

Chapter 22

Lily

I sat anxiously as Dimitri gathered his thoughts. Or pretended to. I could tell he was playing for time, not wanting to tell me whatever shitty news he had. Finally, he clasped his hands in front of him on the desk and looked straight into my eyes.

"James is gone. He escaped."

My breathing stopped. Did I hear him right?

"What?" I gasped.

"It looks like he had help..."

He started going into detail, but I didn't hear a word he said. All I could do was stare at him with my mouth agape, unblinking and frozen.

"Is this some kind of sick joke?" I asked. Dimitri stopped talking and raised an eyebrow.

"No."

Unbelievably, I laughed. My chest heaved with the effort of expelling the sound and tears came to my eyes. Dimitri looked worried, like I'd lost my mind.

"Are you fucking kidding me?! He was in the dungeon for what? Not even twelve hours? What kind of dungeon do you have where people can just get up and walk out?"

"This has never happened before--"

"That's hard to believe!"

"He killed four of my men-"

"Shocking!" I said sarcastically.

"Look, I'm using everything we have to locate him and bring him back and-"

"For what?! So he can escape again?! It didn't take very long the first time around!" I shouted.

"I have protocols to follow!" He snapped.

"He almost raped me! Do you not understand that?!"

"Yes, I do!" He yelled. His voice echoed off the surrounding walls, shaking the glass on the windows. "I know what he was going to do, and I'm grateful I got there before it happened! I never wanted that to happen Lily!" He slammed his hands on his desk, cracking the wood.

Tears sprang to my eyes, but not out of fear at his outburst. These were tears of anger, tears of hatred. Hatred for James. I stood and looked Dimitri in the eye.

"Find him. Because if he finds me first, I won't hesitate this time. I'll kill him." I told him coldly. I watched the color drain from his face as he took in my words. Without another word, I exited his office and made my way through the packhouse. I had a destination in mind, and I tried not to think too much as I walked there. When I arrived at the dungeons, I didn't hesitate, just walked through the door and up to a man I assumed to be a guard.

"Hi. I'm Lily, and I want to look around the cell that James was in." I said.

The man gave me a sour look. "Nobody goes in without permission from the Alpha. Run along now."

"I don't need permission from the Alpha, because I'm the Luna. I have the same level of clearance he does." I snapped.

His eyes widened as he looked me over. "My apologies Luna. I didn't realize-"

"I don't care. Just show me where I'm going."

Pulling out a ring with at least a dozen keys, he led me to a metal door. He scanned his fingerprint and a ding went off, the door sliding open.

"How the hell did he escape if this place is locked down with that kind of security?" I asked.

"We don't know. We think maybe a guard helped him? Other than us who work here, only the Gamma, Beta and Alpha can open to the doors."

My lips squeezed into a thin line as I considered his words. "Are any of the guards missing today?"

"Warriors are checking on that now Luna."

"Good."

We took a left and after opening a second door, descended a flight of stairs. The air was considerably colder down here, and the smell. Ugh! I followed the guard as I desperately tried not to gag. We passed a few prisoners as we walked, and the looks they gave me made me want to shrink into the nearest wall. It was obvious most of them were rogues, and a few had the audacity to call out lude comments to me.

"Pipe down! Or you'll not be getting any meals for a week!" Snarled the guard.

We continued on for several minutes more until we came to a dark, dank cell that was basically a hole in the wall with bars. Dimitri had said to put James in the smallest cell, and they weren't kidding.

"This is it."

"Aya?"

"On it."

I let my wolf come forward, sharpening my senses. It made the smell of the dungeon so much worse, but I'd live. Looking through Aya's eyes, I could see that the cell looked totally normal. Small, dirty, but normal. No bars were bent or broken. I caught a faint whiff of James scent, hours old. I walked a few feet away, but his scent didn't linger. It was secluded to his cell. How was that possible?

"Did you interrogate the other prisoners here?" I asked.

"No point. Not like any of them would tell us the truth."

"Did anyone see this prisoner escape last night?" I called down the corridor. Silence.

"He's right you know. They won't talk. "Aya said.

"Nobody saw anything? Really? Or are you pissed off that he didn't take you with him?" I called.

I walked to one of the cells and peered inside to see an older woman. Her clothes were torn and she was skin and bone. Her hair was matted and her skin was covered with dirt. Regardless, she met my gaze with cold blue eyes.

Kneeling down, I said, "Or maybe you're not talking because you think he's going to come back for you? Maybe he made you some sort of promise of freedom in exchange for your silence?"

The woman lunged for me through the bars and I quickly jumped back. She spit on the ground in front of me.

"Nobody saw nothing! Nobody promised us nothing! We saw the boy come in, kicking and screaming we did, and just like that, he was gone. Talking to himself 'till he up and vanished in the wind." She growled.

"That's not possible." I said.

"No Oliver 'till three. He was gone before then."

I looked at the guard.

"Oliver was on night duty. He checked on James as midnight, and he was still here. Next check, he was gone." He explained.

I turned back to the woman. "What was James talking about? You said he was talking to himself, what did he say?"

"Nothing important, nope."

"It might be, so tell me."

She started pacing the cell, scratching her arms. "Luna this, Luna that. Mad, mad, mad he was. At Luna. At Alpha. Shouldn't have taken his time, he said, yup." She nodded to herself and cringed. "Olly gave him wolfsbane. Screaming, lots of screaming. Then crying. Luna this, Luna that. Gideon. Alpha would pay." She finished.

"Wait, Gideon? Who is Gideon?" I asked her.

She shrugged. "Don't know, don't care. Next time Olly come down, boy was gone and I had to shit."

Lovely. Trying not to make a face, I stepped towards her cell.

"What's your name?"

She stopped pacing and looked at me, the same cold look from earlier.

"Margie."

"Well, thank you Margie. You might have really helped me." I said sincerely.

She blinked at me, but didn't reply. I took that as my cue to leave, and I did as fast I could. The smell was really getting to me; I'd definitely have to change my clothes. On our way up out of the cells, we ran into Ben and another man.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" Ben asked.

"Getting information." I said.

"But... that's my job." He said slowly.

"Well, look at this way. Now you don't have to go down there and deal with the smell."

"Thank Goddess for that." He muttered as he fell into step with me. "Did you find anything?"

I relayed everything Margie had told me, and what I'd found of James cell.

"Hmm. So, she says he just disappeared? Just like that?" Ben asked.

"Apparently."

"Who is Gideon?"

"You're asking me? I don't have any idea, Ben. I'm just telling you what she told me." I huffed.

"Okay okay calm down. I'll look into it."

"And you're sure that nothing in there was touched?" The other man asked me. I shook my head.

"It was still locked."

His brow furrowed and he looked away.

"This is Luke by the way. He's the Gamma." Ben said.

"Oh. Nice to meet you, Gamma."

"Just Luke. Sorry, I have to go." He said quickly and then he was running out of sight. Okay.

"Sorry. Seems like he thought of something though. He always does that shit when he has an idea. Probably going to the library." Ben explained. He shook his head before turning to me. "I take it you're feeling better today, since your here playing detective."

"I'm not playing anything Ben. It's been less than twenty-four hours, and that disgraceful excuse for a wolf somehow escaped and is more than likely plotting someway to hurt me or my mate. I wanted answers, and I wanted them sooner rather later."

Ben held his hands up as if in surrender. "Alright, sorry. You're pissed I know. I heard."

I gave him a questioning look.

"I uh, heard about your 'talk' with Dimitri this morning."

"Oh."

He pursed his lips, clearly debating on whether to continue.

"Just spit it out Ben." I said.

"Alright. You could have given him a break, you know. As soon as he heard what happened, he was the first one here, the first one to question the guards. And he went out personally and looked for James himself. He went all night looking for the little shit, he just got back before he went to find you at breakfast. You didn't need to be so hard on him."

His scolding took me off guard. It was the first time I'd heard someone defend Dimitri in such a way, probably ever.

"He didn't tell me that." I said.

"You didn't give him a chance to." Ben sighed. "Look, Dimitri is my best friend. I know he's rough around the edges, and he's an asshole. I know he hasn't treated you right since you've been here, but the guy is... well, he has shit he's working through too. Stuff you don't know about."

"Like what?"

"Not for me to say. He's your mate, not me. He'll tell you when he's ready, but you both need to stop fighting each other. Give him a chance, an honest chance."

I bit my lip. "I don't know Ben."

He groaned loudly. "Goddess, why are you both so stubborn?! You really are perfect for each other."

Punching him in the arm, I said "Shut up."

"Just think about it Lily. Okay? He's not a bad guy. He's just...lost."

That was close to what Celeste had said. It threw my argument off, leaving me stumped for a reply.

"I have other things to think about right now Ben."

"I hate to say this, but it's unlikely we'll find James soon. And it would be a lot easier to do all our jobs without our Luna and Alpha constantly being at each other's throats."

"So, my love life affects your ability to do your job?"

"Yes! Yes, it does!"

I laughed which earned me a glare. "Go away and let me work. Brat."

"Okay Benji." I snickered.

"Go!"