

Damara

I snap awake, jumping to my feet. I look around, expecting a fight. When there isn't one, I turn, expecting to find Ivy behind me, holding a knife.

But I'm alone, alone in a field of wildflowers. I can hear the bees buzzing as they flit from flower to flower, the birds chirping in the distance, the cicadas humming in the afternoon sun.

I lift my nose in the air, smelling nothing but the fresh air of a spring day.

I tentatively begin walking toward the forest line. "Claire?" I ask in my head.

I get no response. I take a few more steps on the verge of panicking when I see him. Magnor. He's laying on the ground ahead of me.

I race to him, realizing that I am back in my own body now, not his.

I whine, nudging him with my nose, trying to wake him. I can hear his heart beating at a steady pace, but he doesn't wake up.

Suddenly, I hear soft footsteps coming from the forest. I move to stand over Magnor, taking a protective stance and baring my teeth at the stranger. However, as soon as I see her, I stand up straight, the fur on my back that had been

standing on end, relaxing back against my body.

"Hello, Damara. I see you recognize me."

"Mother." It's the only explanation for the ethereal looking woman in front of me.

"Yes, my child. One of my children that I am most proud of. You, who have never once given me grief and have always been true to yourself and your human."

"Claire is a good human. I am lucky to be her wolf."

"Yes, she is a good person."

"Is this...is this your realm? Am I dead? Did Claire die? Is that why I can't hear her?" I ask in quick succession.

The Moon Goddess sighs. "I have to admit, I didn't see this coming. I should have, I guess, but when Magnor made his choice a year ago, I expected that things would be different." She says.

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean. What choice did Magnor make?" I ask her.

"He never told you?" She asks me, smiling softly.

"No." I say, looking down at my unconscious mate.

"I gave Magnor a choice. He could continue to stay here with you and me or he could relive the last year of life but as an omega, giving you the opportunity to live your life as an Alpha. It was always only meant to be one year that you and he would be in the switched bodies. However, it appears that things didn't go according to plan. You weren't supposed to

die again.”

I look down at my mate, not knowing I could love him more than I did before but feeling my heart ready to burst with love for my mate. He did that for me, for me and Claire. He humbled himself in a way that I don't think any other Alpha would have done and gave me a chance to see what being an Alpha was like, a chance to make the pack better.

I lick his muzzle, wishing he would wake up so I could thank him.

“I had no idea he did that for me.” I say, laying next to him and putting my neck over his.

“He loves you very much.”

“And I love him, with everything I am.”

It's quiet for a moment, and then my Mother sighs. “I shouldn't continue to alter the universe this way, but your humans continue to make a big mess of things. Tell me, did Claire reject Tereshan?”

“Yes, the very first time she saw him after the switch.”

“So, it would seem that the rejection is what causes the end result, although this time, some members of the pack lived. It seems as though, in order to survive your 18th year, your humans would have needed to accept each other and learned to work together as a team. No matter how much good they did for or with the pack, it is ultimately their bond that determines if they and you survive.”

She comes over and begins running her fingers through my

fur. She looks thoughtful for another moment before speaking again.

"I can give you one more chance, Damara. One more chance for your humans to get it right. If you agree to return to your body, agree that Magnor return to his, I can give you your 18th year again."

My heart sinks. Everything that Claire did over the past year would be gone, all of our hard work would be eliminated. And, we would have to hope that Tereshan has learned enough to have changed. It seems like he did, but that was in an omega's body. If he returns to his Alpha body, it's anyone's guess if he'll remember what he's learned or if he'll go back to the person he was a year ago.

"Yes, it is a risk, specifically to you and Claire. I can't say how Tereshan will respond. He is an arrogant, proud man. And in the past, he didn't listen to his wolf, insisting that he understood things better than Magnor did. And, of course, he could be angry at what he experienced while he was an omega. Those are risks not only for yourself, but also for Claire. And, you'll go back to the weakened state you were in a year ago. If Tereshan chooses to go back to his old ways, you will never get stronger again. And only with his assistance, will you gain strength enough to regain your wolf form."

"So, worst case scenario, we relive our horrible life and die again?" I ask.

"Yes."

That's a lot to ask of Claire, especially after we've seen what

our pack could become.

"And best-case scenario?" I ask her.

"I'd say, your humans work together and find a way to live through your 19th birthday."

I look back down at Magnor. He trusted me, gave me an opportunity to change the pack, to show his human that there is a different way to run a pack, a more effective way.

"I want to try. I want to give him the same chance he gave me. I have to hope that Tereshan has changed. If not, we survived his torment once before, we can do it again."

"I have to warn you, Damara, this is the last time. If you die again this year, that is it. What is done, will be done. You and Magnor will both have to live with that."

I look down at the love of my life. "He's worth it. And Claire is strong enough to survive it if Tereshan is terrible to her. I know he suffered this year, but I have to hope that he learned something too."

"So, you agree? You are willing to go back to your omega body and live that life again? You are willing to lose all the strength you gained over the past year? You are willing to try one more time to live through this year?"

"Yes, I agree." I say.

I feel her hand run through my fur once more.

"Done." I hear her say as everything fades away.