

Chapter 5 The Bed That Went Cold - Luna Forsaken |

Arya's POV

James didn't come back after the argument.

Not that night. Not the next.

I kept waiting for the door, like an idiot. I didn't know why but I guess a part of me, the part that had been with him all these years hoped we could fix it.

I slept alone for two days, staring at his pillow, still carrying the faintest trace of him, and feeling my throat tighten every time I breathed. It didn't feel like comfort anymore. It felt like something tight under my skin, pulling and bruising every time I tried to pretend I was fine.

Every time I felt him somewhere in the packhouse, it was distant. Controlled. Like he was keeping space on purpose.

And the pack... the pack started acting strange.

People stopped meeting my eyes. Voices dropped when I walked by.

Like I'd become something they didn't want to be seen standing beside.

Whispers cut off mid-sentence, smiles tightened, bows got stiff. Smiles looked pasted on. Like they were remembering, mid-motion, who they were supposed to be loyal to now. Even the ones who used to laugh with me in the kitchen, who used to bring me reports like I was part of the spine of this place, now they moved around me like I was a problem waiting to explode.

I walked past Lisa, the kitchen staff I'd made James take in when she showed up at our gates. Without me, she would've died out there.

Now she brushed past like I didn't exist, snickering with another girl when she thought I wasn't looking.

You don't know how people feel about you until they stop needing you.

By the third morning, I woke to noise.

Not normal morning noise, cheering, clapping, that forced excitement people put on when they think it'll keep them safe.

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Their voices raised in welcome.

My chest went cold so fast it almost hurt.

I didn't need to ask. My body knew before my mind caught up, because the bond went tight and sick, like it was bracing for a blow.

I sat up slowly, my hair falling over my shoulders, my body heavy, my mouth dry. The sound outside grew louder, chants, laughter, the kind of excitement that didn't belong to a pack that had been under threat for weeks.

They were welcoming her. The woman who would stand where I used to stand. Close enough to touch him in public.

Leah Rainhorn.

And my people, were clapping like she was salvation.

A knock hit my door.

Once. Twice.

Controlled. Formal.

I stared at it for a beat too long, then forced my legs to move.

When I opened it, Gamma Raymond stood there.

He didn't smile.

He looked... uncomfortable. Like he'd practised his lines and still didn't know where to put his eyes.

"Luna," he started, then hesitated like he wasn't sure he was allowed to say it anymore.

I said nothing.

His throat bobbed. "Alpha James wants everyone outside. He said no exceptions,"

My fingers tightened on the edge of the door. "Everyone."

He nodded once. "To welcome Leah Rainhorn... and Luna Rebecca Rainhorn."

Luna Rebecca.

My stomach dropped.

What was Marcel's wife doing here/JMaybe she had come to ensure James followed through on their deal.

My mouth went dry. "So he's already crowned Leah,."

Raymond's eyes flickered with discomfort. "Arya, "

"Don't." My voice cut clean. "Don't say it softly like it changes what you're here to tell me."

He took a breath. "The Alpha gave the order."

Of course James did.

I stared at Raymond like he was a stranger wearing a familiar face. "He gave the order," I repeated, slow. "And he didn't give me an exception."

Raymond's shoulders tightened. "He said everyone."

A laugh tried to rise in my throat and died there. "Everyone," I repeated. "Including me. The one he's pushing aside."

Raymond flinched.

"Luna," he tried again, quieter. "Please. Just, please, come with me."

"No." The word came out before I could soften it. "I'm not going out there to clap for my own humiliation."

Raymond stepped closer, palms open, voice dropping.

"They're watching you," he said. "They're waiting for you to give them a reason. If you don't show, they'll twist it into 'she doesn't want protection'."

I blinked.

"They believe Leah is the key," he said, faster now, desperate. "They believe she's their guarantee. The Union recognition. The safety. They think if you refuse to come out, you're confirming every fear they have."

My jaw clenched. "So now I have to smile to keep them from hating me."

Raymond's face tightened like it hurt him to admit it.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, Luna. That's exactly it."

The cheering outside rose again, louder, closer, like the pack was swelling toward the courtyard. Like the moment was happening without me, and every second I stayed in this room was another mark against my name.

Raymond swallowed. "Please don't let them turn you into the villain."

I stared at him, throat burning.

"James already handed them the version of me they needed," I said. "The difficult Luna."

Raymond's eyes widened slightly. "No. He, " He stopped himself, choosing his words carefully. "He's doing what he thinks he must."

"What he thinks he must," I echoed, numb.

Raymond stepped forward again, voice softer now, almost pleading.

"You're still marked," Raymond said quietly. "He hasn't... he hasn't taken that from you."

He swallowed. "This is politics. It's... supposed to be politics."

I felt my mouth twist, but no sound came out.

Because that was the lie, wasn't it?

"Just politics."

Like politics didn't crawl into your bed and steal your breath.

Like politics didn't take the word Luna out of people's mouths.

That it was "just politics," while James made sure the pack saw me comply.

Raymond held my gaze, desperate. "If you stay inside, they'll say you're refusing the Union. They'll say you're choosing pride over protection." His voice cracked slightly. "When people are scared, they get ugly," he said. "And they'll pick someone to blame."

I looked past him, toward the sound outside.

They were celebrating her.

They were welcoming the woman who was coming to take my seat, and they were doing it with the kind of joy they should've saved for victory after a war.

I swallowed hard.

Raymond watched me like he was waiting for me to explode.

I didn't.

Because exploding would only give them what they wanted.

Proof.

A reason.

A story they could tell each other when they needed to hate me.

My voice came out flat. "Fine."

Raymond exhaled like he'd been holding his breath for days. "Thank you."

I didn't answer.

I stepped back into the room, grabbed my Jacket, and wore it.

When I turned back to the door, Raymond was still there, waiting like this was a duty, not a walk.

I paused at the threshold.

My palm went to my belly without thinking, a protective press, quiet, fierce.

I stepped into the corridor.

Not because I wanted to.

Because James had made sure I didn't have a choice.

And with my hand still on my stomach, I walked out to welcome them.