

## Chapter 39 A Human Woman

Twenty elders, from neighboring packs, and regions were seated in the throne room, awaiting Alpha Edward's presence. It was already noon and none of them had heard any word concerning the hunt. Not even the head of council, Garrett Relish, who was almost like a member of the family.

So, they had gathered themselves and arranged an emergency meeting in the palace. Now, they were all present and seated comfortably, with Garrett at the head table.

Finally, Edward walked into the throne room. He had just been told by a palace guard that his elders were waiting for him. He managed to get himself prepared as quickly as he could both physically and mentally he knew why they were here. When he walked in, the elders bowed to him in unison.

"Your Highness, we greet you Alpha."

Edward looked around, he waved his hand in response to their greeting with a nervous smile on his face. He settled into the royal seat, the seat of his father and all the fathers before him. Within him, he prayed that his son would not lose this seat as a result of what he had done.

He looked around, Madeline and Lancelot were not here yet. After hearing about the arrival of the elders, he had begged his mother to alert his wife and son, while demanding for their presence.

"Tell them to meet me in the throne room, there is fire on the mountain," he had said.

Edward heaved a sigh.

"You can do this," he said to himself. He did not show it, but Edward was shaking within him. He feared for the future of his throne, for the future of his son. He only wished he had spoken to Madeline before showing up for this meeting. "Alpha Edward..." Garrett Relish, as head of the council of elders, was the first to speak.

"The ceremonial hunt of your son, and future Alpha King of this kingdom was to take place last night, and we are sure it did..." He paused, before turning to the rest of his elders.

"Or are we not?" he finally asked again.

"We are!" they chorused, even though their voices were not in harmony.

'It did not,' Edward thought to himself, but he said nothing.

"And yet, it is almost dusk, and we haven't heard a word about how the hunt went. We were all supposed to receive celebratory invites to drink and be merry over your son's accomplishment. But, up to the moment we stepped foot into the palace, there has been nothing of such..." He stopped to look around.

"And from what I'm seeing, no preparations are being made."

"At all!" an elder from the crowd of elders said aloud, other murmured in agreement.

Edward swallowed hard. His eyes looked around the room once more.

Where was Madeline?

"So, we are here as your elders and members of your royal cabinet, to ask you what is going on."

Edward sighed and looked towards the men again.

"Well, as you have noted, there would be no celebrations for my son's hunt..."

The murmurs that erupted from the elders was enough to deafen him. Annoyed, Edward screamed, demanding their silence and attention.

"As you all know, Lancelot is a very quiet and private man, so he decided to make it so," Edward stated, his tone taking a definite form.

But the elders would not budge.

"He is not even alpha yet, and he is changing tradition?!" a voice called out from the crowd.

"The ceremony is of as much importance as the ceremonial hunt! It is the day he is supposed to dine and wine with the sages of this pack! For our blessings!"

"Exactly!" Other elders cheered the speaker.

Garrett looked over to Edward, he noticed the faint sadness in the man's eyes. It was very tough to have a son as reserved as Lancelot, and Garrett knew. But, for the sole reason that Lancelot was to be his son-in-law in less than a month, he decided it would not hurt to help the young man out.

"My elders!" he called out. The room became silent at the mention of his voice.

"Let us not forget that we are in the presence of the Alpha. We cannot insult his authority with such meaningless noise making. Let us not forget that the man we are talking about is to be our Alpha in less than five days, we must respect him. It was one wolf from the Dankworth royal family that began the ceremonial breakfast. Therefore, it was very much allowed if another Dankworth wolf, intends to put an end to it," he spoke, earning him the full attention of his colleagues, and Edward too.

"Why would he not put an end to it, when his son has desecrated the sacredness of the ceremonial hunt," a female voice called from the end of the room.

They would have not listened to her, but she had just spoken about something very delicate to all of them.

Every head turned towards the door, including Edward's.

Hermione stood by the door, with Albert by her side.

Edward's heart skipped a beat. Was she not supposed to be at the hospital with Edward till tomorrow? What were they doing here now?

As she turned to the seat of the throne, her eyes met Edward's. Hermione stared deeply into her brother's cold eyes.

"Forgive me brother, but I am first my father's daughter and a daughter of this pack, before I am your sister. And I just fulfill my responsibilities to the land in which I was raised," Hermione said aloud, turning her face away from Edward. By this time, the elders had grown curious. They all exchanged glances, anticipating what Hermione had to say.

"If you have something to say, say it already!" a man called out.

"Yes, why do you keep us waiting?" another voice came.

"You cannot keep us in suspense for so long! Talk to us."

Hermione was going to speak again, but Albert held his mother back. When she turned towards him, there was a wry smile on his lips.

This blow was his to deliver.

He stepped forward and bowed to Edward and the elders.

"My uncle, the Alpha, I greet you Your Grace. Elders of this royal cabinet, I greet you as well." But nobody replied. There was so much tension in the air for them to bother about exchanging greetings. He stepped forward again, using his both hands to gesture around the room.

Edward's heart thundered against his chest. He had thought that he would be able to settle the elders and put the matter behind him. Now that Hermione was here, she was determined to bring everything to light. It was only now that Edward understood why Madeline had always said Hermione was not to be trusted.

When Albert got to the middle of the large throne room, he looked around and spoke.

"There was no ceremonial breakfast after the hunt, because there was no hunt."

Once again, murmurs erupted from around the room, like magma from a volcano. No one could believe what they had just heard.

There was no hunt? It was always scheduled for a blood moon, and there was to be no blood moons again in this season, so did they intend to wait till next season for Lancelot's coronation?

However, Garrett was the one most bothered by this revelation. The more the hunt delayed, the more his daughter's marriage to Lancelot would be pushed aside.

What had happened?

"Did you say, there was no hunt?" Garrett asked, just to be sure he had heard correctly. When Albert smiled and turned to Edward, Garrett's eyes fell on the Alpha as well. Edward's eyes were burning with rage, even though the rest of his body failed to show it.

Did they have something they were keeping away from them?

Garrett did not need to ask anymore, because the answer slipped out of Albert's mouth immediately.

"The hunt was obstructed by a human female..."

Garrett's eyes widened.

"A what?!" The entire hall was thrown into pandemonium. There was so much noise, no one could hear themselves. Edward sat quietly, ready to watch the drama unfold in front of him. "The human female was brought here by the prince, Lancelot. I know so, because he abandoned the hunt, after almost killing me, to rescue the girl, the IMPOSTOR, from my hold." Garrett could not believe his ears, neither could his colleagues. Around him, people continued to murmur, but he stood straight, looking around and saying absolutely nothing. Just then, Madeline stomped into the throne room, but no one paid any mind to her. Confused, she turned to her husband. When their gazes locked, Madeline's heart fell.

They knew, they all knew. She turned back to look at the figure she had brushed past while entering the throne room. Madeline had been in such a hurry that she did not note the face before. Her eyes met with Hermione's smiling face. Madeline wanted nothing more than to walk to her and crack her skull against the wall.

Behind her, Lancelot casually strolled into the throne room. He wore his usual aloof look, and walked with so much assurance in his steps, he did not mind that he was walking into his own demise. Somehow, the elders seemed to notice his presence, because they all became silent and turned to the door.

"You!" an elder cried out.

Lancelot stood by his mother and looked up at the man who was pointing fingers at him. With a casual shrug, he looked away from the man and focused his eyes on his mother.

"He even has the guts to hold his head high after what he's done!" an angry voice called out from the elders.

Madeline's eyes pleaded with Lancelot to at least show some sign of remorse, but he did no such thing. "He has desecrated this land! And put every single one of us in danger!"

"A human woman? A human woman? In the Royal palace? Such an abomination has never been seen before!"

"We expect better from the heir to the throne. What would happen after you're alpha? You would allow the witches, vampires and only the goddess knows what, into our lands and have them frolick with our females!"

Amidst their accusations and yells, Lancelot stayed quiet. It was obvious on his face that he did not care, or did not see the reason why the elders were so furious. Madeline moved to him to pinch him, but Lancelot did not look down at her. His gaze was focused on Albert. His cousin had a smug smile on his face. At that moment, Lancelot regretted not biting his neck off, or even scratching Albert's eyes out.

"Elders, wait!" Madeline tried to intervene, but she was shut out.

"We would not let you speak for your son's evil, Your Majesty. If there is any bone of integrity in him, let him speak for himself." It was Garrett who spoke this time, his eyes narrowed on his future son-in-law.

He was still finding it hard to believe. And he hoped, for Ava's sake, that it was not true. Even if it was, he hoped that Lancelot would have a good explanation to give to the council. It was clear that the elders were not taking the matter lightly at all.

Hearing the man question his authority was more than enough to cause Lancelot to look away from Albert, to the elderly man.

If talking was going to shut them all up, then he would talk.

However, Lancelot knew he had to be careful. This was his fight, and it was obvious neither his mother nor his father was allowed to intervene.