

## Chapter 0009

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Verena

I have to fight this. If Nixie wins, my pup will be in danger. I won't let that happen.

We walk down the stairs and step outside. The sky is filled with gray clouds. On the large training grounds where the air usually buzzes with excitement and the energy of warriors, there's a damp, silent atmosphere among the people who came to watch the ceremony.

None of them seem sad to watch me get rejected. They've never wanted me as their Luna because I'm an orphan. I take my place in the center of the ground.

The people on the left clear a path for Elijah to walk through by standing in two rows, and he stops before the space created for the ceremony. Our eyes meet for a few seconds before he turns to the crowd.

"I won't waste time on explaining what's happening here as most of you present are already aware. But know that I won't tolerate anyone breaking the rules. If anyone dares to say a bad word to Verena or insults her in any way, I will have your head. Rejected or not, she is still a respected member of our family and this pack. So you all are expected to treat her fairly. Is that clear?"

The people nod in unison, fearing Elijah's wrath. A part of me is glad that he is rejecting me in a respectful manner. It would have hurt a lot more if he just allowed anyone to publicly berate me, especially when I go through the rejection.

Elijah walks closer to me, and looks into my eyes. I smell alcohol in his breath. Is he drunk?

"I, Elijah Donovan, Alpha of the Iron Claw Pack, reject you, Verena, as my fated mate and my Luna," he declares. I close my eyes, attempting to block out the pain threatening to consume me. But even in the darkness behind my eyelids, I feel the strength of the rejection, as it threatens to tear my body apart. The pain rattles through my bones, clogging my nostrils and leaving me breathless.

Elijah extends his arm to help me, but I take a step back. I will endure this pain alone.

"I, Verena, current Luna of the Iron Claw Pack, accept your rejection, Alpha Elijah," I declare. My legs wobble beneath my dress as the ache in my chest intensifies. I feel a strong convulsion in my belly, causing me to lose my balance and drop to the ground, clutching my stomach. My baby!

"Rena, are you alright?" Elijah inquires, but I know better than to believe that he actually cares for me. Gradually, the pain subsides, and I feel the herbs taking action to protect my baby from the effects of the rejection.

"I am fine," I manage to say, wiping my tear-soaked face.

"You accepted it," he mutters under his breath. Was he not expecting it? I don't even understand him at this point.

My limbs feel weak, so I remain in my place, trying to prevent myself from passing out. Just as I begin to feel like I have regained some control over my body, a strong scent hits my nose. It smells like lemons and grass, reminiscent of summer.

I glance in the direction from which it's coming and spot a man walking into the crowd, looking around anxiously. He's as tall as Elijah, broad and well-built, with spiky light-blond hair, deep blue eyes, and a tattoo running down his left arm. His aura is powerful, like that of an Alpha.

The moment his eyes land on me, he growls ferociously, his wolf showing in his eyes, "Mine!"

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