

Mated in the Shadow of My Sister

Chapter 2: The Little Brat

(James POV)

I watch sadly as the casket is carried from the temple to the burial grounds.

It is a cold October day, and the gray sky and drizzly weather adds to the overall somber atmosphere.

I cannot help but be impressed at how quickly the pack was able to pull everything together for Stephanie's funeral.

All funerals happen quickly in our world, but because of how fast the funerals must take place, the décor and guest list is usually somewhat lacking. It is a testament to how much Stephanie was loved that they were able to put together so many beautiful floral arrangements in her honor, and that so many people were able to be here to honor her life, including many wolves from other packs.

If it wasn't for it being such a horrible occasion, I would actually describe the color scheme as beautiful. Then again, fall has always been one of my favorite seasons.

I am vaguely aware that we had some other function on the calendar today, but I honestly cannot think of what it was. With a large pack—the West Mountain Pack has over 10,000 members—we have a lot of functions. As the future alpha, I am expected to attend as many of them as I possibly can, but no one expects me to remember what they all are... even if I try to pretend in the moment. Unless reminded by an Omega or my amazing girlfriend, I can't even seem to remember my own mother and father's birthdays most of the time.

My amazing girlfriend. I sigh, wiping a tear from my eye. She will never again be around to remind me about birthdays.

Sadly, there will be no pretending that I know what today's ceremony is about. Stephanie Brogan was the love of my life, and she was my future mate and luna.

I still cannot believe that she is gone. We never even got to fully experience the mate bond, including the sparks and the great sex that I am told comes with it. Had she lived just three months longer, our wolves would have confirmed one another as mates and Stephanie would have been able to formally claim her proper place in my bed and in my life.

Instead of welcoming her sexy body into my bed, I am saying good-bye to her today. I am also saying good-bye to all of our future plans and dreams together. I cannot help but feel anger and resentment about that. This is not how things were supposed to be.

As I watch the funeral procession go by --my father, mother, and I, along with the beta family, must stand at the entrance as guests move from the temple to the burial grounds-- I catch a glimpse of Stephanie's younger sister, Lily. She is standing next to her mother. She looks both sad and innocent, which causes the anger in my body to rise even more. That little brat is the reason that Stephanie is dead.

****FLASHBACK TO LAST NIGHT****

Stephanie and I are cuddled on the couch in the packhouse living room watching a movie. I have my hand on her thigh and I am about to kiss her when she gets distracted by a text message. Stephanie did not let me see the message, which annoys me, but she quickly explains that Lily is lost in the forest after having snuck out to meet a boy.

Stephanie's sister is 13 or 14 years old. She has all the teenage acne and attitude that comes along with being that young. Unlike Stephanie—who has beautiful blond hair and hazel eyes—Lily has reddish brown hair and bright green eyes. Or at least I think they are bright green; she usually has them covered up with large black glasses.

Stephanie gets up and tells me that Lily has texted her, begging her to come and find her. I am annoyed by the interruption, but I offer to go with Stephanie to get the little brat. Stephanie says Lily will be upset if anyone else knows about her little escapade. Stephanie reassures me that she will be fine, and then gives me a quick peck on the lips.

My wolf and I have a bad feeling when Stephanie leaves, but Stephanie has us wrapped around her little finger. It is almost impossible for my wolf and I to disagree with her about anything. We pause the movie and decide to get some work done in my dad's office while we wait for Stephanie to get back. I am a night owl anyway, so I do not mind waiting.

Unfortunately, about an hour after Stephanie leaves, I get an urgent mind-link from our pack warriors. They report that the Little Brat had been spotted running out of the woods screaming for help. Before they can say much more, I shift into my wolf form and take off running.

I follow Stephanie's scent far into the woods... until I come to a small clearing, which is covered in Stephanie's blood. Her torn, bloody clothes are tossed around, and chunks of her hair are thrown about as well.

It is the worst, most savage site that I have ever seen. The smell of rogues is all over, so it is fairly obvious what has happened. The a---holes didn't even bother to leave her body.

****END OF FLASHBACK****

Tears threaten to continue to fall as I think back to the scene last night. I have not slept or eaten since I found what was left of Stephanie, and I am having trouble holding my emotions together.

Now that my eyes have spotted Lily, my anger with her becomes a welcome distraction. I have a very hard time looking away from her. The truth is that I have always found myself strangely curious about her, but today... today all I want to do is take my anger out on someone, and she seems as good a target as anyone else. Her stupid teenage behavior cost me my mate! And it cost this pack its future luna!

My wolf, Luke, begs me to calm down. It is an interesting thing, having the wolf side try to calm the human side. As upset and angry and emotional as I am, it is tempting to ignore him and immediately start teach that Little Brat a lesson. However, I decide to follow Luke's advice after he reminds me that Stephanie deserves to have her funeral be all about her and not some whiny teenage brat.

That does not mean that I am going to let Lily get away with what she has done, but I wait until a more appropriate time to take my revenge.

I turn my focus back to Stephanie's casket, which we filled with her bloody clothes, hair, and anything that could be found at the site that had her blood on it. The casket has been brought to the center of the amphitheater. The alpha and beta families take their seats in the front row, and my father and the pack priest move beside the casket to begin the ceremony.

The ceremony involves a lot of prayers, rituals, and speakers. The average ceremony takes 2-3 hours, and Stephanie's will most likely take closer to 4-5 hours given her status in the pack and how beloved she was.

During the ceremony, I keep trying to distract myself by looking around as others around me. I do not want to be seen as weak by curling into the fetal position and wailing like a baby, even though that is the only thing I want to do right now.

My heart breaks as I glance at Stephanie's parents next to me in the front row, holding on to one another as they cry. Seeing Stephanie's father—a strong, powerful Beta wolf—break down is a sight I have very rarely seen. The pain in his eyes is heart-wrenching.

I also notice Stephanie's brother, Nick, as he clings to his mate, Jenny. Both of them are crying as well. Nick is my best friend, and I have known him since we were tiny pups, but I have literally never seen him cry.

I notice that there are no dry eyes anywhere. Even my father has a few stray tears running down his cheeks, although I am sure he would kill anyone who pointed it out. He is a proud man, just like me.

As the sky continues to darken, I notice the Little Brat starting to act like she is uncomfortable in her seat. I can tell that Stephanie's mother is getting agitated, and rightly so. For once, can the Little Brat not think about something other than herself? Seriously. It is one ceremony. Just

one. For an older sister who died trying to help her. How dare the Little Brat not hold herself together?

The next thing I know, the moon is high in the sky and the final rites are being spoken by the priest. As exactly that moment, the Little Brat whispers something in her mother's ear. Her mother turns and glares at her, causing the Little Brat to put her head down.

I then watch as the Little Brat stands up and walks away. She looks like she is in pain, and I hope that she is. How dare she walk away from her sister's funeral! Especially in the middle of the last rites! I am tempted to follow her and give her a piece of my mind, but Stephanie means more to me than that.

I remind myself once again that I will get my revenge on Lily aka the Little Brat soon enough. For tonight, I must remain focused on the love of my life.

