

Chapter 4

-Lucas-

I haven't been able to rest, despite being heavily sedated. Whenever I doze off for a few minutes, it takes me back to that nightmare; a nightmare I'm still struggling to place in the real world. I can't accept what I saw, I'm not even sure of what I saw.

When Eli, Noah and I got to the campsite by the border, they were all dead; all our brothers were dead. There must have been at least 40 of them lying on the ground, some even missing their limbs. What could possibly cause such carnage?! This had been a clear attack on the camp, but all the dead were lycan! Where were the bodies of the enemies? The warriors stationed here were elite, but they managed not to kill a single enemy?

All three of us stood over their bodies for many minutes, at a loss for what to say or think. Eli was the first to speak, advising we look for clues rather than returning to the Council without any leads. We all agreed but, as we came to inspect many of our brothers' bodies, we realized that no beast known to us could've caused this type of damage. Eli was first to voice his opinion,

"It was wolves," he scowled and affirmed with absolute certainty.

"I have never met any wolf that could cause this, Eli, not against a lycan." Noah does not share the deep-rooted hate for werewolves that Eli has.

"We are right by their border, kid! If not them, whom?!"

"Eli, look around you! Not a single dead wolf? Not a single surviving lycan? And more importantly, no smell of wolf?" Eli grimaced, he knew Noah was right, but even I found myself wanting to believe the wolves were to blame if only to make some sense of this. The alternative that this beast was something unknown, far more powerful than us, was sending waves of fear throughout my body.

"We have to give them proper burial," Noah said and we all agreed, even if it would take us all day.

It took us hours to gather enough firewood for the funeral pyre. A proper send-off would've been done at the main castle, with all of our brothers and sisters present and mourning. At dawn, we would've lit up the fire, sending our brothers into the afterlife. But we had no time, and we knew that the Council would not bother on transporting them for any proper ceremony. We had to do it ourselves.

As we set the bodies, picking them up one by one, my stomach started to churn and my eyes to sting. Picking them up grounded me to what had happened. I contained my need to cry, as we placed them on the pyre.

Once we were done, Eli set it all on fire and we all bowed our heads in respect. I looked to Noah, and he had a solemn look on his face. The fire had engulfed all of them, and it was a matter of time before it would all turn to ash. We remained silent for the rest of our makeshift ceremony.

•

Once the fire had consumed itself, the sun was about to go down. Lycans have very good vision in the dark, so the walk back was not my concern, but what we might encounter was. Noah was the first to move, heading towards the camp-site, no doubt looking for clues. Clearly it had been a surprise attack, everything was in disarray. The beds were not even made, which indicated that the warriors got up in a hurry to fight. This had happened very early in the morning.

Just as we were gathering some evidence for the council, a noise was heard deep within the forest and birds were flying away in a hurry. A chill claimed my spine. I was ready to shift any moment but Eli put a hand on my shoulder, looking into the forest. Noah stepped in front of us. Cautiously walking towards the sound. We didn't move, we didn't breathe, we didn't dare utter a sound in expectation of what could be out there. It was very close to wolf territory, but not quite there. This was still lycan territory.

We heard the sound again, closer, and I almost jumped out of my skin. My lycan was on high alert, with the hairs on my nape standing up. Eli's eyes had turned black, indicating that his lycan was also just below the surface. The sound was something like a big thud, almost like a large tree had fallen over, but we knew better.

Suddenly, Noah shifted a few meters in front of us and launched himself in the air, fangs and claws out. Not needing any indication of what he had seen, Eli and I shifted and went after it too. Noah latched onto something, in the middle of the air! We both attacked, but missed. As Noah was furiously biting whatever it was that had come our way, Eli and I both kept jumping and missing. When I finally felt like I had latched onto something, it caught my leg, painfully crushing my ankle, and crushing me against the ground. I whimpered in pain, but mostly confusion. I noticed Noah was also on the ground, looking far worse than I felt.

Eli came to stand in front of us to protect us though we couldn't see the enemy. At first, I thought it was simply too fast for me to see, but in reality, this thing was invisible. Invisible! Noah and I exchanged a look, and he made the signal. A paw to his shoulder meant retreat. Before we could signal Eli, it was pinning him violently to the ground. The old lycan whimpered as both Noah and I launched ourselves to the air, latching on to the beast. It wiggled us around until it released Eli, then he grabbed me by my middle and crushed me too. Noah saw this and deepened its fangs into it, forcing it to release me.

I helped Eli up and assessed his wounds; the old man wasn't looking so good. Noah came to us and we started to retreat, but the beast was already waiting and in our way. This time, I paid more attention and could see a very faint silhouette. It was too big for me to gauge before, but now, I understood and panic gripped my mind.

Quite simply, if we didn't manage to escape, we would die.