

Chapter 0036

"You cannot blame the boy for being upset with the Moon Goddess pairing him with Lily, Jane. How could that possibly be fair to him? She is weak and wolfless. And her actions led to his first mate being killed. The pack would never have accepted her as Luna. I agree that his language was less than ideal, but you cannot say that you would not have done the same thing if in his shoes."

I shake my head.

"Are you sure that Lily is weak? You saw her, Randall. She was bruised and broken and yet she had command of that entire hall! And did you hear any dishonesty in what she said? I still cannot get her words out of my head. I keep replaying them over and over again.

She said no one ever bothered to ask her about the incident that led to Stephanie's death. How can that be? How can the entire pack blame a 14-year-old girl for a murder and yet NO ONE has ever asked her what happened?

She also said that James has been associating with a she-wolf who had more to do with Stephanie's death than she did. Did you know there was another she-wolf involved that night?

And she said that James has made many mistakes when it comes to her. What else has he been mistaken about?

Randall, I am sorry, but my gut says that girl was telling the truth. And because of that, I no longer know what to believe or think anymore!"

Randall looks at me with fear in his eyes. I can tell that my words are hitting home; he now has questions too. But then I watch as his mind desperately tries to justify everything that has happened.

"Jane... even if there was more to the story involving Stephanie's murder, it was still unfair of the Moon Goddess to pair James with his first mate's sister. Surely that was reason alone for them to reject one another. I do not think I could bear if it something happened to you and I was later mated to your sister Cindy."

Tears fill my eyes. "But Randall... what if we were wrong about that too? What if Stephanie was never James' mate? You forget that Stephanie died before her 20th birthday. We have no idea who her mate was. We all just assumed that it was James, because Margie and I wanted so desperately for that to be the case.

What if... what if James' mate was Lily all along?"

Randall looks at me with horror. "That is impossible. Of course, Stephanie was James' mate."

"If Stephanie was James' mate, that would make Lily his second-chance mate," I said softly.

"Yes... what is your point?"

"You cannot be someone's second-chance mate unless you yourself are in need of a second-chance mate. If Lily was James' second chance mate, who was her first mate?"

I watch as the realization hits Randall... but once again, he tries to ignore it.

"No, that does not make any sense. Stephanie was his mate. We know that. We have always known that. Lily had to have been mated to another male first. Lily is young, but that is definitely possible."

"It is also possible that Lily wasn't mated to anyone else, Randall. What if... What if Lily was his mate all along?"

Randall says nothing, so I keep going.

"Do you remember years ago how James begged us to scale back the events honoring Stephanie? He told us that he thought the events were impacting his mental health. We told him 'no,' Randall!"

As the memory comes back to me, my tears begin to fall.

"Randall, we never tell him 'no' about anything, but we told him 'no' about that! We were so afraid to offend Robert and Margie that we called him selfish and told him that he had to keep attending the events. We told him that it was his duty as the alpha heir!

What if... what if our actions forced him to be so focused on Stephanie and her memory that he was blinded to what the

Moon Goddess really intended for him?!?! What if all of this is our fault?!?!?!"

Again, Randall is silent. However, this time, he grabs me and wraps me up into a hug. I melt in his embrace, especially as I feel his own tears starting to fall.

I had been so sure that saying all of my worries out loud would cause a fight between Randall and I. I am very grateful that is not how it ended up playing out.

By the end of our conversation, I still had no idea what the truth was. For all I know, my worries are just the exaggeration of a tired mother who has seen too many movies and read too many romance books. However, I cannot help but feel relieved that Randall now agrees with me that we owe it to our son, the pack, and even Stephanie's memory to dig a little further.

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Chapter 0037

(Luna Jane POV)

Another week has passed. We were all relieved when James finally woke up on the fourth day, and we were now celebrating that Dr. Miller had given us the blessing to take him home later today.

Although Dr. Miller had cleared James to leave the hospital, he emphasized to us that it was critically important that James avoid stress as much as possible for at least the next few weeks. James' heart was still quite fragile, and his wolf had not spoken to him yet. Dr. Miller said that rejections are especially hard on the wolf counterparts, and we could expect it to take between one and three months for Luke to fully recover, much less be willing to talk to James and/or shift. Until Luke recovered, his ability to heal James would be compromised.

We decided to take Dr. Miller's advice seriously. Earlier today, Randall alpha-ordered all pack members, except Robert and Margie, to avoid talking to James about anything related to Lily, Stephanie, or what happened on the day of the rejection. Pack members were also alpha-ordered to avoid talking about any those subjects in the pack house, because we wanted to avoid James accidentally overhearing a conversation that might trigger him. And finally, the she-wolves that James had been inviting to his

room were ordered to stay away.

Our plan was to wait a few weeks, and then sit James down and have a conversation about everything in a therapeutic setting.

There were two reasons that Randall did not give alpha-orders to Robert and Margie. First, they live in the packhouse with us, and we knew that they were suffering right now just like we were. Limiting their ability to talk in their own home about their two daughters or what happened seemed unnecessarily cruel. Second, Robert and Margie were our best friends, and we knew that they did not need to be alpha-ordered to avoid hurting James. They had proven many times over how much they were willing to sacrifice for him.

Eager to leave the hospital, James had just stepped into the bathroom to change clothes when Margie burst into his hospital room. Her face was tomato-red with rage, and her fists were clenched as though she was ready to hit something or someone.

I admit that I still had not talked to her and Robert since the rejection. Part of it was because I was a coward; part of it was because I have a horrible time keeping secrets from Margie; and part of it was because I wanted to make sure that we had something concrete to present to Margie before we confronted her with our doubts and concerns.

When Margie barged into the room, I expected that she was

angry with me because of not talking to her in so many days. Unfortunately, I was sorely wrong.

"HOW COULD YOU!" Margie screamed. "AFTER ALL I DID FOR YOU! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS!!!!"

"Margie! I do not know what you are talking about, but we cannot talk in here. I do not want James to hear you! Dr. Miller said that it is important that he avoid stress at all costs!"

I quickly ushered her into the hallway and down the hall into a small visitor's office. After I closed the door, I turned around to face her.

"Now, tell me what is wrong Margie," I said calmly.

"I went to the florist to select flower arrangements for Stephanie's birthday memorial, and she told me that YOU SCALED BACK THE EVENT. She said we will only need 10% of the flowers that we normally have. HOW COULD YOU DO THAT WITHOUT TALKING TO ME?!?!"

My heart dropped. I had meant to talk to her about our decision to scale back the memorials after we brought James home. I had not anticipated that she would have a meeting with the florist today. "Margie, I --"

"AND THEN! THEN I GO UPSTAIRS TO THE ALPHA SUITE TO CONFRONT YOU ABOUT THE MEMORIAL, AND YOU KNOW WHAT I SAW? OR RATHER, WHAT I DID NOT SEE?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?"



"We took down most of Stephanie's pictures," I said softly.

"HOW COULD YOU DO ANY OF THAT WITHOUT TALKING TO ME? YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE MY BEST FRIEND AND YET HERE YOU ARE TRYING TO ERASE MY DAUGHTER'S MEMORY!!!! AND WORSE, YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE COURAGE TO TELL ME ABOUT IT FIRST, AND SO I HAD TO FIND OUT THIS WAY!!!!" ¹

My eyes are starting to water. Margie has never been this angry with me, and I know it is all my fault.

"Margie, I am so, so, so, so, so very sorry! I promise, I never meant for you to find out this way. I had plans to come and talk to you as soon as we brought James home from the hospital this afternoon."

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