

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 96

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Chapter 97

#Chapter 97 The Last Thing I Want

Sophie

“I don’t have the first clue what I’m doing.” I complain, throwing my hands up in exasperation.

We’re in the back of Selene’s cafe. Drake is sitting at the kitchen island watching me fight with a lump of dough on a floured cutting board, and unless I’m very much mistaken he’s fighting the impulse to laugh.

“It isn’t funny.” I huff, “I’m not a cook. I’m not a baker – I shouldn’t be the one to take over this place.”

Drake arches his dark brows, “You didn’t want to move into the Pack House, and you didn’t want my money, which means you need a job to make rent.” He reminds me. “This is a job, and a good one at that.”

“Yes,” I confirm, agreeing with his logic, but I can’t do this job. I have zero qualifications – amateur or professional.”

We’ve already had this argument about eight times already, but it keeps resurfacing anyway. Drake knows I can’t boil water without starting a kitchen fire, so I’m a little suspicious that he keeps pushing the cafe on me. I think he’s trying to wear me down until I cave and accept his money or move into the Pack House – but the last thing I want to do is watch him moping around missing Selene, and I don’t want his pity either.

“Sophie,” Drake says gently, hopping down from the stool and closing the distance between us. He stops so close to me that I have to tilt my head all the way back just to see his face. His lips quirk as he takes in my flushed face, “you have flour on your nose.

I swipe at my nose in frustration, “Is that what you came over here to tell me?”

“No,” Drake replies with a wide grin, taking my face between his hands and brushing the white powder from my skin with the pad of his thumb. “I came over here to tell you that you are smart and hardworking, and one of the fastest learners I’ve ever met. You might not be able to cook now, but you just need practice.”

In all fairness, I would love to learn how to cook – for basic survival reasons if nothing else, but learning to do it at home and doing it for a living are very different things. But why this job?” I press, “You’re the Alpha, there must be other businesses where you have sway. I’d do much better as a pet sitter or maid or something.”

“Well for one thing, this job is open.” Drake still hasn’t taken his hands from my face, in fact his thumb is stroking my cheek now. * And for another, this cafe has a knack for helping people get back on their feet.”

“Yes but I was never on my feet to begin with.” I mutter. I know Selene took in a lot of strays, in fact everyone who works here now has some sort of tragic past, but most of those people fell on hard times later in life.

“Neither was Selene before she came here.” Drake counters, making all my limbs tense up. Hearing her name on his lips does nothing but remind me that he’ll never be mine. He might get over losing Selene one day, but eventually his mate will come along and then where will I be? Stuck watching Drake build a life with yet another beautiful woman to whom I can never compare.

Goddess, what a miserable thought. Somehow I’ve got to find a way to break the spell he has over me. I don’t want to spend my life looking on from the shadows while other people find happiness. I don’t want to waste my best years loving someone who can never love me back.

I lurch out of Drake’s hold, turning back to my bread dough-though I doubt the lumpy mass will ever actually become bread. It’s somehow tough and soggy at once. “Maybe Selene had the right idea, maybe moving to a different city is the answer.” I breathe. “You know, a fresh start?”

“No.” The feral snarl makes me jump out of my skin, dropping my pathetic attempt at sourdough straight onto the floor.

I’ve heard Drake grumble and growl at other shifters before. After all, he’s the Alpha, ferocity is part of the job description. This is different. The sound was guttural and raw, so menacing it vibrated deep in my bones – and it was directed at me! My friend has never so much as raised his voice at me, let alone show this kind of animal aggression.

My wolf should be cowering, I certainly am, but Rose is cool and calm as the big Alpha bears down on me. My back is flush against the island, and instead of looking guilty or apologetic for startling me, Drake is prowling forward with eyes aglow. He doesn’t stop until his powerful hands are gripping the island on either side of my body, caging me in.

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“You are not leaving Asphodel.” Drake commands.

Blinking, completely taken aback and quivering beneath him, I scramble for words. ... you.. it was just a thought.”

“Well it was a bad one.” He rumbles deeply.

What’s happening? I ask Rose desperately, I don’t understand, why is he being this way?

I don’t know. Rose hedges, maybe he thinks we really can’t survive on our own.

“Drake, you’re scaring me.” I finally squeak, though the truth is I’m less scared than confused. I don’t believe my friend will hurt me, but I’ve never seen him this way.

Light flickers in his emerald irises, the raging flames slowly dying down as my words register in his mind. Drake’s threatening demeanor softens, his white-knuckled fists unclenching and fangs retracting. Still, he doesn’t move away, he doesn’t free me from his arms.

“I’m sorry, little lamb.” Drake purrs, dropping his head and nuzzling my neck.

Well that’s new. Rose remarks.

Is he smelling me? I reply, loving his nearness and hating it all at once. It’s everything I want and everything I can’t have.

I can’t bring myself to speak, staying still as a statue until Drake straightens up. “I didn’t mean to scare you.” He tells me huskily, “that’s the last thing I want.” He thinks about that statement for a moment, then amends, “actually it’s the second last.”

“What’s the last?” I wonder aloud, my eyes wide as dinner plates.

“You just said it.” He growls.

Before I can ask what he means, Drake’s phone chimes in his pocket, and he promptly retrieves it. I might be offended that he’s abandoning our conversation so abruptly, but I immediately know why he prioritizes the call. I’d recognize that ringtone anywhere: Selene.

While the man I love strides out of the kitchen to speak with his beloved, his voice so full of joy that it breaks my heart, I’m left reeling against the counter. I don’t understand what just happened. And I don’t understand what Drake meant by his last comment.

All I can do is sink down to the floor – next to my so-called dough – and cry.

Drake

When my phone rings, I realize it's already 4'clock and therefore time for the facetime date I promised Lila. It's probably for the best too, because I was completely losing control in that damned kitchen. It happened so fast I didn't even know what I was doing, I just responded out of instinct. My mate mentioned moving away, and my wolf roared to life – needing to stop that from happening at all costs.

I route the call through my bluetooth and hit accept a moment before stepping through the door to the main restaurant, greeting the little pup exuberantly, "Hello my love!"

Lila appears in Selene's lap, both she-wolves visible on the screen though the toddler is taking up most of the frame. "Uncle Rake!" She exclaims, "I miss you!"

"I miss you too, angel." I answer honestly, "It's not the same here without you. How do you like Elysium."

Lila apparently loves her new home, and spends a quarter of an hour telling me all the things she's seen and done since they arrived, all about her new room and apartment, every detail her little brain can recall. When she finally runs out of information to share, Selene takes over, filling me in on the wedding, their dramatic arrival and her concerns about Bastien's plans for the Calypso pack.

"Nothing's decided yet, but he says he's been thinking about a trip there for a few weeks." She relays with a frown.

"I think he's right to consider it, and probably he'll be right to go." I agree. "You've got to know what you're up against."

"I know, I just wish there was another way." She sighs,

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By this point Lila has gotten bored of the grown up talk and disappeared somewhere into the background, so Selene takes the opportunity to ask me something she clearly didn't want to say in front of the pup.

"Listen, I've been going through my boxes and I can't find Lila's favorite puzzle for the life of me." She relates in a whisper. "You know, the rainbow fish one? I know it wasn't in the apartment because we cleared it out, but I remember we had it at the safe house, so I'm wondering if she left it there. I know it's a trek but could you check for me the next time you're out there."

For a second I think I've misheard her, "Wait, what?"

“When Bastien first turned up, I took some of Lila’s toys to the safe house so she wouldn’t get bored. We were distracted when we left so I wouldn’t be surprised if we missed something.” The she-wolf answers.

“Selene,” I state evenly, “what safe house?”

A flicker of unease enters her expression. “The one you sent me to, in the hills.”

“I sent you there?” I repeat, baffled.

“Yes, you texted me from a burner or something.” She pauses anxiously, “didn’t you?”

“No.” I sigh, “I couldn’t have. Because I don’t have a safe house.”

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#Chapter 98 The Safe House

Selene

Drake’s grim face stares up at me from my tablet, his last words slowly sinking into my brain.

This doesn’t make any sense.

Maybe we misunderstood. Luna suggests with a whine.

We didn’t misunderstand. Drake’s words were completely clear, and I can tell from his expression that this isn’t some sort of joke. He seems every bit as confused as I am, only his first instinct is clearly to assume the worst, while I’m wallowing in denial.

Just then Bastien walks in, and Lila races across the room to greet him, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!”

He snatches her up and tosses her into the air, causing the pup to shriek with laughter. “Lila, Lila, Lila!” He mimics, throwing her over his head a few more times before settling her against his broad chest and kissing her hello.

“Daddy, we went to da woods! She exclaims, launching into her account of the day. The trees were so big dey touch the sky!” Lila has seen forests before – but never one like this. The pup had been so taken with the ancient sequoias dominating the Novan forest that she decided to name them. By the time she was done, the list was so long I had to promise to write down all the names when we got home, so she wouldn’t forget.

Lila is rattling off her favorite ones as Bastien carries her into the living room, his wide smile disappearing when he sees the look on my face. I rise from the sofa before he can reach me, still holding the tablet.

Bastien’s eyes dart between Drake’s face and my own, “Baby?”

Glancing at Lila, I hedge, “You remember when you arrived in Asphodel, and I took Lila to stay at that house in the hills?”

“Yes.” He agrees, sounding like he doesn’t appreciate the reminder.

“Well,” I begin, licking my lips nervously. “I thought it was Drake’s house. I thought he sent us there for our vacation.” I censor, still eyeing my pup. But it wasn’t him.”

Bastien’s brow knits together. “What do you mean

“When I got back to the apartment that day, I got a text from an unknown number, with all the information we needed to find the house and everything.” I explain, wincing when I see his expression.

Lila, who has realized her father’s attention is no longer on her, huffs. “Daddy are you lisning?”

“I’ll tell you what little one.” Bastien suggests, “If you give Daddy a few minutes to talk with Mommy, you can have extra dessert at the banquet tonight.”

She readily agrees, toddling off to play in her room while I throw my mate an exasperated look, “Really? Bribery?”

“She’s got to sit through a formal dinner surrounded by adults, I figured we’d be rewarding her anyway.” Bastien replies, changing course and closing the distance between us. “You followed directions from an unknown number?” I can see the anger simmering up inside him, “You drove out into the remote wilderness and blindly walked into a house based on the word of some mysterious stranger?”

“I assumed the message was from Drake!” I counter defensively, “I thought he was using a burner phone or something to contact me so you couldn’t trace the text. I mean who else would have known what was going on in that moment?” I inquire, “Who else would have been trying to help me?”

“It was a fair assumption, Bastien.” Drake pipes up from the tablet.

A low growl rumbles in Bastien’s chest, and he looks down at the other Alpha. “You really knew nothing about this?”

“I thought she’d found her own hiding place. I didn’t press to find out where, because I figured if I didn’t know you couldn’t beat the information out of me.” Drake admits, rubbing the back of his neck.

We’re in our own apartment, guarded by the Pack House’s elite security force, but Bastien starts looking around like he expects monsters to pop out of the walls at any moment. I sidle closer, sliding my arm around his middle to anchor him.

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It seems to do the trick. Bastien’s arm locks down on my waist, holding me tight to his side as he returns his attention to Drake. “Can you get a team out there?”

“Of course, I’ll go myself as soon as you send the address.” Drake confirms, “But Selene is right, the real question here, is who knew what was going on between you two? Who had the access to not only know Selene was alive and that you’d found her, but that she needed a get away?”

it had to be one of your men.” Bastien asserts coldly, “The only people who were in your office with us were our Betas and your guards. Bastien grumbles. “And I know it wasn’t my Betas.”

“I don’t think we can assume anything right now.” Drake combats, assumptions are what got us into this mess in the first place.”

“The bigger question is why,” I breathe, pulling the mens’ attention. “If it was someone in Drake’s camp it was probably done to help me, but if it was someone in yours...” I look to my mate, unable to continue.

Bastien finished the thought for me, looking grave. “It was a betrayal.”

‘It’s a betrayal either way,” Drake corrects, whether they wanted to help you or not, they went behind my back and hid this information. That doesn’t portend good intentions.”

My mind races to process all this new information. I hate to think someone could have betrayed Bastien or Drake, but I don’t see any other explanation. Whoever sent me that message had to be from within our inner circle.

Still, I don’t understand what could have motivated anyone else to send me to that house. “I’m so confused.” I confess, whether they had good intentions or bad, why this? Why help me hide? How could that possibly benefit them?”

*I should think that's obvious enough," Bastien rumbles darkly, "they did it to keep us apart."

Bastien

"We need to get ready for the banquet." Selene's sweet scent wafts over me a few moments before her arms slide around my neck from behind, and her cheek comes to rest against mine. Her skin is still dotted with drops of water from her shower, and I'm sure if I look over my shoulder I'll find her completely nude.

I'm seated on the edge of our bed, trying to work through the unexpected revelations that came to light during Selene's facetime call with Drake. The Eros Alpha agreed to send investigators out to the house this very evening, but I can't get over the fact that someone has clearly betrayed us,

Is that why I've never been able to pin down the person responsible for all the trouble caused in Elysium since Dad died? Is it possible one of my own men betrayed me?

"We have to be over at the hall in an hour," Selene's tongue traces the shell of my ear, and her sharp little canines nibble my earlobe. I have a feeling the mischievous she wolf is trying to distract me. "Though I suppose that's actually quite a bit of time when you think about it."

I can't contain my chuckle, "Come here, you naughty thing." Hitching my arm behind me and snagging my mate's waist, I drag her around and into my lap. "Hmm," I purr, raking my eyes over her bare curves, "You look awfully underdressed for a banquet, little mate."

"Oh," Selene looks down at her naked body like she's only just noticing. "maybe you're right." She agrees, trailing kisses up my neck. Her dripping wet hair sticks to my shoulder as her round bottom undulates over my quickly hardening arousal.

"We're going to have to do something about that." I tease, clamping my hands down on her hips to cease her movement. "I won't have every wolf in the city drooling over my mate because she can't decide on an outfit."

"Are you sure it won't do?" She asks, undoing my shirt buttons one by one. "After all, you'll have to dress to match. Maybe you just need to see it on both of us. You know, get the full effect?"

I arch my brow, shrugging out of my long sleeves. "If I didn't know any better I'd think you were trying to get me naked."

Selene flashes me a devious grin, "Is it that obvious?"

The next thing I know she's sliding out of my lap, kneeling between my legs and tackling my belt buckle. Before I know it she's pulled the leather implement free and slipped her small hand into my trousers, palming my engorged member. "Oh my." Selene murmurs with faux concern. "Well you certainly can't go to the banquet like this."

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I can only groan, cupping her cheek in my hand as she looks up at me from beneath her long, dark lashes, "would you like me to care of this for you, Alpha?"

A growl of primal lust vibrates in my chest, her words instantly triggering my dominant instincts. "I think you'd better," I remark sternly, tangling my fist in her hair. "Since it's your fault I'm in this state."

Selene's two-tone eyes glitter in the dim line as she pulls my cock free, her pink lips hovering just inches from its swollen head. "Your wish is my command."

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#Chapter 99 Halfling No More

Whoever invented stilettos was a sadist.

There are a lot of things I remember disliking about these wretched pack events, but until now I forgot how agonizing it is to stand in high heels for hours on end. Of course the Alpha's mate has to look the part, so I don't have much of a choice. I have to cram myself into constricting, uncomfortable designer clothes and strap torture devices to my feet in order to be taken seriously.

Granted, I suppose I do look good – but at what cost?

Bastien has it easy, he's standing next to me in the same black suit he always wears to these things. Meanwhile I'm over here gasping for air in a skin tight cocktail dress with so many straps and cutouts that I needed a map just to get into it.

Lila's silver and black party dress matches mine in color, if nothing else. She looks absolutely adorable, and she's already stolen the spotlight from both Bastien and I – rightly so. It seems like every elder councilor, ranking pack member and aristocrat in Elysium has already come to pay their respects, and the evening has barely begun.

Everyone who meets Lila has done nothing but sing her praises: saying how lucky she is to have inherited her mother's beauty and her father's spirit. They've congratulated Bastien and I on our reunion, but it's fairly clear that everyone really came out to get a peek at my pup.

Lila really has borne it all well, acting on her best behavior and patiently enduring the endless mingling. She's been delightful and sweet, not the least bit cranky – despite the fact that it's already past her bedtime and we haven't even eaten dinner yet. In short, she already has the pack wrapped around her little finger, and I couldn't be prouder.

By the time we actually get around to the banquet portion of the evening, I've relaxed more than I ever imagined possible. I've seen enough people faking nice over the years to recognize when someone is only pretending to be friendly, and most of the guests in attendance really do seem pleased for us.

Of course there are exceptions.

In between courses Bastien takes Lila for a breath of fresh air in the garden, and I take a much needed bathroom break. After relieving myself and washing my hands, I pause to check my makeup in the mirror. As I reapply my lipstick, the door swings open, and a trio of she-wolves appear in my periphery.

With a knot of dread already forming in my belly, I see a flash of silky red hair – one I recognize all too well. Trying to harden myself for the inevitable confrontation, I glance at the women in the mirror, greeting them coolly, "Ladies."

Three and a half years ago the beautiful redhead now blocking the door almost killed me, pushing me into the pool during Gabriel's birthday party after saying a rash of horrendous things about my marriage. The last time I saw her, Bastien was publicly punishing her for those actions, a fact I'm sure she hasn't forgotten.

"Well if it isn't the halfling." She drawls cruelly, prompting titters from the two minions at her side. "Back from the grave and trying to pass off some other wolf's bastard as our Alpha's pup." Her lip curls, "honestly if you had any decency you would have stayed dead."

Luna surges forward the moment she calls Lila a bastard, and I half to forcibly restrain the urge to shift. Dropping my lipstick I turn to face the she-wolf head on. "You mutt, is your head really so empty that you've forgotten what happened the last time you disrespected me?" I question harshly. "Or did you simply not learn your lesson?"

Her blue eyes burn with fury at my insult, "Careful Selene, Bastien's not here to protect you now."

I let Luna shine through my eyes, feeling power surge through my veins and relishing the startled expressions on the women's faces. "I don't need Bastien to protect me

anymore.” I growl, “And if you say one more word about my daughter, I guarantee you will see just how much I’ve changed since we met last.”

I’ve shifted many times now, but I’ve never felt this strange flood of electricity, it feels like sparks might fly from my fingers any moment. Then again, I suppose I’ve never shifted amidst a threat.

She snorts, “Oh, so you think you’re tough now that you somehow found your wolf?” Sneering, she steps forward and lets her own wolf rise to the surface, “I’ve been shifting since I was thirteen years old. At best you have what – three years of experience? I could trounce you in my sleep.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” I snarl, “I’m also a mother, and you just insulted my pup. But then I suppose a spinster like you

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wouldn’t know anything about maternal instincts.” Pointedly eyeing her up and down, I match her sneering expression, though you may have a point, you are at least twice my size.”

“You bitch!” The redhead lunges for me, her hands reaching for my throat with claws extended.

I don’t know where it came from, I don’t even know how I did it, but one moment the furious she-wolf was charging towards me and the next she and her friends were flat on their backs on the grimy floor.

I didn’t even touch them. I raised my arms to defend myself, but before our bodies could connect some sort of shockwave pulsed out of me. I felt the strange swell of power rising deep inside me, and must have unintentionally pushed it outwards. It slammed into the she-wolves and knocked them out in one go, while I was left standing there in confusion.

“What the hell?” I say aloud, staring at my hands in bafflement. Whatever just happened was not normal. Shifters cannot hurt each other without touching one another, at least, not normal shifters. People always talk about Volana wolves being powerful, having special abilities, but I’m suddenly realizing I have no idea what they include. The only Volana I ever knew was my mother and she died before she could tell me about my powers.

Clearly I have some research to do.

Stepping over the womens’ unconscious bodies, I stroll out of the restroom feeling rather triumphant. It might not have been on purpose and I might not have the first clue

how I did it, but I'd be willing to bet those she-wolves will think twice before messing with me again.

When I get back to the banquet dessert is being served, and true to Bastien's promise, Lila has two pastries on her plate instead of one. I've already opened my mouth to tell my mate about what happened in the bathroom when I glance at my own plate and realize my daughter isn't the only one with two desserts.

My lip quirks, "Am I being rewarded too?"

The Alpha leans over Lila's head to give me a searing kiss, showing no concern for our audience. When he finally drags his mouth from mine, he shifts his lips to my ear and his heated voice answers, "After the way you helped me get ready for the banquet? Hell yes you're being rewarded."

It's almost one in the morning by the time we get back to the apartment, and Bastien has been holding Lila ever since she passed out at ten. We're exhausted both mentally and physically, and I want nothing more than to climb into bed and go to sleep.

Unfortunately we've barely set foot in the apartment when Bastien's phone starts ringing. He glances at the screen and grimaces, before looking over at me. "Can you take her, baby?" He asks, offering me Lila.

I gather the sleeping bundle into my arms, "What is it?"

He simply shakes his head, "nothing good."

I can tell he doesn't want to take the call in front of me, especially when he bends down to kiss Lila goodnight, then also kisses me. "Don't wait up."

Uneasy but needing to get Lila to bed (not to mention out of these damn shoes), I retreat, only catching Bastien's tense greeting as he steps back out the door, "Tell me."

Lila doesn't even stir as I remove her shoes and party dress, before tucking her into bed with a quick kiss. Slipping off my heels, contemplate simply going to bed as I so dearly want to, but it makes me nervous that Bastien wouldn't talk in front of me.

I'm certain he's gone to his study, and it's late enough that I doubt he's got anyone guarding the door. Making a split second decision, I tiptoe out the door and slip downstairs, moving as silently as I can through the sleeping house.

My heart sinks as I near the study door, I can already hear Bastien's voice, and he's not happy. "Destroy them, destroy every last file and don't let anyone watch them first."

To my shock, I hear Drake's voice reply. "Are you sure? It's possible this asshole is on one of them."

My mind reels. What on earth are they talking about? What files? And why is Drake calling Bastien instead of me? Why is he calling so late?

This has to be about the safe house. Luna surmises. They were going out there tonight, they must have found something bad.

Bastien's gruff reply pulls my attention back to the conversation in the study. "They're too smart for that."

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"You never know, they weren't smart enough to put a failsafe on the drive. Maybe that wasn't their only mistake." Drake reasons.

*Fine, check the footage before and after," My mate concedes. "but I don't want anyone going near the recordings from when they were actually there."

Footage? Recordings? What the hell is going on?

"I understand where you're coming from, but you should consider reviewing those files yourself." Drake encourages, "Trust me, you want to know if anyone but Selene and Lila were there. You did say the perimeter alarms went off."

I gasp out loud, understanding finally clicking. There must have been security cameras at the house, but why wouldn't Bastien want the footage to be reviewed? Wouldn't that be important?

"Hold on, Drake." Bastien murmurs, and the study goes oddly silent. I press my ear more tightly to the door, straining to hear what's going on inside. Bastien's scent permeates the heavy wood, and for one glorious second I feel soothed.

Of course, that was before I realized the scent was not coming through the door at all.

It was coming from behind me.

"Hear anything good?" Bastien growls over my shoulder.

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I let Luna shine through my eyes, feeling power surge through my veins and relishing the startled expressions on the women's faces. "I don't need Bastien to protect me anymore." I growl, "And if you say one more word about my daughter, I guarantee you will see just how much I've changed since we met last."

I've shifted many times now, but I've never felt this strange flood of electricity, it feels like sparks might fly from my fingers any moment. Then again, I suppose I've never shifted amidst a threat.

She snorts, "Oh, so you think you're tough now that you somehow found your wolf?" Sneering, she steps forward and lets her own wolf rise to the surface, "I've been shifting since I was thirteen years old. At best you have what – three years of experience? | could trounce you in my sleep."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," I snarl, "I'm also a mother, and you just insulted my pup. But then I suppose a spinster like you

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wouldn't know anything about maternal instincts." Pointedly eyeing her up and down, I match her sneering expression, though you may have a point, you are at least twice my size."

"You bitch!" The redhead lunges for me, her hands reaching for my throat with claws extended.

I don't know where it came from, I don't even know how I did it, but one moment the furious she-wolf was charging towards me and the next she and her friends were flat on their backs on the grimy floor.

I didn't even touch them. I raised my arms to defend myself, but before our bodies could connect some sort of shockwave pulsed out of me. I felt the strange swell of power rising deep inside me, and must have unintentionally pushed it outwards. It slammed into the she-wolves and knocked them out in one go, while I was left standing there in confusion.

"What the hell?" I say aloud, staring at my hands in bafflement. Whatever just happened was not normal. Shifters cannot hurt each other without touching one another, at least, not normal shifters. People always talk about Volana wolves being powerful, having special abilities, but I'm suddenly realizing I have no idea what they include. The only Volana I ever knew was my mother and she died before she could tell me about my powers.

Clearly I have some research to do.

Stepping over the womens' unconscious bodies, I stroll out of the restroom feeling rather triumphant. It might not have been on purpose and I might not have the first clue how I did it, but I'd be willing to bet those she-wolves will think twice before messing with me again.

When I get back to the banquet dessert is being served, and true to Bastien's promise, Lila has two pastries on her plate instead of one. I've already opened my mouth to tell my mate about what happened in the bathroom when I glance at my own plate and realize my daughter isn't the only one with two desserts.

My lip quirks, "Am I being rewarded too?"

The Alpha leans over Lila's head to give me a searing kiss, showing no concern for our audience. When he finally drags his mouth from mine, he shifts his lips to my ear and his heated voice answers, "After the way you helped me get ready for the banquet? Hell yes you're being rewarded."

It's almost one in the morning by the time we get back to the apartment, and Bastien has been holding Lila ever since she passed out at ten. We're exhausted both mentally and physically, and I want nothing more than to climb into bed and go to sleep.

Unfortunately we've barely set foot in the apartment when Bastien's phone starts ringing. He glances at the screen and grimaces, before looking over at me. "Can you take her, baby?" He asks, offering me Lila.

I gather the sleeping bundle into my arms, "What is it?"

He simply shakes his head," nothing good."

I can tell he doesn't want to take the call in front of me, especially when he bends down to kiss Lila goodnight, then also kisses me. "Don't wait up."

Uneasy but needing to get Lila to bed (not to mention out of these damn shoes), I retreat, only catching Bastien's tense greeting as he steps back out the door, "Tell me."

Lila doesn't even stir as I remove her shoes and party dress, before tucking her into bed with a quick kiss. Slipping off my heels, contemplate simply going to bed as I so dearly want to, but it makes me nervous that Bastien wouldn't talk in front of me.

I'm certain he's gone to his study, and it's late enough that I doubt he's got anyone guarding the door. Making a split second decision, I tiptoe out the door and slip downstairs, moving as silently as I can through the sleeping house.

My heart sinks as I near the study door, I can already hear Bastien's voice, and he's not happy. "Destroy them, destroy every last file and don't let anyone watch them first."

To my shock, I hear Drake's voice reply. "Are you sure? It's possible this asshole is on one of them."

My mind reels. What on earth are they talking about? What files? And why is Drake calling Bastien instead of me? Why is he calling so late?

This has to be about the safe house. Luna surmises. They were going out there tonight, they must have found something bad.

Bastien's gruff reply pulls my attention back to the conversation in the study. "They're too smart for that."

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"You never know, they weren't smart enough to put a failsafe on the drive. Maybe that wasn't their only mistake." Drake reasons.

*Fine, check the footage before and after," My mate concedes. "but I don't want anyone going near the recordings from when they were actually there."

Footage? Recordings? What the hell is going on?

"I understand where you're coming from, but you should consider reviewing those files yourself." Drake encourages, "Trust me, you want to know if anyone but Selene and Lila were there. You did say the perimeter alarms went off."

I gasp out loud, understanding finally clicking. There must have been security cameras at the house, but why wouldn't Bastien want the footage to be reviewed? Wouldn't that be important?

"Hold on, Drake." Bastien murmurs, and the study goes oddly silent. I press my ear more tightly to the door, straining to hear what's going on inside. Bastien's scent permeates the heavy wood, and for one glorious second I feel soothed.

Of course, that was before I realized the scent was not coming through the door at all.

It was coming from behind me.

"Hear anything good?" Bastien growls over my shoulder.

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I leap a foot in the air, yelping softly as my heart races with sudden panic. Spinning in place and steadying myself against the solid doors, I find a very large, very angry Alpha towering over me. Bastien emanates disapproval: his silver gaze narrowed in reproach, his jaw rigid and arms crossed over his chest.

I quail, guilt assailing me as I shrink away from him, my cheeks flushing bright pink. "How in the Goddess's name did you do that?"

He ignores me, closing one powerful hand over my nape. "What do you have to say for yourself, little wolf?"

By now my initial shock has subsided, and I realize I have no reason to feel guilty. Straightening up and giving my mate my best scowl, I state, "I have a right to know what's going on."

"Then knock on the door and come in," Bastien admonishes, "don't eavesdrop."

"If I was in there you wouldn't have spoken openly," I argue. "You came down here specifically so I wouldn't hear. Drake called you instead of me because he didn't want me to know either – right?"

“We did those things for damn good reason.” Bastien grumbles, reaching past me to open the doors. Moving into the room, I see the bookcase concealing the side passage he must have used to sneak up on me still standing wide open.

Well that explains that mystery.

Bastien’s phone is sitting on his desk, and I circle the sprawling mahogany surface to retrieve it. Drake’s eyes widen when he sees me, but before I can say anything Bastien plucks the device from my hand. “Some advice Cavanaugh,” He drawls, sitting down and pulling me into his lap. “If Sophie shows any propensity for eavesdropping, you’d do well to train it out of her early on. Don’t make the same mistake I did and overlook it because it’s cute.”

“Excuse me, train it out of her?” I hiss.

Bastien’s eyes flash dangerously, “That’s right.” His arm is like an iron bar around me, far from the gentle embraces he usually prefers

Drake sighs, “Selene, how much did you hear?”

“Enough to know you found security cameras at the house, but I don’t understand why you don’t want them to be reviewed.” I share, turning to my husband.

Both Alphas don the same tight-lipped expression, like they don’t want to answer my question. After a moment Drake shoots Bastien a look that seems to say, “she’s your mate.”

My mate really is fuming, his molten gaze boring into me. “Damn it, this is exactly why I didn’t want you on this call.”

“I have a right to know.” I say again.

“No one is denying that, Selene.” Drake interjects soberly. “The issue is when knowing does more harm than good.”

I don’t like the sound of that. Returning my focus to Bastien, I murmur. “Bastien?”

Looking as if he wants to throw something, Bastien emits a bitter exhale. “They weren’t security cameras.” He rumbles, shaking his head in frustration. It’s painfully clear he doesn’t want to tell me this, and equally clear that he’s livid I forced the situation. *They were spy cameras in every room of the house. Common areas, bedrooms... bathrooms.”

My blood turns to ice as his words register, a thousand horrible implications racing through my head. “What?”

Bastien's mouth is a hard line, his eyes closed in resignation. "Baby, whoever sent you there was watching you."

Bastien

I swear, I could wring my mate's little neck. At the same time, I want to bundle her in my arms and kiss away all her fears, tell her that none of this is real

When I saw Drake's call come in so late, I knew he must have found something like this: something so bad it couldn't wait; so bad he didn't want to tell Selene.

I already regret telling her the truth. The moment the words were out, all the blood drained from her face, her porcelain complexion turning a shade of sickly green.

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"You mean," She stammers hoarsely, "The whole time? When – when we were sleeping?... And when we went to the bathroom?... When you and ...?"

"Yes sweetheart." I confirm sadly.

In a flash she's out of my lap and vomiting into my waste basket. "Fuck," curse, immediately going after her. "Drake I'm going to have to call you back in the morning."

"No, there's something else that can't wait," Drake interrupts urgently, refusing to hang up even as Selene's gagging grows louder.

Already on the ground next to Selene, holding her hair and rubbing her back while she retches, I call. "Then get on with it."

"We were able to trace the feed to a cell tower." The Eros Alpha reports. "We couldn't narrow it any further than that, but we have a general location on where the footage was being sent."

That got my attention. "Tell me." I hiss, fearing I already know where this is headed.

"Bastien," Drake sighs, "I'm sorry, but it was going to Elysium."

Bastien

The soothing jets of the master bathroom's huge sunken tub pulse around our bodies, frothing sweet-smelling foam and bubbles on the surface of the deep water. The massaging streams of heated water are probably doing me more good than Selene, since she's sprawled out on my chest and not actually seated in the tub, but she doesn't seem to mind.

After my mate finished emptying her stomach into my waste basket I hung up with Drake and brought her back up to our room. Half an hour ago we were both so exhausted we could have slept through a hurricane. Now I'm worried I won't be able to get Selene to sleep at all, and if I do I'm afraid it will only be interrupted by nightmares.

She hasn't said a word since I explained about the cameras. She was silent as I carried her upstairs crooning sympathetic words; silent as I started the bath and stripped her down; silent as I guided her to the sink to brush her teeth. Selene bore it all in a sort of trance, looking so lost and empty I've done nothing but fantasize about disemboweling whoever owns that safe house since.

She's still not truly with me, her sleek form rests atop mine and her cheek is flush to my chest, but her eyes are staring blankly into the distance. Trailing my hands over her slender form in soothing patterns, I try to check in without pushing her. "How are you doing, baby?"

I breathe a sign of relief when she blinks and looks up at me, pleased she's still responsive. Unfortunately that's the only good news I'm going to be getting tonight.

"I'm sorry I eavesdropped." Selene whispers pitifully, her beautiful eyes welling with tears.

"Hush now, little wolf." I hum, cuddling her closer and stroking her hair. "I'm sorry I was such an ogre, I only wanted to protect you."

She nods and hiccups, "You were right. I wish I could un-know this."

"I know." I confirm sincerely, "I wish you could too."

"It's so..." Selene searches for the right words, retracting her gaze. "So sick," she finally decides with a shiver. "So violating."

"Hey, look at me." I order gently. She doesn't comply at first, but after a moment her little head tilts back and I'm staring into those bottomless pools of blue and violet once more. "I promise you, Selene. If it is the very last thing I do, I will find whoever is responsible for this, and I will make them pay."

My voice is little more than a snarl at this point, "I will make them regret ever laying eyes on you, I will make them wish they'd died instead of ever hatching this plan." I vow, "And I swear to you, I will kill them."

From the look on my mate's face you'd think I promised to buy her candy and roses, rather than issuing a string of violent threats. "I know you will."

"Good." I praise, caressing her spine.

After a moment Selene looks up again, “Does this mean...?”

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She trails off with a furrowed brow, as if the thought is on the tip of her tongue but she can't grasp it. “Hmm, what are you thinking?”

“Well, you think someone was trying to keep us apart, right?” Selene asks.

“Yes.” I confirm gravely.

“So...” She's almost cringing as she spits out the words, they wouldn't have wanted you to mark me. And they had the access to see you on the verge of doing it when... When we were in the shower in the safe house.”

“That alarm.” I exclaim, realizing she's exactly right.

Someone in Elysium set off that alarm to prevent me marking my mate.

Someone in Elysium altered those DNA tests, took Selene out of the city after the fire and left her in neutral territory, then faked her death.

I've known most of this for a while now, but I'm only just starting to realize the broader implications of these events. All this time I've been thinking about the problems in my city – my father's murder and everything that's gone wrong since – and my misfortunes with Selene as two separate issues.

But now it's glaringly clear.

It's all connected. Whoever has been trying to ruin me as Alpha hasn't only been interfering in the pack, they've also kept me from my mate – and that, is unforgivable.