

## CHAPTER 9: DINNER FROM HELL

BRIAR'S POV

"Is this some sick joke?" I cry, shuing away from him. "What the hell was that?"

And right then, it feels like a crooked disguise slips from every atom of his being.

He lets out a sadistic echo of amusement, depravity and malice coating every inch of his face.

A tremble rattles my spine.

His expression right now is morbid in every light, and he looks nothing like the man I'd spent the last twenty-four hours with.

Panic seizes me, and I brace myself for an escape.

But as though he can read my mind, he snatches me up by my hair and pulls me to stand right by his side.

Pain lances through my scalp, and I let out a curdled cry, reaching up to soften the pressure.

That's when my ripped dress slips all the way down to my feet, and in the span of two staggering seconds, I'm standing in nothing but my underwear before the eyes of everyone present.

His dark breath coats my ear as he seethes, "Allow me to reintroduce myself, Briar. My name is Tavian Ashby Silverton."

My eyes widen at the second name spoken, the realization sickening me to my core, as he continues, "Does it ring a bell?"

Ashby Silverton.

Ashby.

The lanky, young boy from the same summer camp we all attended all those years ago.

Stinky Ashby.

Weak Ashby.

Wolf-less Ashby.

But worst of all, the same Ashby I'd made my life mission to torment that entire year.

He was the older boy who'd been in camp for repeated years because he was a 'late bloomer', and his only crime was being the loser who dared to confess his feelings to the Beta's daughter—me.

He's the same boy I ruthlessly bullied at summer camp when we were young?

But... there's no way. How is that possible?

He watches my expression, his smile only spreading.

"Ah, it does ring a bell."

"Tavian... please."

"You went out of your way to make my life hell. You tortured and ridiculed me simply because you could. You know, I could take that—I could have easily forgiven the sheer stupidity of your teenage years. I am, after all, a benevolent Alpha. But then..." His grip tightens, his voice dropping to a menacing whisper, "But then you went after my brother. The little boy who couldn't shift, who couldn't even speak. The one you extended your claws to, just to spite me. The boy who killed himself because of you."

A hot tear falls slowly down my cheek.

He knew all along that we had history?

He knew... and he... orchestrated this? Every single thing that led us to this moment was by his hand?

His eyes bore into mine, lled with a darkness that chills me to the core.

"Do you remember him, Briar? Do you remember the innocent life you destroyed?"

The memory hits me like a freight train.

Ashby's brother, a mute, sweet, innocent boy who'd never harmed anyone.

I'd targeted him out of spite, out of sheer malice, to hurt Ashby.

Even when I'd heard of the death of the little mute boy, I just didn't think I was to blame.

I'd moved on with my life like it was nothing.

I'd been vicious in those years, desperate to be my father's daughter, and it had made me the worst version of myself.

And now I realize: Tavian's brother was the last and only immediate family Tavian had still alive.

And he died because of me.

He pauses, letting the weight of his words sink in.

"I don't fault you for what you did all those years ago, Briar."

I blink my eyes open, desperate to hear the catch I know is coming. And he doesn't disappoint with his next chilling declaration.

"But there is no forgiveness. And now that we are joined for life, I only request that you extend me the exact same courtesy for everything I am about to do to you."

"P-please, I had n-no idea-"

Tavian's eyes bore into mine, and a chilling smile spreads across his lips.

"I'll make you an offer," he says, his tone deceptively calm. "Say his name. If you can remember the name of the boy whose life you ended, I'll let you go. Right here, right now."

My mind races, but the name eludes me.

I can feel the weight of his expectations, the pressure to recall a name from a past I had tried to bury.

My heart hammers in my chest, and I stammer, "I... I don't remember."

His smile turns into a sneer, and he tightens his grip on my hair, yanking me closer.

"You don't remember? His name was Dario. Dario Silverton. And you couldn't even remember the boy you tormented to death."

The realization crushes me. I am an awful person, a woman who couldn't even remember the boy she hurt so deeply.

He shoves my indecent frame to the gazes of the crowd.

"I have an announcement to all of you present," he barks. "Take one good look at her lth, and you would agree that she has no place by my side as my Luna."

"An omega, rejected by her rst mate, and shoved to the dregs has no business being at my table," he continues. "Her death would be mercy. But you see, there are other uses for her kind. And so, I have decided to make use of her where she would t best. And as of today forward, she will kneel by me as my very own omega pet."

Self-preservation makes me ght, and I rip my hair from his grip with a cry, dropping to my feet on the podium.

I discard the ripped dress as my ight instincts kick in, and for the love of the goddess herself, I bolt from the stage like my life depends on it.

I don't dare look back.

And like a domino effect caused by my own hand, chaos ensues.

People rise from their chairs and race for the exit with worried shrieks and cries.

I don't dare process a single thing that's happening because something tells me that if I let the weight of the night hold me back, I'll never make it out of this alive.

"I really wouldn't f\*\*\*\*g do that if I were you." The dangerous intent coating every single word from his mouth kills my footsteps with a force beyond my own control.

It's like that single sentence and its delivery had the power to paralyze me.

All it takes is a glance back, and I gure out exactly why.

With practiced ease, he holds one of the guests to his side with a strong grip on her throat, razor-like claws extended and digging into the delicate skin of her neck.

One wrong move, and she's dead.

My eyes meet hers, and I recognize her from camp instantly.

A soft cry slips from her as she lets her eyes slide closed.

"Let her go, Tavian," I plead. "Don't involve innocent people in this."

"Come here," he retorts.

"You know I won't do that."

"Take one step further, and I'll rip her head from her body."

My mouth tenses around the words, 'you wouldn't dare,' but I can't voice them.

I can't voice them at all because I know for a fact that he most denitely would.

But my feet have a mind of their own, and even though my mind is paralyzed by fear, the rest of my body isn't.

And Tavian takes his threats quite literally.

All it takes is a single unconscious step backward on my end, and there's blood everywhere.

A scream tears out of me as her knees hit the grass, her severed head rolling as I fall to the ground along with her.

But he's far from done, and he pulls his next victim from the crowd trying to escape.

The panic bleeds into the girl's eyes at the realization of what might happen ... and I just can't take it anymore.

"I'll stay!" I cry. "I won't leave! I won't go anywhere!" I'm on my knees, nails digging into the grass as I plead with everything in me. "Let her go, I'm begging you! Just don't hurt her, and I'll stay."

With a narrowed gaze, he commands, "Crawl to me."

The mortication sinks into my bones as I make my way over to him, barely dressed, and on my hands and knees.

Tears ow freely, blurring my view of everything and everyone around me. His tight grip on my hair pulls me to my knees and up to my feet the moment I reach him.

A slow, malicious grin eats up the length of his face.

It's sickening to witness just how much he's enjoying the disaster he instigated.

My chest churns with emotion, and the weight of the entire night falls on me like pouring rain.

It really was too good to be true.

His lips graze both my cheeks, collecting salty tears on his tongue. It's disturbing in every light.

He cups the nape of my neck and brings his mouth right by my ear, "I'd advise you bask in it all. This will be your last night as my Luna."

He ignores the utter chaos ensuing all around us.

"Because come morning light, I can assure you one thing." A sob breaks free as his grip tightens. "You'll curse the very day you ever laid eyes on me, Briar."