

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 241

Chapter 241

Half an hour later, I stumbled away from

Tristan's body and into Asher's warm embrace.

My legs had been reduced to jelly, and my magical reserves drained so low they might never recover. I could only imagine how much blood and rest it would take before they were back to normal again.

Asher's voice washed over my shoulders, his breath fluttering against my cheek, but the blood roaring in my ears kept me from hearing.

I'd poured everything into Tristan- everything.

Holly and Giovanni remained rooted in place, searching for any sign of life whether it be a heartbeat or an influx of breath. The inky strands of my half-sister's hair cascaded down Tristan's shoulder, hanging off the side of the table he'd been placed onto.

With her ear placed against his chest, she waited and waited.

I understood her worry. Really, I did. Her mother had to sacrifice ten witches just to lock my father's soul into my body. While I didn't have ten innocent people to slaughter, I did have something else on my side.

That otherworldly and very much feminine presence that had taken over just minutes before, allowing me a split second of [search control](#) when I needed it most, hadn't left me. It was still here, bubbling in my veins and wrapping itself around my body in a shroud of silk.

As I used it to strengthen my own magic, I swore I heard its whisper ring in my ears before vanishing completely, melting into the night sky and the stars that watched over head.

"...just this once.' It had said.

When it left, and I felt its absence ringing in my soul, I whispered a quick thank you to the Moon Goddess.

During the walk back to the house, Asher recounted what happened the moment I slipped away. Half of the story he told with words, while the other came in the form of memories dancing down the mate-bond.

Witches had poured into the pack, concealed by Angelica's twin sister, who had also survived the battle. In fact, the two of them were currently in the living room, watching television like two normal children. The witches had split into groups, some attacking the town while others came to the house, beckoned by Cassidy's call.

Those who went into town were met with not only warriors, but pack members who took it upon themselves to defend their own.

Even my dad, who was now safe with Flora visiting grandma in the hospital, had joined the battle.

As for Cassidy herself, I witnessed her death in Asher's memory, and relished every gruesome second.

The witch that had slithered her way into the pack at the ripe age of seven years old, replacing the real Cassidy who had been kidnapped and murdered days prior, was torn limb from limb by the same men she'd befriended and betrayed: Brandon and Asher.

The two of them had banded together and worked as one for the first time in over ten years. Cassidy might have been responsible for tearing them apart, but in the end, she'd also been what brought them back together.

With Asher's arms wrapped around my torso, so tightly that nothing could dare pull us apart, we waited in the silence for life to blossom in Tristan's chest.

It came with a quiet thud, so soft that it could've belonged to a bird perching on a branch, or the first droplet of rain colliding with the hard ground. Holly's ragged gasp told me it was neither of those things.

One beat turned into two, which turned into ten, and then fifty.

An entire minute had passed when Tristan's chest moved, and a gust of oxygen surged into his lungs. The sound was deafening, a clash of cymbals that made my ears ring and eyes water. It was the sound of a soul awakening, taking [search control](#) of a body that should've belonged to the earth.

The wound in his chest had been hard to heal. It was a wound created by dark magic; one I knew would leave a terrible scar.

Tristan's eyes fluttered open, and instead of the bright blues that belonged to my father, I was met with a familiar shade just a few touches lighter.

"Holly." Her name fell from his mouth, quiet like a prayer.

The others remained outside, helping the warriors and Asher's Beta dispose of the dead. I'd been too focused on Tristan to notice the bodies, but from the scent of blood

and decay, I could tell there were plenty. Breyona, Giovanni, Asher, and I remained inside, witnessing this reunion between Holly and Tristan-between two people who clearly loved one another, but never once acted on it.

Tristan's hands rested on Holly's face, quickly becoming wet with tears. Holly's shoulders shook, and while her hair created a barrier between us and them, I could still see the raw emotion playing across her face.

I hadn't realized I was crying myself until Asher's soft lips grazed my cheek and the rough pad of his thumb smoothed over my face.

"Go to them." He whispered.

By the time I approached, having taken a moment to compose myself, Tristan had his sights set on Giovanni. Breyona watched with the same awe and anxiety as I did, both of us wondering if this would turn into a reunion or another fight.

Giovanni stared down at Tristan with eyes of molten amber, nearly pitch black until the light hit them just right. I never could tell what Giovanni was feeling, and now was no different.

"You did good, brother." Giovanni admitted, emotion seeping through the rough cracks in his voice.

Tristan's lips, which were still regaining their color, quirked up at the side. The movement was a bit slow, but he had just come back to life. Not one of us knew how long it would take him to recover fully.

"I did, didn't I?"

His voice was hoarse, and upon hearing it's rasp Holly turned and snatched up one of the blood bags from the cooler Asher had placed on the table. My mouth watered as the scent hit the air, rich and sweet in a way that reminded me of dark chocolate and nectarines. It was easy to ignore the pull to feed when Tristan's eyes swept over

Giovanni and Holly, finally coming to a rest on me.

"My Queen."

Those were his last words-the very ones he uttered as his life slipped through my fingers.

"You sacrificed yourself for me. Why would you do that?" As hard as it was to force the words out, I needed to know.

As his eyes softened, I swore I saw the ice that encased them thaw ever so slightly.

“You know why.” He replied.

“Don’t tell me it’s because I’m your Queen, because that’s bullshit. You knew Freya’s spell would break. Why did you do it?”

He spoke slowly at first, every word carefully chosen in the way that only Tristan could truly master. I wanted to believe it was the acceptance in my eyes and in Holly’s that gave him the confidence to speak freely, to let go of the restraints that held him back.

“I wanted to claim you in the beginning. You were beautiful and powerful, the perfect weapon. I never thought that I’d grow to love you, but I did. It was my mistake believing there was only one type of love. You made me realize there wasn’t one, but many. You are a force of nature, something this world has needed for centuries. Every challenge you’ve faced, you met it head on. You are strong, compassionate, and care for people you don’t even know. Someone needed to die for you to continue the work you started. It couldn’t be Asher. His death would’ve destroyed you. Mine, on the other hand, you would have survived.

I love you, Lola, but not in the way I always thought. Not in the way that I love your sister. I know something happened between you two, and I won’t ask you to let that go, but I will ask you for something else. I ask you for your blessing.”

Holly’s eyes fell shut, her lower lip quivering as she slowly sucked in a stream of air. Despite the way my heart reached out for her, I kept my eyes and attention on Tristan. I forgave Holly for her betrayal, but I wasn’t sure if I could ever trust her again. I wasn’t sure what the future would look like between me and her.

“Stop. Please, don’t ask for this. You have no idea what I’ve done. I’m not-I’m not good, and you deserve good.” She whispered, carefully extracting her hand from his. “Do you want to know what I did? I sold her out, Tristan. I’m the reason all of this happened.”

There was a decision before me, a chance to control what path two of the most important people in my life descended down. I held their hearts in my hands, and that kind of power should’ve felt good, but it didn’t. It felt heavy, too heavy.

I’d made up my mind. Their future would be theirs to shape.

“There isn’t a person in this world that’s purely good, Holly. You made a mistake and people were hurt, but none of us would be here without you. You lost your mother and your sister tonight. I think you’ve been punished enough. I forgave you for your mistake. The only one left to forgive you is yourself.”

Since having Holly walk into my life, I became used to her shy and reserved nature.

Like Tristan, there was always this part of her that was closed off, hidden from the world. Whether it was the tears brimming in her eyes or the way they reminded me of a diamond cracked in two, I realized that part of her was long gone.

With one final squeeze to Tristan's hand, I gave him a swift peck to the cheek and a smile that conveyed my answer.

"Be happy, Tristan. You both deserve it."

The time had come for me to leave, to let the two of them work things out amongst themselves. I turned and locked eyes with Asher, taking him in inch by inch. Holly and Tristan would build the future they wanted, whether it be together or alone.

As for me, I was looking at my future. For once, I couldn't wait to see what it held.

"Lola—"Holly's interruption came at a surprise, but with one glance it was clear she hadn't forgiven herself, even with my blessing.

"We all have light and dark in us, Holly. It doesn't matter if we get lost on the wrong path. The light is always out there, and it always forgives."

I sank into my mate's arms and let him lead us from the house. Breyona, my best-friend and protector, and Giovanni, my second-in-command, followed close behind.

Stepping outside, where dusk painted the sky in an alluring mixture of powder and navy blues, we met up with the others. There were still hints of carnage here and there, pieces of heartbreak and loss, wounds that would never truly heal. The dead were gone from this world, and regardless of what side they resided on, they would be missed.

As the ones left behind, it was our responsibility to make sure no one else followed.

Mason and Clara approached. The curvy witch had a cut along her forehead, it's blood long dried. Mason, the only other best-friend I'd ever known, had a burn wound down his arm that was slowly on the mend.

Ember and Brandon, along with Tessa and

Zeke, followed suit. They too had their own wounds, but nothing that wouldn't heal with time and care.

The ten of us stood there in silence, basking in the quiet that came after a long battle. As much as I wanted to relish this until the sun began rise and the early morning mist crept along the forest floor, I couldn't.

I took a deep breath, holding it for ten seconds before slowly letting it out. All eyes, whether they were Vampire, Werewolf, or Witch, fell on me. For the first time in my life, I didn't buckle under the pressure.

"We have work to do."

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Chapter 242

Epilogue

Six Months Later

"Does this ever get easier?" I groaned, swiping a hand over my forehead. A thin sheen of sweat clung to my skin, running from temple to temple.

There wasn't one specific person I spoke to, rather the entirety of my friends and family that had gathered for this historical event. Naturally, my eyes strayed to my mate, the beacon that never once failed to lead me through the dark.

His lips quirked up at the side, eyes sparkling with significantly less shadows than before. He was slowly learning to forgive himself for the death's of our pack members. "I wish I could say it does, but I'd be lying."

Zeke let out a cheeky snort. "Way to make her feel confident. You've got this, Lola. You're a natural."

Breyona peeked her head from around Giovanni's massive shoulder. "Besides, if you choke you can always work a little magic and make everyone forget about it."

"Hah! With my luck I'll get a little too magic happy and make the whole pack forget about me." A genuine chuckle slid past my lips as my friends continued with their playful banter. I was quickly pulled into the arms of my mate, whose embrace

I accepted with a blissful sigh.

His lips skimmed my ear, brewing all sorts of thoughts that were not suited for tonight's events. "Zeke's right, though.

You were meant for this. You won't choke.

After all, look at all you've accomplished."

I placed my hand against his taut chest, tapping the thick pad of muscle I felt just below his shirt. "All that we've accomplished." I corrected him. "I would've never been able to do this without you."

Asher looked as stunning as ever, playing the part of Alpha to near perfection. He, like the rest of us, were dressed in a mixture of both professional and casual attire. While we needed to step into our roles tonight, we also needed to present an air of comfort and unity to make the

Witches and Vampire's in audience feel right at home.

After all, it wasn't just a few Witches and Vampire's in audience. 1

It was all of them. Well, almost all. Those who wanted to voice their opinions, lend their hand in shaping this new future that would cater to us all, stood in attendance.

Truthfully, I couldn't have done any of it without the help of two unlikely allies.

"I swear, that child gets all her sass from you, Ember. Angelica used to be a sweet, docile thing before you got to her." Tessa scolded her sister as the two of them entered the room.

Ember kicked the door shut behind her with the sharp heel of her boot, and began to take in the contents of the room with a hand propped on her hip. A quick flick of her eyes over the velvet furniture, hand-woven rugs, and paintings hung in golden frames, was all she needed before cocking a sculpted eyebrow at her sister.

"Please, do you even know Angelica?"

"She's never been sweet or docile. The kids a menace." Ember exclaimed with a suspicious amount of warmth to her voice. Paired with the cocky tilt to her lips one might assume she almost liked Angelica.

"She's not the only menace I know."

Tessa shot back, not an ounce of venom in her voice. Her eyes skimmed the room seconds later. She let out a small sound of appreciation. "This place is beautiful."

The room we stood in was one of many at the Seven Springs Country Club. While everything was a bit extravagant for my tastes, it was the only place big enough to hold a meeting this size. Compared to the pack-wide announcement we had well over a year ago, revealing the truth about our alliance with the Vampire's, this was the biggest event our kind has ever held.

I approached the twins with radiant warmth. Six months ago, I had a long list of suspicions and doubts but one-by-one these girls managed to cross them all off.

We weren't yet best-friends, but I could see the road we walked down and knew that with time and patience, I'd eventually trust these two with more than just my life.

"I'm so glad you two made it in time." I beamed, truly relieved.

Ember sniffed, flipping her thick mane of fire-kissed hair over her shoulder. "Well, as the ambassador's of the Witch community we couldn't very well miss tonight, could we?" 1

A laugh rumbled in my chest. Even though she'd sooner lock herself in a dark room with Brandon than admit it (her words, not mine), I knew she was becoming just as fond of me as I was of her.

Tessa's soft eyebrows matched that of her smile. Ever the diplomatic twin, she reached out and grabbed my hand, giving it a quick squeeze. "We wouldn't miss this for the world."

Before the conversation could truly take off, the door opened once more. Asher's

Beta, who had been on leave these past six months doting on his pregnant mate, peeked his head into the room.

"It's show time folks." He drawled, flashing me a gruff smile as though he could see the raw nerves throbbing beneath my veins.

I let out a sharp breath and shook out my hands, visualizing the stress leaving my body in heavy waves. It would never cease to amaze me how I'd rather be neck-deep in battle than speak in front of a crowd.

But hey, we all had our weaknesses.

Asher and I stepped out into the hall, our entourage following closely behind. It was there, beneath the sloped ceilings and crystal chandeliers that we met up with Tristan and Holly.

Tristan, who I had recently denounced as my first-in-command, greeted me with a warm smile. Seeing as he and my sister were now an item, I figured I should no longer come as his first priority.

Holly was still a Princess, after all. And a

Princess deserved a mate that would look after her and her alone. Which is exactly why I promoted Tristan to Head of the Royal Guard. Only instead of protecting me with his life, he'd protect my sister.

The two of them looked the part. Tristan, with his navy button down and dark slacks, matched the sparkly cocktail dress Holly had on, one that showed her lithe figure and subtle curves.

“Are you ready for this?” She asked in her soft, melodic voice.

After spending the last six months with an actual therapist, she had grown in strength. Her entire demeanor had changed, and it was truly a sight to see. She no longer hid from the world and had even found friendship in Clara.

I bumped my elbow into hers, returning the friendly smile she flashed me. “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“She’s going to do amazing, and she knows it. Doesn’t hurt that she has a bunch of Witches, Vampire’s,

Werewolves, an Alpha, and a Princess backing her up.” Clara chimed in, a vision in her sea foam maxi dress. When paired with her dark skin and curly hair, it made her look she’d emerged from the very depths of the ocean.

Mason, with his matching button down, had an arm wrapped around her waist.

The haunted light that came with losing your fated mate was nowhere to be seen.

In fact, he looked more at ease than anyone else here. Catching my eye, his lips quirked up in his usual cheeky grin, one I couldn’t help but return.

“I believe it’s time. Unless, you want to be late to your own event.” Tristan said smoothly, tilting his head towards

Asher’s Beta, who waited by a set of towering double doors.

Doors that would lead outside, to the massive crowd I knew was waiting.

Nothing could’ve prepared me for how many heads there were. It was all too easy to see them all considering we had to carve a path through the crowd to make it to the very center of the field.

Technically, the neatly trimmed grass that surrounded us was the country club’s golf course. All twenty–seven holes were packed with people. Since things were still a bit rocky, the crowd was divided by species, each cluster set with their own handful of guards for protection purposes.

It was our goal that someday the crowd merge as one.

Asher and I led the way, following a path of silver silk laid on the ground to the very center of the field. Since it was the dead of night, lamp posts wrapped in ivy sat scattered throughout the grass.

Behind us was Holly and Tristan, followed by Breyona and Giovanni, Zeke and Tessa, and then the others.

There was no stage waiting for us. I didn't want to stand above the masses, to look down on them as though they were beneath us all. What I wanted was for them to see that regardless of species, we were all equals here.

Several feet in the air was a large screen that would soon feature all of our faces.

The speakers scattered throughout the entirety of the golf course would ensure our voices were heard far and wide.

My skin prickled from the sheer number of eyes turned our way. There was always the risk of this ending badly, but surrounding ourselves with an army of armed guards would not support the idea that this meeting was to discuss terms of peace and unity.

Each one of us had a head set with a microphone that would cast our voices across the sea of people. There wasn't a single one of us more important than the next, and tonight would prove that. Every voice, every idea, every suggestion, would all be heard.

Squaring my shoulders, Asher and I led the others into the circular clearing where finally, history would be made.

Asher and I stood front and center, while the others formed a half circle around us.

For several minutes, chatter rippled throughout the crowd. Waves were thrown left and right, which we reciprocated with equal enthusiasm. Once the excitement died down, I spotted an opening and promptly took advantage of it.

"Welcome, everyone. We cannot thank you all enough for coming here tonight." I said warmly, sweeping my arms out at my sides.

The heat that was Asher's presence loomed over my shoulder. I craned my head to look up at him, flashing him an intimate smile as he stepped forward and bellowed his own welcome.

"Never before has an Alpha had the honor of welcoming so many into his pack. No matter where the future might take us, this is a moment I will not forget.

Everyone here, regardless of your background, will be treated with the same respect as a pack member. Should any issues arise, I ask that you come directly to me. Now, with

that out of the way, I'm going to let my incredible mate, and Queen to quite a few of you, take the stage.

Wiping my sweaty palms on my dress, I took a deep breath and let my thoughts and emotions flow freely.

"Today is the first day we work towards the future—a future that not only see's all three of our species as equals, but as allies, as friends. Many injustices have been committed against your kinds, against Vampire's and Witches', and as much as I wish I could, I cannot erase the past. What I can do is promise that tonight it ends." I bellowed. 2

I paced the length of the circle marked as our stage, looking each and every person in the audience in the eye, taking them all in and seeing them for who they truly were. The camera projecting our faces onto the big screen swiveled as I moved. Vampire's stared out at me, both dark and pale skinned. Witches, with eyes sparkling with magic, gifted me their full attention. Werewolves, wearing various levels of shock on their faces, watched with rapt interest.

"As you all can see, my friends and I here have many differences. We come from different backgrounds and have endured a wide array of things, but not one of us is more deserving of compassion and respect than the next. I don't expect this to be easy. In fact, I expect it to be the hardest thing I've ever done, but I won't give up. I will earn your trust every single day that I choose to fight for you, and for your right to live in the way that you see fit."

An eruption of cheers spouted from all sides, from all corners of the field. It rippled over each and every one of us, thickening the air with something sweet -something that felt an awful lot like hope. As it died down, I addressed the crowd a third time.

"Love, no matter it's source, is always welcome. Without further ado, I'd like to introduce you all to my friends. Hear their voices, their stories, and know that each and every one of us are on your side."

I retreated into Asher's arms, winding our fingers together as Holly and Tristan took center stage.

Pride swelled in my chest as my once timid little sister spoke to a crowd of thousands. With her chin held high, Holly told her story, leaving nothing out. Afterwards, an eruption of cheers sounded. Next came Tristan, who earned every single shout, clap, cheer, from the Vampire's in the crowd.

Breyona and Giovanni came next. My best -friend spoke with such emotion, unraveling the secrets behind what was once a forbidden love. There wasn't a single dry eye in the crowd. After Giovanni's turn, it was time for Tessa and

Zeke to take the stand.

One-by-one, my friends shared their stories, the mistakes that they've made along the way and the displays of bravery they showed that ultimately led us to where we were today. Every single emotion was evoked until both the sharp sting of grief, and the warmth that was joy, rippled amongst the crowd.

As each one finished, they took a stand beside the other, until we were all side-by-side.

"To the future..." I shouted, thrusting my fist into the air. "...where every story matters—where every story will be heard."

A split second of silence rang out before the explosion that was thousands of Vampire's, Witches', and Werewolves' cheering. One-by-one, their fists were raised, kissing the stars and the moon that looked down on us all.

And finally, history was made.

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 243

Chapter 243

Lola & Asher

One Year Later

It was hard to believe how much time had passed, even as I stood at my own wedding reception, surrounded by the people I loved most in this world.

So much had changed in three hundred and sixty five days, and it wasn't just my marital status. There had been some uprising within the other packs in the country, but with Zeke as an ally and assuming leadership over Bran's pack, they were easy to defend ourselves against.

The packs that wanted nothing to do with this new world closed themselves off, shutting their gates and increasing their security even though we had no intention on retaliating. It would take time before those packs changed their ways of thinking, and despite what they believed, violence was not the answer.

Rather than wage war, we focused on our own lands and doing all that we could to welcome any Vampire or Witch that needed a place to call home. Towns similar to the Vampire's safe haven were currently being built on neutral territory.

Never in a million years could I have guessed the identity of the Vampire spearheading the entire thing, but I was slowly learning to love surprises.

Speaking of which-

“Well, look at this. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you look more like a Queen.”

Deacon’s grizzly laugh rumbled throughout the massive tent my reception party was being held under. He emerged through the crowd of

Werewolves, Vampire’s and Witches that attended. The mixture of our kind brought a lightness to everyone’s hearts. that had Asher and I grinning at one another throughout the night. “Spence and Dina wanted to make it, but their little one is still learning to control his blood lust. Won’t be safe to have him around for at least another six months.”

“It’s not a problem. They’re welcome over as soon as their boy is able. I’m looking forward to meeting him. He’ll have all the support he needs when he’s finally of shifting age.” I replied.

Wrapped around Deacon, wearing a floor- length gown of maroon silk, was his mate Bridgette. She quickly winked in my direction before scoffing at my brute of an Uncle. The two would pick at one another relentlessly, but the love and adoration between them was all too obvious.

“I disagree completely. You saw her put that force field over our town last year.

Now that’s what I call a Queen.” Her giggle was warm and airy. She placed her hand on my arm and said, “You look gorgeous, Lola. The gown is incredible.”

“Asher insisted on having it custom made. In fact, he insisted on spending the most amount of money he could get away with.” I commented dryly, glancing at the man in question.

“Lucky he has such good taste then.” Bridgette winked.

A voice sounded to the far left, beside the bride and groom’s table that Asher and I sat at. It brought a grin to my face, filling my chest with unimaginable warmth. Tonight was easily one of the best night’s of my life, and it was partially because of this person.

“Oh, don’t let that brooding Alpha tell you he planned this get together. He might’ve signed the checks, but the masterpiece surrounding you was a team effort.” Grandma’s huff was nothing short of stern, but the soft tilt to her features exuded playfulness. “If we let these brutes have their way, they’d likely host a fighting ring right here on the dance floor.”

She quickly wrapped me in her arms, whispering her congratulations in my ear before moving onto Asher. Since getting out of the hospital a few months ago,

Grandma had been even more affectionate with Asher than usual. I liked to think it was her way of reminding him he wasn't to blame, and despite the stoic way he held himself, I knew Asher enjoyed the affection. 2

"Now that sounds fun. Wouldn't mind duking it out a round or two. Someone has to teach these young pups how to hold their own." My Dad's voice came next, still just as raspy but lighter than ever before.

Deacon's laughter was a sonic boom that made the people closest to us jump. While it was startling at first, there was something infectious about it. Within seconds, we were laughing along side him.

"Can't say I'd mind knocking some heads." Deacon said, sharing a grin with my Dad.

"Good to know it's not just the Werewolves that can be brutes." Flora's soft and whimsical voice trickled through the crowd.

She waddled her way past the other party -goers, her stomach round and swollen from the life she carried. In her hands was two plates stacked with pastries and various finger foods. Upon seeing her,

Dad rushed to her side to take the plates from her arms. There was an adorable blush that stained her cheeks when she realized everyone was looking her way. 5

Claire, Asher's mother, appeared from the woodworks. She and Flora had become close friends over the past year.

Between Claire and I, we'd been there throughout the entirety of Flora's pregnancy. It was the least I could do considering my little sister was a short two months away from being born.

I was pulled into Asher's arms, missing the playful jab Deacon tossed back at Flora that had everyone breaking into laughter. Everyone seemed to be holding their own conversations, jumping back and forth whenever someone poked fun at another. It was chaotic in the best way possible, and I enjoyed taking a step back to watch the madness unfold.

Claire and Bridgette were holding their own conversations when I caught Flora's eye. As I took her in, noting the mossy gown that hugged her body and showed off every inch of her rounded belly, I decided that pregnancy suited her.

Asher's silken lips skimmed my temple before moving to whisper in my ear.

"Do you regret it?"

Dad approached Flora from behind, stopping to rest his chin on the top of her head. His arms slid around her waist, his hands coming to rest on her swollen stomach. There was this dreamy look on my Dad's face that I'd never seen before.

The euphoria it filled me with was indescribable.

As I looked over her pregnant belly, thinking about the life my magic helped create, I realized I already had my answer.

"Not one bit."

Little did I know that nine months later, I'd be welcoming my own child into the world.

Two Years Later 5

"I'm going to kill him." I hissed, clenching my teeth as another jolt of pain wracked my insides.

I'd suffered through evil in many forms, became a Luna and a Queen, but it was this that threatened to take me out. The pain of this little gremlin in my stomach, kicking and fighting to make her grand entrance into the world, was nothing short of excruciating.

If it wasn't for Holly and Breyona, I'd be waddling my way to the hospital alone.

"It'll be okay. It'll all be okay." Holly, ever the peacekeeper, said soothingly.

She had her arm wound around my waist as she supported my right side. I couldn't tell if the words were to calm me or to calm herself.

Breyona, who supported my left, barked out a laugh. "I'll help you kill him."

Together, they hoisted me into the van, easing me into the seat. Between my swollen ankles and the contractions, I could barely move without writhing in pain.

"Help me and I'll make you Alpha." I groaned, falling back onto the seat.

There was a handful of heartbeats in between each contraction, and that number was quickly dwindling as they grew closer and closer together. Breyona started sucking in slow breaths, puffing them out in awkward patters that she expected my agony riddled mind to follow.

She'd been studying childbirth the last six months and while I absolutely loved her for it, I had to resist the heinous urge to clamp my hands over her mouth to stop the huffing and puffing.

“Drive faster!” I howled at Giovanni, who clenched the steering wheel so tightly his tanned skin turned white.

The stronger the pain became, the more time seemed to slip through my fingers. Looking back, the moments leading up to giving birth would come in sporadic flashes. Holly, sitting at my right, dabbing my sweaty forehead with a damp wash cloth. Breyona, whispering words of encouragement to remind me what a bad bitch I was. Her words not mine.

And finally, the rage I felt towards Asher because he and Zeke chose this moment to go and visit the council of witches elected to oversee the magical community, just two towns over.

In his defense, he didn't know my water would break just six hours after his departure, but when you're in the middle of contractions those details seem to slip through the cracks.

It wasn't until I was in a birthing room at the hospital, with no less than a dozen staff members flitting about, that Asher tore through the door. From where I laid in bed, snarling at anyone who came too close, I could see the line of visitors piling up just outside the room.

At the front of the crowd was Dad, Flora, and their daughter, Penelope. Grandma stood at their side, flanked by Asher's parents, Zeke, Tessa, Brandon, Ember, Tristan, Mason, and Clara. The others at their back were hospital staff or overly excited pack members hoping for a glimpse at the future Alpha or Luna.

“You're late!” I meant to snarl the words at Asher, to convey how furious I was, but a vicious contraction tore through me so sharply that the words came out in an agonized yelp.

Asher skidded to a stop at my side, wasting no time as he smoothed the hair away from my face. There was pain burning in his eyes, but it was overshadowed with awe and the innocent kind of joy that came with watching your child come into the world.

His hand found mine, toying with the rings on my left hand. He made no mention of how drenched in sweat I was, and instead whispered in my ear.

“You're absolutely beautiful.”

Breyona leaned over the side of the bed, forcing a straw into my mouth. Her stern expression told me to drink, and despite the pain tearing up my spine, I obliged.

Only she and Holly were permitted in the room considering they were the only two

I'd allow near me. Call it instincts or the horrors of the past, but some animalistic part of me was already attached to this child and skeptical of anyone who tried to come close.

"I'm so sorry, baby. We got here as quick as we could. Fuck, I'm glad we got here when we did." He panted, still drool worthy with his hair disheveled and hospital scrubs hanging off his muscular form.

If I wasn't in such pain, I would've peed myself laughing when Asher, naked as the day he was born, rushed into the room.

The doctor, a kind woman whose name

I'd already forgotten, guided my feet onto this metal contraption that left me wide and very much exposed to the entire room. She rolled a stool over and situated herself front and center stage.

With every contraction, I unleashed my full strength on Asher's hand, spitting and snarling as the pain surpassed any and all thresholds. My incredible mate didn't balk, not even once. Through every one of my death grips, he murmured words of encouragement and reminded me that even covered in sweat and gasping for breath, I was the thing he treasured most.

"Alright, Luna. Are you ready to push?" The doctor asked, peering up from between my legs.

I bit back a snarl. "Do I have a choice?"

"No, you do not." She said, though not unkindly. "With that, lets begin."

The doctor began counting softly, instructing me when to push and how hard. The nurses, who kept a healthy distance, kept a monitor on my vitals. During contractions, they'd gone over breathing techniques and how I should employ them as I pushed. At first, I hadn't been paying much attention, but I guess my brain stored the information somewhere because the second I began pushing, all of their tips rushed to the surface.

Pain, so much pain that it shouldn't have been possible, drilled it's way through my body, carving a path that ended at the junction where my legs met. My own voice rang in my ears, loud and shrill, higher than I'd ever heard it before.

"Fuck, I'd kill for some painkillers." I cried out, but it was useless. Morphine and epidurals were meant for humans, not werewolves.

In any other situation, I would've forced my magic into reality, carving my pain out of existence, but since becoming pregnant my magic had been...wonky, to say the least.

Asher, doing what he could, attempted to distract me.

“Do you still think it’s a girl?” He asked.

We hadn’t gone through with a gender reveal. Both of us wanted to be surprised.

Gritting my teeth, I answered with utmost certainty. “It is.”

The lights in the hospital room began to flicker. Within seconds, the nurses started chattering nervously, their eyes flitting to the corners of the room. In the midst of the agony of my daughter clawing her way into the world, I noticed the shadows that had slithered into view.

They clung to the outskirts of the room, very much visible as they closed in.

Their attention wasn’t on me, but on the sharp squeal that came from between my legs as I pushed one final time and forced our child into the world.

“She’s so beautiful.” Breyona hiccupped; her cheeks red as tears streamed down her face. “She has your hair, Lola. A full head of it.”

“It’s a girl?” I gasped, locking eyes with Asher.

My mate stared at the small bundle swathed in a little pink blanket with nothing short of awe, his eyes glossy and flecked with brilliant gold.

The doctor cradled our daughter, the future of our pack, in her arms before passing her over to a nurse. My heart stuttered as I reached out for my daughter, but before I could utter a command, the doctor was once again in between my legs.

A sharp slash of pain split my stomach in two, traveling down, down, down. It felt like a contraction, only worse. That wasn’t possible, though. It couldn’t be. The shadows hadn’t left yet. They were still there, creeping closer as they watched with silent interest.

“Oh, fuck. What’s happening?” I cried out, frantically looking Breyona and Holly.

Holly’s face paled as she stood behind the doctor, peeking over her shoulder. When Breyona joined her, I thought my friend might faint.

“Oh my goddess…” Breyona gasped.

Holly’s eyes flickered up to my own.

You’re not done yet, Lola. There’s another coming.” 1

Seconds and minutes bled into one cacophony of pain. Voices merged into one, drowned out by the screams that I still couldn’t quite believe were coming from me. It could’ve been hours that passed for all I knew.

When a second wail hit the air, I was completely void of energy, fighting sleep. with every breath I forced from my lungs.

The shadows had retreated to the corners of the room, whispering in feverish voices that I only managed to catch snippets of.

The doctor raised her head, her eyes watering as a smile graced her lips.

“Congratulation’s, Alpha and Luna. It’s a boy.”

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 244

Chapter 244

Holly and Tristan

Three Years Later – Holly’s P.O.V.

The breeze was blissfully cold against my skin, the sunlight a slight tingle that rippled over my exposed arms and shoulders.

Winter was approaching, tainting the air with its crisp scent. No matter how much

I ventured outdoors and basked in the sunlight, I wasn’t sure I’d ever get enough. Even though I burned easily- thank you, Vampire genetics-it was a wonderful taste of freedom that I’d never take for granted.

The shrill screams of children playing pierced my ears. I didn’t find it irksome the way some of the parents here did.

Despite how loud they were, their wails were full of joy and innocence that could never be replicated or replaced.

I looked up from the stack of papers in my hands, focusing on the children racing across the mulch just ten feet away. The tiny font had been giving me a headache for the past two hours now.

“Honey, you need to stop and tie your shoe! You’re going to trip and fall.” The woman on the bench beside me shouted, wrapping her pea coat tighter around her waist when a breeze traveled through.

A little girl with sable pigtails halted in her tracks, her head turned in the direction of the woman’s voice. She got down on one knee, and tied the laces of her sparkly tennis shoes before taking off towards the monkey bars.

Someday soon, Lola's twin's would be running around this very playground. Just last month we'd all gathered for their first birthday. A daydream began to form in my head, painting an idyllic picture that felt like it belonged to some other girl and not myself. a

It wasn't just Lola's twins running amok, climbing the jungle gym to race down the spiral slide. They were accompanied by another child, a little girl with Tristan's golden hair and my pale eyes.

I shook my head, clearing the image from my mind. No matter how many therapy sessions I attended, there was this cloud of guilt that followed me, looming over my head and blotting out the sunlight.

Lola deserved her happily ever after. She'd fought tooth and nail for it. I didn't fight for anything, yet here I was with a wonderful mate and a future ripe for the taking.

I wasn't entirely sure I deserved any of it.

Another hour passed before the woman stood from the bench and corralled the little girl into their arms. Now alone, I basked in the warmth that kissed my skin, wishing it would ease the ball of nerves in my stomach.

I glared at the stack of papers on my lap and sighed heavily. These would have to be dealt with. There was no one else to pass them off on, unfortunately.

A shadow passed in front of my face, erasing the sun from view. I craned my head up to see Clara standing over me, a hand propped on her curvy hip. Her lips were tilted in a knowing smile.

"How can someone look so miserable on a day like this?" She drawled before plopping down beside me.

"Hah." I laughed, then held the stack of paperwork out for her to see. "This is how."

Another breeze kicked up, whipping my hair around my shoulders. Clara's curls bounced happily. Having straight, fine hair was becoming a curse all on its own.

Clara winced. "Ouch. Yeah, that doesn't look like fun. What's it for?"

Shifting on the bench, I passed her the stack of papers. Her eyes skimmed over the words several times. I couldn't blame her for not figuring it out quite yet. The words printed were long and monotonous, drawn up by a lawyer with a far better education than I'd ever received.

After a few seconds, I lifted my hand and tapped on a symbol at the top of the first page. It was a medieval-looking crest with a raven at its center, crossed by a sword and a spear. Clara's eyes flickered over the coat of arms before gasping excitedly.

“No way! It’s actually done being built?” She exclaimed, her lips pulling back into a smile. The way she grabbed my hands. and squealed helped ease the ball of anxiety in my stomach, but only slightly. I still had this mountain of paperwork to deal with.

The Magisterium, as Tristan and I named it, was the world’s first ever academy for the magical arts. When I presented the idea to Lola, she was absolutely ecstatic. I hadn’t wanted to put more on her plate, so I told her I’d take [search control](#) of the project. She and Asher gave me

everything I could’ve ever needed to kick start the thing.

The Academy was now finished being built, and with its shiny new halls and state of the art classrooms, the doubts began trickling in.

“It is, but we’ve still got a long way to go before the place is up and running.” I murmured with a heavy sigh. Taking the paperwork from Clara’s hands, I stared down at the mess of permits, contracts, and employment applications.

Clara’s features softened with concern.

She pursed her lips, placing a hand on my shoulder to snare my attention. “Hey, what’s wrong? You should be excited. This is everything you’ve worked for.”

“It is...” I trailed off, biting the inside of my cheek. “I-I just don’t know what I’m doing anymore. I mean, seriously. I’m not equipped to teach. I barely know enough about my own magic. This was my idea, but now that it’s complete, I have no clue what to do next.”

“You know, I’d love a teaching position myself.” Clara said, quickly trailing off. She hummed thoughtfully, her eyes flicking over the paper and the stack of applications I had to deal with.

Startling me, she squealed and jumped up from the bench. Her hands were on my shoulders before I could think to react.

There was a cheeky grin on her face, and a strange light in her eyes that I wanted to uncover.

“What is it?” I asked, a hint of skepticism bleeding into my voice.

“I have the perfect idea on what you can do.” She exuded smugness, which only made my curiosity worsen. More than anything, I wanted answers on what to do next- on what direction to take my life in.

I sat up straighter, holding back the desperation that swelled in my voice. ”

Well, what is it?"

"How does Headmistress Holly sound?" She asked, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

??

It was hard to believe that was one year ago, but as I walk down the main hall of the Magisterium, my heels clicking against the freshly steamed tile, I

couldn't imagine myself anywhere else.

The girl who lacked confidence, who was afraid of the world and all it had to offer, was slowly dwindling away with each day that passed. I still spoke with my therapist, but it was now on an as needed basis.

This entire time, I had a support system. I'd been too wrapped up in my head, too angry at the mistakes I made in the past, to dare reach out and claim it.

"Headmistress." Carl, the janitor, said warmly.

Smoothing the cobalt blazer I wore, the one with our crest embroidered on the pocket, I returned his smile. "Good morning, Carl. Ready for the new school year?"

"Oh, I'm ready. These little hellions won't get me this year." He laughed, pulling out a small fire extinguisher from his cleaning cart.

As hard as I tried to stifle my laugh, it slipped out without warning. "I promise you, there won't be a repeat of last year. Regardless, I'm glad you came prepared."

Poor Carl was the target of a fiery mishap last year from one of our younger elementals. The girl hadn't meant to hit him in the shoulder, but his clothes went up in flame, nonetheless. Thankfully, after a few afterschool training sessions, there were no further incidents.

"No worries, Headmistress. They're young and bound to make a mistake or twelve before getting it right." Carl winked and continued down the hall.

He was such a good sport, and all too understanding with the witches at the Academy. The work Lola and Asher was doing was slowly paying off. There were significantly less issues this year than ever before, and the werewolves in this pack were slowly warming up to the idea of coexisting.

I continued on my warpath of going over this year's roster. Listed on the papers I held in my hand were the students and their respective classes. Alongside their individual subjects were the teachers that taught them.

If only I'd known that becoming Headmistress meant I'd eat, sleep, and breathe paperwork, I might've not taken Clara's suggestion so seriously,

Speaking of Clara, I looked down at the mess of papers in my hands, searching for the number to her classroom. After finding it on page three, I traveled down the length of the hall which veered to the left to end in a large square. There was an additional corridor down the center that led to my personal office, which is where

I'd retreat afterwards before heading home to Tristan.

He'd been a bit disgruntled leaving my side whenever I went to the Academy, but I was slowly learning to control my magic and could handle myself for the few hours I was away. Thanks to Breyona, our resident librarian, I now had more texts than ever on blood-magic. My sister's best-friend had traveled half the country so far, discovering hidden texts and manuals on different kinds of magic.

She's one of the many things keeping this place together, and even volunteer's her time at our second location, which opened just this year.

I peeked my head in Clara's classroom and was greeted by a wave of laughter and cheers. With Asher and Lola funding the place, we had enough money to build large classrooms full of color. The beanbag chairs and rolling tables were anything but conventional, but the children loved them.

Crystal sun catchers hung from the ceiling, casting rainbows along the floor. That was a personal touch of Clara's, one some of the other professors replicated.

Clara stood at the front of the class room, swiping a stick of chalk over the blackboard. As I entered the room, effectively stealing the attention of her class, a grin swelled on her face. The ankle length skirt she wore swished in a sea of pattern and color, matching her tank top and the lilac eyeshadow she painted on her lids.

"Well if it isn't our wonderful Headmistress. Say hello everybody!"

Many of the budding witches cupped their hands over their mouth to shout, while others were a bit more reserved. A chorus of 'Hello, Headmistress' rang out into the room.

"Hello, everyone. Are you all excited for the start of the school year?" I asked, sweeping my eyes over nearly a dozen heads.

The girls in the class were virtually all of the same age. Here at the Magisterium, we grouped classes based on skill level. All that mattered was that these young pupils were beginners. At the end of their third year, they'd be evaluated and sorted based on their individual magical callings.

After their excited string of 'yes's' died down, I turned to Clara and waved the roster sheet that I held in my hand.

"Oh, new students. Let me see!" She chirped, ushering me over to her desk. Plucking the paper from my hands, she glanced up at her class. "Girls, chat amongst yourselves while the

Headmistress and I go over this year's roster. Oh, and no magic."

Clara's lips twitched as she looked up at a little girl with chubby cheeks and golden hair. Locking eyes with her she shouted, " That especially goes for you, Angelica!"

The little girl in question nodded rapidly, her lips threaded in a thin line. As soon as Clara's head was turned, her eyes scanning the class roster, Angelica spread her arms and unleashed a cloud of crystalline butterflies that sparkled as they crossed into the beams of sunlight permeating the room.

Before I could think to say anything, a small hand appeared at my waist. The little witch it belonged to had dark skin. and a head of curly hair. She tugged the front of my blazer to get my attention.

"What's her name?" The little girl asked, eyes bright with curiosity.

It was a bit odd, but I ignored the twinge and replied, "You know who I am, silly. My name's Holly.

The girl shook her head, her curls bouncing around her shoulders. Clara looked up from the roster and tilted her head. We shared a confused, but curious look before the girl's hand slid from the hem of my blazer and came to rest on my stomach.

"No, Headmistress. I'm talking about the baby."

Read Novel Alpha Asher Novel [by Jane Doe] Chapter 245

Chapter 245

Clara & Mason

Four Years Later Clara's P.O.V.

"Don't you dare, little witch." Mason warned in a low voice.

A shiver worked its way down my spine when he placed his hand against my back. Even through the thin fabric of the dress I wore, I could feel the heat he exuded. One of the first things I'd learned about Werewolves was that they ran hot.

Despite how hard I tried, a smile worked its way onto my face. My chest quite literally ached with the urge to cackle, but I couldn't help it. It's not my fault Tristan's expression was absolutely to die for. Even Lola was having a hard time containing herself, snickering behind her hand as she watched the scene unfold.

Tristan had been locked in place for the last minute in a half, staring at Holly like she had grown three extra heads. No one could blame the poor guy considering he was the only one who didn't know his mate was pregnant. 2

"You're pregnant." He repeated for the thirteenth time.

A laugh exploded from my mouth seconds before Mason wrapped his arms around me and hauled me into his arms. I wriggled against his ironclad hold, knowing I stood no chance fighting my way out of his grasp.

Good thing I didn't need strength to overpower him.

I sent a small jolt of magic crackling down my skin, just enough to provoke a reaction. Since Holly and Tristan were being all lovey dovey, wrapped in each other's arms, the only ones left to notice were Lola and Asher.

"You little cheater, using your magic against me." Mason chuckled in my ear, his voice simultaneously rough and silky. There was a softness to it that stirred the butterflies camping out in my stomach.

Dancing out of his grasp, I wiggled my fingers at him. There was a playful tilt to his lips, that when paired with the beard he'd been growing, was devastatingly handsome. His eyes twinkled as he stalked towards me, both emerald and brown depending on the source of lighting.

There was once a time where that playfulness was nonexistent, where his carefree nature was an act he put on for the world. Despite how much Lola and Breyona cared about him, they never truly realized how much he was suffering inside.

I didn't either. Not for awhile, anyway.

Mason's arms slid around my waist. It didn't take much to send my mind drifting back into the past, to how our relationship first started. Admittedly, I'd gotten on his nerves, but I liked to think that he needed the challenge. More than once we teetered on the verge of enemies, but for the most part, we lingered on the cusp of something more.

I sighed when his lips skated along my cheek. His touch was soothing, relaxing in the best way. It was nothing like the otherworldly sparks fated mates felt, but it was close enough.

“You know, I wouldn’t mind seeing you pregnant. Your skin glowing, stomach round with my child, your

scent even sweeter than it is now.”

My heart sk*pped a beat. Hell, it might’ve stopped completely if it weren’t for my magic. In the four years we’d been dating, he had never said anything quite like this. There was so much between us that remained unspoken. Like the topic of his actual mate.

“Oh, is that so?” I chuckled, craning my head to smirk up at him. The strands of his light hair fell across his forehead tickling my nose. A smile spread across his face as I wrinkled my nose and blew the hair out of the way.

Despite how relaxed I felt around him, how my feelings had long surpassed a simple crush, the thought of Mason’s actual mate was never far from my mind.

Lola herself had warned me ahead of time. Hearing the story of how Mason was not only rejected but suffered through his mate’s death was agonizing. It was a pain I could never fully understand, but with it came a slew of worries.

Would I ever be enough for him? Would he ever truly be happy with me?

I hid the dark turn my thoughts had taken behind a smile, but no matter how far my cheeks stretched and how brightly my eyes sparkled with joy for Holly and Tristan’s baby, I couldn’t help but notice the mating mark on both of their necks.

Never have I wanted one so badly.

The weeks after Holly’s pregnancy announcement blended into one. Each and every morning I’d venture off to work, spending those precious minutes before my shift with Mason, who never once failed to make my lunch.

Teaching Witchcraft 101, seeing the beaming faces of my students, became something I was wholly passionate about. Never in my life did I think that I’d be teaching the next generation of witches, watching them learn from the mistakes of the past as they grew in power.

Still, even with all this happiness in my life, there was something missing-something I craved more and more with each passing day. Perhaps I was selfish for wanting this when I already had so much, but I couldn’t seem to stop myself.

Which is exactly why I called on the one person I knew who could help me.

"I'm actually really glad you wanted to hang out. Gives me a break from the twins." Lola giggled.

She pulled out a chair at the little café we were at and took a seat. I'd ordered our coffee's ahead of time, along with an assortment of pastries. Given Lola's sweet tooth, I figured she wouldn't have any specific preferences. When a few customers passed, she nodded at them in greeting.

How she dealt with the constant string of admirers was beyond me, but that's why she was the one in charge.

I smirked, brushing the crumbs from the croissant I'd been picking at off my lap. "They tiring you out already? Those terrible two's sure are something, aren't they?"

"Oh, you don't even know the half of it." Lola huffed, s*atching her coffee off the table. She scooped the dollop of whip cream off the top and plopped it into her mouth. "Actually, you might considering you're a witch too."

"Go on, lay it on me." I encouraged her with a smirk.

"I wish there was some guide for raising twin tri-brids. It's a blessing in disguise that only Ramona can use magic, because I'm not sure what I'd do if it were both of them. At least with Maven it's the blood drinking I have to worry about."

My eyebrows shot up in surprise. "He's two years old and already worried about blood?"

"Are you kidding me? He loves the stuff. Loves it more than people food, which is a bit concerning.

Tristan and Giovanni say this is normal for a Vampire child though." She huffed, her shoulders sagging with relief.

"Well, it's not unusual for witches to display their magic this early. Especially if they're powerful." I couldn't help but add. Lola had so much on her plate already. Adding two magical children to the mix was bound to cause some additional stress. "If you ever need some time away, I'd be more than happy to watch them. You know I love your kids."

"Ramona has been asking about her Aunt Clara and Uncle Mason." Lola chuckled. After taking a deep drink from her coffee, a speculative look crossed her face. "Anyway, how have you been doing? You looked a bit distraught at Holly's gender reveal last week."

Even though Holly knew her unborn baby was a girl, Lola and I still went through the motions of hosting a big get together. Holly had little to no normal experiences, and this was one we decided she couldn't do without.

"That obvious, huh?" I muttered, my stomach twisting into knots. On second thought, coffee was probably the last thing I needed during a time like this. I pushed the steaming cup closer to the center of the table, focusing my nerves on a blueberry m*ffin topped with thick granules of sugar.

With a frown painting her face, Lola leaned forward and reached out for my hand. The ridiculously long strands of her ebony hair fell over her shoulder, inches away from the c*nnamon bun with it's sticky coating.

"Hey, what's wrong? Things might be different now, but our friendship hasn't changed. If you need anything, you know you only have to ask."

I took a deep breath before forcing the words past my lips. Hesitating would only prolong the torture, and I'd put myself through the ringer enough times this past week alone.

"I was just wondering if-if Werewolves could put their mark on anyone, even if that person wasn't their Goddess given mate." It took a great deal of effort not to cringe at myself. Anyone with two ears and a working brain would know who I was talking about.

"They can, but why would they want-" She stopped in her tracks, and this time I did cringe.

Understanding flashed in Lola's eyes, making her unnaturally bright blue tone's even brighter. "Mason never marked her...just so you know. Clara, he'd be a fool not to mark you. I'm sure if you asked him, he'd leap at the chance."

My stomach dropped. Suddenly, the blueberry m*ffin I'd been picking at no longer seemed appetizing. "I can't just ask him that. What if he thinks I'm trying to replace his actual mate? What if... what if he doesn't want to?"

"Look, all I know is that he's changed since you came into the picture. Actually, I don't think I've ever seen him this happy before. I think you should take the risk and ask him, Clara. I think his response will surprise you."

Lola spoke with such confidence that it was hard not to buy into it. It filled my chest, mingling with the mouthwatering scent of roasted coffee beans and flaky pastries. I took a deep breath and nodded. "Alright, I'll do it. I'll ask Mason to mark me."

"Good. I can't wait to see his mark on your neck." Lola winked, beaming at me from across the table. She took another gulp of her coffee, making a sound low in her throat as she gazed at it almost lovingly. "Actually, there was something I needed to ask you in return."

“Oh.” I replied, just a tad surprised. “Is it about the Magisterium? You already know there’s a spot open for Ramona once she becomes of age, but I wouldn’t mind starting some basic training with her once she’s able to walk and talk.”

“It’s not that, but I’ll definitely take you up on that offer. This is more about Mason and whether or not you think he’d be interested in...a job of sorts.”

My eyebrows lifted on their own accord. Mason was a warrior by nature, but he didn’t have a set job here in the pack. He’d run patrol with some of the other’s when he was on call, but that was about it.

“What’s the job for?” I asked. “Well, Asher’s Beta is retiring. He’s getting up there in age and his mate is pregnant with their fourth. Pretty soon he’s going to have a pack of his own to run.” Lola said with a giggle. “And well, Asher was wondering if Mason would take his place.”

Lola left it to me to reveal the good news, not that I minded one bit. I all but raced home, barging through the front door of our little town house with enough speed to send Mason scrambling in the kitchen.

“Sh*t, Clara! You scared the hell out of me.” His head appeared from around the corner, a lopsided grin spreading across his face. A faint blush stained his cheeks, telling me that I wasn’t the only one planning something.

“Not expecting me back so soon?” I smirked. “Whatcha up to?”

Mason’s eyes widened just a fraction before he disappeared inside the kitchen. There was a series of clanks and bangs that sounded a whole lot like an avalanche of dirty dishes. I crept closer to the kitchen, peeking my head around the corner just in time for Mason to bulldoze his way past.

“Actually, I’m not quite done in there yet.” He chuckled nervously, rubbing at the back of his neck.

No matter how hard I tried to peer around him, he managed to get in the way. With a huff, he guided me by my shoulders into the living room.

“What exactly are you up to in there?” I mused, seconds away from making a break into the kitchen.

That lopsided grin of his returned, forcing my heart to sk*p a beat. He flopped down on the couch, then grabbed me by my hips, pulling me down on top of him. A laugh flew past my lips as I settled onto his lap, tangling my fingers in the ends of his overgrown hair. He’d spoken about getting it cut a few times in the past, but I actually loved the rugged look it gave him.

“You know how last weekend you and Holly designed your dream houses? Well, I might’ve borrowed a few pages.” He admitted, a hint of emotion t*inkling in his eyes. There was obvious excitement, but it was tainted by an uncertainty that bled into his voice. Mason was worried I wouldn’t like what he’d done. A beaming smile tugged at my lips, the joy that followed filling my heart until I thought it might burst. No one—not a single person in my life had gone to such lengths for me. I smoothed my fingers over the c*arse strands of his beard before pressing my lips against his.

When I pulled away, fighting the moisture that gathered in my eyes, my head was swimming.

“When do I get to see it?” The obvious eagerness in my voice made his shoulders relax.

“It’s going to take me some time to buy the rest of the supplies, and before you offer, I don’t want any of your money going to this. This is a gift for you.”

It had been a sore spot between us that I was the only one with a job. Mason had tried a few here and there over the years, but he wasn’t passionate about them. This was exactly why the position of Beta was perfect for him. Mason loved this pack with his whole heart.

“Hmm, I think I have just the solution you’re looking for.” I hummed; my eyes fluttering shut as he nuzzled his cheek against my own. Each inhale of my scent he took sent a warmth surging lower, one I couldn’t focus on if I were going to relay the good news.

“Oh, really?” Mason chuckled against my neck, grazing his lips and teeth over the sensitive skin. “You got

a job for me, Clara?”

“Not me. Lola.” I gasped. Words were becoming hard and the more he played my body like a finely tuned instrument, the more I found them slipping away. I distanced myself, planting my hands on his cheeks to steady my thoughts.

Mason c*cked his head to the side. “Lola has a job for me?”

“Yes, and the sooner you let me finish, the sooner you can help me out of this dress.” I winked.

Now I had his full, undivided attention. He sat up straighter, his eyes no longer wandering down to my cleavage. The sudden shift coaxed another string of laughter from my mouth.

“How would you, Mason, feel about becoming the next Beta of this pack?”

Disbelief made his eyes shimmer like amber jewels. They were speckled with fragments of endearing innocence that matched the way his jaw dropped, and voice failed.

“You...Lola...this can't be...” He sputtered, working through the pieces one by one until he managed a strangled, “...are you serious?”

“Of course, I'm being serious. She told me about it earlier today. You were the first person they thought of for the job. What do you think?”

“What do I think? I think you're amazing.” He stared at me as though I were the one to get him the job, when in reality, it was himself.

Nibbling on my lower lip, I decided to get on with it and voice what had been weighing on my mind for weeks now.

“There is something else...something I wanted to ask you.” I exhaled slowly.

“You know you can ask me anything, baby.” Mason replied, confusion overshadowing his joy.

“I...” Here goes nothing. “I want you to mark me.”

Mason blinked several times, his lips opening and closing, though no words came out. A faint spattering of color covered his cheeks, making me wish desperately that my magic had to do with feeling emotions. Goodness, I would've killed to know what he was thinking in this moment.

Slowly, a smile unfurled across his face, one that made my heartrate skyrocket. He rummaged through his pocket, fishing out a black velvet box that made my world come to a screeching halt.

“I'd love to mark you, Clara, but only if you'll marry me.”