

## Chapter 4

I stared at the remnants of the cake still clinging to my hands.

Wiping away my tears, I sighed. What a waste of all my hard work. Then again, if it took a few cakes to truly see someone for who they were, perhaps it wasn't such a bad trade-off after all.

Tonight was the family dinner where I'd officially meet Lucas for the first time. Naturally, I wanted to leave a good impression. After freshening up and collecting myself, I headed down to the underground parking lot.

From a distance, I noticed a car rocking subtly.

As I approached, it became clear—it was Ryan's Rolls-Royce. The driver's side window was slightly ajar, revealing Ryan cradling Willow in his lap. Her half-lidded eyes glimmered with intoxicated passion, and her soft, breathy moans filled the air as her body moved rhythmically against his.

Though I'd long accepted that Ryan didn't love me, the unexpected sight still hit me like a punch. My heart clenched reflexively.

Ryan opened his eyes, which locked onto mine. For a fleeting moment, his gaze faltered, betraying a hint of panic. Then, as if to mock me, he brushed Willow's hair aside and kissed her with deliberate intensity, clearly aiming to provoke me.

Their movements grew more exaggerated, and Willow's muffled cries echoed shamelessly throughout the parking lot. My wolf stirred angrily within me, snarling at the audacity of these two disgraceful beings.

I took a deep breath, suppressed my wolf's rage, and walked away without a word. I climbed into my car and drove off, heading toward the Silver Claws estate.

On the way, I stopped to pick up the tie I had prepared as a gift for Lucas.

When I arrived at Silver Claws Manor, I was surprised to find Ryan pulling in at the same time.

As he opened his car door, I was hit by the unmistakable stench of his and Willow's frenzied escapades. The car interior was littered with discarded rubbers, a sordid display of their actions. Ryan's face showed a brief flash of embarrassment, but it quickly transformed into smug confidence when his eyes landed on the gift in my hands. He thought I was still infatuated with him.

"You bought me a present?" he sneered. "Let me see."

I stepped back, clutching the box behind me. "It's not for you."

Ryan chuckled lightly, as if I wasn't worth the effort to argue. He blew a lazy ring of smoke and said, "You saw what happened in the parking lot, didn't you? Look, I know you're into me, and you can't live without me. But I've already told you before, haven't I? I'll give you a wedding, but my mate bond is with Willow. She's the one making sacrifices here. She'll be my true mate from now on, so it's completely natural for us to sleep together. She'll even stay at the house sometimes, so you might as well get used to it. I'm doing this for your sake too."

Though I had no intention of marrying him anymore, his brazen shamelessness still left me speechless. As I turned to walk away, he grabbed my arm and issued another of his so-called reminders.

"Uncle Lucas will be at the family dinner tonight. He's a big deal for Silver Claws, so keep it classy, alright? I've done you a favor by bringing you here. If the elders ask about the mate bond, just say we've already established it. And one more thing—don't forget to apologize to Willow after dinner for cutting her earlier today. Otherwise, I can cancel the wedding anytime before it's official."

With that, Ryan strode into the dining hall of Silver Claws Manor as if he hadn't just spewed nonsense.

I took a deep breath, brushing off his words. It didn't matter. Soon enough, he'd know exactly who I was marrying.

Inside the dining hall, Lucas hadn't arrived yet, but the other elders had already taken their seats. Avoiding Ryan, I deliberately chose a spot farther away and left the seat beside me open for Lucas.

Ryan noticed my choice and frowned. He got up, walked over, and sat next to me with a scowl. "You're really making this a thing now, huh? I saved you a seat, and you're still pulling this attitude."

I furrowed my brow, annoyed, and was about to tell him the seat was meant for Lucas when the dining room doors opened.

A tall figure strode in. Lucas was clad in a sleek, silver-gray wolf fur coat, his heavy combat boots thudding against the floor with each confident step.