

Chapter 0031

Niklaus

The heat of the pyre dances across my cheeks, sounds of mourning echoing all around me. My brothers stand at my back while I hold our mother, who has collapsed in a heap, muttering curses in Greek.

My mother, our matriarch who was surely meant to be an Alpha, has kept this family in one piece after my father's assassination. I wasn't made an Alpha immediately, no that's not the way she runs things.

Nastassja Cirilo does not believe in nepotism of any kind; I had to earn my title with blood. It doesn't mean she loved us any less. She just comes from a long line of hybrid shifter warriors and witches.

After the farce of Kristina's funeral, I'm sure whoever is watching us realises my mother's not acting now. She's been a complete mess, blaming me for not keeping her children safe; and honestly, I stand with her on that.

Failure of an Alpha; failure of a protector.

She doesn't leave even as the guests do. She stays there, in my arms, and we watch the pyre die down and be reduced to ashes. It's just the two of us as she gets to her feet, and at this point, Ares and Laz are tending to the guests at the

hotel.

"Niklaus," she says, not taking her eyes off the ashes. "Tell me everything; don't you dare skip a thing."

I take a deep breath, fear and respect warring inside of me as I tell her absolutely everything. From when Verena arrived to what happened yesterday. Her expression is neutral as I reveal what I've been hiding, and I prepare myself for a lashing only she can give me.

"You should have come to me," she says after a moment of quiet. "This girl, she was the start of it all, yes?"

"Basically," I admit. "Without her information, Kristina would be dead."

"But Dimitrios would be alive. I'll take a strong, intelligent Beta over a spoiled daughter any day," she says in that scathing way only she can. I already know what she's going to say next, and a small part of me is hoping she won't say it.

"Bring me to her tomorrow." It's not a request.

I nod my head and crook my arm so she can slide hers into it, then we make our way to the hotel so people can offer their condolences.

Thereafter, I put tomorrow out of my head. Whatever my mother has planned for Verena isn't something I can stop, no matter how much that kitten has come to mean to me.

I call Verena into my smaller boardroom the following day, and watch her as she walks in. The slight smile she wore on her face slips, giving way to confusion as she takes in the woman sitting at the head of the table.

My mother may be in her sixties, but she doesn't look like it. She always says it has to do with her witch bloodline, but we'll never tell her we suspect that she's hexing herself.

No, that will earn us a one-way ticket to her ire forever.

"Good afternoon, Verena," I say as she walks in. "Please, take a seat."

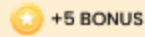
She nods and slips into a chair three seats down from my mother, the latter who looks on in amusement as Verena seems to squirm under her gaze. My mother leans forward, resting her chin on the top of her fingers, then she grins.

"Did you know your mother practises blood magic?"

Both Verena and I wear equal expressions of shock on our faces, my mother having answered a question she didn't know we were actually grappling with.

"N-no, that can't be," Verena says, wide eyed. "My mother is a homemaker—"

"Your mother comes from a long line of powerful Dark High Priestesses. You were due to take over, but instead of showing signs of witchcraft, your father's shifter side was more prominent," my mother explains, much to Verena's



shock. "Your sister is due to take over now. She's been studying under your mother's tutelage."

Verena stares at my mother in disbelief, and I can feel both her shock and hurt from where I'm standing. She doesn't know what to say as a tear slips down her cheek; her eyes flickering from my mother to me.

"I'd wager she was the one who knew you would die while being married to Lucan, so she placed what you would call a cursed failsafe on you," my mother explains, as she gestures with her hands. "Your sister must have found out she did something and killed her in your past."

From here, it makes sense. Verena doesn't know any witches, as she explained, but that doesn't mean they didn't know her.

"No, you're wrong," Verena starts and shakes her head. "I know my mother was poisoned, but to say she did this to me? Had my Goddess curse me for her doing?! It's preposterous! She's not a witch!"

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