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Rhys

I paced around my den with my fingers balled into fists and my wolf's rampage was a second from being unleashed.

Many Alpha's are running with Marcus' claims. They are currently teaming up with our allies. They are having meetings and trying to find our weakest link.

I slammed my fist on my desk. Confinement wasn't good enough for my uncle. I ought to have him skinned alive at least or do something that would hurt him. Maybe it was the only way it would learn.

Reroute the enforcers again. Tell them to visit our allies and remind them of their agreements. I need them to be as domineering as possible. I bellowed in my head.

There have been so many sightings of rogues sniffing around my borders. It's getting on my nerves. Why are they using rogues? Are they too scared or is something up somewhere?

Marcus! This is all his fault! If he'd just kept to the plan and stopped trying to upstage me at every given opportunity, none of this would be happening.

The door to my den swings open and Kaden rushes in.

"Should you be here? How is practice going?" I bark.

"There's something you need to see." He stated avoiding my glare.

I narrowed my eyes on him. "What the heck are you talking about?" I growled.

Kaden's lips pressed together and he shook his head before sighing.

"It isn't something that I can say, Alpha," he muttered.

My heart skipped a beat and the overwhelming sensation that something was wrong hit me.

"Show me," I grunted.

He nodded solemnly and gestured to the door. I followed, running

countless scenarios in my head. I didn't know what was happening but I was certain that if one person in my pack was hurt, I'd commit murder.

We'd just walked past the courtyard when Dawn's scent hit me. I tried to ignore it, but it seemed somewhat impossible. My eyes automatically scanned the area for her. She'd been too well-behaved for my liking in the past few days. I should have been enjoying the peace of not having to chase her around or worry about her safety, but I was a bit annoyed.

I hadn't set my eyes on her and to make matters worse, I couldn't get the thoughts of her or that darned kiss out of my head. Why had I even gone ahead to kiss her? I lied to myself that it had just been to shut her up when all I wanted to do was taste those lips again. It didn't help that she'd fled from my presence after and away from me all through.

"How's she?" I blurted, wishing I could see her.

Kaden halted for a moment, "Should you be asking?" he murmured.

"Watch your tone," I grumbled.

He shrugged. "You can't blame me. I'm just following your instructions. Besides, there's something more important you need to focus on."

"I said keep her out of my sight and out of trouble, not away from me," I barked. "I'm Alpha and I deserve to know about every being in my park."

Kaden smirked, "Okay, great one since you're very invested in every being in Golden Crest. You'll be very amused with what I'm about to show you."

I gritted my teeth. "You're one sick and cunning bastard Kaden," I spat.

Kaden laughed and shook his head. "I believe I can change your mind in just a few minutes. Be patient, Oh Great One."

I wanted to curse out loud, but I'd already known Kaden for too long to start doubting him now. My wolf on the other hand was pissed. It didn't think that there was anything more important than knowing what Dawn was up to. We'd left the packhouse by now but her scent still lingered, teasing me like an eastern wind.

It was when we crossed the residential areas that my senses returned. The first thing that hit me was the awful scent of rotting corpses. I halted and exchanged a look with Kaden, whose expression had grown serious. He still didn't say a word, even after I hit him with my most serious look. The stench increased as we got closer to the boundaries at the north end

of the Pack. A sense of premonition hit me. The North border had always been our weakest link. It was from there that we had regular occurrences of trespassers and rogues.

Lex joined us, accompanied by a few warriors. My fear morphed into something else. I wanted to know more than ever why I hadn't done anything.

"Did you reroute the Deltas as planned?" I questioned Lex. He jolted, then nodded solemnly.

"Okay!" I snapped. "If someone doesn't tell me what's going on this instant —"

The forest trickled out until just outside the boundary. That's when I saw it. At once I understood why Kaden was unable to speak. I froze.

Below us, a heap of dead bodies was piled in what looked like a freshly dug-out pit that lay just outside my border. I was too stunned to speak. It explained why I didn't notice anything. They'd made sure to place the bodies as close to Golden Crest as possible but had taken care to not trespass. A growl escaped my lips. I wanted to know who did it. Who dared bring death to my doorstep?

My wolf felt challenged. To it, someone was warning us. Someone was toying with my supremacy.

"FIND THEM!" I heard myself growling. "Find the person who dared to do this."

Kaden grimaced, "You know it's not possible. Those bodies are too decomposed for us to sniff out the perpetrators."

Like always he was right but it couldn't do anything to calm my raging heart. I began to pace around as I wrestled with my emotions. My wolf didn't want to think. It wanted to rip someone apart.

"But how did this happen?" Lex murmured.

I swung around until I faced him. "Shouldn't you be answering that question?" I growled. "You were placed in charge of the borders."

He swallowed and looked away. It further enraged me.

"Rhys, we may be focusing on the wrong thing." Kaden's calm voice tore through my haze of anger. "It's not when but how and more importantly,

why?"

My hands combed through my hair as I tried to force myself out of rage. The question 'why' rang in my head. Something was wrong somewhere. I was sure of it. But what?

"The person to answer these questions is the person who orchestrated this," I declared.

Kaden frowned and opened his mouth to speak but I stopped him with a wave of my arm.

"That shallow pit is freshly dug," I continued. "Meaning that this job was done by a large group of soldiers or paid mercenaries. Either way, it had to include a large number of people. Lex, you have guards patrolling these places right? So this was only possible when they saw an opportunity. They did it swiftly but they must have had intel from somewhere. And I bet that they are currently fleeing somewhere. That somewhere is most likely where they'll be paid. Split into two groups. One group should follow the trail from which these bodies were obtained. The other should follow the scent of dead bodies. They must still bear the stench of these bodies. We'll find them."

The group nodded and quickly divided themselves.

"Lex check for sightings of large groups. Kaden interrogate pack members for traitors."

They nodded.

A voice resounded in my head. A pack was razed a few days ago. It was wiped off every single being. All the bodies are gone.

A chill swept through me.

It's a setup. Someone is trying to set us up. Kaden's mournful voice rang in my head.

"The worst part is that the mate and children of the Alpha of Silver Moon were killed alongside them," Lex announced.

My heart fell into my stomach. The Alpha of Silver Moon was my oldest ally. He'd just found his mate after years of suffering betrayal. He would be in so much pain that he'd be far gone from reasoning. Before we became allies, he'd been a formidable opponent.

I felt tired. The war was yet to begin and somehow they were already cutting through my defenses.

"There's more," Lex announced.

I didn't think I wanted to hear or know what it was but I nodded.

"It's being rumored that it was the most probable place to find the Crest."

"Fucking Hell!" I snarled. It was a perfect plan. With my already tainted history. No one would believe I was innocent. They would think I did it.

"Find them. Find the people who did this," I commanded. "And find out what Marcus had to do with this."

With that, I walked away. Now more than ever, I needed Devon. The Old Alpha would have known what to do and what to say.

"What are we going to do about the Alpha of Silver Moon?" Lex asked.

"I'll take care of him," I muttered before taking off into the forest and away from the stench of false accusation.

I didn't return to the Pack until I'd been summoned for the council meeting. The stench of betrayal clung to me as I strode into the council chambers.

As expected news of the massacre had reached them and they wanted answers. Answers that I couldn't provide.

"Alpha Rhys!" Bartholomew slammed his fist on the table. "Explain this atrocity! These people were under our protection!"

A hollow ache spread through my chest. "I don't know. This is a setup," I growled.

Elder Elara cleared her throat. "Indeed, Alpha. But appearances..."

"Appearances be damned!" Someone snarled. "They've murdered innocents! They've framed us! We must retaliate!"

I laughed bitterly. "Who, might I ask, are we retaliating on?"

"It doesn't matter. These bodies were found right by our border. Don't think we're blind to the implications."

"We must act swiftly, Alpha. Darius of Silvermoon is on the warpath. A single spark can ignite a conflict that will engulf us all."

"We can't just sit here and be accused like this!" roared Bartholomew. "We

retaliate! Show them the Golden Crest isn't a pushover!"

Elara countered, her voice rising. "Retaliation based on suspicion? We'll be playing right into their hands! We need proof, not bloodshed."

The room dissolved into arguments. Accusations flew like daggers, from one point to another. This massacre was a calculated move, a way to incite war between our packs and Darius'. The real culprits, whoever they were, knew exactly what they were doing.

"Silence!" I roared, my voice thundering above their bickering. As the room fell quiet, I continued. "We will not react in haste. Darius is my friend, and I share his grief. But we need proof, not vengeance. But make no mistake, I will find those responsible. Whoever orchestrated this...they will answer for their crimes."

There was a tense silence, then Elder Elara nodded curtly. "Very well, Alpha. But know this – the pack needs to see action. We can't afford to appear weak."

I agreed, my mind already racing. I needed a plan – a way to find the truth and clear my name, all without giving the enemy the war they craved. My gaze met Lex's "How long until the bodies can be examined?"

"Perhaps a few hours."

"Good. I want a team sent to retrieve any evidence from the scene. Discreetly. We need answers before Darius arrives."

The council grumbled, but they wouldn't dare to disobey a direct order.

"Have you considered possible culprits?" Lex's voice was very low as he asked.

I already knew what he was thinking. Marcus. My uncle may have been insane but he didn't do this. He wouldn't stoop this low.

I raised my head and realized that the whole chamber was quiet. They eagerly waited for a response.

"No. Not yet." I mumbled. "But I'm almost certain that whoever it is, is lurking too close to Golden Crest."

There were grunts of agreement around the room.

"Now let's talk about something progressive," Bartholomew said. "The test of the Nobles approaches and that of the Luna is most important..."

I shook my head. "We have more important things to think about." I waved my head in dismissal. "And you dare not try to bring down my wife. After all none of you were blinded, or forced to make her Luna. You'll reap what you sow."

The room erupted in murmurs. Ignoring them, I stood up and wandered away, allowing my feet to lead me away from their noise to where I could find solace.