

## CHAPTER 104

Jonathan POV

Aaaah. It's good to be back home. It only took one hell of a car drive, a plane ride and the rental of a car to get back as soon as possible and I stare at my pack house with satisfaction in my eyes. I've been gone for so long, but now I can focus on my pack and my duties. I feel older somehow, more responsible. I feel a pang in my chest, remembering my goodbye to Winter. She doesn't even know who I am, let alone is going to be worried about my leaving. I guess I can take comfort in the fact that she's alright and that, in the end, we were able to save her from that son of a bitch Thomas.

I pull up in front of my pack house, and take a moment to look at it with new eyes. It might not be as big as Alpha Kai's, but it's a beautiful wooden style cabin with two stories and modern amenities. It was nothing to be ashamed of. Neither was the pack, even if it wasn't the largest in the country. I was going to change all that. I was going to make my pack, one of the strongest in the world. I had big plans.

I get out of the car and shut the door, my feet pounding into the gravel of the driveway as I walk to the front door and let myself inside. I barely make it into the foyer, before there's a whooshing sound and my mother comes racing in and literally throws herself into my arms. I can feel tears trickling down her face onto my shirt, and feel immensely guilty. Even though she knew where I was heading, even I hadn't fathomed it would

be as long as it had. I was a terrible son, I thought to myself, to make her so worried about me.

"You were gone for so long" she sobbed as my arms awkwardly went around her "I didn't know if you were coming back."

I patted her lightly on her back. "Mother, I was always going to come back" I remind her gently, frowning at the wild look in her eyes "I am sorry it took so long for me to come back though" I finish up.

She continues to cry as I hold her. I don't dare move, even though my shirt is slowly getting drenched by her tears.

"Mother" I say quietly "I'm really sorry."

She pulls back, sniffing, wiping the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. "It's just that I didn't hear from you and Mason has been stepping in for you as the Beta but even he was getting concerned and . . ." she trailed off helplessly.

"Mason is perfectly capable of taking care of pack business" I assure her "that's why I left him in charge. You shouldn't have needed to concern yourself with any pack business while I was gone."

I motion for her to follow me, heading to the trusted study where all the paperwork and boring stuff gets taken care of. Somehow, I'm not surprised to find Mason sitting behind the desk, furiously scribbling away. He'd always been pedantic about making sure all of the work was done. Mason leaps up as soon as he sees me.

"Alpha Johnathon" he says formally, bending his head respectfully. "It is a pleasure to see you again."

I wave my hand at him. I don't care much for the title anymore. It leaves a sour taste in my mouth, although I can't say why that is. "Just call me Johnathon from now on" I say firmly. He nods, looking speechless.

He moves out from behind the desk and I sit in the large chair, motioning for my mother to sit down, Mason sitting in the other chair, one of his legs folded over the other.

"Did the warriors keep up with training while I was gone?" I ask turning to Mason.

"They kept to the rigorous schedule. We will have to find a new head warrior though and soon."

I'm puzzled. "What happened to Nick?"

"He found his mate and is moving to her pack to live with her" answers Mason smoothly.

Damn. Imagine that. "Who's been taking care of the training in his absence then?" I ask suspiciously. Man, I've only been home a few minutes and already I've gone into Alpha mode.

"I have; between all the other duties" Mason answers.

I stare at him in shock. The poor man must be exhausted going from one thing to the other. Clearly, he hasn't delegated any of the work, he was that pedantic he would rather do it himself and burn himself out doing it.

"Mason" I say very calmly and very quietly "that is going to end. You must have some idea of who's the best warrior by now. Ask them if they'll become head warrior. I want it done by the end of tomorrow. If they won't do it, then go to the next best and so on. However, I have no doubts that the first one will agree, considering it's many benefits and perks."

Mason looks upset and a bit sulky. Maybe he doesn't like the fact that I've come back and he's back to being the Beta again. Too bad. He can deal with it.

"I'll arrange it by the end of tomorrow" he assures me and I give a small nod.

"You've changed" my mother breathes, staring at me, her tears long gone. "It's like you've become more mature somehow. You seem to be more responsible" she adds, putting her hands to her face and looking at me in astonishment. It's unnerving.

"Mother are there any maintenance issues in the house or gardens that you would like taken care of?" I ask in the hopes of distracting her. It works.

She cocks her head and thinks about it. "Well, there's a loose step in the staircase" she murmurs "which could be dangerous. Other than that, I really can't think of anything else."

"Consider it fixed" I tell her, watching as Mason scribbles it down. I have no doubt it will be fixed by the end of tomorrow as well, if Mason has anything to say about it.

"What about rogue attacks while I was gone?" I ask, leaning back in the chair.

Mason looks concerned. "We had one rogue attack while you were gone, but it was easily handled."

"Were they killed?" I ask "or thrown in the dungeon?"

Now he looks nervous. "We killed them, should we have taken one prisoner?" he asks puzzled.

I shake my head. "No, but if you had taken a prisoner then I would have wanted to know" I explain. "You did well in handling the rogue attack. Were there very many?"

"About five" Mason answers "luckily patrol spotted them straight away. The other good thing is that we had men injured, but there were no fatalities. None of our people received life threatening injuries."

God I'm tired. The plane ride, although not long, has really taken it out of me. Or maybe it's the last few weeks spent stressing over finding Winter and then saving her from that hybrid Thomas. That's probably it. It was a far better way to travel then by wolf or foot though. If I have my way, I'll only ever be traveling by car from now on.

"Did you find the girl?" my mother asks unexpectedly. She leans forward and looks at me eagerly.

"Yes, we found Winter. Just in time too" I explain "her brother is staying there. He found his mate at the same pack."

My mother claps her hands together. "How sweet" she gushes "but no girl caught your eye there?"

I shake my head. No, the only girl who had caught my eye was Winter, and due to my own stupidity, I had well and truly lost her. I had no one to blame but myself. If I could turn back time, I would do things differently, but she was with Kai now, and she was happy and that at least was something to hold onto. Who knows if she would have found that happiness with me.

"The only girl that I am happy to see is you Mother" I tease as she laughs and shakes her head at me.

"We have to have a celebratory dinner" Mother says with a grin.

I almost laugh. I had anticipated that's what she'd do. She always loved to cook when she had the chance and this had given her the perfect opportunity.

"What do you want, I'll make anything you'd like" she offers.

"Anything you feel like making" I say honestly "a homemade meal is great; it's been a while since I've eaten one."

She looks stricken. "My poor little man" she croons and I cringe. My god, how embarrassing. "I'll have to fatten you up with some decent food. I'm going to go and start cooking right now" she cries and sails out of the room, almost skipping in her happiness.

I dissolve into laughter, Mason's shoulders shaking in his chair.

"I don't' know why you're laughing" I tease him "you know you're expected to attend dinner as well."

"It's just" he chokes out "she called you little man." He bursts into laughter. I scowl at him.

"Don't forget I'm your Alpha" I growl warningly but he just continues to laugh, tears forming in his eyes.

"Alright, alright" he finally says, leaning against his chair and holding his hands up in surrender "I'll stop."

"How is the pack running? Tell me the truth now mother's not here" I order.

He looks perturbed. "The pack is running fine, smoothly. Except for the head warrior position needing to be filled and that rogue attack, everything else has been smooth sailing."

I relax. The pack had been in good hands while I was gone. Mason had done an excellent job of keeping things running. I take note of the fact he has dark circles under his eyes. When was the last time that he had a decent sleep? I really need to organize a Gamma as well to help lighten the load.

"Mason" I say gently "I think we need to look at filling the title of Gamma as well. It's too much work between the two of us and you've had to shoulder the burden the entire time I've been gone."

I swear his face brightens up. Clearly, he thinks this is an excellent idea. "That would be fantastic. It would be far easier if we had a Gamma to help delegate some of the work to."

"Any ideas on who the Gamma should be? I feel like it should be a decision made between us, rather than just myself deciding."

That seems to shock him. "What about Jordan? He's also the best warrior and could fill both positions? Training could be a part of the Gamma's duties?" he suggests.

It's brilliant. It's like killing two jobs with one stone. "I think that your idea is brilliant" I say honestly "let's have a discussion with him in the morning. It's best to get it done quickly."

He nods and I smile. Everything is going well. I'm about to stand up and go to the kitchen, where mother is no doubt cooking furiously, when something comes to mind and I sit back down hastily.

"How is the prisoner doing?" I ask him.

Mason looks blank for a moment. The prisoner, I want to yell at him. You know, the only one that's been there in the dungeon for the last couple of months. That prisoner. The one I swore to Damien that was never going to cause trouble again.

Come on Mason, I think impatiently.

Then he looks at me and bites his lip. Now I'm feeling suspicious. What isn't he telling me? Why is he being so quiet.

"About that prisoner" Mason says in a hushed voice "Um, the thing is" he stammers.

"Spit it out Mason" I growl, watching him wriggle in the chair, clearly nervous.

"There was an incident and he managed to escape" he bursts out. He looks away nervously.

For a minute, there's just silence as I digest his words, not fully comprehending them. Then realization dawns. I stand up, towering over him as he cringes back in the chair. My eyes are narrowed and staring directly at him.

"How does one" I say dangerously quiet "one measly little prisoner manage to escape the dungeon?"

"See, the thing is, there was an omega and they got too close and..." he trails helplessly.

I can't believe it. They let the prisoner escape. One that I was intending to keep locked up for the rest of his miserable fucking life. My hands clench into fists. "How does he get away from a whole pack Mason? Did no one track him down?"

"He escaped just before the rogue attack" Mason explains miserably "by the time we ended the fight, he was well and truly gone. I didn't see the point in wasting the trackers time."

I give a loud huff and punch the wall, giving vent to the anger coursing through my body. "Get out" I say between gritted teeth "before I lose control completely."

He's out the door in a flash. I breathe, counting to ten, trying to keep my wolf from taking over, willing my body to relax. My whole body is tense, my muscles stiff, I'm breathing heavy and I'm so angry. All I feel is pure



rage right now. Finally, I sit back down in the chair and cover my face with my hands. How am I going to tell Damien and Kai that Winter's father, has escaped his prison cell and it was all my fault?