

## Chapter 9

\*Molly\*

I couldn't decide if it was better to let all the grown-ups meet in the room before we got there and get whatever they need out or if it was better to be there when they arrived, but I couldn't get how fragile my mom seemed out of my mind. So here I sit, next to my mate at the head of the table, keeping him as far away as everyone else as I can.

I reach across and squeeze his hand gently. "It's alright, my little croissant," I tell him with a smirk, knowing how much he dislikes, yet secretly likes, when I call him food related pet names. He'd die if anyone else ever heard, though.

"That's got to be the worst one yet," he says, a smile tugging at his reluctant lips.

"If you say so," I tell him, squeezing his hand once again as I smell his parents approaching.

The door opens and Peter and Audrey enter. Peter walks to the table and goes to pull out a chair, but he pauses and looks at me.

"I couldn't decide what was best," I tell him with a shrug. "Just sit wherever. Maybe leave the seat next to Seth empty."

Peter nods at me and pulls the chair out for Audrey, taking the seat across from her in a move that surprises me. It also surprises me as he puts his hand on top of the table, reaching for hers and holding it tightly. Neither Seth nor Audrey look up, not even for a second each burning a hole through the table with their stares. My parents arrive next, taking the side of the table next to Audrey, the two women holding hands underneath the table.

"How's the little one?" Dad asks me, noting where my hand rests upon my stomach.

"Strong," I tell him with a weak smile as he rolls again and again.

"Good," he tells me, leaning over to kiss my cheek, whispering in my ear. "He's going to need to be in this family."

The door opens and Austin and Carolyn walk in. The look of disgust on her face upon seeing my mom and Audrey doesn't go unnoticed as Peter pulls out the chair next to him.

"Why don't you sit here," he says, his voice completely impassive. "Let's give Seth a little room."

Austin nods and takes a seat as Seth situates himself, straightening out his suit jacket. "It's KING Seth," he grinds out, surprising all of us. He's never one for formalities, especially with family.

I sigh, realizing that he's not going to make any of this easy for anyone. "Right," I speak up, sitting up a little taller. "As we talked about, we need to set aside any personal issues so that Seth and I can learn everything we need about David. Audrey, did you think about what we discussed?"

She nods, her eyes never leaving Peter. I see him squeeze her hand and she takes a deep breath. "Mom, Austin, I revoke the order I placed upon you. You're free to discuss."

"But it would be wise for nothing to leave this room," Peter adds in a threatening tone.

"You cannot name David Alpha," Dad says, not wasting any time.

"Agreed," Austin adds with a nod.

"I need reasons why," Seth says plainly. "Firm reasons. Reasons that make him truly unt as an Alpha, not just personal issues."

"He was removed as an Alpha," Peter speaks up. "You wouldn't give Benjamin his title back and his offenses were far less."

"And his offenses?" I say, knowing that they told us some, but we need everything. Lucas isn't going to be happy about a rejection.

"He stole pack funds," Mom says softly, not willing to look at anyone. "We never had physical proof he changed the numbers, but he did. I'm sure of it."

I look to Austin and he nods in agreement. "He also was planning a coup," he says, looking at Peter next to him and then my dad. "There was a journal," he begins but stops himself.

Dad nods slowly. "I decided to burn it. It would have been useful now, but I was protecting your mother. To my knowledge, no one outside of this room has ever read it."

"Was there mention of a prophecy in it?" I ask, rubbing my hand across my growing child. David had assured me that I would be safe, that my children would be safe. Was it a lie? He seemed so sincere. Dad shakes his head and smiles at me weakly. If there were, I'm sure he'd tell me the truth.

"He used a teenage girl," Carolyn speaks up and it surprises me. So much so, that it must show on my face. "It took me years to accept it, but he manipulated a young girl, a girl too young."

I look to my mom, knowing how hard this is for her. She leans forward slightly so she can see me from behind my dad. "He did, but we... we did not have a physical relationship until I was of age."

"And since your mother had shifted so early," Dad adds, placing his arm around her. "It could complicate an argument as to what exactly 'of age' truly means."

"That is true," Carolyn says, clasping her hands together on top of the table. "But it certainly wasn't a newly shifted fteen-year-old. David used many people, and my mate paid the price for it."

There's a silence across the room and I can feel Seth warring with himself. Carolyn's words seem to really have affected him some way.

"Why was he ocially removed as Alpha?" Seth asks. "I know he did many things wrong, but what was the ocial reason?"

Peter shifts uncomfortably in his seat, awkwardly straightening his tie. "He did not have my father's approval to form the bond with Celeste to make her Luna."

"Why would he need approval?" he asks, as confused as I am.

"The bond ties the Alpha and Luna together, similar to the mate bond," Peter explains and nally, I realize why this has been so hard for my mom.

"Mom," I say softly to her, as she looks down at her lap. "Did you know?"

She shakes her head slowly as dad gently squeezes her shoulder. "She didn't know," he says, looking at her. "He told her that having the protections afforded to a Luna were worth it. He did not tell her about the bond until after it was done. He told her it would break when she was marked, but we learned from reading his journal that he knew it likely wouldn't."

"So he was removed as Alpha and it broke the Bond?" Seth asks, nally understanding.

"King Joseph knew my mother," mom says softly. "He told me that he owed me because she saved his life when they were younger. He placed a generational order for me to never nd out what happened to David. The day of the Alpha challenge, though, I saw his wolf and the order started to squeeze my heart since I had deed it. Peter lifted it that afternoon."

Seth squeezes the bridge of his nose, clearly frustrated. "How many more f\*\*\*\*g orders are out here that I don't know?"

"Nothing dealing with family, Son," Peter reassures him.

"Mom," I say quietly, "Will the bond return if we make him Alpha?"