

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 21

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Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Day of the Ceremony

Belene's POV

My fingers anxiously trace the flowers embroidered into the *bodice of my wedding gown* it's a delicate white contera weightless and ethereal I look more like a wood nymph than a bride

I remember the day we chose it, Bastien and I was the first dress *we found* that *did not completely overpower my* frame three years ago. We tried countless others first, but the moment I stepped *into* the gossamer fabric I knew fate said it all

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This is the way of rejection ceremonies Marriages end as they begin

We will wear the same clothes, meet at the same moonlit altar with *friends and family* looking on, we'll even play the same vows instead of vows to love and keep each other we will vow *to part*. Instead of *exchanging* rings we'll *rearmore* then, and instead of shifting to run together beneath the stars, we'll divide, *forging new paths* in *directions of our own* choosing

Of course, Bastien and I never ran together in the first place. *We* walked through the *forest* hand in hand, a sweet concession for the loss of my wolf

Tonight I expect he will shift, and I have a fairly good idea where he'll run rather *to whom* he'll run.

I've replayed my conversation with Arabella over and over in my head. At first I thought I must have *misheard* her, after all Bacon himself told me Arabella was his mate. Yet the more I ponder *our conversation* the clearer it becomes Bastien is *my* mate, or the would have been if I still had Luna, It explains why I *always* felt connected to *him*, why he *always* made me feel safe

Those horrible women at Gabriel's birthday *were* right, I am too broken to be *anything* but a *burden*. *My one* chance to be whole might have been finding the man the goddess chose for *me*, but fate had other plans.

My mate doesn't want me without my wolf,

Who could?

Teardrops pool on my lashes and I suck in a shaky breath, trying to tell myself that one day I *might* find a *wolf* who is able to look past my shortcomings. One day I might be enough for *someone*, somewhere.

The tears fall anyway, rolling down my cheeks in gray rivulets of *mascara*. It doesn't matter if I'm enough for *someone* else. The only person I want is Bastien, and no matter what I do, or how long I live – he will *never* want me.

Bastien's POV

I used to have nightmares about losing Selene, now those horrible dreams are becoming a reality. In less than an hour, we are going to formally end our marriage and part forever.

Axel has been giving me the silent treatment *for* days, protesting my decision to go through with the *ceremony*. I'm not any happier about it than he is, but I have to do this for Selene. This is what being an Alpha is all about, I remind my stubborn wolf, taking care of others, putting their needs above your own.

Being an Alpha is also about being in control. He replies grumpily. Do *you* feel in control right now?

No. *We* both know I don't. I haven't been able to eat or sleep for days. I haven't been able to think about anything other than the fact that I will never get to hold my mate in my arms again. Not only that, I'm going to have to watch her build a life with another wolf – an idea that not only makes me feel completely unhinged, but positively murderous.

So rather than focusing on things that are truly important like Blaise's hunt for Volana wolves or my Alpha training. I've been wallowing in grief and fantasizing about winning Selene back.

The necklace Arabella helped me pick out is sitting on my dresser, wrapped up in a velvet box and decorative paper. When I bought it I told myself it was merely a parting gift for Selene, a token of appreciation for our years together and good will for the future. But deep down I imagined it might convince her to give me another chance.

#Chapter 21 Rejection Day

Ridiculous. Axel chides, apparently feeling very vocal now that he's finally speaking to me again. You think a pretty trinket is going to tell her something three years of marriage couldn't?

A growl rumbles in my chest. He's right of course, there's nothing I can do or say that will change things now. It's too late. It was probably too late when we met. Selene's heart belonged to another years and years before I came along.

It's time I accept it. I have to let us both move on.

With a heavy sigh, I toss the gift box into the trash.

Gabriel's POV

I've always hated wearing suits. If I had it my way, I'd remain in my wolf form day and night, but drafting laws and signing treaties is difficult without thumbs. My fingers tug at the windsor knot choking off my air supply, fumbling with the annoying garment as read over the rejection agreement in my hand.

Disappointment and regret churn deep in my belly. This is not the path I hoped my son would walk. His marriage to Selene started on difficult footing, but the struggle was never between them. For all the horror of her past, I truly thought Selene had found peace with Bastien.

The sweet little wolf was afraid of her own shadow, but she was never afraid of her mate, and caring for Selene had softened Bastien in so many ways. Watching her heal and witnessing them grow together made Odette and I endlessly happy; we were both shocked speechless when they announced the rejection ceremony.

He won't admit it, but I know Bastien is heartbroken. Under any other circumstances I might be angry at the person responsible for his pain, but I know it isn't Selene's fault. In the end I suppose Garrick's torture was too much to overcome. If anyone is to blame it's him, or the Goddess herself. How could she allow one of her creations to suffer such cruelty?

The terrace curtains rustle, diverting my wolf's attention. I drag my eyes from the document on my desk, eyeing the fluttering fabric curiously. The doors were closed when I entered my office, and no one has entered since.

I haven't heard a sound, but an unmistakable draft of cool air wafts through the room. My hackles raise as I scent a strange wolf, my mind racing to understand how anyone could have gotten past my heightened senses. My gaze jumps to the goblet of wine by my computer, but before I can examine it, the curtains part.

A shadowy figure emerges in my periphery, illuminated by the dim terrace lanterns. He's tall and thin, dressed in all black and exuding undisguised hostility. Green eyes glow in the darkness, but I can't see anything more of his face.

"Whatever your complaint," I begin, for it's clear that's what he has, "only cowards hide in the shadows. Be a man and show yourself."

"Show myself?" His voice sounds familiar, yet I can't place it. "You mean you don't recognize me, Uncle?"

My heart skips a beat. "Frederic?"

"You look surprised, Gabriel." He laughs humorlessly. "I suppose it's no wonder. You probably forgot I existed after you killed my father." I see it all too clearly now. His resemblance to my brother is unmistakable, even without good light. "Did it never matter to you that he had a family?"

"I was his family." I remind him sharply. "He betrayed me, and he betrayed you and your mother." I can barely hold onto my train of thought. I'm now certain he drugged me, another coward's move. "If he truly cared for you he never would have done anything that might take him away from you. He had only himself to blame."

The young man's fists clench at his sides. "You really are a heartless bastard." He hisses. "I figured anyone who could kill their own flesh and blood would be – but I hadn't imagined you would show so little remorse."

"You don't know what you're talking about." I snarl, "You have no idea how much it hurt me to fight your father. It was the hardest thing I have ever done, or ever will do."

"I don't believe you." Frederic spits.

"And what do you mean to do about it?" I demand, practically swaying on my feet. "Why are you here?"

"I'm here to finish my father's work." The words barely have time to land before he launches into an attack. My foggy brain jerks me out of his path just in time, but I'm too slow to deflect his rebound assault. Claws rip into my back as I stumble forward,

triggering the shift.

I only transform part way, spinning around to face him before he can sink his teeth into my throat. I launch my body into his, knocking him to the floor and rolling in a vicious tangle of flailing limbs as we both attempt to land blows.

He's young and strong, and I am about as agile as a drunk, but he is still no match for me. I've been Alpha for longer than he's been alive, I was fighting wars while he was still in diapers.

I throw the insolent pup over my head, lunging for him as he bounces across the floor. As one we shift fully, and my wolf takes over. I close my jaws around his hind leg, dragging him yelping and whining over the carpet.

Pain dilates his pupils, the black pools slowly eroding his irises to a neon corona. In the light Frederic's gray fur is so similar to his father's it takes my breath away. For a moment my addled mind believes it is my brother beneath me, returned from beyond the grave,

A single moment of hesitation is all it takes. I freeze for a fraction of a second, and Frederic's claws tear through my carotid artery.

Blood gushes from my body, draining my life in a relentless flood. As thick, coppery liquid fills my mouth, Frederic shifts back to human form, standing over me with a callous grin. "You've lost, old man." He announces snidely. "And Bastien is next."

My growl comes out as a strangled gurgle, and my nephew laughs. "His little mate too, and their pup." Confusion furrows my brow, and his laugh becomes an outright cacklé. "Oh that's right. Frederic taunts. "You don't know: Selene's pregnant."

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 22

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 22

#Chapter 22 The Alpha is Dead

Selene's POV

"Selene, are you ready?" Odette is knocking on the dressing room door, her kind voice unusually somber.

"Yes." I call, smoothing my skirts. "You can come in."

The door pushes open, and my mother-in-law's lovely face peeks inside. She sidles through the narrow opening, approaching me with a wistful expression. "Oh my darling." Odette murmurs bleakly, her eyes shining as she studies my reflection. "I really thought you two would make it."

“I thought we might too” I admit, keeping my gaze high to ward off tears. “For a while.”

Her hand closes around mine, squeezing gently. “What happened, Selene?” She asks gently.

All at once it hits me that I’m not merely losing my husband, but the only parental figures I’ve known since my mother died. I swipe at an escaped tear, “It’s what Bastien wants.”

Odette frowns, the edges of her warm brown eyes crinkling beneath the weight of her drawn brows. She opens her mouth to speak but before any words can escape, all the blood drains from her face in a frenzied rush, leaving her white as a sheet. Her eyes go wide and her body crumples, bowing and bending against her will. Her mouth gapes open in a breathless gasp, emitting a strangled cry.

“Odette!” I exclaim, catching her by the arms so she does not fall. “What’s wrong?”

Her mouth is opening and closing soundlessly, her body trembling beneath my hands. “It’s Gabriel.”

Before I can stop her, Odette rips herself from my hold, flying out of the room and down the hall. I race after her, blood rushing in my ears. I’ve never seen someone look so anguished, so afraid.

We pick up a few sentries as we run, everyone jolting into action the moment they see the look on Odette’s face. She bursts into Gabriel’s office, freezing in the doorway.

I know the moment I hear her choked whimper. I do not need to see her stumble back against the door frame, sinking to the ground with shaking limbs. I do not need to hear the screams that follow, or the weeping. I do not need to see her crawling across the floor on her hands and knees, seeking something just out of sight of the hallway.

By the time I reach Odette she is lying in Gabriel’s blood, her body thrown atop his, wracked with violent, heaving sobs. The Alpha stares sightlessly up at the ceiling, his skin a garish shade of gray.

I clasp my hand tightly over my mouth, trying to hold back my own grief. I can’t fall apart, not when others are hurting so badly. Odette needs me to keep it together, Bastien will need... Bastien.

I know the guards have already gone for him, but in a fit of irrational panic I try to come up with any possible plan to stop them. He shouldn’t have to see this, he shouldn’t have to lose his father so young. I wrap myself around Odette, holding her while she cries and praying that it’s all a bad dream.

Hot, thick blood seeps into my wedding dress, smearing over my skin and pooling beneath our huddled bodies. The stench of death is thick in the air, and I can almost imagine I smell the salt of Odette's tears.

The sound of heavy running footsteps meet my ears, and I know my prayers have not been answered. Bastien towers in the doorway, looking suddenly very young despite his intimidating appearance.

His silver gaze travels over his father's body, to his mother and me. My lip trembles, I could cry from the look on Bastien's face alone. He looks so lost, a child adrift in a sea of uncertainty. I can see the little boy he once was, the one who looked to his father to hang the moon.

He moves forward in a trance, his eyes never leaving his father's body. Sinking to his knees by my side, Bastien roars with fury and despair. I watch helplessly as he sinks forward, lowering his head to Gabriel's too-still form, his hands clenched in white knuckled fists.

I've never seen Bastien cry. He's come close once or twice, but he's never wept as he does now. The sight of my indomitable husband broken and helpless tips me over the edge. Tears stream from my eyes, and then Bastien is reaching toward me blindly.

His arm catches my waist and he hauls me into his lap, squeezing me like a security blanket while he pulls his mother into his other side. We lie in a tangled heap like this, sobbing and bloodstained, until the pack enforcers arrive.

Everything happens in a blur. Aiden is there, grasping Bastien's shoulder and gently telling him we need to move so the investigators can sweep the scene.

Choking back his grief, Bastien nods, setting me on my feet. I stand protectively at his side while he attempts to rouse Odette, trying to pull her from Gabriel's body as tenderly as possible. She won't budge. She bares her fangs and snarls at her son, clutching her mate's body so tightly her hands shake almost as violently as her quaking shoulders.

I slap my hand over my mouth when Bastien growls at Odette with pure Alpha authority, causing her body to jolt with shock. I've seen Bastien assert his dominance over countless pack members over the years in precisely this way – I've experienced it myself on a handful of occasions – but to see it happening to Odette breaks my heart.

People are swarming around us on all sides: council members, enforcers, even Dr. Kane is here. Bastien and I help Odette to her feet, and Aiden asks Dr. Kane to administer a sedative. While the doctor speaks with her, I pull Bastien aside. His silver eyes move up and down my body, taking in the sight of my ruined wedding dress with a dreadful grimace.

I take his face in my hands, pulling his attention to my face. "I'm going to get her cleaned up and into bed." I explain softly, "Will you be okay?"

Bastien's powerful hands clamp down on my hips, his grip so strong I fear I might bruise. His head shakes slightly from right to left, and I think he's going to refuse. Instead he pulls me into the circle of his arms, "Take care of her for me." He pleads in my ear.

Inod, pressing my lips to his cheek. "I promise."

After washing Gabriel's blood from Odette and tucking her in with the help of the doctor's sleeping pills, I return to the Alpha's office. Gabriel's body has been removed and though the once-cozy space is now full of crime scene tape and evidence markers, it is all but deserted.

Only Bastien remains, crumpled at his father's desk, his head cradled in his hands. The man I knew a few hours ago is gone, replaced by a leader with the weight of the world on his shoulders. He looks up when I enter, a questioning expression on his handsome features.

"She's asleep." I confirm quietly.

He nods grimly, dragging his hand through his unruly hair.

"Did the investigators find anything?" I ask hesitantly.

"Not yet." Bastien's voice is like gravel. "They couldn't even decipher a scent for the killer – said too many people had been in and out of the room to pinpoint anything."

I'm already kicking myself for asking the question. Finding the people responsible for the crime is a matter for the future, lingering on it now is merely a pretense to inject some sense of normalcy into circumstances which are anything but.

I close the distance between us, and Bastien turns his chair to face me when I'm finally standing in front of him. He pulls me between his legs, gazing up at me with wide, hopeless eyes. "Tell me this isn't real?" He begs, fisting his hands at my waist.

My throat itches painfully, swelling and throbbing with emotion. "I'm so sorry." I profess tearfully. "I'm so, so sorry."

Bastien closes in on himself, slumping forward until his forehead is flush against my ribs. He wraps his muscular arms around my middle, burying his face in the silk of my bodice and breaking down completely.

I soothe him as best I can, making soft shushing sounds and caressing his hair, shoulders and back. After a while I sink to my knees, framing his tear-stained face in my

hands and gazing up at him with all the love I possess, "You need to get cleaned up too." I murmur, "Come on, let me take care of you for once."

With an obedient nod, Bastien lets me lead him up to our apartment. I pull him into the bathroom, stripping off both our clothes and disappearing into the steam of a hot shower. I scrub the blood from our skin, wishing the searing water could ease Bastien's sorrow as seamlessly as it washes away dirt and grime.

When we finally emerge I guide my husband to bed, pulling back the covers and tucking him in. As I pull away Bastien's hand I latch onto my wrist, holding me captive, "Will you stay with me tonight?" He pleads, appearing more vulnerable than I have ever seen him. "Please?"

I thought my heart was broken before, but now it cracks straight down the middle. "Of course." I vow, sliding into the bed beside him.

Bastien clings to me so tightly I can hardly breathe, and for a moment I even consider begging him to loosen his hold. However I abandon the thought as soon as it enters my mind. As horrible as this night is, as badly as I wish I could turn back the clock and prevent all this pain, a small part of me relishes the fact that this incredible, powerful man finds comfort in me.

I curl my body around his, enveloping him in my love and affection for what will probably be the last time. Tomorrow he will

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 23

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Chapter 23

#Chapter 23 Postponing the Ceremony

Bastien's POV

The day after my father's murder the sun rises just like it has every morning for eons. Its rays filter through the gauzy curtains adorning our bedroom windows, announcing dawn's arrival as if this day is no different than the millions which came before.

This cannot be. Surely the sun cannot shine on a world where my father does not exist. Surely the earth cannot keep spinning when his life has winked out forever.

Yet they do. The world forges on as though nothing has changed – oblivious to the loss of one of its most remarkable creations.

I wish I could snuff out the dawn as brutally as someone did my father's soul.

All I have left of him now are memories. Every plan we made, every expectation or imagined future is gone. We will never speak again, never go on another hunt or share another laugh. Our relationship is an artifact of the past, an unfinished book whose final chapters will never be written,

I cannot bear it.

What's worse is I know this is only the beginning. Few wolves outlive their mates by very long, even when they die young. The grief eats them alive, wasting away their physical forms until there is nothing left. How much longer will I have my mother? How long can she survive without half her soul?

The horrible likelihood is that I will soon be without any parents at all, and I'm already losing my own mate. Though the parting may not be as tragic, it will be just as final.

My father's death bought me one more night with Selene. She's stretched out on top of me, her breath a warm breeze on my chest, rustling the coarse hair scattered across my pecs. Her serious brow is furrowed even in sleep and I gather her close, afraid to wake her but needing to feel her skin on mine.

Her lashes flutter, parting to reveal her stunning irises. It takes a moment for the memory of last night to rise to the surface, but I know the moment it does. Her face crumples, leaving sleep completely and replacing the sweet innocence of slumber with heart rending grief.

My pain is reflected so clearly in Selene's eyes my heart forgets to beat. "I was hoping it was all a bad dream."

"Me too." I admit, running my fingers through the silky blanket of chestnut hair streaming down her bare back. "I just want to go back to sleep and stay there until this all goes away."

Selene does not tell me it's never going to go away, or that I cannot hide from reality. She simply rests her cheek over my heart and forlornly whispers, "I know."

My wolf, who has been swinging like a pendulum between sorrow and fury ever since walking into the Alpha's office last night, quiets ever so slightly. Selene is, and has always been, the only thing that can truly soothe Axel.

"Listen," I blurt out before I can lose my nerve, "I know the ceremony was supposed to be yesterday but..." My voice is pure gravel. "I can't... It's too much."

Her small body, which had gone tense when I started speaking, liquefies. "It's alright Bastien, the ceremony can wait until you're ready."

Axel and I relax in unison, but my relief is only temporary. There is one very large problem with her concession.

I'm never going to be ready.

Selene's POV

In a matter of days Odette has gone from a beautiful, vivacious she-wolf, to an empty shell; a shadow of her former self. Bastien is scarcely better. After emerging from our apartment the day after the attack, the elder council formally recognized him as Alpha, pushing him deeper into shock and confusion.

Though we all knew Bastien was next in line for the role, pack leadership had been the farthest thing from our minds in the wake

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#Chapter 23 Postponing the Ceremony

of the murder. It seemed distasteful and disrespectful to revoke the title from Gabriel so quickly, but the council was determined there should not be any lapses in governance.

Now, instead of taking time to grieve with his family, Bastien is trying to balance running the pack with overseeing the murder investigation, planning his father's funeral and caring for his mother. I help him as much as I can, especially with Odette and the memorial, but there are simply not enough hours in the day to get everything done.

Bastien barely leaves his office, and I've heard him snarling at Aiden and Donavon more than once when they've attempted to coax him into taking a break. The two Betas have become so desperate they decided to call in reinforcements, worried that if he doesn't stop soon he'll collapse.

Unfortunately for me, I am the reinforcements.

We're in the kitchen and the huge men are hovering over me whispering instructions while I balance a silver serving tray in my arms. "Don't take no for an answer." Aiden is saying. "You don't have to be forceful, just persistent."

"Cry, if you have to." Donavon adds.

"And maintain physical contact." Aiden interjects, "it will keep him calm."

Honestly, they're speaking about Bastien as if he's a wild bear. Only with great effort do I keep my eyes from rolling into the back of my head. "You do know we've been married three years, right?"

The Betas exchange a glance, "Yes."

"I know how to handle my husband." I state simply, making a shoeing motion so they'll clear the way to the hall.

They do as instructed, and within minutes I'm outside the office door. Bastien doesn't look up when I enter, his attention is glued to a stack of papers splayed out on the mahogany desk. I set the dinner tray on the coffee table and move to his side.

Bastien reaches out blindly, snagging my hand and bringing it to his lips while he reads. "Thank you, sweetheart."

"Will you eat with me?" I request softly.

"I wish I could, baby." He replies immediately. "Maybe tomorrow."

Pulling my hand from his, I adopt my most intimidating pose, locking my hands on my hips. "Bastien, you need to eat something." "When I reach a stopping point, I will." He lies, still not looking at me.

"You haven't reached a stopping point in three days." I remind him. "You've got to take a break."

Bastien sighs heavily, "Not right now, Selene."

"When?"

"When I can." He evades.

For the first time in my memory, I summon a growl. It's weak and not the least bit intimidating, rumbling pitifully in my chest like distant thunder – very distant.

Bastien freezes, pulling his gaze from his work for the first time since I entered. His silver eyes pierce straight through me. "Did you just growl at me, little wolf?"

I try to keep my gaze level with his, but instead find it skittering back and forth as I put my foot down. "You need to eat."

Bastien drags his eyes down my body to the offending foot, then back up to my flushed face. Though his countenance is wholly disapproving, I'm certain I see the corner of his mouth twitch – the first glimmer of light he's shown in days. "Is that any way to speak to your Alpha?" He purrs ominously.

I notch my chin up, “You’re not my Alpha right now, you’re my husband.”

Bastien unfolds from his chair, rising up and up until he’s looming over me in all his glory. He looks angry, but his voice is warm. m always your Alpha.” He declares firmly, “But since you seem to need reminding – bring the tray.”

I can’t pull my eyes away from his, “What?”

“You wanted me to eat.” Bastien replies simply. Bring the tray.”

Logic trickles into my brain and I slowly retrieve the dinner tray, bringing it over to his desk and setting it down on a freshly cleared spot. I lift the lid and turn to leave, but Bastien loops an arm around my middle and pulls me into his lap. Despite my initial shock, I can’t help but sink into his arms, even as he hands me a fork.

I clasp the silver implement between my fingers, shooting him a bewildered look. “I’m not the one who needs to eat.”

“No.” Bastien agrees, “You’re not.”

After a moment it occurs to me that he wants me to feed him. He confirms it with an arched brow and smothered grin. “Be a good little wolf and show your Alpha you haven’t forgotten your place.”

Blushing scarlet, I spear a morsel of steak from the overloaded plate in front of us and raise it to his lips. His sharp teeth close around the tines, pulling the bloody red meat free and slowly chewing. His heated gaze never leaves mine, and I find it increasingly difficult to weather the weight of his stare.

Feeding him this way is oddly intimate, as well as making me feel completely at his mercy. Even so, pride swells in my chest that I’ve succeeded in getting some food in his stomach where the others failed. Not for the first time, I wonder where Arabella is in all this – not that I mind her absence.

I suppose it would be inappropriate for her to be here when Bastien and I are still technically married. It wouldn’t look good in front of the pack.

About halfway through the meal, Bastien relents, stealing the silverware from my fingers. I think he’s going to continue eating on his own, but instead he offers me the next bite of food. After a moment of hesitation I snag the offering between my teeth, savoring the juicy meat and wondering how the tables turned so quickly. There’s no doubt Bastien still holds the power, but being served this way makes me feel warm all the way down to my toes.

When the plate is finally empty, I settle back against Bastien, sated and drowsy. The baby is making me sleep constantly, but I’ve been resisting as much as possible over

the last few days. Of course, the added bonus of dozing on my husband is that it might force him to rest too. Take that Big Bad Wolf.

Just as I'm drifting off, I catch sight of a brightly colored flier peeking out from beneath the pile of papers on Bastien's desk. It's easily within reach, and I pull it from the stack, "What's this?"

Bastien goes rigid, and a moment later I understand why. The paper in my hand is an advertisement for a bounty being offered by the Alpha of the Calypso pack: Blaise Denizen.

Wanted: Volana wolves of all ages

Cash Reward: \$1 Million for reliable intelligence

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 24

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Chapter 24

#Chapter 24 The Funeral

Selene's POV

"What is this?" I choke, my heart racing as I stare down at the reward flier.

"Nothing." Bastien reaches for the paper, but I lean back over the armrest until I'm on the verge of falling. I may not be able to extend my arms past his reach, but I trust he'll choose catching me over reclaiming the page.

Luckily he does exactly that, clamping his hands on my hips to keep me anchored while I twist my body away from him. "It's clearly something."

"Selene, stop that." He admonishes, pulling me back into the chair, "You're going to hurt yourself."

With a huff I obey, waving the flier in front of his nose. "How long have you known about this? Where did you find it, how long has this been going on?"

Bastien sighs, "Sweetheart this is why I didn't tell you. I didn't want you to worry for nothing. I'm handling it."

“If it were nothing you wouldn’t need to handle it.” I reason sharply, squirming to escape his lap and failing. “And what exactly does that mean? How in the Goddess’s name are you planning to contain this? It already made it this far, how do you know someone hasn’t already reported me?”

Bastien is wrapped around me like a blanket, using the pressure of his limbs to soothe me despite the fact that I very much do not want to be soothed, “We didn’t find this here. It was in the far East outside of Calypso territory.” He explains, not letting up. “I promise no one has reported you and we’re setting up a shadow system so that we can intercept any reports from this part of the continent.”

“How did you find it if it was so far away?” I question sulkily.

Bastien clears his throat evasively, “We have spies.”

“Spies?” I repeat, “We have spies on the Calypso pack?”

“Yes.” Bastien confesses. “I sent them before we got married.”

My heart feels like it’s imploding. All of a sudden Bastien’s request to postpone the rejection ceremony and Arabella’s distance makes a lot more sense. Moving forward with the ceremony wouldn’t have been appropriate amidst the murder, and I do believe Bastien was too overwhelmed to focus on it, but would we be delaying it indefinitely if it were not for this threat?

No matter what he says, I know Bastien considers this a serious danger – the fact that he hid it speaks volumes and it provides an extremely strong motive to keep me close. Bastien considers everyone in the pack his responsibility, but especially me. Me – the mate the pack failed to protect as a child and ended up permanently disabled as a result.

“How long have you known about this?” I croak.

“A few days.” Bastien confesses grimly.

Gabriel died a few days ago too. Would we have made it to the altar if he hadn’t been murdered? I want to ask him this very question, but I’m too afraid to hear the answer. What difference would it make? None of this changes the fact that he doesn’t want me, that this entire marriage has been a sham.

“What about the others?” I inquire instead, “The other Volanas?”

Bastien frowns, “There are precious few Volanas left.”

“But every one of those precious few are in danger.” I insist. “Blaise only needs one.”

He assents with a single, firm nod. “Perhaps, but you are the one I’m concerned with protecting.”

“So what, if they aren’t your responsibility they don’t matter?” I exclaim, looking up into my husband’s molten eyes. His jaw twitches, a hard edge in his expression I’ve rarely seen directed at me. His cozy embrace feels suddenly cold, and I’m at a loss to understand what’s going on inside his head.

“If that’s the way you want to look at it.” Bastien growls, “Yes.”

#Chapter 24 The Funeral

I lurch out of his lap, and he doesn’t try to stop me. I stalk from the room without retrieving the dinner tray, tossing a curt acknowledgement to the Betas hovering outside the office like mother hens. “He’s fed.”

“Is everything alright?” Aiden calls after me.

I don’t bother answering, I continue up to the apartment awhirl with hurt and confusion. I lock myself in for the rest of the night, hoping Bastien will come to bed but unsurprised when I wake up as I went to sleep – alone.

Bastien’s POV

The morning of my father’s memorial service begins with a storm. Apparently answering my complaints about sunshine, the Goddess sends a gale through Elysium, dropping the temperature by ten degrees and dumping buckets of rain over the city.

Thankfully there is no thunder or lightning to frighten Selene, only fat gray clouds and cascading water. My little wolf stands on my right, beautiful and somber in a simple mourning gown. My mother frames my other side, a dark veil over her face. We all wear the deep bottle green of the Nova pack, the same color donned by nearly every member of the pack.

They are all spread out around us, decked out head to toe in grim formal wear and clutching umbrellas. Tonight we will shed it all and take to the forest, but for the time being we pay our respects with all the pomp and ceremony the Alpha deserves.

Beyond the pack members, visitors from near and far gather. The Eros and Vega Pack leaders, as well as dignitaries and representatives from other shifter communities across the continent.

The funeral pyre is shielded by a vaulted tent which will only be lifted when the fire is lit and the flames strong enough to withstand the rain. My father’s body lays peacefully at its apex, lovingly shrouded in flags bearing the crests of the Nova Pack, Elysium, and the Durand family.

Selene's tiny hand squeezes mine just as I fear I might begin to cry again, and I pull strength from my sweet wife. We haven't yet settled our argument about the reward flier, but her support hasn't waned.

I couldn't tell Selene the horrible thoughts that ran through my head when she mentioned the possibility of other Volana wolves being turned in to Blaise. They were too horrible.

I didn't truly mean them, I know in my heart I would never sacrifice one innocent life for another. But logic is cruel, and I'm ashamed to admit that I did consider the advantage another wolf being caught would give Selene. Denizen wouldn't need to keep looking after he found what he wanted.

I shove the unforgivable thoughts away, focusing on the present.

As the pyre ignites color flashes in the corner of my eye, and not the ombre yellow, orange and red of fire. Instead the bright blue hues of the Gemini Pack fills my periphery, sending ice through my veins.

The Gemini Pack have been our enemies since before I was born. Under different circumstances, their presence might be understandable, but we haven't had any contact with them in years. The last time we met, they were aiding and abetting my uncle's coup attempt.

I swear under my breath, squeezing my mother's shoulders as she weeps. The Gemini leaders circle the perimeter of the crowd, the unmistakable scent of strange wolves permeating through the masses. One by one heads turn towards the interlopers, and disgruntled mutters begin sweeping through the assembly. My hackles raise, but I refuse to give them the response they're so clearly seeking.

Flames consume my father's body, transforming him for the last time – not between man and wolf, but being and spirit – the final transition between this world and the next. As I watch his physical form splinter and dissolve, the last vestiges of my family around me, I'm struck once again of all the unwelcome changes in my life.

The first threads of discord unfurl while I'm still caught up in my thoughts, rolling through the sea of wolves like savage ripples. Muted growls gradually evolve into vicious snaps and barks, before silk and wool rend and tear as formal clothing is replaced with fur and claws.

Within moments half the attendees have shifted, the remainder scattering away from the quickly boiling conflict. I look helplessly between Mom and Selene, before shoving them both into Aiden's waiting arms, "get them back to the pack house." I order, gesturing to my father's number two, "Donavon, with me."

smell the first blood before it hits the ground, charging into the unfolding fight without pausing to shift. I refuse to lend any credibility to this chaos. Instead I storm through the battling factions on two legs, ripping wolves off of one another by the scruffs

of their necks and throwing them across the rain soaked lawn.

Together with Donovan and the Nova enforcers, I pull the sweat and blood stained fighters apart, clearing a wide path through the crowd until I've reached the heart of the brawl. In the center of it all, a trio of navy-clad men wait, chests heaving with barely disguised rage.

The Gemini Alpha, Rafe Everhart, is twice my age, gray haired and grised as an old boot. He looks as if he's been to hell and back, and I have to respect his imposing stature. When we near, damp smoke clogging the air at our backs, he roars, "What is the meaning of this, Durand?"

"Funny, I came to ask you that exact question." I snarl.

"I should think that would be obvious." The Alpha hisses. "After all, you invited us.

Bastien's POV

"What the hell are you talking about?" i hiss,

"Hey, I was surprised myself," Rafe answers snidely. "I thought you were finally ready to bury the hatchet, but from the looks of it you Novas are every bit as inbred and backward as I always thought. Can't even throw a funeral without things devolving to bedlam."

I brush off his insults, "No one invited you, Everhart." I announce, mentally tracking my enforcers as they covertly move in, surrounding our assailants on all sides.

"I beg to differ." Rafe quips, pulling an embossed parchment from his jacket and extending toward me.

Keeping one eye on the goading Alpha, I accept the paper, unrolling it swiftly and scanning the contents within. Sure enough, it contains an exact copy of the official invitations sent around to various packs and allies over the last few days, complete with my signature.

I pass the parchment to Donavon. "Unfortunately I must tell you that this invitation is not genuine." I force the words out between clenched teeth. It's true I did not sign any invitations to the Gemini pack, but someone has clearly been at work sowing the seeds of chaos.

"It has your signature Durand." Rafe reminds me coolly.

“A forgery.” I clarify, I needn’t remind you that my father was murdered. It can’t come as any surprise that there are players at large seeking to harm the Nova Pack. Unfortunately it seems you are a pawn in their schemes.”

Or an accomplice. Axel interjects, thoroughly put out not to be in the driver’s seat.

“Tsk, tsk. Rafe chides, “It sounds to me like you don’t have control of your pack.” He adopts a theatrical pout, “I suppose that’s what happens when you leave a pup in charge.”

Enough with the diplomacy, Axel grumbles, let me take a bite out of this bastard,

I do that and I give him exactly what he wants. I argue back,

“You have my word we’ll get to the bottom of this.” I vow ominously, “All those responsible will pay. You and your men are free to leave – for the time being.”

Rafe narrows his eyes at my patronizing tone, belatedly scanning the group around us and discovering the counter moves deployed while we spoke. Understanding sours his expression. He could order an attack now, if he had a death wish. We have them surrounded, a man within throat-ripping distance of his every last envoy.

The Gemini Alpha offers me a deferential nod, though his eyes are full of malice. “Until we meet again, Durand.”

I do not offer him the same courtesy, simply acknowledging his name as he turns away. “Everhart.”

When I’m certain the Gemini wolves are out of hearing distance, I turn to Donavon. “Send sentries to follow them out of the territory. Make sure they’re out, and keep tails on them. I want to know if they’re meeting with anyone from the pack.” I growl. * And find out where on the Goddess’s green earth that invitation came from.”

Donavon takes his marching orders proudly, showing me the same esteem he always afforded my father. “Yes Alpha.”

Selene’s POV

“That’s ridiculous.” I object, “They can’t blame you for what happened. The council knows Gabriel’s death was foul play, they must know this was malicious too – not incompetence.”

Bastien is pacing around his office, slowly wearing a hole in the carpet. “The fact is I didn’t see the Gemini’s coming.” He grouses, dragging a hand through his hair. “They’re right to question me. I fucked up.”

Indignance floods me on behalf of my husband. It isn't fair for the elder council to judge him so harshly. "You were grieving."

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 25

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 25

#Chapter 25 The Elder Council

Bastien huffs out a weary laugh, pausing in front of me to stroke my cheek. "Alphas don't have the luxury of personal feelings, little wolf. The pack has to come first one hundred percent of the time." His handsome features seemed to have aged years over the last week. "There's no excuse for letting enemies through our defenses."

"That is an unreasonable standard." I insist, "One to which they would never hold themselves."

"You're right." Bastien agrees. "They wouldn't, but they aren't Alpha." I latch onto his hand when he tries to pull away, convincing him to sink onto the sofa beside me. "These are the consequences of so much power. There's no end to the responsibility, and no room for error."

"How is anyone supposed to live up to that?" I demand, "How are you supposed to have a life if you can never take your eye off the pack?"

"It's not about living up to it, or fulfilling my own wants." Bastien reminds me, "I have the strength to lead, so I will – because I love this pack. That's all there is to it."

Now that Bastien has relaxed next to me, my own energy overflows in anxious flutterings. "That's the other thing I don't understand." I gripe, "Does the council honestly think there is anyone in the pack more capable than you? Stronger than you?" I wriggle half-heartedly as Bastien tugs my body on top of his, propping my elbows on his chest and resting my chin in the cradle of my hands. "What's the point of trying you when no one else is fit to be Alpha."

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"That's exactly why we have them." Bastien sighs, petting me absentmindedly. "To give challengers the opportunity to step forward and make a claim for leadership. If no one does, it goes on the record as a public censure."

“So that future challengers can drag it back up years later to smear your good name.” I complain, my musings taking a decidedly vindictive turn. “I’d like to dig up every mistake the council members ever made when they were young and rub them in their wrinkled faces.”

To my surprise, Bastien laughs, the vibrations shaking my body fiercely. “Goodness, I had no idea you were such a vengeful little thing.” He teases. “Where have you been hiding all this ferocity, baby?”

I shrug. “I haven’t had a reason to channel it before.”

“Well I’m honored you tapped into it for my sake.” Bastien grins, pulling me up for a kiss.

In moments like this I can almost forget everything that’s happened between us. All the pain and rejection, the pain and loss. I can almost forget he doesn’t want me. I can almost pretend we have a future.

pretending with every fiber of my being that this moment, and all this affection, will never end.

Bastien’s POV

My mother’s haunted face stares at me through the crowd, her eyes red-rimmed and once-golden skin pallid. Of anyone, the hearing has been hardest on her. Yet, as twisted as it probably sounds, I think my struggles have been good for her. The inquisition has helped keep her in the present and supporting me has given her some purpose in all this uncertainty.

I don’t know if I should be guilty for wanting to keep her here without her mate or not, but I know I’m not ready to lose her too. Perhaps it’s selfish, expecting her to find a reason to carry on without her mate. After all, I’m not sure I would want to live in a world where Selene no longer existed.

The grief assails me at the strangest of times. Sometimes it feels as if nothing which has happened over the last week is real, others the truth of my circumstances feel so overwhelming I can’t even draw breath.

Now, as I stare down the elder council, weathering hours of questions about my fitness to rule the pack, I want nothing more than to turn back the clock and beg my father for advice.

“Forgive us Bastien, but you’ve been Alpha for less than a week and we’ve already borne an attack on Nova territory.” The same pack elder has been droning on for the better part of an hour, litigating every last moment of the Gemini intrusion during my father’s funeral. “It’s true you neutralized the threat, but the fact remains the threat should never have gotten through our defenses in the first place. Why should the people

of Elysium maintain faith in you as a leader, when this is what your brief tenure has granted us?"

"Esteemed council members," i begin, making no attempt to withhold the innate Alpha authority of my tone. "I cannot deny that

the appearance of the Gemini contingent at the Alpha's memorial was unexpected and extremely unfortunate."

I circle on the spot, directly my words now at the assembled pack. "They should never have made it past our borders and I take full responsibility for that lapse. However," I continue, "despite my best efforts, I am just a man. I cannot see the future, and I am not immune to grief."

"And like all men, I make mistakes." I concede, returning my attention to the council. "I take the security oversight extremely seriously and plan on doing everything in my power to prevent such failures in the future. But there can be no denying we are under threat. The Alpha was murdered in his own office, in his own home." My mother flinches with every word, and I'm eternally grateful Selene is there to wrap her in a hug.

"This is not just a threat to my family, it is a threat to the entire pack." I growl. "Whoever did this came onto our territory and saw fit to inflict violence at the highest levels." Heads nod in my periphery, giving me hope that my words are landing with the people if not the council.

"I want what is best for the Novas; I always have and always will. So if there is anyone out there who believes they can do a better job defending us, then I welcome your challenge." I extend my arms, circling on the spot as I survey the assembled audience. "If any among you think you have what it takes to lead, speak now. Make me earn my place, or prove yourself more worthy."

Behind me, the council murmurs amongst themselves, too quietly for me to decipher their words. Finally, the head councilor raises his voice above the din. "Well, are there any challengers?"