

## Chapter 111

“How is Reginald blackmailing you?” Seth says bluntly as soon as he stepped over the fence. Stephen and Lydia look at each other, clearly unsure of what to say. He’s clearly covering for her, I realize. I know that look, the look between siblings when one is ready to take the blame to keep the other safe.

“Lydia,” I say, and she turns to look at me. “We can’t help you if you don’t tell us the entire truth. Stephen is covering something up for you. I can tell. My own brother would do the same.”

Tears immediately come to her eyes and Seth’s entire demeanor softens a little.

“You killed him, didn’t you?” Seth asks quietly. “How? You were at the palace when he was hurt.”

Lydia looks down at the ground, her body shaking slightly as she cries more. “I’m so sorry, Seth. I never wanted to hurt you. It... I...”

Stephen steps over and pulls his sister into a hug, resting his chin on the top of her head. “It’s OK, Lyd. But we have to tell him. Everything.” I can see her nod into his chest, but she doesn’t move. She just stays there wrapped in her brother’s arms.

“Dad wanted an in at the palace and when you showed interest in Lydia, he made her go along with it,” Stephen begins and I can feel the hurt from Seth, but he doesn’t show it on the outside. “When you asked her to move in, Dad insisted on it. She repeatedly tried to convince him not to make her string you along, but he wouldn’t hear it.”

“What did he want?” Seth says, his voice deep with emotion, but his face still impassive.

“He asked me to spy. He wanted information about our pack, and a few others. I didn’t know why then,” Lydia says quietly, lifting her head, but still unwilling to look at Seth.

I can feel how much this information has hurt Seth and I reach out, slipping my hand inside his and squeezing it. “Were you able to give him any of the information that he requested?” I ask

Lydia looks at me and shakes her head. “After a while, once Seth granted me permission to be in his office, I realized that if I gave my dad any information that he’d never stop asking for it. I told him that Seth would not allow anyone in his office and that he did not bring anything home. He was furious and continued to push me to stay and spy. I didn’t realize then, but Seth’s location was one of the things he was keeping up with.” A fresh set of tears starts to fall from her admission. “I didn’t know,” she whispers.

“Dad was injured in an attack. I’m still not sure who it was who attacked us,” Stephen continues to explain to us. “I called Lydia then, asking her to come home because we thought he wouldn’t make it. He did though. His wolf was stronger than we thought. Lydia... Lydia gave him some medication through the IV the medics had placed and he died within hours of her return.”

She killed the Alpha. That’s the cover up. “You tried to make it look like you had though, right?” I say to Stephen and he nods slowly. “It’s alright. Seth closed the investigation when it looked like it and it was marked confidential. None of this has to go on record, right?” I ask, looking to Seth and he nods slowly, his eyes never leaving Lydia.

“Why didn’t you just tell me?” he asks her. “I would have protected you.”

“You were always so kind to me, and it was nice to live somewhere that felt safe, even if I was just playing house as a placeholder until you found your mate. I didn’t want to come back here, but one night you started to mark me,” she says and I feel my heart constrict. She knew he had tried. “I wasn’t your mate, though. I still don’t know why you didn’t mark me, but I decided I needed to get out as soon as I could, because it had gone too far. I had met my mate before, but Dad sent him to another pack. When Stephen said he was nearly dead, I decided to come home, because I wouldn’t have to worry anymore. I thought that maybe Stephen could have him return.”

Seth looks down at me and I know he can feel how much it hurt to hear her admission. Even if I knew that it had happened, it still hurts to think about. “I came for the investigation. Why didn’t you just tell me then?”

“Reginald had already marked me,” she whispers and I see her brother place his arm back around her shoulder. “He... he realized what happened and we thought he’d just step aside, but he didn’t. He started to blackmail us and when Stephen stood up to him... he forcibly marked me.”

It’s all making more sense now. How everyone acts, how they’re all so scared of him. The poor girl is terrified, and he forcibly marked her. She never wanted him at all.

Seth looks at me, apology in his eyes before releasing my hand and taking the two steps to close the distance between them, wrapping her in a hug. It hurts to witness, but I know that they both need this closure. I notice Gus looking at me, giving me a nod of acknowledgement and I try to tamp down the emotions I’m feeling. She’s someone he cared about, as is her brother, if we’re being honest. I hope their friendship is one that can be salvaged.

“I was wrong to try to mark you, I’m sorry,” I hear Seth say to her softly. “I made a lot of mistakes, but we’re going to fix this situation, alright?”

She nods into his chest, her arms wrapped around his middle. Stephen looks a little uncomfortable and I realize it’s because he’s waiting for me to become upset about it.

“Why did he blackmail you to become Beta?” I ask him. “Why wouldn’t he try to become the Alpha?”

“That isn’t what he wants,” he says, shaking his head and Seth looks at him, slowly releasing Lydia and stepping back, pulling me to his side. “He’s into some shady shit. That’s what the whole land dispute is over. The only reason he wanted to be Beta was so he’d have fewer people watching him.”

“So the land isn’t actually yours?” I ask and he shakes his head.

“No, it very much is,” he says with a sigh. “The top point of that land borders the pack just to the north. It’s a section that’s only a few feet wide, and we’re the only border they have with any other packs. Alpha Thomas wants it so he can get the fees to get through that Reginald has been pocketing. I’d love to just give it to him, but Reginald isn’t letting me.”

“There’s no pack there,” Seth says, shaking his head in confusion. “This pack is the most northern in the kingdom.”

Stephen sighs deeply and somehow Lydia looks more uncomfortable than she’s looked so far. “I really thought you knew,” she says to Seth.

“Knew what?” he says cautiously, looking between them. The fear and worry that I can feel from him is nearly overwhelming.

“It’s the pack that your uncle has formed, Seth...” Stephen says, not finishing his statement, waiting for Seth’s reaction.

I can feel the anger rising, rising. He feels like he could explode, but he’s not saying any more.

“Tell me everything you know,” I say to him, glancing up to Seth who very much does not look OK.

“Years ago, he started bringing males into his pack, the strongest he could find. A few years after, he realized that it wasn’t the short-term plan he had hoped for, and started bringing women in.” he says to us. “He doesn’t want their mates, though. He said that the mate bond would make them weaker. They were kidnapping rogue women, then started taking women who looked stronger from other packs if they could get them.”

"I heard Reginald talking about some kids crossing," Lydia says, looking deeply concerned. "I didn't hear him say why they we're moving kids, though."

Seth looks like he could murder us all and it’s terrifying. I slowly pull my hand from his, moving it to my stomach for comfort. He looks down at me and his beautiful eyes soften a little. I see him take a few deep breaths, trying desperately to tamp his anger.

“What does he want?” Seth growls out.

“There was a prophecy,” Lydia begins and I begin to grow uneasy. Nothing good has happened in my life because of a prophecy. “Of a king who would be mated to a witch. Their first born is to be born with magical powers. He wants to take over as the King to prevent our bloodlines from becoming watered down by magic.”

Fuck. Fuck. I can feel my heart begin to beat rapidly. Seth, to his credit, looks unbothered by this new information, but even Gus is looking at me sympathetically, knowing that this prophecy is about me, and the child I’m currently carrying. Maybe Seth was wrong and it is a girl, but he was so sure it will be a boy.

Suddenly, I’m thankful that I had already taken my hand from Seth and moved it to my stomach because I would have upon hearing this. “Seth,” I whisper, tears in my eyes.

“Hey,” he whispers, pulling me against him and holding me tightly. “Whatever happens, nothing will separate you and our baby, alright? I promise you- nothing. I’ll never ask that of you.”

"Are you a witch?" Lydia asks, concerned. "Is that why Reginald was asking about your parents? I'd heard before that you don't have a wolf."

"I have a wolf," I whisper. "She was... she was locked away until I met my mate. Once Seth marked me, she was free."

"Shift while you're here. Let everyone see it," she says encouragingly.

I look down to my hand placed protectively over my baby. "I can't. It just isn't safe."