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Rhys

Fear couldn't begin to describe what I felt last night. I'd been hunting Marcus down when they informed me that Dawn had disappeared.

I immediately skidded to a stop. I couldn't understand what they were talking about. How on earth had she gone missing? To make matters worse no one recalled seeing her. Her scent wasn't anywhere but in her room.

I would have waived it off and continued my pursuit of my dubious uncle who remained elusive, but I already knew that for Kaden to inform me, it was getting out of hand.

I split up with my hunting team and doubled back to the Packhouse. The triplets were already combing the forests. Lex was checking the pack boundaries for possible signs of trespassing. It was going to be difficult for anyone to track her since we had yet to bind her to Golden Crest.

Kaden was certain that she was abducted. He believed it had something to do with Marcus or the Crest. Princess, however, was quiet and pensive. As soon as I stepped into Dawn's room, I understood Princess' expression.

"You were the last person to see her, weren't you?" I barked.

She winced and nodded.

A sinking feeling held my mind in a chokehold. I'd been trying to avoid it. I'd been trying to ignore it. Now that it had happened, it was glaring at me.

I felt foolish. I felt like I'd been deceived.

I grabbed Princess and dragged her into my Den.

"What is your father planning?" I growled, gripping her face.

She shrieked and sputtered something about not understanding what I was talking about.

"You know!" I roared. One of two things had happened and I wasn't sure which I wanted them to be.

"Dawn! Dawn! Wasn't! Abducted! We both know that! Your expression tells me that you either know what happened or you noticed that something was wrong the last time you set eyes on her!"

My anger was slowly igniting into fury.

"I don't know!" She screamed. "She may have been taken."

"Taken?" I laughed. "Believe me, Princess, that the moment anything steps into my territory, I'm immediately aware. There are no foreign scents anywhere. Her room looks pristine. There is also no indication of any foreign body there. So you better start speaking up. What is your father up to?"

"I already told you!" She screamed.

"No! You tried to make a bargain." I retorted, growing impatient.

"What else do you want me to say? My father is secretive and sketchy. I told you he believed he and Golden Crest deserved more. I don't even know what more means to him!"

"Do not raise your voice at me." I hissed

She broke into a sob. It was weird seeing Princess cry. I could feel that the source of her tears wasn't me though. It never was. Her pain and tears had something to do with Dawn's disappearance.

"I'm going to give you one last chance," I said in a low menacing tone. "I don't want any more of your vague bullshit. And you're going to listen carefully and give me clear-cut answers because if you don't, you can say bye to your carefree life. I see you've developed some sort of attachment to Dawn. So not only would I rip her away from you, I'll also put you to work and make you go after the Crest yourself. Do you understand?"

Her eyes grew wide in fear and she covered her mouth with her hands.

"Do you understand?" I repeated.

"Yes." She rambled.

"When was the last time you saw Dawn? What was her reaction? What was amiss?"

"Just before dinner." She sputtered, "She was jumpy and avoidant. She also told me that she was tired. The interaction felt weird, but I thought she was recovering, so I let her be."

"Did your father have any discussions with her before he brought her here?"

She shook her head. "Not that I know of. I'm sure she didn't meet him until

that day. But he watched her. He needed to make sure that she was the perfect candidate. I also know that he was working with someone."

The information she gave wasn't big but it was enough to draw a conclusion. Marcus didn't have anything to do with her disappearance. It was becoming glaringly obvious that Dawn ran away on her own.

And she ran away because she was not over her fool of a mate. I gritted my teeth and began pacing. This conclusion hurt more than all of the others.

"You're going to watch her for me, Princess. You're going to tell me if and when your father tries to contact her."

Princess nodded.

"Leave." I finished.

Princess left and I called Kaden and Lex next. Then, I berated them for letting her slip out under their care and gave them the ultimatum to find her before I did.

The truth was that I was hurting. I felt betrayed. It grated my nerves that she was still pinning for a fool when she'd been under my care. Did she know the disgrace she was going to bring to me?

I decided that when I found her, I was going to lock her up. The problem was, how had she been able to sneak away so easily? They searched all night but she didn't turn up.

My anger grew with every second. I was sure that I was disgusted and disappointed in her. I was certain that my attraction to her had been flushed down the toilet.

But that all changed the moment she stepped into my Den, looking rough and tired. Her body was dusty and marred with mud. She also had different cuts that were already healing. Her hair was a bird nest of twigs. And those eyes had fear in them.

Just one sniff of her body and all the anger I had vanished. I wanted to feel her warm body. I realized how jealous and possessive she was becoming. The most important thing was finding out that she didn't run away. Instead, she had done something very stupid. Didn't she care about her life? Who in their right senses jumped out of a balcony engraved in a mountain? When did she become such a daredevil?

Even as I barked at her, I wanted to pull her close. More importantly, I was worried that she might try something even worse. The fact that I was afraid scared me more. Because my gut told me that something worse was coming.

Kaden came in, as soon as she left to eat, followed by the triplets.

"Your job is to watch her. You are her enforcers and today you failed." I grumbled at them.

"We're sorry, Alpha." They chorused.

"If anything of this sort happens again, I'll separate the three of you." I threatened.

They gasped and held each other tightly. Good. I didn't care that I was being extreme. I just wanted Dawn to be protected at all times. I didn't understand why but I didn't want to experience what happened earlier ever again.

I told myself that I was reacting that way because she may have caused me my position. But that was a lie. It was something else. Something is hidden deep within. Something I chose to ignore.

"You'll not like what I'm about to tell you," Kaden said as soon as the triplets were gone.

I huffed and leaned on my chair. The amount of mental gymnastics I'd done in the last few hours left me tired. This was why I stayed away from the female folk. They were a distraction. A very enticing distraction.

"We've found Marcus," Kaden stated, rubbing his neck.

"But what?" I shot.

"Instead of going to Black Moon. He attended a General Council of the Alphas in the north."

I sat up straight, I wasn't sure I wanted to hear what came next.

"He boasted about having a head start on the Crest. He barely survived with his life. They attacked him."

"Fucking hell!" I growled.

"That's not the worst part," Kaden added.

"I don't need you to tell me!" I snapped. "Marcus has succeeded in

directing everyone's attention to Golden Crest! For fucks sake, what is wrong with that old man!"

"We should divert their attention." He suggested "Some people are speculating that you already have the Crest. They think you're hiding it here. They also think that it's why you're yet to be seen. We need something to throw them off."

I groaned. It didn't matter what we did. Whether we liked it or not, war was coming.

"Your utmost priority is to make sure the Pack Members are ready. Prepare the fortresses in the mountains. Every member... no... every single being living within Golden Crest must undergo vigorous training daily. See to that. Ask Lex to return the enforcers from all the auxiliary packs. I'll go after Marcus myself."

Kaden nodded. "Can I suggest something?" He said after a beat.

I smacked my forehead, knowing that I wasn't going to like anything that he was about to say.

"There's a rumor that is fueling these speculations. And it's that Marcus was the last person to see the old alpha Devon, alive. Whether that is true or false, we need to bait the other Alphas. We can keep them away from here and make them go after your uncle by..." he trailed off.

"By what?" I demanded.

"You should go on a tour of some sort or a honeymoon with your wife." He mumbled.

"Are you insane?" I growled. Marcus wasn't the last person to see Devon alive. I was. But no one needed to know that.

"Maybe, but we need both of you in the public eye. That's distracting enough. You'll take her to see the other auxiliary Packs. That'll give us enough time to prepare for any attacks."

"That's absurd. Do you know how dangerous it will be? That's stupid!" I argued.

"Think about it." He persisted. "If you embark on a loud and braggadocious honeymoon, it'll be the clearest sign that you're not in the race to be Alpha Prime. Plus you'll be checking up on your auxiliaries. Meanwhile, back at home, we'll be preparing for anything."

"Some people may not see it that way," I mumbled. "They'll think, I'm using the honeymoon to cover up while I search for the Crest."

"No." Kaden countered, "No, they won't. Because we'll arrange the tour in such a way that you'll only go to your auxiliary packs and we'll make sure that both of you are always seen in public."

I sighed. It was a smart idea. However, I wasn't ready to play such a dangerous game. No one knew that the main reason I asked them to keep Dawn out of my sight was because I couldn't spend a minute in her presence without wanting her.

She was an addiction. If I could barely keep my hands off her now, what would happen when we were alone on the road? We'd have to play pretend. We'd have to sleep in the same space. I wouldn't survive it.

"No." I grumbled, "I'll find another way. The first thing to do is bring Marcus before me."

"If you say so." He murmured before leaving me to my thoughts.

I began to plot ways to keep the attention off myself and Golden Crest. I could create rumors about fake sightings. The thing with rumors was that they were always traced back to the source.

I needed to find a way quickly before my pack became the first casualty in the race to find the Crest.

I thought about Marcus. He was the one that put us in this mess in the first place and I was going to get him to dig us out of it. All I had to do was give him something that he couldn't refuse.

I had the perfect threat. Princess. She was going to be my bait. Marcus may have behaved as if he didn't care for anyone, but I knew how he could get when it came to anything concerning his daughter.

He was going to have to listen to me or risk losing her entirely.

He has been captured. Kaden's voice rang in my head. He's heavily injured and alone.

"Perfect." I mused.

It was time to remind him and everyone who stood in my way of why I was known as Ruthless.