

## Chapter 29

Dimitri

I'd been patrolling the borders, examining the areas that were lacking in security, when Luke had mind linked me. At first, I wondered why this my problem; people rejected each other every day. It was when he started giving me a play-by-play of what was happening with Lily and the others that I paid attention. She handled it perfectly, and admittedly, skillfully. Myself, I would have simply stuck to demoting Connor-He was only in the ranks because of his father anyway. The man badgered me forever until I finally accepted Connor as a warrior. Generally, he was lazy and unnecessarily smug, not a very valuable asset. Lily's punishment was something I knew he would without a doubt hate.

I was proud of her. Turns out she could be quite wicked, when she wanted to be. I could feel that my Gamma was proud of her too, and I was glad he approved of her so wholeheartedly. Ben too, in fact. It seemed she had a knack for drawing people to her, gaining their respect and love. She was going to make a great Luna for this pack; She already was.

"She reminds me of your mom."

"Oh, man. Gross."

"Not like that dummy! The way she puts the pack first. And her kindness. She's a good person at heart, just like your mom was."

"Yeah, I can see that."

"Speaking of, when are you thinking of holding the ceremony?"

"Soon. Probably this week, I've put it off too long."

"Other shit has been going on."

"Exactly. So, the sooner, the better."

My phone buzzed in my pocket, alerting me to a text. I glanced at it, thinking. I should get Lily a phone. True, we hardly used them, since mostly everyone preferred to mind-link. I only had one as a way to contact Alphas outside of the pack if I wasn't in the office. Still, I should have thought about getting one for earlier. With that line of thinking, I wondered for the first time if there was anything else she needed. I'd made sure she had the necessities, but didn't girls like to go shopping? Did Lily? Were there things she needed or wanted that I hadn't thought of before? Like make-up or some shit like that?

"Aww, look who's starting to care about others!" Ajax cooed.

"Do I... should I ask her? Or maybe talk to Thara?"

"Hmm... I'd talk to your sister first. She spends more time with her, she might know what Lily needs."

I checked the time- Thara wouldn't be done work for hours still.

"Hey, you busy?" I mind-linked her.

"I have a minute. What's up?"

"Can you meet me later? I want to talk to you about something."

"Sure. I should be done by six. Meet at the fountain?"

"Sounds good."

"See you later bro."

I spent the next hour surveying the area, taking notes on areas that needed updating. When I was done, I stripped and shifted. There was a stack of paperwork sitting on my desk at home that I wasn't looking forward to, but that was the job. If I did it right, I could cut that stack in half before I had to meet my sister. Shifting at the edge of the trees, I dressed and made

my way inside. My enhanced hearing caught snippets of conversations in the packhouse; Mostly snide remarks about Connor and pity for his ex-mate. But a lot of it was praise for Lily. I smiled, carrying that smile all the way to my office.

Going through paperwork didn't even seem as tedious as it normally was today. I signed off on some permits to build new homes, went through a whole pile of submitted complaints. Half an hour before I had to leave, Ben popped in, envelope in hand.

"Whatever it is, just put it with the others." I said.

"I think you'll want to read this one, actually." He set it in front of me. Curiosity got the better of me, but when I opened it, I groaned loudly.

"Already?! Didn't I just attend this stupid thing?"

It was the annual invite to the Alphas Ball. I loathed those functions; Always I would have to contend with she-wolves throwing themselves at me, sometimes literally.

"You have to go. You know that." Ben took the chair opposite me, propping his feet on my desk.

"A whole night of dealing with arrogant Alphas pushing their daughters in my direction, and dealing with bitchy, entitled Lunas. I can't wait." I rolled my eyes.

"Remember Tina?" Ben chuckled.

A shudder ran through me as I vividly recounted the hawklike Luna of the Night Desert Pack. She'd spent a full hour bragging about her daughter, only to introduce me to a girl half my age. As politely as one could manage, I tried to explain I wasn't looking to end up in jail, and she'd thrown wine in my face. The woman was off her rocker.

"Can't you just attend for me this year?"

"It'll be different this time. You have a Luna now."

That brought me up short. Would Lily want to go with me? If she didn't, did that mean I still had to go?

"I know what you're thinking, and the answer is yes." Ben said.

"Damn it all." I groaned again.

"Hey, where are you?" Thara mind-linked me. Shit, it was quarter past six.

"I've got to go, I'm meeting Thara. Don't RSVP yet, not until I know of Lily will go with me." I told Ben as I left the office. I caught his look of surprise on the way out, but ignored it.

"I'm on my way; I was in a meeting with Ben."

The fountain we met up at was a short walk from the hospital. Patients liked to take walks in the garden surrounding it, or sit and read on one of the benches around it. It was one of our mothers' favorite places to go, though I never understood why. Still, it meant something to me for that reason alone, and I often visited when I missed my parents.

When I arrived, Thara was sitting on the bench nearest the rose bushes, still dressed in her work clothes.

"Hey."

"Finally. I'm tired you know."

"Sorry."

I sat next to her, taking in the bags under her eyes and her unwashed hair.

"You look like shit." I commented and she punched my arm.

"Shut it."

"You, okay?"

"I just haven't been sleeping well lately. I never do, around this time." She gazed towards the fountain and sadness pierced my heart. The anniversary of our parent's death was coming up, something neither of us liked to think

about, but couldn't avoid. Every year we went together to their graves and laid flowers, telling them about our lives. I hadn't had much to say the last few years, or nothing I thought they'd be proud of me for anyways.

"Anyways, you wanted to talk?" She changed the subject, and I was grateful.

"Yeah. Uhm, it's about Lily."

Thara narrowed her eyes at me. "What about her?"

"Well, you two spend time together, and I was thinking today, she probably needs some stuff, right? Like girl stuff?"

"Girl stuff?"

"Whatever it is you buy when you go shopping."

She raised an eyebrow at me.

"What?" I asked.

"Are you talking about tampons?"

"What?! No! I meant like underwear or make-up." I defended.

Thara burst into laughter. I didn't get the joke.

"Sorry bro, when you said 'girl stuff'... well, that's girl code for tampons or pads."

"Can you please stop saying that?"

She chuckled. "Typical male."

"So, can you take her shopping? And get her a phone too?"

"I would have thought you'd be the one to do that."

"Why would I want to spend all day looking at girls' clothes and shit? I thought you loved shopping."

She gave me a look that I didn't understand.

"Dimitri, Lily has never been shopping."

I stared at her. "Ever?"

"Ever. I couldn't tell you what the girl needs because she doesn't know. She's never owned anything like that before, she was never allowed to go shopping." Thara explained.

I sat back, taking in her words. Truly, I hadn't thought about Lily's life before coming here in the last few weeks. Mostly because she was doing so much better. She never brought it up, and I never asked. The memory of what she looked like before she shifted played in my mind, resurfacing old anger.

"She told you this?" I asked.

Thara nodded. "She's been more open lately. There are things she absolutely refuses to talk about, and she won't give details about anything, but from what I've learned from working with her is that she didn't have much of a life outside of cleaning or cooking. No toys, no vacations, no privileges. I bought her a chocolate bar two weeks ago, and I swear she turned into a five-year-old eating candy for the first time. After I finally got her to accept it, that is."

A new sadness pinged in my heart, this time for my mate. Hadn't she been at Snow Moon since she was a kid? How could she never have experienced playing with toys, or eating a chocolate bar? How cruel was that pack?

"You promised you'd look into this, when she first came here. Have you?" My sister demanded now. I shook my head and her face fell.

"I'm sorry. I will, I promise. I've had a lot on my mind. And well, I guess I didn't think about it. She's... better."

"She looks better. Mentally, I'm still not sure. There are days I catch her in her own world, looking miserable. I've asked, but like I said, she doesn't

talk about it." Looking sideways at me, she continued, "Talking to her mate might be helpful though."

"If she doesn't talk to you, why would she talk to me?"

Thara shrugged. "Maybe she will, or maybe she won't. But you're her mate. You're supposed to be there for her."

"You never know until you try. And lately, it seems like you might want to try."

I gave her a sharp look, and she gave it right back to me.

"I'm not dumb Dimitri. You're much less of the asshole you were before. You're even sort of nice to people now. And twice I've caught you smiling for no reason at meals. So, stop being a pussy, and for once, maybe try to go after the thing that's making you happy."

"You know me too fucking well. It's annoying." I grumbled.

She laughed and mussed my hair. "You're my brother, and I love you. And I love Lily. I want you both to be happy."

Together we sat and looked out at the gardens and fountain, lost in our own thoughts. Something inside me told me that I was getting ready to move on, to let go of my anger at my past. And part of me really hoped I had my mate waiting on the other side of that journey.