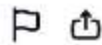




Chapter 27



POV: Seraphine

I walked the corridors fast, hands clenched, the prophecy still grinding through my head: 'Two wolves. One to bring salvation. One to bring ruin.'

For years the answer had been obvious. Isla was the ruin foretold. The weak one, the outcast, the mistake with the mark on her face. I had taken her place as the favored heir, the perfect daughter.

I had made myself indispensable and made her irrelevant. That was the correct reading.

And then she had shifted white under a full moon in front of two hundred witnesses, and the correct reading had been revised.

I reached my chambers and slammed the door. The lavender scent hit me immediately, thick and cloying. It pressed against my ribs. It used to calm me. It no longer did that.

I turned to the mirror. My reflection stared back at a woman who had done everything correctly and been handed the wrong result.

"Ruin?" My voice came out clean. "They think I'm the one to destroy this pack?"

The wolves in the corridors were still talking about her. They had not stopped, and they showed no sign of stopping.

Three days. Her name still occupied every mouth in this packhouse. The white wolf. The Moon Goddess. The miracle. Recited with the reverence they should have been saving for something earned through sustained effort rather than a single shaft of convenient moonlight.

Sorcha's words meant nothing. A dead woman's prophecy was not a verdict I was obligated to accept.

I had to act. I had to take back what was mine, and to do that, Isla had to go. That was the whole of it.

POV: Draven

I sat in the council chamber and let Morvin deliver his conversion. The man who had spent months building institutional resistance against Isla, who had sent Tyla into that arena, now standing at the head of the table.

His voice carried a quality I had not expected to hear from him, standing in that room with those specific people.

"She is descended from the Moon Goddess herself," he declared, and it was not performative. "There hasn't been a wolf like her in centuries. She is a blessing to this pack."

I sat in silence and read her. She was still uneasy. She hid it well, but the edges of rooms told on her.

"She will lead alongside you, stronger than any Luna before," another elder said.

My expression did not change. "Focus on preparing for the Luna Consummation Ball." My tone was firm, final. "The pack expects perfection."

The elders dispersed. As the meeting ended, Jamie fell into step beside me in the corridor.

"You're worried about her," Jamie murmured, falling into step without an invitation, which was a habit I had stopped trying to correct.

I did not answer right away. "She's been through too much. I need to make sure she knows she's not alone."

Jamie smirked. "You've got a soft spot, Alpha. Don't let the pack catch wind of it."

I shot him the look that closed conversations. He chuckled and walked away without adjusting his posture at all.

The ball was everything it was supposed to be. Gold light, roasted meat, spiced wine, crushed flowers. Music moving through the crowd in waves.

Isla had been bathed in milk, dressed in silk, her hair woven with silver threads. Her attendants had moved around her in careful, reverent silence.

Tonight, she was Luna. The word no longer needed the pack's permission. It had weight of its own, settled and absolute.

When it started. She danced with me when the music called for it. She let the pack celebrate her. She smiled at their acceptance with the warmth of a woman who understands exactly what it cost.

I watched her move through the hall and watched the discipline underneath the grace, the specific effort of a person performing ease rather than feeling it, and I did not look away.

And yet, she needed air. I could see it in the way she moved toward the

edges of the crowd after speaking with elders, the faint pull toward the door.

She slipped through the side door into the garden, and I let her go, because I understood.

This is her home now. She would be repeating it, reaching for it the way she always reached for ground: by insisting on it until it held. She will be safe here.

I gave her three minutes. Then the pull in the back of my chest tightened in a way that had nothing to do with thought.

I crossed the hall in six strides and went through the side door into the garden.

The garden was empty. The torches burned steady on a path that held no one. The gate to the rear property hung at its latch, which it should not have done.

I crouched beside the pathway. The soft earth had been compressed by a struggle — two sets of pressure, weight shifted backward, drag marks where heels had fought for purchase before going still.

The scent came up sharp: Isla, and beneath it the chemical sweet of cloth pressed against skin.

She had inhaled it. She had fought — the torn ground showed me every second of it, the resistance of a woman who did not go easily.

She had dug in and refused, and it had not been enough, and now the bond between us was pulling in the wrong direction. Still alive. But wrong. Moving away.

wrong. Moving away.

I straightened and turned toward the door. "Jamic." His name alone, with no elevation of voice, was enough.

He was already in the doorway, reading the shape of it without needing an explanation. "How long?"

"Minutes. Lock the hall. Every exit. Nobody leaves until I have a name and a direction." I was already through the gate.

Raven came up through me the moment my feet hit the dark beyond the wall, black and absolute, and I let him have the speed.

The bond pulled northwest. I had been cold for a long time, and she was the reason that had changed.

Whoever had walked into my garden on the night of her ceremony had made a decision they were going to regret with the full weight of everything I was capable of applying to a single target.

I ran. The trees closed around me. The bond pulled, and I followed it, and I did not slow down.

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

Chapter 27



Comments

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Gifts

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