

The Alpha's Forbidden Bite #Chapter 3: Blood in The Forest - Read The Alpha's Forbidden Bite Chapter 3: Blood in The Forest

It was Petra who found the body.

She had gone out with the early patrol, a standard two-hour sweep along the northern and eastern lines that the warriors ran every morning before the rest of the pack was fully awake. Routine work. Boot leather and cold air and the particular alertness that experienced wolves kept switched on even when nothing was expected. Petra had run this sweep three times a week for the past four years. She knew every turn of it, every landmark, every smell.

She knew immediately when something was wrong.

It hit her at the junction where the northern trail bent east toward the corridor boundary a smell, sharp and copper-bright against the clean cold of the morning air. Her pace slowed. Her hand went to the blade at her hip without conscious thought. She signaled the two warriors with her, a young man named Breck and a steady older woman called Lana to spread and approach slow.

They found him forty meters further down the trail, in the narrow ravine where a creek ran during spring thaw.

He was one of theirs. A pack member named Otto Reld, a forty-three-year-old unmated male who had served as a perimeter scout for over a decade. Reliable, experienced, not given to risks he hadn't calculated. He was lying face-down at the edge of the dry creek bed, his body arranged with a precision that had nothing natural about it. Not fallen. Placed.

Petra crouched beside him. She kept her face even and her breathing controlled, and she catalogued what she saw with the clinical attention of someone who had been in the field long enough to know that observation mattered more than reaction.

Otto was dead. Had been for several hours, the cold had slowed things, but the stiffness told her he had died sometime during the night. There were no obvious wounds on the back of him, no visible trauma to explain it. But when she pressed two fingers to the side of his neck, she found it, two small punctures, precise and clean, already beginning to close in the strange way that such wounds sometimes did.

She stood up.

She looked at Breck and Lana, and what they saw in her expression made both of them go very still.

"Nobody touch him," she said. "Breck, run back to the packhouse and get the Alpha. Now."

Axel arrived within fifteen minutes, moving at a pace that wasn't quite a run but wasn't ordinary walking either. Daren was with him, and behind them a four-warrior escort that fanned out to secure the perimeter of the ravine without being asked.

He stood over Otto Reld for a long time.

He didn't speak. He crouched the way Petra had, examined the puncture marks, pressed the surrounding tissue with careful fingers. He tilted Otto's head slightly to get a cleaner look at the angle of the marks. He was not a man who had spent a lot of time around vampire work, but he wasn't ignorant of it either. His father had made sure of that. Every Alpha of Ashveil, going back four generations, had been taught what the twin marks looked like and what they meant and what they did not mean.

What they meant was obvious.

What they did not mean was that this had been ordinary. Vampires who fed from wolves in their territory did so by agreement or by stealth, and they covered their work. They didn't leave bodies. They didn't place them.

This was a message.

"When did he go out?" Axel asked without looking up.

"He's not on any scheduled patrol," Daren said. He was standing just behind Axel's right shoulder, his voice even and controlled. "He went out on his own. He does that sometimes did that. Early morning walks along the eastern line. He liked the quiet."

"Anyone know how far east he typically went?"

"Never past the junction, as far as we know."

Axel looked at the placement of the body. The deliberateness of it. He looked at the ground around it, no disturbance in the soil, no drag marks, no footprints. Whatever had brought Otto here had moved without leaving a trace.

He stood up and turned to Petra. "You kept the patrol tight?"

"Nobody crossed the creek bed. Scene is clean."

"Good." He looked at Daren. "I want this kept within the senior circle for now. If it moves through the pack before we have information to give them, it becomes fear, and fear makes people stupid." He looked around at the ravine, the trail, the heavy shadow of the eastern trees. "Who handles the death rites?"

"Elder Malka," Daren said.

"Get her. Tell her it needs to be handled quietly and with dignity, but quickly."

Daren nodded and moved.

Axel stood alone for a moment beside Otto Reld's body. He had known the man — not well, but in the way an Alpha knew his pack, which was intimately in some ways and at a necessary distance in others. Otto had been quiet and efficient and had never asked for more than the territory gave him. He had deserved to grow old in it.

Axel felt the anger move through him the way it always did not as heat, but as cold. A deep, focusing cold that settled into his bones and clarified everything. He had learned a long time ago not to act from the heat. Heat made mistakes. Cold made decisions.

He walked the perimeter of the ravine twice before he left. He looked at every tree, every shadow, every line of sight. He was building the geometry of it in his mind —

where someone would have had to stand, where they would have had to move from, how far they would have had to carry the body and from what direction.

The corridor boundary was less than half a kilometer to the east.

He knew the math that made.

Back at the packhouse, he called a closed meeting with the senior circle — Daren, Petra, Soren, Calla, and Russ. He laid out what they had found with the same factual directness he used for everything, and he watched their faces as they absorbed it.

Soren's expression went granite-flat. Calla looked sick for one brief moment before she locked it down. Russ said a quiet, vicious word under his breath and then went still.

"Who else knows?" Soren asked.

"Petra's patrol. That's it."

"How long can we hold it?"

"Long enough to get ahead of it," Axel said. "I need to know two things before this goes wider. Whether this was sanctioned by the Voss Clan leadership, or whether it was done by a faction operating without authority. And whether Otto stumbled onto something he wasn't meant to see, or whether he was chosen specifically."

"You think it was a warning," Petra said.

"It was placed. Warnings get placed." He looked at the map on the wall. "The question is what we're being warned about."

Nobody had an answer for that.

Outside, the sky had not brightened. The grey hung on through the morning, low and close, pressing against the treeline with a persistence that made the forest feel nearer than usual. Inside the war room, five experienced wolves and one Alpha sat around a table and looked at a map full of black markers and tried to think clearly in the direction of answers.

In the eastern corridor, something old and cold and patient waited without movement.

Blood had been spilled on pack ground.

The next question was whose would follow.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.