

Belonging

Elowen POV

Stormclaw Keep - Grand Dining Hall, Evening

By the time we made it back from the forest, my muscles were jelly, my hair was a disaster, and my wolf was purring like she'd just been given a crown.

And honestly? Same. The whole Keep was still under lockdown, but Luna Aelira clearly decided that didn't mean we couldn't have a little joy. The dining hall had been completely transformed.

Golden lanterns floated near the ceiling, casting warm light over the long tables now draped in deep forest green and rich crimson fabric. Floral centerpieces ran down the middle, moon lilies, red roses, and wild herbs, and the scent of roasted meat, honey glazed root vegetables, and fresh bread filled the air so thick it made my stomach growl.

Taya froze in the doorway. She looked around the room, her mouth slightly open, her eyes glassy.

"This is for me?" she whispered. Aelira appeared from the side like a graceful shadow, placing a hand on Taya's arm.

"It's not what you were promised," she said softly. "But it's what we could give you. You deserve to be celebrated, Taya. Not just for turning eighteen, but for the woman you've become. Loyal. Fierce. Irreplaceable."

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Taya burst into tears. Not a dramatic breakdown, just silent, overwhelmed tears as she hugged the Luna tight and whispered, "Thank you. Thank you so much."

Aelira smiled and kissed the top of her head like a daughter. That broke me a little, ngl. Lyssira snorted in my head. "Buck up buttercup."

We all found seats around the long table. Daxon beside me, Rylen across from Taya, Jace already grabbing a roll like he hadn't eaten in five years. Ash stood behind his chair for a long moment before sitting, his eyes scanning the room like he was locking every memory in place.

Alpha Draven gave a short, respectful nod before raising his glass. "To strength. To unity. And to the girl whose fire lights this table tonight."

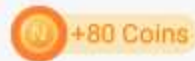
We all raised our glasses and clinked them over the center. Taya beamed.

Dinner was loud and full of teasing, mostly Jace, who kept trying to convince Ash to loosen up and "do shots like a real adult" (which Ash ignored with spectacular elegance).

Halfway through dessert, the double doors opened again, and in rolled the biggest birthday cake I had ever seen. Three tiers. Iced in white and silver. Topped with glowing candles that flickered with real magic.

I swear Ash rolled his eyes, but even he smiled when Taya's jaw dropped. Aelira leaned forward with a sly grin. "It's lemon cake with blackberry filling. Your favorite."

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Taya looked like she was going to combust. "I think I'm in love with the Luna," she whispered.

Rylen grunted. "You're not allowed to mate the Luna."

"Don't test me," she grinned, wiping her eyes and blowing out the candles.

Presents followed, enchanted daggers, a handwoven cloak from the Luna's own seamstress, spell stones carved with Taya's name, and a custom leather bound training log with her wolf Zuki hand painted on the cover.

She opened it and promptly ugly cried into her potatoes. We all laughed. And for the first time in what felt like forever... the room didn't feel like a war room.

It felt like home. Daxon's hand found mine under the table. Ash leaned in slightly and murmured, "Don't get used to this. Training at dawn."

"Bite me," I muttered, smiling. Taya stood at the head of the table, her eyes still wet and her cheeks flushed.

"Okay," she said. "I know everything's a mess right now. The world's on fire. Elowen's out here rewriting ancient prophecy like it's fanfiction. But this?" She looked around. "This is what I always dreamed pack life would feel like."

"And for the record," she added, raising her glass, "if anyone tries to take this from us, Aegis, the Council, or some crusty old blood purists, they're

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gonna have to fight all of us."

We howled in unison, loud, fierce, wild.

And this time, it wasn't about pain or power.

It was about belonging.

****Taya POV****

The moment we stepped out of the dining hall, I felt it.

The air was electric. My skin tingled, my heart was racing, and Zuki...my wild, red furred chaos queen of a wolf...was pacing like a caged animal in my mind.

Thirty minutes to midnight. Thirty minutes until I turned eighteen. And thirty minutes until the universe decided whether or not Rylen Verric was my mate.

We walked in silence through the Keep, our arms full of all my gifts. He kept glancing sideways at me, that confident little smirk of his cracking just slightly with nerves. My own hands were shaking as I opened the door to my new room and tossed everything onto the bed without a second glance.

"You wanna run?" he asked, already tugging his shirt over his head.

"Yes," I breathed. "Now."

We bolted for the back door, shifted mid run, and burst into the forest like

lightning. Zuki's red fur shimmered under the moonlight as she ran circles around Anton, Rylen's massive wolf, who gave chase with a playful growl. Trees blurred past. Leaves crackled beneath our paws. The moon climbed higher, higher...

And then it hit. Midnight. We skidded to a halt in the clearing. Zuki and Anton faced each other, noses twitching. The air changed. Cardamom. Campfire. Sunlight. Wildflowers. It was them. It was us.

A slow circle. A low whine. Their energy shifted from playful to primal in a heartbeat, and I swear I could feel my soul trembling as they moved toward each other, brushing noses, licking gently.

Rylen's voice in my mind was breathless. "It's real, Taya. You're mine."

"I'm yours," I whispered back, tears stinging my eyes.

And then our wolves gave in to their primal needs, wild, free and instinctive. Rylen and I respectfully retreated to the back of our minds as our wolves mated and bonded, this was private between them and there was no need for us to intrude. I felt peace. Happiness and contentment.

When they had finished, we shifted back and sneakily snuck back into the keep totally naked and giggling in each other's arms. The second the door shut behind us, I pressed him against it like I'd been waiting years instead of hours.

"Mine," I whispered, my breath ragged against his throat. He was pure

muscled perfection and I had to get onto my tippy toes just to kiss his massive tree ass.

He groaned, low and primal, his hands finding my hips and lifting me flush to his chest. "You have no idea how long I've wanted to hear that."

His mouth claimed mine again, hungry and insistent, all tongue and teeth and fire. We couldn't get close enough. My hands were everywhere, in his thick brown hair, down his broad muscled back, dragging along those ridiculous abs. I pressed kisses to the sharp line of his jaw, biting lightly, and he hissed through his teeth like I'd branded him.

He began to caress my skin...slow and reverent, his fingers skimming gently like I was something rare and sacred. When his lips found the swell of my breast, I gasped and arched into him, my nails digging into his shoulders. He cupped me gently, then not so gently, his mouth teasing, his tongue swirling.

I sucked in a breath, panting. "You're so fucking hot Rylen."

"Taya," he rasped, "I want to memorize every inch of you."

"You better," I panted. "I'm not letting you forget any of it."

He lifted me like I weighed nothing, carrying me to the bed, his eyes devouring me like I was the only thing that had ever mattered. He kissed down my belly, his mouth hot and worshipful, leaving a trail of fire in his wake. My legs trembled under his touch, his hands firm on my thighs as he

settled between them, looking up at me like a goddamn sinner at the altar.

And stars, did he sin. His mouth lowered over my clit and the breath from his mouth already gave me goosebumps. He flicked his tongue over my swollen nub and my hips bucked up into his face as he proceeded to devour my soaked pussy. I writhed and wiggled under him, moaning his name.

He took his time, learning every sound I made, every gasp, every plea. His tongue was sin, his fingers pure magic, and I was already coming undone before he ever even entered me.

When he rose above me, sweat slick and breathless, I wrapped my legs around his waist, my fingers tangled in his hair. "I want you," I whispered, voice shaking. "Now."

He paused, his gaze searing into mine. "Taya, are you sure? This... this is forever, and I know it's your first time." He searched my eyes, waiting patiently.

I kissed him like an answer, like a promise. "Then take forever," I whispered against his lips. "It's already yours."

He slid his thick cock into me slow and deep, with a groan that rattled straight through my bones. My body arched instinctively, clinging to him, wrapping around him like we were made for this. I froze for a second with the pain as he pushed past the barrier and I hissed slightly. He paused, "Are you ok?" I nodded and grinned as the pain began to fade and he

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slowly started moving. My eyes rolled back into my head. Gods. I did not know it could feel this way.

Every motion after that was a rhythm older than time.

His name spilled from my lips over and over again, his hands tangled with mine above my head, holding me in place while he moved inside me like he was mapping constellations with every thrust.

"Taya," he growled, his forehead pressed to mine. "You feel like heaven. Gods you're so tight."

"You are heaven," I moaned, tears burning behind my eyes. "Don't stop. Please don't ever stop."

The pressure built until I shattered, crying out his name, my body pulsing around his. He followed with a ragged curse and a broken groan, burying himself deep as the world exploded in silver light.

The bond took hold like lightning, searing and eternal.

My skin burned with pleasure and something ancient as our marks appeared, mine along my ribs, curling like vines in soft silver script. His flared across his chest, radiant and wild. We collapsed, tangled and breathless, our hearts racing in sync.

His arms wrapped tight around me, one kiss pressed to my shoulder, and I swear we both sighed in unison.

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Not just lovers. Not just mates.

Bound by fate, and I would never let him go. Not ever. Zuki howled her agreement in our mind link and Anton sleepily growled his happiness.



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