

## The Change

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James led me to a room in the pack house, and when we entered, he kindly took the time to explain everything I needed to know about my stay there. He excused himself gently, but I couldn't help but notice the look of pity on his face as he closed the bedroom door.

The sound of the door closing was the final blow, and the tears I had been holding back for so long finally descended. I collapsed on the floor of the room, hugging myself as I cried, not caring if anyone heard me as they passed by my door.

Sleep eluded me, no matter how many times I tried to force myself into it. The bed was comfortable, even soft. The room itself was simple and welcoming. None of these factors were the cause of my sleeplessness.

I was restless and anxious. My wolf was stirring inside of me, eager to come out, but I was afraid. I feared the pain that would accompany the transformation. It would be like the first time all over again.

How was I going to deal with this? My father had been the one to guide me through my first shift, but now I was all alone. Kaden couldn't care less about my predicament. In fact, he might even find joy in it.

Not many wolves have had to experience a second shift. It was more common during the Great War, when wolves were kept captive and, upon their eventual freedom, had to relearn how to be a wolf again. The pain was said to be excruciating for some, to the point where they died mid-shift. However, that was hundreds of years ago.

I wanted to cry again, but I couldn't. It seemed like my tears had dried

up from the ones I shed hours ago. I wanted to yell, but I couldn't. My father was already branded as a madman in his death, and I, his only living descendant, would also be labeled as mad. Never!

But I yearned for this pain to end, to dissipate. I longed for a moment of happiness. I deserved it; Diana was right.

After pacing around the room a few more times, I lay back in bed. I had no idea when sleep eventually enveloped me, until there was a knock on the door and I jolted upright.

I quickly rose to my feet and unlocked the door. A young lady with red hair stepped in. "We don't lock our doors in this place," she spat out in disgust, her nose scrunching up. I didn't need to be a fortune teller to know that this woman before me disliked me.

"I'm sorry," I apologized meekly. She didn't acknowledge my apology; instead, she thrust a few items into my chest, which I quickly grabbed before they fell to the floor.

"Get cleaned up and meet me downstairs," she added as she promptly exited the room

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As tempting as it was to spend time in the showers, I opted not to. The redhead looked like she would find any slight reason to punish me, and I couldn't take that chance. In a different situation, she would have acknowledged me as a Luna and bowed the moment she graced my presence. But she held no respect for me, nor for my mate. She had even called me a whore in front of his subjects. I had expected this hatred, but nothing truly prepares you for how painful it feels when it finally happens.

Once I was dressed, I left my room and descended the flight of stairs until I reached the ground floor. There, the redhead was angrily tapping her feet against the tiled floor.

"You're late!" she scolded.

"I apologize," I simply responded. There was no need to argue, even

though she hadn't given me a specific time frame to get ready when she dropped off the items in my room.

"Follow me," she said, once again not acknowledging my apology. She stormed out of the building, and I trailed behind her.

As we walked around the pack, I noticed many men and wolves training. Some stopped to stare at me, whispering among themselves, while others simply stared without commenting. The pack was indeed vast and beautiful. Eventually, we reached a building that I assumed was the dining hall.

We entered the hall, and immediately, I wished the ground would swallow me completely. The pack members had suddenly lost interest in their food the moment I stepped into the hall. I was now a person of interest. I tried to ignore the staring eyes and simply followed the redhead.

The dining hall was similar to the one in my former pack, but bigger, considering this pack had more wolves than RedSand. Kaden was seated at a table on a small podium. He seemed to have noticed my presence but made no reaction. He simply stared, just like the others. However, my attention shifted to the woman seated on his lap, sensually rubbing his chest.

I knew he had other women, but I didn't realize he would publicly display them. I felt jealous and sad at the sight before me, but I couldn't protest. Despite the whining of my wolf, no other mate would have tolerated it, but I was tolerating it. Why would I fight for a man who regarded me as nothing?

Unfortunately for me, the redhead was leading us straight to Kaden, and I had no choice but to follow. Kaden was well aware of the feeling of jealousy within me, even though we weren't yet bonded as mates. He could see the glistening tears in my eyes that I was struggling to hold back.

Finally, we reached the Alpha's table. The redhead bowed, greeting Kaden. "I have brought her as you requested," she said.

"Thank you, Ciara," Kaden replied, and now I knew the redhead's name. Ciara excused herself, leaving me alone in front of Kaden. The woman on his lap had stopped her seductive gestures and stared at me. I wondered if this was the Serena girl.

"You do not greet your Alpha!" Kaden's voice boomed across the hall, and I instantly flinched.

"G-good morning, Alpha," I bowed my head, while my heart threatened to jump out of my rib cage. Everyone's attention was undoubtedly fixed on us now. Kaden removed the woman from his lap as he stood up from his chair. James spared me a pitiful glance, while the blonde female beside him was simply stunned by everything happening. Well, that made two of us.

I knew Kaden's plan. He wanted to humiliate me to make himself feel better. But even if that was his plan, he would still be hurt. Regardless of the hatred he had for me, there was still a mate bond between us, and unless he rejected me, he would be affected too. He would feel a little bit of my pain.

"Kaden, don't do this," James whispered just loud enough for those at his table to hear. "She is your mate," he added. I smiled weakly. There was someone in this pack who cared a little about my feelings.

"A daughter of a rapist and killer is no mate of mine!" Kaden yelled. And if the pack hadn't known about my past before, they definitely knew who I was now. Kaden had sentenced me to a life of scrutiny.

Tears flowed down easily this time as I hugged my body with my hands.

"W-what?" The blonde lady beside James asked in confusion. She truly had not known my true identity, and I was sure the pack had no idea either. "What is going on, brother?" she asked again.

"Stay out of this, Serena," Kaden sternly said. Oh! So this was Serena, his sister, not his lover. I looked at her carefully, noticing the similarities in their facial features. If Serena was Kaden's sister, that would mean she is James' mate. How did I not think of that? My stupidity was

definitely at its peak. To think I felt jealous towards Serena.

Kaden's voice silenced Serena, undoubtedly using his Alpha authority. He coughed before continuing, "We have a visitor, my fellow pack members." He faked a smile towards me, and I could see the mischief and anger in his eyes. I stared at him, my eyes pleading with him to save me, to set me free, to let me go rather than subject me to a life of shame. He got the message, but his fake smile turned into a smirk before he turned back to the crowd.

The dining hall was now fuller compared to when I first arrived. He was going to shame me in front of his whole pack, me, his mate. My wolf was saddened, and so was I, but there was nothing I could do, though I wished to run and hide and never be seen again. Our mate, who was meant to love, shelter, and shield us, was the one throwing us into the den of lions, feeding us as a meal to his pack of wolves.

"Three years ago, your Luna Freya was killed by a madman along with my pup in the most brutal way. And now, three years have gone by, and this madman's daughter has decided to defy nature and the ways of the goddess," he announced. My heart sank. He blamed me for the bond. Did he think I planned this? Did he think I paired myself with a man who would hate me? He was letting his anger and guilt for Freya's death consume him, saying things to portray me as the villain.

There was murmuring in the crowd due to Kaden's statement. The wolves were agitated.

"Kaden, I... please don't do this to me," I fell on my knees in tears and begged.

"That is Alpha Kaden to you!" he boomed, ignoring my pleas. He released a deep breath before continuing, "Like I was saying, nature has played a trick on us and made this daughter of a monster my mate," he laughed in spite.

The entire hall became silent at his declaration for a few seconds before the murmurs continued. The pack was angry and disappointed with the turn of events. Serena was already crying, while James was

comforting her. Ciara had a wicked smile on her face as she watched my despair.

I felt my body weaken, the voices in the hall fading out, and the atmosphere changing. And then I felt it, the first crack, and I heard the scream that escaped my lips next.

My mind was in turmoil, and my wolf was scratching at the surface. Then the second crack came, even more painful than the first, and I screamed louder. Tears streamed down my eyes. Why now? Why did the change have to come now? Was this how I was going to die, in the midst of my haters and in pain?

The third crack came, and it sent my legs in another direction. I cried out from the pain, sweat beads forming all over my body.

I could hear Serena's worried voice saying, "Is she changing for the first time? We should help her."

The pack members had grown silent, and the murmuring had stopped as they watched me in my agonizing pain. The cracking stopped, and I lay on the ground, moaning and groaning in pain. I hadn't had a chance to rest when the fourth crack was heard, and I screamed again. I looked at the face of my mate in sadness. At least he got to enjoy seeing me in pain since that brought him joy.

And with the fifth crack, everything went blank.