

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 121

The clearing thrums with a tension so thick it feels alive, pressing against the skin like a storm about to shatter the heavens. Shadows stretch long, the air vibrating with Malik's twisted laughter as the Queen takes another step forward, her face carved from ice.

"Enough of your wickedness," she says, her voice like steel striking flint. "It ends tonight. You've spread pain and suffering beyond measure. Paying with your life won't balance the scales-but it will do."

And that necklace—" her gaze flicks to the glowing chain around his throat, "-it doesn't suit you. On me, it's power. On you, it reeks of desperation. Time to hand it over, shameless thief."

Malik bares his cracked teeth in a ghastly grin. "Desperation? You dare call this power desperation? Look at me, Queen. Look at what I've become-stronger than the Alpha King himself. Stronger than you."

Mock me if you will, Your Highness, but you can't strip me of what's already mine. The necklace sings to me. It feeds me with every breath you take. Look at you-slower, weaker, dying." His hand trails mockingly along the glowing veins creeping up his neck. "You're nothing before me now. Submit, while I'm still in the mood to be merciful."

"How ironic." The Queen's lips curve, cold and merciless. "For all your boasting, you've never possessed a single thing of your own. Always stealing, always leeching —my power, my family, my peace. Even as you drain me through that necklace, you're still empty. You've never built anything of your own. You only steal. You are no wolf, Malik. You are a hollow disgrace."

His eyes glitter, amused at her fury. "Big words from a queen who couldn't even protect her daughter. She was right there, under your roof, wrapped in your so-called queenly care-and I plucked her away like ripe fruit. You didn't even notice. You failed her. Do you remember it-the fear? The helplessness? I drank it in. I fed on it." For the briefest heartbeat, the Queen falters, her face tightening, her fingers twitching at her sides. But she sets her jaw, refusing to give him the satisfaction. "You don't get to twist my pain into your triumph," she says, her voice deadly. "You were nothing but a pawn, Malik."

Varkos's pawn. His obedient dog."

Malik's grin widens, his voice thick with dark pride. "Elder Varkos taught me everything I know. He was my master—a man who understood how to take what he wanted, no matter the cost. Even if it meant the heir to the Alpha King. He opened the gates of your precious palace for me. Without him, I'd have been nothing." His lip curls in disdain. "But now, he's weak. A traitor. Once I kill you, I'll finish him too."

I'll carve him into dust. And then the world will bow to me. With Veydris at my side, I am unstoppable, untouchable. A new age is coming, and everyone will kneel."

The Queen's patience snaps. "I've heard enough of your barking. Since you cling to darkness, feeling no guilt and remorse, you leave me no choice." Her voice cracks like a whip as she raises her hands,

whispering words older than the earth itself.

“Enrai’thos vel carian, sunderis mortem, bindral ethe’nai..”

The air shudders. The necklace at Malik’s throat flares-once blood-red, now blinding white. His eyes widen, the mocking grin sliding from his face.

“No-what are you-” His words shatter into a scream as the necklace turns on him. His skin blisters, black veins searing across his body, burning from the inside out. Smoke rises from his body, and his soul-thick and dark as tar-begins to unravel, thread by thread, sucked into the cursed jewel.

“You caused my pain,” the Queen says coldly even as his shrieks split the night. “You caused my fears. Now you will pay with your life.”

Malik collapses to his knees, clawing at the necklace, but it sears his hands to ash. His body convulses, his screams breaking into guttural roars until, at last, what remains of him crumbles to dust. His soul-black and writhing-vanishes into the necklace. It drops to the ground, glowing faintly amid the pile of ashes.

The clearing falls silent.*

The Queen’s chest heaves, but her face remains unshaken. Slowly, she turns to Jack, who stands in wolf form, blood matting his fur, his eyes locked on her.

“You know what to do,” she says, her voice low but firm. “Once I am inside the necklace.”

Jack shifts back, his bare chest rising and falling with exhaustion. His eyes flash with panic. “Are you sure about this?”

“This isn’t the time to hesitate and be a pussy, Jack,” she snaps, stepping toward him with command that brooks no refusal. “If we don’t act now, Malik will return tenfold in strength. Veydris will rebuild his body, his soul will be reborn, and then no one-not me, not you, not even the King-will be able to stop him. Think of your mate. Think of your unborn child. Is that the future you want-for Malik’s shadow to fall over them and drag us all into hell?”

Jack’s throat works, fists clenched so tightly his knuckles turn white.

He gives a single, sharp nod

The Queen closes her eyes and lifts her hands over the necklace, chanting again, each ancient syllable weaving like blades through the night.

“Syr’anthos vel kriah, souls entravi, mor’thir etha’kai...”

Light engulfs her, her body trembling though she stands tall. Slowly, her spirit tears free-radiant and fierce-while her body remains upright, motionless, eyes closed as if in sleep. Her soul drifts toward the necklace, drawn into its cursed depths.

“My queen-” Jack’s voice cracks, but he doesn’t stop her.

The last flicker of her spirit glances back, her gaze locking with his. Do

With a guttural roar, Jack shifts again, his claws slashing down. The necklace shatters beneath the blow, light exploding outward in a blinding flare—and a voice, sharp and furious, screams behind him.

“NO!”

Jack whirls, eyes widening as his heart seizes. His mate. Kali. But it’s already too late. The shards scatter at his feet like dying stars, his claws dripping with ash and smoke.

Kali stands in the moonlight, hair tangled, eyes wide with terror. For a heartbeat, he can’t breathe, can’t understand how she found him after he had severed the tether, shutting her out.

But she has.

And behind her, half-shadowed, stands the King—that sight explains everything. His face is twisted in fury and grief, and the sound that tears from him—low, guttural, and broken—shakes the very earth. It isn’t the roar of a king. It’s the cry of a man watching his soulmate being torn away.

Jack’s blood runs cold. He knows the pain must be unbearable, seeing his mate’s lifeless body. But the Queen had chosen her fate. She had decided to die.

Kali takes an unsteady step forward, her body trembling as if the ground beneath her wants to swallow her whole. She stops before the Queen’s still form, her hands shaking as she cups her mother’s face.

“Mother..” Her voice cracks, shatters. “Open your eyes. Please—please, don’t leave me forever.”

Her screams tear through the clearing, raw and desperate, echoing in Jack’s bones. She shakes the Queen’s shoulders, tears dripping freely down her cheeks. “You can’t leave me. Come back to me. There must be a way.”

The silence that answers is worse than any sound. Kali’s wail rips through the night, sharp enough to break him. She clutches her chest, then her belly. Her body bends forward, and Jack’s world freezes as he sees it—dark red spilling down her thighs, blood dripping fast and merciless into the dirt.

“Kali!” His voice is thunder, ragged with panic. He lunges, his wolf form shedding in a flash of light until he’s human again, racing toward her.

Her body collapses against his arms before she hits the ground, small and fragile despite the fire she always carried. His hands are everywhere—holding, clutching, desperate to stop what he can’t stop.

“No, no, no...” Jack’s voice breaks as he cradles her, his heart splitting open with every drop of blood that stains his skin. “Don’t do this to me.

Not you. Not our baby.”

Kali's lashes flutter weakly, her lips parting in a soundless plea. Jack pulls her tighter, rocking her against his chest as if his strength alone could keep her tethered. His head tips back, and his roar this time isn't fury.

It's grief.

It shakes the trees. It shakes the sky.

And still, the Queen's body remains motionless, her spirit gone.

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The spirit world opens like a breath of eternity-vast, endless, silver light stretching across a sky with no stars, only the pale glow of the eternal moon. The ground beneath is neither earth nor air, shifting like mist yet solid enough to hold the weight of souls. It is beautiful, serene but heavy, every breath filled with judgement.

At the center of it stands the Queen, her body shimmering faintly with threads of silver running through her skin, marking her for what she is: a direct descendant of the Moon Goddess. Her presence radiates command, her eyes blazing like molten silver. Here, she is not merely queen. She is divine.

Across from her, Malik writhes on the shifting ground, the last of Veydris clinging to him like oil. His veins burn with shadow, his form flickering-sometimes wolf, sometimes man, sometimes a grotesque, twisted in-between. His face is set in a sneer, though fear lingers in his eyes.

“You call this victory?” he spits, his voice ragged with hatred. “You ended your own life just to drag me here, just to erase me from the world. Do you even realize what you’ve done? You’ve doomed yourself,

Queen.”

The Queen voice is calm and unshaken, the mist parting beneath her feet, power crackling in her wake. “Yes. I know exactly what it costs.

Veydris demands balance—a life for a life. I chose mine to end yours.

And I would do it again, a thousand times over, if it meant protecting the ones I love.”

Malik lets out a broken laugh, sharp and desperate. “And now you’ll rot here with me. Unless...” His grin falters, his tone tightening with unease. “Unless the necklace still exists. Tell me you didn’t destroy it.

You couldn’t have—you wouldn’t be so foolish. Without it, there is no vessel. No way back for either of us.” The Queen only smiles faintly, a cruel calm in her gaze. She raises her hand, and from the air

itself forges a chain of silver light, shimmering like moonfire. It lashes out, coiling around Malik's throat with a snap.

He claws at it in panic, the light searing through his corrupted flesh, but the harder he fights, the deeper it burns.

"You fool," she whispers, yanking him to his knees. Her strength here is absolute; his darkness is nothing but smoke before the purity of her light. She leans close, her silver eyes boring into his void-like gaze. "The necklace is shattered, Malik. Gone. You have no vessel, no tether to the mortal world. You are finished. Did you truly believe I would come here without a plan?"

"No..." His rasp turns into a strangled whimper, the fear he tried to mask spilling through. "No, no-without the necklace, we're trapped-"

"Yes." Her voice rises, ringing across the mist like a divine command." But only you will suffer here. When your soul burns in the fire you've sown, I will be reborn. And while you wither in eternal torment, I will return to the ones I love. Now-face your final judgment."

The air shifts suddenly. The ground trembles. And from above, the eternal moon blazes brighter, descending into a figure-majestic, vast, radiant. The Moon Goddess herself manifests, her form cloaked in silver and shadow, her face both tender and terrible.

Malik stiffens as her gaze settles on him. The Goddess's voice is soft, yet it reverberates through the spirit world like thunder.

"Malik," she says, her tone edged with sorrow and wrath. "You were born of my creation, gifted the blood of wolves. But you corrupted what was given. You murdered, betrayed, and stained your soul with darkness. You are a disgrace. A waste of creation."

"No," Malik gasps, thrashing against the chain, his voice breaking into panic. "No, not that-anything but that!"

The Goddess raises her hand, and the mists split open beneath him, revealing a pit of fire so vast and endless it seems to stretch into forever. The flames are not earthly-they are white-hot, devouring soul and shadow alike, a blaze that burns without end.

"No!" Malik's scream rips across the realm, raw with terror. "Not the eternal fire! Please-I'll change, 'll-"

But mercy does not come. The Queen's grip on the chain tightens one last time, and with a flick, she casts him down.

His scream fades into the roar of the eternal blaze, swallowed as his shadowed soul is consumed, dragged into endless torment. The fire flares, then seals shut, leaving only silence, as though Malik had never existed at all.

The Queen remains rooted in place, trembling, chest heaving with the remnants of battle. The chain of light unravels and dissolves into nothing as her spirit remains defiant.

The Moon Goddess's gaze finds her, piercing and unrelenting, but softened with something ancient and sorrowful. Her voice falls like silver rain.

"Do you regret it, child? The choice you made-abandoning the world of flesh, leaving behind your mate, your other half?"

A ripple distorts the misty ground before them, and a mirror of light rises, suspended in the air. Within it, the mortal realm flickers into view: the King. Mighty, indomitable, yet now broken, slumped in grief.

His great-shoulders shake, his hands claw at the earth, his howl of agony shaking the very foundations of the palace.

The Queen's lips part, her throat tight, her body aching to reach through that veil and touch him. She stares, long and hard, her hands curling into trembling fists. But when she speaks, her voice is steady, resolute.

"No," she whispers, then stronger, "No. If I hadn't done this, Malik would have slaughtered them all. Veydris would have drowned our world in shadow. There was no other path. I chose this. I accept it." She breathes sharply, eyes hardening with conviction. "And besides.. will return. I will be reborn through my daughter's womb. I will not be gone forever."

But the Moon Goddess's expression shifts-her face falling like a veil of sorrow lowering over her radiance. She shakes her head slowly, her voice heavier than the silence that surrounds them.

"About that..

Her hand waves once, and the mirror ripples again. The Queen turns sharply, expecting to see her daughter glowing with life.

Instead-her breath catches.

Kali lies in a stark, sterile room, her body pale and drenched in blood.

Her cries echo faintly, wild and broken, as doctors rush around her.

Jack is there, his face carved with anguish, clutching her hand as if it's

• the only thing tethering him to life. The doctor's grim voice cuts through the chaos like a knife:

"She's lost the baby."

The Queen's scream tears from her throat, raw and broken. She collapses to her knees before the Goddess, hands clawing at the mist.

Her crown of silver light slips, flickering, as tears stream down her glowing face.

"No... no, please. Not my grandchild. Not Maya's child." Her words tremble with despair. "Take me! Take my soul, my essence-anything."

Just don't let her lose this child. Don't let her bear this grief on top of mine."

She presses her forehead to the ground, bowing low before the Moon Goddess, her body wracked with sobs. "I gave up my body already. I will give you everything. Just let me save them. Please!"

The Goddess gazes down at her, her eternal eyes unreadable, the silence stretching heavy-too heavy.

The Queen lifts her tear-streaked face, her voice breaking. "Please, Moon Mother!. save my daughter's child."

The air thickens. The silver light dims, as though the Goddess herself is weighing a terrible decision. At last, her voice falls-final, unyielding.

"If I save your daughter's child in exchange for your soul... then you cannot be reborn. You will never return to the mortal world. Not through your daughter's womb. Not ever. So-choose."

The Queen's breath catches, her glowing eyes wide with anguish.

The mist trembles. The mirror flickers. The choice hangs, unbearable.

And the silence waits for her answer.

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The Queen's breath catches in her throat, the weight of the Moon Goddess's ultimatum pressing down on her like chains of fire. Her lips part, but no words come.

To give up her soul means obliteration—no return, no second chance.

Malik would laugh, even from the pit of hell where he had been cast forever, triumphant in her erasure. She can almost hear it: his cruel, mocking cackle echoing in the corners of her mind.

Her hands tremble at her sides, fingers curling into fists. Still, she does not flinch from the truth. If she had not destroyed him, Veydris would have devoured their world and countless others. Thousands of lives would have been lost. Her sacrifice-her everything-had been worth.

A soft, weary sigh escapes her lips. For one wild heartbeat, selfishness tempts her. She wonders if she should refuse this time. Maya could bear another child-another chance, another vessel for her soul. She could return, live again, love again. But the image of Maya's pale face, her raw, unending grief, rips that selfish thought apart.

Her throat tightens as memory surges back. She remembers what it felt like to lose Maya once-like her heart had been torn out, her body hollowed of all light. She cannot bear the thought of Maya enduring that same agony, the same endless ache. Her daughter has already borne too much. Once more, she will give everything.

Slowly, her eyes lift to the Moon Goddess. The divine figure stands patient and timeless, though sorrow clouds her silver gaze. She longs to restore the innocent child, for the Queen-this grandmother-has made an invaluable, selfless sacrifice for the world she helped preserve. Yet to intervene directly would be to defy the laws of nature, and the consequences of such defiance would be perilous.

“Fine,” the Queen whispers, the word tasting like ashes. She closes her eyes, releasing a shuddering breath. “Take my soul. But save my daughter’s baby. Save my grandchild.”

The Goddess’s expression softens with sorrow. She inclines her head, eyes closing as her lips part to speak the words that would twist fate itself. But before the first syllable can leave her mouth, the world shudders.

Not as it had before. This is different. Wrong. The spirit realm groans, the sky splitting into jagged veins of light and shadow. The silver mists writhe violently as though alive, pulled by an unnatural force.

The Queen stumbles back, her eyes widening in terror. “What’s happening?”

The Moon Goddess frowns, her divine poise faltering as she steadies the trembling ground with a thought. “This... should not be.”

And then-out of the tearing mist-he steps forth.

The Queen’s heart stops.

“My king..” Her voice breaks. Her hand flies to her mouth as she stares.

His body is still forming, spectral flesh knitting over luminous bone, his aura blazing with sorrow and fury. “Your majesty.. how? Why are you here?”

His eyes- those eyes she has loved all her life-are filled with anguish as they find hers. He shakes his head slowly, a hollow laugh escaping his lips. “Don’t tell me you meant to leave without me.”

Her lips tremble. “No... Don’t tell me you are dead...”

He steps closer, ignoring her question, gaze locked on hers as though anchoring himself to her soul.

“Answer me, my queen,” he says, his voice low, rough with grief and resolve. His eyes glisten, though no tear dares fall. “Were you planning to leave without me? We are soulmates. We die together. We live forever.”

Her breath hitches, chest tightening, as she takes an unsteady step toward him. His presence is both balm and wound, tearing open everything she had buried in her sacrifice.

“No more. No more sacrifices.” His voice rises, echoing through the mist like a decree that cannot be undone. “It is my duty as your mate, as your protector, to bear this burden now. You don’t have to carry it all alone anymore. It’s time for me to make my own sacrifice-for us, for our child, and for our grandchild.”

The Queen stares at him, lips quivering, caught between hope and fear.

And as the mist swirls violently around them, the Moon Goddess Lowers her gaze, her divine expression unreadable.

– The Queen feels her world tilt. “You... you can’t mean-”

But the King’s eyes blaze with fierce certainty, his presence thrumming with a power older than blood, older than crowns. “I failed as a mate once. Never again. As King of the werewolves, with the power bestowed upon me, I will bend destiny itself if I must.”

The ground splits with a deafening crack, light and shadow colliding violently across the spirit world-before everything collapses into silence. –

Jack doesn’t remember how he made it back. His legs move like a beast possessed, his arms caging Kali’s limp body against his chest.

Blood stains his shirt-her blood-and his heart hammers with a terror he’s never known. By the time he storms into the palace clinic, his throat is raw from shouting.

“Help her!” he roars, laying her down on the table. The doctor scrambles forward, pale-faced, his hands already trembling as he checks her. But after only a moment, his face crumbles. He whispers the words that slice through Jack’s chest like blades.

“I’m sorry... she lost the baby.”

The world goes still for a heartbeat. Jack feels his heart stop, a cold, hollow emptiness washing over him. He’s drowning in grief, but the overwhelming need to save Kali-the one thing that matters more than anything else-screams louder than the crushing weight of the loss.

The sound that tears from Jack’s chest isn’t human. It’s raw, feral. His hand shoots out, seizing the doctor by the throat, slamming him against the wall with a force that cracks the plaster.

“Then why the hell isn’t she waking up?!” His voice shakes the walls, his teeth bared, his whole body trembling with rage.

The doctor chokes, eyes wide. “I-It’s... it’s probably stress-shock-maybe with the Queen passing, she couldn’t bear it-”

Before he can finish, a weak sound breaks through the air.

A whimper.

Jack drops the doctor instantly, spinning back. “Kali!”

Her eyes flutter open, glazed with pain, her hand clutching at her bloodied belly. And then it hits her. The red on her skin. The emptiness inside.

“No...” Her voice cracks, breaking into a sob that tears at Jack’s soul.” No, not my baby..”

She crumples into herself, crying like a child, her shoulders shaking violently. Jack falls to his knees beside her, helpless, wrapping his arms around her though she thrashes weakly in grief. “I lost them both,” she chokes, voice raw. “My mother... my baby... she was supposed to come back to me, Jack. She was supposed to be reborn-”

Jack’s vision blurs. He presses his forehead to hers, his chest breaking open. “Please.. please, doctor...” His voice cracks as he turns, still on his knees, tears streaking his face. “Get her something, anything, to stop the pain. I’ll give you my blood, my heart, whatever the hell you need, just-please!”

The doctor stumbles forward, shaken, fumbling with equipment, his hands moving on instinct. He checks again, his brows knitting, then freezing. His hand hovers midair. His eyes widen, disbelief spreading like wildfire.

“What is it?” Jack snaps, half-crazed.

The doctor doesn’t answer. He jerks the monitor closer, adjusting, his breath catching. “It can’t be...”

“What?!” Jack’s roar makes the lights rattle.

The doctor turns the screen toward them. “Look.”

Jack and Kali both glance up. The world stops.

On the grainy black-and-white image, tiny movements flicker. A heartbeat thrums steady and strong. A baby-alive.

Kali gasps, covering her mouth. “But... I thought..” Her tears double, this time a trembling, breathless relief.

Jack stares, dumbstruck, his throat closing. Then he lets out a broken laugh, his forehead dropping to her belly. “Our baby... you’re still here.” He kisses the curve of her abdomen desperately, reverently, his voice muffled. “Thank you... thank you for holding on.”

The doctor shakes his head in astonishment. “This is impossible. She lost too much blood... the womb shouldn’t... and yet...” His hands tremble. “This is divine. This isn’t medicine. This is intervention.”

Kali presses a hand over her stomach, trembling with a smile through her tears. “Mother.. she kept her promise...”

Jack cups her face, kissing her temple, whispering against her skin. ” We’re going to be okay. Do you hear me? You and our baby-you’re safe.”

The room breathes lighter, relief sinking in. For the first time since the nightmare began, there is joy.

But the door slams open.

A guard strides in, armored and grim. Jack stiffens instantly, recognizing him—the Alpha King's personal bodyguard.

The man bows deeply, his voice taut. "Alpha Jack. Princess Kali."

Jack's stomach sinks. "What is it?"

The guard hesitates, his eyes flicking with something like sorrow. Then he speaks the words that drain all warmth from the room.

"There's something you need to see for yourself... I think the King— your father, Princess Kali... he's dead."

Kali's eyes widen, her hand frozen protectively over her belly. The doctor staggers back in shock. Jack goes rigid, his chest hollowing as the words echo through the air.

Dead.

The alpha king?

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No. No, that's impossible. My father can't be dead. He's too strong, too unshakable, too-everything. He's the Alpha King. He can't just... be gone.

The words burn inside me, sharp and unreal. I can't breathe, can't even think. My lips move before I can stop them, barely more than a whisper.

"Take me to my father."

I try to push myself up, but the moment I shift, Jack is there, pressing me gently back against the sheets. His touch is careful, too careful, like I might shatter.

"Wait," he says softly, voice breaking with worry. "Let me go myself while you rest."

Rest

The doctor shakes his head, wringing his hands. "Alpha Jack is right."

Princess, you need to rest. For the baby. Too much strain now could cause...another complication."

Their voices blur in my ears. Rest. Baby. Complications. None of it matters. My father is gone.

"Rest?" My voice cracks, harsher than I intend. I clutch Jack's wrist, staring into his eyes. "My father is dead, Jack. Take me to him."

He exhales, eyes closing for a second as if my words slice him too. "I don't want you stressed, Kali. Not after—" He cuts himself off, his jaw tightening. "Not after we almost lost the baby once already. I can't—"

"I won't," I breathe, shaking my head fiercely, tears blurring my sight.

My hand slips to my belly, stroking the curve there with trembling fingers. "I promise, I won't do anything to lose our baby this time. But please... please, Jack. As his daughter, I should be the first to see his body."

The room falls silent. Jack exhales, the sound raw, defeated. Without a word, he slides his arms beneath me and lifts me as though I weigh nothing.

I cling to his shirt, burying my face in his chest while he carries me out of the clinic. His heartbeat thunders against my ear, uneven and frantic, every step echoing like a countdown.

The east wing has never felt so far away. Every corridor stretches like a thousand miles, dragging me through memories I wish I could silence. The guilt gnaws at me, sharp and relentless.

The last time I entered his office—the very first time, in fact—wasn't even for him. I had gone there desperately searching for my mother, only to find him instead, hunched in pain, suffering beneath the weight of the mate bond he shared with her. I can still see the shock in his eyes when he looked up and found me standing there, as though he couldn't believe I had come. Yet even then, even through his agony, he tried to reach for me, tried to mend what was broken between us.

And now? Now I would give anything for one more moment. One more word.

My throat tightens, a prayer slipping through clenched teeth. Oh, dear Moon Goddess, let it not be true. Please, not yet. We haven't bonded. I haven't... I haven't told him I've forgiven him.

But deep down, I already know. The truth presses down on me, suffocating. His presence—that powerful scent of smoke and iron, always threaded with something warmer, something fatherly—has already begun to fade.

By the time we reach the heavy doors of his office, my chest feels split in two. Jack's voice rumbles low above me, pulling me back from the storm inside my head. "Are you ready to meet him?"

My fingers clutch tighter at his shirt. My lips part, but no sound comes.

Because how do you answer that?

How do you prepare yourself to face your father's death?

I nod, my throat too tight for words.

Jack lowers me carefully onto my feet, his hands steady me as though I might collapse. My knees nearly do when he pushes the heavy door open.

The scent of iron and smoke lingers thick in the room, but it's not alive
—it's stale, heavy, wrong.

And then I see him.

My father. The Alpha King.

He's sitting in his great chair, his head tilted back, as if he's merely gazing at the ceiling in thought. For a fleeting second, hope claws at me—maybe the guard was wrong, maybe he's only resting, maybe—

But then I see his eyes.

Not the emerald green I share with him, not the fierce fire I grew up both fearing and yearning for. His eyes are white. Empty. A ghost's stare. Dark smoke coils around his head like a crown of poison. His skin is pale, stretched thin, the color of ash.

“No...” My voice cracks in the air, raw and desperate.

Beside me, Jack whispers, grief rough in his throat. “I think his soul left his body.”

The words rip me apart. I scream, stumbling forward, reaching for him—but Jack's arms lock around my waist, dragging me back against his chest.

“You can't touch him,” he growls, though his voice trembles with the effort of holding me. “Kali—listen to me. He did a dark magic ritual.

Until we know what kind, we can't risk it. If it's still active, your soul could be taken too.”

“I don't care!” I thrash against him, sobs ripping through my chest.”

He's my father—”

“I know!” Jack's voice breaks as he pulls me tighter, holding me against his heartbeat. “I know. But I can't lose you too.”

Through the blur of my tears, I hear his voice snap at the guard, harsher than I've ever heard him sound. “Get the High Chief Priest.

Now. Tell him the King... the King needs to be seen immediately. He'll know what this means.’

The guard bows low, his own face stricken, before rushing from the room.

And then it's just me and Jack and the shell of my father.

I collapse against Jack's chest, my sobs soaking his shirt. My voice is jagged, broken beyond repair. "I should've... I should've given him the chance when he tried. He reached out, and I pushed him away. I told myself I needed space, time to heal, and he respected that. And now—"

Jack cups the back of my head, his cheek pressed against my hair. "It's not your fault, Kali. You couldn't have seen him dying. Hell, no one did."

And I promise you, he understood. He hated himself for what happened, but he never stopped being your father."

"I never hated him," I whisper, my voice shaking. "Not for stabbing me."

He paid for that... he gave me his blood, he saved me. And if he hadn't stabbed me, the truth never would've come out—I never would've known I was his daughter." I swallow hard, tears burning hot down my face. "I only resented him for not loving me enough. For replacing me with another daughter. For choosing her instead of me." My chest heaves. "But he paid for that too, didn't he?"

Jack holds me through the storm of it, saying nothing, just steady as the world spins apart.

When the sobs finally break into shivers, lift my head, wiping at my eyes. That's when I see it.

An envelope.

Sitting on the far end of his desk, untouched, waiting. My name written across it in his hand.

My breath catches.

Jack follows my gaze, his own eyes narrowing with a flicker of shock.

He exhales, voice quiet.

" guess he left you a goodbye note."

The world tilts as my feet stumble forward toward it.

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My hands tremble as I clutch the envelope, the parchment already damp from the sweat on my palms. My heart pounds so violently it feels as if it might tear straight through my ribs. Jack's gaze meets mine-eyes full of love and quiet strength. He doesn't speak, only gives me a small nod, a silent signal to open the letter.

I swallow hard, drawing in a shaky breath, and slide my thumb beneath the seal-

The door slams open.

I jerk, clutching the letter tighter to my chest, spinning toward the sound. My father's guard stumbles in, breathless, sweat shining on his temples. And he isn't alone. Behind him shuffles an elderly man in ceremonial robes, his staff tapping against the marble with each step.

The High Chief Priest. A handful of royal officials trail after him, their faces grim, uncertain.

Jack moves instantly. His large frame shifts in front of me, shielding me, one hand curling subtly around my waist to protect me and our baby-if there's any danger. I press the letter tighter against me, hiding it from their sight.

But none of them are looking at me.

All eyes are fixed on the motionless form of the Alpha King-my father.

For a long, aching moment, silence hangs heavy in the room. Then, one by one, the officials drop to their knees, their cries breaking the stillness.

“Your Majesty... do not abandon your throne.”

“Return to us, Alpha King... we beg you.”

“Our kingdom cannot stand without you.” Their voices rise and fall in a mournful chorus, heads bowed low to the floor, tears staining the marble.

The Chief Priest alone remains standing, though even his ancient hands shake as he lifts his staff. He steps forward cautiously, as though nearing a sacred, dangerous flame. His lips part, his voice cracking with awe and fear.

“Blood of royals alone can command such a spell...” He exhales, breathless. “The Ritual of the Severed Soul.”

The words send a shiver straight down my spine.

“What does it mean?” I whisper, though the sound barely leaves my throat.

The priest keeps his gaze fixed on my father's pale face, the white of his eyes clouded and unnatural. It is forbidden magic. A binding between life and death. The king has severed his soul from his body... perhaps to gain power, perhaps to protect something. But the ritual is still active.”

Jack tenses beside me. “Meaning?”

“Meaning...” The priest's voice lowers, heavy with dread. “The soul can yet return... but the same door that allows one back may claim another in its place.”

No one breathes.

Jack's jaw clenches, his grip around my waist tightening like steel but still careful not to harm our baby. “As I suspected,” he mutters grimly.” The magic is still alive. It can take one soul along with it.”

My throat closes, tears blur my vision. My father sits there, hollow yet present-close enough to touch, yet impossibly far away.

“Jack...” My voice breaks as I turn to him. “Maybe this is my chance. Maybe I can reach him. Let me try-let me say goodbye. Please. If I can beg him to return_

“No.” His answer is sharp, immediate, furious. His head snaps toward me, eyes burning with something between fear and rage. “Don’t you dare, Kali. I won’t risk you.”

“Jack, please-”

“I said no!” Jack’s voice cracks like a whip, sharp enough to make everyone flinch-the officials kneeling on the floor, even the guard by the door. His hands tremble as they grip my arms, his forehead pressing against mine, his voice dropping low, raw, and desperate.

“I can’t even imagine your soul leaving this world. You. Our baby. Don’t ask me to watch you walk into death’s hands.”

His words unravel me. Tears pour freely down my cheeks, my chest aching with the weight of everything I can’t say. The letter burns against my palm, damp and crumpled now.

The High Priest clears his throat, his voice carrying authority as it cuts through the suffocating tension. “We have lost both the King and Queen within the same day. Their souls have left their bodies, and so, they must be buried together-side by side. As mates, it is only right.”

Jack pulls back from me slowly, his jaw still tight, his arm protectively around my waist. He nods once at the priest. “Do what needs to be done. I’m certain the king chose to follow because the queen left first.

It’s only right they rest together-they sacrificed everything for this kingdom.”

The priest bows his head gravely. “Indeed. The queen made the greatest sacrifice of all-she gave her soul to shield us from Veydris.

Her courage is carved into our survival. The people are blessing her name even now in the streets.” His voice lowers, reverent. “They will never forget her.” At the mention of my mother, my heart twists painfully. I swallow hard, fighting against another wave of tears.

The priest straightens, turning his gaze to Jack now. “Alpha Jack, the kingdom cannot remain leaderless. After the burial rites, there must be no delay. The coronation for you and Princess Kali as King and Queen will take place immediately-perhaps two days later. The kingdom is in chaos, and our enemies will strike if we appear weak.”

Jack’s hand tightens around me. “We’ll be ready. See to the preparations. I’ll handle the rest.”

The officials bow their heads once more, filing out after the priest, leaving the room heavy with silence once again.

Jack exhales slowly, then turns to me. His thumb brushes a tear from my cheek, his eyes lingering on me with a softness that wars with the steel in his expression. “Come. You need to rest.”

I don't argue. My body feels leaden, my spirit wrung dry. He keeps his arm around me as he walks me back through the palace halls, every step echoing with memories I'm not ready to face. At my room door, he presses a kiss to my temple, lingering there as though reluctant to leave me.

"I'll see to what needs to be done," he murmurs against my hair. "Try to sleep, Kali. Please. For the sake of our child."

I nod mutely, and then he's gone, swallowed by the duties waiting for him.

The moment the door closes, I sink onto my bed, my hands trembling as I pull out the letter. The seal cracks softly under my fingers. For a long moment I just stare at it, my tears dripping onto the paper.

Finally, I open it.

My father's handwriting stares back at me. My vision blurs instantly, but I force myself to read—

"My dearest daughter, if you are holding this letter, then it means..."

My breath hitches. My heart slams against my ribs.

".. am gone."

Tears stream down my face, and a sob tears from my throat. I clutch the letter to my chest as though I can pull him back through the ink on the page.

But even through the blur of my tears, I notice something strange.

The letters begin to shift.

The ink swirls across the parchment, rearranging itself as though alive.

And new words, ones that were not there before, bleed onto the page.

The ink keeps shifting, forming words that feel like his voice whispering in my ear.

Dear Kali... I know your mother and I gave you Maya, but somehow Kali suits you better. Whoever gave you that name did well—it carries the strength of the independent woman you've become without the help of either me or your mother. For that, know this: I am proud of you. And I know your mother is proud of you too.

My hands shake so violently the page rattles. "Father..." I whisper, clutching the letter tighter.

Before I say anything else, dear daughter, please know that I am sorry for replacing you. For making you believe, even for a moment, that I truly did. Perhaps I did, physically. But emotionally, in the depths of my heart, I never replaced you. I only needed someone to fill your shoes temporarily as princess to keep the kingdom steady until you were found again. And even if you had never been found, I would never have made her my heir. My love for you has never wavered—not for a single moment.

The tears spill faster, soaking the edges of the parchment. My throat burns, my chest aches as though caving in.

And I don't want to keep giving excuses. I wanted to prove my love to you and to your mother with action. That's why I turned to this dark magic ritual.

I press my hand against my mouth to muffle the sound of my sob.

Your mother sacrificed enough. Too much. It was time for me, as her mate, to carry the burden away from her—and from you. To do what was right.

The words blur through my tears until new ones crawl across the page.

It's as if my father already knows I'm crying. Don't cry, my daughter. You are too beautiful to cry. I am only going away for a while—to be with your mother. She must be lonely, and she needs me. But be assured, your mother and I.. we will return. That is the reason! chose this path. Watching you in the hospital, losing your child—it broke me. And I know your mother saw it too, from the other side. I know her. She would have given up her very soul to protect your baby, and that would have meant she could never reincarnate—not as your child, not as anyone's child. I couldn't allow that. So by surrendering my living body as king, by giving up my crown and ultimate power, I made the unnatural choice so that you and I would not lose her forever.

My hands fall into my lap, the letter clutched to my chest as I shake with silent sobs.

Don't worry. Your baby will be safe—I'm sure she is by the time you're reading this. And until we meet again... not as your parents, of course, Since we are already gone—but we will return to your life in soon. With this ritual complete, your mother cannot come back as your daughter, because fate no longer binds to us. So how will we return? That's a surprise you'll have to discover on your own.

A broken laugh bursts from my lips, more like a choked sob. "How am I supposed to know?" I whisper to the empty room. "How will I ever recognize you both?"

My heart races, confused and desperate. If my mother won't come back as my child, as I once believed, then whose child will she be? And my father—how will he return? My pulse hammers in my ears, wild and relentless, drowning me in questions.

A sudden knock at the door jolted me back to myself. I gasped, shoving the letter beneath my pillow and wiping hastily at my tear-stained face.

The door creaks open, and an omega steps in, her eyes lowered in deference. She carries a folded bundle of black and silver fabric in her arms.

"Your Highness," she says softly, bowing her head, "your burial attire. It is time."

For a moment, I just stare at it. My parents' burial. The words alone make my chest hollow.

I force myself to stand, though my knees nearly buckle beneath me."

Thank you," I murmur, my voice rough.

She helps me dress in silence, layer after layer of dark ceremonial robes swallowing me whole. I catch my reflection in the mirror once she's finished-my swollen eyes, my trembling mouth, my shoulders squared despite the ache tearing me apart.

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Chapter 197

I don't look like a grieving daughter anymore. I look like a queen stepping into a role I never asked for.

The omega bows once more, whispering, "The kingdom awaits you."

The door opens, and there he is.

- Jack.

He's dressed in his burial wear, black trimmed with silver. The same as mine. His hair is pulled back, his jaw tight, his eyes shadowed with exhaustion. He looks like he hasn't slept in days, and I know why-because while I've been crumbling, he's been the one holding the Kingdom together. He's been doing what I should have been doing as the Alpha King's daughter.

My throat aches as he takes my hand. His palm is warm, steady, and he gives me a small, sad smile. That smile alone nearly undoes me.

"Ready?" he whispers.

No. I'll never be ready for this. But I nod anyway.

He leads me outside, silent and solid at my side, and the world seems to shift as we step out of the palace gates. A vast field stretches before us, transformed into a sea of mourning black and silver. Torches burn along the path, their flames swaying in the breeze like they're bowing to the dead. Hundreds-maybe thousands-of people stand waiting, heads lowered, faces wet with tears.

At the center, two pyres rise. My parents lie upon them, clothed in white robes, their crowns resting on their chests. They don't look like rulers anymore. They look like... my mother and father. My heart squeezes painfully, but I force myself not to crumble. Not here.

The High Priest steps forward, his voice deep and steady though it trembles with reverence. "Today we return our king and queen to the heavens. Their bodies will burn, their smoke will rise, and the skies will carry their sacrifice to the Moon Goddess herself." He pauses, his throat tight. "Let this fire be the mark of their devotion, the proof of their courage, and the memory of their reign."

The crowd answers in unison, voices breaking:

"Long live the King. Long live the Queen. Their names will never die."

The words echo through the field, raw and haunting, as if the earth itself is grieving.

Jack presses the torch into my hand. His touch lingers, his eyes holding mine, silently lending me his strength. My chest heaves, my fingers trembling as I step forward.

The priest's voice carries again. "Daughter of the Moon. Heir of their blood. Light the path."

I take a breath that feels like knives cutting into my lungs. And then I set the torch down. The flames lick up, catching the pyres.

The fire roars to life, fierce and hungry. My parents are swallowed by the blaze, and gasps ripple through the crowd. People fall to their knees, wailing, blessing their names, praising them.

Still, no tears come from me. Not this time. I don't cry, because I know this is not their end. This is just their bodies. Their souls... their souls will find me again. I press my hand to my belly, whispering silently to the child within.

Jack's voice slides into my mind through the bond, low and gentle. "Go sit. I'll finish the rites. Let me carry this for you." I turn my face to him, my heart swelling with gratitude. "Thank you."

His lips twitch, almost a smile, before he turns back to face the kingdom. His shoulders are squared, his presence commanding. He takes my place as if he was born for this role, his voice strong where mine would have broken.

I let myself be guided to the seat prepared for me at the front, watching through the haze of smoke and flame as he takes control.

The High Priest lifts his arms, chanting in the old tongue, words that vibrate in my bones. The crowd answers with sobs and shouts of blessing, the air thick with grief and devotion.

And as the flames rise higher, painting the night sky with smoke and the heavens with fire, one thought claws at me-

The child in my womb. If she is no longer my mother... then who is she?

Could it be... could it be a-

"Princess Kali."

The voice cuts through my thoughts like a soft but firm command. I blink, tearing my gaze away from the rising flames and the smoke curling upward, devouring the bodies of my parents along with the grief that clings to the air.

Turning, I find two familiar figures-Nora, standing quietly with her hands clasped, and beside her... Fury's father.

The last time I saw him, he'd been pale and frail, hunched in a wheelchair-a shadow of the proud man who once guarded my mother with unwavering loyalty. But now, he stands tall. His shoulders

are broad again, even if his hands tremble faintly. The firelight catches the silver strands in his hair, lending him an air of age and quiet strength.

He bows his head, his voice thick with guilt. "I'm so sorry for your loss, Princess. I should have been there-with her. I failed my Queen. I failed you."

His eyes glisten, and for a moment, I see it clearly-the raw pain etched into every line of his face. The grief twisting deep inside him.

The countless tears he must have shed when he heard of my mother's death. He looks like a man begging for forgiveness no one ever asked of him.

"I should have protected her," he continues, his voice breaking. "If only I hadn't neglected my duty—if I had stood by her side like I swore I would —she'd still be alive."

I shake my head slowly, offering him a small, sad smile. "It's not your fault," I say softly. "It's fate. The Queen was destined to die-her time had come. But death..." My gaze drifts back to the flames, the smoke curling upward toward the stars. "Death isn't the end of her story. It's just the beginning of another life." Even without looking, I can feel Nora's confusion-her brows drawing together—and Fury's father's puzzlement, the deep lines on his face tightening. "Princess," he says carefully, "what do you mean by that?"

Are you saying... the Queen will return?"

I press my hand over my heart, eyes fixed on the pyres still burning faintly in the distance. "Let's just say," I murmur, "it's a surprise we'll all have to wait and see."

A small, knowing smile tugs at the corner of my lips as I remember my father's letter. For a moment, silence hums between us-the kind that carries both fear and hope. Behind us, the crowd continues to chant the old prayers, the High Priest's voice rising above the crackle of the fire.

Then, quietly, I ask, "Where's Fury?"

Nora answers first, her tone gentle. "He said he was going to stand by Alpha Jack's side-to assist him with whatever he needs."

That draws a faint smile from me. Despite the Alpha King's blood running through his veins, Fury still behaves like Jack's loyal warrior.

Then Fury's father adds, pride lacing his voice, "My son... he will soon compete to become Alpha of the Blood Fang Pack. I told him I'm well now. He doesn't need to stay behind to care for me anymore. It's his destiny-and I'll follow him, wherever it takes him. That's what a father does."

"That's good," I reply softly, touched by the quiet strength in his words." He deserves that chance."

But before I can say more, a sudden, sharp ache grips my lower belly. I gasp, bending slightly as my hand flies to my stomach. It's not pain-exactly. It's... movement. Something kicked.

Impossible. My heart races. I'm barely a month along-far too early for movement.

“Princess Kali?” Nora’s voice breaks through my panic, full of concern.”

What’s wrong?”

“-” I swallow hard, forcing a breath. “It’s nothing. I’m fine.”

But I’m not. I felt it. Clear as day. A small thump from within me. My child. But that can’t be...

Fury’s father frowns deeply, stepping closer, “Are you sure, Princess?

You don’t look-”

“I said I’m fine,” I cut in quickly-too quickly.

Nora doesn’t buy it. “No, you’re not. I’m taking you to the doctor.” She turns, looking toward Jack. “Should I call him?”

“No!” I snap before she can even finish, my voice louder than I intended. Several heads turn our way, and I force a strained smile before lowering my tone. “Please, don’t. He’s exhausted, Nora. He’s done enough already. I don’t want him worrying about me too.”

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Nora hesitates, then nods reluctantly. “Fine. But I’m coming with you.”

“Good.” I manage a weak smile, but my hand doesn’t leave my belly.

As Nora helps me walk away from the field, I glance back one last time. Jack stands near the flames, issuing quiet orders, his face drawn but he doesn’t see me leave.

And maybe that’s for the best. Because deep down, I know-whatever is happening inside me right now isn’t normal.

Something that shouldn’t be possible-not after reading my father’s letter. He’d written clearly that my mother wouldn’t be coming back as my child-that fate was no longer theirs to command.

Then why... why does it feel like something powerful just moved inside me?

The sharp scent of antiseptic fills my nose as I lie on the hospital bed, one hand resting protectively on my stomach. The soft beeping of the monitors feels too calm for the storm brewing inside me.

The doctor moves around with quiet efficiency, jotting down notes, his glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose. Finally, he looks up at me with a small smile. “Your baby is perfect, Princess. Strong heartbeat, healthy development.”

Relief washes through me, but it's tinged with confusion. "Then why... why did I feel it kick?" I ask, my voice unsteady. "It's too early, isn't it?

I'm barely a month along."

He chuckles softly, shaking his head. "For an ordinary werewolf, yes.

But for someone with royal blood?" He sets the chart aside and gives me a knowing look. "Your pregnancy will not follow the usual six to seven months. Based on the readings, it'll be closer to five. Perhaps even less."

I blink. "Less?"

He nods. "Your child's growth rate is accelerated. Remarkably so. It's rare, but not unheard of—your mother's pregnancy was the same. You were born early too, strong and fully developed." His eyes gleam with professional curiosity. "This little one is just following in your footsteps. Or perhaps... surpassing them."

I swallow hard, my gaze drifting down to my belly. My footsteps. My child. The words feel too heavy, too sacred to say aloud

The doctor glances between Nora and me before asking gently, "Would you like to know the gender?"

I shake my head almost immediately. "No."

He raises a brow. "Are you sure? Many mothers prefer—"

"No." I yell. I take a breath and soften my tone. "I want it to be a surprise. And... Jack should be here when we find out. It wouldn't be fair for me to know alone."

Nora lets out a dreamy sigh from where she leans against the wall, arms folded. "I know the late Queen—may her soul rest in peace—said it would be a girl, but I can't help thinking it's a boy," she teases, her grin playful. "He kicked like a warrior already! Probably impatient to come out and rule the world."

A weak chuckle escapes me. "Maybe."

"I mean, just look at you," Nora continues, eyes sparkling. "You're glowing. That's usually a boy's doing—they bring out their mother's strength. Girls make you soft and dreamy." She pauses, smirking. "But a boy? He's already fighting battles in there." Her words linger, light but unsettling. I've never truly considered the possibility of my child being a boy. The thought only crossed my mind once—earlier at the ceremony, before Nora and Fury's father interrupted my thoughts. But now that she's said it aloud, I can't help but wonder.

Deep down, though, I had always believed my baby would be a girl. I could see her in my dreams—soft curls, eyes like Jack's, my mother's smile. I had wanted to believe it was her... coming back to me somehow.

But after reading my father's letter, maybe... it isn't a girl after all.

I press a hand to my belly again, forcing a small smile. "Maybe you're right," I murmur. "Maybe it's a boy. But until I deliver this baby, I won't know. It'll be a surprise for us all."

The doctor finishes jotting something on his clipboard and gives me a

• final nod. "Rest well, Princess. You and the child are strong, but you mustn't overexert yourself. Not with a pregnancy this... extraordinary." it's been a month.

A month since my parents' burial.

A month since the flames consumed their bodies while we prayed for their souls to be carried to the heavens.

The coronation was supposed to take place just a few days after, but Jack-ever protective-told the High Priest that I needed time.

"Let her mourn," he'd said firmly. "She's not just the Alpha King's and Queen's daughter-she's their only child."

The priest, bless him, agreed. He said the ceremony would wait a month-no more, no less-lest our enemies mistake our silence for weakness.

That month passed faster than I could blink. And now, here I am, standing before the mirror as the palace maids lace me into the gown meant for a queen.

The coronation attire is nothing short of breathtaking. A gown woven with threads of silver and midnight blue, colors that shimmer like moonlight over deep waters. The bodice hugs my growing belly, its soft embroidery tracing symbols of protection and power down my sides-ancient sigils once worn by the queens before me. The train flows like liquid silk, long enough to sweep the marble floor behind me.

A delicate circlet rests in my hair, forged from moonstone and obsidian

-the same crown said to have been worn by my mother on her own coronation day. My fingers tremble as I touch it.

I can never fill your shoes, Mother.

The thought hits like a lump in my throat. She was the strongest queen the kingdom ever had. She gave her life, her very soul, to protect her people-and me.

Could I ever be that selfless?

I place a hand on my belly, feeling the faint pulse of movement beneath my palm. Maybe... maybe one day, when I look into my child's eyes, 'll understand what she felt. Maybe then, I'll find the courage to give everything for someone else.

A reflection moves behind me in the mirror-Jack.

He's already dressed in his ceremonial robes: black and gold with silver threads curling like smoke along the edges, a royal mantle draped over his shoulders. His dark hair is tied back neatly, though a stubborn strand has fallen across his forehead. His eyes find mine in the mirror, soft but fierce.

He walks up quietly and takes my hand, his fingers intertwining with mine. "You look like her," he murmurs. "Your mother-except you have your father's eyes. I'm sure you'll be a great queen, just like she was."

The compliment makes my chest tighten. I turn to him, offering a faint, watery smile. "I could never be her."

"No," he says gently, brushing his thumb against my cheek. "You'll be you. And that's more than enough."

I swallow hard. "You really think so?"

"I know so." His hand slides to my stomach, his palm warm over the growing curve. "And so does our little one."

The baby moves at that exact moment-just a soft flutter, but enough to make me gasp.

Jack's lips curve into a smile, though his eyes shimmer with exhaustion. He hasn't stopped being my shadow-not even after my parents' burial. He still acts like my guard, my caretaker, my everything. I've barely seen him rest. He won't let me lift a finger, not even to pour my own tea.

Now, even as we stand on the edge of being crowned king and queen, his hand refuses to let go of mine.

"The High Priest says today isn't just our coronation," he says quietly. "

It's also our wedding. We'll say our vows before the Moon Goddess and the kingdom. Before your parents."

My throat goes dry. "I know."

His grip tightens, grounding me. "Are you ready, my queen?"

take a deep breath, straightening my crown. My heart pounds so hard it almost drowns out my voice, but I manage a small, confident smile. "Oh, I was born ready."

He chuckles softly, leaning down to press a kiss to my forehead. "Then let's go show them their queen."

We step out of the room together and head into the grand hallway glowing with soft golden light. The marble floors are blanketed with rose petals that shimmer beneath our feet. The low hum of drums rolls through the air, blending with the chant of the High Priests beyond the great doors. The sound isn't loud-it's steady, rhythmic, pulsing like a heartbeat. My heartbeat.

Each step closer to those towering golden doors feels heavier-not with fear, but with meaning.

When the doors open, light floods in.

And my eyes fall immediately on the thrones. The same ones that haunted my dreams since the day of my parents death.

The one in the center, massive and dark, carved from black iron, still radiates that suffocating strength and calm. The Alpha King's throne.

My father's throne.

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But it's the one beside it-the Queen's throne-that makes my heart twist. The carvings of roses and feathers shimmer faintly in the light, the seat gleaming white as snow. As if the throne itself is calling to me, pulling at me the same way the princess's throne once did the first time I saw it.

A shiver runs through me, cold and slow. My gaze locks on that seat, and suddenly the hall around me fades. The drums. The chanting. The whispers. All gone.

It's only me and that throne.

And for the briefest moment, I swear I feel her-my mother's warmth.

The scent of lavender. The echo of her laughter.

A single tear slips down my cheek before I even realize it.

Jack notices instantly. His fingers tighten around mine, stopping me right there in the middle of the hall. He pulls out a handkerchief, his touch gentle as he wipes the tear away. "All eyes are on you, my queen," he murmurs softly. "This is a day of celebration, not tears."

I force a small smile, my voice trembling. "It's a tear of joy, Jack."

His eyes soften, but the emotion there-gods-it could melt steel.

He leans closer, pressing a kiss to my temple before guiding me forward. "Then let them see your joy."

We walk together down the carpeted aisle, the crowd parting on either side. Everyone bows-from Alphas to warriors to Omegas-each one lowering their head as we pass. I can feel their hopes pressing against my chest like waves.

The high priest waits at the front, his robes shimmering silver in the sunlight pouring through the stained-glass windows."Alpha Jack," he begins solemnly, then turns to me. "Princess Kali."

He lifts his hands, his voice carrying through the vast hall. Today, under the eyes of the Moon Goddess, you come before your people not only to be crowned as King and Queen, but to unite your souls as mates

—bound by blood, by spirit, and by eternal love.”

Jack’s gaze finds mine, and suddenly, the world narrows to just us.

The high priest’s voice fades as he hands us a small ceremonial blade. ”Cut your palms,” he instructs, “and vow before the Moon that your love shall never break—even in death.”

Jack’s eyes hold mine as he slices his palm open without flinching. I do the same, and when our blood touches, a golden glow flares between our hands, heat sparking through my skin.

Jack’s voice is steady when he speaks. “I vow to protect you with my last breath, to stand beside you when the world turns its back, and to love you until the stars themselves burn out.”

My throat tightens, but I manage to whisper, “And I vow to stand with you, Jack, through light and shadow. To love you fiercely, and to never let go, no matter what the fates decide.”

The hall erupts in applause as the priest raises his hands, blessing our bond

Then, his tone deepens. “And now.. the coronation.”

He lifts the two crowns—the King’s of iron and obsidian, the Queen’s of moonstone and silver. He places Jack’s crown first, the weight of it commanding silence. Then mine, cool and heavy against my forehead.

The High Priest’s voice booms across the hall. “Bow before your new

King and Queen of the Werewolf Realm!”

Thunderous cheers rise. Warriors howl, people clap, and chants of Longlive the King and Queen! echo off the marble walls.

Jack takes my hand again and leads me to the thrones. My pulse races as I approach the Queen’s seat—the one that called to me.

The moment I sit, a wave of warmth surges through my veins. My body trembles. My vision blurs.

It’s as if the throne itself breathes into me. Power. Fire. Life.

My eyelids flutter shut. For a heartbeat, I’m weightless-floating between worlds. Then—

A rush of energy slams through me, bright and wild, like lightning under my skin. I gasp, my fingers gripping the armrest, and I hear faint whispers—thousands of voices merging into one.

Welcome home, my child...

When my eyes snap open, Jack is already looking at me, smiling softly, pride shining in his gaze.

But behind that pride... there's something else.

Something dark.

Lust.

"Jack," I whisper under my breath, leaning toward him, "this is not the time or place to give me that look."

He chuckles quietly, his voice low and teasing. "I can't help it. With that crown on your head, you look ten times more irresistible."

I bite back a smile, giving him a warning glare. "I'm already pregnant, Jack. I can't get pregnant twice-so stop looking at me like that."

Jack smirks beside me, that familiar mischievous curve tugging at his lips. Before he can lean in and whisper something that would probably make me blush in front of the entire court, the High Priest's voice echoes through the grand hall-booming, reverent, and commanding.

"Now," he declares, raising his staff high, "let all gathered here pay their respects to the newly crowned Alpha King and Queen. The presentation of gifts and praises shall begin-starting with the Alphas and Lunas of the strongest packs."

The crowd stirs immediately, bowing as the first line of Alphas and Lunas step forward in all their regal glory. The air fills with the rustle of silk, the glint of jewels, and the deep scent of incense burning in gold bowls along the aisle.

Jack squeezes my hand once before releasing it, both of us straightening as the first names are called.

"The Alpha and Luna of the Bloodfang Pack-Alpha Fury and Luna

Nora!"

A small, proud smile pulls at my lips as the hall erupts into polite applause. My heart warms at the sight of them-Nora looking radiant in royal gold and crimson, her blonde hair braided into a crown, and Fury walking beside her with his usual quiet strength.

It feels like a lifetime ago since he was just a warrior-my shadow, my protector. After returning to Bloodfang following my parents' burial ceremony, Fury had easily defeated every challenger to reclaim his rightful place as Alpha. With the Alpha King's blood running through his veins, none of them had stood a chance. Since then, he's transformed Bloodfang-tearing down outdated laws, rebuilding what was broken, and creating a home stronger and better than ever.

Now, watching him stride forward beside Nora, pride blooms in my chest. When they stop before our thrones, Fury bows deeply while Nora dips gracefully beside him.

“Your Majesty,” Fury begins. “It is an honor to stand before you again.

My pack and owe everything to your faith in us. I brought this as a token of Bloodfang’s loyalty.”

He gestures, and a warrior behind him steps forward, presenting a chest of black oak. When opened, it gleams with twin daggers forged from moonsteel—the rarest metal known to wolves. Their hilts are carved with the royal crest, each blade shimmering faintly with enchantment.

Jack’s brows lift, impressed. “Moonsteel,” he murmurs, taking one of the daggers and testing its weight. “You’ve outdone yourself, Fury.”

Fury grins, a flash of boyish pride still lingering beneath the Alpha façade. “Only the best for my King and Queen.”

Nora steps closer, her eyes sparkling. “And because we couldn’t decide which one of you is more dangerous, we made sure you both had a weapon to match,” she says with a teasing smile. I can’t believe I almost didn’t like her.

Laughter ripples through the hall, and I can’t help but laugh too.

Standing, I step down from the dais and embrace Nora tightly. “You’ve both come such a long way,” I whisper. “I’m so proud of you.”

As I hold her, a sudden flutter stirs in my belly—my baby kicking, hard and insistent. The movement is so sharp that I pull away slightly, blinking in surprise. My hand instinctively presses against my stomach, but I say nothing.

Jack follows suit, shaking Fury’s hand before pulling him into a brief, brotherly hug—an act that leaves half the room stunned. No one expected their King to embrace another Alpha so openly. It makes it clear to everyone that Fury and Nora aren’t just allies. They’re family. My gaze catches on Nora’s hand brushing gently over her stomach. It’s a small, almost unconscious gesture—but it makes my instincts flare.

My eyes dart from her face to Fury’s, then back again.

Nora is pregnant. Probably only a few weeks along.

I don’t say a word, but the knowing smile curving her lips tells me I’m right.

Fury clears his throat, glancing at Nora before facing us again. A small smirk tugs at his lips. “Before we leave, we have some... news to share.”

The hall falls quiet instantly.

Nora beams and places both hands on her belly. “The Bloodfang Pack is expecting a new member soon.”

The hall erupts into joyful murmurs and applause. Jack lets out a low whistle before stepping forward to clap Fury on the back, while I grasp Nora’s hands, my heart swelling with happiness.

“That’s wonderful,” I breathe. “I knew it.”

But as I touch her, the baby inside me kicks again-stronger this time, as if responding to hers. A strange, unexplainable connection hums through me, sending shivers down my spine.

When Fury and Nora finally step aside, the procession of Alphas continues—one after another, bowing, offering gifts, pledging loyalty.

It all becomes a blur of jewels, ancient relics, and practiced words. My face aches from smiling.

Until—

“The Alpha and Luna of the Red Night Pack.”

The moment the High Priest says it, my spine stiffens.

And then I see him.

Caspian.

My former best friend.

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His tall frame moves with practiced grace as he approaches, head held high, shoulders square. His dark hair gleams under the torchlight, and that calm, stoic expression—gods, I used to know it better than my own reflection.

But now, all I can think about is the last time we spoke. The cold, distant way he treated me like I no longer existed.

tear my gaze away, jaw tight, pretending to be utterly fascinated by the carvings on my throne. My stomach knots, anger and hurt coiling deep. Two can play that game.

Jack shifts beside me, clearly sensing the change in my aura, but he says nothing.

As Caspian and his Luna reach the steps, I still don’t look directly at
—them. Not until movement at his side catches my attention.

The woman beside him has her head bowed, long red hair falling over her shoulders. There’s something oddly familiar about her posture, her aura. My brow furrows.

When she finally lifts her head—

My breath catches in my throat.

“Jasmine,” I whisper.

Jack’s twin sister is standing there beside Caspian like she belongs-like she isn’t the broken, haunted version of herself I remember.

What the hell is she doing here?

And why is she standing there as his Luna?

Could Jasmine be... Caspian’s second-chance mate? As my gaze lingers on her-her soft smile, the faint color in her cheeks, the subtle shimmer of life in her once-empty eyes-! realize what truly shocks me isn’t the bond between them. It’s her.

She’s glowing

Not the way a she-wolf glows when her wolf stirs, but in the way a flower blooms after surviving a storm. Her shoulders aren’t hunched anymore, her steps aren’t heavy. There’s light where there used to be nothing but pain.

My chest tightens, memories flashing unbidden-Jasmine trembling in my arms, her voice breaking as she begged me to free her from Beta Khoas. The scars. The hollow look in her eyes. The way she’d lost her wolf just to survive him.

I shiver at the thought. The monster had taken everything from her-her spirit, her strength, her joy.

And yet here she is. Standing tall.

A smile ghosts across my lips despite the confusion clawing at my gut.

I never thought I’d see this light in her again.

But Jack...

Jack isn’t smiling.

Before I can react, he’s already on his feet, fury radiating off him in waves.

In a blur, he’s standing before Caspian, one hand gripping the Alpha’s throat, lifting him slightly off the ground.

The crowd gasps. Warriors shift uneasily, unsure if they should intervene.

“How dare you,” Jack snarls, his voice dripping with raw authority. His eyes flash gold, his aura shaking the air around us. “She was sent to your pack for protection, Caspian. Protection. Not to be your woman.”

“Jack!” I gasp, jumping to my feet.

Jasmine's face floods with color-shock, then shame, then desperate pleading. "Jack, please-stop! It's not what you think!" Her voice trembles, and she grabs his arm, trying to pull him back. "He didn't hurt me. Please, let him go!"

Jack doesn't listen. His jaw tightens, fangs peeking through, his grip unrelenting on Caspian's throat.

"Jack," I whisper, stepping closer, placing my hand gently over his."

Enough."

His power thrums under my palm, but the moment my skin touches his, his eyes snap to mine. The fury in them falters, just a little.

"Look at her," I say softly, tilting my chin toward Jasmine. "Does she look like someone who's been hurt?"

Jack's breathing slows. His gaze flicks to his sister—her cheeks flushed, eyes shimmering with embarrassment but... alive.

That's what breaks him.

He exhales roughly and releases Caspian, who drops to his knees, coughing hard but still managing to bow in respect.

The tension in the room eases, though the air is still thick with unease.

"Welcome your sister," I murmur to Jack, my tone gentle but firm. "Not scare her half to death."

He runs a hand down his face, trying to calm himself, but his eyes are still hard as steel when they meet Caspian's. "If I find out you've hurt her—"

"You won't," Caspian rasps, voice hoarse but steady. "I swear it, Your Majesty."

I turn to Jasmine, my tone softening. "How did this happen?" I ask, pointing subtly between the two of them.

A faint blush creeps up her neck. She glances around the grand hall—hundreds of eyes watching her every move. "It's... a long story," she says shyly. "One I'd rather not tell in front of half the kingdom."

A few chuckles ripple through the court, easing the tension a little.

Jack doesn't laugh. He folds his arms across his chest, growling low, clearly unimpressed.

"I'd love to hear it," I tell her gently, ignoring Jack's glare. "Once the celebrations are over."

Jasmine smiles, relief flickering in her expression. "Of course."

Caspian bows again, this time more carefully. "Thank you, Your Majesties."

By the time the last Alpha and Luna finish their presentation, I can barely feel my legs. My smile hurts, my back aches, and my crown feels like it weighs a hundred pounds.

The grand hall still glows with golden firelight, the air thick with incense and chatter. Every Alpha from every corner of the kingdom has stepped forward tonight-each one more ambitious, more dramatic, more power-hungry than the last.

I never realized there were this many packs. The line had seemed endless. I make a mental note to tell Jack that we'll need to visit them all—not formally, and definitely not with fanfare. Unannounced. When they least expect it.

Because if there's one thing I've noticed tonight, it's that not all these smiles are genuine. Some of these Lunas look terrified-bowing too deeply, eyes fixed on the floor, their hands trembling slightly as their Alphas speak for them. Like they've been trained not to exist unless spoken to.

My stomach twists. Not under my reign as queen.

"Are you bored already, my queen?" Jack's teasing voice cuts through my thoughts drawing me back.

I yawn before I can stop myself, covering my mouth. "Exhausted, actually."

His lips curve into a knowing smile. "Then let's give the court something to whisper about."

Before I can ask what he means, he's already standing and extending his hand to me. His fingers wrap around mine, firm and warm, and the hall falls silent as he helps me descend the steps.

Everywhere we walk, heads bow. People instinctively move aside, lowering their gazes as if we carry fire.

Jack stops in the center of the hall and raises his voice-smooth, commanding, effortlessly regal. "You've all done well honoring your king and queen tonight. Now-enjoy yourselves. Drink. Dance.

Celebrate until the moon sleeps."

A cheer ripples through the room. The music starts again, the tension breaks, and laughter fills the air.

I let out a small sigh of relief. Finally.

As my eyes sweep across the crowd, it lands on her.

Jasmine-standing beside Caspian, who's deep in conversation with other Alphas. Her eyes meet mine instantly-sharp, unreadable, almost daring. A faint smirk tugged at her lips when I winked and tilted my head toward the grand doors leading to the balcony.

I place my hand on my stomach and send a quick mindlink to Jack.

“Love, I need to pee. And maybe find something sweet before I collapse.

“I’ll come with you,” he replies immediately, his concern brushing through the bond.

“No,” I cut him off gently. One of us needs to stay until the end. “Don’t worry—you can feel me through the bond, remember?”

“There’s a pause, then a reluctant sigh. If you’re not back in ten minutes, I’m coming to find you.”

“Deal.”

I send him a quick mental kiss before slipping away.

The corridors outside the hall are quiet, lined with tall windows that let the moonlight pour in. My heels click softly against the marble as I walk toward the balcony—and sure enough, she’s already there.

Jasmine stands with her back to me, the silver light spilling over her hair. The view before her stretches endlessly—dark forests, the gleam of rivers, the flicker of fires in the distant villages.

Without thinking, I walked up behind her and wrapped my arms around her shoulders. “I missed you, Jas,” I whispered.

She stiffened for half a second before relaxing, a soft laugh escaping her lips. “I missed you more,” she murmured, turning to face me. The moonlight kissed her face. “You’re glowing, Kali. And—Goddess—you’re already showing.”

I glance down at my stomach with a small, sheepish smile. “Tell me about it. I feel like I swallowed a watermelon.”

Her laugh fades into a gentle smile. “Do you think it’s a girl?”

“I don’t know,” I admit. “Jack and I agreed not to find out. We just... want to love our child no matter what.”

She nodded, her gaze softening—but then it dropped to the marble floor, and her voice lowered. “I’m sorry about your parents’ death.”

Especially after you just found them... only to lose them again. The Queen was always kind to me. I know they miss you, wherever they are.”

At the mention of my parents, my father’s letter echoed in my mind.

How am I supposed to really find them in this world once they reincarnate?

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A pang tightened my chest, but I forced a small smile. "Enough about me." I tilted my head, trying to lighten the mood. "Tell me about you.

About Caspian."

Jasmine's lips twitch, and then-to my surprise-she giggles like a lovesick teenager. "Well.." She bites her lip, eyes glinting. "Caspian and I had a one-night stand."

For a moment, I just stare at her. The words don't even register.

Then they do.

My mouth falls open, and I actually take a step back. Wait-what did you just say?"

She blinks innocently. "I said Caspian and I had a one-night stand."

I slap my hand over my mouth before a sound escapes me. Oh. My.

Goddess.

If Jack ever hears that-Caspian is dead.

Like-publicly executed, head-on-a-spike dead.

"Are you insane?" I hiss in a whisper, grabbing her arm. "Do you have any idea what he'd do if he found out?"

Jasmine rolls her eyes. "Relax, Kali. You sound like an old wolf."

"Your brother is the Alpha King now, Jasmine!" I whisper fiercely. "He doesn't relax! Especially not about-ugh, never mind."

I loop my arm through hers and start pulling her down the corridor.

"Where are we going?" she laughs, trying to keep up.

"My blood sugar just dropped," I lie quickly. "I need sweets before I faint from shock-and before hear the rest of this story."

Jasmine chuckles, shaking her head. "Do you always handle bad news with sugar?"

"Yes," I mutter under my breath. "But with a lot of sugar." I fan myself dramatically. "And if I don't get something sweet in the next sixty seconds, 'll collapse—and you'll have to carry a pregnant queen down these halls."

Jasmine rolls her eyes, and by the time we reach my chambers, the

• distant noise of the celebration has faded into a soft hum. I push open the doors to my bedroom and she lets out a quiet gasp.

“Goddess... Kali, this room is bigger than the one in the Red Night Pack

—and dare I say, even Bloodfang’s,” she says, spinning slowly as her eyes dart from the crystal chandeliers to the silk-draped windows. ” And is that an indoor balcony? You have two? Goddess, you could fit an entire house in here!”

I laugh, slipping off the heavy crown that’s been torturing my skull all night and setting it on the dresser with a relieved sigh. “Perks of being the Alpha King’s daughter. Your brother’s lucky to be king-and you’re lucky to be the King’s twin sister, I tease. “But honestly, I’d trade all this space for just one day without someone calling me Your Majesty.”

Jasmine grins, sitting gingerly at the edge of my bed while I pull open a lower cupboard. From beneath a pile of folded cloaks, I retrieve my secret stash-chocolates, caramel bars, and a jar of honeyed almonds.

Jack thinks I’ve given up sweets because of the baby. He’s wrong.

I sit cross-legged on the bed, open the box, and pop a chocolate into my mouth with a satisfied groan. “Heaven,” I mumble, then offer one to her.

She shakes her head, smiling faintly. “I wish I could. But the pack doctor said no sugar for me,” she says softly. “My body’s still weak from being without my wolf. Apparently, I’m supposed to eat boring, healthy things.”

I pause mid-chew, my eyes softening. “Right. I forgot about that. I’m sorry.”

She waves me off. “Don’t be. I’ll just live vicariously through you.”

I grin, then gesture toward her. “Alright then, spill it. The full story.

How did you and Caspian end up together? Don’t skip a single detail.”

Her cheeks flush, and she tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “Oh, Goddess... where do I even start?”

“Preferably from the beginning,” I say, leaning forward eagerly.

“The night I arrived at his pack,” she begins softly, “I was... broken.

Leaving everything behind-you, my twin brother, even Fury-it felt like someone had ripped me out of my own skin. So instead of going straight to your adoptive mother’s house as planned, I went to a bar.” She lets out a small, embarrassed laugh. “I thought I’d drown my misery in something stronger than tears.”

I smile faintly. “Sounds like something I’d do.”

“And then—he walked in.”

“Caspian?” I whisper.

She nods slowly. "The hottest man I'd ever seen. Brooding. Quiet. But his eyes... they looked just as lost as mine. I couldn't stop staring. And when he came over. and sat beside me, I thought my heart was going to burst out of my chest." Her voice softens, a dreamy look flickering across her face.

I chuckle softly. "You? Nervous? That's new."

She smirks. "I didn't know who he was, Kali. I couldn't feel rank or dominance anymore-my wolf was gone. So to me, he wasn't an Alpha."

He was just... a man. A stranger who, for the first time in years, didn't look at me like I was broken. We talked. Drank. He didn't pity me. He laughed with me. He made me forget."

Her eyes glaze over as she drifts into the memory, her voice turning wistful. He told me about his first mate—how she rejected him for power, how she betrayed him. I told him about my ex, that bastard Beta mate who used me and tossed me aside like dirt. We laughed about how miserable our love lives were."

I can't help but smile. "So, trauma bonding led to a one-night stand."

"Basically," she laughs, covering her face with her hands. "Somehow, in that misery, we found... comfort. Warmth. One drink turned into five."

And then.." She trails off, her cheeks flushing red. "The rest was... history. It wasn't planned. It just happened. And it was-"

"Alright, stop right there," I interrupt, holding up a hand. "I don't need that much detail."

She laughs, still blushing. "A week later, realized he was the Alpha of the Red Night Pack when he came to pick me up from your adoptive mother's house. You should've seen my face-I was mortified."

"Oh, I can imagine," I giggle."Turns out," she continues, "he was just as shocked when he found out I was Jack's sister. His face went pale-like he'd swallowed a ghost."

"Oh, Goddess," I groan, covering my face.

She sighs. "He stopped coming. Avoided me completely-for almost a month. I thought he'd used me. I hated him. And then one day... he showed up again. At my doorstep."

Her eyes meet mine, shimmering with emotion. "I tried to ignore him. I told him to leave, but he wouldn't. That's when he finally explained everything. He said he hadn't told me he was an Alpha that night because of my trauma experience with my ex-the Beta who treated me like trash. He didn't want me to look at him with fear. He said he's nothing like that man-that he'd rather die than lay a hand on a woman."

My chest tightens as she continues, her voice soft but steady. "Then he

* told me everything-about you, his ex-best friend. How he was once in love with you. I won't lie, I was jealous at first. But then he told me how Jack threatened to break his bones if he even looked your way again.

That's why he treated you like a stranger."

I sit up straighter, eyes wide. "Jack what?"

Jasmine raises a brow. "You didn't know?"

I throw my hands up. "Of course I didn't know! My husband apparently enjoys keeping secrets."

She chuckles softly, shaking her head. "Anyway, Caspian said it wasn't just Jack's threat that kept him away. He said something changed in him-the day he accepted his Alpha power. He described it like new blood was flowing through his veins. He said the old Caspian died that day, and that's why he never came to you. He didn't want to drag his past into his new life. He wanted to start over. To love again."

There's a strange heaviness behind those words, something that makes my skin prickle.

"And then he did something no Alpha would ever do. In front of his entire pack... he knelt. He begged me to forgive him—to give him another chance. To let him prove that I was the one he wanted."

My mouth falls open. "He what?"

She nods, a shaky smile curving her lips. "The mighty Alpha Caspian-on his knees for a wolfless girl."

For a moment, I can't speak. I just stare at her, stunned.

And you forgave him?" I whisper.

She nods again, tears brimming in her eyes. "I did. Because when I looked at him, I realized I couldn't breathe without him. It was like my heart already belonged to him."

"So... you followed him back here? As his Luna?"

Her smile is small but certain. "Yes. He asked me officially that night.

Said he wanted me beside him. And I... said yes," she whispers.

Her words linger in the air, fragile and trembling like a flame in the wind.

I study her face-the soft curve of her lips as she speaks his name, the light in her eyes when she mentions him. There's no denying it. She's completely gone for him.