

## Chapter 167

89 - Ryker

"F\*CK!" I yell. Willing myself not to put a hole in my office wall. He was there, right under our noses and we missed him. We searched the whole deserted camp and found nothing. I don't know if they were tipped off or if they saw us coming, but everything was packed and gone.

I know my beta saw the camp. I know he's one of the stealthiest people on my team. I can't believe he would make a mistake to let the rogues know we are onto them. I also know the camp was only half a mile away from where we found Emily. That can't be a coincidence. I wonder if they were using the wolfsbane to hide their existence. Who knows how long they have been there. If she wouldn't have disappeared, we may never have discovered it. That ravine borders land that is an unspoken neutral zone. That section of land had a great big fire when I was young that took all the surrounding packs weeks to put out. And in the twenty or so years since, it has never recovered. Many of our more superstitious pack members believe it's cursed. No one likes to go there.

What has me the most angry though is the fact that I found Claude's scent. It was faint, maybe a couple days old, but it was there and distinct. That asshole is here, in my home territory, and I think he's after my mate, but I don't know what he will gain by harming her other than my absolute wrath. 1

I am trying to calm down my racing heart by pacing my office. I can't go upstairs to Kennedy like this. It's late, I gave Claude's scent far more attention than necessary. She doesn't deserve to see me like this anymore, she's been traumatized enough. I take a deep breath and press the heels of my hands into my eyes, trying to relieve the pressure of a headache that's forming. I have found that just thinking of her helps

though. Like now, I can feel her presence nearby. If I really focus I could probably pinpoint her location in the house.

I gasp as tingles ripple up my spine causing it to go rigid then turn to mush. "I can feel this tension across the packhouse." She says softly as she drags her nails down my back, but it's not s\*xual. Somehow it's calming. She presses her cheek in between my shoulder blades as her arms wrap around my waist. "What can I do to help?"

I take in another breath filling my head with her scent. She shouldn't be this all-consuming, but I can't resist her. I was so distracted by the thought of her, I didn't notice she came into the room. And yet, this is exactly what I needed to think straight. My head is so messed up. My dad never said anything about this with the mate bond. Actually, if he did, I probably would have rejected her on the spot. I have always liked and needed to be in control and I am absolutely NOT in control here and for the first time ever, I'm okay with it.

"Hey." She coos at me. "Get out of your head and let me help."

I close my arms around hers. "It's Claude. He was in the rogue camp. He's never been able to mess with my head before..." I trail off. Not wanting to say the words out loud, because it sounds dangerously close to blame. And she's not to blame, Claude is. Copyright © 2024 Miss L Writes and Ember Mantel Productions

"Before me?" She questions. She doesn't sound hurt though, just curious.

"Yeah. I took his pack. I know now it was too easy for me. I was a teenager, and we fought hard. There were losses on both sides, but I thought I had him. But, he has just used me for the last decade to take care of his pack and make it better. He wants it back."



"He'll never get it." She says it with so much conviction.

"What makes you say that?" She moves around to face me and, "Oh, shit! What are you wearing?" It's rhetorical as I push her back from me to get a full view. Her bare feet and long toned legs are on display as I skim up her body to see the hem of my white t-shirt hitting her mid thigh. There is definitely no bra on her under that shirt and her hair is down and messy. "You look gorgeous." I growl out pulling her in close again. I can't get enough of her today.

"You are nuts. I look sloppy." She laughs. "But you needed to calm down, so I didn't have time to change." 