

The One He Claimed Chapter 91

Chapter 91: New Idea

Brooklyn

I saw Luna Sophie and Beta Kinsley follow Dr. Caspian, or Cas as he's asked me to call him, into a room. I'm guessing they're doing what everyone else here is doing, protecting me. It makes me feel special to know that the pack cares so much about me, and it makes me want to try harder to be better for them.

After losing one of the mates who is in the pack hospital struggling to survive after the death of their mate in the battle, I decided to try something different. I don't know if my mother can hear me, but she hasn't given up the fight yet and I have to believe it's because I'm there talking to her every day. So, I called over to the main house and asked if they could bring the pups of the mothers lying in our hospital.

I hadn't thought it through completely and when the first group arrived, we had two crying, inconsolable pups. For them, there had been a war, and they hadn't seen their parents again. The people they are staying with may be friends or family, but they aren't the parents that they trust to keep them safe.

The first two were a young boy and girl, around six and four. I picked up the little girl and took the boy's hand, telling them that their mother was sleeping, and they'd need to be careful but that I thought it might help for her to hear their voices.

When we walked in, I put the little girl on the bed and she immediately snuggled up against her mother, sobbing in relief.

She didn't seem to care that her mother was unconscious, her scent and proximity had calmed the little girl who had fallen asleep almost instantly.

I'd put the boy on the other side of his mother. He had tried to remain stoic, but he lost the battle, and ended up curling against her other side, telling her that he was trying to be brave but that it was hard without her or their father. I let them stay, carefully wrapping their mother's arms around them to help them feel safe and when they had both fallen asleep, I'd gone out to find their mother's friend, Leann, who is watching over the pups.

"They're sleeping," I say, wiping my eyes.

"Thank the goddess. They haven't slept in days. They're exhausted and are refusing to eat. Maybe now they'll eat."

"You're welcome to stay with them. Just let one of us know or find me when you're ready to leave. I'll help you get them disentangled from their mother."

"Thank you. I don't know if it will help her, but it's already helping them," Leann says, looking into the room and seeing the two sleeping children tucked against their mother.

"It's worth a try," I say and start to walk away, but Leann takes my hand.

"I hope it works for your mother as well, Brooklyn."

"Thanks, Leann. I do too."

I am just about to go see if more pups have arrived, when Luna Sophie and Beta Kinsley find me.

"Brooklyn, we'd like to speak with you. Do you have a minute?"

"Of course, Luna, Beta. Right this way," I say, leading them to an empty room. The hospital is clearing out fast now that the wolves are getting stronger and healing their humans.

"How are you, Brooklyn?" Luna Sophie asks as soon as we sit down.

"I'm doing okay, all things considered," I say to them.

"How's your mother?" Beta Kinsley asks.

"About the same. I talk to her every night, telling her about my day. I hope it works, we'll see. Cas, Dr. Caspian, says it can take up to a week for omegas to regain consciousness." I watch my Luna and Beta glance at each other. They caught my slip up.

"How are you feeling after everything that happened with your father?" Luna Sophie asks.

I sigh, clasping my hands. "I know I should be upset, and I am, but not for the right reasons," I say.

Both women reach out and put their hands over mine. "What are the right reasons?" Beta Kinsley asks softly.

"He was my father. I should be sad that I killed him. But I'm not. I'm not sad at all."

Luna Sophie smiles at me. "And what are your actual reasons for being upset?"

"My mother. I should have realized how much it would impact her, but I didn't. If killing him, kills her..."

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“Do you want him to stay?” Luna Sophie asks.

I nod. “I do. I....I feel calm around him, almost safe, if that makes any sense at all.”

“It makes perfect sense,” Beta Kinsley says and Luna Sophie nods.

"If for any reason, that changes and you don't want him here, I'll have him removed from our pack lands. No questions. You have the control here, Brooklyn. No one will take that from you this time," Luna Sophie says.

"I appreciate that. It's different somehow, with him."

"He cares, that's the difference," Beta Kinsley says.

I think we're done, and I'm about to stand when I see the women look at each other again.

"There's one more thing, Brooklyn. Alpha Owen is being brought to our pack this weekend for execution," Luna Sophie begins, and I feel the walls of the room start to close in on me.

"Easy, Brooklyn. Breathe. He won't be allowed to hurt you. He won't be allowed to come near you, and you don't have to come to his execution if you don't want to. But you have the right to be there, and you have the right to be the one who executes him," Luna Sophie says as Beta Kinsley moves to sit beside me, wrapping her arms around me and holding me as I get hold of myself.

I think about what she said for a moment while I try to get my breathing under control.

"I'd like to be there, but I don't think I can be the one to kill him. He deserves to die, but I just don't think I can do it."

"That's okay, Brooklyn. You don't have to. Believe me, Hunter will be more than happy to do it and even your new mate would. probably be happy to do it. Heck, most of the pack would be thrilled to rip him to pieces for what he did to you. I just wanted you to know that the option is there."

I nod, leaning against Beta Kinsley as I try to relax.

There's a knock at the door and Cas opens it without waiting for a reply.

"Brooklyn..." he says excitedly, stopping when he sees me.

"What happened, are you okay?" he asks, coming to crouch. beside me. "Is this about that a****hole Alpha?"

I nod, pulling away from Beta Kinsley to look at him. His scent is already more soothing than my Beta's arms were. He puts his hand on mine.

"I'll be there with you, if you want me. You don't have to be alone. Or, I'll stay here with you if you don't want to go. Or I'll hold him steady while you kill him, if that's what you want," he says, rapidly firing off every possible option, making me smile,

"I'd like it if you were there," I say quietly.

"Then, I'll be there."

He stares into my eyes for a moment, and I think we both forget that there are others in the room with us until Luna Sophie clears her throat.

Me jumps and then looks around.

Was there something you wanted to tell us, doctor?" Beta Kinsley asks and I can hear the laughter in her voice.

"OH! Oh, Brooklyn, it worked," he says, his eyes going wide with excitement again.

"What worked?" I ask.

"Bringing in the pups! You're so smart, so intuitive. Why has no one ever thought to do this before? Well, because they're not you and you're brilliant," he says making me blush with his gushing admiration,

"She's awake?" I ask, standing up.

"She's awake!" he says standing as well, and without even thinking about it, I leap into his arms, wrapping mine around him. I flinch the moment I realize what I've done, but his arms come around me, sure and strong.

"I'm so proud of you, my brave, strong, intelligent mate," he whispers in my ear for only me to hear.

Rather than pull away, I wrap my arms more tightly around him, enjoying our combined happiness at one of our patients waking up.

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Chapter 92: Second Chance

Ezra

"Get him loaded up," I say to my warriors.

"You'll pay for this, you f***g p**k. You'll pay for this!" Owen screams at me.

"Shut the f***k up before I break your nose again," I snarl at him. The man never shuts his f**g mouth. Some days I handle it better than others, but I'm heading to Hunter and Sophie's pack today. Being there is hard for me making me less tolerant of Owen's s**.

I sigh, watching my warriors drag Owen into the back of a windowless van, locking him in with silver handcuffs and leg restraints.

“You’ll regret this!” Owen screams at me again.

“Your pack is gone, half of them killed on Hunter and Sophie’s pack lands. The rest, I’ve taken over. You can choose to shut your mouth and take your death like a man, or I’ll shove a silver- soaked cloth into your mouth until we get to their pack. You’re lucky I don’t wrap your d*k in one after what you did to that innocent girl. I’m not listening to your s**t the entire drive, so shut your f*g mouth or pay the price, your choice,” I snarl, getting into his face.

When he doesn’t respond, I turn and nod to my warriors to close the doors.

“You okay, Alpha?” my Beta, Jake, asks me.

“Yeah. I just want to get this over with and get home. You need to get back to our new pack. You think Will’s got things under control for now?” I ask him, referencing our G**a.

“There’s barely anyone there, and we’ve sent a decent

contingent of warriors. Plus, Alpha Hunter’s pack is close to that one; so if there’s trouble, he’ll call you.”

I nod. Jake had been managing Owen’s old pack, but with me leaving and the other Alphas still out there threatening war, I didn’t want to leave my pack in the hands of my G**a. It’s not that I don’t trust him. I just know that Jake is the stronger leader.

“If you need anything, call me.”

“We’ll be fine, Alpha. It’s you I’m worried about,” he says quietly.

Being around Hunter was never easy after his sister, my mate, killed herself and our pup. I knew she hated how she was claimed, had been so traumatized by it that it had taken me years to finally put a pup in her. And then she’d gone without me to find out that we were having a girl. I didn’t find out until after I’d found my mate’s broken body and laid her body to rest, the pack and I grieving the huge loss of our Luna and my mate.

The thought of her broken body still haunts me at night when I’m alone, the cold, empty bed a constant reminder of what I had and lost.

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So, yeah, it was always hard to see Hunter after that. He never blamed me, but I blamed myself. I blamed myself for losing her, for not being everything that she needed

me to be for her. And now, Hunter has done what I should have done, what all of us should have done. He's fought the system.

Seeing him and Sophie together is even harder than it was when it was just Hunter. Watching them, I can see exactly what I could have had with Diana, if I'd been a stronger man, a stronger Alpha, if I'd been the man she deserved. I didn't know it could hurt worse to see Hunter, but it does now. Now, it's not just a reminder of what I lost, but what I could have had if only I had made a stand.

I've never taken another mate, never wanted one. Diana was it for me and I lost her. I smile remembering my mate. She was so beautiful, with a smile that lit up a room. I didn't see it much, after I marked her, but occasionally, I'd catch her smiling at a pup or every once in a great while, I'd do something that would make her happy and she'd turn that gorgeous smile on me.

These are the thoughts that haunt me as I take Owen to Hunter's pack. I don't really want to stay the night in his pack, but it's easier than dropping Owen off and turning right back around and going home. I'll suck it up. In some ways, I crave Diana's ghost that lives as much in the halls of this pack as it does in mine. Hunter's pack was her home much longer than mine was.

I pull into the guard gate at Alpha Hunter's pack.

"Can you let Alpha Hunter know that Alpha Ezra is here with the s**g Alpha Owen?" I ask.

The guard growls a low, menacing growl, looking at the back of the van. I hear several more echoing around the guard gate and the pack. Obviously, "Brooklyn is well loved around here.

"Sure thing, Alpha. Alpha Hunter says he'll meet you at the front.

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I make my way to the packhouse. I wonder if my warriors would feel the same about one of our omegas. Would they be this protective of them? Somehow, I don't think so, and while Brooklyn is a beautiful sweet girl I think it has more to do with Hunter and Sophie's leadership than the girl herself. Something for me to think about. I may not have a Luna, a heart for my pack, but I need to work to have better cohesion between my pack, members

pull up to the packhouse, stepping out of the car and taking a deep breath. There's a hint of jasmine in the air. I don't remember that scent from the last time I was here, and I

would remember it. Diana planted jasmine all around our pack. I've fallen in love with the scent over the years. It calms me, relaxes me

"Alpha Ezra," Hunter says, walking up to me.

"Alpha Hunter Are we being formal today?" I ask, chuckling

"Only this once." he says, putting a hand on my shoulder by way of greeting i do the same with him. We could have been brothers, we were at one time, when Diana was alive. But I had distanced myself from him after that. Maybe it's time I bridge the distance between us. Diana's been gone several years now. She'd have wanted me to be close to her brother.

I hold him there for a moment. He tilts his head, watching me and waiting "We should reaffirm our alliance while I'm here. I say.

I see the surprise flash across his face before a smile begins. "I'd like that. I'd like it a lot."

"So would I," I say, finally releasing him.

As we walk to the back of the van where Owen has begun banging, I turn to Hunter. "Did you plant jasmine since I was here last?"

"Jasmine? No, why?"

"I thought I caught a whiff of it when I got out."

He nods his head at the van. "Has he been like this the entire trip?"

"No. I threatened to put a silver-soaked cloth in his mouth or around his d**k, so he'd shut up. I guess he figures he's your problem now and my threats no longer matter," I say as I open the back doors of the van.

Owen immediately begins screaming obscenities at the two of us.

"What happened to his nose?" Hunter asks casually.

"I've punched him a couple of times. He truly doesn't know when to shut up," I tell him and watch as Hunter walks in and punches Owen in the face, smashing his nose again.

"Shut the **k up or I'll let my warriors go at you until it's time to kill you. Believe me when I tell you, they'd love nothing more than to torture you and hear you scream," Hunter snarls at him.

He calls some warriors over and they begin to drag Owen out of the van. They 'accidentally' drop him, then 'accidentally' kick him in the gut multiple times before they finally get him out of our sight.

"Do you think he'll survive until tomorrow?" I ask Hunter.

"Oh yeah. They would prefer that I put his execution off a couple of days so they can hurt him. I wasn't kidding when I said that my warriors would love nothing more than to have a go at him. After Koden attacked, Brooklyn tirelessly stitched up their injuries if they weren't too severe. Every one of them has taken up a protective stance with her," he says.

"Protective stance? What for?" I ask as we make our way to the front of the packhouse.

He turns and looks at me. "Did you know Luna Margot asked me for sanctuary? Well, actually she asked Sophie."

"No, I hadn't heard."

"Yeah, well, she got here about a day before Koden attacked. She knows some doctor that she called, and he came to help with our injured."

"You had that many injured?" I ask him, surprised.

"Enough that one doctor wasn't enough to keep up. Anyway, the doctor, Dr. Caspian, is Brooklyn's fated mate. Hence the protective detail of the warriors."

I whistle low. "Wow, it truly is never boring here, is it?" I ask as we step inside. I catch the whiff of jasmine again, stronger this time.

"How is Luna Margot?"

"Getting stronger. She rejected Joshua when she got here which is probably the reason he hasn't yet attacked us."

He's talking to me, but the scent of jasmine is getting stronger and my wolf, Thorin, is starting to thrash around in my head.

'Find her,' he growls.

I'm just about to ask what he means, when I look up into the wide, terrified eyes of Luna Margot.

"No," she whispers, tears filling her eyes. "No, no, NO!" she screams, turning and running from me. I take a step forward, Thorin pushing me to go after her.

“Oh f**k!” I hear Hunter say before I feel a strong hand slap against my chest. I watch Luna Sophie run after Margot, her wide eyes turning to look at me before focusing on Margot. Margot, my mate. My second chance mate.

I drag my eyes away from where my mate ran and look at Hunter.

“Don’t chase after her. It’s the worst thing you can do right now. Let Sophie talk to her.”

I nod, looking back at the direction where she ran.

“How about you and I got get a drink?” he says, leading me to his office.

The One He Claimed Chapter 93

Chapter 93: A Second Rejection?

Sophie

I chase after Margot who is running like someone lit her a***on fire. For a woman whose been recovering from a broken mate bond, she’s remarkably fast.

“Margot. MARGOT!” I yell after her.

She whirls around on me, her eyes wild. “I can’t. I can’t. I can’t do it again. Please don’t make me. I can’t do it again. I can’t, I can’t,” she says, breaking down into s**bs.

I wrap my arms around her as she crumples to the floor, and I hold her while she gets a hold of herself.

I begin rocking her, looking up to see Lucas and Kinsley. Lucas nods and leaves, Kinsley stays but keeps her distance.

“No one is going to make you do anything, Margot. No one. I won’t allow it. Hunter won’t allow it. You came to us for protection and safety and that’s what you’re going to get. We do not allow public claimings in this pack and we do not allow mates to force their mark on their mates. Everything in this pack is consensual. You will not be forced into anything,” I say to her as I rock her. She’s holding on to me like I’m a lifeline and she’s a drowning woman.

“Why? Why would the Moon Goddess do this to me? What did I do wrong?” she s**bs.

I look at Kinsley who presses her lips together and walks over,

rubbing Margot's back. "Maybe you didn't do anything wrong, Margot. Maybe you did something right," Kinsley says.

"How can you say that? You know what it's like," Margot says, looking up at Kinsley fear and anger in her eyes.

"I do. And that's why I can say that. Joshua was an a** I don't even know the man, but I feel confident in saying that. I do know Alpha Ezra though. He was mated to Alpha Hunter's sister, so I met him several times over the years. Before you make any rash decisions, think about this. Hunter told him to let you go just now, not to chase after you, and he didn't fight him, he didn't try to get to you. I know the pull of the mate bond. I'm assuming it's just as strong for second chance mates?" she asks.

Margot nods.

"So, it must have taken a lot of effort on his part to control his wolf and walk away from you to give you the space you need right now."

She takes a deep breath, sitting up. "Where is he?" she asks, wiping her eyes. I watch as she begins to transform back into a well put together Luna. It's a bit unnerving to me as I watch her dry her eyes, set her face back into a normal, passive look and take another deep breath before standing up. I wonder how frequently she's had to hide behind this mask.

"He went with Alpha Hunter to his office."

I stand as well, watching Margot. "I'd like to go to my room for the rest of the day. I'll join you for the execution tomorrow, but I need some time."

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Take all the time you need, Margot," I say, and she nods again before heading toward her room. She stops and turns to look at

"Thank you for keeping me safe like you said you would."

"I don't offer temporary safety here. That's not to say we don't have to fight for it, but Hunter and I are firm in our beliefs. For what it's worth, I think Alpha Ezra has also had a change of heart and is now on board with the changes that Hunter and I have been fighting for."

She nods again but doesn't say anything as she walks away.

I turn and look at Kinsley. "Does it ever get boring here?"

“Not since you arrived,” she says, smiling and putting her arm through mine as we walk back toward the main living area. I want to check on my mate and Alpha Ezra.

Margot POV

I spent a sleepless, restless night tossing and turning. I heard what Beta Kinsley says about Alpha Ezra, and I’ve seen him in the Committee of Alpha meetings. He’s always been very reserved and very quiet, but when he does speak, he seems to have valuable insights.

His scent of cedar and eucalyptus had been intoxicating, but I can’t risk it. I can’t be bound to a man who will mistreat me again. I won’t do it. I need to reject him. I don’t know if another rejection so soon will kill me, if he doesn’t accept it, maybe it won’t. If he does...well then, maybe Joshua will be too weak to

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attack if I die since he didn’t accept my rejection either. Maybe It’s for the best.

Because I have so much restless energy this morning, I get up for warrior training. Alpha Hunter hasn’t let me spar yet, saying I’ m still recovering from my rejection, but I need to work off some of this energy today.

I get dressed and head downstairs. Alpha Hunter isn’t out here yet, so I jog up to Beta Lucas.

“Beta, I’d like to spar today,” I say to him.

“Have you spoken to Alpha Hunter?” he asks me.

“I was hoping I’d see him this morning.”

“He’s been running late since he found his mate,” he says, smiling. I give him a fake smile. I know that that means, and I know it’s not the same for Sophie as it was for me, but I don’t want to think about that. My mind is already all over the place.

“You can warm up with us, but it will be up him if you can spar, Margot.”

“I understand,” I say, and I put myself in the back of the group. I know I’m out of shape, I haven’t sparred in years, but I really just need to hit something or someone this morning. If I can’t, I’ll settle for burning off this nervous energy.

We go through the warm-up with Alpha Hunter jogging up about ten minutes late. I watch as Lucas smirks at him and Alpha Hunter just smiles before joining in.

I catch the scent of cedar and eucalyptus and I know that Alpha

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Ezra has joined the training session too. I should have thought of that He's an Alpha. Most Alphas spar at least once, sometimes twice a day, to keep up their strength and keep their packs strong, I subtly move away from the scent and when the wann-up is over, I head straight to Alpha Hunter.

"Margot, what are you doing here?"

"Alpha, I'd like to spar today."

"Margot, I don't think you're ready yet. It's only been a week..."

"Please, Alpha. I need to..."

"I'll spar with her." His voice sends waves of pleasure rolling down my spine and I turn, seeing Alpha Ezra watchin me.

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I turn back to Alpha Hunter. I want to spar, but I'm not sure it's worth it to spar with my second chance mate.

"It's up to you," Hunter says.

I hesitate, warring with myself over my wolf's desire to be close to him and my fear of him.

"Come on, Luna. I know you want the chance to hit an Alpha," Ezra says.

I turn and look at him now. It's a challenge, a smart one. He may not know me, but I'm not the type of woman who backs down from a challenge.

"And you're offering yourself as my punching bag?" I ask mockingly.

"You'd have to actually land a punch, but sure," he says. It's teasing and challenging at the same time.

Lift my chin. "Then I accept your offer."

Thear Alpha Hunter turn and leave us. "Try not to kill him," he mumbles as he walks away. When we're alone, I look at Alpha Ezra.

"You should know..."

He holds up a finger. "I can guess what you're about to say. All I'm asking is that before you make any drastic decisions, you give me a chance. I've lost one mate in this lifetime. I did a lot of things wrong in that relationship. Now, I'm being given a chance to make that right. Please don't take that away from me without getting to know me first."

He's so sincere, the pain in his eyes so apparent, that I can do nothing but nod.

"Good. Now, as I'm sure you know, sparring means that we're going to get really close. Before we begin, I want you to know that I have my wolf under control and I will not mark you, so you don't need to worry about that. I wouldn't anyway, but I have the utmost respect for Alpha Hunter, and I wouldn't go against the rules of his pack."

I nod. "Thank you for telling me that." It does make me feel better, although I hadn't considered how close we'll be while sparring. He's an Alpha and most likely an excellent fighter. While I may have been a good fighter at one time, I'm very much out of practice.

He takes a defensive posture and beckons me. "Let's see what you've got, Luna."

I'm no longer a Luna," I say, getting into an attack posture.

"Are you not?" he asks me. I know what he's asking. If I'm his mate, that still makes me a Luna

He beckons me forward again and I attack. My lack of practice is immediately evident, but Alpha Ezra is a great instructor. He gives me pointers, gently showing me my weak spots and making sure I'm covering them.

He doesn't let up and neither do I'm not sure how long we've been sparring, but my unused muscles are screaming at me. When he grabs the arm I've just thrown at him to punch him. He spins me around and wraps his arms around me, pinning my back to his chest, my arms pinned across my chest with his arms wrapped around them. We're both panting, and I feel him run his nose through my hair.

"You're trying to fight me. Stop. You need to think about being in a battle. You need to think about fighting someone who is trying to kill you. You're over thinking it. You have good instincts and good training, you're just out of practice. We'll pick this up again tomorrow," he says quietly in my ear, before releasing me.

I look around and realize that training is done, and the warriors are heading inside for breakfast.

"Thank you, Alpha," I say.

"Any time, Luna," he says. He's smiling at me, but his eyes are full of heated desire as he watches me. "You'll want to soak in a warm bath today. Your muscles will be feeling this workout."

I nod and turn to walk inside. I hadn't expected him to truly spar with me. I thought he'd take every opportunity to touch me, and there were many, but he'd used every one of them as a learning opportunity.

I turn and look at him over my shoulder, seeing him watching me as I walk away. Alpha Hunter walks up to him and says something. He responds without looking away from me.

I turn to walk inside. He surprised me today and I put the thought of rejecting him to the back of my mind for now.

The One He Claimed Chapter 94

Chapter 94: Time with Sophie

Hunter

I was surprised when Sophie told me that Brooklyn wanted to be at Owen's execution. It's yet another reminder that I should never underestimate anyone, not even my omegas.

Brooklyn had found a way to awaken all the women who lost their mates. After seeing that it worked for the first one, we started bringing the pups to see their mothers. Some woke faster than others, but now, they've all woken, including Leah. Sophie and I made a point to see them all, checking on them and making sure that they don't need anything from us or the pack. It's not uncommon for those who have lost their mates to want to leave the packhouse, finding the cheerful, boisterous atmosphere too much to bear, and these women were no different. I let Sophie and Kinsley handle the move for the families out of the packhouse and into their own homes. My mate, in all her intuitive genius, decided to move them all close together. It not only allows them to continue to have other pack members close, but it also gives them a sense of security. Now, Leah and Brooklyn aren't alone on the outskirts of the pack.

When Ezra arrived with Owen, I was thrilled that he asked about reaffirming our alliance. He's pulled away from me since my sister's death, but now, hopefully, he's coming back.

Of course, all that goes out the window when he realizes that Margot is his second chance mate. He's been waiting a long time for the possibility of a second chance mate, whereas Margot only rejected her mate a week ago. Understandably, her

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response to finding out that she has a second chance mate was considerably different than his.

When I pulled Ezra into my office, he sat down, putting his head in his hands. I'd given him glass of whiskey and he'd shot it back.

"Why now? Why her?" he asks me.

"I don't have those answers," I say refilling his glass and handing it to him. This time, he sips it, sitting back.

"She smells like jasmine," he says, as sit beside him. He turns and looks at me, his eyes haunted. "Your sister planted jasmine all over my pack lands. I'd never smelled it before then, but I've come to love that smell. And now Margot smells like jasmine."

He closes his eyes and I see the pain written all over his face. "I feel like your sister did this for me. I know that sounds crazy, but I'm here, in your pack, her old pack. Margot smells like the jasmine that Diana planted in my pack. It's too coincidental, don' t you think?"

"It does sound that way. Who knows how these things work, or why some get a second chance mate, and some don't," I say, taking a sip of whiskey. "You know she'll try to reject you."

"I do. Joshua is an a**ole who never treated her well. Her father wasn't any better. All I can hope is that she gives me a chance."

"What are you going to do?" I ask him.

"I'm going to ask you if I can stay for a while and get to know my new mate, give her a chance to get to know me."

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"You know you're always welcome here. But I will not allow you to forcibly mark her and definitely not publicly," I tell him.

He laughs humorlessly. "Trust me, I learned my lesson the first. time. I have no intention of losing another mate."

It isn't long before I hear a soft knocking on the door and smell Sophie's orchid scent.

I smile, getting up to open the door. As soon as he sees her, Ezra jumps up. "How is she?"

"Shocked, as I'm sure you can imagine."

"Yeah, a week ago we were in the same room, and she was mated to someone else. Now she's here, rejected her mate, and found her second chance mate, another Alpha. F**k. She must be terrified," he says, dropping back into his seat.

"She is, but she didn't allow herself to show it for long. She's... she's quite a strong woman," Sophie says and something about the way she says it, has me pulling her into my arms.

I kiss the top of her head, trying to understand the emotions. going on inside her.

"Are you okay?" I ask her.

She nods, sighing and relaxing against me.

"Do you want to sit with us?" I ask her. I know Ezra probably won't want that, but my mate seems to need to be close to me right now.

"No, you two talk. Margot has gone to her room. She's planning to stay there for the rest of the evening, in case you thought to

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look for her, Alpha Ezra," Sophie says to him.

"I'll give her the time and space she needs," he says, finishing off his drink. "I should probably go to my room. I could use a little time to think as well."

He stands, setting his empty glass on the table and walking to the door.

"Thank you for letting me stay. I will not betray your trust by doing anything with Margot. I just want to get to know her. And I still do want to reaffirm our alliance."

"We have some time now that you'll be here a few days. We'll see you tomorrow at warrior training?" I ask.

"I'll see you then."

After he leaves, I spend some time talking to Sophie about the emotions going on in her mind.

"It's like she had a mask and I watched it fall over her face. How many times must she have had to do that for it to fall so easily, to transform her from a terrified, sobbing woman, into a stoic, put together Luna?"

I hold my mate, stroking her back until I felt her calm.

"I think we all know that Joshua is a terrible mate. He either expected her to hide her emotions or...he made it easier for her to hide them than suffer his response to them," I say carefully, wanting to shield my mate from the terrible things I'm sure happen in some packs.

"Kinsley said she was hyperventilating when she got out of the

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safe room. I put her in one thinking that she would be okay, but..."

"You didn't know. You can't blame yourself. We were under attack. She wasn't strong enough to fight," I reassure her.

Lucas had told me the same thing already. I'm guessing that dark, enclosed quarters were a punishment for Margot. Something that she'll hopefully be able to work through with time and maybe, if she allows it, Ezra can help her with that.

I decide to take the rest of the afternoon off and spend it with my mate. We've been working hard, and the pack has been recovering from the first battle, so I tell Sophie that I want to have dinner with her in our room, just the two of us.

I'd almost forgotten how much I enjoy just talking to my mate. We've both been so busy, going in multiple directions for so long that I haven't taken time to just hear about her day. Over dinner, I stay quiet, letting my mate talk animatedly about Brooklyn, how the mates have awakened, and how Leah may have found a second chance mate as well.

"Seriously, Hunter, what is up with our pack?" she asks me.

"Maybe the Legend has started something special here," I say, pushing the food aside and beginning to prowl toward her.

"Well, what does it say about you, Alpha, that you're mated to the Legend?" she purrs at me.

"It says I'm one lucky b**d," I say before showing her just how much I adore her, love her, and want her.

Hours later when we're lying in bed, naked and sated, I kiss the

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"Want to try to multi task with the pack? I ask, knowing that's something she's recognized more than once and that bothers her that she can't do it

"Yes," she says excitedly

"Now's a good time to practice. I used to do it late at night when the pack's minds aren't so active Once you get the hang of it, you can start trying it at busier times of

"What do I do?" she asks.

day."

"Start by opening your mind to the patrols. Listen to their conversations and discussions about what they're smelling and seeing," I say, entering her mind to help guide her. We have four patrols, one in each quadrant that run the entire perimeter of the pack. Even this can be difficult as you have four separate groups conversing with each other.

I sense their hesitation when they realize that Sophie is connecting to them, but then they continue, not getting any requests or commands from her. I'm always connected unless I'm asleep or with Sophie, so they're used to me being part of the

mind link.

Thelp her to filter out the different groups, compartmentalizing them so she can hear them all.

"Very good," I say to her, feeling her getting tired. "We cant practice every night until it's easier, then we'll add in the

nighttime omegas. That always makes for interesting listening," I say, chuckling.

"Why is that?" she asks.

"They see everything, hear everything. If I've missed something. I usually hear it from the omegas."

I can sense her curiosity.

"Here, like this," I say, and help her connect to a small group of omegas that are talking about two pack members who were caught sneaking off to be together.

Sophie gasps. "It's like a gossip channel."

"Exactly," I say before shutting it down. "Now, get some sleep. I love you, Sophie Reynolds."

"And I love you, Hunter Reynolds," she says, and we snuggle together, falling asleep.

The One He Claimed Chapter 95

Chapter 95: Strength

Leah

When I woke in the pack hospital, I was surprised. I hadn't expected to survive my mate's death, hadn't realized that it was even possible for an omega who was mated to someone of a higher rank.

But I had heard my daughter's voice, over and over, smelled her sweet scent, and listened when she told me that she needed me. My mate never needed me, but my daughter does. I swore that after letting her down once, that I'd never do it again, so I'd fought my own body, my heart, and maybe the Moon Goddess herself to stay with my child. If she needs me, I'll be here for her.

Seeing her happy face when I opened my eyes, had made it all worthwhile. She had wrapped her arms around me and sobbed. I was weak, struggling to wrap my own arms around her, but I did it. A mother can find strength she didn't know she had when her pup needs her.

After waking, the healing started. I felt hollow and empty, but I hoped that would pass. My wolf was gone, but the doctor said it was possible that I'd get her back. You just never knew when these things happened.

"I've seen mates regain their wolves after a year or more. Sometimes, it just takes them longer to heal and return to us than it does for us to wake up," he said.

I'd heard Brooklyn when she was talking to me, so I was pretty

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sure I knew who this was. Watching my daughter, I knew I was right.

"You're my daughter's mate?" I asked him when it was just the two of us in the room.

“Yes, ma’am. And I want you to know that you have nothing to worry about. I won’t hurt your daughter and I don’t have any expectations of her except that she gives me a chance and gets to know me. She’s doing that, and I’m perfectly happy.”

He smiled, his eyes staring off. “She’s amazing, your daughter. Truly an incredible woman.”

“Yes, she is,” I said, proud that someone recognizes that int Brooklyn.

He looked back at me. “We all agree that she gets that from you,” he’d said surprising me.

“I’m not strong, not like Brooklyn.”

“Aren’t you? You’re here. You could have given up, but you didn’t. You somehow, and I still can’t fathom how you did it, got your daughter here, after rejecting your mate and you saved her life. And once again, you protected your daughter when her father came to take you back.”

“Brooklyn did that,” I tell him.

“Brooklyn shot him, but she wouldn’t have had the gun if you hadn’t purchased it, ready to protect your daughter at all costs, including your own life,” he said, holding my gaze. “That, my future mother-in-law, is strength.”

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I was surprised that Brooklyn had told him about what had happened. It’s the only way he could have known. Perhaps she is giving him a chance.

I’d spent another day at the hospital, gaining strength and making sure I could walk unassisted. I realized just how much my daughter was doing in the hospital, helping out and how much she had done while I was unconscious.

The warriors all started coming to see me after I woke, wanting to let me know how thankful they were to Brooklyn and how they have made sure to protect her and me while I was unconscious. The massive outpouring of love from the pack had been incredible, nearly overwhelming. It was almost as if they were flooding my mind with love and support to help me heal.

One warrior in particular, Brutus, came to visit with me. The moment he had entered my room, I'd known. I don't know why the Moon Goddess does the things she does. I'd just gotten out of a miserable mate bond, and here, in front of me, was another warrior, another mate, only this one was three times my size.

"Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. I don't know what your relationship was like with Michael, but I know I never had much respect for the way he spoke about you and Brooklyn. He was a fool. I am not a fool. I also know you just woke up after losing your mate and probably have no desire to take on another mate. But don't reject me, Leah. You're too weak. I won't do anything you don't want, but don't kill yourself after everything Brooklyn has done to keep you alive, just because you're afraid of me. You don't need to fear me."

He sat with me that first day, barely leaving my side after he'd

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come in. He told me about how Brooklyn stitched him up, how he'd been watching over her for me while I was out, as had the other warriors. How he'd made sure Dr. Caspian didn't do anything that Brooklyn didn't want and wasn't ready for.

"I'll give him credit. He didn't flinch at us constantly being here watching him. That, more than anything, made me believe that he's the real deal and telling the truth about taking it slow with Brooklyn. I know you probably want to make up your own mind about him, but that's my assessment, for what it's worth."

"It's worth a lot, thank you, Brutus."

He had come back the next day after his patrol and helped to get me back to my home. I told Brooklyn that it was fine for her to stay at the hospital. She seems to like it there, her desire to help others finally having an outlet.

I dreaded going home. I don't want to see the broken door, the blood on the walls from where Brooklyn shot Michael. I'm sure they removed the body, but my little house will be a mess and I'm not sure I stomach the thought of staying there.

However, when we arrive, I see that the door is fixed.

"What's this?"

Brutus shrugs. "Me and some of the other warriors came in and cleaned the place up for you. We didn't want you or Brooklyn to have to come back to this mess. It was the least we could do after she stitched up so many of us."

I was overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with their kindness, overwhelmed with the outpouring of love, overwhelmed with the emotions that were spinning around in my head feeling empty,

III

but also now because of Brutus. It had all been too much and I'd broken down in tears.

Brutus, the big giant warrior, had scooped me up as if I was a small pup and held me while I cried. For such a big man, he is surprisingly gentle. He hadn't told me that I needed to stop crying, or that I was being ridiculous. He'd just held me,

murmuring soft, sweet words to me and rubbing my back until I had cried myself to sleep.

I wake up later, in bed. My clothes are on, but my shoes are off and there is a blanket over me. I look around and realize that I am in my bedroom in my house. I can smell food cooking in the kitchen, so I carefully make my way out of bed, seeing my shoes neatly set against the wall. When I walk out of my bedroom, I see two things that surprise me. The first is Brutus with a large apron on, cooking in the kitchen. The second is a big bouquet of wildflowers on the table.

"Brutus?" I ask.

He turns, smiling at me. "Oh, you're awake. I hope you don't mind. My wolf was making me nuts about taking care of you, so I wanted to make sure you had something to eat. I was worried about what would sit easily on your stomach, so I made roasted chicken, rice, and roasted vegetables."

"You know how to cook?" I ask, stepping into the small area that consists of a kitchen and breakfast nook. It smells delicious.

He turns his head from the stove and smiles at me. "I used to cook for my mate all the time. But, well, since she passed, I haven't really done a lot of cooking."

He watches me as I walk over to the flowers, leaning in the sniff

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them

"Did you bring me flowers, Brutus?"

I'm surprised when this big bear of a man blushes and ducks his head. "I was hoping you'd like them. I thought they might help to brighten your day."

I look at the flowers again. "I'm not sure anyone has ever brought me flowers before. They're beautiful. Thank you."

We sit down to eat. The food is surprisingly good, and I tell him

SO.

"Why surprisingly?" he asks.

"Well, because you're a warrior. Usually omegas cook."

He shrugs again. "I like to cook. I like to do nice things for the people I care about." His eyes are intent on mine, and my mouth goes dry.

Now it's my turn to blush and duck my head. "I'm not used to that."

"Maybe you should get used to it," he says, reaching over and taking my hand. I look up at him and he strokes his thumb over the back of my hand, sending little tingles through my body.

"There's something you need to know," he says, his voice much more serious.

"What's that?"

"Owen arrived today," he says, growling. "He's going to be executed tomorrow."

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"Brooklyn..."

"Has already said she wants to be there, but she doesn't want to be the one to execute him. Personally, I think it's a good idea for her to watch her tormentor die. If nothing else, it will give her some peace of mind and closure. But you have to decide if you want to be there too. I'll go with you if..."

"Oh, I want to be there," I say forcefully, anger and fury flowing through me. "I want to see that poor excuse of a man die."

He nods. "Do you want me there with you?"

I think about that for a moment. “Yes.”

He smiles as if I just gave him a gift that he’s been wanting for a long time. “Then I’ll be there. I have to run patrols tonight. We’re still expecting Joshua and his pack to attack at any time, but I’ve asked to be put in this quadrant of the patrols, so I can keep watch over you. I want you to know that so you can sleep well. You don’t have to worry about someone sneaking up on you.”

After dinner, Brutus helps me do the dishes and then I walk him to the door. He turns, caressing my cheek and running his thumb over my lips.

“Can I kiss you, Leah?”

I would never have guessed that I’d be ready for another man to kiss me this soon, but I find myself nodding my head in

agreement. He leans in slowly, watching me and giving me a chance to change my mind and then his warm lips are on mine, gentle and soft.

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I lean into the kiss, drawn into it by this incredibly gentle man.

His big arms come around me and I can’t ever remember a time that I felt so safe.

When he pulls back, he leans his forehead against mine. “That was perfect. I hope it was perfect for you too,” he says softly.

I nod, not wanting to break the spell this man has me under.

When he lifts his head, he smiles at me, then kisses my nose before turning and heading to work. I watch him leave, surprised when he turns and waves at me before disappearing from sight.

Late that night, while I’m lying in bed trying to sleep, I hear a

wolf howl as they pass by. Without realizing what was about to happen, my dormant wolf awakens enough to answer the call, howling back at her mate.

The One He Claimed Chapter 96

Chapter 96: Execution

Sophie

I'd like to say that I'm sad about having to watch an execution, but since it's Owen, and he threatened my pup, I'm not at all.

Hunter calls the pack together to witness Owen's execution. The man seriously needs to learn to shut his mouth, his very bruised mouth, cheek, swollen eye, and broken nose. The warriors have obviously been taking shots at him. Again, I probably should care, but Owen deserves what he gets and he's apparently not learning his lesson.

I'm standing beside Lucas and Kinsley. Hunter is in front of us, facing the pack as we wait for the warriors to drag Owen's sorry a** in front of him. He screams obscenities the entire way.

"Did you want that silver-soaked cloth, Alpha Hunter?" Alpha Ezra asks, making the crowd chuckle. I notice that he's standing close to, but not exactly beside Margot. She glances at him, and I see a smile twitch at her lips. Interesting. Hunter mentioned that they had sparred together this morning. I hope that's a good sign.

As I look over the pack, I see Brooklyn standing nearly in front of Hunter. She's put herself there so she can watch, her chin held high. On one side of her is her mother and the other is Dr. Caspian. She's holding hands with both of them, and I can see that her knuckles are white with the strain of being here, but she's standing tall, and her eyes are determined. I'm so proud of her I could cheer!

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Standing behind Leah is Brutus. The man is large by most standards, closer in size to an Alpha than a warrior. Behind Leah, he looks like a giant protector, watching over his charge, or in this case, his mate. Much like Ezra, he's been without his mate much longer than Leah has been without hers.

The warriors have created an arc around Brooklyn, as if lending her their strength and letting her know that Owen can't hurt her, that they stand with her and will fight for her.

"I'm not sure I've ever been prouder of our pack than I am right now," Kinsley says, looking over the pack as I am.

"We really have created something special here, haven't we?" I ask, reaching out to hold her hand as Owen is dragged in front of us, screaming obscenities.

"It's beautiful, or it will be once this ***ole is gone," she says, growling the last part.

The warriors toss Owen on the ground at Hunter's feet, then each take a stand on either side of him. Hunter doesn't even look at Owen, remaining steadfast with his hands clasped. casually behind his back, as if

nothing to him, no threat at a furious Alpha at his feet means

all.

When Owen tries to stand, a warrior kicks him in his knee, snapping it and sending Owen back to the ground.

“MOTHER F**R! YOU’LL PAY FOR THIS!” he screams.

“It’s as if he doesn’t realize that he’s about to die,” Lucas says quietly to us, watching as if trying to understand Owen’s curious behavior.

“I’m sure he thinks the law is on his side,” I say. “Remember, he voted for Hunter in his trial with me in the hopes that Hunter would return the favor for him.”

“Wow, how did someone so s**d become an Alpha?” Lucas asks.

“Passed down from one s** generation to another,” Kinsley says.

“Owen, you have been found guilty of improperly claiming a mate, and then discarding her. You did this publicly for all to see and then left your rejected mate to die.”

“She was a sweet piece of a** So f**g tight,” Owen says, Heering at Brooklyn.

I watch as Brooklyn goes pale, her hands squeezing those of her mother and Dr. Caspian. Almost as one, the warriors push forward, tightening the ranks around her. The warriors standing beside Hunter, however, as less casual in their approach. One kicks Owen in the stomach, the other stomps on his ankle, crushing it.

“In addition,” Hunter continues as if Owen didn’t interrupt him, “you threatened my mate and my pup,” he says, causing the pack to snarl viciously. I guess he hadn’t mentioned that part before.

“I would have liked to have broken that filly,” he says lasciviously, turning to look at me behind him. The warriors don’t Lim a chance. One punches him in the face, sending him to ches his fist into his gut, making

“Brooklyn,” Hunter says, his voice gentle. “You have the right to execute this man for what he did to you. There is no shame in preferring to keep your hands clean of this kill, but I wanted to offer you the opportunity one more time.”

“No, thank you, Alpha. I do not want to be the one who executes him,” she says, and her voice remains steady. I smile at her, giving her silent praise for her bravery.

"I don't blame you. If I were you, wouldn't want to sully myself by touching that a**hole either," one of the warriors says, reinforcing that they still think highly of her. The others agree as Owen collects himself and struggles to sit up.

"You have no authority to kill me," Owen growls at Hunter.

"I do, actually."

"It will be your word against the Committee's."

"Oh, you must have missed that Alpha Ezra is still here. He will be my witness if the Committee ever reconvenes," Hunter says, pointing to Ezra. When Owen looks, Ezra gives him a feral smile.

"Alpha Owen, you are hereby sentenced to death by execution..." Hunter begins.

"What about me, Alpha Hunter? Am I eligible to execute this sorry excuse for an Alpha?" Leah asks, and the murmuring crowd goes silent.

"Leah?" Brutus asks, gently putting his hands on her hips.

Leah, however, steps forward, away from Brutus, looking from Owen to Hunter. "I'm tired of the men in my life assuming that."

Chapter 96 Execution

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me and my daughter are weak because we're omegas. She survived what this man did to her, but he won't survive what I, a mere omega, do to him," she says, growling.

"Has your wolf resurfaced, Leah?" Hunter asks her.

"She is strong enough to kill this....person," she says, disgustedly.

Hunter looks over at Ezra who shrugs. I know Hunter wants to kill Owen, but I don't think he'll say no to Leah. When he turns to look at me, I nod at him. Leah should have the opportunity to get revenge for her pup.

"Very well, Leah. Step forward," Hunter says, grabbing Owen by the hair and yanking his head back, exposing his neck.

"You f**g b**h. Don't you dare come near me! I'll f**g kill you if you touch me! Do you hear me? I'll kill you!" Owen

screams.

Leah seems to suddenly realize what she's asked to do. Her hands are shaking as she walks forward, and her lips begin to tremble.

Owen begins laughing at her. "See, you can't even do it. You're too weak," he taunts her.

Brutus steps up behind her, lowering his head to her ear.

"Extend your claws, Leah. One strong swipe is all it takes," he says, guiding her. He stands behind her, his hands on her hips to steady her as she slowly extends her claws. Owen watches and begins screaming at her again, threatening her, taunting her that she's too weak.

"You're not weak, Leah. You're one of the strongest women I've ever met. You can do this," Brutus says.

"Extend your arm out to the side. Aim for his throat. It will be soft and easy to slice through," he tells her as Owen begins thrashing against Hunter. Each warrior finds a body part to stomp on, a leg and a hand to hold Owen still for Leah,

She lifts her arm out to the side, staring determinedly at Owen.

"When you see my ex-mate, make sure he knows that it was me who killed you," she snarls, and her hand swipes through the air. Blood sprays over her and Hunter and I hear the gurgling sounds of Owen dying for a split second before Brutus' claw swipes down and severs Owen's head from his body.

Hunter lifts his head to the sky, holding up Owen's severed head and howling our pack's dominance over the person that hurt one of our own. As one, the pack lifts their heads and howls in return.

Brutus hugs Leah who is probably in a bit of shock after her first kill as I walk to my mate, once again so proud of my mate, our pack, and the cohesiveness that I feel.

I ignore the blood and guts as he tosses Owen's head aside and pulls me into an embrace, kissing me passionately as the pack celebrates around us.

The One He Claimed Chapter 97

Chapter 97: Requests

Hunter

A sense of peace fell over the pack after Owen's execution. I could feel the pack's happiness that we had avenged one of our own, but more importantly to me, I felt

Sophie's pride with me and our pack. I love feeling her pride in me, and I answered her feelings by taking her mouth in a dominant, passionate kiss.

When I finally pull back, we're both a mess, covered in Owen's blood and guts.

"We need to shower. Sorry, but I couldn't wait," I tell her.

"Neither could I," she says, and we stand there listening to the howls and cheers of our pack. I lean my forehead against hers, closing my eyes and just taking it all in. My pack has only grown stronger since I brought Sophie home.

When I finally pull away from her, I look around, seeing Lucas standing by and waiting for me.

"I'll take care of this mess, Alpha. You and Luna go get washed up," he says.

"I can help," Ezra says, walking up.

"Are you sure?" I ask him.

"I need something to do," he says.

"Don't you have two packs to run?" I ask him.

"I already checked on Owen's old pack. My G**a has things under control there, but I may go over there for a half day while I'm here," he says, glancing at Margot.

"How's that going?" I ask him, tucking Sophie under my arm.

"She hasn't rejected me yet," he says.

"She seemed...better after sparring with you this morning," I say.

"And let's be honest, she can't stop glancing at you, Alpha Ezra," Sophie says, smiling at him.

"There's a huge gap between looking at me and accepting me," he says.

"Keep plugging away at her. I would love for her to have a reason to live before Joshua attacks," Sophie says.

"What does that mean?" he asks concerned.

"She plans to let herself die when we kill him. She's asked me not to let that stop her," I tell him, making him growl.

“Not going to happen,” he says, stomping over to where Margot is talking to Leah and Brutus.

“A word, Margot,” he growls at her, startling her. She looks at me. and I nod that it’s okay. He may not be happy with her decision, but he needed to know that it’s what she’s planning. I watch them walk away from the rest of the group. Ezra looks intense and then Margot looks exasperated.

Sophie and I walk over to Leah, who is also covered in blood, as is Brutus now.

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“Leah, are you okay?” I ask. Sophie pulls away from me and takes Leah’s hands.

“That was very brave of you,” she says, making Leah smile and look up at Brutus.

“Told you,” he says.

“Of course my mother is brave. Where do you think I get it from,” Brooklyn says, walking over.

“You were very brave as well,” Sophie says to her.

“Thank you, Luna. That was harder than I thought it would be. I hadn’t expected...” she breaks off and Dr. Caspian wraps an arm around her shoulders, comforting her.

“Owen was an a**hat didn’t deserve his title. I hope that seeing his execution brings you some peace, Brooklyn,” I say to her.

“Thank you, Alpha. I think I’ll sleep better now, knowing he’s gone.”

I lead Sophie through the pack, saying hello to pack members and thanking them for supporting Brooklyn and Leah. As is fairly consistent these days, we have some new faces, some who haven’t yet decided if they want to join our pack. I reach out to Kinsley and ask her to check in on those individuals to make sure that they are okay after the execution.

Then, I take my mate upstairs and strip off our b***dy clothing, setting them aside to burn. No amount of washing will get Owen’s blood out.

When we step into the shower together, I look down and see that my mate’s belly is no longer flat. My son is growing. I kneel down, kissing her stomach before telling my son how much I love him and how much I can’t wait to meet him. Then I tell him how amazing his mother is while she runs her fingers through my hair and chuckles at me.

“Your father is pretty awesome too,” she says. I kiss my way up her body and since I know this is one of my mate’s favorite positions, I turn her around and take her in the shower. I take my time, connecting with her body and mind, letting our love for each other surround us as bring her up and over slowly, then again, and once more before finally finding my own release inside her.

When we get out of the shower, I kiss my mate and her stomach again, before heading down to my office. I send an email out to all of the Alphas that we are friendly with that Alpha Owen has been executed for his crimes against Brooklyn and for threatening my mate and pup.

I’ve just started looking over my work when I hear the ping of an incoming email. I look at it and see that Alpha Robin has responded.

‘I’d like to schedule a video call with this group. I think we need to consider establishing our own Committee of Alphas leaving out the group that does not agree with the changes that we want to make in our packs. I feel like this would solidify our alliances, but also keep each of us from working autonomously when we could be working together. -Robin’

Before I can respond, I get another email, this one from Ezra replying to the group.

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Chapter 9 Requests

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‘I think that’s a great idea. One of our first orders of business will be to discuss what needs to happen with Owen’s previous pack. I have my Beta there running things, but we should decide what to do with his pack long-term. -Ezra’

I’m creating an email to let everyone know that I’ll set something up when another email comes through.

‘Just let me know where and when. -Carter’

‘Same. I agree this is needed. -Calvin

‘Count me in. -Kayce’

‘I’m setting something up now. -Hunter’

I quickly put together a video call for the next day, wanting to do it sooner rather than later, knowing that Joshua is coming soon.

When Lucas arrives, we talk him about the patrols.

"Brutus wants to continue in the eastern quadrant where Leah lives," he says.

"Any concerns?" I ask.

"None."

"Okay. Next?"

"Margot has asked to join the patrols. She says she feels that running the patrols will help her wolf get stronger." I'm not even sure her wolf is back yet. Maybe finding Ezra is helping with that.

I'm on the fence with this one. "Thoughts?"

#248 Mouchers

Lucas grimaces. "I don't know. She's a strong woman, I'll give her that. But she's been through an awful lot. I think she's pushing herself too hard because she's afraid she'll end up back in the safe rooms and we both know how that went over."

I nod, then open the mind link to the pack. 'Does anyone have eyes on Alpha Ezra?'

Several wolves reply that they do.

'Let him know I'd like to speak with him in my office,' I tell them.

While we wait, Lucas and I go through the other issues with the patrols, making sure that any problems are addressed. It's only about ten minutes later when Ezra knocks.

"Come in. Have a seat."

"What can I do for you? Besides attend the meeting tomorrow," Ezra says.

"How are you keeping up with that?" I ask him, frowning.

He pulls out his phone. "Don't you get email to your phone?"

"Yeah, but..."

"I'm away from my pack. I need to be connected," he says. "So, what's up."

"Margot wants to run patrols," I say to him.

He sighs, sitting back. "That woman is so stubborn."

“Can she shift yet?” Lucas asks him.

“If you tell her that’s the only way she can run patrols, she’ll probably force the shift no matter how painful it is,” he says, exasperated.

“How was she when you sparred with her?” I ask.

“She’s got the foundation, but she’s out of practice and she’s still weak.” He shakes his head sitting forward and clasping his hands together. “If it were one of my pack members, I’d probably try to keep them off patrols for another week, but I saw her need to get stronger today. I’m not sure she can handle both though. Her muscles have to be screaming from the workout I gave her this morning. No way she’s ready to run patrols for hours tonight.”

‘Alternative options to help her get stronger?’ I ask. I have my own ideas, but I also know that Ezra wants to spend time with her. If she wants to get strong, being around her mate is the fastest way to do that.

“If she’s willing, I’ll run sprints with her. We can even run loops. around your pack. It would be good for me to remember exactly where your borders are as well and I can set a pace that pushes her, but not too hard.”

I open the mind link again. ‘Anyone have eyes on Margot?’

‘She’s with me, Hunter,’ Sophie says.

‘Can you bring her to my office, my love?’ I ask, knowing I have a smile on my face.

‘Of course.’

“She’s with Sophie?” Lucas asks.

“Yes. They’ll be right here,” I tell them.

The One He Claimed Chapter 98

Chapter 98: Margot’s Defensiveness

Sophie

Hunter mind linked the pack asking if anyone knew where Margot was. She, Kinsley, and I had been talking about the safe rooms and how to make them less stressful for the moms, pups, and elderly that needed to be there.

“Margot, Hunter wants to see you,” I tell her.

“What for?”

“He didn’t say. Come on, I’ll go with you,” I tell her.

I can feel her nervousness as we walk.

“You know he won’t hurt you, right Margot?” I ask, worried about her reaction to being called to meet with Hunter.

“It’s not that. I asked Beta Lucas if I could run patrols,” she says, looking over at me.

“Ahhh,” I say, understanding. I know Margot doesn’t want to be in the safe rooms again, so she’s doing everything she can to get stronger. My guess is she knows that she’s pushing too hard, and she expects Hunter to tell her no.

When we arrive, I knock and wait for Hunter to tell me to come in. Instead, he opens the door for me himself. I smile up at him.

“Hey.”

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“Hi,” he says, leaning down to kiss me. It doesn’t last nearly long enough, but it’s longer than it should be when I realize that it’s not just Hunter in the room, but Beta Lucas and Alpha Ezra as well. Ezra is standing, watching Margot closely.

I had asked her about sparring with him this morning. She’d been surprised when Ezra hadn’t used the opportunity to grope her, but instead had really helped her with her training.

“Margot, come in. We want to talk to you about your request to run patrols,” Hunter says. I look at her, but her eyes are on Ezra.

“Are you going to tell me no? I don’t need to sit down if you’re just going to tell me no,” she says, crossing her arms over her chest, in an obviously defensive gesture.

“Not exactly, have a seat,” he says, taking my hand and leading me to a chair before sitting and pulling me into his lap.

“I take it there is a concern about Margot running patrols?” I ask, trying to break the tension between Margot and Ezra. She hasn’t moved away from the door.

“Yes. It’s not in your ability, Margot, but in your strength and ability to keep up, especially now that you are sparring again,” Hunter tells her.

"You told them I'm not strong enough," Margot states. There's a lot of anger in her voice but some hurt too.

'I said that if you were my pack member...'

"Which I'm not," she says sharply.

"If you were, that I would not let you run patrols yet."

Ezra steps up to her and I give the woman kudos for strength, she doesn't back down from him,

"Tell me your muscles aren't aching after this morning. Tell me you're fully recovered," he says and takes her chin gently between his thumb and forefinger, lifting her head so she can't look away. "And do not lie to me," he says softly.

She yanks her face out of his hands. "Fine, I'm sore, yes. It's been a long time since I've sparred." She whirls around to face Hunter. "So, I'll ask again, why didn't you, st tell me that I you were going to deny me before I bothered to walk in."

I move to stand and go to her, but Hunter holds me back. I can feel that she's on the verge of breaking down and she doesn't want that, not in here, not in front of these men. She would consider it a terrible weakness.

I look at Hunter, wondering why he's holding me back.

'Give it a minute,' he says in the mind link.

"Do you want to hear what I did suggest?" Ezra asks Margot.

She whirls back to face Ezra. "That I quit sparring and patrols until I'm stronger?"

"No, that's not what I suggested. Would you like to sit?" he asks her, gesturing to a chair.

"I'll stand, thank you," she says, crossing her arms over her chest again.

"You should continue sparring. That will increase your strength faster than anything. Not only that, but it will also help you when Joshua attacks. You'll be better able to defend yourself against your old pack. I told Alpha Hunter that you have the foundation, but you're out of practice. Luckily for you, you're a quick learner and you have an Alpha who is willing to give you one-on-one instruction. If you feel the need to also run, I will do sprints with you. If you insist on wanting to run patrols, I'll run with you, see if you can maintain the intensity of a longer run without impacting your ability to continue sparring. My goal isn't to keep you weak, Margot, it's to help you get stronger, faster."

"This is my only option?" she asks Hunter.

"I don't have the capacity right now to offer you anyone who can do what Ezra is offering. Not only that, but nearly any pack member would be honored to get the one-on-one training that Ezra is offering you because he's right. You will get stronger much faster with his guidance and teaching. Ezra is a powerful fighter. He's intelligent and skillful in battle. But he's also a very good instructor," Hunter tells her.

Margot looks at me, silently asking me what I think.

"I know there's a lot going on for you right now Margot. But I think you need to consider what your primary goal is. I think everyone in this room knows that you do not want to go back into a safe room," I say. She glances at Ezra, making me think that Ezra doesn't know the real reason behind her desire to stay out of the safe room.

"If your goal is to get stronger, I think what Alpha Ezra is offering is your best opportunity. I know when my father had time to train me individually, which wasn't often, talways felt like I walked away a stronger fighter. Even now, with Hunter teaching me more defensive tactics, I feel stronger," I say.

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"I would second that. I don't often get to spar one-on-one with Alpha Hunter, but when I do, I always feel like I'm stronger because of it," Lucas adds.

"Do you feel stronger after our training session this morning?" Ezra asks her.

Margot thinks through her answer for a moment before making a face. "Stronger, no. I'm f**g sore after this morning," she says sighing, "But I do feel smarter about fighting. I think tomorrow I'll be even better than was honestly.

day," she says

"Then let me continue to train you hard in the morning, and more gently at night. Running will help loosen your muscles, but only if you don't overdo it. And since I'm quickly learning how stubborn you can be, Luna Margot, I'm guessing you'd overdo it on your own," he says, his lips twitching.

She raises her chin a bit. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Mmhhh," he murmurs, watching her with a hunger I've seen in Hunter's eyes many times.

"Are we in agreement then?" Ezra asks her.

“Fine,” she says, finally relaxing her defensive stance.

“When would you like to start?”

“Now?”

“Let’s go then,” he says, gesturing for her to precede him out of the room.

“Oh, Sophie...” she says, turning to me.

“We’re done for tonight. Kinsley and I get tired easily now that we’re both carrying pups. We’ll pick it up again tomorrow morning after breakfast,” I tell her.

When they leave, I snuggle up against my mate.

“Who says I’m only teaching you defensive tactics?” Hunter asks me.

Lucas snorts as I laugh.

“On that note, I’m going to go find my mate and see what she wants for dinner. Have a good evening you two.”

“You as well,” I say, never looking away from my mate.

When the door closes, Hunter’s chest begins rumbling with the same desire I’m feeling for him. “What are you hungry for?”

“You,” I say, and dinner for us, comes much, much later.

The One He Claimed Chapter 99

Chapter 99: Robin’s Suggestion

Hunter

The next day begins as usual, me pleasuring my mate, me being late for sparring, and then me working with Sophie to help her get stronger and faster after checking over the pack warriors. Some of her movements are starting to become stiffer as my pup grows inside her, making some movements more difficult. I’

d ask her to stop sparring, but I know my mate and she won’t appreciate my protectiveness.

I notice that Ezra is saying “good” a lot more to Margot this morning, meaning he must be testing her on what he taught her yesterday and she’s showing him that she’s using her newly learned skills this morning. She must have listened to him last night, because

she's not as stiff this morning as she was when she came into my office yesterday afternoon.

After breakfast, where surprisingly, Margot joined us, Ezra and I head to my office for the video conference with the other Alphas.

I move my computer to a conference table so that he and I can both participate, and I enter the conference room. Two others are already waiting. One is Kayce, but I only know that because his name is on the screen. His mate is in his lap and the two of them are kissing as if they've forgotten about this meeting.

"Good morning, Kayce, good morning, Luna Allison," I say chuckling.

Allison gasps and pulls away from Kayce, but he holds her in his lap. When she turns toward the camera, she's obviously blushing.

"I won't apologize for kissing my mate, especially when she only told me last night that she's carrying my pup," Kayce says proudly, and we all congratulate them as the others join.

Robin smiles, turning to look over his shoulder. "We need to catch up, Nikki."

"It's not a contest, Robin," she says, walking in and saying hello to Allison.

"Everything's a contest where Alphas are concerned," Robin says, kissing her neck.

"Well then, you'd better up your game, Alpha," she says, making Robin growl.

"Where's Sophie?" Nikki asks.

"Working on better preparing the safe rooms. Apparently, they need a better ambiance, so our pack members aren't sitting scared and waiting while the rest of us fight," I tell her.

"What a great idea," Allison says.

"Let's schedule a call with her, Alli," Nikki says.

"I'll set something up," Allison says before the two say goodbye and walk out of the rooms. When Kayce turns back, he's shaking his head.

"Goddess save us from intelligent, empowered Lunas."

"You'll find no complaints from me," I say.

"That's because our mates haven't talked to yours yet, Hunter. Just you wait. Nikki's already drafting a law to allow the first born to inherit the Alpha position," Robin says.

Calvin frowns. "They already do."

"The first born, whether male or female," Robin clarifies.

"Oh," Calvin says.

"And Allison is drafting a bill to allow Lun and Alpha females on the Committee of Alphas as voting members," Kayce says. "Did I mention that having two intelligent, empowered Lunas living right next door to each other is dangerous?"

"Trying living with two," Dutton pipes in.

"How are things going with the twins. Have they gotten settled in?" I ask him.

"Yes. My bed is comfortably full every night," he says smiling broadly, making all of us chuckle.

"Alpha Carter, how is Luna June? I'd like to give Margot an update on her mother," I say, and Ezra looks at me. He must have forgotten that Margot's mother is living with Carter and Amy right now.

"She's a strong woman. It will take time as these things do, but she's making a name for herself here in our pack. Amy had the idea to put her in the nursery with the pups and it's working out wonderfully. Her Luña nature of giving and loving is really able to shine there and it's helping her to heal."

"Would it be okay if I brought Margot over to see her mother?" Ezra asks.

"Of course, Alpha Ezra, but I thought Margot was living with Hunter," Carter says.

I look at Ezra, waiting for him to tell the group.

He looks at me, pressing his lips together. "She's my second chance mate," he says, making all of them respond with shock, some sitting back heavily in their seats, some sucking in air, some whistling low.

"How's that going?" Calvin asks.

"She hasn't rejected me yet, so I take that as a win," he says.

"Good luck, Ezra," Carter says. "I wish you the best," he says and the rest of us agree.

“Alpha Calvin, how is your Luna’s pregnancy coming along?” I ask, knowing Sophie will want to know.

“She’s doing very well. Our little girl is growing quickly.”

“Oh, you’re having a girl!” Robin says.

“Yes, we’re both very happy,” he says, smiling.

“Before we begin today, has anyone heard anything about any of the other Alphas moving against us, or more specifically against Hunter?” Kayce asks.

“I’ve been trying to keep tabs on Joshua. He’s closest to my pack, or he is now that he’s taken over Elias’ pack, but I haven’t seen anything. My scouts can’t get too close though. He’s got patrols running non-stop. However, we’re pretty sure that your previous G**a is there now, Alpha Hunter, and that he’s running one of the packs for Joshua,” Calvin says.

“That doesn’t surprise me,” I say. “He got away when he attacked with Owen’s pack, the coward.”

The Alphas growl in agreement before turning our attention to Robin.

“Well, I wanted to get us together to discuss reinitiating the Committee of Alphas. I think the premise of the committee is a good one, even though we’d become so divided. Now, there are seven of us who, for the most part, agree on the direction of our future, leaving only four Alphas who don’t agree.”

“Probably soon to be three, if Joshua attacks me,” I say.

“Correct,” Robin says. “So, I wanted to get a show of hands on who agrees that we should implement a new Committee of Alphas,” Robin says, and all of us raise our hands.

“Any concerns?” he asks.

“How do we resolve differences of opinion?” Ezra asks.

“A good question and one that I don’t think we can answer today. I think we need to decide if we are to have a majority rule for our laws, or if we need complete agreement from every Alpha to implement a law,” Robin says.

“I’d also recommend reviewing all of our laws once we decide how to proceed. Laws such as how we claim our mates are outdated. I’m sure that there are others as well,” I say.

“So, if we are in agreement, let’s get up a call in another week or so, depending on what happens with Joshua. Then we can elect our committee leader, I personally will be recommending Alpha Carter, and we can go from there, Robin says.

“Me? Why me?” Carter asks.

“You are the logical choice because you have experience and knowledge that the rest of us don’t have,” Robin says, and I hide my smile.

“Young man, are you calling me old,” Carter growls, making most of us chuckle.

“No sir, I said experienced and knowledgeable, not old,” Robin says, and he miraculously keeps his lips from twitching.

“Maybe I’ll elect Alpha Ezra. He’s...experienced and knowledgeable as well,” Carter says.

“Not nearly as experienced and knowledgeable as you though, Alpha,” Ezra teases.

“In the meantime, I’ll start pulling up the existing laws. It’s going to take time to go through them, but I think Hunter’s point is valid. I know that they’ve never been reviewed since I’ve been an Alpha,” Robin says.

I shake my head as does Ezra. None of us has ever been asked to review a law.

Carter sighs. “I guess that does make me more experienced, because if I’m the last one to have reviewed a law, then it’s been a couple of decades since one was reviewed. Time to bring them up to the current century.”

|||

“We also need to talk about Owen’s pack lands,” Ezra says.

“I’ll add that to the agenda. Hunter, would you mind setting up another meeting for us next week? Let’s plan to elect our new Committee Leader and get an idea of the number of laws we need to tackle. I’ll also say that some of the intelligent and empowered Lunas may want to join to petition that we review their proposed laws.”

“Let’s see if there are any laws that preclude them from doing that first. Then we can move forward with having them present. I’d hate for something down the road to overrule anything we do now because we weren’t diligent with reviewing and modifying our existing laws,” Ezra says.

‘A fantastic idea. Alright then everyone, see you next week,’ Robin says, and I disconnect the call, turning to look at Ezra who looks thoughtful.

“What’s that look?” I ask him.

“I’m wondering if I can use these laws to make an intelligent Luna start to feel empowered.”

“I can talk to Sophie, have her include Margot on the calls with Nikki and Allison. Unless you’d like to introduce her to the idea?”

“I need to go to Owen’s old pack today. I think I’ll ask Margot if she wants to go with me. We can run in wolf form to help her work off some of the tightness from sparring, and I can use the time away to talk to her about what we’re planning, encourage her to get involved.”

“And make sure you tell her that you’d like to take her to see her mother. I’m pretty sure they’re close.”

maybe we can go see her tomorrow,” he says, as we

“You’ll be back tonight?” I ask

“Maybe not by dinner time, but I don’t want to have her out, just the two of us, when it’s dark

“If something happens, have her bide in the mountain. We have a place there where she wolves on the run can hide. Alphas struggle to get in and it has an eat that is much too small for Alphas to fit through And of course, howl and my pack will respond

“will do, thank you,” he says, going in search of Margot, as I mand ink my mate. I want to make sure that she and my pup have eaten lunch and I want to tell her about the upcoming events with the packs

The One He Claimed Chapter 100

Chapter 100: Convincing Margot

Ezra

“Margot, may I have a word with you?” I ask, walking up to her, Beta Kinsley, and Luna Sophie.

I’ve never considered myself easily intimidated, but Robin and Kayce are on to something. Intelligent, empowered women emit a strength I’m not used to seeing or feeling. Put them together in a group, like now, and it’s intimidating, even for an Alpha like me.

Three pairs of eyes turn to look at me, one assessing, one questioning, one defiant. Guess which one is defiant.

“Go ahead,” she says, and I look at the other two.

“I thought perhaps we could speak privately. But if you would prefer to have this conversation in front of your friends...”

She stands. I’ve obviously called her bluff. Oh, this woman is challenging. She’s getting her wings back and rather than just trying to fly, she’s continually flapping them in my face..

But I’m an Alpha and I love a good challenge. Whether she means to or not, she’s only making my desire for her stronger.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” she says to Beta Kinsley and Luna Sophie, breezing past me.

I watch both women’s lips twitch before I turn and follow my mate out into the hallway.

When she’s found the spot where she wants to talk, she spins. around, her chin high and her hands clasped in front of her.

“What can I do for you, Alpha Ezra?” She continually uses my title to keep distance between us, even though I’ve asked her to call me Ezra.

Rather than answer, I take a moment to assess her. Sparring with her has given me time to see how her body moves, when it’s sore and when it’s not. Right now, she’s standing just off center, meaning either her leg or her hip is bothering her. She also rolled one shoulder when she clasped her hands, so I’d guess the shoulder that she fell on during our session today is still sore as well.

The longer I look her over, the tighter her lips press together and the brighter the pink stain in her cheeks becomes.

“Did you just want to ogle me, Alpha Ezra? You could do that from afar,” she snaps at me.

“Where’s the fun in that?” I ask, responding to her snark before I could catch myself. Her eyes flash to mine and she takes a step to leave.

“Wait. That was uncalled for. Your constant challenges of me have me on edge, Luna.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I’m not a Luna.”

“You’re my mate, that makes you a Luna.”

"What do you want?"

"I wanted to know if you want to go with me to Alpha Owen's old pack. My G***a is there, and I'd like to check on things since I'm staying here longer than I anticipated."

"You could leave," she says, once again challenging me. This time, I have me and Thorin under control. But that doesn't mean that I won't challenge her as much as she's challenging me.

"You could come with me."

"No."

"Then I'm staying. As I was saying, I'm going to Owen's old pack to check on things and see if there is anything I need to address. There are a lot of women and children there who lost their mates and I want to make sure we're doing everything we can to help them. I also want to make sure that the remaining warriors who challenged Hunter aren't considering an insurrection against my G**a."

As I've spoken, her posture has relaxed, and now that it is, I can see her subtly shifting her weight to relieve some of the strain on her sore muscles.

"Why do you want me to go?" she asks.

"A couple of reasons. First, I hate the idea of leaving you, even for a few hours. Thorin won't give me a moment's peace while we're gone which will make the trip that much harder for me. Second, it will give you a chance to let Reyna run. We can go at her pace and let you stretch out those sore muscles. Third, I could use a Luna's eye and assistance. Those women will probably respond better to you than to me. I want them to know that they are safe and they're more likely to talk to you about their concerns than they are to talk to me."

I can see her struggle to answer. I know she wants to say no, but the running part of the deal has her hesitating as I knew it would. I also think the thought of helping other women is intriguing to her.

"I will say, I can't guarantee your safety. I will protect you with my life if someone attacks us, but if Joshua comes while we're out in no man's land, it will be a risk for you. Hunter mentioned a place in the mountain..."

"But I don't want

"I know where it is," she says, looking down at me. "My life will be too short to waste yours on," she says quietly, making me growl angrily.

Before I can stop myself, I have her against the wall, my body pressed against hers. "You are NOT going to die."

She looks up at me, resignation on her face. "I am. I've come to terms with that, Ezra. You need to as well. You need to let me reject you. You won't carry my mark, but my death will still impact you and on the battlefield, that could mean the

difference between life and death. You have a pack that relies on you. I have no one.

I wrap my arms around her, holding her against me but pulling away from the wall. "Now you listen to me. I told you once, but I will tell you as many times as it takes, Margot. I lost one mate in this lifetime; I refuse to lose another."

She opens her mouth to speak, but I shut her up, covering her mouth with mine. I feel her body go rigid, and as I angry as I am, I force myself to remain gentle, urging her to give in to the kiss. Her wolf is awake enough that I know she feels the bond. I'm nearly ready to pull away, thinking that I've made a huge mistake, when I feel her relax, her body leaning into mine, her lips beginning to move with mine. Her hands slide up my arms, linking behind my neck.

I tilt my head to the side, sliding my tongue into her mouth. Her sweet, floral taste is as delicate as her scent and I moan softly, pulling her more tightly against me. I let one hand slide into her hair, gently holding her as we kiss. I don't push for more, just 'happy that she's letting me kiss her, happy that she's responding to the kiss.

I hear her soft whimper, smell her jasmine scent increasing in the air around us as she presses her body against mine. When I smell the salt of tears, I pull away, leaning my head against her forehead, letting both of us collect ourselves.

"I talked to Carter today. I told him I want to bring you over to see your mom."

"You did?" she asks, pulling back to look at me.

I lift my hands to her face, gently wiping the tears from eyes. I don't ask about them. I'm sure she's struggling with this mate. bond and her response to me.

I nod. "I don't want you going alone, it's not safe. But I know you. want to see her. That makes two people that you have to live. for, not including the friends that you've already made in this. pack. Don't underestimate how important you are to people, Margot. You're very, very important to me, but I'm not the only one. Please, just don't give up yet."

She nods, but she looks away, meaning that she hasn't changed her mind yet. Well, until Joshua attacks, I have time to try and get through her tough exterior.

"What time to you want to leave?" she asks, making me smile.

"I need to shower first..."

"I noticed," she says, smirking at me.

"Luna Margot, are you teasing me?" I growl softly.

"What if I am?" she asks, her eyebrow raising in challenge as her lips twitch.

I lean in, running my nose over her jaw to her ear. "I like it. I hope you keep doing it," I whisper, satisfied when I feel her body shiver.

When I pull back, she's blushing again, and I smile, pleased with our interactions. It's a good step in the right direction.

"I'll have Hunter contact Carter to make sure tomorrow works for him while we're gone, but I want to leave soon. I don't want the two of us out alone at night with the possibility of war hanging over us."

"I'll be ready," she says, and I walk her back to the room where Beta Kinsley and Luna Sophie are.

When we get to the door, I lean in to kiss her again, but she places her fingers on my lips, narrowing her eyes at me. Instead of her lips, I smile, kissing her fingers. "See you in a few," I say.

As I walk away, I hear her walk into the room.

"That must have been some 'talk'," I hear Beta Kinsley say.

"Yeah, how much 'talking' did you do?" Luna Sophie teases her.

Comparing Margi

"Oh, shut it," Margot says. I smile, feeling lighter than I have in years.