

## To ruin an Omega

Chapter 286: Men and their complex 1

### VALENTINE

***This Chapter contains graphic depictions of violence against women, medical experimentation, pregnancy-related harm, non-consensual medical procedures, and emotional distress involving a parent and child. Reader discretion is advised.***

The heat slammed into my face before I could think.

I threw up a barrier on pure instinct. The spell formed faster than conscious thought. A shield of crackling energy that wrapped around me and Wilhelm just as the vial exploded.

White flames erupted outward like something alive. They hit my barrier and the impact drove me backward. My shoes scraped against stone. The shield held for maybe two seconds before it shattered like glass.

The force threw me off my feet.

I hit the floor hard. My shoulder took the worst of it. Pain shot down my arm and up into my neck. The air left my lungs in a rush that left me gasping.

White fire spread across the table. It dripped onto the floor and burned without fuel or reason. The flames didn't flicker or dance. They just existed. Pure as they terrible and wrong.

I heard Wilhelm scream.

The sound cut through the ringing in my ears. I turned my head and saw my son on his knees. His hands were pressed to his face. Between his fingers I could see blistered skin that was raw and weeping. The white liquid had caught him across the left side of his face and neck.

"Will!"

My voice came out hoarse. I tried to push myself up but my hand wouldn't support my weight. I looked down and saw third degree burns running from my wrist to my fingertips. The skin had turned black in places. In others it had simply melted away to expose muscle and tendon.

I should have felt more pain but the shock must have been dampening it.

Wilhelm's screaming turned to ragged sobbing. His whole body shook. He couldn't seem to catch his breath.

I dragged myself toward him. Every movement sent fresh agony through my ruined hand. I ignored it. My son was hurt. Nothing else mattered.

"You're alright." The words came automatically. "You're going to be alright."

I reached him and put my good hand on his shoulder. He flinched away from the touch but I held on and kept my grip gentle but firm.

I started muttering the healing spell. The words tumbled out in a rush. The words came out too fast and I failed. That was how terrified I was. My mind was a mangled mess. I had to slow down and start over. I had to focus despite the pain and the fear and Wilhelm's sobbing.

The magic gathered slowly. Too slowly. Madeline could have healed this in seconds. I was going to take minutes of not hours and the result would only be half as good.

The spell built and built until I could feel it humming in my chest. I directed it toward Wilhelm. Toward the burned flesh and blistered skin and the damage that would scar if I didn't work fast enough.

My magic poured out of me and into him in droves.

And then something else came with it.

A rush of power that wasn't mine. It slammed into me like a freight train. Foreign energy that tasted old and twisted and familiar in a way that made my stomach turn.

The healing was taking a toll on me. I could feel my eyes getting heavy.

The lab disappeared.

I was somewhere else. Sometime else. The stone walls looked almost the same but cleaner. Newer. The equipment was different. Older models that I'd replaced years ago.

And there was a woman on the table.

Athena, also known as number one.

She was strapped down with iron cuffs around her wrists and ankles. Her belly was swollen with pregnancy now. Seven months along at least. Maybe eight.

I stood over her with a syringe in my hand. The liquid inside glowed faintly blue.

This wasn't a vision. It was a memory. My memory playing out in perfect detail like I was living it again.

"Please." Athena's voice shook. "Please don't hurt my baby."

I didn't answer her. I was too focused on the injection site. The needle had to go in at exactly the right angle. Too shallow and the serum wouldn't reach the fetus. Too deep and I might puncture something vital.

The needle was massive. Longer than my hand. Thick enough that I could see Athena's eyes go wide with terror when I brought it toward her stomach.

"No. No, no, no. Please." She pulled at the restraints. The cuffs bit into her wrists. Blood ran down her arms. "Take me instead. Hurt me. Just please don't touch my baby."

I pressed the needle against her skin.

"This won't kill it." My voice sounded distant. Clinical. "Trust me. The child is more valuable alive than dead to me."

"Please."

I pushed the needle in.

Athena screamed. The sound tore out of her throat raw and animal. Her whole body convulsed against the restraints. The table shook. The chains rattled.

I kept pushing. The needle slid through skin and muscle and into the amniotic sac. I could feel the resistance change when it broke through. I felt the give as it entered the fluid.

The baby moved inside her. I could see it writhing beneath her skin. Trying to get away from the intrusion.

I depressed the plunger slowly. Carefully. The serum flowed into the womb in a steady stream. Blue mixing with clear.

Athena's screaming turned to sobbing. Ragged gasps for air between cries that sounded like they were being ripped from somewhere deep inside her.

"Why are you doing this?" Her words came out broken. Stuttered. "What did I do to deserve this?"

I pulled the needle out and set it aside before reaching for a cloth to clean the injection site.

"You got pregnant with Alpha blood in your veins." I pressed the cloth against her stomach and applied pressure to stop the bleeding. "Do you know how rare that is? An Omega carrying an Alpha's child. The genetic potential is remarkable."

"I just want my baby to live." Tears ran down her temples and into her hair. "That's all. I didn't ask for this."

"Nobody asks for this. People are just unlucky. But trust me, there is nothing unlucky about you right now."

I turned away from her and made notes in my journal. The time of injection. The dosage. Her physical response. All of it needed to be documented.

Behind me, Athena kept crying and she kept begging too. The sound faded into background noise while I worked.

The memory shifted.

*Chapter 287: Men and their complex 2*

## **VALENTINE**

Two years later, after the child had been born, a girl. Small and almost sickly, but alive.

I held her in my hands and examined her. I checked her eyes and ears and the formation of her bones. I looked for any sign that the experiments had taken root.

But there was nothing. She was just a normal Omega werewolf pup. Weak like her mother. The potential I'd been so sure was there had failed to manifest.

My disappointment tasted bitter.

I'd wasted two years. Two years of careful monitoring and controlled conditions. Two years of keeping Athena healthy and well-fed so the child would develop properly.

All for nothing.

I looked at Athena. She was watching me with desperate hope in her eyes. Like she thought this might mean I'd let them go.

"She's useless."

The hope died. Athena's face crumpled.

"No. Please. She's is still just a child. Give her time. Maybe when she's older—"

"I've given enough time." I handed the child back to her. "But you're still viable. We'll make up for lost time."

I increased the frequency of Athena's treatments after that. No more waiting. No more careful spacing to let her body recover. I pushed her harder and faster as I tested the limits of what a werewolf body could endure and survive.

And she started to bear fruit.

The first manifestation came three months later when she tried to escape. Athena had grabbed the bars of her cage and they'd started to corrode. Not with rust. This was actual decay spreading outward from her touch like rot in wood.

I'd watched through the observation window and taken notes. My heart had raced with the thrill of success.

She was creating death where there should have been permanence. Accelerating entropy on a cellular level. It was exactly what I had been trying to achieve. The kind of miracle only gods were supposed to perform.

But there was a cost.

Something I eventually deemed was the rot started to spread through Athena's body. Black veins and bark like lesions crawled up her arms from where she'd touched the bars. Her skin started to slough off. The flesh beneath turned almost gray and necrotic.

She'd screamed and let go, falling to the floor convulsing while her body tried to fight off its own power.

I'd documented everything. The progression of the rot. The way it ate through healthy tissue. The time it took for her healing factor to kick in and start repairing the damage.

Forty-seven minutes. That was how long she'd suffered before her body stabilized.

I noted that she could use her ability for approximately thirty seconds before the rot became life-threatening. Anything longer and she risked permanent damage or death.

Useful information. I could work with these limitations.

The memory jumped forward again.

Athena was trying to escape yet again. She'd been in captivity for almost four years at this point. Four years of experiments and pain and watching her daughter grow up in a cage.

She grabbed the bars again and poured everything she had into that touch. The metal groaned and warped. The decay spread faster this time. She'd gotten stronger with practice.

But the cage was reinforced. Triple-layered steel with spells woven into the structure. It would take more power than she had to break through.

The rot started before she could finish. Black veins crawled up her arms. She kept pushing anyway. She kept trying even as her skin started to peel away.

I watched through the camera feed and leaned forward in my chair. This was the moment. The push beyond normal limits. People always surprised you when they had no other choice.

I expected a miracle. But Athena fell.

Her body hit the floor and she started convulsing. The rot spread faster than I'd ever seen it. Up her arms and across her chest. Toward her heart and brain. Places it couldn't reach without harming her badly.

I reached for the intercom to call my assistant. We'd need to intervene or lose the subject.

Then the child moved.

Number Two had been huddled in the corner of the cage. Small and quiet like always. She'd learned early that drawing attention was dangerous.

But she crawled to her mother and put her tiny hands on Athena's chest.

Light bloomed beneath her palms.

I remembered standing up then and pressing closer to the monitor. What the hell was this?

The black veins in Athena's skin started to recede. The necrotic tissue turned pink again and healthy. The convulsions slowed and then stopped.

The child was healing her.

Number Two was a late bloomer. The abilities I'd tried to force into her as a fetus had finally manifested. Just years later than expected.

I smiled, picking up my journal as I started writing. This changed everything.

I collected Number Two the next day. Put her in her own cage for observation and testing.

She wasn't as strong as her mother. The healing took effort. More than that. It drained her. But she could bring someone back from the edge of death if they were close enough.

And the rot affected her too. Every time she used her power, black veins crawled up her arms. Every time she pushed too hard, her body started to decay.

But she could heal others. That was worth the cost.

I tested her limits. Brought in subjects with various injuries and had her fix them. Documented how much she could do before the rot took over.

She never complained. She never begged like her mother. She just did what I told her with this empty look in her eyes that reminded me of a doll.

The memory shifted one final time.

Number Two was older now. Maybe eighteen. I couldn't even remember nor did I care much. I did know she was old enough that she'd stopped growing. Old enough that her secondary abilities had started to show.

"I can see the future."

She said it during a routine examination. Casual. Like she was commenting on the weather.

I'd stopped what I was doing and looked at her.

"What?"

"The future." She met my eyes. "I've been able to see it for a while now. I just didn't tell you."

My pulse quickened. "Show me."

She'd smiled. The expression looked wrong on her face. Too knowing.

"It plays out exactly like I saw it. Today. Now."

"What did you see?" I had asked.

"I saw you letting me go."

And then like a fucking trick of light, she walked out of the room.

I tried to stop her. I remember using my magic, shouting for my assistants. The alarms. The wards flaring to life one after the other. Every protocol we had ever written triggered at once.

It did not matter.

Every step I took felt late. Every command already outdated before I spoke it. Doors that should never open stood waiting. Traps that had never failed misfired or simply did nothing at all.

It was like chasing a memory instead of a person.

By the time the silence returned, she was gone.

She'd escaped. Without taking her mother with her. But I would come to learn that Athena had known about it all along and I was played like a fool.

The memories released me then.

I was back in my lab. On my knees next to Wilhelm. My hand had started to heal while I was lost in the vision. The flesh was knitting back together slowly. The burns fading from black to red to pink.

Wilhelm looked better too. The blisters on his face had flattened. The raw skin had started to close. He'd stopped crying. His breathing had evened out.

"You're alright." I said it again. I meant it this time.

I looked at the exploded vial. At the white flames still burning on the table. At the blood splattered across my equipment.

That was Athena child...

I didn't know how. I didn't care to know how. But I knew with absolute certainty that this was a creation of mine. A created child of a created child.

The bloodline had continued. Number Two had survived. She'd grown up and had a child of her own.

And that child... That child was this Fia.

I turned back to Wilhelm. He looked at me with eyes that were clearing. The pain medication in the healing spell was taking effect.

"I have to speak to your sister." My voice came out steady despite the tremor in my hands. "I have to know more about this girl. A girl who could only be connected to her."

"Her?" Wilhelm managed.

I nodded. "My Athena."

Because if Fia had inherited even a fraction of her grandmother's power, even a shadow of her mother's gifts, then she wasn't just some Omega caught up in Aldric's games.

She was a weapon.

And Aldric couldn't know it. He could never know it.

*Chapter 288: Crown and Collar*

## **HAZEL**

The other Omegas kept their heads down, focused on folding my dresses with precision I didn't know they possessed. They moved like clockwork. Efficient and as quiet as they could manage. Nobody met my eyes anymore.

Delta stood frozen by the door. Her fingers twisted together. I watched the way her chest as it rose and fell too quickly.

Then she moved. Small steps at first. Hesitant. She crossed the room and stopped a few feet from my bed.

"Luna Hazel." Her voice came out barely above a whisper. "Can we talk?"

The title made something warm bloom in my chest. I let myself smile. Really smile. Not the polite curve of lips I'd perfected over the years but this was something genuine and sharp.

I couldn't help myself. The jokes just fucking wrote themselves.

"It is Luna Hazel now, is it?" I tilted my head, studying her pale face. "Is it because you realize now that you are trapped too? Is it sinking in now like teeth that you are not safe."

She flinched.

I leaned forward slightly. I made sure my voice stayed light, conversational though. "You know you will have no allies in Lily of the Valley. Just as I will not. But your case is going

to be so much worse because you know I can make your life hell." I paused, letting the words sink in. "Are you afraid because you know what I could do to you there?"

Delta's breath hitched. Her eyes were wide, glossy with unshed tears.

I leaned closer until my mouth was near her ear. My voice dropped to a whisper. "Because you are not wrong. It will happen. I will ensure you don't survive Lily of the Valley. You will not last a fucking week."

Her knees buckled. She dropped to the floor so fast I heard the thud of bone against the hard floor.

"I'm sorry." The words tumbled out of her mouth in a rush. "I'm so sorry, Luna Hazel. I didn't know what really happened and it all just got in my head." She looked up at me, tears streaming down her face now. "Perhaps this is why Omegas are meant to be runts of the pack. We have no idea what to do with power. Especially the kind of power your kind holds."

I sat back and let my gaze drift to the other Omegas. They'd stopped packing. Their hands stilled over my clothes. Nobody made a sound but I could feel their attention, heavy and thick in the air.

"Look at them." I gestured lazily toward the others. "No one seems to have the same vitriol they seemed to have before. No one is eager to be your dog to attack me anymore." I turned back to Delta, watching her shoulders shake. "They have realized not all Omegas are cut from the same coat and at the end of the day, I wasn't born an Omega and neither will I die one."

Delta's hands clutched at the fabric of her plain dress. Her knuckles went white.

"If you want my mercy—" I stretched out my leg slowly, deliberately, until my foot hovered inches from her face. "I want you to lick it. Then I'll consider forgiveness."

The room went dead silent. Even the rustle of fabric stopped.

Delta stared at my foot. Her whole body trembled. "Consider?"

I shrugged, casual as anything. "It is not like I owe you anything. This is just me being merciful." I paused, letting the silence stretch. "But I can change my mind real soon and real quick. Do not make me."

Her hands shot out. They wrapped around my ankle, shaking so badly I felt the tremors through my skin. She glanced to the side, toward the other Omegas. A few of them spared quick looks before returning to their packing.

I watched Delta's face. The humiliation written across every feature. The shame burning red in her cheeks. The way her lips pressed together in a thin line.

"Is there still pride in you, my dear Delta?"

She shook harder. Her mouth opened. Then it closed. But she forced it back open in quick succession. Then her tongue came out. Pink and wet. It hovered over the sole of my foot, so close I could feel the warmth of her breath.

I yanked my foot back.

"Ew." The word came out sharp and disgusted. "Were you really going to do it?"

Delta's eyes went huge. Like she realized she just lost something.

"I will. I can." She reached for my foot, fingers grasping at air. "Please, Luna Hazel, I will—"

I shoved her with my foot. Not hard to hurt her but with just enough force to push her back. "Forget it. I'm over it."

"No." She scrambled forward on her knees. Her hands clawed at the sheets, trying to reach me. "I want to live. Please." Her voice cracked. "I want to live. I'll be your slave. I am your slave. I will never act above my station again. I am nothing. I will never amount to anything. I am a nobody—"

The laugh burst out of me before I could stop it. It started as a chuckle but grew into something bigger. My shoulders shook with it. I couldn't remember the last time something had been this funny. It almost made me forget the heartache and the rage that currently consumed me.

Delta's face crumpled. Fresh tears poured down her cheeks.

I kept laughing. The sound filled the room. When I finally caught my breath, I wiped at my eyes. "Delta, it's fine. I forgive you. Really."

She froze. Her hands stilled mid-reach.

"We go way back and I know you may have had past grievances." I kept my voice light. Friendly even. "But since you are going to be the only familiar thing I'll have at Lily of the Valley, I'll extend an olive branch just this once." I let the smile spread across my face again. "I forgive you."

Delta stared at me. Her mouth opened but no sound came out. She slowly pulled her hands back. "You do not..."

My smile vanished and the temperature in the room dropped. "I do not what?"

Her face went chalk white. "I am sorry. Forgive me." The words tumbled out fast. "I meant to say thank you. I appreciate your forgiveness."

The smile returned. I reached down and patted her head like she was a good dog. It was exactly what she was. "Good."

One of the Omegas cleared her throat softly. "We've finished packing, Lluuunaa Hazel."

I looked at the bags lined up by the door. My entire wardrobe compressed into luggage. My life reduced to things that could be carried.

I stood and walked to my closet. The shoes that had already been picked out sat on the bottom shelf. Simple black heels. Nothing fancy. I slipped them on and walked back to the bed.

"Well." I sat down and crossed my legs. "We are ready." I turned to Delta, who still knelt on the floor. "Go tell my mother and grandmother that we are ready to go now."

She nodded quickly and scrambled to her feet. Her legs shook as she crossed to the door. She fumbled with the lock again before getting it open. The door clicked shut behind her.

I let out a long breath. The other Omegas hovered by the luggage, uncertain.

My phone buzzed on the nightstand.

I picked it up and saw the name. Gabriel.

My stomach twisted. I opened the message.

*- I saved your life and now you owe me. Bagging the Lily of the Valley Alpha is no small feat. Since you know nothing about your half sister Fia, a nice alternative would be spying on your grandmother for me. I want two things. How did she bend Lily of the Valley to her advantage and what exactly did she use to try to kill Fia?*

Another message came through immediately.

*- If you do disappoint me or prove to not be worth your keep, you find out quite quickly how your new fairytale life can go poof in your face. I would ask you to be selfish like your grandmother and pick yourself in everything you do. It's good policy.*

Then a smiling emoji appeared.

My heart started pounding. The sound filled my ears, loud and insistent. My fingers tightened around the phone until my knuckles went white.

I still didn't know this man's deal but I had been warned to be wary of him even if he was the reason I still had my head on my neck.

But he wanting me to spy on Grandmother Pauline did not sit right with me. If I had nothing on Fia, which let us face it, I did not have, I would have to get him something in grandmother. Two things actually.

I read the messages again. Each word felt like a threat wrapped in politeness. The kind of thing that sounded reasonable until you really thought about what he was asking.

Spying on Grandmother Pauline. Finding out her secrets. Discovering how she'd nearly killed Fia? Nearly... So it was a failure then.

My thumb hovered over the keyboard. I could refuse. Tell him to go to hell. But then what? He'd already proven he could remould someone's life with a few words to the right person.

And he was right about one thing. I did owe him. In a twisted, horrible way, he'd gotten me out of hell when my parents couldn't do it.

Lily of the Valley might be a prison but at least it was most likely a safer cage.

I looked up at the Omegas. They still stood there, waiting for dismissal or orders or something.

"You can go." My voice came out flat.

They left quickly, practically tripping over each other to get out the door.

I looked back at the phone. At Gabriel's—or would it be Aldric's—messages staring up at me from the screen.

The smiling emoji seemed to mock me. Like he knew exactly how trapped I was. Like he'd planned this from the beginning.

My heart kept its rapid pace. Each beat felt too loud, too hard. I could feel my pulse in my throat.

I knew what was promised to Lily of the Valley.

But... What did Grandmother Pauline use to try to kill Fia? The question repeated in my head. Why did he want to know that? What would he do with that information?

And more importantly, what would happen to me if I didn't find out?

I typed out a response and then deleted it. I typed another and deleted that too.

That was also when the door opened. Delta stepped back in, her face still blotchy from her crying. "They're ready for you, Luna Hazel. The car is waiting."

I stood and smoothed down my plain dress. The phone stayed clutched in my hand.

"Lead the way then."

She nodded and held the door open.

I walked past her into the hallway. My heels clicked against the floor with each step. The sound echoed off the walls.

Behind me, I heard the Omegas gathering my luggage. The soft shuffle of bags being lifted. The quiet murmur of instructions.

My phone stayed in my hand. Aldric's messages burned in my mind.

A day ago, I'd been a Luna. Now I was an Omega being shipped off to marry a man who wanted my half sister instead.

And somewhere in the middle of it all, I was now a spy.

Or I would be.

If I wanted to survive.

*Chapter 289: New Battlefields*

## **HAZEL**

I walked down the hallway with Delta trailing behind me. The sound of my heels hitting the floor felt too loud, too final. Each step took me closer to the car. Closer to leaving.

The front door stood open when we reached it. Sunlight streamed through, bright and mocking. I could see the car waiting in the circular driveway. Black. It was sleek too. The kind of vehicle that screamed money and power.

My luggage was already being loaded into the boot by two sentinels. They moved quickly and efficiently. Nobody spoke.

I stepped outside. The air hit my face, cool and crisp. It smelled like pine and earth. I didn't even realize my home had a familiar smell. This was the place I had always wanted to leave behind now something sentimental tugged at my heartstrings.

The car door opened and I saw them inside. Grandmother Pauline sat in the back row, her posture perfect. Next to her was Grandfather. He hadn't paid me any attention since he'd arrived yesterday. He hadn't asked how I was doing. He hadn't offered comfort or advice or anything that resembled grandfatherly concern.

I knew we barely knew each other but still. The man was like a ghost.

I wondered if he even cared that I was being shipped off.

Mother stood by the car. Her face was composed as it was calm. She looked every inch the stone-hearted Luna who had orchestrated all of this. Who had decided my fate over breakfast like she was choosing what dress to wear.

But when I got close, something in her expression shifted. Damn. She was trying to hard to be stone hearted.

She reached for me. Her arms wrapped around my shoulders and pulled me in. The hug surprised me so much I almost stumbled.

"I know it is hard." Her voice was soft against my ear. Nothing like the cold tone she'd used earlier. "But you will thank me."

I stood there for a moment, frozen. Then I nodded against her shoulder. "I will understand with time."

"You will." She pulled back and hugged me again. Tighter this time.

I looked over her shoulder at the SilverCreek estate. The place that has been gone for the longest time. This massive building that loomed behind us and was all stone and pathetic glass.

Movement caught my eye on one of the upper floors.

Father stood at a window. His figure was unmistakable even from this distance. He was looking down at us. At me especially.

Our eyes met.

Then he turned and walked away. Just like that. He didn't even wave nor did he acknowledge me. He simply disappeared from view.

Something twisted in my chest. I was always a daddy's girl. I had moulded that image so him not giving me the time of day hurt. It was sharp and painful.

I pulled away from Mother and kept my voice steady. "So Father will not come and say goodbye?"

Her lips pressed together in a thin line. "The incident is still fresh in his mind. But he will forgive you and he will forget. I will make sure of it." She smoothed down my hair with one hand. "He will even be at the wedding."

"I will take your word for it."

She nodded and stepped back. Her mask slipped back into place. The stone cold Luna returned. She had to or I might not leave this place.

I turned to the car and climbed inside. Delta followed behind me.

The interior smelled like expensive perfume. Grandmother Pauline's scent. I settled into my seat and Delta moved to sit beside me.

"Go sit in the front seat with the sentinel driver." Grandmother's voice cut through the space in a sharp and disgusted manner.

Delta's face went red. She mumbled an apology and scrambled out, making her way to the front passenger seat. The door slammed shut.

I turned to Grandfather. "Good morning, Grandfather."

He glanced at me. The smile he gave was polite but also empty. Then he looked away, out the window.

That was it. That was all I got.

I settled back in my seat and tried not to let it bother me. I tried not to wonder what his deal was or why he couldn't be bothered to pretend he cared.

The car started moving.

The estate got smaller behind us. I watched it through the rear window until we turned a corner and it disappeared from view.

Everything I'd known. Everything I'd been. Gone.

My chest felt tight. Too tight. Like something was squeezing my ribs from the inside.

I was leaving SilverCreek territory. Actually leaving. This wasn't just talk anymore or threats or plans. This was real. The car under me, the road ahead, the destination getting closer with every second.

Fear crept up my throat. Cold and slithering.

No. I pushed it down and refused to let it show on my face.

I was Luna Hazel. Or I had been. Or I would be again. I refused to be scared. Refused to be weak.

But my hands were shaking in my lap.

I curled them into fists.

Aldric's messages replayed in my mind. His demands. His threats wrapped up in polite words and smiling emojis.

Spy on your grandmother. Find out her secrets. Or else.

I looked at Grandmother Pauline. She sat straight, her gaze fixed ahead. Regal and untouchable.

How was I supposed to spy on her? How was I supposed to find out anything when she looked like the kind of person that rarely told people what she had for breakfast?

But I needed to try. Aldric had made that clear. And if I wanted to survive, if I wanted to keep whatever scraps of power I had left, I needed to play his game.

I cleared my throat. "A little birdie tells me that Fia is doing well today."

Grandmother Pauline turned to look at me. A small smile curved her lips. "Some people just do well in life." Her tone was light and conversational. "Did you curse her and expect that she break out in hives and die or something?"

The way she spoke made it obvious. She was uncomfortable. She didn't want to talk about this. Not with Grandfather sitting right there.

I forced a laugh. "You will be shocked what the power of manifesting can do."

She gave me a curt smile and turned back to face the road.

That told me that was a dead end.

I bit the inside of my cheek and looked out the window. Trees rushed past. The landscape changed from familiar to foreign.

My mind raced.

How would I survive Lily of the Valley? What strategy would work? What mask should I wear?

Should I play the meek lamb? Keep my head down, scope out the territory, make allies with the Omegas and Sentinels? Would that keep me safe?

Or should I come in like a ravaging beast? Assert dominance from day one, make sure everyone knew I wasn't someone to mess with regardless of what they knew or heard?

I didn't know. I hated not knowing. I hated not having a clear advantage.

The best advantage would have been Lysander. If he'd been sexually attracted to me. If he'd wanted me the way he apparently wanted Fia.

Thinking about Lysander made my jaw clench. His obsession with my sister. The way he spoke about her like she was some prize to be won.

Fia. Fia. Fia.

Always Fia.

But I could work with this. I could always make anything work.

Heat season was coming. Babies were made during that time. Wanted or unwanted. If I got pregnant, that would secure my position. Give me leverage.

And if Lysander remained obsessed with my sister, well. I'd heard the current ruling Alpha of Lily of the Valley had plenty of sons. One of them could be bewitched, manipulated or used.

Anything to secure myself.

"What is on your mind, child?"

I blinked and turned to Grandmother Pauline. "Jitters."

She studied me. Her eyes were sharp, calculating. "The look in your eyes did not look like jitters. You looked like someone plotting."

My stomach dropped but I kept my face neutral.

"Your recent lot should have made one thing damn clear." Her voice was cool. Matter-of-fact. "You are not a great plotter. You do not have a beautiful or sinister mind." She leaned back in her seat. "If you will be favored in this pack you are going to, be the

doormat and make sure you are loved by all. That is the smartest advice I would give you."

"Thank you." The words came out automatic.

But my mind screamed something different. That was a fucking useless advice. I will not grovel for those beneath me.

I turned to look out the window again. Anything to avoid her gaze.

The trees thinned out. Buildings started appearing. Small houses at first, then larger structures. We were entering a town.

No. Not a town.

A territory.

My heart started pounding.

And then I saw them. The gates. Massive iron structures that stretched high into the sky. Intricate designs were worked into the metal. Flowers and vines twisted together in patterns that were almost hypnotic.

Lily of the Valley.

The name was written across the top in elegant script. The letters gleamed in the sunlight.

The car slowed as we approached. A sentinel stepped out from a guard station. He waved us through.

The gates swung open.

This was it. This was real.

My hands were shaking again. I pressed them flat against my thighs to hide it.

The car rolled forward. Through the gates. Into Lily of the Valley territory.

My new home. My new prison. My new battlefield.

I took a deep breath and forced myself to sit up straighter. To look confident even if I felt like I was drowning.

Whatever came next, I would survive it. I had to.

Because going back to SilverCreek wasn't an option anymore.

And failure? Failure meant death. Or worse.

*Chapter 290: By omission*

**FIA**

"Valentine?"

The name came from both of them at once, their voices overlapping in a way that made the hair on my arms stand up.

I looked between Morrigan and Maren, confusion pulling my brows together.

"Who is Valentine?"

They shared a glance. The kind that passed information without words, the kind that made my stomach tighten because I knew whatever came next would change something.

Morrigan reached for the paper and held it carefully, like it might burn her fingers.

"He is Madeline's father."

The words landed wrong. They did not make sense at first. My brain tried to arrange them into something logical, something that fit with what I already knew, but they kept slipping through my understanding like water through a sieve.

Then they clicked.

My gut twisted so hard I thought I might be sick.

"What?"

The girl on the bed watched me with those clear, impossible eyes.

"He is the one who tried to kill me?" I said, hearing my voice go thin and strange.

"I do not know that," she said quickly. "I am not sure about that. But he was in the girl who tried to kill you's past. So maybe he is." She paused, her expression careful. "But Alpha Cian wanted to know this. And I have fulfilled that. Now his people do."

My mind started moving too fast. Pieces of information I had been holding separately suddenly crashed together. The man from my dream. The one who had stood over

Athena while she screamed. The one whose face had stayed with me even after I woke up, leaving that oily residue of horror on my skin.

He was Madeline's father...

He was connected to the strange girl who had tried to kill me...

My skin started to itch. The feeling crawled up my arms and across my shoulders, and I took a few steps back without meaning to. The wall stopped me, solid against my spine.

How could people be this evil? How could someone do those things and then go home and have a daughter and live a normal life?

"I do not believe this."

Morrigan's voice cut through the spiral my thoughts had been falling into. I blinked and focused on her face. She was staring at the drawing, her jaw tight.

"You really do not know people until they reveal themselves," she said.

Then she folded the paper in half, and then again, her movements quick and decisive.

"Cian cannot know about this."

"What?"

The word came out sharper than I meant it to. I pushed off the wall and moved toward her.

"Why? Why can't he know?"

She looked at me, and her expression held something I had only seen a few times before. Fear, maybe. Or the kind of certainty that came from knowing exactly how bad things could get.

"If anything, he needs to know immediately," I said, my voice rising. "Because this is the same man I saw in my dreams."

The volume felt wrong in the small room, too loud, too exposed. I dropped my voice to a whisper, leaning closer.

"This man is pure evil. You needed to see what he did to an Omega who was..." I stopped and swallowed. "Who was pregnant."

"I know he is. I know you are right."

Morrigan's voice stayed steady, but her hands gripped the folded paper hard enough that her knuckles went white.

"But Cian tends to be rash. If he knows about this now, he'll probably start a war with the Primrose coven that Valentine happens to be supreme of at the moment."

My breath caught. Supreme? That meant power. That meant resources and people and magic I could not even begin to understand.

"We are a strong pack," Luna Morrigan continued. "But going head first with a powerful cult of witches is not smart. And even if Cian holds back, his daughter is within our walls. Who knows if she is a spy at this point. She was brought here by Aldric, was she not?"

The question hung there, rhetorical but pointed.

"With what I know now, I wouldn't put it past them to be working together." She looked at me directly. "This has to be a secret for now."

I wanted to argue. Every instinct I had screamed that keeping this from Cian was wrong, that he deserved to know, that we should not be making decisions like this without him.

"Cian already knows about Ronan," I said. "He is highly suspicious about Aldric too. He can take this."

"You know him too."

Morrigan's voice went softer, but somehow that made it worse.

"He is probably about to explode with all he knows now. We add something new to it and he'll surely explode. His sworn brother and two father figures..." She stopped. Her throat worked. "I can barely take it. Cian will not."

I hated that she was right. The truth of it settled over me like a weight I could not shake off. My shoulders slumped, and I felt something give way inside my chest.

"You are not wrong."

Morrigan turned to the girl on the bed.

"Until you cannot hide it anymore, pretend you are blind. This is for your safety too."

The girl's jaw tightened. "I made a promise to Alpha Cian. I told you people because I was sure you could be trusted enough to tell him."

I moved to her bedside before I could think it through. My hand found the edge of the mattress, gripping it for balance.

"That is my mate," I said. "And we are an extension of each other at this point. I know what you want to tell him and eventually, I promise you, he will know too. But my mother-in-law has a point and you need to be safe as well."

She looked at me for a long moment. Something passed behind her eyes, some calculation I could not follow.

"Alright."

Relief made my knees feel weak.

The girl paused, then spoke again, her voice dropping lower.

"You and the girl... You and the girl are similar in making. You are not exactly a wolf and neither is she." She reached out and took my hand. Her fingers felt warm against my cold skin. "But you are so much more complex."

Her grip tightened just slightly.

"When you touched me and I synced to you. I noticed... I realized... you have been kissed by divinity."

Footsteps echoed in the hallway outside. Heavy and in multiple sets.

Maren moved faster than I had seen her move all day. She grabbed the bandages and rushed to the girl's side, her hands working quickly to wrap the cloth back over those clear, perfect eyes. Morrigan slid the folded paper into her hidden pocket, her movements smooth and practiced.

I stepped away from the bed. Morrigan moved to stand beside me. Maren finished tying off the bandages and backed up, putting distance between herself and the girl just as the door swung open.

The handler came in first. Ronan followed. Then Cian.

My heart jumped at the sight of him. I wanted to go to him, to press myself against his chest and let him hold me until the world made sense again. But I stayed where I was, keeping my expression neutral.

The handler walked straight to the bed.

"Time to go, diva."

He bent and lifted the girl into his arms like she weighed nothing. She kept her head still, her covered eyes pointed forward.

Cian looked surprised to see me there. His gaze swept over me quickly, searching for injuries or problems, before he seemed to force himself to look away. He walked up to the girl instead.

"I am so sorry I couldn't be of help to you."

His voice carried genuine regret. It made my chest ache.

"But I have paid your handler a lot more to ensure that he gets you a witch to fix your sight. I would use the resources at my disposal. But most witches currently have it out for me because they think I murdered one of my own. I would be more of a hindrance to you than help."

Guilt twisted through me, sharp and sudden. He felt responsible for this. For her blindness. For failing to help her. And he did not need to feel any of it anymore because she was fine, because she was healed, because the miracle had already happened.

I hated that I had to keep it from him. Hated that the bond between us now felt muted and distant because I had locked my side down, terrified he would sense the truth.

"It is fine," the girl said.

Her voice stayed soft, weak, but convincing nonetheless.

"My job has risks and I am sorry I cannot help you now. But when I get my sight back, which I am certain I will... I will draw that image."

Cian nodded. "I'll wait for it. Thank you."

The handler adjusted his grip and carried her toward the door. She did not look back. Did not give any sign that she could see perfectly, that she was lying to protect herself and us and whatever fragile balance we were trying to maintain.

The door closed behind them.

Cian crossed the room in three strides. He stopped in front of me, close enough that I could smell the faint scent of pine that always clung to him.

"Why are you here? Are you alright?"

I nodded.

"Are you sure?"

His eyes searched my face. I felt him trying to reach through the bond, trying to sense what I was feeling, but the wall I had built held firm.

He looked at Maren. Then at his mother. His expression shifted, confusion giving way to something sharper.

"Why are you shielding then?"

The question cut straight through me. Of course he noticed. Of course he felt the absence where our connection should be flowing freely.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out. My mind raced, trying to find an answer that would satisfy him without giving everything away.

Morrigan stepped forward slightly, drawing his attention.

"Well, I would not be surprised," she said smoothly. "She came here because she was feeling weird only to find out you somehow blinded someone in her behalf."

Cian's jaw tightened immediately.