

Not the Son They Wanted

The throne room smells like power and old lies.

Stone walls rise high and cold, carved with victories that were never won by women. The air hums with deep male voices—ocials, elders, and war strategists—gathered for the morning assembly. My father sits on the obsidian throne at the far end, crown heavy on his head, authority effortless on his shoulders.

No woman is allowed inside.

Not even me, the princess. Not even my mother, the queen.

Crazy, right?

Only maids pass through these doors—and only on their knees, scrubbing blood and mud from the oor with bare hands while men discuss the fate of the world above their bowed heads. Sweat dripping. Backs bent. Silent.

Replaceable.

The memory alone makes my teeth grind.

I stand just outside the heavy doors, tucked into the shadow of a pillar, pulse steady despite the fury crawling beneath my skin. There are no guards out here—there never are. All protection faces inward. They assume no woman would dare listen. After all the taming and forceful submission they've inicted, no one is supposed to forget the lesson.

They are wrong.

I listen like this often. It's the only way to stay ahead. The only way to make sure nothing blindsides me.

But if I am caught—princess or not—they will strip me naked in front of the entire court and og me until my back is raw, just to remind every woman of her place.

Inside, the conversation drags on, dull and familiar.

"The prophecy was clear," an elder drones. "A child will be born—an Alpha King powerful enough to unite all packs and defeat all our enemies for good."

A wave of murmured agreement rolls through the room.

"Yet we were given a woman," another adds dismissively. "An unfortunate deviation."

Deviation.

My jaw tightens at their foolishness.

The prophecy said a child, not a son, but these bastards twist every word to suit themselves.

"Obviously it meant a male child," someone scoffs, as if reading my mind. "A woman cannot rule or be crowned. The prophecy failed the moment she was born female. Since the prophecy made a little mistake, we simply x it and make things right."

Laughter rolls through the hall, and just like that, my whole existence is tossed aside like a awed weapon.

They move on, unmoved, unbothered, as though I was never meant to matter.

This is why I am disappointed in my mother.

No—angry.

Because if she had stood her ground, if she had fought instead of kneeling, maybe women wouldn't be treated like stains on stone oors. Maybe daughters wouldn't grow up learning how to disappear.

I exhale slowly, pressing my ngers into the cold wall.

Then—

"Your Majesty."

The voice shifts the air.

It belongs to Lord Kaelros—the high-ranking ocial in charge of war affairs. Brutal, strategic, respected, and most importantly... feared.

I lean closer.

"If the princess has not found her fated mate yet," Kaelros says evenly, "then it is time she is given a chosen one."

My stomach drops.

"We have been patient," another elder chimes in. "Seven years since she turned eighteen. She is no longer a girl."

No longer a girl.

The words crawl over my skin like lth.

"A woman without a mate is unstable," someone adds. "Dangerous."

I love how they know I am dangerous, and I hope they choke on the truth one day.

"We cannot risk her independence becoming... ideas," an elder mutters. "A chosen bond will ground her."

Control her, he means.

My hands curl into sts.

"There are many suitable candidates," another voice says eagerly. "Alphas. Betas. Gammas. War leaders. Men of ambition."

A parchment rustles.

"Here is a list, Your Majesty," the elder continues. "Each one vetted, loyal, and strong. Any of them would rule well beside her."

Beside me.

They mean over me.

"The best among them", Kaelros adds, "can be selected. He will become king. She will fullll her duty as queen."

Then one elder speaks—a voice sharp as a blade, slick with venom.

"In truth, Your Majesty," he sneers, "the princess should be grateful. Without a mate, she is nothing. No purpose. A female with power but no man to contain it is a threat—to herself and to the kingdom."

A few men grunt in agreement.

"She should be bound before she grows too bold," he adds, voice dripping contempt. "Before she forgets what she is."

My vision blurs.

What I am?

They are deciding my life as if it's livestock being auctioned. Discussing my body. My future. My submission.

Without me.

Without my consent.

Blood roars in my ears as my wolf hurls herself against her cage—snarling, furious, desperate to tear through wood, stone, and esh. It takes everything in me not to storm inside, rip the doors from their hinges, and show those old men exactly what their "weak princess" is capable of—exactly how wrong they are.

I step back—slowly, silently—turning away before they can hear the crack forming in my chest.

My breaths come sharp and hot as I stride through the palace halls, ignoring the stiff-backed guards who bow as if my very presence stings their eyes.

I'm actually supposed to be in the Crescent Courtyard Instructional Gathering—the weekly ritual where noble women are lectured on "proper feminine behaviour", not eavesdropping on political meetings. That's where I'm taught how to sit, how to speak softly, how to pour tea, and how not to irritate a husband, a mate, or an Alpha.

Useless. Empty.

A chokehold disguised as etiquette.

Women aren't taught how to ght, or how to lead, or how to think for themselves. The entire purpose is to keep us small—silent—obedient. To make sure we never even dream of defending ourselves.

Unfortunately for them, ghting comes naturally to me. I never needed to be taught. It's as if I was born with the skills—built for battle, not tea lessons.

The very thought of sitting in that courtyard again makes my stomach curl.

I reach my chambers and push the door open, relieved beyond measure when the room is empty—no sight of my mother, no forced serenity, no trembling hands pretending strength.

The last thing I want right now is her voice. Another confrontation. Another plea to "behave." I'm still raw from our last argument.

She's avoiding me—obviously. After our last ght, she probably spun some excuse about why I'm not at the instructional gathering, hoping I'll use the time to repent.

To "come to my senses."

To stop dreaming of the impossible—claiming my place as Alpha King.

I slam the door shut behind me and strip out of my clothes, my movements sharp and frantic. I rush into the bathroom, desperate for anything that can cool the rage thrashing inside me.

I step beneath the shower. Hot water crashes over me in a burning cascade—trying, and failing, to wash away the voices that carved into my skull. The voices deciding my life like I'm cattle.

My eyes close. The burn of the heat feels better than the burn in my chest.

Then—

A shift in the room, an unwanted presence.

My wolf snaps awake.

I lift my head sharply. Someone is inside my room.

I hiss under my breath, so furious I almost choke.

I forgot to lock the damned door.

I grab a towel, wrap it tightly around myself, and step out of the bathroom—water still dripping down my skin.

The bathroom door is glass, transparent enough that anyone in the room could see far too much.

And there he stands.

In the middle of my room.

Darian.

Of course.

Exactly what I do not need right now: to deal with an arrogant arsehole.

He is the son of Elder Morthan—one of the very men speaking lth about me moments ago. No wonder they want me married off. They're all hoping the future king will be their son.

And Darian in particular...

Smug. Reeking of entitlement. A walking reminder of everything rotten in this kingdom.

His arms are folded lazily, his eyes roaming across my room like he owns it—then dragging over my body, slow and possessive.

"Go on," he says, voice thick with arrogance. "You can continue bathing. I was... enjoying the view."