



Ceremony

Elowen POV

Taya's room looked like a glitter bomb exploded during prom week. We had decided to get ready at her house tonight for the ceremony.

Hair curlers hissed on the counter, dresses were slung across every chair, and highlighter sparkled in the air like war paint. She twirled in front of her mirror, her deep green dress hugging every perfect curve, her long red hair in waves that would make a goddess jealous.

"You sure I don't look like a broccoli themed stripper?" she asked, cocking an eyebrow.

I snorted. "You look like the entire forest would worship you, shut up."

She tossed a makeup sponge at me. "Alright, Moon Barbie, your turn."

I turned toward the mirror. My silver dress shimmered like starshine. It was hugging my waist and falling into a thigh high slit that was one strong breeze from a scandal. The neckline was lower than I'd usually go, Lyssira's idea, obviously, and the color almost exactly matched the weird new shimmer in my hair. Like it was meant for this version of me. The post prophecy, glowing eyes, destined to fix the creature world version.

"I feel like I'm wearing my trauma," I muttered, adjusting the straps.

"Good," Taya said, standing behind me with her hands on her hips. "Make it hot trauma. Make them regret every shitty word they ever said."

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We grinned at each other in the mirror. And for a second, I forgot about all the doom

The pack ceremony was held in the moonlit clearing near the gathering lodge. There were long tables of food, flickering lanterns strung between ancient pines, and wolves everywhere dressed to the nines. The scent of roasted meats, wild herbs, and mooncakes filled the air.

Taya and I walked in together, both of us tall, radiant, and 100% over the petty stares. Vaela, Soria, and their clone squad were already there, draped in crimson and gold, whispering like little gremlins.

"Slut shimmer, ten o'clock," Vaela stage whispered as I passed.

I smiled sweetly and flipped her off without breaking stride. The Alpha King caught the exchange and shot them a glare sharp enough to slice bone. They shut the hell up faster than I thought possible.

We took our seats as the pack quieted. Alpha Draven stood, towering in his regal black suit, his voice calm but powerful as it echoed through the clearing.

"Tonight we honor the coming of age for Elowen Skye Thorne, daughter of our previous Beta, Alpha Caelan, who served this pack loyally and faithfully until the Hollow Creed killed him seven years ago, and every other wolf blessed under this moon. You now step into your full strength. Into your path. Into your power."

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A murmur of approval passed through the crowd, and Luna Queen Aelira smiled warmly from beside him. I tried to smile back, but... he wasn't here. I scanned the crowd again. No sign of Daxon. Not his stupid smirk. Not his too broad shoulders. Not his hurricane scent that had haunted me all damn day.

Just... empty space where he should be. And gods help me... I felt disappointed.

Taya noticed. "He's not here?"

"Nope."

"Good. Less drama."

"Yeah," I said, but my heart squeezed anyway. Why did it hurt more than it should?

Why did it feel like rejection... when I never even asked to be chosen?

Daxon POV

I stared at the half empty bottle of fireroot whiskey like it held the goddamn answers. It didn't. All it gave me was a slow burn down my throat and a buzzing in my head that did nothing to shut Talon up.

"She's ours. She's ours. Go to her. Claim her. Mine!"

"Shut the fuck up."

Talon snarled, but I slammed a mental wall between us hard enough to

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make my temples throb. Across the room, Jace and Rylen were lounging on the worn leather couch, throwing popcorn at each other and arguing over whether Elowen could beat Rylen in a fight. Spoiler: She absolutely could. And had. Twice.

"She's your mate, man," Jace finally said, leaning forward. "What the hell are you even doing here?"

"Drinking," I muttered.

Rylen snorted. "Yeah, like that's gonna stop the mate bond. Talon's going rabid."

"He's not wrong. Go to her. Smell her skin. Bite her throat." Talon growled.

"Talon, for the love of Luna, SHUT UP."

I leaned back against the wall and rubbed my eyes, the weight of this whole messed up situation pressing down on my shoulders like a boulder.

Elowen. Fucking Elowen.

The girl I've spent the last few years fighting, glaring at, throwing snark and insults just to keep her away. Because she made me feel things. Things I wasn't supposed to feel. Things that made me question shit. I'd known Elowen our whole lives. Her father was an Alpha who served my father. I hadn't noticed her until we turned 13. She was a nerd. A bad ass nerd, but still. She wasn't anything special.

And now? Now the moon had the audacity to mate me to her? My father

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was going to kill me for skipping the ceremony. Or worse, he'd be..... disappointed.

And honestly, that was harder to deal with.

"Get up," I growled, shoving off the wall and tossing the whiskey aside. "We need to run."

Rylen raised a brow. "Now? In dress clothes?"

"Now," I snapped. "Talon's going crazy and I need to hit something."

Jace whooped. "Hell yeah. Let's wreck some trees."

We stripped down behind the tree line, the forest already humming with energy from the full moon. My shift hit fast and hard, my bone snapping, black fur bursting through my skin. It was the kind of pain that made you feel alive.

Talon surged forward, massive and black with silver streaks down his flanks, shaking the earth with each pawstep. The others followed, Rylen's wolf Anton, all lean speed and brown and tan fur, and Jace's wolf Kreed, a hulking russet brute who ran like the damn wind.

We tore through the woods, paws digging into moss and dirt, leaving shredded bark and crushed leaves in our wake. But no matter how far we ran...No matter how fast...Her scent followed us.

And Talon? He howled for her like the moon itself had carved her into his soul.

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Elowen POV

The bass thumped. The lights spun. Bodies moved like they had no care in the world, twirling and grinding in celebration. But I couldn't breathe. Not with this many people. Not with him not showing up. Not with the bond humming like a live wire under my skin.

I was gonna lose it.

Taya had dragged me onto the dance floor once, but I faked a stomach cramp to escape. The truth? I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being watched. Hunted. Like the moon itself was burning into my skin.

I needed air. I needed to run.

I slipped out the side door, heels in my hand, my dress hitched up as I bolted into the woods. Branches scratched at my legs, the wind licked across my face, and the second my feet hit soft moss, I let go.

The shift hit fast. Skin to fur, my bones breaking and rebuilding, Lyssira screaming with joy as she ripped through me and took control. Finally. She howled into the night, stretching her limbs and shaking her coat.

Her silver and blue tipped fur shimmered in the moonlight, no longer hidden, no longer dyed. We were raw. Wild. Free. And then...We smelled him. Thunderstorms and campfire.

Mate.

My paws stuttered mid stride, claws gouging the earth as the scent crashed

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into us like a goddamn freight train.

"Mine. Mine. Ours. GO." Lyssi was a one track wolf. I screamed in my mind, "NO LYSSI!" But she shut that shit down. I watched helplessly from my mind already knowing what was coming. Lyssira took off, full speed, no hesitation. I couldn't stop her even if I wanted to.

The trees blurred. The earth trembled. Then...There. A blur of black and silver fur tearing through the forest just ahead. Talon. Our eyes met mid sprint. Silver to silver. Fire to fucking gasoline.

We collided. Snarling. Twisting. Tangling in limbs and teeth and pheromones thick enough to drown in. Not fighting...claiming.

Rolling through the leaves, we snapped and circled, nipping flanks and throats, testing dominance and dancing that dangerous, beautiful line between feral and fated.

"Mate." I groaned in my head. "Here we fucking go."

Our wolves didn't care about politics, or bloodlines, or bullshit.

They only cared about us.

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