

Chapter 20

Caden

Tylon's anger wasn't for me. Not really.

It was for the situation, and the trespass, the fact that a rogue had made it into the house. Still, when his voice rose, I played along. Maya didn't need to know how deep this went.

The minute her door clicked shut upstairs, the air changed. Tylon's shoulders dropped, the controlled fury slipping into something heavier.

"She could've died," he said, quieter now. "In this damn house, Caden. When since do rogues cross the wards?"

"Never," I said. "Not until tonight."

The living room has already started being cleaned by the help. I was sure within minutes it would be clean. But regardless, I could still smell it.

Rogue blood had a stench that clung to the walls even after it was gone. It was metallic, foul, and old.

My wolf shifted under my skin, restless again. He hated the silence that followed fights like this.

The back door creaked open, and Leo stepped inside, dirt streaked across his neck and a faint cut along his jaw that was already closing. He ran a hand through his hair, half-irritated, half-exhausted.

"Never until tonight," he said, echoing me as he kicked the door shut. "What the hell was that? In the house, of all places?"

No one answered. The smell of wet fur lingered where the body had been dragged out.

Tylon rubbed a hand across his face, the tension deepening around his eyes. "When did rogues start getting this bold?"

"They're not bold," I said. "They're desperate. Or hunting."

Leo frowned. "Hunting what?"

"Maya."

Both heads snapped toward me. I didn't flinch. "It followed her scent here. And it was so determined, that it didn't notice me until I was on it."

Tylon's hands dropped from his face, and the steel in his expression sharpened. "You're sure?"

"I'm sure," I said, though it made no sense. "This didn't seem random."

The silence that followed stretched until even the walls seemed to hum.

"Is she really your mate?" Tylon asked finally.

His tone wasn't judgmental, but there was something strained under it, like the question itself cost him.

"Yeah," I said. "Maybe I didn't know at first because we thought she was human, but—"

Leo cut in, shocked. "She's not?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I felt it. I formed a bond with her. You both sensed it the day we found her in the woods. And her scent... it's not just human anymore. It's not completely wolf either. It's something else. Like...

like her scent has been tampered with."

Leo shook his head. "I nursed her after the first attack. Her blood didn't smell special to me."

Tylon crossed his arms, pacing the room. "Maybe it's because she's your mate. Bonds change perception. It could be masking her scent from us." He paused, brow furrowing. "But if she's not human, and she's not wolf, what the hell is she? Why can't we sense her wolf?"

"I've been asking myself that for days," I said. "Every instinct in me says she's mine, but she doesn't react like one of us. Her pulse and her scent is too clean. It's like the bond only touched half of her."

Tylon's gaze flicked to me. "And the other half?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "But it's waking up."

Leo leaned back against the wall. "You think it's tied to the rogues?"

"It has to be. They never step foot on protected land, let alone inside the mansion. Those wards are older than the Academy. They shouldn't have been able to pass through."

Tylon's hand clenched. "Unless someone on the inside lowered them."

The thought hit hard. For a second, none of us spoke.

"That's impossible," Leo said, shaking his head. "The wards are sealed by bloodline. Only you can access them, Tylon."

"Exactly," Tylon muttered. "Which means something else broke through. Something stronger."

"Maya is tied to this somehow. Whatever they're looking for, they think she has it."

Leo exhaled sharply. "That doesn't make sense. She's only been here a little over a week. You can't seriously believe she's connected to the rogues."

"I don't believe it," I said. "I feel it."

That shut him up.

We were quiet for a while. The only sound came from the ladies cleaning up.

"I want to tell her about us," I finally said and I meant it.

"No," Tylon protested instantly.

"She deserves to know," I said.

"She will die," he shot back. "If you tell her now, you light a fire that none of us can control."

"She's my mate," I said, my voice rising before I could stop it.

Tylon stepped closer. "You don't even know that for sure. You don't know who this woman really is."

Something in me snapped.

I moved before I thought about it, grabbing him by the collar and shoving him back into the wall. His hand came up to block, but he didn't hit me. We both stood there, breathing hard, our wolves simmering beneath the surface.

"Watch what you say about her," I warned. "I know you weren't thrilled when she arrived, but she's here. And she's mine."

Tylon's eyes flared silver. He met my gaze evenly, voice low. "I'm not your enemy, Caden. But this... her... it's different. We don't know what we're dealing with."

Leo stepped between us, his tone steady but urgent.

"Enough! We can't afford to fight each other. Not now."

Tylon pushed off the wall, brushing past me. He grabbed a glass from the counter, filled it halfway with water, and drained it in one go before setting it down hard.

"Something or someone is targeting her. If the rogues are coming this far in, it's no coincidence."

Leo nodded. "I don't think they're trying to kill her. They would have when they took her the first time."

The words hit me like a blow.

"They won't touch her again," I said finally. "I'll make sure of it."

"You can't guard her forever," Tylon said. "If the Council catches wind of this—"

"They won't," I interrupted. "I'll handle it."

He studied me, eyes narrowing. "Like you handled tonight?"

I didn't answer that. The truth was, I'd barely made it in time.

"Whatever she is, the rogues know something we don't. And I think the council does too," Leo said quietly. "They were looking for her before she ever stepped foot here. So maybe it's not about the house or the wards."

"Then what?" Tylon asked.

"Her blood," I said. "It's not like ours."

Leo frowned. "How?"

"It pulsed," I said. "Like it was alive."

No one said anything after that. The silence stretched thin between us.

Tylon ran a hand through his hair again, frustration bleeding through his composure. "You can't tell her yet. Not until we figure out what she is."

I looked toward the stairs, toward her room. "I don't think we'll have that choice for long."

"Why?" Leo asked.

"Because whatever's inside her is already waking up."

Tylon's mouth thinned, and Leo's brows pulled together.

"We'll protect her," Leo said, voice steady. "Whatever it takes."

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I nodded, though I wasn't sure protection would be enough this time.

My gaze drifted back toward the window, where the forest waited in silence. Somewhere out there, the rogues were still watching and waiting.

"The question isn't what she is anymore," I said quietly. "It's who... and why someone wants her."

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