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< The Alpha and the Mistake



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I lifted the cool glass to my lips, taking a slow drink of the soda as I watched the couple across the room. The crowd of party-goers blocked my view from time to time, but I didn't mind. That meant less of a chance of me getting caught spying. I took another drink. I knew it was stupid, but I couldn't help myself. I was jealous. It wasn't because the woman was attractive or because of the way the guy couldn't take his eyes off of her. It was their freedom. We're the same age, give or take a year or two. While they got to flirt, party, and enjoy these brief years of new adulthood while I was trapped. Trapped in a life never meant to be mine by some cruel twist of fate.

"Do you know him?" A masculine voice whispered over my shoulder. I gave a startled flinch. Finn laughed. He had caught me off guard and knew it. I shook my head as I turned to face him. Finn was in the six-foot range and towered over my meager five' four.


Where most werewolves tended to be muscular and brawny, Finn was lanky but wiry. It made many people underestimate just how fast and strong he is. His sandy brown hair, green eyes, dimples, made him popular with the ladies, too. Tonight he's dressed in a dark t-shirt and jeans; simple but nice. Very Finn-ish.

"Do I know who?" I asked, not sure who he was talking about.

"The guy over there. The one you're drooling over," he replied, sounding a little jealous himself.

A sliver of guilty pleasure rushed through me at the thought of Finn being jealous. It made me feel like a terrible person. It wasn't fair to him. Not when I couldn't give Finn what he wanted and deserved. I did my best to hide my thoughts by taking another drink. "No, I don't. If there was any drooling, it had nothing to do with him." I kept my tone matter of fact.

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"Oh, so it's the girl then," he said, wagging his eyebrows at me and getting me to laugh just like he wanted.

I slapped him playfully on the arm, slipping into old familiarities with too much ease. Old habits do die hard. "It's not the girl!"

"Then what had you staring holes into them?"

The Memory of my envy came back to mind. I sighed, blowing the yellow strands of my hair up and out of my face. "Nothing," I said, setting down the glass on a nearby table. Why did I even come to this party in the first place? I couldn't even remember anymore.

I started to leave when Finn caught my hand. "Wait. Where are you going? Did I say something wrong?"

"No, you're fine," I told him, lacing my fingers with his and squeezing his hand. I looked at our hands. I always liked how our hands, together like this, seemed so perfect. "It's just..." I started, but stopped. I'm not sure he'd understand, even if I tried to explain it to him. "I've got stuff I should do," I told him instead. In all truth, as the Luna of Willow's Pond pack, I always had something to do. Something to read, something to sign, or someone I needed to talk to or needed to talk to me.

"Alice, wait. Don't go," Finn said, still holding my hand. "I'm sorry, okay. I didn't mean to make you upset," he continued, and guilt surged up inside me. Finn gave my hand a little tug. I walked over to him and into the hug he offered. His arms pulled me in close. I rested my head against his chest. Almost instantly I felt better, and I hated myself for it.

I looked up to thank him when Finn's lips met mine. A strange mix of shock and familiarity raced through me. I wanted to return the kiss and break it at the same time. As much as it sucked, I knew which urge I had to follow. With a push against his chest, I turned my head to the side,

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breaking the kiss. It earned me a growl of frustration from him. "Alice," he groaned, his lips seeking mine.

"No Finn," I told him, pushing him even harder and keeping my face down-turned. "We've talked about this."

"No. You talked," Finn said. The bitterness in his voice made me flinch, but he gave up on his attempts to kiss me again. "I don't see why we can't be together."

"Because everything is a mess and..." He hated it when I said it, but I had to. "We're not mates, Finn. We're not meant to be together. It's not what the goddess planned for us."

The scowl on his face seemed so out of place.

At that moment, a chorus of cell phone alerts broke through the noise of the loud stereo system. That was never good. I pulled my phone out of my back pocket and looked at the text.

Code R - western borders

"Damn it," I swore as I texted back with — be there A.S.A.P.

"I guess you got the same text I did," Finn said, only a hint of the bitterness left in his voice. "This almost seems organized." He pulled on his thick cloth jacket and handed me my brown leather one.

"As if I didn't have enough to deal with," I said through clenched teeth. Finn gave me a strained attempt at sympathy, which I ignored. I appreciated it, but it didn't do me a damn bit of good right now.

The music cut off, leaving the house rather quiet despite the growing murmurs of the crowd. Some were talking on their cells, while others were grouping up before racing out of the house. There were hints of

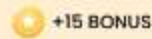
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panic in everyone's expression.

Code R meant rogues were pushing our borders. They were coming into the territory without my permission. Half a year ago, a rogue attack wouldn't have elicited such a response from my pack or me. It's amazing how one night could change everything.

I left the house. The night was cool and damp from the spring showers in the afternoon. It sent a chill running down my spine. "Alice, be careful out there," Finn said with a look that told me he wanted to kiss me again. I turned my head left as if looking for my car to save us both the trouble of rehashing an argument we didn't have time for.

"I will," I told him and squeezed his upper arm before jogging off to my Mini Cooper and Finn to his F150. I had to go to the pack house, and he would go to the western borders to do his duty as part of the enforcers. I couldn't go near the western borders. Mario, my beta, wouldn't allow it. Not even over his dead body. He had served my family until someone betrayed and murdered them.

It was thanks to Mario, I became the Luna when a lot of people didn't want to see a woman ruling them. Especially when I was only eighteen and had never taken part in pack politics before. I still wasn't sure if I should thank Mario or curse him for it. Once in my car, I drove to the pack house. Willow's Pond was a little town, so despite what traffic there was, I got there in about fifteen minutes.

The pack house was a large brick civil war era style building. It had three floors with large windows on the top floor. I saw the beta waiting for me on the porch. He was a little smaller than Finn, but three times as wide. Mario's hair, cut short, was dark, streaked with gray. His coppery skin wrinkled around his eyes and mouth, like aged leather. Mario's tendency to dress in dress pants and suit jackets gave him the look of a mobster.

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Sometimes I suspected he intended it that way.

Parking the car, I got out and walked to him. "How bad is it?"

His dark eyes brightened with hints of gold. Great. That wasn't a good sign.

"Almost fifteen strong if the first accounts are accurate," he replied. His tone hard and all business, sounding like someone from a crime syndicate.

"Damn it," I swore again, slumping my shoulders. As if I didn't need more problems. "But rogues don't band up together. That's why they're rogues. What do we have?" Anger flooded through me and I stuffed my hands in my jacket to hide the fact they'd started to shake.

"Deep breaths, Alice," Mario said, proving yet again that I could hide nothing from him. "We have nothing more than we had before. We'll see what we have after the skirmish is over."

I nodded, taking the last few steps to stand next to him - his mobster persona clashing with my pale, thin frame. Exhaustion swamped me. It wasn't the man. I'm so tired exhaustion. This was something deeper. Something that seemed to reach into my very soul and weigh it down. "Any other news? Alpha Steven said anything?"

"No, not yet. He's been quiet for almost two weeks, so I'm sure we'll hear something soon," Mario said. The corner of his mouth tilted upward before it fell back down. "How was the party?"

"A mistake," I said with a sigh. "I don't know why sometimes I think I can act my age." Mario looked like he wanted to say something, but I shook my head. There was no point in talking about this. Fate was a son of a bitch, and no amount of complaining was ever going to change that.