

Updates and Plans

The next morning, we dressed for training and went downstairs. Gwyn was already stationed in the middle of the hallway. Her ears twitched toward us, but she didn't turn. She knew the only people coming from behind wouldn't attack her.

I rubbed my hand over her head. Lucien did as well. She needed touch and these little bits helped as much as letting her play with the pups.

"We'll be gone for the same amount of time today. After we get cleaned up and get everyone fed, I'll take you to Lucien's oce. It's his day to do school drop-off. Do you need to go out?" I asked her.

She nodded at me. We headed down to the ground oor and I let her out the back door. This must be almost like what humans felt when they had a pet, but mine was smarter than theirs.

"Everything starts today. We'll start getting things in order. We have until the thirtieth. I'm sure we can have a lot resolved before Clover comes." Lucien said as we leaned against the counters in the kitchen.

"Right. Let's see. We have the debrieng and update this morning, then we're splitting early so I can have time with Cara to get the initial plans together for the mating conference. I have to check in on a few members of the collective and take care of the bigger disputes that were sent to me. Talia said she'd be back in the area for Solstice if she nds Val by then." I sighed.

"Marius still has nothing?"

"Not at the call yesterday. He's part werewolf, so I want to bring it to the Werewolf Association. We let the vampires and witches have their turn. He's one of us, too. I have a call scheduled with Queen Maeve. I want fae on this, as well. I'm done waiting." I said.

"You've been far more patient than I thought you would be. I was surprised when you didn't take over as soon as he didn't come home on time." Lucien chuckled.

I raised an eyebrow at him. "Are you saying I'm impulsive, Alpha?"

"Only an impulsive woman would do some of the things you've done, my queen."

Grinning, I shook my head. If not for that impulsivity, I wouldn't have found him. He ended up grounding me a lot over the last ve years. I loosened him up as well, so it was a fair trade.

Gwyn came back in and we locked the door before heading out to training. She went back to guard the pups. I'd miss having the extra bit of security, but I felt Gwyn being with Richard was better for her.

Training was fairly routine. Lucien and I led everyone in the run. Dilly and Claude were right behind us, followed by Richard and Caleb.

Even though they weren't the Beta and Gamma anymore, Thierry and Robert trained with us. We also had the four elite warrior teams join our training. Cara wasn't joining us, though.

Caleb talked to me when Cara was pregnant with their rst pup, Christopher. He said he didn't want her training with us when she was pregnant. Pack born wolves weren't as sturdy as rogue born wolves while pregnant. I agreed to it. I usually stopped training in my last month of pregnancy, but that was a concession I made for Lucien more than a need I had.

After running, we did ght sequences and three and threes, where one person was attacked by three others at the same time. It took a while to get everyone accustomed to ghting three attackers at once instead of having sequential attacks, but they were doing really well.

We played tag instead of sparring. The person who was 'it' would try to tag others into being 'it' as well. The players who were not 'it' would dodge instead of running and couldn't leave the eld. The person who was 'it' had to move on after ve misses and couldn't come back to that person until they'd faced off with at least two others.

It was fun and didn't get me and Lucien as... excited... as sparring did. Not that I would've minded, but we had too much to do today. I didn't think I could give him the attention he deserved.

On the walk back to the packhouse, I gave a brief rundown on Gwyn and what we learned yesterday. I felt like it would be better if we didn't have to hash it out in front of her. She didn't need to feel like a burden.

"Richard, we want Gwyn to stay with you until she's healed. That may mean she'll be with you even after her human side comes out." I said as we walked.

"Amy, I don't need someone with me all the time. I'm better now." He groaned.

"She was rejected and something made her abandon her pack, Richard. She's hurt and she's been hurting for years. This isn't about you and your loneliness. Maybe she can be a friend, but we're sending her to you in order to heal her, not you." I replied.

"Gamma, this is part of your job. She needs support and being around someone who is not mated will help. She may not be completely feral, but she has times when her wolf nature will come out. It's a risk to people who have pups. She's almost as big as Remus." Lucien added.

He didn't want to make it an order, but I knew he would. Lucien was a caring Alpha, but he wasn't above ordering someone to do the work he wanted them to. I liked that. I adopted it myself instead of just ordering people to do what I wanted.

"That's true, Richard. When your mother and I were in this position, we would pick who was the best option to help someone who was rejected or lost their mate. It sounds like you're the man for the job." Robert told him.

"You'll like her, Richard. I've only met her twice, but she's funny." Dilly chuckled.

"Fine. I'll take care of her. If you're hoping I'll give up on my second chance mate, though, you're wrong. I'm not going to fall in love with some wounded wolf." Richard said.

His dad and brother patted him on the back. When Kaysie, his niece, moved away for college with her friend Magnus, a vampire who used to be a fae water spirit, Richard started pulling back into himself.

Richard had been in therapy ever since his wolf almost stripped Clover of her animal magic a few years ago. We had supports living with him and he was in charge of running with the younger wolves for their rst few months after they turned seventeen. He and his wolf, Niall, needed the interaction. With the addition of Kay's support, Richard started getting better.

When Lucien and I announced our fth, and nal, pregnancy, Richard just deated. No, not deated, turned to stone. He went from being soft and sweet to being stiff and chilly. He sent his roommates away and had his maid move out to the packhouse instead of the staff bedrooms in his quarters.

Lucien tried to talk to him, but Richard said he was ne and just wanted space to himself. He didn't want people watching him and reporting back to us in his own home. Even though he isolated himself in his home, he still carried out his duties, went to family meals, and went out with friends.

It was like he was putting on a façade of normalcy. All the reports we got on his progress from his therapist said he was coping with his feelings in a healthy way, even if it didn't seem like it to us. It would have to do until we knew more.

If Richard had shown resistance while we were in the oce, Gwyn might not have wanted to go with him. It would take us a while to nd someone suited to care for her. Lucien may have lied a little about Gwyn's wolf mind being dangerous for children, but it was dangerous to have too much going on around her all the time.

We all went our separate ways to get ready for the day. Lucien and I showered and dressed. We were too focused on our schedule to indulge in each other like we normally did in the morning.

-

When we got down to the oor where the pups were, Gwyn was sitting in the hall watching them toddle toward the stairs. I knew the nannies had already taken Marianne and Juliette down.

They were only six months old and not old enough to take the stairs yet, no matter how advanced werewolf pups were. Lucas and Lissette scared me a little when they tried to help Alexander and Josephine get down the stairs.

It reminded me of when Étienne tried to help Lucas and they both fell down the stairs about a year ago. It was a good thing Lucien worried when the oldest two started crawling and decided to have the stairs going down to the main level padded and carpeted.

Luckily, werewolf children were a lot more durable than human children. Étienne was tougher than Lucas because he was rogue born. He wrapped himself around his little brother as much as he could and took the brunt of the impact of the fall.

Now, Lunette and Étienne were watching over everyone as they made their ways downstairs. They were a lot quieter than they'd been before that dark witch tried to take Lunette. They'd always been a little secretive, mostly talking with each other, but I could tell they were starting to understand the danger of the world. The reality of the things I told them.

I put my hand on Gwyn's head. She let me pet her. Most wolves would allow it from their mates or from children, but not from anyone else. It was one of the things that told me she needed a lot more than we could offer.

Lucien and I needed to focus on our pack, collective, and pups. Richard didn't have the same amount of responsibility. He had the time to focus on her.

"Come on, Gwyn. Breakfast is ready." I said.

She stood and we headed downstairs. Gwyn went to her bowls and started eating as I settled in with my family. There was a lot going on.

Étienne, Lunette, Elisabeth, and Helene were all in the graduating class for preschool. They would start kindergarten next fall. Lucas and Lissette were in the midway class. They would be starting kindergarten the year after.

It would be two years before Alexander, Josephina, Marianne, and Juliette started preschool. Although none of our children were born in the same chronological year, two sets of twins had been born in the same school year groupings.

With the fuss Dillon made at Addy and Aaron's rst day of school a couple of months ago, I was a little concerned about what my reaction would be. Preschool was different than kindergarten. Lucien would probably be more of a mess than I would.

The thought made me smile. I looked over at Lucien and he smiled back as we listened to Lunette and Étienne telling us about how they were going to see a play at the pack elementary school. Dilly was recording it. Addy and Aaron were in it.

It wasn't a big play. They were playing colors and wrote their own lines for what things were typically those colors. 'I'm yellow, like the school bus.' Not exactly Shakespeare, but Dilly was going nuts about it.

He was so proud of all of his adopted children. They couldn't have gotten more involved and attentive adoptive parents than Jean-Claude and Dillon. I loved watching how all four of the Lister children thrived. Kaysie was the only one who kept their last name, but she approved of her little sister and brothers taking the name Dubois-Metz.

After breakfast, the children either cleaned themselves up or were cleaned up by nannies. Our maids took care of the dining room while Lucien went up to get the things we borrowed. Since he was in charge of taking the older kids to preschool today, he would return them.

Gwyn came and stood with me by the front door. We were met by my assistant and Étienne's assistant, Rei and Dia Odhran. About three and a half years ago, Clover tried to help out by getting me support. It was overstepping, but a caring gesture.

She brought in Rei and Dia's mother, Gem, to be my new assistant after my previous assistant died in an attack on the pack. Gem was more suited to caring for preschool, so we made her the head housekeeper last year when the previous housekeeper retired.

"What's on the books for today, Rei?" I asked.

"After the debrief with the ranked members, Cara will meet us in your oce afterward to start with what will be needed for the mating conference. After lunch, there are four proposals for you to review from your program heads. There is a phone call scheduled with Mr. Greene and Mr. Scarlet, followed by a call with Queen Maeve. Then reviews of major issues that have been reported since yesterday." She replied.

Since the program heads took over their positions and got used to their jobs, my workload had lightened significantly. I wasn't tired when I left my oce and had a lot more time. Rei was also amazing. She kept things organized and on track.

When everyone arrived, we headed out. Rei and Gwyn were with me. Lucien and Dia had Étienne, Lunette, Elisabeth, Helene, Lissette, and Lucas. Josephine, Alexander, Juliette, and Marianne were with Pamela and Dionne, their nannies.

"Remind me to call the Association. I'm not going to let that investigation get buried again." I told Rei as we headed off to Lucien's oce.

Rei nodded.

About a year and a half ago, an investigation request Alpha Jason Moore put in had 'gotten lost'. There was an initial visit by a pack-aligned investigator from the Association, but he came back and reported no problems. Normally, we sent a second to conrrm. The paperwork disappeared and the investigation was forgotten.

I was livid when Jason called me to ask if I could light a re under someone. There was no excuse for this. I had streamlined their process and made it idiot-proof. I didn't exactly think it was an idiot causing issues, though.

In fact, I was suspicious about the sudden incursion by a dark witch after all these years of safety. Someone was trying to distract me from something. And they seriously f****d up if they thought endangering my children would help them.