

Chapter 41

Haven Kramer POV:

Silas's forehead was slick with sweat.

"Reallocate ... territories?" he repeated, his voice barely a whisper. The implication hung in the air, heavy and suffocating.

Demetri's expression was unreadable, but the coldness in his eyes was absolute. "They smell blood in the water, Silas. They think I am weak, dying. A wounded lion is no longer a king just meat for the hyenas."

The analysis was brutal, and accurate. The Alpha King wasn't just calling a meeting; he was holding an auction, and Demetri's lands were on the block.

Silas bowed deeply, his respect for Demetri clearly mingled with a new, profound fear. "Yes, Alpha. I will arrange for our spies in the capital to gather more detailed intelligence at once."

"Go," Demetri said, a dismissive wave of his hand.

As if granted a pardon, Silas practically fled. But before he pulled the door shut, he hesitated, his gaze landing on me. It was a complex look, a mixture of awe and intense curiosity, as if he were seeing me for the first time. Not as a political bride, but as a player in this deadly game.

He said nothing. He just bowed to me, a gesture deeper and more respectful than any he had given before, then slipped out, closing the heavy oak door behind him.

Silence descended. A victorious, yet fragile quiet.

I didn't move. I waited. The real conversation was just beginning.

Demetri leaned back against his pillows, his head turning slowly until those ice-blue eyes locked onto me. They weren't angry. They were like searchlights, probing into a deep, dark abyss, and what they held was a terrifying sort of amusement.

He watched me, and then, slowly, a corner of his mouth began to lift. It wasn't a warm smile. It was the smile of a predator that has just appreciated a particularly clever kill.

I met his gaze, my own expression calm. "What do you want to ask?"

A low chuckle rumbled in his chest. "What I want to ask... you've already answered it, haven't you? With your actions."

He paused, tasting the words. "So, the 'poison'... was just bait to lure out this fat rat?"

I nodded, walking to the bedside to start methodically cleaning up my medical tools. "Not entirely. They weren't simple sugar pills. They had a real effect."

His eyebrows shot up, my answer clearly piquing his interest.

I held an empty vial up to the light. "It was an alkaloid extracted from belladonna, mixed with a high concentration of senna leaf extract. A small dose causes severe abdominal cramps, sweating, and heart palpitations. The symptoms are very similar to certain neurotoxins, but it's really just a powerful laxative."

I saw the appreciation in his eyes deepen. He seemed to enjoy this intellectual dissection of the plot.

"As for the 'inhibitor' she got every day," I continued, "those were just mints. Psychological suggestion is the best medicine, especially for someone convinced they're being poisoned."

"Psychological suggestion" Demetri repeated the phrase, his blue eyes glinting with the excitement of a man who's just discovered a fascinating new weapon. "Haven't Kramer, you are... full of surprises."

His praise made a strange heat rise in my chest. I deflected. "Mrs. Villarreal may be locked up, but she was your nursemaid. She has deep roots in this estate. Keeping her around is a liability."

The smile on Demetri's face vanished, replaced by a chilling indifference. "She is not my nursemaid. She is a dog that was never properly fed."

He looked at me, his tone absolute. "Do what you want with her. I only want the result."

I heard the complete authorization in his words. My heart steadied. But I needed more.

"I need a confession," I said. "A voluntary one, where she admits to her embezzlement and to framing me. That way, when you exile her, no one in this manor will have an ounce of sympathy for her."

Demetri watched me, assessing the plan. "She's already lost her mind. You think she'll write it?"

A cold smile touched my lips. "Everyone has a weakness. She seems untouchable, but she has a son who loves to gamble."

I pulled a slip of paper from my pocket, information Silas had just given me. "Her son, Reynolds, owes a massive debt at a casino in the city. The creditors are looking for him. I think she'd be more than willing to trade a confession for her son's safety."

The light in Demetri's eyes grew intensely bright. He laughed again, a genuine pleased sound this time. "Good. Very good."

He held out his hand to me. It wasn't an invitation. It was a command.

I hesitated for a beat, then placed my hand in his large palm.

His skin was hot, his fingertips calloused. He gently stroked the back of my hand, sending a shiver through me. "Then do it, my..." He paused, searching for the right word.

Finally, in a near-whisper, laced with a strange possessiveness, he said, "... my sharpest blade, gifted to me by the Moon Goddess herself."

My heart skipped a beat. I snatched my hand back as if burned, a flush creeping up my neck.

I turned away from him, trying to gather my composure. "I'll see her tomorrow," I said, my voice low.

From behind me came his pleased, deep voice. "I'll be waiting for your good news."

I didn't look back. I walked quickly out of the bedroom, as if a beast was chasing me.

Closing the door, I leaned against the cool wall, my hand still tingling, my heart still racing.

