

Owned by the Alphas |

The Message

The mountain shuddered as Silas glared.

I shrank back as the wind howled and the clouds darkened. I tried not to look as terrified as I was, but I don't think I was doing a very good job at it, especially if they could still hear my racing heartbeat.

We had made the link to make sure the vampires couldn't take me from the wolves, but what if we had accidentally pissed off the witches by doing that? I shuddered at the thought as Derik stepped slightly forward. In front of me.

"Dangerous wolves. A move like this could be construed as an act of war," Silas warned, but Derik shook his head.

"Or an act of love. Either way, it is done. You cannot have her," Derik stated, and Silas smirked.

"Dirty fucking wolves. And you say we can't be trusted?"

"You can't."

"Then how is it that you have two winter borns in your territory and we have none?"

I listened to them argue, getting more and more nervous.

How could they reach any kind of agreement when I was already spoken for and my brother had no intention of being caught by anyone? Surely there had to be something that didn't involve either of us being killed?

"The circumstances have changed. Lorelai is ours. You have no claim on her now, so she will no longer be a part of our negotiations or conversations," Derik said in his alpha voice that told everyone there that he meant what he said.

"Naturally," Silas conceded, but his eyes met mine and I swore the irises moved, swirling with something beneath them like he was letting me know it wasn't over.

Kai growled, his body vibrating next to me in warning.

Silas smirked and turned back to Derik. "And the brother?"

I tensed at the hostility in his voice when he said it.

"That is what we need to discuss."

"Among other things." Silas was so calm and collected, smooth with his quick responses.

"Elias has taken root in the winter born's shadows, possessing him...and them." Derik ignored his other statement.

Silas's eyes narrowed, his smirk turning grim. "For what purpose?" he snarled.

"We don't know. All we know is that he has been taking humans for sacrifices."

"Not much as usual then. And I assume he has managed to curate a conduit dagger for these sacrifices?"

Derik simply nodded. The whole Summit was tense as the vampires whispered among themselves.

I shivered as the wind stopped, everything going still and silent like the calm before a storm. I hated it.

The vampires all whispered until the one just behind Silas whispered in his ear. Silas nodded.

"The other winter born is in your territory. The dagger is yours and the humans are yours. I don't see what you want us to do with this information."

"Simply sharing the information we have. You're the ones who called this meeting, we are simply showing up as required," Derik said, probably preferring as little involvement from the vampires as possible.

"Appreciated," Silas said, before his left-hand vamp whispered in his ear again, and he nodded.

"Despite literally having all the time in the world, we cannot continue this meeting for long, so we will get to the point. Your winter born there is much

more powerful than Elias ever was. Her power radiates despite being on a mountain where such things should be impossible.

“The barrier between our territories was threatened by it during your savage festivities recently, and I am not inclined to wait until that breaks,” Silas explained.

I had no idea what he meant. As vampires who liked human blood, I would have assumed that not having the barrier would be a good thing to them, but Silas made it sound like the opposite was the issue.

“You want the barrier?” I asked, before I could stop myself.

Derik looked over his shoulder, glaring at me to shut up, but it was too late—the question was out.

“Yes. The barrier is there to protect all races.”

“How?” I asked, stepping up with Derik, who was tense as anything, his lips pursed.

Silas smirked during his answer.

“The wolves cannot get into our territory with their fatal toxin, and we cannot sense your human blood that activates our bloodlust,” he explained, and the truth was in his voice.

If they wanted to be separated, then why was fear about vampires drilled into us so deeply as kids? Or was the bloodlust exactly what we should fear?

“If a human was in your territory...,” I prompted, and Silas shrugged.

“Then they wouldn’t be human for long.”

“I’m human,” I reminded him, trying to convince myself that maybe they weren’t as bloodthirsty as I had been made to believe, but Silas had an answer for that too.

“Incorrect.”

“Being a winter born doesn’t change what I am.”

"In fact, it does. It means your scent is much different to a human. You smell like pure power. A delectable taste, but not the insatiable taste of a human.

"But then again, we are who we are, and around the humans, yes, we tend to lose ourselves a little. It is safer for the barrier to remain to keep the races divided as they are.

"That is why I find it a little disturbing that such a ripple was made through it," Silas said, his attention turning back to Derik, who pushed me back behind him.

He was definitely going to tell me off for that one later.

"There's nothing in the laws about a ripple, Silas," Derik said, as if he was bored with the entire conversation, but I knew it was a facade because he was tense as hell next to me.

Silas looked like he saw through it too. "No, there is not. But there are against threats to the border. Which is what she is. Her power is disrupting it."

I had no idea how I could when my "power" was inside me and all I had done was fuck during the heat. I hadn't meant to cause any ripple. Apparently, that didn't matter.

"There is no proof that it is her," Derik snapped.

Silas grinned. "We both know it is. With power that outshines the witches' blocks up here? Don't play dumb, it is beneath you," Silas said, his chin raising.

"Wrong. It could be Elias."

Silas hissed at that. "We are not fools!"

Kai stepped forward, growling as he stood in a threatening stance toward the vampires, the sky harshening with dark clouds.

"Enough. The laws are clear. You may eliminate the threat with proof. There is none, and that is only *if* the threat itself is proven.

"Since that is not happening here and the winter born is linked, this meeting is over," Kai interrupted, his voice deep with alpha vibes that made me shiver.

It always got to me when he got into that mode. Derik was more about diplomatic solutions and talking it out, but I knew when Kai got that voice on, someone was going to get fucked up for disobeying.

I liked getting fucked up by him, in a good way.

His eyes glanced at me and he smirked before narrowing his eyes back on the vamps, who were whispering to each other again.

“Fine. Our proposition for a solution then. You have slighted us. We are technically owed a winter born, you have claimed yours, and to keep the balance, once you have saved the brother from possession, then he belongs to us.”

“No!” I interrupted, but Kai dragged me back, glaring at me. I shook him off and stepped forward again. “You can’t have him.”

Silas ignored me and waited for Derik to answer.

“How do you know we plan to save him?” Derik shrugged, and we did, but he obviously wanted the vamps to think otherwise.

Silas was quick though and nodded to me. “Because of your pet. You won’t hurt her brother.”

“Elias is powerful, we may not have a choice.”

Silas laughed and shook his head before looking at me.

“She is all you need. If you have any brains, which being wolves makes me doubtful, you’ll use her. If you’re unsure then we’d be happy to take over and use her for ourselves,” he taunted.

Kai snarled as Derik held his arm out to hold him back. I grabbed Kai’s hand as he vibrated in anger.

Brax was strangely silent during the entire thing, but I was guessing he was trying to keep an eye on his shadows.

It was hard to feel them against the magic of the witches, but if I concentrated, I could feel mine whispering feelings and sending instincts to me, so I was guessing Braxton was using his too.

Even then, I wasn't sure if it was a guess or I was being whispered to and that's why I was assuming things.

Derik clenched his jaw, then looked at me, and I knew what he was going to say. I shook my head. There had to be another way.

"Don't," I warned.

He sighed and turned to the vamps. "We can't promise you the other winter born. We don't know what will happen to him once Elias has been destroyed within him. We can't promise you a future we don't know the outcome of."

Derik shrugged, and Silas hardened his features, glaring, his patience gone.

"You will give us something, wolf. We will not allow the imbalance of the territories."

Derik scoffed. "Imbalance? You have the entire realm. We have a small percentage that was salvaged from your last bloodlust frenzy.

"Your breeding rates have tripled, according to the latest records, and ours have lessened. With how many vampires compared to wolves, and then the fact that we also have the humans, I think we are the ones at the wrong end of the stick here."

Silas shook his head. "Not with the current power running through your territory."

"You are wrong. Elias and the brother Lucas want to take us out. They have a single goal—to wipe out the wolves. They are accumulating the power to do that.

"You are under no threat thus far, we are. Lorelai is the only chance we have against him, which is why we made sure you couldn't take her. The balance has nothing to do with you right now."

I swallowed that one hard, my mind turning, my heart cracking just a little. Enough to make me wince and look down so the stupid vampire couldn't pick up on it.

Was the fact that I was a powerful winter born the only reason they had decided to link me? I had thought it was because they felt as strongly as I did, but it had been weird that the pack had agreed so readily.

Maybe it was because they knew the real reason?

I kept my head down, refusing to look up, so Silas wouldn't see the doubt and hurt in my eyes because I had no hope of hiding it, it was too raw. It would be until I talked to the wolves about it.

"So you offer nothing?"

"We have nothing to offer."

"And you believe that is fair?"

"It doesn't matter what either of us believe. The witches will decide." Derik shrugged, then looked next to us where the edge of the Summit dropped, as if there was something else there.

"Remember this, wolf. One day soon, you will need our help and we will have nothing to offer," Silas said. Derik narrowed his eyes. "You will not hand over your winter born. You offer no replacement while Elias is at large and in return, you lose the ability to call on us for help. That is the conclusion?" he asked.

Derik nodded and walked forward, holding out his hand. Silas walked forward too.

Kai leaned down to me and whispered, "If the witches agree the terms are in favor of balance, then they will let them shake."

"And if they disagree?" I shivered.

"They will get struck by lightning."

He smirked, and I went wide-eyed, watching the exchange with an anxiety that wasn't there before.

I tensed as they got closer, the hesitation clear in both of them. I had no idea what the witches would deem fair, but I was hoping that them both coming away with a negative was enough of a balance.

Apparently it was, because they shook hands, both of them relaxing a little.

The smug look on Derik's face was enough to let me know he had been nervous. Not promising a winter born was obviously a risk, but I was glad he hadn't given up my brother, even though we had no idea what was going to happen with him.

Apparently the witches didn't think the vamps needed a winter born anyway.

Silas seemed pissed about that as he spun away, his red velvet cloak spinning out behind him. He didn't even say goodbye, just started walking, disappearing over the edge of the Summit with the others following dutifully behind.

Derik let out a tense breath, then turned to us with a grin.

"We're okay. For now," he said, then came over to kiss me.

I kissed him back but pulled away before he could distract me from what I was mad about. He knew though.

"We'll talk about it once we're back, beautiful."

I nodded, not ready to argue when we had just won. Not to mention the nosey witches that I couldn't see but could feel. I knew they were still watching, and it unnerved me, so I walked with the alphas over our side of the Summit.

It was surprisingly hard to walk downward in the snow. Walking was a bit of a stretch, more like sliding. It was cold and wet, but kind of fun.

I smiled as Kai purposely skidded himself down, laughing as he smacked into a tree.

"Bet Tabby told them to put that there." He chuckled and dusted himself off.

I grinned as Brax helped me down the snow. I caught him by surprise with a kiss, breaking his strange stare off into nothing. He looked at me, and I frowned at the subdued, almost empty look in his eyes.

"Are you okay?" I asked, stopping us from moving on with Derik and Kai.

He blinked a couple of times, then nodded, swallowing hard.

"It's hard to be without the shadows as a whole for such an extended period of time. I sometimes get lost trying to keep connected with them," he explained, breathing a little harder.

I frowned at the familiarity he had with the feeling. "That happens a lot?"

"Every time we come here. And my parents used to make me drink some stuff that subdued them so people wouldn't know I was different."

He shrugged, but I saw the trauma there. I leaned up and kissed him. I didn't want him empty, I wanted him alive and present. With me.

He kissed me back, sighing into it as my body grew hot beneath his touch.

He growled, collecting me into him with a rougher grasp, his tongue delving into my mouth with a feverish heat that made me shiver, excited for what I knew was coming.

Until Derik cleared his throat.

"As much as I am looking forward to the 'we survived' sex, doing it when we're not at camp might piss the witches off, so let's not tempt fate and get back before we do it," Derik said, and I laughed, pulling away from Brax's mouth as he snuggled into my neck.

"Thank you, Spitfire," he whispered, and I nodded, giving him one last kiss before grabbing his hand and heading back down the mountain, trailing behind Derik and Kai.

The way back down was much different. There was no snow falling or wind, just a white wonderland with fresh air and an easy walk.

It felt like we had only been walking for ten minutes when Derik came to a stop with Kai and we found them waiting for us at the shimmering sheen of the portal.

I gasped and looked between them and the portal.

"We're already there?" I asked, the idea not even comprehending in my brain because it wasn't logical.

"The witches don't like us staying long once everything is done."

"The witches don't like much, do they?" I murmured, and Kai smirked and went through the portal.

We followed, bumping into the back of Kai as he spun and curled me into him. I gasped and tried to get out of his grasp, but he pulled me away.

"What are you doing?" I demanded.

He refused to let me go. "Keep your head down and your eyes closed," he ordered, and it was his alpha voice, strained and angry.

I sucked in a breath as my body was overwhelmed with their emotions, the magic unlocking the link, slamming me with their fear, anger, resentment.

I winced against the strength of it, falling against Nikolai before he picked me up with a grunt and walked me somewhere that I couldn't see since I was still being held against his chest.

"Can you just tell me why you've gone all alpha on me and where Derik and Brax are?" I asked, needing answers because I was terrified.

Kai tensed before shoving me into a carriage, climbing in with me, and slamming the door. He sat there, his fangs long, his claws out, his eyes red.

"You don't need to know, Lorelai," he growled, breathing hard.

"Disagree," I snapped, my own anger rising.

I was sick of them deciding what I needed to know and when, because they were shitty at judging when that was.

"Don't care," he bit back, and I narrowed my eyes at him.

I didn't answer him. Instead, I bolted for the door of the carriage and shoved it open. He cursed as I did, getting me just in time so I saw nothing as he yanked me back in by my waist and slammed the door shut.

"Stop it," he warned.

"Or what? You'll werewolf out? You're already doing that," I argued, and he shook his head, trying to get ahold of himself.

I felt him trying, felt him pulling back his anger.

"I don't mean to. The link was strong to you and the pack, getting that back after being subdued is fucking hard. Just sit there until I can sort my shit or yeah, I might werewolf out," he warned, only a hint of a joke in his tone.

It was enough to keep me in my seat but not enough for me not to be pissed off.

"Tell me what happened. Why did you rush me in here? What am I not allowed to see?"

Kai shook his head, pinching the bridge of his nose as he shook a little. He finally took a few breaths and looked back up, his werewolf calm.

"A message from Elias," he admitted, and I frowned.

"And why couldn't I see it? You know I need to know what the message said anyway."

He gave me a sympathetic look before answering.

"It was spelled out using humans. Dead ones. The sacrifices that your brother has been taking? Well, they're no longer missing," he said, his anger rising within him, highlighting my own as my entire body tensed.

I was glad he had stolen me away before I had seen that. I would never get it out of my head.

I swallowed back the emotion and tears clogging my throat, shaking a little as I brushed my hair back. I steeled myself against the weak, human part of me that wanted to cry, to fall into a dark pit and wallow.

I couldn't let that be my reaction. I had to be stronger than that. Elias wanted to intimidate me, get to me, but I wasn't going to let him.

I pinned Nikolai with a stare that had him smirking. "What did the message say?" I demanded.

That's when his smirk fell. He looked at me from under hooded lashes.

"Four days," he murmured, and I froze. I'd had two weeks left.

"Four days? I only have four days until the cemetery?" I demanded, and Kai nodded, his face stoic and smooth.

His eyes burned though, and I moved into him, kissing his lips.

“Then we better fuck now because for the next four days, I’m shadow training,” I breathed against him.

He didn’t respond; instead, he just pushed me down onto the bench seat and ravaged me exactly the way I needed him to before I became someone else.