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Dawn

Frustration was the least way to describe what was simmering in my gut.

The training ground was a bustling hive of activity. Pack members sparred, and barked instructions at each other. The pack members of Golden Crest emanated an air of effortless strength. I felt their individual and collective strength that thrummed through the air. It was what made them so great.

Meanwhile, I felt like a sparrow stumbling into a den of wolves. I didn't fit. The worst part was that I noticed a few omegas glancing my way. They were struggling too and they seemed to be looking at me for guidance. Not only did it multiply the pressure I was already feeling but made me question Marcus's decision to bring me here once again.

We began with simple stretches. And even that was a struggle. Muscles I didn't know existed screamed in protest. When we moved on to basic stances, sweat beaded on my forehead and my breath came out in ragged gasps. Nothing was more embarrassing.

How could I be struggling to hold a simple fighting position?

This was ridiculous. I'd spent years doing backbreaking labor back home, hauling heavy loads, and working long hours. How was this so much harder? Shame burned through me as others, younger and seemingly less robust, zipped through the drills with ease. To Princess and the rest of the Nobles, this was like a walk in the park.

It shouldn't be this hard, a voice whispered in my head. I'd worked my whole life, my muscles should remember how to move. Yet, after a few rounds of simple punches and blocks, my lungs screamed for oxygen, and my arms felt like lead weights.

My life before Golden Crest had been far from easy, yet I'd never felt this weak. Was it them, this pack life, the pampering that had made me so? Or was it a truth I'd been desperately avoiding; that I'd always been frail?

Grace's judgemental voice echoed in my head. And I shook it off to focus on the instructor's voice. I couldn't allow myself to fall back into the

vicious cycle of letting her vile remarks damage the self-worth that I was trying to rebuild.

They led us through another series of exercises. From lunges and sprints, to jumps over hurdles.

My lungs burned, and my muscles screamed in protest. I stumbled, catching myself just before I face-planted in the dirt.

"Hey!" Princess said, rushing to my side. "The secret is to listen to your body. Push yourself, but don't break yourself. Focus on form, not speed."

I groaned. "How come you're so good at this? You were complaining seconds ago."

"Appearances can be deceiving." She laughed, "Look around. Do you see any Noble struggling? We've been trained since birth. I was always training for something. I hated it but it's paying off now."

I collapsed on the floor. "Makes sense," I rasped.

"Don't beat yourself up about it. It takes time. You'll get stronger. You'll learn." Princess said.

I didn't believe her. Sure, maybe I'd learn with time, but did I have that time? Did I have the luxury of getting stronger? War was coming and I was supposed to pretend to be a Luna. How was I going to pretend if I couldn't defend myself from the basics? I was trying desperately not to fail Rhys again.

"You're not listening." Princess sighed. "You're not weak. You just weren't trained for this kind of exertion. I'm certain that you have better and smarter ways of defense than an average Noble here. Stop putting yourself down."

"I've heard." I snapped before stepping to the sidelines to watch the rest of the Pack. The sweetest thing happened a few moments later. Little cubs drifted towards me in little groups and sat beside me.

We started our own separate training with their instructor and me leading them. It became a lot more interesting and I felt less ashamed. The children made a lot of mistakes but they were still trying and trying again until they learned part of it.

We were so engrossed in our cute and fun session that we didn't notice that the adults were done and were now curiously watching us. It was the

murmurs that caught my attention.

The instructor quickly ended the session as soon as she realized what was happening and urged the kids to return to their families. The kids, however, ignored their instructor and began to gather around me for a hug. It was clumsy and the best thing ever.

Those children didn't know it but they cleared my doubts and had become the biggest motivation ever. They didn't know what fear or failure was. There and then, I decided that I'd give it my all.

Kaden finally dismissed us and sent us on our way. I was so tired that I had to drag my body back to my room. Rhys' lair seemed too far.

Without those kids, training would have been humiliating. The triplets, bless their concerned hearts, offered a sympathetic smile and a helping hand. But even their kindness couldn't erase the exhaustion I felt.

We parted ways when I entered my room and I practically collapsed onto the floor. I lay there for a while before I finally pushed myself up.

Honestly, I stood up because I didn't like that my sweaty body was drying up plus I was looking forward to a steaming hot shower.

The hot water did little to soothe the ache in my bones, but it washed away the dirt and sweat. Surprisingly, I caught myself smiling at my reflection. I was going to be in a lot of pain but I liked it.

By the time I emerged, a semblance of life had returned to my limbs. I found the triplets waiting alongside Princess. They seemed to be eager to start the day. Meanwhile, all I wanted to do was fall back on my comfy bed and sleep.

"Took you long enough, slowpoke," Princess teased.

"It feels like I went ten rounds with a bear, not practiced jumping hurdles," I grumbled.

The triplets exchanged glances. "We pushed you too hard," Layla groaned.

"Maybe you should stop. Do you want to?" Kayla asked.

I shook my head. "I'm sore but I'm okay. I would like to continue. I have a question though. How come all of you are so excited and pumped up for the day?"

They giggled.

"Oh sweet, Dawn," Princess teased as she dragged me along. "The triplets are Deltas. They are fierce. That simulation we did outside was nothing to them. You'll understand when you see their personal training sessions today. As for me, I'm only here because I'm famished. I need food."

I grinned. "Me and you have the same thing in mind."

The packed house was full today. And breakfast was huge. Mimi offered me a warm smile and a plate piled high with pancakes, bacon bits, mashed potatoes, and beef gravy.

I didn't think I could stomach all that. But she shushed me out of the kitchen.

"This is scary," I mumbled at the food.

"You'd be surprised at how hungry you are," Princess said, already digging into her breakfast which was significantly bigger than mine.

She was right. I finished everything in the twinkle of an eye. After breakfast, we headed to my dreaded lessons.

"Are you guys going to watch me like a hawk again today?" I asked.

"Nope," Princess responded. "We're just walking you to the venue then we go our separate ways. Kaden assigned me to get something for him and the triplets have a special assignment from Rhys."

"Oh. Okay," I murmured,

"We'll be back when your lessons are over though."

As we walked, I noticed a subtle shift in the air. Pack members who had previously averted their eyes from me were now offering hesitant nods or shy smiles. It was too awkward.

Like always Princess noticed first.

"See?" She nudged me playfully. "Everyone's warming up to you. Maybe you just needed to show them you're not made of glass. What you did with the kids today was so inspiring."

"Maybe," I mumbled, unsure if I truly believed it. This newfound attention felt... unsettling.

Why don't you say hi to some people?" Princess suggested. "It'll help you feel more comfortable in your role."

"I'm not ready for that yet. At least, not until I learn the ways of a Luna without embarrassing myself or Alpha Rhys."

"Embarrassing Rhys?" Princess laughed. "Is that even possible? Rhys has never cared about all these policies. I promise you, you cannot embarrass him."

I know she was trying to encourage me, but her words stung. It sounded like she was saying I meant nothing to Rhys so I couldn't embarrass him.

As she promised, we parted ways as soon as I stepped into the building. I regretted complaining about needing space. My wolf was unsettled because it knew that other nobles had forced themselves to give me respect. After all, they were terrified of Princess and the Triplets. This would be my first time attending this lesson without any of them, and my churning stomach was a sign that it wouldn't go well.

I couldn't have been more right. As if on cue, the atmosphere shifted immediately after I entered the hall.

Their greetings were clipped, their smiles strained. As I took a seat, I caught snippets of their conversation.

"Honestly, an Omega Luna? What were they thinking?"

"She's clumsy, can't even hold a cup properly."

"The pack deserves better."

"Can you imagine? So unrefined."

"She'll never be a Luna. Doesn't have the first clue about grace or decorum."

"Where did they fish her from? Those airheads in the council are really about to ruin this pack."

"Maybe it's a social experiment. Or is this blackmail?"

"This is so unlike the Alpha... He..."

That was just the beginning. I could barely pay attention to anything that was being mentioned because the whispers didn't stop.

Their wicked words echoed in my head and became a constant reminder of my supposed shortcomings.

I hated how mean they were. Didn't they get that I didn't choose to be

there? Everything I'd been doing all my life was against my will. Besides I was only Rhys' wife on paper. I wasn't even Luna. I was never going to.

I was only there to pretend until 3 months was up.

"Up." One of the leaders announced. "Dawn, you're wearing your emotions on your sleeves. I can already see how hurt and tired you are just by looking at you. Your insecurities have never been more clear. We cannot have a Luna that behaves like that."

I grudgingly got to my feet. She made me walk through the room, reminding me that I needed to have composure while showing compassion.

A Luna was the mother of all. I needed to be motherly while being graceful and strong.

It was difficult. Even more difficult than all the exercises I'd done that morning. Why wouldn't it be when the snarky remarks didn't cease? For every mistake I made, there was loud laughter in the room.

I couldn't take it anymore. I was seconds from screaming at all of them.

With a mumbled excuse, I bolted out of the room. I just needed to escape, to breathe air that wasn't choked with condescension and disdain.

Wasn't it a good thing that Princess wasn't with me? At least I experienced firsthand what they thought of me.

I knew I should wait for the triplets to come back but I couldn't stay in that building for more than I already did. I needed to speak with Kaden. I was tired of those lessons.

Instead of waiting, I went in search of him. They had to figure out a solution before I went mad. Or at the very least, I would stop learning.

Why was I even learning about something that I didn't need? I already knew that I could never be the Luna of Golden Crest.