

## Chapter 1

I was dying at the banquet, coughing up black blood while the pack celebrated my step-sister Lydia's promotion.

Across the room, Caleb, the Alpha and my Fated Mate, didn't look concerned. He looked annoyed.

"Stop it, Elena," his voice boomed in my head. "Don't ruin this night with your attention-seeking lies."

I begged him, telling him it was poison, but he just ordered me to leave his Pack House so I wouldn't dirty the floor.

Heartbroken, I publicly demanded the Severing Ceremony to break our bond and left to die alone in a cheap motel.

Only after I took my last breath did the truth come out.

I sent Caleb the medical records proving Lydia had been poisoning my tea with wolfsbane for ten years.

He went mad with grief, realizing he had protected the murderer and rejected his true mate. He tortured Lydia, but his regret couldn't bring me back.

Or so he thought.

In the afterlife, the Moon Goddess showed me my reflection. I wasn't a wolfless weakling.

I was a White Wolf, the rarest and most powerful of all, suppressed by poison.

"You can stay here in peace," the Goddess said. "Or you can go back."

I looked at the life they stole from me. I looked at the power I never got to use.

"I want to go back," I said. "Not for his love. But for revenge."

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I opened my eyes, and for the first time in my life, my wolf roared.

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Elena POV:

The chandelier above the banquet hall spun dizzily, a kaleidoscope of crystal and light that mocked the darkness spreading through my veins. \*The air was choked with the smell of roasted venison, designer perfume, and the heavy, musk-laden pheromones of shifting wolves.\* To anyone else, this was the celebration of the year-Lydia, the pack's darling, had just been promoted to Elite Warrior. To me, it felt like a funeral.

I coughed, pressing a napkin to my lips. When I pulled it away, the white linen was stained with black flecks. It wasn't just blood. It was the rot.

"You don't have much time, Elena," the Pack Doctor whispered, leaning in close under the guise of checking my pulse. His eyes were cold, \*professional, and entirely bought.\* He was on my father's payroll, after all. "The wolfsbane has calcified in your marrow. Your Inner Wolf... I can't hear her anymore. She's likely already gone."

My Inner Wolf. The spirit that was supposed to guide me, protect me, and allow me to Shift. She had been silent for years, suppressed by the 'medicine' my step-sister Lydia ensured I took for my 'condition.'

I looked across the room. There he was. Caleb.

He stood tall, his shoulders broad in a tailored tuxedo that couldn't hide the lethal power of the Alpha beast beneath his skin. He was laughing at something Lydia said, his hand resting possessively on the small of her back.

The sight tore through me sharper than any blade. Caleb was the Alpha of the Black Moon Pack. He was the most powerful wolf in the region. And he was my Fated Mate.

The Moon Goddess had paired us, soul to soul. But he didn't want a broken, wolfless Omega. He wanted a warrior like Lydia.

I closed my eyes and reached out with my mind, tapping into the Mind-Link. It was the telepathic web that connected every member of the pack, a hum of voices I usually blocked out. I focused solely on him.

\*Caleb... please,\* I projected, my mental voice trembling. \*I need help. It hurts. I think I'm dying.\*

Across the room, Caleb stiffened. His laughter cut off. He turned, his eyes locking onto me. \*There was a flicker of something-concern? instinct?-before it was smothered by annoyance.\*

\*Stop it, Elena,\* his voice boomed in my head, cold and hard as granite. \*Don't ruin this night with your attention-seeking lies.\*

\*It's not a lie,\* I pleaded, the pain in my chest spiking as the bond between us vibrated with his rejection. \*The doctor said.\*

\*I said silence!\*

The mental command slammed into me. He didn't just speak; he used the Alpha's Authority. It was a psychic weight that forced my head down, crushing my will. But the physical pain in my lungs was stronger. I couldn't hold it back.

I bent over, hacking violently. A spray of dark blood hit the pristine white tablecloth, splattering onto the floor.

The music stopped. The chatter died.

Caleb was there in a second. Not to help, but to loom over me like a thunderhead.

"Did you drink the wine?" he snarled, his voice echoing in the silent hall. "You know your weak human body can't handle alcohol. Look at this mess."

"It's... poison," I wheezed, looking up at him. "Caleb, look at the blood. It's black."

"It's red wine, \*you drama queen\*, he spat.

"Oh no, Elena!" Lydia appeared at his side, her face a mask of perfect, worried innocence. She grabbed Caleb's arm. "She's doing it again, Caleb. She's jealous because I got the promotion. She always gets sick when I succeed."

"\*Get her out of here,\*" my mother, Sarah, growled through the Mind-Link. Her voice was a jagged knife in my brain. \*Get up and leave before I drag you out by your hair. You're embarrassing the family.\*

I looked at Caleb. My mate. The man who was supposed to cherish me above all others. He looked at the blood on the floor, then at his polished shoes, which had a single drop on the toe.

Disgust. That was all I saw.

"If you're going to die, Elena," Caleb said, his voice low and cruel, "do it somewhere else. Don't dirty my Pack House."

Something inside me snapped. It wasn't a bone. It was the last thread of hope I had been clinging to since I was eighteen.

The pain didn't stop, but the fear vanished. It was replaced by a cold, hollow numbness.

I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand, smearing the black toxin across my pale skin. I stood up. My legs shook, but I locked my knees.

"You're right, Alpha," I said aloud. My voice was raspy, but it carried. "I won't dirty your house anymore."

I turned my gaze to the High Elder, who sat at the head table, watching the scene with a frown.

"Elder," I said. "I want the Severing."

Gasps rippled through the room. The Severing Ceremony was an ancient, agonizing ritual to forcefully break a Mate Bond. It was rarely done, and usually only when one mate had committed a grave crime.

Caleb's eyes widened, then narrowed into slits. He grabbed my arm, his fingers digging into my bruise-riddled flesh.

"You think you can threaten me?" he hissed. "You think this little stunt will make me care? You're bluffing."

"I am not bluffing," I whispered. "I am leaving."

"Then go!" Caleb roared. "He shoved me away."

"I stumbled back, losing my footing on the slick floor." My head cracked against the marble.

"Get out!" he used the Alpha Voice. "Roll!"

My body obeyed before my mind could. I scrambled backward, humiliated, broken, while Lydia smirked behind his shoulder.

I stood up, swaying. I didn't look at him. I looked at the exit.

My Inner Wolf let out one final, mournful whimper, a sound of absolute despair, and then she went silent. This time, I knew she wasn't just sleeping. She was gone.