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"I'm sorry you went through that. I wish I could turn that connection off so my moods wouldn't affect you like that." I look down at my feet. I know we need to talk, I guess now is as good a time as any. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"I don't. If you could shut it down, I never would have found you. You wouldn't be here at all."

"What are you talking about?" My heartrate is starting to pick up.

"Who do you think got to you first in that locker room? We are connected for some reason. I think part of it is so I can find you when you are suffering all alone."

"How did you know?"

"I felt off when we were getting ready for the ball, but I brushed it off. Then I got a massive headache, the only kind I get with you. I tried to mindlink you and couldn't. You were blocked from me. I linked dad, I didn't want to say anything to the guys until I knew for sure you weren't still training or doing something equally stupid with him or Kyle." I got a small smile then. Then his eyes go dark and glossed over. "Then my mouth started to bleed, like I took a sucker punch from Kota and my whole chest seized. My wolf took over, I shifted and he jumped out the window of Cam's room. You were so broken," He takes a deep breath

in and a tear falls from his eyes, but I can't move. I'm frozen in place. "I don't think there was a part of you that wasn't damaged." He takes another deep breath in and squats down, pressing the heels of his hands to his eyes. "You told me to let you die." He sobs and sags to his knees. I couldn't hold back anymore and I walked over to him.

Even on his knees, his head comes to my ribcage. He wraps his arms around my waist and buries his face in my stomach. We are both crying now. He found me. He always finds me.

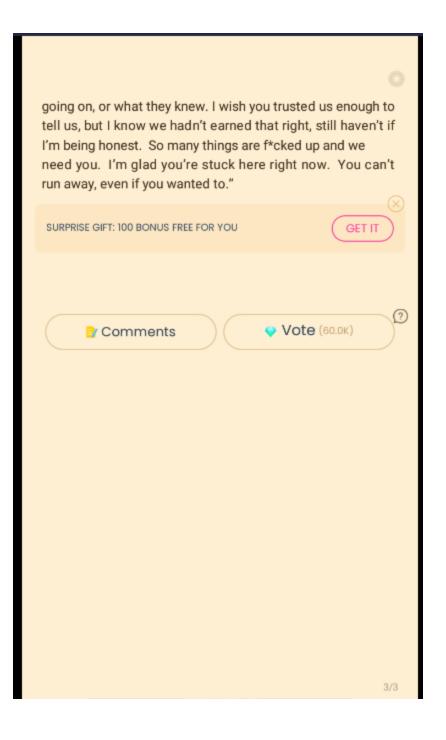
"I'm sorry."

"Then you were gone, they ripped you from my arms. No information, no word of how you were, what happened, who was involved. We were just told you were alive and that's all we needed to know." He takes a deep breath in and lets it out slowly. Then continues talking into my shirt. "The only thing we got was that one page letter. You said you were healthy and training and that was it."

"That's all I had. I was alive. I became a science experiment for Sierra's parents, a freakshow for the other warriors. You know the usual for me."

He huffs a laugh, but doesn't let go or look at me.

"I'm sorry, Bitty. I'm sorry it took you leaving for us to understand. My dad and Delta Kyle sat us down after we got back from that summer training and told us what was



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He's crying. This massive, tattooed guy who is scared of nothing is crying into my shirt. My broody, moody Gamma's never shown this much emotion in living memory, but with just the two of us, he's breaking down and holding me tight, like I might disappear if he lets go. This is our thing, this raw emotion, this connection will stay in this room for only the two of us to bear. I let all my calming thoughts flow to him, like he does for me.

"Why have you been so angry with me if you missed me this much?" I run my fingers through his rich dark hair.

"You never looked this happy and healthy here. Even dead on your feet from lack of sleep and covered in everything that you could possibly be covered in from fighting in the forest, I could see the glow in your skin and in your eyes. You have put on weight, you have so much more muscle now. Being away has been good for you. That's what made me angry. It was better for you to be away, you are better off without us." He takes another deep breath in and lets it out.

That is not what I expected to hear at all.

"It's not that it was better or worse for me anywhere. I had to get away for a little while. I just needed a break from the drama and to experience life and things outside the pack. To see what I was capable of on my own in a place that was unfamiliar without the safety net of you guys around. I wish it didn't happen the way it did, but I can't say I regret it. I was always going to come home. That has always been the plan, it's still the plan even if I have to leave again."

"What happens when you become an Elite Warrior trainer and they keep you until you find your mate?" His hoarse voice is barely above a whisper.

"Is that really what you think will happen?"

"Who knows." He shrugs, still maintaining a tight grip. "You still have a lot of time. You make so many things happen in such short amounts of time, who the hell knows what you'll do in under two years."

"Well, for now, I am here and the pack is in danger. I'm not leaving again until I know everyone is safe and even then I know I can't stay away from you guys like that again. It hurts too much and I don't sleep well. We'll figure something out if the Alpha King needs me. I think we have all grown a lot since I have been away. Now I really need to workout and then I need to figure out what Elena wants me to do."

He lets me go slowly, scrubbing his face as he stands up. " So who's Elena and what is she teaching you?" He goes into business mode right away. The mushy conversation is over.

"Elena is a witch, she is actually in Gentry's coven. Gentry is

Nickolas' mate. Long story. But, turns out that I have more abilities due to my connection with Alpha Reggie and she and I are training in the basics of magic."

"Uh, you're gonna have to give me more than that Bitty. Magic?"

"I'm sure that Alpha Lucas told you I'm Alpha King Reggie's relation. I forget the actual lineage, but he calls me his niece. And the first born females in the Alpha King's blood line traditionally have an extra ability, like the power to be immune to things, manipulate emotions, heal others, use magic, things like that. Apparently there was a prophecy a long time ago about one of the females having more than one ability. Alpha Reggie thinks that my sense of smell is one of mine, but also my ability to withstand silver, even when it's injected into me..."

"Who the f*ck tested that on you? That's not something you just try out to see if you have the ability, Bitty." He blurts. His whole body is shaking with rage.

I grab both of his massive forearms with my tiny hands. "It wasn't voluntary. That's what happened that night in the locker room. It's why you couldn't link me. I was injected with wolfsbane and silver and possibly some other poisons. Doc Ganon and Doc Sylvia took a ton of samples and are studying it, but what I was given should have killed me within minutes, from what I understand."

"You need to tell me who did this to you. Is it the same

person that gave you the silver scars on your back?"

"Yes, it was the same person and no I won't tell you. You wouldn't be able to deal with it in a diplomatic way..."

"Who gives a sh*t about diplomacy when you were tortured?"

"I do when it is a pack member who has been getting away with things pretty much forever. I won't condone it, but at the same time, no one has ever made it clear the behavior is unacceptable. The pack leaders are responsible for that. Yes, things need to change, but current things need to be fixed, past stuff has already happened and cannot be taken back. Keep working with the pups, teach them to stand up for themselves. Teach them to be decent pack members, not to hurt people in order to get what they want. But we need to get back to the magic. I have some control over elements and I need to work on that like I work with weights. Magic is like a muscle, but it still takes a lot of energy for me to sustain, so I need someone with me just in case I overdo it by accident."

"So let's get to work here, a quick full body thing and then where do we need to do your magic? Is there like a special room or what?"

I move over and start setting up weights while I explain about being outside and what I have to focus on for the flow of magic to happen. I also have to read whatever instructions Elena gave me too. We don't talk much, we have never really had to when we work out. I love the silence and the ability to lose myself in my thoughts, but at the same time, I'm not alone. His large protective presence also makes me feel safe and loved.

When we are done and clean up the mess of weights everywhere, we head toward the kitchen to check in with Lenny for our lunch.

"I am so sorry that I have been so distracted this morning. Some demands are more involved than others."

"Lenny, it is okay. We are more than capable of making our own lunch. I just didn't want to be in your way. There are so many extra people in the packhouse right now. I know that prep takes time." She hands me a basket, and it's heavy. "What's in here, we just needed lunch!" I laugh.

"Well, you're breakfast was on the small side and I know you just worked out and you are planning some more training. I want to make sure you maintain that figure, little miss. You are finally healthy and I want to keep it that way." She winks at me and I giggle again as Oliver takes it out of my hands

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