

Claire

I knew letting Roman go was a risk, but Tereshan was right. I would have struggled to kill him. I've never killed anyone, even though I've seen plenty of death.

Dane told me that Roman was as difficult to get rid of as Francine was, cursing and fighting the entire way to the pack borders.

"We need to increase our border patrols and we need to change up how we're doing things." I tell Dane as we sit in my office going over the border patrols. Bryson is sitting in with us today.

"He managed the border patrols over in Alpha Keegan's pack, right?" He asks.

I see Tereshan watching our exchange. He was released yesterday and I'm keeping him close, knowing it will help him feel safe.

I tap my leg under the table, inviting him to come sit with me if he wants. He looks at Dane and Bryson before shaking his head, no.

"He did." Dane says. "And that would be the first place he would try to attack if he wants to retaliate."

"Attacking Alpha Keegan helps him and hurts us in two ways." I say. "First, it puts our alliance in jeopardy if the first time they are attacked, we do not protect them. But it also

has the possibility of impacting our food source. If Roman finds a way to get into the pack lands and destroy their food production, it will take months to get it back up and running."

"Agreed." Dane says before looking at me. "How confident are you that he is working with Alpha Franco?"

I shrug a shoulder. "I never found proof, but I'd say, I'm 90% sure that he's been working with him. We know of several people and ways that Alpha Franco was trying to infiltrate our pack lands."

"Why?" Bryson asks.

"What do you mean?" Dane asks.

"I mean, why is he so interested in our pack lands. It's not the first time he's tried to take over our pack, and I know we're stronger than he is. I get that it would be good for him if he could defeat us, but he can't. He's not strong enough to and we've proven that over and over. So why keep coming at us? What's in it for him?" He asks.

I look at Tereshan who looks thoughtful.

'Any ideas?' I ask him through the mind link.

'None. But you're right to increase the borders at Alpha Keegan's. That's the weak spot, our weakest point of entry to be able to hurt the pack.'

"Alright, let's increase our patrols in both our pack and Alpha Keegan's. Make sure that we have eyes on the food warehouse and in the fields so that no one can sneak in and

burn them to the ground.”

“Yes Alpha.”

They both get up to leave.

“Dane, a moment.” I say.

“I’ll meet you in your office.” He tells Bryson.

When he comes back, I gesture for him to have a seat.

Dane studies me, his eyes narrowing. “What’s on your mind, Alpha.”

“I’m short a Beta, Dane. I need someone that I can trust to be my right-hand, run the pack for me when I’m not here. Someone I trust, who will ensure the pack’s safety and well-being when I can’t.

He looks at me a moment. “You’re thinking of Gamma Bryson? I think he’s a good choice. He’s a great Gamma, but he’ll make a good Beta, too. I think that will work.” He says.

Tereshan walks over, coming to stand beside me. He seems to know what I’m thinking. I pull him into my lap, presenting a unified front to Dane, the only person who knows our true identities.

“I’m not thinking of Gamma Bryson, Dane. I’m thinking of you. I want you to be my new Beta.” I tell him.

He blinks at me, then he looks at Tereshan, blinks again, then sits back.

“But I’m a warrior.”

"A warrior who has shown time and again that he will put this pack ahead of himself." Tereshan says.

He frowns at Tereshan. "You agree with this? After everything..."

"You went against me, for the pack. I may not have recognized it then, but there are many things that I understand much better now. That is one of them. You knew I was destroying the pack and you knew that Claire could bring it back, with your support. You were right, and I'm glad that you went against me. It was the right thing to do."

"You're the only one that knows about us." I say. "And you've never spoken a word of it to anyone."

He snorts. "Who would believe me?"

"You believed me." I say to him.

He looks thoughtful for a moment. "Beta." He says quietly, reverently.

Tereshan looks up at me and smiles. It's a small smile, but I'll take it.

We hold the Beta ceremony two days later. Tereshan and Dane had to help me. Tereshan literally had to put the words into my head to say and then told me that I needed to slit my hand and pour my blood into a cup.

'Seriously?' I ask in our mind link, my heart thumping.

'You're an Alpha, Claire. Slice your hand, don't flinch, and let it drip into the ceremonial cup.' He tells me.

I do as he says, gritting my teeth when I slice my hand, but it barely hurts at all. Man, these Alpha genes are awesome.

I hear Tereshan snort in my mind.

When it's done, we have a pack party, enjoying the time together, celebrating Dane's promotion.

There is music and dancing. Dane pulls Feena onto the dance floor, making her blush as he spins her around.

"Do you think he'll ever make his move?" Tereshan asks, coming up beside me.

"What do you mean?" I ask him.

He turns, frowning at me. "You're always so intuitive. How did you miss it?" He asks me.

"Miss what? What am I missing?" I ask, looking at Dane.

"He's in love with her, Claire. I realized it months ago, and I've been waiting for him to make his move. At first, I thought he was giving her time, you know, after..." He cuts off and I reach down and put my hand on his shoulder.

"But then," he continues, his voice rough with emotion, "he never did. Maybe this is what he needed to be confident enough to finally make his move."

I watch and now that Tereshan has said it, it's so obvious. How had I never noticed?

"I guess I just don't have a lot of experience with people being in love." I say, without thinking about it.

"Yeah." He says, looking up at me with sadness in his eyes. He steps away from me and heads back inside.

I watch him go before turning back. I didn't mean it to be hurtful, but it's the truth, and the truth can hurt. A lot.