



SASHA'S
WOUNDED
Wolf



LACEY THORN

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Sasha's Wounded Wolf](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About the Author](#)

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Sasha's Wounded Wolf

James Pack

By Lacey Thorn

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Sasha's Wounded Wolf

by

Lacey Thorn

Sasha...

My life changed forever the day I was attacked. I barely survived. If not for my brother, I wouldn't have. Learning that my mate had died in an accident the same day made me pray for death. Revenge gave me purpose until there was no more blood to spill. It was a miracle that saved me. One I vowed to hide away and protect with my life. Until an old friend said he had information on my mate's death.

Rowan...

I remember the explosion, the fire, and the darkness that sucked me away from it all. Then I woke to unbearable pain and damage even my wolf couldn't heal. Fire is a brutal enemy, but it wasn't what destroyed me. No, destruction came with news my mate had been attacked and killed. I didn't believe it. Refused to even entertain the possibility. Now, I won't rest until I find her and put those responsible for separating us six feet under.

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Dedication

To Rowan & Sasha, you're survivors.

Don't ever forget it!

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Chapter One

~ Rowan ~

I left behind the cabin we were staying in and walked toward the edge of the woods that surrounded the log refuge. The sky was alive with stars while the moon fast approached a fullness that called to my wolf. We'd both craved the open air since I'd awoken from a medically induced coma. The medical team taking care of me kept me under for nine months. The hope had been that my wolf would be able to heal me given enough time, but there was some damage even my animal side couldn't walk away from. Instead, I'd woken to the fact two of my closest friends had burned to death while doing their best to cover me and protect me from the flames eating at us. They'd achieved their goal, destroying themselves in the process.

“Rowan.”

I glanced over and noted Easton had followed me outside. Both he and Lincoln had been my constant shadows since I'd awoken. I got it. They'd almost lost me, and they weren't taking any more chances with their alpha. Both men were like brothers to me. Always had been. From our first breath to our last. That was our creed. One that hit even deeper now that I'd faced the flames.

“I'm good,” I told him, but I knew he didn't believe me. This wasn't the first night I'd been unable to sleep. When I managed to tumble off, nightmares of burning flames brought me awake, panting for breath while I used my hands to put out a fire that only burned in my mind.

“Maybe, it's time we go home.”

Easton had said the same thing for the last two weeks. He'd been mentioning it since I'd saved a fellow wolf from a trap and sent her to my sister and her mate.

“Where would that be?” I snapped. “The Rigton pack no longer exists.”

“Of course, we do,” Easton snapped back.

“No. They were absorbed into the James Pack two years after I *died* in the explosion. In the last eighteen months, they’ve cleaned house. Something I should have done when I was alpha. They’re better off without me. Bastion is the leader I knew he was, and my sister is the safest she’s ever been. Ivy’s found her mate, and he’ll protect her and little Jasmine. They deserve that. The whole pack does. What they don’t deserve is me bringing my shit back to them and having more of them caught in the crossfire of an enemy I still can’t locate.”

But we both knew I wasn’t only trying to track down the unknown enemy.

“That’s the stupidest shit I’ve ever heard you say.”

Easton paced away, body shaking with anger.

“Someone tried to kill you. If not for Josh and Patrick’s quick thinking, they would have succeeded. Not a word, Rowan,” he warned when I would have interrupted. “Patrick and Josh made their choice and saved your life. Any one of us would have done the same. Gladly. With no remorse.”

“Knowing it doesn’t make it any easier to accept.”

I turned my head, pinching the bridge of my nose as I squeezed my eyes shut and remembered the two men I’d thought of as brothers. God, the five of us had been inseparable. It was only natural they rose with me when I became alpha. My brothers. My most trusted pack members. Two of whom were dead.

“How long are you going to hunt, Ro?” Easton’s voice was low and filled with a sorrow I wouldn’t let myself feel. Not yet.

“Until I find her.”

“Lincoln told you about the attack. She was killed. You’ve got to accept that.”

The same day the truck I'd been in had flipped and caught fire, Sasha had been attacked. I still didn't have all the details. There were too many conflicting stories, but they all ended the same way. Sasha Volkov was presumed dead. She'd gone over the falls, and it was assumed her body had washed away.

"They never found her body."

Plus, I truly believed I'd know if Sasha were gone. She was my mate. I'd been ready to introduce her to the pack, had called my sister home to let Raina meet her first. Then fire had rained down on me, and I'd woken in hell. No pack. No mate. And a body seared by flames so hot even my wolf hadn't been able to fully heal the blistered skin.

"You expect me to believe Nico disappeared after his sister's death?" I questioned Easton.

Sasha's brother hadn't been there when she was attacked. Many believed he'd gone off to grieve his sister in the aftermath, but I knew better. If Sasha were dead, Nico would burn down the world to avenge his twin. The fact no one knew where he was said all I needed to know. He'd taken her somewhere to protect her, thinking I'd been killed and probably fearing she'd be next.

For over three years now.

Whoever was behind what had happened to me and the attack on Sasha had robbed my mate and me of three and half years. Years we could have been loving one another, building a family together, making a life together. Some days, I worried she wouldn't want to be with me when I found her. My face had been untouched by the flames, but my body hadn't been so lucky. I'd suffered such severe burns over my chest, back, and arms that the medical team I'd been taken to had forced me into a coma to try to help me heal. My back and right side bore the worst of the scars.

"If he took her away to protect her, we may never find him."

I knew Easton was correct, but I wouldn't accept that. I couldn't. He didn't understand what it was to be mated. None of the nine wolves who'd stuck by my side did. They were all carefree and single, but my heart was no longer my own. It was Sasha's. I craved her the same way I needed air to breathe. She'd been my first thought when I awoke, and she'd remained at the forefront of my mind every day since.

"I'm worried about you, Ro."

"No need to worry, E," I assured him. "I'm going to find my mate, claim her as I intended, and destroy the person responsible for trying to kill us."

"I'm with you there, but hear me out for a minute. Every time I mention going home, you cut me off."

"I'm not going—"

"Goddamn it, Ro! Listen to me!" Easton roared. "We're doing everything we can. Spinning our wheels everywhere. The guys are getting restless."

"They're free to go anytime they want. Any of you are."

"Fuck you," Easton snapped. "I'm saying let's go back and talk to Bastion James and his pack. They'll help us. Help us find the ghost who ordered the hit on you, on Sasha. They could help us locate Sasha and Nico. Christ, Raina doesn't even know you're alive."

My heart ached at that thought, but I'd made the choice when I'd first awoken. I'd contacted no one but my father. Knowing he'd hurt himself trying to get to me had hit me hard. I'd needed to make sure he was okay and hearing the emotion in his voice when I'd reached out had guilt assailing me. Our last words before my disappearance had been filled with animosity. My father hadn't wanted to accept my mate. I hadn't cared and had let him know he had no say in who I took as my mate.

We hadn't mentioned that when I'd called, though. My focus had been on my sister and the remaining members of the Rigton wolves. I'd urged him to make contact with Bastion James and his pack. I'd known Bastion would take one look at

my sister and fall hard for her. Then he'd step in and protect the rest of the Rigton wolves. I'd planned to introduce Bastion and Raina myself. Circumstances may have prevented that, but it had worked out anyway. My sister was now mated to a man worthy of her. I couldn't ask for more than that. Yet, Bastion had given it to me. He hadn't just taken the Rigton wolves under his protection. He'd accepted them into the James Pack.

Knowing my sister and the remainder of our pack were safe gave me the ability to do what I needed. I'd spent nine months in a coma. The first three months after that had been the darkest of my life. My wolf had rejected skin grafts. With intense rehabilitation I'd learned to make my right arm work again. It had been slow and painful, and there had been far too many days where I'd wanted to throw in the towel. Days where I'd questioned why I'd survived. Every time, it was Sasha's face that pulled me back. Her smile. Her long, dark hair that always smelled like flowers. Her deep-blue eyes that called to my soul as no other ever had. My mate.

I'd spent the last two and a half years hunting for answers. Who'd planned the attacks on me and Sasha? Why? And where was my mate hiding? She was out there somewhere. Thinking I was gone. The thought of her grieving me made my blood boil. The thought of her moving on without me threatened to destroy both man and beast.

"I can't go back. Not yet. But you and any of the others are always free to return. Join the James Pack. Go with my blessing."

"And leave our alpha unprotected?" Easton's face was coated in disgust.

"I'm not your alpha anymore."

"You'll always be our alpha, Rowan. Pack. No pack. We're with you to the end."

Easton held his arm out, and I took it, clasping it tightly with mine, uncaring of the ridged and twisted flesh that marred my skin. He'd seen it, had changed my dressing when I'd been too oblivious to know what was happening. Nine men had stayed with me. They'd all watched over me, protected me

when I'd been locked inside myself, my body struggling to survive. They'd left everything behind. For me. It was a debt I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to repay.

"Just think about it," Easton urged. "Please. It's been three and a half years, Ro."

"I know," I agreed, a growl rattling through my chest. Did he think I didn't know exactly how long it had been since I'd seen my mate? Held her in my arms and promised her forever?

"Have you ever questioned if we're doing this all wrong?" Easton asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone thinks you're dead. They think Sasha's dead."

"And?" I prompted when Easton paused.

"Sasha thinks you're dead." Easton blinked as if he'd just figured something out.

"What?" I barked.

"Sasha will only keep hiding if she thinks you're dead. What would she do if she knew you were alive, Ro? What would Nico do? Christ, we've been approaching this wrong the whole time."

"Sasha would come out of wherever she's hiding to find me. I can't let her do that, E. She's safe, right now. I can't put her back in danger."

As badly as I wanted to find her, I wanted to protect her more. I wanted the person who'd planned the attacks on us, but I wouldn't use Sasha as bait.

"You're thinking like a mate," Easton accused.

"I am her mate." There was no tamping down the growl that filled my chest.

"Then we get in touch with Bastion and have him spread word he knows something about your death. That it wasn't an accident. That he's coming for them."

“And put my sister right in the thick of it? Fuck no, E. What the hell’s wrong with you?”

“Think, Ro. Bastion James won’t let anything happen to your sister. You said it yourself. Raina is the safest she’s ever been with her mate. And Sasha. If she’s alive—”

“She is,” I interrupted.

“Then she has Nico with her. He won’t let anything happen to her. It’s time to go back, Ro. Time to let everyone know you survived. Finally flush this ghost out of the wind. And when he comes at you again, we’ll be ready.”

Maybe, I was tired. Maybe, as he’d said, I was sick of chasing the wind. But Easton was finally making sense. I’d been gone three and a half years.

“Call Bastion. Tell him you want to meet. You, E. Not me. No one knows I’m still alive until I’m ready.”

He nodded. “Whatever you want, Alpha. I’ll head in. Make the call. If we leave in the morning, we can be back in Rigton County by tomorrow night.”

“We leave tonight,” I ordered. “Arrange the meeting for two days.”

Two days. Then my whole world would change again.

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Chapter Two

~Sasha~

I brushed Raine's dark locks out of his eyes as I hummed a lullaby. My son was my whole world. The only thing that had kept me going when I'd lost my mate. I'd wanted to die. To join Rowan in whatever was next, but he'd left a piece of himself inside me. Raine would be three on his next birthday. A gift and a reminder of how long I'd been without my mate. Three years and six months. Forty-five months. One hundred and eighty weeks. Too long. Too fucking long.

Dropping a soft kiss on his brow, I finally pulled myself away, leaving his door ajar before heading back to the kitchen and the post-dinner cleanup I'd left behind to enjoy our pre-bedtime ritual. I cherished every moment with my son. The sound of running water let me know I was no longer alone.

"Hey," I called as I cleared the doorway.

"Sit," my brother ordered. "You look exhausted, Sasha. It's like you forget to take care of yourself when I'm not here."

"I'm fine, Nico."

I'd been saying those words to him since the moment I'd pulled myself back from the edge of the madness Rowan's death had left me in. I'd been ready to hunt down anyone and everyone to get answers. I'd wanted to burn down the world, to make them all suffer the same hell I was. I'd had to settle for killing the ones who'd come after me—or at least, the ones Nico had been able to track down. My twin was as unforgiving as I was. More ruthless and bloodthirsty most of the time.

"Sit. I've got the dishwasher almost loaded. Then we'll talk."

My gaze snapped to him, taking in the formidable male who was my other half. Just as my son had saved me, so had Nico. I couldn't leave him alone in the world. For most of our

lives, it had been just the two of us. Born to one of the few wolf packs left in Russia, our mother had snuck us out of the country as infants and raised us in America. We'd never had the security of a pack around us, but we'd had each other. That was all that had mattered. Until I met Rowan Byrd.

"You're thinking of him." Nico's hand caressed my cheek before he sat at the table across from me.

"I'm always thinking of him," I murmured.

"I know."

There was something in his eyes that gave me pause. His expression.

"What did you find?"

Nico was always heading out to follow a lead of some sort. Though he'd tracked down the men who'd attacked me, we'd never found the person who'd ordered the attack. He'd also been casually looking into what had happened with Rowan. It didn't help that his pack, the Rigtos, had declared it an accident. An accident! What bullshit! Trucks didn't flip and catch fire as they did in the movies. Something had caused it to ignite. Something that wasn't natural. I wanted vengeance for my mate. Blood for blood. My son deserved no less.

"I think it's time we talk to Rowan's father."

I shook my head.

"No! Why would I talk to the man who told Rowan I wasn't good enough for him? That Rowan should look for a woman who'd bring a strong alliance? A man who readily accepted his son's death without question? I have nothing to say to him."

Rowan had told his father about me prior to introducing me to the rest of the Rigton wolves. He'd wanted to wait for his sister to return before making an announcement to the whole pack. His father hadn't wanted Rowan to settle for me, for a wolf who had no value. Rowan had ignored him. Then he'd died. I'd been attacked. When the dust had settled the only members of the Rigton wolves who'd known about me

were gone. There'd been no point in seeking out the rest of the pack, so Nico had gotten me away.

"I don't think he did," Nico admitted, and I stared at him, searching his eyes for answers to unspoken questions. "I think he's been lying this whole time."

"What are you saying?"

"I need you to listen to me and not blow up, okay? Remember that Raine is sleeping in the other room."

"What. Are. You. Saying?" I demanded, forcing out each word through clenched teeth.

"I met with someone while I was gone."

"You do that every time you're gone. Several in fact. Get to the point."

"You've stayed isolated here in the cabin since Raine was born," Nico reminded me as if I weren't aware I'd shut myself off.

"And?" I prompted when he stared at me.

"There are some things I haven't shared with you. I wanted to give you time to grieve. To heal."

"If you're planning to make a point, get there fast, Nico."

"The Rigton Pack is no more."

"What!" I cried, pushing to my feet. "Someone took out the whole pack? Oh, my God! Rowan's sister. Did they get his sister?"

Raina Byrd meant the world to my mate. He'd basically raised his younger sister. He'd only been ten when she'd been born, but with his father as alpha of the Rigton Pack at the time and his mother returning immediately to her duties as pack doctor, Raina had been left to Rowan. He'd loved her from her first breath until his last. I was certain of that. I should have tracked down Raina, forced her to come into hiding with me. Grief and rage had prevented that. Plus, Raina and I had never met. She'd been in college when I'd met

Rowan. He'd been calling her home to meet me when he'd died.

"No. Raina's fine. She's mated to Bastion James. He's taken the remnants of the Rigton Pack and made them part of the James Pack."

"Jesus, Nico! You could have led with that."

I paced around the table.

"Is Rowan's father a part of the James Pack?"

"Yes."

I growled, unable to contain the anger that went through me. I'd never forget hearing my mate's father tell Rowan I wasn't good enough for him. Not having a pack had never mattered to me. Until that moment. Until my mate's father tried to make me feel insignificant and small. Then it hit me. What Nico had said.

"You don't think he's accepted Rowan's death?"

"I've been keeping an eye on the Rigton wolves. The ones who stayed after Rowan died. I paid attention when they became part of the James Pack."

"Anthony?" I asked, knowing my brother had been good friends with one of the James Pack wolves, Anthony Rossi. Anthony was one of James' inner circle. Hell, there'd been a time when I'd been sure Nico would push for us to join the James Pack. He hadn't, though, and I'd never questioned why.

Nico nodded. "Anthony said they've been cleaning up. Getting rid of some troublemakers who lingered with the Rigton wolves. Bastion doesn't tolerate wolves of that ilk. And Hannibal's joined them."

"Hannibal Craig joined a wolf pack?"

There was no way to hide my disbelief. We'd crossed paths with Hannibal several times in the past. Enough times we'd struck up a friendship. Nico had helped him on a few occasions, tracking down wolves that needed to be brought to justice. I'd joined a few times. We hadn't seen each other in four years.

“He’s actually mated to Belinda James,” Nico offered. “And it gets better. Another member of the James Pack is mated to his sister, Cici.”

I’d never met Cici, but I knew Hannibal was very protective of her. I was happy for both of them. I really was. Every wolf wanted to find their mate. I was happy they had. I had, too, but he’d been stolen from me before we’d even realized I was pregnant. In the aftermath of Rowan’s death and my attack, I’d disappeared with Nico. Everything my brother did was to protect me. Now, it was for me and Raine.

“I don’t care what Anthony has to say. Or that Hannibal and Cici are a part of the James Pack. I’m happy that Raina is protected. But I won’t take my son any place where Rowan’s father is.”

I sat across from my brother once again, reaching out and taking his hands in mine, squeezing them.

“If he said or did anything to hurt Raine, I’d rip out his throat, Nico. Don’t make Raine watch his mother kill because I swear to you that I will. One word, Nico. One nasty comment about me or my son, and I would gut him and leave him to bleed out.”

“Sasha.”

“No.”

I shook my head furiously. I didn’t care what Rowan’s father had lost. I still swore he had something to do with the attacks on both of us. It didn’t matter to me that he’d injured himself trying to pull Rowan from the truck. It was guilt as far as I was concerned. Rowan had told his father he was claiming me as his mate. Then he’d had an accident and I’d been accosted before it could happen. That was more than coincidence. If Richard Byrd hadn’t been the force behind what had happened, then he knew who was. I’d screamed that at Nico more than once over the years.

“I spoke to Anthony just before I walked in tonight. He invited us to come visit. I accepted.”

“Have fun.”

“He said they had an interesting call from a wolf who used to be a part of the Rigton Pack.”

“Who?”

I held my breath as I waited for my brother’s answer.

“Easton.”

My heart almost stopped at the mention of one of my mate’s closest friends. They’d been like brothers. Rowan, Lincoln, Easton, Patrick, and Josh. Patrick and Josh had died with Rowan.

“Does he know where Lincoln is?”

“They’re together,” Nico told me. “And they asked for a meeting with Bastion James. They said they have information to share with him.”

“What information?”

My stomach was in knots. I swore I’d throw up any moment.

“About Rowan.”

Nico’s words were like a bomb exploding in my gut. My ears rang. My palms were clammy. Everything came rushing at me. Except air. I couldn’t remember how to inhale. My lungs ceased to work.

“Breathe, Sasha. Breathe,” Nico ordered, jerking my chair back. He forced my head down between my legs, holding it there while he rubbed my back briskly. “Breathe for me, Sasha.”

We stayed like that for longer than I cared to admit. I struggled while my brother did his best to put me back together. God, what would I do without him? He’d always been there for me, but even more so since I’d lost Rowan. Since I’d had Raine. My brother was the best uncle in the world to my son. I knew he did his best to stand in for Raine’s father. It made me proud, sad, and angry all at once. Yes, I was fucked up. Losing a mate did that to a woman.

Finally, I forced my lungs to cooperate. Nico squatted beside my chair as I sat up.

“When are they meeting with James?” I whispered.

“Two days.”

“Does Anthony know what Easton wants to talk about?”

Nico shook his head, but there was something in his gaze.

“What is it? What are you not telling me?”

“Not long ago, a woman showed up asking for the James Pack, asking for help.”

I shrugged. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“She said a man had helped her and sent her to Rigton County. To the James Pack. He told her he’d known Bastion and Raina in another life. She was running, and he sent her there to get help in making a stand.”

“Nico, what is all this leading to?”

“The man who sent her reminded her of Raina. Similar blue eyes.”

My heart stalled then leapt into a fast staccato beat.

“She said he had scars on his arm. Scars that could have been made from serious burns.”

“Nico. I can’t...” I paused, clutching my chest as my lungs threatened to seize again. “What are you...”

I didn’t have to finish. My brother knew what I was asking.

“I think someone survived that fire. I think a lot of wolves left the Rigton Pack when it was most vulnerable, and I can only think of one reason they’d do that. Only one person who would make Easton and Lincoln leave when they’d just lost their alpha.”

“Rowan.” His name was a whisper of hope.

“I think someone survived that fiery wreckage, Sasha. I think we need to go to Rigton County and the James Pack to

get those answers.”

“When do we leave?”

“Tonight,” Nico told me. “Raine will sleep through a big part of the drive. We’ll be there by tomorrow night, and I’ll see what I can find out before Easton meets with James and the rest of the pack.”

“When you reach out, it’s only you, Nico. No one can know I’m there or about my son. Not until I’m ready. Promise me.”

“You know I’d give my life to protect you and my nephew,” Nico growled.

“I know. Do this for me, Nico? Promise me that no one will know I’m there until I decide. Please.”

“No one will know,” he swore. “I promise.”

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Chapter Three

~Rowan~

It was odd being back in Rigton County without being back. I should say, without anyone knowing I was back. My heart hurt. Everything rushed in all at once. Raina's laugh. Watching her and Ivy run around, getting into mischief. Chatting with Ivy when we were both missing Raina once my sister had gone off to college. I thought of little Rebel, who was mated to one of Bastion James' inner circle. My pack was safe. They were happy and thriving, and as much as that soothed me, it also left a hole in my heart. I should be with them. Celebrating. Living. But I hadn't really lived since I'd woken from the coma. I'd gone through the motions while I'd searched for my heart. There would be no life until I had her in my arms again, but she wasn't the only one missing.

We were staying in Lincoln's house. I'd spent plenty of time here in the past. We all had. I easily heard the echo of Patrick's howl. The one he gave for every little thing that was said. The sound of him and Josh bantering back and forth, picking at one another as only the best of friends could. I pictured Patrick on the sofa, sprawled out while Josh and Lincoln sat before the television playing war games. E and I were usually in the recliners, talking pack politics.

Now, Lincoln and Easton sat on the couch while I paced. All of us felt how empty it was without Patrick and Josh's large personalities. It was like losing them all over again. In my case, it was like waking up with a huge part of my soul missing.

"Fuck," I muttered, and Lincoln growled.

"Yeah," Easton agreed.

We'd always been able to read one another. From the time we were little boys. We'd never lost the connection. It

had only grown stronger. Especially in the last few years. Our circle was smaller, but the fire had forged it even stronger.

“I didn’t realize how hard this would be,” I told them.

“You should view it from our eyes.” Easton leaned his head back, squeezing his temples between his thumb and ring finger. “Last time we were here, we were pulling the three of you from the burnt hull of a truck cab.”

Lincoln shoved to his feet.

“I need some air,” he mumbled, making a beeline for the kitchen and the back door.

“He was the first one there,” Easton reminded me. “We put out the fire as quickly as we could, but it’d been too long.”

My arm tingled as if to remind me what the flames had done.

“A few of the pack got your father away. Took him to the clinic. The six of us that remained worked on getting out you, Patrick, and Josh.”

He’d told me before, but I knew he needed to purge it again. Being back here was fucking us all up.

“Patrick was...” He shook his head, leaning his head back on his shoulders and blowing out a breath before shoving to his feet. “Then we had to pull Josh off the top of you. That’s when you moaned. Christ! You moaned, and I about lost my mind when I realized you were still with us. Still breathing.”

He was shaking. I walked over and pulled him in. This was my brother, though we shared no parents. I knew how the events of that day had wrecked him. Had wrecked Lincoln.

“I’m here, E. I’m right here. I swear.”

E gave me a hard squeeze then stepped back.

“Lincoln was the one who found the remains of a device on the rear axle. He stayed behind while me and a few of the others got you out of there. It tossed the back end of that truck into the air, sending you guys into a flip. There was no way Patrick could have done anything about it. Lincoln suspected

there was another placed on or near the gas tank to make it blow, but there was no way for us to verify that once the fire got done with it. Everyone we've talked to said there was no way the tank would have blown like it did without help. None of you were supposed to walk away from that, Ro. None of you."

"None of us did," I uttered.

"Yeah," E agreed. "None of you did, and it fucking destroyed us. Then I found out about the attack on Sasha. Christ. Knowing she went over the falls. I searched. Lincoln searched. We knew you'd want answers when you woke up. When there was no sign of her. Damn, man. For a moment, I didn't want you to wake up. Not to that news."

"Don't judge yourself for that," I told him. "You were right. I didn't want to wake up to that."

"I keep thinking I failed you, Ro."

"Stop." I kept my voice hard, firm. We'd had this discussion before, too. "You saved my life. That's who you are, E. You saved me. You stayed by my side, and you've never once allowed me to feel sorry for myself."

"That's what brother's do," he muttered, and we grabbed palms, leaning in until our foreheads pressed together. "From first breath to last."

"From first breath to last," I repeated, a phrase that hit on a deeper level now that we'd lost Patrick and Josh. "We've got this, E."

"We do," he agreed as we moved apart. He glanced toward the kitchen. "One of us should go after Lincoln."

He said that, but we both knew Easton would be the one to go. I had no intention of making my presence known. Not yet. Not until I was ready. As much as the ghosts in the house were getting to me, I wasn't leaving it any time soon. I'd already given up on the idea of going to the meeting between Easton and Bastion. There was no way I'd be able to keep myself hidden. Especially if Raina was there, which I expected. My sister would never let Easton and Lincoln meet

with her mate without her there. Hell, I hoped they were both prepared for the bomb that would be my sister's temper.

Tomorrow night, everything would change again when they all met. When Easton and Lincoln let Bastion and Raina know someone had intentionally attacked me. None of the wolves with me had ever spoken of what they'd found that day. Other than us, no one else knew there was even a hint of foul play in the accident. Except for the men who'd tampered with the truck, and none of them would ever speak again. One had been dead before we got to him. The other two hadn't known who'd hired them. Or at least, they hadn't confessed anything before their deaths. Those we'd suspected had played a part in the attack on Sasha had already been dispatched. There was no question in my mind as to who'd done that. Nico. Then he'd gone off grid.

Both Easton and Lincoln had tried to reach Nico while I was still in a coma. They'd been desperate for information on Sasha. Hell, they'd wanted to have her there with me, thinking she might be the only person who could pull me from the depths of the hell I'd fallen into. They'd exhausted every contact available, but no one had known where Nico was. Everyone had assumed he'd gone into seclusion to mourn his sister. Even Easton and Lincoln. I knew better. I knew how close Nico and Sasha were. Twin wolves. Their bond was rare and unique even among shifters. Nico would have known immediately when Sasha was attacked. He would have felt it. Every moment of the attack.

He would have gotten to her as quickly as possible then gone hunting for those responsible. How long would it have taken him to get word of my accident? To learn I'd died. Fairly soon, I believed. He'd ditched both his and Sasha's phones and disappeared. Taken her somewhere I couldn't find them. I was grateful even as being without her destroyed me in ways the fire hadn't.

"Lincoln went to look around. Check out some of the old haunts. Get a lay of the land since we've been gone," Easton said as he walked back in.

“Am I doing the right thing?” I asked as I stood in front of the photographs Lincoln had hanging on the wall. Pictures of his parents. He and his sister. Of the five of us, laughing and mugging for the camera.

“It’s too late to back out now, Ro. The meeting is set for tomorrow.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. I mean hiding.”

Easton paused on his way to the recliners, head jerking as he turned to stare at me.

“In the beginning, yes. You were injured. There was too much unknown.”

“There’s still stuff we don’t know,” I couldn’t help reminding him.

“True,” he agreed with a nod. “But you’re not knocking at death’s door anymore. You’re here. Stronger than ever. So, if you’re hinting you’re ready to let Bastion and Raina know you survived, if you’re ready to let everyone know you’re back, then yes. Hell, yes! We’re home, Ro. Let’s stay.”

“You want to join the James Pack?”

Easton snorted a laugh. “Not in this lifetime. I’m Rigton ‘til I die.”

“There’s no more Rigton pack, E. I keep telling you that.”

“And I keep telling you that you’re delusional. As long as you live and breathe, the Rigton Pack survives. In you. In those of us who have never left your side,” Easton argued then held up his finger as his phone rang. “It’s Lincoln.”

“Hey,” he answered while I turned back to the pictures on the wall. “What? Where? How long ago?”

At the change in tone, I whipped back around, understanding something big had happened.

“I’ll tell him. Head back as soon as you can.”

Easton stared at me in complete silence.

“What is it?” I demanded when I couldn’t take it any longer. “Did something happen with Raina?”

“Raina’s fine, as far as we know,” he replied, but his face told me there was something else going on. “Lincoln headed over to one of the bars the pack used to frequent. He thought it’d be a good way to reach out to some of the Rigton wolves. Get a feel for how James and his pack have been treating them.”

I barely refrained from reminding him they were all James Pack members now. Bastion James had accepted them the moment he’d mated my sister. He and his pack had a reputation for being brutal but only when necessary. They were known to take in lone wolves. Whether they were on the run from trouble or leaving another pack or simply had never been a part of one. James took them in and let them show if they were pack material or not. Those who weren’t moved along quickly enough. Hell, he’d certainly weeded out the bad from the Rigton wolves.

“And? Who did he see there?”

“He never made it inside, but he swears he saw someone leaving when he got there.”

“Christ, E. Just spit it out. I’m not playing twenty fucking questions with you.”

“It was Nico Volkov.”

“Nico’s here?”

What the hell would Nico be doing in Rigton County now? Unless...

“He knows someone in the James Pack. He knows you’re coming here with news about me.”

“If it was him, then yes. It would appear so,” Easton offered.

It hit me like a jolt of electricity. If Nico was here, then Sasha was. He wouldn’t leave her anywhere without him. Not after hiding her so well for the last few years. My mate was here.

“Sasha’s here,” I whispered.

“We don’t know that, Ro,” Easton warned.

“I know it. If he’s here, she’s here. Call Lincoln back. I need to know where Nico might be staying. I need to find him.”

“We won’t be able to do that tonight without stirring up a bunch of questions.”

Easton held up his hands when I growled, canines flashing as I gave vent to my anger.

“Think, Ro. We don’t even know for sure if it’s him. Lincoln said he thinks it was, but he admitted he didn’t see the man for very long. We meet with James and your sister tomorrow. If Nico is here, if he came because of us, he’ll be there.”

“I’m going to the meeting,” I snapped.

“You’re going to let them know you’re alive?”

“I’m going to do what I should have done before all this happened. I’m going to claim my mate.”

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Chapter Four

~Sasha~

“When is the meeting?” I asked Nico as soon as he entered the house.

I’d already put Raine to bed for the evening, and I’d been pacing the front room ever since, waiting for my brother to get back. The brick home we were staying in belonged to Anthony Rossi. He and another member of the James Pack, Donovan Mitchell, lived here. They’d given up their home for my brother and me. For Raine, too, though they didn’t know about my son. About Raina’s nephew. I wondered vaguely what she’d think of me naming Rowan’s son after her. I knew my mate would have loved it. That was all that had mattered to me.

“Tomorrow as I said. Easton, Lincoln, and several others will arrive at Bastion James’ house early in the afternoon. Anthony’s already cleared it for me to be there when they do. It helped that Hannibal vouched for me, as well.”

My brother reached out, giving my shoulder a squeeze.

“You should get some rest, Sasha. Why don’t you go sleep with Raine tonight? He’s been quiet since we got here.”

“He’s anxious. He hasn’t been around other people.”

“I know,” Nico said with a weary sigh. “That’s my fault. I took you guys to the middle of nowhere.”

“You did what was needed to protect us. What I needed. I wouldn’t have survived without you.”

I leaned in and hugged my twin, holding him tightly as I sorted through my own fears and anxieties.

“I’m going to see Easton.”

“What?” Nico barked, pushing me to arm’s length. “We already discussed this. The best thing is for me to go and you

and Raine to stay here.”

“There wasn’t a discussion. There was you telling me and me not arguing until we got here.”

“Damn it, Sasha!”

“I’m not going back into hiding. That’s not the life I want for my son.”

“When the fuck did you make that monumental decision?” he demanded, a growl rising in his throat.

“On the drive here,” I admitted. “Raine deserves to know his family.”

“Now, you’re okay with him meeting Richard Byrd?”

“That man will have nothing to do with my son. Ever. But Raine should meet the aunt he was named after. They both deserve that opportunity. He’s a few months from three, Nico.”

“Think about this, Sasha. The moment you walk in there with Raine, they’ll know he’s Rowan’s son. He’s the spitting image of his father.”

“I know.”

How did he think I didn’t know that? Every time I looked at my son, I saw his father. I’d never even got to tell Rowan I was pregnant. Never had the opportunity to share one single moment of it with my mate. It had all been robbed from me. From both of us.

“At least, let me go to the meeting first,” Nico urged. “Let’s see what Easton and Lincoln have to share. Then I can arrange a private meeting with Raina and her mate.”

He pulled me close again, wrapping me in his arms and lowering his face until he rested his cheek against the top of my head.

“There’s still someone out there who wants you dead. Don’t put that bullseye back on you, sis. Don’t do that to me or Raine. Let me protect you like I have been. Once you and Raina talk, we can discuss what you want to do next.”

“Discussing means you listen to me, Nico.” I pushed back enough to glance up and meet his gaze. “I’m not that broken woman you fished out of the water. I’m not fragile anymore. And I’m not the enraged woman hellbent on avenging her mate. I spilled blood, and it brought me no closer to the man I love. It only left me more hollow, more broken. I’ll always be grateful you took care of me when I couldn’t take care of myself, when I didn’t have the will to. You saved my life, and I’m not just talking about the falls. You held me together and made me think of Raine when I didn’t care about anything. You reminded me that he’s a part of Rowan. That Raine is the most beautiful parts of me and my mate. I was destroyed. All I wanted to do when I found out my mate had burned to death in a fire was to join him. I wanted to curl up and go to sleep and never wake up. Until you reminded me I had something to live for. Someone who needed me.”

“Raine isn’t the only one who needs you,” Nico barked.

“I need you to,” I whispered. “I always will, but when we packed up to come here, I made a choice. I’m not going back. I’m done hiding. I’m done grieving.”

Nico stared at me for a long moment.

“What is it you want to do?”

“I want to live. I want Raine to live. I want to see him playing with other children, making friends like the ones his father had, packmates who will be together through everything. Rowan would want that. He’d want Raine here. If not a part of the Rigton Pack then a part of the pack that took them in when Rowan died.”

“You’re going to ask Bastion James to bring you into his pack?” Nico shook his head. “We don’t do packs, Sasha. Not you and me.”

“Those were mother’s rules when she snuck us out of Russia and brought us here. When our uncle was still hunting us. He’s gone, Nico. You killed him a long time ago. Those rules haven’t existed since then.”

“But—”

“Besides, did you think I wasn’t going to join Rowan’s pack when he announced me as his mate?”

“I knew you were going to join the Rigtos. Rowan even asked me to join.”

“I know,” I admitted. “I also know that you agreed.”

“That was for you. You know there’s no way I’m trusting anyone else to watch over and protect my twin.”

Nico’s lips twitched with a smile as he made that ludicrous statement. We both knew he’d respected Rowan. They’d got along from the moment they’d met. I think Nico had accepted Rowan and his friends as easily as I had. There’d been mutual respect between them. And me. They’d both loved me and known I’d never choose one over the other. Nico was my twin. My other half. Rowan had been my mate. My heart and soul. Now, I had Raine, and he was my heart and soul.

“I want to be there when Easton and Lincoln meet with the James Pack. I need to see them. I need to know things only they can tell me, but—”

I held up my hand before Nico could interrupt.

“But I’d like to have that conversation quietly. Do you think they’re at Lincoln’s house?”

“That would be the logical thing,” Nico agreed. “I can go check if you like.”

I shook my head.

“I want you to stay here with Raine.”

“Sasha…” Nico began but paused when I shook my head.

“It’s my turn. I can go see if Lincoln and Easton are there, or I can go see about meeting with Raina Byrd before tomorrow’s meeting.”

“Raina James,” Nico corrected me. “I can make some calls. See if she and James would be willing to stop by tonight.”

I don't like the idea of you going alone to see Easton and Lincoln."

"Why? You know they wouldn't hurt me."

"I don't know anything anymore. They disappeared right after Rowan was killed and you were attacked. No word from them. Nothing. That makes them look guilty."

"We disappeared right after the attack," I reminded my brother. "You tossed our cells, cleaned out our apartment and made sure we disappeared. How were they going to reach out to us?"

Nico shrugged. "You were my priority. Rowan died. You were attacked and almost killed. They disappeared. What conclusion would you make?"

"That they were searching for something. Or someone. They loved Rowan like a brother. You know that. And Rowan wasn't the only one killed. They lost Patrick and Josh that day, too. Hell, there's no way they even knew about the attack on me. If they left, it was to find answers to what happened to their pack brothers, to their alpha. Neither of them would ever betray Rowan. I know that. You know that."

Nico sighed, turning and pacing across the kitchen while raking his fingers through his hair. "I want to believe that, but the truth is I don't know. None of the men who attacked you had a clue who hired them or why. You remember those conversations. They only knew you weren't supposed to survive. They were contacted anonymously and paid in cash left in a public locker. The key mailed to them after you were presumed dead. None of them knew anything about Rowan. No matter how many times you asked them."

I growled as frustrated now as I had been then at the lack of answers. I still believed Richard Byrd factored in somehow. At least with me. He might not have set up his son's accident, but the man would have gladly ordered me killed. If that was what it took to get me out of Rowan's life, then Richard Byrd would have done it with no remorse. The man was evil. Rowan hadn't seen it, but I had. I'd heard it when

he'd told his son I wasn't worthy of him, that I would bring nothing to the pack as if I was nothing.

A knock on the backdoor had us both freezing in place. I nodded toward the front room and slipped out of the kitchen as quietly as I could and into the main room of the house. I was creeping toward the back hallway and the bedroom I had Raine in but paused when I heard voices in the kitchen. Nico must have answered the door. Before I could move again, the front door opened, and a man stepped inside. A fraction too late, my brain processed the fact it was Bastion James. I crouched, blocking the way to Raine, claws out, a growl rumbling from my throat.

"Sasha!" Nico cried as he tore into the room with Anthony and Donovan on his heels. My brother raced to my side, placing himself between me and any danger that might come my way.

James sauntered in with a raised brow, several others following behind him. I told myself to relax, to retract my claws, but my wolf was too close to the surface and the need to protect my son was too intrinsic to override. Then a woman caught my attention. Raina James. I saw my mate in her eyes, the set of her nose. They might have different coloring, but their facial features shouted their relation to one another.

"Sasha," Nico called, not daring to touch me but still trying to get my attention.

"Is there a reason your sister looks like she's ready to attack me?" Bastion James asked as if he weren't concerned at all.

Another growl rumbled in my chest. Bastion let his wolf rise within him as if the alpha animal might help me relax. Not with my son down the hall. I'd take out every bastard in the room if I needed to.

"Maybe because you walked into the house unannounced," I snapped.

"Sasha," Nico tried to pull my attention to him, but I wasn't taking my gaze off the men ranging around the room in

front of me. Another growl filled my chest. I knew about the James Pack. I knew them. That was to my advantage. They didn't know me.

“Stand down. Damn it! Stand down, Sasha. They're not going to hurt anyone.”

“Then tell them to stop edging closer.” My gaze snapped to the man inching closer to my right. “Move much closer and they'll be cleaning your guts off the floor when I rip you open.”

I bared my teeth, letting him see how close I was to shifting.

“What the hell?”

I knew that voice. Hannibal. Before I could say anything, the woman beside him froze. Her eyes seemed to roll back in her head.

“She is vengeance. Vengeance is she. Blood for blood. One will fall. He waits for you. Out of the dark. Into the light. Two halves made whole. And the alpha will rise.”

“Fucking hell,” Hannibal muttered as he scooped the woman into his arms when she swayed on her feet.

“Put her on the couch,” Raina ordered as she stepped around her husband, smacking him on the chest as she did. “And behave. All of you.”

She smiled at me. “Sorry about my mate. He can be an asshole. I'm Raina James. It's—”

Her words died off, eyes widening, pupils dilating as she noted something behind me. Someone.

“Oh, my God,” she cried as my son inched up behind me, wrapping his arms around my thigh and rubbing his face against my skin.

“Mama,” Raine whispered. “I scared.”

I crept back, nudging Raine with me.

“Wait!” Raina yelled as her mate wrapped around her from behind. “Don't go. I need to...” She paused, a sob

spilling from her.

“Raina?” Bastion asked, gaze going between me and his mate.

“It’s Rowan,” she whispered then shook her head at the looks she was given. “Rowan’s son. He looks just like my brother.”

“Sasha,” Nico murmured. “You wanted them to meet. He’s picking up on your fear. Calm down, sis. No one’s going to touch you or him. I swear to you.”

“You’re safe here,” Bastion promised, waving his hand. His men drew back behind him.

It wasn’t that I’d thought they were a threat, but when you lived in survival mode for as long as I had, it was a hard thing to shut off. Raine was all I had left of his father. I’d fight the entire James Pack to protect him, if needed.

“Please,” Raina begged as tears spilled down her cheeks.

I think that was what allowed me to gain control. I dropped to my knees, turned and wrapped my son in my arms.

“It’s okay, baby. Mama’s here. I’m right here.”

I scooped him up into my arms then turned to face the room again. Raine had his face buried in my neck, one arm wrapped around me while the other hand gripped my hair. I eased forward to stand beside Nico, and my brother put his arm around us both, leaning low to whisper to Raine. Raine turned his head to scan the room, taking in all the new faces with the curiosity of a toddler who’d only ever been around his mom and uncle. His grip on me tightened, but no fear showed on his face.

“Oh, God,” Raina said again, her hand rising to cover her mouth.

“Raina,” Bastion soothed, and my son perked up in my arms.

“Your name’s like mine,” Raine offered his aunt with a tentative smile.

“Yeah,” Raina managed to get out. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Raine,” he told her. “I’m almost three.”

Raina’s gaze flew to mine. “He didn’t know.”

It wasn’t a question, but I found myself shaking my head anyway. Raina gave another sob then moved away from her husband. Tears spilled down my cheeks, as well, and only fell faster when she ignored Nico and wrapped Raine and me in her arms.

“You’re home now,” she whispered. “Both of you.”

She finally glanced at Nico and moved her arm to include him in the hug. “All of you.”

Another sob filled the air, and I was mortified to realize it came from me. Then with my son in my arms, my brother and Rowan’s sister hugging me, I broke down and cried as I’d done when I first realized Rowan wasn’t coming back to me.

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Chapter Five

~Sasha~

I took my time settling Raine back in bed. I made sure he had the scruffy gray wolf he called daddy wolf that he'd dropped on his way to me. He cuddled the stuffed animal while I brushed my fingers through the dark locks that lay over his forehead. He had his father's thick waves instead of the straight length that fell down my back. The older he got, the more I saw Rowan in him. Someday, he'd be a man with that dark stubble my mate had favored. Mostly, because he'd known I loved it. Really, I'd simply loved him. Everything about him.

At a soft knock, I glanced back over my shoulder but knew it was my brother before I even turned.

"They're all waiting on you, Sasha," he whispered.

I glanced down at Raine, once more.

"What if he wakes again?" I murmured.

"We'll be down the hall," Nico assured me, coming over to brush his fingers along Raine's still chubby baby cheeks. "He'll be okay."

He slid his hand to my elbow and urged me up. I knew I was merely delaying a conversation that should have taken place three and a half years ago. Not to mention giving my tear-ravaged face a chance to calm. I hadn't cried like that since Raine had been born. My son needed my strength not my tears. Though my brother was fond of reminding me Raine needed both.

"Sasha."

"I'm coming," I muttered, forcing myself to rise, to cross the room, and pull the door shut behind me.

"Careful what you wish for," Nico said with a soft smile.

“What?”

“Just a little bit ago, you asked me to arrange a meeting between you and Raina. Looks like she had the same idea.”

“If that was how things worked, Rowan would be at my side,” I told him. “I’ve wished him back a million times.”

Nico’s smile dropped, and part of me felt guilty for it. Everything he did was for me and Raine. He’d been the one to pick me up and hold me together when I’d lost my mate. I owed him more than I’d ever be able to repay. I glanced up at him, and Nico pulled me against his chest, wrapping me tight in his arms. Just holding me. He’d probably been doing it since we’d shared a womb.

“I love you,” I whispered. I didn’t say it enough.

“Back at you.”

Nico gave me another hard squeeze then turned and stood, letting me take the lead as we returned to the front room. Hannibal must have left with his mate or gone into one of the other bedrooms as neither of them were in the room. Raina stood when I entered, but I waved her back, taking a seat on the floor with my back toward the wall. I faced the room as if I were facing a firing squad instead of Rowan’s sister and her pack. Raina’s face showed she’d been crying also. I hated that but understood it. We’d both loved and lost Rowan Byrd, and neither of our lives would ever be the same.

“I have a daughter,” Raina offered, bringing up my head with a jerk. “She’s almost nine months, now. Her name’s Rowan.”

I swallowed down my tears. I’d shed enough today.

“He’d love that,” I said instead.

“I didn’t know about you,” she finally said when I remained quiet. “How did I not know about you?”

“He was calling you back here.”

I pushed to my feet, too restless to sit.

“To meet me. He wanted you there when he introduced me to the pack.”

“How did we not know?” she demanded, anger flushing her face. Not at me. I was sure not at Rowan, either. Most likely, at the fates that had robbed her of knowing my son sooner.

“Only a few people knew he and I were together,” I admitted. “Two of them died with him. Two of them left afterward. One of them told him not to take me as his mate. That the pack wouldn’t accept a woman who had nothing to offer them.”

“What?”

That incredulous outburst came from Bastion James.

“That’s ridiculous,” he snapped. “A mate is an alpha’s greatest asset. They don’t need to bring anything but themselves.”

“Rowan felt the same.”

It made me smile to know Bastion was similar in thought to my mate.

“Patrick and Josh died with my brother. Easton and Lincoln left after he died. Left before I could get here. Which one of them thought you weren’t good enough?” Raina asked.

“None of them. They were brothers to Rowan. They accepted me immediately.”

I hurried on when I saw the question in Raina’s eyes. I had no love for Richard Byrd, but I didn’t want to discuss her father and the way he’d hurt me. I was too raw. There’d be no way to temper the hatred I felt for him. Not to accuse him of arranging the murder of his son.

“Nico and I spent a lot of time at Lincoln’s house with them.”

Bastion and Raina shared a look.

“That explains why Lincoln called to ask questions about Nico and if he was here alone,” Anthony said from

where he sat in one of the room's recliners. "He was fishing to see if you were here."

"He was fishing to see if she's alive," Nico countered.

"Why's that?" Bastion asked.

"She was attacked shortly after Rowan was killed."

My brother's words had every wolf in the room leaning forward.

"Someone attacked you?" Raina asked.

"She was confronted by a group of wolves. They caught her alone," Nico told them. "Six men against one woman."

I touched his arm, trying to calm the wolf that threatened to shed skin and prowl the room to protect me. My brother had always been protective, but the attack had taken it to a new level.

"I'm here, Nic."

My brother's jaw flexed, and I knew his teeth clenched tight as he fought for control.

"I managed to fight them off," I offered. "I went over the falls in the process. Nico fished me out of the water somewhere downstream."

"She was barely breathing," he growled, his voice more animal than man at the moment. "I almost lost her several times. When she was finally able to stay awake for more than a few minutes at a time, her wolf had healed most of her wounds. She'd taken a pretty severe beating from her attackers, then another from the rapids bashing her against the rocks. It was pure luck she didn't lose Raine."

"Why didn't you go to the Rigton pack?" Bastion asked. "They would have taken you in."

I snorted at that.

"It was weeks before I was well enough to get out of bed. I woke up wondering where my mate was. Only to find out he'd been involved in an accident and killed the same day I was attacked."

I turned away, pacing to a window and found myself wishing I could shift and disappear into the shadows the night cast. Lose myself for just a moment. Run and run and run until my wolf couldn't go any longer. I felt her pressing at my skin, letting me know she'd welcome that as much as I would.

“By the time she was healed enough to be up and around without needing to rest, we were both hellbent on revenge,” Nico told them. “We hunted down the bastards who'd attacked her and killed them.”

“You took a pregnant woman with you on a hunt?” one of the men with Bastion asked. There was no censure. Only curiosity.

“We didn't know I was pregnant then, and I wanted blood. I deserved blood. Nico tried to temper my bloodlust, but there was nothing that would do that. I tortured them, and when they couldn't give me the answers I wanted, I gutted them and watched them bleed out.”

“Fuck,” someone muttered, but I didn't care who.

“I wanted to hurt them as they'd done to me. I wanted to show them what fear is, to let them taste death on their tongues before it actually came for them. I screamed until my throat was raw when they attacked. They deserved no less than what they gave me.”

I saw the understanding on the faces around me. Each of them would have done the same.

“Why didn't you come to us then?” Raina asked.

“Because when the anger was gone...” I paused, wrapping my arms around myself, much as I had ever since I no longer had my mate's arms to surround me. “I was empty. I didn't care.”

“I took her somewhere safe while I tried to get some answers. And your pack wasn't a place I considered safe,” Nico admitted with no remorse.

“Nico,” I warned.

“Why?” Bastion wanted to know.

“Because other than the four men Rowan thought of as brothers, there was only one other person who’d met my sister. One man who’d tried to talk Rowan out of taking her as his mate. He was very vocal about what she lacked and how unworthy she was.”

“He’s probably gone then,” Bastion stated. “We cleaned the garbage from the Rigtons when we took them into our pack.”

Nico snorted, but I replied before he could.

“This garbage is still here. Closer than you could even imagine.”

“Give me a name,” Bastion demanded, using that alpha tone to try to make me fall into place.

“You’re not my alpha,” I snapped, my hackles rising. “Rowan was the only alpha I’ve ever accepted. There will never be another.”

Raina snorted at that then put a hand over her mouth to try to stifle a laugh.

“Christ,” Bastion growled, glaring at his wife. “Where have I heard that before?”

She shrugged then sobered as she looked back at me. After a long glance, she nodded.

“I know who it was. The same man who told me I was mating one of the James Pack because he commanded it. That I was to make myself available when Bastion and some of his pack came to visit. So they could look me over and let me know who I was mating.”

Bastion growled, standing. Several other wolves rose, as well.

“You were always my mate,” he snarled. “That was never in question.”

“There was a little bit of a question,” Raina offered, holding her thumb and finger slightly apart.

“I’ll kill him,” Bastion said, voice suddenly soft and calm.

Raina went to her husband and placed herself in front of him, her back against his chest, tugging one of his arms around her waist and holding it there. It was obviously something she did often. I watched the tension ease from him until he pulled her even closer and bent to inhale the scent of her hair. I understood that. Rowan had often come to me after dealing with things. He said I soothed him. That all he needed was my scent to ease him.

“Tell me, Sasha,” Raina asked softly. “Is it my father who kept you away all this time?”

I nodded.

“He might have some old-school ideas when it comes to how a pack is run and what a mate should bring to the pack, but he wouldn’t have turned you away.”

I laughed at that, but there was no mirth in the sound.

“He would have kept me around long enough to give birth to my son then found a way to slit my throat.”

“No,” Raina denied.

“You’re right,” I agreed. “He probably wouldn’t want any offspring that came from my womb.”

“No matter what you thought of him in the past, losing Rowan changed him. Broke him,” Raina insisted.

“It definitely sounds like it from how you said he proposed you should mate with Bastion,” I agreed with a snap. “And I’m sure losing Rowan did break him. I’m glad it did. That’s nothing less than he deserves.”

“For saying you’re not good enough for my brother?”

“The day before I was attacked,” I stated.

“What?” Bastion asked when Raina shook her head in confusion.

“The day before the attack is when Rowan took me to meet his father. To introduce me and let his father know that

he'd be presenting me to the pack as his mate as soon as Raina arrived. Richard Byrd scoffed at the suggestion. Made his feelings about how worthless I would be as a mate well-known. He told Rowan to go ahead and fuck me out of his system, if he needed to, then to find a mate."

"Jesus Christ," Anthony muttered.

"The next day, Rowan was killed in an accident, and I was attacked and presumed dead. Tell me what you'd think?"

"No."

Raina shook her head in denial, but my gloves were off. The raw, bitter hatred that had forged my backbone made its presence known.

"Richard Byrd either ordered the attack on me or knows who did. I'll also share the fact that I question Rowan's accident," I declared, and it was as if a bomb had been dropped in the room.

Those who'd remained seated came to their feet. I could have cut the tension in the room as they all tried to process what I was accusing Raina and Rowan's father of. Raina was the one who broke the silence.

"You can't think my father had anything to do with what happened to my brother," Raina denied, head shaking. "My brother was his whole world."

"It would make sense to take Rowan out of commission before attacking my sister," Nico stated. "Maybe the *accident* went a little further than he planned."

"You believe this?" Raina asked me, pain swirling in her eyes.

"Yes."

"Then he'll pay. If my father had anything to do with your attack or my brother's accident, he'll pay. I swear this to you."

She shook out her hand, bringing claws to the tips of her fingers and scored one over her palm, breaking the skin so that blood welled to the top.

“I swear this to you,” she repeated, crossing to stand before me, blood running up her arm as she held her palm toward me.

I knew what she offered. I used my claws to cut open my palm and held it out to her. Flesh met and our blood flowed together, binding us to a promise she uttered for a third time.

“I swear to you.”

I nodded then offered a pledge of my own.

“If Richard Byrd had anything to do with Rowan’s death, I’m going to kill him. Slowly. Painfully.”

She never flinched as she accepted my vow.

“I’ll help you.”

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Chapter Six

~Rowan~

Lincoln hadn't been able to track down Nico. He'd made some calls. To Anthony and even a few of our former pack. Nobody had answers. Anthony had moved up their meeting, though. We were meeting mid-morning, instead. I was okay with that. I knew Nico was here, and I expected him to be there when Easton and Lincoln met Bastion. I would be there, too. I'd borrowed clothes from Easton and Lincoln as well as a few of the others, covering my scent with theirs. They would see I was there, but hopefully, neither my sister nor Nico would be able to pick up my scent. They were the only two I was worried about.

"Ready?" E called, and I nodded as I pulled on Damien's jacket, zipping it and pulling the hood over my head.

"You smell like a fucking mutt," Lincoln told me, wrinkling his forehead.

"I smell like all of you," I agreed with a shrug. "So, if the shoe fits..."

"Fuck you, Alpha," Damien growled, bumping my shoulder as he passed. "I smell the way a woman dreams her man will smell."

"Must be why you're single," Cody said with a snicker.

The rest of the group tossed in comments until the mood was more relaxed. I loved these men. Every single one of them. Along with Easton and Lincoln, seven others had left to watch over and protect me. Seven strong male wolves whose only goal had been to guard their wounded alpha. They'd each walked away from their lives in Rigton County. For me. It wasn't something I'd ever forget. I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to repay it, either.

"Let's roll out. We move together," Lincoln reminded everyone. "Rowan stays in the middle. Protect him at all

costs.”

“Any of you get hurt trying to cover me, and I’m going to be pissed,” I warned, knowing it would do no good. Each of them would die for me, the same as Patrick and Josh had.

I stared at all of them. These were my packmates. My *from breath to death*. Easton and Lincoln. My soul brothers. Damien and his brother, Cody. Scott. Uriel. Albee. West. Riggs. All of them had sacrificed everything for me. It humbled me, even as it empowered me. What none of them wanted to accept was, I would die for any of them, as well. I wouldn’t be me, otherwise. I wouldn’t be alpha.

The ride to James’ house was shorter than I’d wanted. My thoughts were still unsettled as we headed inside. Nico had to be here.

I kept my head down, letting the rest of the group swallow me as we headed into a large front room with plenty of couches and chairs. I already knew the main players in this pack. I’d made a point of knowing who they were. James was already there with Raina and all the wolves I’d anticipated being at this meeting. I picked them out as I peeked from under my hood. Cyan Richards stood with his feet apart, arms crossed over his chest. I’d known James’ beta would be with him. Also present were Simon, James’ personal guard and a man far deadlier than most wolves realized, alongside Hannibal, Gabe, and Taylor. Anthony and Donovan stood together, along with another packmate, Michael Sandler. It looked as if all of the inner guard of the James Pack were in attendance.

Raina caught my eye as she walked up to Easton. Her palm collided with his face before he could even open his mouth. When he merely shook his head at her, she slapped him again.

“Raina,” Bastion called, and I almost laughed at his attempt to control my sister.

She surprised me, though, as she lowered her hand to her side, squeezing it into a fist while so many emotions crossed her face.

“You left me,” she accused Easton then glanced over to include Lincoln. “I lost my brother. This pack lost their alpha, and you left. You fucking walked away and left when we needed you most.”

E flinched, and I almost took a step forward. I would have if Damien hadn't adjusted his stance, so he blocked me.

“I—”

“No,” she cut off E. “You don't get to justify to me. Not to me.”

She stepped into him, wrapping her arms around him and clinging while she cried. For a brief moment, E stood there before hugging her back.

“God, Rai. I'm so sorry. I would have been here if I could have.”

Meaning if I had actually died in that fire. I'd arrogantly thought I knew what it had cost them to leave with me, but this showed me I hadn't even been close. Raina reached out and gripped Lincoln by the front of his shirt and jerked him to them. He pulled her away from E and hugged her off her feet.

“Got a slap for me, too,” he asked, offering his cheek.

“Maybe. Probably. Mostly, I'm happy to see you.” She let her gaze scan over the rest of the group. “All of you.”

I almost stepped forward then, Damien blocking me or not, but Bastion spoke before I could.

“You said you have information on what happened with Rowan's accident,” he reminded us. “Tell me what brought you back here, over three years after your alpha died.”

My sister gave a tiny whimper, and more tears dripped down her cheeks. What had I done to her by staying away? I wanted to be the one holding her, comforting her. God, in this moment, she reminded me so much of the little girl she'd been, with pigtails and skinned knees, who'd come to me to soothe away her hurts. That was another man's job now, and as much as I liked Bastion, claws clenched into my heart as he called to her.

“Raina.” He held his hand out to her, and his jaw tightened when he took in her tear-ravaged face. Then he raked a glower over our group. I understood it made him uncomfortable to have so many unfamiliar wolves so close to his mate. It didn’t matter that she knew them or that they were members of her former pack. James didn’t, and that was all that counted when it came to his mate’s safety.

Raina gave both E and Lincoln another squeeze before moving to her mate and standing in front of him. I waited for him to move her behind him or at least, to his side. Instead, he wrapped an arm around her and tugged her against his chest. Then I took note of the positioning of every member of his inner guard. Every one of them would stand between him and any who came at him. They’d die, not just for Bastion, but for my sister. I’d counted on this when I’d first planned to introduce them. I was glad I’d told my father to make the introduction.

“You were there when his truck flipped,” Raina stated, once she was in her mate’s embrace. “What happened?”

“We—”

Easton broke off immediately when Nico slipped into the room.

“Nico,” E breathed out while I watched behind Nico, searching for the woman I knew Nico wouldn’t leave far behind.

He walked over, embracing E and giving him a hard clap on the back before pulling back and resting his forehead against E’s while they clasped forearms.

“It’s good to see you,” Nico whispered. “Rowan...”

He shook his head.

“You went to hunt down the truth behind Rowan’s accident.”

A statement. Nico wasn’t questioning where they’d been.

“It was weeks before we found out about Sasha,” Lincoln admitted, not sharing the fact it had taken so long because they’d been wrapped up in getting me medical help. Those first few weeks had been touch and go before the doctors had decided I might make it.

“We tried to reach out,” E continued.

“I went off grid,” Nico said, confirming what I’d known. “Needed to get away for a bit. Lay low while I figured out some stuff.”

He’d needed to protect Sasha. He wasn’t fooling me one bit.

Nico stepped back, scanning his gaze over our group. He paused briefly on me but moved on until he’d looked at all of us.

“Why are you here now?” Lincoln asked. “Have you joined with the James Pack?”

“I came to see a friend.” He nodded toward Anthony then, and I had the information I needed. Sasha was at the home Anthony shared with Donovan. “When I heard you were here, I decided to stick around. It’s been a long time.”

“How did you know we were here?” Lincoln questioned.

“You know how pack’s work. Word spread as soon as you hit the city limits,” Bastion chided.

We couldn’t argue that. Wolves were attentive by nature and loved gossip as much as our human counterparts.

“I mean here. Now. In this meeting that was to be kept quiet,” Easton reminded the room.

“To find out what you know about Rowan’s death. His accident took place the same day my sister was attacked. You have to question if the two were related,” Nico noted. “Then when you’ve worked that out, move on to the why and who of the equation.”

We didn’t play dumb. Not everyone in the room understood my connection to Sasha, but at this point, they’d

obviously worked out we'd known each other. Otherwise, Nico wouldn't be here.

"First, let's get to the point of this meeting. Tell us what happened with Rowan," Bastion demanded. "As far as we were told, the truck flipped then caught fire. Is that not what occurred?"

"It did," E admitted. "But it had help."

"Fuck," Hannibal muttered. "Bee was right."

"She usually is," someone else commented. I was certain it came from Simon.

"What do you mean help?" Raina demanded, those fists clenching at her sides again. There was something in her expression that gave me pause as if this wasn't the first time my death had been questioned.

E and Lincoln shared a look, and I knew both fought the urge to turn and look at me.

"We'll tell you everything, but only you," Lincoln explained.

"Not going to fucking happen," Bastion warned.

"The two of you with the two of us." Easton nodded toward Lincoln then waved his hand between the two of them and Bastion and Raina. "After you hear what we have to say, we can decide what needs to happen next."

Raina didn't even pause. "Clear the room."

"Raina."

She pushed out of her mate's arms and turned to face him.

"Bastion."

I couldn't see what took place between them, but I had experience dealing with my sister when she wanted something. Apparently, Bastion caved as easily as I always had.

"Clear the room," he ordered, and though there were growls, everyone moved.

I stayed in the center of the group, unsurprised when Nico veered away from Anthony and toward us. This was what I'd waited for. What I'd planned for. I drew to the front of our group, meeting Nico and maneuvering him the way I wanted.

“Come with me and don't say a fucking word.”

He flinched, head jerking up, but he hid it quickly, moving with me without question. Neither of us said anything until we were in the back of the second vehicle my group had taken here. Only then did Nico turn to me, shock on his face as he took me in.

“Where's Sasha?” I demanded.

“Fuck!” he snarled. “You're alive. You're seriously fucking alive! What the fuck, Ro!”

“It's a long story, brother.”

“Well, you better get it worked out because when my sister sees you, you might not be alive much longer.”

I ignored the warning. All I heard was confirmation Sasha had survived her attack. Nothing else mattered.

Chapter Seven

~Sasha~

Raine fell asleep at the table. My son hadn't slept well the night before. Neither of us had. Normally, I'd try to keep him up longer before letting him take a nap. Instead, we'd had an early lunch, then I'd tucked him back in bed, humming a lullaby I'd used since he'd been a newborn. I treasured these moments. Just my son and me. Watching his beautiful face, relaxed in sleep. Lips slightly parted, long lashes dark against his baby-soft skin. So sweet. So innocent. Growing to look more and more like his father every day.

I finally forced myself to leave him to rest and made my way to the kitchen. I was restless, counting the minutes until Nico returned to tell me what the hell was going on. What had Easton and Lincoln come back to share? Were they going to admit what I'd always known? That Rowan hadn't been in a tragic accident. He'd been murdered. I'd never believe anything else.

I was pouring hot water into my tea mug when I heard the back door.

"What did you find out?" I asked my brother, not bothering to turn around. "Did they admit he was murdered?"

"Sasha."

That voice. That fucking voice haunted me. The cup I'd just picked up dropped from my hand, shattering on the floor and sending hot water to splash against my jeans. I wanted to turn, but I was frozen. What if I did, and he wasn't there? What if that voice was only in my head? But I felt him behind me. The heat of his body soaking into mine. His hands. God, his hands coming around my waist and tugging me back against him.

"Don't be my imagination," I begged even as those hands urged me to turn.

“Sasha.”

I squeezed my eyes closed, not wanting to break the illusion, wanting to hold onto it, to him, for as long as I could.

“Look at me,” he urged, and I forced my eyes open, gasping when I got my first look at him.

“Rowan, please. Please be real.”

“I’m real,” he swore. “Touch me, baby. God, I need to feel you against me.”

“They told me you were dead,” we both said at the same time.

Then his mouth was on mine. I tugged down his hood, gripping those thick locks in my fingers and holding him to me. I jumped, wrapping my legs around his waist. I couldn’t get my head around the fact that he was here. That I was touching him. Kissing him. He’d died in a fire. Nico had told me. Swore to me. My brother would never lie to me. I had questions. Dozens of them. No, hundreds of them. But they could wait. I wanted to hit him. To tear him apart for surviving and not coming for me. Not tracking me down. In the same breath, I wanted to crawl inside his skin and never leave. No, I wanted him inside me.

“Bedroom,” Rowan growled, running his teeth over my neck.

“Here,” I begged. “Now.”

I found the zipper of the hooded jacket he wore and tugged it down. Not satisfied with that, I grabbed the neck of his shirt and ripped it down the middle, thrusting my hands in the opening I made and rubbing over him. A growl vibrated in Rowan’s chest.

“Where’s the bedroom, Sasha?”

I pointed blindly toward the kitchen doorway then waved toward the hall. I vaguely saw my brother in the front room, looking shellshocked, but I couldn’t focus on him right now. Later. Much later.

“Upstairs,” Nico said, and I realized Rowan must have asked again where to take me.

I licked his throat, wallowing in him.

“These scents. Why do you have other scents on you?” I demanded. “I need you. Only you.”

“God, yes,” he growled as I ground myself against him.

We were on a bed, ripping and tearing at each other, clothes tossed aside as we fought to get skin-on-skin. Then Rowan thrust into me, his shaft filling me.

“Sasha.”

He moaned my name as he held still, buried deep and reluctant to withdraw.

“Tell me this is real,” I pleaded again. “Tell me you’re really here, Rowan. You’re alive.”

“I’m here. I’m alive. And I’m never leaving your side again, mate. Never.”

I couldn’t stop the tears any more than I could prevent my body from responding eagerly to his every touch. He knew what I liked, what I needed even when I didn’t voice it. Our tongues got reacquainted before he nipped down my neck to lick at my breasts. I arched my chest toward him when he finally took my nipple between his lips and sucked greedily. I gripped his hair in my fingers and held him close, rocking my hips into every thrust.

“Don’t stop,” I begged even as we both raced to the finish line.

The first two times were hard and fast as if we were both afraid the other would disappear. The third time, Rowan tasted every inch of me before turning me onto my stomach and pulling me up onto my knees. He plunged deep then moved slowly in and out, driving us both insane. His hands were everywhere, owning me. Reclaiming me. Reminding me who we were together. The fourth time, I straddled his hips and rode him to completion. In the aftermath, we lay there, breathing in each other, hands still petting one another.

“Let’s shower,” Rowan suggested. “Then talk.”

“How?” I demanded, sitting up on my knees beside him as he moved so he leaned with his back against the headboard. “How are you here? They said you were dead?”

Rowan closed his eyes and sighed.

“Patrick and Josh saved my life.”

“Are they alive, too?”

Rowan shook his head. “They died protecting me. Easton didn’t even know I was alive until they moved them off me. I groaned. Their first instinct was to get me to help. I was burned.”

He waved his right arm and pointed to his chest and back.

“It was bad.”

I ran my hands over the scars, the twisted flesh like hard ridges beneath my fingertips.

“Why didn’t you let the pack know you’d survived?”

“I was in a coma for nine months. The doctors induced it to try to aid my wolf in healing me. I woke up in misery. Everything hurt. I had no mobility in my right arm. The fire did a lot of nerve damage. I spent the next three months getting skin grafts only for my wolf to reject them. Then there was physical therapy to regain use of my arm. I tried to shift to see if it would heal when I was in wolf form. No such luck. And it was excruciating. I didn’t try that again for months.”

He leaned in, snagging me around the waist and pulling me onto his lap.

“In the middle of all that, they told me you’d been attacked and killed. I didn’t believe it. Refused to, no matter what they said about you going over the falls. We tried to reach out to Nico, but it was as if he’d disappeared off the face of the earth. I knew it was because he was hiding you, protecting you.”

I nodded. It had been that and so much more. God, how did I tell my mate he had a son who was almost three?

“Since you’ve been healed, where have you been?”

“Hunting for you. Looking for answers to why we were both attacked.”

“I was up on the ridge alone when they showed up,” I told him. “Six men. I knew something was off immediately, but they were on me before I could do anything. The only way to survive was to jump and hope the water saved me.”

“Christ,” he muttered, pulling me into him. “When I heard you went over the falls...”

He shuddered.

“Nico fished me out somewhere downstream. I was in and out for a few weeks. Nico said he wasn’t sure if I’d wake up or not.”

“I tried to find the ones responsible for the attack, but Nico had already killed them.”

“I killed them,” I growled, pushing back so I could see his face. “I hunted them down with Nico and gutted them when they couldn’t tell me who ordered the attack.”

One corner of his mouth tugged up.

“Of course, you did. My vicious wolf would have been out for blood.”

“They robbed us, Rowan. Of years. Of...too much. They took moments we can never get back.”

“We’re together now, and we’ll be together from now on. You don’t leave my side.”

“You don’t know—” I began, but a sob choked the rest of the words off in my throat.

“I know I’m alive. You’re alive. Whatever happened, we survived, and I won’t let anything separate us again.”

“Rowan. God, I don’t know how to tell you.”

I stopped again, shaking my head.

“Tell me what?” he demanded, body tensing beneath me.

I automatically stroked my hands over his shoulders and chest, trying to soothe my wounded wolf.

“I was pregnant, Rowan.”

Horror crossed his face. “No. God, no.”

I realized what he thought and shook my head.

“I didn’t lose the baby. You have a son, Rowan. We have a son.”

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Chapter Eight

~Rowan~

I couldn't breathe for a moment. A baby? A son?

"Where?"

"He's downstairs. He's probably up from his nap by now."

She flew after me, grabbing my arm as I pushed out of bed and headed toward the door.

"Rowan! You're naked. Let's shower and get dressed. Then I'll introduce you."

I swallowed the sharp retort that wanted to fall from my mouth. It wasn't her fault my son had to be introduced to me. It wasn't either of our faults. It was someone else's.

"Raine doesn't do well around strangers. It's just been him and Nico and me since he was born."

"Raine?"

"I named him after your sister."

I closed my eyes, the pain in my chest gripping me tight. She took my hand, tugging me across the room after her and into the adjoining bathroom. She turned on the shower while I stood there, utterly useless.

"He's amazing, Rowan. Like a miniature version of you. Incredibly intelligent. Inquisitive. Loving. His giggles light up the whole room."

"I have a son," I whispered, tears washing over my face.

"We have a son," she murmured back. "He's going to love you as much as I do."

I'd known we'd missed years of time together, but I hadn't understood exactly what those years had held. My son's newborn years. His birth. His first cry. Smile. Steps. I'd

missed all those milestones. Missed out on the bond that started from the first breath. I was a stranger to my son, and he didn't do well around strangers.

Sasha got me into the shower and began washing me. She'd seen the scars on my arm and chest, but they weren't as bad as my back. I heard her gasp when she urged me to turn, so she could continue using the washcloth to clean the sweat from my skin.

"Oh, God, Rowan. Your back."

It was a nasty mess, but it was a part of me now. There was no changing that.

"It doesn't hurt anymore."

Sasha leaned into me, brushing kisses over the worst of my twisted flesh.

"I wish I'd been there," she agonized.

"I wasn't myself, baby. The pain..." I shook my head.

"I'm your mate. Your pain is mine to bear. I should have been the one by your side, watching over you. Helping you fight to heal."

"We were both healing," I reminded her.

"Nico took me away," she told me. "I was grieving. The attack. Losing you. It almost destroyed me."

"Sasha."

"Nico held me together. Then I found out I was pregnant with Raine."

At that reminder, I flicked off the water and nudged her out of the shower ahead of me.

"Let's get dressed, baby. I want to meet my son."

She nodded, snagging a towel before heading back into the bedroom. I followed on her heels. God, there was so much we still needed to talk about. Years' worth of conversations. We remained silent while we dressed, though, both lost in our

own thoughts. She crossed the room, ruffled in a bag and tossed me one of Nico's shirts.

"I need to meet with my sister tonight, too."

"I met her yesterday," Sasha told me. "She came here. Surprised me. She knows about Raine."

"Raina's met him?"

"He walked out while they were here."

"And?" I prompted.

"He was shy. I warned her it would take him time to warm up to her."

"She knows he's my son?"

"There was no hiding it, Rowan. You'll understand when you see him."

She wrinkled her nose as I pulled on the jeans I'd worn.

"I borrowed clothes from the guys to cover my scent when I went into Bastion's house today."

"You met with him? Was Raina there?" She shook her head. "Of course, she was there. You haven't let her know you're alive yet?"

"I wasn't going to let anyone know. Then I found out Nico was here. I knew you'd be with him. I had Easton and Lincoln tell Raina and Bastion they'd only speak with the two of them. Then when they kicked us all out, I waited for Nico to approach us. Had him bring me to you. He warned me you were going to kill me."

"Not you. Never you."

I pulled her in and gave her another kiss.

"We won't be apart again, baby. I swear."

There was a knock at the door, and the sound of Nico clearing his throat.

"Raine is up and not waiting any longer for his mama to come downstairs."

I opened the door. “We’re heading down now.”

“Christ, it smells like a bordello,” Nico grouched, but his lips were tipped up in a grin.

He grabbed me as Sasha stepped out past him.

“I can’t believe you’re alive. I never heard a whisper. I would have gotten her to you. I swear. I wouldn’t have kept you apart.”

“I know that, Nic. Thank you. For keeping her safe. For being there for my son.”

“She’s my other half. He’s my nephew. Where else would I be?”

Sasha was already downstairs. I heard the murmur of voices then a giggle that hit me in the heart.

“He’s a great kid,” Nico whispered. “Looks just like you.”

“That’s what Sasha said.”

“What’s the plan?” Nico asked as we moved toward the staircase.

“To meet my son then let Easton know to arrange for Raina to come by.”

“She’ll be by anyway. She wants to spend more time with Raine. Get to know him. I meant what are you going to do about your father.”

I shook my head. Hell, I hadn’t once thought about my dad since I’d arrived.

“I’ll reach out and let him know I’m here, though I’m sure he suspects.”

“Why would he suspect that?” Nico asked then tilted his head to glare at me. “Don’t tell me he knows you’re alive.”

I nodded. “He was hurt trying to get to me. I had to let him know I was alive.”

“And he kept it to himself this entire time. Never said a word to anyone!” Nico was pissed.

“I asked him not to, Nic. We didn’t know anything except someone had arranged for my accident and Sasha was attacked.”

“I’d suggest you keep the fact Richard Byrd knew you were alive from my sister.”

“I know they didn’t get along, but he’ll come around.”

Nico snorted. “Maybe, they would have before, but not anymore.”

“Why? What happened?”

“Your accident. My sister’s attack. Both happened right after you told your dad you were announcing her as your mate.”

“That doesn’t mean...” I broke off as I contemplated that reminder. My dad had been adamant I not take Sasha as my mate. Had even told me to fuck her out of my system then find a mate who was more beneficial to the pack.

“He wouldn’t have done that.”

“Either way, his words are what kept my sister in isolation this entire time. There was no way she was coming to the Rigton Pack. She didn’t trust any of them. Not after what he said. I’m warning you, though; no matter what you think your father might or might not be capable of, Sasha believes it was him. If he shows up here, she’s prone to gut him first and ask questions never.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, you didn’t see her when we went after the men who’d attacked her. They caught her by surprise, Ro. Beat the shit out of her. She jumped over the ridge into the falls just to get away, and I’m still not sure it was a jump as much as it was getting to the edge, leaning forward, and letting gravity take it from there. Then the rapids did a number on her against the rocks. She was unconscious when I found her, wedged up against a low tree limb along the bank. I thought she was dead. Hell, it’s a miracle she didn’t lose Raine.”

I growled, fists clenching at my sides.

“She said she killed them.”

“Every single one of them. Told me it was her right. Their blood was hers to spill, and she did. I was with her, but she didn’t need me. She tortured them for answers, but none of them knew who’d hired them. Only that she was supposed to be dead when they finished.”

“She really thinks it was my father.”

Nico nodded. “Just so you know, she won’t have him around Raine, either. In case you were thinking of having him over here also.”

Was my mate right? Was my father the one behind what had happened to us both? He’d definitely been out of line with the comments he’d made to my mate when I’d gone to him to let him meet her and let him know I’d be introducing her to the full pack when Raina got home. I’d nearly hit him then. Sasha had been the one to hold me back. Still, I’d warned him, if he couldn’t accept my mate, he could look for another pack. But killing me? Killing Sasha? Was my father really capable of hiring people to murder us? If he was, then Sasha wouldn’t have to worry about him being around Raine. I’d kill my father myself.

I hit the bottom of the stairs and glanced over to see a small figure dart behind Sasha’s leg. Moments later, two arms wrapped around her thigh, and my son peeked around at me. Sasha reached back and ran her fingers through his hair. I dropped to my knees and stared at him while he watched with big eyes. She hadn’t been exaggerating. My son was the mirror image of me as a little boy.

“Raine.” My son’s name was a choked whisper.

“Raine,” Sasha cajoled as she tugged his hands free and sat down on the carpeted floor. He immediately launched himself into her lap, never once taking his gaze off me. “I want you to meet someone.”

“Hello,” he whispered from the safety of his mother’s arms.

“Hi, Raine.” I sat across from them, easing forward until my folded legs pressed against Sasha’s. “I’m your daddy.”

Raine’s eyes widened before he jerked his head to face his mother. Sasha nodded, tears streaming down her face. Our son cuddled into her and turned to stare at me. I held my hand out to Sasha, and she slipped her fingers between mine. Raine glanced at our hands then slowly slipped his hand atop our joined hands, folding his fingers around them. I think he caught us both off guard when he suddenly launched himself at me, wrapping his arms around my neck.

“Daddy,” he cried, hugging around me.

Sasha crawled closer until she was in my lap with Raine pressed between us. We sat that way for a long time, holding each other while we cried.

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Chapter Nine

~Sasha~

Rowan sat on the couch watching cartoons with Raine while he chattered away. My son, who was so uncomfortable around strangers, had no such qualms around his father.

“He picks up on your emotions,” Nico said as he came to stand beside me, while we watched father and son. “When you’re anxious, he is. He knows you accept Rowan, so he does.”

I hadn’t thought of it that way, but it made complete sense to me.

“What are you thinking?” Nico asked.

I shook my head then shrugged as if that would offer something more to my non-answer.

“My emotions are all over the place. I don’t know... He’s alive. All this time and my mate is alive and with me. I love watching him hold Raine, seeing the two of them together as they always should have been. At the same time, I’m jealous of my son. I want to be in Rowan’s lap. Naked with him deep inside me.”

“Didn’t need that detail,” Nico muttered, and the disgust in his voice drew a laugh from me. One that had both my loves glancing over at us.

“Mama!” Raine called and held out his hand to me.

I was crossing toward them when there was a knock at the door.

Rowan glanced at the time.

“Shit. That’s probably Easton and the rest of the guys. I texted him earlier to bring everyone here.”

“Hold tight,” Nico ordered while he peeked around the curtain. “Looks like the group you walked into Bastion’s

house with. I count nine men.”

“Let them in.”

“Here, let me take Raine,” I told him, moving quickly to join them.

“I have him.”

“Rowan, he doesn’t like strangers.”

“I have him, Sasha. Trust me.”

Rowan stood, our son clinging to him, as nine large men entered, surrounding the couch and the three of us. Where there had been jokes and casual conversation as they filed in, now there was nothing but silence.

“You have a son.” Easton finally broke the silence, moving toward us.

I saw Raine tremble, but Rowan squeezed him tight.

“These are your pack, Raine. You’re safe with them,” Rowan vowed to our son.

Easton reached them first, leaning in to first touch foreheads with Rowan then offer the same gesture to Raine. I watched my son mimic his father, and emotion choked me as Easton gave Raine a solemn promise.

“From first breath to last,” he whispered, and it was echoed by the other men in the room.

Then he moved to me.

“Even when Rowan texted and said you were alive, I didn’t believe it. Couldn’t believe it.” Easton pulled me in and hugged me as if he thought I’d disappear if he didn’t hold tightly enough. “You’re a sight for sore eyes, Sasha. I promise you. This pack will never fail you again. Neither of you.”

We both turned when Raine’s giggles filled the air. I was shocked to see my son being passed around as each of the others introduced themselves.

“Make that all three of you,” Easton added. “A son. Holy shit. Rowan has a kid.”

Easton walked over to join the rest of the Rigton wolves with my son, and Lincoln stepped in to hug me.

“I looked everywhere for you,” he swore. “Had I realized you were still alive, I would have never stopped. I swear.”

“Nico hid me well, Linc. You wouldn’t have found me, no matter how hard you looked. Not without my brother wanting you to.”

“I couldn’t reach him. I did try.”

“When Nico wants us off grid, we’re off grid.”

Lincoln hugged me again.

“God, Sasha. It’s so good to see you. Rowan...” He paused, glancing down and shaking his head. “It was rough for a while. He was hurt. Badly. We weren’t sure he’d make it.”

“He told me. Thank you for watching over him. For taking care of him when I couldn’t.”

“From first breath to last, Sasha.”

“Come here, baby.”

Rowan took my hand and pulled me toward the kitchen. I glanced back and saw Raine on the floor surrounded by seven men. Some sat cross-legged. Some lay on their stomachs. Raine crawled over and through them, laughing as fingers tickled him. Damien grabbed him by the ankle and dangled him upside down. Raine rocked his body and swung up to wrap his arms around Damien’s arm and hang.

“Damn, kid. You’re like a spider monkey or something. Hey, Riggs, what’s that animal that hangs like this?”

“A sloth, maybe,” Riggs offered.

“Nah, he’s too quick to be a sloth,” Cody disagreed.

Raine giggled again, and I let myself relax as Rowan tugged me after him.

“He’ll be fine.”

“I know. It’s just... I’ve never seen him like that before. He’s so at ease with them.”

“They’re his pack,” Rowan stated again as if that explained it.

“What pack would that be?” Easton asked, and I could tell from his expression that this was something they’d discussed before. “The Rigton Pack doesn’t exist anymore.”

Rowan growled. “The Rigton Pack exists as long as I do.”

“Damn right, it does,” Easton agreed while Lincoln nodded.

“Sasha and I will take our vows tonight,” Rowan announced next.

“What?” I asked. “Tonight?”

“I’m not waiting a day longer to claim you as my mate in front of the members of our pack. Hell, as far as I’m concerned, you’ve been my mate since the moment I took your virginity and claimed you.”

“Christ, will the two of you remember her brother’s in the room, please,” Nico grouched as he slammed mugs of coffee on the table and moved back to the counter to grab more.

“The ceremony is to honor tradition. Nothing more,” Rowan continued. “Okay?”

“Yes, fine,” I agreed.

I felt the same. We’d been mated since he’d wooed me into his bed and loved me through the night, showing my body all the things it could feel under the hands of a mate. I shivered as those memories ran through me, followed closely by the ones from earlier upstairs. I watched as Rowan’s gaze grew hooded, his cheeks darkening with hunger, and I knew he was sharing the same thoughts.

“Have a seat, and let’s compare notes,” Nico ordered, and I wasn’t surprised when Rowan took one of the four chairs at the table and pulled me into his lap.

“How long until Raina shows up?” Rowan asked. I knew he was anxious about meeting her.

“A couple of hours,” I said. “I told her to wait until after dinner.”

I glanced around the table.

“Rowan, she and Bastion are bringing their daughter with them tonight.”

He nodded. “I heard she had a daughter.”

He or one of the others had obviously been keeping tabs on the pack. Probably with one of the former Rigton wolves who’d joined with the James Pack. It would make sense to have someone on the inside keeping watch since they were gone. God, how my mate must have felt pulled in two directions the last two years.

“Then you know she named her little girl, Rowan. After you.”

Rowan stilled beneath me. “What?”

“She named her daughter after you.”

“And you named our son after her.”

“They’ll be a little closer in age, but it’ll be fun watching the two of them grow up together,” Easton said.

“Only this time, it will be Rowan keeping Raine on his toes while she wreaks havoc around him,” Lincoln added, and I felt Rowan relax as he laughed with his best friends.

“I hope she’s as onery as my sister always was,” Rowan quipped. “Mostly, so I watch Raina seeing what I dealt with.”

“Then we’re planning to stay in Rigton County?” I asked.

“We’ll discuss it more once Bastion and Raina get here. Once we’ve dealt with the issue at hand.” Rowan cupped my chin and held my gaze. “Nico says you suspect my father was the one behind our attacks.”

“Of course, he did, Rowan. Who else? Were you seeing someone else I didn’t know about who might have been jealous?”

“Never,” he snarled, the thought of that obviously as repulsive to him as it was to me.

“Neither was I. Nico’s the only pack I have, so there was no issue on my side. Your father, however, was very vocally against it.”

“He would have come around,” Rowan said, but I saw the doubt in his gaze.

“Do you remember when you got that call and stepped out for a minute to take it?” I reminded him.

“It was Ivy. I had to take it.”

“I know, but when you stepped out, your father turned on me and told me no two-bit Russian whore was going to worm her way into his pack.”

“The fuck he did!” Nico exploded to his feet.

“He told me the smart thing would be to disappear and let you think I’d changed my mind about mating. Warned me how dangerous being mated to an alpha wolf could be.”

“You never said anything,” Nico charged.

“By the time I was focused enough to recall everything, Rowan was dead. I was pregnant, and the two of us were never going to be mated anyway. It didn’t matter.”

“I would have fucking hunted him down and ripped his Goddamn throat out,” my brother seethed.

“Exactly,” I countered calmly. “I needed you, and Richard Byrd no longer mattered.”

“What about since then, Sasha? You could have told me later. Hell, you should have told me before we headed back here.”

“You should have told me,” Rowan snapped. “I saw you were upset when I walked back in. You never said a word.”

“You walked in and said we needed to leave. I knew something had happened. That you needed to go check on Ivy. I know how some of the pack were with her, and I knew you’d delay if you thought I needed you. Then he told you to go home and sleep on it. Better yet to fuck me out of your system and move on. The next thing I knew, you had your father slammed against the wall, and he was turning blue. I found myself in the uncomfortable position of pulling you off him because I worried what it would do to you if you hurt him.”

“I would have thrown him out of the damn pack, not just warned him that I would!”

“And things still would have happened,” I whispered quietly. “Your accident. My attack. My bet is, he made those calls after we left. To make sure you toed the line he’d set for you.”

“I would have killed the fucking bastard,” Nico stated. “Father or not, Ro. I’m going to rip out his throat when I find him.”

“Christ! I can’t believe—”

“Did you know he practically sold Raina to Bastion?” I cut off Rowan before he could tell me he couldn’t believe his father was capable of something that vile. “Told her to make herself look presentable, so she could parade in front of Bastion and other members of the James Pack. That she was mating one of them to save the pack.”

“What?” Roman snarled. “Bastion allowed that?”

“Bastion didn’t know. He only ever had eyes for Raina. But that was how it was presented to her.”

“I can’t believe I was so fucking blind,” Rowan fumed.

“If he’s the one behind this, then it seems we were all blind,” Easton muttered. “Hell, if he did this, I’m going to help Nico gut the motherfucker.”

“If he did this, he’ll die by my hand,” Rowan said.

“No,” I countered, meeting and holding my mate’s gaze. “Ours.”

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Chapter Ten

~Rowan~

We finished dinner, and I gave my son a bath where we'd both ended up covered in water and bubbles. It was worth every towel I used to mop up the floor when Sasha took a laughing Raine into the bedroom to get pajamas on. His laughter was healing pieces of my heart I hadn't realized were fractured. My mate was doing the same. For the first time since I'd woken from the coma, I felt whole. Alive. Now, I had to tell my sister I'd survived. Then tell her our father might be the person responsible for what had happened. Not that Raina would be surprised. Sasha had already told me she'd shared her suspicions with my sister when they'd met.

I'd been going over that day since we'd finished talking earlier. I'd threatened my father. I'd slammed him against the wall and choked him until Sasha had urged me to release him. Then I'd told him he could accept my mate or join another pack. Had he really called and set up my accident and her attack as soon as we left? Lincoln told me my father had gone crazy when he learned I was in the truck, burned his arms trying to get to me. Had it been guilt? Hell, I questioned every conversation I'd ever had with him.

We'd rarely seen eye-to-eye on how to deal with pack issues. He wanted to adhere to old ways and traditions, and I'd refused. But murder? Had he really solicited the murder of my mate?

I finished soaking up the water and headed upstairs to change into the clothes the guys had brought me. I heard my sister's voice as I hit the top of the stairs.

"I hope you don't mind. I invited Ivy to come with us. She was like another sister to Rowan," Raina said, which was true. Ivy had always been another little sister.

"Of course," Sasha offered.

“Oh, Sasha. We would have been there for you,” Ivy told my mate. “I’m so glad you finally came home.”

“How many babies did you bring?” Sasha asked, not replying to Ivy. I figured she wasn’t sure what to say.

“Bastion has Rowan, and Cyan has the carriers with his and Ivy’s twins, Liam and Lucas,” Raina said.

“They’re too little to leave for long, right now,” Ivy said.

“Don’t let her fool you. She just doesn’t want them out of her sight,” I heard her mate, Cyan, tattle.

“Damn right,” Ivy agreed.

“I understand,” Sasha said. “I was the same way with Raine. Still am.”

“God, I can’t believe Rowan has a son,” Ivy stated.

“Actually, there’s something else I want to share with you,” Sasha said, and I knew she was preparing them for my entrance.

“Don’t tell me Raine has a twin,” Raina said.

“No, he...” Sasha began then broke off as she heard my footsteps on the stairs. “He has a father.”

“Rowan!”

My sister shouted my name and flew at me, launching into my arms as she had so many times in the past. I caught her easily, hugged her tight and just held on as she sobbed into my chest. When I glanced over and saw Ivy crying, I pulled one arm free, waving her over with my fingers and pulling her in when she joined us. I heard the others move around us, the murmur of voices as Bastion and Cyan questioned Sasha and the others. Still, we clung together, all of us shedding tears.

“How? What? Where have you been? What the hell is going on?” my sister demanded. “How are you here? You died! They told me you died!”

“Shh,” I whispered. “Let’s sit down, kiddo. I’ll tell you everything.”

Ivy hugged me again then moved to her mate. Cyan scooped her up into his lap, and she tucked her head into his neck. I suspected she was still crying. Raina cupped my face, running her fingers over me.

“How are you not scarred?”

“He is,” Sasha told her. “His right arm, chest, and back.”

“Patrick and Josh protected me as much as they could,” I told Raina.

“Are they...”

She trailed off when I shook my head.

“They died before help could get to us.”

“I don’t understand,” she murmured again as I led her over to the couch where Bastion already sat with a gorgeous, baby girl in his arms. “Where have you been?”

“I was in a coma at first,” I told her. “The guys got me out of the truck and realized I was still alive.”

Her gaze jerked to Easton and Lincoln. “He’s why you left. Not just because you discovered the accident wasn’t an accident. But to protect him. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Don’t slap Easton again,” I ordered when Raina would have stood.

“You were there? In my house this morning?” She stared at me for a moment. “The hooded jacket. How did I miss you?”

“They did it to protect me. When I woke up, I ordered them to keep it quiet while we tried to find out what had happened. I searched for Sasha at the same time. Easton’s the one who talked me into finally coming here. Told me this was what I needed to do to find Sasha and the person responsible. He argued constantly that I should reach out to you.”

“Well, now, I feel even worse about slapping him,” she muttered, glancing toward Easton.

“It’s okay, kiddo. I’d have done the same.”

I leaned around her and held out a finger to Rowan.

“Is this my namesake?”

Raina took her daughter and cuddled her. “This is Rowan.”

“She’s beautiful, Raina. You named her after me.”

“You named your son after me. Well, I guess Sasha did, but she said it was because you would have wanted her to.”

“Think the world can handle two mini versions of us?” I teased, and Raina grinned.

“I imagine they’ll keep us on our toes if they’re anything like their parents,” my sister agreed then she reached out again and touched my face. “God, I’ve missed you so much.”

“I missed you, too,” I assured her when Raine came around the corner with Lincoln.

“Daddy!” he cried and ran to me.

More tears poured down my sister’s face as I scooped up my son and settled him on my lap. Sasha came over and settled on the arm of the couch beside me.

“I can’t believe this,” Ivy stated. “I saw what was left of the truck, Rowan. I went to your memorial. How did you survive that?”

“Patrick and Josh,” I said again. “Then Easton and Lincoln got me out of there and to help as soon as they realized I was still breathing.”

“The doctors kept him in a coma for a long time,” Lincoln shared. “They were trying to give his wolf time to heal as long as they could.”

“What doctors? Where?” Raina asked.

“We took him to Jax Barlow,” Easton said. “He helped us get him to a doctor who specializes in severe injuries to our kind. Rowan was in and out. In so much pain. They put him into a coma for nine months. We stayed at his side the entire time. Barely leaving.”

“Barlow’s a good wolf,” Bastion said. “I’ve seen him several times, and he’s never once hinted you were still alive.”

“He’s a friend,” I told them.

“You’ve been searching for answers,” Cyan cut in. “Did you come to the same conclusion as your mate?”

“Do you think our father is responsible?” Raina demanded.

Sasha tensed beside me.

“My mate believes he is, and that’s good enough for me,” I stated. “Plus, there’s the fact he hasn’t shown up once since I’ve been here.”

“What do you mean?” Raina asked then passed Rowan back to Bastion. “Are you saying our father knew you were alive and didn’t say anything?”

Sasha growled as I nodded, though I’d already shared this information with her.

“I should have let Bastion beat the hell out of him when he wanted to,” Raina snarled while Bastion grunted.

“Told you I didn’t trust the bastard,” Bastion said. “Not after the stunt he pulled with you when we were supposed to meet.”

“I keep asking myself how I didn’t see who he was,” I admitted.

“Because he’s our father,” Raina said. “God knows, he drilled that into us our whole lives. The importance of family first then pack. Hell, even when you took over as alpha, he still tried to control things. He never outright challenged you because he knew he wouldn’t win, but he tried to lead you where he wanted you to go.”

“He told me once, if I decided to follow in my mother’s footsteps, he’d set me up someplace nice. Make sure I was treated well,” Ivy told us.

“He what?” Cyan practically roared while Bastion and I both growled. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me that?”

She shrugged. “Honestly, I just thought of it. It was after Rowan...died. I came over to the house to pick up Raina and found myself in the front room with him. I mentioned having issues with Austin Mickel, and that’s what Mr. Byrd said to me. That I should come to him first, and he’d set me up. Said he’d set up both Rebbie and me.”

“There’s no way Rebel told Taylor this, or Byrd would already be a dead man,” Bastion said.

“He’s already a dead man when I get my hands on him,” Cyan snarled.

“I don’t think he ever said anything to Rebbie. I’m sorry, Cyan. I didn’t think of it as Raina’s father encouraging me to become a pack whore. I thought he worried I’d be like my mother and was offering to protect me if I did,” Ivy told her mate. “That was maybe a week or two before Raina and I met you guys in the bar. From that point on, you were at the forefront of my mind. Everything else just fell away.”

“He played on your greatest fear,” Cyan said. “He knew what he was doing.”

“Sounds like he did and said a lot of things to different people, but no one ever put it all together,” Lincoln muttered. “Now, that we are, things are adding up.”

“Has he said or done anything since you took in the remainder of the pack?” I asked Bastion.

“He hasn’t been the same since you died,” Raina said then snorted. “Well, that’s not true, since he knew you weren’t dead. Since you were injured, then. He drinks a lot.”

“He showed his ass when he made you think I’d parade you around for my pack to decide who wanted to mate you,” Bastion reminded her.

“I told him to introduce the two of you. I’d planned on doing it before everything happened.”

“Which is probably why he pushed me so hard,” Raina mused.

“Sounds like guilt to me,” Sasha muttered at my side.

Sounded a lot like guilt to me, too. There was only one way to be certain. The irony wasn't lost on me. I'd left my pack to find the answers I needed about my arranged accident and the attack on my mate, but those answers had been right here all along. Tomorrow, my father would answer for his actions, and if he'd been the one behind everything... He wouldn't be walking out alive.

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Chapter Eleven

~Sasha~

Everyone had finally left. Rowan and I had taken our vows in front of the remaining Rigton wolves, as well as Raina, Bastion, Ivy, Cyan, and Nico. Though, I'd already considered us mated just as did he, now it was all wrapped up nicely with a bow. Raine had fallen asleep. Nico was in the room next to his, and Rowan and I were headed back upstairs. We had plans for tomorrow, but I was focused on tonight and loving my mate. He'd been in control earlier when my mind and heart were still processing he was here, alive, with me. Now, it was my turn.

I stepped into our room before him and went to my knees when he turned to shut the door.

"Sasha," he groaned when he faced me again.

I was already reaching for his jeans, unsnapping and tugging down the zipper.

"Let me taste you," I begged, and he reached out to thread his fingers through my hair as he sprung free of the denim, rising hard and thick and making my mouth water.

I didn't waste time. I leaned in, licking over the swollen crown before continuing down his shaft then flicking my tongue over the taut sac below.

"Fuck, Sasha."

His growls fueled my desire as I made my way back to his tip and took him into my mouth, sucking him. His chest rumbled, and his hips flexed, pressing more of his length inside before he could control himself. I reveled in the fact I could make him lose control. I worked him between my hand and mouth, lapping up his precum and swallowing it down with a moan. I'd missed this. The feel of him, the taste of him on my tongue. I had nothing to compare it to. I hadn't done

this with any other man, and nothing I'd ever tasted rivaled to the salty sweetness of Rowan.

"Fuck, baby," Rowan warned. "Keep that up, and I'm going to come."

I popped off long enough to utter, "Yes", before swallowing him whole, breathing through my nose while I took him to the root, my lips pressed tightly against the base of his shaft before I slowly bobbed back to the tip. Rowan's fingers clenched in my hair, tugging at the strands and sending a trickle of pain along my scalp. It only added to the slick heat between my thighs. I wanted his seed in my mouth first, though. Wanted to swallow every drop he gave me. From experience, I knew he'd return the favor as soon as he caught his breath, and the man was a god with his tongue.

I worked my way up and down, sucking and swallowing while he pumped into my mouth. He still fought to maintain his control, but I knew that wouldn't last. Every time he hit the back of my throat and I took him down, he lost a little more of that iron-willed discipline.

"Fuck, baby. I'm coming. Ah, fuck. I'm coming, baby."

Rowan groaned as his semen flooded my mouth. I swallowed down every creamy drop, moaning around him as I did. When he finally slipped free of my mouth, I looked up at him and licked my lips. I discovered two things then. Rowan didn't need to catch his breath, and though he'd just come hard down my throat, his cock was still hard and thick.

He had me on my back on the bed in seconds. Then he was on his knees while mine were over his shoulders. The first glide of his tongue had me wiggling, fingers digging into the bedding while I fought against the scream building in my chest. Earlier, he'd taken his time. This was raw and rough. There was no slow and easy. His mouth devoured, fingers gripping my thighs and keeping them wide while I went wild beneath him. I rocked up into his mouth while he bit and sucked and licked me from my clit down the full length of my sex then back again. I wasn't ashamed at how quickly he had me mewling and begging.

“Please! Oh, God. Please, Rowan. Make me come!”

He growled against my flesh. His lips wrapped my swollen clitoris tight, and he sucked greedily, giving me mere seconds to adjust to that before he thrust two fingers inside me and fucked me mercilessly with them. I cried out, my hands everywhere. I clawed at the bed, grabbed his head to try to control it, then when that didn't work, I scratched at his shoulders only to go back to the bedding to try to ground myself when I felt the oncoming explosion.

“Rowan!” I wailed as I came, and still, he ate me, replacing his fingers with his tongue while he leaned in and pressed my thighs impossibly wider.

He wouldn't let me come down, not completely. Every time the pleasure started to recede, he took me back to the edge and tossed me into the maelstrom again. I lost count after my third orgasm. I swore I'd pass out after the fourth, and I had no control of my body when he finally rose. He flipped me onto my stomach, jerked my hips up and thrust into me.

“Mine,” he growled, bending over my back and sucking at my neck. “My mate. I'm never losing you again. Never.”

“No,” I agreed softly, too breathless to say much else.

“I want another baby,” he whispered at my ear, slowing his pace. “I want to be there from the start. Watch our child grow inside you. Be there for you when he or she is born. I want everything we were robbed of.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “God, yes.”

“Tonight,” he vowed. “I'm going to fuck you until my seed takes inside you.”

His words were like an aphrodisiac, setting my blood alight with need. He fucked me hard, pounding into me while I moaned and writhed under him. He didn't stop. He had me coming again quickly, and I buried my face in the pillow to try to tame the scream rising from my throat. He threaded his fingers through mine on the bed and held tight while he slipped his other hand under my belly, finding my clit and playing it to his rhythm.

His thrusts became frantic then jerky, and I knew he was close.

“Rowan,” I begged. “Come inside me. Fill me up. Make a baby with me.”

My mate growled, biting down at the base of my neck as his seed flooded my womb. He held his cock deep, panting against me as he came.

“Not enough,” he muttered. “More. Give you more.”

I wasn't sure I could take more, but he eased out, turned me over, and filled me again. He tempered his pace this time, setting a slow, steady cadence that was just as consuming as the frantic fucking we'd been doing.

“I love you, baby.”

“I love you,” I assured him, reaching up to urge his mouth to mine.

I clung to him, not wanting to break our kiss. Sweat coated both of us, so our bodies were a slick glide of flesh on flesh. He broke the seal of our lips and left a trail of sucking bites down my throat to my breasts. He stopped there, licking over my nipples before catching one between his teeth and nipping it. At my cry, he sucked it in, rubbing his tongue over it in an attempt to soothe. He treated the other nipple to the same, then his cock left me empty as he trailed his hands and mouth over my stomach, forcing my legs wider with his shoulders.

His fingers spread my lips, and I watched his heated gaze stare at my exposed sex. His fingers trailed over my thigh, capturing the proof of our passion that had slipped free of my pussy.

“Let's keep this inside,” he growled then licked over me while his fingers pushed the seed back into me.

“Rowan, please,” I cried. “Oh, God. I can't! Too much.”

His only answer was to pull his fingers free and dip his tongue inside. My hips jerked up against his face. He was

tasting us, the blend of our releases inside me. Then he rose up my body again, capturing my face.

“Taste us,” he demanded and thrust his tongue into my mouth. I tasted him and me, and it was the sexiest thing I’d ever experienced.

This time, when he broke my kiss, he reared back, pulled my ankles to his shoulders, leaned into me and took my body again. It was hard and deep and at a frantic pace that had me screaming with release within the first three strokes. Rowan wasn’t far behind. He collapsed at my side, tugging me against his chest. I didn’t realize I was crying until he reached down and ran his fingers over my cheek.

“Did I hurt you, baby?”

“No,” I struggled to reassure him as I fought to inhale. “It... I... You...”

I couldn’t finish a thought much less a sentence, but my mate seemed to understand. He cuddled me close, reaching down to jerk the twisted covers up and over us.

“I’ve got you, baby. I’m going to hold you all night, and I’ll still be wrapped around you when you wake up in the morning.”

I rubbed my hands over his chest, up to his shoulders, and looked up when I felt something slick under my fingertips.

“You’re bleeding,” I accused. “Why didn’t you tell me I scratched you up?”

Rowan glanced over at his shoulder and shrugged. “I lost some feeling in my back and shoulders. I got most of it back in my arm, but not my back. Feel free to scratch it up as much as you like.”

“Rowan.”

“Shh, baby. It’s fine. I’m here. I survived, and tomorrow, we’ll get answers.”

“As much as I distrust your father, I hate that you’re going through this. Part of me hopes he wasn’t involved.”

“That no longer seems likely,” Rowan said. “Either way, he’ll be gone after tomorrow.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“If he was responsible for what happened to us, then he’ll die at my hand. If he wasn’t, he’ll still pay for what he put Raina and Ivy through. I have a feeling Taylor will hear about my father including Rebel in his offer to Ivy. If not tonight, then tomorrow. Which means Richard Byrd’s days are numbered. He won’t be allowed in the new Rigton Pack, nor will he be allowed to remain in the James Pack.”

“I’m—”

He pressed his fingers over my lips.

“Don’t you dare tell me you’re sorry. You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m the one who should be apologizing. For not seeing the extent of what my father was capable of.”

“I’m not sure he’ll admit the truth to you,” I said. “But I have an idea of how we can make him.”

Rowan turned to his side and looked down at me.

“How?”

“He doesn’t know I’m alive. As far as he knows, my brother went into hiding to grieve me, and you’ve been searching for a ghost.”

Rowan nodded.

“Then let’s see how he does confronting a ghost.”

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Chapter Twelve

~Rowan~

I'd passed on Sasha's plan to the rest of the group this morning. It was perfect. The woman had a devious mind, and I loved it. Seeing the ghost of the woman he'd killed would definitely pull a confession from his lips.

I'd arranged to meet him in one of the warehouses at the edge of town. According to Bastion, it was where his sister had been held hostage before her mate charged in and saved her, arriving before Bastion and the rest of his inner circle could get to Bee. Raina had told me about Belinda James. Belinda Craig now. She had visions, and as far as Raina knew, they'd all been proved extremely prophetic.

She'd had one when Eliza had arrived. I'd yet to see the woman I'd sent to Bastion and Raina, but I planned to amend that later today. Bastion was calling in the whole pack, so I could let everyone know I was alive. I knew it would cause some chaos, tears, anger, and hopefully joy. I'd tried to assure him I wasn't planning to reclaim any of the Rigton wolves that were now part of his pack, but he'd merely shrugged.

"Let them go where they will," he'd said. "There's plenty of space for two packs here."

"Your dad just pulled up. Get ready," Easton called from his place by the door.

Nico and I stood in the middle of the large building. Easton and Lincoln along with the rest of my Rigton wolves were at the front. Bastion, Cyan, Taylor, Hannibal, Simon, Gabe, Michael, Antonio, and Donovan were spread out at the back. As they'd been in and out several times since Bee's attack, their scents shouldn't cause any alarms to rise. And my mate was hidden just out of sight, ready to come out when the time was right.

“Easton, Lincoln, boys,” my dad said as he entered, and I had to swallow the growl that wanted to spill from my throat. This would be harder than I’d thought. He hadn’t even spoken, and I was ready to kill him.

“Rowan.”

He rushed to me and pulled me into a hug I had no will to return. He didn’t seem to notice.

“God, it’s good to see you, son. I thought I’d lost you. Went out of my mind. Then you called. I know you told me to stay calm. Took everything I had not to go to you.”

“Dad,” I murmured, but that title was like ash on my tongue. “I told you I needed to find some answers. I did.”

I nodded toward Nico, and my father jerked as if he’d just realized the other man was standing there.

“What’s he doing here?”

“Byrd,” Nico snarled.

My father took a couple of steps away from Nico.

“What’s going on, son?”

“Nico is Sasha’s brother.”

“That girl you were going to—”

“My mate,” I barked, cutting him off.

“She’s gone, Rowan. Died the same day of your accident. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. I figured one of the boys with you would.”

“Murdered,” Nico snapped.

“What?” my father asked, gaze bouncing between Nico and me.

“My sister was murdered.”

“Well, now, I don’t know about that. Heard she was up on the ridge with a group of male wolves. Things got a little rough, and she went over and into the falls.”

There was no controlling my wolf's anger this time as a growl tore from my throat.

"A little rough?" I asked, forcing the words past my clenched teeth.

"You make it sound like she was hanging out with those men. As if they didn't hunt her down and beat the hell out of her before she went over the ledge," Nico raged.

"I don't know anything about that," my father denied. "All I know is my boy is alive and home. Everything's going to be fine now."

"He won't forget me."

Sasha stepped out. She wore something similar to what she'd worn when I'd taken her to meet my father. I'd always maintained I'd waited to introduce them because I'd been greedy of my time with her. Now, I wondered if I hadn't subconsciously known he wouldn't accept her.

"What? Who said that?" My father whipped his head back and forth, looking around the cavernous building. I smelled the whiskey on his breath and knew the fact he'd already started drinking would make this even easier.

"I did."

Sasha moved, grabbing my father's attention.

"No one said anything," I countered seconds later. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, God. She's there. Why is she there?"

Nico and I looked at each other.

"Who the hell is he talking about?" Nico asked.

I glanced around, skimming over my mate as if I didn't see her.

"There's no one here."

"You killed me," Sasha accused. "Took me from my mate. He'll never get over me."

“Why won’t you go away?” my father cried, holding his hands out toward her and waving frantically. “Just go away.”

The way he spoke made me think my mate must haunt him. It also showed me she’d been right. He’d had everything to do with the attack on her.

“I can go away,” I offered instead, doing my best to stick with the plan, though all I wanted was to slit his throat and watch him bleed out on the cement.

“Not you,” my father yelled. “Her. She won’t leave me alone.”

“That’s what happens when you kill someone,” Nico said.

“I didn’t kill her!” he screamed.

“You may not have been the one to attack, but you ordered it. I know it,” Nico replied.

“You don’t know anything,” my father yelled. “Nothing. You weren’t there. They...” He cut himself off.

“Confessed everything before I killed them,” Sasha said in synch with Nico.

My father’s head bounced back and forth on his shoulders as he glanced between them.

“They did,” Nico said, claiming his attention as Sasha walked closer. “You didn’t cover your tracks as well as you thought, Byrd.”

“Did you arrange for my accident, too?” I demanded while he was still processing Sasha’s ghost.

“Just a little accident to keep you away from her,” he muttered. “You weren’t supposed to die.”

“I’m not dead,” I told him. “I’m right here.”

“Are you?” he screamed. “Are you? Oh, God! I’m losing my mind. She’s there every time I close my eyes. Accusing me.”

I didn't need to hear any more. He'd as good as confessed and signed his death warrant. I should have known it wouldn't be that easy, though. From one moment to the next my father shifted, ripping through his clothes and charging at Sasha. She never flinched. Merely bared her teeth and let her wolf burst from her skin. Nico and I were only seconds behind. I saw other wolves but paid little mind, not caring who else charged in. My father's blood was mine and Sasha's to claim.

I heard Sasha yelp even as she swiped her paw over his face. Then I was there, slamming into his side and sending him spinning across the floor. Nico attacked then, going for his throat. I howled in warning, but I knew he wouldn't stop. Not when he'd heard the same confession I had. Sasha moved in, though, snarling at her brother until he released my father with a growl. I closed in then, raking my claws down his side and splitting skin. He yelped and tried to back up, but there was nowhere for him to go. He was surrounded.

Nico leaped close and raked open his other side. Blood dripped from him to the floor, making it slicker. Sasha lunged at his face, tearing at one of his eyes. Another yelp and he went down hard. We were on him before he could get up. Sasha went for his throat while I tore open his belly, splitting him wide. My mate's head jerked from side to side before she yanked free, blood spraying as she took flesh with her.

I raised my nose to the roof, letting a howl fill the air. Sasha nuzzled against me before joining in. It was hard to reconcile the dead drunk before me with the tough alpha he'd once been when I was a boy, a man I'd looked up to and wanted to emulate. Now, I prayed his madness never came for me. Sasha rubbed against me again, and I shifted. When she slipped from fur to skin beside me, I scooped her into my arms and took her back to the place where she'd been hiding.

We both had blood on us, but I needed her. My cock was thick and hard between my thighs, and she was already ready for me when I bent her over. It was hard and fast, the animalistic claiming of a mate. She howled again as I pounded into her, furiously fucking my mate. It was a reminder we

were both alive, together, and would never be torn apart again. When we came, it was together, my roar overpowering her scream as pleasure consumed us. We were both gasping for breath when two blankets were tossed toward us.

“We’re going to have to talk about boundaries,” Nico groused, letting me know who’d thrown them. “There are some things a brother doesn’t need to hear.”

Sasha laughed, reached up to kiss me, then wrapped the cloth around her.

“Get used to it,” she told her twin. “Now, that I have him again, I plan to keep him right where I want him.”

“Where’s that?” I asked as I wrapped the covering in my hand around my hips.

“Inside me,” she purred, taking my hand.

“Sounds like a good plan to me,” I agreed, scooping her back up.

I never looked down as I passed my father’s body. He was nothing to me. I focused on the woman in my arms. The woman I loved. Shower, food, and fuck. Those were my only plans for the next twenty-four hours. Raine was safe with my sister, which meant nothing would keep me from sating the instinctual need to rut my mate until the smell of blood left my nose and I accepted the threat to her was gone.

I was Sasha’s mate. Her wounded wolf who’d found his way home. To her. As my wolves closed ranks around us, I knew this was where we were meant to be. Not just Sasha and me, but the rest of the guys, including Nico. We were family. A pack no matter what I’d once tried to convince myself. The Rigton wolves were back, and we weren’t going anywhere again.

Epilogue

~Sasha~

Six week later

I couldn't stop grinning as I left the bedroom, heading downstairs to where Rowan and the rest of the guys were. We'd been staying at Lincoln's house since Richard Byrd's death. Rowan had refused to step foot in his father's house, though Raina said it should be his now. He said there was nothing there he wanted. As Raina had taken all her stuff and most of his when she'd mated with Bastion, I expected he was right. He'd had it torn down, and the foundation of what would be our home was already being lain. We'd be here until it was ready. Thankfully, Lincoln had a big house with plenty of rooms to accommodate all of us.

"What's got that big grin on your face?" Nico asked, popping up beside me and scaring the hell out of me.

"Nothing," I said, narrowing my gaze at him when he looked me up and down, gaze pausing on where my hand pressed to my belly.

"Are you—"

"Don't even say it," I warned. "Rowan's going to know first, damn it. We're doing things right this time."

My brother's expression softened, and he mimed zipping his lips closed before dropping a kiss on my cheek and moving down the hallway toward his room. He hadn't officially joined the Rigton wolves, but it was only a matter of time. He wasn't leaving me, and I wasn't leaving Rowan.

Rowan was watching Lincoln and Uriel play a video game when I walked in. His gaze immediately locked onto me, and he held out his hand. I walked over, but instead of letting him pull me into his lap, I tugged.

"Come with me."

He didn't question. He merely rose and followed me back upstairs. He had his shirt off by the time we reached the bedroom and was toeing off his shoes while I shut the door.

"Rowan."

God, it was amazing how much he wanted me. He was always hard and ready. One glance at the bulge in his jeans, and I knew this time was no different.

"What?" he asked then frowned when he noticed I was still fully dressed. "Is it too much?"

"Never," I swore. "But I wanted to show you something."

He sat on the bed, moving until his back was against the headboard.

"I'm all eyes."

I laughed.

"Hold that thought."

I walked into the bathroom and picked up the stick with two pink lines then returned to the bedroom and tossed it to him.

"What's this?" He glanced briefly down before staring back at me.

"One line is negative. Two are positive."

"It's positive," he noted as he raised the stick to give it a better look.

"Yes," I agreed.

"What..." He trailed off, and I saw the moment it connected for him. He pounced off the bed and prowled toward me. "You're pregnant?"

I nodded then felt a tear slip free when he went to his knees before me and lifted my shirt to reveal my still-flat belly. He pressed tender kisses over my stomach.

"Can you feel them yet?"

"Not yet," I told him with another laugh.

He glanced up at me. “We’re having a baby.”

“We’re having a baby,” I agreed then cried out as he shot to his feet, hauling me into his arms and swinging me around.

“We’re having a baby!” he yelled.

Scooping me up, he ran out of the room and downstairs yelling. Every wolf in the room was on their feet, searching for danger when we got there.

“What the hell’s going on?” Easton demanded, claws already out.

“We’re having a baby,” Rowan told them.

“Well, hell,” Damien growled. “That’s fantastic news! Congratulations, Alpha.”

The others all joined in, and we were surrounded. Each of us hugged in turn. My head was spinning by the time my feet found the ground again. Then I was in Rowan’s arms again, and he was carrying me back upstairs. He shut the door with his foot and took me to the bed, lowering me to my feet beside it.

“Will Raine be okay with us having another baby?” he asked as he stared at me.

“Of course,” I said. “We just have to make sure he doesn’t feel replaced.”

“He’s my son. He’ll never be replaced,” Rowan stated with a growl.

“Exactly,” I agreed. “He’ll be as excited as we are.”

He cupped my belly again. “We’re having a baby.”

“Yep. Apparently, when you declare your intentions, you don’t mess around,” I teased, reminding him how he’d told me he’d fill me up until his seed took root inside me.

He grinned. “If that’s true, then we’re going to have a big family.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Definitely. I can’t keep my hands off you, Sasha. Add to that your plan to keep me inside you. It’s a recipe for keeping you pregnant.”

“I’m okay with that.”

He grabbed the hem of my shirt and pulled it over my head. Dropping it to the floor, he went for the front clasp of my bra.

“I’m going to make love to you, mate,” he told me, bending to lick up my neck. “All night long.”

“Mmm,” I agreed as he lifted me onto the bed and laid me back. “I like the sound of that.”

He opened my jeans and tugged them down, taking my panties with them. Tossing them aside, he bent over me, capturing my mouth with his while his hands ran over my body. This man. This perfect man. My man. My mate. I reached for him, but he pushed my hands down beside my head.

“Let me love you, baby.”

He ran that wicked mouth back down my neck to my breasts, worshipping there for several moments before brushing kisses over my abdomen.

“This is Daddy,” he whispered against my skin. “I love you. I can’t wait to meet you.”

His words hit me like an emotional punch to the heart.

“Rowan.”

“Shh,” he whispered then nuzzled lower, spreading my thighs wide and licking over my sex. “I’m hungry, Sasha, and you’ve got my favorite treat right here.”

He dipped a finger inside. “It’s even ready for me.”

“Yes!” I cried as he ran his fingers over me then pressed one inside.

“You taste like heaven,” he groaned before licking over me again. “I could eat you for the rest of my life, and it wouldn’t be enough. Never enough.”

“Never,” I agreed, already rocking my hips into his mouth.

He made a feast out of me, making me come over and over again, until I was begging him to fuck me. When he slid up my body and pushed inside, I wrapped my arms and legs around him and held tight.

“I love you. I love you so much,” I swore.

He kissed me, and I tasted the proof of his prowess on my tongue.

“I love you,” he whispered back when our lips parted.

I arched into his thrusts, rocking my hips and stroking my hands down his back to grip his ass and urge him toward a faster pace.

“Faster, Rowan,” I begged. “I’m so close.”

He growled but changed his rhythm to match my request.

“Fuck, Sasha. Come with me, baby. Let me feel you squeeze my cock.”

“Oh, God!”

His fingers found my clit, his thumb rubbing circles over it while he pounded into me.

“Fuck, I’m coming!” he cried, but I was already there, tightening around him and milking him for every drop I could get.

I was already nodding off when Rowan moved, lifting me into his arms then settling us both under the covers, tugging me against his chest.

“A baby,” he said again, awe in his voice.

“Our baby.”

“I’m going to make sure every craving you have is met,” he vowed. “Whatever you want. No matter what time or what it is. Anything you want, baby.”

“Want to know what I want right now?”

“Anything,” he promised again.

“Hold me,” I whispered. “Let me feel your arms around me while I fall asleep. That’s all I want.”

“I can do that.”

Rowan tucked me closer, until my head rested on his chest, one arm thrown over his stomach. He stroked his fingers through my hair, lulling me to sleep even while I felt his other hand squeezing my ass cheek. It was perfect, and exactly where I wanted to be.

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About the Author

Lacey is a hyper blonde, bouncing through life with her magical bracelets of positivity. She has a passion for life and romance. She writes possessive, alpha heroes who demand everything from the women they love. Her stories reflect her strong family ties, friendships that showcase how some family consists of those we choose, and a goofy sense of humor that helps keep her laughing through all life's ups and downs.

If you want to talk books, television, movies, actors, World of Warcraft, prepping for the zombie apocalypse, or music (she loves music!), drop her a line at laceythorn2007@gmail.com.

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