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I nod. "Like killing my pack."

A scent, a feeling, or just plain instinct makes me step away from Briar and half-turn. Although I feel her curiosity, I take my time searching the forest, as I try to work out what put me on high alert.

Around me are trees, shrubs, and the ever-present chirping of birds in a picturesque forest. Ordinary sights, sounds, and scents that I'd expect to find anywhere. But something is here.

Something out of the ordinary.

But what?

"Tell me about this witch who lives in the woods," I murmur.

She shrugs. "I know nothing about her."

Lie.

I growl.

Her head jerks to me, and her eyes widen as I back her against the same tree, looming over her.

"I don't have time for this. We have an elemental after us today, and tomorrow, if we survive her, then it's a hundred-strong wolf pack. Tell me. Now."

For several seconds, she doesn't speak. Given what I've seen of Briar Fenix so far, I wait for tears, but I brace myself for another lash of power so potent it makes me feel like I've gone through a grinder.

"Sera told me that a witch called Abigail moved out of town several years ago," she says, her voice low, her gaze unwavering.

There's strength in her. I don't always see it, but it's there.

“Why?”

Briar shrugs. “No one knows for sure. But Sera guesses she had a falling-out with Layla. Apparently, she was a stronger witch and should have been coven leader, but Layla pushed her out.”

“How could she do that if this witch was more powerful?”

Her gaze dances away from me, and a hint of fear drifts from her. “Briar.”

She swallows hard. “Layla started rumors that Abigail was the one who killed your pack.”

For a moment, all I see is red. Just barely, I hold my wolf back. “And you didn’t think to tell me this before?”

“I didn’t know until now. Not until Sera told me.”

Truth.

“And did she?”

Briar shakes her head. “Sera doesn’t think so. She thought that Layla just wanted to turn the coven against Abigail so no one would want her to be the leader.”

“Why does it matter what the coven thinks? She was the strongest. She should have led.”

“It’s not like the wolves. If the coven doesn’t trust the leader, then the coven will never be as strong as it could be. Spells won’t be as potent, and the witches won’t add their personal spells to the coven’s grimoire.”

“So they won’t be united?”

She shakes her head. “No, and first and foremost, a coven is a sisterhood. A—”

“Pack?” I guess.

“Family. Or it should be. And if the coven thought Liam Wolfe would blame Abigail for killing your pack, he would blame the entire coven and go after everyone.”