

Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 206

It was dark magic, it had to be.

Invisible claws latched onto a part of me that was much deeper than mere flesh and bone, wrapping and coiling like the scaled body of a snake. The pleasure soured, and as spasm after spasm rocked my body, I tasted its foulness on my tongue.

I was entangled in it's grasp, powerless even though mere seconds ago I k****d an entire group of witches with my mind.

The way it split my thoughts like a deck of cards, shuffling through them before turning each one over to inspect it felt like a violation.

Everything hurt. The pain was so consuming that I couldn't tell which parts of me were still intact. My skin b****d from the silver tipped arrows, stung from the slices in my flesh, and b****d because every movement I made jostled the quills protruding from my back.

The forest was growing darker, the shadows dancing around the edges of my vision. They thrashed and writhed, their whispers just out of reach. It took me a moment to realize it wasn't the forest that was growing dim, slowly draining of color.

It was me. My strength was failing, and I didn't have nearly enough to fight off the dark magic while also keeping myself from bleeding out.

A splash of crimson blossomed in my peripherals like the petals of a wilted rose.

An idea came to mind, one that would've made me sick if I weren't standing on d***h's precipice.

When I looked back on this moment, I wouldn't remember digging my fingers into the dirt to propel myself forward. I wouldn't be able to recall the feeling of dirt and stone getting wedged under my nails, packed into my wounds as I slid along the forest floor.

What I would remember is the moment I reached her, the witch that shot me.

I'd remember sinking my teeth into her neck, tearing into her flesh with human canine teeth. They were so dull compared to Maya's, so terrible at slashing through flesh that it was almost a chore to get to what little blood remained in her body.

I swallowed and swallowed, drinking the liquid strength that poured from her body in a sea of red.

My skin began to itch horribly as the wound on my side, where I'd been grazed by an arrow, began knitting itself together. The ones on my back were another story all together. I couldn't reach to pull the arrows out of my flesh, and I didn't have enough strength for my magic to get the job done.

"Shadows, I need your help." I croaked, wincing at how sore my throat felt.

Help...help.....help... They whispered in dozens of overlapping voices.

I clenched my hands into fists, unable to look at the stain on my skin and those unnerving veins that crawled up my fingers like poisonous spider webs.

"Can you get rid of this—this evil inside of me?" I tried not to beg them, but I was terrified.

I thought I was slowly becoming comfortable with magic, but this was a wake-up call that showed me just how little I actually knew.

Each word ached like I'd swallowed mouthfuls of glass, but I forced them out regardless. The shadows writhed at the sound of my voice beckoning them closer. To anyone else, it would've looked ordinary. Similar to how shadows dance along the walls in a dimly lit room. If they looked closer they might see the hundreds of tendrils all curling around one another, all speaking in their high-pitched whispers.

Yesss...we can help you, master. We can take the darknesss.

My sigh of relief sounded more like a sob, melting the tension in my shoulders until they slumped. The shadows weren't done, though. Their voices shot out from all sides of the forest, all of them saying the same thing.

It will be painful, master. So very painful... They warned.

I closed my eyes and steadied myself. This wasn't the first time I'd felt pain, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. Anything—anything was better than this evil magic peeling apart the layers of my brain. No matter how bad it was, I'd endure it.

"Do it. Do it now and you can have the d**d witch's blood." I whispered.

As I anticipated, the promise of magical blood sent the shadows into a frenzy of excitement. All at once they shot out from the cover of the forest, slinking from behind trees and untangling themselves from the brush. Like leaches bloated with the anticipation of blood, they flung themselves at me.

It was like every shadow in the forest had come.

They moved so fast that I didn't even have time to cover my face. Darkness flooded my vision, the impenetrable kind that blocked out every single one of your senses and left you wondering if this was what d***h were like.

The pain wasn't instant, but it did come without warning.

I'd been encased in the Shadows, hearing only their chatter when every muscle in my body contracted and every bone flexed. My mouth opened but no scream came out, only excruciating silence. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, it did.

The Shadows continued to writhe all along my body. They had no feel to them other than this icy coldness licking at my skin. When one slithered up my neck and forced its way into my mouth, I let out a choked shriek. Another followed, and another, and another.

Only when I began to thrash did I realize that the Shadows covering my body were there for a reason.

I couldn't move a muscle.

They had trapped me. Caged me in with their bodies and made me their prisoner.

You mustn't fight uss...

Yeah, like that was easy when I could feel my throat expanding, forced to take in the frigid cold. Time passed languidly, each second stretching on longer than the next. There was ice seeping into my bones, using the wounds the dark magic gouged in my body and mind as pathways. I could tell when they made contact with it.

More importantly, I felt how desperate it was to stay.

Agony swallowed my every thought as its claws sank into my soul and held on for dear life, screeching and roaring against the Shadows that continued to coax it away.

It was worse than anything I'd ever felt. Worse than crashing a car, feeling the rattle your bones and your skull crush your brain.

Worse than the crackle and b**n of flame licking at b**e skin.

This kind of pain never truly left. It erased everything I was and ever could be, taking away every memory until there was only pain, pain, pain. I thought it would never end, that I'd be trapped in this hellscape forever. Eternally punished for the things I'd done and didn't do.

Suddenly, the hold the dark magic had over me lessened, and the Shadows surged at the momentary blip of weakness.

Its claws were ripped away, swallowed by the shadows that then spewed from my mouth in a geyser of putrid darkness.

When the Shadows released me and I could once again see, the first thing I did other than wheeze and gasp for air was stare down at my hands.

They looked normal. My skin was once again unblemished, and those creepy veins were gone. It was like they'd never been there, but I knew otherwise. I could still feel the wound it clawed through me to get to my soul. It wasn't physical, but it was there.

As the Shadows left, slithering along the forest floor to lap up every droplet of the witches' blood that was spilled, their whispers lingered.

We wisssh to warn you, master. Every time you draw dark magic into your body, the more difficult it becomes to get rid of it...

...eventually, it will conssssume you.

There wasn't time to dwell on their warning because a few feet away stood familiar face. A wolf made purely of shadow, its head cocked and curiosity shimmering in its rich eyes.

"What the h**l was that?" Breyona asked after shifting back into her human form.

"Long story...lots of pain. Oh, I think I'm going to be sick." I groaned. "I can't shift, not with these arrows in my back."

She hissed between clenched teeth, circling around to the half a dozen arrows spattered around my spine. None had managed to hit it, but there was this painful scratching sensation in my right lung that made me worried one was close to piercing it. Her face paled, lightening in increments until it looked translucent and pulled taut with worry.

Lightly, she peeled back the shredded f***s of my shirt and gingerly touched one. I tried not to recoil at the hot wave of pain that dug into my flesh, but I must've made some sound because she quickly apologized and backed away.

"It's alright. I...I drank some of the witch's blood, so the wounds aren't bleeding anymore. They've scabbed over the shaft of the arrows, which is great for now, but it's going to be a pain when they come out." I grimaced, definitely not looking forward to that. "What I need right now is to get back and help fight."

"The fight is over, Lola. There wasn't much of one left when Brandon and the group of warriors from Bran's old pack got here." She replied, but something tugging at my gut told me she was leaving out a lot of details.

I swallowed, wishing I had cold glass of water—or blood. “Did we lose anyone?”

“Actually, no. Mason did break his arm, and somehow Clara sensed it with her witchy mojo, but they’re both safe. Asher’s...a bit stressed out considering you’ve been gone this long, but I let him know I found you and that you’re alive. Oh, and Dina’s looking for you, but that part can wait.” She said, but her voice was much too nonchalant considering everything that happened.

Suddenly, her eyes glossed over. A whopping three seconds passed before she shook her head and said, “Actually, never mind. It can’t wait. We need to get you out of here.”

I stared at her somewhat dumbfounded before pulling myself together. Before she could shift back into her wolf, an idea sprung to mind.

“That shadow transport thing you do. Think I can hitch a ride?”

She contemplated my question then lifted her shoulder in a half-shrug. “In theory, it should work.”

“Then let’s test this theory, shall we? The sooner the better because if I don’t get some blood in me, I am going to pass out.”

“Let’s do this.” Determination brightened her eyes. As she began to shift, she called out one last time. “Oops, I almost forgot. We captured one of the witches—the elemental girl.”

Before I could ask which one, she landed on four feet and charged at where I stood.

Traveling via Shadows felt a lot like being folded in a million bed sheets. Each one was a new place or point in time. More than a few seemed to tangle around my ankles, but Breyona slipped through each one with ease, pulling me along with her. The forest twisted into nothingness around us, only to untwist and reveal that we were now somewhere else.

I wasn’t the slightest bit embarrassed when we landed in the middle of the street, and I doubled over to puke my guts out.

Breyona, still in wolf form, gave me a look that plainly conveyed her disgust. I swear she was trying to curl her lip, but since she had a long snout instead of her button nose it didn’t translate correctly.

“Don’t look at me like that. You have any idea how it feels to travel through the Shadows when you’re not made of them yourself?” I grunted, spitting out the rancid taste of vomit and blood in my mouth.

As much as I needed another hour or two to fully recover from the nausea alone, time was of the essence.

We'd landed smack dab in the middle of town, only ten feet away from an altercation of some sort. First, I noticed Tessa at the very center of it all. Her hands were bound behind her back, and she was sporting a pretty nasty g**h on her forehead. The blood it oozed was rich and carried notes of gardenia and rose.

I spat a second time when saliva pooled in my mouth.

Tessa was on her back, staring down the snout of a wolf the color of storm clouds. Several shades darker than Mason's wolf, this particular wolf wasn't the least bit familiar.

"That one of the warriors from Bran's pack?" I asked Breyona, who had once again shifted into her human form.

"Nope." She popped the word in between her lips. "That's Dina."

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"S**t." I cursed.

Breyona's sharp gaze softened. She pursed her lips and murmured, "You didn't even realize you did it, did you?"

"No." It came out as a whisper. "I didn't."

"She wants to k**l that one since her twin got away. Brandon actually ran into the fire witch on his way here. He's got a nasty b**n on his shoulder to prove it." Breyona pointed out, her eyes still on the mess ahead.

"Well, lets go intervene. Shall we?"

Turns out, there wasn't much I had to do to turn Dina's attention away from Tessa. My mere presence was enough to have her hackles raising and lips pulling back to show rows of sharp teeth. Breyona situated herself in front of me, standing off to the side incase I needed her. Standing a healthy distance away, keeping a firm watch on Tessa, was Clara, Mason, Sean, along with a mixture of Vampire's and warriors.

"Dina..." I said in greeting. "You look good."

Breyona snorted but covered it up with a well-placed cough.

“She’s uh, she’s trying to mind-link you, but since you’ve got all that silver in your back, it’s not going through.” She explained, her eyes flitting between me and the angry wolf.

“Then it’s a good thing I have this…” Tristan’s voice materialized just a few feet away.

Perhaps he’d been there the entire time, but the loss of blood made it hard to pay attention. I let out a groan of pure, untethered relief when he passed me a blood bag. Each gulp cascaded down my throat and soothed the raging case of dry mouth I had. It also chased away the aches and pains weighing me down, worsening the exhaustion that made me want to crawl into bed and take a long nap.

I hadn’t even realized he’d moved around to examine my wounds until he spoke a second time.

“You just can’t stay out of trouble, can you?” He cursed, his touches feather light.

“She’s always been like that, even back when she was just a wolf.” Breyona smirked.

Tristan snorted, but then turned and spoke to Dina.

“Think you can refrain from k*****g the witch until I get these arrows out of Lola’s back?” He grunted.

Dina gave him a loud, wet snarl as a reply.

“How considerate of you.” He deadpanned.

I barely felt it as he peeled away the back of my shirt, even more so when Giovanni showed up with even more blood. The click of the switchblade Tristan used was drowned out by the rush of energy roaring in my ears. What topped the cake was that Giovanni had news of Asher, and for once it wasn’t bad.

“He’s on his way with Zeke, Deacon, and Brandon. They’re gathering the d**d to be b****d and making sure all the fires in town are put out.” Giovanni explained, his expression perpetually pinched considering his mate was butt n***d roaming around in her human form.

I couldn’t help it, not when he narrowed his eyes and glared at every male within a mile radius.

“You get used to it.” I promised him, my lips tilting in a half-smile.

He grimaced; his eyes locked on my best-friends a*s.

“I somehow doubt that.”

With the blood and a little bit of magic to speed things along the wounds on my back healed up rather nicely. After the torture I went through with the Shadows removing the dark magic from my system, I wasn't sure I'd ever react to physical pain the same again.

The moment the last wound healed; Dina's voice exploded in my head over mind-link.

'You did this, didn't you? Don't even bother lyin' to me, your Majesty. Or should I kneel and call you Luna like everyone else? You turned me into a f*****g wolf.' She snarled, her fur bristling.

I didn't deny it because what was the point? No one else could've done it.

'I swear, I didn't mean to. It was a stray thought I didn't even give any importance to. I have no clue why this happened.' I explained honestly, knowing it likely wouldn't make a difference.

Most Vampire's hated Werewolves, and I didn't expect that to change over night. It made Dina's reaction understandable given she was one of the many that didn't care for them.

'When I get done killin' this witch, I'm coming for you. Tell that to your little Vampire bodyguards.' Her eyes flashed murderously.

Not thinking, I took a step towards her. She swung her head around and snarled, snapping her teeth threateningly. Breyona inched further in front of me, sinking into a defensive position that would only make things worse. I didn't want to imagine the carnage of a fight between them two.

'I don't think it's a good idea to k**l Tessa, Dina.' I warned her. 'I'm willing to bet she has useful information on what's going on.'

'Information for you. I happen to care less about what she knows or don't know. Her twin k****d my mate, and I will not let that stand.' She replied without looking at me, already padding forward to slowly stalk Tessa.

'Sean, Mason—get everyone away from her. She's newly shifted and I don't want her hurting anyone.' I said via mind-link, only partially relieved when they pulled Clara and the others out of the way.

I shook my head at Breyona when she asked if she should stop her. It had been me that turned Dina into a wolf, a fact I wasn't sure I'd ever fully process. So, I should be the one to deal with the consequences.

There were a million and one plans racing through my head, all of them ending with Dina and I fighting it out. If she was able to mind-link me, that meant I didn't just give her the physical form of a wolf.

I must've given her a wolf spirit too.

That meant, like it or not, she was now a part of Asher and I's pack. No matter who she was or where she came from, we did not needlessly harm our own.

"Dina, you need to—" I'd been ready to draw her attention away from Tessa and onto me, even if it meant I'd get injured a second time around, but another voice cut through mine.

Spencer, alive and whole, was here. The mop of hair on his head was tangled and his clothes rumpled, like he'd just woken up from a deep sleep. His eyes quickly darted around to survey everything, from the damaged houses to the charred cars and overturned fences, before finally latching onto Dina's wolf.

"Baby, is that you?"

Dina whirled around faster than any of us, huffing the air in great gusts before letting out a long, harrowing whine that could only mean one thing.

"It was an accident." I said softly. "I never meant for this to happen."

Spencer and I locked eyes. They were the same color as the soil in the forest, dark and vibrant with life. He didn't say anything to me, but he did nod ever so slightly. He spread his arms as he took in Dina's wolf, raking his eyes over every strand of fur from her swishing tail to her snout.

He whistled under his breath. "You look beautiful, baby. Even as a wolf."

A yelp burst from her muzzle as she charged Spencer, shifting at the last second and stumbling over her own two feet until she landed in his arms. He was quick to wrap his arms around her, and even quicker to yank the t-shirt off his body before thrusting it onto hers.

"I thought they k****d you—thought you died." Dina mumbled into his chest, running her hands over his shoulders, through his hair, and over the stubble that covered his face. "You were slippin' away; I could feel it. You were so close to d****g."

"I know, baby. I know." He said soothingly, cradling her neck and staring at her like they were the only two people in the world, like they weren't in the middle of the street after a battle between three mythical species.

“You’re my mate, Spence. Ain’t that something? There’s this—this chain tying us together now.” She rambled.

“It’s a mate-bond. It means that your...your wolf, is also attached to him.” I explained, trying my hardest not to interrupt their moment, but this was something they needed to know.

“So, the voice I keep hearing in my head is my wolf.” Dina blinked, not an ounce of her previous rage on her face. “I’m still a Vampire, but you also made me a wolf. Don’t take this the wrong way or nothing, but that kind of power shouldn’t be available to anyone.”

“Believe me, I agree. It’s terrifying having this much, but if it means I can keep my people safe, then I’ll use every drop.” I replied wholeheartedly, then slid my attention to Spencer. “It doesn’t matter to me who the Vampire’s chosen to follow, as long as it’s not the witches. Deacon clearly cares about you and the others but know that even if I don’t have your loyalty, you have mine.”

Dina’s eyes flickered between Spencer and I, a million words sparkling behind sheets of amber. Her mouth popped open and stayed open.

“Thank you.” Was all she said, her voice soft and genuine.

I wanted to personally tell Dina the ins and outs to being a Werewolf considering I had no clue how to reverse what I’d done, but I never got the chance.

I scented him long before he wrapped his arms around me and hoisted me off the ground, but that did nothing to dull the absolute f*****g relief I felt when I looked into Asher’s eyes. There were knots of vicious tension in my shoulders and in the freshly healed muscle along my back that I hadn’t even realized was there. When the sparks danced along my skin, like tiny electrical currents n*****g at my nerve endings, they vanished one by one.

“Goddess, I missed you.” I muttered, only getting out half a groan before he smashed his lips against mine and swallowed my pain whole.

Asher didn’t erase what had been done to me, but with every languid stroke of his tongue against my own and with every soft n*p he left on my lips, he took a piece of the trauma and cradled it in his arms. Every single time I stared into his eyes, falling into the darkness that filled them, I realized that there was nothing in this world I had to shoulder alone.

“You f*****g terrify me, you know that?” He snarled in between kisses, his eyebrows gnashed together. “Terror is not an emotion I’m used to feeling, and I’m quickly growing to hate it.”

"I'm sorry, Asher. I never meant to run off on my own. The witches tricked me, somehow. They used Breyona's voice to lure me away, but I'm safe now. We're all safe now." I breathed, quickly going silent when I placed a hand on either side of his face.

How one person could fill another so completely, I'd never understand. Every single facet of me, every flaw and strength, Asher had access to. Loving another person like this was terrifying in and of itself, but it was a risk I couldn't imagine not taking.

"Well, we're somewhat safe. I take it you've seen the newest edition to our prison." Asher grumbled.

His eyes were swirling with flecks of gold when they slid to where Tessa sat in the grass, so tightly bound she couldn't move a muscle. I wasn't sure who put the gag in her mouth, but I appreciated the added precaution.

"I'm looking forward to getting some answers for a change." I replied eagerly, not at all thinking about how we'd get those answers. "I'm willing to bet anything that she knows—".

I stopped abruptly, the words disintegrating on my tongue, though I wasn't sure why.

Deacon and the others had returned, Brandon included, but that wasn't what made me pause. Zeke was the only one of us not talking, separate from the little groups we formed to relish in the addictive, but fleeting, feeling of victory.

He stood off to the side, a few feet away from Tessa as he stared her down.

It wasn't until Asher, and I walked over that a sinking feeling rocked me in the gut.

"Zeke, what is it?" Asher said the words I couldn't, the ones that were currently lodged in my throat.

Our close friend didn't tear his eyes away from the witch, didn't so much as blink when he shuddered and said the one word none of us wanted to hear.

"Mate."

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The trip home was filled with silence.

It wasn't the comfortable kind that faded

into the background and made your

eyelids grow heavy as the purr of the car's engine droned on and on.

This one was full of tension and unspoken words that were so loud they needn't be spoken at all.

Zeke, Clara, and Mason hitched a ride with Asher and I since Tessa was currently tied up and unconscious in the back of the work van Breyona drove. Giovanni and Tristan had no choice but to sit back there as well considering they were the only windows blacked out from the rising sun.

It would've been safer to wait until dark to move, but we didn't have the time to waste.

There was no telling if Ember would come back for her twin with more witches, and now that the location of the safe haven was compromised, we needed every spare warrior available to protect the territory.

It did help that Deacon, Dina, and Spence stayed behind, but there was still the risk of the witches attacking during the day.

Since my nerves were too frayed to sleep, I spent the entire drive home thinking of ways to magically protect the safe haven Asher and I created.

Undoubtedly, Cordelia would be able to help. She could use her protection magic to cast an alarm – like spell, one that would alert us if any witches crossed the boundary, but it would do nothing to give us a heads up

I'd been able to turn a Vampire into a

Werewolf and a Werewolf into a shadow creature, so I couldn't help but toy with the idea of somehow creating a protective shield over the land. It was a solid plan, but I'd have to be extremely specific on who would be allowed through. 2

By the time we made it to the pack's boundary lines, I had a stronger idea of what I wanted to do.

I had no doubt that it would take a crap ton of energy, but a shield was exactly what the safe haven needed. Vampires without ill-intentions would be able to pass through and seek shelter, along with any wolves from our pack.

While Asher, Zeke, and a few of the others transported Tessa into one of the reinforced holding cells, I ran my plan by Cordelia.

The middle-aged witch had been in the middle of smudging the house, singing a

whimsical song as she waved the smoking bundle of Sage through every corner of each room. She'd been hesitant over how much energy it would cost me, but was positive it wouldn't draw on any dark, evil magic.

After telling her about Tessa, she very reluctantly gave me a bundle of some bitter smelling plant she called Hemlock. There wasn't a drug or herb on this planet that could take away a witch's power, but this poisonous root would make it harder for Tessa to have access to it. The only stipulation was that it couldn't be administered for more than a couple weeks, or you'd run the risk of death. It gave us time, and time was exactly what we needed.

Only Brandon, Zeke, and Asher remained when I made my way down to the prison cells. The overhead lights were bright, reflecting off the pale tile floors and

white walls. If you turned your head and ignored the row of glass boxes with cots inside, you could almost fool yourself into thinking this was some ordinary human office building.

"What are you doing here?" I asked Brandon.

Asher's brother was mean-mugging Tessa through the observation glass, his arms crossed over his chest as he leaned against the wall. The scowl on his face was identical to Asher's.

Zeke, who sat in one of the metal chairs looking just as distraught as he had hours ago, snorted dryly.

"I asked the same thing."

"And I'll say what I said before. What's it fucking matter? Her twin nearly melted my head off and everyone's on my ass for wanting to know where I can find the bitch?" Brandon snapped with a surprising amount of hostility.

Asher leveled a look in his direction, one that was scarily calm.

Brandon held his brother's stare for a few tension-filled seconds before averting his eyes.

"Just let me know if she says anything useful." He muttered, quickly storming off.

His footfalls echoed down the hallway up until he reached the door that would lead to the winding staircase that brought you to the ground level.

Asher was still staring at the spot. Brandon had occupied when he said, "I'm going to talk to him."

"Asher, is everything alright?" I asked, placing a hand on his arm to stop him.

The sharp edges of his jaw and lips softened when he turned to look down at me.

"I'm not sure. He's always on edge, but this is worse than usual. I'll see if I can find anything out. Let's hope I get to him before he finds the liquor." He grunted, tossing me a look that told me Brandon would be in deep shit if he drank his way

through Asher's whiskey collection.

With Asher and Brandon gone, I had nothing left to do but fixate on Zeke's forlorn stare and the witch it was focused

on.

Tessa sat on the cot in her cell, her back to the wall and her feet stretched out in

front of her. There was dried blood on her forehead, peeling where it reached the corner of her down-turned lips.

"Has she said anything?" I asked.

"No, she's been surprisingly unhelpful." Zeke said sarcastically, his chin in his hand.

"You know, I'd never been in a rush to find my mate. It wasn't until I saw you and Asher together that I started feeling like there was something missing. It's... hard to believe that she's it. My missing piece."

My stomach clenched painfully at the bleakness in his voice. It was terrifying to think that the selfless man who dropped everything to help Asher and I wouldn't get the future he deserved. Even with all the power I held at my fingertips, I had no clue what to do to help him.

"Have you spoken to her?"

He didn't meet my eyes, instead choosing to look at the floor. His reflection stared up at me. Its eyes were familiar. I'd know them anywhere, just as I knew the sound of his laugh by memory. The

hopelessness in them, that was foreign.

"No." Was all he said, and for several seconds we sat there in absolute silence.

The clock on the far wall ticked louder and louder as its hand continued to move. Zeke forced out a sigh, his shoulders slumping.

“Asher already told me, Lola. You can stop beating yourself up trying to figure out how to say it.”

I winced. “What did Asher tell you?”

“The best way to get answers from her is to use the mate-bond. She might be a witch, but even humans can feel the bond when they’re mated to a wolf.” He replied.

Zeke pushed himself up from the chair and took a deep breath, his expression torn in two as he ran a hand through hair. It stuck up in all directions, but he didn’t seem to notice or care. The hulking

warrior responsible for running an entire pack, even if it was smaller than mine and Asher’s, was hesitating all because of one little witch.

The loss of his dimpled grin and easy going attitude was like a kick to the stomach, but no amount of supernatural healing could wipe away the guilt.

“You don’t have to do this. You know that, right? If you want to walk out of here and never come back, I’ll support you. Asher will support you too, but I’ll still tell him to back the hell off for good measure.” I assured him, forcing a smile at the end.

“I know you both have my back. You and Asher have been like family to me. Even if it weren’t both our species on the line, I’d go in there for you guys.” He said, his soft tone contradicting the fact that he was easily six foot tall and comprised of hardened muscle.

The emotion that had been on his face was wiped clean, leaving nothing but emptiness in its wake. It was chilling to see Zeke put on the same stone-faced mask Asher often wore. For some odd reason, it reminded me that Zeke was just as much as an Alpha as Asher was, even if he didn’t spend much time in his own pack.

At the last minute, he turned.

“Asher isn’t the only one who’d do anything for his people.” He winked and slipped inside Tessa’s cell.

The metal chair was cold and hard against my backside and only grew more uncomfortable as the minutes slipped away. Every time Zeke spoke, I’d analyze Tessa’s face for the slightest reaction. It was clear she had training that extended past magic. She remained silent the entire time, through every single

question and accusation Zeke threw her way. Even when he threatened her with death, she didn’t so much as blink.

The only reaction she had came in the form of a grimace, and it was when Zeke mentioned the mate-bond between them.

She wrinkled her nose and pursed her lips, glancing away from him in favor of staring at the far corner of her cell.

“You think some stupid bond is going to change anything? Please. It means nothing.” She chuckled incredulously, then waved her hand in Zeke’s direction.” Just get on with the torture already. Anything is better than this.”