

## Chapter 17 - Hot water

Zara's POV

"That went very well," my father cheerfully told Levi, as we made our way to the car. "Who would have guessed that all the silver-blessed packs would band together to help protect us?"

"Alpha, is that not normal?" Levi asked, surprised.

"No," my father said, stopping abruptly and shaking his head. "The Midnight Moon Pack does not support anybody. They lack treaties with the neighboring packs, and they even claimed to have offered his assistance in opposing the Red Howl Pack!"

My father was ecstatic about his newfound support and could not stop talking about it.

Alpha Nicholas was the first of the pack to offer assistance. Beta Ronan got up from his seat and told everyone present that the Silverado Pack and the Midnight Moon Pack would unite against Alpha Noah and his Red Howl Pack.

Alpha Nicholas appeared satisfied with his decision, and a minute later, the other silver-blessed packs concurred without question.

"Do not forget, Alpha," Levi said. "We also received assistance from smaller packs. Every wolf matters in this war."

"You are right, boy!" My father said, patting Levi on the shoulder. "Eighteen additional packs pledged their assistance in any manner they could."

"Did you count them?" I asked. I was too preoccupied to even count the number of people who had offered their assistance.

I was lost in my own thoughts as soon as Alpha Nicholas told me he would protect us.

"What?" My father asked, confused.

"The total packs?" I answered.

"Yeah," he answered. "And the council verified, as well. I have made a list of the packs that will guard us."

I slid my eyes over the names on the list my father handed me.

We had formed alliances with eight of the packs that bordered on our side. They would easily be able to protect our borders with theirs.

The boundaries of the other packs were on the opposite side of the river and the surrounding areas.

The Midnight Moon Pack was alone and surrounded by its own seclusion at the end of the lake.

"I am taken aback that certain allies failed to extend their backing," I remarked, returning the list to my dad.

Anger and disappointment ached in my father's eyes as he sighed.

"They have chosen to back Alpha Noah," my father uttered, attempting to control his rage.

"The Nightingale Pack, too?" I asked, startled. Something did not seem quite right. Alpha Jack and my father have been friends for a very long time. Why would he suddenly abandon my father?

My dad did nothing more than nod and head back to the car.

"I will try and figure out why he suddenly changed his mind," Levi remarked, beside me. "However, Alpha Jack appeared a little uneasy when he offered Alpha Noah his support."

"Do you think he has something on Alpha Jack?" I asked.

"That would not surprise me." Beta Ronan's voice came from behind us.

I quickly looked at him in the hopes of seeing Alpha Nicolas, but Ronan was by himself.

He stepped forward, reaching out to shake Levi's hand.

With a furrowed brow, Levi accepted Ronan's hand.

After releasing Levi's hand, Beta Ronan turned to face me and nodded.

"My Alpha wishes to arrange a pressing meeting with you," he declared.

"A meeting?" I asked.

Why did Alpha Nicholas not tell me directly?

"Yes," was all he said in response, grinning, nodding, and then quickly turning around and heading in the other direction without saying anything more.

"That was weird," I muttered, confused. "Was there something he wanted to tell me?"

Levi ignored my question and placed his hand on the small of my back, steering me toward the car.

We were all lost in our own thoughts on the seemingly endless drive home.

Once, my father's phone rang, and he picked it up, but I was not really listening to what he was saying. Alpha Nicolas had taken over my thoughts.

Why did the entire council seem caught off guard by his audacious and unexpected offer to serve as our resource? Why did people perceive him as ruthless and terrifying?

How did he become an outsider?

Was there something wrong with my second chance, mate?

Do I need to worry?

"Zara," my father said, startling me. We just entered the pack borders, and my gaze snapped toward him. "I would like to have a word with you after dinner," my father said. He appeared to be struggling with something, and I could not help but wonder what it was. The atmosphere in the SUV became stiff and unbearable; I could barely breathe.

Did he know about Alpha Nicholas and me?

My hands got sweaty and damp, my mind started racing, and my heart began to race inside my chest.

Will he be angry when he finds out?

"Zara, did you hear me?" he asked impatiently when I failed to respond.

"Yes, Alpha," I quickly replied.

One of the warriors yanked open my door as soon as the SUV stopped, and I hurried out before my father said anything else.

In the next instant, Levi was at my side, taking hold of my hand and yanking me out of the lot.

"To where are we heading?" I asked when we turned to face the forest and were no longer visible from the lot.

"Our old den," he answered, casting a sidelong glance to check if we were being followed.

Our den was down by the river. It has been a while since we were there. We found the old cave when we were little, and my father checked it out and said we could use it.

Over time, it became our hiding place and safe haven. Nobody dared enter it because it was regarded as holy ground.

"What is going on? Why are you acting so shady right now?" I demanded to know. "What are you not telling me?"

Did Alpha Nicholas play a role in it?

Has he talked to him about our situation?

"I will let you know when we get there," he answered.

Levi was behaving strangely. He never concealed anything from me. This has to be huge!

"Why are you unable to tell me now?" I asked. "What are you hiding?"

"Keep your voice down!" Levi growled, scanning his surroundings.

I let out a sigh and looked into Levi's eyes.

"Fine." I clenched my teeth and hissed.

"It seems important," Kaya said as she emerged from the back of my mind.

"It seems like it," I answered. "However, I do not like how Levi is acting."

Levi pulled me in the direction of the forest, without saying anything more.

When we got to the edge of the forest, he let go of my hand, undressed, and transformed into Louis, his brown wolf with a silver back and black ears.

Louis raised his head, yapping at me to shift.

"I will not," I answered. "Not unless you explain the situation to me."

"Stop being so stubborn," Levi snapped. "You are wasting precious time! Your time!"

"I am not!" I disagreed. "I have all the time in the world and..."

"Shift or climb on my back!" Levi interrupted me with a growl. "It does not matter to me either way. We need to leave right now, or I'll drag your ass down there!"

"You wouldn't dare?" I gasped in shock. Now Levi was getting carried away.

"Uhm," Levi said, glancing toward the river over his shoulder. He gave a startled whimper. "Just trust me, Zara, please."

"Fine!" Giving in, I shrugged and moved behind a tree.

I mumbled under my breath, irritated at Levi's attitude, and undressed, hiding my clothes. Levi's level of demand was unfamiliar to me.

I handed control to Kaya, who transformed into my black and silverback beast with ease, and I emerged from behind the tree.

"Finally!" Levi mind-linked. "Race you down to the river!"

He turned around and darted down to the river before I could say anything.

What was he up to? Was it a surprise of any kind? Would I enjoy it? Or would this land me in hot water?

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