The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 76

Something back open

Something breaks open–2

Caius said, “Maren Hale, you stand charged with knowingly withholding food and authorizing deprivation as punishment.”

The heat flared so hard I stopped hearing the rest.

My vision broke apart for a moment. Not black. Not empty. The hall stayed there, but another sense seemed to rise over it, not sight exactly and not memory either. I smelled iron from the chains. Wax from the candles. Damp wool from coats. Fear from the crowd, layered and sour and living. I smelled Caius too, close and familiar, clean air and smoke and something that made the panic in my body hesitate before it could become full panic.

I grabbed his arm.

I didn’t think before I did it. My hand moved on its own and closed around his sleeve, fingers pressing into the fabric like I needed proof that the room had not tipped out from under me. The moment I touched him, his head turned toward me at once. Not after a breath. Not after finishing the sentence. Immediately.

The hall seemed to notice his attention shift.

Caius lowered the page. His eyes found mine and whatever he saw there changed his face in a way couldn’t fully read. Not fear. Not alarm in the common sense. Recognition. Focus. The kind of total attention that made the rest of the room fall away without actually disappearing. His free hand came over mine where I held his arm, not trapping it, just there.

“Isla,” he said quietly.

I tried to answer.

Nothing came.

The heat moved again, stronger, rolling under my skin as if it had finally found a door and meant to test it. My fingers tightened in his sleeve. I knew the room was watching. I knew Rodan was there and Maren and my family and the full pack, but none of them mattered in that second the way Caius mattered. He was the point I could hold.

“I’m here,” he said.

I nodded once, or thought I did.

The sound in the room changed. I heard whispers that hadn’t fully become words. I heard Zeron shift his stance somewhere to Caius’s left. I heard one of the guards near Rodan draw in air and hold it. I heard Maren’s breath come too thin and too quick. All of it reached me at once and I wanted to step back from it, but there was nowhere to step that would take me out of my own body.

My body was the place it was happening.

The pressure behind my eyes pushed harder. For a second I saw the hall and the yard together. Not memory exactly. More like the past had pressed itself against the present until both were visible through each other. Rodan in chains and Rodan walking around me with the whip. Maren under guard and Maren telling me to clean the floor. Derek pale in the hall and Derek turning his face away. The pack listening now

Something beaks apen 2 and the pack watching then.

“Something inside me answered.

Clar

The heat was not only heat anymore. It had shape. It had direction. It rose with anger, but it wasn’t anger alone. It rose with grief, but it wasn’t grief alone. It felt alive in a way I’d spent my whole life being told I was not. Buried, suppressed, forced quiet, starved, burned, chained, but not gone. Never gone.

My breath came rough.

Caius moved closer without crowding me. His body angled between me and the room just enough that I felt the shield of him without losing sight of anything. He didn’t tell me to calm down. He didn’t tell me to breathe. He didn’t ask what was happening when I knew he already understood enough.

“Look at me,” he said.

I did.

His eyes held mine and the room narrowed to that one point. The heat didn’t leave. It kept moving under my skin, but it stopped feeling like it would tear through me without my permission. His hand stayed over mine. Not forcing. Not guiding. Present. The same way he had been at doors, in rooms, beside the lake, on the road, everywhere I had needed space and had not known how to ask for it.

The pressure eased by a fraction.

I swallowed.

“It’s happening,” I said, barely more than breath.

His eyes changed.

“Yes,” he said.

The word did something to me. Not because I needed confirmation. I already knew. But hearing him say it without fear, without demand, without triumph, made the truth settle differently. It was happening and he wasn’t making it about claiming. Sera had told me my wolf was there. Caius had told me he would not rush anything. Now something in me was opening in the middle of the hall where they had tried to close every part of me, and he stood beside me as if my choice still mattered even here.

I held on to him.

The heat surged once more, then spread outward instead of upward. My skin felt too aware. My hearing remained too clear. The room remained too full of fear and breath and old wood and metal. But I was still standing. I was still myself. More than myself, maybe, but not lost.

Caius looked toward Zeron without turning fully away from me.

“Hold the room,” he said.

“Yes, Alpha King,” Zeron answered at once.

No one moved after that.

No one dared.

Somedung ber

Caius looked back at me. “Do you need to leave?”

The question reached me cleanly.

I looked past him at Maren, at Rodan, at my family, at the room that had held too many versions of me in silence. The heat under my skin answered again, not as pain this time, but as refusal. I had not come back here to be carried out by what they had done to me. I had not stood through Rodan’s charges to leave before Maren heard hers.

“No,” I said.

My voice was rough, but it was mine.

Caius watched me for another second.

Then he nodded once.

He didn’t remove his hand from mine until I loosened my grip first. Even then he stayed close enough that I could reach him again if I needed to. I didn’t know if the room understood what had happened. I didn’t care. Let them wonder. Let them fear. Let them see that something they had tried to bury was standing in their hall and waking in front of them.

I looked at Maren.

For the first time since Caius had started reading her charges, she looked back at me. Her face had changed.

Good.

I kept my eyes on hers and felt the heat move under my skin like something alive stretching after too many years in the dark. It didn’t own me. It didn’t frighten me the way I thought it would. It was mine. I didn’t know what it would become yet, but I knew that much.

Caius lifted the page again.

The hall waited.

So did I.

And whatever was waking inside me waited with me.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 77

What wakes beside me–1

(Caius)

I lifted the page again, but didn’t read at once.

My attention remained on Isla beside me, though anyone watching would only see a brief pause before proceedings continued. Her face was composed again, more than it had been

a moment ago, but there was something changed in the air around her that no paper in my hand could distract me from. Vorak had gone utterly alert inside me, silent now in the way he became when instinct had already reached a conclusion before language caught up.

I knew what I'd just witnessed.

Not fully, not in every detail, but enough. Something buried in her had answered the pressure of this place, this room, these names, these people forced to hear truth spoken aloud where lies had ruled for years. Sera had been right. Isla's wolf had never been absent. It had been driven inward, starved, cornered, held beneath pain and fear until survival required silence.

Now silence was failing.

I kept my voice level when I began again.

"Maren Hale, you stand charged with continued participation in unlawful punishment, deprivation of food, willful neglect of duty, and the maintenance of abusive conditions under your authority within this household." The words carried cleanly through the hall. "You stand further charged with repeated refusal to intervene when intervention was both possible and required."

Maren's eyes were still on Isla.

That interested me.

Not because Maren feared punishment, though she did. Not because she feared public disgrace, though that too had found her at last. She was looking at Isla because she had sensed the same thing I had, even if she lacked the language for it. Predators noticed when what they had misjudged began to rise in front of them.

I continued reading.

"You used rank to authorize labor under unlawful confinement. You benefited from coerced service. You allowed injury to go untreated while assigning further work. You knowingly preserved conditions intended to exhaust and degrade." I turned the page with measured hands. "These actions weren't passive failures. They were active choices sustained over time."

The room stayed still.

Fear had changed shape now. Earlier it had belonged mostly to those already named. Now it had spread wider. The pack understood something more than legal judgment was taking place in front of them. They could feel it without knowing how to name it. Wolves always sensed change before they understood it.

Beside me, Isla’s breathing remained deeper than usual.

I could hear it because I was listening for nothing else with equal care. The strange intensity that had

What wakay come over her hadn’t vanished. It had settled into something contained, for now. The scent of her had changed too, touched by heat and something newly awake beneath it.

Vorak stirred.

‘She rises.‘

‘Yes,’ I said inwardly.

‘Guard her.‘

‘I already am!

I read the next section.

“Maren Hale, you also stand charged with concealment through false domestic order. Repeated presentation of household normalcy intended to mask ongoing abuse. Suppression of staff concerns. Direction of servants to silence. Maintenance of appearances while crimes continued under your roof.”

A murmur threatened at the rear of the hall.

Raith took one step toward it and the sound died before it was born. Good man. He understood that order was often maintained by the promise of force rather than its use. No one here would interrupt what had begun.

Maren finally looked at me.

There was anger in her now, but thinner than before. Anger weakened quickly when stripped of power. Under it sat something else I had been waiting to see. Calculation failing in real time. She was searching for a version of events that could still preserve her.

There was none.

I set the page down and addressed her directly.

“You watched suffering and converted it into routine. You saw confinement and called it management. You saw cruelty and named it discipline because naming it truthfully would’ve required action from you.” My voice didn’t rise. “Cowardice hidden inside refinement is still cowardice.”

Her face changed then.

Only slightly. A tightening around the mouth. A flash in the eyes. But enough. Masks rarely shattered all at once. They slipped in seams.

Isla didn’t look away from her.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 78

What wakes beside me–2

I noticed that with a private satisfaction I didn’t show. The girl they’d trained to lower her eyes now held the Luna of this pack in open gaze while the hall watched. That alone would’ve unsettled Maren more than chains could.

I returned to the file.

“By authority vested in me as Alpha King, I find the charges against Maren Hale sustained in full.” The words settled through the hall like stone through water. “Sentence will be delivered upon completion of all readings.”

Maren’s composure thinned further.

She didn’t speak. Sensible. Words often harmed the guilty more than silence once evidence was complete. I had seen many rulers fail to learn that lesson before I removed them.

I reached for the next section.

My nand brushed the table and I felt Isla shift beside me, slight but immediate. I turned my head enough to see her from the corner of my eye. Her gaze was forward. Her posture remained upright. Yet the heat from before still moved through her in subtle waves my senses could catch.

“Are you alright?” I asked quietly.

“Yes,” she said.

The answer was firm.

Not forced. Not proud. Simply true. That mattered. I nodded once and resumed before anyone else could interpret the exchange as weakness. It wasn’t weakness to guard what mattered in front of me.

I spoke the next name.

“Derek Thorne.”

The hall changed again.

Families always believed their private sins would remain private. They tolerated horrors when those horrors benefited blood or rank. But when a father was called publicly to account for what he had allowed his child to endure, even strangers felt the ugliness of it.

Derek looked as though he’d aged another year in the last minute.

“You stand charged with dereliction of paternal duty, participation in unlawful punishment, direct request for use of restraint, failure to protect a dependent under your own roof, and repeated consent through action and inaction to sustained abuse.” I kept my eyes on him. “Your rank magnifies these offenses rather than lessens them.”

He tried to meet my gaze and failed.

Good.

What wakes her de

Some nien deserved the mercy of a clean defeat Derek had forfeited that years ago. He had watched his own daughter be broken and chosen convenience every time choice was offered.

I heard Isla inhale beside me.

Not from distress. Recognition. This section mattered differently to her than Rodan’s or Maren’s. Tyrants were one thing. Parents were another wound entirely.

I let the silence hold a moment before continuing.

“You were present during punishments. You benefited from the hierarchy that enabled them. You neither intervened nor reported. You accepted household advantage purchased through suffering.” I turned the page. “You stand charged not only for what you did, but for what you repeatedly refused to do.”

Derek’s knees nearly gave.

A guard stepped closer, not touching him, merely ready. The hall saw it. Shame had weight after all. Sometimes enough to bend a man where conscience never had.

Beside me, Isla’s scent changed again.

Less panic now. More force. More certainty. Whatever had awakened was not receding because names were being read. It was feeding on truth, on confrontation, on the end of silence. Interesting. Rare. Dangerous if mishandled.

I had no intention of mishandling it.

Vorak approved.

‘She grows in judgment.’

‘So it seems.’

‘Good.’

I finished Derek’s section and moved on.

One by one the names followed. Brent. Vera. Torvin. Others who had carried orders, enforced chains, withheld food, struck when told, looked away when easier. Each charge read clearly. Each role named exactly. Each person made to stand inside the plain language of what they had chosen.

No one in the room could claim confusion now.

By the time I set down the last page of that round, the hall no longer resembled the place we had entered. It had become something else. Not redeemed. Not cleansed. Places weren’t changed so quickly. But stripped. The false skin removed in public.

I looked over the assembled pack.

Some were pale. Some angry. Some broken open by belated understanding. Some calculating how to survive whatever Ashcrest would become after today. Let them calculate. Survival under honest rule was simpler than they imagined.

Then I turned slightly toward Isla.

What wake

She was looking straight ahead, but when I moved she met my eyes at once. The heat still lived there beneath her skin. In her gaze too there was something newer, deeper, less burdened by apology than before.

“Still with me?” I asked quietly.

“Yes,” she said.

This time there was no strain in it.

Good.

I faced the hall again.

“We continue,” I said, and every voice, every breath, every shifting body in the room obeyed the command in those two words. “When all charges are complete, sentences will be delivered. Then this pack will hear from Isla herself.”

That struck them harder than many charges had.

I felt it move through the room like weather. Surprise. Fear. Curiosity. Resistance crushed before it could rise. They had expected judgment from me. They hadn’t expected to be addressed by the woman they’d once forced beneath their eyes.

Excellent.

Beside me, Isla went very still.

Not frightened stillness. Readiness.

Whatever was waking inside her had chosen its moment well.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 79

What they buried rises–1

(Caius)

I was finishing the next line of charges when Isla’s scent changed again.

Not fear. Not weakness. Not anything that belonged to panic. It rose hot and wild beside me, threaded with something ancient that struck straight through Vorak and sent him surging hard against my ribs.

I stopped speaking at once.

The hall felt it before they understood it. Heads turned. Bodies stilled. Every instinct in the room reached toward the shift in the air without knowing what name to give it.

I turned to her.

Isla stood where she'd been, but nothing about her was the same as it had been moments earlier. Her body shook in sharp waves that had nothing to do with fear. Her hands were curled partway at her sides as if fighting some new command moving through them. Her breathing came deeper, rougher, pulled from somewhere low in her chest.

Then she looked at me.

Her eyes had changed.

The brown I'd known was still there at the edges, but the center had gone bright amber, lit from within like fire through glass. It wasn't reflection. It wasn't candlelight. It was her wolf looking out through eyes that had been denied too long.

Vorak hit me with a force that nearly took my breath.

'Mine.'

'Control yourself,' I said.

'Protect her.'

'I already am.'

Isla bent forward a fraction.

Pain crossed her face, then anger, then something fiercer than either. The tremor through her body deepened. A sound caught in her throat, not human speech, not yet a growl, something between.

No.

Not in front of them.

Not in this room full of staring wolves and guilty eyes and people who'd already taken too much from her. She would not go through this with an audience.

I moved before thought finished forming.

My arm went around her at once, firm across her middle, catching her as another wave hit. With my other

What they burned unce hand I took her shoulder and turned her into me, away from the hall, away from the rows of faces straining To watch.

Then I stepped between her and everyone in the room.

My body blocked the sightline of the pack, Rodan, her family, all of them. If they wanted to see her now, they'd look through me first.

No one moved.

No one breathed loudly enough to hear.

Raith understood before I spoke. "Clear space," he barked.

My wolves acted at once. Boots moved across wood. The front ranks were driven back several paces. Guards repositioned. Anyone leaning forward was forced behind the line again.

Good men.

Isla's hands seized in my shirt.

I tightened my hold enough to anchor, not enough to trap. She was burning through the fabric now, heat pouring from her skin in waves. Her head pressed briefly against my chest as if instinct had chosen shelter before her mind could catch up.

"Look at me," I said quietly.

She tried.

Her face lifted, strained, eyes bright amber and wide. Tears stood there from pain, not fear. Her teeth pressed together hard enough to show the shape of them through her cheeks.

"It hurts," she said.

"I know."

Another wave hit her.

Her back bowed. Her fingers dug into me. A broken sound left her throat and Vorak lunged again so hard I had to lock my knees to keep him contained.

'She needs us.'

'She needs calm.'

'Take her out'

'I will.'

I looked over my shoulder once.

“Zeron,” I said.

“Yes, Alpha King.”

What they bee

“You hold this room.”

“It will be done.”

“Raith, no one follows.”

“Yes, Alpha King.”

Pryor was already gathering the papers. Efficient as ever. Good.

I looked toward Sera.

She had moved closer but not too close, eyes fixed on Isla with the focused attention of a healer who knew better than to crowd a wounded animal.

“Alpha King,” she said.

“Speak.”

“This is beginning. Maybe first rise, maybe delayed shift response. Trauma suppression breaking under stress.” Her gaze stayed on Isla. “She shouldn’t have the hall watching.”

“She won’t.”

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 80

What they buried rises–2

Sera nodded once. “Take her somewhère enclosed. Quiet. Keep contact if she seeks it. Don’t force anything. If bones start to move, don’t restrain her.”

I almost smiled despite the moment.

“I know how shifting works.”

“This isn’t ordinary shifting,” Sera said. “She’s been blocked for years.”

Fair correction.

Isla made another sound and doubled over harder.

I gathered her fully then, one arm behind her back, the other under her knees. She gasped as I lifted her, then clutched at me with immediate instinct.

The hall murmured despite itself.

I turned my head toward them once.

Silence returned so fast it was almost violent.

Rodan stood chained at the front, face drained, watching with naked disbelief. Maren looked as if the floor had opened under her. Derek had gone white. Brent looked ready to bolt though there was nowhere to go.

Let them watch this much.

Let them understand the wolf they had buried was rising while they stood accused.

Then no more.

I carried Isla toward the side door.

Her face was against my throat now. Heat poured from her skin. The shaking hadn’t stopped, but it had rhythm now, deeper and more internal, as if her body was answering an old command at last.

“You’re alright,” I said.

She gave a broken laugh that was nearly a cry. “Doesn’t feel like it.”

“It will.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I’ve shifted before.”

That earned the smallest breath that might have been a laugh if pain hadn’t stolen it halfway through.

Good.

Keep her with me. Keep her in the moment.

Wat they went on

Clan

We reached the side chamber beside the hall, amold council room now empty except for a long table and chairs. I kicked the door shut behind us and set her on the cleared tabletop because it was the nearest solid surface high enough to support her if her legs failed.

She caught my wrist before I could step back.

“Stay.”

“I wasn’t leaving.”

Her eyes burned brighter now, amber swallowing more of the brown. She looked half feral and wholly magnificent.

Vorak went silent in awe.

Interesting.

I stepped between her knees and braced my hands on either side of her hips, close enough to hold if needed, far enough not to cage.

“Breathe,” I said.

She obeyed once, then another wave tore through her.

This time I heard it.

The small crack of bone adjusting in her hand where it gripped mine. She stared at it in horror.

“Caius.”

“Normal.”

“That is not normal.”

“For shifting, it is.”

She glared at me through pain.

Good. Anger was easier to survive than terror.

Another crack sounded, this time in her other wrist. She cried out and bent forward into my chest. I caught her at once, one hand at the back of her head, the other across her spine.

“You’re safe,” I said into her hair.

“It hurts.”

“I know.”

“Make it stop.”

“Can’t.”

She cursed me.

Also good.

What they be ++

Clam

Sera knocked once and entered when I gave permission. She carried water and cloths, nothing more. She set them down quietly and assessed Isla with one sharp glance.

“Eyes fully changed,” she said. “Good sign.”

“Doesn’t feel good,” Isla said through clenched teeth.

Sera almost smiled. “No one’s first shift does.”

“It’s not my first.”

“No,” Sera said. “It’s your stolen first returned late.”

That silenced the room for a moment.

Even Isla stilled enough to look at her.

Sera stepped back again. “Alpha King, keep her grounded. She’ll follow your voice easier than mine.”

“Understood.”

She withdrew, closing the door behind her.

Isla’s hands were changing now.

Nails lengthening into claws, then drawing back halfway, then pushing again as her body fought for pattern. Fur traced briefly along her forearms in pale lines before receding.

She stared.

I did not.

I kept my eyes on her face.

“Stay with me,” I said.

“Trying.”

“Good.”

“I hate this.”

“You’ll hate it less in an hour.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I know many things.”

She almost bit me then, and I respected the effort.

Another wave came harder than the others.

Her spine arched. A cry tore from her throat and shifted halfway through into something deeper, rougher, wolf beneath woman. Vorak answered with a growl I barely contained.

‘Easy!‘

What they be sen

‘She calls.

“She suffers.’

‘She survives.

That quieted him.

Isla sagged against me afterward, panting.

“It stopped.”

“For now.”

Her eyes narrowed. “I dislike your experience.”

“Noted.”

I offered water. She drank greedily, then grimaced as another tremor ran through her.

This one was smaller.

Then another, smaller still.

The body often learned once it committed.

I brushed damp hair back from her face. “You’re doing well.”

“I look terrible.”

“You look dangerous.”

That earned a real laugh, brief and strained but real.

Good.

Claim

Outside the door I could sense the held tension of the hall waiting under Zeron’s command. Proceedings paused. Judgment delayed. Let them wait.

Nothing in that room mattered more than this.

Isla’s breathing eased by degrees. The shaking lessened. Her claws retracted, though not fully. Her eyes remained amber, watching me with new awareness and old exhaustion mixed together.

“What happens now?” she asked.

“Now,” I said, resting my forehead briefly to hers, “you finish becoming what they failed to destroy.”

And outside, Ashcrest waited while its future changed in the room beside it.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 81

The first shift–T

(Isla)

The first thing I understood was sound.

Not the sound of the hall, not voices, not the waiting pack behind the closed door. This was inside me. A deep pull beneath skin and bone, like something had woken and found every locked place at once. I tried to breathe through it, but breathing belonged to a body I no longer fully understood.

Caius was in front of me.

I knew that because his hands were near me and his voice was there, low and controlled, giving me something to follow. His face stayed close enough that I could find it when the room broke into pieces again. I wanted to tell him I was still there, but the words wouldn't rise properly. They caught somewhere between my chest and throat and came out as a rough sound that frightened me because it was mine and not mine.

"It's alright," he said.

It wasn't alright.

My hands changed again, claws pushing through, then pulling back, then pushing harder until I couldn't pretend this was only heat and pressure. My skin felt too small for what was inside it. My bones didn't feel like bones anymore, but doors being forced open one after another.

I'd been told shifting hurt.

I'd heard girls whisper about it when I was younger, before fifteen, before the word wolfless became the only thing anyone allowed me to be. They'd spoken about pain and fear and the first run after. I'd imagined screaming. I'd imagined breaking. I'd never imagined this.

It was bigger than pain.

Pain had edges. Pain could be counted if I needed to survive it. This had no number and no clean place to hold it. It filled me until there was no room left for thought, only heat and breath and a force that didn't ask whether I was ready.

"Caius," I said, or tried to.

His name broke in my mouth.

His hands came to either side of me, not holding me down, not trapping me, just there. “I’m here,” he said. “Let it come. Don’t fight the whole of it.” I wanted to be angry at him for saying that, because how was ! supposed to let something this large happen to me without fighting it.

Another wave tore through me.

I bent forward and my hands hit the table. The wood cracked under my fingers and I stared at it without understanding how I’d done it. My nails weren’t nails anymore. My fingers were changing too fast for my eyes to accept. Fur moved over my arms and this time it didn’t vanish.

A sound came out of me.

Clain

It wasn’t a cry. It wasn’t a scream. It was deeper than both and it filled the room with a force that made the walls feel too close. Caius didn’t move away. He stepped closer, and I felt his hand at the back of my neck for one moment before another wave took even that from me.

Then I was falling inward.

The room vanished.

Not all at once. First the table went. Then the walls. Then Caius’s face became light and heat and scent. Then even my own name loosened until I couldn’t hold the shape of it. Isla became something far away, a sound someone else might use, a thing that’d been too small for too long.

I wasn’t gone.

I was everywhere.

I was inside my skin and under it and beyond it. I smelled wood, dust, Caius, stone, cold air somewhere outside, iron from chains beyond the door. I heard voices in the hall, muffled and tense. I heard Sera breathing near the wall. I heard my own bones finish becoming something else.

There was no thought after that.

Only movement.

Only tearing.

Only release.

Something inside me broke open so completely that I stopped knowing where fear ended and freedom began. The force of it took everything, my body, my mind, the room, the past, every word ever placed on me. Wolfless burned away first. Then worthless. Then weak. Then every silence I'd swallowed because surviving required obedience.

I don't know if I screamed.

I don't know if I fell.

I don't know if Caius spoke.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 82

The first shift–2

I only knew that something carried me forward, out of the room, through air and scent and sound. There were hands near me once, not holding, guiding. There was Caius's voice, not close enough and then close again. There was cold air, sudden and clean, striking through heat like a blade through rope.

Then the world returned.

I was outside.

The ground was beneath all four of my feet.

For a moment I didn't understand what feet meant. They weren't feet. Paws pressed into cold earth, claws digging slightly into frozen ground. My breath came out in harsh bursts, white in the air.

I lifted my head.

The pack house stood behind Caius.

He was crouched in front of me with both hands raised, palms open, not touching me. His coat was gone, or maybe I'd torn it, I didn't know. His hair was disordered and his face was unlike anything I'd ever seen on him before. Not fear. Not control. Something raw and fierce and careful all at once.

He looked at me like I was a miracle and a wound.

"Isla," he said.

I knew that name.

It came to me from far away and landed slowly.

Isla.

Me.

I blinked, and the motion felt strange because my eyes were different. The world was brighter in shape, deeper in scent, wider in sound. Caius remained crouched in front of me, hands still raised, body angled low enough not to challenge.

1 took one step back.

My body moved wrong and right at the same time. Four legs. Weight placed differently. Power sat under every motion like a thing waiting to be used. I startled at my own movement and a growl rose out of me before I could stop it.

Caius didn't move.

"You're alright," he said. "You shifted."

Shifted.

The word reached me and opened something else.

I looked down.

The best stat

Claren

Palc fur covered my legs. Not white exactly Not grey either. Something between moonlight and ash, with darker marks near my paws where the old chain had been. I stared at those marks and the growl died in my throat.

But the chain was gone.

I lifted one paw and set it down again.

The ground answered me.

I was standing without it.

Caius's expression changed when I looked back at him. His eyes moved over me once, not hungry for spectacle, not curious in a way that took from me. He looked like he was checking that I was whole. Then his gaze came back to mine and stayed there.

"You're safe," he said.

I wanted to answer.

My mouth opened and only a rough breath came out. The sound unsettled me. I backed up another step and my rear legs nearly tangled because I didn't yet know how to be this body.

Panic rose fast, but beneath it something else rose faster.

Instinct.

It told me where my feet were. It told me where Caius was. It told me the door behind him held many wolves, many eyes, many scents of fear and guilt, but none of them were moving toward me. It told me the cold air was good.

Caius stayed where he was.

Then he lowered one hand slightly and stopped, letting me see every movement before it happened. "I'm not coming closer unless you want me to," he said. His voice was lower than usual, but not the way people spoke around danger. He spoke like every word mattered because I might need to hold one of them.

I stepped toward him.

Only one step.

I'

His expression shifted again, and for the first time I understood what was so different about it. Caius looked humbled. Not weakened. Not uncertain. Humbled, as if something sacred had happened in front of him and he knew better than to claim it as his.

That nearly broke me again.

A sound came from my chest, not a growl this time. Caius heard it and his eyes changed. I'd seen him angry. I'd seen him controlled. I'd seen him careful with me. I'd never seen this.

"Come here," he said.

I didn't know if the words were command or invitation.

Then I knew.

Clawn

Invitation.

I moved toward him, awkward and too aware of every limb. The first few steps were clumsy, but the body learned faster than fear did. By the time I reached him, I was moving with more sense of myself.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 83

Claim

The first shift–3

When my nose touched his raised hand, he let out a breath that sounded like he'd been holding it since the room.

His fingers touched my muzzle.

Very gently.

I closed my eyes.

The contact steadied the part of me that was still Isla and met the part of me that wasn't separate from her anymore. I smelled him clearly now, Caius and wolf and smoke and winter air and something that meant mine in a language older than speech.

A door opened behind him.

My head snapped toward it.

Caius rose halfway at once and placed himself between me and the sound. "Stay back," he said, and the command cut through the air. The door stopped moving. Sera's scent came through first, then her voice from inside.

"Alpha King?"

"She's shifted," he said.

A pause followed.

Then Sera answered, quieter, “Is she aware?”

Caius looked at me.

I looked back.

“Yes,” he said. “She’s aware.”

The words settled inside me.

Aware.

I was.

Not fully. Not in the way I’d been before. But I knew him. I knew myself. I knew I’d gone through something enormous and come out the other side with four legs under me and a body they’d tried to prevent from ever existing.

I turned my head toward the pack house.

Through the cracked doorway I could smell them. Rodan. Maren. Derek. Brent. Vera. Cole. Torvin. All of them inside, waiting in a hall where my name had been spoken into law. They’d known me chained. They’d known me bent. They’d known me silent.

They didn’t know this.

Claim

Htook one step toward the door.

Caius moved with me, not blocking this time, only staying close. “Not yet,” he said. “Give yourself a moment.”

I stopped.

Because I wanted to.

Because I could choose to.

The thought moved through me with startling force. I could go forward. I could stay. I could turn. I could breathe cold air and stand on my own legs, all four of them, and the chain wasn’t there.

No one was dragging me.

No one was calling me back.

A tremor moved through me.

Not fear.

Aftermath.

Caius noticed.

He crouched again, hands visible. “You came back to yourself,” he said. “That matters.”

I looked at him and wished I could speak.

Maybe he understood anyway.

His expression changed once more, into something almost too much to hold. Pride, relief, anger for what had been taken, awe for what had returned. All of it was there and none of it demanded anything from me.

I lowered my head.

Not in submission.

In exhaustion.

Caius understood that too. He moved closer by inches, giving me time to refuse. I didn’t. When his hand came to the side of my neck, I leaned into it before I knew I was going to.

The world quieted around that touch.

Not silent.

Never silent now.

But manageable.

The pack remained inside. The hearing waited. Ashcrest waited. For once, all of it could wait, because I was outside the pack house on four legs with cold earth beneath me and the Alpha King crouched in front of me like my trust mattered more than his crown.

And in that moment, it did.

Somments

Chapter 84

What she is–1

(Caius)

I stayed crouched in front of her and didn't move.

I'd seen wolves shift for the first time. I'd seen Alphas come into their power. I'd seen rare bloodlines reveal themselves under pressure and old magic answer from places most wolves didn't believe in anymore. None of it had prepared me for the wolf standing in front of me in the Ashcrest yard.

She was enormous.

Not just larger than I expected. Larger than any female wolf I'd ever seen. Larger than most males. Her body carried power in every line, not the trained strength of a warrior or the inherited force of rank, but something older that didn't belong to any pack.

Her fur was pale, not white and not grey.

Moonlight and ash.

That was the only way my mind could hold it. The color caught the cold air and made her look unreal against the stone behind her. Darker marks circled her paws where the chain had once sat, and seeing them there in this form made something sharp move through me.

But her eyes held me.

They weren't gold.

They were silver.

Not pale, not reflective. Silver, clear and bright, looking at me with awareness that was both Isla and something more. Vorak went quiet inside me. For once, he had no demand, no growl, no push. He only watched.

Behind me, the door opened.

I didn't turn.

I heard Sera step out first, then Zeron behind her. Both stopped several paces away. Neither told me they understood what stood in front of us.

The wolf watched me.

Isla watched me.

spoke, which

That was what mattered. She hadn't been lost inside the shift. Not fully. Whatever had torn through her had taken her under and returned her with her mind still there. She was tired, overwhelmed, still learning her own body, but she was present.

I lowered my hand slightly.

She didn't pull away.

Her breath moved over my fingers, warm against the cold air. Her ears shifted once toward the door, then

Claim back to me. She knew they were there. She knew she wasn't alone anymore, but she didn't break.

"Sera," I said without turning. "What is it?"

She didn't answer right away

That was enough to tighten something in my chest. Sera didn't hesitate unless what she saw mattered more than words. She had seen rare wolves, broken wolves, poisoned wolves, things most healers never touched.

Now she was silent.

"Alpha King," she said at last.

"Speak."

"Celestial."

The word settled into the yard and everything inside me stilled.

Celestial.

Old law. Old blood. Older than most packs. A wolf that didn't fall beneath Alpha. A wolf that stood equal by nature, not by title. Something written in records most packs dismissed because they'd never seen it.

Isla blinked.

I didn't know if she understood it yet.

But her wolf did..

Her head lifted slightly, and the air shifted around her. Not magic in any simple sense. Presence. The kind that didn't need to prove itself. The kind that had been buried and still came back whole.

Vorak moved at last.

'Celestial,' he said.

'Yes.'

'Ours.'

'Careful.'

'Equal.'

That word settled hard.

Equal.

I let that sit in me, then focused back on her. "You're still you," I said. "Stay with me."

Her ears turned toward my voice.

I reached for the mind link.

Claim

Instinct.

It should've been simple. A pull, a thread, a connection I could form with any wolf under my authority. Especially her. Especially, now. 1 pushed for it, not hard, just enough to touch.

Nothing answered.

The space where the link should've formed stayed closed.

I tried again, more carefully this time. Not command. Not force. Just contact.

Still nothing.

I frowned slightly.

“That should’ve worked,” I said under my breath.

Sera heard me.

“It won’t,” she said.

“Why not?”

“She’s just shifted. Her wolf’s been suppressed for years. The bond between human and wolf isn’t settled yet.” Sera stepped closer, still cautious. “Mind link needs balance. She doesn’t have that yet.”

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 85

I looked back at Isla.

She was watching me closely now. Not just reacting. Watching.

“You felt that,” I said quietly.

Her head tilted.

“Yes,” I said. “I tried to reach you.”

She took one step closer.

Curious.

Good.

“It didn’t work,” I said. “Not because you can’t. Because you’re not fully… aligned yet.”

The word felt wrong, but close enough.

Sera nodded behind me. “Her mind and wolf aren’t fully synced. She’ll hear instinct first. Link comes after.”

Isla made a low sound in her chest.

Frustration.

I almost smiled.

“You don’t like that,” I said.

Her ears flattened briefly.

No, she didn’t.

“Good,” I said quietly. “That means you understand what you should have.”

Her gaze sharpened.

There it was again. That same look she always had. The one that refused to accept limits placed on her by other people.

I lowered my hand further.

She stepped forward and pressed her muzzle into my palm.

Permission.

I touched her.

Her fur was thick and warm beneath my fingers. Real. Alive. Not a dream. Not something pulled out of legend. Isla, standing in front of me, whole in a way she’d never been allowed to be.

Behind us, the pack house stayed silent.

Teo silent.

-They were listening.

Of course they were

I turned my head slightly. “Zeron.”

“Yes, Alpha King.”

“No one comes out unless I call them.”

“It’s already handled.”

“Rodan?”

“Contained.”

“Maren?”

“Contained.”

“The rest?”

“Contained.”

Good.

I looked back at Isla.

Clam

She was listening. I saw it in the way her body shifted slightly. The names mattered, but they didn’t define her anymore. Not like they had before.

Sera spoke again, softer now. “She shouldn’t go back in like this unless she chooses it.”

“I know.”

“She might want to.”

“I know.”

Isla’s gaze locked on mine.

There it was.

That same direct look. The same one she’d given me every time she refused to break.

“You want to go back in,” I said.

Her head lifted.

Sera shifted behind me but didn’t interrupt.

I held Isla’s gaze.

“Not yet,” I said. “Not because you can’t. Because they don’t deserve this part of you before you

Claim understand it yourself.”

-She stared at me.

Then she looked toward the door.

The growl that moved through her was low and controlled. Not fear. Not confusion. Anger with direction.

Vorak answered with something close to pride.

“She understands more than she should,” Sera mormured.

“She always did,” I said.

Isla looked back at me.

The silver in her eyes was clearer now.

I stood slowly, keeping one hand near her but not on her. She was tall enough that I didn’t tower over her anymore.

“You’re Celestial,” I said quietly. “That’s what Sera called you.”

Her ears shifted.

“It means old blood. Rare blood. It means what they said about you wasn’t just cruel. It was wrong in every way it could be.” My voice lowered. “It means no one in that hall outranks what you are. Not Rodan. Not Maren. Not your father. Not anyone.”

She went still.

Understanding.

I didn’t rush it.

“You were never nothing,” I said.

Her breath left her in a rough sound.

I lowered my hand again, and she leaned into it for a brief moment.

That was enough.

Inside, Ashcrest waited.

Inside, the people who had chained her waited.

I looked toward the door, then back at her.

“When you’re ready,” I said, “we finish this together.”

Her silver eyes held mine.

She lifted her head.

Certain.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 86

What I am–1

(Isla)

20% OFF

Caius said we would finish it together.

The words stayed with me while the cold yard pressed against my paws and the day air moved through fur I still didn't understand. My body felt powerful and wrong at once, as if every part of me knew what to do except the mind trying to catch up. I looked at him and wanted to answer, but all I had was breath and instinct and silver eyes fixed on his face.

Then the strain hit.

It came without warning, a hard pull beneath my skin that made my legs shake. The shape I wore suddenly felt heavy in a different way, no longer new and rising but difficult to hold. I lowered my head and a rough sound left me before I could stop it.

A voice moved inside me.

'Yield.'

I froze.

It wasn't loud. It wasn't strange in the way I expected a strange thing to be. It felt like it came from a place that had always been there, only locked too far beneath everything else for me to reach.

'Who are you?' I asked.

Warmth moved through my chest.

‘Vaela.

Another pull tore through me before I could ask more.

Caius moved at once.

He didn’t grab me or crowd me. He came closer, one hand lifted where I could see it, the other ready if I fell. With his free hand he unclasped the cloak from his shoulders in one clean motion and kept it ready. His voice dropped lower, the same tone he’d used in the side room when everything had begun.

“Easy,” he said. “You’re trying to change back.”

Trying.

That implied choice.

I wasn’t sure I had any.

Another pull tore through me and my front legs buckled. I caught myself badly, claws scraping frozen ground, shame flashing so fast it angered me. I had stood taller than most wolves a moment ago and now I couldn’t hold myself upright.

‘No shame‘ Vaela said.

What am:1

The words were simple.

They still reached me.

“There’s nothing shameful in it,” Sera said behind Caius.

I turned my head toward her.

Claim

She stood a few paces back, hands empty, eyes calm, watching me the way healers watched storms and wounds and frightened animals. Zeron remained farther behind her, silent and still enough that even in this form I barely heard him breathe.

“It can be harder returning the first time,” Sera said. “Your body knows one shape now. It has to learn the second.”

I wanted to snarl at being discussed.

Instead I made another broken sound and my shoulders jerked with the effort of holding form. My bones felt loose under skin, then tight, then loose again. Nothing settled.

Caius crouched lower.

“Look at me,” he said.

I did.

“Good. Breathe.”

I breathed because his voice gave me something clear to do. Air burned colder now. The scents of earth and stone and Caius and woodsmoke flooded me so strongly that thought kept slipping under them.

“Again,” he said.

I obeyed.

The pull came harder.

Pain flashed this time, quick and brutal through my spine. My body folded sideways and Caius caught me before I hit the ground fully. One arm braced under my chest, the other steadying my shoulders as if supporting a giant wolf required no effort at all.

Heat moved through me where he touched.

Then everything shifted.

My forelegs shortened first.

I felt the shape of them changing beneath me, paws narrowing, claws pulling back so fast it hurt. Fur receded in strange rushing waves. My hindquarters twisted and I cried out, the sound breaking halfway between growl and human voice.

“It’s alright,” Caius said again.

It still wasn’t.

Claim

But I knew now he didn’t mean painless.

He meant survivable.

My body convulsed once more and suddenly the ground struck different skin. Bare knees. Bare hands. Human breath tearing from’s human throat. I curled forward on instinct, shaking hard enough that my teeth knocked together.

Before I could think of anything else, the cloak wrapped around me.

Heavy wool fell over my shoulders and down my body, shielding skin still changing in the cold air. Caius had me covered before the humiliation could fully land. I clutched the fabric closed with shaking hands.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 87

What I am–2

“Stay down,” he said quietly.

I obeyed before pride could argue.

My own hands looked too small to belong to me. Scarred wrists. Thin fingers. Skin rising and falling too fast over ribs that ached.

I stared at them.

I had never looked at hands like they were a mystery before.

They should have felt ordinary.

They didn’t.

These were the same hands that had just stood on frozen ground as paws broad enough to crack earth. The same hands they’d bound, struck, worked raw, dismissed. They trembled now inside heavy dark fabric and I couldn’t stop looking at them.

‘Yours,‘ Vaela said.

My throat tightened.

Mine.

Sera came closer only when I didn’t flinch.

“Can you sit upright?” she asked.

“Yes.”

My voice came rough and thin. I hated that it sounded small after what I’d been.

Still, I pushed upright.

Caius stayed near enough to catch me if I failed and far enough not to make it an insult. I noticed that even through the shaking.

Sera knelt in front of me.

“How much do you know of Celestial wolves?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

The answer embarrassed me though it shouldn’t have. No one had taught me anything worth having.

She nodded once. “Most wolves know nothing. Most think they’re stories.”

I tightened my hold on the cloak.

“Then tell me.”

Her gaze moved to Caius, then back to me.

“Celestial wolves are older blood than modern rank lines. Before packs formalized under Alpha law, there were wolves born with authority that didn’t come from inheritance or challenge. It came from nature itself.”

I frowned.

“Authority.”

“Presence,” she said. “Power. Command that doesn’t need force behind it. The ability to stand equal to Alpha without contest.”

My mind caught on one part.

“Equal.”

Caius answered before Sera did.

“Yes.”

I looked at him.

The word meant more coming from his mouth than anyone else’s. He was Alpha King. Equal wasn’t something lightly given.

Sera continued.

“Some records call Celestials guardians. Some call them judges. Some call them balance when packs grow corrupt. Records disagree on purpose, but not on rarity.”

“How rare?”

She held my gaze.

“The last confirmed Celestial wolf was recorded over three centuries ago.”

The yard seemed to tilt.

Three hundred years. More than lifetimes stacked together. More than any story I’d ever been told mattered to me.

“You’re saying I am the first in three hundred years.”

“I’m saying you’re the first confirmed one in surviving records.”

I laughed once.

It sounded cracked and disbelieving.

“I was chained in a shack not long ago.”

“And you were Celestial there too,” Sera said.

That silenced me.

* Wistiant

Chann

Hooked down at my hands again. Knuckles scraped. Nails broken short from old labor. Fine scars across skin I knew too well.

Nothing about them tooked ancient

Nothing about me looked chosen.

Nothing about the girl they'd named wolfless fit what Sera was saying.

'There,' Vaela said.

I went still.

'You were there?' I asked.

'Always.'

The answer was so small and so certain that it hurt worse than a longer explanation would have.

"I don't understand," I said.

"Of course you don't," Caius said quietly. "You've spent years being lied to."

I turned to him.

Anger moved first, because anger was easier than grief. "Then how did no one know?"

"They may have suspected something was wrong," Sera said. "A delayed shift. Unusual resistance. Traits that didn't fit suppression. But true Celestials are so rare most would never think of it."

"Maren would have," Caius said.

His voice had changed.

Cold now.

"She knew enough history to fear anything she couldn't control."

I thought of Maren's face in the hall. The careful cruelty wrapped in refinement. The way she'd looked at me when my eyes changed.

A chill moved through me that had nothing to do with weather.

"So they buried it."

“No,” Caius said. “They tried.”

The distinction landed hard.

I looked at my hands again.

Not what they had done to them.

What they had failed to erase.

I remembered every time the word nothing had been used around me. Every dismissal. Every order. Every

What Lant pitying look. Every explanation for why I lacked what others had.

“Wolfless

Broken.

Less.

I had built whole rooms inside myself around surviving those words. Now Sera was telling me the foundation beneath them had never been real.

It made me dizzy.

‘Buried,’ Vaela said. ‘Not gone!‘

I closed my eyes for a moment.

That was enough.

“I don’t know what I am,” I said.

Sera’s expression softened, though she didn’t insult me with pity.

“That’s honest. It’s also temporary.”

Caius crouched beside me.

“What you are doesn’t need to be solved today.”

I looked at him.

“You seem very calm about this.”

“I’m not calm.”

That startled a laugh out of me.

He almost smiled. “I’m choosing usefulness over reaction.”

“That’s a very Caius answer.”

“It usually is.”

Clain

The shaking in my body had eased enough for me to notice the cold again. Caius noticed that I noticed and adjusted the cloak more securely around my shoulders.

“You’ll need food,” Sera said. “Rest. Likely another shift soon, though smaller. Your body’s learning fast.”

I groaned.

She ignored it. “You’ll also need practice returning by choice.”

“Today?”

“No.”

“Good”

Zeron spoke for the first time.

“The hall’s still waiting”

I had nearly forgotten it.

Inside that house were chains, charges, names, and the people who’d made my life smaller so theirs could feel larger. Inside waited judgment interrupted by my transformation.

Caius looked toward the door, then back to me.

“We can postpone.”

The offer was real.

That was why I trusted it.

I rose slowly, legs weak but mine. The cloak nearly slipped and I caught it with hands that still didn’t feel ordinary.

‘Stand.‘

The word came from Vaela, quiet and firm.

So I did.

“No,” I said.

My voice was rough, but stronger now.

“I’ve spent enough years waiting because of them.”

Something unreadable moved across Caius’s face. Respect, maybe. Something warmer too.

Sera stood. “Then go in as yourself.”

I almost said I didn’t know who that was.

Then I stopped.

Because for once, not knowing wasn’t defeat. It was beginning.

I looked once more at my hands, at scars and shaking fingers and skin that had become fur in the yard. These hands had scrubbed floors, carried wood, bled against chains, and touched the ground as something ancient.

Not what I was told.

Never what I was told.

‘Isla, Vaela said.

I breathed in.

Vacia, I answered.

“A warmth moved through me, quiet and sure.

I lifted my head.

“Let’s finish it.”

Caius stood beside me, close enough to steady if needed, careful enough not to presume I needed it. Together we turned toward the pack house where Ashcrest waited behind closed doors.

This time, I walked in knowing the lie had ended.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 88

Equal by law–1

(Caius)

I walked beside her as we approached the doors, matching my pace to hers without making it obvious. She didn't hesitate at the threshold, not at the sound of voices inside, not at the weight of what waited for her beyond it. The cloak hung around her shoulders, dark against her skin, and her steps weren't perfect yet, but they were hers. That was enough for me.

The guards opened the doors the moment they saw us, moving quickly and without question. My wolves stood positioned exactly where I'd left them, holding the space, controlling the room, keeping Ashcrest contained without a single wasted movement. Every head turned as Isla crossed the threshold beside me, and the silence that followed wasn't forced. It was earned.

Good.

Let them see her properly now.

Let them understand what they had failed to destroy.

We moved forward together into the center of the hall where everything had stopped earlier. I felt it immediately, the shift in the room, not power in the way Alphas measured it, not dominance, not challenge. This was something older, something that didn't need to prove itself because it existed whether anyone accepted it or not. They felt her, even the ones who didn't understand what they were reacting to.

Rodan's eyes fixed on her and didn't move again after that first look. Maren held her composure, but it sat thinner now, like something carefully placed instead of natural. Derek looked like a man who had seen something he couldn't take back, and Brent looked like he wanted to vanish where he stood. Isla didn't look at them yet, and that restraint said more than any reaction would have.

She walked beside me until we reached the front of the hall and then she stopped where she had stood before everything changed. Her presence filled the space in a way I hadn't seen from her before, not forced, not held together by effort, not borrowed from anyone else. It was hers in a way that couldn't be taken. I let my gaze move across the room once before bringing it back to the pack.

"Proceedings resume," I said, and my voice carried without strain. No one questioned it, not after what they had just witnessed. They couldn't. The room belonged to the truth now, not to whatever Ashcrest had pretended it was.

I stepped back half a pace, not leaving her, not placing distance between us, but giving her space without making a display of it. It was a small movement, but it mattered, and Zeron would notice it. Sera would notice it too. They always did.

Zeron moved toward me a moment later, controlled and quiet as always. He didn't interrupt the room or draw attention to himself, just came to my side the way he always did when something needed to be said without becoming part of the larger moment. "Alpha King," he said under his breath, his tone even. I turned my head slightly in acknowledgment.

"Walk with me," he added.

I didn't hesitate.

We moved a few paces to the side, far enough that the room couldn't hear us clearly, close enough that nothing important escaped my attention. My wolves held the line without instruction, and Sera remained near Isla without crowding her. Zeron waited until we stopped before he spoke again.

"You know what she is," he said quietly.

"Yes," I answered without looking away from the room for long.

He didn't soften the next part.

"Then you know what that means."

I held his gaze then.

"I do."

Silence settled between us for a moment, not empty, not uncertain, just measured. Zeron spoke again, lower this time, the words chosen with care even though they didn't need to be softened. "In the old laws, a Celestial outranks an Alpha King." He watched me closely when he said it.

The words didn’t surprise me, because I had already reached that conclusion the moment Sera spoke the name. It was written in the way the room reacted to Isla, in the way Vorak had gone quiet, in the way my own instincts had shifted without permission. Still, hearing it said out loud changed something. It made the truth settle in a different way.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 89

Equal by law–2

I didn’t answer immediately.

Zeron didn’t rush me.

Then I spoke.

“The old laws say more than that,” I said, my voice steady.

Zeron’s attention sharpened.

“Yes” he said.

Class

“They state that a Celestial wolf and their mate are equal in all things,” I continued, letting that land without breaking it apart. The difference between those two truths mattered, and he understood that as well as I did. It wasn’t about rank alone, it was about balance.

That settled between us.

Different from the first statement, heavier in its own way. Zeron didn’t speak immediately, letting it sit the same way I had. Then he nodded slowly, once.

“Equal,” he repeated.

“Yes.”

There was no challenge in his tone, no doubt in his expression. Only confirmation, the kind that came from understanding rather than questioning. He glanced toward Isla then, and I followed his line of sight without turning fully.

She stood at the front of the hall, still wrapped in my cloak, still not completely steady, and yet nothing in that room stood above her. Not Rodan, not Maren, not anyone who had once believed they held authority over her. The room had shifted around her whether they wanted it to or not.

Zeron looked back at me.

“This changes things,” he said.

“It clarifies things,” I replied.

That earned the faintest shift in his expression, agreement without the need for words. He didn’t need more explanation than that, and neither did I. We both knew what kind of man I was and what kind of King I had chosen to be.

This didn’t take anything from that.

It tested it.

Zeron studied me for another moment, measuring something he didn’t need to ask directly. “You’re not concerned,” he said. I met his gaze without hesitation. “I’m aware,” I answered, because that was the truth of it.

Concern implied uncertainty.

Clam

There wasn’t any.

Isla had never been something I needed to stand above, not even before I knew what she was. That hadn’t changed, and it wasn’t going to. Zeron’s shoulders eased slightly, not in relaxation, but in acceptance of what he already understood.

“Then there’s nothing to question,” he said.

“No,” I replied.

He nodded once more, then stepped back into position without another word. The conversation was finished, not because it was small, but because it was settled. Some things didn’t need to be repeated once they were understood.

I turned back to the room and to Isla.

She hadn’t moved, but something in her had shifted again in a way that didn’t need to be seen to be known. It showed in the way she held herself, in the way she looked at the

people in front of her, in the way she no longer carried their expectations in her posture. She was listening, not just to the room, but to herself.

I stepped forward again and took my place beside her.

Not in front.

Not behind.

Beside.

Exactly where I intended to remain.

The room waited, and I let my gaze move over them once more before speaking. “Charges will proceed as written,” I said, my voice even and final. No one interrupted, no one questioned, no one dared to pretend this would go differently.

I felt Isla beside me, present and aware and no longer alone.

That mattered more than anything else in that room.

Vorak stirred faintly, not with demand or challenge, but with something quieter. Recognition settled where instinct usually pushed, and for once there was no need to hold him back. I didn’t answer him, because I didn’t need to.

I already understood.

And I wasn’t stepping away from it.

The Alpha King And His Chosen Luna

Chapter 90

(Caius)

I didn’t look down at the file again. “There are additional charges that weren’t entered into the formal record,” I said, my voice steady as it carried through the hall. “They weren’t omitted by mistake, and they weren’t overlooked.” I paused just long enough for the meaning to settle. “They were held back.”

That shifted the room in a way the earlier words hadn’t. This wasn’t process anymore, and it wasn’t structure they could follow or argue against. This was something they hadn’t prepared for, something they couldn’t measure or contain. They felt it before they understood it.

I stepped forward a fraction, my attention fixed ahead without needing to name anyone directly. Bodies tightened across the hall, and focus sharpened without permission. The truth had already been laid out in pieces, but now it was being gathered into something whole. There would be no distance left between them and what they had allowed.

“These charges don’t belong to law alone,” I continued. “They belong to conduct that was seen, understood, and allowed without being written down.” My voice didn’t rise. “That doesn’t make them less real.”

The room held still under it. Even those who had steadied themselves earlier couldn’t maintain that control now. This wasn’t something they could reason through or separate themselves from. It sat on all of them the same way.

I let my gaze move across them once, slow and deliberate. “You stood in positions where action was possible,” I said. “You watched, you understood, and you chose not to intervene.” I didn’t soften it. “That is its own charge.”

It landed harder than anything written in the file. It wasn’t limited by rank, and it wasn’t protected by role. It belonged to every wolf who had seen enough and remained where they were. There was no way to step away from it now.

“Silence was used here as protection,” I said. “Not for the vulnerable.” I let the pause settle. “For those causing harm.”

A visible shift moved through the line. This time it didn’t hide behind control or posture. They felt it and didn’t know how to contain it. That was exactly where I wanted them.

“You don’t stand here only because of what you did,” I continued. “You stand here because of what you allowed to continue.” My voice stayed even. “That distinction matters.”

Understanding spread through the room whether they wanted it or not. The charges on the page had given them structure to hold onto. These gave them truth they couldn’t move around. There was no defense left that didn’t collapse under it.

“Those additional charges stand,” I said. I didn’t hesitate, and I didn’t leave space for argument. This wasn’t separate from what came before. It completed it.

I stepped forward once more. “Now judgment begins,” I said, my voice steady. No one misunderstood what that meant this time. They felt it before the first sentence landed.

Clase

Het my gaze move over them once before I gave it. “Rodan Hale is stripped of all rank, title, land claim, command authority, and pack name,” I said. “He will be removed under royal guard and held until execution is carried out under territorial law.” The reaction carne immediately.

Voices broke across the hall, sharp and uncontrolled, filled with panic that had come too late to matter. Rodan surged forward against the chains, but my wolves forced him back before he could gain ground. Maren cried out, and others spoke over each other, trying to be heard, trying to undo what had already been decided. It ended as quickly as it started.

“Enough,” I said.

The word landed hard enough on its own. No one mistook it. The room fell back into place under it without resistance. Even Rodan stilled, breath heavy but contained.

I didn’t give the moment time to stretch. “Maren Hale is stripped of Luna title, household authority, and all standing within Ashcrest,” I said. “She will be confined under guard until final sentence is carried out.” Her composure didn’t crack slowly.