

Fated To Not Just One, But Three #Chapter 591: Can't Be - Read Fated To Not Just One, But Three Chapter 591: Can't Be

Chapter 591: Can't Be

Olivia's POV

My head was pounding.

Not a small ache. Not a dull throb.

It felt like someone had taken a hammer and struck my skull from the inside.

I groaned softly and turned my face into the pillow, squeezing my eyes shut. The room spun anyway. My mouth was dry. My body felt heavy. Wrong.

Slowly, I forced my eyes open.

The world came into focus in pieces. The curtains. The faint morning light. The familiar ceiling.

Then I saw him.

Kaine.

He was sitting in the chair near the wall, still, silent, watching me.

My heart jumped violently in my chest.

"What—" I croaked, my voice rough. "What are you doing here?"

He straightened immediately, like a guard caught out of position. "You woke up."

I frowned, confusion sliding quickly into unease. Why was he in my room? Why did my chest feel tight just looking at him?

Then—

Memory hit.

Not all at once.

In fragments.

The drink.

The anger.

The grief.

His arms around me.

My lips on his.

Oh Moon.

I sucked in a sharp breath and pushed myself upright, the motion making my head throb harder.

"No," I whispered. "No... no."

My eyes flew to him, wide with shock. "What happened?" I demanded. "Last night—what did we do?"

He stood up slowly, carefully, like he was approaching something fragile. "Nothing happened," he said quietly. "You drank too much. You were grieving. I stayed to make sure you slept."

I stared at him.

My stomach turned.

Nothing happened?

Images flashed again—my hands on him, my mouth on his, calling him Lennox.

A sound tore out of my throat, halfway between a laugh and a sob.

"Oh my God," I whispered.

I pressed my hands to my face, horror crashing down on me in waves.

How could I have done that?

How could I have thought—no, believed—that he was Lennox?

How could I have kissed another man?

My chest burned with shame.

I looked at him again, and this time disgust curled in my stomach. Not just at him.

At myself.

"Get away from me," I said sharply.

He stopped where he was.

"You let me think you were him," I snapped, my voice shaking. "You let me touch you. You let me—"

"I didn't," he said immediately. "I stopped it. You were drunk. I never took advantage of you."

That didn't help.

It made it worse.

I swung my legs off the bed, standing despite the dizziness. "I saw his body," I said, my voice rising. "I buried him. I cried over him. How could I think you were him?"

I laughed again, broken and bitter. "Levi and Louis—"

I froze.

My blood went cold.

They must have felt it.

The bond.

The kiss.

They must have felt me kissing another man...

Fuck!

I felt sick.

I turned on Kaine, my fury flaring hot and sharp. "I never want to see you again."

His jaw tightened, but he said nothing.

"You will never speak of this," I continued. "Not to Levi. Not to Louis. Not to anyone. This never happened. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Luna," he said quietly.

I swallowed hard. "You are reassigned. Immediately. I'll give you another duty—far from me."

He nodded once. "As you wish."

The words felt like knives. I felt pained.

I wrapped my arms around myself, shaking. "Get out."

He hesitated for half a second, then turned and walked to the door.

Before he left, he paused.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "For your pain."

Then he was gone.

The door closed.

And I stood there alone, my heart in pieces.

What had I done?

I sank back onto the bed, my head in my hands, shame and grief tangling so tightly I couldn't tell where one ended and the other began.

"I messed up," I whispered to myself... How could I have kissed another man... How could I let myself feel so cheap...

Suddenly, the door to my room opened, and Levi walked in. Fear and panic gripped me. Was he here because he felt the kiss... because he felt me kissing Kaine? Shit. How do I explain this... How do I explain that I was drunk... I wasn't myself, and for Kaine... he will be in a big mess. Levi and Louis will kill him for this.

Fear clenched my chest. I was ready for it.

The anger.

The shouting.

The accusation that he felt it.

I braced myself, my heart pounding so hard it hurt, my mind racing through a thousand explanations I would never be able to say out loud.

But Levi didn't explode.

He didn't snarl.

He didn't glare at me like I had betrayed something sacred.

He just stood there.

Quiet.

Too quiet.

His eyes moved over me slowly, taking in my pale face, the way I was gripping the edge of the bed, the faint tremor in my hands.

Then he asked, calmly, "Did you drink last night?"

The question landed harder than any accusation could have.

I didn't answer.

I couldn't.

My silence was answer enough.

Levi exhaled through his nose and shook his head once, frustration flickering across his face. "I told you not to," he said. Not sharply. Not cruelly. Just... tired. "You haven't touched alcohol in years, Olivia."

I looked up at him then, my confusion cutting through the panic.

That was it?

That was why he was here?

Not because he felt something tear through the bond.

Not because he sensed betrayal.

Not because he knew.

Just... the drinking?

"You shouldn't do this to yourself," he continued, rubbing a hand down his face. "Grief doesn't mean you get to destroy what's left of you."

I stared at him, my mind spinning.

He didn't know.

He didn't feel it.

Neither did Louis.

They should have.

The moment my lips touched Kaine's, the bond should have reacted. There should have been pain. Shock. Something sharp and unmistakable that screamed wrong.

But there had been nothing.

And now Levi was standing here, angry—but not that angry.

How was that possible?

I swallowed hard, my voice barely steady. "You're... you're not angry about anything else?"

He frowned slightly. "Anything else like what?"

My heart skipped violently.

"No," I said quickly. Too quickly. "Nothing."

Levi studied me for a long moment, suspicion flickering—but not the kind I feared. This was concern. Worry. The kind that came from someone who thought he was watching me unravel, not betray him.

"You scared me," he said finally. "You locked yourself away all day. Then one of the servants mentioned you asked for liquor."

My stomach twisted.

"I'm not stopping you from mourning," Levi continued, his voice quieter now. "I know you loved him. I know this hurts more than anything. But drinking yourself into oblivion isn't honoring Lennox."

The mention of his name sent a sharp ache through my chest.

"I know," I whispered.

He stepped closer but stopped short, respecting the space between us. "I just... don't want to lose you too."

That broke something in me.

I looked away, blinking hard. "You won't."

Levi sighed. "Get some rest. Drink water. I'll have the healer check on you later."

He turned toward the door, then paused.

"And Olivia?"

I tensed.

"Yes?"

"Next time you feel like drowning," he said quietly, "come find me. Or Louis. Don't face it alone."

He left without another word.

The door closed.

And I sat there, shaking.

He didn't feel it.

They didn't feel it.

Something is definitely wrong.

If Kaine wasn't bound to me, then why did his presence feel so right?

Why did my wolf go quiet around him?

Why did his scent calm me faster than anything had since Lennox died?

And worse—

Why didn't Levi or Louis feel anything at all?

I pressed my palms into my eyes, my head aching.

Something wasn't adding up.

This wasn't just grief.

This wasn't just alcohol.

This was wrong in a way I couldn't name yet.

And somewhere deep in my chest, a cold certainty settled in—

They should have felt it.

The moment my lips touched Kaine's... the moment my heart reacted the way it had no right to... something should have snapped. The bond should have screamed. There should have been pain. Anger. A sharp warning that I had crossed a line I could never uncross.

But there had been nothing.

And that terrified me.

I pressed my palms to my temples, trying to calm the pounding in my head. My thoughts were a mess, tumbling over each other, refusing to line up.

This doesn't make sense.

Slowly, I leaned back against the headboard and stared at the wall in front of me. The room felt too quiet, like it was listening.

Kaine is just a stranger, my mind whispered.

Then why did his presence feel so right?

Why did my wolf settle so easily around him?

Why did his scent calm me faster than sleep, faster than time, faster than anything since Lennox died?

My throat tightened.

"No," I said aloud, my voice firm even as my chest ached. "No."

I wasn't going there.

I couldn't.

Kaine was not Lennox.

He couldn't be.

I had seen Lennox die.

I had watched his life leave his eyes.

I had held his cold hand.

I had cried until my chest burned and my voice was gone.

I had stood at his grave while the earth covered him, inch by inch, until there was nothing left to see but dirt and stone.

I saw his body.

I saw him decay.

That truth was carved into me.

My hands curled into fists on the bed.

"This is grief," I whispered again, like saying it enough times would make it true. "This is my mind breaking."

But my wolf stirred uneasily inside me.

What if it isn't? She whispered.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

"No."

You once changed your face, she pressed softly. You once hid who you were.

My breath caught.

That memory hit too close.

I had changed my face before.

I had hidden my identity to survive.

I had walked among people who didn't know who I really was.

I shook my head hard, as if I could shake the thought loose.

"That's different," I muttered. "That was magic. That was strategy. That was—"

That was possible, my wolf finished.

My heart started to race again.

I pushed the thought away with everything I had.

"No," I said louder. "Kaine can't be Lennox. That's impossible."

Why would Lennox hide from me?

Why would he come back and pretend to be a guard?

The pain of those questions was too much.

I swung my legs off the bed and stood, even though the room tilted slightly. I walked to the window and pulled the curtain aside, letting the morning light spill in.

The world outside looked normal.

Peaceful.

My stomach twisted violently.

"No," I whispered again, weaker now. "I won't believe that."

I straightened and wiped my face, forcing myself to breathe slowly.

Kaine was just a guard.

A man who reminded me of my mate because I was broken and hurting and desperate.

That was all.

That had to be all.

I turned away from the window and looked back at the room.

"I refuse," I said firmly. "I refuse to believe it."

Chapter 592: Discovery

Olivia's POV

TWO DAYS LATER

It had been two full days since I last saw Kaine.

Not that I cared.

That was what I kept telling myself.

Yet the feeling wouldn't go away.

It sat low in my stomach, heavy and restless, like something unfinished. Like a knot pulled too tight. Ever since I reassigned him to front-door duty, everything felt off. And that annoyed me more than it should have.

I tried to drown myself in work.

Council matters. Pack reports. Meetings I barely listened to. I checked on the boys constantly—Liam most of all—watching him laugh with Leon and Leo, watching him pretend he was okay. I smiled for them. I praised the servants. I acted like a Luna who had everything under control.

But the moment I was alone, the pain and heartbreak pressed me. I cried in my sleep and in my bed, wishing all this was a dream.

I hadn't seen Kaine in the corridors. Not near my room. Not outside the boys' quarters. Not once had I felt that strange, steady presence that always made my chest tighten before I noticed him.

Good, I told myself.

That was the point.

And yet—

That night, as dusk settled over the pack and the sky darkened into deep blue, I found myself pacing my room without realizing it. I stopped by the window, staring down at the courtyard, my fingers curling into the fabric of my sleeve.

Why did this feel like loss?

I shook my head sharply.

This was ridiculous.

He was just a guard.

A mistake.

A reminder of things I needed to forget.

Still, when I finally left my room to get some air, my steps carried me forward without thought. Past the inner halls. Past the stairs.

Toward the front doors.

I froze halfway there.

What am I doing?

I almost turned back.

Almost.

But the uneasy pull in my chest only grew stronger, so I forced myself to keep walking, my expression calm, my posture composed. A Luna taking an evening walk. Nothing more.

The front hall was quiet, lit by torches and soft moonlight filtering through the high windows.

And there he was.

Kaine stood at his post near the entrance, hands clasped behind his back, armor clean, posture straight. He looked exactly like he always did—calm, controlled, unreadable.

But seeing him again hit me like a punch to the chest.

Something inside me twisted painfully.

He noticed me immediately.

Of course he did.

His head dipped in a respectful bow. "Luna."

Silence fell between us.

It stretched.

Uncomfortable.

Heavy.

I hated that he wasn't looking at me the way he used to—quietly attentive, steady. Now his gaze was fixed forward, distant, like a wall I had ordered him to build.

Good, I told myself again.

This is good.

But my wolf stirred uneasily, pacing inside me like she didn't agree.

"How are the shifts?" I asked, just to fill the silence.

"Quiet," he answered. "No disturbances."

Another pause.

I searched his face without meaning to. He looked tired. Not weak—never that—but there were shadows under his eyes I didn't remember seeing before.

Guilt pricked at me.

I pushed it down.

"You will remain here until further notice," I said coolly.

"As you wish, Luna."

There it was again.

That phrase.

It scraped against something raw in my chest.

I turned away abruptly. "That will be all."

I walked away before he could say anything else.

My heart was pounding far too fast by the time I reached the stairs.

What is wrong with me?

That night, sleep refused to come.

I lay awake, staring at the ceiling, my thoughts spiraling despite my efforts to stop them. The kiss. The silence. The way Levi and Louis hadn't felt anything. The way my wolf reacted to Kaine like she recognized him.

Like she trusted him.

"No," I whispered into the darkness.

This meant nothing.

It couldn't.

I had seen Lennox die.

I had buried him.

Kaine was not Lennox.

He couldn't be.

Still... the thought wouldn't stay buried.

And deep down, a question refused to let me rest.

If Kaine was just a guard—why did it feel like I had sent something precious away from me and locked the door behind it?

I pressed a hand to my chest, my breath uneven.

"I'm imagining things," I told myself firmly.

"Are you sure you are imagining things?" my wolf snarled.

I swallowed hard and closed my eyes, my imagination going wild... Is Kaine really Lennox? But why? Why would Lennox be Kaine? How the hell is that possible? I saw his decaying body.

I shook my head. There was only one way to end this madness.

One way to silence the voice in my head.

One way to prove—to myself, to my wolf—that I was not losing my mind.

I had to see it.

I had to see Lennox's grave again.

"I'm sorry," I whispered into the darkness of my room. "I have to do this."

My wolf stirred uneasily, but she agreed to it.

Because somewhere deep down... she wanted the truth too.

I waited until midnight.

Until the pack slept.

Until the halls fell silent and the guards grew fewer, their attention dull with routine. I wrapped myself in a dark cloak, pulled the hood low, and slipped out of my room without summoning anyone.

This had to be done by my hands.

If I brought someone with me, I didn't trust them to keep quiet.

The night air was cold as I crossed the grounds. Every step toward the graveyard felt intense, like the earth itself was trying to pull me back.

You saw him die, I reminded myself. You buried him. This is pointless.

Yet my feet kept moving.

Lennox's grave stood where it always had—fresh earth, still not fully settled. They hadn't sealed it yet. No stone slab. No cement. Just soil and a temporary marker with his name carved deep.

My throat burned.

"I'm sorry," I whispered again as I knelt. "Forgive me."

I found the shovel leaning against the tree nearby, left there after the burial. My hands trembled as I gripped the handle.

Then I started digging.

The first few shovels were easy.

The earth was loose, soft from recent work. Each thrust sent dull sounds into the night—scrape, thud, scrape. My breathing grew heavy as my arms began to ache.

I didn't stop.

I couldn't.

Dirt piled beside me, clinging to my clothes, my hair, my hands. Sweat broke out across my skin despite the cold. My heart hammered so loudly I was sure someone would hear it.

This is wrong, my mind screamed. This is cruel. You're disturbing him.

Tears streamed down my face as I dug deeper.

"I'm sorry," I whispered over and over. "I'm so sorry, Lennox. I just—I need to know."

My arms burned.

My back screamed.

Then—

Thunk.

The shovel hit something solid.

I froze.

My breath caught painfully in my throat.

Slowly, carefully, I brushed away the dirt with shaking hands until the dark wood appeared beneath my fingers.

The coffin.

My heart felt like it stopped beating.

I stared at it for a long moment, my vision blurred by tears, my body trembling violently.

"This is it," I whispered. "This ends now."

I forced myself to move.

I forced my fingers beneath the lid.

Forced my strength to hold.

With a broken sob, I pushed.

The lid creaked as it shifted.

Then opened.

The scream never came.

Because my voice had disappeared.

Why?

Because the coffin was empty.

No body.

No bones.

No scent of decay.

Nothing.

Just dark, hollow space staring back at me.

I stumbled backward, falling into the dirt, my breath coming in short, broken gasps.

"No," I whispered. "No... no, no, no."

I scrambled forward again, my hands moving inside like I had somehow missed him.

Nothing.

Nothing at all.

The world tilted violently.

"I saw you," I whispered, my voice cracking. "I saw you dead. I touched you. I cried over you."

My chest burned like it was being torn open.

"That wasn't a dream," I said aloud, as if the night could argue with me. "That wasn't a lie."

My wolf rose fully now, her presence sharp and clear.

Then why is the grave empty?

I shook my head violently. "No. No, this doesn't make sense."

Images slammed into me all at once.

Kaine not submitting to Levi's Alpha command.

His scent calming me instantly.

My wolf going silent around him.

The kiss—and the bond not reacting.

Levi and Louis feeling nothing.

My stomach dropped.

My hands began to shake harder.

"It can't be," I whispered.

But the truth was standing right in front of me.

Or rather—

Missing.

The coffin was empty.

Lennox had never been here.

A cold, terrifying realization settled into my bones.

"I didn't bury you," I whispered hoarsely.

My breath hitched as tears poured freely down my face.

"You were never here."

My wolf's voice was calm now. Certain.

You've already met him.

My chest tightened painfully.

"Kaine," I whispered.

The name tasted different now.

He wasn't a mistake.

He wasn't a coincidence.

And suddenly, the question wasn't if Kaine was Lennox.

It was—why would Lennox let me believe he was dead?

I covered my mouth with both hands as a sob tore free, my whole body shaking in the cold night beside an empty grave.

"You lied to me," I whispered in pain.

And for the first time since Lennox "died," I wasn't grieving anymore.

I was afraid.

Afraid of why he was doing what he did.

Chapter 593: Step Ahead

Olivia's POV

I didn't sleep at all.

Not even for a second.

I lay on my bed all night, staring at the ceiling, my mind running in endless, cruel circles. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw the empty coffin again.

Kaine was Lennox.

I had no doubt anymore.

Not in my heart. Not in my soul. Not in my wolf.

God, I was so stupid.

How did I miss it? How did I explain it away so easily? The signs had been there—clear as day. The pull. The familiarity. The way my body reacted to him without permission. The way my wolf went silent around him, calm and safe like she was home.

I had gone through this myself once. I had changed my face. Changed my identity. Hid in another identity. That alone should have been enough for me to recognize it.

But I refused to believe it.

I had told myself I saw Lennox die. I had touched his body. I had smelled the decay. I had cried over him until my voice broke and my chest felt like it would cave in.

That memory had kept me blind.

"God," I whispered, dragging a hand down my face as I paced my room.

My eyes flicked to the wall clock.

5:00 a.m.

I hadn't even closed my eyes.

I kept replaying it over and over—how was it possible? How could he be alive? How could someone declared dead, buried, and mourned come back like this? And more than that—how could he sit back and watch us suffer? Watch me break. Watch the boys cry?

How could he pretend?

Anger burned hot in my chest.

I wanted to storm into his room. To grab him. Shake him. Demand answers.

How did you survive? Why did you let us think you were dead? Why did you let me kiss you thinking you were someone else? Why did you let me bury an empty coffin?

So many questions.

Too many.

I stopped pacing and laughed quietly, bitter and humorless.

"No," I said aloud. "Not yet."

I lifted my chin, my anger at its peak.

Two can play this game.

If Lennox thought he could hide in another identity, then fine. I would let him. I would watch. I would listen. And when the time came, I would corner him with the truth he was trying so hard to bury.

My wolf stirred inside me.

What are you planning? She asked, wary but alert.

"Nothing," I replied calmly. "You're going to stay quiet. You're going to watch. Just like I will."

She didn't argue.

Because she knew.

By the time the sky began to lighten, exhaustion settled into my bones—but my mind stayed sharp. When the clock finally read 7:00 a.m., I forced myself to move.

I went to the boys' room.

Liam, Leon, and Leo were already awake, sitting on the bed together, still half sleepy but smiling when they saw me. That smile almost broke me.

"Mom," Liam said softly. "I had a dream."

I sat beside him, brushing his hair back gently. "What kind of dream?"

He hesitated, then said, "I saw Daddy Lennox."

My breath caught—but I kept my face calm.

"He was dead in the dream," Liam continued, frowning. "But... it didn't feel scary."

I smiled softly.

Inside, something twisted—relief, sadness, certainty, all tangled together.

"You're very brave," I told him quietly.

Leon and Leo climbed into my arms, and for a moment, everything felt normal. Like this world hadn't shattered at all.

Their caregiver arrived soon after, cheerful as ever. I kissed each of them goodbye, hugged them tightly, and watched them leave for school like nothing was wrong.

The moment the door closed, my calm vanished.

I stepped into the corridor and stopped a passing guard. "Send Kaine to my room," I said evenly.

"Yes, Luna."

I returned to my room and stood by the window, my heart pounding—not with fear, but anticipation.

I already knew the truth.

This wasn't about finding out if Kaine was Lennox.

This was about forcing him to admit it.

Minutes later, a knock sounded at my door.

"Come in," I said.

The door opened, and he stepped in, dressed neatly in the guard's uniform.

Our eyes met—just for a second—before he lowered his head and looked away.

Every instinct in me screamed to move.

To run to him.

To hit him.

To scream at him for what he had done... for what he had let us believe.

But I didn't.

I inhaled slowly and forced myself to stay where I was.

"Good morning, Luna," he said respectfully, his head bowed.

That alone made my chest tighten.

Lennox... bowing.

A man born to lead.

An Alpha raised with power in his blood.

A man who had once stood taller than everyone in this pack—now standing in front of me like a shadow, eyes lowered, voice respectful.

How were you able to live like this?

What are you planning?

I studied him in silence as he stood there, head bowed, hands clasped behind his back like he had done nothing but this his whole life.

"Kaine," I said calmly.

"Yes, Luna."

I took a slow breath, letting my expression settle into something cool and official. If he was going to play this game, then I would play it better.

"You are reassigned," I said.

His shoulders stiffened—just barely. Anyone else would have missed it.

"Effective immediately, you will serve as my personal guard."

His head lifted before he could stop himself. His eyes met mine for half a second too long.

"Is... that a good idea?" he asked carefully.

There it was.

I felt something twist in my chest, sharp and almost painful—but I didn't let it show.

I raised an eyebrow. "You don't question my decisions."

His jaw tightened. "I didn't mean—"

"You are a guard," I cut in coolly. "You follow orders. You don't evaluate them."

His lips parted like he wanted to say something, but he held himself back.

"As you wish, Luna," he said, bowing again.

Lennox.

I turned away so he wouldn't see the way my hands trembled for just a second.

"Walk with me," I said. "There's something I need to attend to."

He fell into step beside me, half a pace behind, exactly where a guard should be. The halls were quiet at this hour, servants moving softly, guards posted at intervals.

We walked in silence for a while.

Then I spoke, casually—too casually.

"I'm going to see Liam. His illness is getting worse." I lied... this was a trap.

I watched him from the corner of my eye.

He stopped.

Not fully. Not obviously.

But his breath hitched.

Just once.

His control snapped for a second, and panic flashed across his face before he masked it. His hand twitched at his side like he wanted to reach for something that wasn't there.

"What's wrong?" I asked lightly, turning to face him.

He recovered too quickly. "Nothing, Luna."

I tilted my head. "Are you sure?"

His eyes searched my face now, worried and focused. "You said his illness was getting worse."

Ah.

Got you.

A normal guard would have nodded. A normal guard would have waited for instructions.

He didn't.

His voice dropped, urgent despite how hard he tried to control himself. "What do you mean worse? Has the healer—"

He stopped.

Too late. I already got him.

The silence between us grew thick.

I stared at him, my heart pounding so loudly I was sure he could hear it.

A guard wouldn't panic over a child he barely knew.

A guard wouldn't forget himself like that.

Only a father would.

I felt tears sting my eyes, but I forced them back with everything in me.

I straightened, my voice turning cold. "That is none of your business."

He flinched.

"I can take care of my son without your concern," I continued sharply. "Remember your place."

"I—" He swallowed hard. "Yes, Luna."

The pain in his eyes nearly undid me.

I turned away before I lost control. "You will escort me to the eastern wing in the next one hour," I said. "You are dismissed."

He nodded, his face carefully blank, but his shoulders were tense now, rigid with something that looked very much like fear and worry.

We walked the rest of the way without another word.

When we reached the corridor to Liam's room, I stopped. "That will be all."

He hesitated.

Just a second.

I could clearly notice he really wanted to go in with me... He wanted to see Liam, but of course he can't say it.

"You may leave," I ordered coldly.

Reluctantly, he bowed deeply. "As you wish."

And he walked away.

I watched his back retreat down the hall until he disappeared around the corner.

The moment he was gone, the strength drained out of me.

A single tear slid down my cheek.

I didn't wipe it away.

There was no point pretending anymore.

"It's you," I whispered to the empty corridor. "It's really you."

My Lennox was alive.

And he had been standing right in front of me this whole time—bowing his head, hiding his heart, pretending to be nothing more than a guard while he watched me mourn him.

I pressed my hand to my chest, breathing through the ache.

Why, Lennox?

Why would you do this to us?

I frowned in anger and wiped my tears with the back of my both hands. Whatever game he thought he was playing—I was already two steps ahead.

Chapter 594: The Fight

Lennox's POV

I couldn't concentrate.

I wasn't myself—if anything, I was going insane.

Olivia had just told me that Liam's condition was getting worse, and I didn't know what to do. I wanted to see him so badly, but I couldn't. I couldn't show my emotions or seem to care too much, because I was just a guard—and a guard wasn't supposed to worry this much about Liam.

Where I stood, I watched Olivia talking to a woman about some upcoming project. She looked calm. Relaxed. Unbothered. It made me wonder if Liam was doing okay now... or if she was just very good at hiding her emotions.

Should I ask her how Liam is doing? I thought to myself.

There was no harm in it.

All I had to do was ask—simply and casually.

After she finished speaking with the woman, Olivia turned and began walking down the corridor.

I followed a few steps behind her, keeping the right distance. Not too close. Not too far. Just a guard doing his duty.

My heart was pounding so hard I was afraid she might hear it.

I told myself to stay quiet.

To let it go.

But the words slipped out anyway.

"How is Liam doing?" I asked, keeping my tone as neutral as I could. "Is he... any better?"

She didn't stop walking.

For a few seconds, she didn't answer at all.

Her silence felt heavier than any shout.

Then she spoke.

"Not really," she said quietly.

Each word landed like a blow.

"He's eating less," she continued, her voice calm but tired. "He wakes up crying most nights. Sometimes he refuses to talk to anyone. Other times, he pretends he's fine just so his brothers won't worry."

My chest tightened painfully.

She slowed her steps but still didn't look at me.

"The healer says it's not just physical," she went on. "It's grief. Losing his father has taken a toll on him in ways a child his age shouldn't have to carry."

Father.

The word pierced straight through me.

I clenched my fists behind my back, trying to control my emotions. I kept my gaze forward, kept my face blank, even as something inside me cracked. I had done this. My death. My disappearance. My decision. And now my son was paying for it.

Olivia stopped walking so suddenly that I almost ran into her.

She turned to face me, her eyes cold, unreadable.

"Spar with me."

The words caught me off guard.

"What?" I asked before I could stop myself.

She was already moving, heading toward the training yard. "I said spar with me."

I followed instinctively, my steps measured. "Luna," I said carefully, "is this really a good idea?"

She didn't answer.

The training yard was empty at this hour, the air cool, the ground packed firm beneath our boots. Weapon racks lined the edge. Without hesitation, Olivia walked straight to them and reached out.

She picked a spear.

My chest tightened.

I stepped forward slowly and took one as well. I rolled my shoulders, grounding myself, reminding myself who I was supposed to be.

A guard.

Not an Alpha.

Not Lennox.

She turned to face me, spear already raised, her stance sharp and aggressive. There was no warmth in her eyes. No hesitation.

Just anger.

"Defend yourself," she said.

And then she came at me.

Fast.

Too fast.

I barely had time to lift my spear before she struck, the force of her blow rattling up my arms. I stepped back, blocking, redirecting, careful not to overpower her.

But she wasn't holding back.

She attacked again, and again, each strike fueled by something raw and burning. Rage. Grief. Accusation.

It felt like she was trying to hurt me.

No—like she wanted to.

I dodged, parried, kept my movements tight and controlled, refusing to press an advantage. Every instinct screamed at me to disarm her, to end this before she hurt herself.

But I couldn't.

Not like this.

"Come on," she snapped, circling me. "Is that all you've got?"

I said nothing.

She lunged again, spear slicing through the air. I twisted aside, feeling the wind of it pass my shoulder.

"I heard you're a good fighter," she went on, her voice sharp, taunting. "That's how you became my personal guard, isn't it?"

Her strikes grew faster.

Angrier.

She wasn't testing skill anymore.

She was attacking me.

I blocked another blow, the clash of metal ringing through the yard. My arms burned from holding back, from constantly redirecting instead of countering.

Then it happened.

She feinted left and struck right.

I was a fraction too slow.

Pain flared as the blade sliced across my upper arm.

"Damn—"

Blood welled instantly, dark against my sleeve.

She froze for half a second, surprise flickering across her face.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong.

She hadn't meant to stop.

She wanted to keep going.

I straightened despite the sting, lowering my spear slightly. "Luna," I said firmly, forcing calmness into my voice, "we should stop."

Her jaw clenched.

"No," she said flatly. "Not yet."

She attacked again.

I barely blocked in time, pain shooting through my wounded arm. If this continued, I wouldn't be able to keep controlling the fight.

If I were Lennox, I knew exactly what to do.

I would step in close.

I would trap her weapon.

I would pull her into my chest and comfort her, letting her rage burn itself out against me.

But I wasn't allowed to do that.

I was just a guard.

"Luna," I tried again, backing away, "you're hurt. You're not thinking clearly."

Her eyes flashed.

"Don't tell me what I'm feeling."

She came at me harder, driving me back step by step. I caught her spear shaft with mine, locking them together, metal scraping, our faces suddenly too close.

Her breath was uneven.

Her eyes were blazing.

I lowered my voice. "This isn't about training."

She shoved me back violently. "Then fight."

I tightened my grip, blood dripping down my arm, my control hanging by a thread.

If I lost myself now—if I fought her the way I could—everything would unravel.

So I did the only thing I could.

I dropped my spear.

It hit the ground with a dull clang.

The sudden stillness shocked her.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"I won't fight you like this," I said quietly. "Not when you are not yourself."

Her chest rose and fell rapidly, anger warring with something else in her eyes.

I stood there unarmed, bleeding, exposed—waiting to see if she would strike again.

And praying she wouldn't.

Her eyes went cold.

"Leave," Olivia said flatly. "Leave before I chop your head off."

There was no anger left in her voice this time.

I didn't argue.

I inclined my head once, turned, and walked out of the training yard with my arm bleeding freely down my sleeve.

By the time I reached my room, my arm was throbbing badly.

I shut the door behind me and leaned against it for a moment, breathing hard. My control was hanging by a thread. I stripped off the bloodied uniform, hissing as fabric tugged against the cut, then tossed it aside and sat on the edge of the bed.

"What the hell is wrong with her..." I muttered under my breath.

No—that wasn't fair.

I knew exactly what was wrong with her.

Me.

My death.

I grabbed a cloth and pressed it against the wound, my jaw clenched as pain flared. I should have locked the door, because I regretted it when the door suddenly pushed open.

I froze.

Olivia walked in.

My head snapped up, tension ripping through me instantly. "Luna—"

She didn't look at my face.

She looked at my arm.

The blood.

Her jaw tightened, and without a word, she crossed the room and grabbed my wrist. Her touch was firm, practiced, familiar in a way that made my chest constrict painfully.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, my voice low, and respectful.

She ignored the question.

She sat me down properly, her fingers already glowing faintly as she placed her palm over the cut. The familiar warmth of healing magic spread through my skin, sinking deep, knitting flesh together.

I sucked in a sharp breath.

Not from pain.

From her.

"Luna Olivia," I said quietly. "You don't have to—"

"I injured you," she said, her voice tight. "It is right I heal you."

Her eyes never left my arm.

The wound closed beneath her touch, skin smoothing as if it had never been there. When she was done, she pulled her hand away quickly, like she'd burned herself.

Silence fell between us.

She finally looked up at me then, and for a split second, something cracked in her expression—regret, guilt, fear—before she shoved it all back behind her walls.

"You didn't fight back," she said.

"I couldn't," I replied honestly.

Her lips pressed together. "You could have hurt me."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you?"

Because you're mine.

Because hurting you would break me.

Because every instinct in me exists to protect you.

"I'm just a guard...", I said.

She didn't let me finish.

Her free hand came up, grabbing my arm, yanking me down to her level. The motion was sudden, fierce—and then her mouth crashed into mine.

Chapter 595: The set up

Lennox's POV

Fuck.

I wanted to kiss her back.

Everything in me was screaming to. My body leaned toward her before my mind could catch up, before reason could remind me of everything at stake. Her lips were warm. Familiar. Too familiar. For one terrifying second, it felt like coming home.

But I couldn't.

I couldn't let this happen again.

So, with what might have been the hardest decision of my life, I pulled her away and stepped back, putting space between us. My heart was hammering so hard it hurt.

"What are you doing?" I asked hoarsely as I wiped my mouth with the back of my palm, more shaken than I wanted to admit. My thoughts were a mess. Shock. Desire. Panic.

Our eyes met.

I expected guilt. Regret. Anger.

But that wasn't what I saw.

I saw certainty.

Something sharp and knowing burned in her gaze, like she had just confirmed something she'd been searching for.

My stomach dropped.

I swallowed hard. "You—"

She grabbed my shirt again—not to pull me closer this time, but to keep me from stepping back.

"I like you," she said quietly.

The words hit harder than any blow she'd landed in the yard.

I froze.

"What?" The sound came out rough, like my throat had forgotten how to work.

Her grip tightened. "I'm attracted to you," she said, meeting my eyes without flinching. "And before you say anything—yes, I know how wrong that sounds. I know what I'm supposed to feel. I know I'm still mourning. But this—" She pressed her palm lightly to my chest. "This is real."

My mind went blank.

Of all the things I'd braced myself for—anger, suspicion, accusation—this hadn't been one of them.

"I—" I stopped, swallowed. "Luna, this isn't—this isn't right."

She smiled faintly, not amused. "You always say that when you're scared."

I shook my head. "I'm not scared. I'm trying to protect you." And myself. And everything I was barely holding together. "I'm a guard. Your mates—Levi, Louis—if they so much as suspect—"

"They won't," she cut in. "And even if they did, I'm the Luna. I make my choices."

"That doesn't make it right," I said quickly. "You're grieving. You're not yourself. This is pain looking for somewhere to land."

Her eyes softened, but her voice didn't. "Don't tell me what I'm feeling."

I forced myself to breathe. "You're the Luna. You could have anyone you want. But not me. Not like this."

For a heartbeat, she looked like she might step back.

Then she leaned in and kissed me.

It stole the air from my lungs. Every nerve lit up, every memory rushing in at once. I tasted her—familiar and devastating—and my hands curled into fists at my sides as I fought the urge to pull her in, to give in, to stop pretending I wasn't unraveling.

I wanted her.

Gods, I wanted her.

But wanting her wasn't enough to make this okay.

I shoved her away.

I meant to do it gently. I swear I did.

But panic and restraint tangled together, and my hands came out harder than intended. She stumbled back, surprise flashing across her face, and fell onto the floor with a soft, stunned sound.

Silence crashed down around us.

"Olivia—" I said immediately, horror spiking through me.

She sat there for a second, blinking, more shocked than hurt. Then she pushed herself up, anger flaring hot and bright in her eyes—but she didn't say a word. Instead, she just turned around and left.

Where I stood, I continued staring at the door, wondering, "What the hell has gotten into you, Olivia..." I muttered under my breath.

Was she really ready to make out with me?

With me—as Kaine. A guard. A nobody.

The thought twisted my gut painfully. And worse, I knew exactly why it had almost happened. Why it felt so easy. So dangerous.

Because it wasn't Kaine she wanted.

It was Lennox.

And that meant this couldn't continue.

Not like this.

I dragged a hand down my face and exhaled slowly, forcing myself to think like an Alpha again, not a man unraveling at the feet of the woman he loved.

This was getting too close. Too messy.

I needed answers.

I needed to remember why I was here in the first place.

Someone had tried to kill me.

Someone powerful enough to ask a maid and a guard to do it.

If I stayed tangled in Olivia's emotions, I'd lose sight of that truth.

"I have to end this," I said quietly to the empty room. "I need to find out who wants me dead."

I straightened. If I wanted information, I needed to move.

I changed into a fresh guard uniform, adjusting the straps, settling back into the role I wore like a second skin. Kaine the guard. Calm. Charming. Unassuming.

Then I stepped back outside.

The pack grounds were busy now—servants moving about, guards changing shifts, the normal rhythm of life continuing as if everything hadn't shattered beneath it.

I scanned the area slowly, my gaze searching.

The maid.

The one whom Golden had overheard speaking about the plot to kill me.

There I found her.

Near the laundry area at the far side of the courtyard.

She was bent over a basin, sleeves rolled up, hands submerged in water as she scrubbed fabric against a washboard. Her hair was pulled back loosely, a few strands clinging to her damp neck.

I took a breath.

And turned on the charm.

I approached casually, making sure my footsteps were heard so I wouldn't startle her. "Busy morning," I said lightly.

She glanced up, surprised—and then smiled.

"Guard Kaine," she said, a little shy. "Yes. Always busy."

I leaned against the wooden post nearby, relaxed. "You make it look easy."

She laughed softly. "You guards say that because you don't do it."

"Fair," I said with a grin. "I wouldn't last an hour."

Her cheeks warmed at that, and I filed it away. Good. She was receptive.

I let a moment pass, then said casually, "I was wondering... would you like to take a walk tonight? After your duties. Just around the grounds."

She blinked. "A walk?"

"Yes," I said smoothly. "Nothing improper. Just some air. Company."

She hesitated, biting her lower lip. "There are many girls here," she said cautiously. "Why me?"

I met her eyes, lowering my voice just slightly. "Because you caught my attention."

That did it.

She flushed visibly, ducking her head as she scrubbed at the cloth again, suddenly very focused on her work. "You shouldn't say things like that so easily."

"I only say what I mean," I replied.

She risked another glance at me, curiosity winning over caution. "And what if I say no?"

I smiled. "Then I'll respect it."

Silence stretched.

Then she sighed softly. "I finish late. After sunset."

"I'll wait," I said.

She nodded, a small, nervous smile on her lips. "Okay."

She gathered her basket and hurried off before she could change her mind.

I watched her go, my expression calm even as my thoughts sharpened.

Good.

Maids are known to be talkative—especially to their boyfriends. They whispered things when they thought no one important was listening.

And tonight, I intended to listen.

As she disappeared down the path, my jaw tightened.

Olivia... forgive me.

I wasn't doing this because I wanted to.

I was doing this because someone had tried to erase me from the world.

And I was going to find out who.

I was still watching the path where the maid had disappeared when I felt it.

That sharp pull at the back of my neck.

Alpha attention.

I turned slightly—and saw Levi.

He was standing a few yards away, speaking quietly with another guard. His posture was relaxed, but his eyes were sharp, always watching, always calculating. When his gaze landed on me, it held.

Then he lifted his chin once and gestured for me to come over.

Shit.

I straightened my shoulders and walked toward him, keeping my steps steady, my expression neutral. Just a guard answering a call. Nothing more.

As I approached, Levi dismissed the other guard with a brief wave. The man bowed and left immediately, giving us space.

Levi didn't speak right away.

He just stared at me.

Not openly hostile. Not friendly either.

Just... studying.

The silence stretched.

I forced myself not to react, not to shift, not to give anything away. I'd faced council members, enemy Alphas, execution grounds—but something about Levi's stare made my skin prickle.

Finally, he spoke.

"There's something about you," he said slowly.

My pulse kicked, but I kept my face blank. "Sir?"

His eyes narrowed slightly. "I don't know what it is," he continued. "But I've felt it since the day you arrived. You don't move like the others. You don't react like the others."

Careful. Very careful.

"I try to do my duty well," I replied evenly.

Levi snorted softly. "That's not it."

He circled me slowly, like a wolf assessing another. I stayed still, my eyes forward, hands clasped behind my back.

"You don't submit easily," he said. "Not fully. Even when you bow, there's restraint. Control."

My jaw tightened, but I said nothing.

He stopped in front of me again. "Tell me, Kaine—where did you train?"

"Different places," I answered. "Before I came here."

"Hm." His gaze sharpened. "You fight like someone who's had real battles. Not drills."

I met his eyes briefly, then looked away respectfully. "I've survived."

That seemed to amuse him.

A slow smile curved his lips—but there was no warmth in it.

"Good," Levi said. "Then you won't mind this."

He stepped back and motioned toward the open training yard nearby.

"Let's spar."

My chest tightened.

"Sir?" I said cautiously.

He rolled his shoulders, already loosening up. "Just a friendly match."

Nothing about his tone was friendly.

Then he added, almost casually, "We'll make it interesting."

I stayed silent, waiting.

"If I win," Levi said, eyes locked on mine, "I get to do whatever I want with you."

It sounded like a threat... a trap.

"And if I win?" I asked carefully.

A corner of his mouth lifted. "Then you get one request to make, and I'll fulfill it."

Chapter 596: Lashes

Lennox's POV

I stared at Levi, trying to read what was going on behind his eyes.

Why a spar? And why add a prize to it?

Nothing about this felt casual. Levi never did anything without reason—and the look on his face told me this wasn't about training or entertainment.

My first instinct was to refuse.

Every part of me wanted to say no, to step back, to avoid this entirely. Sparring with an Alpha—with Levi—was dangerous on too many levels. If I fought the way I truly could, I'd expose myself. If I refused, it would look like fear... or worse, disrespect.

And you don't disrespect an Alpha.

So I inclined my head. "As you wish."

His lips curved slightly, but there was no humor in it. "Good."

We moved toward the weapon rack. Warriors were already starting to gather, sensing something worth watching. I reached for a short blade, deliberately choosing something basic. Levi picked twin batons—his favorite.

He looked angry.

Not explosive anger. Controlled. Cold. The kind that sat deep in the bones.

This wasn't a friendly spar.

We took our positions in the circle, warriors forming a loose ring around us. I rolled my shoulders once, grounding myself, forcing Kaine to the surface.

Not Lennox. Never Lennox.

"Begin," Levi said.

He came at me hard.

Fast, powerful, precise.

I blocked the first strike easily—too easily—and had to consciously slow myself down, letting the impact shove me back a step. Levi pressed forward, his movements sharp, aggressive, and full of anger.

It was almost... surreal.

Fighting Levi like this—pretending I didn't know his habits, his timing, his tells. I knew exactly when he would faint. Exactly when he would overcommit. Exactly how to end this in less than a minute.

If I were Lennox, this would already be over.

But I wasn't allowed to be him.

So I fought like Kaine.

I let my footing slip just enough. Let my guard lag a heartbeat too slow. Let him land blows I should have avoided.

The warriors started cheering, calling Levi's name, feeding his dominance, his pride. If I wanted to crush his ego, all I had to do was win.

But I didn't.

I never did.

This wasn't the first time I'd let Levi win. And deep down, I knew he knew that.

He shifted into his signature move—the one he always used when he thought he had the upper hand. I saw it coming from a mile away.

I could have dodged.

I didn't.

His baton swept my legs out from under me, and before I could roll, he was on me—knee to my chest, weapon pressed to my throat.

The yard erupted in cheers.

Levi had won.

But he didn't look satisfied.

He leaned down, close enough that only I could hear him. His grip tightened just slightly—not enough to hurt, but enough to warn.

"Interesting," he murmured.

My heart skipped.

"I didn't feel anything," he went on quietly. "No bond reaction. No shock."

Then his voice dropped, low and sharp.

"So tell me, Guard... why do you have the scent of my mate on you?"

Shit.

I kept my face blank, my breathing steady, even as every instinct screamed. Levi's eyes burned into mine, searching, calculating.

"I may not have felt anything," he continued, teeth clenched, "but don't think I won't notice that."

Before I could respond, he stood abruptly and stepped back.

"Our deal stands," he said loudly. "I won."

The warriors roared in approval.

Levi turned to another guard. "A hundred strokes. Now."

The words hit like a hammer.

The crowd went silent for half a second—then erupted again, shocked, excited, thrilled.

I stayed on the ground for a moment longer, forcing myself to breathe.

This was his plan all along.

And as I was hauled to my feet, one truth rang louder than anything else—

Levi knew.

He might not understand how. He might not have proof.

But he knew something about me didn't add up.

Two guards each grabbed my arms as they dragged me to the pillar where I would be tied and flogged. I realized Levi had a plan all along. He didn't just want to have a friendly match with me. He knew from the beginning that I had Olivia's smell on me, and he used this fight as a means to punish me so no one would know the actual reasons.

As I was being tied to the tree, anger flared inside me, but I held myself back. I wasn't Lennox. I was Kaine, and I couldn't come out of character now.

The first lash came down hard.

So hard my breath tore out of my lungs before I could stop it.

Pain exploded across my back, white and blinding, like fire ripping through skin. I clenched my jaw, my hands curling into fists as the rope bit into my wrists. Without my wolf—without his strength, his healing—I was just flesh and bone.

Just a man.

The second lash followed almost immediately.

Then the third.

Each strike landed with a sharp crack that echoed through the yard, the sound cutting deeper than the pain itself. My back burned, skin splitting, heat spreading fast and merciless.

"Keep going," Levi ordered coldly.

No hesitation. No mercy.

"Until it reaches a hundred."

I lifted my head slowly, my vision blurring, and stared at him through the haze. He stood there with his arms crossed, expression carved from stone, eyes dark and unreadable.

I didn't recognize him.

This wasn't the brother who used to laugh too loudly, who always stepped in first when things got ugly, who hated unnecessary punishment.

What happened to you, Levi?

Another lash tore into me.

My muscles jerked violently, a low groan ripping from my chest before I could stop it. Blood began to trail down my sides, soaking into my trousers, dripping into the dirt below.

They weren't using normal lashes.

I could feel it.

These were barbed.

Designed to tear, not just sting.

By the thirtieth stroke, my back felt like raw meat. Every breath hurt. Every movement sent fresh agony screaming through my body. Sweat poured down my face, my teeth grinding so hard my jaw ached.

I forced myself not to scream.

I wouldn't give him that.

I stared straight at Levi, even as another strike landed, and another.

You planned this.

This was never about a spar.

He had known from the start—about Olivia's scent, about something being wrong. And instead of confronting me privately, he chose spectacle. Punishment disguised as honor.

A way to hurt me without revealing why.

The yard was silent now.

No cheers. No laughter.

Just the sound of the lash and my labored breathing.

Then—

"STOP."

The word cut through the air like thunder.

The whip froze mid-swing.

My heart stuttered.

I knew that voice.

Boots pounded across the dirt, fast and furious. The guards hesitated, uncertainty flashing across their faces.

"Untie him. Now."

Olivia.

I lifted my head just enough to see her storm into the yard, fury radiating off her in waves so strong it felt like pressure against my skin. Her eyes went straight to my back—and her face went white.

Then red.

Then something terrifyingly calm settled over her features.

She turned slowly toward Levi.

"What," she asked quietly, "is going on here?"

Levi frowned, clearly annoyed at the interruption. "We had a bet," he said flatly. "He lost."

I felt her aura spike.

"A bet?" she repeated.

"Yes," Levi said. "He agreed to the terms."

She looked back at me, at the blood soaking through my clothes, at the way my shoulders trembled despite my effort to stay still.

Then she snapped back to Levi.

"And you thought strokes was appropriate?"

Levi ignored her and turned to the guards. "Continue."

Her voice echoed.

"Don't you dare."

Every guard froze.

Silence slammed down over the yard, thick and suffocating.

Olivia stepped between Levi and me, her back to my ruined body, her chin lifted, her hands clenched at her sides.

"I said stop," she repeated, her voice deadly. "If any of you touch him again, you will answer to me."

The guards immediately dropped the lash and stepped back, heads lowered.

Levi's eyes narrowed. "Olivia—"

"You don't get to do this," she cut in sharply. "Not without my consent. Not to someone under my authority."

"He's just a guard," Levi snapped.

Her head turned slowly.

The look she gave him made my blood run cold.

"He is my guard," she said, each word precise. "And you will explain to me—right now—why he was being flogged like an animal."

Levi hesitated.

Just for a second.

And that was all it took.

Because Olivia already knew this wasn't about a bet.

She turned slightly, her gaze flicking back to me. Our eyes met.

Something unspoken passed between us—rage, fear, guilt, something deeper. Something I just couldn't explain.

Her jaw tightened.

"Untie him," she said again, softer now—but no less commanding.

"No one dares," Levi growled.

Chapter 597: Release Him

Olivia's POV

"No one dares," Levi growled.

I turned slowly to face him.

For a moment, the entire yard seemed to stop breathing.

The guards stood frozen, eyes darting between us, trapped between two authorities. The warriors who had been cheering earlier now stared at the ground, shame etched into their faces. The whip lay abandoned in the dirt, dark with Lennox's blood.

My chest tightened painfully.

I took a step forward.

Then another.

"I said untie him," I repeated, my voice calm—but edged with authority. "That was not a suggestion. That was an order."

"This doesn't concern you," Levi snapped. "We had an agreement—"

I laughed.

But there was no humor in it.

"You flogged a man nearly to death," I said quietly. "And you think the problem here is a bet?"

Levi's jaw tightened. His eyes flickered—and then his voice slammed into my mind.

What the hell are you doing, Olivia?

I didn't break eye contact with him as I replied through the mind link.

Release him, Levi.

He scoffed, anger burning hot through the bond.

Why are you so bothered about him?

He's just a guard.

My anger spiked so fast it made my vision blur.

Just a guard.

If only you knew.

I wanted to scream it at him. To tell him the truth—that the man tied to that pillar was his brother. That Kaine was Lennox. That the blood soaking into the dirt belonged to the man we had buried, mourned, and cried over.

But I couldn't.

Not yet.

I didn't know why Lennox was hiding.

I didn't know why Lennox was acting dead.

And I didn't know what would happen if I exposed him now.

So I swallowed the fire in my throat and lifted my chin.

"I am releasing him," I said coldly.

I turned to the guards. "Untie him. Now."

They didn't move.

Their eyes flicked to Levi.

Of course they did.

He was Alpha.

His word had always been law.

My hands curled into fists.

"You need his permission to obey me?" I asked quietly.

Still, they hesitated.

That was it.

I stormed forward myself, ignoring Levi's sharp inhale, and reached for the ropes binding Kaine—binding Lennox—to the post. My fingers shook as I worked the knots loose, my heart pounding violently as blood smeared against my palms.

The moment the ropes fell away, he staggered slightly but caught himself.

"Thank you, Luna," he said hoarsely.

The words sliced straight through me.

Still calling me Luna.

Still pretending.

Still protecting his secret—even now.

I stepped back, giving him space, forcing my face into something neutral as he straightened slowly. He didn't look at Levi. Didn't challenge him. Just turned and began to walk away, every step stiff with pain.

Watching him leave like that hurt more than the blood ever could.

Then—

Levi grabbed my wrist.

Hard.

Before I could react, he yanked me toward him and dragged me away from the yard. I barely had time to register the shocked looks around us before he shoved open his door and pulled me inside.

The door slammed shut.

Silence exploded between us.

He released my wrist only to turn and face me, his eyes dark, furious, burning with something I hadn't seen in him before.

"Why," he demanded, his voice low and enraged, "does that guard have your scent on him?"

My heart lurched.

Shit.

I felt the panic rise—but I buried it fast, schooling my expression into cool disbelief.

"What are you trying to say?" I asked sharply.

Levi stepped closer. "Don't play with me, Olivia. Tell me what's going on."

I crossed my arms, meeting his glare head-on. "You're my mate," I said firmly. "If I were with any man other than you, Louis, or Lennox, you would feel it. You know that. So what exactly are you accusing me of?"

His jaw worked, frustration leaking through the bond.

"You smell like him," he snapped. "That's not normal."

"And you're imagining things," I shot back. "I'm grieving. I've been healing people. I've been in close contact with half the pack. If you're looking for reasons to suspect me, maybe you should look at yourself first."

His eyes flared.

"I hope you're not doing anything with that guard," he said harshly. "Because if you are—"

"If I am what, Levi?" I cut in. "Breathing in the same space as him? Bleeding for my pack? Saving a man you nearly killed?"

The room felt too small. Too tight.

Something ugly simmered beneath his anger, something sharp and unfamiliar.

I took a step back, my voice dropping.

"What is wrong with you?" I asked. "You've changed. You're cruel. You punished him like you wanted to make an example—like you wanted to hurt someone just because you could."

His eyes flickered.

For the first time, doubt crossed his face.

I stared at him, my chest aching.

"This isn't the Levi I know," I said quietly. "So tell me—what's really going on with you?"

The bond pulsed between us, tense and strained.

I stared at Levi for a long moment, my chest tight, my head aching.

This wasn't going anywhere.

The bond between us felt strained, stretched thin like it might snap if I pushed any harder. I was tired. Angry. Confused. And right now, I didn't trust myself to stay in that room without saying something I couldn't take back.

"I'm done with this," I said quietly.

Levi's shoulders sagged.

"Olivia... wait." His voice dropped, the anger finally draining out of it. "I don't know what's wrong with me lately. I wake up angry. Restless. Like something is crawling under my skin. I didn't mean for it to go that far."

I looked at him—really looked at him.

He looked lost.

"I'm not excusing what you did," I said firmly. "You crossed a line today. A dangerous one."

He nodded once. "I know."

"Then fix yourself," I said. "Before you become someone I don't recognize anymore."

Silence hung between us.

I turned and walked out without waiting for a reply.

I didn't go back to my room.

My feet carried me somewhere else entirely.

To him.

Lennox.

Kaine.

Whatever name he was hiding behind.

I stopped in front of his door, my hand hovering in the air for a second before I knocked—once, sharp and decisive.

There was a pause.

Then the door opened.

And my breath caught.

He was shirtless.

His back was a mess of torn skin and drying blood, angry red welts crossing muscle that should never have been touched that way. Some wounds had already started to close, but many were still raw, ugly, and painful to look at.

My stomach twisted violently.

"Luna," he said immediately, stepping back as if burned. "You can't be here. If anyone sees you—"

"I don't care," I said, pushing the door closed behind me.

He frowned, clearly uncomfortable. "This will cause trouble."

I frowned. He was still hiding. Still pretending to be just a guard.

I studied his face, the tension in his jaw, the way his eyes refused to meet mine. I wondered—again—what he was really planning. What game he thought he was playing. Why he was putting himself through this.

My wolf stirred, sharp and insistent.

Ask him. Tell him you know. End this.

I swallowed.

Not yet.

I wasn't ready to hear his answers.

"Lie down," I said instead.

He blinked. "What?"

"On the bed," I repeated, my voice leaving no room for argument. "On your stomach."

"I can take care of myself," he said quickly. "It's not that bad."

I stepped closer, my gaze hard. "That wasn't a suggestion."

He hesitated—then slowly obeyed, lowering himself onto the bed with a quiet exhale. Every movement clearly hurt.

I stood there for a second, staring at his back, at the damage Levi had done, at the punishment that should never have happened.

My hands trembled.

I placed them gently on his skin, magic already gathering beneath my palms.

Warmth flowed from me into him, slow and steady. I felt torn flesh knit together, felt the heat fade as wounds closed one by one. He sucked in a breath, his body relaxing.

Neither of us spoke.

But the silence was heavy.

Full of things unsaid.

I didn't stop until every wound was gone.

I moved slowly, carefully, my hands glowing faintly as I worked across his back, following each torn line, each welt, each place the lash had bitten too deep. I made sure there was nothing left—no broken skin, no lingering heat, not even a faint scar. When I was done, his skin was smooth again, whole, as if none of it had ever happened.

I pulled my hands away at last, my chest tight, my breath uneven.

"It's done," I said quietly.

He shifted, then pushed himself up from the bed. He rolled his shoulders once, testing, then stood and turned to face me. Fully healed. Completely whole.

"Thank you, Luna," he said, bowing his head slightly.

That word again.

Luna.

Not Olivia.

Not the name he used to say like it meant home.

I stared at him, my heart aching in a way I didn't have words for. How long was he going to keep this up? How long was he going to stand in front of me and pretend he wasn't the man I loved? Pretend he hadn't shattered my world by dying—and then somehow walking back into it under another name?

I stepped closer without thinking.

Too close.

My hand lifted on its own and cupped his face, my fingers brushing his jaw, my thumb grazing his cheek. His skin was warm beneath my touch—real, solid, alive.

His breath hitched.

So did mine.

For a heartbeat, neither of us moved.

I searched his eyes, trying to find the man beneath the mask. Trying to see Lennox through Kaine. My voice came out softer than I meant it to.

"You," I whispered, "is there something you are not telling me?"

His jaw tightened.

"Luna—"

The door burst open.

I froze.

My hand was still on his face.

Louis stood in the doorway.

His eyes flicked from me to Kaine—shirtless, standing far too close, my hand unmistakably cradling his face.

The air went dead.

"What," Louis said slowly, angrily, "is going on here?"

Chapter 598: What is he up to

Olivia's POV

The question hung in the air like a blade.

"What," Louis repeated, slower now, angrier, "is going on here?"

My hand dropped from Kaine's face as if burned... like a kid caught stealing candy. I took a step back instantly, putting space between us before Louis could say another word. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it might tear free of my chest—but my face stayed calm.

"This," I said evenly, turning to face him fully, "is none of your concern."

Louis's eyes darkened. "I beg to differ." His gaze flicked to Kaine's bare chest, then to the bed, then back to my face. "You're alone in a room with a guard. A half-naked guard. Care to explain?"

Kaine stiffened beside me. I felt it—the instinct to shield, to submit, to disappear—but he didn't move. He kept his head lowered, posture respectful, playing the role perfectly.

I lifted my chin. "He was injured. I healed him."

Louis scoffed. "By closing the door and standing that close?"

"Yes," I snapped. "Because he was flogged within an inch of his life under our authority. Or did you miss that part?"

That gave him pause.

"Levi went too far," I continued coldly. "And I will not apologize for fixing what he broke."

Louis studied my face for a long moment, searching for something—guilt, hesitation, a crack. He found none. I made sure of it.

Then his eyes shifted back to Kaine.

"You," Louis said, voice hard. "Get dressed."

Kaine inclined his head. "Yes, Alpha."

The word twisted something in my chest.

He reached for his shirt, pulling it on quickly, efficiently. No hesitation. No defiance. Every movement screamed discipline. Control.

Louis didn't stop watching him.

"You're dismissed," Louis added. "Leave. Now."

Kaine paused—just for a second—then nodded again. "As you wish."

As he passed Louis, I felt it.

That strange pull.

That silent recognition.

Louis's brows furrowed briefly, his gaze sharpening—but then Kaine was gone, the door closing softly behind him.

The room felt colder without him.

Louis turned back to me immediately. "You're going to explain this."

I crossed my arms. "There's nothing to explain."

"That guard," he said slowly, "has been at the center of far too many... situations lately. You defend him. Levi punishes him. And now I find you alone with him, touching his face."

"He is under my protection," I said firmly. "And that is all you need to know."

Louis's jaw clenched. "You're grieving, Olivia."

"I am aware."

"You're vulnerable."

I laughed. "So what are you trying to say?"

Silence stretched between us.

Finally, he exhaled. "I don't like this."

"I don't need you to," I replied. "I need you to trust me."

He searched my eyes again, then nodded once—reluctantly. "Fine. But if Levi is right about this guard—"

"He isn't," I cut in. Too fast.

Louis noticed.

His gaze narrowed, but he didn't push. "I'll be watching."

"I expect nothing less."

He turned and left, the door closing behind him with a quiet finality.

The moment I was alone, my strength nearly gave out.

I pressed a hand to my chest, breathing hard.

That was too close.

Too close.

And yet—my gaze drifted to the door Kaine had just passed through.

Whatever game he thought he was playing, it was getting harder to keep everyone else from noticing.

My wolf stirred, tense and alert.

What now? she asked.

I swallowed hard.

Now?

I have no idea.

The rest of the day passed without incident—or at least, without anything openly said to my face.

Council meetings went on as scheduled. Servants bowed, guards saluted, and the pack moved as it always did. On the surface, everything looked normal.

But I felt it.

An unease that clung to the halls of the mansion like smoke. Too many pauses when I walked past. Too many lowered voices that stopped just a heartbeat too late. Too many eyes flicking away when they realized I was near.

The staff were whispering.

They hadn't said anything outright. No one dared. But I didn't need to hear the words to know they were there. Rumors always moved faster than the wind, and today, the packhouse felt tight with them.

I kept my head high. A Luna does not react to shadows.

By evening, the weight of it all pressed too hard against my chest. I told the servants I wanted some air and left the mansion alone, pulling my cloak around me.

The courtyard was quieter now. Torches flickered to life. The pack grounds hummed softly with the sounds of people settling in for the night.

I walked without a destination, letting my thoughts drift—until something made me stop.

Voices.

Soft laughter.

I turned my head—and froze.

Kaine.

No.

Lennox.

He was standing near the far path by the gardens, speaking to one of the packhouse maids. She was young, maybe in her early twenties, her hands clasped nervously in front of her as she listened to him. He leaned slightly toward her, posture relaxed in a way I hadn't seen him use around anyone else.

He said something I couldn't hear.

The girl laughed.

Then she blushed.

My chest tightened sharply.

I stayed where I was, half-hidden by the shadows, watching as they began to walk slowly along the path together. Not close enough to be improper. Not distant enough to be meaningless.

Casual.

Easy.

Intimate.

My fingers curled into the fabric of my cloak.

What is he doing?

The question burned hot in my mind. Just hours ago, he had been tied to a post, bleeding because of Levi. Hours ago, I had saved him, healed him. And now—

Now he was strolling with a maid like nothing had happened.

Like he hadn't shattered my world twice over.

Jealousy flared suddenly, sharp and suffocating. I hated it. Hated the way it rose so easily, uninvited, twisting something ugly in my chest.

I watched as he said something else, quieter this time. The maid ducked her head, smiling shyly, clearly flustered.

My jaw tightened.

What the hell are you up to, Lennox?

Was this part of his plan? Another mask? Another lie layered over the first? Or was he trying—gods forbid—to move on?

The thought made my stomach churn.

I should have turned away. Should have gone back inside. Should have reminded myself that whatever game he was playing was his own doing.

But I couldn't.

I stood there, rooted to the spot, watching the man I loved walk beside another woman—alive, breathing, smiling—while the rest of us were still mourning his grave.

As I watched, every instinct screamed at me to march over there, to demand answers, to pull him away and remind him—of us, of everything. My feet even moved forward once.

Then I stopped myself.

No.

I forced my legs to turn away and went back inside, my pulse racing, my thoughts a tangled mess. I told myself I was tired. That grief was making me irrational. That I had no right to question him—especially not when he was pretending to be someone else.

I went to my room and lay down, staring at the ceiling.

I tried to trust him.

I tried to sleep.

I couldn't.

The image wouldn't leave my mind—her smile, his lowered voice, the ease between them. My wolf paced restlessly inside me, unsettled and sharp.

Why does it bother you so much? She murmured.

Because it's him, I answered silently. And because I don't know why he's doing this.

Minutes dragged into an hour. I turned onto my side. Then my back. Then sat up again.

Enough.

I pushed myself off the bed and slipped out of my room, my steps quiet as I retraced the path to where I had seen them.

They were gone.

The garden was empty.

That made it worse.

My imagination ran wild—too wild. A hundred ugly thoughts crowded my head, each more painful than the last. I didn't stop walking.

I went straight to his room.

The door was locked.

My heart pounded.

I knocked.

Once.

Then again.

Footsteps sounded, and the door opened.

Kaine stood there, fully dressed, expression guarded. "Luna—"

I didn't let him finish.

I pushed past him and stormed inside. "Where is she?"

He blinked, clearly caught off guard. "Who?"

"The maid," I snapped, turning to face him. "Where is she?"

Silence.

I inhaled sharply, instinctively, my senses flaring.

Nothing.

No trace of her scent.

No lingering warmth.

Just him.

Alone.

My anger faltered, confusion rushing in behind it. I turned slowly, my voice quieter now but no less intense.

"There's no smell of her here," I said, trying my best to hide my jealousy, but it was so obvious.

His jaw tightened. "Because she was never here."

I stared at him, my emotions colliding—relief, frustration, suspicion, anger, and pain.

"Then why," I demanded softly, "were you walking with her?"

He looked away for a brief second, then looked at me straight in the eyes.

"Luna," he said quietly, "are you jealous?"

Chapter 599: Want you

Olivia's POV

If I was jealous?

Was he seriously asking me that?

Of course I was jealous.

The question alone made something sharp twist in my chest. I had loved him all my life—before the bond, before the pack, before everything fell apart. Mate or not, past or present, that feeling didn't disappear just because he decided to die and come back wearing another face.

I clenched my fists at my sides, forcing myself not to react, not to lean into him the way my body instinctively wanted to. His breath brushed my ear, warm and familiar, and it sent a shiver straight down my spine.

"Tell me, Luna," he murmured softly. "Are you jealous?"

My heart slammed against my ribs.

I turned my head sharply, facing him, putting barely an inch of space between us. "Watch your tone," I said coolly. "You're crossing a line."

His eyes darkened—not with fear, but with something else.

"A line?" he asked quietly. "Or the truth?"

I swallowed.

I hated that he could still do this to me. Hated that even now—especially now—he could unravel me with a look and a few carefully chosen words.

"You were talking to a maid," I said flatly. "At night. Walking with her. Laughing."

"So you noticed," he replied.

That smirk again.

My jaw tightened. "You're a guard. You know how things look."

"I do," he said calmly. "Which is why I chose a maid."

That gave me pause.

I frowned. "What?"

His gaze softened for just a heartbeat before hardening again. "Your mates won't have a problem with me being with a maid... I thought you should love this."

My frown deepened, and my nails clenched into my palms as I glared right at him.

Lennox raised a brow, his boyish smirk on display for me. "Or..." He paused and suddenly wrapped his arm around my waist, making me gasp as shivers ran down my spine. "Are you falling for me?"

I frowned, but his smirk widened, like he was enjoying every second of my reaction.

"Tsk," he said softly, shaking his head. "Luna Olivia... this isn't good at all."

I narrowed my eyes. "What isn't?"

"This," he replied, gesturing between us. "Having feelings for a guard." His voice dropped, teasing. "What would your mates think? Powerful Alphas. Leaders of the pack. And here you are... reacting like this over someone beneath them."

His words were meant to provoke me.

To shame me.

To tease me.

And for a split second, they worked.

Then I smiled.

"Oh?" I said lightly. "Is that what you think?"

He blinked, clearly not expecting that.

I stepped closer—close enough that my body brushed his, close enough that his breath hitched before he could stop it. I wrapped my arms around him, fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt, pulling him just slightly toward me.

"So what if I do?" I murmured. "What if I have feelings for a guard?"

His confidence flickered.

Just a little.

I tilted my head, eyes roaming over his face deliberately, unapologetically. "You look good," I added softly. "Strong. Tempting."

His jaw tightened.

Good.

I leaned in closer, my lips just brushing the corner of his mouth—not a kiss, not yet.

"And if I want something," I whispered, my voice low and seductive, "I don't need permission from anyone."

His breath came out uneven.

"Careful," he warned quietly. "You don't know what you're playing with."

I met his gaze, unflinching.

"Oh," I said softly. "I know exactly what I'm playing with."

Then I kissed him.

For a heartbeat, he froze—like he couldn't decide whether to pull away or give in. I felt the battle in him, the war between duty and desire, between Kaine and the man I knew was buried beneath that name.

He pulled back suddenly.

"Olivia—"

I didn't let him finish.

I shoved him back onto the bed, harder than I meant to, the mattress dipping beneath his weight. His eyes widened, breath uneven, chest rising and falling as he stared up at me like I'd just upended his entire world.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his voice rough, strained. "You shouldn't—"

I climbed onto the bed, straddling him before he could sit up, my hands braced on either side of his shoulders.

"I want you," I said simply.

The truth sat heavy between us.

His hands hovered at my waist, not touching, like he was afraid of what would happen if he did. "No," he said, shaking his head. "This is wrong. I'm a guard. You're the Luna. This—this shouldn't happen."

I laughed softly. "You think I don't know that?"

Of course it was wrong.

But it wasn't wrong when it was him.

Not when every part of me still remembered what it felt like to be held by Lennox. Not when grief had carved a hollow so deep inside me that only his presence ever made it feel less empty.

"I want you," I whispered, the words slipping out before I could stop them.

Something in his expression broke.

"Olivia—"

"Shut up," I said, leaning down and kissing him again, harder this time, desperate. For a second, he resisted—then a low curse left his mouth.

"Fuck—"

In one swift movement, he flipped us, pinning me beneath him. His forearms braced on either side of my head, his body hovering just above mine, not touching more than necessary—but close enough that I could feel his warmth, his tension, his restraint.

I stared up at him.

For a moment, I saw Kaine.

Then I looked deeper.

And there he was.

Lennox.

Alive. Breathing. Looking at me like I was both his weakness and his undoing.

His jaw clenched. "Do you really want this?" he asked quietly. "Because once we cross this line... there's no pretending after. No taking it back. You'll regret it."

I smiled. I reached up, pulling the cloth from the bedside table and lifting it to my eyes.

"Then don't let me see the guard," I said softly. "Let me feel only your touch."

I tied it gently, covering my vision.

"No regrets," I whispered. "Just fuck me."

Chapter 600: love making

Olivia's POV

The room fell into a heavy, expectant silence. Lennox reached up, his fingers trembling slightly as he tightened the cloth over his eyes too, ensuring the world was nothing but blackness. He let out a long, jagged breath, his head dropping forward as he consciously surrendered.

"I can't see you," he whispered, his voice thick. "But I can feel you. Everywhere."

I didn't answer. I couldn't. My heart was a wild animal trapped in my chest. I knew this man. I knew the slope of his shoulders and the way his pulse thrummed under his skin, even if he believed he was a stranger to me. To him, he was Kaine, the guard playing a dangerous game. To me, he was the man I loved, returned from the grave.

He moved then, his hands sliding down my arms to my waist. He didn't pull me down; instead, he shifted, his movements blind but sure. He knelt between my legs, his large hands gripping my thighs with a possessive strength that made my breath hitch.

Slowly, he leaned forward, his face pressed against the silk covering my stomach. He inhaled deeply, as if memorizing the scent of my skin.

"You shouldn't let me do this," he murmured against the fabric.

"Don't talk," I breathed, my fingers tangling in his hair.

He didn't need to be told twice. He moved the nightgown up, the cool air hitting my skin for only a second before the heat of his mouth replaced it. He started at my knees, his lips trailing a path of fire upward, tasting every inch of skin with a slow, agonizing deliberation.

When he reached the heat of me, I gasped, my head thumping back against the headboard. He was relentless. He used his tongue and lips with a desperate hunger, as if he were a man dying of thirst and I was the only thing that could save him. It had been

so long—years of coldness, years of mourning—and now, the sheer sensation of him was almost too much to bear.

I arched my back, my fingers digging into his shoulders, stifling a scream as the pleasure built into a sharp, peaking ache. He knew exactly what he was doing, his blindfold only making him more attuned to every shudder of my body and every broken sound that left my throat.

Finally, when I was trembling and undone, he moved back up. He didn't wait. I heard him fumble for his trousers, discarding them with a focused haste, and then he was over me.

He braced himself on his forearms, his blindfolded face inches from mine. He was breathing hard, his chest heaving against my breasts.

"Olivia," he choked out. It was a warning, a plea, and a prayer all at once.

He pushed into me in one deep, smooth motion.

A sob escaped my lips—not of pain, but of recognition. It was a perfect, soul-shattering fit. We moved together with a frantic, rhythmic intensity, the bed creaking beneath the weight of our shared desperation. Every thrust was a question, and every gasp was an answer.

The friction of his skin against mine was a fire I never wanted to put out. With the blindfold tight across his eyes, Lennox seemed to operate on instinct alone, his hands roaming my body as if he were trying to read me like Braille. Every time our skin met, a jolt of electricity surged through me, reminding me that under this new identity, the soul of the man I loved was still there.

He groaned low in his throat, a sound of pure, unadulterated want. Suddenly, he shifted, his strong arms hooking under my knees and flipping me over onto my stomach. My breath caught as my face pressed into the cool linens of the mattress. I felt the weight of him settle behind me, his chest pressing against my back, hot and solid.

Being blindfolded changed everything. Without sight, the feeling of his hands on my hips was amplified a thousand times. He gripped me firmly, his fingers digging into my skin, and when he entered me again from behind, it was deep and possessive.

I let out a broken moan, my fingers clawing at the sheets. He was relentless, his pace steady and driving, each movement calculated to make me unravel. The darkness between us made it feel like we were the only two people left in the world. There were no Alphas, no pack duties, and no lies—just the raw, rhythmic sound of our breathing and the heat of our bodies colliding.

"Olivia," he rasped, his voice vibrating through my spine. He leaned down, biting gently at the shell of my ear, his stubble grazing my cheek. "You're so tight... so perfect."

I couldn't take it anymore; I needed to be closer. I needed to see him, even if it was only through touch. I pushed back against him, and as he sensed my movement, he helped me turn.

I climbed on top of him, straddling his waist. I felt him beneath me, hard and ready, as I lowered myself down. A long, loud moan escaped my lips, echoing in the quiet room. I arched my back, my hands finding his chest, feeling the frantic thud of his heart.

I moved on him, setting a pace that made my head spin. Every time I went up and down, I felt the sheer power of him. I leaned forward, my hair falling over my shoulders like a veil, and whispered his name—the name he didn't think I knew—into the crook of his neck.

"Lennox..."

He stiffened for a second, his hands flying to my waist to steady me. "What did you say?" he whispered, his voice shaking.

I didn't answer with words. I leaned down and kissed him, my tongue dancing with his, drowning out the question with pure passion. I moved faster, my body slick with sweat, the pleasure building into an unbearable tension. He met every one of my movements, his hips snapping upward to meet mine, until finally, we both came with a loud moan, not minding that anyone could hear us.

I collapsed against his chest, my heart racing against his, gasping for air as the waves of the climax slowly receded, leaving us both trembling in the dark.