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Phoenix: 1

The pack garden was empty at this hour. I was sitting on a bench with a book on my lap, pretending to read.

I was so upset with everything happening in my life that I thought it was the best way to avoid the outside world.

"Sebastian is going bonkers in your absence. You aren't even answering his calls," I stiffened as Beta Hunter dropped onto the bench beside me with the ease of someone who wasn't in a mood to allow personal space.

I lowered my face and buried it deeper into the book, pretending I hadn't heard him. I felt him leaning sideways, peering at the cover, "Isn't it a little late for reading?" he quirked up a brow, "And seriously? You are reading about witches? That's your pick?"

I sniffed quietly, blinking fast, and turned a page to keep my hands busy, "Better than sitting around doing nothing."

In all honesty, I just picked up a random book from the pack library. Thank Goddess, the librarian didn't make an issue because I was no more part of the pack.



Beta Hunter chuckled, resting his arm along the back of the bench, "You're the only one I know who loves reading about women throwing spells in the middle of the night."

I pressed my lips together, refusing to look at him. If I did, he'd see the redness in my eyes. Why was he even here? Didn't he have anything better to do?

Did Sebastian send him?

"Hey," he said softly, leaning closer, "Are you hiding tears?"

I flipped another page after shaking my head, "I'm fine, Beta Hunter. I just need some alone time. Please send a mindlink to His Highness that I'm alive," I tried to read one or two words carefully through the tears, "Also, remind him, I'm his Royal warrior. I'm supposed to keep him safe. It's not the other way round."

He nodded but didn't leave the bench.

I had this weird intuition as if ... as if he was here to watch me.

"I know as a beta you're supposed to inform Sebastian about everything going on around..." I gestured in the air, "I'll really appreciate it if you ask him not to follow me here. I just need some alone time."



Beta Hunter got the message and got up from the bench, "For the next time, don't forget your phone in the room, Phoenix. Because if by any chance, Sebastian couldn't contact you, he can start tearing down the packhouse, looking for you."

Uh-huh. Did he do the same when his wife died?

I don't think so. 2

"You look sad," I was still on that bench when I heard Amora's voice, standing at some distance.

I didn't move, just muttered, "Why? What happened?"

"Keep dreaming of your alone time, Phoenix," my wolf tried to tease me. For a change, it was good that there was someone who knew about my feelings without communicating much.

However, right now I wanted nothing but peace, silence, and some alone time.

Amora stepped closer, and I finally looked up at her, then shook my head, "I'm not sad, Amora. It's just ..." I shrugged, "I'm in no mood to go to sleep."

She chuckled lightly and slid into the exact spot where Beta Hunter had been sitting a few minutes ago, "You don't look alright to me,

Phoenix."

I again forced a small shrug, "Oh, I'm fine, Amora."

She tilted her head, studying me like she could see straight through the lie, "No, you're not. You're upset because of Jai. Aren't you?"

My throat got tight, and I stared down at my hands.

She went on gently, "The one person who had been your shadow all this time... soon, you'll leave him behind. I understand, my dear."

My head snapped towards her, with wide eyes, "How do you know so much about us?" She just got into this pack, so how was it possible?

A sly smile curved her lips, "I've got connections, dear. Don't forget... I can stay invisible when I want. Eavesdrop wherever I please. Though yes..." she gave a mocked sigh, "I suppose it's against manners."

My mouth twitched upwards, but I didn't remark.

Amora leaned back a little and looked up at the sky, "Phoenix," her eyes stayed on the stars, "Don't tear yourself apart over people drifting away. Friends, packs, even family... sometimes

they're not meant to stay forever. That doesn't mean you are any less. It means you're moving into something bigger than this place." 1

I was listening to her while holding my breath. It seemed like she knew a lot about me. Her hand found mine, warm and gentle, "Jai was your anchor for a long time. But sometimes these anchors keep you from sailing anywhere. The Moon Goddess might be cutting those ropes for a reason."

I swallowed hard, staring down at our joined hands, "You know too much about this pack, Amora," suspicious crept in my voice.

Amora forced a faint smile that didn't reach her eyes, "That's because my sister used to be here. She was the pack witch."

My brows pulled together "Really?" I now turned my body fully towards her, "Where is she now? I heard she left the pack before I joined."

Amora shook her head as a sarcastic smirk appeared on her face, "Left? Who told you she left the pack?"

I felt a knot tighten in my stomach at the way Amora said it, already warning me, I wasn't going to like her answer.

Her eyes glistened as she looked past me, "She didn't leave the pack, Phoenix," she paused as

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her tone dropped a little, "She was murdered," tears started sliding down her face, "Jai. Your friend. He killed her. Before starting your treatment, he threatened her and forced her to leave the pack. My sister..." she sobbed, "she didn't defy the orders. But he ... he still killed her. Brutally. Heartlessly..." 1

She had started crying, and I felt like the air had started freezing around me.

Jai?

My friend... Jai Chris?

He was a doctor. He was supposed to heal his patients. How could he kill someone?

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