

## Chapter 4

Caleb POV:

The rage was a living thing inside me. It clawed at my chest, demanding blood. Seeing Lydia on the floor, gasping, her skin red and angry, triggered every protective instinct my Alpha blood possessed.

But beneath the rage, there was something else. A nagging, hollow ache.

When I had shoved Elena, when I felt her frail body hit the wall, a jolt of agonizing static had shot through my nerves. It felt wrong. Physically wrong. Like hitting myself. \*I looked at my hand, flexing the fingers. Why did she feel so... breakable?\*

I looked down at Lydia, who was now breathing easier after my mother applied a cooling salve.

"Is she gone?" Lydia whimpered.

"Not yet," I said. I stood up and turned to where Elena was trying to push herself up from the floor.

She looked like a ghost. Her skin was translucent, her eyes sunken. She held her side, and I could hear the wet rattle in her breath. Why didn't she heal? Even an Omega should heal a bruised rib in an hour. She had been 'sick' for years, but today... she looked like a corpse walking.

"Caleb," she wheezed.

"Silence," I commanded. \*But my voice lacked its usual thunder. It was tired.\*

I couldn't have her here. Her presence was poison to the pack. She attacked Lydia. She disrupted the banquet. She was mentally unstable. \*Seeing her like this... it made me feel like a failure. And I hated feeling like a failure.\*

I had to do what an Alpha must do. \*Cut the rotting limb to save the tree.\*

"Elena," I said, my voice echoing with the full weight of the Pack Law. "I, Caleb, Alpha of the Black Moon Pack, hereby banish you."

The room went silent. Banishment for a lone, weak wolf was a death sentence. Rogues were hunted. They had no territory, no protection.

Elena didn't cry. She didn't beg. She just nodded slowly, as if she had expected this.

"You are no longer Pack," I continued, the ancient magic of the words severing the final mystical ties that bound her to the land. "Leave now. If you are found within our borders by sundown, you will be treated as a hostile intruder."

"Understood," she said.

She walked past me. She didn't look at me. She didn't look at her parents, who stood by the stairs with their arms crossed, looking relieved.

She walked out the front door.

A sudden, irrational panic seized me. \*Stop her,\* my wolf growled in the back of my mind. \*Mate. Mate leaving.\*

\*She is not our mate,\* I argued back, \*clenching my fists.\* \*She severed the bond. She is a threat to Lydia.\*

I followed her to the porch. I needed to see her leave. I needed to be sure.

Elena walked down the long driveway. She reached the stone pillars that marked the boundary of the pack lands. She stopped.

She turned around. For a second, I thought she would apologize.

Instead, she looked up at the sky.

"I swear by the Moon," she said, her voice carrying on the wind. "I will never look back. And for the sin of driving away your true Luna, may you find what you are looking for, and realize it is ash."

She stepped over the line.

\*Snap.\*

I felt it physically. It wasn't the bond—that was already gone. It was the Pack Link. Her light in the mental web winked out completely.

My knees buckled. I grabbed the porch railing to steady myself. My chest felt like it had been scooped out with a spoon.

"Caleb?" Lydia called from inside. "My throat hurts again."

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 +120 Points at most

I gritted my teeth, pushing down the overwhelming sense of loss. "I'm coming, Lydia."

I turned my back on the forest. But my hand, gripping the railing, squeezed until the wood splintered.



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