

The Shift Under The Moon

14. The Shift Under The Full Moon

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The pack was buzzing by the time I woke up, and howls could be heard everywhere. Everyone must be anticipating the full moon that was coming tonight, but I only thought of the pain I was going to endure and the pain Kaden would endure as well.

I woke up early today. I hadn't slept much. I took my shower around five a.m., and when I was ready, I made my way, with slight difficulty, to the pack kitchen to help those who were preparing breakfast. They were a bit surprised to see me, but they allowed me to help, although they made sure I was given minimal work despite my protests. Were they afraid to overwork me, fearing the Alpha's wrath? They should know by now where I stood in Kaden's life, and that was nowhere.

Breakfast was ready. As much as I would have wanted to eat in the kitchen, the head of the kitchen, Nathaniel, informed me that it was against the Alpha's orders to eat anywhere other than the dining halls. He explained that it was Kaden's way of strengthening the relationship with pack members. 'Pack members that eat together stay together.' Those were Nathaniel's exact words.

I held a plate of food in my hand as I walked into the dining hall, my head lowered. I knew Kaden was aware of my presence, thanks to the bond. I felt his confusion seep through for a moment before his walls were back up. I knew he felt everything that I felt. I wasn't good at putting up a wall in my mind while I wasn't yet fully connected to my wolf.

He watched my movements while Ciara was trying to gain his attention. I almost laughed at her attempts, but I didn't. Why was Ciara mateless even at her age? She looked twenty-five or twenty-six. I had no idea how old Kaden was.

I ignored the stares and found the farthest and emptiest table in the corner of the hall to sit on. Their gazes still followed me, wondering what I

was doing. They must have been mind-linking each other, trying to decipher my behavior, but there wasn't really much to decipher. I wasn't welcomed here, and I knew my place.

"What are you doing?" I heard his voice for the first time in my head. It sent a frenzy down my spine as I felt the bond between us resonating. This must be the first-time effect, the first time in each other's minds, or rather, the first time I was able to be in his mind. It meant the wall had been let down. I felt his anger as well at my decision to sit here. But what did he want me to do? Did he not want me to sit here? Did he not want me to eat with them?

That was it, right? Then I would leave. I picked up my plate as I stood up. The pack members were watching me like hawks, as if I were the most interesting thing in the universe right now. I didn't blame them. I would have done the same if I were in their shoes.

I carefully made my way through the tables, and I was almost out of the door when Kaden's voice resonated in the hall. "Stop right there!" he said loudly.

I froze on the spot, and I immediately turned back away from the door. I was utterly puzzled. Was he going to embarrass me again in front of the pack? That would be heartbreaking and too much to bear. If my wolf didn't decide to force shift and die, the shame might just kill me faster. What had I done wrong exactly? I wasn't causing anyone harm. Did my presence really irritate him that much? Was he really making me an outcast in this land?

"Please, I will leave now. I apologize for the intrusion," I said through the mind link.

"Don't move," he responded back through the mind link. He was angry, I knew it. This was a big mistake. I shouldn't have listened to Nathaniel and just eaten in the kitchen.

"Please, Alpha," I pleaded again through the mind link, my eyes already glistening with tears.

Kaden did not respond. Instead, he descended from the table, slightly pushing Ciara away. The pack members' eyes flicked back and forth between me and Kaden. Kaden marched right up to me, and before I could say another word, his lips descended on mine.

My brain ceased to function properly. Kaden was kissing me in front of the pack, in front of everyone, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. He bit my lips, seeking access. That was when my brain fully recovered from the shock. As I opened my mouth to let out a moan of pain, it gave him the access he needed to explore my mouth. Strangely, this time I was able to keep up with him.

When he finally let go, I was completely breathless, but I was still stunned.

"Come with me," he said, taking my hand in his before I had time to respond. The pack was just as stunned as I was. A few mouths hung open. James and Serena were smiling, but Ciara had a scowl on her face that made her look rather unattractive, though she was a beautiful woman.

"Leave!" Kaden told Ciara authoritatively as we reached the table. She flinched.

"Are you tossing me aside for this whore?" Ciara whined. Murmuring spread through the crowd, while I just stared at Kaden as if he were possessed or under the influence of a spell. Why the sudden change? Two weeks ago, he had declared me a mistake of the goddess, and now this.

"Be mindful of your words," Kaden warned.

"But Kaden," Ciara continued to whine.

"I am your Alpha!" Kaden boomed in his Alpha tone, and I'm sure everyone felt the intensity of his power from that shout. The hall immediately fell silent.

"Alpha, I rejected my mate for you," Ciara was almost crying. I could see the fear in her eyes. "I allowed you to have another female in the pack. I comforted you when Freya died. I have given a lot to you."

"I did not ask this of you, though I took advantage of the situation," Kaden explained. Not many Alphas admitted their faults in front of anyone, but Kaden was doing so in front of the pack.

"Alpha, I am better than her!" Ciara spat, staring at me in disgust.

"But my wolf wants this female!" Kaden yelled, and I finally understood everything. This was his wolf's desire, not his own. I knew something was wrong, his sudden change of heart. The bond was working to pull us together; the wolves in us wanted us to be together.

My heart sank, and I suddenly wanted to leave this place, to run far away

and never be seen again. Kaden's confession just proved to everyone in this hall that it was just his wolf that desired me, not him. But I couldn't leave; my wrists were firmly in Kaden's grasp. Where could I go if I managed to run out of this hall? I was still trapped in this pack.

"Leave now!" Kaden ordered Ciara. His voice was calmer now, and with the stomping of her feet, Ciara marched out of the hall.

Kaden sat me down beside him. "Continue your meal," he ordered the pack, and just like that, the wolves went back to their food.

Kaden discarded my plate and gave me his. I should rejoice that my mate wants to care for me, but I am not happy. Kaden was only doing this to satisfy the other half of himself that wanted me.

James and Serena smiled weakly at me, and I knew they pitied me. They knew why Kaden was doing this. Everyone in the pack knew, even Ciara. This was all about his wolf's needs. But I didn't want their pity. I didn't want anyone's pity. This was just my fate, and I had to handle it on my own.

I immediately exited the hall when the pack members were given permission to leave as well. I needed the fresh air. Kaden wanted to follow me, but he stopped himself. I guess he has finally regained his senses.

I made my way to the clinic. James had sent word while I was in the kitchen that Hannah had accepted my assistance. At least I would have something to do that would divert my attention from the incident that just occurred in the dining hall.

Kaden's walls were back up again. I couldn't feel him when I reached out to him in his mind, just as I had expected. It's better this way. He was telling me where we both stood in our relationship, and there was no need to get my hopes up, not that I was going to in the first place.

Ciara should rejoice. Kaden was back to his senses, and he would come running after her to beg for her forgiveness. In the end, Kaden had managed to partially embarrass me in front of the pack members. I am the mate whose mate would not fully accept. But I cannot believe that Ciara had rejected her true mate to prance around the Alpha and claim him as her own. She had not expected him to have a second mate, that was for sure. Ciara was not in love with Kaden; she was attracted to his power, and Kaden had to be foolish to not see it. What about his other lovers, like the blonde that was on his lap the first time he embarrassed

me in the hall? I had not seen her again since that day. Did he not also have a mate, or had she also followed in the footsteps of Ciara?

The clinic was indeed busy, but as occupied as I was, Kaden managed to slip into my mind a couple of times. I always envisioned myself in his arms, and it caused me to heat up each time. The bond was working its magic, and the full moon approaching was a catalyst.

Times when Kaden was not on my mind, my anxiety took over. I was thinking about the pain that was to come, the excruciating experience I had to face in the dining hall. What if this method does not work? What if Kaden is not able to take away part of the pain? Does this mean that tonight would be my last night on this earth, with this shift under the full moon being my final time?

"You should get going," Hannah said as the last patient exited the clinic.

"I want to help you close up the clinic."

"I am good, Anna. There are others here who could help me. The moon will be full in one hour, and you will soon start to feel its effects," she reasoned.

"Oh," I muttered, realizing how much time had passed.

"Yes, I have already contacted the Alpha. He is waiting outside," she revealed.

"Oh," I muttered again. I wasn't ready to face him, but it was inevitable. I had to go to him. I gathered my things and waved goodbye to Hannah. She wished me luck as I left her office. I thanked her and walked out.

Alpha Kaden was standing outside, just as Hannah had said. I avoided his eyes as I walked up to him. He lifted my chin so that I had to look at him directly. Worry lines creased his forehead. "We can do this," he said, and I nodded in response. Kaden's eyes were turning red, indicating that the moon was beginning to ripen. I could feel the energy of the moon as well. The night was about to begin, and I wasn't sure if I would be ready for what was to come.