

Chapter 3

Magnus's POV

I hadn't meant to stop.

The night was young, the moon sharp and heavy over the city skyline, and my wolf-restless, violent-paced beneath my skin. I'd just left the Shadowbane estate, my father's voice still echoing in my skull, a litany of demands and power plays. So I'd stepped out midway, let my Lycan hound loose, and decided to walk until the fury cooled.

Then I smelled blood.

And fear.

Men's fear-bright, sharp, defiant.

Down by the riverbank, under the flickering streetlight, a scene unfolded. A delicate figure surrounded by rogues-filthy half-breeds with too much lust and too little brain.

But it wasn't the danger that caught me.

It was her.

She moved like a cornered flame-fragile, fierce, heartbreakingly beautiful. Her dress was torn, her hair wild, her fists stained red. And her scent... gods, that scent. It wasn't rogue. It wasn't Omega. It was threaded with the unmistakable dominance of an Alpha.

Which meant she wasn't just some helpless wolf lost in the city-she belonged to one of the major packs. Judging by her refined scent, likely an heir.

She fought like a storm contained in flesh-every strike clean, desperate, precise. I could smell the iron of her blood, the fire of her will. She was all sharp edges and stubborn silence, and something in me-something feral and half-buried-snapped loose.

My hound rumbled low beside me. I raised a hand. "Stay."

For a while, I simply watched. I wanted to see how far she'd go. How long before she broke.

But then one of them lunged.

I moved without thinking.

A single kick sent the man's ribs collapsing with a sickening crunch. The rest froze, their stench of fear filling the night air.

I stepped between her and them, my shadow swallowing hers, the moon carving silver over my black coat. My scent rolled through the street, and every wolf in the area would have felt it.

The rogues stumbled back, trembling.

Good. They should.

I turned to the girl. She was still on the ground, chest heaving, eyes wide. There was blood at the corner of her mouth. Her scent hit me again.

The kind that makes a Lycan's pulse trip.

"Interesting," I murmured, crouching a little, letting my gaze drag slowly over her. "Didn't expect to find a little wolf this vicious out here."

Her pupils flared. She didn't lower her eyes-smart and stupid at once.

"Tell me," I said softly, my voice a low growl wrapped in velvet. "Who taught you to fight like that?"

She didn't answer. Just stared. Blood and starlight on her skin.

The rogues groaned behind us. I sighed. "You left a few breathing. That's sloppy."

Her brows furrowed.

"Rule number one," I added, straightening. "If you're going to fight, finish it."

Before she could speak, I turned, expression flat, and ended it for her.

A few crunches. A few screams. Silence.

When I came back, she was still on the ground, back against the dirt, glaring up at me like I'd just insulted her pride. Her lip curled slightly, and for the first time that night, I almost smiled.

"Quick hands," I said, "but a soft heart. Fire without fangs." I tilted my head, letting the moonlight catch the edge of my smile. "Tell me, little wolf, how do you plan to repay your savior?"

She said nothing.

Just stared, gray eyes sharp enough to cut through bone.

The corner of my mouth twitched. "No words? Fine. You'll think of something."

I reached out to help her up. But the moment my hand brushed her wrist, she shoved-fast, fierce, reckless. My balance broke, and I fell forward.

Her body caught mine.

A soft curse slipped from my lips as pain flared in her arm and my hand landed somewhere... unexpected. Warm. Unforgivingly soft.

Her breath hitched. Mine stopped.

For a heartbeat, the world froze. Her eyes went wide, her cheeks flushed, and before I could speak-

"Didn't anyone ever tell you," she hissed, voice trembling with fury, "not to stare at trouble on the roadside?"

Then she kneed me-hard-and yelled, "Help! Enforcers!"

Within moments, the sharp howl of sirens split the night-our kind's version of law and order.

I blinked, half in disbelief, half in amusement, as the little wolf glared down at me like I was the villain of the story.

"You repay kindness with chaos," I drawled, lying where she'd been moments ago. "That's bold."

She stood, brushing blood from her cheek, lips twisting into a smirk. "I'm bold," she said sweetly. "And very, very bad."

And just like that, she turned and walked away-head high, shoulders squared, defiance burning bright.

I watched her until the night swallowed her whole.

The Enforcers arrived minutes later. My Beta, Jackson, rushed in, panting, eyes darting between me, the unconscious rogues, and the fading echo of her scent.

He swallowed hard. "Alpha-should we... clean this up?"

I didn't answer right away. My gaze lingered on the street where she'd stood, that stubborn little spark refusing to die.

"Find her," I said finally, my tone calm, dangerous.

"Who?"

I shot him a look.

He paled. "Right. On it."

Jackson turned to leave, muttering something about the poor woman's impending doom.

But he was wrong.

I had no intention of hurting her.

I just wanted to know-what kind of wolf hides claws that sharp beneath eyes that soft?