

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 225

Chapter 225

“She made you kill my brother, Asher. How can you not want this?” I whispered; my hands flush against his broad chest.

My voice was back to normal, but the sickly veins of darkness crawling up my fingers remained. They’d gotten further this time around, creeping past my knuckles and onto the tops of my hands.

The Shadows were silent, bloated on Rowena’s blood.

There were no whispers of fixing this because this time, the damage was irreversible.

Sprawled out in the dirt, covered in her own blood, Rowena muttered, “I didn’t make him do anything.”

Asher’s neck cracked as he craned his head to look down at her, a ripple of pure malice wracking his body and vibrating down the mate- bond. It wasn’t just me whose sanity was hanging by a frayed thread, but Asher too.

“Believe me, I want her dead and I want her to suffer first, but not at the cost of my mate. Look at your hands, Lola. Look at yourself.” Asher said in a low voice, one laced with caution.

I kept my eyes locked on his face, even as I shook my head defiantly. There was no turning back this time. I knew that, and everyone else needed to as well.

“No, none of that matters. I don’t matter.

This is the least I can do, Asher. For you, for Sean, for every person in this pack that I failed. What kind of Luna am I if I don’t do this?” I said through clenched teeth, begging him to understand whilst fighting back tears.

The pain was too much, squeezing my heart and robbing my lungs of oxygen. The song the darkness in my veins sang grew louder. It was a melody of temptation and promise, one that spoke to the blackest parts of my soul until my fingers twitched with the urge to finish what I’d started.

Asher’s stare was locked on my face, his skin pale as he scoured my eyes feverishly. The fear in his expression made me wonder if he’d seen something flash in my eyes, or if he’d felt the darkness currently poisoning my soul.

His large, calloused hands found my face.

They cradled my cheeks like I was the most precious, fragile thing he'd ever seen.

"Do not ever say that." Asher urged, his voice dangerously calm. "None of this is your fault."

It was easy for him to say that, to absolve me of my role in this mess while also condemning himself. Well, I refused to have it. He needed to know how I felt, that

I was torn in two by Sean's death, but not because it had been his body that did the horrible act.

"It's not your fault either, Asher." I blinked up at him, seeing the refusal in his eyes as clearly as the bond between us.

He never bothered responding, and instead turned to Tristan. He gave the blonde Vampire, whose gaze had not once left my face, a long look before nodding down at Rowena. Her scarlet hair was matted with blood, sprawled out in the dirt where she laid.

"Take her to one of the cells." Asher commanded, though not harshly.

Tristan slid his eyes from me to Rowena, a dark smile toying at the corners of his lips. "Don't mind if I do."

With the gentleness of a feral, rabid animal, he yanked Rowena off of the ground and slung her over his shoulder.

She cried out when his shoulder slammed into her stomach, her face contorting in pain. I didn't bother hiding how much I enjoyed the sound. 1

Asher's attention flickered to Zeke, then to the witch practically clinging to his side.

"Does this one need to be put in a cell too?" Asher asked, and much to my surprise the question was not directed at Zeke, but at me.

Tessa's eyes flashed with fear, and rightfully so. Anyone with half a brain could see the shadows on Asher's face, darkening around his eyes and in the hollows of his cheeks. He was on edge.

Hell, we all were.

"No, she doesn't need a cell." I replied, staring Tessa down. "I don't think I'm going to be trusting anyone for a long time, but she could've joined Rowena or helped her attack me. She did neither, and helped heal Zeke. So, as far as I'm concerned, she's alright for the time being."

Tessa's shoulders slumped in relief, and as I paid closer attention to the two of them, I noticed Zeke's did as well.

"I'll keep an eye on her." Zeke exhaled.

As Tessa looked up at him, there was a sparkle in her eyes that I latched onto immediately. They had the same emerald tint as Rowena's, only Tessa's wasn't as vibrant. Hers was laced with brown, rich, and deep, like the earth had given up a piece of itself to aid in her creation.

An errant thought crossed my mind, one I hadn't paid much attention to considering I was practically frothing at the mouth at the thought of torturing Rowena.

"The prison was broken into. I'm not sure how bad the damage is, but are you sure it's a good idea to bring Rowena there?" I asked Asher.

"I have some men clearing the mess out and removing the bodies." His voice was tight with pain, an emotion I understood far too well.

"I can help get answers out of her." I said, wanting more than anything to be the one that carved them from her mind.

Asher shook his head, as I knew he would. "No magic, Lola. We do this the old-fashioned way."

The song slicing through my veins, boiling the blood that flowed through them until it blackened, took on a shrill tone.

'We don't need his permission,' it seemed to say.

"Fine." I muttered, pain spiking in my jaw from how hard I clenched it. "But I'm still helping."

With Tessa, Zeke, and Breyona following behind, Asher and I headed to the prison where Tristan was waiting with a semi-conscious Rowena.

Giovanni made it there before us, having swung by the hospital to grab some Hemlock from Clara. I reigned in my reaction when the curly-haired Vampire leaned down and whispered in my ear, letting me know that grandma was safe and on the mend.

As relieved as I was, I didn't want to think about her or dad. Their faces made the hole in my chest ache, and right now, my attention was needed elsewhere.

Rowena was placed in one of the cells deepest within the prison, several layers beneath the ground. The moment we entered the observation room, which was identical to all the others with its metal table and chairs, I spotted her a mere ten feet away in her cell.

The chair she sat in was bolted to the ground, impossible to move. There were thick leather straps around her wrists and ankles, holding her in place. While she looked a wreck, still covered in blood with her auburn hair tangled around her shoulders, there was a cocky smile in place that I wanted to carve away.

As soon as the thick, metal door of

Rowena's cell swung open and Asher and I stepped inside, she started talking. For moral support, and another familiar face to keep me from plummeting off the deep end, I motioned for Breyona to follow.

Rowena wrinkled her pert nose at the three of us. "I've never been a fan of blood -well, my own blood, anyway. Aske your damned questions and if I feel inclined to answer them, I will."

"How did you get Asher to kill three werewolves?" I asked straight off the bat, no hesitation.

Breyona gasped softly, looking at the two of us in shock. "It...it was Asher all along?"

"Not consciously." I said, immediately coming to my mate's defense. Asher stiffened, but that didn't stop me from lacing our fingers together. "He'd never knowingly harm his own people."

"No, of course not. I didn't mean..." She blinked at Asher, shaking her head. "We all know he'd never."

Rowena smirked at the three of us, clearly enjoying the after affects of the damage she caused. The longer I stared at her, looking into eyes that once held such kindness-kindness I compared to my grandma of all people—the more I wanted to lash out and tear the secrets from her mind.

Her eyes drifted down to my hands just as my fingers twitched.

"Like I said, I wasn't the one who made him do anything." She attempted to shrug, but I imagined it was hard to do so when your arms were strapped down.

"The other witch then." I snapped, clenching my hands into fists that I hid behind my back. "How did she do it? How did she curse him?"

Rowena made a sound that resembled a hum, resting her head against the back of the chair.

"You should really be careful who you let close. Curses are pesky things, really. All you need is a drop of blood, perhaps a hair or two, and something to bind the curse to the

victim.” She said before leaning in, the hint of a sultry smile toying at her lips. Jutting her chin at Breyona, she purred, “...maybe it’s that one over there.”

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Chapter 226

A snarl tore through my chest and if it weren’t for Asher’s hand on my lower back, his warmth pouring into my icy skin, I would’ve dug my fingers into her eye sockets.

Instead of having the wits to be afraid, Rowena laughed.

“No, you’re right. She’s too close to all of this. It would be much too obvious. Mm, perhaps it’s someone in the background, someone you never would’ve noticed lurking about. What about that half-breed sister of yours, Holly? She and I did spend quite a lot of time together.” She teased, flashing blood-stained teeth when Tristan let out a snarl of his own.

There wasn’t a chance in hell I’d actually believe her, not with how enthusiastically she’s pointing fingers. She could cry witch all she wanted, but I trusted the people closest to me, my half-sister included.

Rowena began to laugh harder, and the sound of it gradually shifted from confident and poised, to a cackle that bordered on unhinged.

“Oh, there’s so many possibilities, but let’s not limit the suspects to only women. My sister in crime is powerful enough to take on the form of either gender, though not for too long.”

Asher’s hand tensed along my back, as did the rest of his body. It was my turn to reign him in, even though the sickly song in my veins told me to do the opposite.

He towered over her and snarled, “Her name. Tell us her fucking name.”

Rowena yawned, making a show of opening her mouth and fluttering her eyes like we were the ones boring her.

“No, I don’t think I will.” She mused. ”

Ask me something else. You’re oozing testosterone and it’s making me sleepy.”

“Why Sean? Why him of all people?”

At first, I didn't recognize the voice that spoke. I didn't feel the words as they left my lips, but that was most likely because

they were encased in layers of ice- dropping the temperature of the room by a few degrees.

Breyona shuddered, her warm breath coming out as a puff of white smoke.

Rowena's grin fell as she lifted a single sculpted eyebrow at me. Goosebumps prickled along her bare arms, filling me with the smallest hint of pleasure.

"You don't think Carson and that other boy were our first choices, do you? Please, who even are they? Where is the poetry in that? No, darling. If it wasn't for your mate's commendable willpower, your friend over there," Her eyes flickered over to Breyona. "...and the other one, would be dead."

At that, my stomach dropped. The siren song was louder now, so tempting that I inched closer to Asher, all but curling into him to keep the urge to kill her at bay.

"Mason and I were your first choices?"

Breyona asked, her voice pitched low.

Rowena's cell seemed to darken, the shadows along the walls climbing higher. For once, it wasn't me controlling them, but Breyona. The shadow creeping behind her took on the shape of a wolf.

"Well, of course. You must admit, there's a beautiful symmetry to it. Lola's closest friends, followed by her brother, sacrificed in the name of ultimate power." Rowena sighed heavily, like a teenage girl speaking about the boy she loved. Quickly, her expression soured, and blood-crusted lips twisted into a sneer. Her eyes, which now looked like sewage rather than fragmented emeralds, latched onto my face. "You had to go and ruin that by turning Breyona here into some shadow monster. Freya wasn't happy about that, not one bit. She's nothing if not inventive, though. Now she's quite keen on the idea of having a guard dog that's a mixture of werewolf and shadow." 2

"I'll never follow that bitch." Breyona snarled, eyes flashing dangerously.

Rowena huffed out a laugh, "You won't have a choice in the matter. Besides, I think you'll be quite flattered to be one of the last werewolves in existence. I know I would if I were in your shoes."

A satisfied smile twitched onto her face when Breyona began to shake, her entire form rippling as pure shadow seemed to seep from her pores. If one of us didn't act soon, Breyona would surely shift and kill Rowena for us.

“Go take a breather.” I turned to Breyona, urging her with my eyes to listen.

Rowena hummed, “That’s right. Go on, now.”

Breyona’s deep, smoky snarl was overshadowed by the cell door swinging open and Giovanni stepping inside. She reacted to his touch immediately, her eyes fading back to their normal color and losing the shadowy tinge they were taking on. Once Breyona was out of the room and the cell door shut, I turned to hear Asher ask the next question.

“Where are the other witches hiding out at? You have to have a base somewhere.” 1

Rowena graced us with a smirk. The smug light in her eyes was enough proof to tell us she knew exactly where the witches were hiding.

“Did you know there’s a subcategory of magic known as Illusion magic? It’s typically present in sigil, natural, and sometimes protection magics. Freya has a few witches with this affinity, though there’s one in particular that’s very skilled. She can make you see anything, believe you’re somewhere a thousand miles away when really, you’re standing in your own back yard.” A slow, sinister smile crept across her face. “Look all you want, Alpha Asher, but you’ll never find them.”

A pulse of earth-shattering rage vibrated down the bond, warning me that Asher was seconds away from imploding and beginning the torture. It wasn’t that I wanted to keep him from hurting

Rowena, because I most certainly didn’t, but I knew that if we started peeling off her flesh, what information she was giving us would surely come to an end.

There were still more questions flooding my mind, and I needed to see if she’d answer them first before beginning the real fun.

“The amulet you gave me, I want you to tell me about it.” I urged, squeezing

Asher’s hand to warn him off of tearing into her quite yet.

“You were coming into your magic quickly thanks to Breyona’s wonderful, but very much dead, parents.” Rowena smirked, staring at the window that led into the observation room as though she knew Breyona was right there, pressed against the glass and hanging onto her every word. “I had to do something to slow you down.”

“Last question, witch.” Asher growled, glowering down at her. “Fail to answer and I’ll happily let Lola tear into you. I’m not sure what she was doing back there, but I’d love to see the end result.”

Rowena's face paled, eyes flashing with genuine fear. My heart skipped a beat, the darkness in my veins bubbling excitedly, it's sickening song picking up pace, whispering promises of power and murder, of blood and sweet, sweet vengeance.

"The spell your blood-witch is doing to enslave Lola. How do we break it?" Asher inquired in a voice of pure granite.

There was no way she'd actually tell us. I was more than sure I'd have to pry the truth from her brain after I cracked her skull like an egg, but when her smile turned reptilian, I realized how wrong I'd been.

"You want to know how to break it?" She giggled like a schoolgirl with a secret. Her voice took on a taunting, sing-song quality that made my nails elongate into claws. "There's two ways but...you're not going to like them."

Asher lurched forward, his jaw rigid and teeth bared. "How? Tell us, witch."

Rowena continued to giggle, unfazed by the waves of pure murder radiating off of my mate. Her eyes flickered down to my hands, to the veins of inky darkness crawling beneath my skin.

"First option is Lola here can give herself over to dark magic, and I mean fully give herself over. There wouldn't be a force on this earth that had enough power to [search control](#) her then. Or...there is one other option. A spell that requires that much sacrifice to create can only be broken by sacrifice of equal or greater measure."

"We'd have to kill three of each species."

Asher's gruff voice wasn't what made the hairs along the back of my neck lift. It was the careful consideration in his eyes, like he was actually entertaining the idea of killing three werewolves, vampires, and witches.

"Mhm, that's right." Rowena hummed. She then leaned in, a wicked grin scoring her face, wrinkling the decaying flesh surrounding her eye. "...but it's not your only option. There's another sacrifice that can be made, one that surpasses killing three of each supernatural species.

There's a thin sheen of sweat clinging to my skin, thickening with each second that passes. A knot builds in my stomach, and for a moment, I feel sick. Something isn't right about this. Rowena is giddy, almost eager as she gives Asher the answers we've all been searching for.

Shadows thicken along the walls, gathering in the corners as they writhed and whispered. Tiny voices overlapped one another by the hundreds. All of them were

saying the same word, chanting it like a warning, but my mind was too much of a mess to pick the voices apart.

“What is it?” Asher asks, seemingly unaware that he’s leaning in, something dangerously close to hope burning in his eyes.

“If someone who loved Lola, loved her purely with every piece of their being, were to give their life for hers, the spell would be broken. It has to be pure love, though. No conditions or stipulations of any kind. It can be a friend...a family member...or even...” 1

I sucked in a sharp breath, my hold on Asher’s hand turning to stone as I jerked my arm and tore him away from her.

“No.” The word slid past my lips as a snarl. “You’re lying.”

I could hear the shadows chanting now, their razor-blade voices cutting into my ear drums, forcing a scream to curl in my throat.

‘Mate...’ ‘...mate’ ‘Mate...’ They whispered frantically.

“That’s right, Lola.” Rowena’s smirk turned triumphant. “...a mate.”

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Chapter 227

‘Let’s take a minute. I need a breather before I tear her heart out.’ I hissed over mind-link.

The darkness in my veins was crooning, ‘kill her, kill her, kill her.’ The possibility that she’d open her mouth again and say something that eroded the last shred of my willpower was terrifying enough to make me want to run.

Still holding Asher’s hand, I pulled him away from Rowena. The traitor was reclined in her seat, lazy smile on her face. She could act like being here was her choice, like this was some five-star resort, but I had a feeling she’d quickly change her mind once Asher began drawing blood.

The mere thought of hearing her screams had my hands shaking, twitching with the urge to let my magic take [search control](#).

There was clear reluctance on Asher’s end, but he relented and let me lead him into the observation room. As Rowena’s cell door swung shut, I closed in on my mate. The

others in the room faded into the background, the prickling sensation that was their eyes smothered by fear.

I fumbled to grab both of his hands, capturing them with my own so that he had no choice but to stop and listen to what I was saying. There was no time for his stubbornness, not when his life was so clearly on the line.

'You better wipe that look off of your face, and don't act like I don't know what it means.' I snarled, sucking in deep breaths to calm my frantic heart. 'You're not sacrificing yourself. It's not an option, you hear me? I will lock you in one of these cells. if it means keeping you safe, and I'm willing to bet anything that Zeke and the others will help me.'

'What kind of Alpha would I be if I didn't do this?' Asher's voice was lower than normal, thickened by grief and guilt.

More than anything, I wanted to wash it away. I wanted to be the balm that soothed his soul and the rock that the waves crashed against, but some things couldn't be fixed. I knew that firsthand, because the hole in my chest where my brother once was would never close-never heal.

I hated that he had to throw my earlier words back in my face. He knew I couldn't argue against it, not when I was so willing to do the same thing. It was pure selfishness that kept me from backing him up, but as hard as I tried, I couldn't seem to change my own mind.

'Asher, I'm not living a life without you in it.

I won't do it. I don't care if it makes me selfish. Becoming a Luna was never something I wanted, not until I met you and realized what you are to me. If I lose you, I lose my reason for everything.'

Flecks of shimmering gold filled his eyes, warming my cold and clammy skin.

'You'd take care of this pack, I know it. You'd be alive and breathing. That's all I want.' He finished; his voice filled with such absolution that a shard of panic pierced my chest.

'No, no I wouldn't.' I closed my eyes, facing the ugly truth behind my many flaws. There was such rage boiling beneath the surface, staining my soul, and turning it black, feeding the darkness that poisoned my blood. When I opened them, I let every bit of that anger show, praying it would be enough to deter him. 'If I lost you, I'd lose myself. The darkness would take over, and I'd let it. Asher, I'd kill every last witch that walked this earth. I'd kill every single person that led to me losing you.'

Surprise and dread flooded the mate-bond in chords of steel and silk, rippling across Asher's rugged face until his guilt and grief morphed into sheer determination. The sea

that was his thoughts began to churn, kicking up into a hurricane that caused the waves to funnel and whirlpool.

'Then there has to be another way. Rowena was far too enthusiastic telling us how to break the spell. She wants us to focus on what she said, rather than what she didn't.'

He said, eyes darting over to the far wall, through the window that gave us a glimpse of Rowena in her cell.

An idea popped into my head; one I'd thought of weeks ago but hadn't given much thought to. It was nearly impossible, but it beat losing Asher or someone else I loved. The smallest glimmer of hope filled my body, smoothing over the ragged edges of the hole in my chest. I couldn't embrace the emotion the way I wanted to. There was no telling if this would work.

'We could kill the blood witch...' I said after several seconds of silence. 'She's the one casting the spell. She's the one trying to [search control](#) me. If we kill her, then the spell is broken and the only person capable of controlling me is gone.'

Asher's eyebrows slid closer together, his face pinched in a grimace. 'It would work, but we have no idea where the blood witch is.

They could be in any town, and we'd never know. Even if you found a way to break through the illusion magic Rowena was talking about, we don't have the time to go through every single human town within a two-hundred-mile radius.' 1

He was right, but there was another option- a faster and much more satisfying one.

My attention drifted over to the observation window, to where Rowena sat. Her eyes were locked on my own even though there was no way she could see past the two-way glass.

'Let's see how enthusiastic she is when pain is involved.'

While Asher went to grab a few things, I stayed put with the others. I didn't need a cart full of instruments to peel her flesh from bone. Even without the aid of my magic, I'd much rather use my bare hands.

Tristan and Giovanni were both leaning against the wall. Neither acknowledged the other, but they didn't seem to be fighting anymore. I hoped whatever feud they had going on had come to an end, because we needed all hands-on deck to get through this. Breyona, Zeke, and Tessa were huddled around the single table in the room, exhaustion clear on all their faces.

"The sun will be coming up soon." I warned both Tristan and Giovanni. "You guys might want to get out of here."

“We’re staying.” Giovanni grunted in his thick accent, staring at me with eyes even as dark as his shadow-wolf mate.

Tristan nodded, still not looking at Giovanni, but said nothing. Just then, Asher returned to the observation room, pushing a large metal cart in front of him. The blades, drill bits, and various vials of chemicals

rattled as they hit one another. From where I stood several feet away, I could make out the subtle tang of old blood coating many of the instruments.

“Would you mind going to check on Holly? She was at the hospital the last time I saw her.” I asked Tristan, smothering the worry that threatened to shine through my eyes.

It wasn’t what Rowena said that had me fumbling, but the potential that my half- sister was in danger too. There wasn’t a single doubt in my mind that Holly could be used by the witches, molded into a weapon of mass destruction. She’d been an object in my father’s eyes, something to possess and use, and I knew that wouldn’t change with the witches involved. It was one of the many reasons why I’d never asked for her help.

“She’s safe with Mason and Clara. They’ve been keeping me updated.” Tristan replied, pulling a cellphone out of his back pocket. He swiped his finger across the screen and held it up for me to see. There was a text thread between him and Mason, along with several texts about both Holly and my grandma.

Tristan cleared his throat, the sound somewhat awkward. Brushing away the strands of his golden hair that fell in his face, he regarded me without his usual scowl.

“You need us right now, and not as your seconds-in-command,’ but as your friends ‘.” He grumbled.

The pressure in the room increased, weighing on my shoulders. It was the only sign I had that told me Asher had approached. Just when I thought he’d snap and lash out at Tristan, he surprised me by doing the exact opposite.

“We need all the help we can get.” He said, then gestured to the cart he’d pushed into the room. “How do you feel about drawing some blood?”

I was positive I’d been devoured by the darkness and forced into an alternate universe because Tristan’s slender lips peeled upwards in a devastatingly eager smile.

“Are you kidding? I love blood.”

Five minutes later and the floors of

Rowena's cell were stained red. Staring down at the growing puddle, I silently wondered if it would seep into the concrete if we'd return to this very room a decade later to find the evidence of what we once did.

I'd always known Asher as one of those rare individuals who excelled at everything he did, and this only reaffirmed that belief. The way he moved, gliding the blade through the flesh and muscle, was nothing short of an artform.

Seeing my fair share of death, I assumed that watching the man I love torture someone would fill me with disgust and shame. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be standing here, fighting the urge to jump in and do far worse than carve off a finger or two. The dark magic I'd dabbled in tainted my thoughts and fought to express its will over my own. It was why instead of helping my mate, I stood off to the side with hands clasped behind my back.

"You're going to tell us where the witches are. It doesn't matter if it's with your last, gurgling breath." Tristan said coldly, hovering over Rowena.

He played the part of Asher's partner in crime with more joy than I'd ever seen him express. I would've never pegged him as one for torture, but where Asher was rough and brutal, Tristan was cold and calculated. They balanced one another out perfectly, keeping Rowena teetering on the cusp of consciousness.

Coated in a thick sheen of sweat and blood,

Rowena's head lolled to the side. Her auburn hair was matted and slicked back from her head. The flesh along her arms was gone, laying on the floor in piles that made my stomach turn. Her chest heaved, her eyes glossy with both tears and rage.

"Where are they?" Asher bellowed, slamming his hands down on the arms of the chair. Rowena jolted but did not move.

Her eyes, however, tracked Asher wherever he went. "Where is the blood witch?!"

Slowly, her lips curled into the smallest of smiles, her teeth painted pink from blood. From behind my back, my fingers twitched, every joint aching as a voice far darker than the shadows danced through my head.

'Kill her, kill her, kill her.'

'Make her pay. Make them all pay.'

'Use us to bend them to your will.'

'We will rule the ashes, not them.'

The only thing that kept me from finishing what I'd started was the stinging pain that came from biting the inside of my cheek. Blood filled my mouth, but its scent was drowned out by Rowena's. The wound healed within seconds, forcing me to bite it open a second time, and then a third.

Just when I thought I couldn't take it anymore and feared I'd truly snap, Rowena belted out a wet, agonizing laugh that made Asher go completely still.

"You idiot." Rowena wheezed, the whites of her eyes bright against all that blood. "She's already here."

The growl he let out was low enough to make my hair stand on end.

"She's here, in my pack?"

Rowena hummed, lips curling at the edges. She's been here this entire time, Alpha Asher. Living right under your nose."

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Chapter 228

There wasn't much more we could do after that. Rowena was dangling on the cusp of unconsciousness and one more slice, one more sliver of flesh, could easily send her tumbling off the edge.

I could've healed her, resealed her wounds. and sent the blood trickling back into her body, but I didn't trust myself. The more I thought about her, about Sean and how I felt, the hazier my mind became. I was running out of reasons not to finish what I'd started back in the forest, and that fact terrified me more than anything.

I should've told Asher, but what was the point? There was nothing that could be done. The dark veins along my fingers and hands were proof that I'd almost went off the deep end, and the shadows themselves insisted there was no cure to be found.

After ordering Giovanni to dose Rowena with enough Hemlock to subdue a small army, Asher and I left. We spent the rest of the day together, though it was anything but relaxing. There was so much he and I needed to talk about, but we were both working on overdrive, fixated on protecting the people of this pack.

Zeke, Tessa, and Breyona tagged along, following us to Killian's old office. The five of us crowded around the large conference table, clutching cups of crappy coffee in our

hands as we created lists of every single person we'd come in contact with since moving to the capital of the pack.

Strangers, acquaintances, friends, family, foes. There were too many people to sort through and not nearly enough time to vet them all. Tessa, surprisingly enough, was the most helpful. She'd stepped up since declaring which side she was on and was honest with the information she gave out despite her obvious fear towards losing her sister.

"I don't know exactly where the others are. Ember and I were kept from the group. We were assigned a protector-or a babysitter as Ember liked to call her. Elaine's one of the witches good with crafting illusions." Tessa explained, her soft features hardening at the mention of her twin. Her voice took on a muted tone as she continued, "...there were a couple of times your wolves didn't even notice us. We'd be camping in the forest and a patrol team would race by."

"Do you think that's how the blood witch is escaping our notice?" Asher asked from across the table. I noticed how he tried to tone down the command in his voice, but it was there, nonetheless. Tessa didn't seem phased by that fact. If anything, from the way she tilted her chin, she seemed used to being given orders.

"No. If she's truly here in your pack, then she's hiding in plain sight. Surrounding herself with a bunch of protectors to hide her whereabouts...it's not really her style."

Tessa cringed.

It should've frightened me that the mere mention of the blood witch had Tessa flinching, but all I could think about was Sean and the fact that both Breyona and

Mason were meant to join him.

"You've met her, then?" Zeke asked, his eyes brightening. They flickered to my mate, staying there for several seconds. He and Asher were having some kind of silent conversation when Zeke abruptly turned back to Tessa and asked, "Do you think you'd be able to point her out if you saw a picture of her?"

Tessa blanched, "I've met her once, but it wasn't an experience I ever wanted to relive. She was terrifying, to be honest with you. The kind of crazy that's cunning and calculated."

"How do we know she's not wearing someone else's face?" I countered, hands clasped and resting beneath my chin. The dark veins running up my fingers made them ice cold. "If the second witch can change her identity, can't the blood witch do the same?"

"Again, that's not really her style. She's cocky, but not in a way that's considered a weakness. She'd thrive on the fact that she's living under your nose, but the second you

came sniffing too close, she wouldn't hesitate to pack up and move on." Tessa explained, pursing her lips. "The way Rowena spoke made it sound like you haven't even come close to figuring out who she is. I'd be willing to bet if she's actually here in your pack, then she's wearing her own face. If she is I think I could point her out."

"It's not perfect or fast by any means, but it's a start. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to know who murdered my parents. Was it that sister of yours?" Breyona chimed in, and as her voice dropped low, I swore the lighting in the room followed.

Tessa visibly swallowed, glancing at the furthest corners of the room as though she noticed the sudden lighting change too.

"No, it wasn't Ember...not that she didn't volunteer herself for the job. My sister isn't bad, not at her core. She's just...she's just angry." Tessa sighed; her earthy eyes locked on the table's surface as though it were the most interesting thing in the world. She scratched at a speck on the surface, not meeting any of our eyes. "Our parents were killed werewolves. Rogues, actually. It doesn't matter to her who you guys are or what pack you belong to. You're all the same in her eyes. The witch that murdered your parents was an elemental like Ember and I, only her element is water." 1

Breyona's eyes narrowed. "Water. Does that mean..."

"Your parents drowned." Tessa said softly. I'd apologize, but what would it change? All of the apologies Ember and I received as children did nothing to bring back our parents."

As the others continued to talk, their voices fading into the background, I lost myself to my thoughts.

The blood witch was here in our pack, waking up each morning on our land, staring our people in the eyes whilst plotting their deaths. Did she sleep in a bed? Was it a house she lived in or an apartment? Did she hold a job to keep up the façade of a pack member? These were all things I mulled over, and the more I pictured her smiling and pretending to be one of us, the angrier I became.

It came to a head when I glanced over at Asher, seeing him when he thought no one was looking.

There were dark circles beneath his eyes, and his lips were swollen from the number of times he rolled them between his teeth.

"Zeke, you and I can come up with a list of everyone within a fifty-mile radius. We'll get pictures and have Tessa go through them one by one. If the blood witch doesn't turn up, then we'll widen it another fifty miles."

Asher declared, his posture stiff and shoulders drawn back.

Tessa tapped on the table's surface, seemingly deep within thought.

"If you had a strong enough witch here, she could cast a location spell. You'd need something belonging to the blood witch though. The more important the object, the more accurate the spell."

Her suggestion made an idea pop into my head, one I should've thought of sooner. I mentally cursed myself for being so distracted with the thought of revenge that I couldn't formulate a plan on how to get there.

"We don't have an object, but we have something else...something better." I mused, looking up from the table to realize that all eyes were on me.

Asher tilted his head, pride flickering in his eyes regardless of how exhausted and pained they were.

"You have something of hers?" Tessa inquired, visibly perking up.

"Yeah, we do." I replied. "We have her daughter."

Once the idea formed, it was all I could think about. There wasn't any need for a locator spell, not when I had Conjunction on my side. That, along with Holly's blood, had to be plenty to show me where the blood witch was. Even the dark magic coursing through my veins agreed with the idea, thrumming its praise as it whispered silky promises egging me on.

"I think we should wait until you're at full strength. I'm all for getting this bitch, but you look dead on your feet." Breyona said with obvious concern. A few seconds passed when her mouth popped open, and eyes went wide. "Ugh, that so wasn't the right choice of words."

Snorting at how horrified my best-friend looked, I shook my head. "I don't know if waiting is the best idea. She has everything she needs now to finish the spell."

"Actually, she has to wait until the full moon tonight to do anything. Blood magic is tricky in itself, but a spell like this relies heavily on any sort of power it can consume. The full moon would be just the extra charge of power Freya needs." Tessa cut in. 3

Shock seemed to ripple over everyone at the table, everyone except for myself.

The poisonous whisper of dark magic filled my head once more, singing songs of all the other things I could do under the might of a full moon. I gave nothing away, not even when one of their tantalizing verses caught my attention and spoke to the wounded shards of my soul.

"So, we do this tonight." I said, glancing around the table for confirmation.

Adrenaline held my muscles in its tight grip, desperate to spring. Even Maya writhed with anticipation, fighting the urge to shred my skin and start the hunt.

“Tonight.” Asher said, and the others quickly followed suit.

For the next few hours we comprised lists and photographs of every pack member within fifty miles. With every pair of eyes I stared into, my patience waned. Tessa breezed through them, her scowl growing more and more prominent with each photograph she slid to the side.

When dusk took hold and the sunlight careening through the large, open windows faded, we decided to call it quits. We filtered back to mine and Asher’s house where

Tristan, Holly, and the others would soon be on their way. Deciding it was better to explain things to Holly in person, I told Tristan to keep our plan to himself.

There was another plan brewing, one conjured up by the dark magic whispering in my ear. It was insanity, so much so that I didn’t dare tell anyone, not even Asher. Still, as insane as it was...it was also highly tempting. Any guilt or doubts I had were slowly wiped away by its siren song.

Even as we pulled into the driveway of the house, it was all I could think about.

Tristan, Holly, and Giovanni had beaten us to the house. They were all in the kitchen, crowded around the island and sipping from the blood bags I kept stocked in the fridge.

My fingers twitched at the sight of my half- sister, at the features her and I shared, one’s we got from our father. I ground my teeth together, agitated and on edge. The room felt too small, too confining. This plan was weighing on my head, dangling in front of my face like a juicy piece of steak. 1

I needed to tell someone before I did something I regretted-something I couldn’t take back.

‘Can we talk for a minute?’ I asked Asher through mind-link, catching his honey coated eyes from across the room. ‘...alone.’

He gave the subtlest of nods and excused himself from the kitchen. Together we walked throughout the house, heading upstairs and straight down the main hall. Asher followed closely behind; his lips knitted tightly together though I didn’t understand why until I stopped in front of our bedroom door.

“Oh, I didn’t realize...” I trailed off, staring at the door. “We don’t have to go in there.”

“No, it’s fine.” Asher replied, his voice deeper than usual. “It’s not the only thing I have to face, right?”

I laced my fingers with his and nudged open the door, flicking the lights on as we stepped inside. Our scent clung to every inch of the room, from the rumpled bedsheets to the closet where my clothes were strewn along the floor. There was something lying by the foot of the bed, something that caught the overhead light and shimmered beautifully.

I gasped, my heart jumping at the small band of metal on the carpet. Practically diving for it, I snatched it off the ground and held it up for Asher to see. The sheer relief that slammed my chest ached, bringing a heavy wave of tears to my eyes.

“My ring...” I stammered, trying to catch my breath. “I thought I lost it in the forest.”

Asher’s attention wasn’t on me though, or the ring. He was frozen just a few feet in the doorway, his eyes locked on the exact spot where I’d lost consciousness. There were a million emotions fraying the ends of the mate-bond, but they were echoes of what they should’ve been, remnants of what Asher was truly feeling.

I wasn’t sure what spurred me on, forcing my feet to carry me his way. All I knew was that I couldn’t physically bare to let him go through this alone.

“Show me what happened.” I whispered, raising my hand to guide his face towards my own.

The fog cleared from his eyes, replaced with blatant refusal.

“I can’t let you see that side of me.” He rasped; his stubble coated jaw clenched beneath my hand.

“It wasn’t you that did those things. You can’t carry this alone; it’ll kill you. If you show me what happened to you...I’ll show you my side of things. You’ll be able to see for yourself that I don’t blame you.” I urged, a piece of my already damaged heart cracking when he closed his eyes. “P- Please, Asher. I can’t even remember the last time I saw Sean. Let me see him, please.”

Kicking the door shut behind, Asher placed his forehead flush against my own and released a shaky sigh.

Mirroring his face, I closed my eyes and welcomed the darkness behind my lids. As I released my senses one by one and slid into the familiar embrace of the mate-bond, a burst of color flooded my brain.

‘I’m so sorry, Lola.’ He whispered; his voice

too broken to utter the words out loud. ‘

Please, don’t hate me for what you’re about to see.’

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 229

Chapter 229 Asher's Flashback

When you've reached the top of a great and mighty mountain, your muscles still burning from the climb, the last thing one expects is to suddenly fall.

Holding Lola in my arms, her scent invading my brain and her warm pussy sheathed around my cock, hearing her soft sighs and the way her voice swelled with love when she agreed to be my wife, it was the highest peak I could ever hope to reach.

Until bars of silver slammed down over my eyes and an inhuman force clawed itself out from the furthest pits of my mind, I had no clue that something had even been wrong.

Sure, there were those moments of lost time where my memory frayed, but that had just been stress, right?

It couldn't have been this-this creature with its spindly limbs and blood-soaked face wrapping around my body, winding around my torso, and dragging me back, further and further away until my limbs no longer responded to my will.

What the fuck was this? Some distant facet of my mind found this thing-this creature, familiar in a way, but that made no sense.

I roared and thrashed against it's hold, but it was no use. The warning I bellowed was nothing more than an echo that lived and died in my head, never reaching my lips. Lola, my mate, and future wife-the one person I dared let close, writhed beneath me with hooded eyes, so innocent and oblivious to what was happening.

By the time fear and awareness seeped into her gaze, it was too late.

The thing controlling my body had its limbs wrapped around me, a bloody gash of a grin on it's warped face as it made me watch.

There would be no living for me if I hurt her. The moment I regained [search control](#), I'd follow her from this life into the next. I'd beg for her forgiveness and spend nothing short of eternity working to earn it.

It dropped her unconscious body and headed towards the balcony, throwing us over the railing. We hit the ground on all fours, racing into the forest. It's emotions-if they could even be called that-were so different from my own that it was easy to get lost in them.

There was a blatant lack of interest as it looked down at Lola, and a maddening determination for something-something that felt so close, yet just out of reach.

Its hunger was insatiable, a craving for something more than flesh that was so consuming I feared it would attack the first person it came across.

The thing used my body, tying invisible ropes around my wrists and ankles, yanking me left and right like a demonic puppeteer.

I watched through my own eyes as I climbed the steps to a familiar house, every piece of my soul crying out in agony and refusal, fighting against its hold. It didn't matter, in the end. No matter how hard I thrashed, it had taken full [search control](#) of my body.

The violation was unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

Each step creaked beneath my feet, the wooden porch groaning under my weight. I focused on my fingers, on how it felt to move them, but they didn't respond. The doorknob was cold in my hand, and twisted so easily, the lock snapping before it even had a chance.

How could I feel the smoothness of the metal but be unable to force my body to let it go?

In a last-ditch attempt to warn whoever was in the house, I cried out. This couldn't be happening, it couldn't be. Not this house, not to someone Lola cared about so deeply.

The door swung open, letting out a loud creak that hung in the air even after it had faded into silence. A shadow passed behind me, one with crimson hair and pale skin. I tried to turn, feeling the muscles and tendons in my neck, but they didn't respond.

I was still in the car, but my hands were no longer on the steering wheel. 2

The monster taking over my body forced me inside slowly, one foot after another as I crossed the threshold and stepped into the small foyer. It made a point not to turn around, not to look at the person following us so closely.

To the right, through a small entry way, was the kitchen. Warm light spewed into the foyer, and the distant sound of a football game on television trickled through the house. The commentators were laughing, joking over the piss poor performance from the playing teams. One of them must've made a touchdown, because following the cheer of the crowd was another shout. This one wasn't coming from the television.

It was coming from Sean.

Fuck this. I wouldn't give this thing what it wanted, not from Lola's brother. It could take its pound of flesh from me, but not her family.

I thrashed against its hold, fighting against the spindly limbs that wrapped around my soul and latched onto it like some kind of vile leech. Its cracked smile, split across a

lumpen, almond-shaped face, didn't waver in the slightest. If anything, I think it grew bigger when a second voice called out.

"Quit hollering at the television! I swear, you're as bad as your dad." Grandma's chuckle twinkled throughout the house, warm even when she was scolding Lola's brother.

Panic unlike anything I've ever known squeezed my throat. All of the battles, the gory fights that ended with hundreds of lives lost, didn't have a fraction of the effect that this had. I never once admitted to it, but there wasn't a person in this town that didn't care for Lola's grandmother.

Even in the beginning, when Lola and I fought one another at every turn, her grandmother had been the one to see

through it all. She accepted me as her grandson before I was able to even admit my attraction to Lola.

My muscles clenched, arms and legs going rigid as my steps faltered. It was as though my body knew what was going to happen, and knew it was not only an act against nature, but one so vile that I'd never come back whole.

This creature stripped me of everything. I wasn't a werewolf, an Alpha, or anything in between. I was scared-so fucking scared.

It drove my body forward, into the kitchen where I spotted the short and slender frame of Lola's grandma. She stood at the stove, pulling a tray of cookies out of the oven. The shadow at my back moved, a flash of teeth along with crimson hair and ivory skin.

Instead of shouting at the thing holding me hostage, I tried the mate-bond. I couldn't feel Lola's fiery, all-consuming presence, but I had to try-I had to.

'Lola? Fuck, fuck! This can't be happening.

Lola, baby. Tell me you can hear me. Tell me you can hear me.' I panted, breaking all over again when grandma turned to stare into my eyes.

It's not me, grandma. This isn't me! Run! Hide! Go, fucking go!

I shouted and shouted and shouted, but my lips didn't move. They didn't fucking move! Grandma stood there, staring at me and not at the person shadowing my every move.

"Sean..." Grandma said slowly, her eyes still locked on my own. The note of warning in her voice made me cry out, but it was just another plea she couldn't hear. "Sean, get in here."

No, don't call for him!

When Sean's face appeared in the doorway across the kitchen, his eyebrows scrunched in obvious confusion, I realized the horrible mistake he'd made and why this thing had brought my body here. Like a switch had been flipped, the pure disinterest it oozed was replaced with a thirst for death. Its teeth cracked from how hard it grinned, and with nothing more than a whispered command, my body lunged.

Grandma, with all the strength of our Goddess, actually threw herself in between Sean and I. She had the fiercest look on her face, one of righteous fury and heartbreaking concern, but it was fleeting- so fleeting.

The woman that had followed me into the house chose that moment to pounce, emerging in a flash of bright hair and nails, attacking Grandma before she even stood a chance.

"Asher? What the fuck's going on?" Sean demanded, seconds away from leaping to grandma's aid.

He would have, but I was blocking his way.

"Run, Sean! That's not Asher!" Grandma yelled, her voice no longer oozing with warmth, but gurgling with blood. "RUN!"

There was a split second where he just stood there, his attention going back and forth between grandma and I, unable to focus- unable to make a decision. I'd never truly thought he and Lola looked alike, but staring at him, seeing his heart shatter in his eyes, made me realize otherwise.

As quickly as he dashed back into the living room, leaping over the back of the couch in a frantic race to the sliding glass door, I was already breathing down his neck.

When we collided, and the ache of my claws elongating radiated up my fingers, I froze. Disbelief kept me from closing my eyes, from blocking this out the way I wished I could've.

I would've given anything-my pack, my title, my land, to block the things I felt out, but I couldn't.

These hands were my own, ripping into my soul-mate's brother, carving open his chest until flashes of milky white bone appeared.

They were as stark white as his eyes, eyes that stared into my own, that begged even when his lungs filled with blood, and he could no longer speak.

I'm so sorry.

My claws sliced through his throat with ease.

His skin split, unfurling like the petals of a rose.

Please, forgive me.

The sticky warmth of his blood pooled in my hands.

I can't stop myself.

Blood coated his face, his skin so pale, his lips still moving.

Why is this happening? Why?

His jaw grew lax, and with my claws still buried in his chest cavity, the light warming his eyes faded, vanishing far beyond the horizon where it would never be seen again. One second stretched into many as a soft, gurgling breath slid past his lips. His heart gave one final shudder before falling silent.

What have I done?

The arms of the creature that grinned over my shoulder loosened, slithering from around my broken soul. It didn't crawl back into the depths of my mind. It simply... vanished.

Blood roared in my ears, the silence a cacophony of screaming-of ghostly wailing that reminded me again and again and again just what I'd done.

I should've thought about grandma, about the woman that attacked her, but there was no room for anything other than Sean's body, his torn flesh, his eyes staring into the pits of my soul even in death reminding me that I did this.

With full [search control](#) of my body, I ran. Landing on all fours, my body a mass of bloody fur, I bolted through the glass door and heard its shards raining to the floor. The pain of them slicing into my skin was dull, nothing compared to the pain inside my chest, eating away at my brain and telling me to do the most awful of things.

The memories didn't start until I made it outside.

As my paws hit the dewy grass, kicking up dirt, images filled my head and clouded my vision. They were old, grainy photographs with edges that blurred. With each one, the colors brightened, and shapes became sharper.

Carson, the college girl whose parents Lola and I spoke to. She was running, mouth agape and eyes so wide they were mostly white. Running through the forest, swatting

away every branch that blocked her path, looking back again and again and again until finally I caught up to her.

It was identical to what I'd done to Sean.

Next was Judge Clint's son, just as fear stricken as Carson even though he'd been a prick in life. Just like her, he ran. Just like her, he stared at me with his mouth agape, because who would've ever thought their own Alpha would be the one to kill them?

In the slideshow of blood and death, I could hear my own voice begging the thing in my body to stop, begging it until they took their final breaths and the memories faded from my mind.

The images came to an abrupt stop. Color drained from my vision, but I deserved it and much worse.

I swayed on my feet, realizing I was no longer in wolf form. Everything felt wrong. The way my skin covered my bones, the way the cold air hit my skin, it was all wrong.

I didn't deserve to be here; I didn't deserve her.

I'd become everything I hated an Alpha that killed his own pack members for the hell of it, a mate that did the one thing I could never take back or dare ask forgiveness for.

Every time I closed my eyes it was there. His eyes stared at me; his face now so similar to Lola's that my mouth filled with bile.

Another plume of wind hit my chest, so cold that my vision sharpened. I wasn't sure where I was anymore. Somewhere deep in the forest, but there was no telling if I was still within pack lines.

All I cared about was the cliff five feet away.

It looked over a sea of treetops and distant mountains, a scene Lola would've found breathtaking.

Never in my life would I have contemplated jumping, but just five minutes was all it took to take everything away from me, to unravel who I was so completely that the role of Alpha now felt foreign.

I wanted to jump. To pay for what I'd done, and perhaps I would've, but something stopped me.

A rush of untethered panic hit me square in the chest, sinking its claws into my heart the way I had done to Sean. It was so raw that I'd almost passed it off as my own, but then I heard her.

'Asher?!' Lola wailed, her voice every bit as broken as I knew mine would be, had I answered.

With her voice ringing in my ears, I backed away from the cliff and slowly sank to the ground.

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 230

Chapter 230

There was nothing in his eyes but agony. Not a hint of recognition or understanding, only pain so intense that it rendered me speechless.

Asher's memories still lingered in my vision, imprinted on the back of my eyelids every time I blinked. Sean's face covered in blood, the way grandma stared at Asher, seeing so clearly that it wasn't him behind those golden eyes, hearing Asher's screams-the way every bit of ferocity and strength left him when he realized what he'd done.

All of it was too much, too overwhelming, but my reason for staying strong was right here, inches away and crumbling to dust in my hands.

Tears streamed down Asher's face, down his cheeks where they trickled off his jaw, tickling my wrists from where I cradled his head. I curled into his chest, holding his empty stare with every sob he held back.

His pain and guilt were a sandstorm that tore into me, scraping away at my skin, but no matter how badly I wanted to cry out and shield myself, I held back. I'd take the pain and weather it if it meant he'd survive.

"How am I supposed to live with what I've done? How do you ask forgiveness for something like that?" Asher asked in a raspy voice. 1

Before I could reply, there was a loud crash from downstairs. Some small, selfish part of me was the tiniest bit relieved because in

truth, I had no clue what to tell my mate. I could only tell him I didn't blame him so many times. Even then, words did nothing to erase the kind of pain he was enduring.

It filled my body with an icy, numbing fear that grew exponentially worse when I heard thunderous footsteps, followed by my dad's voice.

"Where is he?!" Dad bellowed. "Where is the man that killed my son?"

The blood drained from my face. "Let me talk to him. He'll understand, Asher. I know he will." I urged, hoping just this once he'd listen to me.

Asher shook his head and stood, swiping at his face angrily though his eyes were still glossy, and the evidence still shimmered on his cheeks. When he squared his broad shoulders, I caught a glimpse of his sheer strength and knew he hadn't lost it the way he believed.

"No, I won't hide from what I've done. It doesn't matter if it wasn't me. I'm the reason the blood witch can do the spell to enslave you. My body was the weapon that killed him—that killed the others." He said quietly, exiting the bedroom and leaving me to scramble to catch up.

I clipped my shoulder on the corner as I

raced down the hall, nearly tumbling headfirst down the stairs to catch up to Asher. My muscles turned to lead the moment we stepped into the living room, rooting me in place under my dad's intense stare.

He hadn't changed since I last saw him at the hospital. If anything, he looked worse. His eyes were bloodshot, his face tense and marred with dark circles of exhaustion. Tristan and Giovanni surrounded him, speaking in low voices that he didn't appear to be hearing. The others: Breyona, Holly, Mason, and Clara, stood off to the side. Flora hovered behind my father, and as our eyes met, I read the warning in them loud and clear.

He wasn't okay, and there was no promise that he ever would be.

"Let him go." Asher said to Giovanni and Tristan.

The two Vampire's reluctantly stepped away but remained close by. Tristan looked my way, a question burning in his eyes. I nodded ever so slightly, assuming he was asking if I was on board with all of this.

I wasn't, not exactly, but Asher needed this confrontation. My only hope was that it didn't break him—that it didn't break them both.

As Asher and my dad stared at one another, I realized both men looked irreparably broken. The light in their eyes was fractured, letting pain bleed through the cracks.

Neither one looked as strong as they once had. Not Asher, who was an Alpha known for his ferocity, and not my dad, who had fought on countless battlefields and ended hundreds of lives.

Two of the most important men in my life were nothing more than mere shadows of themselves.

Asher broke the silence first.

“I accept whatever punishment you see fit to give me.” He rasped, and I swore I wasn’t the only one in the room to stiffen. The silence was deafening, as were the stares I exchanged with Breyona and Mason. Asher didn’t so much as look our way when he said with dark conviction, “No one will stop you.”

The tension in the room was suffocating, drawing the air from my lungs until I couldn’t take it anymore.

“Asher, don’t-” I whispered, but my warning was cut short when my dad charged.

He bulldozed his way to Asher, a mass of muscle and writhing pain. Time slowed and my heart wailed in my chest, the gaping hole in it weeping with bloodstained tears. Asher didn’t move, didn’t so much as flinch as he stood there, waiting for the blow to come.

None of us, not even myself, could have anticipated what happened next.

Just when the tension in the room reached

its head and it appeared as though dad was going to lay into Asher, he did the opposite. Grabbing him by the shoulder, my dad pulled Asher into his arms, wrapping one around his neck and the other below his arms.

He was hugging him.

Even Asher was stunned, his body going stiff, harder than granite. It didn’t last long, though. How could it when both of them were irreparably broken in the same way? They were two sides of the same horrible coin. Their guilt went hand in hand, as did their pain-their shame.

The stone-cold mask Asher donned split in two when my dad’s shoulders trembled in a poorly suppressed sob. Slowly, with a tentativeness I’d never seen him show before, Asher hugged my dad back.

I watched in silence, the hole in my chest torn open, as my mate and dad shattered entirely.

There wasn’t a single dry eye in the room, not even from the two Vampire’s watching nearby. It took every crumb of strength in my wounded soul not to break down, but as I watched the men I loved reduced to tears by their guilt and grief, it became easier to reign it in. 2

Even if we won this battle, life would never be the same.

They would never be the same.

It was this moment that made me realize what I needed to do. Perhaps the darkness whispering in my veins helped motivate me to make a decision, but it was Asher and my dad that ultimately made up my mind.

The plan I had brewing, the one so heinous I didn't dare speak the words aloud, was our only hope to fix the damage the blood witch had brought to all of us.

I had assumed I hid my thoughts well, but there was one set of eyes that wasn't on the two men crying in the middle of the living room.

Holly stared into the pits of my soul; her appearance so eerily similar to my own that it felt like I was looking into a mirror.

I turned away to give Asher and my dad but all I could think was that she space, knows.

Holly knows what I'm going to do.

Slowly, we all migrated into the kitchen while Asher and dad slipped outside. My nerves were raw without him close by, but he needed this. They both did.

I picked at the edge of the blood bag I was currently drinking from, mulling over how the hell I was going to leave without everyone noticing. With tonight being the full moon and the most likely day for the blood witch to act, I needed to fix things soon.

A set of eyes burned into my skin, pulling my attention away from the crimson liquid sloshing in the blood bag. I looked up, instantly catching Holly's eyes from where she stared at me from across the kitchen.

Swallowing back the guilt of what I planned to do, I slipped into the living room. My ass had just hit the couch when Cassidy's voice popped into my head.

'You there, Lola?' She asked over mind-link, her voice etched with concern.

'Sure am.' I managed to reply, pulling from the blood bag deeply.

Warmth spread throughout my limbs, but not my hands-not where the darkness stained my skin. That part of me remained ice cold.

'I heard what happened.' Cassidy's voice lowered to a broken whisper. 'I'm so sorry, Lola. How...how is Asher doing?' 1

I bit back a sigh. 'He's as well as can be expected.'

'That doesn't sound good.' She said softly.

'It's not. None of this is good.' I replied, swallowing the scrap of irritation that crawled beneath my skin.

The urge to lash out clogged my throat, but what good would it do to rage at Cassidy? It wouldn't take away this anger festering inside of me, anger reserved for one person alone. There was a crash through the mind-link, followed by a burst of obnoxious laughter and the heavy thump of music pulsing through speakers.

I grimaced, not at all hiding the contempt in my voice. 'Are you really at a party right now, Cassidy?'

'Not for the reason you're thinking, trust me. Her reply came quickly, with just a hint of defensiveness to it. 'Look, I'm not one to admit when I'm wrong, because usually I'm never wrong...but I think Asher was right.'

'You think Asher was right about what?' I asked slowly.

'I think something happened to Brandon.' She whispered reluctantly. 'I've gone to every college party within a two-hundred-mile radius, and believe me, it's a lot of fucking parties. Do these college students not have anything better to do? It's like they don't have homework or exams anymore-'

'Cassidy.' I deadpanned, cutting her rant short.

'Right, sorry. I ramble when I'm on the verge of freaking the hell out.' She sputtered. 'Anyway, I've gone to over a

dozen parties and Brandon isn't at any of them. From what I can get out of these drunken idiots, no one's seen him in days.

'Do you think there's any possibility he went to that safe haven you and Asher have been working on?'

'I don't see why he would've. There's no reason for him to be there, but I suppose it's always a possibility.' I frowned, glancing towards the back door where I could see the silhouettes of Asher and my dad talking.

'I can go there and check if you want. I'm wasting time searching these damn parties and as much as I could use a drink or twelve, I'm too wound up to consider it.' She huffed.

'Let me talk to Asher about it and I'll get back to you, okay?' I lied, tapping my guilt deep down where it would never see the light of day.

Cassidy sighed softly, not at all suspicious. Yeah, that's fine. Just don't forget, please. I'm seriously worried about him...' 2

'I won't forget.' I said quickly, then sliced the link in two.

It wasn't that I didn't care about Brandon.

Even though he was an obnoxious dickhead, he was still Asher's brother. He mattered, he really did, but I had limited time and needed every spare second I could manage.

If I was still standing tomorrow, still in [search control](#) of my body and magic, then we'd look for him. Until then, wherever Brandon was, he'd have to wait.

'You're making the right choice. You have this power for a reason. Use it.' The darkness in my veins sang. 1

Its voice wasn't human, but that didn't stop me from understanding it's meaning.

Amid the chatter of Breyona, Mason, and the others, it became hard to breathe. Every glance they cast me stung my skin, bringing up a wave of acidic paranoia that burned my tongue and throat.

Could they see I had something planned? Something that didn't involve them?

I stood abruptly, earning a frown from

Breyona. She took a step in my direction, her brows furrowed with concern. I shook my head, backing away.

"Just need some air." I muttered, slipping out of the living room and into the kitchen. 1

Their voices continued, overlapping one another until I could no longer tell what they were talking about. I yanked open the refrigerator and found there was no more blood bags left inside. Shutting it, I turned and opened the door beside the pantry, stepping into the dimly lit garage.

Two of Asher's cars sat parked off to the side and along the far wall was an icebox where I stashed another case of blood.

Inhaling the crisp scent of gasoline and machine oil, I padded over to the fridge and opened it, pulling out another dozen blood bags. A pair of small feet clicked against the floor, following me into the garage. I knew who it was before I turned around and knew whose stare would soon meet my own.

"Hey." I said awkwardly, shifting my weight between each foot.

Holly stood a few feet in front of the door, her hair a mass of inky darkness down her back and her arms crossed over her chest.

The blues of her eyes were bright, the same shade I imagined mine were.

“You’re planning something-something the others won’t agree with.” She stated in a low, silky voice. 1

I cursed inwardly. Tristan had already told her about our plan to use her blood to locate her mother, which meant she knew about my other plan, the one too insane to dare speak aloud.

Reigning in a flinch, I steeled my spine and stared into her eyes with ease. There was a storm brewing in my chest, raging beneath my skin, but I’d never let it show.

“What’s it to you, Holly?” I asked, simply put.

My fingers began to twitch, stinging with icy numbness. I slipped my hands behind my back, a movement Holly undoubtedly tracked.

She blinked, her eyes sliding from my hidden hands back up to my face.

“Let me help you.”

Suspicion curled in my head, carried by the seductive song coursing through my veins. I narrowed my eyes at her, disbelief staining my voice.

“Why would you do that?” I pondered.

She had no reason to help me, not with this. The thought of her lying to my face, turning me in to Asher and the others before I had a chance to fix this, it was maddening. Rage simmered, coming to a boil that I had to physically fight to contain.

Holly lowered her voice even more, the words coming out in barely a whisper.

“My blood is magic, Lola. You can use it to find my mother, but there’s also so much more you can do with it. I’m your sister, and I want to help you. You deserve it after...after all you’ve been through.”

‘She’s telling the truth. Let her help us. Use her power.’ The dark magic sang.

“I’ll let you help me on one condition.” I told her. “We leave here, right now, without telling the others.”

Holly didn’t so much as hesitate to reply. 4

“Deal.”