

Chapter 0026

(James POV)

It is now 11:37 am, which means that Stephanie's first memorial event of the day is officially and already 37 minutes behind schedule. My father is freaking out, but there is nothing that he can do. There is no way that we can start the event without Stephanie's brother and father.

Thankfully, Nick mind-links me that they are on the way. With luck, we can get this show started in a few minutes.

When Nick and Beta Robert arrive, they seem to be carrying a body bag. It is only when they come closer that I realize that the "body bag" is actually the Little Brat, wrapped up in a blanket.

"What happened to her?" I ask.

"I told you she was bad off," Nick responds.

I walk even closer and pull the blanket back. As I do so, Lily's chocolate and raspberry scent overwhelms me. Distracted, my fingers then accidentally brush the Little Brat's arm, which causes pleasurable sparks to run through me.

For the first time, I start to wonder if I made a mistake by insisting she be brought here.

I force myself to focus so that my eyes can process what I am looking at. The Little Brat's body is covered in bruises, welts, and cuts. I would not be surprised if she has multiple broken bones. She also has blood matted in her hair and covering her face. Her eyes and lips are swollen and purple.

I look around at the others, and everyone except Margie has the same concerned and shocked expression on their faces. That includes Nick and Beta Robert, even though they had already seen what she looked like.

Strangely, Margie does not seem at all surprised, and her eyes have a hint of... guilt. Is it possible that Margie had something to do with Lily's injuries? Could Lily's mother have done this to her? I try to shove those questions out of my head. I need to focus on today's mission.

"Nick and Beta Robert, please bring Lily to her seat in the front next to Sheila."

My father puts his hand on my shoulder. "Son, I do not think that is a good idea. It looks to me like Lily needs medical attention. You wanted Lily here, and she is, but why don't we just keep her on the side or in the back until the event is done?"

"NO! She will sit in the front next to Sheila, like planned."

"Son...."

"No, father. Lily and Sheila must sit together."

Just as I say that, I hear Lily's heart beginning to race. Despite our werewolf hearing, I do not think anyone else can hear it, but as her "mate" I can because I am much more in tune with her than others.

I smirk.


"Little Mate, does it bother you that you have to sit next to Sheila today?" I ask Lily via mind-link. She does not respond, but I do not care. Her increased heart-beat tells me that she is very much awake. "I invited Sheila to sit next to you when she left my bedroom this morning. You know, she stayed the night in my bedroom last night, which she often does these days."

I see a tear slip from Lily's closed eyes, which confirms that I am right. She can definitely hear me.

"Get ready, Little Mate. Sitting next to Sheila is only one part of the fun that I have planned for you this morning."

I end the mind-link. "Bring Lily to her seat," I say again to Nick. "It is show-time." 2

We start Stephanie's memorial event at 12:02 pm. We would have started sooner, but the Little Brat was not helping Nick and her father get her adjusted in her seat; she kept flopping over. They eventually had to swap out her folding chair for a chair that reclines so that they could get her positioned.



Even I have to acknowledge that getting Lily here and in the front row seat created more of a spectacle than was really warranted, but it is done now.

The memorial event finally begins, following its typical format of speakers and speeches.

Towards the end, Beta Robert stands and invites me to join him on stage. I hear buzzing in the crowd; no one had expected me to say anything today.

"Pack members, we have an important announcement to make that impacts all of you," Beta Robert begins. "As you know, my daughter has been gone for a long time. She would have made a fine luna, and she would have helped lead this pack to even greater greatness. No one will ever be able to fill her shoes. However, it has been six years, and we need to begin planning for the future."

I step forward. "To that end, with the blessing of Stephanie's family, I have decided that I will take a chosen mate."

While a new set of murmurs work themselves through the crowd, I invite Sheila to step up to the stage beside me.

"At this time next year, I plan to marry. My marriage will not erase Stephanie's memory or her legacy, but rather continue it. The wedding will be officiated by Beta Robert, and my firstborn child will be named after Stephanie as well."

I take a moment to stare at the Little Brat as I begin the next

part of my speech. "I am not yet ready to announce who my chosen mate will be, but I assure you that whoever I pick, she will make an amazing luna who will bear me many pups.

As you know, beautiful Sheila here was Stephanie's best friend. She is one of the top candidates for the luna position, although not the only one. What I appreciate about Sheila is that she has a wolf, she has never caused the death of any pack members, and she treats all pack members with respect no matter their rank. In fact, I especially appreciate her work at the pack orphanage ---"

Before I can finish, I see Lily stand up. I stop talking, because I am shocked to see her do so. I may have told the others that I thought she was faking, but there is no way that Lily could fake injuries that severe. I knew she could hear what was going on –her heartbeats and tears told me that– but I never expected to see her stand up. I thought for sure she would need medical attention before she would even be able to speak.

"I apologize for the interruption, James," she says in a strong voice, loud enough for the entire pack to hear. "However, I have something to say."


The strength of her voice is further shocking to me. Is it possible that she was faking this whole time? After a minute, I decide that it does not matter. I will hate her the same no matter what.

"Go ahead and speak if you must."



"I, Lily Brogan, forgotten and neglected daughter of Beta Robert and Margie Brogan, hereby reject you, James Anderson, future alpha of the West Mountain Pack, as my mate."

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