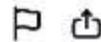




Chapter 27



Being recognized as Luna and actually leading the pack turn out to be two very different things.

The challenges start within a week. Wolves who "forget" to bow when I enter rooms, Beta families who whisper just loud enough for me to hear, elders who remember me as the wolfless shame and refuse to take orders.

The first pack council meeting is worse. Twenty high-ranking wolves around a massive oak table—Kieran at the head, me at his right, Alpha Magnus radiating disapproval. We're discussing territory patrols when Marcus—a pack elder who's served for thirty years—cuts me off mid-sentence.

"With respect, Luna, you've been wolf for less than a month." His voice is polite but dismissive. "Perhaps more experienced wolves should handle pack security decisions. These matters require understanding of territorial dynamics that come from years of—"

"Years of doing things the same way they've always been done," I finish. "Which is why we have blind spots on the eastern border that any competent tracker could exploit."

Marcus's jaw tightens. "The eastern border has been secure for decades under current protocol."

"Current protocol that ignores the new hiking trail the county opened last spring." I pull up the map on my tablet. "Human traffic has tripled in that sector. Our patrols run at dawn when the trails are empty. We need dusk patrols to intercept before someone sees something they shouldn't."

The council murmurs. Marcus's face darkens.

"A valid observation," admits one of the younger Betas. "I've noticed increased scent markers in that area."

"Then perhaps," Marcus says with barely concealed condescension, "the Luna should attend a few more patrols before restructuring our entire security protocol."

Every eye at the table turns to me. Kieran stays silent, expression neutral. He could back me up with one word, shut Marcus down.

But he doesn't. If I appeal to him now, if I need his power to enforce my decisions, I've already lost.

I stand slowly, let my white wolf rise to the surface. Not shifting—just letting that presence show.

"You will address your Luna with respect, Marcus." My voice comes out deeper, carrying weight. "Or you will leave this council permanently."

The Alpha voice. I've heard Kieran use it, heard Magnus wield it. Never thought I'd be able to command that kind of power.

The words roll through the room. Marcus's wolf responds automatically—head bowing, shoulders curving, submission coded into his DNA. He fights it but his wolf doesn't care.

"I—" His voice comes out strangled. "Forgive me, Luna."

The challenge is over. I have authority of my own.

"The eastern border patrols are restructured effective immediately," I say, voice returning to normal. "We'll implement dusk runs and coordinate with the county to monitor trail usage. Any other concerns?"

Silence. Even Magnus looks grudgingly impressed.

I sit back down and feel Kieran's hand find mine under the table, squeeze once. Approval and pride radiating through the mate bond.

Other tests come throughout the week. A dispute between pack families over territory boundaries. I render judgment that favors neither—redrawing boundaries based on actual usage rather than historical claims.

A Beta female requests transfer from patrol duty, citing injury. The patrol captain denies it. I pull her medical records, confirm the injury is real, and approve the transfer while reprimanding the captain.

The Beta female says no one's listened to her in months. "I was a regular pack member," I tell her. "Lower than regular. I remember what it's like."

Word spreads that the white Luna cares about wolves below Alpha rank.

The biggest challenge comes two weeks in, when I announce restructuring of pack education.

"We're opening specialized training for cubs with unique abilities," I tell the council. "Phoenix needs strength control training. There are other cubs showing advanced capabilities who aren't being served by standard education."

"Those cubs can train with their families," argues an elder named Catherine. "We've never separated advanced cubs from regular education."

"Which is why we have seven-year-olds accidentally breaking furniture and terrifying their classmates." I keep my voice even. "Specialized training isn't punishment. It's support for cubs who need more than

we're giving them."

"It's preferential treatment based on power," Marcus counters—though his tone is more careful now. "Creates hierarchy among children."

"Hierarchy already exists. We're just acknowledging it instead of pretending all cubs are the same." I look around the table. "How many of you sent your Alpha-born children to private tutors because pack school wasn't challenging enough?"

Several council members shift uncomfortably. Every one of them, if their silence is any indication.

"That's preferential treatment based on birth rank. This is support based on need." I pull up my proposal. "We implement this program within the month. Questions?"

Magnus surprises me by speaking. "The program requires funding. Where's it coming from?"

"Reallocation from the pack house renovation budget." I meet his eyes. "We don't need gold fixtures in the bathroom. We need cubs who can control their abilities before someone gets hurt."

Something almost like respect flickers across his face. "Approved."

The renovation was his pet project. That he's willing to sacrifice it means he's actually listening.

Other changes follow. I open pack positions previously reserved for high-ranking families. Restructure territory assignments so lower-ranked wolves aren't stuck with worst patrols. Create a grievance system where pack members can appeal decisions without fear.

Some wolves resist. I handle each challenge with Kieran's strategic thinking combined with survival instincts honed by twenty-seven years

as pack scapegoat.

The white Luna isn't just ceremonial. I'm leading them into a new era whether they like it or not.

By month's end, even the skeptics bow when I enter a room. Even Marcus addresses me with genuine respect. The pack house gossip shifts from "she'll fail" to "have you heard what she did for the Riverside family?"

One evening Kieran waits with dinner. The kids are at Rosalie's, leaving us alone.

"You're changing the pack," he says over wine. "Faster than anyone expected."

"Is that a problem?"

"No." He takes my hand. "It's incredible. The council that fought you two weeks ago now implements your proposals before you present them."

The mate bond hums warm.

"I was terrified that first meeting," I admit. "Thought I'd prove everyone right that I'm not qualified."

"You stood up and claimed your authority. That's what a Luna does." He pulls me up, kisses me slow and deep. "My mate. My Luna. Mine."

"Yours," I whisper back. "But also theirs now. The pack's."

"Both," he agrees. "And you're perfect at being both."

Later, wrapped in his arms, I think about how far I've come. From wolfless shame to white Luna. From broken girl to pack leader.

I'm Luna now. And I'll burn down anyone who threatens what's mine.

