

Alpha's STOLEN Mate

Chapter 1

Elowen

The taste of iron filled my mouth as consciousness crawled back. Each bump of the wooden wheels sent spikes of pain through my skull, and my tongue felt thick with the bitter aftertaste of whatever they'd used to knock me out.

Happy birthday to me.

The thought emerged through the fog—so absurd I almost laughed. The sound died as reality crashed over me: silver shackles burning my wrists, the stench of fear and unwashed bodies, the creak of wagon wheels counting down to something terrible.

I forced my eyes open. We were in a mobile prison, iron bars and maybe fifteen other prisoners crammed like livestock. Through the bars, ancient forest pressed close to the road, stone markers appearing at regular intervals with symbols I didn't recognize but somehow felt familiar.

In the distance, mountain peaks rose like jagged teeth. And there, perched on the highest summit, a massive castle caught the afternoon light—its sheer scale and commanding position hinting at the formidable power of whoever ruled from within.

My stomach dropped.

"First time seeing Moon Peak?" A young wolf followed my gaze, his face gaunt with hunger. "Too bad we're probably going to die there."

"The Alpha King's castle," an elderly she-wolf said from the corner, her voice heavy. "Kaius Blackthorne's territory now."

Kaius.

God, no. Not him. Anyone but him.

The sound that escaped me—a whimper, maybe a sob—made all eyes turn.

"You know that name," a gruff warrior said. Not a question.

I pressed my lips together, fighting the urge to disappear. Four years. Four years I'd stayed hidden, built a new life away from everything that name represented. And now,

thanks to a craving for birthday bread, I was being delivered straight back into the nightmare I'd fled.

"Course she knows it," the old she-wolf said. "Kaius has been conquering packs left and right. They say he killed Moonridge—four thousand wolves in one night—accused them of conspiring with rogues. After the massacre, he moved his entire pack here and renamed it Nightfall territory."

My hands clenched, silver biting deeper. Four thousand. The future Alpha King I'd once loved from afar had become this.

Thank God I'd escaped when I did.

The wagon lurched, climbing the mountainside in steep switchbacks. Through the bars, I caught glimpses of watchtowers and patrol routes. This wasn't just a residence—it was a fortress.

"What did you all do?" I asked, desperate for distraction. "To end up here?"

The answers came quick and bitter: poaching, wrong place at wrong time, asking too many questions. Normal wolves caught in a paranoid king's web.

And then there was me—caught behind a bakery at dawn, daydreaming about honey cinnamon bread when the patrol arrived.

The scent hit me before I saw the gates.

Sandalwood and winter pine, with something darker underneath. Something that belonged to blood-soaked victories and the kind of power that bent kingdoms to its will.

My breath caught. After four years, I'd hoped that particular combination would have lost its hold. Instead, it slammed into me like a physical blow, dragging up memories I'd spent every day trying to bury.

That day was the most humiliating of my life. The day I first learned how cruel reality could be.

My eighteenth birthday.

The great hall had been decorated with silver and white—not just for my birthday, but for my first shift under the full moon. Everyone who mattered was there. Father was one of the pack's strongest warriors, so our home overflowed with family and friends, all gathered to witness my transformation into adulthood.

I'd been so happy. Nervous, yes, but radiating excitement as I greeted guests in my carefully chosen white dress.

And then I saw *him*.

Kaius Blackthorne. The future Alpha King.

My heart had nearly stopped. He'd actually come—accepted Father's invitation despite being so far above our family's rank. I'd loved him from afar since I was thirteen, watched him from the edges of training grounds and pack gatherings, memorized the way he moved with that lethal grace, the way his gray eyes could command a room with a single look.

I'd never dared hope he'd notice me. But maybe tonight, after my first shift, after I proved myself as a full member of the pack...

Fate, it seemed, had other plans.

Under the full moon, the ceremony began. The entire pack gathered in the courtyard, their faces turned skyward as ancient words were spoken. I stood at the center, feeling the moon's pull, waiting for that moment every wolf dreams of—when your other half finally emerges.

Minutes passed. Then an hour.

Nothing happened.

Whispers started rippling through the crowd. Concerned glances. Nervous murmurs.

"Maybe she's just a late bloomer..."

"Has anyone in her bloodline had trouble shifting?"

"What if she's—"

Panic clawed at my chest. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, their pity mixing with disappointment. I wanted to run, to hide, to disappear into the forest and never come back.

I was preparing to accept my failure, to apologize and flee, when fate played its cruelest joke.

The mate bond snapped into place.

It was like lightning striking straight through my heart—a golden thread suddenly visible, connecting me to him. To *Kaius*. The bond manifested so clearly that everyone could see it, the Moon Goddess herself making her will known.

Gasps of wonder replaced the disappointed whispers. Faces that had been pitying now broke into smiles of blessing and congratulation. My mother's hand flew to her mouth, tears in her eyes.

But Father's expression carried a shadow of worry.

I looked at Kaius, hope blooming desperately in my chest despite everything. Maybe this was why I couldn't shift—maybe the Moon Goddess had a greater plan, maybe—

He was watching me with lazy assessment, his gray eyes cold and calculating. Serious. Analytical.

He closed his eyes for one long second.

When they opened, something in his expression had hardened into resolution.

"My future is expansion and conquest," he said, his voice carrying across the suddenly silent courtyard. "I need a powerful luna at my side."

My heart started to crack.

"Not a broken wolf who can't even shift."

The world tilted.

His gaze swept over me once more, almost dismissive. Then he seemed to consider something, his expression shifting to something that might have passed for courtesy in a crueler world.

"Your father is a brave warrior," he said, his tone measured and formal. "I respect his service to this pack, which is why I accepted his invitation tonight." He paused, and his eyes—those gray eyes I'd memorized in dreams—looked right through me. "But you... you're not what I need."

The words hit me like physical blows.

Father trained me since I could walk. Pushed me harder than any of his soldiers. And this bastard thinks I'm weak just because I can't shift?

Five years. Five years I'd loved him from the shadows, memorized everything about him, dreamed of the impossible. And he was dismissing me like I was nothing—like all those years of training, all that strength I'd built, meant nothing without a wolf form.

Tears burned behind my eyes. I fought desperately to hold them back, but one escaped, trailing down my cheek.

Kaius's expression didn't change. If anything, his certainty seemed to solidify—firm, resolute, as if my pain only confirmed the decision he'd already made.

"I, Kaius Blackthorne, reject this mate bond."

I didn't hear the rest.

I couldn't. The rejection tore through me like claws ripping apart my chest, agony unlike anything I'd ever imagined. My knees buckled. Someone gasped. Mother's scream seemed to come from very far away.

Then I was running.

"Elowen! Elowen, wait!"

Mother's voice chased me, but I didn't stop. Couldn't stop. I crashed through the crowd, their faces blurring through tears, and disappeared into the night.

Upstairs in my room, I could hear my parents' voices rising in the kitchen below:

"He humiliated our daughter! In front of everyone!"

"The pack needs me. The war isn't over."

"Then choose your pack. I choose my daughter."

But I'd already chosen for them.

Rather than watch my family tear itself apart over my failures, I'd packed a single bag and disappeared into the night. Into a world where no one knew my name—ironic, considering the boy I'd loved for five years hadn't known it either.

Where I could finally breathe without the weight of everyone's expectations crushing my chest.

Where I wouldn't have to see pity in every face or hear whispers about the broken girl who'd been rejected by the future Alpha King.

Broken wolf who can't even shift—if only Kaius could see me now.

Well, not exactly now, considering I looked like roadkill and smelled worse. But once these drugs wore off and the silver stopped burning...

Too bad my current circumstances told a different story.

Once again, this bastard would get to savor my pain. Worse, my pathetic state would validate everything he'd said about me.

The wagon rolled through the massive gates of Moon Peak castle.

My twenty-second birthday.

Another birthday ruined by Kaius Blackthorne.