

Chapter 2: Darius Vane

ELIRA

I woke up to the familiar smell of old wood, sunlight streaming through the small window facing my tiny bed in the attic room.

For a second, just a second, I almost convinced myself it was all just a nightmare.

That I hadn't fallen to my knees, nearly begging Kael. That he didn't look at me like I was nothing. That he hadn't said those words... those cruel words I thought I was already used to, just not from the man I loved.

But when I tried to sit up, the weight of my body felt foreign... heavy. It wasn't the kind of pain I was used to, the bruises or stinging cuts from people who hated me. This was different. Like something inside me had been ripped out.

I raised my hand to brush away the strands of hair stuck to my damp face.

That's when I saw it.

My finger was bare.

The ring Kael gave me was gone.

My lips curled into a bitter smile as tears slipped from the corners of my eyes.

I laughed, but not the kind of laugh I imagined I'd have after Kael took me away from this miserable place. After the wedding, he'd promised me.

It was supposed to be today. He was supposed to marry me... take me as his Luna.

But this is it.

This is my reality.

Kael rejected me. He left me.

And here I am again, in this suffocating attic room. The air felt heavier than usual, not just from the heat trapped beneath the slanted roof but because something inside me had shattered.

The bond was gone.

I curled into myself, hugging my arms tightly.

I had nothing left.

No mate. No future. No place I belonged.

Yet when I pressed a hand to my chest, I could still feel it, my heartbeat. I was still alive.

But why?

Why am I still here?

What is my purpose in this world?

I don't even have any power, nothing like my mother, Luna Eloisa, or my father, Alpha Marik.

I couldn't heal. I wasn't a seer. All I could ever do was bring misfortune to anyone who tried to be close to me... or love me.

Just like Kael.

Or my grandmother Helga, who died the day she held me in her arms, trying to take me away from this place.

The door burst open, slamming against the wall with a bang that echoed through the attic.

I flinched.

Standing in the doorway was the last person I expected to see—Alpha Marik. My father.

My breath caught in my throat. I couldn't remember the last time he had come into this room. Maybe when I was a child... when he first threw me up here, locking me away from the rest of the world. From his new family.

"F-Father..." I whispered.

His cold, unreadable eyes swept over me. We shared those eyes, gray, sharp, and constantly shifting color under sunlight. But that was the only thing we had in common. I looked more like my mother, Eloisa, with delicate features and pale skin that had only grown paler from being hidden away too long.

"Fix yourself," he said, voice like ice. "You're so weak. It's been a day, and you're only getting up now?"

His Beta, Callum, stepped inside behind him and dropped a large box on the floor beside my bed. I looked at it, confused, my fingers twitching as curiosity tugged at me. Slowly, I leaned forward and opened it.

Inside was a white dress. The fabric shimmered faintly, even in the dim light of the attic. Nestled beside it was a red velvet box. I opened it to find a tiara glinting in the light.

It was beautiful. Regal. Nothing like the rags I'd grown used to.

"W-What is this, Father?" I asked, voice barely above a whisper.

He gave a short, mocking chuckle. "Isn't it obvious? It's your wedding dress, Elira."

My eyes widened. "W-What? My wedding dress? I'm going to get married? Did Kael—did Kael change his mind?"

For a fleeting second, hope flickered in my chest. A smile almost escaped me. Maybe... maybe he came to his senses. Maybe—

Alpha Marik's laughter cut through my thoughts like a knife. It was loud, cruel, and sharp with mockery.

"You were already rejected by him, Elira," he said. "Have you forgotten that?"

I blinked. My mouth went dry.

"Wear that," he said, nodding to the box. "Don't take too long. He's waiting for you."

I stared at him, dread curling in my stomach. "W-Who are you talking about, Father?"

My father started walking toward me, the wooden floor creaking with every step. It didn't even take him a second to reach me, given how small my room was.

He smiled, but instead of feeling comforted, I felt a chill run down my spine. His eyes told a different story.

"I'm talking about the Kingdom of Vane. The Lycan King, Darius Vane."

A gasp escaped my lips. I dropped the tiara I was holding as my hands began to tremble. "W-Why is he waiting for me—"

"You're being dumb again, Elira," my father said, cutting me off. "It's

your wedding dress, and he's waiting for you. That means you're going to marry Darius Vane."

I understood. I knew exactly what he meant... but no. I couldn't accept it.

The Lycan King, Darius Vane.

Just hearing his name made my insides twist. My heart pounded in fear as memories of whispered stories came rushing back... stories I'd overheard from the pack.

He was ruthless. Cruel. Being sent to his kingdom was considered a punishment. A brutal one. They said it was better to be thrown in a cell than to be sent there.

His kingdom was powerful, wealthy, and feared by all the packs, but going there was as good as a death sentence.

With my lips trembling, I looked up at my father and asked, "W-Why would he choose me as his wife? For what? You must be mistaken—"

My words barely left my lips when my father's hand shot out and gripped my chin tightly, forcing me to meet his eyes. My breath caught. His touch wasn't out of affection, it never had been. It was punishment.

"I'm not mistaken, Elira," he said, voice low and dangerous. "He was looking for a wife. I offered you. And he accepted. Why are you acting so surprised? Do you think someone from our pack isn't good enough for a king?" He sneered. "We are the Hollow Pack, a respected lineage. This is an honor."

But you never even treated me as part of this pack.

I didn't say it aloud. I didn't need to. I had forgotten one crucial, damning truth. Alpha Marik could read minds the moment you locked eyes with him. And mine had betrayed me again.

His grip tightened, and before I could look away, his hand slid down from my chin to my neck.

I choked on my next breath.

"F-Father..." I gasped, my fingers weakly trying to pull his hand away.

His eyes, identical to mine in color but never in warmth, bore into me without remorse.

"No matter how much I hated you, Elira..." he began, "you are still part of

this pack. Whether I like it or not, you carry my blood. And now... you'll finally serve a purpose."

He leaned closer, his words a poisonous whisper against my skin. "You should be thankful that Darius Vane accepted you as his wife. Do you even realize what that means for this pack? For me?"

His hand released me at last, and I crumpled to the floor, coughing and holding my throat, tears blurring my vision.

"At least now," he continued with a hollow laugh, "you'll be useful, even just this once."

His following words struck deeper than any wound.

"Take this as your payment for taking away my beloved Luna... and my son."

I froze.

I had been sentenced for a crime I never committed... punished for surviving.

He turned away from me like I was nothing more than a broken object that had finally found some worth.

And in that moment, I understood.

I would never be married off for peace. Or alliance. Or love.

I would be sold as punishment, as retribution, as a way for my father to rid himself of the last reminder of everything he had lost.

And there was no one left to save me.

Not Kael.

Not my mother.

Not even the Goddess who had cursed me with this life.

"Don't test my patience, Elira. Wear that dress and move fast. Don't bring shame to my name. Being a cursed one is already enough!"

I stared at the tiara on the floor, frozen, until I felt a tap on my shoulder. I flinched, expecting it to be my father returning with another cruel word. But when I looked up, it was Callum, my father's Beta.

Of all the wolves in this wretched pack, he was the only one who hadn't treated me like something to be feared or hated. He never spoke kindly, but he didn't speak cruelly either. And sometimes, in moments like this,

he offered something close to sympathy.

He crouched down beside me. "Just listen to your father, Elira," he said quietly. "Maybe... maybe this will be better. Better than staying here with us, trapped inside this room, living like a ghost."

I looked at Callum and saw the quiet pity in his eyes. He was the only one who didn't look at me with disgust.

"Better?" I whispered, my voice hoarse from my father's grip just moments ago. "Being handed over to the Lycan King like... like an offering?"

Callum didn't answer right away. He stood, brushing off invisible dust from his pants.

"Sometimes," he murmured, "freedom doesn't look the way we imagined. Sometimes, it looks like something else entirely."

He didn't wait for my reply. He turned and walked to the door, pausing only to glance back once.

"He's waiting, Elira. Don't make your father come back here again."

Callum was right. Maybe this is even better to be offered to a ruthless Lycan King.

After all, there's nothing left for me here.

If I die at his hands, it doesn't matter.

It was quiet. I didn't see anyone as I stepped out of my room, wearing the dress my father had given me. But the tiara remained in my hands, clutched tightly as I walked down the hallway.

As I approached the top of the staircase, my heartbeat louder in my ears.

Then I saw him.

A man sat on my father's throne, the center of the grand room below. He leaned back, legs spread in that arrogant way of powerful men. Like he owned everything he saw. Like he belonged everywhere.

Even here.

His posture was relaxed, but the way the pack gathered around him, silent, heads bowed, spoke volumes about who he was. No one dared breathe too loudly. No one moved. They stood like statues in his

presence.

I couldn't see his face. Only his broad shoulders, his dark coat embroidered with silver threads that shimmered faintly under the dim chandelier light.

"Is your daughter just going to stand there and stare at us?"

His voice echoed, deep and sharp.

I jumped slightly, the tiara slipping from my grasp. It clattered onto the step, but I didn't dare reach for it.

He rose from the chair slowly, deliberately.

Then he turned towards my direction, looking up at me.

And everything in me went still.

"What are you waiting for, Elira Wynter?"



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