

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna chapter 41-50

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

Her brows were naturally arched, like they were always judging the world, or me. Her nose was small and delicate, and those lashes, dark and thick, casting shadows over her cheeks. When she tilted her head just right, it gave her that sultry, half-daring look she wore without trying. The same one she had when I kissed her.

My gaze dropped to her lips, full, soft, and slightly parted in sleep. I had the sudden, almost painful urge to trace them.

Her skin, pale as moonlight and smooth. I ached to touch her. To mark her. To make her mine again and again.

But instead, I just stood there.

Watching. Wanting.

Waiting.

She barely reached my chest, small in frame but lush in all the right places. I remembered too vividly how that body had felt the moment she opened her eyes beneath mine, warm and soft, trembling yet fearless. The memory alone stirred something primal in me, had my body reacting before I could will it not to. It was maddening, how easily she got under my skin.

Vivian was a paradox, innocence wrapped in the kind of temptation that would bring lesser men to their knees. Every subtle movement she made, every breath, every flutter of her lashes, pulled at the animal inside me. And not just me. Any male with working instincts would feel it. That's why I couldn't risk letting her out of my sight. She was danger dressed in sweetness, and I had to lock that danger away, for her safety and everyone else's.

I reached down, winding a strand of her silky dark hair around my fingers, letting the texture soothe my fraying thoughts. It was almost a habit now, touching her, needing to know she was real.

She shifted on the bed beside me, inching closer until our bodies nearly touched. A small sigh slipped from her lips, soft and almost relieved, like some part of her recognized me even in sleep and chose me anyway. The tension in her brows faded. I didn't need sleep like most wolves did, hell, I didn't need it at all. But since Vivian arrived, I'd started following her to bed, not because I needed rest, but because I needed her. Watching her breathe. Hearing the steady beat of her heart. It lulled me like nothing else ever had, and I had lived long enough to know that was not a small thing.

It should've been unsettling, this obsession. But it wasn't. It was grounding.

What had she done to me?

Before her, my pleasures had been simpler. Land. Power. War. Blood. The satisfaction of victory, clean and uncomplicated, repeated until it lost whatever meaning it had started with. I had taken what I wanted from the world and given nothing back because there was nothing I cared to give. I moved through centuries like a force of weather, indifferent to what I leveled. There had been others in my bed, over the years. Warmth of a kind. But I had never stayed to watch them breathe. Never found myself counting heartbeats. Never sat in the dark simply because another person was sleeping in it and I didn't want to be anywhere else. Then she arrived, chained to my bed and furious about it, and somehow the ground had shifted. Now I felt warmth just by sitting beside her. Peace. And that, that terrified me more than any blade ever could.

I shook the thoughts away and glanced at her neck, still bare. No mark. No symbol that she was mine.

The bond was incomplete. Uncertain. And that uncertainty gnawed at me like poison. I couldn't afford to wait. I needed to make my claim, one way or another. Not that anyone would dare touch her. They knew better. But possibility was a dangerous thing. I'd once built a kingdom on possibility and it nearly destroyed me.

A dozen ways to mark her flickered through my mind, some ancient, others brutal, but one idea brought a smirk to my lips.

"I wonder how she feels about tattoos."

The files on your desk. Albericus's voice echoed in my head.

I didn't reply. Instead, I gave Vivian one last lingering look and slipped out of the room, making my way down the dark corridor to my office. Albericus waited inside, standing beside the desk with that ever-present knowing look on his face.

I picked up the green file and flipped it open, scanning through the contents. Vivian's work. Her data. Everything we'd tested and pulled together.

"Pass this along: from now on, no more kiwi on the island. Shut down all imports. Tell the pack to eat what's left or dump it. Anyone who has a problem with it can come to me directly," I said, eyes still on the papers.

Albericus raised a brow. "And may I ask why?"

I glanced up, catching the flicker of amusement in his expression.

"She's allergic," I said simply.

He chuckled, but I could tell he understood. No risks. Not with her.

He leaned forward, tapping the folder impatiently. "So? What's it say?"

I didn't answer right away. I combed through the text again, cautious. I couldn't miss anything. Not now.

"According to this, after twenty-four hours, my blood returned to baseline. No abnormalities. No reaction to the contact with hers. Everything seems..." My voice trailed off as my eyes caught something further down the page.

"Interesting," I muttered. "Very interesting."

Albericus straightened. "What is? What's interesting?"

I passed the file to him, watching as his eyes darted across the page. I saw it the moment it hit him, surprise, then disbelief, then silent awe.

"You're right. That's... wow. That's something."

I nodded slowly, thoughts already moving.

"Indeed."

Whatever fog I'd been living in lifted in a single instant. I stood at the window for a long moment, the night pressing dark and close against the glass, and turned the implications carefully over in my mind. If the results meant what I thought they meant, everything I'd been waiting for was already in motion.

And the storm rolling in? It had my name written all over it.

Time to stop waiting and start moving. Whatever those results said about her, about us, it changed the timeline. It changed absolutely everything.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

I hadn't laid eyes on Zaliver since he shackled me the night before. Honestly, that might've been for the best, because if I had, I'm not sure I wouldn't have strangled him with the very chains he used on me. The thought was more satisfying than it should've been.

Even my wolf was irritated. For once, we were aligned in our fury. She wasn't letting him off the hook for his impulsive, infuriating behavior, and neither was I. His reasoning? Absolutely ridiculous. He knew it too, whether he wanted to admit it or not. Somewhere beneath all that Alpha arrogance, he had to realize it.

All I'd done was put a hand on another guy's shoulder! That was all it took for him to snap like a jealous pup? It wasn't like I kissed the guy or ran off into the woods with him to elope.

I'd tried everything I could think of to get these damn chains off. I'd tugged, twisted, even chewed on them, bad idea, by the way. I tried slipping my hands through, breaking the metal, anything. Nothing worked. The chains barely had a scratch on them. Figures.

I glanced at the clock. 8:50 AM. I groaned, not just out of frustration but from pure exhaustion. I had slept at some point, but it was fleeting. I couldn't find comfort. Not without him.

As much as I hated admitting it, I missed Zaliver's warmth. The solid weight of his body beside mine, his arms wrapped around me like a living cocoon. I wanted to press my face into his chest, feel his lips trail against my skin. It was maddening. How had I spent almost eighteen years perfectly fine on my own, only to fall apart after two nights tangled up with my mate?

I threw my head back into the pillows, letting out another long groan. I was pathetic. One minute I wanted to snap his neck, the next I was aching to be near him. Was this what being mated was supposed to feel like? A constant tug-of-war between fury and yearning?

And did he feel it too? Was he just as affected, or was all of this one-sided?

Last night, wrapped in silence and solitude, I'd had time to really think. His talk about marking me, it haunted my thoughts. Was he finally going to do it? The idea sent a thrill through my chest and a sharp edge of panic.

Excitement came from the bond. From the idea of finally being his, truly. But the fear? That came from everything else.

First, there was the act of marking itself, intimate, deeply primal, and incredibly arousing. Not exactly something you could mentally prepare for. Second, there was the aftermath. Once marked, I'd be his. His in every sense of the word. Zaliver's possessiveness was already stifling. Once the mark was there? I'd be trapped. Not metaphorically. Literally.

And I wasn't even sure he wanted to mark me for the right reasons. Was it love? Was it devotion? Or was it just another way to claim and control me like territory? That question stung more than I cared to admit.

A knock on the door snapped me from my spiraling thoughts.

My ears perked. Maybe it was him. Maybe he'd come to unchain me and apologize. Or at the very least, give me a chance to yell at him face-to-face.

But when the door creaked open, it wasn't Zaliver.

It was a round baby bump.

"Hannah," I said, trying to sound casual as I waved despite being cuffed to a damn bed. I had to wonder what kind of impression this left on her. Was she imagining some kinky Alpha-Luna playtime? Or that I was some kidnapped damsel? Neither version really worked for me.

She entered the room with a tray of food in her hands, her soft giggle letting me know she had, in fact, noticed my awkward situation. She set the tray down beside me, French toast, orange juice, and a bright fruit salad. My stomach growled traitorously.

"Alpha asked me to keep you company," she said, easing herself onto the nearby couch. "Didn't tell me why, but..." She glanced at my bound wrists with a knowing smile. "I think I get it now. So, what did you do?"

I arched a brow and grabbed the fork, stabbing a strawberry with more force than necessary. "Why do you assume I did something wrong?" I asked, glaring at her playful smirk. "Why isn't he the one who's wrong? Why isn't he chained up while I go off and enjoy my freedom, huh?"

I shoved the strawberry into my mouth, chewing so aggressively I bit my own lip. Perfect.

Hannah blinked at me innocently, but I could see the teasing glimmer in her eyes. She was having way too much fun with this.

I groaned and flopped back against the pillows. Everything about Zaliver drove me insane, from his temper to his tenderness. And I had no idea whether I wanted to kiss him or kill him.

Maybe both.

"Ow! That actually hurts!" I groaned, cupping my aching jaw. My lip stung as it began to heal on its own, the familiar tang of blood fading from my tongue. Shifters healed fast, but that didn't mean it didn't sting like hell in the meantime.

Hannah just rolled her eyes at my dramatics, one hand rubbing gentle circles over her round belly.

"I'm sure you like the idea of tying up our Alpha every now and then," she teased, "but I doubt he's into that kind of thing. Then again, maybe? Who knows." She shrugged, then narrowed her eyes at me in mock seriousness. "And by the way, you do know we have these wonderful things called phones now, right?"

I blinked at her, caught off guard by the sharp turn in conversation.

"They're magical," she went on, sarcasm thick. "You can use them to call someone, or even text, imagine that! Record your brother being an idiot, snap pictures of your mate when he's brooding and hot, and oh, I don't know, maybe remind yourself of a doctor's appointment. Super useful. Yes, I sound like the tiger from the cereal. Don't judge me."

Despite myself, I chuckled. Her energy was exactly the kind I needed. It was hard to stay broody around her.

I nibbled on my food as she sat across from me, clearly content with her little speech.

But then she added, in a very matter-of-fact tone, "You're still in the wrong."

I paused mid-chew. "What? How exactly?" I reached for the glass of orange juice beside me, trying not to frown.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"Well," she said, as if it were obvious, "you're unmarked, unmated, and seriously pretty. That's basically waving a juicy piece of chicken in The Hunger Games."

I blinked. "Wait, what?"

She tilted her head. "What?"

"Have you actually seen The Hunger Games?" I asked, suspicious now.

She looked almost offended. "No. Why?"

I had to laugh. "Because it's not about food. I mean, sure, hunger's in the title, but it's really not what you think. It's more like a survival death match. They pick a bunch of people, throw them in a forest, and make them fight each other to the death. Last one standing wins. No chicken involved."

Her face twisted in horrified disbelief. "You're kidding."

"Nope."

She huffed, muttering under her breath, "Why would they call it The Hunger Games if no one's starving for food?"

I shrugged. "Beats me. Humans are weird."

"Right?" she agreed quickly, sighing. Then she glanced down at her belly with a smirk. "Wanna know why I haven't watched it yet?"

There was something mischievous in her eyes that made me pause. "Why?"

She pointed at her bump. "One word: honeymoon. This little bean didn't make itself. Well, it'd be cool if it did, but unless immaculate conception's a thing again, I'm definitely not a virgin."

"Ugh, TMI!" I grimaced, laughing and trying not to imagine it. "Glad to hear you got some, though."

We both burst into laughter. For the first time in days, I felt like I was just a girl talking to another girl. Not a prisoner. Not a Luna. Just me. Vivian.

Eventually, I finished my food while we chatted about everything and nothing. Then her phone rang.

I tried not to eavesdrop, but let's be honest, I was literally chained to the bed, and she was the only form of entertainment I had.

"This is your wife speaking," she answered cheerfully.

I arched a brow. Brave. What if it wasn't her mate? That'd be awkward real fast. But she just smiled at me like she knew exactly what I was thinking.

A male voice came through the speaker, sounding both relieved and mildly frantic. "Glad to hear that, honey. How are you? Do you need anything? What about the baby?"

"I'm fine, Mark. Baby's fine too," she said, her voice softening in a way that caught me off guard. Even with just her side of the conversation, I could feel the love between them. It pulsed in her eyes, raw and genuine.

"Good. Let me know if you need anything, okay?"

"You called me, remember?" she teased. "Besides the check-up, what else do you need?"

I glanced away politely and started fidgeting with my fingers, trying to give her a sliver of privacy even though it was kind of pointless.

"Oh right, sorry. Uh, oh! Johnson's at the house rearranging the baby's room. Says it's his duty as the world's best uncle to pimp it out—"

Before he could finish, Hannah shot up from her seat with all the fire of an angry goddess.

"Sorry, Viv! Gotta go. That idiot is not allowed near my baby's room unsupervised. How could you let him in, Mark?!" she barked into the phone, her eyes wide with fury.

I burst into laughter as she rushed out, her waddle surprisingly fast and fierce for someone so far along. Pregnant or not, that woman could take down a whole pack on sheer willpower alone. Poor Johnson didn't stand a chance.

When the door shut behind her, the silence settled differently than before. Not the heavy, pressing kind I'd woken up to this morning. Something lighter. Hannah had taken the edge off without even trying. That was her gift, I was starting to realize. She walked into a room and rearranged the air without even knowing she was doing it.

I stayed there for a moment, just breathing, and let myself feel it. The strange, uncomplicated warmth of having someone around who treated me like a person instead of a problem. Then I sighed, shook it off, and started thinking practically.

Why hadn't Zaliver linked with me? Was he avoiding me, or just busy?

Maybe it was time I found a phone. I'd feel less helpless if I could at least reach out to him. Even if it was just to yell.

But first, a shower.

I stretched as I rose from the bed, the satisfying crack of my joints breaking the quiet. The cold bite of metal tugged against my ankles as I moved, the chains clinking along behind me like an unwanted shadow. When I reached the bathroom, I left the door cracked open, annoyed at the necessity. Everyone knows you don't shower with the door open, basic horror movie survival instinct. But the chains didn't care about horror movie rules.

I stepped under the water and let the heat do its job. The steam rose around me, curling into the corners of the room, and for a few minutes I stopped thinking about marks and blood tests and what the particular look on Zaliver's face meant when he went quiet in a certain way. I just stood there under the hot water. Breathed. Let myself simply exist for a moment without anyone needing anything from me.

The shampoo smelled like sweet fruits and lavender. It smelled like mine.

When I stepped out and wrapped a towel around myself, the bathroom door had been pushed fully open by the weight of the chains. I frowned at it, already knowing it was fine, already knowing no one had been there. Still. The habit of checking didn't die easily when you were a she-wolf who'd been through what I had this week.

I padded across the room toward the closet, and that's when I saw it.

A laptop. Sitting on the bed. And beside it, a note.

My heart jumped. I crossed to it slowly, like approaching it too fast might make it disappear, and picked up the note. It was short, written in precise, sharp strokes that screamed control and confidence, the handwriting of a man who had never second-guessed a single letter he'd put on a page.

I read it.

Then I read it again, slower this time, like the words might rearrange themselves into something more believable if I gave them long enough.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

Vivian,

I know you're bored out of your mind, so here's something to keep you entertained. It's fully set up. Just stay away from any social media for now. I'm trusting you.

I'll see you at nine.

You will be marked.

P.S. Next time, lock the damn door when you shower. If I hadn't told the others to stay away from this floor, I don't need to finish that thought.

You have a stunning figure, my dear.

You are mine.

Zaliver.

I didn't know what my face looked like, but it had to be a mix of at least seven emotions, shock, embarrassment, fury, relief, amusement, joy, and then more mortification. He'd been here. While I was showering. And he saw me? I could feel my whole face heating up, like my skin had caught fire.

"Oh my goddess," I groaned, squeezing my eyes shut.

He was here. While I was in the shower. The realization hit in waves. First, the horror. Second, the embarrassment. Third, the deeply inconvenient awareness that he'd called it stunning and not, say, average, or fine, or any of the other things I'd told myself in bathroom mirrors over the years. I pressed the back of my hand to my face. It was on fire.

"I can't believe he peeked," I muttered, eyes wide with disbelief.

Sure, back home I never had to lock a door. Nobody barged into your bathroom in a house where privacy was a given. But clearly those days were behind me. New territory, new rules, new man who apparently had zero respect for closed doors and a very specific opinion about what he saw behind them. I made a mental note to start locking the outer door from now on, even if it meant dragging the chains with me to do it.

Still, I couldn't help the little giggle that escaped when I read the ending again. You are mine. The possessiveness in those words should've made me angry. Instead, it sent a thrill right through me, straight down to my toes, and I hated how much I didn't hate it.

He's not going to try to mark you, my wolf chimed in, her tone light and buzzing with excitement. He's going to. It's happening.

I swallowed, nerves tangling with anticipation. The way she said it left no room for denial. Nine o'clock. That was just hours away.

The marking. I'd been trying not to think about it too directly, the same way you don't look straight at the sun. I knew it was there. I knew it was coming. And I knew that once it happened, something about the shape of my life would change permanently. Whether that change was terrifying or wonderful or both was something I hadn't worked out yet.

Probably both.

I shook the thought away and walked to the closet. My fingers brushed over the clothes I'd picked up the day before, settling on a sleeveless navy dress that was both soft and easy to move in. Zaliver's oversized shirts were comfy, sure, but I needed to feel like me again.

Matching underwear, thank goddess I'd bought a set yesterday. How else would I have managed with these stupid chains dragging on everything? The bra was a pain though, the

straps kept tugging awkwardly at my shoulders, so I unhooked them and wore it strapless. Small victories.

After pulling on some socks, I made my way to the bed and sat down in front of the laptop. The chains settled around my ankles with a familiar clink. I'd almost stopped noticing the sound, which was either a sign that I was adapting or a sign that something was deeply wrong with me. Probably the latter.

I thought about what Hannah had said this morning, about phones, about reaching out. I thought about my parents, who I hadn't spoken to since the night my mother pressed that worn-out map into my palm and let me go. I thought about Gwen, holding a pack together without an Alpha. And I thought about what Zaliver had said, that eventually he'd let me call them. If I behaved.

I was on my best behavior. Mostly. The chains were helping with that, whether I liked it or not.

I booted the laptop up, watching the screen flicker to life.

But the background, it wasn't just some generic wallpaper or a company logo like I'd expected.

It was something different. Something chosen. Deliberate.

I leaned in to take a better look.

The image was a photograph, or something close to it. A wolf, but not just any wolf. She was enormous, elegant, and luminous, her coat a deep caramel that darkened toward her tail until it was nearly black. A single patch of ebony fur marked the tip of her left ear.

I went very still.

That was me.

Not a picture anyone had taken of me, obviously. I'd never shifted anywhere with a camera nearby, and even if I had, nobody knew what my wolf looked like except Zaliver. This was something else, a painting or a digital rendering, impossibly detailed, impossibly accurate. Every marking exact. Every shade of my coat right. The wolf in the image sat on a high rock, looking out over dark water, and despite the stillness of the pose, she looked anything but tame. She looked powerful. Certain of herself in a way I wasn't sure I'd ever felt in my human skin.

She looked like she belonged to herself.

I sat back slowly, chest doing something complicated that I didn't have a name for yet.

He'd had this made. He'd had someone recreate what he saw when I shifted, put it on this laptop, and left it here for me to find. He didn't write that in the note. He didn't explain it

or make a speech about it. He just left it, quiet and deliberate, the way he did everything that actually cost him something to show.

I read the note one more time, slower now.

You are mine.

Maybe. But looking at that wolf on the screen, calm and strong and completely herself, I thought, just quietly, just to myself:

You are also mine, Zaliver.

And I had a feeling nine o'clock was going to change a lot of things for both of us.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

By the time the clock read 8:50 PM, I was pacing like a trapped animal, my bare feet whispering across the polished floors. Every few steps I glanced toward the door, then back again, as if staring hard enough would make time move faster or him arrive sooner. My stomach twisted with nerves, like a pack of wolves were scrapping it out in there. I

brought my fingers to my mouth, hovering near my lips. I didn't bite my nails, hated the sensation, but tonight I was sorely tempted.

What was Zaliver going to do when he walked in? Was he really going to mark me? And what did that mean, exactly? The mating mark was supposed to be sacred. A bite at the neck, usually, the claiming kind that made the bond permanent and left a visible sign on your skin forever. But Zaliver wasn't a typical Alpha. Nothing about him was typical. So I had no idea what to expect, and the not-knowing was worse than anything I could have imagined.

I'd spent the afternoon trying to prepare myself and failing completely. I'd read three Chapters of something on the laptop, absorbed none of it, and closed it again. I'd done my hair twice. I'd sat down, stood up, sat down. My wolf had watched all of this with barely concealed amusement, which I found deeply unhelpful.

My wolf paced right alongside me inside my mind now, equally restless. She wasn't scared. She was excited, which somehow made my anxiety worse.

The moment the clock struck 8:59, I froze mid-step. My eyes locked on the door.

And then, right on the dot as the second hand kissed the nine, it swung open.

Zaliver stood there, tall and commanding, his presence like a shadow stretching across the room. His electric-blue eyes found mine instantly, and I held my breath. We didn't speak. We didn't move. We just stood there, watching each other like the rest of the world had melted away.

He was dressed in his usual head-to-toe black, sleek and sharp. His dark hair was pushed back from his face like he'd run his fingers through it in frustration, or maybe anticipation. Even cloaked in his usual cool darkness, he looked devastatingly beautiful, that magnetic aura of his swirling like storm clouds. I could feel it, his power, his restraint, and yet I wasn't scared of him. Not even a little.

His gaze swept over me slowly, and it took everything in me to stay still and not fidget under the intensity. He moved closer, step by step, like he was approaching something dangerous or sacred. I'd probably have bitten him earlier if he got too close, but now? Now I couldn't summon that fire. All I could feel was this knot of longing tangled up inside me.

He stopped just in front of me. His towering frame cast a shadow over mine as I tilted my head back to meet his gaze. A million thoughts swirled in my chest, but all that came out was a soft, shaky smile. Something in his eyes shifted, softened, and he smiled back. Just a little. But it felt intimate. Like we shared a secret the world wouldn't understand.

I stood there for a moment, looking up at him, and made a decision. Not impulsively, not because the bond pulled me. Because I wanted to. Because somewhere in the middle of everything impossible that had happened this week, I had missed him. Genuinely missed him, the way you miss something that has somehow quietly become necessary.

I reached out and wrapped my arms around his waist.

His body stiffened, his eyes widening slightly. For a split second, I thought he'd pull away. But he didn't. So I kept going.

I slid my hands up his sides slowly, tracing the lines of his muscles through his shirt, feeling the warmth of his skin just beneath the fabric. I looked into his eyes as I tugged him gently closer. He moved toward me, hesitant and rigid, like he didn't trust himself not to break something, maybe me. His breathing grew shallow, chest rising and falling in sharp bursts. I rested my head against his chest, letting the sound of his steady heartbeat ground me.

It took him a moment, but eventually, hesitantly, he lifted his arms and pulled me into him, holding me tight. I smiled against his shirt.

"I missed you," I murmured, my voice muffled by the fabric and the emotions rising in my throat.

A sound came from him, deep and strange, something between a sigh and a growl. It made my heart flutter.

"I thought you'd be furious," he said, his voice rough and low.

"Oh, I am," I admitted, grinning.

"But?"

I shrugged into his chest. "Eh."

"Eh?" He leaned back just enough to look down at me, his brows raised in amused disbelief. But there was something else in his eyes too, something deeper. Something that wrapped around my heart and squeezed.

"I missed you," I said again, like it explained everything. "Now, will you please get these off me? I've been chained up all day, and I refuse to be any longer." I raised my hand, rattling the cuffs around my wrists pointedly.

His lips curled into a smirk, the kind that made my knees weak. There was a gleam in his eye that sent heat rushing through me.

"Ah, yes, the chains." His voice dipped lower, richer. "You want them gone, do you?"

I nodded quickly, maybe too eagerly.

The air shifted.

His expression turned darker, not frightening, but hungry. Controlled, carnal, and dangerous in a way that made every part of me sit up and pay attention.

"The chains can go," he murmured, raising one hand. His fingers brushed gently along my jaw, trailing to my hair. He tucked it behind my ear, slowly, letting the strands fall away and expose my left shoulder to the open air and to his gaze.

That look he gave me wasn't just about lust. It was about claim.

And I felt it burn into my skin like a brand.

I didn't pull away.

I tilted my head, just slightly, and gave him room.

Whatever came next, I was ready for it. Or as ready as I was ever going to be.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"W-What are you doing?" I breathed out, my voice trembling as my pulse quickened.

Zaliver's eyes gleamed with something dark and hungry. "I got the results," he murmured, stepping closer, that crooked smile curving his lips. "I can mark you now. But tonight, I'm leaving a different kind of mark."

His gaze flickered for just a second, something unreadable passing through his expression before the smug confidence returned. I didn't miss it. I latched onto it, desperate for time.

"What did the results say? Is everything okay?" I asked, pretending to focus on anything but how close he was, on how my shoulder burned with anticipation.

He didn't hesitate. "Perfect. Everything came back perfect."

I searched his face, trying to decipher if he was bluffing. I couldn't tell. Not with him. "Really? Then can I—"

"Shhh." He hushed me gently, and before I could finish, his lips captured mine.

The kiss melted my thoughts into nothing. It wasn't frantic or rough, but slow and purposeful, like he was savoring every second. Like I was something rare. Like he had six hundred years of patience and had chosen to spend a portion of it on this exact moment. I'd expected something more urgent from him, something matching the intensity of his possessiveness, but instead he kissed me the way someone kisses a thing they're terrified of losing. Carefully. Deliberately. Like he was memorizing it.

That scared me more than the hunger would have.

When we finally parted, he didn't stop. His lips trailed over my cheek and down to my throat, leaving a path of fire behind. I gasped when he sucked softly at the tender skin of my neck, and I could feel the smile against me when a moan slipped out.

My hands slid up into his thick, midnight hair, fingers tangling in the silk of it. His growl rumbled low in his chest and shook through me, vibrating straight down to my toes. He wrapped his arms around me tighter, and my leg instinctively lifted, curling around his waist. Without a word, he lifted me with ease, my other leg locking around him.

He never stopped. His mouth never left my skin, not even when he walked us across the room. His canines scraped against my throat again and again, a reminder of what he could do, what he might still do, and it made me feel completely unhinged in a way I was starting to think I didn't mind.

When my back hit the bed, he hovered over me. The weight of his body, the warmth, the scent of him, it overwhelmed my senses. I could feel every shift between us, every hard edge of his body against mine. A strange kind of pride bloomed in me, knowing the effect I had on him. My wolf purred in satisfaction.

Zaliver's mouth found mine again, urgent now, and I kissed him back like he was air. When we finally broke apart, both of us panting, his gaze held me in place. Lust simmered in his eyes, but something else too, something more possessive. Devouring.

Moon above.

He rolled off me, his body heat still lingering like a brand. With a smooth motion, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small key. I blinked as he unlocked the chains around my wrists, his face unreadable again.

I sat up slowly and slid the chains aside, letting them clatter softly to the floor. My neck tingled, heat blooming there, and I had no doubt I was covered in his marks. The thought made something primal stir in me, something that didn't feel like shame. I pressed my fingers lightly to my neck without thinking about it, feeling the warmth his mouth had left behind, and decided I didn't entirely mind wearing the evidence of tonight.

He stretched lazily beside me, then said with a smirk, "Well, that was fun. We should do it again sometime."

I scoffed and shot him a playful glare. "Only if it doesn't involve chains and being locked in all day."

He chuckled, a rare, easy sound that caught me off guard. I'd never seen him like this before, so at ease, so human. It softened something in me.

"I'm going away for a business trip next week," he said after a moment, his tone suddenly careful.

My heart sank. I didn't want him to go. Not now. Not when we were only just starting to find something that felt like solid ground between us, something that didn't have to be

fought for or negotiated or survived. Not when the chains were finally off and the room felt like a place rather than a cage.

"Can I come with you?"

His features softened slightly, but he shook his head. "Not yet. Maybe someday," he said gently. It wasn't a no, and that counted for something. Still, I couldn't help the pang of disappointment that settled in.

Trying to lighten the mood, he added, "I'll bring you souvenirs. Lots of them."

That made me smile despite myself. "Fine. But they better be good."

He turned on his side, propping himself up to look at me. The lamp cast low light across the room, catching the blue of his eyes, and for a moment he just looked at me the way people look at things they're still not sure they're allowed to want.

"I want to get to know you," I whispered.

Something shifted in his expression, and he didn't hide it fast enough. It was softer than anything I'd seen from him before.

"Me too," he said quietly.

"How long will you be gone?"

"A week." But before sadness could settle in properly, he leaned forward and added, "When I get back, we'll spend real time together. No agendas. No tests. No more chains. Just us. Deal?"

A warmth spread through my chest.

"Deal," I said.

He held my gaze a moment longer, then lay back, quiet and still, and I stayed where I was, listening to the quiet between us, and thought that for the first time since my mother woke me in the dark and told me to run, something about my future didn't frighten me.

It almost looked like something I wanted. Like something I might, eventually, even choose.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"I miss him," I muttered, arms crossed over my chest like that would somehow hold me together.

Hannah just rolled her eyes and kept checking stock, scribbling something on her clipboard without even looking up. We were tucked away in the back room of her shop, where all the good stuff stayed hidden from customers. I was slouched on a stack of unopened boxes, which was about as glamorous as my morning had gotten.

"I'd be more surprised if you didn't miss him," she said matter-of-factly. "But come on, Viv. He said he'd call the moment he landed, and then every two hours after that. Chill. You'll hear from him soon."

"I know, I know," I sighed, shifting restlessly. "But try telling that to my wolf. She's freaking out. She keeps feeding me all these awful images, what if there's a storm and the plane goes down? I don't even know if he can swim." I groaned. "Oh goddess, I didn't even check his suitcase. What if he runs out of clothes or forgets something important? He cannot walk around naked in another country. I will murder him."

That last part came out as a grumble to myself, but Hannah heard it anyway and did not look even slightly sympathetic.

I'd never felt this wound up over someone leaving before in my entire life. The second Zaliver disappeared into that plane, it was like a cord inside me had been yanked tight, snapping against my ribs and making it hard to breathe. I knew it was irrational. Zaliver wasn't exactly helpless. If anything, he was the kind of Alpha who could handle himself, me, and the entire plane if it came to that. But none of that logic was doing a single thing to soothe the panic clawing at me from the inside.

My wolf wasn't helping at all. She'd been pacing since we got here, restless and edgy, occasionally throwing me disaster scenarios I hadn't asked for and didn't want. I shoved her back as gently as I could, which is to say, not very gently at all.

"Ugh, females," Hannah muttered, then pointed a sharp finger at me. "Breathe, Vivian. I am not going to be the one who has to explain to Alpha why his mate dropped dead of a panic attack in my stockroom. He hasn't even properly marked you yet, but I guarantee he can still feel you spiraling like this. So either breathe in and out, or die quietly and give me enough time to get me and Mark the hell out of here before they find your body."

Her face was flushed with frustration, but behind the sass, I saw understanding in her eyes.

"Die quietly? Wow, love that support," I said sarcastically, but I took a deep breath anyway and let it out slowly, closing my eyes.

It helped a little. My wolf curled in on herself, still uneasy, but less frantic now.

"There we go. Good girl," Hannah said, patting me on the head like I was some misbehaving pup before she returned to her clipboard. "Now sit tight and let me finish this up so we can head out."

I slouched deeper into the box and let my head fall against the one beside me, my thoughts drifting.

My fingers crept up to my neck, brushing the skin where I knew the hickeys were. I couldn't feel them raised exactly, but I knew they were there, like echoes of his touch burned into my skin. And just like that, the memory returned, warm and vivid and deeply mortifying.

"Zaliver!" I'd shouted the second I saw myself in the mirror.

He appeared behind me in a heartbeat, hands tucked into his pockets like he had all the time in the world. Dressed in his usual all-black, he somehow still managed to look unfairly perfect. Not a hair out of place. Not even slightly apologetic about what he'd done.

"Yes?" he replied, calm as ever, which only made it worse.

I whipped around and glared at him, lifting my hair to show the damage. "Do you see this? I thought you'd leave a couple! Not cover both sides of my neck like I'm your personal territory marker!"

He leaned lazily against the doorframe, arms crossed, muscles pulling tight beneath his shirt. The smug glint in his eye did absolutely nothing for my blood pressure.

"Well," he said slowly, voice low, "you didn't seem to mind it last night."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I narrowed my eyes, trying to recall. We'd talked. We'd kissed, sure. But I would have remembered if he'd gone full vampire on my neck, right?

His smirk deepened, like he was reading my thoughts. He stepped in close.

"You tend to get distracted when things get heated," he said.

I stared at him, jaw slack. "No way!"

He leaned closer, his mouth brushing my ear. "Can't wait to prove you wrong."

Then he walked away with a dark smile, leaving me standing there shivering in his wake, staring at my reflection, and feeling equally furious and pleased with myself in a way I was absolutely not going to admit to him.

Back in the present, Hannah snapped her fingers in front of my face.

"Earth to Vivian."

I blinked, dropping my hand from my neck. "Sorry. Got distracted."

"I noticed." She gave me a knowing look, then turned back to her clipboard with a small smile she was clearly trying and failing to hide. "You've got it bad."

"I really do," I agreed, and for once I didn't feel the need to argue about it.

He was coming back. He said a week, and then real time, no agendas, no tests, no chains. And I believed him, which was new, because I hadn't believed much of what Zaliver said in the beginning, but somewhere along the way that had changed.

I sat there in the backroom of Hannah's shop, surrounded by boxes and the quiet scratch of her pen, and let myself feel it without flinching.

I missed him. And he was going to come back. He'd made a deal and I'd learned, slowly, over the last strange and impossible week, that Zaliver didn't make promises he didn't intend to keep.

That was enough, for now.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

I sat curled up on the couch, quietly watching Zaliver as he moved back and forth between the closet and the bed, packing his things into a sleek black suitcase. My arms were folded tightly across my chest, trying to keep in whatever mix of feelings I didn't want to admit out loud.

"I can smell your irritation," he said casually, not even turning around.

I stayed silent. What was I supposed to say? That yes, I was irritated? That the thought of him leaving gnawed at me? That I didn't like how easily he just decided to go without even talking to me about it?

He paused, whatever shirt or pair of pants he'd been holding now forgotten as he turned to face me. His brows were pulled together, that intense gaze of his searching my face.

"You're upset because I'm leaving."

His voice wasn't firm or teasing like usual, it was hesitant. Like he wasn't used to being called out on this kind of thing. I tilted my head slightly, silently asking him to go on.

He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, eyes narrowing in that way they did when he was really thinking about something. Then, out of nowhere, he chuckled.

"You know, I haven't had to explain myself to anyone in over three hundred years. I think I owe you an apology for not being more considerate about how you'd feel about this trip. I can't back out of it, but in the future, I promise to let you in on things like this."

I blinked at him, caught completely off guard. Damn. He really knew how to cut through the noise.

"Apology accepted," I replied quickly, maybe too quickly, but I didn't want to ruin the moment.

He took a deep breath, twice actually, and let them both out with this cocky smirk tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"You look satisfied now. Good," he said with a soft laugh, and went back to packing like that little heart-to-heart hadn't just happened.

I rolled my eyes. "Weirdo," I muttered under my breath.

"I heard that."

"No, you didn't."

He hummed knowingly, and I added, "Must be your age catching up to you."

That earned me a playful growl over his shoulder, and I quickly threw my hands up like I was surrendering. "Kidding! Don't bite!"

His tone shifted, though his eyes still danced with amusement. "While I'm gone, steer clear of unmated males."

I raised a brow. "No arguments here. I like my freedom, and I'd rather not have you killing anyone over a harmless conversation."

He smirked in agreement. "Glad we're on the same page. I'll call you when I land in New York and every two hours after that."

I snorted, half-amused, half-exasperated. "Every two hours? Seriously?"

"Yes. You'll sleep in our room every night I'm away. If you decide to spend the night at Hannah's, have Johnson call me."

I nodded. Honestly, the idea of staying at Hannah's didn't sound so bad. Like a sleepover, just with massive wolves stationed around the house for security. I'd already figured out he'd beef up protection while he was gone. It was so him. And while I could call him out on it, I didn't want to. Not yet.

If we were going to make this work, really try to understand each other, then I needed to show him that I could trust his judgment. Even if it was a little possessive and borderline overbearing at times. It was a start.

"So," I said casually, "what's this trip for? Business?"

He stiffened for a fraction of a second before answering. "Yes. Business."

Right.

"And my gifts? You know, the ones you're definitely bringing back?" I gave him a bright, innocent smile.

He glanced at me, mischief flashing in his eyes. The next second he lunged at me with a dramatic roar. I shrieked and scrambled back on the couch while he laughed like a madman.

He left the next morning while I was still half-asleep, and by the time I was fully awake and at Hannah's door with my overnight bag and four wolves in tow, I was doing a passable impression of someone who had it together.

"And here we are, Luna. Welcome to my sister's humble—"

"Humble?" Hannah's voice cut through Johnson's grand introduction as we pulled into her driveway. "Your house is a shack. Mine is fabulous. Don't insult me like that."

I couldn't help but laugh as she threw open the front door and marched inside like she owned the world, which, knowing her, she probably believed she did.

"Well, come on in, Vivian," she called over her shoulder. "Mark should be home by now."

Hannah's place was even more beautiful than I expected. A two-story house painted the softest shade of blue, framed by a clean stone walkway that led to the front door. A sleek black car was parked outside like it belonged there, like everything was intentional, perfectly placed.

Luke was cracking up about something when Courtney and Mila pulled in behind us. Johnson, on the other hand, looked like a thundercloud, muttering under his breath as he stomped into the house after Hannah.

"What's eating him?" Mila asked, nodding toward Johnson's retreating back.

"Hannah compared his place to a humble shack next to her fabulous home," Luke said, grinning. The girls burst into laughter, and even I cracked a smile.

My eyes lingered on the house longer than necessary. It stirred something inside me, something old, something soft. I'd always dreamed of living in a real home, one that was lived in and loved. I wondered if Zaliver had ever thought about something like this, a house, a yard, something a little more human. Probably not. But me? I'd always liked putting spaces together, making things feel warm. I found myself wondering what kind of house he would like.

"Luna?" Luke's voice pulled me back.

I blinked and turned toward him. Courtney and Mila were watching me too, their expressions tinged with concern.

"Sorry," I said quickly, offering a small smile. "Was just admiring the house. Shall we?"

They nodded, but not before exchanging a glance between themselves. There was something strange about it, a flicker of silver in their eyes, but when I blinked again, it was gone. I chalked it up to missing Zaliver too much, seeing pieces of him everywhere I looked.

I made a silent promise to myself then: I wouldn't think about him for the rest of the visit. This was about getting to know Hannah's mate and showing I wasn't whatever rumors were floating around about me. I wanted them to see me.

I drew in a deep breath, shook out my limbs, and walked to the door with a nervous excitement I hadn't felt in a while.

The moment I stepped inside, I was hit by the smell of lasagna and garlic bread, and my stomach practically wept in joy.

Hannah stood beside a man who looked fairly average from behind, normal height, average build, neatly trimmed hair, khaki shorts, and a deep red shirt. Honestly, he looked like someone's dependable neighbor. I almost joked about him being Jake from State Farm.

And then he turned around.

Definitely not Jake from State Farm.

An eyebrow piercing. Snake bites. Bright green eyes that sparkled with mischief. I blinked, stunned for a moment. He laughed the second he caught my expression. Hannah just shook her head with that amused look she wore so well.

Mark was unexpectedly handsome, in a way that made you reassess your assumptions. A whole different vibe from what his back projected.

"Gets 'em every time," he said, still chuckling. "Never gets old. I'm Mark, but I'm sure you already knew that. Hannah's been talking about you, Luna. It's a pleasure. Welcome to our fabulous home." He shot Hannah a teasing look, and she rolled her eyes but smiled.

He extended his hand, and I took it without hesitation, though I silently begged the universe that Zaliver wouldn't feel the contact through the bond. He had a knack for knowing things he wasn't supposed to.

"Lunch will be done soon. The table's already set, go ahead and make yourselves comfortable," Mark said, ushering us into the living room.

"He cooks, he sets the table, and checks in on guests? I approve," I whispered to Hannah.

She gave me a knowing smile, warm and a little secret, that made me like her even more.

Once Mark brought in the food and everyone had gathered around the table, I finally got a good sense of who he was. Over plates of perfectly baked lasagna and soft, buttery garlic bread, I learned that he worked as one of the pack's top trackers. But more than that, he was a devoted mate, attentive, thoughtful, and completely smitten with Hannah and her pregnancy.

It was easy to like him. Easy to see why Hannah glowed the way she did.

I was just beginning to relax, to feel like maybe I could actually enjoy this.

And then Zaliver appeared mid-meal, like a storm sweeping through a calm sky.

Even before I turned to look, I felt him. His presence always hit me like a shifting gravity, familiar and consuming.

And just like that, all thoughts of trying to forget him, even for a little while, vanished.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

Luke was in the middle of chatting with Courtney when his eyes abruptly flickered to silver and stayed that way. The sound that came next wasn't his, it was a deep, guttural growl that reverberated through the room and yanked everyone's attention toward him. The energy in the air shifted instantly. I caught the subtle way Mark inched closer to Hannah, his posture tense but ready, just in case things got out of hand.

But the second he registered the silver sheen in Luke's eyes, his head bowed low. The others followed suit, all of them submitting without hesitation.

I felt it before I heard it. That familiar gravity, that specific shift in pressure that meant him, like the air itself knew Zaliver was present and rearranged itself accordingly. My chest tightened. My wolf lifted her head.

"Having a nice lunch, Vivian?" Zaliver's voice rumbled through Luke's mouth, too calm, too knowing.

My eyes locked on Luke's, and even though the voice was his and the power behind it unmistakable, it wasn't him. It wasn't the same as seeing those piercing blue eyes in front of me, or feeling his overwhelming presence fill a room. Still, my chest ached just hearing him.

Everyone else was quiet, their heads dipped in respect. It felt like a spotlight had been thrown onto me.

"Uh, yeah," I mumbled. "So, what's going on?" My voice came out awkward, uncertain. I had spent the whole day missing him, feeling his absence like a wound, and now that he was here in a way, I didn't even know what to say.

"I just landed," he said, his gaze sweeping across the table. "Wanted to check in and see what you were up to."

I blinked. "And you couldn't just call?" I asked, one brow lifting. I didn't mean it to sound rude, it was more amused than anything. Though I did worry that Luke might not be thrilled with being turned into a human speakerphone.

Zaliver smiled faintly. "This is me calling."

I let out a soft, disbelieving laugh and shook my head. "Well, thanks for the heads-up. As you can see, everything's fine. Now maybe let Luke have his body back?"

His eyes narrowed slightly, and for a second, I wondered if he'd growl something proprietary and unpleasant. But then he just growled under his breath, quiet and annoyed. I realized he probably didn't love being in another male's body when it came to me.

"Fine. I'll call later," he muttered.

And then, just like that, the silver vanished from Luke's eyes.

The air in the room shifted again, everyone let out a collective breath. Shoulders dropped. Conversations resumed, if only briefly.

I picked up my fork again and started poking at my half-eaten food, trying not to look too shaken.

"Nice," Luke said after blinking a few times. "Second time that's happened."

"Sorry," I said, sheepish. "I'll ask him not to do that anymore."

"No! No, seriously, it's fine. He can take over my body whenever he wants! Wherever he wants!" Luke said, a bit too enthusiastically.

The silence that followed was deafening.

And then Johnson let out a snort, and chaos erupted. Everyone burst out laughing.

Luke's face turned beet red as the words replayed in his head. That's when the rest of us completely lost it. Even Mark, who had managed to hold it together for approximately two seconds, gave up entirely.

"Really, dude?" Mark choked out. "He can take my body whenever, wherever? Man, you sound like you're offering yourself on a silver platter."

Courtney didn't skip a beat. "Wow, Luke. If I knew you were renting yourself out, I would have booked you weeks ago. How much do you charge? Do your parents know?"

Luke muttered something about needing the bathroom and bolted from the room. Poor guy. I genuinely felt for him, even as I was laughing so hard I had to set my fork down.

Once the laughter finally died down and Luke had returned to his seat looking like he was considering a career change, Mark turned to me with a curious glint in his eye.

"So, Vivian. What's it like being mated to the scariest wolf in existence?"

I gave him a small smile and shrugged. "Still figuring that out," I said honestly. Because truthfully, I was. Every day brought something new with Zaliver, some moments thrilling, others confusing, and some that left me aching in ways I hadn't known I could.

We ended up spending the whole afternoon at Hannah and Mark's place. It felt good to be surrounded by laughter and casual chatter, to feel almost normal again. I even promised to visit tomorrow, even though I had no actual plans.

Eventually, I asked Luke to drive me back to the pack house. He obliged without complaint, though he was suspiciously quiet the whole drive, and I strongly suspected he was replaying the afternoon's events in his head and doing some serious personal reckoning.

By the time I made it up to Zaliver's room, everything felt quieter. He wasn't here. And he wouldn't be for a while.

I stood by the bed, staring at his side of it for too long. It felt too empty without him. The ache in my chest was sharp and familiar, the same hollow feeling I'd woken up with that morning, the one that had followed me through lunch and laughter and garlic bread and all of it.

I slipped out of my clothes and into one of his shirts, tugging the soft fabric around me like armor. It smelled like him, clean and powerful and something underneath that I didn't have a word for yet, the specific scent of someone who had decided you were theirs and wasn't changing their mind about it.

I curled into the bed and pulled the covers over my shoulders, and closed my eyes.

It was only three in the afternoon. But exhaustion had its hands around me and I didn't have the energy to argue with it. I'd think about everything else when I woke up. The trip, the mark, the deal we'd made, all of it could wait.

For now, I just let his familiar smell wrap around me like a second blanket, and let myself finally rest.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"The plane's here," he had said.

I looked up at him, skeptical. I hadn't heard anything yet. But before I could ask, he pointed south, and my breath caught.

Far in the distance, a small speck moved toward us, growing steadily bigger. A low, familiar rumble followed, and with it came the reality I'd been quietly dreading all morning.

He was really leaving.

"Wow, that's actually kind of cool," I murmured, my gaze still fixed on the distant horizon.

The plane had just landed moments ago, and a group of men moved quickly to unload it. They carried bags and crates of all shapes and sizes, each one draped in red cloth like something out of a secret ceremony. I barely paid them any mind until Zaliver stepped in front of me and gently turned my face toward him with a hand under my chin.

"Hey," he said softly, voice edged with seriousness, "while I'm gone, I need you to take care of yourself. You hear me?"

I nodded automatically, but his eyes didn't leave mine. They were locked in, deep, commanding, and almost worried in a way I wasn't used to seeing on him.

"Eat every day. Shift at least twice this week. Lock the damn door when you shower. Don't go anywhere alone. And for Moon's sake, don't forget to tell the guards if you need something. If you—"

"Basically, don't die while you're gone. Got it," I cut in with a small grin, trying to lighten the mood. "I think I'll manage, considering I somehow survived eighteen years without you."

I expected a smirk, even a chuckle. He didn't return the smile.

Instead, he raised his hand and brushed a loose strand of hair behind my ear. His touch lingered. His fingers moved from the corner of my eye down the curve of my cheek, tracing along my lips and then back again, a gentle, intimate path that felt more like a goodbye than anything he could have said.

"You don't have to anymore," he whispered.

I stayed very still. Four words, quiet enough that the wind nearly took them, and yet they landed in the center of my chest like something heavy and certain. Like a door opening onto a room I hadn't known was there. I didn't know how to answer that. I wasn't sure he expected me to. Maybe it was enough that he'd said it out loud, and I'd heard it, and neither of us had looked away.

Then he leaned in and kissed me.

It wasn't like our usual kisses. Those were fire and dominance, passion that threatened to consume. This one was different. Soft. Deep. It reached something raw inside me and

pulled it gently to the surface. When he finally pulled away, I felt breathless and a little empty, like he'd taken something with him I hadn't realized I was giving.

He was the last one to board the plane. I watched him go and didn't look away until the door sealed shut behind him.

"Goodbye," he said, his voice low and warm. "Take care, Vivian. Be a good cloud and try not to stir up too much trouble, okay?"

I nodded, still reeling from the kiss, and gave him one last look before he disappeared into the jet.

Wait.

Cloud?

I stood there on the tarmac a moment longer than I needed to, watching the door close, turning that word over in my mind and feeling the strange warmth of it. Then I made myself walk back to the car before my face could give everything away.

I must've dozed off somewhere between missing him and exhaustion winning, because the vibration startled me back awake.

The bed trembled lightly beneath me, and I blinked through the haze of half-sleep, disoriented. I tossed back the covers, following the sound, until I found a sleek black iPhone wedged beneath Zaliver's pillow. My brows furrowed. Had he forgotten it?

But when I saw the caller ID, my heart skipped.

His name.

There was no way he could call himself, so whose phone was this? No unfamiliar scents. No signs of anyone else coming into the room. Just me and this mysteriously ringing phone.

He left it for me.

I answered it quickly and lay back down, pressing the phone to my ear.

"So, you can use a phone?" I teased, smiling faintly.

His voice, that deep baritone I already missed too much, crackled through the line.

"Of course I can. I just prefer a clearer image when I'm checking in on my mate," he said casually, though I could hear papers rustling on his end. "How do you like your phone?"

"It's awesome, thanks," I said, pulling the blanket over me again. "Anything interesting happen?"

He chuckled. That sound. I could live off it.

"Nothing worth reporting. But I did find the first of your gifts. I think you'll like it."

"First?" I repeated, curiosity piqued. "As in first of many?"

"Yes, first of many. You didn't seriously think—"

But I never heard the end of that sentence.

Because suddenly, pain, blinding, searing, gut-wrenching pain, shot through my stomach.

The phone slipped from my fingers as I doubled over, arms instinctively wrapping around my torso. I felt like something inside me was tearing itself apart. My breathing grew erratic. I could barely hear Zaliver shouting my name from the phone that had slid somewhere under the sheets.

I stumbled from the bed and staggered into the bathroom. The second I reached the toilet, I vomited violently. My body trembled as wave after wave wracked through me. My throat burned, my skin clammy and hot, yet I was shivering.

Then I looked at my hands.

Red.

No. No, no, no.

I forced my teary eyes to glance into the toilet bowl.

Blood.

Zaliver's voice was louder now, frantic and desperate, tearing through the phone I couldn't reach anymore. I heard my name over and over, and each time it sounded further away, like the volume was being turned down on the world one notch at a time until there was nothing left to hear.

The floor tilted.

The last thing I felt was the cold tile rushing up hard and fast to meet me, and then the world simply stopped.