

## Chapter 22 - Denying the Alpha

FAITH'S point of view

"What's the problem?" Amelio asked as he stepped out from behind the tree.

I finished shimmying into the loose black t dress my father packed me and plonked myself on the floor. My legs needed the break.

"I can't run if I don't eat. I'm spent. I need food and water, and sapphire needs to eat." I hate that I am complaining; I always trained hard and could usually stand much more physical activity than this. But my bodies been through a lot lately, and when you need to rest, you need to rest.

Amelio chewed the inside of his cheek nervously for a moment.

"Okay, I understand but not here," his eyes scanned the woods for danger. I don't think anyone was chasing us; Declan would have caught up by now if he were; what's he so worried about? As if sensing my doubt, he exhales heavily.

"We are directly in between two packs right now. Your old one crescent moon and another, river stone." Amelio explains.

All the colour drained from my face. I hadn't even thought about river stone. I am so glad I am not making this journey alone. I'd be dead meat already. River stone was as uncivilized as they come. They are a pack of rapists, murders and unfortunately, victims and nothing more. Most of their women were held against their will. River stone was so feared that most wolves would reject their mate immediately if they were from there. I guess that's why so many men went as far as to kidnap their mates and mark them against their will. They were disgusting barbarians. I hope the moon goddess punishes them severely in the next life.

"And if two unfriendly packs were not enough, we are deep in unclaimed territory, and as you well know, unclaimed territory is rogue territory."

I understood what he was saying. The irony of it all wasn't lost on me. I don't know why we call it unclaimed territory and rogue territory. If the rogues claimed it, doesn't that make it claimed territory? Then again, packs didn't care for rogues or their boundaries.

In a pack's eyes, if you abandoned your pack, you had nothing. No family, no friends and above all, no home or land.

“So, what do we do?” I asked. He was right; we couldn't stay here out in the open like this, we were sitting targets, but I wasn't joking around when I said I needed to eat; otherwise, I was done.

Wait, DR Charles, he gave me more of those cool vials. I plunged my hand happily into my bag and began digging excitedly, only to come up empty handed. Where were they?

They smashed. You didn't notice, but you were still holding them when we shifted. They are gone. Sapphire reminded me.

Curse my rotten luck.

“Nothing in the bag, huh?” he asks, sounding a little frustrated himself. “I'm sorry”, he apologized immediately, and his eyes softened a touch. “I'm not upset with you. My wolf, he's going crazy. He is feeling extremely threatened right now. He doesn't like feeling so exposed. Isn't yours?.” he asked curiously.

Sapphire, girl, do you feel anything? She hasn't said anything to me, but it didn't hurt to ask.

Our wolf halves were amazing at sensing things that we were unable to. Particularly when we were in danger, I would say that it was like having a sixth sense, but I knew that it had more to do with how perceptive they were of the five senses that they already had. Practically, sight, touch and sound.

To tired. She groans and shuts me out.

I didn't like that. If she were too tired even to be alert to the sense of danger around us, she would be dead weight if we were to be attacked. That put not only myself but Amelio in a very compromising position.

“She says she's too tired” I like admitting this to Amelio even less. He's my uncle, and he loves me, but still, I didn't want to disappoint him. I don't want him to think that I am weak.

“Let's move then.” He says with thinly veiled concern for me.

He helped me back to my feet and, without trying to make it too obvious that that's what he was doing, he supported me as we walked. He wasn't subtle at all despite his attempts, but I didn't mind. I needed it.

We quickly found a small cave in the dense trees along a small river. It was the perfect spot.

The cave offered us cover from both rogues and river stone. Only having one entrance to protect meant we didn't have to watch our back as much because we could see them coming. We were also able to use the river to mask our scents a little. It wasn't much, but everything counted. I was hoping that soon a deer or something equally as large would come for a drink, so we didn't have to leave the cave to hunt.

Over an hour had passed, and there were no signs of any animal of any size coming to drink from the freshwater stream. We couldn't stay here forever, and so Amelio was leaving to go hunt for something.

"Now, Faith", he warns me for the hundredth time. "You need to remember we can't mind link until you have been initiated into waning crescent." Waning crescent was the name of my Uncle's pack, the very one I would soon swear my allegiance to. I knew next to nothing about it except that it was also named after the moon and that my Uncle and aunt loved living there. Werewolf packs tended to call themselves after either their surroundings, like Riverstone, or the moon like the crescent or waning crescent and my least favourite, some horrible war they were a part of way back when. Were death and destruction something to brag about? Just once, I wished they named it something different. If I were to name a pack, I would probably call it Tundra. It still sounds tough, but it's also a type of wolf, so we are still honouring that side of us.

"are you sure you want me to leave you to hunt? You won't be able to call for help if something happens?" He was like a broken record, but I appreciated his concern.

"Amelio, I promise that I will be fine. I won't leave the cave, and I'll hide as much as I can. If something happens, I will howl, I will scream my lungs out, I will make sure that you can hear me. I won't be anywhere but here. Please go. The sooner I eat, the sooner we can move" I was as nervous about it as he was, but we both knew that I had a point.

"Okay, okay. I'll be back as soon as I find something. I won't be able to drag a whole deer back here. It would draw too much attention. Will a rabbit or two do?" A rabbit wouldn't tie me over for long, but it was better than nothing, and he was right.

"Or two if you can" I smile up at him.

He simply nods back.

"Alright, take these" I quickly shifted my gaze away until he down shifting. His wolf took off from the cave without so much as looking back. I hope this didn't take long. Despite

all my fake bravado, I was nervous about being left here all alone out here when I was unable to shift.

I scooped up Amelio's basketball shorts and deposited them into the bag.

More than 30 minutes have passed since Amelio went for food. I knew that it would be a while before I saw him again. Rabbits were extremely skittish and tended to be more challenging to hunt than most things. They never strayed too far from their burrows, and we were too big to follow them underground.

Every little sound made me jump.

The cave floors were covered in wet leaves, they weren't much, but they would do. I crawled along with the cave floor, pushing as many of them as I could into a pile. Once I had enough, I rolled and rubbed my body into the dirt, smearing it up along my arms and legs. I even rubbed handfuls under my armpits and on my face. I was going to rock up to waning crescent an absolute mess, that's for sure, but hey, at least I would be alive.

Once I smelt like moss more than I did human, I returned to my leaf pile and began covering my entire body. Even if a wolf walked by the cave, they would have a hard time finding me. They would likely catch little whiffs of my scent, but as it was so faint, they would hopefully assume that I had already left or brush me off as a pile of leaves and move on.