

Chapter 6

AURORA

FIVE YEARS LATER

Ann Reed is dead.

I'm Aurora DeVere, now, and Aurora DeVere is on the rise. After years of suffering, I was on the path to being Luna of one of the most powerful packs in the world.

All I had to do to get there was face Dane Montague...and hope I survived. Because if I knew him, he would want me dead more than ever.

I stepped out of the zippy white sports car and took in the Georgia mansion I'd just purchased. As glad as I was to see the red earth and breathe the rich air, my stomach felt full of wriggling worms.

Dane had looked hard for me for a few months. I'd even been on the news. He might have found me...if the DeVeres hadn't first.

Once they realized who I was—once they informed me of my true identity as their heiress—I was whisked away.

I thought the Council would force me to go back to Dane. But Augusta DeVere, my biological grandmother and Luna of the Alpine Pack, was one of the heads of the Council. Not only did she handle the rest of them, she kept my location and my

existence a secret.

The Blue Ridge pack was powerful, but they were *nothing* compared to the ancient packs in Europe.

Dane never stood a chance.

"Luna-heir," said a deep voice.

I smiled at Trajan Graves, who had just walked out of the mansion. The former mercenary was a bear of a man. He was my assistant, bodyguard, and my choice for beta when I took over as Luna of the High Alpine Pack.

"Trajan," I said. My voice was smooth, crisp. Just like my cream-colored suit. "It's lovely to see you."

The man gave me a somber smile. Trajan was only a few years older than me, with curly brown hair and a neat, dark beard. He was an American wolf who'd gone rogue for his own reasons, then almost died. I'd stumbled across him and saved him just before the DeVeres had found me.

He was the first and oldest member of my chosen family.

"Everything is ready for you, Luna-heir. Would you like a tour of your new home?"

"Just the basics, Trajan. The gala starts soon, and I need to dress."

I suppressed a shiver at the thought. After five years, I was about to face Dane again.

At least the gala was public. Hundreds of wolves would be there.

Tonight, Dane expected to meet the representative of the High Alpine pack. A wolf who had an opportunity that would increase the power of both Blue Ridge and High Alpine beyond his wildest dreams.

That meeting? It was with me.

My high heels clicked as Trajan and I walked across the stone drive to the mansion's entrance. Inside, a mirror in the foyer class caught my eye.

My pale hair was longer than it had been when I left here. Now it was down past my shoulder blades, and I wore it lightly slicked back from my face. My makeup was so flawless, it looked like I wasn't wearing any. People would only notice the glow of my skin and the brightness of my eyes.

I was nothing like the sad, broken waif who had fled five years ago. But I did look worried.

"What should I expect?" I asked as he led me to the sleek kitchen. The ceiling was two stories, and one of the walls was all windows, looking out on the forest.

He made me tea as I sat at the long bar. "The local wolves are clamoring to know who the spokes*man* of High Alpine is."

"Very good." I sipped the tea and smiled. "If Dane was expecting me, I'd probably already be dead."

"Not on my watch," Trajan growled.

I sipped my tea again. Trajan was the strongest wolf I'd met in a long time, but I'd never met any wolf who could match Dane's raw power.

I wouldn't be here, but my grandmother had demanded it. And when Augusta DeVere demanded something, she got it, or people died.

I was her favored heir, but I wasn't her only one, and I had two very good reasons to do everything she asked.

That meant that in just a little while, I would have to face Dane.

The Blue Ridge pack house was the grandest mansion I had ever seen.

The architecture was so brilliant that it both stood out from the scenery and looked as if it was meant to be there. It was tucked between two arms of the mountain, which held it close like a loving guardian.

The forest all around was some of the most pristine left in the country. There wasn't much old growth forest left in the eastern United States, but much of Blue Ridge was exactly that. Massive trees and ancient habitats that had been all but forgotten everywhere else.

Trajan handed me out of the car. My dress was lilac, like my eyes, a sparkling sheath that hugged my every curve. My neck and ears dripped with real moonstones that flashed blue,

matching my iridescent stilettos and clutch. My eyes were lined and smokey.

Many of the wolves of the southeast had hated me when I was Dane's wife. Reviled me for what Broken Forest had done. What my parents had made me do.

Many of those people would be here tonight. The dangerous wolves who had made Ann Reed's life hell.

I raised my chin, knowing how different I was, and yet, how recognizable, thanks to my pale coloring.

"Are you ready?" Trajan asked, a shadow at my side.

"No. Now let's do it." We entered the venue, and everyone turned to look at me. Whispers started right away.

But I barely noticed. My eyes were drawn to the balcony above, where a man stood on his own, looking out over the party like a king.

There was no mistaking that arrogant stance.

"Dane," I whispered.

As if he could hear me, his eyes found mine.

And I knew.

It didn't matter how I looked, or how long I'd been gone, Dane Montague would always recognize me.

His lip curled in a snarl.

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Then he walked to the balcony railing and vaulted over. He fell fifteen feet and landed in a crouch.

He was coming right for me.



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