

## 10 | Something Else

As soon as my feet cross the threshold of the pack house, Aimee is beside me. I expect her to start ranting about Nathan and his father, or badgering me about wanting to know every last word that was said back there.

When she doesn't, I'm shocked.

We get a few meters through the village, walking down the main path between the houses, before she finally opens her mouth.

"Alpha Andre is a controlling, unpleasant, condescending bastard just like his son is."

I breathe out a sigh of relief that she's not gone ill. Here comes the rant I've been anticipating.

"But I do agree with him."

I choke. I physically choke. "You what?!"

"Just hear me out," she holds up her hands, coming to a dead stop in the middle of the pathway and turning to me. She sounds like a peacekeeper now; using that so, overly reasonable voice to try to cover up the actual meaning of her words.

"The Exiled Alpha is dangerous. It'd be best if you stay away from him. Who knows what the hell he'll do to you," she reasons.

I stare at her blankly, wide eyed and mouth open. I wait for her to start laughing, to elbow me in the ribs and say she's only joking.

But she never does.

It'd be best if you...

That phrase goes right through me. It'd be best if you keep your mouth shut. It'd be best if you'd just do what you're told. It'd be best if you just learn your place.

A hesitant fear crosses Aimee's face and she continues talking with her hands, speaking calmly, "All I'm saying is I've heard things and just... Watch your tongue. The wolf's not stable."

"Do you think it's your turn to move the chess piece?" I accuse hotly, the initial shock subsiding to anger.

Her gaze locks me down on the spot, like a mother getting ready to scold her child.

"Don't be an idiot," she squints at me. "I'm trying not to get you killed. Whatever motives he has, they weren't formulated with the consideration of anyone else."

I don't respond immediately and I find my eyes resting on her, contemplating her perspective.

I don't know his motives. And I don't know his intentions for our pack. There's no argument that I can truthfully use against her here.

As if realizing she's won, her voice softens and quiets.

"You weren't here when he took over Balaige. The rumors we heard were nightmarish. We had no idea if they were true or not, but that only made it worse. And then, nothing. It all stopped," she snaps her fingers, "like that."

She pauses, taking an anxious breath.

"And then we got the word of his exile. You saw the effects of that. The fear," her eyes flit to the ground and back to me, "I'm begging you, Adrienne. Stay away."

Her argument is valid, I'll give her that. Yet I still can't find the fear within me that everyone else has.

I ask, curiously, "What makes him any more dangerous than any other power hungry Alpha?"

She looks around, almost like she's on edge. "He's not of the same breed as the rest of us."

My face scrunches in question. "What do you mean? He's a Lycan?"

"No. The Lycans lived in the same time as the gods and goddesses and died with them as well. But this tyrant, he's something else."

"And what's," I make air quotes using my fingers, "something else?"

She shakes her head. "I don't know. I've just heard stories. It's like he's a different breed of werewolf. Something... beyond us"

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Aimee and I parted soon after our chat. I left her at the doorstep of her house, not necessarily on bad terms, but tense ones nonetheless. I can see her viewpoint, but somehow it still irritates me and I don't know why.

Now as I climb the steep path winding up one of the mountains surrounding our village, I feel my legs burning. It's not a painful burn though. It's a liberating one.

I come upon a familiar circle of trees, grapevines hanging in thick curtains around them as if to make a wall. Walking up to it, the peacefulness of the place sinks in.

This was my escape. When I still lived in Alpha Andre's house, I would come here to escape Agatha, our housekeeper and nanny. She bore prejudice mindsets, and just like everyone else seems to, she saw me as her target.

She'd pull me away from Nathan and I's training, forcing me instead to clean up their messes. She tried her damndest to turn me into the perfect maid and housewife. Needless to say, she never succeeded.

When she failed, time after time, she started to resent me because I wouldn't mold to her hands.

"You should have just let that stupid baby to die instead of taking it in. All she's ever caused me is trouble Agatha's head-splitting voice bitched to Andre one time. Granted, I was eavesdropping; I wasn't suppose to hear it, but it stung then, and it still stings now."

This is where I would come when her nagging became relentless. Where she wouldn't leave me alone even though she hated me. It was the only safe place where she couldn't find me.

Now I need it again.

Pushing a curtain of vines aside, I enter, going straight to the large, flat rock that sits at the other side of the circular outdoor room.

I plop down on it, closing my eyes and resting my head on my folded arms.

Childhood all over again.

I let myself drift, escaping reality if only for a few minutes. Except I don't get a few. I get about one before all of my senses go into overdrive and my awareness skyrockets.

A presence is standing over me. It takes only a millisecond before my wolf knows exactly who it is.

I pop one eye open and look up at him. He's expressionless— as always— but there's something in his eyes. Something like... sympathy?

"Come on," his deep, stone-like voice speaks.

I heave out a long sigh. All I want is sleep. But apparently that's asking too much. Though at the same time, I'm too tired to put up a fight.

I sit up on the rock, the top of my head coming up level to the bottom of Riot's chest.

"Where are we- hey!"

One of his arms scoops up my legs whilst the other snakes around my torso before lifting my bottom off the rock completely.

As soon as the side of my body presses against him, my muscles turn to jelly.

Goddamn whatever this feeling is.

Just like before, when he carried me into the Alpha's house, I'm lulled into a state of dozey tranquility. In that moment I give up, leaving myself both figuratively and literally in Riot's hands.

The last thing I see before shutting my eyes and resting my head on his solid shoulder, is the vines being pushed aside as he carries us through them.

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The ride ends all too soon when we come up on a large cabin nestled between the trees. I blink the sleep from my eyes and try to get a better look.

The sides are varnished and clean, along with many crystal clear windows. He walks up the steps and onto the porch, his shoes tapping against the wood.

My feet meet with the ground when he all but tosses me down, taking the pleasant feeling away like cold water dumped over my head. I stumble slightly before finding my balance. I catch a growl in my throat before it can escape.

He's already turned away from me, facing the door. His body blocks sight of whatever he's doing, but I can hear the mechanical sound of a lock twisting.

Suddenly I remember Aimee's fear. I can hear the shake of her voice and see her wide, serious eyes. She wouldn't lie to me, nor would she have a motive to. All she wants is for me to survive.

I think about running. Now could be the last chance I get before I go into that house where he intends to do god knows what to me.

Mate. The word comes to mind along with a deafening pulse, like there's water in my ears.

My wolf gravitates towards him, wanting nothing but to lean into him and feel the electric touch once again.

Common sense, however, pulls me the other way.

In a split second, half-assed decision, I find myself leaping over the railing and pumping my legs as fast as they can go. I know I've made a mistake when a monstrous snarl shakes the ground beneath me.

I sprint deeper into the forest, the shadows growing darker the further I go. The will to survive encourages me to keep moving, my blood pumping faster. A minute passes by, maybe two, but in reality it's only been a couple of seconds.

Then, without a warning, something heavier than a boulder barrels into me. I crumple to the ground from the impact with its weight crushing my lungs. I gasp for air, claws digging into my shoulder blades as large paws hold me firmly against the ground to make sure I don't get up again.

I swallow hard, gathering enough words to speak.

"I won't run anymore," I say, breathing heavily both from the adrenaline and the short game of predator and prey.

He growls in approval and steps off me, although still standing over me. With one paw he rolls me over onto my back, and sure enough, that same enormous wolf I remember is towering over me with searing eyes.

You've screwed up now, Adrienne.

He snatches my shirt collar between his teeth, pulling me to my feet as he back-steps. I don't object, realizing that it's probably in my best interest to do things that discourage him from moving those canines an inch over and sticking them into my throat.

He guides me back to the cabin, his muzzle never far from my neck, ready to grab me again any second.

This is the second time I've been shoved at snout-point back to a place I tried to escape from. Maybe this whole escapee thing isn't my cup of tea after all. Or maybe I just need new tactics.

"I'm going," I grumble as he prods his nose into the small of my back, urging me through the doorway of the cabin.

I'm pushed up a flight of polished wooden stairs, down a dark hallway, and into a bedroom. Riot doesn't follow me into it.

On my own accord, I go to sit on the edge of the immaculately white comforter spread across the bed.

My mind races, trying to make up some kind of logical reason as to why he's brought me here. Away from my pack; the pack he's just conquered.

Movement in the corner of my eye grabs my attention. Riot, standing on two legs now, enters. Dread fills me up as I spot what's he's bringing with him.

"Hands," comes that same emotionless, I-couldn't-care-less command.

I oblige, tiredly. He ties them up tightly, just as before.

"Ass," I murmur, glaring at his fingers as they pull the knot tighter. He doesn't acknowledge my insult.

Without a word this time, he walks over the doorway, flips the lights into darkness, and closes the door behind him. My new bedtime ritual.

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**Thoughts on the chapter?**

**Do you agree with Aimee about her precautions about the Exiled Alpha?**

**Why do you think Riot took Adrienne from Visari territory and to a completely isolated cabin?**

**Thanks for reading!**

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