

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

chapter 261-266

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

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Third Person's POV

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Caelum sat slumped in the leather armchair of his penthouse study, the muted glow of Deepmoor City outside casting long shadows across the room. The stack of glossy profiles on the mahogany table felt like knives pressing against his chest. Every time he glanced at them, the frustration gnawed deeper.

Eleanor, his mother, hovered beside him, a picture of forced optimism. "Caelum, look at these women I picked for you. Each one of them is fine, strong, respectable. Imagine bringing one back to our family estate—you'll have face, prestige. Something you clearly need."

Giselle, his younger sister, perched delicately on the edge of the sofa, followed suit. "Brother, Mother spent a fortune getting these. You can't just ignore her efforts."

Caelum's amber eyes narrowed into a predatory glare. The wolf within him, silent and restrained for years, prowled under his skin. The words of his mother and sister were hollow, irritating, meaningless compared to the chaos in his life. "Investment? You spent money on matchmaking instead of saving my company? Do you even realize the cash flow is tight? My company's hanging by a thread, and you're buying profiles?"

Eleanor recoiled slightly, but Giselle only tilted her chin, still convinced she was right. "Brother, just maybe... seeing new faces might lift your mood?"

Caelum slammed a fist onto the table, rattling the profiles to the floor. Papers fluttered like wounded birds, scattering across the polished wood. "Mood? Face? Do you really think I care about face right now?" His voice was low, dangerous, a growl resonating from deep within. "You forced me to end things with Freya Thorne for face! That's what you call preserving dignity?"

Eleanor's lips tightened, and for a brief moment, her confidence faltered. "I... I was just thinking of what's practical, what's... appropriate. Freya... she was a childless orphan, nothing to bring into the family. What else could I have expected?"

Caelum's growl rumbled from his chest, wolf instincts flaring with fury. "Nothing to bring? Her parents died serving the country—heroes, every one! And she stood by me when I had nothing. She believed in me, in my vision, in what we were building together. You call that 'nothing to bring'?" His fists clenched, nails digging into his palms as if restraining the wolf that threatened to break free.

Eleanor opened her mouth, stammering, "But... that was different—"

"Different?" Caelum barked, teeth bared in frustration. "Different because she didn't require a

7:32 Fri, Sep 19

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dowry? Because our family had nothing to offer? You were glad to get a free bride, weren't you?" His voice was cold, biting. The room seemed to contract under the weight of his anger, shadows stretching across the walls like the claws of some unseen predator.

Giselle's face paled as she flinched, startled by the intensity of her brother's wolfish outburst. "Brother, you can't speak to Mother like that—"

"Don't!" Caelum's glare cut her off. His wolf senses picked up every subtle movement in the room—the nervous glance of his mother, the hesitant breathing of his sister, the faint scent of fear mixed with perfume. "I speak the truth. Freya Thorne was capable, brilliant, far beyond anything you two could appreciate. She graduated top of her class at Halston Combat Academy, excelled in drone warfare and tactical engineering, and yet you replaced her with Giselle? Someone who couldn't even maintain half-completed projects without ruining them?"

Eleanor's face flushed with embarrassment, but she still tried to defend herself. "I just... I wanted to find someone more... capable, someone who could—"

"Capable?" Caelum barked again, voice resonant with Alpha authority, wolf fire sparking in his amber eyes. "She was capable! She built everything with me, she pushed through when I had no one else, and what do you do? You throw her away for face, for reputation, for appearances!" His tail—the metaphorical one within his psyche, his wolf's instincts—lashed furiously, a storm barely contained.

Giselle tried to interject, trembling, "Brother, don't be so harsh... I'm just trying to—"

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“Trying to what? Ruin the company? Ruin me?” Caelum rose from the armchair, towering over them, his presence like a wolf in full alert, radiating power and rage. The room seemed to shrink under him. “Do you understand now? If Freya hadn’t left me, if I hadn’t been forced into the Lunar Severance Phase with her, my company would be fine! My life would be fine! And I wouldn’t be scrambling like this!”

Eleanor paled, finally silenced, and Giselle’s mouth fell open. Caelum’s wolf had tasted betrayal, and it prowled through him, sharp and hungry. He could smell their panic, their inability to grasp the scale of their mistakes.

Giselle finally managed to speak, weakly. “Brother... are you blaming us? You’re saying... you resent Mother and me?”

“No,” Caelum said, voice low, almost a growl. “I resent myself for letting all this happen. I resent myself for letting Freya be discarded while I chased illusions. While I deferred to your judgment and my own pride. She deserves better than all of you, better than me even. And yet I let it happen.” His chest heaved, amber eyes blazing like molten gold. “And all because of face... because of appearances... because of a family too blind to see what was right before them.”

7:32 Fri, Sep 19

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The room fell silent, except for the faint hum of the city below. Even the Alpha wolf within him seemed to slow, sniffing the air, assessing the danger, but still restless. Caelum’s gaze softened slightly—not toward them, but inward, toward the memory of Freya Thorne, loyal, capable, and brilliant, the wolf who had once shared his vision, shared his dreams, and endured his weaknesses.

Giselle swallowed hard, tears threatening. “Brother... if you truly cared for Freya... why did you... hide it? Why not let everyone know you were married?”

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

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Giselle’s words struck Caelum like an invisible whip, leaving him both flustered and **cornered**. At first, he had only wanted to keep Aurora’s knowledge of his marriage

from surfacing. **It** wasn't that long ago that he had been rejected by her; marrying another woman **so** soon **after** that would make him seem careless with love, too casual, too indifferent.

Yet, as SilverTech Forgeworks expanded, as the empire of his influence grew, the secrecy of his marriage became routine. To him, it seemed that as long as he didn't wear the ring, he remained unbound, free from any obligations or scrutiny.

"And, brother," Giselle pressed, her voice sharp with accusation, "it's not just Mother's pride you're protecting. You care about your own face, don't you? Isn't that why you refused to announce that Freya is your wife? Because you thought she couldn't walk proudly by your side in public? And now, all your resentment over this divorce... you're dumping it onto Mother and me?"

Her words were a slap Caelum couldn't see but felt burning across his face, leaving him utterly speechless. Silence stretched long in the room, thick with guilt and shame. Finally, he muttered, barely audible, "Yes... it's all me. It's me who failed Freya... it's me who wronged her."

"What are you talking about, brother?" Giselle's voice trembled with confusion.

Eleanor, their mother, interjected sharply, her tone filled with the habitual disdain she reserved for Freya. "Do not tell me... Aurora has come back to demand reconciliation? That marriage must not be restored! I will not allow that curse to step into the Grafton family again!"

"Mother!" Caelum's fury broke through, his gaze piercing. "Do not speak another word against Freya in my presence! That so-called curse of yours... saved my life! If she had not intervened back then, I would have drowned in the River without a trace!"

He turned abruptly, leaving both mother and sister behind, and climbed the staircase to his private chambers. The air inside the room was cold and desolate, reflecting the emptiness he felt. Caelum entered the bathroom, splashing his face with icy water, staring at the **reflection** of the man he had become. Once confident, unyielding, the Alpha of SilverTech **Forgeworks** now looked **ravaged**,

worn down by stress, guilt, and the chaos that had enveloped his life.

SilverTech Forgeworks teetered on the brink of collapse. And as if fate were mocking him, Aurora—the Beta daughter of Bluemoon **Pack**—was carrying his child. **Why had this** happened now, of all times? One thing was certain: this child, born of a union he **hadn't** wanted, couldn't be allowed to remain.

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Meanwhile, Silas returned Freya to her apartment. Tonight, the wolf had clearly had more than her usual share of drinks. Her steps were unsteady, and her body leaned heavily against his as they approached the building. Silas's chest tightened at the sight. Freya, usually **fierce** and independent, vulnerable in this state, seemed to rely solely on him. He was, at this moment, her singular anchor.

"I'll carry you upstairs," Silas offered gently.

"No... I can manage," she slurred, attempting to maintain some dignity despite the alcohol's softening grip. Her cheeks flushed like early dawn, lending her an unexpected innocence that made Silas's heart ache.

With a quiet chuckle, he scooped her into his arms anyway, her slight weight pressing against him, warm and familiar. "I want to, Freya. Consider it my choice," he murmured.

She smiled against him, no longer resisting, and let him carry her to her room. Once inside, he gently placed her on the bed. "I'll get something to help you sober up."

"I don't need it," she said abruptly, grabbing his wrist before he could move. Then, in a swift, deliberate motion, she pushed him onto the mattress, her intent clear.

"Freya?" Silas's brow rose, startled. "Do you even know what you're doing?"

"Of course I do," she said, her words deliberate, her lips brushing his in a teasing, intoxicating press. Her hands moved deftly, loosening the tie around his neck, unbuttoning his shirt with the ease of someone entirely confident in her desire. His chest revealed itself piece by piece under her touch. The subtle chill of his skin contrasted with the warmth from her intoxicated body, a heady combination that sent shivers down both their spines.

A low, primal growl built within Silas. Desire—raw and insistent—coursed through him, demanding acknowledgment. "I want to..." he began, attempting to rise, only to be gently but firmly pushed back.

"Shh... today, I lead," Freya murmured, eyes glinting with both playfulness and command.

"You lead?" Silas's surprise was evident.

"Yes," she replied, a mischievous tilt in her smile. "Before, you took control, and... it almost went too far. I prefer this way. Tonight, I dictate the rules."

He let out a soft laugh, resigned but intrigued. "Very well. What should I *do*?"

“Just lie there,” she instructed, her fingers finding his tie once more. She bound his wrists

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together, overlapping them delicately.

“You really think a single tie can hold me?” he teased, though the growl in his voice betrayed the rising anticipation.

“Try and see for yourself,” she said with a smirk, adding a playful flourish—a butterfly knot. “Lana says that tying a man down in bed... has a certain charm. I wanted to experience it too.”

Silas’s eyes darkened with desire, a wild gleam catching in the depths. When she sobered, would she even remember this bold declaration? And what nonsense had Lana Rook been whispering in her ear to inspire this audacity?

“You promise me something?” Silas’s voice softened, though the heat in her gaze remained untamed. “The only man you allow on this bed, bound or free, is me.”

Freya met his eyes, a low, feral smile playing on his lips. In that instant, in the quiet apartment filled with tension and unspoken truths, it was clear that neither would yield. The night belonged entirely to her, the wolf and the woman intertwined in a dance as old as their kind, desire sharpening the edges of their connection, making every touch, every heartbeat, feel infinite.

10:02 Sat, Sep 20

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

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Freya’s laughter broke the heated silence, low and melodic, tinged with alcohol and desire.

“Who else could I possibly tie down like this, if not you?” she teased.

Silas’s golden eyes glimmered with both amusement and warning, his voice rough with possessive hunger. “Even if you could, you won’t. Freya, whatever you crave—love, chains, or fire—you bind it only to me. If you want to play with passion, I’ll follow you into every shadow. But it can never be anyone else.”

The intensity in his words was a vow, primal and absolute. He would bend, submit, and even bare his throat to her games—so long as she never strayed from him.

Freya’s fingers traced the sharp line of his brow, sliding slowly down until they rested against his lips. “Fine,” she whispered, her voice molten. “Only you.”

She kissed him then, at first soft and teasing, then deeper, as if sealing their pact. Her lips traveled from his mouth to the strong cut of his jaw, down to the hollow of his throat, and lower still.

Silas’s clothes were already stripped away under her eager hands. Her eyes lingered on him, unashamed and hungry. “Beautiful,” she breathed.

His lips curved in a rare smirk. “Do you

like what you see?”

“Like?” She laughed softly, her gaze devouring the lines of his body. “I love it. The strength of your frame, the way every muscle seems carved with purpose... the balance of power and grace. It’s...” she exhaled, “...perfect.”

His expression flickered, something darker flashing beneath the gold of his gaze. “Even the scars?” he asked quietly.

Her eyes softened at once, as he had known they would. Her wolf stirred, aching for him. “Especially the scars,” she whispered.

He let out a breath, satisfaction laced with self-mockery. He had used his scars—his broken history, the marks left by war and blood—to draw out her pity, to tether her closer to him. It was a selfish, almost manipulative instinct. Was it fear? Yes. Fear that her love was not yet deep enough. Fear that if fate turned cruel, she would abandon him as others had before.

“Then love me more,” Silas murmured, voice husky, vibrating with raw desire. “Love me until

10:02 **Sat, Sep 20**

there’s nothing left to doubt.”

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The gravel of his tone, edged with command and plea, dragged her further into the storm of him, drowning reason, leaving only fire.

At dawn, Lana was ripped from sleep by the sharp clang of the doorbell. She groaned, burrowing deeper into the blanket. “Moon’s mercy... who the hell is pounding at this hour?”

Her head throbbed. Her eyelids felt heavier than iron weights fighting to stay shut. Last night had been a blur. She had started drinking just to keep Kade company—he had been in a foul mood, pouring whiskey like water. At first, she sipped only to humor him, but as the night stretched on, the glasses piled up until she, too, had stumbled headlong into drunken oblivion. Somehow, she’d managed to drag him home before her own memory went black.

Still half-asleep, Lana shuffled toward the door, hair mussed, lips dry. She yanked it open. “Who-”

Her words died in her throat.

Standing there, framed by the pale light of morning, was Victor Ashford. His face was as sharp and unforgiving as a blade drawn for judgment. For one stunned heartbeat, she thought she must still be drunk, hallucinating.

Victor? Here?

Panic flared, and she rubbed her eyes hard, as if wiping away the apparition. But when she looked again, his cold gaze hadn’t vanished. With a strangled gasp, she slammed the door shut with a loud bang.

Behind her, a groggy voice carried down the hall. “Who’s at the door?”

Lana stiffened, whirling to see Kade wandering toward her, rubbing his temple, his dark hair tousled, his wolf aura thick with exhaustion.

Her mind scrambled. Why was he here—no, why was she here? Hadn’t she taken him to his own apartment last night?

“Who’s out there?” Kade asked again, his voice rough from sleep.

Before she could invent an excuse, the doorbell rang once more, sharp and insistent. Her heart skipped. And suddenly, clarity returned—this wasn’t her home at all. She was in Kade’s apartment. Somehow, after dragging him here, she hadn’t made it back to her own place. She must have collapsed here, dead to the world.

10:02 Sat, Sep 20

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Kade frowned at her hesitation and brushed past, opening the door himself.

Victor stood waiting, his expression thunderous. His gaze dropped immediately, taking in the sight: Kade half-dressed in disheveled sleepwear, Lana standing behind him with her clothes askew, hair wild from the night. The air froze.

“So,” Victor said icily, his voice like the crack of a whip. “It seems I’ve interrupted something.”

Lana nearly stumbled sideways, her heart leaping into her throat. She clutched at the wall for balance, color draining from her cheeks.

Kade, startled, blurted out, “We didn’t—there’s nothing between us! Don’t put false charges on me, Ashford!”

Victor’s eyes flicked to Lana, sharp as daggers.

She raised both hands in defense, blurting fast, “Relax! Even if I were the kind to indulge in a man’s looks, I would never indulge in your nephew.”

Her tone was sharp, but her heart was racing. She valued her life far too much to test Kade’s temper in that way. If anyone could handle his rough edges, it was Freya, not her. For Lana, bedding him would be a death wish.

Victor’s expression softened slightly, though the shadows in his gaze lingered. He stepped inside without invitation, his presence consuming the small space, and fixed Lana with his stare. “Why are you here?”

“Why should I tell you?” she snapped, her pride bristling even as her stomach churned with

nerves.

“You don’t have to,” Victor replied coolly. “But if you won’t explain, I have every reason to believe you’re hiding something. And when the authorities come to your door, don’t claim I didn’t warn you.”

His words hit with the weight of law. Victor Ashford—the undefeated wolf lawyer of The Capital. His reputation was a wall of victories, his courtroom presence as fearsome as any Alpha’s howl. Lana’s breath caught, her bravado faltering. If he truly pressed, she wouldn’t stand a chance.

Grinding her teeth, she swallowed her pride. Better to survive humiliation than to risk his wrath. “Kade was drunk,” she admitted, glaring at the floor. “I dragged him back here. I must’ve... passed out on his couch. That’s all.”

Both men froze at her words.

10:02 Sat, Sep 20

Victor’s expression darkened further, suspicion igniting anew.

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Kade, mid-sip from a water bottle he’d just pulled from the fridge, sputtered violently, spraying the drink everywhere.

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“You slept here?” Victor’s voice cut through the air, each syllable deliberate. “One bed. One room. And you expect me to believe-”

Lana blinked, suddenly uncertain. She had woken up in a bed this morning... but in her haze, she’d assumed it was her own. Had she been wrong? Had she been lying inches from Kade all night without realizing?

Her wide eyes darted toward him.

Kade’s gaze flicked back to hers, equally startled. His wolf stirred uneasily, caught between annoyance and something unspoken.

Victor’s piercing stare shifted between them, tension thick as the predawn mist, each second dragging like the scrape of claws across stone.

10:02 Sat, Sep 20

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

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Kade stared, utterly speechless, at the two pairs of eyes fixed on him—eyes belonging to his small uncle Victor and to Lana, Freya’s closest friend.

“Did you sleep with her?” Victor’s voice cut through the silence, cold as a winter gale rolling down from the northern ridges.

“Where the hell did you spend the night?” Lana pressed, her tone sharp, as though she had every right to interrogate him.

Kade’s jaw tightened. “Moon—damned hells... I must have done something truly vile in a past life to deserve knowing the both of you.” His voice dripped with exasperation.

“You’re lucky you’re my uncle, Victor. And you, Lana—you’re under Freya’s protection. If either of you were anyone else, I’d have already put you flat on your back for barking at me like that.”

Victor’s expression darkened, but Kade wasn’t finished. “And you, Lana—seriously? You’ve got some nerve asking me where I slept. You’re the one who dragged my sorry drunk ass back here last night. I was barely conscious. You think I’d remember which gods-forsaken corner of the room you dumped me in?” He nearly spat the words, biting down just in time to stop a string of curses from tearing free.

Victor’s sharp eyes swung toward Lana, pinning her like a wolf pup caught sneaking meat from the Alpha’s kill. “You drove him back?” His voice was low, dangerous.

“N-no. I called a driver,” Lana blurted out quickly. Even as she spoke, she couldn’t help the flush creeping up her neck. Moon above, why did she suddenly feel like she was back in school, caught lying to a stern tutor? Victor Ashford’s scrutiny had a way of stripping people bare.

Victor’s gaze narrowed further. “So. Where exactly did you leave him?”

Lana froze. Her throat locked. She darted her gaze back toward Kade, silently begging him to save her.

Kade wanted nothing more than to toss her straight out the nearest window. Before he could decide, Victor stepped forward, shrugging off his tailored jacket with deliberate calm. He rolled up his sleeves, exposing corded muscle that seemed almost at odds with his refined

exterior.

Lana blinked, startled. Was he actually planning to fight Kade? She’d seen Kade brawl before- he was infamous across his Pack for it, his fists as quick as his wolf. Victor,

though... he looked every inch the polished gentleman Alpha. Surely, in a fight, he'd stand no chance.

10:02 **Sat, Sep 20**

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"Stop!" Lana rushed between them, her voice rising. "Victor, even if Kade and I did end the same bed—so what? We're both adults, not breaking any laws, not dishonoring any packs. Why are you pressing us like this?"

Victor's face went darker still, his lips thinning to a razor's edge. His eyes glittered with the kind of fury that came from somewhere deep, old. "So it's true? You've set your sights on him?"

Lana opened her mouth to answer, but Kade shoved her aside, his own temper flaring. "Enough. I woke up on the floor, alright? The damned floor." His gaze locked on Victor. "And even if I had been on the bed beside her, I wouldn't have touched her. She isn't the one I want. Why in the name of the Bloodmoon would I take advantage of someone I don't even like?"

Lana's relief at the first part of his words curdled to fury by the end. "Excuse me? What do you mean by that? 'Wouldn't take advantage'? 'Wouldn't lower yourself'? Who exactly do you think you are? If anyone would've lost out in that situation, it would've been me!"

Kade arched a brow, incredulous. "You seriously think sleeping with me would be your loss?"

She shot back without hesitation, "Don't forget, your precious uncle here was once my boyfriend. If you and I really did end up in bed, that would make me practically your almost- aunt. You think that's not disgrace enough? If anyone's losing here, it's me!"

Kade choked, coughing so hard his chest burned. Moon above, did Lana just say that out loud? The woman had no filter.

Lana's eyes widened a split second later, realization crashing down. She had dragged Victor into the fire pit along with herself. Wrong move. Very wrong.

“Victor, it was just... words tumbling out. Don’t take it seriously,” she backtracked quickly.

But Victor’s gaze had sharpened to a wolf’s killing edge. “And what if I do take it seriously?”

Lana faltered. For the first time, she had no clever retort. After a long pause, she managed, “Then... what exactly do you want from me?”

Victor didn’t blink. “When you brought Kade here last night, what did you carry?”

“My bag. My WolfComm. Nothing else.”

“Where are they now?”

“Here,” she said hesitantly, lifting them from the sofa. “Why?”

“Come,” Victor said simply. His hand closed firmly around hers, warm and unyielding. He

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turned toward the door. Over his shoulder, he spoke to Kade, “Don’t drink yourself insensate again. The next time you do, you may not wake up with your wolf intact. And the one who’ll regret it won’t just be you.”

Kade gave a lazy shrug, trying to mask the unease curling in his gut. “Yeah, yeah. Got it.” He watched as Victor led Lana out of his apartment, finally releasing a long breath.

The tension drained from the room like smoke after a fire. If Victor had stayed a moment longer, Kade was half certain the whole place would’ve been torn apart.

Yet the unease lingered. He frowned, leaning back against the wall. The way Victor had looked at Lana—sharp, possessive, almost desperate. Could it be true? That his uncle had never truly let her go?

And if Victor was still bound by something as reckless as desire... then Lana might find herself marked by more than old affections. In their world, when an Alpha refused to let go, the story never ended cleanly.

10:02 Sat, Sep 20

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person's POV

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“Victor, slow down!” Lana protested as she stumbled after him, tugged along by his unrelenting grip. “I haven’t even washed my face, brushed my teeth, or touched my hair this morning-”

Her words might as well have been wind against the mountains. Victor didn’t spare her a glance. He kept pulling until they stood before his sleek black vehicle parked outside the complex. He yanked open the passenger-side door and ordered, his voice edged with command, “Get in.”

“I can get back on my own. I don’t need your car,” Lana muttered, folding her arms.

Victor’s eyes, sharp as a hunting wolf’s, cut toward her. “And you don’t think there are matters between us that need to be settled? Or do you prefer I create... complications for you today?”

Lana stiffened. She knew Victor’s reputation. The Alpha was more than just a high-ranking wolf—he was a lawyer whose name carried weight across the Capital. If she refused, if she tried to brush him off, he could make her life very, very difficult.

She bit her lip, then reluctantly slid into the passenger seat.

Victor started the engine, the growl of the vehicle matching the tension in the air, and drove them away from the gated complex.

“Where exactly do you want to talk?” she asked cautiously.

“Your place.”

Her brows shot up. Of all places, that was the last she wanted him to see. “Can’t we go somewhere else?”

He glanced at her, eyes narrowing in faint amusement. “With your hair unbrushed, your face untouched, where do you think is fitting for you to appear? A café? A pack hall? Don’t fool yourself. You’d be more at ease at home.”

His logic struck like a blade. Lana grimaced. He was right. As much as she didn't want him in her

space,

there **wasn't** really another option.

When Victor stepped **across** the threshold of her apartment, Lana felt her skin prickle with **unease**. This was her den, her sanctuary—and he carried with him the force of a storm that didn't belong here.

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10:02 Sat, Sep 20

“Wash up. Then we'll talk,” Victor said simply.

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“...Fine. Make yourself comfortable,” Lana replied stiffly. She gathered fresh clothes and retreated into the bathroom.

Victor remained in the living area. His eyes swept the apartment with the practiced **assessment** of a hunter sniffing out secrets. He saw no men's boots at the entrance, no scent of another male lingering in the air, no toothbrush beside hers in the washroom alcove. The realization sank into him like a cool draught of water. She wasn't sharing her space with her **so**-called boyfriend.

Against his will, his chest eased with a strange relief.

Ridiculous, he scolded himself. She was just a woman he'd once taken to his bed. A woman he had long since cut ties with. He hadn't sought another mate since—but that was only because he had no patience for distractions, not because he still carried her in his heart.

Still... tongues whispered otherwise. Many in the Capital and the wider territories had begun to assume his reluctance to choose another had roots in Lana Rook.

As if he could be the kind of man to dwell on a broken bond. Impossible. She wasn't worth that.

His gaze landed on a photo album lying on the coffee table. He picked it up, thumbing through casually—until his eyes hardened. Page after page revealed photographs of men. Young, strong, handsome men.

His jaw clenched.

The sound of the bathroom door opening reached him. Lana padded out in fresh clothes, damp hair clinging to her shoulders. When she saw what Victor held, her face paled.

“You had no right to go through my things,” she snapped, striding forward.

“**If you** want to file charges, do it,” Victor replied smoothly, his tone clipped. “I’ll answer in court.”

Her irritation faltered. “...It’s not that serious.”

Victor flicked another **page** before closing the album with a snap. “Never thought you’d enjoy collecting **faces. These** men—your targets? A scrapbook of conquests? Do you not worry that your boyfriend will get jealous?”

His voice carried a faint, biting edge of jealousy he didn’t even notice himself.

“My boyfriend doesn’t care,” Lana said with a light smile, though her heart raced. She **wasn’t**

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10:02 Sat, Sep 20

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about to explain that the album wasn’t hers at all but material a friend had left behind—model portfolios, nothing more.

Victor’s eyes darkened. “He wouldn’t care that you spent the night in Kade’s apartment? Alone. Just the two of you?”

“No,” she said firmly. “I already told you. He’s generous.”

Victor gave a low, humorless laugh. He set the album down with deliberate calm and strode toward her. His presence filled the room, pressing down on her chest. “If he’s that generous, then one of two things is true: he doesn’t love you, or he’s very good at pretending.”

Her brows knitted. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Men aren’t as magnanimous as you imagine. If you’re blind in choosing a mate, you’ll only get burned,” Victor said. His gaze lingered on the damp strands trailing her collarbone. With a sharp motion, he snatched the towel from her hand and began rubbing her hair dry.

Lana froze, stunned. The intimacy jolted her with memories she didn’t want. He had done this before, back when they were together. Every time she washed her hair, he’d towel it dry, muttering about her catching a chill. Back then, she’d basked in it, her heart full.

Now, all she felt was awkwardness and the dangerous pull of nostalgia.

“That’s enough, Victor,” she said quickly, jerking back two steps. She shook her hair, droplets scattering like dew. “I’ll dry it myself with the hairdryer. If you’ve got something to say, say it plainly.”

Victor’s brows tightened. For a long moment he said nothing, then asked in a low, firm voice, “Do you truly feel nothing for Kade?”

“By the Moon, no!” Lana blurted instantly, hands raised as if swearing an oath. “I swear it—I don’t have the slightest interest in him.”

This was one misunderstanding she could not afford to let fester,

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A Warrior Luna's Awakening

Third Person’s POV

Victor’s voice cut like a blade in the quiet apartment.

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“The first time, it was at the Runestone Grounds lodge. The second, in Kade’s flat. Where will the next be, Lana? Perhaps... your own den?”

His words landed with the sharpness of an Alpha’s challenge.

Lana froze. Her pulse quickened, but she forced her tone to remain even. “Coincidence. That’s all it ever was. Nothing more. Surely you know that your nephew already has someone he cares about.”

Victor's eyes narrowed, a glint of mockery flashing in their depths. "You mean Freya Thorne, don't you? But men's desire and men's affection... are two very different things. He may not love you, but if you're harboring thoughts you shouldn't, it won't take much for the wrong things to happen."

The words struck deep. Lana's breath caught, her mind unbiddenly summoning memories she had long buried. The night she overheard him. The cruel laughter. The way his friends had spoken, and how he had let them.

So, that was all she had ever been to him. A distraction. Something to burn away time and lust.

Her lips curved in a brittle smile. "Victor, are you simply judging me by your own measure? Because you, even without caring for me, could still take me to your bed. And so you think all men must be the same?"

For once, Victor faltered. He blinked, caught off guard. "What are you implying?"

"That Kade is nothing like his uncle," Lana said sharply.

Victor's eyes narrowed into slits, the lines of his face darkening with irritation. "You put such faith in him? Do you truly believe you understand the boy?"

"I don't understand him deeply," Lana admitted, meeting Victor's gaze without flinching. "So I cannot say I trust him fully. But I trust Freya. Kade is her battle-brother, her friend, her confidant. A wolf who can bare his heart to Freya Thorne is not the kind to treat love like a game."

Victor gave a short, bitter laugh. "Then tell me, on what grounds do you claim that I am the kind of man who can lie with someone I do not love?"

10:03 Sat,

Sep 20

82

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Lana's chest tightened, but her answer came swift and sharp, like the snap of a whip. "Has Victor Ashford grown so forgetful? Don't you remember what you said in the private box that night, when your pack-brothers pressed you? Or must I remind you of your own words?"

His eyes darkened, predatory, wary. "What are you talking about?"

She lifted her chin. “You told them that I was nothing more than a way to kill time. A diversion. Not a mate. Not even a bond worth mentioning. And I heard it, Victor. Every word. So I left. I refused to remain your distraction.”

The silence that followed hit harder than any blow.

Victor’s body went rigid, his expression carved from stone. For a heartbeat, even his breath seemed to stop. Then he rasped, voice unsteady, “You... heard that?”

“Yes,” Lana said, her smile edged with self-mockery. “I heard it all. And I learned something important that day—that there are men who, even without love, will still claim a woman’s body. And I want no part of that again.”

Victor’s chest rose sharply. His heart hammered against his ribs with a violence he hadn’t felt in years. The weight of her words dragged the air from the room.

“So you ended us... because of what you overheard?” he asked, his tone lower now, tinged with something almost raw.

Lana lowered her gaze, her lashes hiding the storm in her eyes. It hadn’t been the only reason. There had been others, darker and heavier. But this one was reason enough. And he didn’t need to know the rest.

“Yes,” she said simply. “I heard, and I walked away. Or would you have preferred I stayed—kept warming your bed, kept playing the convenient role of your fling?”

Her laugh was soft, but it cut like glass. “If you came today to warn me away from Kade, don’t trouble yourself. I will never look at him like that. I won’t risk being entangled in your bloodline again. Imagine how amusing it would be for me, having once shared your bed, to later call myself your nephew’s mate. Festivals, gatherings, the High Moon feasts—we’d sit across the same table, playing family. Do you think I’d stomach such humiliation?”

Victor’s face darkened into shadow, the fury of a wolf barely leashed. His eyes gleamed with the dangerous light of a predator ready to snap chains.

Meanwhile, in the heart of the Capital, Jocelyn Thorne arrived at the detention center. Her steps faltered as **she** crossed the cold stone threshold. She had only been back in the city for a handful of days, and already disaster had struck: Aurora, the Bluemoon Pack’s proud Beta- daughter, had been seized and thrown into a cell.

10:03 **Sat, Sep 20**

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Her aunt and uncle were frantically searching for counsel, but the Capital's Four Great Firms- each run by packs allied with the ruling Alphas-had closed their doors with chilling finality. No one would touch Aurora's **case**. No one dared. The family had been forced to beg lawyers from Deepmoor and beyond.

The Bluemoon had already washed their hands of Aurora, severing ties as if she were a curse.

Only through tangled favors and pulled strings had Jocelyn managed to see her.

In the sterile meeting hall, Aurora's eyes burned with fury, her nails clawing faint crescents into the table. "It's Freya Thorne's fault. If not for her, I wouldn't be trapped here like this!"

Jocelyn hesitated. Her voice was quiet when she spoke. "The Thornes won't intervene. My father has already said so. This matter touches blood and death. The Stormveil elders have forbidden involvement."

Aurora's expression didn't even flicker, as if she'd expected this. "It doesn't matter. I still have Caelum. He won't abandon me. I carry his child now. He'll be forced to protect me. I've already filed for release under the Lunar Severance Clause-pregnancy shields me. Soon, I'll be free of this wretched place."

Jocelyn's eyes widened. "You're pregnant?"

Aurora's lips curved, her voice dripping with triumph. "Yes. This pup is my salvation. With it, Caelum Grafton is bound to me. He won't cast me aside." Her gaze sharpened, and she leaned closer. "And you, Jocelyn... if you value your position, you had better secure Silas Whitmor. Without him, you'll find no place left in the Stormveil branch."

Her words struck like iron. Jocelyn swallowed hard. Of course she understood. She had been standing on the margins of the family for too long. Without Silas's strength, she would wither and be forgotten.

Leaving the detention center, Jocelyn's thoughts swirled. Her cousin's venom still clung to her ears, echoing truths she could not ignore.

A black vehicle slid to a halt before her, its polished surface gleaming like a predator's hide. The door opened. Wren, the private aide of Silas Whitmor, stepped out. His voice was smooth, professional, but carried the unmistakable authority of his Alpha.

"Jocelyn Thorne. Silas requests your presence."

The weight of destiny seemed to settle on her shoulders as she stared at the waiting car.

3/3

The Novel will be updated first on this website. Come back and continue reading tomorrow, everyone!