



The Alpha's Contract

(Contract by Alpha's #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Accidentally killing her own parents is what turned Neah's life upside down. As punishment for her crimes, her wolf abilities were bound and was forced into a life of slavery by her own brother. At the age of twenty-two, she saw no way of getting out and had given up on life, just trying to make it through each day. A contract between packs brings the arrival of the powerful, crimson-eyed Alpha Dane. A wolf that was feared by men, yet Neah couldn't help but be fascinated by him.

Adding Neah to the contract was never Alpha Danes's plan. There was just something about her strange scent that lured him in and he knew he couldn't leave her behind, especially not when he heard the lies coming from her brother's mouth. But meeting Neah was just the beginning. If Alpha Dane isn't being challenged by her, then it was her old pack that was trying to make life extremely difficult for him by keeping secrets buried. Dark Werewolf Romance and Forbidden Love.....

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A rare flicker crossed her mind—a darkness she had long suppressed beneath the person she had become. Most would have found it unsettling, but to me, it was captivating. I wanted to draw it out, to see it fully revealed.

A sharp knock at the door cut through our conversation, accompanied by Raven's distinct scent. Neah's thoughts shifted, revealing her quiet relief at the interruption.

"Come in," I called out.

Raven stepped inside, her gaze moving between Neah and me as if assessing the situation. "Hey," she greeted. "Can I take Neah shopping?"

"Shopping?" I echoed, raising an eyebrow.

"A few of us are heading into the city. I thought she might want to join. Or am I interrupting something serious again?"

I turned to Neah, still tuned in to her thoughts. "It's up to you."

She hesitated before shaking her head. "I'm not... I'm not ready for that," she murmured, her eyes flicking toward me. "It might not be safe."

"It's neutral ground," Raven insisted. "No one can start a fight there. Plus, I'll be with you the entire time."

"Who else is going?" I asked, curious.

“Klaus, for one,” she listed off a few others.

“Klaus? Shopping?” I smirked. That wasn’t exactly his scene.

“He wants to pick up more books. You know how he is—won’t risk them getting delivered in case the pages arrive creased.” She rolled her eyes. “Also, I figured you’d prefer us to have a chaperone.”

“So, you dragged him along?”

“Exactly.”

I turned back to Neah. “She’s not wrong. The city is neutral. And I trust Klaus.”

Her voice dropped as she whispered, “What about Trey?”

I narrowed my eyes at Raven. “I assume the city isn’t somewhere he’d go.”

“If there’s a problem, we’ll get her out,” Raven reassured.

Stepping closer to Neah, I gently turned her to face me fully. “Raven has been going to the city since she was a kid—she knows it better than anyone. But if you don’t want to go, that’s fine too.”

She lowered her gaze. “You don’t want me to go. I can feel it.”

“I’d rather have you somewhere I can reach easily,” I admitted. “But keeping you hidden won’t help you move past your fears. I trust my sister. I trust Klaus. They won’t let anything happen to you. And if someone tries? They’d be making a very stupid mistake.”

“All the wolves know who my brother is,” Raven added. “Salem made sure of that.”

Though she claimed not to blame me for Salem’s rejection, the bitterness in her words made me wonder. I let it slide, keeping my focus on Neah. “The choice is yours.”

“What if I...”

“We trust that you won’t,” I interrupted.

I felt Raven’s eyes burning into me. I hadn’t told her yet.

“What?” Her gaze snapped to Neah as the realization hit. “Are you seriously telling me she’s like that thing you killed?”

“Yes.”

“So she’s not a wolf?”

“Technically, Lycans are part wolf,” I explained.

“Technically?” she repeated, incredulous.

“Yes.”

Aero groaned in my head. This is going well.

“So the guy in the dungeon—the one claiming to be her brother—he’s the same?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re letting him live?”

“For now. Are you questioning my decision?” My tone left no room for argument.

Raven quickly softened, shifting her focus back to Neah. “Are you okay?”

Neah shook her head.

“Then you need this trip,” Raven decided. “Get away for a while. Clear your mind. And spend a ridiculous amount of my brother’s money.”

Neah’s blue eyes darted to me.

“It’s your choice.”

She hesitated but ultimately agreed, though she spent the next hour making sure I was comfortable with it. Even as she got into the car, she asked one final time.

“Just try to enjoy yourself,” I told her.

Raven tugged her into the vehicle. “I’ll keep an eye on her. If it’s too much, we’ll come right back.”

Eric watched the car pull away. “You don’t usually go for the clingy ones.”

“This is different.”

“Because she’s your mate? Because you marked her?” He raised an eyebrow.

“She’s not clingy out of possessiveness—it’s fear. She just needs time.”

“And Raven? How’d she take the news?”

“She was more focused on the fact that I’m letting Devon live. Took her a second to realize that if she wanted him dead just for what he is, she’d be a hypocrite for not wanting Neah dead too.”

“Raven doesn’t warm up to people easily,” Eric noted. “She must really like Neah. She’s never invited any of the others out before.”

I nodded. Raven had always been more comfortable at the hospital than in social settings.

“There’s something I need you to do,” I said as the car disappeared from view.

“You want me to watch her?”

“Just as a precaution.”

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Neah

Klaus flashes a reassuring smile as I settle into the car. Raven introduces the two women accompanying us, though she wisely keeps the truth about me to herself. I silently hope she continues to do so, at least for a while.

"You'll be fine," Raven murmurs, keeping her arm linked with mine when she notices my nervous fidgeting. "We're all here."

"I've never..." My voice trails off as I feel the other women's curious gazes on me.

"I know," Raven responds knowingly. "That's exactly why I suggested this. You can't stay isolated in the pack forever. Meeting others will show you that there's more to the world than just us."

"Even though Black Shadow is the superior pack," Klaus chimes in with a wink.

Raven pulls a small black card from her pocket and hands it to me. "This is from Dane. He figured you wouldn't accept it directly, so he asked me to pass it along."

I stare at the card in confusion. "What is it?"

The other women chuckle at my lack of knowledge, but Raven quickly silences them with a sharp glare.

"It's a credit card," she explains.

"Oh." I take the sleek black card from her, turning it over in my fingers. I've never seen one up close before—never had a reason to.

"I'll show you how to use it when you find something to buy," Raven offers.

"I don't need his money," I mumble.

She snorts. "You might as well enjoy it. It's not like he's hurting for cash."

For a brief moment, I wonder how Dane earns his wealth. He never seems to have a typical job.

"Taxes," Klaus mutters, flipping open a book.

"Taxes?" I echo, puzzled.

"From contracts," he clarifies.

"Plus, Dane owns several businesses in the city," Raven adds. "Let's just say his pockets are pretty deep."

The other women giggle again, while Klaus simply rolls his eyes.

By the time we arrive in the city, the overwhelming mix of scents—traffic, wolves, food, and other unfamiliar aromas—assaults my senses. I wrinkle my nose instinctively.

"Like I said, it takes time to adjust," Klaus remarks, stepping out of the car beside me and surveying our surroundings.

People are everywhere, moving at different paces—some rushing, others strolling

leisurely.

"Welcome to the city," Raven mutters as she links her arm through mine.

A tremor runs through me, my body reacting to the unfamiliar environment. "Get it together," I whisper under my breath, hoping no one hears me.

Klaus stays a few steps behind as Raven drags me from store to store, insisting that I pick something out. "You can't leave empty-handed," she insists.

She's enjoying herself, but this isn't my idea of fun. The noise, the scents, the crowds—it's too much. I long for the safety of the pack, for the quiet I've always known. Every fiber of my being pleads to return to the car, away from all this stimulation.

A hand suddenly wraps around my wrist, halting my thoughts. I glance up to find Klaus watching me.

He releases me immediately. "I know, personal space," he says, his voice calm. "But you're not enjoying this, are you?"

I shake my head.

"Come to the bookstore with me. It's quieter there."

Relieved, I nod. He informs Raven, who pouts but ultimately relents, making him promise not to let me out of his sight.

"I'm not an idiot," Klaus retorts. "Isn't that the whole reason I'm here?"

Raven gives him a meeting location and a strict time limit. "If you're not back in an

hour..."

"You'll call Dane," Klaus finishes for her. "Wouldn't expect anything less."

Leaving the bustling stores behind, I follow Klaus through a few winding streets and into a narrow alleyway where a small bookstore is tucked away, hidden from the city's chaos.

Inside, he moves swiftly through the shelves, searching for something while I trail behind, admiring the beautifully bound books. Their covers are intricate and enticing. For a fleeting moment, I wish I could read them—wish I could immerse myself in their stories.

But the truth lingers. The words on the pages are just a mystery to me, an untouchable world I can barely begin to understand.

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Lost Among the Shelves

"What kind of book are you looking for?" I ask, thinking that if he describes the cover, I might be able to help him find it.

Silence.

I turn around, expecting to see Klaus nearby—but he's gone. My heart skips a beat.

"Klaus?"

No response.

I dart between the shelves, my pulse quickening. The eerie stillness in the shop only amplifies my unease. There's no one else here.

"KLAUS?" My voice rises in desperation. My breathing turns shallow, and I call his name once more, barely a whisper.

As I reach the final aisle, I freeze.

Cassandra stands motionless, a smug grin stretching across her face. Her arms are folded just below her chest, her expression radiating amusement.

"So, the little rat finally found her voice," she sneers.

Just beyond her, something catches my eye—a foot, clad in a large boot. The same

kind Klaus wears. A thick, metallic scent taints the air. My stomach churns.

"Did... did you kill him?" I stammer, my throat tightening.

Cassandra turns and lands a swift kick to his side. He doesn't react.

"The Alpha let you out, I see." Her sharp gaze flickers to the mark on my neck.

"I'm not alone," I blurt out, my voice shaky.

She lets out a mocking laugh. "Oh, I know. But they're not here right now, are they? It's just you and me." She lazily runs her fingers through her long blonde hair, then tilts her head. "And where is dear Alpha Dane? If you're his contract bride, I'm shocked he let you roam around with these fools."

"Where's... Trey?" I manage to ask.

Her smirk vanishes in an instant. "That's Alpha Trey to you," she spits. "And that's none of your business."

"This is neutral ground," I say firmly, glancing at Klaus's boot. It twitches slightly—he's alive. Relief surges through me. "You're breaking the rules by being here. They won't like that."

Cassandra scoffs. "You think I care? Because of you, my brother is dead!"

A surge of anger flares within me, so suddenly it catches me off guard. "And you're the reason my parents are dead!"

Her eyes narrow dangerously, but before she can respond, Klaus shifts slightly, rolling onto his back.

"Why are you here?" I demand, forcing confidence into my voice.

"Trey wants to see you," she replies, her smirk returning.

"Why?"

Her smile deepens. "He wants to remind you."

Before I can decipher her cryptic words, Klaus moves. In a blink, he's behind her, his hands clamping around her throat.

"Remind her of what?" he growls.

Before she can speak, a sudden force barrels into the scene. Beta Eric appears from nowhere, grabbing my arm and pulling me behind him.

"Answer me!" Klaus demands, his grip unrelenting.

Cassandra thrashes, her manicured nails digging into Klaus's wrists. Blood beads and drips down his skin, forming tiny crimson pools on the floor, yet he doesn't loosen his hold.

"Let her go, Klaus," Beta Eric orders.

"She tried to kill me."

"Tried," Eric echoes with a smirk. "That's all she ever does—try. I doubt she's ever actually killed anyone herself. She prefers to manipulate others into doing her dirty work." He steps closer, his eyes gleaming with malice. "Dane is going to enjoy this. I wonder what he'll take first—a finger? A toe? Or maybe that sharp tongue of hers?"

"As tempting as it is to finish her off," Eric continues, "Dane will want to handle this personally. After all, she's been targeting his mate."

"Bride," Cassandra spits, venom lacing the word.

She saw my mark. Does she not believe it's real?

"Mate," Eric corrects, his voice cold. "You've trespassed onto foreign territory, Cassandra. Not only have you played with fire—you've sentenced yourself to death."

Cassandra's expression twists with fury. "Trey will come for you!" she screeches.

I instinctively cover my ears as her shriek echoes through the quiet bookstore.

Eric doesn't flinch. "I don't doubt it. In fact, I'm counting on it." He turns to Klaus. "My van's parked out back. Take her there and lock her in."

"You bastards!" Cassandra spits. "You pathetic, mindless wolves!"

Klaus scowls.

"Go on, then," Eric taunts, amusement flickering in his eyes. "Shift. I dare you."

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A Dangerous Bargain

Neah

Cassandra's glare sharpens. "You don't want that."

Klaus looks at her, confusion is evident in his eyes. He's the only one here who doesn't understand—doesn't know what I am or what Cassandra and I share.

Beta Eric's expression remains unreadable. What is he trying to accomplish? If Cassandra shifts here, she'll expose me—show him exactly what kind of monster I truly am.

Cassandra's gaze flicks to me, and in that moment, realization dawns. She doesn't know. She has no idea that Alpha Dane's mark severed my binding. That's why she's holding back.

Everything Devon said about keeping the truth from me suddenly makes sense. They never wanted me to know.

"I'll come willingly," Cassandra mutters, her voice subdued.

"Good." Beta Eric and Klaus respond at the same time.

Eric nods toward Klaus. "I'm taking Neah with me. Clean up this mess. If word gets out, we'll have a much bigger problem on our hands."

Klaus gives a curt nod and grips Cassandra's arm. The sharp scent of iron lingers in the air, thick and suffocating.

"She killed the shop assistant," Beta Eric says quietly as if reading my thoughts. "The blood you're smelling—it's his."

A giggle slips from Cassandra's lips as Beta Eric shoves her forward. The van is parked at the end of the alley, away from the crowded streets. She climbs in without resistance. Something about her compliance makes my skin crawl.

Beta Eric slams the doors shut, locking her inside. "Come on," he says, nodding toward the front. "You ride with me."

A deep unease settles in my chest. "Something's not right."

Eric raises an eyebrow. "What do you mean?" He scans the alley, following my gaze. "No one else is here."

"Are you sure?" My stomach twists. Cassandra hadn't so much as swung at me—a first. "She never left the pack without backup."

Eric frowns. "Cassandra was alone when she tried to poison us."

"At the packhouse, yes. But outside of it? They never went anywhere without each other."

Devon's fall from the tree replays in my mind. I glance toward the rooftops, searching. Nothing.

Then, the bookshop door bursts open.

Trey emerges, dragging Klaus by his long hair, his body limp and bloody.

A cruel smirk tugs at his lips. "I'll trade you," Trey growls, eyes locking onto me. "Him—for my mate."

Beta Eric's grip tightens around my wrist, holding me close. His voice is steady. "Is he alive?"

"Barely," Trey sneers. "But if you take him now, he might survive."

My gaze falls to the blood trail behind them. My throat tightens. "Why?" I whisper.

Trey's sneer deepens. He ignores me, focusing on Eric instead. "Make your choice. Quickly."

Eric doesn't hesitate. "Get in the van, Neah."

I freeze for a split second before obeying. As I open the door, Trey chuckles. "For once, you actually follow orders."

I hesitate, gripping the edge of the door.

"Van!" Beta Eric barks.

Swallowing my unease, I climb in and shut the door behind me, wishing I had more courage.

The van rocks slightly. A few moments later, Eric slides into the driver's seat, exhaling heavily.

"Did you give her up?" My voice is barely above a whisper.

"I had to. We don't abandon our own."

"And Klaus? Is he—?"

"Alive. Just barely."

Guilt crushes my chest. "This is my fault."

Eric shakes his head. "No. None of us expected Trey to show up. Dane thought it was too public, especially in a neutral zone."

"Then why did you come?" I ask as a muffled groan comes from the back of the van.

Eric glances at me, his expression unreadable. "Why do you think?"

I don't know if I should feel grateful or frustrated. But if he hadn't come, things would have ended very differently.

The rest of the ride is silent, aside from Eric confirming through the radio that Raven has been informed of what happened.

When we arrive at the packhouse, Alpha Dane is already waiting.

The moment I step out, he grabs my face, forcing me to meet his gaze. His eyes are sharp, searching. "Are you hurt?"

"No," I murmur.

"Don't lie to me, Neah."

I swallow. "She... she didn't touch me."

Without another word, Dane pulls me against his chest, his arms locking around me in a fierce embrace. "I should've trusted my instincts. I shouldn't have let you go."

"You said it was my choice," I remind him.

"It was." His jaw tightens. "But I should've known better, with both of them still out there."

I hesitate. "I don't think she knew."

His grip loosens slightly. "What do you mean?"

"Beta Eric challenged her to shift. She looked at me—really looked at me. I don't think she realized your mark broke my binding."

Dane exhales sharply. "She should've scented you. Or maybe... maybe she was confused. It's been a long time since you were first bound. She could've mistaken your scent for Klaus's."

Turning to Eric, his voice hardens. "Make sure Klaus gets medical attention."

"Raven won't be back for a while, but there's someone at the hospital," Eric assures him.

Dane nods, his hold on me tightening once more. "I won't make the same mistake again."

This time, I don't argue.

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A Lingering Unease

"Come with me," he murmurs, his arms falling away from me.

I follow him into his office, an unsettling weight pressing down on my chest. Every time I step into this room, it feels like I'm on the verge of being reprimanded—like everything I've built is seconds away from crumbling.

Eric's words replay in my mind as Dane settles into his chair. "Eric mentioned you had a strange feeling."

I nod. "Before Trey showed up, I just... something felt off."

"You can't explain it," he states, watching me carefully.

I shake my head. "No. It just didn't feel right."

His gaze sharpens. "What did she say to you?"

"That Trey wanted to see me. That he..." My face scrunches as I recall her cryptic words. "That he wanted to remind me."

"Remind you of what?"

"I don't know. She never got the chance to explain."

"Klaus cut her off?"

I shake my head. "Beta Eric did. He was just trying to protect me... like Klaus was."

Dane doesn't acknowledge my mention of Klaus. Instead, his expression darkens. "I should've killed Trey when I had the chance."

I sink into the chair across from him, watching as he scrawls something onto a sheet of paper. My curiosity sparks. "Alpha Dane... how did they know? How did they know where I was?"

His pen halts mid-stroke. "That's a question for Klaus—once he's healed."

"Klaus?" My brows furrow.

"I'm not saying he was involved, but he saw Cassandra before you did. I need to know what happened in those few minutes before she attacked him."

His gaze lifts to mine, piercing and unrelenting. "Are you sure you're not hurt?"

"Just... confused," I admit, trying to make sense of everything.

His tone shifts as he abruptly changes the subject. "Did you buy anything nice?"

"A few things. I think Raven has them." I pull the credit card from my pocket and slide it across the desk.

He picks it up, amusement flickering in his crimson eyes. "I tell you to buy whatever you want, and yet you barely spend a thing."

His smirk fades slightly as he studies me. "The city was too much for your senses, wasn't it?"

"The first quiet place I found was the bookshop. Klaus told me it took him nearly a year to adjust."

Dane nods. "It did—especially his hearing. That's why he lives farther from the heart of the pack. Fewer people, less noise. It was easier for him." His expression hardens. "Unfortunately, you don't have that option."

"Because I can't protect myself?"

His lips curl into a smirk, but his voice is serious. "Because I want you in my bed every night—not hiding away in some house across my territory."

Unanswered Questions

When word comes that Klaus has fully recovered, Alpha Dane takes me with him to see him.

Klaus sits at the edge of the same bed I had once believed I would die in. His hair, no longer tied back, falls loosely around his shoulders as he drums his fingers against the mattress. The moment he spots me, he's on his feet.

"You okay?"

I nod, and Dane's reassuring squeeze steadies me. "Are you?"

"That bastard came out of nowhere."

"Which one?" Dane's voice is measured, unreadable.

Klaus frowns. "What do you mean?"

"The blonde—Cassandra. She's the one who knocked you out first, wasn't she?"

"She asked me to grab a book for her. When I reached up, she struck me from behind with something heavy."

"Have you ever seen her before?" Dane presses.

"Never." Klaus shakes his head. "And when they left, that other guy... he came out of nowhere. It was like he dropped down from above and cut straight down my back." His eyes flicker to mine. "Don't worry—I'm healed. Fast healer, remember?"

"You've never spoken to them before? Never interacted with them?" Dane's voice is firm, scrutinizing.

Klaus' expression hardens. "Are you asking if I set this up?" His voice is laced with disbelief. "Dane, why the hell would I risk getting myself nearly killed? The guy barely missed my heart. I'm not stupid enough to cross you—I've seen what happens to those who do." His gaze darkens. "I'd rather be on your side than against you."

I glance at Dane, but he doesn't react. I've only seen him kill once—Kyle. How much darker could he go?

Dane turns away. "Right."

Klaus exhales. "So, am I free to go?"

Dane nods. "Yeah."

As Klaus steps toward the door, he glances at me. "Are we still having our tutoring session tonight?"

Before I can answer, Dane speaks. "No. Not tonight."

There's no anger in his tone, but there's something else—something that makes my stomach twist. Unpredictability.

Klaus doesn't argue. He just nods and walks out without another word.

Dane remains standing there, his face unreadable, his energy unsettling.

"Are we going back to the house?" My voice is hesitant, breaking the silence.

His eyes snap to mine, and something shifts in them. A small smile plays on his lips, and he nods. But for the rest of the evening, he barely speaks.

He watches me instead.

Every move.

Every breath.

By the time I slip into bed, my skin prickles with unease. It's only then, as I pull the covers over me, that he finally speaks.

"Have you been linking them by accident?"

His voice is quiet, but the weight of his words sends a shiver down my spine.

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Dane

She glares at me, frustration flickering in her eyes. "Is that... is that even possible?"

"Right now, anything seems possible."

"Because I'm a monster?"

"You need to stop calling yourself that."

She sighs, rolling onto her back, her gaze fixed on the ceiling. Her hands rest on her flat stomach as if trying to ground herself.

"They're all going to react the same way," she mutters, puffing out her cheeks.
"Except you... you're the only one who doesn't seem..."

"I'm not concerned with what you are," I interrupt. "All that matters to me is that you're mine. And why are you still insisting on wearing clothes to bed?"

I pull her against me, my fingers slipping beneath the oversized T-shirt she insists on keeping on. My hand barely grazes the small of her back when she suddenly pushes me away.

"I can't," she whispers, tugging the shirt down over her hips.

She's hiding something. Trying to keep her thoughts clear, so I won't pick up on whatever is bothering her.

Pinning her to the bed, I shift my weight over her. "What's wrong?"

"You're... crushing my... lungs," she breathes out.

I ease up, just enough to give her some air—but not enough to let her escape.

"Are you still feeling sore?"

She closes her eyes, not answering.

"And you're embarrassed?" I press, moving my leg between hers, forcing her thighs apart.

Her head shakes slightly. "Uncomfortable," she whispers.

Brushing a kiss over the mark on her neck, I let out a low sigh. "Fine. Just for tonight."

Only then does she relax, her body curling into mine. She falls asleep before I do, her breathing soft and steady.

A Brewing Storm

'We need to stop Trey and Cassandra,' Aero mutters. 'They nearly ignited a war in neutral territory.'

'I know.'

'And we both know there are others just waiting for a chance to take us down.'

'I know,' I say again, my fingers threading through Neah's dark hair.

Anger simmers beneath my skin, a slow-burning fire I can't extinguish. 'I've been furious, Aero. I wish we had been there. Or that she had never gone in the first place. But I can't change what's already happened. The only thing I can do is make sure it never happens again.'

I glance down at Neah, her long lashes casting delicate shadows over her cheeks as she sleeps. Peaceful. Oblivious to the rage growing inside me.

'I need to run,' I murmur to Aero, carefully untangling myself from Neah's grasp.

'We should talk to Devon again,' he suggests.

'He didn't know Neah was going into the city.'

'No, but he might have a better idea of what they're planning next. Or at the very least, he could help us predict their next move.'

A Midnight Visit

Pulling on a pair of shorts, I step outside into the night. Snow blankets the ground, the cold biting at my bare feet, offering a welcome contrast to the constant heat of my body.

The dungeon looms ahead, a silent structure beneath the moon's dim glow. A guard stands by the entrance, slouched against the door, looking bored out of his mind.

"Any issues?" I ask.

"No, he keeps to himself," the guard mutters, stepping aside to let me through.

The heavy door swings shut behind me, and I flick on the lights.

"Seriously? In the middle of the night?" Devon grumbles, rubbing his eyes. But when he realizes it's me, his posture straightens. "Apologies, Alpha Dane. I'm not the best without sleep. What can I do for you?" He stretches, suppressing a yawn.

"Neah," I say simply.

He blinks. "You're going to have to be more specific."

"You keep saying she's an Alpha."

"Because she is."

"Right," I say, folding my arms. "Then what exactly is she capable of?"

Devon exhales, running a hand through his hair. "No one knows for certain. I've done some research, but the most I've found suggests that someone in her position holds immense power. They just need to learn how to unlock it."

"Are we talking magic? Like a witch?"

Devon shakes his head. "Honestly, Alpha Dane, I don't know. But what I do know is that she has the potential to restore our rightful place in this world."

"And that's why they fear her?"

His expression turns grim. "Exactly."

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A Tense Exchange

"Right now, I don't think it's fear of her specifically—it's fear of what she might become."

"You mean Trey and Cassandra?"

"They're the only leaders left. What do you think?"

"What is it that Trey wants Neah to remember?"

Devon narrows his eyes. "What are you getting at?" He stands, stepping closer to the bars that separate us.

"What does Neah need to be reminded of?"

His brow furrows. "I don't know what you're asking, Alpha Dane. Is she in danger again? You have to let me out. You need to let me help her."

"She's my mate."

"I know that," he says firmly. "But she's surrounded by Wolves. She needs someone who understands what it's like to be one of us."

"We've had this conversation before. It's her decision to make."

Devon's expression darkens. "She doesn't even know you're down here, does she,

Alpha Dane? All these late-night visits, and she's oblivious while you all dig into her past."

"Late-night visits? I've only been here a handful of times since you arrived."

"Your best friend comes down here often," he says with a smirk. "Seems like he's having some relationship troubles."

I frown. "Why is Eric talking to you about his mate?"

Devon shrugs. "Sometimes, a third opinion helps."

"And what exactly do you two discuss?"

"Like I said, his problems. In return for my insight, he brings me things." He gestures toward his cell, now stocked with fizzy drinks, books, and extra clothing.

I make a mental note to have a word with Eric about this. He never mentioned it.

Devon grips the bars tightly, his knuckles whitening. "I swear to you, Alpha Dane, I'm not here to harm her. You know you have the authority to release me. You don't have to wait for my sister's decision."

'I still don't trust him,' Aero growls in my mind.

I ignore him and focus on Devon. "Why would Trey and Cassandra go into the city?"

Devon tilts his head. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"They've always kept to themselves, hidden from other packs. No one even knew your kind existed, and now they're traveling into neutral territory. Why?"

"My guess? The same reason anyone else goes there. They're looking for something... or someone." His gaze sharpens. "Neah ran into them, didn't she?"

"Eric got her out."

A grin spreads across Devon's face. "The hero. I always knew he had a good heart."

"He's not interested in men," I remind him flatly.

Devon chuckles. "People can be persuaded, Alpha Dane. They just need that little seed of doubt." He winks. "But anyway, if Trey and that woman went into the city, there's a reason. Some kind of plan."

"Could they track her down?"

"Cassandra, no. Trey... maybe."

"Because of the blood connection?"

He nods. "But for that to work, he would have already needed to be nearby. Just like when I found Moonshine. I sensed it, but the closer I got, the stronger it became. That's how I knew I was going in the right direction."

He paces in his cell, muttering under his breath. Then he stops abruptly, locking eyes with me.

"Who knew she was going?"

"My sister, her tutor, a few other women. And, of course, me and Eric."

"All Wolves, right? No other Lycans hiding in your pack?"

"Other than Neah, no. Could she have accidentally reached out to him? Opened some kind of link between them?"

"Highly unlikely. The more logical explanation is that they were already in the city for something else, and Neah stumbled right into it. They won't come here. You have the numbers."

I study him carefully, recalling the way he had once explained the origins of Lycans. He claimed it was just a story, that no one truly knew the truth.

But what if it wasn't a myth?

"Devon," I ask slowly, "can they create more?"

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Dane

'What's our next move?' Aero growls in frustration.

'I need to talk to my Beta first.'

'This is getting out of hand. We need to get control of this—now.'

I pound on Eric's door, my fist landing hard against the wood.

"Alright, alright!" he grumbles as he yanks the door open, irritation clear in his voice.

"Are you trying to wake my kids?" His expression shifts the moment he realizes it's me. "What happened?"

"Devon," I state bluntly.

His face falls. "Damn, he told you." He sighs, running a hand through his hair. "Look, I just needed someone to vent to. And I know you've had—"

"That's not the issue," I cut him off. "Whatever you've got going on with him is your business. But that's not why I'm here. They can create more."

Eric blinks, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "What?"

"They can create more Lycans."

"Well, that makes sense. Just like we can create more Wolves—"

"Eric," I interrupt, giving him a sharp look. He's missing the point.

His eyes widen as realization sets in. "Shit. You're serious?" He exhales deeply. "But we're taking Devon's word on this?"

"He said it's an unspoken rule—they're not supposed to do it. Trey likely enforced it to keep their numbers small and their existence hidden. If they had grown too large, they would have been noticed."

I recount everything Devon told me, including how Lycans can only track Neah if they're already close to her.

"You think they were in the city recruiting?" Eric asks.

"The city isn't just home to Wolves. It's filled with humans who have no idea about our kind. So yes, that's a real possibility."

"We should've looked into them more," he mutters.

"There was no reason to suspect anything. They smelled like Wolves, acted like Wolves—it was easy to overlook. But that contract Trey wanted? It was never about needing our support or even Neah. I think their real goal has always been to dismantle me. And it all started with what I created."

Eric exhales sharply. "They wouldn't be the first, Dane. Plenty of people—hell, even some of your past brides—have tried to get out of their contracts or use them to gain information. If Trey and his pack start turning people, we still have the advantage. We have the numbers, and our fighters are stronger. Your brother made sure of that."

His gaze sharpens. "How's Neah handling all this?"

"She doesn't know," I admit. "She was asleep when I left."

A noise upstairs makes us pause. We wait for a moment to see if one of his boys comes down, but when silence follows, we decide to move our conversation outside.

"Is she okay?" Eric asks. "She was quiet on the way back from the city—not like how she was that first night we brought her here, but... different."

"I think she's still processing everything. She's grown attached to Klaus, and seeing him that close to death shook her." I hesitate. "It's not panic, exactly, but she's... unsettled."

"Thanks for getting her out of there," I say after a beat.

Eric raises an eyebrow. "You don't have to thank me. I'm your Beta—protecting your mate is part of my duty."

"You never seemed interested in protecting the others."

He smirks. "You never claimed them."

We spend the rest of the night in his backyard, brainstorming strategies. By the time the sun rises, his sons come bounding outside, demanding food for their "starving stomachs."

Eric gives me a knowing look. "She has to be on board for our next move. It won't work without her."

'She's going to need a hell of a lot more confidence,' Aero mutters.

'Then we help her find it.'

'So much for our run,' Aero grumbles.

'Pack run is tomorrow night. We'll wait until then.'

By the time I return to the packhouse, Neah is already awake, sitting in the kitchen with a piece of toast in hand. She's braided her hair back today, and I notice she's taken out her earplugs.

"How are your ears?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

"Trying... trying to get used to it," she mutters, wrinkling her nose. "You're up early."

"I never slept."

"Oh."

"Aero wanted more answers from Devon, and then I went to see Eric."

She takes another bite but doesn't say anything. She does that a lot—keeping her questions to herself.

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A Truth Unveiled

"I learned something about Lycans last night."

Neah stays silent, watching me with cautious eyes as she takes another bite of toast.

"It turns out they might be able to create more of their kind—by biting humans."

Her toast slips from her fingers, hitting the table with a soft thud. Her blue eyes widen, and her lips part slightly. "Wait... is that even possible?"

"I can't say for sure," I admit, "but it's highly likely. That's how they were created in the first place."

She swallows hard. "Why would Trey want to do that?"

"Numbers," I reply. "Right now, he doesn't have enough followers. But if he starts turning humans into Lycans..." I pause, already anticipating her reaction. "They'll need a real Alpha—not some power-hungry pretender."

**

Please continue following lokepub; the other chapters will be updated soon.