

Chapter 13

Lily

I woke up the next day with my stomach in a pile of knots. For a myriad of reasons: Today was the full moon, I was finally able to shift. That was enough to cause anxiety in itself. Then there was Hazel. She hadn't been happy about what I'd done, but I'd eventually calmed her enough to see the situation rationally. I hoped beyond hope I hadn't lost a friend. Letting out a huge yawn, I flopped back onto my pillow and pulled the covers over my head. I wasn't ready to get up yet... in fact I didn't even want to leave my room until I absolutely had to.

"I'll do all the work Lily. And our mate will be there to help us through the pain." Aya said in my head.

I cringed. Dimitri was the last person I wanted to see right now. Or maybe ever again. The way he'd handled Jennine last night in his office... part of me was admittedly super happy that he'd put her in her place. But an equally loud voice was telling me that it was way too easy for him to manhandle her the way he did. He seemed to have no qualms about being violent... a quality that I certainly did not find welcoming in any way. Obviously, I knew he was violent, but to his own pack members? No matter what they did...

"You're thinking too much into this." Aya clipped.

"Am I? I don't think so." I snorted.

"Obviously, words don't have much effect on the bitch. I bet he'd told her before to back off and she didn't. Maybe this was the only way to get her to listen?"

"It's still wrong Aya. You wouldn't be saying this if it had been me in her place last night."

For that, she had no response, because she knew I was right.

All night I'd been thinking about Dimitri and my first shift. Trying to find a way to get through it without him, without him knowing. I'd briefly thought about bringing Hazel with me, but I didn't want to put her through that. The first shift was gruesome, I didn't want to freak her out. I'd considered Clint too, but if Dimitri did happen to come around, he'd probably kill him. No, not probably. He would definitely kill him. So that only left one option; To do it by myself.

Dimitri could justify what he did a million different ways, but his behavior, seeing the beast inside, it had truly frightened me. Shift or no shift, I wanted to avoid him. Aya didn't agree with my plans, of course. She was pacing in my head, getting more and more edgy as time ticked by. Eventually, I got up and showered, dressed, did my hair. Distraction methods. Greta brought me lunch, a pork stew with a side of freshly cooked vegetables. It smelled so delicious I almost drooled but my stomach didn't feel like it could handle food.

"Don't worry about it dear." Greta said, seeing my facial expression. "It's normal not to be hungry before your first shift. Your body is preparing."

I stared at her. "How did you know-?"

She gave me a half smile. "I've raised four children, not including their friends who were always at our house. I've seen many, many first shifts. The signs are obvious, if you know what to look for."

I sighed. "I'm sorry Greta."

"For what?"

I waved my hand over the tray the food. "You shouldn't have gone to so much work."

"It was no work at all, or trouble sweetie. Tell you what, I'll leave it here in case you get hungry. I have to get back to the kitchens though. Good luck tonight!" And then she gave me a reassuring hug and bustled out the door. I glanced back at the food, my stomach coiling.

"I hate to waste it, but it might be a good idea to listen to our body. I'd hate even more for that to come back up later."

"Agreed." Aya said.

Sitting on the edge of my bed, I blew out a long breath. My legs were bouncing in an unsteady rhythm. I was getting more and more restless by the hour.

"Maybe-"

"No Aya."

"Lily, it's going to be so much worse without him."

"I don't care. I've gotten through so much without him. We have. We will get through this too."

"You are so stubborn Lily."

"And you aren't?"

"Can we at least go outside? I don't want to be in here anymore." She grumbled.

Fresh air sounded really good right now. So did walking. There was only so many times I could pace my room. Aya sighed in relief as I threw my shoes on and opened the door. For a couple seconds, I stood in the doorway, listening for any signs of Dimitri. His scent was faint, a few hours old. He hadn't been up here in a while, probably not since breakfast. Inhaling deeply, I noticed his scent, though old, was stronger now. More defined. It sent a tiny shiver through me and the image of him and I last night before Jennine interrupted flashed into my mind. What would it be like to kiss him? To have his hands on me?

I shook my head, hard. What the hell was I even thinking? I was trying to avoid the man for Goddess's sake!

"Our bond is getting stronger. After we shift tonight, it will almost be complete."

"Almost?" I asked.

"The bond will be at its strongest when we've been mated and marked."

Unfortunately, I didn't blanch the way I wanted to. The idea of Dimitri and I mating right now didn't seem so bad. Giving my head another shake, I stepped into the corridor, closing the door behind me.

"Not going to happen Aya."

"It has too eventually."

I didn't reply. She seemed cheered by the idea of being marked, and I would be too... under different circumstances. Right now, I was focused on getting to my destination-outside- without being seen by him. Keeping my head down, I flew down the stairs and through the front foyer. Once I was finally out, I felt a sense of huge relief. Like getting into a nice hot shower after working out.

"Let's go to the woods."

Nodding, I jumped down the stone steps, heading around the back of the house. I nodded politely to people I passed, saying a quick "hi." At the edge of the trees that lined the property, I glanced back over my shoulder, scanning the house, the workers. Nobody was paying attention to me, so I quietly slipped into the shadows of the forest. It was quiet. Peaceful. The only distinct sounds were the occasional chirping of the birds and crunching of leaves and twigs under my feet. I walked for hours, only paying attention when I noticed the sun beginning its descent behind the far mountains. I'd been feeling so much better, being out here, but anxiety shot through me as I watched the sun getting lower and lower.

Instinctively, I turned, heading back towards the packhouse. My feet seemed to have a mind of their own as they carried me back the way I'd come. Part of me wondered why I was going back, when the whole point was to find somewhere private to go through this. I didn't really know, so I just kept walking. By the time I stepped through the trees into a small clearing, one I'd passed hours earlier, it was dark with the full moon peaking above the tops of the trees. I stopped to catch my breath, staring at it. So many times, before, I'd looked up at the same moon, hearing the screams throughout the pack of those first shifters. It had always put me on edge knowing someday I would go through the same thing. The only thing that made me look forward to it, that made anyone look forward to it, was the joyous howls that followed.

I'd pictured more times than I could count what it would be like to finally be in my wolf form; the feeling of freedom, of strength. Things I did not have for so long in my life, things I craved. Even if I was convinced for a long time that I didn't have a wolf, I dreamed. Hard. I dreamt of shifting and leaving my abusers, my Hell. Of never having to go back. Maybe finding another pack, people who actually cared about me. Who would look after me. Of finding a mate who would love me.

A sole tear ran down my cheek as I stared at the moon. Maybe I'd gotten part of my wish. There were people here who cared about me. Greta, for sure. And then Hazel, and maybe even Clint. People I could call friends. My heart wobbled with the thought of my other wish, a mate who would love me. I didn't think Dimitri was capable of loving anyone. I sat on the ground, wiping my face. Thoughts swirled in my mind while I sat on the hard ground and stared at the hazy moon.

