

Faith's Pov..

Alice moved toward Astor to the sound of scattered applause, her cheeks flushed with timid delight.

Instead of stopping them, I watched the farce with an expressionless face. If they saw me as their future Luna, they wouldn't have humiliated me like that. They had trampled on my dignity.

However, I was more interested in what Astor would do.

Will he accept her kiss in front of everyone?

To my astonishment, Astor turned his face away, evading Alice's advance.

"Enough," he said, his voice cutting through the applause like winter wind. "A man shouldn't let a woman make the first move."

He stepped back, fixing their mutual friend with a glare that finally silenced the charade.

Then his gaze found mine.

I arched a brow, my lips curling in a sardonic smile. Was he implying he should have been the one to initiate? Would he have already had his hands on her had I not been present?

My glacial stare seemed to unsettle him. Astor frowned, then deliberately averted his eyes and reengaged in the party.

The people standing around me witnessed this.

"She should let it go. Astor loves Alice." Someone mumbled it.

"Girl, you should see her. Always trying to please everyone. Acting like she's so good. But we all see through it."

"Well, she's not Luna yet," another voice added. "So things can change real fast."

I sighed. I remained silent. Three years in the Eternal Night Pack had taught me the weight of words—how they could cut, how they could sting. Once, they had seared through me, igniting pain, fury, the desperate urge to strike back. But time had tempered me, hardened what was once raw. Now, I no longer respond. I no longer cared.

That's when I heard a sweet, cloying voice.

"I'm sorry you have to sit so far away from us," Alice said when she got closer. "There was no space at our table, you see. I'm so sorry."

There was no real sorrow in her face. Not a drop. She was enjoying this. She had done this to me two years back. And here she was, doing it again.

"You don't need to apologize, I don't care," I whispered.

"What about my girl? I'm looking forward to my sister's girl to me. What will it be?" She asked with a smile.

I gave her my biggest, fakest smile back. "I didn't know you were coming. As your sister, and also the Luna of this pack, I would have gotten you something. But maybe I'll do it next time you decide to visit us. But you need to let me know in advance that you're coming."

I was mocking them. As Alice's sister and Luna of the pack, I didn't know my sister was coming back and throwing her a party. No one told me. However, they didn't seem to notice my mockery. Maybe they were pretending not to know.

Alice froze. The group at her table looked surprised too.

"Do you have to be mean to me?" She asked.

I looked at her, confused. Mean? I just spoke the truth.

"I just came home," she went on. "And you're already thinking about me leaving. And I've already met with you this afternoon, why don't you have a girl for me? Don't you want me back?"

Then the waterworks started. Her tears. They always worked for her. And they worked today. Everyone stood up. They rushed to her side to defend her.

I didn't understand what I said wrong. She came at me. I just answered her. I didn't even say anything bad. But once again, I was painted as the bad person.

"Why would you do that to her?" The Beta's wife came at me, like she was ready to fight. I knew she didn't like me. None of them did. But they were listening. Everyone knew I did nothing wrong. So why were they coming at me?

"I'm sad. My sister didn't welcome me back." Alice sobbed, hugging the Beta's wife.

Tears burned behind my eyes, but I clenched my jaw. My fingers tightened around my purse like a lifeline. I'm not going to cry.

"At least apologize!" The Gamma said.

"No." I said with strong composure, "I don't really understand what I said that upset her so much. Was I not telling the truth? How could I have gotten her a present when no one told me she was coming back?"

"That's no reason for you to ignore her! She's your sister, and you should be happy to have her back." The Beta's wife said.

"I won't apologize." My voice was steel—unyielding. I turned to Astor, but his silence was a wall, his thoughts unreadable. Did he blame me too? The question flickered, but I smothered it before it could take root.

Without another word, I pushed past the others, stopping only when I reached him. "I'm leaving."

No excuses, no weakness, just the cold, clipped truth. If my absence was a surrender, then so be it. But I refused to stand there and let them carve their judgment into me.

"I'll take you home."

The other stunned me. Not because it was kind, but because it was unexpected. Alice's reaction mirrored mine, though hers came laced with possessiveness.

"Have your beta send her back," she protested, fingers curling around his arm. "We haven't seen each other in so long. Stay with me a while longer. I miss you."

"Have fun with the others." Astor ruled her hair like a child before turning to me, "I'll take you back. We both know you can't defend yourself."

The words hung in the air, thick with implication. Every eye in the room swung toward me, their stares sharp with judgment. They all knew the truth. The truth constantly thrown on my face. I was wolfless, untested, unworthy of being Astor's Luna.

I didn't wait to see their smirks. Didn't let myself wonder if their pity was worse than their scorn. My bag was in my grip before the whispers could start, my spine straight as I walked out.

Let them talk. I refused to be their spectacle.

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