

## Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 201

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“A curse. Now there’s a d\*\*n curse we have to deal with?” Zeke sputtered, his voice flooding the cars speakers.

I turned the volume down a notch, wincing as I glanced over at Asher. He was chiseled from stone, his arm rigid as he held the wheel, eyes narrowed on the highway ahead.

“I told you what the Shadows said. There’s no way to ‘deal’ with it. Even if there was, Cordelia and Rowena can’t sense anything on him. You’d think two powerful witches could sniff out a curse.” I grumbled, sinking deeper into the seat.

My bottom was on the verge of becoming numb, but we didn’t have much longer to go before we’d hit our meet-up point. Fifty miles away, at a small gas station with one of our own wolves posted as cashier, we’d find the others. Breyona, Giovanni, Tristan, Sean, Mason, and Clara had taken a different route to avoid suspicion. Going off of Breyona’s idea when she rescued us from Ember and Tessa, we borrowed a work van from a local company in the pack for them to use.

There wasn’t any need to black out the windows considering it was the middle of the night, which is why the tractor trailer idea Mason had worked out smoothly.

A horn blared behind us, one louder than I’d ever heard before. It didn’t startle Asher in the slightest, but I definitely jumped a few inches in my seat.

“Earth to Lola.” Zeke sang. “Need me to honk again?”

“You said I could do it this time.” Dina snapped, her voice distant over the speakers.

“Why did we agree to let Zeke drive the big rig?” I asked Asher, running a hand over my tired eyes.

Asher tilted his head my way, eyes of sparkling gold crinkling at the edges. It was the only time he dared to relax after our conversation with the shadows.

“You agreed because no one else knows how to drive the thing.” Zeke said smugly.

The truck’s horn blared a second time, longer and louder than the first. I bit my lip hard enough to draw blood. We wouldn’t have bothered with the thing, but the Vampire’s already in the safe haven needed supplies. Among the usual lot of clothing, first-aid, and hygiene products was a fresh shipment of blood-bags.

In between spending time with his family, Asher's Beta had been responsible for getting the shipment to the meet-up point. He'd also been tasked with transporting Bridgette there once I told her about my conversation with Deacon, and that there was a strong chance he'd make his way there in the future. From there, the cashier we had in place would contact one of the few wolves staying at the safe haven to pick up the shipment.

"What the h\*\*l, Zeke." I jumped, startled a second time.

"My bad. Just wanted to honk the horn. Never been in one of these things before." Dina apologized over the phone.

"It's alright, Dina." I sighed, clenching my eyes shut for a few seconds to relieve the pain of staring into headlights half the night. "What were you saying, Zeke?"

"I asked if you tried to break Asher's curse with your Conjunction magic." His reply came a few seconds later.

As we whizzed down the highway, cars darting past us left and right, my eyes were drawn to the night sky. Stars kissed the horizon in a sea of silver and navy blue, reaching up to meet a moon so bright the streetlamps almost weren't needed. I glanced back down to the car's navigation screen, where Zeke's name remained lit up in bold, white letters.

"Of course I tried. I'm still trying to work off this headache. Did you know over the counter medication does nothing for magically induced ailments? Well, I didn't either. It didn't matter how many times I tried or what angle I came at it from, it was like my magic had nothing to hold onto. If the shadows are right about Asher being cursed, and I think they are, then there's nothing we can do but wait it out."

Thick, heady silence enveloped Asher and I. It was so strong that even Zeke and Dina were affected, going quiet on the other end. None of us voiced what was going through our heads, the last part of what the Shadows had said.

Through carnage and blood, the curse would be fulfilled.

When Asher's hand fell over mine, his fingers sliding through my own, I'd almost forgotten we were still on the phone with Zeke. My heartrate quickened when his eyes left the road to stare into my own, so strong and reassuring that I almost didn't believe what the Shadows had said.

Almost.

I'd seen Asher changing these past few months, becoming more and more protective, losing that cunning edge of his in order to wrap me in a cotton blanket and protect me from all harm.

We hadn't even talked about Tristan and I escaping the pack like prisoners of war.

I could tell from the lingering stares and soft touches, from the raw emotion flooding the mate-bond whenever he looked my way, that there was no anger there for what I'd done, but it still needed to be addressed before it happened a second time. If there was one thing I'd learned from my mom, it was that in relationships, things like this always came to a head.

"We will get through this, Lola." Asher promised, his firm voice the pillar of strength I needed—that our pack needed.

And more than anything, I wanted to believe him.

We met at the gas station, parking under the flickering dome light that shone down on one of the three gas pumps. Giovanni pulled in just fifteen minutes after we arrived, with Breyona sitting in the front seat. Her feet were perched on the dash and were the first thing she flung out of the car as she raced to the bathroom.

After reconvening at the meet-up point, there was but a short drive left until we reached the safe-haven Asher, and I spent months creating. There was one way in and out of the place, which might've been risky, but it allowed us to keep an eye on anyone that strayed too close.

When Asher had first purchased the property under the alias of a large real-estate corporation, the area had initially been planned to be turned into a series of quaint suburbs thirty miles from the nearest human town. The houses had been nothing more than husks when we snatched them up. With Killian and Claire lending a hand, the process wasn't nearly as difficult as it could've been. They found builders to come in and finish the homes, humans who had little to no clue what this plot of land was being used for.

When it was all said and done, we began moving Vampire's in. Without Tristan and Giovanni stepping up to transport them, the anonymity of the town would've vanished into thin air. Vampire's who wanted to live here were blind-folded until they passed through the gates deep within the forest.

It wasn't perfect, but we had yet to have any problems.

"Brandon will be leaving in a few hours. I'm still debating on whether or not I should give him the location and have him stop by on his way home." Asher grunted, his eyebrows creasing at the mere mention of his brother's name.

I made a sound of interest and cocked my head. Days had gone by and not once had I seen a trace of Brandon. It wasn't that I missed the guy because I was fairly sure the only one who was actually fond of him was Cassidy, but he'd become such a frequent

presence in my life that it was almost abnormal not to hear one of his dry quips or retorts to Asher inevitably threatening him.

When I finally bothered to ask Asher where his younger brother was, he told me he'd sent him off on a personal mission of sorts.

"He's leaving Bran's pack?" I asked, even more surprised than when Asher told me he'd sent him there in the first place.

Asher nodded, curving off the main road and onto the wide path that would take us into the safe haven.

"He's actually very efficient at weeding out Bran's loyalists. There were over two dozen warriors who hated the man, which isn't surprising in the slightest," He snorted. "But most of them agreed to join the hunt for the witches."

"What about the rest of the pack? They still need warriors to protect them. There's no telling if the witches will attack them now that Bran's d\*\*d."

"That's why I sent Brandon. The warriors loyal to their old Alpha will still defend their pack, but that's as far as their loyalty goes. They won't provide us any help, which means the best place for them to be is right where they are." Asher replied.

The car slowly came to a stop when the headlights hit something deeper in the forest. The glint of old metal sparkled in the night, painted in a coppery tint from rust. He stepped out of the vehicle and waved at Giovanni and Zeke to hang tight as he wrenched open the gate and pinned it in place.

A few more minutes wobbling down the dirt road and the town came into view, stealing away my breath as a jolt of excitement danced down my spine.

I hadn't seen the place since Asher had purchased the land and the houses had been fully completed. Many of the Vampire's here I'd met only because they encroached on the boundary of our pack's borders in search of help. The rest had been vetted by Giovanni and Tristan.

What at first had been a grass lot surrounded by oak and elm, littered with the bones of half-finished houses, was now a sprawling town that thrived under the cover of heavy clouds and silvery moonlight.

Homes of various shapes and color lined streets of unblemished asphalt. Some had shutters and wrap-around porches, while others had little back patios and small gardens nestled off to the side. A few had chain-link fences and driveways, while others were simpler in appearance. It was mismatched in the best way, an amalgamation of different styles and aesthetics from the various Vampire's making each house their home.

There were four streets that branched off, all of them with houses nestled against one another. Each street met at the center, circling the largest house out of the bunch, which served as a sort of community center. This was where the supplies were dropped off at every month and where we parked when a Vampire flagged us down.

The older gentleman standing off to the side of the community center had been one of the Vampire's I'd personally met. His salt and pepper hair had been much shaggier almost two months ago but was now cropped close to his ears. On his face was a tentative smile, one that blossomed into something warmer when Asher and I stepped out of the car.

"Welcome, Queen Lola. I was wondering when you'd come visit us all." The older Vampire chuckled, his voice deep and gruff.

I could hear the others getting out of their vehicles, their feet padding against sidewalk and asphalt as they came up behind Asher and I. The older Vampire whose name I remembered as Emmett, cocked his head, and made a sound of interest.

"Don't suppose you're here to see Deacon, are you?" He asked. "He said you were the one that sent him here. Figured he was telling the truth when that mate of his jumped into his arms."

"Did he come with others?" Dina demanded, her voice coming from a few feet behind.

Emmett's bushy eyebrows sank low on his face. "Erm, yeah he came with others. It'll probably just be best if I take you to him. Feel free to leave the tractor trailer here, I've got guys that can unload it. You can take your car, though. The house isn't that far up the road."

We were led to one of the many houses down the street, one with a small porch and a large set of windows overlooking the front yard. After pulling the car and work van up to the curb, Emmett gave us his farewell and headed back to the community center to help unload the truck.

The front door was unlocked when Asher opened it, and quickly we all saw why.

Seated in the living room were many faces, almost all of them familiar in some way. There was one I homed in on, one that made my blood run cold with recognition even though I knew the man wasn't my father.

Deacon's pale eyes latched onto my own, so much like my father's that I couldn't help but hold my breath. He tilted his head at me, the corners of his lips curling ever so slightly.

"Hello, niece."

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“Glad to see you survived.” I commented, my attention sliding to the woman that clung to his side.

Bridgette met my stare, her eyes strong and slender nose upturned as she nodded respectfully. She’d once looked at me like I were the enemy, analyzing the way I stood and moved as though she were searching for weak points, but not anymore. She seemed completely at ease in this quaint little house, perched on the arm of the antique sofa with a glass of what I knew to be blood in her hand.

She wasn’t the only one in the room, though. There were a few other Vampire’s, most of which had been here for a few weeks now. Two men around Asher’s age, one with hair as pale as snow and the other with curls that mirrored Giovanni’s, though they were a tad bit more unruly, were situated on a set of recliners just off to the side.

“Well, when you told me this one here was alive, I had no choice but to get back to her.” Deacon grunted, his ice-cold gaze thawing when he turned it towards Bridgette.

Asher, who had been quietly observing everyone, gestured to the large map sprawled out on the coffee table.

“What is this for?”

Deacon extracted himself from Bridgette, who frowned at him like she hadn’t gotten her fill of his touch, which she probably hadn’t considering they both almost died recently.

The man I was still coming to terms with as my uncle extended his hand for Asher to grasp.

“Alpha Asher, I’d say it’s nice to finally meet you, but I’ve heard all the rumors and know that most who cross your path don’t stay alive for very long.” He grunted, a hint of amusement weaseling its way onto his face, softening the sharp angles that must’ve belonged to my father’s father.

Asher shrugged but didn’t hesitate to stare Deacon down with his golden-flecked eyes, taking his hand securely in his own.

“That’s typically because they threaten what’s mine. I don’t sense you’ll make that mistake though.” He mused, his lips twitching and eyes darting down to where I stood when I jabbed my elbow into his ribcage.

'Play nice...' I said through the mind-link.

"Seems like it's a common occurrence that smart, powerful women end up saddled with hot-headed men." Deacon snorted, glancing back at Bridgette.

"Who better to keep us in line?" Giovanni said smoothly, a ghost in the corner of the living room.

"See? He gets it. Though from what I hear, Lola gets herself into a fair amount of trouble as well." Deacon chuckled, quickly rubbing at the stubble on his face before tapping the surface of the map. His finger landed on the forest that surrounded this little town, the border to the safe haven we'd constructed. "We're setting up a perimeter around the town. I did everything in my power to make sure we weren't followed, but we don't have magic on our side. The witches do."

Dina appeared in the doorway, her eyes wide and voice harsh.

"You said 'we.' Does that mean Spence is here too? Where is he, Deacon?" Her words trembled as a note of fear slithered its way into her throat.

I'd seen Deacon in action, and he was just as intimidating as my father, but his range of emotions was far beyond that of the previous Vampire King. Sadness rippled across his face, tainting the blues of his eyes until they grew darker in color.

"He was wounded badly, Dina." Was all Deacon said before Dina surged forward.

She and Bridgette must've had some sort of standing with one another, because the auburn-haired Vampire didn't stop Dina or seem threatened by her in the slightest. She stood back and let Deacon handle things, even though her expression was a tad pinched.

"Don't tell me you f\*\*\*\*\*g left him there." Dina spat, her eyes dark as unlit coal, burning with a fire void of light. "I swear on everything that you love—"

"Of course, I didn't leave him there. F\*\*k, Dina. You know I care about Spence more than that." Deacon grunted, staring the ferocious Vampire down with equal parts anger and understanding. "He was the only one that was hurt. Surprisingly, everyone else made it out alive. There were no casualties. I think he's been waiting for you, fighting off d\*\*\*h until you got here."

I heard what Deacon said, that part about no one d\*\*\*g, but it quickly slid into the background when he led Dina to the small staircase beside the fireplace. It was the first door at the top of the stairs that he took her to, still visible from where I stood. The moment the door cracked open, I heard her ragged gasp hit the air, followed by the scent of charred flesh.

It twisted my stomach, flipped it inside out and embedded itself onto every inch of my memory so that I'd never forget.

While Deacon and the others went over evacuation routes, perimeter checks, and the works, I tried and failed not to focus on the sound of Dina's voice slipping through the crack in the door. Her whispered promises were answered by a groan or rasp, one that sounded like it was filled with such excruciating pain that I had to bite my tongue several times to keep the tears at bay.

When all of our stomachs were growling, starved from both the long trip and spending the night without a hint of sleep, we took our meeting into the small kitchen while we ate. The little retro refrigerator was only stocked with blood and various types of alcohol, making me even more grateful Mason had thought to pack a cooler full of food.

"Always being hungry comes in handy, doesn't it?" He said smugly, smirking at both Clara and I.

She swatted his shoulder but grinned around bites of her sandwich.

"H\*\*l yeah, it does." Sean said through a mouthful of sour cream and onion chips.

"Protection magic isn't my strong suit, but if there's any sage lying around, I can try a spell that helps deter unwanted visitors." Clara suggested, flicking her curls over her shoulder when all eyes turned on her. "I'd need someone to run me around the perimeter though."

Mason swallowed a bite of his sandwich to chime in. "I can handle that part."

"I'm sure you can." Breyona murmured, sharing a smirk with Clara.

Deacon nodded, clearly deep in thought as he stroked the stubble coating his jaw. "Hm, it certainly wouldn't hurt."

"Unless the witches did follow you and are close by. Won't they come running if they smell another witch's magic around the place?" Bridgette countered, her legs swaying from where she sat on a clear part of the countertop.

"If they did follow, they're going to come running either way." Clara retorted, her lips thinning.

Bridgette hummed softly. "True. She's right, then. I don't see what it could hurt either."

"Chase and Stefan, think you can find some dried sage for Clara here?" Deacon asked the two Vampire's hovering along the outskirts of the room, leaning against the doorway as far from the rest of us as they could get.



“No problem, boss.” The one with hair pale as snow nodded, his eyes roaming over my face before he and his curly-haired friend, left the house.

The front door closed with a soft bang. There were enough curious looks being thrown around for Deacon to explain who the h\*\*l those two were. Apparently, there were plenty of Vampire’s here that wanted to help, they just didn’t know how.

Shortly after getting to the safe-haven, Deacon sprung into action and had gotten a list of volunteers who would be willing to help with perimeter checks and act as guards that watched the main road from the forest. At the top of that list were Chase and Stefan, two Vampire’s from low-born families that wanted a chance at a life where they weren’t seen as scum.

The two were still wary about seeing me as their Queen, but I didn’t mind. Expecting blind loyalty was foolish. If I wanted it, I’d have to earn it. Which is exactly what I planned to do; I just wasn’t quite sure how.

After going over plans some more, Asher, having decided the risk was worth it, told Brandon to bring the group of warriors to the safe haven. They would make the perfect patrol team during the daylight hours when the Vampire’s had to retreat indoors.

As the guys were going over that list, divvying up the different shifts, Dina emerged from the bedroom, her face twisted into a look of sheer determination as she stormed downstairs.

She squared up to Deacon without a sliver of fear in her body, her fists clenched like she was seconds away from swinging.

“What are we going to do about this, Deacon? I want that witch d\*\*d.” She snarled, giving him no time to answer as she craned her head in my direction and spat, “You and your messed up magic said everyone would survive. That ain’t surviving. He’s—He’s all b\*\*\*\*d up...in so much pain. You’re our f\*\*\*\*\*g Queen, right? Do something, then! That fire witch hurt one of our own, hurt my mate.”

For a moment, all I could do was stare. Her dark skin was practically glowing from rage, coated in a thin sheen of sweat that reflected off her eyes and b\*\*\*d teeth. I placed my hand on Asher’s arm, barely noticing when his deep growl was cut short. I was too fixated on Dina, on the emotion she invoked and how it rattled in my chest. The sight of her struck me deep, bringing an errant thought to the surface of my mind.

Her fearlessness and rage, it was almost awe-inspiring and bordered on animalistic in nature. I’d never met a Vampire that embodied those qualities so effortlessly. Dina reminded me of my own people, of their tenacity and sheer willpower.

Dina would’ve made a good werewolf.

If things had gone differently, I might've felt the twitch of magic tickling my nerve endings, but the alarm we'd long ago set up in town began screeching, echoing through the streets in an ominous tone that meant the enemy wasn't just nearby.

They were here.

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Several seconds passed, flitting into the ether as we all stared at one another, shock written clear across our features only in different fonts. Any and all laughter vanished from the room, its absence letting silence leak in like a d\*\*g.

Asher and Deacon were the first to break free of its hypnotic gaze, barking out orders that were both awe-inspiring and terrifying.

"We must've been followed, but I'm betting it was Lola's appearance that made them act so soon. It would've been smartest to attack during broad daylight. We'd be sitting ducks that way." Deacon snarled.

Asher's eyes momentarily glazed over, caught in a mind-link that left him biting back a growl.

"Witches are close to the border of town. They're close to breaking through. I've got six wolves stationed here. Four are currently fighting, two are rounding up every child and elderly person in town." His grimace deepened, and my blood ran cold from the sheer harshness of it. "There's a witch setting things on fire. That wouldn't happen to be the one you want d\*\*d, is it?"

Dina rubbed the palms of her hands together, her teeth gnashed into a line as she smiled savagely. "That b\*\*\*h is mine. She's going to be six feet under for what she did to Spence."

"Gather as many as you can, anyone willing to fight. With luck, you'll get your wish, and that witch will be d\*\*d before sunrise." Deacon said to Dina, clapping her on the shoulder with a firm hand.

During that split second where they looked into each other's eyes, I thought something might've passed between them, an unspoken vow of sorts. Before I could decipher what it might've been, Dina was out the front door.

"I'm going to help them. Those witches won't know what hit them." Breyona chimed in, a deadly glint to my best friends eyes.

She met Giovanni's intense stare before searching my face. It took me a moment to realize she was asking for permission. I might've been her Luna, but it was likely that these were the witches that had helped m\*\*\*\*r her parents. Justice wasn't something I'd keep from her, no matter how much I wanted her safe. Just like me, Breyona had been given the gift of power, and power demanded to be used.

"Go." I told her. "Make sure they know exactly who they've f\*\*\*\*d with."

When she slipped out of the kitchen, I grabbed onto Giovanni's arm before he could follow. He turned his impossibly dark eyes on me, and I felt them probing my face, peeling back the layers to every emotion I hid within.

"Keep her safe, Giovanni." I all but begged him.

"I will." He promised.

With that, he and Tristan left, followed by Sean and finally, Zeke. Mason seemed to have grown pale during that time. Worry b\*\*\*\*d in his eyes, fear written across his soft features that brought me back to that awful night, the night I helped k\*\*l his mate. He had the same look on his face as he stared at Clara.

"I'll be safe here, Mason. I won't leave this house. I promise." She said soothingly, her plump lips softening into a reassuring smile that took away some of the agony on his face.

"You'll be here when I get back?" He mumbled, seeing no one but the curvy witch that demanded his full attention.

She nodded, her curls bouncing around her shoulders. "I will. I'll be right here."

A look of utter surprise lifted my eyebrows and parted my lips when Mason pulled Clara into his arms and smashed his lips against hers, pouring every ounce of his worry and fear into her willing embrace. She accepted it all, tangling her fingers in his hair to draw him deeper, matching every stroke and sigh he let out with one of her own. When they pulled apart, both were breathless and red in the face.

"I want a kiss like that before we go out there." Bridgette mumbled, her eyes darting up to skewer Deacon.

My heart just about stalled in my chest when Asher's voice flooded my head.

'Lola, can I talk to you in private?'

'Now?' I replied, glancing at the front door.

He nodded stiffly, tilting his head towards the living room. Neither Deacon nor Bridgette commented as we slipped out of sight. The front door slammed shortly after, letting me know Mason had officially left to join the fight.

The longer Asher stared at me, flecks of pure gold swirling in his irises like fireflies in the d\*\*d of night, the more I felt myself teeter towards the edge. Already adrenaline was coursing through my veins, growing stronger with each one of our friends that left to join the fight. If I didn't act—didn't do something, I swore I'd explode.

“Lola—” He began, and I felt my control slip ever so slightly.

I shook my head at him, perhaps a bit harder than necessary, but I needed to get my point across.

“Do not tell me I can't go out there, Asher. I get it, you want to keep me safe, but you can't. Maybe once you could've, but with magic and witches and evil spells meant to take away my free will, you just can't anymore. We are not going to win this by locking me away in a tower like some Princess while our friends fight for their lives. I love you, Asher, but I am going out there to fight.” I exhaled, my heart pulsing against my ribcage as he stared and stared.

I hadn't meant for it to come out like that, rushed and callous, but we had seconds—seconds to get this out in the open. We should've talked about it sooner, gotten it over with and communicated, but it became too easy to shove it all under the rug and enjoy the blissful moments we had together.

He swept me into his arms, his heat melting into my skin and his scent swirling around my head. I didn't fight him but sank into the embrace and felt his heartbeat quickening to match my own. My eyes drifted shut when his lips found my forehead, sending wave after wave of sparks skittering along my skin. When he pulled away, his eyes slightly hooded, they were absent of anger.

“I know, Lola. I wasn't going to keep you from the fight. I just...” He let out a sharp breath, his eyes falling shut. “I wanted to apologize for being so selfish with you. You're a Luna, the best I could've ever asked for, but I've been keeping you from your full potential by smothering you. I haven't been treating you as my equal, and that stops today.”

His thumb swiped at my cheek, making me realize a tear had escaped my eye. I blinked a few times, clearing my vision so I could stare up at him. How he could be so raw and understanding when it went against his very nature, I'd never know, but it would be a part of him I'd cherish forever.

“We need to go out there and help them.” He said, a wicked glint in his eyes, one promising d\*\*\*h and destruction. “Are you in?”

I wanted to say yes more than anything, but there was something I needed to do—something I'd been wanting to do since we'd gotten here.

"I'm in, but I have to do something first..." I trailed off, debating on how much I should say. There was no telling it would work, so I wanted to keep the details to myself. "I'll catch up with you, okay? Promise."

He was reluctant, I could tell by the way his eyes darkened, turning that ferocious gold into a ruddy bronze.

"Go. I'll watch over her." Deacon barked. "Bridgette's just gone out to help as well."

A second time, I was swept into Asher's arms, only this time around his lips closed over my own. Every sense I had working on overdrive shut down one by one, all going lax under Asher's intoxicating taste. His scent flooded my nose, mixing with the adrenaline in my veins and filling my heart with enough love to make me feel as though I were floating.

When he pulled away, I realized how much I truly had to fight for, and finally understood that even with Conjunction, it was one of the biggest weapons I had against the blood-witch.

"What's your plan, kid?" Deacon asked, tilting his head, and eyeing me with a look I couldn't quite decipher.

I turned towards the stairs, listening to the uneven rasp that droned on and on.

"I need to talk to Spence."

The sight was so much worse than I could've imagined, and the smell—it was near overwhelming. His eyes were stark white, so pale against mottled, charred flesh that it struck a chord of terror within me.

He laid flat on the bed, his chest barely moving as he breathed in and out, in and out. On every exhale, his lungs would rattle, and eyes would flare with remnants of pain.

There wasn't much left of his face, only two gaping holes where his eyes sat and a b\*\*\*\*y stump that served as his nose. Even his hair had been b\*\*\*\*d off, lingering in wispy tufts that looked far too fragile. Some part of me wondered if his clothing had been welded to his flesh, or if Deacon had managed to cut it off of him before it could glue itself to the wounds.

"Spence..." I whispered, kneeling beside the bed. "I need to talk to you if that's alright. You don't have to say anything. If you can, I'd like you to blink once for yes and twice for no."

His eyes had followed me as I entered the room and sank to the floor. Slowly, they closed and opened. I felt Deacon watching at my back, silent but present.

Yes.

“Alright.” I exhaled, clasping my trembling hands together. “I know you have your reasons for not liking magic, but if I told you I could use my magic to give you a second chance with Dina, would you take it?”

His eyes remained on my face for what felt like eons before fluttering shut and opening. I waited and waited for them to close a second time, but they never did. A kernel of relief filled my chest, turning to confidence I eagerly devoured.

“I can’t make any promises, Spencer, but I’m going to try and heal you now.”

I placed my hands on what was left of his chest, cringing and whispering an apology when an inhuman groan escaped what was left of his lips.

When my eyes closed, I pulled from that well of magic I’d felt a time or two, like a pool of pure electricity only I could tap into. It prickled my nerve endings, racing along my veins and curling around my bones, melding with my deepest thoughts and innermost desires.

There was nothing left for me to do but picture what I wanted: Spencer, happy and whole, his skin fresh and unblemished.

I didn’t listen to the sounds he made, the ones that stabbed at my heart, nor did I listen to the sound of feet padding down the stairs. On and on, I poured that energy into Spencer’s body, praying above all that it would work.

It could’ve been seconds or minutes that I sat there, I wasn’t sure. All I knew was that when I opened my eyes and found myself staring down at a smooth expanse of skin, I was positive I’d faint.

Spencer was fully healed, not a single b\*\*n left on his body. His skin was flushed an odd shade of red, like he’d just gotten over the worst part of a horrible sunburn, but he was no longer on the verge of d\*\*\*h.

Without thinking, I pushed myself to my feet and instantly wobbled. I would’ve fallen backwards if it hadn’t been for Deacon holding me up, spinning me around to stare him in the face.

His eyebrows, which looked so much like my father’s I wanted to be sick, were gnashed together.

“You healed him, but you asked for permission first.” He grunted, speaking no more on the topic as he shoved a blood bag in my hands and said, “There’s no time to pass out

and nap. They need us out there. There's kids and families counting on their Queen. Time to show your estranged Uncle what you're made of kid."

## Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 204

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This was bad.

The battle was no longer waging on the outskirts of town, not with our lack of numbers and the witch's arsenal of weapons.

Many of the Vampire's here weren't hardened warriors but families without a home, desperate for somewhere safe to raise their children and watch them grow. Seeing as Asher and I refused to force anyone to fight, fearful they'd be k\*\*\*\*d and ripped away from those they loved, it left us at a huge disadvantage.

Deacon had been right. That much was clear in the feverish way the witches fought, banding together in small groups as they used both magic and human weaponry to take us down. There had to be over a dozen of them, possibly more. They could've waited until the sun had risen and claimed this town as their own, but there was always that chance I wouldn't be here.

It was a risk they chose not to take, and probably our only advantage.

The witches had silver, and plenty of it. Clutched in the hands of many were guns with plated bullets, daggers etched in the shimmering metal, and crossbows with tips coated in liquid moonlight.

"That's right. Come and get me shadow mutt." A voice spat, one that instantly ignited my rage.

Ember, surrounded by three other witches, was goading Breyona from the forest line. I couldn't see my best-friend, but somehow I knew she was in there, watching and frothing at the mouth for a second chance at devouring the flame throwing witch she'd fought before.

A screech rang out, this one belonging to Dina as she flew through the air and made an attempt at k\*\*\*\*g Ember. Dina must've gotten the dagger from one of the witches, which she swung the moment she was within range. It was no ordinary blade, curling and forming the shape of a crescent moon, it's edge uncomfortably sharp.

Ember bent backwards, her body arching in the same fashion as Dina's stolen blade. For a moment, it looked like she might fall over. She narrowly missed losing her head,

and as the dagger passed inches above her face, she straightened up and launched an attack that clipped Dina in the shoulder.

Dina's shirt was singed and smoking, but the Vampire barely seemed to notice. She swung again, pushing forward when a beastly snarl exploded from the forest. Breyona materialized from pure shadow, her fur flickering and waving like the curls of smoke that wafted off Dina's burnt flesh. She barreled into Ember and all three of the witches, sending them scattering.

Her maw had been open, revealing pearly white teeth that begged to be coated in blood. At the last second, Ember had thrust another witch in her place, who was instantly snatched into Breyona's jaws and flung across the street, landing in a heap on someone's front yard.

Ember went ballistic, throwing orb after orb of flame, raising walls of it and launching them at Vampire and Werewolf alike. I had just locked eyes on Giovanni when a prickle of awareness raced up my spine.

I whirled around in time to meet the wide-eyed gaze of a witch just feet away from thrusting a blade into my back.

Before I could act, there was a blur of black and white, followed by a face identical to my fathers, right down to eyes of glistening ice.

Deacon had his hands around the witches' neck, hoisting her off the ground even as she kicked and thrashed. Her eyes began to spark, flickering with a golden light that made my adrenaline spike. My uncle made quick work disarming her, then finished her off by thrusting the blade she carried into her stomach.

"What are you doing, kid?" He barked, already moving onto the next one. "Get out there!"

It wasn't Deacon that sent me spiraling into action, but the dull flash of pain blossoming in my shoulder, burning red-hot the way all wounds created by silver did. What was worse was that the pain wasn't my own. No, it flooded the bond between Asher and I with a potency I'd never felt before.

Even though it had been some time since I'd last shifted, there was no pain when I exploded into a mass of fur and teeth. Though my clothes had been torn to shreds, I could still feel the amulet Rowena had given me snug around my neck.

The thud of my feet hitting the ground lasted but a second and I was off, dashing through the individual battles that were raging, past burning cars and trampled gardens. I followed the pull in my gut, the one that ran soul deep until I spotted the wolf whose fur was as dark as Breyona's, like he too was made from shadow.



Asher in his wolf form, fighting against multiple enemies, was a sight to behold.

He moved with a deadly grace that was unusual for a wolf, but it held traces of that feral brutality I loved so much, like he truly was a wild animal with no thoughts other than to k\*\*l and devour. There were four witches still surrounding him, one with a shield of pulsating energy flowing from her hands. Three lifeless bodies lay around him, all splattered in crimson blood.

My eyes homed in on a spot below his shoulder blade. His fur glistened brighter there, and I knew even without the metallic scent filling the air, that he had been wounded.

Every contraction in my muscles as I raced for them was welcomed, right down to the stinging b\*\*n of silver gracing my fur-covered skin. As I slammed into the witches that surrounded my mate, I pictured that force field of magical energy flickering, falling to let me pass through.

The look on the witch's face as her magic failed, obeying my own instead, was intoxicating.

Something fleshy and soft found its way into my mouth, and I bit down the moment it slid into place. The arm I had my teeth buried in belonged to the witch whose crossbow reeked of Asher's blood. She tried to turn the weapon on me, to fire it at my face, but a crossbow wasn't a suitable weapon for close combat. It thudded to the ground when I bit harder, digging my teeth in deeper.

Her scream was raspy and loud, but was quickly drowned out by the chaos, d\*\*\*h, and blood.

'I can handle it from here. Go help Mason! Last I saw he was fighting some b\*\*\*h with super strength.' Asher's voice flooded my head through the mind-link, gritty with determination as he rolled across the grass leapt over a fence, drawing the witches attacking him further away.

I turned around and began sprinting, my feet thundering against the asphalt as the houses began to flit by. Colors blurred, all tainted by flickering hues of red and orange—of flame.

'Mason, where the h\*\*l are you?' I shouted.

His reply came instantly, as did his pain.

'Behind the houses...the one with the broken fire hydrant.'

That was easy enough to spot considering water was still spewing into the air, falling down over our heads like fat droplets of rain. One witch in particular, an elemental from

the looks of it, pulled most of the water towards her. It ran down the street in little streams, oozing through the cracks in the sidewalk to pool around her ankles.

Her golden mane of hair was wild and bright, even soaked through. She flung her hand out and a sheet of ice crackled along the surface of the road, shimmering like diamonds under the streetlights. Sean, whose wolf was just a few shades darker than my own, had been close to snaring her with his teeth when he spun out on the ice.

Without slowing my pace, I dipped into the well of magic I could feel humming, as though it were begging me to use it, and forced the water to stop flowing. The hydrant sputtered and forced out one last pathetic burst of spray. The witch then whipped her head in its direction before setting her sights on me. Her eyes widened with recognition, and I briefly wondered if she knew who I was or what I'd done.

There was no time for her to attack considering that brief distraction was all Sean needed to gain his footing. I pushed the muscles stretching and contracting in Maya's body and soared through the air, over the privacy fence that was standing on its last leg.

I could now hear the snarls and yapping coming from Mason's wolf. Both he and the witch he fought were drenched, making his slate-grey fur darken to the color of ash. I didn't miss the mottled patches of blood on his fur, or how they drizzled down his torso and seeped into the earth.

Chunks of splintered wood were everywhere, some coated in blood and others drenched from the hydrants spray. There was an overturned swing set off to the side, coated in both mud and blood, pieces of the metal irreparably bent or broken entirely.

When Asher had said something about a witch with super strength, I didn't quite understand how that was possible. Now, staring at the muscular woman with runes and sigils tattooed over every part of her body, I understood.

Her pale skin glowed—actually glowed, with a light that could only be from magic. Despite the bulk of muscle that covered her body, the way she moved was lithe and graceful, like she was dancing rather than trying to k\*\*l one of my best-friends.

She cartwheeled out of Mason's grasp, flinging herself on his back as she wrenched her hands into his maw. I watched as she began to force his mouth open, inch by inch until every one of his teeth were exposed. She wasn't stopping, her muscles straining as she kept pulling and pulling. He bucked and thrashed, trying to get her off him but to no avail.

I couldn't watch any longer and raced for the two of them. At the last moment, I hit a patch of mud and slid. Adrenaline masked the pain of slamming into both Mason and the witch, but I felt every shard of wood that pierced my flesh as I sent us all careening through the other side of the fence.

When I righted myself, my fur caked with mud that held the metallic scent of Mason's blood, I went to help him but paused. He had the witches' neck in his mouth and was carrying her off, his tail twitching irritably as she screamed and tried to beat at him.

'Appreciate the help, but this one's mine.' He growled, promptly ending the mind-link.

I shook myself off, flinging mud in all directions. Another snarl rang out, one I recognized as Sean's. Before I could race off to help him, another voice entered my mind, this one wrong in so many ways as it split my head in two.

'Lola—Lola, help me! Help me, please! They've got me—they've got me. Ah, it hurts! It hurts so bad. They're going to k\*\*l me, Lola. Please—PLEASE!'

The witches—they had Breyona.

## **Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 205**

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I didn't hesitate to bound into the forest, chasing the sound of Breyona's voice, the taste of her fear ripe on my tongue.

There was something wrong, something so very wrong with the way her voice coiled around my thoughts and squeezed the life out of them. It wasn't through mind-link that I was hearing her, I was sure of it. No matter how hard I tried to dig past her wailing, to the connection that spanned between us, I just couldn't.

Thoughts refused to form, each and every one shattering under the grip of her pleas.

'It hurts, Lola! It hurts so bad—so bad.' She sobbed and screamed.

I couldn't think, not even to figure out where the h\*\*l I was going or whether or not I should slow down.

The forest cracked and trembled beneath my feet. Limbs like outstretched arms reached to grab me, tearing away bits of my fur and drawing blood. Even the pain was dull, like it too was smothered by Breyona's voice.

Suddenly, she went silent.

It should've occurred to me that the wrongness in the air went further than Breyona begging for her life, for her best friend to come and save her, but I was too slow at recognizing it.

Beams of moonlight speared through the treetops, hitting the ground in slender rays that gave off just enough light to keep from tripping over my own two feet. Shadows writhed and danced in the spaces in between, where the moonlight could not reach. The glint of silver blended in perfectly with both shadow and light, making it far too late for me to react in time.

I felt the sudden burst of pain before I scented the blood.

There was no stopping. Not with Breyona's life on the line, not with that deafening silence so close to s\*\*\*\*\*g me whole.

At first, I thought I'd been hit by a dagger thrown through the air, but the force behind it was hard enough to slice through flesh and muscle, all the way down to bone.

A second one hit, then a third, and a fourth.

I twisted my head to the side to catch a glimpse of an arrow protruding from my back. It was accompanied by three others, each one jutting from various places around my spine like the b\*\*\*y barbs of a porcupine.

When a fifth hit, this one spearing me in between my ribs, Maya and I went down.

We bounced and skidded along the forest floor, kicking up rocks and dirt as we disrupted those silvery beams of moonlight. My fur was receding, sinking back into my body as my bones shrunk and contorted, bringing on another wave of fear. There was too much silver in my body to keep up my wolf form. It took one last desperate thought to make my clothing reappear as I landed in a broken, b\*\*\*y heap of torn flesh and exposed bone.

With every breath my lungs rattled like they were full of liquid. I tasted blood, thick and dark, and instantly knew that this was not good. Every square inch of my flesh felt raw, like it had been through a paper shredder before being crudely put back together.

I reached out with my mind and felt nothing.

Maya was deep asleep, taking with her my connection to Asher and the rest of the pack. I was alone, without any way of contacting the others for help. Even my odd attachment to Breyona felt just out of reach, so close that I could graze it with blood coated fingertips, but not close enough.

There was no way I could stay here. Bleeding, with arrows still lodged in my body that scalded my flesh and sapped my strength, I forced myself onto my hands. My arms trembled painfully, wobbling so much that I had to grind my teeth together to keep from collapsing.

In and out, I breathed. Each time picturing Asher, using his face as an anchor to keep me from blacking out. I had to get out of here before the witch that shot me caught up.

The world went blurry when I made it to my knees. A dull bite of pain gnawed at them when stone and earth dug into my flesh, but it was nothing compared to the feel of hot blood trickling down my spine.

One moment I'd been blinking away sweat and tears, and the next I was surrounded.

There were seven of them, perhaps more but it was hard to tell considering everything began to double and triple. Tree's multiplied, then died off, vanishing so quickly it made my head spin.

One witch stepped forward. Her upturned nose and confident stance struck me as being someone in charge. Wisps of dark hair peeked out beneath the hooded cloak she wore, but it did nothing to hide her face. Every single one of her features was hard, sharpened as though cruelty was the only expression she was ever destined to use.

The witch tossed something to the dirt in front of me and said nothing as I squinted and waited for my vision to stop swirling.

It was a crossbow, loaded with an arrow tipped in silver.

Faster than the realization that spawned on my face, the witch sneered. She curled her thin lips back and b\*\*\*d her teeth, lowering herself to the dirt floor like she was greeting a wild animal.

"You got the upper hand on my pupils twice now, and twice they've been punished for their failure. Tessa and Ember are talented for their ages, but we cannot allow failure this far along. Can we, Lola?"

I could barely understand what the h\*\*l she was saying. Something about training and those two witches, the ones that had chased us through the forest and nearly k\*\*\*\*d Dina.

Blood drizzled from my mouth, seeping into my clothes, and running down my chest. Splotches of darkness, far colder than the shadows, began to fill my vision. They grew and multiplied, each one draining what little strength I had left.

It was a miracle I managed to stay upright, still knelt in the dirt like a prisoner of war—which I had a feeling I'd soon become. Even on the verge of passing out, fear struck far swifter than the arrows that pierced my flesh.

If I passed out—blacked out for even a second, these witches would take me. I'd be gone, lost a second time and Asher would be the one to suffer the blow.

Hazy and speckled with shadows, his face came to mind. He'd storm this entire forest, uproot every single tree, and leave no stone unturned as he searched and searched like a madman on a mission destined for failure.

He'd bellow and snarl, losing his grip on his wolf as the people we loved surrounded him and tried to reign him back in. It wouldn't work, though. I knew this because it hadn't worked the first time.

That left one option.

I could not let them take me.

It would've been easier to sink into the darkness, to let my limbs grow numb as I fell to the cool earth. There would be no pain, no worries, or fears. Everything would fade away like the last rays of moonlight through the treetops.

I opened my mouth to call out to the shadows that thrashed and writhed in the darkness, watching all of this unfold with heady interest, whispering in voices so fast I couldn't make out what they were saying. Only a croak left my lips, a wet one that was chased by a splatter of blood bubbling up my throat.

The ground darkened with my blood as I coughed and spat, unable to call the shadows for help.

"Get her tied up so we can head out. The sooner we get back, the faster we can get this done with." The witch snapped. "And someone get a healer. If she dies before we get there, we're all d\*\*d."

It was at this point that reason left my head, replaced by the animalistic urge to live, to survive and evade capture. I was a wolf, a beast, and huntress in my own right, but now—now I was no better than prey.

Again and again, I heard Asher's roar in my mind, the ragged sound he'd make when he found all the blood and realized I'd been taken.

You said you wouldn't leave, Lola. You promised me.

I could hear him as though he were standing right here, hovering over my shoulder as he watched me bleed and bleed and bleed. I could feel his fractured heart like it were my own, and the feeling of hopelessness that followed, it made me angry.

How dare they destroy my hard work, k\*\*l my people, and ruin my life? The families they've shattered were wounds that went even deeper than the ones on my body. They'd never stop, not until I was bound and shackled, my free will shredded and blowing in a blood-soaked breeze.

The well of electrifying magic bubbled, rising in my veins as it reached out to meet me halfway.

There was no pulling from it, no slow draw of magic as I took my time crafting what outcome I wanted. No, I plunged into its depths and let the pain and euphoria l\*\*k my skin, drawing from that dark, savage part of me that wanted these witches to pay for every life lost, for every building b\*\*\*\*d and family destroyed.

I want them d\*\*d.

I want all of them d\*\*d.

A rush of utter darkness, of putrid decadence like melted chocolate and rotted flesh, filled my body from head-to-toe. It wrapped around my soul like a shroud, whispering sweet words of vengeance. It chased away the fog cluttering my brain, devouring the spots that speckled my vision, and injecting me with what I could only describe as absolute f\*\*\*\*\*g power.

Whatever this was, it felt good.

One of the witches hovered behind me, a chain of silver clanking in her hands, burning as it was wound around my wrists. I barely felt the sting. It couldn't touch this strange, newfound strength.

Through my tangled, blood-soaked hair I craned my head up at the witch who had first spoke, the one leading this attack.

I smiled at her; my teeth tainted red with blood.

“You’re all going to d\*e.”

A fat droplet of scarlet blossomed from her eye, dangling off her lower lid like a tear. It drizzled down her cheek, a streak of metallic she reached out to wipe away. She inspected her fingers, her smug expression melting away to confusion, and then finally, terror.

Screams and gasps rang out around me as the other witches too found blood leaking from their eyes, leaving tracks down their cheeks.

“You—” The witch sputtered, releasing a wet hack as blood began to flow from her mouth and ears. “You have no idea...what you have done.”

She, like all the others, clutched at her face as though it would stop the flow of blood from their bodies. Faster and stronger it grew, egged on by my rage and the command I'd given. A single thud sounded and was the start of many. Where the others died

screaming, their last wails cut off as a final wet gurgle took over, the witch leading this coup, she died quietly.

What did she mean when she said I had no idea what I'd done?

I realized it too late.

The witches that had surrounded me were d\*\*d, but the power that flowed through my veins, it didn't fade. If anything, it seemed to latch onto me, digging invisible claws far past flesh and bone. I could feel it, this foulness I'd mistaken for absolute power.

I looked down at my hands, shuddering as my entire body went cold.

"What have I done?" I gasped.

My fingertips were black, with veins the same sickening shade crawling up them. It was like I'd dipped them into something no one should ever touch, something poisonous and vile. Something that didn't want to leave.