

Chapter 118

I had never been good at sugar coating things, but I tried to tone down the details as I told her what I knew. There was a nervous flutter in my chest because she hadn't turned and bolted up the stairs. She was still here, listening even though her eyes were somewhere far away.

"Her name is — was Carson, she went to the University in town and ran one of the sororities. She had friends and a family." I explained, "I know it's a long shot, but I had to ask. I know you weren't aware of our father's plans, but this was how it started before. She's the first, but there's too high a chance she won't be the last."

Holly was silent for so long that I wondered if coming here was useless. She was unnaturally still. Tristan was the only one who wasn't on edge, leaning against the wall as if this was common occurrence.

"I don't always see things, sometimes its sounds or feelings." Her voice was soft and a few octaves higher than mine.

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I met her gaze unflinchingly, "Anything that could tie into last night? There was a party at a lake in the middle of the forest, then another at a frat house in town."

She paused, and something in my chest jumped as I registered the thoughtful look on her face. Part of me was giddy, this was the most we had spoken in weeks.

"I haven't slept much these last few days." She admitted quietly, not looking Tristan's way. No matter what she gave me, I knew I wouldn't be disappointed. "I could smell something sweet, but it was a different kind of sweet than what vampire's smell like. I also heard a girl laughing, but it wasn't nice laughing. Red hair, but now I think that's because it was covered in blood. That's...that's all I remember."

I believed her, reading the guilt in her eyes. My nightmares were few and far between compared to hers, but they also made little sense. I knew how disorienting they could be and wanted to give her the same shred of hope that I carried.

carried.

"Rowena, the witch that got here yesterday, she said that training will help you. It'll give your magic an outlet, so it doesn't have to show itself in other ways. You'll be able to get some sleep for a change." I told her, relief building in my chest as the smallest of smiles crossed her face.

While Tristan and Giovanni got in touch with their contacts, Asher and I went back to the crime scene. After a quick phone call to Cordelia and Rowena, the two were on their way to meet us.

There were only a handful of warriors left combing through the lake and surrounding beach, the rest having taken up patrol duties for the rest of the day. Asher spread the word to expand the perimeters another five miles. Far enough to search the land without straying too far from home.

The crowd of college students had been chased away, giving us four the privacy to speak freely.

"We'll start on the beach and make our way to where the body was found." Asher said, his hand on the small of my back as

said, his hand on the small of my back as I led the way.

I wasn't sure how I knew where I was going, but my feet carried us down the beach, to where I had run into Devin. Just a few feet away was where Zeke and Carson were, where we had taken that picture.

"That poor girl. I can only imagine how her family feels." Rowena's voice was solemn, her eyes downcast as they scanned the forest.

Cordelia's sad smile held the same flicker of wisdom as grandmas, "If there's anything here to pick up, we'll find it. I'll light a candle for Carson tonight, and for her family."

We reached the edge of the forest and continued through, sticking to one of the smaller trails I had taken in my search for Asher. It was silent apart from Cordelia's soft humming and the occasional snap of a branch. Neither said a word until we reached the small clearing where Carson's body had been discovered.

"She was found against that tree." I

"She was found against that tree." I nodded ahead, eyes darting down to the large spot of dried blood. The grass had gone from emerald, to crimson, to brown.

"Was there a time of death?" Cordelia asked.

"One to three in the morning. Zeke said Carson got in the uber a little past midnight. It's a half hour drive to the lake from there." Asher responded.

Both witches explored the clearing. Rowena with her auburn hair and slacks, and Cordelia, hair streaked with grey and clutching the pendants around her neck.

Several minutes passed and Rowena was the first to speak, "This is not helpful or comforting, but I sense it was a violent death."

"You don't feel that?" Cordelia frowned, growing still. "So faint, I almost missed it."

She stood in front of the tree Carson had been sitting against. Dried blood turned the roots black, making the tree look infected. Her fingers grazed the bark ever so gently.

so gently.

“What are you feeling?” Rowena asked curiously, her mossy eyes locked on the older witch. “All I’m getting is fear and confusion.”

“Is it magic?” I couldn’t help but ask, hoping desperately for some clue that would point us in the right direction.

“I’d assume it were magic, but it’s so faint. I’m afraid I can’t get an accurate read on it. All magic leaves a trace, doesn’t matter what kind it is. There’s spells to cover your tracks, but if you know what you’re looking for, they can be unraveled.” She explained, looking down at the dried patch of blood. Her eyes were more than troubled when she spoke, “Whatever this is, it wasn’t a spell meant to cover tracks. It’s like what happened here has been seared from the land, and what I’m sensing is just the scar.”

“So that’s it then. Whether or not it’s the vampire’s orchestrating this, there are witches involved.” I swallowed, feeling the looming sensation that I was way in over my head.

Cordelia stepped away from the tree and

Gardelia stepped away from the tree and murmured something softly, "I think it's safe to say that, yes. There's a witch, or witches after you, Luna."

"We couldn't have come at a better time, could we?" Rowena locked eyes with the other witch, both had identical looks of worry.

Trying to sleep that night was more difficult than ever. I had finally succumbed to my exhaustion around three in the morning, smothered in Asher's arms and masculine scent.

I could tell by the way my eyes ached that I hadn't slept for long. Spending a solid fifteen minutes brushing the knots from my dark hair, I stuck my head out of the bathroom when I heard the doorbell's silvery chime.

"I'll get it!" I called out to Asher, who was still in the shower.

I was surprised to see a head of golden hair through the front door's square pane of glass. The lock clicked as I opened the door, seeing Cassidy's smiling face. Part of me was a bit surprised, there was no way word hadn't spread by now.

o way word hadn't spread by now.

“Hey, Lola! Sorry to stop by all randomly, I was on my way to the gym and your new house happens to be in the same direction.” Her high pony, and sports bra legging combo backed up her words. Her smile fell just a sliver, “Oh, you aren't busy, are you?”

“Not at all, come in.” I opened the door for her.

“Actually, I did stop by for a reason—” She began but was distracted by the house. Her pale lips popped open, and a sound of enjoyment escaped them. “Oh, this place is beautiful. The marble fireplace, the counter tops and appliances—oh he outdid himself!”

“You knew Asher was having the house built?” I asked curiously, watching her roam the kitchen and living room, making small remarks of approval as she went.

“Of course, I did.” She giggled softly, “Back before Asher became all broody, when he was still a chubby faced kid, he always said he'd build his mate a castle.”

“With how things are going, we could use

"With how things are going, we could use the protection of a castle." I joked, even though a frown twitched at the corners of my lips.

"Oh, that reminds me. I almost forgot why I stopped by." Cassidy shook her head and fished her cellphone out of her purse. I watched in silence as she tapped at the screen, her nails clicking against the glass. Guilt curled in my stomach when she pulled up the sororities I***a page. The most recent photo posted was one at the party last night. "There's been a lot of comments on this picture, most of which aren't good. I've been doing some damage control, but her posting this then dying hours later...Devin and his idiotic friends have been stoking the flames, but I'll make sure they get theirs." 1

I was stunned and flattered that Cassidy wanted to help, that she believed this random girl who was mated to her close friend. Sure, the pack had no choice but to respect me as their Luna, but they still had a mind and opinions of their own.


As much as I wanted to thank Cassidy for all of her help, my eyes were locked onto something much more important.


something much more important.

“You said Cassidy posted this picture?” I asked. ¹

Cassidy gave me an odd look but shrugged, “Yeah, she’s the one with the log in info. Why?”

“This picture was posted at four in the morning.” I explained, realizing things had just made themselves that much more complicated. “The time of death was between one and three. There’s no way she’s the one who posted this.”

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