

# Let Them Kneel

## Chapter 6 Chapter Six

Kaelani woke slowly, her body sore, every inch of her aching with bruises and bites that marked where he had claimed her again and again. For one fragile heartbeat, she thought it was a dream. That maybe she would turn and find herself alone.

But he was there.

Julian stood at the window, tall and untouchable, the early light sharpening the angles of his face. Jace hovered near him, wordless, handing over folded clothes like a dutiful shadow.

Her throat tightened. Kaelani yanked the sheet higher, covering herself to the chin, her eyes peeking over the edge. She prayed they wouldn't notice her, though the air was heavy with the scent of what had happened.

Julian's voice broke the silence, flat and venom-laced.

"Three days... three fucking days trapped in rut intoxication." He shoved his arm through a sleeve, every movement clipped, furious. His eyes never touched her. "How does this happen, Jace?"

Jace hesitated. Just a flicker. His gaze shifted toward her, meeting her eyes for the briefest second. There was something there—a glimmer of sympathy, shame maybe—but it vanished as quickly as it came. He looked away, jaw tightening.

Julian didn't notice. Or didn't care. He fastened his cuff with ruthless precision. "Clean it up, Jace. Nobody learns of this."

Her stomach dropped. *Clean it up.* Like she was a mess on the floor, not a woman whose body still ached from him.

He kept going, relentless, merciless. "I want her tested. Properly. Goddess knows how many fucking times I knotted her." He adjusted his collar, his tone almost mocking. "Push back the mating ceremony. Make sure my future Luna stays put, since now I'll be carrying *that* woman's scent for days."

Julian reached for his jacket, slipping it on like armor. His eyes flicked over the room once, deliberately skimming past the bed, past her. “Take care of it, Jace. I want no ties with this woman whatsoever.”

Then he was gone, the front door slamming shut behind him like a verdict.

Silence filled the room once Julian was gone, thick and suffocating. Kaelani didn’t move. She lay rigid beneath the sheets, her eyes burning, her chest tight. The scent of him still clung to her skin, raw and humiliating, a brand she couldn’t wash away.

Jace cleared his throat quietly, the sound careful, cautious. When she looked at him, he wasn’t staring—he had turned slightly, giving her his profile, gaze fixed on the far wall as though the floorboards were infinitely more intriguing than the sight of her.

“I’m going to leave the room and give you your privacy,” he said, his voice even but softer than she expected. “You can shower. Dress. Whatever you need.”

Her grip tightened on the sheet, knuckles white.

Jace nodded once, still not looking at her. “Take as long as you like. When you’re ready, meet me in your living area. You and I will... discuss what happens from here.”

With that, he moved to the door, pausing just long enough that she almost thought he might say more. But then he left, the click of the latch far gentler than Julian’s brutal slam.

Kaelani exhaled shakily into the silence. Her throat ached, her body ached, but worse was the hollow ache in her chest. The bed smelled of him, the room filled with his absence. For the first time in days, she was alone—and it felt like the cruelest blow of all.

Kaelani forced herself out of bed, her legs trembling as she stood. The sheet slipped from her shoulders, pooling at her feet, but she barely noticed. The mirror above her dresser caught her eye.

She froze.

The mark burned vivid against her neck, stark against her honey-beige complexion—his claim, etched in teeth and fire. Her fingers lifted before she

could stop them, grazing the swollen punctures. Heat prickled behind her eyes, a thousand emotions clawing up her throat. Hurt. Rage. Shame. Something else she refused to name.

She swallowed hard. No. She wouldn't break. Not here. Not over him.

Kaelani tore her gaze away, crossing into the bathroom. She turned the shower on as hot as it would go, then changed her mind and twisted the dial to cold. The spray bit into her skin, but nothing could wash away the phantom heat of his hands, his body. She scrubbed quickly, methodically, until her skin was raw and clean. When she stepped out, she wrapped herself in a towel and dressed with mechanical precision.

By the time she stepped into the living room, her face was calm, composed – though her heart thudded like a drum in her chest.

Jace stood in the center of the room, hands on his hips, surveying the wreckage. Broken glass glittered near the window. A table lay overturned. One of her lamps was shattered. The chaos of three days' frenzy.

He glanced at her once, then back to the mess. "I'll make arrangements. Everything will be replaced, every cost covered." His voice was brisk, business-like, as though running down figures on a ledger.

"Don't bother," Kaelani said quickly, her tone sharper than intended. She folded her arms tight across her chest. "Just leave it."

Jace exhaled, lowering his hands from his hips. His gaze softened, just a fraction, as he gestured toward the sitting area.

"Can we sit?"

Kaelani hesitated, then gave a small nod. She perched on the armchair nearest the window, tucking her legs beneath her, while Jace settled onto the couch opposite, his posture still sharp but less imposing.

He leaned forward slightly, forearms resting on his knees. "Let's start properly." His voice was low, measured. "I'm Beta Jace..." He paused, as though weighing how much to reveal. "...of Blackthorn Pack. And, well—you've already met Alpha Julian Hale."

Her stomach clenched at the name. She kept her face carefully blank.

“And you are?” Jace asked gently.

Her fingers tightened against the armrest. “Kaelani.” She left it at that. No last name—because there wasn’t one, aside from the one she created to blend into the human world.

Jace studied her for a long moment, his eyes narrowing slightly. “Forgive me if this sounds blunt, but... why is a Lycan like you living among humans?”

The question cut sharp, though his tone carried no malice—only genuine confusion.

Kaelani’s mouth went dry. She wanted to look away, but his gaze held hers, steady and searching. Slowly, she drew a breath.

“Because I don’t belong to a pack,” she said at last, the words tasting bitter on her tongue.

Jace’s brow furrowed. “Impossible. Every wolf has a pack.”

“Not me.” Her laugh was hallow. “My wolf never awakened. When I turned eighteen, my Alpha ordered a DNA analysis—just to be certain. It confirmed what he’d always suspected: I was human.” She exhaled sharply. “So they exiled me. Said I was a mistake—just an orphan girl abandoned on their land. Gave me money and sent me on my way.”

She lifted her chin, forcing herself to meet his gaze. “That’s why I live among humans. Because to *your* kind, I was never one of you.”

Jace leaned back slowly, the weight of her confession settling heavy between them. His expression was unreadable, but his eyes—those betrayed something like pity.

“And yet,” he said quietly, “your heat was strong enough to trigger an Alpha’s rut.” His gaze sharpened, no longer just sympathetic but probing, calculating. “That doesn’t happen to humans.”

Kaelani stiffened. The words pierced straight through her chest, because he was right. No matter how many times she’d told herself she was human, deep down she had always known something was—different.

Her throat bobbed as she tried to swallow. “I didn’t ask for this,” she whispered. “I don’t understand it myself.”

Jace's expression softened, just slightly. "I know." His voice was quiet, almost careful. "But the truth is, Kaelani... whether you asked for it or not, it happened. And in our world, what happened between you and my Alpha is a very big deal for someone like him... it can't get out. Not to the council. Not to anyone. Do you understand?"

"I don't want it getting out either," Kaelani said quickly. Her voice was steady, but her fingers twisted against her knee. "I'm not ignorant to the ways of wolves. I know his mark will fade—because I couldn't mark him back. And I'm on birth control... so the chance of pregnancy is low."

She exhaled through her nose, steady but quiet.

Thank the Goddess Tessa had talked her into going on the pill a few months ago—"just in case," she'd said, nudging with a wink.

Kaelani had rolled her eyes at the time.

She was twenty-three. A virgin.

Careful with her time. Cautious with her body. Practically allergic to attachment.

She let people close the way others approached fireflies—briefly, at arm's length, never quite touching the glow.

Still, something in her had known it was only a matter of time.

Jace's brows lifted slightly. "Human contraception or Lycan?"

"Human, of course," she said, a little too fast.

He exhaled. "Ninety-one percent effective in humans, give or take with perfect use. For Lycans?" He paused, eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Drop that by about twenty percent."

Her stomach fluttered—but she held his gaze, forcing a calm she didn't feel.

"Still low," she murmured. "I'll get the morning-after pill too."

Still, his Beta instincts pressed. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, gaze steady. "And how do I know I can trust you? How do I know you won't blackmail him later? Do you want money?"

Kaelani's head snapped up, eyes flashing. "No." The word was sharp, almost cutting. "I don't want his money. I only want secrecy." Her throat worked as she swallowed. "If the Lycan Council learns that a wolf-less omega triggered an Alpha's rut, they'll force me back to my pack. And I will *never* go back there."

Her voice cracked on the last word, but her eyes blazed with conviction.

Jace sat back slowly, studying her. And for the first time since he walked into her home, something like respect glimmered in his expression.

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