

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 31

No. No, wait-

I sit up on the bed, the sheets wrinkled beneath me, heart pounding in my chest like a warning drum. I should let him go. I should.

“That’s it?” The words fall from my lips before I can stop them.

He pauses. His hand rests on the doorknob, unmoving. For a second, I think he won’t answer. But then he exhales, slow and shaky, before turning just enough to glance back at me.

“What do you want me to say or do, Kali?” His voice is quiet-strained. “Were you expecting me to tie you down and forcefully mark you? You think I don’t want to? You think I don’t hear my wolf screaming at me to take what’s mine?”

His eyes meet mine, raw and unfiltered.

“I’m not going to be that man,” he says, quieter now, like the weight of his own restraint is crushing him. “I’ve already done something regret. I won’t do it again.”

His voice cracks slightly on the last word.

Again.

That single word lodges in my chest like a blade. There’s a flicker in his eyes-guilt, pain, regret.

And even though I try to stay cold, to keep the wall up, I feel the sting behind my eyes and the lump rising in my throat.

He’s talking about her. His first mate.

I want to ask. I want to know. But I bite my tongue. I won’t let him see the jealousy crawling under my skin like fire ants. Still, the bitterness slips into my voice. “So... I just confessed I’m attracted to you,” I say, folding my arms tightly across my chest. “Aren’t you going to use that to your advantage? Pin me down and fuck me or something? That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

Jack actually laughs—but there’s no humor in it. It’s dry. Hollow.

He turns fully, walking a few steps back toward me again—not close enough to touch, but enough to feel his presence pressing down on me.

“You think I see you as some easy fuck?” he snaps. “You’re my mate, Kali. Not a damn whore.”

I flinch at the bluntness.

“And since you’re clearly not ready to accept the bond... or submit to me as your Alpha-your mate—then no. I see no reason to take what you’re not offering willingly and fully.”

His words hit harder than I expect. I feel like I've just been slapped. My eyes sting-but I keep my chin up, even if my chest is starting to ache in places I didn't know could feel pain.

Maybe he doesn't want me like that. Maybe it was just the bond.

Maybe I was nothing more than a consequence of fate to him.

He shakes his head slowly, voice dropping. "If all I wanted was your body, I would've taken it already. But I want more than that. I want you.

Your heart. Your loyalty. Your submission-not out of fear, but because you choose me."

His words twist something sharp in my gut. Because I don't know if I can ever give him that. I want him. God, I want him. But being someone's Luna? Giving up control? Submitting?

It terrifies me more than anything.

Jack exhales, his voice rough. "You can keep the house. You're free to leave whenever you want. You don't owe me anything... and you don't. have to tell me if you go."

He walks to the door and opens it, pausing just long enough to glance back over his shoulder. His eyes are dim now, his voice softer than I've ever heard it.

"And don't worry," he murmurs, "I won't be coming back."

Something inside me drops. A sharp sting in my ribs, like we just been hit by the very thing I was trying to run from.

"The next time we see each other.." He swallows hard. "If nothing's changed... if you still don't want me...

His hand clenches at his side. "Then I'll accept your rejection."

And with that—he walks out.

The door shuts softly behind him.

I sit there on the bed, staring at the empty space he left behind, heart thundering in my chest, lips parted in disbelief.

I don't know if I want to scream, cry, or run after him.

I don't know what hurts more-his absence or the crushing realisation that I might've just lost something I didn't even know I needed.

All I know is...

It hurts.

The cold wind slaps against my face as I step out of the house-her house now. The one I built with my own damn hands, hoping... praying ...that one day, she'd call it home.

My first mate never even made it past the threshold. Fate took her too soon, before I could show her the life I'd dreamed of. But Kali-stubborn, sharp-tongued Kali-Will get the chance.

If this damned plan works.

Gravel crunches beneath my boots as I walk away, my chest tight with the weight of a thousand regrets. But I don't look back. Not until I'm far enough that I won't turn around and do something reckless-like storm back in, grab her, throw her over my shoulder, and claim her on the spot.

Kiss her. Mark her. Ruin everything.

Only when I've put enough distance between myself and the house, where I can no longer smell her scent clinging to the air like a drug, do I finally stop-and let the mask slip.

A harsh laugh rips from my throat. Loud, breathless, like a man unhinged. My head tips back as the sound bursts out of me, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes.

I wipe them away, not sure if it's from laughter or the sting behind them. "Holy shit... how was that performance?" | ask my wolf, grinning like a lunatic. "Did you see her face? She's not nearly as cold-hearted as she pretends to be."

My wolf growls in my head, not amused.

"You went too far. I almost believed you were serious about accepting her rejection the next time." His voice is hard, edged with disappointment. "That wasn't the plan. You said you'd scare her a little—use reverse psychology to push her closer to the bond-not crush her heart."

"I had to sell it," I mutter, dragging a hand down my face. "She needed to believe it or it wouldn't work. C'mon, she almost begged me to stay."

You saw it."

"Almost. And what if she doesn't care? Then what, genius?"

"You know I'd rather die than accept her rejection, even if it means repeating our past mistakes," I say with a wicked grin. "We'll stick to your plan. Tie her to the bed, fuck her until she's too sore to walk, too full of our seed to think straight, too bonded to run from us ever again."

"Damn right," my wolf growls proudly as I walk toward the pack building. "She practically gave us permission. You heard her. She wants us. Not just a little —she wants to be wrecked. Fuck, you should've taken the chance right then."

I chuckle, my ego swelling like an untamed beast. "Did you see her face when she admitted her attraction for us? Like she wanted to bite her own tongue off. She's ours. She just doesn't know it yet."

“I felt her wolf whimper,” my wolf adds, satisfaction bleeding through his tone. ” Soon, she’ll be putty in our hands-submitting, begging to be marked. She’ll be ours. Completely. Our Luna. The mother of our pups. The one who seals our rule.”

I hum, my fingers flexing with anticipation, but then something darker twists in my gut.

“There’s still the issue of why she keeps passing out when we touch her ...” I murmur, slowing down. “You think I’m overthinking it?”

“No,” my wolf says after a beat. “Something’s wrong. Maybe it’s not just her body reacting. Maybe she’s sick. Or cursed.”

“I don’t know. But if it happens again, we’re done guessing. We’re going to a witch.”

Just as the words leave my mouth, I reach the front of the pack house.

One of my warriors stumbles out, breathless and pale.

“Alpha!” he gasps, rushing to me. “I—I tried to stop him, but he forced his way in using the royal pass-”

The moment the word royal leaves his mouth, my smile vanishes as the blood in my veins burns cold. I know exactly who the bastard is.

My jaw clenches, and I don’t let the warrior finish. I shove him out of the way with a growl and storm down the corridor, boots thundering against the floor.

When I reach my office, the door is slightly ajar. He’s not in my chair this time like an arrogant bastard. Instead, he’s standing by the window, leaning on that cursed walking cane like some sort of dramatic villain from a shitty story.

“What the hell do you want again?” I snap.

My uncle turns around slowly, his lips twitching with a humourless smile. “I’m not here to waste your time, nephew,” he says, his voice sickly smooth. ” Just doing my duty as a royal messenger.”

I eye him suspiciously as he pulls a letter from his coat.

“What the fuck is that?” I ask coldly, arms crossed.

“A letter,” he says mockingly, lifting it like a stage prop. “From the Alpha King himself.”

I study him, nostrils flaring. “Spit it out. You’ve already read it.”

He chuckles. “You know me too well, nephew. The Alpha King has invited you to the palace... You’re one of the candidates he’s considering as a future mate for his daughter.” I blink, then stare at him flatly. “Im not interested.”

His grin widens. “Figured you’d say that. But here’s the twist-your mother reached out to the Alpha King herself.”

My heart stops.

“She told him you were single. Mate-less. Perfect for the princess.”

My blood runs cold.

“She what?” I hiss.

He shrugs casually. “Didn’t mention your little mate problem. Guess she didn’t want that interfering with her vision for your future.”

“Fuck,” I mutter, jaw tight, the memory flashing-my mother’s voice a few days ago, soft and sweet as poison, urging me to accept Kali’s rejection, to think about the pack’s legacy. I told her I’d think about it. I didn’t think she’d go behind my back like this.

“You know what happens if you don’t show up,” my uncle adds, voice smooth as ever. “The Alpha King doesn’t appreciate being ignored.”

“Fuck off,” I snarl, stepping toward him. “Get the hell out of my office before I break your other leg.”

His smirk fades, but only slightly. “Suit yourself. But don’t say I didn’t warn you!.”

He limps out, and I’m left standing there-jaw clenched, fists trembling.

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Alpha Jack

The wind howls past my ears as I run in wolf form. It takes four hours, but I don’t stop once. I race through forests, leap over rivers, and dodge trees with barely a sound. When I reach a secluded area behind tall hedges, I shift into human form, pulling on the fresh clothes I stashed in a bag.

My chest heaves, rising and falling like a wild animal finally caged, as I think about why I’m here. All I need to do is get in, speak to the Alpha King, and get the hell back to Kali.

The palace looms before me towering beast of stone and gold, carved into the side of the mountain as if the gods themselves placed it there. It exudes power and old wealth. The kind of place that commands silence and respect just by its very existence.

Carriages of every color line the long stretch of gravel-at least a dozen of them, each polished to a gleam, bearing the crests of various packs. Alphas from all over have gathered here. Each one is desperate to impress the king and his precious daughter.

I could have taken a carriage like the rest of them. But that would've taken the entire day. And I don't have that kind of time-not when Kali's all alone, probably overthinking everything I said, maybe even planning to leave.

I came here to fix a mistake.

That's it.

Sure, becoming the Alpha King's son-in-law sounds like a dream-power, influence, a straight path to the throne. But all of that means shit without her.

Kali is my mate. My fated one. The moon goddess doesn't make mistakes. She chose her for me for a reason, and I'll be damned if I turn my back on that bond for a shiny title and a cold marriage. And I'm no fool.

I stride toward the entrance. The guards take one look at me and bow, stepping aside without a word. As they should. They know who I am.

The moment I step inside, I'm hit with the scent of polished floors, burning incense, and an overwhelming sense of pride-a pride so thick it makes lesser men feel small.

The grand hall is massive-marble floors to ceiling, thick red banners bearing the royal crest hanging down, and gold accents glinting in the torchlight.

At the far end, a raised platform holds three massive thrones. The one in the middle-crafted from black iron and etched with moons and

wolves-can only belong to the Alpha King. His presence radiates authority, just as it always has.

He's sitting on it now, radiating authority like he was born in that seat.

Tall, silver-haired, and broad-shouldered, his face is carved from stone. His emerald eyes scan the room like a predator, and even from here, I feel the weight of his gaze.

To his right, another chair sits empty-reserved for his Luna and mate.

To his left, on the smaller throne, sits his only surviving daughter.

She's perched on the throne like she's already queen, legs crossed, chin in her hand, her dark red gown clinging to her curves like it was painted on. Long black hair falls in waves down her back, her lips full and glossed, her nails blood red as she lazily flicks them against the chair's arm. She's beautiful in a venomous way-dangerous, sharp, and fully aware of it.

The line of alphas stretches nearly to the door, each one waiting their turn to impress her. But I don't care about long ass lines, I walk right past them."Hey-get back in line!" one of the alphas snaps.

I turn and lock eyes with him, my glare silent but deadly. He shuts up immediately.

Silence follows me as I stride past the others, heading straight for the front and center of the hall. I don't break my pace. I bow slightly, giving the Alpha King a respectful nod, my fists clenched behind my back.

"Your Majesty," I begin, my tone firm yet respectful as he inclines his head. "There's been a misunderstanding—"

"EEEEEEK!"

A high-pitched squeal slices through the room.

"What the—" I lift my head just in time to see the Alpha King's daughter leap off her throne and charge down the steps like a woman possessed.

The next thing I know, she's barreling toward me, her perfume so overpowering it makes my nose twitch—too strong, like roses dipped in alcohol.

"What the fuck—" I barely manage before she presses her chest against mine—literally throwing herself onto me as if I'm some prize she's just won.

"Oh. My. God." She clutches my arms and gazes up at me with wide, glittering eyes as though I'm carved from the heavens. "Daddy!" she screams breathlessly, turning toward the Alpha King with wild excitement in her eyes. "He's the one! This is the man I want! He's strong and manly, gods, look at that jawline! He's rugged. He's gorgeous!"

I blink, stunned.

Did this chick just—

The entire room falls into dead silence, every Alpha glaring daggers at me, while the Alpha King raises a curious brow.

"I want him to be my mate," she announces proudly, clinging tighter to my arm. "And your future son-in-law. Make the arrangements, Daddy." She bats her lashes at me as though I'm already hers. Her dress clings to her curves in a way she clearly wants me to notice, and she's practically drooling all over my shirt.

"I'm Princess Celestia," she purrs, trailing her fingers along my chest. "And you're going to look so good standing next to me when I'm crowned Luna Queen."

"Lady Celestia," I say through gritted teeth, trying to pry her off me without breaking protocol—or her wrist. "There's been a misunderstanding."

"No misunderstanding," she interrupts, giggling. "It's fate. Fate just walked in. And he's hot."

"I am not—"

"I felt it the moment I saw you. The others were boring. Wimps. But you

- “Her eyes sparkle. “You’re a man.”

I came here to clear up a misunderstanding, but now I’m trapped in the middle of a royal disaster- with a possessive princess on one arm, a deadly king on the throne, and a mate back home who owns my soul.

And right now?

I’d give anything to be back in Kali’s arms... if only she accepts me.

I grit my teeth and glance up at the Alpha King, whose stoic expression hasn’t changed one bit. He watches us with unreadable eyes, fingers steeped under his chin.

I came here to clear things up, not to get involved in some royal mating circus,” I say, this time more to the king than to the girl clinging to me like a lovesick leech. “I already have a mate. A fated one.”

Celestia gasps like I just told her I was married to a goat.

“No,” she whispers, shaking her head dramatically. You can’t! I saw you first. You must be mistaken. I mean-look at us! We fit!”

I look her dead in the eyes, voice calm but cold. “I’m not mistaken.”

She steps back, her lip trembling, eyes wide with disbelief. Her whole body shakes with the kind of fury that signals a spoiled royal tantrum is coming.

I turn my attention back to the Alpha King.

“With all due respect, I came to tell you I am not a candidate. My mother acted without my permission. I have a mate. And I will not dishonor that bond.”

The king stares at me, long and hard. His face remains unreadable.

Then, he rises slowly from his throne.

“Well,” he says, voice deep and commanding, “this just got interesting.”

And I know, right then, that this isn’t over. Not even close.

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Kali

I lay there. Unmoving.

My body is still curled up on the bed, tangled in soft sheets. My eyes are wide open, staring at the wooden ceiling above-as if it holds the answers I've been searching for since the moment I met Jack.

His voice keeps echoing. His words playing in a loop like a broken record, stabbing and soothing me all at once.

"If nothing's changed... if you still don't want me. Then I'll accept your rejection."

Why the hell does that hurt?

He said it so calmly. So... empty. Like he was already letting go. And that terrifies me more than I want to admit.

suck in a shaky breath, my chest tightening. I should be relieved.

That's what I wanted, right? Freedom. Space. A clean break from this confusing, dangerous bond.

But now that I'm actually lying here-alone-something about it just feels wrong.

God, I hate that he has been kind of good to me. He's supposed to be an Alpha. Ruthless. Arrogant. Possessive. A total asshole like the rest of them. The kind of Alpha who thinks the world bows at his feet just because he can growl and swing his dick around like a trophy. Travis was like that. Hell, worse. He tried to tame me that same night like I was just some piece of meat to claim and break.

But Jack? He hasn't even tried to tame me like he should. Except, of course, that one time-when he threw me into a cage. But even that doesn't count since I wasn't hurt. And now he's talking about accepting my rejection like it doesn't hurt him inside. Like he's already preparing to live without me.

Isn't he supposed to fight for me?

My fingers curl into the bedsheet as I try to push the ache from my chest. If only he had acted like a bastard, I wouldn't be here second-guessing every damn thing. I wouldn't care if he accepted the rejection. I'd hate him easily.

But instead... I don't because he touched me like I was something precious.

His hands... they didn't just touch my skin. They went deeper-into parts of me no one has ever dared to reach.

And now can't get him out of my head.

"Ugh," I mutter, rolling onto my side and burying my face into the pillow.

It's just the bond, I tell myself. That's all this is—a stupid cosmic connection meant to mess with our heads.

But deep down, I know that's not the full truth.

Even without the bond... Jack is my type. My kind of man. Strong. Calm.

A little rough around the edges, but not cruel. That jaw. Those eyes.

The way he says my name, like it's both a prayer and a curse.

Everything about him is-

Confusing. Frustrating.

And infuriatingly tempting.

I swallow hard and press my thighs together.

Dammit."Okay," I whisper to myself. "Just get it over with. Sleep with him, get him out of your system, and maybe-just maybe-ll get my full memory back, A win"

That's the excuse. That's the line I'm clinging to.

Not because I like him. Not because I crave the way he touches me.

No. This is practical.

"Liar.

My wolf growls low inside me, the sound sharp and angry.

"What now?" I mutter aloud.

"Why are we pretending?" she snaps. "Why can't we just admit we want him? He's been nothing but good to us. He's trying. And it'll be a damn shame to lose him just because you're too scared to trust."

I sit up slowly, rubbing my temple.

"You think I don't know that?" I whisper bitterly, my throat dry. "But what if he's pretending? What if this calm, steady version of him is just a trick? What if, the second I let my guard down and accept him, he shows his true colours and suddenly he becomes everything I feared?"

My voice lowers to a whisper.

"He's still a wolf, not a sheep. And I've heard the saying—'a wolf in sheep's clothing'".

Silence.

My wolf doesn't respond this time. And that's worse.

Because it means she agrees.

My stomach growls, loud and insistent, making me flinch. "For moon's sake," I groan, dragging myself off the bed. "Can I not have one existential crisis without starving to death?"

I sigh and rise to my feet, my legs weak beneath me. I shuffle over to the wardrobe and pull it open, only to find it completely empty-no dresses, no makeup, no trace of a woman's presence.

Curious, I open another. This one is full. But not with anything of mine.

Jack's clothes. Neatly folded shirts, jackets, and worn-in jeans line the shelves, all smelling faintly of him. I can't help the smile that tugs at my lips. I grab one of his shirts-soft, oversized, and soaked in his scent

-and pull it on. It hangs loosely on me, warm and comforting, like a quiet embrace.

I head toward the kitchen, still barefoot. The house is silent. Too silent.

Like it's holding its breath, waiting-just like me.

I pad down the hall and turn a corner until I find the kitchen.

I push open the door. My heart sinks.

The shelves are empty. The fridge? Empty. No ingredients, no bread, no fruit, not even water bottles or damn crumbs.

It's clean-too clean. Like no one has ever lived here.

Like he just moved in... for me.

The thought slips into my mind, and for a second, I smile again as I imagine Jack nervously setting up this place. No signs of another woman. No old photos. No leftover perfume or hair ties forgotten in the bathroom. No scent of any other woman. Could it be.. I'm the first one he's ever brought here?

But the feeling doesn't last.

Reality slaps me in the face. He could've easily cleaned the place up to make it look like his first mate was never here-erasing the past, erasing her.

"So he really left me here.." I mumble again, tugging open yet another empty cupboard like maybe, just maybe, a damn apple might magically appear and save me from my growling stomach. "With no food. Not even a damn apple."

I drag a hand down my face, leaning heavily against the cold counter.

My stomach growls louder this time, like it's calling me stupid for trusting a man like Jack to care whether or not I starve to death. I glare down at it. "You're not helping."

A tired, bitter laugh escapes me-but it dies just as fast.

The one man who kisses like sin, touches like he means it..." I shake my head, exhaling through my nose. "And forgets to leave food. For two damn days."

Everything about him is complicated-my head, my heart, my damn body. I don't even know what I want anymore.

But the most frustrating part? I can't stop thinking about him. I feel so ridiculous hoping he doesn't accept my rejection.

I press my fingers to my temples. "Get a grip, Kali."

But if this hunger doesn't kill me first... the confusion just might.

I straighten up. I could sit here, starve, and cry about my feelings... or I could do what I've always done-survive. If Jack couldn't feed me, I'd do it the old-fashioned way.

If bounty hunting taught me anything, it's how to live without comfort.

I've done it before. I can do it again.

Rabbit stew. Wolf style.

I head out of the kitchen, rubbing my hands together as I make my way to the room. I slip on Jack's hoodie and his oversized boots, stepping outside and inhaling the crisp, piney air. The house is secluded, swallowed by dense woods-perfect for a solo hunting session.

Rabbits were easy prey. And honestly? Nothing tastes better than roasted rabbit under moonlight in wolf form.

* Shifting comes naturally. Bones crack, skin tightens, and fur rushes across my body. My wolf stretches with a long, satisfied growl.

We run. Silent. Sharp. Hungry.

But after more than an hour of prowling through thick underbrush, I find nothing. Not even a twitching rabbit tail or the flap of a bird wing.

Where the hell did they all go? Did Jack warn the wildlife I'd be coming? -

My frustration bubbles hot and sharp. "Screw this," I growl, shifting back into human form, breath misting in the cool air. "I'm going to find Fury. Maybe he'll give me something to eat."

Come to think of it... where is Fury? He's been quiet lately. Too quiet.

He's practically the only one I trust here-the only one who doesn't treat me like a threat or a ticking time bomb.

Jasmine asked to be my friend, but I don't trust her. Not until she explains those bruises on her back.

I throw the hoodie back on, pulling the hood tight and keeping my head low as i follow the path Jasmine had mentioned. It winds through the woods and into the part of the pack lands I've avoided.

After a while, I spot people moving—warriors in uniform, others in casual wear. I duck behind a wide tree, watching carefully. I can't be seen. If anyone finds out I'm Jack's mate... well, I don't want to imagine what would happen.

When the coast is clear, I move fast and quietly, weaving through shadows, blending in like just another rogue on pack territory. My nose twitches, catching the warm scent of meat and herbs.

Food

Finally.

The hallway stretches long with different doors lining both sides. I take a gamble, open the first door-and instantly regret it.

A man's yelling. His hand slams the wall beside a frightened woman, who cowers with a wince.

"Don't talk back to me again!" he snaps, voice sharp and venomous.

My lips press into a thin line, fingers twitching at my side.

Typical.

I shake my head and quietly pull the door shut.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, I think bitterly. If that's the kind of men this pack breeds... how different can Jack really be?

I bite my tongue. Not your business, I remind myself.

My stomach growls again, louder and more demanding, so I keep walking. After a few more turns, I find a massive door slightly ajar. The scent pouring out nearly knocks me out.

Jackpot.

The dining hall is huge. A long, polished table stretches across the room, already set with steaming dishes-fresh fruit, golden bread, and sizzling meats. My mouth waters instantly.

And the best part? No one's here.

Perfect.

I rush in, grab a drumstick and a roasted potato, and devour them like a starving lion who hasn't eaten in weeks. Food has never tasted this good. Grease coats my fingers, warmth spreads through my body. I let out a low moan of bliss, juice dripping down my chin as I reach for more.

"Sweet goddess," I mutter between bites, "I could marry this damn chicken."

I barely hear the approaching footsteps until it's too late.

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"Shit," I whisper, diving under the table, clutching the drumstick like a thief caught red-handed. I press my back against the table leg, trying not to breathe too loudly.

Through the tablecloth, I see two women walk in, balancing trays and laughing softly as they begin rearranging the plates.

Their voices carry.

"Soon, Alpha Jack won't just be an Alpha," one of them says with a girlish squeal. "He'll be the Alpha King. Do you know what that means for us?"

My chewing slows. My ears prick.

The other woman lets out a breathy laugh. "I still can't believe it. We're all going to be royalty. Can you imagine that? But wait..." She pauses, lowering her voice, "What happens to his mate if he marries the Alpha King's daughter?"

The chicken slips from my hand, forgotten on the floor as my heart squeezes painfully in my chest.

Alpha King's daughter?

Jack... marrying her?

I press a trembling hand to my stomach, the nausea tightening with every passing second. Suddenly, I'm not hungry anymore.

"Does it matter?" the first woman scoffs, her tone light but cruel. "Didn't you hear? His mate dragged him like a dog in front of the entire pack—all the way to the mating room. And the fact that he hasn't even introduced her as Luna says everything. He doesn't want her. He probably already rejected her disrespectful ass." The other woman hums in agreement, voice smug and sour. "Exactly. She's a disgrace. And didn't she cause the commander's death too?"

Honestly, she deserves to be rejected. She's not worthy of our precious Alpha. The Alpha King's daughter and Alpha Jack are a perfect match."

The words hit harder than any punch. I feel like I'm choking on air.

I can't do this. I can't listen to one more word.

My head snaps up, and in a single breath, I shoot out from under the table. The corner slams against my forehead-sharp pain blooms ~ instantly, but I ignore it. The women shriek behind me....

"Who's there?!"

But I don't stop. I don't even glance back. I sprint through the hallway, boots slapping against the floor, breath ragged. I need to get out. Out of this cursed place.

I finally reach the wide entrance doors-but just as I'm about to push through them, I slam straight into something hard. It's like hitting a brick wall. I stumble backward, cursing under my breath.

"What the hell—"

Before I can take another step, a brutal hand fists in my hair, yanking me back so fast I scream. Pain shoots through my scalp, my neck snapping back.

"What the fuck?!" I twist, flailing. When I finally manage to look up, ready to fight-

Holy fucking moon goddess.

The man is a monster. Towering. Massive. Muscles bulging beneath a tight black shirt. Half-man, half-beast. His face is twisted in a scowl, eyes glowing faint red like his wolf is just waiting to rip free. A scar slashes across his cheek, and he reeks of power and violence. Fearjolts through me-cold and sharp-but I shove it down before he can scent it.

"You dare walk away after running into me?" he snarls, his breath hot against my face. Without falling to your knees and begging for mercy?"

I scoff through the pain. "Your ego's bigger than your body. You should be the one apologizing, asshole. What your eyes for? fancy? Or are they decorative ornaments?"

His grip tightens, sending fresh pain through my scalp.

He growls, fury radiating off him like wildfire. "Do you even know who am?"

I roll my eyes. "If you're not the Moon Goddess, I don't give a fuck who you are," I spit. "You could be the Alpha King himself and I still wouldn't kiss your damn boots."Chapter 48

The growl that rips from him is pure fury. His hand clamps around my neck like a vice, squeezing until my feet lift off the ground. I gasp, struggling as he chokes the air from my lungs.

"I haven't seen you around before, and I know a brat when I see one," he snarls. "You can't possibly be from the Blood Fang pack. Our women are well-trained-submissive, obedient. But you-" his lip curls in disgust, "you're a mouthy little brat who clearly doesn't belong."

My hands scramble uselessly against his wrist. Then, without thinking, I spit-straight into his eye.

He roars in rage and lets go, stumbling back with a curse. I collapse to the floor, coughing violently, sucking in air like it's the most precious thing in the world. My lungs burn. My throat screams.

"How the hell could I be from here?" rasp between gasps. "With pigs like you running around, thinking you own every damn thing that breathes—"

"Beta Khaos!" a familiar voice shouts cutting me off.

I turn my head and see Fury jogging over, his face tense, trying-and failing-to mask the panic in his eyes. Relief floods through me... until I catch the warning in his gaze.

I manage a small smile, but he doesn't return it. His eyes stay locked on the brute who just tried to crush my throat.

"I apologize for her behavior," Fury says quickly, stepping between us." But she's the Alpha's guest. You have no right to lay a hand on her. I'll escort her back to her quarters immediately."

Beta Khaos sneers, wiping the spit from his cheek. "Oh," he drawls, voice dripping with mockery. "So this is the Alpha's bitch. The one he couldn't tame. The one who dragged him all the way to the Mating room.

My vision clears just in time to see red.

"Who the hell did you just call a bitch?" I ask softly, my tone dangerously low as I take a threatening step forward.

Before I can go any further, Fury grabs my wrist, holding me back. I glance down at his hand, then up at him, fury blazing in my eyes. He shakes his head, eyes begging me not to escalate this.

I puff out a frustrated breath but stay still.

"She's the Alpha's mate, Beta Khaos," Fury says, voice colder now."

Your future, Luna. Not his bitch."

Khaos lets out a harsh, humorless laugh. "Mate, bitch-what's the difference? You wouldn't understand. You don't have one. But mark my words-keep her the hell away from me. Next time I see her..." He leans closer, eyes gleaming with threat. That pretty little face won't be so pretty anymore. Not to the Alpha. Not to anyone."

He turns, stomping off without another glance.

My heart pounds, fury and fear tangled in a burning knot. Fury still holds my wrist like he thinks I might lunge at Khaos again.

I meet his eyes and try to smile, but it's weak and shaky.

"Thanks," I mutter, my voice hoarse. "I guess I owe you."

Fury doesn't smile back. "You need to be careful, Kali. That man doesn't bluff."

"Neither do I," I whisper, still staring in the direction Khaos disappeared. My voice trembles, but I mean every word.

"Neither the hell do I." Fury says nothing. He just sighs—a long, heavy sound like I'm the last person he wants to deal with right now.

He starts pulling me gently away from the building. His grip isn't tight, but it's firm enough to say, Don't argue.

We slip through the trees like shadows, ducking low, avoiding the main trail. His head is down, jaw locked, the muscles in his arms tight. I can tell he's pissed—at Khaos, at me, maybe at the whole damn world.

My heart still thuds. My throat still aches. My pride is still bleeding from being tossed around like a rag doll.

"Fury-stop." I jerk my hand out of his grasp. "Where the hell are you taking me?"

He doesn't stop walking. Doesn't even look back.

I jog a little to keep up, blocking his path. "Hey! I asked you something."

Finally, he halts, and his cold eyes burn into mine.

"Why were you even there?" he demands. "Why did you leave the damn house the Alpha gave you?"

My chest rises and falls as I try to steady my voice. "Because your precious Alpha left me without food for two days," I bite out. "I didn't go there to cause trouble-I was starving."

Fury runs a hand through his hair, muttering under his breath. "Shit.."

He doesn't say anything else-just keeps walking.

Thurru to get in front of him again, blocking his path. "Don't be mad at me, okay?" I say, eyes searching his face. "I didn't mean to show up at the pack building. I tried not to go. I really did. I even shifted and went out hunting... but I couldn't find a single damn rabbit, Fury. I was hungry. I only went there to find something-anything-before I passed out."

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 35

He stares at me for a beat too long, his jaw working. Then, with a reluctant sigh, he says, "Come on. Let me make you something to eat."

Later...

The kitchen smells incredible. Not only that-Fury has filled the once-empty cupboards and fridge with all kinds of food.

I sit at the small wooden table, watching in disbelief as he moves around the kitchen with practiced ease. Pots clink. Something sizzles in the pan. My mouth starts watering before he even sets the plate down.

“You know how to cook?” I ask, surprised.

He grunts as he places the food in front of me. “A warrior’s gotta survive somehow.”

I shrug. “Didn’t picture you making stew. More like... gutting boars with your teeth.”

He snorts, the ghost of a smile flickering across his face. I don’t even hesitate-I dig in fast, shoveling food into my mouth like a ravenous beast, barely chewing.

“Whoa,” Fury says, raising an eyebrow. “Slow down before you choke to death on scrambled eggs and grilled meat.”

“Too late,” I mumble through a mouthful.

I finish the bowl in minutes, licking the spoon clean before leaning back with a satisfied sigh, rubbing my stomach.

Fury slides a cup of water toward me. “Drink this. You’re ridiculous.” I take it gratefully, gulping down half before wiping my mouth with the back of my hand. “Thanks.. seriously.”

He doesn’t answer right away. His face turns serious, and I feel the shift in the air.

“Kali... there’s something I really need to warn you about.”

My stomach tenses, but I nod. “What is it?”

His voice drops lower, darker. “There are three men in this pack you should fear. Especially now.”

I stay quiet, listening.

The first-and most important Alpha Jack,” he says, leaning forward with his arms crossed. “I doubt he’d hurt you... but I can’t promise it. Not after what I’ve seen him do in the past.”

I stare at him, lips parted, my heart thudding hard in my chest. I nod slowly.

“And the second?”

Fury’s jaw clenches as he looks away. “The man you just met-Beta Khaos.”

I shiver, the memory of his hand around my throat flashing back.

“He’s not just the Beta. He’s also mated to the Alpha’s twin sister...

Jasmine.”

My mind races to Jasmine-the raw, jagged scars, her haunted, hollow eyes.

Fuck.

That beast... that thing... was her mate? I swallow hard, bile creeping up my throat. “What the hell was he doing to her?” I whisper, more to myself than to him.

Fury’s eyes darken, but he doesn’t answer.

I lean forward. “Who’s the third?”

He exhales, long and heavy. “Jack’s uncle. He’s the royal messenger now. Sounds harmless, right? But trust me... whatever you do, don’t let your path cross his.”

I bite the inside of my cheek. “I’m not scared of anyone.”

“You should be,” he says quietly.

I stand slowly, trying to hold onto more pride than I actually feel. I pick up the empty plate and walk over to the sink. “Thanks for the food.”

I start rinsing the plate, but something weighs heavy on me-burns in my chest, in my throat, in the pit of my stomach.

Was Jack really getting married to her? The Alpha King’s daughter?

Is that why he’s accepting my rejection so easily? Why he hasn’t come back for me?

For power?

That cheating, lying bastard.

I grit my teeth and curse him silently, the soapy water sloshing over the rim of the sink as my fingers tighten around the ceramic plate like it’s his neck.

“What did those poor plates ever do to you?” Fury’s voice breaks the silence, laced with dry humor.

I glance down and realize-I’m gripping the plate so tightly it’s a miracle it hasn’t shattered. My knuckles are white.”Nothing,” I mutter, forcing my jaw to unclench. “Just thinking about Jack... and what you said. You’re right. I should fear him more than the rest. He’s an asshole-”

“Kali,” Fury cuts in gently. “While you were in the pack... did you ever hear the rumors about the Alpha and the Alpha King’s daughter?”

I nod stiffly, eyes burning with an ache | refuse to name. I won’t let the tears fall. I won’t. Chapter 50

From the corner of my eye, I see Fury push back from the chair and rise with a long, weary sigh.

“Ignore the rumours going around,” he says. “Nothing’s been confirmed yet. But one thing I do know for sure-the alpha won’t let go of the one destined for him by the Moon Goddess... not a second time. Not even for power.”

I freeze, fingers stilling on the plate in my hands. Something hot coils in my chest, and before I can stop myself, I drop the plate into the sink with a loud clatter.

I whip around. “I don’t care if the rumours are true or not!” I snap, heat rising in my face. “It’s not my damn business, Fury. I still stand by what I said-I don’t accept the mate bond between us. So you don’t have to defend him.”

He runs a hand through his hair, but I continue.

“Power can drive a man crazy. I’ve seen it-I’ve lived it. So Jack can marry the Alpha King’s daughter. Or the goddess herself, for all I care.

He can fuck whoever he wants-”

My voice cracks at the end, and I hate that it does. A heavy silence settles between us as Fury just stands there, calmly and eyes narrowing.

“If you don’t care”, he says slowly, “then why are you crying?”

I blink. “What?”

He motions toward my face. “If the alpha marrying someone else doesn’t bother you, why are there tears running down your cheeks?”

My hand flies to my face before I even register the wetness. Sure enough-two cold, traitorous streaks. My eyes widen, and I quickly turn back to the sink, wiping my cheeks with the heel of my hand.

“I’m not crying because of him,” I say, voice cracking just a little. “It’s the soap...from the water. It got in my eyes. See?” I even gesture weakly at the sink like that’ll somehow help prove my ridiculous lie.

Fury lets out a dry laugh. “Right. Soap.” He rolls his eyes and turns toward the door. “Keep lying to yourself, Luna.”

Luna?

Why did that word make my heart skip?

His back is already to me, but something inside me panics. “Fury-wait.”

He pauses in the doorway, half-turned. “What is it? I’ve got to get back on patrol. I’ve been gone too long already.”

I wipe my hands on a towel and step closer. "I need a favor."

He lifts an eyebrow.

"I need to send a letter... to my old pack," I say quietly. "To my mom-she's mated to the Beta there. And to my best friend Caspian... he's a warrior. I just want to let them know I'm okay and... I need to hear that they're okay too. Please."

Fury studies me for a moment, his gaze softening slightly.

"I can help with that," he says, surprising me. "Luckily for you, Alpha Jack planted spies in every pack. That's how he stays one step ahead-control. Your letter will be delivered without trouble. I'll make sure of it."

I breathe out in relief, my chest unclenching just a bit. "Thank you. Just ... don't let Jack find out, please. This has to stay between us." He nods firmly. "Write the letter while I'm on patrol. Give it to me when I get back-I'll send it immediately."

I smile up at him, small but real. "Thank you, Fury."

He bows and slips out the door, his footsteps fading into silence.

I let out a long sigh and turn back to the sink, determined to finish cleaning up. But when I reach for the plate, I see it-cracked clean down the middle, broken from where I dropped it in my stupid anger.

"Damn it,"

I pick up the broken pieces, tossing them in the trash with more force than necessary. "Screw you, Jack," I whisper bitterly. "Get out of my damn head."

I dry my hands, pacing the kitchen once before storming out.

I have a letter to write.

I push open the bedroom door and step inside with a sigh. I made my way to the drawers of the bedside table; my fingers fumbled through it—empty, of course.

Muttering curses under my breath, I march over to his wardrobe. Jack is an Alpha, and I know he keeps letters and often issues written orders. I rummage through the shelves until I finally find ink, parchment, and a fountain pen. At last.

But before I can reach for them, the door behind me creaks shut with a soft click.

I freeze.

Probably just the breeze, I tell myself, brushing off the sudden chill that skitters down my spine. I don't turn around. Instead, I reach for the

paper-And then I smell it.

That scent.

Gods, that scent. Woodsmoke, cedar, rain-soaked earth- something untamed. It curls around me like invisible ropes, thick and intoxicating, dragging me into a place I don't want to go. My muscles tense, heat blooming at the base of my spine.

"Great," I mutter to myself with a dry laugh. "Now I'm hallucinating his scent. I'm officially losing it."

But the scent only grows stronger, hotter, wrapping around me like wildfire. I can't focus. My hand trembles as I reach for the pen.

"This is insane," I growl, slamming the wardrobe shut in frustration." Damn you, Jack-

I spin around.

He's there.

Right behind me.

My breath catches in my throat as I stumble back, but his hands catch my waist before I can fall. He's so close I can feel his breath against my cheek. His hands burn where they touch my skin, and I'm paralysed-not by fear, but by how easily he disarms me.

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 36

"Why did you bring another man into our home?

My mouth falls open. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Fury," he spits the name like venom. "Why did you bring him here?

Cooking for you, standing too close, doing the things I should be doing with you... for you. Is that why you're so eager to reject me? So you can be with him? What-what connection do you have with him?"

- His jealousy rings in my ears like a siren, and just like that, the haze of his presence shatters.

My breath shudders in my chest, but not from guilt. From rage, and my heart remembers how he left me alone. Hungry. Abandoned. Off to play house with the Alpha King's daughter-his future wife.

i I shove him away. Hard. “I should be asking you that question,” I snap, eyes blazing. “What connection do you have with the Alpha King’s daughter? I heard you’re getting married to her. Is that why you’re so damn comfortable letting me go?”

His lips twitch-almost a smile. “If I didn’t know you better, I’d swear you were jealous.”

“Jealous?” | laugh bitterly. “Please. Have you forgotten? I rejected you.”

“You did,” he agrees quietly. “But you also admitted you’re attracted to me. Don’t lie, Kali. I know you’re pissed because | left for too long. But I had my reasons. I didn’t expect it to take that long—I was settling some issues.”

“You mean setting up your wedding date?” I hiss.

He opens his mouth, but I cut him off.

“You know what? I don’t care anymore.” My voice trembles, but I push forward. “Accept the rejection, Jack. Let’s end this, once and for all

He doesn’t say a word.

Then his gaze drops to the hem of my shirt-his shirt—and a low, possessive growl rumbles from his chest.

“You’re wearing my shirt,” he says softly. A note of something unfamiliar in his voice.

I say nothing.

He takes the chance to step closer, wrapping an arm around my waist before I can move. He lowers his head, inhaling deeply against the crook of my neck. “I like them on you,” he whispers. “They look better on you than they ever did on me.”

He’s trying to distract me.

“Stop it,” I whisper, fists trembling against his chest. “Accept the rejection, Jack. Keep your word. You said the next time we saw each other, if I still wanted to reject you, you’d accept it. I’m not changing my mind.”

He exhales slowly, pulling back just enough to meet my eyes-and for the first time, I see a war raging behind his gaze. A storm. One that mirrors the chaos inside me.

I bite the inside of my cheek, silently begging him to say something else. To beg. Just once.

But he lets go of me.

His hand falls away, and the moment stretches into eternity.

“, Alpha Jack..” he begins, his voice hoarse.

My heart skips, then drops.

....accept...

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

The sound slams through the room like a thunderclap. Relief floods me. I push past him before he can stop me, bolting toward the door as if the hounds of hell are at my heels. My fingers fumble with the handle, and I yank it open-only for words to die in my throat.

Standing there is the most breathtaking woman I've ever seen, as if she were carved from moonlight itself. For a heartbeat, I wonder if the Moon Goddess has come to collect me.

She's dressed in a shimmering emerald gown that clings to her hourglass figure like it was made just for her. Her long, jet-black hair cascades in flawless waves down her back. Her full lips gleam with gloss, and her blood-red nails sparkle like polished claws.

She looks at me like I'm something she scraped off the bottom of her shoe.

"Who are-"I begin, still dazed

She cuts me off with a fake, sugary smile that doesn't reach her icy eyes. "I'm Lady Celestia," she says smoothly. "Jack's future wife. His mate. His Luna."

Is she... the Alpha King's daughter?

And if she is...

My lips part, but no sound comes out. My brain scrambles for words-anything-to say.

But she keeps going.

"And who are you?" she says, her fake smile never fading. "Don't tell me you're one of the Alpha's little flings. One of his whores? Someone he keeps around to warm his bed when he's bored?"

The insult lands like a slap, but she doesn't even blink. "Then again, he is an Alpha. Men like him need an outlet. I wouldn't expect restraint from someone so... primal."

The words swirl in my head, but none of them find my voice.

She lets out a cold laugh. "But seriously -this is what he's been fucking? Pathetic."

And just like that, she walks past me, brushing against my shoulder

Like I'm nothing but a shadow in her perfect little fairytale.

My hands ball into fists at my sides.

And just like that-my silence cracks. Because no one walks into my life and calls me a whore.

Not even the so-called future Luna.Jack

I let out a low chuckle as Kali storms past me like a goddamn hurricane, nearly shoulder-checking me in the process. She's so damn eager to open that door. For someone who begged me to accept her rejection just seconds ago, she sure is acting like I'm nothing more than a mild inconvenience-like whoever's behind that door matters more than the mate she supposedly doesn't want.

Funny. I can see right through her. She's as easy to read as an open book-an open book with torn pages and highlighted insecurities.

Why is she so fucking stubborn?

Her eyes betray her every single time. That spark of hunger when I get too close. The way her breath hitches when I touch her. She wants this bond—wants me. But she's too damn scared to admit it. Maybe it's the fear of what comes next. The rules. The title.

Because once she accepts the bond, she becomes Luna. And in my pack, that title means one thing-obedience. A Luna may be an Alpha's equal in name, but not in power.

She knows that. And she's terrified of losing control. Terrified that the moment she gives in and lets me mark her, she'll stop being this wild, defiant creature and become what the pack expects from a Luna-poised, obedient, and mine.

And I can't fucking wait for it.

If she really thought I was going to reject moments ago, she's completely out of her damn mind. What I was about to say-before that goddamn knock interrupted us-was, “, Alpha Jack, accept your rejection... for myself. But I'll never reject you.”

Then I would've slammed her stubborn ass onto that bed, marked her,and ended this little game of defiance once and for all.

Once that mark sinks in, she won't be able to deny the bond. Her body. her soul-everything will belong to me.

But no. Of course, the knock had to come at that exact moment. She got lucky.

I follow her out of the room lowly, cracking my neck as I stretch. If it's Fury at the door, I swear to the moon, I'll skin him alive for sniffing around my mate. I'll throw him through the nearest wall and remind him that his job is to fight for me, not with me over Kali.

But then I hear her voice.

Lady Celestia.

From a hand through my hair, swearing under my breath. Why the fuck is she here?

I made it crystal clear to her father-the Alpha King himself-that I don't want her. I don't want the title. I'm not here to be a damn puppet king for his legacy. He can pick another obedient lapdog to marry his daughter and be his damn puppet son-in-law.

So many alpha's howl in happiness at my words and her father said nothing seeming to understand my words.

But Celestia? She's here again-uninvited and very unwelcome.

She's like gum stuck on the bottom of a boot-annoying and impossible to get rid of. Desperate. And there's nothing attractive about desperation.

Not like Kali.

Kali's a fucking storm. Wild, unpredictable, dangerous. The kind of woman who makes you want to chase. She's not something you're handed with a red bow and a smile.

I take a step forward-but stop when I hear Kali's voice. She sounds pissed. Curiosity overtakes my irritation, just for a moment.

Their voices drift through the hallway-Kali's sharp, furious tone, and Celestia's sugary-sweet bullshit. The tension practically crackles in the air.

I slide back against the hallway corner, staying hidden, just close enough to hear. And what I hear makes me smirk like the devil himself.

Kali's jealousy is loud. Deliciously loud.

And I fucking love it.

Let her burn a little. Let her feel what it's like to see someone else circling around me. Maybe it'll finally break that damn wall she's built and push her over the edge.

"Who the fuck did you just call a whore? Who the fuck do you think you are to insult me to my face?" She growls, venom dripping from every syllable, and I can almost see the fire in her eyes.

"Say it again, if you like that pretty face of yours. I dare you, you plastic, fancy bitch."

There's a pause before Celestia snarls, her voice cracking. "You called me a fancy bitch?"

Kali snorts, unbothered. "No, I called you a plastic fancy bitch, dumbass."

I press a hand to my mouth, holding back a laugh. She's insane.

"You must not love your life, I see" Celestia hisses. "But am I wrong? Aren't you just one of the Alpha's little playthings? Is that where your confidence comes from-sucking his dick?"

Oh, hell no.

Kali lets out a low, dangerous growl. “What did you just say?”

“You heard me,” Celestia sneers, lifting her chin.

And then it happens.

Both women lunge at each other like wildcats in heat.

“Shit.” I push off the wall and rush into the room.

Kali’s got a fistful of Celestia’s perfect black waves in one hand, yanking like she’s trying to rip her damn scalp off. Her other hand’s cocked back, ready to do damage that’ll be felt in the next realm.

Celestia snarls, claws out, aiming straight for Kali’s face-but I get there just in time, grabbing her wrists mid-swing before she gets the chance to land even a scratch.

“Enough!” I bark.

Celestia thrashes in my grip, wild and unhinged. “Let me go, Jack! That slut needs to be put in her place!”

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 37

“Shut your mouth,” I snap, turning to her with a glare that could melt silver. “You don’t walk into my house and insult my mate.”

That shuts her up—at least for a second

But Kali? She’s still trying to tear through me to get to her, her fingers still tangled in Celestia’s hair.

“Kali, let go!” I growl, holding Celestia tighter as she tries to lunge again. “You’re going to rip her damn head off!”

“That’s the plan!” She snarls, chest heaving with fury.

I sigh and start prying her fingers loose, one strand at a time. The second I do, Kali stumbles back, breathing hard, her eyes never leaving Celestia.

“Touch me again,” Kali spits, “and I’ll rip those fake lips right off your face.”

Celestia glares at me like I’ve just betrayed her. “You’re seriously going to stand there and let that thing insult me? You’re letting her get away with this?”

I turn to her, voice cold as ice. “You should’ve never come here, Celestia.”

Then I glance at Kali.

And damn, if she isn't the most breathtaking sight I've ever seen when she's pissed.

Fire in her eyes. Blood on her hands. And still, mine.

This... this is the woman I want.

The woman I'll claim. No matter how much she fights it.

No matter how loud she screams.

She's already mine.

Celestia's screech yanks me out of my thoughts.

"I'll tell my father about this, Jack!" Her voice is sharp enough to pierce glass. "Let's see if your precious little mate can handle the consequences when she's punished!"

Before I can open my damn mouth, Kali steps forward with a scoff, eyes gleaming with fire.

"Who the fuck is your father? The Alpha King?" she laughs dryly, crossing her arms and tilting her head. "Please."

But then she sees my face.

Deadpan. Silent.

And her laugh cuts short.

Her brows furrow as she stares at me, and I see it—just for a flicker— the first crack in that fearless mask she always wears. A sliver of fear.

She quickly looks away, masking it with an eye roll and clenched jaw.

But I saw it.

And it makes me grin.

"Well, that was fun," I say coolly, turning to Celestia. "Apologies for her behavior, Lady Celestia. But truthfully, it's not her fault."

She looks smug for a second. Too soon.

"It's yours," I continue, stepping closer to her. "You came here uninvited. Interrupted my day. Insulted my mate. So don't play victim. You reap what you sow, princess. Stop acting like a spoilt brat."

Her mouth drops open in sheer disbelief, like no one's ever dared to speak to her like that before.

“Are you taking her side?” she spits, glaring daggers at Kali.

I raise a brow. “I’m stating facts. Don’t twist them.”

“So tell me, why are you here?” I ask tired of the performance.”Because I made it very clear to your father-I want no part of this arranged nonsense. I don’t want his position, his power, or his daughter.”

Celestia’s eyes darken. Her lips twitch into a smile that’s pure poison.” Yes, you did make that clear,” she says smoothly, circling me like a vulture. “But... a little bird told me something quite interesting.”

I stay still.

She glances at Kali. “You haven’t even introduced her to your pack yet.

She hasn’t taken the Luna position, has she? That’s odd, don’t you think?”

She walks around me, then stops dead in front of Kali and drops her gaze to her neck.

“And as far as I can see...” Her finger gestures to the bare skin. “She doesn’t even bear your mark.”

My jaw tics.

“And that can only mean one of two things,” she continues, voice like velvet laced with venom. “Either she’s rejecting you, or you don’t want her to be your Luna.”

Kali doesn’t say a word.

I don’t have to look at her to know she’s feeling every damn syllable of that

Because Celestia’s not wrong.

Kali was ready to walk out of my life just minutes ago-stubborn and stupid enough to believe I’d let her.

And that embarrassment? That truth she won’t face?

Yeah. I feel it clawing up my spine too.

But I swallow it down and smirk.

Alright. Let’s play.

“Oh, Lady Celestia,” I drawl, boredom thick in my voice. “What can I possibly do to ease your poor, bruised heart and stop your father from ripping off my mate’s head?”

I glance sideways at Kali. Her shoulders stiffen. Her eyes flick toward me, unreadable-but I know that look. It’s not indifference. It’s fear.

Confusion. Conflict.

Good.

I want her on edge.

I want her jealous.

And Celestia? She's the perfect trigger.

Celestia's smile returns. Slow. Vicious. Delighted.

"It's simple," she says, chin lifted in triumph. "I want to stay here. Live here. And since she—" she lifts her hand and points at Kali like she's scum on the floor "-doesn't bear your mark, give me a fair chance."

She leans in, voice low and sultry. "Let me try to win your heart, Jack.

And maybe, if I succeed...be yours.

Kali's head snaps to me.

Her eyes are wide. Her lips part like she wants to say something-but she doesn't. She just stares, frozen.

And me?

I smile.

Because for the first time since we met, Kali looks like she might finally realize what she stands to lose.
Chapter 54

It feels like the air has been knocked out of my lungs. I just stand there, frozen, my heart pounding far too hard against my chest.

Did I hear that right?

Live here? Win his heart? Be his?

My eyes instinctively flick to Jack-and for the briefest moment, I swear—I see it. The faintest twitch at the corner of his lips. A damn smile-or is it a smirk?

And just like that, it's gone-vanished like it was never there. But saw it.

Something twists painfully in my chest.

Is he... enjoying this?

“Focus on what really matters,” my wolf growls inside my head, her voice sharp and jagged like broken glass. “Mate rejected the Alpha King’s offer-for us. Stop gawking like some jealous fool and claim him. He chose you. Stop being stupid. Accept him. Let him mark us now so we can throw that bitch out before she takes what’s ours.”

But before I can respond, Jack’s voice cuts through the tension, deep and laced with something I can’t quite place.

Authority? Anger?

Or... protectiveness?

“What you’re asking is impossible, Lady Celestia,” he says firmly, his eyes never leaving hers. “I don’t even know how you found this place... but you’re not staying here. You can’t live with us. This house,” he gestures behind him, “was built for my mate and me to live in peace.

You’re not welcome here. You don’t belong.”My breath catches again-but this time, not from shock.

Us. Peace.

His words melt through my bones like warmth I didn’t know I needed. I. can’t stop staring at him - that strong jaw, those unwavering eyes that only look at me.

Is he really this protective....or is this just another illusion I’m foolish enough to believe?

Celestia scoffs. “Do I need to remind you of the gravity of this situation?” she says, her voice soaked in false concern. “Your little mutt laid hands on the future Luna Queen. She assaulted the only living heir to the throne. For her sake, suggest you choose your next move carefully, Jack. Because I won’t be here, sure-but neither will your precious mate. I’ll have my father pierce a knife through her heart before the week is over.”

That’s it.

Enough.

“I don’t give a damn if your father is the Alpha King!” I snap without a second thought “You are not staying in this house. Over my dead body will that ever happen.”

Celestia’s mouth falls open in shock. Even Jack looks taken aback too, like he didn’t expect me to say anything-let alone that.

Good.

I’m just getting started.

“You want me gone?” I hiss, glaring into her cold, smug eyes. “Fine.

Drag me to him, if you've got the balls. Let's see who ends up with a knife in their chest. Let's see how that ends-for you." Jack shifts beside me, jaw tight-but then a slow, dangerous grin spreads across his face. That rare kind of proud smirk.

"You heard her," he says coldly. "And my decision stands. Nothing is changing."

He adjusts his stance, eyes hard and unreadable. "If you want to take this to your father, Celestia, then go ahead. I don't mind going to war with the Alpha King if that's what it takes to protect her."

My head whips to him. "Jack, you'd go to war-"

But Celestia cuts me off, her voice thick with disbelief. "You're willing to lose everything for a woman who doesn't even bear your mark? She hasn't even called you her mate. This isn't love, Jack. This is you forcing yourself on someone who clearly doesn't want you."

She steps closer, her voice sharper now. "You're an Alpha. Yet you can't even control your own mate? What will others think? You're throwing your reputation away. And innocent warriors will die-for someone who won't even stand beside you."

"She's the one person the Moon Goddess created for me to protect," he says. "And I will protect her-no matter the cost. If shedding innocent blood is the price... so be it."

My heart nearly leaps out of my chest.

No, no-he can't mean that.

I step forward, grabbing his arm. "Jack," I hiss. "We need to talk. Alone."

He opens his mouth-probably to argue-but I don't wait. I don't care that Lady Celestia is still standing there like some porcelain statue, watching me drag him away like a woman possessed.

I tighten my grip on his wrist and march down the hallway. I throw open the bedroom door and pull him inside, slamming it shut behind us. I stare up at him, his eyes narrow, but he doesn't say a word at first.

Then, he scoffs-low and dangerous-and steps toward me with slow strides.

"You shouldn't ever drag me away like that again," Jack growls, stopping just inches from me. His body heat pours into mine, his presence overwhelming in the most distracting way. "Not in front of others. It sends the wrong message-makes them think you hold the power. That you're the dominant one."

I blink up at him, his piercing gaze stealing the words right out of my mouth.

His scent-dark, earthy, intoxicating-wraps around me. I swallow hard, my throat suddenly dry.

"-I'm sorry," I mutter. "But you can't go to war... not because of me."

- Not when your warriors-Jack, they'll die."

He leans closer, his lips brushing the shell of my ear. “That’s all you wanted to say?” he murmurs. “That’s why you dragged me in here?”

Because for a moment... I thought you were finally ready to be claimed.”

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 38

His eyes drop to my lips, and heat surges to my cheeks. Damn him.

Damn that voice. That look. That scent.

“This is serious, Jack,” I say, struggling to keep my thoughts straight.” You can’t fight the Alpha King over me. Do you even realize how many lives it would cost? How much blood would be spilled?”

“If that’s the price to protect you, then yes-I’ll pay it.” His voice is so calm, it makes me shiver. “Besides, weren’t you the one who said you weren’t afraid of him? As if your own life isn’t on the line too?”

I exhale sharply and take a step back. “It’s different. This is who I am. I don’t bow-to anyone. Not even the Alpha King. But that doesn’t mean I want a damn war started in my name.”

“So what?” he snaps. “You’d rather I stand by while he rips you apart?”

He steps closer again, towering over me. “Celestia is serious, Kali. If she doesn’t get what she wants, she’ll drag you to her father. And you know what will happen then.”

I look away, the truth weighing heavy on my chest.

“Fine,” I whisper. “Let her stay. One month. That’s all she gets. After that, she’s gone.”

Jack’s eyes flash with something unreadable. “She won’t leave after a month, Kali. Not if she sees I haven’t claimed you. Not if there’s no mark. She’ll see that as an opportunity and keep pushing.”

My heart thuds faster. “Then what do you suggest we do, Jack?” I murmur, lowering my gaze to my open palm. My voice is barely a breath. “What do you want from me?”

He lifts his hand and gently tilts my chin up, forcing me to meet his eyes.

“We make it work,” he says softly. “We take this one month and use it.

Share a room. Build our connection. That’s the time I’ll give you to accept our bond. Don’t you think that’s fair?”

My lips part, but I can’t speak. My throat is too dry. “That’s... moving too. fast.”

His brows rise slightly.

“Fine. We’ll share a room-but not a bed. And I mean it. We take things slow. I need to know who you really are before I give myself to something so... irreversible.”

He runs a hand through his hair, frustration flickering across his face.” And how do we do that, exactly? Get to know each other... slowly?”

I draw in a breath. “Let’s... date.”

Jack blinks at me like I’ve grown a second head. “What does that even mean?”

I blink back. “You don’t know what dating is?”

He tilts his head. “No. Should I?”

I almost laugh, but there’s too much tension. “I read about it in a book.

Humans-before they get married-they date. They spend time together, Learn if they’re compatible before they commit for life.”

Jack snorts. “Date? Like humans? Kali, we’re wolves. We don’t date. We mate. We mark. The moment we meet, we accept. That’s how the Moon Goddess designed us.”

I lift my chin and meet his eyes. “Take it or leave it, Jack. It’s all I can offer... until I’m sure about you.”

A long silence stretches between us before he exhales a low growl under his breath.”Fine.”

Before I can react, his arm wraps around my waist and he pulls me closer. I gasp, my heart skipping a beat as his forehead nearly touches mine.

But then his eyes glaze over, and I know immediately-he’s mind-Linking someone. A second later, he pulls back, jaw tight.

“I have to go. My Beta, Khaos, needs me. It’s urgent.”

My blood runs cold.

Khaos?

My heart drops. That word. That name. His hands around my neck, calling me a bitch like I was nothing.

Desperate to change the subject, I blurt out, “Jack... is it true? That your Beta is your twin sister’s mate?”

I go stiff.

Jack notices immediately. “Kali?”

He studies my face. “Do you know my Beta? Have you met him before?”

I force a weak laugh and shake my head. “No,” I lie smoothly. “I’ve never met him.”

He doesn’t look convinced. “Hmm.”

I scramble for a distraction. “Jack... is it true? That your Beta is your twin sister’s mate?”

His face changes slightly. “How do you know that? Did Jasmine tell you?”

“No,” I lie again quickly. “Just a guess. But... maybe you should check on

“Not yet,” I say coolly over my shoulder. “I wanted to enjoy my mate first. Not that it’s any of your business.”

Her hiss is sharp, but I’m done playing nice.

“Fine,” she spits. “I’ll stay in one of your other mansions then. This little house doesn’t suit a future queen like me anyway.”

I don’t bother responding. Not a single word. I just walk out, slamming the door behind me, muttering curses under my breath.

The only damn reason I’m letting her stay is simple-I want Kali to burn.

Let her see another woman breathing down my neck, flaunting herself like she has a claim. Let her wolf rage at the sight. Because when that happens?

She’ll come to me willingly-desperate to claim me before someone else does. She’ll beg for my mark. She’ll give me hers. And when that moment comes, I’ll finally show her just how much I’ve been holding back.

Until then?

Let Celestia parade around with her fake royalty bullshit.

A smirk pulls at my lips as I step into the woods. The trees sway gently under the breeze, and the smell of damp earth calms the storm brewing in my chest.

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 39

It doesn’t take long before the pack building comes into view through the trees-and the second I step out of the cover of the woods, my smirk vanishes.

The place is crawling with guards. Not mine. Royal ones.

They're standing like polished statues, dressed in their fancy armor with that arrogant air they all carry like perfume. But what makes me straighten my spine with pride is the way my warriors stand right beside them-silent, alert, unmoved. Not one of them flinches. Not one backs down. They look the royals in the eye like equals.

It makes my blood hum.

If war ever comes... we won't be the ones to bow.

But then I see it.

A crowd.

My pack members gathered at the front steps, cheering like it's some damn coronation.

"Lady Celestia!"

"All hail the Alpha King's daughter!"

"Our future Luna!"

My fists clench so tight I swear I hear my knuckles pop.

I can't stand their voices, their stupid blind joy. They don't even know her. She could poison the damn pack and they'd still kiss her feet because of her royal blood. No. Fuck this.

I duck through the side and slip into the building through the back door before any of them sees me. I move fast down the corridor, ignoring the curious stares from the few pack members inside. My footsteps echo sharply as I throw open my office door and step in with a scowl carved deep into my face.

Seconds later, the door swings open again, and Khaos steps in. He's just returned from one of the business trips he usually handles on my behalf.

I walk around my desk and drop into my chair, my fingers tapping impatiently on the polished wood.

"Why haven't you dismissed those damn people outside?" I snap.

"They're disturbing the fucking peace of the forest, not to mention my mood."

Khaos stays quiet for a moment, clearly choosing his words carefully.

"The pack wants you to hold an introduction ceremony," he says slowly.

– “For the Alpha King’s daughter. They’re getting impatient. News of your ... marriage has spread fast. And once the rest of the pack finds out she’s here, that crowd out there is going to double. Maybe triple.”

I hiss sharply through my teeth, pushing back from my desk and rising to my feet.

“When did I ever say I was marrying her?” I growl. “They want an introduction? Of who, exactly? A woman I’m not even mated to? Hell no. I already have a mate. I’m not going to parade another woman around like she’s my Luna.”

I jab a finger toward the window, toward the cheering crowd.”I don’t care if she’s the Alpha King’s damn goddess. I’m not introducing anyone who doesn’t bear my mark.”

Khaos straightens, his jaw clenched. “With all due respect, Alpha...”

The way he says it already sets me off.

*...I believe Lady Celestia would make a better Luna. The pack already adores her. Unlike that disrespectful, untamed brat the moon goddess cursed you with. She’s not Luna material—no manners, no grace. She doesn’t even know how to submit-

I don’t let him finish.

My roar tears from my chest so loud the walls fucking shake. The desk rattles. A painting falls from the wall. And Khaos—who looks like a beast himself to most people—freezes, eyes wide, his face pale.

“Shut the fuck up.”

My voice is gravel, dipped in fury. My wolf is clawing under my skin, begging to take control. I step toward him slowly, every inch of me pulsing with rage.

“You threatened her, didn’t you?” I say, my voice low and deadly.”

That’s why she froze and went cold. You met with my mate-my mate, Khaos, your future Luna-and disrespected her to her face, didn’t you?”

He bares his neck immediately, trembling slightly now. “Alpha-Jack-I only meant to-”

“The only reason you’re still breathing,” I cut him off, is because I don’t want my twin sister to become a widow today. That’s it. That’s the only thread holding your fucking neck together.”

Khaos swallows hard. “-I apologize, Alpha. Deeply.”

I don’t stop glaring at him. My voice drops lower, more dangerous.

“And since you felt the need to share your unwanted opinion on my mating life, maybe I should return the favor.”

I cross my arms, stepping even closer.

“My sister, Jasmine. You’re treating her properly, right? Being the mate she deserves?”

He stiffens. “Of course, Alpha. With everything I have. Did she say something to you?”

I ignore the desperation in his voice.

“You know I’ll kill anyone who lays a hand on her. Rip them apart. Burn the pieces. She’s not just my sister-she’s my twin. The only soul that’s been with me since birth. And your head, Khaos?” I tilt my head, smiling coldly. “Your head is no exception.”

He drops to one knee instantly, head bowed low in full submission, voice hoarse.

“I would never harm her. You have my word, Alpha.”

I stare at him a beat longer, then turn away and walk to the window.

Outside, the voices are louder.

Celestia this. Celestia that.

They want a queen?

They’ll have one.

But it won’t be her.

It’ll be Kali-when she comes running to me, craving what’s already hers. And when she does... I’ll mark her so deep the pack won’t ever mistake anyone else for my Luna again.

“Please be careful when delivering these letters,” I tell Fury in a serious tone. “Especially the one for my mother. I know I told you my adopted father is the beta but I also forgot to mention that he is holds • the title for the world’s biggest asshole. His senses are sharp as hell.

He practically keeps my mother on a leash.”

Fury gives me a slight bow, his hand pressed to his chest. “Of course, Luna. I’ll tell the men to be discreet about it. You have my word.”

But as he straightens, I notice it again—he scratches his nose. Not once, not twice. He’s been doing it from the moment he stepped back inside. My eyes narrow suspiciously.

“You good, Fury?” I ask.

He freezes, his nostrils flaring as he sniffs the air. His face twists into a grimace, and he scratches his chin hard enough that I almost hear the scrape of nails against skin.

“Yeah, yeah..” he mutters, but then he sniffs again, looking almost embarrassed as frustration creeps into his voice. “It’s just-there’s this weird scent. I can’t explain it.” His eyes dart around like he’s searching for a ghost.

It hits me then, and I almost gag. I scrunch my nose and smirk. “Im sure that weird scent’ you’re talking about belongs to Lady Celestia.

God, I feel like vomiting too.”

I burst out laughing. Fury shakes his head, a rare smile tugging at his lips, though his hand still unconsciously rubs his nose like it’s driving him insane.

“I know, right?” he mutters gruffly. “But this is.. different. The scent... it’s driving me-” His voice trails off again, and he shakes his head like he’s trying to clear it. “Forget it. Forget I said anything,” he mumbles, clearing his throat. Before I can press him further, he snatches the letters from me and stuffs them into his jacket like they’re precious contraband. “Once! get their replies, I’ll reach out,” he promises.

“Thank you, Fury, say softly, watching him head for the door.

Something still feels off about him, but I push the thought aside once he’s gone.

As the door clicks shut behind him, I let out a heavy sigh and lean back against it, sliding down until I’m sitting on the floor. Alone. Finally.

Relief bubbles out of me uncontrollably, and I end up laughing like a lunatic, clutching my stomach. God, I must look completely deranged-but I don’t care. The image of Celestia’s face when Jack told her to go make herself “comfortable” in the attic flashes through my mind, and I cackle even harder.

“Serves her right,” I mumble through giggles.

But before I get too comfortable, my wolf huffs in my head, dragging me back to reality.

“We still have to get rid of her,” she grumbles. “We can’t afford her hanging around our mate. We need Jack. His touch. His kisses-”

“Alright, alright!” I groan, throwing my head back against the door.”I get it! Shut up already.”

I’ve heard the same speech from her a thousand times. No way in hell was I about to let her start writing a whole romance novel in my head again.

“Let’s go for a run,” I mutter, pushing myself to my feet. “Clear our head.”

My wolf snorts but then howls in agreement. “Anything to get out of this house — it reeks of that bitch’s scent. “Hopefully, by the time we come back, the stench will be gone.” Chuckling, I walk over to the windows, shoving them open wide and dramatically waving my hand through the air like a woman banishing a demon.

The cool breeze rushes in, taking the edge off the cloying, sickeningly sweet scent Celestia left behind. I smile grimly. Good riddance.

Slipping outside, I carefully scan the woods. No one in sight. Good.

The last thing I need is anyone catching me mid-shift – my wolf is massive. Bigger than any female wolf I’ve ever seen. Bigger than most males, too.

And honestly?

That still scares the shit out of me.

Closing my eyes, I feel the familiar, powerful pull ripple through my body – and shift. Bones stretch and pop, muscles ripple, fur replaces skin – and in seconds, I’m standing on four legs, almost the size of a damn tree. My paws sink deep into the soft soil.

“Let’s run,” my wolf growls impatiently.

I obey, surging forward. Trees whip past me, the night air cool and freeing. I leap over fallen logs, my paws moving so fast the ground barely feels solid beneath me.

It feels incredible – until voices, human voices, reach my ears. I skid to a stop, panting, my ears swiveling toward the sound

Shit. I’m way too close to the main pack grounds.

Without thinking twice, I shift back – my clothes staying intact – and dart behind a massive oak tree.

Crouching low, I peek around the thick bark. A crowd is gathered in front of the pack building – the same one where I’d had the unpleasant encounter with Beta Khaos earlier.

They’re loud, their faces lit with excitement, chanting in one obnoxious voice:

“All hail Lady Celestia! Our future Luna!”

They sing her praises like she’s some goddess sent down to bless them.

Jealousy burns hot and furious in my chest, making me almost dizzy.

“You want that, don’t you?” my wolf purrs in my head, smug.

“No,” I whisper harshly, lying through my teeth. But the words taste bitter, and the truth claws at me, undeniable and raw.

Because... I do.

A part of me wants them to chant my name instead. I want to belong somewhere.

Submission is Not My Style – Chapter 40

I flash back to Fury earlier – how naturally the word had rolled off his tongue when he called me “Luna.” And how it had sent a stupid, secret thrill through me that I couldn’t shake, no matter how hard I tried... It had felt good.

Too good.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I turn away from the crowd pressing my back against the rough bark of the tree.

“I don’t care,” I whisper to myself.

But the ache inside says otherwise. Still, I refuse to stand here like some pathetic girl crying over something that was never mine.

Yet.

I just needed to figure out how to send that bitch packing without starting a war—and then...

Maybe, just maybe, the chants would be for me.

I’m still trying to breathe through the ache in my chest when the voice I hate most shatters my thoughts.

“Why are you hiding behind the tree like some thief?”

I jolt, spinning around so fast my heart nearly punches out of my chest.

And there she is.

Lady Celestia, smirking like the devil herself in a flowing white dress.

I grit my teeth so hard my jaw aches.

“Oh, that’s right,” she says, voice dripping fake sweetness. “You don’t belong here.” I don’t even think before I snap back, “Better to hide than to parade myself around like a desperate, attention-starved hag.”

Celestia’s eyes flash with anger, but she covers it quickly with a snide little laugh. She tifts her hand, scratching her nose dramatically, like she smells something rotten.

“You smell weird,” she says, wrinkling her nose in mock disgust as she sniffs the air around me. “Like you-were with another man. It’s definitely not Jack...”

Her smile turns sly. “Are you cheating on him already?”

I stare at her like she’s grown two heads. What the hell is she even talking about?

Just like Fury earlier, she keeps scratching her nose like something’s driving her mad.

“You know,” Celestia hums, stepping closer until the sickeningly sweet scent of hers invades my senses, “you could just hand him over to me.

Save yourself the heartbreak.”

I clench my fists, feeling my nails dig crescent moons into my palms.

But I force a smile the kind that feels more like baring my teeth.

“You see, Lady Celestia,” I say sweetly, “ve dealt with bitches like you before. Bitches obsessed with owning what the Moon Goddess gave me. But you?”

I step closer, close enough to see her pupils sharpen dangerously.” You’re one unlucky bitch....because I actually want to keep this one.”

Her eyes flicker dangerously, but before I can walk away with whatever dignity I have left –

A brutal shove slams into my back.

I gasp, my body pitching forward. I hit the ground, face-first, hard enough to taste blood.

Pain explodes through my palms and knees. The world spins for a second.

And then –

Silence.

Followed by the sudden, unmistakable prickle of every damn eye turning to stare at me.

Mortified, I scramble to get up, my hands scraping at the dirt. But before I can fully lift myself, a sharp kick slams into my side, knocking me down again, pinning me there like I’m nothing.

My wolf growls low in my head, ready to tear, but I force her down.

I watch from the dirt as Lady Celestia saunters past me like she hasn’t just humiliated me in front of everyone. She lifts her arms theatrically,

turning to the small crowd.

“Thank you, everyone, for your warm welcome,” she says, her voice smooth and sugary, dripping with fake humility.

The crowd roars louder, clapping, some even throwing flowers at her damn feet.

I glare at the back of her head, wishing I could burn a hole straight through it.

But then –

She turns.

Looks right at me, still crumpled on the ground like trash.

Her lips curl into a cruel smile. "Oh, look, everyone," she announces, loud enough for the whole dame pack to hear.

"It's Alpha. Jack's...mate."

The way she spits the word "mate" makes it sound dirty, like an insult.

The crowd quiets. I can feel their eyes crawling over me -judging, whispering.

I want the ground to open up and swallow me whole.

I force myself to move, to stand – but my body feels like it's turned to stone.

Frozen there, helpless.

Célestia saunters back over to me, all grace and malice. She bends down, offering me her hand like she's being merciful.

Her nails, sharp and manicured, graze my skin as she leans in close, her breath hot against my ear.

"You said you've dealt with rude bitches like me?" she whispers, just for me. "That's impossible, Kali. I'm the Alpha King's daughter which makes me so different."

I suck in a breath, my heart hammering faster at that word...

"You stand no chance against me," she continues, her voice almost pitying. "Unless, of course, you die and are reborn into my bloodline."

She chuckles darkly.

"But we both know that's impossible. So be a good little girl... give up Jack... and walk away while I'm still feeling generous."

She pulls back, straightening up, smiling sweetly for the crowd as if she's just helped a wounded puppy. My hands curl into the dirt, rage and humiliation bubbling so high almost choke on it but then... a dangerous smile curts across my lips.

Because an idea-dark, daring, and deliciously reckless-forms in my head.

And I already know exactly who I need to make it happen.

Jack.

My smirk doesn't budge, not even as the sting of dirt clings to my skin and humiliation pulses beneath it like a fresh burn.

Celestia turns back to the crowd, chin held high, basking in their attention like it's sunlight. She looks utterly pleased with herself, but that's where she messed up.

Because she gave me the spotlight.

And now... I'm taking it.

Slowly, deliberately, I rise from the ground. Graceful. Poised.

I act as though I don't care that every eye is on me. My heart pounds like a war drum, but I force my spine to stay straight.

This isn't how I imagined being introduced to the pack... but fine.

If they want a show – I'll give them one.

Confidence. Control. No fear.

What a Luna should have.

And I will be Luna, for now.

Without giving myself time to second-guess it, I stride straight toward the crowd -toward her.

Celestia's smirk falters for the briefest second as I approach, but she schools her face quickly, pretending not to flinch.

I stop in front of her – close enough to catch her sickly sweet scent again. It's cloying. Overbearing. Then I lift my foot and slam it down – right on hers.

Her smile freezes. Her pupils dilate.

But she neither screams nor jerks away.

She endures.

Good.

I lean in, my lips brushing her ear as I whisper – just loud enough for a few nearby to catch it.

“Game on.”

Then I flash her the sweetest smile I can muster as I lift my foot off hers.

She doesn't move. But her eyes?

Oh, they scream.

The crowd parts for me like water as I walk through them, even though I can feel their stares sticking to my skin.

| I keep my face blank – calm, composed – but inside I’m still burning.

Then come the whispers.

“She’s really Alpha Jack’s mate?”

“Wow... she’s not as ugly as I thought she’d be.”

“She’s beautiful, yeah, but she looks... strong. Too athletic.”

“She’s pretty... but no one compares to Lady Celestia. She’s soft. More feminine.”

I pretend I don’t hear them. I focus on my breathing. On my steps. On keeping my chin high and my eyes forward. Then – right on cue –

Celestia clears her throat, loudly.

Desperate little princess. Trying to snatch the spotlight back before it slips from her manicured claws.

“My father will be most pleased to hear that you all welcomed me so warmly,” she says. Her tone is sugary-sweet, but there’s unmistakable venom beneath it.

She’s pissed.

The crowd lights up again, falling all over themselves to praise her.

“The Alpha King’s daughter deserves only the best and nothing less!”

“You’re royalty, your highness! It’s an honor to have you here!”

“In fact,” someone shouts, “that’s why we’re gathered! We want to persuade Alpha Jack to throw you a proper introduction ceremony!”

More cheers. More applause.

And still, I keep walking, my smirk slowly stretches into a full-blown grin..

A ceremony for her? Over my dead, freshly humiliated body.

There is no damn way Celestia is getting introduced before me.

As I near the pack building, I pause. It’s heavily guarded.

That’s new.

Four warriors stand like statues, and two of them wear royal uniforms

-black coats embroidered with gold thread, swords strapped to their sides like they actually know how to use them. Royal guards. Celestia's loyal little watchdogs.

As I get closer, the two royal guards step into my path like I'm some uninvited pest.

One holds out a hand. "This area is restricted. You may not-"

I arch a brow and turn to the third warrior – not a royal dog, but one of Jack's. He wears Jack's colors. I recognize him.

I meet his eyes and say, calmly but with enough steel in my voice to make him blink, "Are you seriously going to let them block my path?"

I'm your Alpha's mate. You know that already."

His jaw tenses for a moment – but then, like a switch flipping, he shoves the royal guard aside with one firm hand. "She's allowed in."

I flash him a small, knowing smile.

"Good choice."

Inside, the scent hits me immediately.

Jack. That woodsy, dark mix of spice and wild that makes my knees wobble like a damn amateur.

I follow his trail, every step calculated, heart pounding louder the closer I get to the large double doors at the end of the hall. My hand wraps around the knob, ready to twist-