

Chapter 51 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya's POV

Some part of me is hoping for a different reaction from my past love, maybe some form of acknowledgment that would change everything. But hope is often a feeble thing, that can be harshly shattered by the realities of life. This cruel reality crushes my expectations and longing, as Marco completely blanks me. His glares daggers into my heart as he turns away and moves into the next door house.

Not wanting my daughter to see my misplaced feelings, I take Claire's hand and head into our home. I prep dinner, and we eat whilst she tells me all about her day. I always love listening to her stories of what she got up to. And despite the lingering desire to speak to the man next door, I remain enthusiastic and present in our conversations.

Later however, as I'm washing the dishes, I hear a loud sound coming from Marco's house. Recalling Lisa's request, my eyes widen with realization. With Claire, we rush out the door and into the other. The bathroom light is on, and I hear Marco cursing in clear annoyance.

Fearing the worst, I rush into the bathroom, only to be halted in stunned realization. Marco is completely naked from top to bottom. He's stood in the shower, covered in foam with soapy bubbles in his hair. I quickly avert my eyes immediately, my cheeks growing red with an apparent blush. My daughter on the other hand isn't as afraid or ashamed to state the obvious.

"Daddy's naked!"

While taking short quick glances, I notice Marco's expressionless stare, although, hidden beneath is a slowly formulating glare of anger? Embarrassment? I couldn't tell. But in response, I hurry to cover my daughters' eyes, who childishly struggles to try to remove my fingers, thinking it is just a silly game.

Still looking at the floor, I speak to Marco. "I can fix it for you. I think the pipe is blocked..." I know the pipe is blocked. Marco stares at me for a moment, a long silence held in the air, till I hear him sigh, recognizing he is putting aside his pride despite his dislike for me at the moment. "Fix it then," is all he mutters.

I leave Claire in the living room, quickly grabbing my tools from next door, before returning. By then, Marco has stepped out of the shower, and wrapped a towel round his waist. He's still

drenched in soap however, so I try not to stare whilst stepping past his muscular chest. If only he knew how often I ran my hands down through his abs, how much I admired his strength.

I snap myself out of the naughty daydream, and one by one I take out the tools needed for the specified task, staying silent whilst working away at fixing the pipe, whilst very aware that Marco is watching me carefully.

Sweat and grime grace my fingertips as precipitation dribbles down my forehead. I unclog the pipe from any residue that's preventing waterflow, while also mending the small cracks in its piping. The bathroom definitely needs a new pipework system, but that isn't my problem to fix. It just needs to be mended so Marco can have a decent shower, and not be left drenched in soap.

Eventually, the job gets done. I put my tools away and wash my hands under the sink whilst speaking. "That should keep it in place for the time being. But I'd recommend not showering for too long and keeping it on the colder settings," I say with a sheepish smile. Marco only nods his head, and I can't help but notice that he appears rather impressed with my handiwork. Course he doesn't say this, but his gaze isn't so cold anymore.

We then leave Marco to finish his shower, and Claire and I head home. It is already pretty late, so I help my daughter get into her pj's and help her fall asleep. I read her one of the bedtime stories we borrowed from the library, before switching off the lights for the night.

I rub her back gently as time slowly escapes us. I'm starting to fall asleep when her little voice rings out sleepily through the darkness. "Mommy, it's raining outside," just then, a loud thunderclap causes the house to shudder. It forces me awake, I get up to take a look out the window, watching the heavy rain stream down the glass pane.

But exactly at this moment, I realize that the house Marco is renting out has terrible leaks in it.

Just his luck...

I rush back to Marco's house for a second time tonight, pushing through the door I find my shoes stepping onto murky grim carpet that is now soaked. I move quickly, pushing the door to his room as I hear the clear sound of running water, almost sounding like a river or stream.

It feels like a scene out of a comedy film, as I enter to find buckets, pots and pans littered about the room in an attempt to isolate the rainwater. However, the bed couldn't be saved, as a massive leaking from above is pulling water onto it, accumulating into a massive puddle that is causing the mattress to sink.

Despite the straight line on his lips, the veins on his forehead or highly visible through wet blonde pieces of hair. And his eyes seem bloodshot, tired and clearly overwhelmed. His clothes are drenched, as are some of his belongings that he has unpacked. Despite seeing me, he chooses not to speak, as his silence illustrates his hidden fury at his circumstances.

In his depressed looking state, I can't help but find the image of him amusing. It was not often that I saw Marco in a situation where he's at a complete loss of what to do. He was usually always on top of things. And for once, despite never willing to admit it, I can tell he needs help.

Even though it is humorous, I don't want to further damage his pride. I silently get to work. I pull out one of the chairs and set it underneath the leaky ceiling, taking a minute to study the situation, and what was causing the ceiling panel to fall loose.

Till a loud clap of thunder surprises me. I can't help but flinch in surprise, unintentionally wobbling the chair beneath me. I'm unable to regain my balance, and with little time to react, I find myself falling backwards to the pull of gravity.

Thankfully, I'm saved from the fall. I collapse into Marco's arms who has been standing behind me all this time. My heart can't help but increase the pace of its pulsing as I feel his strong solid arms beneath me. My petite frame is pressed against his chest, as we lock eyes. And I can't help but once again drown in his ocean optics that stare back at me.

I must snap myself out of a trance, and hurriedly stand which Marco complies with. We both step out of the swampy room to converse.

"I won't be able to properly repair the ceiling till the rain stops, during the day," I say defeatedly, and Marco sighs in similar discontent. "You're more than welcome to stay at mine for the night. I can sleep with Claire, and you can sleep on my bed."

But even before I can finish my sentence, Marco is fiercely shaking his head. But, at the same exact moment, his stomach grumbles loudly. In response I gaze at the kitchen, noticing the messy situation it's in. The equipment is all old and brittle, and the stove top doesn't even appear to properly be connected to the gas. I doubt much could be cooked in here.

No way is I leaving Marco here to starve. "Don't be silly, come on," I say giggling lightly, gently pushing him out of the house. "One night won't hurt."

Despite his protests, he eventually complies and follows me to my house. We are sure to be quiet with Claire asleep, but I get to work making dinner. With the soft sound of the rain filling in our silence, I slice tomatoes with ease, and cover slices of bread with cheese. I then place the tomatoes in a pot with herbs to roast and stew into liquid. Whilst I grill the sandwiches.

In no time, the kitchen is purified with the smell of warm food. I set up a bowl for the tomato soup and plates for the sandwiches for the both of us. Marco is clearly hungry because he eats in silence.

"This is nostalgic," he says nodding his head, whilst wiping his mouth with a napkin.

"Nostalgic?" I ask curiously.

“Yeah, reminds me of time I’ve had this before. Just can’t remember when sadly. Either way. You know what you’re doing in the kitchen,” there’s no elevation to his tone, still a detached sensation to his words, so I can’t really tell if he’s complimenting me. Nevertheless, I’m glad he’s fed. So, all I mumble is a quiet “thanks.”

After the trials and tribulations of the night before, where I have been able to help Marco, he no longer seems willing to accuse me of being a vicious woman. Nevertheless, he still remains distant and cold towards me.

I sit uncomfortably with the thought till my daughter arrives home from school. She too appears in despair over something as I watch her pass the house window. I flit to the entrance and open the door and my arms for her to be cradled, aware she’s been crying.

“What’s wrong dear?”

“Why don’t I have a dad like all the other kids!”

I pet her head gently, ultimately sad that I couldn’t offer her any true answer. So, I just allow her to continue to explain what is on her mind. “The Family Day Event is coming up at school, and all the kids are teasing me for not having a dad! I got so angry mummy! So, I made a bet with my classmates that daddy would attend the event! So, when is he coming back mummy?”

My eyes widen in a mixture of sadness and insecurity over how to answer or address my young one. At that very moment, Marco is walking towards the house. My daughter turns to him suddenly, with fresh tears in her eyes. “Are you, my daddy? Can you come to my school’s family day?”

Chapter 53 I’m Claire’s Father

Chapter 52 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya’s POV

I’m extremely flustered and embarrassed by my daughter’s words, as I glance between her and Marco also appears slightly taken back. Finally, I kneel to my daughter so I’m at her eye level. “Honey, why do you keep calling Marco daddy?”

Almost as if convinced by her conviction, she responds with little hesitation, looking at me with pure childish innocence. “Because he has the same blue eyes as me!” she squeaks, playing with her fingers as if she’s suddenly nervous from all attention paid towards her by the both of us.

Nevertheless, she continues to explain. “And I like Marco, I want him to be my daddy. I feel it in my heart,” she places a hand on her chest, before turning round to face Marco, and running into his arms without question, looking up into his eyes. “And I’m very cute, and Marco is very handsome, so you must be my daddy.”

She is utterly adorable as she provides an explanation to her obvious childlike thought process. But you couldn’t deny the purity of her beliefs. I find amusement in my daughter’s words, and even Marco can’t help a small smile slipping onto his lips.

“Can you please come to my school’s family day?” she pleads.

Marco pats Claire’s head like a gentle giant, but still turns down her proposition, although he does so carefully, trying not to upset her. “I’m sorry sweetheart, but I’m not your father.”

Trying to soften the blow, I come up to my daughter’s side, placing a hand on her shoulder. “Why don’t we ask Caspian or Dylan to come to family day, they’ve witnessed your growth,” I say softly.

But Claire repeatedly shakes her head, clearly adamant about her wishes. “Everyone knows Caspian isn’t my daddy. I want Marco to come...”

Marco’s POV

Today’s the family day event at Claire’s school, and I’m completely torn over the prospect of whether to go or not. It feels silly to even be debating over the idea as I walk down one of the roads, needing the fresh air to think over the matter.

I recall the fact that Tanya suggested Caspian show up for family day instead, and something about that bothers me. I don’t understand why, nothing logical explains it. But just the thought of Caspian being there twists knots in my stomach and unsettles me in a manner that harbors some form of inner anger. It stirs aggravation within me that doesn’t make sense.

Tanya’s behavior these last couple of days has also been highly confusing. Lily clearly established that Tanya had maliciously distorted and destroyed her sense of smell, preventing her from ever being able to work as a perfume designer again. And I saw Tanya treating customers horribly, forcing them to buy her perfumes just for money, which put a horrible taste in my mouth. I should believe that Tanya is a vicious woman, capable of terrible things.

And yet.

The moments I have spent with her show me her to be the complete opposite of what I presumed. She appears to be an incredibly hard-working mother, going out of her way to ensure safety and happiness for her daughter. And during all the crazy unlucky events I had to deal with within that

horrible house, Tanya was there, fixing things and helping me out where she could. When she could've easily looked the other way.

As I continue to walk and ponder, I eventually feel Manuel stir from within the depths of my subconscious, speaking over my trifling thoughts.

'There is something about her that feels so familiar, something that feels like home... were drawn to her somehow Marco... why not get to know her better?'

The suggestion immediately brings me on the defense, and I shake my head firmly, not able to respond to Manuel with anything other than that. Because something deep down inside me, even if I don't want it to, agrees with him.

Just then, I see the old man that was in the store with Tanya when I first arrived. The old man strolls up to me, bearing a broad smile as he speaks.

"Been meaning to thank you for the other day! You distracted Tanya for me, so she'd quit nagging me about my health issues and stop giving me those darn perfumes."

I look at him, slightly confused. "Give? Weren't you being forced to buy them?" I say.

Now he appears confused. "What? No! Tanya's worried about me, and says my love for alcohol is going to kill me one day. She was giving me the perfumes she made especially for me to help with all my health problems," he says. "But my motto is if you aren't happy, you aren't truly living. And alcohol makes me happy, even if the bastard kills me!"

I can't help but ignore the rest of his rambles upon the realization that I have misinterpreted the situation at the perfume shop. And in turn, I have misunderstood Tanya's nature entirely. I snap a quick glance at my watch, deciding that although I might be a bit late, I'd still be able to make it to the family day event.

Leaving the old man who continues to ramble about his beliefs, I hurry off towards the school.

Third POV

The Blue Moon Pack's local and only school is buzzing with life and excitement. Situated in the heart of town, it maintains status for generations as the true beating organ that brings life and youth flowing to the other sections of the pack.

Its ashen walls that have been built many moons ago are brought to life with colorful murals, and kindergarten paintings. While rainbow handprints decorate its arches that lead to the front doors. Pinboards are littered with posters and important notices cover every indoor wall. Whilst the surrounding air bustles with the cafeteria's lunch menu.

But today is no ordinary day. Today is Family Day! And the chatter from the surrounding classrooms is louder than usual as the clock ticks down to the end of the school day early for the event.

Eventually, the bell sings its song as classroom doors are thrust open to spill out with children all in a hurry to gather their things. The quickest among them rush outside, all lining up to wait patiently for their parents.

Outside, stalls for food and activities are being set up by the older children with their teachers. While janitors help hang up the decorations. The principal is hurrying back and forth across the stage, making sure all is ready for the big day. Light-hearted and cheery music can be heard from the surrounding speakers, but it's ultimately drowned out by the chatter from the excited students.

And there amongst the crowd stand Claire, looking slightly feeble and overwhelmed. Her favorite doll is tightly pressed against her chest out of desired comfort, while eyes scan the slow filtering in of parents walking past the main gate.

She knows her mother would be here. There is no doubt in the child's mind of that. Tanya has never missed a single event. Sports day, bake sale, the annual school concert. You name it. She was always in the crowd, smiling proudly.

Although, today she is looking for a different face. Someone less familiar, and yet has somehow made a powerful impact on the girl's life. It might've made little sense on the surface, but Marco really has meant something to Claire.

Sure, Caspian is nice, but he is too nice. Too overbearing at times for the little girl. Their personalities just don't seem to match, and he could never take a break from talking, when Claire is generally the quieter type.

Marco however, despite only meeting him a few times, Claire finds herself drawn to him. Like a magnet to the north pole, he is the male father figure she wants. Needs. Course it is only childlike wishing that again doesn't make much sense. But, from the way he holds her, to the natural strength he exudes, Claire just feels safe around him. She feels protected. And sometimes, that's all a child ever wants from an adult.

Still waiting to see his blonde locks of hair and identifiable blue eyes, Claire fusses nervously with the hem of her shirt, nibbling on the arm of her doll, a typical comfort habit that she's grown accustomed to doing.

"So where is he then? Uh?" the taunting voice of a little boy beside her makes her flinch in surprise. "You bet that your dad would be here. So, where is he?" It's Elliot... her regular tormentor, always appearing at the worst possible times. And as usual, his favorite goons have joined him, all smirking smugly, entertained by Elliot's mean streak.

“You’re a liar!” the boy jabs a finger into Claire’s chest, shoving her delicate body back in a stumble. His friends are all laughing in evil glee.

“I’m not! I swear he’s coming! Just wait a bit,” says Claire in growing apprehension and fear, eyes again frantically searching the crowd for Marco.

“No more waiting! You lost. Now give us that stupid doll like you said you would if he didn’t come.”

Claire ultimately looks horrified by the concept of parting with something so precious to her. “No, please, my mum made it for me. It’s supposed to look like my daddy. I won’t give it to you!” she cradles the toy closer to her chest, terrified that it would be taken away.

But the boys are enclosing on her, and she looks like a tiny rabbit being circled by dangerous vultures, eager to cause her more anguish for their own childish fun. Claire’s cheeks are now damp with fresh tears, her frail body shrinking away from her bullies. She stumbles backwards, only to suddenly hit a firm wall behind her.

Claire can only see the boys’ gaping faces to then realize that the wall behind her is in fact a person. She turns round to gaze up. Marco’s tall and robust frame blocks the sun out of her eyes as he glares down at them all. Eyes blazing with their cobalt sheen, and hair strikingly golden today from the sun’s rays.

Her heart soars with a mix mash of joy and relief. All the sensations she is in desperate need of warm her heart as his hand trails round her little body, pulling her closely against him, and adding to her feeling of ease.

“There is no need for this silliness children,” he says with a carefully controlled but firm tone. “I am Claire’s father.”

Chapter 54 Why Don’t You Wear Your Wedding Ring?

Chapter 53 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Marco’s POV

It warms my heart to see the relief in Claire’s eyes as she realizes it is me. She eagerly takes my hand as I take her away from her bullies and safeguard her from them. However, I can’t help but stiffen as the child for the third time this week encompasses me in a hug. Her dainty arms doing their best to wrap around my understandably larger body.

I always have a particular softness towards children. To adults, I have no desire to showcase any form of remorse or whittle down my brashness. But with children... there is something about their innocence that captures my attention.

My negative outlook on people's intentions never befalls on children. Even with their temper tantrums, they have a level of purity with regards to the world around them. You could never blame them simply because they don't understand enough about life. They are always good intentioned, or at least oblivious to the consequences of their actions. How could you be mad or mean to something so fragile?

Hence, despite my lack of capability to maybe communicate on their level, I have a desire to protect them full heartedly. Even now, as Claire wraps her arms around me, I only gently rub her back to comfort her. And it soothes me to think she knows that she can count on me.

Reaffirming that I've made the right decision to come today...

Once I'm assured Claire will be okay, I let her join the other kids all seated in their class groups on a mat in front of the stage. I then turn and walk over to Tanya, who's clearly surprised to see me. But we don't have much time to talk as the host who must've been the school principal speaks into the microphone.

"Welcome everybody! Before we start our family day event, we have a bonus activity for all the mums and dads!" the crowd cheers excitedly. A burgundy silk curtain suddenly drops down behind the host as she explains. "We are going to test how well the mums and dads know each other with a little game!" the kids understandably scream, cheer, and laugh in clear excitement.

"I want all the mums to stand behind this curtain, and then they must stick their hands out from behind it. The dads must then take turns trying to guess which hand is their wife's hand," upon saying this, a loud 'oooo' of anticipation ripples through the crowd. "Let's begin! Up you come mums!"

With there being many of us, groups of parents take turns playing the game. It's admittedly a comical event, as many of the dads fail to recognize the hands of their significant other.

Laughter exudes from the crowd as some of the parents laugh off their mistakes, while others don't take the news too well. One of the wives comes out to whack her husband at the back of head, which both Tanya and I can't help but laugh at.

This goes on for a couple of minutes, with the host commentating the event throughout. The audience of teachers, parents and children all enjoy the show. But eventually, it's my turn.

All eyes are on me as I make my way up the stage steps, but the attention barely bothers me, as I focus on the line up of hands in front of me. I have initially been worried when the host first announced this activity. I don't want to embarrass Tanya or Claire since I haven't known either of them for very long. However, ...

I only need to take one glance at the lineup of feminine limbs, before my gaze lands on one with utmost confidence. To my surprise, there is no hesitation, and my feet move without me asking them to. I'm silent in my brigade across the stage, the crowd hush as they watch in anticipation.

I stop before the outstretched hand. Not out of self-doubt, neither am I second-guessing myself. But almost in bewilderment to how sure I am. As the wind whistles by with the fresh autumn breeze, I find myself staring down at the female fingers that look so familiar, as a mirror image sits sturdy in my mind.

It's not that I have paid any close attention to any of Tanya's features. Sure, she is in fact very pretty. But due to Lily's established conviction that she is evil and downright terrible, I have mostly been looking at Tanya over the last few days through lenses colored and blurred by false opinions, too busy being angry at her to appreciate her beauty.

I reach for the hand before me, comforted by its softness. The hand seems hesitant at first, almost like the person behind it is also astonished with my findings. Eventually I grasp her fingers firmly, and gently pull her through the burgundy curtains that slowly brush past her elegant figure. Tanya emerges from the silk curtains slowly, her glistening emerald hues widening as they see me. She comes to stand beside me, as the audience erupts into a chorus of cheers.

She is just as surprised as I am. But there is something so familiar about having her hand in mine. The way her palm pressed into mine, and how her delicate fingers fit perfectly with my larger ones.

I have only known Tanya for a couple of days. How do I know it is her hand? Even more confusing, is the doll Claire has been holding on to. It could've been any old doll, but it strangely looks like me, it has my blonde locks, my lean but muscular build, and my eyes. Claire's eyes...

Before I can further spiral into wondering if I am going mad, the crowd cheers and applauds my decision. The host comes over to congratulate the both of us. I turn to look at the kids who have been bothering Claire. And their mouths gape in astonishment. I wonder if they now believe that I'm Claire's father.

But none of that seems to matter, I turn to look down at Tanya's hand as it still rests in mine. And I sense that something is missing. Confusion is displayed in her features whilst I curiously twist her hand right and left, trying to work out what I feel is missing.

And that's when it hits me! A ring. Since the day we met, I've never seen Tanya wear a wedding ring.

Tanya's POV

My heart pounds sharply beneath my chest as we walk off stage. On the one hand, I'm ecstatic that Marco recognized my hand, he chose me... and yet, it's so strange, I was made to believe

that he had lost his memory. So how did he know it was me? Was it purely instinctual, or was he starting to remember? Or was it all just luck...

“Tanya.”

I twirl round as Marco calls out and approaches me, snapping me out of my thoughts. He appears to check our surroundings, as if trying to ensure that not many people are around to listen to our conversation. And my heart pounds even harder as I wonder what he’s about to say.

“I hope this isn’t rude of me to ask, but why have I never seen a wedding ring on your finger?”

Instinctually I reach up and place my hand against my collarbone. Beneath the fabric of my shirt rests the ring Marco was speaking of. Even after what had happened, I could never get rid of it. So, it was strung up, attached to the ruby necklace that my mother gave me. It means both the two most precious items I own are close to my chest and heart. Never far away.

Course Marco can’t see the ring as it’s hidden beneath my shirt. And before I can decide what to say, my daughter answers for me as she now stands between the two of us. “Mummy told me that she doesn’t wear her ring because daddy’s gone to a faraway place. But it’s okay! You’re back now! And we can all live happily together forever!”

Before either of us can have the heart to correct her, she’s distracted by her school friends and they all run off to play. I smile sweetly, yet sadly as I watch her run off, before turning back to Marco who speaks solemnly to me. “I’m sorry that I brought it up. I didn’t realize your husband had passed away.”

He obviously thinks that what I told Claire is a white lie to protect her from the truth of her father’s ‘passing’. I have mixed feelings, as her true father stands before me, comforting me for his own “death”, and it is slightly amusing to say the least.

“I’m terribly sorry for your loss Tanya, I know how difficult that can be.”

I can only nod in appreciation to his words. I couldn’t even decide how to feel about the situation, whether to laugh or cry over the strange ordeal.

“Right folks!” just then, the host returns to center stage to announce. “It’s time for the Family Day Event to officially begin!”

Chapter 55 My Daddy Is The Best!

Chapter 54 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya's POV

The midday autumn sun rests high in the sky, soothed by a breeze that remains calm and gentle towards all the outdoor stalls and laid out food for the family day event. It begins with various activities for all the families to participate in. Claire skips along in front of us, and I'm comforted by the high spirits that my daughter finds herself in. And I'm ever grateful to Marco for making that happen.

He walks calmly beside me. And whilst I wouldn't blame him for feeling out of place surrounded by all the parents and children. He blends in perfectly. Conversations with other parents seem like a breeze for him, as he plays the role of a wonderful dad, fully in love with his daughter. I can't help but admire him quietly whilst he speaks or smiles at my daughter's playful antics. If only this was real life...

Nevertheless, I savor the moment and enjoy the day. We get up to loads of things. First, we stop by a stall where you're required to shoot targets to gain points, with the winner getting balloons as a reward. I watch one of the little boys, Elliot, that has been teasing my daughter walk up to her.

"My daddy is very good at shooting! He'll win and get me those balloons!" he says.

The little boy's father does shoot very well, hitting many of the nine-point targets, but fails to hit a ten pointer target with the ten shooting pellets made available. My child only shyly nods, clearly unaware of Marco's ability as she turns to watch him take his turn.

Wanting to impress my little girl, Marco offers me a hint of a knowing smile, and closes his eyes. Even with Marco's eyes closed, he easily hits the ten pointer targets with all his ten shots, causing the winner bell to sound off loudly. Claire is ecstatic, cheering delightfully as she's given a bunch of balloons.

Elliot's demeanor instantly changes, first to surprise, and then to one of sadness. My daughter notices this, and true to her morals, she turns to him. "Here, you can have one too."

He blinks at her. "Really?"

"Mhmm..."

"Oh, thank you! Um," he stammers at first, but eventually the words tumble out of his mouth. "I'm really sorry for teasing you before. I- I won't do it again," he says shyly.

"That's okay," she smiles, before leading us to the next stall, leaving me and Marco to smile at one another. As we walk past Elliot, he stares up at Marco with a sense of admiration in his eyes towards the older man before him. Noticing this, Marco gently pats the little boy's head in a

form of high regard for his actions. In reaction Elliot smiles broadly, pleased to receive praise from Marco, before running off elsewhere.

As we follow Claire, I can't help but sneak Marco a smile of approval, noticing his softness round children. He only gives me a small smile, avoiding my gaze to hide his bashfulness.

Next is a game requiring some form of teamwork between the family members. We must carry a ball together from one end to the other using only our faces. Pressing it between our cheeks to carry it there. For the first half of the distance the child and one parent have to carry it, and then for the second half of the distance, both parents must carry it to the final destination.

I'm the one who joins my daughter at the starting line, with Marco waiting for us at the half-way point. The whistle blows and me and Claire work together, squishing our cheeks intensely against the ball so it doesn't fall, while still trying to move as quickly as possible. However, we can't help but laugh throughout the whole journey, I even see Marco trying to withhold his laughter at how silly we look.

We eventually reach Marco's location. We can't touch the ball with our hands, so Claire and Marco have to maneuver carefully so they can switch positions. However, Claire is evidently eager to win, and a little too hasty in trying to get us to be quick. Without waiting for Marco to be fully ready, she removes her cheek from the ball, and it falls.

Marco's cheek accidentally collides softly into mine. Our faces touch one another's as we suddenly realize the misplacement of the ball that bounces below us. Our skin only touches for no longer than a second, but are so close, close enough to kiss.

We both quickly pull away upon realizing our mistake. And we can't help but both laugh from the embarrassing moment. The crowd then cheers for the winning family. But because we are the losing team, we must receive a form of light-hearted punishment dealt out by the winning team.

The winning family chooses the water guns. They get ready to spray, and although I was ready and willing to be sprayed with the water. Upon closing my eyes in preparation, I notice I am barely feeling any of the liquid on my skin. I open my eyes to see the large shadow like figure of Marco standing in front of me, taking the fall for me and letting himself get drenched in water so I don't get wet. I can't help but smile at the sight of this.

After Marco dries himself off with a towel he's been given, we all head to the cake baking and decorating station. We're required to bake a cake and decorate it within an allocated time frame. Course Claire is very excited, and use to baking cakes, since we tend to do it a lot at home. However, Marco's silence seems to capture my attention.

As we get started, Claire takes the lead. Rolling up the sleeves of her shirt, and like a comical little chef, she calls out orders of what she needs us to do, totally unaware of Marco's completely clueless to her words.

"Daddy! I need a rolling pin! Stat!"

I watch as Marco turns to get it, although, he stands for a couple of minutes, with a rolling pin and what looks to be another cooking utensil in his hand, secretly debating which is the right one, without showcasing that he doesn't know the answer.

I gently pat my daughter's arm, giving her a knowing look, while glancing to Marco. She follows my gaze, before smiling back at me. Together, we step over to Marco, and pull him to the baking table.

"I'd rather just watch..." he says, trying to hide the insecurity in his voice.

"We need to do this as a family," says Claire, "Don't worry, we will teach you," I nod my head with smile.

And so, as a trio, we work on making the cake. My daughter and I only gather the ingredients needed, whilst we let Marco do the main practical elements. It's difficult for him and he appears flustered at times.

"But the dough is so sticky. How is this meant to turn into a cake?"

I chuckle softly. "Don't worry, you just have to keep kneading it, trust in the process Marco."

I worry he'd think I'm making fun of him, but he doesn't. He nods his head in understanding, before becoming focused in his efforts, rolling, and kneading the dough as much as he can. He surprises himself as the dough eventually stops being so sticky, now becoming round and forming into a coherent shape.

Eventually we put the cake in the oven. Claire runs off to play for a bit while I wait at the table. Marco however is pacing in front of the oven door comically. Every now again he closely checks on it, squinting to try and see through at our cake. He repeatedly opens the oven door, and on the third time I have to stop him.

"You can't keep opening the door, you'll let all the hot air escape," I say playfully.

"But it's taking too long. Why is it taking so long?" his impatience is adorable, he clearly wants this to turn out good despite never having baked a cake before.

"Because good things take time Marco," I give a soft smile, and eventually after much consideration in his head, he returns my smile on a small scale, finally agreeing to sit beside me as we wait.

Eventually however, the cake is ready. Marco calls Claire back over, and he's almost just as excited as she is as we take the cake out of the oven. We let Claire cover the cake in her cream of choice before we let Marco try making designs with me on the sides and top of the cake.

His manly hands aren't as delicate as mine, and whilst he tries his hardest to move the piping tool and bag carefully to get a pattern round the side. His hold inevitably slips, creating a long line that's out of place from the rest.

He huffs, dropping his shoulders in defeat. "I've ruined it. Haven't I?"

I shake my head while smiling. "Who said every cake had to look exactly the same?" he now looks up at the surrounding cakes, noticing how everyone's looks exactly the same, but are all boring because of this.

He quirks the side of his lip, puffing his chest in some form of pride that our cake would be different. He nods, before continuing to work hard at decorating the cake. When it's all done, Claire wonders back over, and without a single word to the two of us, she dips her fingers into the cake's cream and daps it on Marco's nose.

Marco is startled at first, looking comically cross-eyed at the whipped cream on his face. But his expression soon relaxes. He then dips his fingers into the cake, smudging cream onto my daughter's face, before smudging it against mine too. We all laugh together at the comical situation we find ourselves in.

As I laugh, I notice Marco is looking at me with a sense of curiosity in his gaze. "Have we done this before?" I blink, not knowing how to answer. "I feel like I've met you before."

Before I can say anything, Claire yells out to us, calling us over to do the next event, leaving the question I desperately want to answer, hanging in the air between us.

After a whole day filled with fun activities, we finally head home. We're walking towards our house when I see Mr. Barlow arguing with Raphael. Raphael is known as the bully among the pack members. He always causes fights and generally always gets his way.

They seem to fight over a badge in Mr. Barlow's hand, and Raphael is threatening to attack.

Chapter 56 Bet Your One Night

Chapter 55 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya's POV

I race towards the two, my hands pressing firmly against Raphael's chest, shoving him away from Mr. Barlow. Of course, my hand meets with the bully's rippled chest, and I can barely push him. He chuckles at my feeble attempt, only stepping back with a malicious grin.

Raphael isn't as tall as Marco, but he is still a decent height for a male. And he didn't get classed as a bully for no reason. Although muscular, there is no smooth elegance or refinement to his physic. Raphael is a rough piece of work, as if he has been carved with a blunt knife. Curated with jagged edges, a shaggy unkempt beard and buzz cut. He is like a rusty machete, worn, weathered, and ragged, but still dangerous enough to cut you and give you a nasty infection.

"Stop! Stop this nonsense!" I yell, decently fearful, as I feel a close friendship with Mr. Barlow. Even with his annoying old man tendencies. I don't want to see him getting hurt.

Everyone stays away from Raphael and tries hard not to get in his way, including myself. And for good reason too, while the color of his eyes matches mine, I know my optics are a soft and soothing sage, like the forest leaves. While his are unsettling like a coiled snake, piercing as he stares at his prey.

Course Raphael doesn't seem to care about my concerns, he viciously turns to me, all intensifying my fear as he yells in my face. "Go away woman! This isn't any of your business. This lunatic owes me money. So, I have the right to take anything from him that is of equal value to the money I'm owed," he points sharply at the badge he has snatched away previously. "This badge covers it, and I have every right to take it!"

"NO! That's mine you bastard," Mr. Barlow wails.

I frantically think of a way to deescalate the situation. "Let me pay for the money he owes. I can give you the money you want," from the money I have saved up from working at the perfume shop I am sure could probably gather enough money to pay off Raphael. And even if that isn't enough, I can ask others for help.

But despite my offer, Raphael just scoffs, shaking his head in clear disapproval. "No, I'll only take his money. You aren't the one paying the money. He is!" the terms seem totally unfair, and a clear attempt to just cause more problems for Mr. Barlow for no good reason.

It is as if Raphael enjoys the chaos he caused for the rest of us. As if he revels in creating havoc and invoking fear. His tyrant behavior is sickening to me. Why would any want to cause this much disruption in other people's lives?

But I couldn't get into the mind of the male before me, I could only try to plead and reason with him. I watch the look in Raphael's eyes shift into something different, behind them I sense the gears in his head turning in malevolent thought process. His gaze trails down my body in a slow and methodical manner, licking his lips in clear temptation. My heart sinks as the hairs on the back of my neck stand.

"But... if you're so desperate to help this pathetic old man, I'm willing to make a bet with you."

“A bet?” I ask. Mr. Barlow behind me has now fallen silent, he too trying to decipher what Raphael is about to ask of me. Apprehension rises in us all knowing of Raphael’s malicious tendencies.

“Yeah, if you win, I’ll return the badge. But if you don’t win,” the grin on his lips stretches poisonously. “You stay with me for the night... alone, just the two of us,” I shrink in growing despair as Raphael inches closer lustfully, clearly liking what he saw. His hand reaches out, desperate to caress my face and skin.

But we both flinch in response to Marco’s primal growl erupting in the air between. Marco moves suddenly. He viciously slaps the hand away from my face, and rushes into Raphael’s personal space, forcing the shorter man to back away as Marco towers over him dominantly, wolf-like in his method of intimidation, whilst baring down a formidable glare.

“I’ll bet against you,” Marco’s voice is low, and yet brutal in its delivery. Raphael even attempts to puff his chest to not seem afraid, but he’s no match to Marco’s Alpha-like qualities.

“Oh yeah? And what do you have to offer?” he says as he glares back.

“You can cut off one of my arms if I lose,” My mouth gapes in pure horror and disbelief. And I’m almost relieved when Raphael refuses.

“Hell nah! Why would I want your arm? It’s no use to me!”

My hand presses against my chest, as I try to calm my racing heart. I look utterly panicked, and Raphael picks up on this. I see that evil grin once again take its place on his lips before he rolls his eyes.

“Fine, but Tanya has to compete against me. Not you,” he either knows that he is no match against Marco in any and all situations, or he wants to get closer to me. “You sure you can trust her with your life man? Are you willing to risk your arm for this?”

A chill runs up my spine, I rush to grab Marco’s arm, turning his attention to me. “Marco, this is crazy. Don’t do this. We can get the badge back some other way. You’ve only known me for a couple of days, you shouldn’t be risking your life and limb for me. What if I lose?”

He doesn’t seem to register, or blatantly ignores the desperate pleading in my eyes. He remains focused in his gaze, so overly confident which I can’t understand why. He shakes his head and leans closer to me to explain. “You might be right Tanya. And despite the fact that I initially doubted your morality, my wolf completely trusts you. And if he trusts you, then that’s a good enough reason for me to trust you too.”

My eyes widen in disbelief, but I can’t utter a response before Marco turns back to Raphael, scoffing in full fledge confidence. “Tanya has my full confidence, let’s do this.”

Raphael is clearly surprised but tries to hide this. “Fine, so if Tanya wins, I will return the badge, but if she doesn’t win, you will lose your arm. This way.”

The bully takes the four of us to the site of the Blue Moon Tree as his chosen location for us to compete. I couldn’t fathom any idea of how the Blue Moon Tree could be involved in his plans. And so, I ask, “Why are we here?”

He smiles at me smugly. “The competition is whoever can make the Blue Moon Tree sparkle and shine its dazzling glow within thirty minutes. If you do. You win.”

I’m utterly dumbfounded, looking at the Tree and then back at Raphael, before peering down at my watch. It’s already dusk, and the Blue Moon Flowers unveil their natural glow in about forty minutes’ time. But that is on their own accord, like any natural plant, it is completely impossible to force the flowers to open up before their said time. Raphael’s request is totally absurd.

“You’re tricking me. What you’re asking me to do is impossible. Not only I can’t do it, but you wouldn’t be able to do it either. This competition is pointless,” I say in bewilderment.

He smiles wickedly, “I don’t have to win to keep in the badge. I specifically said that it’s only if you ‘win’ that I’ll return the badge. But if it’s a tie, then I still keep the badge and Marco has to lose his arm,” he manically laughs at my despair, and it’s then I realize that Marco has made a bet with the wrong man. A man with no morals or common sense. We are helpless.

I want to sink deep down into a hole of nothingness as I would be responsible for not only losing Mr. Barlow’s badge, but also forcing Marco to cut off his arm! My eyes are welling up in tears as I’m near breaking point, until...

Through my watery pupils, I see a small butterfly gracefully flutter past my field of view. Extravagant colors shade its wings as it hovers nearby, before flying away. At this moment, my eyes light up with an idea that gives me a solution to this terrible situation!

Chapter 57 Have We Met Before?

Chapter 56 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya’s POV

There is no time to waste on the hows and what-ifs. If I am going to get Mr. Barlow, his badge back and keep Marco’s arm attached to the rest of his body, then I couldn’t waste any more time worrying. I have to put my plan into action and just hope for the best.

“Does anyone have a pen and paper?” I say with clear urgency in my voice.

“I do!” Mr. Barlow shouts, handing them over to me without question. I quickly jot down a list of perfume-making equipment, ingredients, and raw materials that I know I’d need. With pen in hand, my fingers rush over the page in a scribbly mess as I’m aware of time. When I’m done, I turn to the one person who knows every item listed on the page, because he has been the one to set up my entire perfumery room... back when...

Oh no...

I stammer, frozen in conflict as I’m about to hand Marco the paper. I try to hide my realization, and sudden epiphany. That if Marco doesn’t remember our previous relationship, he definitely wouldn’t remember his gift to me for Valentine’s Day. Oh, how silly I feel, and how strange I must have looked, turning to him, only to gape and withdraw my hand and paper so suddenly.

He’s confused of course by my hesitation, but suddenly takes the paper from my hands without question, probably thinking I was just a little overwhelmed. “Is this what you need?” he asks, ignoring my blatant stammer.

“Yes, but.”

“I recognize all these things; Lily use to use them when she made perfumes. Give me the keys to your shop,” he’s so focused and resolute about the matter of wanting to ensure I have the best possible chance of succeeding, but I continue to fumble with my words.

“Tanya, the keys,” he snaps my mind awake, and I finally regain some form of mobility. I toss him the keys and watch still flabbergasted as he rushes off to fetch what I need.

He takes no longer than five minutes to bring two massive bags. With no nearby table, I settle down on the grass bed beside the Blue Moon Tree and unload all the contents from the bags. Despite the urgency of the situation, the atmosphere is light and calming, and I fall into my usual rhythm when creating my perfumes.

My unorthodox activity within the area also starts to attract some people. And soon, a crowd forms to watch me work. But I don’t mind the curious eyes, as I withdraw into a bubble of my own comfort while doing what I love most.

I extract and ground up the necessary ingredients, from regular practice and also from experience from the competition, I know what accents work well with the Blue Moon Tree’s aura. And while Marco has been getting my things, I have also taken the time to pick some flowers from the tree and now add that to my mixture.

But what matters the most, is that I have chosen ingredients that are very aromatic, and strong in scent. And as my perfume becomes thicker and fuller, it soon seems that my predicated

calculations are correct. A moment after my solution starts to emit the desired smell, a butterfly flutters close by, comfortably resting itself on one of my perfumery utensils.

I continue to work in silence, all while noticing the crowd growing louder and louder with their gasps of admiration and wonderment. I finally look up, smiling to see thousands of butterflies of all different sizes and colors hovering around me.

Some rest upon my work equipment, some found seating on my shoulders and head, while others flap their dainty wings to stay close to my perfume that oozed with a smell that I know is delectable to their kind.

It is a pretty site in fact, but I know the next step would only be more wonderful. Still conscious of time, I only have a couple of minutes left. And whilst Raphael seems overly confident to begin with, he now doesn't look so sure as to whether I'd lose.

I'm done with my mixture and pour the perfume into a small spray bottle. The resting butterflies twitch awake as I stand up. With excitement bubbling in my chest, I spritz them with a bit of the liquid, before turning towards the tree. I spray quite a bit on its leaves and branches, and like moths to flame, the butterflies chase the scent in union.

Because I used the Blue Moon Flower in my perfume, there's a natural glow that it emits, creating a fluorescent light exactly like the Blue Moon Tree. By lacing the wings of all the butterflies with the perfume, their insect bodies glow a soft hue. Sparkling in a dance of color as they gently flap their wings whilst perching on the branches and leaves of the tree.

I'm awed by the sight, and so is the crowd. I'm also just in time too. I've made the Blue Moon Tree glow!

I now turn to Raphael, who is looking particularly miserable and heavily disappointed.

"I've done what you asked. I made the Blue Moon Tree glow within thirty minutes. So, I win. Now please return the badge to Mr. Barlow as you promised."

Not wanting to admit defeat, he tries to fire back a response. "No, that can't count. You didn't actually make it glow. You used the butterflies, that doesn't count!"

My brows furrow, unable to decide how to respond. But thankfully, my crowd of onlookers do it for me.

"She won fair and square!" one yells.

"Yeah! Look at the tree! It's glowing! How can she not win?" another adds.

"You're trying to cheat! That's not right!"

And before long, the crowd is growing angrier and angrier at Raphael by the minute. And despite Raphael's domineering temperament, he couldn't fight back against an entire crowd.

"Alright! Alright fine! Quite you're yelling. Tanya wins!" he yells back in frustration, disgruntledly handing me the badge. The crowd cheers in good spirits and I turn to hand the badge to Mr. Barlow, who smiles at me warmly.

"Thanks kid. I honestly couldn't have gotten that back without you. I owe you one," he says with a cheery attitude.

Marco's POV

I barely utter a word to anyone, I'm silenced, awed by Tanya's ability to craft perfume. Her movements are fluid and graceful, and in these past days of knowing her, I've never seen her so confident in her actions and mannerisms.

Her calm aura soothed me and left me at ease watching her work. I wouldn't have had a problem watching her work for hours, just because how relaxed it made me feel. The sensation was strangely nostalgic, and I just couldn't put my finger on where I had felt like this before.

When she is finished, I bask in the glory that is the Blue Moon Tree. It was always beautiful to me, but even more so than ever now with the thousands of butterflies that grace its leaves, dazzling with brilliant light that glows alongside the setting sun.

But whilst I admire her work, a strange thought thrusts its way to the front of my mind. Tanya is beyond talented in the art of perfumery. Better than anyone I've ever seen, even better than Lily I'll admit. So then why would she destroy Lily's sense of smell?

It doesn't make much sense. Tanya doesn't need to do that, she is already better than Lily, it would just get her into trouble. She's already at a stature above everyone else in her industry, so why risk it all?

Did Lily lie to me? But why would she lie?

Just before I can consider the worrying prospect, the sun finally sets. The flowers on the Blue Moon Tree finally bloom and release their magnificent glow that lightens the surrounding the greener beautifully. It's angelic to witness, and I'm once again in awe while recalling how this was the place my parents fell in love.

Just then, Tanya turns to me, her eyes shimmering with excitement, and I can't help but mirror her glee. It's strange... the situation feels so familiar. The place, the tree, her. I feel like I've been here before. With her...

But how...

Before I can come to a resolution, or ask Tanya, Mr. Barlow yells out in clear panic. “Wait! Claire’s missing! She’s gone! Where has she gone?”

Chapter 58 Mind Link

Chapter 57 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya’s POV

It’s a known verified fact, that a mama bear will do anything for her cubs. And in that very moment, I’d never felt so much emotion in my life. Every instinctual motherly fiber within me is scorching with fierce intensity. My heart hammers against my chest as my weak senses heighten to their extremity and adrenalin kicks in.

“Claire! Claire!” I scream, darting from one side of the pathway to the other, the crowd parting for me as I desperately look for my child.

No one would ever understand how much my daughter meant to me. After I chose to leave Marco, I was nothing. Caspian found me washed up by lake on the brink of death, and even after he saved me, I was a hopeless empty shell of my former self.

The loss of my love was so destructive to my brain and heart, every day after that felt like a chore. The weeks blurred as I aimlessly slept my worries away. And the only thing that kept me from ending it was knowing I had a responsibility to my child.

She kept me eating, I would only nourish my body with food and water because I knew she needed it. Eventually I grew back the strength I lost when the due date grew closer. My mood shifted to one of high spirits as I started setting up the nursery and buying the baby clothes.

And when she finally arrived...

Claire gave me a new lease on life. A new purpose. I felt truly alive again. She was my precious ball of joy. One that I couldn’t dare to lose.

And so now I frantically scream her name in dear longing to find my child. I’m so tunnel visioned by my efforts that I startle quickly when Marco grabs my arm. He tugs me close, baring down his gaze into mine.

“Where would she go?”

“Marco- we need... we need to find her!”

“Tanya!” he snaps me out of my panicked protest. “Where would Claire go?” Marco doesn’t waste his time with comfort or sympathy, which I for once appreciate. He becomes the leader I know he’s capable of being, focused on the important task at hand.

I stammer at first, before finally being able to form a coherent sentence. “Her favorite candy store, the park, or the school. She also could’ve gone home.”

He nods firmly, before speaking aloud to the surrounding pack members. “Everyone! We need help looking for Claire. She’s five. Wavy black hair, and blue eyes. Spread out,” people nod their heads, all seeming willing to help in the search, and they head off in different directions.

“Right, we will go check those places you’ve mentioned,” he says to me, still holding my hand to keep me steady whilst I lead us to the candy store first.

Once we get there, I question the shop owner, who of course recognizes me, knowing my daughter loves his candies very much. He says he hasn’t seen her but promises to keep a look out.

Marco and I thank him before heading to the park. We consistently call out to her as we walk up and down the vast expanse of grass. We even check the playground to see if she ended up there. But we have no luck either.

We don’t find her at the school, and when I realize she’s not at the house I find myself at my breaking point. I crumble down to the ground upon the steps in front my home, beginning to uncontrollably sob in utter despair.

It is then that I feel Marco lower himself beside me, embracing me in a soft hug, trying to soothe me. “We will find her Tanya. I promise, we won’t stop till we find her. She can’t have gone far,” he says trying to reassure me.

However, before anything else can be said, within his embrace I suddenly feel Marco’s body uncomfortably stiffen. I look up, and his expression is glazed over in some form of bewilderment. I glance in the direction he’s looking but nothing’s there. I look back at him as his brows furrow.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s Claire.”

“What? Where!”

I jump to a stand, looking around, but I don’t see her anywhere, I look back to Marco as he finally elaborates. “She’s speaking through the mind link.” I blink, now just as surprised as he is.

“Come, I know where she is.”

He grabs my hand, and we rush off quickly. We run for a couple of minutes before we come to the edge of town. I see her long black waves flowing in the wind as her eyes seep with fear and confusion.

“Claire!” I call in a magnificent spell of relief. She runs eagerly into my arms and I squeeze her tightly in my embrace. “Where did you go? I was so worried! We looked everywhere for you!”

“I’m so sorry mommy,” she snuffles, whispering in shame. “I didn’t mean to worry you. The balloon Marco won for me slipped out of my hand. I had to chase it, but it was too fast. When I stopped running, I was lost. I’m so sorry mummy! So so sorry!” she again leaps into my arms in tears, while I sigh, just relieved to have her back with me.

When all of us have finally calmed down we start making our way back home, Claire’s fingers tightly laced in mine. We’re silent for a little while, which lets my thoughts drift to today’s events. I can’t help but think about the near confrontation between Mr. Barlow and Raphael.

And I remember seeing a black strand of smoke surrounding Mr. Barlow’s hands when Raphael threatened him. The smoke is so familiar, and I think about how it is very similar to the smoke coming from Dorian’s fingertips the day he tried to kill me.

It can’t be that the two of them are somehow related. It just can’t be possible...

My line of thought is interrupted however as Marco speaks to my daughter. “Claire, how were you able to speak to me through the mind link?”

She shrugs in a childlike manner. “I just thought of you and mommy and kept calling out for you. I dunno... it must’ve just gone through somehow,” she says.

Marco still looks particularly confused and says to me. “Only members of the same pack should be able to hear each other through the mind link. Is there any chance that Claire is part of the Ironclaw pack?”

I’m rather stunned to say the least, and struggle to answer him, only to be interrupted as Caspian suddenly arrives. “Hey,” he greets Claire and me. “So sorry I couldn’t make it to the family day event, got really caught up with pack business. But I’m here to tell you news about...”

Just then, he notices Marco, “Why is he here?” And as he notices the open door of Marco’s house, he realizes. “Marco lives next door to you now?”

I nod.

Upon learning this news, Caspian is still smiling, but I accidentally glance at his hands as they’re tightly clenched into fists.

And with Caspian's interruption, another of Marco's questions is once again left to hang in the air, left untouched among his forgotten memories.

Dorian's POV

My leather hiking boots perch on my table as I feel the need to stretch my legs. I sink my back into my leather chair, lounging within the comforts of my office as I fiddle with my badge. I focus on the dainty thing as I twiddle it in between my fingers, before repeatedly tossing it up into the air, and letting it fall back into the palm of my hand.

The badge resembles a coat of arms design, shaped like a medieval shield with two rearing Lycan wolves attached on either side. The badge is of a dark purple with the wolves painted black. On the shield itself are gold symbols.

After tossing the badge upwards again, it lands back down in my hand just as there's a knock at my door. "Come in."

Two of my subordinates shuffle in, with their head bowed respectfully as I always expect. "What is it?"

"We found him in the Blue Moon pack," one utters.

Immediately I drop my boots off the table, pulling myself close against the table whilst shoving the badge into my pocket. I can't help the snarky smile from creeping onto my lips from the news.

"The old man?"

They nod to confirm my conclusion. And I chuckle in greater excitement, it's hysterical to me that he's lived this long. "Course he's not dead. He isn't an easy kill... but you see, it just makes this all the more fun."

My subordinates don't really know how to react to my strange pleasure in this situation, but that doesn't matter to me. "It's time we cause a bit of mayhem. Let's send some trouble his way. Take this."

One of them looks up and catches a bottled potion that I toss to him. "Pour the poison into the Blue Moon pack's main water source. And be sure to be discreet."

My minions nod their heads, before flitting out of the room as I dismiss them. Once they're gone, I settle my legs back up on the table, resting my back against the chair in blissful thought of how much fun I am about to have.

Chapter 59 Sleep Walking

Chapter 58 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya's POV

Caspian is quick in his greetings to Marco, with something clearly on his mind that he's eager to spill.

"So, Tanya, have you ever been to a banquet?" he probes with a toothy smile.

"Um," I have to stop myself from glancing in Marco's direction upon recalling our night at the auction. With Marco's memory loss, did the Autumn Equinox even count? "No," my tone does not meet the energy of his anticipation, but Caspian doesn't seem to notice it.

"Well, my dear, you're invited to the banquet at the Blue Moon Pack!" I feel bad for not appearing more excited, I do try to usher on a pleased smile, but today's events have really worn me out.

"The theme will be masquerade, and it will be taking place later this week! Almost everyone from the pack will be there," he adds.

Upon hearing this however, a discomfort settles in my stomach. I never did good with such busy events. The environments of such balls are much too intense for me, I'm not much of a dancer, and I'm always too shy to strike up conversations with other people. Even in the Blue Moon Pack where I feel comfortable. I'd still prefer to stay within the comforts of my own home working on my perfumes.

I nervously scratch the back of my neck as I try to turn him down. "Um, I don't know... it's really not my scene," and I look at him with an apologetic smile. "I do really appreciate the invitation Caspian, but maybe next time..."

Despite my attempts however, the Alpha is undeterred. "No way," says Caspian with an eccentric flare to his tone. "You'll love it! I know you'll love it! It'll be everyone you know from the pack, and there'll be loads of delicious food."

That's when I hear Claire who stands beside me squeal with excitement. I have to internally sigh as she tugs at my shirt. "Mommy please can we go. Pretty pretty please."

If it weren't for my daughter, I would've stuck to my guns. But she had a long day, which ended on a sour note. This seemed to have lifted her spirits within an instant, and I didn't feel like shattering it again tonight.

“Alright, will come,” Caspian almost adopts my daughter’s childish mannerisms as they both cheer in utter excitement. I don’t understand why he’s so persistent in me coming. Caspian knew I got along with the rest of the pack; it has already been five years. It’s not like I need to mingle and get to know them. And yet he seems well and truly enthralled now that he knows I’m coming, saying his goodbyes before heading off with a merry pep in his step.

Despite me trying to hide my discomfort and slight confusion, I turn to Marco, realizing that for once he is hiding none of his feelings towards the situation. As a heavy frown takes a deep seat upon his lips whilst watching Caspian disappear into the distance.

I’m half-awake, my vision blurry and only able to make out mere objects through the darkness. It is the cold that has stirred my senses slightly, making my body shiver at its mercy. But when I reach out to pull the covers over myself, my hand collides with something solid.

Crash.

My eyes flutter open in alarm as I’m startled awake. But I’m not in my room. I’m standing outside my door, the cold wind brushing fiercely against my exposed skin that is left bare by my short nightgown. My breath hitches in uncertainty and confusion till I glance down to see one of my potted plants knocked over. The ceramic is cracked, and lays dismantled on the ground, while the soil muddily litters the steps up to my house.

I sigh, crouching down to clean up the mess, while I think about the fact that I am sleep walking again. When I had to jump off that cliff to escape from Dorian, I found my necklace damaged during the fall. The ruby pendant had a crack, and its once glossy reflection it gave is now dulled. Ever since then, I was periodically sleep walking during the night, with no conscious awareness until bumping into something that woke me.

But the sleep walking tendencies did eventually stop after I had Claire. So it is incredibly strange to me that I am sleep walking again, coincidentally when Marco has reappeared in my life.

Speaking of Marco...

The door to his house opens and shuts, and I hear the man walk across the small patch of grass that separated our buildings. “Everything alright?” he asks, coming to stand beside me.

“Um, yeah I’m fine. I was just coming out for some fresh air, and I knocked over the pot by accident,” I say quickly.

“It’s really dark. And since the streetlamps are broken, I can’t really see,” I add, knowing that Marco is well aware of my lack of wolf which means my senses are deplorable in comparison to the rest of the pack wolves.

I choose to withhold the truth of the matter, not telling Marco about my sleep walking, and I of course can't tell if Marco truly believes me or not. He simply nods silently before bending down beside me to help pick up the broken pieces. We do so quietly, and somehow, I feel a little uncertain with how quiet he's being, wanting to desperately know what he's thinking.

Finally, he speaks. "May I come with you to the banquet?"

I try and blink away the surprise on my face. I find it a little unusual that he's asking for my permission, as well as the fact I know he isn't the greatest fan of banquets in general. But something about the look in his eyes tells me that something has changed, I just can't pinpoint 'what'.

I realize my silence, and I quickly respond. "Of course, you can come. Definitely. Claire would love it if you came along."

He again nods, although I do notice some relieved tension in his expression, I don't question it and we continue cleaning up the mess. Afterwards I say goodnight and I head inside and back to bed.

The next day is a typical workday for me, and by the afternoon, I'm walking home from work. The natural light is dimmed as the evening rolls around and the sun is slowly setting. Hence, I notice the contrast of artificial light at the corner of my vision.

I turn my head to see tiny light bulbs flickering with an orange glow that's warm and enchanting. They're each attached by a wire that strings them along the white picket fence that leads up towards my house.

I'm eager to follow them, like an entranced moth drawn to the light, I pick up the pace towards home. That's when I see my house gorgeously decked out in the tiny light bulbs hung on the infrastructure surrounding it. Almost like little fireflies that sparkle calmly against the growing darkness.

But what draws my gaze away is the individual on my left. Marco is standing on a metal ladder, course I never thought his exponential height needed one. Nevertheless, I examine him quietly as he's positioned by one of the street lamps, the main bulb has been removed whilst he tampers away at the electrical wiring inside its structure.

His brows are narrowed in focus, the sweat on his shirt and the ruffled look to his hair suggest he has been at it for a while. Course, eventually he notices me staring, gaze flickering up to me when he realizes my presence.

"You didn't have to," I say quietly, clearly aware he's mending the broken light fixtures after my accident the other night.

"It's good to have proper streetlight, especially during the darker months of the year," says Marco in a logical manner, still focusing on the light fixture he was mending. "But it's going to

take a little longer to fix, so those little string lights will do for the time being,” finally, his gaze flickers back up to me, and although barely there, I swear I could see a small playful smile sneaking its way onto his face. “Plus, I think Claire would appreciate that no more of her favorite plants will get knocked over during the night.”

And just like that, his smile vanishes, and as if he’s never said a word to begin with, Marco returns to working on the wiring. He leaves me smiling and encapsulated in admiration, watching the silhouette of him working as the sky grows darker.

The soft glow of the lights jogs my memory to the day I stood outside the Moon Goddess Temple five years ago. When I first realized the lights had been fixed, the day when everything between us had fallen into place. The memory felt so similar and yet so foreign when compared to now, and my eyes can’t help but gloss over with moist sheen at the thought.

Chapter 60 Masquerade

Chapter 59 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Marco’s POV

I generally detested banquets of this nature. It obviously didn’t help that I was a part of the royal family that used every God damn excuse to host events like this. My experience with royal banquets made me assume they were just all so fake.

None of the noblemen liked each other anyways, whether due to politics, or rivalry for power. Their greasy hair slicked back against their balding scalps. Whilst their royal wives rotted with jealousy over this girl and the next, as they were caked to the heavens with an unnecessary amount of powder that was somehow overshadowed by their massive air balloon shaped dresses.

However, I soon realize that my negative assumption of the Blue Moon Pack’s banquet is oddly wrong.

As Tanya, Claire and I step into the main ballroom, the atmosphere feels light, and weightless. Despite the evening darkness that shimmers through the grand windows, the room emanates brightness. With sheer sky-blue curtains tied back stylishly, while walls are decorated with pearly design patterns.

Due to the Blue Moon Pack’s economic issues, they understandably didn’t have the same luxuries as other wealthier packs, and the ballroom here is dwarfed by even the palace’s smallest

rooms. But, they seemed to know how to well manage what money they did have, and the residents seemed eager to volunteer to help for special events like this one.

The days leading up to the banquet, I agreed to watch Claire on multiple occasions, since Tanya often went over to Mrs. Monroe's bakery shop to help the older woman bake treats for the evening. I eye the table where rows of gorgeous deserts lay at the ready to be engorged. And Claire had told me that her school class was among those chosen to help hang up the decorations the day before. And now I see the sparkly silver ornaments that slung from lamp to lamp.

I wonder how Eric could be so arrogant. Despite their economic drawbacks, the pack lives in harmony, and has a beloved fondness for the tree that is central to the pack's faith and beliefs.

And as I'm reminded by the monument, I recall how Tanya had been working night and day to reproduce a modified version of her Blue Moon Tree perfume. One that could last for hours. With that in mind, my head tilts back to inhale the deep aromatic scent that tickles my wolfish senses in all the right places, forming a small smile on my lips.

"You think it turned out alright?" my irises flicker open to the sound of Tanya's soft-spoken voice. She peers up at me innocently with her delicate viridescent hues that are encased by a bright blue masquerade mask. Clearly aware I like what I smelled, I nod silently with the relaxed smile yet to fade from my lips as my eyes trail down to her dress.

She's worn a gorgeous pastel blue dress. While the top is covered in intricate lace, it is cinched at the waist to maximize the puffiness of the bottom. The skirt is layered in white tools that lie on top of one another to make the skirt appear fluffier than it is.

I catch myself staring and shoot my gaze back up to watch her mirror my initial smile. She then must turn to Claire who adorably protests about her hunger. I chuckle softly. "Go ahead, I'll wait nearby."

Tanya rushes off after her daughter, whilst I trickle over to the corner of the ballroom. Even though the atmosphere is quite nice, it is still a lot of people, and I find much comfort in sitting on a chair in the corner, able to people watch from a comfortable distance.

Course, that's when my attention is pulled by two familiar male voices.

"Is it done?" Caspian utters in a low tone.

"Yes, I've arranged for someone to pass the number to Tanya during the card drawing session. You'll both have the number nine," I hear Caspian's Beta, Dylan reply.

It takes me a moment to realize what they are talking about. It was Claire who excitedly told me the conversations she had with one of her classmates whose parent was helping organize the event. Apparently, the adults are to draw number cards, and the men and women with matching numbers are to dance together for the first song of the evening.

Upon realizing what this means, my gaze narrows steely as the men confirm my suspicions, with Dylan speaking first. “The plan will work sir.”

“I really do hope so Dylan,” Caspian mumbles hesitantly.

“Trust your gut Caspian, you’ve loved Tanya since the perfume contest five years ago. But you could not peruse her because of him,” says the Beta with conviction, but I don’t hear Caspian respond and assume he’s still unsure of himself. And so, Dylan continues. “You’ve responsibly suppressed your feelings all this time. But now that Tanya’s here, and in your pack for so long. Now’s your chance sir. There’s never been a better time!”

“You’re right Dylan,” the Alpha’s newly found certainty sparks a dangerous chill in my bones. “This is my chance. I will dance with Tanya tonight. And then, I’ll confess my love to her. It shall be done. Thank you, Dylan, for all your help. Cheers.”

I hear their glasses clink, and it only exacerbates my icy demeanor. And for once, both Manuel-my wolf-and I, agree on what needs to be done this evening.

Tanya’s POV

Claire has satisfied herself with a bunch of desserts, leaving me chuckling despite the fact she shouldn’t be having sweets so late at night. But I’m unable to say much as the host announces the start of the main event for the ball.

It’s been the part of the banquet that I have been dreading the most. The host basically confirms my disdain. It is a dance, where the guests are required to pick numbers out of the glass bowl he holds, which determines partners for the first dance.

I must drag my feet to reach the podium, I withdraw a card and step away. But before I can look, I’m suddenly tripped from behind. I stumble before collapsing on my puffy dress that softens my fall. In my confused haze, I have lost sight of the card. I finally can stand, and find it gently resting on the ground, and pick it up to reveal the number seven.

Thing is. I’m not planning on participating in the dance anyways. My head has already come up with a couple of possible excuses I could use to whichever guy I get partnered with. Course I do feel a little bad for being a spoil sport. But I really don’t have the energy nor the mental capacity to facilitate anyone this evening. I just wait to go home later.

Either way, I fall inline beside many of the excited young women as the genders split on either side of the ballroom, with a veil drawn between us. Us girls organize ourselves in sequential order, and I expect that the men are doing the same.

The giddy murmurings eventually grow louder and louder, and when the time comes, the curtain ascends to the ceiling to reveal our designated partners. I inhale a deep breath, bracing myself to explain my circumstances to the partner I am randomly given. That is until...

I see the pants of his black suit first, my gaze trailing upward hesitantly to the remarkable chest hidden beneath a matching ebony suit and undershirt. The collar left undone it creates a V-shape, revealing his broad collarbone and neck. Subconsciously I already knew, but my eyes didn't want to believe it.

Till a mask of a sharp inky black, trailed with intricate swirls of gold pigment frame the frosty irises of the man that once loved me. Marco...

I barely move as he takes the initiative to walk up to me. A hint of a smile registering on his lips. He out stretches a hand towards me. My gaze flickers between his hand and those benevolent eyes of his.

"May I have this dance?" I'm still too stunned to offer a response, but like the gracious gentleman I know he's capable of being, Marco lowers his stance, lowering his stature and dominating figure to-

To bow to me. One arm crossed over his back, whilst the other resting across his chest in a chivalrous display. "Please... "

Marco isn't the type to 'request' things, specifically from people he 'believes' he doesn't know too well. This is sincere. He really does want to dance with me. I come to the conclusion that the universe has a strange way of inflicting both pain and pleasure onto its residents.

I suddenly feel honored. All my previous grievances towards this banquet wash away in that single moment. And so, my hands pluck the sides of my dress, and I curtsy down to meet him.

Gaining my permission Marco resumes his posture that towers above me and takes my hand in his. Course I am nervous, because despite the beauty in this moment, I'm still not that good at dancing. And so, I'm conservative in my movements, tentatively trying to maintain pace alongside Marco's graceful motions that have us gliding across the marble flooring.

Course, at some point I nearly trip over my feet, and I almost surrender to my embarrassment, ready to take the fall. Till an arm swoops beneath my waist, righting me with swiftness. Marco twirls me to hide my miss step and spins me back elegantly into his arms.

The warmth that swirls inside me from this action alone makes me scarily giddy, and bliss overtakes me. This moment feels just like all those years ago. And I desperately cling on to it. And even though there is music playing, I barely take notice. I'm entranced and contained in our own bubble of fortune, dancing to our own beloved tune that syncs our souls in ways I couldn't describe and may never understand.

The banquet goes on for hours, and we dance away to our hearts' content. Till of course I remember I have a child to care for. Course Claire hasn't been too fussed that I have left her to play with the other children and eat all the candy her heart desires. But eventually, I can tell that my little girl is tired. And Marco agrees it's time we head home.

Claire and I step outside just in time to see the fireworks. They explode into a gorgeous array of light that illuminates the night sky in dazzling colors. With a smile, we start heading home. And that's when I see Caspian standing across the road. At first, I wonder why he's standing outside on his own. Until I see the large bouquet of flowers cradled in his strong arms.

Chapter 61 | Love You

Chapter 60 - Pregnant After One Night With The Lycan

Tanya's POV

I silently watch Caspian stride towards me, the smile on his face growing broader with each step. In midst of my confusion, I find Lisa has come up beside me, offering to take Claire home. Something in her gaze tells me that she knows what's going on. But fails to articulate. Instead, I nod whilst still firmly confused, allowing her to take my daughter back to the house so she can get some sleep.

When Caspian approaches, I can take a closer look at the flowers in his hands. Fresh red roses bunched together in a beautiful bouquet. But as the fireworks continue to sparkle and explode up in the sky, the mood of the atmosphere dawns on me.

"Tanya..." says Caspian, a sweetness encompassing his tone.

"Ever since the day you won the perfume competition, and protected the Blue Moon Tree from a terrible fate. From that moment on, I fell deeply in love with you," he says as his eyes shimmer with a strange intensity.

"And I want to spend the rest of my life with you," he graciously hands me the flowers, pressing them into my arms as I remain too stunned to speak.

I guess I should've seen this coming. I should have known Caspian had a liking towards me, his overly affectionate compliments, and eagerness to constantly spend time with me, trying to get Claire to call him Daddy...

Yet, I still tried to blind myself to it, tried to believe it was just acts of kindness relative to his character. I grew accustomed to it, failing to see the subtle signs leading up to this.

Problem is. “Caspian, I-”

Before I can express my feelings that don’t mirror his own, I feel a presence come up from behind me. So in tune to his movements I know it’s Marco. But what surprises me is that the Prince slips his hand into mine. He doesn’t pull me away, but something tells me he doesn’t want me near Caspian.

I glance over to Marco, a subtle smile dawning my lips in reaction to his touch that feels warm and nostalgic. It is different to the feel of Caspian’s flowers in my hands, that feel foreign and artificial, overly doused in a layer of love and needy affection that don’t match my aura.

Caspian is someone I deeply care about. But together, it just doesn’t make sense. My love is elsewhere. And even if I’d never have Marco again, I could never see myself moving on from him. And knowing that I am okay with that, says enough of where my feelings lie.

Finally, my audits flicker back to Caspian, who tries to desperately maintain his smile despite Marco’s grip on my fingers. “Caspian. I’m sorry, but I just don’t feel the same way about you.”

It looks like he almost doesn’t hear me initially. But eventually I see his smile begin to drop in slow realization whilst I continue. “I’m forever grateful for how you’ve looked after me, and I dearly cherish our friendship. But that’s the extent of it. I don’t love you in this way.”

I proceed to gently press his flowers back into his frozen arms with an apologetic smile. And while normally, I’d feel bad causing anyone some form of pain, this feels like the right decision. I feel morally obligated to express the truth, no matter how much it hurts Caspian. In the long run, this is better for both him and me.

With Marco leading the way, we turn to head home, leaving Caspian standing surrounded by a crowd of people, all unsure of how to react to my rejection.

Marco and I walk in silence for a little while, basking in the calming nightly atmosphere, before I finally find the courage to ask. “You took hold of my hand when Caspian confessed his love to me. Why?”

Knowing Marco has lost his memories, means there is little reason for him to be bothered about Caspian’s feelings towards me. And yet I could feel that he doesn’t want me to be there. At first, Marco frowns, only shrugging his shoulders, clearly unsure of how to express his thoughts directly. I don’t pressure him, and let him ponder his thoughts as we continue to walk.

Finally, he mildly explains. “I honestly don’t know. I just, I didn’t like the situation. It made me feel really uncomfortable,” I know that this is far more than what Marco was used to expressing about his inner world. Although I appreciate him opening up to me, it instead only casts further

confusion as to how deep those lost memories are. I wonder whether they are a lot closer to the surface than I initially believed.

But there is little time for me to respond, as small drops of rain pitter patter onto the gravel road, before escalating. Within seconds the sky is showering down a mass amount of rain that drenches me entirely. For any other wolf, it would be as easy as shifting into their wolf form where fur copes better with the soggiess of the rain. But I have no wolf. So, I just continue walking in surrender to the rainclouds.

“Come closer.”

It takes me a moment to register Marco’s words, but through the downpour I can see that he’s removed his jacket, lifting it up for me to get beneath to shield me. I don’t think to object, nearing his form I’m inevitably pressed up against him whilst he holds the jacket over my head.

Together we walk home in silence, the air between us filled with the rhythmic patter of the rain that encompasses us. It is at this moment, I understand why I have turned down Caspian. Even if the Alpha of the Blue Moon pack could’ve given me everything I’ll ever need. Safety, a job, a home, his devoted love and attention. To me, it would have never felt real, I would never be able to reciprocate his love, and that is no way to live.

Marco on the other hand could no longer give me any of those things. He knows nothing of our past, nor would ever be a part of my future ever again. And yet, I would remember everything, I know what life he has given me, and all the memories we shared. And that is enough. Enough for me to be at ease knowing I got to experience that and cherish them as moments that changed my life forever.

And even now, despite no longer loving me, every one of his actions feels true. They feel real and honorable. I feel such a connection to Marco that even in the tiniest of moments where he shields me from the rain, feel exponentially touching, reminding me of the night on valentine’s day, where Marco carried me home from the restaurant. It feels true in every way.

And so, I now decide that I’m going to tell him about the memories he’s lost. Even if he hates me after. I can no longer live a lie. He needs to know. I need to tell him.

But the time I’ve come to a decision, we reach my doorstep. I thank Marco, before asking. “Would you by any chance be free tomorrow to meet for a cup of coffee?” Marco nods, agreeing to the meet up, before saying goodnight and heading back to his house.

With a sigh, I step into my home, only to be greeted by my very over excited daughter who has been clearly watching the interaction from the kitchen window. She runs into my arms, giving me warm hug, before stepping away to peer up at me.

“I’m so happy you came back with Marco and not Caspian!” she cheers, leaving me to chuckle.

“Oh, is that so? You know you shouldn’t be listening in on adult conversations sweet pie,” I say comically.

To which Claire responds. “I begged Lisa to tell me mommy. I wanted to know what was going on. I’m just happy you chose Marco!”

I chuckle again. “I didn’t choose anyone baby,” I ruffle her hair as my child giggles.

“If you say so,” she gives me a mischievous grin before skipping along to her room. I go ahead and shower and change into my nightgown so I can tuck my little girl into bed. I fill a glass of water before making my way into her room and sitting down on the edge of her bed, offering the glass to her.

But as she takes a sip, I watch her nose crinkle in clear distaste. “This water tastes weird.”

“Does it now?” I say, before she nods her head firmly. “Well, maybe it’s because you ate all that candy. It must’ve affected your taste buds!”

Claire gapes at me, before we both laugh and giggle while I tickle her stomach. But eventually we settle down. From our long night at the banquet my little girl falls asleep very quickly, and so do I.

The next morning, I awake in my room, it is still a school day, so I call out to Claire as I’m getting dressed. I’m putting on my shirt when I realize she hasn’t responded.

“Claire! It’s time for school, up you get,” she usually wakes up naturally, or would at least hear my voice since she is a light sleeper. But something unnerves me when she still doesn’t respond.

I turn to head into her room. “Claire no more playing around you need-”

I stand frozen as I see she isn’t even awake. I gently shake her thinking maybe she’s just a little tired, but she doesn’t budge.

“Claire? Claire, please wake up,” but no matter what I do, my little girl doesn’t make a sound, and I start to fear the worst.