

Chapter 51

Jasper

The shield was up, and I was exceedingly grateful. I felt like I could sleep tonight knowing my family, and the pack, was that much safer.

"Thank you." I said again.

"No need to thank me."

"You think you'll be staying for a while?" I asked.

"For a little while. I don't like to be away from Rose too long."

Vie had told me her grandparents' story. It was heartbreaking, to say the least.

"I understand."

We stepped onto the sidewalk. Violet was waiting for me, standing under a tree with Tracy. They were chatting happily and I smiled for the fact that she'd made a friend here. A few times she'd expressed how much she was missing Brianne, even though they talked on the phone.

"Hey." I greeted them.

"Evening Alpha!" Tracy grinned at me. She seemed more bubbly than usual.

"Tracy, you remember my grandpa?" Violet gestured at him.

"Oh, yes! Hello again, Mr. Gideon!" She shook his hand firmly.

"Hello Tracy." Gideon smiled.

"Well? Let's get this over with." Vie sighed.

We started walking together, Tracy supplying most of the conversation. I glanced at my mate when she mentioned she was our new nanny, but Vie wasn't looking at me. Or Tracy. She was staring at the sidewalk, breathing deeply and steadily. I stepped closer to her, wrapping one arm around her shoulders.

"Hey. It'll be okay." I whispered.

"What if it's not?" She looked up at me with fearful eyes.

"Then we deal with it, just like we've dealt with everything else so far."

"Together?"

"Together." I nodded.

As we came up to the Hall, she clutched my hand tightly. I rubbed her back slowly, hoping the mate bond would help ease her nerves. When we got inside, we were greeted with cheerful hellos and handshakes. A few women stopped us to inquire how Violet was feeling, and congratulated us on twin baby boys. She thanked them politely before moving on. Mom and Dad were also in the crowd, and Elena. I gave her and Mom and hug. Tracy got lost somewhere in the crowd, but Gideon joined us on the stage where King and Ashwell were already in their respective spots. I went to them first.

"Is everyone here?" I whispered.

"Everyone except four guards at the cells."

"No problem. I'll fill them in later."

We stepped apart, and I went to the podium, raising my hand. The noise of the pack quieted.

"Thanks everyone, for coming tonight." Violet whimpered quietly behind me. "We've gathered you all here tonight because we have an announcement to make. Violet?"

She made her way robotically to the podium, staring out at the pack. They looked back expectantly.

"I-I'm not sure...what to say..." She whispered in a low aside to me.

"It doesn't have to be a long speech. Just do your best." I assured her.

She looked back at the crowd, clearing her throat.

"So, uhm, as many of you know...Jasper and I care about this pack very much." She took a deep breath. "Even though we've been here for...such a short time already, we've grown to want the best for each and every one of you. And part of that is, we believe, not withholding important information from you. That said, I'd like to tell you what we've uncovered from the rogue who was captured earlier. He was working for a woman, set upon this pack to kidnap me."

Gasps echoed around the room.

"We learned there were more rogue groups with the same mission, and we don't doubt there are more out there now."

"What can we do?" Someone called up to us.

"Tomorrow, training by the Blood Moon warriors will begin for those who want to join. We've also taken some safety precautions as well." She looked over her shoulder, motioning to Gideon, who stepped up beside us. "This is my grandfather, Gideon. He is a witch."

Every pair of eyes in the Hall went to Gideon. A few people standing near the stage took several steps back. I internally sighed, hoping the reaction to Violet was better.

"You don't need to be afraid of him. He came here to help us. A short while ago, he created a protective shield around all of Silver Moon. Now nobody can cross our borders without being invited in by either myself or my mate."

People started whispering, looking at Gideon a little less warily, while others still clearly didn't trust him.

"But why are they after you?" Tracy shouted from her spot. She might have been the only one here who was looking on with a face full of concern.

"Because... because of what I... am." Violet replied lowly. She closed her eyes briefly, then said the words I knew she was terrified to speak. "We believe this woman is after me because I am a Hybrid."

It wasn't exactly the truth, but it could have been. We'd not discussed whether Jennine knew or didn't know about Violet being a Hybrid. Though that was a far easier explanation than retelling her parents' whole history. It was also safe to say Jennine would figure it out, if she hadn't already. However, it was very clear nobody at Silver Moon had suspected. Violet's words were met with a dead silence. Everywhere I looked, I saw that people just didn't know how to react. Some looked at her like she was telling a not so funny joke. Others were shocked, and some were just dumbfounded. It was silent for so long that I started counting in my head. Two minutes went by, and nobody had come up with anything. They were all frozen, resembling an odd painting.

I leaned over the podium. "Uh, we're going to need someone to say something."

"I knew it!" A voice shrieked from the far wall. Everyone turned that way, almost in perfect formation. Of course, it was a woman from Warrick's old friends, pointing an accusing finger at us. "I knew you would wreck this pack! You come here, pretending to be so sweet and innocent and wanting to help us, but really, you've just been biding your time!"

"That girl is a monster! She will kill us all!" Her mate yelled. Violet winced, flinching back.

"She would never hurt anyone!" Mom screamed back. Once again, I was glad they had relocated here with us.

"Isn't that your son?" The woman snapped. "Of course, you would defend him and his mate!"

"Now, hang on just a minute." Kettler, of all people, shouted back across the room. "They did come here and help us. They just built us a new fucking hospital for Goddess's sake!"

His argument sent the pack whispering again.

"Not to mention all the work of getting the fields back again. And the Orchard. Didn't I see you out there today, Greg?" Kettler looked around.

"Sure did." Greg spoke not far away. "Our new tractors run like a dream. Wouldn't have happened without these two." He nodded at us.

"Violet is a sweet girl, she wouldn't do anything to hurt the pack. She only wants to help." Dad said firmly.

"They brought a witch to our pack!" The woman yelled again. "They've been hiding things from us! We can't trust them!"

"I came here to help protect you." Gideon shot at her. "I didn't have to. And nobody asked me either. But if you wish, I can take down the shield, and you can go up against the rogues yourself?"

The woman backed down, nudging her mate. I finally remembered him as Ricardo Perez; He had fought us tooth and nail when we evicted him. Obviously, he would hate us, no matter what.

"We apologize for keeping this from you." I said. "Our intent was never to lie. You have to understand, Violet is the first Hybrid in a very long time, and that name already has a poor reputation. We wanted to gain some ground with this pack first, show you that we have the best intentions for you at heart. And now we're hoping you can forgive us for our mistake."

"How can we trust you?" An elderly woman stepped forward, placing her hand on the stage. "How can we trust that she isn't dangerous? We all know the stories. Hybrids tried to take over, get rid of us all!"

Violet stepped around me, her arm brushing my back. She strode to the forefront of the stage, looking down at the woman.

"I am not like them." She stated firmly. "I know what they did. The Hybrids of the past looked down on regular werewolves, thinking they were better than them. Tried to wipe them out."

She jumped, landing neatly in front of the elder. They came face to face as she straightened.

"I am not them." She said again. "I am not higher than anyone else. I am the daughter of an Alpha, the mate of one, and a Luna. And a werewolf. But I am also part witch. And even though I am all these things, they don't justify who I am. Because at the end of the day, I'm just a girl who is trying to help this pack, and loses sleep wondering how in the Hell I can do it. At the end of the day, I'm a mother-to-be who has no idea what motherhood will be like, but is really looking forward to it. I'm just a girl, just like you." She looked around. "And like you. And you. And you. I did not grow up as a Hybrid. I grew up as a wolf, only discovering what I was after my first shift."

She climbed back up onto the stage, further away than before.

"You may call me a Hybrid, but my wolf and I? The Goddess has another name for us. We are a Midnight Wolf, the first of our kind. This leads me to believe that my ancestors were not the monsters who committed such horrendous crimes."

And then she shifted.

The planks under her feet creaked from the new weight. But the loudest sound of all was the gasps and murmurs of awe as Violet turned, showing everyone the marking on her side. Her aura, so much stronger now as

Luna, wrapped around those of us standing closest to her. Her large head found the elder again, her eyes piercing.

"I believe that is the correct answer, young one." She smiled. "You are no danger."

A low whine came out through Hala's teeth.

"Thank you." I said to her. "If anyone has anything else they'd like to say, any questions or concerns, please feel free now."

"I'm not concerned at all!" Greg scoffed. Around him, others agreed.

"I'm a bit surprised, but I don't believe we have anything to fear." Kettler added.

Sounds of agreement sounded all over the Hall. My eyes briefly landed on Stacy, who unlike everyone else, was staring at me instead of Violet. Her gaze was cold, and maybe calculating even. I looked away.

"Alright. If that concludes tonight's business, you can all go home. Thank you again for coming out." I turned away from the podium, coming to face my Beta and Gamma.

Ashwell's lips were in a thin line, and King looked equally as pleased.

"Yes?" I asked them.

"You should have told us." Ashwell whined.

"We would have kept it to ourselves." King added sourly.

"We weren't keeping it from you specifically." I apologized.

They both pouted and I chuckled. "So, you two can work under a Hybrid?"

"We work for you."

I laughed harder. "Don't kid yourselves. We all know who the boss is." I looked at Hala, who rolled her eyes.

"I suppose every Luna is the true boss." Ashwell eyed her as well.

"I want to go for a run." Hala's voice sounded in my mind.

"Sounds good."

"I'll see you guys later." I clapped them on the shoulders as I left, following Hala. We waited until everyone had left, then she shifted back.

"Come on. Let's go outside." I took her hand, leading her out to the side of the building. This time we both shifted, shaking out our fur.

"Where to?"

"Anywhere."

We took off at a nice pace, heading for the woods. We hadn't found the time to run together since we left Blood Moon. I felt overjoyed at having her next to me again, racing through the woods, our bodies brushing against one another every so often. Eventually, I let my conscious drift the back of my mind, letting Ehno take over. The two yipped, playing with each other's tails, jumping at each other and nipping ears. They hunted for a while, bringing down two large deer and sharing their spoils. After a while, Hala lay down, panting. We lay next to her, nudging her belly with our nose, whining softly.

Part of me wondered if it was safe for Violet to shift, but I knew I was being paranoid. Lots of she-wolves shifted during pregnancy, unless otherwise instructed not to be a doctor. Some even said it was good for the pups. Ehno stood, whining again. Hala got to her feet, and they retraced their steps, stopping at a stream for a drink. Ehno gave me back control when we came up to the edge of the woods, and I shifted back.

"I think there's a stash of clothes around here." I said as Violet shifted as well. I sniffed the air, following the scent of familiar fabric. A wooden chest lay at the base of a tree, full of clothes for men and women. I grabbed shirts and pants, tossing a pair to Vie.

"Thanks." We dressed quickly.

"So... That went better than expected." I said, referring to the meeting.

"Yeah. But people are still going to be wary of me for a while."

"They'll get over it. Once they see you really aren't a danger."

She smiled softly, reaching out to take my hand. "I hope you're right."

A scream echoed through the dark towards us. Instantly, we were both running, Vie holding her belly as she went. We'd come out pretty close to the packhouse, and I judged that's where the sound came from. But when we got there, I couldn't do anything but gape.

"Dear Goddess." I gasped. "Gideon, what did you do?"