

## Chapter 11 - Rumor has it

Nicolas POV

For what seemed like the hundredth time this morning, Zara's cute face kept popping into my mind.

"Something feels off," I murmured to myself. "I should not be affected by the bond anymore. By now, it ought to have been severed. The mating ritual happened nearly a week ago."

I sighed with annoyance, set the pen down on my desk, and peered out the window.

The memory of meeting Zara held my thoughts captive all the time. Her beauty was even more striking up close. Her perfect skin revealed a subtle glow on her cheeks under the moonlight. Her raven hair shone brilliantly. Her silver eyes looked like mercury owing around her pupils.

I found myself thinking about that evening again.

"Take the Alpha's hand, Zara," her beta whispered, gesturing to my hand.

Zara hesitated, unsure of what to do.

I couldn't help but find Zara's expression adorable. Almost like a deer in headlights, she hesitated a great deal to take my hand.

Did she feel afraid?

Was she afraid of me?

A few minutes ago, she appeared confused rather than afraid of me.

"You are scaring our mate," Ray growled inside my mind. "Back off! Back off now!"

"Why should I?" I asked, finding the situation amusing. "I enjoy unsettling her. She looks adorable with that red glow on her cheeks."

In fact, I was finding it hard to ignore, and it stirred excitement in me. My c\*\*k twitched, and a shiver ran down my spine. Her scent was driving me insane, urging me to want to taste her.

"Stop it!" Ray let out a roar and scratched to be released.

"Alright!" I exclaimed. "I will retreat!"

Once again, my focus was on Zara.

"Don't worry about it," I said, trying not to show how disappointed I was. With a smile, I gently withdrew my hand.

"Zara," Beta Levi hissed. "You just offended the Midnight Moon Pack's Alpha!"

"Your Luna has the right to decline to shake the hand of another Alpha," I reassured Beta Levi. "You ought to take it as a compliment, Beta. It just goes to show that Luna from the Silverado Pack will always cherish her bond with you. I honor her decision. So should you!"

Beta Levi was speechless as he looked at me in bewilderment.

Zara looked away and towards her hands with a hint of nervousness.

Is it really me who is making her anxious?

That idea infuriated me. I just saved her life a few moments ago; I have not done anything to offend her.

"Perhaps she believes you are unable to scent her as your mate?" Ray huffed. "You have not openly claimed her!"

"And I will not!" I snapped, irritated.

"Calm down!" Ray growled. "She is going to pick up on your emotions!"

I inhaled deeply, letting her warm, rich scent of wildflowers fill my lungs, but I could not help but notice that there was an even sweeter, more seductive scent coming from Zara. It smelled like a honeypot, begging to be licked.

"F\*ck!" I internally grunted when I finally realized that the smell was her arousal, begging me to go and touch and taste her.

I shook the thoughts off, yet worry crept in.

I was going to end up in big trouble if I didn't leave soon.

Once Ray has noticed the scent, instinct will take over, and he will get me for control to claim Zara. I would be unable to exert any kind of control over him.

I glanced in Ronan's direction.

"I think we should call it a night," I said, trying not to inhale much of Zara's aroused scent. "We still have a long road ahead of us."

Zara raised her eyes. Her once-sparkly silver eyes now seemed dejected.

"You can't be leaving now," Beta Levi protested. "It is late. Instead, spend the night in the packhouse. Tomorrow morning, you can set out early to return to your pack."

I shook my head. If I stayed any longer, I would be unable to control myself in any way.

"I am sorry. I have a very important meeting in the morning," I lied.

A frown appeared on Ronan's forehead as his eyes narrowed.

"What's going on?" he mind-linked. "You seem nervous about something."

"I can't stay the night," I replied. "It's complicated. We need to leave now!"

Without raising any more queries, Ronan nodded.

We quickly departed, and even though it has been nearly a week since I last saw Zara, our mate bond is only growing stronger every day.

Her persistent presence in my thoughts was unsettling and had an impact on my work and mental health. I was having trouble concentrating. I couldn't eat, and it was impossible to get a good night's sleep.

I was slowly losing my mind.

I stood up and moved in the direction of the window. The weather was clear and sunny, and wolves were making the most of the final few days of summer.

A few young pups were playing at the playground, chasing each other up the play structure. Their high-pitched laughter made me shiver and smile. I loved watching them play.

My focus moved to a couple approaching the playground. They were holding a pup's hands, and his parents were happily swinging him between them. He erupted in laughter.

My heart was suddenly heavy with sadness—that could have been Isabella and me—and my smile wavered.

I closed my eyes, attempting to recall her face, but my thoughts kept returning to Zara's.

"What the devil!" I hit the window sill with my fist, growling. "Why are you wiping my memories?"

"She is not," Ray said, emerging from the recesses of my consciousness.

"So why am I not even able to remember Isabella's face?" I snarled.

"Because the bond is now only recognizing Zara as our mate," Ray replied. "It desires for you to take and claim our mate."

"I can't," I replied, feeling emotionally spent.

"Then you have to reject her!" Ray yelled. "It is the only way!"

The thought of rejecting Zara left a bitter taste in my mouth. I could not bear to watch her suffer. I would never be able to forgive myself.

How the hell do I do this?

How the hell do I stop having lustful thoughts about Zara?

A soft knock on the office door startled me, and when I turned around, Ronan was just sticking his head in.

"Do you have a moment to spare?" He asked.

I nodded and motioned for him to come in.

Ronan stepped inside and shut the door. He appeared anxious and a little tense.

"What seems to be the problem?" I asked, getting straight to the point, as soon as he sat down in one of the two chairs facing my table.

Except in situations where it could mean the difference between life and death, Ronan never comes to bother me with minor things. This must be something big.

"The council called to arrange an emergency meeting with all surrounding packs," he said.

That sounded a little strange. Our monthly meeting was only scheduled for next week.

"In connection to what?" I huffed, annoyed.

I have never been fond of the council, and I hated our monthly meetings. Ronan usually attends the meetings rather than me.

"There are rumors that a war is on the horizon," he said. "And it involves the Silverado Pack."

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