

Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 176

Read Alpha Asher by Jane Doe Chapter 176 – “You must be awful stupid comin’ around these parts, girl-even with a Vampire at your side.” A loud voice snapped.

A woman came into view, emerging from where she blended in with the forest line. Her skin was as dark as the bark that covered each tree, but that was where the similarities ended. She swayed her round hips gracefully as she approached the bike, her full lips curled back in a fearless sneer. She stopped five feet away, standing on the dual yellow lines that split the road in two. The leather jacket she wore glittered under the moon, mirroring the light in her dark eyes.

For a single fleeting moment, I wondered if they were oblivious to who we were. The miniscule dash of hope fizzled out when the woman spoke a second time.

“And don’t expect me to call you Queen, you ain’t no friend of me or mines.”

Though I didn’t dare take my eyes off the Vampire, I could see in my peripherals that she wasn’t the only one venturing from the forest to stand in the road. In all, I counted four others. Two to our left and two to the right.

We were surrounded.

The humanoid shape at the far end of the road came closer, their features growing sharper with each heavy footstep they took. When I managed to make out two pale-blue eyes, a wide mouth, and a set of messy hair, I found myself stunned into silence.

“Go on, now. Take the helmets off so we can have ourselves a civilized conversation, yeah? You can shut off the bike too, won’t be needing that anytime soon.”

The homeless man that had been sitting outside of the gas station came to a stop beside the woman. He brought the can of beer in his hand to his lips and took a long drink.

“Oh, thanks for the beer, by the way.” He said, ignoring the woman’s scowl.

Several seconds passed and Tristan hadn’t moved. His position turned defensive, and I could tell by the way he clenched his jaw that he had no intention on listening to them. I tapped his shoulder pointedly, once again wishing Vampire’s had the luxury, and curse, of a mind-link.

He must’ve understood well enough because a second later he cut the engine and removed the key from the ignition. The silence was deafening, but it was the eerie sense of foreboding that thickened the air and raised the humidity.

“Now that that’s done with, what the h**l kind of business you got in these parts?” The woman demanded.

Her eyes narrowed into small slivers, but I could still see the gleam dancing within them.

“Dina, just k**l em’ and be done with it.” The homeless man said.

He flashed me a grin that might’ve seemed apologetic if he hadn’t chosen to belch afterwards. The sound echoed across the pavement, sending the rancid scent of stale beer and sour breath in every direction. The woman at his side wrinkled her nose but didn’t tear her eyes away from Tristan and me.

The man shrugged indifferently. “Sorry, doll face. Buying me a beer won’t save ya,’ even if you are the Queen.”

His words stirred something deep within me, a feeling that unfurled in my chest like the blood-soaked petals of a freshly plucked rose. I slid off the back end of the bike, feeling the Vampire’s on either side of us stir. Tristan didn’t dare stop me, but instead followed my lead and lifted his leg over the bike before knocking the kickstand into place.

I took a few steps towards the man and woman, stopping at Tristan’s side.

“Clearly you need a Queen if you think k*****g me is a smart idea, but what do I know? It’s not like I’m the Luna of the largest pack in the world. Oh, and laying off the beers might help too.” I replied, skewering him with my stare for a couple long seconds before turning my attention to Dina, the female Vampire. “I’m here looking for a Vampire Lair, and it looks like I’ve found it.”

The male opened his mouth to respond but was silenced when Dina raised her hand. On either side of us, the Vampire’s stirred and shifted restlessly. Clearly, Dina had some sort of sway here, but I couldn’t be sure how much.

“You ain’t found nothing, and if you’re smart you’ll take your little a*s out of here before I change my d**n mind.” She snapped.

I wasn’t fazed, even if her voice was laced with fire. Something about her reminded me of a dragon, huffing smoke into the air as a warning before it burned the forest to ash. Unlike the drunken Vampire at her side, intelligence flickered in her eyes.

“You’re smart, I can tell. You don’t want the trouble of kidnapping or murdering me, not without knowing if my mate and the rest of the pack know where I am-which they do. There’s a reason you didn’t join the rest of your lair and help the witches when they sought you out, which is a good thing considering they infiltrated my pack. It’s comforting to know Bridgette wasn’t lying, though she could’ve saved me some time by warning me about Frank Gallagher over here.” I replied confidently, smirking when the male’s face reddened and contorted in anger.

“The f**k is that?” He bellowed, crushing the beer can in his hand.

Dina whirled around with such fury in her eyes that I found myself waiting for her to breathe actual flame.

“Either shut your d**n mouth or go the h**l back to Garret’s and keep watch.” She snarled, jabbing a finger into his chest. When he clamped his lips together and tossed the crumpled can to the side of the road, Dina turned back to the two of us. “What do you know about Bridgette? Where the f**k is she?”

She had the same fury raging in her eyes. It was powerful enough to make me doubt our safety. Clearly, she cared about Bridgette. Did she care about her enough to try and harm us?

“Bridgette is alive. Who do you think gave me the directions to your lair?”

Dina pursed her lips. “You torture her for the information? Bridgette wouldn’t give up our location any other way.”

I shook my head, “She’s unharmed, but the same can’t be said for the other Vampire’s. I defended myself when they attacked, but I didn’t k**l them, and neither did anyone in my pack.”

To the left of us, I heard what I thought was a choked sob. When a golden-haired Vampire keeled over, clasping her hands over her mouth, I knew I’d been right. It brought me no pleasure to see the agony on her face, to watch the shadows deepen along her protruding cheekbones, furthering the darkness that already lingered within her eyes. The male at her side, whose dark hair was slicked into a short mohawk, took her in his arms.

She trembled and shook but didn’t break her stare from my face. “If you aren’t responsible, then who is?”

“The witch they chose to follow.” I answered truthfully, “She’s the one who k****d them.”

Dina cleared her throat, suspicion burning in her eyes. “How the h**l does one measly witch k**l that many Vampires?” She demanded.

“She wasn’t just any witch...but you should already know that. Wait, didn’t you know she was the blood witch?” I frowned, running my eyes over each Vampire that surrounded us, soaking in the confusion as it morphed into various shades of h****r and realization.

Dina’s scowl darkened, turning so grim that I had to fight back the urge to shudder. She turned to the Vampire that had been posing as a homeless man and said, “Royce, go

pull the car out. If what she's sayin' is true and Bridgette survived, Deacon is going to want to talk to her."

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"What's with Vampire's and abandoned warehouses?" I asked, speaking to no one in particular.

The breaks of the rusty minivan we were crammed into squealed as we pulled into a handicap space close to the front doors. I could make out the symbol painted on the spot, though it had faded over time.

Within the parking lot were a few cars, but most looked like junkers rather than functioning vehicles. There weren't any windows apart from the ones that lined the front, but they were blacked out by scraps of cardboard boxes and old newspapers.

"This one won't be half as luxurious as your father's." Tristan muttered at my side; his face marred in a permanent scowl.

From the front seat, Dina snorted. She turned around and glared at Tristan.

"With how flimsy your loyalty is, you got no room to be judging anybody, Tristan." The pale-haired

Vampire at my side lifted an eyebrow, but Dina didn't falter in her rant. "That's right, I know you. You don't know me, though. I was a nobody back then, a body for her father's military." She jutted her chin in my direction. "I saw you a couple times, scramblin' to obey the King and all his whims. It's ironic you're doin' the same for his daughter now, isn't it?"

I wanted to come to Tristan's defense, and I had planned to, but Dina's words struck a chord in my chest that left me silent.

Tristan had been my father's right-hand man. He'd been closest to him, even though my father trusted absolutely no one. Part of me wondered if Tristan's loyalty to me had anything to do with the mark that sat on my neck, or his lingering hopes that I would choose him over Asher.

I didn't have to wonder for long if Tristan would speak up.

“Thank you, Dina, for dredging up the years I spent serving a monster who deserved not a speck of the loyalty he received. Everything you said was correct. I don’t remember you because I never cared to look your way. As you’ve already stated, I was busy trying to prove my worth to a King who viewed us all as disposable.” He said with a clipped tone.

The pale blues of his eyes glittered menacingly as he leaned forward in his seat. Dina remained rooted in place, but from the harsh set of her jaw and the way her grip tightened on the arm rest, I knew she was preparing herself for if he decided to attack.

“Our new Queen, she doesn’t see us as disposable. I might’ve had to prove my loyalty to her, but never my worth.” 1

Tristan leaned back in his seat, his severe expression unwavering, even as Dina slid her eyes over to my face. The brooding Vampire at my side wasn’t one to speak idly, especially when it came to paying someone a compliment. I knew without asking that every word he said, he truly meant.

My heart flipped in my chest and took off, pounding harder with each set of eyes that found my face. I couldn’t read the emotion in their eyes other than obvious suspicion, not that I had much time to.

The door of the minivan slid open, clambering against the side of the vehicle with a loud thud. A shaggy haired man with a toothy grin and a thin scar above his brow appeared, but the expression fell the moment he and I locked eyes.

“What the fuck, Dina.” He grunted, but the venom in his voice felt flimsy. “You we’re ‘supposed to come back with dinner.”

The stranger pulled open her door and crossed his arms over his chest. Like a Queen herself, Dina slid from the seat and patted the man on his shoulder. He visibly relaxed under her touch, and as his eyes softened, I could read the truth within them.

He and Dina were mates.

“Deacon inside?” She asked him, then jutted her chin in my direction. “Our Royal Highness here decided to pay us a visit. She needs to speak with him.”

Within an instant, Dina’s mate lost his cheesy grin and replaced it with a scowl so fierce I was almost fearful.

“Why the hell would I— “

“It’s about Bridgette. Believe me, baby, he’s gonna wanna hear what she’s got to say.” Dina said curtly, though the sour tone was reserved for Tristan and me alone.

Just then, the oddest thing happened.

Rather than bark out another sharp reply, or huff in defeat, Dina's mate turned his attention to my face, staring at me long and hard. He pursed his lips, and the scar above his eyebrow rippled from the intensity of his scrutinizing gaze.

"She don't know, does she?" He asked, still not taking his eyes off my face.

Dina shook her head, glancing my way for a fraction of a second. "No, she don't know, but she's gonna."

Her mate's toothy grin returned as he clasped his hands together and rubbed them eagerly. "Wonderful, I love surprises. Let's go then."

A sinking feeling encased my stomach, weighing it down like I'd swallowed a ton of lead.

Tristan had been right about the warehouse, and other things, but I had no intention on admitting that anytime soon.

Upon entering, we passed through a set of broken metal detectors, and ventured into a small room.

There were nearly a dozen cots laid out in what I assumed was once an employee break room, though the lockers had been torn out. I could still see the imprint of where they'd sat against the wall, and as I looked even harder, I spotted a few broken combination locks scattered about. The counters still remained, along with a sink that looked as though it hadn't properly functioned in the last ten years.

Two Vampire's perched on a single cot, huddled close together, stopped their whispering as we walked into the room. The woman, whose freckles were dark and cinnamon colored, wrinkled her nose at me. At her side was a man young enough to be her son, whose hazel-eyed gaze remained curious as we passed through.

It wasn't until we slipped through a second doorway that I began to hear voices. One was deep and booming, easily commanding the attention of the others, who murmured anxiously in response.

As we passed rows and rows of metal shelves, nearly all of them empty apart from a few moldy boxes, I scoured our surroundings, trying to glean what information I could about this place.

"Looks like it was some kind of make-up warehouse." Tristan said gruffly, his eyes darting towards the ground. "See all the trash?"

Sure enough, there were flattened boxes belonging to various brands of make-up. I recognized a few, having owned some myself, though the packaging we walked on looked to be a couple years old.

Growing closer with each step we took, I heard someone call out.

“What we need to do is help the witches!” A shrill voice cried out, one bordering on hysteria. “They promised us a place with them—promised we’d have our own land once the werewolves are extinct. If we don’t put our trust in them, we have no one. We have to take their offer while it still stands!”

An eruption of murmuring filled the warehouse, echoing lightly before fading into nothingness. The voices overlapped one another, some frenzied and other’s tainted with worry and fear. From what I could hear, many of the Vampire’s were agreeing with the hysterical woman.

The sound of my own kind contemplating joining the Blood Witch, set my teeth on edge and made a cold chill skitter down my spine.

I picked up my pace, slipping past Dina’s arm as she reached out to stop me, and blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

“You’re all wrong. The witches offer you nothing but death.”

Tristan’s hand came down on my shoulder seconds too late. The words had already been breathed into existence, and all attention was now on us.

We stood at the center of the warehouse, a place where the employees would meet up before every shift if the peeling stickers on the floor were any indication.

There were more Vampire’s than there were cots, and all of their eyes were on me. Well, all except for one.

The man with the booming voice, he had his back turned to us all. I could tell it had been his voice I heard not because of his giant stature, but because of the sheer force of his presence alone.

“The girl is right.” His deep baritone rippled across the crowd, silencing them. “Even though her kind offers us the same thing.”

I was seconds away from lashing out with a response, but Tristan of all people rendered me silent.

“There’s no way...” He said in utter disbelief, slack jawed as the Vampire turned around to face the room.

The moment I latched onto those pale blue eyes, I understood.

They were the same—exactly the same, identical to the ones I watched turn glossy seconds before severing his head from his shoulders.

It was my father's eyes I stared into, but this man, he wasn't my father.

"Hello, niece."

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"What the fuck?" I deadpanned, staring at what could easily be my father's clone like the man himself had risen from the grave and sewn his head back on.

I couldn't process the thoughts churning in my head enough to formulate any other response, but I couldn't help but feel as though those three words summed things up brilliantly.

He had the same thick hair, composed of the darkest onyx, that Holly and I inherited, along with the startling eyes. His build was definitely larger than my father's, but his face, the wide-set jaw and sloped nose—that was the same.

The man who claimed to be my uncle—as if that wasn't the weirdest thing I'd ever said, raised one of his dark eyebrows. "Well said."

"You're Deacon?" I managed, my voice a touch suspicious.

He nodded imperceptibly, "That's what I'm called."

"The former King doesn't have a brother. I spent nearly all of my time by his side, and never had he mentioned a brother. How is this possible?" Tristan grimaced, hovering protectively at my side.

Deacon snorted at Tristan's reaction, his broad shoulders shifting in the process. The other Vampire's in the warehouse, the one's he'd been conversing with, stared with equal parts curiosity and contempt.

"You think just because you spent your every waking moment preening after my brother, means you get access to his secrets? Try again. My brother would've served

your head to the witches on a silver platter if it meant getting what he wanted, no matter how loyal you were.” He replied, rubbing at the stubble on his chin as though he had a second, more amusing thought. “No wonder you’re following this one around. You must be grateful she got rid of him before he could get rid of you.”

The teasing and condescending tone laced within his rough voice made me bristle, sending a rush of heat down my neck and arms.

“Lola. My name is Lola.”

“How right you are, Lola.” He replied, putting emphasis on my name as he stared at me with those glacier eyes—cold, but not nearly as cold as my father’s. “You’ve changed since you beheaded my brother. You’re stronger, more confident in yourself.”

I set my jaw stubbornly, refusing to break my stare from his, even with all the Vampire’s in the room hovering nearby. “That happens when you kill someone.”

“That’s not all that happened though, is it?” Deacon asked, his tone implying he wasn’t expecting an answer. “Luna and the Vampire Queen. You must have your hands full. Does your mate know you’re here? Alpha Asher is a well-known name in this country, though you’re becoming more popular by the day.”

“You left out the part where I have a bunch of witches trying to kill me, and yes, Asher knows I’m here.” I kept my voice hard, molding it into granite so nothing could slip through.

Deacon crossed his arms over his chest and tilted his head ever so slightly. It was something my father would’ve never done, a movement that lacked the class and etiquette he had prided himself on.

“Mmm, I think you’re lying, Lola. I think your mate has no clue you’re here, and even if he does, I have a strong feeling he doesn’t know where here is. So, what’s keeping me from separating your head from your body like you did my brother, and sending your little minion here marching out into broad daylight?”

At my side, Tristan went rigid. Waves of pure loathing radiated off of him like a furnace, so scalding that I thought he might sink into a defensive position and attack.

“How would you know anything about Asher?” I snorted, smirking up at the man who had just threatened to lob my head off. I craned my head to the left and right, pretending to look around. “As far as I can tell, you’re holed up here, in a trashy warehouse. Some leader you are, Uncle.”

Deacon’s lips twisted upwards, and as they did so, I realized why my father never smiled himself.

He was horrifying in the same way my father was, eyes glinting with unshod knowledge and cruelty. Even though there were differences between the two, I had a feeling they were alike in more ways than I could count.

“I have my spies scattered along my web like little spiders. They whisper information down the threads, and I hear it. How else would I know about the murders in your pack, or of your mate’s unhinged nature? I can relate, you know. Living with someone cruel and violent is draining—constantly on your guard, wondering when the day will come when you see your blood being spilled.”

I swallowed a snarl, letting it rumble in my chest rather than giving Deacon the satisfaction of knowing he’d gotten to me. A thought slithered into my head, and rather than play it safe in hopes my uncle wouldn’t murder me, I opted for reckless and impulsive.

“I’m impressed, truly. You know so much about my pack, it’s frightening.” I nodded solemnly. “It affects me so deeply because a certain prisoner of mine, the one who gave me the directions to this place, she didn’t mention anything about who you were. I can’t help but feel that Bridgette left out a huge chunk of information when we last spoke.”

Deacon’s entire demeanor changed. Like a switch had been flipped, the cruel and almost humorous light to his eyes vanished, blown out like a candle whose wisps of smoke trickled and faded into the air.

“Everyone, get the fuck out?’ His tone was flat, not too loud but not too quiet.

Without pause, the Vampire’s surrounding us began to move, bustling towards the fallen shelves, headed in the direction we had come from.

“You can stay, Dina.” He grunted at the last second.

The African American Vampire who’d stopped our bike in the middle of the road nodded, and I swore a wave of understanding passed between the two, one I wasn’t sure I’d ever understand.

Once every single Vampire was out of sight, Dina’s mate included, Deacon shattered the tension-filled silence.

“I want you to tell me everything you know about Bridgette, and if she was with any other Vampire’s when you found her.” His entitled demand coaxed a dry laugh from my throat.

“Yeah, and I want you to tell me how my father has a secret brother, and everything you know about the witches that want me dead.” I retorted, losing some of my steam when his eyes remained unbreakably hard.

I knew the look from staring at Asher half a dozen times. Deacon cared about Bridgette, but he was a man carved from steel, honed by cruelty and a past most likely laced with darkness. He'd burn down the world for her, but he'd never let it see him break.

"Look, she's still alive. I didn't have her tortured or anything. What information she gave me, she did of her own freewill."

Deacon didn't let his relief show, but I had a feeling it washed over him the same way it had washed over me when I heard Asher's voice two night's ago and realized he was alive.

"You didn't use any magic on her?" He narrowed his eyes as he asked. "Yeah, I know about your magic, and I'm not talking about the shadows, either."

I wanted to know how he knew, and while I planned on asking that very question, the time wasn't right.

"No, I didn't use magic on her."

Deacon watched me, his expression rigid and unfaltering. I'd long mastered the art of keeping a

Vampire out of my head, but I couldn't help but reinforce my walls as his stare turned penetrating.

"I was what the royal family called a 'back-up child.' If my brother were to defect, then I would take the throne. As it turns out, I'm the one that defected.

When the eldest child takes over, there's no need for a back-up anymore. The only mistake my brother ever made, other than getting his head chopped off by you, was letting me live." Deacon huffed, launching into an explanation I knew was horrendously shortened. "I was banished, but I wasn't alone. My brother had already been King for some time, long enough for some of his people to see him for the madman he was. Some of those Vampire's decided to come with me. Now, tell me about Bridgette."

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There was an itch I needed to scratch, a burning curiosity I needed resolved before I could give him what he wanted.

“How do you know about my magic? As far as I know, it’s passed down through my...my grandmother, but it was kept a secret for the most part.” I grimaced.

“It was kept a secret because my father despised witches and their magic. My brother, on the other hand, saw only power. Unfortunately for him, our mother died before he ever got the chance to use her in his plans.” Deacon replied, then let out a snarl. “ I’ve been more than accommodating considering I haven’t had you killed on the spot. I won’t tell you again, niece or no. What do you know about Bridgette?”

I’d never been a cruel type of person, nor was I someone who lorded information over another person’s head, but there was something about Deacon that provoked that side of me. Perhaps, it was his attitude and the way everything he said felt like a challenge, but I couldn’t help but feel that a Queen — his Queen, wouldn’t take kindly to someone telling her what to do.

‘Neither would a Luna.’ Maya grumbled, her hackles rising. T say stick it to him.’

I wanted to, but I had to keep my wits. Asserting myself as his Queen was a must, but I couldn’t threaten him, his mate, or any other Vampire in the process.

“From where I stand, neither one of us have any room to be making demands of the other. I have no intentions on harming Bridgette, just like you won’t harm Tristan and me. Next time you think to demand something from me, remember that I am your Queen. You might’ve been banished when your brother was in rule, but not anymore.”

Deacon threw his head back and laughed, but it wasn’t a sound of joy.

“You silly child, there is no more Kingdom! There stopped being a Kingdom when you decapitated my brother—your father. Believe me, I’m not complaining, but you’re no Queen. You chose your side, and us ours.”

I stood my ground and shook my head firmly.

“That’s where you’re wrong. So long as there are Vampire’s in this world, there is and always will be a Kingdom. I can feel it in my blood, in every single Vampire that chooses to follow me. This mentality that there are sides to pick is what will get all of you killed, it’s what pits all three of the supernatural beings in this world against one another. What I want is to end that, once and for all. No more sides, no more forcing witches into hiding or barring Vampire’s from living on an Alpha’s lands. It’s what Asher and I want, which is exactly why we’ve been working so hard to create a safe place for Vampire’s to go until this war is finished —a safe place your mate seemed very interested in.”

From the darkness creeping across Deacon’s face, I was sure he was going to belt out some vicious retort, but Tristan’s voice pierced the air first.

“Lola has been juggling both of our kinds wants and needs since becoming Queen, and you have to admit, it’s more than her father has ever done.”

This seemed to halt Deacon’s retort in its tracks, giving me a moment to slip in with some useful information.

“Bridgette crossed the boundary lines to my pack a few nights ago, along with several other Vampire’s. They were with a witch —the Blood Witch, who was animating a dead body of a werewolf I knew. They attacked, and I fought using my magic, but I did not fatally harm any of them. It was the Blood Witch that killed them, all of them except for Bridgette. She slit their throats and left them for dead. A witch in my pack was able to heal Bridgette before she died. She was the only survivor.” I said grimly, swallowing back wave after wave of nausea at the thought of all that blood and the lives that vanished in the process. “Do you know why they attacked, or why the witch took their lives after infiltrating my pack?”

Deacon and Dina locked eyes, both of them sharing a knowing look that made goosebumps pebble along my skin. After a few long seconds of silence, listening to the large ceiling fans sway and creak, Dina stepped forward and spoke.

“A few witches showed up one day, late in the afternoon. Don’t know how they found the place, but they did. We let them in, but only because they threatened to tear the place down until we were all in the sunlight. They said they just wanted to talk, but I figured anyone who wants to ‘just talk’ isn’t willin’ to murder innocent people in the process, you know?” Dina frowned, “Deacon was at an old supermarket in town, hiding out until the sun set. He was getting us all some food before some of the other Vampire’s started killin’ humans, so he missed the witches showin’ up. I didn’t want anythin’ to do with them, was about to tell them to go the fuck away, but Bridgette wanted to let them in. She didn’t want none of the others gettin’ hurt, so she let them in.”

“I got back just before they left. I didn’t need any of the others listening to the witches’ poisonous plans, so I told them all to scatter. Seeing that they trusted me, the witches decided to pitch their grand plan to Bridgette, Dina, and I. I heard them out, then promptly told them to fuck off. Guess Bridgette connected with something they said, because when I and a few others went for a food run, she was gone.” Deacon explained, not a speck of hurt in his face or voice, even though I knew it bubbled deep within.

I leaned forward, stopped by Tristan’s steadying hand.

“Their plan—what was it?”

I held my breath, hoping desperately that this was it— that I’d finally understand what the hell was going on. More than anything, I needed to know why these witches wanted me so badly, why they were willing to kill random werewolves in the pack and stage it like my father’s previous victims.

“Don’t know all of it, but they wanted your magic— both from my mother’s side and my father’s. They mentioned there was something special about you, and that their leader was cooking up a spell that would bring you to their side.” Deacon replied. “I asked them what this spell of theirs did, but they wouldn’t tell me.”

I couldn’t help it. I let out a groan and sank my teeth into my lower lip to bite back a frustrated snarl.

Deacon’s eyebrow twitched, lifting an inch up his forehead. The way he skewered me with my eyes made me feel as though he were trying to pick me apart, intent on figuring me out before I did something dangerous.

“You didn’t let me finish. They wouldn’t tell me what the spell did, but they did tell me something else about it—something important.”

“What is it?” I asked eagerly, more than desperate for any hint of knowledge that could help me understand why.

“You might wanna get rid of the enthusiasm, girl. It’s not good, but it does explain why this Blood Witch killed my Vamps.” Deacon grunted, folding his arms over his chest. “They didn’t tell me what it did, but they did mention one of the required ingredients to complete it.”

An ingredient? How would that help us? Cordelia’s spell book came to mind, along with the various herbs and crystals inside. I couldn’t see how an herb or crystal would explain the deaths of numerous Vampire’s.

“Three sacrifices from the three species that make up the tri-brid. That’s the final ingredient, and from what I understand...they’ve almost got what they need.”

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The corpses of Carmen and Devin came to mind, both strategically placed shortly after their gruesome murders. It brought me no peace to learn that their deaths were for a specific purpose. Learning the truth had renewed my rage, but also invoked a wave of disgust that made me nauseous.

I had no doubt that the witches were more than willing to knock off a few of their own if it meant getting what they wanted.

'That's why we'll win in the end. Even under Tyler's rule our pack had more loyalty for its members than the witches. ' Maya huffed, her tail swishing in agitation.

"We have to assume they've already sacrificed three of their own. There's no reason why they'd wait if they have three witches readily available. H**l, they probably offered themselves willingly. We know they've k****d more than one Vampire, which leaves..." Tristan trailed off, his voice fading but his grimace was answer enough.

"Which leaves one more werewolf." Deacon mused gruffly, one of his thick arms crossed over his chest as he tapped on his chin. The way he regarded me wasn't the way an uncle would look at his niece, but the way a predator would size up its prey.

'He's s**t out of luck, then. We've never been prey, and if he's stupid enough to a****k, he'll learn that fast. ' Maya chimed in, hackles raised and ready to fight.

I anticipated Deacon's comment and had a retort dangling off the tip of my tongue.

"We could n*p all this in the bud real quick by just k*****g you." He shrugged one of his meaty shoulders, "You'd be saving one of your own."

"Go ahead and try." I dared him.

Off to the side, Dina stiffened. She'd jump in if it was brought to a fight, that was a given. I didn't have to divert my attention from Deacon to know Tristan was glowering at her, issuing a silent dare of his own.

For half a second, Deacon looked like he might just take me up on my offer, but after a long pause of silence, he huffed and shook his head.

"Don't really feel like fending off a feral Alpha. I'm banking I'd k**l him in the end, but not before he s*****d half the Vampire population."

I twisted my lips into a humorless smirk. "Looks like hiding all these years made you smart. Good to know."

Deacon barked out an amused laugh, "You sure you aren't my kid? Can't see my brother removing the stick up his a*s long enough to make one."

I was about to tell him how unappealing his question was when Dina's mate came sprinting through the stacks of metal shelves. His greasy hair was slicked back, giving me the perfect view of his wide eyes and gaping mouth. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that was his 'oh s**t' face.

It seemed I hit the nail on the head with my assumption, because the moment Dina spotted him, she was at his side in an instant.

“What is it, baby?” She asked, her tone hushed.

Dina’s mate wasn’t looking at her, though. His eyes were square on Deacon, the earthy tones bright with fear.

“They’re here, the witches...” He stammered, swiping his fingers through his hair hard enough to tear a few strands out. “S**t, Deacon. They just pulled up. They must’ve been watching us. What the fu-“.

“Relax, Spence.” Deacon commanded, his tone firm but not harsh.

There was a sort of understanding on his face that piqued my curiosity, if only for a moment. He stared Tristan and I down, towering over us both in height and physique. I knew he was noticing how Tristan had inched closer to my side, his hand wrapped firmly around my arm. Before my heart could thud a second time, Deacon had come to whatever conclusion he’d been searching for.

“Spence, get the others ready to evacuate. Have them meet at the fire exit on the west side of the building. Bring the witches to me, then join the others.” Deacon growled, frowning when Spence scrambled into action, nearly wiping out on some scraps of cardboard. He glanced at Dina. “He going to be alright?”

Dina, whose face had somehow become even more grim and severe, nodded her head.

“Yeah, he’ll manage. Thank you, by the way, for not making him stick around the witches. He’s got a bad history with them.”

“You’re welcome.” Deacon murmured, his brows still furrowed, then jutted his chin at Tristan and me. “You can repay me by getting these two out of here safely.”

I’m sure my eyebrows crept halfway up my forehead once I heard him say that. He let out a puff of air that sounded like both a scoff and a snort, but I wasn’t sure if it was in response to my expression or Dina’s. The dark-skinned Vampire stared at Deacon like he had two heads, just as surprised as I was that he was keen on helping me live.

“Don’t think I’m doing you any favors, kid. Turning you in might save my people in that moment, but long term it’ll only lead to our destruction. Best chance we got is if you somehow win this thing, considering you weren’t lying to my face about how much you care about Vamps.” He grunted, puffing out his chest as he stared down Dina.

Even though she was a few feet shorter than him, Dina wasn’t afraid to put on a scathing d***h glare. Her spine was rigid, and her jaw set in harsh angles that added to the deadly aura she was giving off. Even her eyes, which were a few tones darker than her skin, seemed to glow with the same scalding emotion on the rest of her face. She had more ferocity than any of the Vampire’s I’d met so far.

I bit back the thought that popped into my head before I blurted it out, but that didn't stop it from playing itself on repeat behind my eyelids.

Dina would've made a badass werewolf.

"We're running out of time, Dina." Deacon warned, his voice low and face blank, completely unaffected by her d***h glare.

She cursed under her breath and stormed over to Tristan and me, then jabbed her thumb towards the back of the warehouse. There were more of those rusted metal shelves sitting in rows, wedged so tightly together that I could only manage glimpses at the far wall.

"Let's go." She barked, muttering something under her breath that I would've caught had I not been lost in thought.

Even though Deacon made it clear enough he didn't support my rule, he was intelligent enough to know that the best chance for Vampire's was in my victory. That decision came with risk on his end, and if he was willing to stick his neck out for me, I needed to do the same in return.

Unfortunately, the risk I was about to take came with stakes much higher than his, but I knew there was a chance it might turn him to our side. Worst case scenario, it would inspire other Vampire's to switch teams.

I only realized Tristan was pulling me along when I dug my heels into the ground and forced him to turn back. His expression was equal parts bewildered and exasperated, but that was nothing new.

"Do either of you have a pen?" I asked, my eyes darting between Deacon and Dina.

"A pen? Girl, we don't have time for this!" Dina snapped, rubbing her temple in frustration.

I snarled under my breath, feeling the faint prickle of magic ghost across my skin.

"Then why are you wasting time when you could be finding me a pen?"

"Here, kid." Deacon's gravelly voice called from a few feet away.

He stood off to the side, a pen in his meaty fist. While Dina and I had been snapping at one another, Deacon had quietly done as I asked. I rushed over and snatched it from him. It was a bit rougher than I intended, but the prickling sensation telling me the witches were nearing was growing stronger, putting me more and more on edge. Hastily, I glanced around for any shred of paper I could find, but there was nothing, but trampled bits of cardboard crushed to the warehouse floor.

Without hesitating, I grabbed Deacon's hand and flipped it over. He didn't fight or question me as I scribbled messily across his palm, running the tip of the ballpoint over his callouses and weathered skin.

"This is where you'll find Bridgette, alive and unharmed. Don't bring anyone you don't fully trust with you." I both pleaded and ordered, "There are a total of five people in this world who have the information I just gave you. I can't stress this part enough. Protect these coordinates with your life."

This time, Deacon did react. One of his bushy eyebrows lifted an inch as a flicker of surprise crossed his face.

He grumbled, "This wouldn't happen to be the location of that safe haven some of the others were whispering about, is it?"

I didn't answer his question with a simple yes or no. In my eyes and in the rigid way I stood was all of the experience I'd accumulated in such a short amount of time. There was still so much I needed to learn as both Queen and Luna, so much maturing I still had left to do, but the Lola that had ran from her old pack and boyfriend like a coward was no more. In her place was someone new, someone both strong and vulnerable, with so much more to lose.

"I'm risking the lives of innocent Vampire's by giving you this. Do not make me regret it."

A hand wrapped around my upper arm, and I knew then that it was time to go. Deacon's expression was guarded, a blank mask that watched stoically as Dina led Tristan and I away. The slight nod he gave me was the last thing I saw before we vanished behind the rusted shelving.

'What do you think that meant?' Maya asked, both curious and just a tad worried.

Dina began to weave in and out of the stacks, inching us closer to the back of the warehouse. She seemed to know which aisles weren't jam-packed with the skeletons of old boxes, making it easier to keep our steps as quiet as possible.

'I have no clue, but I'm hoping it's his way of thanking us. Anything else would mean disaster.'

When the scuffle of two dainty pairs of feet hitting the warehouse floor found my ears, I had no choice but to tune my wolf out and strain to listen. I must've slowed because Dina turned back and frowned. She cupped her ear and pointed in the direction we had just come from, a question unraveling across her face.

Assuming she was asking if the witches were here, I nodded.

“Can you hear them?” I whispered with a voice so quiet that even I had to strain to hear every other word.

Dina’s eyes flickered to my lips for a second when she mouthed, “A little.”

We continued moving through the stacks, concealed by the metal shelving and the decomposed boxes that remained. Even on sections of the shelves where nothing sat, there were so many in a single row that it was nearly impossible to spot us through them.

I was able to make out the exit sign when a feeling slammed into my gut so hard that I came to a standstill.

“Hello, Deacon. Our mistress wants to know if you’ve changed your mind about joining us.” A familiar voice said, somehow managing to sound both vicious and cloyingly sweet.