



204 THE RACE FROM THE DARK FOREST

In the split second that Philip stepped into the forest. 1

He was engulfed in the forest and dragged inside.

It happened so fast and yet they all saw it.

The hands of the little girl who had been his sister turned into a stretch of black and then turned into a horrifying monster that dragged Philip inside the forest.

Philip screamed in horror as he was taken away from everyone. 1

They all watched in horror as they heard his screams.

No one said a single word.

"Can we not perhaps go help him?" Owen asked stepping forward towards the forest. 1

"No, do not make that mistake," Erik said, setting his hand on his shoulder and stopping him from propelling forward. "Philip is gone. We have to keep on moving. If we get caught in the dark in the forest, we are in it for life, and we will never leave here alive."



Erik climbed back up on his horse.

Then Xaden made some words in their tongue as he looked towards the forest.

He was saying some words that would end Phillip's bond and also help him cross him over.

As soon as they climbed their horse, someone else crossed into the forest.

"Wait no!"

But it was too late.

By the time they had all turned to see what the new commotion was about, another wolf in their party had turned into the forest.

And then another and another and tenth were just getting in in their numbers. 2

"What is happening?" Xaden asked.

"They opened up their senses and then the Ryliat are taking over and making them cross over," Erik added two and two together.

He turned back to the men. "Shut down your senses! Close it back! Do not let them get into you! If they do, then they will be able to control you and let you do what they want you to do now!"

But they had already done it.



A number of the wolves were now crossing across.

Over seven of them had gone looking for their loved ones or the ones that the monster had used to deceive them.

Xaden reinforced his power as Alpha and was able to suppress and curb those who had not yet been taken control of by the Ryliat.

Erik began to feel his senses vibrate and he knew that his wall was weakening.

He started to heat his late wife. 3

"My love." She called out in pleasure.

But then he turned his head and tried to suppress her voice even though it pierced his heart.

They rode off away, and now they were left with only twenty-two men, including both Xaden and Erik.

They raced down the forest.

It was like an endless maze.

But they kept on running nonstop.

Soon, it was almost dusk, and the forest seemed not to be ending anytime soon.

"Erik are you sure that this forest is closing up



anytime soon?" Xaden asked. "It has been years are you sure that things are not different now?"

"These places never change," Erik said. "They have no reason and that is why they will always remain the same."

The men said nothing as they went down the path.

Inward they grieved for the ones they had lost.

But kept on going ahead.

The plants that had been calling out to them with their delicious fruits came into view.

Owen stopped short. "Gods. These look like they were a gift from ten gods themselves."

Owen tried to stretch and pick out the fruit.

"Do not touch that," Erik warned him

"It has been a while since I ate something fresh," Owen said, stretching out. "And look, the fruits are hanging out from the forest and into the brown path. Surely that would be a sign."

Erik snapped at him. "Do not! You do not touch anything from the dark forest. It will find its way to drag you in. But you are free to if you want to wind up dead."

Owen withdrew his hands quickly and swallowed hard.



They returned on their journey.

As they progressed further, they saw that all the beautiful plants and trees they had been hanging out to attract them were now rotting.

The darker the weather got, indicating it was nighttime, the more the plants and flowers on their left and right fell dead.

The fruits fell down to the floor rotting.

"Still want those anymore?" Someone asked jokingly.

Owen swallowed hard and thanked his stars that he had not touched the fruit. 1

"It's getting darker." Someone said. "And we are still here."

Erik knew that by the eighth hour of the night, the monsters in the dark forest would begin to evolve and attack them.

As they rode up, he saw a hill up ahead.

He recalled that hill and knew that they were close to the end of the forest.

"We have about twenty minutes before we arrive ." He said.

And it was precisely twenty minutes for them
To get to their destination.



Would they make it in time?

"Increase your pace men!" He snapped at them. "We have to race before the eight hour. When we reach the hill you will know we have escaped the dark forest. Go, go, go!"

The men all obeyed as they put pressure on their horses as they rode on faster and faster.

The cold air brushed against their face and enveloped them as every angle rotted and smelled of the dead plants.

The creatures were now howling and screaming in a rush to break free from their hold and claim their new victims.

They raced on, Erik could hear the creatures screaming and feel them coming closer and closer.

The men went across the hill and passed the forest.

Xaden was the last as he was behind protecting the men.

Then eight hit and soon the creatures were coming after him right from behind.

"Xaden fast! Hurry up come on!" The men screamed. 3

He rose his horse galloping, and just as they



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would have grabbed him, he jumped right off the brown path. 1

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