

Fated To Not Just One, But Three #Chapter 401: Such Love - Read Fated To Not Just One, But Three Chapter 401: Such Love

Chapter 401: Such Love

Olivia's POV

I didn't know what to say... how to react. This was not what I expected to see from him.

I expected the cold-hearted Lord Frederick. The monster who threatened me. The man who wanted me so desperately, not because of my abilities.

Not this man.

Not this broken figure before me, whose heart looked like it had been shattered into pieces a thousand times by my great-grandmother.

And to imagine that after all these years—decades, centuries—he still loved her... it was unreal. Impossible. What kind of love was this?

A woman who had lived her life, grown old, and died... yet he still loved her as though no years had passed at all. His heart, his soul, had never moved on.

I swallowed hard, my wolf pacing uneasily inside me.

It wasn't just obsession. It wasn't just hunger.

This was love. Twisted, tragic, endless love.

I swallowed hard, my chest tight. For a moment, I imagined myself in his place.

What if it were me? What if, centuries from now, I was the one left behind... still young, still alive, while Lennox, Levi, and Louis grew old and slipped away from me?

The thought alone nearly tore me apart. I pictured their smiles fading with time, their strong hands growing frail, their laughter silenced by age. My wolf whimpered at the image, clawing inside me as though to erase it.

If that happened to me, could I ever move on? Could I ever let them go?

Maybe not. Maybe I would be just like him.

My gaze softened as I looked at Frederick. Broken. Bound to a ghost. A man who never let go.

"Frederick," I whispered, my voice shaking. "You have to move on. Hailee... she did. She had a family. A life. She chose, and she lived. And she's gone now." I hesitated, my throat tightening. "You can't keep clinging to her shadow forever."

He didn't answer. He didn't even move. Just stared out into the night, his face carved in pain.

A tense, heavy, suffocating silence hung between us, and I finally turned, ready to walk away.

But then, just as my hand brushed the doorframe, his voice followed me.

"...Thank you."

I froze. Those words... they were the last thing I expected to hear. I didn't turn back. I only closed my eyes, swallowed hard, and kept walking.

When I got back to the room, I lay on my side, eyes wide open against the dim glow of the wall sconce. Sleep refused to come. Instead, my thoughts tangled around Lord Frederick and Hailee.

I had never seen a love like his. So raw. So endless. So... consuming.

Didn't she see it? Didn't she realize how deeply he loved her? Was she blind to it?

My chest ached as the questions spun through me. What could have possibly made her turn away from that kind of love?

And then realization hit me.

Sir Nathan.

The triplets' great-grandfather.

A sudden wave of curiosity gripped me, and without giving it a second thought, I reached through the bond.

"Lennox... Louis... Levi..." My voice was soft, hesitant. "I need to know something."

Lennox's presence stirred immediately. "What is it, Liv?"

I drew in a shaky breath. "Was your great-grandfather Nathan... Hailee's mate?"

Louis answered without hesitation. "Yes. They were fated mates."

My heart thudded hard in my chest. I closed my eyes, letting out a long, heavy sigh.

Of course.

No wonder she never chose Frederick. No wonder she walked away from him, no matter how deeply he loved her.

There was no bond stronger, no force greater, no pull more unbreakable than that of fated mates.

I closed my eyes, whispering to myself in the quiet, "No wonder..."

The truth was simple.

Hailee hadn't been blind. She hadn't ignored his love. She simply hadn't had a choice.

Frederick never returned that night.

By morning, I forced myself up, bathing quickly and slipping into fresh clothes before heading down to the dining table.

Selene was already seated there with a plate of fruit before her.

My wolf bristled instantly.

I narrowed my eyes at her but turned instead to the nearest servant. "Where's Lord Frederick?"

The maid bowed her head politely. "He went for his morning run, my lady."

I nodded, turning my attention back to Selene. She lifted her gaze from her plate, meeting mine with an unreadable look.

"We need to talk," I said firmly.

For a moment, she glared at me. Then, without a word, she pushed back her chair and stood.

She followed as I led her away from the servants' ears, around the corner of the hall, where no one could overhear us.

The moment we were alone, I folded my arms tightly across my chest, my eyes narrowing on her.

"Nice performance yesterday," I said coldly. "So... what's the next plan?"

Selene's lips curved in a smirk, then she scoffed. "I don't take orders from you, Olivia."

I scoffed. "Of course you do."

She sneered. "Bitch... who the hell do you think you are, huh?..." she spat and took a step closer to me. "I only take orders from the triplets, and that is because they promised me a great fortune if this plan works."

My brow furrowed. "They promised you a fortune?" I asked, confused. I had no idea about this.

"What is it you were promised?" I asked desperately, hoping the triplets hadn't made a ridiculous offer to her.

Selene smirked, but before she could retort, her head tilted slightly. I noticed it too—the faint echo of footsteps drawing nearer down the hall. It was Frederick. He was approaching us.

In an instant, Selene's expression shifted. She lifted her hand—and before I could understand what was happening, she had slapped herself. Hard.

Her cheek reddened instantly, and she cupped it with trembling fingers, her eyes wide and glassy like she was about to cry.

By the time Frederick showed up, Selene was already clutching her face, painting herself as the fragile victim once more.

And I stood there, frozen, my wolf snarling with disbelief.

Chapter 402: Joke

Olivia's POV

His eyes flicked between us instantly—me standing rigid with my arms folded and Selene clutching her reddened cheek, tears pooling on her lashes. "She slapped me," Selene whispered hoarsely, her voice shaking as if she'd been holding back sobs. "Your fiancée told me to leave, and when I hesitated... she hit me."

Frederick's gaze snapped to me, sharp and unreadable. For a moment, silence hung in the air, broken only by Selene's shallow, trembling breaths. I didn't flinch. I didn't deny it. I decided to play along.

"Yes," I said evenly, my chin lifting. "I told her to leave. And I slapped her."

The tension thickened; Frederick's eyes narrowed as though he couldn't quite believe my bluntness. Selene's lip trembled as she looked at him, playing her part perfectly. And there I stood, my wolf pacing inside me, daring him to decide whose side he was really on.

Frederick frowned. "And why would you ask her to leave? Selene is my guest here." Frederick groaned, trying his best to keep his anger in control, but I could already notice it—the way his body was vibrating because I'd slapped Selene. I decided to play my part well and raised my brow at him. "Tell me, Lord Frederick, do you want to fuck her?" I spat.

His frown deepened, but he didn't deny it. His silence was answer enough. His gaze flickered, just once, toward Selene before snapping back to me. That single hesitation lit sparks of suspicion in my chest.

I stepped closer, my voice raised with anger. "It's simple. Either she leaves... or I do. Choose."

The room went quiet. Selene's eyes widened as though she hadn't expected me to make such a decision, and Frederick's aura darkened instantly—but he didn't say a word. Rather, he grabbed Selene by the wrist and made her walk with him.

Where I stood, I furrowed my brow as I watched them leave, wondering, was he sending her away? But it didn't look like it, so I followed them.

The moment I arrived in the sitting room, I met Selene talking. "I have to leave," she whispered, her eyes dropping to the floor. "If I stay, she'll never stop hating me."

But Frederick's answer came instantly, sharp and final. "No." His gaze burned into her; his tone left no room for argument. "You're unique, Selene. Do you have any idea what your blood means? How many vampires would crave it, hunt you for it? If you walk outside these walls unprotected, they will tear you apart."

Selene's lashes trembled as she lifted her eyes, flicking toward me for just a second before returning them to him. "But I don't want to cause trouble," she murmured, sounding so innocent that if I hadn't known her true nature, I might have been fooled. "Your fiancée doesn't want me here."

Frederick responded at once. "She's not my fiancée. Not yet."

The words hit me.

Not his fiancée? He was right, but still—what was this? Did Frederick... actually like Selene? Or was I imagining things?

His eyes stayed fixed on her while I stood there, trying to solve the puzzle lying before me.

No. I wouldn't let myself believe what it looked like. He didn't love her. He couldn't. This was about her blood—nothing else. It had to be. But still—the way his gaze lingered on

her, the way Selene's lashes fluttered as if she were savoring his attention—made me uncomfortable.

Before I lost my composure, I teleported straight out of the mansion.

When I reappeared in the study, the triplets were gathered around a desk, papers and maps sprawled before them. Lennox was the first to lift his head, his eyes narrowing. "Olivia," he said sharply. "What's wrong?"

I paced, my frown deepening. "Something isn't right. Frederick—he's starting to act like he likes Selene. It's more than just her blood. He's protecting her, looking at her... like he's in love."

Levi leaned back in his chair, exchanging a glance with his brothers. "That's good," he said, sounding relieved. "If he starts to care for her, then he'll trust her. It makes the plan easier."

"No!" I snapped, my wolf growling with me. "Don't you see? If he actually falls for her, if she falls for him too—what then? What if she forgets the plan? What if she tells him the truth? Everything we've worked for could collapse!"

Lennox responded, "Don't worry, Olivia... Selene hates Frederick. She isn't just helping us—she is also there for revenge."

My brow furrowed. "Revenge? How?"

Levi spoke up. "Frederick is responsible for the death of Selene's grandmother... it's a long story. So don't worry—she won't fall in love with him. She hates him more than we do." Levi tried to reassure me with his words, but it did nothing.

I shook my head. "I don't trust this," I spat.

Louis arched a brow, his lips twitching as if he were holding back a smirk. "Or..." he drawled, "maybe you're just jealous."

My head snapped toward him, my glare sharp. "Jealous?"

"Think about it," Louis shrugged. "You stormed in here, furious, because Frederick isn't craving you anymore, isn't wanting you like before. He's starting to want Selene."

My wolf bristled, hackles raised. "Jealous? You think I'm jealous?" I spat at Louis, my voice echoing off the study walls.

Louis didn't flinch. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, the smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. "That's exactly how it looks, Olivia. You're snapping, pacing, furious—because Frederick isn't looking at you. He's looking at Selene."

I slammed my palm against the desk; the maps scattered. "Don't twist this into something it's not! I don't care about Frederick. I don't! I just don't trust her."

"Then why are you acting like this?" Louis shot back, his tone sharper now. "You've never been this restless. Not even when it came to us."

"That's different!" I snapped, my chest heaving. "You three are mine. You always will be. Him? He's nothing—nothing! And Selene—" I broke off, my words burning on my tongue.

Louis's eyes softened just slightly. He lifted a hand, like he was trying to calm me. "Olivia... calm down. It was a joke. That's all. I didn't mean—"

But I didn't let him finish.

The anger in my chest was too much. Before any of them could move, I teleported away.

The study blurred, their faces vanished, and in the next heartbeat, I was gone—leaving their voices calling after me, unanswered.

Chapter 403: Apologies

Louis's POV

"And what the hell was that?" Lennox snapped at me the instant Olivia teleported.

Shame burned my chest. I looked away, unable to meet his eyes. "I was just joking," I muttered. "Teasing her... like we used to. I didn't think—"

"You didn't think at all," Levi cut in, his tone calm but his eyes hard with annoyance. He leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, disappointment written across his face. "You saw how wound up she was, Louis. And you pushed her further."

I clenched my fists, jaw tight. "I wasn't trying to hurt her. It was a joke—just a damn joke."

Lennox slammed his palm against the desk, the sound echoing through the study. "This isn't the time for jokes! She's walking a fine line, holding herself together in front of Frederick. One wrong slip, and everything we've worked for goes to hell. And you—" he jabbed a finger at me, fury blazing in his eyes—"you decided to throw fuel on the fire!"

The weight of their anger pressed down on me. My wolf whimpered inside, guilt clawing at my chest. I'd seen Olivia's eyes before she left—hurt, betrayed, furious. She didn't even wait for me to explain.

And goodness, that stung.

"I'll fix it," I said. "I'll talk to her. Apologize. Whatever it takes."

Lennox's glare didn't soften. "You better." He spat.

I swallowed hard and left the study. I stopped in the hallway, dragging a hand down my face. My wolf pawed restlessly inside me, urging me to go after her. To find her. To make it right.

Closing my eyes, I reached through the bond. "Olivia." My voice was softer than usual. "Please. Listen to me."

No response. Just silence. But I knew she could hear me.

My chest tightened. I pushed again, this time letting her feel my guilt through the bond. "I didn't mean it. The joke... it was stupid. I should've known better. You've been carrying too much already, and I only added to it. That wasn't fair."

I paused, pacing the corridor as if the movement would calm the panic inside me. "I'm sorry, Liv. Truly. I didn't mean to hurt you. Please... talk to me. Yell at me if you want. Just don't shut me out."

Still nothing. Only the faintest echo of her wolf.

"Oli... I'm sorry..." I pleaded desperately, but she didn't respond; rather, she shut the mind link at me.

A deep sigh left my lips as I opened my eyes. I needed to do something—really fast—but what could I do? It's not like I knew where she was so I could go after her... Olivia could be anywhere. But suddenly I got a whiff of her scent. My brow furrowed.

"Olivia is around," I whispered to myself and began moving.

Her scent—honey laced with a faint trace of nutmeg, sharp and stubborn, just like her—enveloped me. My wolf stirred instantly, pulling me forward, guiding me through the halls until I reached the old room that used to be hers.

My hand hovered on the knob for half a second, nerves prickling through me, but I didn't give myself time to hesitate. I pushed the door open.

There she was.

Olivia sat on the bed, back straight, her arms folded tightly across her chest. She didn't look startled, didn't even flinch at my sudden entrance. Instead, her brows knit together in that same stormy frown that made my chest tighten.

I stepped inside slowly, shutting the door behind me. For once, I didn't try to smile, didn't try to charm her with the playful grin that always used to work.

"Liv..." I said softly, my voice breaking in ways I hated. "You are here."

She looked at me—her eyes filled with anger.

I swallowed hard, forcing myself not to look away this time. "Say something. Yell. Curse me. Just... don't stay quiet. Don't shut me out."

Yet I got no response from her. Sucking in a deep breath, I stepped closer and sat beside her, and luckily she didn't shift away.

"I'm sorry, Olivia," I said finally. "I shouldn't have joked like that. Not now. Not when you're already carrying so much. I wasn't thinking."

She didn't answer.

I leaned forward, forcing her to see the truth in my face. "You mean everything to me. The last thing I'd ever want is to hurt you, yet I keep messing it up. That's on me. Not you. You deserved my support, not my stupidity."

Still nothing. Just that deep, unreadable frown on her face. My chest tightened painfully.

"I'm sorry, Olivia. Please do anything to pour out your anger," I went on, softer now, almost pleading. "Yell at me... scold me... Just... don't shut me out completely."

For a long moment, she just stared at me. My wolf whimpered in the silence, bracing for rejection.

Then Olivia sighed, her arms loosening just a little. "You're an idiot, Louis," she muttered.

Relief crashed through me so hard I nearly laughed. "Yeah," I breathed. "I am. But I'm your idiot."

Her lips twitched, the smallest smile breaking through her frown. And before I could say another word, she grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me into a kiss.

I kissed her back like I had been holding my breath for years. It was strong enough to show I meant it, but gentle enough not to scare her. Her hands slid into my hair, holding me close, and for a moment the whole world faded until there was only her lips and the beat of my heart.

When she pulled away, she was only a little space from me. Her chest rose and fell fast as she breathed, and her eyes locked on mine, bright and full of fire.

"I'm not really sure you've forgiven me," I said, my voice rough and shaky. The words came out smaller than I wanted, but she always knew how to pull out the part of me that was weak.

She let out a short laugh, sharp but happy. Then, without looking away, she stood up from the bed and dropped to her knees in front of me. My heart jumped hard in my chest, and even my wolf stirred, restless and wild.

She reached for my belt slowly, her fingers brushing the buckle. She looked up at me with that dangerous, playful smile on her face. "Maybe this will convince you," she whispered, her voice soft and seductive, sending a shiver through me.

Chapter 404: Make Up Sex

Louis' POV

The click of the buckle echoed loudly in the quiet room, my chest rising and falling harder with anticipation. She slid the leather free, then popped the button, then the zipper, slow—like she wanted to drive me insane. Her fingers brushed against my already hardened cock, and my body jerked in response. A growl rumbled out of me, deep and low, my wolf restless and clawing at the edge of my skin.

"Still think I haven't convinced you?" she whispered, lips curved into a dangerous smile.

She took out my cock. Her hand wrapped around me. She stroked me once, then again. Heat shot through me, my breath catching as her thumb brushed across the tip of my cock, making me groan. Then she leaned forward. Her lips closed over my cock, hot and wet, and my knees nearly buckled. My hand shot out, gripping the edge of the bed just to keep myself steady.

She moved slowly at first, teasing, her tongue sliding against me, every pull of her mouth dragging a sound out of my chest. My wolf clawed at me, wanting to take control, but all I could do was hold on. Her pace quickened, her mouth working me deeper, and the pressure in my stomach built fast. My fingers tangled in her hair before I even realized, guiding her, demanding more.

"F—fuck..." The word tore from me as she hollowed her cheeks and took me harder. The world blurred; there was nothing but her mouth, her hands, and the heat coiling tight inside me. I couldn't hold back. My body went rigid, a shudder running through me as the release hit, fierce and consuming. Her name ripped from my throat as I released in her mouth, every nerve on fire.

When it was over, I slumped back, my chest heaving, still trembling. She pulled away slowly, wiping her lips with the back of her hand, eyes shining with triumph.

"Convinced now?" she teased, her voice low and satisfied.

A rough growl tore out of my throat before I even thought about it. I grabbed her by the waist and pulled her up from the floor. In one smooth motion, I turned and laid her back on the bed, pressing her down against the sheets. Her eyes widened, but there was no fear—only that fierce spark that always made me lose control. She opened her mouth to say something, but I cut her off with a hungry kiss, hard and deep, tasting myself still on her lips.

When I pulled back, I smirked down at her. "My turn."

I slid my hands down her sides, then hooked my fingers into her pants and tugged them down. She lifted her hips, helping me, and in seconds she was naked beneath me. The scent of arousal hit me—sweet, heady, intoxicating—and my wolf went wild. I didn't waste another second. I spread her thighs wide and lowered my mouth to her. The first taste of her tongue-slick heat made me groan into her, vibrating against her skin. She gasped, her back arching off the bed.

I licked her slowly at first, savoring, dragging my tongue from her entrance up to the sensitive nub at the top. Her fingers shot into my hair, gripping tight as a moan spilled from her lips. That sound pushed me further. I sucked her clit into my mouth and circled it with my tongue, hard and relentless. She writhed under me, her thighs trembling, her cries growing louder with every flick and pull.

"Louis—" my name broke from her throat, desperate and shaky.

I dug my hands under her thighs, holding her open as I devoured her. My tongue thrust into her, then back up to her clit, working her in quick, messy strokes that had her body jerking. Her taste filled my mouth, sweet and addictive. I couldn't stop, wouldn't stop—not until I felt her fall apart. And gods, she was close. Her legs shook around my shoulders, her cries breaking into gasps.

"Come for me," I growled against her, my mouth never slowing.

And she did—her body tensing, back arching high as she screamed my name, climax ripping through her in hot waves. I held her through it, licking, sucking, drinking in every drop until she finally collapsed back onto the bed, trembling and drained. When I pulled back, my chin wet with her, I kissed the inside of her thigh and looked up at her with a grin.

"Now we're even."

She blushed. Her body was still trembling from her climax when I moved up over her, caging her in with my arms. Her chest was rising and falling fast, her lips parted, her eyes dark and wild. I kissed her hard, deep, letting her taste herself on my tongue. She moaned into my mouth, and it sent another jolt straight through me.

I pulled back just enough to look at her. "I need you," I growled, my voice rough.

"Then take me," she whispered, no hesitation in her eyes.

That was all I needed. I lined myself up, the head of my cock pressing against her slick entrance. I paused just long enough to feel her legs hook around my waist, pulling me in. Then I pushed forward, sinking into her inch by inch. The tight, wet heat of her made my head spin. A deep groan ripped from my chest as I buried myself fully inside her.

"Fuck, Liv..." I panted, forehead pressed against hers.

Her nails dug into my back, her voice breaking in a needy gasp. "Don't stop."

I pulled back, then thrust into her again, harder this time. The bed shook with the force. She cried out, clutching at me, and I lost myself in the sound. My hips moved faster, driving into her over and over, each stroke rougher, deeper, until the room was filled with the rhythm of our bodies and her breathless moans.

She met every thrust, her hips rising to meet mine, her legs tightening around me as if she never wanted to let me go. Her lips found my neck, kissing, biting. The bond between us burned hotter, sparking through every nerve, making everything sharper, more intense. I could feel her—every flicker of pleasure, every wave of need—like it was my own.

"Louis—" she gasped, her voice high and broken. "I'm close."

I held her tight, thrusting harder, faster. "Then fall with me, Liv."

Her body tensed, and she shattered beneath me, crying out my name as her climax tore through her. The pulsing squeeze of her around me dragged me with her, my release hitting hard and fierce. I groaned into her mouth as I spilled inside her, every muscle straining as the pleasure ripped through me.

For a long moment, I stayed there, buried deep inside her, our bodies locked together, our hearts racing as one. When the tremors faded, I kissed her slowly, tenderly this time, brushing my lips over hers.

"This was the best make-up sex," I whispered against her mouth.

She smiled shyly, still breathless, her fingers tracing the back of my neck. "I'll rate it a ten."

I chuckled and crushed her mouth in another passionate kiss.

Chapter 405: Unease

Olivia's POV

I teleported back to Frederick's mansion. The halls were quiet, but I could hear soft laughter coming from the sitting room. My wolf's ears twitched and my brow furrowed. I walked quickly down the hall and peeked through the archway. There Selene was, sitting by the fire with a cup of tea, acting so calm and happy. Her hand was bandaged, and she looked almost... comfortable.

And across from her sat Frederick. His chair was leaned back, a glass of wine in his hand. His eyes were on her, so soft, like he was admiring her. Selene smiled softly. "You don't need to worry about me, Lord Frederick. I'm already fine."

But Frederick's lips curved into a smirk. "I'll decide when you're fine," he said, his voice low.

My stomach twisted; my brow furrowed. What was happening here? Why did it feel like this was not supposed to be happening? I knew the triplets thought it was good that Selene was getting closer to Frederick so he could trust her, but I, on the other hand, didn't like this idea. There was this uneasiness deep inside me I couldn't just overlook.

As if noticing my presence, they both turned and looked in my direction. The moment Frederick saw me, he straightened up and had a panicked look—like a man caught cheating. I frowned and began descending the stairs, my eyes fixed on Selene as I tried to establish a mind link with her, which worked because somehow we were related.

"And what exactly is this?" I demanded, my eyes narrowing at her.

Selene kept a calm expression, but her spiteful voice responded through the mind link. "What? I'm playing my part well."

My jaw clenched. "I don't like it. I don't trust this. Just make him feed from your poisoned blood like we planned. What is all this—this connection you're building with him?"

Her lashes fluttered as her lips curved slightly—too slightly, like she was mocking me in secret. "Connection? Oh, Olivia... maybe it's not about the plan at all. Maybe you're just jealous."

My chest tightened, my wolf snarling at the accusation. "Jealous?" I snapped back. Why would she even think that?

Selene's expression remained calm even though her voice was spiteful through the link. "Yes. The triplets' attention isn't enough for you anymore, is it? You want Frederick's attention too. You want him looking at you the way he looks at me. You want the attention he gives me... goddess Olivia... three men aren't enough for you—you want four!" She mocked, while outwardly she tilted her head and smoothed her hair like nothing was wrong.

Her words angered me, though I refused to let it show on my face. My anger increased, and I took a step closer, letting my anger ripple through the bond between us.

"Don't flatter yourself," I hissed. "This isn't about wanting him. This is about not trusting you."

She scoffed and tried to respond, but Frederick's words got my attention.

"I have been calling your mobile line, Olivia... you were not picking up," he said.

I frowned. My phone was still back in Nightshade Pack, while I had been with the triplets in Full Moon Pack. But I wouldn't tell him that. Instead, I spat, "And why should I answer? Clearly you've been enjoying yourself in my absence." My tone dripped with jealousy, though it was all an act—an act meant to convince him Selene and I weren't working together.

Frederick's brows furrowed, his smirk fading into something unreadable. His gaze darted between me and Selene as if sensing the tension. "Olivia," he said slowly, his voice deeper now, "what are you saying?"

I crossed my arms and lifted my chin. "Wasn't that what it looked like? Sitting here with her, wine in hand, staring like she was the only thing that mattered?"

Selene's lips twitched, amusement glimmering in her eyes though she kept quiet. I could feel her satisfaction buzzing through the bond like static.

My wolf bristled, snapping inside me. Frederick leaned forward in his chair, placing his glass aside. His eyes locked on mine. "You think I'd choose her over you?" His voice was low and vibrated with annoyance.

I took a step closer, putting on my best act. "It's not about choosing," I spat. "It's about you forgetting about me the moment you met this lady. Why don't you just let me go and be with her!" I snarled.

Selene shifted in her seat; her voice was sly through the mind link again. "You sound exactly like a jealous lover, Olivia. Keep going—he might just believe it."

My hands clenched at my sides, but I forced myself not to react. I knew she wasn't praising me but rather mocking me.

He rose slowly, his gaze never leaving mine. Instead of anger or denial—he smirked. That smug, knowing curve of his lips that always made my wolf bristle.

"If you're jealous," he said, his tone dropping into something dark and velvety, "it only proves you care. And I like that."

My frown deepened. Jealous? Care? Joke on him to believe my act.

I shook my head sharply. "That's not what this is..."

But he stepped closer, cutting me off. "You don't have to hide it. The anger in your eyes, the way you storm in here ready to tear Selene apart... it tells me everything." His smirk deepened. "You want me all to yourself."

Behind him, Selene bit her lip to keep from laughing, her eyes glittering like she'd won something.

I scoffed inwardly. This was just an act, and yet here he was—believing it.

Frederick stepped closer. "Enough of this. Tonight, I'm taking you out to dinner," he said smoothly, as if it were already decided.

Before I could respond, Selene's voice cut in, her tone laced with faux innocence. "Then I should leave tonight."

Both Frederick and I turned to her. She lowered her lashes, her fingers curling around her cup like a timid child. "It's scary for me to stay here alone while you're away. There are vampires everywhere. What if they come for me?"

Frederick straightened, his tone immediate and firm. "No. You'll stay here. You're safer in my mansion than anywhere else."

Her lips trembled as though she were truly frightened. "But your staff... what if they turn on me? What if they attack me? I can't—I can't stay here by myself."

I rolled my eyes inwardly. She was playing him so perfectly it almost made me gag.

"My staff would never," Frederick replied sharply, his jaw tense. "They value their lives too much to betray me."

Still, Selene shook her head, her eyes wide, her voice quivering. "I'm scared..."

And then—just as I thought I'd heard enough—Frederick's words stunned me.

"Then come with us," he said firmly. He turned to me as if the decision needed my blessing. "Olivia won't mind."

My entire body stiffened. My suspicion had just been confirmed.

Chapter 406: Apology

Olivia's POV

I went speechless... Of course I won't mind... I hated the idea of me and Frederick having dinner alone or being seen alone with him, but then the realization that Frederick suggested that Selene could come with us was something unexpected....

This was Frederick—the same man who had cornered me with his obsession, who had sworn fire and brimstone if I didn't belong to him. The same man who had snarled and threatened to tear down everything I loved if I dared to reject him.

And now?

Here I was, playing my part, pretending to want him, and he was the one suggesting she should come along. Suggesting Selene—Selene—could join us at dinner.

It felt wrong. Twisted. Like somehow, I had become the third wheel in a game I was supposed to control.

I forced a smile. "Of course I don't mind," I said sweetly, though every word burned on my tongue. "Why would I?"

Selene's lashes fluttered, and the faintest curve of triumph touched her lips. Frederick didn't notice it, too busy pouring another glass of wine like this was all normal.

"I'll go home and get something to wear," I said flatly. Frederick only gave a small nod, swirling his drink before taking another slow sip.

That was it. No protest. No insistence. No promise to provide me with anything.

Before I could fully process that, Selene's soft little voice slipped into the air. "I... I don't have anything proper to wear."

And without missing a beat, Frederick leaned forward, his eyes softening. "Don't worry about that," he said smoothly. "I'll get you a dress."

The words made me raise a brow.

A dress. For her.

I waited—just waited—for him to say the same thing to me. To at least glance my way, acknowledge me. But nothing came. His gaze stayed on her, his attention only given to her.

I waited another second, but Frederick said nothing about getting me a dress. It's not like I wanted one... but he was supposed to at least say it... he was supposed to put me first and not Selene... I'm the one he wants... the one he is obsessed with, so why is he ignoring me all of a sudden and pouring all of his attention into Selene?

I didn't like this for many reasons. One reason—he clearly likes Selene, which is pretty obvious, and I don't care. But my fear is Selene. What if she falls in love with him too? Then what happens to our plan? Of course Selene wouldn't want to kill a man she was in love with.

Unable to stay in the room any longer, I teleported back to my room in the Nightshade Pack.

I sucked in a deep breath and glanced around the room. It had been more than two days since I came here.

I sat on the bed, staring at the walls of my old room in Nightshade pack, my thoughts heavy and restless.

My wolf stirred. "Maybe something good might come out of this."

I frowned. "Good? What good?"

She responded instantly. "If Frederick truly starts liking Selene... then maybe, just maybe, he'll finally let go of you. Isn't that what you wanted? To be free of him?"

The thought made my chest tighten. Free. That was the dream, wasn't it?

But then, another fear pricked at me. What if Selene fell for him too? What if she stopped caring about the plan, stopped caring about revenge, and tells him the truth? What if she betrayed us?

I dragged a hand over my face, groaning. "This is a mess," I muttered to myself.

My wolf pressed again, stubborn. "It could still be the key to your freedom. If his obsession shifts to her, he will let you go. Think about it, Olivia."

I lay back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. My heart was torn between relief and fear, my mind tangled in questions I didn't want to answer.

Was this a blessing in disguise... or the beginning of another disaster?

Suddenly the door to my room pushed open, and I frowned, glancing at it, because I already knew who it was.

"What do you want?" I spat, glaring at him as he walked in.

Calvin stayed at the doorway, his hand gripping the frame. For a moment, I thought he would turn and leave. Then, with a deep breath, he crossed the room and sat beside me, his shoulders heavy.

When he finally spoke, his voice was low and raw. "Olivia... I—" He stopped, the words failing him for one terrified, human heartbeat. Then he exhaled like he'd been holding it forever. "I'm sorry."

It's not the quick, brush-off apology I expected. It's heavy. He says it like he means it.

Apology? I never expected to get one from him.

I frowned. "You hurt me," I said. "You weren't my brother when I needed one."

He looked down, shame flashing across his face. "I know. I thought—God, I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought being away from the triplets would keep you safe, keep you from being hurt again. I told myself I was protecting you. Now I see how wrong I was. I see how much I hurt you. I'm so sorry, Liv. I was an idiot."

My jaw tightened, and I didn't know what to say.

He finally met my eyes, and there was nothing left to hide. "I know. I can't take that back. I can only try to make it right now. If you'll let me. If you'll have me back as... as your brother."

There was a pull inside me—anger, yes, but also something softer. The longing for brotherly love and support.

"Why should I believe you?" I asked, looking away.

He moved closer, earnestness hardening his features. "Because I love you—always have—and because I'll do anything to prove it. I'll respect your decisions. I'll follow your rules. I'll be patient. If being with the triplets makes you happy, I'll agree to it. If you want me in your life as a brother and nothing more, that's all I'll ever ask for. Just let me try."

Let him try.

Letting him in feels risky. Trust feels like a fragile thing I don't have enough of to throw around. But hearing him speak so sincerely made me want to believe him.

I study him for a moment. Finally I breathe out. "You hurt me, Calvin. But I really want to forgive you."

His shoulders slump with relief and remorse all at once. "I know. I'll earn it. I'll earn you back one day at a time."

I picture the weeks we lost. It won't knit overnight. Boundaries need to be set. Tests might be thrown. But the idea of not having him at all anymore after everything feels worse.

"All right," I say at last. "Let's build our relationship."

His face brightens like dawn. "Thank you. I wasn't your brother when you needed me, Liv. But if you let me, I'll spend the rest of my life trying to be."

He means it. I can feel it in the way his voice settles, in the way his eyes refuse to look away.

There's one more thing, a thought that has been at the edge of my mind. "If I choose them—if I choose the triplets—will you... are you okay with that?"

Calvin's answer was quick and simple. "You're my sister. Your happiness comes first. If loving them makes you happy, I'll support you. Always."

Chapter 407: Dinner

Olivia's POV

I looked at myself one last time in the mirror. The sky-blue dress hugged me perfectly, the color matching my eyes. Silver heels shined on my feet. My black hair fell loose over my shoulders. I looked pretty... maybe even beautiful.

"You look beautiful," Lolita said with a smile.

I forced a small smile back, though inside I felt no joy. If this dinner had been with the triplets, my stomach would be alive with butterflies. I would be thrilled, maybe even nervously excited in a way that felt good.

But no. This dinner was with Frederick. The one man I wished would vanish from my life. Instead of butterflies, I carried nothing but irritation.

"I'm leaving," I told Lolita before grabbing the silver purse that matched my heels.

Clutching it tight, I teleported and landed in Frederick's living room.

The sight before me made my brow crease.

Frederick stood close to Selene, his hand lifting gently as he tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. She smiled softly at him, shy yet pleased, as though she enjoyed the attention.

The moment his eyes found me, his hand froze. Shock washed over his face, like a child caught doing something wrong.

My gaze narrowed harder, taking him in. He wore a dark tailored suit, the kind that hugged his broad shoulders perfectly. His shirt was black, open at the top, giving him that dangerous, powerful look he loved to carry.

Then my eyes shifted to Selene.

She wore a soft cream-colored gown that draped perfectly over her figure. Her long hair spilled over her shoulders like silk, and the faint glow from the fire made her look even softer.

I hated to admit it, but she was beautiful. A beauty I couldn't deny, no matter how much my wolf snarled inside me.

"Olivia, you are here," Frederick said in a tense tone as he stepped toward me. I scoffed, glancing at Selene once more. She stared back with that fake innocence that infuriated me.

I moved my gaze back to Frederick, who looked tense despite how hard he was trying to stay composed. I folded my arms against my chest. "Am I interrupting something?" I asked.

Frederick's jaw flexed. He stepped closer, every line of his body tense, though he tried to look calm. "No," he said quickly, his voice too quick, too defensive. "You're not interrupting anything."

I arched a brow, my wolf scoffing in my chest. Not interrupting? My eyes flicked back to Selene. She still sat there so perfectly composed, her hands folded neatly in her lap, her big eyes wide with that false innocence she wore like a crown.

"Really?" I pressed, tilting my head slightly. "Because from where I'm standing, it looks like I walked in at a... delicate moment."

Frederick's nostrils flared, but before he could speak, Selene lowered her lashes, sighing softly. "You misunderstand, Olivia," she said, her voice sweet as honey.

I scoffed, my eyes narrowing on her. "Of course," I muttered, sarcasm thick in my tone.

Frederick's lips pressed into a thin line, and I could almost see the uneasiness in him. Then, as if snapping out of the moment, he cleared his throat.

"We should go," he said firmly, brushing past the tension like it didn't exist. "We'll be late if we waste any more time."

Late. That was his excuse.

I said nothing, just clutched my purse tighter, and followed him out. Selene trailed behind, her soft footsteps irritating me more than they should have.

A sleek black Mercedes was already waiting. Inside, the air smelled of leather and Frederick's heavy cologne, rich and suffocating.

I slid into the back seat, my eyes scanning every detail—the faint trace of wine on the seats, the smooth finish of the wood panel, the subtle gleam of silver accents. Selene got in beside me while Frederick quietly settled on the other side.

The ride was silent, heavy with tension. My wolf growled low in my chest, restless. I kept my gaze fixed out the window, watching the trees and lights blur past.

When we arrived at the restaurant, Frederick was the first to step out. He moved with his usual grace, the air of authority clinging to him like a second skin.

He turned and, to my surprise, extended his hand to me. I hesitated, then took it, my silver heels clicking against the pavement as I stepped out. He guided me inside, pulling out a chair for me at our table.

But then—to my surprise—I watched him do the same for Selene, as he pulled a seat for her too.

The waiter arrived, filling our glasses with water. Frederick leaned back, his eyes sweeping over both of us before landing—of course—on Selene.

"Tell me something about you," he said, his voice softer than I had ever heard it. "How old are you?"

Selene smiled politely, lowering her lashes. "I'm twenty-one."

Frederick nodded in approval. "And what brings you here?" he pressed, sounding so interested in knowing everything about her.

She answered, her tone gentle, carefully measured. "I came for an IT program."

I nearly choked on my water. An IT program? Such lies. And since when did Frederick care about anyone's education? Since when did he ask?

He had never once asked me questions like that. Never cared about the little details of who I was, or what I wanted. With me, it was always possession, demand, obsession. But with Selene... he was curious. Attentive.

My fingers tightened around my fork as Selene frowned at the crabs on her plate. "I like crabs, but I hate peeling them. It's too much trouble."

Without hesitation, without even looking at me, Frederick reached across, slid her plate closer, and began peeling the crab for her with practiced hands.

My wolf froze. My heart dropped.

Shit.

I knew it then—clear as daylight.

Frederick wasn't just intrigued. He wasn't just interested in having a taste of her blood.

He was falling in love.

And that, more than anything, terrified me.

Chapter 408: The Bathroom

Olivia's POV

I felt like the third wheel. The whole dinner, Frederick only looked at Selene. He asked her question after question. She smiled, she laughed, and she lied so easily—even about her family. I stabbed my fork into my food, my wolf pacing inside me. I couldn't take it anymore. Was he doing this to humiliate me now? To make me jealous? "I need to use the bathroom," I said quickly, pushing back my chair.

I walked down the hall and into the bathroom. My hands gripped the sink as I stared into the mirror. My chest rose and fell fast. If he was doing all those things to make me jealous, then it was okay, but if he truly cared about Selene, then we were in trouble. I scowled and stared at my reflection in the mirror as a thought came through my mind. What if he wants me and still wants Selene? What do I do then? My frown deepened. I reminded myself I needed to go back to my original plan, which was finding the vessel and destroying it. I can't believe Selene and her games...

Suddenly the door opened. Selene walked in, smirking.

"You don't look well," she said sweetly. "Not able to stand it, I'll bet."

I turned on her, my eyes sharp. "Why aren't you doing what we planned? Why haven't you made him drink your poisoned blood?"

Her lips curved. "Why the rush, Olivia? You seem more upset than I am."

My anger flared. "He's falling for you," I hissed.

She tilted her head, mocking me. "So what? Or maybe... you're just jealous."

I scoffed. My wolf snarled. "Jealous? Don't flatter yourself. I'm not jealous, okay? I just don't trust you because you're nothing but a lying whore."

Her eyes reddened and a big frown spread across her cheek, and before I could process it, she slapped me.

Something snapped inside me. My hand grabbed her hair, yanking hard. Before she could fight back, I slammed her face into the wall. The sound echoed. She gasped, pain and shock flashing across her face. I let go of her. Selene touched her cheek, her lip bleeding slightly, her face showing a small visible bruise. She glared at me. "Get ready to pay," she spat before storming out of the restroom.

My wolf growled, pacing inside me, but I forced her down. This wasn't the time to lose control. I shut my eyes and reached through the bond to the triplets.

"I don't trust her," I said firmly, letting my anger carry through. "Selene is dangerous. She's not following the plan. She's playing her own game—and Frederick is falling for it."

Silence followed for a moment before Levi's voice came, calm but heavy. "Olivia, stay calm. We knew she'd play it her way. As long as the poison gets into him, it doesn't matter how she does it."

"No!" I snapped back. "You don't understand. If she falls for him—or worse, if she decides to protect him—everything will be ruined. I can feel it. I can't trust her."

Lennox's voice cut in, hard and commanding. "Then keep your eyes open. Don't let your guard down. If she turns, we'll deal with her. Together."

Louis' tone was softer, but it carried a warning edge. "Don't let your emotions cloud you, Olivia. We can't afford mistakes now."

I cut the link off, frustrated, my chest tight. They didn't see it the way I did. They didn't feel it. But I knew—I knew—Selene was a ticking bomb. Drawing in a sharp breath, I fixed my dress and headed back to the table.

But when I arrived, my stomach dropped. The table was empty. Frederick and Selene were gone. I walked outside, heels clicking fast against the floor, and found nothing. The sleek black car was gone too. My brow furrowed deep, my wolf bristling in alarm.

"Damn it," I hissed. Did Frederick just leave me here?

Closing my eyes, I teleported back to Frederick's mansion. The air shifted around me as I landed inside the grand living room. I lowered myself onto the couch, clutching my silver purse tightly in my lap. I knew they hadn't reached the mansion yet. They were

still on their way here, which was almost a fifteen-minute drive from the restaurant. My fingers tapped restlessly against the purse. A knot twisted in my stomach.

Was Frederick really falling for her? Or was this a game—just to punish me? To make me jealous? Either way, I was done waiting to find out.

I waited for a few minutes, then I heard the sound of a car rolling into the mansion. They were back.

Frederick came in first, his face hard with anger, his eyes burning like rage. His chest rose and fell as if he had been holding his rage back the whole ride. But what froze me wasn't him—it was Selene. She trailed in behind him, her gown a little ruffled, her lip bleeding again. Worse—her face was marked with fresh scratches. Long, red lines cut across her cheek.

My eyes widened. I hadn't done that. I only left her with a bruise, a small cut. This—this was far more than I had given her. My wolf growled low. She staged this.

Frederick's chest heaved as he glared down at me. His hand clenched into a fist at his side, so tight I could hear the leather of his gloves strain.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" His voice thundered, vibrating the walls. "Why are you acting like a jealous bitch, Olivia?" The words hit me like a slap. My throat tightened, but I lifted my chin.

He stepped closer, his eyes sharp with rage. "First, you act like you don't want me. You reject me, spit in my face, and tell me you'd rather die than be mine. And now—now you see Selene, and suddenly you can't stand it? Just one smile from Selene and you lose control like a jealous little girl? You feel threatened by her? Is that it?"

I scoffed but said nothing. Frederick's voice shook the room. "You should apologize," he said, eyes burning.

I stood my ground and crossed my arms. "I won't," I said loudly.

"You will apologize, Olivia. On your knees if you must. Or I swear, you'll regret testing me tonight."

"Never!" I spat.

His expression hardened. He inhaled slowly. "Very well," he said. He looked at Selene. She looked back at me, her face still red and sore. Then Frederick said something that made my blood run cold.

"If you won't apologize... then Selene will give back to you exactly what you gave her."

I blinked. "What?"

Frederick nodded once, his jaw tight. "I don't care who you are. I am against injustice. If you don't apologize to Selene, she will smash your face on the wall just like you did to hers."

Chapter 409: Accused

Olivia's POV

I couldn't believe it. My ears felt hot. Did he really say that? Frederick wanted me to apologize to Selene—or she would do to me what I did to her? This was unbelievable... it felt like a dream.

"Apologize?" I asked, lifting a brow.

"Yes," he said, his face cold and hard.

I gave a small laugh, then nodded. "Okay."

I walked toward Selene, my heels clicking on the floor. She stood still, her lips curved as if she had already won.

I stopped right in front of her. Then, without warning, I raised my hand and—Smack!

The slap rang loud in the room. Selene's head jerked to the side, her hair flying across her face.

"That," I said, my voice low and full of rage, "was the slap I didn't give back."

Her eyes went wide in shock, and for once she didn't look so sweet. She couldn't act innocent.

Frederick's eyes darkened, his whole body tense, like he was about to explode, but I didn't care.

He stormed toward me, his aura flaring, choking the air. His hand shot up, and my breath caught—he was this close to hitting me. My wolf growled, ready to fight, but I stood tall, refusing to flinch.

"Enough!" Frederick roared. His chest rose and fell fast as he glared at me. "What the hell is wrong with you? Acting like some jealous little brat?"

I clenched my jaw, my hands curling into fists. "She deserved it," I spat. "She's not as innocent as she looks."

But Frederick's rage only grew. He glared at me, and I could see he was just a string away from hitting me. "You think this is a game? First you act like you don't want me, like I'm nothing to you. Now you see Selene and suddenly you attack her like a madwoman?!" His voice shook with fury. "You're out of control, Olivia!"

Selene whimpered softly behind him, holding her cheek, her tears sliding down as if she had been the one wronged. Frederick glanced back at her, and that only made my blood boil more.

He turned to me again, his hand trembling as if he was still fighting the urge to strike. "You are becoming more unbearable by the day. I can't stand you." he spat.

I scoffed and folded my arms. "It's simple—let me go. Break the vow and let me go."

He scoffed and shook his head. "Never happening. You think I'm a fool? You think I don't know why you are acting this way? You want me to get irritated and let you go... but that is never happening, Olivia. You are mine forever."

My frown deepened. What the hell is wrong with this man? What is his obsession with me?

Ignoring me, he turned to a crying Selene and cupped her face with both hands like he was holding something fragile. "Just forget about her, okay?" he pleaded.

Selene, who was great at her act, nodded through tears, and then Frederick glared at me before leading Selene away.

I was enraged, but I forced myself to remain calm while I established a mind link with the triplet.

"I don't trust Selene—" I started, breathless.

Silence hummed for a beat, then Lennox answered, "Where are you? Come to the study."

I blinked and reappeared in the study. The boys were already gathered—Lennox with that tight jaw, Levi calm as always, Louis pretending not to be worried, though his fingers drummed on the table.

I told them everything while my hands clenched and unclenched. I left out nothing: the dinner, the way Frederick watched Selene, how he'd demanded an apology, the slap, and the way he cupped her face. I could feel the anger inside me like a live wire.

Levi was the first to speak. "We'll contact Selene. Make sure she's still on our side."

Lennox's eyes flicked to me and then to Louis. "If she's still playing along, good. If not, we deal with it."

Louis inhaled, then reached out through the bond to Selene. A moment later his face tightened. "She says she's fine—still in the mansion. Claims she's doing all this to get Frederick closer to her." He looked up at me. "Everything is fine, Oli."

I didn't like the sound of it. "She could be lying. They could be plotting something."

Lennox leaned forward, his brow furrowed. "Olivia... if anyone who didn't know you saw how you reacted tonight—they'd probably think you were jealous."

My mouth opened. "Jealous? Why would anyone think that?"

Lennox met my eyes. "Because of the way you acted. You walked in all heated, you made a scene, you said things that sounded like—" he searched for the right word, "—like someone who wants the man in question. Oli, look at yourself in the mirror; you are practically fuming."

"And I don't like it," Levi added.

Louis sighed. "Even my wolf thinks you're jealous. That's how strong it came across."

Where I stood, I went speechless... What are they even saying? Me jealous? Why should I be? I'm not jealous—I'm worried. Why can't they seem to see it?

"I'm not jealous. I'm worried. Selene is lying. She's playing both sides. If she falls for him, the plan is over."

Lennox rubbed his forehead. "We know you're worried, Liv..."

"Then why will you guys think I'm getting jealous?" I frowned.

"Because that's how it looks," Louis muttered, glancing away.

My frown deepened. "Looks? What does that even mean?" My anger spiked to its peak. First it was Selene who thinks I'm jealous, now it's the triplets... My jealousy is an act for Frederick, and my unease is about not trusting Selene.

I shook my head. "This is unbelievable."

"Even you three think I'm jealous?" I asked.

Lennox looked away first. He ran a hand over his face. "No — not like that," he said. His voice was rough. "We mean you're acting like someone who wants him. That's all."

Levi folded his arms. "We didn't mean to make you feel worse, Liv. We just noticed how it looked from the outside. To others, it could be mistaken for jealousy."

My shoulders sagged under the weight of their misunderstanding. I hated it. I hated that they couldn't see the truth.

"Fuck you three," I spat, then vanished, teleporting away.

Chapter 410: Attraction

Frederick's POV

I led Selene down the hallway, my hand still cupping her face. Her skin was soft, trembling under my touch, and her tears clung to my fingers like dew. She looked fragile, breakable—everything Olivia refused to be.

"Forget her," I murmured again, softer this time, though my chest still heaved from the fury boiling inside me. "She doesn't know what she's doing. Don't take her words to heart."

Selene sniffled, lowering her lashes. "I... I'll try, my lord." Her voice trembled, and I hated how wounded she looked. What the hell was happening to me? Why did I care for a woman? This was a first. Ever since Hailee, I hadn't cared for anyone. With Olivia, I forced myself to try, still struggling every step of the way. But with Selene... it came naturally. The night I first saw her, something inside me shifted—an urge to protect her. I couldn't explain it.

Sometimes I told myself it was because of her pure hybrid blood. I wanted a taste of it—if she gave it willingly, it would make me twice as powerful as I already was. That was the excuse I kept clinging to, the reason I gave myself for being kind to her. But deep down, I knew it was a lie. I don't fake attention for anyone, not for anything. So why was I so easily drawn to Selene? Why was I putting her above Olivia, when it shouldn't be so? Olivia was supposed to be the one I wanted. Since I couldn't have Hailee, I chose Olivia. And yet here I was, defending a woman I barely knew, siding with her instead of Olivia.

Selene suddenly spoke, pulling me out of my thoughts. "Do you... regret binding yourself to her?" she asked, almost too gently.

I froze. My eyes snapped to her, and she flinched. "Never ask me that again," I growled. "Olivia is chained to me."

Selene looked frightened by the way I snapped and nodded her head before looking away. My chest tightened with guilt. I cursed myself inwardly, hating how easily I lost control.

"I'm sorry." The words felt wrong in my mouth. I wasn't the type who apologized easily—but I meant them. For Selene, I meant them. For the part of me that surprised me.

She gave a small nod and sat down on the bed. My throat tightened. What the hell was wrong with me? Why did I feel so dangerously drawn to this woman?

"Selene..." I started, then stopped. I hated how soft my voice sounded. I hated that my anger toward Olivia was bleeding into this... this weakness.

Slowly, she lifted her face. Her eyes were wet, glimmering in the dim light. "No man has ever defended me like that," she whispered. Her voice cracked.

I swallowed hard. Something hot burned in my chest, not fury this time but something far more. It was protection, possessive. The same madness Olivia dragged out of me, but this was softer and sneakier.

I took a step closer. "Don't thank me," I muttered. "I don't even know why I did."

"You did because you care," she said quickly, almost desperately. Her small hand reached out, brushing the back of mine. "You are a good man, Lord Frederick."

A good man... it had been ages since someone said this to me, and the last person who did was Hailee. My breath caught. Her touch was light, but it lit a fire across my skin. For a heartbeat, I saw young Hailee—stubborn lips, fiery eyes—and the urge that always rode me when she defied me. But Selene wasn't Hailee. She wasn't even related to her, so why am I seeing Hailee in her?

Suddenly, she leaned toward me.

Her lips parted just slightly, as though asking without words.

I should have pulled back. I should have reminded her who she was and who I was. But instead, I bent down, and our mouths met.

The kiss was soft at first. Then her fingers clutched at my sleeve, pulling me closer, and I deepened it before I could stop myself. Her tears tasted like salt. Her blood scent, sharp and pure, made me snarl in the back of my mind. I felt the urge to take her, to claim her. To sink my teeth in. But I broke the kiss suddenly, stumbling a step back, my chest heaving.

"What the hell..." I muttered, dragging a hand over my mouth. Shame and hunger battled in my veins, leaving me unsteady. I looked at Selene. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips trembling, and her eyes searching mine for something I couldn't give.

"This should never happen again," I forced out, my voice rough. "Do you hear me? Never. I am bound to Olivia. I am to marry her."

Selene's face crumpled, guilt flashing across her features. "... I'm sorry, Lord Frederick," she whispered, her voice breaking. "I shouldn't have—"

"Enough," I snapped, though the sound of her apology twisted inside me. She looked so small, so hurt. My chest ached with the urge to pull her back, to taste her again, to sink into the comfort she offered. I hated myself for wanting it. I hated how part of me screamed to claim her, while another part clung stubbornly to Olivia.

I turned away sharply, my fists tight at my sides, and walked out before I did something I would regret.

By the time I reached the living room, the fury and confusion inside me had swelled until I thought I might burst. I grabbed the nearest bottle from the table, ripped the cork free, and drank. The liquor burned, but not enough. Nothing was enough to erase the feeling of her lips, or the sound of her whisper calling me a good man.

I slammed the bottle down, breathing hard. My vow to Olivia weighed like chains on my chest, yet my body still throbbed with hunger for another woman. A woman I barely knew. A woman who wasn't mine.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs broke through my thoughts.

I looked up, and there was Selene. Her eyes were red, her cheeks blotched from crying, but her back was straight. In her hand, she carried a small traveling bag.

"I'm leaving,"