

Chapter 105

The moment the sun began to settle in the sky, the countdown began in the back of my mind. It inched closer with each ticking second, until I found myself standing before thousands of werewolves.

My heart hammered in my chest as I looked out at the sea of people, thousands of features illuminated from the last shreds of fading sun. Even with the little jitters of panic that raced down my spine, I reminded myself that I wasn't alone.

The words of my family and friends circled my mind, chasing away the doubt that lingered at the corners. The hairs along my arms lifted as I dared to look past the sprawling crowd, towards the forest that seemed near pitch black.

I could see the tendrils of darkness slithering far from the lights reach, merely observing...watching and waiting for blood.

To my right stood Asher, tall and proud in a long sleeve shirt, darker than the encroaching night sky. He stood tall and

encroaching night sky. He stood tall and confident, like a king who had never doubted his title—his place in his own kingdom.

Only I could see the tenseness of his jaw, and the vein that protruded from his neck. The golden flecks in his eyes swirled, making them brighten and flash dangerously.

Towards the left of the stage stood Zeke, his arms crossed in front of him, a crucial ally for our pack and a trusted friend.

Asher's Beta stood to the right, a quiet man who saw much more than the rest of us. He peered out into the crowd; his face neutral beneath the harsh stage lights.

Claire and Killian, the previous Alpha and Luna, stood behind us. Brandon, clueless and already bored, had his place on stage. He had brought it on himself, flashing me a flirty grin as we walked onto the stage. The way his brother's eyes darkened; I knew Brandon had it coming. I was sure I had scented bourbon on him half an hour before the announcement, but there was no fog of drunkenness in his eyes.

I gave no more thought to Asher's

●ave no more thought to Asher's troublesome brother. Their strange relationship slash feud was the least of my problems, and I knew I wouldn't be the one to end a lifetime of rivalry. However, I had no problems breaking his hands, should he decide to touch me again. 3

While I suggested inviting Rowena to the pack meeting, Asher refused. I understood his mistrust, especially with how little we knew about witches. The last thing he wanted was his people exposed and at risk.

"I want to thank you all for leaving your children and families to come here tonight. I trust that those of you in need of babysitters took advantage of the services the local community centers are providing." Asher addressed the crowd, his gruff voice emerged from the speakers on either side of the stage. The crowd began just a few feet away. There was nothing separating us from them, no barrier or line of guards. We weren't above them, no matter our position. There were countless warriors amongst the crowd, different ages and genders as they blended in effortlessly. "It's rare that I hold announcements such as these,



but as you can tell from the presence of our Luna, things have been changing. Our view on the world must change as well. My mate has my full trust, and all I ask is that you give her the same respect as you have my own family.”

I listened to him almost enviously, hearing the silent command in his words. He addressed his pack as equals, but there was absolutely no mistaking the authority in his voice and the dominating stance he held on the stage.

I squared my shoulders and stepped towards the microphone, because if there was one thing I was sure of, it was that I never ran from a fight—even if it wasn’t the kind of fight, I was used to.

“Asher took over my pack over a year ago, and while I haven’t been one of you for long, my hometown has flourished under his hand. I know the rumors and the questions you all have. The battle in my hometown wasn’t a small one. There are some of you here who feel that loss, and I wish for the life of me that I could change that. I’m sure many of you have come to your own conclusions, but



me to your own conclusions, but tonight we're setting everything straight."

I wasn't the seasoned and poised public speaker Asher was, but my firm tone and unwavering voice caught the attention of the crowd. I could feel each and every one of their eyes on me, trying to peer past bone and flesh to see the answers hidden within my head. Asher's hand found my own, squeezing softly.

"The battle in my hometown was the tipping point in a feud between our kind and another race of beings, ones not talked about nearly enough. Werewolves have all but forgotten about the existence of Vampire's, and that was our first mistake. We have been misinformed about these people, left to horror stories that bred prejudice and fear." I took a soft breath, tasting the anticipation of the crowd. It was tart like pomegranates, with something bitter hidden beneath. "What our ancestors have failed to teach us, is that Vampire's are more similar to ourselves than we care to admit." 1



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The crowds murmuring began to grow, concern and panic rising but I refused to

Concern and panic rising but I refused to stand down. A surge of frustration pulsed through me. This had to work—they had to listen to me, to their Luna.

“They are no more monsters than we are. Capable of good and evil, just like our human neighbors.” My voice was a whip, slicing through the insolence of the crowd. It was unbreakable, unbendable as I informed the people sworn to abide by the laws of their Alpha and Luna, bound by honor and blood. “Any judgements you have about them, look towards yourselves first. Should my mate and your Alpha, have been cruel and unforgiving, this pack would be no different than the kingdom of the Vampires—the kingdom that my biological father built after getting my mother pregnant, the very kingdom I have been tasked with transforming.”

A symphony of gasps and exclamations, the burning eyes of the crowd brighter than the stage lights. I could taste the adrenaline and surprise but refused to stop.

I scanned the crowd with my senses, venturing even farther to where the



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●nturing even farther to where the forest surrounded us. I could just make out the low croak of a couple toads, and the rustling of deer migrating away from the noise and light. There were far too many scents to comb through, but a tickling in my gut told me to remain on alert. 1

Counting the seconds and bracing myself for much more than the reaction of the crowd, I continued.

“The Vampire King’s death has given these people a second chance, one where they won’t be forced into a war they never wanted. Families with women and children, held at the throat by a cruel king. These are the Vampire’s, the people that I am advocating for. They are the ones who wish to rebuild what was destroyed, and to taste peace they’ve never known.”

My fingers twitched in Asher’s hand as the distant sound of wildlife was snuffed out. Not a single cricket chirped nor branch rustled, even the breeze itself had halted. The trees in the back ceased their swaying, and the world itself seemed to

'Are you ready?' Asher asked, feeling the change in the air and in how I stood.

I gave him the barest of nods, keeping my head turned towards the crowd.

"There are Vampire's who are against the idea of peace, who want to cause chaos and death. It is our duty to both werewolves and vampires that these threats are extinguished, so that peace—"

My voice didn't falter, even when the glint of a silver pistol snagged my eyes. Deep within the churning crowd, swallowed by darkness and a sea of featureless faces, my heightened senses made out the object. My gut tightened, as it often did when something was awry.

As a single gunshot rang out, the sound deafening over the murmur of the crowd, I shifted ever so slightly. My last thought before bracing for impact was 'this is going to fucking hurt'.