

The Chosen Luna: Alpha's Unwanted Daughter

Chapter 2

POV: Isla

The question hung in the air between us, and I felt the whole room contract around it.

I held her stare for three full seconds. Then I let the corner of my mouth pull, just enough to be seen. "I think you already know the answer to that," I said. "Or you wouldn't need to ask."

Kael shifted beside her, and I felt his eyes move to my face the way they always had — searching, waiting, like I owed him something even now.

I turned to him directly. I gave him the full weight of it, no softening.

"I reject you." The words came out quieter than I intended, but quieter was worse. Quiet meant I meant it without needing anyone to hear. "Completely."

Something moved across his face. The expression of a man who had wanted the door to stay open even after he had already walked through it.

I did not give him time to answer. He did not deserve the last word in a sentence I was closing.

Seraphine's eyes flashed — I'd landed something real, and we both knew it. She opened her mouth, but my father's voice cut through from the courtyard entrance before she could answer, rolling through the hall with the ease of someone who had never once needed to ask for quiet.

Seraphine turned away without another word, sliding her fingers back into Kael's hand as they moved toward the doors together, and I stood there watching them go.

I followed. Not because I wanted to witness it, but because I refused to be the one who stayed behind and pretended it hadn't happened.

The courtyard was bright and cold under an open sky, every rank of the pack assembled across the stone yard.

Warriors stood near the outer wall in their training gear, called straight from the yards. Omegas gathered toward the back. The elders sat on the raised stone steps to my father's left, their expressions already shaped into approval.

I pressed myself to the crowd's edge and kept my jaw set and my shoulders level. I already knew what was coming — some part of me had understood it since the moment I watched Kael's arm settle around her waist.

But knowing something is coming and standing still while it arrives are two different kinds of damage, and only one of them leaves a mark you carry permanently.

"As you all know," my father began, his voice carrying the full width of the yard without effort, "we have been blessed with two daughters. But only one can lead the pack." He paused, letting the weight of it breathe. "Today, we announce that Seraphine has been chosen as your future Luna."

The pack broke into applause, immediate and full. A few older warriors added low calls of approval that bounced off the stone walls.

I held my position at the crowd's edge with my nails pressing into my palms, my hands absorbing the pressure that had nowhere else to go.

Seraphine stood three paces behind my father, her hand in Kael's, her chin lifted just enough to catch the gray light. Her eyes found mine across the yard and held there, waiting for what would cross my face. I kept my expression shut and gave her nothing to carry back.

But my feet had already decided before my head finished its argument. I pushed through the pack until I stood close enough for my father to hear me without raising my voice.

"Father." The nearest pack members went quiet. "I am the elder twin. By every law this pack holds, the title of Luna passes to the firstborn." My chin stayed up. My shoulders stayed back. "I am the rightful Luna."

A ripple moved through the crowd. Not support. Careful, noncommittal wariness. The stillness of people who had decided this was not their confrontation.

My father brought his gaze to mine. No surprise in it. No anger. Just flat, practiced patience, the expression of a man who had rehearsed this and found it exactly as dull as he had expected.

"Isla." He used my name as punctuation, a period placed at the end of a sentence already closed. "Seraphine is more suited to lead. She is stronger, more respected. The choice is clear."

"I have trained before this pack opened its eyes every morning for years." The last word thinned and exposed itself to everyone in the yard, and I could not pull it back.

"I have bled for these drills, carried every burden expected of a firstborn heir. The law is on my side, and I am the rightful Luna."

"Enough." He raised one hand, palm out. "Do not embarrass yourself in front of this pack. Do not embarrass this family. Seraphine has proven herself. This decision is final." He turned his back to me before he had finished speaking.

Heat climbed my throat so fast my vision blurred for one second. I had stood in those training yards before dawn, year after year, because I had believed it meant anything real.

I had done every unglamorous, unrewarded thing required of me, the work no one stands in a courtyard to announce, because I believed the law was mine and I had to deserve what was already mine by right.

My father had not held my gaze for ten seconds. That was the real damage. Not Seraphine getting the title. The complete, effortless ease with which he turned away.

"It is not personal, Isla." Seraphine's voice carried warmth calibrated to land precisely wrong. "Some of us were simply meant for greatness."

Approval moved through the crowd in a low, steady murmur. Kael looked down at Seraphine and pressed his mouth to her forehead, slow and deliberate, a gesture performed for an audience rather than felt between two people.

I had spent two days asking myself why he had chosen her. Whether my parents had worked on him before I ever walked into that hall, whether Seraphine had made promises, whether he had simply run the calculation every wolf in this pack had already run.

Maybe all of it. Watching him hold her, certain and at ease, I understood the answer no longer required my attention.

He chose approval. He chose the easy alignment, the path that cost nothing and demanded no courage. He was built from the same material as everyone else standing in that yard.

What I had wanted was not him. It was the life I believed stood behind him, and that life had never once been on offer to me.

I walked toward the gate at a pace that looked chosen, because if I let it become anything faster, every wolf in that yard would know exactly what it meant.

I was nearly through when my mother's presence arrived at my shoulder, unhurried and precisely positioned, as though she had tracked my exit from the moment I stepped forward in the courtyard.

She had known I would take this gate. She had crossed the yard to intercept me here, at this private gap between the stone arch and the gathered pack, where no witnesses could reach.

This was not a parting remark. This was a tool she had carried across the yard and placed, deliberately, into the wound while my back was still turned.

She leaned close and dropped her voice to the register she reserved for precision work. "We only ever needed one daughter to rule." She let that settle for a full breath. "Do not make this harder than it has to be."

I did not stop. I did not turn around, because turning would have meant letting her see my face, and my face was the only thing I still owned completely.

I walked through the gate and pressed my back against the cold corridor stone. I stood there until the applause faded. Then I pushed off the wall.

Whatever they expected me to do next, I intended to prove them wrong about every part of it.