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LATER THAT NIGHT

ABIGAIL

Abby cried out in her cell, writhing with pain. Her body was on fire, and the herbs the pack doctor had brought in weren't helping. Nothing was helping.

After the betrayal she'd suffered, nothing ever could.

ALPHA EDWARD

Edward summoned Michael and Jacob to his office for a private meeting.

As the pack alpha, Edward was more than just a father to his son—he had a responsibility to the entire pack. It was his duty to keep them safe. To keep them in order.

His son's betrayal of his mate was a heavy shame, but it wouldn't stop Edward from doing his duty.

He'd had no choice but to lock Carson in a holding cell at the other end of the pack lands and order his warriors to stand guard.

Carson had been shifting uncontrollably, over and over, as he fought to get to Abby. He may not love her, but she was still his mate, and she was in heat.

His son also yearned to see the woman he loved.

Edward was still trying to decide if he should keep Carson restricted from going to Taylor for the entire duration of her pregnancy. It was a hard punishment. But his son had hurt his mate in the worst way possible.

And Carson's indiscretion had not only hurt Abby, it had hurt the entire pack. Undercurrents of pain still filtered through them all. Shame, confusion, and distrust could scar a pack, and if they couldn't trust their alpha, the pack would fall apart.

A hard knock sounded at the door.

"You may enter."

Warrior Michael came in and grudgingly bowed his head.

“Sit,” Edward grumbled, pulling out a bottle of amber liquor and filling three glasses.

He scented his beta approaching the door. “Beta Jacob, you may enter.”

The man entered, looking tense, and bowed his head.

Edward gestured toward the empty chair. “Sit.”

Jacob took the glass that Edward slid across the massive desk toward him. Michael did the same.

“Gentlemen...” Edward took a sip of the fine liquor and leaned back in his chair. “I am in an impossible position.” He slammed his free hand down on the armrest. “Fucking pups!”

His men stayed quiet.

Edward took another sip of his drink, then sighed.

“Carson is only getting stronger as his wolf gets antsier. He wants to be with his mate for her heat, he wants to be with his unborn pup, and he yearns for the young lady *two of us* in this room had no idea he had feelings for.”

Jacob turned red, but when he opened his mouth to speak, Michael leaned forward.

“You both know as well as I do that a marked, mated, and now rejected future luna will eventually be shunned.” His voice was rough with emotion and fatigue. “Be rejected by *all* the packs.

“Being deemed unworthy by her alpha mate—it will taint her.”

Jacob reached out and gripped Michael’s forearm, a sign of respect. “I truly am sorry, brother, for your family’s pain.”

Too little, too late, Edward thought, shaking his head. “Exactly how long has this...~relationship~ been going on between Taylor and my son, Jacob? Hazel and I have never smelled anyone but Abby on him.

“Many, many moons. Not living with Abigail must have given him time to shower Taylor’s scent off him.”

“And why did you not come to me about this?”

Jacob drained his drink and placed the empty glass on the desk.

“Carson said he planned to tell you after he and Taylor consummated their relationship. I didn’t want to overstep with the future alpha, but I told him if he didn’t do it soon, I’d force the issue.”

Edward pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “Which is why he asked me to call all of us together this morning...”

Michael’s eyes flashed. “Abby is in physical pain! Pain at the hands of *your* son, a pup I thought of as my own. She’s the one suffering here.

“Carson won’t lose his title—he’ll have his pup and a woman who he loves. But Abby will lose everything! Our own pack will instinctively shun her!”

“I’m sorry she’s in pain—that’s my fault. I told him not to go near her because I wanted the situation to have some time to calm down.” Edward looked at his beta. “I assume you didn’t know Taylor was with pup before today?”

“I smelled the change in her scent this morning, and I believe the future alpha did as well.”

“My wolf is going to have a grandpup.” Jacob’s chest puffed proudly. “I expect my daughter to be marked and officially mated. She will not carry the shame.”

“But *mine* shall?” Michael jumped to his feet, livid. “My daughter is the one who has to carry your daughter’s shame! Abby’s the only innocent in this, yet she’s the one who will carry this for life!”

Howls rose over the pack lands, and Edward straightened. Carson was out of control and breaking through his restraints, and the entire pack could feel the urgency of his need to escape.

“Fuck!” Edward felt his eyes flash as his wolf surged. “I need to deal with this. Go protect Abby, Michael. If Carson gets loose, he’ll head straight for her.”

They all knew what would happen if Carson was able to reach his mate, and there’d been enough destruction at the hands of his son already. Edward could not allow there to be more.

“I will not stand down if he comes for her.” Michael’s eyes glowed, and a growl of his own power reverberated in the room.

“I promise I’ll do everything I can to keep him away from her, Michael. And Jacob, I’ve lost trust in you as my beta. We’ll discuss this later.”

After quickly shifting, Edward raced to the cell where Carson was being held.

His son's howls were changing into desperate, wailing shrieks. And despite the sedative the pack doctor had given her, Edward could feel Abby clawing desperately at the walls of her cell on the other side of the pack.

Because of his superior strength, Carson had to be restrained with cuffs and chains, but he was getting so worked up, Edward doubted they'd hold him much longer.

When he arrived, most of the warriors guarding Carson's cell were in their wolf forms and pacing, their hackles raised.

His mate was there as well, shifted into her magnificent wolf form, and was snarling and pacing, swiping at the pack warriors who were keeping her from her pup.

Normally his warriors' loyalty would extend to his son, their future alpha, and his mate, their luna. So attacking Carson's wolf—or Hazel's—would be hard for them to bear. But he knew they'd do it if it came down to it.

Hazel's wolf was unhappy about Carson being locked up—she'd snapped at him several times today—so it came as no surprise she wanted to protect her pup, regardless of how old he was.

But Edward had to keep the whole pack in mind, not just his mate and pup.

So even though he was filled with pride at his amazing, fierce mate, he couldn't have her interfering with their son's imprisonment.

He shifted back. "I command you to go home, Luna! *Now!*"

As he watched Hazel's wolf run off, he felt a deep sadness, but he shook it off and turned back to his son's cell.

One of the guards in human form opened the door, and Edward watched his son fight against the bonds keeping him inside.

"This is your punishment, Carson!" he said as he walked closer. "You've made grave mistakes, son, ones that you'll atone for by the hand of the Moon Goddess.

"My focus needs to be on the mate you'll be rejecting, so I can help her the best I can. You've ruined her life with your selfishness, and you're not fit to be alpha."

Still fighting against his restraints, Carson shifted into his full wolf form and let out a level of alpha power Edward had never seen from his son before.

Pride and shame warred within his chest. His son had behaved disgracefully, and there was no question he should be denied alpha status, but it was clear Carson was born for the role.

Not to mention, Edward had his own reasons for wanting to retire.

He sighed, trying to ignore the ache in his hip. He had to make the best choice for the pack, no matter how much it wounded him personally.

“If you don’t control yourself, I’ll keep you away from your pup until it’s born.” He shook his head in disgust. “Did you even *consider* the shame a marked and rejected future luna will carry for the rest of her life?”

“*Her entire life*, Carson. She’ll be shunned by every pack. Will be seen as worthless. Her own mate, an alpha, didn’t want her after marking her. You have put her in a mateless hell, made her a nomad with no pack.

“She could die because of you!”

CARSON

Carson’s wolf continued to fight him for control, but at his father’s words, he managed to shift back to his human form.

“What?” he cried, his voice painfully hoarse. “What do you mean, a nomad?”

“Abby was trained to be a luna, mated to an alpha!” his father shouted. “She is marked, mated...the only things left are the mate’s pact ceremony and the consummation. You might as well have rejected her at the altar!”

Carson knew the final ceremony was necessary to complete the bond, so he’d purposely pushed it off until the last possible minute. Everyone had been asking why he and Abby weren’t living together...

“Everyone will deem her unworthy, just like you have. You’ve shunned one of your own pack members before you even had the title of alpha. What do you think that shows me and this pack about the kind of leader you’ll be?”

Carson slumped in his restraints, his chest heaving, and let out a low moan.

His father’s lip curled. “Why are you shocked, son? This is all in the books you’ve been reading—what happens when a mate is rejected, from an alpha down to an omega—haven’t you been studying?”

“Or have you been too busy lying and sneaking around?” His father shook his head. “I’m going to have to teach you a lesson, Carson. And it’s going to be a painful one.”

