

## Chapter 36

“Celeste, will you stop for a minute?” I continued following her. “We need to talk, please.”

“I can’t talk to you, can I? I don’t want to mistakenly put my hands on the Luna and earn myself a death sentence!” She snapped, walking faster. The people on the street openly stared at us as I chased after my best friend.

A large mass appeared from nowhere and blocked her path. She almost ran into Jabari as he blocked off her movement.

“You! Why have you been following me about?” She exclaimed at him, not minding the fact that he could crush her skull with his palms. Turning to me with a glare that made me step back, she asked, “Did you put him up to this?” I raised my hand in surrender.

“I never mentioned anything about you to him,” I said truthfully but I didn’t think she believed me.

It seemed our friendship had been ruined after all because the way she looked at me, it was clear that she hated the air I breathed. I suspected she would reproach me for hiding my mating with Valens from her and then getting her father locked up, possibly to be executed, but I held out hope that she would forgive me.

“The Luna wants to speak to you,” Jabari said in a soft voice. I’d never heard him speak in a soft voice to anyone in Redville before.

“Great. So the Luna wants to speak to me and I have no choice but to listen?” She went toe to toe with him, wagging a threatening finger in

his face. I expected him to break the finger but he looked nothing but amused at the small lady threatening him.

“Yes. She’s the Luna.” Jabari may not know how much worse he was making things. He didn’t need to remind her of my new status because it upset her enough already and she didn’t like big men in general based on her past trauma.

“Thank you, Jabari but you can let her go. It’s fine if she hates me now.” I may sound dejected but I didn’t care at that point. All that mattered to me was that I’d lost the only friend that stuck with me through everything. I’d lost a friend once so I could bear losing another.

“I don’t hate you but if anything happens to my father, I’d never forgive you.” She stalked away with that.

“Your friend is cute,” Jabari said in his deep voice. I nodded without saying anything in response.

I met Valens changing his shirt when I got to our suite. I spared him a glance before going underneath the covers, waiting for him to leave so I could nurse my wounds in silence. The thought of losing Celeste hurt too much to bear.

“My shirt –” Valens turned to me, pausing when he realized I’d buried myself underneath the covers. “What’s wrong?”

“Can I have Beta Strauss released today?” I emerged from the covers. I didn’t need to do that anymore. He was my mate and he had the power to fix my friendship before it was completely ruined.

“I’m still considering whether or not to make him a scapegoat. No, he cannot be released now or anytime soon.” He buttoned his shirt without an ounce of care in his voice.

“He’s Celeste’s father,” I reminded him.

“He is also Lucien’s father. That’s a double offence against him.” He ran his hand down his shirt before looking at me. “There’s no chance of him getting released. He put his hands on you. That’s a disrespect to me, my status and my wolf. I’m not letting it go.”

“If you cared about me in the slightest, you’d let him go today.” He gave me a weird look.

“Your argument is not valid. You are my mate and I care about you but he is not getting released. Don’t speak to me about it again.” He turned, about to leave the penthouse.

“Wait!” I scrambled out of bed.

“What is it? I have a meeting now.” I rushed to stand before him.

“I know you don’t care about me but I have only one friend – there’s only one person who has loved me without conditions. Celeste is the only reason I had the strength to go through it all. If I lose her then I’d have lost everything. It’s not something I’d ever forgive.”

He leaned into me, his breath fanning across my face as he whispered, “I am still your Alpha.” His lips caressed mine in a soft kiss before he strode out, leaving me perplexed. I stared at the door after it shut for a long time before I walked out of the suite.

Today, I would test my authority as the Luna of over forty packs.

I flagged a can to the sketchier parts of the pack where we had the dungeons. I hadn’t been here in a long time but I’d been here often enough for the place to still feel familiar. I entered the building that housed the dungeons. The front of the place advertised it as a ‘defense’ store but the stairs at the back led to a vast basement that could hold at least a thousand prisoners at the same time.

The store’s receptionist lowered her eyes and bared her neck respectfully as I passed while she explained the workings of a keychain that had a small decorative thing on it which was really a weapon.

“Beta Strauss,” I said to the man standing at the door that led to the dungeon.

“Welcome, Luna Aysel,” he greeted me as he led the way.

The corridors of the dungeons were dimly lit as we proceeded. They were mostly empty as usual but I noticed they were more heavily guarded and some of the doors had been changed to more sturdy ones. There was the prickly feeling of silver in the air and other little renovations that showed work in the dungeons – preparations, really.

The warrior stopped at a cell door and a man with long, wavy black hair that was sprinkled with grey raised his head slowly.

“Have you guys been feeding him?” I asked in a small voice. I hoped the people had not heard my squeak at the glare Beta Strauss gave me.

“Yes, once in two days according to the Alpha’s orders.” The warrior guarding the door replied.

Despite the Beta’s weak state, his anger and hatred reflected in his eyes, harsh enough to knock me off my feet.

“O – open the door,” I said to the warrior. The big man unhooked a small bunch of keys from his waistband with slow and deliberate caution.

The Beta, I noticed then, may have had silver in him a while back because he had angry red circles around his wrist that did not look like they would ever heal.

Silver had the ability to cut through a man’s skin, down to his bones. Silver burned when it came in contact with a werewolf and it slowly burnt through flesh and veins and bones and everything between. It could amputate a man’s hand if it stayed for only a day.

“This is a risky thing to do.” Jabari materialized beside me.

He’d been following me since the minute I stepped out of the pack house. He was good at following people without them knowing but my

wolf recognized him as her guardian so she felt at ease every time he was close. It was the only reason I knew when he was following me.

“I am the Luna,” I said in response to his words. My voice shook as I spoke but I held my head high. “I can release a prisoner if I want?” Instead of being declarative and authoritative, I sounded like a schoolchild asking for permission to do something that wouldn’t end well.

“You are the Luna,” Jabari affirmed with a nod of his head.

“Open the doors,” I said more firmly and Beta Strauss’ cell doors were pushed open. “Come out,” I said to the prisoner nestled within.

“Your Luna is speaking to you,” Jabari called at Strauss with pure menace in his tone.

“I’ll make you regret what you did to me.” Strauss spat on the floor of the cell room as he stood and strode out. “Your wrongs will not be forgiven.” Jabari seized him by his collar before he was fully out.

As a beta, Strauss was built larger than other wolves but Jabari picked him like a piece of linen, his own mass making the other man look like a joke.

“Look at me.” Strauss was compelled to look him in the eyes. Whatever thing he saw in them made him shudder. “I am her beta. I will tear you apart limb for limb, keep you alive for the longest time so you can understand what pain means. I can get creative and I will get creative if you dare ‘think’ to threaten her again.” He dropped Strauss like a sack of potatoes. Strauss, being emaciated, looked like a rag doll on the floor.

“Can we not mention this part to Valens?” I whispered to Jabari who grunted. If Valens heard I’d been threatened, he wouldn’t spare Strauss for a second time.

“He said he wants you in red,” Jabari’s grumbled. My cheeks flamed as I understood the message.