

His Defiant Mate: The Lycan King's Chosen Luna chapter 1-3

Chapter 1

Audriana POV: "I'm sorry, Ms. Sullivan, but Mr. Black's appointment was for half an hour ago." The clerk's voice was polite, but his eyes held a pity I refused to acknowledge. I glanced at the sleek watch on my wrist. Thirty-two minutes. He was thirty-two minutes late. "He's on his way," I said, my voice smoother than I felt. My stomach was a tight knot of cold dread. I stepped away from the polished walnut desk, the scent of lemon cleaner and old paper filling my nose. The North American Inter-Pack Alliance Registry Hall was designed to be imposing, with its marble columns and vaulted ceilings, meant to impress upon werewolves the gravity of the contracts signed here. Today, it just felt cold. The air conditioning ghosted across my bare arms, raising goosebumps. I unconsciously twisted the delicate silver chain bracelet on my wrist, a nervous habit I'd had since I was a child. The tiny links were cool against my skin. My phone buzzed in my clutch. A message from my assistant, Maya. 'Apex Ventures deal is ready for your final review. They're getting antsy.' I typed a quick reply, my fingers flying across the screen. 'Tell them to hold their breath. I'm handling something personal.' Personal. That's what this was supposed to be. The final step. Gabe and I, registering our intent to bond, a formality before the ceremony that would tie our packs, our families, our futures together. I closed my eyes for a second, focusing, trying to pull his scent from the air. It was a game we used to play as kids. I could always find him. That familiar, comforting scent of pine and damp earth. But all I could smell now was a cacophony of strangers-stale coffee, cloying perfume, the metallic tang of anxiety from a dozen other wolves waiting in this sterile hall. A wave of nausea rolled through me. Something was wrong. My phone buzzed again. Not a work message this time. An unknown number. The message was short, brutal. 'VIP Lounge 3. He's waiting for you.' My breath hitched. VIP Lounge 3. I knew the layout of this building. It was at the end of the private corridor, reserved for Alphas of significant standing. Gabe's father had used it last year to finalize a trade agreement. My fingers tightened around my phone. It was a trap. A cruel joke. It had to be. But the knot in my stomach pulled tighter, a cold, hard certainty. I pushed open the heavy glass door that separated the main hall from the private corridors. The sound of the bustling hall was instantly muffled by the thick, plush carpet. My heels sank into the crimson pile with each step, silencing my approach. As I moved down the hallway, a new scent cut through the sterile air. Cherry blossom. Sickly sweet and artificial. Hailee's scent. My steps slowed. My heart, which had been hammering against my ribs, gave a painful lurch and then seemed to stop altogether. It couldn't be. She was my cousin. She was supposed to be my maid of honor. I reached the door. Room 3. It was heavy, dark redwood, and slightly ajar. Just a crack. Through the gap, in the dim, intimate lighting of the lounge, I saw them. Two figures, tangled together on a leather sofa. Gabe. His hand was buried in her blonde hair, the same way he used to touch mine. Hailee's head was thrown back, her laughter a low, throaty sound that made my blood run cold. The world narrowed to that sliver of a view. The sound of my own blood roaring in my ears drowned out everything else. I didn't think. I acted. My hand shot out and slammed the door open. It crashed against the interior wall with a sound like a gunshot. They sprang apart, their faces a blur of shock and panic. Gabe scrambled to his feet, his shirt rumpled, his face flushed. "Audriana! What the hell are you doing?" Hailee, true to form, immediately dissolved into a picture of terrified innocence. She shrank behind Gabe, her eyes wide and already filling with tears. "Audri, it's not what it looks like." A laugh escaped my lips, but it was a harsh, ugly sound. "Not what it looks like? You're half an hour late to our registration, and I find you with your tongue down my cousin's throat. Please, Gabe. Enlighten me." "You were following me?" he roared, his voice bouncing off the wood-paneled

walls. He took a step forward, trying to use his Alpha presence to intimidate me, to make me shrink. It was a tactic that had stopped working years ago. "Don't be stupid," I snapped, my voice like ice. "I can smell her on you. You reek of cheap perfume and betrayal." Hailee let out a sob. "We couldn't help it! The bond... it's just so strong between us. We never meant to hurt you." The bond. She dared to speak of the bond. I ignored her, my eyes locked on Gabe. On the man I had loved since we were children. The man my wolf had recognized. The man who was supposed to be my future. "Give me an answer, Gabe," I said, my voice dangerously quiet. "A real one. Now." He looked from my face to Hailee's tear-streaked one. She gave a little whimper and tugged on his arm, the perfect damsel in distress. And in that moment, I saw his decision. His jaw tightened. His eyes, which I once thought held the whole world, turned to stone. "I, Gabe Black, Alpha of the Blackwater Pack," he began, his voice formal and loud, ringing with the ancient power of the rite. The air in the room crackled. The words were a physical force, slamming into me. "Reject you, Audriana Sullivan, as my mate." Pain. It wasn't emotional. It was physical. A spear of white-hot agony that started in my chest and ripped through every nerve in my body. It felt like my soul was being torn in two. My breath was stolen from my lungs. My knees threatened to buckle. I bit down on my lower lip, hard. The coppery taste of blood filled my mouth. I would not scream. I would not cry. I would not give them the satisfaction. My fingernails dug into the soft leather of my clutch, the leather groaning under the pressure. For a flicker of a second, I saw something in Gabe's eyes. A flash of regret. Of pain. But it was quickly smothered by the cold, hard wall of his decision. Hailee's hand was on his arm, a triumphant possessiveness in her touch. I forced myself to stand taller, to straighten my spine, even as the world tilted around me. I met his gaze, and I let him see the abyss that had just opened between us. I cleared my throat, my voice a raw, broken thing. But it was steady. "I, Audriana Sullivan," I rasped, each word costing me a piece of my shattered soul, "accept your rejection." The bond snapped. It was a sound no one else could hear, but for me, it was a cataclysm. A final, brutal severing. The pain intensified for a blinding moment, then settled into a deep, hollow ache that I knew would never truly leave. Behind Gabe, Hailee's lips curved into a small, victorious smile. I looked at them. Really looked at them. Not as my fiancé and my cousin, but as two strangers. Two pieces of trash I had found on the side of the road. Worthless. Without another word, I turned my back on the wreckage of my life. I walked out of the room, my steps even and measured, down the long, silent corridor, and away from the man who had just ripped my heart out of my chest.

Chapter 2

Audriana POV: Each step down the corridor was a battle. The plush carpet that had silenced my approach now felt like quicksand, trying to drag me down. The soul-tearing pain of the rejection was a physical weight, settling in my bones, making my legs tremble. I stumbled, my shoulder hitting the cool, unforgiving wall. I pressed my palm against the patterned wallpaper, steadying myself, forcing air into lungs that felt like they were lined with broken glass. My phone vibrated in my hand, a vicious little buzz against my palm. I didn't need to look. I knew who it was. I flipped it over. Hailee. A picture of her and Gabe, his arm wrapped around her, her head nestled on his shoulder. They were smiling. The photo was taken in the lounge, just moments after I'd left. A cold, sharp laugh, devoid of any humor, escaped my throat. I didn't delete it. I blocked the number. The action was swift, clinical. A tiny, insignificant act of control in a world that had just spun violently out of it. I pushed off the wall and continued my march, my focus narrowed to the exit sign glowing at the far end of the hall. Just get out. Disappear. That's when I felt it. A gaze. Heavy. Intense. In the shadows of a recessed archway, leaning against a massive Roman column, a man stood watching me. He was tall, impossibly so, dressed in a dark, impeccably tailored suit that seemed to absorb the dim light around him. I couldn't see his face clearly, but the sheer force of his presence was a physical thing, a change in the atmospheric pressure of the hallway. His knuckles rapped a silent, impatient rhythm against the cold marble. The name 'Caden Sinclair' echoed in my

mind—the CEO of Sinclair Global, one of the most powerful men on the continent. I had seen his picture in business journals, but never in person. Before I could process his scrutiny, a new disturbance shattered the quiet. "Caden! Don't you dare walk away from me!" A woman with fiery red hair and a dress the color of spilled wine came storming down the intersecting corridor. Her heels clicked angrily on the marble floor. She was beautiful, furious, and heading straight for the man in the shadows. "Juliana," he said. His voice was low, a deep baritone that rumbled with arctic cold. It was not a greeting. It was a dismissal. "Don't 'Juliana' me!" she shrieked, her voice echoing. "Our families have an agreement! You can't just ignore me. You can't just decide you're not interested!" The man, Caden, finally moved out of the shadows. He stepped into a pool of light from an overhead sconce, and my breath caught. He wasn't just handsome; he was terrifyingly beautiful. Sharp, aristocratic features, dark hair swept back from a high forehead, and eyes so dark they seemed to swallow the light. They were eyes that held the cold stillness of a frozen lake. He barely glanced at her. His brow furrowed in a minute expression of extreme displeasure. "The agreement," he stated, his voice devoid of any emotion, "is cancelled. All business between Sinclair and Beaumont is terminated. Effective immediately." Juliana gasped, her face paling. "You can't do that." She reached for his arm, her manicured nails flashing. He moved with liquid grace, a subtle shift that put him just out of her reach. A man who had been standing silently behind him, an assistant of some kind, stepped forward, placing himself between Caden and the hysterical woman. "Ms. Beaumont," the assistant said calmly. "Perhaps we can discuss this at a later time." Juliana dissolved into ragged sobs, her fury collapsing into a messy, public spectacle. Staff members down the hall were starting to stare. Caden didn't even look back. He turned, and his gaze, deep and penetrating, landed directly on me. He had been aware of me the entire time. The observer had become the observed. I just wanted to get past. To escape this hallway of public humiliations. I kept my eyes fixed on the exit, trying to make myself small, to slide by the edges of his powerful orbit. But as I drew level with him, it happened. A scent hit me like a physical blow. Not perfume or cologne. It was something elemental. Snow-covered pines and the clean, sharp scent of ice just before a storm. It was cold, powerful, and utterly intoxicating. His eyes, which had been cold and distant, flared. His pupils dilated, turning his dark irises into black pools. I saw his jaw clench, a muscle twitching violently. A low growl rumbled in his chest, a sound so deep I felt it in my own bones. Mine. The word wasn't spoken. It was a primal roar that crashed through my mind, a violation of my innermost thoughts. My own body betrayed me. A jolt, like a live wire, shot up my spine. My legs went weak, a strange warmth pooling low in my belly, a stark contrast to the icy ache of Gabe's rejection. It was the recognition. The fated mate bond, a thing of myth and legend for most, a cruel joke for me, happening now, in the worst possible moment of my life. He moved before I could react. One long stride and he was in front of me, a wall of muscle and power, blocking my escape. The air crackled between us, thick with a tension that was both terrifying and thrilling. I took a half-step back, my guard slamming up. I tilted my head to look up at him, my neck aching from the angle. "Excuse me," I said, my voice tight. His gaze swept over me, taking in my pale face, my trembling hands, the faint scent of my own tears that I was trying so hard to hold back. He saw everything. He saw my weakness. He didn't waste time with pleasantries. He didn't ask my name. "You need a shield. I need a wife," he stated, his voice a low, magnetic rumble that vibrated through me. "Marry me." I stared at him, dumbfounded. The world tilted on its axis for the second time in less than an hour. The pain from Gabe's rejection was still a raw, open wound, and this stranger, this impossibly powerful Alpha, was proposing? I must have been hallucinating. The pain was making me crazy. "You're insane," I breathed. He took a step closer, invading my personal space, his sheer size overwhelming. His scent was a dizzying cloud around me. "Am I?" he murmured, his voice dropping even lower, meant only for me. "You were just publicly rejected. Your pack will see you as damaged goods. Your family will either hide you in shame or sell you off to the highest bidder to salvage some value." Each word was a cold, hard slap of truth. He gestured with his chin towards the sobbing Juliana, still being placated by his assistant. "I am being pressured into a union I have no interest in." His eyes flicked back to the direction of the VIP

lounge I had just fled. "We both have a problem. A marriage of convenience provides a solution for us both." My mind, usually sharp and analytical, was a chaotic mess. But through the fog of pain and shock, his words cut through. A shield. A. He was right. My grandfather would be furious. My family would see me as a failed investment. They would try to marry me off to some old, decrepit Alpha to forge a new alliance, to squeeze some last drop of use out of me. This man... he was dangerous. The raw power rolling off him in waves was unlike anything I had ever felt. It was an inferno to Gabe's flickering candle. That power could be a cage, or it could be a fortress. But it was a choice. My choice. And right now, it was the only weapon I had. I took a deep breath, the scent of him filling my lungs, steadying me. I met his dark, intense gaze. "Okay," I said, my voice clear and firm. "I will." A flicker of something-surprise? satisfaction?-crossed his features, so fast I almost missed it. Then his face was a mask of cool indifference again. He simply nodded. "Follow me." And he turned, expecting me to obey. I watched him for a second, then fell into step behind him, walking towards the registration desk, towards a future that was even more terrifying and unknown than the one I had just lost.

Chapter 3

Audriana POV: We walked side-by-side, a strange and silent pair cutting a path through the registry hall. The few wolves still lingering stared, their eyes drawn to the raw power Caden radiated. He ignored them as if they were furniture. I tried to do the same, focusing on the rhythmic click of my heels against the marble, a sound that grounded me in the surreal haze. We stopped at the central registration desk, the same one I had stood at less than an hour ago, my heart full of hope. The old clerk, a wizened Beta named Elmsworth, looked up over his spectacles. His eyes widened slightly as he took in Caden, then flickered to me, a flicker of recognition and confusion in their depths. "We need to register a binding," Caden said. His tone left no room for questions. Elmsworth pushed his glasses up his nose. "Of course, sir. The preliminary paperwork, if you please..." Caden didn't bother with paperwork. He reached into the inner pocket of his suit jacket and produced a slim, black card made of some unidentifiable metal. He slid it across the polished walnut. It made no sound. Elmsworth took the card, his hand trembling slightly. He swiped it through a scanner attached to his terminal. The screen beeped, and the clerk's face went from professionally placid to pale with what looked like pure, unadulterated fear. He shot a terrified glance at Caden, his mouth opening and closing like a fish. I saw it all. The shift was undeniable. I narrowed my eyes, my gaze sliding to Caden. Who was this man? I knew who he was—Caden Sinclair, the billionaire CEO. But knowing a name and standing next to the man were two different things. The power radiating from him was unlike anything I had ever felt. He stood impassive, but he subtly shifted his body, his broad shoulder blocking my view of the monitor, obscuring whatever damning information was displayed there. He turned his head slightly, his voice a low murmur meant only for me. "My family has certain privileges within the Alliance. It expedites the bureaucracy." It was a gross understatement, and we both knew it. This wasn't privilege; this was power on a scale I couldn't comprehend. But I just nodded, filing the information away. Elmsworth, now sweating visibly, fumbled beneath the counter and produced two scrolls of what looked like actual sheepskin parchment, tied with a silver cord. He unrolled them with reverent hands. These weren't the standard digital forms. This was the old magic. The kind that couldn't be broken. "The Eternal Vow," he whispered, his voice trembling. Caden took the offered quill without hesitation. I accepted the other, its feather cool against my fingers. I stared at the intricate, glowing runes that lined the edges of the contract. This was real. This was happening. For a heartbeat, my hand faltered. The memory of Gabe's rejection, the searing pain, was still a fresh wound. Was I really about to chain myself to another Alpha, a stranger, so quickly? Caden's senses were as sharp as his features. He felt my hesitation. "Second thoughts?" he asked, his voice low and smooth, but with an undercurrent of steel that suggested backing out was not an option. I lifted my head, my eyes meeting his. I thought of Hailee's triumphant smile. I thought of my

grandfather, already calculating how to sell me off. I thought of a life spent as a pariah, a rejected mate. My resolve hardened. This was not a chain. This was a sword. I dipped the quill into the inkpot and signed my name-Audriana Sullivan-at the bottom of the parchment. The ink flared with a soft, golden light as it touched the runes. My handwriting was sharp, angry. Caden followed suit, his signature a bold, authoritative slash of black. "Your hands," Elmsworth instructed, his voice barely a whisper. We placed our palms simultaneously over the large, embossed Alliance seal in the center of the contract. A soft, silver light pulsed from the seal, warm and alive. It flowed up our arms, a tingling sensation that was both unnerving and strangely pleasant. The light coalesced at our wrists before sinking into our skin, leaving a faint, shimmering mark that looked like two intertwined wolves, barely visible unless you knew to look for it. A mate mark. A binding mark. The skin on my wrist burned, a constant, physical reminder of the vow I had just made. Caden's hand moved, his long, warm fingers closing around my wrist. His thumb brushed over the new mark, a gesture of casual ownership that sent a jolt of pure electricity through my system. It was the spark of recognition, magnified a thousand times by physical contact. I snatched my hand back as if I'd been burned, my breath catching in my throat. My heart hammered against my ribs, a wild bird trapped in a cage. His eyes darkened, a flash of possessive heat in their depths, but it was gone as quickly as it came. He turned back to the clerk, his face once again an impassive mask. Elmsworth, looking relieved to have survived the ordeal, quickly stamped the documents and handed Caden two small, leather-bound booklets. Our official certificates of binding. "It is done," the clerk breathed. Caden passed the booklets to his silent assistant, who had materialized at his side, without a second glance. We turned to leave. As we reached the massive doors of the hall, Caden stopped. "This arrangement," he said, turning to face me. "It remains between us for now." I raised an eyebrow, waiting for the explanation. "My family... is complicated," he said, the corner of his mouth twitching in what might have been a grimace. "The transition of certain responsibilities is at a delicate stage. I do not wish for you to be drawn into it prematurely." It was a plausible lie, and one that suited me perfectly. "Good," I said, my relief palpable. "I'm in the middle of a major acquisition at work. The last thing I need is my personal life becoming a distraction." I pushed it a step further. "And with my current workload, moving in together would be... inconvenient." His eyes narrowed, studying me, assessing my attempt to draw a boundary. I expected an argument, a command. As my Alpha, my husband, he had the right to demand it. But he surprised me. He gave a slow, deliberate nod. "Inconvenient," he repeated, tasting the word. "Very well. We will maintain separate residences. For now." The unspoken words hung in the air between us. I let out a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding. My shoulders, which had been tensed up to my ears, relaxed a fraction. He pushed open one of the heavy glass doors, holding it for me. The cool evening air rushed in, a welcome relief from the charged atmosphere of the hall. He gestured for me to go first, a simple act of courtesy that felt strangely protective. I stepped out into the twilight, leaving the registry hall behind, bound to a man whose name I had only just learned, a man who was now my husband.