

## CH 22

Oriana

She stared right at Slade, near on speechless at his words, then asked "How do you know?" as she turned her eyes to the ignition and started the car. "The full moon's not until tomorrow."

"Audrey can feel the sparks on her skin already, and the closer the full moon gets, the more she craves me."

"Do you feel it, scent her?" Ori asked him.

"No, but that doesn't mean it's not true, I've been watching her for a while now too." He chuckled softly, "It's so very cute, the way she tries to hide it, her knowing."

Ori could actually hear the happiness in his voice, he was actually really excited about this.

She pulled the car out and headed back towards the pack, not that she wanted to. The last two days for her had been very depressing, she'd heard something she'd not wanted to, and, even though she'd known it was coming. It had still hurt, she had been closing her suite door, and had heard her

father's voice "Are you excited, son?" and her heart had dropped.

She'd just come back from an early morning swim, before everyone was up and off to training, had not clicked the door closed, at hearing those

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words, had held it a millimeter off being closed and heard Hayden's reply "Yes, officially being sworn in, that is going to be the best day of my life."

"I know, I was excited about my official swearing in day, too. Now remember you can't tell Ori, it's

not your place, the Alpha will do it himself."

She'd felt anger mixed in with her sadness that morning, she'd clicked her door closed and actually felt tears burn her eyes, then they'd spilled over and down her face, 'officially sworn in' the decision had been made, it seemed. Even before Slade had come home to assess them and make his choice.

She'd said nothing to anyone for those two days. She wasn't supposed to know; she had overheard by accident, just like the first time.

Her eyes looked at a very happy Slade in the passenger seat next to her, the way he'd greeted her, all happy and smiling. She didn't think that he knew about it yet either. Didn't think that he would be this happy with her in the car if he knew. He would be all apologetic and filled with guilt for not telling her.

They were both supposed to be getting blindsided, only she had a heads-up. "Is Audrey upset, that you're off home and not with her on the full moon, so you two can scent each other out?" she asked him.

"She understands, and we're not supposed to say anything until the full moon, so we have to play that we don't know. Rules of the Alpha Council."

He chuckled softly "Bloody lucky I made it out of the room to come home though." He leaned back in the seat to make himself comfortable "the last few days, since she told me, and doesn't have to hide it.."

"I get it." She murmured.

"All hands on." He laughed "she's worse than I am."

"I said I get it." She repeated herself. "I can also smell her on you." and she could, it irritated her quite a bit, even China seemed unhappy about it, the scent of another on her pup's father. 'Not our Mate.' She reminded China, and he wasn't. He had an Alpha female that could feel the sparks of their Mate Bond already.

"You smell different yourself," Slade commented, and she turned and looked at him with a frown, watched him actively try and smell her.

"Do you remember what happened the last time you did that?" she grated out instantly. She did know that a pregnant she-wolf, smelled slightly different to the pup's father, more desirable if they were mated to each other, though she wasn't certain if they did if not mated to each other.

"Yes." He muttered, but was frowning at her. She watched him turn in his seat and really look at her.

"You look different to me too, more...girly." he stated as he looked her over "Not the clothes though, they got worse I think."

Ori rolled her eyes. "It's my boyfriend's shirt." Was out of her before she knew it.

"What? A boyfriend, since when?" he asked seemed more than shocked, and she realised she had his undivided attention now, hadn't meant to do that. Didn't even know where those words had come from.

"Mm." she shrugged "A few days now, you're probably picking up his scent or a bit of it... I had to wear his shirt, he didn't like the idea of me in a car alone with you." rolled out of her, and so bloody easily, and she could have kicked herself, where the hell were all these lies coming from. It was one bloody lie after another, she realised.

"Got some nails I see." he reached out and touched her hand on the steering wheel, "you're wearing make-up too, you look very different."

"Got me some bling too." She tugged the sleeve of her shirt down to show him the Luna Bracelet. "A whole matching set." She touched her earrings as well as she smiled; she really did like her jewellery.

"He must like you a lot to buy you gifts like that

this quick." She heard him mutter.

She glanced at him, he was just looking out the window, it seemed his happy mood was gone, he'd presumed her imaginary boyfriend had bought her jewellery. She let that one go. What did it really matter? He had a Mate now anyway.

They drove in silence, and he murmured "I'm gonna nap, I'm beat." She heard the slight amusement in his voice, with those last two words.

"What else is new? You slept on the trip to Alpha College. You might as well sleep on the way back."

He snorted "yep, why not?"

This was not a good start, she needed to talk to him, but every time she looked at him, she recalled just how damned happy he'd been with that she-wolf, an alpha-blooded female. He was getting exactly what he wanted; a tall leggy blonde, that couldn't get enough of him, would give him pure alpha-blooded pups.

A part of her just wanted to yell it at him, and another part of her wanted to run away and hide. How could she ruin his happiness by telling him about her and his pup? An illegitimate pup, when in a month's time, he would be marked and mated

to an Alpha female. It was going to ruin his life.

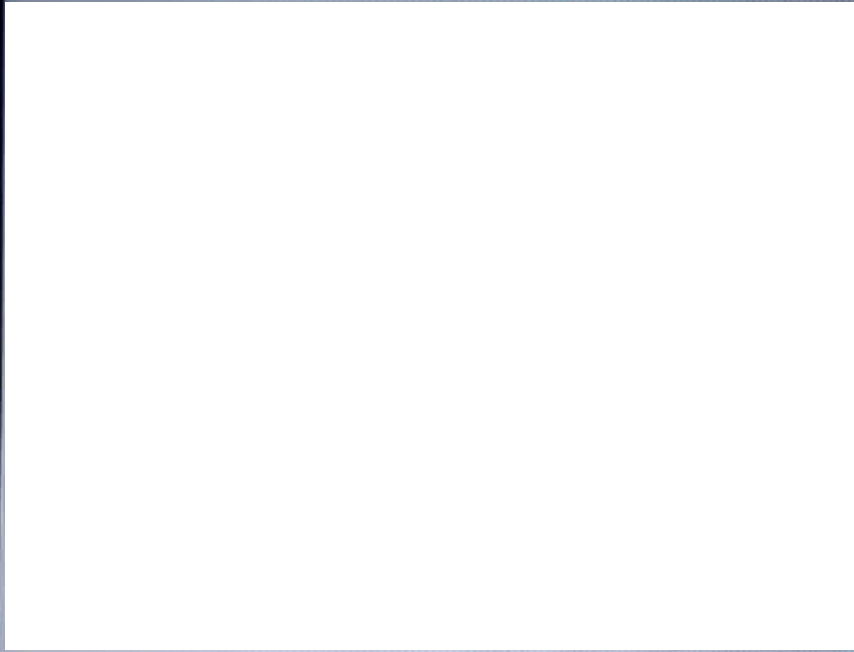
Her life, she knew, was already down the drain, she wasn't even the future Beta anymore, she was just waiting for the official announcement was all. What the hell was she supposed to do, 18 and pregnant, with not her mate's pup! No, to the future Alpha of the pack, her best friend even.

That was about to change and she knew it. She looked at him asleep in the car as she sat at a red traffic light and knew she just couldn't do it. Ruin his happiness. He wanted her as his Beta, she knew that it was his and her father that did not. They'd overruled him, and he didn't even know it yet.

He would go back to Alpha College in just three days, the day after the full moon, and she could let him be none the wiser, let him have that happy blissful moment and gain his Goddess Gifted Mate when he went back to Alpha College. She just had to keep the knowledge to herself, only let it out when the pup was born. Play the 'I don't know card' and the 'I don't recall sleeping with anyone' card, and she could put it down to how it actually happened; one drunken night of s\*x that neither of them remembered.

Could she pull that off, she wondered? Could she

act all shocked and unknowing, that she didn't know whose pup it was, though wolves always knew they were pregnant, so then there was that; she and China had known and likely for a while.



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Her eyes moved back to him as she drove, when he shifted in his seat to be more comfortable. He and Audrey would start good; she was not going to ruin their mate bond, she would plead the fifth, no knowledge of who the pup's father was. She would let them be blissfully happy for as long as possible.



Goddess this was all such a mess and the yelling she was going to get, when her father found out, the whole pack was gonna know he was disappointed in her. Well, she thought bitterly, she was more than disappointed in him herself, in all of them and the way they had all stabbed her in the back.

She scrubbed a hand over her face and sighed heavily to herself, her life was out the window, she was not the future Beta anymore, a complete disappointment in her father's eyes, the moment he found out about the pup 'irresponsible' would be the word coming out of his mouth, even more so when he found out that it had come from a drunken one-night stand, that she was going to plead she had no memory of.

Un-mated and pregnant at 18, hell, the whole bloody pack was going to be looking down on her, and she knew it, but she would not have them do that to Slade. Not until it had to happen, she would bear it all and then just apologise to him, when he was hauled home when Alpha Roman found out; after the pup was born.

She would explain why she didn't tell him, because of how happy he was with Audrey and not wanting to ruin that. She took in a shaky breath as they turned down the road that would lead back to the

pack. "What's wrong?" Slade asked.

"f\*\*k!" she gasped, "way to scare person." She gasped out, and he laughed.

"I have been awake for a while. You were miles away."

"Mm." Was all she said, and she knew she had been. She just had to keep her secret until he left. It was all of a day and a half now. She could do that.

They crossed into the pack, and she saw him relax a little as they crossed over the actual border, and he felt the connection to his home. It always settled a wolf when they came home, but then he just sat up and looked annoyed a minute later, "your dad I presume." She murmured at hearing him huff.

"Yes," he muttered, "he wants to see me pronto."

She didn't say anything. What was there to say? She knew what was about to happen. Today was going to be the day she realised, Alpha Roman had let her perform one last Beta duty, it seemed, when they pulled up she was going to be taken into the Alpha's office and demoted, be passed over for her brother, and then he would be announcing it to the pack, a few minutes later,

likely while she was made to pack her stuff and move out of the Beta suite.

Her eyes fell on the front steps of the packhouse as she drove up to it, and there on the top step was Alpha Roman and his unit. Right there on the next step down was Slade's unit with Hayden all dressed up formally in his pack suit, lined up there in order of rank. He was being formally presented to Slade as he got home, her demotion and announcement already made, only she didn't know about it.

She heard Slade sigh very heavily, and turned to look at him, and she saw his eyes move right to hers and there it was; the guilt she'd thought she'd see if he knew. "You knew." She stated as pain filled her, he'd been in agreement to do this to her, and like this, they'd been in this car for seven bloody hours, and he'd said absolutely nothing, had slept practically the whole bloody trip home even, clearly didn't care at all how it was done, had known and said nothing.

"Yes, I've known for a while it was actually..."



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