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But I won't. Even if he had his entire pack out there waiting, I still wouldn't run.

Dominant wolves—alpha wolves—don't run. They fight. Always.

After cutting the engine, I shove open my door and climb out. A bell rings, and I pause beside my truck, my head bent as if I've just dropped something.

I wait as an elderly couple dressed for a hike in khaki pants and blue windbreakers amble over to their car. Once they've pulled out of the parking lot, I make my way over to my waiting party in the forest.

With only two other cars, one parked closest to the grocery store entrance, and the other, a sleek, black BMW three spots away from my truck, I'm hoping there won't be any interruptions for a situation that has the potential to turn bloody. And fast.

As I stride toward the waiting alpha, my gaze glances over the three men in black sweats standing deeper in the forest. Two men I've never seen before. But the third? The fresh but healing scars which mark his right arm tell me that whatever nasty spell the witch hit Jonas with must've been bad.

We shifters heal in a few hours, but it's been nearly ten, which is enough to make me wonder if the other two survived it.

I focus my attention on the dark-haired, blue-eyed, and, for the time being, relaxed alpha of Madden Grove. And the son of the man I killed before I left town.

I stop a few feet away.

"When Jonas told me you were in town," Liam says, "I thought it was time I intervened."

For the moment, I keep my tone light. Unthreatening. At least until I know how this plays out. "And how did you intend to intervene?"

Any fight we have will be an alpha challenge, and those are always to the death whether we fight as man or wolf. It can't be anything else, with both of us being the most dominant shifters in pack hierarchy. None of us will or can walk away from a fight once it's started. It's just in our DNA.

And I would win.

There's no way Liam or Jonas wouldn't have heard about what I do. A long time ago, a fight between me and Liam would have been too close to call. But now? After I've spent the last ten years doing nothing but hunt and kill out-of-control alpha and beta wolves all over the country?

I start to understand why Jonas would give me an hour and not run me out of town the second he locked eyes on me.

An hour is plenty of time in a town as small as Madden Grove to fight Liam, win, and then be promptly torn apart by the rest of the pack, who might never accept a wolf who has killed their last two alphas—leaving Jonas with a clear and free line to the top job.

I could be wrong about the pack, but I doubt it.

And then there's Jonas. I'd have to sleep with one eye open for the rest of my life, or for however long it lasted, which, if Jonas had his way wouldn't be long at all.

It could all be guesswork, but my instincts warn me that Jonas is playing some game here. What, I don't know, but my instinct feels right.

But that isn't why I came back to Madden Grove. And after what happened here, I have no intention of staying in a place filled with ghosts.

"I haven't decided yet," he drawls.

"That the reason you sent the beta?" I ask, ignoring the jingle of the grocery store bell behind me.

The beep of a car alarm, doors open and close, and an engine purrs to life. As a car pulls away, Liam angles his head to study me, as if he's trying to work me out.

I do the same. Briar dreamed of him, and it must have been some dream for her face to burn as hot as it did. She couldn't even look me in the eye.

My wolf snarls, a vicious sound, distracting me. I silence him.

Not now. I have to focus. In case it escaped your notice, there's one of us and four of them.

When my wolf falls silent, I continue my observation, trying to see him the way Briar—or any woman—would. He's attractive enough, I guess. The classical handsome you'd find on the front of a magazine, or in some Hollywood movie.

But she's beautiful, so of course, they would notice each other.

"Hmm," he murmurs. "I'd heard you were spotted with a certain red-headed witch."

His gaze invites me to tell him why a wolf would have anything to do with a witch. I raise my eyebrow. "No need to get bent out of shape. You can go back to your... whatever it is you have with her soon enough. I have no plans to stay."