

Chapter 25

Kyson

Damian stands by my office window, his gaze lost in whatever he's watching outside. His chuckle catches my ear, and I glance up, curious but trying not to show it because I know that will give them an excuse to try to pull me away from work.

I keep my focus on the maps spread across my desk, tracing the patterns of the recent attacks along the river. The river isn't deep enough for boats, just canoes, maybe. Each body found is a taunt, marked with a hunter's or rebel's patch, a gruesome display designed to provoke. No scents, no clues, nothing - it's like chasing ghosts.

Yet they were always laid out and on display like they wanted them found and were merely taunting us.

The location they were always found was never near enough to any packs to pinpoint one, and they were nowhere near any

human settlements, so it was a mystery, as always. One that had been doing my head in for years.

The main perpetrator of the werewolf rebellion that was helping the hunters was proven dead. Marissa, Ivy's mother, has been dead for years, so who is leading them now?

It makes no sense to me. It was also the reason after my sister's death, no werewolves could set foot in my castle grounds except Alpha Kade, and of course, Abbie and Ivy, who were the first werewolf servants we had in over a decade. Werewolves couldn't be trusted, and everyone was scrutinized before ever entering through my castle gates.

But the laughter from Gannon and Damian is a distraction I can't ignore for long. "They wanna run now. That old woman has a good arm on her." Gannon's amusement pulls me from the frustrating puzzle I've been trying to solve for decades.

I glance up from examining the dots on the map. I'm looking for some sort of pattern to see Gannon and Damian watching out the window. Both of them hold silly grins of amusement.

"Oh, that had to have hurt," Damian snickers.

“What are you both staring at?” I ask, and Gannon turns slightly to look over his shoulder at me.

“Apple war,” he laughs.

My eyebrows raise, and he turns back to the window before snorting at whatever he is watching. Intrigued, I finally give in, leaving my desk and walking around it, standing and joining them at the window. Below, in the gardens, a chaotic scene unfolds. Clarice, Abbie, Ivy, Dustin, and Peter, are engaged in an impromptu apple war. The sight is absurd yet somehow endearing. Peter, the mischievous kid who once pelted Damian with horseshit, now ducks and weaves, dodging the girls lobbing apples at him.

I remember the day the little shit threw horseshit at Damian, and man, did he go off. Damian had thrown him into the small lake by the stables that day. The kid was always up to no good, but he was a breath of fresh air around the typical somber mood.

I watch, unable to suppress a smile, as Ivy attempts a throw, her apple flying wide off the mark. Dustin, quick to retaliate, hits her squarely on the head with his own projectile. The look of mock horror on his face when she rubs the spot is priceless. She charges at him in a moment of daring foolishness, only to slip and tumble, both of them landing in a heap.

Their antics, so carefree and light-hearted, are a stark contrast to the weight of the world outside these castle walls. I can't shake a twinge of envy as she lands on top of him after Dustin slips on an apple in his haste to escape her a second time.

The nervous glances I receive from Gannon and Damian as they continue to wrestle each other are not missed like they expected me to blow up over them messing around, but I know Dustin is no threat to me or her.

Peter rushes to help Dustin as Ivy manages to get him to the ground, only for Peter to be smashed with an apple by Clarice, who triumphantly fist pumps afterward.

I see Ivy laugh, climbing off Dustin before leaning down and smearing her hand over his face before she ducks off. Suddenly, thunder cracks across the sky, echoing my inner turmoil. The sky darkens and I watch Ivy, jealousy coursing through me. The laughter and shouts below fade as the group gazes skyward, sensing the impending downpour.

Then, Abbie slumps her shoulders, and Peter follows suit. Ivy wipes her clothes off as she makes her way back to the laundry door, stopping beside Dustin and offering him a hand up.

He takes it, and she pulls him to his feet before he bows to her. Ivy shakes her head and waves goodbye to Peter. Abbie skips back over to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and pressing her head against Ivy's shoulder as they walk inside together, arm in arm.

"They seem to be having a good time," I murmur with a nod before trudging back to my bar and grabbing a glass. I pour some whiskey in it and scull it then pour another glass. After the third glass, I realize no matter how much I drink, it won't subdue the jealousy coursing through me at seeing her play around with the guard.

"I wonder if Abbie has told Ivy she is leaving this afternoon," Gannon says, and I look over at him from where he is sitting in the armchair at my desk.

"Well, she will know tomorrow when she wakes up, and Abbie isn't here anymore," I tell him with a shrug.

"You should have said no," Gannon growls.

"He is her mate, and she asked to go with him. I won't deny her wishes if that is what she wants," I tell him. We warned Abbie

and she wouldn't listen, believing whatever lies Alpha Kade fed her. Sometimes you just have to let people make mistakes. Plus, I can't risk tension with Alpha Kade now. I need him and his pack's support to get to the bottom of this rogue business.

"He doesn't deserve her," Gannon growls, glaring at my desk, and I sigh.

"She will see reason," Damian tells him, gripping his shoulder.

"By then, it will probably be too late," Gannon snarls.

"If not, and she wants to come back, you gave her your number. She also has the king's and mine so she can get a hold of Ivy if she wants to come back."

"We will go get her," I finish for him, and Gannon sighs but nods.

"What if he hurts her?" Gannon asks, looking tortured at the thought.

"She is his mate; he can't hurt her without hurting himself," Damian assures him, but that wasn't true; she-wolves are

always at a disadvantage when it comes to men, especially Alpha men, though we didn't admit that in front of Gannon but he is fully aware.

“There are other ways to destroy someone; you don't have to physically hurt them to break them,” Gannon says, and I furrow my brows at his words.