

# **Their Burning Touch on my Skin - Shelagh Milano**

## **Chapter 1**

EMMA

A gasp resounds in the crowd as Ace looks down at me wide-eyed.

Holding my arm, I keep shivering as the adrenaline pumps through me.

"It's nothing," I say, my voice shaking as I hold my burned forearm, the blood dripping through my fingers.

His worried face suddenly shifts, his caring expression morphing into a frown. "How the fuck can you tell me that it is nothing?!"

My heart squeezes, making me open my eyes.

I must have fallen asleep during the ride.

Staring outside my window, I watch the trees pass by, the landscape slowly transforming as we are nearing the royal pack's territory.

Serena has fallen asleep as well. Her head leans against my shoulder, and I take a deep sigh, getting Kai's attention on me. "Everything alright? That was a deep sigh for someone just waking up from a long nap."

I force up a smile at him. "Everything is alright. Just had a bad dream."

"A nightmare or a ghost from the past?" He asks, his eyes already directed back to the papers in his hands.

I lower my head, removing invisible lint from my dress as I change the subject. "What are you looking at?"

The ghost of the past, as he calls him, is quite a sensitive subject for me.

Kai and I share a special connection, even if I'm two years older than him. We haven't talked about it properly as we are both too shy to address it, apparently, but we have spent our entire life together, and we are actually just waiting to find out that we are mates to finally get over with it.

It is totally different from how it was with Ace.

With Ace, it was like sailing through a storm.

A gorgeous storm you would watch with your jaw on the floor and your heart beating in your throat, but still...

For him it was just natural to tease me, compliment me and as soon as he had the opportunity to, he stole my first kiss, and it didn't take him much longer to get my innocence too.

That night, I thought, was the best of my life, and he promised to make me his Luna, even if we would find out that we weren't fated mates.

But just a month later, he was gone.

So much for promises.

A bit more than five years have passed since that moment. I had often dreamed of being the mate of both of them. Aunt Artemisia had five, so I prayed so much to the Moon Goddess for having just one more mate as I couldn't decide who I loved more.

But it's just typical that for us it is more complicated than for everyone else.

Usually, we find our mate as soon as we turn twenty years old, and as I'm already twenty-five, the Elders are confused about why my wolf hasn't resurfaced yet.

Well, they are confused about it just like they are about everything else.

But complaining is useless, I am just exhausted because of all the testing, but I'm doing my best to grit my teeth to keep going as Aunt Artemisia is going through much worse as she shields me from as much as possible.

"The documents the High Court sent us. Hendrick wanted me to study them before we meet the Judge because of Serena," he looks at the ceiling as he throws his head into his neck. "I can't believe he did that to us. He knew I never wanted to be an Alpha."

"Did you talk to Cayden?" I ask him, tilting my head. "Maybe Ryder could take over. He did turn twenty-one, didn't he? He would be old enough to start the Alpha training."

He sighs exhausted, closing his eyes. "Ace was the strongest of us, and cocky enough to want the title. Ryder, just like me, has always had the idea that Ace would become the Alpha. None of us wants to take that from him."

"I understand. But he has gone. He has left us, so you don't have a bad conscience for taking a potential title he was trained for," I say, looking back out the window.

Serena stirs, stretching herself as she follows my gaze with sleepy eyes. "Are we there yet?"

"Not yet. But it won't take any much longer," I say, caressing her head.

She looks up at me, her dark eyes with the red speckle boring into mine. "My butt hurts."

We crack up while she sulks and I hug her close. "I'm so sorry, Sese. I will ask them to make us go on a stroll before they have us sit down for dinner."

As we finally arrive at the royal palace, Serena and I stare in awe while Kai frowns, looking at the palace in a confusion of emotions. We get out of the car, and I have to hold Serena back as she is already about to run away, ignoring the welcome committee that is waiting for us.

"Judge Attwood, my name is Kai Blackwood. I'm pleased to be your interlocutor on this matter," Kai greets the Judge, holding his head high while the Judge flashes him an enormous smile.

"Kai Blackwood. We have already heard a lot about you, and I'm happy to make your acquaintance."

The Judge's robe rustles while he speaks, the other Judges standing behind him nodding repeatedly.

A small group of she-wolves approaches us after the introduction, leading us to our quarters as we seem to get separated from Kai.

I look back at him wide-eyed as I follow them inside and his cold expression remains unmoved as he mind-links me, "Don't worry. I'll get that sorted out as soon as possible. Cayden warned us about this already."

Taking a deep breath, I concentrate on keeping my cool as I don't want to upset Serena. I push her gently through the hallways and as I'm too agitated by the she-wolves surrounding us, I don't even get to admire the halls properly.

"I think that counts for a walk," she says lowly, making me chuckle as we indeed have to walk a long way to reach our quarters.

As we finally reach them, one of the she-wolves, who introduced herself as the lady-in-waiting appointed to us, leads us through our rooms, making us stare incredulously.

Wow!

Serena squeals, running to the large four-poster bed and starts jumping on it after having slipped out of her shoes.

I watch her with a smile until the lady-in-waiting clears her throat, getting my attention back to her. "I'll let you settle in in peace and will come fetch you for dinner in about an hour, if that's alright with you, Miss?"

"That's perfect. Thank you so much," I say, and we do a curtsy practically simultaneously before she leaves the room quietly.

Serena makes a last high jump before she lets herself fall onto the bed with a groan. "But I'm hungry now!"

"Be kind," I say with a giggle as I turn around to open the door more to the Omegas bringing our suitcases in.

As soon as they are gone, we start unpacking our things and sorting them in into the different closets as the front door opens and closes with a bang. I lay down the pile of t-shirts I was about to put on a shelf as I hurry to the door. "That must be Kai."

Serena just hums, just taking note of it as I leave her alone to reach her brother who must have resolved the problem of getting separated. "Did you sort it-"

My breath hitches in my throat as I stand in front of what could seem to be Kai, but he isn't.

I get enveloped by the mouthwatering scent that still haunts me in my dreams as he stands before me, his muscular arms covered in tattoos. My brain blacks out, my thoughts just running wildly as they follow the shapes of them into the collar of the tank top he is wearing.

"What are you doing here?" he asks, making his deep baritone get under my skin.

"Ace!" Serena screams, running past me and right into his arms.

Ace picks her up, hugging her as his gruff expression morphs into a caring one. "Hey, baby sis!"

God, I wish I was her.

"So, has the cat got your tongue again?" he asks as he sets his sister back down on her feet.

He is so mean.

He knows exactly how much I struggle with actually speaking much because of what happened to me.

"I should be asking you," I say, cringing as it comes out as a light stutter. "You have some audacity to show up like this. Did you forget all your manners? I'm pretty sure Luna Artemisia taught you how to knock."

He shakes his head, just about to retort something to me as the door opens again. Kai entering the quarters with his head held low as he looks at his phone. "I think that I could-"

Kai halts in his tracks, lifting his head slowly as his eyes widen. "What the actual fuck?!"

"Hello, brother."

I feel myself about to hyperventilate as suddenly my heart stills. Their scents blend into an alluring mixture, enveloping me.

My stomach turns as my wolf stirs awake, making an excruciating pain ripple through me.

'Mate,' her voice booms through my mind, making me black out as my wolf awakens, draining all my energy at once.