

Chapter 26

Lily

I was nervous as fuck. Juggling my water bottle between my hands, I waited for Dimitri to join me in the training yard. I'm not proud to admit it, but I took more time this morning picking out an outfit and fixing my hair than I ever did. I'd settled on a high ponytail and a green sports bra and black leggings. I felt way too exposed, but I couldn't train in a t-shirt and jeans, could I? I'd been waiting twenty minutes, glancing in the direction of the packhouse every few seconds. I had no idea what training with Dimitri was going to be like, but I was positive it would be much different than training with Clint.

"Hey."

A loud, echoing scream left my lips and I spun around. Dimitri held up his hands and took a step back.

"Calm down, it's me!"

My hand was placed over my chest, my heart beating rapidly.

"Where the fuck did you come from?!"

He pointed to the forest on the other side of the yard.

"Why?!" I gasped.

"Huh?"

"You were supposed to come from there!" I pointed towards the packhouse.

A look of amusement crossed his face. "I go for a run every morning. It's not a big deal."

"You scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry." He smirked. "Ready to start?"

My heartbeat picked up double time.

"Uh, sure?"

"You don't sound sure."

I rolled my eyes. "Just start."

"Fine. Fifty laps to start, let's go."

He took off towards the track and I followed. He seemed impressed as we ran, probably because he knew I could barely walk the stairs when I first came here.

"That was good." He said when we finished. I gave him a thumbs up as I chugged my water. Wiping my mouth I asked, "What's next?"

"Sparing."

My jaw dropped. "With you?"

"Yes. What did you think we'd be doing?"

"But... I can't spar with you!"

"Why not?"

I waved my hand up and down his body, giving him a "Duh" look.

"You can't spar with me because I'm...hot?"

My cheeks flushed and I gave him a dirty look. He returned it with an innocent one.

"No jackass. I can't because you're going to kill me. I thought you were going to teach me how to fight, well... not by fighting you!"

"How else are you going to learn?"

"Dimitri, you're at least a hundred and fifty pounds of muscle heavier than I am. I won't be standing after one hit. How am I going to learn anything if I end up in the hospital?" I demanded.

His expression softened. "I would never hurt you like that, Lily."

"But you told Clint-"

"I know. I won't go easy on you, but you don't need to be afraid either. I won't hurt you."

I searched his eyes, looking for any hint that he was lying. He seemed sincere though, which eased some of my worry.

"Okay?" He said.

"Okay."

"Come on."

He led me to one of the mats laid out on the yard and ran me through the basics. Most of it I'd already learned, though he did give me some pointers on my stance and positioning. When he took the side opposite me, I gulped. You couldn't even blame me; he was a very intimidating opponent. Taking a fighting stance, I nodded at him. The next thing I knew, I was on my back on the ground, my breath whooshing out at the impact. What the hell?

"Whoa." I croaked.

"Sorry. You good?"

I took his offered hand, ignoring the sparks. Once my breathing regulated, I groaned.

"Yup. I quit." I sighed.

"Quitting will get you nowhere." Dimitri replied.

"Say that when you have to fight you."

He chuckled, the sound foreign to my ears. Had he ever laughed with me before?

"You just need to focus. You're tense, nervous. You have advantages, you just need to know how to utilize them."

"The only advantage I have is being a huge wolf. Shifting isn't always possible."

"That's not the only thing you have going for you. You're a small human."

He said that like it was a good thing. "How is that an advantage?" I asked.

"There's a warrior here, Karla. She stands around four foot nothing. You know why she's one of my best?"

I shook my head.

"Because nobody can get their hands on her. I've seen that woman duck under grown men's legs."

"Huh. I didn't know you had female warriors."

"I don't have a lot, but the ones I do have more than earned their place in the ranks."

"Can I train with them?" I asked eagerly.

He rubbed his chin, thinking it over. "I'll ask Karla to join us a few times a week. But your main partner is going to be me. Now, get ready."

I groaned again, but got in position. This time, I managed to dodge his first attack, but he had me pinned a minute later. We kept at it until I begged for a water break. Every part of me was sore, and I deeply regretted not taking a firmer stand against this idea of his.

"You're doing really good." Aya cheered for me.

"You're not the one out here."

"No, but I think I have an idea that might help. Well, it was Ajax's idea."

"Do tell."

"Are you forgetting we're a werewolf?"

I frowned, confused. How could I forget that? It was the only reason I'd been able to make it this long against Dimitri. Finally, what she was saying clicked, and I grinned.

"Tell Ajax I owe him one."

"Breaks over!" Dimitri called.

Setting my water down, I joined him on the mat. While he took his position, I focused on my wolf, letting her come forward. My senses sharpened, my muscles tightening. I waited and focused on Dimitri, analyzing his moves. His left foot cocked backwards, and my instincts told me he was getting ready to charge. A second later, I twisted out of his way, sending my elbow into his side. I sent a sharp kick to the back of his knee, satisfied when his leg buckled.

He was up in no time, grabbing for my arm. Twisting it behind me, he tried to lock me in a choke hold. I ducked at the last second, aiming a kick to his stomach which he blocked. Using his grasp on my arm, I yanked him towards me, catching him off guard and causing him to lose his grip. Sidestepping, I twisted my body behind his, readying a punch. Just blocking it, he brought my arms to my sides, holding them there. We were both breathing hard, bodies flushed against one another. Dimitri gazed at me with admiration, surprise, and something I couldn't identify.

"That was excellent Lily!" Aya yipped.

"Where the hell did that come from?" Dimitri asked at the same time.

I shrugged. "You told me to focus. Aya helped me focus."

"You used your wolf?"

"Is that not allowed?"

His hands slid down my arms, coming to rest lightly behind my back. "No, it's great. It helps a lot actually. Clears the mind, helps you see things more clearly. Great job."

I smiled hugely. When he returned it, my heart burst into sprint. It was the first time he'd smiled at me without any hint of sarcasm or underlying anger. He was gorgeous.

Forcing myself to stop staring at him like an idiot, I asked, "Are we done for today?"

He didn't answer, forcing me to meet his eyes again.

"Dimitri?"

"Yeah. Yeah, we're done for today." He let me go, taking a few steps away.

"Alright. I'm uh, going to shower."

His eyes darkened and returned to normal so quickly, I was almost sure I'd imagined it.

"I'll find Karla, see if she can be here tomorrow."

"Great."

Why did all our conversations end so awkwardly? Giving him a wave, I turned and started walking home. I was all sorts of riled up, and I thought it had a lot to do with the amount of physical contact between Dimitri and I today. The sparks from our bond were very distracting at times. Still, I think I preferred training with him; I learned a lot, not that Clint wasn't a good teacher, but Dimitri was better. At least thanks to Clint, I hadn't started from scratch today. I'd have to thank him for that later.

All in all, I was proud of myself. I focused on that feeling, instead of the way it felt to have his arms around me. I liked it more than I was willing to admit, even to myself. For a second, I was sure he wanted to kiss me.

The look in his eyes... would he, if I hadn't said anything? Did I want him to? And, more importantly, was I ready for that?

I looked over my shoulder, only to catch him staring at me intently. I blushed and looked away. Shoving my troubled thoughts aside, I focused on getting inside to a much-needed hot shower.