## **Chapter 3 THE PACK NEEDS A LUNA**

## XAVIER'S POV

I lay in a cave surrounded by a dozen beautiful, naked she-wolves. Each had pledged herself to me when I saved them from vampires who had used them as blood whores. The cave used to belong to the vampires, too, but I took it over after exterminating the bloodsuckers. I called it the Wolf's Den, and it had become the place I went to blow off steam with the shewolves—something that had been their idea.

Initially, I'd refused their offer, happy just to provide them with comfort and protection. But after spending time with them, attachments developed and our sexual relationship began. I cared for each of them, too, but made it clear early on that I didn't want a luna because of circumstances of the heart. They understood and provided me with sex regardless.

Though I never slept with just one or two. No, no. It was always a group endeavor. That was their rule—so I couldn't pick favorites. And who was I to complain when so many shewolves made themselves so readily available?

I glanced around at their beautiful bodies, strewn all over, each lost in a peaceful and exhaustion-driven sleep. We'd gone at it for hours. Even I had fallen asleep for a while.

I checked my watch: 11 p.m. I cursed as I shoved a thigh off my chest, then pushed another set off my legs.

"You know we're late for the elders' meeting?" my wolf, Exodus, reminded me.

"Yeah. Thanks for that," I said sarcastically. "Probably the same old shit anyway: rogue attacks, border protection, warrior training... blah, blah." The usual for an alpha, and I'd been alpha of the Midnight Pack for five years.

I'd done a damn good job of it, too. I'd made our borders impenetrable and had ensured our fighters were the strongest. Plus, I maintained exceptional relationships with most of our neighboring packs.

"No need to get snitty with me," Exodus growled. "I'm just warning you because Elder Panton will be up your snout about spending time in the Wolf's Den." Exodus snickered.

I grunted at him, then ran into the night with the moon keeping me company.

By the time I arrived at the temple, it was so late that I knew the elders had to have been waiting for hours. When I entered the meeting room, all seven of them sat on their raised chairs, fuming so noticeably, I was surprised I couldn't see smoke coming from their ears.

"You're late." Elder Ramos greeted me with a scowl.

My wolf didn't appreciate the tenor of his reprimand, so I responded with unveiled annoyance. "You'll watch your tone with me... All of you," I boomed, with my eyes piercing each of them in turn.

Six of the seven elders squirmed and shivered, all except Elder Panton. Like me, he had alpha's blood. What made things worst was that he was my great-great-granduncle and the oldest werewolf in our pack. So he'd lived through many wars and fallen packs.

When I was a pup, he was the one who'd told me about the rogues, witches, and vampires who fought and failed to take the Midnight Pack from the alphas before me. My favorite story of his, though, was the Legend of the White She-wolf. I would always beg Uncle Panton to tell me that one. Something about it fascinated me.

But though I enjoyed his stories, I didn't like that he was the only one who seemed completely unintimidated by me. "Hush it, boy," he spoke out. "We may not be the alpha, but we're all hundreds of years old. We deserve respect. If your parents were here—"

"Enough!" I growled, not wanting to relive the horrible memories of my parents' deaths. Five years had passed, but the pain of losing them was still raw, partially because I still hadn't caught Cyrus, the rogue who killed them. "Let's just get to the matters at hand," I said, working to calm myself. "Are our borders secure? Do we need to send warriors to help other packs?"

"No Alpha," Elder Brigsby answered. "This isn't about borders or rogues. It's not our typical meeting, though our food rations are low and need adjustment. But I'm afraid the matter at hand is of even greater importance."

Because of the seriousness in his voice, I sat on my throne, expecting grave news. "Okay. Well, what's this all about then?"

With some trepidation, Elder Barnaby said, "Alpha, you're twenty-eight, and you don't yet have a mate."

"Is this a joke?" I barked.

"The pack needs a Luna," Elder Panton said delicately.

Anger coursed through my veins, and I sprang from my seat. "Have you all forgotten about Scarlet already?" I sneered.

The Elders hung their heads.

"You remember? The she-wolf who was my mate? The one you all told me to reject because she didn't have Alpha blood?"

They kept their heads hung, not a single one daring to speak, not even Elder Panton. My wolf was at the surface and would rip their heads off if they did, so they were wise to remain quiet.

"This meeting is adjourned," I bellowed.

"But Alpha," Elder Panton called.

"What?" I snarled, with darkness swirling in my eyes and my claws extending. My heart filled with pain as I remembered having to give up Scarlet. I didn't want to think about that almost as much as I didn't want to think about my parents' deaths.

"With all due respect, Alpha," Elder Panton said, daring to continue, "we have the pack's best interest at heart. You finding and mating with a luna with alpha's blood will only strengthen us."

A part of me agreed. But something within me died when they had me disrespect the Moon Goddess and reject my mate. An empty void had taken residence in my chest, and I feared it could never be filled. Still, I relented at least somewhat by saying, "I'll see about it. But give me some time."

"Yes, Alpha," Elder Panton bowed, and the others repeated his words in unison.

With them satisfied, I dashed out the door without a glance backward. My wolf and I needed a run. I ripped off my clothes, shifted into my wolf form, and sped through the thick forest like a bullet. Trees zoomed past me in a blur as thoughts of Scarlet invaded my mind.

She was so funny and had the prettiest green eyes I'd ever seen. And her vanilla and rose scent drove me and my wolf into a frenzy.

But the Elders had said she couldn't be Luna. With that thought and memories of arguing with them about it flashing through my mind, my paws pounded against the forest floor. My claws dug deeper as I recalled giving in when they eventually forced my hand.

I'd had no choice because their arguments had been valid. Still, my wolf raged over the loss.

Why did she have to be both an omega and a rogue? Worse, why did she have to be Cyrus' younger sister?

As if her being both an omega and a rogue weren't bad enough, Cyrus was a problem. A big problem. And not just because he'd killed my parents.

He wanted power and would do anything to get it, including joining forces with the vampires to become king of the werewolves. He had even used Scarlet as a bargaining chip with the vampire king. But the vampire king didn't just want Scarlet. He hand-picked twelve other rogue she-wolves for his high-ranked friends—the she-wolves currently naked in my Wolf's Den.

Scarlet had escaped the vampire king before I wiped out that cave of vampires, though. My wolf's steps softened as I recalled the first time I saw her. I had gone to her, intending to execute her for trespassing on my land. But then my wolf identified her as our mate. At first, I denied her. But as I got to know her, I came to see her goodness and beauty.

She'd been so gracious about my eventual rejection of her, too. She knew I had no choice.

After our rejection ceremony, the Elders suggested I send her to another pack, but I couldn't do it. So I gave her property and a cottage on the outskirts of our land. With my mind still in a blur, I found myself facing that little white cottage and realized my feet had taken me there without thought.

My wolf whimpered as I slowed our pace. "We should turn back," I told him.

"I know, but we haven't seen her in years. Just one glimpse, then we can go," Exodus pleaded, and I gave in. "I smell blood," he announced as we approached.

I, too, could smell it. Following the scent, I lightly padded forward until my front paws brushed against something. My eyes fell on what I thought was a log, but quickly realized was a young girl, barely dressed, covered in blood and mud.

My bones cracked as I transformed back into my human form. I checked the girl for wounds, but found none. Then I scented the blood covering her. It was from two high-ranked wolves. But she didn't carry a scent. Was she human or werewolf? I couldn't tell. She was trembling, though. I needed to take her inside.

The cottage's front door flew open, and Scarlet stepped out in all her red-headed beauty. "Xavier, I caught your scent," she said, beaming. Then her eyes landed on the girl. "Moon Goddess, what happened to her?"

"I don't know."

"Quick, get her inside," Scarlet demanded.

I scooped the girl into my arms with ease and made my way to the cottage. My heart tingled as I carried her, and I wondered if it was because I was close to Scarlet.

Then the girl stirred in my arms. Her eyes fluttered open, revealing a marvelous silver color, and the tingling in my heart turned into a buzz.