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Liam's expression turns blank.

Carefully blank.

Something is going on between them.

My wolf rumbles again, but an even more enraged snarl from behind Liam drowns the sound out. I shift my gaze to Jonas, whose face is mottled red with fury as he takes a step toward me. "No alpha would fuck a witch. You dare disrespect the—"

Liam raises his hand. Jonas snaps his mouth shut.

"So you haven't killed her and you don't plan on it?" Liam murmurs in an expressionless tone. But he's hiding something from me. I know it. "Curious."

"What I'm here to do is—"

"No secret to anyone with a brain," Liam interrupts me as he straightens from the tree. I ready myself for his attack. "There's only one reason you'd come back. But Madden Grove is mine now."

He stalks to my right, toward the black BMW. "Despite what you did, I'm not unreasonable, nor am I lacking in mercy. No wolf deserves to have their entire pack wiped out the way you did yours, so I'm giving you a one-day pass."

It's a battle to hide my surprise because that's not the response I was expecting. The dark glower on Jonas's face makes it clear this decision is not one he agreed with, but a beta can only ever advise an alpha.

"My task will take longer than a day," I say.

Liam halts beside the door and peers over his shoulder. All amiability has vanished from his face as if it were never there, and his eyes are so hard that I know the next time I see him, we'll be fighting to the death.

“Then we have a problem. Given what Briar Fenix did to the Callas this morning, I’m doing you a favor—both of you, by giving you a chance to get out now. That pretty little thing has been marked for death. Diana... well, you don’t cross an elemental, and you certainly don’t piss off an elemental coven leader. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have rumors of a faulty gas leak to spread.” He turns away.

Jonas pulls open the passenger seat and Liam climbs inside before he closes the door behind him. As Jonas rounds the car to the driver's seat, he glares at me all the while.

The two other shifters slide into the backseat without a word.

“Pretty little thing,” I mutter as I watch the car disappear down the street. “Guess she’s not the only one having wet dreams.”

Once I’ve lost sight of the BMW, I head into the forest.

The witch’s scent—an unidentifiable herby scent which clings to all witches, and that always makes my lip curl, is easy to track.

I frown. Not all of them. Not Briar, who sometimes smells of wolf, sometimes faintly of witch, and sometimes of something sweet, alluring, and far too tempting.

I point my nose in the direction she took, and it leads me in a nice, easy path through the interior of the forest that wraps around Madden Grove.

The lush forests are a large part of why we wolves settled here—or why my great-great-grandparents did. In the hundreds of years since wolves made this place home, buildings and roads have gone up and been laid down, and the dense forests, full of ash and birch and fir trees, would make it a haven for any wolf to live here.

It’s why two wolf packs could exist side by side and not endlessly brawl for territory. There’s land enough for two packs, and mine and Liam’s fathers were, if not friends, then acquaintances clever enough to realize that the more wolves in Madden Grove, the less likely the witches were to take over the town and make it theirs.

So they put aside wolf territorial politics and agreed to, if not work together, refrain from killing each other.

Until a witch wiped out Dad and everyone I ever knew.

There was no way I could've joined Amos Wolfe's pack. It wasn't mine, and his violent attempt to stop me from hunting down the witch responsible made us enemies. I would have had no home in that pack, especially after what I did to Amos.

I stop.

The trilling birds and small creatures rummaging in the brush continue, but up ahead, I know it isn't just birds and squirrels in the forest.

Witch.

"I know you're there." My voice bounces off the surrounding trees, filling the forest with a new sound.

Silence.