

The Chosen Luna: Alpha's Unwanted Daughter

chapter 21-23

POV: Isla

The training ground had gone quiet around me before I finished registering that it had ever been full.

They had been there when I arrived, a cluster of young she-wolves at the edge of the field, voices low, bodies close.

I had walked toward them with the specific intention of being useful: defense, leverage, how to survive a fight with less size and less wolf than the person across from you.

Everything I had learned the hard way, offered freely.

They turned away. One at a time, systematic, until I was standing in the middle of an empty field with the cooling evening air on my face and nowhere to direct the thing building in my chest.

I swallowed it down and held the line. 'It does not matter.' I will earn their trust eventually.

I did not entirely believe it yet. I kept the position anyway. That was how the thing worked.

Heavy footsteps behind me. A presence I would have known in a room with my eyes closed.

Draven came to a stop beside me. Said nothing. I felt his gaze move across the empty field, then settle on me: the unhurried attention of a man who has already made his decision and is observing the evidence.

"See me in my chamber." Low and steady. An order that did not dress itself as anything else.

My heart moved in my chest. I turned to look at him, but his expression was already closed, dark and unwavering.

I did not argue. I turned and followed him into the corridor.

His chamber was dim, candlelight moving along the stone walls in slow patterns, the fire burning low. I crossed the threshold and heard the door settle behind me.

Draven moved to the window, arms crossed, the tension in him contained beneath the surface of a posture that looked relaxed to anyone who had not been watching him for weeks.

"The pack still doubts you." His voice was calm and heavy in equal measure, each word placed with care.

I took a slow breath. "But I won the trial. That was supposed to prove my worth."

His gaze moved to mine and locked there with the particular weight of a man who has already decided the conversation. "They need to see your wolf, Isla."

The silence stretched between us, taut and unresolved, and I made no effort to fill it.

"Tell me the truth." His voice dropped, quiet but firm, leaving no space for deflection. "You have not shifted yet, have you?"

My fingers tightened around the fabric of my sleeves. The truth was already in the room — had been since the council session, since I woke from four days of unconsciousness and reached inward and found the absence.

Tears rose before I could stop them. I blinked hard, lifted my chin, kept my eyes on his.

"It just won't end, will it?" My voice cracked on the edge of it, frustration breaking through. "I will have to keep proving myself. Again and again."

Draven crossed to me before I had finished deciding whether I wanted him to, and I did not move away.

His fingers brushed my cheek, the touch warm and unhurried, and he wiped the tear that had slipped free before I had managed to stop it. I bit my lip without my recollection and watched him catch that simple moment.

"Stop that," he murmured.

I looked up and found his face considerably closer than I had registered it being. "Stop what?"

His thumb grazed slowly across my lower lip and stayed there. "Biting your lips."

My breath caught and held and all the prepared words dissolved in the same instant.

I opened my mouth to push back, to say the word that would restore the distance between us. I never got there.

His mouth came down on mine with a force that dissolved every prepared sentence in my head.

He kissed me rough and hungry, his tongue past my teeth before I had finished processing the fact of contact, and he tasted like sin and stolen whiskey and I stopped thinking in sequential order.

His hands gripped my waist and pulled me against the full length of him. I could feel every hard line of his body, feel him already half-hard against my stomach.

The heat between us was electric. I was drowning in it. My hands dug into his shirt like I intended to remove it immediately.

He did not give me air. His lips were on mine again, sucking and biting and taking.

His hands moved across my body with the authority of someone who has already decided it belongs to him. One hand fisted in my hair.

He pulled my head back. Teeth at my pulse point, marking. I gasped and drove my nails into his shoulders.

He walked me backward. The edge of the table found the backs of my thighs and then he was lifting me onto it, stepping between my legs in one continuous motion.

His hands pushed my thighs apart and his fingers found the waistband of my underwear and pulled it down in one motion, and his mouth was on my neck, and I moaned and tangled my hands in his hair.

"Draven—" My voice came out unsteady, and I did not finish the sentence because I had not decided what the sentence was going to be.

He answered with a smirk pressed against my inner thigh, his breath hot and deliberate, and the smirk carried everything the words would have said.

"Let me taste you," he growled, voice dark and low, and then his mouth was on me.

His tongue moved through me slowly and deliberately and I nearly came off the table. He worked my clit, circling and teasing until I was arching against him, hips lifting, searching.

He laughed. The sound was dark and filthy against my skin. Then he was consuming me like he had been waiting for exactly this and had exhausted his patience for waiting.

His fingers pushed inside me, curling to find the exact right angle, and I was soaked and shaking and he knew it and he did not slow down.

"Fuck, you taste so good," he groaned against me, his breath hot as he sucked my clit into his mouth, and I nearly came apart.

My thighs closed around him, hands gripping the table edge like it was the only anchor available.

"Draven — I am going to —" I gasped it out, hands gripping the table edge, but he did not stop.

His tongue moved and his fingers worked and I shattered, my orgasm breaking over me in waves I had not braced for. My body shook with it.

I cried out his name and kept crying it as the waves moved through me, one after another, until I was trembling and undone and boneless against the surface.

He did not stop immediately. He drew it out, every last tremor, until I was wrecked and panting and entirely unmade above him. Only then did he pull back.

He pulled back and looked up at me from where he knelt, his eyes dark, his lips wet with me.

"You're perfect," he growled, licking his lips like he couldn't get enough.

His hands pressed slowly up my thighs, and the look he gave me was a promise with teeth in it.

"I can't wait to take your clothes off." His voice was rough, unhurried, the tone of a man who has already decided.

End *of* *The* **Chapter**

Chapter 21

POV: Seraphine

They were talking about her again, which meant they had never stopped, which meant the three weeks since the trial had done nothing to redirect the conversation.

"I always knew she was meant to be a Luna." A voice bright with the specific warmth of someone who has located their correct opinion in hindsight.

"She's kind-hearted," another offered, with the reverence people reserve for things they have just discovered they were wrong to overlook.

"And with Alpha Draven beside her, she's truly lucky." Awestruck. That was the word. They were awestruck.

I stood in the corridor and listened to every syllable, and I let each one arrive at its intended destination, which was the place in my chest where I kept the accounting. Every word of it. Filed precisely.

'I was supposed to be Luna. Not her. That was not bitterness — it was a fact, and facts did not require apology.'

I walked into the room and the voices found other subjects with the specific speed of people who have been caught. They smiled at me. I smiled back. That, too, was filed.

I had spent years making sure Isla had nothing. Not a foothold, not a name worth using, not a single piece of ground she could claim as her own.

I had been systematic. Patient. I had done the work no one was supposed to see, and I had done it consistently for years.

And Isla had risen out of the space I cleared for her burial and risen wearing a title.

That was the part that infuriated me most. Not the loss. The waste. All that careful, precise, invisible work accumulated over years, and here we were.

A knock at my chamber door, deliberate and not particularly patient. I did not turn.

Kael stepped inside. I could hear the particular quality of his silence, composing itself before it spoke.

"We were supposed to gather flowers for the wedding." He stepped inside and the door stayed open behind him, which was its own kind of message. "Is this about Isla again?"

I met his gaze in the mirror, which spared him the full weight of my expression and spared me the effort of arranging one.

"The wedding does not matter right now." My fingers tightened against the edge of the vanity. "Isla's victory makes us both look like fools."

He crossed his arms in the doorway and settled into the posture of a man about to be reasonable. "This is not about us. She earned it."

I turned from the mirror slowly, with the pace of someone who is not in a hurry and wants the room to understand that.

"Earned it?" The laugh that came out was not warm. "No one believed she would survive. The fact that she did does not make her worthy. It makes her improbable."

"She survived something you couldn't." His voice was quiet and he was

watching me for the reaction.

The words arrived differently. Not in my chest. Lower, at the depth where I kept the things I did not examine.

I held the expression I was wearing and did not let it slip. I had been holding expressions since I was old enough to know they were a strategy, and I was not going to lose the skill now, in front of Kael, over a woman who had spent her entire life failing to protect herself from me.

"Maybe." The word came out clean, without texture. "But survival alone is not enough. Draven will realize soon enough what she actually is."

Kael's eyes narrowed, and beneath the question was the specific wariness of a man who has started to read the room correctly. "What are you planning?"

I stepped toward him, letting the distance compress until he had to choose not to step back.

"Three moons." I kept my voice below the level that carries. "That is all I need to show Draven the truth about her. Isla has always been fragile — underneath, where no one looks. When Draven sees it, I will be there."

"You are obsessed with this." His voice had the tone of a man delivering a diagnosis, which told me he believed the diagnosis was useful information. "We are getting married. You will be a Luna too."

"A Luna too." I let the phrase sit and tasted the shape of it. "I was meant to be the only one." I turned back to the mirror. "I do not need your help, Kael. I took everything from Isla before. I will do it again."

He was quiet. The quality of the silence had changed — something had completed behind his eyes.

"So you used me." His voice had gone quiet. "The whole time. You used me to hurt her."

Not a question. An arrival. He had found it on his own timeline, which was slower than I would have preferred but confirmed the conclusion was correct.

People always arrive at the truth eventually. The smart ones learn to use the delay.

I met his eyes through the mirror. "What did you think I was doing, you fool?" I let the question sit, because it deserved to.

He stared at me for a long moment, and I watched him watch me, and I let him see exactly as much of the truth as I had always intended him to see: all of it, now that it no longer served me to conceal.

Then he turned and walked out, and the door closed behind him with the sound of a man who believes the decision he has just made is final and permanent and his.

I let him go without moving, without speaking, without the smallest gesture of pursuit. The door closed.

I adjusted my hair in the mirror. The smile that formed was not performed. It was the specific, quiet satisfaction of a woman who has been running a long game long enough to see where all the pieces land.

"Three moons," I said to my reflection. "By the end of it, I'll have her pack, her power... and her husband."

End *of*

POV: Isla

The lanterns flickered and the shadows they made against the stone walls did not hold still, which suited the room.

I sat on the edge of the bed, shoulder aching with the specific persistence of a wound that has not finished announcing itself, and I let the room be quiet around me.

The ache in my shoulder was manageable. The weight in my chest was a different calculation entirely.

'The pack is waiting to see your wolf.' Susan had said it three days ago and it had not moved since.

I had not shifted once. Not before the trial, not during it, not in the four days of unconsciousness that followed. Lira was present. I could feel her warmth.

But the shift had not come, and the pack knew it, and the council knew it, and now I was sitting in a room that was mine only conditionally, carrying a title that was mine only provisionally, and the fear had been making its case since I woke up.

'They will turn on me. Call me a fraud. Draven will cast me out. Just like my own blood did.'

Lira stirred. The warmth of her shifted and focused. 'Stop. You are stronger than this.'

"Am I?" The words left my mouth before I had decided to speak them. "If I were, I would not be afraid."

'Fear does not define you. What you do next does.' She said it with the

certainty of someone who has already run the calculation.

I sat with that. Outside, the evening pressed against the window and the lanterns moved in the draft and I pressed my palms flat to my thighs and made myself breathe through it.

The door creaked open and Susan entered with a tray, her sharp gaze moving to my face with the efficiency of someone conducting an assessment they have been running for a while.

"You look terrible." She set the tray down without ceremony and looked at me. "Thanks," I muttered.

She pulled the chair to the bedside and sat in it with the ease of someone who requires no invitation. "You are overthinking."

"They expect me to shift." I kept my voice level, which cost me more than I wanted to spend on it.

"And?" She said it without inflection, which was her version of forcing you to finish the thought.

"I can't." The words came out smaller than I intended and landed between us with the specific weight of an admission.

Susan studied me for a long moment and I held her gaze, because looking away would have cost me ground I was not prepared to yield.

She exhaled, slow and deliberate. Her expression did not change but the temperature of it shifted. "You survived the trials. You brought back the crest. That is what matters."

"It will not be enough." I could feel the truth of it in my chest, specific and settled. "Not for them. Not for Draven."

Susan shrugged — not dismissively, but with the economy of someone who does not waste motion. "Then figure it out. You have faced worse."

She left. The door closed and the room folded back into itself and I was alone again with the flickering lanterns and the weight in my chest that Susan's words had lightened by approximately nothing.

'Run. Before they see you for what you are. A fraud.' The voice was not Lira's. It was older than Lira, built from years of someone else's certainty about my limits.

I recognized it the way you recognize a scar, by touch, by the shape of the damage.

I did not run. I had run once, had crossed three territories in the dark and arrived here with nothing.

Running was the one option I had already used. It was not available again. Not here. Not when I had bled in their arena and earned the right to stand on this floor.

I pulled my knees to my chest and stared at the lanterns and I held the ground and I breathed through it until the breathing was steady.

The corridors were quiet when I finally left the room. Cold stone passages, dim lanterns, the packhouse settled into its nighttime register.

I needed air. My feet on dirt. Motion was the one reliable tool I had for keeping the voices at their correct volume.

I was crossing the east corridor and nearly at the stairs when his voice came through the stone wall and stopped me dead.

Kael. The name hit my chest before my mind had caught up to the sound

of it, and I pressed myself against the cold stone.

I stopped without deciding to, pressed against the wall by the particular reflex of someone who has learned that his voice means the situation has changed.

I remember, he was in the room at the end of the passage. I could not hear the words, only the cadence, the careful, reluctant tone of a man being summoned somewhere he does not want to go. A servant's murmur in response. Then silence.

I stood in the corridor with my back against the stone and I did not move and I did not breathe particularly well.

I had not thought about Kael in weeks — surviving had not left room — but standing in the cold stone passage with a title not yet entirely safe, I felt it settle back.

What he had done, landing in its old position. Not grief. Not anger. The clean knowledge of a door that had closed.

He had chosen. I had walked through what that choice made available, and I had not looked back, and I was not looking back now.

Draven. Not the name of the man who had put me in this position — the name of the man who had stood in front of his entire council and said mine.

The thought arrived without drama. Draven, who had come to my door the night before the trial. Draven, who had not flinched when every elder in that chamber pushed back against my name.

I straightened away from the wall and stood in the corridor under my own weight.

own weight.

I had no wolf to show them yet. That was a fact. It was also a fact that I had survived every other version of not enough this world had offered me, and I had done it by getting back up off floors that had no reason to release me.

The training yard was cold and empty and I walked into it and stood in the middle of it and breathed the night air in and let it clear the corridors from my lungs.

I was enough. I had always been enough, even when no one in the room agreed with me.

I just had to prove it one more time. That was all. One more time, and then the next one after that, until the proof was too heavy to contest.

End of *The* **Chapter**

Chapter 23