

Chapter 2 - Wild Jasmine Waits for No Full Moon

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It was a photo taken under soft, warm lighting. Seraphina's hand rested gently on her stomach, where a faint golden glow shimmered beneath her skin—a mark every werewolf would recognize instantly. When a female wolf is carrying an Alpha's heir, her body radiates this unique golden aura across her abdomen.

Below the image, written in her elegant cursive, were the words: Three weeks. The Moretti-Rossi bloodline has begun. Vincent said this child will have his eyes.

My phone slipped from my trembling fingers and crashed onto the cold marble floor.

Inside me, my wolf let out a deafening, guttural howl. The sound echoed through the pack bond, reverberating outward. I was certain every Moretti wolf nearby could feel it too. It was pure, primal pain—the kind of anguish a wolf releases when a bond of trust is shattered beyond repair.

My legs gave out, and I collapsed onto the floor. I clutched my chest tightly with both hands. The pain there was unbearable, as though someone were slicing my heart open with a silver blade, cutting deeper with every passing second.

Three weeks.

That meant it had already happened over a month ago—long before Vincent first came to me, asking for my so-called "consent." He never truly wanted my agreement. He only wanted to ease his own conscience.

What did he take me for? Eleanor Hayes, the gullible she-wolf he could manipulate at will? A backup option, always waiting in the shadows, ready to be used?

I closed my eyes as silent tears streaked down my face. My wolf curled into a ball inside me, retreating in despair. The bond that had tethered us to Vincent for twenty years began to unravel in my mind. The silver threads that were supposed to strengthen and turn unbreakable gold after we completed our mate bond were now as fragile as a spider's web in autumn, ready to snap at the slightest touch.

Let it break, my wolf whispered coldly, her voice steady and resolute. He was never ours. He never was.

The sudden vibration of my phone pulled me out of my spiral of pain and back to reality.

It was my mentor, Dr. Anya Sharma. Her voice, as always, was crisp and rational—a lifeline thrown to a drowning soul.

"Eleanor, I know your mating ceremony is coming up soon, but I wanted to ask one last time," she said, pausing briefly. "Have you reconsidered the DARPA project? The Department of Defense specifically requested you. You're the most talented student I've ever taught."

Her tone remained measured as she continued, "Given your upcoming mate bond, the project director has agreed to make an exception. You'd be allowed external communication once every two months, so you can stay in touch with your Alpha."

I had known about the secret lab deep in the Nevada Desert for six months. Dr. Sharma had personally invited me to join the cross-species coexistence research project. But accepting meant complete isolation from the outside world until the end of the project's first phase. That could mean one to two years, or even three to five.

Back then, I had declined without hesitation. I couldn't bear the thought of being separated from Vincent for so long, let alone losing all contact with him.

But now, that image—the one with the golden glow—kept flashing in my mind. The place that should have been my child's had been claimed by another wolf.

Vincent was already someone else's father. He hadn't considered my feelings, nor our upcoming mating ceremony. If that was the case, then there was no point in holding the ceremony at all.

My grip on the phone tightened involuntarily, my nails digging into my palm.

"Dr. Sharma, I'll join the project," I heard myself saying these words, my voice calm and steady, betraying none of the storm within. "No special exceptions. I'll follow the standard confidentiality protocols."

There was a brief pause before her surprised voice broke through. "Really? That's fantastic! The project team will be thrilled. When do you plan to join us? Maybe a week after your ceremony? That way, you can still enjoy a honeymoon—"

"The day of the ceremony," I interrupted.

My eyes drifted to the calendar on my desk. Next month's tenth was circled heavily in red. Under the full moon, an Alpha was supposed to mark his Luna at the ancient stone altar in Moonlight Woods, sealing their bond before the entire pack.

It should have been the moment my dreams came true.

Now, it had become the countdown to my escape from Vincent Moretti.

Fifteen days left.

I would treat those fifteen days as a farewell—one final act of closure for the twenty years of love and loyalty I had blindly given him.

And on that fifteenth day, every bond between us would be severed completely.