

Chapter 4

Aysel's POV

I didn't even know what kind of storm I'd stirred until dawn bled over the Moonvale estate.

The moment I stepped through the gates, still reeking of dried blood and smoke, my father-Alpha Remus-met me with a snarl and a hand faster than thought.

The slap cracked across my face, sharp as a whip. My head snapped to the side, and for a second, the world went white.

"I should have known," he growled, his voice shaking the walls. "No daughter of mine would dare bring shame to this Pack!"

The metallic tang of my own blood filled my mouth. My wolf bristled, teeth bared under my skin. I didn't move. I didn't even blink.

Around us, the room froze.

Luna Evelyn gasped softly. My brothers-Fenrir and Lykos-stood tense, eyes bright with anger. And on the sofa, Celestine Ward-our precious family guest, our beloved ward-watched everything with the smallest, most poisonous smile.

So that was it.

Last night's ambush by those filthy rogues, the one I barely survived-it wasn't random. I'd suspected as much. And judging by the calm in Celestine's eyes, I'd been right.

The little snake had planned it.

She'd tried to have me ruined-or dead. And now, she'd turned my own family against me before the bruises on my skin had even faded.

I didn't say a word.

I just moved.

Three strides, and I was in front of her. Her perfume-sweet amber and deceit-burned my nose.

Then my palm connected with her face.

The sound cracked through the hall like thunder.

For a heartbeat, no one breathed.

Luna Evelyn screamed, "Aysel! What are you doing?!"

Before anyone could stop me, I struck again-the other cheek this time. "That's for last night," I hissed. "For the rogues you sent after me."

Celestine staggered, one hand pressed to her now symmetrical face, shock twisting into fury. She'd always been the serene one, the fragile one-the saintly sister everyone adored. Now she looked ready to shred me apart.

Fenrir lunged forward, grabbing my wrist and throwing me back. My spine hit the cabinet with a dull thud, right against the bruises from the night before. Pain flared, sharp and deep. My wolf snarled, but I bit it back.

No one noticed.

Of course they didn't.

Everyone's eyes were on Celestine-checking her skin, soothing her, murmuring comfort.

No one cared about the Alpha's daughter covered in dirt and blood.

"Why would you hit your sister?" Alpha Remus's voice roared again, shaking the chandelier.

I lifted my chin, tasting iron. "Then why did you hit me?"

He froze for a fraction of a second.

I smiled without warmth. "You taught me that, didn't you? Strike first. Then talk about justice later."

His face reddened with fury. "You dare compare yourself to me? You bought rogues to attack your own blood! Do you even realize what you've done?!"

"Bought rogues?" I echoed, my voice colder than moonlight. "Then where's the proof?"

"The rogue confessed!" he barked. "He said you paid him to crash Celestine's car. If it weren't for her mercy, you'd already be locked in the Enforcer's cell!"

I laughed under my breath. "So all you have is a liar's word."

Celestine's lips trembled. "Aysel, I don't know why you hate me so much. If you want me gone, I'll leave Moonvale. I'll leave the Eastern Territories forever. Just... stop hurting everyone because of me."

Her voice shook, fragile and pure. Her wolf lowered its head, radiating submission and heartbreak.

Perfect. She knew exactly how to play them.

Alpha Remus's growl deepened. "Enough! Celestine stays. She has every right to this house. If you can't accept that, you can leave."

The words hit harder than any slap.

And the worst part?

He was right.

Celestine's mother had died protecting me. It was the sin no one let me forget-the reason I'd spent my life paying penance to a girl who'd learned to weaponize forgiveness.

I couldn't argue it. I didn't even try.

Lykos shoved a first-aid box into Fenrir's hands, muttering, "If anyone's leaving, it should be her. Having a sister like this is a disgrace."

Fenrir scowled. "Aysel, apologize to your sister."

I met his gaze, my voice steady. "It wasn't me. I won't take the blame."

Father raised his hand again-but I was faster this time. I dodged easily, wolf instincts flaring.

I turned toward Luna Evelyn and Damon Blackwood-the man who was supposed to stand beside me. The man who used to. "You believe them too?"

Neither spoke. Their silence was louder than any verdict.

Fine.

I pulled out my comm crystal and dialed the Enforcer line. "If I'm accused of a crime," I said clearly, my voice ringing through the room, "then let the law decide. Not my pack."

Gasps.

"You dare-!" Father's voice shook.

But I'd already pressed send.

Celestine's mask cracked for a flicker of a second. I saw panic there, raw and ugly, before she hid it again.

"Aysel," Luna Evelyn said sharply, "Pack business is not for outsiders. Celestine was ready to forgive you, and you throw it away. You disappoint us again."

"Then disappointment is mutual," I said quietly.

Fenrir's jaw clenched. "If you're found guilty, don't expect the Moonvale Pack to protect you."

Of course not.

They all looked at me like I was feral-an embarrassment, a stain on the Moonvale name. I could almost hear their thoughts: Let the Enforcers break her spirit. Maybe then she'll learn obedience.

Damon stepped forward, his scent-smoke and cedar-washing over me. His voice was low, pleading. "Aysel, if this is about me and Celestine-there's nothing between us. Please, don't ruin your future over pride. Just apologize. Once. That's all it takes."

My laugh came out hollow. "Apologize? For what? For fighting back? For not dying when she sent rogues after me?"

Lykos glared. "Watch your mouth."

"I am," I said softly, meeting Damon's eyes. "I'm just done watching my back."

The air thickened. Wolves stirred. The pack bond buzzed with tension.

Finally, I straightened, blood still crusted along my jaw. "Those slaps were fair," I said. "One for Father's hand, and one for the snake who thinks the Moonvale Pack belongs to her."

Silence.

Luna Evelyn's voice broke it, cold and final. "You've lost your mind, Aysel. Truly lost it."

"Maybe," I said, smiling faintly. "But at least I didn't lose my teeth."

The Enforcers arrived minutes later.

And just like that, for the second night in a row, I walked into their custody-head high, unrepentant-while my family watched from the doorway, pretending it was justice.