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## Chapter 200: Who's Lying Now?

\*\*Ethan's POV

I saw Behar was at the front of the incoming wolves and Madalynn ran straight toward him. She must have told them that we'd got reinforcements, so they'd sent theirs in, too.

A group of Behar's wolves started to move in our direction, and we were outnumbered again.

Rosalie was after Madalynn, and I knew I needed to stop her right away.

"Rosalie, come back!" I shouted again, and tried to persuade her not to run into the enemies' ambush. "Madalynn was lucky this time, but they'd be back! We'll get them next time!"

That time, she seemed to finally hear my words and she turned around to look at me.

Her eyes fell on me, and I could tell she was staring at my ugly wounds all over my upper body. Her gaze was gentle, and I could tell she was worried.

Was she worried about me, or worried about her son's father?

I covered myself with some clothes so that she wouldn't need to see those wounds. I hated how it felt. I hated that I was weak.

It should be my job to protect her, but here she was, fighting in my stead.

She walked over and gently bumped me with her front right shoulder. It was time for us to return before Behar and his guys caught up to us. However, I wasn't able to shift.

Rosalie's concerned wolf eyes focused on my face to see if I was okay.

"Don't worry, Rosalie," I said. "You're not going to be rid of me just yet. I'm just tired."

'Get on one of your wolves' back,' Georgia said to me through the mindlink. 'Unless you want Rosalie to give you a ride.'

Not arguing with my little sister, whose tone conveyed that she was angry with me at the moment, I climbed onto the back of one of my men, while Georgia hopped on Rosalie's.

The way back to camp was easy as our enemy also knew that it wasn't their best time to attack either.

Without the immediate crisis chasing us, I couldn't help but admire how gorgeous Rosalie was. She was smaller than many shewolves, but so fast. And her brilliant white fur gleamed in the fading sun. Even though her fur was stained slightly by blood and dirt, I still couldn't find other words to describe her other than pure and innocent and beautiful.

However, bitterness spread within me.

After yesterday's conversation about Soren, she seemed to avoid me as much as possible. Though I didn't blame her for what she said, it didn't mean that it didn't hurt.

I wished it was me who went to the islands to execute the tasks instead of Soren. That way, hopefully she wouldn't see me as much of a monster.

And now, today, I'd fallen into the enemy's trap so stupidly, and she'd had to rush over to rescue me!

I didn't want to know what she was thinking about me right then-probably that I was just an arrogant, heartless, stupid, and weak \*sshole... I sighed bitterly.

We approached the camp, and I thought I should say something to her. I wanted to be with her, even if it was under the guise of just being friends.

But as we got close, a swarm of people came rushing at her. She had her responsibilities and priorities, and I knew I wasn't either of them.

She turned and looked over her shoulder at me, as if asking whether I would be okay. I couldn't bring myself to be a burden and I gave her a reassuring smile. "I'll be fine, don't worry. Go do your thing."

She hesitated for a moment then headed back to her tent. I figured she would shift and get changed there.

Georgia went in another direction and we followed. Before I knew it, the wolf I was riding had deposited me at the tent reserved for healing.

"I'm fine!" I told her as I swung my leg down off of the warrior's back.

"Let them check you out!" Georgia said, narrowing her eyes at me.

Knowing now was not the time to argue with her and have her screaming at me, I went inside and took a cot, waiting for the healers to have a chance to come and look at me. They were all busy elsewhere, which was fine. I didn't need anything but a few minutes of rest.

Seeing that I was just waiting, Georgia's eyes narrowed as she stopped next to my cot, her arms folded. "What the actual h\*ll, Ethan?"

I glared at her. "What are you talking about?"

"I cannot believe you are that stupid!" she barked. "Did you really think Rosalie could allow herself to get taken prisoner by f\*cking Madalynn? And did it not occur to you that, if that b\*tch in the cage had been Rosalie, you would've felt the mate bond to her?"

I wasn't in the mood to argue. In fact, I was just as upset as myself. Not because I'd chased after the imposter, but because I had almost put Rosalie in danger.

I didn't say anything. Just then, one of the healers came over to check me out.

Georgia and I were both silent while the doctor patched up my cuts and gave me some pain medicine that I didn't really want. I took it anyway before I returned my attention to my sister.

"Ethan, please tell me you actually thought it through?" Georgia's tone calmed down a bit.

I stared at her and slowly shook my head. "I wasn't going to take the chance, Georgia."

She waited patiently for me to say the rest. "I'd lost her way too many times in the past, and... I couldn't afford to lose her ever again. If there was even a one percent chance that Rosalie needed rescuing, I'd go after her. With my luck, you never know when the mate bond might fail you or other conditions could overshadow it."

My sister stared at me. It was actually quite uncomfortable. Finally, she sighed. "Well, you sure are lucky that she came to rescue your \*ss, or Madalynn and Behar probably would've killed you!"

I didn't know what to say.

She shook her head at me. "I'm... dumbfounded," she said, and I chuckled. Her eyes narrowed even more. "i\*\*\*t," she muttered.

I couldn't argue with that at the moment.

Georgia glared a bit longer before she was so fed up that she headed out of the tent.

I took a deep breath and considered taking a nap. I was exhausted. The wounds weren't as bad as they appeared. I'd bled, but for some reason, I did notice I was healing faster than before, but my insides felt like a giant jigsaw puzzle someone was straining to put back into the right order, and they weren't nearly finished yet.

A moment later, my mate bond kicked in, and I smelled the fragrance that always filled my lungs when Rosalie was nearby. It brought a smile to my face. It was truly a blessing to just know she was around.

I wondered what she was busy with now.

But when she appeared in the opening of the tent, I felt my heart tighten. Was she here for me?

Then, she saw me. A smile came to her lips. She rushed between the doctors and around the cots. "There you are," she said, stopping next to my cot. She was wearing a clean dress, her hair pulled back away from her elegant neck. She was stunning.

She was like sunshine. As long as she was willing to talk to me, all I could feel was warmth, happiness, and content.

"Here I am," I said, lifting both hands to present myself.

"Georgia said your wounds would need my attention right away. Here, drink this." She handed me a cup of water as she looked me over. I knew she had mixed her blood in.

After staring at her for a couple seconds, I peeled my gaze away and looked down at the cup in my hand. It was obvious that Georgia told such a white lie in order to get her stupid brother an opportunity to be with Rosalie.

However, was I really worth it? I hurt Rosalie deeply before...and now, I didn't even have the strength to protect her any more.

"I was feeling lightheaded before." Realizing that I'd been silent for too long, I knew I had to say something. "But I'm better now, I think."

"Oh, good," she said. "I was worried."

I knew I probably shouldn't stare at her, however, the concern in her voice made me so hopeful that I couldn't help but look at her again.

Rosalie placed a hand over her heart. I saw her beautiful bright eyes, and I saw the sincere care in them.

Sincere care for a friend.

Both of us avoided yesterday's conversation and my stupid act today. I should feel grateful that we'd moved past those and could interact like friends again.

However, why couldn't I be content?

"About me?" I wanted to hear her soft lips say that it was me that she was worried about.

Rosalie's cheeks turned a soft pink color as she looked down at the floor. "Well, you just never know." She cleared her throat and looked back up at me. "Do you mind if I check you over?"

Though the doctor had done a thorough job, who was I to refuse the queen?

"Please, go ahead," I told her.

She came over to me, slowly, cautiously, and like the way she would do to others that might need her help. As she leaned over me, checking my cuts and abrasions, I did my best to stay back out of her way, but whenever her hair brushed against my cheek, I couldn't help but breathe her in.

Thoughts of leaning over and kissing her neck came to mind.... I held back.

"I think you're okay," she said, looking into my eyes. "You scared me for a minute."

"Sorry," I told her. That blush was still about her cheeks. I licked my lips.

She reached down and patted my hand. "I think you'll recover," she said with a teasing smile. But then, her hand froze on top of mine, and her expression changed. Her eyebrows knit together, and her mouth turned down at the corners.

She dropped her eyes and saw the ring on my hand beneath her own as she pulled it away.

My ring. I had managed to recover it today. It was the same one I'd given to Madalynn—just to shut her up.

But Talon told me there'd been pictures of Madalynn wearing it, and Rosalie must've seen them at some point, because the look on her face told me that the ring brought back bad memories for her.

I wanted to say something to comfort her, but I wasn't sure what to say. Some hurts are harder to take away than others, and with all of the lies and deceit from our past circling around in her mind, what could possibly come out of my mouth to ease her troubles?

"I, uh, need to go check on supplies," she said, her hands folded in front of her now. "There are other wounded who need to be taken care of. I heard that we took some prisoners hostage, too. Someone will need to check on them soon."

"It sounds like you're really busy." I nodded understandably, letting her off the hook. "You should go do that stuff. Do you need me to do anything?"

"Oh, uh, no," she started backing toward the door. "I'm good. You rest. Yeah, I'll just... go check on Rowan. See you—later."

"See you soon," I said, wondering if she'd misunderstood me when I provided her with the opportunity to leave. Did she think I was saying I wanted her to leave?

Because that wasn't the case at all.

Yet, looking down at the ring on my finger, I knew we couldn't avoid the unhappy moments from our past forever. Sooner or later, we would have to face them.

However, now wasn't the time.

For now, it was probably best this way.

Until I tried to figure out the right opportunity to tell her that I'd lied to her—again, at the Goddess's temple.

And that lie just might be the most painful one of all.