

## Chapter 2

Elena POV:

The pain of the Severing Ceremony was not physical. It was spiritual amputation.

I sat in the center of the Elder's study, surrounded by burning sage and salt circles. The Elder chanted in the old tongue, his voice a low drone that vibrated against my ribs.

Every word he spoke felt like a serrated hook digging into my chest, finding the golden thread that connected my soul to Caleb's, and pulling.

"Do you, Elena of the Black Moon Pack, accept the eternal void that comes with severing the Fated Bond?" the Elder asked, his eyes sad.

"I do," I said. I didn't hesitate. The bond was already a noose; I was just cutting the rope.

"So be it."

The Elder brought a silver ceremonial knife down, slicing the air between us.

A scream tore from my throat. It felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest cavity without anesthesia. I curled into a ball on the rug, gasping, clawing at the floorboards. The connection—that constant, background hum of Caleb's presence, his emotions, his location—vanished.

Silence. Absolute, terrifying silence.

I lay there for a long time until the tremors stopped. When I stood up, I felt lighter. And emptier.

I walked back to my room. It wasn't really a room anymore. It used to be the Luna Suite, destined for Caleb's mate. But after I failed to shift at eighteen, Lydia had gradually taken it over. Now, it was a glorified storage closet filled with Lydia's old trophies, winter coats, and boxes. My cot was shoved in the corner.

I sat on the thin mattress and pulled out a small wooden box from under the bed. Inside was a photo of me at eighteen, smiling, hopeful, waiting for my wolf to come. That was before the sickness. Before the 'vitamins'

Lydia gave me.

My phone buzzed on the crate I used as a nightstand.

"Hello?" I answered.

"Ms. Elena? This is Moonlight Crypts," a professional voice said. "We're calling about your reservation. The payment for the plot was declined."

I closed my eyes. Even in death, I was broke. My parents had cut off my allowance years ago.

"I... I see. Just cancel it," I said softly. "I'll figure something else out."

"Are you sure? The body disposal fee will still apply if-"

The door to my room banged open.

Caleb stood there, chest heaving. He looked wild. His tie was undone, his hair messy. He was breathing hard, inhaling deeply, his nostrils flaring.

"Where is it?" he demanded.

"Where is what?" I asked, not bothering to stand.

"The smell! The jasmine!" He took a step forward, looking around the cramped, dusty room as if searching for an intruder. "It just... stopped. Why can't I smell you?"

The scent. The unique olfactory signature of a mate. Now that the bond was severed, to him, I would smell like nothing more than a regular wolf. Or in my case, a sickly human.

"I told you, Caleb," I said, my voice flat. "I severed the bond."

He froze. He stared at me, processing the words. "His expression wasn't just anger anymore; there was a flicker of genuine confusion, like a man who stepped off a curb and found no ground beneath him." Then, his eyes fell on the phone in my hand. He must have heard the tail end of the conversation.

"Who were you talking to?" he barked.

"A funeral home," I answered honestly.

His face twisted in rage. "He snatched the phone from my hand and hurled it against the wall." It shattered.

"Stop it!" he yelled. The walls shook. "Stop trying to manipulate me with this suicide garbage! You think buying a grave plot will make me pity you? It makes me hate you more!"

He grabbed my shoulders and hauled me up. "You are cursing this Pack with your obsession with death. You are the Alpha's Mate, and you live in a closet, planning your own funeral like a martyr."

"I am not your mate," I said, meeting his furious golden eyes. "Not anymore."

"You will always be what I say you are!" He used the Alpha Voice again. "Kneel!"

My knees hit the floor hard. The command bypassed my brain and controlled my muscles directly.

I looked up at him from the ground. He looked powerful, beautiful, and utterly monstrous.

"Do you remember, Caleb?" I asked softly. "When we were eighteen. You swore to the Moon Goddess you would protect me."

He sneered, looking down his nose at me. "The Moon Goddess makes mistakes. She paired a lion with a mouse. You aren't fit to be Luna. You aren't even fit to be a wolf."

His words should have hurt. But the part of me that could be hurt by him was dead.

"You're right," I said. "I'm not Luna."

He scoffed and turned around, storming out of the room. He slammed the door so hard dust rained down from the ceiling.

I stayed on the floor for a moment. Then, I crawled over to my broken phone. The screen was cracked, but it still worked.

I opened my email draft. It was a scheduled message, set to send in forty-eight hours. Attached were my medical records, the logs of the 'medicine' Lydia gave me, and a recording I had made of my parents discussing how ashamed they were of me.

I added one line to the body of the email: \*Congratulations, Caleb. You're free.\*