

A Warrior Luna's Awakening

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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?"

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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.

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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.

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Jocelyn's heart skipped when the sleek black WolfComm vehicle pulled up before her. Since that day she had admitted in front of Freya that Silas had another woman in his heart, she had not seen him again. Back then, she had even entertained a hope that this revelation might drive a wedge between Silas and Freya—perhaps even end their bond entirely.

But the truth was far more bitter. Aurora, the newly appointed female pilot of the Bluemoon Airborne Wing, had been detained—and Jocelyn now knew from her that Freya had orchestrated it. And even worse, Silas had assisted Freya in her plan, making him her ally in this matter.

"Jocelyn," Aurora's words had echoed in her mind, sharp and deliberate, "Silas is fully Freya's supporter now. Within the Whitmore family, you'll have no protector left."

The sting of truth settled cold and heavy over her. Aurora could see Jocelyn's precarious standing in the Stormveil Pack's first branch. How could Jocelyn deny it to herself?

She tried to steady her voice. "Does Wren know why Silas wants to see me?" she asked cautiously, keeping her tone even, masking the tight coil of unease in her chest.

"Miss Thorne, when you meet Silas, you will understand," Wren replied, his face impassive, his every movement efficient, like a wolf patrolling his Alpha's territory.

The car door opened. A pack of silent bodyguards flanked the vehicle, their presence a silent assertion of dominance. Jocelyn knew that refusal would not be an option; they would not hesitate to drag her into the car. Swallowing her apprehension, she slid into the seat.

The vehicle glided through the streets of the Capital, its blacked-out windows reflecting the neon lights in a streaked blur. Soon, it arrived at the Whitmore ancestral estate, an imposing fortress of redwood and steel, the very image of Alpha authority.

Jocelyn followed Wren through the grand halls, her steps echoing against marble floors polished to a shine. At last, she was brought before Silas Whitmor.

He sat in a high-backed mahogany chair, his posture flawless, his presence radiating lethal calm. The sharp lines of his tailored suit clung to his form, while the piercing golden eyes, the Alpha's signature, held a contradictory warmth when they fell upon Freya—but icy command when they rested on Jocelyn. The contrast gnawed at Jocelyn's mind like a predator's scent marking its territory, and jealousy churned within her.

Silas's gaze cut into her. Jocelyn could see clearly the difference in how he looked at Freya and

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the way he now regarded her. His attention was not casual, nor distracted—it was singular, focused, and burning. Yet, she could not deny her own worth. She was no weaker, no less cunning.

“Alpha Silas,” she began, forcing confidence into her voice, “did you summon me because of what I said the other day? To reproach me for speaking the truth?” Her tone was sharp. “I only spoke what I knew. Ultimately, your feelings for Freya... perhaps they're merely a reflection of someone from your past. A placeholder.”

Silas's lips curved into a brief, humorless smile. “A placeholder?” he echoed, the sound carrying both amusement and scorn. “I never take a substitute. If I desire someone, it is that individual—and that individual alone. A hundred similar faces, a hundred fleeting shadows... they are meaningless.”

Jocelyn's heart thudded in disbelief. “But... but haven't you always searched for that girl? Haven't you longed for her? If Freya were not a replacement, how could you fall for her so quickly?”

Silas's brow knit, a storm brewing in his amber gaze. “Quick?” he asked softly. “No. It is far too slow.”

He would have acted sooner. If his feelings had bloomed the moment he saw Freya, he would have ended her previous ties swiftly, not waste time watching them fester.

“I searched for that girl because she saved my life,” Silas continued, voice steady and calm, each word deliberate, Alpha authority radiating in every syllable. “I owe her a debt. My love for Freya? That is because she is Freya—unique, unyielding, unreplaceable.”

Even if both girls had shone in his eyes, he distinguished between obligation and unrelenting passion, between gratitude and the irreversible pull of the heart.

Jealousy and defiance flared across Jocelyn's face. “What could Freya possibly have that makes you love her so? What makes her so special?”

Silas's expression did not soften. "What makes her special is no concern of yours. I summoned you here to warn you: should you ever speak slander against Freya in her presence again, I will personally *see* to it that your tongue is removed."

The words fell like a blade across Jocelyn's mind, icy and absolute. Her blood ran cold. "You... you would have my tongue removed... all for Freya?"

Silas's gaze hardened to stone. "I would do far worse, if necessary," he said, his voice calm, unflinching, like a wolf laying down the law of the pack. His eyes were cold, yet the subtle gleam hinted at the deadly potential behind them.

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The memory of her uncle's warning shivered through her. "Jocelyn, do not provoke Silas again. He took your eye once without hesitation. Should he truly set his wrath upon you, the damage would be far greater."

A secret lingered at the tip of her tongue—one that could bind Silas to her, or destroy her utterly. The thought of revealing it now made her skin crawl. She realized that even the hint of betrayal could ignite the predator within him.

"Do you understand my warning?" Silas asked, his voice soft but carrying the menace of a wolf pack's bite.

Jocelyn nodded hastily, swallowing hard. "Y-yes... I understand," she stammered.

A shadow of dissatisfaction flickered across his face. Silas raised a hand, and one of his lieutenants stepped forward. With the swift precision of an Iron Fang Recon operative, the subordinate's hand shot toward Jocelyn's mouth in a strike meant to enforce obedience, to demonstrate the lethal consequences of underestimating a Whitmor Alpha.

Every muscle in her body tensed, instinctively aware of the Alpha's unspoken command: respect, or pay the price. The scent of his dominance—the unmistakable aura of predator and pack authority—permeated the room. Jocelyn realized in that instant that she was no longer negotiating with a man, but a force of nature shaped by Silverfang Pack blood and the relentless logic of the Ironclad Coalition.

And if she misstepped... even by a word, even by thought, she would discover just how absolute that power could be.

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Jocelyn's scream split the heavy air of the Whitmore estate, a raw, panicked sound that only seemed to provoke the Alpha seated before her. One sharp slap, and her lips split, blood immediately mingling with the metallic taste of fear.

"Continue," Silas Whitmor said with casual indifference, his amber eyes barely lifting from the leather-bound tome in his hands. The air around him was cold, predatory, as if the very walls of the Whitmore estate held their breath at his command.

Another slap landed across Jocelyn's face, then another—relentless, precise. The taste of iron filled her mouth as blood welled from her lips, the stinging pain blossoming into a fiery haze. She gasped between strikes, her voice cracking. "P-please... spare me... Whitmor... have mercy..."

She had known of Silas's ruthlessness. She had seen it firsthand, watched him manipulate, dominate, and crush opposition, and in her arrogance, she had believed herself immune. She had thought herself clever, different, untouchable, and that his cruelty was reserved for fools who dared provoke him.

But now, when the cruel precision of his hand fell upon her own body, the reality was starkly different. Pain and fear coursed through her veins in a way she had never truly understood before. The world blurred around her as another strike landed, then another, until her face was numb, her body trembling from the exertion of resisting the inevitable.

"Jocelyn Thorne," Silas said again, voice smooth and dangerous, "do you understand now?"

"Y-yes... I understand..." she murmured, the words spilling through bloodied lips. But beneath the surface, her resentment only deepened. How could he do this, all for Freya?

"Whitmor... you truly believe Freya will forgive everything you do? No matter the wrongs, she will embrace you, shield you?" Jocelyn's words cut through the room, her pride as fierce as her pain.

"She will forgive me," Silas said calmly, his voice carrying the unyielding weight of an Alpha. "Because I will never give her reason to truly despise me. Freya and I... we will grow old together. But you—those thoughts you harbor that should never exist—you'd better lock them away."

Jocelyn laughed, a bitter, hollow sound, tears stinging her eyes. "And if you... if you have ever done something Freya despises? Will she forgive that too? I look forward to seeing that day!" Her words were venom wrapped in despair.

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By the time Silas returned to his private chambers later that evening, Freya Thorne lay sprawled across the sofa, clutching a photograph. Her delicate fingers held an image of a family of four—her family, captured in a single moment of joy and warmth.

Silas approached cautiously, his gaze softening as it fell on the photograph. He traced the outline of Eric Thorne's face, the brother who had vanished years ago. His voice, barely a whisper, betrayed the rare fragility of an Alpha whose pack loyalty extended beyond mere politics.

"If I find you... tell me, Freya... will you forgive me?" he muttered, more to himself than to her.

He set the photo gently on the glass-top coffee table, intending to lift Freya and carry her to her room when her eyes, previously closed in sleep, opened. His body froze. Even his voice faltered slightly. "When did you wake?"

"I heard you murmuring over the photograph," Freya said, sitting upright, her gaze steady. "Are you feeling unwell?"

"No," he replied, masking the storm within with a casual shrug.

Freya's instincts as a Thorne were keen. She pulled him down onto the sofa beside her, pressing her palm to his forehead. "Hm. Your temperature's normal... but your expression- why so grim?"

"Company matters," he said, the excuse light, but it did little to mask the tension that radiated from him like wolf-fire. "It's been... demanding these past few days."

"By the way," she asked, curiosity flickering, "what were you muttering about that photograph?" Her sharp gaze caught the flicker of emotion in his eyes—he thought she had not heard.

"I... I only wished to locate your brother as soon as possible," he said, careful, measured, aware of the weight behind his words.

Freya's lips curved in a small, grateful smile. "Thank you," she said softly. She knew the depth of his involvement—that the Whitmore family's intelligence networks had been mobilized to assist her.

"As your protector, and because he is your brother, I must," he said quietly, pressing down the guilt he carried. Years of inaction weighed heavily—had he intervened sooner, Eric Thorne might have been safe long ago.

"Rest if you're tired," Freya suggested, attempting to shift the moment toward care. She rose slightly, but Silas's hand caught her wrist with a firm, possessive grip.

"Kiss me," he said suddenly, his voice low, commanding yet unsteady.

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Freya froze, disbelief flickering across her features. "What?"

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“Kiss me,” he repeated, eyes dark with a strange urgency. “Do it, and I will feel whole again.”

Despite the absurdity, Freya’s instincts as a wolf recognized the Alpha’s need for connection, the raw vulnerability beneath his command. She raised her hand, placing it firmly under his jaw. “Fine.”

The kiss was gentle at first, exploratory, a meeting of heat and breath. His left hand circled her waist, anchoring her to him, while his right cupped the back of her head, drawing her closer. The world around them seemed to fade into shadows and warmth, a wolf’s intimacy manifesting in the delicate press of lips and the steady thrum of heartbeats.

Just as Freya leaned back to end the kiss, Silas’s dominance surged. He deepened the kiss with sudden intensity, a consuming fire meant to stake claim, to merge their breaths into one.

“Mm...” Freya murmured, struggling slightly. She could break away with ease, her strength and reflexes honed as part of the Stormveil Pack, but Silas’s hold was ironclad, an unspoken assertion of his position as an Alpha—and as the one she had chosen to trust, even amidst his relentless power.

The kiss lingered, a predator and mate in perfect equilibrium, a moment that spoke of loyalty, obsession, and the inescapable bond of wolf blood coursing through both of them.

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Third Person’s POV

The kiss Silas pressed upon Freya was not tender—it was a raw, feral hunger that clawed at the edges of reason. She tried to pull away, to put distance between them, but it was as if the Alpha’s desire was a living thing, wrapping around her and rooting her in place. His strength, tempered by the restraint of a lifetime as Ironclad Coalition’s Alpha, made any attempt at escape futile.

Time blurred into moments, breaths mingling in a rhythm older than the packs themselves, until finally, Silas broke the kiss, his chest heaving with restrained fire. His lips hovered near her ear, the low, gravelly murmur sending shivers down her spine.

“Freya... don’t ever leave me,” he breathed.

She chuckled softly, her own voice warm and teasing. “Silly, how could I ever leave you?”

Silas’s amber eyes softened just enough for vulnerability to flicker through the predatory mask. “Exactly... how could you? There’s no one in this world who could love you like I do.”

The night passed in tangled shadows and whispered promises. By the morning, Freya was weary yet restless, the remnants of Alpha fire lingering in her veins like wildfire. When she and Lana Rook walked through the gleaming halls of the Ashbourne Commerce Center to attend the bid conference, Lana couldn’t help but tease her.

“Quite the... intense evening?” Lana said, eyes flicking to Freya’s high-necked blouse, concealing traces of the night before.

Freya’s cheeks tinged pink, a flutter of discomfort under her calm exterior. Silas had been insatiable, a predator feeding on her body as though it were a hunt he had waited years to pursue. She sometimes wondered if he had taken some mysterious elixir—his appetite, his fervor, seemed almost inhuman.

“Well...” Freya admitted reluctantly, “he did say I’m his first woman...”

Lana whistled softly, remembering Victor Ashford, her former partner in the Capital. Even he, with all his composed façade, had become a reckless beast once the barrier of restraint fell. Wolves, it seemed, bore their animal instincts beneath the veneer of civility.

Then realization struck Lana like lightning. “Wait... you’re saying Silas Whitmor... had never...?”

Freya nodded, a wry smile tugging at her lips. “No one before me.”

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Lana’s jaw practically hit the floor. “No way... that’s... insane. He’s... so... pure in that sense?”

“Yes,” Freya confirmed with a soft shrug. “Believe it or not.”

The two women laughed quietly, the humor in the absurdity of it settling between them, before Lana’s expression turned serious. “After this, come with me to the sanctuary.”

“Sanctuary?” Freya asked, curious.

“To offer prayers,” Lana said simply. “I’ve had... a string of bad omens lately. Can’t hurt to clear the air.”

Freya humored her friend, lighting incense and kneeling as Lana guided her through the ritual. But the stillness of the sacred space was abruptly shattered by a sharp, cutting voice.

“Freya Thorne! How dare you show your face here?”

She turned, her amber eyes locking on the intruders—Eleanor and her daughter, Giselle. Freya’s body tensed, the wolf inside her bristling at their insolence.

“This is a place anyone can come,” Freya said calmly, though her claws of irritation flexed invisibly beneath the surface.

“People like

you don't come here to pray," Giselle sneered, her tone dripping with disdain. "It's the result of all the sins you've committed. No wonder you can't find your brother—it's karma catching up with you!"

Lana's face contorted with anger. "Your family's manners are atrocious. Giselle, how dare speak like that?"

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"She speaks the truth!" Eleanor defended, her voice shrill. "Otherwise, how could her brother remain missing all these years?"

Freya stepped forward, eyes flashing ice. "Do you dare repeat that?" she said, voice low, dangerous. Every word carried the weight of her lineage—the Stormveil Primal Hall, the Ashbourne Legion's Hall of Martyrs, the honor of a family who had sacrificed generations for pack and country.

Giselle lifted her chin, defiance burning in her eyes. "I can say it as many times as I like. Your sins catch up to you. The gods will not help you!"

In a blur, Freya's wolf instincts took over. She struck out, a perfect arc of strength and precision, landing her foot squarely on Giselle's knee. Giselle's knees buckled; she fell to the ground with a cry of pain, unable to rise.

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Freya's hand pressed down on her shoulder, a weight impossible to resist. Giselle struggled, but Freya's wolf-enhanced strength pinned her like iron. Every movement was an assertion of power and justice, a reminder that she was no ordinary girl.

"Freya, let her be!" Lana barked, restraining Eleanor as she lunged. "She deserves this—her arrogance, her lies, her cruelty!"

Giselle cried out, the mixture of fear and pain sharp in the air. "Let me go! Freya, release me!"

Her eyes met Freya's, the storm within the Thorne girl unyielding. "Kneel and apologize!" Freya demanded, the sound of her voice resonating through the sanctuary, a pack Alpha's command woven with righteous fury.

"Why should I?" Giselle spat, defiance intact but trembling.

"Because my family bled for honor, for this land, for our packs!" Freya's voice rang, the weight of centuries of Thorne loyalty and sacrifice threading every syllable. "My parents gave their lives for the greater good. My brother disappeared serving the nation. And I.... I have done nothing but uphold the legacy of my family and my pack. You accuse me of misdeeds? Then name one—what sin have I committed?"

Her words thundered through the marble halls of the sanctuary, sorrow and rage intertwined, the pain of being the last of a lineage of warriors, the last sentinel of the Stormveil Pack's honor, sharpening her tone.

Visitors froze, hesitant, the authority and presence of Freya Thorne, the last loyal scion of the Stormveil, imposing itself like the weight of the moon over the forests.

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Giselle froze, caught completely off guard. She had never imagined that the Thorne family, the very bloodline of Freya Thorne, was one of unbroken loyalty and sacrifice—the kind that ran deep through generations of pack warriors.

“Even if... your family has a legacy of honor, that doesn't give you the right to force me to kneel!” Giselle shouted, struggling, panic flaring across her features.

Freya's amber eyes turned ice-cold, the power of her wolf pack heritage radiating from her like moonlight cutting through darkness. “You say that again, and I will make you apologize before the gods. Do you think there's anything I cannot do?”

The moment the words left her lips, her hand came down with the authority of a born Alpha. Giselle's head was forced toward the marble floor of the sanctuary. Each strike of Freya's hand, controlled but unyielding, compelled Giselle to bow her forehead. The world narrowed to nothing but the cold stone beneath her and the oppressive force of Freya's strength.

One... two... three...

Giselle cried out between the strikes, her protests becoming a mixture of pain and fury. “Let me go! Let me go!”

Eleanor lunged forward, desperate to shield her daughter, but Lana Rook's quick reflexes intercepted her. "Stay back!" Lana barked, holding Eleanor firmly in place. "This is what she deserves!"

"You... you vile woman!" Eleanor shouted. "How dare you treat my daughter like this? I'll report you!"

"Go ahead!" Lana shot back, her tone dripping with scorn. "Go report her! Let Freya put your daughter on a military tribunal for insulting a soldier! Let's see who comes out on top."

Eleanor's face paled, her anger dimming slightly. "She... she wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't dare?" Lana scoffed. "Do you really think Freya Thorne is some soft little girl you can toy with? She tolerated your nonsense before, when you were her elder. Now, she is no one's subordinate, and she answers to no one but her pack and her honor."

Meanwhile, Giselle continued her unwilling obeisance, forced down by Freya's iron grip. Every bow of her head was a blow to her pride, each one a silent testament to the strength of the Stormveil blood coursing through Freya. The sanctuary echoed with the sounds of

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submission, Giselle's protests muffled by the inevitability of Freya's command.

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Eighteen strikes. Eighteen humiliating bows. Only after the last did Freya finally release her grip. Giselle stumbled to her feet, her pride in tatters, while Eleanor's hands twitched, unsure whether to lash out again.

Then, a voice cut through the tense air like a blade. "Mother... Giselle... what's happening here?"

Giselle froze, and Eleanor's hands faltered. Caelum Grafton had appeared, his sharp gaze falling on Freya. The very sight of him made Giselle's previous defiance crumble. For days, Caelum had searched for Freya, turning over every corner of his estate in the Capital, desperate to locate the woman who had haunted his thoughts.

He had intended to find her, to apologize for every wrong he had done, every injustice he had allowed to happen to her. And now, before he could even seek her out, fate—or perhaps pack instinct—had drawn him here.

“Brother!” Giselle's voice shifted instantly, her earlier courage evaporating. She rushed to Caelum's side, pointing accusingly at Freya. “Brother, she forced me—she forced me to kneel before the sanctuary gods and apologize!”

“Indeed,” Eleanor chimed in, her voice full of triumph. “Giselle suffered so terribly at her hands! You must set things right for your sister, Caelum!”

But Caelum barely seemed to register their words. His amber gaze, wolf-sharp and unrelenting, was locked on Freya. He barely even noticed the protestations of his mother and sister, so consuming was his awareness of the Alpha standing before him.

Freya's voice, cool as winter frost, sliced through the air. “Caelum Grafton... do you intend to intervene for them?”

“Intervene?” Caelum paused, his mind recalibrating to the human conventions around him.

“My sister insulted me, claiming my brother's absence is the result of my misdeeds and bad karma. I demanded she kneel and apologize. But it seems she has yet to truly admit fault... and if necessary, I will continue until she does,” Freya said, her voice carrying the full weight of her pack and family honor.

Shock registered on Caelum's face. “You actually said that?”

“And what is wrong with saying it?” Giselle’s eyes blazed. “She has done nothing but spread misfortune. Aurora herself suffered because of her actions—lost her position, even landed in detention. If it weren’t for Freya, Aurora would be thriving. Brother, your silence would allow her to escape justice.”

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Before Freya could finish, a sharp slap cut through the tension. Caelum’s hand had struck Giselle across the face with the authority of a pack Alpha, commanding respect and obedience. “Apologize to Freya immediately,” he said, voice low but deadly.

Giselle’s hands flew to her face, stunned, as disbelief and fear overtook her. Never had Caelum, her powerful brother and head of SilverTech Forgeworks, struck her for speaking out against anyone. Not even for Freya.

“Caelum, why did you hit Giselle? She should have been scolding Freya, not the other way around!” Eleanor cried, rushing to her daughter’s side.