

Defy 651

Chapter 651: Seduce Cane

"And what makes you think we didn't think of that?" Leon argued. "We know that. Cane knows that. That's why he's surrounded by guards." There was nothing but disgust in his voice as he added, "A proud werewolf would be at the front of the battle, but he's a coward — a smart coward at that. He knows we're coming. So tell us, what's this special way you'll win a war without bloodshed?"

Micah rolled his eyes. All these complaints and yet no action. The things he did for his sister.

"Well, none of you can do this," he said, stretching out his hand. Shadows billowed around him like smoke.

There was a sharp gasp as Alexa instinctively stepped back. Ezra pulled Nancy behind him just in case, while Jeremiah stiffened, ready to strike if Micah tried anything. Only Irene and Aeron stood their ground, though their eyes narrowed, and their muscles coiled, ready for a fight if it came to that.

"Calm down," Micah said, unfazed. "It's just a demonstration, a dramatic one at that. I tend to have a thing for theatrics," he added with a sly smile.

Leon, still on edge, asked, "And how exactly is this supposed to help us?"

"I can charm Cane. Or anyone close enough and unmated. I just need to get within ten meters for my appeal to work. It's most effective on skin contact, the victim becomes completely enamored. But I doubt Cane will let me near him."

"So let me get this straight..." Ezra said. "We have to bet this war on you seducing Cane and killing him?"

"Well, if you put it like that," Micah shrugged, unoffended.

Leon jabbed a finger at him. "So we're supposed to trust this nonsense? We don't even know if it works."

Accusing him of collaborating with the enemy was one thing, but looking down on him was another and Micah wasn't going to take it.

Micah smiled, sly as a fox. "Perhaps you should find out for yourself, Alpha Leon."

"What?" Leon frowned, confused.

Then the air changed, a static prick crawling along the skin. Goosebumps rose on everyone's arms as Micah's magic spilled outward and touched them all.

Irene felt it first. Her thoughts fogged; Micah stood in a brilliant halo in her mind. She wanted to be close to him, to touch him, to be with him. The urge rose like heat beneath her ribs.

She almost staggered toward him before the image of her husbands — Aeron and Arion — slammed into her mind like a cold bucket. She snapped out of it, her breath coming fast. What in the world was that?

Aeron looked dazed for a second before clearing. As for Ezra and Nancy, they were unmoved. Their bond was a shield that the charm couldn't pierce through. It simply had no effect on them.

Micah's sinister smile widened. He pushed the charm, directing its warmth like a current. All eyes tracked as Leon, the South Pack Alpha, walked toward him as if pulled. There was nothing but adoration in his eyes. When he reached Micah, he stood in front of him like a worshiper.

Micah commanded, "Go down on your knees."

"No..." Jeremiah gasped, barely recovered from the fog. "He wouldn't..."

But Leon did. He sank to one knee before Micah, eyes twinkling with a strange, disbelieving glee. Shock slammed through the room; faces froze in varying shades of horror and disbelief.

Irene cupped her mouth, the image still vivid behind her eyes. Jeremiah had both hands on his head, stunned into silence.

Nancy's mouth formed a perfect O, then unable to hold it in anymore, laughed. She snatched up her phone before anyone could stop her.

"No, babe, don't—" Ezra barked, too late. Nancy clicked a photo, laughing so hard she nearly doubled over.

Alexa flushed crimson, embarrassed and caught off-guard. Yet when she met Micah's cool gaze, the shame softened into admiration. Micah had surprised them all.

Maybe he wasn't so bad, after all. Except there was more than admiration in those eyes.

Micah could have pushed it further. He could have made Leon crawl on his feet, dance, or even debase himself, like giving him a lap dance.

But Leon was an Alpha and wouldn't forgive such a public disgrace. Not to mention, Micah was now mated, and Adele would murder him. So he eased the hold, letting the charm die gently.

Leon blinked, the world snapping back. He scrambled to his feet, cheeks flushing with shame and fury as if waking from a fever dream.

"What the hell?" he snarled, scanning the room for answers, but the smug satisfaction on Micah's face said it all.

"Seriously?" Leon growled.

Nancy could not hold it. She dissolved into louder, raucous laughter, clutching her belly until tears spilled. Irene tried to hide a grin but failed; she let out a shocked, helpless chuckle. The sound spread, contagious and ridiculous. Even Aeron cracked a small smile.

Leon's humiliation curdled into reluctant concession. He straightened, jaw tight. "Fine," he spat. "You made your point. You win."

"The pleasure's all mine," Micah said, shameless and calm.

"Alright, that's enough. We need to focus," Ezra cut in, folding the room back into business.

"You know what this means?" Aeron asked.

"Yeah," Ezra said. "Micah doesn't necessarily have to charm Cane in person. He only needs someone close to Cane to do the dirty work."

"True," Micah agreed, "But I still need to be in close quarters for the charm to hold. I must ensure the person actually carries out the task. My presence is required for control."

"If that's the case," Irene said, "we need Cane's exact location. That way, we can drop you in, execute, and extract you alive."

The others nodded in agreement.

"Surely, there have to be spies, or at least a few still loyal to us, in Cane's camp," Irene said, crossing her arms.

Ezra's expression was thoughtful. "There should be. And if not, we'll make one. There's always an Alpha willing to switch sides for the right price, or protection. Jeremiah and I will look into it. If we can't find loyalty, we'll buy it." He glanced around the table. "We'll come back with a name and location soon enough."

He paused, then turned to Micah. "In the meantime, is there anything you'll need before this mission?"

Micah didn't hesitate. "Nothing else," he said, "except a long, private call with my mate. No disturbance."

Chapter 652: Have A Talk

The classroom door swung open, and Daisy let out a long breath of relief. "Thank God, you're here." She hurried forward and wrapped Ivy in a tight hug.

Ivy embraced her back, then pulled back, eyes wide and tense. "She really called you? Luna Zara?"

Daisy nodded, still shaken. "Yeah. She questioned me about Violet and Lila."

Ivy's expression twisted in fear. "What do you think we should do? What if we just run away? My family has a private property in the city. We can hide out there until this all blows over."

But Daisy shook her head. "No, Ivy. Running away only proves we're hiding something. We can't do that."

Ivy hesitated. "Then what do we do?"

"We stay," Daisy told her. "We simply keep our heads down, and act normal. The moment we run, we look guilty. Violet would want us to be brave, not cowards."

Ivy sighed, running her hand through her hair. "What in the world is going on here? Where is Violet? What happened this time?"

"There's one person we can get information from," Daisy said.

"Who?" Ivy asked warily.

"Natalie Avax."

It was just one name, but Ivy's face twisted instantly in disgust.

"Blah!" she groaned, making a face. "You mean the bitch who took Violet's place?"

The bitterness in her voice was unmistakable. Everyone knew Violet should've been the one in charge of the fifth house, but Natalie, with her family name, privilege, and connections, had snatched the position without blinking.

"Violet might have been cool with it," Ivy muttered, crossing her arms, "but I'm not."

Not to mention, ever since Violet left Lunaris Academy, Natalie had practically taken her place. Even though Principal Jameson claimed the Luna ranking had been scrapped, the hierarchy still existed. Only this time, a human was sitting on the throne ruling as the new queen.

Daisy sighed, crossing her arms. "I know you've got a beef with Natalie, but if there's anyone in this academy who has information on what's happening, it's definitely her."

Ivy frowned, reluctant. "Fine. Let's go," she muttered.

Classes were still ongoing, but neither of them cared, they had bigger problems. After almost twenty minutes of searching, they finally found Natalie Avax tucked away in the far corner of the library.

She was perched on one of the reading tables, lunch spread out neatly before her: a bowl of creamy pasta, fruit slices arranged in perfect symmetry, and croissant. Typical Natalie. Even eating, she looked like she was filming a royal etiquette ad.

Ivy smirked. "Shouldn't the queen bee be eating somewhere less common?" she teased.

Daisy shot her a look and mouthed, Behave.

Natalie lifted her gaze, her eyes cold and calculating. "Violet's minions," she said coolly, setting down her fork. "What do you want?"

Ivy gasped. "Minions? Did she just—"

Daisy gave her the eye again, a silent warning. Then she cleared her throat and said, "We need your help."

Natalie leaned back lazily, twirling her fork between her fingers. "And why," she asked with quiet amusement, "would I do that?"

Before Daisy could answer, Ivy jumped in, sarcasm dripping from her voice. "Because, at some point, I actually believed you were Violet's friend."

Natalie scoffed, lips curling into a smirk. "Tough luck," she said with a cutting tone, "You really can't tell the difference between friends and competition, can you?"

Daisy tried again, her voice pleading. "Look, Natalie, we're not entitled to your help. You don't owe us anything. But Violet is our friend. We just want to know what's going on with her. Please."

An emotion equal to pity flashed in Natalie's eyes then, a subtle crack in her icy composure. She leaned back in her chair. "Fine," she said at last, "since you're so desperate to know. Here it is. Violet Purple and the cardinal alphas are missing."

"What?!" Both girls shouted in unison, loud enough that a few students at nearby tables turned their heads.

"Keep your voices down," Natalie warned them, "If you two value your peace, you'll keep that little secret to yourselves. There's already enough tension brewing at in the wolf packs. We don't need the whole academy panicking. And yes, you did not hear that from me."

Daisy exchanged a quick look with Ivy. "Missing?" she whispered. "What do you mean missing? Where did they go?"

Natalie picked up her spoon again, stirring her untouched pasta lazily. "I don't know," she said flatly. "And honestly, I've answered your question and I'd prefer to keep my quiet time."

Ivy frowned, opening her mouth to push further, but Daisy touched her arm in warning. "Thank you for telling us," Daisy said simply.

Natalie didn't respond, she just waved them off dismissively, like she couldn't care less whether they stayed or vanished.

As the two girls walked out of the library, Ivy muttered under her breath, "So Luna Zara came to us thinking we actually have an idea where they went."

Daisy's lips pressed into a thin line. "I think we do have an idea where they went."

Ivy frowned at first, but then it clicked. Her eyes widened in shock. "The—" She stopped mid-word, her throat tightening as the spell burned against her tongue, stopping her from saying the name out loud.

They exchanged a knowing look and quickened their pace down the hall. But as soon as they pushed open the door and stepped into the corridor, their stomachs dropped.

"Hello, you two," Elsie Lancaster said sweetly, leaning against the wall with her usual smug smile. Two of her ever-present minions flanked her, arms crossed and eyes glinting with mischief. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

Daisy and Ivy froze. Nothing good ever started with that tone.

"Grab them," Elsie ordered.

The two girls lunged forward and chaos erupted. Ivy swung first, kicking one of the minions in the stomach. Daisy shoved another off her arm.

"Run!" Daisy yelled.

"I'm not leaving you—"

"Go!" Daisy screamed again.

Ivy hesitated only a second before bolting down the hall. Behind her, Daisy fought hard, but the odds weren't in her favor. One of the girls caught her from behind while the other clasped a hand over her mouth.

Elsie smiled coldly as Daisy struggled. "Good girl," she purred. "Now, let's go somewhere quiet to talk."

And just like that, they dragged Daisy away, vanishing down the corridor before anyone could notice.

Chapter 653: Save Her

Daisy struggled as fiercely as she could, but the two girls holding her were half-breeds and she couldn't break free even if she tried.

Her muffled cries went nowhere as they gagged her with a strip of fabric, the sour taste of it choking her, then pulled a paper bag over her head. Panic rose in her chest as they left her blind and breathless.

Time lost all meaning as they dragged her roughly along the hallways until, suddenly, she was dropped hard onto a smooth floor. Her knees hit the tiles with a painful thud, and she let out a muffled yelp.

Ripping the bag off, Daisy blinked rapidly and glared up to find Elsie Lancaster staring down at her, a smug smile twisting her lips.

She tore the gag from her mouth and snapped, "Are you out of your mind? What the hell is this for?"

Elsie's eyes gleamed with hatred. "Maybe I am," she said with a crooked grin. "You and your little gang, led by your precious Violet, made me lose everything. Did you really think I wouldn't find out?"

Daisy swallowed hard, sweat beading at her temple. However, she stood her ground, even as her heart pounded in her chest.

"There's only one person who wanted my position... Violet! And you all helped her set me up!"

"It isn't a setup if it's the truth..." Daisy didn't finish as Elsie's hand struck her cheek. Her head whipped to the side, tears springing to her eyes.

"Yes," Elsie hissed, breathing heavily, "I'm the one in charge here. You don't speak until I say so."

Daisy's fear increased. The girl before her wasn't the same Elsie she'd once known. This was someone who'd already fallen and decided to drag others down with her.

She took in her surroundings, they were in the indoor pool. The glass ceiling above reflected rippling turquoise light onto the walls. The pool itself stretched wide, its surface eerily still, while the air was heavy with chlorine. No one else was there, only Elsie and her two accomplices.

Since Elsie's fall from grace, everyone had practically abandoned her. Her name was poison now, her reputation shredded after her dirty secrets were exposed in public — the Asher mask scandal and her twisted affair with Grace. Who knew she had such a distorted kink?

Hence Daisy couldn't imagine how she'd convinced these half-breed girls to follow her, unless they were foolish enough to believe Elsie was truly rising again.

But then again, first years were easy to fool. Typical Elsie, pick the ones she could manipulate, train another Grace. Well, two Grace.

Daisy eyed the door, calculating how far it was, how she'd have to move, how she'd engage the three of them and what the outcome might be.

Elsie must have seen it in her face because she laughed. "Don't even think about it. You're not leaving here until you give me what I want."

"Ivy's coming with help. You're not going to get away with this!" Daisy snapped.

"Aww." Elsie put a hand to her chest, all drama. "You think I'm scared? Let me tell you how this will go." She leaned forward and pointed at the door. "Even if they show up, I've barred the door. They won't get to you in time, not until I get what I want. Will I be punished? Maybe. Maybe not. It's all just a little play between friends who should be in class."

Blood drained from Daisy's face. This girl had truly gone off the rails.

"Tie her up. Time for us to have a little fun," Elsie ordered.

"What?! No!"

Except Daisy was not going to sit still and let them do what they wanted with her.

The moment they approached her with the rope, Daisy moved first.

She ducked low before the first one could reach for her, sweeping her leg in a clean arc that Commander Malakai himself would have been proud of.

Hence the first half-breed crashed to the floor with a startled yelp. Then Daisy used the momentum to spring up, her elbow ramming into the second girl's ribs. There was a muffled grunt as the air expelled from her lungs, her body folding.

They tried to recover, but Daisy was already spinning, landing a kick that sent one of the girls staggering into the pool with a splash. The other one lunged at her, grabbing a fistful of her hair but Daisy turned with it, driving her knee into the girl's gut.

The sound that tore out of the girl's throat was ugly — and satisfying. The girl collapsed.

Daisy stood over them, chest heaving, heart thundering in her ears. No one messed with her!

Recalling that Elsie was still around, Daisy turned around to deal with her too only for a punch to land in her face and stars exploded in her vision. Daisy hit the tiles, dazed.

Elsie's voice sliced through the ringing in her ears. "Useless lackeys! Tie her up now, you fools! Can't even handle a mere human!"

Daisy groaned as rough hands grabbed her arms, forcing them behind her. The sting of rope bit into her wrists as they yanked it tight.

Her cheek was pressed against the cold tile, her breath shallow, and pulse pounding. Daisy wanted to scream, to fight again, but she was so exhausted.

Elsie crouched beside her, voice dripping with venom. "You're mine now, Daisy Fairchild. Now, you'll learn what happens when you cross me."

The ropes cinched tighter and Daisy winced. This couldn't get any better!

"Pull her up to her feet," Elsie commanded.

And her faithful servants obeyed.

Daisy grunted as they forced her to face Elsie, who was grinning like a lunatic high on her own power. The sight almost made Daisy laugh through the pain. Did Elsie seriously think this was some kind of mob movie and she was the boss giving out orders?

"So, Daisy," Elsie began, circling her like a predator savoring the moment before the kill. She stopped right in front of her. "Where is Lila Meadows? Is she with Violet Purple? And if she is, where are they?"

Daisy's mouth fell open. Oh.

It hit her all at once.

"Luna Zara sent you, didn't she?"

Of course. That explained everything. No wonder Elsie hadn't made a move since Violet vanished. She had only been waiting, crawling back into relevance with the Luna's leash around her neck.

"Yes," Elsie said, stupidly proud. "She chose me for this." Her grin widened. "So you'd better talk before things get ugly."

But Daisy laughed, breathless and defiant. "Even if you held a knife to my throat, you wouldn't get a word out of me."

Elsie's smile dropped, her tone sharpening instead. "Really? Is that so?"

Then she snapped.

"Toss her into the pool."

"What?" Daisy's blood ran cold. "No—wait—"

The girls didn't hesitate. They shoved her hard.

The world spun, and icy water swallowed her whole. It crashed over her face and filled her mouth before she broke the surface, gasping and sputtering. Her arms jerked uselessly since it was tied tight behind her, while her legs kicked frantically to keep her head above the water.

The chlorine burned her eyes, and panic clawed up her throat as she heard Elsie's voice echo coldly from above.

"Tell me the truth and you won't drown Daisy."

Daisy shouted, "What? I don't know where they are!"

"You must really have a knack for pain," Elsie hissed, clearly not believing her. Her eyes gleamed with that wild, dangerous light that made Daisy's stomach twist.

"Get in there," she ordered the girls coldly. "We'll drag the truth out of her if we have to."

"No, no, no, Elsie, I'm telling you the truth! I can't tell you even if I wanted to—" Daisy's voice broke, but Elsie wasn't listening.

Before Daisy could even blink, the two girls slipped into the water, swimming toward her from both sides. Panic shot through Daisy's veins as they reached her, gripping her bound arms tightly beneath the surface. Elsie loomed above at the pool's edge like a dark queen presiding over her punishment.

"I'll try once more, Daisy Fairchild," she said, her voice deceptively calm. "Where did Lila Meadows and Violet Purple go?"

"E-Elsie, believe me," Daisy gasped, trembling, "I can't tell you. Please—"

But Elsie's expression didn't soften. She wanted results, and this was her chance to prove herself again to Luna Zara, who'd turned her back on her.

"Duck her."

The words were flat and ruthless.

The two girls obeyed immediately. They shoved Daisy's head under the water.

Cold water rushed into her nose and burned her lungs. Daisy kicked wildly, struggling to break free, but their grip was like iron, and her screams were lost to the water.

The torment felt like forever, and just when the darkness began to creep in, they yanked her up again.

Daisy broke the surface with a violent gasp, choking, coughing, her eyes red and nose stinging.

Above her, Elsie smiled. A slow, evil smile.

"Ready to talk now, Daisy?"

Oh God. Someone save her.

Chapter 654: Not In Heaven

"Fine..." Elsie smirked wickedly, savoring Daisy's defiance. "Duck her again."

"No—wait!" Daisy shouted.

Elsie raised a brow, amused. "Oh? You ready to talk now?"

"Yes—yes... just let me—let me catch my breath..." Daisy coughed violently, chest heaving.

Elsie's expression hardened. "I see what you're doing. You're stalling."

"I'm not..." Daisy rasped. "There's just too much water in my lungs..." another coughing fit shook her.

Elsie rolled her eyes, impatient. "Throw her back in."

"No, don't—Violet's not here!" Daisy blurted in desperation.

Elsie leaned down until they were eye-to-eye, her face twisted with vindictive satisfaction. "Exactly. Then where is she?"

"In a place far away," Daisy whispered hoarsely. "I can't tell you. I've been spelled not to. You have to believe me."

"Bullshit," Elsie laughed. "You think I'm stupid because you and your little squad embarrassed me last time. Not happening again." She flicked her fingers. "Do it."

"No—don't—!" Daisy's protest drowned in a rush of water as her head was shoved under. Bubbles stemmed around her as she screamed into the pool, inhaling more water.

A loud bang slammed against the door.

Elsie's head snapped toward it, eyes widening. "Shit. Help is here, and she hasn't told me anything yet!"

The two girls froze, exchanging fearful looks. They did not sign up for a murder charge. They hoped Elsie knew what she was doing.

"Pull her up!" Elsie barked.

They dragged Daisy above water. She surfaced with a violent gasp, coughing, eyes red and burning.

"Where did Violet and Lila go?!" Elsie yelled, desperate now.

"I CAN'T tell you! How many times do I have to say it to get it into your dense skull?!" Daisy screamed back.

Elsie flinched, startled by the fire in Daisy's voice. The nerve. The audacity.

Of course, she didn't believe Daisy was spelled into silence. In Elsie's mind, Daisy was just testing her patience. And to Elsie, stubbornness was a challenge. A dare.

"Fine," Elsie hissed, her voice low and chilling. "You want to drown? I'll help you drown."

She snapped at her minions, "Put her back in, and don't let her up."

"What?!" the girls cried, horrified. Even they weren't expecting that. Didn't that mean Elsie practically wanted the girl to drown?

When neither moved, Elsie snarled, "Fine. I'll do it myself."

Daisy's eyes widened. "Don't let her—!"

Elsie shoved her head under. Daisy's scream turned into a stream of bubbles as her legs thrashed helplessly.

The two girls panicked as the pounding on the door intensified. Whoever was out there would break it down pretty soon.

"Oh, I'm out of here!" one girl yelled, scrambling out of the pool. The second one didn't need further convincing and bolted right behind her.

Elsie, blinded by rage, never stopped pushing Daisy down. Violet had taken everything from her. The Alphas. Her place as Luna and her popularity. And now, she would experience what it felt like to lose something that mattered to her.

The door exploded inward, kicked off its hinges as Oscar stormed into the pool area with three others at his heels.

"She's over there!" one of Elsie's fleeing minions shrieked, pointing toward the pool where Elsie was still forcing Daisy underwater.

"Fuck my life," Oscar hissed the moment he understood what he was seeing.

When Ivy had sprinted to him screaming that Daisy had been abducted, he had not expected attempted murder. Daisy and Ivy were under his pack, his protection, and with Alpha Griffin gone, Oscar was the one holding the East House together.

And here this psycho was, trying to drown a member of his House.

Not on his watch.

Oscar hit the pool in one giant splash, cutting through the water.

He wasn't the only one.

Ace Storm stripped his jacket and dove in right after him. He knew exactly who Daisy was, he could recognize her even blindfolded after all the hours he'd spent researching Violet's roommates.

Underwater, Oscar ripped Elsie off Daisy, dragging the crazed girl away while Ace surged forward.

He reached Daisy before her body sank, an icy bolt of panic shooting down his spine. He hauled her up to the surface and swam with her to the edge, lifting her out of the pool as gently as possible.

Ace laid Daisy on the tiles, water streaming from her hair and limbs. His heart stuttered.

Daisy Fairchild wasn't breathing.

Ace began chest compressions. He'd grown up around science and emergency drill, hence he knew the steps, yet panic still made him skid the rhythm. Ace couldn't explain it but every fiber of his being was scared of losing this girl.

So he forced his breathing to become steady, counted under his breath, and pushed again. "Come on. Come on. Breathe."

Behind him Ivy pressed a hand to her mouth, tears running down her cheeks. If Abel hadn't held her back she would have lunged forward and broken Ace's focus with her sobs.

Around them phones were out as the students filmed the scene, the poolside filling with the roar of noise and shock.

In the pool area, Oscar had Elsie pinned to the ground while she screamed like a banshee.

"Let me go, you moron! Let me go now!"

Meanwhile, Ace kept at it, slamming his palms down over Daisy's chest. "Don't die on me. Come on."

Then, like a small, impossible mercy, Daisy gasped and came alive, sputtering as her lungs found breath.

Relief hit Ace so hard his knees nearly buckled. He let out a sound that was half laugh, and half sob.

Daisy blinked up, her eyes glassy. A wet mop of blonde hair clung to the stranger's skull above her, and when their gazes met the breath left her for a different reason.

The blue of his eyes struck her, they were startling and, in some ridiculous way, beautiful. She didn't even know when she

reached out and found his cheek.

"Am I in heaven?" she murmured.

Ace let out a short, incredulous chuckle that sounded like music to her ears. He brushed a thumb along her jaw and said, deadpan, "No. You're not, Daisy Fairchild. And I'm glad, because that would only mean you're dead."

Chapter 655: Expell Elsie

The kids would be the death of her! They were out to get her.

Just one day—one blessed day—couldn't they avoid trouble?

Principal Jameson pressed her fingers into her temples as the phone lines screamed like sirens.

Her office looked like the inside of a call center with the lights blinking, two phones off the hook, and the desk intercom buzzing.

Her secretary stood inside the office instead of at her own desk outside, juggling a headset and a mobile at the same time, speaking quickly.

Another call lit up. Then another. Then three more stacked on hold.

"Put them through," Jameson said tightly.

Her secretary clicked a button. "You're live with Principal Jameson," she mouthed, and slid the handset across.

"Principal?!" a woman's voice exploded into Jameson's ear before she could say hello. "Is my daughter safe? Has she been bullied? We just saw the video of some poor girl drowning! What kind of school are you running? Is this a dogfight ring or a school?"

Jameson swallowed and pitched her voice low and calm. "Ma'am, I understand how upsetting that clip looks. The situation is under control. The student is stable, and—"

"Stable? I saw her limp! Isn't that attempted murder?!"

"It was an isolated conflict," Jameson said, forcing each word through her teeth. "We do not tolerate violence. Our security—"

"Security? Where was security when the child was choking on pool water? My daughter is human. HUMAN. Can you guarantee she won't be next?"

Across the desk, the secretary was soothing another caller. "Ma'am, yes, I know what the caption says, but please ignore the hashtag. It's not 'werewolf bullying,' it's a disciplinary incident involving some students. The victim is receiving care—"

Jameson pinched the bridge of her nose. "Ma'am," she told her caller, "we are reviewing footage and interviewing everyone involved. I give you my word—"

"Your word means nothing if those monsters—"

"Excuse me," Jameson snapped before she could stop herself. "We do not use that language about our students."

But the woman laughed, high and brittle. "You'll hear from my lawyer."

And the call cut.

"Christ Lord." Jameson groaned.

Another line rang and the secretary, still on her second call, lifted a finger—one moment, please—then pressed the base of the phone.

"Sir, with respect, please stop shouting. The girl is breathing. Yes. Yes, she is breathing. No, the rumor about broken ribs is false. We will release a statement soon—"

Jameson's chest burned. She reached for the next call. "Principal Jameson—"

"You people lied when you said 'safe for humans,'" a man said at once. "We're coming to get our son."

"Sir, campus access is restricted during—"

"Try and stop me."

The line died. As well.

"Pull the lines," Jameson said with flat voice.

Her secretary froze. "Ma'am?"

"I said pull. The. Lines. Now.!"

At once, the poor lady Amara rushed to the board and killed every incoming feed. The office dropped into a sudden, heavy hush. For the first time in thirty minutes, Jameson heard her own breathing. It was loud and angry.

In one move, Jameson swept everything off her table.

"What is wrong with that girl?" she hissed, pushing a palm through her hair. "Elsie Lancaster. What is wrong with her brain?"

Jameson had clawed her way back from the previous scandal by hitching herself to Violet Purple's fame and the cardinal alphas' glow. It cushioned the blow, and she retained her position. But now, there was no Violet. No distraction at all. Just a viral video of a human girl limp in a pool and the words "werewolf bullying" stamped across a thousand feeds.

They were going to nail her to the wall.

The office door opened without a knock.

Jameson looked up with murder in her eyes. Natalie Avax strolled in like she owned the building, a small smile on her face.

"This isn't the time," Jameson snapped.

"Oh, this is exactly the time," Natalie said without a care, stopping in front of the wrecked desk. "You're busy, so I'll be quick."

"What do you want?"

"Have you forgotten?" Natalie tilted her head. "I am the elected representative of the Fifth House—the human house—charged with the welfare of all humans at Lunar Academy." She called out her position with emphasis.

"One of ours was hurt today, and that means action."

Jameson barked a laugh. "The Fifth House is a plan on paper, Avax. A TV stunt. We're not operational."

"Is that so, ma?" Natalie's smile sharpened. "Then perhaps you should tell that to the millions who watched you announce it. Or should I go make a statement? 'Principal Jameson says the Fifth House is fake.'" She sweetened her tone to mimic a newsreader. "I'm very quotable."

Jameson ground her molars. "What do you want?"

"Expel Elsie Lancaster."

The words smacked the air like a slap.

"What?!" Jameson and her secretary said at the same time, their eyes blown wide.

"You must be out of your mind," Jameson said, heat rushing to her face.

Lunaris Academy belonged to the wolves. It was their home ground, their history, their power. Yes, a few had been expelled before, but never over a human's case. To expel a werewolf girl for bullying a human would set a flag in the ground: the school wasn't run by wolves anymore. It would send a message that Jameson had surrendered the reins. She could picture the fallout in ten different directions and all of them ended in fire.

"That cannot happen," she said.

"Why not?" Natalie asked calmly.

"It just cannot," Jameson pushed back. "Expelling a werewolf because of a bullying incident, do you even understand how that sounds?"

Natalie leaned in until only the desk separated them, both palms flat on the wood. "Do you want to know how it sounds when I rally the humans to protest a werewolf trying to drown a human girl on school property? How it sounds when we march through your gates with parents and press? How it sounds when your seat gets very, very hot?"

Jameson felt the threat slide into place like a blade between ribs. That little poison, she thought. If she'd known this girl would use the Fifth House like this, she would have protested against it. Perhaps she should have listened to Asher's proposal.

Natalie's eyes glinted. "And truly, I don't know why you're protecting Elsie. She has no backing. Not the cardinal alphas. Not the Alpha King. Nobody will catch her. Why let a wild pig drag you down to the mud?"

Jameson stared at her, speechless. Natalie did have a point. But then to have a child like her tell her what to do. It simply pissed her.

Then Natalie straightened, smoothing an invisible crease from her skirt.

"I'm sure you know the right thing to do, Principal Jameson," she said. "I'm simply sharing my opinion. I hope you make a good decision. In the meantime, enjoy the little chaos."

Natalie turned and walked out.

Chapter 656: Her Junior

Ace fucking Storm.

That was who she had called an angel.

The son of the woman who had sent Elsie to nearly drown her all in the name of "getting information" about Violet and Lila's disappearance.

Yet as he stood beside her, she couldn't help the way her heart raced like a possessed drum.

After Daisy was rescued, she refused to let anyone wheel her to the infirmary, nor touch her. She was still shaking and traumatized, and the last thing she wanted was strangers hovering over her.

Unfortunately, she needed to be checked, and since her favorite healer, Adele, was gone, the substitute nurse had stepped forward to take over until Ace said he'd do it instead.

Apparently, he had been part of an emergency medical brigade back home and was certified for situations like this.

Alongside his many, many science-nerdy skills.

God. What was she even saying?

Right now, Daisy lay on her bed, wrapped in a warm blanket and dressed in fresh clothes. Her hair was still damp and stiff from chlorine. She looked like a total disaster in front of her underage doctor.

Ace stood over her with the phone flashlight on, tilting her chin gently with two fingers.

"Look me in the eye."

Oh, shit.

Not the eyes.

She was a sucker for stupidly gorgeous eyes like his.

Most girls fell for handsome faces, sharp jawlines, and broad shoulders, you know, the whole alpha male fantasy package.

But her? No. It was the eyes.

"The eyes are the window to the soul," she once read in a book.

Daisy never believed it until now.

Ace's irises were blue—not just blue, but a shade that looked like a slice of sky had been stolen and trapped inside them. There was a darker ring circling the iris—limbal ring—and the contrast made the color even more intense. His pupil contracted a little under the light.

It was no wonder that her brain immediately switched into weird documentary mode.

When pupils dilate, that's attraction.

When they constrict, that's—whatever the opposite is.

Oh god, why was she thinking like a microscope?

"Daisy," He slowly called her name, and dear, lord, her name had never sounded so sexy.

"What?" she whispered, nearly enchanted.

"You're supposed to follow the light, not analyze my face," Ace murmured.

"W-what? I—I wasn't analyzing anything," Daisy lied immediately.

His lips twitched. "You muttered 'limbal ring' under your breath."

Oh fuck.

Daisy swore she felt her soul leave her body. "Did I?"

"You certainly did," Ace said, a small smile tugging at his lips.

Of course he smiled.

And of course smiling made him look even more handsome.

Geez. Someone take her away from here.

Her face flushed, Daisy panicked and blurted the only distraction her brain could produce.

"Are you even qualified for this?"

Ace paused. Then he slowly lifted his head and gave her a flat, deadpan stare.

"Isn't it a little too late asking that now?"

He straightened up, switching the flashlight off.

"Your pupils reacted fine. You're okay."

He added, "And since you asked, then you should know that If my father would let me take the offers from the many, many universities that wants me, I'd have a degree in medicine by now." He waved his hands, "Apparently, 'I need to grow up properly.' Whatever that means."

His eyes met her eyes, annoyed and smug all at once.

"And, not to brag, but I have an IQ of 163."

Daisy froze.

163.

That was not normal. That was Einstein-level hot.

Ace kept going, unaware that her brain had flatlined.

"I also have multiple inventions under Storm Enterprises and the latest was just launched weeks ago —"

Daisy lifted a hand, stopping him.

"Okay, genius. I just wanted to know if you could check my vitals. Not build a hospital."

Ace said amused, "You asked if I was qualified. I answered."

Daisy chuckled, "No, that's not confidence. That's straight-up bragging at this point.

"Was it?" He teased her.

Daisy cleared her throat. "Well, since we're apparently whipping out IQs like trading cards, then you should know I have an IQ of 148."

Ace's mouth went wide. "No way."

"Nope," Daisy said, popping the "p."

"148. Tested twice. I can, in fact, do algebra and cry at the same time" she joked.

"That's hot!" Ace said without realizing it, his eyes twinkling.

Daisy blushed, unconsciously tugging her hair behind her ear. "Well, not hotter than your 168."

"Yeah," Ace breathed out, rubbing the back of his neck, "apparently it's the Storm family gene. Something about... uh... strong swimmers or whatever—"

He froze.

His eyes widened.

"Oh my God— not that kind of swimmers!" he blurted, mortified. "I meant genetics— like— sperm— no, wait, that makes it worse—"

Daisy stared at him.

Ace slapped a hand over his face. "I swear to the goddess, I'm smart. My mouth just isn't cooperating."

For a moment, it looked like Daisy might get offended. But instead, her lips curved slowly into a mischievous smile.

"Well, good to know where the premium sperm bank is if I ever decide I want genius babies someday."

Ace choked on air.

"Sperm— bank— what?!" Color shot up his neck, ears turning bright red. "If that's the case, I wouldn't deny you a visit."

Their eyes met.

Daisy was grinning like she knew exactly what she was doing, and Ace couldn't help but grin right back.

They were still staring at each other like idiots when someone groaned.

"Dear God, this is terrible."

It was Ivy.

And both Daisy and Ace jerked like guilty criminals.

Ivy stood by the door with her arms folded tight, staring at them like she had just witnessed a live-action romance scene she never signed up for. The girl looked distressed.

And she wasn't alone, Abel was with her too. It was quite unfortunate the poor nerdy couples forgot they had company.

Ivy pointed at the two of them dramatically.

"You two were eye-flirting so hard I thought I'd gone blind."

Daisy blushed immediately while

Ace's ears turned completely red.

But it didn't end there because Abel rubbed his face like he was in pain.

"Can you just confirm she's alive so I can report back to Oscar before you both start making babies right in front of us?" he said dryly to Ace.

Daisy nearly choked on her own spit while Ace wished the ground would open up and swallow him up.

"We were not— we weren't—" she spluttered.

Jeremiah lifted a brow. "You were making intense eye contact. That's like foreplay to you nerds."

"Stop stereotyping." Ace glared at him.

But Abel dared him. "Prove me wrong then."

Daisy told him. "Stop it. I'm older than he is."

"So?" Ivy challenged.

"So..." Daisy started, ready to answer, except the words died the second she met Ace's eyes.

"So... so...." she stuttered helplessly, her brain suddenly short-circuited.

Great. Now her brain was mush.

She cleared her throat. "Can you just... check me instead?" she blurted.

The shift was instant. Daisy saw Ace's eyes dimmed a little and it hurt in a way she couldn't explain.

Sure, they flirted but It was harmless fun.

Now reality hit her like a brick because he was two years younger than her. Even though he looked older than half the boys in her level —thanks to his werewolf genetics—he was still technically her junior.

It was wrong.

She was his senior for crying out loud.

"Okay," Ace said.

And suddenly, his voice was all professional. Nearly robotic.

"Do you feel dizzy?" he asked.

Daisy shook her head slowly. "No, just tired."

"Headache?" he asked next.

She shook her head again.

"Chest pain? Any difficulty breathing?"

"No. Just coughing." Daisy rubbed at her throat, voice still raspy.

Ace stepped closer.

Way too close.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her voice pitching slightly as he invaded her personal space.

"Confirming your breathing." His tone was calm, and professional. As if he wasn't aware her soul just tried to leap out of her body.

He leaned in not enough to be inappropriate, but close enough that she could feel the warmth radiating from him. Daisy stiffened, instinctively pressing her back to the headboard. He didn't touch her chest, but angled his ear near her upper shoulder, listening.

Her breath hitched.

"Haven't werewolves heard of... sharp hearing or something?" she muttered, her voice a shaky attempt at sarcasm.

"I just need to be sure," he murmured.

His focus was intense. Ace was tracking the rise and fall of her breathing, his expression tight with concentration. Daisy could feel her heart punching her ribs, loud enough she was sure he could hear that too.

Then she noticed his scent. It was clean, with a hint of mint and cedarwood. There was no cologne. Just him.

It did weird things to her body like turning her bones to liquid and her brain to static.

She stared at the top of his head, watching his messy blond mop of hair. It was the kind of messy that made her think about her fingers threading into it.

God save her.

When Ace finally leaned back, their eyes met again and held.

Chapter 657: Deal With Luna Zara

While Ace and Daisy were locked in that hypnotic moment, Ivy and Abel stood at the corner, having the time of their lives commentating like deranged romance announcers.

"This is the moment we've been waiting for..." Ivy whispered, leaning in with ridiculous anticipation as if she was watching live television.

Abel nodded, dead serious. "If only we had popcorn, or a camera. Their future generations deserve to witness this."

"I know, right" Ivy breathed, her eyes wide and sparkling. She gripped Abel's arm. "Oh my God, my nerdy friend is about to have her first kiss."

And true to her words, Ace and Daisy were caught in that heavy, charged stare. Their faces inched closer, breath mingling, and eyes searching and yearning.

Then suddenly, Ace snapped out of it like someone dunked him in cold water.

Both Ivy and Abel deflated like disappointed balloons.

"Aww COME ON!" Ivy yelled, throwing her hands up.

Abel groaned out loud, "We were so close!"

Ace, trying to reclaim some dignity, cleared his throat and switched into stiff doctor-mode.

"Exam completed. The patient, no, I mean, you're fine. There's no concussion. Hydration recommended."

He stood, turned, and marched toward the door like a soldier fleeing the crime scene of his own feelings.

"Wait!" Daisy blurted.

Ace stopped mid-stride and turned back.

"How did you get here?" Daisy demanded. "You're supposed to be in the North Pack. Why are you here?"

Her eyes narrowed. She might have been flustered but she wasn't stupid. Luna Zara had just been on Lunaris ground hunting for answers about Violet. She almost drowned. Then Ace magically appeared to save her.

That wasn't a coincidence.

Something was definitely going on.

Had it been anyone else, Ace would've lied without blinking. But Daisy was smart — and he liked her. Lying to her felt wrong.

"You're right," Ace said finally. "My coming here is not a coincidence."

He stood straighter, shoulders squared as he confessed, "I know Violet, my brother, and the cardinal alphas are not in this realm. I saw them vanish right before my eyes."

Daisy froze. Ivy did too. The lighthearted atmosphere evaporated, replaced by a sudden tension.

Daisy's face twisted with disbelief. "You told your mother about it?!"

"No, I didn't." Ace snapped, desperate to explain, "I knew she wasn't trustworthy. She even tried to erase my brother's memory so he wouldn't be mated to Violet—"

"What?!" Daisy and Ivy shouted in perfect unison.

Ace dragged a hand through his hair, breath uneven. "The point is she fled the North Pack. I know she wouldn't do that for nothing especially after the Alpha King's visit. So I followed her here, and the rest is as you already know."

For a moment, neither Daisy nor Ivy spoke.

They just stared at him with narrowed eyes, guarded and suspicious.

And that hurt more than he expected.

Ace swallowed, yet managed to say,

"Trust me. I would never do anything to hurt my brother's mate."

For a moment, no one spoke.

Daisy and Ivy exchanged a silent yet tense and rapid conversation with their eyes. When they finally looked back at Ace, a decision had settled on their faces.

"How many people know about this?" Ivy demanded.

"And I have a feeling I shouldn't be asking that either," Abel muttered.

"Yes, you shouldn't," Ivy told him. "It's for your safety." Then she turned back to Ace.

"Can we trust your father? He doesn't know the full details anyway, but still."

"He won't say a word." Ace answered with a firm voice.

Daisy studied him, "And your mother?" she asked, unimpressed. "What are you going to do about her?"

The question hit him like a challenge. This was a test from Daisy. Ace's jaw flexed.

"My mother won't bother you again," he said to her. "She's being dealt with as we speak."

Daisy and Ivy exchanged a startled glance.

Daisy tilted her head, hesitant. "You guys are not planning to kill her or something? Because I didn't exactly ask for that."

"That's a matter for the North," Ace cut in. "The North Pack will handle Luna Zara's insolence. Just know she won't be bothering you."

"Well, if you say so."

Daisy shifted on the bed, pretending to adjust the blanket when in reality, his sudden confidence did things to her insides. It was sexy as hell.

God, Daisy. Impure thought. Abort mission.

Ace took a step back. "If that's all, I'll take my leave. There are family issues waiting to be handled."

"Wait!" Daisy blurted.

At once, Ivy and Abel traded a look that translated perfectly: Oh, buckle up. This ride isn't over.

Ace stopped, brows raised. "Yes?"

"Is that all the questions you're going to ask?" she pressed. "You know, concerning you know what I'm talking about." She gestured vaguely.

"Daisy!" Ivy cautioned her.

"I'm just saying—" she added with conviction, "he does seem to be on our side."

Warmth grew across Ace's expression. That single stretch of trust meant a lot.

"Thank you," he said. "Then... my brother, is he safe? Wherever they went?"

Daisy's expression softened. "Ace, I'm honestly sorry. I don't know. But if he's with Violet and the other cardinal alphas, then I'd say no harm will come to him."

It wasn't the answer he wanted, but it was enough.

Ace nodded once. "Thank you. For that."

Then he turned to leave only to stop and turn back again.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"What?" Daisy was stunned. That question came out of nowhere.

"Yes or no, Daisy Fairchild. Or are you that scared of a simple answer?" He had the cockiest smile she had ever seen.

"No, I don't have one. And no—whatever you're thinking is not happening."

"And what exactly do I have in mind?" he teased.

Daisy sighed. "You're sixteen, Ace. I don't do children."

"Exactly. Sixteen. That's two years away from getting my wolf." He stepped closer, voice lower. "And I feel it, deep down, you're mine, Daz. Moreover..." his grin turned wicked, "what's down here doesn't belong to a child."

Her jaw dropped.

"Oh my God." Ivy was living for this. Abel howled, literally cheering him on.

Daisy's face flushed scarlet. She was losing. Badly.

She crossed her arms defensively. "I don't do long-distance relationship."

"Don't worry," Ace said, already walking toward the door, "I won't be a distant face for long. Just you wait."

"What? Ace—" Daisy had a bad feeling about that and wanted answers. But her underaged doctor was already gone.

She slowly turned to see Ivy and Abel staring at her with matching suspicious expressions.

Ivy wiggled her brows. "Aren't you two just precious?"

Daisy groaned, grabbed a pillow, and hurled it at them.

"Out. Both of you!"

Cackling, Ivy and Abel sprinted out of the room, the door slamming behind them. They leaned against the door in the hallway, catching their breath until Abel got ideas.

Roman's Beta leaned close to Ivy, voice dropping into a low husk that had worked on every girl he ever flirted with.

"So..." he drawled, swaggering just a little, "your friend's paired up. Guess fate wants us to be next."

Ivy gave him a sweet smile that didn't touch her eyes. She leaned in and whispered,

"That line was the romantic equivalent of soggy bread. Better get back to Oscar."

She patted his cheek and sashayed away, and Abel stood there, openly staring at her ass with no shame.

Chapter 658: Over for Her

Elsie Lancaster was not just a disgrace to her, no, the girl was a disgrace to the entire North Pack. To think Zara had even considered her as a mate for her precious son, Alaric.

One task. One chance to prove herself, and Elsie had gone ahead and escalated everything.

Get the truth from their mouths through

any means possible. Obviously, Zara had not meant nearly killing the girl. They were teenagers, for crying out loud. Ever heard of digging up dirt and using blackmail?

How could someone be so utterly stupid?

Zara knew she was doomed. She could only hope Elsie hadn't dragged her into it, but who was she kidding? It wouldn't be hard to trace the scheme back to her, not after her visit to Lunar Academy.

Caspian would be onto her.

She needed to get out of here, return to the North Pack, and talk to him. Make him understand her action and fix this before it escalated any further.

Elsie Lancaster was on her own.

Zara picked up her bag of meagre things and opened the hotel door only to freeze. Standing in the corridor was Akim, her husband's beta.

She swallowed and took a step back. For Akim to come all the way from the North Pack to find her in Aster City couldn't mean anything good. She forced a calm smile. "What are you doing here, Akim? Shouldn't you be in the North Pack helping Caspian?"

He did not smile. "Same question I'd like to ask the Luna of the North Pack who should be back home rebuilding her pack from the ashes."

"I had business here," Zara said with a light voice. She could feel the flight alarm inside her head like a bell. "But since you're here, we'd all return to the North pack, then. Isn't it wonderful?"

"No, that's where you're wrong," Akim's voice dropped, and something about him turned the air cold. "Taking into account your recent antics, Alpha Caspian has other plans for you."

Whatever bravado Zara had evaporated. She realized, with a cold plunge of dread, that her husband had truly turned his back on her.

Panic answered before her brain could think. Zara slammed a fist into Akim's face and bolted only to see a pack member standing at the far end of the hall, blocking her path. Of course, Akim wouldn't have come alone. That was not the way they operated.

They must still hold some reverence, she thought, because the guard did not lay hands on her. He only said, "You should come with us quietly, Luna Zara."

Survival lit something feral in her. When he moved to grab her, Zara lashed out, her sharp claws raking across his cheek and gut. He howled from the pain, clutching a torn shirt and a spreading stain. That would slow him down enough for her to escape.

Except two more pack members emerged from both sides of the hallway. With Akim, the three of them circled her, trapping her. The last of whatever mercy the pack had for her had gone. Luna Zara was a threat now, and they would take her down by any means necessary.

Zara Storm was scared out of her mind. This was the first she was in a situation like this - her pack turning against her. How dare they?! Everything she had done was for the survival of the pack! For her sons!

She launched herself at them like a feral wolf, the fury blurring her vision.

Zara hit the nearest werewolf and drove her shoulder into his ribs. Adrenaline made her faster than she'd been in years, clawing and kicking at them.

But these were elite wolves and they were done holding back. The second wolf dodged her strike and let her momentum carry her forward. Then he caught her arm in a lock that was all bone and steel. But Zara managed to slip through, hitting him hard with her head from behind.

Then she targeted Akim. When Zara swung at his face, he took the blow on the jaw. Her knuckles stung, yet his expression stayed flat as if that hadn't hurt him. When Zara lashed again he did not attempt to dodge, and caught her punch.

Zara was strong, but a certain Beta was furious. Akim drove his fist into her stomach for the first time and the breath rushed out of her lungs. The hallway tilted while her legs found nothing beneath them and she went down.

Once on the floor, Akim pinned her there. Then he ordered, "Get the suppressors!"

"What?!" Zara shouted alarmed. Then she began to thrash against him but Akim wouldn't let her up.

"How dare you lay hands on me?! I am the Luna of this pack. I will have you persecuted for this. I will make sure your head rolls." Zara rained threats but it had no effect on the beta.

Instead, he tightened his hold and pushed. The pressure pinched her wind, and she coughed.

Akim told her, "I act on the orders of the Alpha, so your threat has no effect on me."

But Zara laughed harshly. "Oh, you would see. I'll get out of this and once I'm free, you're as good as dead. I'll make you regret everything."

But Akim didn't care, instead his attention moved to the guard who now arrived with an injection.

"No, no, no -!" Zara screamed at the top of her voice.

She thrashed harder and the other guard planted a knee on her shoulder and held her still.

"No, don't do this please. Don't -!" she begged at the top of her voice but none of them paid her attention.

Zara screamed in both pain and betrayal as she felt that injection sink into her blood streams. At that moment, all she could think about was that day she had pinned down Alaric like this too, was this how he had felt.

Her thrashing slowed and they eased her hold on her. Zara bit a cheek so hard she tasted copper.

She could feel the effect of the drug kicking in. It was all over for her

Chapter 659: Behavioral Reconditioning Center

Zara woke with a groan.

Pain radiated through her body in little stabs, as if she had been run over by a truck, then dragged through a subterranean pit. Her head itself throbbed while her limbs felt like wet sandbags. It was horrible.

For a moment Zara could not remember anything, but her throat hurt badly hinting she must have been screaming or something. Hence she forced herself upright, her feet trembling violently.

Regardless, Zara pushed to her feet, teeth grit, because she refused to be caught looking weak. The word swayed as soon as she stood, the memories choosing that moment to return.

Akim. He captured her upon Caspian's orders and brought her here. Except what was this place?

Instead of the holding cells Zara expected they would put her in, she stood in a room so white and stark it felt sterile.

What the hell?

The walls, ceiling, and the floor were all white, gleaming with that unpleasant brightness that belonged to a hospital or an asylum. It was almost the same concept with the holding cells, except she would recognize it. This was not her holding cells.

A chill crawled across her arms.

Her now fearful blue eyes scanned the space.

There was the small bed she had woken from. A plain desk with a chair and a lamp on it. While against the wall was a tiny shelf, barely wide, holding a handful of books arranged neatly. A miniature library. That was it. She lived surrounded by nothing but the barest essentials.

There was no vanity. No mirror. And no clothes rack. Nothing personal at all in this room. There was no window either, only a single iron door that sat flush against the wall, bolted from the outside. The narrow vault-like grate above allowed fresh air to flow inside, keeping her alive.

But what froze her blood was not the lack of freedom, rather the camera mounted high above the door watching her.

Zara felt sick to the stomach. The white walls felt closer than before, like a mouth ready to swallow her whole. Where had Caspian brought her to? She didn't like this place one bit. She wanted to get out of here.

They must have been watching her because the iron door clicked right at that moment, making the hairs at the back of her neck rise. Zara straightened instinctively, refusing to be caught scared. Her pulse hammered in her throat as the door swung open and someone stepped inside.

To be honest, Zara had been expecting a burly looking guard or something, but instead, a woman came in.

Zara's gaze raked over her from head to toe.

The woman wore a modest and breezy flowery dress, you know, the kind of thing worn by women who baked cookies and smiled at neighbors over garden fences. Her red hair was swept up in a perfect chignon, not a single rebellious strand slipping free, while her lips were painted a matte red.

And then there were her eyes. A stunning Green. Eyes that lured you in and made you want to trust her.

Except Zara didn't trust anything that perfect.

The woman closed the door gently behind her with a graceful move, then smiled at her. "You're finally awake, Luna Zara."

Zara frowned. "You know who I am?"

It wasn't until the last second Zara realized that was a dumb question. Of course, they brought her here. They knew her.

A headache began to brew, and Zara lifted a hand to rub her temple. She forced the storm of emotions back down and asked through gritted teeth, "Who the hell are you, and what am I doing here?"

"Of course, how silly of me," The woman stepped closer, unbothered. She stopped just short of Zara's reach as if she had calculated the exact distance down to the inch.

"My name is Marie," she answered. "I'm your chaperone throughout your recovery, and I'll be overseeing your adjustment here in this facility."

Her voice was a melody. It was sweet and controlled as if she had spent years practicing how not to raise it.

"What the fuck are you talking about? What recovery? Where the hell am I right now?!"

"This is a Behavioral Reconditioning Center. You probably haven't heard of it, we operate under the radar. God forbid the humans find out there's a facility that reconditions werewolves. Especially high-ranking ones." She chuckled, as if this were funny and not Zara's reality collapsing around her.

Zara gestured wildly, words tumbling over each other in her frustration. None of it felt coherent. She stepped right up to Mari, invading her space, and Marie didn't flinch, as if she wasn't remotely afraid of being hurt.

She screamed in her face, "What the fuck am I doing here? I demand to be let out this instant!"

But Marie continued, undeterred in her polite voice, "As I said, we specialize in restoring behavioral balance for those who've lost their way."

Zara barked a humorless laugh. "For people who lost their way? Are you shitting me right now?"

Her eyes darkened. Without thinking, Zara's hand shot out and wrapped around Marie's throat, squeezing hard.

"I was dragged here against my will," she hissed. "I command you to move me out of here. Right. Now."

But Marie didn't panic.

"Go on," she said, voice steady despite the pressure around her airway.

"What?"

"Kill me." Marie's voice remained maddeningly calm. "Even if I die, it won't change anything. I'll be replaced, and another chaperone will be assigned to you. This isn't the North Pack, Zara. No title protects you here."

Zara's hand shook, realizing how fucked up this situation was. Perhaps, killing Marie was a bad idea, and would make her situation worse.

Or she could do it anyway just to spite Caspian.

Marie must have sensed the exact moment that thought turned dark, because her gaze flicked to the camera in the corner and then pain exploded through Zara's skull.

Zara screamed like a banshee, collapsing to her knees. She clutched her head with both hands as the pain ripped through her skull. It was so excruciating that hot tears spilled down her cheeks against her will.

"What are you doing to me?!" she cried, shaking, nails digging into her scalp.

Marie stood over her, completely composed.

"Each of our clients is implanted with a chip upon arrival," she explained calmly, as if Zara weren't writhing at her feet. "It doesn't just track your movement within the facility, it corrects you when you get ideas like the one you just had."

The blaring agony in her skull abruptly cut off.

Zara collapsed onto the cold floor, shivering uncontrollably. Her breaths came in broken gasps. The pain had been so unbearable she never wanted to feel it again.

Marie leaned over her with a slow, pitiful tilt of her head, the kind someone might give a wounded animal.

"Don't worry, Luna Zara," she cooed. "You were brought here for your own good."

Even through the pain, Zara's anger surged back inside her chest.

"For my own good?" she spat, her voice raw. "I was taken against my will!"

Marie's voice turned stern, all softness stripped away.

"You abducted your son and Cardinal Alpha, Alaric Strom, and attempted to perform a dangerous surgical procedure on him. Then you manipulated Elsie Lancaster into nearly drowning a human student at Lunaris Academy. That is abuse of authority, reckless political interference, and endangering the alliance between wolves and humans. These offenses are enough to earn you prison time."

She paused, letting every word sink in.

"But your husband reached an agreement with the Alpha King, and you were sent here instead. Until you are deemed safe to society and to the pack as a whole, you will remain here."

Marie leaned down and gently wiped the sweat from Zara's forehead, as if comforting a frightened child rather than a woman she'd just helped torture.

"I know this feels scary now," she said in a soothing voice. "But that's why I'm here. To guide you."

Her gaze drifted around the stark white room.

"With every improvement in your behavior, you'll graduate to better accommodations within the facility. But for now, you need to be stripped down to the barest minimum."

She tapped a finger lightly against Zara's chest. "To you. The version of you before you became Luna of the North Pack.

Before the power. Before the ego.

Back when you were light and goodness."

Bullshit. Zara thought inwardly. This was prison in its glorified form. Caspian had sent her to her worst nightmare and she would never forgive him for it.

Marie straightened and turned toward the small shelf.

"There are books about the facility, our goals, and our rules. I advise you to read them. For now, settle in. We'll take things one day at a time. If you have questions, go ahead."

Zara swallowed hard, her voice slow and cautious. "Why can't I feel my wolf?"

She hesitated, letting her voice drop to a whisper. "Am I on... suppressants?"

"It's just as you thought," Marie said. "You're on a suppressor shot. This is a werewolf-run facility, and we know exactly what our kind is capable of. That's why our clients are medicated."

"But don't panic," Marie continued, "The suppressor is timed. You'll have a few hours each day where your wolf is accessible — a privilege, not a right. We're not ignorant of the dangers of prolonged suppressor use. Hence build trust with us, and we'll extend your time off it. Days, weeks, even"

A small, satisfied smile curved her lips.

"Some of our most obedient clients earn months. Any other questions?"

Zara gulped. "My husband—"

"Will not be visiting," Marie cut in smoothly. "He made that very clear."

The words hit harder than the suppressor. Something bitter and jagged rose in Zara's chest, but she forced it back down. She asked her final question, her voice hollow.

"Who owns this facility?"

Marie's smile didn't reach her eyes.

"The Alpha King, of course."

Chapter 660: Prison For Inconvenient Wives.

Alpha Caspian sat in his office, watching the live feed streaming from the facility with a blank stare. Zara was curled on the white floor shivering. It hurt him to watch his wife and Luna of the North pack being treated like this, but it was quite unfortunate she brought this upon herself.

Elijah was furious and wanted her imprisoned for her last stunt, but Caspian argued and bargained with him. Zara was a proud Luna, and if the divorce had gone through, that would have been the cleanest way to cut her down legally, and politically. But Elijah insisted on "keeping the family united." And in the end, his brilliant idea detonated in his face.

Instead of prison, Zara was sent to the Werewolf Reconditioning Center, now rebranded as a psychiatric ward for unstable wolves.

Not many wolves even knew the place existed, and even if Zara had known, she would never have believed Caspian would send her there. She always said he lacked the spine to make hard decisions.

Well, he proved her wrong. He started with her.

Back in the old days, powerful Alphas often married pure-blooded she-wolves to maintain their lineage. Later, some added human concubines as status symbols or to satisfy a fetish for "taming the fragile human."

Not every Luna handled that humiliation well. Some bullied the concubines, others plotted against them, a few even attempted murder. So the Alpha King at the time quietly created the Conditioning Center.

Wolves would rather die than be labeled mentally unstable, so the place was

labeled a rest facility — a place for "emotional recalibration." Unofficially, everyone knew what it really was: a prison for inconvenient wives.

Lunas who resisted their husband's new plaything were escorted there to "reflect on their behavior" and returned only when the alpha deemed them obedient enough.

Over time, the practice faded, and the Center was shut down when concubines fell out of trend. Within a generation, the Conditioning Center became nothing more than a dark joke alphas brought up after too many drinks.

Then Elijah secretly reopened and rebranded it as a psychiatric institute. And unlike the Alpha kings before him, he didn't discriminate. Male. Female. Luna. Alpha. Beta. Delta. Gamma. If someone threatened stability, they went to the Center to "cool off."

The only difference now was that a guardian, spouse or mate had to sign before someone could be taken in. They also determined the length of the "cooling-off period" and any special conditions of the stay. It was a calculated move on Elijah's part, a legal shield that made the imprisonment look voluntary and protected him from any future backlash.

He watched as the chaperone — the one assigned to manage his wife — stepped out of the room and closed the door. The feed went blank. Zara's room was the only access he was allowed.

Moments like this made Caspian wonder who else Elijah had hidden away inside his psychiatric ward.

His phone rang and he didn't need to check the caller ID. He'd been waiting for this.

"Alpha Caspian," a voice greeted, cool and professional.

"Doctor Lydia," he replied, recognizing the specialist and director of the facility.

"Alpha Caspian, I'm sure you've noticed your wife has finally begun to settle down."

Caspian stiffened. "When you say settling down, you mean hurting her? What the hell was that? I sent her there to be taken care of, not treated like an animal."

Doctor Lydia laughed for a situation that was anything but casual.

"Oh, Alpha. I understand that all you wolves think this place is some dump where you can leave your 'problematic loved ones' until they chill out. But this isn't a kennel. This is a psychiatric ward. We are intentional about both physical and mental well-being here. Your Luna has a documented pattern of aggression, impulsivity, and violence and to every action, there is a consequence. She must learn that."

"And the chaperone?" Caspian demanded.

"That's where Marie comes in. The chaperone is not a guard. She is the patient's friend, helper, and confidante. In a place like this, it's easy to feel lonely, hence someone is assigned to guide them through adjustment. Marie will help your wife transition into her new life till her ascension."

Caspian exhaled harshly. "What are your treatment options? Zara isn't exactly crazy... she's just drunk on power."

Lydia hummed, as if making a clinical note. "Power-induced behavioral dysregulation. Inflated dominance identity. You may call it whatever you want. But that it is still a problem. But don't worry, by the time we are done here, your Luna will be a changed woman."

Of course, Caspian was worried. A psych ward owned by Elijah was the last place he ever imagined sending Zara. At least Doctor Lydia was a werewolf and not a human like Patrick, who now armed himself for a war thanks to Elijah's recklessness with their secrets.

Still, caution was a luxury he could not abandon. He would look deeper into this institution soon. But for now, Zara would face the consequences of her actions while he focused on restoring the North Pack to its former glory.

"Is there anything else you're worried about?" Doctor Lydia asked.

"No," Caspian said. "That will be all."

"Okay. Remember, you're always free to check on your wife." Lydia's voice reverted to polite professionalism. "Do have a good day, Alpha Caspian."

The line went dead.

Caspian sighed and dragged a hand through his hair, leaning back in his chair as exhaustion pressed down on his shoulders. He told himself he was fine, that sending Zara away was necessary, but the lie didn't change the hollow ache in his chest.

For years, Zara had stood beside him. They built the North Pack together. She took his hand and never let go.

Now he was alone.

A sharp knock pulled him out of his thoughts.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened, and Ace stepped inside. His son was back.

Before Ace could say a word, Caspian crossed the room and pulled him into a tight hug.

Ace stiffened, shocked. He never saw that coming. But it dawned on him.

"Is she...?" Ace asked quietly, his voice muffled against Caspian's shoulder.

Caspian nodded once. "Yes."

Ace exhaled. Understanding. Acceptance. Pain. "Okay."

It didn't matter that Zara being gone was safer for all of them, it still hurt. She was his mother after all.

Caspian tried to steady his voice. "You're safe now. We all are. We'll hold the pack together until your brother returns."

He said it like a reassurance to Ace.

But honestly, it sounded more like a reassurance to himself.

Ace slowly pulled back. He didn't know what to do with this sudden affection. For years, he'd gotten formality and distance from his father, not this open, raw embrace.

Come to think of it, it was the first real hug he could remember since he was a kid.

Ace cleared his throat. "I'll go change and check on the progress of the pack."

Caspian nodded, turning toward his desk again. "Ace?"

Ace paused at the door. "Yeah?"

"Thank you for your support."

Ace gave a faint smile. "No problem."

He turned to leave, but hesitated. Caspian caught the shift instantly.

"What is it?"

Ace met his father's eyes with determination.

"I want to move to Lunar Academy."