

# Talking to the Moon |

## Winter Festival

The annual Winter Festival is upon us, a tradition that the White Oak Pack has been hosting for over a hundred years.

Almost every pack is invited, but for obvious reasons, each pack only sends a small portion of their members each year, rotating who gets to attend, with the exception of the higher ranks.

Even Jason is here, and he's brought a date, Betty. She's a sweet, lovely woman, and I instantly like her.

They haven't been together for long, but since they've both lost their mates, they've chosen each other and are planning their mating ceremony like a wedding.

I'm genuinely happy for them and wish them the best. When I hug Betty, she whispers a secret in my ear. She's expecting a pup and plans to tell Jason after the Winter Ball.

A pang of sadness hits me, reminding me of the pup I lost. I hide it behind a smile and hug her again, holding on until I'm sure my tears won't fall.

The White Oak Pack hasn't been too pleased with the twins since word of their rejection spread. Many have either offered me their condolences or cursed the twins for their foolishness.

I appreciate their support, but I hope they'll find peace with the situation and eventually accept their lunas, once the twins find them.

Mostly, it's the omegas who approach me, and I learn that since I left, they haven't been treated the same.

Omegas are no longer given menial tasks or demeaning jobs. Everyone is responsible for their own laundry, food, and cleaning.

The only exception is during events like the festival or pack breakfasts, where everyone pitches in, even the warriors.

The transition wasn't easy and faced some resistance from the warriors, but they eventually complied.

Everyone is given the opportunity to go to college to earn a degree that benefits the pack, and no one has to worry about tuition.

The pack hierarchy has changed drastically for the better, all thanks to the twins. They've matured a lot since I left, and I feel a sense of pride.

Leo and I spend the day exploring the festival, going from vendor to vendor, sampling food and drinks.

I find the cutest handmade onesie with a wolf and the words *Sweet Little Wolf*. I buy it and give it to Leo, who gets teary-eyed and kisses me.

He's overjoyed at the thought of becoming a father soon.

A vendor brewing wassail fills the air with the scent of mulled wine and spices, and we sip on it while listening to a choir of pups singing on a makeshift stage.

The pups sing their hearts out, and one sings with such passion that he dramatically waves his arms around.

Lumen expresses her love for the baby onesie and Leo while she talks nonstop about Pax. We let them run free a few times a week, but it seems it's not enough for them.

Most vendors have a winter theme and focus on comfort food and drinks, but some offer other crafts as well. It seems to be going well for most, as they have customers lining up to buy from them.

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Later that evening, I head to the event building where the Winter Ball is held.

I'm wearing a long, champagne-colored evening dress with a low neckline and an open back, showing off the many moonflowers on my body. My six-inch heels match the dress.

I chose simple makeup and left my curls loose, flowing down my back.

Leo is helping Greyson back at the pack house and promised to meet me at the ball when they finish. I can't wait for him to see me in my dress, knowing he prefers me in them for easy access to my sweet spot.

Liam and Jameson kick off the ball with a welcoming speech and then sit by the dance floor, watching the other wolves dance.

They're dressed up for the event, which I know they hate; this is the only day of the year they do it.

Growing up, I spent every year forcing them to get dressed and tying their ties for them. It was a tradition that I've missed every winter since.

The ballroom is decorated with candles, pine branches, fake snow, and animal fur. It's breathtaking and romantic, and I can't help but wish Leo would hurry up so he can twirl me around on the dance floor.

I'm sipping my drink and wondering what's taking Leo so long when I see Greyson spinning Clara around on the floor, looking happy and in love. They might make it after all.

I wait for the song to end before I approach them and ask about Leo.

*"He needs to hurry, I miss Pax,"* Lumen urges me.

I laugh at her and am glad she likes Pax so much. *"Patience, Lumen. They'll be here soon."*

"You two look great." I hug Clara. "Where's Leo?" I ask Greyson.

"He's helping Amelia get settled, and then he'll be here," Greyson assures me. "Don't worry, she just had a lot of bags for someone just staying a week. You know how she is—shallow."

"Greyson can dance with you while you wait," Clara suggests with a smile.

"Thank you, but I'll be okay. I'll just wait for him," I assure them, and let the couple dance away.

Suddenly, I feel a light touch on my elbow. The scent of rosewood and vanilla fills the air, and I know Liam is behind me.

I turn around and find him standing there in a black suit, with a champagne-colored handkerchief in his pocket matching his tie.

Liam follows my gaze to his handkerchief. "We got them to match your dress," he admits, and gestures toward Jameson, who stands to the side. He extends his hand. "May I have this dance?"

I hesitate, not wanting Leo to walk in and think I'm entertaining the twins. "I promise it's just a friendly dance. No ill intentions," Liam assures me, extending his hand further.

Not wanting to make a scene, I take his hand and let him pull me closer.

His scent surrounds me, and I start to reminisce about old times. I remember all the sweet moments we shared, all the touches, and the promises of love.

He twirls me around the dance floor, remaining a perfect gentleman the entire time.

Our bodies communicate what our lips can't. I miss him, even though he's the one who hurt me.

As the dance ends, he bends down and plants a gentle kiss on my cheek. He bows, thanks me for the dance, and walks away.

Jameson steps up to me and pulls me close. "May I?"

I nod and let him whirl me around the dance floor, just like his brother did. The scent of green apple and lemon fills the air, and my senses are heightened, sending me on a trip down memory lane.

Jameson's laughter and his playful spirit make me smile. I remember how he used to make me laugh until I couldn't breathe.

The song is halfway through when my mate mark starts to burn. The heat intensifies until I can't bear it anymore. I rush out of the ballroom before I become the center of attention.

I reach the lawn, collapse onto the grass, and start dry heaving from the pain. A sharp pain in my heart makes me gasp for breath, and I think I might die.

Jameson and Liam kneel beside me, whispering comforting words, stroking my back, and holding my hair back.

"Olivia, what's wrong? Let us help you," Jameson pleads. "We're here for you."

"My mate mark, it's burning." I clutch at the mark but feel no heat under my fingertips. I can't understand what's happening, but I know something is terribly wrong with Leo. I just hope he's okay.

"Olivia," Liam cries out, "it's gone. Your mate mark isn't there anymore."

Greyson and Clara come running out. "Olivia, what happened?"

"My mate mark is gone, and it feels like I've been stabbed in the heart," I sob, clutching my stomach in pain. "Is he hurt, is he dead? Why is this happening?"

Clara gasps, and I know she can explain what's happening to me. "Clara?"

"Where's Leo?" she asks Greyson.

"I told you, he's with Amelia. Why?" Greyson responds, running his hand through his hair.

A single tear rolls down Clara's cheek as she looks between the men in a panic. "It seems he's found his mate and marked her."

Everything goes black as I pass out from the pain, cradled in the twins' arms, and let Lumen take control of my body.