

The Lycan King's Treasured Luna 219

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The tears didn't stop until I had nothing left to cry. I didn't even realize I'd reached the riverbend until the clearing opened before me. Without wasting time, I knelt and began sorting the clothes into piles.

I didn't own much, just a few worn pieces handed down by random pack house members. I couldn't afford to let them pile up. Every day, I had to wash them.

Our pack was small, just about two hundred members. I knew that because every year, Alpha Joe oversaw a census himself. We weren't the only supernaturals, though.

Lycans ruled the seven realms, but people like me had no reason or privilege to ever meet one. The rest of the supernatural world existed in the background of my life, distant, and irrelevant because right now, all that mattered were the clothes beneath my shaking hands.

I scrubbed the clothes harder, pressing my palms into the fabric until my arms trembled. As anger boiled in my chest, flashbacks lashed through me.

Maltreatment. Verbal abuse. Insults. Physical blows. I felt my veins throb violently and a sharp, splitting pain ignited across my forehead like a migraine. It was so intense I thought I'd black out. Then, just as suddenly, it stopped.

By the time I made it back to the house, the sun was retreating behind the horizon.

I heard voices inside and the unmistakable voice of Alpha Joe. Confused, I pushed open the door. Every head at the dining table turned toward me.

"Alpha," I mumbled.

"I've been waiting for you all afternoon, Narine," he said.

"I'm sorry, Alpha. I was doing laundry at the river bend."

"Laundry?" he echoed, puzzled.

"Oh, Joe," Ama intruded sweetly. "Narine's such a clean freak. She complains the washing machine doesn't get things properly clean."

Joe nodded in understanding.

"Anyways," he continued, "I'm here because it's your birthday. It's custom for the Alpha to bless you and pray that Aeryna's spirit sees you through your transformation from man to beast."

I blinked, stunned. The Alpha remembered my birthday. My parents hadn't.

"Thank you, Alpha," I whispered.

"Come, sit. You must be starving." Ama beckoned.

I hesitated, startled by Ama's sudden show of kindness. But I dropped the bags by the door and took the empty seat beside Levon. I couldn't even remember the last time I'd sat here.

There was toast, chicken, prawns, pancakes, pasta, and fruits. I took a single spoonful of pasta.

"Oh, come now, sweetheart," Ama drawled in a cloying voice. "Don't be shy. Joe doesn't mind a little gluttony."

Joe laughed, and I forced a tight smile, doing my best not to react to the thinly-veiled insult. Less than eight hours left, I reminded myself. I could endure that much longer. And then I would shove my fingers right up her smug face.

"Have you always had that mark on your forehead?" Joe asked suddenly.

I touched my forehead, confused.

"What mark?" I asked.

"There's a small red mark there."

"Oh, it must have been from when I bumped into a tree on my way back,"

Joe nodded, accepting it.

The conversation shifted. Vargos and Joe discussed pack matters. Levon played on his phone and Ama chirped in now and then. Dinner ended quietly. I cleared the plates and did the dishes.

I looked out the window. The sky was parting, revealing a full moon, stained deep red.

All of a sudden Heat exploded under my skin. I doubled over, gasping.

"It has begun," Joe mumbled.

"Go to the courtyard," Vargos instructed. His voice was cold and detached like he was issuing orders to a stranger. "Take off your clothes and remember to breathe through the pain."

He had never directly mistreated me, but he had also never stopped it. His indifference made him just as guilty.

Still, I obeyed.

I stumbled outside, while the others trailed behind me. I didn't even make it to the center before the first scream tore from my throat. The air howled with the rising wind. Storm clouds gathered, and lightning flashed across the sky. My own screams were swallowed by the roar of the storm as agony tore through me.

Then, Rain pounded down.. My bones snapped and elongated painfully slow. I could feel my spine twisting in odd angles. The pain was so agonizing all I could do was lay there as tears slipped from my eyes, powerless against the pain. After what felt like an eternity of screaming, the pain finally faded and I laid there panting.

I staggered up on unfamiliar legs, I watched in awe as my golden fur shimmered under the rain, with champagne hues dancing across the sleek coat. The tip of the fur blazed with burnished red that contrasted the golden undertone.

Everything was sharper now. I could smell, see, hear, and feel more than I ever had.

Far-off noises. Every leaf, and every drop of water. I could see it all. I howled wildly to the red moon. Then I turned back toward the others brimming with happiness.

Instead, they were frozen, staring at me like I'd grown two heads.

"Monster," Ama whispered.

Levon's mouth hung open. Joe and Vargos edged forward carefully, as if approaching a wild animal. I tried to step forward, and they all jerked back.

"What abnormality is this?" Vargos muttered.

"Aeryna has forsaken you, child," Joe whispered.

Panic flooded me. What was wrong? Why were they looking at me like that?

I turned and caught sight of myself in a puddle.

My blood ran cold.

I was huge, towering over even Vargos's six-foot frame. But that's not what startled me. On my forehead, a third eye sat. Its socket was black as void, and the iris glowed molten gold, while my main eyes burned red.

I barely had time to register it before darkness swallowed me whole.