

The Chosen Luna: Alpha's Unwanted Daughter

Chapter 3

POV: Isla

The moonlight came through the window in pale strips across the floor, and I sat on the edge of my bed and did not move.

The packhouse had gone quiet. The celebration had wound down an hour ago and the corridors had been still long enough that the silence had taken on weight.

I sat with my knees drawn to my chest and told myself that breathing was adequate. The floor said otherwise. The walls said otherwise. The silence accumulating since that courtyard announcement said it loudest of all.

"They have shown you exactly who they are." Lira's voice rose from somewhere deeper than thought, the voice of my wolf, the other half of me that shared my bones and had always held itself together when I could not. "We do not belong here. We never did."

I pressed my forehead against my knees. "Where would I go? They have made sure I have no one."

"Anywhere past these walls," Lira said. "They have chosen her. Let them keep her. You and I, we will find our own path."

"There is nothing else waiting for me. That is precisely the point." I turned onto my side and pulled the blanket up.

"Outside this packhouse is open territory and wolves who would register a rogue on sight. At least here I know what is coming."

Lira was quiet for a long moment. When she spoke again, her voice had less give in it. "You know what is coming. And still you stay."

I did not answer her, because she was not wrong, and I did not have the energy left to pretend otherwise.

I lay there in the dark until the packhouse sounds faded entirely, until the only movement was the slow drag of moonlight across the stone floor.

And then a thread of sound reached me. Voices, low and unhurried, filtering from my parents' study at the far end of the hall.

My father's voice, deliberate and low. My mother's, unhurried. And beneath both of them, Seraphine's, light and unbothered.

I had enough experience with this family to know I should have stayed where I was. I went anyway.

The hallway was dark except for the thin strip of amber light under the study door. I pressed my back to the wall outside it and I listened, my pulse steady and deliberate in my ears.

"This plan has worked perfectly." My mother's voice was clear, precise, unhurried.

Each word arrived at a volume that required no effort to reach through wood and stone. "Kael bonded to Seraphine exactly as we arranged. Isla is hanging by the thinnest thread."

My hand found the wall beside the door. I pressed it flat against the stone and held it there.

"I told you she would break." Seraphine's was light, almost bored. "She cannot handle being alone. She never could."

They had arranged it. Kael had not chosen. My parents had moved him, steered him away from me and toward her, built the entire structure of it before I had stepped into that hall.

Every moment I had stood in front of the pack fighting for my birthright, the outcome had already been decided. The humiliation had been a scheduled event.

"Before dawn," my father said, quiet and approving, "Isla will be out of our lives for good. Seraphine steps into her place. As it should be."

There was a pause. Then my mother's voice, unhurried and precise: "She will not go quietly if she has any sense left. We may need to make certain she understands there is no version of this where she stays."

The amber light under the door did not change. The voices continued, easy and untroubled, as though the decision had been made so long ago that discussing it now was merely a courtesy.

My mother knew I was in that hallway. I was certain of it. She had always moved through this packhouse with the awareness of a wolf who tracked every vibration in the stone floor.

She knew which rooms were occupied, which doors were cracked, which daughter crept the halls at this hour. She had spent years cataloguing that knowledge and placing each word where it would do the most damage.

This conversation was a performance, staged precisely for the ears pressed to the other side of that door. And I walked straight into it.

She wanted me to run. She wanted me terrified, alone, bolting before dawn without forcing them to do what they had left deliberately unspoken. Make certain she understands there is no version where she stays.

My father had not flinched at those words. His tone had not shifted. He had agreed without needing to say so.

My mind built the image without being asked. My father stepping into my room in the dead of night with the silence he carried when a decision had already been made.

My mother in the doorway with that cool, unbothered gaze. Seraphine behind her, watching the way she watched all transactions, already composing the version she would tell the pack come morning.

I had spent years staying. Staying had felt like endurance, like refusal to be driven from the place that was supposed to be mine.

Standing outside that door, I understood that staying was exactly what they had planned for me to do. Stay long enough to be dealt with. Wait until they made the decision, because I had not made it myself.

I moved back through the hall and into my room, and I closed the door without a sound.

My hands were steady. The fear was real and I acknowledged it and I set it aside, because it was not useful and there was work to do.

I had no pack. I had no mate. I had a wolf who had been telling me to leave since morning, and I had a door, and I had whatever time remained between now and dawn.

I reached under the mattress for the coin purse I had been building for two years, slow and patient, enough to last a week if I moved carefully.

I was done with the particular brand of restraint they had spent years training into me. Now I would be careful in the ways that served my survival.

I pulled my traveling boots from under the bed, laced them in the dark without lighting a candle, and I began to move with the quiet precision of someone who had been rehearsing this exit for a long time without knowing it.

