

Chapter 119

"You're sure?" I asked Mason, my irritation increasing with each missing piece thrust in front of my face. ①

Mason met Asher and I on our way to Carson's parent's house. My stomach was rumbling from the lack of food, but I wasn't sure I'd be able to keep anything down if I tried. Just the thought of facing the shattered remains of her family, it left my nerves frayed and exposed.

He nodded, just as perplexed. "Positive. Not only was Carson the only one with access to the sorority's social media account, but the picture was also posted from her phone."

"Thanks, Mason." I sighed, feeling that familiar pang of guilt as I looked into his mossy hazel eyes.

Asher's phone began to ring. He frowned at the screen and turned away, placing the phone against his ear. The voice on the other end was muffled, but it was Mason I had my attention on.

"Don't feel bad, Lola. We've both been busy these last two weeks." His

busy these last two weeks." His easygoing smile gave me some reassurance, but not much. "Once you start your training back up, we'll see more of each other." 1

"How has training been going?" I asked, feeling a little more lighthearted when some of the spark returned to his eyes.

"It's harsher here in the capital. Your mate was going easy on us back then, y'know?" He grinned, and it was impossible not to smile back. Even with my stomach full of dread, Maya and I were both excited to keep up with our warrior training. He got into the Chevy Asher loaned him and chuckled, "Give me a call when you're ready to join. There's still some empty slots left, not that it matters since you're Luna and all." 1

Facing Carson's parents, it was a sign of respect and something we were expected to do as Luna and Alpha. It was the circumstance and cause of death that soured things, which made my heart hammer mercilessly as we climbed the cement steps of Carson's family home.

I wouldn't run, even if the cowardly voice in my head begged me to do so.

My head begged me to do so.

I could feel pieces of myself, of the carefully constructed façade I had erected, cracking and chipping away as I looked—saw the hole that had been torn through her family, and through their lives.

Her parents were respectful and gracious to Asher and me, who had a hand in their daughter's death, no matter how removed that hand might be. The grief in their eyes and hearts radiated from every pore, filling the house until the air was thick and heavy. Sounds were deeper, scents richer.

I couldn't smile this time, knowing how flimsy and fake it would look. These people, who held pieces of their daughter within their chestnut hair, pale eyes, full lips, and dimpled cheeks--they would see right through it. Parents cursed with losing a child, they knew what fake smiles looked like.

The photos that lined the walls, framed in thick wood and covered in streak-free glass. Smiles and bright eyes, young baby-like faces that slimmed and lengthened with age. Missing teeth became full, toddler bob-cuts grew into long curls

With age. Missing teeth became full, toddler bob-cuts grew into long curls. They were whispers and echoes of the past carried throughout the future.

I stared at the last family photograph on the wall until my eyes grew painfully dry.

These walls showed the lives of Carson and her younger sister, showed them grow and mature over the years. Carson, in her high-school graduation gown and her sister, wearing a dress of pink tulle. There would be no college graduation, no mate or grandchildren appearing in the family photos, tracking the milestones of their lives.

I wanted to apologize for their loss, but I knew once the words escaped, they'd bounce from picture to picture until they too faded. Instead, I channeled the kindling of rage that had ignited the moment I saw her body. I let it smooth out the cracks and bumps of emotion in my voice until I sounded as harsh and unforgiving as a Luna should. Instead of promising vengeance, I promised closure.

I swallowed the emotion from my voice and sucked in another greedy gulp of fresh air, "why would the killer post that

sh air, "why would the killer post that photo of Carson and I?" I asked Asher on our drive to the house the witches were staying at.

He said nothing about how I'd been fighting tears for the last fifteen minutes, and instead gave me time to sort through the hurricane in my head. The steady rhythm of his hand along my thigh soothed the rain and harsh winds into something gentler.

He was reluctant to leave me there alone, especially since there was no solid way to vet Rowena or Cordelia. All we had to go on was my illusive gut feelings and Holly's nightmares that she rarely talked about. Asher's suspicion made him unnaturally careful. It's part of what makes him an incredible Alpha, but allowing two witches onto his land, within close proximity of his mate—there was so much out of his control.

"To create chaos." Asher grunted; his thick fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel. Just the sight of him, tense and rough in all the right places, it took away some of the anxiety that made my throat ache. "People like Carson's

took away some of the anxiety that made
● throat ache. "People like Carson's
parents, they respect our family. No
matter what they're going through, they
trust us to have their best interests in
mind. We take care of our own, but that
doesn't mean everyone's on board."

"We have to contain this, before anyone
else is killed." I accepted every bit of
strength Asher could give me, and let it
chase away the chill of the shadows that
were never far from reach, reminding me
there was always another way.

We pulled into the curved driveway,
stopping a few feet short of the two-car
garage. I noticed a head of glossy auburn
hair, like rubies in the sunlight, from up o
n the porch.

"Anything happens, you call or mind-
link." Asher's stern voice made my
stomach flutter and brought a smile
twitching at the corners of my lips.

I held it back as best I could and leaned
towards him. He made no movements as
I brushed my lips against his, once and
then twice, savoring the clash of sparks
that tickled my skin.

"I thought you Alphas were used to

● "I thought you Alphas were used to taking risks." I peered into his toffee-colored eyes, mesmerized by the shimmer of gold in their depths.

"You're worth too much to risk." His voice was sincere but held a hint of darkness made it grow deep.

That possessive glint in his eyes, for a moment I swore he contemplated locking the doors and speeding away, giving into those instincts that told him to protect at all costs. He knew I'd fight, though. That there was no way in hell he could control me, and even though it infuriated him, it was what kept us clawing at one another.

"Your mate struggles to control his instincts." Rowena said in a voice void of judgement. I could smell the lavender wafting from the cup of tea in her hands and noticed a few small buds floating on the surface. She looked up at me from where she sat on the porch, reclined on the plush cushion of a wicker bench. "It's what sets him apart—what makes him a ferocious Alpha, but it is also weakness."

"Weakness? How is it weakness?"

"His need to claim and protect. Too much

"His need to claim and protect. Too much can interfere with fate, and fate...she rarely likes to be meddled with." Rowena shook her head, chasing the momentary fog from her emerald eyes.

She stood and smoothed out the form fitting dress she wore, which was cinched at the waist with a thin belt and ended just above her knees. With the sleek heels and updo, she looked nothing like the pre-school teacher I had imagined.

I followed her through the front door, catching a strong whiff of dried herbs and petals. Nearly a dozen bundles sat on the kitchen table, bound in frayed twine. It gave the house a sweet scent with an earthy undertone.

Rowena passed the living room and kitchen, venturing down a short hallway to where the den was. Bookshelves lined the walls, circling an oak desk stacked with old looking texts. The window seat with its dainty throw pillows and the armchair with its clawed feet were the only comforting things in the room.

"He knows he can't protect me from everything." I assured her.

everything." I assured her.

Trusting Asher was second nature, and while he'd do everything possible to keep me alive, only together could we protect the pack. ①

"I'm sure he does." The worry faded from her eyes, and her nude painted lips tilted up in a relieved smile. "I apologize... the young girl's death has me a bit shaken up. It's taken some time for the severity of the situation to sink in."

"I understand this isn't what you signed up for—"

"Training two young witches is exactly what I signed up for, regardless of everything else going on." Rowena waved a hand dismissively, turning away just as the door swung shut.

There was nothing connecting her motion to the door closing, and yet I knew it was magic she had used. I could feel it's gentle charge in the air, almost untraceable as it fizzled out ever so quickly.

"In time, doing trivial things like that will become second nature." She explained, directing me towards the

explained, directing me towards the armchair. "For now, let's see what I can learn about your magic."

Her hands were cold and steady as they sought out my own, "Witches naturally have a better intuition than most, but our skill still varies. Most of us get feelings through touch, but the rare few can pick up bits of information."

"Can you do that?" I asked, forcing the unease far from my eyes, shoving it down where it couldn't be seen.

"Really, it's not as ominous as I'm making it out to be." Her laughter was light, making her shoulders gently shake. "Every witch's energy is different. By holding your hands, I'm able to seek out that energy with my own. First lesson, this particular trick is a form of passive magic. It happens on its own without my control or say. Active magic requires concentration and intent."

"Like what you did with the door." I commented, glancing across the room.

"Exactly." She nodded, sounding just as a proud teacher would. Her manicured nails rested along my hands, "this might

●ls rested along my hands, "this might take a few seconds, maybe even a minute or two. I've never tried to get a read on a Luna or Vampire Queen."

I watched and waited as Rowena closed her eyes. The golden light trickling through the parted curtains made the highlighter across her cheekbones and eyelids sparkle. I had to admit, I was expecting a zap or tingle. Something like the foreign rush that was actual magic. It reminded me of shifting, letting this wild energy burst free. There was nothing, not the faintest whisper of magic nor the slightest movement beyond the protective boundaries of my mind.

As Rowena's confident smile lessened, morphing into a confused frown, I felt my expectations fall.


"Well, that's certainly odd. There's something different about your magic, which I'd assume was obvious since you're the first tribrid in existence." She sighed, though not in defeat. "I have a few witch friends. I can make a few calls, see what they can find out through the grapevine. If there's anything you know about your heritage, even if it seems

grapevine. If there's anything you know


● but your heritage, even if it seems useless or obscure, please make me aware. Even the smallest bit of information can be useful." 1

The name Renaldi danced on my tongue when the weight of a freight train forced the air from my lungs. The gut feeling was more like a punch in the face, but its message was well received. For whatever reason, my witchy intuition was telling me to keep my mouth shut.



Jane Doe  Author

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Hello everyone! <3 I am back from my holiday break and ready to get some writing done! I hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday themselves!
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