

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 26

Nathan

“How are you holding up, son”

I glanced up from the spreadsheets I had been staring at sightlessly to find my father regarding me with knowing eyes. Setting aside the pack business reports I could recite by heart, I attempted an upbeat smile.

“Well enough. Just reviewing the latest border territory usage agreements.”

My father raised a sceptical eyebrow. “Yes, I could see how enthralled you were by those fascinating figures.”

I sighed, leaning back in the plush leather office chair and kneading my temples. No point trying to hide my gloomy preoccupation from the wolf who knew me best.

“My apologies, Father. I don’t mean to be a poor company. My thoughts are....elsewhere today,”

He waved off my needless apology. “No need to put on a brave front on my account. This whole mess would weigh heavily on any leader’s spirit. His tone turned gentle. “But remember the sun always rises, even after the longest nights. Joy will find you again.”

I mustered a more genuine, if tired, smile. “You always know just what to say. I’ll try to shake off this melancholy”

My father nodded approvingly. “Perhaps some exercise in this fine weather is in order. We could both use some fresh air and movement.

The suggestion was well timed. I had been cooped up finalising estate affairs for days on end. Logging miles on foot or fur through the crisp autumn forests surrounding the city penthouse would surely lift my spirits

“An excellent recommendation,” I agreed, standing to help my father into a comfortable jacket in preparation for our outing. The colour had blessedly returned to his face these past weeks as he regained strength. Terra’s tireless care had worked miracles even after nearly losing his fight for life.

Thoughts of our headstrong healer tempered my improving mood. Her frequent absences from the penthouse to attend to this mysterious “supplier” continued nagging me. Surely her skills were most needed tending my father, not gallivanting about the city on trivial errands? When confronted, she had calmly but firmly informed me her time was her own. The nerve!

But reopening that quarrel would gain me nothing today. Better to let it lie for now, and simply enjoy this time alone with my father.

Opportunities for slow wandering conversations had been few and far between after decades of pack leadership occupying his days. I would not waste a minute of our precious reconnection harbouring frustrations with Terra's odd behaviour. The pack was safe in Derek's hands; she would return when needed.

Together my father and I made our way down to the building's bustling lobby. The occasional resident shot us awed glances and murmured greetings as we passed, but none dared approach directly. Even in the human's den, an Alpha's bearing inspired instinctive respect. I held my head high, hoping my confident aura would balance Father's slow careful gait.

The crisp autumn air filled my lungs like a reviving tonic as we emerged onto the busy city streets. Beside me, my father similarly straightened taller, eyes brightening in his element. Now free of the sickroom's gloomy confines, his vigour blossomed. I nearly sighed aloud in relief. The wolf spirit in him yet thrived.

We set off unhurriedly, content to simply savour this time together away from sickbeds and responsibilities. The penthouse's central location allowed easy access by foot to sprawling urban parks where towering trees with leaves in peak fall display offered welcome pockets of nature amidst the dense buildings and traffic. Strolling the rambling forested paths bathed our senses with earthy nostalgia. Crisp oak leaves underfoot, clean sharp cold air, and melodic birdsong overhead worked their magic, loosening the tension perpetually knotting my shoulders.

After some time meandering in thoughtful silence, my father spoke musingly. "I had nearly forgotten the beauty to be found here after so long focusing only on survival. He turned his face up to the dappled sunlight. "It's good to be reminded there is more beyond the walls we build around our small worlds

I nearly stumbled over an exposed root as his simple but incisive wisdom struck me. When was the last time I had lifted my eyes to truly appreciate life's fundamental joys beyond the compounding daily demands upon me? In my own way, I had become as isolated and purpose-driven as Terra seemed now. We both kept our gazes stubbornly fixed on the road ahead, refusing to acknowledge the light surrounding us on all sides.

My father shot me a knowing look but said nothing more. He did not need to. I resolved in that moment to heed his gentle reminder. I would lift my head again, opening my senses to beauty and meaning in small moments rather than forever rushing onward. The pack's troubles would wait. But this precious time together would not come again. I must embrace it fully, while I am able.

By the time we circled back to the penthouse, I felt cleansed of the malaise plaguing my spirit these past weeks. No matter how Terra ignored me or how heavy my station

weighed at times, connection and purpose remained all around if only I stepped back to appreciate them. I would not lose sight of this lesson as I once had.

Speaking of wayward healers, Terra herself was exiting her sleek car just as we passed through the building's front entry. Tension instantly coiled, making my shoulders bunch. But I forced my tone to be pleasant. "Hello again, Terra. Wanted to thank you once more for everything you have done. I'm certain your tireless care is the only reason my dear father still stands beside me today."

Terra blinked, clearly surprised by my direct high praise in the presence of strangers milling about. But she recovered swiftly, inclining her head in graceful acknowledgement. "I am happy to aid your family however I can, Alpha. Now if you'll excuse me."

Before I could object that she need not rush off, Terra had slipped inside an elevator, not even favouring us with a backward- glance. I clenched my jaw in frustration. How long would this cold war between us drag on? I was making efforts to be civil, very much against my instincts. Some reciprocal courtesy would be most welcomed.

My father placed a staying hand on my arm, sending silent reassurance. I took a calming breath. As he had subtly reminded me today, I must seek the positive path forward.

Though Terra's indifferent manner continued testing the limits of my patience, I should continue extending the olive branch. An Alpha led by example.

That resolve was soon tested over the following week's infuriating events. Terra spent her days locked away in her suite, barely emerging even for meals. My polite knocks on her door went pointedly unanswered. But Derek informed me she was making frequent excursions into the city alone even after sunset, against all prudence.

Likely off cavorting with some new lover rather than informing me of her whereabouts, I thought darkly. Even colony wolves knew not to wander unaccompanied at night. What was she thinking?

But questioning Terra openly would likely only worsen the discord between us.

So I bit my tongue during her fleeting public appearances, struggling to remain cordial for the sake of pack unity.

She noticed my effort to smile blandly over breakfast and cocked a quizzical eyebrow but said nothing. I nearly spewed coffee across the table.

The little minx relished dragging this out, obviously!

Only pleas from Father kept me in check. He implored patience and compassion where Terra was concerned. I supposed nearly dying granted him that right. So I smothered my outrage for a while longer, focusing on my duties from a makeshift study.

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 27

Nathan

Late one Friday evening, after another long day of reviewing estate financial reports until my vision blurred, I stumbled toward the kitchen, desperate for strong coffee. My supernaturally keen hearing picked up Terra's distinctive laughter echoing from within.

I hesitated, not trusting my restraint around her unpredictable moods presently. But caffeine called my name. I braced myself and pushed through the door.

Terra sat casually at the marble counter scrolling her phone, cheeks still flushed from whatever had amused her. She quickly smoothed her features at my entrance. I attempted civility. "Burning the midnight oil, I see? Can I get you a coffee!"

She shook her head, already edging toward the other doorway. No need, I was just heading up."

I felt my diplomatic smile crack around the edges. "Wait. Please. It came out inore harshly than intended, making Terra pause warily. I took a slow breath. "My apologies. It's only well, we've hardly spoken in days. I want to know you're alright."

Terra's expression remained detached, but her voice softened fractionally. I'm fine, Alpha. Just been busy."

I seized on the subtle thaw. "Yes, I imagine so. How are preparations coming for the Harvest Festival?" I knew Terra had loved the colourful autumn celebration as a child. Perhaps reminiscing would break through this endless frost between us.

But in my words, her face shut again completely. "Everything is handled. If you'll excuse me, I need to finish packing

She turned on her heel before I could respond. Packing? "Wait, you're leaving?" I hated the plaintive note that crept into my question.

Terra glanced back, impatience in her eyes. Tve stayed overlong already. My work here is done now that your father is well. I'm sure you have capable physicians on hand to take over his ongoing care."

"But I thought I floundered uncharacteristically, blindsided by this abrupt announcement. We had just begun. establishing a tentative rapport. How could she depart so soon?

Terra's sharp gaze softened almost imperceptibly. "You'll be fine now. Try not to miss me too terribly." Was that a hint of her old playful humour warming her voice? But then the elevator doors slid shut, leaving me staring after her in frustration and confusion. As always, Terra remained a puzzle I could never quite solve.

In the days that followed, I waited in a fog of restless agitation for some word from Terra before her departure. I knew not what gesture or entreaty might sway her to remain longer, as our pack healer and perhaps more. But the reckless wolf in me could not let her vanish so suddenly again without a fight. I wanted – needed – the chance to speak openly, to make amends at last.

Yet my pride kept me chained, silent. Terra seemed in no hurry to seek me out either, holing up in her rooms when not flitting about the city on unknown errands.

The penthouse felt more like a gilded prison than refuge now. Even as my father continued regaining strength under my care, melancholy still clouded my spirit. I missed deep conversation and warm laughter lighting our home. With Terra present but distant, loneliness haunted me.

Autumn's beauty passed unappreciated outside the floor to ceiling windows. The turning colours and crisp air usually never failed to soothe my soul. But Terra's imminent departure weighed too heavily. A chapter I had only just reopened in my life's book was abruptly-ending before I grasped its meaning.

I had The night before Terra intended to take her leave, I finally mustered the nerve to knock at her suite once more. She called for me to enter, sounding weary. My heart sank to find her kneeling amidst neat stacks of luggage, already packed up. run out of time.

"What can I do for you, Nathan?" Terra asked without looking up. Her use of my name rather than title kindled a fragile hope.

I cleared my throat, trying to dislodge the lump there. I only wished to see you once more before you go. And to ask... I faltered miserably. She waited without prompting, for once. I took a deep breath. "Ask if you might stay longer. I -we- would still be glad for your company

Terra rose slowly to face me, expression unreadable. "You know I can't remain. You'll be fine now. Your father is nearly well. thanks to our combined efforts

I stepped closer, desperate to reach through her impenetrable mask of composure. This isn't only about my father's health. Please, Terra. Don't shut me out again when we've come so far already mending what was broken. My pride lay in tatters. but I no longer cared. I could not lose her twice.

For long agonising moments Terra simply searched my face. I held her piercing gaze unwaveringly, allowing, at last, the full depth of longing and remorse to show. She saw through to my spirit – she always had.

After the silence between us stretched taut as a bowstring. Terra sighed heavily, the detachment in her eyes softening. “Oh Nathan. I wish the past could be undone. But some roads only lead us farther from where we want to be. She rested feather-light fingers on my wrist. You will become the great leader you were meant to be. Of that I am certain

Her tender faith despite everything pierced me sharply. I clasped her hand between mine desperately. “How can I without you there challenging me to grow and see beyond myself?”

The barest hint of wistfulness flickered across Terra’s face before the neutral mask slipped back in place. She withdrew her hand gently. “You will find your way, as will I. Our paths were destined to diverge long ago. She met my anguished look squarely “But I am grateful we had this second chance, however brief.”

When I still could not find words, frozen by the crushing reality of imminent loss, Terra stepped closer and pulled me into a fierce, brief embrace.

“Lead and live well, old friend,” she whispered close to my ear. The brush of her cheek against mine scorched like a brand. Too soon she was slipping away, the ghost of jasmine perfume all that remained of her presence.

I stood motionless even after the suite door clicked shut, unsure whether to chase after Terra or accept this was the necessary end she seemed to believe. In truth, the choice had never been mine. Fate would steer us together or apart now.

Finally I left as if moving through water, making my way to the sleek study that had become my refuge. The shadows clung more thickly now, but I no longer had any wish to resist their numbing comfort. Only the potent whiskey secreted away in a bottom drawer cut through emptiness echoing once more in my hollow chest.

Some time later, warm fingers plucked the empty glass from my own and set it aside. I blinked sluggishly to find my father standing over me, concerned about etching his brow. The heavy despair fogging my mind receded some as I straightened. under his steady gaze.

“She’s gone, isn’t she?” It was not a question. I looked away, unable to voice the truth aloud yet. But my silence spoke for me. My father sighed heavily and gripped my shoulder.

“Dark times come to us all, my son. You mustn’t let this defeat define you. The world is ever changing. We simply must keep pace.

With immense effort I met his eyes again. "You're right, Father. I know you are. It's only...

"You care for her deeply. I understand. His warm clasp on my shoulder kept me tethered fast as old grief and fresh loss howled through me. Sheltered in the eye of that storm, I began slowly piecing my shattered spirit back together. I would endure, somehow. It was the wolf way.

By the time golden dawn light streaked the sky, I had found some fragile acceptance. Terra walking her own lone road was never mine to prevent. She would have chafed here caged by stiding traditions and expectations, her wild spirit slowly

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extinguished. Perhaps someday, somehow, our paths would meet again naturally when the timing was right.

I clung to that slender hope through the difficult days that followed. Holding my head high before the city pack members came easier with my father's tireless support.

He seemed to sense when the choking loneliness threatened to overwhelm me, and would draw me into debates on pack politics or share colourful stories from his youth roaming these very forests. The tales vividly recalled helped anchor me in the present, not the unchangeable past Terra now represented.

Miraculously, as autumn shifted to winter's first chill breezes, the pain I carried gradually eased enough that I could appreciate life's simple joys again. Laughter with my father as we took our daily constitutionals through the bustling city's patchwork wooded parks.

The satisfaction of completing a difficult but beneficial trade agreement with our sister pack to the north. Even the mundane comforts of hot coffee on a snowy dawn or reading the morning newspaper filled me with subtler satisfaction now, as never before.

By subtle degrees, sunset's violet hour no longer carried piercing melancholy as Terra's absence had initially burdened it with. I smiled more readily, shoulders unburdening. Her herbs and wisdom yet ran through my spirit, remodelling me more wholly than either of us likely realised.

She had played her role, and played it well. Time did not stop, however keenly parts of my soul might resist moving on. But her rediscovered light would burn within me forever, come what may.

My father noticed the shift as well, and remarked upon it one blustery morning as we walked together admiring the city's you these bustling holiday garb. "Your smile has returned, Nathan. It heartens me greatly to see the darkness lifting from past weeks."

I blinked in surprise, turning inwards to take his measure. The weary weight pressing constantly on my chest had indeed begun to ease, no longer an ever-present.

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 28

Nathan

“Another day survived,” I muttered, rubbing my temples as the heavy oak doors of the conference room closed behind me. The sharp click echoed with finality in the marble-floored hallway.

Father chuckled, falling into step beside me. “Now, it wasn’t as interminable as all that. I distinctly remember you managing not to snarl once.”

I cast him a wry half-smile. “A monumental achievement, to be sure. But after five hours of pedantic debates over make-believe crises, even my patience wears thin.”

“The curse of leadership one must feign interest in the concerns of those they serve, however trivial,” Father remarked sagely as we exited the bustling municipal building into the brisk winter afternoon.

I nodded, inhaling deep cleansing breaths of the crisp air. The subtle scents of pine and snow carried rejuvenating power, sweeping the stale political atmosphere from my lungs. Out here surrounded by the natural city, priorities realigned.

We meandered unhurriedly through the winding parkland paths dusted white with the season’s first snowfall.

Ice-limned branches arched overhead, creating an air of removed serenity curiously lacking in the circles of power we departed.

No sound but the crunch of boots puncturing fresh powder and distant trills of adventurous birds.

The simplistic purity of this hushed scene reminded me what truly mattered-guarding the trust my people placed in me through service, not empty posturing.

Leadership meant setting aside pride to tackle unglamorous but essential tasks that safeguarded the pack’s future. We were all links in a chain strengthened by compassion far more than fear or force.

After we paused to rest on a stone bench backing the sparkling frozen pond, I turned to Father. “Thank you again for insisting I remain patient and keep perspective today. The goddess knows I need frequent reminding.”

Father smiled, clapping my shoulder. "You underestimate your capacities, Nathan. The challenges you've faced since taking on the mantle would have crushed a lesser wolf. Yet here you stand, ever learning." Pride warmed his tone.

I glanced down, unsure I deserved such effusive praise. But Father tilted my chin up firmly.

"Leadership is a ceaseless slog up mountainous terrain. Take satisfaction in how far you've already climbed. And keep placing one foot ahead of the other." His steadfast gaze reminded me I did not walk alone on this steep path. Though my doubts towered as high as the snow-dusted pines surrounding us, I would scale them and see the vista beyond.

Buoyed by Father's bolstering words, we walked a bit farther, planning to purchase spiced ciders from a beloved bakery before returning to the penthouse.

Shopkeepers called cheery greetings as we passed, no artifices of ulterior motives poisoning the exchanged smiles and handshakes here. I stood a bit taller.

Until a fur-bundled figure emerging from the bakery stopped me short, my pleasant mood evaporating instantly. Jade.

Her gloved hand rested possessively on the arm of a powerfully-built blond wolf I didn't recognize. They both turned looks of comically exaggerated-shock on me.

"Oh, Nathan! What a surprise running into you here," Jade exclaimed with patently false delight. Her companion's grip tightened on her elbow almost imperceptibly.

I inclined my head in perfunctory polite greeting, not trusting my voice yet. Jade's beauty had not diminished, but neither did it stir me at once. Her feline eyes held only cold calculation now, any hint of genuine emotion reserved for the wolf at her side.

"Good to see you both looking well," I managed after an aching pause. "Enjoy the cider." Without another glance, I grasped Father's arm and steered us brusquely away.

Jade's grating laughter chased after us, scraping harshly on my ears until the bakery door snapped shut, cutting it blessedly off. We walked another block in tense silence before Father gently extracted his arm from my white-knuckled grip.

"Come. Let us take the long route back." His tone brooked no argument. I trailed him numbly, focused on regulating each harsh breath. But the black miasma of past betrayal threatened to choke me nonetheless.

Once we reached a secluded section of running paths, Father nodded his approval. "Shift. Run. Release it, son

Too upset for words, I simply obeyed, shedding human form hastily. Snow dampened my paws as I surged into the woods, running full out. I outpaced the bitterness, fury and humiliation roiling within, reducing my world to the rhythmic pounding of heartbeat and paws.

By the time I rejoined Father, trotting on four legs back to the path, the tempest had blown its worst force,

He smiled gently down at my wolf, no lecture or analysis needed

Thank God no humans are in sight.

Together we walked slowly back to the penthouse as dusk's violet shadows stretched long across the snow.

I took longer soaking in the vast bathtub that evening, m**y and physically exhausted. But the day's trials had burned away some accumulated weakness, like a forest fire making room for fresh growth. I could not control others' choices. My integrity alone defined me.

After redressing. I found Father reading by the c**g fireplace, two glasses of brandy already poured. He gestured to me silently.

Had it been grandma didn't bring Jade to me, I would have been with Terra. I would have been happy.

No further words were needed between us. The day's experiences would shape me if I let them.

I woke the next morning feeling surprisingly well-rested and clear-headed.

Over a leisurely breakfast with Father, we discussed my agenda for the day ahead. With the bulk of tedious political meetings finally concluded, I now planned to walk the city speaking with various common pack members about their lives and concerns.

Too long I had been sequestered away with the privileged few. Rubbing shoulders with ordinary workers and families brought much-needed perspective on the deeper issues facing many beneath the surface. I sought not to judge but simply listen.

Donning my plainest cloak and gloves, I set off alone as requested. The cold air's bite felt invigorating, not harsh.

For hours I wandered the sprawling city undisturbed, marvelling at the simple joys and trials of everyday life.

Children laughed and played, adults laboured proudly at their trades, elderly told stories of times long past. Away from the estates and halls of power, true living transpired.

As I Painted the cobblestones crimson, I wearily climbed the steps to the penthouse, strangely more energised than depleted by the long day's walking. A doorman rushed to relieve me of my snow-dusted cloak.

After warming myself by the lobby's great hearth, I headed upstairs reflectively.

But my quiet evening routing was unexpectedly interrupted by raised voices emanating from Father's study as I passed. hesitated, not wishing to intrude. But worry for his health overcame manners. I knocked lightly before pushing the door open. "Father, is everything alr-"

The question died on my lips. Every muscle locked in stunned disbelief at the sight greeting me. Father stood behind his desk, posture radiating anger barely contained. Before him, head arrogantly high and eyes flashing defiantly, stood Terra.

"What is the meaning of this?" I bit out through clenched teeth, barely recognizing my own voice. Blindsided shock unflinching. thunderously gave way to roaring accusations. Terra levelled her piercing gaze at me,

"I returned to provide essential updates on the pack's protection enchantments. Your father deserved to know their weakened state." Her clipped tone betrayed no hint of guilt or shame at being discovered here after weeks vanishing without explanation.

I stalked closer, hands fisted to resist grabbing her d**bly arrogant shoulders and shaking the truth free. "You presume to lecture on responsibility? After breaking trust so callously by disappearing with no cause or word?"

Terra glanced away, jaw tightening almost imperceptibly. But her voice remained steady. "I apologise for the abrupt departure. But there were urgent reasons."

A scathing rejoinder blistered my lips but I bit it back with monumental restraint. Terra's infuriating evasions hardly mattered now. I turned my full fury on Father instead.

"And you saw fit to allow this deception? I expect far better of your judgement." The harsh words escaped before thought, my glare accusing

But Father met my temper c**y. 'Mind yourself, Nathan. Terra acted only from necessity. There are situations you know not of' His chastisement stung, but could not quell the maelstrom raging inside me. I stabbed an accusatory finger at her.

"I know enough. This woman has done naught but lie and manipulate all who foolishly trusted her. Terra flinched almost imperceptibly but lifted her chin higher. "She is a threat to our pack, and will be made to answer for it."

I advanced toward her, ready to forcibly drag her down to the holding cells for interrogation by our finest trackers on how she had slipped past their supposedly impenetrable security. Let her haughty facade finally crack before their skilled coercion. I was done being made a fool of by this scheming she-wolf.

But quicker than blinking Terra whirled into a fighting crouch, emerald eyes dangerously narrowed. "Touch me and you will draw back a bl**dy stump." Her tone held not an ounce of bluster.

I nearly laughed aloud at her audacity. She stood cornered, outnumbered and overpowered.

Yet still those fierce eyes burned defiantly, ready to battle to the last rather than surrender.

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 29

Nathan

A small voice of warning broke through the bloodrage fogging my thoughts. There was more here than met the eye. Terra was no whimpering maid to be cowed by shows of brute strength.

Nor would she make wild threats empty. She had come anticipating possible violence, and looked fully prepared to weather the consequences. What could drive anyone to such extremes?

Father's stern tone intruding on the tense stalemate jerked me fully from the savage haze. "Enough. Stand down, both of you." When I continued glaring mutinously, he thundered, "Now!"

With herculean effort, I unclenched my fists and adjusted my posture to non-aggressive.

Terra likewise slowly straightened from her fighting stance, eyes never leaving mine. Father beckoned us to sit. After an interminable silent battle of wills, we reluctantly complied, flanking opposite ends of the imposing desk.

Father regarded us both gravely. "Powerful emotions run high here. But we must all master them, for the pack's sake. Terra will explain her reasons in due time. Until then, you both stay under this roof." He held up a hand to silence my fresh protests. "I mean it, Nathan. There are politics at play you grasp not. But the time for truth comes soon."

His resolute words doused my rebellious anger as effectively as icy floodwaters. However deep the perceived betrayal by Terra, he was right. Wisdom ruled impulse here – I must trust in Father's solemn counsel, as I always had.

With immense effort I ruined my roiling emotions by schooling my features. "Very well. You have my obedience, if not my understanding. I kept my gaze fixed ahead rather than look at Terra. One wrong move could shatter my tenuous composure. I wanted only to flee the repugnant sight of her.

After a fraught pause Father nodded in satisfaction. "That will have to suffice for now. Nathan, you may go. Terra, remain for a moment."

The urge to object flared hotly. What further secrets could they possibly have to share? But under Father's steady gaze, I wordlessly departed, each step rigid with banked fury. If only the seething vortex were so easily caged as my tongue now. I stalked blindly onwards, trusting my feet to find purpose eventually.

But there was no escape from the maelstrom within. It chased me no matter how far or fast I fled through the moonlit city

streets.

By the time icy air burning in my lungs finally cooled my rage some, I found myself in an unrecognisable industrial district. Steam billowed from overflowing gutters and establishments of repute lined the narrow alleyways. Faintly the lonely wail of police sirens cried out to the unrelenting night. What was I doing in this grim place so far from proper streets?

A ragged beggar lurched from the shadows, eagerly pleading for coins with rotting breath. Revulsion twisted my face. I waved the filthy urchin off without a backward glance, resolved to move on. Enough wallowing in futile anger over what was done. I was Alpha. Self-control was imperative, now more than ever with Terra poised under our very roof to wreak the Moon knew what new havoc. I must play the steady leader despite inner storms.

I strode towards the nearest thoroughfare, intent on hailing a taxi carriage back to the respectable hotel district. But the surrounding dilapidated buildings grabbed my notice instead. Crooked shutters hung by rusting nails, gaping holes where glass should fill windows. No trace of light, warmth or welcome.

My steps stowed. Here were the hollow shells of businesses once vital, now abandoned and stripped of worth. But also dens where the city's desperate and downtrodden languished every night, ignored by polite society. A stark reminder of how enviously even an Alpha's grasp on power clung. Nothing lasts eternally.

The profound realisation winded me more forcefully than my furious dashes through the wooded city park earlier. I sank onto an icy curb, humbled. True leadership meant aiding all under my charge, especially the vulnerable. What efforts had I made to guide society toward more equitable treatment, not simply preserving traditions?

Piece by piece, the mountain of righteousness I had built up while scoring Terra's disappearance toppled. I had been so focused on personally feeling betrayed, I ignored the wider packs welfare. Bringing about true unity and security mattered. far more than my petty grudges or pride.

A new resolve took root. I would not waste this unexpected second opportunity with Terra, however plagued by suspicion and misunderstanding. We would find a way forward guided by level heads, not volatile emotions. I must extend patience and compassion. The pack deserved no less.

Frozen but calmer, I continued back to more reputable streets and hailed a taxi as originally intended, grateful for the chance to thaw cramped limbs. By the time the penthouse elevator's polished doors parted, equilibrium had returned to my frayed mind. I was ready to speak calmly with Terra and Father.

But I found Father alone by the dying fire, wearily massaging his temples. He started slightly as I entered. Alarm prickled along my neck. Father was never less than keenly alert, even in supposed solitude. I had clearly interrupted an interrogation of conscience.

"What troubles you, Father?" I kept my tone gentle, free of pressure. He debated internally before finally sighing.

"Forgive my agitation. Old ghosts sometimes return to rattle one's peace. His smile appeared more grimace. My brows knit. Why so cryptic tonight?

But respect-forbade prying deeper into his personal burdens, so simply clasped his shoulder. "If certain ghosts still haunt, perhaps we should exorcise them through open dialogue." I held his cagey stare. "Secrets spread darkness, not light"

Father's eyes became veiled, his touch nudging my hand off. "Let the dead keep their bones buried, son. Now get some rest. Added perspectives tomorrow will clear up certain matters."

I hesitated, but ultimately bid him goodnight without further objection. Whatever shrouded truth he guarded, it was not mine to demand. But I vowed to show Father the virtues of transparency and patience I had just pledged to bring to my leadership. By enacting them myself.

Despite mentally rehearsing reasonable discourse, I still tensed instinctively when Terra entered the dining room the next morning. But she politely offered a quiet "Good morning Alpha, Elder" with no hint of our violent history. I murmured, returned the greeting and sipped tea, encouraged.

But as breakfast commenced, Father seemed oddly reticent. He answered direct questions curtly, otherwise allowing stilted silence. I sought desperately for neutral topics to fill the yawning void. Terra kept to herself, eating little

Mercifully, Father finally set down his untouched plate with resolve. “Let us clear the fog between us. I know only forthrightness restores trust now.”

Terra and I both started, shock cracking her impersonal mask. Father gestured for her to speak first. She set her fork down with utmost care before responding-

“Very well. But what I share cannot spread beyond this room yet Her eyes implored sincerity. I gave a nod of silent acceptance. We were beyond petty games now.

With a fortifying breath, she began slowly. “After departing here, I returned to my hometown in the rural valley. For the first time in years, I felt peace. Believed I could build a humble but worthy new life through my small clinic there.”

Her expression grew distant with bittersweet nostalgia. “And so I did. I spared no effort restoring the derelict building into a sanctuary of care and laughter. Lighting it up night and day so none felt turned aside.”

My own shadowed memories supplied images of cherry rooms illed with activities for children, delicious cooking scents wafting from the kitchen hearth. Terra’s smile held profound sadness and pride.

“It became everything I dreamt – a haven for outcasts. The unwanted, ill, elderly any in need knew they had refuge.” Her voice dropped, barely audible. “And finally a family, bound not by blood but choice. Three lives I’d sacrifice all for.”

They had threatened her newfound loved ones. It was the only explanation for her ferocity when challenged. My fists clenched under the table. She would not betray innocents, no matter the cost. I should have trusted her integrity.

Oblivious to my churning shame, Terra continued haltingly. “I received a message three moons ago. Return and fulfil required duties, or else permanent harm would befall those most precious.” Her breath hitched discreetly. There could be no choice at all.”

When she said no more, Father prompted gently,”

His Rejected Mateless Luna Chapter 30

Nathan

“Yes...yes that is my only mistake, I accept it and I am willing to make changes. I am inclined to seek forgiveness from everyone involved. I will do that, I promise”

“You can do that from your prison chamber. I don’t give a damn! Now step out” I was done conversing with him and I have better things to do rather than to squander my time listening to his bullshit.

“No wait... Please listen to me...

“Get the hell out of the damn car before I get you out of it myself, I made sure to put emphasis on pronouncing each word and that got him to get down immediately, his hands shoved into his pockets and his head hanging low in shame or whatever, I can’t tell and I don’t give a damn. All I want to do was to fulfill my instructions and get the hell out of this damn place.

I walked slowly behind them, my eyes focused, ready to take action in case any one of them attempted to scope away. Spencer had been surveying the whole surroundings. I don’t know what for but I sure as hell was going to show him he stood no chance if he tried anything ridiculous.

Fortunately for him, he didn’t and I guided them successfully into the station and we were greeted by two cops sitting at the counter, each going on with his business. I recognize one as been part of the food assigned to look into Landon’s matter and he actually looked not so pleased to see us, probably thinking we are here to see if there is any information regarding our missing child.

I don’t know how people have depended on this waste of space for protection but they really do and it is so sad to know. Should we have followed their instructions, we would probably be at home, doing nothing but just waiting for them to perform their miracle and find our son.

“I told you precisely to stay out of here and we are going to get back to you if we find the slightest information that might be helpful, why are you here right now!” He arched his brows and squinted his eyes in a challenging kind of way.

My eyes met his in an equally challenging kind of way and I replied without batting a lash. “I am not here to source any piece of information from you, instead, I am here to pass it on to you”

“What?” He remarked with a bit of confusion. His gaze flickered between me, to Spencer and then finally landed on Collins, probably hoping to get some form of explanation from him whereas Collins had his head faced down, avoiding eye contact with each and every person in the room.

“What do you mean by that? Start explaining yourself, I do not have all the time in the world and you should not just come here and expect me to tolerate you speaking in riddles. This is a station. We do not do that here” The other Officer, who I do not recognize spoke. He too seemed to be very much invested in the conversation since we came in and he had his attention focused solely on us rather than the computer in front of him which he was supposed to focus on.

“The missing child, Landon that is, has been found and I am here to put before you the culprit responsible for his kidnapping* As much as they do not want their time to be

wasted, so do I despise being around humans and I would try as much as I can to reduce my interaction with one, except when it is utterly necessary.

“What?” The familiar officer muttered again in disbelief. He was either deaf or had a weird obsession with making people repeat their words, either of the two, I wasn’t planning on repeating anything I said because I wasn’t fond of doing that especially not to a lesser being.

“I did not stutter” I deadpanned, gazing at him dead in the eyes. You either take time and let what I say register into your head before opening your mouth or I take away my criminals and evidence to another station”

Nathan

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