

Chapter 2. The Alpha King

The words sank into her skin like a brand.

Selene stared at him. The Lycan King.

That name hadn't been spoken aloud in years—**not without fear**. Not without a hush following it, as if the wind might carry it back to him and summon him from whatever exile he'd vanished into. Rumor had it he killed his own Council. Disappeared into the mountains, never to be seen again.

Until now.

Until her.

Until this exact moment.

She opened her mouth, but no sound came.

Her hands gripped the edge of her seat like it might stop the ground from opening underneath her. The man—no, **the King**—just watched her. Calm. Quiet. Like a wolf watching something wounded drag itself into reach.

He said nothing else. His jacket still lay across her legs. Heavy. Scented like forest smoke and storm-soaked leather.

She swallowed. “Why—why are you here?”

Stillness. The flicker of flame in his pale eyes.

“To find you,” he said, as if the answer were obvious. “To claim what’s mine.”

Her breath caught in her throat.

No.

No, no, no—this couldn't be happening.

She stood up too quickly, the chair legs scraping against the stone. The jacket slid off her lap and crumpled to the floor. Eyes were still on her. Wolves all across the ceremony were frozen in their conversations, half-lifted glasses and unfinished laughter suspended like a painting. At least two Elders stood near the edge of the altar, watching her with their lips pursed in thin disapproval.

And Lucan.

Lucan was staring.

Selene felt her spine straighten. She stepped away from the King—one step, two. Her body screamed at her to run.

He didn't follow. He simply leaned back in his chair, tattooed arms resting on his thighs, watching her with a kind of clinical hunger.

"Run, little wolf," he said softly. "I'll catch you later."

Her stomach twisted.

She turned and walked as fast as she could without drawing more attention. Her heart thundered in her ears as she pushed through the crowd, ignoring the way whispers bloomed in her wake.

She needed air.

She needed space.

She needed to stop shaking.

Outside the hall, the path wound around to a darker part of the woods. She kept walking until the light dimmed and the music faded behind her. Only then did she let herself exhale.

The cool mountain air hit her skin like ice. She leaned against a tree, pressing her forehead to the bark, breathing like she'd just outrun a beast.

Mate.

The word made her throat close.

Wolves didn't fake that kind of claim. You either felt the bond or you didn't. And she had felt... something. A crackle in her blood. An instinct rising. But she'd been under pressure, overwhelmed. She wasn't thinking clearly.

And he was dangerous. Untouchable.

What if it wasn't real?

What if he was lying?

"You're shaking."

She jumped at the voice—sharp, low, and much too close.

Lucan.

He stood a few feet away, arms crossed, jaw clenched. His Alpha crest glinted at his collar. He looked at her like she'd just betrayed a kingdom.

"I didn't know who he was," she said quickly.

Lucan didn't move. "You sat beside him."

"I didn't mean to—"

"He gave you his jacket."

She went cold. "Lucan—"

His voice dropped to a growl. "He's not supposed to be here."

"I didn't invite him."

"You didn't have to," Lucan snapped. "He found you anyway. You think that's a coincidence?"

Selene stiffened. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying," Lucan stepped forward, eyes hard, "that whatever bond you think you felt—whatever *he* said—it's not real. It's manipulation. He's a killer. He's cursed."

"I felt it," she said before she could stop herself.

Lucan stared at her like she'd just admitted a crime.

"I don't know what it means," she continued, softer now, "but I felt something. My wolf—reacted. And yours didn't, not last time. You said—"

"I know what I said," Lucan snapped. "I was wrong. I was under pressure. My father—he forced me to choose someone else."

Her heart squeezed.

"I never stopped wanting you, Selene," he said. His voice was quieter now, and more dangerous. "You were always mine. You *are* mine. And I will not lose you to a mad king who should've stayed in his grave."

She stared at him.

For a heartbeat, the past hovered between them—what they were before, what they could've been.

Then Lucan stepped closer, his scent overwhelming.

“Don’t go to him again,” he whispered. “If he calls, don’t answer. If he touches you, reject it. The Elders won’t allow it anyway.”

Selene didn’t speak.

Lucan’s jaw clenched. “Say you’ll stay away from him.”

A long pause. The leaves rustled around them.

Then, behind them, a voice like thunder on velvet:

“She won’t.”

They both turned.

And there he was.

Alaric.

Leaning against the edge of a tree like a statue carved from obsidian, his eyes glowing faintly silver in the dark.

Lucan stepped between them, chest rising.

“You don’t belong here,” he growled.

Alaric tilted his head. “You think she belongs with you?”

“She’s mine.”

Alaric’s eyes gleamed. “You had your chance. You threw it away. You don’t get to touch what’s marked.”

Lucan moved to shift—his shoulders twitching, eyes going gold—but Alaric didn’t even flinch.

“Try it,” the King said softly. “I’ve already killed better wolves than you.”

Selene’s pulse was chaos.

Lucan looked at her, then back at Alaric, fists clenched.

“You’ll regret this,” he said to them both. “The Elders will never allow it.”

He stormed away.

Silence settled again.

Selene turned to Alaric, who hadn’t moved. Her hands were shaking again.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” she said.

His voice was a whisper against the wind. “He was wrong. The bond is real.”

She swallowed.

“You’ll feel it more soon. Your mark hasn’t finished blooming.”

“My what?”

Alaric stepped forward.

And her skin ignited where he brushed a finger across her collarbone.

There—just below it—something burned faintly beneath the surface.

A mark.

And it was glowing.