

Chapter 5

Aysel's POV

Daylight spilled through the tall windows of the Moonvale Enforcement Hall, harsh and cold as judgment.

Different guards were on shift now-wolves I didn't recognize.

When they heard that the one who called the Enforcers was also the prime suspect, they froze for a moment, brows furrowed, scent laced with disbelief.

Usually, a wolf who dared to walk into the Enforcement Hall of their own accord, asking to prove their innocence, was either a fool... or truly clean.

They took one look at me-at the bloodstains still faint on my sleeve, at my calm face-and their instincts tilted toward the latter.

But the victim's companions were loud, dramatic, swearing on the Moon Goddess herself. So the officers did what they had to-protocol over instinct.

Then came the part that made the air shift:

The "victim" and I belonged to the same Pack.

Celestine Ward-the Moonvale's precious adopted daughter, always bathed in Luna Evelyn's affection.

And me-the real daughter, standing alone on the other side of the room, demanding an investigation.

The female Enforcer doing the record blinked at the family tree for a long minute before muttering, "Moon help me," under her breath.

I didn't blame her.

Even from the outside, this was the kind of twisted Pack drama wolves gossip about for years.

Just a few hours ago, Alpha Remus had slapped me bloody in front of everyone. Fenrir glared like I'd killed his mate. Lykos practically growled my name like it was a curse.

And Damon, my supposed fiancé-had held Celestine as she coughed softly, pale and delicate, like the perfect Luna-in-training.

Watching him hover, the Enforcer's eyes darkened with disgust.

Her scent turned sharp with judgment.

"You expect me to believe that girl tried to kill this one? Sure."

If wolves could roll their eyes out loud, she just had.

The way Damon brushed Celestine's hair back, how her trembling fingers clung to his sleeve-it was obscene. The kind of thing that made every instinct in me want to bare my fangs.

But I didn't.

I just sat there, calm as ice, answering questions, voice steady.

The Enforcer-young, sharp, and probably the only one here with a working brain-watched me for a while, then quietly placed a cup of hot tea in front of me.

And a small bar of chocolate.

I almost smiled. She must've noticed how the Moonvale servants didn't even bring me breakfast. Their loyalty began and ended with whoever the Luna favored.

The case itself wasn't complicated.

The driver confessed.

He was hired-but not by me.

The name that came out stunned everyone.

Aine Rook.

A dancer from the Bluemoon Pack. Celestine's rival in their shared troupe.

She admitted everything-said she only meant to injure Celestine lightly, ruin her chance to perform as lead. But she'd used the ongoing family feud as a cover. She'd heard rumors of me "hating my sister," and decided to frame me, knowing my family would swallow it whole.

Clever bitch.

If I hadn't walked in to confess nothing, she'd have gotten away with it.

Celestine, of course, chose forgiveness. Because that's what she does best-turn other wolves' sins into the stage for her own sainthood.

Aine's dancing career was over, but she didn't seem to care. Her scent was cold, her expression unreadable, as she passed me by on her way out.

She paused just long enough to whisper, "You may have proved you're clean, Aysel Vale, but you still lost. You always will."

I didn't answer.

Her words stung less than they used to. Maybe I was just numb.

Back in the hall, silence reigned.

Alpha Remus's face twisted with something like regret-until he opened his mouth.

"If you hadn't been so arrogant," he said, "your classmates wouldn't have turned against you. You brought this on yourself."

I almost laughed. "Right. And if she ever sheds a hair, it'll be my fault for breathing too close? You should just wrap her in glass and light incense for her three times a day."

He slammed his hand against the table, a growl rising from deep in his chest. "Watch your mouth!"

The young Enforcer snapped, "No physical aggression in the Hall, Alpha."

The command tone of an officer cut through even Alpha authority, and Remus froze, hackles still half-raised.

Celestine coughed weakly, leaning harder against Damon. Luna Evelyn's voice dripped with reproach.

"Aysel, look what you've done. Your sister's health is fragile enough-must you drag her through this?"

Fenrir folded his arms, expression dark. "You knew you were innocent. You could've handled it quietly instead of embarrassing the Pack."

Lykos snorted. "Maybe that's the point. Some wolves crave attention, even if it means a cell."

I stared at them all-my blood, my Pack, the family I'd once believed would die for me-and felt nothing but cold.

"Right," I said. "I'm dramatic, I'm jealous, I'm vicious. But at least I'm still a wolf, not some creature that hides behind a saint's shadow and calls it love."

The room went still.

Then I tilted my head, lips curling in a tired smile. "Funny how you can all smell lies but never hers. Maybe your noses are just for decoration."

One of the male Enforcers choked trying not to laugh. The young female officer's tail flicked once, amused.

Luna Evelyn's jaw tightened.

The Enforcer turned toward me and said clearly, "Aysel Vale, the case is officially cleared. You're free to go. As for Celestine Ward, as the injured party, you may be contacted for follow-up."

Finally.

I thanked her quietly and turned to leave. Damon made as if to follow-but Celestine swayed, clutching his sleeve, and he froze.

Typical.

I didn't look back until Luna Evelyn's voice followed me out. "Aysel, wait. You and Damon's bonding ceremony yesterday had to be halted due to Celestine's injury, but the High Priest has divined the date of the next one-less than a month from today.. You should stay at the estate until then."

The words hit like a joke from the gods themselves.

I turned slowly, eyes landing on Damon-on the arm still wrapped around my sister.

"Luna Evelyn," I said softly, "look again. He's already holding his Luna. You really think it's still my ceremony?"