

Fated To Not Just One, But Three #Chapter 501: The Best Decision - Read Fated To Not Just One, But Three Chapter 501: The Best Decision

Chapter 501: The Best Decision

Calvin's POV

"Are you okay?" Mother asked for what felt like the hundredth time.

I scoffed, pushing my plate away. "I'm fine."

It was a lie, and we both knew it.

How could I possibly be okay?

My mate, my fated mate, was getting married tomorrow.

At first, I thought she was bluffing. Maybe it was one of her little tricks to provoke me, to get a reaction. But when I received word from one of our allied warriors stationed at the Full Moon Pack, the truth hit me like a punch to the gut.

Nora wasn't bluffing.

She was actually getting married.

To Daniel Latin, a respected warrior in the Full Moon Pack.

My stomach twisted painfully. My mate was slipping away, and I was sitting here like a fool, doing absolutely nothing to stop it.

Mother's voice broke through my thoughts again. "Your silence, it has to do with that girl, doesn't it?"

I didn't deny it. Didn't even look at her.

Instead, I pushed my chair back abruptly, the legs scraping against the floor. "Excuse me, Mother. I'm not hungry."

"Calvin," she called, her tone softer now. "Is there something you should tell me?"

I froze, my jaw tightening.

"Nothing, Mother," I said quietly. "I'm just not hungry."

I walked out of the dining room, ignoring the look of concern in her eyes, and made my way toward the balcony. The cold morning air hit me as I stepped outside.

My wolf growled low inside me. "She's ours. You're just going to let another man put a mark on her?"

I gritted my teeth. "What do you want me to do? She made her choice."

"She's lying," he snarled. "You can feel it. You know it's not real."

"Even if it's not," I whispered, staring into the distance, "it's better off this way."

The silence that followed was suffocating. I could feel the tension building in my chest, burning, twisting, the kind of pain that made it difficult to breathe.

I leaned against the railing, fingers curling around the cold metal. My mind wouldn't stop replaying her words, the way her eyes had shone with anger and hurt.

"Alpha?"

The voice came from behind me. I turned slightly to see Thomas, one of my stewards, standing by the door.

"What is it?" I asked, feeling irritated.

He hesitated before replying. "Lady Patricia is here to see you."

I felt something inside me snap.

"Tell her I'm busy; she should leave," I said tightly.

Thomas bowed quickly and disappeared, sensing my mood.

I inhaled deeply, closing my eyes. Maybe this was for the best. That's what I kept telling myself.

Nora getting married meant she'd finally be happy, loved by someone whole, not broken like me.

And maybe, maybe I'd finally be free too.

It was supposed to be a win-win.

So why did it feel like I was losing everything?

I rubbed a hand over my face, trying to steady my breathing. My wolf's growl rumbled faintly in my head, restless and angry.

"Keep lying to yourself," he said bitterly. "You'll believe it eventually."

Before I could respond, the door creaked open again. Mother stepped in, arms crossed, that look of disapproval already etched into her face.

"Why did you send Patricia away?" she asked, her tone sharp. "The poor girl took a one-hour trip just to see you."

I exhaled, turning to face her. "Because I never asked her to come. She didn't even tell me she was visiting."

Mother raised an eyebrow. "Calvin, she's been patient with you. You're courting her."

"I'm not." My voice came out harsher than I intended.

Her eyes narrowed. "You're not? Then what would you call her visiting here every week? The gifts? The dinners?"

"She was the one insisting," I replied tightly. "I never asked for any of it. And I'm not courting her."

Mother sighed heavily, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Regardless, she's here now. The decent thing to do is to at least see her."

I stared at her for a long moment before finally nodding. "Fine."

She gave a small nod of approval and left, satisfied she'd won the argument.

A few minutes later, I walked into the sitting room. Patricia stood by the window, looking effortlessly perfect as always, blonde curls falling over her shoulders, wearing a white fitted dress that probably cost more than most people's cars.

"Calvin," she greeted with a practiced smile. "I was beginning to think you'd forgotten me."

I forced a polite nod. "Patricia."

Her blue eyes scanned me curiously. "You look troubled. Everything alright?"

"I'm fine," I said flatly, sitting opposite her.

She laughed lightly, brushing a curl behind her ear. "You always say that."

I didn't respond. My wolf was silent too, completely uninterested. Normally, he'd growl when another woman got too close, but this time, there was nothing. Just emptiness.

She began talking about her trip, about a gala she'd attended, about dresses and social events, none of which I cared about. My mind drifted elsewhere, to a girl with soft hazel eyes and a voice that haunted my every thought.

Suddenly, Patricia's sharp gasp snapped me out of it.

A maid had accidentally stepped on the hem of her gown while setting down a tray of tea.

"You clumsy little thing!" Patricia snapped, glaring at the girl. "Watch where you're going! This dress costs more than your lifetime salary!"

The maid stammered an apology, clearly shaken, but Patricia wasn't done. She raised her hand like she might actually strike her.

"Patricia." My voice came out hard, commanding.

She froze, hand still midair.

"Leave us," I told the maid gently. She bowed quickly and hurried out, eyes wide with fear.

When the door shut, I turned back to Patricia. "You didn't have to talk to her like that."

She blinked, as if genuinely confused. "Excuse me?"

"She made a mistake. That's no reason to humiliate her."

Patricia scoffed. "Calvin, she's a maid. It's literally her job not to make mistakes. If she can't handle that, she shouldn't be working here."

I stared at her, really stared, and for the first time, I saw her clearly.

The arrogance. The entitlement. The complete lack of empathy.

And in that moment, I realized something.

My plan had been to marry her because she was safe. Because she wasn't my mate, and that meant I wouldn't get hurt.

But standing there, listening to her belittle someone so easily, I realized she wasn't safe at all.

She was everything I didn't want.

"This isn't working," I said finally.

Her smile faltered. "What?"

I stood, my voice steady. "Us. Whatever this is. It's not working."

Patricia's expression hardened. "You can't be serious."

"I've never been more serious in my life."

Her lips parted, a mix of disbelief and anger flashing across her face. "You're making a mistake, Calvin."

"Maybe," I said quietly. "But at least it's mine to make."

She frowned and rose to her feet. "Tell me, Calvin... who is she? There's another woman, isn't there?"

Chapter 502: Mistake?

Calvin's POV

Patricia frowned, her perfectly painted lips curving downward. "Tell me, Calvin... who is she?" she demanded. "There's a woman in your life, isn't there?"

I stared at her in silence.

Her tone sharpened. "That's it, isn't it? That's why you're ending things with me. Because of her."

I exhaled slowly, forcing my voice to stay calm. "This isn't about anyone else, Patricia. It's about us. Or rather, the fact that there is no us."

She scoffed, folding her arms tightly across her chest. "Don't lie to me. I'm not stupid. I see the way you've been acting, distracted, cold, distant."

I didn't answer. I didn't need to. My silence said enough.

Her jaw tightened. "So that's it? You throw me aside for some lowborn girl? Who is she? Is her family wealthier than mine?"

My wolf growled faintly in my head, irritated by her tone, but I kept my expression composed. "Watch your words, Patricia," I said quietly. "You're walking a thin line."

She blinked, startled by the shift in my voice, but I continued before she could recover.

"I'm not interested in playing games," I said firmly. "Whatever you thought was between us, it's over. There's no one for you to blame, and there's nothing more to say."

Patricia's face twisted with disbelief and fury. "You can't be serious. You think you can just end this and walk away like it's nothing?"

"Yes," I said simply. "Because that's exactly what it is—nothing."

Her eyes flared. "You'll regret this, Calvin. You think she'll make you happy? You think she's better than I?"

I took a slow breath, holding her gaze. "This isn't about who's better. It's about what's right. And this," I gestured between us, "isn't right."

She stared at me for a long moment, her face flushing red, lips trembling with rage. "You'll come crawling back," she hissed finally. "And when you do, don't expect me to be waiting."

I gave a faint, humorless smile. "You won't have to worry about that."

Then I turned and walked away, her angry voice echoing faintly behind me.

I kept walking—straight past the guards, past the office, past everything—until I found myself standing by the same balcony again, staring into the cold horizon.

Somewhere out there, Nora was preparing for her wedding.

And I was here, convincing myself that letting her go was the right thing.

But deep down, I already knew it wasn't.

I turned away sharply and made my way to my room. The moment I entered, I reached for the cabinet and grabbed the nearest bottle of whiskey.

If I couldn't stop thinking about her, maybe drinking would help me forget.

The first gulp burned down my throat.

The second one didn't hurt as much.

By the third, the pain in my chest started to blur—but it never really faded.

I sat by the edge of the bed, staring blankly at the wall as the sun began to set. My head was spinning, my thoughts messier than ever. The bottle was half-empty now, but still, I drank.

Maybe if I drowned myself in enough liquor, the ache in my chest would finally shut up.

The hours passed in a haze. I didn't know when night fully arrived, but the room had grown darker, the only light coming from the dim lamp by the corner.

A soft knock echoed on the door.

"Calvin?"

I didn't need to look to know it was Mother. Her scent drifted into my room.

"I'm busy," I muttered, taking another drink.

"You've been in here all day," she said, her tone gentle and full of worry. "Open the door."

"Go away," I said quietly.

The door creaked anyway. I hadn't locked it. She stepped inside, sighing softly before sitting across from me. "You look terrible," she said bluntly.

"Thanks," I mumbled, raising the bottle to my lips again.

She watched me for a long moment. "Talk to me, Calvin. What's really wrong?"

I laughed bitterly. "Everything."

Her eyes softened. "Start somewhere."

I hesitated, my fingers tightening around the bottle. Maybe it was the alcohol, or maybe I was just too tired to keep lying. "I'm mated, Mother."

She blinked, surprised. "Mated? To who?"

"Nora," I said flatly. "Olivia's friend. She's my second-chance mate."

Her eyes widened slightly, but then she smiled. "Well... that's wonderful. So what's the problem?"

I looked away. "The problem is I don't want to fall in love again."

"Calvin—"

"No, you don't understand," I cut in, my voice breaking slightly. "The last time I fell in love, it almost killed me. I barely made it out alive. I can't... I can't go through that again."

She reached over and took the bottle from my hand, setting it aside. "You're not the same man you were then," she said softly. "And she's not the same woman. Don't punish Nora for what someone else did to you."

"I'm not," I muttered. "I'm protecting myself."

"By running from your mate?"

"I'm not running," I said, though even I didn't believe it. "I'm choosing peace."

Mother sighed deeply, sadness filling her eyes. "Peace doesn't come from hiding, Calvin. It comes from healing."

I looked at her, and for the first time in a long time, I felt something crack inside me. "I don't know how to heal," I whispered.

She reached out, brushing my hair back from my face like she used to when I was a boy. "Then start by not pushing away the one person the Moon Goddess sent to help you do it."

I didn't respond. I couldn't. The lump in my throat was too heavy, my vision blurring with unshed tears.

She stood slowly. "You'll regret this one day," she said quietly. "Mark my words, son—you'll regret letting her go."

The door closed softly behind her, leaving me alone again.

I buried my face in my hands, the room spinning around me. My chest hurt so badly I could barely breathe.

Somewhere between exhaustion and alcohol, my body finally gave out, and I fell asleep right there on the bed.

In my dreams, I saw her—Nora—dressed in white, smiling at another man.

She looked beautiful. Happy.

And I was nowhere in sight.

I jolted awake, gasping, my heart pounding painfully in my chest. The morning light streamed weakly through the curtains.

The dream replayed in my head—over and over—until the pain became unbearable.

I stood abruptly, shaking my head in disapproval. "No..." I whispered. "No. I'm not letting that happen."

Chapter 503: The Wedding

Nora's POV

The morning of my wedding arrived with a quiet heaviness that I couldn't shake. I was supposed to feel happy, excited even. Every girl dreamed of this moment: the gowns, the laughter, the preparations. But all I felt was empty.

Olivia had gone above and beyond. Despite everything happening in her own life, despite Alpha Lennox's situation weighing heavily on her, she'd poured her heart into making my wedding day perfect. She'd hired the best designers for both my traditional and white gowns, each hand-stitched with crystal embroidery that shimmered when the light touched them.

The venue, the grand pack hall inside the mansion, had been transformed overnight. Golden drapes cascaded from the ceiling, white roses lined every aisle, and a chandelier of moonstones glowed softly above the altar. It looked like a royal wedding, not a wedding between a maid and a warrior.

Lolita was beside me, humming softly as she pinned the last strands of my hair. She smiled at my reflection in the mirror. "You look beautiful," she said gently.

I managed a weak smile. "Thanks."

Her hands stilled for a moment, and she met my eyes in the mirror. "You know, you can still cancel this."

I froze.

She sighed softly, brushing a curl behind my ear. "I'm serious, Nora. You don't have to do this. You don't look happy."

I looked down at my hands, at the silver engagement ring glinting faintly on my finger. "I made my decision," I said quietly.

Lolita frowned. "Yeah, but was it the right one?"

I didn't answer, because deep down, I didn't know anymore.

She moved around to face me, folding her arms. "I've known you for years. You're not yourself, Nora. This whole thing, this wedding, it feels rushed."

I let out a shaky breath. "Olivia's been amazing. She's done everything, everything I could ever ask for."

"That's not what I meant," Lolita said softly. "I'm talking about you. You're supposed to be glowing right now, not looking like someone's dragging you to your own funeral."

I tried to laugh, but it came out hollow.

Lolita knelt slightly so we were eye-level. "You love him, don't you?" she asked quietly.

My chest tightened instantly. I didn't need her to say his name; we both knew who she meant.

"Love who?" I asked weakly.

She gave me a look. "Calvin."

I swallowed hard. "No."

She tilted her head. "You sure?"

"Yes," I lied. "Calvin doesn't want me. He made that clear. He wants someone better, someone with status, someone his mother would actually approve of. I'm just me."

Lolita's eyes softened with pity. "Nora..."

I stood abruptly, cutting her off. "Daniel is a good man. He's kind, loving, and he actually loves me. That's what matters."

"But you don't love him," she said quietly.

My throat closed up. "I'll learn to," I whispered.

The room fell silent. Only the activities from downstairs could be heard.

Lolita sighed, shaking her head. "You're doing this to forget him."

I looked at her through the mirror, my reflection pale and tired. "I'm doing this to move on."

She didn't argue after that. She just nodded, sadness clouding her eyes, and went back to fixing the final touches of my traditional veil.

When she was done, I stood and faced myself in the mirror. The dress was perfect. The hair, the makeup—flawless. But the woman staring back at me didn't look like a bride. She looked like someone pretending to be one.

Lolita whispered, "Are you sure?"

I forced a smile, though it trembled at the edges. The door creaked open, and Olivia stepped in, glowing in her peach gown. Her smile lit up the room as she looked me over from head to toe.

"Oh, my goodness," she whispered, clasping her hands together. "You look beautiful, Nora. Absolutely breathtaking."

I forced a small smile. "Thank you."

She came closer, brushing a stray strand of hair from my face. "Today's the big day," she said softly. "The day you finally become Mrs. Daniel Latin."

I swallowed, trying to match her excitement, but my lips barely curved. Olivia noticed instantly. Her eyes softened. "You don't seem happy," she said quietly. "Talk to me, Nora. Do you really want this?"

"Yes," I replied quickly, too quickly. "Of course, I do."

Olivia studied me for a moment longer, as though trying to read the truth behind my words. Finally, she nodded slowly. "Alright," she said, though her voice carried doubt. "If this is really what you want..."

"It is," I said, forcing a steady tone. "It's time I moved on."

She didn't argue further. Instead, she took my hand gently and turned toward the door. "Then let's go. Everyone's waiting."

Lolita followed us as we walked out of the room and down the grand staircase. My heart was pounding so hard I could feel it in my throat. The entire mansion seemed to buzz with excitement—guests laughing, music playing softly, and the faint scent of flowers filling the air.

When we reached the double doors of the grand hall, two warriors opened them wide. The sound of the crowd washed over me—applause, gasps, murmurs of admiration.

Everyone stood.

I stepped forward, the weight of my traditional attire heavy on my shoulders. My veil shimmered faintly beneath the lights as I walked slowly down the long aisle. Daniel stood at the front, smiling, his expression full of pride and affection. He looked happy.

And that should have made me happy too. But as I looked at him, I didn't see Daniel. I saw Calvin.

My heart clenched painfully.

When I finally reached Daniel, he whispered softly, "You look beautiful."

I forced a faint smile. "Thank you."

The ceremony began. The priest stepped forward, his voice booming through the hall, reciting the ancient words that bound mates in spirit, even if this was not a fated bond. Guests smiled, some even teary-eyed. But inside, I was falling apart.

My wolf whimpered weakly in my head. "Please, don't do this."

I shut my eyes tightly, fighting back the sting of tears. My heart was pounding so fast I thought it might burst. Each word from the priest felt like another weight pressing down on my chest.

Then came the final part, the marking.

"Now," the priest said, smiling warmly, "the groom may mark his bride as his mate."

Daniel turned to me, his expression excited, his eyes kind. He reached for my neck gently.

And just as his fangs grazed my skin—

BANG!

The great hall doors flew open with a force that shook the floor. Gasps erupted through the crowd. Every head turned toward the entrance.

My heart stopped. My breath caught in my throat.

And then... our eyes met.

Chapter 504: Refused

Nora's POV

The entire hall fell into stunned silence. It was Calvin. He stood at the entrance, tall, panicked, sweating, his dark eyes locking onto mine like I was the only person in the room. His chest heaved, his jaw tight, and for a moment, the whole world seemed to stop moving. Then his voice broke through the silence.

"This wedding isn't holding," he said, his tone rough, trembling with emotion. "Nora is my mate."

Gasps rippled through the guests. Olivia narrowed her eyes, Daniel stiffened beside me, and my heart... my heart stopped beating for a second. Calvin's eyes softened as he took a slow step forward.

"Please," he said, his voice breaking. "Please forgive me, Nora."

I stood frozen, unable to move, unable to breathe.

He continued. "I wasn't rejecting you because of who you are. I was rejecting you because of me. Because I was scared."

He paused, his throat bobbing as he swallowed hard. "You're everything I want, kind, selfless, brave. You make me feel things I thought I'd never feel again. That's what terrified me."

Whispers filled the hall, but he didn't care. His eyes stayed on me.

He took another step closer. "My first mate..." His voice cracked slightly. "She broke me, Nora. She betrayed me with another man, someone I trusted. I gave her everything, and she destroyed it. After that, I swore I'd never fall in love again. I thought the only way to protect myself was to never feel anything that deep again."

Tears burned in my eyes, but I refused to let them fall.

He shook his head, his voice shaking now. "But then you came along. And you ruined that promise, Nora. You made me feel again. You made me want again. And that scared the hell out of me. So, I pushed you away. I made excuses. I lied to myself, to everyone, just so I wouldn't fall."

He stopped, his gaze softening even more. "But I already fell. I've loved you from the moment you walked into my life. I was just too much of a coward to say it."

I could hear people whispering around us, feel the weight of hundreds of eyes watching, but it was like the world had faded to nothing but him.

He came closer now, just a few feet away. "Nora," he said quietly, "I love you. Please... don't marry him."

For a moment, I forgot how to breathe. The words I had waited so long to hear, the words I thought I would never get, hung between us like fragile glass.

But it was too late.

I blinked back the tears, forcing my lips to move even as my chest felt like it was shattering.

"Calvin..." My voice trembled. "It's too late."

He froze, disbelief flashing across his face.

I turned slightly toward Daniel, who stood stunned beside me, his expression unreadable. Then I looked back at Calvin, the man who had broken my heart long before I ever agreed to this wedding.

"You had your chance," I whispered, tears finally spilling down my cheeks. "You made me think I wasn't enough. You made me believe it. And now, when I'm finally trying to move on... you show up?"

Calvin shook his head, stepping closer, his voice breaking. "No. I was wrong. I see that now. Please, don't do this."

But I stepped back, my hand trembling as I held my veil. "You can't show up at my wedding and decide you want me just because you're scared of losing me."

His face fell completely. The pain in his eyes mirrored the one tearing through me.

"Please," he whispered again.

My voice cracked, barely a whisper. "It's too late, Calvin."

And before anyone could say another word, I turned away because if I looked at him a second longer, I might not be able to do what I wanted to do.

"Please, let's continue, Priest."

Calvin's voice broke through the murmurs again, louder this time, trembling, desperate. "No! This wedding can't continue."

I turned sharply toward him, my heart twisting. "What are you trying to do, Calvin? Use your Alpha authority to force me?"

His eyes widened, filled with hurt. "No," he said quickly, shaking his head. "I would never force you, Nora. I'm begging you... please."

His voice cracked on the last word. The strength I always associated with him, that firm, commanding presence, was gone. All that remained was a man on his knees emotionally, stripped of pride, pleading.

My wolf whimpered inside me, feeling his pain through the bond we both still shared.

My lips trembled. "Calvin, please... let me go."

He took a hesitant step forward, his voice low and trembling. "I can feel your pain, Nora. Don't do this. Don't end us like this."

I shook my head, my tears falling freely now. "You had months to fight for us. And you didn't. You had every chance to tell me how you felt, but instead, you made me believe I wasn't enough. You told me I didn't belong by your side."

"I was scared!" he shouted, the words slipping out in agony. "I didn't know how to love again. But I'm trying now. Please,"

I cut him off, my voice breaking. "And what happens when you stop trying? When the fear comes back? What if one day you look at me and realize you can't love me after all?"

He stood there, frozen. Silent. Because deep down, we both knew I was right.

My wolf whimpered louder, clawing at my chest, begging me to go to him, to forgive him, but my mind refused. I couldn't build my life on uncertainty.

"Please," he whispered again, softer this time, his voice barely holding together. "Don't marry him."

I closed my eyes. Every part of me wanted to run into his arms, but my head wouldn't let my heart win this time.

"No, Calvin." My voice came out barely above a whisper. "Let me go."

He stared at me for a long moment, eyes glistening, then slowly nodded. His lips parted, like he wanted to say something, but no words came out. Finally, he stepped aside, broken, defeated.

The hall was painfully quiet.

I turned to Daniel, my hands trembling. He looked at me with pity, not anger, as if he understood that no matter what happened next, this wasn't victory.

"Let's... continue," I said softly. My heart was breaking, but I forced my feet to move. The Elder hesitated, glancing between me and Calvin, but when I nodded, he began to resume the ceremony.

The moment felt heavy, suffocating. My heart pounded so loudly I could barely hear the words.

And then,

"This marriage cannot hold!"

The voice echoed through the hall like thunder.

Gasps filled the air again. I turned sharply, my breath catching in my throat.

At the entrance stood a pregnant woman.

Chapter 505: Betrayed

Nora's POV

I furrowed my brow, confusion twisting in my chest as I watched the woman take bold, hurried steps toward us. Her heels clicked sharply against the marble floor, echoing through the stunned silence of the hall. Before anyone could react, she raised her hand.

SMACK!

The sound of the slap echoed through the air. Everyone gasped. She had just slapped Daniel.

"You think I wouldn't find out?" she shouted, her voice shaking with rage. "You thought you could hide from me forever?"

Daniel's eyes widened in shock, his hand moving to his cheek. "What the hell are you doing here?"

My heart pounded as I looked between them, my voice trembling. "Daniel... what is going on?"

He didn't answer. His lips parted, but no sound came out.

The woman's eyes snapped toward me, burning with jealousy. "Don't act innocent," she hissed. "You really think he's yours? You think you could take what belongs to me?"

Before I could even move, she lunged toward me, her hand flying up to slap me.

But before the slap could land, a strong hand caught her wrist midair.

"Don't you dare," Calvin growled, his voice low and deadly calm. His grip was firm, his aura radiating Alpha dominance that filled the hall. "Touch her, and I swear, you'll regret it."

The woman froze, her lips trembling as she met his glare. Even the air seemed to tighten under his power.

I stood there, stunned, my breath shaky. Calvin slowly released her hand, his eyes still burning with warning.

I turned back to Daniel, my voice breaking. "What is going on?"

Daniel looked pale, sweat beading on his forehead. "Nora, I can explain."

"Explain what?" I snapped, my chest tightening.

The woman scoffed, stepping forward again. "You want the truth?" she spat. "I'm his mate. His wife. And the pup in my belly," she pressed a hand against her stomach, glaring at him, "is his."

The hall exploded with noise—gasps, whispers, shocked cries.

I staggered back a step, my mind spinning. "No... no, that's not possible."

Daniel's voice broke through the chaos, desperate. "Nora, please! Listen to me! She's lying. She's insane!"

But the woman scoffed, turning on him. "Oh, I'm insane? You mean after you abandoned me in Brooks Pack? After you left your pregnant mate to rot while you ran here to start a new life like nothing happened?"

I felt my breath catch. My hands trembled so badly, I nearly dropped my bouquet.

Daniel's face went pale. "I didn't know she was—"

I slapped him before I even realized I'd moved.

The sound was sharp, echoing through the hall. He froze, eyes wide, while I stood there trembling.

"She's pregnant, Daniel!" I screamed, tears streaming down my face. "You didn't know? You didn't know?"

He tried to reach for me, but I stepped back, shaking my head. "Don't touch me!"

The woman smirked bitterly, folding her arms. "You see now? You were about to marry a man who couldn't even claim his own child."

Gasps spread again through the guests.

I could feel every pair of eyes burning into me—pity, shame, sympathy. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me whole.

Daniel tried again, his voice cracking. "Nora, please, believe me! I left her because she made my life hell. She used the bond to control me. She's toxic."

"And yet," I cut in, my voice shaking but cold, "you were still bound to her."

He stopped.

"You were going to let me stand here," I continued, my throat tightening, "and mark me while your real mate and unborn child exist somewhere else?"

Daniel's lips trembled. "Nora—"

"No!" I shouted, my voice echoing through the hall. "This marriage is over."

The silence that followed was deafening.

I could feel Olivia's eyes on me, full of sympathy, and somewhere behind me... Calvin's presence. Heavy. Still. Watching.

My chest heaved as I tore the veil off my head, letting it fall to the floor. I turned toward Daniel one last time, my tears blurring everything.

"You broke me before this marriage even began," I whispered. "You and him both."

Then I turned, clutching my gown, and ran out of the hall before anyone could stop me.

I ran.

My gown dragged along the floor, the cold air outside hitting my face as I burst into the garden.

My chest burned, my vision blurred from tears. I stumbled near the fountain and finally stopped, clutching my stomach as I gasped for air. Everything—Daniel's betrayal, the humiliation, the whispers—spun in my head.

And then I heard footsteps.

I turned sharply, wiping my tears with the back of my hand.

It was Calvin.

He stopped a few steps away, his expression unreadable, but his eyes filled with concern. "Nora," he said quietly, "are you okay?"

A bitter laugh escaped me. "Do I look okay to you?" My voice cracked as I took a shaky step back. "How can I be okay, Calvin? How?"

He didn't answer, just watched me with that steady, calm gaze that only made me angrier.

"Please," I said, my voice trembling, "just leave me alone."

He didn't move.

"I said leave!" I snapped, the pain in my chest spilling out as anger. "If you think I'm going to come back to you because of what just happened, you're wrong!"

Calvin's face tightened slightly, but his voice remained gentle. "I'm not here to ask you to come back. I just needed to make sure you're okay."

"Okay?" I let out a broken laugh. "I'm not okay, Calvin. Not from betrayal, not from heartbreak, and definitely not from you."

He looked down, guilt flickering across his eyes.

"Leave," I whispered again, my voice hoarse.

"Nora—"

"Leave!" I yelled this time, my tears finally spilling over.

The garden fell silent.

Behind me, I heard soft footsteps approaching. Olivia's voice followed soon after, calm but firm. "Calvin."

He turned toward her slowly.

"Please," she said gently, "go back to your pack."

He looked between us—between my broken figure and his sister's pleading eyes—then finally nodded. "Alright."

He turned back to me, his voice low, heavy with sorrow. "I wish you happiness, Nora. Even if it's not with me."

And with that, he turned and walked away.

Something inside me cracked completely.

I fell to my knees, sobbing into my hands. Olivia was beside me in seconds, wrapping her arms around me, pulling me into her warmth.

"Shh... it's okay," she whispered softly.

I cried harder. "Why does it hurt so much, Olivia? Why does everything hurt?"

She stroked my hair gently. "Are you crying because of Daniel's betrayal... or something else?"

Her question made my breath hitch. Because she was right.

It wasn't just Daniel. It was Calvin too. The pain of losing him, of pushing him away even when part of me wanted him to stay—it was all too much.

I couldn't even speak.

Olivia cupped my face, forcing me to meet her kind eyes. "You know," she said quietly, "if you still want him, it's not too late to give him a chance."

I shook my head weakly. "It's too late."

She smiled sadly. "You're wrong. Calvin isn't a bad man, Nora. Not because he's my brother, but because I've seen what life did to him. Our parents left him alone too soon. He had to grow up carrying everyone else's weight. And then his mate—his first mate—broke him. He lost faith in love after that."

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I listened.

Olivia squeezed my hand. "He's not perfect, but he's real. If anyone deserves a second chance, it's him."

I couldn't speak, so I just nodded slowly, wiping my tears.

Then the sound of a car engine starting reached us from beyond the courtyard.

I froze.

"He's leaving..." I whispered.

Olivia's eyes widened. "Nora—"

But I was already running.

I ran down the path, my gown brushing against the flowers, my heart pounding in my chest. "Calvin!" I screamed, my voice breaking. "Calvin, wait!"

Tears blurred my vision as I turned the corner.

And suddenly, I collided with something solid.

Strong arms steadied me before I could fall.

I looked up, breathless, trembling—

And my heart stopped.

It was Calvin.

Chapter 506: Come Home

Nora's POV

His hands were still on my arms, steadying me as I looked up into those familiar, alluring eyes. For a moment, neither of us spoke. My breath came in ragged gasps, and the only sound between us was the soft hum of the morning.

"Calvin..." I whispered, my voice breaking.

He looked down at me, his jaw tightening as his thumb brushed a tear off my cheek. "You shouldn't be running in that dress," he murmured, his voice low but shaky. "You'll hurt yourself."

"I thought you were gone," I said, my throat tight. "I thought you left."

"I couldn't," he said quietly. "Not like that. Not when you were still hurting."

That did it. The tears I'd been holding back poured freely. "Why now, Calvin?" I cried softly. "Why do you come back?"

He exhaled deeply, his hand falling from my arm as he stepped closer. "Because I can't stop loving you," he admitted, his voice trembling. "I tried to fight it. I tried to bury it. But I can't. I'm tired of pretending I don't care, Nora. I do. More than I should."

I shook my head, wiping my face with shaky fingers. "You don't know what you want. You never did. One moment you push me away, the next you say you love me. You can't keep breaking me like this."

He cupped my face suddenly, gently but firmly, forcing me to meet his eyes. "I'm not here to break you again. I'm here because I finally want to heal with you." His voice cracked. "I don't know how to love right anymore. But I want to learn. I want you to teach me. Please."

My breath hitched. The pain in his eyes mirrored my own.

"I want to love you," he whispered. "Help me do that."

The silence was tense but not suffocating. Then, softly, he asked, "Will you come home with me?"

I blinked at him. "What?"

"Not as my mate," he clarified gently. "Not as anything you're not ready for. Just... come with me. Let's start again. No pressure. No pretending. Just us, getting to know each other the right way this time."

For a moment, I said nothing, just stared at him, the words sinking into me like warmth after a storm.

Then, unexpectedly, I let out a weak laugh. "You don't want to rush?"

He smiled faintly, his thumb brushing my jaw. "No. Not this time."

A tear slipped down my cheek as I looked at him, this broken, beautiful man trying to make things right. "That's too bad," I whispered.

His brow furrowed slightly. "Why's that?"

I let out a trembling chuckle, my voice barely above a whisper. "Because I do."

Something flickered in his eyes, surprise, then something deeper. "Really?" he murmured.

"Maybe," I breathed, stepping closer. "You think I can handle it?"

He smirked softly, the faintest trace of that old confidence returning. "I don't know, Nora," he said in a low voice, leaning in closer until his breath brushed my lips. "Can you?"

I didn't get to answer because before I could speak, his lips were on mine.

The kiss was slow at first, soft, trembling, filled with every emotion we'd both tried to bury. Then it deepened, desperate and real, weeks of pain melting into that single moment.

His hands slid to my waist, mine to his chest, and for the first time in what felt like forever, the world went quiet. No heartbreak. No noise. Just us.

When we finally pulled apart, our foreheads rested together, both of us breathless.

He whispered, "Come home with me, Nora."

I swallowed hard, my lips trembling. "Will your mother accept me?" I asked. Somehow, I was worried about what his mother would think. I knew she wasn't a bad woman; she had never treated me badly. In fact, in the few weeks I had gotten to know her, I could

tell she was a nice woman. But this was different. This was her son bringing a commoner home.

Calvin's eyes softened when I asked that question, the one that had been eating at me quietly since he'd asked me to come home with him.

"Will your mother accept me?" I asked again, my voice barely above a whisper.

For a second, he said nothing, then a small smile curved his lips. "She already knows," he said softly. "And yes, she'll accept you."

I blinked, surprised. "She... knows?"

He nodded slowly, his thumb brushing against the back of my hand. "She knew before I came here," he admitted, chuckling faintly. "I think mothers always do."

My chest tightened.

He took a step closer, his tone firm yet gentle. "But even if she didn't accept you, even if the entire world stood against us, that should never be your worry."

I frowned slightly, meeting his gaze.

He lifted our joined hands, his warmth steady against my skin. "I don't care about their opinions, Nora. Not my mother's, not the council's, not anyone's. The only opinion that matters is yours and mine. I choose you. That's enough for me."

The sincerity in his voice made my throat ache. He meant it.

For a moment, I couldn't speak, my heart fluttering painfully between disbelief and hope.

Then, he tilted his head slightly, that teasing glint flickering through his eyes again. "So," he began quietly, "will you let me date you?"

I blinked, caught off guard by his choice of words. "Date you?"

He grinned faintly. "Yeah. No more pushing, no more confusion. I want to get to know you, really know you, the way I should have from the start. The way you deserve."

My lips trembled into a soft smile despite the tears still lingering in my eyes. "You're serious?"

"Dead serious," he said with a playful smirk. "But I'll only take that as a yes if you say it."

I laughed softly, shaking my head. "You're impossible."

"Maybe," he said, his grin widening, "but you're still here."

I looked up at him then, really looked at the man who had broken me, yes, but who had also finally stood before me ready to love me right. The fear that once held me back began to melt away.

"Yes," I whispered, smiling through my tears. "And I'll go home with you."

His eyes softened, relief and something like joy flooding them. "Thank you," he murmured, his hand coming up to cup my cheek again. "You won't regret it, Nora."

I smiled faintly. "You better make sure I don't."

He chuckled quietly, that low, deep sound I hadn't realized I missed so much, and then he leaned in.

The moment his lips touched mine, everything else faded. The pain, the doubt, the fear, all of it dissolved into that single kiss. It was tender but certain, soft yet full of promise.

When we finally pulled apart, he rested his forehead against mine, his breath warm against my skin.

"Welcome home," he whispered.

Chapter 507: Back Home

Selene's POV

As the car drove into the familiar gates of home, a strange, heavy feeling crept over me, that old, suffocating sensation I knew too well. The closer we got to the mansion, the tighter it wrapped around me. It was the same every time. That invisible weight pressing down on my chest, the reminder that here, I wasn't free.

For the past few days, while I was away, I'd felt different, lighter. I could breathe without thinking twice, laugh without feeling like I was being watched, and speak without fear of being corrected. But now, now that the gates had closed behind us, that freedom seemed to fade with every second.

I turned my head slightly, staring out the window. The garden was just as perfect as ever, the trimmed hedges, the roses in neat rows, the marble fountain glistening under the sun. Everything was too perfect, like it was all pretending to be something it wasn't.

My hands tightened in my lap as the car rolled to a stop in front of the house. A guard opened the door for me, but I didn't move right away.

"Miss Selene?" the guard said softly.

I nodded and stepped out, forcing a polite smile. The breeze brushed against my hair, carrying that familiar scent of home: lavender, stone, and control. I hated it.

As I walked toward the front doors, I could already feel their eyes—the maids, the guards, everyone pretending not to stare but doing it anyway. The front doors swung open before I reached for the handle. Two sentries dipped their heads. I didn't slow down. If I hesitated, the walls would close in, and I'd forget how to breathe.

The sitting room waited like a courtroom. Heavy curtains. Dark wood. Portraits of stern men who stared like they were still judging the living. My father sat in his usual chair, back straight, hands steeped, while my brother stood at the window, shoulders squared, face blank. Alpha posture. Puppet eyes.

I stopped at the edge of the rug and bowed my head out of habit. "Father. Brother."

My father stood up without saying a word and walked quickly across the room. Before I could understand what was happening, he slapped me. The sound was so loud that the maid standing nearby jumped. My head turned to the side, and I could taste blood in my mouth.

For a heartbeat, there was nothing, no sound, no breath, just the echo of his palm and the quiet shame of the rug under my feet.

Then his voice, low and venomous. "I gave you a simple task."

I lifted my gaze to him slowly. My cheek throbbed in time with my pulse. "It wasn't—"

"A simple task," he repeated, eyes cold. "Kill Lord Frederick. The vampire who butchered your mother. The only thing this family has asked of you since the day you could hold a blade. And what did you do?"

I didn't answer. I didn't trust my voice not to shake.

He leaned closer. I could smell the mint on his breath, the old steel of his temper. "You failed. Not only did you fail, you dragged them into it. Olivia. Lennox. You put their lives in danger for nothing."

His words landed like stones.

My father straightened, disgust twisting his mouth. "You are a useless daughter."

Something burned behind my ribs. I glanced toward my brother, searching for the smallest sign of spine, of loyalty, of anything human. He kept his face turned to the window, jaw clenched, hands folded behind his back like a perfect statue.

My father let out a humorless breath. "I wish Olivia were my daughter. She would have done a great job."

Heat rushed up my throat. "Would she have?" I asked softly.

He ignored the question, turning away like I'd already been dismissed. "You'll be confined to the estate until I decide what to do with you. No visitors. No correspondence. No more embarrassments."

The old Selene would have lowered her head and swallowed the order until it cut her from the inside. The Selene who had felt free for a few days refused.

"Fuck off," I said.

The room snapped to attention. My brother flinched; my father went very still.

I didn't wait for the consequences. I pushed past him, past the portraits and the perfectly polished table and the door that had always felt like a cage, and I didn't stop until I reached the stairs. No one followed. Maybe they were too shocked. Maybe they were deciding what punishment would look like this time. I didn't care.

My room greeted me with the same familiar lie: soft blue drapes, a bed too neat to sleep in, shelves of books I'd read and re-read to distract myself from the way my life had been arranged for me. The windows were open. The garden's scent drifted in.

I went straight for the cabinet and poured a glass of whiskey. It sloshed against the sides of the crystal like a heartbeat. I took a swallow so large it burned all the way down and dared the tears to fall.

One slipped free anyway.

I wiped it away with the back of my hand, angry at myself for bleeding where he'd see it later. I stared at my reflection in the dark window: a woman with a reddening cheek and eyes that refused to break. All my life I'd been groomed for one thing, sharp voice, silent feet, clean kill. I could disassemble a rifle in thirty seconds. I could map a patrol route from a single night's walk. I could lie without blinking.

But I couldn't kill the man I'd been promised to hate, because the first time his scent hit me, I knew. The bond slid into place like it had been waiting since before I was born.

Lord Frederick. Enemy. Mate.

I took another swallow and let the truth sit heavy on my tongue: if I were given the chance again, I still didn't know if I could do it. Not because I was weak. Because I was stupidly, dangerously in love with him.

The worst part? That love hadn't made me softer. It had made me cruel—to myself, to the oath I'd swallowed as a child, to the memory of my mother's blood on cold tile.

The phone on my nightstand vibrated.

I ignored it. Let it rattle against wood until it stopped.

It started again. More insistent this time, like a fly I couldn't swat. I crossed the room, snatched it up, and stared at the screen.

Unknown number.

My thumb hovered over decline. I let it ring until it nearly died, then, on some impulse I couldn't name, I dragged the slider.

"Hello?"

Static, then a breath. A voice I knew like the shape of my own name.

"Selene," he said quietly. "It's Frederick."

Everything in me went very still. I pressed the glass against the table too hard and the ice clicked. "How did you get this number?"

"Please don't hang up." No command in his tone. Just the kind of urgency that made my pulse stutter. "I have information about your mother's death."

The room tilted a fraction. My free hand closed into a fist at my side.

"I know what you were told," he said. "I know what they made you believe. But what happened that night wasn't what it seemed."

"You murdered her." The words came out steadily. I was proud of that. "That's all that matters."

A beat of silence. "No," he said softly. "That's not the truth."

I laughed bitterly. "You expect me to believe you?"

"I don't expect anything," he said. "Except that you deserve to know what I know. If you still hate me after that, I won't fight you." Then he paused. "Meet me. One hour. The old conservatory at the edge of your family's southern grounds. No guards. Just you."

Chapter 508: Meet Up

Selene's POV

"Why should I believe you?" I asked, frowning. "You might want to kill me."

On the other end, I heard him exhale sharply—the sound of a man fighting for patience. "Stop it," he said tightly. "You know I will never kill you. I like you, Selene."

"Like me?" I gave a bitter laugh. "Or do you mean you like my body?"

"Selene," his tone dropped—low, rough, strained. "Don't do that."

I smirked even though he couldn't see it. "Do what? Say the truth to your face?"

"Don't make this hard." His voice hardened. "You think I like this? You think I enjoy chasing after the woman who's been trained to put a blade in my chest?"

Something twisted in my stomach—not fear. Something else. "Then why are you calling?"

"Because I want to prove my innocence," he snapped. "Not to anyone. I don't care what anyone thinks. But you... I care what you think about me, and you're still the only person who deserves to know what really happened to her."

For a moment, neither of us spoke. The silence stretched, heavy and sharp, until I realized how ridiculous it was that his anger almost made me smile. God, I was supposed to hate this man. But look at me—listening to the sound of his voice like it was the only thing keeping me grounded.

He must've sensed the shift because his tone softened again. "Please," he said, quieter this time. "Come, Selene. Just come. Let me explain everything."

"I can't," I said under my breath.

"Why not?"

"I'm grounded," I admitted, hating how small my voice sounded when I said it.

There was a pause—then his voice rose, rough and furious. "He what?"

I winced. I could feel the heat of his anger even through the phone, a wild energy pushing through the connection. "Selene, if he laid a hand on you—"

"Frederick, don't—"

"I'm coming there," he cut in, his voice sharp and angry. "Right now."

My heart skipped. "No! You can't."

"You think I'll just sit back while that bastard locks you up?"

"You'll make it worse!" I hissed, glancing at the door like he could somehow appear there. "If you show up here, it'll be war. My father and brother won't hesitate to attack you."

"I don't care."

"Well, I do!" I snapped, desperate now. "Please, Frederick. Don't come. I'll... I'll sneak out. Just give me an hour."

He went silent for a moment, and then finally, through gritted teeth, "Fine. But if you're not there, I'm coming."

"Understood."

I ended the call before he could say anything else.

For a moment, I just stood there, my heart pounding, my hand trembling slightly around the phone. Then I tossed it on the bed and started moving.

I changed quickly into something dark—jeans, a loose shirt, and my old leather boots. Clothes that wouldn't make noise when I ran. I tied my hair back and opened the wardrobe, pulling out the dagger hidden beneath my mother's old shawl.

"I don't trust Frederick," I muttered, sliding it into the sheath strapped to my thigh. "You're insane," I added under my breath.

I cracked the door and listened. Silence. The guards had likely been told I was confined to my room, which meant they wouldn't expect me to move. That was their first mistake.

The hallway beyond was dim. I stepped out, quiet as breath, and moved toward the servants' passage—the one that led straight to the back staircase. My father didn't know I still remembered every creaking board in this house.

At the landing, I paused. Two guards were posted at the main entrance below, chatting softly. The back door was closer. I veered left, slipping behind the heavy curtains near the storage hall. My pulse hammered. I waited until one of them turned his head away, then moved.

The cold night air hit me as soon as I stepped outside.

Freedom.

For the first time since I'd arrived, I let myself breathe properly. I ran across the courtyard, keeping to the shadows, my boots silent on the gravel path. The southern gardens stretched ahead.

I didn't stop running until I reached the hedge. My breathing was fast, and my heart was pounding hard in my chest. I looked back at the house. The lights in the windows were shining, and the guards were walking near the gate, and no one was coming for me.

I resumed running, the night air cold against my face. My legs burned, but I didn't stop until the tall glass building came into view—the old conservatory at the edge of the grounds.

I slowed down, my breath coming out fast and shaky. My eyes searched the shadows. "Frederick?" I whispered. No answer. The place was quiet—too quiet.

Panic started creeping in. What if he tricked me? What if someone else was here instead? I looked around again, hugging my arms close. The air felt heavy, my heartbeat loud in my ears. My wolf was alert and ready to shift.

Then I smelled it—that deep, smoky scent that always made my wolf stir. My chest tightened. I turned quickly, and there he was.

Frederick stepped out from behind one of the tall vines. His black shirt clung to his chest, and his silver hair looked messy, like he'd been running too. He looked tired, exhausted — like he hadn't rested in days — and still impossibly handsome.

My wolf purred inside me, happy to see him. I hated that. I lifted my chin, trying to sound calm even though my heart was racing. "So?" I said coldly. "What is it you wanted to tell me?"

He didn't answer. He just walked closer—slow, steady steps that made the space between us smaller and smaller. My breath hitched. I stepped back, but my back hit the cold glass wall.

"Frederick," I warned softly.

He didn't stop. His hand reached out and caught me by the waist, pulling me gently toward him. His touch was firm and warm—it made my wolf shiver with pleasure.

My eyes met his, and for a moment, I forgot how to breathe. The anger, the fear, everything disappeared, leaving only the sound of our hearts beating too close together.

"Frederick..." I whispered.

He leaned in slightly, his breath brushing my ear. "I miss you."

Chapter 509: Don't Believe

Selene's POV

Something inside me trembled—not because I believed him, but because a part of me wanted to. I pushed him away hard, my hands flat against his chest.

"Don't," I snapped. "Don't ever touch me again."

Frederick stepped back, his jaw tightening. I could see the flicker of pain in his eyes, but he didn't move closer. "Selene—"

"What do you want to show me?" I cut him off sharply, folding my arms to keep my hands from shaking. "You didn't drag me out here just to play games."

He sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. "Just answer one question first."

I frowned. "What question?"

He looked at me carefully, his voice calm but serious. "How was the relationship between your father and your mother before she died?"

The question caught me off guard. I blinked. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Just answer me," he said quietly.

I hesitated. "They weren't close. My mother was kind, but Father—" I stopped. "He was... strict. Controlling. Why are you asking this?"

Instead of replying, he pulled his phone from his pocket and handed it to me. "Watch this."

I looked at the screen. It was a video—shaky, recorded in a dim room. A woman appeared, sitting in front of the camera. She looked to be in her late forties, her eyes red like she'd been crying.

Then I saw him—Frederick—sitting across from her, his face calm but stern. "Tell her," he said in the video.

The woman's voice trembled. "I... I did it. I poisoned her."

My blood ran cold.

Frederick's voice came again in the video. "Why?"

She broke down, tears spilling. "Because your father paid me to."

My hands shook as I stared at the screen. "No..." I whispered. "No, that's not true."

Frederick's voice in real life was quiet. "It is."

I looked up at him, my voice cracking. "You told this woman to lie. You forced her to say that."

His expression stayed steady. "I didn't."

"You're lying!" I shouted, shoving the phone back into his chest. "You expect me to believe that my father killed my mother?"

Frederick met my eyes—hurt flashing across his face, but not anger. "I knew you wouldn't believe me," he said softly. "That's why I brought more proof."

"Come with me," Frederick said suddenly. His tone changed. "I know a witch. She can help you... see your mother. Just for a minute. I paid her a lot to do this."

My breath caught. "What?"

He stepped closer, his eyes fixed on me. "You don't have to believe me. But if you talk to her—if you talk to your mother—you'll know I'm not lying."

I shook my head slowly. "That's impossible. My mother's gone."

"She's not alive," he said quietly, "but her spirit hasn't fully crossed over. The witch can make the connection for a short time."

My heart twisted painfully. The idea was crazy... but the thought of hearing my mother's voice again made my throat tighten. "No," I said quickly, backing away. "This is insane. I'm not doing this."

Frederick sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Selene, please. I wouldn't risk this if it wasn't real. You have to see her. It's the only way you'll believe me."

I stared at him, torn between anger and desperate curiosity. His eyes—those stormy gray eyes—looked raw and honest. I hated that it made me want to trust him.

Finally, I whispered, "You're crazy."

A faint smile tugged at his lips. "Maybe. But so are you for meeting me out here."

He wasn't wrong.

I took a deep breath and muttered, "Fine. Just... one minute. Then we're done."

Frederick's shoulders dropped in relief. "That's all I need."

He led me to his car parked behind the old conservatory. I hesitated by the door, glancing at him one last time. "If this is a trick—"

He cut me off gently. "You'll be armed. You can kill me yourself."

I didn't answer, but I slid into the passenger seat. The engine started with a low growl, and the road ahead stretched into darkness.

Neither of us spoke during the drive. The air felt thick with questions I wasn't ready to ask. My fingers brushed the dagger strapped to my thigh, just in case.

After nearly twenty minutes, Frederick turned down a dirt path leading into a dense forest. The car bumped over roots and rocks until we reached a small wooden cabin. Smoke curled from the chimney, and faint lights flickered through the windows.

"This is it," he said, parking the car.

I stepped out slowly, the air colder here, heavier. "You're sure about this?" I whispered.

He nodded once. "Yes. She's expecting us."

My heart pounded. Every instinct screamed that this was a bad idea—but still, I followed him toward the witch's door.

As we approached, the door creaked open on its own. Candlelight spilled across the floor.

A woman stood inside, wrapped in dark robes, her silver eyes glowing faintly under the flickering flames.

She smiled—a slow, welcoming smile. "Ah," she said softly. "You must be Selene."

My breath hitched.

"Come in, child," she said softly, her voice smooth yet echoing strangely, like two people speaking at once.

I froze at the doorway, my hand tightening on the dagger hidden beneath my coat. Frederick gently touched my elbow. "It's alright," he murmured. "She won't hurt you. I won't let that happen."

The witch smiled faintly. "I only hurt those who are evil, and child, you are not."

That didn't help. I didn't trust her or Frederick himself.

The inside of the cabin smelled like herbs and smoke. Candles flickered on every surface, their wax dripping down into messy rivers. Jars of strange liquids filled the shelves—some glowing faintly, others so dark I couldn't tell what was inside.

In the center of the room stood a small table covered with runes and a silver bowl filled with water.

"Sit," the witch said, pointing to a wooden chair beside the table. "Let's begin."

Chapter 510: The Truth

Selene's POV

I didn't move. "What are you going to do?"

"Help you speak to the one who has been waiting for you," she said simply.

My chest tightened. "My mother."

"Yes."

I turned to Frederick, but he was already by the wall, his eyes fixed on me.

"This isn't safe," I whispered.

"Neither is living a lie," he said quietly.

I swallowed hard and sat down. The chair creaked under my weight. The witch began to hum, a low sound that vibrated through the air. She took a small vial from the shelf and poured a drop of thick, black liquid into the silver bowl. The water hissed, steam rising in slow, curling ribbons.

"Look into the water," she commanded.

My fingers trembled as I leaned forward. The surface rippled. For a moment, all I saw was my reflection—pale, tired, scared. Then the image shifted.

The smoke thickened. A face appeared—familiar eyes, gentle smile, long dark hair. My heart stopped.

"Mother?" I whispered.

Her image flickered, then steadied. "Selene," she said, her voice soft, echoing like a memory.

Tears filled my eyes instantly. "It's really you..."

"I don't have long," she said quickly, her gaze full of sadness. "Listen to me, my star. Everything they told you about my death—it's not true."

My breath caught. "You mean... Father didn't—"

"It was your father," she interrupted. "He feared I would reveal his plans—his dealings with the dark packs. Your father is a monster, Selene. He kidnaps little girls and sells them to the dark packs. When I discovered the truth, he paid one of Frederick's maids to poison me, to make it look like Frederick killed me."

I shook my head violently. "No... no, that can't be true."

Her expression softened. "He's changed you, Selene. But it's not too late. Don't let his hatred guide your heart. You were meant for more than revenge."

The image began to fade, the smoke swirling faster.

"Wait!" I cried, reaching out. "Please, don't go!"

But her voice was already fading. "Now you know the truth. Trust the bond fate gave you. He isn't your enemy..."

And then she was gone.

The bowl went still. The cabin was silent except for the sound of my own heartbeat.

I stared at the water, trembling. Frederick slowly approached, his voice low. "Are you okay?" He tried touching me, but I pulled away—not because I didn't want him to touch me, but because I hated myself.

I turned to him, tears streaking down my cheeks. I couldn't breathe. My whole body felt like it was burning from the inside out. "All my life," I said through shaking breaths, "I was trained to kill you. To hate you. To make you pay for something you never did. And the person who murdered my mother..." My voice cracked. "It was my own father!"

The pain ripped out of me like a scream. I wanted to hit something, to break something—but instead, I just sank to my knees. The tears came fast and hot, spilling down my cheeks before I could stop them.

Frederick moved toward me slowly, his steps careful, like I was something fragile. When he reached me, he knelt and placed a hand on my shoulder. "Selene," he said softly.

I didn't pull away this time. I couldn't. The warmth of his touch broke me completely, and I leaned into him, sobbing into his chest. His arms came around me, strong but gentle, holding me like he was afraid I'd fall apart if he let go.

"I hate this," he whispered into my hair. "I hate seeing you cry. Please, stop."

But I couldn't. The tears wouldn't stop. I'd spent years holding them back, pretending to be strong, and now they were finally free.

Frederick's voice stayed low and calm. "You don't have to worry about anything. As for your father—I'm already gathering evidence. Every deal, every crime, every secret he's tried to hide. I'll make sure the council knows the truth."

I looked up at him, my vision blurry. "You'd do that for me?"

He smiled faintly, brushing a tear from my cheek. "No, Selene. I'd do it for you and for her."

That broke me all over again. "Thank you," I whispered, my voice barely holding together.

Before he could answer, the witch interrupted. "Selene," she said slowly, her tone almost teasing. "Aren't you going to tell him the truth?"

My heart stopped.

Frederick turned his head toward her. "What truth?" he asked, frowning slightly.

I froze. Panic flooded through me. My pulse raced so fast it hurt. "I—"

The witch just smiled knowingly and turned back to her candles.

I turned to Frederick, shaking. "I'm sorry," I whispered.

His brows furrowed. "Sorry? For what?"

I looked at him, my voice barely a breath. "Because I should have told you before now..."

"Selene," he said gently, moving closer. "What are you talking about?"

I swallowed hard. "We're... mates."

Frederick went still. The silence was so thick it hurt.

I forced myself to keep talking, the words trembling out of me. "Since you're a vampire, you couldn't sense it—but I could. From the first moment I saw you at the party... my wolf knew. But I didn't want to believe it. I thought you killed my mother. I hated you. I told myself the bond was a curse."

Frederick's expression shifted—shock, then confusion, then pain. He took a slow step back, as if he needed space to breathe.

"You knew," he said quietly, his voice breaking. "All this time... you knew?"

Tears filled my eyes again. "Yes."

"And you still wanted to kill me?" His tone wasn't angry—it was hurt, raw and deep.

I nodded weakly. "Because I didn't want it to be true. I didn't want you to be my fate."

Frederick's jaw tightened, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. "And now?"

I stared at him, my heart pounding so hard I thought it might burst. "Now... I don't know."

He turned away slightly, running a hand over his face. "You should have told me, Selene." His voice was low and heavy with emotion. "You should have trusted me."

"I was scared," I said, my voice cracking. "I thought you were my mother's killer. What did you expect me to do?"

Silence hung in the air, and I tried to move closer to him. "Do you hate me now?"

He looked at me, his eyes dark and full of pain. "I don't hate you," he said softly. "But I don't know how to feel right now."