

Chapter 43

Haven Kramer POV:

I watched the motion of his hand patting the mattress, his eyes holding an unyielding command. I hesitated.

Finally, I walked over, but not to the bed. I sat in a chair a few feet away. I needed to keep my head clear, and I needed distance.

A flicker of displeasure crossed Demetri's eyes at my choice, but he didn't push it.

He shifted into a more comfortable position, though the oppressive weight of his presence didn't lessen at all. "You did well," he said, his voice laced with a lazy satisfaction.

I rubbed my tired brow. "This is just the beginning" I said. "Now that the internal rot is gone, we can focus on the external enemies."

I was referring to the Alpha summit, just a month away.

Demetri fell silent. He knew I was right. After a long moment, he spoke, his voice turning serious. "What do you need from me?"

I knew this was it. The moment to negotiate. This was the most important bargaining chip I had earned by taking down Mrs. Villarreal.

I looked him straight in the eye. "I need a promise," I said, my voice steady.

I stood up and began to pace, both to organize my thoughts and to build my own presence in the room. "I will heal you. Not just the silver poisoning but your damaged nerves and muscles. I will get you back on your feet, and I will restore your full power as an Alpha."

Demetri listened quietly, his ice-blue eyes unreadable, as if I were talking about someone else entirely.

"In return," I stopped pacing and turned to face him directly, "when my family, the Kramer family, requires you to make a choice, I need you to stand with me."

I added, "I need you to use your influence, your power, to help me take back everything that belongs to me and my mother. I need you to help me get my revenge."

The room fell into a dead silence, broken only by the occasional crackle of the fire.

Demetri stared at me for a long, long time. So long I thought he was going to refuse.

Then he laughed. It was a cold, cruel laugh. "Your terms are... to heal me, use me, and then... throw me away?" His voice was dangerously quiet, filled with the offense of a king being treated like a pawn.

My heart sank, but I couldn't back down. "You can see it that way if you like," I forced myself to meet his gaze. "This is a transaction, Demetri. You get your health and your throne. I get my revenge. When the deal is done, I will leave. I won't cause any trouble."

As I said the words, a strange hollowness echoed in my chest, a sharp, aching emptiness I immediately smothered before it could take root.

"Leave?" he repeated the word. His voice was as light as a feather, but it landed like a ton of bricks.

He suddenly sat bolt upright. The immense pressure of his Alpha power slammed into me, filling the room, making it hard to breathe.

"Who do you think you are, Haven Kramer?" he growled, his voice low and menacing. "Do you think the Contreras estate is a place you can just come and go as you please?"

"Do you think you can just walk away after you've healed me?" he pressed, his eyes burning with an intensity that felt like it could devour me whole.

His power pushed me back a step, my back hitting the cold wall. There was nowhere left to run.

His eyes blazed with a fire I had never seen before, and... something else. A flicker of something I couldn't decipher. Hurt.

I clenched my jaw, telling myself not to show weakness. "Then what do you want?" I shot back. "Our marriage was a political deal from the start. You can't possibly expect any real feelings between us."

My words were a knife. They stabbed him, and they stabbed me, too.

The fire in his eyes slowly died, replaced by an endless, bottomless cold. "Fine. Very fine." He leaned back against the pillows, resuming his lazy, dangerous posture.

"I accept your deal," he said.

A wave of relief washed over me, but before I could even feel happy, his

next words plunged me into an ice cave.

"I will help you with your revenge. Your enemies are my enemies." He looked at me, a wicked smile playing on his lips.

"But I have a condition of my own."

My heart leaped into my throat.

He spoke each word slowly, deliberately. "During our 'cooperation,' you must... belong to me. Completely."

His gaze was an invasion, stripping me bare from head to toe, branding me with his mark.

"Body, mind, and your loyalty," he added.

