



My Mate (The Alpha Shifter Collection #23)

Author: *Sam Crescent*

Category: Fantasy

Description: Dex Arlington is the Alpha's son, and he will not allow anyone to hurt his mate. When he finds out she's been beaten up by one of the pack wolves, he goes to settle the score. He doesn't care that Casey hasn't been able to change into a wolf. She belongs to him, and no one will hurt her, and anyone who tries will pay the price.

Casey Scott isn't happy. Ever since she knew she was a wolf, all she has ever wanted was to transition. She wants to run out in the wild, beneath the full moon. Only, it never happens. Her wolf is not coming.

She doesn't know how Dex can want her. Yet, nothing sends him away. He refuses to leave her alone. From the moment they first met as children, he said he knew they were meant to be mates.

But someone has a secret. They are closing in. Who would dare try to kill the Alpha's son?

Total Pages (Source): 12

Page 1

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Dex Arlington knew his father would be very proud of him at this moment. He stood in the men's shower at the swimming pool complex, and he hadn't torn Buddy Anderson's throat out. This was a good thing, or at least it was according to his father.

A torn throat would cause a great deal of issues within the pack, and Dex didn't like dealing with them at the best of times. Even his own father, Klaus, sometimes hated having to be Alpha. One day, Dex would have to take over and the whole Arlington Pack would belong to him. Everyone would turn to him for guidance and all that shit, but he had a way to go before that happened. He was an Alpha in training. Not that he felt like he needed any training.

No, that wasn't true. He just liked to piss his dad off from time to time by pretending he knew it all. It was fun to irritate his father. At the moment, he already annoyed his dad by having a very bad reputation, especially among his peers.

It wasn't his fault that everyone else was an asshole, or more specifically, it wasn't his fault that Buddy Anderson rounded up a group of his buddies to beat the crap out of a girl. One specific girl, Casey Scott. There was no way he was going to allow anything to happen to Casey. She was the person he was going to protect above all.

Five months ago, she turned eighteen and like the rest of the pack, she was expected to change into her wolf. The only problem was that, even now, she was the only pack member in history that had not changed into wolf form. Unfortunately, it made her a target, and Dex could not allow that.

Staring at Buddy, wearing his swimming boxers and even whistling while not giving

a shit, pissed him off. He leaned against the lockers, staring at the guy he wanted to kill. Dex cleared his throat and as he did, Buddy let out a shout and spun around.

“Holy fuck, you scared the crap out of me,” Buddy said. “I nearly shit myself.”

He didn’t laugh and the smile soon fell from Buddy’s face.

“Uh, what’s the problem?”

Dex stared at him for several seconds, but he didn’t say a word, just waited.

Buddy was a weakling and a coward. Always had been and always would be. He couldn’t stand him. The guy had gone after a female, and he looked at him, feeling the revulsion once again.

He could see Buddy tense up.

“You’re my problem, Bud,” Dex said. “You think it’s okay to attack females?”

Buddy scoffed. “Come on, man. You’re seriously not mad about Casey? That can’t be possible. We’re just trying to do the pack a favor.”

“A favor?”

“No one wants that weakling.”

Dex took a step, then another step. “And you’re the Alpha who gets to decide that?”

Another weak chuckle. “I’m on your side and the Arlington Pack is strong, and she cannot turn into a wolf.”

“My father has no problem with Casey. She is pack. Her place is here with all of us. Do you remember what happened to David?” Dex asked.

Buddy’s eyes went wide, and he started to shake his head.

Last year, David Delagair decided he was going to scare the crap out of Casey, and it ended with her getting a black eye. Dex made sure David had two bruised eyes, a broken arm, and he forced him to apologize to Casey. Anyone who hurt Casey, directly or indirectly, suffered.

Since the moment they were kids, she had been a target for bullies, but Dex had taken care of it. The bullying had soon stopped, until it was only a few fleeting events, which he dealt with. No one messed with his Casey.

He didn’t give a shit that she hadn’t changed, and he didn’t care if she never did. Casey was one of the nicest, sweetest people in the pack. Nothing was ever too big or too small. She gave, and people were quite willing to take from her.

Dex would make sure no one abused her kindness. She would be protected.

The black eye he saw, along with the split lip, were highly unacceptable. In fact, all he saw as he looked at Buddy was the new bruising on her face, and it pissed him off. The first punch was not that hard, but the second and third were. Buddy tried to hit back at him, but he was no match for Dex. He was a training Alpha. He’d been born bigger, stronger, and faster. No one could compete with him, and that was exactly what his father had taught him.

The pack needed to respect him. If anyone had any inkling of weakness it would throw the pack into chaos. Dex would not allow that to happen.

Buddy landed in a heap on the floor and began to sob and beg. Wrapping his fingers

around the man's neck, he didn't squeeze, although he was tempted to.

"You're going to go to Casey, and you're going to look her in the eye and you're going to apologize to her. Do you understand me?" Dex asked. "If you don't do this, then I will fucking kill you. I'll annihilate your whole family, and I don't care about the repercussions, got it?"

"Yes, yes, I got it. I'm sorry, Dex. I'm so sorry."

Dex let him go, and then took one last look before he left the changing room, then made his way out of the building. He should have known his father would be there, waiting with the car. Dex had walked in the hope of burning off some of his anger, but it hadn't worked. He was just as angry now as he was before.

"Dad," he said.

"Son."

"He's still alive."

"Good."

"But there is blood," Dex said.

"I already called the family, and they have apologized."

Dex nodded.

"Son, do you want to explain this to me?"

He shrugged. "The bastard beat the shit out of Casey. She can't stand up for herself,

or won't, I don't know, and I can't allow her to get hurt. What could I do?"

"I'm not talking about this situation. You actually made it easier for Buddy and his family. I don't take kindly to bullies, and I believe I heard correctly that he was attempting to force Casey out of the pack. That is not going to happen."

Dex looked toward his father. "You don't think her not being a wolf is a problem?"

"Her not transitioning is not unheard of."

"Seriously? It's never occurred in the pack," Dex said.

"Doesn't mean it hasn't happened before," Klaus said. "I'm interested in whether you're aware of why you're fighting this?"

"Dad, stop—"

"No, you need to understand that you're acting like a mate. You're acting like her protector and behaving exactly as I've seen all other mates react. When are you going to face the reality that Casey might not be your mate?"

Dex looked toward his father. He had never been honest with him. From the moment he first saw Casey Scott across the town square, nearly fifteen years ago, he remembered feeling this pull. They had been three years old at the time, but he knew what he felt. It had been powerful and strong.

That feeling hadn't faded. Not as they entered kindergarten, or high school. He'd felt this pull to be with her. Every time she entered the room, he didn't even need to look around to know it was her. She was like a magnet to him.

Casey made him feel, she made him want to be a better guy, although he did

everything he could to be hated, especially by his peers. He didn't flirt with the girls, hook up, or do any of that shit. The only person he wanted was Casey.

He also couldn't stand when other males tried to fight for her affection. That had the ability to piss him the fuck off. Casey belonged to him.

Again, he'd never said anything. His father was convinced he and Casey were not mates, but Dex knew differently. He also knew something was blocking Casey's ability to turn into a wolf, and he'd figure it out. Until then, no one was going to hurt her.

"Dad, she's a friend, and she needs someone to watch her back."

Casey slid her hand up and down, holding onto the paintbrush as she worked on the fence. Her dad was convinced she was too stressed. Turning eighteen and being the only one in her eighteenth year not to turn sucked, big time.

She had never been a popular kid at school, but when news had gotten out about her lack of wolf, she'd been treated far worse than she ever thought possible. Like most of the pack, she was still being given the year to adjust and to acclimate herself in with the pack. There was no school, just jobs that needed to be done around the pack. Allowing each new transitioner to get used to the unpredictable feeling of being the wolf as well.

For the past five months, she'd watched other people her age struggle. They had been serving coffee or taking care of people, and their wolf gene had suddenly manifested. It resulted in the Alpha being called to help guide each person to have complete control over their wolf.

She had nothing. No feeling, no sensation. Not even the conversations she'd overheard others discussing. She was alone. No wolf.

For a short moment, she had wondered if she was adopted, and her parents had some kind of freaky secret. Again, she'd been wrong. She was her parents' child, and there was no changing that. Now her father was trying to get her to relax and not freak out. This was proving to be very difficult, because the more time passed with not even a freaking tingle, the harder it was for her to not panic.

Painting a fence was supposed to help clear her mind from the fact she was beaten up the other day. Her parents were not happy, especially as she refused to attack back. What could she do? Get her ass kicked? She wasn't a coward, but fighting didn't seem to be the answer. Although the bruises were still on her face, the pain had lessened to almost nonexistent.

She blew out a breath and then sighed, feeling a headache start to bloom. Most of the fence was painted and her father had said once the first coat was done, she should go back over everything and do it all again.

Once she came to the end of the painting, which was at the front of the house, she paused, putting her paintbrush on the lid of the paint can.

"Uh, Casey."

She frowned and turned around to see Buddy Anderson holding a bouquet of flowers, wild ones. There were several guys with him, and she tensed up. They had all been there, laughing and taunting as he started to hit her. The attack had taken her by surprise, which is why she hadn't defended herself.

"What do you want?"

Then she noticed the black eye and the fact one of his arms was in plaster. Wolves were fast healing, but within the first few transitions, it could still take time to adjust.

“What happened to you?”

“I want to apologize for what I did. I will understand if you would like to pay me back. Name a time and place, and you can hurt me and everyone who hurt you, as this is your right.”

“Wait a minute here,” she said, holding up her hand for him to stop. This seemed completely ludicrous to her. “What the hell is going on?” This confused her more than getting beat up because she couldn’t turn into a wolf. The other, she understood. This, she did not.

“I shouldn’t have hurt you. It is not my right nor my place, and I am sorry.”

There was no way Buddy came to her to make amends. Something was going on here, and she didn’t like any of it. She glared at him, waiting.

“What is going on?” she asked again. “Who did that to your face and your arm?” The last time she saw him, there was absolutely nothing wrong with his arm.

“I am sorry,” Buddy said.

She was done with this, and quickly closed the distance between them. Even though he’d hurt her, she wasn’t afraid of him.

“Tell me.”

Buddy looked up at her, and even as he was attempting to apologize, she saw the disdain he had for her, and she couldn’t help but smile.

“Yeah, that’s it. That’s the real Buddy. Now tell me, who did this to you?” she asked.

“There is only one person who could do this to me,” Buddy said.

Casey didn’t need him to tell her the rest. “Get lost.”

“But—”

“I said, get lost!” she yelled, and then headed in the direction of where she’d find none other than Dex Arlington. She didn’t know what he was trying to do, or if he even thought this was going to make her life easier. Like all the new transitioners, his jobs also came from his dad and Alpha, as he had to train to take over.

Not all his jobs were about community and being part of the pack. Dex’s was about taking care of the pack. Willing to do the jobs others hated, which for him right now was chopping logs for the coming winter.

Klaus considered it an Alpha’s job to gather the necessary tools. Casey was aware that they spent most of the summer as hunter-gatherers.

She didn’t care how long it took, she was about to have a word with Dex. He should leave her alone, and she was going to confront him.

Charging through the forest, she came to a stop right at the edge where he swung the axe down, and the piece of wood split in two. There was no need to slam it down or do anything else. Dex was strong. He always had been.

Casey held her hands together and clapped. “Well done,” she said, gaining his attention.

She also happened to notice he was shirtless. The symbol of the wolf pack was

printed on his chest. New transitioners were not allowed the ink until they had completed their duties, but Dex was in line to be Alpha.

“What do you want?” Dex asked.

“Seriously?”

“I can tell you’re not here to thank me, and from that look on your face, you’re pissed.”

“Very funny. I am upset.”

“Would it kill you to say a curse word?” Dex asked, as he started toward her.

“Just because I can say them doesn’t mean I should.”

“Everyone else does.”

“I’m not everyone else,” she said. She immediately cringed as she’d just admitted once again that she wasn’t like the other pack. She couldn’t turn.

Her parents were convinced she was highly stressed. When her birthday came, she didn’t feel stressed. She’d felt excited to finally take her place among the pack, and now there was no place for her, the only pack member who couldn’t turn. Yes, it grated on her nerves, and she grew more and more agitated with each full moon that passed. There was no special sense, no connection, nothing.

She felt like it was an empty void within her, and she was terrified of admitting that to anyone. Without the ability to turn, what was the point of keeping her in the pack? She was useless to them.

Pushing some of the hair out of her face, she then folded her arms and glared at him. “You shouldn’t have hurt Buddy,” she said.

“Why not?”

She frowned. “Why not? Because it is not nice to hurt someone who cannot fight back. In case you didn’t know, you’re the soon-to-be Alpha, and he cannot fight you.”

Dex shrugged. “He tried to, and pack politics have not stopped him from attacking me in the past, so don’t attempt to play that card. I know what Buddy is capable of, and if he thought he could beat the crap out of me, trust me, he would be all over it.”

She couldn’t argue with that.

He took another step toward her, then another. “Have you looked at your face?”

“He didn’t break any bones.”

“No? Not this time, but that doesn’t mean next time he won’t try a little harder. You can hate me all you want, Casey. No one beats the shit out of you and gets away with it.” He leaned in a little closer and she found it impossible to pull back. “And anyone that does will answer to me.”

“They have every right. Until I turn, I can’t be part of the pack.”

“No, you are pack, and anyone that says otherwise will get hurt, I guarantee it.”

“Your father is not going to be happy with this.”

“Funnily enough, he is happy about it,” Dex said. “I saved him a job. You’re pack,

Casey, deal with it, and don't allow others to beat you up. You and I both know you're quite capable and can stop them."

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

The next full moon was only three days away. It was dark, and Dex knew exactly where Casey was going to be. They were no longer under curfew, and seeing as they were desperate for her to find that peace with her wolf, no one was stopping her from entering the woods.

They didn't have to worry about hunters or humans walking through their forest. His father had long befriended an old witch who lived in a cabin at the edge of the woods. She hated being disturbed. For the added protection to his pack, she was part of the pack, even though she didn't possess any wolf genes. She was all witch and could probably curse them while they were sleeping, but so far, nothing bad had come from helping her. His father had always said it was important to help others.

It didn't take him long to find Casey. She was sitting in the center of a small clearing, and if there had been a full moon, the beam would have cast a light on her. The scent of chocolate and coffee was heavy in the air. Two scents he fucking loved, and most often Casey smelled like. She had a little addiction to both, and seeing as he had a not-so-secret addiction to her, it worked for the two of them.

"It's rude to go sneaking around," Casey said, and spun toward him. She crossed her legs, rested her palms upward, and stared at him.

"I don't see anyone else here," Dex said.

"So you're happy to be rude to me."

"Last time I checked, you're more than happy to have your ass kicked than to do any real kicking," he said.

“That’s not funny.” Casey glared at him, but she didn’t turn away.

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t know, trying to figure out what is going wrong.” She sighed and he watched as her shoulders slumped.

He moved closer to her and sat on the floor so their knees were touching.

“Stop,” he said.

She lifted her head, and seeing the glistening tears in her eyes was like a punch to the gut for him.

“Don’t,” he said.

She snorted and then shook her head. “It’s insane, right? Feeling this way.” She closed her eyes and watched as one of the tears fell down her cheek. He couldn’t stand to see her cry.

Reaching out, he swiped it off her cheek. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about tears.

“Tell me what to do?” he asked. He needed to fix this. To hurt whatever was making her cry.

She shrugged. “You’re so sweet, but there is nothing for you to fix. There is nothing you can do.” She sighed. “It’s ... just ... this.” She dropped her head.

“Talk to me,” he said.

If there was nothing he could fight, he could spend his time attempting to help her. There had to be something he could do.

“Do you really want to hear this?” she asked.

“I wouldn’t have asked.”

“All my life, ever since my parents told me what I would become and started to prepare me for my transition, I couldn’t wait. All I ever wanted was to be part of the pack. I loved that sense of having my place, of knowing what I was going to do, what I was going to be. I’ve never been more excited for anything, other than my eighteenth birthday, where I was going to be part of the pack.”

“Casey, you already are.”

“And do you know what it was like, going out into the forest, hearing all the howls, knowing the recent newbies were there, running? I stared up at the full moon, and I waited, and nothing. That was all I could do—wait. The moon stayed high in the sky, and then I watched it slowly set, and nothing.” She stopped and there were more tears. “I didn’t want to go home. I wanted to stay in that forest until I transitioned, and I tried. The sun came up, and still I stayed. Nothing. Eventually, I got hungry and knew I would have to go to my parents. The moment they looked at me, they knew I hadn’t transitioned.”

She pressed her lips together, and she was so close to tears.

“It’s okay,” he said.

“No, it’s not. You keep telling me my place is among the pack, but it’s not. If I can’t turn, what does that make me?” she asked.

“Someone special,” he said.

“Please don’t play jokes.”

“Believe it or not, I am not playing jokes. If you can’t turn, so what? That doesn’t stop you from being part of the pack, and my dad is not going to kick you out. I know he can be an asshole and he has his rules and stuff like that, but he loves this pack.”

Casey pressed her lips together. “You don’t think he is going to get rid of me?”

“No, he’s not.”

She uncrossed her legs, and then spun so she was lying on her back, staring up at the night’s sky.

Dex joined her, getting close, and he reached for her hand, locking their fingers together, as they both stared up at the sky.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I just ... I don’t know what I am going to do.”

“What we’re all doing—being part of the pack—and I don’t see a problem. While everyone is breaking their bones and splitting their skin, you can be making that famous chili I know you love to make.”

She laughed. “I should have known you would always be thinking of your stomach.”

He chuckled. “It’s a damn good chili, and after a run, I’m always starving.”

“What is it like?” she asked.

“What?”

“Running. Allowing yourself to be free and wild.”

Dex glanced over to her and smiled. “Well, I can try and give you that experience.” He got to his feet and held out his hand. “Get up.”

“Dex?”

“Trust me,” he said. “Now, strip down to your underwear.”

She pursed her lips. “You know, this is something bullies do.”

“Have I ever bullied you?” he asked.

“No.”

“And I’m not going to start now. There is no one else around, and if anyone messed with us, I’d deal with it.”

“You’re always so sure of yourself,” she said. “Fine, fine, fine, but don’t look.”

He frowned but didn’t agree with her. There was no way he was not going to look.

Casey stripped down to just her bra and panties. It was a plain beige pair, but he knew she had better lingerie at home. Whenever she wore too large a shirt or dress, they would gape at the front. He particularly liked a red set he knew she had. It didn’t matter what he liked, though. All that mattered right now was helping Casey.

“I’m semi-naked, now what?” she asked.

He tried not to look, but Dex had never claimed to be a gentleman and seeing Casey nearly naked was a fucking dream. One that made his mouth water.

She wasn’t like a lot of the females in the pack. She had full hips, a slender waist, large tits, and a nice juicy set of thighs. To him, she didn’t look fragile, she looked ready to take on the world, and he fucking loved that. He felt his cock start to harden, but this wasn’t about him tonight.

“Run,” he said. “If I catch you, I win, and if you evade me, you win.”

“Wait, what do I win?” she asked.

“We’ll have to find out what you want.”

“And what do you win?”

“You’re going to have to wait to find out what I want.”

She looked doubtful. “I’m not sure about this.”

“You want to back down, or do you want to know what it really feels like to be a wolf?”

She glared at him. “You know what I want.”

“Then run, and hope I don’t catch you.”

It was official.

This was insane and crazy.

Or possibly crazy and then insane.

None of this made any sense to her, but yet, the moment Dex gave her that warning look that she had come to associate with him, she didn't linger. Hell, no, she turned on her heel and ran like crazy. She had no idea where she was going.

She couldn't believe she was running away from Dex in her underwear. There had better not be any of the pack around as she felt this was going to require way too many questions and she didn't have a clue how she would be able to answer them.

But once again, Dex was at her rescue, trying to make her feel better. She didn't know why he was always there when she needed him. It had been that way for as long as she could remember. Even before they started school, Dex was always there.

At first, running through the forest naked didn't feel special, other than the fact she was in her underwear running from her soon-to-be Alpha.

Casey didn't quite know when that feeling changed, but she felt the air on her face and the earth beneath her feet. It was fast, and it took her breath away. She didn't want it to stop.

And then, she heard Dex as he began to make chase.

She started to slow down, as she knew she was no match for Dex. He'd be able to do whatever the hell he wanted. Everyone knew how good he was, faster and stronger than everyone else. She knew she wasn't going to make this easier for him, but she was going to make him work for it.

Running as fast as she was able, which she didn't feel was a great speed, she was feeling like her lungs were about to explode. It felt incredible, and with Dex gaining on her, she didn't know what he was going to want from her.

Dex never told her what he wanted. He never asked for a single thing, not even back in high school. Whenever he saw her getting bullied, the person doing the bullying would end up on their face, and he'd hold out a hand for her to take. Everyone knew they messed with her at their own risk. Sometimes they tried to do it in secret, but Dex had his ways of finding out. Most of the time, she didn't even need to tell him what had happened or who had done it. He'd been able to detect who they were by simply scenting her skin.

To some people that was weird, but she also knew it was the Alpha part of him that was able to do the things he did. She also knew, one day, when he did take over from Klaus, he would be just as good as his father.

Dex had a heart, although he tried to hide it. Her mother once said that the only problem with Dex was that someone he cared about kept getting hurt.

Casey suddenly came to a stop as she realized who she was talking about. The pack hurt her. Dex cared about her .

She spun around as Dex came toward her, and she stared at him. For so long she had wondered who he cared about, but it would seem for the longest time it had been her.

"I've got you," he said.

Her back was to the tree. She kept panting, and much to her surprise it only took a few seconds to catch her breath.

"It's me," Casey said. "I am the one you care about."

Dex stared at her, and he took one step, then another, until he reached out and rested his hand against the side of her head.

She didn't know what to say or do, she could only look at him. "That's right, isn't it?"

"Did you not know?" he asked.

"I ... I ... no."

He smiled. "You know, for a clever woman, Casey, you sometimes are a little dumb."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because you didn't know it was you I cared about."

She couldn't help but smile. "No, not why I'm dumb, but why did you not tell me?" she asked. "Why do you care about me?"

Dex could have any other girl or single woman in the pack. Besides the fact he was handsome and sexy, he was also going to be the next Alpha, and to a lot of women, that was a draw no one could deny.

She didn't care that he was going to be the next Alpha. When they were little, her parents would always tell her to be nice to Dex. She didn't have to be told to be nice. Once again, it took her a little time to realize that Dex was the Alpha's son. She already cared about him by then. He was her best friend and in his way, her savior.

It would seem there were a lot of times when fellow peers from the pack didn't like her. She had no idea what she did to irritate them, but either way, she was not going to let it bother her. Dex cared for her.

“How could I not care for you?” he asked. “You’re smart—”

“You just called me dumb,” she reminded him.

“You’re smart and dumb at the same time. You do not know what is right under your nose, and you’re ... beautiful. Even when people are being assholes to you, you haven’t changed. It has not made you bitter. You don’t think about getting them back. Even after what Buddy did to you, you’re not thinking about hurting him.”

“I can’t change who they are, and I am not going to allow them to change who I am,” she said.

Her mother had always told her it wasn’t about what other people did or how they acted, it was about how it made her feel and behave. She was not going to let any of them get under her skin. The bullying was manageable. Now, she knew it was all because of Dex. He made it work. He stopped the bullies.

“No, you can’t change them, and they haven’t changed who you are. You’re amazing, Casey. I know that, and so does everyone who comes to know you.”

“I’m not special.”

“You are to me, and that is all that matters.”

She looked at him, a little taken aback by his honesty. “I had no idea.”

“And that is what makes you pretty dumb.”

Casey sighed. “So, what do you want?” she asked. “You won. You caught me. What is it you want?”

“This.” He closed the distance between them, and then his lips brushed hers.

She felt that tingle shoot all the way through her body, and it made her melt so hard and so fast. She didn’t know what to do with her hands, and for several seconds she kept them at her sides. Then, she wanted to touch him, to feel his body beneath her hands.

Starting at his waist, she slowly began to slide them up, going toward his chest. She felt how hard he was beneath his clothing. Dex had always been all muscle.

Several of the girls in her class had wanted Dex all to themselves. She’d heard them conspire, trying to gain his attention. Whenever he’d enter a classroom, they’d puff out their chests, wanting him to notice them.

Looking back now, Casey remembered him always finding her and coming to sit right beside her in class. Now, that made a lot of sense to her why some of the other girls hated her guts. Some of the bullying, especially in school, had come from the girls.

She was having a reality check and an epiphany after each one. They hated her because of all the attention she got from Dex. This made so much sense to her.

Kissing him, she loved the feel of his lips on hers, and then, as she wrapped her arms around the back of his neck and pressed her body to his, he felt so good against her. She loved the kiss. It felt like she’d been waiting all her life to feel his lips on hers. And then he pulled away.

“You’re my reward.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

“You’ve done good,” Klaus said.

Dex looked around at the stacked piles of broken wood.

“Now, all you need to do is to take them into the storage shed, and we’ll distribute them.”

“Great,” Dex said.

“You got anything else you need to be doing?” Klaus asked.

“Nothing.”

“Good, let’s get started. Trust me, your grandfather did this to me, and your great-grandfather did it to him.”

“And when I have a son, I get to give this job to him?” Dex asked.

“Now you’re getting it.”

There was no smile on his father’s face. They lifted several pieces of splintered wood, and he followed his father over to the storage shed. He knew Klaus had done this multiple times over the years. Even before he turned into a wolf and was old enough to help his father, he’d come and join him. His job had been to get the logs ready for his father to chop, and then gather each piece. He had to be fast, as his father didn’t like waiting.

“What’s on your mind, son?” Klaus asked.

“Nothing. Just remembering what this was like when I was a kid. Running around, gathering the wood. I used to love it.”

His father laughed at this. “Ah, as a grown man, you’re going to hate it. It’s a job that needs doing. I don’t want the pack to get cold this coming winter.” He stopped and took a deep breath. “It’s going to be a cold one. I can sense it.”

Dex thought about Casey. After the kiss they shared, he walked her back home. Every window in her home had been dark, and she had no choice but to climb up the back to her bedroom window. He’d waited until she was safe in her home, and then she’d given him a wave, blew him a kiss, and he left.

All night long, he had a fucking hard-on that had taken multiple strokes to get rid of. He’d even tried a cold shower, but nothing stopped his raging erection. Eventually he did get to sleep, but by then, it was time for him to get back to work.

“Dad, what is going to happen with Casey?” Dex asked.

Klaus turned toward him. “Nothing. Why?”

“She’s worried that she won’t be able to join the pack,” he said.

“Casey will always be pack, son. You know that.”

“What if she doesn’t turn?”

“Then she doesn’t turn, and come the full moon, she won’t change into a wolf.”

“You know what the pack is like,” Dex said.

“The pack is a lot more accepting than you think. Only a few little young shits who think they know best have caused her a problem. I know for a fact she is very much loved by everyone in the pack.”

“And what about her position as my mate?”

Klaus looked at him. “Are you willing to accept it?”

“I’ve always accepted it,” he said.

Klaus raised a brow.

“I did, I just don’t want to scare her,” Dex said. “I’ve always known.”

“Do you feel it?” Klaus asked.

“Yeah, I felt it years ago.”

“That is what is going to make your mating unique. Some people don’t know who their mate is until after they are mated.”

“Was that the way for you and Mom?”

“Yes,” Klaus said. “I was always drawn to your mother, but never like when we finally transitioned, and as you know, we share the same birth month, so our joining came at the same time.”

Dex did know his parents had been together from the moment they transitioned into wolves. He also knew his father hadn’t been with another woman. His parents had been young sweethearts.

He, himself, hadn't been with anyone else. He was a virgin, and he knew Casey was as well.

"Will Casey know I am her mate?" Dex asked.

"That I don't know, son. You're going to have to ask her how she feels."

Dex gripped the back of his neck after he helped his father stack the chopped wood. "I can't ask her that. She is already stressing out about this. Is there anything we can do to help her?"

"Time," Klaus said. "She needs time."

"Can you not call on her wolf?" Dex asked. "I know you can force wolves to change."

"That is a punishment, Dex. If I call on her wolf, it is going to be painful. Even more so than if she allows the transition to happen on its own."

Dex took a deep breath. "So, all I've got to do is wait?"

"Yeah, that is all you can do. Wait it out."

He couldn't help but think about the old witch at the secluded cabin on the edge of the forest. "What about ... magic?" Dex asked.

"No, you do not go to Lucinda about this."

"Why not?"

"Because Lucinda will not meddle with pack business, and you will have a price to

pay. Trust me, there is no magic in this world that would be worth that price.”

“What about for the protection of humans? You paid that price,” Dex said.

“Yeah, I did,” Klaus said. “Do you want to know what price was paid?”

Dex didn’t know what price his father paid. The pack thrived. They were safe.

“How many brothers and sisters do you have?” Klaus asked.

He didn’t have any.

“On the month you were born, we had hunters in the forest,” Klaus said. “Nothing seemed to be going right for your mother, with the pregnancy. She could only run, and one of the days she went running, heavily pregnant with you, she was naked. The men heard her, and then tried to go hunting. I took care of it. I always took care of it.” Klaus continued talking as he walked outside. “I knew hunters and humans were going to be a risk to us all. Lucinda moved onto the edge of the forest. She had lost her coven, and she wanted the protection of the pack, which I granted. I went to her, and she warned me that the cost of doing magic is ... pricey. It affects you in ways you are not expecting.”

“How did she lose her coven?” Dex asked.

“She wouldn’t keep paying the price of the magic. She turned her back on helping people because it always came with a steep price. She warned me. She said what I asked for would come with a price, and I told her it was one I was willing to pay. The shields went up, and for two weeks, I thought I didn’t pay any price because I did the right thing. I was wrong, so wrong. On the night you were born, your mother started to hemorrhage. She nearly died giving birth to you. You lived, but her ability to have more children was taken from us. That was the cost I had to pay to keep the pack

safe. Lucinda felt horrible. It's why she remains at the edge of the forest, staying close but not too close to the pack. She also doesn't practice magic anymore. You will not go to Lucinda, promise me."

"I promise."

He had no idea of the sacrifices his father had made. Or what his parents had suffered for the sake of the pack.

"Dad, I'm so sorry."

"Don't. I do not regret my decisions. I preserved the pack, and it saved us. We do not have to fear humans nor hunters, and for that I am grateful. You will not go to Lucinda."

"No, I won't."

He couldn't do that. If the price had to be taken out on a loved one, he was not going to risk Casey being hurt. He'd take everything for her.

"Ouch." Casey pulled her hands away from the rosebush and glared at the plant. She had a small droplet of blood on her finger, and she wrinkled her nose.

Sticking her finger into her mouth, she sat back on her heels and looked around the garden. She was starting to doubt her father's assessment of trying to relax her.

"Are you okay, honey?"

She looked up to see her mother coming out of the kitchen, carrying a small pitcher

of lemonade along with two glasses.

“How much do you like roses?” Casey asked, knowing it was a pointless question as her mother loved the prickly little plant.

Her mother was also called Rose. According to her grandparents, they didn’t know what to name their daughter, and it took them a long time, but noticed their little girl was always near the roses.

Casey wasn’t quite sure how accurate the story was, but they would claim her mother could crawl at a very young age. Either way, Rose Scott loved her garden, which is why her father planted them for her.

“Oh, sweetie. Your father plants them for me every year we’re together.”

“Mom, that is at least eighteen plants I know of,” Casey said.

Rose chuckled. “I know. I know. He can’t help himself and that is one of the many things I love about your father. Some of the early plants didn’t make it. Not because we had a bad relationship or anything, just because we didn’t know how to take care of the roses. Over time, we were able to learn, and since then, this garden has thrived.”

She knew her mother loved her garden. Not so much the gardening, but she would always spend a lot of time outside, especially in spring and summer.

“Dad loves you very much.”

“That he does. I would have to say I have a feeling Dex has quite a few feelings about you.”

“Mom, come on, stop it.”

“What? Can’t a mother ask about her daughter’s love life?”

“Your daughter doesn’t have a love life.”

“Okay, so what is Dex?” she asked.

Casey sighed and couldn’t help but giggle. “I don’t know, and I probably sound like a schoolgirl.”

“Honey, you are still a schoolgirl.”

“I care about Dex. I’ve always cared about him.”

“But?”

“Can I allow him to ... you know, be with me?” Casey asked.

She moved from her muddy patch and joined her mother as she poured them both a glass of lemonade.

“Why can you not be with him?” Rose asked.

“Are you not worried about the giant problem right now?”

“You mean about you not turning into a wolf?”

“Yeah, it is a pretty big ... problem.”

“Only if you make it one. I don’t see a problem. If you and Dex are in fact mates,

then there is not, nor is there ever going to be, a problem with the two of you being together. Here you go, sweetheart. It is way too hot out here.”

Casey took the lemonade from her mother. “How can you be so positive?”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe it is because of ... you know, Dex always showing up here. I also saw what he did to that Buddy boy, and now that I think about it, whenever you did come home with bruises and scratches, the people responsible were always joining you.” Rose shrugged. “You and Dex can make this work.”

She leaned back and took a long sip of her lemonade, not realizing how thirsty she had become.

“You’re not convinced?”

“It’s not that...” She pressed her lips together. “Just ... what if I don’t feel quite as strongly as Dex?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said yourself that you and Dad struggled. You did the whole dancing around but when you both went through your transition, you knew without a shadow of a doubt, and no one could come between you.”

“I know where this is going, and you cannot allow that to hold you back. You’re mature, and I do not think you need to have a wolf transition to know in your heart if you love a man.”

Casey sighed and sat back. “What if I do?”

“You don’t. Love is all about the heart. It’s in here and I think what is happening here

for you is you're panicking. You want to transition. I know your father and everyone in the pack don't know how excited you were for your transition night. I did. You talked about it all the time growing up, and I knew you were counting down the days. I also saw how gutted you were when it didn't happen. Don't let it affect your decisions. Your transition will happen."

"And if it doesn't?"

"I don't believe that."

She wanted to argue with her mother, but she also knew Rose had blind faith. Finishing off her lemonade, she glanced around the garden, feeling trapped. "Can I go for a walk?"

"Yes, go and relax. Calm that mind of yours. Everything will be okay."

She smiled at her mother, although it didn't quite reach her eyes. Getting to her feet, she stopped to hug her mother, and then made her way out of the garden and went straight toward the forest.

In the last five months, she had spent a lot of time here, trying to animate her wolf, to bring her to life, to do something, anything, that would wake her up. She meditated, did yoga, and tried to call on that part of her soul that was supposed to be connected to her wolf.

Nothing.

Not a damn thing.

Today, she kept walking as her thoughts drifted to Dex. The kiss they shared had been amazing. Even now, just thinking about it, her lips tingled. She had never told

another living soul, but she did feel a connection to him. She didn't know if it was as strong as the one he had for her.

All their lives, she'd been acutely aware of him when he entered a room. She saw how other pack females reacted, and she didn't want to run with the crowd. It wasn't about gaining his attention, she loved being his friend, and it made her feel calm just being with him.

This is what she feared for Dex. If he decided to mate with her, to declare her as his, then he might be living a second-best life. Casey might never turn, which meant she might not have the strongest feelings. He would have a mate who loved him but didn't feel that consumption of love. It felt so wrong to her, because at the same time she felt that denial.

Her feelings for Dex were not flighty or light. They were strong and all-consuming.

Suddenly, Casey felt a chill come over her as she crossed a line. Wrapping her arms around herself, she glanced and sure enough, the sun was beaming down on her, and yet the cold swamped over her.

"What?" she asked.

"You're not supposed to be here."

Casey spun around and there was Lucinda, the small witch that resided on the edge of the forest.

"I'm so sorry. I had no idea where I was going."

"No wolf should be wandering the forest this close to the edge."

She smiled but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Well, you're in luck, because I am no wolf." She tried to keep her tone light and cheery, but that didn't happen.

Lucinda didn't laugh, nor did she smile. She kept staring at her. "You have a lot to learn. You must leave."

"I am so sorry for breaching your ... zone."

"All pack are welcome, as long as you do not want anything from me, and then we're good."

Casey nodded. "Want anything from you?"

"A spell. A potion. Some kind of look into the future."

She frowned. "Can you do all of that?"

Lucinda glared at her. "It is none of your business."

She held her hands up in surrender. "You're right. I'm sorry."

Backing away, Lucinda made no movement but kept watching her. There was no way she was coming back here.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Dex was making his way back home when he came to a stop as he caught sight of Lucinda at the edge of the forest near his parents' house. He rarely spoke to Lucinda as she liked to keep to herself.

There were a few times growing up when he'd sneak into the forest, and she'd catch him playing. She'd always bring him back while also giving him a stern warning about not coming into the forest, especially near her home.

"Hey, Lucinda," he said.

She looked at him, lips pursed. When she did this, he had to wonder why. Was she trying to assess him, or was she seeing something else? She had hinted that she sometimes saw images that were not there.

"You need to keep her well away from temptation," Lucinda said.

"Casey?"

"She is a wolf. Her wolf is there, but it needs to come out on its own."

Dex frowned. "Why are you telling me this?"

"I see two paths. One path is filled with love, a future, and hope. The second path is nothing but pain, loss, and an end to all things you hold dear."

Whatever she held in her second palm disintegrated into dust, and she waved it in the wind.

“What happened?”

“Casey stumbled into my zone. I have no problem with the pack coming to see me, but I do not offer magic. I cannot and will not help her. She needs to figure this out on her own,” she said, then turned around as if to walk away.

“Wait, stop.”

“I do not have to do as you tell me, at least not yet,” Lucinda said, and she stopped anyway and looked at him.

“She is a wolf?”

“Of course she is a wolf.”

“Will her wolf ... appear?”

Lucinda didn't say a word. “I will not say anything that could ruin the future. There are still two outcomes. It is not up to me to decide, it is up to you and her.”

With that, she turned on her heel and Dex frowned. “You know this is not very helpful—leaving little tidbits that don't really tell me what is going on.”

He could already hear her saying, “It is not my job to tell you everything I mean.”

Dex blew out a breath, and then headed into his home, only to find it empty. His parents were probably in town, mingling, having a date, or helping the pack. He had a long day of storing the wood, and he was tired and hungry.

Entering the kitchen, he saw a note from his mom stating that his food was in the microwave. He hated microwaved food, and he opened it up to find pasta. Now he

was pleased he didn't just go ahead and heat the damn thing up. The pasta would have tasted like rubber.

His mother very rarely coated the pasta in sauce, and this time was no exception. There was just a nice dollop of sauce on top. He transferred his food to a bigger bowl and stirred it all together. Grabbing a fork, he carried his food to the window and looked out toward the spot where Lucinda had stood. It was rare to see her. She didn't venture out too often from her space in the forest.

If there was a chance Casey could change into a wolf, he knew he needed to help her. He didn't like the potential outcome of their future. One was happy, the other was a course of pain and misery. How? What? And who?

Lucinda wouldn't help him. She'd only give him clues and little riddles and he wasn't in the mood to try and figure them out.

Go and find her.

His wolf spoke clearly through his mind, and he finished up his food, quickly. There was no need to leave a note, and he left his home, heading out into the forest, picking up Casey's scent just like he did every single time. She loved being in the forest.

He lost count of the number of times he found her, either sitting among the earth, staring up at the sky, swimming in the small lake, or dancing. She loved to dance.

He kept his movements slow, taking his time so he could sneak up on her. This time, he found her in the lake.

When they were kids, they were told stories of a sea creature living in the lake, wanting to eat children's toes. It was all a big joke around Halloween, and his father would be waiting for that kid that tended to think he wasn't afraid of anything. Of

course, he'd always been that kid. The first time it happened, Dex had been terrified, but then he'd laughed it off.

Since then, it was a good prank to play on people. Standing at the edge of the forest gave him a clear sight of Casey, and he saw her pile of clothes as well as her shoes. Even though he was quite a distance away, he saw she still had on a bra and panties. This pair was a pretty blue set, which he might have already snuck a glance at.

"You don't have to sneak," Casey said.

This is what he didn't get. Casey hadn't changed into a wolf, yet her senses were some of the best of the pack. He snuck, and he was legendary for going undetected. Even his father had been impressed with his ability to move without being seen or heard. And yet, Casey wasn't a wolf. He also knew she was able to scent as well.

"I'm not sneaking."

She spun around in the water. "What would you like to call it?"

"I'd like to call it keeping an eye on you."

Casey laughed. "Why?"

"Lucinda came to see me."

She rolled her eyes. "Can no one do anything inside this pack without someone tattling?"

"Did you go see her?" he asked.

"No, I didn't."

“Are you lying?”

She scoffed. “No, I don’t lie.”

He took a step closer toward the edge of the lake, and when he got level with her clothes, he began to remove his own.

“What happened?” he asked.

Dex saw her gaze at him, and he slowed, tensing his body, so she got the full appreciative view of him.

“I was walking and thinking and I got distracted. Before I even realized where I was going, I was at Lucinda’s. That is all.”

He stripped down to just his boxer briefs, and he looked at Casey. He was not going to keep playing coy or constantly dance around her to get what he wanted. Pushing his boxer briefs down his hips, they landed on the floor, and he heard her gasp. Her gaze was on his dick, and he was already hard. He stepped into the pool.

“You’re naked.”

“That is what happens when you go skinny-dipping.”

“But I am skinny-dipping and I still have my underwear on.”

He tutted. “Maybe you should take them off.”

“I ... no, I don’t think I should.” She nibbled her bottom lip.

“Why not?”

“Because you don’t know who could ... you know, be watching.”

“Casey, you’re the only person I know that comes to the forest as much as you do. There is no one else. Just you and me. Besides, once they saw I was here, they wouldn’t dare try to take me on,” he said.

“You’re that big and powerful wolf that no one wants to mess with.”

She moved back and he advanced into the pool, getting closer to her.

“I’m glad you see that. Maybe you should take some notes.”

He loved her laugh.

“Wow, you are so full of yourself.”

“Come here,” he said.

“Is that a command?”

“Yeah, it is, or do I have to come and get you?”

He had no problem chasing her.

“No, I’ll come,” she said.

She moved toward him, and the moment she was close enough, he wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. The moment she touched his body, he couldn’t deny how good she felt. The fullness of her tits, the lushness of her ass. Everything about her was perfection.

He knew she always would be.

There was no fear as Casey walked toward Dex. There was just trust and as his arms wrapped around her body, that panic of moments before evaporated. Her panic wasn't because of him, far from it. Even in moments when she wasn't even thinking about the transition, she'd suddenly find herself panicking.

The hardness of his cock pressed against her back, and she closed her eyes, sinking against him, not wanting him to leave her alone.

"Do you have any idea what you're doing to me?" he asked.

She smiled as she just couldn't help it. "I've got an idea."

One of his hands moved down, resting on her stomach, and she couldn't help but gasp.

"Do you like that?" he asked. "My hands on your stomach?"

"You know I do. Can't you sense it?" she asked.

"Yeah, I sense a lot of things when I'm with you." His lips pressed against her neck. "Tell me you don't want me."

She frowned. "Why would I do that?" There was no point in denying what they both wanted. She craved him and feeling his arms wrapped around her, she now understood more than ever how much she did. He was written deep into her soul.

This connection they shared wasn't because of some vague attraction. It went deeper

than that. On another level, they had known they were mates. Their souls had sensed one another, and now they were together, or at least partly together.

“Casey?”

“What do you want me to do, Dex? Reject you? Tell you I’m not ready?” She slowly turned in his arms and pressed her hands against his chest but then started to glide them up, and she smiled at him. “That’s not going to happen.” She licked her suddenly dry lips, and she couldn’t help but glance down and look at Dex’s lips.

“You’re making this hard for me.”

She pressed her body against his so she felt the hardness of his cock as he was so close.

“Good. Dex, I thought I was ready to turn into a wolf.”

“You will, you just—” She pressed her fingers against his lips and shook her head.

“I’m not saying I won’t. What I’m saying is that I was ready. I was excited. I don’t know what has stopped this from happening. It has made me realize that sometimes in life, it’s not about how ready you are, or how not ready you are. Life is going to throw whatever it wants, and you’re going to have to deal with it.”

She saw the slight frown on his face.

“You’re not a problem, Dex, you’re a ... reward.” And then, she went up onto her tiptoes and kissed him.

The feel of his hands were so good as he ran them down her back, and he suddenly gripped her ass within his palms. She couldn’t help but moan as his touch sent a

shockwave of sensation rushing through her body, and it made her not want it to end. She loved the hardness of his cock, the feel of him against her. She couldn't get enough of him.

Dex took over, and now his kisses were all-consuming. He grabbed her ass, and their bodies squashed together. She didn't even care that all she was wearing was a flimsy pair of panties.

"I want to make you feel good," he said.

"You already do."

But then, he spun her around so her back was pressed against his chest. His cock was long, thick, and hard as he rubbed against her ass. One of his hands went back to her stomach, but this time he didn't linger there. He began to slowly work down, sinking toward her panties.

She glanced down as his hands slid beneath the elastic of her panties and cupped her pussy. Casey couldn't keep the pleased sounds from coming out as she gasped.

"Are you wet for me?" he asked.

"Yes."

He slid a finger between her slit, and this time she did cry out, whimpering as he touched her, working her to a fever pitch. She didn't want him to stop. It felt so damn good. So magical.

And then, she realized she didn't want him to be the only one touching. She was about to reach behind to touch him, but then his other hand glided up her body and cupped one of her breasts. He pinched the full nipple, then soothed it out, and she

whimpered.

The pleasure was intense and seemed to go from her tit toward her clit and back again. Dex didn't just stop at one nipple, he moved toward the second and back again.

For a few seconds of the sensations rushing through her body, she completely forgot what she was doing, and then her memory came back and she reached for him. He wasn't wearing anything, so she wrapped her fingers around his cock and began to work from the root to the tip.

He growled. It was such a sexy, guttural growl. One that was deep, and she sensed his wolf beneath the surface.

Dex smoothed his fingers between her slit, going from her clit down toward her entrance, but she felt that he didn't plunder inside her. He came back up and began to circle and tease her clit. Each stroke sent her higher toward her orgasm.

She didn't want to come without him, so she began to work his dick, feeling how it pulsed within her fist. Even though they had water up to their hips, she still felt the softness of his cock as well as how stiff it got.

He hissed against her ear, and then she cried out as he kissed her neck, but then bit down, not to draw blood. He kissed and teased her neck, sliding his tongue back and forth across her pulse, making her whimper. She didn't want it to stop. It felt so good.

"Please," she said.

"Do you want to come?" he asked.

"Yes."

“Then come for me, Casey. Trust me. You’re my mate. Trust me.”

She did trust him. She trusted him more than anyone in the whole world, and in a strange way, that also terrified her.

“Trust me,” she said.

“I do. I would gladly put my life in your hands.”

She couldn’t help but chuckle seeing as she was currently holding his cock within her grip. She worked from the tip back down to the root. Her movements had begun quite slow, but now she sped up, working his cock, feeling what aroused him, and knowing she wanted to drive him to the edge.

Up and down, she worked his cock, and then she felt that change within him and she couldn’t quite explain how it triggered her own. She felt that climb toward her peak, drawing her ever closer, and then, when they were both at that edge, he pushed her right over.

Together they came, their names spilling from each other’s lips, and it just felt like everything was finally going to be okay.

Dex brought her back down, and she slowed down her movements when he nibbled at her neck, giving her a warning that he couldn’t take much more.

“Do you know what this means?” he asked.

Casey spun around and circled her arms around his neck. “You’re going to want to visit the lake more often?”

He chuckled. “You’re my mate.”

“And that means you’re mine as well.” She tilted her head back. “Does that scare you?”

“No, it doesn’t scare me.”

“It means no other pack females. I may not be able to turn, but that doesn’t mean I can’t claw their eyes out.”

“Other pack females?”

“You know, from the ones you might have enjoyed when you went out at a full moon?” She looked down because she didn’t want to know the truth if he’d been with other females.

There were a lot of women in the pack, young and old, who wanted him. His title, as well as how handsome he was, would be a draw to many.

“There hasn’t been any other female,” he said, pushing some of her hair off her shoulder.

This revelation certainly made her look up at him. “What?”

“You heard me, Casey. I’ve not been with any other female.” He leaned in close. “I’m as virginal as you.” He scrunched up his nose. “Probably not, because I know I’ve taken my dick into my hand and lost count of the number of times I’ve masturbated thinking about you.”

This made her gasp, but then she couldn’t help but laugh. “You’re being serious.”

“Deadly serious.”

She closed her mouth and then opened it.

In that moment, she was pretty sure if she didn't already love Dex Arlington, she'd have fallen madly in love with him right then and there.

"You're insane," she said.

"No, just crazy about you."

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Several Days Later

“You keep looking at the clock, son. Is there anywhere else you’d rather be?” Klaus asked.

They were in his father’s office, dealing with several handwritten complaints that had come from the pack. Some were petty, trivial things, like one of the kids bringing their dog to take a shit on his lawn. Others were arguing about the noise, and then there were some complaints about one of the shop owners being rude.

Again, nothing bad, just the pack acting up before the full moon. Sometimes it was like they created problems so they could take all that aggression out on the full moon.

And the strangest thing of all, a full moon was happening tonight, which was why he kept reading and not really seeing the words right in front of him. No, he knew Casey was excited about tonight. Nervous as well. She tried to deny it, but he read between the lines. This would be the sixth month she hadn’t been able to transition, if she didn’t. Dex had never been far from her during the previous months.

For the longest time, she would stand, just staring up at the full moon at a specific spot in the forest. He knew it well, as even when they were kids, it was where she would go to relax.

She would be surrounded by the forest and bushes, but it was like an opening that looked straight up to the full moon. Dex had felt its power, the rush through his body, but each month he tried to be quiet as he watched her.

While his wolf wanted to tilt back its head and howl at the full moon, he'd kept in control. Casey had simply stared up at the full moon as if she was nothing more than a human. No reaction, no lack of control, nothing. As the hours passed, she'd eventually sit and just stare up at the moon.

At first, he had thought she did it as a challenge, a way to give the moon a big fuck you, and she wasn't budging until it turned her into a wolf. Now he saw it as something different.

This wasn't an act of resilience or even defiance. No, this was her ... giving up. She wasn't going to turn into a wolf, so she would just sit there and admire the beauty. He had seen her cry once or twice. His father had given him orders not to approach her for fear of what his wolf would do. Knowing Klaus, his father was there, watching Casey, keeping an eye to make sure none of the pack decided to do something about her. Other than their peers, he'd not heard anyone register a complaint about her not turning. Glancing at the letters, he then frowned and looked up.

"Has anyone complained about Casey?" Dex asked.

"So that is why you're constantly checking the clock."

"Dad, come on, you know how important these nights are for her. If she doesn't turn tonight, it will be six months, and all Casey has ever wanted is to be a wolf."

Klaus sighed. "Maybe that is the problem. She is wolf, and right now she is thinking she is not a wolf."

Again, riddles.

"Have you been hanging around Lucinda?"

“That’s not the point, and besides, you know she would come to me after going to see you and even Casey. She told me the warning she sees for the two of you.”

Dex ran his fingers through his hair. “I didn’t go looking for her. She came to me.”

“I know, which is why it was so important for her to tell me. You’re part of the pack, and Lucinda, in her own way, is part of the pack. She knows about Casey. She also knows how important it is for Casey to turn. This is a path she must take, and seeking out magic for help is not the answer.”

“Dad, Casey didn’t go looking for a quick fix, okay. What she did was go for a walk and she got distracted, that was all.”

“Distracted enough to end up near Lucinda’s property?”

“It’s not the way it sounds.”

Klaus held his hands up. “You can say and do whatever you want, Dex, but it doesn’t change the fact that she still ended up there. I get that it is completely innocent, but that is also the point. While she was distracted, she gravitated toward Lucinda, and I’ve given her strict instructions that she is not to help Casey.”

Dex sighed and he rubbed at his temples. “What would you do, Dad? If it was Mom?” he asked.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“I know you think it doesn’t, and that is fine, but come on, you and I both know if it was Mom, full moon after full moon, then you wouldn’t just stand idly by and do nothing.”

Klaus sat back, flicking the pen between his fingers without losing control of it once.

“You’re right, I wouldn’t.”

Dex frowned. “Hold on, this is not what I asked you. I wanted to know if you had gotten any messed-up complaints about Casey, and you changed the subject about Lucinda. I’ve seen you do this enough times with Mom, which means you have a complaint. What is it?”

“Do I need to remind you, son, I am still the Alpha, and until I say otherwise, I’m the one in charge.”

Dex sighed.

“You’re eighteen years old, you’re not ready to take over this pack, and until you can learn to deal with things offering up a little diplomacy, you’ve got a long way to go.”

“Is this because I beat the shit out of Buddy Anderson?” he asked.

His father didn’t answer.

“Because if it is, then that is bullshit and you know it. He hurt Casey, and I know the bruises have already faded now, but that is be—”

“What did you say?” Klaus asked, interrupting him.

“Which part, I was kind of saying a lot?”

“About Casey.”

“Buddy and his friends beat her up. I was just paying him back.”

“No, about her bruises.” Klaus put his pen down on the desk.

“They’re healed and nearly all gone.”

Klaus smiled and Dex frowned.

“What?” Dex asked. “I feel like I’m missing something.”

“Think about it, son. Casey was beaten up less than a week ago. If she didn’t have any wolf in her veins, she would still be dealing with the bruises for many weeks after. Humans take a long time to heal. Even from a simple bruise.”

“So, what are you saying?” Dex asked. “That even though Casey hasn’t been able to transition, it doesn’t mean it’s not going to happen?”

“Yes.”

Dex frowned. “You’re distracting me again. You don’t want me to know who has written a complaint about Casey. Who was it?”

Klaus clicked his tongue.

“Come on, Dad, I need to know who did this. I may not be ready to take over today, but one day I will. Do you want me to find out then?”

His father still didn’t move for several seconds, and Dex truly believed he wasn’t going to.

“It was Buddy Anderson’s father,” Klaus said. “He doesn’t believe that having a non-transitioner is good for the other wolves. Also, he doesn’t think it would be ideal for his son to be around someone with such lower blood.”

“That piece of fucking shit.”

“Son, you will not respond to this. I took care of it, and some things are best left alone.”

Dex shook his head.

“Promise me.”

“Damn it, Dad.”

“Now.”

“Fine, fine. I promise I won’t go after Anderson’s father.”

“Or Buddy.”

Dex gritted his teeth as he’d hoped his father wouldn’t see through his attempt to break through the promise.

“Fine, I won’t go after any of them. Not while I’m not Alpha.”

Klaus nodded. “And understand, Casey is safe here. While I am Alpha, and while you are here, nothing bad will happen.”

Dex nodded. “Now can I go?”

“Yes.”

He got to his feet and left his father’s office. Then he left the house and started in the direction of the forest.

Dex felt like someone was watching him, and he turned, catching sight of Buddy Anderson. The other man had stopped in the middle of the street, and Dex caught sight of the anger in the other's face.

He might have promised his father he wasn't going to cause trouble, and he wouldn't, but that didn't mean he wasn't going to respond if Buddy decided to take him on.

Casey's parents had wished her good luck.

Did they even know she still didn't feel different? There was no magical change within her. Plain and simply nothing.

Heading out to her favorite spot, she usually spent many hours watching the full moon, praying that something—anything—would happen. This time she had brought a blanket to lie on, as well as one to wrap around her. Even though it was still summertime, they were getting toward the end, and that meant it was getting colder, especially at night.

Once she was at her spot, she didn't even bother to look at the full moon. Instead, she rolled out her blanket, threw it down on the ground, and then lay on her stomach so her back was to the full moon.

She reached for the book she had decided to bring with her—a romance her mother had told her was pretty good. She didn't spend a lot of time reading anymore. Her spare time had been consumed with trying to figure out how to bring forth her wolf.

"I'm just not going to bother," she said, opening her book.

It didn't matter to her. She was not going to turn into a wolf. What was the point in

trying?

She read one page and then the second, but none of the words registered. She didn't understand it. And she couldn't help but let her thoughts drift to Dex.

After they had been together in the lake, he'd helped her out, taking the towel she had brought along to dry her. Dex had taken care of her, and it had been so sweet and loving.

Now, with the full moon at her back, she couldn't help but feel those doubts. They completely flooded her.

Dex deserved someone who could run beside him, be with him. The very thought of him doing that filled her with such sadness, and she also felt this anger. Could she give him up? Did she even want to? It would be the right thing to allow him to be with a mate who could give him children, the right kind of children.

Her eyes glistened, and that was when she realized she was crying. She didn't want to cry. No, she wanted to be defiant, but the truth was, she felt so lost and alone.

"Don't," Dex said, suddenly coming out of the forest.

She gasped and turned toward him, to find he was once again naked. "Shouldn't you be a wolf?" she asked.

"I was one, and I had to sit back and watch as you started to cry." He shook his head. "I'm not going to let you do this."

"Dex, don't worry about it. It's nothing. Just stupid monthly hormones." Although, she wasn't on her cycle, or even close to being there. "It's fine. Go and run with the pack, enjoy your night."

“No,” he said. “Every full moon, this is where I come.”

“You do?” she asked, unable to help but frown, as she’d never seen him.

“Yes.”

“I ... I’ve never seen you.”

“I watch you.”

“Ah, so you’re a bit of a stalker?”

“Not even a bit, but a lot.”

She couldn’t help but laugh. “That’s incredible.”

“You’re not angry?”

“No, I’m not. I’m actually quite glad. Yeah, I’m glad.”

She got to her feet and went to brush the earth from her body, but then realized there was no point, seeing as she’d been lying on the blanket.

“I mean, I’m not glad, because you should be running with the pack, but the past few months, I’ve been thinking that someone is watching me, and I’m right.” She laughed. “You are.”

“Yeah, I am.” He reached for her waist, pulling her close, and then took possession of her lips.

Casey forgot what the tears were all about the moment his lips brushed against hers,

and she couldn't help but melt against him. At first, she kept her hands at her sides, but she just couldn't help herself, so she began to wrap them around his body, holding onto him.

Once again, that feeling of peace and calm washed over her.

"I've got you," he said.

"And I've got you."

"Don't cry," he said.

Casey sighed. "I ... I don't think we should do this."

"Don't."

"Come on, Dex. You're going to be an Alpha one day. Do you want a mate that can't turn into a wolf? I bet there are a lot of people in the pack who would agree I shouldn't be your mate."

"Then they can fuck off out of my pack. I don't give a shit."

She pressed her lips together and shook her head. "It's not that simple."

"Yeah, you know what, it is that simple. It has always been that simple." He stroked some of her hair behind her ear. "And it can always be that simple. I don't want anyone else, Casey. You're my mate. You will always be my mate."

"But—"

"No, no buts. I didn't sign up to leave when it seemed to be getting a little harder. I

signed up for life with you. You're my mate and there is no way I am backing down from this. You're mine, just as I am yours. Forever."

Tears filled her eyes. "How do you do this?" she asked.

"Do what?"

"Make it seem like everything will be okay?"

"Because it will." He took possession of her lips, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing her body against him. "And we can do everything, as long as we have each other."

He kissed her again, this time a little longer, and once he finished, he rested his forehead against hers.

"You're very naked," she said.

He laughed. "That I am."

"Aren't you cold?"

"No, I run just a little hotter, especially around the full moon."

"Don't you want to go for that run?"

"No, I want to stay with you." He held her in his arms. "I always want to be with you."

He cupped her hips, and then she realized they were swaying back and forth. She couldn't help but giggle as he moved her, swaying her from side to side. He took hold

of one of her hands, spinning her around, then drawing her back against him.

“We’re dancing,” she said, feeling so silly for stating the obvious.

“Yes, we’re dancing and we’re doing it together, just like we’re going to be doing everything together, and you’re never going to have to worry about anything else, ever again. I’ve got you, Casey. I will always have you.”

She sunk against him and closed her eyes.

As long as she had Dex, it was going to be okay.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Six months moved into seven months, and seven months moved into eight. By the ninth month, Dex no longer went for a run. When he did so, it was when Casey was busy, but he joined her at her special patch in the forest. He carried the blanket, along with a small picnic basket.

Casey tried to pretend it didn't bother her, but he knew differently. With every month that passed, she became even more despondent. It was why he began to spend as much time with her as possible. He didn't want her to feel alone, which is what he knew happened.

Her parents were worried. Everyone was worried, even his own parents.

When they were together, he was able to take her fear away.

"It's cold," Casey said.

They were heading into December. Their parents had already put up the Christmas decorations.

"Which is why I bought you not one but three blankets."

Casey laughed. "Three. Do you think that is going to be enough?" she asked.

"With the warmth of my body, it is going to be more than enough. I also have a sweater for you."

He stopped at their spot and reached into his rucksack that he'd brought along with

him. "There, it is going to make you feel very nice and very warm."

Sliding one of his sweaters over her head, it completely swamped her, as it was so large.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I think you should wear my clothes more often. You make them look sexy."

"I don't think that is possible. There is no way I make these look sexier than you."

He laughed. "Now, Miss Scott, I might start thinking you're trying to seduce me."

She gasped. "What if I might be?"

"Well, then I would have to say it is going to be an amazing night." They hadn't had sex yet. There were a lot of make-out sessions. He had stayed at her place, and she had stayed at his place.

Her parents were happy with her, even her father was happy with him. Dex had already proven himself to her father by taking care of her. He had respect for him, because he'd been more than willing to stand up for her. When it came to Casey, she was his top priority.

"You promise?" Casey asked, running a hand down his body.

He stared at her, and he didn't know why, but he felt a change within her. "Yes." He pulled her close and kissed her. "First, I get to feed you and warm you up."

"You're the perfect mate. Always thinking of everything." She sat down as he rolled out the blanket.

Dex joined her and reached back into his rucksack for the thermos of hot soup his mother had prepared for him.

“I always come prepared.”

She laughed.

He poured them both some tomato soup and handed her a mug of the hot liquid.

“That is good,” Casey said. “That is really good. Your mom is an amazing cook.”

“According to my dad, she wasn’t always a great cook, but that has come with time,” Dex said.

He handed his mug of soup to Casey and reached for a blanket, wrapping it around her before taking his soup back.

“You don’t have to panic. I won’t steal your soup.”

“I know what you’re thinking,” Dex said, teasing her.

“It’s a lovely night,” Casey said.

He was not going to ask her if she felt any change or a difference. He knew the answer was going to be no. She never felt any differences, and the last time he asked her, she’d gotten so upset.

“It’s always a lovely night.”

She released a breath, and a puff of smoke filled the air. “And cold.”

With one hand holding the soup, he wrapped his other arm around her. “And now I will warm you up.”

For several seconds, there was no need to talk. It felt good. He felt free while also connected with Casey.

“Dex, what do you think the future is going to be like?” she asked.

“You mean with floating cars and stuff?”

She chuckled. “No, I mean with us.”

“One day, we’re going to be mated and married. Then we’ll move into a house together, have a couple of kids. I’m thinking ten.”

Casey snorted. “A couple is not ten kids!”

“Come on, don’t you want to have a big family?”

“Yeah, I do. Do you wish you had a brother or sister, or both?” Casey asked.

“I guess, but it is not going to happen.”

“How come?”

Dex sighed. He wondered if he should tell her about the price his father had paid. No one else knew. Casey was his mate, and she needed to know there was going to be a price for anything she asked of Lucinda. He still understood the witch’s vague warning, and he didn’t like it.

He told her everything his father had told him, not leaving anything out.

“Wow,” Casey said, by the time he was finished.

“Yeah, wow.”

“Your parents, I can’t believe they did that for the love of the pack, for everyone.”

“No one knows,” Dex said. “They felt they were lucky they got me. I could have been the price they had to pay.”

“I see what you mean, but wow. It makes you wonder why anyone ever does any kind of magic.”

She laughed.

“You’re not tempted?” he asked.

“I mean, I’d be lying if I said there wasn’t a slight bit of temptation. Yeah, I’m tempted, especially on nights like this. I mean, think about it, Dex. Fifty, sixty, a hundred years, and we might not ever get the chance to run again.”

Dex reached out and cupped her cheek. “Stop it,” he said. “Even if we don’t get a chance to run together as wolves I’d run side by side with you as a human, every single day.”

Casey smiled. “You would?”

“Yeah, but I’m thinking I need to make some terms and conditions.”

This made her laugh. “What kind of terms?”

“No matter what, you have to be completely naked when we do this.”

“Oh, wow.”

“Yeah, and afterward, I get to make love to you, no matter what,” he said. “What do you think?”

“I think I like these terms and conditions. Deal.”

She held her hand out, which he took, but he also pulled her in close and took possession of her lips. He loved her lips, and he’d also come to realize he loved kissing her, and he didn’t want to ever stop.

She moaned his name, and he swallowed it down.

Casey broke the kiss first, and he watched as she put her mug of soup to the side, and then took his from out of his hand.

“Why don’t we start that tradition today?” she asked, grabbing the edge of his sweater and pulling it up over her head and tossing it to the side.

“It’s freezing.”

“I don’t care. I just know I’d love to run with you. To be with you.” She stopped trying to undress herself and cupped his face. “We’re together. We’re going to be mates. I don’t see a reason for us to fight it anymore.”

She kissed him hard and then pulled away, getting to her feet. He watched as he removed her clothes with speed, and then she stood before him completely naked. He’d not seen her like this before. Her full tits looked heavy, with tight, hard nipples pointing out. He wanted her. His cock sprang into action, the fullness pressing against the front of his jeans.

“Come on, Dex, why don’t you catch me?” she said, and with that she took off.

Dex got to his feet, and he didn’t quite know how he removed his clothes, only that within seconds they were on the floor, and he was completely naked and ready to chase.

Casey spent a lot of time crying.

Dex wasn’t always aware of how much time she spent sobbing. Her parents had an idea, but she also tried to hide it from them. There were moments, both morning and night, that she accepted what had happened. She was not going to be a wolf, and she just got on with her life. Then, she’d be with Dex and it would suddenly hit her, especially when they saw other wolves together, other mates. There was going to be a lot of things she couldn’t do for him, and that sucked. She wanted to be his everything, just as he was her everything.

Pushing that bullshit negativity aside, she focused on the now, and sensing Dex starting his chase, she ran through the forest. Part of her was a little angry at herself for even suggesting this, as it was freaking December. She was freezing cold, and the ground beneath her feet wasn’t exactly soft and warm from the summer’s sun. No, it was cold, hard, almost punishing as she ran.

Casey heard Dex start to gain on her, and what surprised her was the flood of excitement that rushed through her at the thought of him catching her. It felt amazing and freeing to be out in the forest, running, feeling Dex close by.

Could this mean her wolf was close?

She ignored it and instead just relished the moment. Each second felt even better than

the last.

Casey ran between each tree, jumping over a fallen one, and then as she was about to make a run for the clearing that would take her right back to where they started, Dex caught her. He wrapped his arms around her and cushioned her fall as he took her to the ground.

He'd also gotten naked.

The way they fell, his cock was pressed right against her core, and she let out a little moan. Staring up at him, she didn't feel fear, just anticipation, as it took her a second to gain back her breath.

"You got me," she said.

"When are you going to realize that it doesn't matter where we are or what we're doing, I am always going to catch you?"

She gasped as he suddenly took possession of her lips. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she couldn't resist holding onto his body, as she circled her hips around his waist, holding onto him, not wanting to let him go.

"Casey, when we do this, there is no turning back. You will be my mate in everything."

She looked up at him and smiled. "Good." She pulled him down. "Now kiss me."

She was more than ready.

Dex growled, and this time his kiss was almost bruising, but it didn't hurt. It felt good.

His hands started at either side of her head, but then he broke the kiss, lifting up.

“What are you doing?” she asked, wanting him as close as possible.

“I’m going to make sure you enjoy this.” And with that, he kissed her neck.

Casey didn’t know what he intended to do, but then his lips started to trail down her neck, sucking at her pulse, before stroking down. She moaned his name as he pushed her tits together, and she didn’t even need to ask, as he took each nipple in turn.

They were both virgins, but she knew what she wanted, knew what she wanted from him. This was not a guessing game, just natural.

Dex licked and sucked at each nipple, before moving down her body. She cried out as he spread her thighs open. He didn’t tease her or make her wait but slid his tongue between her slit. She moaned his name as he took her clit between his teeth, using just the right amount of pressure to make it almost too good and yet, on that knife edge of pain. It felt amazing.

Casey felt herself drawing closer toward orgasm, only to stop, and then Dex teased her some more. She didn’t know how much more she would be able to take, when he finally pushed her over that edge, and she screamed his name. She just couldn’t help it. It felt so good, so amazing, and she didn’t want it to stop.

“Please,” she said, begging him, not ashamed to be that close.

“Come for me, baby,” he said.

She came hard and fast, like her body belonged to his. She was at his command, and she would do everything he said.

Her orgasm felt amazing, so perfect, and before she had even finished, Dex moved up between her spread thighs. He kissed her hard, and she tasted herself on his lips and didn't care.

He stared into her eyes, and she felt the tip of his cock slide between her slit, moving down, going toward her entrance. The moment he thrust hard and deep within her, she cried out. The pain was fleeting, and Dex stopped, even before he'd filled her.

"Shit, fuck, are you okay?"

Casey hadn't even realized that she'd screamed. "Yeah."

"I hurt you."

"No, the pain is gone. It was there and then it left. I'm fine." She reached for his ass, because she didn't want this to end. "Make love to me, Dex."

He reached for her hands and locked their fingers together, pressing them either side of her head, keeping her in place.

"There is only so much control I have," he said.

This made her smile. "Was I driving you a little crazy?"

"Just a little," he said, and then he took possession of her lips and she felt him begin to rock inside her.

Inch by inch, slowly at first. She needed more. Thrusting her pelvis up to meet his, she growled, and he chuckled.

"All in good time."

And then she realized why.

He was a virgin.

She was a virgin.

This was their first time together.

Dex let go of her hands and cupped her face. “I want to take it slow.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him at that moment that she loved him, but she didn't. She looked into his eyes, seeing the glimmer of his wolf shining back at her, and she knew. She loved him more than anything else in the world, and she had loved him for a very long time. Longer than she thought possible. She had started to love him since the moment they had first met, and those feelings had only gotten stronger.

There was no need for words.

She didn't thrust up or try to take over. She was with him every step of the way.

Nothing was ever going to come between them. Nothing.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

“You’re back again. What do I have to do to keep you kids out of my area?” Lucinda asked. She waved some kind of talisman at him, or it might have been a hand-stitched doll.

Dex frowned. “First of all, this is the very first time I sought you out. If you remember, you came to find me, to give me that dire warning of two paths.”

“Tomato, tomatoe,” she said. “What do you want? You certainly haven’t stumbled here.”

Dex glanced around at the forest. The truth was, he didn’t exactly know where he’d been heading, but clearly, he did have a direction in mind and it was to come to Lucinda.

“The last time you came to see me, you said there were two futures for me and Casey.”

Lucinda snorted. “Only two, sweet boy, trust me, there are more than two maps for everyone, and it gets real confusing.”

Now Dex frowned. “You came to warn me, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember that, but you see, there are so many ways of interpreting the future. It is all dependent on whether you go left or right, or stay on the right path, or go back. This is why looking into the future is no guarantee. Someone can change. That is the pesky thing about human beings, they tend to change their mind.”

“We’re not humans. We’re wolves.”

Again, she snorted. “But you are still human, and you have choices. You can always choose to do the right or wrong thing. It depends on your mood and what exactly is the right or wrong thing. Am I making myself clear right now, because I feel like I am saying the same thing over and over again?”

“Are you purposely talking in riddles?”

“Oh, my, how does your father even put up with you? This is why I will not date, as I don’t want the risk of having children.” Lucinda took a deep breath, spun in a circle one way, and then the other. “We all have choices. Just like your good friend Buddy made the choice to hurt Casey. His path had three directions that day. One was to hurt her, the other was to not hurt her, and the other was to walk away.”

Dex frowned. “Isn’t not hurt her and walk away kind of the same thing?”

“Yes and no. They have the exact same outcome. Casey wouldn’t have been hurt, and you wouldn’t have hurt Buddy. Do you see?”

He nodded. “Then why are they different outcomes?”

“He could have not hurt her, in the way that she was aware of his presence and the fact he didn’t do anything. Walking away would mean no one knew he had that choice in the first place.”

“But all three had different outcomes?” he asked.

“Yes, all three of them.”

“So that means you saw me hurt Buddy?”

Lucinda wrinkled her nose.

“What?” he asked.

“I saw you hurt Buddy, then I saw you kill him, and then I saw you walk away.”

“That was never going to happen,” Dex said.

“Exactly, it was never going to happen, but that doesn’t mean it is not a possibility.” She shrugged. “It all balances itself out, but I don’t think you’re here to talk about what might have, or could have happened.” She wrinkled her nose. “I confuse myself at times.”

“So does that mean Casey and I can change things?”

“You do realize that no future is set until you make choices.”

Dex was really starting to feel a headache coming on. He now understood why his father had a nice, tall mug of coffee, and it always took him a few hours to deal with Lucinda.

“None of this makes sense.”

“Nothing would happen if we all stood still.” She suddenly jumped, lifted her arms out, and her eyes went wide, as she became still. “See, nothing happens, no choice is made, other than to stand still. No path is chosen. When life throws you the chance to go to A, B, C, or even D, that is when the future changes, but it is always happening.” She sighed. “Wow, I am getting thirsty.”

Dex blew out a breath. “I don’t know what any of this means.”

“It means a lot of stuff, and not a lot of stuff.” Lucinda shrugged. “You think you have it rough, try living inside my world.”

“Can you turn it off?” he asked. “Seeing the future. Wouldn’t that make your life easier?”

Lucinda laughed. “Of course, but tell me, where is the fun in that?” She blew out a raspberry. “Just because something is a pain in the ass and often not worth our time, doesn’t mean we should get rid of it. I like it. It’s like watching a movie that is always changing the ending. Come on, that has got to be a lot better than watching the same old movies, where you always know the ending.” She shrugged. “It is awesome.”

“I guess that means Casey and I still have the good path and the bad one?” Dex asked, shoving his hands into his jeans.

The witch stopped and turned toward him, and then stepped close. Being a wolf, he was used to not having a lot of privacy, but Lucinda seemed to break through that personal barrier wall and came right up to him. She was so close that he saw the little red marks within her eyes.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re scared.”

“I’m not scared.”

“Not for normal stuff, silly. You’re scared for Casey.” She smiled. “You’re in love with her.”

“This is not news to me.”

“I know, and it is not news to me either. Your love has been shining bright and is getting brighter as you age. She is your everything. Everything you do is for Casey.” Lucinda smiled and then clapped her hands. “And it is so sweet to see. You fear her pain. You want to know who suffers if the future doesn’t go well.”

“Is there any way you can guarantee she doesn’t get hurt?” Dex asked.

He didn’t even know why he came here, and yet she made it so clear. He wanted to take care of her, to look after her, to make sure Casey had everything her heart desired.

“You love her,” she said.

“You know I do.” She’d already said that before. “I-I can’t bear the thought of anything bad happening to her.”

“What if the cost comes to you?” Lucinda said.

“Then I will pay it. Please tell me.”

Lucinda sighed. “Knowing the future doesn’t make it easier.”

“Just tell me.”

“No,” Lucinda said. “But I will show you.”

Dex frowned as Lucinda reached out and pressed her fingers against his head. At first, he didn’t know what was happening, but then it felt like he was being pulled under, forced to sleep when he didn’t want to.

“Don’t fight it.”

His wolf didn't like this, but Dex had to trust Lucinda. She had warned his father of the price that would be paid.

She didn't allow any wolf to ask her for anything. She tried to protect them all, and he'd been the one to come to her. The vision was so clear, like he was living it.

He looked down at his hands, and that was when he saw them covered with blood.

"No, stop. Let him go," Casey said, yelling.

The fear and pain in her voice tore at his heart.

He tried to scream, to tell her it was going to be okay, but nothing came out of his mouth. Dex didn't know why nothing came out of his mouth. Then, he didn't get chance to see what else happened, as his throat was ripped out. His last image was of Casey, sobbing, as his life ended.

He came out of the memory and looked toward Lucinda.

"What the fuck was that?" he asked.

"That is what happens if Casey doesn't transition in time. Your life will be in the balance, Dex. She will have nothing but guilt, but the pack will also expel her, and your father will spend a lifetime hunting her."

"Are you okay?" Casey asked.

Dex didn't even respond. He looked straight ahead at the television as if he'd not even heard her. They were at her house as her parents had left and were enjoying a

very rare date night.

“Hello,” she said, waving her hand in front of his face.

He jerked and turned toward her.

She offered him a smile but it was difficult to do.

“What’s the matter?” Dex asked.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me?” She pressed her lips together. Ever since he’d picked her up from the diner in town, he’d been quiet. Something was off, and she didn’t need to have wolf senses to know that.

“I need a drink,” he said, pulling away from her.

Casey was tempted to let him walk away and to not pressure him into talking to her, but that felt wrong. Getting to her feet, she followed him into the kitchen.

In the past couple of months, her parents had gotten used to him hanging around. They both loved him, and Casey understood why. Dex was amazing. She knew there were a lot of pack females who were jealous of her and Dex’s relationship. They hadn’t come out and admitted anything, but the glares said it all.

“Does this have anything to do with you going to Lucinda’s?” she asked, to which he nearly choked on the water he was drinking.

“How do you know about that?” Dex asked.

“You were spotted. I guess seeing the Alpha’s son heading to see a witch can cause a lot of gossip.”

“They should be minding their own business.”

She pressed her lips together and nodded. “Do you want to tell me what is bothering you?”

He finished his water, swilled out the glass, and then turned toward her. She watched as he pressed his hands on the counter and took a deep breath.

“You’re nervous? Whatever Lucinda had to say must have been important.”

“It’s not about what she said. Lucinda doesn’t say a lot of anything. She tries to show, and that is about all she does.”

“She showed you something and it has you freaked out?” she asked.

Dex shook his head. “It’s ... it’s a potential path for you and me.”

“Like our future?”

“Yeah.”

“But our future is never clear,” Casey said. “I’ve heard Lucinda talking, or more like mumbling, on the rare occasion she comes to town and one of the kids ask her to tell their fortune or their future.” She rolled her eyes. “Go on, go on.”

“Well, she explained that there are constant directions that a future can go. Different decisions, how we make those kinds of decisions. It’s all relevant, and it is never easy or clear on how we’re going to get to that path.”

She listened and she knew if Lucinda had given Dex a warning, there was a real chance it had a high probability of coming true.

“And what did you see?” she asked.

At first, he didn't say anything, and Casey felt that wave of panic wash over her. She repeated the question and felt the tears in her eyes, as if she already knew the answer before he said anything.

“I saw my death,” Dex said.

Casey shook her head. “No, that can't be possible.”

“You and I have two outcomes. One of them, we're happy, we have a blissful life, and the other, you don't save me, and I die.”

She pressed a hand to her mouth because the very thought of anything bad happening to him was like a constant punch to the gut. “No, that is not possible. She must have this wrong.”

“I know, but, I know what I saw, and trust me, Casey. This one ... I can't get it out of my head.”

She moved toward him and cupped his face. “No, we won't let this happen. How do you die? I can't ... no, there is no way this is going to happen. I don't know why Lucinda has shown this to you, but it must be wrong.”

“It's not. Someone kills me. I don't know who. I mean, I've got my suspicions, but...”

“Buddy?” Casey asked. “He's the only one who would do it. We've got to do something. Chain him up or something.”

“No,” Dex said.

“Wait,” Casey said, frowning. “You said I don’t save you. What does that mean?” She couldn’t help the tears from falling as she looked at him.

“You don’t turn into a wolf. You don’t save me, and because of that, I die.”

She shook her head. “No, no, no.” She turned away and pressed her hands against her face in the hope of trying to contain her scream of fury.

Once again, it came back to what she wasn’t capable of doing.

“Then I have to leave,” Casey said, spinning around.

“No,” Dex said.

“I can’t be responsible for your death if I’m not here. Please, I can’t ... no.” She tried to keep the sobs inside, but it wasn’t possible. They fell down her face, and she pressed one hand against her stomach and covered her mouth with the other.

This couldn’t be happening.

Dex came to her as she collapsed to her knees.

“I can’t kill you. I can’t save you. You’ve got to let me go,” Casey said. “You need someone who is going to be able to save you.” She couldn’t even stand the thought of another woman touching him, being close to him. It made her sick to her stomach and all she wanted to do was scream. She didn’t say anything, but it was there, bubbling beneath the surface, threatening to come out.

“Casey, no,” Dex said.

“You can’t die.”

“I’m not going to die. Lucinda said it was a potential path, but there are at least three main players in this one.”

She frowned. “What?”

“Well, there’s you, then there’s me, and whoever decides to kill me. What if he or she doesn’t make that choice?” Dex asked.

“This is insane,” she said, ready to sob again. “There is no way you can take a chance that this person might not attack you!”

She wanted to scream at him, but instead she could only shake her head.

“We can’t live our lives in fear,” he said.

“Dex, someone in the pack is going to kill you.”

“ Might kill me.”

She growled. “That doesn’t make me feel any better.” She shook her head, and then began to sob. “This isn’t right. We shouldn’t be arguing about this. What if we leave?” she asked.

“We can’t do that either, Casey. The pack is our home.”

She knew it was a long shot.

Staring at Dex, she looked into his intense eyes, which no matter what, always had a hint of his wolf. “I don’t want to fail you, Dex. I love you. I love you so much and this scares me.”

He cupped her face, and then in the next second, he kissed her. “We’re not going to fail each other, okay? We’re going to make this work. I promise you. We’re going to make it work.”

And then he kissed her again, only this time there was a little more desperation, and she felt it too.

She was desperate for Dex, and now she feared for his life. Who would be dumb enough to try and kill Dex? She couldn’t imagine anyone being able to succeed.

Nothing bad could happen to him.

She wouldn’t allow it.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Dex had gone from storing the wood in the shed, to now loading it up in his father's truck, ready to distribute. He didn't know why he couldn't have just taken it to the people they were helping.

His father had tasked him with doing this side of the pack business. He had a list of the men and women that needed the firewood. After already going to five homes, he now understood why. They were much older, and they didn't get around as well. Dex knew it meant they were not going to survive many more winters.

This is what happened to a wolf—they lived for a very long time, until their light started to burn a little too bright.

Several of the people he went to had seen close to two hundred years, as they were granted at least double a human's lifespan. It was just how they aged. He knew it was going to be a long time before he no longer looked eighteen.

He couldn't stop thinking about the premonition Lucinda had shared with him, but also Casey's fear. He had a horrible feeling his mate would attempt to flee the pack. So far, she was sticking around, but he had learned she was attempting to interrogate pack members.

Casey wasn't known for being very ... open with the pack. She'd always been nice and kind, and the pack loved her. Now, she was even more chatty, asking questions, finding out what the pack really thought of her not being able to turn into a wolf.

By the time Dex finished unloading the truck, he headed back to town and parked outside the diner, where his father waited with his lunch.

He came to the truck window, and Dex rolled it down. The cold was getting worse.

“How are the deliveries going?” Klaus asked.

“Good. I think.” He opened the foil-wrapped package and took a large bite out of the sandwich. He was starving and needed all the food he could get.

“Do you want to talk about whatever is bothering you?” Klaus asked.

“Nothing’s bothering me.”

Klaus crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Fine, how about you tell me why Casey is taking it upon herself to start asking the pack how they feel about her not being able to transition?”

Dex swallowed a lump of the sandwich. “You’ve heard about that, huh?”

“Yeah, I heard.”

“It’s nothing. I think it is just her frustration.”

His father took another step toward the truck. “Dex, if you don’t tell me the truth, there is no way I can help you. I want to help.”

Dex took another bite of his sandwich, only this time he didn’t quite taste it. He didn’t know if Lucinda had shared this premonition with him to be kept secret.

His father would find out. If Casey had known he’d gone out to Lucinda’s, then his father already knew. Just looking in his eyes, he knew it was true.

“Don’t get mad,” Dex said.

And he told his dad everything he knew, including the premonition that his death is caused by the fact Casey doesn't change into a wolf and save him. She's not able to.

"You've got to promise me that if this happens, you cannot hunt her down. It is not your fault."

"Fuck!" Klaus's jaw clenched.

"Dad, please," Dex said.

He knew his father loved him, but seeing his anger was quite a shock to him.

Klaus shook his head in a similar way to Casey.

"No, son, this is not going to happen. Casey is doing the right thing by asking the pack. We need to find out who would dare touch you, and I'm going to Lucinda. She has been warned about this." He opened the door of the truck. "Move over."

Dex had no choice but to move out of the way.

His dad was currently no longer his father, but the Alpha of the pack, and Dex had no choice but to follow what he ordered.

"Dad, I don't want you to get upset over this."

His father didn't say a word but pushed the truck into reverse and pulled out of the parking spot.

Dex was hungry, but food was the last thing on his mind. He didn't want to start eating his sandwich until he knew his dad wasn't going to do anything stupid.

“You’ve got to listen to me—”

“No, you need to stop giving me warnings, and what you need to do is eat your food and let me deal with this. Lucinda knows she shouldn’t be sharing this with you. The future is too easy to get wrong. People make different and difficult choices all the time.” He slammed his hand on the steering wheel.

He knew his father was already showing restraint as the steering wheel didn’t cave under the pressure of his hand.

“I asked, okay? I did, Dad, and now there is something we can do about it.”

“You don’t get it. This kind of magic has a price, Dex. Did I not warn you about this?”

“I didn’t ask to see. I tried to understand her warning better.”

“There is already a chance that because she shared this with you, your path is sealed. Messing with decisions or trying to change something has consequences.”

“If what you’re saying is true, then it means I am going to die, and Casey is going to be the cause.”

He saw his father’s hands clench on the steering wheel.

“Dad, you’ve got to promise me that no matter what, you will take care of her. She’s my mate. She is everything to me. Dad.”

Klaus didn’t respond and Dex couldn’t stand this. He needed to know his father would do everything to protect her.

“If you don’t, then I’m taking Casey and getting the hell out of the pack. I’ll take her far from here, and we’ll live our life away from all of this.”

His father brought the truck to a stop and turned to glare at him.

He faced his father. He knew they were in a battle. A silent one, but a battle nonetheless.

“No,” Klaus said.

“Casey is the love of my life, Dad. She is my soulmate. I can’t even describe it, but you know what she has meant to me all these years. If you cannot guarantee her safety, then it is simple, I will take her far away from here, where I know she will be safe.”

He watched as his father’s anger grew. The last thing he wanted to do was to give the man an ultimatum, but it was essential for Casey. Dex would fight for her until he took his last breath.

“This is my wish,” Dex said.

Klaus’s teeth were clenched.

Seconds passed, possibly even minutes, before he turned back to look at him. “I will not kill her.”

“No, you will not allow her to die because of what might happen to me,” Dex said.

“Agreed,” Klaus said.

“And you better not hurt her, or allow her to be punished.”

Klaus shook his head. "I will keep my word, son, that she will be well taken care of."

"Casey wouldn't allow me to die, Dad."

"And yet, you tell me she allows it."

Dex rubbed at his temple because he didn't know if his dad was being dense on purpose.

"It is not a choice. It's not like she wants me dead. She loves me."

"And she should fight."

Klaus came to a sudden stop at the edge of Lucinda's land, but they didn't need to go looking for her as she stood at the edge, waiting.

"So much for the element of surprise," Klaus said, and climbed out of the truck.

Was Dex the only one who wasn't surprised by the fact they couldn't sneak up on Lucinda? The witch knew everything.

"You're angry," Lucinda said.

"I want you to tell me who would dare attack my son!" Klaus finished with a final roar.

Lucinda shook her head. "You know that is not what I can do."

"Damn it, Lucinda, I'm getting tired of all these games. Dex is my son. He is the heir to this pack. He is all I have left to secure the pack's survival."

“And he will live on,” Lucinda said, as she turned to look at Dex and gave him a tut. “I told you he wouldn’t be happy.”

“That is not a conversation you had with me,” Dex said.

Lucinda frowned. “Huh, that’s right. Another reality.” She laughed. “Look at me, getting everything confused. She turned toward Klaus but the laughter died. “I showed him what I could without bringing risk to his life.”

“He’s going to die.”

“No, depending on all parties, he might die. It is a possibility. Casey is so consumed with turning into a wolf. She doesn’t know her place within the pack, but soon you will all see.”

He noticed Lucinda kept touching her stomach.

Dex frowned. “Are you trying to tell us that Casey is pregnant?”

Lucinda gasped. “Why would I do such a thing?” But then, she winked at him, as if they were sharing a secret.

Casey hadn’t been pregnant in the vision.

“Our future has changed,” Dex said.

“Maybe, maybe not, but I would say you need to go to Casey and tell her to start enjoying more waffles. The kid is going to enjoy them.”

Dex looked from Lucinda to his father.

His dad waved at him. “Go, go on, go to her.”

He didn’t even look back but went toward his pregnant mate.

“I thought you said you didn’t lie,” Klaus said, turning toward the witch he wanted to throttle.

He liked Lucinda. She was a rare, nice witch, and using all those words in one sentence never suited a witch. He’d met his fair share of nasty ones over his lifetime.

“I didn’t lie, but I gave him hope, and in doing so, it might help him to enjoy what is ... happening.”

“You were going to say what life he has left?” Klaus asked.

She pressed her lips together.

He couldn’t bring himself to cry, but the thought of losing his son was more than he could bear.

“You told me, looking into the future, giving anyone the chance to change theirs, runs the risk of throwing everything out of balance, and yet here you are, sharing the future with him. Why?”

“Dex’s path is still not decided.”

“Should I kill Casey?” Klaus asked. Dex would hate him, and it would cause them a few problems, but at least his son would remain alive.

“Dex has brought this upon himself,” Lucinda said quietly.

“What?”

“Casey did not ask for this. She did not want this. She is in love with your son, always has been, always will be. She will fight for him, but Dex’s decisions are what has brought them to this point. He is responsible for his death. No one else. Casey is nothing more than a victim of it.”

Casey helped the young girl off the climbing frame, and she held onto her quite tightly, until she had put her back on the ground.

“Thank you, Miss Scott,” the young girl said.

“Please call me Casey,” she said.

She wasn’t expecting the kiss on the cheek, but it was so sweet and adorable. Today, she got to volunteer at the nursery. The next generation of wolves, all together, enjoying playtime.

They were adorable, and some of them a little violent. She had to break up a couple of scraps they were getting into, but nothing too severe.

She had no choice but to stifle a yawn, which she hid behind her wrist. One of the teachers had warned her never to show any kind of weakness. It was like the kids sensed it, and then took full advantage.

From the moment she arrived at the nursery, she’d been on full alert, waiting for any of them to strike. She had felt tired the past couple of days, but she’d put that down to

the longer hours she had spent trying to turn into a wolf. Even when Dex was asleep, she snuck away to stare at her reflection, to focus on that inner voice, to try and wake it up.

Nothing.

No inner voice.

She folded her arms across her chest, as one of the teachers came toward her.

“You did good today, Casey,” Miss Newton said.

“Thanks. This is amazing. I bet you love your job.”

“It’s a good one. Watching the young kids is certainly an eye-opening experience. Is teaching something you have considered?”

“Uh, no, not really. I hadn’t really thought about what I would do after this next year.”

She didn’t even know if she would have a permanent place within the pack. This was all new territory for herself, for the pack, and for everyone.

“Oh, that is right. You haven’t been able to fully transition yet, right?”

Casey tried not to show that her words did in fact hurt. She didn’t know if Miss Newton was being cruel on purpose, or she simply didn’t see how hurtful her words were.

“That’s right,” Casey said.

The parents were in the process of picking up their kids, and much to her surprise, they ran back, and Casey expected them to be going to Miss Newton, but instead, they rushed toward her, throwing their arms around her waist and hugging her.

“Wow, the kids like you,” Miss Newton said.

“I imagine it’s because I’m new.”

“Well, we will have to see about a possible position for you here. Of course, it will only be recommended if you are able to transition completely. You were advised as you’d not shown any signs of it.”

Miss Newton walked away, but Casey watched as the other woman suddenly paused, and she turned her head to the left. Casey followed her gaze, and sure enough, Dex was walking toward them.

He walked straight past Miss Newton and came toward her.

Casey didn’t have time to ask him what was going on, before he’d cupped her cheeks, tilted her head back, and then kissed her. It was such an intense kiss, that at first, she was taken completely aback by the power of it, and then she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him back.

She didn’t know when the kids had started whistling and screaming in joy, but it made her break away from the kiss. Dex was already laughing. He turned toward the kids, kissed his fingers, and blew it at them.

“You’re such a tease,” Casey said.

“Are you ready to get out of here?” Dex asked.

“Yeah, I am.”

He didn't even give her a second before he was pulling her out of the school, and they were running from the main town square and heading straight for the forest. The ground was covered in a light layer of snow, and she was bundled in thermal clothes, as well as a Dex's sweater and thick socks. She didn't feel the cold quite so much at this second.

“Dex, what is going on?” she asked, then giggled as he suddenly pressed her against the nearest tree.

“Does something have to be wrong for me to want to come and take my mate?” he asked.

He kissed her again and she couldn't help but smile. “I don't know, now that you put it like that, I don't see why not.”

He chuckled. “You've got to stop being so pessimistic.”

Casey was tempted to remind him of what her lack of ability would cause, but she also didn't want to put a downer on his good mood. Their future already felt doomed, and they had barely begun.

“You're right,” Casey said, wrapping her arms around him.

Dex ran his hands down toward her ass, pulling her closer to him, and there she felt the hardness of his cock pressing against her. She couldn't help but gasp at the sheer size and width of him.

“That is what you do to me,” he said.

She moaned.

“Tell me, Casey, are you wet for me?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

She didn't even get a chance to ask him why, as he suddenly spun her around and began to attack her jeans. She worked her zipper down herself, and Dex growled as he tore at her panties. His palm cupped her pussy, and she gritted her teeth, feeling the pleasure rush through her whole body. She couldn't think, all she could do was feel.

His touch was everything. Dex pressed two fingers deep inside her, stretching her.

“That's it, baby, I want you,” he said. “I want you soaking and ready to take my cock.”

Sinking her teeth into her bottom lip, she tried to contain her sounds, but it was impossible to do so.

“Please!”

He growled against her neck, and then his teeth sunk down, not piercing skin but commanding in his grip. She whimpered, feeling her arousal start to build.

“I need to be inside you.”

He pulled his fingers from her pussy and tilted her body so he could slide inside her from behind.

She held onto the tree as she felt him start to sink inside her, inch by inch. She closed her eyes, basking in each new sensation, not wanting it to stop.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” he growled out as he began to rock back and forth inside her.

At first, he was gentle, giving her a chance to get used to the feel of him, but slowly, little by little, he began to pound inside her. All too soon, he just couldn’t take it anymore, and he stopped, sliding his fingers between her thighs and working her clit.

“Come for me, Casey,” he said.

Her body belonged to him. Her heart belonged to him. Every single part of her being belonged to this man, and the moment he commanded it, she gave herself to him. Dex owned her, and she didn’t care what the fuck other people thought. She trusted him. She loved him, and she screamed his name as he pushed her right over the peak of pleasure.

Before she had finished her release, he grabbed her hips and began to fuck her, hard, building toward his own. She wanted it, pushing back against him, feeling his hard cock throb as he came close. The moment he did, she felt each spurt fill her pussy.

Dex let out another growl, and then she heard him.

“You’re pregnant,” he said.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Dex's father and mother were staying the night at a hotel in the town square. They occasionally did this, especially if they had pack business to attend. He was aware of one female who was heavily pregnant, and sometimes his father was needed to control the wolf during the birthing process.

There were rare occasions when the wolf tried to get through, to help heal, but also to speed things along. The only problem was, this made it a risk to the baby.

Female wolves could change within the first trimester, but after that, they had to handle their cravings and attempt to control their wolf.

Casey paced the length of his bedroom.

"This means we're going to have to get our own place," Dex said. "I've been looking at a house, it's nice, not too big or too small, close to the town—"

"Dex, I've not even taken a pregnancy test," Casey said.

"We don't need to take a pregnancy test. You know it as well as I do. You haven't gotten your cycle the past couple of months."

"Lucinda might be wrong."

Dex frowned. "Do you want her to be wrong?"

"No, no, of course not. I don't want her to be wrong. I mean, I want her to be wrong about that other thing, but if I accept she might be wrong about that, then she must be

wrong about this.” She pressed her hands against her stomach.

“Do you feel any different?”

“No. Maybe, I don’t know.” She blew out a breath and then came to sit with him on the bed. “I’m so confused right now.”

“Bad confused?” he asked.

“No, I mean, if we’re pregnant, then that is incredible and I am so lucky,” Casey said. “We’re so lucky, but I don’t know if I can be happy with this, knowing what I know is coming.” She sighed. “I don’t know what we can do.”

Dex took her hand, locking their fingers together. “We work it out together.”

“I’ve talked to so many pack people, and yes, they are seeing me as a bit of a freak right now. Trust me, I get it. It’s not every day they get asked if they like someone of the pack.” She shook her head and he tightened his grip on her hand.

“It’s going to be all right.”

“I don’t know how you can say that.”

“Because I know I’m right.”

She laughed. “How does it feel to be right all the time?”

“Pretty awesome.”

Casey leaned her head against his shoulder. “I’m sorry. This is driving me crazy. Do you think it would be worth us going to ... Lucinda?”

“No,” Dex said.

“Why not? Maybe if you saw the vision again, it would give you an indication of who is attacking you. Why? I don’t know.”

“We’ve already messed with too much, and now you’re pregnant.”

“Was I pregnant in your vision?”

“No,” Dex said. “Not from what I saw, but you’re also not showing yet.”

“So it is either a few years from now, or very soon,” Casey said. “None of this is comforting.”

“You know what, we’re done talking about what might be. Remember, the future is undecided and we’ve got the chance to change it.” He climbed off the bed and began to move to the top, peeling back the covers. He slapped the spot right next to him as he climbed in.

Casey rolled her eyes, but she was already crawling toward him.

“You can’t keep doing that,” she said.

“Doing what?”

“Changing the subject or putting a ban on the one we’re talking about, just because you don’t like it.” She gave a tut-tut.

“Aren’t you tired of us speculating?” he asked. “It’s exhausting, and do you know what is going to happen?”

“What?”

“We’re going to be fifty years old and laughing about how much time we wasted thinking about something that might not happen.” He knew he never should have gone to Lucinda, nor should he have listened to her in the first place. “We’re mated. All we have to do right now is focus on us and what we want. That is it.”

Casey moved in close, wrapping an arm around him and resting her head against his chest. She tilted her head back to look at him.

“You’re right. If I am pregnant, what does this mean?” she asked. “For you?”

He smiled. “It means we’re going to get our own place. We won’t have to keep sneaking around to be with one another.”

She snorted. “We don’t do a whole lot of sneaking. In case you didn’t notice, our parents like to make time for each other. We’re not getting in the way of that.” She let out a sigh. This one wasn’t filled with frustration, but it had a softness to it. “It would be nice to have our own place. We wouldn’t have to keep making love in the forest. That would be nice.” She snuggled against him and he sensed she started to relax, and that was what he enjoyed.

“You don’t like making love in the forest?”

She giggled. “I do, but not when it is freezing cold.”

“I’ll have to remember that.” He kissed the top of her head. “I want you to marry me.”

This made her tilt her head back and release a gasp. “Is that a proposal?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“You’re not going to get down on one knee?”

“No, I’m not. This is going to be the proposal you remember. You don’t need me bowing down or declaring anything. You know the way I feel about you, and that is not going to change. I love you, and now that you’re pregnant with my child, I’m never letting you go.” He kissed her lips as she tilted her head back to look at him.

“We’re really going to do this?” she asked.

“Yeah, we are. I’ll talk to my dad about getting a place of our own. I don’t think it will happen before Christmas, but next year we could be decorating something for ourselves.”

He couldn’t help but love that smile on her lips. In that moment, he didn’t care about the vision or what it meant. All he cared about was spending the time with Casey. Lucinda had been unclear. There were three people who played a part in his death. He didn’t know who the third player would be, but he was more interested in making sure it didn’t happen.

Casey would never forgive herself.

He had Casey and his unborn child to fight for.

Lucinda hated this feeling.

She glanced through her mix of herbs and potions, and she had always known something was off, but now she was sure of it. A special herb was missing—an

enchanted chamomile she'd been experimenting with.

On one of her many visits with Klaus, the Alpha had mentioned how worried he was about pack females, and some of them were not able to control their wolves. Lucinda knew how difficult it was for some of the wolves. She tried to keep her distance from the pack, as she knew how tempting it was for them to seek her out to use magic.

Magic was dangerous and deadly. The cost of doing business was far too high.

After Klaus's sadness, she had decided to try and experiment with suppressing the wolf inside the woman long enough to give birth. She knew it was a risk to even attempt. Meddling with someone's wolf could have dire consequences. She created the chamomile into a tea, but there was no way for her to test it. She'd need her subject to be willing, and to ask Klaus for his permission, and of course there was always the risk something could go wrong.

She had never told another soul about this experiment, at least she didn't recall telling anyone. Apart from her book. Her missing potions book and the missing chamomile. She didn't know how long it had been since she misplaced her book or the herb.

She couldn't help but think about Casey. She'd seen the young woman many times, even as a child, at a distance, and knew the girl would grow to be a fiery wolf. There was so much passion, love, and loyalty in her. Lucinda, herself, had sensed the young woman's wolf at a young age. This is why she'd been so shocked to discover the young woman hadn't transitioned. If there had been anyone within the Arlington pack she could bet her witchcraft on who would successfully transition, it would have been Casey.

The tea had to have worked, but that meant someone had to have known what it was used for and then been in a position to give it to Casey. Who? There was only two people she knew she could trust with this information.

Lucinda quickly rushed out of her home.

“What do you think?” Dex asked.

Casey glanced around the small dining room. There was already a table and four chairs. She’d noticed the few pieces of furniture, and it didn’t take a genius to know his father had been responsible for making this place freaking awesome.

Neither Dex’s parents nor her own had opted to come with them to check out this new place. From what Dex had told her, Klaus had handed him the keys and he was to let them know what they thought.

“I think it’s amazing,” she said.

“You know what this is, don’t you?” he asked.

She couldn’t help but laugh. “What? You don’t think I saw we’re equal distance from my parents as well as yours? Close to the pack, for whenever you need to ... be present. It’s the perfect starter home for the soon-to-be Alpha.”

There was enough space, but not too much, to also raise not one but a few kids. She was still trying to wrangle her head around the pregnancy thing. The confirmation hadn’t exactly made it easier to accept.

“If you don’t like it, we don’t have to stay.”

She walked toward him, resting a hand on his chest. “I know that, but I also don’t want to be the only one to have input in what house we stay at. I think it is a decision we should make together.”

Dex sighed and cupped her face, tilting her head back. She loved it when he did this. Staring up into his eyes, that dark blue shade with a hint of amber, letting her know his wolf was so close to the surface.

One day, she wished she would get to know what it felt like to finally run with him. To be by his side as they embraced the future together.

“You want to know what I think?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s what I just said.”

He leaned in and pressed a sweet kiss to her lips. “I want whatever you want, Casey. You’re my home. No one else, and no other place. Wherever you want to be is where I want to be.”

She couldn’t help but feel the tears fill her eyes. “There you go saying all those magical and amazing things.”

He laughed. “I do my best.”

This time, she kissed him, going onto her tiptoes to press her lips against his. “I want to be wherever you are,” she said.

“Good.”

She couldn’t help but glance over at the table.

Dex followed her gaze.

“I have no idea what is wrong with me,” she said.

“I’m guessing it’s the hormones.”

“I’m not that far along, but you are driving me crazy, and I need you.”

She grabbed his jacket and moved toward the edge of the table. Casey didn’t need to ask him to lift her up. He picked her up and placed her on the edge of the table.

She wore a long skirt with a soft pair of tights that didn’t even last a minute against Dex’s hard grip. Releasing a moan, she felt his hand slowly slide up her thigh, moving toward her pussy. The moment he touched her, she felt her body grow tense, wanting more.

“Please,” she said.

“Don’t worry. I know what you want.”

Him.

Casey sat up suddenly.

“What?” Dex asked.

“Did you hear that?”

“Did I hear what?”

She frowned and tried to listen. “You didn’t hear that?”

“Hear what? Casey, there is no one else in this house. My dad did it this way so he knew...”

She wrinkled her nose. "Please don't remind me that our parents know we're having sex."

"Our parents are wolves, baby. They know how we feel, and we're also newly ... together."

Casey smiled. "And soon we'll be mated and married," she said.

Dex sighed. "Those words sound so good."

She laughed. "You know, men are supposed to be a little terrified at the prospect of being married off."

"Not this man. It is all I've ever wanted, so long as the woman I'm going to be with is you."

"You know the right answers." She pulled him in close and kissed him.

He cupped her pussy, sliding a finger between her slit.

Casey knew what she heard, but she also knew no one was in the house. It had to have been in her head. Maybe she was getting tired. Being pregnant, facing the reality of possibly never transitioning, had started to take its toll.

She didn't know what that voice was, but she knew that as long as she was with Dex, she'd be happy. He was the love of her life, and she wasn't going to allow Lucinda's premonition to affect their future. She couldn't.

She wouldn't fail him.

Pulling him down into the kiss, she felt his fingers as they pressed inside her. She slid

her hands down, going toward the zipper of his pants and working it down. He let out a moan as she reached into his pants, taking out his cock and working from the tip right down to the base. Pre-cum already leaked out of the top, providing enough lubrication for her to work his dick.

She refused to believe anything bad was going to happen. She wouldn't fail Dex. The very idea of it seemed almost ludicrous to her.

“Do you have any idea what you're doing to me?” he asked.

She moaned as he pressed a second finger inside her, twisting his hand around, and she rocked against him. “I imagine the same you're doing for me.”

The words were hard to form. She didn't know what she was saying or thinking. Everything felt so good.

All too soon, he stopped, pulling out of her pussy, and she thought he was ready to take her, but then he dropped to his knees.

“Dex?”

“I have to taste you.”

Within seconds his lips were on her pussy, and she cried out. His tongue sliding up and down, moving around her clit, then gliding down to plunge inside her. Closing her eyes, she gave herself to the pleasure.

Ours.

Our mate.

Forever.

Casey opened her eyes, and she couldn't believe it.

“Dex!”

He stopped. “What? What is it?”

“I ... I think I hear my wolf?” She frowned and looked at him.

“What?”

“I know it's crazy, but I think I just heard her.”

“What did she say?”

“She ... you're ours, and that you're our mate, forever.”

“Are you sure you didn't just think that?”

“I know what I heard and I know what I feel.” She nibbled her lip. “It could have been my wolf, right?”

He cupped her cheeks and then took possession of her lips. “Always. She could be there, always.”

She smiled at him. “I know it's crazy.”

“No, it's not crazy. It's not crazy at all.”

What did this mean? If her wolf had finally started to talk to her, what did it mean?

Page 10

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Three Days Later

“Is there a reason we’re prowling the forest?” Dex asked.

“One of Newman’s kids said he saw a body out near the lake. We’re coming to check it out.”

“Newman’s kids? Aren’t they like ten years old? Why didn’t they come and check it out or something?”

Klaus sighed. “I guess it freaked them out. Not many kids have seen a body.”

Dex frowned. “But it would have to be one of the wolves. We don’t have hunters coming through here.”

“True, unless Lucinda’s shield has been affected, but I doubt that because it would have happened long before now.”

He agreed with his father. In the last eighteen years, not even a single traveling human had broached this forest. From what Lucinda had told him, humans tend to get an uneasy feeling when they’re close, and try to avoid the forest at all costs.

Dex didn’t understand how the magic worked, only that it did, and he wasn’t going to be the one arguing about it.

They made their way to the lake, and he couldn’t help but think about Casey. She’d been so excited the past couple of days, as she’d been enjoying rare glimpses of her

wolf. She asked him not to say anything to their parents, and he promised he wouldn't. He was nervous about it.

In Lucinda's shared vision, at no point was it even hinted that Casey would know her wolf. Did this mean the future had already been changed? What had altered their path? He had no way of knowing anything, but he had promised himself a visit to Lucinda's to try and make sense of what is going on.

"Do you think it is a dead body?"

"Nah, probably a rabbit."

"The size of a body?"

"Or a deer. We still get them from time to time."

They made their way down to the lake and Dex began to look, trying to figure out where the Newman kids would have been standing to witness a dead body. He glanced around, and at first he didn't see anything, but then he spotted it.

"Or maybe they really did see a dead body," Dex said. He started to rush, especially as he saw who it was lying on the ground. "Shit, Dad, it's Lucinda. She's cut up pretty bad."

His father was already there, picking her up in his arms, and they took off, not going back to her home but in the direction of his father's.

Dex stayed by his side. He couldn't sense a pulse or a heartbeat. Lucinda was freezing cold to the touch. He didn't know how the cold affected witches. If it even could affect them.

“Dad, what is going on?” Dex asked.

Klaus didn’t say a word, and much to Dex’s surprise, his mother was already waiting at the front door.

“The spare bedroom is made,” his mom said.

Klaus took the stairs two at a time, and they walked into the warm spare bedroom. They had at least two spare bedrooms in their home. Dex knew it had always been in the hope of strengthening their family, but it had never happened.

Now he knew the price that had to be paid.

Was this a price Lucinda had to pay for making magic?

“What happened?” his mother asked.

“I don’t know, but I’d say from the scars, a wolf attacked her,” Klaus said.

“A wolf? Dad, no one in the pack would dare attack her. It’s just not possible.”

“Not possible, and yet, look at her, son,” Klaus said.

His mother was already cleaning the wounds, and the water was red with blood.

“She’s so cold. I need to get more blankets. Dex, please, dear,” his mother said.

Dex nodded and went to the linen closet to get some blankets. He looked for the thickest, which were hard to find, seeing as they mostly ran hot and rarely ever got cold.

He made his way back to the bedroom, and then realized his mother had sent him

away so she could talk to his father without him there.

“Someone nearly killed her, Klaus. If her coven hears about this—”

“Honey, her coven doesn’t give a shit that she even exists. She left them, remember?”

“I remember, but even still. A coven will do anything to cause conflict. You know this.”

He sensed his father’s anger. “Oh, I know this. I also know those wounds on her cannot come from anything or anyone but a wolf. One of the pack did this.”

“But who?”

“I have no idea,” Klaus said. “Maybe whoever is going to try to kill Dex could be responsible.”

Dex pushed open the door and looked from his father to his mother.

“The blankets.”

“But we don’t have a clue who that is. Even Casey couldn’t find anyone who is suspect enough to do this,” Dex said.

“Whoever it was, they knew how to hide their scent,” Klaus said. “There were too many of the pack scent, to get a single identifying element.”

He looked toward his mom. “You didn’t have to send me away.”

“Look, I know Lucinda is part of the pack, and we all do what we can to take care of her, but covens can be sneaky, and they may consider this an attack on them.”

“I know what they might consider it,” Klaus said. “But they are not going to know unless Lucinda is the one to tell them.” He ran fingers through his hair.

There was a soft moan and Dex glanced down to see Lucinda had started to move beneath the blanket.

“More,” Lucinda said.

His mother had been so focused on the conversation that she hadn’t put the additional blankets on Lucinda. The witch began to shake, and his father quickly grabbed the blankets and placed them over her body.

“We’ve got you, Lucinda,” he said. “We’ve got you.”

Dex moved closer and Lucinda turned to look at him.

“I know you,” she said.

This wasn’t good.

“Dad?”

“Don’t, son. Don’t panic.” Klaus moved in closer. “Do you know your name?”

Lucinda frowned and then turned toward her mother, who took a step toward her.

“Water?” Lucinda asked.

His mother nodded her head and quickly left the bedroom.

“It’s okay. I promise you, whoever did this is going to pay. I will not let anyone hurt

you.” There was a brief pause, and Dex saw his father’s anger. “Again. I will not let anyone hurt you again.”

“Dad, you didn’t do this,” Dex said.

Klaus turned toward him. “I did.”

Dex frowned.

“Anyone who gets hurt on our watch is our fault, son. There is no way out of this blame game. We’re the ones to blame, no one else.”

“You couldn’t have known.” He didn’t want his dad to feel any guilt.

“It doesn’t matter. All that matters is that Lucinda gets better,” Klaus said. “That is all I care about and not because of what the coven can do to us. Lucinda is one of us, and whoever did this will pay for it.”

Casey stepped out of their new bathroom and glanced toward the bed to see Dex lying on top of the covers.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m just trying to figure out who could have tried to kill Lucinda. I get that not everyone likes her, but she’s not a bad person,” Dex said, rubbing at his temples.

“It has to be the person you saw in that premonition,” Casey said, moving toward the bed. She lifted the covers and slid inside.

She knew she didn't have to wait long before Dex reached out and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her in close. She loved when he did this.

Their parents had been so happy that they loved the house, and they were more than happy for them to move in. At first, Casey didn't understand why their parents were so enthused with them leaving the nest, but in the last three days, they had not been able to keep their hands away from one another.

And then she realized their parents knew how they felt. While they lived with their parents, they did show a great deal of restraint but it hadn't been a lot. Their parents could only give them privacy for so long, and with it getting colder, having sex outside didn't have much appeal. Their own place was the only solution, and she was thankful their parents had granted it to them.

"Yeah, but none of us know who that could be. Lucinda didn't even recognize my parents, Casey."

She felt Dex's arms tighten around her.

"It's going to be okay," she said, hoping to give him something to hold onto.

"You don't know if it is going to be okay, but thank you." He pressed a kiss to her temple and she smiled.

"I wasn't just saying it. I believe it. Lucinda is not going to die."

"I hope not. She was getting warmer and Mom was making her chicken soup, which is always good."

Casey nodded. "See, she is in good hands."

They were silent for several minutes and then Casey frowned. “Where did you say you found her?”

“A spot near the lake.”

“A perfect spot?”

“Only to hide who actually did it,” Dex said. “Dad wouldn’t be able to detect any one scent, and with how cold she was, I’d say she had been out there a few days.”

“But, why would Lucinda have been at the lake?” Casey asked.

She felt Dex tense. “What do you mean?”

“Well, Lucinda rarely leaves her home. How did she end up at the lake?” She turned to look at Dex. “It makes no sense. The only time she comes into town is when she is accompanied by you, your mom, or your dad.”

Dex frowned. “So someone would have had to attack her at her house?” he asked.

“It makes sense.” Casey looked at him and waited.

“You’re not coming,” Dex said.

“What the hell, Dex, are you kidding me?”

“You’re pregnant!”

“And, whoever attacked Lucinda could be responsible for your death. I know there is a risk this may play out like it did in your premonition, but you’re not keeping me out of this, so don’t even try. There is no way I am letting you leave without me.” She

grabbed his arm. “We’re in this together. We’re a team.”

She saw that he wanted to argue, but even if he did attempt to leave her behind, he’d only get so far and she’d follow him. There was no way she was leaving him to find a possible suspect on his own.

“Fine. Fine, but any sign of danger, and I’m warning you, you come home right away, do you understand me?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, yes.”

It didn’t take them long to get dressed, and they were out of their new home within a matter of minutes. Dex took her hand, and they walked stealthily toward the forest, and from there, they ran. She had a feeling she was slowing Dex down, but she was not going to let him do this on his own. They were a team.

It didn’t take them long to make it to Lucinda’s house.

“Doesn’t look like anything bad happened,” Dex said as they arrived.

“What do you mean?” Casey asked, inhaling deeply and finding it strange to get so many different smells.

She had never smelled the pack before, and it was woodsy and floral at the same time. There were a lot of smells—vanilla, cinnamon, even a hint of chocolate—and for some reason, she could also smell metal, which was odd. The fact she could smell anything was incredible to her.

“Are you okay?” Dex asked.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m okay.”

She hadn't told Dex that she'd been hearing her wolf more often, or the fact that she was starting to feel more like herself, which was an odd sensation for her. Now, she developed a stronger sense of smell. None of this made sense.

At no point did she make any request from Lucinda. She had started to accept that her wolf was not going to be here. She was ... dead. Her wolf was never meant to be. She hated to accept it, but she had no choice.

Only now, she was starting to smell things, sense things, and it was hard not to get excited at what it could possibly mean.

They walked up Lucinda's path, and with the frost and a fresh falling of snow, there were no discernable tracks. Nothing to give them information on who could have come to see Lucinda.

Dex turned the handle on her door, and even Casey frowned. Lucinda was known for her privacy. She always locked her front door as she didn't want daring kids to just wander into her home and start touching everything. It drove her crazy when they did that.

"She never leaves her door unlocked," Casey said.

"Which means someone must have taken her," Dex said.

Casey watched as Dex's arms transformed into those of a wolf's, and he placed one hand in front of her, and the other he had ready to attack.

They stepped inside Lucinda's home, and Casey looked around. It was like any other home. A small sitting room to the left, the dining room to the right.

They walked into the house, and the kitchen was fine, but the part which should be

either a study or an office had floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with potions and ingredients. There was a pot in the center, on the table, along with an electrical stove that could plug into the wall.

“Dex, there is nothing out of place,” Casey said.

He moved to the shelves.

“She must have gotten lost, tripped or something, then maybe a rare bear or a dog attacked her.”

“Casey, we don’t have rare bears, and trust me, stray rabid dogs don’t just wander into our zone. They can scent us. Also, someone has been in here,” Dex said. “Lucinda likes to keep the jars facing forward, so she knows each ingredient and each potion. When I came here as a kid, she would tell me it would make her look unprofessional if she had to scramble among her shelves to find what she was looking for. She told me she loved how freaked out people would get when she would go to the right shelf and pick off exactly what she needed.”

He clicked his tongue.

“And these have been messed with.”

Casey didn’t like that feeling of foreboding that suddenly swept over her.

“Dex?” she asked, but before she could say anything an explosion of smoke came to the room and separated her and Dex.

Someone was there, and they were fast.

Casey frowned as her vision, regardless of the smoke, was clear, but in the panic,

someone had grabbed Dex and was attempting to force him out of Lucinda's house. She was not going to allow that.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Klaus was used to taking care of members of the pack. He was also used to keeping an eye on Lucinda. When she first came to him years ago, she had feared for her life and what the coven would do to her, for turning her back on them.

He put the spoon into the soup and Lucinda wrinkled her nose.

“It needs a little more chili,” she said.

“My wife makes amazing soup.”

“For the pack. For me, I always need an added kick of spice,” Lucinda said.

Klaus nodded his head. “I’ll go and get the bottle of hot sauce.”

“Thank you,” Lucinda said. “For coming to get me.”

“How did you make it out into the forest, especially near the lake? You told me you hated the forest, even if you live around it.” Klaus waited.

Lucinda sighed.

“Did your coven come?” he asked.

“Klaus, it was one of your pack,” Lucinda said.

“How can you be sure?”

“My memory has returned. I know exactly who attacked me and I also know why.” Lucinda reached for his hand, and the moment she grabbed him, he watched as her eyes went wide, and he knew she was not even looking at him. She was seeing the future, which meant something had changed, or someone’s life was attached to his own. “You have to go,” Lucinda said. “There is not enough time. She is so angry, and if you don’t, Casey and Dex are going to be killed!”

“Leave him alone!” Casey said.

Dex finally moved away from whomever was pulling him. Whatever had been in that smoke was seriously messing with his senses. It was like he couldn’t see or smell. The truth was, he thought Casey had grabbed his hand, which is why he also left with her.

Now, as he pulled away, he couldn’t help but stumble, but all too soon, he was struggling against a tree. The moment he felt the branches of the tree around his body, he realized this was exactly the premonition Lucinda had shared with him.

The fog dissipated and then he saw who it was. He had thought it would be Buddy. It was the only logical explanation. That asshole had been his target for a long time. Only, the person that stood between him and Casey was not a man, and was not Buddy, but sweet, kind Joanna Kingsley.

She worked at the diner, made amazing tea and coffee, and never once got his order wrong. Dex remembered her from high school. She had been one of the last to transition who had been born in the same year as him and Casey.

“What?” Dex asked.

“You!” Casey said.

“Stay back, if you know what is good for you,” Joanna said.

“We’re trying to look for who could have attacked Lucinda,” Casey said. “I know you and Lucinda were close, but what is going on?”

Dex looked toward Casey, and then his premonition replayed in his mind. Her long brown hair fell around her in waves, she wore a pair of Wellington boots, and the clothes she wore were an exact replica.

This was the vision come to life.

Joanna.

What the fuck was going on?

Joanna glared at Casey. “She found out I took something from her. She was going to tell Klaus, and nothing I could do was going to stop her. I couldn’t have that. There was no way she was coming in between my future, so I did what I had to do. I took care of it.”

“You attacked her.”

“She was going to tell the Alpha what I did. I couldn’t have that. I thought she would understand but like always, everyone looks at you and sees a damn princess. They see a woman who is worthy to be an Alpha’s queen.”

Dex looked toward Casey.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I saw the way he looked at you. It didn’t even matter if you didn’t give him the time of day, or even if it was just a soft, sweet smile. Dex would come running back for more. Everyone always talked about how sweet and fucking cute it was that Dex was head over heels in love with you. How you’d make an amazing couple. You’ll be strong and be able to take on anything together. The pack would grow from strength to fucking strength. Everyone was excited about you turning eighteen. Dex had already transitioned, but you hadn’t yet, and I knew what Lucinda was trying to do. She is always so helpful. She really should start to consider what other witches are like. They don’t take bullshit from anyone—”

“What did you do?” Casey yelled.

“Don’t you dare interrupt me!”

Casey held her hands out as if in surrender, but he saw the mocking way she did it. “Oh, I’m sorry. You attacked one of the pack. Lucinda is a witch, but she is still one of us, and now you’re complaining because people like me. Get over yourself.”

“And I knew if I stopped you from transitioning, then everyone would see the real you. That you’re weak. You are not worthy of Dex’s love or devotion. You would not make a good pack queen. You’re a horrible bitch, and you don’t deserve to live.”

“You!” Casey said. “You did something to me.”

Joanna laughed. “Yeah, I did. While you were giving me sweet smiles, I was brewing you a special tea. You see, Lucinda had been working hard on a new potion, one for pregnant pack females. The aim was to suppress the wolf, but she didn’t know what Klaus would think. She got nervous, doubted herself, and put the jar of tea far out of reach, but I knew it would work. Everything Lucinda did, worked. So I tested it on you and only you. You love coming to the diner for your coffee and tea, and I made sure to put a nice dose in any beverage you had. When it came time to transition, you

couldn't." The glee in her face irritated Dex.

"Casey could transition," Dex said.

"Oh, there is a good chance she might at some point, but I've been feeding her a lot of tea, and we don't know the long-term side effects, so there is also—"

Joanna didn't get to finish because Casey had moved, and she had done so at a speed that surprised Dex. She wrapped her fingers around Joanna's throat, once again cutting her off.

"Why don't we see?" Casey asked, and with a strength that took him by surprise, she threw Joanna across the forest.

He watched as Joanna hit one of the trees, and the force of it made the tree shake. The other woman fell to the ground, and clearly was taken aback by Casey's strength.

There was no match for her. Even before Joanna could attack, Casey was there, blocking her, keeping her back.

He tried to free himself from the bindings.

"What is happening?" Joanna asked.

Casey held onto Joanna's throat and lifted her in the air, and that was when he saw her start to transition. It was one of the most beautiful sights in the world. There was no pain, just a merging of Casey with her wolf.

His father had said it was rare with the wolves. That it did take some time for them to get used to their wolves, that voice that spoke to them.

Then, Dex remembered the other night. Casey asked who had said that. There had been moments it looked like she could hear something, but it was only her that was able to hear anything.

She'd been hearing her wolf.

"I haven't been going to the diner. I haven't drunk anything from you."

"Casey, don't," Klaus said, suddenly coming toward them. Hot on his tail was Lucinda, who instantly saw what had happened to Dex, and she waved her hand, freeing him.

Dex rushed toward Casey.

"She tried to kill Dex," Casey said. "She cannot be allowed to live."

"That decision is for the pack," Klaus said. "These are our laws, and trust me, she is going to be severely punished for what she has done, but her death will not be on your hands."

Dex looked toward his mate. Her rage was so acute. He didn't know if there was going to be any way for Casey to stop what she was going to do.

Joanna had tried to ruin her life. The other woman had clearly thought that if she stopped Casey from being able to transition, Dex would turn his back on her. That was never going to happen.

Casey was his soulmate. His reason for breathing. His reason for everything. He loved her with his whole being.

"Casey," Dex said.

She turned to look at him. She hadn't fully transitioned but she wanted to. He saw it. Her wolf was so close to the surface.

"For me, it has always been you. Nothing and no one is going to change that."

Seconds passed and he stared into her eyes.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you too."

Casey was a strong woman as she turned off her wolf and slowly lowered Joanna to the ground. He saw her give the other woman's throat a final good squeeze, and then she let her go.

Klaus was there, as was his mom, along with Lucinda.

"I'll deal with this," Klaus said.

Lucinda gave them the update about everything that had happened. How Joanna had been obsessed with Dex, but it had been that of a small girl crush, but also how she had used her and Lucinda's friendship to hide what she had been doing.

"It will never happen again," Lucinda said.

"That doesn't mean you have to leave," Dex said.

"I am not leaving, but my potions will have a protection spell placed on them, and from this point onward, I will not share anything. Now, if you don't mind me, I'm going to enjoy some soup that just needs a little hot sauce." Lucinda turned on her heel, and Dex looked toward his woman.

“I can turn into a wolf. Did you see that?” Casey asked.

“I saw.”

“Do you think you can ... run? That you and I can run? I won’t get much chance. Not when the baby grows a little bigger.”

He smiled. “We can run. How about you have a head start, and I will chase you?”

Casey smiled and then she took off.

Dex frowned and turned to look in the direction of Lucinda, only to nearly jump back as she was standing so close to him.

“You have a question,” she said.

He stared at her and she raised a brow.

“You like doing that, don’t you? You like freaking people out.”

“I find it rather pleasurable, yes.” She gave him a soft smile.

“The premonition didn’t play out the way I thought it would,” he said.

“Of course not. It’s a guide, Dex. It always has been. Sometimes it helps to give you the push you need, to make decisions you have to make. Now, don’t think too much about it. Trust me, it will drive you crazy.”

And with that, Lucinda was gone and he was able to go chasing after his mate. There was no way he was going to listen or allow another premonition to get in his way again.

He had Casey, and that was all he needed.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 7:26 am

Ten Years Later

Casey glanced around the table and there were plenty of seats set up. They had two tables—one for the adults, one for the children.

Christmas music played in the background, and she heard laughter and merriment coming from the sitting room.

“I thought I might find you here,” Dex said, wrapping his arms around her once again swollen stomach.

She put her hands on top of his and sunk against him. “I’m just, you know, checking to make sure everything is set up.”

“This is not our first Christmas hosting. You need to stop stressing.”

In the past ten years, she had hosted Christmas three times. Her mother had also done it three times, Dex’s parents had hosted once, and Lucinda had hosted twice.

Ever since Joanna’s plot to try and remove her from Dex’s life, Lucinda had made an effort to become part of the pack. She didn’t turn into a wolf, but she became friendlier with everyone. She visited town more often, joined in on holiday events. As for Joanna, her punishment was to be banished from the pack. Even her own family had been embarrassed by what had happened. They had also pledged to leave the pack out of embarrassment of their daughter. Klaus wouldn’t let them leave. There was no bad blood.

The moment Joanna crossed the town line, she would never be able to find this place again. Lucinda had made sure of it.

She was also not able to talk about the pack, and there was no way any other witch or warlock could uncover any secrets. Lucinda had made sure of it.

As for Casey, in the last ten years, she had married Dex, mated with Dex, given birth to three babies, was pregnant with their fourth, giving her wolf the freedom she needed.

Their family was growing, and their parents were amazing grandparents. Their kids were happy, and so were they.

Klaus had also thanked her for not turning to magic to help fix things. Lucinda had told her that one of the premonitions or visions had been the result of Casey giving in to seeking magic. If she had done that, the cost would have been Dex's life.

As much as she wanted to be one with her wolf, she would never sacrifice the love she had for Dex to get it. She would have gone without her wolf.

"I want it to be perfect," she said.

"Hear that?" Dex said.

They were both silent, and they heard cheers, laughter, giggling of children, and a happy family.

"That is successful, Casey. Not the look of the table, or the three turkeys and spiral ham you've made. Don't get me wrong, I do not see any leftovers, and you better serve me up some extra roasted potatoes, but it's all of us spending time together as a family. You, me, the kids, our parents, Lucinda. All of us."

She leaned back against him. “You’re right, and we’re so lucky, aren’t we?”

“Yes, so lucky.”

The End