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After a few hours, we make it back to the house and shift back to human form. I reach for my clothes out of the basket next to the back door, but Marco's firm hands around my waist stop me.

"I got a better idea, Corazón," he smiles as he turns me around, embracing me, and giving little kisses between his words, "Clash and Mercy had time together. How 'bout you and I do the same. I can't think of anything I want more, than to be distracted from today by the sparks I feel when your dark skin is against mine."

"Mmm, well, if a distraction is what my handsome mate needs, who am I to say no," I wrap my arms around his neck and give his lips a long soft kiss, letting the sparks between us intensify.

I feel his hands slide down my ass and grab the backs of my thighs. He easily lifts me up, allowing me to wrap my legs around his waist while he carries me inside, kissing my neck and nibbling at my marking spot. I feel myself purring from the sensation.

Instead of making his way to the bedroom, he stops in the kitchen and sets me down on the counter. He uses his hands to massage my inner thighs, working his way up between my legs. His kisses move from my marking spot down to my breasts. I try to watch him as he takes one of my nipples into his mouth, alternating between sucking on it and giving little sharp nips with his teeth that he knows drives me wild. The mix of pain and pleasure makes my head fall back. I let it lean against the cabinet behind me and moan loudly, placing my hand on the back of his head so he won't stop.

When he moves to give the other breast attention, I feel his hand at the entrance to my core. I lean my hips forward to give him better access. The smell of my arousal is thick in the air. I look back to Marco whose eyes are black as onyx, letting himself go as he pleasures me. His fingers press against me, teasing and gently massaging my clit as the pleasure builds. Another moan escapes me when I feel one finger slowly slide inside, moving in and out in a calm, patient pace, followed by a second finger. My hips move against him on their own accord. He looks up at me with my nipple between his teeth and gives me a devilish smile.

My hands move from the back of his head and I pull him up so I can kiss him. The devilish smile deepens as he grips my hair tightly and presses his mouth against mine. I give an excited growl when I bite his lip to get him to open his mouth, allowing our tongues to meet between us.

I reach forward and take his hard member in my hands, giving him long, firm strokes, making him even harder. He groans into my mouth as he feels the effects of my touch.

When I can no longer breathe, I pull away from our kiss and look into his solid black eyes.

“Take me to the bedroom, Mon Loup, I need this inside me,” I give him a hard squeeze, making him growl in pleasure.

I kiss and lick Marco’s marking spot when he picks me up off the counter. As soon as we get to the hallway, he stops and pushes me against the wall. The action slightly knocks the wind out of me. His rushed, urgent desire makes a fresh wave of wetness drip from my core. He holds my legs up just high enough that I feel his hard member against my entrance.

“You’re so beautiful, mi Corazón,” his rough voice breathes huskily in my ear, “I love you so fuckin’ much.”

Before I can answer, he thrusts his hips up and lowers me onto his awaiting erection, pushing deep inside my core. I cry out as he fills me, creating a sudden burst of pleasure, edging me closer to ecstasy. I rake my claws on his back, expressing how close I already am to reaching my climax. He pumps harder when he feels me tighten around him as my orgasm builds. His breath is rough and ragged as he moves in and out, faster and harder. Being held up against the wall like this, I have no control over the pace, but it doesn’t matter. I let myself bounce against him as Marco moves perfectly against me. My legs stay tightly wrapped around him until I can’t control myself anymore.

A loud howl comes from deep inside me as my orgasm hits its peak. His fangs extend and plunge into the marking spot on my shoulder. I’m practically blinded by pleasure as I feel him grip my shoulder hard with his teeth. I lose all control of my senses and yell loudly in the rhythm of his movements.

We’re both slick with perspiration when I sense a change in his rhythm. Faster and more urgent as he edges closer to his own orgasm. I push against him until I feel him release inside me. I extend my fangs and force them deeply into his marking spot, biting down hard the way he likes. He hisses with the mix of pain and pleasure as I grip his shoulder with my mouth. I feel his muscles relax and his damp forehead rest against my shoulder before I let go.

We are both panting heavily, kissing each other more gently now. He pulls himself out from inside me, leaving me feel empty but satisfied.

“Come on, mi belleza de ébano, let’s go lay down,” he pants, picking me up bridal style and taking me to the bedroom.

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Chapter 20

Once we are laying down and have had an opportunity to calm down, Marco pulls me close so we can let our bodies become tangled together.

“Okay, Marco. No more stalling. What happened today? What was the emergency on the fifth floor? Why did we get sent home?” I ask, brushing my fingers across his cheek and jaw.

He sighs and looks past me. He closes his eyes for a long second before he looks back at me. His eyes are slightly glossy, as if there are tears behind his eyes.

“Kas attacked James. She didn’t just attack him, she tried to kill him. She ripped his throat open with her bare hands. He almost died today,” he says before rolling onto his back, looking at the ceiling. He rubs his hand over his eyes and forehead.

I sit up in disbelief, “Oh my Goddess. Are you serious? Why? Why would she do that? And of all wolves...how did she possibly get the best of James?”

“I’m completely serious. As for the rest of the questions, I’ve got no idea. I don’t know what possessed her,” he shakes his head at the ceiling, “I heard the commotion and went inside thinking James must’ve caught someone trying to get in through a window or something. I don’t know. But when I opened the door, she was in full attack mode and he was bleeding out.”

“Marco, I-I don’t know what to say. I-,” I can’t finish because I really don’t know what to say.

“I don’t need you to say anythin’, Musu. Just being here listening is enough,” he looks at me with a weak smile. He pauses, then looks back up to the ceiling. He covers his eyes with the heels of his hands and speaks again. His voice shakes now, “For half a second, I considered shooting her, Musu. I almost shot my Luna. Clash stopped me. He wouldn’t let us hurt her.”

He takes his hands away from his eyes and blinks hard, trying to fight back the tears, “She was doing exactly what we taught her to do if she needed to protect herself from an attacker. Not use it against one of us. James and I turned her into that wolf.”

“Marco, you can’t think this was you or James’s fault. You will get to talk to her soon enough and clear this whole thing up,” I reassure him.

“As soon as I told her who she was attacking, she stopped, and tried to heal him. Like she actually didn’t know. The look on her face. She was so surprised.”

Marco takes his job as the Luna’s guard very seriously. So for him to say there was even an inkling of a thought of hurting her, I know it was serious. Marco, James, and the Luna all have a very close relationship. I can’t even fathom any of them wanting to hurt the other.

“She healed him after she almost killed him?” I ask, with confusion.

“Well, she tried to heal him, but then she started having a vision, so she wasn’t able to finish. We had to take him to the hospital wing. He’s gonna make it. He’s strong, but still. If she wasn’t a healer, he wouldn’t have made it.”

“Wait a minute. How in the Goddess’s name, were you just able to do that to me, out there,” I point to the hallway, “If you just experienced your partner almost getting killed a few hours ago?”

“It’s gonna sound cold, but I just needed to not think about it for a little longer,” he sighs with a shrug.

I don’t even know how to feel about that. The mind of a true warrior, I guess. Able to set aside trauma as needed to live his life in the pack. If he was still on Milo’s covert ops team, I would never know what he did at work, so I guess it would be the same mentality, but I would know less about his side of the story.

I hear a text chime in the special tone I have for Lenora on my phone. Marco is still looking at the ceiling, lost in his thoughts. I take the phone from the nightstand and she’s asking for a translation. Greek. Simple enough.

‘You are strong. Trust your instincts.’ I quickly text back and put the phone down. No idea what it means out of context, but I can find out later. I have more important things going on.

Mercy chimes in, “Tell him now. Take his mind off of things.”

“Mercy now is most definitely not the time,” I scold her.

“Now is the perfect time. Do it! Don’t make me take over,” she warns.

I roll my eyes internally at her.

“Marco, umm, maybe now is not a good time, but I think it is probably as good a time as any,” I say, uncharacteristically unsure of myself.

“What’s wrong, Corazón?” he leans up on his elbow, looking at me with concern.

“Well, remember a couple weeks ago, when I had a bad day at work and you got the bath ready for me?”

“Yeah, I remember you fell asleep in the tub.”

“Okay, well, after that. Like, after you carried me to bed. Do you remember that?” I give him a sly smile.

He looks at me for a moment until I see the memory connect in his mind and he smiles back at me, “oh, that...yeah, I remember that.”

“Well, things have been so crazy since then and I haven’t really seen you much, so I haven’t had a chance to really talk to you and I -”

“Musu, just tell me what’s on your mind,” he takes my hand in his and gives it a kiss.

“Marco, I-I’m pregnant,” my voice is so small I’m not sure if he hears me. 1

He looks like he’s stuck in time with my hand pressed against his lips. I feel like my heart just stopped. Is he upset? I can’t read his expression.

“I-I know we wanted to wait until we after we get married, an-and we aren’t even engaged yet but, you know, we haven’t exactly been careful,” I try to justify. His eyes shift to mine as he slowly lets go of my hand, “A-are you disappointed?”

“Stay right here,” he says and gets out of bed. He pulls boxers out of the drawer, finds shorts and a shirt, and walks out of the room. He peaks back in, “I’m serious, don’t move.”

I pull the sheet up to cover myself, suddenly selfconscious, and look out the door curiously, waiting for him to come back. He put a shirt and shorts on to walk around the house? Half the time he gripes about having to wear boxers. This is not the reaction I was expecting

It seems like he’s gone for an eternity, but a minute later; he comes back in the room and gently pulls me so I’m sitting at the edge of the bed.

“Marco, what are you doing? Please talk to me,” I beg.

He stands in front of me, pacing for a moment, then kneels on the floor in front of the bed. His beautiful light brown eyes shine brightly as he clears his throat and starts to talk.

“Musu Goba, I knew the moment I saw you, I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you. You’re perfect. Hell, you’re more than perfect. You’re like, everything I didn’t know I even needed in a mate. I know we’ve only known each other a little over a year, but it seems like it’s been a lifetime. And now you just told me I get to be a father? You’re gonna have my pup? I’m the luckiest son of a bitch in the world.”

I breathe a little sigh of relief now that he sounds happy about the situation.

He looks down for a moment before he looks me in the eye and puts his hand out in front of him. In between his thumb and index finger is a beautiful diamond ring. Emerald cut with filigree around the band.

“Musu, will you please marry me?” he asks with tears in his eyes.

“I-,” my voice catches in my throat. Yes, we had looked at rings, but I didn’t know he had actually bought one, “Marco, of course. Yes, I’ll marry you.”

He gives me a broad smile when he carefully takes my left hand and slides the ring onto my finger. It’s a perfect fit. I look in awe at the beautiful ring, then pull him toward me, giving him a deep kiss.

“It’s perfect, Mon Loup. Thank you,” I smile before giving him another kiss.

“I’m so relieved,” he sighs, putting his hand on his heart.

“Relieved? Were you worried I would say no?”

“I bought the ring the day I got the bath ready for you. I was gonna ask that night, but when I came back in the bathroom, you was sleeping in the tub, so I knew it wasn’t the right time. And like you said, after that, we haven’t really had a chance to spend time together. So, I’ve been carrying it in the inside pocket of my work suit jacket to keep it safe, but I couldn’t keep it in the box, cause it woulda been too bulky.” 1

I smirk at him as his Hispanic slang gets thicker with his explanation and laugh, “Let me guess, the ring box is in the gun safe at the packhouse?”

“Yeah, how did you know?”

“Because you know that is the only place I wouldn’t look for it,” I smile as I take in his handsome features, “Why did you put a shirt and shorts on just now?” “I don’t know a lot, Musu, but I know a proposal ain’t the right time to be an animal,” a small blush comes over his face. He smiles as he looks up at me from the floor and pulls me toward him for another sweet kiss. He pulls away, then wraps his arms around my waist, and leaning his ear against my belly. 2

“How long until I get to hold our baby, Corazón?”

“Well, our first appointment is next week, but should be in about four and a half months,” I inform him as I rub the back of his head.

He nuzzles closer to my belly and whispers soft enough that I’m pretty sure he didn’t intend for me to hear, “Thank you, Moon Goddess.”

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Chapter 21

Kas’s POV

When I woke up from my nap, I felt much better. I could hear maintenance staff still out in the apartment, speaking in hushed whispers. Bronx asked me to stay in the bedroom until they were finished, so I pulled out my laptop to see what was going on in the world. I have basically been missing for a week. It doesn’t matter who you are; the world turns with or without you.

A red scrolling bar at the top of the home screen has Bronx’s name on it. Huh?

I click on it and get directed to a news page. There is a video of Bronx sitting in front of a blue background. The headline just reads ‘Rare Statement From MasonCo CEO’. I put on my headphones, lean back against the pillow, and click the play button.

I’m mortified for the next three minutes. My face flushes red, first out of embarrassment that he would tell the world I was missing and almost drowned, then from anger at the thinly veiled threats he made to whoever took me, and back to embarrassment when I hear him say he is offering reward money for information that leads to the arrest of the kidnapers. I open more windows. Every site I go to has the same video with various articles about it.

“Bronx, get your butt in this bedroom right now,” I snarl through a mind link.

“Is everything okay, Baby? I’m still out here with maintenance. They will be finished in ten minutes.”

“Oh yeah, everything is just dandy, considering you announced I was missing and almost drowned and then threatened my kidnapers over the internet.”

“Oh. You saw that?”

“Yeah. I saw that. How could I not? It is on literally every website in existence!”

I hear him sigh, "Let Maintenance finish and I'll be there as soon as I show them out."

I cut off the mind link and search other sites. People are losing their minds trying to hypothesize over what could have happened to me. There are some seriously crazy theories. There are even sites betting on whether Bronx will get charged with murder when the kidnapers are caught. I seriously want to melt into the sheets and disappear again. How am I going to go to work with all this attention? My bakery is in the human town. It's on one of the main streets downtown, so the regular number of paparazzi hanging around outside who want my picture is bad enough. Now?! Ugh. I don't even want to think about it. I need to warn Delilah, if she will even talk to me.

"I think it's sweet," Lex purrs, "Our mate cares about us."

"You're not helping, Lex."

"What? What woman wouldn't want a man to scour the earth to find the people who hurt her?" she

Swoons.

"You're like a lovesick puppy. What gives? Where is the feisty warrior child of the Moon Goddess who constantly wants revenge? I could really use that wolf right now."

"He loves us, Kas, and he was worried. He still is. Can't you feel it? This is his way of showing it. It's romantic if you think about it."

I roll my eyes at Lex. Clearly she is not on my side for this one.

Now, don't get me wrong. Over the past year and a half, I have become accustomed to being referred to as 'Bronx Mason's wife'. I get it. He is a big deal. Since the day we got married, I knew I might be a target for attacks. I think it just comes with the territory when you are married to a multi-billionaire. When we first met, I knew he was well off, but I did not know how much money he was actually worth. Honestly, I never wanted his money. I have always wanted to earn my keep. To have money of my own, not be a leach or a drain on anyone.

It may sound weird, but being spoiled by Bronx is still uncomfortable for me. I was a slave growing up. I had nothing. My bedroom was in a dungeon where no one could hear the Alpha whipping me. All my clothes came from a donation pile by the dumpster of my old pack house. I didn't even have an actual bed, my makeshift furniture was all from trash. Going from that to having everything I could imagine and more can be overwhelming. A small part of me feels like I don't deserve it.

I get to a website that theorizes that I'm actually still missing and the video message was a smokescreen. That's enough. This rabbit hole is bottomless. I slam the laptop closed and toss it to the end of the bed before I cross my arms and lean back on the pillows with a huff.

When Bronx finally comes into the room, he sits quietly at the edge of the bed and lets me scold him without interruption, watching me intently as I pace in front of him, venting to him about how angry I am.

When I'm finally out of words, I stand in front of him with my hands on my hips, waiting for an answer. He doesn't say anything. He just takes one of my hands and pulls me toward him a little, so I am standing between his knees.

His crisp apple green eye bores into my soul before he speaks. His gruff voice is calm and sincere, "Kas, I'm not sorry. If I had to do it again, I would send the same message into the world. I meant every word and I won't apologize. Will things be awkward for a while? Yes. Am I sending you to the bakery with extra security for the foreseeable future? Abso-fuckinglutly, yes. Will this all blow over, eventually? Yes. In the meantime, I need you to trust me to do this my way. Please. Let me be the overprotective husband and mate who will do anything to keep the love of his life safe." He pulls my hand to the side of his stubbly face and closes his eye, breathing in my scent. His tone changes, becoming softer, "Baby, I thought I would never see you again. Four days of not knowing where you were almost broke me."

And with that, all my anger dissipates. All my willpower dissolves, and I let him pull me onto his lap so he can hold me close and calm himself with my scent. Who am I kidding? I miss his dark chocolate and coffee scent, too. I love when his muscular arms wrap around me. It feels like the safest place in the world.

After a while, my stomach rumbles. I realize I can't remember the last time I had something to eat other than when Lex took over and had a craving for rabbit. Sometimes sharing a body with a wolf is more weird than others. I feel a little disappointed when Bronx unwraps his arms, taking away the little cocoon he has me in.

"What do you want to eat? We will stay in the apartment tonight. We still have a ton to talk about," he kisses my forehead and gives me a knowing look.

"Rabbit?" I ask. 2 "Really?" He looks at me, shocked and a little concerned.

"No. I'm messing with you, Bronx," I giggle at his reaction, "How about just some pizza? I could go for a banana too."

"Okay, pizza and a banana. Anything else?" He smiles now that he knows my mood has improved.

“I want to make cookies. The fall menu at the bakery needs a couple more items. Can you ask Mrs. Miller to send up some ingredients? I will write them down for you.”

“Alright. Cookies. You’re gonna turn me into a fat old wolf, you know that, right?” he muses with a grin while he stands me up from his lap. Referring to the fact that he is seven years older than me, “Why don’t you put on some comfy clothes? I’m going to let Tyree know someone will be up from the kitchen. He’s probably hungry, too. I will see what I can do about getting him a break.” 1

“That’s my evil plan, Bronx. If you’re fat, you won’t be able to move fast. Then I can finally beat you in a sparring match,” I smirk as he walks out of the bedroom. 1
“Hilarious, smart aleck,” he calls back as he heads out the door to talk to Tyree.

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Chapter 22

When Bronx comes back, he has Mrs. Miller in tow. I come out of the bedroom with a big smile when I hear her voice. She is one of my favorite people. Left to our own devices, she and I can experiment with new recipes and trade technique ideas all day long. Bronx is carrying the ingredients I asked for. She is carrying a pizza box. As soon as she sets it down, I throw myself into her arms.

“Oh, Luna, we have been so worried about you. I am glad to see you back at home safe and sound,” she comforts me in a warm hug while she smooths my hair.

“I’m glad to be back, Mrs. Miller,” I grin, “I am going to come see you this week about ideas for sandwiches for the bakery.”

“Of course Luna. You know where to find me,” she squeezes me a little harder before she says goodbye and takes her leave.

Bronx takes our pizza to the living room so we can relax while we eat and talk. This is how he and I usually talk about pack or regent business when there are tough decisions involved. We have found it works better for us than being in one of our offices.

Once we settle in, I take a huge bite of the pizza. It is the most delicious thing I have ever eaten. That may be my hungry stomach speaking on my behalf, but it really is delicious.

“So where do you want to start?” Bronx gives me the option to talk about what I want. He knows me better than to make me talk about what he wants to hear first. We will get to it, eventually. I don’t even have to think about what I want to start with. It’s been on my mind since I woke up from my nap.

“Can we start with James?” I request, wiping my mouth with a napkin.

“Of course, Baby. You want to go first, tell me what happened? Or do you want me to tell you what we know?”

“I can start,” I give a quick nod before explaining that I didn’t recognize his scent and that when I opened the bedroom door, I didn’t recognize him. He was wearing a t-shirt and jeans, not his usual black suit.

“So, you don’t remember me telling you he would be out here?” Bronx looks confused. “I-I’m sorry, but I don’t remember that at all,” I frown, trying to recall any conversation about James being inside our apartment.

“Alright, well, how come you didn’t just mind link Marco? Why act so aggressively? That’s not like you, Kas. I think that is the part we are so concerned about. You weren’t just trying to incapacitate an intruder to protect yourself. You tried to kill him,” his tone is serious and firm, “Was Lex influencing you?”

“Excuse me?!” Lex growls, “You had better tell him it wasn’t my idea, Kas.”

“No. In fact, Elexis tried to stop me,” I use her full name for emphasis, “There was just this part of me that felt more... I don’t know...independent? No. Alone? That’s not right either.”

Bronx watches patiently as I try to find the right word.

“Primal. No. Feral. Yeah. It felt like there was a part of me that was feral. Like I needed to attack him,” I look at him to see if he comprehends.

“Alright. Is there anything else I should know about that feeling?” His expression hints that he knows something I don’t. I’m confused by the question, “I-I don’t think so. I mean, I don’t feel like that anymore now. It’s over now.”

Bronx takes a bite of pizza and looks at me, clearly trying to figure out what to say. Finally, he cocks his head to the side, “Do you remember me bringing you back to the packhouse this morning from the woods?”

“I remember you carrying me and I remember telling you I’m still mad at you...which I am...but that is a conversation for another night,” I hold my hands up, not wanting to start an argument.

“Hmm...Kas, do you know anyone named Cora?”

“Not that I know of? Should I?”

“I don’t know yet, Saint mentioned the name. How about a group called the Feral? Is that something you remember? Maybe it could be a group of wolves from Silver Moon? Or do you know if Silver Moon ever had witches on their territory?”

“I never saw any witches. I definitely don’t remember any groups calling themselves the Feral. Why do I feel like we had this conversation?”

“Nah, don’t worry about it,” he brushes off my question, “But saying you felt feral and the fact that you wouldn’t eat human food, then involuntarily shifted in the hospital wing so Lex could go eat raw food makes me more and more feel like this was a group of witches that enchanted you or something.”

“I guess it could be? Maybe we could ask Delilah if she had ever heard of a group like that. Once James is out of the hospital wing, though. I’m sure I stressed her out enough,” I sigh, then take another bite of pizza, trying to push my worry down. I need to think about Delilah later. We are still in business mode here, “Okay, your turn.”

Bronx puts his plate down and adjusts his position before he looks at me, “So, we had James and Marco come up here for guard duty since we didn’t know if the people who took you would try to show up again. They weren’t wearing their usual suits because they came within fifteen minutes of me mindlinking them. We all figured you would sleep most of the day. We positioned James inside, so if something happened that the hospital wing wouldn’t be able to handle, he could call Delilah right away. I also didn’t want you in here by yourself. I know I told you I was leaving, but I didn’t know what your state of mind was going to be when you woke up. We definitely didn’t think it would be murder.” 3

“BRONX!” I squawk.

“Sorry, that was uncalled for, but you get the idea,” he’s the one putting his hands up now, “Marco explained to Lenora that the maneuver was one they had taught you to use for extreme emergencies and had not really practiced it. So how did you know it would work?”

“I could see it in my mind. Exactly where I needed to put my feet. Exactly how much pressure I needed in my hands, how far I would need to lean back so he couldn’t throw me off. It’s like it all instinctually calculated itself in my mind. I just had to execute with precision,” I shrug, “Looking back on it, I don’t know why I didn’t recognize his scent.” 1

“So, Kas, you should know, you were able to mostly heal him, but he is definitely going to have scars left on his neck. I don’t know what his mindset is right now. I just want you to be prepared that there could be a possibility he might not want to come back as your guard.”

"I-I, umm, okay," I swallow a hard lump forming in my throat. "It even freaked Marco out," Bronx continued, "Lenora had to send him home with Musu."

"Okay," I fight back a feeling of panic, "Can we give them both some time off? Before they ask for it? Give them time to think about if they want to be my guards. I-I understand if they don't but I don't want them to decide right now. Maybe some time away could help."

"Calm down, Baby. We will figure it out, but yes, we will give both of them some time off," Bronx reaches out and takes my hand, "I have already talked to Tyree and Ashley is pulling a few guys from Milo's ops team to cover guard duty for you."

I clap my hands on my cheeks, "What have I done, Bronx?"

He doesn't answer. He just looks at me sympathetically. I shake my hands out and stand up.

"Just give me a minute," I request, "It's just...a lot."

"It's okay, Kas. Take your time."

I wander into the kitchen and lean my arms on the counter and rest my forehead on my arms. I take a few deep breaths but it can't stop the silent tears from rolling down my face. The only thing I can do is to pray to the Moon Goddess, to my mother that she won't take my guards away from me. I feel Bronx's hand rubbing my back. 1

"Are you alright, Baby?"

I shake my head. If I try to talk right now, it's going to give my emotions away. I don't want Bronx to worry about me even more.

"Kas, I can feel how bad you're hurting. Come on, come here," he tugs on the back of my shirt, making me stand up.

I turn around and wrap my arms around him and let myself actually cry into his shirt. He smooths my hair and whispers that it's going to be alright. When I finally calm down, he leads me back to the sofa, so we can finish talking about pack business.

He tells me about the weird "coincidence" of seeing a video of the CEO of Santoro Industries being killed by one of my sisters and his wife calling to request a meeting with Bronx directly for MasonCo contract negotiations.

"One of my sisters did that? But she couldn't have attacked you. All the photos we have seen, she has silver hair and violet eyes like I do. I think you would have recalled that when you met me."

“Yeah, we are still trying to figure out how it all connects, but I wanted you to know. We have seen these women do some messed up things, but never as far as killing someone.”

“You know what? I could go for that banana now. But only if it is covered in ice cream and chocolate syrup,” I say blankly.

“Well, you have come to the right place. Peeling bananas and scooping ice cream is my specialty. You’re on your own for the chocolate syrup though,” Bronx looks at me and smiles at his attempt at a joke to lighten the mood, officially ending talk of business for the night.

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Kas’s POV

I peek in through the little window of the hospital room. I can see James hooked up to machines, sleeping peacefully. A strong pang of guilt courses through me when I see there are bandages around his neck. Delilah is curled up in the chair that’s pulled up to the side of the bed. She is holding his hand through the railing of the bed.

“You can’t talk to her from the hallway, Kas,” Bronx whispers in my ear from behind me, “I’ll wait here until you’re ready. Just mind link me.”

I nod, then take a deep breath. I quietly open the door and step inside the room. I close it behind me and take a step into the room. Delilah’s breath hitches in her sleep, but she doesn’t wake up.

I take slow deliberate steps until I am next to the chair. I squat down and put my hand on her forearm.

“Delilah?” I whisper, “Wake up, please.”

Her brow furrows as her eyes flutter open. Her deep sapphire blue eyes take a moment for her to recognize my face, but when she does, they immediately turn royal blue. She gasps and throws her arms tightly around me.

“Kas,” she sobs in a loud whisper, “I was so worried about you! Are you okay?”

“Oh, Delilah, I’m fine now. I-I’m so sorry. I don’t know what came over me. You know I would never do this on purpose, right?” I finally stop trying to hold back my tears. This is my best friend. I can be myself with her, “I thought you would hate me. I didn’t think you would want to see me.”

She pulls me back from her embrace and holds me by the shoulders with her long, spindly fingers. Her eyes and nose are red and puffy from crying, but she looks relieved that I am there, “Kas, I could never hate you. Never. I know whatever happened must have been an accident. This is not you. Whatever happened yesterday, that was not you. I’m sure of it.”

I breathe the enormous sigh as I feel the vice around my heart loosen just a little. I will never understand the mind of a pacifist, but I am grateful at this moment that my best friend is one. 1

“Delilah, when James wakes up, we can talk more about what happened, but I have a couple of questions. Bronx needs information that could be related to my kidnapping or maybe one of my past lives.”

“I will help in any way I can. What do you need to know?” She looks at me attentively. “Have you ever heard of a woman named Cora? Probably a witch or at least someone who can perform gray or dark magic that can manipulate a person’s mind. Bronx thinks she is part of a group called the Feral. Have you ever heard of a coven or a group that goes by that name?”

Delilah looks like she is racking her brain, trying to remember anything about either of the names. She finally shakes her head negatively.

“No, I definitely don’t remember either of those. I can ask my mother when she gets here tomorrow.”

“Oh! Lady Camille is coming here?” I feel my eyebrows rise in surprise.

“Well, she was planning on coming to see me for a low key visit anyway, but with everything going on, yeah. Beta Lenora and I thought it would be for the best for her to be here for a while. I hope you don’t mind,” she looks at me apologetically, “We don’t know how she can help exactly, yet, but knowing her, she will have some sort of helpful advice.”

“I would love to see her. In fact, Bronx thinks maybe I was influenced by magic and that is what could have caused me to...” my voice trails off as I look over to the bed and see sleeping James laying there.

Delilah uses her fingertips to pull my chin so I am looking back at her, “We’re going to figure out what is going on here, Kas. We are all in this together.”

I smile weakly at her and nod, "Delilah, Bronx and I would like to speak to James. D-Do you think he is in any shape to talk with us?"

"Um, well, he will definitely be able to listen, but yesterday, he was having a little trouble with his voice. The doctor said something about his vocal chords. We are hoping his wolf helped heal it overnight. I used some of my healing magic, but we both know it isn't the same as when you do it. We will know more when he wakes up, I guess." 1

"Okay, do you want to see if you can rouse him? I can step out and get Bronx to give you some privacy." 2

"Yeah, give me five minutes," she smiles, "Kas, I'm so glad to see you. I have missed you so much. I have so much to tell you once we wake James up."

I give Delilah a little peck on the cheek and step out of the room so she can wake her mate up.

Bronx stands up from a chair in the hall and steps up to me. He brushes some tears from my eyes, "Well, how did it go? You're crying and smiling. I don't know what to do with that."

"She isn't mad. She is waking James up now to make sure he is okay speaking with us. The doctor said there is a problem with his vocal chords, so we don't know if he will be able to speak right now," It is sinking in that no matter how many people try to reassure me, this is my fault.

"Bronx, do you think he will let me finish healing him?" 1

"I'm not a mind reader, Baby. You'll just have to ask him and find out," he rubs my back.

I hear the door open. Delilah peeks her head out, "You can come in now."

Bronx sees the hesitation on my face, takes my hand, and leads me into the room. James is sitting up in the bed, his short sable hair is ruffed up and his eyes are looking much more alert than I remember from yesterday. He tries to mess with the bandages on his neck, but Delilah steps up and stops him, whispering about, waiting for the doctor. When she convinces him to stop, she sits in the chair next to the bed.

"James," Bronx tips his head and regards him. He tips his head in return, then holds his hand out toward me.

I look at Bronx, then back at James, confused.

"I think you're being paged, Luna," Bronx says quietly as he lets go of my hand.

I step up to the bed and take James's hand. He pulls me, urging me onto the bed next to him. I carefully climb up being careful to avoid the wires they hooked him up to.

"James, I-I'm -" he covers my mouth with his hand until he is sure I will not finish whatever it was I was going to say, then he takes both my hands in his and places my palms on his neck. He nods and closes his eyes, showing he wants me to heal him.

The vice around my heart is completely removed now, "Alright Lex, time to get to work."
"You got it, Kas. Let's finish what we started," she says confidently.

I carefully peel back the bandages from around James's neck. There are still some gashes that are not fully healed and bright red marks in the areas that were healed. You can see clearly defined scars developing on the healed skin.

"I'm going to make this right, James," I say, trying to bolster his confidence.

He gives a quick nod and closes his eyes again. My hands carefully themselves against his throat and I begin to concentrate. I send as much of my essence as I can into him, blurring the lines of who he is and who I am. I manipulate the muscles and tissue to fuse and repair itself. Pushing positive energy in to help regeneration. I see down to the molecular level, making sure there is no sign of infection before I pull myself back into my body. When I open my eyes and look at him, he looks a little shocked. 1

"How do you feel?" I ask. Personally, with everything that has happened the past couple of days, I feel spent and kind of weak, but I will be fine after a little rest. Helping James is too important to think about me right now.

He clears his throat and tries to speak, "Thirsty," his voice is gravely and scratchy. Delilah gives a gigantic smile and gives him a cup of water.

Once he has had enough to drink, he puts the cup down and turns to me again. He doesn't say anything, he just pulls me toward him and drowns me in the biggest, heaviest hug I think I have ever experienced. I can hear Bronx growl slightly at the sight of another wolf hugging me.

"Thank you, Kas," James whispers, "You do not know how much that meant to me."

"James, I don't know what words are a good enough apology right now," I shake my head.

"No apology needed," he pulls me back and looks me in the eye, "I know and you know there isn't any way you would have done that if you weren't affected. Honestly, in a perverse way, I'm kind of proud of

you."

“Proud?” I ask, confused. I look at Bronx, who also looks confused.

“Yeah. I once told the Alpha that I thought you would make a good assassin. You just proved that you would be if it ever came down to it. I didn’t hear you wake up, let alone open the bedroom door. You got the best of me, Kas. Probably the first wolf ever to do that,” he smiles with pride. I look over to see Bronx laughing

now.

“Don’t even think about it, Kas. You are definitely not adding assassin to your resume,” Bronx scolds in a playful, mocking tone.

“Oh, you guys don’t need to worry about that. I can’t even imagine doing something like that again,” I shake my head vigorously.

Bronx steps forward now, “James, while I am here to make sure you are okay, I am also here on official business. Kas and I want to offer you a month off of work, full pay. We want you to take some time to think about if you want to stay on as Kas’s guard. We don’t want you to rush into a decision right now and we both want you to take the time to heal.”

“Same goes for you, Delilah,” I address her with a smile, “I want you to take a month off from the bakery. Spend time with your mate. You more than deserve the time off and you will be back just in time for the update to the autumn menu.” “Thank you, Alpha, Luna,” James says gratefully, “We will definitely take advantage of the time. Delilah, didn’t you have something you wanted to talk to Kas about?”

We all turn our attention to Delilah now, who has a huge smile on her face, looking at each of us in turn, “I’m pregnant! James and I are having a baby.” 1

My brain churns for a moment as I process what she just said. I hear an excited squeal erupt from deep inside me as I throw myself at my best friend and give her the biggest tightest hug I have ever given anyone in my life, ignoring the tiny pang of pain knowing I may never get the chance to share the same news.