

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 21

Nathan.

Dawn's fragile light filtered into my quarters, At odds with the grim mood fogging my mind. I sat slumped at my desk, papers strewn half-finished. Thoughts kept drifting to my father's declining health, despite my best efforts to bury myself in Alpha duties.

His condition plagued my steps like a shadow as I went through the motions of leadership. Reviewing land disputes and reports from allied packs now seemed meaningless formalities. Father's time grew short, and I was powerless to stop fate's cruel hand.

A knock interrupted my brooding. I straightened as Derek entered, his assessing gaze missing nothing.

"You're looking rough, Alpha. Everything alright?"

I forced a dismissive wave. "Nothing, some fresh air and exercise won't cure it.

Derek's raised brow showed he saw through my deflection. But he simply briefed me on the day's tasks and packed matters requiring attention before departing. I envied his stoic focus. My thoughts roiled like stormy seas.

As we walked to breakfast, I decided voicing my turmoil might grant some clarity. Derek's counsel had never led me astray.

"I fear time is not on my father's side, I admitted quietly. "Each day the sickness drains more of his spirit. I know not how to slow the tide."

Derek nodded gravely. "Dark days indeed. But remember, even the longest night passes. The sun always rises again."

I clasped his shoulder, bolstered by his unwavering light guiding me through the gathering dark. Hope remained while breathing the flower, however faint. I must cling to that.

Preoccupied as I was, my Alpha duties continued unrelentingly. After breakfast I met with various members seeking guidance on disputes and decisions. Though weariness dragged at me, I focused completely on each petitioner, offering what wisdom I could. Their trust strengthened my resolve.

Later, as I walked the woods alone, my thoughts turned inevitably back to Father. The vibrant hues of the autumn forest seemed cruelly indifferent to our grief. I paused by a bubbling stream, wishing desperately for some way to share my vitality, with him. But

such power lay beyond me. Helpless rage and anguish tore through me until I fell to my knees, spent.

As the moon rose overhead, painting the woods in silver, numb acceptance settled over me. All the magic or might in the world could not turn back time. I could only make the most of Father's remaining days, easing his discomfort as the inevitable end drew near.

Back home, I sat for long hours reading Father's favourite myths and legends to him, describing the brilliant fall colours outside, reminiscing on happy memories from my boyhood. Bittersweet joy pierced through the lingering sadness in those quiet moments together.

Until finally fate's hour could be delayed no more. My last fragile hopes shattered when the elder healer soberly took me aside one morning. "His time has come. Stay close to him now."

I clasped Father's limp hand, speaking soft words of love and gratitude as his breathing slowed. Hot tears tracked down my face. But despite the crushing grief, I kept my tone upbeat. He needed not witness my anguish.

As the afternoon sun dipped low, Father met my gaze, sharp and clear once more. "You will be a wise Alpha," he rasped. Trust your heart."

I could only nod, words stopped by sorrow. With a peaceful sigh his eyes drifted shut for the last time: Respectful silence filled the room as attendants came to tend the body. My noble father was gone, his long burdens laid down, I could never fill the vast void left behind.

In the days that followed, my duties carried on without pause for grief. I arranged an honourable farewell ceremony, befitting Father's legacy, nodding gravely through countless condolences. But inside, grief gnawed ceaselessly.

The pack needed their Alpha's strength now. I buried my pain, donning the impassive mask of leadership. But seeds of doubt took root in my heart. Could I ever become the guardian these people deserved?

One evening while walking the estate perimeter alone, anguished introspection overwhelmed me. I shifted, fleeing into the forest on four legs. My wolf sought solace in primal abandon, racing tirelessly through the moonlit woods.

I do not know how long or how far I ran in my mute fury and grief. But eventually I stopped to a halt, flanks heaving, utterly spent. Gentle hands stroked my fur as my vision cleared,

Terra's kind voice soothed my fractured spirit. Her healing care slowly mended the long-ignored wounds of loss I carried. And her wisdom reminded me that life continues in rhythms beyond mortal understanding.

With

my dear friend's help, acceptance finally brought comfort. By honouring Father's life daily through how I lived mine with compassion and courage- his light would never fade from this world.

The future remained shrouded, but Terra's stalwart support filled me with hope I could yet become the Alpha my pack deserved.

Her grace shone as a beacon through pain's darkest nights. Healing was possible, if we walked forward together

But then a faithful evening Derek brought me the s***t news.

"Alpha, you must hurry, it's your father. His body has worsened. He banged the door to my office,

"Did you call Terra?" I asked.

"Yes she says I should inform you."

I jolted like a light bolt following Derek.

I hope it's not the end.

Terra

The air hung heavy, smelling of damp earth and wolf musk as I walked the estate's shadowy halls. Night whispered secrets: only it knew. The pack's rhythm pulsed, an ancient heartbeat in the torch flames that flickered.

In the huge master suite where the former Alpha lay weak, the stillness felt heavy to bear.

Moonlight filtered through the curtains, making the once-proud man now fading look ghostly pale. Nathan stood over the bed, just a silhouette against his father's sickness.

"D**n it, Terra. How'd he get so bad so quickly?" Nathan muttered, fingers tugging his messy hair

I met his eyes, sharing the pain we both felt. "Sometimes life just throws you s**t. We handle it. My voice was rough with years of learning to be tough and keep going. It echoed around the dim room.

His amber eyes usually vibrant with alpha power now mirrored vulnerability. "We've got to do something. Fast."

I sighed heavily, moving closer to the bedside. The old Alpha's ragged breaths were a haunting dirge, mourning the end of an era slipping away. "I can't work miracles here, Nathan. But I can try easing his pain some."

The flicker of gratitude in Nathan's eyes was a silent plea for reassurance. I squeezed his shoulder, our bond transcending all the rough history between us. "I'll do what I can."

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The walk through the estate's shadowy halls passed in a blur, my mind focused on the job ahead. Elder Vera waited in the solarium, a beacon of wisdom in the creeping dark..

"Terra," she greeted, her ancient eyes full of knowledge. "The former Alpha worsens."

I nodded, feeling the weight of it all press down. I've got to get Him to the city, Vera. The facilities there are his best shot

now."

Her gaze held mine, a conversation beyond words echoing between us. "I will arrange it all. Time is everything."

Outside, the world unfolded in moonlit trees and rustling leaves as Nathan and I crossed the courtyard. The night air nipped a subtle chill, an eerie contrast to the urgency firing through our blood.

"He doesn't deserve this c**p," Nathan muttered, his voice thick with generations of burdens. "None of us do."

I glanced his way, the moonlight painting his worried face in silver. "Life's not about deserving. It's about dealing."

His lips quirked a wry almost-smile, an echo of the boy I once knew. "Your bedside manner needs work, Doc."

I chuckled low, a rare bit of lightness despite the heavy shadows looming. "Maybe so. But it's gotten me this far."

The courtyard echoed distant howls as we reached the waiting SUV. Its sleek shape looked out of place against the rustic backdrop. The promise of modern salvation. Nathan's gaze lingered, acknowledging the stark contrast in worlds we lived

between

The former Alpha lay weak in the backseat, each shallow breath a chilling reminder of mortality. As I settled beside him, the smells of ancient woods and sharp fear intertwined. Nathan took the wheel, the engine's hum starting our journey that could change the pack's history.

The city unfurled ahead, steel and glass against the black night sky. The hospital's neon-bright facade glowed like a beacon of hope. But hope, like life, came with no guarantees.

The ER's sterile embrace replaced the primal forest musk with antiseptic t**g. Nurses moved smoothly and efficiently, performing a graceful life-saving dance like a pack in perfect sync.

I quickly explained the dire situation to the staff, urgency charging the air. They wheeled the former Alpha away into the maze of halls. Nathan paced restless, silently begging for some control

"He'll be in good hands," I said, professional cool just barely covering my inner chaos.

Nathan's gaze bore into mine, the weight of unspoken words hanging thick between us. "You better be right, Terra."

The steady beeps and hums of hospital machines filled the air as I stood at the former Alpha's bedside. His breaths, once ragged gasps, now came calm and even signs of stability, of recovery. Modern medicine had worked its magic, with my two hands carefully guiding the dance between life and death.

Relief shone clear in Nathan's eyes too as we watched over his father. The strained connection between us held a shared hope now for the future. We had set aside the ghosts, tethered by this old wolf's fragile life thread.

Days and nights blurred within the hospital's stark walls. My routine became a tiring dance of treatments and tests. Nathan stayed close, a silent sentinel, his eyes full of pain witnessing his father's vulnerability.

When moonlight cast shadows on the linoleum floor during the lonely hours, Dr. Collins appeared at my side. His presence anchored me amidst the nonstop chaos. This man whose rock-steady support had carried me through my worst times now fought by me to heal.

“Hey you,” he greeted with a tired smile, his fingers brushing mine. “How’s our patient holding up?”

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I sighed, exhaustion sunk deep in my bones. “Stable, for now. But it’s touch-and-go still. We’ve got to watch him closely.”

Collins nodded, a look that said he understood this intricate dance with death. “You’re doing incredible work, Terra. He’s lucky to have you.”

His praise sparked a little flicker of grateful warmth in my weary soul. “We’re all in this fight together.”

The hours ran on, blurring into a marathon of treatments and talks with colleagues. Collins stayed at my side, offering a steady hand when I faltered and laughing when I needed them most. His humour sliced through the hospital’s serious dreariness.

“Woulda thought we’d be doing this back when we first met?” he mused, a hint of amusement glinting in tired eyes.

I huffed a chuckle, appreciating the absurdity. “Not in a million years. But here we are.”

Collins’ gaze softened, acknowledging the long winding road that brought us to this moment together. “You’ve come such a long way, Terra. And you’re not alone in it anymore.”

His words soothed old hurts, a gentle caress. The bond we now shared transcended doctor and patient labels. It held a depth of years in the making.

As night wore on, the former Alpha gradually stabilised. The monitors’ relentless beeping quieted, signalling we had won this round against his mystery sickness. Nathan’s stoic mask cracked, rawness spilling out.

“He’s going to pull through,” I assured, squeezing Nathan’s shoulder. “Your father is a born fighter,”

Nathan just nodded, face etched with b**e-**p gratitude. “Thank you, Terra. I couldn’t stand to lose him too.”

Past and present collided at that moment. Our ghosts fell silent, if only for a heartbeat, replaced by life’s power. The former Alpha embodied resilience, our shared triumph over time’s relentless march.

Minutes passed, then hours, bringing hope that recovery would win out. The former Alpha's room lost its shadows of uncertainty, filled now with promise. Nathan kept diligent watch at his father's side, guarding this newfound peace.

One fateful dawn, as gold light washed the hospital windows, the former Alpha woke. His knowing gaze met mine with a depth that said no words could fully capture his thanks.

"Thank you, Terra," he rasped, the simple words weighted heavily,

I smiled, relief and joy lighting me up. "You're so welcome."

In the aftermath as the hospital faded to memory, Collins and I stole a rare moment together in the cafeteria's hush. The clinks of trays and distant chatter backdropped our shared silence.

"How're you holding up?" Collins asked, searching my face with knowing eyes.

I shrugged, subtly admitting my b**-d**p fatigue. "It's been a rollercoaster. But he'll recover fully."

Collins reached across the table to trace soft patterns on my hand. "And you? How are you doing through all this?"

His care resonated deeply, a lifeline amidst the chaos. "I'll be alright. It's just...a lot."

He nodded, understanding beyond words. "You don't have to carry it alone, you know."

His gentle reassurance settled feather-light on my shoulders. "I know. And I'm so grateful for that."

The former Alpha recovered slowly but surely, becoming a beacon of hope for Nathan, his stern mask now melted away, taking comfort in this victory that was shared.

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Terra

As the steady beep of the heart monitor filled the quiet hospital room, I let out a long breath. The former Alpha's condition had finally stabilised after days of touch-and-go uncertainty. Modern medicine had worked its magic under my and Collins' attentive care.

Nathan kept vigil at his father's bedside, features softening almost imperceptibly in relief. No words were needed to express our shared hopes kindled anew. For now, the ever-present shadows had receded.

I slipped outside to update Derek and Lianna, the estate's leadership needing assurance their beloved former leader was on the mend. Their stoic relief echoed my own churning emotions. Sleep could wait a bit longer.

With the crisis tempering for now, my thoughts turned to the three bright souls I had missed dearly through this ordeal- my rambunctious boys. Collins' steady updates and photos had lifted my spirits, but nothing could replace holding them close.

I decided I had earned a quick ride home to see my family. Derek arranged an inconspicuous car, wise enough not to question my motives. The forested backroads lulled me into a thoughtful calm as I made the familiar journey.

Too soon, the cheerful penthouse came into view. My breath caught at the welcoming sight. Joyful peals of childish laughter rang out as I stepped from the car.

Before I made it halfway up the walk, three wild-haired figures came barreling from the porch, yelling "Mommy!" in delighted unison.

I dropped to my knees, arms flung wide to catch their exuberant hugs. Their sweet scents and uncontrolled energy engulfed me as we tumbled together on the soft grass. I buried my nose in Landon's curls, squeezed Luke and Levi tight, unable to stop smiling and murmuring affection through joyful tears. This was soul-deep nourishment.

Collins ambled over, giving us space for our enthusiastic reunion. But I soon extricate myself to wrap him in a fierce, grateful hug too.

"Thank you for holding down the fort," I whispered. He smiled into my hair.

"Of course. But we've missed our glue keeping things together" Drawing back, his brow furrowed slightly. "You look beat, Terra. Everything okay?"

I touched his hand reassuringly. "Just a difficult case. But I'll tell you about it later. Right now I just need my boys."

The rest of the too-brief visit passed in a blur of gleeful chaos-playing games, reading stories, tickles and cuddles before bedtime. Simple joys that realigned my world, reminding me what truly mattered. I tucked their sleeping forms in snugly breathing prayers of gratitude over them.

Out in the moonlit yard I swayed gently on the porch swing, Collins' solid warmth beside me. Cicadas hummed a lulling cadence. For these stolen hours, the estate's looming pressures seemed to melt away

Collins waited for me to speak first, ever-patient. I kept it simple for now. "A family friend fell ill suddenly. I had to pull out all the stops to stabilise him."

“Sounds intense. But I know you’ve got this.” Collins gave my shoulders a reassuring squeeze. “Let me know if you need anything. I don’t mind the extra kid chaos.”

I smiled tiredly, leaning into him. “Thank you. Just knowing they’re safe here helps more than you know.”

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We sat quietly together until reluctantly admitted I should head back. Collins walked me to the car, the moon lighting his thoughtful expression. “Get some rest when you can, okay? And come home soon. To all of us.”

I nodded through a tight throat, hugging him fiercely once more Collins’ steady presence would keep everything in balance. But leaving my sanctuary still felt like tearing off a piece of my soul all over again.

During the long drive back, I allowed a few bitter tears before forcibly regaining composure. I had chosen to follow this difficult path. And much work remained to see it through. My family was a warm light guiding me – I just had to keep putting one foot in front of the other until I reached them again

By the time the estate’s imposing silhouette came into view, I felt centred once more. Now I could resume my role as healer with renewed purpose.

Stepping back into the elegant suite where the former Alpha lay sleeping, the antiseptic smells again replacing the cabin’s warmth, I squeezed Nathan’s shoulder gently in reassurance. He gave me a weary but grateful look.

“Your father’s condition is excellent now, I affirmed. “Once he’s home again, he should recover well with attentive care and rest.

“Thank the moon,” Nathan exhaled. “I know my absence has been long, but the pack needs assurance their Alpha is capable. You’ve helped restore their faith. His candid words acknowledged the foundational role I had played in this hard-won victory over fate.

I simply inclined my head in acceptance. “Now go get some decent rest yourself. Doctor’s orders”

The answering twinkle in Nathan’s exhausted eyes lifted my spirits. Together we had brought his father back from the brink against odds.

With compassion and trust, perhaps there were brighter days still ahead. If I focused on paying forward the kindness others so freely gave me, I could get through anything.

“How’s our patient doing today?” Collins asked, handing me a steaming mug as I shuffled into the clinic’s cosy kitchen.

I sighed, sinking gratefully onto a stool and wrapping my hands around the warm ceramic. “Much improved, thankfully. His strength returns a little more each day.”

Collins nodded, leaning against the counter to sip his own coffee, eyes crinkling with shared relief. “That’s wonderful to hear. All your tireless care is clearly paying off.”

I smiled tiredly, blowing gently on the fragrant liquid before taking a cautious first sip. The rich dark brew immediately helped clear the lingering hospital antiseptic smells from my nose.

“Well, I can’t take all the credit,” I admitted. “Your steady help these past hours was invaluable. I don’t know how I would’ve managed without you there.”

Collins waved off my praise, but his expression softened all the same. “We make a good team. But I know you haven’t had a real break since this whole crisis started. Maybe you should take a quick ride to see the boys soon? They miss you like crazy.”

My shoulders tensed instinctively at the suggestion, despite my heart leaping eagerly at the thought of holding my rambunctious trio close again. It had been weeks since I was home. But the risk still felt too great.

“I don’t know...” I hedged, staring down at the swirling dark liquid

Collins reached over and gave my arm a reassuring squeeze. “It’s okay, Terra. I know it’s complicated. But you deserve some time with them. I can hold down the fort here.*

I bit my lip, wavering. The warm encouragement in Collins’ deep brown eyes and understanding tone slowly dissolved my hesitation. He was right – I had been spread thin for so long. One brief visit would restore my flagging spirits.

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“Alright, you’ve convinced me. I conceded with a small but genuine smile. “I’ll plan to sneak away for an evening soon.

Thank you.”

Collins grinned, giving my shoulder a light squeeze before standing to rinse out his empty mug. “Anytime. Let me know the day and I’ll get the ice cream sandwiches stockpiled and action movie queue prepped for their arrival!”

I laughed, the last of the tension easing from my frame. With Collins' stalwart help, I could allow myself this small respite. without anxiety. He kept our little family glued together in my absence. My gratitude for his steady presence in our lives swelled once more.

Over the next few days, I waited anxiously for the right window of opportunity. The former Alpha improved daily under my attentive care, but I remained wary of leaving too long until his strength was more secured.

Nathan kept nearly constant vigil at his father's bedside, leaving the the sole medical authority monitoring his fragile progress.

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But late one afternoon, Nathan reluctantly agreed to take a brief walk outside at my urging. The fresh air would restore his own depleted energy, and I could slip away for a few hours knowing the former Alpha rested stable and secure.

I hastily scribbled a vague note about following up on a supply request since full transparency about my destination. remained impossible for now.

Nathan's hard-won trust felt too fragile to test with the truth. The knot of deception in my gut twisted sharply, but I forced myself out the door. I would unravel that tangled web later right now my boys needed me.

I took the winding forest backroads, windows down and hair whipping wildly around my face. The cool pine-scented breeze helped settle my frenzied thoughts as I neared the secluded valley town I now called home.

Too soon the charming log cabin tucked against a hillside emerged into view, plumes of fragrant smoke already wafting cheerfully from the chimney. My heart swelled at the welcoming sight. I was out of the car almost before I shifted into park, taking the steps two at a time.

The front door flew open just as I raised my hand to knock, three wild-haired figures tumbling out to cling to my legs and waist, all talking over each other at once.

"Mommy, you're home!"

"We missed you!"

Never leave again, okay?"

Laughing and crying simultaneously, I sank down and wrapped my arms around their sturdy little bodies, breathing in their sweet scents – laundry detergent, fresh grass stains, sugar and spice. Each one is imprinted permanently in my memory.

“Oh, my darling boys,” I whispered fervently into their silky hair as I placed scattered kisses over their upturned faces. “Mommy missed you terribly. But I’m here now.”

We stayed tangled in our emotional reunion embrace until the boys finally wriggled free, grabbing my hands to eagerly drag me inside. “Uncle Collins made cookies for you!” Luke informed me importantly.

I raised my eyebrows in delighted surprise. “He did? Well that was so thoughtful.”

Collins stood at the stove keeping watch over a simmering pot of beef stew, but he turned with a broad smile as we tumbled through the doorway.

“Welcome home, stranger,” he said warmly, opening his arms for a quick but heartfelt hug. “You’ve been sorely missed

around here.”

I clung to him tightly for a long moment, overwhelmingly grateful for this man who my little family. “Thank you for everything, Collin. For them, and for me.”

had become an irreplaceable pillar for

He simply winked, ushering me to the counter where a plate of melting chocolate chip cookies waited as promised. The mouthwatering aroma mixed heavenly with stew’s rich scents. After so long subsisting on coffee, hospital food and camp, I was suddenly ravenous.

Perched on the sturdy oak stools, the boys entertained me with rambling accounts of adventures I had missed – tree climbing, wildlife sightings, new hiding spots.

Their exuberant innocence eased the lingering worries and fatigue from my work caring for the former Alpha in his long illness. Here I could simply be Mom again, leaving the rest of the world’s chaos temporarily at bay.

The hearty stew Collins ladled out for dinner tasted like manna after my recent deprivation. I inhaled two heaping bowls along with crusty bread-slathered in butter. A deep sense of comfort and relief settled over me, the kitchen’s flickering candlelight and my family’s familiar voices cocooning me in warmth. This was home, however fleeting.

After dinner we baked snickerdoodle cookies, the boys “helping” by stealing spoonfuls of sugary dough when they thought I wasn’t looking. Their delighted giggles filled the cosy space with music sweeter than any symphony.

I let the three wild rascals stay up late watching their favourite superhero movie, cuddling under a massive pile of blankets on the living room sofa. Their Mischievous antics kept me smiling until finally even their boundless energy ran out.

With Collins' help I wrangled them through quick baths and into clean pyjamas before tucking each one under the covers, dropping more kisses on their sleepy sweet faces. My throat grew tight listening to their even breathing, every protective maternal instinct swelling fiercely. But for now they were safe and near-nothing else mattered.

Collins was out on the front porch swing waiting when I finally emerged from saying one more goodnight prayer over the boys. I curled up gratefully against his sturdy warmth under the ivory moonlight, letting the crickets' thrumming song wash away the last lingering stress. For just this moment, peace settled through my weary being.

"Thank you again for today," I said softly after we had swung in comfortable silence for a while. "You'll never fully know what a gift time here is. Makes everything else worthwhile."

Collins turned so I could see his small, understanding smile. "Seeing you all together again is thanks enough, believe me. This place doesn't feel whole without you." His eyes searched mine intently, his calloused thumb rubbing gently over my knuckles.

I swallowed down sudden emotion, blinking rapidly, somehow Collins always perceived exactly what I needed – whether reassurance, a listening ear, or simply his steady company during restless nights of pacing the estate halls. The depth of selfless care he showed my boys and I still astonished me. I had not dared hope for such unearned grace in this life.

Impulsively I wrapped both arms around his broad shoulders, burying my face in his collar in a fierce hug. The words seemed to stick in my throat. "Just – thank you. For being you." I hoped the fervency of my embrace conveyed everything left unsaid aloud.

Collins held me close, his chin tucked atop my hair and hands spanning my back with comforting strength. We stayed twined together as the crickets' melody swelled and ebbed, rocking gently in the moon's tranquil glow.

Much too soon, the symphony of frogs and rustling trees was interrupted by the buzz of my phone alarm, signalling my short stolen hours of peace were over. Reality's demands crashed in forcefully once more. With a heavy sigh, I extricate myself from Collins and stood, squaring my shoulders.

"Duty calls?" He asked simply, hands slid into his pockets as he walked me down the gravel drive to where my car waited faintly illuminated beneath the silver maples.

I nodded, the familiar weight settling across my frame once more. "Unfortunately so. But I won't stay away so long next time. You all provide the light that keeps me going

Collins pulled me close once more, calloused hands framed my face as he bent to press a lingering kiss to my forehead. "Hurry home to us. And remember you're never alone in the darkness."

His unwavering faith warmed me as I slid behind the wheel and watched his silhouette fade into the moon-washed night. The drive back to the estate passed in a blur of memories I clung to in order to bolster my nerve. Too soon the imposing stone facade rose ahead, the guards leaning casually against the iron gates.

With no choice but to resume the exhausting charade, I transformed myself back into the consummate professional healer, submerging my secret longing for the refuge I had just left. The crackling fire and boistero

But those precious stolen hours would have to sustain me in the days ahead. I had chosen this path for a reason, however difficult. Life depended on my skills here. I would carry on because I must.

The former Alpha still slept as I checked in, his chest rising and falling steadily. I allowed myself a small smile seeing him improving. But weariness dragged at my bones and spirit.

The emotional whiplash between my two worlds threatened to split me at the seams. I could only withstand the strain by focusing single-mindedly on the present task. The past and future carried too much dangerous power to dwell on.

Nathan kept his word and had not yet returned from his much-needed walk. I stood over the sink splashing cool water on my face, trying to revive my depleted energy.

So much work lay ahead. But Collins' parting reassurance echoed in my mind – I was not alone, not really. However dark the path grew, I would continue putting one foot in front of the other. My family lodestar shone bright, guiding me home. For them, I could weather any storms still to come.

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Terra

"How about some fresh air, Alpha? A change of scenery could lift your spirits," I suggested gently,

Nathan straightened from his slumped position in the chair by his father's bedside, alertness returning to his exhausted features. He scrubbed a hand roughly over his face before giving me a grim nod.

"You're right, of course. I've been cooped up here for too long. Will you sit with him a bit? I don't like leaving him unattended for long."

I clasped Nathan's shoulder and offered an encouraging smile. "Of course. Take a decent walk to clear your head. Your father is resting well – I'll watch over him."

Nathan's answering look held a world of unspoken gratitude. He had scarcely left the former Alpha's side since we brought him stabilised but still frail back to the estate from the city hospital. The ordeal had clearly taken an immense toll on Nathan's own health. But his stubborn devotion as guardian remained tireless.

After Nathan departed with the last few instructions on medications, timing and vital checks, I settled into the plush chair he had vacated

Late afternoon sun streamed through the broad bay windows, leaving dappled patterns on the polished wood floors. Birds chirped faintly from the gardens outside, a cheerful counterpoint to the solemn atmosphere hanging over the suite.

The even rise and fall of the former Alpha's chest as he continued sleeping eased my own worries somewhat. In repose, lines etched deep from decades of leadership seemed to smooth, restoring a glimpse of the fierce warrior he must have been in youth. No wonder Nathan felt such a crushing responsibility to live up to his noble legacy.

On impulse, I gently brushed a few silver strands off the elder wolf's forehead. He had been a second father to me long ago.

Renewing that bond these past weeks while fighting to save his life brought some light even amidst the heavy shadows. He was healing under my diligent care. The question now was whether the long-neglected wounds between Nathan and I could also mend from past's merciless scars.

My bittersweet reflections were interrupted by faint hoarse mumbling. The former Alpha's eyes fluttered rapidly, darting beneath closed lids. I recognized the signs of disturbed dreams and softly grasped his searching hand.

"Hush, it's alright. Just rest now," I soothed. "All is well."

At the sound of my voice he gradually relaxed, featuring smoothing into untroubled sleep once more. But his forehead remained creased and feverish. Infection often plagued the elderly even after major crises passed.

I spent the next hour monitoring for any worrying changes while preparing tea with recuperative herbs and tinctures for inflammation. When the former Alpha finally woke fully, I helped prop him up against plump pillows to sip the steaming brew.

"This will help strengthen your recovery," I explained after briefing him on my assessments. "Your progress is excellent so far. How are you feeling today?"

The elder wolf took careful stock of his body's signals, assessing in the methodical way of experienced warriors. "Still very weak. But the pain has dulled some."

I nodded encouragingly. That's a very good sign your body is healing well. Be sure to finish that tea- it will speed the process

His eyes softened slightly as they searched my face. "You've been a great balm through this trial, Terra my dear. I won't forget all you've done for me and my son."

I quickly looked down, blinking back sudden tears at his heartfelt words. Despite all the years lost between us, he still saw me clearly. "It's been my honour," I managed simply.

We passed the next hour peacefully enough, with me helping the former Alpha wash up and change into fresh night clothes. Once he finished the medicinal tea. He was able to walk short distances supported on my shoulder, stopping periodically to rest.

I kept up an encouraging stream of praise and distraction through the painful process, a sizable portion of my focus split between monitoring his condition and listening for Nathan's return.

By the time I got the elder wolf settled back into bed, dusk's shadows were slipping long across the polished floors. The promised brief escape stretched longer, kindling my worries over Nathan's own state of mind.

Clearly he had needed time alone to fully clear his head, but his injuries made wandering the forest reckless. Just as I was about to ask the guards to discreetly search for their alpha, heavy footsteps echoed down the hall.

I let out a breath I hadn't realised I was holding as Nathan filled the doorway, hair dishevelled and colour high on his cheeks

I shot from the mountain air. But his shoulders set straighter than before, and the hollowness had retreated from his eyes. His pointed look I hoped conveyed my dual relief at his safe return and annoyance he had not sent word. Nathan had the grace to appear somewhat abashed.

"My apologies for staying out so long past dusk." He inclined his head respectfully to me, then turned concerned eyes on his father. "How is he?"

"Much improved, now that he's been coerced into resting properly thanks to your very capable healer here," the former Alpha remarked wryly before I could reply. Nathan looked between us, questions in his gaze, but his father waved them off.

Fill you in later, son. Just know all is well."

Nathan appraised me silently for a moment but appeared to accept the evasion. "Very well, we'll speak more tomorrow. Terra, please make use of one of the spare rooms to stay close in case you're needed through the night."

I nodded in acquiescence. Protesting would only raise Nathan's suspicions that I was eager to leave for other reasons. His

frail state.

overprotectiveness was understandable given his father

After we transferred the elder wolf to Nathan's watchful care for the night, I made my way wearily up the shadowy corridor to the familiar guest suite I had occupied often many years ago.

The plush furnishings remained unchanged, yet they now seemed suffocating rather than inviting. I have outgrown the comforts of luxury and privilege. My true home's simple charms awaited across town, feeling worlds removed from this imposing mansion.

But the brief escape earlier could still offer me some small measure of balm. Opening my hidden suitcase compartment, I carefully drew out the rumpled letter covered in endearing messy handwriting that had arrived for me earlier that week.

Curled up on the brocade bedspread I had avoided touching too closely for fear of soiling the expensive fabric, I soaked up my boys' presence through their enthusiastic scrawl.

"Dear Mommy,

We miss you a lot! When are you coming back home? Uncle Collins is nice but he makes yucky sandwiches. Luke put a frog in Levi's bed as a joke. We hope you are feeling better. Landon lost his tooth but we can't find it! And guess what – we learned how to howl just like wolves! Uncle Collins says we sound ferocious. Please visit soon! We love you!

Love,

Your Three Monsters"

My throat tightened as I traced over their messy signatures for the tenth time, imagining their bright faces screwed up in concentration as they sounded out words.

I should be there guiding their writing practice, not confined here playing political games with wolves who had long abandoned me Suddenly the elegant suite felt stifling as any prison.

Blinking back useless tears, I tucked away the precious letter again safely and began to pace, needing to release nervous energy somehow before I exploded.

Five more minutes of the antique four poster's oppressive grandeur had me grabbing my small purse of necessities and slipping out the servant's entrance unseen.

I have to see them.

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 25

Terra

The guards gave only cursory acknowledgment of my departure on foot, long accustomed to my moonlit ramblings when sleep proved evasive.

For once Nathan's overprotectiveness played in my favour – he rarely sent escorts to trail my steps anymore, trusting the estate's security and my own combat expertise,

As long as I returned before first light, I would attract no suspicion.

The brisk autumn air helped clear the jumbled anxiety and anger churning through me as I slipped through the shadowy woods with directionless urgency. Crunching leaves and hooting owls soothed my restless spirit. Out here surrounded only by towering pines standing silent witness, the suffocating estate politics and posturing retreated some. I could breathe.

But wandering aimlessly brought me no true peace. My feet carried me along the winding trail out of the forest toward town before I fully registered where I was headed.

Passing the sleepy village outskirts, I made straight for the one place my soul most longed to be. Light already shone welcomingly from the clinic windows despite the late hour. Home.

My shoulders sagged in profound relief the moment I stepped across the humble threshold. The subtle herbal smells were

Collins infinitely more comforting than any luxurious perfumes. I made my way silently toward the back rooms, knowing would be awake completing patient charts at this time of night.

Sure enough, his broad shoulders were silhouetted against the dim desk lamp as he scribbled notes in precise script. But he turned instantly when I creaked open the door, compassion flooding his features as he took in my haggard state. In three long strides he had wrapped me in his strong, steadying embrace. Safe at last, I finally let the tears fall

Collins cradled the back of my head gently as sobs wracked my frame. "Shhh, just let it out, I've got you," he murmured softly. We stood entwined without another word for long minutes as he simply let me cry myself out against his chest. Even through the flood of

emotions, I marvelled yet again at how Collins always knew exactly how to balm my battered spirit. He was my rock amid chaos.

When the storm finally passed, Collins kept an arm around my shoulders as he steered us to his office sofa. “Here, feet up and relax a minute. I’ll make us some tea. His tone brooked no argument. I managed a shaky nod of acquiescence, wiping my eyes roughly on my shirtsleeve. I should apologise for the breakdown, but we were long past standing on social niceties.

Collins returned shortly with two steaming mugs, handing me one before sitting close beside me. The cushions dipped with his solid weight. I cradled the hot drink under my nose, letting the minty vapours soothe my raw nerves. Already calm settled over my frayed senses.

After several restorative sips, I finally spoke hoarsely. Thank you. I just...had to get out of there for a while tonight.”

Collins regarded me with his trademark thoughtful half smile. “Seemed like you needed a haven. Stay as long as you want – I’m bunking here overnight anyway. No one expects you

back?”

I nearly laughed aloud at the question, thinking of what fits Nathan and Derek would throw if they knew my location. “They assume I’m resting in the guest quarters. Probably best not to mention I stopped by,”

Collins’ eyes crinkled knowingly. “Your secret visit is safe with me. Now try to get some decent rest, doctor’s orders.” His teasing tone drew a hint of a smile to my face. Leave it to Collins to know exactly when stern compassion or gentle humour was required. In all the chaotic uncertainty swirling through the rest of my life, his solid presence shone as a beacon to steer towards

Soon the blend of mint tea, Collins’ reassuring pats, and sheer emotional exhaustion had me drifting off still curled catlike on the sofa. I woke briefly when Collins lifted me easily to transfer my sleeping form to a makeshift bed of pillows and blankets in his office. My lips shaped whispered thanks as my eyelids slid closed again. Vaguely I felt the gentle pressure of lips against my hair before he slipped away.

Morning came all too swiftly, pale light filtering through the blinds alerting me it was time to slip away again before the estate woke. With a monumental effort, I dragged myself upright, shaking off the last cobwebs of sleep. My bones groaned in protest after a night scrunched on the office floor, but my spirit felt mended. I could endure the days ahead.

Folding the loaned blankets neatly, I peeked out to find Collins already busy brewing coffee. At my footsteps he glanced over with a smile. "One for the road?" He held up a clean travel mug questioningly.

My own smile came easier this morning. "You're a lifesaver, truly I clasped the warm mug he offered like a precious gift. "For this, and...everything. I don't know what I'd do..." My voice hitched unexpectedly.

Collins simply brushed his fingers over my cheek. "Hey, no need for thanks. You know I've always got your back." He tilted his head appraisingly. "Ready to face the music?"

I straightened my rumpled clothes ineffectively and took a fortifying swig of rich coffee. "As I'll ever be. Wish me luck." Impulsively I stretched up on tiptoe to kiss his stubbled cheek before slipping out the side entrance unnoticed.

Throughout the hurried trek back through the woods, I held tight to the memory of Collins steadfast support like a talisman warding off despair. The day's challenges would seem less daunting knowing I had him to turn to when strength faltered. He was family in all but blood. As long as I had that haven to run to, I could weather the storms that raged elsewhere.

I had just crept back into the stifling guest suite when a brisk knock sounded. Hastily smoothing my hair, I called for Nathan to enter. His sharp gaze instantly took in my rumpled clothes and bleary eyes. I prepared myself for the interrogation.

But he simply inclined his head politely. "Apologies for the early intrusion. I wanted to inform you Father continues improving. He's eager to have you check his progress when you are ready."

I stared mutely, unprepared for Nathan's unusually gracious tone first thing in the morning. "Oh yes, of course. Please tell him I'll be there shortly."

Nathan nodded again, then paused before turning to leave. "Get some more rest first. You've worn yourself thin tending us day and night. I should have ensured you had breaks from the strain. Please, take all the time you need this morning to recover your own strength"

Before I could form any response, he had exited quietly. I sank onto the velvet tufted bench at the foot of the imposing bed, emotions swirling. Just when I thought I had Nathan's measure, he showed a new side. The haughty, demanding wolf of our youth had grown into a leader who put others' well being before his own. Perhaps the Nathan I once knew still existed somewhere beneath the scars life carved on us both.

After changing into fresh clothes and splashing cool water on my face to dispel the last lingering blariness, I made my way to the elder wolf's suite. He looked pleased as I

entered, angling to sit up straighter. Nathan stood from where he had been keeping watch beside the bed.

"I'll give you two privacy to work," he said after an encouraging pat of his father's shoulder. With another polite nod he departed. The former Alpha watched his son go with a mix of pride and melancholy.

to me,

"He's grown well into the role, though it wasn't easy for him." The elder sighed heavily, "I regret leaving him with so many burdens so young.

I touched his arm reassuringly as I went about taking his vitals and assessing his healing progress. "You did an admirable job preparing him, I assure you, Nathan is fair and strong traits he learned from your example."

The former Alpha gave a grunt that might have been agreement or dissent. I let him sit quietly with his thoughts as I worked, keeping my focus on monitoring his condition. His colour and energy showed massive improvement from the grave assail on his life a few weeks before. Relief left me slightly lightheaded.

When I finished my examination, the elder wolf grasped my wrist gently. "Please, sit with me for a moment."

I pulled over a chair beside him, clasping his weathered hand between mine. He searched my face intently. "I feel the tension simmering below the surface here. You carry much hardship from the past. He raised a hand when I opened my mouth to politely deny it. "It's written clearly in your eyes, child. I won't pry, but now I still consider you as my own."

Unexpected tears **harply. Swallowing hard, I squeezed his hand. "That means a great deal. Truly." Ever since losing my parents, this wolf's gruff affection had been the closest thing to fatherly care I knew. The bond between us ran deeper than blood.

Seeming to sense my roiling emotions, he patted my wrist gently "You're a good girl, Terra. Always have been. Remember your worth lies in your spirit, not the evolving circumstances around you."

I simply nodded, unable to form words around the lump in my throat. But the former Alpha appeared content, his own eyelids drooping again. I helped settle him more comfortably before taking my leave so he could rest. Our talk left me pensive but with an odd lightening in my spirit. Even near the end of his long path, the old wolf's wisdom remained a balm. I would carry his reminder of my inherent worth close to my heart.

The elder wolf's health blossomed rapidly. Soon he was taking short, slow walks around his suite on my arm before building to using a polished wooden cane. I beamed with

pride at his progress each time he completed another full lap. The formidable wolf of old was emerging again from behind the frail patient's mask up

Nathan kept close but allowed me full authority conducting the healing regimens. His humble faith in my skills after so long apart touched me profoundly. Together we coaxed his father steadily back to strength. The rapport I once thought destroyed between us now held new shoots of trust.

During rare breaks when Nathan took over monitoring duties, I slipped away to call Collins for much needed touchstones of laughter and encouragement. His deep voice soothed my fr**ed thoughts better than any meditation.

And his photos of the boys latest antics never failed to make me smile, however exhausted. Their precious faces pulled me through when all other fortitude failed.

I woke up from lying down on the sofa, my head pounding?

What is that? A dream or my memories?