

Chapter 33

Jasper

I was in the training yard doing my best to focus on Alpha Dimitri and what he was telling me. Yet, my mind kept slipping back to the last two days with Violet. The challenge had been postponed for obvious reasons. Alpha Warrick wasn't happy, but I was sure his big problem was the reason for the delay. I'd briefly met his mate, Luna Anne. She was a bitter woman with a pinched face that always resembled someone who'd just sucked a lemon. I'd bet ten to one that he hadn't gotten any in a while.

I was exhausted, but happy. Vie hadn't let me rest for more than a couple hours at a time. I wasn't complaining though; The last couple days were the best of my life. I saw a whole new side of my girl, and I liked it. A lot. It wasn't just the sex either. She'd been so vulnerable, but bold too. If she needed water, I got it. If she wanted a cool shower, I sat in with her and washed her head to toe. And when she needed me, I was there to satisfy her. It made me feel needed, important, in ways I never had been before. It brought us closer.

Yet, I'd held off on marking her. That was something I didn't want to do while she was in heat. I wanted her to have a clear head, not driven by uncontrollable lust, when we marked each other. I thought maybe she was a little disappointed, but she said she agreed.

"Focus Jasper!"

My arm came up, almost a second too late, blocking Alpha Dimitris fist. I took a few steps back, holding up my hand.

"Sorry Alpha."

"Your head isn't where it should be." He frowned.

"I know."

He sighed. "I'm not going to even ask where your mind is, because I think I know. But you need to focus on this, not on.... that. You can't be daydreaming tonight."

"Sorry," I apologized again. "I think Alpha Warrick did this on purpose. He knew I'd be tired today."

He shifted uncomfortably, but nodded. "Probably. But I couldn't argue; Violet's heat is over. There was no valid reason to postpone any longer. Unfortunately, being tired isn't a good enough excuse." He clicked his tongue, thinking. "I think we've done enough for today. Why don't you go back to the house and try to get a few hours of sleep? That's probably the best thing right now."

I stretched my arms. "Sleep sounds good. Thank you, Alpha."

"Just Dimitri. We're family now, so we can drop the formalities."

I raised an eyebrow but didn't argue.

"Alright... Dimitri." I felt uncomfortable not using his title. Like I was disrespecting him. It would definitely take some getting use to.

We walked back to the packhouse together, the wind blowing wildly around us. A storm seemed to be on the way, though I had no idea when it would hit. The air was thicker today, humid.

"Are you nervous?" Dimitri suddenly asked.

I shrugged. "I think I'd be a fool not to be. This isn't a regular fight, after all."

"No, it's definitely not." He stopped walking, turning so we were face to face. "Have you ever seen a challenge before?"

I shook my head.

"They are rough. I need you to understand that. Your opponent won't go easy on you. And this is much different than fighting rogues. He will be looking to kill you." He met my eye. "No matter what Jasper, don't let him win. Not just for my daughter's sake, but for the sake and future of Silver Moon. Warrick has no business holding the title of Alpha. Regardless, he will do anything and everything to hold onto his position. Be wary, and be careful. But don't forget that I, as well as everyone else, believes in you. Should you win tonight, I believe you will make a great Alpha, someone I would be lucky to have as an ally."

My face grew red with emotion. This man was treating me like an equal already, but I didn't feel like I'd done much to deserve that. So far, my only claim to this family was the fact that I was mated to his daughter. But I'd also been the cause of much discord among them, to the point that Garrett used magic to heal and move on. And he was saying he believed in me? That I'd be a great Alpha? I wasn't as positive on that as he was, but I would spend a lifetime trying my best if I got the chance.

"Thank you." I managed in response. "That means a lot."

Dimitri patted my shoulder. "However, if you hurt my daughter by dying, I'll wait the rest of my life and then kick your ass in the afterlife."

I laughed at that. "Understood."

"Good. You go on, I have some things to do. I'll see you tonight."

We went our separate ways, me dragging my feet back to the house. It was eleven in the morning, but Violet was still sleeping when I got back to our room. Typically, it took another full day for she-wolves to completely recover from their first heat. Quietly, I slid under the covers next to her, admiring her peaceful expression. My eyelids drooped as her scent wafted around me, and I was asleep within minutes.

"Jasper. Wake up."

My eyes opened. The first thing I saw was Violet's face, no longer asleep, but hovering above me. She peered down at me with a strange expression. I forced myself to sit up, rubbing my eyes.

"What time is it?" I drawled out sleepily.

"Almost seven."

The remaining sleep in my brain fizzed away at her words. Our eyes met and I could almost feel the tension rolling off of her. Once again, she was worrying her lip with her teeth, while her whole body was fidgeting. I had exactly one hour before the fight started.

"I need to go." I said quietly.

"I know."

Neither of us moved. The words I wasn't sure if she was ready to hear sprang to my lips, but I held back. Although, what if this was the last time I ever saw her? Emotions crashed down on me; What had I been thinking, challenging Alpha Warrick? How could I chance losing Violet? No, she should know how I felt.

"I lo-"

She interrupted my declaration with a heartfelt kiss. The force of it took my breath away; I could feel the tears on her cheeks as they transferred to mine.

"Don't." She whispered. "Not now. When you come back, I want to hear it. Okay?"

I nodded mutely. Another reason to survive this. Vie gave me a small smile and another passionate kiss before she moved off the bed.

"Dad told you I have to stay here?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, but you know it's what's best."

"I know. I'll be down in the cafeteria."

"Okay."

Quicker than I would have liked, I got dressed in a tank top and loose-fitting shorts. I opted to remain barefoot, and I was ready. Vie was waiting by the door, and together, we left the room. It was silent between us as we walked down the hall and descended the ladder. Only when she started to part ways did I stop her, this time pulling her in for a breathless kiss.

"I will be back." I promised her.

"Go kick some ass." She smiled and I chuckled. Just then, Gamma Luke appeared, eyeing her meaningfully. "I'm coming." She told him.

We finally parted. The Alpha, Luna and Beta Ben met me outside the front door, and together we started making our way. I didn't feel at all as ready as I should. Too much was staked on this match; An entire packs wellbeing for one. And Violets wellbeing, if I didn't live.

"How do you feel?" Dimitri asked.

"Uh... Scared." I admitted.

He frowned. "You can't let him intimidate you so easily already."

I shook my head. "I'm not scared of him. I'm scared of what this will cost me if I lose. The damage my death will cause."

Dimitris face relaxed back into a neutral expression. "Ah. Then you are in a good frame of mind."

I stared at him, dumbfounded. "Excuse me?"

"You have legitimate reasons that will aid in you succeeding." Beta Ben spoke up. "You're scared of what you might lose, what will happen if you do. Warrick is only afraid of losing his title, his wealth, and position. You have something honest to fight for."

"Just think of everything you just said. All those people, including my daughter. That's who you're fighting for, not just yourself. Keep reminding yourself of that." Luna Lily said.

I nodded thoughtfully. They were right. I had people waiting for me, even if they didn't know me yet. People who were depending on me to free them from Warrick's brutal Alpha ship.

We walked right across the training yard, heading to the forest. I would have preferred this fight take place in the training yard like so many other events; It was familiar ground for me. I knew every bump, every blade of grass. I'd been training there since I was eight years old, even though I hadn't technically been allowed to. After school, I would sit on the sidelines and watch the sessions, following along at my own speed. Until the head warrior, Ned, allowed me to train alongside the others, conditionally. I wasn't allowed to spar until I was thirteen. And that had been my routine for years, until I was old enough to train properly like everyone else.

Tonight however, the fight would be taking place in a more traditional setting, for werewolves anyway. As we neared our destination, the trees started to thin, and voices could be heard. They ran together, a low hum on the wind. About thirty feet ahead, I could see lights. My stomach started to twist, and sweat gathered on the back of my neck. I took a few deep breaths to try and calm myself, reminding myself why I was here again.

We stepped through the thicket. I was momentarily distracted by the view, my eyes wandering to take it all in. Torches had been placed in a large, wide circle, giving off more than enough light for everyone. And there was a lot of people. Obviously, the entire pack couldn't be here, but it sure looked like they tried. I scanned the crowd, recognizing some people from school. There were even people sitting in the trees, not able to find a spot on the ground. I received a lot of smiles and shouts for victory as I

followed my escorts. The sounds of genuine support for me warmed me a little inside.

Looking ahead, I saw a low tent had been placed at the head of the circle. Inside sat Alpha Warrick, his Luna, and his son. I stared at the boy, a little shocked that he and I looked so much alike, given that we had different mothers. Aside from that, the only vibe I got from him was nervousness, and I felt a small pang that he might lose his dad tonight. On the other hand, Luna Anne looked the same as always. Totally uncaring. Though when our eyes met, she shot me a smug smirk.

"Stand beside Ben, there." Luna Lily pointed and I dutifully walked to my place and waited. She took one of the seats inside the tent, while Dimitri stepped forward, addressing the crowd.

"Welcome, Blood Moon." His voice rang out, silencing the distinct chatter. "We are here for the official challenge between Alpha Warrick of Silver Moon, and Jasper Cole of Blood Moon. Elders?"

Three men I hadn't noticed before separated from the crowd, walking up to us. Each of them looked to be in their late fifties, or early sixties, and each one had an air of authority around them. They stopped in front of the Alpha, bowing their heads slightly.

"By whom was the challenge made?" One of them asked.

Beta Ben nudged me, and I cleared my throat. "Me." I said.

"State your name."

"Jasper Cole."

"In front of the Goddess herself, do you swear this is a fair challenge, an honorable challenge, and have taken no part in anything that would aid you other than your skill, your mind, and your heart?"

"I swear."

"To whom is this challenge made for?"

Alpha Warrick stepped forward. "For me."

"State your name."

"Alpha Bryan Eugene Warrick."

"In front of the Goddess herself, do you swear this is a fair challenge, an honorable challenge, and have taken no part in anything that would aid you other than your skill, your mind, and your heart?"

"I swear."

"In front of your Alpha, your Luna and peers, and above all our Goddess, state why this challenge was made."

The seeming oldest Elder looked at me, and I fumbled for a second. Because Warrick was an asshole and a tyrant probably wouldn't go over well with them. Beta Ben nudged me again, and I shook my head slightly to clear it.

"I am the son of Alpha Warrick. By law, I have the right to challenge him for the title of Alpha. I believe he is no longer a suitable fit for that role."

I could see Warrick's jaw clench, but he had to abide by the same rules I did. He couldn't lash out in front of the Elders, even if he wanted to.

"Alpha Warrick of Silver Moon, you accept?"

"Yes."

All three bowed their heads again. "Let the challenge commence, and may the Goddess bless you both." With that, the three men walked off to the side, re-joining the crowd. Warrick gave his son a pat on the head, but barely glanced at his Luna. It was then that I noticed an actual circle had been painted on the dirt in blue. The ring.

"You coming boy?"

Alpha Warrick was already standing on the other side of the circle, a mocking smile on his face. Discarding my shirt, I stepped forward as well.