

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 426: When the seasons change 2

FIA

Athena's eyes brightened. Something fierce and alive flickered behind that ancient exhaustion.

"That's good. Anger is good." She stepped toward me again, close enough that I could see the gold flecks in her dark eyes that matched mine exactly. "Hold onto it like a lifeline."

She reached out slowly, like she was afraid I might disappear if she moved too quickly. Her fingers didn't quite touch my arm, hovering just above my skin.

"Valentine Blossom is part of the reason why I couldn't live a fulfilled life and raise my own daughter right. The reason I couldn't be there for my grandchild. For you."

The words came out measured, each one weighted with decades of pain that had never found proper release.

"There were others too. Pauline Strati and her demented husband. But those are sins of old."

Her hand dropped away.

"New sins however deserve punishment. If Valentine intends to repeat a cruel history I died for and Muna escaped to prevent for your sake, then we have to take it upon ourselves to protect the innocents of the future."

My hand moved to my stomach without conscious thought. The gesture felt automatic now, protective in a way I hadn't fully understood before this moment.

Athena's gaze followed the movement.

"That's why you instinctively called me to this space."

She said it like a conclusion reached after long deliberation. Like she'd been watching me since the moment I'd pulled her here and had only now figured out the why of it.

"You inherited the light from Muna. But not the darkness."

The statement should have felt like an accusation. Instead it landed like simple observation, a fact stated without judgment.

"Healing and foresight won't help you where you wake up."

She smiled then. The expression transformed her face completely, made her look like the woman she might have been if Valentine hadn't gotten his hands on her first.

"What will?"

I needed to know. Needed to understand what she thought I could possibly do against everything waiting for me on the other side of this conversation.

Athena held out her hands, palms up. As I watched, light began to gather in them. Not the warm blue glow that came when I healed, but something cooler. Silver and ethereal, like moonlight made solid.

"For my great grandchild, I gift you this, granddaughter."

She opened her left hand first. An olive branch materialized there, small and perfect, each leaf catching the strange light in this space and reflecting it back brighter.

"The gift of small miracles."

Then her right hand opened. A garnet stone sat in her palm, deep red and gleaming like fresh blood.

"And we can't forget... the red."

I stared at the objects in her hands. They felt significant in a way I couldn't quite articulate, like symbols of something larger than their physical forms suggested.

"What is that?"

The question came out quieter than I'd intended.

Athena's smile widened.

"There are divinely appointed seasons for the mortal experience." She stepped closer, close enough that I could smell something floral on her, jasmine maybe. "As Selene's own maiden, you should know. There's a time to heal and a time to..."

My hand closed around the garnet stone before she could finish. The weight of it felt right, felt like something I'd been searching for without knowing what I needed to find.

"A time to kill."

The words left my mouth with certainty. With the kind of clarity that came from finally understanding what had been missing from every plan I'd tried to make, every attempt to escape or fight back that had failed because I'd been trying to win a war with the wrong weapons.

Athena's expression went radiant.

"The goddess promised me this day would come. Justice."

She was starting to fade now. I could see the wall behind her through her chest, could watch as she became more transparent with each word.

"So get us all that." Her voice stayed strong even as her form weakened. "Show Valentine he's nothing but a small minded mortal at the end of the day."

The olive branch and garnet stone began to sink into my palms. It was not painful in any way and if anything, it felt as if they were becoming part of me, like they'd always belonged there and were finally returning home.

Athena's smile turned sharp as she slowly disappeared.

"Destroy. Everything. Granddaughter."

Then she was gone.

The cell around me began to crack. Not violently, but like ice breaking up in spring, pieces of it falling away to reveal something underneath. Light, bright and insistent, leaked through the fractures.

I could feel my body now. The real one, wherever it was. Could feel pain returning in waves, could taste blood in my mouth and smell something chemical and wrong.

The garnet stone pulsed once against my palm.

I understood then what Athena had given me. Not just power, but permission. Permission to stop trying to heal what couldn't be fixed, to stop offering mercy to people who had never once shown it to anyone else.

Valentine wanted to repeat history. Wanted to take me and do to me and my child what he'd done to Athena and Muna, what he'd done to countless others in his endless pursuit of whatever perfect creation lived in his head.

But I wasn't Athena. I hadn't been broken by years of captivity, hadn't had my will stripped away piece by piece until nothing remained except what he'd put there.

And I wasn't going to let him write that ending for me.

The light grew brighter, swallowing the last remnants of the cell.

I held onto the anger Athena had told me to keep. Held onto it like the lifeline she'd promised it would be.

Then I let the light take me, and somewhere in the distance I heard my own heartbeat. Slow at first, then stronger. Then steady.

I was waking up.

And when I did, Valentine was going to learn exactly what happened when you pushed a blessed werewolf too far.

Chapter 427: Athena's curse

PAULINE

I sat on the cold stone floor, my body curled tight around itself, the dampness seeping through my dress and into my bones.

Time felt meaningless down here. There was no light except the thin shaft filtering through the barred window high above, no sound except my own ragged breathing and the occasional drip of water somewhere in the darkness.

I was the third daughter of a nothing pack.

The thought came unbidden, sharp and bitter. My father had ruled a territory so small you could walk its borders in an afternoon. Three daughters, no sons, and a dwindling influence that hemorrhaged away with each passing year.

My eldest sister had been beautiful in that delicate, porcelain way men claimed to prefer. Soft-spoken. Gentle. Everything a Luna was supposed to be.

She never stood a chance at the ball, where eligible wolves gathered like vultures circling fresh meat.

My second sister had been clever, sharp-tongued, and quick-witted, armed with enough political savvy to make our father proud.

Marcus had barely looked at her.

But me?

I had been a freak in the sheets and a master strategist in every other room. I studied him the way generals studied battlefields, learned every weakness, every desire, every vulnerability he tried to hide beneath that carefully constructed facade of control.

I made myself indispensable.

The night I seduced him, I wore red. Not the soft blush of innocence but the deep crimson of blood and power. I whispered things in his ear that made him forget himself, made him crave me in ways that had nothing to do with love and everything to do with obsession.

When he chose me over both my sisters, I thought I had won.

I thought I had proved my worth in every way that mattered. That my cunning and my willingness to do whatever it took had secured my future in a way beauty and breeding never could.

I had been so far from the fucking truth.

The laugh that bubbled up from my chest was hollow and bitter.

All those years of fighting. Of scheming. Of breaking myself into the perfect shape to fit the hole he needed filled. And for what?

How you get them is how you lose them.

My mother had whispered that once, back when I was still young enough to think love mattered more than strategy. I had ignored her, dismissed it as the bitter ramblings of a woman whose own marriage had crumbled under the weight of disappointed expectations.

But she had been right.

If I could seduce Marcus away from better options through sheer force of will and sexual prowess, what made me think another woman could not do the same to me?

Athena had not even tried.

That was the worst part. She had simply existed, all wide eyes and genuine smiles and that nauseating purity that made grown men stupid.

And Marcus had looked at her the way he never looked at me.

I had resisted it. Fought against the inevitable with everything I had. Bent the rules until they snapped. Destroyed her before she could destroy me.

But maybe it had always been going to happen regardless.

Maybe this ending had been written the moment I clawed my way into a position I had no right to hold, secured through manipulation instead of genuine connection.

I wondered if today was the day it all finally caught up with me.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs jerked me from my spiraling thoughts.

Heavy boots. Multiple sets.

The sentinels.

My heart hammered against my ribs. I scrambled backward until my spine hit the wall, my hands scrabbling uselessly against the damp stone.

The cell door swung open.

"No." The word came out small and pathetic. "No, I am not going."

"Alpha's orders," one of them said, his voice flat and professional. "Come quietly or we drag you."

I shook my head, pressing harder against the wall as though I could somehow meld with the stone and disappear.

They moved forward.

I kicked out, my foot connecting with something solid. That grunt of pain was quickly followed by hands closing around my arms with brutal efficiency.

"Let me go!"

I thrashed against their grip, nails raking across fabric, teeth bared like a feral thing.

"Alpha Dimitri said to do what it takes if she resists," one of them muttered.

The slap came fast and hard, snapping my head to the side.

Pain exploded across my already bruised cheek. The fight drained out of me in an instant, leaving only hollow exhaustion in its wake.

They dragged me from the cell.

My feet scraped uselessly against the stone steps as they hauled me upward, back toward the world I had tried so desperately to control. The corridor stretched endlessly before us, familiar and terrible in equal measure.

When we reached the study, they pushed the door open without ceremony.

Marcus stood behind his desk, his expression carved from ice. But it was the woman beside him who made my blood run cold.

She was young. Beautiful. Fashion-forward in a way that spoke of no true wealth and influence, and her dress was cut in elegant lines that hugged her frame. But it was the gloves that caught my attention. Red. Vibrant, arterial red that seemed to glow against her pale skin.

A delicate.

"This is wrong," I said, my voice cracking. "Marcus, this is wrong. You cannot do this."

He did not look at me when he spoke.

"I cannot trust your words." His jaw worked. "But this. This, I can trust."

He turned to the delicate.

"Get to work."

The girl looked toward the hulking man standing just behind her. Broad-shouldered. Dark-skinned. Silent as death.

Her handler.

The man gave a single, sharp nod.

The delicate stepped forward, her fingers moving to the fastenings of her gloves with practiced precision.

"No." I pulled against the sentinels holding me. "No, Marcus, please. You do not understand what you are asking."

The gloves came off slowly, revealing hands that looked too delicate to contain the power they held.

"Dimitri!" His name tore from my throat, desperate and raw. "Dimitri, no!"

The delicate moved closer.

"Resistance will be dangerous for your mind," she said softly, her voice carrying the weight of someone who had seen what happened when people fought this process.

Her hand reached for me.

I thrashed harder, my whole body bucking against the iron grip of the sentinels. But they held firm, pressing me down until I could barely move.

Her fingers made contact with my temple.

Ice.

That was the only word for it. Her touch spread across my skin like frost creeping over glass, seeping into my pores and burrowing deeper with each passing second.

I started to shake.

Violent tremors that rattled my bones and made my teeth clack together painfully. Somewhere in the distance, I registered that the delicate was shaking too, worse than me, her eyes rolling back until only the whites showed.

I looked at Marcus.

He stared back with nothing but cold indifference.

The invasion began.

I felt her presence in my mind like oil spreading across water, slick and wrong and impossible to stop. She moved through my memories with surgical precision, peeling back layers I had spent years building, dismantling the careful architecture of my lies.

The tears came harder now, mixing with the spit gathering at the corners of my mouth.

"Please." The word was barely a whisper. "Please, no. Please no. I am begging you."

I tried to hold her back. Tried to force my mind closed against the intrusion.

But what found me was pain.

White-hot and jarring, it tore through my skull like lightning splitting a tree. I coughed, tasting copper, feeling warm blood spatter across my lips and chin.

Then, as suddenly as it began, it stopped.

The delicate pulled her hand back, her own body trembling, sweat beading on her forehead despite the cold that still clung to my skin.

"I have what I need, Alpha Dimitri."

The sentinels released me then.

I collapsed forward, my knees hitting the floor with bruising force. I crawled toward Marcus on my hands and knees, my pride shattered beyond recognition.

"Please." I reached for his boots, my fingers curling around the leather. "Please forgive me. Please. I know I was wrong. I know—"

He stepped back, removing himself from my grasp.

His attention was fixed on the delicate.

"That must mean her secrets are big."

The girl straightened, pulling her composure back together with visible effort. She met his gaze directly.

"The woman called Athena is truly dead."

Relief tried to bloom in my chest.

"But she had a child."

The relief died, strangled before it could take root.

"She had your child. And that child had a child. And that child who was had is currently Luna of Skollrend."

The delicate paused, letting the words settle like stones dropped into still water.

"*Your granddaughter.*"

My stomach heaved.

Bile rushed up my throat, hot and acidic. I turned my head just in time, vomiting onto the polished floor of the study, my whole body convulsing with the force of it.

The delicate continued speaking, but I could not hear her over the roaring in my ears.

Granddaughter....

The word echoed through my mind, bouncing off the walls of my skull until it was all I could hear.

I retched again, bringing up nothing but stomach acid that burned my throat raw.

Everything I had done... Every choice I had made... Every life I had destroyed...

And for what?

To delay the inevitable by a single generation.

Chapter 428: True Story 1

LYSANDER

Breakfast the next morning carried the same weight it always did. The table was set. The chairs were occupied. The silence pressed down like something physical.

I sat in my usual seat and waited.

My sisters were already there. All of them looked tense, their hands folded in their laps and their eyes fixed on empty plates. Sofiane slouched across from me with that lazy posture he wore like a shield, but his gaze kept flicking toward the door.

Hazel sat to my left. She hadn't said a word since arriving. Her hands rested on the table, fingers laced together so tight that they started to turn her knuckles pale.

The clock on the wall ticked past the appointed time.

One minute. Then two.

But father did not appear.

Sofiane was the first to break. He leaned back in his chair and let out a low whistle.

"Well," he said. "This is new."

One of my sisters shifted uncomfortably. "Maybe he's running late."

"Father doesn't run late," I said.

"Maybe he's sick," she tried again.

Sofiane grinned. "Maybe he finally had a heart attack, or one of the Omegas snapped and said fuck it, let's kill this psycho."

"That's not funny," I said.

He shrugged. "I think it's a little funny."

I stood. The chair scraped back, and the sound cut through the room sharper than I intended.

"I'll go check on him," I said.

Sofiane stretched his arms over his head and yawned. "Take the food with you while you're at it. Let the rest of us have a comfortable breakfast for once. Goddess knows our other siblings might actually come down if the old man isn't here to terrorize them."

I looked at him. "And how many lives of Omegas will that cost?"

His grin faltered.

I turned toward the Omega standing near the sideboard. She had been waiting there the entire time, silent and still, hands clasped in front of her.

"Do well to take my father's food to him before I get there," I said.

She nodded immediately and moved fast. Her hands were steady as she loaded the tray, but I saw the tension in her shoulders. She knew what it meant to be late. She had seen what happened to the others.

She had been safe and smart, but that did not seem to matter now that my father did not show up and mistakes like these were not allowed to breathe in Lily of the Valley.

Sofiane watched her leave and then looked back at me.

"Go play heir, boy savior," he said.

I didn't dignify that with a response. I just left.

The hallway outside the dining room was cooler. Quieter. My footsteps echoed against the marble as I walked toward my father's study.

I saw the Omega ahead of me. She was moving quickly, pushing the trolley with both hands, her eyes darting to the small clock mounted on the wall every few steps.

I slowed my pace.

There was no need to rush. She would get there first. That was the point. That was always the point. The Omegas bore the brunt of everything in this place, and if my father was in a mood, better she arrive alone than with me standing behind her like an anvil that father could use to judge and punish her.

She reached the study door and knocked twice in a soft and respectful manner.

A voice from inside told her to enter.

She pushed the door open and guided the trolley inside. I stayed in the hallway, just out of sight, and waited.

Her voice came through faintly. It sounded something like an apology. Something about not realizing earlier that he would be having breakfast in his study.

Then my father's voice covered the space in quick succession. I expected the worst kind of judgement, only for the man's voice to come back calm and almost pleasant.

"It matters that you adapted quickly," he said. "Thank you."

I blinked.

Thank you?

My father did not say thank you. Not to Omegas. Not to anyone, really, unless there was a political or scary reason for it.

I cleared my throat and stepped into the doorway.

My father looked up. His expression shifted slightly when he saw me. Not a surprise, exactly. More like mild curiosity.

"Lysander," he said. "What are you doing here? Have you had breakfast?"

"I was worried about you, Father," I said. "You usually never break routine."

He set down the cup he had been holding and turned his attention to the Omega.

"You can leave," he said.

She bowed low and left immediately. The relief on her face was obvious. She had survived this encounter. That was all that mattered to her.

The door clicked shut behind her.

My father leaned back in his chair and studied me for a moment. Then he reached for something on his desk.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

"I got a letter," he said. "I think you need to see this."

He held it out toward me. There was a photograph clipped to the front of it.

I stepped closer.

The photograph caught my attention first. It was a girl. With beautiful dark hair and the sharpest features one could ever lay eyes on. On those features was a face I knew better than I wanted to admit.

"Fia," I said.

The name came out before I could stop it.

My father smiled. "The Skollrend - Silvercreek girl you were obsessed with, right?"

I felt my jaw tighten. "Why do you have her picture?"

"It was sent to me," he said simply.

He held the letter out further. "You should read this."

I snatched it from his hand and unfolded it.

The handwriting was clean. Deliberate. Every word was placed with intention.

I started reading.

To the Alpha of Lily of the Valley,

I will not waste your time with pleasantries, nor will I insult your intelligence with half-truths. What I am about to place before you is not rumor, not speculation, and not the desperate grasp of a man seeking relevance. It is evidence. Verifiable. Damning. The kind that reshapes alliances and buries bloodlines when handled correctly.

You were not my first choice, but you are the most efficient one available.

My eyes moved faster.

Your position places you in a unique intersection of power and proximity. Close enough to the royal family to be heard, distant enough to act without immediate scrutiny. That balance is rare. It is also precisely why I am writing to you.

I kept reading. The words started to blur together.

Fleshcraft. Human experimentation. Records. Names. Dates. Survivors.

Then I reached the part about the photograph.

Look closely at her.

You will recognize the face, even if you do not wish to. The resemblance is not a coincidence, and it is not harmless. She is one of them. A product of the same work detailed in the records I possess. Not a relic. Not a mistake that was corrected and erased.

She lives.

She holds a title.

*She sits as **Luna of Skollrend.***

My chest felt tight.

I forced myself to keep reading.

And more importantly, she did not rise to that position through ignorance.

Cian Donlon, Alpha of Skollrend, knew what she was when he chose her. He knew what had been done to create her, what she represented, and what her existence defies. He took her as his Luna anyway, binding himself, his pack, and his bloodline to something that stands in direct violation of the laws our kind was built upon and with good reason.

My hands were shaking.

I didn't realize it at first. But when I looked down, I saw the slight tremor in my fingers where they gripped the edges of the paper.

This is not just corruption. This is complicity.

When this comes to light, it will not remain contained within Skollrend. It will reach the royals. It will force a response. It will demand judgment, not just for those who created such abominations, but for those who knowingly sheltered them and elevated them into positions of power.

The word abominations stuck in my throat like a bone.

I kept reading anyway.

You understand what this means.

The royal family cannot afford to ignore something like this, not if it is presented properly. Not if it comes through the right channel. Not if the evidence is undeniable and the consequences of silence are greater than the consequences of action.

That is where you come in.

The letter went on. Leverage. Standing. Indispensability. All the things my father valued most in this world lay out neatly like bait on a hook.

Then the conditions.

We will speak first.

You will hear what I have, and I will determine whether you are capable of understanding its weight. If you are, you will carry it forward. If you are not, then this ends here, and I find another path.

Do not mistake this for a gamble. I have already begun setting other pieces in motion. This is simply the most efficient route, not the only one.

If you are interested, you will come alone.

Two nights from now.

The old river crossing at Skollrend. You know the one.

If you do not come, I will assume you have chosen irrelevance, and I will proceed accordingly.

Choose carefully.

The signature at the bottom was a single name.

Gabriel.

I stared at it.

Gabriel?