

Chapter 34

Jasper

I took my spot across from Warrick, regarding him with careful eyes. Dimitris voice sounded behind me.

"The rules agreed by both parties are as follows! There will be no weapons. There will be no yielding. There will be no third-party interference. There will be no attacks on spectators. Shifting is permitted. And lastly, there will be only clean kills; No mutilation of any kind will be accepted as a victory. Begin!"

Warrick cracked his neck, the smugness never leaving his face. I had to admit, I was impressed by him. The man had a lot of muscle, and he was well toned. He was a big guy; But that only meant he would fall harder. We started circling each other, and the crowd was buzzing with anticipation. I tuned it out, totally focused on the man opposite me. I looked for anything I could use, any weaknesses. He had a long scar that ran from his left knee down to his ankle. An old battle wound?

"Not brave enough to make the first move boy?" My eyes snapped up to meet his. "What happened to all your confidence?"

"Sometimes too much confidence can lead to making stupid mistakes." I replied.

"And sometimes, it's called knowing what you're doing."

Suddenly, he lunged for me. I blocked his punch, sending a sharp right hook to his jaw. The impact had him flying back several feet, though he remained on his feet. Rubbing his jaw, Warrick eyed me with renewed interest, and a new anger.

"Not bad at all. But just because you landed the first hit, doesn't mean you'll be walking away from this."

He struck again, this time coming from the left. I dodged neatly, going on the defensive. Maybe it was a stupid plan, but it was my best shot right now. I had no idea what his fighting style was, but the more he attacked, the more I learned. It was becoming easier to tell where he would move, what he would do. And the more I picked up, the less I had to try. Meanwhile, Warrick was tiring himself out, exactly as I had hoped.

"His leg isn't as strong as the other. He's leaning more to the right." Ehno said.

"That's his weak point." I agreed.

I caught Warrick's wrist, twisting his arm. He cried out in anger, jerking back. I countered by pulling him closer, landing a solid kick just under his left knee. And down he went.

"You old fool! What are you doing!" Luna Anne screeched from the sidelines.

And that's when I made a terrible mistake. Taking my eyes off Warrick for just a second to glance at his screaming mate.

"Look out!" Ehno's voice shouted in my head, but it was too late.

Pain ripped through my torso and I gasped. I let go of him to clutch my side; It was wet, and warm. Blood ran down, pooling in my hands and dripping onto the dirt. I jumped back, nearly losing my footing. Warrick's claws were out, fury reigning on his face.

"Left!"

Acting on instinct, I rolled to the left, very narrowly avoiding another attack. He was back on his feet, and I was on my knees. It was at that moment that the realization of the situation struck me. Part of me had been hoping that if I could best him, get him down long enough, he would yield.

But I knew now that wasn't going to happen. He was out for blood, aiming for the kill. And he would kill me without hesitation, without mercy. I'd been thinking like the boy he thought I was. But no more.

Warrick charged at me; I rolled again, this time landing on my feet. Channeling my wolf, I felt my own claws extend. I ducked around his assault, swiping my hand across his chest. Blood spurted immediately, though I knew I hadn't gone as deep as I wanted to. His foot connected with my chest, and I landed in a pile, the breath totally knocked out of me.

"Shit! Get up, we have to get up!"

"Oh no." Warrick stood above me, his foot pressed down on my chest. A wicked smile played on his face. He was breathing raggedly, while I was still having trouble breathing at all. "Stay down. If you give up right now, I might even make this a quick death."

"F-Fuck...you." I spat.

"You put up a good fight Jasper. I'm even a little proud, if I'm being honest. But this is where it ends."

His foot moved to my neck, pressing down and cutting off the little air I was getting anyway. I tried desperately to move it, to wiggle free, anything. But the position was against me.

"Ehno! Ehno, we have to shift!"

My bones started snapping, and Warrick frowned at me.

"Really? I'm an Alpha! Do you really want to take on my wolf?"

I glared at him as my face transformed. "You're not the only Alpha in this ring." I growled.

I gave control to my wolf, and then I was on four paws instead of two feet. Thankfully, my shifting had worked in throwing Warrick off. By the time I looked back at him, he had also shifted. It was obvious who was bigger; I stood at least two heads above him, easy. A loud, vicious snarl ripped

out of me, and a lot of the crowd started backing away. I knew I had to be careful now; He might be smaller, but that only meant he had better access to go for the neck. We paced in a circle, snapping at each other, until he lunged, jumping at the still open wound on my side. I dodged, turning to grab his flank.

Blood filled my mouth as I tore a chunk of flesh away, throwing it to the ground. He yelped, jumping away, and I saw my opportunity. I ran at him, running my claws down his face. At the same time, I sunk my teeth into the fur on his neck, shaking harshly. Warrick's yelps and whines echoed through the air, until, I let him go, throwing him across the dirt. He lay, bleeding and panting, his eyes on me and filled with fear.

"No! Get up! Get up! You idiot, you stupid fucking idiot!" Luna Anne was frantic.

I walked over, standing above the man that was my father. Without hesitating, I grabbed him by the neck again, biting through fur and skin as hard as I could. He went limp, and I dropped him. Blood started to pool, his body reverting back to human.

Warrick was dead.

There was a moment of total, absolute silence. And then cheers erupted from the crowd. I turned to see everyone clapping, shouting, grinning. I caught sight of my parents; Mom was crying, the relief almost tangible even from where I was standing. Luna Lily walked to me, smiling hugely, and holding a pair of shorts. I shifted back, grateful that she brought extra clothes.

"The victory goes to Jasper Cole of Blood Moon!" Alpha Dimitri announced, and the cheers grew again.

"Come on. Let's get you cleaned up." Luna Lily took my arm.

"No!"

I looked up to see Luna Anne storming over to us, dragging her son.

"The challenge is over Luna Anne." Luna Lily said.

"Maybe for my mate!" She tossed the boy in front of us. He landed on his knees, and he looked terrified.

"What is this?" Dimitri demanded.

"He-" She pointed to her son, "-Is challenging him next!"

"What?!" I exclaimed.

"This boy isn't even old enough to rightfully take part in an official challenge!" Luna Lily yelled.

"That doesn't matter. He has Alpha blood, and as Luna, I have the right to offer him up as a challenger."

"Are you insane?!" I demanded. "I'm not fighting a kid!"

"You don't have a choice!" She spat back.

I looked down at the boy, my half-brother. He was shaking on the ground, looking between the three of us. Big, fat tears were running down his cheeks.

"P-please! I don't want to die!" He begged.

"Where are the Elders? This is legal, just ask them!" Luna Anne looked around for the three Elders, who unwillingly stepped forward.

"Unfortunately, the Luna is correct."

"The boy has been offered to fight, so he must as an Alpha heir." Another frowned.

"That's ridiculous! He doesn't even a wolf!" Luna Lily screamed at them.

"It is the law."

Luna Anne smiled viciously, but I felt like throwing up. There had to be a way out of this. No way was I going to lay a hand on that kid.

"If you refuse to fight, you yield your victory, and it goes to my son."

I glared at her, sickened she was using her own son this way. Was this her idea alone? Or had Warrick and her planned this together, in the event of him losing? It didn't really matter in the end, it was wrong. I wracked my brain, trying to come up with an answer.

"This 'law' of yours opposes my pack law of harming children." Alpha Dimitri told the Elders.

"The boy is not from your pack."

"Why does that matter?! He's on my land!"

"How can you do this?" I asked Luna Anne. "You know he will die. Why present him as a challenger? Do you not care about him at all?"

She shrugged. "My son has a duty to his pack. He knows that."

I looked down at him again, my guts twisting. Around us, the pack was shouting their disapproval along with insults at Luna Anne. And suddenly, thankfully, I thought I had the answer, the solution to this horrible scenario.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"K-Kiren." He whimpered. I crouched down to his level, hoping my expression was reassuring.

"You're not going to fight today, Kiren." I told him.

"So, you're conceding your victory then?" Luna Anne asked.

"No." I held out my hand. Hesitantly, Kiren took it and I pulled him to his feet. "He's going to renounce his claim as Alpha heir."

"What! Of course he's not!"

"Would he have to fight if he did this?" I looked at the Elders, who wore varying expressions of relief.

"No, he wouldn't."

"Kiren! Don't you dare!" His Mother screeched.

Alpha Dimitri stepped in between them. "Kiren, if you renounce your claim as Alpha, you can walk away. Otherwise, you have no choice but to fight Jasper. You know you can't win. This is the only way for you to live."

"He will not-!"

"I renounce my claim!" Kiren shouted. "I renounce it, I renounce it! I don't want to die! I don't want to be Alpha!" He wailed.

"You brat! You're as useless as your father! Do you not care about the pack at all?!" Luna Anne screamed at him.

And then Luna Lily stepped forward, her hand whipping out and slapping the woman. The resounding smack echoed around the forest, audible gasps following it.

"How dare you stand here and talk about the wellbeing of your pack when you just offered their heir as if he were nothing! As if he was fodder for the livestock! You should be ashamed of yourself; You are no Luna! And you're certainly no mother!"

"The victory of the fight is Jaspers. And your son has renounced his claim as Alpha. Therefore, you are no longer Luna of the Silver Moon pack." One of the Elders stepped announced.

She seemed stunned by the turn of events. Still holding her cheek, Luna Anne, or now just Anne, grabbed Kiren's arm and began to stalk away.

"Hold on!" I caught Kiren's other hand, stopping them from leaving. "You don't have to go back Kiren. You don't have to go with her."

"I'm his mother!"

I ignored her. "You can stay here Kiren, and come back when I go to Silver Moon. You can stay in the packhouse with me." I got down on one knee. "I'm your brother, and I will take care of you."

"Enough!" Anne pulled Kiren out of my grasp. But he resisted.

"No! I want to stay with him! I want to stay with my brother!" He kicked at her shins. "I hate you! I don't want to go with you!"

"Kiren, I swear to the Goddess-!"

Abruptly, I was shoved to the side. Beta Ben landed on top of me, and I had a second of confusion before I looked up to see Luna Lilys wolf standing above us. A few screams echoed through the night at the sudden appearance of the Mother Wolf. I was just glad I'd been shoved out of the way of her shift.

Anne dropped Kiren's hand and stumbled back several feet, her mouth hanging open. He ran to me, launching himself into my arms where I held him tightly.

"Kiren stays at Blood Moon." The Lunas voice sounded in my head, as well as everyone else's. Anne whimpered in terror. "You are hereby banished from ever stepping foot on our land again. Leave. NOW!"