

Alpha's STOLEN Mate c 2

The Girl With No Scent

Elowen

The wagon jerked forward through the massive gates. His scent grew stronger with each turn of the wheels, so thick I could barely breathe. That familiar presence pulled at something deep in my chest that I'd tried so hard to sever.

We rolled past barracks and training grounds, guard towers looming like silent sentinels, then shuddered to a halt in the fortress's heart.

What I saw made my blood run cold.

Wooden platforms stood in the courtyard center, dark stains telling their grim story.

"Public executions," the old she-wolf whispered, face gray with terror. "He's making examples of us."

Through the bars, I could see the remnants of what must have been Moonridge's original buildings, reduced to rubble and ash at the edges of the courtyard. New construction rose around the square—stark, imposing structures built from the bones of the dead pack.

The scent of sandalwood and winter pine was overwhelming now, mixed with something darker—power, violence, the metallic tang of spilled blood.

He was here. Somewhere in this crowd of spectators, Kaius Blackthorne was watching and waiting.

The guards began dragging us out one by one, silver chains clanking as we were herded toward the platform. I kept my head down, letting my matted hair fall across my face like a curtain. Just another nameless rogue. Just another casualty in his endless war.

But when I risked a glance toward the platform, my breath caught in my throat.

There he was.

Four years had changed him, transformed the already imposing future Alpha King into something that belonged in legends. He stood on the raised dais in black leather armor that seemed to absorb light, every line of his body radiating lethal authority. His jaw was sharper now, carved from granite and shadow. Those storm-gray eyes swept over the crowd like a predator cataloging prey.

His dark hair caught the afternoon sun, revealing hints of midnight blue. Broad shoulders and a lean, powerful frame that spoke of countless battles won, countless enemies crushed beneath his will.

For one traitorous moment, my body reacted before my mind could stop it. God, he was beautiful. More beautiful than I remembered, than my dreams—and nightmares—had painted him.

Then reality crashed back in. This perfect, cruel face had destroyed me in front of hundreds of witnesses. Had declared me broken. Worthless. A mistake.

I didn't care how devastatingly handsome he'd become. He was still the monster who'd ripped my heart out and fed it to the wolves.

I pulled every last shred of strength I had, wrapping my scent in layers of concealment until I was nothing more than empty air. *Please*, I begged whatever gods might be listening. *Let me disappear. Let me be invisible.*

The executions began immediately.

The young wolf who'd spoken of dying was dragged up first, his thin frame shaking as the official read his charges. "Illegal hunting in the Moon Grove Sacred Lands. Three deer taken from the protected forest."

"My sisters were starving!" the wolf cried, falling to his knees. "I just wanted to feed them!"

Kaius looked down at him with the same expression he might give a piece of furniture. "I don't care why you did it. The law applies to all wolves equally."

The axe fell. Blood sprayed across the wooden platform.

The middle-aged warrior was next. The official unrolled evidence as his charges were read—sheets of parchment covered in familiar handwriting, a bag of Eastern Coalition gold coins.

"Traitor," someone spat from the crowd.

Another head rolled.

When they brought up the elderly she-wolf, my chest tightened. Her charges were read: disrupting public order, inciting rebellion against military conscription.

"I just wanted to know how my son died," she wept. "He was only eighteen..."

Kaius stepped closer to her, his voice carrying clearly across the silent courtyard. "Your son Garrett died defending the northern border against rogue attacks. He died protecting innocent families from slaughter."

"He died with honor. But you've spent months questioning military decisions in the marketplace, dishonoring his sacrifice."

His voice turned deadly. "Leave my territory. Never return. If I see you again..."

The threat hung in the air like smoke. The old she-wolf was dragged away, sobbing but alive.

Kaius was still the master manipulator I remembered—making each punishment seem justified, each cruelty appear necessary. Even showing mercy to make himself look reasonable.

But the fear growing in my chest had everything to do with the inevitable moment when my name would be called.

"Last prisoner," the official announced, his voice echoing across the courtyard.

My legs nearly gave out as rough hands seized my arms, dragging me toward the platform. This was it. This was how I died—as a nameless rogue in front of a crowd of strangers, with my mate's cold gray eyes watching my execution.

At least Kaius would never know who he'd killed.

The official consulted his scroll. "Unidentified female rogue. Discovered in Willowbrook with suspicious behavior. Showed unusual reflexes during capture, inconsistent with typical wanderers."

I kept my head down, shoulders hunched, trying to look as small and pathetic as possible. Just another broken wolf. Nothing special. Nothing worth remembering.

"State your name." Kaius's voice cut through the air like a blade.

Silence.

"Where are you from? What were you doing in Willowbrook?"

I pressed my lips together, staring at the blood-stained wood beneath my feet.

"I'm giving you one final chance. Speak now, or face execution as a spy."

Still I said nothing. What could I say? Any word from my mouth might give me away, might trigger some half-forgotten memory in his perfect, calculating mind.

"Spies are trained to stay silent," he said conversationally, as if discussing the weather. "They'd rather die than betray their mission."

"Very well. Grant her wish."

The executioner stepped forward, raising his axe. I closed my eyes, thinking of honey cinnamon bread and birthdays I'd never have. At least this nightmare would finally be over.

At least I'd die with my secrets intact.

"Wait."

The official's voice cut through my resignation like a knife. I opened my eyes to see him approaching Kaius, speaking in urgent whispers.

"There's something unusual about this one, Alpha King."

Kaius frowned, clearly annoyed at the interruption. "Such as?"

"She has no scent."

The words hit the courtyard like a physical blow. Wolves began murmuring, craning their necks to get a better look at me. Kaius went completely still.

He stepped down from the dais, moving toward me with predatory grace. I fought every instinct that screamed at me to run, to fight, to do anything but stand there like prey waiting for slaughter.

He stopped just close enough to catch my scent—or lack thereof.

His eyes narrowed as he inhaled deeply, confirming what his official had reported. When he spoke, his voice was deadly quiet.

"Interesting. Complete scent suppression isn't a skill you learn wandering the countryside."

He circled me slowly, like a wolf stalking wounded prey. "Either you're a very well-trained spy... or you're something else entirely."

My heart was beating so fast I was surprised it didn't burst from my chest. He was close enough to touch, close enough that the mate bond I'd spent four years trying to forget stirred traitorously to life. My body recognized him even if my mind rejected everything he'd become.

"Take her to the dungeons," he commanded, his gaze never leaving my face. "I want to know exactly what we've caught."