

Silas Knight, the indisputable Alpha of the North American Continent, stared at the mother of his pups, the love of his life, and his partner in every way. She walked back and forth twisting her wedding ring.

"Don't look at me that way, Silas. I told Renée and Mélange what you said about all of this before they went ahead with the procedure. Since it wasn't outlawed or breaking any specific rules, they took a chance." Jasmine stood in front of his desk, dressed in a navy blue short-sleeved dress that accented her curves and warmed her bronzed skin. She and the girls had spent time on the island a few weeks ago and it showed.

He took a deep breath to focus on the problem at hand. "What are you not telling me, Jasmine?"

Her hands moved constantly as she chewed her lower lip, something was bothering her. She turned and met his gaze.

"Is there something wrong with the pups?" That would account for her jittery behavior.

"No." She drug the word out and bit the tip of her thumb. "This is so messed up."

"What is?" Silas wanted this conversation about Renée and Mélange over and done with so he could spend quality time with his mate before his next meeting. That wouldn't happen until she fixed whatever problem her sister had gotten into.

"Let me tell it my way Silas," she snapped.

He nodded as he sat back in his seat.

"This all started with Ruby and Chase having so many children," she murmured.

"One litter of five? We have more than that," he said, to get the conversation moving.

"Not all at once." She took a deep breath. "Jewel and Patrick had two, that's seven. You know they moved to finish their post-graduate studies at the University where Renée and Mélange work." She looked at him.

Silas nodded.

Jasmine released a breath and shook her head slightly. "Renée's been spending a lot of time with all seven babies and somewhere along the line, had a complete change of heart. Of course, she wanted what she couldn't have." She looked at him. "Renée had a hysterectomy, remember?"

He didn't recall and shrugged.

She frowned and turned away. "For months, every day, she talked about having a family, being complete, wanting children. Not one, she wanted two or more. First, she talked about adopting, which was fine until... Mélange admitted she lied." She peeked at him.

Now things were getting interesting. "Lied? About what?"

Jasmine turned to face him. "I did not know this in the beginning. I wouldn't keep this from you. Renée told me this earlier today when she called... upset."

Silas did not particularly care for Mélange, the woman had tried to kill Asia and had been Elyria, his estranged daughter's lover until she met Jasmine's sister, Renée, her mate. If she and Renee hadn't mated, he would have allowed Asia to kill her a long time ago.

"Go on," he said into the silence.

"Before they mated, Mélange told Renée she had a hysterectomy and could not have children." The words came out in a rush as she looked at him.

Silas frowned as the words landed. "Mélange is full-blood, how could she have her uterus removed without permission from her Alpha or me? No one on this continent would approve of such a thing without my permission and I would not have given it. For one thing, I am capable of

healing any wolf, therefore, we do not allow surgeries, it's too dangerous. We heal too fast. Her body would try to regenerate another womb, which might have killed her or worse. Renée believed her?"

"Yes. Why wouldn't she? That whole can't lie to each other thing must have gone wrong," she said with a hint of sarcasm.

His frown deepened. "We cannot lie to our mates, as you well know. If she told Renée she had her uterus removed, it was the truth as far as she knew." He paused. "It's possible she had been told she had the surgery by someone she trusted and never checked to see if it was false." He thought of the sickness that had taken Elyria's mind and could see her telling Mélange such a lie to keep them together.

Jasmine stared at him for several moments. "Elyria?" she whispered.

He shrugged. "Possibly. Mélange and Elyria were bi-sexual, a child from a random lover would complicate their lives. Elyria was obsessed with Mélange and could have convinced her of the necessity of them both having the procedure. Elyria had been desperate to keep Mélange with her and would never have shared her with a child. Either Mélange had the procedure and her uterus grew back or she never had the surgery. Those are the only two options." Neither mentioned Elyria's kidnapping of Asia and Hawke's daughter, Sarita from kindergarten or her subsequent death by Jasmine's hand.

Jasmine's brow rose. "You remember a lot about her."

"I was in Elyria's mind, saw her history, recognized her unbalanced, possessive nature, and pain." He would make no excuses or give more apologies for his past. The Goddess had erased his first family from his memories and he had not known of Elyria until she arrived and kidnapped Sarita. In the end, Jasmine killed her to save the pack when he could not. That was a difficult time for everyone, one he rarely thought of anymore.

"Well, whatever happened, Mélange thought she misrepresented the truth when the doctor surprised her with the news of being able to conceive. Renée was devastated at first. Then excited because they could have the family she wanted. I don't think Mélange is as into this pregnancy as Renée. I think she offered to carry the babies to make up with Renée, not the best idea, especially when she wasn't technically at fault."

Silas sat up, his brows furrowed. "They had the in-vitro procedure? Even after I made it clear I was against it and would not sign off on the permission form?"

Jasmine nodded and held up her hand. "As I said, you didn't say no. There aren't any rules against it. Renée bugged Mélange and I about it day and night. They interviewed a few men--"

"What?" Silas slapped his hand on the desk and stood. "By being against it, that was a no, Jasmine. Any surgeries must be approved by an Alpha or me ..."

She dropped her face into her hands for several seconds. "What was I supposed to do? We have six wonderful children. Mom has another four. Ruby, Jewel, everyone has babies and it was driving my sister insane, Silas. She stopped eating, lost weight, stopped going to work." Jasmine ran her hand through her hair and met his gaze. "I was losing her. Losing my sister who has always been there for me. I couldn't... take it. What was I supposed to do?"

He bit back a growl of disappointment. Would her family always come between them? "You were supposed to support me and my position, Jasmine. I let you handle your family but I can't allow you to make exceptions for them. It's not right or fair and could be dangerous. Alpha Chase will need to be informed of this breach of procedure," he grumbled. "Renee is not a full-blood, but Mélange is and knows the rules. This should have gone up the chain of command instead of going to you." He walked around the desk to stand in front of her. "I am not a monster. However, I've lived a long time, seen a lot of things, and don't make decisions lightly. When I say no, I have a good reason. You've got to remember humans and full-bloods are different in a lot of ways. We don't think of family the same way. Mates, who cannot have pups naturally, don't have pups."

She placed open palms on his chest. "With the technology today, that's not true, Silas. They can and will have pups. Mélange's pregnancy proves that."

"The seed took root?" He had not been informed of this until now.

"Yes. She is in her first trimester, almost in the second."

He pulled her close as the information was cataloged in his mind. Chase would be furious but respectful since Jasmine approved the request. But it set a bad precedent. Or did it? Was it possible to breed this way? He hadn't thought that far ahead. He would discuss it with Hawke and Angus.

"Who sired the litter?"

"Dr. Jaxon Minter, a professor at the University. Both Renée and Mélange liked and respected him. He's out of the country for a semester or two, teaching in Europe somewhere." She rubbed her head against his chest.

"Finish it. What's the problem?" He stepped back and looked down into her beautiful face. This woman held his heart in her small hands; he could not imagine life without her. Her ideas of family, merging human values with full-bloods, often meant walking a tight line. The concept of taking sperm from an unmated full-blood male had trouble written all over it, even though his mate thought it was okay.

She took a deep breath and spoke quickly. Renée had sent three text messages this morning, full of fear for her mate. Mélange had not changed her position no matter how much Renée begged. "Dr. Minter, the guy who gave his sperm, met his mate while in Europe."

Silas groaned and shook his head. This would not end well which was why he was against it from the beginning.

"Wait, wait, it's not what you think. The mate isn't angry about what he did, just the opposite. She wants them to be a part of the children's lives, something Renée and Mélange are against."

Jasmine waited for Silas' explosion and wished for the hundredth time she had remained firm in her support of his position. But Renée's deteriorating health made Jasmine relent and she gave permission for the procedure. Within a month, Jasmine received a phone call from her sister, crying and laughing with the good news of the pregnancy. Happy Renée was on the mend, Jasmine prayed everything went well.

She should have known better.

God didn't like ugly.

Karma was real.

Silas did not approve of insemination; he had been very clear on that front. Now, Mélange was in warrior mode, fully prepared to fly to Europe and terminate the threat to their family. Renée had been so distraught, this morning she sent three text messages full of fear for her mate. Mélange had not changed her position no matter how much Renée begged.

Horrified over Mélange's plan, Jasmine had spoken clearly and authoritatively to Renée. "If Mélange kills Dr. Minter and his mate, it would be a death sentence for her once the pups were born." Renée's gasp didn't change the verdict. There was nothing Jasmine could do or say that would stop the hand of justice from swinging in that direction. Renée became unglued when Jasmine explained why she was powerless to intervene if Mélange carried out such a vicious act. Jasmine had disconnected the call with this one certainty, Silas would be furious.

"It is within their rights." He put his hands behind his back as his eyes glowed emerald green.

Oh, oh.

"If they petition me, and they would have to do so, I will grant them access to the pups."

Her gaze jerked up to meet his. "What? Why?"

His jaw tightened. The vein in his neck jumped as he glared at her. "Because they are his pups, that's why."

She frowned. "But he agreed--"

Silas waved his hand and snorted. "Means nothing. What will Renée and Mélange do? Sue? Take him to what? Court? I rule this Nation! My word is law! This was never supposed to happen, Jasmine. Never."

She bit her lip with indecision. Renée begged her not to tell Silas of Mélange's plans. Renée believed she could talk her mate out of leaving the country to search for Dr. Minter. Jasmine hadn't agreed but didn't want to make this a bigger mess than it already was.

Jasmine took a deep breath. "Mélange is going after him."

Silas' eyes flashed as his beast rose to the surface. Heat spilled over into the office as he tilted his head to the side while holding her gaze. "Going after who?" The way he asked the question meant he knew the answer but wanted her to say it.

"The guy who... you know, donated his sperm."

"Why is she going after him? To discuss co-parenting? To offer a bribe? To kill him?" The last option was spoken so smoothly it took her a second to realize what he said.

Jasmine cleared her throat. "Renée thinks that's the plan. She's never seen Mélange like this, so obsessed with protecting the babies that she won't listen to reason."

"Full-bloods take siring very seriously. He will fight to the death for his pups. Renée has lost her mate." Silas stepped back and looked at the clock. "I hoped to make love with you before my meeting but dealing with your sister's problems has taken all our time. Tonight, I want your total focus and attention, Jasmine."

She held up her hand, stopping him. "What do you mean Renée has lost her mate? Mélange is at home with Renée."

"When she goes after Dr. Minter, I will allow him to kill her. If she kills him, she will not return to the States alive. Either way, if Mélange acts on this threat, she is dead." He turned and walked out of the office.

Jasmine sat heavily on the desk and stared at the floor. The disappointment in Silas' gaze and voice pierced her heart, leaving her raw and devastated. Why couldn't this have been simple? Easy? Mélange gets pregnant; the babies arrive healthy. She and Renée have their family. Jasmine released a long sigh and shook her head.

*"Mistress?"*

Jasmine was glad to hear from Asia. *"Where are you? I need to talk to you."* She pushed off the desk and headed to the door.

*"In your office, but I can meet you anywhere."*

Jasmine needed to relax, get comfortable for this conversation. *"Are the boys at home?"* Asia's teenage sons, Wyatt and Kayden loved sports and often remained after school for practice.

*"No, Ma'am. They are at school. I will meet you at my home."*

Jasmine left Silas' office and headed toward the elevator. She and Asia would come up with a solution that would appeal to Silas and keep everyone safe.