

The Rise Of The King

The Rise Of The King Chapter 21

-Vera-

"Are you sure about this?" Noah asks me, taking my hand and squeezing it reassuringly.

"Yes. It's our only chance. It has to work," I smile at him but I lie.

The plan that we came up with is an excellent plan, but it's time sensitive; and my role in it may be the reason why it fails. After many hours of discussing our options, Caleb, Eli, Noah and myself finally came up with a plan. It's quite simple really.

It's evident the Council will challenge Noah's claim to the throne, and if Caleb is correct, they will do it today. The Council was incredibly frightened by Noah's aura, it is in their best interest to get rid of him... soon. But considering they can't just remove him, they'll do it the 'legal' way: by challenging his lineage.

The thing is, even if we do manage to prove that King Alexander is his father, the nature of his relationship to Noah's mother will arise, and with it, her name and lineage. Noah is half wolf; a half breed lycan. If that information gets out, not only will he be forced to abdicate the throne, but he could also be exiled from his land. Unfortunately, by proving that he is Alexander's son, the same document will inevitably expose his mother.

That leaves us with no other choice.

We have to get rid of the Council.

But we have to do it without them suspecting what we are up to.

The first phase of the plan is simple. Let this Council meeting run its natural course until they challenge Noah's claim to the throne. Then, a certain amount of time will be granted for him to gather the evidence and make his case. To avoid an incomplete reading experience, visit Jobn'i'b.com. When the time is up, however, we will not be presenting said proof. We will be presenting a united front where healers, warriors, scholars, and common folk recognize him as King, in spite of the Council; this is the second phase of the plan.

Moreover, with how weak the Houses have become financially and politically, it wouldn't be difficult to have them accept him as the King. Council or not, out of mere self-preservation. Essentially, we would be twisting their arms.

That being said, if the Houses still do not accept Noah as King and decide to boycott the Castle financially, there are two options. Either we go to war with them and force them to submit, or my initial plan comes into play. Opening up trade routes with wolf territory.

I came up with this idea a few months ago, really. Lycan territory is incredibly vast, but severely underdeveloped. Wolves have a diverse economy and advanced technologies, but with that, we have neglected our farmers and farmland; making it the perfect trade off. They get to profit off of bringing their businesses into lycan territory, and lycans benefit from selling their crops to wolves while also enjoying their technological advances. Gone are the days where everything is handled through physical correspondence, we can actually have phones and computers here now. The possibilities are endless. And more importantly, it wouldn't matter if the Houses decide to no longer support the Crown, we would be sustaining a thriving economy without the them.

There is only one additional problem, however.

This plan leaves us with one unchecked box, which is where I come in. For Noah to have a legitimate claim to the throne and therefore, the vast support of his people, we do in fact need to prove that he is Alexander's son, the natural heir to the throne; not for the Council's sake, but for the people's sake. And if we prove that he is **also** part wolf through his mother's side, and from a powerful clan at that, there might be less resistance from wolves to do business with lycans. But that is the key word... **might.**

This crucial part of the plan could backfire, extraordinarily.

By revealing Noah is part wolf, we would also have to reveal how the union between Alexander and Ellie Goldmoon came to be. How she escaped her husband to be with Alexander, defying her family's wishes and tradition. Even if we make a case for them being destined mates, her family could still decide Alexander kidnapped her and that she was an unwilling participant in the affair, making Noah not only a bastard, but a bastard conceived through force. Either way. I have to go back to wolf territory to seek the most important part of this plan: Noah's legitimate birth certificate.

If he has no legitimate claim to the throne, the people will not stand behind him. Seems like a simple plan, right?

Then why am I so weary?

After Noah, Caleb, and Eli left to face the Council, I'm left not knowing what to do with myself. I'm already anxious about this whole thing; there are too many variables we aren't even considering. What if there is no document, here or in wolf territory, to prove

Noah's lineage? What if the Gold Moon clan, rather than accept Noah, see him as an abomination and declare war against lycans for the kidnapping of their daughter? What if the Council moves on removing Noah before we get the chance to pull this off? After a few minutes of going crazy with what ifs, it's clear that my anxiety really won't help the situation at all. I leave the courtyard, determined to go up to the clinic and help organize everything again, but after careful consideration, doing that will only make my frustration worse.

Instead, I decide to go work on Charlotte's peonies. Maybe concentrating on something else and releasing some of this pent up energy might help calm me down.

In theory, moon peonies only bloom for a few hours, or a day even, but the flowers that I initially used my magic on, have remained in full bloom. My aunt and grandmother have told me it's because I channeled my magic through them, which means they are sort of like a part of me? Or rather, reactive to the state of my magic.

Charlotte has helped me shape them and guide their roots to where we want them, which really is all throughout the Castle. They have already begun taking over the stone walls of the courtyard where the rest of the vegetation has taken up residence. I take a quick look around before beginning, making sure there is nobody watching me. [Search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

I get on my knees in front of the first handful of flowers that I saved with my magic; I've realized that as I use my magic on them, their roots expand even more, making it the center of the growth.

I take several deep breaths, trying to concentrate.

With each breath, I let go of all my worries and anxiety, clearing my head to allow my magic to flow from my fingers onto the roots of the flowers, making sure it is not an erratic release. This has helped me greatly these past months to understand the behavior of my magic and what I can expect from it.

I feel the tell-tell sign of my magic beginning to be released; my fingertips first feel warm, and then they feel a little shock of electricity as my magic is released. As I concentrate. I also feel my wolf close to the surface.

I breathe out, and feel through the roots how new flowers begin to form all the way up in the Castle wall.

The feeling is elating. Now that I have somewhat learned to control my magic, I feel this connection to everything it touches, almost like the roots and flowers themselves are an extension of myself.

When I'm satisfied, I slowly open my eyes and smile at my work. The flowers look radiant, sizzling with magic. Maybe it's a glow that only I can see, but it makes them so much more beautiful and fragrant.

When I stand up and take a step towards the courtyard to see the new flower buds, I hear someone gasp.

It's a wide-eyed Cassia, and she just dropped a full tray of food she was carrying with her.

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The Rise Of The King Chapter 22

-Vera-

"Oh crap," I murmur.

Cassia hasn't moved an inch; she's just staring at me, petrified.

"Cassia? Where did you go?" I hear someone behind her.

It's Charlotte.

"There you are!" she says, looking at the tray of food on the ground and then looking at me, "oh no," she says.

"Cassia, I can explain." I say, stepping cautiously towards her.

She takes a step back and I frown.

"Cassia, it's really not what you think," Charlotte backs me up.

"Not what I think?! She just made flowers appear out of nowhere!" She yells, finally coming to.

"Shhh! Be quiet!" I say, coming closer to her and looking around to see if anybody heard her.

"You're a witch!" she whispers to me.

"Cassia! Be quiet!" I say, grabbing her arm and taking her to the gazebo in the garden; it's far enough so that nobody will hear us.

I really have no other choice than to come clean to her, there's no spinning what she just saw.

"How can you be a witch, though?! You're a wolf! Unless... unless you're *not* a wolf!" she gasps.

"Cassia, I will tell you one more time, *lower* your voice!" I say.

"Uh, I will go get us some food," Charlotte says, nodding at the tray that Cassia just dumped all over the ground.

"Thank you, Charlotte," I say.

"No problem," she says, but mouths 'I'm sorry' to me right as she turns to leave.

"Cassia, what I'm about to tell you is a secret, do you understand? Nobody else can know about this."

She nods enthusiastically, the initial shock subsiding.

"So that's what it was, right?! I knew it! I knew a wolf couldn't defeat a lycan that easily; even if she's untrained, Violet is a beast! What spell did you use?" She asks, a little too ecstatic. "Hard work and determination," I say, a little annoyed that this topic hasn't been settled.

"Come on but like, what spell did you use? You can tell me, your secret is safe with me," she winks at me, leaning in.

"Cassia, I am a trained fighter. I defeated Alistair *and* the witch that came with him, not to mention, do you wanna ask around how many lycans here have had their *asses* handed to them by me? Give me a break," I say, pinching the bridge of my nose.

"What... what do you mean? But you're a witch... witches use spells and... stuff... right?"

"Yes, and no. There's different kinds of magic all around us, spells and *stuff* yes, but also more natural flowing magic which is what you just saw."

She looks at me perplexed.

I sigh.

"Spells, conjures, potions, etc, are ways to force magic to happen, to bend it as desired by the witch or warlock. But magic itself has a flow and a way... self-determination, if you will... and there is only so much of it that you can control; that's the way it's supposed to be."

"So..." she says, but she doesn't finish her sentence and she stays quiet for a few seconds.

"So...?" I say, arching my brow at her.

"So, you didn't use your magic to defeat Violet?"

"Goddess... No! I didn't! Quite frankly, I didn't have to."

"So, she really is that bad, isn't she?"

"She sucks," I say, definitely.

She laughs at this, thankfully breaking the tension and annoyance that was building inside me.

"Ok, so you're a witch," she looks around to make sure nobody is listening to us, "does the King know?" she whispers.

"Of course, he knows," I start enumerating with my fingers, "Caleb, Elden, Eli, Charlotte, Lucas, and now you, are the only ones who know for sure. I plan on keeping it that way."

"But you wanted to kill me back at the manor," she points out accusingly.

"I only said that to flush out the rat... you I mean, to flush *you* out."

"How did you even know, though? I hadn't seen you and you hadn't seen me at that point."

"When Violet came in with that perfume of yours, I sensed magic. I wasn't sure if Violet was the source, but I knew something was up."

"Wow," she says, her apprehension suddenly changing to admiration, "that's incredible."

"Well, I'm happy to inform I still managed to get us desserts!" Charlotte comes in with a tray of food, just as my stomach growls.

"You're the Goddess's child, you know that?" I say, eyeing the food hungrily.

Dinner time snuck up on me today.

I start eating the meat pastries once Charlotte sits down and we all stop talking, much to my relief.

"These are amazing," Charlotte says between bites, "I don't think they've ever tasted this good." [SEARCH THE WEBSITE](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

I nod in agreement, too busy to talk.

"It's my brother," Cassia says, wiping her mouth, "he's the best cook ever."

Both Charlotte and I nod, devouring the last of the food in minutes.

Once we are done, we move on to the dessert; a type of flan that I have never tasted before, it's tastes almost fruity. It's delicious as well. "Ugh," I moan, "this is amazing too. I'm so happy he came with us."

"*He's* even happier, you have no idea. Cecil had taken him out of the kitchen to patrol and pretend to be a soldier; he was miserable."

When all three of us are stuffed, we stay seated for a little while, chatting.

"So, you're a wolf, but also a witch?" Cassia asks after I explained my condition to her.

"Correct. My father was a warlock, and my mother was a werewolf."

"And you can like, turn into your wolf?" she asks.

"I can."

"Ooh! I want to see! A spirit wolf must be a quite a sight!"

"I'm afraid I can't, nobody can know I'm a witch, that's why we've kept the circle close."

"But how would they know you're a witch? Witches aren't wolves," she asks, genuinely confused.

I smile and close my eyes, concentrating on my wolf. When she comes to the surface of my mind, I greet her as usual and she nods her head, understanding I don't mean to turn. Then, I open my eyes and look at Cassia. She gasps.

"Your eyes..." she says, "they're... they're white."

I close my eyes again, allowing my wolf to retreat. When I open them again, Cassia is still bewildered.

"Yeah, they're the eyes of a witch. My wolf's eyes are white, it would be very telling."

"But my eyes... aren't white," she says, doubting herself.

I extend my hand to her, inviting her to place her palm on mine. I focus some of my magic on her, feeling the electric current emanating through my skin.

"Can you feel that?"

"Yes, of course, how could I not?"

I extend my other hand towards Charlotte; she places her palm on mine.

"Charlotte, can you feel that?"

"I don't feel anything." she says.

I retreat my hand from under their palms.

"The fact that you can feel it is a clear indication that you're a witch, Cassia. My wolf also sensed you before we even met you. There's no doubt of what you are, I just haven't figured out why your magic is... different." "Different how?"

"Well, not that I have much experience with other witches, but the ones I've met have great control of their magic; maybe it's a matter of training?"

She stays silent, looking at me intently. All of a sudden, she hops off her seat and is on her knees in front of me.

"Teach me! Teach me teach me teach me! Please! I'll do anything! This is the first time I've ever met another witch and... no... a spirit wolf at that! Please please please please!" she pleads nonstop.

I hear Charlotte giggle a little beside me.

At least one of us is finding this amusing.

"Cassia, get up," I say, trying to lift her.

"Not until you say you'll train me! Please!" she pleads even more.

"Cassia, come on, get up."

"No!"

"Cassia..."

"Please!"

"Ugh, fine! Fine! Not that I know much, but I'll teach you what I can," I finally cave in, "but you can't stop working for Elden! I promised him an assistant and you're it!"

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! I promise you won't regret this!"

She's hugging my legs as I try to peel her off of me.

She gets up and quickly collects the empty tray of food and rushes off in the direction of the

kitchen, shouting 'thank you' up to the air.

I watch her run off with my hand on my forehead.

What have I just gotten myself into?

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The Rise Of The King Chapter 23

-Vera-

When Cassia left, I stayed chatting with Charlotte for a little bit. Not much went on while we were gone searching for a wife; of course, except the old time healers dismantling everything we had been working on for the past few months. "I should get going." Charlotte says, "Ethan will be back soon and I have a surprise for him, it's our anniversary soon."

A surprise for Ethan?

As curious as I am, I prefer not to ask what it is. If Charlotte is anything like Sophia, and she does remind me of her, I think I rather not know.

I smile at her and wish her luck before she leaves. She smiles back at me and once again apologizes for bringing Cassia over. It turns out Cassia had been looking for me earlier and Charlotte was the one who hinted at me spending quite a bit of time in the garden; it was an honest mistake. Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

I have been left with an unshakeable feeling of dread since earlier today. Noah's wild aura, the Council making moves to take away his throne, having to go to wolf territory to negotiate with the clans... Usually practicing my magic drains all of the negative thoughts, but this time is different.

This time, the feeling is a lot like the one I had that morning I burnt Mehra's body; that terrible feeling of foreboding.

My heart begins beating a little faster just thinking back to that day. And to think that we were naïve enough to think that Alistair was going to be the biggest hurdle to jump through.

When I finally decide to leave the garden's gazebo, it's already quite late; and yet, I can't see myself falling asleep any time soon. So, instead of going up to our room, I decide to go to the other place that became my safe haven here; even from my thoughts. The library.

I could even use some of that honey tea Elden prepares.

I take my time as I make my way through the library. I haven't been spending as much time there as I'd like. Nowadays, this place is always filled with scholars and their assistants. Not to mention, I have been keeping busy by the clinic. Somehow, I feel foolish having not thought of the possibility of the Council turning on Noah; it makes perfect sense now.

"Hey!" A voice calls for me.

It's Lucas.

I smile at him, actually happy to see him.

"Hey, you! Long time no see." I tease.

"Yeah well," he blushes, "I've been busy."

"I bet." I laugh and he blushes even more.

He clears his throat.

"So, the guys and I are having a little get together out by the clearing. We're lighting up a camp fire and what not. We thought you'd like to join us."

"We?" I ask.

"Yeah, Violet and I."

I cock my head slightly to a side,

"Lucas, Violet is terrified of me."

"Well," he's taken aback by my comment, almost as if not expecting for me to know that piece of information, "she is. But that's the point! I don't want her to be. I've tried telling her hundreds of times that you're cool and you hold no grudges; I mean everything worked out in the end, right?"

"Right..." I say.

"Would you please come? I don't want to keep avoiding you when I'm with her because she's scared of you."

"You've been avoiding me?" I feign surprise, putting my hand on my chest dramatically.

I actually hadn't noticed they had been avoiding me; I simply thought they were too busy* and that's why I hadn't seen him around.

"I mean, kind of?" he puts his hand on his nape, "Violet *freaks out* every time she senses you close."

"Senses me?" I laugh out loud, ""she must really be traumatized."

"She is. Everyone has tried telling her that there's no reason to fear you but still..."

I smile at him.

Lucas and I have become like siblings these past months, and even before that, we just clicked. I see why it's important to him for Violet and myself to get along.

"I'll come join you guys later," I smile at him, "I just have to go talk to Elden for a bit."

"Great! Thanks, cool!" he says, happily jogging away.

I sigh.

Maybe the distraction will be good for me; it might even remind me why we're going through all the trouble to keep Noah on the throne. When Alistair was King, this little get together wouldn't even have been possible; the mere air within in the Castle was asphyxiating. I reach the library lost in thought; lost in the feeling of anxiousness.

Opening the wooden doors, I step inside. All the lights have already been turned on and there is a faint moon light glow coming in from the floor to ceiling mosaic windows. There are many people studying in the refurbished study tables, each with a pile of books and a little table lamp on.

I make my way to Elden's dark corner.

I still remember when this entire place used to smell like mold and abandonment. It makes me smile to think how far it has come.

When I reach Elden's corner, I begin to smell for him. It's easier to find him by scent now that the library is clean; before, he smelled no different than the mold that had become resident here; it was impossible to find him. Now that everything is clean, his scent sticks out like a sore thumb.

Unsurprisingly, I find him in one of the far-end, abandoned book shelves.

From behind, I see him lift his head to sniff the air.

"Ah, my young wolf, what brings you all the way here?" he asks, shutting the book he had in his hand and placing it back on the shelf.

"I was hoping you had some of the magical, relaxing tea?" I ask, crossing my arms on my chest.

"Always," he says, walking past me and disappearing into one of his hideouts, "follow me," he says, to my surprise.

We enter one of the tunnels, this one hidden behind a book shelf; it's one I had never seen before.

"How many of these *are there*?" I ask in disbelief before entering the tunnel.

"More than you'd like to know," he says, entering behind me and placing the book shelf back in place.

We walk for maybe twenty minutes until we reach an exit. As soon as he opens the fake wall leading outside, the scent of herbs, spices, and flowers hits me.

"That smells amazing." I say, sniffing the air and relishing on the smell.

As I step outside, following the smell, I find yet another greenhouse. This isn't the same one I saw before leaving to the cabin all that time ago; this one is bigger and fully stocked. There's even a lovely, quaint table in the middle with two seats. "How many of these do you have?" I ask, stepping closer to the table.

"Just the two," he says, rummaging through his garden for the herbs he's going to need for the tea, "this one is by far my favorite."

He quickly fires up the antique stove with some firewood, placing the kettle on top of it to heat up the water.

In no time, the tea is ready.

He serves two cups and joins me on the table, placing a small glass with honey and a spoon in front of me.

Watching Elden in his natural habitat is fascinating. Despite being blind, he is the most independent and self-sufficient individual in the entire Castle.

I take the honey and put some on the tea, sipping on it carefully so I don't burn myself.

"So, tell me, my dear wolf, what's got you so worried?"

"You can tell?"

"Always," he says, sipping on his tea.

I sigh and begin telling him everything. From the plan, to my involvement and plan to visit wolf territory; how everything could backfire and how apprehensive I am about Noah's aura.

He stays silent for a while, contemplating everything I just told him with a grim expression.

"Vera, there's one more thing you should be worried about."

I frown,

"What's that?"

"The Witch Mother."

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The Rise Of The King Chapter 24

-Vera-

I stay silent, observing Elden carefully.

I have not confided in anyone but Noah what I know about the Witch Mother and Spirit Wolves; more importantly, I have not told anyone that both my grandmother and aunt believe her to be alive.

"I always thought the Witch Mother was just a myth; a legend perpetuated by witches and warlocks to instill fear in other creatures, but I'm beginning to think my initial assessment may have been wrong. I now believe that the Witch Mother was the witch

that accompanied Alistair and made him believe she was his mate all those years ago; I have no other explanation for the level of power she had. What I still have yet to figure out is, why? Why go through all the trouble? It also doesn't escape me that her body was never found. When we went looking for her remains, there was nothing there."

Once again, I stay silent.

It has never been out of mistrust that I have chosen to keep things from Elden; he was and still remains one of the people I trust most in this Castle. Noah and I simply figured that keeping it between the two of us would protect everyone else around us. If they don't know, they have plausible deniability; also, they wouldn't go digging for information that could prove dangerous.

"The scholars and I have been searching endlessly for any books, manuscripts, folktales, witnesses, or anything that may help us figure out how to destroy her; but we've had no luck so far. The accounts we have of her are not only ancient, but they paint this woman as evil personified and a literal force of nature, and I'm afraid she may seek retaliation against you."

"Her name was Mehra."

Elden blinks, "Who?"

"The Witch the accompanied Alistair, her name was Mehra. I killed her and burned her body, that's why you couldn't find any remains." "You killed the Witch Mother?!" Elden says, his eyes opening up wider.

"She wasn't the Witch Mother, Elden, she was a mere servant. In fact, she even offered to take me to the Witch Mother to serve her as well."

He stays silent, looking at me. I know he's blind, but sometimes when he looks at me, it seems like he can see through my soul; this is one of those moments.

"But you are not wrong to believe that the Witch Mother may be alive. In fact, it's one of the reasons why I have agreed to not shift to my wolf form as often; my wolf is sort of a beacon for magical creatures. But that's not all," I pause, "she might not only be after me." "What do you mean?"

"You asked why that witch would have such interest in Alistair, and the truth is, she didn't. She found the weakest link and used him to kill King Alexander; Noah was only spared because nobody knew of his existence. There's a prophecy, Elden, that says that the end of witch-kind will come about at the hands of 'the first son of the first son, which is in reference to..."

"Alexander's bloodline," he says.

"Yes,"

He observes me in silence after I let him in on my secret. I'm trusting Elden will be cautious with this information, not only to not tell anyone, but to not go digging where he'll only find bones. "Everything makes sense then. I was right in my suspicion, only I had the wrong culprit, and the wrong reason," he says after a while, "no wonder I was hitting wall after wall in my research."

"Elden, you have to be careful. If the Witch Mother is indeed alive, which we have every reason to believe she is, we don't know under what capacity or with which magical abilities."

"Don't worry about me, I'm a ghost; but Vera, you have to be very careful. Alistair had loyal servants within the Castle, many of which I can guarantee are still here amongst us. To avoid an incomplete reading experience, visit Jobn'i'b.com. If *he* had eyes and ears here, I wouldn't be surprised if that witch did too."

I nod, even if it's just to myself.

"How much do you trust Cassia? I may put her on a special mission to investigate some documents I can't yet read."

"We only just met, but my wolf seems very comfortable with her. She's just... young. Besides, the tea didn't kill her, clearly."

He chuckles.

"She even asked for seconds. Well then, I better get back up there before the nosy scholars come into my corner wondering what kinds of books I've been collecting."

We both stand and he leads me to the door.

"You know, you could probably let Cassia help you out with the greenhouses; she had a very beautiful one back at her home."

"I'll think about it," he says, "this way."

He leads me to the entrance to the tunnels once again and opens the fake wall.

"After you," he says, and I comply.

We begin walking once again towards the library, reaching it soon after.

When we enter the library again, we say our goodbyes and Elden disappears into one of the corridors filled with books yet to be organized.

I stretch, cracking my neck, my back, and my arms.

I'm so tired.

I feel like these past months all I have done is try to distract myself from this terrible feeling of foreboding, but now it's coming back with a vengeance. My head is lightly throbbing from the terrible sleep I've been getting; it's all stress related, no doubt. I groan as I remember my promise to Lucas.

Stupid bonfire.

If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't even go. Screw Violet and her fear of me. In fact, she **does** have good reason to fear me, she tried to take my **mate**". Not only that, but I defeated her "*despite** her cheating.

I let out an exasperated huff, trying to get rid of my sudden sour mood. All I want right now is to soak in a nice, hot bath; but I have to do this for Lucas.

Stepping out of the library where the level of activity betrays the hour, I walk through halls and countless stairs to reach the entrance of the Castle, which is literally the other end of the Castle from here. [Search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

When I get to the entrance of the Castle, I note that it is mostly desolate. The warriors are no longer training and the dining hall is completely empty.

I step onto the threshold of the main doors to the Castle, greeting the night guards who politely greet me back.

I stretch the tension off my body once again, letting the cool night air clear my thoughts, but instead, the smell it carries makes me frown.

The air smells of the bonfire and a whole lot of wine.

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The Rise Of The King Chapter 25

Vera-

The more I near Lucas and everyone else, the more intense the smell of alcohol gets. Soon, I hear loud chatter coming from the clearing and feel the warmth coming from the bonfire. Oh Goddess, what am I walking into?

When I step into the clearing, this is a lot more people than I initially anticipated. I recognize a few familiar faces; Ethan and Charlotte, Mason and Eva, Lucas and Violet, and then Ezra, Jeremy, and Thomas off to a side. "Vera! You came!" Lucas notices me; it doesn't escape me that he's a little more smiley than usual.

In fact, they all seem a little drunk.

"Of course! Are we celebrating something I wasn't aware of? There's a lot of people here."

"Well, it was initially going to be something small, but when everyone else heard about the bonfire, more and more wanted to come, how could I say no?"

"Yeah, how could you?" I mumble to myself.

The bonfire is voraciously eating away the wood within it, demanding more and more firewood. It's crackling in the middle of the clearing, taking away the chill of the evening.

"Hey, Violet! I told you she'd come!" Lucas yells.

Chatting away with a group of people, I notice Violet meet Lucas's eyes and then mine.

She pales.

There's a certain level of satisfaction I feel in her reaction to me; a wolf coming into lycan territory and defeating their equivalent to a princess, without turning or cheating? I should make sure it's at least a footnote in their history books. Despite this feeling though, I did promise Lucas to make this right. It's ridiculous to think that they'll be avoiding me forever if we live in the same place. Not to mention how close Lucas is to Noah and I.

I smile at her and she gulps.

Violet turns to look at Lucas again and he nods reassuringly, extending his hand to her.

She takes a few wary steps towards us and when she finally reaches us, she chokes on her first few words.

"H- Hi. Vera, we were hoping you'd come," she says, holding her drink tight.

I smile at her again and take a step closer, surprising her.

I guess I could "tell" her it's alright, that she has nothing to fear and that we're good; but I tried that last time on our way here and apparently it didn't work. Even buzzed, she seems very anxious. So instead, I surprise her - and myself - and I hug her.

It takes her a moment to process what's happening, so I hug her a little tighter. It's a comforting hug, one that really says 'you have nothing to be afraid of'; of course, I'm also using a little magic for her to relax.

She hugs me back, finally releasing the tension she had been carrying.

When I separate from her, I hold her at arm's length.

"Violet, I'm sorry you've been walking around here thinking of me as a threat. I'm really not; everything worked out wonderfully despite us meeting under such... stressful circumstances."

"Thank you so much." she says, genuinely, "I just... during training everyone kept saying how I should watch my back because I tried to take your mate from you and how I was lucky you didn't kill me back at the manor. It got to me."

I roll my eyes,

"Of course, they would tell you that, boys are stupid," I say, eyeing a few teenagers that I help train that no doubt have been telling her these things.

They quickly disperse when I narrow my eyes at them.

"Are you sure we are good? I mean, I would understand if we weren't..."

"Yes, Violet. You can relax. You're Lucas's mate and Lucas is like a little brother to me."

She turns to Lucas. He smiles down at her and nods again.

"In that case, I was also hoping we could maybe train together?" she blurts out quickly.

I cock my head to a side, surprised by her suggestion.

"It's just... Lucas is too nice! He never *really* trains with me. Back at the manor I used to train with Jeremy but he's as bad as I am. The other warriors also don't like to train with me because I'm a girl *and* Lucas's mate. You're the only one who won't go soft on me." "You make a good case," I say, pretending to think about it for maybe a little too long; her hope deflating with every passing second, "I'll train with you under one condition," she lights up, he* can't be anywhere near us," I point to Lucas. "Hey!" Lucas protests.

"Done!" Violet says without giving him a second thought.

He looks back and forth between the two of us,

"Unbelievable," he says, turning around and walking away from us angrily.

Violet and I stare at him as he walks away and then turn to each other.

We start giggling at Lucas's expense.

"I can hear you!" He shouts behind him, and then we really start laughing at him.

"I'm sorry, he can be very protective," Violet says.

"You don't have to apologize, they're all like that."

I stay chatting with Violet for a few minutes until someone else calls her and she leaves.

"What was that about?" Charlotte comes up behind me. She had been looking at the exchange from the distance, "I wasn't sure if I should come rescue you so I just watched," she laughs.

"Oh no, I was just burying that hatchet. Apparently, Lucas and Violet had been avoiding me altogether."

"Goddess," she says, face-palming her face, "I didn't think it was that bad."

"Me neither."

I shrug it off.

"I need a drink," I tell her.

"Well, if it's wine you want, Ethan can go get it for you," she says, "Ethan!" she calls to him.

I look at Charlotte and notice the drink she's holding is not alcoholic,

"What are you drinking?" I ask her, curious.

"Hmm this? It's this tea Jeremy prepares, it's delicious. Want to try?"

She offers me her cup but I decline, something about the smell makes me slightly nauseous.

"Why aren't you drinking?" I ask.

Charlotte is not one to shy away from a glass of wine or two.

"I didn't feel like it today. I have an early morning tomorrow," she says dismissively.

I narrow my eyes at her, not believing her in the slightest, but I decide to not press for more information as Ethan comes over and hands me a drink. "Thank you," I say, smiling at him.

"You're welcome," he says in a tone that's colder than usual for him as he walks away.

I frown, not understanding his mood.

"Don't mind him, we had a fight and he's being pissy about it," she says, rolling her eyes.

I open my mouth to say something but close it; it's really not my place. If she wants to tell me, she knows she can come to me anytime, anywhere.

Unexpectedly, the wind starts blowing in my general direction, demanding my attention.

I let it soak into my skin, urging me to walk a certain direction.

After only a few steps, I know exactly where I'm going.

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