

CH 2 - KATHERINE

KATHERINE POV

I felt him before I saw him.

That awful prickling at the base of my skull—like someone had just scraped my name across a blackboard behind my back. Like always happened since middle school.

I didn't stop walking. Just clutched my folder tighter to my chest and kept moving down the science wing hallway—too quiet, too empty. Most people didn't come here unless they had a reason. I thought that was the whole point. But clearly, I wasn't the only one with that idea.

The lights overhead buzzed, ickering like they were on their last legs. The paint on the walls had yellowed, cracked in places. The air smelled like old chemicals and dust. Fitting.

"Katie."

His voice was close. Closer than I expected. And it made my stomach turn.

I didn't turn around. Not right away.

He always said it like it was a joke. Like I was some amusing little problem he could poke with a stick. I didn't want to give him the satisfaction. But I turned anyway.

Jonas Hound leaned against the wall like he owned it. Like he owned me. Newsflash: he didn't. He never would.

One boot crossed in front of the other, arms folded, a lazy smile tugging at his mouth.

Smug bastard.

Too tall. All sharp edges and predator stillness—like something used to being obeyed without question. He was always a second away from doing something violent just for fun.

His sleeves were pushed up, all casual-like, showing off those veiny forearms he probably exed just to remind everyone he had them. I'd bet my last nerve he got off on the way heat-struck she-wolves looked at him—like he was every fantasy they'd been spoon-fed since they were pups.

That wild, dark hair that never laid at. And those eyes—gold-eked and too bright, too knowing.

Too calculating.

He was the kind of beautiful that felt dangerous. The kind that made your instincts pull you in and push you away at the same time.

"Stalking me now?" I asked.

He grinned. "You wish."

I rolled my eyes and reached for the nearest door. The chem lab. Empty, I hoped.

I slipped inside and tried to shut the door behind me.

Tried.

He caught it with his palm, easy, and walked in like he'd been invited. The door clicked shut behind him.

No lock. Of course there wasn't. Why would there be, when the universe was clearly in on the joke?

He didn't say anything for a second. Just looked at me.

Then, "Big day tomorrow."

I stared. "So?"

He stepped closer. Casual. Like this was just a friendly chat and not something much worse.

"You shift at midnight, right?"

I didn't answer. Mostly because my throat had gone tight.

Partially because I wanted to scream at him to go to hell.

But it would just give me more troubles.

Jonas moved again, one slow step at a time. Closing the gap like a hunter backing a deer into a corner.

"Most of us shift at sixteen," he said, voice low. "If you're not shifting tomorrow, it'll mean you're human. And we do not allow humans in our pack anymore. I don't know what my father was thinking when allowed your mother to join us."

I didn't rise to the bait.

He tilted his head, studying me. "What? Cat got your tongue Katie? Or are You nervous?"

"No."

"You should be."

I crossed my arms, trying to look bored. "Why are you even here?"

That stupid half-smile again. "Making sure you don't chicken out."

"I'm not afraid."

He moved in even closer, and now I could smell him—pine, something smoky, and underneath it, something raw. Not sweat, not cologne. Something I craved. Unfortunately.

His wolf was closer to the surface than usual. I could feel it in the air between us.

"You don't have to be afraid," he murmured. "You'll just fail," he said slowly. "Quietly. Alone. Where no one will see how pathetic it is."

I stepped back, hit the counter behind me. He followed, bracing his hands on either side of me, trapping me there.

Still not touching.

Still too close.

The air between us crackled with tension. The kind that wasn't romantic or exciting. The kind that made my skin crawl.

"You feel it," he said.

"I feel gross," I said, wrinkling my nose like he was a smell I couldn't wash off.

His smile faded.

His eyes darkened, pupils blown wide. His wolf was right there, just under his skin—pacing, clawing, wanting. I could feel it pressing at the edges, wild and hungry, and not for food. I could see it.

"You're lying."

"No, Jonas. I'm not. Just because you're turned on doesn't mean I am."

His nostrils ached. His jaw tightened. "That's not what this is."

"Then what is it?"

He didn't answer right away. Just stared at me. His breathing was too steady. Too measured. Like he was trying to keep himself from doing something he'd regret.

Or something he wouldn't.

Then he said it. Quiet, like a curse.

"Maybe the Moon Goddess is laughing her ass off right now."

My stomach dropped.

I didn't want to understand.

But I did.

"No," I said, shaking my head. "You wish that were true."

He just looked at me. And that told me everything.

"No," I repeated, louder this time. "If you think I'm your—"

"I don't want it," he snapped. "Don't atter yourself."

"Good. I reject you. Right now. Done."

He backed up a step, like the words had physically hit him. Like they meant something.

He stared at the ground for a second, then back at me.

"You're gonna go to the old clearing tomorrow night," he said, voice at now. Cold. "North ridge. Alone."

"Excuse me?"

"You want to prove yourself? Do it where no one can help you. No one can bail you out."

I frowned. "Who said I need help?"

He gave a bitter laugh. "Please. You're barely holding it together now."

"I'll shift just ne."

"Then do it. In the dark. Alone. Show me."

I wanted to punch him. I wanted to scream. But most of all, I wanted to get the hell out of that room and away from the pressure of his body, his words, his scent—all of it.

Jonas turned to leave.

Stopped in the doorway.

He didn't look back when he said, "Better hope you don't smell like mine when it happens," he said.

Then he was gone—just a shadow slipping out the door.

And I stood there, shaking. Furious. Sick.

Because the worst part wasn't what he said.

It was that part of me, buried deep, that didn't say no loud enough.

My heart was racing, and my sts were clenched, that awful twisting feeling in my gut like I'd just swallowed poison.

I hated him.

I hated what he made me feel.

And I hated the small, cold whisper inside me that wondered—

What if he's right?