

Rejected Little Secret

Chapter 05 -10

Every few years, the **Alpha** Ascencion takes place, where the reigning Alpha willingly steps aside to allow the **next** generation to take charge.

There are two possible ways that it can happen. The first way, is when the Alpha title's peacefully transferred through **a** straightforward ritual of passing over, creating a sense of continuity. The festivities typically **span a** full day. culminating in a magnificent **feast** that leaves everyone satisfied and content. The next way is a bit more conventional, as the title is only bestowed upon the predecessor if they triumph in a fierce duel with the Alpha.

Our

pack, known as the Thornholde Pack, takes the lead as the biggest among the six packs in the country. No matter **the** predecessor, our pack always hosts the Alpha Ascencion, fostering a strong sense of community and togetherness. Our home is always teeming with activity when **the** other five packs are invited.

Sammy had a strong dislike for the event. Going outside wasn't really her cup of tea, to be honest. The community events in our pack always bring her face to face with her True Mate and require her to watch as he spends time with his family, which she finds particularly challenging. Sammy can't escape, she's gotta show up, even if she really doesn't want to. While the Alpha is generally understanding, he becomes exceedingly strict when it comes to attendance.

I wasn't surprised when Sammy woke me up with a slap on the pillow to the face, jolting me awake. Startled from my sleep. I clumsily untangle my legs from the twisted blanket **on** my bed. Baring my canines, I growl at her, but my aggression quickly fades when I see the look on her face.

"Sammy?"

"You smell weird, Maya."

Suddenly, a rush of embarrassment floods over me, making my cheeks turn red.

The moment Axton knotted inside of me, an intense sensation of connection flooded my senses, prompting me to request that he bring me back home. Sneaking him inside, the both of us climbed through the window, careful not to make a sound so Sammy wouldn't find out. He didn't overstay his welcome in my room, simply biding his time until it was safe for us to separate.

Immediately after, I took the pill, not wanting to take any chances, especially since he wasn't my True Mate,

I wracked my brain for a while, searching for the perfect answer **that** would finally quiet Sammy. I leaned back against the bed headrest, biting the inside of my cheek to hide my nervousness, while trying to appear nonchalant.

"Made a little adjustment to my diet, might **have** affected my pheromones," As I wave my hand in the air, **I** can't help but notice the intensifying curiosity **in** Sammy's expression. "I'm gonna shower, so the smell won't stick around for long."

For a moment, Sammy didn't say **a** word. Instead, she paused, her head tilting as **she** took in **a whiff** of the **surrounding** air. A flicker of darkness passes through her eyes, **followed** by a playful snicker. Crossing her arms against her chest, she leaned against the **door** frame, a **mischievous** smirk spreading across her cheeks.

"Nah, **Maya**, don't bother with a shower, **just** stay as you are," Sammy suggested, her face still adorned with a **mischievous smirk**. It **was** really irritating me, but unfortunately, there was nothing I **could** do. "Hey, get dressed. we're gonna hit up the Town Square **soon**. Word on the street is they've got breakfast. Can you believe how they're going all out on the Alpha Ascencion today? Your boyfriend **is a** spoiled little shit, huh?"

A surge of annoyance caused my eyebrow to twitch, and I couldn't help but notice Sammy's smirk growing wider in amusement. She knows exactly what she's **doing, aiming** to provoke a reaction from me. Well, I wasn't really in the mood to have my spirits dampened, especially after having **an** amazing dicking yesterday.

"He's **not** my boyfriend anymore," Standing up, I spat and paid no mind to the crumpled bedsheets. I can't explain **why**, but I decide to **take** her

advice **and** skip my **usual** shower. I'm totally aware that I stink like Axton, **but** there's **this**

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nagging feeling inside me, wanting everyone to know. "He just doesn't know it yet."

"Daaaamn," Whistling a low tune, Sammy approached me with a mischievous grin, jabbing me playfully in the stomach. I make a disapproving sound with my tongue, pushing her aside, but all it does is make her burst into laughter. "Shit, you still got **that** fire in you, **bitch**. Keep it, show everyone what you're made of, especially today, got it?"

After

r Sammy leaves, I'm left in silence, the echoes of her footsteps fading away. Among the jumble of clothes, there is a mishmash of my **own** garments and some that belong to Zeke. Even though I am aware of the consequences of my actions, the mere sight of anything related to Zeke triggers a surge of anger within me. With a swift movement, I snatch his jacket **from** my drawer and shred it to pieces using my claws.

Anger welled up inside me, and tears mixed with snot **streamed** down my face, prompting me to hastily wipe them **away**. Zeke doesn't deserve any of it not the tears, not the heartache, not a second more of my time.

Without much thought, I reached for a random shirt and hastily pulled on a pair of loose pants. Instead of showering. I choose to follow Sammy's recommendation. I don't even bother to run a brush through my hair, still feeling the lingering sensation of Axton's fingers from last night.

Stepping out of my room, my eyes are immediately drawn to the mirror hanging in the hallway. I lock eyes with my own reflection, giving myself a nod of approval.

Today, **Zeke** is **going** to learn firsthand that there is no anger quite like that of a **woman** who has been betrayed,

When I finally reached the town square, it was already bursting **at** the seams with a crowd of people.

Sammy, with her perpetual **scowl**, walks right beside me, her grumpy demeanor palpable in the air.

No matter how **hard** she tried to be subtle, her eyes couldn't resist stealing a quick glance at her True Mate, who, unsurprisingly, was surrounded by his loving family. Their status as mates was an open secret in our pack, though it was disapproved of for him to abandon the family he had created to be with her. Although he never planned on it, the man had a deep affection for his family, and Sammy was resolute in not being reduced to the role of a mere mistress.

Differences in our values regarding being someone's secret caused frequent arguments between Sammy and me. However, being roommates would make it difficult for us to constantly be at odds with one another. We always maintained our own perspectives, which is why we agreed to disagree.

Sammy grabbed for my arm, breaking my train of thought. There was a smile of pure mischief on her **face as** she grabbed me by the jaw and made me face some direction. With my cheeks squeezed, I stare at what she's pointing And lo and behold, there was Axton, talking with some of his packmates

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As I lay my eyes on him, the wolf inside of me awakens, ready to pounce. In the morning light, his beauty shines event

brighter. Looking at his tousled hair, I couldn't help bu *all* the sensation of running my fingers through it during

the time we had sex. It's the thought that fills me with both anticipation and aching desire, and it seemed to catch Axton's attention, causing him to turn and meet my eyes.

I stood frozen, my eyes locked on Axton as he waved goodbye to his packmates and made his way towards us. Even Sammy **seems on** edge, clearly caught off guard by Axton's unexpected approach, a wide smile on his face as if we were all old friends. Even those around us were **watching** closely, their eyes fixed on Axton, the formidable Alpha of Blackacre, as he approached the misfits of the **Thornholde** Pack.

“Hey Chestnut,” With an air of nonchalance, Axton playfully tousles my hair, completely carefree. Sammy’s mouth hangs open in astonishment **as** she looks at us, her face a mix of confusion and bewilderment from the unexpected. spectacle. Axton, indifferent, casually turns to look at Sammy, flashing a friendly smile as he firmly shakes her hand. “Hello, allow me to introduce myself, my name’s Axton Hunt-”

In disbelief, Sammy’s gaze remains fixed on **him**. “I know who **you are**. Everyone does, no doubt. You’re the youngest Alpha who’s ever been Ascended. **You** became Blackacre’s **Alpha** when you were only 16, right?”

With a grin on **his face**, Axton glanced in my direction before redirecting his attention to Sammy. He **pulls** me towards him, **his** arm lazily draping over my waist, as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. In a fleeting moment, he **leaned in and** nuzzled his **nose against** my **hair, taking** in my scent **before** shifting his stance, his arm still firmly wrapped around my waist.

“That’s me!” With a wink, Axton says again, giving my hip a playful squeeze. “This event has been great so far, everyone’s been really cool. Mine **wasn’t** as massive as this one since only a few people witnessed it. **Having** a party

would’ve been so much fun.”

Axton’s arm on my waist held Sammy’s attention, and she couldn’t seem to tear her **gaze** away. To be honest, I **was** staring at it **too**, feeling **uncertain** about where to place my hands or why **Axton** was displaying such possessiveness towards me. It wasn’t that I disliked it, I simply wasn’t accustomed to it. On the other hand, my wolf was ecstatic, her tail wagging furiously as she **soaked** up his attention.

“Chestnut,” towards Sammy **as** if urging me to pay **attention**. How **about** introducing us? I’m not sure **what** her name is, Chesnut.”

With a gentle nudge against my hair, Axton’s hands tightened around my hips, his head motioning

“**That’s Uh**, Sammy. My roommate.”

“Ah! So very nice to meet you.”

Blinking in confusion, Sammy remained unsure of her next move. “Uh, right. Nice to meet you. So I’m just going to go... somewhere.”

Without a wave or a word, Sammy turned and walked away, leaving us standing there. With a quiet chuckle, Axton released his hold on me slightly, his gaze fixed on my face. With his eyes slightly lowered, he focused intently on my lips, as a sensation of slippery slick moved down my legs.

... What are you doing?” With bated **breath**. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from him, studying his every move beneath my lowered Lashes. “You’re being too close, don’t you think?”

Axton chose not to answer, opting instead to bring his lips tantalizingly close to my ear. I feel the warmth of his breath, brushing against my skin, causing a shiver to run down my spine. Instinctively, I find myself **clutching** his bicep, torn between the conflicting desires to push him away or pull him closer.

“Just so you know, I don’t remember if you told me your name, Chestnut,”

As Axton whispers in my ear. I can’t help but cringe with embarrassment, the weight of his reminder sinking in. I can’t believe I just hooked up with someone without him **even** knowing my name. Axton chuckles again, and when he away, he glances to the side, a playful smirk on his lips.

“You must be a big deal for the future Alpha of Thornholde to stare at me like **that, huh?**”

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I’m filled with confusion as I lock my eyes on what he’s staring at, a sense of dread settling in my stomach. Standing just a few feet away from us, Zeke exudes an aura of danger, growling and glowering as if lie’s ready to pounce and attack.

When we’re in public, Zeke has a way of pretending I don’t exist.

Although his actions initially hurt me, their familiarity **has** gradually desensitized me after being together for so long. It wasn't like he ever set aside time for me, even though most of the pack knew we hung out sometimes. Our relationship was a secret, and in the beginning, I was fine with that. But things are different now, especially after the pain he caused me.

True to my expectations, Nadia was positioned right next to him. To be fair, Nadia's father, who held the position of beta, was also present, alongside Alpha Gavvyn. With smiles on their faces, they chatted away, oblivious to Zeke's intense glare and menacing growls aimed at us.

Curious, I tilted my head and observed as Zeke's eyes flickered, transitioning from a deep black to their usual color. He was always possessive and jealous, constantly forbidding me from interacting with any male members of our pack. It's amusing, maybe he had been projecting all along, especially given that he was the one who ultimately cheated on

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Nadia had her arm tightly wrapped around Zeke's bicep, giving occasional squeezes to grab his attention during their conversation. At the same time, Axton is snickering beside me, his amusement contagious. Even though he was still holding onto me, both of us couldn't help but openly fix our stares on Zeke. It's a miracle that tensions haven't escalated into a fight yet.

"Well?" Axton's breath tickled my ear as he whispered, gently guiding me closer to him. I could feel the soft brush of his neck against my head. "So, what do they call you, Chestnut?"

Torn between conflicting emotions, I roll **my** eyes and contemplate whether to push him away or bring him closer. Right now, my **wolf** is unusually silent, its piercing howls replaced by an eerie stillness. Usually, she would have protested vehemently at the mere sight of an unmated male approaching **and** touching me in Zeke's presence.

"Maya Dalton."

"Hm." Axton boldly pulls away, his breath warm against my cheek as he leans his forehead against mine. "I'm thinking I'll just call you Chestnut from now on. The nickname's adorable, don't you agree!"

I stared at him, my expression completely blank.

“I don’t really care.

“Ah, you make my heart race with your words.”

With his hand securely wrapped around the back of my neck, Axton gently guided me in a direction, showing no signs of wanting to let me go. Following him clumsily, I steal a quick glance at Zeke, whose intense glare **remains** fixed on us. Strangely enough, there’s **a** touch of hurt hidden behind the mask of anger on his face.

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There’s **a** bittersweet mix of emotions within me a part that wants to burst into laughter, but also a **part** that’s throbbing with **pain**. Does he think I actually want **this**? The only thing I longed for was his acceptance, for him to boldly announce to the entire pack that we were True Mates.

Just as I was pondering that, I noticed Nadia staring at us as well. Her eyes revealed **an** unexpected mix of curiosity **and a** subtle flicker of surprise. Our eyes locked for a brief moment, **and then** she hastily averted her Axton, who seemed disinterested in her presence. Axton’s words buzzed in my car, but their meaning seemed to fade gaze **towards** away as I struggled to feign interest.

From the moment I was adopted by the **pack**, Nadia has been **a** constant presence in my life. I know her face, the subtle changes in her expression when she’s upset, angry, or wants something. I can tell by the look on her face and the expression she’s wearing that she wants Axton to come closer.

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It’s impossible to deny that Nadia is stunningly beautiful, **and** I have no **shame** in admitting it. She’s the prized jewel of the Thornholde pack, her beauty unmatched by **any** other. Her allure is so strong that even those who are already Mated can’t resist her. Nadia **wasn’t** fortunate enough to have her mate among our pack members. With her father’s blessing, she had spent years venturing into various packs, hoping to find her mate, but her search had yielded no results.

This could only signify one thing – her Mate, whoever that may be, is unmistakably human.

Since that possibility emerged, Nadia has remained silent about finding a Mate.

“Who’s that, **and** why does she have your **scent**?”

Out of nowhere, a voice startled me, making me realize that I had suddenly become encircled by a group of people. I’ve always been the one to blend into the background during events, so when someone finally directs their attention towards me, I become paralyzed with uncertainty.

There’s a young girl, seemingly five years younger than me, whose eyes are fixed on me. Standing next to her, I couldn’t help but notice her height, as she was noticeably shorter **than** me. Her brown hair, neatly tied into three braids, added a charming touch to her appearance. One braid rested in the middle, while the other two framed her face on either side.

“Say hello to my good friend, Maya Dalton.” With a wink, Axton introduced me to the girl, his voice filled with excitement. “She gave me an amazing welcome when I got here.”

Overwhelmed by embarrassment, I instinctively turned towards Axton and jabbed my elbow into his stomach. He groaned and folded in on himself, his exaggerated reaction not fooling me in the slightest. With a look of pure disdain, the little girl’s lips curl up in disgust as she gazes at him. And it wasn’t until much later that I finally noticed the striking resemblance between her **and** Axton.

“Ugh, gross. You’re embarrassing” As her attention shifts towards me, her eyes scan over my entire body, from my head all the way down to my toes. “You’re not much to look at, but I suppose it’s better than nothing. Your personality **is all** you’ve got, so you better be nice.”

I could feel a vein throbbing in my head, as if it were about to burst. Without thinking, I impulsively flicked her forehead before I could even realize what I was doing. I could see the disbelief in the girl’s eyes as she stared at me, **as** if she hadn’t anticipated my actions either.

“Lemme guess, you’re his sister?”

“Hey there, **stranger**, The little girl’s words burst forth, her voice projecting with a playful volume. “I don’t think we’ve been properly introduced. And well, my brother would have preferred if we never met. I’m Axel, by the way”

Not expecting such a bold introduction, I blinked in surprise, my eyes widening.

“Um, hi, Axel. I’m Maya.”

Her grin widening, Axel leaned in closer, making a show of sniffing the air with exaggerated gestures. My cheeks burned with embarrassment as I finally caught on to what she **was** implying.

“Oh, um, that’s probably just... Look, I can explain-”

But Axel interrupted me abruptly, her face contorted in a disgusted scowl.

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“Ah, I see how it is. You’re one of Axton’s playthings, aren’t you? I knew it!”

Alright, ouch.

Considering I had been Zeke’s plaything too, I didn’t really expect it to hurt, but the pain was **sharp** and unexpected. It’s probably not the smartest move to become someone’s plaything again, especially since it’s only been a day since the last time. I could feel the eyes of the surrounding pack members on us, and I desperately wished for the ground swallow me whole. I couldn’t help but notice how Axel’s laughter cut through the air, a clear indication of her enjoyment at my expense.

“Hey, leave her alone, Axel.”

Letting out a sigh, Axton rolled his eyes and pinched his sister on the nose, unable to hide **his** amusement. Axel let out a piercing yip before attempting to sink her canines into Axton’s hand, but Axton managed to swiftly retract his hand just in time.

“Come on, Axton. Can’t I have a little fun? Besides, someone’s gotta keep you in check.”

Axton sighed, his eyes filled with regret as he shot me an apologetic look.

“Sorry about her, Chestnut. She’s always **been** a handful.”

I forced a smile, but it didn't quite reach my eyes as I tried to hide the awkwardness.

"It's whatever, Axton."

"Seriously, though, Axton, **you** need to learn to control your urges. I can smell you on Maya from a mile away."

I let **out** a silent groan, desperately wanting to vanish into thin air. Axel's relentless **teasing** felt like a never-ending barrage, and I had a sinking feeling **that** she had no intentions of stopping anytime **soon**. Axton didn't show any signs of being bothered; in fact, he even puffed **out** his chest as if seeking acknowledgment.

"**Okay, t**

that's enough," Not wanting things to get any worse, I swiftly stepped in to intervene. "I should probably find **my** seat before the ceremony **starts**."

With a smirk on her face, Axel basked in the enjoyment of being the center of attention.

"Fine, fine. But this isn't over. We'll continue this later."

Watching Axel strut off into the busy crowd, leaving Axton and me standing there, a wave of relief washed over me, making me feel lighter. After enduring her relentless teasing, I finally found solace in a moment of respite. While Axton tightly held my **hand and** guided me towards his pack, a sudden surge of panic coursed through my veins.

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"Um, what are you doing?" I stammered, my words stumbling over each other **in a** desperate search for coherence. Glancing back at me, Axton's eyes held a look of curiosity. "I think I should sit with my pack. You know, not someone else's"

Axton's brows knitted together in confusion, but he decided **not** to delve further into the matter. Instead, he responded with a single nod and a comforting smile. "Of course, Chestnut. Whatever makes you comfortable. I'll see you alter the ceremon

With that, he turned to wave goodbye, his hand disappearing into the distance, leaving me standing there with a lingering sense of bewilderment.

It seemed strange to me that Axton was so insistent on us sitting together, especially given that we're not friends. We had sex once, and we don't really know each other. But I chose to **ignore** the thought, refusing to give it any more of my attention.

As I weaved through the bustling crowd, desperately searching for Sammy, a **sense** of isolation washed over me. The air was filled with laughter and excitement as everyone seemed to be paired off with their friends and True Mates, engaged in lively conversations. My heart ached for something similar, for the sensation of being nurtured and understood by those who cherish me.

I finally caught sight of Sammy across the square, sitting on the ground with her knees drawn up to her chest. People instinctively avoided her as she walked by, her scowl giving off an unmistakable warning. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief as I quickly made my way towards her, even though she gave me a cold stare.

"Hey, Sammy, I hope you saved me a seat."

Gratefulness washed over me as I **grinned**, appreciating the fact that Sammy reluctantly scooted over, muttering to herself. Settling into the seat next to her, my eyes involuntarily darted back towards Axton, unable to resist stealing a glance at him. From across the square, his eyes were fixed on me, his **lips** curving into a gentle smile.

Despite the warmth **that** spread through me, I couldn't muster a smile in return when I saw him. Instead of acknowledging him, I **chose** to casually tuck a loose strand of **hair** behind my ear, doing my best to ignore him.

Lost in my own thoughts, I barely registered when Sammy nonchalantly nudged me, directing my attention towards the stage.

"Look, Maya. They're about to announce the new Alpha."

My mind suddenly jolted back to reality, and I quickly shifted my gaze towards the stage. Zeke made his grand

entrance, and the air crackled with anticipation, everyone in the square turning their heads to catch a glimpse of him. But as the ceremony progressed, an unsettling atmosphere hung in the air, making me feel on edge.

As the Alpha Ascension ceremony kicked off, a sense of excitement hung in the air, making it crackle with anticipation.

The square **was** a melting pot of different **packs**, each identifiable by their distinct markings and scents. As Alpha Gavvyn stood tall and proud beside his nephew, everyone in the audience couldn't tear their eyes away from the stage. With a **tense posture and an** unreadable expression, Zeke's demeanor was inscrutable.

From the crowd, I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, and a knot of unease twisted in my stomach. **Despite** the lively sounds and colorful decorations, a lingering sense of something being **amiss** persisted.

As Alpha Gavvyn spoke, his voice reverberated across the square, demanding the attention of all in attendance.

"Today marks a new for the Thornholde pack," As he began to speak, his words resonated with the weight of centuries of tradition and the responsibility to uphold it. "As I step down from my position as Alpha, I am proud to pass the torch to my nephew, Zeke."

While the crowd erupted into applause, my attention remained solely on Zeke as he confidently stepped forward to accept his new title. His face gave nothing away, his jaw firmly set in a display of unwavering determination. The moment our eyes connected, a bittersweet **sensation** washed over me – a blend of hope and fear that gripped my heart.

In that brief moment, our eyes connected, and I sensed a hidden depth in his gaze that stirred my innermost feelings. Just as I **was** about to decipher the message hidden in his gaze, he abruptly shifted his attention **back** to the stage. where Alpha Gavvyn's words filled the air.

With each passing moment of the ceremony, my unease intensified. Zeke's ascension to Alpha should have been a moment of celebration, but instead, **an** eerie silence hung in the air, foreshadowing the impending chaos. The air in the **square was** heavy with tension, as if something ominous **was** about to unfold.

With a quick glance, I surveyed the expressions of the other pack members, hoping to detect any hint of shared unease. Their expressions spoke volumes they were all caught up in the excitement of the moment, their **faces** beaming with joy **and** anticipation.

Returning my focus to **the** stage, I observed as Alpha Gavvyn gracefully stepped aside, creating space for Zeke to assume his position. With each step towards the podium, his countenance grew more serious, his unwavering gaze revealing the burden of responsibility he carried.

Thank you, Uncle,” Zeke’s strong and confident voice rang out as he spoke. My heart betrays me, for **even** though I **am** aware of the hurt he inflicted and the need to detest him, the sound of his voice and the way he carries himself still evoke a reaction within me. “I am honored to **accept** this title and to lead our pack into the future.”

The cheers from the crowd echoed through the air, but I stayed quiet, captivated by Zeke’s words and unable to **tear** my eyes away from him. My heart was filled with a mix of anger and pride as I looked at him in that moment. At the end of the day, instincts prevail, solidifying the bond between him and me as True Mates, regardless of my personal sentiments.

The sound of Alpha Gavvyn’s voice filled the square, resonating with authority, while his hand waved towards the side of the stage.

“I would like to invite Markus, my beta, and his beloved daughter, Nadia, to join us up on the **stage**.”

A sense of **confusion** washed over me **as** I observed them ascending the stage, causing my brows to furrow and **a knot to** tighten in my stomach. Why should they be up there?

I couldn’t quite understand the depth of Zeke’s emotions as his expression grew tense and **his** jaw clenched. As I stole a quick look at him, I longed for reassurance in his eyes, but they betrayed no hint of emotion, only **a façade** of

indifference. Amidst the crowd, I caught sight of Axton, his face mirroring my own curiosity as he watched intently. It was as if he had **a** sixth sense, because the moment I started watching him, he turned to meet my gaze.

We exchanged a glance, **but** then he shakes his head, silently acknowledging our mutual **lack** of understanding-

The Alpha Ascencion ritual would often begin with the current Alpha delicately cutting their forearm, a small drop **of** blood staining the ground as a symbolic gesture. Just like their predecessor, the chosen successor also does the **same**. In order to symbolize the pack's leadership unity and ongoing legacy, a ceremonial vessel is used to collect the blood from both Alphas. As the blood is combined, it forms a symbolic concoction **that** embodies the combined strength, wisdom, and lineage of both the old and new Alpha. Passed down through generations, this blended blood is believed to be infused with the very essence of leadership, making it highly revered.

Once the blood is mixed, it is ceremoniously anointed **on** the forehead of the chosen successor, denoting their status as the new **Alpha**.

None of those events have taken place so far. Zeke has just been introduced.

So, why did they call Nadia up on stage?

“We stand on the cusp of a new **era**,” Alpha Gavvyn’s voice filled the square, booming and commanding as he made his declaration. He waved his arm towards Zeke, a proud smile spreading across his face. “To guarantee the flourishing of the Thornholde pack, it is essential that our Alpha is united with a formidable Luna.”

The weight of his words settled heavily on me, causing my breath to hitch in my throat as I absorbed the implications with a sinking feeling. My head begins to shake, and I mutter incomprehensible words that escape my lips. Tears well up in my eyes as I feel a **chilling** sensation run through my entire body, causing me to tightly clasp my hands over my mouth.

After a brief pause, Alpha Gavvyn continued, his voice filled with a sense of gravity.

“After extensive consideration, it has been determined that Zeke, who **is** our future Alpha, will be paired with Nadia in an arranged mating. Both of them have not yet discovered their True Mates and have both made the noble sacrifice of rejecting them in order to ensure a prosperous future for our pack.”

Gasps erupted from the crowd, their collective surprise reverberating through the streets. A surge of agony coursed through me as my heart tightened in my chest, **the** weight of pain crashing down on me like **a** relentless tide. The idea seemed too far-fetched to accept. It felt surreal, as if it couldn't possibly be real. As everything around me becomes a blur of pain, I instinctively curl inward, clutching my chest and struggling to catch my breath.

From the sidelines, I could feel tears gathering in my eyes, the pain of betrayal igniting like a raging fire within me. How could Zeke, knowing the consequences, possibly agree to this? How could he just stand there, allowing them to tear us apart piece by piece? As the questions swirled through my **mind**, a sense of helplessness washed over me, knowing that there was nothing I could do. It was a bond that could not be broken, the unbreakable connection between Alpha and pack.

To go against it was to gamble with everything.

And I was not worth anything.

“It is for the good of the pack,” Zeke's proclamation resounded, bouncing off the nearby cabins and filling the air. “And as your future Alpha, it is my duty to ensure the survival and prosperity of our kind.”

Listening to his words, a bitter taste lingered in my mouth, amplifying the searing sensation of betrayal in my chest. How **could** he use duty as **a** justification for tearing us apart?

It felt as though the entire world **was** pressing against my chest, making it difficult to catch my breath. As I watched from the edge of the crowd, the pain of betrayal twisted like a knife in my heart, bringing tears to my eyes. How could this be happening? How could Zeke agree to be mated with Nadia, the woman who had torn tie —

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The weight of it became unbearable, and I couldn't take it anymore. I felt overwhelmed by the **pain** and sorrow, as if it could spill out of me in a shattered scream **that** I couldn't hold back. My hands shook uncontrollably as I raised them to my mouth, desperately trying to suppress the sound from escaping. **But** it was no use. The sorrow was too **great**, the pain too **intense**.

I couldn't hold it in any longer, and a loud, choked **sob** burst forth from my lips. It was impossible to ignore the piercing gazes of those around me, their eyes filled with a curious and concerned expression. But I couldn't bring myself to care. The overwhelming **sense** of loss consumed me, as if my heart had been shattered and scattered into countless irreparable fragments.

And then, **as** if by some miracle, I felt a strong, warm arm encircle my waist, providing **a** gentle and comforting embrace. Through tear-filled eyes, I glanced upwards and saw Axton standing next to me, **his** gentle expression and warm smile providing comfort.

With no need for words, he gently pulled me into an embrace that made me feel safe and secure. I buried my face against his chest, inhaling deeply, as the comforting scent of his calming pheromones instantly put me at ease.

"It's okay, Chestnut," Softly, he murmured words of comfort, his voice like a gentle lullaby. The sensation of his hand running through my hair intensifies my emotions, causing even more tears to well up in my eyes. "Let it out. I'm here for you."

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And without hesitation, I did exactly as I was told. I couldn't hold back the tears any longer, and they streamed down my face, carrying with them the weight of my pain and sorrow. Holding me close, Axton's presence became anchor in the storm, his steady heartbeat a comforting rhythm in my darkest hour. When he pulls me away from the crowd, I can hear the distant chatter fading into the background.

However, my heart, filled with foolishness, couldn't resist stealing one last glance towards the stage. Despite the pain he caused, I find myself unable to resist the urge to search for him.

Zeke's standing there, all tense, looking at Axton like he wants to rip him apart.

Yet, he does nothing more than that

The weight of betrayal hung heavy in the air, making each passing moment during the ceremony feel like an eternity. As Axton's hand wrapped around my waist, I felt a reassuring warmth coursing through me. In search of solace, I turned to him, finding refuge in the familiarity of his gaze.

And then, as if sensing my anguish, Axton leaned in and placed a tender, chaste kiss on my forehead, his lips brushing softly against my **skin**.

"Tomorrow's going to be different," His voice, filled with unwavering conviction, barely audible as he whispered his thoughts. "Better believe it, **Chesnut**."

I clenched my jaw, fighting back tears and suppressing the overwhelming desire to scream and vent my **anger** at the cruel unfairness **of** the situation. But I had a sinking feeling that my **actions** would yield no positive outcome.

I wanted to believe **him**, desperately hoping that tomorrow would bring solace to the ache in my heart. But the **pain** of betrayal still clung to me, a lingering reminder of the trust that had been shattered and the heart that had been broken.

As my heart weighed heavily, I reluctantly shifted my attention back to the stage, where Nadia stood, her presence commanding. With no shame in her eyes, she locked her gaze onto mine, a mischievous smile forming on her lips.

My eyes were locked on the stage where Zeke and Alpha Gavvyn stood side by side, as I stood on the outskirts of the bustling crowd. Axton stood by my side, his hand no longer intertwined with mine but still providing quiet comfort as he gently massaged my back. In an effort to regain composure, I inhaled deeply, fighting **back** the tears that threatened to resurface. The touch of Axton's hand against my back felt like a balm, slowly mending the pieces of my shattered heart.

Steadying my breathing. I watched as Alpha Gavvyn took a step forward, his weathered face conveying a somberness that matched the gravity of the situation. A silver blade, shining **brightly** in the sunlight, was held aloft by his raised forearm. With precision, he made a small cut on his skin, **causing a** single drop of blood to pool and stain the ground beneath him.

At the sight, my heart tightened with a mix of emotions, fully aware of the symbolism behind the act.

The Alpha Ascension ritual is starting-

Alpha Gavvyn gracefully stepped aside, allowing Zeke to seamlessly step into his position. With determination etched on his face, he mirrored his uncle's actions and carefully cut his forearm, his jaw clenched. My eyes fixated on **Zeke**, his skin turning crimson as the blood pooled silently. Even **as** my heart ached for him, I couldn't escape the bitter taste that lingered in my mouth.

A ceremonial vessel, crafted from ancient silver, was brought forth to collect the blood of both Alphas after they **had** made their cuts. The vessel's surface was a testament to the craftsmanship of the past, with intricate carvings that held the secrets of generations.

Once the blood was mixed, a symbolic concoction took shape, capturing the essence of both the old and new Alpha in a powerful blend. It was a powerful reminder of the ancestral bloodline flowing through their veins, a heritage that would serve as a compass and shield for future generations of the pack.

With a solemn nod, Alpha Gavvyn carefully anointed Zeke's forehead with the blended blood, a symbol of their sacred connection. The crowd exploded with applause, chants, and howls, their voices blending together in a symphony of celebration and support.

While I watched from the sidelines, **a** sharp, acrid taste lingered on my tongue. This was not the future I had envisioned for Zeke, for us. With each passing moment, the weight of betrayal grew heavier, leaving me wondering about the uncertain future that awaited us..

“Zeke,” As Alpha Gavvyn invited Zeke back to the center of the stage, the atmosphere in the town square became charged with anticipation. Zeke stood tall and the crowd grew silent, their eyes fixated on him. “As the newly appointed Alpha of our pack, it is now your responsibility to address your fellow pack members.”

Zeke nodded in acknowledgment, his jaw clenched tight with unwavering determination. Stepping forward, he cast a sweeping gaze over the crowd, until **his** eyes met mine. For a brief **moment**, our eyes locked, and I saw a flicker of sadness in his gaze. Then, in the blink of an eye, it vanished, replaced by an unyielding resolve that made my spine tingle with uncase.

“My felle

fellow pack members,” Zeke began, **his** voice **taking** on a commanding tone that was quite different from his usual demeanor. “I stand before you today as your new Alpha, ready to lead our pack into a new era of prosperity and strength.”

As the crowd murmured in agreement, the sound of their voices blended together, creating a harmonious chorus of support for their new leader. With a single gesture, Zeke held up his hand, effectively silencing everyone around him. “I **know** that there have been rumors of Rogues lurking around the **Six** Packs of our nation,” Zeke continued, the mischievousness in his eyes replaced by a sudden seriousness. This **is an** unfamiliar side of him that I’m seeing. “But I want to assure you that there is no cause for alarm. With my ascension comes **a** renewed dedication to our safety and security.”

The crowd erupted in cheers, their excitement spreading like a ripple **as** Zeke’s words resonated. Promising to keep them safe, he vowed to protect them from the hidden perils that awaited beyond our borders.

“I vow to hunt **down** every single Rogue that dares to threaten our peace,” Zeke declared, his **voice** ringing **with** conviction. “I will not rest until our pack is free from the shadow of danger, until every last one of our enemies lies defeated at our feet!”

Zeke’s words were filled with bravery and confidence, yet a lingering sense of unease made my stomach churn. As I turned my head to face Axton, I

found him wearing a similar pensive look on his face. He reassured me last night, saying that there was nothing to worry about. The conflicting statements from Zeke and Axton have left me feeling incredibly anxious.

As the echoes of the cheers dissipated, Zeke's resolute expression remained, and he cast one final glance over the crowd. "Together, we will build a future filled with peace and prosperity. And as your Alpha, I promise to lead our pack with honor and integrity, always putting the needs of our people above all else."

As Zeke uttered those last words, he retreated from the stage's edge, his body language radiating confidence and resoluteness. In a cacophony of applause, the crowd showered their new leader with admiration and respect, their voices blending together in a chorus of support.

But as I watched Zeke stand tall and proud, a pang of sadness pierced my heart.

Throughout the entire ceremony, there wasn't a single moment where he cracked a smile.

As I watched the ceremony come to an end, the weight of sorrow settled upon me, and a wave of memories crashed into my mind, overwhelming me. I couldn't help but remember the Zeke I had known, the Zeke who was playful and carefree, his laughter filling the air like music. He **had** always been so vibrant, his infectious smile capable of brightening even the gloomiest of days.

But as I looked at him now, standing tall and proud on the stage, a sense of sadness washed over me like a tidal wave. The Zeke I remembered **was** nothing like **this**. The man standing on the stage was a stranger, not the one I had fallen in love with.

As the ceremony unfolded, I searched for any sign of the Zeke I knew and loved, but he seemed to have vanished, leaving behind only an empty shell. Instead, he had been cold and distant, his eyes filled with determination and resolve. He had spoken of hunting down Rogues and killing them without hesitation, his words ringing with a sense of finality that sent shivers down my spine.

As I looked at this new Zeke, I struggled to make sense of how he had transformed from the boy I used to know. The boy who had laughed and

played with me under the stars, who had held me close and whispered sweet nothings in

my car.

Where had he gone?

What had become of the man I loved?

I can't **stand** the fact that I'm completely ignorant about the answer.

Watching the crowd **disperse**, I could feel the weight of my emotions as tears welled up in my eyes, and the distant sound of their voices added to my **sense** of loneliness. It felt like he was slipping through my fingers, disappearing a little more with each passing moment. I watched as the Zeke I once knew slowly transformed **into** a hardened, **unrecognizable** figure.

I yearned to embrace him tightly, whispering reassurances that everything would turn out fine. But deep down, I knew that it was too late. It was a painful realization that he had made **his** choice, **and** it wasn't me the weight of it pressed down **on** my heart.

Just as I turned to leave, a powerful voice resonated through the air, pulling me back towards the stage. It was Zeke, clapping his hands together to get the crowd's attention. As I watched hike

Leaning close to Axton, I whispered softly into his ear.

"What's he doing?"

"Attention, everyone!" Zeke called, his voice echoing through the air as he cupped his hands around his mouth. "I have something important to discuss with the Alphas of the other five packs. Please, join me on stage."

Confused, Axton furrowed his brow, then let go of my hand and excused himself, playfully teasing me. Flashing a playful smirk, he uttered some words before melting into the sea of people.

"Looks like your ex is calling me, Chesnut."

As I watched him go, a rush of heat flooded my cheeks, **a** mix of embarrassment and gratitude for his teasing and presence. As I shifted my focus back to the stage, my eyes landed on Zeke, who's already encircled by the other Alphas of the neighboring packs. As they gathered around him,

their expressions varied from curiosity to suspicion, their eyes locked onto him with anticipation. Alongside them, Nadia engaged in a conversation with her father and the esteemed Alpha Gavvyn.

A gentle pull on my arm made me stop in my tracks and look behind me.

“Hey, are we going **back** to the house now?”

her ever

I turned to face her, and as I looked into I couldn't help but notice the sadness that lingered behind her forced blank expression.

“Yeah, Sammy, we can go **back**.”

In a quiet, almost inaudible voice, she suddenly spoke, her words barely reaching the air.

“He saw me.

“Huh?”

“My True Mate,” Sammy replied, her voice dripping with bitterness. With her gaze averted, she crossed her arms protectively over her chest. “He spat at my face and told me to spend the money he gave me on clothes, so I wouldn't embarrass him any further.

“Oh,” I whispered, my hand extending towards her shoulder, but ultimately retracting before making contact. “That's awful.

With a shrug, Sammy tried to shake off the hurt, but her forced chuckle betrayed the pain he was feeling. Her words came out strained, her voice revealing the pain she struggled to keep hidden.

“Oh, it's fine. Just another day in the life of Sammy, right?”

But I could see through her facade, the heaviness in her sighs exposing the deep wounds she carried. I knew it wasn't fine as soon as I felt the tension in the air. It was unimaginable that someone could be treated with such cruelty, especially by the one person who was supposed to be their True Mate. I would know, and it frustrates me that I would.

“Attention, everyone!” With a grave and authoritative tone, Zeke called out again, demanding everyone's attention. As Sammy **and** I exchanged **a quick glance**, we instinctively shifted our attention towards

the stage. “In order to prioritize the safety of all six packs, we have made the decision to provide training for each pack. The Thornholde pack has been selected as the venue for the **training**. And the initial phase will involve the Blackacre Pack.

Speculative whispers rippled through the air, making the tension feel **thick** and palpable.

The warmth of the evening **air** couldn't ward off the chilling sensation that **sent** shivers down my spine. I could feel the intensity of Zeke's stare as his cold, unwavering eyes locked onto mine. A sickening sense of realization washed

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over me, **causing** a knot to form in **the** pit of my stomach.

Despite the suffocating sense of dread, I summoned all my strength to maintain composure. I couldn't let Zeke see

the way my **hands** were **shaking**, a clear sign of how deeply his announcement **had** affected me. I couldn't let him see the flicker of annoyance that danced in my **eyes**, giving him the satisfaction he craved.

He was glaring at me because he knew.

Blackacre Pack. Axton's pack.