

The Warrior's Broken Mate Chapter 01

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I don't have a single memory of my mother; she died bringing me into this world. But every recollection I do have is scorched with the presence of my father—his fists, his boots, the searing pain of his belt. I wear his anger like a second skin, every bruise branding me as guilty.

He is the Alpha of the Crystal River Pack: looming, broad-shouldered, a shadow of terror in every room. For fifteen relentless years, he has looked at me with the same haunted fury—as if I were the executioner who stole his light. Each day he reminds me with flinty eyes and rasping words, “It should’ve been you. Not her. Not my Luna, not the mate who held my soul together. His angel. His heart. And me? I am nothing but the poison that leeches all hope from him—a blight, a curse, bad luck that he needs to crush underfoot.”

After her death, he chose a new partner. She wasn't a fated mate but a Luna picked for her power and status. Rumors swirled that he almost pursued my mother again until his Beta stepped in. Once, I believed those whispers—until I learned the truth. Now, as my sixteenth birthday arrives and the chance to awaken my wolf looms, reality returns: only the strong harness that power. I am not one of them, not with my health ruined by my father's heavy hand.

“Lyra!”

My name boomed from downstairs, thunder in his voice. Heart pounding, I dropped the old rag and hurried down two flights of stone steps through the packhouse.

There stood Alpha Thorne. Towering at six-foot-five and built like a war god, his muscles strained against his black shirt as he glared down at me with a look that suggested I was utterly insignificant.

“Apologies, Alpha,” I whispered, lowering my gaze.

“I told you that the guests are arriving tonight. The Vanguard Pack will be here shortly. This ballroom needs to be spotless. The floor better shine,” he barked.

“Yes, Alpha. I'll take care of it right away,” I replied quickly, bowing again before rushing off toward the supply room.

I hadn't heard much about the Vanguard Pack, only that they were some of the fiercest warriors in the werewolf world—respected and untouchable. Their reputation was why Thorne was so on edge, treating their arrival as if it were a royal visit. Maybe it was.

I ducked into the laundry room and grabbed a tin bucket, filling it with hot, soapy water. With a stiff scrub brush and a handful of rags, I headed back to the ballroom. That's when I bumped straight into her.

"Watch it, you worthless brat!" Seraphina, my stepmother and the Luna of the pack, snapped, her designer dress now splattered with soapy water.

"I'm sorry, Luna," I murmured, quickly dropping my gaze.

"Thorne! Your child just soaked me!" she shrieked, calling down the hallway.

My father appeared almost immediately. His icy gaze locked onto me, and then he struck—hard—across my face. White sparks blurred my vision. As I stumbled back, Seraphina smiled smugly and linked arms with him. They walked away, leaving me invisible. My jaw throbbed, but I couldn't linger in self-pity. I picked up the brush, dropped to my knees, and began scrubbing the enormous ballroom floor. It would take all day to finish, but I had no choice; falling behind would only make things worse.

As I worked, time slipped by, and the monotonous scrubbing dulled my senses until I noticed voices drifting in from the adjoining room. I paused and crept toward the kitchen doorway, hiding just out of sight.

"Some omega left a bucket out with half the floor still undone," one unfamiliar voice said, tinged with irritation.

"Let the Alpha catch her. He'll show her what it means to be careless," another voice chimed in.

As their footsteps faded, I stood frozen behind the door, my heart racing. Outsiders in this house were unsettling. The rule was clear: no one could see me—only Thorne and Seraphina could acknowledge my existence.

Once I was certain they had vanished, I crept back into the ballroom, shutting the doors behind me. My knees burned raw, and my back screamed with each stroke as I worked, unable to pause. I wondered what lies my father spun about me after my mother died—maybe he claimed I was dead, maybe I was never mentioned at all. Either way, the message thundered through every silent hallway: I was meant to disappear, to be erased.

After I made the last tile shine and cleared away the water, I returned my supplies to their spots and headed to the kitchen to dive into round two of my responsibilities—preparing for the banquet.

As I walked by the ballroom doors, I could hear the sound of chairs scraping against the floor and voices calling out. I peeked through a narrow crack in the wood. Servants were busy setting up long tables that stretched the length of the hall—easily

accommodating twenty seats on each side—with a wide open space in the center. A dance floor. Naturally.

I slipped away quickly before anyone noticed and hurried back to the prep table. There was no time to pause or catch my breath.

In the kitchen, I gathered ingredients for the evening's buffet-style dinner. I started by putting the roast in the oven. Next came handmade biscuits, followed by seasoned roasted vegetables. I prepared apple and cranberry sauces, and arranged a fruit platter ringed with fresh vegetables for lighter options. The spread looked so tempting. I eyed a slice of mango, wondering if anyone would notice if I took just one piece.

But I quickly crushed the urge. My family would probably count every last piece of fruit down to the ounce. Stealing even a sliver would mark me as a thief, and my father's twisted paranoia meant it wouldn't surprise me if invisible eyes watched my every move. There is no freedom in this house—only the constant threat of punishment, lurking behind every corner.

After that, I turned my attention to the desserts I had been assigned. I baked a rich chocolate cake layered with decadent ganache, prepared a creamy cheesecake, filled dozens of tiny glass cups with mousse topped with fresh whipped cream, and finally assembled a fruitcake. The kitchen was now filled with the warm, inviting aroma of sugar and spice.

"Why aren't you done yet?" came the sharp voice of my stepmother, Seraphina, as she swept into the kitchen. She was dressed in a floor-length gown glimmering with emerald sequins, her heels clicking sharply against the tiles. Jewels sparkled at her ears, neck, and wrists, as if she were trying to outshine the very moon.

"I've just finished everything, Luna," I replied, lowering my gaze and stepping back from the counter. "It's all prepped and ready to go."

"Good. Now get out. The servers will take it from here," she snapped.

I nodded and slipped out the back door, heading up the hidden staircase behind the pantry. Three flights passed in silence before I reached the attic door. Unlocking it quickly, I crept inside and made sure the lock clicked shut. Dust and cobwebs filled the cluttered space, but I found my way to the worn cot by the window. Curling onto the thin mattress, I gazed at the dusky sky—where crimson and gold marked my only escape from this house.

I picked up one of my old books hidden under my blanket, my only real treasures. As I read, I heard engines outside and looked out the window. Limousines arrived, and elegantly dressed men and women stepped out like royalty. I could faintly hear my father and Seraphina greeting them at the door with polite words and fake smiles.

They were definitely on their best behavior tonight. These weren't just any guests; they belonged to the Vanguards Pack, renowned for their combat skills and unmatched discipline. Other packs turned to them when they needed serious assistance or training in battle.

From my hidden perch, I studied the men below—power incarnate, every gesture deliberate, every word a display of discipline. The women's laughter sparkled, their beauty effortless and untouchable. Jealousy coiled tight in my chest. For one fragile heartbeat, I truly became the invisible, forgotten girl from a fairy tale—a cursed Cinderella, doomed to rot away, unseen and unrescued.

With a slow exhale, I closed the window and sank back onto my cot. The muffled sounds of laughter and music from below faded as I lost myself once more in the pages of my book.

Somewhere between one heartbeat and the next, I drifted into an uneasy sleep—only to jolt awake to frantic rattling at the attic door. Panic clamped down on my chest, my hands shaking as I flew to check the lock. Relief swept through me like cold water—it was still secure. For a moment, terror kept me frozen.

"Is someone in there?" a deep male voice called from the other side. My pulse raced, and I kept silent.

"I know you're in there. I can hear your breathing... your heartbeat." He paused before adding, "It's racing."

My panic shifted to dread. If my father found out someone had spoken to me—especially tonight—there would be serious repercussions.

"Go back to the party!" I stammered, desperate to keep my voice steady.

"Who are you?" the stranger asked calmly.

"No one," I whispered. "Just leave, please."

"I'm not going anywhere until you open this door," he said firmly.

Before I could reply, another voice—sharp and cold—echoed down the hall.

"What's going on here?"

It was my father.