

From Luna to Warrior Never Again

Chapter 1

The day the offer came from the Royal Talons for a permanent position, my best friend, Alicia, stared at me in shock. “Permanent? Serena, that means leaving for good. Leaving Damien?” I shook my head, my voice soft. “It’s just for five years. I want to learn their advanced pack management and strategies. When I come back, I’ll be able to help Damien even more.” Alicia sighed and dropped it. She knew. Everything I did, I did for one name—Damien. I said goodbye and rushed back to the manor, my heart soaring. Five years was a long time, but it was a small price to pay for the strength of his pack. I couldn't wait to tell him. I could already picture it: him pulling me into a tight hug, his deep voice a rumbling whisper against my ear, telling me he couldn't bear for me to leave. My flight was in three days—on our mating anniversary. Maybe, in our last few days, he'd be like he was when we first bonded. Claiming me in the most primal way, over and over. Branding his scent into my skin, trying to fuse me into his very bones. But the moment I pushed open the manor doors, the glittering hall smashed all my fantasies to pieces. This was for Lila's coming-of-age ceremony. It was far more lavish than our own mating celebration had been. My heart plummeted. My wolf whimpered and sank with it. Damien was directing the staff, his focus entirely on the massive champagne tower they were building. He didn't even notice me. “Damien,” I said, walking up to him. I forced my voice to stay even. “I just got some news...” “Whatever it is, it can wait,” he said without looking up. His tone left no room for argument. “This is Lila's big night. I don't want any surprises.” Any surprises. He meant me. My chest tightened. A sharp sting shot through our mate bond. I bit my lip and shoved the letter back into my bag. “I understand. I already got Lila a gift.” He seemed surprised when I took it out—a custom perfume designed to soothe a wolf's spirit. He finally looked at me, his gaze a storm of something I couldn't read. Annoyance? Guilt? “That was thoughtful of you.” “She's family,” I forced a smile that didn't reach my eyes. “Go to the study and organize the guest list. They'll be here at seven,” he said after a moment's hesitation. I hurried to the study, telling myself not to fight. Not now. Not before I had to leave. In the study, a receipt stopped me in my tracks. It was from a high-end jeweler in Milan. —Moonstone Wolf Pendant. The long string of zeros after the price felt like a slap in the face. My wolf jolted, my heart hammering in my chest. A year ago, on the anniversary of us being confirmed as mates, Damien had whispered a promise

in my ear. He would have a one-of-a-kind moonstone wolf pendant made just for me. It was the most sacred token between mates, a symbol of the Moon Goddess's ultimate blessing. But that day, he'd spent the whole night calming Lila down from one of her anxiety attacks. I thought he'd forgotten. But he remembered. Was this my anniversary gift, for three days from now? Before I could even feel a flicker of hope, Lila's voice called from upstairs. "Serena! The guests are arriving!" I quickly gathered the files and rushed upstairs to help her with her gown. Lila looked like an angel in a white silk dress. She gave me a sweet smile when she saw me.

"Serena, you look a little worn out. Want some of my concealer?" I glanced in the mirror. She was right. I was exhausted. I'd been preparing for today's interview for two months. "No, thanks." I handed her the perfume. "Happy birthday, Lila." Her eyes lit up as she tore open the package. "Oh my god, I've wanted this forever! You're the best, Serena." She gave me a hug, and I smelled the expensive skincare products on her. The ones Damien bought for her. "The guests are here," I said, hearing voices from downstairs. "Let's go." The banquet hall was already full. Pack elders, key partners, and some younger faces I didn't recognize. I found my seat and froze. My seat was at the far end of the long table. Wedged between two staff members. Lila was sitting at Damien's right hand, in the seat of honor, soaking in everyone's praise. It was a public humiliation. An Alpha's mate belongs at his left. But that seat—my seat—was empty. I took a deep breath and kept my smile in place. It must be a mistake. Throughout the entire dinner, Damien acted like I didn't exist. His attention was completely on Lila, introducing her to every guest, making sure her glass was never empty. "And now, a very special gift for Lila," Damien announced, standing up. He pulled a velvet jewelry box from his suit jacket. My breath caught in my throat. He opened the box. Inside lay a stunning moonstone wolf pendant. It shimmered under the lights as if blessed by the Moon Goddess herself. "Lila, this is to celebrate you officially coming of age, and a blessing for your future," Damien said, personally fastening it around her neck. "You deserve the best of everything." Tears of joy streamed down Lila's face.

"Damien, I... I don't know what to say." "Just say you'll always stay with us," he said, stroking her hair. "This is only the beginning. I'll give you so much more." The room erupted in applause. I sat in my corner, the world spinning, a roar in my ears. My wolf was crying out, feeling the sting of betrayal. It curled into a painful ball inside me. I struggled to keep my expression neutral, but I must have failed. Damien's sharp gaze shot across the room to me. His voice, laced with the steel of his Alpha command, sliced right through me. "Serena. Don't tell me you're losing your temper over a single gift for Lila."