



Business and Gossip

Gwyn sat in the corner of the oce after sning around a little. I set les out on Lucien's desk. Rei set out glasses and a pitcher of water. All the talking could make our throats dry.

Caleb and Cara came in. He was our Beta and my cousin on my mother's side. He looked like his father with his golden blond hair and hazel eyes. He was tall and muscular. All Cara could talk about when she met him was how attractive he was.

Cara was one of my two childhood best friends. She was Alpha Jason Moore's little sister and we met when the previous Beta of the Daylight Moon pack adopted me. We were twelve years old. She was taller than me with wavy strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes that always held a mischievous glimmer in them.

He gently guided her to their seats and made sure she was comfortable before sitting next to her. I loved how he took care of her. They were very happy together. This was their third pregnancy.

"How are you this morning, Cara?" I asked.

"I'm ne. I don't know why he does this every time. I'm only a month along." She sighed.

"I don't know. Pack wolves are weird like that." I replied with a smile.

Lucien used to carry me home from the hospital every time we went for pregnancy checkups. I almost missed it, but it was also terribly embarrassing. It was one of the silly things I permitted.

Jean-Claude and Dillon came in next, followed by Lucien. They all took their seats. Dillon was my other best friend from childhood. I was so excited when his mate turned out to be my cousin on my father's side, Jean-Claude.

Both men were around 6'0" with warm, tanned skin and amazing ghting skills. Their similarities ended there. Jean-Claude had copper-colored hair and rich, honey-brown eyes. Dilly had dark blond hair and jade green eyes. Dilly was a gossip and Jean-Claude only shared his secrets with his brother and his mate.

Dillon was built like a rogue born wolf with more compact muscles and build. Jean-Claude looked like a fairly typical pack warrior, with the heavier build that implied. Dillon fought like a vampire and Jean-Claude fought like a werebear. They were perfectly matched.

Lucien sat next to me and I poured him some water while he sorted his les. Richard was running late. Dilly was probably linking him to get him to hurry.

The kids' play started in three hours. Which was plenty of time, but Dilly vowed to never miss a single thing the kids did, so he was antsy.

Richard strolled in a minute or so after Lucien had his papers settled. He paused in the doorway and sniffed before looking at the corner where Gwyn was. I looked over.

She was sitting up, staring at him with her head tilted. Gwyn sniffed the air. I gripped Lucien's hand.

They didn't move toward each other. Instead, Richard turned back to us and sat next to Jean-Claude. He nodded brier to me.

Richard was Jean-Claude's older twin brother. They looked similar, but Richard wore his hair long and wasn't as thickly built as Jean-Claude. My uncle, Robert, said that was how twins worked in their family.

My father was Robert's twin brother. He was thick and muscular like Jean-Claude. There were three universal facts about the rst-born Dubois children. First, they were always boys. Second, they always had eyes that looked like rich caramel. Third, the second born was built to be a warrior.

Before my father, Jean-Luc, and Robert were born, there was a fourth rule. The second son was always gay. My father was the rst one in the history of our family not to be interested in men. Which was great for me and bad for Lucien.

Lucien's rst mate was my mother. He was only eighteen and waited for my mother to turn seventeen. He was fairly certain she was his mate, but it can only be conrmed once both people have manifested their wolf. She rejected him in favor of my father. Lucien banished them both from his pack in a t of rage.

My mate regretted his rash decision and tried to nd my parents, but they had moved to the other side of the state and were using fake names. They died when I was six. They were killed by hunters who were led by King Fuller of the Limb Torn Collective.

He wanted me as the mate for his son, Kyle. It started a string of events that led me to my future as the Queen of the Eaten Heart Collective and the Luna of Lune Rouge. That was beside the point.

For a moment, I really thought Richard had found his mate. He'd been waiting for her for so long. So many of the visions and readings from the seers we consulted about the Ghost Wolf and Richard's mate sounded similar. I'd been almost certain she was his mate.

"You okay, Richard? You seemed confused." Lucien said.

"Just getting used to the new scent, Alpha. My apologies." He replied.

"Don't worry about it. Everyone, that is Gwyn. We'll address her in a few moments. First, Beta, what is the status of the pack after the attack?" Lucien asked.

"The people who were injured were treated and have either healed or are mostly healed. The local witches have decontaminated the area and did a cleansing on the pack as a whole." Caleb reported.

"Any information on how he made it past the magical alert system without setting it off, Dillon?"

"Nothing. I checked the motion-activated cameras all around the pack lands, too. I have nothing. The guards reported seeing nothing. No one can gure out how he got in." Dilly said in a frustrated tone.

"I asked everyone. No one could pick up his scent. If not for Addy playing in the garden, we wouldn't have even known what direction he went." Jean-Claude added.

Gwyn's head came up and she came over. We turned our attention to her. She sat next to Richard and started pawing at her nose.

"You could smell him?" Lucien asked.

She yipped in response, then laid down and sunk her back like someone was climbing on her. Gwyn stood and sniffed the ground like she was following something. She stopped and laid down again with a small whine, then got up and turned back to us.

"She followed his scent when she was returning Lunette." Richard said.

"Even I couldn't catch his scent." I murmured.

There were small traces of it, but nothing solid enough for me to track very well. A pack wolf shouldn't have a better sense of smell than a rogue wolf. It didn't make sense. There was something about her, but I couldn't gure it out.

I'd never seen a pack wolf give up on being human. I'd never seen a wolf, who wasn't an Alpha, who was the same size as Gwyn. I'd never met anyone who smelled so much like a wolf. Even in their wolf form, werewolves smelled like werewolves. Not like natural wolves.

"Can you lead us to where you left his body?" Lucien asked. "We need to collect it so our witches can get more information about him. None of our people can gure out where you came from before you came out of the stream near where we found you."

Gwyn returned to sit next to Richard. She nodded. The corner of Richard's mouth twitched. There was a brief moment where he seemed almost... proud?

"Richard, Jean-Claude, I want you two to get a team of warriors and go with Gwyn to collect the corpse." Lucien ordered.

"Yes, Alpha." They replied.

We continued on with our business, covering new guard rotations, infrastructure updates for the Swift River site, diagnostics that needed to be done on our security system, general facts about Gwyn, and going over the list of teens who would be getting their wolves in the coming week. As we talked, I watched Gwyn put her head in Richard's lap and Richard stroke her fur. It wasn't lost on anyone else, either.

They might not be mates, but it looked like they were forming a bond. We wouldn't point it out, though. Neither one of them would appreciate that.

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Once we were nished, Cara, Dilly, Rei, and I headed to my oce, while Jean-Claude, Richard, and Gwyn went to meet up with the warriors, and Lucien and Caleb worked on other business.

When my door was closed and we were all situated on the couch and armchairs, we started smiling at each other. Rei had quickly grown accustomed to being part of our circle. She was observant in other ways and added a lot to our gossip.

"Did you see the way Richard was petting her? How he closed his eyes and scratched behind her ears? It was so cute! I almost started squealing!" Cara said, hugging herself and wiggling.

"She didn't hesitate to put her head in his lap. He didn't act surprised in the slightest, either. It was as if they had always done that. Do you think she might be his mate?" Dilly asked.

"I don't know. He didn't react like she was, and neither did she. I could imagine she would've freaked out." I said. "Cara, Gwyn was rejected by her mate. She indicated that she didn't leave her pack because of it. I'm inclined to believe her. The few wolves who have been rejected in the pack will usually request a transfer if they don't want to stay. None of them go rogue. The sooner she's healthy, the better. I want to nd out what pack she came from and get to the bottom of why a wolf like her didn't think she could transfer." I told them.

Cara looked like she was going to cry. She was always more emotional when she was pregnant. Dillon nodded solemnly, remembering what I told them at training. Yesterday, he came to my oce and told me how funny he thought Gwyn was.

Once she realized he wasn't a threat, she acted annoyed by him. Normally, people were a lot nicer to him after he said he was my best friend. I liked that about Gwyn. The approval of ranked members didn't seem to matter to her. It was refreshing.

"She wouldn't have trusted him as easily." Dilly said. "I've seen when people nd their second chance after rejection. It's hard because they're afraid of being rejected again and basically being told they're not good enough by the person who is supposed to love them, twice."

"Richard would never do that, but she doesn't know anything about him. That's not important. It would be hard for Gwyn to nd her second chance when her other self isn't able to be reached. Patty said it felt like she was sleeping. No... not sleeping. You know how we're born with our wolves, but they don't manifest until we're seventeen?" They nodded. "Patty said it felt like a person who's between twelve and seventeen. The magical attachments are there, but the other part is unreachable."

"How could she just go dormant like that? Even if I got rejected, I don't think I could do that." Cara said.

"I don't know, but we're going to support her. She needs us. I don't want you guys pressuring her or Richard. We need to keep them together." I told them.

"Didn't Lucien tell you not to play matchmaker with pack members? I seem to remember him telling you that just a couple months ago." Cara chided.

"I'm not playing matchmaker. I'm ensuring that a member of my collective who is a potential member of this pack is healed. The more time she spends with Richard, the better. She trusts him already. He could be her link to coming back. It's hard for her to connect to us, because we're about her age and have mates and families. Even though Richard being mateless sucks, it's something she can identify with. I hate saying it, but it's a blessing to have him here." I replied.

"What about her weird scent?" Dilly asked. "I didn't notice it as much outside, but I did in the oce."

"No clue. I'm planning to have Silas come for a visit. His site is home to the only wolfwere in the collective. I haven't met her, but I think she might have some insight as well. We're going to gure all of this out." I vowed.

"Good. Now, we need to get on the mating conference plan." Cara said with a nod.

I groaned. I didn't want to do this. I wanted to start getting people on the mystery of where Gwyn came from and what happened. Lucien was taking care of the dark witch situation, because the attack was on the pack and the pup he took was the future Alpha. I'd help, but this was his responsibility for now.