

The Alpha Games

Chapter 5 - An Alpha's order

Despite her pounding head, Maddie was in the Alpha's office, and standing before her father's desk, five minutes before he strode in from the morning training session. With a bit of makeup and luck on her side, she could cover most of the effects of her late night drinking, but she knew he would know anyway. His warriors had been on her for a reason, and she had done her best not to disappoint his low expectations of her. When the door to the office opened, her back pulled straighter and her shoulders squared, as she waited for his scrutiny.

The Alpha barely gave her a cursory glance, as he passed by and pulled the curtains behind his desk wide to let the morning sunlight pierce into the room. Maddie winced as the bright light cut across her vision, but she resisted turning away from its glare. The darkness had been a comfort against the storm in her head, but she hadn't expected it to last.

A thick silence held in the air. She supposed most families would greet each other with hugs and share stories of their time apart, but instead she was to stand there and wait for him to address her. Maddie hadn't expected anything less, and spent that time taking in the small differences of her father. Though she had seen him a few times over the past few years, when he had visited the Red Dawn pack, his visits had been brief and had never been for her. She couldn't help but notice the new greys in his hair and beard, and her eyes raised at the glasses he took from a draw when he turned to his paperwork.

Maddie sucked her teeth, knowing he was purposefully taking his time and turned her gaze to the floor-to-ceiling window behind him. It looked out over the entire pack, and they were even high enough to see the beginnings of the docks that laid at the east of their island. Beaches laid either side of the docks, but the terrain soon steepened to cliffs, which built to their highest point in the west where the packhouse stood proud, looking over its territory. The round island wasn't far from the mainland but was large enough to house the 1500 Silver Moon wolves. They were easily the largest pack in the kingdom and had proved in their history that they could live off the island resources if they came under siege.

"You stand like a warrior, did the lessons with Eleanor do nothing?"

Her hands were behind her back, opening her stance wide as she faced him. At his disapproval, Maddie brought her hands before her and clasped them lightly, resting them on her thighs. She hated standing like that. It urged the shoulders to curl in and the gaze to drop. It was submissive and went against everything she had grown up believing as the Alpha's daughter. Still, with the look on her father's face, she didn't want to piss him off further and just forced herself to stand tall despite the demure stance.

"Better." He grumbled, eyes returning to his papers. "Do you know how much work you've caused me? All the agreements with Red Dawn are being dissolved and questions from all our allies are flooding in now that the news is out. They're demanding to know what's going on and are questioning your..." He peered over his glasses, his gaze as sharp as his words. "Suitability for leadership."

Maddie had to grit her teeth against the tidal wave of anger that surged within her. Despite her training, her father always knew the right words to say to try and make her break her composure. However, she had grown in the last three years and swallowed the unwise comments that wanted to bubble free. "My suitability shouldn't be in question when I stopped a person unfit to be an Alpha from leading the pack. Leaving Daniel was the best for Silver Moon, and for me."

Her father hummed, but she couldn't tell if it was in agreement or not. Though he might act as her Alpha first, and father second, even he couldn't deny Daniel's behaviour was not befitting an Alpha who should value loyalty.

"And you had to drown your sorrows at The White Wolf? You racked up quite the tab I hear."

"I paid for my own drinks and shared the company of many Silver Moon wolves, all of whom were happy to see me home." Her jaw tightened as she countered. "And I was celebrating my birthday. Nothing more." Her tone was clipped, and she saw his eyebrow raise before adding, "Alpha."

"Perhaps you should go to an establishment better suited to your future title from now on." He mused in that voice that was less of a suggestion and more like an order.

"There's nothing wrong with a Luna being among her wolves."

Maddie held her head high as her words echoed to silence. It was a sore topic between them that had always been there. Her father was of the opinion that separation brewed respect, but she believed being among the people would make her a better leader. Maybe not when she was plastered, but showing the trust and familiarity to do that among civilians was a respect in itself. There weren't many areas she pushed back on, but that would always be one of them.

He sighed. "You're twenty-five now, Madeline." She had to bite back the surprise that he had remembered, not that he had wished her a happy birthday. "Your new status is unacceptable and must be changed."

The Alpha dropped his eyes to the paperwork piled before him, and she narrowed her gaze. Her skin crawled waiting for his next words, like they would hold the weight of her future. Maddie knew her father. He was an honourable Alpha who would look a wolf in the eye when he gave an order, to show the respect he held for them. The only time he couldn't was when he had to give an order he didn't want to give.

His reluctance made a lump thicken in her throat, but she forced it away. "My new status?"

"As single, Madeline." He sighed. "You are to take over the pack this year, you must have an Alpha to do it with." Her stomach tightened. She couldn't deny that she had wondered what would happen; maybe delay her accession until she found her match, or maybe a tour of all their allies to see if there were any compatible suitors. With the way her father's features tightened she knew it would be worse than anything like that. "The Alpha Games."

"No." The word slipped from her lips so quiet that her father continued as if he hadn't been heard.

"It's been many years since the last one was required, but the invitations have been sent to all our allies this morning and registration shall begin in a week."

A heavy weight dropped like lead in her stomach and a white noise filled her ears, drowning out the Alpha as he continued to explain the process. Maddie didn't hear a word.

The Alpha Games were a myth more than a practise that packs still followed. Future Lunas of the bigger packs actively searched out a compatible partner before their twenty-fifth birthday to avoid the games from ever happening,

because they stole almost all the choice from the Luna. Being in a strong pack and not having a compatible partner by twenty-five was so rare that Maddie didn't know when the last Alpha Games had been held, let alone seen one. All she knew was it would take away her right to choose her mate, and all their allies would be allowed to submit candidates to *compete* for her.

That included Red Dawn; which included Daniel.

Bile clawed up her throat at the thought of being forced to mate the man who had so publicly defiled their promises to each other.

"No." She shouted sharply.

Suddenly, a deep, growl erupted from her father. The sound rang with the authority he had held for twenty-three years and pierced through to the marrow of her bones, make them shake with the force of it. She cowed, her gaze dropping to the floor, though her eyes were wide, and tears dripped freely to the carpet, silencing their presence.

Her father marched towards her, stopping so she could see his boots, but she didn't dare to lift her gaze. Daughter or not, he was her Alpha and her leader.

"This isn't the choice any of us want, but you will *not* disrespect me like that." A quiet fury held in his voice, making her tremble and she screwed her fists tight in an attempt to keep them still. Her chest felt hollow with the words she wasn't allowed to say, as her lips pressed tight together. "There's no other option now, Madeline. Silver Moon *must* uphold our traditions and you *will* be mated and ascend to Luna before the year is out."

It was an order. An order which stripped her of all her choices and would serve her up on a platter for whichever man was strong enough to beat the others back. Whether he was twice her age, cruel, unfit to rule or even her ex. If they won, she was the prize. Maddie bit her lip to stop a whimper from escaping.

"Madeline!" Her father growled again, expecting an answer.

"Yes, Alpha." The words burned like acid on her tongue, but she had learned long ago that there was no running from a birth right, whether she wanted it or not.

She could feel the pressure of his scrutiny and her muscles tensed as if waiting for a physical blow to accompany the devastating decree he had made on her life. But it never came. Instead, he took pity on her, and in some ways that felt worse.

“Go get cleaned up. I know this isn’t what you want, but you will accept it with the grace of a Luna.”

Maddie’s fingernails bit into her palms as she accepted his order and then fled the office.