

Chapter 19

Zyan had heard enough of his lies. We had a fucking deal. He was the one who broke it. Vince shifts just as Zyan mauls him. Blood and fur go everywhere as we start ripping into each other. Vince and Zyan fight fiercely, snarling and biting as they grapple with each other. Claws come out as they roll around, each wrestling for the upper hand. Vince manages to break free after Zyan pins him, and he lunges at Zyan, ripping into his shoulder and causing him to growl at the sudden pain. Zyan retaliates by sinking his teeth into Vince's neck, shaking him violently and causing him to yelp in agony.

Overridden by our anger, Rose, and our daughter scream in the background, which only fuels our anger. All this time, not one of them thought I would like to know that I have a daughter. I am so angry that I can't think straight. Keeping my daughter from me is no small secret. The betrayal and lies fuel my rage. And there is also the fact that Vince is alive. My mind can't make sense of it. All I can do is fight.

Seeing movement out of our peripheral vision, I catch sight of Rose trying to get between us. Vince snarls, snapping her leg, which makes me see red when she cries out and clutches it. Sage, I observe, is helping her up when teeth sink into the back of my neck. Zyan pivots, attacking my assailant, only to be attacked from behind again by Vince, returning our attention to him.

Suddenly, teeth sink into my back for a third time, trying to rip us off Vince's wolf.

It's clear that whoever is trying to rip me off Vince's wolf is no match for Zyan's teeth, as Zyan quickly turns the tables. Zyan snarls and twists,

sinking his teeth into whoever it is, only for a collective gasp to ring out loudly.

Sage's blood-curdling scream rises above everyone else when Zyan looks down at Andrei, bleeding profusely. Andrei attempts to push Zyan off him, but Zyan's grip is too strong. Sage rushes to Andrei's side, trying to help him while shouting at Zyan to let go, and I do the same. Zyan finally releases his grip, and Andrei falls to the ground. Taking control back from my wolf, I force the shift while he apologizes profusely in my head, saying he didn't see him.

Shifting back, I extend my hand to help him up. But Andrei slaps it away and shakes his head. "Get the fuck off my pack territory. You are not welcome here!" he snarls at me.

"I'm not leaving without my daughter."

Andrei's eyes move behind me, and I glance over my shoulder to see Vince assessing Rose's leg where he bit her, apologizing profusely. Yet, Rose is glaring at me. Sage speaks as I turn back to look at Andrei. "He can stay," she tells me. However, her eyes are trained on my brother. The glare she gives him confuses me.

"Mom!" Rose exclaims angrily.

"No, Rose. We warned you that this would happen. You should have told him. Casen should be allowed to get to know his daughter."

I raise my eyebrows, surprised to hear Rose defending me.

"Dad?" Rose demands.

"I'm staying out of it. Every time I interfere with your relationships, it causes more arguments," Andrei snaps as he gets to his feet. He groans, touching his shoulder where Zyan ripped into him. It is already healing, thankfully.

“This is fucking bullshit, Andrei. You know what he did?” Vince snarls. Andrei glares at him, and then his eyes go to me. “

You and I need to talk,” Andrei tells me, and I nod when Vince speaks up again. Only this time, I growl at him to shut his damn mouth.

“You're not fucking serious!” Vince yells at Andrei, storming over to him. Yet I'm suddenly confused about why Andrei is calling the shots and not Rose.

Peering over my shoulder, I see Rose scoop our daughter up, her eyes on Vince when Casey speaks. “Is Daddy and Poppy going to fight again, Mummy?”

“Shh, shh, no, of course not. Let's go inside to make cocoa,” Rose tells her, turning on her heel and walking back to her house.

Turning back to Andrei and Vince, I catch the back end of their argument. “My word is final. He can stay, or are you worried my daughter will finally see what an asshole you are with your brother here?” Andrei asks.

“He tried to fucking kill me!” Vince snarls angrily. Andrei looks Vince up and down before responding coldly, “And yet here you are, still alive.” Vince clenches his jaw, unable to come up with a response.

“Maybe next time we'll get lucky, and he'll finish you,” Andrei sneers. Woah, what the fuck is going on here? Vince's hands fist at his sides as he leans forward, and I see Sage grab Andrei's arm with a worried look on her face as she stares at Vince.

“Vince, enough!” I growl, and he steps back, peering over his shoulder at me. Andrei's sneer fades, and he steps back, his eyes shifting away from Vince to me. Sage relaxes her grip on his arm and takes a deep breath, her eyes still nervously watching Vince. Getting up, I move between them, feeling the tension in the air.

Yet my mind is racing, trying to figure out what is going on. Vince looks me up and down and growls. “Stay the fuck away from my mate and

daughter,” he snaps, turning and walking off. “You mean my daughter?” I call out, and he stops. His back becomes tense, but then Rose comes out standing on the porch. Just before Vince can turn around, she calls out to him.

“Vince!” He looks in her direction, and she shakes her head. He growls but reluctantly walks back to his house.

“I told you to leave. I'm glad to see you still don't listen,” comes Malik's voice. I turn to see him hand Andrei a shirt. He tosses me one, and I snatch it out of the air and quickly pull it on.

“You being here will make things worse for her...” Andrei growls at me. “You should have left when I said!”

“Andrei!” Sage scolds.

“Don't, Sage. You can't seriously be defending him after what he did!”

“Yeah, well, don't pretend I'm the only one that doubts his story,” Sage growls, stalking back to the house. Andrei shakes his head, watching her leave before returning his attention to me. He looks at me briefly before his eyes go to Rose's house behind me.

“You can't be any worse than him. Maybe you can make her see sense! I rather you Alpha than him,” Andrei snaps, walking off. I stare after him when he calls out.

“Meet me for dinner at 7 PM. And don't be late!” he yells out without bothering to look back.

I swallow, glancing at Rose's house and then at Malik. “Come on, let's get you cleaned up. I don't know about you, but I could use a damn drink.”

“What am I missing?” I ask, scooping my bag up as I follow Malik home.

“You still haven't figured it out?” Malik asks.

“I wouldn't be asking if I had. Why isn't Rose Alpha?”

“She is. Rose calls the shots. We are all ordered to obey unless Andrei pulls rank.”

“But he was supposed to retire?” I question, and Malik stops, glancing at Rose's house.

“After Rose banished you, Vince came back. Andrei then challenged her for her title, not wanting Vince to have it. Since then, he has refused to hand the title back over.”

“What? ...Why?” Malik scoffs and shakes his head.

“I can't say.... but if Andrei doesn't tell you, you'll know soon enough!” Malik says, glaring at Rose's place. He then turns and keeps walking. I follow, and my brows furrow in confusion.

“You shouldn't have left,” Malik says as we reach the house.

“She banished me!” I snap, sick of repeating myself.

“That didn't mean you had to go missing for four years!” Malik argues.

“Well, it's not like I had a welcoming party when I arrived back here, Malik! You told me to leave!”

“Because you were banished by Rose. Because of what you did!” Malik yells at me.

“I was protecting her!”

“Were you? Because Vince tells a different story...” I press my lips together.

“So you were the one that kidnapped her?” Malik snaps when I say nothing.

“It's not like that! Vince and I had a deal... Then when it fell through, I lost it. I wasn't going to rape my mate!”

“No, just mark her while she was underage!”

“No... I don't know. I was angry. Then Vince arrived, and we got into an argument, and I shoved him.”

“Has to be more to it than that because Rose hated you, Casen. So spill,” Malik retorts, and I sigh before nodding. This entire thing was a mess, but Vince isn't totally to blame. I can't blame him for the things I did after I thought I had killed him.

“Let me get some pants on first, and you're gonna want that drink,” I tell him, following him inside and making my way back to my old room. Upon opening the door, I was shocked to find it still the same way I had left it. Why didn't they convert it for one of the girls?

Shaking my head, I dump my bag on the bed. I am wondering if there are any vacant places. I love Malik, but I moved out when I was twenty, and I'm not sure living under the same roof as him is a good idea.

I sigh and take out my phone, scrolling through my contacts list. Finding Eziah's number, I send him a quick text letting him know I am staying with Malik. Once I have done that, I pull some fresh clothes from my bag and pull them on, only to turn around to find Malik at the door.

“Are you ready to tell me what really happened?” he asks, holding out a rum bottle to me. I sigh and accept it before snatching my cigarettes out of my bag.

“Come on,” I tell him, and he leads me out the back to where he has a firepit. I sit in one of the plastic chairs, wondering where his mate and daughters are, as I light up my cigarette.

Peering around, I can just see Rose's house from here. I lived in it by myself before Rose came to live with me. That didn't last long, however.

“The one next door to her is vacant,” Malik tells me, and I look at him. He lights his smoke, passing me the lighter. “Yeah, that might cause some arguments if we are neighbors,” I tell him, and he shrugs.

“Ask Andrei. I'm sure he'll happily give you the keys,” Malik says, and I raise an eyebrow at him.

“A lot has happened in four years. As pissed as everyone is about you lying to us. Most wish you followed through with killing him,” Malik says, and I attempt to ask what he means, but he shakes his head.

“You first. As I said, I can't tell you much. Only Andrei and Rose can, but I need to know why you did it. I need to know if you are safe to have here with my girls and mate.”

“I am no threat to your family, Malik.”

“Can never be too careful, especially when you raise someone thinking they are one person only to find out they are another,” Malik says, drawing back on his smoke.

“I had my reasons!” I snap before drinking from my bottle of rum. I watch Malik drink his before tossing it and reaching into the cooler beside him, and pulling out another.

As he cracks open his newest bottle, Malik asks, “So, these reasons will you tell me about them?” Shaking my head, I take a deep drag and exhale before nodding my head.

“Fine,” I sigh, sitting back and looking at him, trying to build up the courage to tell him what really happened.

Chapter 20

Eziah

I stare up at the manor through the windshield, exhale, and then quickly sit back in my chair. The old black manor is shrouded in darkness and shadows. The windows are dark, but the grounds are perfectly manicured, giving off an eerie sense of life and death at the same time.

I find this quite funny, given that my sister's mate might as well be death incarnate when pissed off. As I drive down the long driveway, I can see the gardens surrounding the manor, framed with dark, dense forest. It's as if the forest was protecting the manor from outsiders. The forest here has always given me the creeps.

Yet the closer I get, the more nervous I am. I haven't seen my sister in years. Not since before the fight with my fathers. I've spoken to her over the phone, but only briefly, as I prefer text messages.

Pulling up out the front, I can see Kyan and Jonah are home, which also makes me nervous. I haven't exactly got the best track record with either of them. I take a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves, turning my gaze to Temperance. She is fast asleep, and I exhale heavily, hoping she won't freak out when I try to wake her. She jolts awake as soon as I brush her hair back from her face. One hand gripping the dash, the other, the seat, as she twists herself up in the seatbelt.

"It's just me," I tell her, holding my hands up as her chest rises and falls heavily. She looks up at me with a wild expression in her eyes, slowly relaxing as she realizes who I am to her. Temperance leans forward, peering out the windshield at the imposing structure. Her eyes flicker with a mix of curiosity and unease. I can't help but smile at her reaction.

“Don't worry, it's just my sister's place,” I assure her, trying to lighten the mood. “You're safe here.” However, the feeling through the bond makes me queasy.

Temperance shakes her head, her eyes flickering dangerously as her wolf comes forward. “We shouldn't be here,” she says, her voice filled with fear. “I can't be here. I want to go.”

I furrow my brow, confused by her sudden change in demeanor.

“What's wrong?” I ask, turning my gaze to the house. As if on cue, the front door swings open, and Marabella appears. The moment she spots us, she starts to run over, her face lighting up with excitement.

Unable to contain my own, I reach for the car door handle, eager to introduce her to my mate. But before I can even open the door, Temperance leans over and grabs my arm, stopping me in my tracks.

“It's Marabella, my sister,” I explain, reassuring her. “She won't hurt you, I promise.”

Temperance looks at my sister and then back at me. The alarm on her face reminds me of when I first laid eyes on her. “Can't you feel it?”

“Feel what?” I ask, my confusion deepening.

“It's alive,” she says, her voice barely audible, and I can feel her hand that grips my arm, is shaking.

“What's alive?” I question, my heart rate picking up. Something is off with her, something telling me that maybe it wasn't a good idea bringing her here. Malachi comes forward, sensing Shadow beneath her skin, the bond changing, filtering her wolves through.

“The house,” she replies, her eyes never leaving mine.

I stare at her for a moment, trying to understand what she's saying.

I'm not surprised that she picks up on how off this place is. The Octavian bloodline is as cursed as mine. And this place always sets me on edge. I glance back at the house, her grip on my hand tightening.

Just then, Marabella reaches the car, her face flushed with excitement. She rips my door open. Temperance immediately moves to press closer to the door, tangling herself up more in her seatbelt, when Marabella gasps. "You found her?" she murmurs, her eyes moving from me to Temperance.

Marabella smiles and moves toward Temperance's side but Temperance instantly freaks out. "Easy, Marabella," I warn when I feel Shadow pressing forward with Temperance. Temperance freaks out, trying to climb out of her seat to get away from her, but the seatbelt is wrapping more around her body. I try to calm her, but she is frantic. Suddenly her claws slip through the sash and I groan, barely grabbing her in time as she moves to jump into the back seat. Marabella watches cautiously from outside while I pin Temperance's thrashing body against mine.

"Stop, breathe. My sister won't hurt you," I try to tell her, yet her heart beats hard against my hands.

"I don't want to go in. You can't make me!" she screams, when suddenly she bites me. The poison from her bite slivers up my arm, stunning me for a second as my own magic fights against the poison. Suddenly, Malachi surges forward, my grip suddenly stronger, and my teeth at her neck.

She calms instantly, and her thrashing stops, but her breathing remains hard. It takes me nearly half an hour to get her out of the car with Marabella's help. The thing I find odd is, at first, I thought it was my sister she feared. But she doesn't fear Marabella, it's the manor.

The first thing that hits me as I push open the massive wooden door of the Octavian Manor is the scent of power—ancient, dark magic. It's the same feeling I always get when I come here, like the weight of history presses down on my chest.

I glance at Temperance, wondering if she feels it too. She's practically vibrating with tension, her eyes darting around the dimly lit entryway, noticing the portraits and crystal chandeliers. I notice the way her shoulders hunch as if she's trying to protect herself from something unseen.

I guide her further inside, trying to make her feel at ease. "It's just an old house," I tell her, even though I know it's much more than that.

"Nothing to be scared of."

But as we step deeper into the manor, I feel Temperance's fear spike. I realize she's not just sensing the Octavian bloodline's power—she's struggling to keep control of Shadow. Her breathing becomes ragged, her nails digging into her palms as she fights the urge to let Shadow take over.

"I need to get out of here. She doesn't want me in here," Temperance gasps, her eyes wide with terror. She bolts for the door, but I catch her arm, forcing her to stay put.

"We can't leave yet," I tell her, my voice firm but gentle. Marabella looks at her with worry. Just then, footsteps come down the stairs of the manor, I glance over my shoulder, and see Kyan.

"Everything okay?" he asks, his eyes instantly going to Marabella. My sister places her hand out, telling him to stop, and I feel like I am trying to cage a wild animal as Temperance's eyes dart from each of us. I try to keep my grip on her arm gentle.

But Temperance is beyond listening. She wrenches her arm free and races for the front door, throwing it open just as Dominic, Kyan's father, steps into the manor. They collide, and for a moment, it's as if time stands still.

"You," Shadow hisses, her voice taking over Temperance's body. Her eyes darken, and I can see the battle for control playing out on her face.

Dominic's expression hardens as he studies her, his eyes flickering. "I know you," he says slowly, reaching out to grab her.

But Temperance staggers back, turning, and I see it is no longer her in control. I feel Shadow has taken her over while she fights to gain control when I hear my nephew's voice along with Jonah's as they come in from the kitchen. They stop in their tracks, and Jonah is quick to snatch his son up. Kyan moves instantly, just as I sense the change in Temperance. No control left, she turns rabid and Shadow shoves forward and goes to attack me. Yet one word from Dominic rings through the air. "Sleep!"

Temperance stumbles, her legs giving out from under her. I'm there instantly, catching her before she hits the floor, my arms wrapping around her trembling body as she passes out.

Dominic slowly steps forward as I scoop her up. His eyes narrow, his brows furrow as he studies Temperance.

"I'm sorry, Mara. I shouldn't have brought her here so soon—" I try to explain when Dominic speaks.

"How is that possible?" he asks, his voice low and disbelieving.

I frown, not understanding. "What are you talking about?"

He doesn't take his eyes off Temperance as he answers, "I recognize her."

"I know her, but I can't figure out how. It's right there; I can feel it."

Dominic watches her carefully, with that eerie gaze he gets when his expression suddenly turns thoughtful. "She was a Gemini twin," he says, as if we should already know this.

"Pardon?" Marabella and I both speak at the same time.