

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 16

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 16

#Chapter 16 The Wine Is Drugged

Selene's POV

Woops.

When I asked Drake to keep me company at the party, I planned to flirt and dance, to give Bastien a little taste of his own medicine. Annoyance, that was the plan. An annoyed Bastien is manageable, an enraged Bastien is dangerous.

I stare at my husband with wide eyes. He's standing in the doorway, on the verge of shifting, fury rolling off him in waves. His metallic gaze is locked on my face, on my tears and Drake's comforting hands.

Drake doesn't seem the least bit troubled by the rabid creature looming over us. He slides his fingers from my skin, turning to Bastien with a friendly smile. "Bastien, it's been a while."

"Too long." Bastien agrees, "So long you seem to have forgotten who you're dealing with."

Drake rolls his eyes, and I have a sudden and newfound respect for the young Alpha. He may wear the face of a playful rogue, but underneath he is every bit the hard and commanding leader the role demands. "Honestly Bastien, I didn't think you'd be so ungrateful." He quips, "In case you haven't heard, I saved your wife's life tonight. I wouldn't have had to if you'd been here."

Bastien's claws extend and retract compulsively, betraying the conflict raging within him. Drake's words were an outright provocation, but there was no denying the truth in them. After a moment Bastien settles into a low simmer, striding past the other man to reach me. He drags me into a tight embrace, cuddling me to his chest. "What happened?"

Feeling suddenly warm and hazy, it takes me a moment to realize he asked a question. Drake – apparently – suffers no such impediment. "You have some vipers in your nest." He drawls, "It was only a matter of time before one struck."

I plant my palms against Bastien's chest, trying to push away from him so I can pin Drake with the full force of my indignant glare. "What happened to 'heroes don't tattle?!'"

Drake's face scrunches up in a wince, and I belatedly realize my mistake. I look up at my husband, whose handsome features are awash with foreboding. "Am I to take it you intended to keep this information secret?" He asks, his voice dangerously low.

I lower my gaze, careful not to challenge his dominance, "It wasn't a big deal." I argue, "It's not as if she knew I couldn't swim."

I see Bastien's head turn in my periphery, and realize he's now looking to Drake, "Who?"

His answer is immediate. "Redhead, blue dress, gaggle of minions trailing after her wherever she goes."

Ten minutes later the door swings open, and Aiden pokes his head in. "Bastien would like to see you in the great hall."

Drake and I move silently through the opulent building, finally arriving in the hall just in time to see the rest of the party guests gather within. We move forward, slipping through the crowd until the object of everyone's attention is revealed.

Bastien stands in the center of the hall, the redhead from the gardens at his feet. Bastien gestures us forward, still vibrating with anger.

We stop a few feet away and the she-wolf looks up at Bastien sulkily, as if asking whether she really has to do this. Bastien makes short work of her hesitance, clamping one large hand around the back of her neck and steering her forward until she's kneeling before me. "Speak," He hisses in her ear.

"Selene -" A sharp growl makes her wince. "Mrs. Durand, I'm deeply sorry for the things I said and the way I treated you. I was horribly disrespectful and I should never have spoken to my Alpha's wife in such a way."

Another warning growl thunders in my husband's chest, and the woman quickly amends her statement. "I should never have treated you that way, no matter who you are."

I'm not sure what I'd expected, but this isn't it. Part of me is indignant: I'll never learn to stand on my own two feet if other people are always fixing my problems for me. The rest of me is gushing pure elation. For the first time in my memory, Bastien is putting me ahead of the pack. He's protecting me, making a public example of my detractors, and staking his claim for all to see.

I stare down at the she-wolf with growing contempt. She'd been so fierce and fearless when she was bullying me, emboldened by my vulnerability and weakness. Now she looks anything but strong; she looks like a spoiled child who got their hand caught in the cookie jar.

"No, you shouldn't have." I agree, "I suggest you never do so again: you won't like the outcome." I warn.

Bastien gives me a small smile, before turning his attention to the gathered audience. "That goes for all of you." He announces, "if I hear anyone speaking about my wife in such a way, or anyone lays a hand on her again, I will not be held accountable for my actions."

The joy of Bastien's public display fades almost immediately. Everything was fine when we sat down to dinner, but by the end of the second course, my husband was back to acting as if I don't exist.

He's behaving very strangely, almost as if he's drunk – but he's only had one glass of wine. He's vacillating back and forth between giddiness, aggression, and detachment. One moment he's so happy he's grinning like a fool, the next he's snarling and growling at anything that moves, and five minutes after that he can't even focus enough to eat his dinner.

We make it through the meal in starts and stops, and Bastien's odd does not go unnoticed. I see his parents exchange glances a few times, but no one says anything.

As the wait staff clears our places following dessert and the party begins to shift toward the ballroom, I catch him. "Bastien?" I say firmly, grasping his arm to get his attention.

He swings his attention to me in a daze. His pupils are dilated and his eyes glassy.

"Are you alright?" I question pointedly, checking his forehead for a temperature but finding nothing amiss.

Before he can answer me, a young socialite approaches his side and asks him to dance. I recognize her as one of the women who'd been gossiping with my would-be murderer. I shoot her a disgruntled frown, but she smiles defiantly back at me.

Bastien rises without a word, following her into the ballroom without a backward glance. Unease prickles at the back of my neck, It was extremely odd for a pack member to approach and proposition an Alpha this way – even if he weren't married. The general rule is that unless you need their assistance with something, they'll come to you.

I have many doubts about my husband – about my marriage – but I know something is wrong. This is not Bastien. His behavior is completely out of character, regardless of

how he may feel about me or Arabella or anyone else. He is not in control, and he is always in control.

I find my feet, and notice Aiden studying Bastien's wine glass out of the corner of my eye. I shift in his direction and our eyes meet. We're both thinking the same thing. Aiden slips the goblet into his jacket, no doubt planning to take it for testing.

Aiden's confirmation is all the confirmation I need to go after Bastien.

Whatever happens in the future, Bastien has watched my back for years without complaint; the least I can do is return the favor. Doubt lingers in my mind as I search the crowd. What if he will not come away, what if he publicly rejects me after making such a display a few hours ago?

It's a risk I have to take.

It only takes a moment to find them. They stand at the center of the dancefloor, Bastien swaying drunkenly next to the blonde, who is wrapped around him like cling film. I glide through the swaying mass of dancers, never taking my eyes from the pair.

In the end I needn't have worried about being rejected. When Bastien sees me over his partner's shoulder he steps away from her without a word, closing the distance between us as if in a trance. I rise up on my tiptoes when he is in front of me, looping my arms around his neck so I can speak in his ear. "I think it's time to go home."

Bastien's arms close around my middle and he pulls me flush to his body, continuing to sway to the music. I drop back down onto my heels as he begins to turn us haphazardly around the dancefloor, his intimate grip and undulating movements arousing my erogenous zones and muddling my own thoughts. I'm caught between my desire to extract us both from my situation and my instincts to submit to my husband. Drugged

Bastien might be out of his right mind, but he is the same dominant Alpha he's always been, and my body responds thus whether my brain is in agreement or not. Eventually he solves the problem for me.

His strangely shifting moods take a turn for the risqué. One moment we're dancing and the next Bastien has dragged me out a side door and pressed me up against the wall, kissing and nibbling my neck.

"Bastien." | gasp, trying to get his attention. "Take me home." I free my hands from their trapped position between our bodies and catch his face between them. "I need you to take me home." I implore, hoping my words will trigger the caretaker in him.

He frowns down at me for a long moment, as if trying to remember something he's long forgot. Bastien's confused expression gives way to something feverish and fierce before he takes me by the hand and pulls me out the door.

Bastien's POV

My wolf is going out of his mind with the need to claim Selene,

She's driving, her attention fully focused on the road, but every few minutes she sends a worried glance my way. She's so beautiful, and her sweet scent is making my mouth water. I'm not sure I can wait to get home, I want to take her now, finally make her mine in every way possible.

I've been worried about my little wolf lately: first the strange illness and her refusal to seek help, then the incident with Arabella and her flight from the hospital, Worse was her determination to hide from me during the storm, and her devastation throughout; her secretive behavior afterwards.

Perhaps it is simply that so much has happened in such a short period of time, or that I'm projecting my own distress about the rejection onto her, but something tells me there is more to her actions than meets the eye.

Tonight didn't help, staying on task after learning that Selene had nearly drowned had been nearly impossible. Only Aiden's level headed counsel kept me from tearing through the city to reach her. When I was finally free to leave I'd been ready to cart her out of the party, pack obligations be damned,

Then I found her with Drake Cavanaugh. It infuriated me to know that he'd been there for her when I was not, that he'd done my job and I couldn't even hold it against him. He'd been right, if it weren't for him, she would have died, and there would have been no one to blame but myself,

Still, seeing him comfort her, seeing Selene no longer wearing my colors but sporting his, made Axel roar in outrage. My wishes to abandon the party were eroded by my need to formally stake my claim, but even that went out the window when Drake told me what Selene apparently intended to hide – what she'd lied to my parents about.

Yes, something is definitely wrong.

This is not terribly unusual for my wife. Communicating her emotions is very difficult for her – with good reason. Her brain had been wired to associate showing her emotions as a vulnerability others would exploit to inflict harm upon her, but I thought we'd made good progress over the years.

It seems getting to the truth of the matter will require some creative solutions. In the back of my mind I'm already devising countless debauched strategies for making her talk, but right now my plans for Selene have nothing to do with extracting secrets, and everything to do with filling the gaping hole in my chest where our mating bond is supposed to implant.

I know I'm dangerously on edge, that Axel's desperation to join with her is dangerous for my delicate mate – yet I can't dampen the flames engulfing me. I need Selene in the most raw and primal way. I've been ravenous to claim her for years, and the strange fog now dulling my ability to reason is like a sweeping invitation to give in to my base instincts.

I've been lost to this bizarre haze since dinner first started, the world going fuzzy all around me. At first it seemed like everything was under water-dulled, distant and distorted. Now everything has reduced to a single focal point: Selene.

My drowsy euphoria has slowly morphed into excruciating lust and the gradual disintegration of my inhibitions. I feel the way she wolves must in heat, as if my entire world has reduced to a single searing need – so powerful and all-consuming I think I might go mad without it.

Axel's urging to claim Selene right there on the dance floor had jarred my senses enough to slip away from the pack, but only my wife's gentle plea had overpowered my desire enough to get me out of the building.

Now I count the minutes until we reach home, knowing with a resigned sort of certainty that I've finally lost the battle against my instincts. Tonight I will mark Selene, once and for all.

Selene's POV

By the time we get home Bastien is so far gone into the drug that I barely recognize him. Though his pupils are still blown wide, the glowing state of his eyes betray how close he is to shifting. His claws and fangs are halfway extended, and the low purr in his chest is sending tortuous vibrations through my most sensitive parts.

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#Chapter 17 Indulge in Passion

I'm barely able to drag him inside and up to our room. He's stumbling and swaying like a drunk, but he's also determined to get his hands on me, attempting to remove my clothes multiple times as we ascend the stairs to the top floor.

I swat him away every time, ignoring his admonishing growls. When we finally enter our apartment I don't even make it two steps inside before I'm trapped between Bastien and the door.

Bastien's mouth slams down on mine with crushing force. The violent fervor of his lips devastate my senses as his arms wind around my body, pulling me close and lifting my feet off the floor. I wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist, clinging to him like the lifeline he is.

He devours me, body and soul. His lips blaze a scorching path over my skin as he strips me bare, his powerful hands stroking and kneading my flesh so forcefully it seems he's trying to fuse our bodies together.

I throw myself into his embrace just as passionately, slanting my mouth beneath his to deepen the kiss. His tongue delves into my mouth, coaxing mine out of hiding to tangle with his. Bastien groans with pleasure as my hips rock intuitively against his, and the world around me fades.

I melt into his arms, giving myself over to the heady rush of desire. His lips claim every bare inch of skin they can reach, his teeth nipping my delicate skin, only to be followed by the soothing caress of his tongue.

My heart feels full to bursting and my lungs feel empty of air. I breathe Bastien in, knowing he is the only cure for the ache. The bittersweet pang of love and imminent loss consumes me; another last kiss. Another last chance to be with the man who gave meaning to my life when it seemed all was lost.

The tears fall without my permission.

They slide down my heated cheeks before I can stop them, and I know the moment Bastien scents them. His pulls away from me abruptly, concern and regret written plainly across his face. "It's nothing." I promise, but he isn't convinced.

"I'm sorry." Bastien professes gutturally, looking absolutely beside himself as he sets my feet on the ground and shifts away.

I try to follow him but he holds out his hand, stopping me from coming near. "Don't." He orders, "Please don't make this any harder."

A frigid draft of air sweeps over me, freezing my blood. "I don't understand."

"I can't be near you." He growls, eyes flashing. "You're making it worse."

"Bastien-

"No, Selene." He cuts me off, "I can't do this. It will ruin everything." His words are slurred, his eyes unfocused.

I gulp in a few steadying breaths and understanding slams into me. Whatever Bastien is on, is sending him into rut, and I was merely the closest female – but not the one he wants. Not the one he needs.

“Do you want me to call Arabella?” I offer, hating the words but unable to stand the tortured expression on his face.

He grimaces, “She’s still in the hospital.”

Color floods my cheeks, “I’m sorry.”

“Stop apologizing.” Bastien growls.

“Do you want me to go?” I ask in a small voice.

“No.” I almost feel relieved until he adds, “You stay. I’ll go.”

The door slams shut as Bastien storms down the stairs, and I slide to the floor of my foyer. My tears fall unhindered now, grief and rejection egged on by my seething hormones. Confusion and anger surge through me as I try to figure out where I went wrong, how I got here.

A few days ago I was happier than I’ve ever been in my entire life, now I feel as if the world is crumbling beneath my feet. My marriage is over, my husband – the love of my life – wants nothing to do with me. My pack hates me for the crimes someone else committed against me, and I’m pregnant with a child that has already survived one attempt on its fragile life.

I’ve always known I would have to leave Elysium after the rejection ceremony, but it’s beginning to feel like I need to move up my plans. I’m afraid of what might happen if I stay here, and I know that the best case scenario still ends with heartbreak.

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I don’t know where I’m going to go, but I know the best thing I can possibly do for my baby is get out of this place while I still can !

My days with the Nova pack are numbered. I have to get out before it’s too late.

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Chapter 18

#Chapter 18 I Want To Reject

Bastien’s POV

Five Hours Earlier

I stare at the flier in my hands, my hackles raised. It’s a reward poster, not the kind people pin up to find lost pets or missing children, but the kind law enforcement agencies use to locate wanted criminals. It has precisely the same format, asking for

tips or any information regarding the whereabouts of Volana wolves, listing details on how to identify them and promising monetary compensation for any solid leads.

A crude illustration was plastered beneath the words, displaying a woman with black hair and two-toned eyes. She looks nothing like Selene, but the descriptions provided offer enough details for even the most clueless wolf to identify members of her lineage.

“Where the hell did you find this?” I ask Aiden in horror. When he’d called me right before my father’s celebration insisting it was an emergency, I’d known something had to be terribly wrong. Aiden knew how important this event was, he would not call me away for no reason. Even so, this was worse than I’d imagined.

“One of our spies in the East came across it just outside of Calypso territory. Thankfully it doesn’t seem to have spread any farther than that.” His warm brown eyes survey me curiously, “Do you have any idea why they’re looking for Volanas?”

Everyone in Elysium knows what Selene is, but I’ve gone to considerable effort to gloss over and downplay her lineage, and no one knows the secret of her blood. I study my right-hand, hating myself for questioning whether he can be trusted. Other than my family, I trust Aiden more than anyone, but Selene’s safety is too precious to risk.

“I know that Blaise Denizen is a cruel and twisted man.” I say, referring to the Calypso Alpha, “If he wants Volanas, I guarantee it isn’t for anything good.”

Aiden eyes me for a second, and I know he caught my evasion. Instead of looking offended he simply asks, “You have reason to believe he’s a danger to Selene?”

“I know he is.” I admit.

“Is that why we sent spies East in the first place?” Aiden questions, “You thought something like this might happen?” Now I do hear an edge in his voice, and I can’t blame him for being annoyed. He can’t do his job if he’s working with incomplete information.

“Yes.” I concede softly.

“What the hell, Bastien?” He snaps, “Do you really trust me so little?”

“It isn’t like that.” I promise tiredly. “I promised her I wouldn’t share this secret with anyone, even you.”

“When it comes to the safety of my Alpha’s mate – my best friend’s mate – I need to know what’s going on.” He declares harshly. “I don’t have to know the details, you don’t have to betray confidences, but I can’t protect this pack if you’re withholding intelligence.”

"I know brother, I'm sorry." I reply honestly, "The fact is simply that Blaise will kill Selene if he finds her, he'll kill any Volana he finds."

Aiden scrubs a hand over his face. "We need to be proactive." He waves the flier in the air, "This reward is only going to get higher and spread farther. We either need to neutralize Denizen, or make sure the truth can never get back to him."

"I'd like nothing more than to get rid of the man." I grumble, "But I'm not Alpha yet, and even if I was – he's the most powerful pack leader on the continent. We'd need an army to take him down."

"You're right." Aiden agrees, "We couldn't win a war against the Calypsos. But who said it has to be a war?"

I snort, "So what, you want to assassinate him?"

Aiden grins, "You have to admit the idea has its merits."

I can't help but laugh. "That's true enough." I mean it, I'm already fantasizing about disemboweling the cruel leader. But for the time being let's focus on increasing surveillance and spreading counter-propaganda. Publicize some of Blaise's less savory

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pursuits, the more unpopular we make him, the less people will want to help him."

"Popularity isn't your problem." Aiden reminds me, "Money is. Few people actually like the man, but plenty would help the devil himself if he offered enough money."

I'm staring at the poster again, a new thought crossing my mind. "Who do we have that's good with graphics?"

Aiden shrugs. "Eddie's pretty good in a pinch."

Inod in agreement, "See if he can duplicate this. Set up a new phone line devoted to tips and replace it with Denizens." I say, the plan coming together as I speak it. "Put them up everywhere, across the continent, all the way to the east, replace as many of his posters as possible.

My beta's brow furrows, "Why would you bring more attention to this?"

"First because I want to know who is calling and what they're reporting. Second, because if we can get to Volanas first, we can help them." I explain. And third, because if people think they've already reported a tip, it won't matter if Denizens real posters actually spread this far, anyone with information will think they've already contributed it."

Aiden nods in agreement, "I'll get Eddie on it right away."

I thank him, "in the meantime we need to figure out security for Selene after the rejection ceremony."

Aiden grimaces, "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" He borches carefully, eyeing the flier, "Especially now?"

"My job is to do what's best for my mate." I speak the words I've chanted in my head over and over again these past few weeks. "She's never had any choices in her life and deserves them now. She's in love with someone else, I want her to be happy."

"And what about your happiness?" Aiden demands, "Don't you deserve to be happy too?"

No, I think. Not really. I killed my best friend, I abandoned his sister after promising to care for her, and I forced my traumatized mate to marry me – even if it was for her protection. "If Selene is happy, I will be too." I answer. I tell myself I'm being honest, and part of me believes it, but deep down I know that watching someone else make my mate happy will destroy me.

Even so, it's a fitting punishment.

"Man this really isn't your day." Aiden says, standing over me with his arms crossed over his chest.

I groan, too exhausted to do anything other than swat at him from my position sprawled out over his couch. I feel as if I've been

I came straight to my Beta, who welcomed me in with open arms and only light teasing.

"You do realize they drugged you?" He says pointedly.

"Who is they?" I ask savagely.

"If I had to guess I'd say it was Selene's new friend." He answers, referring to Amanda, who almost killed my mate with her little pool assault. "But honestly it could have been any one of the harpies."

"The harpies?" I repeat in confusion.

"All the silly she-wolves who used to chase after you just because you were the Alpha's son." He expounds, "You know the ones, they almost revolted when you married Selene and I guarantee they think they have a chance now that you're splitting."

“How the hell does anyone even know about the rejection?” I snarl, “We haven’t announced anything.”

“You know how gossip is around here,” Aiden admonishes me, “The walls have ears.”

I swear fiercely, frustrated beyond words. “We need to find out who is responsible – and what the hell they gave me.”

“Already on it.” Aiden assures me. “I nabbed your glass from the dinner table. We’ll get it tested.”

I sigh with relief. “When did you figure it out?”

“Halfway through dinner?” He reflects uncertainly, “About the time you started growling at the waiter for refilling Selene’s water glass.” I wince, not remembering that particular detail. “Don’t worry about it too much – you were behaving oddly but you didn’t

say or do anything too wild. I was getting ready to cart you out of there but Selene beat me to it.”

“You should have acted faster,” I grouse unfairly. “I shouldn’t have been alone with her.”

Aiden brushes off my foul mood like the easy going person he is. “I acted the best I could based on the information I had. And Selene was the best person for you to be with under the circumstances

“I almost marked her!” I snarl furiously

“But you didn’t.” Aiden reasons coolly, “If you’d gone away with anyone else it would have been a disaster. You would have caved to one of the harpies and created a scandal or lashed out at one of the men for trying to keep you from your mate. Instead you took the edge off and got through it.”

“Barely I mutter mutinously

“Stop whining.” Aiden scolds, “We have more important things to worry about. Someone in this pack thinks they can drug their future Alpha and get away with it. Do you want to prove them right, or do you want to make them pay?”

I don’t answer, distracted by a persistent buzzing in my pocket. I pull out my phone, finding Selene’s photo plastered across the screen, announcing an incoming call. Guilt swirls in my stomach, I can’t handle talking to her right now. With a heavy sigh I hit the decline button

Selene’s POV

After my third call goes to voicemail, I close my eyes bitterly. Today has been too much. Sometimes being with Bastien feels like being a human yoyo: First he's sweet and flirtatious, then he abandons me. He comes to my defense, only to ignore me afterwards. Then he's all over me, only to walk out when things start to get truly heated.

It's frustrating. When I hear the outgoing message of his voicemail on my fourth call, I make a decision

"Bastien, call me." I say, "I want to talk about our rejection ceremony as soon as you can. I can't wait five days: We need to move

it up,

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3 Days Until the Rejection Ceremony

Selene's POV

I haven't seen or spoken to Bastien since the night of Gabriel's birthday party, despite my efforts to get in touch with him.

I barely slept that night, though I never sleep well without Bastien. I tossed and turned, wondering where he'd gone, what had happened. It's clear to me that he was drugged, but I cannot even begin to understand everything that happened between us in those few short hours. All I know is i'm done.

The last few weeks have been a blur, more confusing and eventful than any since we married. I can barely think straight with everything that is going on, but I think I've finally understood that Elysium – and the life I've lived here – is in the past.

I was never meant to stay here forever. I do not belong, and this chapter of my story is ending fast. Our rejection ceremony is in three days, after that I will start fresh somewhere new.

My selfish heart wants nothing more than to spend every last second of my remaining time with my husband, even if he doesn't want me there. Regardless of my wishes, it is not an option. I don't know where Bastien is or how he's feeling, though I imagine it must be a considerable relief for him to finally be free to do as he wishes in life.

I'm on my way to the library, intent on researching other packs to help me decide where to go once the rejection is complete. I know embarrassingly little about the world beyond this city, and though I know well enough not to go anywhere near my mother's pack, I don't have the faintest idea where I should turn for refuge.

I'm seated on the city line bus, watching Elysium fly by outside the tall, wide windows. I've only ridden the bus a few times over the last few years, mostly in moments like this one when I don't want Bastien to know what I'm doing.

I know my husband well enough to realize that though he might not want to be married to me, he would never approve of me leaving. He and Gabriel think of me as their responsibility, their ward – neither will want me out of their sights.

I scan the paper in my hand, a quickly jotted list of nearby territories to get me started. I catch the man beside me eyeing the paper too, and quickly fold it closed. There had only been one available seat when I boarded, and though my neighbor's leering gaze has made me nothing but uncomfortable, I've comforted myself with the knowledge that this is only a short trip.

When the bus finally pulls to a stop outside the library I rise to my feet so quickly my head spins. I stride quickly from the oversized vehicle, my stomach dropping below my navel when I realize the man who'd sat next to me departing as well.

I make for the library entrance with a racing heart, unsure whether my instincts are trying to warn me of real danger or if my past trauma is playing tricks with my mind. I slip inside the historic building, pulling an armful of volumes from the shelves and finding a table near the circulation desk.

Once I'm sure I'm alone I dial Bastien's cell, still anxious about the man from the bus. I hide my phone beneath the curtain of my hair, worried the librarian might take offense if he realizes I'm making a call. However there was no need to be concerned, because Bastien doesn't answer. My call goes straight to voicemail, as do the next five calls I make.

I shouldn't be surprised, I've tried calling him a dozen times over the past few days to no avail. I understood his silence before, after all I clearly told him in my texts and voicemails that I wanted to discuss the rejection ceremony. I can sympathize with the desire to avoid an unpleasant conversation.

But this is different. I need him – and he isn't here for me.

I spend more than an hour pouring through the texts, feeling marginally more confident when I finally leave, but still undecided about where I should go. I like the idea of the Eros pack, who control a vast territory in the west, but I worry about their ties to the Nova's.

The Eros pack leaders had been at Gabriel's birthday, their heir rescued me from drowning. They knew me. If I went there would they betray my location, the existence of my child, to Bastien? The same problem was true of the Vega pack. I need to avoid our allies. I think firmly.

As I'm leaving the library I notice a familiar scent, one that makes me stop in my tracks. It is not merely the fact that I recognize

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#Chapter 19 Bastien Doesn't Answer *My* Calls

the scent which startles me, but the realization that I'm smelling it at all. Ever since I lost Luna my wolf senses have been nonexistent – I should not be able to smell anyone this way,

What should and should not be quickly ceases to matter as the man from the bus appears in front of me. He is easily a foot taller than me, with thick black hair and icy blue eyes. At least twenty years my senior, he closes in, "Hello beautiful."

My heart stops, and I back away carefully, once again inevitably frustrated by Bastien not picking up his phone when I needed him. "Hello."

A wide smile splits his cheeks, "Oh come on, don't look like that sweetheart. I want us to be friends"

I shake my head. "I'm not interested."

"How can you say that when you don't even know me?" He counters, his ogling stare belying the reasonable tone of his voice.

"I know because I'm married." I say, sounding much braver than I feel.

"Not for long from the way I hear it." He replies gruffly. "What's wrong, the Alpha doesn't want you anymore angel?"

"Whatever may be happening in the future, at this moment I am still your Alpha's wife." I remind him. "Whether he loves me or hates me, if you put your hands on me, you will be challenging him directly."

"Is that so?" The man sneers.

"Yes." I insist.

He laughs cruelly, "I don't think so. If he cared about you he wouldn't be leaving you."

I turn to run, but he catches my wrist, jerking me into an alleyway. I try to cry out but his hand clamps down over my mouth. I thrash against him, biting down on his palm. He jerks away with a pained yelp, then delivers a harsh backhanded slap across my face. I lurch to the pavement, feeling nausea curdle in my belly as stars swirl in my vision.

I flip over, crawling away from him as he looms over my vulnerable body. His hand reaches toward me, coming within inches of my throat before he is propelled backwards, flying through the air and landing on his back at the mouth of the alley.

I gaze up at my savior, my breath coming in gasps. Drake Cavanaugh stands over the man, his booted foot crushing the stranger's larynx. "What in hell do you think you were doing?"

"She was asking for it, just look at her." My would be assaulter babbles in panic.

Drake looks over his shoulder, surveying me carefully before turning his attention back to his prey. "And you asked for this." He growls, slamming his foot down on the man's head.

I stare at the unconscious man as Drake helps me to my feet, waiting for him to jerk awake and attack once more. But he does not move, he lies there on the pavement, blood trickling from his lips. I try to scrub the image from my memory, letting Drake lead me out of the alley and into the light.

"I hate to say it Mrs. Durand," He says with a kind smile, "But you seem like a magnet for trouble."

I almost laugh, but my nerves are too frayed. "You're not wrong." I agree gloomily, "I don't know what I ever did to deserve it."

Drake pulls up short, taking me by the shoulders. "That isn't what I meant. You didn't do anything wrong whatsoever." He frowns, "I think we should call your husband."

I shake my head. "He won't pick up." I've called Bastien half a dozen times over the past couple of days, each time getting no response.

"Then tell me what I can do for you." Drake implores me, there must be something."

"Actually there is," I hedge, taking a steadying breath. "You can tell me about the Eros pack."

"Why do you want to know all this?" Drake is sitting across from me in a small tea shop, sipping a mug of chamomile and willingly answering the bevy of questions that have poured from my mouth uninhibited over the last hour.

I watch him closely, weighing whether or not he can be trusted. He has a kind face, and he's saved me twice in under a week. Of course this is not a guarantee that he is a good person or anyone suitable to confide in, but something deeply buried instinct

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urges me forward. "Because I'm not staying in Elysium after the rejection."

"Oh." Drake says, his brow furrowing. "So you're looking for a new pack?"

I shrug evasively. "I'm looking for someplace I will be safe, somewhere people won't come looking for me."

"What people," He asks sharply, "Bastien?"

A bitter smile stretches across my face, "He wouldn't have any reason to seek me out, but I wouldn't want him to find me if he did."

Drake doesn't look convinced. Are you in some sort of trouble Selene?"

"My husband doesn't want me." I remind him, "Isn't that trouble enough?"

The young Alpha's mouth is set in a hard line as he sets down his tea, pinning me with a stern glare, "I want to help you, Selene. And I give you my word that I will, but only if you are honest with me."

I gnaw on my lower lip, considering the man in front of me, "And if I tell you something you don't think should be kept secret.**

"It's your life," He assures me gently. "Not mine. I'll respect your confidence."

Call me a fool but I believe him.

I take a deep breath, furtively scanning the room to make sure we will not be overheard, before giving him the full weight of my

attention. "I'm pregnant."

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#Chapter 20 Bastien And Arabella Buy Rings

Selene's POV

Drake sits across from me, appearing surprised but sympathetic as he processes my revelation. "Bastien doesn't know?" He asks.

"No." I confirm simply, "And he's not going to find out." I rub the back of my neck, "Our situation has always been complicated, but Bastien is a good man. If he found out the truth he would never go through with the rejection, and I won't have him stay with me out of pity or obligation."

"For what it's worth," Drake offers kindly, "I think he's a fool for wanting to reject you at all."

"Then you're one of the few." I reply honestly.

He frowns, "Is the baby the reason you're leaving?"

"It's the reason I realized I had to go," I confess, "But in all honesty I don't think I could have stayed either way. I don't want to watch Bastien marry someone else." Hot tears burn my eyes, "And I'm sick of being the pack side show. I need a fresh start, someplace where nobody knows me. Where my baby and I can be safe."

Drake squeezes my hand. "I understand." I swipe at an escaped tear and he offers me his napkin. I take it with appreciation, dabbing my eyes. "If you want to come to Asphodel, I will help you in any way I can. We'll find you a place to live, a job, we'll introduce you to the pack as a distant cousin and never mention the Novas at all."

I blink in surprise, a kernel of hope blooming in my chest. "What about your father?"

"My father is getting older, most pack business has been under my control for a few years now." Drake explains. "If I tell him it is important we help you, on your terms, he will respect my decision."

"I don't understand why you would do this for me." I state warily.

"Has the world truly been so cruel to you that kindness is cause for such suspicion?" From anyone else the words might have sounded self-righteous or judgemental, but from Drake they merely sounded aggrieved.

"Yes." I confirm icily, "It has."

He frowns deeply, taking my hand again. "I'm sorry, Selene." He professes, "It won't have to be that way for much longer."

“Truly?” I ask in disbelief.

“Truly.” He vows, “Have you thought about how you want to do it?”

“How I’m going to leave, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Not really, I’ve mostly been thinking about the after” part of the equation.” I wince at my own shortsightedness.

“That’s alright.” Drake insists.

“It has to be soon.” | announce abruptly, “before he can figure out that I’m with pup.”

“Don’t worry.” He advises, “We’ll come up with a plan together. By this time next week, it will be like you were never here.”

1 Day Until the Rejection Ceremony

The day before our rejection ceremony | slip away to Elysium’s shopping center, intent on purchasing new clothes and supplies for my imminent departure. Drake and I talked for many hours on Sunday, laying out plans for my flight from Elysium.

He helped me realize that slipping away in the night would not be enough to truly escape. As I already suspected, Gabriel and

Bastien’s sense of responsibility for my wellbeing would result in a search, one that would extend into *Eros* territory and *may not* be thwarted by the Alpha’s protection alone.

If I truly want to be free of my past, I must sever myself from it completely, leaving no room for doubt or second guesses *among* those I leave behind. It had not been easy for Drake to convince me to fake my death. After all, I do not want to hurt the people! love with such a cruel lie, but in the end I saw that there is no other way.

The only chance I have to start fresh is if I end my old life once and for all. My past cannot catch up to me if no one ever comes looking for me, and the only way to keep my baby safe from the likes of Arabella, is to make her believe it does not exist.

I know a day may come when I regret these decisions, but for now the desire to turn over a new leaf is so overwhelming that I feel nothing but relief.

As I stroll through the mall, more and more bags accumulating on my arms, I let myself imagine my new life. I dream of my baby, of the home I will build and life I will lead. I

dream of being normal, rather than some pathetic victim; an incomplete wolf so broken that I cease to have a place in the pack.

I start to feel warm and light, as if I am walking on air. Every purchase I make is another step forward, another puzzle piece bringing me closer to my goal. I do not think about the pain I will cause, only the joy to be found ahead.

Then I see them.

Through the shining glass window of a high end jewelry store, I can clearly make out Bastien and Arabella bent over a jewelry counter, wide smiles on their faces.

Irrational hurt lances through me. After all, here I am daydreaming about faking my death and putting people I love through great pain, yet I have the temerity to feel affronted by my contract husband planning his own future with the woman he loves.

Then again, love is never rational and Goddess help me, I do love Bastien.

I do not know when Arabella was released from the hospital, but she looks perfectly well now. She is beaming, so full of love and beauty that my stomach revolts – not that this is anything new. These days I'm nauseous more often than not.

Perhaps it is the fact that our rejection is still before us. Bastien and I are still married for the time being, and it seems wildly insensitive and disrespectful for them to be publicly advertising their relationship this way.

I stride across the atrium in a daze, coming to stand at the entrance of the jewelry store with blazing eyes and flushed cheeks. *Please tell me I am not seeing what I think I am.

Bastien and Arabella turn toward me in surprise, and I find myself shrinking back, unsure of where I found that sudden wave of confidence.

“Selene – ”

“Let me, Bastien.” Arabella cuts him off, placing a graceful hand on his arm. “After all, jewelry is women’s business.”

My husband’s face twists up in concern and confusion, but Arabella is already striding toward me. She links her arm with mine as if we are old friends, pulling me out of the doorway and away from the windows so we won’t be overheard.

“We are still married you know,” I remind her hotly.

“Yes, you’re married.” Arabella drawls, “For one more day. After that he’s mine. If I were you, I’d let it go before you make things even more uncomfortable than they already are.”

"You've got a lot of nerve." I tell her. "First with the stairs, and now this. Are you really so desperate that you cannot wait until the papers are signed?"

"Sweetheart the moment the papers are signed Bastien and I are going to be married. We have to have a ring in advance otherwise we'd have to wait even longer." Arabella croons, "And we're done waiting. *You've* kept us apart long enough."

"That was never my decision or choice." I argue.

"What, like it was mine?" She hisses, baring her teeth. "I didn't have any more say in this than you did, and it's worse for me." Arabella insists. "You might be his mate, but that bond is not a choice. He loves me so much that your bond seems like nothing in comparison. He loves me so much that he is forsaking what nature ordained."

I stumble backward, not understanding her strange words. She pursues me, a wolf stalking a rabbit, "*You've* stood in the way of that love, love so powerful even the Goddess cannot break it." She growls. "Does that make you proud? *Are* you happy to know

how badly you've ruined our lives?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." I insist.

"Oh yes you do." She snaps, "You know exactly what you've done and if you think that brat you're carrying can change anything now, *you're* sorely mistaken."

"That brat." I repeat harshly, "You mean the baby you tried to kill? Your husband's child?" My anger raises empty threats to my lips, "how do you think Bastien would feel if he knew what you tried to do to his heir?"

Some of Arabella's composure slips, and her blue eyes flash, "But he's not going to know, is he Selene?" She retorts, "Don't forget you showed your hand." Her clawlike fingers catch my chin, tugging it up so I have to look her in the eye. "You don't want him to know. You want to leave – but you'll never be able to get away if he finds out the truth."

"Maybe not, but I might be able to show him what a snake you are." I combat, "And that's got to be worth something."

Pure rage bleeds into Arabella's saccharine expression, "If you say so much as one word to him, I will finish what I started in the hospital." She threatens. "If you want your baby to live, you'll keep your mouth shut." She growls, "And when you leave, you will never come back."