

## Scars by Jessica Bailey Chapter 19

### Chapter 19

Amelie

The day has finally arrived—my own personal doomsday. Today I will go into the mountains at night and complete the ritual. I feel like I just want to run away but, there is nowhere to run to. Tate's Mate Mark is on me; I cannot run out of my skin.

"We are going to be OK. We will get through this. I'll still be here." Inari is acting brave, but I can feel she is just as scared as I am. I was sealing my wolf sprite. She was a part of me attached to my soul. She did not deserve this.

"Hey, how about we spend the afternoon shifted and in the woods? Dad's guards will have to deal." I can feel Inari perk up a bit. This would be the last time she gets to run free.

"That would be nice, thanks." Her voice is so soft I could barely hear her.

I mind link dad, "It's our last chance to shift. So, your guards will have to keep up."

"I understand, kiddo; I'll tell them to give you space." He ends our link.

I walk out to the tree line and hide behind a tree to undress. We shift; we have been shifting more since being back home, so it's much faster now. Inari's deep brown fur glistens in the sun and looks almost bronze. We head off this time, no destination in sight, just enjoying our last run. Taking everything in the wind through our fur as we run, the rocky ground beneath our paws, the smell of the clean mountain air, the sounds of all the mountain critters scurrying about it's comforting. It is mid-September, and the air is cool and brisk. It feels amazing. It almost made us forget our pending demise was looming.

Sealed was a broad term. It could mean we could never shift but still have heightened senses. It could also mean that even Inari is permanently weakened, like how she was with wolfsbane and silver cuff. We just didn't know; that was making this whole ordeal worse. We slow down, just taking in the surroundings. A cool breeze kicks up and rushes past. Out of pure frustration, we let out a long, loud howl straight to the sky. It was our cry, our plea to the goddess to spare us even just a little. The sun is starting to set, and the early evening light changes to deep yellows and orange. We start heading back to the Packhouse. We must prepare for tonight's ritual.

I step into the backdoor of the Packhouse, and Dad is leaned up against a counter. "How are you doing, kiddo?" I can hear him trying to hide the fear in his voice.

I give him a slight smile and reach in for a hug, and I can't hold back my tears. I'm terrified! I know this has to be done no matter what. He just holds me as tight as he can without saying a word, giving me a moment to be a scared, weak little girl in her dad's arms. He leans down and kisses me on the top of my head. "You can do this. You are going to be OK. I'll be here waiting for you when you get back. You are not alone, and I'll be here." I look up and nod my head. I release my grip from around my father's waist. I don't say a word. I know if I try to talk, my tears will start to flow again. I turn and head to my room.

I pack a bag to prepare for the ritual; I include in the book the wooden box, a jacket, and some candles; they felt more appropriate than a lantern. It's not too long of a walk from the Packhouse to the cave I'll be using tonight. I head down to the kitchen, and dad is making dinner. I sit on a stool at the counter and just watch. I'm in a hazy; the minutes till I head out are quickly ticking away. Dad sets a bowl of bow tie pasta with sundried tomato cream sauce in front of me. "Thanks, I guess I'll need my strength." I dig in, not even noticing the flavor. Once I am done, I just sit there staring at the clock, not saying a word.

The clock reaches 10:30 PM. I stand up from my stool, look over at dad, "I guess it's time for me to head out." He nods. I can tell he is holding back staying strong for my sake. I step outside the back door, and two guards are waiting at the foot of the stairs. I know they are doing their jobs, but I just want them to go away. I walk past them and continue to the tree line. I toss my bag strap over my shoulder and continue to the cave. It feels more like I'm marching to my execution than doing a ritual. I get to about 30 yards of the mouth of the cave and turn to the guards. "Please find a comfortable post. If I haven't come out by 1:00 AM, come and get me." They nod and watch as I finish my march into the dark cave.

I step into the cave. I had already scouted it the week prior and came to check on it a few times. I pulled the candles out and placed them around me, lighting each one. Next, I took out the wooden box and the book. I opened the book, the page I needed skimming over again to make sure I didn't miss anything. I undress, fold my clothes neatly, and place them in my bag for safekeeping.

I pull out the bowl and the steel knife. I cut my left palm, letting the blood drip into the dogwood bowl. I look at my watch, which I have placed beside me on the ground. It's now 11:55 PM. Time to start; I take a deep breath.

"Selene moon goddess. I offer you my blood and ask for your blessings to protect my heart and bless me with a new beginning as I am reborn under your new moon." I pick up the silver dagger from the box and dip it in the bowl of blood. "Bless me in this new life, goddess Selene." I take the dagger dripping with my blood and drag it in an X across my Mate Mark. Both Inari and I scream for the searing pain. "Inari, are you OK?" I ask in a panic.

"Don't stop. Keep going." I can hear the desperation in her voice. I must finish it.

I dip the knife in the bowl of blood again and recite the last words of the ritual “I, Amelie Ashwood, Reject you, Tate Cozad, as my mate. I REJECT YOU!” I drag the blade in a cross pattern across my mark. We both scream again in agonizing pain. “I did it. I’m free.” Then pass out.

Gideon

I am jolted out of bed. I grab my chest; it’s throbbing. It’s the girls, I don’t know what’s wrong, but they are in pain. I rush across the hall; I bust down the girl’s bedroom door. “Daisy, Rose, where are you? What’s wrong.” I am in a complete panic. I have never felt this kind of pain and sadness from them. They each had a bed, but they always slept together in one or the other. I hear them crying, and I see them huddled together on Rose’s bed. As soon as my eyes are on them, I calm down a bit. I sit down on the edge of the bed and place the girls on my lap. “Girls, what is wrong? Why are you crying? Your scaring daddy?”

To my surprise, Rose speaks up first, “Daddy, why did new mommy have to get hurt?” I’m baffled. They have been bringing up this “New Mommy” for a while now.

“Rose, baby, who got hurt? Daddy can help. That’s what daddy does is help people remember.” I pull her close and lift her up and kiss her head, trying to stop the tears. She lays her little head on my shoulder and slowly stops crying. Daisy is still sobbing and has no intention of stopping. “Daisy, come on, tell daddy how he can help. I promise I’ll make it better.”

“Daddy, new mommy’s puppy got hurt. New mommy was hurt bad. There was lots of blood right here.” She points to where my faded Mate Mark is. It must have been a nightmare. I’ll have to talk to Jorden and Shay to see if they watched something scary on TV. “Daddy, new mommy almost left us like old mommy.” I can tell whatever nightmare they had, they seem to have experienced it together, and it was more than they could explain.

“Do you girls want to sleep in daddy’s room tonight?” They both look up at me and nod their tired little heads. “OK, do you want to take Miss Whiskers and Mr. Hops?” They both nod again, rubbing their eyes. “OK, let’s bring them along. It’s late; it’s time to sleep.” Rose grabs her stuffed bunny toy, and Daisy gets her stuffed kitty, and I carry them back to my room. They snuggle together with Rose’s back to me. I cover them up, and they start to drift back to sleep.

“Daddy,” Rose turns to me.

“What, baby? It’s time to sleep.” I rub her back, trying to calm her little mind.

“You have to be nice to new mommy. OK? Promise you will be nice and not scawee.” I chuckle a little.

"I promise. Now go to sleep."

## Scars by Jessica Bailey Chapter 20

### Chapter 20

Amelie

After I finish getting dressed, I slowly clean up the cave floor. I had knocked over the bowl of blood when I passed out along with a candle. I blow out all the candles except one. I put the bowl and daggers back in the box. I'll clean them when I get home. I leave the candles. I'll have to come back for them later. The wax is still hot. I put everything back in my bag and stagger to get out of the cave. Right as I am getting to the cave entries, I see the two guards. I must have taken too long. "I'm here. I'm fine." I trip and fall to my knees. One of the guards picks me up, puts my arm around his neck, and helps me walk.

"You know I hate to admit this, but it might be easier to carry me. I'm quite a bit shorter than you, and I don't think you want to walk back crouched like that." I give him my best smile, but I know it's filled with pain.

"Miss Amelie, please, if you will allow me." I nod, and he picks me up. I do not want to fight it. I'm physically weak after that. I feel worse than after my battle with Tate.

"Inari, are you there? I can feel you. Can you talk to me," I reach out to her, waiting and hoping for a response.

As soft as I have ever heard her, "I'm here. I'm in pain, but I will be fine. We need some rest." We both feel drained.

I breathe a sigh of relief, "Let's check tomorrow what has been sealed."

"OK." That was all she could muster as I felt her drift to the back of my mind and sleep. I knew Dad would be waiting for me, so I tried to stay awake till we got home, but I felt myself slipping in and out of consciousness. I don't have the strength to fight, and I slip into darkness.

Gideon

Whack, I groan as I remove Daisy's tiny foot from my face. They are sprawled out on my bed, taking up more room than me. I am not sure how it's possible, but I slowly get up, trying not to disturb them. I quickly take a shower. As soon as they are up, I will need to get them dressed and ready these few minutes in the morning are a refuge for me. As I am rinsing out my hair, I turn and almost jump out of my skin, and they are standing in front of the shower.

“Girls, that’s not nice to sneak up on people. Go sit on the bed. I’ll be out in a second.” They both stand there for a moment. Daisy makes her little hands into a fist and stomps her foot, and storms out. “What is that about?” I towel off and grab some jeans and a long sleeve tee. The girls are sitting on the floor in front of the bed.

Daisy looks at me and tries to cross her arms, but it seems more like hugging herself. I know she’s serious, but she looks so funny. I clear my throat and hold back my laughter, “Daisy, do you have something you want to say to daddy?”

She hugs herself tighter and grunts at me. Rose is just sitting there with her stuffed bunny in her lap. She looks at her sister, then at me. “Daddy, you didn’t go save new mommy at night when we told you she got hurt. Daisy is mad. I am sad because new mommy is hurt.”

This new mommy thing again. “I know you girls had a bad dream, and I know you want me to help the person in your dream, but I don’t know who she is or if she is real.”

Daisy jumps to her feet with her fist balled up at her sides and screams. “NEW MOMMY IS REAL! YOU ARE STUPID, DADDY! YOU PROMISED! DADDY LIED” I look at her wide eye. As an Alpha, I’m a little upset she screamed at me. As a single dad, a bit bothered that they won’t let this new mommy thing go. As a father of daughters proud, no one will mess with my girls with that much moxie. As proud as I am, I cannot let her talk to me like that.

“Daisy! You DO NOT scream at daddy.” I give her a stern look. She plops back down on the floor and turns her back to me. “Girls, I know you want a new mommy, but these things take time. I promise you will have a mommy someday. I don’t know when but someday.”

Rose looks up at me with a confused look, “Daddy, I told you. After we turn, this many new mommy will come live with us.” Again she holds up three fingers with one hand and holds the rest down with the other. They do not understand; well, it’s pointless to fight with two-year-olds.

“OK, for now, let’s go back to your room and get dressed. Shay and Jorden will be by with Easton and Ryan soon.” They get up, and we walk across the hall to their room. They pick out matching overalls and long sleeve tees, Daisy in yellow and Rose in pink. Shortly after they are dressed, Shay and Jorden take the girls to the playroom.

I head down to my office and start going through emails from my investigators. We email details so we can keep everything logged and organized. Mind Linking is great, but I can only hold so much in my mind at one time. Plus, I can quickly go over details if I missed anything. I see an email from Matt, one of the investigators I placed at the Ashwood Pack. I open the email.

What I read has me in shock. Amelie completed the rejection ritual last night at midnight. Matt had never seen anyone who had performed the ritual, and neither had I. He said there were no issues, and no one tried to attack during, which was good. He said she almost died, and her wolf was now sealed. To what extent they didn't know yet. Now that Amelie completed the ritual, his main concern was Tate seek her out for revenge even more. Would he be enraged that she single-handedly dissolved their mate bond? Rage is an issue with wolves we can go to the extreme if we feel provoked. I open the attachment.

I am at a loss for words at with, I see. It's Amelie passed out being carried by Matt. He has slightly pulled back the collar of her shirt, showing a black and bloody scar where her Mate Mark was. This is what a Scarred One looks like. I am horrified that she had to go through that. I'm pissed Matt is holding her. I shouldn't be, but I am. I stop for a second and re-read his report. I look at the time she completed the ritual, around midnight. Her wolf was harmed in the process, and she was bleeding and injured. It was all the things Rose and Daisy said. I closed the attachment and sat back in my chair.

They just had a bad dream. This is just a coincidence. It doesn't mean anything. Kids say weird this all the time. I mean, look at Easton. He was eating mud a few weeks ago. My mind is going crazy. My phone rings, and I jump. Why am I jumpy today? Damn it.

I answer the phone without even looking at who it was. "Hello, Alpha Gideon here."

"Alpha Gideon, It's Alpha John Ashwood. I am sure you have already received the report from Matt. I gave my permission to take a picture of Amelie. I wanted to confirm that the mate mark is gone. Tate may make a move now." I take a deep breath.

"Yes, Alpha John, I agree he may make a move soon. I will reach out to my information network and see if there is anything new," as a father myself, I can understand John's need to do everything he can to keep his daughter safe. I could not imagine watching your child walk off to do something like this. He must feel so helpless. I just had a two-year-old scream at me today over her nightmare I couldn't fix. This was a whole different level.

"Alpha Gideon, we are still scheduled for March training for James, correct?" I had forgotten about the young heir, James.

"Yes, I will be there to train the boy on investigative techniques and military tactics. I have scheduled travel for March 6th. I'll stay for a month to train him." I didn't want to leave for a month, but this is what is required of me as the Druit Guard Alpha. I train all Alpha heirs. It will be right after the twin's birthday February 26th.

"OK, we will plan to see you then. Please keep me updated if you hear anything new." John was keeping the conversation short. I'm sure he wanted to get back to his daughter.

“Will do, sir. I hope Amelie recovers soon.” I hung up.

Something was weird, and I didn't want to keep connecting the dots. All the coincidences, the pull I felt to her, the ritual she completed, the odd things the girls keep saying. This was not a mystery I wanted to solve at the moment. I pushed it out of my mind for now.

I need to reset. I mind link Tyson and Marcus, “Be ready. I'm coming down to the training grounds, and I'll be taking you both on today.”

They both groan, and Tyson says, “Just make sure we can walk this time.” I cut my mind link—time to blow off some steam.