

## 42 42- Tomorrow! Before Lunch!

Aurora: 1

There was still one hour left in the patrolling shift. I was sitting on a rock, my legs swinging a little.

I waved at a fellow guard passing by.

"Phoenix!" he waved back with a smile.

The wind was kinda cold, and my back hurt from all the exhaustion from this twelve-hour shift.

When someone plopped beside me, I already knew who it was.

"Why are you here?" I asked, squinting at Jai.

He gave me that usual lop-sided grin and threw an arm around my shoulders, "My shift just ended, se\*xy. Thought I'd come hang out with you."

In his free hand, he held a small pack of gummy bears, "Peace offering," He said.

I snorted, "How generous!"

I took a red one and popped it into my mouth, "I was crazy about these when I was a kid. Now, I realize this is the weirdest snack," I mumbled, chewing.



"Yeah. I was in love with those cardboard crackers they handed out back then."

We sat in silence for a minute, just watching the dark sky with no stars. There was a slight tinge of orange that was starting to appear.

Jai leaned back on his hands, "Have you ever thought of running away? Like... not forever... but just for a bit. Away from all this shit, find a beach, eat fried stuff, no patrols, no duties, no hospital calls."

I gave him a side eye. He never complained about his routine, "And live on what? Gummy bears?"

"Shut up!" he smirked.

I was about to say something dumb back when I saw them in the distance. Four figures. I squinted and then froze.

Luna Raya and Kiara were walking towards us, chatting. But it wasn't them that made my heart drop. Walking behind them were Luna Tamia and Tina.

We were both well hidden behind a tree, but I could see them clearly, standing right under the light.

I felt my chest going tight, and I almost forgot

how to breathe for a second. My whole body went still.

Listening to someone, talking about them, was one thing, but seeing them like this was another. Two years!

It had been two years since I last saw them.

*"Because Luna's order, slave! It's Luna's order."*

The words echoed in my mind that still followed me. Jai was a good doctor. He had already treated my back, but looking at this evil woman made it burn again.

It had been so long.

Too long.

The way my skin crawled, the way that cold chill rushed up my spine... it felt like... like it happened just tomorrow. 1

Unconsciously, I ran my hand through my hair, making myself believe that I wasn't bald anymore.

Everything healed. Except my face and heart.

Jai must have noticed right away. His arm tightened around me, "Hey!" he said quickly, "You okay, Phoe? You're shivering!"

I didn't answer, I just stared at them.

They were too busy talking... or maybe consoling a crying Kiara.

Jai followed my gaze and scoffed, "What's their deal now?"

Kiara was still crying, and the women around her were crowding in, trying to calm her.

"You're the best, silly," Luna Raya tried to reassure her, "That's why you are our head warrior."

Tina was also patting her back, "There'll be plenty of chances. The king will see. Just don't give up right now."

We kept watching them from behind the tree. I didn't say anything. My throat felt tight, and I was clenching my hands without realizing it.

Jai leaned a bit, watching my face, "Phoe... what is it?" he asked me gently, "You look like you've seen a ghost."

With a sigh, I finally blinked and looked away, "It's nothing," I muttered.

Thankfully, those vile women started walking away, not sensing our presence. I turned my head to look at Jai, who was already watching me, "Really?" I shrugged, "It's really nothing."

He raised a brow, "Doesn't look like *nothing*."

I rubbed my arms, trying to control the shaking, "It's something... from my past, okay?" I whispered and moved my eyes away from his face, "I'm... I'm not ready to talk about it."

All this time, I had thought I had become stronger. But no. I had turned weaker. All those nights when I secretly thought of slapping Luna Tamia and Tina were nothing but a fantasy. A wishful thought.

Jai held my hands that were placed on my lap, "You don't have to. Just know I'm here, yeah?"

I gave him a small nod, still not meeting his eyes.

The women had vanished far away, and here I was still living in my past.

"Hey, Phoenix," Todd, who was taking a round, stopped when he saw me sitting there, "Isn't your duty over?"

I got up with a nod and quickly tried to wipe my face.

Shit! I was crying.

Jai had also gotten up and was now telling some silly joke to Todd.

Stupid boy!

He was trying his best to divert Todd's attention from my wet face.

On our way back, we were walking quietly when I suddenly asked him, "Hey. Where are the rest of the gummy bears?"

A slow smile made its way on his lips as his hand disappeared into his pocket and came out with a pack. I snatched it from him and popped some into my mouth.

"Umm," I closed my eyes, and Jai had to hold me to keep me from falling.

"Watch out!" he warned, and then suddenly his eyes glazed over.

Mind link.

After receiving it, his face suddenly turned pale.

"What is it, Jai?" I asked him in concern.

We halted in our steps as I grabbed his hand in concern, "Was it Alpha Blake?"

He nodded and looked straight into my eyes. When he spoke, his words made my stomach drop in panic.

"Blake gave me this message and asked me to convey it to you," he paused for a moment, "King Sebastian... he wants to meet you. Tomorrow. Before lunch."