

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 171

Chapter 0171

(An hour later)

“What the f&&k do you mean that you do not know where Lily is?” I scream as I press Brady aggressively

against the wall in his office.

“Get off me, James.”

“F&&k you, Brady. TELL ME WHERE MY MATE IS!”

“I already told you! I do not know.”

“How long has she been gone, Brady?” Dr. Hyder asks, in a voice even more angry than my own.

“Since the day we got back from Hawaii.”

“What?!?!?!?!?!?” I punch Brady hard, breaking his nose. I then step away.

“How could you not tell us?” Dr. Hyder demands.

“I did not know for two weeks that she was gone. Once I found out, I immediately sent trackers out there

looking for her. That a&&hole over there was not even supposed to know where she was,” Brady explains, pointing at me, “and I did not want you to come here screaming your head off at me and tipping off the

enemies that she was out there in the world defenseless.”

“Two. Weeks. You did not know that Lily was missing for TWO. WEEKS?!?!? I gave you one assignment, Son. ONE! Protect that girl. And you did not know she was gone for two weeks? You do not deserve to call yourself an alpha! What the f&&k is wrong with you?!?!?”

Brady runs his hands through his hair, obviously feeling frustrated and ashamed. Too bad I do not feel sorry for him. I want him to feel that way and more.

“Look, she left here voluntarily, okay? You know Rose is special. I think Rose helped her get out of here,” Brady says quietly, still trying to defend himself. He was doing a horrible job.

He reaches into a locked drawer and pulls out a letter. “Here, look. She left this note.”

Dr. Hyder reads the letter and then gives it to me. I read it a few times, not really sure what to make of it.

“Has she given you any clues about where she might be, James?” Dr. Hyder asks.

“Why would he know?” Brady responds, suspicion obvious in his tone.

“Because she has been communicating with him by phone.”

“WHAT? Are you even sure that it is her?”

“Yes, A&&hole. She is my mate. We have talked by text and by phone.”

“And you know it is her? Not some scammer? Not someone pretending to be her?”

“I would know my own mate, Brady. It is her.”

“Really? Because I remember not too long ago in the past you thought your mate was Stephanie.”

I get up to punch Brady again. This time I am ready to kill him. I only get one punch in-surprisingly, Dr.

Hyder does not even try to stop me- when my phone rings.

Everyone in the room freezes.

I pull the phone out of my pocket. It is Lily. Oh, thank Goddess.

“Lily?”

“James? Are you okay? You called me 55 times and sent me 34 text messages.”

“Why didn’t you answer?”

“I was working. I had a double shift at the girls’ home and I do not have my phone on when I am there.

Are you okay?”

“Yes... but where are you?”

“James, I-”

“Please, Lily. Tell me where you are. Black Moon was attacked today. They are still trying to piece together who did it, but everything so far is pointing to them trying to come for you. Please. Tell me

where you are. I will come to you.”

Silence.

“Is everyone at Black Moon okay?” she asks.

“Yes. There are some injuries, but no casualties.”

More silence.

“Lily?”

“I am here.”

“Please, Lily. I need to see you. I need to know that you are safe. I am here with Brady and Dr. Hyder. They are just as worried as I am. Please. Just tell me where you are.”

Silence.

Finally, after what seems like forever, Lily responds. “Ravenswood.”

“Ravenswood?” I repeat, letting out a small smile. “Home of the Wolf Packers?”

“Yes.”

“I will be on the next flight out. Please. Stay right where you are, okay? Please. Do not go to work. Do not go anywhere. Just wait for me. I will be there as soon as I can.”

“Okay.”

I hang up and start to leave Brady’s office. Before I can, Dr. Hyder stops me.

“Take our plane.”

I glance at Brady, who is giving his father a dirty look.

“It will be faster. Take the plane.”

I nod. Off to Ravenswood I go

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Chapter 0172

(Nick POV)

After the disastrous wed

memorial event, I somehow made it back to the packhouse. I really do not know how I got here. I am sure that I was ushered back by one of the security guards, but I honestly.

cannot remember.

I do know that, ever since I got back, I have been sitting by myself on a chair in the packhouse living

room. I also know that it has been several hours since we got back.

Wolves around me are running around. A few-like my mother-seem to be happily rejoicing Stephanie’s return. Others seem confused. Still others, including Sheila and Jenny’s parents, seem worried or

nervous.

For their part, Alpha Randall, Luna Jane, and my father are hurriedly gathering information for, and meeting with, members of the werewolf council. They all have their “business faces” on.

I have no idea where James is. I know that Stephanie has been looking for him everywhere, but she has

yet to find him. As far as I know, he left before the end of the showdown between Jenny, Stephanie, and

Sheila. I do not even know if he saw it all, or if he saw how it ended.

As for me and what I am doing and how I am doing?

I am just sitting here, numb. I do not know where to turn or where to go. I do not know what to think. I

do not know who to trust, who to rely on, or even what part of this entire mess that I should be most

shocked by.

I mean, so many things were revealed today. What part of is more shocking? Is it that:

-Stephanie is alive?

-Stephanie tried to fake her own kidnapping?

-Stephanie has been living happily with a human for the past six years?

-Stephanie has a pup?

–Lily was innocent?

-Lily was mocked and tortured and punished for years for something she did not do?

–I slept with Sheila three times without knowing it? (I do vaguely recall having sex before I marked Jenny and while Jenny was out of town, but until today I thought those were just very vivid dreams.)

Stephanie not only recorded me sleeping with Shella, but also sent the video to Jenny?

I

Honestly, any one of those things would send most wolves for a tailspin. In fact, I suspect half the pack

is probably reeling right now.

And yet.. deep down.... I know that I am not sitting numbly in this chair because of any of those

revelations.

No, I am sitting in this chair because of Jenny.

Please do not get me wrong. I am shocked and disturbed and upset by what came out today. I do not understand why Sheila and Stephanie have not yet been sent to the dungeons; a part of me wants to take

both of them there myself.

But... the betrayal I am feeling from my mate almost feels worse. No, it is worse.

Seven years ago, I committed my heart and soul to Jenny. I fell in love with her the moment that we discovered that we were mates. Stephanie gave me a hard time when I announced the mating, saying.

she would have preferred Sheila to be my mate, but I ignored her. I was determined to be with the she-

wolf that the Moon Goddess chose for me.

Jenny and I marked, mated, and married right after Jenny returned from a pre-planned trip to see her

extended family in Europe over the summer. We have barely been apart since.

I have always known that Jenny and I did not have the most romantic of relationships, but I thought that

was just the way that Jenny was, and it seemed to work for us. I had no idea that Jenny was holding back so much pain and resentment, nor did I have any idea that she was keeping so many secrets.

Stephanie and Sheila obviously have a lot to answer for. What they did was wrong, and the werewolf council will have to deal with them. Even my mother will not be able to prevent them from facing punishment. (Although they are not in the dungeons, they have been placed on strict house arrest, not able to leave the packhouse until the council finishes its investigation.)

But again, for some reason, I am not angry at them. Well, I mean, I AM angry at them. But I am much, much more angry at Jenny.

How many nights did I cry on Jenny's shoulder after Stephanie died? How could Jenny sit there and comfort me, knowing how badly I was hurting, and never tell me the truth?

How could Jenny sit there and watch my whole family fall apart? My mother was in agony. My father was too. What did either of them do to deserve that pain? What did I do to deserve it?

And what about Lily? Jenny was there when Lily was mocked and neglected and abused. She knew that Lily was suffering. She knew that people blamed Lily for Stephanie's death. She also knew that our own

nothing? 5

And what about the betrayal pains? How could Jenny keep all of the pain and hurt locked inside her for so many years, and never trust me enough to tell me about it? Or ask me about it?

Why did she even marry me? Or let me mark her?

And why would she choose to disclose everything today, in the most public, embarrassing way? Was she trying to ruin my family? Was she trying to ruin me?

None of it makes sense.

I know that I love Jenny with all of my heart, but I no longer know if I know her. And neither does my

wolf.

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 173

Chapter 0173

(Nick POV)

I ended up sitting in that d&&n chair in the packhouse until three o'clock in the morning. It was only after the activity around me quieted down, leaving me by myself, that I finally I decided to drag myself home.

I

Jenny and I have a small cottage near the pack house. My grandparents used to live there until they died. My parents gave me the cottage when Jenny and I married. It is about a five minute walk.

To my surprise, despite the late hour, Jenny was waiting for me in the living room when I walked in. The

first thing that I noticed -other than the fact that she was awake- was that she had a large suitcase

I

sitting next to her.

“Jenny, what are you still doing up?” I asked.

She stood up. “I have been waiting for you.”

“Why?”

“Don't you think we need to talk?”

I sighed as I ran my fingers through my hair. “Now?”

She nodded. “Yes, now.”

“Can it wait until the morning? After we have slept a little?”

Jenny ignored my question. Instead, she asked one of her own.

“Will you cut off your family, denounce the pack, and leave with me?”

“What?”

Jenny’s question sounded oddly rehearsed, and yet it was not at all what I expected her to say.

“Nick, they are not good people. What came out today does not even cover a fraction of the horrible things that they have done. It is not just Stephanie and Sheila. Your mother, your father, Alpha Randall, and Luna Jane have all done things. Bad things. All of them are to blame.”

I ran my hands down my face. “Can we please talk about this in the morning, Jenny? It has been a really long day. We both need some sleep.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, Nick. We need to talk about this now. I need to know if you are willing to cut ties with your family.”

“How can you ask me to do that, Jenny?” I asked in both exhaustion and disbelief. “They are my family!”

“I already told you. They are not good people,” she responded sadly.

“I

“I know that Stephanie did some bad things to us. Horrible things. But my parents are my family too

Family stands by one another. Forgives each other for making mistakes.”

“You never felt that way when it had to do with Lily,” she said bitterly.

I rubbed my neck. She was right. Goddess, she was right.

Even so... Two wrongs do not make a right. And Jenny was not just asking me to cut off Stephanie. She

was asking me to cut off my entire family and my entire pack. That was a lot to ask. She had to know

what a huge “ask” that was.

“You are one to talk, Jenny. You were right there with us when half the stuff happened to Lily. And unlike

all of us, you knew the truth.”

Jenny wiped a tear from her eye and shrugged her shoulders. “You are right. I guess you could say I am a

bad person too.”

“Why?” I asked. “Why did you keep it all to yourself? Why didn’t you tell me? Why did you let all of us suffer unnecessarily?”

Jenny started crying. Through her tears, she tried to explain.

“I was so hurt and so angry that all I could think about was revenge. I did not care who got hurt around me. I did not mean for Lily to get blamed for everything, but once she was, I chose not to do anything. about it. I told myself it was okay, because she had the same blood running through her veins that Stephanie and your parents had.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I asked again, trying to hold back my own tears.

“I didn’t want to lose you. If I did, they would win.”

“Wow. So that was what I was to you? A game? A pawn in your revenge scheme?”

I

“No. I wanted to be your mate, Nick. I really did. But every time we were together, all I could think about was what had happened before. And no matter how much I tried, I could never fully commit myself to you or make myself vulnerable. I wanted to, but I just couldn’t. Memories of the betrayal pains and the video just kept haunting me. As a result, I always held a part of myself back.”

I still did not understand what she was saying. Nor did I understand why any of this had happened or was

“You could have told me. We could have worked through it together.”

“Maybe,” she replied, obviously unconvinced.

“What is with the suitcase?” I asked, pointing beside her.

“I need a fresh start.”

I gulped.

“Without me?”

“If that is what it takes. I cannot spend another day here.”

“We are fully marked, Jenny. We can’t just reject each other now.”

“We can if our wolves agree.”

“Jasmine is okay with rejection?” I asked in surprise.

“Yeah. She agrees that we cannot stay here, around Stephanie and Sheila and your family. If you were

willing to cut them off and come with us, we would try. This time with a clean slate. But as long as you

insist on sticking by them and this pack, Jasmine agrees. It is time to start over.”

I looked at her in disbelief. I felt my heart breaking, along with that of my wolf.

“How long have you been thinking about this?”

“Seven years.

“SEVEN YEARS?”

“In one form or another, yes. At least off and on. I did not want to end up here, but I was not sure if |

would ever be able to get past the pain. Or the hate and anger. I do not like what it has done to me. Who it has turned me into.”

“You have thought about this for seven years and you want me to make a decision about cutting off my family in thirty minutes?”

She took a deep breath. “Yes.”

I sunk down in a chair.

“Jenny, I know that what Stephanie did was wrong. I know she hurt you. Both of us. But you are asking for something I do not know that I can give you. I love my parents. You cannot ask me to cut them off.

Stephanie did what she did and if she can be redeemed. She is my sister for Goddess’ sake. What your

are asking isn’t fair. And... you hurt me too.”

She frowned. “I know.”

I ran my hands through my hair again. “Where will you go?”

“I heard Australia is nice. I will start there. And once I am settled, I will call you and we can make

arrangements for the rejection.”

“You are really serious about this?”

“Yes.”

Jenny came over and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Bye, Nick.”

With that, she left, taking her suitcase with her.

And with that, I finally let out all of the tears that I had been holding back.

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 174

(Beta Robert POV)

Losing my daughter, Stephanie, was one of the hardest things that has ever happened to me. Her death.

almost killed my mate, and it almost killed me too. No parent should ever have to deal with the loss of

his or her pup.

Did I sleep with Sheila? Yes. I am not proud of it. But I needed comfort. Margie was obsessed with

Stephanie's death. Everything in Margie's mind revolved around Stephanie and her own feelings of loss. I

got ignored. My feelings got ignored. My pain got ignored.

I started volunteering to go on even more business trips than normal. Business trips have always been

my way of escaping, and of taking a break. I could not spend 24 hours a day, 7 days a week comforting

Margie. Even before Stephanie died, Margie was always upset about something. I needed time for

myself too.

One day not that long ago, Sheila showed up at one of the hotels that I was staying at. She invited me to

go and have a drink with her. It seemed innocent enough, so I agreed. We had a couple of drinks, and

she asked me how I was. She asked me about me. It felt nice. It had been a long time since anyone had

asked me about me. I was always the one taking care of Margie; not the other way around.

fit.

One thing led to another. I am not proud of it. Sheila is less than half my age, and she has gotten around. a lot. I had had a few drinks, but I was not drunk and I was not drugged. I was just sad and lonely. And

Sheila made me feel good.

When I got home from my trip a few days later, Margie asked me if I had had a good time. I knew exactly what she was referring to. I felt awful. But, I also knew that she would forgive me. She had before. 1

I know you have already heard about what happened with Tyler. The piece of that story that even Luna Jane does not know is that I succumbed to the pressure my family put on me; I slept with one of the she-wolves that my parents picked for me. I was desperate to prove that I was not the problem; that I could produce an heir. So I slept with another she-wolf. Just once. It happened in between Tyler and Stephanie. Again, I was in mourning. Margie was so focused on her own pain that she did not care

about mine.

Thankfully, the she-wolf I slept with did not get pregnant, but Margie did and just a few weeks later. I

never cheated again. Until Sheila, that is.

I am not trying to justify what I did. I regret it immensely. Most wolves never cheat on their mates, and I cheated on mine twice. It is because of the guilt that I felt that I allowed Margie to spin out of control.

Yes, I know Margie has done some bad things. Okay, a lot of bad things. And I know that her obsession

I also know that James has been drawn to my youngest daughter for a long time. It was not a surprise to me that James' mate was actually Lily not Stephanie. I may have said otherwise when Nick brought it up, but I was lying to him and to myself. I never would have forced James to marry Lily, but a part of me had secretly wondered for a long time whether the two of them were mates. I just never said anything because it would have devastated Margie.

Despite everything that Margie has done, she is my mate. I love her. She has forgiven me for the ways. that I have wronged her, I owe it to her to forgive her

for the ways that she has messed up too. Especially when my own actions led to her being the way that she is.

When she got pregnant with Stephanie, I encouraged her obsession with the pregnancy. I also

encouraged every fantasy and dream that Margie had associated with Stephanie. Even the crazy ones.

Even the ones that hurt other people.

I love my youngest daughter, but Lily does not need me. She is strong; she always has been. Even when Margie was beating her yes, I was aware of at least some of it- she kept her head held high. Even when others bullied her yes, I was aware of that too- she persevered.

Now, at the time, I told myself Lily's pain was acceptable because she deserved it... but even then a small voice inside me knew that it was wrong: I knew I should blame myself for Stephanie's death at least as

much as I blamed Lily.

What was it like to find out that Stephanie was actually alive? That her death had been faked by my daughter-in-law after Stephanie tried to fake her own kidnapping? That the guilt that I had felt was

misplaced? That the anger I had felt towards Lily was unjustified?

I do not know. I really do not know. I am still in shock.

My mate is happy. She is already telling people that James and Stephanie are second-chance mates.

She has absolutely no reason to think that, but I suppose it allows her to save face with the community.

Am I really in a position to deny it? After all, the more Margie focuses on Stephanie, and on the idea of

Stephanie and James being mated, the less Margie will focus on my recent affair with Sheila. And the

fact that Sheila is likely carrying my pup.

Plus, I have bigger problems to worry about than whether James and Stephanie are mates. The werewolf council heard everything that Stephanie, Sheila, and Jenny talked about. Nothing they said implicated Alpha Randall and I, but their argument definitely raised a lot of serious concerns. Council members have already said that they plan to stick around the pack for the next few weeks to make sure that everything is running appropriately.

They have placed Stephanie and Sheila on house arrest, and they are asking questions about elders in the care homes who may have been abused. They also want to know whether it is true that my son was

I know Margie is going to fight back against Stephanie receiving any type of punishment, but I do not

know how much leverage she or I really have.

Am I glad that Stephanie is alive? Of course I am. But what does this mean for Lily? What does this

mean for the life that I have built with my mate? What does this mean for any of us?

How do I feel about everything I heard?

Numb.

I feel numb.

And scared. As a beta wolf, I am not scared of anything. But today? Today I am scared.

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 175

Chapter 0175

(Lily POV)

After the phone call with James, I had another small panic attack. James was on his way here. Was I ready for that? For whatever that would mean?

I left Black Moon so that I could be on my own and independent for a while. I had quickly come to love it in Ravenswood, and even in the short time I have

been here, I have found myself growing as a person and as a she-wolf. Coming here was absolutely the right decision for me.

With James on his way, what would happen to the life that I have started to build? What would James want and expect with respect to our relationship? Would he expect me to give up my independence now

that there is a new safety threat?

Truthfully, I have come to really enjoy the last couple of weeks of daily phone calls and text messages with James. Being able to develop a friendship with him, while physically separated by a long distance, has made me feel more comfortable than I probably would have been had we tried to do that while living

in the same town or same pack.

Was I ready to take things beyond friendship? Was I willing to work on repairing our bond? Was I ready to

trust him?

“You already trust him, Lily,” Rose pointed out. “I did not encourage you to tell him about your panic attacks, about Stephanie being alive, or about anything else you told him. You did those things on your own. Old Lily would never have dreamed of sharing information with Old James, much less important information. New Lily did not hesitate to share with New James.”

Okay, fair point.

But... hardly any time had passed. Time heals all wounds, right? Had enough time passed to heal all of our wounds? Or was James coming here going to make things complicated again? What about Brady? I

really did not want to be part of a love triangle again.

“Sometimes it is not the amount of time that passes, but what happens in the time we have. A lot has

changed for both you and James in a very short period of time. I do not see your heart being conflicted anymore. I still see fear, but even that is diminishing.” a

I sighed. Sometimes Rose is more of an older sister than a wolf. It can be annoying at times.

“But you love me.”

“Yes, I do love you, Rose. But let me panic in peace, please. I need to get it out of my system.”

“You know, Old Lily never would have been able to talk things out or panic peacefully. And Old Lily may have even been on a plane to Antarctica right now, instead of waiting for James to get here. Tonight’s panic attack has been pretty boring if you ask me.”

I rolled my eyes. “Out of my thoughts, Rose.”

Rose sent me a visual of her sticking her wolf tongue out at me. I laughed.

Several hours later, at around six in the morning, I heard James knock on my apartment door. (He had

texted when he landed asking for my address.)

The moment I opened the door, he silently grabbed me and wrapped me in a tight hug. He hugged me so tightly that I could barely breathe, but I really did not care. As soon as I felt his arms around me, any remaining fear or panic left in me immediately evaporated. James smelled amazing, the sparks between us felt stronger and comforting, and Rose and I were both really happy to see him.

I did not know what the future held for us, but at least at that moment, I knew that being in his arms was

exactly where I wanted to be.

After a minute or two, James loosened his grip enough so that I could let him into the apartment. As I let him in, I noticed that he was wearing a tuxedo shirt and jacket, with his tie loose and the first few buttons

of his shirt unbuttoned. His hair was a little messy, and it appeared he had not gotten much rest on the

flight here. Despite his exhaustion, James looked s**y as hell.

“Old Lily never thought about Old James that way,” Rose linked me.

“GET OUT OF MY THOUGHTS, Rose!”

Rose laughed and then happily laid down in my head.

As soon as I closed the door behind him, James pushed me against it, grabbed my face with both hands, and kissed me. I immediately melted, relishing the feeling of his lips against mine.

“Hi,” he whispered breathlessly once we broke apart.

“Hi,” I responded back with a smile. “Are you tired? It looks like you have been up all night.” James nodded. “I am exhausted. But I am so glad to see you. I was scared to death.”

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Chapter 0176

I shook my head dismissively. “I am fine. I promise. I am safe here.”

James sighed. It looked like he wanted to say something, but I knew that he needed to get some sleep. I grabbed his hand and led him towards my bedroom.

“Here. Why don’t you go ahead and lay down. We can talk when you wake up.”

James took off his jacket and shirt and climbed under the sheets onto my bed. I turned to leave, but he grabbed my hand and pulled me towards him. “Stay?” he asked.

I was too tired to protest, not that I would have wanted to anyway. I slipped under the blanket next to

him.

A thought occurring to me, I reached for his left hand and looked at his ring finger.

“I take it that you are not married?”

James shook his head. "No. I told you I would not marry her. And I will not marry anyone until you agree

to be mine."

I felt myself blush a little bit as he pulled me closer so that my head was laying on his chest.

"Are you going to tell me what happened? You were a little....frantic... earlier, so you did not tell me very

much."

"Well, your sister showed up and made a public scene with Sheila. Embarrassed both of them. Jenny was involved too; I guess Jenny was the one staged everything to make it look like Stephanie had been

murdered. Sheila and Stephanie only intended to fake a kidnapping. It was crazy, and I did not even stick

around for it all because we heard that Black Moon had been attacked and I was worried you were there.

Which thank Goddess you were not because the attackers were definitely looking for you. They even

made their way to the room you had been staying in."

I raised my eyebrows. "Wow. It sounds like there is a lot more to both of those stories."

James kissed my forehead. "Oh, there is. I will tell you everything, I promise. But first lo

us sleep. I

need to just hold you for a while and catch my breath."

He did not have to tell me twice. I had barely-slept while waiting for him.

Soon, both of us were fast asleep.

(James POV)

I woke up to the smell of eggs and bacon. I rolled over and realized that I was beside myself in Lily's bed.

I stretched and looked at the clock on Lily's nightstand. It was 12:30 in the afternoon. I got up and

walked into Lily's kitchen, where I found her cooking.

I smiled as I went up behind her, kissing the nape of her neck from behind. She shivered as she turned

around to face me.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning, beautiful. Thank you for letting me sleep."

"I hope you are hungry," she replied as she began to put the food on plates.

"Starved."

Lily put the plates on the kitchen counter, and she gestured for me to have a seat on one of her bar

stools. Instead of sitting down, I pulled her close to me and kissed her again. Kissing Lily was quickly

becoming one of my biggest addictions. I simply could not get enough. I was relieved and happy that

she seemed just as happy to kiss me as I was to kiss her.

Suddenly, I heard coughing behind us. "Just friends, my a&&," a female voice said.

Without letting go of Lily, I turned around. Lily giggled softly in my arms.

"James, meet Charlotte. Charlotte, meet James."

I nodded my head at Charlotte in greeting.

Lily pointed to a few shopping bags on her couch. "James, I noticed that you did not bring any luggage. with you, so Charlotte agreed to pick a few things

up for you from the mall. She is an amazing power shopper, able to get in and get out with tons of good stuff in seconds flat.”

“Thank you. That was very nice of you.”

Charlotte looked at me a little suspiciously. I did not do it to be nice. There is a cost involved.”

“I am happy to pay you back. Just tell me what I owe you.”

“I do not care about the money. You and Lily-are going on a double date with me tonight.”

I looked at Lily with a raised eyebrow.

“A double date with Derek Abbott,” Lily clarified. “I know we have a lot to talk about, including whatever

I could not help the huge smile that immediately took over my face. Kissing Lily and going on a double

date with Derek Abbott. I was already in heaven. 1

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 177

Chapter 0177

(Stephanie POV)

It feels really good to be home.

It also feels really nice to see evidence of how much everyone missed me. I love how many of my pictures and mementos are hung everywhere. If I knew that I was this loved and this missed, I would have come back years ago.

While I was gone, Sheila told me some of what the pack did for me, but her

descriptions really did not do it justice.

For her part, my mother was so happy to have me home that she immediately demanded that the pack

host a large welcome-home banquet in my honor. Alpha Randall and Luna Jane were not happy with the

idea -Luna Jane even had the audacity to complain about how much money they had already spent on

Sheila's cancelled wedding- but they eventually relented.

We would have held the banquet this Friday, but the werewolf council is making life difficult, so we

decided to delay the banquet until James' birthday. That timing should give the werewolf council plenty

of time to get out of our hair, and it will also give James and I plenty of time to reconnect. I have the

perfect dress in mind that will allow me to show off the mate mark that James will give me before the

event.

Speaking of the werewolf council, they are really annoying me right now. They have placed Sheila and I

on house arrest, and they have also started to sniff around and ask a ton of questions. I really do not

understand what they are doing or why they are punishing me

I mean,

nean, it is not a crime to take an extended vacation. And really, that is all that I did. I did not lie to

anyone and I did not fake my death. I even wrote letters for Pete's sake! It is not a werewolf crime to

travel the world or sleep with a human. It is also not my fault that Jenny was upset with me and that

Sheila wanted to steal my mate.

Okay, maybe my fault that Jenny was upset with me, but if the Moon Goddess had paired

t was SORT-OF

Sheila and Nick as mates like she should have, none of this would have happened. After what Jenny did to Nick and our family, I feel validated. Jenny never deserved my brother. It is disgusting that she let Nick, James, the rest of my family, and the pack mourn my death, knowing all the while that I was alive. How could she live with herself knowing how much pain she was causing everyone?

I know that Sheila did the same thing, but at least Sheila had a reason I can understand: she wanted

James. What was Jenny's justification? She experienced some betrayal pains and I sent her a video? Who cares. She did not have to watch the video; any trauma she suffered while watching that is on her. I know I could never watch a video of James sleeping with my sister. How sick does Jenny have to be to have actually watched the entire video of Nick and Sheila together?!?!?

Speaking of James and Lily, I cannot find either of them. I have searched the packhouse twice. I would go look for them outside the packhouse, but again, the stupid werewolf council has me stuck inside.

are

Thankfully, my mother thinks that the council investigation will be over soon. The council consists of seven members chosen by the Moon Goddess herself. As far as anyone knows, only six members are currently alive, and my mother has sold girls to three of them. All we need is to be extra friendly to one of the other three and we will have a majority voting in our favor. They will still have to punish Sheila and I somehow-you know, to keep up appearances- but my mother thinks the punishment will be a slap on

the wrist and then we can move on.

In the meantime, I just have to wait. My mother suggested that I keep myself busy by going ahead and moving my belongings into James' room. She also thinks that I should begin to re-decorate the room to match my style. I think that is a great idea, and I plan to start working on that tomorrow.

I would have done it today, but Luna Jane got angry when she saw me checking out James' room earlier. She told me that it was James' room and I did not have any right to be in there. She also told me that I had "some nerve" waltzing in after all this time, and that she has no idea how I can hold my head up high

after all that I did.

I really do not understand what her problem is. James and I are mates and we should sleep in the same room. I wonder if she is just angry that I have a pup and that I slept with a human. If so, she needs to mind her own business. The only one who should care about my past sexual history is James, and my

mother reassured me earlier that the mate bond is powerful and makes you forgive almost anything.

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 178

Chapter 0178

After Luna Jane yelled at me, I went to my mother in tears. My mother was super angry when she heard what Luna Jane said to me, and she promised that she would fix it. My mother always gets her way with Luna Jane, so I know everything will be fine.

I just need to find James. And Lily. I am so angry that they are not here to welcome me. I have been gone for SIX YEARS. Did they not miss me? What could be more important than visiting me?

My mother thinks that James is just taking time to process everything. She said that he had a really tough time after I "died," and she told me that it was not unusual for him to disappear for weeks at a time

sometimes.

So I guess disappearing is just how he copes now? That is fine if that is what he needs, but the mate

bond cannot help us fix anything if he is not here to feel and recognize it.

Sigh. My only option right now is to text him. Thankfully, I still remember his phone number. Hopefully he responds to one of my text messages sooner than later. I have already sent him 10 messages, and I will

continue to text him until he responds.

Unfortunately, I do not have Lily's phone number. She was too young to have a phone before I left.

Honestly, I am more annoyed at her than I am at James. What the f&&k is her excuse to not be here?

James may be a little upset that I slept with someone else, but what could Lily possibly be upset about?

Nothing.

My mother refuses to tell me anything about Lily, and at my mother's request- Alpha Randall alpha-

ordered everyone else not to talk to me about her either. I know the little goody two shoes did not do

anything bad, so what are they hiding? Perhaps Lily is dead? If so, that would be really sad.

Whatever. I need to focus on what I can control. And I need to clean up some messes. That includes

dealing with Antonio, Jackson, and Sheila's pup.

I am not convinced that Sheila is pregnant, or that the pup belongs to James. Surely James did not really sleep with her, did he? In the past, despite what I have heard about the alpha sex drive, James was always really prude and talked about wanting to wait for the mate bond to kick in,

I know things have changed in the past six years, but I cannot imagine things have changed so much that James would be okay sleeping with Sheila. Marrying her? Finé. Especially if our parents put pressure on him. But the idea of James sleeping with Sheila is gross. Sheila has gotten around more than I have.

Oh, wait! Of course! Why did I not think about this before?!?! James probably does not know how much Sheila has slept around. Maybe he left because he was feeling conflicted between his feelings for me and the promises that he made to Sheila. The mate bond should help him resolve most of his conflicted

send him the one of Sheila sleeping with Nick... but edited this time. I bet if I send him that, he will be back here ready to claim me in no time!

I am so smart! Why did I not think of this before?

Okay. So I have a plan: make nice with one of the werewolf council members; move into James' room. tomorrow; send James a few more texts including the video of Sheila sleeping with Nick; beg my mother to tell me where Lily is; and then figure out what to do with Antonio and Jackson.

Oh, yeah. Antonio and Jackson. I still need a plan on what to do about them.

I wonder if James would be okay doing a threeway with Antonio and I? I mean I know James used to be

a prude, but things and people change and the Moon Goddess would not pair me with someone that I am

sexually incompatible with, right? Maybe if I explain to James how much fun a threeway can be he will

be open to trying it. That would make me happy, because Fam already craving Antonio again.... he really

was amazing in bed...

There are no betrayal pains during threesomes, right? Hmmm. I will have to do some research.

Anyway, it is sure good to be home. My life will be back on track in no time.

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 179

Chapter 0179

(Lily POV)

After Charlotte left, James and I ate breakfast. We then took turns showering and changing clothes. (Yes, a part of me wondered what it would be like to shower with James, but I am not ready for that yet.)

Once we were both dressed and ready, James asked me if I was okay with doing a video call with Brady and Dr. Hyder. He told me that they were really worried about me, and he said that the four of us needed. to talk about the security breach at Black Moon and how to deal with it anyway.

Lagreed Given the way that I left, I was a little nervous to talk to Brady, but I knew I had to work past the awkwardness.

We sat down on the couch and James initiated the video call using my laptop. (No, I cannot afford a laptop, but Charlotte gifted me hers after her parents bought her a new one). Within just a couple of minutes, the faces of Dr. Hyder and Brady appeared on the screen.

“Lily,” Brady said softly.

“Hi, Brady,” I responded.

“Are you okay?” he asked, concern evident in his voice.

“I am fine.”

“I miss you,” Brady said.

I felt James stiffen next to me.

“Lily, when it is safe, I want you to come back here,” Brady added. “You have been gone too long. We

need you back. I need you back.”

I could feel James’ jealousy and rage at that second comment. He immediately put his arm protectively

around my shoulders. He also reached over with his opposite hand and began to rub my upper arm.

hurt in Brady's eyes when James did both of those things, and I felt like I wanted to disappear.

This is exactly what I had hoped to avoid when I left Black Moon,

Thankfully, Dr Hyder intervened before I had to respond to either of Brady's comments. He gave me a fatherly lecture about leaving Black Moon without telling him or anyone where I was going. He also asked me a series of questions about how I was able to leave the pack without anyone noticing.

was really honest, explaining that my departure was much quicker than I originally planned. I told them

Rose insisted that we leave immediately after those guards gave me a box of chocolates.

Dr. Hyder of course wanted to know who the two guards were, and I told them. I watched as Brady's face paled and Dr. Hyder looked at him confused.

"We have never employed any guards named Hunter or Kyle," Brady explained.

Oh, sh&t. I did not know who was looking for me, or why I was in danger, but I had watched enough true crime documentaries to know that is bad.

"What did you do with the chocolates, Lily?" Dr. Hyder asked.

"I did not want to leave them there or throw them away in case someone else might try to eat them... Rose was really uncomfortable with how they smelled... so I took them with me."

"Where are they now?"

I looked down, feeling slightly embarrassed. "I still have them. They are hidden under my bed. I know I

should have thrown them away, but —"

"No, Lily, I am glad you didn't," Dr. Hyder said gently. "We need to have them tested. James

an address, will you mail the chocolates there?"

James nodded. "Of course. We can get that done today."

if I text you

After that, the conversation shifted to how to keep me safe. Dr. Hyder encouraged James and I to stay

where we were for the next several days until they could get more information about the current threat

and how to deal with it. He also encouraged James to figure out some cover story to explain where he

was, because Dr. Hyder had received reports that Margie and Stephanie were getting a little desperate to

find him.

I watched James' face as Dr. Hyder brought up Stephanie. James was largely stoic; if anything, he

seemed mildly annoyed.

Next, Dr. Hyder told James that he had talked to all the allies, and they were ready to go back in as soon as James was back in town and ready. Until then, the werewolf council would stay at the pack doing an investigation about the little it knew so far, so it was unlikely anyone would be hurt in the interim.

I could n

not follow all of the conversation because I did not know much about what had been going on, but it seemed like everything was clear for James and I to have some time together the next several days. All we had to do was come up with some sort of cover story for James.

Given the circumstances, I knew I should feel worried, but a part of me felt a little happy too. I only had to work two shifts at the girls' home this coming week, and most of my training for the team was done, so I

James must have sensed how I was feeling, because he gave me a small smile and leaned over and gave me a kiss on my forehead.

Unfortunately, when I looked back at the laptop screen, the look in Brady's eyes broke my heart. It reminded me once again of all the reasons that I left Black Moon, and of all the reasons that I did not want to be part of a love triangle. I hated the idea of hurting anyone, much less Brady after all he had done to help me.

Eventually, after a few moments of silence, Brady asked me if I would be willing to share my phone number with him so that he could communicate with me while everything got sorted out. James immediately tensed yet again, pulling me closer to him. I was not sure what to say.

Thankfully, Dr. Hyder spoke up before I could. "Your pack has been compromised, Brady," he snapped. "It

is not safe for Lily to be communicating with you."

Brady started to get angry. "But it is okay for that a-hole to communicate with her? And what about

this call itself? How is this safe?"

Dr. Hyder visibly got even more upset. "You need to start thinking like an alpha, and not like a jealous son-of-a-bitch. If James' phone was compromised, the enemy would have found Lily weeks ago. And my phone and laptop are military grade; there isn't anyone getting into my devices."

Sighing, Dr. Hyder turned back to us. "We should limit communication for a while, though, just to be safe.

I am not saying do not reach out to me, but let's try to be a little sparing about it, okay?"

James and I agreed, and the video call was disconnected soon afterwards.

James and I sat quietly for a few minutes, neither of us saying anything. Finally, he spoke.

"Dr. Hyder is different with you than he is with anyone else. He is gentle."

I smiled. "Yeah, he is like a father to me. He reminds me of how my dad used to be before the whole

thing with Stephanie.”

James gave me a sad smile.

Then, almost out of the blue, he asked me something that caught me off-guard.

“Do you still have feelings for Brady?”

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Chapter 180

Chapter 0180

(Brady POV)

I was sitting in my office, quietly wondering to myself whether this week could get any worse, when my week... well, immediately got worse.

I felt like I had enough to deal with already. My pack had been attacked, which not only resulted in loyal pack wolves being hurt, but which also interrupted some of the precious time that I had with my son. And not only had my pack been attacked, but also the attackers had made their way into areas of the packhouse that I had previously considered to be safe and sacrosanct.

On top of all of that, I had to deal with my father, with imposters infiltrating my security team, and with heartache relating to the increasing probability that I would lose Lily to that a&&hole James. 1

“You mean lose her to her mate,” Kalen corrected me in our link.

“No. I mean lose her to that a&&hole James. He does not deserve to call himself her mate anymore,” I

linked back.

“And you do?”

“YES!” I replied angrily..

“It took you two weeks to even notice that Lily left,” Kalen reminded me.

URGH.

I immediately put up a block. I did not need to deal with Kalen right now. I hated how often he was right about things, and I hated how often he chose to rub that in my face.

Unfortunately, the exact moment that I blocked Kalen was the same moment that Evelyn decided to

barge into my office and confront me with more wild accusations. As much as I was not in the mood to

deal with Kalen, I was REALLY not in the mood to deal with her.

You may notice that I said “MORE wild accusations.” Ever since the day that Evelyn announced her plans for Sammy to become alpha of Andrew’s pack, she had come to my office at least once a day to accuse me of failing her, my son, or my pack in some way. Some of her complaints had been legitimate, but most of her complaints were petty bullsh&t. Regardless, it was always something. She had come so often in the past couple of weeks that no one tried to stop her from coming in here anymore, and she did

not even bother to knock on the door.

I did not know what her sudden motivation was for acting this way; she had never acted like this in the past. Nor did I know why I allowed her to continue with the behavior.

Maybe it was because I spent years ignoring and being ignored by her, and this was the most we had talked in years. Maybe it was because a part of me was happy to see her everyday. Or maybe it was because I am just masochistic.

Either which way, with everything else on my plate, I was finally getting tired of both her and her behavior.

Not that she cared.

“Is it true?” Evelyn asked me angrily as she slammed my office door.

I rubbed my temples. “Is what true, Evelyn?”

“Were we attacked because of your floozy?”

“WE were not attacked, Evelyn. You are no longer a member of this pack, remember?”

“Cut the bull, Brady. We were here. The attack scared our son. He is worried that he is going to lose his father and that something is going to happen to him too. Did you know that the attackers even went into his room? Thank Goddess he was with me when the attack happened and he did not see them.”

I sighed. I did know that. It was one of the many things that really bothered me about the attack.

“I am working on beefing up safety protocols, Evelyn. We will make sure that they are unable to get through again.”

“How can you say that? If it was so easy to just ‘beef up protocols, why did you not do that ages ago?

Why wait until our son was traumatized to take care of the problem? What kind of alpha are you???”

Great. So this was one of her legitimate rants. Again, just what I needed. More guilt and more reminders

of my failures. Seriously, she should have been mated to my father not me; they could have enjoyed belittling me together. Too bad for her my father is in love with

my mother.