

Luna Forsaken

Chapter 10 The Dance That Defied Them

Arya's POV

Lev's hand stayed steady at my waist, like the whole room could glare itself hoarse and he still wouldn't let me wobble.

The music was loud, but the whispers still found me.

Every step I took felt like a statement the pack didn't want me to make.

I caught bits of it, provoking, ruining, rogue, that ugly one they liked to repeat, and my stomach clenched.

"Let them talk," he said, calm as sin. "It means you're still standing."

He guided me like he didn't hear any of it, like the room's spite couldn't touch us.

Then the link snapped tight in my skull.

Arya. Don't.

James's voice.

Hard. Possessive.

The audacity of it nearly stole my breath and my body betrayed me for half a second, because his voice still did what it had always done. It still reached places in me I didn't want it to reach.

You're making a spectacle.

I felt my hands tighten. Lev's grip didn't change, but his chest rose slightly, like he sensed the shift in me.

James pushed again, sharp and insistent.

You're my mate, Arya. Don't forget that.

Mate.

Wife.

Words he was throwing at me while he stood up there marrying someone else.

My throat burned.

I leaned closer to lev, just to prove I could. Let the room see. Let James feel it through the bond.

Lev's arm tightened slightly around me, protective, not possessive, like he was bracing for impact.

I linked James back.

If I was your wife in anything but name, you wouldn't be standing up there playing groom.

A pause, one beat of silence, like I'd slapped him through the bond.

I held it.

Then I sent the next words clean and cold.

I hope it was worth it.

James's presence surged, anger flaring.

Arya,

I cut him off, still dancing, still smiling faintly like nothing was happening.

Don't.

"He's in your head," Lev said quietly.

"Yes."

"Want me to give you a reason to ignore him?"

I shook my head once. "No."

Lev watched me for a beat, then spoke quietly, as if we were the only two people in the hall.

“So you’re Arya,” he said. “I was wondering when I’d finally meet you.”

I blinked, startled. “ me?”

He nodded once. “The Luna who doesn’t bend,” he said. A faint smile tugged at his mouth. “The one who bites back.”

My chest tightened. “That ... as you can see I have been replaced”

“You are not Luna because you were his mate. You are Luna because you earned it,” he finished calmly. “I admire your strength.”

I swallowed hard, because hearing admiration today felt like touching warmth after being frozen.

Lev’s gaze stayed steady. “And knowing James is supposed to be your mate...” His voice cooled. “Learning he did this just for a seat at the Union table, ”

My breath hitched.

Lev didn’t soften it.

“That’s... weak,” Lev said, calm but disgusted. “And it’s not what an Alpha does to his mate.”

My fingers trembled against his shoulder. I forced them still.

Lev continued, measured and blunt. “The Union isn’t as great as it seems.”

I lifted my eyes to his. “What do you mean?”

“Most uninformed wolves think Union membership guarantees protection,” he said. “They’re wrong.”

The words landed sharply.

“It’s not guaranteed protection against all attacks,” Lev added, calm as law. “Not the way people think. Not the way men like Marcel sell it.”

My stomach turned. “Then what is it?”

Lev’s jaw tightened slightly. “A network. A shield, sometimes. A political gate. A tool. And a leash, if you’re foolish enough to let it become one.”

I let out a slow breath that shook.

Lev's eyes cut briefly toward the front, where James was. "I wonder how many more things James will sacrifice to avoid fighting to keep his land."

The sentence hit too close.

Because I already knew the answer.

As many as it takes.

The song ended.

Lev guided me back without hurry, like returning me to my seat was not a retreat, just a choice.

The murmurs followed us like a swarm.

I felt eyes on my covered neck. On my hands. On Lev's arm around me.

James linked again, low, furious.

Arya. Enough. Go back to your table.

I didn't answer.

I didn't give him the satisfaction.

We reached our table.

Maxwell looked... pleased. Not smug. Not cruel. Just quietly satisfied that I'd held my ground.

He leaned in slightly as Lev pulled my chair out.

"Well done," Maxwell murmured, and then, louder, "Arya, "

I looked at him.

His expression softened in a way it hadn't all day.

"I wish I had a daughter like you," he said simply.

My throat tightened so sharply I nearly looked away.

I forced myself to nod. "Thank you."

Lev sat beside me, quiet again, but attentive. Not in a way that demanded anything, just present. Offering small courtesies without making them feel like pity. He refilled my glass without a word, shifted his chair just enough to block the worst of the stares, and kept his eyes on the room like he was counting threats so I didn't have to.

And for a few fragile minutes, it worked.

For a few minutes, I forgot the pain that wouldn't move no matter how I breathed..

I forgot the vows.

I forgot Leah's smile.

I forgot James's voice in my head.

I breathed.

I ate a little.

I even almost, almost, felt normal.

And then the yearning hit.

Not desire.

Escape.

A sick, desperate need to disappear somewhere no one could touch me.

Somewhere my baby could live.

My fingers pressed lightly to my belly under the table.

My mind flicked to Lev again, his calm, his authority, the way Marcel had backed down from him so fast.

A thought rose, dangerous and hungry.

Ask him. Ask him if he can find you a new pack.

