

Chapter 42

KYSON

Waking the following day, I tuck Azalea's makeshift den around her. She had built it in her sleep, growling at me when I moved out of it. I always secretly loved seeing female Lycan nests. As dangerous as a nesting Lycan can be, I like the possessive nature behind it. I love how they never lose that primal instinct over time and after changes in tradition.

It is built in their DNA, just like our calling is in us men. Azalea burrows underneath the blanket she had shredded, feathers covering every inch of the bed as she disappears beneath it. Grabbing some shorts, I mosey to the door to see Damian standing guard, wide awake and looking alert.

"My King," he nods.

"Watch her for me," I ask him, and he nods. I head for the stairs before stopping.

“Don’t enter. Azalea is—”

“Nesting. I heard her shredding the bed earlier. Also heard you try to save your pillow from her. It woke me,” Damian laughs, and I tug my lips in the corners.

“When I return, you can go off duty. I won’t be leaving her side,” I tell him, and I turn for the stairs again when Damian speaks.

“Dustin, My King?”

I stop, a growl slipping out of me as I turn to face him.

“He wants to return his post,” Damian continues.

“Trey has it handled?” I say, but I am now a little uneasy about Trey.

“About that. I have removed him from her guard.” I furrow my brows, and I turn to him.

“Very well,” I answer.

“You agree?” he asks, shocked. Yet, ever since Liam said something last night, it has bothered me.

“Dustin doesn’t trust him, and despite what he did, I know he wouldn’t have done it to put her in harm’s way. Liam said something last night, too, so keep a close eye on him,” I tell Damian.

“Certainly, and Dustin?”

“He can return to his post, but—”

“I will tell him to keep his distance. You are doing the right thing, My King,” Damian says.

“He’s her friend,” I answer.

“And yours, My King. He is yours, too,” Damian says. I nod, heading downstairs toward the kitchen. I am starving, and I don’t want to bother Clarice, so I figure I will make my and Azalea’s breakfast. Or is it lunch? I have completely lost track of time. Only when I enter the kitchen, I stop and sniff the air. Rogues.

I stare at the two boys sitting on the counter with a bowl between them. They are licking an eggbeater each, and both of them freeze when I step into the kitchen. Clarice is nowhere to be found, and neither are any of the chefs, so I assume it is between shifts.

“Hello?” I tell them, walking into the room and glancing around. How did they get in here, and where did they come from? They both stare at me like stunned rabbits. The oldest of the two tucks the younger boy

closer like he can protect him from me. I watch them for a second. The youngest looks like he is only three or four years old. I can tell by their faintly similar scents they must be siblings.

“What are your names?” I ask. The oldest boy answers, while the youngest cowers away from me. I check my aura, making sure it hasn’t slipped out, but I give them no reason to fear me. I look them over, noticing how skinny they are and the bruises that line their arms. Where did they come from?

“I’m Logan. My brother’s name is Oliver,” the oldest boy answers. He goes to jump off the counter, but I shake my head, and he remains where he is.

The little boy stares up at me as I approach him. I can tell they are scared, their little hearts beating rapidly like a hummingbird’s wings in a gust of wind.

“What are you making?” I ask them, peering into their bowl. It looks like a cake mixture.

The youngest boy scoops some out with his finger, holding it out to me. His brother nudges him nervously, but I think it is cute to offer.

“Want some,” he whispers, and I smile, grabbing his little hand and licking his finger.

“And that is Clarice’s famous mud cake. You two must be special if Clarice is making cake,” I tell them before scooping some batter out with my finger and eating it. They giggle, the sound warming, considering how frail they both look.

The youngest boy, Oliver, turns on the counter and grabs a wooden spoon, offering it to me. I take it, watching as they both use a teaspoon and their egg beaters to scrape the sides, and I join them. I want to ask questions but don’t want to scare them. When the back door to the laundry swings open, the boys jump off the counter and hide behind me as Clarice walks in with a washing basket.

“Now, you boys didn’t eat all my batter, did you?” she asks, turning around and spotting me with the wooden spoon in my hand. I quickly hide it behind my back. Her mouth falls open, and she glances around for the two boys currently hiding behind me. Oliver sticks his head out, and relief floods her features before her face turns stern, and she places her basket on the counter and folds her arms across her chest.

“Boys, why are you hiding behind the king?” she scolds before spotting her empty mixture bowl. She clicks her tongue.

“Did you eat my batter?” she asks, and I glance down at them. Her lips tug in the corners, and the boys step out from behind me. Logan, the cheeky little thing, points at me.

“He helped,” Logan snitches.

“Is that so, My King?” Clarice asks.

“I was merely helping by making sure it didn’t go to waste,” I tell her, and she chuckles, turning her attention to the boys.

“Well, you best get me more ingredients, boys. I can’t make a cake without a batter,” she tells them, and they scurry off toward the pantry. Logan stops at the door to the enormous pantry and peeks back at me.

“Are you really the king?” he asks.

“I am,” I tell him, and his eyes widen before he rushes inside after his brother.

“You are teaching them bad manners,” Clarice scolds me.

“To be fair, they had eaten your batter before I came in and helped,” I tell her, and she laughs.

“So, are you going to make me ask, or are you going to tell me where they came from?”

“Gannon and Liam dropped them to me here; now I know I have a full schedule, but they are no-fuss. I can still do my tasks. And I will keep them in line...” Clarice gushes, and I touch her shoulder, stopping her.

“You can keep them, Clarice,” I tell her, knowing her too well. She loves kids, and I will never turn away a child. Clarice lets out a breath.

“Thank you, Kyson,” she murmurs. “They really are good little boys, timid but sweet.” Her eyes sparkle as they rush back out with flour and cocoa in their arms.

“Will you help?” Oliver asks, and Clarice goes to excuse me, but I shake my head.

“Of course,” I tell him, scooping up the boy. He is almost weightless, and I look at Clarice, who ruffles his curly locks and smiles sadly.

“Where?” I ask her.

“Where do you think?” she asks, and I nod. Looking at Logan, I notice a few lash marks on his shoulder where his shirt slipped down a bit.

“Gannon took care of it,” Clarice answers.

“Yes, I know he would have, but someone needs to take care of that Alpha,” I tell her, and she nods once.

“I will see to it,” I tell her while turning my attention to the angelic little boy in my arms. Someone definitely needs to take care of that Alpha.

“And I will have you moved into one of the bigger guest quarters to accommodate the boys, too,” I tell her.

“Thank you, Kyson,” she says, smiling at the boys who are excitedly waiting for her to make more batter.