

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

chapter 141-150

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Freya's POV

+8 Pearls

Silas' body stiffened when my words left my lips. His head, which had been bowed low, lifted slowly until his eyes locked with

mine.

"I don't make jokes about things like this," he murmured, his voice low, raw. His gaze—dark as the abyssal depths of the sea we'd just fought against—reflected only me. "Freya, I don't know if what I feel for you is what you'd call love, but I know this -when I realize there is someone I cannot lose, I name that feeling love."

My breath caught. His words landed heavy in my chest. Could he mean... me? Was he saying he could not lose me?

"Perhaps at first," he continued, his tone almost confessional, "you were simply interesting. A spark I couldn't look away from. You didn't abandon me when danger loomed, and that made me want to keep you close. But when I saw you throw yourself into the sea after that child... something shifted. Everything changed."

Silas leaned closer, the shadows sharpening the planes of his face until he was all predator, all Alpha, his presence swallowing

the air between us.

"I felt fear. Terror, The bone-deep dread that you would be taken from me. I don't ever want to feel that again. And before I even realized what I was doing, I was in the water after you." His voice grew husky, brushing my ear, vibrating against my skin..

"I was following you, Freya. Always following you."

My heart slammed in my chest at the desperation threaded through his tone. His dark, lupine eyes gleamed with hunger, with need.

“So give me a chance,” he whispered, almost pleading now. “Be mine. I’ll treat you well. Everything I am, everything I have—I will lay at your feet.”

His voice cracked like smoke and spellcraft, thick and intoxicating. Dangerous, addictive. And gods help me, to hear such words from a wolf like him—from Silas Whitmor, the Ironclad Alpha himself—was shattering. He was the one wolves whispered about in fear, the one enemies broke against like waves on stone. And now he spoke to me with a raw humility, almost supplicant, as though I were the one who held power.

My heart gave a painful stutter.

I forced myself to steady, to breathe, to think.

14

“We’ve barely known each other,” I said, tamping down the pulse racing beneath my skin. “And already you speak of love? Of giving me everything? Don’t you think that sounds... reckless?”

“Time has nothing to do with it,” he replied without hesitation, his words striking with Alpha certainty. “There are wolves who fall in love in a single heartbeat. One glance, and they are mated for life.”

I lifted my chin, unwilling to yield to the storm of his conviction. “That’s not love, Silas. That’s lust. A spark of flesh, nothing more.”

His eyes flared, feral and unyielding. “Not for me. If I look at someone once and know they are mine, that will never be desire alone. It will be forever. A bond, unbreakable.”

“You speak in absolutes,” I countered, though his certainty left me rattled.

“The Whitmor line has always loved this way.” His voice softened, but the weight of truth pressed heavy in it. “Even my father -damn him though I may-loved my mother until his dying breath. She was gone, but he never looked elsewhere. He remained bound to her, heart and soul, until the end.”

His gaze snapped back to mine, sharp as a blade. “And I... I know I carry the same curse, the same devotion.”

Then, like a caress, he spoke my name again. “Freya.” The way he said it, rich and low, sank into my bones. “Understand this -it isn’t even sudden for me. Not truly. Not lightning at first sight, but something that has grown in the shadows between us. Day by day, moment by moment. Perhaps it would’ve been easier had it been immediate. At least then I wouldn’t have wasted time pretending I could ignore it.”

I bit down lightly on my lip. His nearness burned. Too close. Close enough that every exhale of his breath skimmed across

1/2 o

SIAM

D

D

+8 Pearls

my cheek, searing the edges of my control.

“Day by day.” I echoed, my voice softer than I intended. “Silas, we’ve barely had that many days together at all. Whatever you feel now—it could be nothing more than a rush, an illusion sparked by adrenaline. You jumped into the sea beside me, and now your blood is singing too loud to tell the truth from the fever.”

He didn’t even blink. “Then tell me this. If weeks pass, months pass, and I still feel the same—will you give me what I ask?”

The steel of his tone clashed against the fragile, traitorous beat of my heart. I lifted my eyes to him, holding his gaze with mine, refusing to be cowed.

“No,” I whispered.

His eyes flickered, shadow cutting across their depths. “Because you don’t love me.”

“Yes,” I admitted. “I don’t. Not like that. I told you already—I only just severed myself from Caelum Grafton. The Lunar Severance Phase is barely behind me. I’ve bled for years in that bond, Silas. I have things I need to rebuild, dreams of my own I must chase before I surrender my heart again. I don’t want to step into another tangle of passion so soon.”

The words left my mouth firm, final. And yet the silence that followed quivered between us, alive.

“You should dry your own hair,” I added, desperate to steer the storm elsewhere. My hands were still wrapped in the towel draped over his head, caught against his, trapped by the weight of him.

I moved to pull away. But Silas’s hand snapped up, covering mine with his own, holding me there. His touch was firm, searing, tethering.

“I will not stop you from doing what you need to do,” he said, his voice a rasp against the quiet. “Pursue your path, chase your ambitions. But let me be your shield. Your spear. I will walk at your side, shoulder to shoulder, through every fire. I will bind my life to yours, in blood, in battle, in storm. Whatever comes, I will not betray you. Not now, not ever.”

Every word struck like thunder in my chest.

Those were my words. The ones I had spoken, long ago, about what I dreamed love would be. A wolf who would not falter. A wolf who would not abandon me.

And he had remembered. All of it.

I froze, breath caught sharp, unable to mask the tremor that ran through me.

“Or is it,” he whispered, eyes dark and solemn, “that I truly am what I feel?”

The question cut like a blade, straight into me.

“No,” the protest burst from me before I could stop it.

unworthy? That no matter

As a p

His eyes, which had dimmed with shadow, flared suddenly bright. “Then you will love me?”

you could never return

storm

Heat scalded my face. My throat locked, words tangling. I coughed lightly, trying to reclaim ground, to steady the storm inside.

“I only meant,” I stammered, forcing the words past the rush in my chest, “that you are not unworthy. Alpha Silas... you are many things, but never that.”

Send **Gifts**

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

O

O

O

+8 Pearls

If Silas were truly the monster the world whispered him to be, he would never have lowered his proud Alpha head and offered three solemn bows before the urns of Arthur and Myra at the funeral hall. Nor would he have stood silent and unmoving, his presence a shadow of iron, when their ashes were carried to rest in the Ashbourne Legion's Hall of Martyrs, the sacred ground of warriors who had given everything.

And Freya knew this.

Her gaze lingered on him, torn between mistrust and something softer, something dangerous. "And you went into the sea today," she said quietly, her voice low, testing. "A wolf without honor would not risk his own life for another's child."

Silas's eyes, black as midnight, flickered. His voice was steady but carried a raw undertone. "I went into the sea because you did." He reached forward, his calloused hand wrapping around hers with unyielding insistence, drawing it to rest against his chest.

"All my life," he continued, his voice dark with confession, "I never thought life was worth much. My own, least of all. But today..." His words faltered, roughened, as if caught in his throat. He tightened his hold on her hand, pressing her palm against the steady, drum of his heartbeat. "Today I saw you dive into those waters without hesitation, and something inside me shifted. Because of you, Freya. Because you showed me that some lives are worth saving. That perhaps I could be more than I am. That I could be," his voice softened to a near-growl, reverent—"a good man, if it meant standing in your light."

Freya froze, her breath hitching.

He looked at her as though she were the moon itself—untouched, radiant, too pure for his shadowed hands. She was everything he was not: bright, honorable, unflinching. She carried no darkness, or so it seemed, and yet he—who was born in blood, who wore scars that told of torment and iron chains—ached to reach her. The blackest parts of him yearned for the sanctuary of her light.

Freya had never imagined she would hear such words from Silas Whitmor, the Ironclad Alpha feared across the Coalition. And yet... here he was, confessing that she could alter the course of his life. That she could change him.

"Freya." His voice lowered to a husky plea, his gaze locked onto hers with naked hunger. "Give me a chance. If one day you are certain—truly certain—that you will never love me, I will walk away. I will not chain you, I will not haunt your steps. I will leave, even if it

tears me apart. But until that day comes, don't push me away. Don't shut me out on purpose."

The intensity in his words struck something in her chest. His eyes—those fierce, dark eyes—carried a desperate glimmer, one that summoned to her mind the forbidden room in the Whitmor estate. That night when she had seen him curled in on himself like a wounded wolf, his back a canvas of scars carved by whips. She remembered Jocelyn Thorne's bitter words— that Silas had watched his own mother die before his eyes.

The rejection forming on her tongue caught, trapped, unwilling to leave her throat. Instead, pain bloomed in her chest, sharp and tender.

Could she really claim she would never, not ever, love Silas Whitmor? She asked herself the question, and silence was her only answer.

Besides, Silas was not the sort of wolf to accept rejection lightly.

Drawing in a breath, she steadied herself. "Very well," she said at last, her tone measured. "I promise I won't push you away for the sake of it. If I fall in love with you, then.... we will be together. But if, by the time I finish my duty as your protector, I still feel nothing— then we part ways. Clean and final. You walk your road, and I walk mine. No chains. No regrets."

Silas's lashes fluttered. For the briefest heartbeat, vulnerability tremored across his face. Then he smiled, slow and sharp, the kind of smile that promised storms. "Agreed. Then it is a vow."

But in the marrow of his bones, the Alpha of the Ironclad Coalition knew—he would not wait idly for her to love him. He would forge it. He would win her. He would make her heart his.

Far across the hall, beneath chandeliers that gleamed like pale moons, Caelum stood among government officials and Ashbourne's most powerful merchants. He exchanged words, nodded at roasts, lifted his glass when prompted. Yet his **mind was** nowhere in the room.

Again and again, the image surged before him: Freya's body cutting through the waves, her strokes swift, decisive, fearless as

11:31 AM P

she dove for the drowning child. She hadn't hesitated, hadn't paused.

How many in this hall would have shown such courage? How many wolves could?

+8 Pearls

Caelum had seen the child fall into the sea as well. He had felt the instinct to move. But if he had reached the edge, if he had stood staring down at the churning black water, would he have jumped? Or would he have faltered?

The ugly truth echoed inside him. He would have faltered.

And with that came another thought, darker, heavier.

Freya had claimed she once tried to save him from the river, years ago. He had doubted her story. But tonight, seeing her, he could no longer dismiss it. Her strength in the water, her fire, her resolve—it was who she was. She would have leapt without hesitation. She would have fought the river itself to drag him to shore.

If she wasn't lying... then who was? Aurora?

The thought sent a shudder through him, his grip tightening around the stem of his glass. Wine sloshed dangerously, nearly spilling.

"Caelum?" Aurora's voice cut in, crisp and bright. She stood beside him, her uniform sharp, her eyes searching his face. "What's wrong? You've gone pale."

"Nothing," he answered too quickly. His gaze lifted to hers, taking in the Beta's daughter. Aurora was the very image of a proud Bluemoon wolf: bold, forthright, incapable of deceit. She had always been that way. And she had been right before—when he was nothing but a nameless Silverfang wolf, a boy with no power and no fortune, she had stood by him. What reason could she have had to lie?

None. And yet the seed of doubt dug its roots deeper.

The sound of commotion stirred at the entrance of the ballroom. Heads turned, whispers rose.

Caelum's eyes followed—and froze.

Through the doors strode Silas, clad in a black suit that clung to him like midnight armor. At his side walked Freya, simple in her tailored ensemble, but no less radiant for its austerity. She looked steady again, the pallor from the rescue gone, her step proud and unyielding.

Relief, sharp and unwanted, cut through Caelum at the sight of her unharmed.

"Alpha Whitmor, Miss Thorne," called the Pack Councilman overseeing Ashbourne's island development, his voice carrying above the hush. "The city owes you its thanks. Your courage today spared us from tragedy. Without you, this gathering would have been stained by **loss**."

All eyes

fixed upon them—upon Silas, dark and magnetic, and Freya, fierce and unbending. And in the shadows of the hall, hearts shifted, hungers awoke, and old bonds strained like chains ready to snap.

Send Gifts

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

D

+8 Pearls

Third Person's POV

Silas' voice cut through the gathered hall, calm yet carrying the edge of command that marked him as an Alpha.

"The one who deserves your gratitude is Freya," he said evenly. "She was the one who dove in to save the child. I merely followed."

The Councilor from Ashbourne, who had praised them moments before, arched a brow. "Yet I saw you hold her close once the child was safe. Forgive me, Alpha Whitmor, but I can't help but wonder—what exactly is your relationship with Miss Thorne?"

Silas's gaze never wavered. His words, however, carried the kind of weight that silenced idle curiosity. "She is someone very important to me. In that moment, I wasn't holding her for show. I was simply... too afraid for her."

The Councilor blinked, clearly surprised. Around them, whispers stirred.

For Silas Whitmor to openly call someone "important"—the Ironclad Alpha, known for his cold distance and ruthless pragmatism—was no small matter. It meant that Freya Thorne was not simply his bodyguard from the Stormveil Pack's fifth branch. She was something more. Something claimed.

Across the ballroom, Abel Thorne stood among Ashbourne's merchant wolves, sipping his drink as laughter and chatter flowed around him. But their gazes, like hounds sniffing out prey, turned to the pair across the room—Silas and Freya, side by side.

"That girl," one merchant drawled with a hint of envy, "she's one of yours, isn't she? From the fifth branch?"

"Yes," Abel replied with polite detachment. "That's Freya Thorne."

“Well, the Stormveil Pack must count themselves blessed. First Jocelyn from the Metropolitan branch, and now Freya,” another wolf muttered, the sour edge in his tone impossible to hide.

It was the way they said “first Jocelyn” that made the bitterness in the air sharper. As if Jocelyn Thorne were a discarded relic, her shine dulled and forgotten, while Freya’s star now burned brighter.

Abel gave a small smile but his eyes were shadowed with concern. He knew too well what alliances meant in Ashbourne- alliances with power like the Whitmors were as dangerous as they were enviable.

At his side, Jocelyn’s nails bit into her palm, her jaw tight. Each word of admiration spoken of Freya was like a knife twisted in her gut. Once, it had been her they whispered about. Once, she had been the Thorne jewel, the one standing beside Silas. Now she was “before.” A past tense, a faded page.

Her gaze snapped toward Freya—and then widened.

NOW the

She saw someone approach Freya, whisper something, and the young wolfess excused herself, leaving Silas alone in the throng.

Jocelyn’s heart lurched. This was her chance.

She smoothed her gown, schooling her face into composure, and approached.

“Silas,” she said softly, almost tenderly. “Could we speak alone for a moment?”

Silas turned his head toward her. His dark eyes were cool, his tone edged with indifference. “And what could we possibly have to discuss?”

Jocelyn’s chest tightened. Still, she forced herself to smile, to plead. “I know what happened at the estate. I spoke wrongly then—I shouldn’t have. My words weren’t meant to wound you. I only wanted Freya to understand... how deep our bond once ran. How much I cared for you.”

Silas’s lips curled in something that wasn’t a smile. “Cared for me?” His voice was laced with mockery. “If you cared. Jocelyn, you wouldn’t have run away Not when I needed someone most.”

The color drained from her face. His words cut into the memory that haunted her like a nightmare: stumbling into that forbidden chamber years ago, seeing the walls lined with whips, smelling blood thick in the air, and finding Silas, his back a

11:31 AM P P.

O

raw tapestry of lashes, his mother's lifeless body crumpled beside him.

And she—she had fled. Terror had clawed her heart, her feet had carried her away before she could even think.

ED

+8 Pearls

It had been the greatest regret of her life. If only she had stayed. If only she had touched his hand, whispered his name, refused to abandon him—perhaps he would have let her in. Perhaps he would have been hers.

“I was just a child,” she whispered, desperation cracking her voice. “Any child would have run. I was too young, too frightened. But I... I paid for that moment. Don't you see? I lost my eye that day. I bear the scars too.”

Silas shrugged lightly, as if her torment were no more than dust. “You were young. You were afraid. You had no obligation to stay.” His voice turned cold as iron. “And I have never blamed you for that. But don't mistake my indifference for forgiveness. And do not speak of my family's secrets again. You survived that night, Jocelyn. For that, you should thank Freya.”

The bitterness on Jocelyn's tongue was sharp enough to choke her. Thank Freya? Freya, who had stolen the place that should have been hers? Rage flared behind her forced composure, but Silas had already turned his face away, his gaze fixed in the direction Freya had gone.

Something inside him had shifted since he admitted his truth to her. It left him restless, raw. Now, even the briefest absence made unease coil in his chest. She had been gone only minutes, yet he ached to see her again.

Freya had not gone far. She followed the orphanage matron through the corridors to the hotel's medical wing.

There, the boy she had pulled from the sea lay curled on the bed, his eyes wide and hollow with fear. But the moment he saw her, he scrambled upright and hurled himself into her arms.

“Forgive us,” the matron said, her voice apologetic. “Since he was pulled from the water, he's been inconsolable. He kept crying for you, refusing to rest.”

“It’s all right,” Freya murmured. She knelt beside the bed, wrapping the boy in her embrace. “You’re safe now. You don’t need to be afraid anymore.”

“I’m still scared,” the child sobbed, his voice muffled against her shoulder. “The waves... I thought I’d never breathe again. I thought I’d die.”

His small body trembled like a leaf in storm winds. The sea had left a scar deeper than any wound—a terror that might haunt him for years.

Freya stroked his damp hair, her voice gentle, her wolf aura wrapping around him like a shield. “Listen to me. I’ll protect you. If danger comes again, I’ll be there. I’ll pull you out. I’ll never let the darkness take you.”

The boy lifted his tear-streaked face, eyes wide and fragile. “Really?” His voice wavered with hope, with desperation.

Freya nodded, her resolve firm, her tone unshakable. “Really. That’s my promise.”

Send Gifts

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

“Mm. Yes. I will save you. Always.”

+8 Pearls

Freya’s voice rang steady, strong—like steel cloaked in velvet. The words, fierce in their oath, smoothed the trembling of the child clinging to her, calming the frantic beat of his small heart.

And yet, those same words made the figure in the doorway freeze.

Caelum stood rigid. Every instinct in him went still, as though the world itself had halted.

The vow Freya had spoken—it was the same one he remembered through half-drowned, delirious haze years ago, when icy river waters had dragged him toward death. In that darkness, he had heard a voice, faint yet unyielding, promising to save him. A voice he had clung to like a lifeline.

Why... why would Freya speak those same words?

Why did her silhouette overlap so seamlessly with the shadowed memory he had carried all these years?

Who had truly saved him that night? Aurora... or Freya?

Freya, unaware of the storm unraveling in Caelum's chest, continued to soothe the boy. Her warmth and calm finally eased the child's terror, the fear melting away until his lashes fluttered shut and he slipped into exhausted sleep against her shoulder.

Careful as moonlight, Freya laid him back on the bed, tucking the blanket around him.

"Thank you," the matron of the Ashbourne orphanage whispered. Her eyes gleamed with gratitude that went deeper than words. Not only had Freya saved the boy from drowning, but now she had given him peace.

"This was my duty," Freya replied. Her voice held quiet conviction. Though she had long since laid down her uniform from the Iron Fang Recon Unit, the vows of service she once swore still burned like brands in her soul. A wolf's promise was eternal.

She left her contact with the matron. "If his nightmares linger, or if he falters, call me. I'll come."

Live

When she stepped into the hallway, her breath caught—Caelum stood waiting. His tall frame blocked the exit, silver-grey eyes burning with unreadable intensity."

Freya stiffened but moved as if to pass him.

Caelum's arm shot out, barring her way. "Why did you say that

to

the child?"

Her brows knit. "Say what?"

restless very

"That you'd save him. Always. That vow." His voice was low, taut as a bowstring. His gaze bored into hers, restless, almost feral.

Freya's expression chilled. "Why shouldn't I? You think those words belong to someone else?"

"It isn't that," Caelum said, his throat working. His voice cracked, raw and strained. "Freya... why would you repeat the very words Aurora once said to me?"

Her eyes flashed.

So that was it

“You think I’m imitating Aurora?” Her tone cut like frost-edged steel. “That I covet being seen as your savior? You flatter yourself. Whatever you believe, Caelum Grafton—keep it. I have no need for your recognition, nor to play the shadow of

another wolf.”

The venom in her words should have struck him back. Instead, he reached forward suddenly, clutching her sleeve in a grip that betrayed more desperation than dominance.

Then tell me this,” Caelum rasped. “Why did you dive into the sea tonight? That child was no kin of yours. No tie of blood

+8 Pearls

Why risk your life for him?”

Freya let out a laugh, cold and sharp as winter wind. “Do you truly need an answer? If every act of salvation must be justified by kinship, then you should be rotting beneath those river waters, not standing here now. You’re alive only because someone -stranger or not-believed your life was worth saving.”

The truth in her words cut deeper than any blade. Caelum faltered, his hand trembling at her sleeve-

And another hand struck his away.

The interruption came like a storm breaking through.

Silas Whitmor stepped forward, Alpha presence heavy as a thunderclap, his cold eyes narrowed at Caelum. With a single motion he had brushed Caelum’s grip off Freya, his stance one of shield and claim.

Caelum’s lips pulled back into a snarl. “And what exactly is Whitmor doing here?”

“You and Freya have severed your bond,” Silas said, his tone flat with disdain. “Dragging her back into your shadows is beneath even you. No need for this pulling and grasping.”

The name he used—Freya, softened to my Freya in the weight of his voice—slammed into Caelum’s ears like a challenge. He remembered the sight of Silas on the shoreline earlier, arms around her, as though she already belonged to him.

“Then it’s acceptable for you to touch her?” Caelum snapped.

Silas's eyes gleamed like blades. "If it were me, I'd never have been fool enough to cast her aside. You forfeited your right. Whatever bond we share now is no concern of yours." His lips curled. "But congratulations on securing Aurora. When your mating ceremony arrives, I'll be sure to send a generous gift."

The words landed like claws across Caelum's chest. His pride bristled, his wolf snarling, but his tongue stuck against his teeth.

Freya ignored their clash. Her gaze softened only slightly as she turned to Silas. "Why are you here?"

"I worried something might happen," Silas admitted simply. His eyes lingered on her, protective, unreadable..

"The boy's fine. Just shaken," Freya murmured. "He's resting now."

"Then let's go."

She nodded, ready to move.

But as they passed, Caelum's restraint snapped.

www

"Freya!" His voice thundered through the corridor, sharp and desperate, cutting through the air like a howl on winter wind.

Freya halted.

2

Her steps froze, her body tense, and slowly-slowly-she turned back.

150

2

Caelum's heart lurched at the sight. Even now, even after all, she still answered his call. The old tether between them had not been cut cleanly, no matter how he told himself otherwise.

And it was that single glance, her eyes upon him once more, that made the storm inside him rise, threatening to drown him all over again.

Send **Gifts**

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

3

O

+8 Pearls

Third Person's POV

When Caelum lifted his gaze and collided with those cold amber eyes, his throat locked. Words—sharp and practiced, meant to wound—died before reaching air.

“Caelum Grafton,” Freya Thorne said, her voice a blade honed by disdain, “do me a favor and stop dragging me into your questions about the night you nearly drowned. We’re done. The Lunar Severance Phase stripped us clean. Whoever saved you—it doesn’t concern me. Or is it that, if it was me, you would regret it? Regret the three years you spent sneering at me? Regret discarding me?”

Her gaze was pure mockery.

Caelum’s lips parted, but nothing emerged. He stood bound by silence, his wolf straining inside his chest, claws raking against his ribs.

Only after Freya walked away with Silas at her side did his body stumble as though unmoored.

Regret? The thought lanced through him like silver.

No. He would not regret. Could not.

It was she who would regret.

She thought Silas Whitmor’s attention was victory? That running with the Ironclad Coalition’s Alpha would grant her safety? A fool’s hope. Males like Silas consumed and discarded. His so-called devotion would wither when novelty dulled.

Caelum’s path was already set. He only needed to weather SilverTech Forgeworks’ current storm. Once he steadied his pack and his company, he would rise higher than ever before. And then—then Freya would see what it meant to spurn him. She would learn that no longer bearing the Silverfang Alpha’s mark was the greatest loss she would ever suffer.

But still... his chest twisted, restless and uneasy, as if some unseen thread yanked against his heart.

Driven by something darker than reason, Caelum turned back into the infirmary.

107

The matron of the Ashbourne orphanage frowned when she saw his pallid face. “Alpha Grafton? Do you require something?”

He ignored her, eyes fastening on the boy sleeping soundly beneath the blankets. The child’s breathing was steady, but Caelum’s mind was a storm. That image—the small form clutched against Freya’s chest, her voice weaving calm—stirred memories he’d buried deep.

Long he stood there, haunted by a night of icy waters and a vow in the dark

..

At last, he left the infirmary and lifted his WolfComm, voice low and sharp when the line connected.

“I want you to dig into the night I went into the river. Every detail. I need to know if Aurora was truly alone that night—or if someone else was there.”

When he ended the call, his hand trembled faintly.

This wasn’t betrayal of Aurora. No. This was to confirm her. To ensure there would be no cracks, no shadow of doubt gnawing his loyalty. He needed certainty, nothing more.

Or so he told himself.

Meanwhile, Freya and Silas walked the stone path back toward the banquet hall, moonlight painting silver across the sea breeze.

Silas’s voice broke the silence. “If one day Caelum discovers you were the wolf who saved him, if he regrets the severance and wants you back... what would you do?”

Freya faltered. “What?”

“Would you mate with him again?” His eyes lingered on her profile, searching, probing.

11:31 AM P

+8 Pearis

Her answer came without hesitation. “No.”

She straightened, her conviction unwavering. “Whatever bond once tethered us is ashes now.”

Silas’s mouth quirked. “Even if he knelt at your feet, begging?”

Freya’s laugh rang sharp. “Caelum Grafton kneel? Impossible. He wants Aurora. If he begged only because I was his savior, then what kind of love would that be? Pathetic. Laughable.”

Silas’s lips curled, approval glinting in his eyes. “Indeed. A farce, nothing more.”

He thought of Caelum—blind wolf, thrashing against the truth. How pitiful, when Freya had stood beside him for three long years, the very wolf who had pulled him from death, and he had never once believed her worthy.

Silas’s voice dropped, almost a growl. “If it had been me, I would never have mistaken another for the wolf who saved me.”

Freya turned to him, faintly startled. “You believe it was me?”

“Of course.” His reply was swift, unwavering. “I believe everything you say.”

Her

Her chest tightened unexpectedly.

For three years of marriage, Caelum had not trusted her once. Yet a wolf she had barely known three moons already placed his faith in her without question. The feeling of being trusted—it was a balm she hadn’t known she craved.

But warmth soon gave way to exasperation when night deepened.

She opened her chamber door and found Silas waiting, pillow tucked beneath his arm like a mischievous pup.

She stared. “What... is this?”

“I’m sleeping here tonight.” His tone was calm, assured.

“...Reason?”

“I don’t like being alone,” he said solemnly. “You’re my protector, aren’t you? You’ll keep me safe.”

Freya nearly choked.

Afraid? Silas Whitmor? She had seen him break attackers with bare hands. His wolf thrived on danger. And yet here he stood, face earnest, insisting on fear.

“There are Whitmor sentries outside your chamber,” she reminded. “You’re not exactly undefended.”

“They aren’t you,” Silas countered smoothly. “I trust only you.”

Her mouth opened, then shut.

The wolf inside her huffed. Against such relentless insistence, resistance was wasted. She exhaled a long breath. “Fine. You take the bed, I’ll use the sofa.”

But Silas merely set his pillow on the couch and lowered himself onto it, sprawling with casual grace. “The sofa suits me.”

And there, the Alpha of the Ironclad Coalition stretched like a satisfied wolf, content under the gaze of the very female he sought to guard—and perhaps, to claim.

Freya could only stare, heart torn between irritation and something far more dangerous.

Send Gifts

98

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Freya’s POV

O

+8 Pearls

I watched Silas settle onto the sofa with that easy, unshakable calm of his, pillow tucked beneath his arm like he belonged here. I should have argued longer, but the words dried on my tongue.

“Then, good night?” I said at last, trying to sound casual.

“Good night.” His lips curved in the faintest smile.

For a moment, I forgot how to breathe. That smile—subtle, almost boyish—was so different from the cold, untouchable Alpha I had first met. Lately, I had seen it more and more, glimpses of warmth breaking through the iron armor of the Ironclad Coalition’s Alpha. I turned quickly, forcing my eyes shut. I needed rest.

But while sleep pulled at me, I could feel his presence across the room. His wolf's energy pressed faintly at the edge of mine, steady, watchful.

He probably thought I believed his excuse—that he feared someone might attack him in the night. But my instincts told me otherwise. His fear wasn't of blades or bullets. His fear was me. That I would slip away, that I would break whatever fragile trust we had forged today.

The realization left a strange ache in my chest.

So this was what it meant to love someone—to carry so many fears. My father, Arthur Thorne, had loved my mother, Myra, with a ferocity that sometimes seemed reckless. I wondered, lying there in the dim lamplight, if his heart had pounded with the same restless dread Silas carried now.

But Silas was not my father. His wolf was tempered with steel. He would not make the same mistakes, would not drive me away with desperation. At least, that's what I told myself.

Yet in the quiet, I heard his breathing change, heavier with memory. He shifted, and though I kept my eyes shut, I could sense his hand trailing across the scars on his back. I knew them, faint glimpses I had caught when his shirt shifted—pale lines carved by violence and survival.

Once, he had told me he kept those scars as a reminder, a vow to never forget what had shaped him. But now, in his silence, I felt the truth. He feared those scars would repel me, that I might recoil from the flawed flesh of his body.

"Freya," his voice whispered, low as a wolf's breath in the trees. "Don't despise me..."

The words dissolved into the darkness, too soft for anyone but me and the night itself to hear.

When morning came, it wasn't his whisper I woke to, but the sudden weight of his hand brushing near. Half-asleep, instincts surged. I roiled, grabbed, and pinned him against the mattress with a move born of years in the Iron Fang Recon Unit.

Only then did my eyes snap fully open.

Silas lay beneath me, wide-eyed, lips curved in something dangerously close to amusement.

Heat flooded my face. I scrambled back. "Sorry, I wasn't fully awake—I didn't realize it was you."

He only shrugged, his voice maddeningly calm. “No harm done. I only meant to wake you. But for the record—if you want to pin me down again, I won’t resist.”

My ears burned. Ancestors, what kind of Alpha spoke words like that with such seriousness?

If it had been any other male, I would have dismissed it as crude teasing. But Silas’s eyes were steady, his wolf calm, as though he truly meant it. His words struck deeper, left dangerous thoughts stirring in my mind.

No wonder the magazines in The Capital had once named him “the male most worth toppling.” For once, I understood the appeal.

I coughed twice, forcing the heat from my face. “Ahem. You should go back to your chamber to wash up. I need to get ready as well. The island’s investment summit starts today.”

He inclined his head. “Yes. Are you interested?”

122

“Me?” I gave a dry laugh. “Not really.”

+8 Pearls

Lana’s company, SkyVex Armaments, had no plans to expand here in Ashbourne. My own path lay back in The Capital, working under her. This summit was about territorial development, alliances, trade. None of it concerned me.

Silas, however, would be involved. The Whitmor family had their claws deep in this project, and his presence here was far from casual.

But then his gaze sharpened. “What if I told you that Caelum’s proposal to the Ashbourne government relies on a patent you filed during your marriage? Would you still have no interest?”

My heart slammed against my ribs. “How do you know that?”

“Is such knowledge difficult for me?” His smile was all steel.

I exhaled, almost laughing at myself. Of course. For a wolf like him, information was a weapon, and Ashbourne was his battlefield.

And so, despite my lack of desire, I found myself walking into the grand hall of the summit at his side.

The conference chamber was vast, banners of the Ashbourne council draped across the high ceiling, the scent of ink, parchment, and wolves thick in the air. Alphas, Betas, envoys—they gathered like predators circling the same kill.

I felt Jocelyn’s eyes spear me the moment we entered. My cousin’s lips thinned, displeasure curling her features. “Alpha Silas,” she said sharply, “why bring Freya here? She’s nothing but an ex-soldier. What could she possibly understand at a summit like this?”

Silas’s chuckle was soft but edged like a blade. “If you can follow the proceedings, Jocelyn, then surely Freya can as well.” Jocelyn’s face darkened, her wolf bristling. “Even if you’re infatuated with her now, don’t overestimate her worth.”

“How I view Freya,” Silas replied, his tone a warning growl, “is none of your concern.”

I caught the flicker of fury in Jocelyn’s eyes before she looked away.

Then the air shifted.

Caelum entered, Aurora trailing in his wake, her uniform of the Bluemoon Airborne Wing gleaming beneath the chandeliers. The Silverfang Alpha’s presence rolled through the hall like thunder—commanding, undeniable.

But his gaze caught on me almost instantly.

“Freya,” he said, voice low, dangerous, uncertain. “Why are you here?”

His question coiled between us, heavy with unspoken history, sharp with the scent of regret and challenge.

Send Gifts

98

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Freya’s POV

豆

+8 Pearls

I met Caelum’s gaze across the crowded chamber, his silver-grey eyes sharp as forged steel. He had the gall to demand, “Freya, why are you here?”

I laughed softly, though my wolf bristled beneath my skin. “If you can be here, Caelum, why shouldn’t I?”

His jaw clenched. “I’m here as Alpha of Silverfang and head of SilverTech Forgeworks. I carry my Pack’s banner. You—what do you represent? The government’s published list of summit enterprises makes no mention of SkyVex Armaments, nor

Lana Rook’s name.”

My smile cooled. “You plan to wield a patent that I forged with my own blood and hours, and you think I don’t have the right to stand in this hall?”

64

The chamber thickened with silence. Caelum’s face hardened, his wolf scent edged with unease. He hadn’t expected me to know.

And I saw where his eyes slid—to Silas Whitmor, looming steady at my side. My anchor, my shield. Caelum realized in that instant that expelling me would not be so simple. No one moved against the Alpha of the Ironclad Coalition without a reckoning.

“That patent,” Caelum said at last, voice tight, “was filed during our marriage. The terms of the Lunar Severance Phase were clear. I have claim to it.”

2

Aurora, the Bluemoon Beta’s daughter, stepped forward quickly, her voice slicing through the air like the snap of rotor blades. “Freya, you severed your bond to Caelum willingly. You were eager enough then. Now that he puts the patent to use, do you mean to snatch it back? Typical of a woman like you—quick to promise, quicker to betray.”

Her smirk glittered with malice. She wanted me cornered, wanted me to falter before the watching Alphas and envoys. She imagined me helpless, as though the patent’s brilliance could be twisted into her victory.

I tilted my head, met her eyes, and let my wolf’s disdain bleed into my smile. “I never said you couldn’t use it. But tell me, do you really think you can?”

Caelum blinked, uncertain. Aurora scoffed. “Why couldn’t we? The patent belongs to you both. Caelum’s labor carved out the forge for SilverTech. Do you think you would’ve had time to toy with theories if not for his grind? Without his earnings, would you have had the freedom to draw a single design?”

“Freedom?” The word tore from my throat in a bitter laugh.

Three years of marriage. Three years I buried myself in his vision, his company, his Pack. Every night, while he raged about markets and rivals, I labored over schematics until dawn. If not for that sacrifice, if not for my research, do they think I would have produced only one patent?

I looked at Caelum, my voice low, steady, cutting. “So you believe SilverTech stands here today solely because of your power? Your money? That all I did was bask in your glory?”

quest of less

Aurora’s chin lifted. “Isn’t that the truth? Military innovation is one thing, but business demands more—vision, ruthlessness, networks. You can’t just build drones and think empires rise from blueprints. Wealth doesn’t fall from the sky.”

I let her words fall, then exhaled, almost pitying her. “You’re right—wealth doesn’t fall from the sky. I remember every step of clawing it from the dirt. I remember spending every drop of my father’s trust and every link of my mother’s connections to open doors for SilverTech. And when Caelum nearly destroyed the company with reckless decisions, I was the one who fought him back from the edge.”

The truth hung there, burning the air,

Aurora’s face flushed, but she snapped, “Then all the more reason the patent belongs to him too! He shed sweat and blood beside you. His power shaped it. It is not yours alone.”

I gave a shrug that cut sharper than a blade. “Fine. Keep telling yourself that. But if you believe in his strength so utterly, then hold onto it when his strength falters. If his empire crumbles, Aurora, stay with him still. Don’t forget these words then

A hush swept the chamber. I could feel the storm building: soon, the summit would start, and my turn to strike would come

11:31 AM P

Let Caelum try to wield my work—he would learn it wasn’t so simple.

+8 Pearls

Then Jocelyn sneered with venom. “Freya, you’re jealous, aren’t you? Caelum cast you aside for Aurora, and you lost a prize mate. Admit it—you’re bitter because the Silverfang Alpha chose someone else.”

The words twisted in the air, cutting Caelum too, for they painted him as the triumphant betrayer, the male who discarded his first mate for a shinier bond. I saw his wolf twitch, discomfort flickering.

But before he could form a defense, Silas spoke.

—

“Jealous?” His voice rolled like thunder across the chamber, deep and certain. “Tell me what reason would Freya Thorne have to be jealous?”

Every gaze snapped to us.

That single word—Freya—from his lips carried more than possession. It was claim. It was declaration. In that moment, he bound his presence to mine for all to see. Silas Whitmor, Alpha of the Ironclad Coalition, did not posture. He promised.

The silence that followed was suffocating. Jocelyn paled, nearly biting her tongue. She understood what he meant—understood that I was no discarded mate, no castoff. I stood beside power equal to, no, greater than Caelum’s.

Caelum’s face twisted, humiliation flickering across his proud features. Only yesterday, he had feared whispers—that he was a wolf who abandoned his bond when fortune rose. Now the story shifted, recast by Silas’s presence.

No longer was I the forsaken one. Now it was he who looked like the wolf left behind, replaced by a rival stronger, sharper, more unyielding.

And I, no longer bowed my head.

Send Gifts

19

98

4

4

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Freya’s POV

+8 Pearls

Caelum looked as though the ground had opened beneath him. For once, it wasn’t me who wore the mark of abandonment. It was him. He was the one stripped bare in front of the packs—pitiful, exposed.

Aurora, ever eager to stitch her dignity back together, forced a brittle smile. “Affection,” she declared, her voice pitched too high, “isn’t measured by a male’s wealth, but by how much of himself he gives you. A man might clutch a hundred coins but offer only one—what value is that bond?”

Her gaze flickered toward me, triumphant, as though she had made some grand revelation.

Before I could answer, Silas looming beside me like the iron spine of a fortress, spoke with cold amusement. “And yet Caelum spends his hoarded coins well enough on you, doesn’t he, Aurora? Jewelry, baubles—gifts from the silver coffer of Silverfang. Tokens of a bond born in another’s ruin.”

The air in the hall shifted, a ripple of wolf-scent and restrained growls. Aurora’s cheeks flamed scarlet.

Those trinkets had painted her in the world’s eyes not as a Beta’s daughter or a promising pilot of the Bluemoon Airborne Wing, but as Caelum’s mistress—the interloper who gnawed at another female’s place. She had flown bold and reckless over the sea isles, stunts meant to repair her image. But Silas’s words dragged her face back into the mud.

He didn’t stop there. His voice rumbled steady, the weight of a Whitmor decree. “As for what I own—if Freya desires it, she will have it. My pack’s hoard, my blade, my blood. All of it.”

Gasps shuddered through the chamber.

Silas Whitmor, Alpha of the Ironclad Coalition, was no minor wolf. His empire’s reach stretched across borders, its wealth a shadowed mountain none could map. The implication was staggering.

Aurora’s chin jutted, sharp and desperate. “Then tell me, Alpha Whitmor—what if Freya demanded Whitmor Industries itself? Would you place it in her hands?”

Silas turned his head slowly, a predator’s smirk tugging at his mouth. He didn’t even glance at her—his gaze found me, steady, unshaken. “If she asked, I would.”

The chamber exhaled as one, a hiss of disbelief and awe.

I froze, caught off guard. I had expected protection, maybe words of defiance on my behalf. But this? Even as jest, it was more than I imagined—he had just placed me on a pedestal in front of half the Capital’s wolves. My cheeks heated, though I forced my spine straight.

“No,” I said at last, voice low but clear. “What I want, I’ll take with my own claws. I don’t need to be given.”

Some around us nodded knowingly, dismissing the exchange as courtly flourish, politicking. But whether they believed or not, they had seen enough. They had seen that in Silas's eyes, I was not a discarded mate. I was chosen. Elevated.

Silas's lips curved faintly. "Of course. A wolf like you hunts for herself. Not like some others, who cling to scraps tossed from a stronger's table."

Aurora's flush deepened to crimson, shame burning through her mask. Even Jocelyn at her side shifted uncomfortably, unable to defend her ally. Silas's words had struck like claws across both their faces.

Before the tension could snap further, the convocation shifted. The summit began in earnest.

Delegates stepped forward, one by one, presenting their Pack's projects for the isle's development. Each spoke of vision and industry, each defended their proposal before the panel of government officials and the twin colossi of Whitmor and Thorne,

Then it was Caelum's turn.

I saw him hunched over his papers, knuckles white against the parchment. His wolf's scent was soured with unease. He hadn't expected me to remain, hadn't expected to present with my eyes on him.

Because he knew.

+8 Pearls

That proposal in his hands? It was mine. I had drafted it in the final weeks before leaving SilverTech Forgeworks. Every line of it had bled from my mind, my sleepless nights. He had done nothing but swap the word riverfront for isle.

And now he would parade it as his triumph.

Aurora leaned close to him, whispering something, her brows knitted in concern. "Caelum, are you well? You look pale."

"Nothing," he muttered, but when he raised his eyes, they met mine across the chamber. His gaze flinched. His wolf recoiled.

The announcer's voice rang out, merciless: "Now, the Alpha of Silverfang and head of SilverTech Forgeworks—Caelum Grafton. Present your project."

The applause that followed was polite, expectant. But I felt the tremor ripple through him. His heart stuttered, his pride choking him as he mounted the dais.

He began to speak, words clipped, forced.

I had seen him sell before, striding with confidence before investors and officials, weaving visions with his silver tongue. But today? Today the words snagged. He stammered. Even when he read straight from the page, the cadence faltered, unsteady.

Because he knew every syllable had my scent on it.

A fog of shame swelled in the hall, wrapping tight around him. My gaze did not leave him, and under it, his wolf cowered.

At last he finished, lips dry, voice cracking.

For a moment, silence. Then one of the government men—Director Leo, if I recalled right—nodded approvingly. “I find this project promising. The application of unmanned craft in isle development is keenly suited. Efficiency, reduced labor, accelerated construction. And SilverTech’s patent, in particular, is valuable—its innovation would serve Ashbourne’s coast well.”

I nearly laughed, though it caught sharp in my throat. The patent. Mine. They lauded him for my claws’ work, my sleepless hours.

He stood there, basking in the official’s praise, and I wondered if he felt it burning through him—how easily his triumph would unravel the moment I chose to speak.

I said nothing. Not yet.

But my wolf stirred restlessly, knowing the reckoning was close.

Send Gifts

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Caelum’s POV

2

+8 Pearls

The applause that followed my presentation rang hollow in my ears. For a moment, I thought I had survived it—the quiver in my voice, the crack in my delivery. The officials clapped, and Director Leo’s words had sounded like salvation.

Then Freya’s voice cut through the air.

Cold. Sharp. Inescapable.

“Caelum Grafton,” she called me by name, not title, not Alpha, but with a blade on her tongue. “I never thought you’d stoop so low—not just clinging to my patent, but stealing the proposal I wrote before I left your Forgeworks.”

The hall went still. The weight of her words crashed over me, drowning the scraps of approval I had just managed to clutch.

My lips pressed tight, but instinct forced me to speak, to salvage what pride I could. “This,” I said, holding up the document in my hand like a shield, “is a SilverTech proposal. Freya, you may have left, but what **you** created while under my banner belongs to the company.”

Even as I said it, the lie scalded my tongue.

Her laughter was not laughter at all—it was venom. “So that’s what you’ve become. A male who doesn’t even bother with honor anymore.”

Heat clawed up my neck, burning across my face. “Careful,” I snapped, voice shaking though I tried to force steel into it. “If you keep slandering me like this, don’t blame me for discarding every shred of history we shared.”

Her eyes, those storm-born eyes, only mocked me. “History?” she said. “Caelum, you never once gave me loyalty in all those years. If you were capable of honor, would our bond have rotted the way it did? The only one you’ve ever shown care for is Aurora.”

My throat seized. The hall turned, eyes shifting again to Aurora—my fragile shield, my chosen distraction—and she wilted under the weight of their judgment.

Freya pressed on, relentless. “And besides,” she said, lifting her chin, “this proposal? It was unfinished when I left.”

The words pierced through me like a spear.

“Unfinished?” I repeated, stunned. I had studied every line of that document, lived with it for weeks. To me it had been complete—more than complete. The blueprint of our next conquest.

But Freya *only* nodded, cold and merciless. “Yes. The patent mentioned there—my patent—is three years old. Useful, yes, but outdated. Technology evolves. So too do the claws raised against it. The interference systems now prowling the skies can cripple those drones. Without a countermeasure, without the new layer of anti-disruption protocols I had already begun, your machines are nothing more than iron carcasses waiting to fall.”

I couldn’t breathe.

The applause that had carried me seconds ago withered into silence. My heart pounded in my chest like a drum of doom. I had gambled everything on this—everything.

heart as silver Str yoll

If she spoke truth—and my wolf knew she did—then the very weapon I had paraded as Silverfang’s edge was no more than dull steel.

Her voice pressed the weight harder. “Had our bond not broken, I would have finished the work, strengthened the pack’s weapon, sealed its dominance. But you tore us apart, Caelum. You took what was mine, and so now you may choke on it.”

My blood iced. I could feel the eyes upon me—wolves, humans, Alphas, and officials alike. The scent of disbelief rippled through the chamber.

“That’s her work?” someone muttered near the front.

“So SilverTech’s Alpha built his fortune on his ex-mate’s claws?” another whispered.

“Three years he’s stood in the Capital’s market, and not one of those ideas was his own?”

+8 Pearls

Each whisper was a fang in my hide. I wanted to bare my teeth, to silence them with a growl that would split the air, but I could not—not with Freya watching, not with the truth already bleeding out around me.

And then Silas Whitmor’s voice, slow and deliberate, drove the blade deeper. “So tell us, Director Leo—do we still waste time discussing SilverTech’s bid? Or do we pass to the next, one worth the ink?”

The official hesitated, gave a brittle smile, and cleared his throat. “Yes... perhaps we move along.”

The words felled me more thoroughly than claws ever could.

The host gestured, and I realized too late that I was still standing at the podium, frozen, shamed. My legs felt like stone, but I forced them to move, each step dragging as though the eyes of every wolf in the chamber were weights tied around my limbs.

I descended, one step, another, and reached the floor.

Aurora was there instantly, her voice soft, desperate. “Caelum, don’t despair. We can craft another proposal, something stronger. I believe in you.”

But her comfort was a noose. Each word reminded me of the truth I could not speak aloud: that if I had been capable of better, I would never have used Freya's plan in the first place. My wolves had offered me drafts—weak, useless. My own mind had turned in circles, desperate. And in the end, I had stolen.

And now, worse, I had been caught.

My vision blurred at the edges. If Freya was right—if the patent was already obsolete, if the drones could be gutted by a stronger interference—then everything I had woven, all the empire I promised Silverfang, would crumble.

Not just this project. Not just the isle. SilverTech itself could bleed out in the dirt. My rivals would smell weakness, the Consortium would abandon me, the funding chain would snap. From Alpha of the Forgeworks to beggar in the ashes—it would all unravel.

No. I couldn't allow it. I wouldn't.

My wolf roared inside me, clawing at my ribs, demanding I fight, demanding I tear the smug triumph from Freya's throat. But I couldn't—not here, not before this many eyes.

So I forced my rage down, forced my breathing—steady.

I lifted my gaze and fixed it on her—Freya Thorne, the mate I had cast aside, the female who had just gutted me with truth in front of every pack and every man of power.

Her shoulders squared, her expression unreadable, but I knew her well enough to **see** it—the glimmer of fire, the satisfaction she took in my fall.

The convocation droned on around us, other voices, other projects. I heard none of it.

Because already, my mind was spinning. Already, I was searching for a way to claw my fortune back from the pit she had

thrown it into.

Tonight, the summit would end with a banquet, with donations and dances before the wolves departed the isle.

And I would find her there.

One way or another, I would not let Freya Thorne be the death of me.

Send Gifts

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Freya's POV

10

o

)

+8 Pearls

The banquet hall gleamed with polished silver and crystal, the kind of splendor meant to dazzle donors and soften their purses. But beneath the glitter, I could feel the restless shift of wolves, the crackle of politics and posturing. Tonight's charity was for the orphans of the Isles—a noble cause, and one few dared to ignore. Even the pups themselves had been brought to the hall, dressed in fresh clothes, eyes wide at the splendor.

Among them, I saw a boy I recognized—the same child who had tumbled into the sea days ago. His cheeks still held a touch of pallor, but his spirit was brighter. When he caught me watching, I gave him a smile and a small wave. Relief coursed through me when his lips curved upward in return.

At least some wounds could heal quickly.

When the donations began, the wealthiest stepped forward one by one, their pledges echoing like drums of war. This was as much about reputation as generosity; to give was to prove strength.

Jocelyn was one of the first to rise. She moved with the practiced poise of the Metropolitan Pack, her voice ringing clear as she pledged thirty million credits on behalf of our family. Her smile was sharp when she descended from the stage, but her

words found their mark at me like claws.

"Freya," she said, low enough to sound casual, loud enough for others to hear, "Great-Grandfather praises you endlessly. He says the Fifth Branch is the pride of Stormveil, a house of martyrs. And yet, with all that inheritance resting solely in your hands now... you couldn't find it in you to give?"

The smirk she wore was the kind only a rival cousin could muster, equal parts scorn and bait.

I met her eyes evenly. "The thirty million you just gave—was that not under the banner of the Thorne name? Or are you saying the Fifth Branch no longer counts among Stormveil?"

Her breath hitched. A small stutter in the rhythm of her mockery. She couldn't answer—wouldn't. To deny the Fifth Branch here, before these packs, would bring Ken Thorne's

wrath down upon her. Even James, our great-uncle, would never forgive such an insult to the fallen. My branch might be reduced to one, but I carried the bloodline of wolves who had given everything on the frontlines. That could not be erased.

“Of course not,” she managed finally, her smile stretched thin as old parchment.

I let the silence press against her until she turned away.

But then, the hall shuddered with a ripple of surprise. The great screen behind the dais flickered, the gentle film of orphans laughing and learning replaced by flames.

Flames.

The crowd gasped. My heart lurched as I recognized the footage: five years ago, the borderlands near Ashbourne. A blaze so fierce it swallowed the forests, devouring everything for miles.

And with it—my brother.

I went rigid. My wolf pressed against my ribs, restless, grieving all over again. I had pored over those reports, clawed through every name, every list of the fallen. Eric had not been among them. No hospital bore his name, no survivor remembered him. Yet still... he had vanished there, at the edge of the burning line.

To this day, I could not decide which truth cut deeper—that he had died unmarked in the fire, or that he had lived and

chosen not to return.

Why hadn’t he come back? What could keep him from me for so long?

As I struggled to keep my breathing steady, I noticed movement—Aurora, standing near Caelum. Her face had gone utterly white, her body trembling as though pierced by a ghost. Beads of sweat broke upon her brow though the hall was temperate, her eyes fixed on the screen with naked dread.

Strange. The fire had shaken many of us, but to quake like this.....

“Aurora,” Caelum’s voice rang out suddenly, too loud, too sharp, “what’s wrong? Are you unwell?”

11:32 AM P P.

ON

+8 Pearls

Heads turned. The Bluemoon Beta's daughter found herself exposed in an instant, every gaze upon her pale form

I studied her. She looked not merely unwell, but terrified. But terrified of what—of memories? Or of secrets?

Aurora forced a shaky breath. "I—it's nothing. Just tired."

Her words did little to cover the fear still writ across her face.

My cousin Jocelyn seized her chance to play the snake. "Aurora," she said brightly, "wasn't this the very blaze you fought in? The border inferno?"

Aurora froze, her spine stiff as if caught in a trap.

Jocelyn's smile widened as she turned to the hall, her voice carrying with a performative lilt. "Yes, I remember now. Five years ago, during her training with the Bluemoon Airborne Wing, she saw the flames, and rather than fleeing like most would, she ran toward them. She saved lives, called in reinforcements, fought alongside the human brigades. A true act of courage!"

As she spoke, she flicked me a glance—a gleam of spite and triumph. Jocelyn never missed a chance to put me down by raising someone else up.

The wolves around us murmured, admiration rising in a chorus.

"Such bravery."

"Few males would dare, let alone a young she-wolf."

"Worthy of a toast!"

Crystal glasses lifted. The hall clinked with praise.

Aurora's face remained pale, lips tight in a brittle smile that did not reach her eyes. She looked cornered, yet she endured the flood of adulation.

But I... I saw the cracks.

The fire was not just memory to her—it was something else. Something that had shaken her bones even now, years later.

And for the first time, I wondered if Aurora's tale of heroism was not the whole story.

Because the flames that had stolen my brother still licked at her shadow.

Send Gifts

98

W