

guaranteed win.

I wrapped my arm around Alpha Zeke's neck, pressing it tightly against his windpipe. His hands flew up to my arm, using his remaining strength to peel it off. I knew my arm would be a bruised mess come tomorrow, but I held on for life. Gritting my teeth together and clenching my eyes shut, I didn't let go until Alpha Zeke fell to his knees. Once he hit the mat, I hopped off his back. While I felt exhausted and wobbly on my legs, I forced myself to stand tall.

Alpha Zeke took a few deep breaths, a wide grin forming on his face. The grin sent a jolt of surprise running through me. It was unusual for an Alpha to be happy with defeat.

"That was awesome, Lola." Alpha Zeke grinned and shot me a friendly wink, "Great job. I expect a rematch in the foreseeable future. Next time you won't win."

Alpha Asher's eyes had darkened as he took in my tired frame. After ending training, Alpha Asher approached me.

"It seems Alpha Zeke has grown fond of you." Alpha Asher's tone held a certain hardness, his eyes searching my face.

"I have that affect on people." I shrugged, a smirk twitching at my lips. "You don't have to be jealous."

"Jealous?" Alpha Asher scoffed, taking a step towards me. We were only inches away. His husky and woodsy scent swirled around me, igniting a fire deep in my stomach. "Every time I look at you, I see my c\*\*k in that pretty mouth of yours. How can I be jealous when you belong to me?"

I wanted to fight back, to come up with some smart remark. My words died on my lips when Alpha Asher's hand gripped my face. His thumb ran over my lips, his eyes looking down on me as if I were the only person in the room. The passion and heat burning in his eyes had me clenching my legs together, fighting the arousal that burned when he was near. As soon as he had touched me, he backed away.

“I have some work to take care of today.” Alpha Asher smirked, clearly seeing how effective his words had been. “Be good, Lola.”

“Does this work have anything to do with Tyler?” My throat ran dry as I spoke his name. While some part of me wanted to feel sympathy for Tyler, he had gotten himself into this situation. Alpha Asher wasn’t known for his mercy, Tyler would suffer before giving information. I was much too accepting of that fact.

“It does.” Alpha Asher’s voice hardened; any lingering emotion wiped from his face.

Once Alpha Asher walked away, I headed into the locker rooms. Deciding I would just shower tonight, I slipped on some fresh clothes. I walked out of the locker room, my eyes scanning for Mason and Breyona.

“I sent them outside.” Luna Freya’s voice came from behind, “They’ll be out there waiting for you.”

“Thanks.” I breathed, my stomach twisting as I remember what she had asked of me. I had been so caught up in my fight with Alpha Bran, that I hadn’t talked to Alpha Asher about Brittany.

“All is forgiven.” Luna Freya waved her hand, as though she could read my mind. “I understand these last couple days have been—eventful.”

“I am sorry about that.” I frowned, “I haven’t forgotten what you asked.”

“I was able to contact my daughter.” Luna Freya pursed her lips, her eyes locked on the lingering people in the building. “Come with me.”

I followed Luna Freya into the empty locker room. Her eyes darted around suspiciously, making sure everyone had first cleared out. Once she was certain we were alone, she opened her mouth to speak.

“She gave me what information she could.” Luna Freya pursed her lips, her hands intertwined tightly. “Their keeping her under tight lock and key, since Tyler was captured and all.”

“I understand.” I frowned, “He’s not going to give in easy. Alpha Asher isn’t known for being merciful.”

“I know exactly what Alpha Asher is known for.” Luna Freya’s eyes went dark for a moment before returning to their usual light color. “I hope with your help, he will not bring harm to my daughter.”

“I promised to do what I could.” I nodded, “What was she able to tell you?”

Luna Freya took a deep breath, “They won’t tell her much. Her and Tyler had sought the Vampire’s out but found themselves farther up the chain than they realized. They had found the Vampire King.”

“Vampire King”, The words were weak as they left my lips. Luna Freya shot me a sympathetic look, clearly mistaking my discomfort for fear.

It wasn’t fear I was feeling, but a sick sense of acceptance. The pieces I had been holding apart clicked together, and I was sure the sound could be heard in the locker room.

Tyler and Brittany had gone searching for Vampires but found much more than they bargained for. They found the Vampire King himself, my Father.

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I promised Luna Freya I would speak to Alpha Asher about Brittany before the day ended. It was just another thing on my already full plate. I couldn’t ignore the look of concern in Luna Freya’s eyes, nor the fear she felt for her own daughter. I fully believed Luna Freya had faith in her daughter, but I remained rightfully suspicious. The last time I had met Brittany, she knew about the Vampire’s they worked with. While she could have found out later on, my suspicion remained intact.

I met up with Mason and Breyona outside of the training building. The moment I stepped outside; their eyes were locked on me. Concern and curiosity filled their gaze’s and I knew what they would

ask before their lips parted.

“What did Luna Freya want with you?” Mason was the first to ask, his light-colored eyes filled with innocent curiosity.

My gaze flickered to Breyona, her eyes holding the same emotion. The two of them looked much like myself. Hair messy and face’s red from training, but wearing clean clothes. Breyona looked a little more worried than usual, but it seemed the entire pack was on edge.

There hadn’t been another murder since Kanyon, and I hoped he would be the last. Alpha Bran, Alpha Zeke, and Luna Freya each brought a handful of men with them. Their men added to our own patrol, increasing security around our small town. I doubted the Vampire’s would strike with the added security, but it was best to always stay on guard. They had slipped through our defenses before, certainly they could again.

I debated telling Mason and Breyona the truth. I had already trusted the two of them with so much and felt guilty keeping this bit of information from them. I decided to tell them about Luna Freya and her daughter, desperate for another opinion on the matter.

“I’ll tell you at your house.” My eyes were set on Breyona. She shifted to her other foot, confusion filling her eyes. “I need to see that book your Mom showed me.”

“Alright.” Breyona nodded, “She won’t be home for another half hour. She’s already curious about your sudden interest in Vampire’s, asking a second time will make her suspicious.”

“That works for me.” I nodded, “I’m not sure Alpha Asher wants everything out in the open right now.”

Alpha Asher had been honest with everyone in the pack. They knew the attack had something to do with Vampires, but hadn't a clue of the severity of the situation. I could tell Alpha Asher hated keeping everyone in the dark, but he had to prevent panic from rising. Everyone was already on edge, but panic would lead to chaos.

The three of us headed to Breyona's house. Her parents were teaching extra classes at the local college, but Breyona was used to living in a near-empty house. Her Mom and Dad both held a strong love for History. Their interests weren't designated to a specific species. Vampire, Werewolf, Human, they were interested in all.

"It's on her special bookshelf. Give me a minute." Breyona huffed with an exasperated eyeroll.

"Special bookshelf?" Mason snorted, plopping down on the antique looking couch. "Who has a special bookshelf?"

"My parents do." Breyona grimaced, the large book in her hands. "It's where they keep all of their important texts and artifacts. They don't like me touching it, so this stays between us three."

"How priceless can a book be?" Mason raised his eyebrow at Breyona, but she merely shook her head.

"My parents have enough books and artifacts to fill a small museum." Breyona chuckled dryly as she sat beside me on the couch.

I ignored the two of them as they began full-scale bickering. My fingers ran against the jagged pages, faded and stained with age. The book itself smelled old and musty, looking as though it would crumble to dust at any moment. The repairs Breyona's parents had made to the book were all that kept it from falling apart. A grimace formed on my face as I reread the information.

'Did you expect it to change?' Maya chuckled humorlessly, 'It says the same thing as before.'

'I'm part of the Kouritis bloodline—we know that much.' I frowned, discomfort filling me as the realization hit.

'Which is why the shadows answer to you.' Maya grimaced, recoiling at the idea.

"Did you find what you're looking for?" Breyona frowned, her full lips puckered as though she wanted to say more. Something troubling flashed in her eyes, gone before I could look any further.

"Not really." I sighed, closing the book gently. "Only reaffirming what I already know."

"What are you looking for, Lola?" Breyona grimaced, "Did something happen?"

If only you knew, I wanted to say. While I wasn't sure I wanted to mention my trip to visit the Vampire King, I needed to give her something.

Instead of mentioning my visit, I told them about my fight with Alpha Bran. From the shock on their faces, neither of them had noticed anything strange that night. Only Alpha Asher had seen the gathering shadows, had felt the cold chill rush against his skin. Part of me wondered if my Grandma had seen the same, that would explain the sour expression on her face. Grandma wasn't one to miss things, she had the uncanny ability to see through people. I wouldn't be surprised if she saw exactly what happened that night.

"So, you can control shadows?" Mason gaped, his eyes wide with a renewed sense of curiosity. "Like some kind of superpower?"

"Not everything is about superheroes." Breyona rolled her eyes.

"Well excuse me for trying to lighten the mood." Mason narrowed his eyes at Breyona, who in turn scoffed.

“I wish it was like a super power.” I chuckled lowly, “It feels a lot darker than that.”

“I wonder if you can also get into people’s minds—like that one Vampire did to you.” Breyona hesitated, not wanting to speak Tristan’s name. If only she knew the mere mention of Tristan send a shard of longing piercing within me, one I ferociously fought against.

“She’s part of the Kouritis bloodline—but she’s not a pureblooded Vampire.” Mason pointed out, earning a surprised look from Breyona and I.

“I hadn’t thought of that.” Breyona frowned, “So I guess you can’t get into people’s minds.”

“I can live without that.” I chuckled dryly as I remembered what it felt like to have my mind invaded, “I don’t think anyone should have that kind of power.”

I told the two of them what I heard that night, and how the shadows had fed from the blood leaving my ankle. Today, the cut on my ankle was nothing more than a pink line but the searing pain that rushed through me would linger in my mind forever. The pain I had felt as the shadows fed from my blood was horrifying, so cold it almost felt hot.

“You have to pay for their services?” Breyona shifted uncomfortably, “That sounds kind of dangerous.”

“It does, doesn’t it?” My face mirrored her own. Slowly, Mason’s curious gaze faltered and turned into one of worry.

“I wouldn’t use a gift like that.” Breyona shook her head, her short hair bouncing from the movement. “It doesn’t sound like a gift at all.”

“A gift you have to pay for in blood.” Mason added in, a frown forming on his boy-ish face.

“The bigger the request, the higher the price.” I recited the words my Father had spoken last night.

“Like more blood?” Mason frowned, “What do shadows need blood for?”

“I’m thinking the price isn’t just about blood.” Breyona frowned, “To me, a high price would be someone’s life.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they asked for that.” I murmured, “I don’t plan on using that—gift again.”

I silently promised myself to keep far from the shadows. The power to control them felt dark and alluring, a power I could see myself yielding completely to. The power was tempting, a soft caress against my cheek. I could see myself using this power, giving into it completely. It was a tempting idea, to use the shadows against my own Father. What price would they command if I asked for his death? For the deaths of the Vampires against us? The idea’s that crossed my thoughts sent an icy chill down my spine.

“Is that why you wanted to see the book again?” Breyona frowned, another hidden flash ghosting past her almond shaped eyes.

“I wanted to see if anything else fit, now that I know more.” I sighed, “I really want to know about this stupid mark on my skin.”

Breyona hesitated, clearly debating on whether she should say something or not. Her eyes were pained, her lips pressed tightly together.

“My Mom has a secret stash of books; one’s she won’t let me see.” Breyona spoke the words quietly, as though her Mom were hiding in the walls listening to our conversation. “I was thinking about finding them—to help you, of course. They might have more information about Vampires.”

I couldn’t help but linger on Breyona’s words. She had clearly thought of these books long before I mentioned my heritage, but decided not to speak on it. I couldn’t shake the feeling she had her own reason for wanting those books.

“Would you be able to find them?” I frowned, my eyes sparking with interest.

“I already know where they are.” Breyona’s eyes flickered to the hallway in her house. “Locked in a safe, that’s how important they are. She’d kill me if she ever found out I touched them.”

“Can you get into the safe?” I pressed, “Can I see them now?”

“Not now.” Breyona shook her head, her eyes glancing to the large clock on the wall. “Mom will be home in ten minutes. We can get them tomorrow after training, her and Dad have tons of lecture’s tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow.” My stomach twisted into knots at the thought of learning more.

“I can’t promise they’ll have anything about Vampires.” Breyona frowned, “But it’s the only place I know to look.”

“It’s a start.” I nodded, “Your Mom keeps those books hidden for a reason, let’s hope it helps.”

Breyona had tucked away the old book before her Mom came home. The three of us stayed on the couch, our faces lighting up with innocence as her Mom walked through the door.

“Where’s Dad?” Breyona quipped calmly, tucking a strand of her light-colored hair behind her ear.

“A student needed his help with their presentation, he’ll be home in an hour or so.” Breyona’s Mom shot the three of us a smile, one that said she was glad it wasn’t her staying behind at work.

Breyona’s Mom offered to cook the three of us dinner, to which we wholeheartedly refused. Breyona’s Mom couldn’t cook to save her life, and had given up many years ago. The three of us made sandwiches, eating them in silence. While I wanted to continue talking about my complicated lineage, I couldn’t do so in front of her Mom. My fingers were practically twitching at the thought of getting my hands on those books.

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While I wanted to visit my Grandma and Dad, I had spent the rest of the afternoon with Breyona and Mason. I returned to the packhouse around seven, immediately heading to the kitchen for something to eat. Werewolf appetites were troublesome at times, requiring a large amount of food to keep us sustained.

Alpha Zeke stood in the kitchen, a bowl of chicken and rice in his hands. His black hair was a tousled mess on his head, his large body leaning against the countertop. His eyes twinkled in amusement as I walked into the kitchen.

“Here, I made dinner.” Alpha Zeke grinned, looking much too young for his age. He shoved a bowl of steaming food towards me, his eyes expectant. With little more than a grin, I grabbed the bowl and dug in. Alpha Zeke had something about him that invited you in. While he still had that powerful aura of an Alpha, he was care-free and had a great sense of humor.

“Where’s Alpha Asher?” I kept my voice even with just a hint of curiosity. I forced the longing from my voice. As strange as it felt, I missed him. I hadn’t seen him since training, and had noticed the absence of his presence.

“You call your mate by his title?” Alpha Zeke snorted; his mouth full of food. “I’m not sure what he’s doing. Said he’ll be back shortly though.”

“Did he tell you we were mates?” I pursed my lips, trying to hide the hopeful tone in my voice. Alpha Asher was well over eighteen. He would know if the two of us were mates.

“He hasn’t said anything to me, but it’s pretty obvious.” Alpha Zeke shrugged, his lips pulling up in a smirk, “The way you look at him says it all.”

I wanted to roll my eyes and let a frustrated huff leave my lips. Alpha Asher hadn’t said anything about being my mate. Alpha Zeke had gotten his information from the way I looked at Alpha Asher. The information provided little help, and only frustrated me more.

"I have no idea who my mate is." I pointed out.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it's Alpha Asher." Alpha Zeke shrugged unbothered but let a smirk form on his face, "He rarely shows interest in women, but I can see what intrigued him about you."

"He rarely shows interest?" I couldn't hide the smug satisfaction that lingered in my words. The thought of Alpha Asher ignoring other females was oddly satisfying. If Alpha Asher expected me to belong to only him, I wanted the same in return. Other men hadn't piqued my interest as well.

'Other than that Vampire.' Maya murmured grumpily.

She was right after all. Tristan had grabbed my interest. His ethereal beauty nearly matched Alpha Asher's. With his hair light as the sun, he had my attention the moment we met. The mark on my shoulder tingled at the thought, a feeling I shoved deep down within me.

"Most she-wolves are docile and obedient creatures when it comes to being an Alpha." Alpha Zeke nearly grimaced, making me wonder if he experienced the same. "They'd obey our every command without argument. It's not very appealing if you ask me, although Alpha Bran would disagree. He prefers his women to be obedient little creatures."

I couldn't help but snort at his comment, "Obedience is difficult for me. I tend to speak without thinking."

"Oh, believe me, I noticed." Alpha Zeke winked, flashing me a dazzling smile.

Alpha Asher had been quick to find me in the kitchen, as if he knew I had been there all along. His honey eyes met my own, but conveyed no emotion. They were hard, as though he had a rough afternoon. The two of us were quick to head upstairs. Alpha Zeke had thrown out a snarky comment, telling the two of us to 'have fun'. After a half-hearted snarl from Alpha Asher, we headed to his bedroom. I had long ago stopped questioning if Alpha Asher wanted me in his bed. Sleeping by his side felt right, increasing my hope that he would be my mate. While I wanted to ask, I couldn't bring myself to form the words.

What if he wasn't my mate? Would I be able to stomach it? I knew my eyes would fill with disappointment if he said no, followed by crisp tears stinging the backs of my eyelids. My birthday was a week away—I could wait a week.

"You look more troubled than usual." Alpha Asher noted, his dark eyebrow raised in a way that sent butterflies swarming my stomach.

"I could say the same about you." I noted, ignoring the blood that flooded my face under his intense gaze. "Care to share?"

"You go first." Alpha Asher smirked, his eyes dark and patient. He strode over to one of the armchairs in his suite, pouring himself a glass of that dark colored liquid. Much to my surprise, he poured a second and placed it in my hands. "Drink", was all he said.

I brought the glass to my lips, determined not to cringe as the strong taste of liquor hit my lips. The alcohol was strong, but contained notes of teak wood, maple, and cinnamon. My chest warmed as I swallowed the liquor, chasing away the chill that had settled over me.

Guilt was eating away at me as I debated on whether to tell him about my visit with my Father and how I discovered I was part of the Kouritis bloodline. Maya wanted me to tell him, urged me to trust him above all others. In the end, I gave into her whims. If I couldn't trust my friends and the man, I shared a bed with, I could trust no one.

Alpha Asher's eyes darkened with every word, with every detail I provided. Any traces of humor fled his chiseled face as I told him about my Father.

“And you’re sure of this, Lola?” Alpha Asher finally spoke, after a prolonged moment of silence.

“I’m sure.” Unfortunately, I was. I could feel the truth of what I said in my bones.

“He could use the shadows against us.” Alpha Asher paused, his eyes burning with fury. “How can my men fight against shadows?”

“The bigger the request, the steeper the price.” I repeated for the second time today. “I doubt even the Vampire King would pay any price.”

“I wouldn’t underestimate him, Lola.” Alpha Asher grimaced, “Underestimating can get you killed.”

“Noted.” I nodded, taking his words to heart. “I do have something else to tell you.”

Alpha Asher’s dark eyebrow lifted, registering the reluctance in my tone. Stress and frustration clouded his dark eyes, but I had his full attention. Trying not to squirm under his gaze, I told him about my conversation with Luna Freya.

“She should have come to me directly.” Alpha Asher’s eyes flared with anger; his lips pressed into a thin line. I could feel his fury rolling in waves. While Luna Freya’s actions may have come off as disrespectful, her heart was in the right place.

“She just wants the best chance for her daughter.” I frowned, “She knew you would be angry.”

“Angry?” Alpha Asher scoffed, his dark eyes burning holes in my skin. “Her daughter is a traitor to her own kind, but it is not my pack she betrayed. Her own pack would be responsible for sentencing her.”

“I know.” I exhaled, my eyes wide and pleading as I looked on at Alpha Asher’s clenched jaw. “She wants to get Brittany away from the Vampire’s. She wants to bring her here.”

“Here?” Another wave of anger flashed through Alpha Asher’s eyes. While his eyes conveyed how he truly felt, his calm voice gave nothing away. “If she is to reside in my pack, I will take responsibility of her interrogation and sentencing.”

My irritation with this irresistible, hot-headed Alpha began to grow. My own voice turned sharp, my tone slightly demanding. “If she provides crucial information about the Vampire’s plan, is that enough to prove her innocence?” I questioned, my own eyes flashing brightly.

I had my own doubts about Brittany, but wanted to give her the best chance I could. If she was truly innocent, then she deserved that chance. Any information about what the Vampires were planning could change everything. With the upper hand, we could prevent further intrusions on Alpha Asher’s territory.

“Provided her information is accurate and useful—I will consider it.” Alpha Asher murmured thoughtfully, some of the anger draining from his eyes. “But I will not provide any of my men in the attempt to rescue Luna Freya’s daughter. I will ensure her safety, nothing more.”

“I can work with that.” I nodded, “I’ll tell Luna Freya tomorrow.”

Alpha Asher stood from the armchair, approaching me with hooded eyes. His glass of liquor was forgotten in his hand. My own frustration faded as his hand lifted to touch my face. His thumb rubbed against my lower lip, sending a cacophony of butterflies swarming in my stomach. Someday I would have to ask him what his obsession with my lips were, but now wasn’t the time.

“Ferocious little Lola.” Alpha Asher chuckled darkly, his eyes looming down on my lips.

“You’re not distracting me this time.” I murmured breathlessly, my tongue emerging from my lips to flick against his thumb. “It’s your turn to share.”

Alpha Asher looked up from my lips, his eyes hooded and dark before removing his hand. He let out a frustrated sigh, taking a deep drink from his glass. His eyes were more troubled than usual, sending a wave of longing through me. I wanted to wipe the irritation and worry from his face, to

run my fingers over his frowning lips. Those things would have to wait a moment.

“I told you I was looking for information about your brother.” Alpha Asher cleared his throat, his eyes dark and troubled. “I found what I was looking for.”

“You know where he is?” I immediately perked up, stepping towards Alpha Asher without noticing.

“I have a strong inkling where Sean may be.” Alpha Asher sighed, as though he didn’t want to have this conversation. “I sent some of my men to various cities, searching for what information they could find. It seems the Vampires have been gathering for much longer than we anticipated. Packs in the United States haven’t thought of Vampire’s in nearly sixty years, we had almost forgotten they existed. The Vampires have spread out in many cities, taking control of what they could. Many own clubs, casino’s and even large corporations. Mainly businesses open at night, due to their—aversion to the sun.”

I was practically shaking with anticipation, my heart a thundering mess in my chest. I willed him to continue, silently begging him to give me the information I needed. I would head into the city by myself if need be. I would bring my brother home at all costs. With each word Alpha Asher spoke, the chain around my heart grew tighter.

“Word is the Vampire’s enjoy watching the brutality of others, placing bets with life or death. They have an underground fighting tournament, one that appears in different cities each time. I have word Sean is a participant, forced to fight others for sport. I also happen to know where this week’s fight will be held. Atlanta, just a few hours from where we are now.” Before Alpha Asher could finish, the words were flying from my mouth with little thought.

“I’m coming. When are we leaving?” The words left my lips in a rush, my heart pounding with anticipation.

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Alpha Asher insisted on keeping our group small, wanting us to blend in with the mix of human, werewolf, and vampire’s. I insisted on bringing along Mason and Breyona. The two of them could hold their own, and I trusted each with my life. I couldn’t think of two werewolves better suited to help us out.

While Alpha Asher preferred, I stay behind, he left the choice in my own hands. I'm sure he figured I'd sneak out regardless and find a way to accompany them. It was only vacant rumor whispered from ear to ear that depicted Sean as one of the many fighters participating tomorrow night, but it was a chance. It was the first we had heard of Sean's whereabouts, and I was willing to take the risk.

"I'm meeting up with the two of them tomorrow." I informed Alpha Asher, "I'll make sure their ready."

I could see the worry in Alpha Asher's eyes as the two of us slid into bed. I could feel his worry as it mirrored my own. Would I be visiting my Father again tonight? It was clear Alpha Asher was used to dealing with threats through brute strength and his claim as an Alpha. He had never encountered an enemy he couldn't touch, and was powerless to stop my Father from pulling me close again. I said nothing as he wrapped his arms around my waist, pulling me into his large chest. While my stomach fluttered at the intimate position we were laying in, I gave into his warmth and the intoxicating swirl of his scent.

I had slept peacefully last night, not a single dream lingering in my mind. When I finally peeled my eyes open and winced at harsh sunlight, Alpha Asher was already dressed and ready to leave.

His eyes lingered on my porcelain skin, his eyes burning over every dip and curve of my body. I had long ago stopped trying to wear clothes in his bedroom. Alpha Asher was a man of his word, not once allowing me to sleep with any form of clothes on.

"Be here at six in the afternoon, no later." Alpha Asher grunted, peeling his dark eyes away from my body. "I wouldn't tell your Dad where were going just yet, wouldn't want to get his hopes up."

"The minute I tell him were leaving, he's going to know what's going on." I snorted, pulling on a pair of jeans and a dark blouse.

"Then don't tell him you're leaving." Alpha Asher's dark eyebrow lifted, his eyes roaming my face questioningly.

“My Grandma will know, she always does.” I shrugged, “But I’ll do what I can.”

I told Alpha Asher about the books Breyona had found in her Mom’s library, and how they might give more information on our situation. Alpha Asher almost seemed eager when I told him there could be information on removing the scarlet mark from my skin.

“The three of you can skip training.” Alpha Asher grunted, his honey eyes flashing as they looked into my own.

Ten minutes after texting Breyona, her car rolled into the large drive way. Mason was already seated in the back, his hazel eyes perking up as I walked from the house.

“You seem excited to read some old, musty books.” I chuckled, flashing Mason a smirk.

Mason rolled his eyes, brushing his sandy hair away from his face.

“More like he’s excited to potentially get me killed.” Breyona snorted, “Let’s make this as quick as possible.”

The three of us headed back to Breyona’s house, quiet as we opened the front door. I could feel Breyona’s anxiety like a thick cloak wrapped around her. I was unaware her Mom had a safe full of books but judging from Breyona’s aloof demeanor, her Mom was quite serious about the books locked away.

Instead of taking our usual place in the living room, the two of us followed Breyona down one of the

hallways in her home.

“They lock the library.” Breyona snorted, digging through the drawers in her parents’ bedroom.

A dull pain throbbed in my chest as my eyes roamed the framed photo’s sitting on her parent’s dresser. Each photo held some part of their lives. One was a wedding photo, Breyona’s Mom and Dad gazing lovingly at one another. The sight poked and scraped at the hole that had formed in my chest at my own Mom’s death. When I had first come back home, I was hellbent on ignoring the pain. Even now, I felt incapable of dealing with the loss. With everything that’s been going on, it had been easy to block out the dull ache.

I had never been close with my Mom, never had the relationship her and Sean had but she still held a place in my heart. The two of us could never see eye to eye and would constantly argue. Learning about my Vampire side gave me a better understanding of my Mom. For whatever reason, her mate had been the Vampire King. Her one time slip up resulted in me, a half-breed. Yet she had remained strong for so long, resisting the pull of her deadly mate.

“You have a library in your house?” Mason snorted, as though he were surprised.

“You’re really surprised?” Breyona turned, c\*\*king an eyebrow at a smirking Mason.

“I guess I shouldn’t be.” Mason chuckled, “They lock the library? What if you wanted to go in?”

“They know I hate stepping foot in their library.” Breyona shook her head, a grin on her face as she pulled a small silver key from one of the drawers. “History books make my brain go numb. I prefer the wonderful world of fiction.”

Breyona led us down the hall to a set of dark double doors. Her parent’s library smelled of crisp leather, fresh air, and a whole lot of dust. Each and every book lining the ceiling high shelves looked old and worn. I wasn’t sure there was a new book in this entire library. While the bindings on some were holding strong, others looked as though they might burst at any moment. I half expected some of the books to disintegrate, spewing and scattering pages along the floor.

Dark leather furniture sat in the middle of the room, in the center of the looming book shelves. Mason and I plopped down on the dark leather sofa, my eyes trailing the library around us. I felt as though I were sitting in the center of a tornado, a swirl of books surrounding us. Breyona gave us an each a tentative glance and headed over to the far wall. In between book shelves, a large painting hung on the wall. I found myself wanting to laugh at Breyona's parents for their obvious hiding place. The painting was of an older man, no doubt a figure from our History. The frame was a thick and gilded gold, looking older than many of the books in this library. Breyona swung the painting to the side, much like you would a normal door. Nestled in the wall behind the painting was a thick silver safe.

"They need a safe like that just to hide some books?" Mason coughed, glancing at the safe with a wary look on his face.

"My parents are paranoid." Breyona shrugged, "They think the books would get stolen. While they happen to be paranoid, they like to write everything down. I found the code to the safe months ago."

"What if they changed it?" Mason's light eyebrow lifted; his eyes still locked on the gleaming safe.

Breyona turned her attention to the safe, entering in an eight-digit code. A moment of silence ensued, one that left me holding my breath. A loud click followed by a flashing green light came from the safe.

"They didn't." Breyona shrugged, giving Mason a cocky grin. "Mom's horrible with remembering numbers. She used to forget Dad's birthday all the time."

Mason and I waited with held breath as Breyona opened the thick safe. An exhale of breath came from Mason's lips as we locked eyes on the only book sitting in the safe.

"One book?" Mason scoffed, shaking out his sandy blonde hair. "An entire safe for one book."

"Like I said, my parents are paranoid." Breyona shrugged, her hands gentle as she lifted the book into her arms. "Plus, this book is probably priceless."

Breyona winced as the book hit the oak coffee table with a thud. The cover was thick and practically hanging on by a thread. It was clear her parents had done everything in their power to preserve this book. While it didn't have the dusty smell most of their other books had, this one looked decades older. The pages were thick and stained, the writing on them faded and patchy.

I could feel the makings of a headache begin as my eyes roamed the pages, struggling to make out the carefully written words. A few moments of silence passed, three sets of eyes scanning the weathered pages.

"This is a journal of some kind." Mason frowned, his eyes running over the strange figures and symbols etched onto the paper.

"This looks like a first account of the Burning." Breyona breathed, looking almost excited. I was sure her Mom would nearly faint if she saw her daughter excited over History.

"Even our elders don't know the actual story." Mason breathed, looking just as absorbed as Breyona. "They pass it down through the years, but it changes every time."

"Looks like your Grandma was right Lola." Breyona chuckled, her eyes still locked on the book. "The Burning happened because a Vampire was mated to a Werewolf. Mom and Dad always told me the Vampire's attacked first."

Something flashed in Breyona's gaze, something that oddly resembled pity.

"That's my Dad's version of the story too." I nodded, "Only Grandma told me about the Vampire in love with a Werewolf."

"It's kind of sad, isn't it?" Breyona frowned, flipping the pages gently. She nibbled on her lower lip; her eyes clouded as she scanned the book. "That two people in love couldn't have a happy ending, all because of their species."

"I wonder if the Vampires were plotting against the pack back then." I frowned, my eyes scanning

Breyona's face.

"It looks like they weren't. It looks like a case of wrong place, wrong time. The she-wolf had found her mate, only to realize it was a Vampire." Breyona let out a shaky sigh, nudging the book closer to me. "This is what we're looking for."

My own eyes drifted down to the book, the strange look on Breyona's face forgotten for the moment. Even Mason looked uncomfortable, glancing at Breyona every couple seconds. I was able to make out the word's 'mark', 'mate', and 'half-breed' without much hassle.

The first half of the page was identical to what Breyona's Mom had showed me. It told vague information of the Kouritis bloodline, and how controlling the shadows was a suspected ability. The bottom half of the page was completely different. Instead of blank space, words had taken up the lower half of the page.

## Half-Breed

Vampire's and Humans have coupled since the beginning of time with little effects. With enhanced senses, speed and strength these creatures lack the ability to befuddle the mind. While Vampire's have an average life-span, they are able to resist disease and illness. Vampires are able to mark their chosen mate's, whether they be Human or Vampire.

Mating between Vampire's and Werewolves' holds a complexity that eludes most. Both species is able to mark their mates, yet a werewolf is unable to choose its desired mate. A mark is a symbol placed onto the skin, signifying a connection between two parties.

It is known, a Vampire's mark works very similarly to a Werewolf's. A connection is established between two parties, a bond formed as the mark heals on skin. A mark will heighten emotions and feelings of intimacy.

Once complete, a mark will not fade from skin. The symbol is permanent, as is the bond between two souls. Completion of the mark involves both parties adorning the same symbol followed by the process of physically mating.

Though there have been rare occurrences, little is known about these particular half-breeds. Few Werewolves and Vampires have been mated, and even fewer couple to produce offspring. Vampires and Werewolves have long been thought of as natural enemies. Acknowledging the ability for Vampires and Werewolves to mate poses a heavy question. Are the two species truly destined natural enemies?

During the 1,500's a surge of half-breeds appeared across Eastern Europe. Various tests had been done before each half-breed met an untimely demise. It is unknown whether Werewolves or Vampires are responsible for this mass slaughter.

A she-wolf by the name Catherine had completed the mating process with a Vampire. Pregnant and unmarked, a male in her pack had long desired Catherine. After taking her in the night, the fellow werewolf placed his mark upon her skin. Upon the arrival of her true mate, Catherine had searched for any possible way to remove the mark from her skin. Unable to find a way around the Werewolf's mark, her Vampire mate placed his own. The mark of the Werewolf faded, replaced by that of her true mate.

These half-breeds are similar to Vampire's and Werewolves individually. Each half-breed adapts differently, taking on certain qualities of their species. Few half-breeds studied lacked a wolf spirit within them, unable to shift. These half-breeds craved blood over food. Those half-breeds with a wolf spirit living within them often craved food, unresponsive when introduced to blood. While these creatures vary, they each had heightened strength and speed, and were also able to detect the scent of Vampire's. Vampire's claim the ability to mask their scent, to hide the sickly-sweet scent that flows from their pores. Half-breed's are able to detect this scent, whether it be concealed or not.

I tried to hide my interest at the last paragraph I had read. The thought of drinking blood sent a wave of disgust down my spine. I could only assume Vampire's weren't in the business of drinking animal blood, the thought nearly made me want to retch. Hunting in wolf form was different. Maya enjoyed hunting other animals, much as a wolf would.

My eyes widened as I read the paragraph a second time, a distant thought crossing my mind. I had met someone who could smell the Vampire's. The two of us picked up on that sickly sweet scent, even as the other wolves were unable.

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After reading our fill of the information before us, the three of us trudged back into the living room.

Breyona made sure to return the book, placing it exactly how it was when she had removed it from the safe.

“Can’t be too careful.” Breyona chuckled breathlessly, but her eyes looked pained.

The three of us sat in silence, each mulling over our own bit of information. I hadn’t told them about Jessie, not having realized how important she was until now. I had met Jessie during patrol one night with Carter, Wade and Mason. Two years younger than me, but out running patrol due to her keen sense of smell. I wasn’t sure if Jessie knew of her heritage, but happily placed it into the ‘worry about later’ category. There was little point for me to jump into Jessie’s life and turn it upside down.

When the silence finally became too much, and I remembered Alpha Asher’s plan for tonight, I broke the silence.

“How would you two feel about coming with me to get Sean back?” My voice sounded stronger than I felt, my words coming out strong and steady. My insides were a knot of nerves. Worrying about Sean and his safety, along with my Father’s plans and the annoying mark on my neck.

While I felt elated to have found information about my mark, I still had a week before my nineteenth birthday. An entire week to endure this mark on my skin, to deal with the constant pull I felt whenever I thought of Tristan.

“Does Alpha Asher know of this plan to save Sean?” Breyona’s eyebrow lifted, some of the trouble in her eyes faded at the distraction.

“Of course.” I scoffed, “He’s the one who came up with the idea. It’s like you have no faith in me.”

“Faith? That’s what you call it.” Breyona chuckled, my question now grabbing her full attention.

“What would we have to do?” Mason’s eyes were locked on my own, a lopsided grin forming on his face.

“Alpha Asher is bringing two of his own men. We’re going to a nightclub in some city. There they have this underground fighting tournament, one with werewolves and humans.” My lips slowly fell as I said the words out loud.

I’m sure we were all thinking the same thing. If Sean was there and we managed to rescue him, would he be the same?

“So, are we storming the gates? Or is this more of a lay low operation?” Mason quipped, breaking the air of unease that had filled the room.

“I think it’s a lay low operation.” I chuckled, “Alpha Asher will go more in depth once we leave tonight, but for now dress the part.”

“I wonder how many werewolves they get have come into their clubs.” Breyona mused, her fingers tapping against her jeans.

“Hopefully a couple.” I mumbled, “That’s something you should mention to Alpha Asher tonight. Be at the packhouse before six.”

Claiming she had some errands to run, Breyona dropped Mason and I at my old house. Anytime I mentioned my Grandma’s cooking, Mason nearly jumped from his shoes in excitement. I was sure by the end of the year; Grandma would want to adopt both Breyona and Mason. I made sure to tell Mason to keep the plan from my Dad. It would butcher my insides to see the look of sorrow on his face if we failed, or if Sean was nowhere to be found.

“Felt like I haven’t seen ya in ages, kid.” Dad grunted, watching from his usual place on the recliner. Some football rerun played quietly on the television.

“We saw her yesterday at the fight.” Grandma pointed out, coming inside from the backyard, an exasperated look on her face as she eyed her middle-aged son.

“I meant around here.” Dad grunted, “She’s hardly been around the house, been spending all her time up with Alpha Asher.”

Grandma shot me a quick look, followed by a wink that made my stomach twist into knots.

“She lives at the packhouse now.” Grandma snorted, pulling some food from the refrigerator, as if she had known the two of us walked into her house hungry. “Mason, would you give me a hand with some of this?”

Mason scrambled like an eager kid to help my Grandma, asking questions along the way.

“Your parents ever teach you to cook?” Grandma side-eyed Mason, a smile playing on her lips.

“Not really.” Mason shrugged, giving Grandma a sheepish grin. “I worked at a Deli last year, so I know how to fry up some meat but that’s the extent of my cooking abilities.”

“Grab an apron and let me show you my ways.” Grandma chuckled, tossing an apron at a shocked looking Mason. I gave him a thumbs up and plopped down on the couch, shooting my Dad a grin.

“How’ve you been likin’ the packhouse, Lola?” Dad grunted, forcing his eyes to remain on the television. Something in his tone piqued my interest. He sounded uncomfortable and hesitate, holding back what he really wanted to ask.

“It’s been fine.” My eyebrow lifted as I took in my Dad’s weathered yet handsome features.

“And I suppose the Alpha’s been treatin’ you alright?” Dad grumbled, clearing his throat before reluctantly forcing his eyes on me.

“Dad, just ask your question.” I chuckled, ignoring the ball of discomfort in my stomach. “We’re both horrible liars and you look like you’re about to be sick.”

After giving me a defensive grimace, Dad finally caved.

“You and Alpha Asher—seem close.” Dad grunted, waiting for me to make the connection. “I just don’t want to see you in the same situation—as before, y’know.”

A violent blush filled my face, my Dad’s words and their multiple meanings swarmed my head.

“I’m not—There’s nothing for you to worry about.” I chuckled, “My birthday’s almost here, which will solve a lot of my problems.”

I hadn’t told my Dad the possibility of my mate being a Vampire, nor could I bring myself to mention it. Neither of us had talked about what Tristan did, or what Mom had done. I couldn’t bring myself to mention the past, to reopen the wound she had caused all those years ago. A sour taste filled my mouth at the thought of my Mom. I had been so quick to shove the pain away, that I never had a chance to truly mourn her death. Even now, there were far too many other things drawing my attention.

‘Well, you’re not outright lying.’ Maya snorted, ‘We are pretty...close with Alpha Asher.’

‘Hush.’ I hissed, ‘Dad doesn’t need to know that.’

‘And the raging blush on your face is supposed to reassure him?’ Maya chuckled.

"I trust you Lola." Dad nodded, his eyes running over the deep blush that stained my cheeks. "Got any plans for your birthday?"

"I'll probably just run around town like a crazy person, sniffing around for my mate." I shrugged, "The usual."

From the kitchen I could hear my Grandma snort, a cheeky smile on her face as she met my eyes. Mason had a smear of flour across his chin. The white powder stood out on his tanned skin, looking much like chalk dust.

"You'll do no such thing." Grandma chuckled, shaking her head. "I'm sure Alpha Asher would be more than willing to throw you a birthday party."

"I'm not sure I'm up to a birthday party this year." I chuckled lowly, remembering how well Chelsea's birthday at Haze had gone.

'Well, we did meet Brittany that night but our time with Alpha Asher was well worth it.' Maya shrugged, making an excellent point.'

"With all of the bad stuff going on, everyone needs something to celebrate." Grandma shrugged, her eyes lit with her mysterious and seemingly infinite wisdom.

"I'll think about it, but I doubt Alpha Asher would want to throw me a birthday party." I shrugged, peeling my eyes away from Grandma's knowing gaze.

The four of us had dinner in the kitchen. Every so often Grandma would flash a proud smile at Mason, who returned the action feverishly. Once dinner was finished, Dad retreated out to the fire pit, a beer nestled in his hand. Grandma wasted little time, practically cornering me in the small living room.

"Does Alpha Asher have any news on Sean?" Grandma frowned, her light-colored eyes searching my own.

While I could've tried to hide the information from Grandma, she would know something was up. Whether she found out the truth or not, it would bug her until we came home safely.

"We might have information on where Sean is. We're going tonight to try and bring him home." I murmured, hoping the TV would drown out the sound of my voice.

"Be safe, Lola. I know you can handle yourself." Grandma nodded; her lips pressed into a thin line. Something flickered in the back of her eyes, something that was clearly eating away at her.

"Is there anything you need to tell me?" I lifted my eyebrow at her, my eyes searching the lines on her face.

"Nothing you need to worry about right now." Grandma shook her head, "Focus on getting Sean back, we can talk after."

"I'll hold you to that." I nodded, letting out a weary sigh as Grandma pulled me into her arms.

Dad dropped Mason off at home before taking me to the packhouse. If we were trying to go in the club undetected, we'd have to look the part. While I trusted Breyona to do most of my make-up, I wasn't completely incapable.

I dug through one of the closets in Alpha Asher's bedroom. He had all of my clothes moved into his room, and had my stomach twisting at the thought hours after.

I slipped on a tight black dress. It reached around mid-thigh, but covered all of my bits nicely. The neckline dipped down my chest, showing the barest hint of cleavage. Perfect to wear to a club, but also give me some sense of security. I curled my hair lightly, letting it fall down my back in thick waves of obsidian. I slipped on a pair of medium length heels, long enough to poke an eye out if need be. Once I finally came downstairs, Alpha Asher and Alpha Zeke were in the middle of a heated conversation.

Alpha Asher's eyes found my own, as though he had felt me enter the room. I watched with concealed satisfaction as his honey eyes grew dark, taking in every ounce of creamy skin I had left open to view.

"I'll stay here and babysit Alpha Bran, but next time you're taking me along." Alpha Zeke grunted, crossing his arms over his chest. A wicked grin formed on his face at Alpha Asher's clear reaction to me. The sight sent a jolt of pleasure down my spine, one that had me hoping Alpha Asher was in fact my mate.

Breyona and Mason arrived on time, ten minutes before six. They each had dressed for the occasion. Dark in color, Breyona's dress resembled my own. I ignored the blatant desirable stare Alpha Zeke had given Breyona, and it seems she too ignored his powerful gaze. Mason wore dark slacks followed by a long sleeve top. The shirt clung to the dips and ridges in his body, making his muscles stand out.

Alpha Asher had put every one of us to shame, his outfit simple yet highlighting every delicious ounce of his body. His black shirt was thin, consisting of a material that clung to every ripple of his muscles. His build looked huge in the outfit he wore, concealing most of his skin yet highlighting every bump and groove. His large forearms were visible, the sleeves of his shirt bunched up at the elbows.

Carter and Wade were last to stroll into the room, the hint of a friendly smile forming on Carter's face. Wade remained stoic as he often did, eyeing the four of us somewhat warily.

"I want to make this as fast as possible." Alpha Asher grunted to the five of us. "Alpha Zeke's friend can get two of us into the fight, the rest will linger in the club. Keep an open mind-link at all times, I want no surprises tonight."

While my stomach turned, we all listened intently. The prospect of finding my brother weighed heavily in my stomach and for a moment, I had wished I skipped dinner.

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We went over the plan a couple more times in the car. The silent whoosh from the highway lulled me, almost making me tired. While my eyes grew heavy, my nerves were shot.

There was too much riding on our success tonight, especially on such short notice. Alpha Asher sat behind the wheel of the dark SUV we were driving. I sat in the far back wedged between Breyona and Mason. Carter and Wade sat in the middle seats, separated by a thick console.

“We’re all going in separately. Lola stick by my side, Breyona and Mason stay together, Carter and Wade watch each other’s backs.” Alpha Asher grunted from the front seat.

“Won’t they know who you are?” Breyona frowned, giving Alpha Asher a wary glance.

I locked eyes with Alpha Asher through the rearview mirror, a strange sense of determination filling his honey eyes. I knew Alpha Asher was here for my benefit. Typically, he would send a group of his men and stay behind. Alpha Asher was taking a risk leaving his pack, a risk that hadn’t gone unnoticed. Beta Devin and Alpha Zeke stayed behind to monitor the pack, to ensure no one noticed Alpha Asher’s absence. I’m sure Beta Devin and Alpha Zeke also stayed behind to keep a close eye on Alpha Bran, who had spent the past day pouting over his loss.

“I’ll cover my scent. Most of them haven’t seen my face. That’ll have to be enough.” Alpha Asher frowned; his light eyes locked on my own. “Lola and I will head to the back where the fight take’s place. Breyona and Mason stay in the club, keep a close eye on everything. Carter and Wade, circle the building then head back to the front. Make sure the car’s ready.”

“What city did you say we were going to?” Mason frowned, shifting uncomfortably in the backseat.

“I didn’t say.” Alpha Asher sighed, running a hand through his dark tousled hair. “We’re going to Atlanta.”

Mason’s body went rigid, growing uncomfortably still in the seat beside me. His discomfort was written on his face, his eyes filling with a foreign emotion.

“Are you alright?” I murmured lowly, a gentle hand tugging on Mason’s sleeve.

“Yeah.” Mason cleared his throat, his face looking unseasonably pale. “I used to live in Atlanta, before we moved back.”

I wanted to press Mason, to ask what happened to him in Atlanta but halted. His full lips were twisted into a frown, an expression Mason rarely wore. Breyona and Mason had the same strange light flickering in their eyes, a sort of wary hopefulness they couldn’t shed. Not wanting to ask in a car full of people, I made the silent decision to ask them later, if this entire night went according to plan.

“Are you up for this?” I grimaced, my heart racing in my chest.

As selfish as it sounded, I needed to know before we walked into Vampire territory. Any hesitation, any reluctance could cost me Sean. At this point, it wasn’t about me and how I felt. This wasn’t about my conflicting heritage or my strange connection to Tristan. This was about getting Sean home safely, making sure I didn’t lose another family member.

“I’ll be alright, I promise.” Mason grinned, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “I have a lot of memories of Atlanta, not all good experiences.”

“You can always talk to me y’know.” I frowned, a pang of guilt rolling about in my stomach.

I had been so concerned with my own life, that I hadn’t asked about my two closest friends. I hadn’t a clue how Breyona and her mate were fairing, especially after hearing how her mate wasn’t accepting of who we were.

“I had a mate once.” Mason frowned, his eyes burning into the palms of his hands. His hazel eyes were sad as they met my own, a sense of sorrow I had never experience lingered in their depths. “I

met her in Atlanta.”

“What happened?” I breathed, unable to control myself. I knew Mason was over nineteen, but he had never mentioned a mate before. I figured he would tell me when he felt the need, not wanting to push before I truly got to know the guy.

“She tricked me, led me to a park in the middle of the night. The guys with her left me for dead.” Mason murmured, his eyes that were usually filled with happiness and excitement looked dull and faded.

Everyone in the SUV was silent, clearly trying not to listen in on what Mason was telling me. Mason didn’t seem to care, if he even noticed.

“How—” I opened my mouth to speak, to ask how mere human men could have nearly killed a werewolf. As if he anticipated my question, Mason continued his story.

“I thought she might’ve had a boyfriend, and the guy got pissed at me, but it was so much worse.” Mason frowned, shaking his head slowly. “I wasn’t sure until I saw the mark on your shoulder—the one the Vampire left on you.”

My own lips turned down in a frown, wondering what my mark had to do with Mason’s mate. Something inside my heart tugged at the mention of Tristan, but I shoved the irritating emotion to the side.

“She was mated to a Vampire.” Mason’s voice held strong, but was intertwined with such sadness. “They both had identical marks on their shoulder, just like yours.”

“I’m—” I stopped, because truly what could I say? Losing your mate was more than just a simple breakup. The loss of your mate signified the loss of part of your soul. Happiness could still be found, but the person would live a half-life, one where they constantly wondered ‘what if’.

It posed a question in my mind; one I had been trying to avoid. If Tristan were my mate, what would

I do? Would I have the strength to resist the mate bond? If I were able to reject him, what would be my next move? I couldn't go back to Alpha Asher and pretend nothing had changed. If Tristan was truly my mate, that meant Alpha Asher had a mate out in the world. I would never be able to forgive myself if I took Alpha Asher away from his destined mate.

'Time will tell.' Maya murmured, 'No use in tormenting yourself over it, there's nothing you can do until your birthday.'

'Thanks for the words of wisdom.' I muttered, letting out a nervous sigh.

"It's alright." Mason sighed, the fog clearing from his eyes. "It's hard, but some days aren't so bad. Sometimes something good can come from a bad situation."

Mason shot me one of his lopsided smiles, a strange emotion surging through my chest. His hazel eyes flickered with some hidden emotion, one that prompted Mason to drape his arm over the back of the seat.

"What was she like?" I couldn't help but ask, my own curiosity winning over.

"Absolutely stunning." Mason chuckled, "Everything I could've ever wanted, and yet she was nothing like I'd expected."

From the corner of my eye, I could see Breyona listening intently to our conversation. A glimmer of pain flashed in her gaze, subdued before I could analyze any further. While my heart went out to Mason, I hoped Breyona's ending would be much different.

As our conversation faded, the dull hum of the highway grew louder. The monotonous sound tugged on my eyelids, my body beckoning me into the darkness. There was little anticipation coming from the six of us. The drive was silent, a heavy sense of foreboding and acceptance emanating from each of us.

I wondered if everyone else had the same knot in their stomachs, their nerves feeling bristled and

frayed. The silence in the SUV gave me plenty of time to think about everything that could go wrong. We were essentially walking into a trap; one we might not emerge from.

'Looking pretty sleepy there, Lola.' Alpha Asher's voice caressed my skin, raising little goosebumps along my arms.

I lifted my head from the seat, my eyes darting to Alpha Asher warily. His eyes were on the road, his large hands grasping the steering wheel tightly. His full lips were slightly parted, tempting me from where I sat.

'Maybe you should take a nap.' Alpha Asher chuckled through the mind-link, making me jump at the sudden noise.

'I'm not sure I'm able to.' I sighed, the true extent of my nerves shining through in my voice. 'I'm scared. What if we lose Sean? How will I be able to face my Dad? He already lost Mom; I can't let him lose Sean.'

'I'd be worried if you weren't scared.' Alpha Asher's voice was a calm murmur, a safe beacon in the middle of a violent ocean. I swam towards his voice and the security it provided. 'You can't think that way. Don't think about what could go wrong, just focus on what we came here to do.'

'Alpha Asher, calm in the face of danger.' I chuckled through the mind-link, butterflies swarming my stomach as Alpha Asher shot me a look through the rearview mirror. His dark eyebrow was cocked, the hint of a smirk playing at his lips.

Alpha Asher continued talking to me through the mind-link, chasing away all lingering thoughts of our reckless plan tonight.

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My eyes snapped open, my body jolting upright as we hit a bump in the road. I must've dozed off, as the road signs said Atlanta was a mere ten miles away. My nap had been dreamless, floating in the blissful darkness without a lingering thought. The knots in my stomach came back full force as I remembered what we were doing tonight.

Alpha Asher had talked to me in private, telling me the role I'd be forced to play. I'd pose as Alpha Asher's girlfriend, a title I wasn't completely opposed to. It was clear there was something going on between the two of us, and I hadn't seen Alpha Asher with another she-wolf. The thought made me smug, and yet I continued wondering what we were to each other. Thinking about Alpha Asher was an enjoyable distraction from our mission tonight.

While Wade had an alluring calmness to him, Carter was practically bursting at the seams. If anyone was excited for what tonight had in store, it was Carter. For the first half of the drive, Carter was jumping with excitement at the thought of killing a Vampire. Carter had been trained in Alpha Asher's pack his entire life, never old enough for actual battle. This was the first time Carter was leaving the pack, going on his first mission. Alpha Asher stifled Carter's excited rant with a growl, allowing the silence to continue. While Carter and Wade seemed attached at the hip, Wade had battled against rogues' countless times.

The full impacts of our mission dawned on me as we hopped on the exit for Atlanta, GA. There was so much that could go wrong, that could leave Sean injured or worse. We had little time to plan, forced to strike before they moved Sean to another location.

My biggest fear was someone at the club recognizing Alpha Asher or I. I couldn't see Tristan visiting a club to watch men fight to the death, but better to be prepared.

In between the silence, I practiced what my Grandma had told me. I rebuilt the crumbled bookshelves in my mind, placing my thoughts between each page. An hour later and a dull headache, the library in my mind was organized. It had been left in shambles the last time I faced Tristan. A cold chill ran across my skin at the thought of facing him again.

We veered off the exit into Atlanta, GA and was instantly met with the sprawling city. Sky scrapers sat in clusters, shining windows and bright lights. Tourists and residents were bunched in pairs, walking down the sidewalk without a care in the world. I watched as Mason's eyes glazed over, no doubt living through every memory he had here.

We drove through the center of the crowded city. The sun had long ago set, drawing out the vast night-life of Atlanta. Neon signs hung at the ends of corners pointing at various clubs and bars. The

smell of freshly cooked food and alcohol was being carried on the breeze.

We continued driving, past the crowds of scantily dressed women, past the vibrant clubs with their pulsing music. Soon the crowds began to thin, the number of people outside dwindling significantly.

Alpha Asher pulled into a poorly lit parking lot, the tires of the SUV crunching loudly as it drove over the loose gravel. Confusion was written clear on my face, my eyes glued to the dark and grim building in front of us.

It looked to be an old warehouse, some of the windows blocked and boarded. The outside of the warehouse was covered in sprawling vines inching their way up to the sky. Just as I readied to open my mouth and insist, we came to the wrong place, I noticed the number of cars occupying the parking lot.

We parked towards the front, as close to the doors as we could manage. New cars of varying color's and models were scattered around the parking lot. Each car looked shiny and new, some newer than others.

"What better place than an abandoned warehouse." Carter scoffed, cracking his neck and flexing his fingers.

"Remember, keep constant tabs on each other." Alpha Asher's voice was rough and stern, his honey eyes locked on the five of us. "If Lola and I need to flee, I expect the four of you to know about it. The mind-link will be open the entire time."

"No worries, Alpha. If Wade and I get stuck, leave us behind. We'll fight our way out." Carter smirked, his shoulders bouncing as he fake jabbed a couple times. Wade gave his friend a tired look, his eyebrow raised as he silently questioned Carter's sanity.

“Do you actually hear the things you say?” Breyona quipped, not skipping a beat as she glared at Carter. “Or do you just talk out of your ass and hope it goes well?”

I couldn't help but snicker at her comment along with the death glare on her face. Carter placed a hand over his heart, giving Breyona an insulted look. From the looks of it, Breyona's comment earned a chuckle from all of us, a nice distraction to lighten the soul-crushing mood.

“So mean.” Carter shook his head, giving Wade a weary glance.

The six of us headed to the front door, not a person in sight. Anticipation and worry filled my gut. Would we manage to get Sean home safely? Will Sean even be the same person after what happened to him?

“We won't leave here without Sean.” Breyona murmured from beside me, linking her arm in my own. “We'll bring him home, Lola.”

“I hope so.” I breathed, unable to say much else.

I adjusted my tight dress and smoothed down my long hair. The neckline was low, enhancing my cleavage yet managed to cover the scarlet mark on my shoulder. A long shiver rolled through me, and for a moment I regretted not bringing a jacket. It wasn't the air that chilled me, it was the thought of what could go wrong.

“Put this around your neck.” Alpha Asher murmured, handing me a red lanyard. His cologne wafted into my nose, soothing some of the turmoil in my stomach.

“Is this our way in?” I frowned, wondering why Breyona and Mason weren't wearing one.

“This is how we get into the fight.” Alpha Asher continued, slipping the lanyard over my head, “It'll be in another part of the warehouse, I'm sure. Keep an eye on the exits, we don't want to get blocked in.”

“We’re going to have to cause a scene to get Sean out of here, aren’t we?” I grimaced; my fists clenched at my side.

There was no way we’d be able to sneak Sean from the building, not when he was supposed to be fighting. This wasn’t a mission of stealth, but of cunning. We would have to find some way to get Sean free while saving our own skin.

“We are.” Alpha Asher nodded, rolling his lower lip between his teeth.

“Do you have a plan for that?” I paused, my eyes scanning his rugged face.

“No, I don’t.” Alpha Asher shook his head, “There wasn’t enough time.”

“You don’t have a plan?” My lips were pressed tightly together, unwelcome surprise flowing through me.

Much to my dismay, Alpha Asher’s lips turned up in a smirk. His honey-colored eyes shined with amusement, despite the weight of the situation.

“I figured we could take a page from your book.” Alpha Asher chuckled lowly, “Act first, think later. Improvise.”

“You want to improvise with my brother’s life on the line?” I sighed, for once seeing the error of my own ways.

‘Not so fun when it’s someone else acting before thinking, is it?’ Maya’s smug voice rang out in my head.

‘Now is not the time for a life lesson, Maya.’ I snapped, turning my attention back to Alpha Asher.

'There's always time for a good life lesson.' Maya shrugged, backing off once she sensed my irritation.

"Like I said, there wasn't enough time." Alpha Asher frowned, his voice a rough murmur. "If we waited, there would be no telling when Sean would pop up again. He could be halfway across the country if we wait."

I knew Alpha Asher was right, but that did nothing to calm my ragged nerves. Maya sent small increments of strength into my veins, enough to calm my hammering heart.

Silence swept over the entire parking lot, and I held my breath as Alpha Asher knocked on the large swinging doors. A second passed by, followed by another until one of the wide glass doors opened. The windows were blacked out, hiding whatever lie beyond the doors.

A bald man opened the door, his body built like a mountain. Even his head was rounded, uneven in its shape. The guy looked as though he were carved from the side of a mountain, rippling muscles larger than my head lined his arms.

The guy was standing just inside the warehouse, in a little black room clad of any furniture or decoration. The only light hung from the ceiling, casting its yellow hue against the blacked-out walls.

Alpha Asher approached the man leisurely, with a calmness even I couldn't muster. The man made no moves, even as Alpha Asher leaned in and murmured something to the man.

With little more than a grunt, the bouncer walked us over to another set of doors, on the opposite side of the blacked-out room.

The moment he opened the doors, thundering music and blissful laughter could be heard. The flashing lights swarmed around the room and seemed to be landing on a new person each time.

The smell of s\*x and alcohol lingered in the air, coupled with the blindingly sweet scent of Vampires.

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The six of us wandered inside the club, the floor practically vibrating from the bass of the music. Red and white lights flashed in the air, dazzling me each time they crossed my vision. The entire club was coated in harsh red light, even the scattered furniture was red velvet.

The inside of the club was actually fairly appealing. From the inside, you'd never be able to tell this place was an old warehouse. The inside looked completely remodeled, fresh black paint coating the walls and shiny oak boards covered the floor.

Towards the back of the room sat a long platform. Tables, chairs, and booths sat on the platform with only a few people occupying them. A thick red rope lined the platform, cutting off the back half of the club. A silver placard with the word 'VIP' etched in hung from the rope.

Each side of the club had a long bar, three bartenders on each side rushing to fill orders. In the center of the club sat a rounded bar, two younger guys in the middle made bright looking drinks.

Even with the severity of what we planned to do; the club had a nice feel to it. Everyone was either dancing the night away or ordering some of the colorful drinks. If it wasn't for the sickly-sweet scent of Vampires, I might actually enjoy this club.

'Talk through mind-link.' Alpha Asher murmured to the five of us, 'I won't risk anyone overhearing.'

'Where do you want us, Alpha?' Carter asked through the mind-link, his eyes scanning the room.

'I want the two of you to split up, but keep close to the doors.' Alpha Asher led me over to one of the bars, his face an impassive mask as he ordered a drink. He managed to order a drink and talk to the bartender while talking to the five of us through the mind-link.

'Breyona and Mason, split up and head deeper into the club. Lola and I will head to the VIP area. Keep your eyes and ears open.' Alpha Asher brought the cup of liquor to his lips, his eyes calmly

scanning the room.

I wasn't sure what Alpha Asher was looking for. It was nearly impossible to pinpoint anything. The flashing lights and the crowd of people dancing made it nearly impossible to focus our senses. While I could smell the scent of Vampires throughout the club, the scent was scattered and difficult to pinpoint.

Either there were a lot of Vampires here, or there's one Vampire who happens to move very fast. Unfortunately, I was betting the latter.

Carter and Wade were the first two to break off, each strolling to a different side of the club. Breyona followed Alpha Asher and I to the bar, while Mason headed to the other side of the club.

'Got a good view of the VIP area from over here.' Mason told the five of us through mind-link. 'We won't be any help once you get in the back.'

'You'll be close enough to come if we call.' Alpha Asher's voice was harder than usual. 'Keep an eye on those doors and blend in.'

'Are you ready?' Alpha Asher spoke directly to me, his honey-colored eyes meeting my gaze. It was hard not to ogle with Alpha Asher standing this close to me, but I managed.

'There will be plenty of time for that once we get Sean.' Maya murmured appreciatively.

'Let's do this.' I breathed, my worried eyes burning into Alpha Asher's. I could feel his own calm-ness washing through the mind-link. Alpha Asher was confident in what we were planning to do tonight. His own willpower rivaled my own, and I wondered how far he would go to get my

brother back. From the small glimpse he had given me into his mind, he was willing to go pretty far.

Alpha Asher held his arm out waiting for me to step forward. My torso rested against his own, his arm draped over my shoulders. I took deep breaths of his intoxicating scent, desperate to drive the smell of Vampires from my nose. While his cologne and woody scent were all I could smell, the sickly-sweet scent lingered.

I melted against Alpha Asher's body as though I had been made for him. His fingers traced patterns on my shoulders, sending goosebumps scatter along my skin.

Alpha Asher led the way, maneuvering the two of us through scattered groups of people. Some danced as we walked through, wandering fingers grazing against my lower back. Although his eyes burned with anger, Alpha Asher made no move against the guys with wandering hands.

A small group of girls stopped Alpha Asher and I, their intense gaze telling me all I need to know. Each were scantily dressed, wearing clothes that hardly covered their backsides. Despite their attempt at flirting with Alpha Asher, the group of girls actually looked good. Even with jealousy rushing through me, I wasn't the type to bully anyone for what they wear.

We made it to the back of the club, standing near the corner of the velvet rope. The back of the club was a little less crowded, the clothes much nicer and more expensive. The VIP area was filled with wealthy looking people. Two guys at a table wore suits, as though they had just gotten off work.

Standing at one of the back doors, a huge man stood keeping eye on everyone. The guy looked nearly identical to the one at the front door. Both built bigger than linebackers, a lumpy head and tree trunks for arms.

The man took one look at our lanyards and grunted, unclipping the velvet rope to let us forward. While it was difficult to make out his scent, I was fairly sure the man was human. Some part of me wondered what his parent's looked like. What kind of people could create a human that big?

'Focus on the task.' Maya mumbled, giving me an irritated huff.

“What’s a dog like you doin’ here?” The large man grimaced, his voice as menacing as his body.

“I’m here to bet.” Alpha Asher smirked, staring up at the man with an amused expression. While my heart thundered in my chest, the large man seemed unphased. “Do you get a lot of us dogs?”

“Get plenty of em’. Mostly rogues.” The guy grunted, his face a mishappen unyielding mask. “Most of em’ aren’t dressed as nice. Never seen you before.”

“Have you been here long, human?” Alpha Asher said the word ‘human’ as though it were an insult. The smirk on his chiseled face remained intact, but his eyes flashed dangerously.

I had to give the guy some credit, he definitely had balls. Not a single member of our pack would stare Alpha Asher down. It was considered a disrespectful action, not that it ever stopped me.

I was sure the big guy noticed the murderous glint in Alpha Asher’s eyes. He knew what we were, and I was sure he knew his employers were Vampire’s. He must be used to dealing with us short-tempered creatures. The bouncer averted his eyes, sensing the power that rolled from Alpha Asher in dark waves.

Without another word, the bouncer stepped aside and led us into another room.

I had never been inside a warehouse before, but always imagined it as this brightly lit sprawling place, people flitting about as they worked machinery.

The back of the warehouse had been completely remodeled, and I wondered how long it had taken them to fix everything up.

Dark walls, hard wood flooring and brightly lit chandeliers. Large velvet couches lined the room, almost as if it were a movie theater. Young men in tuxedo’s walked the room, platters of champagne and glasses of a deep red liquid that was hopefully wine.

The back half of the warehouse was sectioned off by a temporary back wall. Through a thick sheet of glass, a fighting ring stood in the center of the room. Each seat was positioned to watch the fighting ring. My heart thundered in my chest, wondering if I would see my brother through the thick glass.

I had been right, there was no chance we would escape without a fight.

Alpha Asher entered the room without hesitation, as though he had been there countless times before. His actions held a certain calmness I found myself jealous of. I ran my fingers over the length of my dress, trying to still the trembling of my hands.

The sickly-sweet smell was much stronger back here. A few people sat on other identical couches, their eyes scanning the room. Some turned to look at Alpha Asher and I. I could feel the stares across my skin, and somehow knew they were Vampire's. I couldn't discern any specific scent, but some hidden instinct within me knew.

'Relax, you look like you're going to be sick.' Alpha Asher murmured through the mind-link. I was extremely aware of the four other presences in my mind and knew Breyona and the guys would hear our silent conversation.

'I do not.' I grumbled, resisting the urge to grimace at Alpha Asher.

'Get a drink, relax. Once they see the look on your face, the Vampire's will see right through you.'

Irritation rolled through me, but I forced my face to remain a calm mask. A deep chuckle rang out in my mind as Alpha Asher felt my irritation. I let excitement shine through as I raked my eyes over the fighting ring.

Alpha Asher led the two of us to one of the velvet couches. Without warning, Alpha Asher sat on the couch, his hands on my hips as he pulled me down. I landed on his lap, forcing a smile on my face as he nipped at my jaw.

Don't get me wrong, I was enjoying every bit of this but I was aware we had an audience. As if to

prove my point, one of the middle-aged Vampire's in the room glanced my way.

'Good girl.' Alpha Asher murmured, giving my waist a playful squeeze.

I could feel Carter and Wade in my mind, both trying to ignore what they heard. Blood rushed to my face, catching a few more Vampire eyes at the sight.

'They probably want to eat us.' Maya grumbled.

'Can they?' I frowned, 'I am half vampire.'

'I have no idea, but I wouldn't put it past them.' Maya shrugged, content on ignoring that other side of me.

Alpha Asher handed me a glass of champagne. I drank the fruity drink greedily, wishing it were something stronger.

As a few more people came into the back room, a man approached Alpha Asher and I. I knew he was a Vampire the moment our eyes met. His raven hair was pulled back in a low pony tail, his eyes a startling shade of green. A black suit clung to every curve and dip of his body.

My heart hammered in my chest as he took a seat beside Alpha Asher and I. I placed a mask of calm over my face, hoping it wouldn't crack.

My fear was rightfully placed, and I could only hope my training with Chris had been sufficient.

"Hello Alpha Asher Desmond." The Vampire shot the two of us a knowing smile, a nerve-wracking shine to his emerald eyes.

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If Alpha Asher was surprised by the Vampire's words, he didn't let it show. Alpha Asher's face

remained an impassive mask, disinterest flashing in his eyes. I wondered how he managed to keep his cool, and how long it had taken him to perfect that technique. Alpha Asher raked his eyes over the Vampire lazily, a neutral expression on his face. I honed my features, hoping they would convey the same disinterest.

While my heart was a hammering mess, I meticulously checked the stable bookshelves in my mind. Each thought and memory were safely tucked away, bound in leather and stuffed onto a shelf. Before I could wonder if the man was a full-blooded Vampire, I felt someone entering my mind.

Clear as day, I watched as the raven-haired Vampire strolled through my mind. His nails scratched against the thick oak bookshelves. It felt like an irritating scratching sensation in the back of my mind, an itch I could never scratch. It took all of my concentration to keep the library in my mind upright. Clearly this guy wasn't as skilled as Tristan with the mind games. Nonetheless, his intrusion caused me discomfort. I wasn't sure I had room in my head for anyone else, Maya already took up enough space. Resisting the urge to wince, I schooled my face into an irritated glare.

"Could you stay out of my head?" I raised my eyebrow at the Vampire, my eyes flashing dangerously. "It itches."

Alpha Asher turned his eyes to me, letting them flash with caution and concern before wiping the emotions away. The raven-haired Vampire stared at me blankly before letting his lips turn up in a dazzling smile. While the smile transformed the man's entire face, it was a smile that lacked any form of warmth or comfort. His smile was serpent-like, cold and calculating.

"My apologies, but surely you can't blame me for trying." The raven-haired man smirked, his emerald eyes bright and alert.

'Instead of insulting me, let's keep the Vampire's out of our head.' Maya grumbled, bristling at the close proximity between the Vampire and I.

"It is a welcome surprise to find you here, Alpha Asher." The Vampire smirked, his emerald eyes raking over Alpha Asher before turning on me. His full lips turned up in interest as he met my eyes.

Something dark twinkled in their depths, a knowing smile forming on the man's face. "And a pleasure to finally meet you, Lola. I presume you're here for one of our fighters."

A low warning growl shook Alpha Asher's chest, the Vampire's smile deepening in response. The bright-eyed Vampire knew why we were here, who we had come for.

'This could be a trap.' Maya murmured, 'They don't plan on letting us leave.'

'I knew we'd have to fight our way out of here the moment we stepped inside. Let's make it count and take Sean with us.' I nodded in response.

Alpha Asher's voice filtered through my mind, anger lacing his tone. I could feel the presences of Breyona and the guys listening in, waiting for word of what happened.

'They knew we were coming.' Alpha Asher repeated what Maya had said, his voice hard yet determined. 'We're waiting for an opening. I'll need a distraction to get the three of us out safely. When I give the signal, sow chaos.'

Annoying pinpricks danced behind my eyes as I looked at Alpha Asher. He was determined to lead this mission even though he had no obligation to my family. He could have just sent a team of men to do the job for him, but he knew I'd insist on coming along. He was willing to go so far to get my brother, willing to fight for his life. I felt the same as I thought about Breyona and Mason, how there was no hesitation when I asked for their help. I gathered up my strength and forced the tears away, giving the Vampire a hard look.

"If you know what we're here for, then you know how far I am willing to go to get him back." My voice came out steady and strong, conveying none of the that currently boiled in my stomach.

There was no reason to continue playing nice. I wasn't needlessly trying to start a fight, but it was better to get straight to the point. Whether they had time to prepare or not, they knew what we came for.

I refused to let myself think of Tristan, determined to ignore the fluttering in my stomach at the thought of seeing him. Since the scarlet mark on my shoulder had healed, I felt the pull to Tristan much stronger than before. That small part of me hoped Tristan would be here tonight. Maya growled in frustration, hating the scarlet mark that brought nothing but torment.

"A fight would be pointless, unnecessary bloodshed." The dark-haired Vampire shrugged, his emerald eyes flashing with amusement. He leaned forward, his cold eyes staring into my own. "I'm sure we can come to an agreement."

Alpha Asher caught on without needing an explanation, but I could feel the growl that had been building in his chest. Attacking the Vampire would do us no good, at least not at the moment. The fight had yet to begun and Sean was nowhere in sight.

"What do you want for him?" My voice was hard and cold, but even I couldn't hide the interest that lingered in my gaze. As though he knew I were hooked, a serpentine smile formed on his face.

"That can be discussed." The Vampire smiled, the strange expression lighting up his face.

"Do you even have him?" Alpha Asher's voice matched my own, cold and patient.

"Stay for the fight, Alpha Asher. You'll see soon enough." The Vampire's eyes hardened as they flickered to Alpha Asher. "My friend will be over to discuss our terms."

In a fluid and graceful movement, the Vampire stood and left the two of us alone. Alpha Asher's eyes met my own, and I swore we were thinking the same thing.

'An agreement?' Breyona frowned, her voice concerned as she spoke through the mind-link.

'Sounds kind of sketchy.' Carter's voice ran through my mind, followed by Mason and Wade's approval.

'There will be no agreement.' Alpha Asher's voice was hard, leaving no room for negotiation. 'We will bide our time, and wait until they bring out Sean. Once I call for a distraction, we'll grab Sean and fight our way out.'

'We may have to leave out the side door. If we do, we'll circle around front and meet you there.' I chimed in, earning a glance of approval from Alpha Asher.

Ignoring how close the two of us were seated and the heat that crept along my skin, I turned my eyes to the fighting ring. It seemed the fights were about to begin, all wandering eyes turning to the spectacle in the center of the room. Two men were pushed forward, each looking pissed and disheveled. Hatred and acceptance burned in their eyes, protesting yet succumbing to their fate.

There was little hesitation before the two men leaped at one another. While one was built large, the other had rippling muscles. They leaped at one another, the muscular guy taking the bigger one to the ground. Interested chatter broke out among the people watching. Burning disgust had risen in my throat, directed towards the Vampire's enjoyment at the fight.

"Hello, beautiful." A voice called out, that small bit of my soul reaching out to touch.

Tristan strolled over to the couch Alpha Asher and I sat on. His blonde hair was light like snow, his eyes the lightest shade of blue. He was nicely dressed, wearing black slacks and a black button-down shirt. The top buttons on his shirt were undone, giving a glimpse of his hard chest. I was equally attracted and disgusted, my own emotions a boiling mess in my head. Alpha Asher stiffened beside me, feeling my inner turmoil through the mind-link.

Tristan's eyes danced as he looked me over only to harden as they met Alpha Asher's eyes. With little care for the fight going on before us, Tristan took a seat beside the two of us. I was keenly aware Tristan had chosen to sit next to me, as close as he could get without hassle. Some small part of me cooed, 'he won't hurt me.'

'Are you alright?' Alpha Asher sent over the mind-link, unable to hide the hostility and concern in his

tone. 'Keep him out of your head. It's your mind, kick him out if he tries.'

'I can handle this.' I reassured him, collecting my scattered thoughts. I focused on Maya, latching onto that side of myself with all of my strength.

Instead of picturing my library, I tried a different approach. A set of iron doors sat in the front of my mind, impenetrable and unmovable. Layers upon layers of iron and steel blocking what lie within. Tristan's seafoam eyes met my own, a smile playing on his lips. A dull prickling sensation formed at the base of my skull, irritating and incessant. I swore I could feel his fingers grazing against the door in my mind, stroking it lightly as he willed it to cave in.

After giving myself a killer headache, I felt Tristan leave my mind. I had held the door firmly, but not without consequence. As though I had run a marathon, my head was throbbing and my limbs weak. Rather than letting my exhaustion show, I leaned closer into Alpha Asher, propping some of my weight against him. Tristan watched the action, his light eyes flaring at the sight. Maya grumbled smugly, practically screaming her hatred for Tristan.

I didn't have to look to know Alpha Asher had a smug expression on his face, aimed directly at Tristan. After an irritated snarl, Tristan turned his intense gaze to me. His blue eyes burned into my own, calling out to the small shard of me that longed for him. I turned my head away from his own, determined to chase away the trail of heat his eyes left along my skin.

I wanted to cringe as I watched the brutality of the fight. The muscular guy had blood falling from his chin, spitting it across the floor as he fought for his life. The bigger man held more strength, clearly a werewolf from the looks of it. A silver bracelet seared into his wrist, silencing his wolf and keeping him from shifting. Silver against the flesh will burn and nullify your wolf, but will not take away your strength or speed. Silver in the bloodstream will destroy us from within, almost a certain death unless treated right away.

A sour look formed on my face as I watched the human and werewolf fight. I found it unfair how the werewolf still had his strength and speed, using it to brutalize the human. The human had speed on his side, much like myself. His speed was what kept him alive so far.

"Are you not enjoying the fight, beautiful?" Tristan asked, his face impassive while his eyes burned.

“A werewolf against a human?” I scoffed, ignoring my thundering traitorous heart. “He’s clearly stronger and faster, it’s not a fair fight.”

“It isn’t, is it?” Tristan mused, a playful smile playing at the edges of lips. “I have quite a bit of money placed on this fight. Let’s even the odds, shall we?”

Tristan waved his hand and the Vampire we had spoken to earlier came to his side. The Vampire with raven hair and emerald eyes smiled at me, a smile that bore too much intimacy and familiarity for my comfort. Without a word, Tristan pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and placed it in the man’s hand.

“Let’s see if a human is smarter than a wolf.” Tristan smiled, his eyes gazing down to where his mark sat covered.

I kept my eyes on the fight, resisting the urge to steal a glance at Tristan. I had almost missed it when a small shard of silver was thrown into the fighting ring. Large enough to pierce a beating heart if need be. Time seemed to slow, the seconds ticking by as my heart rate sky rocketed. The two men locked eyes, a wave of understanding between the two. Both scrambled for the dagger, for a clean way out of the fight.

The human was faster, diving to the floor with the dagger in hand. The werewolf’s moves were rushed now, more frantic than they were before. The human had the upper hand, using the werewolf’s impulsive blows against him.

In just a second, it was all over.

The human had rolled to the ground, dodging the werewolf’s lunge. The silver blade met flesh, sinking into the werewolf’s chest with a sickening thud. I swore I could hear his last heartbeats; swore I could see the light leave his eyes as he clattered to the floor.

I felt sick to my stomach, ready to dispel the champagne I had drunk tonight. My skin felt sticky, slick with nervous sweat. How anyone could find this entertaining was beyond me. Betting on life and

death made my insides feel rotten, but renewed my strength and purpose.

“Who did you bet on?” I found myself asking. I almost flinched with surprise, noting how calm my voice had sounded.

“The human.” Tristan smirked, his eyes flickering with amusement.

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“I want to see Sean first.” I frowned, my eyes flickering to the mess in the fighting ring.

“Of course.” Tristan’s velvety voice caressed my skin, but did nothing to erase the disgust burning in my stomach.

The fighting ring was cleaned quickly, not a trace of blood lingered on the white floor. Some people in the small crowd grimaced or mumbled angrily over the loss of their money. It was unnerving how these people could watch such brutality.

My heart leaped in my stomach as two more men were pushed onto the stage. Sean’s face came into view, looking haggard yet defiant. One of his eyes had been blackened and looked to be slowly healing. His lip was split, a thick line of blood running down the center. From the angry glint in his eye, Sean had not been broken by these Vampires.

“What’s your price?” I spoke without thinking, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. My heart thundered in my chest at the sight of Sean. His skin was pale from lack of sunlight, the hair on his head dirty and unruly. “What do you want for him?”

“What I want—is you.” Tristan breathed, his voice calm and his eyes steady on me. My eyes snapped over to Tristan, reading the sincerity in his eyes. Tristan wouldn’t budge, that much was clear.

“Name something else.” Alpha Asher snapped, anger seeping into his eyes.

“A life for a life. Lola for Sean.” Tristan murmured, his eyes burning into my own. He hadn’t spared an ounce of his attention, placing it all on me. “Is your brother worth your own life? How far would you truly go?”

Alpha Asher stiffened, his anger rolling in waves through the mind-link. I could feel Breyona and Mason tense as they heard our conversation through the mind-link. Tristan’s words replayed in my head, bouncing between the six of us.

‘Don’t you dare, Lola.’ Alpha Asher snarled through the mind-link, sensing my hesitation.

I wanted to deny I had even contemplated it, but I couldn’t. I hadn’t the time to properly mourn my Mom’s death, but I refused to mourn Sean’s. I refused to let him suffer because of what I am. Alpha Asher could sense how far I was truly willing to go.

‘Breyona, we could use that distraction now.’ Alpha Asher growled through the mind-link. I stifled the surprise that crossed onto my face, wondering what Alpha Asher had planned.

‘Alright, give me a minute.’ Breyona huffed, leaping into action. ‘Stall him or something.’

“Why do you want me?” I stared at Tristan, my gaze hard and unyielding. ‘Is it because of my father?’

If Tristan was surprised, it didn’t show. His lips simply turned up in a mischievous grin, his seafoam eyes dancing.

“I thought someone was listening in on us.” Tristan chuckled, before leaning in. “Messing with the shadows already? I hope you’re a fast learner.”

“I didn’t bring myself there.” I scoffed, shaking my head. “For whatever reason your King wanted me to be there.”

Tristan’s eyes conveyed nothing, not even the smallest trace of lingering emotion.

“Vampire’s choose their own mates. From the moment I met you, I knew you were mine. This was before I learned of your—heritage.” Tristan murmured, his voice a silky whisper. “You had felt it then as well. I looked into your mind, saw your desire for me.”

Tristan had successfully taken my mind off of the fight, gaining all of my attention. Guilt swarmed me as I had forgotten about my brother in those short moments. Sean and the human had lunged at one another. Steady fists and heightened speed gave my brother the advantage against the average sized human.

“You were just some hot guy in a club.” I muttered, my eyes filling with anger.

“Your words lie, but your thoughts do not.” Tristan murmured, and I fought against his intense gaze. “I know what you feel for me. I feel the pull as well.”

Deny, deny, deny.

Tristan would never know the full extent of my longing for him, the irritating pull in my veins whenever I thought of his face. I would hide that from the world, accepting the discomfort and pain before I told anyone the truth. Alpha Asher chased those emotions away, dulled the part of me that longed for Tristan.

A silver dagger clattered onto the fighting ring. My wide eyes met Tristan’s; a sly smile had already formed on his face.

“Even the odds?” Tristan questioned, his voice light and caressing.

Sean and the human scrambled for the knife. I found myself leaning forward, anticipation and fear suffocating me. Just as Sean’s hand wrapped around the hilt of the dagger, an explosion sounded.

All at once everything went to hell. Fire alarms blared in unity; sprinklers spewed water onto everything below. Those watching stood in surprise, hair slick as the water rained down.

‘Get Sean and get out.’ Breyona hissed, her words clipped.

Alpha Asher pulled the two of us to our feet, lunging at Tristan without hesitation. Tristan had been much faster than I thought, on his feet as Alpha Asher made contact.

‘Get Sean!’ Alpha Asher snapped, knocking me from my daze. ‘Carter and Wade, get your asses in here.’

‘On our way.’ Carter’s voice was laced with excitement. ‘Wait till you see what Breyona did.’

If it weren’t for the fight ahead, I would’ve laughed at the comment.

I ran towards the back of the room, heading to the door that led back stage. The room had erupted into chaos, thick black smoke seeping in through the doors. The smell of burning wood filled the room, and I wondered what Breyona had decided to do.

As I threw open the backstage door, someone heavy knocked me to the floor.

Sean’s scent filled my nose, along with the tang of fresh blood. His eyes were wide but burned with determination. The silver cuff still sat on his wrist, silencing his wolf and searing his skin. The silver knife was clutched in his hand, a death grip around its hilt.

The doors slammed open, swinging shut with a deafening slam. The smell of burning wood and plastic was stronger, as was the smoke lingering in the air. Carter and Wade barreled into the room; their eyes set on the Vampires who crouched menacingly. Some of the crowd had left, filtering out of the club at the first sign of danger. Others stayed behind, their eyes shining with anger as they looked between Alpha Asher and I. Sean pulled the two of us from the floor his arms holding me in a death grip that lasted for just a moment.

Chaos ensued as two Vampire's headed for Sean and I, only to be stopped by Carter and Wade. Tristan had gotten away from Alpha Asher, barking out an order. Alpha Asher was on his feet, a whirl wind of snarls and blows. Tristan was skilled, almost matching Alpha Asher in his own blows. My heart thundered; my eyes torn between who to help.

Carter and Wade were beginning to shift, their nails lengthening as they cut down Vampires. The ones who fell were quickly replaced, soon overwhelming Carter and Wade. I knew they could handle their own, but their opponents had every ounce of their attention.

A Vampire lunged at Sean, who darted to the side with the silver blade slick in his hand.

"Leave Lola untouched." Tristan murmured, his pale eyes once again burning into my own.

Alpha Asher was fending off three Vampires, ones who had quickly arrived after Tristan's order. A Vampire lunged at me, a holder man with greying hair and dark eyes. Instead of tearing into my skin, his large hands wrapped around my own. Anger and strength surged through me, expelling through every blow I made. My knee slammed into his gut, knocking him back and ripping his hands from my body.

Tristan had left the room while I was distracted, a dozen Vampire's to take his place. All at once I took in the severity of the situation, my heart a thudding rapidly in my chest. Alpha Asher was overwhelmed, sweat gleaming on his forehead, and a look of fury in his eyes. Four Vampire's surrounded him, four surrounded Carter and Wade. Sean was fighting two at a time, his eyes bright and alert. Another two were making their way over to me, the same cold glint in their eyes.

A cold sweat broke out over my skin, more thick smoke poured into the back of the warehouse and the water continued raining down. The harsh air burned the back of my lungs, the scent nearly overwhelming.

'You're running out of time' Breyona's voice hissed in my mind, a faint afterthought as I looked around the room.

Fear scattered along my skin; my eyes locked on Alpha Asher. The Vampires had brought him to his knees. Their dead littered the ground at Alpha Asher's feet, countless Vampire's had died at his hands. Everything seemed to slow, that familiar icy caress sliding over my skin.

'Lola, don't-' Maya's voice was cut short as I called out to the shadows.

Ice lapped across my skin, Maya's words fading from my mind. I had promised myself I wouldn't use the shadows again, but there was no way we were winning this fight. They had known we were coming, had prepared for it all along. They had the numbers, overwhelming us easily. If I didn't act fast Alpha Asher would lose his life, followed by Carter and Wade. Desperation rushed through me. For once, I didn't have to wonder how far I would go.

'Save him.' I hissed, feeling the icy tendrils lap at my skin. 'Save Alpha Asher and get rid of these Vampires.'

'The price is steep-' The disembodied voice slithered into my mind, 'A life for a life.'

Its voice circled my mind, stirring my thoughts violently. I knew what it was asking, what it wanted from me. What scared me the most was how easy the decision was. My life for Alpha Asher's, a worthy trade. Every intimate moment between Alpha Asher and I flashed through my mind, igniting a comfortable flutter in my stomach. My feelings for Alpha Asher had changed since I had met him, a fact I had been trying to ignore. As I realized the lengths I would go to for Alpha Asher, it wasn't a hard decision to make.

'I don't care.' I breathed, 'I accept.'

A cunning icy breeze caressed my mind, as though they were thanking me. One by one each of the Vampire's stiffened, their glassy eyes rolling in the backs of their heads. Each fell to the ground, a loud thud against the wooden floor. Somehow, I knew they were still alive, simply incapacitated for

the time being. I could see the shadows flit from Vampire to Vampire, each collapsing to the floor in its wake.

I locked eyes with Alpha Asher, for once his emotions were written plain on his face. I could taste his fury and feel his concern. He could see the gathering darkness behind me, and could only assume what I had given it in return.

My own eyes widened as the icy voice slithered into my mind, its words sending me to my knees.

‘You would give your life, Princess?’ They hissed, slithering around in my head. ‘You do not get to choose.’

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 70

Breyona’s P.o.v

The moment Lola asked Mason and I to come save her brother Sean, my heart dropped. An image of my mate–Giovanni popped into my mind. His soft curly hair, his deep and intoxicating eyes. The musky yet sweet scent that swirled around him, clinging to my nose and calling to my soul.

The mate-bond didn’t care what species we were, hell-bent on bringing the two of us together. My mind resisted the idea, but my body longed for him. My wolf felt the same, equal parts desire and reluctance. I was constantly pulled in each direction, and yet I couldn’t shake that small shred of hope.

I had not seen him since we saved Lola and chased them off. Yet for some reason I continued going to my Aunt’s house every weekend. I knew Giovanni would not come, as his reluctance surpassed my own. I went to my Aunt’s house for another reason, one laced with sadness and longing. I would go to my Aunt’s house and pretend Giovanni was there waiting for me. If I closed my eyes, I could see him standing in the threshold, his dark eyes conflicted and torn as he stared down at me. After an hour spent in my Aunt’s sturdy yet dilapidated house, I’d return home swimming with a guilt I couldn’t shake. Escaping to my Aunt’s house felt like a breath of fresh air, while everything else felt smothering.

I couldn't understand how Mason did it—how he continued breathing and smiling when he couldn't be with his other half. Mason made it look easy, managing to cover the flash of sorrow and longing that appeared in his eyes at least once a day. Mason and I had this silent understanding where neither one of us asked questions. We often saw the look in each other's eyes, and knew where it had come from. It was the look formed by the loss of your mate, your other half. That constant pain followed you, seeping through your pores and thickening the air.

I wanted to tell Lola, to have someone to confide in but guilt consumed me. While at times I swore I could see a flash of longing in Giovanni's eyes, he would never turn his back on his kind. And how could I blame him, when I refused to do the same?

Everyone in the SUV heard Mason's confession of his last time in Atlanta. I knew we had both come for the same reason, each of us hanging onto that small shred of hope.

I fought with myself relentlessly, that small shred of hope had quite a loud voice. What would I do if Giovanni was there? Throw myself into his arms and plead for him to stay with me? While I couldn't seem to give up, I couldn't see a future with Giovanni. I wanted a future where I could be with my mate and my pack, a selfish future.

The club would've been awesome, had it not been crawling with Vampire's. While I couldn't trace their scent, my instincts told me the truth. Every other pair of cold eyes that danced across my skin were those of Vampire's. Some sneered as they sensed a wolf in their midst, other's glanced briefly but looked away.

Once Lola and Alpha Asher headed to the VIP area, I stayed at the bar on the far end of the club. The warehouse setting made the club enormous, making me unable to see the other end of the room through the winding bodies.

People of all species were dancing, bodies grazing against one another as the thin scent of sweat filled the air. The red and white lights danced across bare skin, scattering different hues throughout the club. People of all species danced in thin little dresses, the rough hands of men caressing their

hips. Two women leaned against the wall; their lips tangled in a fight to the death.

I felt like an exposed nerve, every last thing I saw brushed against my sensitive endings. I had spent days ignoring the growing hole in my chest, but every sight and smell at the club brought it to my full attention. Lust-filled looks were thrown across the club, wandering hands and lips caressing against skin. All it did was bring Giovanni to the front of my mind.

“What can I get for you, gorgeous?” A voice pulled me from my thoughts. The inevitable rush of disappointment ran through me, as the voice did not belong to Giovanni. Without even realizing, I had been leaning against the onyx-colored bar. One of the stools grazed against my hip, my front facing the crowd of dancing partygoers.

The bartender was cute, a guy I would have no doubt swooned over but things had changed. The bartender’s blonde hair was a tousled mess on his head, the hint of muscles straining through his dark shirt. His eyes were dark with mystery, something the old me would have loved. Men lacked their usual appeal since I had met Giovanni. I was no longer giving flirty glances or sly touches; guilt became a constant companion.

I knew I shouldn’t have felt guilty, but Giovanni had not rejected me. That had to count for something, right? I had begged him, yelled at him and yet he didn’t reject me. It seems I wasn’t the only one dealing with an inward battle.

“Rum and coke.” I sighed straining my voice to raise it above the music. The bartender flashed me a dazzling smile, one that would have had me snagged from the beginning. Yet, I felt nothing for the hot bartender. My stomach was absent of butterflies, the hole in my chest growing bigger with each guilty thought.

“You don’t seem to be enjoying your night, gorgeous. The drinks on me.” The hot bartender flashed me a sly smirk, those mysterious eyes flashing as they ran over my skin.

I felt nothing from his prying gaze, no heat, no warmth, just the unmoving hole in my heart. I wanted to pretend, to gain some semblance of my old life back but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I wouldn’t

give the bartender my empty meaningless words, string him along as I pretended to be who I once was.

“Thanks.” I murmured, taking the glass from his outstretched hand. The alcohol burned as it ran down my throat, bringing some warmth to my cold body. I wanted to laugh spitefully. Heartbroken humans could easily forget their sorrows, simply able to drink them away. Werewolves’ could do no such thing. Drugs and alcohol refused to affect us, leaving us little outlet for our inner demons. Perhaps, that was why werewolves were so violent.

“What’s your name?” Another dazzling smile, one personal and intimate. Deep moss-colored eyes fanned my face, but my body held no reaction.

I couldn’t help it when irritation flooded me. I wanted to be left alone, suffering in silence as I was triggered by practically everything. I could feel him hovering over my shoulder, waiting for an answer.

“Breyona.” I spared no effort to raise my voice above the music, my eyes darting over my surroundings. There was no sight of Mason, Carter or Wade but the makeshift warehouse club was huge.

“Breyona. I’m Noah.” My name left his mouth like a seductive song, carried to my ears by the thundering music. His voice was raspy, nothing like Giovanni’s. Giovanni’s voice was rough, but held a certain silkiness that made your toes curl.

For just a split second I noticed the nametag pinned to his shirt. Big blue letters spelled the name, ‘Noah’. I had seen it as I walked to the bar, but had not cared what his name was. Even now, I couldn’t bring myself to care. I wasn’t normally this way, a heartless bitch with eyes for no one else. I had changed the moment this festering hole was placed inside my chest.

“Did you–” Noah’s mouth opened, full lips I would have once trailed my eyes over.

“He knows you guys are here.” Another voice, a heart stopping familiar voice. Rough but smooth like silk, sweet like honey with that murderous edge bathed in mystery.

He had looked the same, dark curly hair brushing the cusp of his eyebrow. Long lashes framed dark eyes, eyes that burned with every intense emotion.

My eyes left the open-mouthed bartender, the one who had tried and failed to make a lasting impression. That bitter part of me wanted to chuckle, what would another man have over Giovanni? With the looks of an earthbound God and the body of a warrior, Giovanni stood behind me.

“Gorgeous—” My eyes were no longer on the bartender, his name already forgotten from my memory.

“Scatter, human.” Giovanni’s voice hardened, still sweet and silky as it held a murderous edge. Dark eyes flashed with anger and irritation, evoking more conflicting emotions from my battered heart.

Out of instinct and my guild ridden feelings for Giovanni, I blocked the mind-link between the six of us. It was almost like pressing the mute button on a phone, keeping my conversation and surroundings from their minds.

He didn’t reject us. There is hope, he didn’t reject us.

Those damning thoughts danced gleefully in my mind.

I heard the bartender pause, no doubt looking over Giovanni warily. If the bartender was smart, he would leave. My disinterest in him was clear, as my eyes were now glued to Giovanni.

For the first time in what felt like forever, my face flushed. I was hyper aware of the outfit I had chosen for tonight, specifically picked on the slim chance I would see Giovanni. Scarlet in color, the soft fabric hugged my slim body and brought attention to my long legs. The back of my dress was open, revealing creamy skin.

The mate-bond had strengthened each time we met face-to-face. I could feel Giovanni’s self-control as if it were a tangible substance. It rolled around him in waves, forcing him to keep his eyes locked

on my face. Each time I had to remind myself that I didn't truly know Giovanni. I knew he was interested in betting and odds, but that was it. Did he have a family? Did he already have a woman in his life?

Even though I hardly knew the man, my soul knew his own.

"He knows you guys are here." Full lips parted to repeat the words he had said before, capturing my attention once again.

'Get a grip. Remember why we're here.' My wolf chanted in my mind, a stable ledge for me to perch myself upon to avoid the churning ocean content on swallowing me whole.

"Tristan?" A name that tasted sour on my lips, one that sent irritation and anger bubbling in my veins. "What are the two of you doing here?"

I sounded like a nagging, concerned girlfriend but I couldn't bring myself to care. My soul had connected with Giovanni's, and I was too weak to force myself to say the words that would set us free.

Reject him, don't reject him. Two options that fought against each other in my mind, a constant war that left me with a lingering headache.

"Many place bets on the fights, little she-wolf." Giovanni's light accent was deliciously tempting, the hole in my chest aching beyond belief. His dark eyebrow raised; the movement sent a fluttering into my stomach. "I oversee the money and ensure everything is done—safely."

From the sound of Lola's inner turmoil and surroundings, the fights were anything but safe. I could feel Lola's disgust as she watched two people fight, could taste her anger on my tongue like scorching hot sauce.

"Then he knows why we're here?" My lips turned down, as they had done quite often this week. My own selfish worry flooded my veins. I would have to warn them and then be forced to explain how I

came by this information. “He knows what we came for?”

“He chose this location specifically.” Giovanni nodded, his eyes dark and his voice hard.

“Why can’t he just leave her alone?” My own voice was tinged with anger, anger directed at both Tristan and myself. “What is with his stupid obsession over her?”

My frustration bubbled and ebbed, directed at myself. I wanted to shout to the night sky, to drag the Moon Goddess from her heavens and demand why she had done this to me. I wanted to know why she had paired me with a man I could never be with. I needed to know why she had left me with this horrible choice yet refused to give me the strength to be done with it. And yet here I stood, frustrated and hurt without a single helpful answer.

As if he could sense my turmoil, the raging storm that boiled in my blood, Giovanni lifted his hand. It hung in the space between us, a choice begging to be made. Acid burned my stomach, my heart dropping as his hand once again remained at his side.

“Tristan—believes he is Lola’s mate.” Giovanni’s words were calculated, measuring how much information he was willing to give me. I could feel the unspoken words floating in his mind, information he would not give me.

“I’m sure he has other motives.” I scoffed, my damned emotions bleeding through my eyes. Everything Giovanni said or did was weighted, as though he had a glimpse at the potential outcomes.

For a second, panic filled my veins. I could see Lola and Alpha Asher’s surroundings through the mind-link. A dark-haired Vampire had approached the two of them, had known who they were. He was talking to Lola, telling her they could come to an agreement in exchange for her brother’s life.

‘An agreement?’ I asked through the mind-link, worry and distaste filling my tone.

‘Sounds kind of sketchy.’ Carter chimed in, followed by Mason and Wade’s approval.

'There will be no agreement.' Alpha Asher snapped, his tone hard and unyielding. 'We will bide our time and wait until they bring out Sean. Once I call for a distraction, we will grab Sean and fight our way out.'

'We may have to leave out the side door. If we do, we'll circle around the front and meet you there.' Lola chimed in, followed by Alpha Asher's begrudging approval.

Some of my nervousness ebbed away at Alpha Asher's voice. It was clear he had no intentions on letting Lola take the reins. I knew without a doubt how far she would go for her family. She hadn't shown much grief with her Mom, but Lola was always one to deflect things. The two of us were alike in that way, content on finding distractions to avoid facing the pain.

An image of Tristan approaching Lola and Alpha Asher flashed into my mind, raising my irritation until my skin felt itchy and singed. I drowned out the words Tristan was speaking to them, placing my focus on Giovanni.

"An agreement?" I scoffed, my eyes burning as I looked at my Goddess given mate. His dark eyes conveyed no emotion, his irritating mask was firmly in place. My voice held hurt and anger, but didn't come out as murderous as I wanted. "He wants her in return for her brother's life? This is all just a pathetic ploy to get Lola on your side, to use her powers yourselves."

"Ploy or not—Lola's position is coveted. Tristan is but one of many. However, he does not give up easily." This was more information than Giovanni had ever given me, useless and yet I was hanging onto his every word. I could feel the mate-bond between us, a glistening rope of pure gold that spanned the short distance we stood from one another.

"Lola will never betray her pack; you have to know that." I placed all of my attention on him, on staring into those emotionless eyes. My stomach contracted, as if I were trying to crack his mask with my own free will.

"Tristan is willing to bet otherwise." Giovanni's eyes were hard, but held something deep and painful within their depths.

My heart shuddered in my chest as he turned away from me. Clammy, on edge and unbearably alone, that's how I felt the second his eyes left my own.

"You wouldn't reject me—Why?" I found myself asking, the words spewing from my throat without any self-control. I needed to know, to understand why he couldn't say the words. He knew why I couldn't, because I was weak and hopeful. But why couldn't he?

A long pause, those dark eyes burning into me once more. "I do not know."

'Breyona, we could use that distraction now.' Alpha Asher's voice was angry as it filtered into my mind. I wanted to curse, wishing I had more time with Giovanni. I would've stayed in this club forever if it meant we didn't have to deal with the outside world, deal with our species hatred for one another.

"Wait—" I called out, my body lurching forward as I began to lose all control. I was acting on impulse, taking a page from Lola's book. Thinking before speaking had gotten me nowhere with Giovanni, instead I let the overwhelming emotions of the mate-bond take control.

Giovanni had stopped abruptly, turning around as my torso collided into his. His hands found my waist, steadying me. From the brief look of surprise on his face, control had slipped through his tight grasp. His hands singed my skin, burning through the dress I was wearing. Overwhelming emotions scattered along my skin like waves of electricity, bouncing from Giovanni to myself.

'Alright, give me a minute.' I huffed through the mind-link, 'Stall him or something.'

"You have to know this is wrong. He's her brother, she's going to do everything in her power to save him." I breathed, letting my own control slide like thick oil through my fingers. I let the emotions I had contained tightly flow through my words, staining them with the longing and turmoil I felt. "I'm not asking you to kill Tristan or anyone else but—help us, help me."

The mask that clouded his features, the one he had focused so hard on keeping intact, slipped from his face. Emotion lit up his eyes like fireworks, his thoughts practically wrapping themselves around his mind. He felt the pull of the mate-bond as well as I did. He too was swept under the current, drowning in the emotions as he stared down at his mate. Two species eternally at war, but also

destined to mix, to expand.

“I—” His lips opened, seconds away from refusing my plea. I wasn’t sure what I would do if he refused. I was laying my entire heart on the line, the empty hole in my chest throbbing at the risk.

“Please, Giovanni.” I breathed; his name tasted sweet on my tongue. I could feel his breath as it rolled past his lips, its creamy cinnamon scent caressed my face. “She’s asked for none of this. I have to cause a distraction, but I’m begging you to help me. Help us get Sean out of here, you—you can do what you choose afterwards.”

Time seemed to slow as the beating of my frantic heart increased. Its dull thuds pulsed in my ears, the music around turning silent. The pulse from the base continued scattering across the floor, making it feel as though we were vibrating.

My desperate hands clung to his shirt, rippling muscles dancing along my fingertips. His hands never once strayed from my hips. We were both drowning in the current, our gazes locked on one another.

“Sean will find his way to Lola, little she-wolf. I will make sure of it, but that is all I am able to do.” His words were like a salve, smoothing the jagged edges of the hole in my heart. The knot in my stomach erupted into a clu\*ter of butterflies, my eyes incredulously roaming Giovanni’s.

Turmoil, frustration, contempt, and yet his eyes still held that buried glimmer of longing.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 71

Lola’s P.o.v

The power of our deal rippled through the air, sending a chilling wave over my body. The wave rippled and cracked, as though it were made of ice. Instead of passing over me, it delved into my skin and sunk deep into my bones.

A heavy shiver wracked my body, my teeth clattering roughly as the cold settled into my bones. Goosebumps erupted across my flesh as the shadows grew still.

The power that rippled over my skin dimmed as the shadows returned to their normal place in the room. Their whip-like voices faded from mind as the shadows lingering around the room stilled.

The cold had not faded from my bones, and I wasn't sure it would. I felt as though I were in a walk-in freezer, and was surprised when I couldn't see the puff of hot breath leave my mouth.

"What did you do?" Alpha Asher roared, his voice taking on that of an animal.

I had been frozen in place, rooted to the spot where I had made that cursed deal. I had given into the shadows without trying to find an alternative.

'He would have died, Lola...' Maya's voice was soft, but held the weight of the decision I had made.

"What did you do, Lola?" Alpha Asher snarled, his large hands grasping my arms. "What did you give them?"

Alpha Asher was all that kept me on my feet. His grip was rough, but I was too numb to tell if it was painful.

My eyes dragged over the room slowly, looking at the dozens of Vampires that fell to the floor. None were stirring and yet I could hear each and every breath they took. My eyes locked on Sean, looking much more ragged than what I remembered. His hair had grown and was now sticking up in unruly tufts, dirt and deep bruises stained his face. His shoulders hunched with exhaustion, but his face remained determined.

“We don’t have time for this.” I shook my head, my voice cracking as the weight of my emotions threatened to crush me. “We need to get Sean out; more could come at any minute.”

Carter and Wade leapt into action, thankfully not asking questions as they eyed the twenty-five unconscious Vampire’s that littered the floor. Smoke was still trickling into the back room, thick and suffocating as it sealed us in.

The sprinklers continued spewing water, and I wondered when they would finally run out. Pools of water mixed with the blood on the floor, turning the deep cherry wood an unsettling shade of pink. Water streamed down my face, mixing with the tears that fell from my eyes.

Murderer, killer, monster.

The words flashed through my head; my own inner voice filled with hatred. This was different than self-defense, different than anything I had planned for.

I assumed it would be my life I was giving up, my death in exchange for Alpha Asher’s life. I hadn’t asked, hadn’t thought that they could be talking about someone else. Someone innocent was going to die, and it was my fault.

Carter and Wade helped Sean stand, using their body weight to hold him upright. Alpha Asher’s eyes were wild as they scanned my face, and I wondered if he could tell I was crying.

“The back door, go out the back door.” Alpha Asher snarled, tearing his eyes away from my own.

Alpha Asher let go of my shoulders and gripped my hand in his. With our hands locked together Alpha Asher and I ran across the room, stepping over the incapacitated Vampire’s. An exit sat at the end of the room on the far wall, the red sign flickering impatiently.

We barreled out the door and into a damp alleyway. Puddles of what were hopefully water sat in large pools, soaking our shoes. The sickly-sweet scent of Vampire's had faded once we came outside, and was quickly replaced by the smell of wet garbage.

At the end of the alley, a large group of people had formed. Everyone who had been in the club evacuated, crowded around the front of the building.

'Mason, Breyona, did you both make it out?' Alpha Asher asked, his hand never once leaving my own.

'I'm out.' Breyona breathed, sounding as flu\*tered as I felt.

'Me too.' Mason chimed in, but my mind was somewhere else. 'I'm heading to the car.'

'I think they got the fire under control. A couple Vampire's just went back inside, get out of there!' Breyona's voice came out in a rushed whisper.

'Circling around front. Be ready, we'll have to act fast.' Alpha Asher replied.

Alpha Asher pulled me forward, towing me behind him as we rushed down the alley. We merged into the crowd of people outside, trying to blend in as we headed for the car.

My heart was thundering in my chest, but not from the thought of getting caught. What I had done was still circling my brain, pushing any other thought to the side. If Alpha Asher hadn't been pulling me along, I might have gotten lost in the crowd. The car was parked far enough from the warehouse to go undetected, but close enough for easy access. My bare arm grazed against the cold metal of the SUV, but I couldn't feel it. The icy splinters had embedded themselves in my bones, weighing me down and chilling my blood. The splinters reminded me of my deal, reminded me the cost of Alpha Asher's life.

Alpha Asher ripped the passenger door open hard enough to tear it off. As though I were little more than a rag doll, he lifted me and placed me in the seat. His hands moved swiftly as they buckled my

seatbelt. He was in the driver seat a second later. The SUV roared to life and I swore every Vampire in the club could hear it. My own paranoia and guilt made me on edge, teetering somewhere between shock and denial.

Murderer, killer, monster.

'Focus on Sean.' Maya murmured, sensing my inevitable panic. 'Focus on him for now. We can worry about everything else later.'

Sean sat in the back, pressed between Breyona and Mason. His face was haggard but a strange sense of pride lingered in his eyes. I did what Maya said to do, I placed all of my focus on Sean. While the guilt and horror of what I had done was placed on the backburner, the icy splinters remained in my bones.

"I'm sorry—" My voice caught in my throat; the thoughts I had forced aside reared their ugly heads. "I didn't know—we didn't know what happened to you."

"You came." Sean breathed, the sound reminding me of sandpaper. "You came, that's all that matters."

Everyone descended into silence, lost in their own thoughts. Alpha Asher's hand tightened on my own, and I realized he had grabbed my hand the moment he was in the car. His calloused hand around mine was the only thing keeping me together, the only thing keeping me from falling apart.

We swerved down the dark back roads, keeping away from the highway in case anyone had trailed behind us. Each turn and curve set my teeth on edge. I was sure I'd see pairs of glowing eyes through the forest line, an army of Vampire's to finish what we had started.

"You think we were followed?" Carter broke the silence, his eyes gazing the forest as we rushed by.

"I don't—"

The windshield shattered, spewing glass throughout the car. Tiny shards caressed my skin, followed by a gentle stinging pain throughout my face. The small cuts were already healing, my flesh sealing itself together. The loud screech of tires filled the air followed by Alpha Asher's furious snarl.

My teeth clicked painfully, my tongue spewing blood from the rough bite. My head slammed against the seat, and for a second I was thankful Alpha Asher had put my seatbelt on. The front of the SUV was lodged into a telephone pole. The telephone pole stood tall as if it were mocking our horrible attempt on its life. Across the small street was a run-down farm house. Withered wooden boards with large cracks and chunks missing framed the house. Long grass freckled with weeds took up the land around the house.

Their eyes were not glowing, but I began to notice the serene faces of the Vampire's that had stopped our car. A large and jagged rock sat on the floor of the SUV, tiny shards of glass glistening against the dark floor.

The Vampires were standing out front of the decrepit house, each set of eyes locked on our SUV. Smoke billowed from the hood of the SUV, followed by a collective groan from each of us.

"We're not leaving here without a fight." Alpha Asher hissed, his murderous eyes narrowing on the Vampire's. "Everyone alive?"

"Unfortunately." Breyona grunted, the small cuts on her face healing slowly.

Thankfully we were all conscious and able to move. I'm sure the seven of us would be horribly bruised come tomorrow, but we were alive. The seven of us got out of the SUV, Alpha Asher's eyes never once left the Vampire's.

"Their waiting for us." Carter scoffed, "They know we can't leave without a fight."

"Then let's give them what they came here for." Alpha Asher let his snarl rip through the night, letting it wash through the group of Vampire's that had come to fight. 'Be ready to shift at any moment.'

The group of Vampire's hadn't moved an inch as we approached them. Some faces turned up in cruel sneers, but that was the extent of their reaction. A man and a woman stood at the front, stepping forward as though they were the leaders of this group. The man had long dark hair, and eyes the color of a summer sky. The woman at his side looked exotic and beautiful, deep espresso skin and long curly hair. The scarlet mark on her shoulder was uncovered, baring itself to the world.

The man and his companions were clearly Vampire's, as the sickly-sweet smell seemed to radiate from them. The exotic woman happened to be human, her scent smelled of peonies and fresh cream.

"Adrienne—" The name left Mason's lips like a prayer, soft and gentle as a rippling breeze. His eyes were alight like I had never seen them before, his hands clasped together as he stepped forward.

The Vampire who held Adrienne at his side laughed, his silky laughter boomed and echoed into the night.

"Hard to kill, pup?" The Vampire chuckled, his eyes bright and taunting as he looked at Mason. "I won't make the same mistake this time around. Severing your head from your body seems a good way to go."

"Adrienne—" Mason wasn't looking at the Vampire, his eyes were on Adrienne. "Come with me—please."

A chorus of hisses sounded in the night, the Vampire's tensing at Mason's thoughtless movements. His eyes burned into the woman, into the scarlet mark that stained her shoulder.

My thoughts were whipped into a frenzy as I recognized the look in Mason's eyes. Adrienne—the woman who bore a Vampire's mark was his mate.

"She has a mate, pup." The Vampire's lips turned up in a reptilian smile, "You're five years too late. Our bond is complete—unbreakable even with your own pathetic mate-bond at work."

"My mark—my mark can change that, Adrienne." If it weren't for Mason's desperate words, I'd

assume he hadn't heard the Vampire speak at all.

My heart crumbled in my chest as I watched the emotion pour through Mason's eyes. He looked at Adrienne as though she were a Goddess walking the earth, his strength crumbling as he beheld her beauty. Her golden eyes were bright under the moon, but her face remained impassive and cold.

"Your mark will change nothing." The Vampire chuckled, patient and smug as he savored the encounter. "If you had come before we finished the mating process—maybe, but you are too late. She will never choose you pup."

"Adrienne—"

"Enough." Her voice was unlike what I had expected, different from the cold mask she placed on her face. Her voice held warmth, held pity for the young werewolf that begged for her hand. Those golden eyes remained hard, even as her words said otherwise.

"I made my decision years ago. I have my mate, but I'm sorry you lost yours." Warm to detached, her voice changed in an instant.

I was sure I could hear Mason's heart shattering in his chest, the air ripped from his lungs as Adrienne gazed lovingly into the Vampire's eyes.

"I, Mason Briggs—accept your rejection, Adrienne LaFont." His voice held strong; every emotion he was forced to hold down melted into his words. Her name left his lips with sorrow, the mate-bond between them shattering to dust.

Everything went to absolute hell as an achingly familiar cold front licked across my skin. Shadows gathered in the darkest recesses of the forest, slithering from darkened corners untouched by moonlight. They greeted me, whipping around my feet as though they were playing with a friend.

Their silky voices were torn from my memory, their words replaying themselves in my mind.

'You do not get to choose'

Some hissed the words gently, others taunted and snickered. They snak\*d across the ground, unseen by all except Alpha Asher and I.

'To save the one you love, a life must be taken'

A thousand silky voices churned in my mind, all speaking at once to form one voice. Emotions of every kind laced each individual voice. Some sneered the words at me, others murmured them gently. Some shouted them in anger, while others cooed seductively.

'A mate stolen from an innocent'

The smoky tendrils slithered from my legs, heading to someone else. The icy shards in my bones twisted, grinding painfully against my nerves. Despite the cold, sweat began to bead across my skin as I watched the shadows glide away from me.

Murderer, killer, monster.

'This is the price you have paid, Princess'

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The shadows slithered from sight, maneuvering through the tall grass unseen. Alpha Asher's wide eyes met my own as he too could see them slithering. I was thankful he couldn't hear their seductive whispers, begging me to call on them again.

'Mason...' Maya gasped, cringing against the icy torrent invading my body.

The shadows slithered across the small space that separated us from the Vampire's. I watched as they gathered, most of the Vampires were completely oblivious.

The one standing beside Adrienne was not. His seafoam eyes widened at the sight, his eyes snapping up to meet my own.

'He can see them...' Maya murmured; her tone fearful. 'Why can't everyone else see them?'

I couldn't form the words to answer Maya, rooted in place as the shadows glided forward.

Adrienne was oblivious, her golden eyes narrowed at Mason, her arm tucked tightly around her Vampire mate.

They pooled around her feet, lapping against her stiletto boots like murky water. The shadows gathered at her feet, rising as more added to their numbers.

I held my breath until my lungs burned, silently pleading for a way out of this bargain.

'Unbreakable...you must pay the price, Princess'

The shadows cooed, their silky voices falling on my ears in hushed waves. Neither side had made a move yet, as Alpha Asher and the Vampire watched the gathering shadows in horror.

The other Vampire's twitched anxiously, waiting for their leader to call them forward. My friends shot Alpha Asher and I uneasy looks, also wondering why we hadn't taken action.

The shadows rose high, much higher than my short stature. Just when they reached Adrienne's height, the whisps of shadow seemed to solidify and take form.

The dark form of a man stood in front of Adrienne, just inches away, and still she was oblivious.

I sucked in a ragged breath as the shadow's arm raised, slicing across the air in one smooth motion.

Silence echoed across the dark forest, as if the bugs and animals were all holding their breaths. There was no mistaking the feeling of unease that had settled across us all. Even if they couldn't see the shadows, they could feel that something felt...wrong.

A thin, jagged line of scarlet beaded against Adrienne's neck, bright in contrast to her espresso skin. She hadn't even realized what happened yet.

Her golden eyes widened, her hands lip at her sides. At first the blood trickled down, slow and thick as it made its descent down her slender neck.

Her hands snapped up to her neck, her hands grasping wildly at the gaping wound in her throat. Her blood began to spurt in long waves, watering the grass and staining the earth.

The shadows broke apart, falling to the ground once more. They slithered over the fallen blood, devouring each drop that fell to the earth.

Mason lurched forward; his hands extended as if he were going to help his dying mate.

'There's nothing you can do', I wanted to tell him. 'I killed her, Mason. I killed your mate.'

Mason stopped dead in his tracks as a chorus of hisses erupted from the Vampires, warning him to back off.

As if things couldn't get any worse, her Vampire mate unleashed a snarl of pure fury.

Adrienne fell to the ground, beautiful and still as she lay in the grass. Her golden eyes were focused on me, as though she were taunting me.

'I know what you did, stupid wolf.'

I could hear her exotic voice in my head, her words like a whip against my bare skin.

I made the mistake of looking into Mason's eyes, drowning in the sorrow and confusion that filled his gaze. His eyes never once left Adrienne,

The Vampires rushed forward, their leader barreling into Alpha Asher. Carter and Wade met the Vampire's with equal gusto. Mason and Breyona leapt into action, but the four of them couldn't seem to wipe the horror and confusion from their eyes.

I had been so absorbed with the horror of what I had done that I didn't notice the two Vampire's charging my way. With a snarl of absolute malice, Sean knocked the two Vampire's to the ground.

Breyona and Mason both fought in wolf form, tearing the throats out of the Vampire's with furious snarls. Alpha Asher fought in his human form, shifting his hand into claws as he tore the heart from one of the Vampire's. Carter, Wade and Sean all did the same.

Alpha Asher was fighting more than one Vampire at a time, giving most of his attention to their leader.

With my heart bursting at the seams, and Mason's horrorstruck face in mind, I called Maya forward and shifted.

While she wanted to stretch her legs and take her time basking in the moonlight, there were more important matters. I took the backseat while Maya charged at one of the Vampire's fighting Alpha

Asher.

The guy couldn't have been any older than eighteen, a child forced to fight against wolves. His blonde hair was a couple shades darker than Tristan's, sun kissed even though he couldn't go out in the sun. My teeth sunk into his throat like butter, as he hadn't seen me coming. Shock filled his cerulean eyes as they widened at my bite.

I had never killed someone before, even in self-defense and I would never forget the emotions that crossed his eyes. Innocent surprise filled his gaze, followed by sheer denial. He couldn't fathom that this was the end of his life, that all of those years of learning and growing culminated to this moment.

Maya threw his corpse to the ground without hesitation and moved onto the next Vampire.

As their numbers dwindled, Alpha Asher seemed to gain strength and speed. With little more than a cruel sneer, he tore the heart from the Vampire leader's chest. His body hit the ground with a wet thud, his out stretched hand only inches away from Adrienne.

'What do we do?' Breyona spoke through the mind-link, her voice thick with emotion.

'Drag them into the woods, and burn the bodies.' Alpha Asher's voice was strong and acted as a beacon to get me through this horrible night.

Breyona, Mason and I shifted into our human forms. We slipped on some clothes we had kept in the trunk, just in case of emergencies.

We worked in silence for the next ten minutes, each of us dragging a Vampire corpse into the woods. I could hear my heart shatter as Mason picked up his deceased mate, her long curly hair waving in the light breeze. She was limp in his arms, her vacant eyes still staring at me.

The smell of burnt flesh was nauseating, mixing with the sickly-sweet smell that radiated from the Vampire's. Mason stared on at the fire, watching as it licked and crackled against his mate's curly

hair.

“What happened?” Mason’s voice was just below a whisper, each word left his lips slowly as though the sound brought him pain.

I didn’t know what to say. What could I say? There was nothing that could undo what I had done. I had blindly made a deal with the shadows, not bothering to have them elaborate on the price.

‘Not that this excuses what happened...but it wasn’t your fault.’ Maya murmured, the crackling fire drowning out her sorrowful voice. ‘She chose the Vampire’s over Mason. She would’ve killed him if she had the chance.’

Maya was right, it didn’t excuse what I did.

“I don’t-” My mouth opened, my voice a painful croak in my throat.

“Don’t lie to me.” Mason spat the words, his eyes hardening. I had never seen him look so furious before, as though he were seconds away from lunging at my throat. “I felt something there with us, something cold and ancient and just-bad. It was the shadows wasn’t it?”

“I-it was, but Mason-“

“Did you ask them to kill her?” Mason snarled, taking a step towards me as his eyes flashed murderously. All traces of his lopsided smile and bright eyes had vanished, this Mason was someone else entirely.

“Enough.” Alpha Asher’s voice was hard and commanding as he stepped in between Mason and I. His back was turned to me, but I could feel the protectiveness radiating from his body.

I wanted to scream. Couldn’t he see? I didn’t deserve his protection. Mason had every right to be angry with me-to hate me.

"I didn't, Mason. I swear!" My voice shattered, a sob trembling through my body. Mason began to turn his back on me, his eyes vacant and cold. I couldn't let things end this way. I couldn't let him walk away thinking I wanted to kill his mate. "I made a deal. Asher-Asher was going to die. They said a life for a life. I thought they meant me, Mason!"

Something flickered in the depths of Mason's eyes, something that gave me the smallest shred of hope.

"Give him a minute." Alpha Asher murmured, turning to face me. His eyes were dark and his voice thick with repressed emotion. I hadn't told Alpha Asher the deal I made; I hadn't told him the price I was willing to pay for his life.

Wetness cascaded down my face, and I realized I had been crying. Alpha Asher raised his hand as though he were going to wipe my tears away. I flinched away from his touch, and turned towards a stoic Breyona.

I couldn't accept his comfort, couldn't let him chase the horror and ice from my veins. I deserved to feel everything for what I had done. I didn't deserve an easy way out.

Breyona's face was an impenetrable mask, her hazel eyes locked on my face. I wanted to say something, but what could I say?

"Anyone know how to hotwire a car?" Carter broke the thick silence, a frown etched onto his carefree face. "Cause I don't feel like running three hours home."

"I'll find us a car." Breyona grunted, her eyes flickering to the patch of forest Mason had wandered off into.

"Lola, go with her." Alpha Asher murmured, his intense gaze heating my cold skin.

Breyona turned on her heel and headed back to the main road, leaving me to follow closely behind.

Once I had finally caught up to her, we walked down the dark road in silence. I could feel the whirlwind of emotions that swarmed within her, and cringed against their intensity.

“Are–Are you mad at me?” I wanted to throw something, to smack myself across the face for saying something so careless.

“No.” Breyona used her voice like a whip, lashing against my chilled skin without mercy. “I understand why you did what you did, but that doesn’t change how Mason feels.”

“I know.” I choked out, my voice little more than a painful rasp. “I didn’t know–I didn’t know it would be her.”

“You want to know what pisses me off?” Breyona stopped dead in her tracks, her hands resting on her hips. Breyona’s emotionless mask had shifted into one of irritation and anger. Her hazel eyes narrowed at me, sending a shard of regret burrowing into my stomach. “You were willing to give your damn life without thinking it through.”

“I did think it through.” I shook my head furiously, tears pricking the backs of my eyelids. “I couldn’t–“

“I know, Lola. You couldn’t let him die.” Breyona snapped, running a hand through her short hair. “But don’t you get it? You can’t be a damn martyr and throw your life away without thinking of the rest of us. How would your Grandma feel? And what about Sean and your Dad?”

Millions of words flitted through my mind, and yet I couldn’t figure out what to say. Tears formed in Breyona’s narrowed eyes, her slim figure shaking with anger.

“You’re–you’re mad I didn’t think it through?” I chuckled, ignoring the tears that escaped my weary eyes. “I killed someone–I killed Mason’s mate.”

“If Adrienne hadn’t been killed by the shadows, what would have happened to her?” Breyona grimaced, as if the words burned her throat during their exit. “During the fight, what would have

happened to her? Would we have spared her? Taken her as prisoner until she was forced to switch sides?"

I knew what she was asking, and I knew the answer. Adrienne would have died, or escaped to run back to the Vampire's. While it nearly made my heart seize in my chest, there wasn't a happy ending for Adrienne and Mason.

"She would have died, or somehow gotten away." Breyona murmured, "And I know how much Mason is hurting, but she wasn't going to change sides. Does that make me a bad person?"

"I don't know." I murmured; my voice rough with exhaustion.

Just a mile up the road we found a small parking lot littered with different cars. A small sign sticking from the ground said this was where you park if you were going to take a bus. The bus stop sat at the corner, a few feet away from the parking lot.

The streetlights flickered dimly, and my eyes flickered to every shadow in sight. There was no movement, no slithery voice that cooed in my ear. Everything was still, even the crickets had fell silent.

Breyona picked a deep brown mini-van, set with at least thirty bumper stickers. The back window had one of those stick figure families. A stick figure Mom and Dad stood next to a child and a little dog. Above the stick figure family was another sticker that said 'my child made honor roll in 2019'.

"Not my first choice, but we have seven people to transport and we need something inconspicuous." Breyona grunted, catching my gaze as I looked over the tacky bumper stickers.

I leaned against the cold metal of the mini-van in silence, watching as Breyona messed with an assortment of wires.

"How did you learn to hotwire a car?" I found myself asking, thankful for a distraction from my own inner turmoil.

“Made some human friends a year ago.” Breyona shrugged. The engine roared to life and Breyona shot me a half-hearted grin, “They taught me a thing or two.”

We drove back to the abandoned house, maneuvering around the back end of the wrecked SUV. Smoke was no longer billowing from the hood and thankfully the car hadn't erupted in flames.

Alpha Asher, Carter, Wade, Sean and Mason stood around the side of the house, keeping out of view from the road. Breyona pulled into the gravel driveway and hopped out of the van.

“A mini-van?” Carter scoffed, giving Breyona a side-eyed glance. “That's the best you could do?”

“I'm sorry we can't fit seven people in a damn sports car.” Breyona snapped, “It's bad enough we're stealing one car, let's not add another to the list.”

“Alright, alright.” Carter grimaced; his hands raised in surrender.

Alpha Asher climbed into the driver's seat, while everyone else filed into the back. I leaned my cheek against the passenger window, unable to feel the cold of the glass.

Alpha Asher, Carter, Wade and Sean were all splattered in blood. The sickly-sweet scent was all over their clothes, staining their skin.

We all fell into a heavy silence, each of us baring the weight of what happened tonight. Every other minute Alpha Asher's toffee-colored eyes would find their way to my face and linger there for a few moments. When we were half an hour away from home, Sean spoke up.

“Alpha—could I stay in the packhouse tonight?” Sean's voice sounded fragile, as though it were a paper-thin sheet of glass. “Just for the night—I just need some time alone before I see Dad and Grandma again.”

“Of course.” Alpha Asher nodded, his eyes never once leaving the road. “I’ll have Beta Devin bring you to one of the suites when we get back.”

“I’ll have to at least call Grandma.” I frowned at Sean, looking over his haggard and exhausted face. “She kind of figured out where we were going tonight.”

“Of course, she did.” Sean chuckled, but it sounded weak and forced.

Alpha Asher dropped Mason and Breyona off at their houses, followed by Carter and Wade. Mason hadn’t said a word or spared me a glance as he hopped out of the van, trudging up the steps to his house.

‘Give him time.’ Maya murmured, ‘His mate rejected him for a Vampire, and she died. He has a lot to sort through.’

We arrived at the packhouse early in the morning, but the living room light was still on. Yellow light peeking from the sheer white curtains in Alpha Asher’s living room.

The three of us walked inside, Alpha Asher and Sean coated in a thick layer of Vampire blood. Beta Devin and Alpha Zeke were both sitting on the couch, the dull sounds of a football game played on the TV.

Two sets of eyes snapped up from the TV, roaming over Alpha Asher and Sean’s blood coated body.

“You actually did it.” Alpha Zeke chuckled, his eyes brightening as he looked at the three of us. “Kill a lot of Vamps?”

“They knew we were coming.” Alpha Asher grunted, and I could hear the exhaustion in his words. “We’ll talk more in the morning.”

Beta Ned showed Sean to a spare bedroom. Before retreating into the room, Sean pulled me into his

arms. My brother and I had never been affectionate towards each other, but for a moment I allowed myself to forget what I had done and enjoy my brother's company.

Alpha Asher stood off to the side, waiting patiently for me to follow him to his—our room.

“Don't torture yourself, Lola.” Sean murmured into my hear, pulling his arms from around me.

“If only it were that easy.” The words came out in a hushed whimper, but Sean had already closed the bedroom door.

My body was on autopilot as I followed Alpha Asher into our bedroom. I sat motionless on the bed, my fingers grazing against the silky material of his blankets. Alpha Asher stripped the bloody clothes from his chiseled body, tossing them into the bathroom trash can.

I watched in silence as Alpha Asher pulled me from the bed, guiding me into the bathroom where a steaming shower awaited our presence. Much like he had before, he stripped the clothes from my body and let them fall to the floor with a quiet thud.

I savored every moment of his hands against my flesh, smearing soap into my skin until it lathered. Alpha Asher's touch had always awakened something s\*xual within me, flipping a switch that made me crave him entirely. This time his touch was different.

He washed my hair for me, his rough fingers tangled through my hair as he rubbed my scalp. Just when I was about to fall asleep in his arms, he rinsed the soap from my hair. After quickly washing himself, he pulled me from the shower. As if I were a fragile piece of glass, he carried me into the bedroom and placed me lightly on my feet.

While I wanted to collapse onto the bed, his thick arm around my waist kept me upright. His toffee eyes grew dark as they took in my tired and sorrow-stricken face. My lips felt dry and chapped, my eyes swollen from the tears I had shed and yet Alpha Asher looked at me like a man seeing the sun for the first time.

“You were willing to die for me.” Alpha Asher murmured, his voice thick and rough as he recounted the decision I had made.

“Of course.” My voice cracked as I spoke the words, tears burning the back of my eyes as I looked at the heavy emotion clouding Alpha Asher’s face.

“Don’t ever give your life for mine.” His dark eyes grew hard, fear and anger flashing in their depths, “Do you hear me, Lola?”

“I hear you.” I responded, but he could see the truth bleeding through my eyes. “But I’m still here. And Mason’s mate isn’t.”

Alpha Asher’s eyes were still dark, still dripping with emotion he couldn’t put into words. His arm tightened around my waist as he lifted me against his chest. He slipped under the covers; my body still tucked in his arms.

Turning on his side, he pulled me against his chest. His skin radiated a warmth that soothed my chilled bones, and chased away the icy splinters that refused to leave. His hand traced light patterns across my bare back his lips pressed against my clean hair as he inhaled deeply. Even as the sobs wracked my body, his hand never quit its soothing pace against my skin. His touch and affection did something to my wounded heart. It began to slowly patch up the jagged and cracked pieces.

Just as I was ready to succumb to the darkness, a fleeting thought crossed my mind. It was something the shadows had said when I made the deal with them.

‘To save the one you love, a life must be taken’

The shadows had been right. Somewhere along the way, I had fallen in love with Alpha Asher.

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While I was desperate to succumb to the darkness, I would have to try again tomorrow night.

For the second time, I stood outside my body and looked down at mine and Alpha Asher's sleeping forms. A scowl was etched onto my sleeping face, as though I were having a nightmare.

This time around felt different, almost as if I were more tangible than before. My skin no longer had that transparent dream-like hue. Rather than be forced by the Vampire King to visit, I stumbled towards my body. The effort made my legs ache, as it was like walking through quick-sand. Just as my fingers grazed the blanket, I was pulled backwards.

As though it were a dream, the room around me faded and changed into something different. Alpha Asher's dark walls were replaced with a deep shade of maroon. Black couches dotted the large room, and book shelves lined half of the wall. A four-poster bed covered in black satin and large pillows looked strangely inviting.

Tristan's muscular form walked out of the bathroom, letting steam ebb into the room. His near-white hair was messy and damp, the water still dripping from his skin. With nothing but a towel around his waist, Tristan strolled out of the bathroom. My eyes trailed the length of his body unwillingly, taking in every dip and curve of his muscles.

His crystalline eyes met my own and widened, his care-free gait stopped as he noticed me standing there. While my heart thundered with equal parts hate and desire, Tristan's full lips turned up in a smirk.

"Quite the voyeur." Tristan chuckled, continuing his stroll to what I assumed was his closet.

I clenched my fists at my side, trying to force myself back to my body but nothing seemed to work. If I was in my body, I would've had a headache from the effort.

"You're the one who brought me here." I rolled my eyes, coming to accept that this wasn't just a realistic nightmare. "Feel free to send me back."

“Send you back?” Tristan’s bemused and vivid eyes brightened, showing me a quick flash of his teeth before removing his towel.

With an annoyed hiss, I turned around. I could hear his silky chuckle, knowing I had turned around a second too late. While I wanted to toss the nearest lamp at his head, I couldn’t touch anything without a body.

“I’m not the one who brought you here, beautiful.” Tristan chuckled and I whipped around angrily. His face was the picture of innocence, tainted with the sly smile on his face. “It seems you found your way to me all on your own.”

Wearing nothing but a pair of low-cut sweatpants, he looked like a fallen angel. Beautiful and alluring, but dangerous and corruptive. I knew if Maya were here, she’d talk some sense into my head, telling me not to think that way about Tristan.

“I’m sleeping with Asher right now. Why would I come and see you?” I grimaced, uncaring at how cold my voice sounded.

Despite the small part of me that wanted him, this was one of the Vampire’s responsible for Katie and Kanyon’s death, and Seans abduction. No matter how hard, I had to keep myself from falling off the edge.

“As I said, despite what you claim you feel something for me.” Tristan murmured; his smile seductive yet scornful.

Faster than I could process, Tristan was standing just a few feet away from me. Even without my heightened smell, I could easily notice the sandalwood and citrus scent filling the air. Warmth radiated from his body, making me realize how cold I had been this entire time.

"I don't. I feel nothing for you. How many times do I have to say it?" My voice wavered, an uncomfortable knot twisting in my stomach.

Tristan leaned forward, his lips an inch away from my ear. I couldn't hide the shiver that went down my spine as his breath fanned against my ear. The amused tone in his voice annoyed me, helping me resist the urge to run my fingers over his bare skin.

"Sweetheart, let me tell you a secret." Tristan murmured, letting out a silky chuckle. "The mark wouldn't have healed if you felt nothing for me."

Dread and denial punched me in the gut as I tried to ignore what he had said. My throat constricted, fighting against the part of me that knew he was right. It might have been a dull ember in comparison to the explosion I felt with Alpha Asher, but the attraction was there.

"You're lying." I shook my head, taking a step away from Tristan and the intoxicating heat his body radiated.

"I'm not lying." Tristan chuckled lowly, and I swore his bright eyes were growing darker as he took another step towards me. "You know I'm telling the truth, just as I know that you feel something for me."

"It's nothing compared to what I feel for Alpha Asher." I shook my head, my eyes clenched shut as I fought against his stinging words.

"It isn't, yet." Tristan murmured, his smooth voice and confident. "You have spent a lot of time with the Alpha. Those feelings are understandable given your-relationship with him."

He said Alpha as though it were a curse, an insult to what he was. The distaste that filled his eyes vanished, leaving his usual lu\*ty and calculated gaze.

Tristan closed the distance between the two of us, his arm wrapping around my waist as his lips

slammed down on my own. Revulsion and confusion were my first reactions, but Tristan's grip was tight around my waist. His touch startled me, as I thought I couldn't touch anything without my body. His hard body meshed against my own, muscles pressing against soft skin.

I flattened my hands against his chest, shoving roughly as I clamped my lips together. Without Maya by my side, my strength was severely impacted. Tristan held me tightly, as though he couldn't feel the force beneath my touch. His hands were soft as they drifted up the front of my shirt, grazing the bottom of my bre\*st teasingly. An angry growl left my lips as I tried shoving against his chest for the second time. I resisted the sensations he was causing within me, resisted the tingling that formed between my legs.

Tristan's large hand grabbed my bre\*st roughly, his thumb pressing against my nip. I yanked my head away from his own, my face heated and my lips parted in outrage. Tristan took the opportunity without hesitation, forcing his tongue into my mouth. While his tongue danced against my own, his fingers toyed with the sensitive flesh of my nip.

Despite all of my collective willpower, I couldn't keep the moan from leaving my lips. Silent as a whisper in a hurricane, but Tristan had been able to hear it. Alpha Asher felt like an explosion of passion and heat, feral lu\*t and desire removing inhibitions. Kissing Tristan felt like thick dark chocolate, rich and seductive.

Just as I regained some of my common sense, I shoved against his chest for the third time, using every ounce of strength I could muster. Tristan stepped away from me, his lips red and his eyes bright. For a second, I had thought my strength was enough to push him away but then an impatient knock sounded at his door.

Tristan's full lips turned up in a sly smile, placing a finger against them to silence me. Without further explanation, Tristan turned and opened his door.

A curly headed Vampire stood at the door, one I recognized from the night at the swimming hole. Giovanni had escaped shortly after Tristan did, leaving a dead Vampire and Tyler behind.

"I have news for you." Giovanni grunted; his eyes dark as he frowned at Tristan.

Shooting me one last lu\*ty glance, Tristan murmured something quietly to Giovanni. While I strained to hear what they were saying, I only made out bits and pieces.

“...she got away...” Giovanni muttered, a dark look on his face.

Amusement hit me as I realized they were talking about me. I had escaped from the club, managing to save my brother and keep my friends alive. They had lost many Vampire’s on their side, but we hadn’t lost a single werewolf.

‘That’s for Katie and Kanyon.’ I thought smugly, glaring at the two Vampire’s.

Tristan turned his face partially to meet my eyes, his sly smile deepening. “She got away? Good. She will come back.”

I wanted to storm over and attack him, wiping that sly smile from his face. The confidence in his eyes made me see red. How was he so sure I would come back to him? He himself knew how I felt about Alpha Asher.

‘Asher’. I thought, nearly smiling at the sound of his name. Turning my eyes away from Tristan, I thought about Asher and how his dark eyes and charming smile made me feel. I remembered how silky my hands felt in his hair, and the way he looked at me as though I were the moon in a dark sky.

Just as the door closed, leaving me alone with Tristan once more a tugging sensation formed in my gut. As though it were a long rope bringing me to Tristan, I felt as it snapped and the room faded into black.

My eyes snapped open, aching as sunlight burned into them. A thin layer of sweat coated my skin, and a headache had already begun to form around my temples. The irritating mark on my shoulder stung angrily, as if scolding me for running away from Tristan. Maya’s thoughts were a whirlwind of anger and disgust as I replayed where I had been.

A set of dark eyes watched me from the corner of the room, making me visibly jump as I met Alpha

Asher's intense gaze.

Seated on one of the armchairs, Alpha Asher watched me closely. His dark eyes were locked on the scarlet mark that tormented me, narrowing as if he knew what had happened.

"Good morning." I cleared my throat, wincing at how weak my voice had sounded.

"You were saying his name in your sleep." Alpha Asher pointed out, his calm voice hiding the rage he felt. "I tried to wake you up, but you were practically dead to the world."

I wanted to deny anything happened, deny that Tristan had put his hands and lips on me. Most of all, I wanted to deny that a small part of me blossomed under his touch.

Alpha Asher's eyes narrowed, taking in my heated face and dewy skin. I clutched the blanket around my nak\*d chest, using it as support for what I planned to say next.

"It was this stupid mark, it brought me to him." I hissed lowly, clenching my teeth as my stomach rolled.

"Why were you screaming his name, Lola?" Alpha Asher's voice remained hard; his anger steady. However, I wasn't sure his anger was directed towards me. From the look of loathing on his face, it seemed he was angry at himself.

"It seems Tristan doesn't care for consent." My voice turned dark as I registered the murderous glint in Alpha Asher's eyes. My own voice was laced with disgust as I tried to soothe some of the anger within Alpha Asher. "I tried to fight back, but I was weak without Maya. He only managed to kiss me before someone knocked on his door."

I decided to leave out the part where his hand had snuck up my shirt, and how a tiny part of me had enjoyed it. I knew Alpha Asher was close to exploding, and I wanted to minimize the damage while I could.

“He kissed you?” The emotion seeped from Alpha Asher’s voice, instead retreating to his darkened eyes. “I’ve had enough of this. We need to get his f\*\*king mark off your skin.”

“Wait.” I paused, thinking back to what Giovanni and Tristan were talking about. “I was still there when someone knocked at his door. It was that other Vampire from the swimming hole—Giovanni. I couldn’t hear much of what they were saying, but this could be useful.”

“Useful?” Alpha Asher’s eyes blazed, but I stood my ground. “How is being tied to that—Vampire useful?”

“If I can bring myself to him at the right moment, who knows what I might overhear?” My eyes remained hard, unyielding but my lips turned up in a sly smile. “

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 74

Staying connected to Tristan felt like a silver shard lodged in the bloodstream. Sure, a small part of me longed for him but the rest of me absolutely loathed the Vampire. I felt no animosity or distain towards Alpha Asher, as his touch and presence seemed to consume me entirely.

Still, I couldn’t deny that staying connected to Tristan didn’t have its benefits. If I managed to figure this link out, I could drop in at any point. Who knows what kinds of plans I could overhear?

I could see the hurt hidden beneath the boiling anger in Alpha Asher’s eyes, and ignored the sharp pain it sent through me. I couldn’t voice what I felt towards Alpha Asher in words.

How could you explain that someone’s mere presence consumes you? That their touch ignites every cell, every nerve ending on the body. Even though I wanted more from Alpha Asher, I would’ve settled for anything just to stay by his side.

I hoped beyond anything that the Moon Goddess wasn’t cruel, that she wouldn’t pair me with someone like Tristan. I had another concern, one hidden so deep, I hadn’t allowed it to see light. If Tristan was my mate, that meant I was destined for terrible things. If Alpha Asher were my mate,

that meant I'd become Luna of his vast pack.

Alpha Asher knew there was nothing we could do to remove Tristan's mark on my neck, not without my mate there to claim me himself. The thought made my heart leap as I looked into Alpha Asher's dark eyes.

"I don't want him, Asher." I shook my head, my heart a thundering mess as I took a risky leap. "But I want this war to end and I want this pack to feel safe again. We both know that what I listen in on could change everything."

Something flashed in the deep obsidian depths of Alpha Asher's eyes, an emotion I wasn't prepared to face. For a brief moment I worried he'd be angry I had forgotten his title, but flash of pride shined through his eyes. Slowly, his stubborn resolve cracked into one of irritable acceptance. I knew he wanted to keep me from danger, wanted to keep Tristan from touching what was his but he had to know how far I was willing to go.

"I don't want him touching you again, Lola." Alpha Asher all but snarled, the muscles in his jaw working overtime under the stress. "Keep your distance from him, but listen closely."

While Alpha Asher was still fuming, I couldn't help the smile that twitched onto my face. I wasn't expecting him to actually listen to me—like an equal. Feeling bold and willing to see how far his feelings for me went, I stood from the bed. The silky comforter dropped to the floor, leaving every inch of my creamy skin exposed. For once I wasn't cold, as Alpha Asher's dark gaze chased away the lingering chill.

Instead of coaxing the sweet anger coated lu\*t from Alpha Asher, I did something I never had before. I walked over to him as if his burning gaze wasn't sending a blush to every inch of my skin, and wrapped my arms around his neck. I could feel how rigid he was, probably thinking the same thing I was. I had never made the first move, and I had certainly never tried to comfort him before. Instead of peering into his eyes, I buried my face against his chest, letting his consuming scent fill my nose. Cedarwood and just a hint of something sweet, earthy and incredibly alluring.

Slowly his stiffened posture relaxed, and his large arms snaked around my waist. My heart was thundering, but a small smile had worked its way into my face, covered by his dark shirt. Very quickly, my face was yanked from Alpha Asher's chest as he lifted me into the air. His rough hands gripped my thighs, sending a blissful wave to my core.

His dark eyes peered into my own, his pupil blending into the dark color. His full lips twitched in amusement as his hands

"Feeling affectionate, Lola?" Alpha Asher smirked, the sly look on his face sending an incredulous blush along my cheeks.

I narrowed my eyes at Alpha Asher, "I was trying to comfort you and besides, you don't let me touch you."

Despite the time's I've had his length down my throat, Alpha Asher had never let me touch him. Countless blissful orgasms at his hands but he had never caved into doing anything more. My fingers twitched at the thought of feeling the hard planes of his stomach and the softness of his skin.

Alpha Asher's sly smirk deepened, his eyes flickering with amusement. His hands gripped my bottom, holding me against his core.

"I have let you touch me, Lola."

My throat ached at his words, and my body reacted under his touch. I knew what he was referring to, but in my eyes it didn't count. He had never let me trace the length of his muscles, or run my fingers over his hardened shaft. He kept me at a distance while I was willing to give myself completely, but it didn't change my feelings towards Alpha Asher. While I highly doubted, he was saving himself for his mate, he enjoyed teasing me.

'Four days' I thought in frustration. The thought sent a blush to my face, but I couldn't deny the

attraction I felt towards Alpha Asher. Even though I knew little about his family or his personal life, I knew without a doubt that he would never actually hurt me. He brought me a sense of security and comfort.

“I remember very vividly.” I cleared my throat, scowling as he trailed a finger along the blush on my face.

Just as his smooth lips parted to respond, a knock sounded at the door. I watched as irritation passed over his eyes, then finally begrudging acceptance as the knocking on the door returned with vengeance.

Alpha Asher set me on the floor, his dark eyes telling me we would finish this later. Even if he refused to give himself over completely, my body ached with anticipation.

I stalked over to the closet, grabbing a quick outfit and stumbling into the bathroom to change. From the bathroom I could hear Alpha Asher open the door. From the deep chuckle, I knew it was Alpha Zeke.

After slipping into a pair of leggings and a blouse, I emerged from the bathroom. Alpha Zeke stood with his arms crossed, a look of amusement on his face as he looked between Alpha Asher and I.

“Did I interrupt something?” Alpha Zeke smirked, lighting up his strangely intense eyes.

“No.” I shook my head, my face still heated from Alpha Asher’s touch.

“In fact, you were interrupting.” Alpha Asher smirked, matching Alpha Zeke’s amusement. “What for?”

Zeke took Asher’s question as permission to speak in front of me, his smirk fading just a hint as he spoke.

“While you guys were off getting Sean, Luna Freya had plans of her own.” Alpha Zeke grunted; all traces of his smirk removed. “A lot of the Vampires were distracted, probably because they sent them all after you. She managed to send a few of her men in and get Brittany.”

In the span of ten seconds, all humor and enjoyment were vacant from the room. Alpha Asher met my eyes, remembering what he had promised me. I’m sure he had his ways of getting information, but Brittany deserved a chance to prove her innocence.

“Where did you place her?” Alpha Asher grimaced, his posture stiffening once more.

“In the room next door.” Alpha Zeke shrugged, but then rolled his eyes at Alpha Asher. “Your dungeon, obviously.”

While I cringed at the thought of Alpha Asher lashing out on Alpha Zeke, he instead met my narrowing gaze.

“She will not be tortured.” Alpha Asher raised his eyebrow at me, “She will be questioned and if she is truly innocent, she will tell me what she knows.”

I shuddered at the thought of being locked in the dungeons, remembering how Tyler had once shown me around. The stench of blood and death lingered in the air like a sour perfume, mixing with the smell of wet earth. The moment I had stepped foot in the dungeons, I swore I’d never go back. I could handle fighting against an opponent, but I wasn’t sure I had the stomach for torture.

“I’ll be down shortly to speak with her.” Alpha Asher nodded to Alpha Zeke, who then left the bedroom.

“As much as I’d like to hear what she says, I’d prefer not to go down in those dungeons.” I shuddered, my nose wrinkling from the memory of the putrid smell.

Tyler’s family had hardly ever used the dungeon, and yet it had a constant stench of blood and piss.

“Unfortunately, I need you to come.” Alpha Asher chuckled lowly, gesturing for me to follow him from the bedroom.

“Why do you need me there?” I groaned, knowing the smell would cling to my hair and clothes.

“I need you to speak with Tyler.” Alpha Asher’s voice turned hard, irritation practically rolling from him in waves. “He’s been incredibly resilient, and refuses to share information. His one request is to speak with you.”

I’d spend an hour in that putrid dungeon to avoid speaking with Tyler, but I knew Alpha Asher wouldn’t ask if it weren’t important. His hatred for Tyler exceeded my own, and he would love nothing more than to watch him die at his hands, but the safety of his pack meant more than revenge.

“He will remain restrained.” Alpha Asher grunted, the two of us heading downstairs. Alpha Zeke was nowhere to be seen, most likely already in the dungeons.

“I’m not afraid of Tyler.” I snorted, knowing I could handle myself against him with ease. The thought gave Maya a sick sense of joy.

“I know.” Alpha Asher chuckled, amusement flashing in his darkened eyes. “As entertaining as that fight may be, if he touches you, he dies.”

“I might have to fight you for that honor.” I snorted.

“You’ve never beaten me before, Lola.” Alpha Asher purred, gazing down at me with a mix of lu\*t and longing shining in his dark eyes.

“Just you watch.” I grimaced, fighting the infuriating blush that crept into my cheeks. “There’s a first time for everything.”

I cringed as we walked down into the basement, the putrid smell of the dungeons was dim up here but it would slowly get worse. The basement of the packhouse was abysmal. A large square with brick walls and towering boxes. The basement had been old and dusty when Tyler's parents lived here, and it seems it hasn't changed.

A tunnel stuck out of the far wall, and has probably been here for the last fifty years. The tunnel was man-made by someone in Tyler's family, its purpose was specifically for a dungeon. That way, anyone who might escape has to go through the packhouse.

I thanked the Moon-Goddess I wasn't claustrophobic as we walked down the tunnel. The stone tunnel quickly turned to smoothed dirt, the foul stench growing stronger as we neared a set of stairs. Dim lanterns pegged into the earthen walls lit the narrow tunnel, just big enough to fit two people.

The hallway stopped, branching out into two more. I followed Alpha Asher down the left tunnel, taking shallow breaths of the ripe smell. Crude metal cages lined the walls of a large hallway. Each cage was rusted from use, but made with flecks of silver embedded within. Any touch to the bars would sear the skin. The farther down the hallway we walked, the older the cages seemed.

"I will speak with Brittany. She's being kept in the other wing, down the right tunnel." Alpha Asher grunted, nodding his head towards the end of the walkway. "He has ten minutes."

Giving me one last glance, Alpha Asher turned and left me alone in this putrid dungeon. I walked further down the wide room, glancing at cage after cage. They were all empty, except for one at the very end.

Tyler's cell was tall enough to stand in, and possibly lay down but that was the extent of his range of motion. My stomach churned at the sight of Tyler, and a sick amusement rose in my throat at his haggard appearance.

His once blonde hair now looked brown, clouded with days' worth of dirt. The blue eyes that had once reminded me of the ocean were dull and flat, reminding me of swamp water. He had thinned out, either from stress or his days in this cage. The muscles that jutted from his arms were thinner, giving him a lanky kind of look. The silver cuffs around his wrists chained him to the wall, searing his skin and suppressing his wolf.

“Lola, you look good.” Tyler chuckled; a painful grin formed on his face.

While I couldn't see any open wounds on Tyler's body, but his torn and bloody t-shirt was proof of Alpha Asher's questioning. While the thought of someone getting tortured turned my stomach, Tyler had been pitted against Alpha Asher from the start.

“Better than you do.” I snorted, crossing my arms over my chest.

“This isn't my best look.” Tyler chuckled, but his expression quickly turned serious. “Not that it matters now, but I wasn't lying when I told you how I felt. Everything I did was a mistake—leaving you was a mistake.”

I thought back to when Tyler had found his mate. The sound of his name had sent aches rolling through my body, and part of me dreamed he would say those words someday. After meeting Alpha Asher and resisting Tristan, I felt nothing for Tyler. That tiny shred of longing or hope had vanished, turning into something new under Alpha Asher's touch.

“I'm not getting you out of this situation.” I chuckled darkly, shaking my head at him. “Your mistakes have led you here. I can't promise your life if you talk, but I can promise a painless death.”

Tyler remained quiet for a few minutes, as if he were actually contemplating what I had said. I knew Alpha Asher would never let Tyler live, not after all he had done.

“Have you spoken with Tristan?” Tyler asked, his voice sounding rough. Even with the absence of his werewolf, his eyes were dark.

“We saved my brother.” I glared at him pointedly, “I saw him at the club they took Sean to.”

“Don't listen to the lies he spews, Lola.” Tyler frowned, for a split second he actually looked genuine. “He just wants you for your title.”

"Title?" I scoffed, "His Vampire King might be my Father, but I want no part of that side of me."

"You don't want anything to do with it?" Tyler chuckled darkly, as if I were missing out on something important. "You can't change that, Lola. The only heir to the Vampire Kingdom."

"That doesn't matter." I shook my head, "I refuse, plain and simple."

"Oh, Lola." Tyler sighed, false sympathy bleeding through his dull eyes. "You can't refuse, it's in your blood. Once the Vampire King dies, his power will be passed down to you."

"You're lying." I shook my head, anger growing in my gut as I continued looking at his irritating face. "What is it you wanted with me, Tyler? Either give me information or quit asking for me."

"I suppose you'll find out on your own in time." Tyler shrugged, a smirk forming on his haggard face. "Come back tomorrow and I'll tell you something helpful."

"Tomorrow?" My eyebrow lifted, but I hid the burning interest from my eyes. "Are you busy today, is that it?"

"I wouldn't mind your wonderful company for one more day." Tyler smirked, looking much like his old self for those few short seconds until his smirk fell. "Who knows how long I have left?"

"Fine." I grimaced; my jaw clenched as I looked into the dull eyes of the guy I had once loved. "Tomorrow, Tyler. Don't disappoint me again."

"Wouldn't dream of it." Tyler chuckled as I turned and walked away.

I met Alpha Asher at the base of the tunnel stairs. His eyes were dark and irritation rolled from him in waves.

“Learn anything new?” I quipped, noting his tense shoulders and rigid posture.

“The Vampire’s plan on attacking from the southern side. The forest is dense over there, much harder for patrol to fully encompass. She doesn’t know when, but from what she heard they’ll be attacking soon.”

“What’re you going to do?” I frowned, hoping Brittany’s information would change the outcome of that fight.

“I’ll double patrol on that end of town, send some of Alpha Bran’s men out.” Alpha Asher sighed, running a hand through his messy hair. “Did Tyler tell you anything useful?”

“Apparently I’m the next Vampire Queen and I have no say in the matter.” I grimaced, shooting a furious glance towards the tunnel Tyler’s cage sat in. “Other than that, I learned nothing. He wants me to come tomorrow, says he’ll give me information then.”

“We will deal with that later.” Alpha Asher grimaced, referring to my future title as Vampire Queen. “He’s making more demands now? Interesting. Seem’s he’s waiting for someone.”

“I’m not so sure about that.” I shook my head, “Tyler doesn’t have any men, the Vampires have no reason to keep him around. I can’t see them wasting their own to rescue him.”

“Then why request to meet with you tomorrow?” Alpha Asher’s eyes burned holes into my own. His hatred towards Tyler gave the putrid air a spicy scent.

“He knows he’s going to die down here.” I shrugged, “Guess he wants some company before he dies. That doesn’t mean I trust him though. Not even a little bit.”

The two of us finally headed out of the putrid tunnels, upstairs and into the living room. I gulped the fresh breath, noting the subtle hit of flowers lingering in the room.

“Good.” Alpha Asher murmured, his hand grazing my cheek. The wall he placed that hid his emotions from sight had shifted, softening his eyes and letting longing bleed through. “It’s bad enough I have a Vampire fighting for your hand.”

“He doesn’t stand a chance. No one else does.” I shook my head, staring into the deep honey eyes I had come to love.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 75

After our individual conversations with Tyler and Brittany, Alpha Asher cancelled training for the day. As we emerged from the basement, Luna Freya stood in the living room, eyeing us warily.

“I trust my daughter isn’t being tortured down there.” Luna Freya grimaced, scowling at the basement door.

“I gave Lola my word she would remain unharmed, so long as she tells us what she knows.” Alpha Asher nodded, his rough voice held equal parts respect and authority. He respected Luna Freya and her position, but also knew he was free to do what he wished.

“Thank you, Lola.” Luna Freya gave me a warm smile, but her light eyes remained worried for her daughter. “I hope what she knows will help us end this mess. Enough lives have been lost.”

“Yes, they have.” Alpha Asher nodded, “She has provided useful information, we will see how accurate it is. You may visit her if you wish. Down the stairs, through the right tunnel. My men will direct you if you become lost.”

“Thank you, Alpha Asher.” Luna Freya flashed her heartwarming smile, “It is much appreciated.”

Once Luna Freya disappeared into the basement, I turned to meet Alpha Asher’s intoxicating eyes. The color of honey with golden flecks throughout, beautiful and alluring.

"I'm going to check on Breyona—and Mason...if he will allow it." I frowned, fighting against the storm of emotion in my stomach. I hadn't heard a word from Mason, not that I expected to after what I had done. I still couldn't shake the guilt, and wanted to make sure he was doing alright.

I pulled out my cellphone and sent a quick text to Breyona asking if she could come and pick me up.

"He needs time. He knows it wasn't what you intended, but she had rejected him regardless. Give him time to process that information." Alpha Asher's words were soft, despite his rough voice. His molten eyes burned into my own, softening as they read the guilt on my face.

"I'll be back in an hour or so. I'm sure Sean will be ready to leave by then." I replied, forcing a smile to my face.

As though today were a day for risks, I once again stepped into Alpha Asher's arms. His body stiffened for a moment before it relaxed entirely. His reaction made me want to laugh. Had he never been hugged before? Much faster than last time, his arms snak\*d around my waist. His chin rested on my head as I enjoyed every second in his presence. His musky scent clung to me, marking me as his own in yet another way.

Watching the guy you love almost die had a sobering affect. I was no longer afraid of pushing Alpha Asher's boundaries. He claimed many times that I belonged to him, therefor I expected the same. I wouldn't force him into anything without his agreement, but I no longer feared touching him.

Leaving myself no time to hesitate, I stood on my toes and reached towards his face. As though time had slowed, I watched as the bright color of his eyes dimmed. My lips fell against his jaw, a smile on my face as his stubble tickled my skin. I let my lips linger on his skin for a moment, enjoying the way his hands felt around my waist. As I pulled away, I noticed how dark his eyes had become and couldn't stifle the burn that sparked deep in my stomach.

"You are extremely affectionate today, Lola." Alpha Asher purred lowly, pulling me tighter against

his body. His calloused hand gripped my chin and his thumb ran along my bottom lip. His eyes burned into me, shining with feral hunger and something softer. "Should I worry you've done something bad?"

"You've been with me this entire time." I smirked, letting my tongue graze against Alpha Asher's thumb. "I made my choice, Asher. You or Tristan. It's time I started acting like it."

"Someday, Lola. Someday I will erase every trace of that Vampire from your little mouth." Alpha Asher snarled lowly, his face a mere inch from my own. His warm breath fanned across my face, sweet mint making my mouth water with desire. While I was feeling risky, I wouldn't dare close the distance between the two of us.

"Then do it." I breathed, eyes wide with longing as he held me against his defined body. "Why wait?"

"Affectionate and inquisitive." Alpha Asher purred, his lips turning up in a deep smirk but he made no move to distance himself.

Just as I thought his remaining self-control had finally collapsed, someone across the room cleared their throat. With my face burning brightly, Alpha Asher stepped away from me. He pulled me tight against his side, as though he wasn't embarrassed at being caught.

Alpha Zeke stood across the living room; a deep smirk etched onto his face. He leaned against the doorway, eyes glistening as he took in my heated face.

"Impeccable time as always." Alpha Asher growled, though his eyes shined with humor as he looked at his friend.

"Terrifying...yet oddly arousing." Alpha Zeke smirked; his bright eyes glued to my reddening face. "Is there a limit on how red your face gets?"

Alpha Asher's chest rumbled with laughter. Beyond my control, his words had my face brightening even more. Alpha Zeke grinned mercilessly as he noticed this.

"I suppose there isn't a limit." Alpha Zeke chuckled, "That's good to know."

Mumbling an incoherent goodbye to Alpha Asher, I stalked from the house before Alpha Zeke could say anything further. The two of them were still chuckling as I left.

Breyona was oddly quiet in the car, her face a peaceful mask of indecision and contemplation. Even as she drove down the street, I could tell her mind was somewhere else.

"Could I ask you something?" Breyona finally spoke when we were inside her house. I looked through Breyona's closet, eyeing up each dress and expensive pair of shoes she owned.

"Go ahead." I nodded, my eyes trailing over one of her dresses approvingly. Black in color with ruffled baby-doll sleeves and an extremely short hem. It would land around my mid thighs, but I worried what might be revealed if I bent over.

"If Mason's mate wanted to switch sides—would Alpha Asher have allowed it?" Breyona frowned, playing with her hands as she watched me explore her never ending closet. "Or would he just kill her?"

I couldn't help but flinch at her last sentence, a disturbing picture of Adrienne's death coming to mind.

"I wouldn't have let him kill her." I frowned, "He'd want to question her, to prove her innocence but I'd never let him kill her."

"Is that what you did for Brittany?" Breyona asked, her voice sounding just a little less troubled.

"New's travels fast, huh?" I quipped; my eyebrow raised. "But, yeah. Everyone deserves a chance to

prove their innocence.”

“I agree.” Breyona spoke softly, “I have another question for you.”

“I’ll answer on one condition.” I smiled sheepishly, holding up the black dress I had seen in Breyona’s closet. “Can I borrow this?”

“That’s your condition?” Breyona snorted, sounding much like her normal self. “Hell, keep the damn thing. I’m too tall for it anyway. Shows all my goodies when I bend over.”

“I’m thinking it’s going to do the same for me. Perfect to wear around Asher.” I snickered, “What did you want to ask me?”

“Do you think all Vampires are evil?”

I felt myself stiffen at her question, wondering where the hell it had come from. From the serious look on her face, I knew she wanted an honest answer. For a moment I wanted to say yes, to curse all Vampire’s for my personal experiences with them.

Were all Vampire’s evil? Some Werewolves were evil, but others were good. Could it not be the same with Vampire’s? Who was I to condemn an entire race?

“No.” The word surprised myself, as did the mature thinking behind my answer. “There’s good and evil in everything. At the end of the day, it’s all about choice.”

Eventually she stood and helped me raid her closet, holding up a couple dresses for my approval. Breyona’s parents always had more money than my own, resulting in her huge closet. When we were younger, she’d always let me borrow her clothes. She had loads of dresses and shirts that no longer fit her comfortably due to her height.

“I guess not growing has it’s perks sometimes.” I chuckled, happiness rushing through me at the

sight of a genuine smile from Breyona.

Whatever had been plaguing her mind was subdued, for now. It was clear she was dealing with her own demons at the moment, but I'd wait patiently until she wanted to share.

"How have things been going with your mate?" I found myself asking, wondering if she's even had any time to spend with the poor guy.

"I actually haven't had much time to try and visit." Breyona chuckled breathlessly, "With everything going on, I don't know how safe it is to venture away from the pack."

"I guess you're right." I frowned, my voice soft and sympathetic. "I'm sorry about that—really."

"It's not your fault." Breyona shook her head, a hint of anger shining through her hazel eyes. "Tyler's the one that started all of this."

"And now we have to deal with the mess." I chuckled darkly.

"Some people never change." Breyona's laugh matched my own.

After spending the next two hours with Breyona, she sent me home with half her closet in my arms.

I tossed the clothes she had given me on the end of Alpha Asher's bed and walked down the hall to Sean's room. I knocked on the door and waited a few moments, smiling as Sean opened the door. He looked a million times better than he had last night. The short beard that had been growing was now gone, his face freshly shaven. His shaggy hair was now washed, and his skin absent of dirt. While he had lost weight, his eyes were no longer lifeless and sullen.

"Looking good." I smiled softly, "You ready to head home?"

“Actually, yeah.” Sean grinned, looking much like his old self. A hint of sadness still lingered in his eyes, but I hoped that too would fade in time. “I actually wanted to talk to you. Come inside.”

I followed Sean inside, my stomach churning at how our last encounter had went. Sean had been upset over Kanyon’s death, blaming me for what happened. I hadn’t known it at the time, but Kanyon’s death was partially my fault.

“It wasn’t your fault, Lola.” Sean turned, replying to my thoughts as though they were etched onto my face. “Sure, the Vampire’s want you but they also want to destroy this pack. You couldn’t have changed that.”

“I never knew you were close with Kanyon.” I frowned.

“We were more than just close, Lola.” Sean sighed, looking twice his age as he sat on the bed. His eyes were shut, as though he were looking back in time. “He was my mate.”

While I visibly struggled to pick my jaw up from the floor, Sean did something unexpected. An earsplitting grin formed on his face and genuine laughter left his lips.

“Let’s hope Dad and Grandma have the same reaction.” Sean chuckled, his eyes misting over as he talked about his mate. “Kanyon’s parents didn’t know either. We never told anyone. I–I wasn’t sure what I liked for the longest time. I was in denial, and wouldn’t admit the truth. Then Kanyon comes along and I could feel the mate-bond snap into place. I couldn’t hide anymore. I couldn’t keep denying what I wanted.”

“Dad and Grandma will accept you as you are.” I promised him, making a mental note to rip Dad a new one if he says anything insensitive. “I never knew–I mean, you could have told me.”

“I know, Lola.” Sean smiled sadly, “When you left, I thought you hated me. I did nothing to stop you. Hell, I didn’t even contact you half the time. Tyler made you out to be the bad guy, and like an idiot I believed him.”

“We’ve all made mistakes.” I nodded, not a single drop of animosity in my veins. “What matters is that you’re back.”

“But Kanyon isn’t.” Sean frowned; his voice sounded so broken that I cringed.

“I think—I think you should talk to Mason.” I replied, “Mason just lost his mate too. I think you two might have a lot in common, and I think talking to someone might help you.”

“I’ll try.” Sean forced a smile to his face, but his eyes remained sad.

“Sean—I don’t know what the Vampire’s told you, but I found some things out while you were away.” I grimaced, cringing at the uncertainty in my voice.

I wanted to tell Sean what I had learned, how Dad wasn’t my actual Dad. After what Sean had just told me, I didn’t want to ruin things between us. He had left angry at me, and I wasn’t sure I could handle that a second time.

“I know, Lola.” Sean frowned, but his eyes remained understanding. “The other fighters talk, some of them overhear things. The Vampires were looking for you, they called you half-blood.”

“Mom’s mate was a Vampire.” My voice came out in an irritating whisper.

“Wow, that explains a lot.” Sean scoffed, looking oddly unaffected. “I mean—we knew she left her mate for Dad. I couldn’t understand how any werewolf could do that. I guess it makes sense now.”

“You’re awful understanding.” I chuckled, but my face remained clouded with stress.

“I mean—I just told you I like men, and you were pretty understanding.” Sean shrugged, much like his old self would.

“Thank you for that.” I breathed, the stress leaving my body as a smile formed on my face.

Perhaps Sean was going to be alright after all.

Using one of Alpha Asher’s vehicles, I drove Sean and I back to my Dad’s house. The sun was beginning to settle in the sky, preparing to lower so the moon might rise. The light in the living room was on, and I knew Dad was sat in his usual recliner.

Without knocking, the two of us walked into the house. Dad’s eyes snapped up to where Sean and I stood, the beer tumbling from his hand as he threw himself from the recliner. Dad had never been an affectionate man. His version of praise was a smile and a slap on the back. The sight of Dad pulling Sean into his arms warmed me, and I couldn’t fight the grin that formed on my face.

“You—” Dad grimaced, pointing a finger at me as he continued hugging Sean. “You are in so much trouble.”

“You’re welcome.” I smirked, relishing the happiness in my Dad’s eyes.

“You did it.” Grandma breathed, a smile stretching on her face as she looked Sean over. “Going to need lots of food to make up that weight.”

“I’m sure you can manage.” Sean chuckled, moving from my Dad to my Grandma.

“Now—I want the two of you to relax. Lola, come help me with dinner.” Grandma murmured, turning up the TV for Sean and my Dad.

“Everything alright?” I frowned, setting to work as she pointed at an onion and pepper that needed chopping.

“Remember what we talked about before you left to get Sean?” Grandma sighed, standing beside me to dice up some raw chicken.

"Very well." I murmured.

"I'm aware of your-affinity with the shadows." Grandma cleared her throat, glancing at Sean and my Dad to make sure they hadn't heard. "I saw you at the fight, calling to them. I'm sure you know now how dangerous that is."

"I do." I frowned, something I had been wondering crossed my mind. "How come you can see them? Asher can see them too."

"It's not a special ability or anything." Grandma shrugged, her lips twitching as she registered Asher's name in my words. "You simply have to look hard enough."

"Look hard enough?" I snorted, but my heart wasn't in it. "Is that it?"

"It sure is." Grandma chuckled, but her expression quickly turned serious. "I can't tell you not to mess around with them shadows—but be careful. Their prices can be steep."

"I know how steep their prices are." I muttered to myself, refusing to meet her startled eyes.

"Don't tell me—did you barter your life?"

"No." I scoffed, "They wouldn't accept my life. They took someone else's."

"Oh goddess." Grandma shook her head, her hand against her heart.

Something about Grandma's reaction flooded me with guilt, enough to bring me to my knees. Her sympathy and disappointment ate at me, hitting me harder than anything else.

“I didn’t—I didn’t know.” I spoke simply, “Asher was about to die, we were outnumbered. I had to do something. They would’ve killed Sean, Breyona, Mason, Carter and Wade once I was in their grasp.”

“The shadows can be a valuable resource, able to do things we can’t.” Grandma nodded, “But the cost can often outweigh the benefits. Sometimes a little of your blood is payment enough, but as you well know, sometimes they ask for more.”

“It was Mason’s mate they took.” I whispered; my guilt laden eyes locked on Grandma. “She rejected Mason for a Vampire. I didn’t know they planned on taking someone else’s life.”

Grandma didn’t say anything, knowing it would do nothing to rid the guilt from my system. Instead, she pulled me into her arms and squeezed tightly. Tears refused to spring to my eyes, as I had shed enough already. Her lavender and honey scent filled my nose, reminding me of the long days we spent in her herb garden. And even though my life was a mess, I knew everything would be alright in the end.

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Breyona’s P.o.v

My mind was reeling the entire drive back to our pack’s territory. While I felt horrible for Mason and what we had just witnessed, the only thing on my mind was Giovanni.

Guilt was a constant companion of mine since I had met Giovanni. I felt guilty because I couldn’t tell anyone the truth, and because Giovanni was the only thing on my mind. Something had changed, he had helped us get Sean free. No, he hadn’t turned his back on his kind but this was a start.

‘Sean will find his way to Lola, little she-wolf. I will make sure of it, but that is all I am able to do.’

Once those words left his lips, I knew I couldn’t give up.

Alpha Asher dropped me off at my house after we rescued Sean from the club. I stood on the front steps, staring up at the dark house before me. The lights inside were off, as my parents hadn't a clue what I had done tonight. I told them the same excuse I've used multiple times, that I was staying the night at Lola's. They never questioned me, never thought to call Lola to see if I were telling the truth. My parents trusted me, and yet I continuously betrayed that trust. I used that same excuse to go to my Aunt's house, to see Giovanni.

It took me a total of five minutes and thirty-seven seconds to decide my next move. A tugging sensation formed in my gut, like a tether pulling me forward. My body reacted on its own accord, fishing my car keys from my purse and darting over to the driveway. The leather seats of my car were cool against my bare thighs, but I hardly noticed. My hands trembled against the steering wheel at the thought of seeing him again.

The entire drive that incessant tugging sensation grew, increasing my nerves and underlying excitement. I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I couldn't stop myself. I refused to have the same ending as Mason and Adrienne. I refused to watch him take his last breath because he was on the wrong side of this war. As selfish as it sounded, I didn't care who he would be leaving behind by choosing our side. It was an innate instinct to keep him alive, and how far I was willing to go for him terrified me to my core.

I pulled into the driveway of my Aunt's house, letting out a ragged breath as I noticed a single light on within the house. The ground was slick from previous rain, the pleasant scent of damp earth swirled around the house. Water dripped from the roof of the house, hitting the ground in time with my thundering heart.

My eyes found his instantly the moment I walked into the house. His dark curls were shining, as though he had gotten caught in the rain. Little droplets stood out on his dark jacket, the rain making his mouth-watering scent stronger.

Something seemed to shift inside him at the sight of me. The intense guard that kept his emotions in place shattered as he lurched forward. Despite the chill in the house and his damp clothes, his hands seared my skin through the dress I wore. After a single touch from him, I was no longer cold. A blistering fire surrounded me, emanating from Giovanni.

His lips clashed against my own, soft and plush as we met hungrily. A deep noise sounded from his throat as I threaded my fingers through his curly hair. I had spent many days wondering what his curls would feel like beneath my fingers. I held his lips against my own, relishing in the taste of his skin. Pure male musk mixed with something sweet, awakening my tastebuds and setting every nerve on fire.

Sparks devoured every inch of my skin, connecting the two of us in more ways than one. Two warring species and yet this was our moment of peace, just a single moment where our family and friends weren't able to dictate the choices we made. A single moment where the two of us were able to love freely, away from the prying eyes of our pack and family.

His arms remained wrapped tightly around my waist as our lips pulled apart. Fear and hurt settled in my bones as I prepared for Giovanni to walk away for the third time. Instead of walking away, his grip tightened around me. His deep eyes met my own, and the turmoil I saw within them send a flash of pain through me.

"When I heard—" His voice was thick, tinged with the slight accent he sometimes had. "When I heard Tristan sent Vampire's after you—I thought you were dead."

"We got away, but we had to kill them all." I frowned at how weak my voice sounded, at the lingering fear that circled my words.

I was afraid; afraid he would hear how we killed his kind and abandon me once and for all. I thought I was strong, that I could handle rejecting my Vampire mate. As I looked into the depth of his eyes, I saw how weak I truly was. I could see what rejecting him would do to me. I wasn't as strong as Mason or Lola. I wasn't sure I'd be able to survive losing Giovanni.

"I don't care about them." Giovanni snarled, but his words held a certain weight to them. Words that once spoken, could never be taken back. "I care about you, Breyona."

I wasn't sure who made the first move; him or I. Our lips found each other's with newfound vengeance. I could taste the frustration on his tongue as it glided silkily against my own. I could feel

the longing in his hands as he gripped at the thin fabric of my dress. Our hands trailed the length of each other, roaming over creamy skin, committing the feel to memory.

“Breyona–” He forced himself away, and I realized he had been grazing the skin underneath my dress. It wasn’t lust that burned in his eyes, it was a longing so severe it nearly brought me to my knees. A dark craving for affection and love burned in his eyes, a craving he continuously fought whenever I was around.

“I’m not sorry, Giovanni.” I breathed, trying to hear past my thundering heartbeat. “I’m not sorry for wanting you to change sides, for knowing you’re better than the Vampire’s you pledge your loyalty to. I’m not sorry for knowing you deserve so much more.”

For a second, I thought he would turn away from me, and leave me broken hearted yet again. Instead of turning away, he stepped closer. He was teetering on the edge of a cliff, unsure whether to save himself or to enjoy the blood-rushing fall. Without hesitation, I threw myself from the cliff and enjoyed every moment of the fall. I wanted him, more than I had ever wanted anything. My soul called out to his own, begged him to join me in the fall.

“I’m not sorry that I want you.”

The all-consuming sparks raced across my skin as Giovanni lifted me into his arms, darting down the hall and into the first room that had a bed. His lips never left my own, his hands never stopped roaming my body.

As the thin quilt on the bed met my back, I looked up into Giovanni’s eyes and nearly gasped at the wonder and awe burning within them. His hands clasped my waist lightly, as though he were afraid I’d crumble into dust under his touch.

“Say it–say it again.”

“I want you, Giovanni.” I exhaled, relishing in the feel of his thundering heart against my own. I could see the vulnerability in his eyes, the weakness this strong Vampire carried within him. Every emotion he longed to experience was locked away, and I was the key.

His lips took their time tasting my skin, roaming over every creamy ounce until he had his fill. With each breathless gasp that left my lips, his hunger seemed to intensify.

I cleared my mind, refusing to let myself think of anything other than what was happening within these walls. Nothing else mattered, nothing but the man who held half of my soul.

Neither of us needed to ask as we shed the clothes restricting us. We both had leaped from the cliff, determined to enjoy the free-fall until we met the unforgiving ground.

I hadn't heard the tear of my dress as he ripped it from my body, nor did I feel the cool breeze graze against my skin. My panties were the last to go, as I hadn't worn a bra with my form fitting dress. My skin was on fire under Giovanni's touch, warming me in ways I had only dreamed of experiencing.

As Giovanni's clothes fell to the floor, I took in the wonderful man before me. Bronzed skin and dark curly hair, a jaw line made purely of sharp edges, and a chiseled chest with a light spattering of dark hair. Mouthwateringly beautiful, and all mine. From the unspoken awe in Giovanni's eyes, he too was thinking the same thing. His eyes devoured every inch of my skin, drinking in my naked form.

His lips trailed down my skin, taking my hardened nip in his mouth with a blissful groan. My body reacted under his touch, relishing the hands and mouth that had been made to love and please us.

"I want to taste you." He murmured softly, his large hands grazing against my inner thighs.

Wrapping his arms around my thighs, he brought my core to his face. His dark eyes searched my own, looking for any trace of hesitance or regret. When he had found none, his tongue darted out and met my sensitive flesh. My blissful whimpers encouraged him, and he lapped hungrily at my dampened folds. Pleasureful sparks mixed with pure ecstasy, and I found myself coming undone under his skillful tongue.

After the waves of pure bliss had finally ended, his lips found my own. I moaned against his lips, savoring the taste of myself on his tongue. My body reacted on its own, my hips bucking as the head

of his length pressed against my entrance. The intimacy burning in his eyes made my heart constrict, and something within me had finally broken free.

“I don’t care what you are. You’re mine, Giovanni.”

With a grunt of pure ecstasy, Giovanni slid his length inside of me and groaned at the tightness of my core. I dug my fingernails into his back as I struggled to fit his c\*\*k within me. Stretching my walls to the point of pain, I threw my head back and let loose a breathless moan.

“As you are mine, Breyona.” He murmured against my neck, thrusting deep within me.

As Giovanni took my body for his own, I couldn’t tell where I began and where he ended. A mess of tangled limbs, sweat, and blissful moans. His brilliant eyes had never left my own, unable to hold back the torrent of emotion he suppressed.

His husky moans filled my ear, making my pu\*\*y throb painfully on his length. Once more the pressure between my legs began to grow, spurred by the feral male between my legs. His mouth devoured every inch of my skin, committing my taste to memory.

“That’s it.” He purred lowly in my ear, “Come for me.”

My nails dug painfully into his soft skin, my back arching as pleasure spanned my body and clouded my mind. With a blissful moan I would never forget, Giovanni filled me with his seed.

I wrapped my arms around his torso, determined to prolong this moment. I wanted to leave the world behind us, to hide within these walls and live out this fantasy. Once we left this house... I wasn’t sure I could handle letting him go.

Something had changed within his eyes, something I thought was simply due to lu\*t. For a moment, I swore I could see his past within those dark eyes. A young boy, born for one purpose, forced to set his own passions and desires aside for duty. He didn’t fight me as I clung to his smooth body, instead he rolled to the side and pulled me against his chest.

“I’m afraid—after this, I do not want to leave.”

I could hear how difficult it was for him to speak those words, and what they truly meant to him.

“Then don’t.”

My mind was made up. I refused to let Giovanni go, I couldn’t.

“Stay with me, Giovanni.”

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Lola’s P.o.v

Eating dinner with my family brought back some normalcy into my life, but I couldn’t ignore the empty chair where my Mom used to sit.

I wondered if she was looking down on me, watching as I discovered who—what I was. Would she be proud to see me resisting Tristan? Or disappointed that I wanted to reject half of myself?

After dinner Sean and Dad retreated to the couch, watching sports as they once had before this mess started. Dad couldn’t see it—but I could. I could see how much Sean had changed. Even with a smile on his face, the light had left his eyes. While I could never understand the feeling of losing your mate, I hoped he found happiness in his life.

After helping Grandma clean up the kitchen, she motioned for me to follow her outside. Standing on the back patio, I looked over to where my bedroom window sat. I could still see Kanyon’s lifeless eyes staring into my window, his scarlet blood staining the grass. I wondered if I were to look close enough, would there still be little droplets of blood on the grass?

"I'm not using the shadows again." I assured Grandma, grimacing as I stared out into the forest.

There used to be something reassuring about the dense forest that surrounded our little town, but now it filled me with unease. There could be anything—anyone out there, watching and waiting.

"I don't think you should ignore that side of yourself, Lola." Grandma frowned, as though the words pained her. "The shadows are not an inherently evil force, their actually neutral."

"Neutral?" I scoffed, "Slitting someone's throat doesn't sound very neutral to me."

"A life for a life." Grandma sighed, looking much older in that moment. "You can't expect things for free, Lola. Sometimes they'll want blood, sometimes they can be—creative."

"Creative? That sounds reassuring." I grimaced, "How do you know all of this anyway? You know more about Vampire's then the history books."

"Your Mom moved here when she was young, after she met the Vampire King. She hadn't a clue he was a King, or that he was the heir of the Kouritis bloodline. She rejected him before fleeing from her little town, hoping he wouldn't dare hunt her down." Grandma sighed, "I became close friends with your other Grandma, and eventually your Mom. Your other Grandma and I—well, we were the only two your Mom told."

"Then how did Dad know?" I asked, my attention captivated because I was finally getting the answers I craved.

"They too became close friends over time. It had been a couple years since she moved to this pack, but one day she went outside of the territory. The Vampire King had found her within the hour." Grandma paused, shuddering as she relived the memory but continued. "He toyed with her, let her live in safety for a couple years. He could have gotten to her at any time, should he use the shadows.

Something you need to know about your true Father, there is not a price he wouldn't pay for power. That makes him dangerous."

I had figured as much, but hearing the words out loud sent a chill down my spine. I had no doubt the Vampire King would remove his own child if it helped his cause.

"Your Mom was a half-blood too, only her other half was human. She was the one who figured out how to block her mind, and she passed the information on to me." Grandma smiled grimly, "The Vampire King needed a way to produce an heir, so he called to the shadows. He could have chosen another woman, but your Mom would give him the strongest offspring."

"What price did he pay?" I wasn't sure I wanted to ask.

"Complete control of the mind is quite the favor." Grandma's smile dropped. "They asked for someone in her bloodline, someone who loved unconditionally, and they wanted him to do the job himself. It was your other Grandma they wanted."

Buttery light from the setting sun bounced across the forest and grassy floor, a beautiful sight in the midst of a grim conversation. The unspoken words lingered between us, their meaning loud and clear. The Vampire King had gotten what he wanted, as I was proof of that. He had taken my other Grandma's life with his bare hands, paying his debt to the shadows.

"I always thought you didn't like Mom." I chuckled dryly, remembering the countless angry looks and sideways glares.

"I always liked your Mom." Grandma scoffed, waving me away. "I just hated how hard she was on herself. She loved you, but blamed herself for her Mom's death."

Grandma and I went back inside once the sun had completely vanished behind the forest line, carrying that buttery light further away. After giving me more leftovers than I needed, Dad dropped

me off at the packhouse.

As I scurried into the kitchen I locked eyes with Alpha Asher who leaned against the counter enduring a conversation with Alpha Bran. I hadn't seen the sandy-haired Alpha since I had beaten him in the fight, and from the grim smile on his face, I knew he remembered that night very well.

"Room will be made for when your men arrive." Alpha Asher grunted, an irritated look of indifference on his face.

With a dark sweatshirt draped against his form, my eyes found the dip and curve of his arm muscles easily. My eyes trailed up his broad shoulders, and chiseled-jawline to meet his darkening eyes. As he noticed my attention, a sly smirk formed on his face. Sensing Alpha Asher's attention was elsewhere, Alpha Bran flashed me a transparent smile.

"I'm sure that you'll see them taken care off." Alpha Bran smiled stiffly before turning leave.

"It seems he's taking his loss rather hard." Alpha Asher smirked, the curve of his lips warming my insides.

"His men haven't arrived yet?" I asked, an amused glance in the direction Alpha Bran stalked off in.

"He has had issues gathering his forces." Alpha Asher grunted, "Wasting as much time as he can."

"Are we sure Alpha Bran isn't working with the Vampire's?" I snorted, "Procrastinating could be to their benefit."

"Alpha Bran isn't stupid enough to work with the Vampire's. His family has hated them for decades." Alpha Asher shook his head, "He'd forfeit his position as Alpha to see them all killed off."

"And what about patrol? Brittany said an attack could happen at any point." I questioned, ignoring my flinch at his previous statement.

“Alpha Zeke brought what men he could afford; we have them stationed around along the southern perimeter.”

“How do we know they haven’t changed plans?” I frowned, “They have to know we have Brittany by now.”

“She says they are unaware of the information she has on them.” Alpha Asher said simply.

“I’m sure you’re still taking precautions.” I replied.

“Of course.” He smirked, “Trusting her word alone could mean the death of this pack. As for patrol tonight, I meant to tell you earlier, but you are relieved of patrol duties for the foreseeable future.”

“Really?” I questioned; eyebrow raised. I wasn’t complaining, but everyone in training was required to run patrol.

“Really.” He chuckled lowly, his eyes flashing playfully. “Actually, I’d like for you to accompany me tonight. If you aren’t busy.”

“Well, I was going to run patrol.” I smirked, but I was sure he could hear my accelerating heartrate. “It seems I have some free-time, now that I’ve been relieved.”

“Change into something comfortable, I’ll wait down here.” Alpha Asher smiled, one that softened his face and smoothed the hardness from his eyes.

I ran up the stairs and into our bedroom, stripping off the clothes I had worn today in exchange for the dress Breyona let me borrow. While the black fabric covered my important bits, it was on the shorter side. Just to be safe, I slipped on a matching pair of shorts.

Alpha Asher hadn't moved as I slipped back downstairs. His toffee eyes roamed me, approval flashing in his gaze. Under his eyes I felt self-conscious, my skin flushed and heated.

"You look good in black." Alpha Asher nodded, appreciatively. His large hand tugged at the hem of my dress, a smirk forming on his face. "I particularly like this dress."

"I wonder why." I snorted, though blush formed across my face.

"No need to rub Alpha Bran's loss in his face." Alpha Asher smirked, his thick arm snaking around my waist as he led me to the back door.

"Where are we going?" I frowned, following him to the forest-line. "Isn't there going to be an attack any day?"

"We aren't going far." He assured me, "I have men roaming the forest, and some stationed around the house."

I had never fully explored the woods around our pack before. I had followed Tyler to the swimming hole countless times, but never ventured out on my own. Tyler had refused to let me train or join patrol, claiming my status as future Luna put me above everyone else. Alpha Asher led me into the woods, holding back branches and leaves as I trailed beside him. His hand found my own, our fingers threading together. Alpha Asher had never made me feel below him. I had voiced my opinion to him a few times now, and each time he listened. I didn't feel as though I were following my Alpha into the woods. I was following the guy I loved, one who cherished my body and enjoyed my opinions.

"Where are we going?" I asked, breaking the comfortable silence between us.

"You'll see." Alpha Asher gave me a genuine smile, one that left me staggering for breath. "I enjoy time alone, and had found this place shortly after taking over the pack."

We walked into a small clearing, as big as our bedroom in the packhouse. Small flowers were

scattered throughout the clearing, growing in white clumps. The petals were thin, but seemed to absorb the moonlight shining overhead. The white petals appeared to be glowing as they attracted the light of the moon.

"I believe the previous Luna had planted these." Alpha Asher murmured, "I never asked."

"She loves gardening, but I never knew about this." I nodded, my attention on the luminescent flowers that dotted the clearing. "It's so-beautiful."

My stomach was a mess of knots as I felt the presence of the man behind me, gauging my reaction as I looked over the flowers. He had brought me here, a place he went to be alone. There were times I doubted his feelings towards me, but this had to mean something. Where I usually had courage, something about Alpha Asher brought me to my knees. I wanted to turn around, confess my feelings for him and demand to know if he felt the same. Instead of doing any of those things, I turned around and gave him a gentle smirk.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd like something like this." I chuckled lightly, my heart speeding up as he closed the distance between us.

"I am allowed to appreciate beauty when I see it."

Alpha Asher smirked down at me, his dark eyes smoldering as he took in my face. My heart thundered at the meaning of his words. I ran my tongue along my lower lip, coating the soft flesh with moisture as butterflies swarmed in my stomach. His eyes caught the movement, following the trail of my tongue with burning intensity. His breath fanned against my lips, hovering just above my own. My self-control was holding by a frayed thread. Just as a low growl sounded from his throat, I began to close the distance between us.

'Alpha-there's been a breach on the northern side of town, a group of Vampires. Patrol was able to take three down, but four slipped through. Breyona's Mom saw them running down her street, it seems like their looking for something.'

The words echoed between Alpha Asher and I, the moment between us shattered violently.

“Dad’s house is on Breyona’s street.” I croaked.

‘Tell everyone to keep indoors. Send a patrol team to Lola’s house, we’re on our way.’

“What if they don’t know I moved into the packhouse? Dad and Grandma are there.”

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“They’re going to be expecting you.” Alpha Asher frowned, but I had already made up my mind.

With Alpha Asher’s hand in my own, we fled from the forest and back to the packhouse. Rather than shed our clothes and shift into wolf form, we hopped into one of Asher’s vehicle’s and sped towards my Dad’s house.

“Remind me to kill Alpha Bran and take his pack for my own once were finished.” Alpha Asher growled, his eyes dark and murderous as we sped down the narrow town roads.

“Alpha Bran?” I questioned.

“If he wasn’t content on being a f\*\*king nuisance, his men would have been here by now.” Alpha Asher snarled, “We would have outnumbered them easily.”

“We can win against them, can’t we?” I asked, trying to keep the fear from warping my voice.

“I can’t speak for the Vampire’s training, but I’m confident in my pack.” Alpha Asher’s words held a certain conviction that filled me with strength. He was so sure of his pack, of their ability to handle this threat.

Just when we were a minute away, Mason's voice filtered through our heads, making my blood run cold.

'Alpha, we had to retreat back to the boarders. More Vampire's showed, their forcing us back, trying to find a hole in our defenses. Their attacking from the northern side of town while another group is attacking from the southern side. It's a distraction—we know that, but we can't afford any more warriors.'

'I need all warriors—anyone capable of fighting to head to the northern or southern patrol stations. Those of you in your homes, I would not ask if I had an alternative. Those of you able to fight, uninjured from past battles, head to the northern or southern patrol stations. Make them regret f\*\*king with our pack.' Alpha Asher snarled through the mind-link, his eyes hardening and hands tightening over the steering wheel.

Alpha Asher's voice was that of a leader, strong and reassuring in the midst of chaos. His words stirred something within me, something that made me want to stand up and fight.

'We won't let them hurt our family.' Maya snarled, affected by Alpha Asher's words.

"You have a plan for this, right?" I gasped, my mind racing as I thought of Sean, Dad, and Grandma. I could only hope the Vampire's had passed Breyona's house, leaving her behind in their search for me.

"Of course." Alpha Asher grunted, "I had many of my warriors from other cities travel here, some of the best are on their way. From what I heard; they were ahead of schedule."

"Brittany—" I started, but Alpha Asher cut me off with a low growl.

“I will deal with her when this mess is sorted.”

“She might not have known. They could have let the information slip, knowing she’d plan on escaping.” I rushed out, my eyes narrowing as we drew closer to the house. “They could’ve planned all of this for the upper hand.”

“Or Brittany could be a spy.” Alpha Asher snapped.

“She could.” I agreed, “But, we need to hear her out first.”

Standing out front of the house were six figures, four dressed in dark clothing, their postures rigid and tense. My hammering heart dropped to my stomach as I was able to make out the grim faces of Sean and Breyona. The lights inside the house were on, and from a distance I could make out my Dad and Grandma’s worried faces as they peaked out the living room window.

I knew Dad was itching to go outside and defend his son, and I prayed to the Moon-Goddess that he would stay put. Dad had shattered his knee many years ago, and while it had healed, it still gave him trouble time to time. Grandma had a will of fire and obsidian, a force to be reckoned with but even she remained inside, most likely to keep my Dad from throwing himself out the door.

Both Sean and Breyona were standing their ground against four Vampires. In the hands of the Vampire’s, they held something that reflected the dull light of the streetlamps. The Vampire’s had come prepared this time; sporting knives coated in silver.

Sean was fighting against two of the Vampires, but his movements were slower than usual. I watched as pain flashed across his face, and my eyes were drawn low, to the crimson liquid leaking down his thigh. If Sean was stabbed by one of the Vampire’s, his wolf was now suppressed, leaving only his strength and speed.

A flash of blonde hair—lighter than I had seen on a human came into view. Those eyes, Tristan’s eyes met my own as a smile fluttered onto his face.

Breyona fought against the Vampire's with a ferocity I had never seen before, her face clouded with emotion as a thin line of blood trickled down her scalp. From behind, five more Vampire's stalked under the dim streetlight, their eyes set on Breyona and Sean. Undoubtedly, they slipped through the patrol line, avoiding the fight around our town.

Tristan stood back from the fight, surveying everything with a serpentine smile on his face. I was revolted at the sight of him, wondering how I could've ever felt attracted to such a monster. The scarlet mark tingled against my skin, as if it were scolding me for such thoughts.

"I'm going to f\*\*king kill him." Alpha Asher snarled, jerking the car onto the side of the road.

The two of us leaped from the car, running over to Breyona and Sean. Alpha Asher tackled one of the Vampires from behind, knocking him off Sean. With a swift movement, Asher's claws lengthened and raked across the Vampire's throat. Thick blood sprayed across his face, the metallic scent filling the air.

I leaped at one of the Vampire's, ducking as he swung the knife at my face. Time seemed to slow, and I met my reflection in the blade's smooth surface as it whizzed past my face.

"Do not harm Lola!" Tristan snarled at the Vampires who continued fighting for their lives.

The Vampire fighting against me listened to Tristan's words, and worked to restrain me. With the Vampire's body close to my own, it was easy to twist and maneuver until my lengthened canines sunk into his neck. The feeling was oddly satisfying, like sinking your teeth into a stick of butter. Recoiling at the taste, I spat a piece of his throat into the road and watched as he fell to his knees.

In the midst of the fighting, something had changed. Sean no longer had the upper hand against the Vampire's and collapsed to the ground as the leather hilt of a knife protruded from his abdomen. Breyona lunged to protect Sean, but was still standing her ground against two other Vampire's.

My head snapped around as the front door to the house slammed open, and Dad came barreling down the steps. Grandma stood in the open doorway, her hand against her heart and a look of terror on her face.

“Dad!” I screamed, every nerve in my body bursting aflame, “Don’t!”

My body moved on its own, propelling myself forward until I collided with the Vampire stalking towards Sean. Maya’s strength flowed into my body, dulling the sensations in my limbs. My claws and canines lengthened on their own as I swiped at the Vampire in feral rage. Snarls and growls echoed across the quiet street, and I had realized those primal sounds were leaving my lips.

Dad wrapped his arms around Sean’s torso, glaring murderous daggers at the remaining Vampire’s. Making use of his time, Dad dragged Sean up the curb and onto the porch steps. I had but a moment to watch as Grandma stepped outside and helped, pulling Sean into the house.

Something hot and sticky ran down my face, the smell of copper in my nose. The Vampire beneath me was a bloody mass of torn flesh and muscle. His face was no longer distinguishable, though I knew he was handsome when alive.

I leaped from the Vampire’s body, ready to move onto the next when a sharp pain wracked my torso. There was a tear in the dress Breyona had given me, around three inches long. Protruding from the hole was the leather hilt of a knife, a single ruby embedded into the handle.

Tristan met my eyes, horror filling his murderous gaze. Alpha Asher whipped around, as though my pain had physically affected him. While the two of them gaped at the knife protruding from my stomach, my eyes were on Breyona.

She was fighting against two Vampire’s, the fight in her eyes was flickering, dying out as though it had been doused with cool water. Another Vampire stalked forward, landing a blow to her back that sent her to her knee’s.

Our eyes locked, and in them I could hear the words that refused to leave her lips.

‘I’m sorry’

“Stop!” A voice bellowed; one I hadn’t heard before.

The Vampire’s seemed to notice the voice, as they all froze, their eyes locked on the figure that walked forward.

Dark curly hair sat on top his head, with blackened eyes that seemed to peer into the darkness around us. Realization hit me, followed by confusion. This was the Vampire I had seen in the clearing, the one that had gotten away with Tristan. Tristan had told me his name...Giovanni.

My stomach twisted itself into knots as Breyona turned and met his eyes, a strange emotion crossing her face as their gaze’s met.

Love

“Giovanni?” Tristan’s voice held the confusion that burned in my eyes. As he took a step forward, Giovanni’s gaze hardened.

“Do not come closer, Tristan.” Giovanni warned, his voice hard as a light accent curled his words. He approached Breyona’s form, clasping a hand around her arm as he pulled her back.

“Get off of her!” I called out, but quickly realized the error of my words as Giovanni turned to face me.

“I will not hurt her, Lola.” Giovanni murmured; his voice soft as it hit my ears. “I will never hurt her.”

Breyona looked into his eyes, a look I had seen only a handful of times.

All at once, every word and action Breyona had made burned into my mind. Her gloomy mood, the questions about Vampire’s and mates, her sudden desire to research Vampire’s.

His name—she had told me the name of her mate.

Giovanni

“Giovanni, what is this?” Tristan spat, his icy eyes hardening as he took in the close proximity between him and Breyona.

“I have found my mate, Tristan.” Giovanni’s voice held strength and conviction; emotions difficult to falsify. “It is time you leave Lola alone, and allow her to find her own.”

The words seem to physically wound Tristan as his smooth face quickly became grim and pale with anger. Two things happened simultaneously. Tristan lunged forward, with speed I had never anticipated, slamming into Giovanni. Giovanni had managed to shove Breyona behind him, and I watched as her bottom hit the pavement.

“Lola, get Breyona.” Alpha Asher snarled, fighting off the four remaining Vampire’s himself, struggling to stand his ground. “Get her inside the house!”

“No.” Breyona snapped, pushing herself from the pavement. “I’m not leaving him.”

I watched in stunned silence as Breyona’s bones snapped sickeningly, and fur sprouted from her body. Her clothes tore into small scraps, falling to the pavement like confetti. With deafening snarl, she tackled one of the Vampire’s fighting Alpha Asher.

Tristan and Giovanni circled each other, their faces dark and unyielding. Blood coated Giovanni’s face, and I wondered if it were Tristan’s or his own. Without enough time to think, I lunged at one of the remaining Vampires. I knew Asher would be pissed with me later on, but I refused to leave him as well.

The Vampire fought defensively, trying to restrain my hands and shove me away. A snarl tore ripped through my throat as he slammed his hand into the hilt of the knife in my stomach, digging it further into my flesh. The sharp scent of my blood filled the air, but I let the scent and my anger fuel me.

I wrapped my hand around the hilt of the blade, pulling it from my stomach with a painful hiss. Agony radiated throughout my body, blurring my vision. I barreled into the Vampire, gritting my teeth against the pain. The blade sunk into his chest with a sickening thud, growing beads of blood seeping through his shirt.

I stumbled back and watched as the fight quickly came to an end. Breyona had killed another Vampire, and Alpha Asher was pressing forward against the last. Giovanni seemed to have the upper hand, slamming his shoulder into Tristan's chest, nearly knocking them both to the ground.

Giovanni had been a moment too late as he registered the knife in Tristan's hand. Tristan used his surprise against him, sending him stepping back with a slash of the knife. A scream tore through Breyona as Tristan lunged with dangerous accuracy, sinking the wide blade into Giovanni's chest.

Breyona tore past Tristan, his presence ignored as she clamored to Giovanni. My eyes were set on Tristan, who stepped away from Giovanni with a grim smile on his face.

"Never had I expected you to change sides. Of all people Giovanni, your death disappoints me the most."

Icy prickles danced across my skin, settling in my bones with sickening familiarity. Shadows danced from the forest line, gathering behind Tristan like a looming cloud. They glided over to Tristan, wrapping around him in a shimmering cocoon. A few tendrils circled around my feet, as if they were greeting a friend.

Nearly a second later, the shadows around him thinned, and Tristan was gone.

The street was silent apart from Breyona's gut-wrenching cries. I stumbled over to her, kneeling beside her. Her face was rigid, grim lines etched onto her face. Even without my heightened senses, I could tell Giovanni was dying. The knife had been torn from his chest, leaving a gaping wound behind. His blood flowed steadily, absorbed by his dark t-shirt.

"Save him, Lola." Breyona hissed so quietly, I nearly missed her words.

“Breyona—the price is too steep.” I croaked, pain constricting in my chest.

“I don’t care. I’ll pay it.” Breyona turned her eyes to me, anger burning in her gaze. “I’ll pay anything. Do it, Lola!”

Even with my muddled thinking, I knew what I would do. I had watched the life drain from Adrienne, and saw the sorrow in Mason’s eyes as he accepted her rejection. I wouldn’t allow Breyona to go through the same. If the price was someone’s life, I was terrified of what she might do.

“Don’t!” Alpha Asher spoke, but I had made up my mind.

The shadows that had lingered surged at the sound of my voice, their icy licks caressing my skin. Their smooth voices filled my mind, greeting an old friend who had called on them yet again.

‘Save Giovanni.’ I told them, ‘Name your price.’

Their silky voices wrapped around my head; the price of their favor burned into my mind. Breyona’s eyes widened as she looked at the empty space around me, where the shadows pulsed seductively.

‘She’ll pay it.’ I whispered, ‘Now save him.’

The shadows seemed to twitch in anticipation, gliding towards Breyona excitedly. While fear flashed in her eyes, she remained still. Her scream echoed into the night, bouncing off houses filled with people listening to the battle outside.

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The blood that coated my stomach and hands was warm in comparison to the shadow’s ice coated words. Maya recoiled at their price; her hackles raised as an earsplitting growl reverberated throughout my mind. Breyona was still crouched over Giovanni, her eyes burning madly as she watched the shadows pulse around my body.

They had asked the unthinkable, and Breyona had agreed blindly.

'Our price is this.' They hissed seductively in my ear, 'To save the Vampire she calls mate, we ask for the form of her wolf.'

"She'll pay it." I whispered, meeting Breyona's burning gaze. "Now save him."

The shadows pulsed around my body, slithering between my legs as they raced towards Breyona.

"What-what was the price?" Breyona whimpered, her body unnaturally still as the shadows glided around her body.

'Your wolf form-' I croaked. Pain wracked through my body, but it wasn't originating from the wound in my stomach. The pain coursing through me was for my friend and what she was willing to give up for her mate.

Her wolf would remain in her mind, trapped in a flesh-prison. Unable to shift and roam the earth, unable to feel the dirt beneath her paws. Breyona had made the ultimate sacrifice for Giovanni, and I prayed he was willing to do the same.

"Their taking my wolf?" Her voice was small, smaller than I had ever heard it before. Breyona's voice was paper-thin glass, transparent as fear bled into her eyes.

"She'll still be there-within you." My voice cracked as I struggled to force the words from my mouth. "But you won't be able to shift anymore. That's-that's their price."

Realization dawned in her eyes as one of the shadows surged forward, latching onto Breyona's chest. I was rooted in place as a gut-wrenching scream tore from Breyona's mouth, cracking as her vocal cords struggled from the pressure.

After just a few moments, the screaming died down, turning into a heartbroken whimper. Everything within me erupted into agony at the sight of her face, and for a moment I wished I had been the one to pay the price.

One by one the shadows glided away from Breyona and over to Giovanni. The blood coating his body was thick and had a sweet smell to it. I knew without the shadows, Breyona's mate would be all but lost.

The shadows caressed Giovanni's body, and Breyona's eyes widened as the shadow's voices spilt into the air. I could hear the sharp breath Asher su\*ked in, and knew he could hear them as well.

'Remove the knife from his chest, she-wolf.' They hissed, their silky movements becoming still as they waited impatiently.

Breyona grasped the handle of the knife tightly, unresponsive as the silver coating seared her skin. Giovanni let out a grunt as the knife slipped from his chest and clattered to the pavement. She tore away the ripped shirt that covered his chest, exposing a smooth plane of bronze colored skin.

The shadows had wasted little time, gliding over Giovanni's body to the wound that sat just above his heart. I watched in painful silence as the threads of his flesh formed together, muscle connecting to muscle, and his life-blood running dry.

The shadows slithered away from his body, wrapping once around my ankles as though they were parting me goodbye.

The street was silent, the only noise coming from Giovanni's chest. A dull thud that grew stronger,

faster, as the wounds within his body healed. When his eyes fluttered open, a sob tore from Breyona's chest. She threw herself into Giovanni's arms, her body shaking as his arms snaked around her body.

Giovanni's dark eyes met my own, and for a moment, I swore there was a message deep within his intrusive gaze.

Asher was at my side in seconds, his hands shaking as they peeled away the bottom layer of my dress. Blood had soaked into the black fabric, staining his skin as his hands roamed my stomach.

"I'm fine, Asher." I hissed; my eyes remained on my best-friend.

"You were stabbed, Lola." Asher met my eyes with murderous intensity, his hands trembling as they brushed across my bloody skin. Asher shot a hard look at Giovanni and Breyona, "Stay where you are."

"I have nowhere else to go." I could see a flash of surprise in Asher's gaze at Giovanni's unexpected response, followed by suspicion.

"Where is the wound, Lola?" Asher's voice was hard, guarded as his hands ran over the smooth skin of my abdomen.

"I'll explain later." I whispered, and met Giovanni's gaze. He was listening to our entire conversation, and while Breyona seemed to trust him, I remained on guard.

Asher's eyes were burning with emotion, each flashing in his gaze faster than I could process. His rough hand remained on my stomach, where the stab-wound had once been.

"You would betray your own kind for her?" Asher turned away from me, shooting me one last glance before placing his attention on Giovanni.

Asher's voice swelled, feral dominance filling his voice as he stepped into the position of Alpha. His honey eyes were darkening, heavy flecks of gold swirling in his gaze. Giovanni met his stare unflinchingly, his arms never once wavering from Breyona's shaking form.

"Yes." Giovanni answered, and I noted there was no hesitation in his voice. "Yes, I would."

"And what is it you expect now?" Asher questioned harshly, though there was no malice in his words. "A place in the pack? You would join a community that holds nothing but hatred for your kind?"

"So long as Breyona remains, then yes." Giovanni nodded, his arms tightening around Breyona.

I noted the way she looked up at him, comfort and love blazing in her hazel eyes. Something had dawned on me at the sight of them together. Breyona had been with him before, had met up with him in the past. I hadn't a clue where or how, but love like that is not instantaneous.

The way she looked at him struck something within me, and I found myself wondering how different Vampire's truly were to Werewolves. Asher was right, this town harbored much animosity towards Vampire's, and for a good reason but they hadn't a clue about my true heritage.

Would my own pack reject me if they knew what I was?

'Asher?' I whispered through the mind-link, even though no one could hear us.

His eyes remained on Giovanni, but his voice filtered through my head.

'What?'

'Do you trust me?' I asked, and this time his eyes found my own. Confusion lingered in his eyes, but I could see in his gaze that he trusted me fully.

'I do.' He responded.

'Give Giovanni a chance.' I spoke quickly, leaving him no time to interrupt. 'Question him, keep him away from the pack, but do not tear him and Breyona apart.'

'You are supporting this?' His voice was laced with anger, though not directed towards me. 'You would have this pack harbor a Vampire, knowing the deaths and attacks we've suffered?'

'I am half-vampire, Asher.' I forced strength into my words, and realized this was the first time I had admitted the truth to someone other than myself or Maya. 'It is not right to allow me to remain here, while casting Giovanni out.'

'You are also half-werewolf, Lola.' Asher responded; his tone hard. 'Giovanni has been directly involved with the deaths and attacks on this pack. For all we know, he could have helped take Sean.'

'I understand that.' I replied, my voice cracking at the thought of my Dad dragging a wounded Sean into the house. 'He is Breyona's mate for a reason, Asher. I think things are changing. I think—I think Vampire's and Werewolves have been separate for far too long.'

I could feel the reluctance seeping from Asher's pores as we locked eyes, but I could also see the unwavering trust he held for me. The emotion was strong enough to bring tears to my eyes, to which Asher's eyes softened.

"If it were up to me, you would be executed come morning." Asher turned to Giovanni, his voice lowering into a rough growl. At Asher's words, Breyona's eyes snapped up. "Lola has convinced me otherwise. She has convinced me you deserve—a chance."

Two sets of eyes met my own, Breyona's and Giovanni's. Each burned with gratitude, but Giovanni's was laced with surprise.

"Breyona had once told me you would accept me." Giovanni's light accent curled around his words,

“I did not believe her at the time. I hope I am able to live up to your expectations.”

“Oh, you will.” Asher nodded darkly, the blood of an Alpha coursing through his veins. “Your existence will not be revealed to this pack—not yet. They will not take kindly to your presence here. There is a house on the outskirts of my territory, head there now and remain unseen. I will come to question you when this mess is fully sorted.”

“I would expect nothing less, Alpha Asher. Yet, I thank you for your hospitality.” Giovanni nodded; his face oddly serene as he looked down at Breyona.

“It’s not me you should thank.” Alpha Asher grunted, “Thank Lola, without her you would be dead.”

“Thank you, Lola.” Giovanni nodded, keeping his intense gaze on my face. Gently, Giovanni stood and pulled Breyona into his arms. Her hazel eyes were wide and blood-shot as they burned into my face. I watched as her lips parted and moved silently, unable to force the words from her lips.

“I’ll tell your Mom you decided to stay with me.” I promised her, “I’ll tell her you’re alright.”

The edges of her lips pulled up in a small smile, but I could see the shattered pieces of her heart slicing into her skin. I could see the pain of Breyona and her wolf lingering in those hazel eyes, celebrating their mate but mourning their loss.

With Breyona in his arms, Giovanni darted down the road, his body becoming blurred from the speed.

“Sean.” I choked, stumbling towards my house. The Vampire’s corpses sat in the middle of the road; the scent of their thick blood lodged in my nose.

Asher was beside me in an instant, his rough hand under my arm as he led me up the porch stairs. Lying on the floor was Sean, much paler than usual, with Dad hovering over him. Dad’s face was rigid, the lines on his face appearing deeper and much more drawn out. Grandma flitted from the backyard to the kitchen, and finally back to Sean. She placed a wet rag against his stomach, pressing

firmly as she looked between the two of us.

Her dark hair was streaked with grey, pulled up in a bun as her face contorted in concentration. Her eyes widened as she took in Asher and I standing there. I was sure the two of us looked horrible. I could feel the sticky blood drying to my skin, flaking and peeling off with every move I made. The short dress I was wearing was torn, revealing my blood-coated stomach and dark shorts.

“I put herbs on the wound.” Grandma’s words were clipped as she focused on Sean. “It’ll help dissolve the silver in his blood, but he needs a doctor.”

“One is on their way.” Asher nodded; his face hard as he looked down at Sean. “The Doctor’s at the hospital will be quite busy, so I called for my personal Doctor.”

“The patrol teams.” I choked, my heartrate speeding as I remembered the fight occurring around our town.

“When–Tristan vanished, the rest of the Vampire’s retreated.” Asher grimaced, his tone filled with fury as he spoke Tristan’s name. Even with the horrendous scarlet mark on my skin, my stomach turned sour at the sound of Tristan’s name.

We remained with my Grandma and Dad until Asher’s personal Doctor arrived. Only when I was sure Sean would survive, did we finally leave the house.

As guilty as I felt over Sean’s injury and Breyona’s loss, my mind was overflowing with questions and sick realizations.

My Father had used the shadows to save Tristan, which meant a price was to be paid. What had my Father paid for Tristan’s escape?

Alpha Asher and I got back into the car we left on the side of the road. Some of his men had already arrived, removing the bodies and blood from the road. Asher had told me Alpha Zeke fought on the northern side of town, mowing down Vampire’s as fast as he could. Zeke had brought Bran with him,

who killed the Vampire's with equal ferocity. Luna Freya had remained at the packhouse, but sent her men to aid in the fight.

The silence in the car allowed me too much time to think.

Either Brittany had been wrong, or she had planned for Asher to move all of his men to the southern side, taking her warning as truth. While I was still suspicious, I still believed Brittany deserved a chance to clear her name.

The scent of drying blood set my teeth on edge as I allowed my fingers to graze my creamy skin. Beneath the thick layer of dried blood, my stomach was smooth and without injury.

'Where is the wound, Lola?' Asher had asked as the fighting finished and Giovanni was healed.

Maya had recoiled from the thought, from the same realization I had but it would change nothing. Even Maya couldn't deny what had happened.

Turning my head from Alpha Asher's gaze, I ran my tongue over the dried Vampire blood on my lip and trembled at the taste. The Vampire had been half-human. I knew that, because as the blood hit my tastebuds, strength and bliss shocked my nerve endings. I had been stunned into silence as the blood brought strength to my weary body, the wound in my stomach sewing itself back together.

Most of the drive home I had been mulling over the price my father paid for Tristan's escape, and why he would agree to such a thing in the first place. What was so important about Tristan?

While questions swam in my head, battering against my skull until a dull ache formed, only one of my questions was answered.

Situated in front of the packhouse, with her back against the door sat a girl I had thought about only a handful of times. Our only interaction had been before I knew the truth, when the Vampires were sneaking onto our land.

Jessie was positioned against the front door, her legs stretched out as though she were waiting for someone.

Only she wasn't waiting. Her eyes were wide in fear, staring off into the distance. Her small hands were clutching her neck, and through them I could see the thick jagged line that nearly severed her head from her body.

Just like with Adrienne, there wasn't a drop of Jessie's blood on the ground.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 80

Alpha Asher mind-linked his Beta, and the two of us waited by Jessie's body until he showed. With Jessie's lifeless face lingering in my mind, Asher turned to face me. His honey eyes were hard as they regarded me, stress and exhaustion hidden beneath the surface.

"The Vampire King used her as payment, didn't he?" Asher asked, recognizing the pattern of death.

"It seems he did." I frowned, my eyes lingering on the spot Jessie had once sat.

'This isn't your fault, Lola.' Maya murmured, 'You aren't responsible for everyone.'

I wasn't sure she knew about her heritage, and I never had the chance to explain. I had long stopped trying to understand the shadows and why they demand such payments, but I couldn't see the point in killing another half-blood. Jessie was just a child, born into a world where species are at war, and collateral damage is high.

"Why?" Asher grimaced, anger flaring in his dark eyes.

"She was like me." I stated simply, turning my face away as his intense eyes searched for my own.

"Not the same blood-line, but she was a half-blood."

“How long have you known this?” Asher asked, his voice dark.

“Not long.” I shook my head, “I met her when the attacks were happening. We could both smell the Vampire’s—though neither of us knew where the scent was coming from.”

“And this is an indication of her species?” Asher asked, his voice taking on an impatient tone.

I brushed the anger in his voice off, knowing we both endured a very long night. I wondered if either of us would manage to achieve any sleep. With my birthday two days away and a war between species looming over my head, I needed all the sleep I could manage.

“You can’t tell Breyona any of this.” I sighed, knowing her Mom would kill the two of us if she found out we read her private collection of books. “Breyona’s Mom has a secret stash of books. We broke into her safe and read them. According to the books, Vampire’s scents are nearly undetectable. The scent is undetectable, unless you’re a Vampire.”

“Undetectable?” Asher questioned; his eyes were captivated as I continued speaking.

“They smell sweet—like, really sweet.” I grimaced as the smell ebbed to the front of my memory. “Jessie could smell them too.”

“Then, I suppose the shadows asked for the life of a half-blood.” Asher frowned, “Though he hadn’t killed her himself.”

“Maybe the shadows have a preference.” I shrugged, though a nagging feeling remained in my gut.

"I'm no closer to figuring them out than I was a month ago."

"I'm not sure I want you to figure them out." Asher murmured to himself, each of us sharing a look of uncertain concern.

"We need to talk to Brittany, don't we?" I sighed, knowing this night wasn't through yet.

"We do." Asher nodded, "Though I would prefer to speak with her sooner rather than later."

"I know." I frowned, "I think I should speak with Tyler."

"Even locked in a cell, I cannot stand the thought of him under the same roof as you." Asher growled lowly, exhaling sharply as we entered the house.

Alpha Bran had made it back to the packhouse before us, and was slumped on the living room couch. A thin trail of blood ran the length of his face, along with a bloody wound on his arm. The pristine couch in the living room was flecked with blood, but neither Alpha seemed to care.

"One of the fking vermin bit me." Alpha Bran snapped, holding his arm up to showcase the bloody wound. "Bit me like I'm a fking sausage."

"Did you make him regret it?" I found myself asking, a dry smile on my face as I looked at the Alpha I had once beat.

"I did, my dear." Alpha Bran returned my grim smile with one of his own. "His remains are scattered throughout the forest."

"And what of Alpha Zeke?" Asher questioned, his eyes flashing at Bran with annoyance.

"Tending to his men." Alpha Bran grunted.

The putrid smell was far from mind as we walked down into the dungeons. While my nose wrinkled at the scent, my stomach no longer turned itself into knots. I had seen enough death and blood to last a lifetime, a putrid stench was nothing compared to that. Reluctantly, Asher took the left tunnel where Brittany resided and I took the right.

Unable to leave Brittany and Tyler unguarded, Asher had left two men each to guard their cells. Isaac and one of Asher's men guarded Tyler's cell. It was almost humorous to see Tyler's once best-friend guarding his prison cell, though Isaac's eyes held no fondness for his old friend.

"Lola." Isaac nodded; his eyes hard as he glanced at Tyler's slumped figure. "I wanted to apologize about-before."

"No need." I shook my head, dismissing his apology with a wave. I had long ago moved on from Tyler. The more I thought about my relationship with Tyler, the more I realized how much I had truly changed. The girl who dated Tyler was the shallow daughter of a Beta. She didn't care for pack politics or a war between species. Even though it had only been a year ago, it felt like another lifetime.

"Trying to get in her pants already, Isaac?" Tyler snorted; his voice rough from lack of water. "Get in line, though I'm not sure you can compete with an Alpha or Vampire."

Isaac didn't react to Tyler's bait, clearly used to it at this point. I rolled my eyes at Tyler and watched as he pulled himself from the earthen wall. He was looking much more haggard than yesterday, his hair a couple shades darker from a thick coating of dirt.

"I assume there's a reason behind your visit?" Tyler smirked, having the gall to act smug while he rotted in a silver cage. "Are things not going so well with your new Alpha?"

The bitterness in Tyler's words fell on my ears, and part of me wanted to laugh. While a war between our species must have been brewing for quite some time, it was Tyler that lit the match and watched everything go up in flames. Had Tyler truly expected everything to work out in his favor?

'Yes, because his pride clouds his mind.' Maya murmured.

"Let's play a game, shall we?" Tyler chuckled, though his laughter was a shell of what it used to be. "A question for a question."

"Very well." I nodded, remaining cautious incase Tyler had something up his sleeve.

"Are you worried, Lola?" Tyler spoke lowly, his eyes ablaze with hidden emotion. "I assume your birthday is coming up any day now. Whoever could your mate be?"

"That's two questions." I rolled my eyes. "And of course, I'm worried. Did you know about the attack tonight?"

"Tonight?" Tyler's eyes were bright, almost hopeful. "I knew they were planning an attack, but I hadn't a clue when or where it would happen. How far did they get?"

I couldn't see the harm in answering his question, so I obliged.

"Not far." I shrugged, "They headed to my Dad's house. It seems they were looking for me."

I watched in silence as some of the light in Tyler's eyes diminished. I realized; Tyler was hoping the Vampire's would rescue him. He had nothing for them, nothing to benefit their cause of the complete destruction of all werewolves. They wouldn't come for Tyler, and now he was beginning to believe it.

"Is Brittany in on this?" I asked, watching Tyler's expression carefully.

Irritation flooded my veins as an ear-splitting grin formed on Tyler's face. A deep, raspy chuckle emerged from his chest while his eyes were bright with amusement.

“You’re desperate for this answer, I can see it in your eyes.” Tyler snickered, “Perhaps she is—but maybe she isn’t.”

“Enough, cut the bull-sh\*t.” I snapped, pinching the bridge of my nose as I exhaled slowly. As I opened my eyes, Tyler’s grin had only widened.

“How interesting.” Tyler chuckled, “If I told you she was in fact working with the Vampire’s, your Alpha would kill her, but I could be lying. Could you handle that, Lola? Could you live with yourself knowing your precious Alpha tortured and murdered an innocent girl?”

I knew this conversation was pointless when Tyler erupted into unhinged laughter. His time in Asher’s dungeons had muddled his mind, or perhaps he had always been this way.

There was one other option, one I had refused to think about until we were left empty handed. I could use the one-sided bond between Tristan and I to find out the truth. If Brittany was working with the Vampire’s, Tristan would know. For once, Maya begrudgingly accepted my alternative plan.

Asher and I were silent as we retreated up to our bedroom. Once the door closed softly, he turned to face me. I could see the exhaustion etched onto his gorgeous face; the corners of his full lips were turned down. His eyes were clouded, filled with emotion that knotted my stomach.

If anyone were to look closely, they would see the truth behind Alpha Asher. Rumored to be ruthless and cruel, Asher had a limitless love for his pack and people. There was nothing he wouldn’t do for his pack, nothing he wouldn’t sacrifice.

“Did she say anything?” I found myself asking, holding myself back from running into his arms.

“She cried, a lot.” Asher sighed, running a hand through his already messy hair. “I had to resort to some—unsavory methods to ensure she wasn’t lying.”

“And was she?” I leaned in, my heart hammering for some unknown reason.

“She claims to have no idea the Vampire’s changed their plans.” Asher murmured thoughtfully, yet a shred of suspicion lingered within him.

“You’re not going to like this—but it’s something I need to do.” I grimaced at how weak my own voice sounded. “I’m going to use the bond between Tristan and I to visit him. I’ll do everything I can to uncover the traitors in this pack.”

Asher’s honey eyes turned dark in seconds, flashing in anger as he stalked over to me. Before his lips parted, I knew what he was going to say. There wasn’t a chance in hell he would willingly allow me to do this, but I didn’t care. I continued speaking before he had the chance to utter a single word.

“This is my pack too, Asher. Sean could have died tonight. My Dad, my Grandma both could have died tonight.” I frowned, remembering the fear I felt when my Dad ran from the house. “If she is innocent, I won’t let Brittany suffer.”

“I have one condition.” Asher murmured darkly; lingering anger continued to swim in his obsidian eyes. “If he touches you, moves towards you, or breaths too closely, you will come right back.”

“I will, I promise.” I nodded, and I truly meant it. The part of me that longed for Tristan was much easier to control now, and I knew I wouldn’t be caught off guard by him again.

Surprise jolted me as Asher wrapped his arms around my waist, holding me to his chest tightly. The quickened pace of his heart matched my own and calmed some of the raging storm within me.

His dark eyes were consuming, heating my skin as they roamed my face slowly. His hot breath fanned across my lips, and my body leaned in on its own accord. Every nerve ending erupted in little explosions at the short distance between us. The heat that radiated from his core warmed me, and chased away the chill that settled in my bones when I called on the shadows.

As his lips hovered above my own, a surge of fear washed over me, strong enough to bring me to my knees.

All this time with Asher, and I hadn't asked the obvious question in fear of the answer. Unknowingly, I had given this man my entire heart and was unsure if I owned his in return. The fear that crippled me spurred my decision.

Confusion fluttered in the depths of his dark eyes as I turned my head away from his own.

"Asher—what do you feel for me?" I found myself asking, looking into the depths of his eyes as though they held the answer.

I had held back asking these questions, knowing I would be destroyed if the answer wasn't what I expected. I had shoved those burning questions away, content to live in bliss with Asher.

"What do I feel for you?" He murmured, those intoxicating eyes burning into my own. "Why have you waited so long to ask me this?"

"I—I was afraid." I grimaced, clearing my throat in a poor attempt to strengthen my voice. A fool could hear how fragile my words were, how everything hinged on Asher's response. "I'm still afraid."

"I find you intriguing, intoxicating, and utterly irresistible." Asher purred, his hand tracing lazy circles across my lower back. "I think about you so often, I moved you into my house and bedroom. And how do you feel about me, Lola?"

"I—" Those three words hovered on my tongue, sweet like honey as it awoken my tastebuds. I couldn't bring myself to utter those words, not without knowing for sure. "Am I your mate?"

Those four words hovered in the air between us, and as the seconds ticked by, my heart cracked painfully.

Asher's eyes gave nothing away, not a single emotion as he weighed my words on his tongue. Even as my heart threatened to split in two, I couldn't bring myself to regret asking the question. My patience had finally run thin, and I couldn't stand waiting the two days until my birthday.

Asher's words were slow and measured, as though he spent a considerable amount of time thinking over his response. He had gone over this conversation in his head hundreds of times, waiting until I was brave enough to ask the question.

"I know how I feel about you." Asher murmured; his hand rough as it trailed along my cheek. "The moment I met you, I was drawn in. My parents told me many times what the mate-bond feels like, and yet--this is different."

"Different." The word stung my skin, like a blade against soft flesh.

"I understood more once I learned you were half-vampire." Asher murmured, capturing my attention with a gentle stroke of his hand. "Vampires are able to pick their own mates, yet werewolves cannot. You are a mix of both. While I feel drawn to you, how are we to know you cannot just pick a mate as you please?"

Something inside of me ached as I understood the reason behind Asher's restraint. He hadn't given that part of himself over to me in fear I wouldn't choose him, as if anyone else stood a chance.

"You think I might be able to choose my own mate?" I asked.

The thought had never occurred to me before, but sent a jolt of panic down my spine. This was a good thing, right? Yet, I felt no relief.

If I were able to choose my own mate, that meant Asher had a mate in the world, and she wasn't me. I had knowingly gotten involved with another Alpha, one whose mate was possibly someone other than myself. I had promised I would never go through this again, and yet I couldn't seem to resist Asher.

"What if you're wrong?" I questioned, holding his gaze as I silently pleaded with the Moon-Goddess. "What if--what if you're my mate?"

“If you’re my mate, I’d consider myself the luckiest Alpha in the world and will not hesitate to remove that Vampire’s mark from your skin.” Asher purred, drawing me into his arms once more. His thick fingers trailed over my back, and I couldn’t hold in the jagged sigh that left my lips.

Despite the renewed anticipation I felt for my birthday, the knot encompassing my heart had finally begun to unravel.

v

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I laid awake until Asher’s breathing grew heavy, slowing as he fell asleep. With his arms wrapped around me, and the heat from his body warming my bones, I closed my eyes and thought of Tristan.

It was harder than I expected, tapping into that sliver of myself, the part of me that longed for Tristan. Hour after hour passed as I stared at the backs of my eyelids, until a tugging sensation formed in my gut.

Instead of fighting the intrusive feeling, I allowed myself to be pulled away. The world around me faded into black until my surroundings changed completely. This room was different from the one I had previously met Tristan in. The walls were bare, rough as if the room itself were carved from stone. A plush bed sat in the middle of the room, large enough for four people to sleep comfortably. A Persian rug sat across the tiled floor, golden whorls and shapes glittered on its surface. Across the room sat a gilded fireplace, the edges were etched in gold, reflecting light as the fire within blazed merrily. In front of the fireplace sat a long couch, deep maroon in color. As my eyes wandered over every feature of the room, I nearly missed the figure sitting on the couch.

I circled around the couch and faced Tristan. His blonde hair looked gold as it attracted light from the blazing fire. His hands were clasped tightly, anger burning in his gaze as he stared into the hungry flames. I watched in silence as he noticed me, the anger replaced itself with amused interest.

“Well, hello beautiful.” Tristan purred, leaning back on the couch as his eyes roamed me lazily.

I ignored the tingling of my scarlet mark and gave Tristan a hard look. I could still see the remnants

of anger burning in his eyes, though he tried to conceal it with a sly grin.

“Rough night?” I asked, my eyes probing the depths of his own. Tristan hid his irritation skillfully, a look of mock offense forming on his face.

“Clearly.” He scoffed, but continued eyeing up my bare legs. “Though, you could drastically change that.”

“Don’t count on it.” I snorted, “Does it hurt? To know one of your own betrayed you for the love of a she-wolf.”

“Hurt?” Tristan mused; his eyebrow cocked. “It does not hurt. Is it a horrible inconvenience? Yes. Regardless, Giovanni will be dealt with in time.”

“If you say so.” I shrugged, schooling my face into a mask of indifference. “Giovanni’s loyalty will be useful. I can’t wait to hear what he knows.”

“My dear, you believe you are the only ones who have spies?” The corners of Tristan’s lips twitched, his eyes playful and amused.

“Really?” I chuckled, shaking my head in disbelief. “I highly doubt your spies would get past Alpha Asher for long.”

“You think too highly of your Alpha.” Tristan chuckled, his ocean eyes burning into my own. “Though, I’ll let you find out for yourself.”

“Is Brittany one of those spies?” I mused, paying close attention to the emotion burning in his eyes.

Whether Tristan had anticipated my question or not, his eyes revealed nothing. His lips twitched into a smile, one that sent irritation flooding my veins.

“Brittany?” Tristan smirked, “The mate of your prior boyfriend?”

“You know who I’m talking about.” I rolled my eyes, his smirk widening. “Is she a spy?”

“And why should I give you anything, beautiful?” Tristan asked, “You have given me nothing in return.”

“What do you want?” I asked, my eyebrow raised as I anticipated his response.

“You.” Tristan shrugged, flashing me a predatory grin.

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen.” I shook my head.

A headache danced around my temples, and I wondered how that was possible. Tristan’s eyes trailed over my body, and yet he made no move to approach me. His eyes flickered from my own to the far wall, lingering on the clock for just a few moments. When his eyes met my own, a joyful grin formed on his face.

“I suppose it would do no harm to tell you now.” Tristan shrugged, “By the time you wake up, it will be too late.”

“Tell me what?” I asked, wondering if he could hear the affect his words had on my heart.

“Brittany is much more than meets the eye.” Tristan smirked, “She is quite the mastermind. Your Alpha suspected, and yet she remained alive. Such a shame, the consequences won’t be pleasant.”

My stomach dropped as his words settled in my mind, each word piercing my skin like shards of glass. Tyler could have avoided all of this and told me himself, but he continued playing games. I wasn't sure what Tristan meant when he said it would be too late, but I couldn't risk staying around any longer.

"Goodbye, beautiful." Tristan purred, "Until we meet again."

The connection between the two of us snapped like a thin sheet of glass, shattering to the floor as I awoke in bed. The sun was beginning to rise, casting hues of gold along the damp earth. Stray beams of light ebbed through the curtains, though the room was still cloaked in darkness.

I pulled myself from bed and quietly slipped on some clothes, noting how calm Asher's breathing sounded. The entire house was silent, and I saw no point in needlessly waking Asher up.

I tiptoed downstairs, shuddering at how dark and eerie the house felt at night. I headed down to the basement, feeling the overwhelming need to check on Brittany and Tyler. Tristan's words had embedded themselves under my skin, filling me with a sense of dread and paranoia.

As I made it down to the basement, I nearly screamed as Luna Freya emerged from the dark dungeon tunnel. Surprise flooded her eyes as she placed a hand against her heart.

"Lola, you nearly gave me a heart attack." Luna Freya exhaled sharply, humor dancing in her eyes.

"Same here." I nodded, letting out a breathless chuckle. "What are you doing down here?"

"I needed to check on Brittany." Luna Freya frowned; concern etched onto her face. "I understand Alpha Asher is suspicious after the attack last night, and I allowed him to question her, but I needed to make sure she was alright."

I wondered what unsavory methods Asher had resorted to in order to get answers from Brittany, though I couldn't blame him. Holding the title of Alpha wasn't an easy job, especially when you

looked over the largest pack in the world. Sometimes cruelty and ruthlessness were required, though I had seen many sides of Asher.

"I understand." I grimaced, and for a moment I wondered why I had come down here in the first place. "How is she—"

My words caught in my throat as the dark stain on Luna Freya's jacket made itself known. Deep in color, shining under the poor basement lights. The blood on her jacket was still wet, though her skin was free of blemishes or wounds.

Every ounce of motherly concern drained from Luna Freya's face as she caught the location of my gaze. Something dark and feral crossed her eyes, and without hesitation, she lunged for my throat.

I had just enough time to scramble backwards, knocking into a stack of boxes. I grunted as something hard slammed into my head, but remained focused on Luna Freya. I steadied myself as the boxes crashed to the floor, and I hoped the noise had woken the entire house.

'Asher!' I shouted through the mind-link, 'Asher, wake up!'

Her canines were lengthened, her claws elongated as she lunged again. Her claws scraped against the skin on my stomach, but I rolled to the side with seconds to spare. Warm blood seeped into my t-shirt, but I couldn't waste the time to assess the damage. It was clear from the way Luna Freya moved, that she had extensive experience in fighting. Her movements were graceful, calculated and precise. She wasn't toying with her prey, as most werewolves do, she was heading straight for the kill. Her speed was half of my own, though it was my speed that kept me alive.

'Lola?' His voice was faint due to the roaring in my ears. My head throbbed in time to my quickening heartbeat.

Killing Luna Freya was the last thing I wanted, but I knew she wouldn't let me leave this basement alive. From the look of primal determination on her face, I knew Asher would never get answers from her.

I felt my own claws emerge and watched as she failed to defend her left side. With a slim chance of survival, I lunged at her. A snarl of fury left her lips as my claws sunk into her sides, and my canines met her throat.

I was greeted by the thick taste of her blood. Rich and decadent like dark chocolate, I struggled to pull myself from her body. Her claws scraped at my skin, but my grip on her was iron clad. I could no longer feel the stinging pain as her claws raked into my flesh. Instead of pain, her claws felt like gentle caresses.

I wanted to be repulsed, but everything within me praised the blood. It ignited my cells, shocking my nerve endings as I became bloated with strength. Maya remained silent, speechless as she watched the other side of me make itself known. As much as Maya wanted to be angry, she knew what I was, and accepted me regardless.

“Lola?” Asher’s voice was a beacon that pulled me away, pulling my attention from Luna Freya’s blood.

I forced myself away from Luna Freya’s body, unable to pull my eyes from her frozen corpse. Her face was contorted in rage, her claws still lengthened. Her blood coated my mouth, and I resisted the animalistic urge to lick every last drop.

I couldn’t force myself to meet Asher’s eyes, convinced this would change everything between us. How could he care for a monster? Would he even want me as a mate after this?

Large hands pulled me from the floor, setting me on my feet. My legs felt like jelly, but remained strong from the blood I had consumed. Asher’s hands toyed at the shredded shirt I wore, peeling it back to look at my stomach. Luna Freya’s claws had slashed across my stomach, but there was no wound to be found.

Asher wiped away my blood with part of the shirt, running his fingers over my stomach slowly. Instead of a wound, there were three raised lines, thick and jagged. The wound alone would have killed me, and yet the blood healed them effortlessly.

“That’s how you healed from the stab wound.” Asher spoke, though his voice held no animosity. I

dared to look into his eyes, flinching at the softness within them. "This would have killed you."

"I—" My voice fell short, sputtering out as I realized I hadn't a clue what to say.

"When did you find out you craved blood?" Asher asked, cupping my chin as he forced me to stare into his eyes.

"I don't—I don't crave it." I winced at the word, "When I taste it, I like it. I'm not some walking blood addict."

"How interesting." Asher murmured, tearing the bottom of my shirt off and using it to wipe the blood from my lips.

"Interesting?" I choked, glancing down at Luna Freya's body. "I killed her, and drank her blood. It's disgusting."

"It's who you are." Asher stated simply, unphased by what just happened. "Though, it seems you don't need blood to survive. You've gone eighteen years without it."

"She's half-vampire?"

Zeke's voice broke the trance between Asher and I, as we both whipped around to meet his surprised face. Wearing nothing but loose-fitting sweatpants, it was clear Zeke had just woken up. His dark hair was a mess on his head, sticking up in random directions.

"She is." Asher nodded slowly; his eyes locked on his friend. "Though, I would appreciate if you kept the information to yourself. Alpha Bran is quite—bloodthirsty when it comes to Vampire's."

Much to my dismay, Zeke snorted at Asher's terminology and flashed me an uneasy smile.

“Luna Freya. What happened?” Zeke asked, both him and Asher meeting my gaze.

“Might as well explain from the beginning.” Asher grunted.

“Well—a vampire marked me, so I have a constant connection to him until I find my mate. I visited him through the mark last night. I needed to know if Brittany was telling the truth, or if we had more than one traitor in this pack. He told me Brittany was a spy, but by the time I woke up, I’d be too late.” I grimaced, “I came down here just as Luna Freya was leaving the dungeons. She had blood on her clothes—fresh blood. When she saw I noticed, she attacked me.”

“Luna Freya was a spy.” Zeke scoffed, shaking his head as he stared down at her corpse. “Anything else I need to know?”

“My father is the Vampire King, so there’s that.” I sighed, wishing I could start this morning over.

Alpha Zeke looked oddly at peace with the information I was handing him, though it could prove dangerous to myself. Zeke turned to Asher, meeting his eyes with a hard stare.

“I only need to ask once. Do you trust her?” Zeke asked Asher, and I tried not to be offended by the question.

“Lola had the chance to let me die, and yet here I am.” Asher nodded, a soft smile on his face. “I trust her with my life.”

“Sorry.” Zeke gave me a gentle smile, “I had to ask.”

“I’m a little offended, but I understand.” I huffed, watching as Zeke’s smile widened. “We need to go down there. That blood on Luna Freya’s jacket didn’t belong to her.”

The three of us headed down to the dungeons, walking down the damp corridors as we approached the fork in the tunnels.

"I'm going to check on Tyler." I nodded to the two of them and turned on my heel.

The scent of fresh blood mixed with the scent of old, both alluring and disgusting as it entered my nose. As I walked into the room where Tyler's cage sat, I noticed two bodies slumped to the floor.

Isaac and one of Asher's men lay lifeless on the ground, their eyes wide as though they were reliving the attack that cost them their life. Blood coated their throats and torso's, and I kneeled down to view the wound on their necks. The wound on their neck wasn't from the shadows, but from a werewolf's claws. Puckered and jagged, the wounds on their neck still glistened with blood. My heart ached for Isaac and the mate I knew he had, though I had never met her before.

When I turned to face Tyler's cell, my jaw clattered to the floor.

Strung against the wall like meat, Tyler's face was etched into a look of horror. His shirt had been torn from his body. A thick, jagged line spanned the length of his chest. The wound was gaping, showing the white of his ribcage.

Sitting on the floor of his cell sat his heart, neatly carved from his chest.

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Asher had set to work the moment he returned from Brittany's cell. Luna Freya had managed to free Brittany and kill the guards. Upon further investigation, one of the patrol teams on the western side of his territory had been killed. We could only assume Luna Freya had been working with the Vampire's and used them to free Brittany.

Without Tyler, we hadn't a clue why Brittany was valuable to the Vampires, and I was reluctant to visit Tristan and ask him myself.

Asher and Zeke left the house shortly after searching the dungeons, taking their Beta's with them. The rest of Asher's men had arrived and needed proper housing and food. Bran had also left due to the arrival of his men. The few warriors Luna Freya brought with her were confused by her absence, and repulsed at how their Luna had betrayed the pack.

Breyona wasn't answering my calls, not that I expected her to. While I was still uneasy about Giovanni, I knew he would never hurt her. I resisted the urge to call Mason, though I hadn't heard from him since the Vampire's had attacked the pack. Even my Grandma, Dad, and Sean were busy. For the first time in a long time, I felt utterly bored.

I savored the free time I had, relishing in the peacefulness. Sometime during the afternoon, Breyona had finally called. After reassuring me everything with her and Giovanni was fine, she asked if I would sleep over tonight.

Breyona picked me up from the packhouse around seven at night. The stress and weariness had left her shoulders, leaving a light glow across her skin. Her eyes had a sparkle within them, twinkling with happiness when she thought I wasn't looking.

"How's everything with Giovanni?" I asked, noticing the smile that tugged at her lips when I said his name.

"He's struggling. He's leaving behind his family, but he understands the choice he made." Breyona sighed, "Alpha Asher stopped by today and questioned him. He seemed to believe Giovanni."

"Asher stopped by?" I frowned. I hadn't seen or heard from him all day.

"Only for a couple minutes." Breyona shook her head, "Is it bad that I'm happy? I feel horrible for Giovanni, and I understand what he lost—but, I'm still really happy."

"I don't think that's a bad thing." I frowned, "I just hope other Vampire's see things his way. We don't want to eradicate them the way they do us."

“Giovanni never wanted any part of that.” Breyona frowned, “He was raised to obey the King above anyone else, his opinions never mattered.”

“Well, they do now.” I nodded, giving her a reassuring grin.

We spent the night in her bedroom as we had countless times in the past. She told me about Giovanni, and how she would meet with him at her Aunt’s house. I could see the guilt burning in her eyes, but I couldn’t seem to muster any blame. I knew I would have done the same. She couldn’t seem to stay away, but she hadn’t betrayed the pack by giving him information. I promised her I wouldn’t tell Asher, a promise I was happy to keep.

Her pastel pink walls remained the same, even though she had begged her Mom for months to repaint the room. Over the years, her twin sized bed had been switched out for a larger one, along with a sofa against the far wall. Her room hadn’t changed much from when we used to be friends.

‘I hear you’re spending the night away from me.’ Asher’s deep voice coiled into my mind.

‘Who told you?’ I asked, shooting a suspicious look at Breyona.

‘Breyona.’ Asher chuckled, his laugh deep and rich. ‘Whatever will I do without you hogging my bed?’

‘I don’t hog the bed.’ I scoffed, ‘You’re the one that likes to cuddle all night.’

‘You sleep nak\*d.’ Asher chuckled, ‘Can you blame me for wanting to stay close?’

‘I sleep nak\*d because you refuse to let me sleep in clothes.’ I rolled my eyes, though a blush had

already began forming on my face.

'Clothes are restricting.' Asher snickered, 'I'm afraid I'll miss you tonight.'

'The mighty Alpha Asher can handle a night to himself.' I cooed, chuckling as his low growl reverberated through the mind-link. 'After all, you left me alone all day today.'

'I had business to attend to.' Asher sighed, and my heart fluttered as a strong pang of longing flowed through the mind-link.

'Does that business have anything to do with why my entire family seemed to be busy?' I smirked.

'It is your birthday tomorrow.' Asher chuckled.

'I don't need a party or anything like that.' I sighed, though a smile had worked its way onto my face. 'I have enough to worry about tomorrow.'

'In the midst of all this death, we all need some downtime.' I could feel Asher's smirk through the mind-link, 'You most of all.'

'I suppose it wasn't a horrible idea.' I chuckled, my face turning red at the thought of Asher organizing a party for my birthday.

'Goodnight, Lola.' Asher purred, 'I'll be thinking of you tonight.'

Breyona eyed me suspiciously as I ended the mind-link, the corners of her lips turning up in a smirk as she registered the heat on my face.

"I'm guessing you talked to Alpha Asher." Breyona snickered.

“Don’t pretend you didn’t have the same look on your face when we were talking about Giovanni.” I teased.

The two of us stayed up late, talking as we used to. Asher was right, we needed some fun in the midst of all this drama. We couldn’t let death take laughter and love from us. I curled up on Breyona’s couch, a mountain of blankets covering me to replace Asher’s incredible body heat. Sleeping without him left me feeling cold, but I reminded myself it was only for one night.

As I slipped into darkness, a feeling of unease settled in my stomach. The pink walls around me faded, replaced with smooth stone. The carpeted floors evaporated, turning into smooth tile. Where her desk had once sat, a roaring fireplace resided.

Tristan stood from the couch he sat on, a breathtaking smile on his face as we locked eyes. I was positive I hadn’t brought myself here, and wondered if he were able to call me against my will.

“Hello, beautiful.” Tristan grinned, “Happy birthday, Lola.”

My eyes flickered to the clock on his wall, looking strangely out of place against the velvet maroon furniture. Tristan was right, it was my birthday. The clock on his wall read three in the morning.

“What am I doing here?” I grimaced, “I didn’t bring myself here.”

“For once, I called on you.” Tristan smirked, “It’s not every day the future Vampire Queen finds her mate.”

“You’re not my mate.” I scoffed, relief flooding my veins at the absence of a mate-bond between Tristan and I.

“You are half Vampire, Lola.” Tristan smiled slyly, his ocean eyes seemed to capture the light from the fire, making them flicker with heat. His voice turned uncomfortably soft as he began to approach me. “You are more like me than you think. Tell me beautiful, did you enjoy the taste of that

Vampire's blood? Did it make you feel powerful?"

Heat flooded to my face but disgust did not follow. He was right. The Vampires blood healed the wound in my stomach, but also filled me with a sense of power. The blood swelled my muscles, and sharpened my senses. The taste was alluring and rich like dark chocolate, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't bring myself to feel disgusted.

"You don't have to say anything, beautiful." Tristan murmured, coming to a stop just a few inches away from me. His hand grazed across my jaw, but I was rooted in place. The trail his hand made across my face was warm, similar to how drinking blood made me feel.

"So beautiful, so perfect." Tristan purred, awe lingering in his tone. As I looked from the corner of my eye, I noticed him watching me. "I am asking you to choose me, Lola. I know what you want, what you need. I would give you the world."

My chest constricted at his words, and I tried desperately to force myself away. The mark on my neck burned with need, and it took all of my willpower to remain rooted in place. I could taste the sincerity of his words on my tongue, I could feel his fondness for me grazing over my skin.

"I don't—I don't want that." I managed to force the words from my lips, though they lacked conviction.

"What a beautiful Queen you will make." Tristan murmured, his fingers running down a lock of my raven hair.

Something in his words called to me, making my blood sing. Queen, I would be Queen. The power was in my blood, waiting for me to accept my role and step into power.

"You feel it don't you." Tristan murmured; his eyes soft as I fumbled for the words to say. "The power is right there, Lola. All you have to do is reach out and take it."

An image full of blood and death flashed through my mind. Asher's cold corpse lying on the ground,

his blood watering the earth. Breyona and Giovanni, sprawled out in the middle of a battle field, their fingers intertwined as they met at death's doors. Sean, Dad, Grandma, Mason, Zeke, Bran. All of them scattered across a battle field, the grass a brilliant shade of scarlet. Birds circling up ahead, lured by the smell of blood and death. Buildings burned and reduced to rubble, shards of glass littered along sidewalks and deserted roads. The packhouse bright with flames, crackling as the heat devoured every trace. A once beautiful town reduced to rubble, the earth stained with the blood of thousands. A crown of gold and rubies sitting upon my head, Tristan at my side. My Father, the man who had used and discarded my Mom, smiling at me from the throne I sat on. Countless Vampire's at my beck and call. So much power, and so much death.

I wanted none of it.

"No." My voice came out in a breathless rasp as I stumbled away from Tristan. "No. I don't want this. I don't want to be Queen. I will not help eradicate Werewolves."

"Why kill off an entire species when you can rule them all?" Tristan's voice grew quiet, his eyes intense as they roamed my horror-struck face. "I would never ask that of you, Lola."

"But—"

"The Vampire King has his own agenda, and I have mine." Tristan murmured quietly, his eyes flickering to the thick oak door that separated his room from the rest of the building. His words were sincere, but laced with a danger I did not want to face. "You must listen closely Lola, as I will only say this once. Your Father wishes for the complete destruction of Werewolves. Without Werewolves, we will be free to enslave humans."

"Becoming Queen won't change that." I hissed, but the fire in my voice had long been extinguished. "I'll fight with my pack until this mess is over."

"It will never be over, Lola." Tristan's words were dark, his tone heavy. "If you think for one minute your Father does not have a backup plan, then you are a fool. I know you well enough to tell you are no fool. If you do not accept the throne, you will sorely regret it."

"What is that supposed to mean?" I hissed, jumping as footsteps echoed outside of Tristan's door.

His eyes were wide as they turned on me, his voice held desperation. "I am not as evil as you make me out to be, Lola. Choose me and I can help you. There are some Vampires who agree with me, who do not wish for the destruction of your kind."

"What is his backup plan?" I pleaded, but the room around me had already begun to fade, leaving behind a heavy sense of foreboding I couldn't seem to shake.

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The conversation I had with Tristan replayed in my head until a headache whispered at my temples. What did he mean? How did the Vampire King have a backup plan? Was there some way I could refuse the throne, and why would I sorely regret it?

My inner monologue was cut short by the sound of Breyona waking up. The two of us headed down to her kitchen where we cooked a huge breakfast. As her Mom and Dad were particularly useless in the kitchen, they sat on the sidelines with steaming cups of coffee in their hands. Breyona hadn't worked up the nerve to tell her parents she found her mate, let alone tell them he was a vampire. They both had asked a couple questions about Breyona's mystery mate, but quickly dropped the subject.

Once we finished with breakfast, Breyona insisted on sorting through her closet to find me the perfect outfit for this afternoon. I wondered what lengths Asher had gone to for my birthday celebration and how large the party would actually be. Breyona wouldn't let a single detail slip, claiming I could use a positive surprise after all that's happened. She managed to find me a little black dress, the sleeves hung low and exposed my shoulders. It was a far cry from other dress Breyona had given me, the one I had suffered a stab wound in. This dress was longer, much more appropriate for a birthday party.

Breyona managed to keep me thoroughly distracted until late in the afternoon. She had applied a thin layer of make-up to my face, using black eyeshadow around my eyes. After a generous helping of concealer and loose powder to the scarlet mark on my shoulder, it was successfully covered up. Though I could no longer see the mark, I could still feel the weight of it on my skin. She also curled my raven hair into large ringlets, brushing them out so they framed my face perfectly.

My pleas at leaving the house had gone unnoticed. She had denied my idea of visiting Giovanni, knowing I would use the opportunity to sneak a peak at what Asher and my family had been up to. We were both worried about the future, and how the pack might react to Giovanni.

“If Asher’s my mate, their Luna will be a half-breed.” I shrugged, though it didn’t ease the worry in my gut.

“Maybe—maybe Giovanni and I should just leave.” Breyona frowned, concealing the pain burning in her eyes.

“No.” I shook my head, my voice hard. “I’m not letting anyone drive you away. If Giovanni is truly on our side, he’s part of this pack. Anyone who has a problem with that can come to me.”

I wasn’t ready to voice what Tristan had told me; that he was in fact on our side. Tristan’s loyalty came with conditions, but he was willing to stand against my Father.

Most in the pack would follow Asher’s word as law, but there would be some who retaliate. People like Alpha Bran had a long standing vendetta against the Vampire’s and would never accept them into their lives. If I were to become Luna, would I be able to do what must be done? Those who rise against Asher would have to be snuffed out. I couldn’t expect Asher to react to treason with mercy.

We left the house around six in the afternoon. Breyona promised to stay at the party for as long as she could, but had to leave to bring Giovanni some blood. Asher allowed Breyona to take blood from the pack hospital, so long as it was nearing its expiration date. Asher had been respectful when questioning Giovanni, even though he still didn’t trust him.

Confusion was written on my face as we approached the pack house. The large yard spanning the front of the house looked exactly the same. The flower beds along the porch had been tended to, the bright gardenias and poppy flowers were swaying in the afternoon breeze. As we got out of the car, I was battered by a hundred different scents. Upbeat music trickled through the open windows of the pack house, the breeze carried the scent of roasted chicken, sugary icing, and various barbecued foods. If I listened hard enough, I could hear the faint chatter and laughter of people.

Breyona led me through the pack house with a grin on her face, placing her hands over my eyes at the last minute. With an amused scoff, I let her lead me through the house. She slid the backdoor open, my nose and ears showed me what my eyes couldn't.

The chattering had died down as the door opened, replaced by hushed whispers. Now that I was closer, I could make out the scent of each food. My stomach rumbled in response as Breyona removed her hands.

The large garden behind the pack house had been completely renovated. It was clear how I hadn't noticed it from my window, as the party strayed from that side of the house. The sun was slowly lowering in the sky, casting buttery light across the plush clouds. Twinkling lights had been woven through the rose bushes and over the canopy of trees. Various fountains sat around the garden with stone benches circling each one. A couple large grills were scattered about, my Dad manning one of them. Grilled meat was piled onto large platters and placed onto long buffet-style tables. Although it wasn't dark outside, lit torches lined the garden. The party wasn't refined or proper, making it absolutely perfect.

Something strange swelled inside my gut as I looked on at the crowd of people who had come to the party. Most came for the celebration, needing a bit of happiness in the midst of all this horror, but Asher and my family had planned this entire party for me. I blinked back the tears that pricked my eyes and grinned at the crowd of people.

"Happy Birthday, Lola!" Breyona grinned, glancing at the plates of steaming food.

"Where's Asher?" I couldn't help but ask. I was practically shaking at the thought of seeing him, at the thought of finding my mate. For a moment, sympathy flashed in Breyona's eyes and my stomach dropped.

"He'll be here." Breyona smiled softly, understanding the anxiety boiling in my gut. "He's stationing the rest of his and Alpha Bran's men around the borders. We don't want any surprises tonight. Come and enjoy the party, I know you're dying to eat as much as I am."

I traveled down the porch steps with Breyona, heading over to the grill my Dad was cooking on. His eyes crinkled as he saw me, pulling me into a hug before I could say anything more.

“Your Mom would be so proud of you, Lola.” Dad grumbled, wiping away the tears that formed in my eyes. “You might have not come from me, but I watched you grow and learn. I was there when you first shifted and nearly took Sean’s head off. You’ll always be my daughter.”

“And you’ll always be my Dad.” I chuckled a little breathlessly.

I breathed in his familiar scent as it mixed with the smell of grilled food. No matter who my Father was, I already had a Dad. The man who raised me could be replaced by no other. I grabbed a piece of grilled chicken from the large plate my Dad had, giving him a cheeky grin as I plucked the piece in my mouth.

“Hey, Lola!” Sean shouted, maneuvering through the crowd to greet me. “Happy birthday! There’s someone here who wants to talk to you!”

I turned from my Dad with a wave and followed Sean. For a moment, my heart was hammering in my chest. I assumed it were Asher who wanted to speak with me, but my excitement quickly turned sour as I caught Mason’s gaze. He was seated at one of the stone benches, watching the water trickle from one of the many fountains. This particular fountain was wide-rimmed with a voluptuous woman standing in the center. Water poured from her open hands, her face a mask of serenity and peace.

Mason had seen better days, but seemed to be putting on a brave face. His eyes were bright but ringed with darkness. His usual lopsided smile was missing, replaced with one of uncertainty. Sean clapped a hand on his shoulder, giving him a reassuring smile that held a certain familiarity.

‘It seems Sean took our advice.’ Maya murmured, ‘Hopefully they help each other cope with everything.’

Sean left the two of us alone, and I shifted uncomfortably on my feet. The upbeat music seemed out

of place with Mason's solemn face. I half expected him to yell at me, to tell me how it was my fault Adrienne had died. Instead of yelling, an exhausted sigh left his lips. He mustered up a half-hearted smile and waved me forward. I sat beside him gingerly, keeping my eyes on the fountain before us.

"Happy Birthday, Lola." Mason smiled, his voice held a hint of the friendliness he felt before. A shard of guilt pierced my skin as I looked into his eyes and saw the loneliness within them.

"Thanks, Mason." I breathed with uncertainty.

"I forgive you, y'know." Mason frowned, running a hand through his tangled hair. The haunted look on his face nearly brought me to tears. "I know it wasn't your fault. It never would have worked between us, I know that now."

"I can't explain how sorry I am, Mason." I frowned, fighting to keep my voice strong. "I'm sorry for everything."

"I know you are." Mason sighed, wrapping his arm around my shoulders. I leaned into his touch with a small smile. I hoped everything would be okay, and that Mason might find some semblance of happiness in his life.

We sat in silence, watching the water fall from the porcelain woman's hands. Her eyes were closed, an intimate smile on her face. I couldn't help but notice the similarities between the stone woman and Adrienne. Both were curvy with angular faces and full lips. The only difference was the statue had a look of peace on it's face, while Adrienne had a look of disdain.

"I fell for you, Lola. I fell hard." Mason's voice held such confusion and sadness that my heart lurched in response.

An amused chuckle left Mason's lips at the look of shock on my face. A sliver of his lopsided smile had returned as his fingers brushed against my reddening cheek. I had never thought of Mason in that way, and felt guilty for that fact. Asher had always been on my mind, followed by brief thoughts of Tristan.

“I never-“

“Just let me finish.” Mason smiled softly, halting my words. “I know you don’t feel the same, and I’m not asking you to choose me. My Mom was abused by her Dad. Even when he was old and frail, she was still so afraid. I think I fell for you because of how fearless you are. You’ve never been afraid of the things thrown at you, you face them head on. I hope you find your mate, Lola. You deserve a happy ending.”

After fighting the urge to convulse into tears, Mason shooed me away. He wiped the tears from my eyes and told me to enjoy my birthday. My heart felt heavy and light at the same time, both free and horrifically weighed down. I cleared my mind, determined to enjoy this sliver of heaven while it existed. I danced with Breyona until my limbs ached, and ate until my stomach groaned.

A head of black and silver hair pulled me from the dance floor and I stepped into my Grandma’s arms. Even with a million different scents in the air, I could point out Grandma’s lavender scent effortlessly.

Her dress matched the delicate pink of the rose bushes, making her look much younger. The dress flowed over her curves in a sea of pink silk. Even though I wasn’t related to her by blood, my soul recognized her own. The love in her eyes was mirrored in my own, as was the beaming smile. The worry that plagued her eyes was gone for the moment, replaced with fondness and excitement.

“Happy Birthday, my beautiful granddaughter.” Grandma grinned, pulling me into her arms. “I wanted to give you some time with your friends before pestering you.”

“You could never pester me, Grandma.” I laughed, leaning into her embrace.

“Your Dad would say otherwise.” Grandma scoffed, “Alpha Asher and your Dad seemed to be under the impression I work too hard. They refused to let me lift a finger while they set all of this up.”

“Asher wouldn’t let you help?” I snickered, giving Grandma an innocent smile.

“Wouldn’t even let me bake the cake.” Grandma scoffed, “Men. Can you believe it?”

“You mean I have to endure this entire night without any of your pastries?” I gasped in horror. The horror wasn’t entirely forced, as Grandma’s pastries were addicting.

“Of course not.” Grandma snickered, looking like a devious teenager. “Since when did I let a man tell me what to do? You’ll find a few containers in my car.”

“Did you make your lavender brownies?” I questioned, my eyes flickering over to my Dad.

Dad seemed oblivious to our conversation and was enjoying his job at grilling all of the food. It had been too long since Dad had gotten out of the house.

“Of course, and enough coconut macaroons to last you the weekend.” Grandma chuckled. “Now, tell me what’s been bothering you.”

“Bothering me?” I asked with a frown.

“You can’t hide the troubled look in your eyes from me.” Grandma shook her head, “Even your Dad hasn’t mastered that art. Better to get it off your chest so you can continue enjoying your birthday.”

“I visited Tristan last night, the Vampire that marked me.” I sighed, letting Grandma lead me away from prying ears and over to one of the fountains. “He brought me this time. He was trying to warn me, Grandma.”

Little lights sat at the bottom of the fountain, making it look as though the water were glowing. This fountain had three tiers, spewing water from each level.

“Warn you?” Grandma frowned, the troubled expression on her face matched my own. “Do you believe this Vampire cares for you?”

"I think he does, in his own strange way. The feeling isn't mutual." I sighed, "Something he said worried me. He said the Vampire King has a backup plan in case I reject the throne. He said I'd sorely regret it. How could my Father have a backup plan?"

"The only backup plan I could think of is having another daughter. Vampires can only reproduce with their marked mates, and I'm positive your Mom never had another child." Grandma grimaced, shaking off a bad memory. "This Tristan could have been lying to you, perhaps to force you into taking the throne. Do you believe he was being sincere?"

"All I know is, this is the first time he hadn't tried to make a move on me." I shook my head, trying to sort through the hurricane of emotion I was feeling. "He looked genuinely concerned. He even told me he wasn't on my Father's side, that he doesn't want to get rid of all the werewolves."

"I think it would be best if you proceed with caution. Do not take Tristan's word as truth, but I wouldn't dismiss him quite yet." Grandma nodded, looking oddly serene. "If what he says is true, he could prove to be a valuable ally."

"His loyalty comes with a price. He wants me." I grimaced.

"It seems Tristan is playing a dangerous game. Regardless, if he truly cares for you, your happiness is paramount." Grandma shrugged, but gave me a reassuring smile. "I'm much too old for these kinds of things, but I'll help you in any way I can."

"You'll never be old to me, Grandma." I grinned, feeling as though a weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

Grandma led me back to the party, demanding I set aside my worries for tomorrow. While the issue of Tristan and his questionable loyalty had been set aside, I had another concern pressing at the edges of my mind.

Where the hell was Asher? I hadn't seen him during the party, and hadn't heard from him through the mind-link. The few times I attempted to contact him, I came up short. While Alpha's had the

power to block a mind-link, it worried me that he had chosen to do so.

Other than the delicious scent of charred meats, I hadn't smelled anything intoxicating and alluring. Maya was still on the lookout for our mate, though Asher had been at the forefront of our mind.

After quite some time, Breyona managed to catch back up with me. The sun had long ago sank behind the clouds, leaving behind a deep indigo sky. The twinkling lights looked like fireflies resting in the trees and rose bushes, making the entire garden look like a magical oasis.

"Leaving already?" I asked, noticing the dreamy look in Breyona's eyes.

"I'm sure Giovanni is starving by now." Breyona chuckled, the pink tinging her cheeks was noticeable by the torch light. "He won't hunt for anyone, but I don't want him to suffer."

"No worries, I believe you." I chuckled, though the thought of Giovanni hunting a human made me equally uncomfortable and hungry.

"This is for you. It isn't much, but I know you've never been one for expensive gifts." Breyona teased, handing me a small box wrapped in silver paper.

"I'm sure it's perfect. Thank you so much." I smiled softly, "Tell Giovanni I said hi."

"You have to stop by sometime. He's really amazing. I think you two would get along quite well." Breyona grinned merrily, and I couldn't help but return the smile.

"I'll stop by tomorrow." I replied, waving as she headed back into the pack house.

'Happy Birthday, Lola.' Asher's rough voice murmured through my mind.

Irritation formed at the edges of my heart, though my stomach fluttered excitedly at the sound of his

voice.

'And where have you been?' I grimaced, 'You spend all this time setting up a party and have the nerve to not show up.'

'Let me make it up to you.' Asher purred, his warm voice coiling around my agitated heart. 'Look towards the forest line, Lola. Do you see the blue lights?'

I scanned the forest line as Asher suggested, noticing a thin string of cobalt lights wrapped around the trunk of a tree.

'I see them.' I nodded.

'Good, follow them.' Asher murmured, his voice thick. 'Come to me, Lola.'

My legs moved on their own and before I knew it, I found myself in front of the thick oak tree. Using the string of thin lights as a guide, I let them lead me deeper into the forest.

The brush around me was dark, but I had little trouble navigating through the dense forest. It seemed as though a path had been cleared for me, the ground leveled so I would have little trouble walking in the dark.

Further up ahead, I could make out a warm light. Little balls of orange light twinkled in the trees, cascading down the branches in a sea of white and orange. The emerald leaves stood out against the light, making the forest look completely different at night.

Twenty feet away, at the edge of a little clearing, stood Asher. Dressed in a black suit, he looked incredibly beautiful but completely out of place. His devastatingly handsome face was serene, but even from the distance, I could see the worry gleaming in his eyes.

The orange and white light gave his honey eyes more depth and seemed to draw out the golden

hues within them. From where I was standing, I couldn't grasp his scent.

As the anticipation and worry began to build within me, I stepped forward. A thin sweat broke out over my skin, and my heart hammered mercilessly.

I couldn't help but notice how my dress matched Asher's suit perfectly, as though Breyona's clothing choice had been intentional.

As I stood ten feet away from him, the air around us seemed to shift. A gentle breeze whipped past Asher, ruffling the hair on his head.

All at once, his scent swirled around me, battering me senseless.

Rich and earthy, sweet and musky, both dark and alluring. His scent was a beacon drawing me forward, awakening parts of me that had been sleeping for so long.

The shock and joy in his eyes mirrored my own as the mate-bond snapped together with an audible click.

My legs moved on their own accord, propelling me forward until I slammed into his hard chest. The golden hue in his eyes had been replaced by endless darkness and longing.

"Mate." Asher murmured in awe, his voice soft and fragile.

Asher had always been a strong Alpha, willing to do what needed to be done. I hadn't realized he had fears and hopes of his own. I never thought this moment lingered in his mind as much as it did my own.

The dazzling light danced off our skin, reflecting in our eyes. The word left his lips like a song, full of longing, relief and excitement.

“Mate.” I repeated, Maya’s voice blending into my own.

A weight had been lifted from my shoulders, one I had never noticed. The weight of my potential mate had been pressing down on me, suffocating me into exhaustion.

A dazzling smile formed on Asher’s face, one that left me weak and enthralled. My heart fluttered at the sight, realizing he had reserved that smile specifically for me. The smile lit up his face, and I wondered if I had ever seen another person so full of joy.

My hands crawled up to his face, and a smile of my own formed as sparks ran the length of my skin. Dad had told me countless times what it would feel like when I found my mate, but words seemed to fall short in comparison to this moment.

Everything other than Asher and I seemed to fade away, the importance of everything else drifting away. I knew what I was fighting for, who I was fighting for.

“I knew it, I knew it.” Asher laughed lightly, though his eyes were blown wide with wonder. “I’ve never loved someone like this. I’ve never loved someone so completely.”

“You love me?” I breathed, shocked at the sound of my own voice. I had never heard myself so full of happiness before, so carefree of the dangers that lie ahead.

“I do.” Asher smiled, flashing his dazzling teeth. “I have for so long.”

While I had experienced his embrace countless times, this felt entirely different. My soul soared to meet his own, blending into something new yet familiar. Our light touch wasn’t enough, and yet it was everything I would ever need.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” I asked, my voice coming out in a breathless laugh.

“I needed to know—I needed to know you were mine first, that you weren’t meant for someone else.” The pain in his voice broke something within me and I clamored to erase the flash of pain in his eyes.

“I’m yours. I always have been.” I smiled softly, the stubble on his jaw tickling the pads of my fingers.

“As I am yours, Lola.” Asher murmured, his face lowering to meet my own.

His lips had been nothing like what I expected, as they held more emotion and passion than I ever could have anticipated. His lips were soft against my own, but held the pain and worry we both had been feeling for weeks now.

My fingers tangled in his silky hair as our lips meshed together, our pain and passion melting into one. Every ounce of stress or anxiety I had been feeling melted away under his gentle touch.

Asher had relinquished control, allowing me to part his lips with my tongue. I was drowning in his scent, in the blissful sparks that consumed my entire being. I could feel a piece of him burning within me, marking me as his equal, as his Luna.

Any past experience had not prepared us for this moment. Even after every touch and caress, our bodies were completely unprepared for one another. Our lips moved together slowly, savoring every taste and sensation blasting through our bodies.

It took every ounce of strength within me not to leap on him, as I had forgotten our surroundings completely. Maya was a love-struck mess, willing to seal the deal out here in the open.

“I want you to mark me, Lola.” Asher murmured, smiling slyly at the look of shock on my face. “I’ve waited far too long to claim you as my own. If it weren’t for our surroundings, I would complete the mating process right now.”

The passion in his words left me speechless, fumbling for some semblance of control. Instead of waiting for an answer, Asher held me against him and looked deep into my eyes.

“Mark me, mate.” He purred, “Let me mark you in return.”

My lips knew what to do on their own, finding the softest piece of flesh to sink my teeth into. The scent wafting off his skin left me dizzy. A low growl rumbled in his chest as I dragged my canines along his neck before sinking them into his soft flesh.

Asher remained still as I lapped the blood from his skin, smiling softly at the wound I created on his neck. Somehow, I knew once it healed, it would be sapphire in color.

Neither of us felt the need to speak, as our eyes communicated what needed to be said. I tilted my head to the side, unable to stifle the whimper that left my lips under his touch.

“You’re so beautiful.” Asher purred against my skin, his tongue flicking over my neck slowly.

His canines were cold against my skin, yet they heated me to my core. Pain melted with pleasure as his teeth pricked my skin, drawing blood that trickled down my collarbones.

‘Alpha we have a problem. Luna Freya’s men have invaded the pack—the blonde Vampire is leading them. They barreled through our defenses on the Northern perimeter and are heading south.’

“Breyona and Giovanni.” My voice came out in a breathless rasp, fear settling into my bones.

Any kindness I had felt for Tristan vanished, leaving me wondering why he had come in the first place. I knew the blonde Vampire was Tristan, just as I knew he was spearheading this entire attack. His false promises left a bitter taste in my mouth.

Asher sprung into action, planting a hasty yet passionate kiss to my lips before speaking.

“I know you want to come, but stay here, Lola.” Asher breathed, fear burning in his eyes that I hadn’t

seen before. "Go find your Dad. I'll take care of this."

I gave him a weak nod, the same fear burning in my own eyes. I knew Asher could handle himself, yet I couldn't fathom a world without my mate, a lifetime without Asher. I couldn't imagine how Mason and Sean survived, as the thought of losing Asher was enough to bring me to my knees.

I watched on in silence as Asher shifted and bounded off into the forest, taking a part of my soul with him.

A new weight pressed on my shoulders as unspoken words dripped from my lips. Covered under layers of concealer, the scarlet mark on my shoulder remained untouched and intact.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 84

As Alpha Asher bounded through the forest, he sent out an alert to everyone in the pack. I could feel the panic ripple and spread, but Asher managed to contain the wildfire before it consumed us all.

'Attention everyone—those of you on the Northern side of the pack, seek shelter. Remain indoors until further notice. The rest of you, head South and find a safe place to lay low.'

I had no intention of letting Asher handle the invasion alone, as I'm sure he had suspected. Now that I had finally discovered my intended mate, the last thing I wanted was to let him out of my sight. First, I needed to make sure my family was safe. I didn't run when I found out the truth about my heritage, nor did I run when I found out Sean was taken, and I refused to run now.

Staying in human form, I bounded through the woods and headed back to the party. The twinkling lights that had once been romantic, were now beacons leading me back to my family. The smell of grilled food still lingered in the air, though the laughter and dancing had ceased. The music had gone silent, as had the carefree atmosphere. Tension rippled along the crowd as many held their children close, piling into cars and driving down the road. Most chose to leave, heading to their homes where they believed themselves to be safe. Children continued running around, oblivious to the heavy sense of foreboding. The adults knew the truth. If Asher, Zeke, and Bran's men failed to stop the attack, none of us would be safe.

My Dad had abandoned his station at the grill, helping some of the elderly into the packhouse. I gave Dad a hand as we lifted an old woman's wheelchair onto the porch. Dad placed the woman into her chair and wheeled her inside with a grim nod. Grandma was helping some of the parents track down their excited children, those too young to understand what was happening. Sean and Mason were nowhere to be found, most likely heading towards the Northern perimeter. I wanted to scold Sean for placing himself in danger, but how could I blame him when I intended to do the same thing?

Once everyone had cleared out, I headed inside with my Grandma. There were only a handful of people who chose to remain in the packhouse, all of them chattering quietly about the oncoming threat. Grandma flitted around the room like a hurricane, offering food and water to anyone in need of it. Dad perched himself in one of the recliners, looking more troubled than usual.

"Sean and Mason head over to the Northern perimeter?" I asked, catching the sour look on my Dad's face.

"Sure did." He huffed, "Can't stay out of trouble any better than you can."

"I guess it runs in the family." I snickered halfheartedly.

"You make sure your brother's safe while you're there." Dad grunted, his eyes narrowing as he looked at the bloody mark on my neck. "I suppose Alpha Asher finally got around to markin' you, huh? Can't say I'm disappointed, always knew you were destined for great things. You'll be the most stubborn Luna in history."

"I'll be stubborn, but I'll get things done." I chuckled; my face heated under his knowing gaze. "How'd you know Asher was my mate?"

"Blame your Grandma." Dad grumbled, "She's suspected ever since you started training."

“Of course, she did.” I scoffed, meeting my Grandma’s amused gaze. “I have to take care of something before I leave, but I’ll make sure Sean’s safe.”

I ran up the stairs, heading to the bedroom Asher and I shared. This had been a last resort, but I needed information. The scarlet mark on my shoulder tingled under the layers of concealer, reminding me that it hadn’t faded away under Asher’s touch. As the bedroom door closed behind me, I reached out with my mind. Calling the shadows had become easy, as though they were hidden in the dark, waiting for my call. I walked over to Asher’s bedside table, grabbing the crude dagger I knew he had stashed there. The air around me turned cold, followed by the teeth chattering chill that sank into my bones. From the deepest corners of the room, the shadows squirmed, answering my call.

I pressed the jagged blade against the palm of my hand, exerting the slightest amount of pressure. The stinging pain was numbed from the cold, and I watched as my blood pooled in my hand. I couldn’t help but notice Tristan’s mark was the same shade, the color of fresh blood.

‘I need information.’ I told the shadows, watching them writhe at the sound of my voice. The slivers of smoke and shadow glided towards me, wrapping around my legs like an affectionate dog.

‘Ask, Princess. Let us drink.’ They whispered, their voices like icy silk against my cheek.

‘Why hasn’t Tristan’s mark faded from my skin?’ I kept my voice low in fear of being overheard. ‘I was just marked by my mate, but the Vampire’s mark is still on my skin.’

‘Half-Vampire, Half-Werewolf.’ They whispered; their silky voices sent a chill down my spine. ‘A mate for each side. One by fate, one by choice.’

‘I didn’t choose Tristan.’ I hissed, watching as the shadows coiled around my legs.

‘A part of you is drawn to the Vampire.’ They purred, ‘The part of you that longs for blood.’

'I want his mark gone from my skin.' I grimaced, 'What is your price?'

'A bond for a bond.' They replied, 'Our price is the bond you hold with Alpha Asher Desmond.'

'No.' I murmured, wincing at the stab of pain that coursed through my body. Asher was the mate I wanted, the person I had chosen and was made for. Giving up the mate-bond between Asher and I meant destroying a part of my soul, destroying a part of his soul. 'I don't accept.'

I could taste the shadows disappointment on my tongue, sharp and cold like a shard of ice. I willed the shadows away from me, willed them to return to whatever depths they emerged from. One by one, they slithered into the darkest corners of the room. The shadows writhing against the walls became still, making the cold dissipate.

'The shadows were wrong, they had to be.' I murmured to Maya, who unleashed her outrage at the information I had just received. 'I don't want Tristan, and I certainly don't choose him.'

'I know.' Maya sighed, 'I know how you feel for Asher, but I can't tell how you feel about Tristan. There's a whole side of you that I don't have access to.'

'Tristan's attractive and can be seductive when he wants, but he doesn't call to my soul. He doesn't make me feel like I had been sleeping my entire life, only to finally wake up under his touch. He doesn't make me feel a fraction of what Asher does.'

'And yet there's a bloodthirsty side of you that he calls to.' Maya frowned, 'Whatever happens, don't throw away what we have with Asher.'

'I won't.' I shook my head, 'I promise you that.'

I ran back downstairs, giving my Dad and Grandma a quick hug before darting out the door. I grabbed a set of car keys from the table in the foyer, unlocking one of the many cars Asher owned. Only a few minutes had passed since I talked to the shadows, and I hoped I wasn't too late.

'Taking your sweet time coming up here, Lola?' Asher's voice flooded through my mind.

'Am I that predictable?' I snorted, putting the car in reverse and peeling off down the road.

'Predictable is not a word I would use to describe you, darling.' Asher purred, somehow managing to sound seductive despite the fact that he was fighting against our own kind. 'Sean is safe, by the way. Mason's at his side.'

'I'll be there in a couple minutes.' I promised, 'We're mates, you can't get rid of me that easily.'

'Which car are you taking?' Asher asked, making me chuckle. Even with the situation at hand, he cared about his car.

'I grabbed the first key I came in contact with.' I shrugged, 'It's a Mercedes, if that helps.'

'Good, it's Zeke's car.' Asher snorted.

I ended the mind-link as Asher came into view. He had shifted into his wolf, a large black beast that plowed through Vampire and Werewolf alike. Even with his large size, he moved with incredible speed and accuracy. Blood coated some of the other wolves' coats, yet none ceased their fighting. It seemed the Vampire King had deployed very little of his men on this attack, and used Luna Freya's remaining men as the brunt force of the attack.

The houses had become scarce on this side of town, as most people lived towards the center. My heart stammered in my chest as the house Giovanni was staying in came into view. An inconspicuous house of blue panels and an old white porch. Breyona's car was parked outside, rested against the curb. I parked Zeke's car on the side of the road, watching as one of the many wolves fighting slammed into Breyona's car. The door of the car dented effortlessly under the weight of the wolf, the window shattering upon impact.

'Breyona's going to be pissed.' Maya muttered.

'Pissed but alive.' I commented.

Asher and the rest of his men seemed to have the fight under control. I stayed on the outskirts of the fight, inching my way towards the house. As I made it to the porch, my stomach dropped. The door had been kicked down, lying in pieces on the living room floor. I made it inside just in time for one of the wolves to slam into the porch, destroying a quarter of it. The boards groaned and screamed as they snapped, but the wolf seemed mostly unharmed.

With the snapping and snarling of wolves outside, the inside of the house was heartbreakingly quiet.

"Breyona!" I shouted, running up the stairs and peeking my head into the two small bedrooms. A king-sized bed sat in one of the rooms, the blankets a mess as though someone had been sleeping in it. Breyona's scent was all over the house, the strongest portion on the large bed. Her scent was mixed with another, something earthy with a hint of sweetness. I knew the smell would be Giovanni's, but the scent in the bedroom was already beginning to fade.

As I stumbled back down the stairs, I noticed something shiny on the floor, reflecting the dim light in the kitchen. I headed through the kitchen to the sliding glass doors that gave a perfect view of the forest. The glass had been shattered; tiny droplets of blood stained some of the pieces. An icy chill rushed through me, though this time it wasn't from the presence of shadows. A note was pinned against the wall, held in place by an ornate silver dagger. I had seen this dagger before, when Tristan and Giovanni fought to the death.

We want the half-breed. Make a wrong move, the traitor and his bitch will die. You have 48 hours.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 85

The first thing I did was try to mind-link Breyona. I was hit with a wall of darkness, of nothing. Even as I stumbled through the dark, I knew they had placed silver on some part of her body. Mind-linking her would be impossible until the silver was removed. Breyona had given her wolf-form to save Giovanni, but her wolf still resided within her, simply trapped in her human body. Enhanced speed and strength she would retain, as well as her connection to the pack. My nerves felt horribly fried, but panicking would do me no good. I needed to stay calm for Breyona's sake, and come up with a plan to save their lives.

Once the fight had ended, Asher came inside the house. I watched as his entire frame went rigid with anger. Not only did they want me in return for Breyona and Giovanni's lives, but they had come here with the purpose of taking Giovanni. I knew it was a low blow for Asher, as Breyona was a part of his pack, and he was tasked with protecting us all. I sent a gentle soothing wave down the mate-bond between us, watching as some of the tension faded from his shoulders.

Asher had lost little men during this fight; Luna Freya's men were not so lucky. The bodies of both wolf and man were scattered about, and Breyona's car was beyond destroyed. I figured that was the Vampire King's intention, to use Luna Freya's men in replacement of his own. After all, what was more dead wolves to the Vampire King?

Asher gathered a group of men and began dragging some of the fallen into the woods to burn. We pulled the bodies of our own men behind a building, keeping them out of sight. Their families would need to mourn properly, and a large funeral would be held for them. I helped the guys drag the bodies into the forest, though I could only manage one at a time. Each of us wore a grim expression on our face, all thinking the same thing.

The Vampire King had done nothing but toy with us for weeks now, and had taken little action to throw this pack into disarray. We still had little information on the Vampire King, and hadn't a clue where he might set up base. I had seen the stone bedroom in my short visits with Tristan, but couldn't glean enough information to name a specific place. Their headquarters had to be close enough for immediate action, but far enough away to remain safe and inconspicuous.

A plan was beginning to take root in my mind, though I needed to think the entire thing through. The war between Vampires and Werewolves was inevitable, but this pack had been taunted enough. Alpha Asher had brought in nearly a thousand of his men from across his vast territory. Many housed with other families and filled all the nearby Hotels. Bran and Zeke's men were in the same situation, taking what shelter they could find, or accepting the tents Asher had given them. Food had been provided at the large Community Center in town, courtesy of the influx of volunteers we received. Asher had resumed training two weeks ago, expanding the size of his class by another hundred students. Anyone willing and able to fight would have a place in this war.

Asher split the training up into smaller groups, assigning some of his men to the task. I was surprised at the influx of volunteers, young men and women willing to risk their lives for this pack.

Despite Asher's cruel reputation, he was willing to give everything for this pack. I could tell by the look in his eyes, that Asher would give his life before forcing any of his people to fight. It was a side of him I had never knew existed, a side that changed the way I viewed him.

A couple days ago, I had talked over evacuation plans with Alpha Asher. His territory was vast, but the Vampires were targeting the center of our town. Many of the citizens could head to the opposite end of Asher's territory, nearly four hours away. Others could escape into the nearby city, finding shelter until the war was finished. What we needed was inside information, we needed a heads up on when this war was happening. Without it, we were all as good as dead.

I was once the type of person to jump into a situation without thinking. While I'm still stubborn and headstrong, I had learned my lesson. As insane as my plan was, I had thought the entire thing through. There was no other option for this pack. My sense of self-preservation and my duties as Luna were at war, but they had not changed my decision.

The smell of burning bodies lingered in the forest, the dark smoke spewing into the sky, covered by the darkness of night. The breeze was blowing in the opposite direction, a gift from nature that the people in this pack would not have to endure the stench of death. Asher's men made quick work of cleaning the blood from the streets, houses, and cars.

Exhaustion had long ago settled in my bones as countless hours had passed. My feet ached from the flats Breyona had given me, and the dress I wore was speckled in dirt and ash. I smelled like a walking corpse, and promised myself a long shower once we were finished. I visibly jumped as Asher placed a hand on my shoulder, the comforting sparks licking over my skin.

"Let's head back, let the rest of the men finish cleaning up." Asher spoke lowly, his eyes still dark and troubled.

Asher led me down the road to where I had parked Zeke's Mercedes. The car had somehow remained untouched, not a scratch on the shiny paint.

"Good, Zeke will be happy to hear his car survived." Asher chuckled dryly, slipping in the driver's

seat.

Asher had thrown on a pair of loose sweatpants after returning to his human form. While it was hard to take my eyes from his rippling muscles and creamy skin, the two of us had other things on our mind. I'm sure Asher already assumed I was coming up with a plan, and had no intention of letting Breyona or Giovanni die for me. Instead of demanding answers from me, we drove home in a comfortable silence.

'Attention everyone. It is safe to return to your houses. The threat has been neutralized.'

Asher sent a quick message through the mind-link, informing everyone in town that it was now safe to return home. My birthday had quickly gone downhill, though I had no one to blame but my Father. I still considered it a blessing that Asher was my mate, even with the problem of Tristan's stubborn mark.

When we arrived at the packhouse, Dad had taken most of the elderly home in his truck. Grandma had already baked up a storm in the kitchen and was putting her cookies and brownies into Tupperware containers. They each had their own ways of coping with stress. Despite Dad's injured knee, he insisted on being hands on. Grandma liked to bake enough pastries for the entire country.

The smell of Grandma's pastries filled the house, and I couldn't help but meander into the kitchen. Tupperware containers were stacked by the dozen, and I watched as Grandma wiped down the counters with a rag, humming softly to herself. A relieved grin formed on her face as she caught my eye, pulling me into a hug that soothed some of the unease in my stomach.

"How's Sean and Mason doing?" She asked.

"They're alright, just helping the others clean up." I sighed, giving her a tired smile.

"It seems we weren't the only one's busy." Asher commented, stepping into the kitchen.

A soft smile had formed on his face as he looked at my Grandma, one that made me want to ask about his family. Grandma gave Asher a gentle nod, a bright smile forming on her face.

“Welcome to the family, Alpha.” Grandma chuckled, “I’m afraid I’ve raided your kitchen.”

“Would you mind passing some of those out to some families tomorrow?” Asher asked, eyeing the dozens of Tupperware containers. “Save a few for us, of course. Lola didn’t save me any the last time.”

Grandma’s eyes brightened at Asher’s words, and I snickered as she shot me a knowing look. She had always judged someone’s character on whether or not they liked her cooking, and so far, Asher was passing.

“Of course, I will.” Grandma nodded happily.

By the time Dad had brought all of the elderly home, Sean and Mason had returned to the house. The four of them piled into Dad’s truck, and headed home. I was practically swaying on my feet, and didn’t argue as Asher led us upstairs.

“You smell like death.” Asher chuckled dryly, picking up a strand of my hair and breathing deeply. His face contorted in a grimace, making me roll my eyes and smack his shoulder.

“You don’t smell so wonderful yourself, mate.” I smirked, making a show of sniffing him and nearly gagging.

“Keep taunting me and neither of us will get any sleep tonight.” Asher muttered, though a rare smile had formed on his face.

The two of us hopped in the shower, and I used my remaining energy to scrub the scent of death from my skin. The steaming water released some of the tension from my body, but my mind was clouded with worry. There was no way Asher would agree with my plan, but it was our last resort.

The Vampire King would grow tired of taunting us, and we needed information before that happened.

Asher's eyes narrowed as he noticed Tristan's mark still lingering on my skin. The wound Asher had left on my neck was healing, revealing a cobalt blue mark beneath the scab.

"His mark is still there." Asher growled lowly, tracing his finger over it with a dark grimace.

"I asked the shadows. They said I have a mate for each side." I frowned, "I asked them to remove it, but the price was too much."

"What did they ask?"

"They wanted our mate-bond." I spoke softly, tracing my finger over the wound I had left on Asher's blemish-free skin. "I couldn't part with what I feel for you. Not in a million years."

"And what about this Vampire?" Asher snarled, "What do you feel for him?"

I looked into his eyes, holding his dark stare. I let the truth ring through the mate-bond, soothing his aching heart.

"I feel nothing for him, Asher. Nothing compared to the way I feel for you."

Asher scooped me into his arms, placing a fierce kiss against my lips. There was little restraint as our lips collided, my back slapping against the tiled wall. Desperation, love, and jealousy flashed within the kiss, and I devoured each emotion as the sparks lapped my skin. We only pulled away once our lungs were devoid of oxygen, our lips sore and bruised.

My mind was still reeling as we slipped into bed, the silk blankets grazing my bare skin softly. Asher pulled me into his arms, and I inhaled the clean scent of him. All man, mixed with spices and earth. The sparks that ran across my skin lulled me, making my eyelids heavy.

“Tell me about your family.” I found myself asking, my voice a sleepy mumble. “I hardly know anything about them.”

“My Mom’s name is Claire, my Dad is Killian. They had a rough start as mates, but it worked out in the end. I have an annoying little brother, Brandon, and a couple cousins.” Asher’s voice was gentle, his hand tracing circles along my spine. “What else would you like to know?”

“Where are they now?” I asked, my words somewhat slurring together. “How did they have a rough start?”

“I sent them away when all of this began. My Mom, Dad, Brother, Aunt, Uncle, and cousins are all someplace safe.” Asher replied, “As for my Mom, she dealt with some things when she was younger, things that came back to haunt her. Dad wasn’t so understanding at first, but eventually he came around.”

“They sound really nice.” My voice came out soft. Anything else Asher had said fell on deaf ears, as I had already drifted off to sleep.

I woke to an empty bed, holding the pillow Asher had been sleeping on. His side of the bed was still warm, letting me know he hadn’t been up for long. I threw on a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt, and headed down to the kitchen. Asher smirked as I walked through the door, one of my Grandma’s cookies in hand.

“Cookies for breakfast?” I asked, an eyebrow raised. I made myself a cup of coffee and drank deeply, letting the warmth seep through my body.

Asher snorted at my comment and took another bite, “Can you blame me? You and Zeke ate everything last time. I never thought lavender cookies would be this good.”

“Never underestimate Grandma’s baking.” I shook my head, grabbing a cookie for myself. “She’ll have you on the ground if she hears you doubted her incredible skills.”

“Just as I have no doubt, she could defeat me.” Asher chuckled. His carefree attitude was short-lived as last night’s events came to mind. Asher knew I was coming up with a plan of my own, that I wouldn’t allow Breyona and Giovanni to suffer. “Care to tell me your plan concerning Breyona and Giovanni? I watched you mull over it for hours last night.”

The kitchen was the last place I wanted to have this conversation, but Bran, Zeke, and Asher’s Beta were all still asleep. It was better to get it off my chest now, as I was unwilling to negotiate.

“I’m going to turn myself in.” I nodded, stilling the turmoil in my gut. At first, Maya was completely against the idea. She hated the thought of being unable to reach me, the thought of me being in danger. As the hours passed, she had come to agree. We had no information regarding where Breyona and Giovanni were being kept, and we hadn’t the time to send spies out into the world.

“No.” Asher stated, simply put. His face contorted into a grimace, one that made my heart ache. “They’ll kill you, Lola. Have you thought any of this through?”

“You know I have, and I don’t think they’ll kill me. I’m the Vampire King’s only daughter, he needs me to take the throne. My Mom’s dead, so he can’t have any more children.” I said, taking a deep breath before launching into the details of my plan. “I’m going to turn myself in and gather as much information as I can about where their headquarters are. We know nothing about the Vampires, Asher. We don’t know where they sleep or where they come from. When this war happens, we’ll be blind. We can’t afford to let them have the advantage.”

“And what about your heat?” Asher asked, his voice growing darker with each word.

That was one of the downsides of this plan, that my heat would quickly be approaching. I had around a week, perhaps two, until my heat hit with full force and I’d be willing to mate with anyone. A she-wolf’s heat didn’t start until after she was marked, a way to speed up the mating process.

“I’ll have to get my information before that happens.” I grimaced, knowing how bad this plan sounded. “I have two weeks at the most, but I’ll get it done in a week. I won’t be anywhere near them when my heat hits. I’ll find a way to mind-link you, then you and a group of men can come and meet me at the entrance to where ever the Vampire’s go during the day.”

Asher remained silent, clearly at a loss for words. He hadn't expected me to think this through so thoroughly, but he knew I was right. We needed this information at all costs. It could be the tipping point of this entire war.

"And what if they place silver on you? You won't be able to contact me. I can't let that happen. I won't let you sacrifice yourself for this pack." Asher shook his head, his lips set in a grim line.

"Tell me you wouldn't do the same." I pressed, "Tell me you wouldn't risk everything for this pack's safety. I'll figure out a way around the silver, I'll send the shadows to tell you if I must, but I need to do this."

Asher closed the distance between us, taking my face in his hands. His grip on my face was gentle, as were his lips when they met my own. It was nothing like last night's kiss. The kiss was one of boiling, consuming fear. I could taste the terror on his lips at the thought of losing me. His tongue grazed along my lower lip, slowly begging for entrance. Just as I allowed him access, he pulled away, leaning his head against my own.

"Don't you dare die on me, Lola." Asher murmured, those honey-colored eyes burning into my own. My stomach fluttered unhappily at the thought of leaving Asher, but we needed this information. There wasn't much I wouldn't do to return to Asher and this life I had built for myself.

"I won't, I promise." I murmured softly, running my hands over the rough stubble that coated his jaw. "I'll always find my way back to you."

"You better. I'm not sure I'll be able to let you go." Asher breathed, giving me an empty chuckle.

"It's because you love me that you'll let me go." I smiled softly.

"In that case, you're spending the day with me." Asher smirked, but the action didn't reach his eyes.

Asher walked me through what he had to do in a day, and I wondered how he managed it all. As

soon as Bran and Zeke woke up, a whirlwind of problems, questions, and requests surfaced. The influx of warriors in the town required large amounts of food, and loads of volunteers to cook the food. Asher appointed a few of his men, some I had seen around town before, to oversee finding more volunteers. Some of the men were unhappy with their living quarters, to which Asher tried his best with new accommodations.

Next came the repairs to the Northern part of town. You'd be surprised at the damage that occurs when a large werewolf is thrown into a building or car. Those unlucky enough to live on that end of town were in dire need of new cars, as it was too long of a distance to walk. Asher used money from his personal fund to replace their cars and fix any damages to the house and land. Asher had listened to every request, no matter how small, and treated them with the utmost importance.

He had also planned small gatherings within the pack to boost morale. The constant attacks were weighing on everyone, and Asher was determined to provide an outlet for the frustration. He also began preparations for funerals of the lost werewolves in our pack, and gave large financial settlements to the families. As each of the dead were named, Asher's eyes seemed to dim. I could tell he took every death personally, every life lost was another chip on his shoulder.

We had finally gotten time to ourselves late in the afternoon, long after the sun had sunk into the sky. Asher sat at the chair in his office, a hand combing through his dark hair. I could now see why his hair was always so messy. A scowl had been etched onto his face as he stared down at a stack of papers. My gut twisted at the sight of him. A man with countless rumors talked about him, a man feared, and yet his loyalty to his pack was unbreakable.

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"You need a break." I frowned, standing from my chair across the room.

I approached Asher, turning his chair away from the desk, from the stack of papers begging for his attention. Reluctantly, his eyes turned on me, dark and pleading.

"Don't go." Asher sighed, wrapping his arms around my waist and burying his face in the crook of my neck.

"I wouldn't if I had a choice." I spoke softly combing my fingers through his soft hair, "I'm doing this for the pack. I'll kill my way out of that building to get back to you, I promise."

“You’re too good for me, you know that?” Asher murmured against my neck, his hot breath fanning over my skin.

I pulled myself away from Asher and looked into his eyes, staring into their honey-colored depths. I could see how much he believed in what he had said, that I was too good for someone like him.

‘He’s wrong.’ Maya murmured quietly, ‘He thinks he needs to do everything by himself, that he doesn’t deserve help.’

“You’re wrong.” I shook my head, letting my fingers trail over his stubble. “We’re perfect for each other, that’s why we’re mates. You need someone willing to sacrifice just as much as you for the good of this pack. You don’t have to handle this stuff alone anymore, let me help where I can. And right now, I’m helping you by making you take a damn break. Come take a bath with me.”

Maya’s silent approval on my suggestion was enough to push me forward. She wanted to remain as close to Asher as possible before I turned myself in. She was still uncomfortable with the thought of being suppressed by silver, but knew we were out of options on the matter.

Asher’s lips turned up in a smirk, though his eyes were blown wide with emotion. Giving him a half-hearted scoff, I tugged at him until he stood, leading him far from his office and into our bedroom. The bathroom had proven to be my favorite room in the house, with a large walk-in shower and a large four-person tub. I had used the jets on the shower walls more times than I could count, letting the hot water pour down my aching muscles.

I turned the faucet on and watched as the tub slowly began to fill with water. Asher cocked his head in my direction, a lop-sided grin on his face as he tugged at the hem of my t-shirt. He slipped it from me in one fluid motion, letting it fall to the floor in a pool of cotton. Even after marking each other, the weight of his gaze was enough to make blood rush my face. As always, Asher noticed every

response my body made under his attention, and appreciated each and every one.

“Even after all this time, you still blush when I have you undress for me.” Asher smirked, a chuckle rumbling deep in his chest.

“It’s not my fault I have some decency.” I snickered, looking him up and down. Asher had let his own shirt fall to the floor, but still wore his low hanging jeans.

“Decency?” Asher snorted, his smirk going wider. “Last I remember, I caught you swimming in your bra and panties.”

‘You caught us because you were lurking.’ Maya snickered, though there was no malice in her tone.

“No one else knew about the swimming hole.” I shook my head, unable to avert my eyes as his pants slid to the floor. Muscles encompassed most of his body, running down his arms and stomach in hard waves. He his broad shoulders only made his built look larger, and me that much smaller in comparison. “I’m still not sure how you knew about it.”

“I patrolled the forest around this town extensively before attacking.” Asher smirked, reminding me of a time when Tyler had been alive. Tyler had long ago pissed Asher off, disrespecting him and his pack. “I found the swimming hole easily. When I saw you walk into the woods, I knew exactly where you had gone.”

‘And yet, you felt the need to follow.’ Maya’s purr wrapped around my mind, and I received a very detailed mental image on how she hoped this bath would end.

Asher tugged at the hem of my sweatpants, and smirked as they fell to the floor. With another gentle tug, my underwear had fallen around my ankles. I sank into the tub with a happy sigh, the hot water seemed to wipe some of the stress away. While my plan had officially been set in motion, tomorrow was the day I turned myself in.

I could feel Asher's hand wrap around my submerged ankle, tugging it until I slid across the tub and into his arms. His sly smirk made me roll my eyes, though something else had grabbed my attention. The wound I had left on his neck was fully healed, revealing a beautiful mark. Cobalt blue in color, a crescent shaped moon with two small stars stood out on his skin. The mark was unique, as it was for all mated wolves. The color was not flat, but seemed to shimmer and deepen, reminding me of the night sky.

"Your mark is healed." I smiled softly, taking in the full image of Asher. His large build leaned against the tub, the water lapping at the muscles on his stomach, the cobalt mark standing out against his creamy skin. Strands of his hair had gotten wet, and clung to his forehead. He looked like a fallen angel, carrying the weight of this pack on his shoulders, somehow managing to withstand it all.

'It's the exact opposite of Tristan's.' Maya pointed out. She was right, where Tristan's was the color of fresh blood, Asher's was the color of the midnight sky, set with hues of black and indigo. Both were striking in appearance, but symbolized different things.

His eyes were soft as they roamed my face, reading the awe in my gaze as I took in his form. Asher grabbed a bar of soap and moved to turn me around. I rooted myself in place and shook my head, grabbing the bar of soap from his hand.

"You've washed me how many times now?" I asked, "It's your turn, now turn around."

A lazy smile formed on his handsome face, and instead of turning around, he grabbed my hips and placed me over his lap. My legs were wrapped around his waist, my core against his thighs. Asher leaned back in the tub, exposing his muscular chest and arms. Half of his stomach was out of the water, and I traced the lines of his abs with my eyes.

"Start with the front, darling." Asher grinned, making me roll my eyes, though a blush had already crept onto my face.

"c\*\*ky Alpha." I scoffed, poking my tongue out at him.

I ran the bar of soap across his chest, unable to keep my fingers from wandering the plains of his muscles. His chest rumbled under my touch, and I watched as his eyes darkened, clouded with lust. The sparks were gentle, growing in intensity as I continued running the soap over him. I trailed from his chest over to his arms, working the soap into a lather, before moving down to his stomach.

Surprise flashed in my eyes as something hard hit against my backside, and the soap had fallen from my hand, hitting the bottom of the tub with a dull thud. Asher's lips were on mine seconds later, both of us burning with urgency.

A day, a week, a month. It was too much time to go without him, to not know my fate. I wanted something for myself, something before I finally fell into the clutches of my Father. I had been willing to give it all to Asher in the past, and that hadn't changed since receiving his mark. I let my fingers tangle in his hair, tugging his face closer to my own, his lips further into mine. His tongue darted in my mouth, softly seeking my own. His hands lit my skin on fire as they grasped my waist, and together we burned. For once, Asher didn't protest as my hands wandered down his chest, over his stomach and to the length that pressed against my core.

Just as my fingers grazed his c\*\*k, I was lifted from the bathtub. Soap clung to Asher's chest in small bubbles, but neither of us noticed. Dripping wet, Asher walked us from the bathroom, lying me down on the edge of the bed. The water running off our bodies seeped into the comforter, but neither of us cared. His large hands parted my thighs, tracing down my skin with agonizing slowness. As he knelt between my legs, the heat in his eyes was enough to curl my toes. I knew the expression in his eyes mirrored my own, complete and total surrender. Neither one of us would be able to stop once we started, and neither of us had the strength to put an end to this. I was immediately thankful my Mom had placed me on birth control as soon as Tyler and I started dating, never knowing I would make use of it with a different Alpha—my mate.

He trailed warm kisses down the center of my thighs, moving lower with each nibble. A groan of frustration left my lips as Asher took his time working to my core. At the sound of my groan, he looked up and smirked.

"Patience, darling. You'll ruin my fun." He purred, running a finger along my dampened slit for emphasis.

After an agonizing minute, his tongue grazed along my entrance, a deep growl reverberating in his chest as he approved the wetness between my thighs. His self-control was a tether holding him

back, growing thinner with each encounter between us. I could hear it snap as he flicked his tongue along my cl\*t with unbridled ferocity. My back arched from the sudden rush of pleasure, but Asher held me in place.

With each gasp and moan that escaped my lips, Asher's pace increased, until pleasure filled my every limb and I was calling out his name. The sparks coupled with the pleasure of his tongue, all-consuming as the pressure within my core burst.

As I began to sit up, my legs trembling, Asher pushed me back down with a gentle hand. He wrapped his large arms around my thighs, holding me against his face as he continued devouring me. My breathless moans turned louder as one of his fingers slipped inside of me, and then two. Only when I had reached my org\*m for a second time, trembling in both pleasure and pain, did he pull away. The stubble along his face glistened with my juices, but the look of primal hunger on his face had not yet vanished. His lips trailed their way up my body, nibbling at my stomach and circling around my breasts. He took his time savoring the taste of my skin as his tongue wrapped around one of my sensitive buds, grazing against my soft flesh with his teeth.

Not once increasing his torturous pace, his teeth grazed my neck, his tongue flicking over the place where his mark was. A new sensation entirely had washed over me as he touched my mark. The sparks turned to lightning, electrifying my skin and the places where his body met my own.

"I will never tire of this—of you." He purred softly, his hands tangling in my hair.

His chest rose and fell in time with my own, our eyes burning with need, desire, and so much more. I had once thought the mate-bond forced love onto you, but I now knew I was wrong. The mate-bond intensified what was already there, the passion and love between two people.

Where Asher had once refused to let me touch him, he made no action to stop me as I trailed my fingers over his chest, running my nails down the hard plains of his stomach. With one of his arms beside my head, I felt his c\*\*k brush against my entrance, and couldn't help when fear flashed my eyes. I had seen that part of Asher before, but wondered how his thickness would fit inside of me. It would stretch me to my limits.

"Relax, Lola." Asher purred, nipping at my ear.

I ran my hands through his hair, grabbing handfuls as the head of his c\*k entered me, grimacing as he looked down at me with a smirk. Asher lifted my bottom, allowing a few more inches slip inside of me. His lips found the mark on my neck, his teeth grazing it slowly as gave me time to adjust. My entrance stretched painfully, though Asher did what he could to distract me. While his tongue flicked against my mark, his fingers rubbed my clt in slow circles.

“fk–so fking tight.” He growled against my neck, moving his hips slowly.

His rough words made some of the pain subside, pleasure taking its place. The whimpers that left my lips increased in volume as Asher continued thrusting. I dug my fingernails into his back, running them along his skin, urging him to go faster. With each thrust, I could feel the bond between us strengthen and pulse.

“You’re mine.” I murmured, running my fingers over him, committing the smell, taste and sight of him to memory.

My mate, who carried such a heavy weight on his shoulders, determined to bare it all so that his pack might thrive.

I moved my hips against his own, our lips meeting as a deep groan escaped him. His pace was unforgiving as he placed a hand behind my head. My legs wrapped around his waist, wanting him close, wanting every inch of his flesh beneath my fingertips. Release tore through me as his fingers stroked my cl\*t, crying out as his length pounded into me, drawing out my pleasure.

“My beautiful mate.” He moaned lowly in my ear.

My name left his lips as he came, slamming inside of me roughly. Our bodies trembled against each other, our lips still moving in sync. The room grew silent, our panting breaths the only sound. His eyes were bright, like molten honey, staring down at me in awe. The mating bond was like a thick chord between us, joining us in more than just physical.

We spent the next few hours lying in each other’s arms, unable to pull our hands away. His skin felt

like velvet under my fingers, and I marveled the softness of his lips. Asher's eyes were glazed as he traced patterns along my shoulders, spine, and bottom. Settling into his arms, I fell into a blissful sleep, the soreness between my legs a happy reminder of our night.

I had woken sometime in the middle of the night to Asher's lips grazing my jaw, his teeth nipping at my skin. Somewhat groggy, I opened my eyes and smirked at the innocent expression on his face.

"Couldn't sleep?" I asked in amusement. From his small kisses alone, my body had already begun responding to the touch.

"Can you blame me?" He murmured against my jaw, "You look like a goddess, nak\*d and beautiful. I'm afraid my self-control is entirely spent."

His words were enough to ignite a fire burning in my belly, a slickness forming between my legs. I pulled myself from the bed, Asher's considerable length the focus of my gaze. Asher moved to sit up, but I stilled him with a firm look.

"My turn." I smirked, "Don't ruin my fun."

Asher settled against the bed with a lazy smirk on his face, his arms stretched out behind him. I snorted at the sight, and ran my tongue against the head of his c\*\*k. As I put the tip of him in my mouth, he jumped with a start.

"f\*\*k, Lola." He groaned; his cheeks flushed.

Just as I had taken half his length in my mouth, Asher leapt from the bed. He pushed me onto my hands and knees, my bottom up in the air. His c\*\*k slid inside of me easier this time, though I still needed a few short moments to adjust. His thickness stretched me to my limit, but set my skin afire with burning need. I needed every inch, every thick inch of him within me, claiming me.

Asher wasn't gentle as he had been the first time, slamming into me with a deep groan. My pu\*\*y contracted around his length, begging for more, begging for whatever else we could manage.

“Look at you.” Asher purred; the sounds of our coupling flesh filled the room. “So beautiful–bent over for me.”

Asher’s hand wrapped in my hair as he quickened his pace, slamming himself into my pu\*\*y without mercy. My moans turned into blissful cries, his name leaving my lips more times than I could count. As I felt the pressure between my legs grow, Asher pulled me against him. His hand slid to my front, rubbing at the bundle of nerves as he continued to thrust.

“That’s it, darling.” He purred, his voice husky. “Come for me.”

His sultry words were my undoing, along with the feral growl in my ear as I found my release on his length, my back arching to give him a better view. Asher climaxed shortly after, filling me with his seed for the second time tonight.

Asher’s arms snak\*d around my torso, his lips pressing against my hair. I wondered when this need–this incessant desire to touch him, to feel him within me would end, if it ever would. I could spend an eternity in this bed, an eternity familiarizing myself with his body–with the husky noises that fell from his lips. As the trembling in my limbs stilled, I fell into a blissful, dreamless sleep.

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Asher’s POV

The moment I saw the note the Vampire’s had left, I knew a plan would form in Lola’s mind. I wanted to blame her, but I couldn’t, as I would have done the same. I would have given myself up to save any member of my pack, but Lola was different. The selfish side of me wanted to whisk her away, damning Breyona and Giovanni’s life in the process. Yet I couldn’t, because Lola would never forgive me.

I watched the gears turn in her head as we cleaned up the mess from the fight. She intended on turning herself in, that much was clear. My wolf and I were at odds. He wanted us to take Lola far away from this pack, away from the Vampire King, while I knew we needed to respect her decision, even if it might tear my mate away from me.

Sean, Mason, and some of my other men scooped up the corpses and brought them deep into the woods. The easiest way to dispose of the bodies were to burn them. I wouldn't allow them to be buried, to curse my land with their presence. They would be burned, their ashes cast far away from my pack.

The Vampire's had toyed with my pack countless times, and the war was finally coming to a head. I had made preparations weeks ago in case we suffered another attack, all we needed was information. Thousands of men had been brought in, from my pack, Zeke's and Bran's. Evacuation plans had been made, ensuring the safety of all those who couldn't fight. Countless volunteers had stepped up to fight in this upcoming war, and each new volunteer brought on a new wave of pain. These people—my people were willing to give their lives for their home. I wanted to spare everyone, to fight this war on my own.

'Just as Lola wants to willingly walk into the enemy's arms.' My wolf grumbled, 'You two are not so different. She's taking on the position of Luna without ever knowing it.'

Save Lola, save the people of this pack, I wanted to do it all and yet, I knew it was impossible. I knew lives would be lost on both ends, but I continued wondering if there was something more, I could do.

Once the streets were cleaned up, and the blood gone from the earth, I took Lola back to the packhouse. Once her Dad and Grandma left, I led her upstairs, watching as she wobbled on her feet. I noticed everything about Lola, the way her eyes would flutter shut when she got tired, or the way blush would stain her cheeks as she slept at night. She had me wrapped around her finger long before her birthday, probably since the moment I had met her.

"You smell like death." I chuckled, a fluttering sensation in my chest as she blushed and rolled her eyes.

"You don't smell so wonderful yourself, mate." She smirked, making a show of smelling me, her small nose scrunching up.

If only she knew what she did to me, she might never let me live it down. Every expression that crossed her face left me in a perpetual state of awe. I'd watch as her plush lips turned up in a smirk, and a sly glint cross her eyes. If it weren't for all of the drama going on, I would have long ago locked her in my bedroom and finished the mating process. Every smirk, every touch was beginning to drive me mad. This was how the mate-bond worked, it would drive us closer and closer, until the process was complete. The jealousy, the frenzy wouldn't end until her first heat had subsided.

It was in the shower that I noticed Tristan's mark still on her skin. The wretched Vampire had marked her against her will, and decided he had some false claim over her. The one thing I refused to take away was Lola's choice. She often acted and spoke before thinking, but I would never take that away from her. Tristan declared himself her mate long ago, confident though he had been utterly mistaken.

"His mark is still there." I grimaced, unable to keep the growl from escaping my lips. I traced over the vulgar mark, wishing I had been there that night.

"I asked the shadows. They said I have a mate for each side." Lola frowned, looking truly torn. Her sadness evaporated some of my anger, as I was now distracted with the urge to remove her frown from her face. "I asked them to remove it, but the price was too much."

I wondered what the shadows had asked for. Was it another life? Did they want someone else to die to wipe the mark from her neck? I would gladly kill a thousand Vampire's to pay that debt.

"What did they ask?"

"They wanted our mate-bond." Her voice was soft, though my stomach dropped. I could hear the fragility of her voice, how she desperately wanted his mark removed, and yet she absolutely refused. She would rather remain connected to that Vampire than destroy the bond between us.

I knew it was ridiculous, that there was no need to ask. I could see how Lola felt about me every

time her eyes met my own, but I needed to hear her say the words.

“And what about this Vampire?” My voice emerged in a guttural snarl, “What do you feel for him?”

Her words had worked their charm, calming my wolf like a sedative.

“I feel nothing for him, Asher. Nothing compared to the way I feel for you.”

The sincerity in her words made my control slip, and I found her in my arms, my lips against her own. Lola hadn't been my first kiss, but she had been the first to ignite so much emotion within me. I had been loved, and loved in return, but I had never been in love. So desperately in love that I was willing to sacrifice everything I cared for, everything I worked for, just to keep her safe. The emotion was raging and uncontrollable, but I couldn't fight it even if I tried. We pulled away for oxygen, a useless necessity that tore her from my arms.

We slipped into bed, every inch of her milky skin on display. Not that she would admit this, but I knew she enjoyed sleeping bare as much as I did. I had caught her eyes roaming me when she thought I wasn't looking, and enjoyed every ounce of attention I received from her. As devious as she acted, her innocence shone clear in her eyes. Her face always gave her away, blush filling her cheeks anytime I caught her gaze straying downward.

With her in my arms, all of the stress cleared from my mind. Her delicate scent of vanilla and pears calmed me, wiped all worries from my mind. Her soft breaths fanned across my chest; her body molded perfectly into my own.

“Tell me about your family.” She asked, surprising me yet again.

I smiled as I heard the sleep mixing into her words. She wouldn't stay awake much longer, that I was sure of. Lola was always quick to fall asleep, and could be a nightmare when you woke her up. In the mornings, her hackles would raise and her bright eyes would narrow at anyone who dare woke her up. It was another thing I had quickly come to love, something that made Lola that much more beautiful and adorable in my mind.

“My Mom’s name is Claire, my Dad is Killian. They had a rough start as mates, but it worked out in the end. I have an annoying little brother, Brandon, and a couple cousins.” I told her, giving her the shortened version as she was quickly on the verge of sleep. “What else would you like to know?”

My Mom Claire, had hated the idea of finding her mate. My Dad had been an asshole at first, but quickly fell under the pull of the mate-bond. It took a truly awful person to abuse their mate, to treat them badly. Though my Dad held the same cruel reputation as I, he had never harmed my Mom. Sometimes I could see parts of my Mom in Lola. The sheer strength, the courage to risk it all. They were both so alike, and yet so very different.

“Where are they now?” She asked, her silky words slurred sleepily, and I smiled as she yawned loudly. “How did they have a rough start?”

“I sent them away when all of this began. My Mom, Dad, Brother, Aunt, Uncle, and cousins are all someplace safe.” I assured her, “As for my Mom, she dealt with some things when she was younger, things that came back to haunt her. Dad wasn’t so understanding at first, but eventually he came around.”

I didn’t mention the specific details, hoping Lola might ask her when they finally met. I had heard the story of my Mom and Dad meeting countless times, how he had tried to force the bond between them, and Mom retaliated. Dad told me she had bit him a number of times, something I could easily see Lola doing. When I was old enough to understand, I asked my Mom what happened to her all those years ago. Even with a rough start, and ghosts from the past, Mom and Dad had made it work.

“They sound really nice.” Lola cooed, the sound making my heart flutter. Anything else she planned to say fizzled out as a quiet snore left her lips.

I chuckled at her soft snores, running my finger along the blush on her cheeks. With Lola in my arms, sleep had come easily, pulling me into its endless depths.

I had woken up before Lola, a usual occurrence as she somehow could manage to sleep half the day away. After the long night we had, I figured I’d let her sleep for another hour or so.

I headed down to the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water and a Tupperware container of Lola’s

Grandmas cookies. Lola had a strange addiction to anything her Grandma baked, and could eat her cookies by the dozen. Her and Zeke had easily gone through four containers. Their stomach ache lasted for hours, though they both deserved it.

“Cookies for breakfast?” Lola asked, her eyebrow raised as she strolled into the kitchen.

I watched in silence as she made herself a cup of coffee, noting how her jeans hugged her full hips perfectly. Her round bottom was on display, and though it wasn't her intention, she was teasing me mercilessly. I had half a mind to skip work today and carry her to the bedroom.

Instead of acting on my impulses, I snorted at her comment. “Can you blame me? You and Zeke ate everything last time. I never thought lavender cookies would be this good.”

My own Mom had been absolutely horrible in the kitchen, though her skills improved over the years, her cookies were nothing like this.

“Never underestimate Grandma's baking.” She shook her head, her raven hair fanning out from the motion. “She'll have you on the ground if she hears you doubted her incredible skills.”

“Just as I have no doubt, she could defeat me.” I chuckled, though the feeling of comfort was short-lived.

“I'm going to turn myself in.” Lola spoke up, her plush lips pressed tightly together. She had never been one to procrastinate, and I knew this conversation was coming. I had watched her plan formulate in her mind for hours last night, and knew she would eventually act on it.

“No.” I replied, my wolf speaking the word for me. He was desperate to keep her at our side, and was willing to lock her away if need be. I was constantly fighting him for control, to give Lola the chance to make her own decisions. “They'll kill you, Lola. Have you thought this through?”

I already knew she thought this through, as I had watched her mull over the plan for hours. Her face would contort in determination, just to fall in sadness. I knew she worked through every possible

variable, though this plan was far from safe.

“You know I have, and I don’t think they’ll kill me. I’m the Vampire King’s only daughter, he needs me to take the throne. My Mom’s dead, so he can’t have any more children.” She said, taking a deep breath before continuing. “I’m going to turn myself in and gather as much information as I can about where their headquarters are. We know nothing about the Vampires, Asher. We don’t know where they sleep or where they come from. When this war happens, we’ll be blind. We can’t afford to let them have the advantage.”

She was right, horribly so. We needed this information, any information to give us a head start. It would take time to evacuate the people in this town, to get the elderly, pregnant, sick, and children far away from the battlegrounds. The Vampire’s would tear them to shreds without a second thought, uncaring if they were unable to defend themselves.

I had spoken with Giovanni yesterday, and hated myself immensely for not asking the location of their headquarters. I had been too hellbent on understanding Tristan and Lola’s Father. Giovanni told me all he knew, that Tristan’s infatuation with Lola had to do with her place on the throne. He wanted to stand by her side, to rise to power along with her. Lola’s Father wanted her for the same reason. As his sole heir, she was the only one able to take the throne. The Kouritis bloodline couldn’t be allowed to end, the power of controlling the shadows vanishing completely.

“And what about your heat?” I asked, my voice dark.

Too much could go wrong if Lola were to go into heat around the Vampire’s. They wouldn’t be affected the way a werewolf would, but I knew none would dare refuse her advances, especially Tristan. She would throw herself at any male, desperate to end the fire burning beneath her skin. Lola wouldn’t be to blame in the situation, but it was a risk I desperately did not want to take.

“I’ll have to get my information before that happens.” Lola grimaced, and I knew that this was one of the downfalls of her plan. She had thought over this fact, but couldn’t come up with a solution. Once you had marked each other, there was no stopping your heat. “I’ll have two weeks at the most, but I’ll get it done in a week. I won’t be anywhere near them when my heat hits. I’ll find a way to mind-link you, then you and a group of men can come and meet me at the entrance to wherever the Vampire’s go during the day.”

I remained silent, mulling over her plan myself. If everything were to go perfectly, we could have the upper hand in this war. We would know where the Vampire's hide during the day, and hopefully gain information on when they planned to attack. It would be a fool's mission to bring the war to their turf, but if we knew the timeline of their plans, we would have a better chance at winning.

"And what if they place silver on you? You won't be able to contact me. I can't let that happen. I won't let you sacrifice yourself for this pack." I shook my head, my chest constricting painfully at the thought of handing Lola over to our enemies. Any number of things could happen to her, and I wasn't sure I'd survive in a world without her.

"Tell me you wouldn't do the same." She pressed, her eyes bleeding with desperation. "Tell me you wouldn't risk everything for this pack's safety. I'll figure out a way around the silver, I'll send the shadows to tell you if I must, but I need to do this."

She was right, she was right and we both knew it. I closed the distance between us, determined to keep her close, to claim every inch of her before she left—before our future became uncertain. Our kiss wasn't hasty, it wasn't burning with unbridled passion. This kiss was one of longing, one of an unspoken future where I woke up beside Lola each day. A future where we grew old, where we had a lifetime to decide, to have children, to love each other. The kiss was one of fear, one that showed just how terrified I was of losing her.

I had survived on my own for so long, living in the dark until I became accustomed to it. Lola was my light, and I had been blinded by her for so long. Now that my eyes had finally adjusted, I couldn't go back to living in the dark—to living without her.

As our lips melted together, our worries, hopes and fears mingling, I skimmed my tongue along her soft lip. Just as her lips parted, I pulled away. Her breath fanned across my face, sweet like coffee creamer. My heart hammered in my chest, and I stifled the fear that threatened to explode within me.

"Don't you dare die on me, Lola." I whispered, my forehead against her own. Her bright eyes were wide, but brimming with emotion. She didn't want to go through with this plan, and I knew her wolf was having the same selfish thoughts as my own.

We could run, that had always been an option. To leave all of these innocent people to fend for

themselves, hoping the Vampire's would follow us instead of them. It was an option neither of us could stomach, one that would never see the light of day.

"I won't, I promise." She murmured softly, her small fingers trailing along my jaw. The sparks that caressed my skin did little to ease the fear boiling with in me, a feeling I was coming to loathe. "I'll always find my way back to you."

I believed her, and I knew she would find me again.

"You better. I'm not sure I'll be able to let you go." I breathed, giving her an empty chuckle. My wolf was fighting me at this very moment, demanding we protect our Luna at all costs, demanding we come up with some kind of plan to spare her from the Vampire's.

"It's because you love me that you'll let me go." She smiled softly.

She was right. I loved her too much to tear her away from her pack and family, I loved her too much to take away her choice. I would follow her anywhere, and knew that no matter how this war ended, we would never be apart.

"In that case, you're spending the day with me." I smirked, but the expression was halfhearted.

I wasn't planning on letting her out of my sight today. I couldn't afford to be as selfish as I wanted, selfish enough to whisk her away, but I could afford this. I would keep her by my side until the very last moment, until I was forced to let her go.

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I spent the day with Lola, emersed in work as I often was. With Lola destined to be my Luna, I knew she could handle the work load. Her loyalty to this pack was as strong as my own, and I knew there wasn't anything we wouldn't do for the benefit of our people.

Running a pack was so much more than paperwork and brisk orders. You had to be willing to sacrifice yourself, your time, and your life. Being an Alpha meant giving up your hopes and dreams, your hobbies and personal interests for the good of the pack. You sacrificed those things so that

your people might have the opportunity to pursue what they love and enjoy.

As soon as Bran and Zeke woke up, my day had begun. The three of us pulled thousands of warriors into this small town, preparing for the inevitable war. The downside of having a large army was providing them with the basic necessities of living. They needed places to sleep, food to eat, and room to breathe.

The people of this pack were willing to volunteer their time and energy to help the troops, cooking food, and providing places to live. Those with larger houses offered up guest rooms, opening their home to countless warriors. It was a debt I could never repay, but something I was eternally grateful for. I opened my own home to many warriors, providing every last inch of space so that they might have a place to sleep, a roof over their heads.

Even with the influx of volunteers and the use of the Community Center, there were some warriors forced to live in tents surrounding the pack. The packhouse was open to those living in tents, providing showers and food when needed.

Hours later, a headache throbbed at my temples, radiating across my forehead. The two of us had gotten a lot of work done, but there was always more. It was a never-ending stream of work, but the end was always worth it.

“You need a break.” Lola grimaced, standing from the chair she sat at in my office.

I watched as she approached me, hips swaying as they often did. The more time I spent with Lola, the more I was awed by her beauty. Completely oblivious, as she often was, she caught the eye of many males. None dared look longer than a few moments, seeing the cobalt mark on her neck, the mark of an Alpha.

“Don’t go.” I sighed, pulling her small frame into my arms.

I buried my face into the crook of her neck, the side with my mark, and inhaled deeply. Vanilla and pears, such a unique scent with a huge impact. I could feel my tense muscles relaxing as I held her in my arms, the spark licking their way up my skin.

“I wouldn’t if I had a choice.” Her voice was soft, and I nearly groaned as she ran her fingers through my hair. Her fingernails grazed my scalp, sending waves of delicious pleasure down my neck. “I’m doing this for the pack. I’ll kill my way out of that building to get back to you, I promise.”

I knew she would, I could hear the conviction in her words. She’d kill the Vampire King herself if it meant coming home to me. She stepped into the position of Luna unknowingly, and embraced every stressful, horrible aspect. I could hardly stomach the guilt that followed. Did I deserve someone so selfless? So irrevocably brave and fearless?

“You’re too good for me, you know that?” I mumbled against her neck.

She shivered as my breath fanned across her neck, coaxing a wave of primal pleasure from my wolf. He wanted her here and now, as he had since we first met Lola. I had tried to keep my distance from her, to let her develop feelings on her own, but self-control had never been a strong suit of mine, especially with my wolf breathing down my neck.

She pulled herself away from me, making me grimace from the lack of comfort, the lack of Lola. She stared into my eyes searching for something, delving into their depths until she reached a part of my soul, I kept hidden, a part only she had access to.

“You’re wrong.” She shook her head. I let my eyes close as her fingers drifted over my stubble, tracing along my jawline softly. “We’re perfect for each other, that’s why we’re mates. You need someone willing to sacrifice just as much as you for the good of this pack. You don’t have to handle this stuff alone anymore, let me help where I can. And right now, I’m helping you by making you take a damn break. Come take a bath with me.”

My wolf's ears perked up at her words, pride bursting through him as we gazed at our mate. I couldn't deny her, not when she was looking at me with those brilliant eyes. Staring at me as though I were the one thing, she had spent her life waiting for. Staring at me as though all the terrible rumors couldn't hide the person I truly was. It was a vulnerable feeling, but Lola was the only wolf I would ever submit to, my mate.

I couldn't hide my interest at her words. Any chance to see her without those restrictive clothes was a blessing, and I planned on taking advantage of every opportunity. My lips twitched into a smirk, which soon turned into a grin when she scoffed at me.

I let her tug me out of my office, leading me down the hall and into our bedroom. Her strength was no match for mine, even with her constant tugging, but I let her lead me nonetheless. I had quickly noticed Lola's second favorite place in the house was my massive bathroom, her first was the bed.

I waited silently as she turned the tub on, sticking her finger under the stream to check the heat. She must have been thinking something particularly naughty, as when she turned around, blush had formed on her cheeks.

I flashed her an innocent smile, tugging on the hem of her t-shirt. She let me slide it from her body, forgotten on the floor. In my eyes, Lola had no imperfections. Every ounce of her creamy skin was alluring, seductive without even trying. A harsh blush stained her cheeks as my eyes drifted down her shoulders and to her bare chest.

I tossed my own shirt to the floor, watching Lola in amusement. I had seen every inch of her supple body, had tasted every ounce of her delicious skin. She had been completely bare before me, back arched in toe-curling pleasure, and yet she still blushed under my gaze.

"Even after all this time, you still blush when I have you undress for me." I smirked, chuckling softly.

"It's not my fault I have some decency." Lola snickered, looking me up and down.

"Decency?" I snorted, my grin growing wider. "Last I remember, I caught you swimming in your bra

and panties.”

Lola glared at me, making me chuckle louder. She often reminded me of a kitten with its hackles raised, swiping with tiny paws and bared fangs. She was a formidable warrior against most, but I could handle her fire, her feistiness.

“No one else knew about the swimming hole.” She shook her head, her eyes practically burning holes into me as I removed the rest of my clothing. “I’m still not sure how you knew about it.”

The way she looked at me started a fire deep in the pits of my stomach, those wide eyes burning with need, need she wasn’t sure how to act on.

“I patrolled the forest around this town extensively before attacking.” I smirked, remembering how her previous Alpha had overstepped, had disrespected me to the point of no return. “I found the swimming hole easily. When I saw you walk into the woods, I knew exactly where you had gone.”

‘And the moment we saw you, neither of us could resist.’ My wolf chuckled lowly, ‘We had no choice but to follow.’

I tugged at the hem of her sweatpants, smirking when they fell to the floor. The burning in my gut raged on as she was completely bare to me. She no longer tried to hide herself, knowing I would only pull her hands away. With every beautiful inch of her on display, the temptation was nearly too much.

She sank into the tub with a soft sigh, oblivious to how her relaxed purr affected me. I wrapped my hand around her submerged ankle, pulling her across the tub and into my arms. I chuckled as she rolled her eyes, but settled into my arms happily. Her eyes drifted down my face, lingering on my neck where her mark sat. Her gaze softened as it traced over the cobalt mark, and I found myself watching her silently, tracing the arch of her lips, the curve of her nose, and the deep color of her eyes.

“Your mark is healed.” She smiled softly, her eyes roaming my face with gentle intimacy. I returned her gaze, taking in the beauty that was my mate, my Lola. The woman I knew I didn’t deserve, yet had been blessed with anyway. My Luna, my equal in all forms, the only wolf I would ever submit to.

As I had many times, I grabbed a bar of soap and moved to turn her around. I had washed her countless times, an excuse to graze her skin with my fingertips. Intimacy had never been a strong suit of mine, but I was determined to worship and appreciate every inch of Lola, every supple curve and gentle arch.

“You’ve washed me how many times now?” She asked, “It’s your turn, now turn around.”

A lazy smile worked its way onto my face. I grabbed her hips, running my thumbs over her soft skin and placed her on my lap. I kept myself under control, desperately not wanting to take a cold shower later. I leaned back, resting against the ridge of the tub.

“Start with the front, darling.” I grinned, laughing as she rolled her eyes.

A beautiful blush stained her face, soft like rose petals. Her eyes betrayed her, darkening as she took in my muscles.

“Cocky Alpha.” She scoffed, sticking her tongue out at me.

The sight alone made my c\*k twitch, my heart thunder with suppressed lust. If only she knew what I wanted to do to her, the positions I’d have her in, the noises I’d coax from her plush lips.

She ran the bar of soap across my chest, her fingers grazing over the plains of my muscles. My wolf growled pleasantly, the sound rumbling through my chest. Her breasts grew heavy, her nips hardening from the cool air. My fingers twitched, aching to feel her creamy skin, to hear her little whimpers as they escaped her lips.

A brilliant flash of surprise exploded in her eyes as I grew hard against her backside. She completely underestimated the affect she had on me. The final straw was when the soap slipped from her fingers, clattering to the floor of the tub. My self-control snapped like a tether, where it had once been a strong chord, it was now a thin string of yarn.

I wanted to feel her tight entrance squeeze around my c\*\*k, stretching to fit my length. I wanted to feel every beautiful inch of her, wanted to feel her walls contract with every agonizingly slow stroke. I wanted her writhing underneath me, her back arched and eyes hooded with pleasure.

I pulled her against my chest with urgency, slamming my lips against her own. I wasn't stopping until our lungs screamed, until our lips were bruised and chests heaving. Her hard nips grazed over my damp chest, making me growl into her mouth.

I wouldn't stop—I couldn't, neither could she. Weeks and months this need had been building up, growing and evolving until neither of us could resist any longer. The sparks consumed us, licking over every inch of our skin, fueled by lu\*t and love, desire and passion.

Her fingers tangled in my hair, and I let myself drown under her touch. The stress, the fear, all of it melted away as she whimpered into my mouth, her tongue grazing against my own. Her hands wandered down my chest, over my arms, and down to my stomach. She savored each touch, devouring me as I devoured her.

Just as her small fingers grazed the length of my c\*\*k, I lifted us from the tub. I cupped her plush bottom in my hands, holding her close as I stepped out of the tub and towards the bedroom. Water splashed onto the floor, onto the carpet and bed, but nothing else mattered—nothing but my beautiful, intoxicating mate.

I placed her on the edge of the bed, desperate to have another taste of her. I had tried countless times to suppress my urges, the burning need to taste her wetness, to feel the sweetness of it on my tongue. My self-control had long ago snapped, and she had tasted as incredible as I imagined, leaving me craving even more.

As she laid on the bed, her hooded eyes burning with lu\*t, I parted her thighs and trailed light kisses closer and closer to her core. The wetness there was glistening, begging me for more—for everything I had. A groan of frustration left her panting lips, and I laughed at her impatience.

“Patience, darling. You’ll ruin my fun.” I teased, running a finger down her wet slit and groaning at the extent of her arousal.

I let my tongue trace along her entrance, nearly losing myself as her back arched. The blissful whimper that left her lips destroyed the remainder of my self-control.

I devoured her completely, pinning her legs in place as they fought against the rippling pleasure running through her body. I lapped up every ounce of her sweetness, flicking my tongue against her clt hungrily. I snarled as she screamed my name, her back arching and pu\*y contracting around my tongue.

She tried to sit up, her legs shaking. I pushed her back down, needing another taste, needing those intoxicating moans that drove me mad. I wrapped one of my arms around her waist, holding her against my face as I groaned against her pu\*y. I slipped a finger inside of her, and then two, pumping steadily as my tongue circled her swollen clt.

She was perfect, absolutely ethereal with every whimper, moan, and plea. Her legs shook, her back arched, her jaw went slack. My mate—my sensitive, responsive little mate.

Only when a second org\*\*m assaulted her body, did I pull away. I trailed my way up her body, kissing and nibbling at every ounce of her soft body. Her skin tasted of vanilla and pears, overwhelming and addicting.

As I positioned myself over top of her, I ran my lips along her neck. I knew her first time would hurt, and wanted her prepared for me. I grazed the mark on her neck with my teeth, savoring her breathless response. A gasp left her lips, and she flattened herself against me.

“I will never tire of this—of you.” I purred, looking down at my mate, still breathless and shaking from pleasure.

Her nails grazed against my chest, my stomach and arms, the lut in her eyes mirrored in my own. I placed one of my arms beside her head, and brushed the head of my c\*k against her entrance. The slickness I found there was enough to coax a growl from my throat. Naked and trembling beneath me, my mate wanted every inch of me inside of her, wanted me to take her fully.

“Relax, Lola.” I murmured, nipping at her ear.

Her eyes widened as she looked down at my length, though she had already seen it before, we had never come this close. I slid the head of my c\*\*k inside of her, and lifted her bottom, allowing a few more inches to slip inside.

Pain and lust clouded her eyes, mixing into one. I did everything I could to distract her, nipping at the mark on her neck, and tracing slow circles along her clit. As I slid the rest of my length inside, I gave her a few moments to adjust, simply savoring the feeling of her wrapped around me.

“f\*\*k—so fighting tight.” I growled, moving my hips slowly.

Her pussy had my cock in a death grip, and I nearly lost myself then and there. Pleasure I had never known wracked my body as I found myself buried deep within her. As her whimpers of pain turned into blissful moans, I increased my pace. Her fingernails dug into the skin of my back, consuming pleasure and pain wracking my body.

“You’re mine.” She murmured, running her fingers along my back.

Her hips moved against my own, our lips meeting as a groan escaped my lips. I couldn’t hold back anymore, couldn’t restrain myself. My cock slammed into her tight opening without mercy, and I grunted as her core tightened, milking my cock for everything it had.

“My beautiful mate.” I moaned in her ear, grazing her lobe with my teeth.

Her name fell from my lips as I came, my c\*\*k sliding inside her roughly, our souls joining—our scents merging. Our bodies trembled against each other, but I kept my lips against her own, savoring the taste—the lasting pleasure that continued running through me.

I looked down at her, at the woman who had changed my life completely, who provided companionship—unending support and love. The mate-bond was thick between us, unbreakable and unyielding, solidified by the love we felt for one another.

I kept her in my arms, unable to pull away, to leave her touch. Her warmth became my own, her happiness, sorrow, fears, and hopes—they were all mine, as I was hers. I traced every ounce of her delicate skin with my fingers, lulling her, soothing her into a peaceful sleep.

I had woken in the middle of the night, burning with hunger and need as I watched her body curl into my own. Her nips grazed against my skin, renewing the fire in my stomach. I trailed light kisses along her jaw, watching as those beautiful eyes fluttered open and awareness seeped into their depths.

“Couldn’t sleep?” She asked, her light voice tinged with amusement.

“Can you blame me?” I mumbled against her jaw, my fingertips trailing over her perky breasts. “You look like a goddess, naked and beautiful. I’m afraid my self-control is entirely spent.”

She pulled herself from the bed, out of my arms. Her eyes burned with need, focused on the hardened length between my legs. I moved to sit up, to claim her then and there but she stilled me with a single look.

“My turn.” She smirked, “Don’t ruin my fun.”

My wicked little mate, taking control as I once had. I relaxed against the bed, a purely male smile on my face as I stretched my arms out behind me. Lola snorted at the sight, but gripped my ck in her small hands. As she put the tip of my ck in her mouth, a wave of pleasure so strong I jumped, coursed through me.

“f\*\*k, Lola.” I groaned, feeling the blood rush to my face.

Every inch of me was burning, aching to feel the wetness of her puy, to feel it pulsing around me as she came. I managed to wait a full thirty seconds before pouncing, pushing her onto her hands and knees. With her round bottom in the air, I slid my length into her. I was met with some resistance, her tightness excruciatingly pleasurable. I could feel her stretch to her limits to take all of me in, wrapping around my ck tightly. I palmed her bottom with lust-filled eyes, watching as her cheeks reddened from every smack.

I wasn't as gentle as I had been the first time, as the fire was now consuming every part of me. Every cell, every hair and inch of skin was lit with this painful fire, burning out of control, satiated only by her touch. Her pu\*\*y contracted around my length as I slammed into her, thrusting roughly against her wet core.

"Look at you." I purred, unable to help myself. "So beautiful-bent over for me."

I grabbed a handful of her luscious hair, tugging as I slammed inside of her. Her delicious moans turned into cries of ecstasy, my name leaving her lips like a prayer. Unable to take much more, I pulled her against me, cupping one of her breasts with one hand, while the other drew slow circles along her clt.

"That's is, darling." I growled in her ear. "Come for me."

I kissed along her neck, her shoulders, her back. The sound of her moans echoed in my ears, committed to memory. Every thrust brought me closer, but it was her orgm that sent me over the edge, my seed spilling into her tight puy.

Her eyelids fluttered in exhaustion, and as I held her close, I planted light kisses along her face, whispering sweet words until sleep claimed her for the second time.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 89

Both Asher and I slept in that morning, holding each other as we tried to prolong the inevitable. I would be leaving soon, and neither of us knew when I would return. I'd either return before my heat began, or suffer the consequences.

My stomach was a mess of guilt and nerves, but Asher's touch pushed the heavy emotions from my mind. As we laid in each other's arms, hands wandering over soft skin, the intimacy blossoming through me was stronger than I've ever felt. This morning wasn't about s\*x or burning physical need, it was about comfort, true companionship and love.

"No one knows I'm leaving, right?" I asked, pulling my head from Asher's chest to look into his eyes. "I don't want my family knowing until after I'm gone."

It was selfish of me to think that way, but it would make things easier. I wasn't doing this for myself, but for this pack—for Breyona and Giovanni. I now understood how Giovanni could turn his back on his species for Breyona, how the mate-bond filled every aching hole in your soul.

"Only my Beta and Zeke will know." Asher nodded, absentmindedly running his fingers through my tangled hair. "I'm afraid most of the pack already knows you're my mate, and their Luna."

Well, that grabbed my attention. I pulled myself from Asher's warm embrace, propping myself up on one of my elbows. Asher didn't seem to mind that the pack knew, though I wondered how they came about that information.

"How?" I asked, an eyebrow raised as I took in his amused expression.

"It seems your Dad got excited when he heard his daughter was our future Luna." Asher smirked; his hair deliciously messy from sleep. "He told a couple of his friends."

"Who in turn told the entire pack." I confirmed, snorting at the smile that had taken place on Asher's face.

"I can't blame him." Asher murmured, planting feather light kisses along my jaw and cheek. "This pack is lucky to have you, a Luna willing to risk it all. Beautiful, fearless—there is no one more fit for the job."

"Plus, I know how to handle you." I smirked, though a blush had crept onto my cheeks at the sincerity of his words.

After another hour in bed, I had no choice but to shower and get dressed for the long day ahead. Come tomorrow, I would no longer be in this pack—and my future would be more uncertain than ever. I was on a mission, to safeguard this pack and hopefully ensure a long and happy life with Asher by my side.

I threw on something simple, a t-shirt and a pair of dark leggings. I wanted to get far away from the pack's territory line before calling on my Father and his men. I wanted the wolves running patrol to remain safe, and keep another fight from brewing.

Shortly after I had gotten dressed, Grandma called and asked me to join her for coffee. I knew I wouldn't have the chance to say goodbye to my family, but it was a risk I was willing to take. I was betting on my survival, on returning with crucial information about the upcoming war. Dad, Sean and Grandma would be furious—but they would live, and that was what mattered.

I accepted her invitation, as it was the last chance, I'd have to see her. Asher personally dropped me off at the coffee shop, giving me a lasting kiss that made me question if leaving was the right choice.

'It's for Breyona and Giovanni.' My wolf reminded me, 'Neither of us want to leave, but it's what a Luna would do. Two members of our pack are just as important as the rest.'

She was right, we both knew it. Neither of us wanted to leave Asher, it simply felt—wrong, but the safety of this pack mattered more than our personal happiness.

Grandma arrived shortly after Asher had left, a sour expression on her face. Her face was creased with lines, her eyes clouded with sleep. Grandma had definitely seen better days. I had expected her to return home weeks ago, I was sure she missed her little cottage in the woods and her herb garden. Not only did she stay for Dad, she stayed for Sean and I. With our Mom gone, our family had a gaping hole that no one could fill. Grandma never tried to fill that hole, but she filled the house with life and laughter. She refused to let Dad and Sean sit around moping. Mom wouldn't want that, and Grandma knew it.

"You look like you need a couple days' worth of sleep." I chuckled lightly, giving her a quick hug

before heading into the coffee shop.

“I think this entire pack needs a couple days’ worth of sleep.” Grandma replied. Despite the exhaustion in her eyes, she smiled, looking years younger. “War takes its toll on everyone, warriors and civilians alike.”

“It does, doesn’t it.” I sighed, “I heard you’ve been volunteering at the Community Center.”

“Someone has to feed all the soldiers.” Grandma shrugged, “They deserve some quality food, not that gruel Kate was serving.”

Kate was just another member of the pack, a few years younger than Grandma, with four children of her own. Volunteers had stepped up left and right, offering their homes, food, and time to help out the pack.

“I’m sure their very appreciative.” I smiled softly.

I ordered myself an Iced Mocha Latte and one of their huge chocolate chip muffins. The last time I had been here I was with Breyona, how things have changed. Grandma and I sat at one of the small circular tables in the coffee shop, and I watched as something shifted in her eyes.

“How’s life as the Luna treating you?” She asked, “When this mess is over, are you going to go through with the ceremony?”

The ceremony—an event I had completely forgotten about. It wasn’t that I questioned the decision to step up as Asher’s Luna, but there were more pressing things on my mind.

The ceremony was a day of joy for the entire pack, where their Luna would step up and claim her position. It was a simple matter, the Alpha and Luna would draw a shallow cut along their palm and join hands. All of those voices—everyone in the pack would then be linked to me. The ceremony was binding, allowing me to mind-link everyone in the pack simultaneously, as Asher had done many times.

Mates could naturally mind-link with each other, just as any individual in the pack could mind-link Asher. The ceremony often happened months after the Alpha met his mate, giving the she-wolf time to decide if she truly wanted to become Luna. I had no such qualms; I was more than ready to step into the position.

“Of course, I will.” I nodded, “As much as I’d like to get it done with now, the last thing we need is an invasion during the celebration.”

“I agree.” Grandma nodded, giving me a long look. “My Granddaughter, a Luna. Not that I’m surprised, I always knew you were destined for great things. You’re already willing to give everything for this pack, you’ve been its Luna for quite some time already.”

Something was bothering her; I could easily tell. I knew she hadn’t a clue about Breyona and Giovanni’s disappearance, but Grandma easily picked up on the moods and expressions of others. She could tell I was stressed, and that there was something I wasn’t telling her.

The only people who knew about Breyona and Giovanni’s disappearance was his Beta, Zeke, and Breyona’s parents. They hadn’t taken the news lightly, but they trusted Asher to bring their daughter back. If only they knew that their trust wasn’t in Asher, but in me. The thought made my stomach turn. The last thing I wanted was to destroy their trust, to fail in returning their daughter.

Even if we managed to get the upper hand and win this war, there were still other pressing concerns. How would the pack react to Giovanni’s presence? He couldn’t remain in the dark forever. Alpha Bran would undoubtedly refuse, which could lead to another problem entirely. Alpha Bran could easily decide to retaliate, which would lead to yet another war.

The ‘what ifs’ and potential problems made my head swim, but the caffeine and sugar did what it could to quiet my frazzled mind. Grandma and I stayed at the coffee shop for another half hour before she had to go back to the community center. It was nearing dinner time, Grandma and the other volunteers had to make food for all of the warriors who had come to this pack.

As we stepped outside of the coffee shop, we nearly ran into Chelsea. I hadn’t seen her since her birthday, not that I actively sought her out to begin with. She had Ethan at her side, an odd pairing

considering neither really ever liked one another. Ethan had seen better days, dark rings lined his eyes, and they shined with a dull haunted light.

Isaac had been a close friend of his, and had lost his life when Brittany managed to escape Asher's dungeon. Chelsea had never cared for Isaac, making it even stranger that she stood by Ethan's side.

Chelsea's face turned up in a sneer as we locked eyes, while Ethan remained indifferent. Ethan was an ass on all accounts, but he had never pretended to like me. When I dated Tyler, Chelsea was my closest friend. She was also the first to turn on me once I discovered Tyler wasn't my mate.

"Looks like everything finally worked out for you, Lola." Chelsea sneered, and through the jealousy burning in her eyes, I could see her insecurities shining clear. "You've got your claws in yet another Alpha, maybe this one will actually stick around."

For once, Chelsea's words had no effect on me. I had a long list of things to worry about, and petty jealousy wasn't one of them. Chelsea had always known how to provoke a reaction from me, but this time, her words fell short. I had every intention on turning away when Grandma opened her mouth and spoke.

"Child, you need to learn some manners and learn how to speak to your future Luna." Grandma snapped.

A smart person would hear the contained anger in her words and back off, Chelsea was not one of those people. Grandma had always known how to strike fear into Sean and I. Even Dad kept his distance when Grandma was truly angry. She emitted a calm and wise aura that surrounded her, and could easily make anyone sound childish and inexperienced. She looked down on Chelsea like a toddler throwing a fit, blatant disappointment burned in her eyes.

"She's not my Luna." Chelsea sneered, though it wasn't fueled with as much anger this time around. She crossed her arms over her chest and glared at my Grandma, who seemed completely disinterested.

Ethan stood to the side, his eyes flitting around the outside of the coffee shop. I wasn't even sure he heard what Chelsea had said. I was never close with Isaac, nor had I ever pretended to be, but I felt

sorry for Ethan. Even though he was a total asshole, he had lost someone important.

“So long as you live in this pack, Lola is your Luna.” Grandma’s voice held an eerie calmness, one that told me Chelsea better back off if she had any sense of self-preservation. “How shameful, Alpha Asher will hear of this. He will not take kindly to you disrespecting his mate.”

Chelsea paled, most likely recalling the horrible rumors that surrounded Asher. Rumors where he killed brutally and without mercy, rumors where he’d take prisoners for the slightest infractions and never let them see the light of day. Little did Chelsea know, most of the rumors were true, but they only told half of the story. Asher was brutal, dominate, and fought with a ferocity that made most men pale in comparison. He was also selfless, brave, and would do anything and everything for his people. Every act of brutality, every cruel action had been for the benefit and safety of his pack. When he had taken this pack from Tyler and merged it with his own, it had taken a full month before the people of this pack saw him for what he was, everything that an Alpha should be.

“Ethan” I called out before Chelsea could storm away with a huff. Ethan’s wandering eyes met my own, strained with grief. “I’m sorry about Isaac. The people who hurt him will pay; you have my word.”

“Thanks, Luna.” Ethan nodded; his voice rougher than usual.

Ethan headed into the coffee shop, leaving Chelsea staggering to catch up. Grandma flashed me a humorous smile, though her eyes shined with both anger and sadness.

“That girl will learn some manners sooner or later. She’s going to say the wrong thing to the wrong person someday.” Grandma huffed, “You handled that well, Lola. I wish I could’ve said the same about myself.”

“She needed to hear what you said.” I shrugged, “You’re right, someday she will say the wrong thing to someone.”

It nearly killed me to turn away from my Grandma, to let her get into the car and watch as she drove away. There would be no long goodbyes. My family would only try to stop me. They wouldn’t understand that I had no choice, that it was so much more than my life for Breyona’s. I swallowed

the guilt and tinge of fear that swirled in my stomach, mustering the courage to move forward.

I headed towards the forest line just at the end of the road. I needed to be far from the pack's territory. From there, I would call the shadows and have them send the Vampire King my location. It was all downhill from there.

'Have you left yet?' Asher's voice flooded through my mind, rough and somewhat raspy. 'I'm about five minutes away from calling this entire thing off and dragging you back home.'

'You wouldn't do that.' I chuckled softly, savoring the sound of his voice. 'I'm heading into the woods now. I'll be off our territory within an hour.'

'I wish there was another way.' Asher replied, and I could almost see the grimace that tugged at his face.

'I know, but Breyona would do the same for me.' I smiled, his voice filling me with a small sliver of peace. 'When I get back, we're going to have a lot of time to make up.'

'You don't have to remind me; I know what I'll be missing.' Asher chuckled, though it was dry and somewhat forced. 'Remember, you need to be back here before your heat begins.'

'I know.' I nodded, stepping over rocks and pushing back branches as I continued walking through the forest. 'Two weeks max.'

'Let's make it one.' Asher countered, 'I'll be waiting for your voice the entire time. One last thing, if that Vampire tries to put his hands on you, kill him. As much as I want to do it myself, I'd rather have him dead sooner than later. Only my mark should be on your body.'

'Oh, I plan on it.' I chuckled, 'He won't get his hands on me, I promise.'

Asher sent an alert to the patrol team on this side of the forest, telling them to steer clear so that I

might pass. He hadn't given them a reason, nor had they asked for one. I walked through the territory line without a wolf in sight.

I could have shifted, it would've made the hike a lot faster, but I wanted to prolong this. I wanted to prolong my freedom. Within the next hour or two, I would officially be a prisoner. I was nearly positive that my Father would keep me around until I changed my mind, or use a full-blooded Vampire to try and mess with my mind. I remembered what Grandma had taught me, and developed my own methods on shielding my mind. The Vampire King could try, but I would never condone the deaths of my people.

I walked for two hours before stopping. I had been far enough away thirty minutes ago, but wanted to make sure the Vampire's wouldn't be anywhere near this pack. Birds chattered in the trees; leaves rustled as squirrels darted away from my presence. The forest was teeming with life, and despite the situation, it was beautiful. The sunlight shone through the trees, making the emerald leaves look delicate and transparent. As much as I hated to interrupt the peace in this forest, I had things that needed to be done.

I closed my eyes and called out with my mind, calling to the shadows that lurked in every corner and crevice. A tugging sensation formed in my gut, and I winced as the forest around me grew quiet. The birds were no longer chirping, the leaves were no longer crunching under the small feet of squirrels. The air around me grew uncomfortably cold, a chill settled in my bones and crept up my spine.

I opened my eyes to see the forest had darkened, the sunlight no longer streamed through the treetops. Shadows slithered from every dark corner, some large tufts of darkness, others small and leech-like. They glided to a stop at my feet, circling my body and waiting like patient pets. Larger shadows lingered at the edge of the forest line, and I could feel them watching me with burning intensity. I could feel their barely contained anticipation.

They liked me—as much as shadows could like a person. They liked that I made deals with them, that I fed them my blood. I had only tasted blood twice in my life, but each time had been quite the experience. The initial thought of drinking blood made me want to retch, but the taste—the strength it brought on was unlike anything I had experienced. Don't get me wrong, I had no plans on going around biting humans, but I couldn't deny a part of me relished in the taste and strength.

'What is it you need, Princess?' They hissed in unison, their slippery voices circling my head and running down my skin in cold waves.

I pulled out a small pocket knife from the pouch in my leggings. Asher had given this to me when I told him of my plan, and assured me there was no silver within the blade. It was small and unassuming, and would do little damage if I actually stabbed someone with it. I flicked it open and watched what little sunlight was left catch the bright metal of the blade. The point was deviously sharp, begging to break through skin.

I placed the pocket knife against my palm, gritting my teeth as I dragged it across my flesh. A hiss of pain escaped my clenched teeth, reminding me of how the shadows often sounded. Blood pooled in my hand, hot against my icy skin. The shadows slithered around my feet, their anticipation building with each drop of blood that splattered onto the earth.

“I need you to send my location to the Vampire King, along with a message.”

‘Tell us.’ They hissed, slithering around my feet excitedly, ‘What is the message?’

I gathered the blood in my hands, throwing it into the air and watching as it rained down on the shadows at my feet. They swarmed on the blood, and I watched in silence as they cleaned it from the earth.

“I’m here. Come and get me.”

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 90

Each passing minute gave me more time to think, a curse in and of itself. The more time I had to think, the more I wondered if there was a way out of this mess, a way Breyona and Giovanni could return safely. I was risking so much on the hopes that my Father would actually let Breyona and Giovanni go. Breyona was useless to him once he had me in his clutches, but it was Giovanni I worried about. Giovanni had betrayed his King, and any proud leader would want retribution. There was a large chance the Vampire King had no intention of letting Giovanni go, and I knew Breyona would refuse to leave without him. I needed a plan in case that happened.

One hour and thirty-four minutes is how long it took to hear the quiet crunching of leaves beneath the heavy feet of the Vampire Kings men. I knew the men coming to take me were Luna Freya’s men, as no Vampire would survive a blast of direct sunlight.

The footsteps continued for the next ten minutes, growing louder with each passing second. I remained still, letting my senses drift to where the Luna Freya's men walked. I could make out at least six or seven sets of feet, possibly more. A sickening sense of fear settled in my stomach when the heavy footfalls stopped completely, and the forest was once again enveloped in silence.

A stinging pain erupted from my neck, like a sharp bee sting. My hand flew up to the source, plucking a small dart from my skin. The needle was a few inches long, a clear substance dripping from the tip.

The forest around me blurred into bright shades of green and brown. I could no longer hear anything other than my panting breaths. The pain spread into my body, seeping into my bloodstream. The world around me tilted as my vision tunneled, and I found myself looking up from the forest floor. My legs had collapsed from under me, yet I felt nothing. The sky was a bright shade of baby blue, round tufts of clouds drifted by slowly. The world around me faded, the bright colors leached from my vision until darkness swallowed me whole.

I woke to the sound of voices, though I couldn't make out who they were coming from. The main person talking had a rough voice, one I hadn't heard before. I could hear gravel crunching and my body jostling as we drove down some road. My vision was obscured, cloaked by a dark mesh that had been placed over my head.

My entire body ached, my muscles groaning as I fought to remain still. I focused on my breathing, keeping it even and relaxed. Judging from the aching pain in my body, they had used wolfsbane. A dart that size should have been enough to render me unconscious for a few days, but for some reason I had woken up early. Maya was still down for the count, unconscious in my mind, but I was becoming more lucid with each passing second.

It must've had something to do with not being a full werewolf. That was the only explanation I could think of as to why the wolfsbane hadn't worked to its full capacity. I strained my eyes, trying to peer through the thin fabric that was placed over my head. It was clear they expected me to still be asleep, as the fabric wasn't as thick as it could have been. It was still day time, that much I could tell. I could make out blurred shades of green as we passed by a cluster of trees.

My hands were bound at the front, and judging from the slight stinging pain, the cuffs had small bits of silver embedded within. Not enough to cause excruciating pain, but enough to keep me bound and in human form. The silver and wolfsbane kept me from mind-linking Asher, not that I had any useful information at the moment, but it would have been nice to hear his voice.

I was smushed between two large forms, both radiating an intense heat. My head was relaxed against one of the men's shoulders, who sat still as I slept against him. From what limited hearing I had, there were four men in the vehicle. Two smushed against me, one in the passenger seat, and one driving.

"Tristan has the room ready. She should be out for the rest of the day."

I wondered if they were going to throw me in a cell, much like the one they probably put Breyona and Giovanni into. I wasn't expecting hospitality and kindness, I knew exactly what I was walking into. Would my Father actively try and sway me to his side? Or would he use my friends against me, forcing my hand?

If Maya were awake, I could've tapped into her senses, heightening my own. As it stood, I was on my own for the time being. I strained my eyes harder, ignoring the prickling headache that formed across my temples. We were driving down a narrow two-lane road, there were no other cars passing us by. I could make out a large parking lot at the far end of the road, and what looked like a small clu\*ter of vehicles parked inside.

I used my minutes wisely. The closer we got, the more details I could make out. As we pulled into the parking lot, I noticed the large building that stood at the edge. It had to be a warehouse, as it was larger than any house I had ever seen, and looked run down on the outside. My eyes snapped over to the entrance of the parking lot, where a small sign said 'Macys Warehouse'. It wasn't enough information yet, but it was definitely a start.

The white walls of the building were stained with dirt and what looked like mold. I could just make out a bunch of wide bays for semi-trucks to park and make deliveries. I had expected something more extravagant, certainly not an abandoned warehouse in the middle of nowhere.

The car lurched to a stop, and I could hear two of the doors open and slam shut. The man on my left side got out of the vehicle, closing the door behind him. One of the men scooped me into his arms and headed towards a large set of double doors. The glass was tinted, making it impossible to peer inside. I should have known they would have remodeled this place. I couldn't imagine the mighty Vampire King living in a mold and rat-infested warehouse.

As we stepped inside, safe from the sunlight, a familiar voice called out, one that nearly made me stiffen.

"I've got her." Tristan said to the men. "Let him know I'm bringing her to her room."

A large pair of hands grabbed my torso, pulling me from the car much more gently than I had expected. Tristan scooped me up, one of his arms around my back, the other underneath my legs. I kept my limbs loose, desperately trying to maintain the facade that I was unconscious. I let my head roll against his neck, grimacing under the thin fabric as his scent registered in my nose. It was nothing like Asher's rich and intoxicating scent, the smell of nature and male musk. Tristan's scent was lighter, with just a hint of sweetness that let me know he was in fact a Vampire.

As I remained still in Tristan's arms, I made sure my mental blocks were in place. Grandma had told me to picture a library, but that technique hadn't worked so well for me. Instead of a library, I pictured a thick wall of steel, blocking my mind from anyone who might want to intrude.

As Tristan held me close to his chest, I could feel him slithering into my mind and greeting the thick wall with a frown. I nearly shivered as his fingers grazed down the metal, asking for entrance. My wall remained intact, and I continued scanning the inside of the warehouse.

I wasn't sure what I had been expecting, but this wasn't it. The inside of the warehouse had been completely remodeled; false walls had been placed in an effort to make the building look more like a luxurious home. We stood in what was supposed to be the foyer, a thick Persian rug covered most of the floor.

Tristan walked with purpose, giving me little time to scan the room around us. He gave a brief nod to one of the men standing in the room, and continued forward. We walked through another door, one that led to a living room and a flight of steps. Tristan moved fast, darting through the living room and up the stairs with ease.

He walked down a thin hallway and unlocked one of the doors, stepping inside and shutting it behind us. I recognized the room, and knew I had come here when I visited Tristan through our one-sided bond. The walls were rough stone, the floor bare except for a black shag carpet. A thick fireplace sat at one end of the room, a bright fire crackling within. At the other end was a bed and an oak dresser. Another door sat at the far end of the room, hopefully a bathroom. My Father had to have been remodeling this place for years. The inside was too luxurious to have been done in the last few months.

Tristan sat me down on the large bed that sat at the other end of the room. The comforter felt like silk against my skin, red in color. It seemed the color red was an occurring theme in this place, a sad irony. I resisted the urge to rub at my wrists as he removed the cuffs from my hands. I could see his form through the fabric. He had stopped at the edge of the bed and was looking down on me, but I couldn't make out the expression on his face, only his large form and blonde hair.

"You can stop pretending now, Lola." Tristan's voice called out, soft and somewhat grim.

Every instinct in my body was telling me to chuck the nearest heavy object at his head and make a run for it. I was in enemy territory, and even with Maya unconscious, I already wanted out. This place wasn't my home, it was more a prison than anything else. My home was with Asher, with the pack he selflessly ran. My home was my Grandma, Sean, and Dad—my real Dad. As much as I already wanted out of this place, I was here for more than just Breyona and Giovanni.

"We have more pressing matters at hand, Lola." Tristan grunted.

His footsteps grew louder as he approached. I felt his fingers wrap around the thin fabric they had placed over my head. I gave him my best murderous glare as he yanked the bag from my head, his eyes both flickering with amusement and irritation.

I brushed the hair from my face, pulling myself into a sitting position on the bed as I glared daggers at Tristan. My wrists were red and sore with what looked like rub burn. I knew the irritation was

from the silver, but the cuffs didn't have enough to actually sear my skin. I could feel Maya stir in the back of my mind, but knew she wouldn't be awake for a couple hours now. The lingering pain in my body told me it was still working to get the wolfsbane out of my system. There would be no shifting or contacting Asher for the next few hours.

"There you go, beautiful." Tristan nodded, his face looked as though it were chiseled from stone, scarred with severity.

"How'd you know?" I asked, surprised at how stubborn and strong my voice sounded.

"I've long learned not to underestimate you." Tristan snorted, crossing his arms over his chest. "Also, you snore when you sleep."

"I don't snore." I snapped, "And stop creeping on me while I'm sleeping."

"You're not the only one who knows how to tug the bond." Tristan shrugged; a half-hearted smirk twitched onto his lips. "Besides, if I remember correctly, you visited me first. You left the door open, I simply stepped through."

"Next time I'll make sure the door's shut, and locked." My voice came out sarcastically sweet.

"You couldn't just leave well enough alone, could you? You had to come running to save your friends." Tristan shook his head, pinching the bridge of his nose.

It seemed someone was in a sour mood today. I expected Tristan to practically dance with joy, rubbing my surrender in my face as he tried to weasel his way into my heart—or pants. Instead of looking smug or joyful, Tristan looked irritated.

His blonde hair was pulled behind his head, the top half pulled back in a pony tail while the bottom half was draped over his broad shoulders. This time he wasn't dressed to impress, but was wearing a casual t-shirt and a pair of loose jeans.

"I couldn't leave them behind." I replied, "She's my best-friend."

"And what about Giovanni?" Tristan asked, his eyes narrowing. "How quick you are to accept him, knowing what side he was once on."

"People can change, Tristan." I snapped, "He's her mate, and he chose her. I'm willing to trust Breyona's judgement."

"I hope you have a plan in place, Lola." Tristan's voice was like ice, though something else flickered in the depths of his crystal eyes. "Now that he has you, he will never let you go."

"I can handle it." I replied, straining to keep my voice calm and confident.

"Can you?" Tristan asked, a single blonde eyebrow lifting in disbelief. I noticed a brief flash of pain in his eyes, though he quickly covered it up. "If you can truly handle it, answer a question for me. Why is the Alpha's mark on your skin? Why can I smell him on you?"

"He's my mate." I grimaced, "That answers all of your questions."

"If your Father sees his mark on your skin, if he smells his scent on you, he will kill you both." Tristan hissed lowly, "It was a stupid mistake, Lola."

"What am I supposed to do?" I snapped. "I let him mark me because he's my mate. I slept with him because I love him. I can't just remove his mark—and even if I could, I won't."

Low blow, my conscience told me. A felt a sharp stab of guilt as Tristan's eyes darkened, freezing over. His voice felt like shards of ice piercing my skin, making small beads of blood form along my body.

"You don't need to remove it, just conceal it." Tristan's voice had dropped exceedingly low, "Ask the shadows to hide the mark and cover your scent."

“And what about the men that brought me here?” I asked, my voice losing some of its previous venom. “I sat in a car with them for who knows how long. They’ve already noticed my scent.”

“I took care of that the moment you arrived.” Tristan grunted, averting his eyes from my face and over to the crackling fire that warmed the room.

“You went inside their minds?” I asked, surprise staining my voice. “Your mind games don’t work on full-blooded werewolves.”

“Luckily, most of the deceased Luna’s men are half-breeds.” Tristan replied, his eyes running over my face as he said the word ‘deceased’.

Tristan had gone inside of their minds, wiping the memory of my scent from existence. He had done that for me, to keep me alive. The somewhat selfless action surprised me, but that didn’t mean I was willing and ready to jump in bed with the man.

Somehow Tristan knew Luna Freya had died at my hands. I wondered if Brittany was here, living somewhere in this warehouse. It was a hopeful thought. I could kill two birds with one stone, rescue Breyona and Giovanni, and kill Brittany.

“Don’t flatter yourself, I did it for completely selfish reasons.” Tristan grimaced, but I could see the lie burning away in his eyes, brighter than the fire that crackled in the room. “Go on, call on the shadows.”

“I’m not willing to pay their prices.” I shook my head, “They ask for too much.”

“That’s because you let them ask for too much.” Tristan sighed, “You know so little about what you can do. It’s a surprise you made it this far.”

“Gee, thanks.” I rolled my eyes, “How do I keep them from asking for too much?”

“More often than not, they’ll do favors for just a taste of some blood.” Tristan shrugged, “It’s the bigger favors that require unique and often unpleasant payment.”

Even Tristan knew more about the Shadows than I did, the thought was somewhat discouraging. I had no doubt that my Father could teach me so much, but I wasn’t willing to betray my entire pack for the information. I would rather remain in the dark and save the people I love than trade thousands of lives for power.

“Do you have a knife?” I asked, my voice hard with determination.

I would make it through this, I told myself. I would make sure Breyona and Giovanni were safe, I would give Asher information that changed the outcome of this war, and I would come home to him.

“You’re going to feed them your blood?” Tristan asked, his face contorting with surprise.

“I’ve done it before.” I shrugged, grimacing at the strange look on his face. “They don’t seem to mind.”

“Well of course they wouldn’t.” Tristan scoffed, “You’re half-vampire, half-werewolf. Not only that, you’re a part of the Kouritis bloodline and heir to the throne. Your blood is of the highest standard. The Vampire King would lose his mind if he heard you fed the shadows your blood.”

“It’s not like I have an endless line of willing victims.” I rolled my eyes, already catching a glimpse at the kind of person my Father was.

“Use my blood.” Tristan replied, pulling a small silver blade from his pocket, pressing it into my hands gently.

Confusion twisted in my gut at the gentle expression on his face. I was far from ever trusting Tristan with anything, but I wondered what game he was playing. Did he think the werewolves were going to win? Was that why he was suddenly kissing up to me? He hadn’t tried to force himself on me yet,

a positive sign. Not only did he go through the minds of Luna Freya's men, he was willing to use his blood to call the shadows, to keep me safe from my Father.

I pushed those conflicting thoughts aside and steadied myself. I closed my eyes, reaching with my mind into the deepest corners of the room. Calling the shadows was effortless now, as they responded to my calls with barely contained glee.

When I opened my eyes, the room had darkened, the thick shadows against the wall pulsing. The icy coldness washed over me, though this time my body seemed to handle it better. I was becoming used to calling the shadows, the thought both excited and worried me.

The shadows pulsed and slithered from the darkest corners of the room, gliding across the floor to pool at my feet. Larger shadows remained behind, watching me with silent interest. I had their undivided attention, and was both thrilled and intimidated by that fact.

"Their almost excited to see you." Tristan scoffed, shaking his head. "Do not mistake their excitement for fondness. They enjoy your blood, your power."

"I know." I replied, my voice strong. "I know what they are. They're not pets."

"No, they are not." Tristan agreed, giving the shadows a wary glance. "They are much more obedient to you, it seems."

I stood from the bed and walked over to Tristan. His eyes were guarded as the shadows followed closely behind, pooling around us in a sea of ebony. He placed his hand in my own, his crystal eyes smoldering as I pressed the blade against his palm.

Ignoring the intense look in his eyes, and thinking only of Asher, I called out to the shadows.

"Be stern with them." Tristan murmured.

"I need a favor." I told them, "I need you to conceal the cobalt mark on my skin, and hide Asher's scent from my body. Do not remove the mark, just conceal it. I expect it back once I leave this place."

'What will you pay, Princess?' They hissed with their silky voices, 'The blood of a pure-blood Vampire?'

"Yes." I nodded, "You can have some of his blood."

'We enjoy your blood, Princess.' They whispered, pooling around my legs, stretching out like cats. 'Ancient blood, powerful blood.'

"It is mine to give as I see fit." I told them, "I told you what I offer, do you accept?"

"Yes, Princess." They whispered, their voices caressing my skin like shards of ice. "For you, yesss."

Tristan gave me a firm nod, and I pressed the blade hard against his hand. I might've been harder than needed, but I couldn't force myself to feel guilty. Blood pooled in his cupped hands, a blazing shade of scarlet. The scent swirled around me, rich and potent. Melted chocolate and blood oranges, liquid nectar. The Vampire side of me practically watered at the mouth, but I pushed it aside with ease.

"Drink." I told them, and watched as Tristan let the blood splash to the floor.

His blood splattered across the floor, tiny crimson drops flying in every direction. The shadows devoured the blood feverishly, leaving the floor spotless.

I pulled the hem of my t-shirt aside, looking down at Asher's cobalt mark. I ran my fingers along it, remembering how it felt as his teeth sunk into my skin. I remembered the ecstasy that coursed through me when his lips grazed the mark, the way my name sounded when it left his lips. I watched in sheltered sadness as the cobalt mark faded from my skin, the lingering scent of Asher vanishing from my body. Not gone, just concealed.

Three days, or possibly four—I wasn't entirely sure, but the monotony of being locked in this room was slowly eating away at me. The silver cuff on my wrist kept me from mind-linking Asher, and kept Maya at bay. My skin under the cuff was sore, red and irritated as though I had a rash.

My days and nights began to switch, screwing with my already questionable sleeping pattern—not that I expected much sleep when my Father was somewhere lurking about. Tristan came to the door once every couple of hours, a tray of food and a small cup of blood in his hands. He needn't worry that I might run, as I was already too weak from the constant contact with silver. I was practically human, making Tristan and the rest of the Vampire's much stronger than me.

It was blatantly obvious the Vampire's weren't used to human or half-human guests, as the food was horribly lacking. Gelatinous oatmeal and often small packs of crackers or cookies. I wasn't ashamed to say I downed the cup of blood he had given me at each meal, though it worried me where it might have come from.

Each day I'd ask Tristan when the Vampire King would finally see me, when would Breyona and Giovanni be released—each time he said 'soon', annoyingly cryptic. It gave me more than enough time to think over Tristan's sudden loyalty switch. He had told me once that he had his own plans, that he never wished for the Werewolf species to be eradicated. Does that mean I suddenly trusted him? Not at all, but I needed whatever allies I could find.

I leapt from the bed as I heard footsteps echo down the hallway, followed by the thick wooden door to my bedroom holding cell open. Tristan stood in the doorway, this time without a tray in his hands. He stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. When he finally spoke, his voice was low and hushed.

My stomach was in knots as I followed him down the hallway, towards the back of the warehouse. Tristan was silent the entire time, his shoulders tense at what was to come. We stopped in front of a thick set of double doors, the wood smooth and flawless to the touch. Two Vampire's stood on either side of the door, their dark eyes never once straying from where they stared.

My eyes bounced around the room as the doors swung open, revealing a room I had once been to. It was the room I visited when my Father used the shadows to call me to him. A large maroon

sectional was sat in front of a large fire place, a thick Persian rug under our feet. A small bar carried decanters of suspicious looking scarlet liquid. Sitting on the sectional, with one of his arms draped over the back, was my Father—the Vampire King.

I had seen my Father once before, but this time was different. I hadn't seen him in person, not truly. The aura that surrounded him was dark and suffocating, like walking into a sauna. My lungs struggled to breathe in the thick air, and my heartrate sky rocketed. The mop of styled raven hair on his head was identical to my own, right down to his bright eyes, which stared into the flames roaring in the fireplace.

I was hyperaware at how the shadows in the room slithered, hiding in the darkness as they surrounded us. I could taste their excitement, their interest in what was about to happen.

“Sit, Lola.” My Father all but commanded, never once turning to look me in the eye.

Tristan stood off to the side, leaning against the fireplace mantle as I trailed over to the couch. I sat as far away from my Father as I could get, holding my ground as he turned and looked into my eyes.

I always thought his eyes would be empty, lacking any hint of a soul. I was wrong, his eyes weren't empty. They were filled with a burning hunger that would bring the world to its knees, an anger that consumed every sliver of compassion or conscience. Looking into my Father's eyes taught me something, evil doesn't just pop into existence—evil is born, bred, and taught.

I tried to imagine my Father as a child, eyes full of wonder and happiness. I didn't bother looking for any sliver of good within him, as I knew it had all been smothered by that vicious fire burning in his eyes, but he had not been born evil. Life warped him, changed him into this monster—and not once had he resisted.

I could see my features reflected in his own. The dark hair, full lips, and round eyes. Looking at my Father's face made me realize how little I had gotten from my Mom, and I wondered how she stomached raising me. How could she look into my eyes for all those years and not see the evil, twisted mate she had once given into?

“Do you understand why I need you here, Lola?” He asked, those luminous eyes staring at me, slicing away the layers until he reached my soul.

I resisted the urge to fidget, to shift uncomfortably under his stare. Everything about him was intense, frighteningly so. I knew without a doubt that with my help, he would achieve his goal. He would never rest until the Werewolves were all but eradicated, and the humans lined up for the slaughter.

“You need a Queen.” I repeated the words that plagued my mind for months now.

Tristan watched the two of us carefully, his eyes never lingering on the Vampire King for too long. My Father scoffed, though the action lacked emotion. He looked me over for a minute, running his eyes down my hair, my face with his speculative gaze. I was sure he saw what I did, himself reflected in my face.

“Why would I need a Queen I cannot trust, one I cannot control?” My Father asked, one of his dark eyebrows lifting as he stared at me. I had the feeling his question was rhetorical, so I kept my mouth shut. “What do you know about witches, Lola?”

The question caught me off guard, and I wracked my brain for every last detail I remembered. Grandma had taught me the history of witches, though not much was known anymore. Most of the information had faded into obscurity, or had been buried over the centuries.

“Not much.” I admitted, “There used to be a lot of witches, but many lines died off or went into hiding.”

“Do you know why they went into hiding?” My Father pressed, and seemed to be amused at my lack of knowledge.

“No, I don’t.” I replied.

“My Grandfather had a plan, one that would rid the world of our enemies. A plan that would ensure Vampires were finally able to step into the light.” My Father continued, “Vampires have been at the bottom of the food-chain for too long, letting the humans think they actually held some semblance of power. My Grandfather hunted the witches into near extinction, all whilst remaining under the noses of Werewolves.”

“What does this have to do with me?” I asked, fighting to take the edge out of my voice. Before leaving the room, Tristan had warned me not to speak out against my Father, that he was cruel and vengeful when need be.

“It has everything to do with you.” My Father’s smile was oily and serpent-like. “Let me tell you a story, then you might understand your purpose.”

“Many years ago, the shadows guided me to a woman, one who would be my ideal mate. She was a werewolf, and lived in a small pack with her family. The moment we locked eyes; she was under the thrall of the mate-bond. I spent countless weeks with her, until she allowed me to mark her, and I let her do the same. I told her of my plans, and while she was conflicted, she remained by my side.” My Father began, and I knew he was talking about my Mother. I wanted to stop him, to deny that she would’ve ever had a part in his plans, but Tristan’s firm look stopped me in my tracks. “I told her of the child we would have, and her importance in this world. The child would be of three different species, and would wield power the world has not yet seen. She would be the product of a Werewolf and a Vampire, but hold power bestowed to her from generations of Witches. The young, mated Werewolf was horrified when she learned the truth, that she would sire a monster unlike any other into this world. She fled, but couldn’t remain hidden forever. I found her again, and when I did, I used the mate-bond she coveted against her. You were the product of that, Lola.”

My heart constricted as I replayed his words over and over again, each time refusing to come to terms. It wasn’t possible, it couldn’t be. My Mom would never join his side, would never abandon her people. My stomach rolled, and I clenched my fists as I fought the urge to hurl all over the expensive Persian rug on the floor. He had used the mate-bond against her to conceive me, that much I expected. What I couldn’t understand was how he thought that child was me. Witches were all but extinct, and I had never seen one in real life before. My Mom was not a witch, that much I knew, nor had I ever exhibited any signs of strange power. My mouth flopped open, and I said the first thing that came to mind.

“My Mom wasn’t a witch.” I shook my head, “You’re wrong. I’m not that child.”

“Something you’ll learn, I am rarely ever wrong.” My Father smiled grimly; the shadow of the crackling fire wavered against his alabaster skin. “My Mother was the last in a long and ancient line of witches. She was Half-Vampire, and had been sought out by my Father for a very specific purpose. The Magic in her blood-line skipped a generation, and only seemed to show in the women of her family. The Magic of my Mother’s bloodline skipped her generation, falling onto you.”

I wanted to cover my ears, to ignore everything he was telling me like a child would. Tristan’s firm gaze was the only thing keeping me sane, reminding me to remain calm, to remain respectful. My Father wasn’t above hurting me, nor would our family relations keep him from throwing me in a cell next to Breyona and Giovanni.

“Now, I want you to listen closely, Lola.” My Father spoke clearly, enunciating each word so that I might commit them to memory. “Do not overthink your purpose here. You will comply to my terms, or be eradicated with the rest of the Werewolves. I won’t for one second believe you have suddenly changed sides. As my first-born, you hold the most power.”

“First born?” I repeated, feeling my gut twist at his blatant threat. “My Mom never had another child.”

She hadn’t, not with the Vampire King. I was sure he knew about Sean, but I refused to speak his name, to give the Vampire King another person to use against me. My Father’s lips twitched, pulling up in that dry, serpentine smile he favored.

“You are not the only one to make deals with the Shadows, Lola.” My Father replied, lifting his hand to wave at Tristan. “You would be amazed at what they can do, if one is simply willing to pay the price.”

I watched as Tristan left the room, returning a moment later with someone in tow. Every muscle in my body stiffened, every joint locked as I looked into the eyes of a girl no older than eighteen. My hair, my Father’s hair sat on her head in long, raven-colored waves. Her face was soft and round like my own, her cheekbones high and lashes long. The only difference were our eyes. I had gotten my eyes from our Father, where the girl must have gotten them from her Mother—whoever that might be.

“How?” The word left my lips in a ragged whisper.

I couldn't force my eyes from the girl. She gazed at me with the same curiosity, though hers was laced with caution and suspicion. My eyes darted over to Tristan, silently pleading with him to tell me this was some elaborate lie. From the hardness in his eyes, I knew my Father had not told me a single lie since arriving—that everything he said had been the truth.

“Two years after your birth, I tried relentlessly to regain you and your Mother, but the man she chose as a mate had a witch for a Mother.” My Father laughed dryly, his eyes burning with that uncontained, murderous light. “The woman possessed little power, but was able to keep your Mother and you safe.”

I wracked my mind, lingering over each word until I finally understood. Grandma, my Dad's Mom. She had always seemed to know when something was happening, when someone was hiding something from her. Her little cottage came to mind, the old and dusty books she kept littered on shelves, and the sprawling herb garden she had outback. Grandma was a witch, a part of a breed that was thought to have died off many years ago. I wanted to be surprised, but I found this information the least surprising of the bunch.

“I needed an alternative, in case you proved to be unreliable.” He sneered, “I called on the Shadows, who were happy to do my bidding. They offered me the chance at another child. Not as powerful as a first born, but not without potential. All I needed was a powerful witch to sire this child. I found one in Craiova, Romania. A blood-witch who had grown tired of hiding, who had grown comfortable in her habits. She didn't have the gift of foresight like her Mother, and never saw my men coming.”

My stomach rolled again, and I pressed a hand to my throat as the urge to hurl increased. He had sought out a witch, and forced her to carry his child. My brain refused to process the thought, to accept that someone was capable of such a vulgar action. I knew without asking that his request had come at a steep price, but couldn't hold myself back as I asked.

“What did you pay?” I asked, my voice weak.

“As you've already figured out, the higher the request, the steeper the price.” He smiled grimly, “I

paid ten years of my life. After the witch was with child, I fell asleep for the next ten years. In that time, the witch used what remaining power she had and escaped my men. Ten years later, I sought out the child she had stolen from me. I perfected my plans, gathered my recourses until I could finally come for you.”

“You know why I’m here.” I stammered, forcing the words from my lips as I struggled not to think about what he had done to the poor witch. “I’ll do whatever you need, just let Breyona and Giovanni go.”

“I am a man of my word.” He nodded, “Despite the fact that Giovanni was one of my best men, I will let them go. I’m sure you wish to see proof of that before moving forward.”

“I do, I want to know that their still alive.” I nodded, leaning forward in my seat.

“Very well, but I must take measures of my own to ensure your compliance.” He replied, his eyes flashing with deadly intention. “There is nothing stopping you from betraying me once your companions have been released.”

“Tristan, you may proceed.” My Father nodded, his eyes never once straying from my own.

I knew what was coming next, as Tristan had warned me before taking me to my Father. I watched as Tristan stepped forward, and shuddered as he slid into my mind. I could feel him trail his fingers down the shield I had around my mind, the steel door that kept him barred from my innermost thoughts and feelings. The door shuddered and shook as I wrenched it open, allowing Tristan access into my mind.

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Tristan had told me what to expect when my Father finally called. My Father had a back-up plan, one where he would not need me. It was in my best interest to prove useful to him, to show that I was willing to do anything for Breyona and Giovanni’s freedom. I believed Tristan when he told me the only way my Father would allow their freedom, was for Tristan to infiltrate my mind.

My Father did not know that I had long ago learned to shield myself. In those few minutes I had with Tristan, he taught me how to carve out a small piece of my mind for him. I would be able to keep my wits, my thoughts, and my self-control. The hardest part would be pretending that Tristan had

control of my mind, that he was able to make me compliant. I had no time to practice, and unfortunately had to place my trust in Tristan.

I wrenched open the door that blocked my innermost thoughts, carving out a small section for Tristan. After a dull headache began prickling along my forehead, I was confident Tristan could venture in my mind no further. My Father sat silently, watching Tristan and I with an unwavering gaze.

‘It’s your turn.’ Tristan’s voice echoed in my mind, ‘Play your part well, or we’ll all be doomed.’

I didn’t have the time to mull over what my Father had said, or the fact that my Grandma had kept this from me. The sting of betrayal was brief, as I had more important things to focus on. My sister—half-sister, stood at the other side of the room, her chestnut eyes on me, her lips parted with words that would not form.

For a split second, I wondered what her life had been like. Our Father was subdued for ten years, his payment for her creation. She must’ve lived a normal life until then, until he snatched her from her home in an attempt to turn her into a monster. It was a risk—one I prayed would pay off, but I couldn’t leave her behind. She had spent far more time with our Father than I had, and I wondered how grievously she suffered. No matter what happened, I’d find a way to take her with us.

I wiped the emotion from my face, and let the light fade from my eyes. I turned to face my Father slowly, almost lethargically. I remembered how it felt to have Tristan in my head, how it almost felt like I was being drugged. I let my eyes glaze over as I gazed at my Father, and waited until he finally spoke.

“Did she fight you?” My Father asked Tristan, his bright eyes interested and calculating.

“She did, my Lord.” Tristan nodded, “The Witch who helped raise her, tried to teach her how to shield her mind. Her shields are weak, I’ve broken through them before.”

“Good.” My Father nodded, completely unaware that Tristan had betrayed him. “I assume she would like to ensure her companions safety.”

“She would.” Tristan nodded.

“Lead her to the dungeons, keep her under tight control.” My Father nodded, his eyes flickering back to the fire. “When you release the traitor and his mate, make sure to blind-fold them. I won’t have our location getting back to the she-wolf’s pack. Regardless, they are on borrowed time. We’ll let them have these next few days before we wipe them off the map.”

“Yes, my Lord.” Tristan nodded, heading to the door.

I stood from the couch slowly, keeping my posture relaxed and my gait slow. I remembered how it felt when Tristan entered my mind at the club, how all of the important details in my life faded into the background, how nothing truly mattered. If Tristan were truly in my mind, I wouldn’t have any idea where I was, or who I had been talking to.

I followed Tristan down the hall, keeping my glazed eyes ahead. I never once let my eyes stray to the guards, or the Vampire’s that lingered the corridors and rooms. Tristan led me downstairs and towards the back of the warehouse, where a thick metal door sat in the concrete wall. He slid the door open, and I kept my gaze uninterested as the screech of metal filled the warehouse.

We walked into what looked like an old maintenance closet. Brooms, mops, and shelves of cleaner sat along the walls. Towards the back of the room, a cement staircase descended into the floor. Flickering fluorescent lights lit the staircase, and I followed closely behind Tristan as we traveled down into the earth.

The tunnel we turned into was not one made of earth, as the walls and floor were the same cement

material as the rest of the warehouse. It was just another testament to how long the Vampire's had been living here, and how long they had spent remodeling the place.

I fought the urge to squint as we turned down a hall where the fluorescent lights had begun to flicker and fade, trying my best not to stumble over my own feet. With Maya suppressed by the silver cuffs around my wrists, I had only my human senses to rely on. Even with those dulled senses, I could smell the odor of blood and human filth. I clenched my teeth together, fighting the urge to gag as we turned into a room full of cells.

It was Breyona I noticed first. Her shoulder length hair was sticking up in matted tufts, her make-up smeared down her cheeks. The clothes she had worn were caked with dirt. In the same cell, sat Giovanni. Dark circles sat under his eyes, his cheekbones more prominent, and his skin a sickly shade of white. I wondered if they had been feeding them down here, and if they had given Giovanni any blood. The flash of burning hunger in his eyes told me what I needed to know, that whatever they had been feeding him, it wasn't enough.

I fought the urge to physically recoil as I realized why they had put Breyona and Giovanni in the same cell. It wasn't out of the kindness of their hearts. They knew Giovanni would be overwhelmed with hunger, and wanted to see if their mate-bond could withstand his need for blood. From the looks of it, Giovanni hadn't fed from Breyona.

As Breyona saw me, she leapt to the front of her cell, her hands wrapped around the silver bars. I could hear the stinging of her flesh as she gripped the metal, but her eyes burned with such a ferocious helplessness that I couldn't help but want to console her. Instead, I had to remain calm-uninterested as my best-friend pleaded with her eyes.

Two guards stood at the end of the cell room, and another two were situated at the entrance. I kept my eyes away from the guards, letting them roam lazily.

"Lola?" Breyona gasped, her voice rough and hoarse. "Lola, what are you doing here? You can't be here, they're using you. They're using us to get to you!"

The hardest part of all of this was not looking Breyona in the eyes, pretending she didn't exist, that she held no importance. I wanted to throw myself to the floor, to fight with every last breath until she was freed from her cell. I let my eyes pass over her face, glazed and uninterested.

"I'm afraid you're wasting your breath, she-wolf." Tristan sighed, though he didn't look too unhappy over the fact. "She can't hear you, not truly."

Breyona turned her gaze on Tristan, practically spitting fire as she snarled at him. Giovanni did not follow Breyona's gaze, his eyes were locked directly on me.

"You got inside her head." Breyona growled, "Another pathetic attempt to get into her pants, and get yourself a higher position."

"My position is secure, but do enjoy your freedom." Tristan sneered, "While it lasts."

'Will he actually let them go?' I called out in my mind, pinpointing Tristan's presence as it lingered in the space I had carved out for him.

'Yes. Despite everything else, he is a man of his word.' Tristan grunted, 'They'll be unconscious and blind-folded, but he will release them.'

'Good.' I replied, my voice shaky.

Tristan turned to leave, and I followed behind him. Just as we were leaving, I locked eyes with Giovanni. I tried to convey the words I needed to say through my eyes, and desperately hoped he would understand. I could tell from one look, Giovanni saw right through my ruse, and that he knew I was very aware of my surroundings. He moved his head, the smallest of movements, but I knew he understood.

Only when Tristan brought me back to my room and shut the door behind us, did I let out a long breath. My shoulders sagged and for a moment, I felt a crushing weight lift from my shoulders. Giovanni knew, that could prove useful. Undoubtedly, Breyona would want to stay behind, to rescue me herself. Giovanni would be able to placate her, to convince her to return to Asher.

"You sounded believable back there." I told Tristan, unease dancing around my stomach.

I still couldn't figure Tristan out. I replayed the different scenarios and endings in my mind, never once discerning what angle Tristan was playing. He hadn't once attempted to take advantage of me during my stay here, though I wouldn't put anything past him. If anything, he was proving helpful. He had openly betrayed his King by not taking control of my mind, by having us pretend. For now, we had the upper hand.

"We all have our part to play, Lola." Tristan smiled grimly, "I'm simply playing mine."

"And what part is that?" I called out just as Tristan turned to leave. "You're helping me by lying to my Father. Whose side are you on?"

"I'm on the side where neither of our species is eradicated." Tristan grimaced, "As it stands, Vampires have the upper hand."

"That's also why I'm here. I want to give my pack the upper hand." I countered, "There's only one way to stop this war, and that's to kill my Father. I could end all of this right now if I were able to get to him."

"Kill him, in his own home?" Tristan scoffed, "You'll be dead before you get the chance. There's two ways you can go about this, use magic to end his life, or wait until you're on the battlefield."

"I don't know any magic, and I don't have the time to learn." I shook my head.

There was no way I would be mentioning my upcoming heat to Tristan, but even without my heat, there was no chance my Father would postpone his war plans so that I might teach myself magic.

"Then I assume you better come up with a plan." Tristan murmured, "I'll be back tomorrow, try and get some rest until then."

The door shut behind Tristan with a dull thud, leaving me to my looming thoughts. I already had a plan. Figure out when the Vampire's planned to attack, discern the location of this warehouse, and

get the information back to Asher. He could come up with a small team to help rescue me—and my half-sister, while also preparing for the upcoming battle. I could only hope Asher would have enough time to evacuate the town, assuming I learned of when my Father planned to attack.

After sleeping a total of two hours last night, I woke to the sound of my door opening. My heart stilled in my chest as my half-sister walked in. Even with sleep clouding my eyes, I loosened my posture and tried to appear oblivious to my surroundings. Her dark hair was shorter than mine, grazing her shoulders, but everything about her face looked familiar—except for those dark eyes, brimming with silent intelligence.

“You don’t have to pretend.” She shook her head, her voice small and delicate. “I know he’s not in your mind.”

“How did you know?” I asked, my voice flat and tinged with suspicion.

“I just know.” She shrugged, picking at her fingers as she watched me from across the room. “Father says my powers should be manifesting, but I’ve never seen any proof of that.”

“And did you tell him?” I grimaced, “Did you tell him I was faking it?”

“No, I didn’t.” Her tone was soft, her eyes guarded. She walked over to the side of my bed, cautious as though I might attack her. She perched herself on the edge, her spine ridged and straight. Her voice dipped into a low whisper, “Are you planning to leave here? To escape?”

“What would make you think that?” I asked, fighting to keep my voice even. “I came here of my own free will.”

Not that I would tell her, but I planned on taking her away from here as soon as I could. I didn’t care if she were kicking and screaming, I would get her far away from our Father. He would do nothing but turn her into a monster, and use her for his own gain. She had a life before this, before he swept in and took her.

“Take me with you.” She whispered, “Get me out of this place. I can help. I know where all of the guards are stationed. Once Father attacks your pack, the warehouse will be vulnerable. There will only be enough guards here to keep an eye on the two of us. Father is going to join the battle; he wants to kill the Alpha himself.”

I tried not to flinch at the thought of Asher dying at the hands of my Father, and tried even harder not to think of him. Every time I thought of Asher, I felt this crippling pain in my chest. I didn't know it was possible to miss someone with every fiber of your being, to be willing to burn the world down just for a glimpse at them.

“Do you know when he's planning to attack?” I whispered; another wave of unease settled in my stomach as I placed more trust than I wanted in this girl I had never met before.

“I don't.” She frowned, “He doesn't tell me things, he doesn't trust me. Any number of the Vampire's in here will know, the problem is getting them to tell you.”

She tilted her head towards the door, as though she heard something interesting, and quickly stood from my bed.

“What's your name?” I asked as she walked over to the door, “I'm Lola.”

“Holly.” She murmured, closing my bedroom door behind her.

A mixture of Vampire and Witch, my half-sister was much like me, though she didn't have the loyalty and strength of an entire pack standing behind her. I wanted to trust her, I wanted to believe that I wasn't alone in this, but I had to remain cautious. Whether I could trust her or not changed nothing. She was family, and she would not be left behind.

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Tristan had stopped by later on in the day, and I set my plan in motion. I was becoming impatient, each passing day increased my anxiety. The silver bands around my wrist kept me separate from Asher, though I didn't have enough information to give him at the moment. Worst case scenario, I'd use the shadows to contact him, but I needed to find out the location of the warehouse and when the Vampire's planned to attack.

I nearly ambushed Tristan as he came into my room, asking–begging him to give me any information he could. I could see the indecision in his eyes, and nearly screamed as he stormed from my room. The next few days went that way, me begging Tristan for his help, only for him to storm out. Each time, I could see the indecision burning in his eyes. I wasn't sure I could ever truly trust Tristan, but it was clear he wasn't sure which side he was on.

Four days later, I was nearly at my wits end. I hadn't heard from Holly or my Father, making me increasingly worried. Tristan came into my room as he often had, a tray of food in his hands. I snatched the glass of blood from the tray first, downing it before I took a deep, ragged breath. The blood rushed through my veins, making my head feel floaty and my body tingle. The blood always sent a surge of energy through me, though I was still powerless with the silver cuffs on my wrist. I had to give it to my Father, even under the impression my mind was controlled, he was still paranoid.

“Don't start this again.” Tristan grunted as I pleaded with him for the fourth time.

“Tristan, if Asher doesn't get this information, it's over.” I sighed, rubbing a hand over my face. Even in this large suite, I was a prisoner. “What do you think will happen then? He'll attack, and the pack will be overwhelmed. I can see it in your eyes Tristan, you don't want this war. So, help me. Help me stop it.”

“Let's say I help you and your Alpha wins; my people would suffer.” Tristan snapped, his ocean eyes narrowing into little slits. “Countless Vampire's would be killed. Don't think I haven't heard about Alpha Bran. He would single handedly fight for the slaughter of my kind–of our kind.”

“I don't want that any more than you do.” I shook my head. I had too much time to think things over. If Tristan and Giovanni were both questioning the morals of my Father's plan, then how many others were thinking the same? Vampires weren't inherently evil, just as werewolves weren't. They all deserved a place in this new world, one where peace was an attainable goal. “Countless will die either way, that's war.”

“Then what is it you want, Lola?” Tristan asked, he sounded confused and exhausted. “What is the outcome you’re looking for?”

“I want our species to get along, to stop trying to kill one another.” I hissed, “I want peace. I want Vampire’s and Werewolves to wake up in the morning, not fearing for their life.”

“I want the same, Lola.” Tristan murmured; his eyes thoughtful.

“Then help me.” I pleaded, forcing all the emotion I held into my words. I channeled my desperation, the overwhelming desire to see my mate again, and the need I felt towards protecting my younger sister. “Help me get this information to Asher.”

“You need to promise me something, Lola.” Tristan spoke lowly. “Promise me, you’ll always have the best interests for Vampire’s in mind. You’re not just a Werewolf, you need to remember that.”

“I promise.” I swallowed, unable to shake the feeling that my words were binding. “I want what’s best for both of our species.”

Tristan approached me, his eyes darkening as they met my own. The knot that had been growing in my stomach twisted painfully, and I resisted the urge to flinch away from him. Standing this close to him, it felt too personal and just wrong. The looming threat of my heat was dangling over my head. I had been here for a week already, but had not yet felt the signs of my heat coming on. My patience and courage were running thin, I needed a way out and I needed it now.

Tristan leaned down, his lips hovering over my ear. I clenched my teeth together as his breath fanned across my cheek, silently wishing it were Asher who stood this close to me. His words were low, and I strained to hear them clearly.

“He plans to attack your pack tomorrow night. Your Father and his troops will be leaving out at sunset, tomorrow. The main group will attack from the North, your Father and another team will venture in from the West and head North.” Tristan whispered, “He will leave you and Holly here. He doesn’t need you until after your Alpha’s pack has been demolished. You’re at an abandoned warehouse in Screven, South Carolina. The warehouse is just off Morgan Street. Tell your Alpha to prepare himself, that war is coming.”

The sound of metal clattering to the ground rang out throughout the room. My head snapped down in time to notice the silver cuffs falling from my wrists, the padlock securing them unlocked. As I lifted my head to meet Tristan’s eyes, he had already left the room, closing the door behind him.

I rubbed at my raw wrists and clamored into the bathroom. I let out a painful hiss as I ran the tap water over my skin. Wounds from silver could heal much slower, but all I had was a raw, painful rash. I couldn’t still my frantic heartbeat as I thought of Asher, and how in just a few short hours, I would finally be able to speak with him again.

I hid the silver shackles under the bed, curling under the covers as I searched for Asher with my mind. At some point I had drifted off, succumbing to the darkness.

‘Lola?’ A voice drifted through my head, seductive and deep. The voice called out to my soul, yanking me from my sleep with a rough hand. ‘Lola, are you there?’

The thick voice of the male was growing stronger, more frantic as he called out to me. My eyes snapped open, awareness flooding into my eyes as Asher’s voice called out in my mind. For a moment, I sat on the bed grinning like an idiot. This was the most comfort I’ve had all week, and I had truly underestimated how much I missed Asher’s voice.

‘Lola?’ Asher hissed; his voice laced with frightened venom. ‘This is the first connection I’ve been able to make with you all week. Answer me!’

‘Asher.’ I exhaled a ragged breath, fighting the pain that darted behind my eyes. Tears stained my vision, and pain ran through my chest as I listened to his voice.

‘Goddess, Lola.’ Asher groaned, ‘Don’t f\*\*king scare me like that! I haven’t heard from you all week.’

What happened?’

‘Silver cuffs—they put silver cuffs on me.’ I choked out. I closed my eyes and took a few steady breaths, calming my nerves so that I could give Asher a rundown of everything that happened. ‘There’s so much I need to tell you, but I don’t have much time.’

I didn’t have a clue when Tristan would come back, or when these cuffs would need to return to my wrists. I didn’t want to tell Asher about the other side of my heritage over the mind-link. I wanted to look into the depths of his dark eyes as I told him what I was, what kind of monster my Father wanted me to become.

‘Breyona and Giovanni made it back.’ Asher responded, and I left out a choked sob. My Father had been good on his word, the thought sent crippling relief rushing through me.

‘Listen closely.’ I hissed, unable to bask in the joy of my mate’s voice, the feeling of him through our mate-bond. ‘My Father plans on attacking tomorrow night. Half of his men will come from the North, the other will come from the West and try to ambush you. You need to start evacuating people, Asher. Now.’

‘Consider it done.’ Asher replied, and I could feel his dread through the mate-bond. He wanted this war as much as I did—not at all. This war was a necessity. This pack—our entire species was being threatened. There was only one way to eradicate a threat like this. To cut the head off the source—my Father. ‘Where are you, Lola? You can’t stay there any longer. I need you here, baby. I need you to come home.’

‘I miss you so much.’ I whispered, feeling a featherlight caress through the mate-bond. ‘I’m at an abandoned Macy’s Warehouse in Screven, South Carolina. Just off Morgan street.’

‘I’ll come for you, Lola.’ Asher murmured, ‘When I find you, you’re never leaving my sight. You know that, right?’

‘After all of this, you won’t be able to shake me.’ I chuckled, but quickly turned serious. ‘Asher, I don’t have time to explain the details, but I have someone else here we need to rescue. My half-sister, I can’t leave her behind. You know you can’t come here, right? You need to stay with the

pack, lead them—be their Alpha.’

‘Lola, you’re not keeping me away from you. Not again.’ Asher snarled, but I could hear the hesitation in his words.

He knew I was right, but neither of us wanted to admit it. I wanted him here, more than anything—but the pack came first. They needed their leader, they needed Asher to instill courage, hope and motivation within them. Asher was the glue that held this pack together, and right now, they needed him more than I did.

‘Asher, we’ll see each other again. I promise.’ I murmured softly, ‘Our pack needs you. What kind of Luna would I be if I put my needs before the pack?’

The link between us went silent for a few moments, then Asher finally replied.

‘Alright.’ Asher sighed; his voice heavy. ‘I’ll send a group to come and get you both. It’s going to take a couple hours; I can’t let my men walk in there blind. I’ll pull up the blueprints and scout out every exit, and guard locations. By tonight, you’ll be in my arms.’

‘My sister—Holly, she said that once our Father leaves with his men, that the warehouse will have little guards. Their leaving at sunset tomorrow. That’s our best window, and will cause the least amount of damage. They have me locked in a room, I’m on the Eastern side of the warehouse, on the second floor.’

‘If you can, try and get your sister in the same room when the time comes.’ Asher replied, ‘It’ll be easier to get the two of you out without having to scour the warehouse.’

‘I’ll do what I can. I love you Asher, so much.’ I exhaled, sending the rush of emotion through the mate-bond. As my hearing increased, and I heard the heavy steps of someone walking down the hall, I called out to Asher. ‘I have to go, someone’s coming.’

Just as I dove under the bed and emerged with the silver cuffs, my bedroom door opened and

Tristan stepped inside. His eyes were still haunted, torn between what he believed and what his King expected of him. Tristan was still insufferable, but I had learned more about him than I ever thought possible. I didn't fool myself into thinking I earned Tristan's loyalty, but he had helped me where no one else would.

"If I had been anyone else, you'd be monumentally screwed right now." Tristan glared at me, his eyes flickering down to the cuffs in my hands.

"Well, I guess I got lucky." I huffed, "Do I need to put these back on?"

"You do." Tristan nodded stiffly, "Your Father requests your presence for dinner."

"Dinner?" I grimaced, "I thought Vampire's didn't eat human food."

"They don't." Tristan spoke darkly, "He wants to make sure you're still under my control before he leaves. I'm not sure how, but he's going to test you, Lola. Whatever you do, don't break."

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My stomach was in knots the entire walk down stairs and into the massive dining room. All traces of the usual warehouse appearance had been wiped away. While the outside of the warehouse looked run-down and desolate, the inside was completely remodeled.

A long table sat in the center of the room, a couple of clear vases with blood-red roses sat on top. I kept my eyes forward, letting them glaze over as I ignored my surroundings. The silver cuffs were back on my wrist, cutting me off from my wolf and my pack. I noticed my Father at the head of the table, with Holly sitting off to the side. Her eyes held just a flicker of fear within them as she noticed my presence. I pretended not to see her, pretended not to care.

Tristan pulled back a chair for me, and I sat almost robotically. I could feel my Father's eyes on me, narrow and assessing. If he had any suspicions, he didn't voice them. Tristan pulled out a chair across from me, sitting down beside Holly. I kept my eyes straight ahead, focusing on an oil painting that hung on the wall.

“Has she been fighting your control?” My Father asked, turning to look at Tristan.

“She did at first, but I expected as much.” Tristan nodded, playing the part of the dutiful soldier well. Part of me wanted to let out a dark laugh. My Father had clearly been furious at Giovanni’s betrayal, but had no inkling that another traitor sat in his midst. “Since the traitor and his bitch were let go, she’s calmed down quite a bit.”

“Very good.” My Father nodded, his eyes drifting over to me. I resisted the urge to stiffen as I wondered if he planned on testing me. I felt as though I were playing the part well, but I had no idea if my Father could see through my act. “She will soon learn it is all but pointless to stand against me. That in time, I will win. The sooner she cuts those pesky ties to her pack, the better.”

I could feel my anger spike, but regained control before my sporadic heartrate gave me away. While I pretended to be under Tristan’s complete control, my Father knew I could still hear everything around me. Tristan had entered my mind multiple times, each time seeking to gain a foothold, but always failed. I could only wonder what it would have felt like if he truly managed to latch himself onto my mind, embedding himself in my thoughts. How would it feel to lose all control, to be forced to sit and listen to my surroundings, unable to do anything?

“It seems with Lola completely under your control, I have no need for my other daughter.” My Father shrugged, as though this were just a normal occurrence. My Father’s cold eyes were on me the entire time, gauging my reaction as his words settled in my ears. “Dispose of her for me, Tristan. Make it slow.”

“Yes, my Lord.” Tristan murmured, and in a flash, he was out of his chair.

His movements were a blur, and when I blinked, he was standing. Tristan held Holly in front of him, her mouth gaping as his hands gripped her slender neck. I could see her pleading with me, her eyes wide and full of terror. Pain echoed within me as I fought the urge to leap from my own seat.

He wouldn't actually kill her, I tried to tell myself. She's his daughter, I repeated like a mantra. I knew my Father held no qualms with killing the two of us. He would do so once we lost our use, wanting nothing but our power and our ability to take the throne.

With all the strength I had inside of me, I kept my head straight, my eyes blank. My hands were relaxed as they sat on my lap, my breaths slow and even. Holly visibly trembled from the corner of my eye, shaking as Tristan's hands gripped her neck.

"Lola, please." Holly whimpered, but the sound was quickly cut off as Tristan squeezed her throat.

"Continue." My Father nodded, never once taking his eyes off my face.

Holly's whimpers turned into a low croak, and I watched as her eyes began to widen and bulge. My control was slipping with each passing second, with each garbled gasp for oxygen that would never come. Just as I began to break, and my fingers started to twitch, my Father turned his eyes back to Tristan.

"Good, that'll be enough." My Father nodded, never once glancing at his other daughter, the one who desperately gasped for air.

'You did good.' Tristan's voice drifted through my mind.

I wanted to respond, I really did, but I was shaken to my core. I couldn't ignore the hurt look Holly gave me, nor could I ignore how I almost watched my half-sister die. Our Father held no remorse, no sympathy for his wheezing daughter. As though this were a normal occurrence, Holly sat back down in her seat, her eyes down on her lap.

A few moments later, a silver cart rolled into the room. One of my Father's servants placed a plate in front of me, along with a tall glass of blood. I had grown used to the taste of blood, had come to

anticipate it with every meal. Blood had become more fulfilling than food, sending a surge of strength and bliss through my veins. A thick steak sat in the center of my plate, along with some steamed broccoli and mashed potatoes. The scent of the food wasn't nearly as appealing as the blood. Neither my Father nor Tristan had a plate in front of them, only a tall glass of blood. Just as my Father lifted the glass to his lips, Holly began cutting into her steak. I followed suit, lifting my own glass as robotically as I could. The blood washed down my throat, chasing away the lingering fear I had felt as I watched Tristan choke Holly. My muscles relaxed, my brain clearing as the blood coursed through me. After I drained the glass, I moved onto my steak. I cut the piece of meat into little cubes, all whilst keeping my eyes glazed and uninterested. The steak tasted like ash in my mouth, as did the rest of the food.

Dinner finished shortly after, and Tristan escorted me back into my bedroom. He lingered in my room for a few moments, making sure no one had followed us. His lips were turned down in a frown, his eyebrows pressed together in irritation.

"Did you enjoy nearly killing Holly?" I laughed dryly, "How you can pretend to be so loyal is beyond me."

"We both played our parts well tonight." Tristan replied, his tone hard and cold. "That girl deserves better. She's been through far more than you. If you don't remember, your Father took her from her home months ago. She's endured him much longer than you have. I'm not a good person, I never claimed to be—but I am nothing like your Father."

As Tristan turned to leave my room, and errant thought crossed my mind. Tristan had become an unlikely, and somewhat unwanted, ally. I wouldn't have the information I did without him. I needed to know where he would go after this, what he would do.

"Where will you go after this?" I asked, my voice low. "I'm sure you have no intention on sticking around after Asher gets me and Holly out of this place."

"What will I do?" Tristan murmured thoughtfully, "I have no idea, Lola. That's been the question all along."

"Come with us." I suggested, flinching at the tone of my voice. I still felt the lingering effects of his mark, but I no longer held any romantic feelings towards him. Asher's mark had all but scorched the

emotions from me, only leaving room for him. Regardless, it wouldn't hurt to have another ally on our side. Tristan was clearly my Father's right-hand man. With everything he knew at our disposal, we had a much better chance at winning this war.

"Come with you?" Tristan scoffed, "I'd be executed the minute I stepped foot in your pack. If your precious mate wouldn't do it, then Alpha Bran would."

"I wouldn't let that happen." My answer was immediate, and I felt the weight of my words as I spoke them. I would never leave Asher for Tristan, but if he truly wanted to change sides, I would give him the safety to do so. Asher would be rightfully pissed, but I'm sure Tristan already knew that much. "I'd make sure of that."

"You would vogue for me, even against your own Alpha?" Tristan quipped, one of his blonde eyebrows raised. "Even after all I've done?"

"If you help us, if you leave my Father behind and change sides, then yes." I nodded, "After all you've done, Asher will be pissed, but I know he'll understand."

"I'll think about it." Tristan replied, catching me by surprise. I half expected him to deny the offer outright, but I found myself glad he was thinking it over. In a strange way, we made a good team. Even though it was hard to look past all the bullsh\*t he put me through.

"One last thing." I called out just as Tristan turned away. "Could you find a way to bring Holly to my room tomorrow? It'll be easier to escape if she's already with me."

"I will make sure she's here tomorrow." Tristan nodded, "I won't apologize for the things I've done, but I will admit, you continue to surprise me."

"Thank you, Tristan. I'm far from actually trusting you, but you've helped me more than I care to admit. If you want to change sides, come to my room tomorrow." I replied, "You can leave with us. As long as you don't betray my trust, no one will harm you."

“Spoken like a true Luna.” Tristan smirked, closing my door behind him.

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I got absolutely no sleep that night. My mind refused to shut off, especially now that I knew I might see Asher again. I picked at the silver cuffs on my wrists, wishing Tristan had removed them before he left. I needed to talk to Asher again, to hear his voice so that it might wash the anxiety from my mind.

I lingered in the void between sleep and awareness, tossing and turning on the plush bed. The bed was comfortable, but even the softest of material couldn't fix the unease churning in my gut.

The morning rolled around all too soon, bringing on the hardest part of the day. I had nothing but time, and nothing to do but wait until Asher's group had come to the warehouse. My Father and his troops would be leaving out at sunset, leaving the best opening for Asher's men to get in and out without a huge battle.

After hours of lying in bed, lost in my worried thoughts, a knock sounded on my door. Only, it wasn't Tristan who stepped inside. I assumed he belonged to my Father, though he couldn't have been more than a few years older than me. His chestnut hair was short and messy, a few strands falling in his face as he held a silver tray in his hands. I let my eyes glaze over as I sat up on the bed, ignoring the presence of the man who stepped into my room.

“Eat.” He grunted; his voice coated in a thick accent.

The name-less goon sat the tray on my bed, and I moved stiffly towards the glass of blood. Taking my time to finish the food on my tray, I watched withheld breath as the man left. It was usually Tristan who brought me my food each day. The switch up had my chest pounding. Too much could go wrong in the short amount of time it would take Asher's men to get to the warehouse.

Tristan could have been caught; his secrets revealed to my Father. For all I knew, he could be sitting in a cell somewhere—or worse, dead. He could have easily changed his mind, resorting to spilling the truth to my Father in an attempt to bargain his life.

Hours passed with no message, no visit from Tristan or anyone else. By the time I heard footsteps thundering down the hall, I was ready to pull my hair out. I leapt from the bed at the sound, flinching when my bedroom door swung open with a loud slam. The name-less man who had brought my food was standing in the doorway, a look of surprise on his face as he stared into my eyes. My stomach dropped as I realized I had let my guard down, and that this man knew I wasn't under Tristan's influence.

His hands were braced on the door frame, and I watched as his mouth flopped open. Instead of words, a strangled gasp left his lips. His body fell forward, thudding to the floor. My eyes snapped forward as I spotted a familiar face down the hall.

Mason stood at the end of the hall; his arm stretched out as if he had just thrown something. I glanced down at the knife sticking out of the man's back and figured Mason had killed him. Mason, Sean, and four other men charged down the hall and into my bedroom, dragging the dead Vampire inside.

I was swept into a familiar pair of arms and breathed in the scent of my brother, the knot in my stomach finally beginning to unravel. Sean had an incredulous look on his face as he glared down at me.

"You're absolutely insane, you know that right?" Sean scoffed, giving me a quick squeeze before setting me on my feet. "Luna or not, Dad's going to f\*\*king kill you. You'd be lucky if he doesn't ground you for the rest of your life."

"It was the best option at the time." I shrugged, breathless from the joy of seeing my brother and friend again.

"Best option?" Sean snorted, "We can continue this conversation when we're not minutes away from being killed."

"It's good to see you, Lola." Mason murmured, pulling me in for a quick hug. "Breyona's doing alright. She's pretty pissed at you, though."

"She'll live." I chuckled.

I walked over to the dead man and dug through his pockets, letting out a sigh of relief as I picked up a small, metal key. The key fit perfectly in the silver cuffs that irritated my wrists, and I smiled as the blistered skin already began healing.

"Agreed." Mason nodded, his eyes hardening as he looked over at Sean. "Let's get out of here."

"Wait—" I called out, just as Sean opened my bedroom door. "We have to find my sister."

The words were stuck in my throat as Tristan and Holly turned down the corner at the end of the hall. Holly had an arm around Tristan's shoulders, who supported her weight as he dragged her down the hall. Holly's face was pale, and she was sporting a nasty gash on her forehead. I wasn't sure about the healing rates of Vampire's, but we didn't have time to search for a spare pint of blood. Mason let out a rough snarl at the sight of Tristan. I grabbed Mason's shoulder and propelled myself forward, putting myself in between my friends and my new allies.

"Don't hurt them." I shook my head, turning my attention to Tristan and Holly. "Is she alright?"

"She'll heal." Tristan grunted, "Slowly, but it'll speed up once she gets some blood in her system. I would've come sooner, but we were held up."

"Breyona said he had gotten inside her head." Mason murmured to Sean, who flashed me an uneasy glance.

"He's not in my head, and were wasting time!" I snapped, "Whether you believe it or not, Tristan is

the reason Asher has the information he needs. Now, we either need to leave, or all of us can become prisoners once my Father comes back. As much as I loved staying here, I want to go home.”

It took Sean all of two seconds to see the truth in my eyes. He gave me a sharp nod and motioned for us to follow him into the hallway. Mason stopped Sean halfway, the muscles in his jaw working as he glanced at me.

“We can’t take him with us.” Mason growled under his breath, “He got in her head before, he could be pulling her strings now.”

Sean gave me a long look, seeing the impatient fire burning in my eyes. “She’s our Luna, and my sister. I trust her word, and you should probably do the same.”

We ran down the hallway and met up with Tristan, who was currently returning Mason’s deep glare. Sean and Mason took the lead with another of Asher’s men, while three remained behind Tristan, Holly and I. I slipped Holly’s other arm over my shoulder and supported the rest of her weight. Tristan and I were all but dragging her down the hall, stepping over unconscious or dead men. I wasn’t sure which were Luna Freya’s men and which were my Fathers, but it didn’t matter at the moment.

“Brittany–” I huffed, glancing over at Tristan’s hardened face. “She was in on this, wasn’t she?”

“Your Father promised her your Alpha’s land once his pack had been disposed of. She was smart for leaving Tyler behind. Her Mother’s men followed her word and arrived just a week ago.” Tristan grunted.

“Looks like you decided to come with us.” I noted, watching as Mason and Sean disabled another guard.

“I’m trusting you, Lola.” Tristan’s eyes darkened as they met my own. “I’m trusting you not to get me killed. Besides, Holly is in no shape to escape without help.”

"I'm trusting you too, y'know." I pointed out, "Don't make me regret this."

"I all but sealed my fate when I gave you that information." Tristan grunted, "Your Father would have found out eventually. My family will disown me, wipe any trace of my existence from our history."

I never bothered thinking about how all of this might affect Tristan. Not once had I considered he had a family of his own. The thought made me feel somewhat guilty, but Tristan was an adult, he was perfectly capable of making his own decisions.

"Your family?" I questioned.

"I do have a family, Lola." Tristan chuckled dryly, "Old and wealthy, stuck in the old ways as most Vampires are. My little sister, she has no clue what's going on. They've kept her sheltered for years."

"That's horrible." I frowned, "Why would they do that?"

"Let's make it through this, and maybe I'll tell you." Tristan's smile was brittle and somewhat rueful.

We made it downstairs, and into the parking lot before I managed to take a deep breath. The sun had dipped behind the clouds, and I squinted against the brief remainder of light. I hadn't been outside since arriving here, and missed the crisp breeze and the scent of nature. I looked around at the parking lot, noting how few cars remained. Sean shot me a brief look, the corners of his lips twitching as he looked over each car.

"We disabled the cars." Sean commented, "If they're going to follow us, they'll have to do it on foot."

We hid behind cars, keeping out of sight as we drew closer and closer to a blacked-out van. Sean slid the side door open and Tristan and I carefully placed Holly in one of the seats. I climbed in beside her, followed by Tristan. Sean and Mason took the front seats, while the remaining men situated themselves in the back. As soon as Sean sat down in the driver's seat, the engine was roaring to life. The wheels screeched against the pavement as we peeled away, my heart hammering in time with

the thud of the gravel road.

'Lola! Lola, are you there?' Asher's frantic voice filled my mind, sounding somewhat choppy, like we had bad service. 'I can feel you. The bond—it's faint, but I can feel it.'

The skin around my wrists had healed, sped up from the blood I had earlier in the day. The skin around my hands was still red and sore, but was no longer blistered and burnt. Even with my wolf still asleep, I could feel the beginnings of the tether that bonded me to Asher.

'I'm here! Asher, I'm here!' I called out, frantically searching for him in the darkness of my mind. 'Did something happen? What's wrong?'

'Everyone was evacuated safely.' Asher huffed, 'Wherever you got your information from, they were right. Your Father's men came from the North, the rest are moving through town, trying to ambush us. They're here, Lola. The war is starting.'

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Asher's voice faded in and out of the mind-link, undoubtedly because he had joined the fight. I could hear the anger and exhilaration in his voice, and my heartrate skyrocketed as anxiety took hold. My skin flushed a bright shade of red, and I slipped my jacket off as I fidgeted. Each mile felt like hours, and by the time the mile marker for our town appeared, I was nearing explosion.

Sean talked over our plan on the way home, but I had zoned out for most of the conversation. While I was physically seated in a moving vehicle, I was with Asher the entire time. Our bond burned brightly within me, reminding me that he was still alive—still safe, for now.

Sean pulled over at a small gas station on the outskirts of town. The lights in the little cube-shaped building were off, and not a single person was in sight. This gas station was technically off of Asher's territory, but it was close enough to need evacuation. I flashed Tristan a grateful glance as I looked at the deserted store.

While the rest of Asher's men, Sean, Mason, and I headed into battle, Tristan would get Holly to safety. It was a last-minute idea, but I plugged the address to Breyona's late Aunt's house into the GPS. Breyona had once been visiting Giovanni there, and it seemed fitting to use the house again. I passed the keys to Tristan with a hard look in my eyes. I was trusting him, more than I ever wanted

to. First, I trusted him with my life, and now, my half-sisters. Even though I hardly knew the girl, I knew she deserved better than this life.

Tristan peeled off down the road, with a pale looking Holly in the passenger seat. Sean had reminded him to stay away from the main roads, and to avoid the werewolves at any cost. The rest of us slipped into the woods. Maya had been unconscious for the entire drive, building up strength from the constant contact with silver. I managed to make her stir, and grimaced as she yawned loudly.

“Not enough time to explain, but it’s time to wake up.” I called out to her. “The fight is happening now, and were about to head right into it.”

“I expect the full story later.” She replied, and I grimaced as the bones in my body began to shift.

I hadn’t been able to shift while being held prisoner at my Father’s, so the process was uncomfortable. My muscles stretched, my bones cracked, and my teeth elongated. I resisted the urge to scratch at my skin as large tufts of hair emerged. Once I was on four feet, I followed Sean, Mason and the rest of the warriors into the forest. Our feet thundered against the damp earth, kicking up bits of dirt and grass. My tongue rolled out as a huff left my snout. Not exercising for a week hadn’t done me any favors. I pushed myself harder, feeling the burn in my muscles as I kept up with Sean and Mason.

I could hear the fighting, and smell the tang of blood before I could see anything. Snarls, growls, and yelps—both wolf and vampire, filled the air. The scent of blood overwhelmed everything else. I could no longer smell the wet earth, or the warm breeze that brushed through our fur. The metallic scent was everywhere.

The battle spanned through the forest, into a large clearing, and partially inside of town. We emerged out of the forest and onto the outskirts of town. Only a few houses sat out here, along with a small farm. The entire fight was mayhem, bodies scattered along the ground, most still leaking

fresh blood. There were no lines to tell one side from another. Some werewolves still fought in human form, using elongated claws and canines to kill their enemies. Others shifted and fought, teeth snapping as they clamored at the Vampire's.

'Asher?' I called out, 'Where are you?'

A few seconds of silence passed, until his voice flowed through my mind. Even with the situation at hand, Asher managed to sound playful, "In the middle of it all, where else?"

His voice sent a rush of warmth through me, calming my nerves and clearing my addled mind.

Asher's men were skilled, both strong and fast. His troops were able to take on multiple Vampire's at once, but I had underestimated my Father's number of followers. Some of the Vampire's looked younger than me, yet they fought for their lives. I wondered how many of them actually wanted to fight, and how many were forced.

We leapt into the fight without hesitation, sinking our teeth into any Vampire that raised a hand against us. The unmistakable flash of silver shined throughout the battle, but I kept my gaze ahead. I knew Asher's wolf without needing ever see it. My eyes were locked on one wolf in particular. Larger than the rest, its fur was the color of midnight. Asher's honey-colored eyes were reflected in his wolf's. Sean, Mason, and I killed our way through the Vampire's, making it to Asher's side. The numbers continued to dwindle, but I couldn't tell which side was winning. My heart hammered, and a skin-crawling sensation ran over my skin. There were so many, so many dead bodies. Each lifeless face was a person, someone who had a family. That fact didn't change my pace, nor my ferocity.

'Where's Breyona and Giovanni?' I shouted through the mind-link, locking eyes with Asher's midnight wolf. I dodged a silver knife thrown by one of the Vampire's, snarling as it whizzed past my ear. I slammed into the Vampire, knocking him into the ground before sinking my teeth into his throat. "Are my Dad and Grandma safe?"

Asher was tossing the body of an older Vampire to the ground before answering. "Breyona and Giovanni, at her Aunt's place. Your Dad put up a fight, but he's far from town with your Grandma."

Crap, I internally groaned. I had sent Tristan and Holly to Breyona's Aunt's house. I had assumed Breyona and Giovanni would evacuate with the rest of the townspeople. Instead, they remained in town, a risk, but they'd be nearby in case we won. Instead of freaking out, I mind-linked Breyona. While she was unable to shift, she still had a wolf living within her, and had a place in this pack.

'Breyona?' I called out, narrowly missing an attack. The Vampire had come from behind me, but I caught him in time, knocking him off of his feet before sending the silver knife scattering in the other direction.

Even at night the air was humid and thick. With all the fur on my body, I felt unbearably warm. If I were in my human form, I'd probably be sweating. I fought past the feeling and pushed forward, stashing any physical pain deep in the recesses of my mind.

'Lola?' Breyona practically screamed. I could hear the pent-up excitement and relief in her one word. 'Oh, my Goddess. Where are you? Did you escape your Father?'

'I don't have a lot of time to explain.' I grunted, leaping through the air and barreling into a Vampire that was approaching Sean from the rear. 'I'm in town, fighting Vampire's. Tristan and my half-sister Holly, are coming to your Aunts. Holly's hurt, she needs help. Don't kill Tristan, please. He's the one who helped me escape.'

Breyona was silent for several minutes, and for just a fleeting second, I felt sorry for Tristan. He had no idea what he was walking into. While I trusted Breyona, I had a strange inkling Tristan and Giovanni were close.

'You don't want me to kill Tristan?' She asked slowly, as if she had heard me wrong.

'Don't kill him.' I repeated, giving Mason a nod as he joined my side, tearing down another Vampire. 'I know what you're thinking. He wasn't in my head. He had me pretend so my Father wouldn't kill me. Trust me, Breyona.'

'Alright, but get here as soon as you can.' Breyona huffed, ending the mind-link.

I didn't have a chance to think as another wave of ungodly warmth passed through me. My entire body shuddered, and I winced as the warmth grew hotter. I felt uncomfortable in my skin, in my wolf form. All of this fur, it was slowly suffocating me. The warmth grew until liquid fire ran over my skin. A strangled whimper left my mouth as the fire rippled over my skin.

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Mom had warned me about this as a child. It was a way to ensure children, to make the mating process faster. Shortly after marking your mate, the female wolf would go into heat. It always varied, sometimes happening a month after being marked. A she-wolf's heat was short, typically only occurring once a year. Mom had told me how brutal it was, how it felt like your body had been doused in gasoline and lit on fire. Once I was older, she told me what would happen during my heat. That other males would take notice, that some might even fight over the she-wolf.

I knew what was happening the moment the fire began rushing through my veins, consuming my cells and blistering my skin. I should have noticed the signs before, but I hadn't. It made sense now, the increase in body heat, the random hot flashes that had been happening for a couple days now. My heat decided to come at the worst possible moment. It was much harder to control in wolf form, and it took every ounce of my concentration to keep my wolf still. All she wanted was to seek out Asher, to let his touch soothe the fire blazing within us.

The best thing to do when a she-wolf's heat hit was to spend the time with your mate. Only your mate could keep the other wolves away. As it was, Asher was much too distracted by the fighting at hand, and I couldn't bring myself to pull him away. This pack needed their Alpha to fight, but I knew Asher would never let another male claim me, even though I couldn't make that decision for myself.

Mason sunk his teeth into a Vampire that had noticed me fall, and wanted to take advantage of the situation. Above the searing pain, I was hyper aware of Asher's location. My wolf's desperation filled my mind. She needed someone—anyone to soothe the fire crackling beneath our skin.

I ground my teeth against the pain, an animalistic whine escaped my clenched jaw. I could feel my hold on my wolf slipping, and knew I wouldn't be able to regain control once she fully took over. Large black spots danced along my vision as I writhed on the ground, vaguely aware of the wolves that stood around me, protecting me from the Vampire's. With an agonizing cry, I rolled over on the grass, my bare skin angry and red. It took every last drop of energy I had to shift back into my

human form. Soon, my scent would spread, acting as a beacon to any wolf who might want to mate. Even now, I could see some of our own wolves' tense as their instincts took over, letting them know there was a she-wolf in heat.

A large pair of arms wrapped around me, and a familiar voice barked orders to the rest of the wolves around me. I half expected to see Asher, but it wasn't him. Sean held me in his arms, ignoring the fact that I was nak\*d and shaking. Sean snarled as a wolf stalked towards us, it's intelligent eyes on my shaking form. My head felt like a weight, my muscles absolutely useless. As Sean shifted me in his arms, my head fell to the side. Like a magnet connected the two of us, I locked eyes with Asher. His golden eyes were set on me, every ounce of his undivided attention was placed on my shaking shoulders. Even from a distance, I could feel the rush of overwhelming desire and protectiveness that exuded from him. His entire body was tense, and I knew that he too was fighting the urge to come and claim me.

"I can't be here. They're going to die because of me." I all but screamed through clenched teeth.

I couldn't afford to be a distraction to Asher. He needed to focus, as did the rest of the wolves. I was a liability, a huge distraction that could cost countless wolves their lives. I wanted to fight—I needed to, but I couldn't. That fact made me want to scream in anger, if only I had the energy to do so.

'Get her out of here, Sean.' Asher grunted through the mind-link. 'I can smell her from over here. Take her somewhere safe, just get her out of here.'

Apart from Asher, Sean was the next best choice to get me to safety. A she-wolf's heat wouldn't affect family members. As Sean was both gay and my family, he was the safest person to be around.

'Mason and Ethan, shield them both.' Asher snarled. 'Watch their backs until they get away.'

Mason's wolf sauntered over to us, visibly stiffening once he caught my scent. I could see the determination in Mason's eyes, and admired his strength. Fighting against your instincts was one of the hardest things a werewolf had to endure. I wish I could've said I was that strong, but the fire rippling over my skin crippled any fight I might have. Weakly, I extended an arm in Mason's

direction. A silent plea, begging him to take away the fire that consumed my body. Mason's wolf let out a low huff before tackling the nearest Vampire, sinking his teeth into its neck. Ethan's wolf was the color of charcoal, with dark patches of fur. Ethan was also affected by my scent, but had a much harder time controlling his instincts. A snarl ripped through him as he glared at Sean, viewing him as an enemy that shielded what he wanted.

'Ethan, if you touch her—I f\*\*king swear, I will kill you.' Asher's voice held such blinding power that I inwardly groaned. 'Sean, take her to Breyona. She'll be safe there.'

"No!" I tried to groan, but it came out as a garbled wail.

Sean knew, I told myself. He knew not to bring me to Breyona, that Tristan and Holly would be there as well. Vampires were unaffected by a she-wolf's heat, but even though I had some trust in Tristan, it wasn't nearly enough to believe he wouldn't take advantage of the situation.

I could see the lure of my scent shatter in Ethan's eyes, and watched as he shook himself off, as though he were ridding himself of the feeling. Ethan gave me a nod, his eyes conveying a silent apology. Ethan and Mason did as they were told, keeping countless Vampire's and Werewolves away from us. Some of our own warriors became distracted, lunging at Sean in order to get to me. Mason and Ethan tossed our warriors aside, leaving them stunned but unharmed.

I hadn't a clue where we were going, nor could I think straight enough to clearly make out my surroundings. I faded in and out of consciousness, but my wolf kept pulling me from the darkness. Her overwhelming need to satiate the fire was overpowering everything else, even as I fought to give into the darkness. When I opened my eyes again, Sean was placing me in the back of a sedan. He had slipped on a pair of sweatpants and was currently draping a blanket over my body. A painful hiss slipped through my teeth as I tried to find the energy to tear the blanket from my body. It was too hot—much too hot. The blanket was only keeping the heat in, making me feel as though I were suffocating.

"Don't take me to Breyona." My words were garbled, but legible enough for Sean to understand.

"Tristan and Holly—"

“I know, Lola. I’ll get you somewhere safe.” Sean replied, his knuckles tight on the steering wheel as he sped through the deserted streets in town. “Everyone is far from town. Our best bet is to get you far from this fight and hole up in one of the vacant houses.”

Sean continued talking, but I could no longer make out his words. The fire burning within me wasn’t losing its intensity. It stayed strong enough to bring me blinding agony, but wasn’t painful enough to render me unconscious. I was stuck enduring every excruciating moment until Asher could come and relieve me of the pain—if he came.

I forced the thoughts from my mind. He would survive, they all would. Asher’s voice filtered through the mind-link, somehow soothing the fire enough for me to understand the words that filtered through my head.

‘Your Father’s here, Lola.’ Asher grunted, as though he were throwing an opponent off of him. ‘No matter what happens, I love you—I love you so much. Don’t ever forget that.’

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Asher’s POV

One week—one entire week of planning out escape routes, defensive strategies, and safe evacuations. Getting through the week, knowing Lola was in constant danger, was the hardest thing I had endured since becoming Alpha. Each minute I felt the absence of the mind-link between us, was another minute I became closer to losing my sh\*t.

The day Lola turned herself over to her father, Zeke found me in my office. Most of the furniture was destroyed, scattered along the room with shreds of paperwork. None of it mattered. Not the paperwork detailing potential treaties and alliances, nor the computer—which held countless emails between other Alpha’s in need of assistance. Zeke was the only one I told, the only person other than my Beta and Lola, who had my full trust. Zeke and my Beta managed to gain my attention, setting me straight before I leveled the house. There was nothing I could do at this point, but prepare for the inevitable. Lola had her mission, and I had mine.

In between scouting safe places for the townspeople to evacuate to, I took the time to break the news to Lola’s family. Lola had asked that I told them the truth once she was far away, as she already

knew how her Dad would react. Her Dad turned an interesting shade of red, undoubtedly feeling the same helpless anger I felt. Sean placed a hand on his Dad's shoulder, keeping him sitting in the recliner.

"You let her turn herself in?" Lola's Dad sputtered, the red in his face spread down to his neck. "What kind of f\*\*king mate are you? Do you have any regard for my daughter's life?"

"Calm down." Lola's Grandma snapped, silencing her son with a harsh look.

Lola's Grandma reminded me of my Aunt Kira. Quick to step into an argument, but also quick to shut it down. I learned from Lola that her Grandma had an uncanny ability to sniff out bullsh\*t and lies. She reminded me of someone I had once met, someone I had long forgotten. It was a brief encounter, but the woman looked eerily similar to Lola's Grandma. There was no way I had met Lola's Grandma before. Lola told me her Grandma lived in a small cottage in the forest, hundreds of miles away. The woman I had met was in my hometown, two days journey from where I stood. Regardless, I couldn't help but briefly wonder if Lola's Grandma had any relation to the stranger I met—the one who knew too much.

"You're sticking up for him?" Lola's Dad scoffed, "He let Lola go, Ma. Let her walk into the enemy's hands. Do you have any idea what they could do to her—what he could do to her?"

"I know very well what could happen, not that I need to remind you." Lola's Grandma scolded her son. "Since when have we been able to stop Lola from doing anything? What makes you think her own mate could control her?"

That got Lola's Dad to quiet down. Some of the redness faded from his face, and he let out an irritated grunt. Lola's Grandma flashed me a smile, but I couldn't miss the pride burning in her eyes. She knew what Lola had sacrificed. She knew why Lola had left, even though no one had told her. Seeing the pride and absolute trust in her Grandma's eyes solidified my own strength. I trusted Lola, and there was no one else better equip to help us all—to help rule this pack at my side.

I spent my days neck deep in work, never once taking a break for myself. Any time I had for myself was spent thinking of Lola, searching down the length of our ironclad bond for any whisper of her voice. Each day without her, rattled my insides, making me realize how much I had come to depend on her. I promised myself, the day I got her home, I would name her Luna and complete the ceremony at her side. I wouldn't stop until my people, and my mate, were safe.

Breyona and Giovanni made it back onto pack territory shortly after Lola's surrender. I was surprised her Father had actually lived up to his word, as I had no expectations when it came to him. Giovanni and Breyona hid in her Aunt's old house, giving me a call when they had made it safely. The pack was still unaware of Giovanni's presence, a problem I would face when Lola was safe and by my side. Anger pulsed through me when Giovanni could give me no information on their whereabouts. The sooner I could get Lola out of there, the better. Giovanni insisted her Father had changed locations as soon as he heard of his betrayal. While he couldn't give me Lola's current location, he did give me the location of their previous base.

Hope blossomed in my chest when Lola flooded my mind one night. I couldn't hear her voice, but I could feel her lingering in my mind. It was the first time I had felt Lola since she turned herself in to her Father. I sat upright in bed; my eyes wide as I scanned the dark. Absentmindedly, my hand wandered to her side of the bed, and I swore I could feel her right beside me.

My wolf snarled in outrage when I heard they had put silver cuffs around her wrists, though I expected nothing less. I cleared the overwhelming anger and worry from my mind and focused on what Lola was saying. Another act that was unbearably hard. All I wanted to do was soothe her pain, the anxiety I felt radiating down the bond. She was safe, for now—that was what mattered. The information she gave me would be the tipping point of this battle, it would change everything. I could only pray that her Father's plans hadn't changed.

Two days wasn't much time to evacuate the town and surrounding land, but it was enough. I put out the mind-link immediately, telling every non-warrior family to begin leaving. I had all of the families in town pack their most important belongings days ago, hoping to speed up the process during evacuation. I hauled myself from bed and threw on a t-shirt and some jeans, knowing tonight I would go without sleep. Zeke and my Beta appeared in the kitchen a few minutes later, looking as ruffled and tired as I did. Zeke, Bran, and my Beta attended to many of the families leaving, and helped those who stayed behind wishing to fight. I found myself heading over to Lola's Dad's house, determined to get them far from the fight. Lola would never forgive me if I let her stubborn Dad stay in the pack. Unsurprisingly, her Grandma managed to convince her Dad to leave, while Sean stayed behind. After a stern conversation with Lola's Dad, telling me to protect his son and daughter, they

left the house.

The town was all but vacant when the sun began to rise. The only people left in town were warriors, dispersed between houses and hotels. I gathered everyone to the Northern side of town, leaving a small group behind to attack from the back. The small group would remain hidden until the Vampire King's troops arrived, and until the fight began. I found myself walking the nearly deserted streets, marveling at the dreadful silence that filled the town. Even without the many families that lived here, the entire town was holding its breath. The houses and stores, the offices and schools—it was all waiting, waiting to see the outcome. Would these buildings still be standing after this fight? Would the town and its rich history be preserved if we lost? What of the families who spent countless generations in this town? What would they come back to if we lost?

What ate at me the most, was knowing I would be the one to give the final call. All of those families would be waiting, waiting for the outcome of this battle. I would be the one to tell them if we won or lost. I could only hope, that if we lost, I could get the message out before I died.

Just as the sun settled in the sky, I called out to Sean and Mason, telling them to meet me at the pack house. I wanted nothing more than to leave this pack, to head to the location Lola gave me and storm the damn warehouse. My muscles were tense, my body rigid, as I fought the urge to reclaim what was mine. As much as I hated it, Lola was right. The pack needed their Alpha fighting by their side. I wouldn't make the same decision Tyler made. If my pack were to die, I would stand with them until the end, and I knew Lola would do the same. Heeding Lola's words, I sent a group of my most talented warriors to her aid. I sent Sean and Mason as well, giving Lola familiar faces. I wasn't sure what she had endured during her time with her Father, but I could only hope Sean and Mason would remind her of what awaited.

Once the sun began to dip in the sky, most of the warriors headed to the Northern side of town. There was a small grassy area just outside of the forest line, and I hoped we could keep the brunt of the fight there. The least amount of damage to the town, the better. Apart from quiet murmurs, a thick sense of foreboding lingered in the air. It felt like the entire town was holding its breath. Each empty house, school, and store were waiting—waiting to see if they'd still be standing come morning. I had sent a small group of scouts into the forest, telling them to remain hidden at all costs. Their job was solely to alert us when the Vampire King's forces trudged through the forest.

An hour after arriving at the battle site, Sean and Mason mind-linked me.

'We've got her, Alpha.' Sean spoke through the mind-link, and I let out a long breath I didn't know I had been holding. The tension from this week left my shoulders, making me feel lighter. The sensation was short lived as Mason chimed in, his voice thick with suspicion and irritation.

'There's been a change of plans.' Mason grunted, 'She's making us take Tristan with her, and some girl she's calling her sister.'

A ripple of anger pulsed through me at the mention of the Vampire's name. Tristan had done nothing but attempt to weasel his way into Lola's heart—and pants, all while working for her Father. I might not have deserved Lola, but Tristan was far from ever being worthy of her.

'If we can't trust our mate, who can we trust?' My wolf chimed in. Usually, my wolf was quick to anger, but the trust he held in Lola was unbreakable. As much as he hated Tristan, he trusted that Lola made the right decision.

Gritting my teeth together until my jaw ached, I stifled the anger that pulsed through me. I had a million and one questions running through my mind, none of which I could have answered at the moment. If we lived, I'd get those answers. I had a sneaking suspicion Lola's information came from Tristan, and wondered what side the Vampire had finally chosen. If the information he gave Lola was wrong, and this was all a set up, I would make it my mission to end his life first.

'Trust Lola, Mason.' I hardened my voice, but refrained from using an Alpha command. I had never needed to use one before, and I wasn't planning on it now. Taking away someone's free will was a good way to lose their loyalty.

Before I could say more, I felt the flicker of the bond in my mind. Lola's presence was faint, but I could feel it. After a week of feeling nothing on her end, I could detect even the faintest trace of Lola in my mind. The memory of her scent wrapped around me, chasing away every emotion other than grim determination. We would see each other again, after this battle was won.

'Lola! Lola, are you there?' I called out to her, willing the bond to strengthen, willing her to heal from the silver that blocked out connection. 'I can feel you. The bond—it's faint, but I can feel it.'

Another voice echoed through my mind, one that made my muscles tense and my wolf snarl. The scouts I had sent into the forest had news. The Vampires were coming, heading from the North, just as Lola had said.

'We see them, Alpha.' One of the warrior's voices flooded my head, pushing Lola's to the side. 'Three minutes away.'

The small group of warriors I had sent into town confirmed the same. The Vampire King's troops were on the move, pushing through town and heading North. What interested me the most, was that one of the warriors swore they saw the Vampire King in the midst of his own troops. The warrior wasn't certain, as he had never seen the man in person before, but noted how the other Vampire's seemed to form a barrier around the man—deeming him important.

'Circle around and come back here. I don't want any of you getting stuck behind them.' I told the warrior, and ended the mind-link.

'I'm here! Asher, I'm here!' She called out after a few moments of silence. Her voice was quiet, like she was shouting down a long hallway, but it still managed to make my stomach clench and my heart flutter. 'Did something happen? What's wrong?'

'Everyone was evacuated safely.' I told her, 'Wherever you got your information from, they were right. Your Father's men came from the North. The rest are moving through town, trying to ambush us. They're here, Lola. The war is starting.'

I had seen many battles as a teenager, and as a young Alpha—but I had never seen war. The second the Vampires cleared the forest line; all hell broke loose. I had just a split second to watch the realization dawn in the Vampires eyes before they all charged forward, a sea of dark clothing and the sly glint of a silver blade.

The sound of torn clothing filled the air as many of the warriors shifted into their wolf forms. Some decided to stay in human form until the last moment, while others shifted and barreled into the Vampire's. As the Werewolves and Vampire's clashed on the feild, the sound rang out into the night.

I locked eyes with Zeke, who was normally care-free and playful, but held a similar look of determination on his face. I called my wolf forward, and within seconds, was on four feet. Shifting had always come naturally for me, even during my first time. I locked eyes with Zeke's wolf, and an unspoken understanding settled over us. We'd go where the fight was at its worst, the thickest and bloodiest part.

Time seemed to slow as Zeke and I barreled through the crowd, dodging Werewolves and slashing at Vampires. Zeke let out a howl as his claws slashed through the chest and neck of a Vampire, nearly severing its head. The sharp tang of blood filled the air within seconds, and each Werewolf body littering the ground was a wound in my chest.

'Asher?' Lola's voice filled my mind, bringing on a wave of strength that pushed me through a group of Vampires that had huddled together. 'Where are you?'

I groaned inwardly, but I had expected as much. Some small part of me hoped Lola would have some sense and seek shelter with Breyona and Giovanni. Somehow, I knew she would come and fight. She wouldn't leave my side, just as I wouldn't leave hers. It filled me with both love and irritation.

'In the middle of it all, where else?' I smirked, my heart stuttering at the sound of her distant giggle.

While fighting and watching Zeke's back, I spotted Lola barreling through the crowd. I had given her sh\*t in the beginning, but I found myself in awe of how she moved. Her wolf was larger than most, but held a sort of grace that most lacked. She was an expert at evading an attack, and missed the swipe of a silver blade from countless Vampires. A chuckle ran through me as I remembered when we first met, and how frustrated she had been when we fought during training. We were equals, even from the beginning, just as it should be.

'Where's Breyona and Giovanni?' She shouted through the mind-link, her bright eyes meeting my own. Lola rolled to the side, narrowly missing the swipe of a silver blade. 'Are my Dad and Grandma safe?'

'Breyona and Giovanni, at her Aunt's place. Your Dad put up a fight, but he's far from town with your Grandma.' I replied, keeping my words short as two Vampire's lunged at me. One of the Vampire's was larger than most humans, broad shoulders with thick, tree-trunk arms.

The large Vampire grinned at me, showing a set of bloody teeth. His companion was much smaller, a female with an even happier look on her face. They were enjoying this, I found myself scoffing at them both. I lunged at the big one first, determined to knock him off his feet. Even with the Vampire's enhanced speed and strength, they were no match for me. Werewolves were stronger than Vampire's, it was what kept us alive for thousands of years. Our animalistic side worked with us, supported us—while a Vampire's animalistic side controlled them, made them eternally bloodthirsty.

As I dodged the smaller Vampire, I felt a silver blade graze my ankle. The pain was brief, and my wound healed fairly quickly. Little did they know, it would take more than a thin slice to bring me pain. I let out a dry laugh as I charged at the two Vampire's, feigning left and sinking my teeth into the female's throat. I tossed her body aside and watched as the larger Vampire screamed in outrage. His bloody teeth gnashed together, while his dark eyes burned murderously. I couldn't muster up a single ounce of guilt as I realized I had killed the Vampire's mate. The loss made the Vampire frantic, swiping wildly with the silver blade clutched in his meaty hand. It was all too easy to disarm him, watching the knife become engulfed in the long tendrils of grass that spanned the field. As I sank my teeth into his neck, severing his head from his body, I sent him back into the arms of his mate.

As I turned on the nearest Vampire, a strange feeling came over me. Unbridled warmth flooded my veins along with a sickly feeling of panic. My eyes found Lola on their own, as if they knew the feeling was coming from her. She was on the ground, writhing in the grass. Loud whines escaped her muzzle, and the hair on her body began to thin. She was going into heat, I realized. A snarl echoed through me, ringing out into the night, registering with every wolf nearby.

I charged forward, barreling through two Vampires who turned to attack. I couldn't get to her in time, that much I knew. The two Vampire's I barreled into joined a third, and all three of them approached me. As I fought against the three Vampire's, I noticed Mason protecting Lola, who had shifted back into human form. She was bare as she laid in the grass, her arms tightly wound around her torso. An echo of pain ran through me, along with a rush of longing so intense, it wavered my own concentration.

'We need to get her out of here.' My wolf snarled, 'I won't be able to hold back for long.'

The urge to claim her was overwhelming, spurred on by the other wolves around us. Each one would catch her scent; each one would fight at the chance to mate with her.

'Get her out of here, Sean.' I snapped through the mind-link. Sean held Lola in his arms, moving through the crowd of Vampire's and Werewolves with wary eyes. 'I can smell her from over here. Take her somewhere safe, just get her out of here.'

It took every ounce of my concentration not to snarl at the wolves glancing her way. Not only was I worried about my mate, but I was also worried for the warriors in my pack. Lola would serve as a distraction, one that would cost many lives. It was best to get her out of here, to find somewhere safe, despite what my instincts were telling me.

'Mason and Ethan, shield them both.' I snarled, 'Watch their backs until they get away.'

Mason and Ethan charged over, surrounding Sean as they moved through the battle field. I watched as Ethan's wolf stiffened, baring its teeth at Sean and Mason. Before he could take a step forward, I shouted through the mind-link. I used just a shred of my power as an Alpha, just enough to get through the haze that had become Ethans mind.

'Ethan, if you touch her—I f\*\*king swear, I will kill you.' I promised, 'Sean, take her to Breyona. She'll be safe there.'

My words seemed to register in Ethan's mind, and his stiffened posture relaxed. Ethan threw himself at a nearby Vampire, one that had noticed the small party moving through the crowd. I watched the tension leave each werewolf as Sean carried Lola off the battlefield and out of sight. The fight resumed at full force, the wolves ripping through Vampire's left and right. I turned my eyes away from the werewolves that had fallen and pushed forward, stopping when I found who I was looking for.

Standing at the center of a circle of Vampire's, was Lola's Father. I couldn't be sure it was him, but who else would the Vampire's protect so vehemently? His hair was the color of night, his eyes a startling shade of blue, just like Lola's. I could see her features mirrored in his face, and wondered how my beautiful mate had come from someone like that. The Vampire's that circled him tore down wolves left and right, all while keeping their King—their master, safe.

The Vampire King's crystal eyes locked on me, feeling my heated stare burn into his skin. A

serpentine smile formed on his face, stretching the taught skin on his face. He was pale—horribly so, and his skin reminded me of old, worn leather. Somehow, he still managed to look young, but his eyes burned with malicious intent.

Zeke stood close by, and I flashed him a hard look that I hoped he would understand. I nodded towards the Vampire King, growling when Zeke nodded his head. I needed him to cover me, to help me disable the Vampire's surrounding Lola's Father.

Any one of my warriors had the right to kill him, but I wanted that honor. It sounded horrible, murdering my mate's Father—but the man was not family, he was a monster. I had never been fond of Vampires, but my hatred never spanned as far as Bran's. With Lola at my side, I knew that being a Vampire was as much a part of her as being a Werewolf. She couldn't have one without the other, and I accepted that fact wholly. Things would change if we won this battle, and I could only hope they would change for the better.

With that thought in mind, and the image of my beautiful mate seared into me, I charged the Vampire King and the group of warriors that surrounded him. With Zeke at my side, we dodged stray Vampire's, jumped over fighting wolves, and barreled into the circle of Vampires that surrounded Lola's Father.

I took two down with ease, while Zeke took down one. Our presence on the battle field was noticed. Warriors looked to their Alpha's, seeing the importance of the person the Vampires were protecting. Bran charged forward, snapping and snarling as he took out another one of the Vampire King's defenses. Left and right, the Vampire's began to fall, but not without loss of our own.

I faced Lola's Father, seeing the calculated malice on his face as he realized the war was nearing its end, and that he was standing on the losing side. A familiar cold front passed over me, chilling me to the bone, sending liquid ice rushing through my veins. The night seemed to grow darker, the shadows gathered at the edge of the forest eagerly. None of the other werewolves seemed to notice, but I couldn't ignore the pulsing shadows that twitched with anticipation.

I charged forward, skidding across the grass as Lola's Father dodged my attack. Zeke and Bran ran forward, both aiming for the Vampire King. The attack gave me enough time to run forward, taking advantage of the distraction. I could hear the shadows hushed whispers, and knew we were running out of time.

Just as the Vampire King opened his mouth to speak, Zeke dove forward, clipping his leg. The Vampire King fell to one knee, his lips moving as he stared at the gathering shadows. I wasted no time, darting forward and sinking my teeth into his flesh. My heart hammered with each dull thud of the Vampire King's heart, with each pulse of blood that squirted from his wound. Zeke and Bran latched onto one of his legs, pulling one way as I pulled another. The sound of tearing flesh filled the air, and I watched as the Vampire King's head rolled across the grass, his blue eyes shining smugly.

The shadows that gathered along the forest line darted forward, slithering across the grass until they reached the corpse of the Vampire King. Zeke and Bran's eyes widened as they too saw the slippery tufts of shadow that inched forward. The shadows descended on the Vampire King's body, stealing every droplet of blood that stained the earth, leaving behind emerald grass in its place.

The Vampire King was dead, and the remaining Vampires seemed to notice their leader's absence. One by one they stopped; hands raised in surrender. Zeke, Bran and I sent out a mind-link to our troops. The war was over, the fighting was finally finished, and we had won. Each wolf lifted their head to the night sky, the full moon our beacon of light, and unleashed a deafening howl into the sky. Even with the joy and sorrow of victory pulsing through our veins, I couldn't shake the icy feeling that lingered in my bones, the feeling that told me I had been too late.

Novel [Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] Free Online chapter 99

Lola's POV

As Asher's voice faded from my mind, the heat encompassing my body increased. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, unbearably warm and antsy. I struggled to sit up in the sedan, but could hardly move my limbs. I knew Maya was fighting for control, pushing back against her instincts in order to give me a reprieve from the intense heat. My eyes fluttered closed, and I cherished the brief minutes of unconsciousness, free from the blistering heat.

When I opened my eyes, I was in Sean's arms, the thin blanket still wrapped around my torso. Sean's eyes found my face as I let out a long groan. A whisper of a smile formed on Sean's face. His amusement only added to my horrific discomfort and muddled mind. There was nothing I could do but let out a low growl.

"That bad, huh?" Sean chuckled, carrying me up the stairs to a small house.

“Yes, it’s that bad.” I snapped. Instead of sounding cold and ferocious, my words came out in a garbled groan.

A little one-story house, covered in sky blue paneling with a little white porch. Judging from the flower pots on the porch, and the lace curtains in the window, someone lived in this house. Sean fished a key out from his front pocket, holding me with one arm as he unlocked the front door.

Whoever had once lived in this house must’ve moved recently, I thought to myself. An old couch sat against the wall, along with an old television stand. The television was gone, as were most of the other furniture. I could see the imprint against the wall where a row of pictures had once sat.

“Kind of glad my mate was a guy.” Sean chuckled, but his eyes had that misty, faraway look I often saw on Mason’s face. “I feel for Asher. You’ll jump his bones the minute he steps into the house.”

“Shut up!” I groaned, clenching my eyes together in hope that I would once again fall unconscious. The last thing I wanted to do was talk about jumping my mate’s bones with my brother.

“Alright, alright.” Sean replied, a small smile twitching on his lips. “Want me to put you in the bedroom?”

While I detected a hint of amusement from Sean’s voice, I ignored it in favor of something better. What I needed was to cool the fire crackling along my skin. I let out a painful grunt, which Sean took as a yes. As he opened the bedroom door, I noticed a bathroom off to the right. That was exactly what I needed. The heat was overwhelming, making my breaths come out in labored pants.

“The bathroom.” I croaked, “Take me into the bathroom.”

The bathroom was fairly large, and I assumed that this bedroom was the master bedroom. The bathtub was large enough for me to submerge myself fully, and I sighed at the thought of an ice-cold

bath. Sean sat me down on a plush stool that sat against the wall. I resisted the urge to tear the blanket from my shoulders and dive into the tub, whether Sean was there or not.

“Well, I’m not sticking around while you–do that.” Sean cleared his throat. Sean walked over to the tub and turned on the cold water, wincing as he stuck his hand under the faucet. “I’ll be just outside the bedroom. Gotta keep all those hungry wolves away.”

“Ugh, go!” I groaned, eyeing the frigid water.

I was off the stool and across the room before Sean could shut the bathroom door. I practically leapt into the bathtub, hissing as the cold water lapped at my heated skin. I half expected steam to come rolling out of the tub, my hot skin reacting with the icy water. There was no steam, just as there was no relief from my heat.

I thought about what Sean had said, and was grateful he stood watch. I loved Asher, and wouldn’t trade my mate for the world, but I wasn’t sure I’d be able to stop myself if someone came in here looking to relieve the pain, I was in. I knew Maya’s instincts would take over, and we would mate with anyone—regardless of who they were.

My eyes roamed the plain bathroom, settling on the large window across the room. It would be so easy to slip away, to crack the window open and leave. I could find someone—anyone, to take this pain away. Certainly, they wouldn’t be able to resist. A nak\*d, she-wolf in heat, roaming the streets. If the battle was won, there would be countless males, tired from battle, looking for anything to relieve the horrors from their mind.

“No. Not a chance.” I groaned into the empty bathroom, tearing my eyes away from the window and curling myself into a ball. My damp hair fanned out across the water, and I sank lower into the tub.

My entire body grew stiff as the large lights in the bathroom grew dull, magnifying the shadows that bounced along the walls. The cold water that filled the bathtub grew colder, cold enough to make me wonder if shards of ice swirled in the water. The blistering heat that seared my skin was momentarily forgotten as the shadows gathered along the walls. My heart hammered in my chest as

fear settled in my bones. The shadows gathered at the edge of the tub, lapping against the porcelain walls like an inky ocean. I watched in fearful silence as the shadows gathered, forming a large mass that was human in shape. It had no discernable features, and yet I could feel it staring at me. Analyzing—watching the half-breed Princess who had often fed them her blood.

I hadn't called the shadows, and they never came on their own before. Which meant someone else had called them. Only two others had the ability to call on the shadows, my Father and Holly. Fear raced through me at the thought of what might've happened. We could have lost—and my father could have sent the shadows to claim my life.

"Why are you here?" I asked, finding my voice and sending all the strength I could muster into my words. I kept my voice stern. I controlled the shadows, not the other way around, I reminded myself.

The humanoid shape moved, gliding across the floor until it stood in front of the bathtub.

"The Vampire King has fallen." They hissed, their silky-smooth voices colder than the water I sat in. "He had one last request—his price paid in full."

I braced myself, my hands gripping the edge of the tub as I debated screaming out for Sean. It would do no good, I told myself. Even if Sean could see the shadows, there was nothing he could do. I tensed against the side of the tub, trying to keep as much distance from the shadows as I could. I clenched my eyes shut, hoping it wouldn't hurt—praying to the Goddess that Asher would be well taken care of.

Instead of pain, a heavy weight pressed on my shoulders. I felt my limbs go slack, only to stiffen and become horribly rigid. My back arched as a frightened wheeze left my lips. This was it, I told myself. I wondered if I would go home to my Goddess, or if the shadows would also claim my soul.

Something exploded in my mind, filling my head with a thick, coldness. I could feel every icy shard that rolled through me, every crystal-like piece of ice that embedded itself in my mind. My heart pounded in my chest, never once slowing. As I waited for death, I realized it wasn't coming. All at once, thousands of silver threads wormed themselves in my mind, all connected to a single Vampire.

I could feel them, all of them. Every Vampire that walked this earth, I could feel their presence in my

mind. It was nothing like the mind-link I had with my pack, and yet it was oddly similar. I was aware of their presence, and they were aware of mine.

“Heir to the Kouritis bloodline, companion to the shadows, host to the Renaldi magic. Hail Queen Lola, ruler of the Vampires.’ The shadows spoke all at once, their voices coming from every inch of the room. I could feel every single Vampire, and knew they were all looking to the sky. Mourning their lost King, and honoring their new Queen.

I couldn’t wrap my head around it, around what my Father might have asked of the shadows. I was already in line for the throne, that much I knew. Upon his death, I would become Queen, whether I liked it or not. So, what did he bargain for with the shadows?

“What did my Father ask of you?” I asked the shadows, “What did he pay for?”

The human shaped shadow tilted its head at me, and I could feel a million cold eyes pierce my skin. The heat that singed my skin was long gone in the presence of the shadows, allowing me just a few brief minutes to think clearly.

“He asked for your compliance.” The shadows hissed, “From hence forth, you are unable to forfeit your crown. Not even your sister will be able to remove this burden from your shoulders. Upon your death, your first-born child will take your place.”

“Wait!” I called out, but the human shaped shadow was already beginning to unravel, each individual shadow slithering back to its corner. The lights in the bathroom brightened until I was left alone, the blistering heat my only companion.

I wasn’t sure how long I sat in the tub, succ\*mbing to the pain and my whirlwind of thoughts. There was more to what my Father bargained; I know it. He wouldn’t just die without exacting some form of revenge. He solidified my place as Queen, but I couldn’t understand why. Wouldn’t he want the crown to go to Holly? After all, she had lived with him for much longer than I did.

I stayed conscious the entire time, holding Maya back from what she truly wanted. Maya had tried to fight against her instincts, but the battle had been too much. Her willpower chipped away until she was fighting against me, urging me to leave the house and search for someone—anyone to remove

this pain.

The bathroom door swung open, my salvation stepping through the door and into the room. Asher's chest heaved as he caught my pain filled gaze. I could see the torment in his eyes, the urge to resist my thick scent, luring him forward. My heart hammered in my chest at the sight of him. He was alive, and relatively unharmed. Dried blood splattered his skin, and I noticed a small wound on his abdomen that had already healed.

I opened my mouth, trying to form the right words that would end my pain. I wanted this, all of it. Better it was with Asher than anyone else. My soul called out to his, begging him to claim me—to end the pain that consumed every cell, every living piece of me. I could no longer fight against Maya, not now that Asher stood in our presence. Strength coursed through my body, and I stood from the bathtub. Freezing cold water dripped from my skin, running between my breasts and down my legs.

Asher's eyes darkened at the sight, and I watched as the bulge in his sweatpants grew, spurred on by the burning lust in my eyes. I could see his hesitation, see it etched onto his face. He didn't want to take advantage of me, of how willing I was in this state. I didn't care, nor could I bring myself to stop. I let my fingers trail down my damp skin, running down my breasts and circling one of my hardened nips. The hiss that left my lips was echoed from Asher, who watched my movements like a blind man seeing color for the first time. As my fingers trailed lower, dipping down to the wetness between my thighs, Asher's control snapped with an audible crack.

He was on me within seconds, his arms wrapped around my torso as he pulled me from the tub, his hungry lips claiming my own. There was nothing sweet or romantic about the way we devoured one another. The heat crackled against my skin, soothed by Asher's touch. Each time he pulled away from me, the fire returned tenfold. Simple kissing wasn't going to satiate me, nor would it extinguish the flames. I twisted my fingers in his hair, pulling him closer. I needed more, so much more of him.

"Lola." Asher groaned against my lips, but I didn't want to hear the rest of what he said. He wanted this just as bad as I, but didn't want to take advantage of me.

"Please—" I whimpered, guiding his hand between my legs. His fingers grazed my wetness with predatory focus. A long, breathless moan left my lips as one of his fingers slipped inside of me. "I need this—I need you."

“What do you need, Lola?” Asher murmured against my lips, his other hand twisted in my hair, yanking my head back so that he could devour my neck with his mouth. “Be specific. Use your words.”

“I need you to f\*\*k me, Asher.” I whimpered, rocking my hips against his hand, basking in the pleasure and relief a single finger brought me. I felt the pressure gathering in my groin, but found no release. I needed more. I needed to feel his steel length inside of me, stretching and pushing me to my limit. I needed the pain and pleasure that came from his hands.

An animalistic sound ripped through Asher; one I hadn’t heard before. He gathered me in his arms and stormed out of the bathroom, placing me on the bed before crawling on top of me. My fingers clawed at his clothing, tearing into the grey sweatpants he wore. My nails lengthened on their own as Maya spurred me on. The desperate lu\*t burning in his eyes nearly brought me to my knees. I didn’t know I could make someone want me this bad, but Asher did. His lips trailed over every inch of my skin, rough and demanding.

His face settled between my legs, his hands gripping my thighs as his tongue lapped at my puy relentlessly. He devoured every inch of me, groaning at the taste of me on his tongue. Even as I clawed and tugged at his hair, he never stopped his frantic pace, spurred on by my heat as much as I was. Only when my orgm rippled through me, coaxing a blissful scream from my parted lips, did Asher pull away. My back slammed against the bed, my heart shuddering in my chest. My legs shook as the remnants of my org\*\*m rippled through me.

“You taste so f\*king sweet, Lola.” Asher murmured, looking up from between my parted legs with blind lut.

The look in his eyes sent another wave of heat crashing through me, and I found myself sitting up and flipping him over. I settled over his hips, which were still covered with his torn sweatpants. I shredded the rest from his body, feeling his dark eyes watching my every move. His ck sprung out, rigid and ready for me. I centered myself over him, lowering down with a blissful groan. With my head tossed back, I ground myself against his ck, savoring the pleasure and pain that ran through me. I gave myself no time to adjust to his length, and began riding his c\*\*k feverishly.

“fk, Lola.” Asher groaned, his fingers digging into my hips roughly. Every rough touch sent a wave of icy bliss through me, soothing my heated skin. “You feel so fking good wrapped around my c\*\*k.”

Asher lasted a total of fifteen seconds before wrapping his arms around my thighs and driving himself deeper inside of me. The sounds that left my lips were ones I never knew I was capable of making. I felt myself detach from my body, only to rush back in, facing the intense pleasure. His hips slapped against my own as he thrustled relentlessly. With each long stroke, the pain and pleasure grew.

“That’s it, baby.” Asher groaned, his dark eyes watching as he slammed his c\*\*k inside of me. “Take it, take every inch.”

Asher flipped the two of us over, lifting my legs over his shoulders as he continued thrusting inside of me. Our eyes never left one another, never stopped roaming the other in blind lut. His fingers worked my swollen clt, while his mouth devoured every inch of my heated skin. Only when I was crying out his name, tears burning in my eyes, did Asher finally release himself inside of me.

“That was not fair, Lola.” Asher groaned, lying beside me. Our hearts pounded in tandem, and my limbs felt blissfully relaxed. The heat that had once pulsed through me was now long gone, chased away by the countless org\*\*m s Asher had given me.

“You wanted it just as bad as I did.” I teased, tracing circles along his bare chest, savoring every touch—every moment with my mate. The soreness between my legs ached with every movement, but spurred on a pleasure of its own.

“How could I not?” Asher scoffed, running a hand through his dark, messy hair. “With you standing there like that, touching yourself in front of me. f\*\*k, Lola.”

I chuckled as Asher began to harden again. Just as I reached over, determined to feel him inside of me again, his large hand wrapped around my wrist. Asher had a pained look on his face, and I whimpered as I already knew what was coming.

“Trust me, baby. I want nothing more than to take you again, but there’s things we need to do.” Asher murmured, planting gentle kisses along each knuckle. “When were done though, I’m going to f\*\*k you until you scream.”

“Promise?” I sighed, letting my finger nails scrape along his bare chest.

"f\*k, I promise." He groaned, running the rough pad of his finger over my nip. My back arched under his touch, pushing my breast into his hand. "My mate, so responsive."

"I'm glad it was you who found me." I swallowed, feeling the guilt burn in my eyes. "I wasn't sure I'd be able to control myself if someone else walked through that door."

"Don't." Asher hushed me with a gentle kiss, one that soothed every aching muscle in my body, while making the sensitive spot between my legs throb. "It's not your fault, it never was. Next time you go into heat, I'll be there. We won, Lola. You're lucky if I ever let you leave my side again."

"So, it's true." I exhaled, "He's really dead?"

"He is." Asher nodded, and I watched his adam's apple move as he swallowed. His voice held unease, something that was unusual for Asher. He was always so certain, so concrete in his decisions. "He called to the shadows, Lola. At the end, that is. I worried I was too late, that he managed to make a deal with them. The shadows—they took his blood. I think he did make a deal, but it wasn't to kill you."

The shadows' earlier words came back to me, and I found myself running through every connection I felt in my mind, each and every one led back to a Vampire.

"You were too late." I murmured, "He did make a deal with them, but it wasn't for my life."

"What?" Asher grimaced, sitting up in bed. His hands grasped mine, holding on tightly. "What did he ask for?"

"He made me Queen." I whispered, meeting Asher's wide eyes. "I can't forfeit my crown. Not to my half-sister, not to anyone."

"Your half-sister?" Asher murmured, "Then how—how would there be another ruler?"

"If-If we have a kid someday. They would be the next ruler." I winced. I couldn't stop the guilt that rolled through me. This burden wasn't only mine to bare. It was also Asher's. Any future child of ours would be caught up in this mess, in this fight between Werewolves and Vampires.

"Then-then we make sure we leave things better than they were." Asher reasoned. The determination and softness in his eyes soothed my nerves. I blinked back the tears that formed in my eyes, and appreciated every inch of my incredible mate. "We'll fix things. So that someday, when our child takes over, there won't be conflict between our people."

Our people. I repeated those two words in my head a million times. I wasn't in this alone. I had Asher, and knew he would never leave my side. I was torn between two worlds, three if you counted my supposed witch heritage, but Asher would be there to help me through it all. I didn't know the first thing about being a ruler, but I had amazing people by my side.

"Now, you have quite a bit of explaining to do." Asher chuckled, "I want a rundown of everything that happened while you were gone, and I mean everything. Don't think I don't know about Tristan's sudden change of heart, and I want to hear everything about this half-sister of yours."

"I'll explain everything, I promise." I replied, unable to stop the hint of a smile that formed on my lips. "After we get my family, and the people of this pack back where they belong."

"I'll hold you to that, beautiful." Asher murmured, taking my face in his hands. "It won't be easy, but things will be different when we do have children. They won't have to deal with the problems we're facing now. We'll bring our people together, and end the fighting once and for all."

"Sounds like a plan, Alpha." I giggled, wrapping myself in his arms, surrounding myself with the comforting scent of my mate.

[Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] chapter 100

One Month Later.

I was going to be sick. I was becoming more and more accepting of my fate as the minutes ticked by. My wolf and life-long companion would never forgive me if I embarrassed us that way, but the anxiety was twisting and turning my stomach until nausea was left in its wake.

This was our time to shine, a test that would prove what exactly we could handle. We had battled rogues, vampires, and a hot-headed Alpha or two, but never this. This was entirely new, in the best and worst of ways. Give me something to fight, and I'll win or lose with pride, but I wasn't quite sure I could handle this.

This would be the first act that would propel us from simple werewolf, into the infuriatingly complex role of tribrid Luna.

It was a coveted position, one that plenty of she-wolves wanted. They had a glamorized version of the life of a Luna in their head. One where they would oversee the women of the pack, and greet their mate as he came home from work that day. Eighteen years and a few children later, they now had someone to inherit the pack and take over. This is what my mate's parents did, and there is nothing wrong with that.

So rarely do our kind have peaceful lives, especially during the years where petty wars and rogue attacks are at their highest. The problem is that these glamorized ideals of being a housewife, they encourage us to close our eyes and ignore the truth of what's happening in the world.

It couldn't go on any longer, this ignorance to the world around us- -the arrogance that truly led us to believe that we were the most powerful creatures on this earth.

Perhaps, at one point we had been at the top of the food chain. We lived within this false bubble of peace, while the Vampire's and Witches hid in the dark, acclimating-changing.

They were all here, all of the people most important to me. Beacons of courage that reminded me I have been through worse than this—the people I love have been through worse.

Breyona and Giovanni stood off to the side together, eyes always roaming one another as they held their little private conversations, even back stage at what would reveal not just myself, but him as well. Even Tristan had come, his sour expression common but his presence was still encouraging. Dad, Grandma and Sean were all backstage, talking to Mason and some of the lighting crew as they finished up some final touches.

“And how is my favorite Queen of the Undead?” Zeke’s cheerful voice boasted through the room, earning an instant grin from both Breyona and I.

Tristan and Giovanni collectively snarled under their breath. The one and only thing the two Vampire’s agreed on nowadays was that Alpha Zeke was a nuisance to humanity, and vampires.

“Trying not to flake out on this entire thing.” I groaned uselessly, grumbling when Zeke swept me into a bear hug. “Can I flake out on my own pack meeting?”

Over the past three months, Zeke’s gone out of his way to help the two of us. Not only was I adjusting with my new position as Luna, but I had an entire country full of Vampire’s to rule- -half of which absolutely hated me, the other half only followed me out of fear and respect to whomever held the crown.

Zeke, though still woefully unmated as he liked to gripe about from time to time, had become like family to Asher and I.

“Flake out? And miss all of the fun? ” He scoffed; his over exaggerated expression of surprise made me lift an eyebrow.

“Is it bad that I’d rather fight in another war than be forced into public speaking?”

"Of course not. Even us Alpha's feel that way." He snorted, flashing his lopsided grin which had earned him the majority of his dates. "But wartime is over, which means certain things need to be done in order to establish long lasting peace."

"How very wise and just of you, Alpha Zeke." Breyona cooed, coming up behind him with a grin on her face. I snickered when Giovanni snarled under his breath, stifling a laugh when Zeke winked.

Breyona had just cropped her hair short again before coming with us to Asher's hometown, so it now reached an inch or so above her shoulders. Even without the ability to shift, from when she had me make a deal with the shadows for her mate's life, Breyona retained her werewolf perks of enhanced senses and speed. Constant training, along with her morning and nightly runs, kept her and her wolf sane. "Did you read that out of a book somewhere?"

"Actually, I Googled it." Zeke grinned, but quickly wiped the expression away for one of his rare, serious moments. "For real, though. There are only rumors circulating right now, nothing anyone is taking too seriously. When this gets out, word will spread. The entire world will know what happened here today, and that their future will forever be changed. For what it's worth, you're doing the right thing. Exactly what a Luna and Queen of the Undead would do."

"That is not my official title and you know it, Zeke." I scolded him, swallowing the emotion in my throat every time he threw out some of his wisdom.

"Well, your actual title is a bit of a mouth full. Who has time to say, 'heir to the Kouritis bloodline, companion to the shadows, host to the Renaldi magic - -?" He pouted, jutting out his lower lip. The expression made him look younger, less of the rugged Playboy he acted like. "Besides, Queen of the Undead has a nice ring to it."

"I 'm glad you think so , because you're the only one allowed to call me that."

"Which is what makes it even better. " He smirked, giving Breyona and I a half wave. "I think I've hyped you up enough for one afternoon, I need to go bother your mate about security detail. We'll be right there on stage with you."

“The man says he wants a mate, but I don’t think he could slow down if he tried.” Breyona laughed breathlessly, shaking her head at where Zeke had stalked away. Her eyes met mine, flickering with humor even though she was nervous about tonight as well. “I think since you’ve become the Vamp Queen, this is the most fun he’s ever had as Alpha.”

“Whoever she is, I already know we’re going to like her.” I smirked, “Especially if she can tame him.”

“So, are you ready for this?” She asked after a few seconds.

“Not at all. What about you?”

“Oh, hell no.” She chuckled, her eyes flitting over to where Giovanni stood, always watching her. He had become ultra-protective since her wolf was locked away, a trait I understood entirely, even if it was a little overbearing. “I’m not even the one speaking and I’m nervous.”

“Here’s to hoping I don’t fall off the stage or puke on someone.”

“I think you’ll surprise yourself, Lola.” She smiled softly, a genuine one that gave me just a hint of courage. “You’ve changed from the girl you used to be. I always knew that when you finally came home, you’d shake things up. Granted, I didn’t think things would change this much, but I’m ready to help you work towards a better future, we all are.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to give this speech?” I chuckled breathlessly, blinking back the emotion that prickled behind my eyes.

“Now, I’d definitely puke on everyone.” She grinned, making it nearly impossible to remain nervous and fearful.

“Would you mind if I borrowed our Luna?” Asher’s gravelly voice slid up my spine, wrapping around my neck as it filtered through my ears. I turned and tried not to lose my breath entirely. His usually messy hair was styled, paired perfectly with the button-down shirt and slacks he wore. The dark colored clothing made the unusual shade of gold in his eyes stand out, swirling and churning

with the darkness in them.

"Not at all, Alpha." Breyona smirked, mouthing 'good luck'.

"Zeke told me you were terrified." His chuckle was deep and rich, as was the smirk that fell on his face.

"He would use that particular phrase, wouldn't he?" I grunted, lifting an eyebrow at him from where he stood across the room. I rolled my eyes at his grin and turned back to Asher, "I'm not terrified, I'm nervous. There's a difference."

"We're all nervous, Lola." His voice was the courage I needed, the confirmation that there was nothing wrong with feeling this way. "With all of the changes that have come our way so far, I'd be concerned if you weren't worried."

"I'm worried not everyone will be accepting." I admitted reluctantly, forced to look at the golden swirls in his eyes when his hand tilted my head up. The last part was quiet, quiet enough that only Asher could hear, "That I'll tear this pack apart."

The stage manager waved us forwards, letting us know we were on.

"Not everyone will be accepting, that is an inevitability." He shook his head, not at all phased. "There will be some who wish to challenge you, but I know that my Luna can hold her own. Those who matter, whose loyalty spans countless generations, they'll follow us."

Over and over, I repeated the words I needed to say. I took a deep breath, and then two. There would be no fear, no shame or hesitation. I was so much more than this world knew, but they were about to find out.

I stepped out from behind the billowing curtain in front of me, and faced the crowd of thousands.

Our world was no longer safe, no longer as secure as we wanted to believe. Vampires were no longer content with hiding in the shadows, and the witches—they had plans of their own.

For years, we had turned a blind eye as the Vampire's gathered, cultivating their race and accumulating their resources. Only when they were on our doorstep, did we finally see truth and fight back.

There were still many of us who had refused to believe the Vampires were even an issue in the first place.

Now, there's something even greater calling to our attention. Something that will require both Vampires and Werewolves cooperation, which has been all but impossible in the past.

Things are changing since my father's lifeblood watered the earth, and the power and weight of my new role came crashing down upon my shoulders. There is magic in the world, magic that many of us had forgotten about. It had left for a while, and no one alive cares to remember why.

It's finally waking up again, bringing Goddess knows what along with it.

[Alpha Asher By Jane Doe] chapter 101

Two Days Before Announcement

"You're sure they're going to accept me?" I asked for the thirtieth time since passing the 'Welcome to the town of Pine Plains.'

I had yet to see a single building, house, or spec of life since passing that sign. There seemed to be nothing but unending forest, caps of juniper and pine that inched higher and higher as they veered up the slopes of the mountainous terrain.

The scent of sap and earth permeated the air, mixing with the richness of the trees, slipping through the sliver in the window as we coasted down the highway. The views were incredible; jagged walls of earth surrounded us as we drove through and around mountains.

We had been driving for hours now, but the finality of everything hadn't truly set in until I saw the sign, reminding me that we were growing closer and

closer to the capital of Asher's- -of our pack.

"I have no doubt they'll accept you." Asher replied from the driver's seat, the depth of his voice near matching the rumble of the engine as we sped up an incline. Even though the sounds were similar, only one affected me so much.

Eyes I had once thought were honey colored, but were actually full of golden fragments, were locked on me in the passenger seat. The way his eyes would heat when he looked at me for too long, darkening the golden hues into something savage, the impact of it hit me full force every time.

I swallowed heavily when they drifted downwards, to the charcoal-colored dress I had picked out for this special occasion. It was the most professional article of clothing I had in my closet, along with a pair of black pumps. The dress fit to my athletic form,

which had toned even more over the last three months, and ended just above my knees. His eyes ventured back up, taking their time as I squirmed in my seat.

"They will accept you because you are my mate, and you deserve to be accepted." He smirked, revealing just a flash of canine before wiping the expression away. "As for our people, they will accept you because I do. They will respect you as I do, and trust will build over time."

"Wow. They must have a lot of faith in you and your parents." I murmured in surprise. The next words that trickled through my brain might have been better left unsaid, but I had a bad habit of

letting things slip past my lips. "Not many had that kind of loyalty towards Tyler or his parents. Most of them only stayed because there was no other option."

"Not everyone is capable of inspiring that kind of loyalty." Asher said with honesty in his voice, not at all irritated from the mention of my recently deceased ex-boyfriend. The man- -boy, I thought I'd mark, mate, and spend the rest of my life with. The excitement I once felt at being toted around on his arm made me want to gag. Asher's eyes flickered over to me again, though this time only for a fraction of a second. "You'll notice that my family

house isn't very large. Most of the money that is taxed from the members of our pack is put back into the community, and the warriors who protect it.

Actually, a good portion of my parent's income is from my morn."

"Doesn't your dad make money, from being Alpha?" I questioned, remembering how Tyler and I would run through the maze-like halls of his house, which seemed more like a mansion or estate.

There had been a time or two when I was very young, where I had actually become lost within those halls. The first few times Tyler had found me crying in the hallway, and would snicker at me as he led me downstairs. There was never a time where Tyler had to go without something, never a time where his family worried about making ends meet.

"Being an Alpha doesn't come with a paycheck." Asher chuckled lowly, the sound rumbling through his chest. Even though I felt like I knew the man well, some of the things he said surprised me. I soaked in every word, feeling out of step in the world of ruling. "A good Alpha takes what he needs to survive comfortably, only if his people are living in the same conditions."

I replayed his words in my head for the rest of the drive, trying to apply them to my own newfound position as Queen of the Vampires. As we coasted down the curved highway that wrapped around the base of the mountain, I thought of my new role and how much trouble I had encountered in just three short months.

Since the death of their once King, things have been rocky. I was a newcomer, a tribrid without any roots. The ones who followed me did so out of duty and sense of self-preservation, but there were still many who voiced their opinions against me. I couldn't blame them, not entirely.

After all, my first act in their world had been to assassinate their King.

The dark thoughts that swarmed my head scattered as my name fell from Asher's lips, fleeing from the sun that washed my world in tones of gold and amber.

"We're just a few minutes away." He told me with a grin, chuckling when my eyes flitted out the window.

"Is the capital of your pack in the middle of the forest?" I asked, lifting an eyebrow at him.

While I had expected a sprawling city, or at least a semi-bustling town, neither Maya or I would have complained if it was. It would give us an excuse to go on more than our morning runs, which had become few and far between already.

"Now you're picturing huts, and little wooden cabins." Asher deadpanned, making me snicker where I sat.

"That and small fishing boats, nightly town bonfires..." My teasing trailed off when we coasted down another hill, and around a sharp curve.

Traffic seemed too thin at some point, making us and the two cars behind us the only ones on the road. In a moss-colored minivan behind us, with rusted rims and a bundle of lavender hanging from the rearview mirror, was my grandma, dad and Sean.

Breyona, her parents, and Mason followed behind, in a blacked-out SUV that held both Giovanni and Tristan inside.

We had decided to bring Holly along as well, to expose her more to the world. It was Holly I worried about the most.

She seemed to shut down once being rescued, fearful of this new place. She rode in the blacked-out SUV with Tristan and Giovanni, even though she could withstand direct daylight. Her half witch, half vampire genetics made sunlight uncomfortable, but not deadly.

As lost in thought as I was, I wasn't oblivious to the passing forests and ravines. From the corner of my eye, I saw a flash of silver, and turned my head to see the very distinct outline of a wolf dashing through the woods. Anytime it neared closer to the tree line, I could see a flash of silver and a long snout.

"I think we're being followed." I told Asher, nodding towards the passenger window.

He glanced over once, then twice before rolling his eyes and cursing. What I did notice was the very distinct lack of surprise on his face.

"Of course, mom told him we were almost here." He snorted, turning his eyes back to the road. I watched the muscle in his jaw move before looking back towards the silver wolf. "The welcoming committee tailing us right now is my younger brother, Brandon."

"Well, I don't know how skilled he is at swimming, but he's running out of ground to run on." I snickered, now fully invested in watching.

The forest began to thin out, giving me a better view of my mate's younger brother. We had talked about his family many times, but Brandon was always a subject that made Asher uptight.

Brandon's wolf was silver with some onyx patches around his face and ears. Nearly the same size as my wolf, he kept up with us easily, even over the rocky terrain. He was agile, I'd give him that. He pressed off of a particularly large stone and landed on four paws just a few seconds later, never losing speed. His eyes, which were a more washed-out shade of Asher's honey color, kept darting towards us.

"He's showing off for you." Asher deadpanned, never once looking over from where he sat. "If you wave at him, he might never leave us be."

For good measure, I waved a couple times.

Another minute in and I watched withheld breath as the road we were currently on became a two-lane bridge. There was no more earth on either side of us for Brandon to continue running on, just a steep rocky slope, and a near endless looking lake that glittered beneath the sun.

"He's not going to jump." I shook my head, certain of it. A few more seconds passed, but he wasn't slowing down. If anything, he was gaining speed with every leap and push. I looked towards Asher with wide eyes, "Is he?"

Asher glanced over at the cliff and was quiet for just a second, "The fall won't kill him. Won't even break a bone if he sticks his landing right."

"That's going to be hard to do as a wolf." I pointed out, just a tad more concerned than Asher.

"He's a fast shifter." Asher shrugged, lifting a thick eyebrow at me.

At the very last moment, Brandon's feet kicked off the ground and into the air. One foot turned into six and then seven, until there was nothing but sky and air beneath his body. With his snout towards the glittering lake, the silver fur shrunk into his body, revealing bare skin, a cocky grin, and a very obvious male appendage. The splash signifying his landing was the last thing I heard.

We coasted over the bridge and back into the densely packed forest without another glimpse of silver fur or toffee eyes.

Now it was my turn to gasp when the forest finally opened up. The tree's veered off to the left and right, creating a bowl shape around the entire city with steep mountain edge's blocking everything in.

There were at least three snowcapped mountains off in the distance, each one more jagged and unique.

The entire city was bathed in color. Brick buildings and cobalt shutters, plum colored park benches and flower wrapped street lamps. There were buildings with graffiti art on the sides, pictures that sprawled from top to bottom showing hyper realistic wolves and other animals.

"This is the art district. Anything that has to do with creative expression, you'll find here." Asher smirked softly, some of the harshness in his eyes smoothing out. "Art galleries, classes, restaurants, and clubs are all on this side of town. The university is actually only a few blocks away."

We continued through the art district, and I marveled at the random statues that seemed to have little monuments around town. Many of them were abstract pieces, twisted and curved. I couldn't interpret a single one, but they were all incredible to look at.

"The college students make those." Asher pointed out as we passed another, "Mom figured they'd look better around town than in a storage closet somewhere, so every year she picks a few winners to be featured in the city."

From the art district, it was another ten-minute drive to a modest looking neighborhood, surrounded by little ponds and domed fountains.

The houses were clearly meant for families, judging from the assortment of toys across many of the lawns. The neighborhood was very obviously lived in and loved with great care.

We headed towards the end of the street, and pulled into a long driveway. My heart thudded with every passing second, listening to the sound of smooth pavement beneath the tires of the SUV.

I took a second to admire the house, trying to see a younger version of Asher storming out the front door and down the porch steps. Large windows allowed light into the living room, giving me a glimpse at a leather sectional and a small television.

We hadn't the chance to climb the porch steps before the front door was opening, and a petite woman came outside. Chestnut hair that drifted just a bit farther than her shoulders, along with a light spattering of freckles across her face. Asher's morn still looked young, with slight creases around her eyes and mouth. A smile stole her face the moment she saw us both, though I'm sure my face was one of surprise.

"You're both early." She squealed, eyes lighting up as she clasped her hands together. She pivoted on her heel and glanced back at us. "I 'll go get your dad!"

I smirked at Asher as I heard his morn's voice ring throughout the house, telling Killian to get downstairs and that work can take a minute.

I wasn't at all stunned to see that Asher was the spitting image of his dad, who gave me a firm handshake and what I assumed was a warm smile. He was much like Asher with the limited facial expressions, the most frequent ones ranged from mildly disgruntled to full blown rage. The only difference were that Asher's eyes were completely unique from his parents, and that his dad's hair was a bit on the longer side.

"I have been waiting so long to meet you. All I ask is that you call me Claire, and make yourself at home here." Asher's morn beamed, pulling me into a hug even though I had no say. She was a few inches taller than me, and for a brief moment, my chest

tightened as I remembered my own morn. Our relationship had been tumultuous at best, but there had been a time where I wanted her attention and advice. She gave Asher a smug grin and released me from her grip, "I told him that once he left this town he'd finally find his mate. I knew from the very beginning it would take someone special to catch his attention. He was just too stubborn to listen to me."

"Special is a very generous way of describing me." I nodded, giving her a sheepish grin that showed just how out of my element I was. Fighting I could do, but meeting my mate's parents- -that was bound to make anyone nervous. I stumbled over my words for a moment before regaining my footing, "Are you sure you don't mind my family staying here?"

“Of course, we don’t mind. You’re all a part of the family now. It’s been too long since we’ve had a full house.” Claire shook her head, smiling softly up at Asher’s Dad, Killian. “I’ve been beginning to think Killian here enjoys the peace.”

“Of course, I don’t mind if they stay.” Killian grumbled, the look on his face was equal parts pain and adoration.

I didn’t bother trying to stifle my grin, even when Asher cocked a dark eyebrow at me.

Dad, Grandma and Sean arrived just fifteen minutes later, pulling the van into the long driveway.

Grandma veered towards the porch, stopping at the garden that sat just next to the front steps. Colorful flowers sat in rows, with a small wire fence protecting them from smaller creatures. The flowers themselves were wilted, only shadows of their potential.

I watched Dad chuckle to himself as he spotted her, and hobbled over to the trunk to grab some of the smaller bags. Asher and Sean grabbed the rest, hauling them into the house.

“I’ve had nothing but trouble with those plants.” Claire sighed, giving my grandma a tired grin. “I’ve tried just about everything, but they keep dying on me.”

“Don’t you worry, I’ll have these plants healthy in no time.” Grandma waved a hand at Claire, whose grin widened even further.

“Actually, there’s another garden out back. It’s doing a lot worse than this one. Killian’s sister planted them for me, but they really do seem to hate me.” Claire chuckled, leading Grandma inside and to the backyard.

“Your brother left a few hours ago, presumably to welcome you two in.” Killian grunted, reminding me far too much of Asher with his calm and poised demeanor. “You should be safe to go for dinner without running into him.”

“Is Brandon really that bad?” I snorted, glancing between both father and son.

Two identical faces of suppressed brutality. Hidden behind smooth skin, dark lashes, and loads of silky hair. Attractive in that savage sort of way. Asher let a small smirk form on his face at my question, while Killian actually rolled his eyes.

“My other son can be exhausting.” Was all he said before returning to Claire’s side.

We stayed for another hour, and I relished the chaos of it all. Grandma was talking Claire’s ear off about her garden, calling me over every few minutes to join in the conversation.

My dad had liked Killian from the beginning, actually having some friends that grew up in his pack. Dad was recounting his war stories, while Killian added a few of his own. We all but had to pry them away to make the reservation Asher had placed for all of us.

“I think I’m actually going to stay here, dear.” Grandma smiled softly, but I could see the eagerness in her eyes at a new project. That garden would have no choice but to grow, no matter how much it detested Claire. “I ‘m going to get an early start on that garden. Mark my words, it’ll flourish before we leave.”

“Make sure you eat, mom.” Dad frowned, bushy eyebrows creasing together.

“Don’t try me.” She frowned at him, gesturing towards the door. “I made sure you were fed for twenty-five years, leave me be. I know how to feed myself.”

Sean and I snickered as Dad mumbled something incoherent, following us from the house.

Asher had made plans at a restaurant in town, undoubtedly a popular one given it was Friday afternoon. I had been correct when we had to circle the block three times before finding a slim parking space alongside the road.

Upbeat music played from across the street, carrying the mouthwatering scents of fried food. There was a patio outside that overlooked a small lake, and was already freckled with people milling about.

I was relieved to see I wasn't the only one overdressed. Plenty of she-wolves wore dresses and shorts, enjoying the warmth that came with the fading sun.

As we exited the vehicle and crossed the street to the restaurant, I couldn't help but feel eyes on us.

Everywhere I looked, people began to notice Asher and I.

A warmth spread down my chest and into my stomach when his arm wound itself around my waist, holding me close under the eyes of half the town.

"I feel incredibly vain for even saying this, but everyone is staring at us." I mumbled quiet enough for only him to hear.

"I'm not exactly the most sociable Alpha, if you haven't noticed." He replied, the corner of his mouth twitching.

"Are you making a joke?" I snorted, narrowing my eyes as I peered up at him.

"Not at all." His eyebrow lifted, a smirk stealing his face as he opened the door for me and my family.

A young host with neatly styled golden hair, and a dark collared t-shirt led us to our table, flushing profusely whenever Asher looked in his direction. His cinnamon freckles were completely lost as he stammered a warm welcome to the two of us.

"Looks like it's not just the she-wolves drooling over their Alpha." Sean chuckled once we were seated out on the patio, directly beside the picket fence that separated the restaurant from the sidewalk and street.

While it gave us the perfect view of the setting sun and glittering lake ahead, it also gave everyone on the street their own perfect view of Asher and I.

I had dealt with plenty of hate in the past, so I found myself waiting for the petty whispers to start.

“They wouldn’t dare.” Asher said without a fraction of hesitation, reassuring me that this pack was much different from the one I had been raised in.

“Not around you, they wouldn’t.” I smirked, meeting the curious eyes that watched us. “I wonder what they’ll say when you’re not at my side.”

Asher snorted, a quiet sound that I had almost missed. In the depths of his golden eyes, there was more than a hint of amusement.

“You’re excited for them to challenge you.” He stated, as it wasn’t a question. A giggle escaped my lips, followed by my dad’s raspy chortle.

“Of course, she is. Didn’t hesitate to piss you off, even before you met.” He grinned, and the sight made my chest flutter.

This was the happiest dad had been since morn was killed. Grandma was forcing him to leave the house, and even with his injured leg, walking was getting just a tad easier. He was making friends--rebuilding his life that had once crumbled.

What had been most surprising, was the excitement he showed when Asher and I announced we’d be leaving for the capital of our pack. We had offered they come, of course, without much hope that dad would leave the house. All week he talked about the trip, and how his bag was already packed.

I blinked back the emotion in my eyes, refusing to become a blubbery mess over top of the steak I ordered. Instead, I lived in the moment, the curious eyes along my skin already forgotten.

I was already planning on my midnight trip for leftovers as we left the restaurant, and quite literally stumbled into two people who seemed more than elated to see Asher.

I knew who the first one was instantly. The moment his cerulean colored eyes met mine, the same shade as Claire's, and his smirk, the one he shared with Asher.

At Brandon's side, her arm laced with his, was a woman with pale blonde hair. Her rich, hazel eyes brightened and an excited smile blossomed on her face, turning her cheeks a rosy shade of pink.

"Well, if it isn't my brothers' mate." Brandon grinned cheekily, untangling himself from his companion to take a few steps towards me. He was just a few inches shorter than Asher, but still towered over me. His dark hair was cropped a bit longer, making him look mischievous and rugged. I

felt my own eyes widen and surprise flicker across my face when his eyes dipped down to the dress I wore, "Brother, you didn't tell me- -"

"Asher!" The blonde squealed, the sound both soft and feminine. She clasped her dainty hands together, painted nails drawing my attention. "Oh, you should have called me once you got in! We could have planned something- -"

Her eyes swiveled to me as I took a step in Asher's direction, flecks of mossy green showing around her pupil. Her smile never faltered, but I swore I saw a

flash of something cross her eyes that brief second.

"This is your mate?" Her petal-colored lips widened, flashing a genuine smile that was soft and sweet. She pressed forwards and took her hands in my own, "It's so incredible to meet you, Luna. I'm Asher and Brandon's best-friend, Cassidy. We practically grew up with one another, well us and their cousins."

It was hard to keep up with her enthusiasm, but the kindness she spoke with seemed so genuine. I gave her my own smile and introduced myself.

Her attention quickly turned back to Asher, and I tried not to let that fact grate on my nerves. Shoving my wolf's instincts down where they could no longer torment me, I paid attention to the conversation, and was surprised at what I had noticed.

Asher was very obviously glaring at Brandon, all whilst Cassidy talked solely to him.

"I think we should definitely get together tomorrow for lunch." She said with a giggle, brushing her hand against his arm to gain his attention. His eyes flickered down on me when I very obviously stiffened, but Cassidy was still talking. "We have so much to catch up on. Hopefully you won't be leaving again soon with my birthday coming up next week."

"We will be in town for a while." Asher nodded at Cassidy, familiarity in his eyes for his childhood best-friend. "I'm sure Lola and I can find time to meet up with you, though not until after the pack meeting tomorrow."

"Why don't you invite them to the party Sunday, Cass?" Brandon murmured, a silky smile on his face.

Like a warped version of Asher that I neither liked nor hated, Brandon was the exact opposite of his brother. Brandon tugged on a lock of her pale blonde hair, making her giggle and swat at his hand. His amused eyes flickered over to me, "I don't suppose you like to have fun, Lola. Asher here was always so miserable at parties. I'd hate it if his mate had the same affliction."

"Really, it would be super awesome if you came." Cassidy smiled softly at Asher. Her eyes flickered over to me after a few long seconds, but her smile never faltered. "It's at a local swimming spot in town. We keep it secret year-round so the tourists can't ruin it."

Asher's eyes were hardened granite, glancing down at me in a way that made my face and neck flush.

'Don't you dare.' He warned, gruff voice rolling through my head on a wave of command that made my knee's nearly buckle.

Unfortunately, I didn't do very well with commands.

'It sounds like fun.' I pouted, 'Besides, I need to get to know people in our pack and they need a chance to get to know their Luna.' 'There will be other oppor—'

"We'll be there!" I grinned, feeling his rough growl roll across my mind.

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There was something so satisfying about disobeying my mate, no matter how selfish and conceited it sounded. Perhaps it was the way his eyes darkened and nostrils flared whenever rage surged through him, or maybe it was the fact that deep down, my disobedience turned him on.

The respected and feared Alpha Asher, tormented and denied by a girl.

From the possessive touches that reminded me who my body responded to, and with the looks that held just a flicker of anger, I knew what Asher had planned for me the moment we made it back to the house.

Luckily, the things he wanted to do weren't suited for his parents' house, so I was in the clear for the time being.

A silent game played between the two of us, one where I seldom won – -but I wasn't through trying.

Later that night, like many previous nights, sleep was an elusive beast that even I couldn't tame.

I woke up with foggy eyes and a bit of drool on my face, torn from what could have been the best sleep I've had all week.

That was perhaps the only thing I missed about my old life, the endless potential for naps.

I woke from Giovanni tugging on the chord that connected me, the Vampire Queen, to every single living Vampire in this world.

It wasn't quite like a mind-link. I couldn't enter his thoughts and snare him to my will. I could merely feel his presence, like an annoying tap on the shoulder that wouldn't cease.

I left the bedroom and wandered down the hall to the bathroom, opting to wake Asher up once I could form coherent sentences.

"I'm beginning to wonder who's really the monarch here. Doesn't the Queen ever get to sleep in?" I mumbled to myself, stumbling backwards when I nearly ran into Brandon's towering form. I took a few steps back, wiping my eyes with the backs of my hands. "Oh."

"What were you saying about monarchs and lack of sleep?" He smirked down at me, the spitting image of Asher, only with messier hair and crystal blue eyes.

The lights in the hallway were bright, making my eyes ache, but I could still smell the alcohol that wafted off of Brandon in waves. Rich amber and notes of thick honey, definitely some kind of whiskey. He wasn't piss drunk, not by far, but he had consumed more than enough to affect your average male wolf.

"Just mumbling about a dream I had." I said a bit harsher than I meant, but he was blocking the

bathroom door with his frame.

Both Claire and Killian had agreed it was better not to tell Brandon the truth. At least, not until the big announcement. Apparently, the man couldn't keep a secret to save his life. It was almost impossible to believe.

"Maybe you could tell me about this dream sometime, if my brother dares to let you out of his sight." Brandon replied, his smirk a bit messier considering his state.

I couldn't keep the death glare from settling over my face when Brandon felt bold enough to glance down at the tank top and shorts, I wore. Not at all revealing, but my obvious anger only seemed to amuse him further. I stepped back and to the side when he tried to take a step towards me.

"Why don't you hold your breath, and I'll get on that." I answered without pause, my voice rightfully harsh. I slipped past him and gave him one last glare. "Go sleep off the alcohol before I knock you out myself."

"Mm, now I see why you're my brothers' mate." He chuckled to himself, turning on his heel. With a last drunken grin, he called out over his shoulder. "Goodnight, Lola."

I woke Asher up ten minutes later, letting him know his brother was a raging dumbass. After spending a total of three minutes convincing Asher not to go and kick his drunken ass, we left the house and hopped into the sedan.

Tristan, Holly, Giovanni, Breyona and Mason all stayed in a house two neighborhoods over. The houses were newly built, so many of them were vacant for the time being. It was the perfect place to stash two Vampire's, and one Witch-Vampire who happened to be my half-sister.

We pulled up to the two —story house, wide with large windows that overlooked the porch and front yard. A driveway jutted off to the side, wrapping around the back where a two -car garage sat.

As Asher and I walked up the porch steps and through the front door, I was hit with the distinct

scent of my grandina's lavender cookies—mixed with the heady perfume that was human blood.

Since becoming the Vampire Queen, human blood was as vital as food and water. Granted, I could go longer without human blood than I could food, but it was blood that often smelled better. A month ago, I had tried to go an entire week without the thick taste of blood in my mouth. The sickness that swept through me was horrible, all but vanishing once I finally gave in.

I could feel my mouth watering, though I wasn't sure if it was from the blood or the cookies.

As we walked through the foyer and into the kitchen, I was greeted by the scent of both.

Tristan leaned against the wall; his golden hair cropped shorter now, just a few inches below his ears. It made him look a bit younger, less serious even though a scowl currently decorated his face.

Per usual, Holly was nowhere to be found. Over the past month, I had been trying to get to know her.

Never once pushing her to join the outside world or my pack, I tried everything possible to reach her.

Oddly enough, it seemed Tristan was the one to understand her most of the time. He was the only one who could get her to open up, but it didn't seem to be helping. She continued to shut herself off from the world, refusing to talk about the magic that had to be swirling beneath her skin. The same way I swore it swirled beneath mine.

Giovanni sat at the kitchen table, watching Breyona with dark eyes that shimmered with amusement every so often. Giovanni had always been reserved. Only Tristan and Breyona could evoke the slightest hint of emotion from the man. While Breyona invoked all of the good things, Tristan had the opposite effect.

"Does this taste right to you?" Breyona frowned, shoving a cookie in my face. The delicate scent of lavender mixed with vanilla and brown sugar to create something deliciously unique.

I grabbed the cookie, and took a bite, wrinkling my nose when something salty crossed my tongue.

“Too much salt.” She sighed softly, snatching the oven mitts from off the counter. With her hands on her hips, she glared at the remaining cookies in the oven. “You know, when your grandma gave me this recipe, I thought there would be actual measurements.”

“Grandma never measures anything.” I chuckled, my eyes straying to where Giovanni sat, a dark glass of blood in his hands.

With a snort, he stood and waltzed over to the fridge, purposefully ignoring Tristan as he stood just a foot away. He grabbed a blood bag from the fridge and poured it into a glass, approaching me with long steps to place it in my hands.

“Thanks.” I mumbled, still not at all used to my new title.

Vampire’s and their monarchs were different than werewolves. While there was no Vampire command forcing their will, they could feel the strength of their ruler and had a sort of sixth sense when it came to certain things. It didn’t go as far as a mind-link, but both Giovanni and Tristan could often tell when I was hungry for something other than food.

Giovanni was a man of few words, but the fact that he often brought me blood when I needed it, that was statement enough for where we stood. He supported me, both because of my friendship with Breyona, and because of the new future I wished to put into motion.

I tried not to drain the glass entirely within seconds, feeling Asher’s curious eyes on my face.

“I’m sure you didn’t call us here at four in the morning to chat?” I asked warily, already sure something had gone wrong.

“Just another pesky band of Vampire’s trying to rouse up trouble.” Tristan sighed, brushing back the strands of hair from his face. When Giovanni grunted, Tristan flashed him an icy glare.

“Pesky?” Giovanni repeated, his light accent paired with his deep voice to create something almost musical. “They killed six werewolves.”

“Six?” I paled, already thinking about the future backlash and the grief the families must be going through. I glanced up at Asher, whose golden eyes had darkened with rage. “Where are they attacking from? We’ll send forces after the announcement, and give them an opportunity to stand down.”

“They could cause much more damage within the next eight hours.” Breyona pointed out.

“I know, but I don’t think sending warriors there to slaughter them is any better.” I sighed, plopping down in one of the wooden chairs at the dining room table. “I need the other Vampire’s to see that I’m on their side, that I’m not going to kill them all because I’m mated to an Alpha.”

“Why don’t you send your troops to where they’ve been attacking and simply tell them to hold back.

Don’t engage unless more lives are in danger.” Tristan suggested, leveling his cool gaze with Asher’s.

I could feel the response in him instantly, but Asher had much more patience than Giovanni. Where Tristan and Giovanni often resorted to punches, Asher hadn’t so much as laid a finger on Tristan.

“It’s not a terrible plan.” I replied, knowing as well as he did that it was our best option.

Within the next half an hour, assignments had been sent out to a team of warriors, all of which Asher and I trusted to obey orders. With bleary eyes, we headed for the front door. Tristan followed us outside, eyeing the rising sun warily.

“We need to speak.” His voice was unusually gruff, and I nodded for Asher to get in the sedan without me.

“Something wrong, Tristan?”

“Your sister is having nightmares again.” Was all he said, and I felt my stomach plummet to the ground. “Bad ones.”

“Have Breyona’s parents had any luck yet?” I asked, feeling desperation swirl in the pits of my stomach.

“They’ve found a few candidates.” He nodded sharply, eyes staring down at me. “You’ll get the files in a few hours. The sooner you go through them, the sooner we can get her help.”

“I’ll get on it.” I assured him, “But Asher’s going to have a say in it as well.”

“I’d expect nothing less.” He replied with a brittle smile, eyes roaming my face before he turned on his heel and went back inside.

Asher and I putted down the road, the engine a smooth hum as we passed houses and street signs. When we passed his family home, I frowned and looked at him.

“Where are we going?” I asked, to which he smirked softly.

“You look like you could use a run. I think I might want one as well.”

“That sounds a lot more fun than sleeping.” I replied truthfully, feeling my wolf stir beneath my skin.

If there was one thing I adored more than sleep, but less than Asher, it was shifting. The feel of bounding through the forest, your feet near silent against the earth as pure strength and instincts hurl you forwards; there’s nothing more freeing.

He pulled over on the shoulder of the road when the forest became thick, nearly impossible to peer through even from where we stood.

It was impossible not to feel confident around Asher, especially when I stripped the clothes from my body.

His eyes tracked my every movement, leaving behind goosebumps along every place his mouth and hands had touched.

Once we were both bare, the cool wind whipping across our heated skin, I closed my eyes and let Maya come through. The pain of shifting was brief, thanks to the nightly runs I often took.

I charged into the forest after Asher, hot on his trail as we kicked up dirt and clumps of grass. We were both blips of darkness as we sprinted throughout the forest.

I tailed him for a few minutes, when Maya had the brilliant idea to nip at his hind legs. Like I had expected, he turned on his heel and the two of us skidded to a stop. It took a few seconds for the dirt to settle, my heart hammering as each one passed.

With our chests heaving, we faced one another.

There was a challenge in his eyes, and Maya snarled playfully when his voice ran through our head.

'Did you just bite me, Lola?' Asher's voice wasn't velvet smooth as it normally was, but rough and commanding.

'Maybe if you picked up your pace, I wouldn't have to. ' I replied breathlessly, relishing the thrill as his eyes darkened and hackles raised.

Maya and I, on the same page as always when it came to teasing our temperamental mate, had another plan in mind.

I blinked innocently at him, taking a few steps forward to drop my head. Just as he lunged for me, easily suspecting I was up to no good, I rolled to the side and took off into the forest.

I could feel him on my tail instantly, just a few feet away as he snapped and snarled at my heels. I feigned exhaustion for a few seconds before putting on a show and kicking off the ground in a burst of strength that sent me propelling forwards.

There was a reason Asher and I were mated, one of those reason's being that he was the only man in this world that held the title as my equal.

While I leaped over the rotten carcass of a fallen tree, Asher used it as a springboard, kicking off it as he soared into the air.

The impact of his body slamming into mine made my teeth rattle, but I hardly felt the sliver of pain over the thrill of being chased—and caught.

The two of us landed in a mess of tangled limbs, bare and human as we rolled to a stop in the tall grass that surrounded us.

I had landed rather clumsily on his chest, straddling his stomach. The pads of my fingers were pressed into the thick muscle that spanned his smooth chest. My eyes trailed the vein that ran down his neck before I smirked and dug my fingernails into his chest, pinning him down for the moment. My obsidian hair, still long and wavy, hung over us like a curtain.

" See? Now's the perfect time to practice your self— control." I snickered breathlessly, my entire body thrumming from the closeness between us—and the need that tugged at my own willpower.

Asher thrived and desired control, but secretly liked the disobedience and chaos I brought to his life.

There was little to no one who would dare defy Asher, a fact I had given little thought when I first met the man.

I had been trying for weeks now to take the reins, each time failing- -though not miserably. The outcome was still phenomenal each time.

I could feel him stirring beneath me, hardening with every heavy breath that left his lips. Seconds later, the thick length of him brushed against my backside.

Keeping one hand of fingernails firmly pressed into his skin, I used the other hand to reach behind me. Smooth skin stretched taut, just a few seconds of contact before Asher snarled and flipped me over.

My breath halted in my chest as the warm grass met my back. His large hand was wrapped around my throat, while his hulking form towered over me, wedged in between my spread legs.

Since coming into both of my titles, Asher and I rarely had more than a few minutes to ourselves. Unfortunately, this time was no different.

As his Beta's voice filled his mind, I felt a persistent and incredibly impatient tug from Tristan.

"You tell me to control myself, but look at how wet you are." His snarl was another jolt of adrenaline, lighting up every nerve ending on my body, pulling my thoughts away from anyone other than himself. His fingers flexed around my throat, powerful and rough with callouses. The same ones that had ended many lives, just as his teeth had torn through countless enemies. The same set of teeth that currently hovered above my own throat. Yet, it wasn't fear that rushed through me. "The next time you do something like that, I will not stop.

Regardless of who calls us."