

Ascension of a Gamma by C. C. Chapter 78

Chapter 78 Whispering Promises

– Liam

I'd been squeezing a stress ball since morning – Gale's recommendation. As ridiculous as it looked, it was helping.

"Did you hear back from Helia?" I asked as soon as Lexy entered my office.

"She'll be here by tomorrow morning," she replied, dropping on the sofa like a bag of potatoes. "Are you sure you want to me to handle this, bro? We can ask the humans – they've more experience and frankly, I've only ever delivered one baby."

We owned hospitals and leaving her in the hands of an expert would maybe lower the risks, but she was a special case.

Her blood, her race – if something hocus pocus happened while a human was around, the safest measure would be to kill that human. It would upset her. Then again, she didn't have to know. Still...

"I'm leaving you in charge of preparations," I said firmly. "If something... starts happening, do whatever you have to save her."

"I want her to make it through this, too, Liam," she said. "But I can't guarantee she will."

There was a short pause after. Helia might be there to assist, but even Lexy's magic had its limits.

It was said that the first Luna gave birth alone to the first Alpha's firstborn and thus, only heir. He died in battle while his Luna was in labor. As she felt the bond break, her wolf was also in agony. Stories said this was when the first split happened.

With the pain of losing her mate coinciding with the pain of childbirth, her wolf couldn't handle the exchange of energy between her and the child and the loss from her soulmate's death. It killed the child.

As the Luna breathed her last, she begged the Moon Goddess to save her child. The Goddess took pity on her and used her wolf's remaining energy to breathe life into her son. Both a curse and a gift, Lunas had to battle with their wolf to birth an Alpha's child.

Some stories said the Luna returned, but who knew what really happened then? Jaymer might but he didn't even know he really was.

All Lexy and Helia could do with their magic was maintain her physical body.
None of us

knew what might happen to her – she was wolf-less. It might be a normal delivery like a human's and any other normal she-wolf, or something else.

I can't lose her...

I was the Alpha and yet with her life on the line, I was helpless. And it wasn't just her. This was my fault – my desire to have an heir. Then again, at some point, she would've asked for this. Anna wanted a family with me, and as worried as I was, I couldn't deny her what I wanted as well.

"We're ready for her any day... I pray the Goddess grants mercy," said Lexy, lying on her back.

"I'm going out," I said, standing.

"Say 'hi' to Anna for me," she called behind me as I closed the door.

I went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. By seven, she still hadn't come down, so I decided to just bring it up to our room.

Anna was lying down on her side with a lot of pillows surrounding her. I walked up to her and stroked her hair, smiling at her peaceful sleeping figure. For many more nights, for many more days, opening the bedroom door or getting up in the morning, she would

always be the first I'd look for.

Her stomach was bigger than the rest of her and I was so proud of her for doing so well. She was going to be a great Mom and I'd beg the Goddess like the first Luna did if I had to.

I couldn't picture a future without my Anna. She was in every moment in time that I could think of and our pups... they deserved to grow up, with her.

Her eyes fluttered open.

"Hey," I said softly as I leaned in to kiss her forehead.

She wasn't as moody as she was before, and I was thankful to the stars that phase was over.

"Hi," she said sleepily. "We're hungry."

I rubbed a hand over her stomach gently. "I made you spaghetti."

"Thank you." She smiled sweetly at me. I kissed her slowly before helping her get up.

"Thank you, babe."

"For what?" she asked, placing her hand on top of mine.

"For this... for us... I'm so happy for all you do for me. Thank you."

She giggled. "Have you thought of names yet?"

I'm always thinking of names!

"Too many to choose from. Do you have names in mind?"

I helped her get up from bed then held out her robe for her. She was having difficulty doing the simplest things now. I didn't mind. She'd pamper me, too if it was the other way around.

"I have a few in mind. What do you think of 'Liam Jr.'?"

"No," I said firmly with a straight face. "Fuck no."

"Ha-ha! I'm kidding!"

She laughed as she went to the bathroom to do her business. Sometimes, she needed help with something. Usually, it was someone to hold her hair away from her face as she threw up.

We had a nice dinner after. She still had a healthy appetite which was always a good thing. I made sure she didn't eat too much, though and that she was getting the proper nutrition the four of them needed. 4

Lexy put me through countless briefings and lectures – she'd kill me if I didn't look after her right.

As always, I made sure she had her supplements. Then, as she laid on her back, I gently applied natural cocoa butter on her belly before massaging her now swollen feet to get her to relax. *My Anna* was going through so much.

"Thank you," she said as I slipped in beside her.

I kissed her forehead then replied, "Anything for you, babe."

"You're thinking about it, aren't you?" she asked. Her head was resting on my chest, her back and legs and sides supported by pillows. "You're worrying too much."

My heart sank.

Your life and theirs are at stake.

"I just... want you and... our pups to be healthy," I replied, trying to divert the subject.

"We'll be fine, Liam. Keep worrying like that and your hair will fall out," she said, giggling.

You're so adorable.

I held her hand and kissed her fingers.

"I worry because I care about you, Anna," I murmured.

She looked up at me and touched my cheek. I leaned into her palm, her warm touch comforting

"As do I, my love," she said softly.

She suddenly gasped and I was instantly on high alert. Was it happening? Is the bed wet?

"They're kicking!"

She took my hand and placed it on her stomach. "Wait..."

I felt a small kick and my heart swelled. It was an amazing feeling.

She smiled as she breathed deeply. "Oh!"

I felt another kick and I couldn't help but be in awe. Life was growing inside her and letting us know.

"I love you," I whispered, leaning down to kiss one side of her belly.

"And you," I said as I kissed the middle.

"You, too." I also kissed the other side.

Then I kissed her slowly until we parted for air. "And you, my love."

"They're going to need you, Liam," she said.

I held her hand, rubbing small circles at the back of it with my thumb.

"Us, Anna. They're going to need us. We're going to raise them together then kick them out the house when they're old enough so we could make up for the sexless nights."

She playfully slapped my chest and I chuckled. "Liam! They can hear you."

"No, they can't."

"We're not kicking them out the house!"

She rubbed her belly. "Your Father didn't mean it, kids."

"They'd have to go to college." I shrugged. "I'll have the walls soundproofed instead."

"Oh, Liam!" she exclaimed, laughing.

"That's right, babe," I murmured, placing soft kisses on her shoulder.

"You're distracting me with the sex talk, aren't you?" she questioned.

How did she –

A woman's intuition is scary.

She laughed at me then pecked my lips. "You're adorable," she said, smirking.

I sighed. She looked at me with a soft expression as she touched my cheek, her forefinger tracing along my jaw. These peaceful moments lasted for as long as they could when I wished they could last forever. It made me think that we'd be alright, that when this was all over, she would still be here with me. The prickly feeling in my gut made me feel otherwise – that these were simply consolation, memories to live by, for when the impending day came

I held her hand and kissed the back of it.

"I can't lose you," I whispered.

"You won't," she whispered back. "I'll always be with you. I promised."

"But I want you here, with me, just like this... the way we are now."

I can't continue without you.

"Whatever happens, promise me you'll love them," she said, taking my hand and placing it on her belly. "And raise them well and look over them... and always tell them I love them, and their Mother has absolutely no regrets... and you don't, too."

"You can tell them yourself," I whispered, afraid that my voice would crack if I said it aloud, a clear sound from my heart.

"Promise me, Liam," she said firmly.

"I can't..." I said, looking away.

How can you be so selfish? You can't leave me... us.

"Please, Liam," she whispered as she blinked rapidly and inhaled deeply.

I balled my hidden hand into a fist.

"I... promise," I said. "But you have to promise me... you'll fight for us, all five of us." 1

I wiped her tears with my thumb.

"I promise."

I brought my face closer to her, then captured her lips. Flicking my tongue at her lips, she gave me permission.

Sweet... addictive...

I poured all I had in me into the kiss as her hands tugged on my hair. I nibbled on her lips, captured her lips, and sucked the air out of her until we parted for air.

Goddess, don't take her from me. Don't take her from our pups.

My mind kept me awake. My eyes were closed, and I breathed in her scent to calm me. I pretended to be sleep because Anna wasn't sleeping. When it was close to midnight, she got up and locked herself in the bathroom.

She turned the tap on a little, then for thirty minutes or more, she cried. I could hear her as she muffled the sounds – hiccups, sniffles, and the silent screams. I turned to the side, my pillow soaking up evidence of my eavesdropping. I was helpless and it was worse than getting punched in the gut a thousand times.

I calmed myself down, thankful that she didn't turn the lights on when she came back to bed. She touched my face, tousled my hair, and kissed me all over as she whispered things I recorded in my heart. Then she slept, her hand holding mine tightly.

Brave. She was the bravest person I'd ever known.

"You can bring me down on my knees and strengthen me at my weakest."

I brushed the few strands off her face then kissed her cheek. I took in the sweetest and most calming scent that only I could smell.

One more day. One more night. I lived in these moments now and I would until forever, as we create more. Stay with us, my love...

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Chapter 79 Hopeful Hearts

~Liam

“AAAHHH!!!” Anna’s screams filled the entire room as our babies pushed their way out. In a few more hours or minutes, we were going to be parents!

“AAAHHH!!! Ughm!”

I clenched my jaw as she crushed my hands in a death grip. She was sweating profusely, her breathing heavy. Lexy and Helia and nurses were constantly checking on her.

I didn’t know what else to do. If I could share the pain with her, I would. The only plan my mind came up with was to talk to her like it would help.

“You’re doing great, babe!” I encouraged.

I can’t feel my hands.

“Breathe... breathe... you’re alright... you’re doing great!”

Her screams rang in my ears. Tears fell from the corners of eyes and all I could do was watch. The hours Carson and I spent watching videos of women giving birth because Lexy forced us to, was nothing in comparison with witnessing it happen in person. The screams, the smell, and tension – these weren’t conveyed from the screen.

“Deep breaths, babe... deep breaths.”

“Shut up! Just shut up!” she screamed.

My hands were dead by this point. Pups, please come out now...

“AAAHHH!!! Get them out!!!”

“I can see the head,” said Lexy. “Keep pushing, Anna.”

Her eyes widened as she screamed, "I can't!" that my knees almost gave away.

Fuck you, Liam. You can do this! "Almost there, Luna. One, two, three, push!"

She responded with an all-out effort to push our pups out.

Out of her... head and ...

I shifted my weight between my feet to steady myself.

"Push!"

After what seemed like time slowed down, cries filled the room. Amidst the smell of vanilla and freshly cut roses, of sweat, and of metal, three new scents registered.

I was in awe as I watched their tiny bodies, their tiny hands and feet twitching as they cried. They looked... wrinkly... and... precious.

"Anna..."

I looked down at her to see the whites of her eyes roll back. It sent a punch in my gut. The machines started beeping and Lexy's eyes widened.

"Get the Alpha out of here!" she ordered.

Her hands let go of mine.

"No. No, Anna. Anna!"

A nurse pushed me out of the room and closed the doors behind me.

Goddess...

Rigel and Gale held me up before I lost my balance. Carson's mouth was moving but I couldn't hear him. Andrix was frozen from where he stood.

I heard nothing. Nothing. She was inside, fighting for her life.

You have to fight, my love. I'm waiting for you. Our pups are waiting for you. Everyone's here for you.

I found myself sliding down a wall, my elbows resting on my knees as I ran my fingers through my hair.

You promised me you wouldn't leave. You promised me you'd fight to stay.

I kept remembering everything – from when we met to when we first fought to when we first kissed – everything that we had been through. I couldn't live without her.

I need your smile and your giggles. I need you slapping my chest and being adorable. I'll bake and cook anything you want. Just come back to us – we're waiting for you.

We have the perfect names for our babies. Don't you want to meet them? Don't we have a game to see who looks like who? We have more to go through, my love.

My tears rolled down my cheeks as I thought about everything. Then we felt it. Luca began howling in pain. Her mark burned my skin. Pain shot through my body like lightning, my limbs jerked uncontrollably, then I slumped on the floor.

Don't go.

A scream tore through my throat as something pulled itself apart in my mind, stretching and stretching

Don't go.

"Anna!" I screamed as I forced myself to get up. Another round of pain jerked my limbs, forcing me back on the floor.

Don't leave.

Luca howled louder than he had ever done before. My head felt like splitting into two. And as something kept stretching, the pain intensified.

I didn't know how, but I got to my feet and somehow kept myself straight enough. I turned to face the doors.

Goddess, don't take her.

As pain traveled through my body, I forced a silent prayer.

She deserves to live. Everyone's waiting for her. Her pups cry for her.

It wouldn't stop stretching.

If you should take a life, take mine instead. I'll gladly return, just please... bring her back.

I felt numb all over. I'd never felt this much pain before. Then it happened. I screamed.

Something snapped, and the world fell away.

I fell forward into the room.

My body, my mind, my soul – unimaginable pain coursed through my being, my heart unspared. I forced to look up at her. She was gone.

I didn't have a second to clear my confusion. I screamed as more pain assaulted me." Anna," I whispered as darkness covered me.

When I woke up, I was in my room. I'd been waking up then passing out for two days. Lexy was beside me, comforting me, again. My brothers stood silent, their presence a

silent condolence.

It took me some time to get a grip on myself. Lexy and Helia offered to look after my pups, but I declined.

I stood to close the blinds, refusing to let the full moon peek in the windows.

Amiry, Aylan, and Alia slept peacefully on their crib. They looked adorable with their cute noses and tiny bodies, their tiny hands in tiny mittens. And I couldn't accept that Anna was just gone. 1

We should be here together, watching over them. She should be here doting over them. She should be here, in my arms, both of us in awe.

I couldn't...

I didn't have the chance to thank her for giving me a family. I didn't have a chance to tell her just how much she meant to me. I didn't have a chance to tell her I love her, and that I always will.

Now, I had no chances of showing her I could love her like no other. I couldn't show her our babies – she would've been fawning all over them.

Bring her back. Goddess, bring her back.

Every time I looked at my kids, I couldn't help but be reminded that she was gone because of me. Anna gave her life for them, for me. And the guilt ate at me like maggots, and every day I feel a part of myself die.

Anna left a cold divide, a black hole that only she could satisfy. There was the familiar feeling of emptiness and helplessness and regret – my three best friends. I thought I'd gotten rid of them a long time ago, but they must've been hanging around in dark corners that I didn't notice.

I sat on the edge of the bed, the white envelope beside me. Carson handed it to me right when I woke up feeling that a part of me was gone... empty. No one could explain what happened. She was just... gone.

There were no names written on it. It'd been days. I couldn't open it. If I did, I might find something... a validation, that this was real, and that she knew it was going to happen. I couldn't live with the thought that she continued to live everyday like normal, knowing full well within herself that she wasn't going to survive.

I heard her cry. I knew what she hid, but I still had hope that she'd fight for us. I hoped that she'd be here with us – one happy family. Why couldn't the Goddess give me this?

Why must You take my happiness from me? Is it never enough for You? Haven't I suffered enough?

I missed her – everything about her. It killed my heart when she left me because of a misunderstanding. Those three months without her, I burned in fire.

This was different. It was killing me by the day, by the hour, by the second. Her scent had almost dissipated, and I feared the day it wouldn't be here anymore. I needed her warmth, but all I had was a cold empty bedside from where she used to lay, beside me, our fingers interlocked as I stroked her hair.

The room was silent, as if mocking me, a constant reminder that these four walls wouldn't witness her laughter and giggles anymore. For days and nights, all it witnessed was a dying man who cried and prayed and mourned the loss of his other half.

Luca was silent from the moment I regained consciousness. He was grieving with me, and right now, we were doing what we could to keep it together. Everyone was worried, but I was anxious about tomorrow.

Come back to me...

Come back to us...

Their sudden cries pulled me out of my thoughts. They must've been grieving with me.

Do they know? Can they feel that their Mom's not with them?

What do I tell them? When they start to ask questions, when they start to wonder where their Mom had gone, what should I say?

I couldn't accept it myself... it'd be too selfish and cruel to force it upon them.

Their cries grew louder. I gently held Alia in my arms, her lightness still a surprise to me. I leaned her to my right as she cried, rocking the crib gently for our two boys.

"Are you crying for your Mom?"

"Your Dad's crying for her, too."

Their cries pierced through my heart. "We miss her, don't we?"

I held each of them gently, like the slightest pressure would hurt them. I fed them milk – Lexy taught me how to properly feed them. Helia taught me how to calm them down.

Soon, they were fast asleep. Amiry, Aylan, and Alia – their names were perfect. Anna came up with the boys' names, my sole contribution was a "yes".

Amiry came out first, then Aylan, then Alia. 1

They're adorable, Anna. If you can see them now, you'll see how precious they are. I'm guessing Alia will take after you – she'll be as pretty as her Mom and as much of a handful. Amiry and Aylan will probably be a pain – I know I was when I was young.

It was adorable when they stuck out their tiny tongues or when their hands would move slightly as they slept.

Amiry and Aylan will be the best brothers in the world for Alia. I'll pound it into their heads. I love them, Anna. They're our tiny versions until they're grown. I just... wish you're here with me.

"Amiry, Aylan, and Alia. You know, your Mom fought hard for us until the end," I whispered. "She was the bravest woman I've ever known, and she saved your Dad from himself. Well, she saved me a lot of times... We'll... get through this... together, alright?"

"She... she will always be with us, tiny pups. And maybe someday- someday, the Goddess will bring her back." 3.

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Chapter 80 Little Alphas

"I'm thinking of adopting," said Gale as he ran a hand through his hair. "I haven't talked to Andrix about it yet, but he won't be averse to the idea, would he?"

Rigel calmly drank his glass of bourbon, which was from Liam's not-so-secret personal collection.

"A human kid?" he asked.

"No, you fucking dumbass. Do you want the kid to die?" Gale said, scowling.

Liam muttered under his breath, something about not having a moment of quiet time for himself as he scanned and signed through a stack of documents. Gray streaks dyed his hair, and lines had begun to show on his face. He had a stubble from having forgotten to shave that morning. It was because of the children jumping up on him before daybreak.

Sighing, he signed the last of the fist stack. Gale and Rigel were still bickering on how to make the adoption work.

“What if the kid’s a spy?” asked Rigel as he poured himself another glass.

The stress from work showed on the occasional drooping of his eyes. The Delta Unit were sent to a recon mission for the past week and they had just returned.

“You’re overthinking it! Don’t you want me to have a kid?”

Rigel filled another glass and placed it on Liam’s desk.

“Thanks,” Liam grumbled.

Looking after two packs was taxing work. He’d thought about absorbing the Black Mist Pack into the Red Claw Pack, and Carson and Andrix had proposed the idea to him. He rejected it. Anna kept the packs separate in honor of her father and he wasn’t about to ruin what she left behind.

A knock interrupted the three of them.

“Come in, babe,” said Gale, then turning to Rigel, “Not a word.”

Andrix showed signs of aging as well, but he still had that charismatic air around him. Gale walked up to him and pulled him into a quick kiss that had Rigel looking away.

“Hello, you. You’re here early,” said Gale.

“I was here earlier but I went to check on my nephews and niece,” Andrix said, chuckling. “Hey, Liam, Rigel.”

Liam grumbled.

Not a moment of peace.

“You didn’t give them chocolate, did you?” he asked, not looking up.

“I left the treats at the cupboard,” answered Andrix. “It’s like they were wearing diapers only yesterday, now they’re running around like they never tire.”

“They don’t,” muttered Liam.

Each one constantly sought his attention for whatever reason, no matter the time, be it the middle of the night or three in the morning.

"You ready to go?"

Gale nodded, clasping Andrix's hand. "See you all tomorrow," he said.

Rigel raised his glass, smirking at Gale.

"So... how are you holding up?"

"Good."

"It's tough having kids, isn't it?"

Liam sighed. It required immeasurable patience that he could just snap at times. If he wasn't working, he was playing with the kids. He drank the last of the bourbon then rubbed his temples.

"It's not always a piece of work. I love those kids, but the only time I get peace and quiet is when I'm asleep," he answered.

Rigel chuckled, put the glass down, then stood.

"You can say that again."

Rigel observed him for a while but said nothing. His brother had been more and more absorbed in his work over the years. He took it as his brother's way of coping with Anna's loss.

"Carson proposed we all go out for a boy's night. You can leave the kids at my place. Sabri loves having them around Raixel and Rasi." 1

"I'll think about it," answered Liam, finishing another stack, then starting with another.

Rigel nodded, then left.

As the door clicked, the pen stopped moving. Liam set it down, then deeply sighed. They'd been worrying about him as of late and tried to get him away from his work. He wasn't enslaved to his work, he simply found that when he did have some quiet time, it wasn't to his liking.

Alone in his office, surrounded by stacked documents and empty furniture in the quiet, there were too many reminders of his inner condition.

Liam glanced at his watch; it was almost four. The kids would be home soon.

After cleaning up for the day, he grabbed his jacket from the rack then went to the kitchen. Minutes before five, a car stopped outside and in seconds, roaring laughter and loud voices pushed back the silence better than the simmering pot of sauce.

He heard small footsteps coming to his direction and the squeak of sneakers on the floor as two more sets hurriedly ran up the stairs. Liam's lips pulled into a grin. They knew what they did today and that they were in for it, so they were going to use his weakness against him to soften him up a bit.

A little girl came into the kitchen, wearing Timberland boots and a thick jacket. She had a white bonnet on, which was a contrast to her long dark brown hair. Her honey glazed orbs sparkled when she saw Liam, white teeth flashing.

"Daddy!" she squealed as soon as she saw him.

Liam opened his arms to her while crouching. The little girl giggled, then dropping her bag to the floor, ran up to him that her bonnet dropped to the floor, and threw her arms around his neck.

"I missed you, Daddy!"

He hugged her tightly, feeling his tiredness leave his body. "I missed you too, baby. How was school?"

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She scrunched up her nose and stuck her tongue out.

"I don't like school," she whined.

"Why not, baby?" asked Liam, patting her head.

"The boys pulled my chair this morning. I fell and hurt my butt," she said, her cheeks

blushing.

Liam held back his anger. "Who pulls your chair, baby? Does it hurt? We can call Aunty L," he said worriedly.

The little girl shook her head. "It doesn't hurt now, Daddy. It hurt this morning. Then, we had lunch and they said 'sorry' and gave me their cookies."

Liam grinned. "What did you tell them, baby?" he asked.

"I said 'okay', then took their cookies. I had three cookies and they didn't have cookies and I felt bad, so I gave them back their cookies," she said proudly. "And

if they pull my chair again, I'll tell on them. I told them my Daddy was a big strong Alpha!" she exclaimed while pressing Liam's cheeks together.

Liam laughed at her. Some of those kids wouldn't understand what she meant.

She crossed her arms and pouted. "I still don't like them, Daddy. I'll never talk to them again. Ever!"

Liam brushed her hair and fixed the headband that was almost to her forehead.

"Don't worry, baby. They won't pull your chair again. I promise."

"You mean it, Daddy?" she asked, almost teary-eyed. "Everyone laughed at me and teacher didn't see them. She got mad at me. It hurt when I sit down."

He kissed her forehead while getting up, holding her to his side. "They won't hurt you again, baby. And I'll have a talk with Mrs. Wilson. Don't you worry."

As she saw what her Daddy was cooking, her eyes sparkled. Her stomach let out a sound.

Liam chuckled as she blushed deeper.

"Go and change, baby. I'll have a huge serving ready for you when you come down," he said, putting her down. "And call your brothers, will you, baby?"

"Are you mad at them, Daddy?" she asked slowly, rocking on her boots.

"I'm not mad at them, baby. But if they won't come down, they won't have dinner."

She seemed to be thinking about it as her gaze shifted.

"Okay," she said finally, picking up her bag then leaving the kitchen.

After getting everything ready, Liam quickly made his way up his room, not the faintest sound heard save for the click of the bedroom doors. He took a quick shower, finally

shaved his stubble, much to his relief, changed into a suit, then went back to the kitchen.

Liam set the table for the four of them. He generously plated spaghetti for all of them, adding lots of shredded cheese just as the kids liked it. Taking the bottle, he brought out earlier, he poured Chianti for himself and for the kids, carbonated water.

The big bowl at the center had Alia's eyes sparkling. It was filled with her favorite, fried chicken.

“Daddy, I love you!” she squealed, running to him to give him a hug. The skirt of her royal blue dress fluffed as she ran as fast as her short legs could let her, from the door to one end of the table.

Liam kneeled to her level so he could receive her hug.

The two boys inched their way inside the dining room while Liam pulled a chair for his little girl.

She giggled as she sat down. “Thank you, Daddy.”

“You’re very welcome, baby,” he replied, smiling.

Slowly, he turned to face the boys. Aylan pushed his glasses up as he stared at the floor. He had one hand hidden on a pocket of his black slacks, which was paired with a well ironed white dress shirt. His lips pursed. Then he took out his hand to tinker with the black bowtie which was already neatly worn.

On the other hand, Amiry looked to the side as if the wall was the most interesting thing. His dress shirt tucked on one side, the dark blue tie hanging down his shoulders.

While it was difficult to tell which was who, they gave themselves away with the way they carried themselves. Unless they were playing a prank on Liam, again. Tonight, however, he felt that they weren’t – even the two troublemakers wouldn’t dare.

He kept his face placid, his cold demeanor making the boys more and more uncomfortable each passing second.

Internally, Liam was glad and couldn’t be prouder of them. They protected their sister from her bullies, but he still had to reprimand them for skipping a few minutes of training. Liam cleared his throat.

“Won’t you join your sister at the table? Food’s going to get cold.”

The two boys stared at each other’s deep brown orbs, mirroring each other’s confusion. Aylan shrugged, then took his seat on Alia’s right. Amiry sat on her left. Liam was

directly opposite Alia.

“Fix your tie, Amiry,” said Liam coolly.

The little boy fumbled with the tie for a few minutes, tying and untying until he got it decent. Without being told, he tucked in his dress shirt, giving him a neater look.

Liam smiled as the kids ate their servings and gladly served them seconds. The chicken was devoured first, and the shredded cheese followed. Sauce smothered their lips and

cheeks, which he found funny but held back from laughing in front of them. For now, he just wanted to enjoy a nice dinner with his family.

Afterward, the kids were leaning back on their seats. Liam drank the last of his wine, then got up, and wet a napkin. Amiry scowled as Liam wiped his face clean. Alia was all smiles and giggling while Aylan was as rigid as a tree.

"Thank you, Daddy," said Alia, then nudged her brothers.

"Thanks... Dad," Aylan said awkwardly, looking to the floor.

Amiry just crossed his arms.

Liam pretended not to notice their little acts as he collected the dishes to the sink, smiling to himself.

The little girl nudged Amiry again, this time glaring at him with her cheeks puffed up. She was mad, but she looked adorable.

Amiry pursed his lips, then, in a strained voice said, "Thanks for... dinner, Dad."

"You're very welcome," Liam drawled. "Now, who wants to watch a movie?"

"Me!" exclaimed Alia. "It's my turn, Daddy!"

"Alright, baby. What do you want to watch?" he asked.

The boys visibly cringed. She always chose a Barbie movie. They looked at their Dad with pleading eyes, but he smirked at them.

"I know a movie you haven't seen yet," he said.

Alia giggled and shook her head. The boys were looking expectantly at her.

Liam pouted. "No?"

She pushed his cheeks together. "Amiry and Aylan don't like girl movies. They like dinosaurs."

Amiry nodded in approval.

"Are you sure, baby? It's your turn. You can choose anything you like."

"Rawr!!!" She held her hands out like claws and Liam gasped, stumbling back.

"Calm down, dinosaur," he said, and she giggled.

He brushed the strands of hair from her face and smiled. "You go ahead and get everything ready, baby. Daddy has something to say to your brothers."

"But _"

"Go on, baby. We won't keep you waiting."

Alia looked at her brothers and they nodded slightly at her, accepting their fates. Their Dad was strict with them with training, simply because they were the next to take over as Alpha. Their cousins Raixel and Rasi were always training with them. Either of them could be the next Head Gamma.

Liam gestured for them to take their seats. He sat opposite them, calmly observing their fidgeting fingers.

"We don't want to keep your sister waiting," he said slowly. "Gale and Rigel had the scouts and spies looking for both of you within the territory. Where were you?"

They glanced nervously at each other. "Being an Alpha means learning to take responsibility for your actions. Every decision you make has a good or bad effect on the pack. Do you understand?"

They nodded.

"Good. Now tell me why you were twenty minutes late for training today."

Aylan chewed on his lip, his gaze moving to the side to glance at his brother.

"Lame humans," Aylan muttered.

"What did you do?" he asked, getting up slowly, the chair scraping against the floor.

Aylan nudged Amiry.

The truth was that Liam already knew. He simply wanted to test them and to make sure there would be no troublesome qualms with the humans.

"We made them cry," answered Amiry, crossing his arms and puffing up his chest.

His eyes met Liam's cold, calm gaze. He held it for two seconds before looking away, mumbling, "Sorry", under his breath.

"Go on," Liam stated.

"I- I punched the bathroom wall," said Aylan sheepishly.

That's my boy!

"They made Alia cry," Amiry said quietly. "They laughed at her when she fell. Humans are weak."

"And lame," added Aylan, pushing his glasses up. "Alia was smiling and saying it's okay."

"And Phil called her 'ugly', Dad!" said Amiry.

Liam's eyebrow twitched. A young kid called his adorable, sweet baby "ugly"?

"We told them to say 'sorry' to her and if they don't Aylan will punch them."

Aylan crossed his arms, too. "And if they hurt her again, we told them their parents will lose their jobs," he said proudly.

Who was teaching these kids?

"They didn't understand," said Amiry, smirking. "Of course, they didn't, bro. They're lame humans," said Aylan.

Liam sighed. They'd been spending too much time with Andrix.

"Amiry, Aylan, an Alpha protects the people he loves. I am very proud of you both for defending your sister," he said and the two beamed. "But next time something happens, you leave it to the grown-ups, alright? They don't know we exist, and it is very important we keep it that way. Do you understand?"

"Dad, we are stronger than anyone in our class," said Amiry, scowling.

"There are kids of Alpha blood in your class, too, Amiry," said Liam, sighing.

"We're stronger, Dad," said Aylan. "And humans are lame. Why should we keep hiding?" "We're not hiding, little Alphas. We are simply co-existing. Don't show your strength unless absolutely necessary. Am I clear?"

"Daddy!" called Alia.

She had the speakers turned up loud that the opening was loudly heard in the dining room to the kitchen.

"Am I?" Liam repeated.

The boys nodded.

"Yes, Alpha," they responded.

“Good. Now go join your sister.”

Liam washed the dishes before joining his kids. They were all gathered on the couch, with him in the middle, the two boys on his right and his only daughter, who used his leg as a pillow, to his left. The screen was showing the group of young dinosaurs leaving their homes, but Liam wasn't paying attention.

His mind drifted to his two little Alphas who would someday take over the Red Claw Pack. His little girl would grow up to be the Alpha of the Black Mist Pack. It went without saying that she'd be single until she was at least thirty since Liam would bar all boys from getting a meter close to her. They'd have to keep their dicks in their pants, or he'd cut them off and feed it to them himself. No one, not a single guy, no matter his position, was ever going to steal his only daughter from him.

He smiled to himself. Time flew by quickly. It seemed only yesterday, they were crawling and cooing. Next thing he knew, he was chasing them all over the house. Now, they were already five, old enough to start getting involved with the pack. Soon, he'd be an old man and they'd be all grown up.

They'd start their own lives and he'd have to look forward to his own end. Although Liam was content with how things were, and that the boys and Lexy assured him he was doing well, the emptiness haunted him. It was in the peaceful moments, when his mind was tired and his heart, vulnerable, that the sneaky darkness in his soul seeped through its confines.

No matter the distractions he set for himself, it found a way to remind him that something... someone... was missing.

The movie ended. The kids yawned and stretched. Alia hesitated to get up from the couch. Holding her hands out, Liam had to carry her in his arms and bring her to her room, with the boys behind them.

“Goodnight, Dad,” said Aylan, hugging his side.

Amiry followed.

“Goodnight, Dad,” he said, hugging his other side. Their heights only allowed them to reach his hips, so he had to bend a little on one knee.

“Goodnight, Alia,” said the two, kissing her cheeks.

She giggled and said, “Goodnight, Aylan. Goodnight, Amiry.”

“Remember to brush your teeth,” said Liam as they closed the door. He brought Alia inside her room and laid her on the bed.

“You should brush your teeth first, baby,” he said.

Alia yawned. “Okay,” she said softly.

Liam waited for her to finish, helped her with her pajamas, then tucked her in.

"Goodnight, baby," he said, kissing her forehead.

"Daddy..."

She looked up at him with a guilty look.

"... I think Amiry and Aylan scared them. Amiry looked angry when they laughed at me."

"They love you, baby. It is natural for them to get angry when someone hurts you."

"You won't get mad at them, Daddy?" she asked softly.

Liam smiled and shook his head. "I can never get mad at you three, baby. Now, go to sleep. We're going somewhere tomorrow."

"Where, Daddy?" she asked, her eyes half-closed.

"It's a surprise, baby," he whispered.

Liam left her room, closing the door slowly. Then, he checked up on the boys.

"Dad?" called Amiry just as he was about to close the door.

He turned the lights on and entered the room with the door halfway open.

"We did something," said Aylan. The two were in their pajamas, sitting up on their beds. Thinking they were acting on the Alpha talk he just gave them, he sat on Amiry's bed, patiently waiting for them to talk.

Aylan took out an all too familiar envelope from the top drawer of his nightstand.
"We're

sorry, Dad," he said quietly.

Liam sighed. "Did you read it?" he asked. They both nodded.

"Alia wanted to play dress-up and thanks to someone, our ties were destroyed," said Aylan. Liam raised a brow, pushing the matter into the back of his head.

"I was this close to making a slingshot!" roared Amiry.

That's not how you make a slingshot.

"Alia's asleep."

Amiry looked to the side. "Sorry, Dad."

"Come here." Liam beckoned to Aylan to sit beside his brother.

He gathered the two in front of him, then asked, "Is there a reason why you're telling me this now?"

The two boys looked at each other and smiled.

"It's Mom's birthday!" exclaimed Amiry and Aylan shushed him.

"You know, for what you did for your sister today, she would've been so proud of all of you," said Liam, ruffling their hairs.

"Mom... loves us, right, Dad?" asked Aylan.

"Very much, Aylan."

"She'll come back, right?" asked Amiry.

"Aunty L said the Goddess will return Mom if we're good. But we made you mad today," said Aylan, his gaze downcast.

"Uncle Gale and Uncle Rigel were mad at us, too," added Amiry.

"Is She not going to return Mom because of us?" asked Amiry, his eyes brimming with tears. "We-We promise not to be late to training."

Liam's chest tightened. Lexy shouldn't have said that. Though he hoped within his heart that she will, there were no facts, no signs, no evidence that she would ever return.

The boys rubbed their eyes with the back of their arms. They were old enough to understand the contents of the letter. Reading how much Anna loved them fueled their guilt. However, they had nothing to be guilty of – there was simply an abundance of love i

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n the family. And Liam fought back tears of his own from the blessings Anna had left him.

Liam engulfed them both in a hug. He kissed the top of their heads as he patted their backs. "She loves all of you so, so much."

"Will Mom come back to us?" asked Aylan, sniffing.

"She is always with us, Aylan, Amiry. She's watching over us, always," he replied, pulling away. "It's already late. Go to bed, little Alphas."

Aylan picked up the envelope and handed it to him.

"Keep it," he said, and the little boy hugged it to his chest as he went back to his own bed. "Does Alia know?"

"No," answered Amiry.

Fair enough

"We'll let her know tomorrow, Dad," said Aylan. "Mom loves her, too."

"Dad, do you miss Mom?" asked Amiry when Liam was by the door.

"Always," he replied with his back to them. "Now go to sleep."

"We love you, too, Dad," said Aylan, melting his heart.

"We do," added Amiry, yawning.

It took him a moment to get over the shock. The boys usually shied away from things that were normal to their sister.

"I love you, too, little Alphas," he replied as he closed the door slowly.

His legs carried him to his room, walking like he was possessed while his mind wandered. He sat at the edge of the bed. Atop the nightstand, beside the lamp, was a photo frame laid flat on its face. He raised it and let it sit. It was a picture of Anna, one that she included with the letter.

Her beaming face brought a longing smile on Liam's face.

"You are simply amazing, my love. The kids love you even though they've never met you. They know you by the stories and the pictures – they are in awe of you, brownies... as am

I."

Liam raised the frame and brought it to his lips. His fingers stroked the glass lovingly as if it would crack. Luca purred; his eyes closed as he remembered how she used to play with

his fur. "Happy Birthday, my love."