

## 07 | Hide And Seek

### Recap:

"Explain to us," Andre says, leaning past me to lay his palm flat on the tabletop, "What that monstrous bastard wants with you."

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"Explain to you?" I repeat, raising an eyebrow. "You're the ones who watched it happen!"

"And you're the one who he took into my goddamn house," Alpha Andre retorts coolly.

"So I'll say it again," he stands up straight as if to add an intimidation factor, "What does he want with you?"

I realize that I don't want to tell them. This thing between me and that monstrous bastard—assuming it is what I think it is, is too personal to be ruined by Andre's opinion and Nathan's hatred.

So I play dumb instead.

"I don't know what he wants," I answer, adding an irritated tone to make it sound believable.

Andre hums as his eyes rake over me, from head to foot and back. Deciding whether to believe me or not. Whether to kill his prey or let it walk another day.

"That's his shirt," he observes, stroking his black and grey beard.

I notice his nostrils flare subtly, smelling.

"Did he make you wear it?"

I nod.

Half a minute passes by. Half a minute of Andre deep in silent thought and half a minute of Nathan and I in silent confusion.

Then, he speaks.

"You're the meat," he says.

"Come again?"

"He was watching the ceremony from the dark," he concludes, "He knows you're Nathan's chosen Luna. Taking his pack is one thing, but taking his Luna is a statement of further dominance. He's baiting Nathan to challenge him and you're the bait. The meat."

I blink, dumbfounded. His theory sounds... surprisingly reasonable? Probable even.

My stomach drops as I consider the possibility that he's right.

The feeling of stupidity heats my cheeks. Maybe I didn't know as much about this stranger as I thought. Maybe his ferocious desire to replace Nathan's scent with his own had a different motive than I thought. Maybe what I thought I felt for him was nothing at all.

Out of the corner of my eye, Nathan shifts in his seat. His jaw is clenched without a doubt, and I'd bet money that the vein in his neck is just waiting to make an appearance.

"So he's toying with me?" Nathan growls, balling his fists on the table top.

Alpha Andre pulls out the chair opposite of his son and slumps down in it, stretching his long legs out. He crosses his arms over his chest and heaves a sigh. Three prominent stress lines crease the old Alpha's forehead.

"Riot Sydney doesn't toy with people. He destroys them."

A forceful shiver jerks my entire body and my breath audibly hitches in my throat. My chest is like a drum locked in a room with metal walls, every beat being echoed right back to it. The effect that this name has is terrifying.

Riot Sydney repeat in my head. The Exiled Alpha. That's his name.

My eyes blur out of focus as I remember his face. His perfect jawline covered with just the right amount of stubble. Stubble that I haven't gotten to feel against my skin or in my palm. His sharply cut nose and strong cheekbones. Somehow, there's something about everything about him—right down to that minuscule scar that cuts off the tip of his right eyebrow—that Riot Sydney fits perfectly.

An aggravated growl demands my attention. When I look up, Nathan's fierce glare is settled on me.

"You're thinking of him now? Because you think he's gonna win this game?" Although they're formed in questions, his touchy words are identical to an accusation.

I raise an eyebrow, taken aback by the confidence in himself. But of course he would have confidence. Assholes always do. And with his pompous need to have confidence comes my profuse need to crush it.

A devilish grin starts to pull at the corners of my lips.

I blow air out of my nose in a laugh, "How could he not? He's already taken your pack. Now what's dominating it to him? Nothing."

There's the angry vein that I've been waiting on.

I anticipated Nathan's reaction; irritation so beside himself that he bites his tongue and clenches his fists like a red-faced child trying not to have a tantrum. But Andre's, I didn't anticipate. Andre's, I didn't even think possible. Not for this.

A quiet growl rumbles in his throat as he slowly comes to sit up straighter in his chair.

"Nathan," he growls, not looking nearly as relaxed as he had five seconds ago, "Take her back to the cell."

The color drains from my face. My stomach twists so violently that I want to puke. My hanging jaw is trembling. Spasming. Visibly shaking.

"She won't be of use to him down there."

I take a step back.

"Don't fucking touch me." My voice is weak. So weak and unsteady.

Nathan reaches out to grab my arm. "Adrienne—"

"NO!"

I jerk back, backing toward the door. I register that the side of my face is twitching, involuntarily.

"Adrienne—"

"Shut up."

"Don't make this difficult."

I reach behind me and fling the door open, rushing out so fast that I nearly trip over my own feet. When I turn back, he's in the doorway, making a hasty grab for my arm. The door is slammed shut, and in the same instance a scream tears from the other side of it.

I see the shiny nails of four fingers sticking out before I turn and bolt thoughtlessly into the brush of the forest.

I hope they rot and fall off. Asshole.

...

The snow from the previous day is mostly gone, only a light dusting left on the frozen ground. The trees, leafless and bare, still provide hiding places, not that I'm using them.

My claws click against the hard dirt and frozen carpet of dead leaves on the forest floor. My heartbeat pounds to a frantic rhythm in my chest and hot breath heaves from my mouth, warming the clothes between my jaws.

I can hear him nearly a mile back. He's also breathing heavily, claws scratching the dirt every now and then with a faltered, lazy step. And sometimes, when the wind blows from behind me, I think, just maybe, that it carries the smell of his bloodied, broken fingers with it.

I remember this game from when we were kids. I remember playing hide and seek with the Alpha's son before he turned into a bastard. I was always better at it, because I knew the land better; he'd try and every bush, memorized through every season. While he hardly left the village, I strived to get away from it.

But he never gave up then. And he won't give up now. Especially not now. Not when his daddy has given him an order.

My run slows to a jog, then to a walk, until eventually, I come to a stop and drop the clothes behind a mound of piled up brush. I sit for a handful of seconds behind the barrier of fallen limbs and sticks, catching my breath.

Taking in the deep and light browns of both the ground and the trees and brush surrounding me, I curse the sky for not having snowed the night before. Against this background, my cream colored fur is nothing but a white flag waving surrender.

I grit my teeth and bare the pain of my body shivering, exchanging fur for skin.

I all but get the dark jeans buttoned and the shirt pulled down before the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

He's near.

I suck in a sharp breath to shallow my breathing. But it's pointless.

An arm shoots from around the brush pile, it's hand grabbing the collar of my shirt. A gasp rips from my throat when I'm jerked sideways, pulled face to face with that piece of egotistical shit.

My hand wraps around his wrist, trying to crush it.

"Stop.. RUNNING!" He manages through heavy breaths. On instinct, I swing my free arm around, dragging my clawed fingers across his face with burning hatred.

If only it were his throat.

As soon as he expresses his pain—vocally, through a string of choice words—I break away and flee off into the woods once again.

If we keep on like this, maybe he'll bleed out first.

The frozen mud seems to bite at my feet, my boots having been abandoned at the beginning of the chase. It stings, no doubt the skin gradually being scraped off the bottoms.

I make a sharp turn and run a few more yards before picking a tree and feverishly climbing. Hiding is a long shot. I know that. But my folder of options is progressively getting thinner.

It's only when I drag myself up one last limb and lean my back against the trunk that I realize just how much fire is burning in my lungs and how shaky my hands are. I suck in air, breathe a deeper breath, hoping to cool the heat in my chest.

When I look down, a bright red in the corner of my eye catches my attention. On my collarbone, staining the brilliant white of Riot Sydney's t-shirt, is two drops of blood: one thumb sized and the other slightly smaller.

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**I feel like this chapter might be a bit boring but it was fun to write XD.**

**Do you think Andre's right about the tyrant using Adrienne as a statement against Nathan?**

**Thanks for reading!**

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