

## The Mating Pact Prologue

Cora

10 years ago

The room was buzzing with tension and anxiety. I could feel it crawling into my skin as I took everything in. The sheer number of people gathered around just to punish my father. Punish him for something he hasn't even done. Loud murmurs echoed around, accompanied by dirty looks in his direction. It was so disturbing that I was tempted to scream. But I knew that would make everything just worse.

Finally, elder Zardes, the oldest member of the Council, stood up and took the atmosphere in before clearing his throat to grab everyone's attention. In a few seconds, all eyes were focused on him.

"After a thorough investigation, we have gathered that beta Anthony Scott of the Gray Crest Pack has been found guilty of residing with the rogues and plotting an attack on his pack, causing much destruction and loss of life. He has betrayed his alpha and his family, as has been proved by the pieces of evidence we have seen. On alpha Joseph's request, we rest the choice of punishment for beta Anthony and his family with him."

Again, a string of loud murmurs escaped from everyone. I couldn't breathe with anxiety and reflexively my eyes drifted to the young boy standing opposite me. His face was impassive as he stared at the two men gathered in the center.

"What is your decision, Joseph?" The old man asked, raising his brow.

Everyone gathered around, the council members and the pack members, and even the jury, all waiting with bated breath for the final decision, for justice to be served to the Gray Crest Pack. Justice that was based on lies and false accusations and fake pieces of evidence.

Their eyes were stuck on the man standing in the center, the almighty alpha of the strongest werewolf pack in the country. His eyes were dark as he turned to my father kneeling in front of him.

"I did not do anything," he begged. "Please, Joseph, trust me. They are framing me. I will never commit such a sin. I can't even think of betraying you or my family. Please, believe me...please..."

"It's too late for that, Anthony," Joseph muttered. "For the sins you have committed, I, alpha Joseph Gray of the Gray Crest Pack, order you and your family to be banished from the pack and our territories forever. I declare you a traitor and a felon as of today. Considering our friendship, I am sparing your and your family's lives. You will no longer hold the title of a beta anymore. You and your family will be considered a part of the rogues now. That's my decision and should be brought into effect immediately. "

Dismay and horror flooded through me as I watched these selfish people my father called family agree with the alpha's decision, throwing condemning looks at my father. The beta who has served this pack with the utmost dedication for years.

"No!" I exclaimed, unable to hold back anymore. "No! He is NOT a traitor! My father is not a traitor! You are lying. You are all liars!"

"Cora," My mother pulled me back, her eyes red with unshed tears. "Don't sweetheart,"

"They are lying, mom. Daddy would never do that. Ever! How could they? After years of serving this pack faithfully!" I wailed, glaring at Joseph.

"Cora," Father shook his head and I had no option but to shut up. I loved him too much to ignore his silent plea.

My helpless eyes once again drifted to the boy standing across the room and I hoped, above everyone, he would understand. That he would support me and my family. Nobody understood me better than him. He grew up with my family more than his own. He has to support me. He was my best friend and yet, much more than that. The future alpha of this pack, the first born of alpha Joseph and luna Grace, Logan Gray. But so far he was all silent.

"Daddy," I rushed forward, throwing my arms around him as everyone slowly walked away, leaving us alone. "It's alright, I know you did not do anything. They are lying! They are all lying!"

“Thank you, sweetheart,” Father whispered, looking battered as he pulled me and my mother, who was sobbing incoherently, into his arms. “Don’t worry, it will be fine. We will all be fine.”

I tried to relax with his warm assurance, but in the same breath I knew, nothing was ever going to be fine. This was too hard a blow for someone like my father. As I gazed up, I was surprised to see Logan still standing at his place, his face impassive.

See? I knew he would understand. With renewed hope, I rushed over to him and took his hands in mine. He could help me. I knew he will.

“You know they are lying, don’t you?” I urged. “Please, Logan, help us out. They are all mistaken. You know father won’t ever do anything like that, right? Please talk to the alpha. We have no home outside this pack. Please.”

“Why did you do this?” He finally spoke, his voice hard. “How could your father betray the family?” I froze as I silently gazed back at him, my body going weak as I realized...I misunderstood him.

“Wh...what?” I whispered.

“You should leave, Cora. And never come back,” Logan replied, pulling his hands away. “You are rogues now. And I hate rogues.” He gave me one last look before turning on his heels and walking away. All the while, I stood there, feeling choked and blank. Now I realized how my father must be feeling.

This was what betrayal felt like. Like death. Especially when coming from someone...

You loved...