

The wolf was coming.

Lander Morton knew this because he'd invited the wolf into his home. His body man, Sheldon, had come to tell him the wolf was at the door and had gone to fetch him. Now the two of them were coming back, but Lander only heard one set of footsteps echo through the house.

He shifted in his wheelchair and took a long swallow of his bourbon. Fire rolled down his throat. His old guts would make him pay for it later, but he didn't care. Some men were men, and others were wolves in human skin. He needed a human wolf for this job, and he would get one.

For the first time in the last three days he felt something other than crushing grief. This new emotion cut through the thick fog of despair, and he recognized it as anticipation. No, it was more than that. It was a heady mix of expectation, apprehension, and excitement tinged with fear. He used to feel like this years ago on the verge of closing a huge deal. It had been decades since he'd experienced the splash of adrenaline like this and for a moment, he felt young again.

Sheldon appeared in the doorway of the study and stood aside, letting the other man enter. The guest took three steps inside and stopped, letting himself be seen. He was young, so young, and he moved with an easy grace that made Lander feel ancient. Strong, tall, handsome in that Mediterranean way, shaped by sun and saltwater. When Felix's boy grew up, he might look like that.

Pain lashed him, and Lander struggled with it.

His guest waited.

Lander looked at his face. There it was, in the eyes, the wolf looking back at him. Cold. *Hungry*. About time he got here. No, he couldn't say that. He had to be civil. He couldn't fuck this up. "Thank you for coming to see me on such short notice."

Sheldon stepped back into the hall and closed the doors. He would wait by them to make sure they wouldn't be interrupted.

"Please think nothing of it," the guest said. "My condolences."

Lander nodded to the bottle of Blood Oath Pact bourbon waiting on a corner of the desk. "A drink?" The guest shook his head. "I don't drink on the job."

"Smart." Lander splashed another inch of bourbon into his glass. He wasn't sure if he was drowning his grief or building up liquid courage. If he failed to state his case and the man walked away... He couldn't let him walk away.

"I knew your father," Lander said. "I met him and your mother while I was over there making a deal for Carrara marble for Castle Hotel. It was expensive as hell, but I wanted the best."

The man shrugged.

Panic squirmed through Lander. Words came tumbling out. "They killed my son. They took his money, they used his knowledge and connections, and then they murdered him, and I don't know why."

"Do you care why?"

“Yes, but I’ve already hired someone for that.”

“So, what do you want from me?”

“I love my son. He was smart, sharp, sharper than I ever was, and honest. People hate my guts, but everyone likes him because he was a good man. His wife, Sofia, died three years ago, and he took care of his kids by himself. A son and two daughters. The boy is the oldest, fourteen years old. I’ve had a stroke, and there’s cancer eating at me, but now I can’t croak for four more years. I’ve got to hold on until the boy is old enough to take over. I want those bastards to die!”

Lander clenched his fists. His voice had gone hoarse and some part of him warned him he sounded unhinged. But the hurt was too raw, and it bled out of him.

“I want them to suffer, and I want them to know why. They took my son from me and from his children. They’ve ruined my boy, my handsome smart boy. Everything I built, everything he built, they think they can just rip it all away from me.” His voice dropped barely above whisper, rough and dripping pain. “Kill them. Kill them for me.”

Silence filled the study.

Worry drowned Lander. Had he said too much? Did he sound too crazy?

“My mother remembers meeting you,” the guest said. “There is a photo of the three of you on the yacht. She was pregnant with me at the time. She said her morning sickness was unbearable and you told her that ginger ale was the best for upset stomachs. There was no ginger ale to be had and you ordered a case of it from Milan by courier.”

The guest stepped up to the desk, splashed a finger of bourbon into the second glass and raised it. “To your son.”

He drained the glass in one swallow and Lander saw the wolf again, staring at him from within the man’s soul.

“Does this mean you’ll take the job?”

“Yes.”

The relief was almost overwhelming. Lander slumped in his chair.

“I’ve reviewed your situation prior to my visit,” the guest said. “It will take time and money. It will be complicated, because it has to be done right.”

“Whatever it takes,” Lander said. He felt so tired. He’d done it. He could look at Felix’s gravestone now and he could promise his son that revenge was coming.

“The proof of their guilt must be irrefutable.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Lander said. “You’ll have your proof. I only hire the best.”