



Fated Hearts (Fated Mates Collection #2)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: A forced marriage, a reluctant Alpha, and a human woman fate refuses to let go.

Athena Chapman knows better than to believe in fairytales. Still, a part of her—buried under lesson plans and dog-eared shifter romance novels—hopes that somewhere out there, her villain is waiting.

The one who will fight for her, claim her, and finally make her feel seen.

But villains don't come wrapped in moonlight and mystery. They come in the form of unwanted proposals and cruel ultimatums. With time running out, Athena escapes to the one place she still feels safe—only to run straight into Draco Blackwood.

The billionaire Alpha with a dangerous past. The same man who looks right through her. The one her soul seems to recognize... even if he clearly wants nothing to do with her.

Draco has no interest in fairy tales or fated mates—especially not now. With his father's pack unraveling and the future of his bloodline on the line, the last thing he needs is a human woman who smells like trouble and stirs something primal inside him.

But fate doesn't care about timing. And it never plays fair.

As danger closes in and enemies circle, Draco and Athena must decide if the bond between them is a curse... or the one thing powerful enough to change everything.

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Chapter

One

Athena looked at her class and let out a cheer as one of her students finished reading a paragraph they had been struggling with for a while. She strongly believed in celebrating hard earned accomplishments.

Once she'd led the kids to the gym for their P.E. period, she settled behind her desk and pulled out her lunch to eat while she graded yesterday's practice spelling quiz. Her phone buzzed in her drawer, drawing her attention, interrupting the audio book she was listening to in the process.

"Hey, my favorite beautiful bitch! Are we still on for The Hen tonight? I so need to have a few drinks after the shit show at work today."

Athena laughed at her best friend's text. It was always a shit show at her job.

When she remembered she'd promised Deidra a night out, she cringed. She'd forgotten about the plans and had wanted to go home and drown her sadness in a pint of ice cream and sleep the weekend away.

"Don't even think about talking your way out of going. You promised. Be showered and ready by seven. I will be there then to help you pick out your outfit, makeup, and hair."

Well shit. There went her plans for the weekend.

“Fine! I could use a drink or two. Chris is an asshole!”

“What else is new? What does the lazy fucker want now? ”

“ He’s trying to force me to hitch myself to Rob Maplewood. That fucker creeps me out.”

“Oh, hell no!”

“Right?! The guy is gross as hell. Always following me around saying he owns me because my brother sold me to him.”

“No, the fuck he didn’t! We’ll talk more tonight. I got to run. See you at seven!”

“Later!”

Athena couldn’t help but chuckle. She knew her best friend would have her back.

Her family wanted nothing to do with her, unless they wanted to use or abuse her. She was an outcast to them because she chose to go to college and be an elementary school teacher.

She had worked her way through college, which is how she’d met Deidra and they became best friends. Even better, they were both at the same college.

Once they had realized that tidbit, they were inseparable, even after college. She had moved to Pelco Grove where Deidra lived and started working at Pelco Grove Elementary School.

Sadly, the move three towns away didn’t stop her mother and brother from trying to control her life. It just made it harder for them to pop up unannounced most of the

time.

Deidra knew how her family treated her and had even intervened a few times on her behalf. She truly was lucky to have a friend like her.

Sighing deeply, she restarted her audio book and continued with grading the quizzes and put the rest of the past behind her, where it needed to be. She would go out with her bestie and have a few drinks just for fun.

Who knew where the night would lead. Who the hell was she kidding.

She was a twenty-eight-year-old virgin who was afraid of dating anyone thanks to how her family had treated her all of her life. Her family was trying to push her off on someone who terrified the living shit out of her.

She sighed heavily as she continued to listen to the audio book she was listening to. Why couldn't she find a man like Xaden in *Fourth Wing*, or Rhysand in *ACOTAR*, or so many of the other men she dreamed about at night when she fell asleep.

She knew she wasn't every man's dream woman. She stood five feet, two inches tall with strawberry blonde hair, blue-green eyes, and extra weight in her stomach, ass, and thighs.

While she was a plus-size gal, she was curvy. Deidra told her every day that men salivated at women like her, yet she'd yet to see it. Deidra was proof of that.

Her bestie was beautiful. She was tall at five foot five inches, with a toned body that showed her love for running.

The men salivated at her dark hair and whiskey brown eyes whenever she would grace their presence with it. She was a goddess while Athena was merely her lady in

waiting.

Ugh, Deidra would beat her ass if she found out that she was thinking like that. She'd never allow her to live it down if she knew what Athena was thinking just now.

Deidra tried to set her up several times, but those dates never panned out. They were only giving her pity dates as a way to get close to Deidra.

Ugh, screw it. She was going to go out tonight with her bestie and they were going to have fun.

To hell with everything and everyone. She was going to turn a new leaf in life.

Fuck her family, fuck her brother and his trifling ass. Maybe Deidra was right.

She needed to stand up for herself for once in her life to let her family know she was truly done playing their stupid ass games.

Starting today, hell, tonight. She was going to go out and have fun, maybe kiss a man and be the curvy version of her best friend.

She didn't know how well she'd pull it off, but she was going to do her damndest to try and see how well it went for her. At least Deidra would be there to back her up no matter what.

With a definitive nod, Athena went about getting her paperwork done and made it through the rest of the day at work with a smile and a new determination for herself and her life. She was going to be a whole new woman.

The countdown for tonight was on. She made it through the rest of the day with her students, getting them ready for the actual spelling test, working on basic math and

sentence structures.

She told the kids that if they passed their spelling test on Monday, they would have a pizza party that afternoon to celebrate their passing. Her kids all left for the weekend with their spelling books and a new zest for studying.

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Chapter

Two

Athena followed Deidra into The Hen, trying to pull her shirt up to cover her boobs that her bestie was determined she show off. They were definitely two different personalities of women who somehow became the best of friends.

Deidra believed in flaunting what she was born with. Along with her five foot five height, she was blessed with a toned framed that carried an impressive rack and a peach shaped ass.

The woman had a body that Athena was insanely jealous of. She knew Deidra not only loved to run, but she worked out in the gym when she could.

Things Athena avoided. While Athena watched what she ate, mostly, she indulged at least once a week.

Yet, no matter what she did, she was overweight for her height of five feet two inches. Deidra said she was pleasantly plump with nice tits and an ass she herself would kill for.

She highly doubted it, but her bestie said she was the modern-day Marilyn Monroe, without the sex scandal and the mole. Or the white-blonde hair.

“Stop fidgeting and leave the girls alone. Live a little for a change. I’m here with you and I won’t let just any random loser flirt with you.”

“So, you’re saying you’d let a known loser flirt with me?” Athena baited her with a quirked eyebrow.

“No smartass! There’s a difference between being a snack and a meal. You, my dear, sweet, pain in the ass bestie are a five-course meal that a man needs to savor and earn. He needs to be starved for you to truly enjoy your offerings.”

“I hope like hell you’re not claiming to be a snack!” Athena glared at her best friend.

“Oh, baby, I’m not just any snack. I’m a delicacy dessert. If I choose to let the prize for the night to have it.” Diedra winked at her as she led them to a table.

“You’re in a good mood now, compared to our conversation at lunchtime.” She observed her friend smiling at others.

“I’m doing way better. Mom and Dad called me at work. Dad took a few days off this week. Anyways, they called to tell me that fucknuts is not getting his greedy paws on the company like he wants.”

“Your dad changed his mind about retiring?” Athena asked, smiling as the picture of the older gentleman came to her mind.

Athena loved Deidra’s parents. She’d met them several times through the years, and they treated her like one of their own.

Deidra’s parents always invited her to family dinners, events, and holidays. Even her siblings loved her.

Well, the ones she has met anyway. Of Deidra’s five siblings, she’s met all but one, the oldest of them all. She can never admit to her best friend that the photos she’s seen of her oldest brother are part of her spank the clit bank.

In the ten years she and Deidra have been friends, she's never met the elusive family member, but she's seen several photos that she's saved to her phone thanks to the texts from the woman. Those photos got her through many a lonely night with her trusty clit vibrator.

God help her if she ever meets the man in person. She'd never be able to show her face to their family functions again.

"Draco is coming home to take over the company. With Dad's permission, they are merging the two companies into one which works out perfectly, to be honest."

"The elusive one? What kind of company does he have that can be merged with your dad's?"

Well shit! There goes her showing her face at family functions ever again.

"As you know, Draco is prior military. He was special forces or some shit that was hush hush. When he got out, he decided to start his own security company. He owns his own multi-million-dollar business. They specialize in setting up security systems, both building and technical, internet for example for clients. They also do bodyguard work and search and rescue now and then too."

Athena watched Diedra flag down a waitress for them to order their drinks as she explained what her brother did. She had no idea what any of it meant.

"I knew it was slut night, but seeing these two, I guess The Hen isn't selective on the sluts they allow in."

Athena rolled her eyes at the male voice that sounded behind her as Deidra growled low in her throat. It was a toss-up who hated her brother and his asshole friend more, her or Deidra.

“There are so many things wrong with your sentence structure in that asinine statement you just made, but it’s not worth pointing them all out,” Athena responded as she turned toward the voice, wishing she could disappear into thin air.

“Hooked on phonics didn’t help the high school dropouts, obviously. If any chick hooks up with you two, she’s either drunk, high, ugly, or all three at the same time.”

Athena had to cough to hide her laughter. She knew if she laughed, there would be hell to pay later on.

“What are you two doing here? This isn’t your territory, Maplewood,” Deidra demanded, making Athena look her way.

“Word is, you won’t even run this town pretty soon, cunt. Word is there’s a challenge for a new Alpha going out from my old man to yours!” Robert Maplewood smirked nastily at the two women.

“Oh, please. Yes, your waste of space father did challenge my father. But he was informed he would have to challenge me, as my father, not only hand over the reins of his business to me, but also his Alpha title as well.”

That voice! Holy shit on a cracker she just came in her damn underwear.

“Draco!”

Athena watched as Deidra jumped up and ran around the table and jumped into the man’s arms, giving him a big hug. She had to look away before she allowed the jealousy to take hold.

W...T...F! Jealousy?

Where the hell did that come from? He's her fucking brother for fuck's sake!

"Draco, meet my bestest friend in the galaxy, Athena. She's the hottie I've been telling you about all these years. Athena, this is Draco, my oldest brother."

When Draco's eyes landed on hers, Athena suddenly felt like Little Red Riding Hood about to get devoured by the big bad wolf. Too bad shifters weren't real.

If they were, then she would love to be eaten by this wolf. Lord help her, she was going to hell with her wanton thoughts, but, fuck what a way to go!

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Chapter

Three

Draco Blackwood stepped out of his black SUV and stretched his six foot six frame slightly to get the kinks out of his back and shoulders.

After driving the last two and a half days to get from California to his hometown in North Carolina, all he wanted was to have a couple of beers and talk to those of his team about stupid shit before the seriousness of everything started in the morning.

He looked over as the other SUV pulled in next to his. Out of the eight of his team members, only two of his people wanted to come to The Hen with him.

When they arrived at Pelco Grove three hours ago, they checked into their hotel and grabbed dinner.

When he mentioned going to The Hen, all but two declined due to wanting to rest up for tomorrow.

One wanted to see their old stomping ground and the other wanted to see what his two bosses used to get themselves into.

Leonardo Mason, his Beta, already knew the place as intimately as he did back in the days. The two of them used to sneak out of their rooms and meet up here with fake IDs and have all kinds of fun.

When Draco joined the Army straight out of high school, Leo was right there beside him. When he joined the Special Forces, Leo was again right there with him.

When the military created their specialized spec ops unit of shifters, called “Ghost Ops”, with Draco leading the team, Leo was the first one to join him. His Beta has his back even in the darkest of times, tonight was no different.

Against his and Leo’s parents’ wishes, they stayed in a hotel until other accommodations could be arranged for the rest of their team, permanently. They were used to being on the go all the time, so them having a permanent place more often than not, was going to be a new adjustment for all of them.

“Tony and Ray meeting us at the bar?” Leonardo Mason asked as he clapped his hands rubbing them together in excitement.

“Yeah. They were at Mom’s when I called her. Apparently, there have been some issues with the Maplewood pack trying to expand their territory with sneak attacks. He’s coming to give us a brief rundown of what Dad isn’t telling me over the phone or email.”

“How successful have they been?”

“According to Tony, they just seized Roque’s Pack last week.

They attacked when the Alpha was weak from a sneak attack that rendered him useless hours before from a pack of rogue wolves that were paid for by the Maplewoods.

That’s when Tony convinced my parents to ask if I wanted the Alpha spot.

Dad is aging and knows he wouldn’t survive if he was wounded. The others don’t

want the spot.”

“Well, duh! You are an Alpha through and through, boss. You out Alpha even the other Alphas round the planet.”

“Kiss ass!” Leo quipped at his teammate.

“And the ladies love it!” Justin “Case” Holt laughed as he smacked Leo on the back.

Draco shook his head at his two friends and teammates. They are a tight-knit group thanks to the blood and sweat they shared through the years.

His spec ops team followed him into the civilian life when he left after a bad op to start his own company to cut through the government red tape bullshit. He’d lost some damn good soldiers through the years because of that bullshit.

Now, he, along with those who joined his company were rich as hell by forcing those who exploited their wealth and the government to pay out of the ass for their services. Those who couldn’t afford his services and truly needed them were helped for free.

“Who all knows you’ve arrived back in town?”

Draco looked over at Leo with a huge smile.

“Tony, Ray, and my parents. I’m sure there will be hell from the others when the word of my being at The Hen instead of the homestead spreads by morning when we all arrive for the meeting.

Deidra will be there with her report from Dad’s side of the company itself.

I have Hawk and Shades assigned to work with her in regard to the fucknut spreading

the rumor he's the new head of the company. ”

“Think it's Maplewood making a play?” Leo's eyes sparked at the thought.

“They aren't smart enough for that play. I think they are working with someone else and using them as muscle,” Draco admitted as they walked into The Hen.

“Weak ass muscle if you ask me,” Leo fired back, shaking his head.

“Agreed.”

Draco surveyed his surroundings and nearly growled so deep, his shackles and claws wanted to raise as he looked to where he found his baby sister being surrounded by three Maplewood pack members. The female with her was an unknown but damn she made his cock stand at attention.

Not fucking good. Especially in a potentially dangerous situation they could be facing here in a few.

“Isn't that Robert Maplewood?” Leo questioned, following Draco's line of sight.

“Unfuckingfortunately.”

“Word is you won't even run this town pretty soon, cunt. Word is there's a challenge for a new Alpha going out from my old man to yours!”

“Yes, your waste of space father did challenge mine. But he was informed he would have to challenge me, as my father, not only handed his business over to me, but all Alpha business as well.”

“Draco!”

Draco kept his eyes on the man who dared to sully his sister's air with their presence. He wrapped his arms around his sister and squeezed.

"Draco, meet my best friend, Athena. She's the hottie I've been telling you about all these years. Athena, this is my oldest brother, Draco."

Draco's eyes landed on Athena's and fuck if his wolf didn't just react in a way the fucker had never reacted around a woman before in their life. He was suddenly the big bad wolf ready to devour Little Red Riding Hood.

"Hello, Athena. Nice to finally meet you."

"S-same t-to you."

"Athena let's go. Now!"

Draco continued to stare at Athena as she gulped quickly before grabbing her beer bottle and taking a couple of quick swallows. Now he wondered if her sweet little lips would be able to wrap like that around his cock.

"Athena, now !"

Draco turned his stare to the man who yelled at the woman his sister just introduced to him. When she stood up and moved to stand in front of him, her hands on her hips, his fucking cock went rock fucking steel.

"Go to hell, both of you! I am not here with you. Both of you can go fuck yourselves. Leave me the hell alone."

Yep, he was totally fucked. His wolf wanted her.

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Chapter

Four

“Hello Athena, nice to finally meet you.”

Well, double shit. Now his attention was on her and she just had a mini orgasm in her pants just from looking at the man.

“S-same t-to you.”

What the fuck was wrong with her? She couldn't string a damn sentence together worth shit.

She grabbed her beer bottle and took two large gulps trying to cool her rising body temp. Especially when she was wondering about how intense he could look at her as he fucked her into a screaming orgasm.

“Athena! Let's go, now !”

When Draco continued to stare at her like she was his next meal, she brought the beer bottle to her lips and took a couple of more gulps of the cold brew. Damn it, what the fuck was wrong with her.

“Damn it, Athena. Move your fat ass now!”

When she saw Draco's eyes leave hers, she finally heard her brother and Rob

demanding she leave with them. She was done with their bullshit.

She slammed her beer bottle down on the table and stood up from her seat. She stepped in front of Draco and put her hands on her hips as she glared at the two men.

“Go to hell, both of you! I am not here with you. Both of you can go fuck yourselves. Leave me the hell alone!”

“Bitch, I will fuck you up. You better watch how you speak to me.”

“Or what, Robert? I already told you, my brother, and my mother that I am not marrying you or any other fucking reject they demand I marry or fuck. I don’t live in your house or theirs. Neither of you pay my fucking bills. So, go to hell with your controlling bullshit.”

“You fucking bitch ass whore...”

“I believe the lady has spoken. Now, as I reminded you earlier, you are out of your jurisdiction. My sister has informed me that her best friend lives and works in my territory, so, that alone places her under my protection. Since she is my sister’s best friend, that puts her under the entire Blackwood Pack’s protection.

Do yourself a favor and heed my warning and leave! ”

“You may be the Alpha here, but she is my property.”

Athena bristled at the term of being Rob’s property. She belonged to no one but herself.

She was totally blaming the alcohol when she balled up her fist and punched Rob in the face, breaking his nose and her hand at the same time. She was suddenly yanked

backward when she screamed out from the pain in her hand.

When Athena heard several deep growls, she jerked her head up to find Deidra's brother in front of her with his hands wrapped around her brother and Rob's throats, lifting them off their feet.

Holy shit the man was strong! Athena stared at her best friend's brother with her mouth wide open.

"Draco!" Deidra said loudly to her brother. "She's okay."

"This is your last warning, Maplewood. Do not come back into Blackwood territory again without permission. That goes for your friend here, too. Athena Chapman is under my protection. Walk away, now!"

Athena watched as Draco shoved her brother and Rob away from him. She was so paying for that scene later.

"I think I just got a lady boner," she mumbled to herself.

"I'd support that cause." Deidra laughed next to her.

Shit! She said that out loud.

"Are you okay?"

Athena looked over at Draco and nodded as she moved to sit in her seat once again. When she was handed an ice pack for her hand, that's when she not only noticed Tony and Ray, Deidra's other brothers, but two other men who were hot as hell, too.

Okay, not as hot as her bestie's oldest brother, who makes her hot enough to strip

buck ass naked just to feel a cool breeze, but still hot as hell.

“Let me check out that hand, beautiful!” One of the hotties winked at her as he took her hand into his.

“Athena, excuse my brothers’ manners...” Deidra started when Draco growled as he turned around to see her hand in Leo’s. “This is Leo Mason. My brother’s oldest, or should I say only best friend. They joined the Army together and are still joined at the hip all these years later.”

“You met in the Army?” Athena asked Leo softly, smiling down at him.

“No. We grew up together. Our parents have been best friends all of our lives. Okay, gorgeous, your hand isn’t broken. Looks like you just bruised it really good when you socked that asshole.”

“Thank you.” Athena smiled at Leo sweetly as she put the ice pack back on her hand.

“The lugnut behind me is Justin Holt, but you can call him Case,” Leo introduced her to the other hottie standing off to the side behind him.

Athena awkwardly waved her hand at the man before she turned her gaze back to Draco shyly, biting her lower lip. She couldn’t understand why he seemed so pissed at her.

“Hey, mouse, you okay?” Tony Blackwood asked as he pushed his way toward her.

“Yeah, hurts like a bitch. At least I don’t have to work tomorrow, so I can keep it still for a few days.”

“You’re still coming for the welcome home party for Draco tomorrow, right? Mom

can look at it more to keep it stabilized.”

“Um...”

Athena hesitated at the answer when she heard that low deep growl again when Tony got close to her to look at her hand. Why was he growling like that?

“Probably not. That’s more for your family...”

“First off miss thing, you are family. Mom and Dad love you like one of their own. It would be an insult to Mom if you didn’t come, as well as me, since we were the ones to invite you.”

Athena leaned over toward Deidra and whispered as she pointed her thumb in Draco’s direction, “I don’t think that he wants me there.”

When Deidra glared up at her big brother, Athena actually wished she hadn’t said anything. “Ignore him. He forgot his manners in California.”

“Don’t take his surly behavior serious, beautiful. He’s always a grumpy asshat. It’s part of his charm actually.” Leo winked at her as he stood up.

“I’ll take offense if you’re not there, too,” Tony backed his sister up, smiling down at her.

Athena looked around the small group and realized she had been surrounded by them the whole time. Deidra was right, she and her mother had invited her for this thing with Draco.

Then tonight happened with her brother and Rob, and she was afraid to really show her face at the event, if she was being honest. While Deidra knew most of the horrible

things those two had put her through, she didn't know it all.

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Chapter

Five

Draco had to close his eyes at his sister's words. What the fuck was wrong with him?

When Leo, Case, and his brothers got close to the woman, his wolf went apeshit. Shadow had never done that before.

Usually, his wolf would just show his ass to get him to talk to a woman then calmed the hell down for a while once he fucked someone. Not this fucking time.

No. His damn wolf was going ape fucking shit when his brothers or his friends got near this damn woman whom he didn't even fucking know.

Just being close to her has his wolf demanding they claimed her in front of the whole fucking room. The fucker wanted to rip those two motherfuckers to shreds for causing her harm.

Now she felt like he didn't want her around. Shadow was giving him mortal hell.

"I would be honored if you came to this bullshit party my mother and sisters insist on having for me and my friends to welcome us here."

There! He could be nice and prayed like hell he could keep his hands to himself.

"Athena, I think you should pack an overnight bag and stay at my parents for a few

days,” Ray Blackwood suggested making Draco growl as he glared at his brother.

“W-why?”

“Ray’s right. You said yourself that Chris is trying to force you to marry Rob.

You literally just rejected him in front of everyone that is a part of this town tonight.

Draco nearly beat their asses. Even with him banning them from the area, it won’t stop them from trying to get to you,” Deidra agreed with her brother.

Draco’s attention went to Athena. His wolf howled loudly in his head at the news.

“Who is this Chris to you?” Draco demanded, his fists tightening at his sides.

“He’s my brother. He is best friends with Rob.

Has been for a long time. That is why I moved to Pelco Grove, to get away from them.

H-he sold me a couple of months ago to Rob and his father, trying to force me to marry Rob as tribute for a position working for them. I’ve refused every time I see them.”

Draco saw red at the woman’s words. When he heard Leo in his head telling him to calm down, he knew it was showing in his facial expression.

“Athena, come stay the weekend with me at my parents. We both know from past experience they will retaliate if you are home alone,” Deidra softly reminded Athena, pulling her best friend into her arms.

“Retaliate?” Leo asked, making Draco glare toward the door the two men were shoved out of a few minutes ago.

“It’s never been anything serious. Just flat tires, broken windows on the house and my car. A dead animal. One was a puppy I had just gotten...”

“That had been your dream dog. One Dad found for your birthday last year. When they killed him, Deidra and Mom had to watch you for a month and a half because you wouldn’t eat or sleep.

All you did was cry and stare out of the window.

Everyone worried about you. We, including Dad, were ready to go hunt the bastards down,” Ray outed the shivering woman.

“They killed your dog?” Leo growled, forcing Draco to look back at the group.

“Look, this shit isn’t new with my brother. He and my mother have bullied me all of my life. I got out when I left for college ten years ago and have never been back.”

“How long have you lived in Pelco Grove?” Draco found himself asking for some reason.

“Since I graduated college. I’ve been a teacher at the elementary school for the last six years. Bought the house I live in about four years ago.”

“She lives down the street from me, Draco. Mom and Dad vetted both houses. She’s been my best friend since our freshman year of college.

I’ve seen the shit her family has put her through.

So has Mom, Dad, Ray, Tony, Robyn, and Dimitri.

We have all been there to protect her without her asking.

” Deidra informed her brother, glaring at him.

“Deidra’s right. She’s never asked for help. In fact...” Tony turned to glare at Athena, making Draco growl low in his throat. “She’s gone to great lengths to hide a few of the damages they have done, including the bruises.”

“Excuse me, bruises?” Leo and Draco asked at the same time, Draco’s growl louder this time.

“Her brother showed up a few times last year and the year before and beat the shit out of her because she refused her mother’s demand for money to pay off her loan sharking drug dealer.

Mom had some party planned that this one helped with.

When she suddenly called to cancel her appearance there, Mom, Deidra, Robyn, and I went to find out why.

She didn’t answer the door when we knocked, so Deidra got her spare key out and let us in.

We found her in the shower hiding, cleaning up the blood from where she’d been cut from the punches.

They have even sent thugs after her a time or two.

She refuses to tell us who they are.” Tony glared Athena’s way.

“Because I don’t know their names or who their boss is. And even if I did, no, I would not have told you. The sheriff in that town is just as crooked as they are. Maplewood Sr. sends him after you, he’ll shoot first, ask questions...never.” Athena glared right back at Tony.

Draco watched the woman for several seconds. She wouldn’t go to his parents for the weekend because she felt like she would be intruding on their private family time.

Draco looked over at Leo and Case, nodding his head at them. As an Alpha and their team leader, he was able to talk to them mentally.

“Have Shades and Arrow prepared to stay with her tomorrow. One taking the days and the other taking the nights. Case, I want you and Hawk to do the perimeter, set up cameras around the inside and outside of her house, and around the property while she’s at work on Monday.”

Draco turned back to look at Athena, assessing. “ I’ll stay at her place tonight. Make sure they don’t try anything... ”

“I’ll have Tuck and Townie ready for the perimeter. Give you backup in case they do,” Case advised, walking away and pulling out his phone.

“She’s your mate, isn’t she?” Leo asked, staring him down. “Your wolf is going apeshit.”

“ No. She’s not. She’s Deidra’s best friend. That is all.”

Draco had to close his eyes as he turned to walk away, even his wolf knew he was lying. Athena Chapman was his mate, one that he could not claim.

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Chapter

Six

Athena did everything she could not to notice the man in the seat beside her. Since she and Deidra had taken an Uber to the bar, Draco chose to drive them back to her house.

Which wasn't the bad part. The bad part was both were staying at her house with her.

She was in fact grateful that her best friend was staying for the weekend. The bad part was that Draco was staying...in her house...on her small ass couch!

"Y-you can take the guest room. Deidra can sleep in my room," Athena suggested softly, looking back toward Deidra.

"Thank you, but no. I can't keep an eye on things from there. Deidra can have the guest bedroom."

"You won't fit on the couch with how big you are."

When Deidra coughed to stifle a laugh, she wanted to bang her head against the dashboard. When she replayed her statement back in her head, she wanted a hole to open up and swallow her whole.

"Shit! That sounded wrong. I didn't mean to imply you were fat. You're not fat. Probably don't have an ounce of fat on you. I mean you're tall and muscley and my

couch is really small compared to you. Fuck! Someone just shoot me now.”

Athena covered her face with her hands in horror when she wound up with diarrhea of the mouth trying to explain what she meant. She wanted to flog Deidra when the woman started howling with laughter from the back seat.

“Breathe, Athena. I know you weren’t calling me fat. It’s better for me to stay in the living room so I can head off any potential disasters should they happen. I’ve slept in tighter spaces than your couch. I promise I will be fine.”

Athena relaxed at Draco’s words, just a little, but not much. When she looked back out the window, she realized they were pulling into her driveway, into utter chaos.

Her car had been vandalized worse than ever. Three of her tires were shredded, her windows were all smashed out of the vehicle, the leather seats were shredded to pieces, and her headlights and taillights were smashed in.

Her front door had been kicked in, barely hanging onto the doorframe. The windows in front of the house were all broken and the frames busted up.

She noticed the words “whore”, “pig”, “bitch”, and “cunt” were spray painted on the front of her house, her garage, and her car. They even destroyed her garage.

She was petrified to find out the extent of the damage to the inside of the house. She was so out of it, she never registered Draco or Deidra’s voice as one called the police and the other called their parents.

She started to get out of Draco’s truck when both of them held her back. She could only stare at Draco when he told her to let him check out the house to make sure it was safe before she got out of the truck.

“Y-you can’t go in there alone. What if they are still in there?” Athena asked, panic in her voice.

“I will be fine. I promise. Stay in the truck. Lock it once I get out. Dee, you know what to do.”

Athena could only stare at the man as he got out of his truck, a gun in hand. She hadn’t even realized that he was carrying a gun the whole time.

“Dee, what if h-he gets hurt? What...”

“Hey, breathe. He will be okay, Thena. He does this kind of thing for a living. Have faith in my big brother.”

Several minutes later just as the police and several other cars pulled up to her house, Draco was walking out, looking more pissed than when he went inside. She unlocked the truck doors and jumped out of the truck, running toward her house to see the damage.

She barely registered Draco catching her and pulling her into his arms. She knew from the way he was visibly vibrating that it was bad.

“Wait, little one. Don’t go in there just yet. Let the officers do their job,” Draco murmured as he held her close.

“Let me go. This is my home. I have a right to see the damage.”

When he didn’t budge, she turned pleading eyes toward him. “Please.”

“Wait. Let me give the police my report then I will personally take you into the house and let you see the damage so that you can file your insurance claim.”

Athena nodded and pulled into herself. She wrapped her arms around her waist as she watched Draco and Deidra meet up with their family, some new strangers, Leo, Case, and the police.

Her need to see her home won out while everyone was occupied. She only really cared about one thing in her home.

As she stepped in, her heart sank to her feet. Her living room was utterly destroyed.

They tore holes into her walls, shredded her sofa and love seat, broke her coffee table, and shattered her TV and lamps. There was nothing spared in the room.

Her kitchen, guest bedroom, guest bathroom, and utility room were given the same treatment as her living room. Everything was shattered, shredded, and destroyed beyond repair.

When she walked into her bedroom, she broke. Her stuffed puppy, the urn that her deceased puppy's ashes had been placed in, and a photo memoir, which included his little footprint had been destroyed beyond repair.

His urn had been pried open and the ashes thrown around the room. The same words were sprayed inside her bedroom all over the walls.

Picking up one of the shredded stuffies that had been the favorite of her beloved pups, the last photo of them together, she sank to her knees and let out a painful, heartbroken wail. They had finally broken her completely.

She never heard the footsteps running into the house or the voices screaming her name. She had curled into a ball on her bedroom floor and cried, holding the only remaining reminder of her Shadow that never had a chance at life.

She never felt the arms that picked her up and carried her out of the house or put her in the truck. She was completely broken and numb.

She didn't respond when spoken to or touched. When Deidra helped her undress, she was oblivious.

She numbly took a shower when Deidra told her the water was running. When she came out, she got dressed in the pj's left out for her and crawled into bed.

The dam broke when her head hit the pillow and the lights went out. She cried her heart and her eyes out.

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Chapter

Seven

Draco was furious. He knew who it was and was currently helpless about what they could do.

He could smell Maplewood and a few other wolves involved in the destruction of Athena's home. He also smelled the human that Athena said was her brother.

They looked nothing alike and their personalities were totally opposite of each other. When he heard her wail inside the house, it took everything in him not to shift and hunt for the danger.

Seeing her in the state she was in right now, made him want to hunt every son-of-a-bitch down and end their lives for causing the heartache she was in. He'd never felt this helplessness before.

"I don't understand," Draco admitted out loud. "Was it the destruction of the house?"

"No. It was the destruction of Shadow's memorial and the desecration of his urn that broke her," Deidra softly answered as she sighed heavily before sitting on the couch next to him.

"They also destroyed the stuffed replica of him that we had commissioned for her. Not to mention the toy that she had kept that was the pup's favorite," Tony growled angrily.

“Shadow? My wolf is alive and fine. A little pissed at the moment, but he’s fine.”
Draco looked over at Leo in confusion.

“Shadow, her dream dog was a long haired, black German shepard. She always thought they looked almost wolf like. She loved that puppy as if she’d given birth to it.

Took her the entire summer to get out of the state she’s in now when they killed that pup.

It wasn’t until Deidra and Tony had given her that stuffed replica that she started coming out of her funk.

Them destroying her memorial and urn...they made what they had done personal.

It reeks of Maplewood and his crew in that house,” their father answered, walking in the living room, the anger clear on his face.

“Can we get another one made for her? I know we can’t do anything about the ashes...” Draco slowly suggested, his voice going low.

“I’ll call Cale in the morning and see if he has any availability.” Coren Blackwood nodded at his son. “Tonight, we let her grieve in peace.”

Draco walked away while the others began discussing how to fix Athena’s home and adding the security features she would need. He knew that Leo had that discussion already handled.

He stopped just outside her doorway. Technically it was his doorway since it was the room he had when his parents moved into the house when he was thirteen.

“She’s your mate, isn’t she?”

Draco turned to see Deidra standing there, the sadness evident in her eyes. Shit, how did he respond to that question?

“No.”

“No, she’s not, or no, you don’t want her to be?”

“Both?”

“Asshole!” Deidra glared at him.

“I have too many enemies. Plus, this shit with Maplewood. She would be a target to get to me. Let’s not forget that she’s also human. Our kind wouldn’t accept her as their Luna,” Draco reasoned with his baby sister.

“Bullshit. While she isn’t aware our kind exists, our people love her.

She’s the elementary school teacher for more than half of our kind here in Pelco Grove.

They would welcome her as their Luna with open arms. I get the target part, but big brother, you forget our mother survived for nearly forty plus years as a Luna.

Our people love her without question. Athena will be just as strong. ”

“Our mother is also a wolf shifter. Athena is a human. Maplewood and his people get a hold of her, they would tear her to shreds just to get control of our territory.”

“Then train her as you have other human women. Don’t leave her defenseless. You

won't be alone in protecting her. You will have not only our family, but your team as well. We both know once Maplewood is dealt with, others will be too afraid to go up against you."

Draco knew what his sister said was right, but it didn't change his mind. "Maplewood is too dangerous, too unpredictable right now. I will not jeopardize her life to satisfy any lust I may feel for her."

"Damn, big brother. Never knew you to be a coward. Guess it's for the best. You can sit here in self-pity while she finds a semi-love life with someone else.

That's if Maplewood doesn't force her to wed him since her brother sold her to him.

As your mate, she would be protected by pack laws.

But you're too chickenshit. Thanks for leaving my best friend unprotected. "

Before Draco would say anything to her statement, Deidra stormed away angrily. He hated seeing the anger and the hurt in his baby sister's eyes, but he was saying firm on his stance.

But tonight, tonight he would give her just a little comfort and take a memory of her for himself. It was the least that he could do for her, since he wouldn't be able to do anything else once tomorrow came.

Opening his bedroom door just a smidge, he disrobed quickly and quietly. Once he'd placed his clothes on the bathroom counter, he shifted.

Using his nose, he pushed the bedroom door open enough to squeeze his large wolf frame through the door. Once inside, he used his nose to close the door quietly before allowing his eyes to adjust to the darkness.

Moving toward the bed, Draco jumped up and inched his way toward the sleeping form who whimpered in her sleep. Once he was next to Athena, at her back, he leaned over her form to sniff her slightly before licking the side of her face.

Satisfying himself with just that, he laid down, lining his body up to her back, he stretched out, leaning his large frame toward her, laying his head on his paws just before closing his eyes. No sooner had he closed his eyes, he'd been startled awake.

Athena had rolled over in her sleep and wrapped her arm around him, snuggling her face into his fur. Once she'd relaxed, her sniffing had ceased, and she fell into a deep sleep, her arm around him and her breath ruffling his fur.

"I'm so sorry I failed you, Shadow. I'm sorry they hurt you like they did. I miss you so much. Love you."

Draco couldn't help the whine that came from his throat. She blamed herself for what happened to her pet.

"Now I've lost you for good. It's all my fault because I refused that asshole.

My father doesn't want me. My mother hates me.

My brother despises me. The things I love always get destroyed.

I need to move far, far away to protect Deidra and her family.

They will hurt them to force me to marry him.

Maybe if I do, they will leave this family alone. "

Draco growled low in his throat at her words. Like hell she would do either of those

things.

He pressed his nose into her neck and whined, making her squeeze closer to him. When she drifted back to a deep sleep, he licked her face once more before relaxing himself.

Now he had to figure out how to keep her safe as well. She was not sacrificing herself to save his family, or herself.

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Chapter

Eight

Athena woke up when the sun came through the window and shone into her face. Stretching the kinks out of her body, she looked toward the door to find it slightly ajar.

Looking up at the ceiling, she replayed the weird dream she had last night. Her beautiful pup, Shadow, had come to her in his adult form and curled up next to her during the night.

She talked to him like she did when he was a puppy and would curl up next to her at bedtime. Just like he did then, he would whine a little as if he was talking to her then lick her cheeks.

With that memory in her mind, she was able to relax with the knowledge that he was never forgotten or gone from her. He was with her always.

Now she needed to refortify her fortress so that she could go back to her house and assess the damage that was left behind. She knew she needed new dishes, groceries, pots and pans, well...everything.

She couldn't remember if she needed new appliances or anything else. She knew that every single penny she'd been saving for the last six years would officially be wiped completely out with fixing the house back to normal.

When she heard the knock on the bedroom door, she jumped slightly. Guess it was time to face the others.

“Come in,” Athena hoarsely told the knocker.

“Hey, bestie! Thought I heard you up moving around. Mom made breakfast for you. It’s your favorite.”

“Thank you. I-I don’t have any clean clothes,” Athena admitted, looking down at her hands. “I need to go shopping.”

“Got you taken care of. Here’s a bag with a pair of undies and a bra. Even got you some cute sandals to show off that smoking pedi we got yesterday.”

Athena couldn’t help but chuckle when Deidra wiggled her eyebrows. She always knew how to make her laugh in the bad moments.

Athena breathed deeply as she looked around the room she’s slept in multiple times. It had always been her favorite space when she stayed over for events she’d been invited to.

It wasn’t a large room to begin with. It held a full-size bed, with a headboard that was black and had round poles spaced out, two nightstands on either side of the bed, and a desk that held a lamp and a few books about the history of WW1 and WW2.

On both sides of the desk, that sat opposite the bed, stood two tall bookshelves that held books, trophies, and photos of Draco as a kid, a teenager, a track star, a football star, and a few of him in his military uniform throughout the years.

While the furniture in the room was black, the walls were painted darkish blue.

She always felt at peace in this room. Safe. She couldn't explain it.

"I didn't mean to keep your brother out of his room last night," she whispered softly.

"You didn't. He's staying at one of the hotels in town with the rest of his team. I get it, even if Mom and Dad would rather him be staying here."

"Yeah. I need to go by the house to look over the damage again. Then I need to go shopping, get a hotel room, and make some calls to get the house and car dealt with. I need to decide how to deal with Chris and Rob before they come after you and your family because of me..."

"One, your house is being dealt with as we speak. Two, same as your car. Three, before the welcome home party, Mom and I are taking you shopping. Draco and his team, along with my dad and my other brothers are at the house now taking care of what needs to be fixed. They are even adding a few things to the place to make it safer for you to be there if one of us aren't with you. "

Athena felt the tears starting to fill her eyes. These people were not her blood family. She's only known them for ten years and yet they have treated her as one of their own since day one.

"Dee, that's too much! I need to find out how much everything is to pay them back."

"You'll do no such thing, young lady. You are family.

Family takes care of each other," Katarina Blackwood proclaimed from the doorway.

"Now, breakfast is ready. Come eat, then get you a good shower. There are clothes in the bathroom for you to wear. Once you're ready, we will go by your house and see how the men are doing and what still needs to be gotten before we go shopping. "

Athena looked between the two women as the ears slid freely down her face. She's always been alone in her life.

Always! Even in the early stages of her friendship with Deidra, she held back out of fear.

"You s-still need to finish the prep for the party this evening," Athena stalled, trying to come up with more excuses.

"Already dealt with. The food is being catered. We got a party planner to help with a good portion of it. Stop stalling, young lady. Chop, chop."

Athena tried hard to hide the smirk but lost when Deidra quirked an eyebrow as if to say, "the queen has spoken". Shaking her head, she got out of the bed, put her hair in a bun and got breakfast.

Athena chose not to mention her dream about Shadow with Deidra. He came to her in her dreams to comfort her and show her that he was still there for her.

After making small talk with Deidra and her mother over breakfast, she went back upstairs and grabbed a quick shower.

Looking at the clothes that were left out for her, she decided to put her jeans from last night back on and the clean T-shirt that was obviously one of the brothers, due to the size.

She brushed out her hair and brushed her teeth, making herself as presentable as she could. Once she was ready, she took a deep breath and looked at herself in the mirror for a few minutes, mentally telling herself her daily morning affirmations.

Thirty minutes later, the three women were pulling into her driveway where there

were multiple cars surrounding her house in the street and yard. She noticed that her car was missing from its usual spot.

“Tony had the car towed to his garage. He’s getting the tires and windows replaced. The bodywork should be done within the next week. He’s having a loaner brought to you this evening at the party.”

“T-thank you. I appreciate everything you and your family are doing for me. I don’t know who would do...” Athena started but stopped when she caught sight of a shirtless Draco working on the front of her house along with two other shirtless males.

Lord have mercy that man was fine as hell. She wished she was as confident as Deidra was and knew how to flirt.

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Chapter

Nine

Draco woke up before the sun hit the horizon. Turning his head, he could tell that their positions didn't really change much through the night.

Athena had kept her face in his fur and an arm wrapped around him all night. What got him was the fact that for the first time since he was a kid, he'd managed to sleep uninterrupted through the night.

Since high school, sleeping through the night was a luxury for him. The Army made it nearly impossible to sleep more than a couple of hours at most.

Slowly detangling himself from her arm that was wrapped around him, Draco gave her one last look, lightly rubbing his nose along her cheek before giving her a swipe of his tongue.

After jumping down off the bed, he stretched his large frame before shifting back into his human form to open the bedroom door.

When he walked into the kitchen after a hot shower and a change of clothes, he saw his mother there putting food on a couple of plates. When he looked over at the dining room, he saw his father and all three of his brothers, as well as Leo sitting at the dining room table.

"You're all up early," Draco mused as he gave his mother a kiss on her cheek.

“Your father and I are always up this early. By the looks of you and Leo, I would say the same for you both. As for your brothers, maybe.”

“Here, let me help you with everything.”

Draco helped his mother carry plates into the dining area as she set them in front of everyone. Once the plates were passed out, she went about pouring drinks.

“Love, sit and eat. These boys are old enough to pour their own drinks.” Coren Blackwood lightly touched his wife’s arm, stilling her movements.

Draco watched the exchange with his parents and had to fight the jealousy that was rearing its ugly head at the gentle ease they had with one another. His parents were fated mates.

Two halves who found their whole. Something all shifters dreamed of finding, except him.

Finding your fated mate was a fifty-fifty chance for most shifters. Yet, in his mind, as an alpha, a liability.

To him, they left an alpha vulnerable to the enemy. If they really wanted to bring a pack leader to his knees, they only needed to go after the fated mates.

Fated mates have a bond so strong, that if they are harmed, it can render the alpha useless too. Something he could not afford in this day or time.

Knowing the woman asleep in his childhood bed was his fated mate, was going to be his ultimate weakness. He was already losing his legendary control when it came to the people he trusted with his life being around her.

Draco knew he had no choice but to reject her for her own safety. He would only choose a mate he could stomach touching long enough to have an heir for the future of their pack, once he had his heir, he wouldn't need her for anything else.

He would make sure Athena found her a man who would love her the way she deserved. The way he would not be able to because of his position.

“How are you handling things today?” Tony asked, bringing Draco out of his thoughts.

“I want to personally assess the damage to her home. I have Billings and his crew meeting us there first thing this morning. Between all of us, and his team, we can have her house and garage repaired by the end of this weekend. Your mother and Deidra are going to take her shopping for new furniture and clothes when she wakes up.”

Draco nodded at his father in approval. “I will be having my team meeting us there as well. I will be putting in a security system around her home, garage, and the property itself. It will be looped into us as well, until we deal with her threat. I'm also assigning Shades and Arrow as her personal security until then as well.”

“You all know she will fight this, right?” Ray questioned, looking around at everyone.

“What do you know about her family?” Leo asked, looking between Draco's parents and his three brothers.

“Her father is unknown. He left when she was young. Her mother and brother have verbally and physically assaulted her throughout her life. She went to college on a full scholarship yet worked a full-time job while studying. She and Deidra met their freshman year when someone attempted to sexually assault Athena. Your sister

intervened. She's slowly come out of her shell since then.

Her brother is an asshole who feels that she is supposed to support him and their mother, shows up now and then to demand money.

You already know about the puppy we got her last year. ”

Draco listened to his mother relay what she knew about Athena. He had two names added to his list now.

“What about Rob Maplewood? Athena mentioned she was refusing his marriage proposal...” Leo pressed on, leaning forward.

“Marriage proposal my ass. Her mother and brother sold her to that asshole. Deidra and I told her as long as she stays in Blackwood County, the Maples nor her mother or brother could enforce their bullshit. That fool only wants to torture her while he forces himself up on her. They don't believe a human can breed a powerful alpha.

That whole lot are fucking useless wastes of space.

Any wolf would be lucky as hell to have that young woman as their mate. ”

“At the risk of getting maimed, how could an alpha and a human female make a powerful shifter alpha?” Leo hesitantly asked.

“When the human female gets her fated mate mark, her body changes. She's stronger, healthier, and better than a regular human.

While she doesn't turn into a shifter, she is more like us than not.

Her ability to hear and see is stronger, her speed is faster, she can talk mentally to her mate and bear strong alphas.

She can also live longer, like wolves do. ”

“I still don’t get how the half human alpha is stronger than full shifter alpha,” Leo admitted, scratching his head.

“What about our healing abilities? Can they heal like us if they get hurt?” Tony asked, rubbing his chin.

“Yes, they have all of our abilities but the shifting part. My father, grandfather, his father, and his father before him all believed it was a gene the Goddess gave the human female, as long as she was with her true fated mate.” Coren smiled over at his wife.

“How do you know this? Mom’s a shifter like the rest of us,” Draco asked, looking at his father in confusion.

“No, son. I’m not. I’m human like Athena is.”

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Chapter

Ten

Draco left breakfast and headed to the hotel to meet with his team with his head swimming after the news his father told them. It didn't change his mind about claiming Athena either way.

Once he'd managed to get all of his team together, minus Leo who was headed to Athena's house with his dad and brothers, he managed to relax back into the zone. Work was his comfort zone.

This is what he knew. Control and command.

He had to be in control at all times. He didn't think Athena could handle his dark side.

The side that had no problems taking a life when the need was called for. The side that enjoyed the hunt before the kill just as much.

The darkness in him would swallow her light and leave her a shell of who she was now. His family would wind up hating him.

"How is she this morning, bossman?" Case asked as he came into the room followed by the rest of his team.

"When I left the house this morning, she was resting."

“What happened last night? Thought we didn’t have to be anywhere until later this evening,” Jasper “Hawk” Hawkins pointed out.

Draco rubbed the back of his neck in a clear sign of frustration. They were hitting the ground running in no time.

“Change of plans, Hawk. Shades, you and Arrow will be on protection detail. The rest of you will be on perimeter. Leo and I will be dealing with the ring leaders personally.”

“Whatcha need me to grab boss?” Case pulled out his notepad that he always had on him.

“Motion sensors, cameras, audio, the works. I want cameras on her doorways, garage, and around the perimeter. I want them invisible, too,” Draco ordered, pacing the room.

“Who are we protecting?” Jessica “Shades” Shade asked, pulling out her notepad.

“Athena Chapman. She’s my sister’s best friend and a human. Her home was vandalized last night after an incident at The Hen. It’s looking like her brother and the fucker he sold her to, which is also a rival pack, the Maplewoods.”

“Does her brother know they are shifters?” Case asked looking up from his notes.

“I believe he does know the Maplewoods are wolf shifters. I also believe the fuckers are sadistic to string the SOB along, thinking they can make him one of us, hence why he sold her to be used and abused. Athena publicly rejected Maplewood and his claim on her before attempting to feed him his teeth.” Draco couldn’t help chuckle at that memory.

“While she felt the pain, her rejecting him, then punching him his face was a beautiful sight to see.” Case chuckled along with Draco.

“So, we’re babysitting a human with close ties to your sister.”

Draco’s sharp, angry eyes met Shades, daring her to comment further. Daring her to make a snide remark about Athena.

He knew that Shades harbored feelings for him. Hoping that he’d one day lower his iron clad shields for her.

But that was never going to happen. While she lusted after him, she bed hopped between Case, Townie, Tuck, or whatever guy she picked up at a local bar.

Draco has never touched the woman, despite her attempts. She wasn’t his type.

She was a damn good operative, which is why she was on his team. He had no problems firing her if she became a problem.

“If you have a problem, then you know where the door is. This is no different than any other human we’ve protected because of a shifter targeting them,” Draco warned, putting more ice than usual in his voice.

“No problem. Just trying to understand the dynamics since the whole team is on her protection detail, which is not something that normally is done,” Shades fired back, staring him down.

“She is important to my family, therefore important for me to protect. That is all you need to know. Our job descriptions have not changed. Just our location,” Draco told his group, staring Shades down again.

“On it, boss.” Hawk clapped his hands together before rubbing them in eagerness. “When do we get started?”

“Now. Shades and Arrow will be introduced to Athena at the family event this afternoon. Before the event, it will be all hands on deck at her place, making it livable again. Apparently, after the incident at the bar, they gathered a group that went to wreck her house just shy of demolishing it completely. While we are fixing things, I want cameras and audio put in, that way if I need to pull someone, she’s still protected.

Case, you and Hawk reach out to Leo, he’s there now and he’ll tell you exactly what all is needed for outside. I’ll deal with inside personally.”

Draco and his team loaded up everything they needed and headed to Athena’s house. On the way there, he made a phone call to an old friend and made a request that made him think fate was on his side at least once.

While his team worked on everything with the garage, and the perimeter, he and Leo worked with his father and brothers on the house. After an hour, everyone had their shirts off due to sweating like crazy.

Three hours in, they nearly had every hole patched in, walls repainted, and an order in for all the new appliances she would need. He was debating about her furniture when his father walked over wiping sweat from his forehead.

“Only thing left is her furniture. We’ve ordered the appliances, which will be delivered here tomorrow. Your mother and Deidra are taking her shopping today for that and other necessities.”

“Good. I have something coming in for her that will be here during the festivities. Knew the guy during my time at Fort Bragg. Damn good at what he does.”

Draco turned to assist Ray and Tony with the gutters in front of the house when he heard a car pull into the driveway. When he turned to see who it was, his cock went steel hard at the sight of her eyes going dark staring at him.

Chapter

Eleven

Athena watched as Draco slowly turned around toward her and stared for several minutes. God, she wished she was as bold as Deidra at the moment.

She'd walk right up to that man and go to her toes and kiss the hell out of him. But she didn't have Deidra's courage or boldness.

"You're drooling, chick. Better be over Draco and not the others."

Athena turned to glare at her best friend.

"For starters, I'm single. I'm not even your brother's type.

He probably prefers hot models who bat their lashes and eat nothing but salads.

Sorry, but I'm not for soft men. And since I'm single, I can look, drool, and dream at any man standing here, except your dad.

I just can't touch them. Especially when I'm getting ideas for my own spank bank thank you very fucking much. "

"Look all you want, beautiful. I'd happily give you ideas for that spank bank of yours. I'm definitely not a soft man," Leo purred behind her, winking at her when she whirled around in horror.

Her horror only intensified when she realized Draco and two other men she'd never met were also standing there. Dear God, let the Earth swallow her ass up whole.

"I'll second Leo's statement..." Jasper "Hawk" Hawkins winked at her. "I'm Hawk. I work with these lugnuts."

"H-hi. I'm Athena," she stuttered, staring at the hot as hell man.

"Hello, beautiful. I'm Luke. But you can call me Tuck. Whichever you prefer." Luke "Tuck" Tucker stepped forward, taking her hand into his and kissing it.

The small group turned toward Draco when they heard a low growl rumbling from his direction. She couldn't help but look at everyone in confusion when they all turned to look at him and smirk.

"Umm, I just came by to make a list of everything I need to get while we are out. D-Draco, you can have your room back tonight. I plan on getting a hotel room in town until the house and garage are done."

"No. I am at the hotel in town with my team. Keep the room until everything is done. Your new appliances will be here on Monday morning as well as your new furniture. If you don't like anything, let Mom or Dee know and we will trade it out for something that you do like."

"Are you always this bossy?" Athena fired back, her hands on her hips as she glared at Draco.

She nearly faltered her stance when the infuriating man stepped toward her, towering over her. God, she wanted to climb that fucking man like a monkey and have her way with him.

“You have no idea, little one. Now, be a good girl and go make your list. Stay at my parents so that we can get this done and keep you safe.”

“Who’s keeping you and your family safe from my dangers? I can handle it. I’ve been dealing with it longer than any of you have,” Athena challenged as she stepped closer to Draco.

“Now, it’s time to let us help you. I can handle myself, little one. My team and my brothers have my back. We all have yours.”

Athena continued to stare into Draco’s eyes, losing visual of those around her. She was afraid of trusting them.

Trusting them left her open. Vulnerable. It also made them targets. Even dead.

“I’m not a child, so stop calling me little one.” Athena glared at him.

She felt the need to push him away with her anger. Keeping them all safe by distancing herself was her best bet.

“Never said you were. But compared to my size, or my brother’s, you’re small,” Draco said softly as he brushed her hair off of her forehead.

“Jesus Christ. Just fuck her already so we can move on.”

Athena startled at the female voice that sounded harsh. She quickly backed away from the infuriating man and walked away.

She walked as quickly as she could into the house and looked around at what had already been repaired. She pulled out the notebook she had and started writing all she would need.

She was in the bedroom when she felt his presence nearby in the doorway, hovering. She continued to ignore him.

“I’m sorry for Shades. She’s never learned how manners worked, sadly.”

“No biggie. I know to stay away from her and the rest of you since that seems to be her territory,” Athena quipped, moving toward her bathroom.

“She’s a teammate. One of my employees. Nothing more. She doesn’t own any of us. Especially me.”

Athena turned to look at Draco for several minutes before shaking her head at him. “Does she know that? You know what? Not my circus, not my monkeys. What you do and with whom is none of my business. Just like what I do and with whom is none of yours.”

She turned away and continued into her ensuite bathroom, turning on the light as she looked around. When Draco stepped into the bathroom, the room suddenly became crowded as hell.

She nearly squealed out when he gripped her arm and jerked her around to face him. His eyes had gone dark and dangerous.

“I have never touched her or Arrow.”

“I don’t care, Draco. I’m not some little girl crushing on you. I am out of your league. I’m not stupid enough to even wish I was in your league.”

“And who is?”

“Definitely not me. Men like you go for the skinny girls. Girls who are hot as hell.

Models. I'm definitely not a model."

Athena didn't know what hit her when Draco's hand encased her throat, while his other hand gripped her ponytail. She couldn't help the gasp that sounded at his touch, which sent her body into overdrive.

"Whose shirt are you wearing?"

"Huh?" She looked at him in confusion.

"Whose...fucking...shirt...are...you...wearing?"

When Draco growled out each word, her entire body lit up. Her nipples tightened, her eyes dilated, and even her pussy clenched, sending her senses into overdrive.

"I-I don't know. It was one Deidra had put in the bathroom along with a pair of sweatpants for me to wear after I got out of the shower this morning."

As soon as she got the words out, Draco's mouth was on hers, devouring her whimpers. When his tongue swept into her mouth, her whole body melted into his.

She never heard the rip of the shirt as he expertly kissed her like he was a man dying of thirst. When she felt the hand leave her throat and encase her breast instead, her pussy wept from the touch.

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Chapter

Twelve

Draco didn't know what came over him. Something about this woman made him lose all common sense when he was around her.

After tearing into Shades when she made the snide remark outside when he saw the hurt in Athena's eyes, it made him furious. He took her off of Athena's detail and assigned her to grunt work.

Case happily took over for Shades, his own anger at the woman evident. When Athena rushed away, he realized she was in one of his brother's shirts, and his wolf demanded he go after her.

Her snark toward him always turned him on, more than any woman has ever done before. Mentally, he knew he needed to stay away from her.

Physically was another story. Being around her made his entire body come alive in ways it has never done before.

Even his wolf was reacting in ways he's never reacted before. He was demanding that Draco claim her in front of everyone.

Mark her! Usually, he would just turn his back on him when he slated his lust for little with whoever he'd selected at the time.

Even worse...his cock got rock fucking hard whenever she's nearby. Something else that's never happened to him before.

Not even as a teenager, and he had been a horny fucker even then. He needed to put distance between them.

That's what he kept telling himself. Until he smelled his brother's scent on her.

Everything went to hell in a handbasket once his mouth tasted hers, it was game over then.

He was a man thirsty for the taste of her. He couldn't get enough of her.

He didn't even think when he shredded his brother's shirt from her body. He just knew he wanted the offensive garment gone.

Gripping her hips, he lifted her onto the counter of her bathroom vanity and cupped her breasts. Fuck him, her breasts filled his large hands and then some.

Breaking the kiss, his mouth went straight to her luscious breast and feasted. His cock was going to have zipper imprints from how fucking hard he was.

The smell of her arousal and the whimper she made drove him insane. It made him wonder about the sounds she would make as he fucked into her pussy.

Draco groaned when he felt her hands dug into his scalp as he nibbled and sucked on her nipple in his mouth. He was like a kid in a candy store feasting on her.

"Athena?"

Draco let out a low growl at the voice saying her name. A voice that had no business

saying her name.

“Athena?”

“Oh, God! Y-yes?”

“Mom and Dee are looking for you. I wanted to make sure you were okay. They are ready to go when you are.”

“Thank you, Tony. I’ll be out in a minute.”

Draco backed away from Athena, forcing himself to let her go. He and his wolf were fighting for control.

“My...my shirt. It’s ripped,” Athena murmured, her voice wavering as she looked down.

Draco couldn’t help the smirk that came to his lips. Without thinking, he took the one he’d put on just before coming back into the house in search of her off of him and handed it to her.

“Now you’re without a shirt,” Athena pointed out to him.

“I have another in my go bag in my vehicle.”

“Go bag?”

Draco chuckled at the curiosity in her voice as she put his shirt on.

“It’s a military term. A bag we keep in case we are out and about and get called to do a mission A.S.A.P.

Law enforcement also uses the term. I guess another way to put it is a bag that's ready in case you need to leave quickly.

Domestic survivors use it as a term for bags they have ready in case their abusers find them, and they need to leave town in a hurry.

Mostly clothes, items of importance like paperwork, money, and new IDs. Depending on the situation."

"Oh, that makes sense. I better get out of here before they come in here looking for me."

Draco watched as Athena opened the door and peeked out before exiting the bathroom. Once she was gone, he closed and locked the door.

He unzipped his jeans and took his unruly cock in hand, stroking. With a tight grip, he stroked himself as he remembered how she sounded with his mouth on her breasts.

The way her eyes glazed over in desire as he teased her nipples. The way she gripped his head to keep him attached to her had him gripping the counter tight.

"Hey, Draco. You in there?" Leo yelled out.

"What?" Draco seethed through his teeth.

"We need you in the living room. Townie and Arrow found a couple of things that we need to talk to you about."

Fuck! Draco groaned, realizing he wasn't going to get the release he so desperately needed right now.

Draco pulled himself together as best as he could. He splashed some cold water on his face to cool down and counted to fifteen before opening the bathroom door.

“Missing a shirt?” Leo smirked from where he leaned against the doorway.

“What did you find?” Draco ignored Leo’s stare.

“Looks like your girl is being watched. We found a few cameras in the house. Townie and Arrow found a couple around the property and the garage. Tony said his guy just called him to let him know they found a tracker on her car.”

Draco saw red. They have been watching her every move.

“Where in the house?”

“Living room, front doorway, her bedroom, and her bathroom facing the shower.”

“Have you removed all of them?” Draco questioned, already knowing the answer.

“Yes. All have been removed. We did that when we were scouting the best locations to put ours. We’ve even added several extras just to be safe. Once they know we’ve found them, shit will hit the fan, boss,” Leo warned him as he rubbed the back of his nape.

“Good. We’ll be ready when it does.”

Chapter

Thirteen

Athena fiddled with the sundress that Deidra and her mother both insisted she get and wear for the party this evening. She rarely wore dresses, much less heels with how clumsy she was in normal shoes.

The day got away from them while they were out shopping. They took her to several stores for clothes, shoes, undergarments, and her toiletries.

She nearly passed out in embarrassment when Deidra and her mother took her to a lingerie shop and had her try on a few pieces. When they finally left the store, the two women walked out with three bags each, yet all six bags were for her.

When they stopped back by the house to put all the items away, her house and garage were finished with repairs. What had the tears in her eyes was the fact that not only were all her appliances replaced, but all her furniture as well.

She'd taken a quick shower and put on the undergarments, dress, and shoes they had begged her to wear. She'd also let Deidra and her mother do her hair and makeup.

"Why am I dressed up again? This party isn't for me," Athena huffed out as she glared at Deidra.

"Because there will be hot single men there, and I'm showing my bestie off."

“Why are we friends again? These people already know me, Dee. The dress and makeup won’t make a difference.”

“Trust me, it will. Have I ever steered you wrong?”

“The Kappa Li Au party our freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. The Delta Ka Li parties, all four years. And let’s not forget the two other parties I didn’t want to go to, but you dragged me too as well.”

“Oh, please. You had fun at those, and you know it.” Deidra waved her statement off.

“Live a little. Have fun. Let your hair down. Enjoy the party. Just because it’s a welcome home party for Draco and Leo and their team, doesn’t mean we can’t have fun and laugh a little.

If anyone deserves it right now, it’s you.

Don’t let anyone know how much this has hurt you. ”

“You’re a pain in my ass! You’re lucky I love your crazy ass, damn it.”

Athena let out a heavy sigh. Deidra was right, she deserved to live just a little.

Following Deidra out of the house, she laughed with her best friend as they joked with each other over silly things they tended to talk about. She never saw Draco nearly stumble as he walked with Leo or the fact Leo had to smack his back when he choked on his drink.

Athena was oblivious to her beauty or the men who attempted to flirt with her. Her life had always been about escaping her family and her job.

Maybe that's why she and Deidra got along so well. Deidra knew how to life her up and make her feel like she was worth it for someone.

“Thank you everyone for coming this evening. Today we celebrate, not only the return of Draco and Leo, along with their team following them, but a new generation that will be taking over as our Alpha and Beta. Draco has accepted his role as Alpha of the Blackwood pack and community, while Leo has accepted his role as the Beta. We have also agreed to merge Blackwood Financing with Blackwood Security. Congratulations son and Leo. Welcome home!” Coren announced to everyone gathered around them.

Athena joined in the cheers with everyone else even though she didn't know what it all meant. She figured with Deidra excited about her big brother being home, that was a good enough reason to cheer.

After Draco and Leo gave a small speech, thanking their parents for welcoming them home, they introduced their teammates to everyone. Once that was done, the official party started.

A few of the kids she had in her class now and through the years came up to say hi and talk to her, along with their parents. The parents checked on her since they had heard about what happened to her house and car.

When they walked away, the moms and kids would hug her, and the Dads shook her hand. She loved her school and the kids she got to work with every day.

The biggest thing was how small their community was, so she got to see her former students grow into the intelligent individuals she knew them to be. Many of her former students kept in touch with her.

When she had a moment, she let Deidra and her mother know that she was going into

the house to use the restroom. Before she could open the bathroom door when she was done, she heard voices outside.

“What the fuck are you doing, Shades?” a female voice asked harshly.

“What I’ve wanted to do for years. He’s going to be mine and some two-bit fat bitch isn’t getting in my way just because she’s the boss’s sister’s best friend. I will fuck him tonight and stake my claim.”

“It doesn’t work like that, and you know it. You’re going to get into serious trouble.”

“Only if this doesn’t work. But I know it will. Come on, let’s go. I need to find out what he’s drinking.”

Athena sagged against the wall in the bathroom and counted to twenty. She was afraid to go out there now.

When she finally opened the door to the bathroom, Deidra was about to knock. “Oh, hi.”

“Hey, you, okay?”

“Y-yeah. What’s up? Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t mean to hog the bathroom.”

“You didn’t. Draco and Leo are looking for you.”

“Why? Is Draco okay?”

“Yeah, he has something for you.”

Athena looked at Deidra in confusion. “Oh. Why or should I even ask?”

“Nope. Let’s go.”

“Wait!”

When Deidra turned around, Athena looked around them before she stepped closer to her best friend and told her what she overheard.

“That fucking bitch. Let’s go.”

Athena had to walk fast to keep up with Deidra. When they got to where Draco and his friends stood, she watched in horror as Shades handed Draco a drink and smiled at him.

Chapter

Fourteen

Athena's heart skipped several beats when she saw Draco take the drink. She honestly didn't know how to respond with everything she knew without making an ass out of herself.

Before she could say anything, Deidra walked up to the woman and punched her in the face, knocking her to the ground. Pandemonium broke out.

"Don't drink that!" Athena shouted as she knocked the drink out of his hands and stepped in front of him.

"What the fuck is going on?" Draco yelled out, making everyone go still and look his way.

"S-she is trying to drug you or something. Trying to get you under the influence so she could get you to have sex with her. And something about claiming you so you would have to claim her. Whatever that means."

Athena wanted to fall to her knees and bow her head in compliance when Draco turned his dark angry eyes toward her. Why she felt that way she had no fucking clue.

"She's lying. I would never do that!" Shades screamed as she lunged toward Athena.

"Enough!" Draco yelled at Shades before turning his eyes back to Athena.

Well, shit. Now she was in serious trouble.

It wouldn't matter if Deidra believed her or not. It would be up to Draco what happened to her now.

"She's telling the truth. Arrow had come to me about Shades' plans," Leo confessed, joining the group, moving next to her.

"I know she's telling the truth. What has me upset is she put herself in harm's way as my sister and a traitor fought," Draco seethed without taking his eyes off of her.

"Bite me, asshat. Excuse me for my lame attempt at protecting you. I forgot, I'm a weak two-bit, fat bitch. At least according to your fucking team. You know what, I'm out of here. Deidra, call me after the party. I'm getting an Uber and going home."

"Don't you dare," Draco growled darkly toward her.

She had no clue what came over her, but she turned toward Draco and flipped both of her middle fingers up at him then walked away. She fought the urge to turn back around when she heard his deep chuckle.

When she heard Deidra shout her name in fear, she whirled around to find a giant dog jumping into the air at her with its massive jaw opened. Reacting, she jumped to the side, twisting her upper torso as she shoved the animal away from her as she fell from the impact.

When the giant dog stood up, it shook its head then turned her way, growling at her as it prowled toward her. Before she could react, a giant black dog attacked the one stalking her.

She was barely aware of Deidra, Leo, Coren, Katarina, Tony, and Ray running

toward her and pulling her away from the fray. She tried to look around them at what was happening, but they did their best to block her view.

When the other dog stopped moving, the large black one turned toward her as if to study her. To make sure she was okay.

When it advanced toward her, she stepped slightly back toward Leo, whose hand touched her arm. When the large black animal growled and snapped at Leo, she reacted and smacked the animal's large snout.

"Don't you dare snap at him because he's helping me. Just because you saved me from the mean dog doesn't give you the right to be rude."

When the animal tilted its head, she could see behind him and froze. Where once a large animal had laid, now lay a naked woman's body.

W...T...F? Was she in a dream or was this a nightmare?

"Oh, shit."

"You see it, too?" Athena turned toward Deidra.

"You weren't supposed to find out like this, little one."

Athena whirled back around and nearly swallowed her tongue. A naked Draco stood before her where the huge black dog...holy shit, a wolf, had been sitting.

"Shifters are real?" Athena asked in shock, looking around her.

"Yeah." Deidra sighed heavily as she shifted from foot to foot.

“Oh, God.” Athena’s flight mode kicked in as she thought of something that had been said to her recently.

Now it all made sense. So many things she’d been confused about.

She’d always put it down as her being an outsider. Boy was she an outsider.

“Thena...”

“No!” Athena backed away from Deidra, her hands in the air.

Athena looked around at Deidra’s parents, the tears welling up in her eyes. She realized then that had hurt worse than her best friend having lied to her all these years.

With one last look around her, she ran away from the group. When she got to the road, she remembered she had no car.

“Come, I’ll take you home. And answer any questions you have.”

Athena turned to see Deidra’s father coming her way with a weary smile. All she could do was nod to keep the tears at bay.

The ride back to her house was made in silence. She had so many questions, yet wasn’t sure who she could trust to ask them to right now.

When they pulled into her driveway, Coren turned the car off and turned her way. Her heart was breaking at the loss of someone she looked up to so much.

“I’m sorry you had to find out this way, Athena. This wasn’t how you were supposed to find out. Deidra wanted to tell you so many times, but our laws prohibit that.”

Athena looked at the man in confusion. “If it is your law, why not amend it? Ten years, Mr. Blackwood. Was I not a good enough friend to Deidra in those ten years? Or is it because I’m weak and have a horrible background?”

“Ah, sweetheart, if it had truly been my law, it would have been broken for you years ago. Let me ask you this, can I have Deidra, my wife, and Draco come over and we can answer any and all questions that you have. I can also explain why that particular law isn’t mine to break without repercussions. ”

Athena stared at the man for a few moments, seeing the sincerity in his eyes. “Okay.”

Chapter

Fifteen

Athena went into her bedroom to change out of her sundress into a pair of sweatpants and a T-shirt, before putting her hair into a ponytail. When she came out, everyone was already there.

“I’m so, so sorry, Athena. I wanted to tell you so many times, but I couldn’t. Please forgive me?” Deidra begged, tears streaming down her face, obviously fighting her natural urge to come to her.

“Was I joke to everyone? The poor, pathetic human who was clueless?”

“Never!” Deidra and her parents answered at the same time.

“Sit, Athena, and I will explain our shifter laws I told you about that didn’t allow us to tell you about our kind.”

Athena sat down on the love seat that was facing the large couch Coren, Katarina, and Deidra were sitting on. Draco sat on the chair that was off to the side.

“Okay.” She placed her hands in her lap and stared at her fingers.

“Look at me, little one. I want you to be able to see me telling you the truth,” Draco ordered softly as he sat forward.

When Athena looked up at Draco's order, she had to fight the glare she wanted to send his way. She wanted to punch him when he smirked at her.

"Dad said he mentioned one of our laws to you earlier. This law predates even us. It was made by the Shifter Council, generations ago. While I am now the Blackwood Pack Alpha, each pack has its own leader. As pack leaders, we answer to a higher Council. As shifters, we have several rules or laws as we call them, that have to be obeyed, or we have to answer to the Council."

"Such as?" Athena asked looking at each of them for a few seconds.

"We can't shift or talk about shifting in front of humans who don't know about us," Deidra murmured, her eyes begging Athena for forgiveness.

"But how are we to find out?" Athena asked, challenging them with a look at the men at the same time as she showed confusion in her eyes.

"Usually when they wind up in a relationship with one, or when something like today happens."

"What happens if your Council finds out that I now know about you and how it happened?"

"Being one hundred percent honest, it depends on the situation in which it happened as well as the Alpha in the location it happened. Like the humans, who have homeless people or those off of the grid, we have what we call rogues. They don't adhere to the laws or a pack Alpha's rule.

If one of those cross paths with a human, then nine times out of ten that human is going to be killed by the rogue. "

“The people at the party?”

“Most are shifters, yes. I’m human, like you are. Coren is my true fated mate. There were other humans there with their fated mates. Male and female,” Katarina answered, smiling softly at her.

“Fated mates?”

“The ones that fate meant for us to be with. A rare pairing, in all honesty. Because of that, fated mates are protected by the Council. If another shifter kidnaps or harms, even kills a fated mate, the surviving mate is protected when they avenge their mate’s harm or death.”

“Oh. What if a person is mated to someone else that’s not their fated mate, then they wind up meeting their fated mate?”

“That’s up to the ones mated,” Draco answered matter of factly.

“They can choose to accept who fate made for them or reject it. If they choose their fated mate, the one they left behind cannot intervene,” Coren answered fully.

“So, what now? What happens to me?”

“Do you hate me?” Deidra asked, moving to the love seat hesitantly.

“No! I could never hate you, Dee. I get it now. You’re bound by rules that protect you.

I’m hurt because I feel like you should have trusted me with that information as long as we’ve been friends.

I would never betray you or your family's secret.

Especially those here in Blackwood. It will just take me a little to get past that hurt, despite my understanding. ”

“I get it. You're my best friend, Athena. My soul sister. I don't want to lose you.”

“You won't. I just need a couple of days to adjust.”

“She's had a lot thrown at her, Dee. Her house being destroyed, a she-wolf who wanted her dead, and finding out about us. She's not going anywhere.”

“I promise, Dee. I will call you in a couple of days.”

Athena wrapped her arms around her best friend and held on for several minutes. She never could stay mad at the woman for long.

“You guys go home. I'm staying the night. I'm going to do a perimeter once you leave,” Draco told his family, hugging his mother and sister.

“Um, excuse me, don't I have a say in this?”

“No. Arrow will be here tomorrow. She and Leo are dealing with Shades' body. You have someone after you the way they destroyed your house. I'll sleep on the couch. Your safety comes first.”

“Bossy asshole. I would say that is probably an Alpha requirement, but your dad has always been nice. So, I think it's just one of your traits.”

“As long as you listen when I give an order in regard to your safety, then we will be good.” Draco smirked as he winked at her.

“On that note, we are out.” Coren laughed as he stood up from the couch.

“Actually, Dad, there’s one more thing. Athena, now that you know about us, I can give you this warning.

Be careful around Rob Maplewood. You’re protected as long as you’re in Blackwood Pack territory.

If you need to leave for any reason, which you’ve not done since you’ve moved here, tell Dad or Draco so they can have someone with you.

Maplewood is dangerous where you are concerned,” Deidra pleaded with her.

She couldn’t understand the fear in her best friend’s eyes. Rob was just a two-bit thug who preyed on those he considered weaker than him.

“She’s right, Athena. Rob is also a shifter. He’s the son of the Maplewood Pack Alpha. They are not a good pack. They are dangerous. So, please let me or Draco know if you need to leave the territory so that we can protect you,” Coren pleaded with Athena.

“O-okay. I don’t see me needing to leave anytime soon, so no worries at the moment.”

“Mom, Dad, I’ll be out in a second. I’d like a minute alone with Athena,” Deidra requested, looking back at her parents and brother.

“Ugh! Girl talk.” Draco rolled his eyes. “I’m going to go start my perimeter search.”

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Chapter

Sixteen

Athena bit back her laughter when Draco's mother smacked him on the back of the head at his statement. It was funny to see his sheepish grin at his mom.

When the three left, she turned toward Deidra and waited for her to say something. Knowing Deidra, it could be anything.

"We are okay, right?"

"Yes, Dee. We are okay. I'm still in shock and disbelief, but I'm okay."

"Any questions you have that you couldn't ask in front of my parents?"

Athena had several but looked out of the window as she watched a large black animal...wolf walk around outside. Draco's wolf was fucking huge and black, like her Shadow was.

"I think, well, strongly believe you and Draco are fated mates. Mom does, too."

"W.T.H., Dee! He's...you all are shifters. I'm not. How could I be his mate? I mean, how would one even fuck a shifter? Dog form? Our kids?"

"For starters, he'd fuck you in his human form, since you are human. Especially since we are in human form more often than not anyway. Second, we aren't dogs. We are

wolves. Huge difference. Although Rob is a mangy dog wolf...same thing.”

“He shifted and killed one of his own. His teammate.”

“To save your life. You are an innocent. Something we have always protected. With Draco being an Alpha, his abilities are more powerful than regular wolves. Plus, if Mom and I are right, his wolf took control to protect you, his mate first and foremost.”

“He sniffed me. In front of everyone.”

“Well, you did smell nice with that perfume I had you spray on.”

Athena rolled her eyes at her bestie as she stood to pace. Her mind was whirling with everything and anything.

“We aren’t fated mates. He can’t stand me. He only tolerates me for your sake.”

“Oh, please. He looks at you like you’re Little Red Riding Hood and he’s the Big Bad Wolf.”

“He’s your brother!”

“So?”

“You just called him the Big Bad Wolf and me Little Red Riding Hood.”

“Seriously. Please. He’s hot. I know because that’s all I heard growing up from all the chicks he went to school with and then some.”

“He’s still your brother.”

“You know, shifters can elongate their tongues to eat you out better.” Deidra wiggled her eyebrows at her.

“Oh, my God, Deidra! You’re seriously talking to me about your brother eating me out?”

“Nope. I said shifters. Huge difference.”

“Go home before I change my mind.” Athena laughed, pushing her best friend to the door.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” Deidra wiggled her eyebrows at her again.

“That leaves the field wide open, if he’d been interested, since you’re not picky.”

“Hmm, we’ll see.” Deidra winked as she waved at her. “See you soon.”

Athena shook her head as she shut the door. She didn’t lock it since she knew Draco would be back in a few minutes.

She never in a million years believed that there was such a thing as shifters. Now she was wondering if there were lion, tiger, and bear shifters.

She was afraid to ask now. Shaking her head, Athena walked into the kitchen to pour herself a glass of much needed wine.

Hearing her door open then close, she assumed that it was Draco coming back into the house. She smiled to herself at the thought of the infuriating man in her home.

When she turned around to speak to him, she came face to face with her mother and brother glaring at her. Well, double shit!

“Mother. Chris. To what do I owe this displeasure?”

“Watch your tone with me, you little bitch! You embarrassed your brother and future husband yesterday. Time for you to atone for your mistakes,” Delilah Chapman demanded, slowly advancing on her.

“First, they embarrassed themselves. Second, Rob is not my future husband. Both you and Rob were all told that I didn’t consent to your bullshit. That is on you. Not me. You want to be a part of their family so badly, you marry him. Now, get the fuck out of my house.”

Athena had been so focused on her mother, she never saw her brother move from his spot until it was too late. When she heard a noise to her right, she whirled that way only to be punched in the mouth and knocked to the ground.

“Maybe losing a few of your teeth will shut that mouth. Rob doesn’t care if you have teeth or not anyway. He only cares about your holes he can fuck.”

“Let me make this clear, bitch.” Her mother kneeled down and gripped her hair tightly in her fists.

“If you don’t marry Rob, then I will make you watch as they not only wipe out the entire Blackwood family, but make you watch as they rape and mutilate your so-called best friend, her mother, and her sister.

I will make you watch as they torture their father and all of the brothers before they are dismembered and scattered to the four fucking winds.

You have one fucking week to say your goodbyes and show up in Maplewood territory or we will wipe the entire Blackwood pack off of the fucking planet. ”

“The Blackwoods would never allow you to get close enough to Dee or their mother. Their new Alpha is stronger than you think. Ask Chris. He’s already gotten his ass kicked by Draco once.” Athena smirked at her mother.

“Draco isn’t the Alpha, yet.” Chris laughed as he glared at Athena.

“Um, yes, he is. They had the official ceremony today. Sorry your invite got lost in the mail.”

“Bitch!” her mother screamed as she slapped Athena hard across the face.

All three froze when they heard a low growl coming from the entryway to the kitchen. When her mother and brother turned around, they saw the large black wolf baring his teeth in warning at them.

In pure Chapman fashion, well for Delilah and Chris, they fell over each other, trying to get up, ignoring the fact they were using her to do so.

Once both of them were up, Delilah pushed Chris toward the growling wolf as she jumped on the counter toward the large window to open it and escape out of it.

Chapter

Seventeen

Draco's wolf, Shadow, glared at the two individuals. He was pissed that they had gotten past his defenses.

He was adding more to the front so her mother and brother can't get through anymore. When he came into the kitchen slowly, he'd seen that they had hit Athena and knocked her down.

He didn't hear what the woman had said to her to put the fear in those beautiful green eyes, but he got the gist of it from her comments defending him and his family. He was dealing with them today.

Enough was enough. When the old woman pushed Athena's brother toward him, he attacked. He gripped Chris's arm in his massive jaw and drug him kicking and screaming out of the open back door and through the backyard into the woods behind her house.

If he'd had more time, he'd toy with the stupid fucker, but he needed to make his point and get back to Athena. No telling if they were alone.

Draco and his wolf were pissed off for not sniffing them out earlier. He should have been able to sniff their scent from a mile away.

Now he wanted to know what they had said to her before he got there to put the fear

of the goddess in her eyes. They will pay for that.

Draco and his wolf, Shadow, bit down harder on Chris's shoulder, making the fucker scream out in pain. When he got to the spot in the woods behind Athena's house, he let the asshole loose.

Once he dropped his prey on the ground, he shifted back to his human form and quickly dressed in his jeans as Chris cried from the pain on the ground. After getting his jeans on, Draco grabbed Chris by his hair and yanked him up, not caring if he was hurting him or not.

"I'm assuming you already know who and what we are, same as the Maplewoods, so let this be your last fucking warning.

Come near Athena again and I will end you on the spot.

Come back into my territory again, I will end you on the fucking spot.

Spread the word, Athena is off-limits to you, your mother, and the Maplewoods. "

"The Maplewoods will own you! They are going to tear you apart. Before they do that, they will force you to watch as they have their fun with your whore of a sister and that cunt my mother bore."

"They can try, but I promise you they will never get close enough to either of them. There's a reason I'm called a ghost, and it's not because I yell out boo.

Come to my territory again, and I will end every fucking one of you without blinking a fucking eye.

Athena is off fucking limits," Draco growled in Chris's face.

“She belongs to Rob. He bought her. She is his mate. What he wants, he gets. Fuck her fat ass all you want, but she will be Rob’s to fuck and sell in the end.”

Draco let out a rumble from his throat that had Chris pissing his pants. “The only reason I’m letting you live is to get the warning back to the Maplewoods. Next time I’ll send your carcass back to them in pieces.”

Stepping back, Draco let his hand grow claws before raking them across Chris’s chest, marking him. While Chris screamed in horror, Draco nodded at the figure in the woods.

“Drop him at the boarder of the Maplewood territory. They can deal with him from there.”

“Yes, sir. I got it from here. Mother escaped from the window and hauled ass out of there. Arrow has Athena now. She’s begging for us to find you. She’s afraid you’re walking into a trap.”

“They have threatened Dee and the rest of us. Get with the enforcers when you get back, up the patrols near the borders. Arrow will have day duty with Athena. I’ll be taking nights here until further notice.”

“You need us, yell. We have your back. Look, Draco, I know your stance on mates. I get it, but if it’s true, and she’s your fated mate, the only way to protect her is to claim her.

Then you’ll have the Council’s backing. Once the Maplewoods are dealt with, then you can sever the bond and let her go if you don’t want her.

Personally, I think you’d be a fucking idiot.

But that's just my opinion. Once you take out the Maplewood Pack, no one will fuck with you or your pack. ”

Draco glared at Tucker as he shrugged. He knew what the man said was true, but he knew if he claimed Athena, he would never be able to reject her.

Once, and if, he claimed her, their mating bond would take over and it wouldn't sate until she was carrying his pup. His parents would disown him for rejecting their bond then.

His siblings would castrate him with the help of Leo and the rest of his team. He would not risk it.

Instead, he would protect her while getting rid of the Maplewood Pack. Even then, she would remain under his protection as he watched her from afar.

“She will remain under our protection. I will not claim her.”

“Your brothers and sisters were right. You are a dumbass with fucked up ideas about fated mates. If she were mine, I wouldn't hesitate.

Your father said they make you stronger, better.

You're a damn good leader, generally, but a piss poor man and Alpha right now.

I'm taking this fucker to do as you asked. ”

Draco seethed as he watched his friend and teammate walk away. Like Leo, Tucker, Townie, Hawk, and Case always gave it to him straight. Arrow always rolled her eyes at him and would call him a dumbass.

That was what he loved about his team. They weren't kiss-asses and always let him know when he'd fucked up.

Some would call them insubordinate, but he preferred a team that could be heard and valued. He felt that made them a better soldier, a family who fought, bled, sweat, and cried together when called for.

Right now, he admitted insubordinate sounded about right. Fucking know-it-all.

Draco removed his jeans and shifted back into his wolf. Even that asshole was busy being a dick about it all.

"You don't claim our mate, I'll make sure your dick never works for another pussy again."

"It's too dangerous for us. And for her."

"That shaman worked for the cartel. Ever stop to think he told you that bullshit to throw you off of your game? I thought you were smarter than the others. Guess I was wrong."

Chapter

Eighteen

Athena woke up with a startled jump, gasping for air. She had been having nightmares for the last three days.

She's struggled to make it through work during those three days, barely maintaining a smile and interacting with people. During those three days, Dana, aka Arrow, was her constant shadow.

She would be there from the time Athena woke up, until the time she went to bed each night. She figured Draco was avoiding her, but for the life of her she couldn't figure out why.

Getting out of her bed after throwing the covers off of herself, she rubbed her face, trying to shake off the last of the nightmares from her mind. Her nightmares seemed to be on repeat, night after night.

The last several days have turned her world upside down. Before she could comprehend one thing, something else would shake her world even more.

Her own mother had sold her to her worst nightmare. Shifters were fucking real.

The hottest man on the fucking planet was her best friend's brother. They were all shifters.

Her mother and brother attacked her in her own home, after they had helped bad shifters destroy her home. Shifters were fucking real!

She wanted to fuck a certain shifter more than her next breath. But she wasn't his type, so that would stay a fantasy until the day she died.

Water. She needed to get a cold glass of water to cool her burning libido, and her heart at the rejection.

Going into the kitchen, she got herself a cold glass of water. She held the cold glass against her chest for a few seconds until she heard the voice behind her.

"Everything okay?"

Athena squeaked when she jumped, spilling the water down her front. "Shit."

Athena turned around to see a nearly naked Draco standing behind her with his dark hair sleep tousled. Not to mention he was standing there with just his boxers molded to his perfectly chiseled body.

Well, shit, that didn't work out and she highly doubted a cold shower would now. Guess she was going to have to get her rose out.

Best investment ever. She needed to remember to thank Dee for that toy later.

Draco's dark black hair looked tousled as if he'd just run his fingers through it, his chiseled, perfect chest with his six-pack abs, tattoos, and sleepy looking eyes that were as blue as the ocean.

She didn't know if that was the sexiest thing in the galaxy or if it was the fact he was the skintight boxers with his impressive package that was growing by the second.

Oh my! The things she wanted to do just from staring at him.

“Eyes up here, little one,” Draco ordered gruffly.

“W-what did you ask?” Athena stammered, embarrassment hitting her hot cheeks.

“I asked if you were okay.”

Athena looked up at Draco’s concerned eyes. Damn it, he looked exhausted.

Shit. She was disturbing his sleep that he obviously needed and here she was drooling over the damn man thinking of ways to jump his bones.

“Wait a minute...I thought Dana stayed the night too, since she was my shadow.”

“She’s with you during the day. At night, I’m here.”

“Why?” Athena forced herself to ask for some reason.

“Why what?”

Athena shook her head, it didn’t matter. She moved away from the counter to go around him.

She stopped when he reached out to touch her arm. “Why what, Athena? Everything okay?”

“Why are you here? Why do you care if I’m safe? I’m nothing to you but your sister’s friend.” Athena laughed as she threw out her hands. “You don’t even like me.”

“Why do you think that I don’t like you?”

Athena stared at Draco intently for several minutes. She shook her head and started to walk around him again.

“When I ask a question, I expect an answer,” Draco ordered, turning her around to face him, his eyes dark and assessing.

“You run the minute I walk into a room. You kissed me and nearly had me naked and now you can’t stand to be around me.

You know what, it doesn’t matter. I get it.

I’m not model material. I’m not beautiful or skinny and I have baggage.

Just have Dana stay here so you don’t have to.

You’re not obligated. Not like I could satisfy you if you had ever considered fucking me.

I think I’ll take Dee up on setting me up with the guys she suggested.

Maybe then I’ll know what it’s like to be fuck... ”

Athena never got to finish her tirade as Draco shoved her against the kitchen wall and crushed his lips to hers. She felt his hand go around her throat as he held her in place.

She gripped his waist, trying to hold on as he devoured her lips, stealing the air she breathed. She couldn’t stop the moan that escaped her lips.

When Draco broke the kiss and placed his forehead against hers as he breathed

heavily, she whimpered when he backed away. She wrapped her arms around herself.

“I shouldn’t have done that.” Draco ran his fingers through his hair.

“Okay.” Athena pushed off the wall and walked away.

“Athena...”

“No! Don’t. I get it. I’m not your type. Even for an hour. Just send Dana or one of the others. I’ll find someone who can stomach my presence or touch to help me get through my nightmares. Good night, Draco. I’ll be out of your hair in a couple of days.”

She made it as far as to the doorway to her bedroom when she felt Draco behind her. She gasped when she felt his hand on her arm as he spun her around.

“What do you mean you’ll be out of my hair in a few days?” Draco growled low as he got into her space.

“I’ve accepted an offer from an organization to go to Africa to teach children there. They work with doctors, nurses, teachers, and religious missionaries. I can ask Dana and Dee to help me find someone for one night before I...”

She didn’t get a chance to finish her sentence before Draco was backing her up toward her bed. Stalking her like a hungry wolf ready to pounce on its prey.

When the back of her knees hit her bed, she yelped as she stumbled. Before she could react, Draco shifted one of his hands into claws as he shredded her nightgown without leaving a mark on her body.

Chapter

Nineteen

Athena stood before Draco naked as the day she was born. She started to squirm when all he did was stare at her body, breathing heavily.

“On the bed. If I touch you right now, this will be over before it begins,” Draco ordered, his eyes roaming her body.

Athena awkwardly climbed onto the bed and laid down. She didn’t know what she was supposed to do.

“Hands gripping your pillow, bend your knees and spread your legs. Let me see my pussy.”

“Technically, it’s mine,” she sassed back.

“Tonight, it’s mine. Do as I say or I walk, Athena. Let’s get a few rules out of the way. I’m in charge. I tell you to do something, do it. I do something you don’t like, tell me. Are we clear?”

“Y-yes.”

“Yes, what?” Draco stared down at her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Good girl. Hands gripping your pillow and legs spread, now.”

Athena complied, shyly spreading her legs until Draco grabbed her knees and spread her legs further. She held her breath when he leaned down and smelled her pussy before swiping his tongue through her folds.

She tried to close her legs in embarrassment, but Draco gripped her thighs and rested his upper body on his elbows. Before she could say anything, he buried his face in her pussy and gorged himself, teasing, licking, nibbling, and drinking her juices as they flowed.

She closed her eyes as the sensations built inside her, sensations she's never known she could have. Athena gripped her pillow tighter as she opened her mouth to scream his name.

“D-Draco.”

“One more, little one. Fuck you are so tight. You're going to strangle my cock.”

When Draco's fingers and tongue hit her sweet spot once more, she detonated. Her legs shook as she came, her voice hoarse from chanting his name.

When Draco got off the bed to take his boxers off, she opened her glazed eyes and watched him. Even though she'd seen him naked when he shifted in front of her for the first time, she had been too shocked to notice how big he truly was.

When Draco hadn't returned to the bed, she started to shut her legs and reach for the covers to cover herself up when he growled low in his throat making her stop. She shifted slightly, not sure what to do.

“Did I give you permission to move?”

“N-no. I-I thought you were done. I’m sorry, I di-didn’t please you. I-if you need to think about someone e...”

Athena shrieked when she was pulled from the bed and placed over Draco’s knees. Without any warning, his hand rained down on her ass cheeks ten times, making her scream out.

What made her angry was that even though it was painful, she also got even more turned on from the pain and his dominance. Something she never thought she would find a turn on.

When she felt three fingers tease her pussy after that tenth smack, she was slightly embarrassed that he now knew her secret. When he had her on the brink of another orgasm, he stopped and placed her back on the bed.

“Do not ever degrade yourself in my presence again. I am here with you.” Draco grabbed her hand and wrapped it around his cock, helping her stroke him.

“This is all for you. You made me this fucking hard. When I fuck your delicious pussy, Athena, you are who I’m sinking my cock into. You are who I’m thinking about.”

Because he was kneeling on the bed, she leaned up and did the one thing she’d always wanted to do since she first laid eyes on the man. Something she’d fantasied about every night when she closed her eyes, hell, even when her eyes were open.

She wrapped both hands around his cock, stroking and rotating her hands at the same time as she sucked, taking as much of him into her mouth as she could, nearly gagging when he hit the back of her throat.

She breathed deeply as she took him in a little more and swallowed around the tip of

his cock, all while doing her strokes and rotating hand motions.

“Fuuuck!” She heard Draco yell out as he gripped her hair tightly.

Draco pulled her mouth off his cock and slammed his mouth down on hers as he followed her down onto the bed. Using one arm, he lifted her leg after he guided his cock to her entrance.

Athena moaned into Draco’s kiss when she felt his cock at her entrance. When he started slowly thrusting, inch by agonizing inch in, she met his thrusts as best as she could.

When Draco broke the kiss and looked down at her, she gasped for air. Draco thrust hard, making her scream out at the intrusion.

When he went still, looking down at her in shock, she was petrified that he would pull out. She grabbed his ass cheeks and started moving her hips, praying he would continue.

“Please, Draco. Just one night. You can go back to hating me tomorrow morning,” she pleaded.

“I could never hate you, Athena. Did I hurt you?”

“No. Show me how to please you tonight.”

Athena groaned when Draco leaned down to kiss her softly and started thrusting again. She shifted her free leg, taking him deeper, making them both moan out.

She placed a hand on his face and broke the kiss. “Stop holding back, I want the real you tonight. Please.”

“I don’t want to hurt you. I don’t know how to be gentle.”

“Then don’t be gentle. Be you. I need you, the real you! I want to know, for once, what it’s like to be wanted. Desired. Irresistible.”

“You are all of that, Athena. Never doubt that.”

Draco kissed her passionately. The kiss that started out slow, turned into pure molten fire.

Draco reared up, gripping her other leg on his other arm and started thrusting, hard and fast. He never broke eye contact with her.

Athena gripped the sheets on the bed, breathing out of control. She didn’t know what to do with her hands.

“Touch yourself. Tease your clit. I want to feel you detonate around my cock!”

Chapter

Twenty

Athena didn't know what to do. Yes, she's touched herself before.

But never with someone watching. When Draco growled slightly, she moved her hand to her clit and started rubbing.

Two strokes of her clit and she detonated like Draco ordered. Her back arched off the bed as she came, screaming his name.

Before she could come down from her orgasm, Draco pulled out and flipped her over to her stomach and thrust hard back into her pussy. He gripped her hips hard in his hands and pounded into her hard and feverishly fast.

He released her hip with one hand and grabbed her by the throat, pulling her back up to his front. She felt another orgasm building fast, a fire burning hotter than the last time.

"Mine!" Draco's voice told her, gripping her throat tight.

"Yes...yes...mine," Athena yelled out as she moved up and down, doing her best to meet him thrust for thrust.

She felt a sharp pain in her neck and collarbone area, then immense pleasure as she came, screaming Draco's name. She felt him still as he came, gripping her body tight

to his.

She passed out from the intensity of pleasure only to wake up a couple of hours later. Her need, a red-hot desire consumed her inside and out.

Draco lay beside her, sleeping and naked. She scooted down on the bed and lifted his cock into her hands and started stroking.

She took him into her mouth, licking, teasing, stroking, and sucking. Her need for him was driving her movements.

She felt him stir slightly, then his hand gripped her hair. She became afraid he was going to make her stop.

“Fuck, Athena. That mouth of yours.”

Athena continued sucking and stroking his cock, her hands in the twisting motion that drove him wild. She relished the noises he made, and how he continued to curse her name in pleasure.

When she felt him pull her hair, she growled around his cock. When he couldn't get her off of him that way, he gripped her throat and squeezed.

Gasping for air, she dropped his cock with a plop from her mouth and licked her lips. She looked up at him with her glazed over eyes as she awkwardly shuffled up his body, lining her soaked pussy with his cock, slowly lowering herself on to him.

She moaned loudly as his rock-hard cock stuffed her full. She never once lost eye contact with Draco.

When she put her hands on his chest, she started grinding her hips. Her mouth

opening on a silent moan that was fighting to escape.

“Fuck!” Draco groaned, his grip in her hair tightening. “Who taught you to suck cock like that? What’s his name?”

“Y-your sister t-taught me with videos and a cucumber,” Athena panted out as she started moving faster.

“How many men?”

Athena blushed at his question, afraid to answer. When his hand circled her throat again, she bit her lower lip.

“You were my first...for everything.”

“And I’m going to be your last,” Draco announced as he gripped both of her hips in his hands again.

He held her still, preventing her from moving. When he started pounding into her from below, she saw stars as she dug her nails into his chest.

Athena screamed his name as she came all over his cock. The glow of her orgasm never had a chance to calm before she was on her back and Draco’s mouth was on her pussy, eating her like a starved man with his first sack of groceries in months.

Another orgasm slammed into her in a matter of seconds that had her legs shaking around Draco’s head. As she came again, Draco surged up, thrusting hard and deep in one thrust.

“Oh, God!” she screamed.

“No, It’s not God. It’s Draco,” Draco growled deeply. “Fuck, you’re still so fucking tight.”

Using his arm, he lifted one of her legs, opening her wider. Draco was relentless in his thrusts.

Pounding into her hard and fast. He growled deeply as he thrust hard and breached her cervix.

Athena reared up as far as she could go and bit his shoulder at the same time she raked her nails down his back. He bit her in the same area he’d marked her, officially claiming her as his mate.

There was hardly any sleep to be had all night. One was always reaching for the other.

Athena called out of work while Draco sent a mass text that they were both sick and not to bother them. For the next two days, they were inseparable, and insatiable.

They couldn’t get enough of each other. They had each other in every room of her house, including the guestroom and bathroom.

The morning of the third day was met with loud banging on the front door, bright and early. Draco kissed her hard before leaving her in the shower to finish getting cleaned up as he went to answer it.

When she went into the living room, she found Deidra, Tony, Ray, their parents, Leo, Arrow, and Case all surrounding Draco. When Draco growled at them, they swirled her way and chaos erupted.

“You mated her...yes!” Deidra shrieked and ran to her. “Now we are officially

sisters.”

“W-what?”

“Slow your roll, sis. You’re scaring her.” Tony laughed as he pulled her into a hug.

“Like you’re not?” Ray rolled his eyes at both of his siblings.

“Enough!” Draco yelled, pulling her away from them toward him.

“She’s your fated mate, isn’t she?” Katarina asked with a smile on her lips.

“Yes. Although I’m inclined to limit her time with my sister for the way she managed to trap me.” Draco glared at his sister.

“Um, your sister didn’t tell me to do that thing I did,” Athena admitted, her cheeks heating up bright red. “She only said you didn’t want to settle down. You would only marry to produce an heir since you didn’t believe in love.”

“I told her to move on. Since that’s basically what you said you wanted.

I had planned to talk to Leo, Case, Tuck, Hawk, and Townie about taking her out or helping Arrow vet other potential candidates for her to date,” Deidra admitted with a sly smirk on her lips as she shrugged her shoulders at her brother.

“I agreed to help. Told her I’d even help with the dating profile for the dating websites,” Arrow admitted with her own shrug as she sat on the love seat.

“You’re fired.” Draco glared at Arrow. “You are disowned.” Draco glared at his baby sister.

“Then you might as well disown me, too. I’m the one, along with your father, who told her exactly how to get you fired up. I even told her to work on a few other things.”

Chapter

Twenty-One

Draco looked over at his mother in complete shock at her revelation. His whole family knew his stance on why he would reject a fated mate and worked against him.

Granted, he never expected one like Athena. He never expected to be this obsessed with her either.

He figured his fated mate was another shifter. Not that it would have mattered.

He also figured after the mating heat wore off, he could relax. Nope. He was still ready to tear someone's head off for being near her.

Yet, when she touches him, hell, her presence alone calms his demons and his need to annihilate. Her presence quiets his need to constantly hunt for the dangers that aren't there.

"I don't need to know that my mother taught my mate how to literally own my soul with her mouth," Draco declared, shivering.

"Y-your mom didn't. I learned that from Dee," Athena reminded him of her earlier confession.

"Who learned it from Mom when she found me crying over Bobby Leiland one weekend when I was home from college."

“Seriously? You were crying over that asshole? Please, that idiot was so beneath you. He didn’t deserve you. He actually hit on me when you went to the bathroom when he came over to the dorm. Even talked about a threesome.”

Draco listened to his sister, mother, and Athena talk about a dead man walking. That was until Athena turned shocked eyes his way.

“What’s wrong?” Draco asked quietly.

“D-did you just say dead man walking?”

“She’s our true fated mate!” Shadow preened, his wolf chest puffed out.

“W-who was that? Why am I hearing voices in my head?” Athena stammered, stumbling backward.

“No, Athena. You’re not losing your mind.

” Draco helped her sit down on the sofa, his hands cupping her face.

“It’s the mating bond snapping into place.

It means that we can mentally communicate without using our voices verbally.

You can communicate with me and my wolf mentally.

It usually takes a while for that to happen, but in this case, it happened immediately. ”

“He’s right, sweetie. Only true fated mates are blessed by the goddess to talk mentally to each other. Alphas can do so with everyone in their pack. The stronger the Alpha, the stronger the bond is with his pack.” Katarina smiled down at her

sweetly.

“Will I be able to do that with the others? I mean, I’m human, so I’m in shock I can even do that with Draco.” Athena looked over at him, worry in her voice.

Draco pulled her into his arms when Shadow nudged him closer. Knowing this part snapped into place this quickly helped ease some of his apprehension about their mating.

“No. You will only be able to do that with me. I will know your feelings, your thoughts, and your needs, just like you will know mine. Mom and Deidra, and even Dad, can work with you on how to shield yourself from me since they know how to do that. When we are together, I will work with you some as well. That way you have some privacy if you don’t want me to know something.

I only ask that you be one hundred percent open and honest with me, like you want me to be with you. ”

Draco hated to admit his vulnerability on that aspect. It was the biggest reason he didn’t want to mate his fated mate.

He didn’t like being vulnerable. He felt that it made him weak if he allowed himself to feel anything more than he should.

He knew his father would beat him over the head with a brick if he voiced that opinion out loud. His father would take it as Draco calling him weak.

During his father’s reign as Alpha, he could count on one hand how many times his father was challenged for his position as Alpha. His father had always been larger than life, ruling with an iron fist, yet being firm, fair, and consistent with his laws.

Now, with times changing, technology getting sneakier, he hated to admit that being an Alpha was now more dangerous than ever. One of the reasons he never wanted a fated mate in the first place.

“What does being a fated mate mean? Or should I say a mate? I don’t understand what that really means,” Athena asked, looking around the room, breaking him from his musings.

“Technically, in shifter terms, you’re hitched now that he’s claimed you.

Humans have to do the whole ceremony and blah blah blah.

Shifters, they just mark you, claim you and ta-da you’re hitched.

When he bit you, in the location that he bit you, that was a shifters way of claiming the person they are with. ”

“I don’t understand why you claimed me when you didn’t want to in the first place,” Athena called him out in front of everyone.

Draco turned her to face him, his hands on her face and looked into her eyes. He wanted her to know he meant every word.

“Yes, I didn’t want to have a fated mate. I felt that it would make me weak to have that. Not weak in a sense but makes me vulnerable to any enemies. You need to understand, as my mate, you will be a target for those who want to fight me and take my place as Alpha. And not for good.”

“Because I’m human? I’m not strong like you guys are...”

“No. Even if my fated mate had been a shifter, I would have felt the same way. Never

think that it was because you are human. You're stronger than you realize. You've held your own pretty damn well since all this has started."

"He's also in his damn head because of a mission we had several years ago before we left the military.

We were chasing a shifter who was the head of a cartel.

He was superstitious as hell and had a shaman working for him, guiding him in everything.

While jackass here was working undercover against the cartel, he met up with that shaman.

The shaman made the statement that the cartel leader should not claim his fated mate because she would make him weak to his enemies.

Dumbass took that to heart," Leo declared, telling Draco's dark secret.

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Chapter

Twenty-Two

Draco wanted to claw Leo's face off with his claws at the horror on Athena's face. When she turned her eyes back to him, he could tell she was close to tears at the news that Leo had announced.

"I-I don't want to make you weak. You can't be weak if the Maplewoods are trying to come after you..." she stammered, trying to back away from him.

"You're not going to make him weak. What we've been trying to tell the fucktard is the shaman told them that to fuck with the cartel leader.

The shaman was being held against his will and the cartel fucker had his family held hostage to force him to work for him.

He only said that because if he had claimed his fated mate, it would have made his ass way stronger.

Fated mates make the wolf stronger. Even Mr. Blackwood would confirm that.

"Leo shook his head, as he ran his fingers through his unruly hair.

"Don't lie to me, Leo." Athena glared at the man, making Draco's heart swell with pride.

Shit. His heart was swelling with pride. She had no problems standing toe to toe with him or his men.

But it still didn't ease the worry that was plaguing him where the Maplewoods were concerned. They were still very much a danger to them.

"Do you regret claiming me?"

Draco looked into Athena's eyes and saw the worry there. Fuck. He had to remember to shield himself so that she wouldn't feel the negativity or the worry he had.

"No. I did at first because of how dangerous the Maplewoods are to you and my pack. Yes, I'm still scared because I'm worried about what can happen if I'm not with you, since I do have responsibilities as an Alpha that will keep me away from you.

Plus, your job. But, no, Athena. I do not regret claiming you.

Maybe my mother is right. My claiming you can possibly keep you safe from them.

Rob is a shifter, so now that I have officially claimed you as my mate, he has no claim on you. "

"Unless he takes it to human court, then you technically don't. They don't know about you so he could claim since we aren't married, you have no right to me. They will claim you took me to purposely jeopardize their business agreement." Athena bit her lower lip, looking around the room.

"She's right. Especially in their territory, they could pay the judge off to make problems for us.

The business deal between Chris and Rob was struck in their area, even though she

lives here.

They could make up some claim that she was set to marry and that you stole her from them and took their deal away or whatever.

If you two aren't married by human standards, they could force our hands.

We'd have to get the Council involved then," Coren agreed with Athena.

"Then I guess we go to the courthouse today, get officially married. We'll get the paperwork done for her to change her name legally so if there's any questions, they can fuck off."

"Just like that?" Athena quirked an eyebrow at Draco, staring at him intently.

Draco had to think for several seconds. That's all it took him to realize he was making the right decision.

"Our mate is waiting for an answer."

"Are we making the right choice? We go through with this, she becomes a target to get to us."

"She is our mate! As our mate, we are stronger. She makes us stronger. Gives us something to fight and win for. You don't do it, you'll never get pussy again. I will fight you tooth and nail if you even sniff another crotch."

"Bastard."

"Chickenshit."

“I am positive we are making the right choice. You’re my mate, Athena. If it means that I have you in both the shifter and human world, then so be it. But this will also protect you where your family and the Maplewoods are concerned.”

Draco held his breath as he watched Athena bite her lower lip and thought about everything he just said. Why he was worried she wouldn’t accept him, he didn’t know.

It wasn’t like they really had much time together. That’s the thing with mating and the mating bond.

When a shifter found their fated mate, because it was so rare for them to find each other, it was usually a whirlwind of emotions that tended to be acted upon.

The mating bond tended to make the two feel that the only thing that would satisfy the hunger, the desire, the need would be each other right then and there.

Did he love Athena? Draco couldn’t honestly say just yet, because he hadn’t spent time with her.

What little time he had spent with her made him know he wanted to get to know her. He wanted to hear her laughter, her thoughts, her voice.

He wanted to feel her touch, her kisses, her in his arms. He suddenly realized that he wanted to see where this could go.

“Okay. If it’s going to protect you and your family, then let’s do this,” Athena agreed, nodding her head as best as she could.

“No, love. We do this together. I’m protecting you as well,” Draco reiterated as he looked into her eyes making sure she knew he was serious.

“Okay. We can make this work. How would this work? I mean, I live here. You live...where?”

“Since we are mates, I will move in here. You’re already established here. I’ve been staying at the hotel with my team until we could figure more permanent lodgings once the Alpha ceremony was completed,” Draco suggested as he rubbed his thumb across her lower lip.

“Okay. That works.”

Draco breathed a sigh of relief at her acceptance. He would make this work.

Come hell or high water, they would be successful in their marriage and life together. How, he had no idea, but he strongly believed that no matter what, they would survive it.

Oblivious to everyone in the room, he fused their lips together and kissed her passionately, sealing their fate completely. Goddess help him, but he would end anyone and everyone who caused his mate harm.

Chapter

Twenty-Three

Athena had been in a daze for the last three weeks. The afternoon everyone found out that she and Draco were mates, thanks to Coren and Katarina, they were married by the justice of the peace.

The next day, an official announcement was made naming Draco as the new Alpha of the Blackwood Pack, and she was the new Luna. She had to admit she was surprised by the welcome and the cheers she received when everything was announced.

It was agreed that she would be able to finish out the rest of the school year as a teacher and then they would go from there. In the meantime, Katarina would continue with the duties of a Luna while she taught Athena what was needed.

Once summer came, she would be a full time Luna with guidance from Katarina until she was comfortable in the role. But every night, when it was just the two of them was a whole different story.

Every night when she got home, she would make sure there was a dinner cooked, or she would stop and pick up something that was quick and easy and make sure there was something cooked when he got home from his days of working his corporate job and that of a newly crowned Alpha.

She admitted that the one time he was done with his day before she was, and she had got home, he'd had dinner ready and was waiting on her when she got home.

But once dinner was done, and the dishes were done, the night was just getting started for them. Every night, they were in each other's arms, the passion flowing, and very little sleep happening.

Despite the nights spent in each other's arms, she always felt refreshed and ready to face the day. Each day, she also greeted Arrow with a fresh cup of coffee and breakfast, since against her wishes, Draco had assigned Arrow as her bodyguard.

"Draco, don't you need Dana with you and your team? Surely her talent is being wasted babysitting me," Athena asked as she walked into the living room where Draco was sitting on the couch looking over some papers he'd brought home that night.

She didn't see Draco put the papers down onto the coffee table until he'd reached out for her and pulled her into his lap, making her shriek out in laughter. When he let her up for air after kissing her breathlessly, she could only stare at the exasperating man.

They've only truly known each other for several weeks and yet she was mated and married to the man. The both of them talked as if they'd been married for far longer.

"Because the Maplewoods are still a danger to you. Just because they haven't made a move now that the word is out there that you and I are not only fated mates, but also husband and wife in the human sense of the word, doesn't mean they aren't planning something. Your safety is my first priority."

"Draco, your family and your pack should be first. Focusing on protecting me leaves them unprotected. They all made threats against your family. You need to protect them."

Athena placed her hand on his face and forced him to look into her eyes. She was desperate for him to see the importance of saving his family and his pack.

She wasn't used to someone looking out for her. These last several weeks with Draco had been a dream for her.

She had honestly thought that when things settled, that Draco would be scarce, hiding away from her after they had been caught together. She partially was afraid he would think he was being forced to marry her since they had mated in the shifter sense.

But Draco has never made her feel like he was forced to do anything. In fact, he's been totally the opposite.

Loving. Caring. Attentive. Passionate. Dominating.

Everything she'd ever wanted in a relationship. Only thing she can't get past is the fact he hasn't said the three words she's longed to hear from a man.

She couldn't really get too upset about it since she's never told the man those three words herself. But, in her defense, she was afraid to say them.

Afraid that her feelings would be one-sided. She knew, thanks to Deidra, before that eventful night happened that Draco never wanted a real wife in the sense of them being happy and loving.

He was prepared to settle for someone to have a child with that would reign as the Alpha of the pack when he was ready to step aside. It didn't matter if he didn't love the person he had that child with.

They would be well taken care of and exist. To her, that was a sad and lonely existence.

Yet, she couldn't help if that's what this would wind up being anyways. How long would she be able to coexist without love in the mix?

“Penny for your thoughts, my mate?” Draco asked softly as he rubbed his thumb over her lips, as he looked into her eyes.

“What makes you think I’m thinking about something?” she parried back, quirking an eyebrow.

“You seem to have forgotten I can feel your emotions. You’re sad and torn about something. Talk to me.”

Athena looked up into Draco’s eyes and just stared for a minute. A part of her wanted to take the plunge and say what she was feeling but a part of her was petrified of the answer.

“I guess I was thinking about something you had told your family a while back. Only marrying to produce an heir to take your spot when you were ready to step back. What would have happened if the firstborn was a female? Would she have been able to take over as Alpha?” Athena blurted out, biting her lower lip.

Draco coughed his laugh at her question. Shaking his head, he leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

“No. Sadly, the Council does not allow for a female to lead, yet. I guess it would have been up to the female I would have mated. If she wanted to try again for a male or we marry our daughter off to a male who has Alpha blood and merge our packs with them,” Draco answered honestly, rubbing his fingers over her lower lip.

“And I took that away from you. Your ability to just do that. Didn’t I?”

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Chapter

Twenty-Four

Athena couldn't look him in the eye after she admitted that statement to him. She honestly didn't want to hear his answer to that statement and started to move off his lap.

When his grip tightened on her to hold her still, she couldn't resist the desire to look up into his eyes. The eyes that always made her heart melt, her insides go gooey.

“Yes. You did.”

Athena tried again to move but he shifted their positions and had her on her back on the couch before she could react. His whole body covering hers as he followed her down onto the couch.

“Yes. You did. But I wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

You made me realize that it's okay to have that laughter, that happiness, and still be the Alpha my pack needs.

My father and mother have done it for thirty plus years.

While the times are different, the ability to have both are not.

Have patience with me as I learn. Please? ”

Athena couldn't help but stare up at the man for several seconds as she listened to him speak. At his question she gave him a nod, afraid her voice would fail her if she tried to answer.

She sighed deeply when he leaned down and gently placed his lips on hers. Their kiss started out passionate.

She moved her hand from his arm to his face, holding him to her as she drank from his lips, the gentleness nearly doing her in. Making her crave more and more of him.

When she moved her hands from his face to the nape of his neck, she couldn't help but let out the moan that was building up inside her at the need she had for this man. He was quickly becoming the air that she breathed.

She ran the heel of her foot up the back of his leg, until she reached his waist, opening herself up for him even more. Good thing the dress she had on was a flowy one and not one of the tighter ones, otherwise she'd be stuck with just rubbing her foot against his legs.

She felt Draco's hand unbutton a few of the buttons on the top of the dress and move the flaps, along with the cup of her bra to the side as he feasted himself on her breast, making her back arch off of the couch from the sensations of his tongue, teeth, and his mouth driving her insane.

She gripped his hair with both hands to keep him where he was as she rode the pleasure his mouth was bringing her.

With her free leg wrapped around his waist, the skirt part of her dress hiked up, her crotch lined up with his hard cock, she let herself ride. Athena groaned as she felt her orgasm rushing to the surface, then wanted to kill the man when he stopped what he was doing.

When she felt him move to free her other leg, she quickly wrapped the leg around him to lock him into place. When she heard him chuckle lightly, she wanted to punch him in the nose, but she kind of needed his face to be bloodless at the moment.

“Easy, baby,” Draco murmured against her lips as he came back down.

Athena moaned loudly when she felt Draco’s fingers ease her panties to the side and start teasing her pussy with his fingers. She now realized the appeal why the alpha males in her books preferred their women without them.

She used one hand to reach for his belt and undo it. Once she had gotten it open, she opened his jeans and reached in, gripping his cock and stroking him as best as she could.

“Fuck!” Draco groaned out loudly as he rested his forehead against hers. “How attached to these panties are you? Fuck it, I can buy you more.”

Without waiting for an answer, Draco tore the underwear she was wearing from her body as he slid down her body, dislodging her hand from his cock. When he got in position, his knees on the floor, he lifted her legs over his shoulders and feasted on her pussy.

He was a man who was starving for her taste. Teasing, licking, sucking, and using his fingers and tongue to bring her to an explosive orgasm that had her screaming out as she came.

She didn’t get a chance to come down from her orgasm before Draco surged up, his cock in hand as he notched it to her entrance and thrust in hard. With her legs still over his shoulders, Draco held her hips as she pounded into her hard and fast.

“Fuck,” was all Draco could say as he continued at his fast pace, staring down at her.

Athena struggled to catch her breath as her orgasm rushed faster than it's ever done before. She grappled for something to hold on to as her world was turning upside down.

She gripped his forearms, her nails digging into his skin, drawing blood as her mouth opened on a silent scream, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as she came hard, soaking his cock in her juices.

When she heard him yell his release shortly thereafter, her body started shaking from the intensity.

She sighed in relief when she felt her legs fall to the side as Draco came down on top of her, his body holding her to the couch. All she could do was run her hands up and down his back as lightly as she could.

They stayed that way on the couch for several minutes before Draco got up from the couch, picked her up in his arms and carried her into the bedroom. Once there, he helped her to her feet and continued to disrobe her.

Once she was naked, he shed his clothing and then led her, rubber legs and all into the bathroom and stepped into the shower.

Once they were both cleaned, in between kissing and touching each other in the process, he wrapped her in a towel and led her back into the bedroom, only to dirty her up again and again.

He always took care of her afterwards. Something that made her heart stutter each and every time.

Chapter

Twenty-Five

Draco dried himself and Athena off, before crawling into bed after another round of passionate lovemaking. Each and every time they were together, it was more intense than the last time.

He really didn't know how to process his feelings at the moment. He knew he needed to keep her at arm's length for her safety and kept telling himself he shouldn't be touching her because the chances of her getting pregnant with his pup were high.

"Penny for your thoughts," Athena murmured in his arms.

Draco squeezed his arms around her, not sure if he should voice his concerns. Hell, he didn't even know what his thoughts were in all honesty.

"You know you want her carrying our pups. Stop fighting it."

"It's too dangerous for her to be carrying our pups. At least until the Maplewoods are dealt with."

"Ah, now you admit that you want her carrying your pups. We will not let anything happen to our mate or our pups. She makes us stronger. Unstoppable. Stop fighting it!"

"How can you be so sure?"

“I can smell her lineage. Her father was a powerful wolf.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Draco asked in shock at Shadow’s declaration.

“Ask your father about her smell. Ask her about her father. See what she knows.”

Draco looked down at Athena who was snuggled into his arms, her hand wrapped around his waist. How did he broach this subject?

“What do you know about your father?” Draco asked hesitantly.

“Not much. My mother made a comment once that he left when she found out she was pregnant with me. Blamed it on me and that even he didn’t want me. She never talks about him,” Athena murmured softly as she started to move away from Draco.

“No. You’re staying right here. Why do you shut down when talking about your father?” Draco asked, pulling her closer to him, wrapping both arms around her.

“Be...because I wonder how you could want me if my own father or even my own mother never wanted me. I feel like there is something wrong with me.”

Draco laid her flat on her back and hovered over her, locking her legs with his, his arms bracing her between them, forcing her to look up at him. He wanted to find her mother and hunt the father down if he could figure out who he was and beat the shit out of them for causing this pain in her eyes.

“There is nothing wrong with you, Athena. You are beautiful, both inside and outside. I don’t know what your mother was like back then, so I can’t say much about her.

I want to believe that she loved you in the beginning and something broke her and

made her into the evil bitch she is today.

As for your father, all you have is your mother's statement.

We don't know anything about him. If I tell you something, will you promise not to cringe or say anything mean?

"Draco asked, pulling her back to look at him so she could see his eyes.

"Why would I cringe or say anything mean?"

"Our wolves, the animals that live inside of us. We can communicate with them when we are in our human form."

"What about when you're in your wolf form?" Athena asked curiously.

"We can communicate with our human side."

"Okay that's cool. Why would I cringe at that? I'm kind of jealous to be honest." Athena giggled slightly.

Draco couldn't help but chuckle at her statement. That actually made his heart happy that she didn't get weirded out by the fact he could talk to his wolf.

"Thank you." Draco kissed her lips softly.

"Your wolf, what is his name?"

Draco hesitated to answer since he knew about her dog that she had lost to the Maplewoods. But his wolf was pushing him to tell her his name.

“His name is Shadow.”

“S-Shadow? A-and he’s black. Like my Shadow was,” Athena stammered as she looked at him in shock.

“Yes. Is that ok? I know that has to be hard for you.”

“Ye...no. I think fate had its reason for sending you to me. Shadow was my baby in so many ways. Your wolf is what he would have looked like when he got older. I like to think that he guided us together so that I wouldn’t be lonely anymore.

Don’t get me wrong, your sister is an amazing friend, but the loneliness is still there when I think about him. ”

“I get it. And my sister can be a pain in the ass.” Draco laughed, tapping her nose with his finger. “That isn’t the reason I was telling you about him.” Draco cleared his throat.

“Okay. So, you say you two can communicate. What is he saying to you about me?”

Damn his woman was smart as hell. He didn’t have to tell her it was about her.

“Well, a shifter’s sense of sight, smell, and sound are more heightened than a regular human’s.

Shadow says part of your smell is familiar to him.

Not in a bad way and he’s not saying you stink so don’t think that.

What I mean is, part of your scent is that of a wolf.

We know you can't shift. You've confirmed that.

It's not uncommon for a shifter and human to have either a shifter or non-shifter offspring.

It's usually fifty-fifty on that chance.

It's higher the offspring is a shifter if the female has shifter DNA in her bloodline. "

"Wait, you're saying Shadow says she can smell a shifter scent on me? I've been around you and your family. Couldn't that be what he is smelling?" Athena asked, biting her lower lip as she thought about everyone she'd been around.

"That's what I was thinking, but he says no.

Would you be willing to do a DNA test with one of our shifter doctors we have?

They can run it through our database, and we can see if he is in there.

It's up to you. If it's true, then it could help us protect you against the Maplewoods and whatever they are planning," Draco asked softly, rubbing his thumb over her cheekbone.

"What if what my mother said was true, that he wanted nothing to do with me?"

Draco hated the vulnerability in her voice. He really wanted to beat that woman's ass for causing such doubt in this beautiful woman's eyes.

"Then it is his loss. You have my father and mother to love you enough for both of them."

Chapter

Twenty-Six

Athena sat nervously in the chair as the nurse swabbed her mouth. Draco, his parents, and Deidra stood nearby as her support team.

Could it be possible that her father didn't know about her? She had never met her father, and her mother never talked about him.

"Okay, all done." The nurse smiled down at her as she stepped back.

"How long will it take to get the information we are looking for?" Athena asked, trying her best not to get her hopes up.

"Hopefully not long. If he's a shifter then he should be in our database."

"Are all shifters in the database?" Athena asked the room, looking at everyone curiously.

"Most. If they are Alphas, Betas, part of the Council, or have joined the military, become rogue or arrested in any way, then yes. If they aren't in the database, then we likely have a family member who is in it somehow so we can find him one way or the other if he's a shifter," Draco answered for her.

"What if he isn't a shifter? Is there a chance that Shadow could be wrong?" Athena hesitantly asked, biting her lower lip.

“I don’t think Draco’s wolf is wrong,” Coren answered for Draco.

“I thought you were a she-wolf myself the first time I met you. Deidra told us you were human, but we thought you’d never been taught to access your wolf.

As time moved on, we realized you were just human, so we had assumed you were close with another wolf we didn’t know about. ”

“I had to tell them they were stupid on that aspect since I knew you were a virgin and guys tended to scare you in college because of the hell your mother, brother, and Rob put you through while we were in college.” Deidra smirked over at her parents as she rolled her eyes.

“You knew she was a virgin?” Draco asked, his glare going toward his sister.

“Yep!” Deidra grinned as she popped her ‘p’.

“I didn’t trap you!” Athena blurted out, her face going red.

Before anyone could respond to her statement, she stood up quickly and rushed out of the room. Her head started swimming from the movements.

She’d only made it as far as the lobby of the office space they were in before she passed out, nearly hitting the floor before a pair of arms caught her. She never registered the voices yelling her name as she rushed away.

When she came to a few minutes later, she was in one of the hospital beds with a very worried Draco and his family beside her bed, Draco holding her hand tightly. She was embarrassed by all the fuss.

“Okay, I reran some of the bloodwork we took for the DNA since we wanted to be

sure on both ends. Looks like you're going to be a Mommy. Congratulations," the doctor said as she walked into the room with Athena's file.

"What? How?" Athena stammered as she looked at the doctor in shock.

"I know you didn't fall asleep in sex ed. Especially with me as your friend." Deidra laughed as she clapped in excitement.

"Smartass," Athena mumbled, rolling her eyes at Deidra. "What now?" she asked as she looked over at Draco.

"Sooner than we had expected. We have been playing with fire by not using protection. But then again, that's usually what happens when the mating bond kicks in when we connected," Draco told her softly as he sighed deeply.

"But I'm not what you really wanted...I didn't trick you! I promise. I just wanted to know what it was like to be held, cherished just once before I turned myself over to Rob to save your mother and Deidra," Athena sobbed, removing her hand from Draco's and covering her face.

She jumped when she felt Katarina's hands around her face, making her look up into her eyes. She expected anger in her eyes, but all she saw was love and understanding.

"Sweetie, no one thinks you trapped or tricked Draco. And you're not turning yourself over to Rob to protect me or my daughter. You are the Luna of this pack now, so you are protected, one hundred percent, by every shifter in our pack."

"Baby, had I woken up and found you gone, and you were not in the house, not at work, or with my mother and sister, I would have hunted you down and tanned that sexy ass of yours until it was nice and red. I don't think you trapped me.

I could have said no and let you have Mom and Deidra set you up with someone to make you happy.

But I'll be damned if I would have been able to handle it.

I knew touching you would have started the mating bond, and with Shadow fighting my every move where you were concerned, I took that leap anyway.

I told you last night, while yes, you derailed my initial plans to be distant with whoever I chose to be my Luna, fate, destiny, the goddess herself, whatever you want to call it is stronger than my plans were.

I do not regret what happened between us.

I could have, at any time, changed how I spent my time with you, but I didn't. I want this. I want us. Our family."

Athena stared at Draco for several minutes before she let go of the breath she'd been holding. She stared Draco in the eyes, seeing his honesty, she nodded at him her acceptance.

"Okay. So, now what? We're going to have a kid. The Maplewoods want control of your pack and we don't even know who my father is or if he even gives two shits about me."

"First, the Maplewoods have been trying to take over our pack for years and have failed each and every time. They will fail this time as well. Second, I told you, whatever happens with your father, you will have us no matter what. You are my mate, Athena."

Athena could only stare at the man. God she was in love with him but so damn scared

of telling him.

Chapter

Twenty-Seven

Athena went back to work on Monday, ready to start her week with a new perspective. She and Draco had spent so much time together after she got out of the hospital that she finally believed what he was telling her.

He was an Alpha and loving his mate scared him, according to Katarina. He felt that his fated mate gave him a weakness to exploit to get him to do what his enemies wanted.

Athena knew her being human only made it worse. It made her worry about her unborn child.

“For your father’s sanity, I hope you’re more like him than me, peanut,” Athena murmured with her hand over her stomach.

Her door opened, letting her know that her quiet time alone was over. Her class students came rushing into the room with excited chatter.

Athena could always relax the easiest around the kids in her class. Something about little ones always soothed her.

Guess it was a good thing since she was about to have one herself. Her dream had always been to have her own football team.

She probably needed to discuss that with Draco now that they were married. She knew he was resigned to just one.

“Do we get to call you Mrs. Blackwood now that you’re mated to our Alpha?”

Athena looked down at the small boy standing in front of her. She knew now that his parents were shifters in the Blackwood Pack.

She suddenly wondered when the shifter gene kicked in for kids of shifter parents. How would that even work?

“Hi, James. Yes, you guys should have been calling me Mrs. Blackwood by now. I was going to wait to change it officially on my door for next year. But I guess now is just as good a time as any.”

“Yay! I’m glad you are our Alpha’s wife. My mom and dad are too. They were afraid that nasty Sheila woman would be the new Luna.” James shivered at his statement.

“Thank you, James. I appreciate that vote of confidence.” Athena laughed, leading James to his seat while she waited for the rest of the class to come in.

She’ll have to ask Dana who this Sheila chick is. She doesn’t remember one that had her eyes on the family before, but one never truly knows.

The day went by fast as she got the kids through their tests that were required before the end of the year. It was hard to believe that summer break was approaching fast.

She had two more months of teaching these kids before they moved on to the next grade. Teaching was all she had thought about doing and wanted to do.

Now, she was the Luna of the Blackwood Pack, wife to the Alpha. She didn’t know

the first thing about dealing with adults.

Give her kids any day of the week and she could handle any crisis there was. Adults, that was a totally different story.

On the drive home, she and Dana were laughing at that very statement. Dana just shook her head and told her she was being silly.

“Seriously, adults, especially the Karens and Chads of society are nothing but big children whose parents never told them no. Just look at them like that.” Dana laughed as she looked over at her quickly.

“Well, I didn’t think of it like that. I guess you’re right,” Athena admitted as she shook her head at her own thoughts. “Um, I do I have a question for you. One of the kids had mentioned someone named Sheila who had been sort of chasing Draco. Do I have anything to worry about?”

“Fuck no! One, you’re true fated mates. He couldn’t stomach being with another woman, much less have one of them touching him.

I know because the one and only time I know she put her hand on his arm when she did her flirting thing, he looked at her with hatred in his eyes and told her she didn’t have permission to be touching him much less in his space.

He’s not even looked at another woman.” Dana laughed at the memory.

“Who is she?” Athena asked in curiosity. “I don’t remember a Sheila being introduced to me recently.”

“She hasn’t been. She’s the new pack attorney since the other one passed away about a month or so ago from a nasty car accident when he went to visit his daughter in

Vermont. They said it was a drunk driver.”

“So right after Draco and I were married?”

“Yeah.”

“Draco still at the office or is he doing his Alpha rounds?” Athena smirked over at Dana for the word she had used for Draco going out and checking the territory.

“Why don’t you ask him? You have that mind talk capability,” Dana reminded her, shaking her head.

“Are you still at the office or doing your Alpha rounds?” Athena asked, glaring at Dana for not helping her.

“Mmm I do love hearing your voice when I’m dealing with idiots. I’m in the office, unfortunately. How was your day, little one?”

“I’m not going to be little for long. Once our little one starts growing, you’ll need a wheelbarrow to push me around in.

But my day was good. Little James asked me today about calling me Mrs. Blackwood.

I am ashamed to admit I hadn’t even thought about that at school.

I am an awful wife.” Athena blushed as she admitted that to him.

“Guess I’ll have to spank you later for that mishap.”

“Promises, promises, Mr. Blackwood. Too bad you have a meeting to attend. I was

thinking of having Dana bring me by the office. I kind of have a fantasy of being on my knees under your desk, my mouth on you while you are conducting said meeting. But if they are already in there, well that fantasy would be a moot point.” Athena couldn’t help the smirk that came across her lips.

“I don’t know what the hell you just said to him, but I’m being ordered to bring you to the office, now,” Dana said, her voice slightly shaking.

“Sorry. I’ll make him apologize for scaring you like that.”

Athena couldn’t help the smile that played on her face, now that she knew the mind talk really worked, they could have some fun. Although, she probably might have to rethink that since he could be just as evil with his thoughts as she was.

Chapter

Twenty-Eight

Draco looked up when Athena knocked on his open door. His eyes went dark and heavy at her scent.

Ever since her comment about her fantasy, he couldn't get it out of his mind. Even his wolf was having a hard time maintaining his control.

"Shut the door," he ordered, his voice going low and dark.

When she complied, he hit a button on his desk that automatically locked the door and made the windows go opaque. He couldn't hide the smirk at her shiver when she noticed.

"Nice trick," Athena murmured, her eyes never leaving his.

"I believe you mentioned a fantasy?"

"I did. Don't you have a meeting in a few minutes thought?"

"I do. Don't tell me you're trying to chicken out now after getting your husband all worked up thinking about that mouth on his cock as he conducted said meeting."

Draco couldn't help the possessiveness that sounded in his voice as he watched her nibble on her lower lip as she thought about what he had just said. He waited her out

for several minutes before he stood up from behind his desk and stalked her way.

“Having second thoughts about that fantasy?”

“No. I just didn’t think you were into voyeurism,” Athena baited him, causing him to smile darkly.

“I’m not. Your sounds are mine and mine alone,” Draco warned her, as he stopped in front of her.

Draco didn’t give her any warning as he gripped her throat with his hand and pulled her into him. He crushed his lips to hers and kissed her passionately.

“Everything about you belongs to only me. Your moans, your screams, your orgasms, your smell, how that pussy feels wrapped around my cock...everything, little one,” Draco warned her, his voice low and dark.

“Sounds unfair,” Athena pouted back.

“How so?” Draco asked as he walked them back toward his chair behind his desk.

“You say all of me belongs to you. Then all of you should belong to me.” Athena glared at him.

“I do belong to you.” Draco pulled her in for a passionate kiss.

“Mmmm. Too bad you have a meeting this afternoon. Another fantasy is you taking advantage of me on your desk.” Athena bit his lower lip as she pulled away to get up off of his lap.

Draco sighed as he leaned back in his seat, refusing to relinquish his hold on his wife.

Something about her soothed him and his wolf and he just wasn't ready to let it go yet.

"Yes. I have to deal with Sheila, her assistant, Leo, Tuck, and Townie all in one room for a meeting." He groaned at the idea of dealing with Sheila.

While he didn't mind the assistant who seemed timid and afraid of Sheila, there was something about the new attorney that was new to the pack. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he just didn't trust the woman.

"Sheila is going to be in this meeting?"

Draco looked over at his wife at the sound of jealousy in her voice at the mention of the attorney's name. He didn't like that sound in her voice.

"Yes. Why?"

"You said the others are going to be here too? Around you, right?"

"Athena, you have nothing to worry about with Sheila. She doesn't appeal to me. At all," Draco promised her, his hand framing her face as he leaned up to kiss her forehead.

"It's just, she's a shifter from what Dana said. She's more your type than I am," Athena admitted, moving to get up but huffing when he wouldn't let her up.

Knowing what he needed to do, what she needed, he decided to take control of the entire situation. He wanted her to see exactly how it was where he was concerned and put the other woman in her place.

He would never admit how right Athena was about Sheila. While she was a shifter

and more of what he would have been looking for if Athena hadn't been his true mate, he would have never chosen her as Luna of his pack, much less as his mate in name only or for producing an heir to his pack.

"On your knees. Now," Draco ordered, moving his arms from around her, his voice commanding and low.

Draco's cock got rock solid with the way she complied, nibbling on her lower lip as she looked up at him from her knees. Looking over at the love seat he had in his office, he got up and walked over toward it to grab one of the large pillows and walked back toward his wife.

When he gestured for her to stand, she did so quickly. Draco placed the pillow on the floor under his desk.

"On your knees, little one," Draco ordered her again, pointing toward the pillow.

When she complied, he sat down in his chair and pulled himself closer to her, but not caging her in to give her a chance to say no. When she didn't make a move to get away from him, he gripped the armrests as he stared at her.

"I think my little pet forgot to tell me the extent of her fantasy, didn't you?" Draco questioned, gripping the armrest tighter when he saw her eyes glaze over at his orders.

"Y-yes."

"Good girl. Take my cock out of his confinement. He's hungry for your mouth. First, move further under my desk, no one needs to see what belongs to you. They also don't need to see you giving me pleasure. That's ours and ours alone."

Draco couldn't help the immense pleasure that ran through his body as he watched Athena do what needed to be done with his pants and release his cock. As soon as her hand gripped him and started stroking, it took everything in him not to come right then and there.

When he felt her mouth close around the tip of his cock, he couldn't stop the moan escape from his mouth. Her mouth was fucking heaven.

When he heard the knock on his office door, he had to bite back to curse that nearly popped out of his mouth at the interruption, despite him knowing he had a meeting and that he had every intention of giving her the fantasy she had.

Once this meeting was done, he was enacting the one he had since the day he'd met her in that bar.

Chapter

Twenty-Nine

Athena couldn't help the smile that came across her lips at the low growl when the knock sounded on Draco's office door. When he gave the order for them to enter, she forced herself to slow down.

That is until she heard the nasally sound of a female voice enter the office. The challenge was on to mark her mate for good.

"Draco, darling. So good to see you."

"I told you to stop calling me that. It's unprofessional and it's an insult to my mate."

Athena sucked him in deeper, nearly gagging as he hit the back of her throat. She remembered to breathe through her nose before it was too late.

She nearly jumped when she felt Draco's hand on her cheek as if to comfort her. She slowed her motions, letting it drag out.

"Oh, come now, Draco. You and I have history together. We had fun together in the past. Whatever do you see in that waste of a human schoolteacher? I didn't realize you had a thing for elephants."

Athena was about to pull away, ready to hide in the corner under Draco's desk at the comment. Draco gripped her hair, keeping her where she was.

With his hand in her hair, he guided her up and down his cock. She'd half a mind to bite it off.

“Let me make myself very fucking clear, Sheila. This will be the last time we discuss this. Next time you feel brave enough to insult my mate, my wife, your Luna, remember your position in this pack. I can and will terminate you at my discretion or hers. As for our “history”, there is no history between us. You attempted to kiss me in high school, and I rejected you then as well. You attempted to reconnect when you came back after college and again was rejected. Know your place.”

Athena's eyes got watery at the way Draco defended her honor. She'd never had anyone do that for her, besides Deidra.

She moved her hands to grip Draco's knees as she moved to take him deeper in to her mouth. When she felt him hit the back of her throat, she swallowed around the head of his cock.

“Draco!” Sheila gasped at his threat.

When Athena swallowed around the head of Draco's cock, Draco pounded the desk with an open palm, a low growl emanating from his throat. Athena moved a little further down his cock and swallowed again before she relented.

She didn't want him to come just yet. She wanted to prolong everything.

She wanted to drive him to the edge. Make him crazy with want.

Crazy with need. She wanted to make him pant and beg for his release the way he makes her.

“Sheila, if you're smart, which I've yet to see, you'll back off of Draco. He's told you

he's not interested in you and your childish head games."

Leo! Athena breathed a sigh of relief that Draco wasn't alone with the banshee anymore.

Gods, she wished they were alone so that she could scratch her nails down his chest. That always drives him toward the edge.

Draco loves it when she marks him. It was like a badge of honor for him. He marked her just as much for everyone to see she was his and his alone.

Her growly Alpha mate was a bit possessive where she was concerned. Truth be told, she was too, where he was concerned.

Athena had to admit the back-and-forth insults between Leo and Sheila were comical to her. It was clear as could be that Leo couldn't stand the woman.

"Look, it's obvious the Maplewoods want an alliance with us.

They want a truce. You mating the human who was promised to the Alpha's son, the one who is not your true mate, so therefore no true mate bond, is a clear call for a war between the two packs.

Right now, they are the stronger pack," Sheila yelled out, causing the room to go silent.

"Who the fuck are you to say our mating isn't the true mate bond?" Draco's voice went low and deadly at his question.

"She's a fucking human..."

Athena jumped at the yelp that sounded from several people in the room. She could feel the anger coming from Draco in waves.

She used one hand to rub his thigh while she gripped his cock with the other. She decided to send him over the edge.

“Enough! Everyone out of my fucking office. Now !”

As soon as she heard the door click, she was pulled from under the desk, picked up and placed on Draco’s desk. Soon as her ass was planted on the desk, her dress was thrown up to her waist and her panties tore from their spot on her body.

In one thrust, Draco’s hard, solid steel cock was pounding into her hard, fast, and furiously. All she could do was hold on for the ride.

“ Mine .”

Athena heard both Shadow and Draco’s growled word in her head. She reached up with her hand and repeated the word back to him.

Draco gripped her throat in his hand as he pounded her pussy like he was a man possessed. She reached up and gripped his shirt and pulled him to her.

She leaned up as best as she could and bit into his jaw as she repeated his word, “mine.”

She didn’t know what possessed her to do so, but ripped open Draco’s shirt, exposing his chest, not caring she was sending buttons flying everywhere. As she felt her orgasm fast approaching, she bit his shoulder and marked him the best way she knew how.

When she felt Draco's teeth sink in her flesh, she came, her orgasm the hardest its ever been. Her body shook from its intensity.

“ Mine .”

“ Mine !” she repeated mentally.

“ We are one. Our bond is officially sealed. Only death can break our mate bond. Even in death, I will follow you. We are eternal .”

“ One heart .”

Athena released her hold on Draco and leaned back to look into his eyes. What she saw there made all the fear and doubt she'd ever had about their mating and relationship melt away. She knew then and there she was in love with this man with every fiber of her being.

“I-I know you don't feel the same way yet. But I wanted you to know, I love you. I know it's foolish to say that this soon, but I can't help how I feel.”

Chapter

Thirty

She loved him. Draco stared into Athena's beautiful blue-green eyes and drowned in their depths.

To him, love was a simple word. It didn't come close to describing how he felt about her.

She was the sun to his moon. The air he breathed day in and day out.

A simple touch from her calmed the storms that raged in his head. All he could do was stare at his world. His everything.

He didn't really know how to put into words what he was feeling. Being speechless wasn't something he was used to.

"L-like I said, it's ok if you..."

Draco placed a finger over her lips to silence her for a moment.

"Me not repeating the words doesn't mean I don't.

Love is a simple word. A simple emotion that one can gain and lose easily.

What I feel for you goes beyond love. You are my everything.

My world. The air I breathe. The reason for my existence. ”

He didn't have to say anything else after that. Athena crushed their lips together, kissing him passionately. He held her tight and let his feelings for her show through his actions.

“Thank you, Draco. You have made me the happiest woman on the planet. I guess I had better go so you can focus on work.” Athena kissed his lips again.

“Mmm. Why don't you go release Arrow...eh, Dana for the day. We can ride home together. I'll make us reservations for dinner to go. We can sit by the fireplace at home and make out like kids hiding from my parents.”

Draco's cock went instantly hard at Athena's hearty laugh at his statement. He just had her, and he already wanted her again.

“I'll wait for you in the lobby so that you can concentrate on your work so we can leave sooner.”

When she leaned in to kiss him again, he pulled her into his arms. Kissing her was a drug he would happily stay addicted to.

“I want you here in my office, on the love seat so I can look up and see you whenever I want.”

“Bossy!” Athena laughed as she kissed his cheek.

Draco watched her walk away with a smirk on his face. Shaking his head, he walked back toward his desk and moved the papers around as he found the one he was looking for.

He didn't look up when he heard his door open a few minutes later. He knew it was his Beta, Leo.

"Any particular reason you're keeping the bitch around, other than to annoy the fuck out of me? It's obvious she's going to keep pushing this truce bullshit with the Maplewoods until we cave or a war breaks out."

"I want to see what game she is playing. She doesn't have access to anything important if that is what you're worrying about." Draco rolled his eyes at his Beta.

"I still think it's dangerous to keep the bitch around. She's already made it clear she thinks we should accept Maplewood's offer of a truce. Their idea of a truce is to bow down and kiss their ass. I'd rather go to war," Leo admitted, plopping down in a chair in front of Draco's desk.

"Trust me, brother, the war is going to happen. But we need to let it play out so that the key players show their hands and we are justified in case the Council steps in," Draco reminded him as he put his paperwork down to focus on his Beta.

"Have there been any challenges issues that you know of?"

Draco sighed deeply as he leaned back in his seat. His father had just called him this morning to inform him of the Alpha of the Maplewood Pack demanding a meeting and release of Athena from their pack before they went to the Council.

He had already been on the phone with someone in the Council about the situation, heading off the shit storm that the Maplewood Pack was trying to cause. Luckily for him, the laws were on his side.

"I'm heading them off after the call from Dad earlier this morning.

Apparently, the Alpha of the Maplewood Pack challenged him this morning.

He's refusing to accept that Dad has passed his position down to me and is specifically challenging him.

He's refusing to accept otherwise," Draco admitted to Leo, rubbing his face with his hands, exhaustion setting in.

"What are you going to do?" Leo asked, sitting forward, his own hands rubbing his face as he rested his elbows on his knees.

"I've reached out to our contact in the Council and alerted him to the situation. He confirmed that as long as Athena is my true fated mate, then we are protected, and the Maplewoods will face the consequences of their actions."

Draco let out a heavy sigh at the news he just leveled on Leo. Picking up the phone, he called his assistant and decided to play a hand that he knew that he needed to play to put all of this to bed and fast.

After relaying his message, he hung up the phone and leaned back in his seat. He couldn't help the little smile on his lips when he looked over at the love seat and the ideas that had popped into his head at the thought of his mate lying there soon.

"That's a sight I haven't seen in a long time," Leo stated, staring at him for a bit.

"What?" Draco asked in confusion as he looked back at his Beta.

"You, smiling. Haven't seen that smile since high school."

"Have I been that much of a surly asshole?" Draco asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“Worse. I have to say, brother, your mate looks good on you.” Leo laughed as he stood up to walk out of the office. “Although, I’d be careful with her around Sheila. That bitch has claws and will have no problems trying to sink them into Athena.”

“She touches my mate, she won’t have to be fired. They won’t find her body. Not like anyone would even report her missing.” Draco smirked over at Leo.

Chapter

Thirty-One

Athena walked out of Dana's office with a huge smile on her face. She could tell her friend and bodyguard was relieved she was free for the rest of the day.

She had to admit she cherished her time alone with Draco. Especially now that she was pregnant with their little one. Draco had become very attentive and careful with her ever since they found out she was pregnant.

Earlier in his office was the first time he'd even lost his composure the way he did. She loved every second of it.

"What are you doing here? The Alpha is a very busy man. He doesn't have time to deal with you or your flimsy human whims at this moment."

Lost in her thoughts, she failed to pay attention to her surroundings. Looking toward the sneered voice, she came face to face with Sheila.

"I am aware my husband is a very busy man. I am also aware, Sheila, it is none of your business what I am doing here, especially since it was my husband who asked me to be here. Know your place."

Athena's heart skipped several beats as Sheila's eyes narrowed as she stepped closer to her. The evil smirk on the woman's face made her nervous as hell.

“You’re the one who should know her place, human. There’s a reason wolves are at the top of the food chain, not weak-ass humans. I can take you out with one swipe of a claw. You are a temporary place holder until Draco realizes what a waste of space you are. He’s mine, bitch! We have a history...”

“History? Yes, you’ve already played that card once and he shot you down.

He doesn’t want you. Never has and never will.

Technically lions, tigers, and bears are on top of the food chain, wolves are somewhere behind them.

You might be able to take me out with your skanky claws, but I can have you dealt with, with just a single word to Draco.

Even if I wasn’t in the picture, he still wouldn’t fuck you! ”

Athena glared at the woman, daring her to say something else. When Sheila growled and raised her hand to strike her, all hell broke loose.

“You bring that hand down to strike my wife, I will end your fucking life right here and as your life slowly drains out of you, and as you’re taking your last fucking breath, I will dance in your fucking blood.”

Athena couldn’t hide the smirk she gave the woman at Draco’s dark command. How he knew something was up was beyond her.

She knew without a shadow of a doubt he was angry. She could feel it coming off of him in waves.

Shivers went up and down her body at the intensity of the anger she felt coming off

of him. She was both scared and yet turned on at the same time.

“Excuse me, Draco? You didn’t...”

“Alpha Blackwood!” Draco yelled at the woman, making several of the people around them lower their heads at his roar.

“Do not ever speak to me as if you are a part of my inner circle, family or friend. You are neither. In fact, you are hereby fired and exiled from the Blackwood territory. You have one hour to pack what you want and get out of our territory before you are executed.”

“You can’t do that! Your father is the true Alpha of the pack! You haven’t been sworn in yet!” Sheila dared to talk back.

“You’ve been working with me for the last four months. You even saw the papers that were verified that I was now the Alpha of Blackwood Pack.”

“I never sent them to the Council.” Sheila laughed as she shook her head at Draco. “I also never sent your bullshit paperwork on the sham of a mating with this stupid bitch either.”

“I know you didn’t. I sent all of that in before I gave you the chance to do your job. All you were given were the filed copies. Call my mate a bitch one more time and you forfeit your life.”

Athena looked at her husband in shock. When he was within touching distance, she moved closer to him and placed her hand on his back, settling herself.

“I leave, you have no attorney for pack business. Council law states there has to be one in place...”

“Stop stalling, Sheila. I know the Council laws. Perhaps even better than you do.”

Athena watched as Leo and two others from Draco’s team walked up behind Sheila and waited. When she felt Draco nod toward them, they jumped into action.

Leo and two of the men grabbed Sheila by the arms and started escorting her out of the building. When they were halfway down the hall, Draco called Leo’s name.

“Alpha...”

“Sheila, this is me, per my mate, showing you grace. Something you don’t deserve.

You have one hour to vacate Blackwood territory.

Secondly, never assume I know nothing. I know more than you think I do.

Third, Bigley O’Connor is the new pack attorney.

He has been for the last four months. He was only able to move here last month.

Now, get your ass out of my office before I forget my wife’s kindness and do what I want to do. ”

Athena watched as Leo, Tucker, and Case escorted a yelling Sheila out of the building. She said a silent prayer for the three men because that woman was fucked in the head.

Athena looked back to where her husband was in a conversation with an older man that was dressed in a three-piece business suit. She could tell from how relaxed he was that her husband and this man knew each other well.

“O’Connor, this is my wife, my true mate, Athena. Athena, this is the pack’s attorney, Bigley O’Connor. He is also the attorney I had for my company while I was in California.”

Athena smiled at the man and shook his hand. She could see he was a gentle soul.

“Don’t let the smile fool you, mate. He’s a fucking shark in the courtroom. I stole him from his law firm. I think the D.A. and everyone else in California cried in relief.”

Athena laughed at her husband’s joke with the attorney. She was starting to see him relax more and more lately.

Placing her hand over her stomach, she said another small prayer for her husband and their unborn child. She sent a silent prayer that the mess with the Maplewood Pack was over with soon.

She still had a hard time sleeping sometimes after everything they had put her through. She was afraid the worst was yet to come.

Because of that fear, she was petrified of what would happen to Draco, their unborn child, and her in-laws. She admitted she would wish for death if anything happened to them.

Little did she know her nightmares were about to come true. Wishing for death was going to be her new mantra.

Chapter

Thirty-Two

Athena woke with a start. When she realized she was at home in bed with Draco, his arms wrapped around her waist, she relaxed slightly.

With a heavy sigh of relief, she laid back down and curled up closer to Draco. His scent and touch calming her already.

“What’s wrong, mate? Another nightmare?”

“How did you know?”

“We are mates. I can sense your emotions. Want to tell me about it?”

“No, not really. I’m afraid to give them a voice. I can’t lose you, Draco. Not when we’ve finally found each other...”

“Hey, hey! Calm down, baby. I’m not going anywhere.

Not without a fight. They don’t know who or what they are up against when it comes to me or Leo.

We won’t let anything happen to you or our little one.

Even if, by some fluke, they manage to get to you before Leo or myself, just know I

will find you. I will always find you.”

“How? How will you find me if they manage to take me into their territory?” Athena sobbed, letting the tears and her fear win out.

“Our minds, our hearts, and our souls are connected, my beautiful mate. There are mates, fated mates, and then there are true fated mates, like us.” Draco pulled her into him, holding her tight.

“I understand the differences between mates and fated mates. But what is the difference between fated mates and true fated mates?”

Athena remembered the conversations with them all in the beginning about the differences between mates and fated mates. Rolling over, she turned to face her husband, her hand going to his to intertwine their fingers together.

She breathed in his scent when he moved to wipe the tears falling freely down her cheeks with his thumbs. Her heart thumping like a runaway horse racing to the finish line.

“Mates choose whomever they want, which is something that happens more often than not. Fated mates are a rarity among shifters. With fated mates, they share a bond that is unshakeable. They can sense feelings and emotions. With fated mates, it’s not talked about, but they don’t even have to like one another or even love one another.

That bond can be rejected. It’s hard as hell, but it can be rejected, just like the mate bond when they want to divorce. ”

Athena’s eyes jumped to Draco’s. That was something they had failed to tell her about fated mates.

“I thought fated mates were blessed by the goddess or whatnot from the way you guys were talking.”

Athena started to pull away but was stopped with Draco’s hand on her hips stalling her movement. When he pulled up to his elbow so that he could stare down at her, she knew he meant business now.

“For some, yes. If their fated mate was one that they were happy with, then it is a blessing by the goddess. For some, the belief is that fated mates are found to bear strong offspring. There are many different beliefs around it,” Draco answered, rubbing his thumb on her hips in circles.

“True fated mates? Can they be rejected or hate each other?” Athena bit her lip, fear seeping into her eyes and voice.

“True fated mates are even rarer. Not very many find theirs. What is known is they do not hate each other, nor do they reject each other. They are happy together. Soulmates as it has been described.”

Athena looked up into Draco’s eyes and saw the love and wonderment in them. She knew he was telling the truth.

“So, they are considered truly blessed by the goddess? Have any ever rejected their true fated mates?” Athena’s heart skipped a beat, fearful of the answer.

“No. To my knowledge, once a true fated mate has been found, there is no rejection because they love one another, desire one another and can’t survive without the other. A mate and fated mate can survive without their mates. A true fated mate cannot.”

Athena looked up, her hand going to his cheek. She knew without a shadow of a doubt she could not live without this man in her life.

“Do you remember the feeling you felt, the power when I marked you?”

Athena thought back to the moment that Draco had finally marked her. It had been a shock to her that he had done that when he had been adamant that he wouldn't do so. But when he did, gods when he did, her whole world tilted upside down.

She felt like her soul left her body and when it had returned, she was finally whole for once in her life. She had finally felt warm in all the places that she had thought were cold and dead.

She nodded her head at him when she looked back at him. She wondered if he had felt it too.

“Yes, I felt that way too. Things that I thought were forever going to be closed off, cold and dead inside are now warm and alive for the first time in a very long time. When I marked you, I thought we were only fated mates. But when you bit me, despite you only being a human, I felt my world upend and my soul leaving my body. I knew then what it had felt like for you when I marked you. You imprinted your soul to mine. Only true fated mates can do that to each other.”

Athena looked at Draco in surprise. She hadn't even thought about that fact.

The first time she'd “marked” him as Draco has claimed, she didn't know what drove her to do so. She just felt this need to place her mark on him like he had her.

“Your parents are fated mates, right?” Athena asked, her hand wrapping around his wrist.

“True fated mates. Just like my grandparents are, and their parents before them. Mom noticed the mark on my chest when I had taken my shirt off while working in the yard the other afternoon when she came over. She was the one to ask about us

speaking mind to mind. That's how you know it's a true mate bond versus the fated mate bond. ”

“No one knows about that part of it, then? If something happens, then I should be able to reach out to you from wherever I am?” Athena asked, hope in her voice for the first time in a long time.

“I will always find you, my mate. I will burn down the world to find you wherever you and our child are. No one is safe from me if anything happens to you. I promise you that.”

Chapter

Thirty-Three

Athena woke up to an empty bed, only to find a note and a red rose on Draco's pillow the next morning. He had told her last night as he was holding her close that he had to take a tour of the territory, a monthly thing he does, to make sure all is going well.

He was taking Leo, Tucker, Case, and Hawk with him to do the tour so that they could make their presence more known. Dana stayed with her as usual and for her to reach out if they needed anything.

He reminded her that he was only a mind conversation away if she needed him. He signed off on the note that he loved her and couldn't wait to see her this evening.

She couldn't help the huge smile on her face as she lay there and inhaled his scent from his side of the bed. Gods help her she loved this man with every fiber of her being.

She couldn't help but pray that if anything ever happened to Draco, that their little ones were old enough to fend for themselves because she didn't think she could honestly live in this world without him by her side.

She knew that was a harsh thing to think, but Draco was the air she breathed, and gods help anyone who harmed him, because she would do everything in her power to take them out with her.

Getting up, she completed her morning routine just as Dana knocked on the door to let her know she was there for them to head to the school. She couldn't remember a day when that didn't happen anymore.

“Good morning, Dana. Coffee is on. Make you a mug. Would you like a bagel with cream cheese this morning?”

“Good morning, Luna. Thank you. I don't know why you ask because you make me one anyway.”

Athena laughed at Dana's response. She was right, though.

Every morning, she had the coffee ready for when Dana arrived, and she made sure there was an extra bagel with extra cream cheese on it just for her shadow. It wasn't Dana's fault her husband was overprotective, so she was making sure her guard was well taken care of.

“Just like you don't listen when I tell you to call me Athena instead of Luna. I don't think I'll ever get used to hearing that word in association with my marriage to Draco. I haven't the first clue how to tell a shifter what they should and shouldn't do.”

“You know more than you realize, Athena. You're intelligent and everyone already loves you.

That's all that matters as a Luna. Besides, if anyone gives you any shit, just tell one of us before Draco finds out and we'll have them crying in their underwear before the boss gets to them.

Otherwise, he deals with them after saying something to you, then they may not live another day. ”

Athena laughed at the image that Dana presented to her. She was glad that Dana was one of theirs.

“Alright, let’s get to school. Kids have a big day ahead of them. They need extra time and encouragement today. Some aren’t as excited about the fact they are headed to fourth grade as they should be.”

“They aren’t even excited about summer break? I remember loving the last day of school just because it meant summer break. Being able to play with my friends and the Alpha and elders taking us out into the forests to learn about our wolves and the stories of our ancestors.”

“Oh wow! That sounds amazing. I wonder if they have something like that here?”

“I don’t know. I never heard Draco talking about it. It might be something to ask him or his parents about. My father was a Native American, so most tribes that have shifters would do that.”

Athena looked over at Dana after getting into the car and started thinking. She wondered what Draco’s pack did to teach the children of the pack about their wolves and where they truly came from.

She sent Deidra and her mother-in-law a text asking them that very question. She wanted to be prepared for when their little one came along, and they had their father’s DNA to shift.

Once she got to the school, she set about getting her classroom ready. She’d just turned around when her door opened, and little Jimmy Spencer came running into the classroom.

“Mrs. Blackwood, Tommy is hurt real bad on the playground. I know we’re not

supposed to be on the playground without an adult, but we wanted to swing really bad like and he fell...”

“Calm down, Jimmy. It’s going to be okay. Show me where you two were playing.”

Athena grabbed her phone quickly and ran after Jimmy. As much as she wanted to have a discussion about listening to adults with Jimmy, Tommy needed her help more.

She sent a quick text to Dana and walked as fast as she could to the playground. When she got there, her heart froze in horror at the sight before her.

Rob Maplewood stood there with a gun at little Tommy’s head. Her brother and Townie were off to the side with their own guns out, pointed in her direction. The young boy was crying out for his mom, snot running down his face.

“Townie? What the fuck, dude?”

Athena’s heart seized in that moment when she heard Dana’s voice behind her. Dana was outnumbered with these three.

“You seriously don’t get it do you, bitch? I’m going to the winning side. I’m done working for chump change and handouts. Boss was losing his edge because of this human slut. Then he took out my mate. He didn’t have to fucking kill her like he did.”

“Y-your mate? Who the fuck...wait, you’re saying Shades was your mate? Dude she was fucking pining for Draco since the minute she joined the damn unit. She only rode your dick to scratch an itch. Hell, she even fucked Tucker and Case.”

“She was still my fucking mate. Doesn’t mean we have to like each other, but she

was still mine. He fucking knew that. He didn't have to kill her."

"She was going to attack Athena because she got outed about her plan to drug Draco. Are you fucking kidding me right now? Is that why you refused to go with Draco and the others today?"

Bang

Bang

Bang

Athena screamed as she covered Jimmy with her body as Townie fired his gun at Dana. Before she could react, she felt hands in her hair and her arms, pulling her from the little one.

When she looked to where Dana lay, she wasn't moving. They killed Dana. In front of the kids. W...T...F...

Chapter

Thirty-Four

Athena couldn't stop the tears that fell down her face. She didn't know where she was or what time of day it was.

They had placed a black hood over her head and dragged her to a vehicle, before shoving her into what she assumed was the trunk of the vehicle they had driven after they tied her hands and legs up. She was still in shock knowing that Townie had betrayed Draco and his friends.

She said a silent prayer for Dana, praying that she was okay and just pretending to be dead. Please let her be okay...please!"

When she felt the vehicle stop, she steeled herself for whatever was about to happen. She couldn't see anything with the hood over her head, but she could hear everything around her.

She was roughly pulled out of the trunk of the vehicle and dragged several feet away. She knew she was going into a building of some sort since they took her up some steps and through a door.

Her shoulder and arm were going to be bruised from the doorframe thanks to them not caring how rough they were handling her. She prayed that her unborn child survived through this nightmare.

She knew Draco would never forgive himself if something happened to their unborn child. She needed to do whatever it took to protect her stomach at all costs.

Athena was then pushed down a flight of stairs after going through another door. She managed to grab a railing to keep from rolling down the stairs.

She knew from the smell she was in a basement of some kind. She screamed out when she felt hands grip her by the hair and pull her across the ground.

She bit her lip when she felt her skin getting nicks from things on the ground biting into her legs and thighs. She yelled out again when her head slammed against a hard surface.

Athena felt iron like objects encircle both wrists and the figure's shadow moved away from her. She gasped when hands yanked the hood from her head, pulling her hair along with it.

It took several minutes for her to get her bearings once she opened her eyes and started to look around where she was at. The room was dark with a small light coming from a single lamp in the ceiling.

She blinked several times before the dizziness in her head slightly receded. Once she could focus on her surroundings, she looked up and saw Rob, Chris, Townie, Rob's father, her mother and Sheila all standing there with a smirk on their face.

She looked around the dimly lit basement where they had her shackled to a wall. Yep, she was truly fucked.

"What is the meaning of this? Let me go right now!" Athena demanded, glaring at Townie, before shifting her eyes at the others.

“You are in no shape to make demands, human.” Claude Maplewood sneered down at her.

“I have every right. I am the wife and mate of the Alpha of the Blackwood Pack...”

Pain exploded across her face as Claude stepped forward and punched her across the face hard enough to make her see stars floating in her vision. She knew if Draco found out about this, he would kill the man.

“Does hitting women who are defenseless make you feel like a real man? Oh wait, that’s poisoning the Alphas of the pack you’re going after and then attacking their wives and making them watch as they die.

Didn’t work for you this time, did it? Townie couldn’t get close enough, nor could Sheila.

She couldn’t dig her skanky claws into a real man. ”

Pain exploded on her face again as this time Sheila backhanded her across the cheek. She licked the side of her lip where she tasted the coppery tang of her blood from the cracked skin.

“Not only do you act like a bitch, but you also hit like a bitch,” Athena continued to goad the woman.

“You whore!” Sheila shrieked as she started back toward Athena.

“You’re seriously calling me a whore? You’re the one going after a married man. A mated man. You’re so fucking jealous you’re fucking every man you can find to fill that gaping hole in your vagina. Oh wait, you’ve never been with Draco so you wouldn’t know how he feels.”

“Enough!”

Athena jumped when Claude yelled out as he grabbed Sheila and threw her to the ground behind him. Looks like playtime was over with.

“You have made a mockery of my son and my pack. You were to be wed to him, yet you spit in his face and his generosity. If you think your pairing with the Blackwood Pack will save you, think again, human. Either you renounce your mating with them, or I will get the Council involved and have their entire pack brought to their knees with that farce of a pairing!”

Athena glared at Claude as she thought through her options for what he just presented. Remembering something that Draco had told her, she looked up at the man and studied him for several minutes.

Claude stood at an even six foot tall, with salt and pepper hair, a swimmer’s build with an even tan. The man’s eyes were a malt whiskey color that had her thinking of alcohol.

Remembering what Draco had told her when they had talked about Sheila and statements she’d made that night, she smiled at the man. The man and his pack were in for a rude awakening.

“Call the Council. Bring them in and let’s see which pack really gets handed their asses.” She smirked at the man.

“You stupid bitch! You really think the Council is going to save you?” Athena’s mother shook her head.

“What I know is that the Council goes by facts and Pack laws. You sided with people who bend shifter laws to benefit themselves. I know that you will not prevail with

whatever bullshit things you think will make you guys come out on top.”

“What your mouth, bitch! We have an inside with the Council that backs us up. It’s you that’s fucked, bitch!” Rob sneered her way.

Well shit! It looked like they were under prepared after all.

Chapter

Thirty-Five

Draco's chest started seizing, making him grab his chest. Something was wrong and he didn't know what it was.

He looked over at his team that was with him and noticed they were panicking about his reactions. They pulled him to the waiting vehicle, watching for anything that could be targeting him.

When he heard Leo's phone ringing, his heart nearly gave out from worry. He'd never been scared of losing something his entire life.

Not even in war zones or missions. Now that he knew what having his true fated mate was like, he could not, would not lose it.

"Fuck! Get us to Pelo Grove Elementary, now ! Dana's been shot. Medics are on the way there now."

"Athena?" Draco asked, glaring at his best friend.

"Taken. Draco, she was kidnapped by Townie. He's assisting the Maplewoods."

"He's fucking dead. I knew he took Shadow's death hard. Never thought it was betrayal hard."

Draco's wolf wanted to come out and find his mate and annihilate anyone in his path, but he knew he had to play it calmly. He pulled out his phone and sent a message to his father to let him know what was going on.

Draco instructed his team to get to Dana ASAP at the school. His father was meeting them there with a guest who had just arrived at the home.

They sped through streets, taking turns at a high rate of speed. Thank the goddess no one was out or got in their way.

They flew into the school parking lot, tires squealing as they came to an abrupt stop. The ambulance, pack police, and his father all arrived at the same time they did.

"Arrow!" Draco yelled out as he rushed out of the SUV.

"I'm fine. The bullets are already out," a disgruntled Arrow grumbled as she pushed hands away from her.

"Ma'am, you were shot with bullets specially designed to take out shifters. The fact you are still breathing is a miracle." The medics huffed at her.

"Bullshit. If Townie wanted me dead, he would have killed me. That motherfucker never misses his targets."

Draco pulled back at the news Arrow had just given them. Someone he'd trusted with his life had betrayed them.

He'd known that Townie was hurting and angry with him over Shades' death. He had thought they'd worked past all of that when they had their talk.

"Athena?" Draco asked, his voice going tight.

“Townie took her. He had Rob and her fucking brother with him. Draco, they have someone in the Council on their payroll. It’s why they have not been punished for any of their actions so far.”

“Did they say who?” A man stepped forward, along with Draco’s father.

“No. Just know they said that this person was going to deny Draco as the Blackwood Pack’s Alpha and denounce the mating of Athena and Draco. They are declaring an all-out war between the two packs.”

“Who are you?” Draco asked the man standing next to his father.

“I am Douglas Amari, the High Lord of the Shifter Council. I believe you were already looking for me, young man. Considering your medical team was requesting access to my DNA profile.”

“Holy shit! Athena,” Leo murmured in shock from beside Draco.

Draco studied the man in front of him. He stood tall at six feet three inches, a stocky build with reddish brown hair. It was the eyes that made him stop in his tracks and took his breath away.

The blue green with sparkled whiskey flecks that always made his breath catch whenever she would look up at him with that smile that stole the air from his lungs. He knew without a shadow of a doubt this man was Athena’s biological father.

“Who is this Athena?” Douglas Amari asked as he crossed his arms across his chest.

“Well, Doug, based on the DNA test, your daughter. She’s never met her biological father. Her mother told her that you left them because you never wanted a daughter because she was unworthy to be your child,” Draco’s father informed the man, his

eyes glowing with his wolf in anger.

“Who is her mother?” Douglas asked, his own eyes glowing with his wolf in anger.

“Delilah Chapman.”

“You’re telling me that Delilah Chapman had my child, and I was never told about her?”

Draco had to fight the instinct to take a step back and bow his head at the anger that was echoing from the man’s voice. The man was the Alpha of all wolf shifter kind.

Douglas Amari was considered royalty in the shifter world. Others in the Council answered to him.

“You never knew about Athena?” Coren asked, the confusion evident in his voice.

Draco winced when he saw the man turn toward his father and glare. Yet his father never backed down from the man.

“No. Delilah Chapman was a drunken weekend fling after high school, before I joined the military. I tried to reach out to her when I had come home for a visit shortly after basic training but found out she had gotten married. I never knew she had been pregnant nor that the child was mine.”

“Her and the man she married did have one child together. A son. He’s partnered with the Maplewood Pack. He sold your daughter to them for a place in their territory. The mother is a part of their conspiracy and abused toward my mate.”

“My daughter, she is your fated mate?”

Draco swallowed his fear of this man. He knew from reports that this was not a man to be fucked with.

“Yes, sir. She is my true fated mate.”

“Draco, I miss you so much. I don’t know if you can hear me this far away. I’m keeping the faith you will find me in time.”

“I’m here my love. Where are you? Where are they holding you?”

“Behind a wall in a basement somewhere. They kept a hood over my face so I couldn’t see where.

Draco, they have a man, someone from the Council.

A Jordan Roosevelt, who is going to declare our mating unlawful and allow the Maplewoods to declare war as retribution.

S-Sheila told them about our baby. They are executing me in the morning in a mockery of a trial in front of their whole pack. ”

Draco roared loudly and painfully. Those around him, with the exception of his father and Athena’s father, whimpered and lowered their heads in obedience.

Hell was going to reign on Earth tonight. The devil himself was getting new souls sent to him, express train and all.

Chapter

Thirty-Six

Athena couldn't help the relief she felt when the connection between her and Draco actually worked. When they said they were going to be executing her for her betrayal of Rob, she lost all composure.

She'd started out in tearful prayer for Draco to find her quickly and nearly crumbled in relief when he responded to her. She'd completely forgotten in all of the chaos they could reach out with each other telepathically.

She relayed everything she knew to help him find her. Now all she could do was wait and pray to every deity in the Universe that they got to her in time.

She'd just fallen asleep when rough hands gripped her hair, jerking her wide awake while they unshackled her hands from the wall. She was dragged from the room she had been held in, through the building and through the vast yard.

She was shoved outside toward a circle and into a chair, to which they zip tied her hands to the chair. When she looked at her surroundings, she saw her captors along with most of the Maplewood Pack surrounding them, glaring at her.

Standing next to Claude Maplewood was a man who appeared to be in his late thirties or early forty's, sneering at her as if she was a pebble in his shoe. She stared at him for several seconds before she rolled her eyes at him.

The man obviously thought he was better than everyone currently present. She guessed him being part of the Council made him so.

The man was tall, lanky in build with his dark hair slicked back with a lot of hair product. The wind was blowing slightly outside and not a single hair on his head moved with the wind like hers did.

The man's eyes were another story all together. She didn't even bother to look at them to see the color because all she could see was the crazy in them.

The man was obviously cray cray in the head. She reached out to Draco in a panic when the strange man sneered an evil smirk her way.

"Please hurry. I really fear this man is going to enjoy torturing me before he kills me."

"Be calm, my mate. They will not harm you. We are almost there."

"I thought wolves could smell each other. How do they not know you are close by?"

"I'll explain when we get you free and home."

"Please be safe. The baby and I need you. I love you, Draco."

"I love you too, Athena. Never forget that."

Athena returned her focus back to her surroundings. Her mate was nearby and would be rescuing her soon.

"Members of the Maplewood Pack, welcome to our Pack tribunal. Today we will put this human on trial for her crime of betrayal to our pack. Her mother signed a contract

with me for her to mate your future Alpha, my son, Robert. Not only did she betray him by refusing their mating, but she also denied they were fated mates. Instead, she mated the future Alpha of the Blackwood Pack, Draco Blackwood.”

“Lord help the de lulu in this speech!” Athena mumbled, rolling her eyes in the process.

Her statement was met with a hard, painful punch across her right cheek. Fuck, that shit hurt like a motherfucker.

“Mind your tongue, whore!”

Athena looked at the man who punched her in the face and smiled at him. She was going to enjoy watching his life drain from his eyes.

“Patience, my heart. He will pay for putting his paws on you. We are nearly there. Just a few more minutes then you will be free.”

“How, Draco? They have a high-ranking member of the Council here. He claims his word in law.”

“We will have fun with him the most, next to the Maplewoods. Please forgive me when your mother and brother die when we attack.”

“She, nor he, mean nothing to me. If they die in your rescue mission of me, then that is on them. They chose their side of this war. I have chosen mine. I choose you. Always and for eternity.”

“Athena Chapman, you have been brought before the Council to be tried for your crimes against the Maplewood Pack. How do you plead?”

Athena looked at the Council member who spoke and had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing. Hearing Draco talking to her and telling her what to say, told her he was nearby and could hear what was being said to her.

“First, it’s Athena Blackwood. Secondly, I never agreed to the mating of myself or Rob Maplewood.

Since I was over the age of eighteen at the time the farce of an arrangement was made, nor was I living in my incubators’ home, their contract is null and void.

Rob Maplewood is not my mate nor is he my fated mate.

Draco Blackwood is my true fated mate. Yet, you stole me from my territory to bring me here for a sham of a trial that should have more than just one Council member present to prove or disprove the allegations being leveled against me. ”

Athena couldn’t hide the smirk when the Council member, Claude, and Rob glared at her when the members of the pack started murmuring under their breaths at her statement. She prayed that was enough to cause discord within the pack.

“Silence!” Claude roared, making his pack members whimper and lower their heads at his order.

“You, human, are not a shifter, therefore you do not benefit from that rule.”

“Even as a human since you like to point that out, I am an Alpha shifter’s true fated mate.

Therefore, I am allotted the same rights as a shifter, unless he rejects our mating.

In matters such as this, a Shifter High Lord is supposed to be here to verify the

authenticity of a true mating, yet from what I can see, he is not here.

You are only a Council member by your own statement. ”

Athena never saw the punch to her face coming. She was hit so hard that the chair she was tied to fell over, causing everything in her body to flare with pain.

“Who do you think you are to try and tell me shifter law? I am the Shifter High Lord!”

As her world went dark, she heard a loud roar. She welcomed the darkness with a smile on her face knowing her mate was here to make everyone pay.

Chapter

Thirty-Seven

Athena jerked awake quickly when cold water splashed across her face. When she focused her glare on the person who did it, she noticed they were surrounded by Blackwood enforcers ready to attack at a moment's notice.

It wasn't until she saw Rob standing in front of her with a gun pointed at her way that she realized why. Fucking coward.

"How dare you raid my territory!" Claude Maplewood bellowed at Draco, getting into his face.

"That's funny coming from you, seeing your spawn and his flunkies came into my territory and kidnapped my mate." Draco chuckled, crossing his massive arms over his chest, relaxing.

"Please! We did no such thing. Your own enforcer invited us into your territory, therefore we didn't sneak in. We were escorted." Rob laughed as he rolled his eyes at Draco.

"He's not my enforcer. He was banned into exile the day before your spy, Shelia was. So, therefore, they snuck into Blackwood territory. You kidnapped my true fated mate and shot her guard."

"Those are serious allegations, Mr. Blackwood. Do you have any proof of what

you're claiming?"

"Duh! I'm right here, zip tied to a fucking chair. That asshole shot Dana. What more fucking proof do you need?" Athena screamed at the arrogant asshole.

"Is this alleged victim a shifter or a mere human?" The man sneered at Draco, obviously ignoring her.

"Are you fucking serious right now? Dana was a shifter. That fucker shot her, knocking her off her feet. Even gloated how you helped them get special bullets that prevent them from shifting to heal," Athena shouted at the asshole.

"That's nonsense. I would never do such a thing." Roosevelt huffed snootily.

"Those bullets she mentioned were recovered from the scene of Dana's shooting.

Luckily for her, she was wearing a vest. Only one penetrated her body, her leg, but she was able to shift once the medics dislodged the bullet.

It was confirmed to be from a stockpile the Council had in a vault.

The same stockpile that went missing six months ago.

"Draco smirked at the man as he ran his index finger and thumb over his chin as if lost in thought.

"How dare you accuse a member of the High Council of such a horrible act. Like you would have someone on the inside. I would have known about that." Roosevelt glared at Draco.

"Really? Like they would have known about your side business with the

Maplewoods?” Draco countered back, quirking an eyebrow at the man.

“I am the High Lord of the Council, therefore, I do not have to inform anyone who I have decided to work with. Considering I have been watching you for a while now, Mr. Blackwood, I have to say, you’re getting too big for your britches.

Therefore, the Maplewoods have my full support.

I believe that the Alpha of the Maplewood Pack has issued a challenge to the Alpha of the Blackwood Pack.

Therefore, Claude and Coren shall fight to the death! ”

Athena’s whole world tilted at that announcement. Coren couldn’t fight Claude.

They didn’t know about the treatments that Claude was undergoing that made him impossible to beat. They were cheating.

“Draco, Coren can’t fight Claude and win. The asshat has been using some kind of serum that makes him impossible to beat. I saw Roosevelt give Claude a new batch.”

“Thank you, my love. I will handle this. My father won’t be fighting. Be patient and reserve your energy for our child.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint Claude, but I am no longer the Alpha for the Blackwood Pack.

That duty was given to my son, Draco, upon his return to the territory.

And since when did you become the High Lord, Roosevelt?

Last I heard, Amari was the High Lord, and he accepted the declaration that was sent to him last month that Draco was the new Alpha.

He also accepted Draco and Athena's mating upon hearing they were true fated mates.

"Coren quirked an eyebrow the two men's way, challenging them in front of the Maplewood Pack.

Athena stared after Coren as he walked forward, standing beside his son, tall and proud. He let it be known that he wasn't going to back down from any challenge come as it may.

"Amari? Please. Now you're showing how uneducated you truly are.

Amari hasn't been the High Lord for some time.

Now, enough wasting my time. Either you, Coren Blackwood, will fight to the death with the Alpha of the Maplewood Pack or you forfeit.

If you forfeit, then the Blackwood Pack falls under the ruling of the Maplewood Pack.

"Roosevelt sneered at Coren as if talking to a peasant.

"As I stated previously, I am no longer the ruling Alpha of the pack, that duty falls to Draco. Unless you're stating that Amari, accepting that title change before he stepped down is no longer valid, then you have failed to inform us.

If that is the case, then I am allowed to choose my champion to fight in my honor as you are now claiming you are the new High Lord yet failed to inform any of the

packs around the country of the change, which is custom by law.

” Coren smirked over at the weasel, daring him to respond.

Athena watched as the man sputtered and glared at Coren who was clearly over politicking the man every which way he turned. There was something going on in the depths of this maneuvering and she couldn’t figure it out.

“Choose your champion,” Roosevelt seethed through his teeth.

“I choose my son, Draco Blackwood. The true Alpha of Blackwood Pack to fight against the Maplewood Pack.”

Athena’s heart sank when she saw the evil smile spread across the face of Claude Maplewood. She knew they were done for.

While her husband was in phenomenal shape, she was afraid he would be no match for a man who was chemically enhanced to fight those tougher than him. Draco didn’t do drugs, despite everything that he’d been put through in his military days.

“Good, then I choose to face your son. I’ll enjoy killing him and then you when I win your pack in this fight.”

Chapter

Thirty-Eight

Athena didn't know how to respond to the comment that was just made. She struggled to get up but was limited in her movements.

She gasped when she felt hands on her arms as they helped her to sit upright. When she looked over, she saw that it was Leo and Case who had helped her up and positioned themselves between her and Rob.

She felt Case beside her cut the zip ties that held her to the chair as Leo worked on the other side. Once she was free, Tuck and Hawk came to help the other two surround her.

She knew right away what they were doing. She moved to stand beside Leo.

"Stay behind me, Luna. If anything happens to you, our Alpha will have our asses," Leo pleaded with her.

"I may be the Luna of the pack, but I refuse to hide. My husband is fighting not only for his life, but for the life of his parents, his sister, and his pack. I will not hide like a weak human." Athena glared at Leo, trying hard to keep her emotions at bay.

"He's fighting for you and your unborn child too, Luna. He's fighting for all of it. He will win." Leo promised her a smile on his face.

“Leo, that Council member has been giving Claude serums that make him stronger than a normal person. While I know my husband is damn good at what he does, I’m still worried about that serum. That’s how he beat the other Alphas he’s fought against,” Athena informed Leo, fear sounding in her voice.

“It’s okay. We already knew about the serum before we got here. Maplewood won’t win. Even if he does manage to beat Draco, which he won’t, we have an ace up our sleeve as well. Try to relax, Athena. If you’re agitated, he will feel it.” Leo pulled her into his arms to soothe her.

Athena watched as the two men circled each other. One with decades as an Alpha of his bedraggled pack that seemed sewed together of those who defied the laws or were rejected from their packs because of their past.

Then there was her husband. A man who took pride in not only his pack, but his family and in his destiny.

While he was at first hesitant to take a fated mate, because he felt that made him weak, he now relished having a fated mate, realizing that made him stronger. She didn’t know what made his sudden change, but she would not challenge it.

The man he was now, was vastly different than the man she’d met months ago. The man months ago was hard, cold, and firm in his decisions.

The man now, was totally different. Now, he smiled, laughed, teased, joked and loved.

He was still hard, cold and firm, but he was more so in a way that you didn’t fuck with him or his family. Only she, or those he considered his inner circle, saw that soft side.

She gripped Leo's arm and held on tight as she closed her eyes and said a silent prayer for the safety of her husband and their pack. She knew without a shadow of a doubt that if Claude beat Draco, they were all dead.

She had to control herself when her husband walked over to her and took off his shirt to hand to her. Unable to resist, she reached for his nape and pulled him down for a passionate kiss.

"Please be careful. Do what you need to take him out. I need you to come home to me. I can't live without you," Athena pleaded with Draco, her head in his neck as he held her tight.

"Fear not, my mate. I know what I'm doing. I've faced stronger than him in my years in the military. Kiss me again for luck."

Athena growled as she leaned up onto her toes and kissed Draco with everything she had. He stole the breath she breathed as he kissed her like it was going to be their last time ever touching lips again.

"Enough! Stop stalling and let's get this over with so I can get on with my day to dismantle your pack and end your family line," Claude growled as she stalked toward them.

Athena watched as Draco slowly backed away and winked at her. What the hell was he up to now?

When the fight started, she wasn't sure what to expect. She'd heard that some fights within the packs were fought in their wolf form, but Claude opted for them to fight in their human form.

Apparently, from what little she had gathered, the serum only made the human side

stronger than the wolf side. Something that didn't make sense to her.

"Leo..." she whispered to him, pulling him down so she could speak into his ear softly.

While she knew that wolves had superior hearing, she was afraid that her question would be heard by Rob, who was watching his father fight with an evil smile on his lips. When Leo leaned down to accommodate her, she asked a barrage of questions that had been plaguing her.

"This serum, if it only works on the human side, what could it do to the wolf side? Wouldn't the Shifter Council want the wolf to be stronger than the human side?"

Leo pulled her in for a hug. She felt like he was patronizing her but when he pulled her down to speak in her ear, she bit back the harsh comment she had ready to come out.

"What isn't said about that serum is that it weakens the wolf side.

The serum was only in the experimental stage when the High Lord pulled it from being used because of that.

The serum was Roosevelt's baby and he didn't listen when people told him the damage it caused.

He strongly believes it makes both human and wolf stronger but only has tested the human side.

While it does make the human side stronger than the average human, it overworks the heart when they are in fighting stage.

Claude is dying and doesn't even realize it. ”

Athena pulled back and stared at Leo in shock. They knew about the serum the whole time and knew that Claude was using it.

But it didn't explain why Draco wasn't worried about the outcome of the fight he was now a part of. She jumped when she heard a fist hitting flesh and turned to see Claude land a fist to Draco's jaw.

“That will be his one and only hit.” Leo smirked down at her.

Chapter

Thirty-Nine

Athena watched in horror as Claude's hand transformed into wolf claws and swiped at Draco. She nearly fell to her knees when he managed to swipe Draco's chest, drawing first blood.

So much for Leo's assessment that the first punch was the only one that Claude would get in. She wanted to punch Leo for fibbing to her.

Even after Draco winced from the slice, he gave Claude a smirk as he shook off the pain. Athena wanted to smack her own husband at that point since she knew Draco was toying with Claude.

The look in her husband's eyes was one she'd never seen before. Focus, determination, coldness, detached from those around him.

The fight drug on and on. Punches, kicks, swipes, barbs and anger were exchanged between the two.

Well, the barbs were mostly from Claude trying to rile Draco up to make a mistake. So far, Draco had been dominating. After the first blood was drawn, Claude hadn't been able to get close enough again.

Draco was wearing the man down and for that she was grateful. While Draco was younger than Claude, the older man was holding his own.

Even though he was getting angry that the younger man had lasted as long as he did, Athena was afraid something was about to pop off. She sensed it when Rob started shifting from foot to foot, like he wanted to jump in.

Even his hands were getting twitchy. She pointed it out to Leo who acknowledged her and signaled to the other two men.

Draco suddenly punched Claude hard enough to knock him backward off of his feet toward Rob. Rob chose that moment to jump toward his father, something in his hand and jabbed it into his father's arm.

“No!”

Athena moved away from Leo's side and ran toward Rob, hitting his arm away from Claude's to show the needle that was finished injecting more serum into his father's arm.

She felt her world tilting when pain exploded in her face as someone had backhanded her hard across the cheek, knocking her to the ground before kicking her side.

She heard the roar of anger as Draco lunged toward the two men assaulting her. Blood spurted everywhere as Claude and Draco fought hard, fist to fist, gnashing teeth to gnashing teeth.

Leo, Case, and Tuck, went after Rob and two of his enforcers while Hawk got her out of harm's way. It took everything she had not to scream out when she saw the fight ensuing between Claude and Draco.

“His heart. Hit his heart, hard as you can. If the serum messed with his heart, the punch would make the heart explode. Please don't leave me!” Athena pleaded in her mind, her tears falling freely down her cheeks when she felt the wall that wasn't

normally there with Draco.

When she heard the roar coming from Draco, she looked over in time to see him punch up from the ground directly into Claude's face, knocking him away from him to give him a chance to get back to his feet.

This time when Draco roared fiercely, his punch aimed true for Claude's chest, hitting him directly in the sternum with all of his might.

Claude fell to the ground, gripping his chest, eyes wide and lifeless. He fell face first onto the ground, dead.

Rob roared his own anger and lunged at Draco, who was prepared for the attack when she screamed out that Rob was coming after him. Leo and Hawk held her back as Case and Tuck raced to Draco's assistance, grabbing Rob before he could attack.

"Enough!" a loud male voice shouted, making every single wolf shifter wince and lower their head in compliance.

"A-Amari...I thought you were on vacation overseas somewhere," Roosevelt mumbled, stumbling over his words.

"From what I heard, you were claiming my place in the Shifter Council because you felt I was old and unable to rule properly. You've been a very bad boy, Roosevelt. Did you honestly think I wouldn't find out?"

Dismissing the man that he was speaking to while his guards arrested him, the large, powerful man turned to look at her and study her for several minutes before he walked over toward her. When he stopped in front of her, he held her gaze as he smiled down on her for several seconds.

“Are you Athena Chapman?” the man asked, his gaze softening as he studied her.

“Blackwood. I am Athena Blackwood. Who are you?”

“Athena, this is your biological father. He showed up shortly before we found out about your kidnapping. Sweetie, the man never knew about you,” Coren softly told her, coming up beside the man as he reached out to touch her arm.

“Wait, you didn’t know about me? But my mother said you never wanted me because I was human,” Athena squeaked out in a sob.

“Oh, my beautiful daughter, I didn’t care about that.

Had I known about you and the treatment you were receiving, I would have taken you away so that you would know what a real family does for each other.

I am so sorry you had to endure the hell you did.

But I now know about you and claim you as my daughter in front of everyone, including the Council. That is if you will accept me?”

“What about your wife and other children. I don’t want to cause problems between you and them by coming into your life.” Athena stalled, her heart going a mile a minute at the news she’d just heard.

“They know about you and how you came to be. My wife knows you were born before I met her. She’s excited to meet you and get to know you.

She will show you what a true mother does for their child.

As for your siblings, two of them are here now, one of them was the reason you were

protected as much as possible while in this vile packs hands. ”

“Wait, what? Who?” Athena and Leo asked at the same time looking around them.

At that moment, Townie stepped forward, a sheepish smile on his face, along with Hawk, who had been standing behind her. There were several gasps among the group, except for Draco.

Chapter

Forty

Athena stared at the two men who stood side by side next to their father, sheepishly looking at her and the others surrounding them. The only one who didn't seem surprised by it all was Draco.

"But you shot Dana. You kidnapped me and allowed Rob to punch me." Athena glared at Townie.

"Arrow knew what was coming. I had already talked to her about a plan while you were inside before Rob and his crew showed up. I went undercover in the Maplewood territory to find out who was helping them and see if we could find the missing serum. Draco was aware of the situation but not the extent of their plans. Even I wasn't aware of some of their plans right off the bat.

What I found out was relayed as quickly as possible, when I could. "

"But your last name and Hawk's are different," Leo pointed out, scratching his head before turning to glare at Draco.

"Don't look at me. I didn't know about it until just recently when Townie came to me with his plan.

That's when I found out the truth about Townie and Hawk.

I didn't know about Athena being related to them until the High Lord showed up and informed us himself.

"Draco glared back at Townie on that aspect.

"We changed our last names so that there would be no connection to our parents or other siblings should anyone try to look into us further. We assist our father with investigations into packs who go against the Council and their laws. Our father did it when his father was in power. Our children will probably do the same in the future as well." Hawk smiled over at her, answering her question.

"W-what would you have done if they had tried to kill me before Draco could have gotten here as quickly as he did?" Athena threw out the one thing that seemed out of the way for her at the new revelations.

"I would have revealed myself as the High Lord's son and that you were my sister and taken them out myself.

But I trusted Draco to get here as soon as he knew about Dana.

I wouldn't have allowed anything to happen to you or my future niece or nephew.

Draco is damn good at what he did in the Army, which is why Hawk, and I petitioned to be on his team. "

"But you were angry with Draco about Shades," Athena pointed out, glaring at the man again.

"Ah, that. Yeah, um that was the story we were using to justify why I did what I did. In reality, she should have been gone from the team a long time ago. She was already under investigation for her ties to Roosevelt. Who is the biggest fucking dumbass on the planet."

“Townie is also how I knew about the serum before you told me, my beautiful passionate mate.” Draco grinned down at her, pulling her into his arms.

“And you two are ok with being my brothers? Is it just the two of you?” Athena rushed out her questions, fear drumming itself up in her heart.

“There are three others. Two more brothers and a sister. I’m almost positive if Mom has her way, she’s already called them and let them know about you.

I wouldn’t be surprised if she and our sister arrive this afternoon once dear old Dad calls her and let’s her know you are safe.

” Hawk laughed, smacking their father on the back as he moved his position.

“So, what now?” Athena asked, looking around at everyone.

She had a hard time believing that the danger was really over. What did that mean with everything going on?

“Now, my mate, we live happily ever after. You get to know your father and his side of the family. We have as many pups as you want and have fun making them in the process.”

“I am standing right here, young man. That is my daughter you’re talking about,” Amari challenged Draco who could only laugh at the man’s mock anger.

“Yes, she is. She’s also my mate, sir. My true fated mate that the goddess saw fit to send my way when I said I never wanted one. I am grateful for the goddess for not listening to me.” Draco admitted, leaning down to kiss her lips.

“What’s to happen to my birth mother and brother?” Athena asked, looking over to where Delilah and Chris stood, glaring at her, surrounded by Blackwood enforcers.

“They will be taken into custody to answer for their crimes. Because they are your mother and your brother, I will consider giving them some leeway in their punishment,” Amari answered, leaning down to kiss her forehead.

“No. Don’t give them any. They never had any compassion for me.

Treat them how you would anyone else who has caused harm to those you love or are under your protection.

They were going to let Claude and Rob kill me just because I refused Rob’s claim to mate.

I am happy with my true mate. For once in my life, I now know what real love is.

When I have my child, and any other future children, I will show them the love that my own mother couldn’t show me.

That will be their punishment. I want nothing to do with either one of them. ”

Athena didn’t hesitate when Draco pulled her away from the group. When they returned home and cleaned up, she lay on the couch with Draco, breathing in his scent.

This was her happy place. This was her home.

When she looked up at the man who owned her heart, she saw that he was staring at her as if he could just eat her up.

“Mmm what big eyes you have.” Athena smirked up at him.

“So that I can see your beauty even when you don’t see it in yourself.”

“What big ears you have, Mr. Blackwood.”

“So that I can hear you screaming my name all night long, and even during the day, my love.”

“Mmm my what sexy lips you have, my dark wolf.” Athena licked her lips as she stared at him.

“So that I can eat you until you scream my name as you come all over my tongue, my mate.”

Athena did just that. She screamed and moaned his name all night, and well into the early morning light.

Thank goodness it was a weekend, because there was no way she would have been able to walk a straight line with the way Draco took her. Speaking in tongues was a new thing for her as she came hard and fast.

THE END!!!