

## The Resulting Chaos

A FEW MINUTES EARLIER

I nodded politely to Briggita, Alma, and Zia as they walked by on their way into the party. Ta y was with them, but she paused, reaching out and giving my arm a reassuring squeeze.

"She'll be here in just a moment," she remarked with a sly smile. "Try not to pounce on her the second you see her."

"No promises," I grinned, and she gave me a wink before joining the others.

I'd been waiting for this moment all day, excited to finally see Shade again. After tonight, nothing would ever be able to keep us apart. But as the seconds turned into minutes, my excitement shifted to anxiety.

*Where is she? Ta y said she was right behind her.*

And then I felt it, the sheer power of it forcing me backward as it rushed against my skin and penetrated through every part of me like a tidal wave crashing against the shore. I knew that energy.

This was Shade's gift.

Chaos erupted all around me as her ability spilled over every wolf in the party. Fights broke out, mating squabbles escalated, and lovers embraced passionately, losing themselves in the intensity of the moment.

Some screamed, terrified by the sudden shift in emotion. Some cheered, their excitement giving way to dark desires.

It was absolute mayhem.

My father barked orders, trying his best to control himself and the situation. My mother remained calm, trying to rein in the pups as they went wild with childish abandon.

I started forward to help them when I heard it.

"Caelan," Shade called weakly through our mind-link.

"I'm coming, Shade," I assured her.

I didn't waste another second. I took off in the direction she should have been coming from, following her scent. It muddled with the cacophony of smells filling the pack house, making tracking her more frustrating than it should have been.

*Crap. I can't tell which way. Why did I have to demand so much cherry pie?!*

It would be a long time before I allowed it to be cooked in the pack house again. The only cherry pie scent should be Shade's.

I hurried out the back doors just in time to see a group of wolves I didn't recognize disappearing into the trees.

Outside the air was clearer, and three familiar scents met my nose. I took a deep breath, inhaling the stink of pungent pollution, the overly acidic scent of citrus right before it spoils, and the alluring aroma of cherry pie.

*Alpha Huxley, Sunny, and Shade.*

I rushed into the trees after them without a second thought. Two wolves jumped on me from behind, the three of us crashing to the ground as several more surrounded me. I threw them off, calling for Dillon, Ta y, and Oliver through the mind-link.

*Goddess, I hope they've shaken off the effects of Shade's gift.*

One of the wolves in front of me snarled, his body crouched low as he prepared to pounce. Just as he leapt, three wolves I'd know anywhere burst through the undergrowth.

Ta y and Oliver jumped straight into the fight, scattering Huxley's forces while Dillon tackled the wolf that had tried to attack me. I quickly shifted and joined them, smashing into another pair with a growl.

"They took Shade!" I declared as I jumped onto the opponent closest to me, snapping his neck with a twist of my head. "Huxley has her! We have to find out where he took her!"

I swiped my massive paw against the face of the next Dark Moon wolf, my claws digging into his flesh and destroying his eyes. He howled in pain, spinning around desperately as he struggled to see.

I left him, racing to help my friends. *I need one of them alive for questioning anyway, and he's not going anywhere.*

Ta y and Oliver were tearing into their own opponents with ease, but Dillon was fighting two wolves at once. I rushed over and jumped on one of the attackers, gripping his ear between my teeth and ripping it free from his head.

He snarled, sailing beneath me and snapping at my leg in an effort to break free. But I wouldn't be stopped so easily.

I grabbed onto his other ear, blood gushing into my mouth as I tore it off. He yowled in pain as Dillon nished off his opponent with a sickening snap, stalking toward the wolf I had pinned to the ground.

He gripped the front of the warrior's neck and yanked, ripping his throat out with his sharp teeth. Ta y and Oliver trotted over, their foes dead as we surveyed the carnage before us. The panicked whimpers of the one I'd blinded reached me.

*Bring him here,* I instructed as I shifted back.

Dillon and Oliver changed into their human forms, running over and grabbing the wolf. By the time they dragged him over to me, he'd lost the ability to maintain his wolf form, his injuries too grave to hold it any longer. They dropped him to his knees before me.

Ta y remained in wolf form, circling him and snarling, the blood of his comrades still staining her fur.

"Where did they take her?!" I roared. "What does Huxley have planned for Shade and Sunny?!"

"What makes you think I'm going to tell you anything?" he gasped, his face twisted in a pained grimace as he spat on the ground before me.

"Because if you don't talk, I'll begin removing one appendage after another until we find the one that finally loosens your tongue," I remarked, grabbing his arm roughly and yanking it back sharply. "Now, where did they take my mate?!"

"Okay, okay! I'll tell you what you want to know!" he squealed. "Alpha Huxley only wants the one sister. The gray-haired one. He just used the other one to get to her."

"Sunny is helping him?!" I exclaimed, my rage that she would betray her own flesh and blood like this threatening to boil over.

"After we killed Alpha Butch and took over Thunder Moon, she pleaded for mercy," he rasped. "She promised to help him kidnap her sister so he could force her to become his mate."

I snarled, moving my grip to his throat. "Keep talking."

"He found out about the curse and all the damage he could do with it once he could control her with his alpha command, and he became obsessed. Then he saw what happened on the night of the challenge. A power like that could make him king of the wolves. He plans to force his mark on her tonight."

My grip tightened, the man's fingers clawing at my hand as I squeezed.

*He's going to make her his mate?! Not while I still have breath in my body. I'll put an end to this the only way Huxley seems to understand.*

I sank my claws into his tongue and ripped it free from his head. His attempted scream became a strangled gurgle as blood gushed forth from the gaping wound, spilling from his lips and dribbling over his chin.

Before he had a chance to register what was happening, I punched my fist into his chest cavity and yanked out his heart, holding it up for him to see as it stopped beating.

His glassy eyes stared in disbelief before he fell into a crumpled heap at my feet.

"Woah," Oliver gasped.

I turned to find the three of them staring at me in shock. Was my behavior violent? Yes. A little over the top? Perhaps. But as I glanced down at the heart clutched in my hand, I realized there was no other way.

*This is exactly what they're going to do to me. Shade is my heart. My everything. I'll end everyone and everything that tries to take her away from me. Huxley and his pack signed their death certificates the moment they tried to take her away from me.*

I dropped the now useless muscle onto the ground beside the lifeless body, bending to wipe my hand clean on the grass.

"Come on. We have to get to them before he marks her," I grunted, shifting and stalking through the trees before they had the chance to question my actions.

Dillon and Oliver shifted back, joining Ta y as they followed me without a word.

*Hang on, Shade. We're coming for you.*