

The Monster Who Raised Me

The moment the carriage wheels scrape against stone, I ring the door open. I don't step out—I launch myself into the air, shove a handful of coins at the driver, and sprint toward the palace like a madwoman nally seeing daylight.

My feet ache.

My heart is a war drum.

But I'm free.

I got away from him.

I slip through the side entrance—normally guarded by two warriors built like walking mountains—but tonight?

Empty.

No guards.

Just silence, blanketing the palace like fog.

"What in the moon goddess' name..." I whisper, peeking around a pillar.

This place usually crawls with hundreds of soldiers. My father believed in one thing above all: control through fear. And fear requires guards. Lines of them. A small army at every hallway.

But right now?

Not even a single footstep.

"Well," I mumble under my breath, "maybe the Moon Goddess is nally on my side. Took her long enough."

My real scent is seconds away from returning. I'm exhausted, shaky, and still buzzing from Kei's touch like an i""t still wearing that red dress. I didn't even have time to change back into my omega clothes.

I need my room. Now.

I glide through the corridors with silent feet, heart pounding, trying not to overthink how unnervingly smooth this is.

No guards.

No witnesses.

No trouble.

Suspiciously lucky.

I climb the last staircase to my wing. My room door is dark, quiet. No lights leaking from underneath.

"Huh." I blink. "Maybe Mother actually fell for my trap and thinks I'm asleep."

That would be sweet.

I push the door open. Step inside. Close it behind me with a breath of pure relief.

I lick the light switch.

I'm lifting my dress to step out of it when my soul leaves my body.

Air punches out of my lungs so hard I stumble back, hands dropping uselessly to my sides.

Because sitting on my bed—perfect posture, one elbow resting on his knee—is the last man I ever want to nd waiting for me.

My father.

The Alpha King.

His gaze is xed out the window, but his aura hits me instantly. Cold. Sharp. Calculated. Disappointment pours off him like poison—thick enough to drown in.

He wasn't born with this aura.

He built it.

Forged it.

Sharpened it like a blade.

A beta-born man who clawed his way to the throne with ambition alone.

Who married my mother—daughter of the former Alpha King—not for love, but for power.

And ruined the kingdom with it.

He destroys everything he touches.

Especially women.

"Where are you coming from," he says, "and why are you dressed like that? It's the last thing a princess should ever wear."

Not a question. A warning.

I freeze. My mind races for lies, excuses, alibis—but one look at him kills all of them instantly.

He knows.

He knows I've been gone for hours.

He knows I've been sneaking out.

And lying to him will only make me look pathetic—and I refuse to look pathetic in front of him.

"I went to the club for some fresh air," I answer.

There's a pause. A split-second of absolute silence.

Then he turns his head toward me.

"If you needed fresh air," he says smoothly, "you could have taken a walk in the gardens. Like a proper lady should."

My jaw clenches. Proper lady.

His favorite phrase.

His favorite insult.

"I was told," he continues calmly, "that you've been sneaking out of the palace. Regularly."

Oh gods.

He knows everything.

He has eyes everywhere.

I was foolish to think I slipped past his radar—foolish to think I could live freely for even a moment.

"And your mother..." His lips atten. "Has been covering for you. Just like she's covered for your missing training sessions and skipped classes."

"Mother didn't cover anything. She thought I was asleep. I—"

He lifts his hand. A silent command to shut up.

"She will be punished for failing her duties as queen," he says simply. Emotionless. "And so will you."

A spark of fury lights in my chest. "I'm an adult. I'm not doing anything wrong. I just wanted—"

"The elders were right," he interrupts. "I should have married you off the moment you turned eighteen—or even before."

What?

"Your freedom," he continues, "is going to your head. And now you are acting irrational. Undisciplined. Deant. You think you're above the rules simply because you were born a princess."

I step forward. "It's not freedom if I'm trapped in here my entire life. Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean—"

He stands and suddenly the room feels smaller.

He is tall. Imposing. Cruel in the quiet way that hurts more than yelling ever could.

"You," he says slowly, "have been warned. Many times." His eyes slither down to my dress, my hair, my ushered face. "You are forgetting who you are. What you represent. What you owe."

"I don't owe anyone my life," I snap before I can stop myself.

His aura ares—just enough to silence the air.

"Ravelle."

My name. A warning. A leash tightening.

"You will obey," he says. "You will behave. And you will stop disgracing your title."

I swallow hard, my pulse a frantic drum. "Father, I want to decide my own destiny. I'm done living the life you and everyone else expects me to live."

His nostrils are. His wolf pushes beneath his skin—scraping, snarling, furious that I dared to push back.

"i guess you leave me with no choice," he says, voice tight with irritation. "Get ready for your arranged marriage. Tomorrow."

Tomorrow detonates inside my chest like an exploding star.

Not soon.

Not eventually.

Tomorrow.

I've known this was coming. I've heard the whispers. I've eavesdropped on the poisonous conversations I was never meant to hear. I've rehearsed this moment in my head a thousand sleepless nights.

And still—

It feels like the oor disappears beneath me.

He doesn't look at me to see how the words unravel me piece by piece.

"Hundreds of men," he continues coolly, pacing like a king delivering a decree. "Alphas. Warriors. Leaders from the strongest packs. They will stand before you, and you will choose one."

Choose.

As if this is some kind of gift.

"That man will become king," he adds. "You will serve him as queen. You will open your legs, bear his heirs, and obey him as your duty demands."

My vision goes red.

"No." I croak. "You can't."

He stops pacing. Turns slowly. Annoyance ashes across his face, like I'm an insect daring to buzz.

"I was born to be king," I say. My voice shakes, but the truth steadies it. "Not queen. Not some man's obedient shadow, King."

The slap comes out of nowhere, a sharp crack splits the air.

Pain explodes across my cheek, snapping my head to the side. A high ringing lls my ears, swallowing every other sound. My knees wobble. My mouth oods with blood.

I taste humiliation.

My tongue presses against my split lip, and I let the blood drip down before spitting it at his feet.

The sound echoes—a deliberate act of disrespect.

It's the rst time he has ever struck me.

The perfect princess.

The girl who never stepped out of line.

And still—it was never enough.

"Even if you hit me a thousand times," I say through the pain, "it won't change the truth."

His eyes darken.

"We both know the prophecy is real," I continue, my voice trembling but erce. "You felt it. You've always felt it. I was never meant to kneel."

He scoffs. "The prophecy died the moment you were born female."

"You're lying," I snap. "You've been lying since the day I took my rst breath."

I step closer, ignoring the ache in my jaw.

"The power has been in me since birth. You saw it. You know it. You hid it because you were afraid."

His jaw tightens.

"I won't hide anymore," I whisper. "I won't shrink myself to make you comfortable."

The air hums—charged, unstable.

"This time," I say, "you can't stop me."

For a heartbeat, doubt ickers in his eyes. Then it vanishes—crushed under years of ambition and cruelty.

"I gave you time," he snaps. "Years. I hoped you would nd your fated mate. That love would tame you. That you'd nally accept your place and stop chasing fantasies."

He exhales sharply.

"I wanted you peaceful," he says coldly. "Quiet. Useful."

Then he reaches for my hands.

The touch is gentle.

Too gentle.

My stomach drops. It's the rst time he has ever held me like this—almost like a father. The unfamiliarity freezes me in place.

"I wanted you happy," he says softly, his gaze searching my face with something dangerously close to affection. "I truly did."

I don't have time to react.

Something cold snaps around my wrists—tightening, biting, burning.

Magic surges up my arms like ice.

I gasp as the world goes silent.

My wolf—

gone.

Just—gone.

No presence. No heartbeat. No warmth. Only a hollow, screaming emptiness where she has lived my entire life.

I stumble backward, clutching my wrists, panic tearing through my lungs.

"What did you do?" I rasp.

He steps back, eyes sharpening again, watching me dispassionately.

"I had these made when you were ve," he says calmly. "The rst time I saw you do something no child should be capable of."

My mind ashes—

The day the ground cracked beneath my feet when a boy pushed me.

The time the wind bent around my scream and shattered stone pillars. The night the moonlight answered me like it recognized me.

"You were never a normal girl," he says atly. "And that made you dangerous."

He walks closer.

"So tell me," he sneers, "who would accept you as king? You are a woman."

The word drips with contempt.

"And women are defective," he continues. "Broken. Incomplete. If you had been born male, perhaps your delusions might have mattered."

His eyes ice over.

"But you weren't."

Something inside me cracks.

"You can't do this!" I scream. "I won't be Mother. I won't kneel. I won't rot beside a throne and pretend it's love! I won't submit to you or anyone!"

My voice ricochets off the walls, wild with fury and terror.

Guards rush in.

"Lock her up," he orders coldly. "Until tomorrow."

Hands grab my arms. I ght—kick, thrash, claw—but without my wolf, without my power, I am suddenly fragile.

Just esh.

Just a woman.

As they drag me toward the door, he speaks without looking at me.

"This is your last chance, Ravelle. Accept your fate."

He pauses.

"Because I would rather kill you and rip your heart out," he says calmly, "than allow a disgrace for a daughter to rule... allow a woman to become king."