

# Ascension of a Gamma

## Chapter 35 Sleeping Ace

-Liam

Behind the mansion, deep into the woods where wolfsbane grew in abundance, which was about a kilometer and a half from the territory's boundary, was an isolated house. It was a bungalow like the rest of the pack's houses, painted in the same red and gray motif. The only difference was that the blinds were all drawn, and the outside was unkempt.

One person lived here, and no one else was to come near this area except for Rigel, Gale, Lexy, and myself. The rest of the pack knew better than to take the risk of getting close to the house anyway since he accidentally zapped a few members thinking they were intruders. Their timing was unfortunate – he had just woken up.

"Is he awake?" I asked Gale.

We stopped at about ten meters from the entrance. After the last incident, he might've set some traps around the house. He didn't like being disturbed. At least not when he was asleep, which was

st not when he was asleep, which was almost an entire year.

"If I knew, we wouldn't be standing here with you," he replied.

I surveyed the surroundings. Brown fallen leaves covered the ground thickly. If there were markings, there was no way of telling. The trees could've been marked

too.

"Do you want to do it?"

"No," he said. "I don't like pain."

"Still going on about that?"

Gale wasn't weak. He just abhorred pain with a passion he'd do almost anything to avoid it.

"Your arm," he said, pointing to it.

The lines lengthened, creeping up from my elbow to my upper arm, intertwining to follow the same pattern. It was almost sad to see this lovely piece of art be regarded as a marker of the remaining time of its bearer.

"Leave it," I said. "The match will be over soon."

over soon."

Gale shifted his attention back to the house.

"I'm sure you need a warm-up before the duel," he said.

Going down on one knee, he picked up a piece of stone and threw it carelessly. We held our breaths as we waited for something explosive or flashy – whatever performance he wanted to show off. The stone landed on the ground. Nothing happened.

Eight...nine...ten seconds, still nothing.

Gale exhaled in relief.

But it felt wrong

"He must've undone them?" he asked. " Maybe he's awake! We could be in luck, Liam."

It didn't feel like it. I picked up a stone and threw it as well. It landed on the ground and –

One after another, rings with written sigils around the inner area lit up on the ground. The colors were red and yellow.

Fire.

Pire.

"Stand back!" I shouted at Gale and pushed him to his side.

We each hid behind a tree, and a blast of

fire blazed past between the trees. It lasted for a few seconds. The heat was more than enough to burn the skin.

Thanks to Luca, I didn't have to worry about getting a burn.

Peeking behind the tree, the other half of the trunk had burned to charcoal, and all around were embers from ashes of burnt leaves and nearby trees. That was overkill, even for him.

"Is he trying to kill us!" Gale shouted in frustration. "Jaymer, you ass! Get out of here!" 1

No response came from the house, no sound to indicate the presence of a person.

"He's still asleep?" I asked.

Gale warily looked around. "Was that all o fit?"

"Let's find out," I said.

Getting behind him and grabbing him by

pping behind him and grabbing him by the collar, I dragged him towards the front lawn.

"Hey, hey, hey... don't – "he protested but I shoved him down the once marked areas anyway. "I'm indispensable you ass!"

"Nothing happened," I said simply as I looked around warily.

He got back up to his feet, brushing the dirt off his jeans.

"Thank Goddess. Look, I didn't know you were with Anna, alright? Maybe next time, mind-link me to get you after you two are done."

"Where's Rigel?"

"With Salina. Our spies reported a witch. Other than that, we've got nothing," he replied, narrowing his eyes at the front door.

"Sister Katrina. Used to be of the Black Star Coven. What do we know about her?" I asked, carefully making my way to the house.

«The coven's gone. She's the only one

he coven's gone. She's the only one alive who used to be a part of it."

"What happened to them?"

He wouldn't set traps directly in front of the door, would he?

"Everyone burned to their deaths."

"She survived?"

"She killed them all."

I stopped. Witches were nasty, to say the least, but a sister killing her sister, worse. Her entire coven... the rest of her kind would hunt her for it. They were a sisterhood, all of them, regardless of their covens. To kill one of them would normally go unpunished... 3

"How's she still alive?" I asked.

The sisters should've hunted her down to avenge their kind. Or did they change their system to adapt to the times – everyone was capable of change, especially if it meant their survival.

"I don't know," he said. "The team suddenly lost her, and the trackers can't pick up her scent. She's bad news, Liam."

pick up her scent. She's bad news, Liam."

"He's asleep," I said, sighing,

Of all times.

We needed him now.

"What do we do now?" he asked, sounding worried.

"We'd have to handle this without him, Assign the Delta Unit to guard Anna. Tell Rigel to split the trackers and spies. Have them go by three's, two trackers, one spy on each team. Have a team join the Delta Unit, another to the patrollers, three teams on the village."

I turned to head back to the village.

"Inform Lexy to prepare for the worst. Have the medical unit on standby and distribute potions to our men. Keep all channels open."

"Get a team here but keep them twenty five meters away. Jaymer can take care of himself but I have a feeling he'll need a bit of time if someone uninvited wanders here."

"What about Rigel?" he asked.

convince Rigel to stand by me.

My eyes glazed over as I tapped into the mind-link. Using the open pack channel, I called for their attention. The noise died down instantly. They had to be informed as well. We needed everyone...

## Chapter 36 Alpha Duel

Liam

It was almost nighttime. The pack kept pouring in into the open field in the woods, which we used for pack gatherings, often for families to hang out at night. Rigel was helping set up the bonfire, keeping his distance from me for

now.

There was no laughter in their eyes. Instead, a worrying tension that they failed to hide from me. Surprisingly, the children were present, a lot of them. They could've chosen to stay at their homes, attending tonight's event was optional. Pride swelled in my chest – they're a good pack.

They could've berated me for accepting the challenge but here they were, supporting me. How could I possibly let them down?

A link tried to connect. It was Gale." Alpha, everyone is in position."

"Don't let your guards down."

They replied with a unified answer, in a

ey replied with a unified answer, in a reassuring tone.

"Yes, Alpha."

Opening a private link with Gale, I asked, "How'd Anna take it?"

"The Delta Unit is guarding her room for now. She'll be there soon. They'll be right behind her."

"And Lexy?"

"She's with Luna, Alpha."

"I see. I'm cutting the link for now. Keep me updated on the Delta Unit's channel."

"Yes, Alpha."

Angry flames ate the wood prepared, casting pale yellow flickers on everyone's eyes, the shadows hiding their tight closed lips. I smiled as a familiar scent came from behind me. Pretending not to notice, I kept seated on the log.

Then a pair of warm hands covered my eyes.

I heard a giggling, and my smile widened.

""Hmm... who could this be?" Lasked

mm... who could this be?" I asked playfully, picturing a pout on her face.

I molded my hands into hers, reveling at the sensations she woke in me.

"Let me guess. Should I start guessing from A or Z?"

I heard the click of a tongue.

That annoyed her?

"I'll start with A. Hmm... Alia?"

Those hands harshly pulled themselves off. Then a loud hit landed on the back of my head, shaking my brain cells.

"Who is this Alia?" she snapped, standing in front of me with a hand on her hip

I'd tell her but it was way too soon.

Rubbing the back of my head, I replied with a smile.

"No one, babe. I was just messing with

you."

She pouted.

There it is.

There it is.

"Come here," I said, motioning for her to sit beside me.

With a little assistance, she was seated, watching our people fill the grounds. Two more bonfires were set up, far smaller than the first. We sat in silence, with her leaning on me and my arm around her waist. This was almost everyone. The Red Claw Pack, my pack, and now hers as well.

Her hand found mine and our fingers intertwined. I brought it up for a kiss. I could never get enough of her.

If she looked closely, she'd see that the mark had reached up the sleeves of my shirt now. And if I took it off, the mark was already on my chest. This would be the last – her silence was killing a part of me.

A new scent wafted into the air. They were here. Alpha Myron and Salina in front with their men behind them, joined my pack. They kept their distance, occupying one side.

"Anna -" I began, but she cut me off.

This time, she brought my hand closer to

is time, she brought my hand closer to her lips. Soft, gentle, unrushed. Her eyes looked up at me with clarity instead of fury.

"For the pack," she said, and forget that everyone was there, I captured her lips, feeling the softness of them as I pressed harder.

Then I got up, and without looking back, headed straight to where Myron stood – in front of the biggest bonfire. Salina and Rigel were on both sides of him.

"You showed up," I said in a bored tone.

"I challenged you. As Alpha, I remain true to my word."

"Remember that," I said.

They will always make you.

"Who will officiate the duel?" he asked. "This pack has no elder in sight."

All elders were at the Red Circle.

And Sister Katrina was nowhere to be found as well. None of the members had seen her, and neither did I since this morning

morning

"I'd like to nominate Rigel. As you are already known, he's my Head Gamma. With your consent..."

He gave Rigel a quick look. "So be it."

"Salina, why don't you find yourself a seat?" he said, an arm around her waist as he directed her out of the way. "I think their Luna needs company."

She gave me a side glance, the usual spite in her expression gone, replaced by sadness. That... couldn't have been right. Salina knew no such thing.

"Such a beautiful thing," he said, sighing. "Pity how you can't see it."

"I've seen enough," I said coldly.

Steel gray eyes stared back at me, determined to "put me in my place". Ten years ago, I would've looked away. I wasn't the same person now. I had grown and changed. I wasn't a young boy; I was now an Alpha

As we stared down at each other, Rigel interrupted.

"Let's get this over with," he said,

et's get this over with," he said, yawning

Did he just fucking yawn? 4

I was risking my life here and he was bored from this? Maybe Gale was right – I might've been too lenient on him.

My pack behind me, and his pack behind him, they gathered in an imperfect circle around us. They were about twenty-eight meters away to give us the space we needed. Rigel's voice was loud and clear as she addressed everyone present.

"Tonight, the two packs have come together to witness the traditional duel between Alphas, challenged by Alpha Myron Knox of the Blue Moon Pack and accepted by Alpha Liam of the Red Claw Pack. Let the death marks bear testimony that the Moon Goddess has given them her blessing."

That was what it was – a blessing. Myron began to unbutton his shirt as Rigel continued. A little girl came up to him, holding a golden goblet in each of her hands.

"Let the ceremonial wine warm their

Det the ceremonial wine warm their spirits, that it may give them the courage to see the duel to its end."

Rigel took the goblets from her and handed them to us. I emptied the content, the fiery taste of wolfsbane burning all the way down to my stomach.

It felt warm at first then it began to spread to my limbs, getting hotter and hotter by the second. I shrugged my shoulders and stretched my neck, ignoring the burning heat. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, the weight of their anxiety boring on my back. They supported me with a silent trust. None opposed my decision. It was all riding on me now.

"The Alpha Duel has two rules: One, the winner, or in his absence, his second-in-command, gets to enforce his terms, and the defeated must give his Alpha Word, or in his absence, his second-in-command must give his Beta word, to accept those terms; and two, the defeated is the Alpha who perishes first or surrenders."

"Myron kept a calm demeanor all

throughout, his arms to his sides with a thoughtful expression on his face. His

ughtful expression on his face. His eyes were set on me, shifting from time to time to the background.



"Alphas, name your Betas," said Rigel.

"Beta Gale Gavyn," I said aloud.

A snarl came from behind me, followed by howls.

"I have none," said Myron. "My daughter, the future Luna shall take the Beta's place."

Howls came from his own pack.

"I accept."

Rigel nodded, then stepped back from us.

Myron took off his shirt, showing the death marks that were almost upon his heart. We were running out of time,

He lowered himself on a solid stance. His breathing was controlled, and his eyes on me. His pack howled for him, and he raised both arms in a defensive position.

I raised my shirt over my head and threw it to the side. My pack howled, a plethora of emotions pulsing through the open channel. It felt hotter still. I hadn't drunk

Annel. It felt hotter still. I hadn't drunk wine with wolfsbane in a while.

Almost close to where the pack had gathered, Rigel stopped and got on all fours. It took him a few moments to shift into his wolf. Once that was done, he looked us over.

"Come," said Myron.

Rigel raised his head to the moon and howled

I was on him immediately, my first punch blocked by his arm. I didn't give him a split second to adjust as I continued to rain combinations on his head and body, finding a weak spot. He blocked them all. Not a single hit landed.

When I was still training under him, I couldn't defeat him. But it was different now. This wasn't a practice session; this wasn't a game. There were too many at stake, too much to lose.

I didn't let him breathe as I joined in kicks along with the punches, alternating between low kicks and high kicks. He was faster still.

He dodged all my attacks, without having

dodged all my attacks, without having taken a single step back. As expected of my father's disgraced Beta.

I retreated in five steps, keeping my distance from him. My body was heating up, my breathing ragged, and beads of sweat rolled off my forehead.

That must've been a really strong mix, I don't remember it having this effect on me. 1

I filled my air with lungs, keeping my face straight and my stance solid. 2

"You let your guard now," a voice whispered in my ear, followed by a punch aimed at my abdomen. I dodged to the side at the last second, still keeping my distance. My limbs felt heavier, and my heart hammered in my chest as I struggled to breathe. Everything felt hot like I was burning in flames but on the inside.

"You don't look so good, boy," said Myron who was suddenly beside me.

A powerful roundhouse kick landed on the side of my head, and I was lifted off the ground only to land back down. A

Oground only to land back down. A ringing in my ears made me dizzy, and my vision a little blurry. I got back up with constrained effort, the cold wind making me shiver as it blew on my sweaty back.

I swayed on my feet, confused as to what just happened or what was happening. I planted my feet firmly on the ground and raised my arms for defense, but before my eyes could see clearly, a punch landed on my right cheek, then on my left. My head spun and my vision went hazy, pain registering on my brain from the beating.

"You should know by now, boy," he said in a harsh tone. "You always lose to me."

A mind-numbing pain shot from my jaw and I lost balance, landing on the ground with a heavy thud. I tasted metal in my mouth, and I could hardly see anything from my left eye. And yet, the fire from earlier continued to spread and burn, my body weighing like a ton as sweat poured out of my pores.

He placed his foot on my chest, pressing down on my heaving chest and I coughed up blood. Too hot. I was burning inside \*like an oven and my mind was foggy. I

an oven and my mind was foggy. I didn't understand how I was on my back, looking up at the man I hated most. From the flickers of the campfire's light illuminating his face, I could see him smirk triumphantly as if he had already

won.

Won? Won what?

I couldn't think straight with the searing pain coursing throughout my body, the pain from the bruises and cuts and kicks he gave me. Something weighed my body down, something far stronger than gravity held me on the ground and pinned my entire body to it. I couldn't even lift a finger.

"Yield!" he shouted, stomping on my chest.

My body lurched forward on its own as blood shot up from my throat to my mouth, leaving more pain in its sudden reaction.

"Yield!" he shouted again and kicked me on the side of my stomach.

I spat the blood in my mouth and forced the word out of me

**meworu Out on me.**

"No!" I shouted.

Why am I saying no?

Another kick to my side. "Yield!"

"No!" I shouted with Herculean effort it felt like my lungs would burst open.

Pain.

All I could register was the agonizing protest of every part of me and the taste of my own blood. All I could feel was the relentless fire that consumed me.

Another stomp on my chest. I couldn't tell if my body was reacting anymore.

"Yield!"

But despite all the confusion and the tortuous screaming of my body, the voice in my head shouted "no." I stuck to that voice as I felt myself drowning, the pain inflicted on my flesh and the scream of "yield" fading...

The small voice repeated itself over and over, saying only that one word. I clung to it like it was my saving grace. I clung to it like it was the light in the darkness that surrounded me. I couldn't breathe but

ofrouted me. I couldn't breathe but somehow, I was alive. I couldn't feel my limbs, the pain subduing as I focused on that faint voice. It said no other word but no."

Then I heard another. "If you yield, the pain will stop," it said. It was louder, it drowned out the small voice. "If you yield, you'll be free."

I told it no.

“Yield and you will free yourself of the

*pain.*”

“No.”

Why do I keep saying no?

“Yield!” it demanded, shouting at me.” Yield, now!”

The booming voice hurt my head, but I was determined to keep saying no. With every reply, the pain returned... increasing in intensity. It felt unbearable, The fire returned. I could picture the flames raging and burning everything inside me. I could feel the blows on my stomach, on my legs, on my head, and on my chest.

my chest.

And louder than the shouting voice in my head was something familiar. It said no words, it was but a sound. A sound that lit something in my mind. Something in me pulsed, slow at first then faster and faster

A scream tore through my throat. A scream so low and guttural in my ears, it didn't sound human. I felt my bones crack, and my insides twist and move. Another scream forced its way out my mouth, and I slammed my head back down to stop the splitting headache.

The pain grew tenfold than before. I was being split. I gasped for air as my lungs began to feel smaller, and soon I was struggling to breathe. My body spasmed, the flames jumping around.

I was losing my senses, losing a sense of who I was. All I could feel and think of were the waves of furious torture that racked throughout my body, intent on destroying me.

Someone screamed, her voice almost a

cry.

“Liam!!!

jam!!!”

Then everything went black

When I opened my eyes, I was face to face with a wolf. The murderous gaze of gray eyes focused on me. The wolf in front of me snarled and snapped its jaw – Alpha Myron.

"Stay with me," said Luca.

Luca?

Realization dawned on me at the mention of his name. I was in his body, and he was in full control. The pain from earlier was gone, and I felt a lump gather in my throat. I still felt hot, although compared to the raging wildfire earlier, this one felt like dying embers.

"What happened?" I asked him.

The wolf attacked, jumping forward and aiming for our neck. Luca growled and tilted his head, successfully biting at the wolf's left hind leg. It whimpered, then dragged itself a short distance from us.

"I don't know," he replied, warily eyeing him. "I can't hold on much longer, Liam."

Myron limped but he wasn't backing

ron limped but he wasn't backing down. He aimed for our neck once more that Luca and I had to fight him off again. He continued attacking, looking for the split-second opening that would guarantee his win.

This had become what it truly was – a fight to the death.

"You have to finish him," said Luca, heavily panting

Luca staggered, body leaning to one side that we almost tipped over.

Myron jumped to our side.

Luca whimpered. He got bit on his side. Taking advantage of our bigger size, Luca snapped his jaws at the wolf's head. Then, he paced back for some distance.

"I'm... fading," he said.

He didn't give me time to process what was happening or to reply.

Growling, he lurched forward at an incredible speed and I understood this was his last strength.

- "I'll give you an opening."

il give you an opening.

Luca found his neck and bit down, hard. He moved his head from side to side, trying to tear the flesh apart as a last show of strength and defiance. Myron howled in pain before dropping to the ground, blood dripping down his neck.

Luca howled at the moon, then he retreated. His body was returning, mine showing itself in place of it. The fire returned to consume me; my insides had probably burnt to coal by now. A growl escaped me.

Myron was shifting back to his human form as well. Lifting one heavy foot up, then another, and another...

I dropped on my knees when I neared him. He was sputtering red, and he'd choke on his own blood if this continued. Positioning myself right beside him, I dangled one arm from his shoulder, then slowly brought it up to capture his neck tightly.

I was losing consciousness. Everything was beginning to fade again.

I tightened my hold, strangling him harder. His legs kicked at the ground

O der. His legs kicked at the ground while his nails clawed at my arms and reached up desperately for my face.

I was going...

"Yield!!!" I shouted, using up all the air in my lungs as I poured the last of my strength into choking him. It lasted for what seemed like a long time...

Until I heard him whisper something, and my body was beyond exhausted that my hold loosened, and I instantly fell on my back. The fire had fully consumed me. I felt nothing anymore. The beating of my heart, the unbearable heat, the pain in my chest – everything, gone. There was only tranquility. My breathing heavy with every intake, the moon high up in the sky watching my struggle.

Am I dying?

"Alpha Liam has won the Alpha Duel!" someone shouted, and cheers and howls erupted, cutting through the peaceful feeling washing over me. I smiled, letting it take over. My body felt lighter and lighter until I couldn't feel it anymore.

This feels... peaceful.

This feels... peaceful.

There was no pain, no pain of any kind. Just a comforting quiet, a soft warm embrace. Every memory I treasured flashed by in a blur.

They're waiting for me.

Something pulsed in my head. Curiosity took over and I opened it.

"Alpha," a voice said. It was Gale, my best friend, and Beta. My little brother.

I smiled, that snotty boy was all grown up now. His voice was urgent as he spoke again.

“Vampires were spotted near the territory. Rogues incoming.”

Vampires? Rogues?

I think he was saying something else, but I was floating away somewhere. So light and so free, I was leaving for somewhere.

Where?

I felt a pleasant tingling on my skin. I felt warmth.

That feels nice. Where do I go now?

That feels nice. Where do I go now?

If I floated away, I got the feeling these lovely sensations wouldn't last long. I didn't like that. I wanted it to last for as long as it could

I felt the warmth spread. Then something

... wet.

Why would I feel wet?

Sighing in my head, I went back down. There was something wrong. The warmth I felt was getting cold... colder as I felt myself get heavier. I wasn't floating anymore, I was descending. It didn't feel right to float. The cold troubled me.

All of a sudden, I heard a sniffle. My lids felt like lead, but I forced them open anyway.

Anna.

My heart sank. She had tears in her eyes, and her lips quivered.

I'm sorry.

I could never do anything right by her. All I did to her since she got here was make her cry and worry. I couldn't even protect her when she needed me the most.

I could, but I was too tired to reply. Luca was retreating further into my mind and soon the link would cut. I had to warn her.

I opened my mouth to speak, but only my lips parted. She had to get to safety.

Run. Run. Run!

I was screaming in my mind, but she brought her face to mine instead and kissed me. So soft, so sweet, so right. But she had to leave.

Please... run.

If something ever happened to her, I'd never forgive myself. She didn't deserve this. None of them deserved this. They had to run, all of them. For now.

I can't protect them, again.

How much time had gone by? They had to get away from here.

I tried to speak again. The darkness pulled me into itself. A breath left my lips as my eyes closed. I could only hope I said the word

### Chapter 37 Luna's Pleas

-Anna

His body went limp as he closed his eyes, lips parted, a single breath leaving his mouth.

"No. No. Liam. Liam..."

I slapped his face gently for a few times to wake him. He couldn't just leave me. He couldn't just...

I screamed his name over and over as I slapped his face harder, but he didn't respond. Sweat and blood slicked his face and arms. He had bruises all over his torso. He felt cold. Too cold like he had been submerged in icy water for hours.

"Liam..." I whispered, choking at the words I wanted to say. More tears flowed as I cupped his cheek.

Please open your eyes. Please... you can't just leave me... us. The pack needs you. I need you.

A firm grip on my shoulder made me jerk my head up. The pack members had surrounded us, looking down at us with

nee your

A firm grip on my shoulder made me jerk my head up. The pack members had surrounded us, looking down at us with pained faces, most of them in tears. I looked back to the person behind me. It was Rigel. He wore a calm expression, but his eyes flickered momentarily into a deeper shade of forest green.



"Anna! Liam!" a voice shouted. Lexy came running to us, the pack making way for her and three more members. "Le... he

She got down on her knees and pressed two fingers below his ear.

"He has a pulse," she said, beckoning for her companions to put the stretcher down.

I hesitantly handed him to them, and with Rigel's help, I shakily got to my feet.

Lexy's face hardened and her brows furrowed.

"Come with us," she said, joining the rest who were already carrying Liam away from the scene. I nodded and was about to follow when the murmuring of the pack stopped me. Their eyes were

glued to Liam, a glimmer of hope in their eyes. None of them looked back at us as they hurried to get him to the clinic.

I took deep breaths to calm myself.

He's going to be alright. Lexy's the best healer there was. He'll wake up, right?

He fought hard for us. Seeing him get kicked and punched and stepped on was mortifying, but he always got back up. He didn't scream in pain, he didn't ask for a break, he never pleaded for his opponent to stop. He kept denying, he kept saying "no", and he kept fighting back.

The pack cheered him on regardless. They believed he'd win, and he did. They trusted their futures upon him completely, even though he accepted the challenge suddenly and on his own. And even now, they continued to hope that he would return to them.

Noble. Admirable.

For his people to place this much faith in him, I was yet to understand how burdensome it must be for him. I was willing to share it. He didn't have to bear the weight alone. Not anymore.

A thoughtful expression on his face. His eyes were set on me, shifting from time to time to the background.

"Alphas, name your Betas," said Rigel.

"Beta Gale Gavyn," I said aloud.

A snarl came from behind me, followed by howls.

"I have none," said Myron. "My daughter, the future Luna shall take the Beta's place."

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zone immediately.

The children began to wail, and their mothers gathered them in their arms.

"Mind-link everyone left in the village. Retreat to the Forbidden Area, Block 2E."

As soon as he finished, the pack ran ahead of us. Most of them shifted into their wolves and sprinted, into the Forbidden Area Rigel had just mentioned.

Everyone in the village?

I watched the pack members frantically run over to safety. This wasn't an evacuation. They were retreating,

Why?

The Alpha was down. No one to issue orders and coordinate a counterattack among the different units. They could communicate via a mind-link but that'd only lead to more confusion. They were sitting ducks, we all were. Loyal to the Alpha, the Gammas would fight to their last. The howls grew louder. This time, it came in random intervals, and most sounded pained.

Rigel was gripping my arm painfully as he dragged me forward. I was a distraction,

dragged me forward. I was a distraction. They needed their Head Gamma and here he was, dragging my sorry self to safety. Could we win without him?

They knew more about this pack than I did. This was the Red Claw Pack! They took down other packs and they were the largest pack on the continent.

I had to trust them... trust Gale...

And yet my gut shouted at me to interfere.

They had a strong chain of command until the Alpha, the head, was cut off the picture. The Beta was next, but if the attack was widespread...

Gale could handle it. I didn't underestimate any of them in the slightest. I shouldn't do this. I'd only get in the way. But... I couldn't let them do this alone when I could do something...

I forced myself to a stop.

Rigel glared at me. "What are you doing? We have to get you out of here," he implored.

Take me to Liam," I said firmly.

"Lexy will –

I shook my arm off his grasp and started to run, more like limp, towards the clinic. He had no choice but to follow.

"What are you doing?" he asked, irritated.

"I need to be with him. Get me a map and give me a run-down of our units. You'll be my eyes and ears until this is over."

"Anna, I have to get you to safety!" he shouted, his eyes flashing a dangerous glare.

I understood that keeping him here was frustrating him. His men were on the frontlines and he should be there with them. But he had to make up for my shortcoming. I didn't have a wolf.

He made a move to grab my hand, but I jumped to my side to avoid it, balancing on one foot. I kept up with my pace.

"Anna please!" he shouted. "Listen to m

e!"

"I need... I need you to relay orders to our

fighters!

My mind was thinking up how we could survive this, years of training under my father kicking in.

Tamen RICKING m.

"I'm joining the fight."

"Liam is unconscious, for fu—"

"Not Liam's," I said, looking him right in the eye. "Mine."

The door opened with a bang. One of Lexy's assistants was on his way out.

"Where is he?" I demanded, and he pointed to a hallway. My voice must've shocked him – I was beyond anxious and

furios.

We passed by a line of displayed lockers. A map was spread out on the wall beside the pack crest. I hurriedly removed the pins and clung to the map.

"This way," said Rigel, passing me by and leading the way

When we reached the room, from the small circular glass window, I could see him lying down on a bed, with an oxygen mask on and different tubes attached to his body. The people gathered around him, every single one of them busy with their own tasks.

"You're taking his place?" Rigel asked

ou're taking his place?" Rigel asked silently, his lips set in a deep frown.

He reached for my arm, but I pulled it back, avoiding him. "No, Rigel!"

"I have to get you to safety, Sarina!" he shouted, making me gasp. He slapped himself once, hard, leaving a red handprint on his cheek. "I'm sorry. Anna, please..."

I shook my head, dismissing his outburst. We'd discuss it later. Right now, we had three forces to deal with.

"Their positions and units. Mark all of it o in the map."

"Anna..."

"I am your Luna, and you will obey my commands!" I shouted.

His eyes widened then he recovered, his eyes the normal clear green.

"Now do as you're told, Head Gamma."

His gaze hardened as he stared down at m

“Fine,” he said through gritted teeth. He snatched the man from muhand and

atched the map from my hand and spread it on the floor. He pointed to several spots as he gave a brief summary of their positions and numbers.

The rogues are here,” he said, pointing to o an area in the northeast borders, “and here.” Another area on the eastern borders. “Right now, the special units are on standby. The remaining Gammas have split into two.”

From the north, it was closer to the castle. The attack on the east most likely targeted the villagers. But why? The timing was impeccable. There weren’t many members in the village. If they attacked earlier, they would’ve had more advantages.

Their number was too many and rogues usually acted alone or in small groups. This seemed like a coordinated attack. It couldn’t have been a coincidence. What were they really after?

“Where’s the Forbidden Area?” I asked,” Block2E?”

“Here,” he said, pointing to a spot the farthest from the attacks.

“Why’s it forbidden?”

Why’s it forbidden?”

“The pack’s craziest member lives there. He’s isolated for many reasons, but when need be, he will protect the pack,” he replied

“How?” I ask, “Who... what... is he?”

He hesitated in answering. “He... he’s a very powerful witch.”

Witch! That’s it!

“Where’s the witch who came with the Blue Moon Pack?” I overheard Lexy talking to some scary-looking warriors earlier at the mansion about a witch.

“We don’t know,” he admitted.

“Keep the channel open. Pass this to

Gale.”

His eyes glazed over.

"Tell him I'm taking command. Pull back our fighters on the east borders and have them join our forces on the northeast."

"The rogues will enter."

"Let them. Mobilize all special units near the area. Draw them into the territory. The slope should slow them down. Tell

The slope should slow them down. Tell those units to repeatedly engage and retreat."

"More rogues are coming," he growled, relaying Gale's reply.

"In the absence of the Head Gamma, the Delta Unit will lead them. All special units near the Forbidden Area are to gather there immediately. They have only one order: protect the pack at all costs."

"The Delta Unit is for you, Luna!"

"I am with the Head Gamma. He is more than enough to protect me," I retorted. "Where is this very powerful witch? Which border is he assigned?"

"He is asleep, Luna."

"Wake him up!"

A witch, who was no doubt a powerful one, would greatly increase our chances of surviving. Then I was reminded, what happened to the Blue Moon Pack?

I shook my head; they were none of my concern. They shouldn't be...

"We can't. He'll go on a rampage if we force him."

**TULCEM**

I clicked my tongue in annoyance. This was my first to hear of a sleeping witch. "Get the spies to watch the Blue Moon Pack. Under no circumstances are they allowed to engage. Their orders are to observe and report suspicious activity immediately."

Rigel remained silent. "Beta, please let me help..."

"I have an Order," said Rigel, relaying his reply. "What are your intentions, Anna? If it goes against my Order, I will not let you take part in this."

"I have no other intentions but to protect the pack and my Alpha," I said firmly.

"My Order is to protect our people," he said. "Very well. The Red Claw Pack places their faith on their Luna."

"Keep this a secret between us. Am I clear?"

"Yes, Luna," he replied. Rigel's eyes fluttered as he came back to himself. ( Yes, Luna," he repeated. This time, the "answer came from him.

This was supposed to be on the Beta's

is was supposed to be on the Beta's hands.

But, with Liam fighting for all of us, forgive me for being selfish, everyone.

This would be straining for Rigel. I'd apologize and prostrate before him later until he was satisfied, so let me be selfish for now.

"Keep me informed," I said firmly, and h e nodded.

The door suddenly opened and Lexy stepped out.

"How is he?" I asked, feeling a sting on m y already swollen eyes.

She drew a sharp intake of air.

"Werewolf poison and black magic," she divulged, her voice cracking. 2

She looked at Rigel with worrying eyes.

"I can't..." she trailed.

Hands covered her face, and her shoulders shook as she sobbed.

"Almost immediately, she showed us her face again. Blinking away the toare che e again. Blinking away the tears, she wiped the moisture off with her fingers.

"It didn't... won't... work," she said.

I didn't know if it'd work. Lexy was about to have a breakdown. Liam lying on that metal bed with the machine beeping high

and fast, he looked dead. It was up to me

now.

"What does he need?" I asked, holding Lexy by her arms. "Lexy..."

"B-Blood," she hiccupped. She was shaking even worse now, and Rigel was already on her side. "Po-poison... in... blood."

It's crazy for me to think I can save him.

"Use my blood," I told her. "It'll heal him."

I shouldn't get their hopes up.

"Wha-what?" she asked, gasping for air.

"My blood can heal. I'll explain later. Trust me. Change his blood with mine."

She stared at me with widened eyes like I had just gone insane. Maybe I was. It sounded insane in my mind, it sounded

unded insane in my mind, it sounded desperate.

"Trust me," I whispered, glancing at Liam behind her shoulder. "Please..."

"You'll lose too much," Lexy answered.

I smiled in relief. She accepted. "To change all of it, you'll – a

"Do it," I said, interrupting her.

We should wake that sleeping beauty and drag his ass over here so he could heal my Liam!

"Now, Lexy!"

"Okay," she breathed, as she led me into the room.

"Rigel, update," I ordered as they prepared me.

"The Gammas have all gathered on the northeast border. The special units are slowing down the rogues on the eastern border. All pack members are accounted for and in the Forbidden Area. The Blue Moon Pack has fled to the south."

"Good. Whichever of the borders gets cleared first, order all units to assist the  
ared first, order all units to assist the remaining immediately. Block 2E team is still on stand-by. Send spies to check the village. Make sure no rogue is left behind." 1

"Yes, Luna."

I laid down on another bed beside his. His skin was going blue, and he was still as if he was a corpse. His chest neither rose nor fell, and his lashes didn't flutter in the slightest. It'd be alright now. This had to work. No one was going to die again – not under my watch. It was too early... too early for him to go. Things were just



beginning between us. It was a rocky start and we still had a lot to clear up, but we were headed in the right direction.

I don't accept it. You have to live.

Someone squeezed my hand. "Anna, if we do this, you'll lose... you'll d-"

"I won't," I said, smiling up at her." After scaring the souls out of us, I won't forgive him until I give him a good smacking."

'Her assistants chuckled at my statement.

Her assistants chuckled at my statement,

"I'm the Head Healer of the pack," she stated, looking me straight in the eye. "No Alpha or Luna is dying under my watch. Trust me."

"I do," I replied, looking at my mate.

I reached for his hand and intertwined my fingers with his. They felt ice cold. A shiver ran up my spine.

You'll be alright. I promise.

I closed my eyes as I felt the soft wet cotton dab on my skin. Then a slight prick of the needle. I focused on breathing as the needle settled under my skin. It was uncomfortable, to say the least.

"Update, Luna," said Rigel.

I was still conscious enough for this. I nodded my head

"Vampires have entered the territory from the Northwest," he said.

Vampires? The packs have a treaty with the Vampire King, a truce that'd been honored for millennia. Vampires weren't welcome here, and werewolves weren't

come here, and werewolves weren't welcome on their own hunting grounds. Nasty species.

What were they after – the witch? Was he that powerful? Regardless, they needed to be captured alive as much as possible. This was a serious breach of the truce; it might be labeled as a rebelling against the werewolves.

"How many? What's the situation on the borders?"

Lexy's assistants tensed and glanced at each other with worrying looks.

"The scouts reported two. The Gammas need more time."

They were coming from the northwest, too close to the Forbidden Area. If I moved the Delta Unit, the pack would be left defenseless.

There might be more of them. Or if it's just the two of them, then they're high ranking

Either way, I couldn't risk it. We had to make a move.

"Mobilize the Delta Unit. Engage from a

dobilize the Delta Unit. Engage from a distance. Avoid close combat for as long as possible," I ordered.

"Luna, half the Delta Unit can take on two vampires."

"Do not underestimate them, Rigel. Two vampires can easily slaughter a pack if they're high-ranking."

"Do not underestimate my team, Luna," he said. I could see him smirk. His team?

"I'm sorry."

I heard a crumbling sound. Opening my eyes, I saw that he had punched the wall outside, a small cloud of cement dust clouding his fist.

"They need me out there..." he whispered.

"With all due respect Head Gamma, you'd be of more use here. One more man can't change the tides of battle."

"Anything can turn the tables, Anna," he said sternly, looking me straight in the eye.

His fist was shaking in fury, but I couldn't let him go. He strode towards me with a scowl on his face. "Gale and the

with a scowl on his face. "Gale and the warriors, the medics... they're all risking their lives for the pack and here I am acting as a phone. I'm more useful in the face of battle, Anna. In here, I'm nothing but a coward. But I can't leave your side because I've been given an Order."

Lexy got between us before he could get any closer.

"Don't," she said sternly.

My head was spinning as more blood traveled through the tube. I squeezed Liam's hand, hoping to feel the warmth from them again. They were cold.

"I need my knight."

My vision blurred and I could only hear their voices faintly. I tried to concentrate on what they were saying but only inaudible sounds registered in my brain. The pack must survive. Liam must live.

I think I heard howls from a distance.

It must've been my imagination. The rogues shouldn't be nearby.

"Jaymer woke up," said Rigel. "He's..."

I couldn't hear him anymore. My body

buldn't hear him anymore. My body felt too light yet too heavy. The blurry images were a pain that I closed my eyes instead. As I held his arm, my mind wandered back to when we first met, the events that took place within a week – it was all rather interesting.

Almost everything was now new to me. The world was full of colors and everything vibrant and full of life.

It all happened because Liam found me that night, and he accepted me as his mate. He never once called me hurtful names, or shouted at me, or treated me like I wasn't a person.

My body was protesting. All the blood was leaving my system and I could feel my heart frantically jumping.

Goddess, please don't take them away from me.

"Keep them safe," I whispered as the world faded into the background.

## Chapter 38 Tiring Wake

-Anna

Beep Beep. Beep.

What an annoying sound

I cracked an eye open, staring at a white ceiling. To my right was a machine that constantly emitted the sound.

Very annoying.

I tried to sit up, but my muscles ached. I felt weak and tired all over. A muffled groan vibrated from my throat.

“Anna?”

Gale came into view, and I opened my other eye. He stared down at me with a slack jaw, before running out of the room.

What the

“Anna?”

It was Lexy this time. She came over to me, with a huge smile on her face. I smiled back, just a little. My vision was spinning,

and I felt lightheaded. I shook my head

gently, but it worsened the dizziness.

gently, but it worsened the dizziness.

How do you feel?” she asked, sitting on the bed.

“Ghe...” I meant to say “great” but instead managed a raspy whisper.

“It’s alright. You should take it easy for now,” said Gale.

I caught the aroma of bittersweet coffee.

“You’re awake,” someone said breathily.

Straining my neck, I looked up to see Rigel standing by the door with two cups of coffee in his hand.

They all looked like they hadn’t slept in a while. Lexy’s lips were chapped and her greasy hair was tied in a messy bun. Gale still had morning stars in his eyes, and Rigel’s eyes were bloodshot. Despite the strong smell of alcohol and room freshener, their stink still permeated through – they could all use a long, warm bath.

My gut clenched. I remembered passing out. I swallowed then licked my lips.

“The pack?” I whispered, unable to form proper sounds. I kept my eyes closed, moper sounds. I kept my eyes closed, trying to ignore the swirling fog in my head.

“We’re alright,” said Lexy. I felt her hand on mine. “I’m... we’re... we’re... thank you.”

Thank you?

I left them when they needed me. Taking care of the pack had left a toll on them. The pack was alright – we survived the attack.

Attack?

Liam. He...

My eyes shot open and I felt a twang in my heart. He wasn't here. He should be here.

Where – where is he?

The beeping became louder. My head hurt. Listening to it, thinking about this...

As if sensing my panic, Lexy squeezed my hand.

Bro's in the other room," she said.

Room?

**"ROONITE**

Something wet stung my eyes and I realized I was crying. He should be here with me, standing beside me and holding my hand.

What's he doing in the other room? Is he still alive? Wha- what's this "other room"?

A hand wiped the tears that slid down my temples

"It's alright, Anna. He's... he's going to be fine." Lexy's voice cracked. I must've been out for days. And Liam wasn't awake yet.

"He's the Alpha, Anna," Rigel said gently. "He just needs more time."

"You were out for a week," said Gale, holding my other hand. "He'll wake up soon. If there's one thing I know about him, it's that he always keeps his promises."

I sniffled. I just woke up and I was already bringing the atmosphere down on them. I should be doing the opposite – cheering them on and raising their hopes up. This should be a happy moment for us.

stou DomainaPPY TITOTTEN TOT US.

Stupid Anna!

I nodded my head in agreement "Yes.... he'll be alright."

Pulling my hands off their grasps, I wiped the tears with my palms. There would be other days to cry. I needed to be strong right now.

“Up.”

Gale supported my back as he and Lexy helped me sit up, my back leaning on pillows against the headboard. Rigel handed me a glass of water. I took small sips until it was half-empty, the warm water soothing my dry throat.

“What happened?” I asked, my voice now full.

“Rigel and I were a match, and so were other members of the pack,” Lexy explained. “Surprisingly, you lived long enough for us to replenish the blood loss. We ran some tests on your blood, and...”

I nodded. They shouldn’t have done that without my consent. This was our secret – Carson and I, until Alpha Fraser and my father caught me using my blood to

ther caught me using my blood to heal a scratch on his knee.

There was nothing strange from the results. It all came out normal,” she said.

I guess we’d never know why I was like this.

“Liam?” Tasked.

“We changed out his blood with yours. Toxicity levels went down drastically. Damaged tissue repaired itself...” she said, raising her eyes at me.

“Restored... would be more appropriate. I t was like he never had any injury.”

I sighed in relief. It worked. I only knew it healed physical injuries...

I see. I’m glad.

My eyes were starting to tear up again. I pinched my arm to keep myself grounded. This was no time to get emotional

“Ooofff!

Lexy suddenly threw herself on me.” Thank you for saving my brother,” she whispered.

whispered.

Gale joined her from the other side. Thank you for saving my brother and best friend."

Rigel cleared his throat. I smiled at him as he turned his head, hesitating. He came over and joined from Gale's side." Thanks for not dying on us."

Smack!

We shared a laugh as Rigel rubbed the back of his head.

"Can you stop being an ass for a minute?" Lexy reprimanded.

"I missed you guys."

"We missed you too," replied Gale, pulling away.

"Can I see him?"

"Maybe not now," said Lexy.

I nodded. My body didn't feel like me for now. And... I wasn't ready to face him yet.

"You should rest for now," said Rigel.

But I've been resting for a week already," I whined.

plecady," I whined.

A week?

"Lucky you, Rigel said, smirking." We've been working our asses off since the attack. I'd love to take your place right now."

I smiled up... he was suddenly behind Gale. Lexy was glaring at him.

Goddess, they're a playful bunch.

"Come on, children. Break it up," I chided. They narrowed their eyes at me.

"Children?" asked Gale.

"Children..." trailed Lexy, already blushing

Rigel stuck his tongue out at me, making me snicker.

"I'm not a child," he said, crossing his arms and turning his head in a scoff.

"I'm sorry," I said, chuckling. "Do you guys mind telling me what happened while I was out?"

Lexy gasped, looking at her watch. "I've to make rounds. I'll see you guys later." She went beside me and gave me a quick

went beside me and gave me a quick hug

"You're leaving on purpose, aren't you?"

"Yes and no. I'll be checking up on you too as soon as I'm done," she said, smiling as she disappeared out the door.

I looked over at the two and raised a brow. "Well?»

Gale let out a silent yawn, forcing his lips to stay sealed

Rigel sighed and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Go get some sleep. I'll do it."

He yawned again and went to where he was sitting on a couch pushed up against the wall on the far-left corner of the room.

"How long has he been here?" I asked, watching how he almost collapsed as he neared the couch

"We've been taking turns. It really isn't much, but with Liam asleep, he's in charge of keeping the pack together," he answered.

"This can wait. You look tired too. You should sleep."

should sleep."

"You sure?" he asked, yawning.

"Positive," I replied. "I need my knight energized."

Rigel grinned. He helped me lay back down slowly, something I was thankful for because I didn't miss the dizziness.

"Thank you."



I heard the door click, and his footsteps as she went to the opposite corner from where Gale was. A soft flutter of sheets, then silence. I took a deep breath to calm my thoughts.

"Thank you for coming back," he said. "I thought I'd lose you."

His voice lacked the usual playful hint. It was low, dry, almost inaudible.

I smiled. "And leave my knight behind to serve another princess?" I questioned, then scoffed. "I'm your princess until you find your mate, Rigel. Get used to it." –

He didn't reply. I could picture the grin across his face. Gale's loud snores filled the silence. Minutes later, Rigel's too.

Might as well join in.

ght as well join in

Hours later, I was up to date on the events. I'd taken a short warm shower and changed into more comfortable clothes. Then I found myself standing outside his door, butterflies fluttering in a frenzy. No training in the world could've ever prepared me for this.