


Mated in the Shadow of My Sister Novel

Chapter 12-13

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Chapter 0012


"We all know how much Stephanie's passing impacted you," Beta Robert continues. "But after six years, the whispers from pack members are getting louder and louder. They are worried about whether you are going to be capable of taking over the pack. If those whispers get any louder, you may face a challenge from one or even multiple other wolves for the position. Or worse, alphas from other packs may sense your weakness and initiate a war to take over the West Mountain Pack and expand their territories."

"We are one of the strongest packs in the area. We are not weak. We would easily defeat any pack that dares to challenge us," I protest.

"You are correct. We are not weak. And it is my responsibility to make sure we do not become that way," my father answers. "Beta Robert is absolutely correct about the whispers and the risks. Given the existing circumstances, we cannot possibly allow you to take over the pack by yourself. Doing so would only worsen the perception that you are weak. When you take over the pack, you need to do so not only with a luna by your side, but also with one that is strong and fully trained."

I take a deep breath, struggling to remain calm.

"I still do not understand why we are talking about this

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today. Today should be about Stephanie. Not about getting another she-wolf in my bed."

Stephanie's mother rolls her eyes. "We are not talking about getting a she-wolf in your bed," she says bitterly. "We are fully aware of the she-wolves that have made their way there on their own the past few years."

I let out a frustrated laugh and put my head in my hands. If she only knew. If only if any of them knew.

Thankfully, my father decides to avoid that line of discussion. "Son, there is a reason that this needs to be announced today. You are not the only one that needs to be sold on the idea of a chosen mate. The pack needs time to adjust and accept the idea. Pack members have worshipped Stephanie for years, and they have placed her on a metaphorical pedestal. We need the pack members to believe that Stephanie would be in support of you moving forward. The best way to convince them of that is to incorporate her as much as we can."

I take another long sip of water, and swallow it. I know this is about to get a whole lot worse.

"Incorporate her how?" I ask finally.

"You and Beta Robert will make the announcement together. You will tell the pack that you are planning on taking a chosen mate within the next year," my mother says gently.

"And if I do not find someone who is acceptable?"

"Then Beta Robert and his wife will choose for you," my mother responds.

I gasp. "What? Why?"

"One more thing," my mother adds, ignoring my question. "Your firstborn child... if it is a girl, she will be named Stephanie. If it is a boy, he will be named Stephan."


I drag my hands down my face and look around the room. "This is insane. No, you are insane. All of you. How can any of you think that any of this is a good idea?"

My father stands up and puts his hand on my shoulder. "I am going to ignore the disrespect, Son, because I know this is a lot for you to take in. I called you here this early so that you could have a few hours to process all of this. Go for a run, go punch a punching bag, go do whatever you need to do. But by 11 am, I expect you to be on the stage with the rest of us, prepared to make the announcement."

"And if I am not?"

"I will denounce your status as my heir, and appoint Nick in your place."

The shock of my father's words hit me hard. This cannot be happening. Nick is my best friend. He is a strong, capable wolf. But he does not have alpha blood. I am the proper heir to this pack. I have worked and trained my whole life

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for that role.

I have to get out of here, now.

"Let's go to the waterfall," Luke says, speaking up for the first time since the meeting started.

 Comments

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Chapter 0013

(James POV)

Agreeing with Luke's suggestion, I head towards the waterfall. Shifting into Luke's wolf form would have been faster than walking, but my human body needs the distraction and the exercise.

"Why are you so calm, Luke?" I ask him through the link. "Doesn't it bother you that they want to force us to take a chosen mate?"

"No," he responds simply.

Something is off. Luke never responds with a one-word answer to anything. In fact, come to think of it, he has not said very much since last night.

"What is going on, Luke?" I ask. "Why aren't you talking? Why doesn't it bother you that they are going to force us to take a chosen mate? You are the one that is always going on and on and on about waiting to find our mate. Well, our second-chance mate."

"We are not going to take a chosen mate, James."

I feel myself becoming frustrated. "Were you not paying attention in that meeting, Luke? We either take a chosen mate or we lose our position as alpha."

"WE ARE NOT GOING TO TAKE A CHOSEN MATE, JAMES. I WILL NOT ACCEPT A CHOSEN MATE," Luke responds angrily.

"Is something going on that you are not telling me? Because I know d---n well that you are not willing to let someone else be alpha."

"I have been feeling restless since last night. That usually means ---"

Suddenly, the most amazing scent hits my nose. It is chocolate mixed with raspberries. "MATE!" Luke exclaims. "Mate is here!"

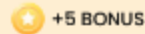
I do not see anyone yet, so I continue to walk towards the scent. I notice that we are quickly nearing the waterfall.

"How did you know our mate would be at the waterfall?" I ask Luke.

"I didn't. But the waterfall always makes us feel at peace. It makes sense that she would be here. She must be connected to this place somehow."

I take a few more steps towards the waterfall, and that is when I see her. Her back is to me, and she is sitting on a rock. I do not think she has scented me yet, so I take a few moments to take her in.

Just ten minutes ago, I was protesting the idea of giving up my chance to find a second chance mate. But now that I



have one, I have to wonder if I am ready. A part of me knows that I need to move on from Stephanie, but at the same time, I am scared to do so. I loved her so much, and she brought so much love and happiness to the pack. Am I really ready to let someone else replace her?

"She is not our second-chance mate, James, she is ---"

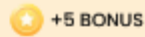
I cut the link with Luke when the she-wolf stands up. She dusts something off of her jeans, and then turns. Our eyes lock.

I cannot believe what I am seeing. The she-wolf in front of me is absolutely gorgeous. Easily the most gorgeous she-wolf that I have ever seen. She also reminds me of someone... but who?

I slowly begin to move towards her so that I can get a better look, and as I do so, it suddenly hits me who she reminds me of. The she-wolf in front of me has Stephanie's same body type: the same small waist; the same medium to large breasts; the same button nose and high cheek bones. In fact, as I continue to walk towards her, I am struggling to find any meaningful differences. Her hair is different, of course, but...

Then it hits me. Oh, my Goddess! Before I cut off the link, Luke told me that this she-wolf is not our second-chance mate. That can only mean... this IS Stephanie! Oh, my Goddess! This is Stephanie! THIS IS STEPHANIE!!!

"James, please do not misunderstand. James, this is ---"



Luke keeps trying to reestablish our link so he can tell me something, but I am too overwhelmed by the mate bond and the feelings of relief. I have spent so many nights grieving for Stephanie and praying that the Moon Goddess would somehow find a way to return her to me. And now, after six years, here she is.

I do not know how it is possible, but we never found Stephanie's body. So maybe she survived somehow? Maybe she was kidnapped? And now she has escaped and come back? Maybe she was hurt and lost her memories? The guilt starts to hit me hard. Could Stephanie have been alive all this time? Could she have been waiting and praying for me to come and save her?

Being on her own, or being kidnapped and escaping, could definitely explain some of the differences in her appearance. It would also explain the confusion and uncertainty I see in her eyes.

Oh, I just hope she will forgive me. I will explain everything to her. I will make this right.

"James, please," Luke cuts in again. "Please listen to me. Do not ruin things with our mate!!"