

Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 171

Read Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 171 – “I hear our girl’s night has been cut short.” Holly stated as she stepped past the threshold and into the house Asher had built for me. As she spoke, her eyes scanned the foyer, her head pivoting back and forth to soak up every detail.

I hummed my confirmation, motioning for her to follow as we passed through the dimly lit kitchen and into the living room. “Sorry about that, things sort of popped up at the last minute.”

“Oh, no worries. I had a feeling something would come up. Truthfully, I’m just happy to be out of the house.” She smiled softly, striking a chord deep within my chest as I noticed the similarities between us. Releasing a sound of interest, she spoke. “Oh, so many windows! This might sound hard to believe, but I absolutely love natural light. I can’t stand being cooped up.”

“That’s not hard to believe at all.” I murmured, thinking back to the meek and obedient girl I’d met, trapped within the walls of the warehouse our father called his home. “Does sunlight hurt you? I never asked how it affected you, being half vampire and all..”

Holly shrugged, following me out the backdoor. “It’s not painful or anything, but I do sunburn very easily. After awhile I start to feel a bit tingly, but I’ve never tested it longer than an hour or two.”

“Well, if you ever want to try again just let me know.” I assured her, succumbing to the slight flutter in my chest when she gave me an enthusiastic nod.

I padded across the patio and hefted the small box of supplies into my arms, kicking open the door and descended the stone staircase into the field that served as our back yard. It was here, beneath the blossoming light of the moon, that we would attempt the protection spell

“I’ll make sure I call you.” Her voice was laced with anticipation, flecked with dollops of hope that made me wonder if a happy ending weren’t an impossibility. She bounced on the b***s of her feet, flipping her ebony braid over her shoulder. “I’ll admit, I’m a bit nervous... and excited. We’re both powerful, I can feel it. There’s no way this won’t succeed.”

“You think so?” I asked, my eyes on the task of setting things up for the spell. More than once I scanned the page, ensuring I followed each and every direction down to the smallest of details. “I heard you were doing incredible at calling on your magic...” I trailed off. “I haven’t been doing as well, but I’m trying. It just seems to be a bit more spontaneous is all.”

“Pay attention to what it feels like when you use magic, it’ll make it easier to call on it again. I can feel your power, Lola. We’re sisters, but your magic isn’t quite like mine. It’s...it’s different.” She hummed, closing her eyes, and furrowing her brows together as though she were concentrating. When they popped open, the same shade of blue as my own, they flashed with hidden knowledge. “It’s older and much more volatile than mine, but there are some similarities too. Our magic is rooted in darkness, but that doesn’t make it evil. No matter what you do, or how it manifests itself, remember that. Don’t fear it, embrace it.”

I took every shred of her advice, accepting reassurance from the little sister I’d always wanted but never knew I had. This was what I’d been wanting those months after my father’s d***h, a relationship where we could talk to one another, where we could recount the experiences and events that led us to where we were today.

“Are you ready?” I asked, stepping into the ring of black pillared candles I created, cradling a few of the rough crystals in my hands.

Holly met my eyes, her mischievous grin matching my own. “Let’s do this.”

As she said the words, the wicks of each candle went up in flame, bursting to life in one spontaneous whoosh.

We faced one another within the circle, a chunk of the dark colored crystal in each of our hands. Black Tourmaline was what the book called it, a stone meant to protect both the witches casting the spell and the subject in question.

Within each pillared candle a piece of Asher’s hair was burned, the smoke thick as it curled into the air and vanished within seconds.

I had taken the day memorizing the spell, committing the words to memory. Holly was able to recall them on command, which I found incredibly impressive since my memory was lackluster at best. Every facet of the spell was important, and even the smallest of slip ups could alter the outcome.

The two of us raised the stones above our heads, tilting our chins towards the new moon that hung in the sky.

I let out a slow breath, relaxing my shoulders as the words flowed from my thoughts to my lips. “I call on the Goddess of the Moon, mistress of the night and all who walk her path. Come to thee, hear your daughter’s cries, hear our pleas cast into the sky!”

As hard as I tried to ignore it, the amulet Rowena had given me began to warm around my neck. Though the feeling wasn’t unpleasant, it was distracting. Holly’s voice snared my attention, both calm and confident despite the weight of the spell we were casting.

"I call on the Goddess of the Moon, huntress and protector, so merciful and bright. Come to thee, hear your daughter's cries, shine your light on these willing eyes!" Holly shouted, her voice reaching it's crescendo before merging with my own.

Together we spread our arms, embracing the night in all of its beauty-basking in the breeze which quickened in its pace, though none of the candles seemed to register its presence.

Our voices became one haunting melody as we shouted into the open air, the stars and moon our only witness.

"An Alpha of blood and iron is whom we wish to protect. Shine your light on him, shield him from the evil that brings him closer to d***h. With your might and your love, conceal Alpha Asher and power in his blood."

The wind that had whipped up turned cold, slashing through our circle so sharply that every single went out, plunging us both into darkness. Only the stars and moon, which I swore shone brighter, provided light.

"So, you think the spell worked?" Holly asked several minutes later, once the silence between us surpassed contemplative and turned awkward.

We'd gathered the half-melted candles, cradling the crystals to our chests as we placed them in various areas of the house, all places Asher frequented the most.

The two of us were now perched in front of the television, some nameless romantic comedy Mason had forced me to watch playing on the screen. He might've lost his mate in a horrific way, but that hadn't k****d the hopeless romantic that hid beneath his baby face.

"I felt...something." I replied, trailing off as I remembered the cold spike of energy that passed through me. From hundreds of feet away, I could feel the shadows that hid within the forest line react to the release of energy.

Even after returning inside, I could feel them lingering. They seemed calmer since last night, and if I weren't so tired from the spell, I would've thought they felt almost happier since they'd been fed.

Holly didn't seem to register that I'd spoken, and instead her attention was on the couple that filled the TV screen. Locked in a passionate kiss as some sappy song played in the background, the main characters of the movie were oblivious to chaos around them, so lost in one another that the pedestrians on foot and bike had no choice but to alter their paths to narrowly avoid a collision.

The look on her face, brightening her eyes and making them appear almost watery, was one of curiosity and longing.

I felt guilty breaking the trance the movie had put her in, but there was a question I needed to ask, one that had been plaguing my mind since I woke up this morning.

“Holly?” I whispered, nudging her with my elbow until she blinked rapidly and turned her bleary eyes in my direction. “Did you see anything about tonight-about Tristan and I’s mission?”

She pursed her lips together, “...no.”

“You’re not a very good liar.” I laughed dryly, trying to ignore the way my stomach rolled.

“No, I’m really not.” She nodded understandingly, patting my leg in a gesture that was meant to be comforting. “Look, some things are better left a... surprise.”

A surprise. That certainly wasn’t comforting. I wracked my brain for another question, something that would provide just a shred of useful information, anything to ease my guilt and trepidation.

“Is there any advice you can give me, anything at all?”

Holly went silent for a few seconds, and I held my breath waiting for her words—words I hoped would change what could easily be a disastrous night for Tristan and I.

“A good leader knows when to ask for help.”

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Read Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 172 – As always, Tristan had impeccable timing.

Not ten minutes later he stood at the front door, an instant look of suspicion on his face when I opened it. He blocked the way with his lanky torso, not allowing me the chance to slip outside without thoroughly scanning the inside of the house.

“Holly still here?” He asked, knowing full and well that she was.

I rolled my eyes, sarcasm thickening my voice. “She’s in the living room doing a dark and ancient spell that could save us all, but it has horrible consequences.”

Tristan blinked once, his already milky skin somehow growing paler.

“It’s hard to tell when you’re joking sometimes.”

“Obviously, I’m joking.” I sighed, patting his shoulder as I slipped out the front door. “We watched some romantic comedies and talked about boys. Really, you didn’t miss much. If you wanted to watch us do some magic, I’m sure we could uncover a spell or two-“

“No, that’s alright.” He shook his head, pushing back his newly cropped locks with his hand. The look on his face was one I’d seen in the mirror more times than I could count: exhaustion regardless of how much sleep was had. “On second thought, you might need some magic once you see-.”

I stopped in my tracks, standing at the top of the stairs on the front porch. The circular driveway my car rested in was deserted, covered in a thick and eerie silence that enticed me to look even farther, towards the forest that surrounded the house.

When I spotted half a dozen sets of eyes glittering just within the forest line, I cursed loudly.

“I’m guessing your mate disapproves of your plan.” Tristan remarked, his tone brittle and unsurprised. He curled his lip at the wolves watching us, too far to hear our words but close enough to stop me if I tried to make a run for it. “Looks like you get to have your girl’s night after all.”

“This is our only chance.” I hissed quietly, clenching my fists at my side. “We know nothing, absolutely nothing about the witches doing this.”

Rowena’s words replayed themselves in my mind, so loud that if I closed my eyes and concentrated, I could’ve easily fooled myself into believing she were here.

Tristan lifted one of his pale eyebrows. Despite the dangers of going to the Vampire lair, he’d never pass up a chance to help me go against Asher’s wishes. “You’ve got a plan forming in that devious head of yours, I can tell. What is it?”

I didn’t answer right away, but instead sent a certain blonde she-wolf a quick mind-link.

‘Hey, Cass. You busy?’ I called out, thankful for her speed when an instant jolt of awareness unfolded in my mind.

Her voice was accompanied by the sound of music and laughter. ‘Hey, Lola! I mean, I’m not busy with anything important. I’m at this wedding Asher’s mom put together, figured I’d feel safer around a bunch of wolves. Why, did something happen?’

‘Nothing happened, but I need your help with a plan. You game?’

Despite how shaken up she’d been, her voice held a kernel of excitement when she replied. ‘H**I yeah, I’m game. Let me know where and when, and I’ll be there.’

‘Actually, stay where you are, and I’ll come to you.’ I told her, quickly snipping the connection once her reply reverberated in my head.

“Lola?” Tristan’s voice sounded from a few feet away. As I turned away from the forest line and met the brunt of his worried stare, I felt a small throb from the mark he’d long ago put on my neck—the one I still needed to find a way to remove. “This plan of yours, what is it?”

“It’s not so much of an ‘it’ as it is a ‘who’.”

I snarled at the wolves currently watching us and stormed back into the house, stopping only when I reached the living room and Holly’s petite frame came into view. She was in the same position I’d left her in, bundled in blankets like a human burrito with an extra-large bowl of popcorn in her hands.

“I’ll help.” She sighed, speaking before I had the chance to even explain my plan. Her eyebrows were furrowed with a look of worry, and she held up a hand to silence me as I opened my mouth to speak. “If it involves me going out in public, I’d really rather not know the specifics until it’s too late to turn back.”

“Thank you, Holly.” I exhaled, my shoulders slumping with relief. With two sets of curious eyes on my face, I rounded out the last details of my plan and said, “Alright, we have a few stops to make. How do you guys feel about going to a wedding?”

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“Well, I can’t say I saw this coming. It’s nice, in a way. I’ve always liked surprises, even if I am a bit anxious about going out in public. Never been to a wedding before…” Holly chattered softly, her hands two dark blurs in the rearview mirror as she moved them back and forth, gesturing at seemingly nothing.

A small whisper of a smile ghosted across my face as I listened to her ramble, watching as she talked with her hands. I found it both interesting and odd that the same amused expression drifted across Tristan’s face, only to be wiped away once he caught me looking.

“This dress is nice, Lola. I appreciate you loaning it to me, though I wish it were a bit longer.” Holly hummed. The sound of rustled lace came from the backseat as she shifted and tugged the hem down past her knees. “It certainly smells like you, that’s for sure.”

With Holly’s wispy voice floating in the background, I focused on the road and on sending my thoughts down the mate-bond to wherever Asher currently was. He’d been radio silent all day, which wasn’t too concerning since I’d know if anything serious happened to him. Given that the house was surrounded by wolves, his silence made perfect sense.

Currently, those same wolves were tailing my car as I coasted around the curvy backroads that led into town, staying just inside the forest line to give me the illusion of privacy. I had no doubt that even if I demanded they back off, they wouldn't listen. They'd protect me with their lives, no matter how much I protested.

'Thanks for the personal brigade of wolves, but it's really not necessary.' I shot my snarky response down the mate-bond between Asher and I, hurling it like a flaming projectile intent on destruction. 'You can call them off now, or at least tell them to stop acting like I don't know they're following me.'

Asher's reply was instant. The second his calm and collected voice hit my ear drums, I wished he were here, but only so I could throttle him. 'I understand you're pissed, but I'm just trying to keep you safe. This isn't how I wanted to do things, but you haven't given me much of a choice. When I get back, we can go to the Vampire lair together.'

For all of his stubborn over-bearing ways, I loved the man, but I refused to repeat myself a second time.

'You've made me a prisoner in my own pack, Asher. I won't be forgetting that anytime soon, and more than anything, I promise to make you regret it.' I replied, cutting the link between us before he could formulate a response. The longer I kept him in my head, the more of a chance he had at figuring out my plan.

"Has he figured it out yet?" Tristan asked, his eyes sliding across the forest line to where I sat behind the wheel.

I made a face, something in-between a grimace and a smirk.

"You'll know once he has. The entire pack will be after us when that happens."

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Read Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 173 – Judging from the small building the wedding was being held at, it was initially meant to be an intimate event. As grandma mentioned earlier, the couple in question had high hopes that a wedding was just what people needed to lift spirits. As it turns out, they were right.

There were cars spilling out of the little parking lot, parked alongside curbs and even up on the flat, grassy areas. Dainty paper lanterns suspended on thin fishing wire were what led guests to the front doors, though many just walked around the building to where the party was overflowing into the grass. A hastily thrown together dance floor had been constructed out back, along with a dozen or so tiki torches and streamers in various shades of violet.

The sign out front read, 'Chatham Recreational Center.' The music pouring from within was loud and upbeat, matching the laughter that drifted throughout the air. Children darted in and out, weaving between adults who were either drinking, eating, or dancing.

There was no order to any of it, but the chaos gave it a homey feel that reminded me more of a family reunion rather than a wedding.

"So many children..." Holly said thoughtfully, nervously fidgeting with the hem of the dress I loaned her. She twisted the lace around her fingers only to release it and repeat the motion.

She was lodged in between Tristan and I, sticking close to our shoulders as we maneuvered throughout the crowd. I noted the way her eyes scanned everything with both hesitation and a budding sense of curiosity. It seemed to shake her whenever someone would look her way for too long. They'd hold her gaze until they noticed me standing at her side, then their attention would flit between the two of us until the similarities between Holly and I answered their unvoiced questions.

"I'm not entirely sure I like weddings." She said quietly, lowering herself so she could speak the words in my ear. As two children zoomed by, one covered from head to navel in bright splotches of sugary frosting, her look of discomfort faltered. Her lips twitched and eyes followed the children until they were lost from sight. "I do like children, though."

We approached the back doors, both of which were propped wide open so that people could run in and out, in search of Cassidy. Further inside I spotted my grandma, who was chatting with Claire and a woman in a sparkling white dress. The veil she wore was thrown back and dotted with little diamonds that twinkled like newborn stars. All three looked relaxed and joyful, laughing like old friends would. Before grandma could spot me standing there and inevitably uncover my plans, I made a beeline for where Cassidy said she'd be.

She wasn't alone when I approached with Holly and Tristan but was giggling and very clearly flirting with a guy almost three times her size. The guy, whose grey eyes were bright in contrast to his dark skin, grinned and devoured every second of the attention.

"Oh, Kendrick! This is the one and only, Luna Lola." Cassidy said smoothly, tossing her blonde mane of curls over her shoulder. She sauntered over to me and looped her arm through my own, paying no attention to Tristan or Holly in the process. "Lola has been such a friend lately. She came right to my aid the other night and kicked some serious—"

"Really, it was nothing. You would've done the same for me, I'm sure." I interrupted her, not wanting to relay the details of what it was I did that night. I was still figuring it out

myself, and the last thing I needed was for everyone else to make up their own interpretations.

“Oh, of course! I owe you one, seriously.” Cassidy nodded exuberantly, her sparkly eyeshadow shimmering as it caught the torchlight. She lowered her voice as the thunderous pop music melted into something soft and slow. “This is the guy I’ve been telling you about. He wanted to meet the Luna, like every other wolf I know.”

Her voice took on a teasing note as she winked at Kendrick and cozied up to his side. There was a small part of me that wanted to bring up Lars considering she’d been more than interested in him up until the events of last night. Emilia’s warning came to mind, and rather than get on Cassidy’s bad side, I said a warm welcome to Kendrick and continued to push things along.

Once he ventured off in search of food, I managed to give Cassidy a quick run-down of tonight’s plan. I hadn’t been sure of how she’d react when telling her why I had to come up with a plan in the first place. She’d been Asher’s best-friend since childhood, and I wasn’t sure if pissing him off were something she’d feel comfortable doing. Turns out, Cassidy had no qualms over angering my mate. That fact made me like her even more.

During the hour we spent at the wedding party, I could hear snippets of Asher’s voice in my head. A few times he spoke through the mind-link, attempting to ease my anger but to no avail. Here and there I let a few details slip, little things I happened to see or hear. The music, children laughing, the scent of food hanging in the air, even a quick flash of the dress I gave to Holly to wear.

A giddiness settled over me as the time neared to act on my plan. Tristan, Holly, and Cassidy ventured inside the Recreational center while I hovered near the doors and waited. A few minutes passed, turning giddiness into budding anxiety, when I began to grow impatient and decided to peek my head inside. Rather than look in the direction of the restrooms, which is where Cassidy and the others went, I found myself looking towards the other side of the room.

Apart from a few people here and there, most of the guests had wandered outside to continue partying under the light of the moon. There were a few people perched on bleachers, paper plates on their laps piled with food, but that was it. The lack of people made it all too easy to spot his head of salt and pepper hair, which he seemed to have brushed and styled specifically for tonight. Judging from who he danced with, I could see why.

Dad and Flora were practically invisible, absorbed within their own world as they swayed to the gentle beat of the song that filled the room and spilled into the night. One of his hands rested on her hip, while the other cradled hers. There was an awkwardness that would’ve told me dad had never slow danced before if I hadn’t already known myself, but it wasn’t that which robbed me of breath and made my insides twist with guilt.

It was the very obvious limp in his left leg, and the constant flashes of pain in his eyes that sent me thinking back to the events of a few days ago, when grandma had attempted her hand at healing his leg. He'd sounded more than defeated when she'd been unable to do it, yet here he was, still doing his best to dance with the mate he thought had died long ago.

It wasn't a wish I put into existence, but a need so strong it overshadowed everything else, even the risky and partially insane plan I was about to follow through on. Dad's pain and beautifully innocent desire to dance with Flora coaxed the electrifying feel of magic from my blood until it rang in my ears and warmed the amulet nestled against the hollow of my throat.

There was no time for me to question what I'd done or how I'd done it, because Tristan had returned. The missing presences of Holly and Cassidy, paired with Asher's snarl vibrating down the mate-bond, told me the plan was officially under way.

"Your plan's working so far. They're tailing after Holly and Cassidy, but sooner or later they're going to realize they were tricked." Tristan grunted, pulling me away from my hiding spot and around the side of the building.

"It'll take them even longer considering I gave Cassidy the keys to my car." I smirked and fished a different set from my pocket, one's Cassidy had slipped into my hand when Tristan wasn't looking. I dangled them in front of his nose, a grin developing as his momentary look of surprise shriveled. "Hope you know how to drive a motorcycle, because I sure as h\*\*l don't."

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I let out a sigh of relief. He hadn't figured it out yet.

A single tap to Tristan's shoulder told him we were in the clear-for now, anyway.

Since the helmets we wore left us unable to communicate, the tap system I made up on the spot was what I used to keep him up to date. One tap meant we were safe, and to keep coasting down the backroads at normal speeds. Abiding by the speed limit was slower than simply taking off like a bat out of h\*\*l, but there was always a chance it would keep us from being discovered for just a few seconds longer. Two taps told him to speed up, and three...three meant we were out of time.

'You know I can't do that.' I told Asher, forcing to the very back of my mind the loud snarl of the motorcycle's exhaust and the pressure the helmet exerted on my temples.

Cassidy's head was much smaller than mine. Sean had been right when he said I had a big head, even if he'd only been teasing. Thankfully, adrenaline was much more potent than Tylenol. I'd certainly feel it in the morning, though. If we managed to live that long.

'Oh, you'll live that long. Not even d\*\*\*h can keep you from me, not with how much trouble you're in. You won't make it far, Lola. The warriors are gaining on you, and they have instructions to stop the vehicle at any cost.' Asher's gristly voice circled my head, picking up on snippets of my thoughts, little fragments that managed to slip down the mind-link. 'I highly doubt you'd mow them all down.'

The confidence in his voice and in the dry laugh he sent down the bond tinted my vision in an unsettling shade of red. It boiled the adrenaline in my veins and made my muscles go rigid with fury.

As Tristan finished speeding around a curve and brought the bike back into its upright position, he turned his head ever so slightly in my direction. He tapped once on the top of my hand, the one clutching his leather jacket to keep me from flying off the bike. Though I couldn't hear him or communicate mentally like I could with the pack, I knew he was asking me if I were alright. I tapped once in response, wondering if I'd hurt him when I clenched my fists and inadvertently tightened my hold on his torso.

'You remember what happens when you underestimate me, Asher?' I asked, my voice venomous.

At the moment, there was no trace of the she-wolf he loved, only the unforgiving nature of a Luna crossed by someone she trusted. The bond between us was still there, still intense, and unbreakable, but the stress of our circumstances forced us down opposing paths.

Asher had changed since the announcement where I revealed what I was to the pack. Perhaps this illogical, overprotective side of him had always existed, but was buried beneath the unwavering strength of an Alpha born and bred from polished steel. I wasn't sure what specific moment triggered this side of him, but he'd slowly been spiraling these past few months, sinking to the bottom of his own tumultuous ocean.

His reply was instant, tinged with the barest hint of disbelief. 'You'd risk k\*\*\*\*\*g your own people to follow through on this plan of yours?'

'Unbelievable, isn't it? Although, I think it pales in comparison to you trying to force me into compliance with an Alpha command...as if that's ever worked for you.' I laughed bitterly.

From out the corner of my eye, I saw something moving within the forest. I craned my head towards the trees, watching with peeled eyes as they all blurred into a massive wall of darkness, the emerald greens and rich browns stolen away by night. Silence radiated down the bond, vibrating the mind-link constructed between Asher and I. Seconds, I waited for his response, expecting nothing less than some flimsy excuse about the lengths he'd go to protect me.

When those seconds ticked by and a full minute had passed, I tapped Tristan's abdomen twice.

The sport bike we were on snarled, spitting its rage and shooting forward with enough speed to send me sliding off the back end of the seat. I tightened my grip on Tristan's torso, too consumed with Asher's silence to react to him relaxing under my hold.

'Was that a motorcycle?' Asher asked, his voice unsettlingly calm.

A single drop of sweat, chilled by the wind that tried so desperately to hold us back, trickled down the back of my neck.

I leaned to the left as Tristan hit a sharp curve without breaking speed, managing a glimpse at the GPS in the process.

So close.

We were so close to the borders of the pack. Without a doubt, I knew there would be a patrol team surveying the area, but they had no clue who we were or that we were headed their way. Once we barreled through the boundary lines, they most likely wouldn't bother following.

I forced the rumbling of the engine and the sound of wind whooshing in my ears to the back of my head, and somehow managed to conjure a response out of thin air. 'Nope, that was Maya and I snarling at you.'

Seconds ticked by and my stomach dropped further.

'You clever little brat.'

S\*\*t.

Alarm bells exploded in my head, screeching in their shrill tones until my ears began to ring. Saying to h\*\*l with the system I created, I tapped Tristan's abdomen in rapid succession. I squeezed my eyes shut to keep Asher from picking up on any stray images that managed to slide past my grasp and held on for dear life.

'Uh, Lola...the wolves slowed down. I think they know you're not in the car.' Cassidy shouted over mind-link, her voice growing farther away.

Two things happened simultaneously.

A series of howls split the air in two, and Tristan twisted the throttle to its furthest limits, sending us veering head-first into oblivion.

The chilling song of the warriors d\*\*\*\*d out everything. Every sound, from the bike's wailing engine to the creatures that lurked within the forest, was silenced by the cries of our pursuers. Only one thing managed to pierce the unsettling veil the wolves howling cast over us-Asher's voice.

'No wonder you weren't worried about getting past the warriors. Who is driving the car, Lola?' He asked darkly.

As Tristan hit another curve, barely slowing in speed, the bike lurched to the right. Even with my eyes clenched shut, I could feel the whoosh of something much too close to my face for comfort. As he completed the turn and yanked the bike into an upright position, my eyes snapped open. I had to s\*\*\*\*\*w back bile as I realized it was the asphalt of the road I felt, breezing but a foot away from my face.

Werewolf or no, a motorcycle c\*\*\*h at triple digit speeds with only a helmet as protection would leave me irreparably scarred.

'Doesn't matter who's driving the car, Asher.' I shot back, 'You did this when you stopped treating me like a Luna and started treating me as only your mate.'

'You are my mate.' He bellowed, his anger vibrating the length of our bond until my teeth began to chatter. 'I'll find out who's helping you, Lola. Mark my words.'

'I am your mate, but I am also the Luna of the largest pack in the world, and the Queen to an entire race of mythical beings. I told you my plan because I love and respect you, but I do not need your permission to protect my people.' I replied, instantly noticing the power that filled my voice and thoughts. It matched that in Asher's, perfectly equal in its intensity. 'You can either have the warriors follow the car to figure out whose inside, or you can have them try and catch up to me. It's your choice, but the outcome will remain the same.'

There was a wisp of desperation deep within Asher's voice, one he tried to conceal with his aggression and hide by means of intimidation. His anger had never worked on me before, which is why I was able to see right through it.

'Lola, this is your last chance...' His voice grew impossibly low, full of dark promises that were colder than the chilly sting of wind against my neck and chest.

Another chorus of howls pierced the thin veil of night, much closer than they had been before. He'd made his decision, just as I had made mine.

'Through hell or high water, Asher, I will come back to you.'

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A total of four hundred and seventy-three miles west of Asher's pack was Alpha Bran's, which we fully planned to steer clear of. Even though it was insanity not to relay the location of the Vampire's lair on the off chance we didn't make it back, I couldn't risk Asher sending a group of warriors to my rescue.

The last thing I needed were the Vampire's thinking I'd come to ambush them.

A few of the warriors followed us past the boundary lines, though they didn't dare venture too far. If I had to guess, the ones brave enough to leave Asher's territory were new recruits, desperate to prove themselves in the eyes of their Alpha. When the last wolf following us slowed and darted back to the territory lines, I let out a sigh of relief.

The sound was muffled by the helmet I wore and smothered by the snarling of the engine, yet Tristan still felt the need to turn his head ever so slightly in my direction. It was the weird connection he and every other Vampire had with their ruler. In many ways, it was similar to the bond between a Luna and her pack, yet there was no direct channel of communication.

As convenient, and mildly unsettling, as it was to have Tristan and Giovanni picking up on my emotions, the ability to mind-link would've been far more useful

Curled behind Tristan's large frame, I lost track of the time that passed. Unable to see the small screen on the sports bike, I counted the passing hours by how sore my backside was becoming.

Silence rang in my ears where Asher's voice had once been, and even though I promptly ended the mind-link between us after promising I'd return, I could feel his lingering presence in the furthest depths of my thoughts, waiting—listening for any whisper that I was in danger.

Always the protector, no matter how tumultuous things became.

"He'll forgive you. You know that, right?" Tristan grunted, clearing his throat to regain my attention.

I set the helmet onto the seat of the bike and stared up at the flickering sign of the gas station we stopped at, unsure of how to respond. FastMart, I deduced even though the blinking letters read 'F st M t', was nothing more than a little shack comprised of four poorly constructed brick walls. Right outside the front door, whose glass was hazy and covered in half-peeled stickers from cigarette advertisements, were two gas pumps. The one we stood at had a rusted number 2 on the handle, as if we couldn't figure that one out ourselves.

I looked back at Tristan, still unable to conjure a response. He had never liked Asher, especially before coming to accept that I'd never choose him as my mate. It was strange to hear his reassurance rather than some clever insult meant to tear Asher down.

"I'll go pay for the gas. I don't think this fossil has a card reader." I mumbled.

As I fished my wallet out of my jacket pocket and stared down at the slim wad of cash I kept handy, I hesitated.

"Don't pay in cash." Tristan drawled, "If we don't make it back, Asher can track us through your card and see that we stopped here. It's not much, but it'll give him somewhere to start."

He watched me from where he leaned against the pump. It sat at an odd angle, making it look as though it were going to fall over at any moment. I nodded, erasing my look of surprise when he snorted dryly.

The start of a plan unfurled in my mind—one created by the slew of intrusive thoughts that explained in explicit detail the many number of things that could potentially go wrong. Well, at least they couldn't take me to my father. Not that I would've minded k\*\*\*\*\*g him a second time.

"If anything happens, I want you to leave me behind and go straight to Asher."

It was Tristan's turn to raise his eyebrows, only instead of surprised, he looked unamused.

"Sure, thing. I'll run for my life and the Queen of all Vampire's to d\*e. Who will plan my f\*\*\*\*\*l when Asher murders me for leaving your side? Perhaps, Giovanni will forgive me for trying to m\*\*\*\*\*r him and for the loss of Breyona's wolf. If not, I'm sure Breyona could prepare a lovely f\*\*\*\*\*l."

I rolled my eyes at him.

"So dramatic."

Leaving him to his own devices, I turned on my heel and approached the little shack. Through the foggy glass windows, I could see a single aisle of what appeared to be potato chips and some very old looking candy, along with a tiny counter and a mass of crimson hovering behind it.

“Aye’ kid, you got any money?” A raspy voice low to the ground asked.

The homeless man sitting against the brick wall of the gas station was partially concealed by a large ice cooler. A sign was stuck to the door of it by a single piece of duct tape. ‘Out of order,’ it read.

He peered up at me, his eyes a bright shade of blue. They were made even more vibrant from the dark tattered clothing he wore, and from the uneven mop of ebony hair on his head. Without looking too closely, I fished a twenty from my wallet and held it out to him.

“Appreciate it. Garret in there charges an arm and a leg for a beer, just thought you should know.” The man said, jabbing a thumb over his shoulder as he pointed towards the inside of the little shack. He let out a wet laugh and relaxed against the brick wall.

I nodded, grabbing the door handle. “Glad I could help.”

A little silver bell attached to the frame jingled as I pulled the door open. Instantly, I was greeted by the pungent scent of gas station hot dogs and the body odor of who I could only assume was Garret. The mass of crimson I saw through the foggy window was the man himself-or his shirt, rather.

The strength of the man’s body odor could easily alert every werewolf in the state that this man was one hundred percent a human. He looked up from his magazine, which had half-dressed women printed on both the cover and backside and flashed me a greasy grin.

“Whatchu doing around these parts, sweetheart?” He drawled, sliding the magazine off to the side.

His voice had a slight southern twang, which made sense when he picked up an old Styrofoam cup and spat a wad of something dark into it. The scent of stale tobacco wafted between us, deepening the look of disinterest on my face.

“Getting gas, that’s what.” I deadpanned.

“No need to get snippy, just askin’ a question.” He chuckled, his large stomach jiggling.

One of the perks of growing up in a pack was that I didn’t have to deal with human men. More often than not, human men were insufferable and entitled with their women. Werewolves had the same qualities, but they knew when to back down and submit.

Garret here, had the same haughty tone as most men, speaking down on me like I was some innocent doe. Little did he know, I wasn't just a wolf but a blood-drinking one at that.

"And I answered it. Put thirty on pump two, and I'll pay for a beer for the guy outside. I trust you'll make sure he gets it." I replied, holding out my card.

Garret grumbled incoherently and spat a second time into his cup. I walked back to the pump, listening to the homeless man's wet laughter hit the air, followed by the crack of a can being opened. By the time I caught Tristan's interested gaze, the laughter had morphed into harsh coughing.

"How kind of you, buying the local drunk a drink." He commented dryly.

He plucked my helmet from the seat and held it out for me to take, glancing once at the pump. The faded numbers ticked by slowly. I snatched it from his hands and snorted through my nose.

"At least someone will have a good night. Maybe we'll have one too."

I flipped my hair over my shoulder and yanked the helmet into place. A solid five minutes later, the hum of the engine filled my ears, and my backside resumed its aching.

Counting the mile markers and letting my thoughts drift by as idly as the surrounding trees, I noticed we'd made it about fifteen miles before rounding a curve and hitting a long stretch of road.

I'd been fixated on the moon as it hung in the sky, shining brightly and free of any wispy clouds, when Tristan stiffened, and the exhaust's rumbling faltered. I tapped his shoulder, not expecting a response, but the bike's slowing speed was answer enough.

He must've spotted the sign Bridgette told us about, the one with the splotch of glow-in-the-dark paint. I caught a glimpse of the speedometer and grimaced when it read a whopping ten miles per hour. At that point, I said, 's\*\*\*w it' and lurched to the side to peer around Tristan.

It wasn't the distinct outline of a person standing at the very end of the road that made me pale. Rather, it was the rustling I heard coming from the forest, both behind us and on our sides. A chilly breeze kicked up, and the scent of something sweet permeated my helmet.

I'd been wrong, so very wrong.

Tristan hadn't found what we were looking for, the sign which led to the Vampire's lair. Instead, they found us.

