



Fearful Mate (Katu Wolves #9)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Thomas was raised in captivity. He has been experimented on, hurt, and humiliated. He struggles to trust anyone except his newfound family in the Katu Pack. His wolf is an abomination, larger than any other and a menace to contain. His greatest fear is losing control and hurting any of his new friends or perhaps even the fated mate he has been craving.

Lola left home, tired of being controlled by a pack and an Alpha that clearly does not care for her. She's heard rumors about a pack taking in strays, rogues, and more and intends to find them. What she doesn't expect to find is a new pack who welcomes her with open arms, and a second chance fated mate who doesn't even know who he is.

Now they will have to work together to find their future by facing their past, and the Hunters.

Total Pages (Source): 10

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Lola

I can feel the stirrings in the air and I know today will not just be like any other day. Leaving aside the fact that it is my birthday, I know something big is coming.

Fear and anticipation thrum through my veins as I go along with my day, doing my chores and chatting with neighbors, just like I always do.

“Silas want to see you,” my mother says as I deposit the groceries on the little round table in the kitchen.

“Why?”

“No idea,” she says with a smile. “Probably just to say happy birthday.”

I nod before stepping outside through the back door. My heart is hammering in my chest. I have never been fond of our pack Alpha, simply because I find him intimidating and I don’t always agree with his style of leadership. But when your Alpha calls, you go.

I knock on the door to his home and wait. He has always held his meetings here and I know that seeing me today will be no different.

The door swings open and the scent of spearmint hits me, hard. I stare at Silas as the realization dawns on me. He is my fated mate. His stormy gaze scans over me while a frown mars his handsome features. He gestures for me to enter.

I struggle to maintain my composure wanting nothing more than to throw myself at him. I have always thought he was a handsome yet unapproachable man and the age gap won't make a difference to me.

"Please take a seat," Silas says, his voice low and formal. "We have some matters to discuss."

I look around the lounge and take a seat on one of the couches, waiting for him. I twist my hands together in my lap, nervousness riding me.

"I've known since the early morning hours that you are my fated mate," he says softly, drawing my attention to him.

"Why did you wait to call me?" I ask, my voice quivering.

Something is very wrong now, I just can't put my finger on it.

"I can't be your mate."

"What?" I cry out, jumping up from my seat. "Did I do something wrong?"

Already I can feel the tears building in the back of my throat as I fight to keep my animal at bay.

"I love someone else. Someone I can never be with," he replies softly. His gaze connects with mine and I know he doesn't want to hurt me. He feels bad for the situation and the pain he will cause me but that won't change his mind. "I'm sorry, Lola."

Tears are now flowing freely down my face as I watch the man who was supposed to cherish me as the mate fate has chosen for him. I don't hear the words he speaks but I

watch his lips move.

Indescribable pain seers through my entire body and my knees give way. I land on the tiled floor and curl myself into a ball trying anything—everything—to stave off the waves of excruciating pain. My animal howls in pain, setting my ears ringing along with everything else I am feeling right now. I feel like I am dying, and I actually wish I would if it would stop the pain.

Just when I think I can't handle anymore, the world around me fades to black and the physical pain stops. I already know the emotional toll will be with me for many years to come.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I sit staring out the darkened forest, listening for any sounds that don't belong. My heightened hearing and sight make me the perfect scout for the perimeter wall. Don't get me wrong, everyone living in the Katu compound is a shifter and has heightened senses, but mine are even more so.

My entire life, I was held in captivity and experimented on. As a result of their gene manipulation or whatever else those sick monsters did to me, I am more than the average wolf shifter. My body is bigger, my senses are even more heightened than anyone I have ever met, and my wolf is more temperamental.

I watch Peyton and Caine enter the compound after they went for their nightly swim down at the waterfall. I rub the center of my chest to alleviate the pain that blooms there. I will never have what they have, what any of the other fated couples in our pack has. I would be a danger to any female, let alone my fated mate. My size, the volatility of my wolf, all of those things, would be too much for any woman to handle.

"What are you thinking about?" Godrick asks from his spot beside me.

"Nothing," I mumble.

"I can hear the wheels in your brain turning," he counters. "Talk to me."

I'm not sure how to explain what I am feeling but I do know I want to open up to Godrick. Of all the men in the pack I have become closest to him. In the year I have

lived here, I haven't really forged a bond with anyone else the way I have with Godrick. Men have always scared me after the way I grew up, but I enjoy his companionship and want to be friends with him in every sense of the word.

"I was thinking about fated mates," I say after a long silence.

"I'm sure the Goddess has a mate picked out just for you," he says with a smile.

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of."

"Meaning?" A frown mars his features making him look more intimidating than he actually is.

"How can I ever have a fated mate?" I ask, genuinely wanting to know his thoughts on the matter. "When a shifter finds his fated mate, he is even more volatile than usual. How the hell will that work with my wolf? You know my beast is unpredictable."

"I know what you mean, Thomas," he says, nodding his head. "And I am sure that whoever the Goddess chooses for you will be able to navigate all those issues with you. To be honest, I don't know a fated couple that didn't have to conquer some or other problem, real or of their own making, before they could claim their happily ever after. However corny that may sound."

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"Peyton had to go through a rejection to find Caine, Calum's mate was forced to mate with someone else before we found each other, and Keela's first mate died. The list goes on and on."

Shock courses through me at what he has just revealed. "I had no idea."

He nods with a small smile. "It seems people tend to only talk about the good times. It's easier than having to relive the tough times."

"Makes sense."

"Does that help you?"

"Not really," I say honestly. "I'm not sure there is a way to overcome my issues. What if my wolf hurt my mate? That would kill me."

For long moments both of us remain silent, thinking through everything that has been said between us.

"I'll tell you what Peyton told me," he says, cutting through the silence. "The goddess will not choose a fated mate for you if there is no feasible way for you to be together. Remember that when you meet her."

I don't say anything else. Unless you live with the constant fear I do, have been through what I have lived my entire life, I don't think anyone will ever understand.

Lola

"You need to accept the decree of your Alpha. Silas knows what is best," my mother says, a frown marring her features, the same one I see when I look in the mirror.

"I don't want to be mated to someone who isn't my fated mate. Not to mention I don't even know him," I retort. "You're my mother, you're supposed to support me."

"This isn't about you and me, Lola," she says with a sigh. "This is about our pack, the

Thorn Pack. The Alpha has decided we need to join with another pack and for that to work, you need to mate with the beta from the Crescent Pack.”

“That isn’t his choice to make.”

“But it is. As long as you remain part of the Thorn Pack, you will obey your Alpha.”

“Then I’ll leave,” I say angrily.

I turn on my heel and walk through the house we have shared my entire life. In my room, I grab a duffle from my cupboard and start stuffing my belongings into it.

“Lola,” my mother says from the doorway. “If you do this, if you cost the Thorn Pack the opportunity to merge with the Crescent Pack, you will be excommunicated for life. You will be a lone wolf. No home, no pack.” She huffs. “You know we are a dying breed, dire wolves. We need to grow our numbers, and this is how we will do it.”

“At my expense,” I retort. “If Silas was so concerned with the dwindling number of dire wolves, he wouldn’t have rejected his fated mate. He wouldn’t have rejected and damn near killed me. And if you loved me at all, you would leave with me instead of trying to force me into this.”

I sling my duffle over my shoulder, my decision already made. I will not remain here only to be used as a pawn in pack politics. I stayed after Silas rejected me even though it hurt just to breathe, but I’m done now. The Thorn Pack has no regard for my feelings or my well-being beyond what I can offer them.

I have no idea where I am headed but I would rather be a stray, a nomad, and an outcast than live another day among my own kind to be used. Silas damn near killed me with his rejection two years ago, and everyone simply chooses to act like it never

happened. It happened. I felt it. It broke me in a way I am not quite sure can ever be repaired and I won't stand to be hurt anymore.

I jump in my old white Volkswagen and drive away from the only home I've ever known, leaving behind my only living family member. I don't look back, choosing not to let my mother see the tears streaming down my face. She wouldn't care even if she did see. She has always been "pack first."

It hurts that she has chosen the pack above me, her own daughter, her only child, even if I knew she would do it. I drive five miles away from the pack compound before pulling over and allowing my emotions to fully escape. Wracking sobs shake my entire body as I sit beside a stretch of road in the dark. My wolf whimpers deep in the recesses of my mind.

But we both know I have made the right decision for us even if it hurts like a bitch.

After fifteen minutes, I finally have my emotions back under control to the point where I can continue my journey. This is the start of my new life, and I fully intend on embracing it.

On my first day away from the Thron Pack, I heard the same rumor I have been hearing for years. Deep in the mountains, on the outskirts of the forest is a small town called Katu Falls. It's not the town that has grabbed my interest but the pack said to be residing in the heart of the forest. People say the Katu Pack take in wolves that have no pack, the outcasts, those deemed not good enough to be part of a pack. Wolves like me.

I don't even consider that it may be a tall tale, I simply take off in that direction. For all my professions of being fine on my own, I already miss the camaraderie of pack

life. I feel lonely and if the Katu Pack can offer me that, I know I need to take the chance.

It takes four days for me to reach my destination. I stop in town for dinner at a quaint little diner before booking a room at the local bed-and-breakfast that overlooks the town square. It's like something from a TV show. Everyone knows each other and waves and smiles as they cross paths. My heart warms and I know I could easily build a life here where the sense of community is so thick it wraps around me like a warm, fluffy blanket, even though I am an outsider.

I leave my car in town and make the trek through the forest to where the pack compound is rumored to be located. The air is cool against my heated skin, helping to calm my frayed nerves. I know the Katu Pack is well known for taking in wolves who no longer have anywhere to go, but what if they don't want me? I have very few talents to offer a growing pack. The thing that worries me the most is knowing that not all shifters take kindly to those outside their species. It's why I booked the room and left my car in town. I may need somewhere to return to when—if—this pack sends me away.

Taking a deep breath, I step out of the relative comfort the treeline offers me and walk toward the perimeter wall with my head held high.

A large man with long, dark hair appears out of nowhere and I almost turn and run away.

“Hello,” he says, his voice deep. “How can I help you today?”

His calm demeanor throws me for a loop. If a stranger had approached the Thorn Pack on foot, there would be absolute anarchy as everyone lost their minds.

“Is this the Katu Pack?” I ask, trying to keep my voice even and my nerves from

showing.

“Yes, it is,” he replies with a smile.

“Then I would like to speak to your Alpha.”

“Regarding?” he asks with a raised brow, keeping his smile in place.

“I would like to join his pack.”

For a long moment he remains silent, and I think he is going to tell me to leave. Fear courses through me at the thought of having to roam the world alone. The thought of never belonging to a pack scares me senseless no matter what lies I try to force-feed myself late at night when I’m alone.

“You’re in luck. I’m headed over there.”

He walks away and for a moment I am frozen to the spot. He turns to look at me with a frown.

“Are you coming?”

And I scamper after him little a lost, little puppy.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I watch from my perch above the main gate as a tall, blonde woman follows Godrick into the Katu wolves' compound. My wolf is losing his mind, rampage inside me and fighting to get out. I know what this means but I try to fight the truth.

This stranger, the woman who just walked through the gate, is my fated mate. My greatest fear simply traipsing through the forest and striking up conversations with people they don't know.

I want to rage at the injustice of the fucking universe, but I hold myself back, frozen to the spot. If I move now, I will probably lose the last bit of control I have over my beast. The last thing I need is for my unpredictable, overgrown wolf to be running around doing whatever he damn well pleases.

"Thomas."

A hand lands on my shoulder, shaking me out of my entranced state. I need to be more vigilant about my surroundings, especially with the hunters still in our area but the woman distracted me. Turning, I find Rose behind me.

"I brought you something to eat," she says softly.

"Thank you, Rose." I take the plastic container from her, the smell of grilled chicken already invading my senses. "You don't have to keep doing this."

"I like feeding people," she says, her cheeks flushing dark pink. "I'm good at it and I

get to make sure everyone is still doing okay at the same time.”

I smile at her explanation. After being held captive by the hunters each of us have walked away with our own damage. I hide my true self, my true nature from everyone as well as I can. Rose has become a provider, always needing to touch base, and James has taken to teaching self-defense to anyone above the age of ten.

Those monsters have left a lasting impression not just on us, but on everyone we come into contact with.

“What were you thinking about when I came up here?” she asks. “I called out your name four times and you didn’t hear me.”

I plaster on a fake smile before replying, “Just daydreaming.”

“Well, I hope it was something good.” She smiles brightly before heading down the stairs and across the compound to take the next person their meal. I know she will be back later to bring me a sweet treat, and even though I say it isn’t necessary, my sweet tooth will never forgive me if she stops.

Half an hour later, I am alone in my house.

I have been alone since I left Emmaleigh’s house to strike out on my own. Even though I am still young by human standards—only twenty years old—I am an adult in the shifter community and should be able to take care of myself. Now I live in this building because it’s most certainly not a home, and loneliness eats at me every day.

Which is why I spend as much time working or training as possible. Godrick has been teaching me how to fight and I have bulked up quite a bit since I arrived here from

the hunters' compound. No longer am I the lanky young man who arrived here, selectively mute. Now, I have an intimidating human figure to go along with my beast. I have made friends and taken care of my pack.

Restlessness pounds through my veins like a drug and all I want to do is shift and run. But I won't. I never let my wolf out voluntarily. It's only in stressful situations that he takes over, a defense mechanism of sorts.

My abuse at the hands of the hunters has altered my mind and my animal irreparably. I used to think it was soul deep, that I would never be like the others of my kind, but I now know that isn't true. I am just like every other shifter in this compound even if my animal doesn't look it. I want to love and be loved. I want a family and to be part of a community. I want to belong. I also know that just because you want something doesn't necessarily mean you will get it.

"Dammit," I curse before walking onto the back porch that overlooks the surrounding forest.

In the distance, along the treeline I watch a man inside the perimeter wall. He is tall and muscular, walking with purpose. His scent burns my nostrils, niggling at a memory that escapes me, but I instantly know this man has come here with ill intent. Slowly, I make my way across the open meadow behind my house and several others as I keep my distance while tracking the stranger.

When he stops, he glares at the home Sayer and Raleigh share with their mate Iris. I can feel the anger rolling off him in waves. I'm unsure what to do next. I need to protect my pack, my friends, but I need more information. What if I hurt this man and it was all in my mind? Insecurities flood me as I struggle to decide on a course of action.

The decision is ripped away from me when a large grey wolf bounds out of the

shadows and takes the man down without a second thought.

Lola

The man leads me through the compound in silence until we reach a large log home. Instead of taking me inside, he leads me around the building to a back porch where a man is seated with a petite blonde woman on his lap.

“Godrick,” the woman greets with a smile when she sees us. “Have you made a new friend?”

“Maybe,” he replies with a grin. “We haven’t really been talking.”

“Please sit.” The woman gestures to one of the other seats on the deck. “My name is Peyton. And this is my mate, Caine, Alpha of the Katu Pack.”

The friendly way these people have greeted me throws me for a loop and I fall into the seat, shocked into silence. The man who led me here, Godrick, chuckles, drawing my attention.

“I know it’s weird. I didn’t get it at first either,” he says with a gentle smile. “Not all packs are welcoming, but this pack is exactly what it looks like. They are good people even though they are overly friendly.”

I breathe easier, a small smile tugging at my own lips as I listen to his explanation.

“My name is Lola,” I say facing the Alpha, Caine, once more. “I left my pack, and I am looking for a new one.”

Peyton, the luna of this pack, considers me carefully, taking me in from head to toe before she speaks. “You’re not a wolf but you are a predator. What are you?”

“She’s a dire wolf, love,” Caine says before I can explain.

“She is not!” Peyton exclaims, her eyes the size of saucers. “I thought they were extinct.”

“Most of the living world thinks we are,” I say softly. “The Thorn Pack prefers to stay hidden from the world. Fear of prejudice drives Silas, the Alpha, to keep us out of sight.”

Everyone nods before falling silent. “Why did you leave?” Caine asks.

Knowing I will have to tell this story makes my heartrate accelerate. I wish there was a way I could skip this part, but I know they will need to hear the truth before they can even consider allowing me to stay with their pack. It makes sense. Of course they need to take care of their own first.

Taking a deep breath, I gather my courage before I explain. “Two years ago, when I turned eighteen, my fated mate was revealed to me. It was Silas, our Alpha. He refused me.” I hear the low growls from the males present and know they are unhappy hearing this. “I stayed with the pack,” I explain, watching their reactions change from anger to shock. “I knew why he did it and even though it hurt, I went on with my life. But now he is trying to marry me off to the only other dire wolf pack in the country.”

“Excuse me?” Peyton asks. She jumps off her mate’s lap to walk the deck from side to side. We all watch as she paces. “You mean to tell me this asshole refused you and now he wants to marry you off to grow his reach? Am I understanding this correctly?”

I nod, never having had someone get upset or defensive for the way I have been treated. Tears prick at my eyes as I watch this stranger's indignation grow when I know my own mother didn't give a shit.

"Fuck that noise," she says angrily, glaring at the forest. "I will kick some Alpha ass if I ever run into him."

I can't help the laughter that falls from my lips, drawing everyone's attention to me. "Sorry," I say waving them off. "I've never had someone react like that."

"Like what?" Caine asks.

"Like they actually care that I got hurt. Like my feelings mattered."

"What kind of pack have you been living with?" Godrick asks but his words sound far off.

My wolf is raging, fighting me for dominance. There is a foreboding sense of danger pushing her to the forefront, forcing both of us to react. I feel the change shimmer over me, but I push her back.

"Something is wrong. There's someone here," I say to the Alpha. "It's a scent I've smelled before, but I don't know who it belongs to." I grit my teeth as my wolf pushes forward once more. "My wolf is going to overpower me."

This isn't the first impression I wanted to make. I wanted to start slow, and maybe even build a relationship with these people before her crazy ass was let loose on them, but it seems I don't have a choice.

"It's fine," Caine says with a nod. "Godrick and I will follow you."

The instant the words leave his lips, my wolf bursts forth howling loudly at the inky night sky. She turns, bolting toward the perceived danger, not waiting for the men. We don't need anyone to protect us even if a little diplomacy would probably go a long way. The houses pass us in a blur before she bounds between two. In the distance, just inside the treeline, are two men. One is the danger, the other is something else. Something delicious. For a split-second she loses concentration as the scent of fresh rain invades our senses before focusing back on the threat. A moment later the man is pinned beneath her paws.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I watch in shock as the grey wolf takes down the man I was following. I know I should be shocked that there is a stranger—a strange wolf—in the compound but that's not what has grabbed my attention. It's the fact that this wolf is larger than any other I have ever seen, closer to the size of my own and vibrating with unbridled rage.

A moment later, I watch Caine and Godrick run across the field to stand beside her in their human forms. Confusion swirls in my mind as I make my way closer to them. Already, my wolf is pushing against my hold on him, wanting to get out. It's then the scent hits me once more and I know this wolf is the woman from before, my fated mate. She smells like strawberries and cream and my mouth waters.

“Get off me, you fucking bitch!” the man roars angrily even though it is an impotent rage. My attention focuses on him, needing to make sure he doesn't pose any threat to my yet unclaimed mate. The stunning grey wolf has him pinned down while she bares her teeth at him.

“Who are you?” I ask. “What are you doing here?”

He turns to look at me and fear overwhelms me. He is a Hunter, the second in command. I have known him my entire life. My wolf whimpers as memories flash through my mind. I stagger back, bumping into Godrick, who steadies me. I fight to remain in control of my wolf who wants nothing more than to take his true form in the face of this monster.

“Hello, Thomas,” the man says with a cruel smile while my heart does its best to beat

right the fuck out of my chest.

“Aaron?” All our gazes turn toward Iris. She stands between Sayer and Raleigh, both her mates watching carefully as she holds her large pregnant belly. “It can’t be.” The words are nothing but a whisper on the wind, but I can feel her pain as if it was my own.

The wolf pinning the man to the forest floor snorts, her gaze locked on Caine. He tilts his head to assess her before nodding. “You can change back. We’ve got this.”

She releases the man before bounding away. I track her with my gaze until she reaches Peyton who holds out a fluffy white robe for her. Quickly, the shift falls over her and she is back to her human form. She hastily slips the fabric over her arms and cinches the belt before she and Peyton both make their way toward us.

“Why are you here?” she asks the man who is now being held up by Godrick.

Aaron glares. “Why are you?”

Her eyes narrow before she turns and speaks directly to Caine. “This is Aaron. He is second in charge of the Hunters. I met him once. He and Silas have an agreement to keep them away from us.”

“Excuse me?” Sayer cuts in. “Who the hell are you?”

“Lola. I came here to join your pack, but he showed up. Now I want to know if he is following me.”

“He could be tracking me,” I say, not knowing if it is possible but fearing it all the same.

“He’s here for me.” Everyone turns their attention to Iris once more. “This is my brother, the man Max thinks he killed.”

Aaron glares at Iris before trying to break free from Goldrick’s grasp. He roars when he cannot escape but that doesn’t stop the poisonous words falling from his lips.

“You’re a whore. Our father’s greatest disappointment,” he seethes. “Look at you, spreading your legs for these animals. As if that wasn’t bad enough, you’re breeding their filth now!”

You could hear a pin drop in the forest, everyone shocked into silence before the air is rend in two by the sound of a slap. Aaron’s face whips to the side, blood dripping from his nose. We all stare at Lola, this strange new woman, as she breathes harshly and fights to hold back her wolf.

“I should rip your fucking throat out,” she says with a low growl. “Count yourself lucky this isn’t my pack.”

She is vicious and strong, ferocious in her defense of these people she does not know. I am in awe of her strength and beauty. I want to hold and praise her, but I know it’s not the time for that now. Soft sobs emanate from Iris, and I watch her mates as they try to comfort her. I know she lost a brother, or thought she did, but I never knew he was this man.

This man, Aaron, is pure evil. He was always the lead whenever tests or experiments were performed on me. Just seeing him here has a frisson of pure fear and blinding rage running down my spine.

“Take her home,” Caine tells the twins, nodding at their sobbing mate. “Aaron is going to lockup, and we will deal with him in the morning.”

They nod and lead her back across the field, soft words whispered between them. Caine turns to Lola with a nod. “Thank you. You are welcome to stay as long as you like.”

“I appreciate that.” She doesn’t take her eyes off Aaron as she answers, “I want to help with him.”

My instincts scream at me to intervene but my wolf whines in my head, stopping me. I may not always be able to control my animal, but I do trust his instincts, so I remain quiet.

“Nothing will be done tonight,” Godrick says. “Iris needs a moment to process the fact that her dead brother is actually alive and a venomous pig. She should be there to decide his fate. This impacts her as well. You can stay with Emmaleigh and Nico. I know Thomas’s old room is empty. We will deal with this shit in the morning.”

Lola

I am enraged. I am sad. I am confused. All those feelings swirling inside me, coupled with my volatile beast, do not make for a good combination, but I take several deep breaths, keeping my cool. Caine takes Aaron away to lock him up for the night while Godrick leads me through the compound toward a house.

My mate disappears into the inky darkness. My heart is already breaking. He won’t look at me and already avoids being near me. I don’t know if I will be able to survive a second refusal. I never considered that I had a real chance of finding a second fated mate, but now that he is a reality I don’t want to give him up. I want a mate who wants me as badly as I want him, whether he is a dire wolf or not.

Godrick knocks on the dark wooden door waiting for someone to open while my mind runs away with the possibilities this new life could offer. A few seconds later, a stunning woman with dark hair and a beautiful smile opens the door.

“I’ve brought you a houseguest. I hope you don’t mind,” Godrick says with a chuckle. “Lola, this is Emmaleigh.”

“Hi.” The word sounds ridiculous falling from my lips but I honestly don’t know else to say. At least I didn’t fucking wave.

“When did you guys go out? I didn’t know there was a raid,” she questions Godrick with a frown.

“No raid. She wandered in all on her own,” he replies with a snort. “Came right up to the gate looking to find a new pack.”

Emmaleigh stares at me but I’m not focused on her. What does have my attention is the smell emanating from inside her house. It smells like the first rain of summer on a stormy night. My mate has been here, and not just for a visit. He spent many hours and days in this house and his scent is still coating everything.

“Lola?” she asks waving her hand in front of my face. “Are you okay?”

“Does anyone else live with you except your mate?” I know I’m being rude, but the answer is important. I won’t go inside if I can fuck things up for someone else.

“Not anymore,” she says with a frown. “Thomas left last month so it’s just the two of us.”

I breathe in a lungful of the scent as Emmaleigh allows me entrance. Thomas. Our mate’s name is Thomas. My wolf wants to take control once more and track him

down, but I fight to keep her under control.

“There is a lot going on tonight,” Godrick cuts in. “Perhaps just get some rest and we can talk everything through in the morning? We can introduce you to everyone.”

My wolf snaps at him in the recesses of my mind, wanting to hurt the big male for keeping her from what she actually wants, but I force myself to keep a lid on her grumpy ass, she has had enough action for one night.

“That could be hard,” I say through gritted teeth. “You’ve seen what my wolf is like when she wants to get out.” Godrick frowns and I know he isn’t comprehending what I am saying so I have to spell it out for him. “My fated mate is in this compound.”

“Fuck,” Godrick and Emmaleigh say in unison.

I instead of staying with Emmaleigh and her mate, I get taken back to the Alpha’s house. Peyton suggested I stay with them until I can get my wolf under control and figure out how to approach my mate. I haven’t told them I know who my mate is yet, fear of rejection keeping me from pursuing him in any way. Staying here is for the best. Caine will be able to control me in some fashion with his Alpha commands and at the moment it is the best chance we have.

“This isn’t ideal,” Caine says as we sit in their kitchen.

“Not ideal?” Peyton asks with a raised brow, sarcasm dripping from every word. “What if I had told you that you had to stay away from me when you first felt our bond?”

“My moon...”

She cuts him off with a glare. “Don’t you dare my moon me. You know you would have torn anyone and everyone limb from limb to get to me.”

“This is for the best,” I interject, not wanting her to be upset. “No one here knows me. My mate could refuse me. We need to take the night and let calmer minds do the thinking in the morning, not a mate bond.”

“Why would he refuse you?” Caine asks harshly.

A sad smile plays on my lips. “Not everyone wants a massive, volatile dire wolf as their mate.”

“Bullshit! And any one of my people that refuses a mating based on breed better start looking for a new pack.” Disdain at the mere thought pours from him in waves. “I will not have anyone else suffer like my moon did.”

I stare at her in shock but all she does is shrug. “My dad is mated to a panther.”

“What?”

She nods with a smile. “Massive age gap. She is his second chance at happiness after my mom died. I’ll tell you the story sometime when everything calms down.” Caine snorts. “If it ever calms down,” she amends with a loud sigh.

“It will take me a while to get used to all of this,” I say rubbing at my brow. “You people are by far the strangest pack I have ever met.”

Peyton laughs freely and before either can reply, a howl rends through the evening air right before the front door is splintered into pieces. A stunning onyx-colored wolf stands just outside, breathing harshly. His yellow gaze seeks me out immediately and I can’t help but smile. We may have thought it was a good idea to wait until morning,

but my mate and his wolf have other plans.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I lie in bed thinking of my mate. I know where she is, I can sense her even on the other side of the compound, but I force myself to stay in bed, alone and lonely even as my wolf revolts inside my mind.

There is still the fear in the back of my mind that no female will ever want a mate as defective as myself. Science and experimentation have changed me so vastly that beside a regular wolf shifter I am almost twice the size. Godrick likes to joke that Joy rides my beast like a horse, but I know that's not so much an exaggeration as it is the truth.

My thoughts drift from my fears to the need I feel to be near her. I can't imagine wanting to be far from her even if she does decide to refuse me. Her straight blonde hair and grey eyes have mesmerized me. The curve of her spine and slope of her neck have been burned into my memory. A smile spreads across my face as I recall her animal, also much larger than any wolf I have ever seen.

I pull forth the memory of her fierce defense of Iris, a woman she had never met before that moment, and feel my chest swell with pride. Soon enough, I drift off to sleep with thoughts of my beautiful mate swirling in my mind.

I don't know how I got here but I do know I am not in control. A howl rips from deep in my chest and I know my animal is currently running the show. Before I can try to force him to shift back or understand even an ounce of reason, he runs at the front

door of Caine and Peyton's home. His shoulder connects and the door is ripped from its hinges, all but exploding from where it was a moment before.

Before us, our mate stands with a brilliant smile. She is dressed in a t-shirt and jeans now instead of the fluffy white material from earlier, but I can smell the clothes belong to someone else.

"Well, hello there," she says, her voice lower than it was before. There is not an ounce of her earlier anger remaining in her tone.

"Fuck me," Caine curses, trying to shield her from my beast. From me. "Thomas, I need you to calm down."

I can feel him trying to use his Alpha inflection on me, but it isn't working. Not. One. Bit. A low growl builds in the depths of my chest before rumbling out of me. He shouldn't touch her.

"Caine, you may want to back away," my mate says. "Dire wolf males are extremely volatile on a good day. Worse when they are separated from the things they want."

"Dire wolf?" Peyton asks loudly.

"Mmm," my mate purrs as she steps up to my muzzle. Her hand slips beneath my maw, long fingernails scratching at the fur. My eyes fall closed at the pleasure that rockets through my beast at having her hands on us. "There is something else, perhaps a Yukon wolf?"

She continues to touch me as she speaks. Behind my ear, across my back, over my flank. Every little touch placating my wolf more and more until he recedes, leaving me naked and aroused in my Alpha's house. For a moment, no one speaks or moves and then Peyton throws a robe at me.

“I assume female dire wolves can be difficult as well. Especially when their unclaimed mate is naked around other females,” Peyton says dryly.

It’s only then I realize my mate has withdrawn from us, standing in the doorway breathing hard as she glares at Peyton. With a nod she glares at me, and I quickly don the robe, blushing furiously. Peyton has seen me naked before, as has most of the pack, but this is different. Lola is different.

It takes her a moment once I am covered to breathe out and finally relax. “I’m sorry about that,” she says to Caine and Peyton. “We have a much harder time controlling our animals.”

“It’s okay,” Peyton says with a wink. “I remember what it’s like to find your mate. And how hard it can be to control your animal.”

She gives Caine the side eye and for the first time ever, I see the big Alpha blush. I can only imagine what thoughts are running through his mind right now.

“What happens now?” The words fall from my lips before I can think them through.

“That depends on you, Thomas.”

Caine’s reply leaves me with more questions than answers. When I don’t say anything, my mate smiles sadly. She shakes her head before moving deeper into the house once more.

“We stick to the original plan,” she says. “I will stay here until he knows if he wants to accept me as his mate. If not, I will leave the pack. It’s not like this is my home.”

My heart breaks with every word that falls from her lips to caress my ears. Has she already decided she doesn’t want me as her mate? She doesn’t even know me. My

wolf howls in pain at the mere thought of losing her.

“Lola...”

“No,” she says cutting me off. “I’ve already been hurt before, and I won’t let your hormones or mine dictate whether we should be a mated couple. Jumping into this in a rush will only hurt both of us. Go home. We can talk in the morning.”

“But...”

“Please, Thomas,” she begs, and I know I will never be able to deny her a single damn thing.

With a heavy heart and a tattered soul, I turn away from her and head home.

Lola

He doesn’t stay away even though I know he tried. His beast has other plans. All night, he paces outside Caine’s house. I watch from the window above him as he prowls the area, making sure I am safe. His animal knows he wants to honor my request, but his nature will not allow him to be far from me. Not now that he has found me, and not once we are mated. If we are ever mated.

I wanted to give myself over to him the moment he broke down the door but what I said remains true. I don’t want to simply be his mate because it’s what fate deemed correct or necessary. I want a mate who wants me, not just any mate. Not that I’ll know how to tell the difference, but I believe I will.

So instead of giving myself over to my baser instincts I remain inside, away from my

mate. I lie in bed for hours, staring at the ceiling, wishing he would go away and leave me in peace while simultaneously praying to the Goddess that he never gives up on me. An hour before sunrise, I slip from beneath the covers and make my way downstairs.

In the past twenty-four hours I have requested to join this pack, attacked a stranger, found my mate, and invaded the home of the pack Alpha. The least I can do is make breakfast.

I spend the next hour acquainting myself with Peyton's kitchen and cooking up a storm. It has always been one of my coping mechanisms. Whenever I get stressed, I cook and bake. The Thorn Pack always said I was wasteful, not that anyone ever told me they didn't want my food, so I started to suppress the urge. But this is just too stressful for me to keep the urge at bay.

"Fuck, woman. What did you do?" Peyton says, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

Shame washes over me. How do I explain this fucking compulsion? "I'm sorry..."

"No, no, no," she says with a wave of her hand, grabbing a banana-nut muffin and taking a big bite. She moans softly before swallowing. "I don't care that you cooked, it gives me the morning off, but you are definitely going to spoil everyone and then I'll have to up my game."

"What smells so good?" The voice comes from behind and a shriek escapes me before I can stop it.

Everything happens in a blur. One minute I am looking at a younger version of Caine and the next, Thomas has him pinned to the ground, teeth bared. I grab his ear and yank him back with all my strength, trying my best to dislodge him from the other man.

“Thomas, stop!” I demand. “He didn’t do anything. It was just a jump scare.”

Thomas looks at me, never moving his weight. He assesses me, making sure I am not injured before he steps back. His beast sniffs me before rubbing his big head on my thigh.

“Go home,” I say scratching between his eyes. “Shift back, get dressed, and join us for breakfast.” The giant onyx wolf huffs, sitting down beside my feet. “I’m serious. Besides, you know these people, they’ll never hurt me.”

With a grunt of disapproval, he glares at everyone before walking away.

“Seems we may have missed something while we were out hunting last night,” a pixie-like woman says while she helps the other man up from the floor.

“Talon.” Peyton addresses the woman with a chuckle. “That is the understatement of the fucking year.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I don't return to my Alpha's home. Shame keeps me locked in my own house. Calum has never been anything but good to me and I attacked him. If it had not been for Lola, I would have killed him. My wolf is insane, and I can't remain here in the compound putting this community at risk. There are children here for heaven's sake.

What if I hurt Joy? Or one of the others? I die a little inside just thinking of it. It may be time for me to make peace with the fact that I don't belong here.

A knock sounds on the kitchen door, and I glare at it. I'm not in the right state of mind to talk to anyone. A second knock a few moments later has me rising from my seat to make them leave. It's probably just Rose, coming to check in like she always does.

Opening the door, the words die on my lips as I take in my mate. The sun hits her hair making it shine. Her grey eyes are weary as she takes me in.

"I brought you some food," she says nervously. "You never came back."

"I couldn't."

"Because of Calum?" she asks. "Or because of me?" She looks nervous as the words slip softly from between her lips.

"Why would I avoid you?" I ask with a frown.

“Could we have this conversation inside?” She holds up the plate. “We have a lot to discuss.”

Moving out of the way, I allow her into my personal space. Her strawberries and cream scent permeates the air and I sniff her hair as she walks past me. Her gaze connects with mine and I feel my face flush with embarrassment.

“Sorry,” I mumble closing the door before going to stand behind the counter. I need to keep the dark wooden structure between us as some semblance of the boundaries I don’t have when it comes to this woman. And I want to hide my enormous, inappropriate erection.

“Here,” she says removing the cling film and pushing the plate toward me. “I made you a plate.”

The smells are divine, but I can’t focus on food right now. My cock is harder than lead as I stare at the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. All I want to do is lick and kiss every inch of her while whispering words of praise. It is the hardest thing I have ever had to do, standing here and not going to her.

“I’ll eat later,” I reply, pushing the plate aside.

Lola frowns but doesn’t say anything. For long moments we stare at one another before she finally breaks the silence.

“We need to talk, Thomas.”

I know what is coming and even though it is going to kill me, I know getting it over with will allow us both to move on with our lives.

“We don’t need to have the talk,” I say not waiting to give her a chance. “If you’re

going to refuse me as your mate, just do it.”

The words sound harsh and leave a bitter taste in my mouth while my wolf is whimpering inside me as the last part of my soul is shattered. But I won't force her into anything. She is far too precious to have anyone hurt her in any way.

“Excuse me?” she asks, confusion coating her words.

I can't quite decipher the look on her face but I'm not too good at that. My social skills are very much lacking, never having been socialized while living in the Hunter prison. But I do know something is wrong.

“That's why you're here, isn't it?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “No. And that's why I wanted to talk to you.”

“Shit,” I mumble, scrubbing my hand down my face. “I'm no good at this stuff.” I try to explain myself, but I seem to be failing miserably. “My socialization skills are basically nonexistent.”

I feel my face heat with shame. She shakes her head trying to hide her smile and failing miserably. She is even more beautiful in this moment, and I can't help but smile at her.

“Why don't you let me speak first?” she says, taking one of the seats at the counter.

“That way, you can take your cues from me.” I nod in agreement and wait for her.

“We're mates. That much is obvious,” she states, staring into my soul with those stormy grey eyes of hers. “I think we both have baggage. Just taking what you said earlier, I assume you are afraid of being rejected?”

She is so calm, her tone even. I nod in reply.

“I have the same problem. I’ve been rejected before and I just assumed with you keeping your distance in human form that you weren’t interested. Add in the fact you don’t want to eat what I cooked...”

Her words fade away and I take that as my cue to say something. I breathe deeply before I speak, getting my rage under control at the idea of someone hurting her by refusing her.

“I didn’t know you cooked. I’m just too nervous to eat. As for the rejection fear, most of that is because of my wolf. I don’t trust him not to hurt someone. Hurt you.”

She smiles brightly. “Your wolf is actually quite docile. I think that’s because you’re not a pureblood dire wolf.”

“Dire wolf?”

“Do you not know your heritage? Where are your parents?”

I knew this was coming, I just hoped it would be a while and I could have some time to prepare. Now, I need to just tell her everything and get it over with.

“I don’t know my parents. My mother died in childbirth, and I never knew my father,” I say. “I grew up...” The words desert me and all I can do is stare at her. She waits patiently. The next words are simply blurted out. “I was raised in captivity. The Hunters caught my mother while she was pregnant with me. They started experimenting on me while I was still in the womb and continued until we were rescued.”

Lola

Rage sweeps through my veins and flows through my body. How could those monsters do that? It's no wonder he says he has zero social skills. Growing up in a prison, separated from any semblance of pack life, never getting to build relationships. That is fucking disgusting. Barbaric to say the least.

"I'm sorry," I say through clenched teeth. "I still don't understand why you thought I would refuse you."

He gazes over my shoulder. "They did experiments on me. Things that changed my animal..."

My heart breaks a little once our gaze connects. He truly thinks he isn't worthy of a mate. I may have issues about being refused because I've lived through the pain of actually being rejected. He just thinks no one could ever love him.

I stare at the gorgeous man in front of me. Dark hair, hazel eyes, and tan skin. He is taller than I am, around six and a half feet, and muscular. Dark ink decorates his arms and I want to see where the rest of the tattoos lead. To tell the truth, I want to climb the man like a tree. I can't see a single outer reason to not want him. He is a great specimen of male physicality, and no one should be pushed aside because of their history. Especially not if they didn't have any choice in the matter.

"Your wolf seemed perfectly fine to me," I say with a small smile. "Exactly the way I would expect a territorial male with an unclaimed mate to act."

"Really? You said I was mixed. My breed, that is." Once more he looks self-conscious.

"Most wolves are mixed. Some are two different kind of wolves and some are dire

wolves mixed with regular wolves. I think you have some Yukon wolf in you. That could be something the Hunters did or either of your parents could have been a Yukon,” I explain. “I’m full-blood dire wolf but my best friend has arctic wolf on her father’s side. It happens.”

He nods, working through my words. “So, you’re not here to refuse me?”

“Not at all but I do think we need to decide how we would like to move forward.”

“I have no idea how to do that,” he says sourly. “I honestly don’t know what the hell I’m doing. Yesterday, my wolf was leading me, but I don’t trust him.”

She smiles. “I think that’s the first thing we need to do.”

“What?”

“We need to get you better acquainted with your wolf. To show you he is trustworthy and won’t hurt anyone you care for. And he definitely won’t hurt me.”

It takes me an hour to convince him nothing bad will happen. When I finally lead him out of the compound, gripping his hand tightly in mine, I know this was exactly what he needs. We are going to run together, my wolf and his.

Knowing he doesn’t intend to refuse me has my heart—and my wolf—bursting with joy. I know he is still struggling to accept that I don’t have any intention of refusing him and he lives in fear of his own animal, but I am sure this will help.

We make our way into the thick trees, and I can feel the nerves pouring off him. Taking a deep breath, I release his hand once we are far enough from the compound

to be considered decent. I smile softly when I turn to him.

“Breathe, Thomas,” I say, pulling the shirt over my head. “This is natural. We are going to run together, and I will prove your animal doesn’t pose any danger to me.”

“But...”

I cut him off. “But nothing. I can take care of myself if I need to.”

I allow my bra to fall to the ground beside my shirt before slipping off my shorts and panties. My gaze travels back to my mate and pride surges through me at the sight of the obscene erection tenting his sweatpants. His gaze is dark, and his breathing is harsh as he takes me in.

“Lola.” He rubs the back of his hand across his mouth.

“Run with me.” The words are soft before I allow the shift to fall over me. My wolf howls at the sky before taking off into the forest. She is sure-footed and fast. A moment later we catch the sounds of our mate chasing after us. His footsteps are loud and gaining. Both of us intend to play with him for a while but our plans are thrown out the window when we are taken to the ground by the large onyx wolf.

He pins us beneath him, his gaze crazed. He nuzzles us with his jaw, a rumble building in his chest. Both my wolf and I are aroused beyond measure, and she quickly allows me to shift back to my human form.

“Thomas,” I beg lowly, the fur from his beast pressed against my breasts. “Shift.” His wolf growls in displeasure and I kiss his jaw. “Please.”

A moment later, Thomas is above me, pinning me to the ground. His thick erection is resting against my inner thigh as he stares down at me. I pull him down to me, kissing

him. For a moment he is hesitant before kissing me back.

I push against his shoulders and roll us over until I am straddling him. I want to take his thick length inside me, but I hold back. Something is wrong and I need to know what it is. I can feel his hesitation in the way he kisses me. Yes, I want to claim my mate and have him claim me but not if this isn't what he wants. The euphoria from a moment ago leaves me as I consider he may not want to refuse me, but he also may not want to claim me.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

“Did I do something wrong?” I ask, keeping my gaze locked on hers.

I’m trying to be a gentleman but it’s damn hard when the most beautiful creature I have ever seen is straddling me, naked.

“Do you want me as your mate?” Lola asks with a frown.

“Yes...”

“But you didn’t want to kiss me?” she asks, cutting me off.

“Lola...”

She cuts me off. Again. “I can feel your hesitation.”

I roll us over, pinning her beneath me again. I kiss her harshly. “If you let me talk, I can explain.”

A dazed look crosses her stunning features before she nods.

“I don’t know what to do,” I whisper softly.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve never ... that was my first kiss.”

She frowns with a look of confusion. “You’ve never?”

“No.”

She breathes deeply. “Is it wrong I find that kind of hot?” she asks softly.

“If you find inexperience and ineptitude sexy, I guess not.”

She rubs at the frown on my forehead. “I think you’re perfect.” She wraps an arm around my neck and pulls me down. “We are fated mates and all of this is natural. You just need to stop stressing so much.”

“I want to give you pleasure,” I say softly, rubbing my erection against her smooth skin.

“Then do it.” Her voice is low and raspy. I am frozen to the spot. “Just do what feels natural.”

I move my gaze from her face to her breasts. Softly, I palm the globe in my hand. She sighs and I withdraw my touch, afraid I have done something wrong.

She takes my chin in hand, tilting my head back so she can look at my face. She assesses me for a moment before nodding.

“Let me tell you what I want.”

“Please,” I beg shamelessly. “I’ll do whatever you want.”

Her hands slip from my body to cup her breasts, lifting them up to me. “Suck my nipple.”

I don't have to be told twice, lowering my head and taking the pink tip between my lips. I run my tongue over the tip gently before sucking softly.

“Harder.”

I gaze up into her lust-filled eyes as I open my mouth wider, taking in her every reaction. I take almost half her breast into my mouth before sucking harshly, running my teeth along the soft skin. Her eyelids flutter and a moan falls from between her perfect pink lips, her hips lifting off the ground.

“So good,” she mutters.

I do the same to the other breast, wanting to draw as much pleasure from her as I can. I scent her arousal in the air and my wolf howls in the back of my mind. My hips push forward of their own accord, smearing the pre-cum on the crown of my cock against her skin.

“Please, Thomas...”

I release her nipple with a loud pop. “Tell me.” I'm all but begging this delicious creature for direction. “What do you want?”

“Lick...” her words falter, and she blushes.

“Lola.”

“Lick my pussy.”

I kiss my way down her body, licking and tasting her skin as I go. The smell of her arousal invades my senses as I finally reach the apex of her thighs. There is a small patch of neatly trimmed blonde curls, already wet from her juices.

Slowly, I push her thighs apart, saliva gathering in my mouth as I bare her pretty pink pussy to my gaze.

“Please,” she whispers.

I lower my head and lick through her soaking folds. A shriek tears from her lips as her body bucks beneath me. Instantly, I stop, worried I have done something wrong even as her taste settles into my soul and addicts me to her.

“No! Don’t stop!”

I lower myself back down, licking, nipping, tasting her delicious cunt. Sounds fall from me and her, creating an obscene chorus and filling the empty forest around us.

“Thomas!” she cries out, back bowed beneath me. Her pussy spasms against my lips and I push my tongue inside her. “More.”

Lola

I want ... I need ... I don’t have the words to tell him. Fuck!

I have never been this aroused in my entire life. I’ve had sex three times and none of them were ever like this. I’m sure it has to do with our mate bond pushing us together, but it’s also Thomas.

It may sound strange but knowing that once he claims me, I will be the only woman he has ever had sex with does something to me. It makes me feel a little feral and I want him to rut me on the leaf-covered forest floor until my legs give out. And then I want him to hold me up and use me for his own pleasure until he falls down beside

me tired and sated.

Thomas gently inserts a finger into my sex, and if I didn't know better, I would think he is toying with me, but I can feel his insecurities.

"Harder," I demand.

"I don't want to hurt you," he says, kissing my pubic bone softly.

"But I do," I say pushing up on my elbows. "I want you to lose your mind and fuck me with raw abandon. I want you to mark me, claim me, rut me."

He stares at me in disbelief. "I don't know."

I push against his chest hard, and he falls back, landing against a thick tree trunk. An instant later, I am in front of him on my knees, eyeing his cock hungrily.

"My turn."

I lick at the underside of his cock head before suckling it into the wetness of my mouth. Thomas growls loudly above me, fisting his hands in the dark earth of the forest floor. I love that I have this effect on him, but I wish he would lose control. I make it my mission to have him giving in to me and take his long, thick cock to the back of my throat.

He is by far the most well-endowed man I will ever have and my mouth hurts stretching around his girth. He makes the most erotic sounds above me driving me to take more of him into my mouth. The taste of his pre-cum on my tongue has another shot of lust pulsing through my system. I can feel his thighs tremble beneath my hands, and I know he's getting close.

In an instant, Thomas pushes me off him. We stare at each other. Both naked, aroused, and close to the edge. I spin around and present myself to him on my hands and knees, my ass and pussy on full display for him.

“Please, Thomas,” I beg.

I’m fully prepared to tell him exactly what I want and to beg some more but it isn’t necessary. Thomas grabs my hips firmly before settling his monster cock inside me with a single thrust. I cry out to the heavens, pleasure and pain bleeding into one as he fills me like no other ever has.

“Fuck!” His curse is loud as his grip on my hips tightens. If he bruises my skin, I won’t shift to erase the marks but I will wear them with pride.

I think he will remain immobile but in the next breath, he sets a punishing pace. He fucks into me in long harsh, hard strokes. He hits a spot deep inside me, sending shards of pain splintering through my body to mingle with the immense pleasure. My orgasm crashes through me unexpectedly, robbing me of my strength, and I almost fall face-first into the dirt.

He catches me just in time, pulling my back flush with his chest. He licks the sweat off my neck and grazes me with his teeth. Seems he is finally doing what feels natural instead of letting his insecurities hold him back.

“You’re so hot, so tight,” he mumbles in my ear before nipping the lobe. “I could spend the rest of my life right here.”

Not for a moment does he stop thrusting, his cock reaching places I wasn’t even aware I had. “Thomas,” I mewl. “Please.”

“Don’t worry, Lola. I’m going to make a mess of this perfect pussy before I claim

you. And then I'll take you home and do it all over again." His dirty words push me over the edge into another orgasm. He has been holding back out of fear but it was absolutely unnecessary. "Yes. Milk me."

He growls loudly before his cock kicks deep in my heat and I feel his seed spill inside me. Pain blooms in my clavicle as his teeth break the skin and bind him to me forever.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I finally understand why new mates spent weeks locked up alone in their houses. Never having experienced sex or the mate bond, I never understood. But as I stare down at my sleeping mate as I carry her back to the compound, I get it.

I want to wake her and fuck her again. Hell, I may do it while she is still asleep. I want to put my marks all over her gorgeous body and pump her full of my seed. I want any man, human or shifter, to know she belongs to me. It's like an irrational urge I just can't seem to fight.

I can't believe the things I said to her, but it didn't seem to bother her. I still have so much left to learn. I should have asked the other men and now it's too late. Lola will have to give me direction.

I stride around the compound to the back entrance where I can keep my very naked mate from the prying eyes of those around us. I carry her through the meadow behind my house, over the deck and inside to my room. The moment I lay her down on my pristine white bedding, I know this is where she belongs. Gently, I push her thighs apart. The skin is slightly pink from my whiskers, and I absently wonder if I should shave. But my seed seeping out of her sex distracts me.

I watch it slide from her to lie against the crack of her ass and the dirtiest thought pops into my mind. Before I can reevaluate, I dip down and lick our combined juices from her silky skin. Lola sighs above me and I continue my ministrations. Her musky-sweet taste is at the forefront, but my own saltiness is also present creating something completely unique.

I know I should let her rest—she is completely worn out—but I can't help myself. Once I have cleaned her pussy with my tongue, I slowly sink my raging erection into her dripping pussy.

I thought I had exaggerated the sensations in my mind because it was my first time but it's exactly as I remember. Hot. Tight. Silky. Perfection.

Slowly, I pull back before thrusting inside her, doing my best to let her rest. Her tits bounce on her chest as I take from her what I need, what I can't live without. Her pussy clamps down on me as an orgasm sweeps through her, little moans falling from her lips.

“Thomas.”

She mumbles my name in her sleep, and I am lost. I empty myself into her waiting channel once more. After, I lift her and place her on my chest, keeping my cock buried inside her as I fall asleep with my mate on my chest.

I wake hours later to pleasure coursing through me. My mate is leaning over me, her teeth locked onto my clavicle as she sets the final step of our mate bond. My painful erection is still buried inside her heat, and I can't help but rock my hips beneath her.

“Lola,” I moan loudly. “Oh, Goddess.”

She sits upright, impaling herself on my erection fully with a brilliant smile. Her hands cup her breasts as she rides me slowly, pushing the pleasure up even more. I let her take what she needs, knowing I will enjoy this as much as she does. But then she starts talking and I damn near lose my fucking mind.

“Your cock fills me so well, Thomas,” she mutters, her eyes closed. “It stretches me and reaches places ... oh, my.” A loud moan follows her words. “I love waking up with you inside me. I just couldn’t help myself.”

“Neither could I.” She opens her eyes and arches a brow, clearly wanting an explanation for my statement. “I’ll tell you later.”

I flip us over easily and take control, using long strokes to push her over the edge of her orgasm before I join her. We lay locked together for long moments, trying to catch our breath, simply enjoying being together.

“You’re beautiful, mate,” I say softly, running my hand over her back while I cuddle her from behind. “I couldn’t imagine a more perfect mate for me. I will do everything in my power to make you happy.”

Lola

Loud banging wakes me from the most peaceful sleep of my life. Thomas is already out of the bed we were sharing, pulling a pair of jeans over his hips.

“Go back to sleep,” he says with a lopsided grin. “I’ll get rid of whoever it is and be back in a minute.”

He disappears down the hallway and I listen as voices murmur from the front of the house. I know we are living in our little bubble of mated bliss but there are still things that need to be dealt with. And I doubt Thomas is coming back to bed anytime soon. Slipping from beneath the soft sheet, I pull on a red t-shirt I find in the top drawer of the dresser and walk down the hall to join my mate and find out what is going on.

Peyton smiles brightly when she sees me. “Seems Lola is awake after all,” she says to Thomas, smirking.

The tips of his ears turn red with embarrassment at being caught in a lie before he looks at me over his shoulder. “So it would seem.” His voice is low as he stares at my bare legs peeking out beneath the material from his t-shirt.

“What’s going on?” I ask, doing my best to ignore his lust-filled gaze.

Newly mated pairs usually spend days and weeks locked up alone together, fucking and marking, setting their bond. We have only had a few hours but that won’t make a difference. I know our bond is strong and the pack needs us.

“The hunter...”

Peyton’s words trail off and I nod. “Give us twenty minutes to shower and get dressed.”

She nods and walks away. She knows this is an important time in our newly formed mating and relationship, but as Luna she also knows we need to be present for this man’s interrogation.

I shut the door, grab Thomas’s hand, and drag him down the hallway and into the bedroom. I don’t release his hand as I start the shower but only once I need to strip. He stands, staring at me as I step beneath the spray. He looks like he is stuck to the spot.

“If you want to grab a quicky you’ll need to start moving,” I joke with a wink. “We have places to be.”

A moment later he is behind me beneath the spray. His hands caress my body,

molding to each of my curves as he adjusts me. My hands settle on the cold white porcelain tile as I bend, presenting myself to him. A low growl escapes my mate before he thrusts into me.

“I wish we never had to leave this house again,” he rasps beside my ear as he fucks me at a leisurely pace. “I want to fuck you on every surface in this house and pump you full of my cum.”

“Thomas,” I moan loudly.

“Yes, scream my name. My perfect little mate likes getting railed and everyone should know it.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

I wish I could be anywhere but here. I want to take Lola away from this animal and make sure she never has to breathe the same air as him ever again. He glares at us as we watch him closely, waiting for him to make the first move.

The door to the bunker opens with a creak and Iris walks in with the twins. She looks tired and pale. Instant worry for the woman before me settles over me like a cloak, wrapping around me.

“Breathe,” Lola says softly, squeezing my hand. “Her mates won’t allow anything to happen to her.”

Iris stares at her brother for a moment, sadness coating the air before she shakes her head. Lifting her chin, she straightens her spine before walking right up to him and slapping him. The sound bounces off the bare white walls of the small room.

“I mourned you,” she hisses. “You and Father manipulated me. Lied to me.”

“You stupid bitch!” he roars. He fights against the leather straps that keep him bound to the wooden chair but can’t break his bonds.

“Shifters are not what you said,” Iris hisses back. “They don’t kill people for fun or eat humans. They are just like us, trying to live in peace. They don’t experiment on pregnant woman or babies!”

My skin crawls at the reminder of the only life I have ever known. Iris is right, the

shifters are not the bad guys in this situation.

“Not all humans are bad,” I say softly, stepping beside her and offering some of my strength. “But your brother and father certainly are.”

She stares at me with tears swimming in her gaze. “I don’t know what to do.” The words are barely a whisper as they escape her. “He’s my brother.”

“You don’t have to do a damn thing,” Lola says. “Keep him locked up until clearer heads can prevail.”

“Don’t you fucking dare!” he roars from his chair. “Thomas, I will get you for this.”

“I’m not afraid of you anymore,” I say, leaning into his space, allowing my wolf to shimmer beneath my skin. “I have learned that I am not weak. You should be afraid of me.”

I see a flicker of fear in his eyes before he smirks.

“And you, Lola? What would your Alpha have to say about you breaking a deal he has worked so hard to keep?”

I growl loudly, leaning into his space and contemplating letting my wolf have his way with the bastard in front of me. But my mate’s laughter pulls me back from the brink of violence simmering in my veins.

“My Alpha, Caine,” she states slowly and clearly, “probably wants to rip your head off and send it back to your father in a pretty box with a little bow on top. If you are talking about Silas and the Thorn Pack...” she smiles sweetly before continuing. “Well, I don’t give a single flying fuck. I can tell you there will be words about their association with the Hunters and I have a feeling things are going to change.”

“You don’t know shit, little girl,” he says, smiling cruelly.

“I know your agreement excludes all dire wolves.” She shrugs nonchalantly. “I know Silas made it clear he would wipe each and every hunter off the face of the earth if you broke his one single rule. Did you know dire wolves are basically endangered? We are almost extinct to be honest.”

The hunter smirks. “We’ve never touched a single fucking dire wolf.”

“No?” She looks like she is thinking really hard before she smiles at me. “My mate is a dire wolf.”

Terror flashes across his features as he looks at me. “That’s not true...”

“But it is.” My words ring with finality. “Did you really think you built some super wolf shifter with your little experiments? You’re not God. Not even close.”

I watch the color drain from his face and for the first time in my life, I know I am the one in control. I have the upper hand.

Lola

Pride is the overwhelming emotion I feel at my mate standing up for himself. As we all walk out of the bunker toward Caine and Peyton’s home, I know we don’t have any solutions for the current situation, but we will. Soon.

My heart hurts for Iris, this woman I barely know. What she has been put through is terrible. I can’t believe her own family manipulated her so badly. But then again, what was my mother trying to do to me? It seems our parents do the most harm to us,

even if they may have the best intentions at heart.

One of the twins brings Caine and Peyton up to date when we arrive at their home while the rest of us take a seat on the outside deck.

“Do you really think Silas would care what the hunters have been doing?” Caine asks.

I shrug. “I know he cares about dire wolves and that should be enough. I also know my words put the fear of God in Aaron. He thinks Silas will retaliate and I want to believe that too.”

Before Caine can reply, the earth beneath our feet shakes before we hear the explosion. Screams rend the air as smoke billows from the main entrance.

“Not this shit again!” Peyton yells, already running in that direction.

We all follow suit, chasing after her to see what is happening. At the gate, a large black Hummer with dark tinted windows sits idling. All of us stare, not a single soul moving, as the passenger-side door opens. An older man in a suit slides out, his grey hair slicked back neatly. Steel grey eyes take in every person here. There are at least twenty people waiting with bated breath for him to make a move.

“My name is Mattias,” he says loudly. “I know what you are, and you know who I am. Return my son and we will leave without causing any bloodshed.

“I don’t believe you!” Iris calls out, stepping from the center of the group. “And if your own daughter can’t trust you, why should anyone else?”

A flash of pain crosses his features before he can hide it. Seeing his daughter was not something he expected. Interesting.

“I don’t have a daughter,” he says turning away from her. I hear her soft sob before a comforting murmur follows. Her sounds move further away, and I know that one or both her mates have taken her away from this scene.

“What guarantee do we have that you will leave us in peace?” Caine asks.

“None but my word,” Mattias replies with a glare.

“You cannot attack this compound,” I say loudly. “We fall under the Silas and the Thorn Packs’ protection.” I know I’m lying but desperate times call for desperate measures.

“And why would Silas afford you mutts such a luxury?” he asks with a sneer.

“Because we have dire wolves in this pack,” I announce. “And you know how he feels about dire wolves...” I let my voice trail off.

He draws a cell phone from his inner breast pocket and fiddles with it before pressing it to his ear. After long moments he speaks.

“I have a pack here claiming to be under your protection,” he says into the device.

His listens at who I am assuming to be Silas speaking on the other end before locking his gaze on me.

“What is your name, girl?”

My mate bristles beside me as I answer, “Lola.”

He repeats my name into the phone and waits a second before putting the device back in his pocket.

“Fine. You are protected. Bring my son and we will leave.”

Caine looks at me questioningly. I nod, knowing he is asking if it is safe for him to do this. He has to have the best interests of his pack at heart, and this could very well be a trick. If Mattias was actually talking to Silas, I know we have bought some time. It could still be a ruse, but we will have to take our chances.

Caine nods toward Godrick who quickly leaves to retrieve Aaron. It feels like it takes a lifetime for him to return even though I know it couldn't have been more than a few minutes. He shoves Aaron toward his father where he falls on the ground. His bound hands don't allow him to break his falls, and he lands with a loud thud.

Another man, burly and intimidating, emerges from the vehicle and lifts Aaron from the ground before placing him in the back seat. Mattias takes in each person standing before him. Assessing some while glaring at others.

“This is far from finished,” he states. “You may have protection now, but I will wipe your entire species from the face of the earth, dire wolves too.”

“We'll be waiting,” Caine replies.

A moment later, Mattias is back in the vehicle and kicking up dust as they drive away.

“What do we do now?” Thomas asks no one in particular.

“We need to find out if Silas is really our ally.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 7:46 am

Thomas

We drive for three days. Me, Lola, Caine, and Godrick.

We decided to leave Calum behind to watch over the pack. Godrick wouldn't let Caine come alone and as an Alpha himself could help defend us. I'm not sure it's the best plan to bring the two strongest Alphas along for this, but no one was listening when I voiced my opinion.

We reach the Thorn Pack and step out to make our presence known. A tall, muscular man with red hair approaches us with a snarl until his gaze lands on Lola.

"Lola?"

"Silas." She nods but her entire body is stiff.

"Why are you here? You left us when we needed you." Anger suffuses his words and my wolf bristles.

"Watch how you speak to my mate," I interject, leaning forward as I fight to keep my animal in check.

"Who are..." his words taper off as surprise clouds his features. "It can't be."

He staggers back a step before toppling over and landing with his ass on the grass.

An older woman emerges from a nearby house with a bright smile, and I can't help

but smile back. She seems familiar, her scent of clean laundry washing over me. She winks at me before helping Silas to stand.

“Stop overreacting and invite our guests inside.”

“But, Mother...”

“Don’t but me, boy. Alpha or not, I can still whop your ass,” she says, slapping his shoulder. “My grandson is always welcome, as are his friends.”

Confusion swamps me, my wolf receding in my mind. “What are you talking about?”

“You are Liliana’s boy,” she replies. “I know my daughter’s scent anywhere. I knew you would come back. Where is your mother?”

Lola gasps before a hand covers her mouth. “No.”

“What is going on here?’ Godrick demands.

“Come inside,” the old woman says and gestures to the large log house on the left. And we can all talk. I think there is a lot to work through.”

Everyone files into the kitchen, taking a seat around the little wooden table. I stand behind my mate, my hands resting on her shoulders as she quietly cries.

“Let’s start from the beginning,” Silas says softly, staring at me intently. “Why are you here?”

“My name is Caine. I am the Alpha of the Katu Pack, and we’ve come here for your help,” he says calmly. “The Hunters want to exterminate all shifters, including the dire wolves.”

“We have an agreement—” Silas starts but Godrick cuts him off.

“Yes, we know. With Mattias. He doesn’t intend to honor that he is just keeping you for last,” he explains. “Sorry, my name is Godrick.”

Silas glares at Godrick, clearly not believing a word he says.

“They don’t care if a shifter is wolf or dire wolf, or even a damn house cat. They lock us up and experiment on us until we are no more.” My words drip with venom as Silas stares at me. “They caught my mother when she was still pregnant with me. I grew up with those monsters. I should know.”

“Your mother?” the old woman asks. “Do they still have her?”

“No, ma’am. She died when I was born.”

At my words the old woman starts crying along with my mate. Lola rises from her spot and holds the old woman tightly as they grieve for someone I never knew.

“You don’t know who you are?” Silas asks, his voice softer and tinged with sadness.

“I’ve only known I’m a dire wolf for a week.”

“Your father’s name was Ivan, and he was the greatest Alpha we have ever had, his mate was Liliana. She was pregnant when she went missing. Ivan went mad before being shot by a human thinking he was a real wolf.”

I nod, sad that I never knew these people. “But it still doesn’t make any sense.”

“You’re the true Alpha of the Thorn Pack,” Lola says, clearing up all the confusion.

L ola

All of us spend the night at Miriam's—Silas's mother and the pack elder—home. There isn't much talking and even less sleeping. Each of us is lost in thought after the revelations yesterday afternoon. Thomas makes love to me gently as the sun rises in the early morning hours, kissing me and marking me again.

I know he is going through a lot and having me so close to the man that refused me is pushing all his buttons. He needs to make sure I smell like him and wear his mark to remain in control of his beast.

We go downstairs for breakfast and eat in silence. When Silas joins us, Thomas speaks for the first time.

"Do I need to challenge you for the pack?" he asks Silas.

"No. It's your birthright." Silas lowers his head. "The pack has already been made aware of the coming change."

Thomas nods in agreement. "How many members?"

"Fifteen adults, two children," Miriam says. "Have you decided to stay?"

"No, I already have a pack. I have a home, and my mate is not comfortable here," he says taking my hand on the wooden top as he glares at Silas. "But I will say three things. The Thorn Pack no longer works with the Hunters. They killed my mother, a dire wolf, and kept me locked up my entire life. We will work together to sort through this mess and take out the hunters before they can cause any more damage."

"And the third thing?" Silas asks, anger already suffusing his tone.

"The Katu Pack will welcome any member from the Thorn Pack," Caine cuts in,

smiling at Thomas. “We are a blended pack, a mixed family of sorts. Wolves, dire wolves, panthers, and even a human live with us.”

“Excuse me?” Silas looks like he may puke at the thought.

“You can stay up here on the mountain until your numbers dwindle, the hunters come for you, and you are extinct,” I say, glaring at him. “Or you can open your mind and see that your old-fashioned ways are not helping your pack.”

“I want to go with you,” Miriam cuts in.

“Mother?” Silas asks in shock.

“Lola is right, Silas. And I want to know my only grandchild.” She cups Thomas’s cheek with a soft smile. “You’re an adult. Live your life the way you want but this is my choice.”

Her words are final as she walks deeper into her house. Two hours later, Miriam is sitting between me and Thomas, chatting his ear off as we drive home. Behind us, three vehicles follow.

The Thorn Pack is no more. We are all Katu wolves now.

The End