

Chapter 14 Murder In Oakland

DENVER.

I drove the car back to my Pack before coming to an abrupt halt. Pushing the door open, I stormed out of the vehicle and headed straight toward the chamber. My heart was pounding with a fiery rage and my footsteps were heavy enough to crush the dry, crisp leaves beneath my boots.

I flung the front door open and the metal clang echoed the fury in my soul. I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palms as Eliana's voice kept replaying in my head.

"Maybe you're the enemy, Denver." Her words stung like an open wound.

"I think it's better we just stay away from each other. You stay on your end and I stay on mine. We don't ever have to cross paths again." How could she think I was the one who killed Adam?

Did she not have the slightest idea of who I was? Was I that ruthless and monstrous to her that she thought I would do such a thing?

The betrayal sliced through my heart, although I wasn't sure entirely why.

I was never one to be moved by what anyone thought about me but ever since Eliana walked back into my life, I just seemed different. Like I wanted to be different even more from the man I was six years ago.

So hearing those words from her lips—that accusation, the betrayal and disappointment was unforgivable. My steps grew more forceful as I approached the chamber doors, muttering curses beneath my breath.

I didn't kill Adam and I would do everything I can to prove it.

I pushed the door open and the whole room died in silence once I stepped in. My vision cleared as my eyes landed on Sheriff Lance, and right beside him was Cory, one of my most trusted betas and my right-hand man.

Judging by the searing looks on both their faces, I could tell something was wrong.

"What happened?" Cory stepped forward, telling the same. "You wouldn't believe that Eliana thinks I killed Adam" I scoffed, running my hands through my hair. But I caught a suspicious glance that he exchanged with the Sheriff and then I exhaled.

"Please don't tell me you think that bullshit too" I cursed. "Actually, I do not" Sheriff Lance cleared his throat before throwing a file of documents to the table in front of me. I darted my eyes back and forth with a sense of intrigue and when I looked back at Cory, he nodded.

I reached for the papers which on closer look only appeared to be very graphic pictures of someone decapitated or another with their organs spewing out of their stomach. One thing all five photos had in common besides their unrecognizability was the amount of blood and gore. Now, I couldn't do that. Not to Adam, nor to these people.

"Do you know these people? What happened to them?" The Sheriff folded his arms with a brow perched up and I scoffed again. "I don't even know who they are" I replied. There was a brief pause before he hummed.

"There have been five bodies, Adam's being the fifth in the past week," Lance started and my lips fell slightly open. "Look at them, all five of them have been gruesomely murdered by what witnesses and citizens are calling a wild beast. An animal mine has seen before" He continued and I closed my eyes to flashes of Adam's body.

The first time I laid eyes on him in Eliana's arms. Those deep claw marks scarred into his skin and the sight of his limbs barely hanging by a thread. I looked back at the other four photos and they were just like him.

Maybe a wild beast was roaming the forest or it was something worse, something I'd never seen before. Something stronger.

A hard lump formed in the back of my throat.

"Four of them were civilians and they're already a bunch of agencies looking into their murder," "Well they won't find anything, nothing from us" I interrupted Lance. "I can't assure you anymore" He replied. Dumping the photos to the table, I squared up his gaze with a colder one.

"What are you saying?" I gritted.

"I'm saying one, two deaths could be ruled as a coincidence but when five people die in the most grueling way possible and in just one week, it raises a lot of questions and attention and I'm not sure how long until your secret gets out—" I dashed my way toward him in a split second with my hands around his neck and his body against the wall.

"I'll tell you what you won't do which is let my secret come out. Don't let me remind you of the deal we made" I seared through my teeth, fire igniting in my eyes and my claws already digging through my skin.

"Denver!" It was Cory who zoomed in and broke us apart. Sheriff Lance fell to the ground to catch his breath and I turned away. "This is the last thing we should be doing now" Cory muttered.

"The last thing you should be doing is killing innocent civilians. I have a pact with my people first before yours. And if you go ahead killing them, I'm not sure they would even be any" The Sheriff reached for his papers.

"Denver didn't do this" Cory stepped forward.

Why did everything think I had something to do with this?

I may not have a stellar peacemaker reputation but it didn't make me into a wild beast capable of killing innocent people.

"I'm not saying he did," Lance paused. "I'm saying one of you did it and you better find out that person before there's another murder" He added.

"It could be the Blood Hounds you know" Cory looked at me for a second. "A Blood Hound killing one of their own?" Lance shook his head.

"I don't think so."

"It would be pretty stupid for one of mine to kill one of them too you know. Not after what happened the last time" I said. "We have strict rules and laws here—" Lance only halted when he got close to me and his hands soothed around his bruised neck.

"Maybe we're dealing with a rogue, one who doesn't follow rules" He said before walking out of the room and my eyes immediately darted to Cory's whose were immediately filled with worry.

"It doesn't make sense" My arms fell to the table. "Which one of us would be stupid enough to attack a Blood Hound?" As I asked, I could feel the rage pulse through my veins. Because if I found out it was one of us, then there would be a sixth murder.

"Lance seems pretty mad—" Cory paused. "You too."

"You said Eliana thought it was you who did it?" He asked and with my fingers between my teeth, I nodded. "Can you believe that?" It was a rhetorical question but Cory ended up answering.

"I couldn't a hundred percent blame her" He replied, striking the air with his hands. "Please don't throw me against the wall" He remarked. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes.

"Speak." I ordered nonetheless.

"Eliana left six years ago and honestly you weren't the best person six years ago. You were a ruthless and most of them, stoic—" "It didn't mean I was a killer then and most especially not now" I interrupted.

"The scores of people under your belt say otherwise" Cory muttered.

"You know I'm the man I used to be six years ago" My voice went low for a moment and Cory stepped forward. "You see now, I do. But I'm not sure Eliana does. I think she still knows you for who you were before and it won't be as easy trying to convince her that you've changed" He said.

"It will when I convince her that I didn't do this at least" I said, brushing past his shoulders. "Why does it even matter anyway?" His question made me stop in my tracks and I looked back at him.

"What she thinks." He added and I blanked out for a second.

"She was my wife..."

"Was" Cory echoed. Yes, was. Eliana was my wife who I should've never let go of. And then suddenly, Cory's eyes grew wide with an idea.

"I know that look" I sauntered closer to him.

"What if these murders have nothing to do with us? What if they're some sort of message to Eliana herself?" He asked. "I mean she only just came back to town after six years and then one of her people suddenly gets murdered. Four more in the last week."

"When was the last time anyone got murdered in Oakland?" Cory asked and there was some truth in his words. "You may be onto something" I replied. "I don't think Eliana's safe—" On the verge of turning around, Cory immediately held me back.

"The question right now is who would want to pass a message to Eliana, well aware that one way or another, we would be involved?" Cory narrowed his eyes and he pulled out of his pocket, a picture of Adam that was taken by Lance.

"Look at this, Denver" He spelled it out and my heart suddenly thumped in my chest. "Lance said it himself, this is something he has never seen before but it's something we have—"

"It's not possible" I blurted out.

"Do you have any idea what you're saying?"

"It's him, Denver. Look at these bodies, only he could do this. Could devour flesh and eat to the bones. These bodies are drained of blood and for the last five years, when was the last time any of us had a kill?" Cory questioned and I felt fire around my chest at that moment.

"But...he's been gone. He's been gone for so long" I whispered.

"Well, I think he's back," Cory pressed his lips tight. "I think Blake is back." The news had barely sunk in when I suddenly felt a rupture in my heart. I fell backward with a thud and Cory had to hold me up.

"What is it?" He asked. I lifted my gaze to him because that wasn't the first time that happened. "It's Eliana" I panted. "I think she might be in danger" It was like a gut feeling but more intense and tethered. I felt it for the first time last time and it was how I knew she attended the Moonlight Ball. How I knew to show up.

My body almost couldn't resist the urge to fight back at the thought of Eliana being in danger. But this wasn't like last night. I could hear her shallow screams from a distance even and I thrust myself outside the door. "Denver!" Cory called as my hands fell to my knees.

My breathing grew labored and intense and for a moment it felt like my lungs started to close. My body convulsed and immediately I raised my face to the skies, I let rage fill them. The monster surged inside of me as my bones started to crack beneath my skin. My spine arched, my teeth elongated into carnivorous fangs and the fur growing out of my skin etched my entire body with a burning pain.

As my hands detached from my knees, the man was no more. I now stood tall with a thunderous howl that escaped my lips. I looked back at Cory whose eyes widened in awe and without saying anything else, I surged forward, through the trees and headed back to Eliana.

She was in danger.

And if truly this was Blake, I couldn't wait to rip my brother's heart out of his chest, once and for all.