

Chapter 127

On Your Left

Dylan knew the jig was up the minute the enemy stopped firing. For longer than he liked to consider, the woods outside the Red Moon prison had been awash in a field of smattering, staccato gunfire, meant as more than an intimidation tactic passed between the two teams than any effective means of attack.

But when he realized it had been at least five minutes between rounds, Dylan knew sure as shit that they didn't break for lunch. His ears strained, desperate to pick up the thunderous sound of wheels as backup arrived. Whether it was their own or the enemy's was a problem to be addressed when someone anyone fucking arrived.

But Dylan didn't hear the sound of armored SUVs. And judging by the confused, wary glances he was getting from the rest of his team, they were just as unsettled by the new onslaught of silence.

"I don't hear anything," said one of the remaining males from his original team. "Are we in the clear?"

"Unlikely," muttered a female from the Syracuse team.

Dylan wished she'd kept the sentiment to herself.

Finally, there was a noise, but it didn't come from the tree line before them. It came from behind.

"The doors!" Someone yelled. "They set the prisoners free!"

Dylan cast a cautious glance over his shoulder, hoping beyond hope that the shadows he saw running toward them full force would be the trembling, grateful forms of the civilians they'd come to save. No such fucking luck. "Up," he breathed, sudden panic making his voice hoarse. "Up! Up! Retreat!"

He, along with what handful of members was left of the original two teams he'd set out with, staggered to their feet and beat a hasty dash straight ahead, right toward the forest cover that they knew full well had a team of soldiers waiting with guns aimed right for them.

But, really, what other option is there when a horde of newly released jailbirds come storming right at you, hot on your heels. And not the docile,

socially adjusted ones he'd hoped. But the kind who had, until minutes before, been locked behind bars in a facility lovingly referred to as 'the pit' by the very people you and your team represented.

The very people whose cases Dylan and the other Alphas had planned - and had never gotten the chance to reevaluate and correct.

Unfortunate as this was, Dylan wasn't beyond recognizing the sick irony here and how this nightmare for his and his team's life expectancies looked an awful lot like divine justice from the other point of view.

"Get to the tree line!" He shouted, running full tilt across the short field leading from the prison entrance to the forest.

"The shooters!" Someone called back. In answer, Dylan lifted his gun and began to fire into the spaces between tree trunks, never once breaking stride.

From beside him, his teammates did the same. From before him, the enemy returned fire.

Out of the corner of his eye, Dylan saw the male he'd bunkered next to fall in a spray of red. In a split second, he adjusted his aim and took his swift revenge as he saw a body fall beneath his bullet.

It was a small blessing that the bastards hadn't armed the escapees, but as his ears registered the sounds of bones cracking and baleful, moaning screams from beneath the rapid popping of fire cover, he realized in a rush of horror that they hadn't needed to.

He'd successfully cleared his way, and his body had just cleared the tree line when the sounds of a few hundred furious, galloping paws hit the grass behind him. He didn't, however, fully grasp the true depths to which they were truly fucked. No, that occurred when Dylan ran past one of the enemy soldiers who'd just spent the last hour trying to murder him and his men, and instead of attacking him, he, too, lowered his weapon and began to run.

They drove straight into a massacre. There was the only way Xavier could think to describe the mass of Wolves crashing over one another like waves. The energy he felt coming off of the horde was unlike any he'd seen before. Angry didn't hold nearly a visceral enough connotation to describe the inky black miasma.

These Wolves were furious, sickly so. Rabid.

"Goddess," Liam breathed from beside him. "What the fuck am I seeing here?"

Xavier could only shake his head as explanation escaped him and words defied him. It was nearly impossible to determine where to make an entry

point, much less who they were meant to rescue versus who they were meant to avoid.

The battlefield spanned the length between the prison and well beyond the edge of the surrounding forest. The Wolves he could gather were escaped prisoners, and through gaps in the chaos, he could spot the white uniforms of Noah and Neia's soldiers mixed with the camo green of the Governors'. He saw distressingly few of their own team's black Kevlar.

The Wolves, for their part, seemed to be attacking indiscriminately, ripping into anything and everything that got in their way, including each other. The wild card here was the humans.

They were everywhere, unnervingly eager in their fervor. Dressed largely in civilian clothing accentuated with leather and spikes, Xavier recognized them as some of the disturbingly plentiful gangs of human renegades that had cropped up recently, seemingly just to create problems for the supernatural community.

And that was exactly what it looked like they were doing, gleefully picking off whatever furred and clawed figure they could.

A snarling, furred mass launched itself at their armored SUV with enough force that a hair-thin crack fractured the glass of the windshield. Xavier's radio crackled to life as Craig's voice came through.

"You're all seeing this, too, right?" He asked, his naturally hoarse voice nearly haggard with disbelief. "We haven't just been huffing carbon monoxide or some shit?"

Xavier pressed his call button and replied, "Keep your windows up until we can figure out what the fuck is happening here. Keep your hands on your weapons. The Wolves are already doing a number on our vehicle."

"Xavier...." Liam nudged his shoulder and pointed off into the distance and up to where he could just make out a familiar icy blonde head peeking out from the branches of a tree.

As he watched, Dylan barked an order, and from a few surrounding tree boughs, figures clothed in dark Kevlar came into view. As one, they lifted their rifles and fired into the seething, roiling mass below. Xavier watched as body after body fell, all clothed in leather and spikes.

"Get to the corpse of white oaks at your nine o'clock," he yelled into his radio. "We're aiming for the humans. Non-lethal force on the Wolves, when possible. Go! Go! Go!"

The three armored convoys they brought opened as one spilling over a dozen heavily armed fighters out into the fray. It was a drop in the bucket compared to the pandemonium writhing around them, but in a sea of chaos, having a mission could make all the difference.

With ruthless efficiency, Xavier fired again, and again, and again, blowing vigilante after vigilante off their feet. The further into the combat he drew, the more evident it became that the humans were the aggressors here.

Xavier kept his finger on the trigger and his head on a swivel, but he still didn't see the huge grey Wolfman spring at him from just outside of his periphery. Three-inch-long claws ripped into his shoulder and back as the heavy-ass weight of a fully grown male propelled him into the thick base of an oak tree.

Xavier hissed through his teeth at the searing pain of his flesh shredding as the male reared back, preparing for another lunge. As he rose to his full height, he let out a gut-wrenching bellow filled with such rage it shook Xavier far harder than any wound. He watched on in morbid fascination as the Wolfman's howl cut off mid-shriek as a bullet cut through the center of his skull.

A large body dropped from the tree above him, landing in a crouch before springing back to his feet to offer him a hand. Xavier shook off the lingering unsettling effects of witnessing that male, possibly even one of his own Pack member's, brutal final moments.

"I should have known you'd still be alive, you squirrely bastard," Xavier gritted out through clenched teeth as he slapped his hand against Dylan's and let his friend drag him to his feet.

"No thanks to your slow ass," Dylan shot back.

They stood back-to-back as the remaining members of Dylan's team also dropped from the trees to join their backup on the ground. They came together to form a makeshift phalanx, leaving no angle unprotected.

"How the fuck did things go so sideways, Miller?" Liam growled.

"Your guess is as good as mine," he called back, his gun rattling off shots like a firecracker. "It was us against the usual suspects until the humans appeared out of nowhere and opened the prison gates."

Fed up with the constant stream of non-answers, Xavier called Alexandre to attention and shifted until a Wolfman stood in his place. He broke rank and plunged into the fray, closing a large, clawed fist around the first vigilante throat he found. The human man's eyes bugged wide as Xavier hauled him up by the neck and jumped, launching them both into a tree branch overhead.

Xavier landed on the thick branch in a crouch, dangling the human over the forest floor far below.

"Speak," he commanded, each fang menacingly bared. "What have you done?"

The human squeaked, gasping for air, prompting Xavier to loosen his grip ever so slightly. A manic grin slowly crept over the human's face until he was cackling between gasping breaths. "We. Are. Legion," he croaked. "This prison was only the beginning. The supernatural world will burn!"