

## Chapter 8

Caleb POV:

We tore apart Lydia's room first. It didn't take long. Behind a loose floorboard under her vanity, we found it. Vials of liquid wolfsbane. A bag of silver powder. And a journal detailing dosages.

\*I had my guards drag Lydia from the bridal shop. She was screaming, confused, still clutching a swatch of silk.\*

\*"Caleb! What is this?" she shrieked as I threw the journal at her feet.\*

I forced Lydia to touch the bouquet of Moon Flowers in the vase.

She grabbed them, confused. "What are you doing, Caleb? These are for the wedding!"

Nothing happened. No rash. No choking. She held the flowers that she claimed nearly killed her, and she looked perfectly healthy.

"Liar," I snarled. I didn't kill her then. Death was too easy. \*"Throw her in the cells. If she speaks, gag her.\*"

Then, I went to the motel.

The door to Room 4 was open. The smell hit me instantly.

Old blood. Fear. And the metallic tang of silver.

I walked in. The bed was stripped. There was a dark stain on the mattress. On the wall, a spray of dried blood showed where someone had been hit.

John fell to his knees. He picked up something from the corner. It was a small, wooden sword.

"I made this for her," he sobbed, clutching the toy to his chest. "When she was five. She wanted to be a warrior like me. I told her... I told her to throw it away when she didn't shift."

Sarah was tracing the blood on the wall with her fingertips, her face a mask of horror. "This is my baby's blood. She was here. Alone."

My wolf whined, a high-pitched sound of distress. The scent trail led out the back door, into the woods.

We followed it. The trail was weak, the scent of a dying creature dragging itself to a final resting place.

It led us to Rosa's Diner.

The lights were off. The "Closed" sign was crooked in the window. But there was a smell coming from inside.

It wasn't food. It was the scent of death. Cold, sterile, final.

I stepped onto the porch. The door opened before I could touch the handle.

Rosa stood there. She looked small, an old woman in a faded apron. But in her hand, she held a dagger made of pure silver. And her eyes were harder than the metal.

"Get back," she said. Her voice wasn't loud, but it carried the weight of a mountain.

"Rosa," I pleaded, my Alpha authority crumbling into dust. "Is she here? Please. Let me see her."

"You?" Rosa spat on the ground near my boot. "You want to see her now? You had eighteen years to look at her, Caleb. You looked at her and saw trash. You looked at her and saw a mistake."

"I know," I choked out. Tears blurred my vision. "I know I failed. But she is my mate."

"She *was* your mate," Rosa corrected coldly. "Now, she belongs to the Goddess. You don't get to mourn her. You don't get to say goodbye. You are the reason she is dead."

She raised the knife. "Take one more step, Alpha, and I will carve out your heart. And I won't even need this silver to do it. Your guilt will do the rest."



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