

# Mated in the Shadow of My Sister - by Lady Gwen |

## Chapter 1: The Birthday Funeral

(Lily POV)

Today is my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

There will not be birthday cake, singing, or a party. Instead, we are attending a funeral. My sister's funeral, to be exact.

Before my sister... died... we had a large party planned for me. I normally do not have a big party, but 14<sup>th</sup> birthdays are a really big deal to werewolves. They are the day that we first meet our wolves. The next monumental birthday is our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday; that is when we can first identify our fated mates.

I am our Beta's youngest daughter, and my father is loved and well-respected. Everyone was excited to meet my wolf and to see what type of wolf she would be. Thus, the guest list for my party was pretty large, and it included ranked wolves from nearby packs.

I am normally a little bit of a loner, hence why I usually do not have a big birthday party. However, for this particular occasion, I was happy to have a lot of guests. Meeting your wolf comes with the first shift/ transition, and that can be incredibly painful. As inherently social creatures, the only thing known to help wolves with the pain of the first shift is to have supportive family, friends, and community around you.

The way that it typically works is that the pack will host a dinner or barbeque in your honor. As night falls, and the moon replaces the sun in the sky, everyone will gather inside the pack amphitheater. The shifter-to-be will stand in the middle of the amphitheater while guests quietly chant well wishes and prayers to the Moon Goddess. The energy in the space can be electrifying for everyone present, no matter whether there are 25 attendees or 500.

Once the first shift is completed, the new wolf will prance around the stage and strut their stuff. The crowd will "ooh" and "aah" until the pack alpha approaches, learns the new wolf's name, and introduces the wolf to the crowd. The new wolf will also swear his or her allegiance to the pack and to the alpha, allowing the wolf to mind-link with other pack wolves. Finally, the new wolf and any guests old enough to shift will go for a pack run.

The whole process is incredibly special and exciting.

As you might imagine, décor is also an important part of the party planning process. Each shifter gets to decide the decorations and party theme that will be used for their party. If more than one wolf turns 14 on the same day, the wolves can either agree on a theme or split the party into parts that they can individually decorate. The pack luna will then work some sort of magic that somehow blends the individual areas into one cohesive theme in the center.

My birthday is in October, and despite how large our pack is, I am the only one born on that day. I love having an October birthday because my favorite season is fall. For my décor, I had picked flowers and decorations in rich fall colors, including deep oranges, reds, and greens.

Unfortunately, none of my party decorations will be used. Or rather, none of my decorations will be used for me.

As I mentioned, we are holding a funeral today instead. My oldest sister, Stephanie, died this morning.

Pack and religious tradition dictates that we must hold funerals within 24 hours of death. Because Stephanie died shortly after midnight, her funeral must be held today. All food and décor set aside for my birthday party was therefore immediately diverted for the funeral; thankfully my fall themed colors were sufficiently somber-ish to work.

All decorations that seemed relatively “happy,” celebratory, or that mention me have been removed. Pictures of Stephanie have now been placed on tables and podiums, and the music I selected has been swapped out for songs about loss or Stephanie’s favorites.

The loss of Stephanie is a really big deal. Not only was she my sister and my parents’ oldest and favorite child, she was also widely anticipated to be the mate of Alpha Randall’s son, James, which meant she was most likely the future luna of our pack.

Stephanie would have turned 20 in three months, and she and James would have been able to confirm that they were mates then. The pack was so sure that they were mates—and Alpha Randall was so eager to turn the pack over to James and his mate, once she was identified and ready to take on the luna position—that they deviated from standard protocols and decided to begin Stephanie’s Luna training just after she turned 18.

If I am being completely honest, something never sat right with me about Stephanie starting Luna training. Part of it is what Stephanie's Luna training meant for me, but that is a separate conversation. The biggest thing was that I did not understand why luna training could not wait until Stephanie turned 20 and could confirm who her mate was. Lunas for generations have waited for their training; why couldn't Stephanie?

It also bothered me quite a bit to watch Stephanie hang all over James at pack functions. Our pack frowned upon dating and public displays of affection prior to finding your mate; it created too much risk for problems, anger, and jealousy once your mate was located.

For whatever reason, an exception was made for Stephanie. But then again, exceptions always were made for her. Stephanie was strong and absolutely beautiful, and the pack knew her as being kind, smart, and energetic. She could do no wrong in the eyes of my parents, the alpha, or the pack.

I hope I do not sound too jealous or bitter. I loved my sister, and her death is hitting me really hard. It’s just that.... I knew a different side of my sister than everyone else, and I know more

than anyone that my sister was far from perfect. Had I spoken up before she died, I would have been accused of jealousy and lying. And were I to speak up now, well... I would be accused of jealousy, lying, AND improperly speaking ill of the dead.

It is easier to just let it go. Along with my birthday. It isn't that important anyway. I do not want to be selfish or self-centered.

The only immediate problem with letting go is that --bad timing or not-- I am going to shift for the first time tonight. There is nothing I can do to stop or postpone it, as much as I would like to do so. I am worried about how it is going to go.

Hopefully, during the reception, my mother or father or brother or someone will be willing to step aside with me for a 20-30 minutes just to get me through it. We could then return and act like everything is normal. Or as normal as it can be with Stephanie now gone.

Sadly, I should have known that nothing in life is that easy.