# Chapter 36

Serena Lancaster

I carried the bag of clothes towards Patrick's room, feeling anxiety creep up on me with every step I took. My conversation with Jon had opened up a whole other can of worms.

I knew I was in no position to judge Patrick for claiming a mate. The only law he had broken was claiming a mate outside the ceremony—a more forgivable action than say, murdering an alpha.

She's a princess, the daughter of a former beta exiled for killing a Luna.

The fact that she could be seen as a catalyst for the war didn't even occur to me. I had to give Jon props for thinking of the next steps. Would the people clamor for her to be sent back North if they thought it could prevent war? Would Valeen's father unleash his wrath to take her back? Would Jon be able to defeat him?

You can always ask Jon to leave. He'd do it for you.

Yeah, right.

Hesitantly, I knocked on Patrick's door. I heard some shuffling inside before I came face to face with Patrick himself, looking disheveled and tired.

"You look horrible. Have you eaten or rested at all?" He shook his head.

"Is he still angry?"

"You know Jon. He'll brood about it for a while but he'll forgive you." I tried to sound reassuring.

"Do you think I'm a fuck up as well?" Patrick sullenly asked.

"I think...you did something foolish." I carefully said. "Patrick...I don't wanna be the one to ask this but..."

"What?"

"Do you really love her?" I asked. I cursed myself for my bluntness when I saw his hackles rise. I immediately sought to rectify my mistake. "You didn't just mark her to mask her scent?"

"I...I don't know how to respond to that." He blinked at me, his face stoic. I was startled because for a second he looked just like Jon.

"You're gonna have to get your story straight. The tribunal's gonna want answers—Jon's gonna want answers. If you say you marked her because of love, then we'll put this matter to bed."

Patrick was silent, and for a moment I feared I crossed a line.

"Way before we were in the river, we already talked about mating...by then I'd already fallen for her...I guess. I told her about the ceremony, that we could get her in because she's now our citizen and she's required to go. She said she wouldn't mate with anyone else except me. When I realized we could be spotted, I asked her...why not now? I don't know what to tell you, Serena. It just happened."

I stared at Patrick intensely. There could be no way at all to determine what was true. Was it possible Patrick marked her both out of necessity and love?

"Why you? Is it just because you were the one to retrieve her?" I asked. Patrick seemed taken aback.

"No." He said after a while. "We just...connected. I can't explain it. She's my mate. I just knew"

That's that.

I nodded before smiling at Patrick, gathering him in my embrace.

"That's as good an answer as any." I sighed. "I told Jon I'd send you to his office. You should go see him."

"Is he ready to see me?"

"He's not going to hurt you, Patrick." I soothed. "But you two need to talk about this. Your mate is due to say her piece in front of the war council in a few hours, so I suggest you get moving."

There was silence. Patrick gave a growl and sat down on his bed, putting his head on his hands.

"He's disappointed in me."

"Yes." I said without hesitation. "But you owe him your side of the story. Just be honest with him. He loves you so much." I said. Patrick stood up.

"Okay." Patrick finally said. "Will you tell Valeen I've gone to Jon? She's still inside the bathroom."

"Of course. I'll help her get dressed and everything." I said, motioning to the bag with clothes. "You're gonna have to get her some new clothes."

"Will you help me with that?" Patrick asked.

"Of course. It's normal to need time to adjust, Patrick. They key is to communicate. She's in an entirely new world and you're all she has." I hesitantly said. "And once you've settled, I suggest letting her talk to someone like a therapist...I can only imagine the horrors she experienced..."

"I know. She told me." Patrick bluntly said.

"Your life is going to change now. That means no more partying, flirting with other girls..." I teased. Patrick chuckled.

"I know I seemed like the type of wolf to not want a mate but deep down I did. I wanted to be so attracted to someone that I just hadto claim her and I'd get my act straight." Patrick laughed. "When Jon brought you back, I felt jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Yep. Jon was always the perfect older brother. Even when he fucked up, he still brought home the Gold Rank female from Eastern Claw." Patrick winked. I playfully slapped his arm.

"Well, you certainly outdid him. You brought home a Princess" I said. Patrick smiled wistfully, looking in the direction of his bathroom.

"Go...Jon's waiting for you."

"Thank you, sis."

With one last hug, he exited the room.

Remembering what I came here for, I tentatively knocked on the bathroom door. When there was no response, I was about to barge in but thankfully, Valeen answered.

"Who...who is it?" Her soft, hesitant voice asked.

"It's me...Serena...Jon's mate?" I said. "Patrick's gone to speak with my mate and he asked me to make sure you're okay."

A few moments later, the door opened to reveal Valeen—she looked dirty, and smelled a bit.

"I...I didn't know how to work the water pumps...I...it's not the same...up North..." She mumbled.

"Let me help you." I said as gently as I could. She stepped back, looking on the floor.

"Patrick said I have to speak in front of a lot of people?"

"The war council, yes." I smiled encouragingly. "I'll help you get ready. You need to look like the princess that you are."

I led her to Patrick's bathtub, filling it up with warm water. I put some oils and bubble bath in the tub. She looked at it with awe.

"You didn't have this back home?"

"I...that wasn't my home..." She bluntly said. "No...just water from the river..."

"The bath will clean you up and relax you. Step in." I said, helping her out of her clothes. She didn't seem to mind being naked in front of me; I guess they didn't have that kind of propriety in the north. She stepped in the tub and hissed when she felt the warm water.

"Feels good, right?" I asked. She nodded.

Silently, I washed her hair and cleaned her skin. She had the most beautiful pale skin, marred with bruises, and scars that I was too afraid to ask about. Her hair was the color of milky tea, and it looked shiny after I washed it.

I noticed that she kept on glancing at the door, so I tried to soothe her.

"Patrick will be back, don't worry." I cheerfully said. "It's awful being away from your mate, I know. When I first got here, did you know Jon didn't talk to me for like a week?"

"I...I'm not looking for Patrick..." She mumbled.

"Oh?"

"I'm scared my father will come barging in any moment to take me back."

Gently, I turned her to face me.

"Hey, you did a very brave thing running away. Your father's miles away. Lightwing will keep you safe. Patrick won't let anything happen to you. These Lancaster princes of ours...they're very protective." I smiled. She looked like she was about to say something, but stopped and nodded.

Silence followed. I finished washing her so I led her from the tub and dried her with a towel. I brought her back to the bedroom and sat her down before I rummaged through the clothes I brought with me.

"You're thinner than I am so my clothes will be loose on you." I hummed. "But until Patrick takes you shopping, these will have to do." I took out a long sleeved white boho dress.

"Shopping?" She hesitantly asked. I looked at her and she blushed, embarrassed.

"I...It's when you buy clothes from a store." I muttered, giving her the dress.

"It's the color of snow." She whispered, fingering the fabric and staring at it in awe.

"It's the smallest thing I have. Try it on." I said. I helped her into the dress. It fit her so nicely that I was stunned—she looked like an angel.

"You look beautiful."

"Up north we only had a few fabrics. And fur."

"Well, here you can have all the clothes you want. See, you look lovely!" I exclaimed, turning her to face the full-length mirror. She gasped when she saw her reflection.

She was silent, tilting her head to the right as she surveyed herself.

"My mother used to tell me about the Moon Goddess. I always imagined she wore white..." Valeen mumbled, smoothing the fabric.

"When you stand in front of the council, they'll be expecting to see a savage rogue. But you're a princess. They will listen to what you have to say." I smiled, leading her to sit down so I could brush her hair. I braided her hair into a lovely coronet at the top of her head.

"I...I am scared..." She mumbled, her hands shaking.

"You are far braver than any of the generals in that room. You risked your life to send a message across the border and you stuck your neck out to help our cause. We are grateful to you,Valeen, and I am honored to call you my sister."

There was silence. Valeen sighed and looked at herself in the mirror, curiously probing the braided crown in her head.

"I have never looked so beautiful." Valeen said, her eyes pooling with tears. "Patrick called me pretty when he first met me...when I was wearing rags...and now...I wish my mother could..."

She gathered herself and took a deep breath.

"Did my father really kill a Luna?"

I was stunned. I didn't know a lot about Vanir Vanaheim. Jon said he was so consumed by jealousy that he could not accept that his alpha defeated him inside the fighting pit during the claiming.

"Yes."

"He killed my mother too." She bluntly said. I was about to ask how when a knock on the door sounded.

"Princess Serena?" It was Darien. "The war council is ready." He said.

I held Valeen's hand as we walked towards the war room. I could feel her shaking but she never faltered. Instead, she held her head high and did not waver when the people in the halls stopped to stare at her. We must've looked like a formidable sight.

Finally, we reached our destination

"Remember, they're here to listen to you." I whispered. Valeen hesitantly nodded.

I pulled Valeen inside, my eyes taking in the round table with the scale model of the territory in the middle. There were two empty seats between Jon and Patrick, and I was grateful that Valeen would be beside me—she'd need the support. I spotted the King, conversing in hushed tones with General Ivon. Generals Xerxes and Cra were moving army pieces around the model territory, and Agent Ba'yon was looking over some maps.

When we entered, the whole room hushed. I saw Patrick looked shell-shocked—this was probably the cleanest he'd seen his new mate. Jon who motioned for me to go to him. I led Valeen to our seats. Patrick immediately drew Valeen into his arms, kissing her on the cheek.

"How are you?" I asked, holding Jon's hand.

"I'm not ready for this."

"None of us are, but we'll get through it together." I said, kissing his hand. Jon smiled at me snd cleared his throat, calling everyone's attention.

"It is a blessing from the Goddess that today, I welcome a new sister, Valeen Lancaster. Anyone who tries to invalidate my brother's mating will have to go through me." Jon said, his voice carrying a threatening tone. I looked at him proudly. "She is the daughter of the Rogue King, Vanir Vanaheim, and we are thankful that she arrived safely. She has information that will be vital to our victory against the savage rogues. Sister, the room is yours."

Patrick helped her up, and she shook so much that for a while I was afraid she'd cry and run for the hills. But she didn't. She peered curiously at the scale model, especially the northern part with the snowy mountains and icebergs.

"What does this red block mean?" She gently asked, pointing at a red wooden piece just a few miles from the border.

"Your father's main camp." General Ivon proudly said. Valeen looked at him and curiously nodded.

We all gasped when she plucked the red block and transferred it a hundred miles away across the territory to the west. She then placed a blue piece of paper beside it.

"My father's den is beside Lake Wolfsbane. This..." She motioned to the where the block was previously placed and put a crumpled piece of paper there. "Is where the women are kept. Your map is wrong."

"Women are kept separate from men?" General Xerxes asked.

"This is called the nurturing den." Valeen said, motioning to the crumpled piece of paper. "But it is a misleading name. That is where the men go to breed with the imprisoned females. That is where pups are born and kept until they shift and join my father's army. Any deformed baby is killed and eaten."

"And you lived in this den?" Jon asked.

"No. I was born in the den. I was raised here." She said, putting another red block to the northernmost tip of the continent. "My father said that females needed to know true winter before they can feel the warmth of a male. Females get sent to the nurturing den when they turn 18."

"But you are 17..." I whispered. Valeen nodded.

"My father wanted to claim my first breeding. When my mother found out—she sent the first message to you. She hatched the plan to get me out and when she died, I saw it through. Tomorrow would have been the day my father bred with me." Valeen sadly said, taking Patrick's hand. "He has been looking forward to it for a long time..."

"Because my father could not leave his den, he had me sent to him so we could wait my 18th birthday out there. He has hundreds of wolves stationed here, here, and here..." Valeen hummed, placing pieces of paper near the borders.

"He also plans to have a hundred of his men take a ship south and wreak havoc across your packs. That's why you need to have your waterways secured. If you want to defeat my father, you will have to take over his stronghold. His guards know the forests well, so the best strategy is to meet him in battle over the frozen lake." Valeen said, pointing at the blue piece of paper.

"Wait, your father just told you all of this?" General Hassan suspiciously asked. Valeen shrugged.

"My mother told me to eavesdrop and to observe. My father caught her, and killed her." She replied, trembling slightly at the memory. Patrick rubber her back soothingly and she gathered herself.

I felt a lump in my throat, my gaze never left the nurturing den.

"Is the nurturing den heavily guarded?" I asked

"No. He thinks you don't know about it, so he will keep his best wolves close to him." Valeen said. She stopped, looking hesitantly at us. "Make no mistake, my father will raise hell to take me back. He will try to make deals, but he will not honor them. By now he's probably realized I'm gone and is taking action. You need to act now before he does something irreparable, Prince Jonathon."

There was silence. Jon mulled over the words, his eyes flitting across the scale model of the territory. He muttered a few words to himself and rearranged some of his army pieces.

"You are right." Jon nodded, already deep in his thoughts.

"This cruelty is a crime against the goddess! Vanir Vanaheim has plans to attack our territory! We must declare war and go north." General Cra indignantly said.

"General Cra is right. Your majesty, you have to declare war now. These rogues are getting bolder by the minute!" General Ivon added, looking pointedly at the king.

"Alpha Adam reported three of his Silver Ranked warriors injured during an encounter two days ago." General Xerxes supplied.

The King was silent. Jon looked at him expectantly, narrowing his eyes.

"Is there any way we can handle this quietly?" The King asked. Jon growled.

"War cannot be avoided now. My father awaits the bloodshed." Valeen whispered

"We have to inform our people, father! They deserve to know that their lives are in danger! Are you so afraid of swallowing your pride that you cannot admit that your edict to have he rogues exiled HAS FAILED?" Jon roared.

"It is too late to handle this quietly, your majesty, the prince is right." General Xerxes calmly said, holding a hand up to diffuse the situation. Jon could not be dissuaded.

"Your majesty, say the word and we will have our best fighters sent north immediately to defeat this king!" Agent Ba'yon added.

"I WILL NOT DECLARE WAR!" The King bellowed, his voice shaking the walls.

Jon growled, pushing his seat away. He gave a roar, but the king snarled and silenced him.

"LET ME FINISH!" The King growled. Jon clenched his fists tight. "I cannot declare war because I will not be the one fighting it."

"Wasn't that the whole point of my life? You raised me to fight your war and now you won't even have the decency to declare it?" Jon snarled.

"Only a King can declare war." The King said.

"AND YOU ARE THE KING SO DO YOUR DAMN JOB FOR ONCE!" Jon bellowed.

"JON!" I cried, pulling him away. "CONTROL YOURSELF!"

The room was silent as father and son stared each other down.

The King stood and walked over to Jon. King Armand faced his heir. Jon didn't back down.

" *You* will declare war, and *you* will lead it. As of this moment, I am abdicating my place as King of the Werewolves."

What.

Then, King Armand pushed Jon to kneel in front of him.

"I have had my failures as a King, but this is one thing that I am certain I am doing right, *your majesty*".

King Armand took the heavy set crown from his head and transferred it atop Jon's unruly curls.

"Rise, King Jonathon Lancaster."

Jon froze. My hands shaking, I placed them on his shoulder and helped him up.

When Jon stood up, one by one everyone in the room knelt down. Until it was only me and him standing up. I gave a low curtsy. Jon immediately pulled me up, and everyone followed suit.

"We will follow you to war, your majesty." General Cra proudly said, putting his hand on Jon's shoulder. Jon was still silent.

"Jon?" I tentatively called. My voice shook him out of his reverie. He glanced at me with such an infallible look of humility and strengh that I couldn't prevent a smile.

"Call Adam, tell him to ready the North for our arrival. Write down every word that Valeen reported about the savagery beyond the border, and spread it. Send a message to every pack—all warriors will report North a week after the claiming ceremony." Jon ordered.

He's a king.

"I, King Jonathon Lancaster, am declaring war against Rogue King Vanir Vanaheim."

King Jonathon Lancaster and his Queen Serena.

May the Goddess bless our reign.

A/N
We only have a few more chapters left until the end! Just a reminder, I update on TUESDAYS and FRIDAYS.

What do you think of Valeen and Patrick? Any first impressions on them as a couple? Is Jon ready to be King? More importantly, is Serena ready to be a Queen?

Send me your thoughts and votes! Love you all!

**Continue to next part**