

Chapter 14

KYSON

Damian opens his mouth, no doubt to tell me I need to keep my head but I cut him off, not wanting to hear it.

"Don't. I am fine," I tell him. I gulp down the last of my glass before trading my glass for the entire bottle. I haven't seen or heard a word of the rebels in years, yet I know they're out there. Why now? They are primarily werewolves, unhappy that Lycans still have control. There have been rumors that they've received help from human hunters over the years. This is one source of fear for Lycans, as they know the rebels have been gathering strength and resources, preparing to strike again. Plus, with the added support of humans and their technology, they have become a much bigger threat than before.

"Fourteen years since the fall of the Landeena Kingdom, and they have come back. So close to the anniversary too," I tell him angrily, swigging from the bottle.

"Yes, and it's been five years since the..." Damian doesn't finish.

I don't need the reminder that it's the fifth anniversary of my sister's death—of when they came for my Kingdom, the same day as the Landeenas fell, but five years after the fall of their kingdom. They took everything from me... they took her from me. We had already lost my parents, leaving only the two of us, but they robbed me of her too.

The Landeena kingdom was the closest to ours. King Garret and Queen Tatiana were aware of the threats and watched the other bloodlines get taken down. The other three Royal families were eradicated years before, leaving only the Landeenas and ours.

We were sure both our kingdoms would be attacked next. We believed it was an inside job, too. The King and Queen hadn't left their castle or been seen for four years before their murders. They thought keeping a low profile might stop them from being targeted. The only correspondence with them was by mail or phone until we got a call saying their kingdom had fallen.

The rebels constantly attacked on significant days, and it was the anniversary of the Landeenas' murder when they struck again. They had died almost exactly five years earlier. However, my sister insisted I leave, that we no longer had to worry because nothing had happened in the five years since their deaths.

That morning, I had a bad feeling, I knew something was amiss. But I ignored that stirring worry in my stomach and left to visit Dark Creek Pack about the rogue sightings. They'd been losing their supply trucks, so the meeting was over. That day has haunted me ever since. Just as it

does now. The memory invades my mind vivid and as real as the day it happened.

"Why haven't you left?" Claire, my sister, had demanded when she came down to the kitchen wearing her floral robe. It was much too long for her. We were constantly scolding her for wearing it while pregnant, worried that she would trip over. It was my mother's and she favored that over everything else, but my mother was a good two feet taller than her.

"I will reschedule it," I told her, returning to my coffee and opening my newspaper.

"You've been putting it off the last three weeks, Kye," she scolded me. When I didn't answer, she walked over, snatching my newspaper. I growled at her, but she tossed it in the bin and walked back to fix her coffee. I often caught her down here in the early morning sneaking a mug.

"Have you forgotten what today is?" I asked her.

"No, I haven't, and I'll be fine. You worry too much," Claire told me. "Besides it's been five years, if they were planning to return they would have by now." She shrugged.

"We don't know that for sure," I told her.

"Well, no. But we can't keep putting our lives on hold, chasing ghosts, Kye. You are King, you have responsibilities, and they don't involve babysitting me. Now get up!" she snapped. I remained silent until she snatched the newspaper from the bin and hit me with it.

"Up now!" she commanded.

"Don't make me get your mate," I smirked at her, causing her to pout, a hint of my sister coming through.

"Does he know you're down here sneaking coffee?" I ask, and she glares at me when the maids wander into the kitchen to get ready for the day. She watches them move to the pantry, drumming her fingers on her mug, pursing her lips. Clarice wanders into the kitchen and pecks her cheek.

"Morning dear," Clarice told her. Claire smiled at her before wandering off to give the servants orders.

"Come with me then," I asked her. Claire shook her head.

"No, I have some things to take care of today. But go!" She gave me a pointed look as she walked toward where I sat. Sighing, I stood up. "Fine," I told her, pressing my lips to her forehead.

"Behave!" I mocked and she smiled.

"I will. I'm having my sneaky coffee, probably finish the last of yours off too," she laughed, eyeing my half-drunk mug.

"Then back to bed for a few hours."

"How can you drink coffee and be tired?" I shook my head at her.

"I was born tired," she mocked. I smiled before walking out the door and meeting my driver.

I shake the memory away before it sucks me in too deep. When the rebels made their move, she couldn't even fight back or shift to protect herself and her unborn child. Her husband was dead beside her.

I will never forgive myself for leaving that day.

One of our servants, a spy, waited for me to leave before plunging the silver dagger into my sister and her mate's chests while they slept. I found them the following day when I returned.

The servant, Marissa, turned rogue and vanished, never having to pay for what she had done. She had worked her way into the castle two years prior until she was conveniently placed in my sister's quarters. Then she murdered her in cold blood, nearly destroying me in the process.

"We will catch those responsible for your sister's death," Damian assures me.

The liquor reduces my searing anger to a simmer as it burns through my system. I try to forget; nothing good comes from dragging the past to the present.

"Now, how is your mate?" Damian asks, changing the subject.

"We don't know if she is," I tell him, and he raises an eyebrow at me. "Well, we don't know, not for sure anyway."

"Are you trying to convince yourself or me that she isn't your mate? You have never shown so much interest in any other woman. But her? I have seen how you look at her; I know she is your mate. And I have seen your reaction to her. Almost like you are about to jump out of your skin and mate with her on the spot," Damian states.

I roll my eyes at my Beta; the man is too observant for his own good.

"I know you, Kyson, so where is she?" he asks with a smirk plastered on his face, and I groan.

"In the room across from me," I tell him, my lips tugging up. Fuck. He's right. It is the only thing that explains the strange pull toward her.

"And you say she is not your mate, yet you have her sleeping in your quarters. Not even Ester could stay up here, hmm?"

"Fine, let's say she is. We don't have any info on her. She is a common werewolf and—"

"And you are the King. No one will say shit to you about her being a werewolf and not a Lycan. You could always change her anyway. If she is your mate, and I know she is, she is now in danger. The rebels are back, and if they find out she is your mate, Ivy will have a target on her back," Damian tells me.

"So, what are you saying? Spit it out," I tell him.

"I'm saying keep her close. She needs the training to protect herself. Ivy needs you near to help forge the bond quicker. She may not know who you are to her. But the more time you spend with her, the stronger the bond will solidify to ensure she survives you changing her. It will also strengthen you; Lycans aren't supposed to go without their mates once found. You know this, Kyson."

"Yeah, I know. She's across the hall, yet even that feels too far away," I tell him, and he laughs softly.

"Don't say it," I warn him, admitting what is right in front of me. Ivy is my mate. I just don't want to believe it. Knowing she will become my weakness and share the same knife hanging above my head, knowing

it will now be above hers as well, frightens me. They will come for her to reach me if she is, in fact, my mate.

"I won't say a word. Gannon figured it out, but I told him to keep it to himself."

"Yes, keep it that way. I want her to find out on her own."

"Gannon and I have canceled all your appointments this week and next. You have the next two weeks off. None of us are comfortable knowing the rebels and hunters are back, and we want to ensure your - and potentially our queen's - safety. We don't advise you to leave the castle, my King."

"Keep my local appointments. They can visit the castle instead. I will go crazy not working; I always need a distraction this time of the year," I tell him.

"You have just the right distraction in the room across from you, but as you wish. We can't afford risks; early morning meetings and that is it, my King. Advisors agree, the risk is too high for you to be out and about."

"Yes, and I also don't want to leave her alone," I admit.

Damian smiles but adds nothing to my obsession with my mate. "I will have a guard stationed on this floor at all times and one on Ivy when you aren't with her," Damian explains, and I nod.

"I want her watched at all times. All times, Damian. I won't risk her getting hurt."

"As you wish, my King."