

## CHAPTER 81

CHAPTER 81 Justice

"Are you sure?" Garrett asked. He didn't want to believe it to be so but Brandy did have wolfsbane. No sane werewolf or werefeline would ever grow any plant that would negatively impact their own kind.

"I saw that curse carved into my father's chest. No one but them would say anything so horrid." The memory of that vile message etched into his father's lifeless body haunted his dreams for years. The memory of it made his jaw clench in anger.

Garrett contemplated Ethan's words for a moment. "Not unless someone is trying to make us think it's hunters to get us off their trail."

Before they could delve deeper into their discussion, there was a sharp knock at Ethan's door, breaking their concentration. Ethan's irritation was evident as he slammed his glass down on the counter. "Who the hell is it now?"

His private doctor entered the room, his expression grave, and concern etched into his features. He handed Ethan a report, his voice laden with unease. "I've examined Adrian again, my King. It's as if his mind is unraveling. Whatever this specific strain of the herb is, it is causing severe damage to his brain. Without an antidote soon, he will be lost."

"An herb?" Garrett asked, a tinge of guilt creeping into his voice as he recalled the brutal confrontation with Adrian earlier.

"Yes," the doctor confirmed. "Adrian was poisoned with a particular herb that allows for manipulation, but too much of it can lead to insanity and, in severe cases, death."

Ethan scanned the report, his brow furrowing in deep thought. He handed it to Garrett for his review. The information it contained was troubling, to say the least.

"Were you able to obtain records of what he ate in the past month?" Ethan inquired.

The doctor nodded solemnly. "I did. There was nothing unusual in any of his recent meals. He didn't have anything delivered to him. He always ate in the dining hall. It appears, so far, that we do not have an internal traitor."

Garrett's jaw clenched in frustration, the inability to pinpoint the source of Adrian's condition gnawing at him. "Then what the hell happened to him?"

Ethan's frustration mirrored Garrett's, but he maintained his composure. "We've spoken to the warriors who were on patrol with him. None of them noticed anything out of the ordinary. This might have happened during their last patrol when he was alone."

"Then we can't rule out that there is a traitor," Garrett added.

"My King, I'll continue to monitor Adrian and work on finding a solution. There might be an antidote or treatment hidden in our ancient texts. I'll start my research immediately."

Ethan acknowledged the doctor's commitment with a grateful nod. "Thank you for your diligence."

Once the doctor left, an awkward silence descended upon the room. The weight of Adrian's condition and the looming threat it posed to their pack hung heavily in the air.

"We need that antidote before the trial. Whoever did this, their main goal was to get to Lily, which means it could have been anyone from the Winter Moon celebration," Ethan said, finally breaking the silence. "I will have to investigate my warriors thoroughly."

"Let me do it. You're too close to them. I will be able to provide an unbiased assessment," Garrett said.

"So be it," Ethan agreed. "Finding the traitor will lead us to who is behind this. I am unaware of who would want to harm Lily in this manner."

Garrett's thoughts were racing, connecting dots that led to a disturbing conclusion. "Kenneth. He would. He forced her to give up her mate bond to my brother and then sold her off to me. If Lily was marked or even violated, he assumes I wouldn't want her because that's how he thinks. This is his doing," he stated flatly, shocking Ethan with the bold accusation.

Ethan's brows furrowed in concern as he regarded Garrett. "While I see logic in your judgement and I do consider him a prime suspect, it doesn't necessarily mean there aren't others we aren't aware of who may have a grudge against her. But why else do you sound so confident that it's Kenneth? Did you learn something?"

"Other than him giving Luna Debra an ultimatum to deliver Lily to him within a few days? Luna Debra would never betray her. Isn't it oddly coincidental that Adrian loses his mind around the same time? Then, Lily dreams about her mother being murdered. This stinks of Kenneth," Garrett explained, his voice laced with anger and suspicion.

Ethan listened intently, piecing together the fragments of information. "Wait. Lily's mother was murdered?"

"She had a dream about it last night. She relived a suppressed memory. Her mother was killed in front of her."

Ethan's mind raced as he considered the implications. "Her abilities are manifesting. All of this is bad timing."

"Abilities?"

"You didn't think ancient blood was just that, did you? Red wolves can possess one or two abilities. Being mated or even having the affection of a red wolf can bestow all sorts of gift because it is as if you are blessed by the Moon Goddess herself. Didn't you wonder how you could fight a Lycan and win?" Ethan revealed.

Garrett hadn't thought about it. He had acted instinctively to defend Lily, but the revelation about her abilities added another layer to their already complicated situation.

"We need to exhume her mother's body to confirm that she was murdered. I can't arrest him without evidence. I will send out an order now," Ethan declared, determined to uncover the truth.

"Wait. Can you get someone onto the pack's territory to dig up and retrieve her body?" Garrett suggested, raising an important concern.

Ethan raised an eyebrow, curious about Garrett's reasoning. "Why?"

"Being transparent would give him time to get rid of the body if he had something to do with her death. Before I met Lily, I looked into her family, and Kenneth was involved in some shady business. Much of it was centered around Brandy, but I wonder if he used Brandy as a cover."

Ethan nodded in agreement, recognizing the validity of Garrett's concerns. "You may be correct. Brandy did her fair share of burning through his money, but Kenneth has been making large withdrawals lately, and I have not been able to trace where the money is going. My scouts have not reported back yet, which could mean they are dead or that it's too risky to report back, but it's more likely that they haven't found anything."

"Then, all the more reason to be discreet about this," Garrett concluded firmly.

"We can't give him any inkling that we are looking into him. Right now, we need him to keep believing that our primary objective is bringing Brandy and Mandy to justice."

"I'll handle it."