

Chapter 3

Elena POV:

I woke up to the sound of birds chirping, a cruel contrast to the fact that I had roughly two days left to live. The poison was moving faster now. I could feel my kidneys shutting down, a dull, throbbing ache in my lower back.

I had barely sat up when my father, John, burst into the room.

"Get up!" he roared.

I flinched. "Father?"

"Don't call me that. You embarrassed us last night. Leaving the banquet? Making a scene with the Elder?" He paced the small room, kicking a box of Lydia's old shoes. "Lydia has been crying all morning because she feels responsible for your 'moods.'"

"She's crying?" I asked dryly. "That must be terrible for her."

"Watch your tone," he warned. "You are going to go downstairs, and you are going to apologize to your sister. And then you are going to help her prepare the floral arrangements for the ceremony tonight."

I didn't have the energy to fight. I pulled on a loose sweater to hide the bruises on my arms and followed him downstairs.

The living room was filled with flowers. White lilies, roses, and... Moon Flowers.

Lydia sat on the sofa, dabbing at dry eyes with a silk handkerchief. When she saw me, she brightened.

"Elena! Oh, I'm so glad you're here." She stood up and grabbed a bundle of the Moon Flowers. They were beautiful, glowing with a faint pearlescent light, but their pollen was potent. "I need you to weave these into a crown for me."

I stared at the flowers. "Lydia, you told the whole pack you were deadly allergic to Moon Flowers three years ago. You said I tried to poison you with them."

That lie had cost me three lashes from the pack enforcer.

Lydia's smile didn't waver. She leaned in close, her voice a whisper only I could hear. "I know. But Caleb isn't here right now to fact-check, is he? And you're going to hold them."

"No," I said, stepping back.

"What is going on here?" Caleb's voice boomed from the entryway. He had just come in from a morning run, shirtless, glistening with sweat.

"Caleb!" Lydia gasped. "I was just trying to bond with Elena. I asked her to help me with the flowers, but she refuses. She says she hopes I choke on them."

"I didn't say that," I said calmly.

"She's lying!" Lydia shrieked. Then, she did something insane. She grabbed my hand and forcibly shoved the bouquet of Moon Flowers into it.

In the struggle, she deftly brushed her own neck. I saw a flash of powder on her fingertips-itching powder mixed with a mild irritant.

"Ah!" Lydia screamed, dropping to the floor. She clawed at her throat. Instantly, red welts began to rise on her skin. "My throat! She rubbed the pollen on me! Caleb, help!"

My parents rushed in from the kitchen. "What did you do, you monster?" my mother screamed.

Caleb didn't ask questions. He didn't look for logic. He saw his 'true' choice of mate on the floor, gasping for air, and me standing there holding the flowers.

He moved faster than human eyes could follow.

He didn't punch me, but he shoved me aside with the careless force of an Alpha clearing debris.

I hit the wall hard. The impact knocked the wind out of me. I slid down to the floor, gasping, my vision blurring. My ribs-already brittle from the poison-*groaned under the pressure.*

"You dare?" Caleb roared, his eyes flashing the bright amber of his wolf. "You dare hurt her in my presence?"

He scooped Lydia up in his arms. She buried her face in his chest, sobbing loudly, but over his muscular arm, her eyes met mine.

She winked.

It was a look of pure malice. A victory lap.

"Get her out of my sight," Caleb growled to my father, nodding at me. "Before I kill her myself."

I lay on the floor, unable to breathe, watching the man I loved cradle the woman who was murdering me.

"Don't worry," I whispered, though none of them heard me. "I'll be out of your sight soon enough."