

Chapter 40

Jasper

I tried hard to relax the further we got from Blood Moon. In an attempt to distract myself, I struck up conversation.

"Tell me about Silver Moon." I said into the silence. Ashwell looked at me over his seat.

"What do you want to know?"

"The truth." I looked him in the eye. "I get the feeling that Warrick's version of things was...off."

The Gamma scoffed. "Probably! Though I'm sure things were very nice from his position." He sneered.

"You really didn't like him, did you?" Violet asked beside me.

"We outgrew him." King answered. His eyes were on the road, but his expression was dark. "Tyrone and I grew up with Bryan. Thick as thieves, the three of us."

"What changed?" I asked.

"He did. Being the Alphas son... I think the power went to his head. No, I know it did. By the time we realized..." He trailed off.

"It was too late." Ashwell finished. He shook his head. "When Bryan took over as Alpha, the changes were slow. Small, undetectable. Until they weren't. The pack was falling apart, and all he cared about was doting on his friends and screwing the help. He made up laws, and ignored real ones."

The pack was suffering, but he was too much in his own world to see it. Or maybe he did, and he just stopped caring."

"But you stayed on as Beta and Gamma?"

"Our families have held our titles for generations. It felt wrong to give them up now. We tried to fix things, but we're not Alphas, and we cannot go against our Alphas orders."

I leaned forward in my seat. "And now?"

"Now?"

"Are you willing to stay on as my Beta and Gamma now?"

They shared a brief look before King answered. "We would like to."

"Why do I hear a 'but' at the end of that sentence?" Violet asked.

"We agreed. If you won the challenge, we would keep our titles. Unless you turned out to be exactly like Warrick." King said.

"We will not serve another tyrant Alpha." Ashwell nodded.

I smiled halfheartedly. "Very well. All I ask is one favor."

"What's that?"

"If you two ever feel I'm going down the wrong path, you will speak up and set me straight. That's not a request either, it's an order." I used my Alpha voice for the very first time. I listened to it echoes through the vehicle, felt my aura radiate around me. Violet shivered beside me.

"Yes Alpha." King and Ashwell said together. I could hear the satisfaction in their voices.

The next half hour went by uneventfully. Violet and I chatted with our companions, getting a feel for our new relationship with them. I liked them both quite a lot, and couldn't help but feel that I'd lucked out a bit. Both King and Ashwell seemed like upstanding guys, willing to put the

pack first. They would be detrimental to making the changes I knew had to come.

"What is that?"

My eyes followed Violets shocked gaze out the window. A small shack stood out amongst the trees, totally worn down. The grass was massively overgrown, with tall weeds clumped around. A few pictures I couldn't make out were painted on the wood side, but the most shocking thing about the scene was the woman and child hanging laundry on a poor clothesline to the side.

"We are at the edge of the border. There are a few houses here." King said.

"House?! That's not a house! Stop the car!" Violet ordered.

"We're almost-"

"Now!"

King braked, and Violet jumped out the door. I hurriedly undid my seatbelt before following her. King and Ashwell jumped out after me, trekking towards the so-called house. Vie approached the woman determinedly, but the woman looked fearful. She clutched her daughter to his side, eyes wide. Touching the girl's head, they both dropped to their knees.

"B-beta. Gamma." She whispered.

"Maybe you two should wait in the car." I said to them. King shrugged, turning back. Ashwell eyed the pair in front of us sadly.

"What is your name?" Violet asked.

The woman shook, her eyes never leaving the ground. I moved closer, noticing how thin and small they both looked. Neither seemed to have the intention of answering though. Violet must have realized it too, because she got on her knees in front of the woman, reaching out to take her hand.

"Please tell me your name."

"M-Ma-Marian."

"Is this your daughter Marian?"

She nodded quickly.

"It's nice to meet you two. My name is Violet. That is my mate, Jasper."
She pointed to me. "Is this your House?"

"Yes." Marian whispered.

"Can I ask why you're living so far from the pack?"

Hesitantly, Marian raised her eyes to meet Violets. There was still fear, but curiosity now too. She glanced at me, then at Ashwell and gulped loudly.

"Never mind him. Gamma Ashwell brought us here; he won't hurt you."
Violet assured her.

"A-Alpha Warrick... he put us here." Marian breathed.

"Why?"

"Because... Because I couldn't work anymore. My pregnancy... it was difficult."

I clamped down on the anger that was growing inside me. I could feel Violet doing the same.

"Are there others out here too?"

"A few..."

Violet gave her a tight smile before standing up. She rounded on Ashwell, fire in her eyes.

"Find every single person out here and round them up. I want them brought to the packhouse, today. I don't care how long it takes you."

He nodded. "Will do."

"N-no! Please!" Marian started to wail. "W-we will leave! I promise!"

Vie got back on the ground, taking the poor woman by the shoulders.

"Hush. I'm sorry. I'm not bringing you to the packhouse to punish you, I swear. I want to help you."

"T-the Alpha-"

"Is dead." Violet interrupted her. Marian's words cut short with a choke.

"What?"

"Warrick is dead. My mate challenged him for the Alpha title and won. We are the new Alpha and Luna Marian." She smiled tenderly.

"The Alpha... You?" She looked at me properly for the first time. I nodded, hoping my face was reassuring. "Goddess... Oh, Goddess, thank you!" She clutched her daughter close, sobbing.

"Marian, we will give you a ride to the packhouse. Can you grab what you need?" Violet asked.

"We have little... maybe a few things..." She stood on shaking, weak legs, carrying her child inside their shack. I shook my head.

Violet stood, wiping the dirt from her pants. I could tell she was just as upset as I was, maybe more. We both looked into the forest; I spotted two more structures in the distance. I couldn't find the words to describe what I was feeling. The treatment of these poor folk was downright inhumane. Marian emerged carrying her daughter in one arm, and a dirty bag littered with holes in the other. I finally noticed how dirty the two were as well; Did they not even get the decency of clean water to bathe in? Or did they not get a bath at all? I doubted one would fit inside their 'home'.

"Come on." I motioned towards the SUV but stopped at her soft voice.

"No, we cannot. We must walk."

Walk? She could barely stand!

"I insist you ride with us Marian." I tried again.

She looked at Violet, who nodded and smiled. Slowly, we made our way to the car and I helped Marian inside. She sat far away from us, huddled against the door with her daughter in lap.

"Let's go." I told King. He acknowledged me by started the car and driving on. The entire rest of the way, I took a mental note on how many shacks I saw. By the time the trees started thinning, and more realistic looking homes came into view, I'd counted more than thirty. My heart sank in my chest at the cruelty of this place.

The further we went through Silver Moon, the more disgusted I became. We passed home after home that desperately needed care. Pack members dropped to the ground at the sight of our vehicle, trembling on the ground. Unknown to them was the fact that I, not Warrick, sat therein.

"How could he have enjoyed this?" Violet raged beside me. "It makes me feel sick."

"Me too." I agreed.

King said nothing, his eyes focused ahead.

We took a sharp right, and the difference in scenery was astounding. Grand houses were sat one after another, six in total. Every one of them looked as though they could house a dozen families. The lawns were crisp, perfectly cut and cared for, with lush flowerbeds; One even had a fountain! I concluded these must be where Warrick's friends lived.

"We're here." King announced.

He came to a stop in front of the grandest house of all. Five stories, at least, a beautiful red brick mansion lay. Dozens of windows reflected light back to us, and vines crept up one side. Hundreds of flowers grew lazily around the base, some dotting off just outside the mulch barrier. The house was huge, easily as big as Blood Moons packhouse, if not a little bigger.

A detached building sat to the right; I assumed the garage King had spoken of earlier.

Instead of standing in awe at our new home, I only felt unease. I was supposed to live here, in this luxurious space, while others lived in filth and poverty? How could I do that?

"Hey." Violet touched my shoulder. "Do you trust me?"

I nodded. "Of course I do."

"Come on." She took my hand, pulling me out of the car with her. Marian followed us quietly, staring at the ground. "Beta King!"

The sound of his door closing, and then he was standing beside us. Violet turned us in his direction.

"Your first order of business is to wait here until Gamma Ashwell returns. When he does, I want you both to find rooms in the packhouse for whomever he brings with him. Make sure everyone is fed, and has clean clothes."

"Yes Luna."

"After you're done that, you can also come back. With your family."

"Uh..."

"The Beta should be in the packhouse. Same with the Gamma. Understood?"

Relief flooded his eyes as he nodded. "Understood Luna. I will do as you wish."

"Good. While you're waiting here, I want you to send out a mind-link for everyone to meet here, tomorrow morning. And I do mean everyone."

"I don't think the entire pack will fit on the front lawn." He replied.

"Where should we meet then?"

"The Hall is used for pack meetings. It's about ten minutes that way." He pointed.

"Alright, that's where we'll meet. See you then."

Vie pulled me into the house. My first impression was one of excessive grandeur; costly furniture was arranged everywhere, with just as expensive art hanging on the walls. There was barely an open space anywhere.

"Good grief..." I sighed.

"May I help you?" A feminine voice floated to us. A maid had come from one of the entrances off the foyer, smiling at us politely, but her eyes were wary. She glanced at Marian who was hiding behind us with distaste. I stepped forward, hand extended.

"Hello. My name is Jasper Cole."

She was a tiny thing, with fair skin and highlighted blonde hair. Her blue eyes appraised me properly for the first time, and she gave me a smile I knew too well. Beside me, I felt Violet tense. The maid grasped my hand in hers, shaking firmly.

"Hello Jasper. My name is Stacy." She purred.

A low growl sounded from Violet and I stepped back.

"And I'm Violet, Jaspers mate." She said. Stacy's expression drifted to her unwillingly. Neither offered to shake hands.

"Alpha Warrick is away at the moment." Stacy told us. "But Luna Anne is here. Are you here on pack business?" She looked at Marian again.

I smirked. "Alpha Warrick will not be returning."

"Excuse me?"

"He's dead." Violet said. Stacy's eyes widened momentarily.

"Dead? How...?"

"I am his son. I challenged him for his title, and won."

"So... you're the new Alpha?" Her tone held way too much excitement.

"And Luna." I brought Vie to my side. Stacy bristled.

"I see. Well. I should inform Luna Anne-"

"Actually Stacy, I need you to gather everyone in the house. If Anne is here, that includes her. I want everyone down here in ten minutes." Violet ordered.

"Some of the maids are off duty." Stacy snapped.

"Then mind link them. I expect everyone here. Ten minutes."

The girls face went a shade darker, but she stomped off to do Violet's bidding. I chuckled.

"You're so cute when you're jealous." I grinned.

Vie scoffed. "Jealous? No. I just don't like the way she was looking at you."

"That's called being jealous love."

She stuck her tongue out at me making me grin. I turned to Marian; Her daughter had nodded off in her arms.

"Marian, come here. Please, sit."

I pulled a wooden chair away from the wall, gesturing to her. She looked at Violet, who nodded before collapsing onto the seat.

"Thank you." She whispered.

"What is your daughter's name?" I asked gently.

"Skye."

"That's a beautiful name."

She nodded, but didn't say anything more as voices began to drift down to us. Maids started appearing from the left and right, whispering as they entered the foyer. I looked them over, becoming uncomfortable at the common traits; All had blonde hair, blue or green eyes, and were fairly busty. It occurred to me that Warrick had held a preference for a certain type of woman, and had chosen to surround himself with girls who fit. I waited until everyone was gathered in a group, their blonde heads making a yellow and white sea in front of me.

"Is that everyone?"

"Yes." Stacy replied from the front.

"Alright. Vie?" She smiled at me. I had no idea what she was up to, but I trusted her completely. She stood in front of the girls, back straight and head held high.

"Hello everyone. I don't see Anne here?" She looked at Stacy who rolled her eyes.

"The Luna is in her office and doesn't wish to be disturbed."

"Anne is no longer Luna of Silver Moon." Violet snapped. "You will go and retrieve her, or I will get Beta King to do it."

"Fine!" Stacy huffed and left. Violet returned her attention to the group.

"I'll cut to the chase. Alpha Warrick is dead. My mate won his title, as his son. Kiren has given up his claim to the Alpha title as well. Going forward, we are the new Alpha and Luna of Silver Moon." Her words caused murmurs amongst the girls. It ceased when she continued. "If you could all do me a favor, can you arrange yourselves from youngest to oldest?"

The group moved, making a long line. I was stunned to see the girl at the very end couldn't be more than fifteen or sixteen years old. Violet frowned.

"Thank you. How many of you are under eighteen?"

Six girls raised their hands from the left end.

"Go home. You should be in school, not working."

"You're firing us?" One asked.

"Yes."

"You can't!" Another shouted. "We are the only stable source of income for our families!"

"What?" I gasped.

"Please don't worry about that. I promise your families will be taken care of." Violet reassured them. The youngest started crying, being consoled by the girl next to her. She glared at us.

"You're sentencing us to become rogues! We need this job!"

"You dare enter my house?!"

Every head turned to see Anne storming in. I brought myself closer to my mate, ready to shield her from the unpredictable woman.

"What are you doing with my maids?! You have no right to be here! Leave!" She commanded.