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Rhys

Nothing was more satisfactory than seeing Marcus looking beat up.

"That's what you get for stirring commotion," I said smugly.

My uncle who was healing slowly chuckled and adjusted on his chair.

"Why are you here, Alpha? Shouldn't you be back at your pack enjoying your wedding bliss? You're defeating the purpose of my mission." He said with his tired voice.

"What mission? The one I sent you on or the one you created for yourself?" I snapped.

"I was supposed to be a decoy." He shrugged.

"Yet you couldn't keep yourself from poking your head where it didn't belong. Who asked to pretend to be a representative of me and spew nonsense to the Alpha in the North."

He looked away. "That didn't go quite as I'd planned."

"What exactly had you planned, Marcus? Why'd you keep meddling with things that don't concern you?"

He groaned and adjusted. "You've become so pompous that you can barely see ahead of you."

"I don't know what's going on in that head of yours," I growled. "Frankly, I don't want to know. But I'm certain that nothing warranted what you just did. We were trying to take attention away from ourselves and you went ahead and did the exact opposite."

"You don't get it, do you?" He said grimly. "I'm going to do whatever I can to make Golden Crest the home of the Alpha Prime."

I palmed my forehead. "Do you have a fever? Or is something eating your brain? I've said it before. I'm not in the race to become Alpha Prime. Golden Crest is not gunning for it."

He shook his head. "The foolishness of youth. That's why I'm here anyway. I'll make sure that you eat those words."

My anger flared up. "What the heck is wrong with you, Marcus!" I snapped.

"Why are you so intent on ruining the peace I've created for my people?"

"Peace?" He laughed. "That's weakness! You've become too comfortable. You've become less ambitious. You're stifling your wolf. You're stagnant!"

"Are you listening to yourself?" I spat. "How is being content a weakness?"

"Stop lying to yourself." He growled, "You're not content with anything. You're just running away from responsibilities and commitment like you've always done."

My breath stuck in my throat. Marcus had hit below the belt. Bitter memories of my parents' death raged through me. It took years after the death of my parents before I took the position of Alpha. I'd tried to keep Marcus as Alpha Regent for as long as possible. I told myself and everyone who asked that I wasn't in the right headspace.

The truth, however, was that I didn't think I would make a good leader like my beloved parents. They were the best thing to happen to Golden Crest. They carried with them a lovely light that brought about joy and happiness.

I on the other hand was battling with an extremely dominant wolf within me. I carried darkness within me. I felt like becoming Alpha would not only taint Golden Crest but would also grant my wolf immense power that I couldn't control. I was afraid and couldn't have been more wrong.

I wouldn't be here if not for Marcus and Devon. They beat the excuses out of me.

"You're afraid!" Marcus roared, standing up from his chair with surprising agility for someone whose body was badly battered up.

Within me, I flinched and felt like taking a step back. But I was Alpha now and I wasn't afraid like he accused.

"I'm not going to let your fear, let you do a disservice to Devon's legacy. He believed in you. He said he saw something in you!"

The mention of Devon's name had my chest splitting into two. I'd promised to find the person responsible for the death of his body.

"You won't stop me, boy!" Marcus said, "The earlier you understand that I will not stop at nothing to have you in the run for the Crest, the better."

I rubbed my face and clenched my fists. "You're delusional, Marcus." I

growled, "My word still stands."

He laughed. "Then prepare to defend what matters to you. Your beloved Golden Crest will receive attack after attack. I'll pick off those surrounding one by one until you have nothing but the Crest to chase after. It doesn't matter if it takes years. I'll get it done, Rhys."

A cold chill swept over me. "You wouldn't dare," I growled.

"I have already," He countered.

"Then I'll have to kill you, Uncle," I promised.

Marcus remained unfazed. "Like I said earlier. I'll make sure you eat those words and I'll mock you when you do."

"You will do no such thing," I growled, trying to keep myself from charging at him.

He laughed and settled back on his chair. "I'll give you credit for being smart enough to not underestimate me, Alpha. You'd better return to your beloved back to put protective measures in place. I'm very close to siding with your enemies because I need to wake you up from your fantasies."

"Marcus!" I roared, smashing my hand on the desk close to his head.

"Yes, Alpha." He responded simply.

"You're hereby confined to this room until further notice. The moment you leave with my permission, you'll be excommunicated from Golden Crest."

He smiled. "Yes, Alpha."

He was too smug for my liking and just then, I remembered the last trick I had up my sleeve.

"When you're excommunicated," I continued, "You'll be hunted and chased to death by no other person but your precious Princess Hollowvern."

His eyes widened and his face blanched. I smirked, knowing that I'd also hit him below the belt.

"When you're excommunicated, you'll be killed by Princess Hollowvern, she'd take your position immediately," I repeated.

I didn't wait for him to react before storming out. I already knew that I had my uncle where I wanted him. I could have gone further and compelled him to not do anything without my permission but I wasn't ready to

completely box him up. I was going to give him one last chance and if he pushed me again, I'd do worse than sending his daughter after him.

The journey back to the pack was short and uninteresting. My head was filled with thoughts of Alpha Devon and a certain female that I'd forbidden myself to think about.

I needed to begin my investigation in Creekside. I wasn't going to fail Devon after everything he'd done for me. It's why I wished the Crest remained in Creekside. Because it would have been easier to fish out the culprit.

Despite how urgent it was, I couldn't go after the culprit for Devon's death until the whole Crest debacle was over. Marcus was up to something sinister and I knew that it was only a matter of time before he began to fight back. I needed countermeasures like he suggested.

The pack evening training for the pack was ongoing just as I arrived. I shifted back to my human form, found some stashed clothes, and ambled toward the arena.

Pack members were in different groups, and following their instructor's instructions.

Lex. I called. I'd put him in charge of my boundaries. I needed to know what to expect. He was by my side in seconds.

"We've secured the weakest links. There has been no news of any ambush. The Deltas will be arriving soon." He reported.

It was silent. I didn't like it. It would have been better if there was someone actively trying to spy on us.

"It's too quiet." I said to him, "They are watching. Someone is planning very quietly. Sweep the pack for spies."

"Yes. Alpha."

"And as for the Deltas, ask them to create a diversion. No one but me should know when they enter my territory. Make them turn around."

"Yes, Alpha."

"Are our allies still allies? Or are they planning to switch up?" I asked, inspecting the pack members who were training.

"We're watching them. A few Alphas are being secretive and sketchy. But

no one has made a bold move." He responded.

"Hmmm. Keep an eye on them. They can turn around to become our weaknesses. We also need information from them."

"Yes, Alpha." Lex agreed, before slipping away from my side.

I moved a few paces before skidding to a stop at the sight before me.

Dawn Griffin was sparring with Princess and was failing horribly.

Kaden! I roared in my head as my feet moved swiftly towards them.

She fell uncoordinatedly to the ground but jumped back to her feet with a smile and a crooked posture. She had already sustained a few bruises, yet she was still fighting back. Did she have a death wish or did she enjoy getting beat up?

She barely avoided Princess's swing that had her twisting a bone.

"For fucks sake!" I snarled, shocking everyone including myself.

They all froze in their positions as I marched to Dawn who was rubbing her shoulder.

"Yes, Alpha." Kaden finally responded, heaving heavily by my side.

I grabbed Dawn's arm and dragged her to a secluded corner.

"Why the hell is she training with the triplets!" I roared. "Why is she training in the first place?"

"You instructed everyone to train?" Kaden responded.

"Everyone but her!" I snapped.

"And you. Do you enjoy getting beat up? Look at your body. You're bruised and battered, while Princess doesn't have a speck of dust. She hasn't even broken a sweat."

She exchanged a puzzled look with Kaden.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you." I hissed. But the moment those green eyes met mine, I swore. I didn't even know why I was reacting this way.

"This training is over for you." I declared, "Now get lost."

I needed to be far away from her before I was overwhelmed with the need to touch and feel her.

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hear her, "I've already gotten the memo. I'm nothing to you. I'm an inconvenience brought about by your uncle. I've heard it loud and clear. What I'm not going to let you do is get me killed because of your impulsive behavior. For someone who has asked me to stay away from him repeatedly, you're too invested in my well-being. Don't you think?"

With that, she turned away from me. "Tell me when he's done being an asshole and has made a decision."

I couldn't believe my ears. But I didn't know which one was worse, the fact that she spoke to me like that before my pack or the fact that I was turned on.

I made to go after her, but Princess and Kaden stopped me.

Leave her alone. Princess hissed into my head. And mind you, she'll continue her training whether you like it or not. I won't bother explaining why it's important to someone as obtuse as you.

The triplets were already trailing behind Dawn who'd taken off running. But I didn't miss their veiled disappointment.

Princess went after them, while Kaden dismissed the pack training.