

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna chapter 51-60

Chapter 51: Do you have a dollar

Vivian Grey's POV

Darkness.

But not the peaceful kind that let you drift off. No, this one was dense, unsettling, and full of buzzing sounds. There was a steady beeping somewhere to my left. Faint. Monotonous. But present enough to pull me toward consciousness. Something tugged at my arm, cool and tight. A needle, maybe. I didn't know for sure.

My body felt light, like I was floating just above the bed, but my head was wrapped in a thick fog, making every thought sluggish and out of reach. The worst of it though was the dull, aching throb just below my ribs. It was the kind of pain that stayed after being punched, pulsing with each heartbeat. Not unbearable, but enough to remind me I was still here.

I took a slow, shaky breath through my nose.

The air was cold and sterile, laced with the sharp scent of antiseptic. But underneath that, something else. Familiar. Warm. Him.

Zaliver's scent was everywhere, like a cocoon wrapped around me, dense and unmistakable. It wasn't just a trace. It was the kind of presence that meant someone had been here for a long time, had sat close and stayed close, had breathed this air alongside me while I wasn't conscious to know it. Comforting. Safe. Even before I opened my eyes, I knew he had been nearby.

Maybe he still was.

But this bed didn't feel like ours.

I tried to reach for a memory, something solid to explain what had happened, but all I could grasp were bits and pieces. Zaliver's voice, soft and worried. Something about a gift. But it wasn't my birthday. I hadn't done anything special lately. So why? And where was he now?

Wait. Traveling. I remembered now, he had to leave for something. But if he was supposed to be away, why was his scent here, fresh and potent like he'd just stepped out of the room?

Confused, I blinked slowly, dragging my heavy lids open. It took everything in me just to focus.

Lavender and soft jade. That's what greeted me, the walls painted in those gentle, calming hues. Definitely not our room.

I sat up with effort, gritting my teeth as the motion sent a jolt of pain through my abdomen. My hands trembled slightly, and then it hit me, a flash of red. My blood. I remembered now. The vomiting. The collapse. I had been on the phone with Zaliver, and then everything went dark.

He must have heard me. Realized something was wrong.

He came back.

The guilt hit before the warmth did. Sharp and immediate, twisting in my chest. He had responsibilities, things to do, places to be, and I had made him turn around. I hadn't asked him to. I would never have asked him to. But he had come back anyway, which meant he was out there somewhere in this building, probably having cut short whatever he'd been sent to handle, because of me.

I hated that. And I was grateful for it. Both at the same time, in that particular way that had become familiar when it came to Zaliver.

I sighed and looked down at my arm, scowling at the IV needle buried in my skin. No thanks. I reached over and tugged it out carefully, wincing as it came free. My throat was bone dry and my whole body felt like it had run a marathon. But oddly, I was also craving sugar. A very specific, almost childlike craving for something sweet. Something wrapped in plastic and loaded with preservatives.

I pushed myself off the bed. Every step was a battle, my legs trembling and uncertain. The robe I wore was thin, but it covered me well enough as I shuffled out of the room into the dim hallway. It was empty, quiet. I had no idea what time it was, but my stomach didn't care. It wanted candy.

I followed the scent of sugar like a hound and found myself in front of a vending machine. The blinking lights. The shiny wrappers. Jackpot. I pressed my hand against the cool glass, eyes roaming over the choices, chocolate, gummies, even those little cakes with the suspiciously long shelf lives. My mouth watered.

But as I considered how to shake the thing down, an alarm blared overhead and red lights flashed across the ceiling. Loud thudding footsteps echoed down the corridor behind me, heavy and fast, but I barely reacted. Everything felt like I was viewing it through thick glass, muffled and distant. Like I was underwater.

"I wonder what happened," I murmured, not really expecting an answer. The vending machine was still my priority. I tilted my head, thinking I might be able to knock it from the side.

Then a presence. Big, looming, and familiar.

I turned my head and found myself looking up into wild black hair and a face that was far too pale.

Zaliver.

"Zaliver!" I said brightly, relief flooding me. My chest felt warm at the sight of him, but there was something else too, a strange urge, not quite instinct, just something primal whispering underneath my skin. Slippery and ungraspable.

He looked terrible. Worn out, sleepless, the shadows under his eyes dark and deep. His expression was a mix of anger, fear, and something more fragile that made my heart ache.

"Viv—" he started, voice cracking on my name.

"Do you have a dollar?" I blurted out before he could finish.

He blinked, stunned. I didn't even wait for him to catch up to my train of thought. I stepped closer and gave him a little poke, ignoring how good he smelled. Earthy, warm, and sharp. It hit me straight in the chest.

"Hey, you got a dollar?" I asked again, tilting my head with a faint grin.

He still looked confused, like I'd short-circuited his brain. "W-What?"

"Do. You. Have. A dollar?" I repeated, slowly.

He gave a slow, dazed nod, his eyes never leaving me. He scanned every inch of my body like he was memorizing it, like he couldn't quite believe I was standing there. I did the same to him. Same clothes from yesterday, or today, I wasn't sure anymore. Time felt tangled.

But none of that mattered in that moment.

All I wanted was a damn chocolate bar.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

"Why?" Zaliver asked, reaching into his wallet. My eyes widened as he peeled out a thick wad of cash.

Oh. My. Goddess.

"Because I want those fruit snacks... and those barbecue chips... and a Sprite. And that Snickers bar. Oh! And a sandwich, but they don't have any, so that granola bar will do. Hey, do you have five bucks?" I looked up at him with what I *hoped* was my most innocent, doe-eyed expression.

He glanced between me, the vending machine, and the money in his hand. With a deep, dramatic sigh that I definitely didn't take seriously, he pulled out another bill.

"How about this," he said slowly, like he was trying to reason with a very small and greedy child. "Pick one thing for now, and if the doctor gives the green light, I'll get you all the junk food your little heart desires later."

More candy later? That sounded like a win.

I didn't even hesitate. I snatched the dollar from his hand before he could change his mind and punched in the code for the fruit snacks. Victory.

Tearing open the bag, I popped one into my mouth, chewing with satisfaction... until I paused. My brows pulled together. Something felt... off. I stared at the bag, then shifted my gaze to Zaliver, who was looking at me like I'd just grown an extra head.

"You want some?" I asked, trying to sound nonchalant. *Please say no.*

Instead of answering, he stepped toward me and wrapped his arms around me, pulling me into his chest like I was some priceless treasure. I blinked, arms frozen in front of me, still clutching the snack bag awkwardly.

He leaned back against the wall beside the vending machine and nuzzled his face into my hair and neck, breathing me in like I was the sweetest thing in the room not the fruit snacks.

The warmth of him was soothing. It chased away the sterile chill of the hospital air. My eyelids fluttered a bit. He smelled so good, like pine and spice and something dark and addictive. I could've melted into him right then and there... if I hadn't been too focused on the chewy candy in my mouth.

Then I felt it a low, steady vibration. He was purring. At first it was subtle, almost a hum under my skin, but it grew louder the longer he held me. Something inside me stirred at the sound, a hazy awareness curling through me, but my thoughts were too foggy to make sense of it.

I wriggled my arms free and wrapped them around his waist, patting him gently. "There, there," I mumbled.

He pulled back just enough to look down at me, his piercing eyes searching mine, then ducked his head again and continued purring like an oversized feline. My body felt heavy, drowsy, and I blinked slowly.

"Can we go home now?" I asked, voice soft.

I didn't expect him to scoop me up bridal-style without warning, but suddenly my feet weren't touching the ground anymore. He began striding down the hallway with purpose.

"Why did you leave the room, Vivian?" His voice was low, tense, though still soft. "You could've been hurt or worse. You're in no condition to be wandering around without me."

Had I not been buzzed on whatever they'd pumped into my system, I might've picked up on the strain in his voice, or the way his arms clutched me tighter than necessary. His thumbs rubbed slow circles on the back of my thighs, something I might've noticed too if my fingers weren't buried in his silky hair.

"I wanted food," I mumbled, nuzzling into his neck. "Something sweet, I think."

"You could've pressed the call button instead of disappearing," he grumbled, carrying me back into the room.

As we entered, a young man with bright blond hair and warm hazel eyes looked up from a clipboard. "Hello, Luna Vivian. I'm Dr. Leonard. How are you feeling? Any pain?"

I perched on the edge of the bed, Zaliver standing beside me with his hand resting gently but firmly on my shoulder. I leaned into his touch without thinking.

"Tired. Everything's sore. So... what happened? I remember throwing up blood, then nothing." My brain wandered, distracted. I tilted my head. "How does your hair stay so soft?"

"I came back the moment you didn't answer me," Zaliver cut in before the doctor could respond. "Had you transferred to a hospital I trust. Dr. Leonard's been monitoring you since."

I turned to the doctor and gave him a polite nod. "Thanks. But... I'm okay now, right?"

Zaliver's expression shifted, something unreadable passing through his eyes as he stared at the doctor, who hesitated for half a heartbeat before smiling and nodding.

"You're doing well," Dr. Leonard said carefully. "You might not feel quite like yourself for a while. The medication you were given numbed a lot of your physical responses. Rest and hydration are important... and staying close to "

He suddenly stopped mid-sentence, coughing awkwardly.

"Staying close to *what*?" I pressed, eyeing him.

He swallowed and glanced at Zaliver, who stood a little too still beside me.

"Nature," Zaliver said smoothly, voice laced with a sharp undertone. "He means nature. It's calming for wolves, right Doc?"

Dr. Leonard nodded quickly, eyes flickering between the two of us.

I narrowed my eyes at both of them. Something wasn't adding up. I could feel it in my gut. Like there was a puzzle everyone had the pieces to except me.

"So what was actually wrong with me?" I asked again, this time firmer.

The doctor and Zaliver exchanged a look, then stepped aside and started whispering to each other in the far corner of the room.

Seriously?

Wasn't *I* the patient here?

I scowled as a nurse walked in, breaking the tension with a bright, too-practiced smile. She fussed over me, checking my pupils, ears, pulse everything except what I *wanted* to know. The moment she left, my head throbbed, an ache pulsing right at the base of my skull.

Something big was being kept from me. I could feel it. And no amount of fruit snacks was going to sweeten the truth when I finally uncovered it.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

Zaliver's gaze locked with mine while he spoke to the doctor in a low, serious tone. His expression was unreadable, hard lines carved into his face like stone. I tried to read him, tried to silently ask for answers with just a look, but his eyes slid away. That familiar pang of frustration twisted in my chest. Why wouldn't anyone just tell me what was going on?

I swung my feet over the side of the hospital bed and let them dangle, kicking at the sterile air. I wasn't broken. I didn't feel sick, at least not in the normal sense. That sudden overwhelming heaviness that came after Zaliver left earlier had hit me out of nowhere. At first, I thought it was just the ache of missing him. Then it turned sharp, like my insides were being ripped apart by invisible claws.

Maybe he was right. Maybe I needed to shift more often. But it didn't explain the intensity of the pain. It didn't explain the silence from my wolf, either. I tried to reach her, but everything felt foggy, like she was just out of reach, dulled behind a thick haze. Probably the medication they'd pumped into me. I needed it out of my system before I could even think of communicating with her properly.

I was so deep in my thoughts that I didn't notice Zaliver standing in front of me until I looked up and there he was. Close. Too close.

His blue eyes studied me in that unnerving way of his. I glanced over his shoulder and noticed the doctor and nurse making a quick exit. I scrambled off the bed, determined to

catch them and demand answers, but my legs gave out underneath me. My body felt like jelly.

Strong arms wrapped around my waist, steadying me before I hit the floor. My palms landed on his shoulders for support.

"Whoa," I muttered, dazed.

"Easy, Luna," Zaliver murmured near my ear. "You've been out for a few days. Your body's still catching up."

A few days? My eyes widened. That couldn't be right. That meant, oh Goddess, sponge baths.

Dr. Leonard's polite expression cracked for just a second, slipping into unease as his eyes flicked nervously to Zaliver behind me. His voice stuttered out a parting sentence, and then he practically fled, dragging the nurse with him. But before the door closed, I caught sight of him gripping his temple like something had pressed hard against the inside of his skull, then released. I recognized that look. Zaliver had said something to him through that quiet, invisible authority of his. Something that ended the conversation before it could start.

Something was off. Way off.

"Zaliver, what the hell is going on?" My voice sharpened with frustration. "Why didn't Dr. Leonard tell me what's happening? What did you do to him just now? Don't lie to me!"

He didn't answer, at least not in words. Instead, he stepped in and grabbed my arms gently but firmly, folding them across my chest and holding me still. His nose skimmed along the side of my neck, and my breath hitched. The heat of him pressed up against my back, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

Even through the leftover haze of drugs, my body responded to him instantly. My head tilted, baring my neck without thinking, and a soft sound escaped me, half moan, half sigh.

A low growl rumbled from him, vibrating against my skin. His mouth opened, and I could feel the scrape of his canines just barely grazing my neck. My legs trembled.

And then he pulled back. Abruptly. Like something snapped inside him.

He started pacing, running both hands through his dark hair in frustration. I watched him silently for a moment, then eased myself back onto the bed, taking slow breaths. The fog was lifting, and with every second I could feel more of myself again. My thoughts were clearer. My instincts sharper. My wolf, closer.

"I need to get you home," Zaliver said finally. His voice was gravelly and low.

I narrowed my eyes and sat up straighter. I'd had enough.

"Not until you tell me the truth," I said calmly, but firmly. "What's going on with me? Why is everyone acting like I'm fragile and dangerous all at once? Why does no one seem willing to just look me in the eye and say it?"

I crossed my arms again and stared him down. My heart was pounding, but I didn't flinch. His glare was fierce, his jaw clenched tight, and his body practically radiated frustration, but I didn't care.

I was done being in the dark. I had a right to know what was happening to me.

Even if that meant defying the most powerful wolf I'd ever known.

Even if that wolf was my mate.

"I'm trying to help you, Vivian. Don't make this harder than it already is. I need you back home. I'll explain everything there."

His voice was low and tense, words pushed through clenched teeth. His fists were tight at his sides, and the way his body vibrated with restraint made my wolf stir uneasily.

"I am calm," I said, keeping my voice even, despite the storm building inside me.

That earned me a crooked smirk that sent a jolt through my stomach. I swallowed hard, resisting the shiver crawling up my spine.

"I wasn't talking about you."

Oh.

Right.

He meant his wolf.

Zaliver never really talked about that side of him. Honestly, the man himself was already wild enough, like he was barely tethered to civility by a single thread. And that thread frayed more each time I defied him.

Most wolves balanced their human and beast. Not Zaliver. His instincts ran the show, feral, brutal, unpredictable. I'd never seen him shift, not once since we met, and that scared me more than I cared to admit. I had a feeling that if he ever did, there'd be no man left, just the monster beneath.

"Fine," I said, lifting my chin, "but I want answers. Or—"

"Or what?" he snapped, stepping toward me.

His energy hit me like a wall of fire, and my heart thudded in warning. Still, I didn't back down.

"Or you'll find yourself rejected and mateless."

The words fell from my mouth before I could stop them. A bluff. A dangerous one. But he didn't know that.

His body stilled completely. His eyes tracked my every movement as I took a cautious step back. He didn't lunge or roar, didn't throw me over his shoulder like I half-expected. He just looked at me. Piercingly. Blank-faced. Something unreadable brewed behind those cold, blue eyes.

Panic crept in as I realized what I'd done.

"I was—" I almost said joking, but he cut me off.

"Go to the bathroom. Change into the clothes in there. Come out when you're done."

I blinked at him, my mouth parting slightly. There was no inflection in his voice, just pure command. Alpha command. My body moved before I could decide if I wanted to.

Shit.

He was using his Alpha tone on me.

Not a suggestion.

Not a plea.

A demand I couldn't disobey.

My chest tightened as I made my way to the bathroom. Folded on the counter were sweatpants, a t-shirt, and a hoodie. Not exactly my style, but I pulled them on with trembling hands, barely glancing at the mirror. I didn't want to see what I looked like right now. I already felt like a wreck.

When I stepped back out, he hadn't moved a muscle. He stood there like a statue carved from ice, waiting.

The moment I got close, his hand wrapped firmly around my elbow. Not gentle. Not cruel. Just possessive. Like I was his and I'd forgotten it.

"Where are we going? Zaliver, where are you taking me?" I asked, unable to hide the fear creeping into my voice.

He didn't answer right away. His face was unreadable, colder than I'd ever seen it, even at our worst.

Then he laughed. It was low and empty, the sound of someone teetering on the edge.

He stopped in front of an elevator and pressed the button. I heard the sound of bones cracking. His knuckles were white from clenching so hard.

"I wanted to give you space. Time. But you just threatened your place in my life," he said without looking at me. "You wanted answers? You're about to get them. And more than you bargained for."

The elevator doors slid open. He shoved me in, not violently, but rough enough that I stumbled. He followed, looming behind me.

His smirk returned, only this time it wasn't charming. It was feral. Vengeful. The kind of smile nightmares wore when they knew you couldn't run.

"You won't enjoy this," he murmured, voice dripping with warning. "But I will."

The doors slid shut. The sound echoed like a sentence sealed.

And I knew I'd crossed a line I couldn't uncross.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

I was running.

Not for fun. Not for sport.

I was running for my life.

For my freedom.

For my very nature.

I was running from the last person I ever imagined I'd flee from.

My mate.

Zaliver.

My feet pounded against the forest floor, kicking up dry leaves and snapping brittle twigs that seemed unnaturally loud in the eerie silence around me. My heart beat furiously, like the frantic flutter of a trapped bird, roaring in my ears and drowning out everything else.

I couldn't hear him, but I knew he was near. I could feel it. That deep, chilling awareness in my bones. It only made me push harder, faster. The wind whipped through my hair, stinging my cheeks as I searched the shadows for a miracle, any advantage, any place to hide or escape.

But I couldn't keep this up forever.

My legs screamed. My chest heaved. My muscles begged me to stop.

But he could keep going. He wasn't like me. He wasn't like anyone.

And still, I ran.

Tears stung my eyes, blurring everything in front of me. Fear, confusion, betrayal, so many emotions battled for space in my chest. But one rose above them all.

Hatred.

For my own mate.

For Zaliver.

He was doing this. Forcing this. All because he couldn't handle the idea of another male laying claim to me. As if my autonomy didn't matter. As if his pride meant more than my will.

I should have seen this coming. I should have known his possessiveness had limits, and I'd just pushed him past them. I underestimated how deeply he distrusted the bond that tied us together.

Now he was out to prove something.

Something cruel.

Every time I thought I heard him behind me, I'd whip around only to find shadows. Nothing there. But each time, I swore I could feel him. The warmth of his breath ghosting across the back of my neck. The weight of his presence pressing into my spine.

And his breathing. Rough. Ragged. Cold.

I used to laugh at horror movies, those moments when the girl would run, glance back, and trip over nothing. Not so funny now. When you're being hunted, every instinct screams to check behind you. Distance feels like safety, and tripping feels like death.

And sometimes, just when I thought I had a lead, he'd blow past me. Not with a sound, not with a growl, just a blur. A gust of wind so forceful I nearly toppled over. Every time, it made my heart crash against my ribs in panic. I'd fall, scrape my knees, slam my palms into the dirt, but I'd always scramble up again and run in a different direction.

I didn't care where I ended up. Just away. Away from him.

My legs were bleeding. My skin scratched and raw. I couldn't feel any of it through the haze of adrenaline. The sky had dimmed, my vision picked up what little light it could, but even my wolf-enhanced sight was useless in this tangle of thick trees and vines.

He must have planned this. Brought me far enough that no one would hear me scream. Far enough that no one would question my absence. He must have known I'd try to run. He'd wanted this chase.

This was never about punishment. It was a twisted game. A sick, calculated game.

Catch and release.

Only I wasn't sure which part we were in anymore.

Suddenly, my foot caught something, a root, maybe. I tumbled hard, my body rolling until my back slammed against the base of a thick tree. The impact knocked the breath from my lungs. I gasped, my ribs burning, but somehow I got back on my feet.

Barely.

My knees shook. My limbs trembled. But I still ran.

I had no direction. No plan. And no real hope.

Even if I escaped this forest, where would I go? He owned this island. Every wolf here followed his command. Every path led back to him.

He knew that.

So did I.

And that was the worst part, knowing I'd never win. That no matter how fast I ran, how hard I fought, I was already caught.

But I ran anyway.

Because I had to. For me.

The air had turned sharp, biting at my skin, but I didn't slow. I couldn't afford to. I didn't know how long I'd been running. Minutes? Hours? It all blurred together now. My body felt like it had reached the brink, and still somehow I pushed past it.

Then it happened.

A sudden, searing burn lit up in my chest.

I staggered, clutching it, confused. My wolf howled inside me, a mix of warning and fear. Something wasn't right. She didn't know what to do either.

That's when I felt it.

A shift in the air.

A presence.

He was here.

Before I could react, something massive launched at me from the dark.

Straight for my throat.

And I knew it was Zaliver.

Just then, I collapsed to the forest floor with a heavy thud, a sharp cry escaping my lips. My hands clawed at the dirt, but my limbs were trembling so badly they could barely hold my weight. I tried to push myself upright, but my strength had long since abandoned me. Gritting my teeth, I crawled, half dragging, half stumbling toward the massive tree a few feet ahead. My hands scraped through roots, damp grass, and jagged rocks, uncaring of the fresh cuts opening up along my palms and forearms. When I finally reached it, I forced myself up just enough to slump against the tree trunk, breath ragged and heart pounding. I curled in on myself, hugging my knees, trying to still the shaking in my bones.

And then I saw him.

Far off in the trees, his silhouette appeared, tall, dark, and still. And in that moment, pure terror flooded me.

Just a few minutes earlier...

He'd pulled the car off some remote stretch of road and stopped abruptly. No words, no explanation. He opened the door, left it hanging open, and grabbed me without warning, dragging me out. I stumbled as my feet hit the ground. The look in his eyes wasn't familiar. It wasn't tenderness or even frustration, it was something darker.

Zaliver yanked me along into the forest. Normally, I would've welcomed walking through the trees with him, even found comfort in it. But not this time.

This time, I was afraid.

He didn't say a word as we plunged deeper into the woods. Branches grew thicker above us, casting shadows that swallowed up what little sunlight remained. The vines clawed at my legs, and the further we went, the more my chest tightened with dread.

"Zaliver?" I whispered.

He didn't answer.

The silence was deafening, his grip unyielding.

Somewhere in the fog of my thoughts, I prayed the drug they'd given me would wear off soon. Not just for me, but for my wolf.

Eventually, her voice stirred, drowsy but furious.

What did you say to him to make him this angry?! she growled.

I told him... I said I'd reject him, I admitted, my guilt a crushing weight.

Are you insane?! Do you even understand what you've done?

I thought... if he believed it, he might tell me the truth. About everything.

Well, congratulations, Vivian. He believed you. And if we end up mateless tonight, I swear I'll never forgive you, she snarled.

I don't think he'll actually leave us, I said weakly.

He better not, she muttered, still simmering with fear and exhaustion. She quieted down again, curling up in the back of my mind, but the unease lingered between us.

I waited until we were deeper in, until the oppressive weight of silence grew unbearable. Then I yanked my hand free from his grip. The sudden stop made him freeze. I bit my bottom lip as I saw his fists clench, then release, over and over.

"Zaliver?"

He turned to face me, and for a moment, the tension in his shoulders shifted.

"I thought they were taking you away from me," he said, voice low and strained. "When you didn't respond, all I could hear was you groaning in pain, and I couldn't do anything. I've never felt more helpless in my entire existence. Uselessness, it's a cruel thing, Vivian."

His eyes locked onto mine, the rawness in his voice making my throat tighten. I stayed silent, sensing he wasn't done.

"They," he continued, stepping closer, "are the ones above the gods. Alstha, god of war and knowledge. Eccasto, god of intelligence. And others. But your kind, you only speak of two: Fate and Luna. Mother Luna, as you call her."

I flinched slightly as he reached out, gently twirling a strand of my hair around his finger. I didn't pull away, though every nerve in me screamed for answers.

There were more gods?

Why hadn't we ever been told?

And how did Zaliver know them?

Was he one of them?

No. Not one of them. But something made by them.

"My existence," he said, as if reading my thoughts, "was crafted by their hands. I was their executioner. Their living weapon. When rogue supernaturals threatened the balance, when the gods didn't want to intervene directly, they sent me. I was their message to the world."

He chuckled bitterly. "I should hate them for it, but in some twisted way, I'm grateful. Look at me. Immortal. Unstoppable. Feared and revered. I have what any alpha would kill for, endless strength, command over armies, and a throne carved from power itself."

His words chilled me. Not because he sounded proud, but because he sounded resigned. Like all of it had been forced on him. Like power had come at the cost of peace.

Back to present...

I pressed my back harder against the tree, watching his silhouette in the distance. He hadn't moved. Neither had I.

And now I had to ask myself what did that make me, the girl fated to be his mate?

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

A killing machine? Zaliver. My thoughts splintered into a thousand pieces, and for a moment, all I could do was stare at him, stunned and silent.

"I have all this strength, all this control, and for what?" His voice cracked like thunder, bitter and jagged. He let out a sharp, mirthless laugh, stepping back from me, his hands tugging through his hair as he shook his head slowly, like he was trying to shake off ghosts only he could see.

I didn't move. I just watched, my chest tight with unease as his energy shifted into something darker. Something haunted.

"We were human once. All of us. Chosen, trained, molded for them," he said, and there was a hollow ache behind every word. "But I didn't even know who 'they' were at the time. The control they had over our minds back then, it was terrifying. We were loyal, like a brotherhood with the other soldiers. But the gods? The real ones? They were untouchable. Distant. We weren't allowed near them unless summoned."

He paused, eyes distant. "We worshiped them. I worshiped them. Blindly. Faithfully. I don't remember everything about that life, but there's one thing I do remember. My brother."

My heart lurched.

"Your brother?" I asked softly, barely able to get the words out.

He gave a single nod. "Yeah. I had a brother. And they slaughtered him."

The horror of it sent ice skittering down my spine. My stomach clenched, but I had a sinking feeling it wasn't even the worst of it.

"Actually," his voice dropped to a broken whisper, "I slaughtered him."

For a second, I couldn't breathe.

"They wanted proof, proof that our loyalty to the gods was greater than anything else. Even blood. They made us show them," he said, and something shattered in his voice. "I was the better fighter. Always had been. Joshula never stood a chance. He didn't even fight back. And when it was over, they didn't even let me bury him. Just took his body like he was nothing."

Zaliver stared down at his hands as if expecting them to still be soaked in blood. A long silence stretched between us, filled with the weight of everything he'd said. When he spoke again, his voice was quiet, raw with grief.

I swallowed hard, unsure if the ache I felt in my chest was mine or his. Maybe both. To be forced to kill your only family, there were no words in any language that could fix that kind of wound. His body bore no scars, but I could feel them seared deep into his soul.

Then, suddenly, like a storm snapping back to life, he looked up at me with a wild, unsettling smile. His blue eyes gleamed with something twisted.

"So I trained harder. I got stronger. Better. I outmatched every one of them. If I could take down hundreds, why would they need thousands?" His lips curled with a cruel edge. "So I took them out. All my competitors. One by one. Earned the bastards' trust. Climbed the ranks. Became more than a soldier. I became family." His laugh was dark. Bitter. "Funny, right?"

I didn't answer. I couldn't. My pulse thundered loudly in my ears, and the more he spoke, the clearer it became. Zaliver wasn't just powerful. He was dangerous. Unpredictable. And beneath that lethal exterior, there was a storm that had never truly passed.

"My plan was simple," he went on, his tone becoming unnervingly calm. "Earn their love. Then use it to turn them against each other. Let them destroy themselves the same way they made me destroy Joshula."

Then his tone shifted again, almost amused. "But then something unexpected happened. Luna, yeah, the same one your kind calls Mother Luna, she joined the circle. And Fate, the spiteful, calculating bastard, didn't like it one bit. Luna's wolves intrigued him. So he sent me down to observe. Report. Spy."

I swallowed hard, my throat dry as sand.

"I did what I was told, like the loyal soldier I was," he sneered. "But then Fate got jealous. Couldn't stand that Luna might have power he couldn't control. So what did he do?" Zaliver's smile deepened, teeth flashing like a predator ready to pounce. "He promoted me. Gave me more influence. Moved me higher."

And just like that, I understood the gravity of what I was dealing with.

Zaliver wasn't just some overpowered Alpha or feared immortal.

He was forged in blood and betrayal, built from grief and obedience and the slow, deliberate corruption of someone who had started out human.

And Fate had made him his weapon.

"But no human could be a god," he said, his voice almost dreamy, like he was caught between memory and madness. "They're too fragile. Too easy to kill. He wanted a god for

the wolves, something similar but not quite the same. Not the same species at all. And honestly, it was brilliant. A stroke of cruel genius."

His eyes, glassy with memories that haunted him, drifted away for a moment before they snapped back to me.

"It might've worked," he said, "if he hadn't chosen me. If he hadn't trained, altered, and handed that much power to the one soul who despised them all the most."

There was no emotion in his voice. Just bone-deep exhaustion and resignation. But his words sent a chill crawling up my spine. My gut twisted. What was he trying to tell me?

I narrowed my eyes, trying to read the man standing across from me, my mate, my mystery, my walking contradiction. A tightness squeezed in my chest. Something felt off. The kind of off that makes your instincts scream run. That fight-or-flight part of me stirred again, and it wasn't subtle.

Then he moved, crossing his arms over his chest with slow deliberation. His gaze latched onto me like I was a question he couldn't quite solve.

"But you?" he murmured, voice low and dark. "You were the curveball, Vivian Grey."

He started to circle me slowly like a predator sizing up its prey, like he was waiting for me to sprout wings or light the room on fire with some untapped force I didn't even know I had. I tensed but didn't move, locking my knees firmly in place.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"When they realized what I was really after, it was too late. I already had the power to wipe them off the map. So what did they do?" He gave a bitter smirk. "They sent a peace offering. A gift. A distraction. You."

He stopped in front of me, his eyes searching mine.

"I thought you'd be some kind of siren they created, sweet voice, wicked body, luring me in just to slit my throat when my guard was down. A pretty little dagger, wrapped in charm."

My throat dried. His words weren't meant to hurt, but they stung anyway.

"Imagine my surprise when I ended up with this fiery little mate. Sharp tongue. Too much heart. Innocent without even trying."

He laughed to himself, but there was no humor in it.

"Of course I didn't trust you. Not at first. It wasn't until that night when you started rambling, totally unfiltered, that I slipped into your head. You didn't even know you'd dropped your walls, but you did. I saw everything. Every unguarded thought, every flicker of emotion."

He moved closer, lowering his voice. "You weren't thinking about how to kill me or what your orders were. You were thinking about me. About what I was thinking. About us."

A strange ache bloomed in my chest. I didn't know what hurt more, his past, or how much I was already tangled up in it.

My stomach churned. The things he had been through, the choices he'd been forced to make, I could understand his pain, but the way he said things, the quiet violence sitting just under the calm surface of every word, it scared me. And then there was that part about me being a pawn. A tool used against him. I swallowed the rising nausea and looked away for a moment.

Was this bond even real?

Was I even real?

He tilted his head, as if sensing my spiral.

"And in the middle of all that madness, you were the one good thing to come from it. My beautiful little cloud." His voice dropped lower, almost reverent. "You drive me insane, you know that? I catch myself wondering where you are, if you've eaten, if you're cold or bored or safe. I hate how much I think about you."

For a second, I wanted to lean into that warmth, that tenderness he rarely let show. But I knew better. His affection came tangled in blood and shadows.

Then he sighed and took a small step back.

"But I couldn't mark you. Not the way I wanted. Not yet. I had to be sure your body was as untouched as your mind and heart, not in the way you're thinking," he added quickly, catching the glare I shot at him.

"I just had to be sure your blood wasn't laced with poison. Figuratively or literally. So I tested it. And the results," he trailed off, something dark flickering in his expression, "the results were very interesting."

He leaned in slightly, too close for my comfort. "Want to know what made it so interesting?"

My heart was pounding now, thudding so loudly I was sure he could hear it. I hesitated, then gave a reluctant nod, dreading whatever truth was about to come out of his mouth.

But instead of answering, he tilted his head and gave me a crooked smile.

"Before I tell you, though, I think you still want to know why you woke up in the hospital, right?"

I let out a frustrated breath. Of course he was dodging again. I just didn't understand why.

He looked down at me, his expression etched with something that looked like sadness, but I ignored the familiar pull in my chest, that aching instinct to reach out and comfort him. My arms stayed at my sides. I wasn't ready to give in. Not yet.

"We're not the only pair of mates who haven't marked each other," he began, his voice low. "But we're the only ones dealing with certain conditions."

"Conditions?" I narrowed my eyes. "Like what? A psychotic mate and his reluctant, kidnapped Luna?"

A ghost of a smile played at his lips, but he didn't answer that. "All in due time, Vivian," he murmured, brushing past the sarcasm. "Because of what we are, or maybe because of what you are, we didn't notice it before. We were constantly together, practically wrapped around each other from sunrise to moonrise, so the bond was steady. Stable. But the moment I left for that trip, the distance started pulling at it. Without the mark anchoring us, it had consequences."

He paused, gaze heavy.

"I should've known it would happen. That's on me. I didn't feel what you did because my body doesn't work the same way yours does. The pain only hit you. I went through something else entirely."

I stood there, trying to absorb every word, but the more he said, the more it felt like I was walking through thick fog. Mates were meant to stay close, sure. But separation didn't usually end in near-death experiences. He hadn't even been gone a full day, and yet I'd felt like I was being ripped apart from the inside out. Why only me? What made me so different from every other mated wolf alive?

My heart pounded.

"I didn't want the doctor explaining too much," he added, tone edging into frustration. "It would've led to more questions. Complications. But as always, you notice things others miss."

I snorted. "I wouldn't call it paying attention. I think anyone would've noticed a doctor tiptoeing around the patient's condition."

That made him chuckle, but I didn't return the smile.

"Fair enough," he admitted. "But then you went and threatened to reject me, and I don't take risks when it comes to you. To us."

His face darkened, voice shifting into something colder. Protective. Possessive.

"You should've known better than to say something like that."

I crossed my arms, uneasy. "I was bluffing. I wasn't actually going to do it."

His stare didn't soften. "Bluff or not, Vivian, I simply cannot gamble when it comes to you."

I didn't know what to say to any of that, so I waited, arms crossed, heart still hammering, wondering what he wasn't saying yet.

Chapter 57: I have a beast

Vivian Grey's POV

He took a breath and moved on. "Anyway. Back to your test results. While yours were mostly normal, mine weren't. And that's where things get interesting."

There it was again. Interesting. I was starting to loathe that word.

"When my saliva made contact with your blood, your cells," his voice gained a strange note of pride, "began to change."

A chill slid down my spine. "Change how, Zaliver?"

His eyes gleamed. "Your cells morphed. Transformed. Whatever was in you, something that had been dormant, it woke up. The new cells were homogeneous."

His tone was light, almost excited, like this was good news. But to me? It sounded like a nightmare.

"Homogeneous?" I echoed, breath catching. "What does that even mean?"

"Identical. Compatible. Undifferentiated," he said smoothly, like he was reading from a textbook.

Compatible?

My stomach turned. Compatible with what?

"What's been dormant in me?" I asked, the question leaving my lips before I could stop it.
"And what are you, exactly?"

I looked at him then, really looked, and it hit me that even now I didn't truly know what I was dealing with. Sure, he had the dominance of an Alpha, the power of a ruler, the aura of something old and wild. But what if he wasn't a werewolf at all?

He didn't flinch. Instead, he watched me for a heartbeat, as if weighing how much I could handle.

Then his chin rose, jaw tight. "Lycan," he said simply.

I blinked. "What?"

"Lycan," he repeated. Like it was the most natural thing in the world.

My head tilted instinctively, lips parting. Was he serious?

"Zaliver," my voice dropped, almost disbelieving, "are you messing with me?"

His expression didn't waver. "No."

"That's impossible. Lycans are a myth. A horror story humans came up with to make us seem like monsters!"

"And yet," he said softly, "here I am."

I didn't realize I was shaking until I clenched my fists. My skin felt too tight, my breath shallow. A part of me wanted to reject what he said outright, but another part, a deeper, older instinct, believed him.

"You've seen what I can do, Vivian," he said quietly. "You've felt it. I'm not just an Alpha. I command wolves. Not just by rank, but by blood. We're similar to werewolves, yes, but we're stronger. Faster. Made of something older. Something more primal."

I backed up a step, needing space to think. Needing to breathe.

And yet, no matter how far I stepped, I couldn't run from what I already knew deep down.

He wasn't lying.

Lycans weren't just real.

They were him.

And somehow, I was changing into one too.

"And don't all myths start with a thread of truth?" Zaliver's voice was low, steady, too calm for the weight behind his words. "I shifted in front of a human once and let them live. Next thing I know, stories start spreading, 'a two-legged beast howling at the moon.'" His intense eyes pinned me in place. "Tell me, Vivian. How many have seen the color of my wolf?"

I couldn't answer. My mouth went dry.

He leaned forward, his voice grave. "None. Because I don't have a wolf. I have a beast." His gaze didn't waver. "Wouldn't the god of all wolves have to be the darkest of them all? Think about it. What does that tell you?"

My heart stuttered in my chest.

"You already know the answer, Vivian," he added softly, like he was coaxing something out of me I wasn't ready to admit.

But the truth clicked in my head like a door unlocking. He was telling the truth. He had never shifted in front of anyone, not me, not his own pack. He was stronger than any alpha I'd ever known, faster, more commanding. He didn't just lead the wolves, he was apart from them. A king, but not of this world. He stood above us all because he wasn't one of us.

And suddenly, it made sense.

"Zaliver?" I whispered, my eyes fixed on the ground as the air grew heavy around us.

He stepped closer. "You said my cells were identical. Identical to what?"

His voice dropped to a whisper as he leaned near my ear.

"Identical to me," he breathed.

A jolt ran through me. Before I could even react, he pressed a brief kiss to my cheek and pulled away, leaving me frozen, my breath caught in my throat.

I stumbled back a step instinctively, my heart pounding. He matched my retreat with a few slow steps of his own, eyes scanning me with something unreadable.

Then, without warning, Zaliver reached for the hem of his shirt and tugged it over his head. The fabric fell to the floor.

My eyes widened. "What are you doing?"

He didn't answer, just calmly undid his belt, unfastened his pants, and slid down the zipper. My head whipped away, my cheeks flushing, but somehow my eyes found their way back to him. Those stormy electric-blue eyes held mine.

"Unlike werewolves, my clothes don't shift back with me," he said casually. "So, yes. I'd be completely naked. Lucky you, huh?"

"Y-you're shifting? Why?!" My voice cracked. Fear laced every syllable. I wasn't ready for this, for him. My mind was spinning, everything I thought I knew unraveling in front of me.

He gave me a devilish smirk. "Well, you did threaten to reject me. And leave me mateless."

"I was bluffing!" I burst out. "You'll find I do that a lot when I'm overwhelmed."

"Bluff or not," he said darkly, "a mate can only reject if they're unmarked. And I plan on marking you."

My breath caught again. "But if you mark me, won't that change me? Your saliva would enter my system, and I..." I couldn't even say it. I didn't want to become what he was.

He tilted his head, studying me like I was something delicate and reckless all at once. "Yes, you'll change. And I'll be doing it in my other form. The deeper the bite, the stronger the claim. The more permanent our bond. No other will ever be able to challenge it. And if you transform, you'll be immortal. I won't have to lose you."

My stomach dropped. My chest tightened.

"Zaliver, I don't want that. I'm happy being what I am. We can find another way, a less intense way to mark me. A hickey! Hell, I'll even wear a collar. Just not that." My voice cracked with panic as I took a step back.

But his expression hardened. "That won't be enough. You'll still be vulnerable. And I can't allow that. You're unclaimed, Vivian. Mine, but still unmarked. Do you understand what that means to others?"

He looked at me like he was already mourning something.

"I'm sorry, Vivian," he whispered. "But I've lived a long, cruel existence. You're the only thing that's ever made it bearable. I won't lose you. Not to time. Not to anyone."

My legs trembled beneath me. I shook my head, tears burning behind my eyes. He wasn't just claiming me, he was about to change my fate forever.

And I wasn't sure if I had the strength to stop him, or if some part of me didn't even want to.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

"Why do you keep thinking someone's trying to take me away from you!?" I snapped, voice rising, raw and furious. "No one even likes me, Zaliver! Your pack avoids me like I carry some deadly disease. They're scared of you. Scared you'll snap their necks if they so much as say hello. You have no reason to act like this. It makes no damn sense! I'm still shocked you even like me!"

I was breathing hard, chest heaving, the frustration spilling out before I could stop it.

His face didn't change, but his eyes, something simmered beneath that icy surface.

"They stayed away from you because I told them to," he said evenly. "I gave them that order. Do you know why? Because the moment they saw who you really are, how gentle, how radiant, how kind you are inside and out, they'd want a piece of you. They'd want your friendship, your time. And that would mean less of you for me."

He stepped closer, the intensity in his voice rising with every word. "You underestimate how much I crave every part of you. Your voice. Your thoughts. The way your eyes light up when you're annoyed. I want everything, your body, your pleasure, your time, your fears. All of it, Vivian. All of you."

His confession caught me off guard. My chest tightened.

I had definitely underestimated how deep his obsession went. It was oddly sweet, in a twisted way. But it also made it clear that Zaliver had demons. And I wasn't sure love alone could silence them.

"Okay," I said, softer now, trying to keep us grounded, "but just because people like me doesn't mean they're trying to take me away. And I sure as hell wouldn't leave you. You're my mate, Zaliver. My crazy, possessive, slightly deranged mate who probably needs professional help, maybe a long vacation with a therapist or two."

His lips quirked upward, but his tone turned cold again. "That's touching, really. But you're getting marked, whether you agree to it or not."

My blood ran cold.

"You remember what I said before? 'Something you won't enjoy, but I will'? Well, this is it."

I took a step back. "I won't forgive you for this," I warned, voice trembling despite how hard I tried to keep it firm.

"I'm fine spending forever earning your forgiveness," he replied without hesitation. "Because after this, you'll be mine. Completely. Irrevocably." He tilted his head. "Got any ideas on how I could win you over afterward? I was thinking, maybe flying in your parents for a visit? You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

My stomach twisted. Gods, that was low.

The thought of seeing my parents again sent a pang of longing through me. But knowing he'd use them after he'd taken my choice away? That he'd bring them into a world where I was already changed?

It broke something in me.

"You can't do this," I begged, panic finally cracking my voice. "You can't mark me against my will. I'm not ready for this. I don't want to change, Zaliver. Please. What'll happen to my wolf? What if I lose her?!"

He didn't answer right away. Instead, he began slipping off his pants with calm, deliberate movements, leaving only black underwear between him and his shift.

"I can. And I will," he said simply. "I'm sorry you don't want this, but it's not as bad as you think. There are perks. Immortality. Power. Me, at your side, forever. You and your wolf, she won't be gone. Not completely. You'll have time. A week, maybe two. Then the changes begin."

He crouched, muscles coiling, body preparing to shift.

"No. No! No! Please, don't do this!" My voice cracked as desperation clawed its way up my throat.

Inside me, my wolf whimpered in fear. Real fear.

And for once, she agreed with me.

Run.

His body began to tremble violently.

At first, it was subtle, just a twitch in his muscles, but then it escalated. His skin rippled unnaturally, as if something powerful clawed its way to the surface from deep within. Coarse black fur surged from beneath his skin like wildfire. Bones cracked loudly, sharp and sickening, making my stomach turn as his entire frame began to morph before my eyes.

He grew larger. Taller. Leaner. The shape of him stretched unnaturally, limbs elongating until his feet had shifted into powerful paws and his hands twisted into clawed weapons. His handsome face, the face I was just yelling at, contorted and elongated, his nose and mouth forming into a sharp, menacing snout.

His thick black hair thinned out, merging with the dark fur spreading rapidly across his skull. Two pointed ears rose from his head, twitching slightly as if testing their new form. Then came another gut-wrenching crack, his ribs expanding and contracting, widening to accommodate the massive beast he was becoming.

It was terrifying. Savage. Yet, in some haunting way, beautiful.

More graceful and primal than any werewolf transformation I'd ever seen or heard of. It was raw power layered with ancient magic. The kind that whispered of bloodlines older than memory itself.

The creature rose to its full height.

Even from this distance, I could tell it was enormous. Easily larger than Zaliver's already intimidating human frame. My heart thundered. The air around us thickened.

But then, the beast looked at me.

And I froze.

Those eyes. Those unmistakable, soul-piercing blue eyes. Zaliver's eyes.

For a moment, they locked with mine, and I couldn't look away. It was him.

I shook my head in disbelief, but it was no use. I couldn't lie to myself. His eyes darkened slowly, the way the moon fades into shadow during an eclipse, blue giving way to blackness. I felt like something precious was being stolen from me.

And I ran.

I spun and bolted into the forest, heart pounding, branches slashing at my arms and legs. I didn't even think. My body just moved, driven by pure survival.

Then the growl came.

It was so loud, so deep, it rattled through the earth and climbed straight into my bones. My knees almost buckled from the weight of it. That wasn't just a sound. It was a command. A declaration.

Do not run, mate. I'll be chasing you.

Chapter 59: my mate the monster

Vivian Grey's POV

His voice, Zaliver's voice, reverberated inside my head, but it was different now. Rougher. Feral. Unforgiving.

I screamed, but I didn't stop. I ran harder, faster, toward where I thought the car was. He'd left the door open. The keys had still been in the ignition. I had to find it.

But the trees all looked the same now, dark and endless. My direction was off. I must've veered from the path.

Terror clawed at me.

Fine, run. This will be fun.

His voice slithered through my mind again, smug and amused. I twisted my head to glance around, but all I saw was shadow. His fur was pitch black, he could be inches away and I wouldn't know.

I leapt over a fallen log, ducked under a branch that almost clotheslined me, stumbled on a root and barely caught myself. My lungs burned, and my ears strained desperately for the sound of his footsteps, his breath, anything.

You're fast. But I'm faster.

Something whooshed past me like a gust of wind, and in that instant, I saw it, a hulking blur. A massive figure darting through the trees ahead. I gasped and skidded to a stop, spinning on my heel to run in the opposite direction.

"Oh gods," I breathed out.

Just imagine how fast you'll be when you transform.

We'll be able to run together. Forever.

Just give in, Vivian.

His voice was softer now. Smooth. Enticing. Almost seductive.

It made my stomach twist.

"No!" I yelled, the sound ripping from my throat.

I ducked behind a thick tree trunk, pressing my back to the bark as I tried to quiet my frantic breathing. My chest heaved. I clamped a hand over my mouth, forcing myself to slow down, to breathe through my nose in thin, careful, silent streams. I closed my eyes and prayed to the Moon Goddess, or anyone who was listening, that he'd lose the thread of my scent in the dark.

Please. Just give me a moment. Just one.

Silence.

Total, terrifying silence.

And then, scrape.

The horrible sound of claws dragging down the bark behind me made my blood run cold.

I bolted again, shoving off the tree and sprinting blindly. I couldn't help myself, I glanced back.

And I wished I hadn't.

A massive figure stood upright just behind me, one clawed hand still resting on the bark. His black eyes gleamed in the darkness like polished onyx. He was watching me. Hunting me.

My mate. The monster.

He crouched low in the shadows, massive and still, his black fur blending almost perfectly into the darkness. Only his eyes, two eerie, glinting black mirrors, gave him away. They gleamed with an unnatural light, reflecting the faintest sliver of moonlight that filtered through the trees. I watched a puff of mist curl from his snout with every slow, deliberate breath he took, and my lungs tightened in response.

I held my breath, praying to the Moon Goddess that he wouldn't move, wouldn't step closer.

But he did.

He began to rise slowly, deliberately, until he towered above everything. Then one clawed foot slid forward, crunching softly over the forest floor, followed by the other. Each step echoed like a countdown in my head, a steady march toward my undoing.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to run. But I couldn't.

My legs wouldn't obey. My body had shut down, every muscle frozen in shock and sheer exhaustion, and some primal part of my brain had simply stopped cooperating with the rest of me. I told my feet to move, screamed at them internally with everything I had, and they stayed exactly where they were. I had thought werewolves were the pinnacle of power. I was wrong. Zaliver, whatever he was, was something more. Something beyond. He moved through the forest like a phantom, silent, untraceable, and so impossibly fast that I never once saw him coming. I hadn't sensed him until he was already right behind me. He was something far greater than a werewolf, something ancient and terrifying and real.

And he was mine.

The closer he drew, the harder my heart pounded, hammering painfully in my chest. I was drowning in fear. Drowning in him.

"Stop. Please," I whimpered, my voice barely audible through the tightness in my throat. I wanted to look away, to block out the sight of him, but I couldn't. Even in that monstrous form, he was heartbreakingly beautiful. Terrifying, yes. But there was still him in there. Zaliver.

He stopped. But he didn't back away.

I don't want you to hate me, Vivian, his voice whispered through my mind. But I'm going to mark you now.

My blood turned to ice.

He began moving again, slow and steady, like a predator closing in on prey. I squeezed my eyes shut, trembling all over. I couldn't bear to look at him. The heat radiating from his body hit my face, scorching and suffocating. Just thinking about what he looked like, those massive fangs, that sharp snout inching toward my skin, sent me spiraling into panic.

"W-Wait!" I choked out, my voice breaking under the weight of everything I felt.

He stopped again.

"If you're going to do it, c-change back. Please," I sobbed. "I-I can't. Not like this. I can't handle it. Please."

I didn't dare open my eyes. I just stood there, begging into the darkness, knowing the beast, my mate, before me could tear me apart or claim me forever. Either felt equally

terrifying. Either felt equally possible. And the worst part was that I wasn't sure anymore which one I feared more, or which one some quiet, broken part of me was silently hoping for.

Silence hung between us, thick and unbearable, until the crack of bone and sinew finally filled the air. The sound was awful, but this time, I welcomed it. I sucked in a shuddering breath, air finally reaching my lungs again.

But the moment relief washed through me, a hand reached out toward my face.

I didn't move. I didn't open my eyes. I just stood there in the dark, heart still hammering hard against my ribs, tears drying cold on my cheeks, and waited to find out which version of him had come back to me.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I scrambled back and threw myself to the ground, trying to crawl away, until Zaliver was suddenly on me. Moving faster than thought, he flipped me over and pulled me into his lap, straddling him in one quick, fluid motion.

His arms locked around me, one hand pressing gently but firmly against the back of my head, keeping my gaze locked on his.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, his voice low and heavy with guilt. "He's harder to control than I remember."

His breath warmed my skin. His hand trembled slightly against my back. His eyes, now glowing an unnatural shade, dropped to my neck.

"After I mark you, all your injuries will heal faster. Our bond will strengthen completely," he whispered.

But I didn't hear most of it.

All I could focus on were his parted lips and the sharp glint of his elongated canines.

I knew I had lost even before it ended. Deep down, I knew. Just like he did.

It was only now, standing there with the weight of reality pressing down on me, that the truth finally sank in.

I was mated to him.

To Zaliver.

To the most powerful creature born of not just one race, but two. He didn't just command a species, he was one. He didn't need armies or weapons to catch what he wanted. He was the storm.

Relentless. Unstoppable. Inescapable.

There was no corner of the world I could disappear into where he wouldn't find me, not with the strength he carried in his body, the speed in his blood, or the sharpened instincts in his soul.

I was shackled to a force that no one, not even me, could run from.

"No man should have this much power," I whispered, my voice trembling with awe and something close to fear.

His piercing blue eyes locked onto my neck, and a slow, devilish smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"You're right," he murmured.

He stepped closer. My breath caught.

His fingers brushed through my hair, gently pushing it over my shoulder, then wrapped around the back of my head. He tilted it, exposing my neck.

My heart kicked hard against my ribs.

I knew what he was about to do.

This wasn't a kiss. It wasn't playful. It wasn't a tease.

This was forever.

His lips found the curve of my neck. I felt the brush of them, soft, reverent, then the tip of his nose grazed up toward my ear as he whispered, voice low and final.

"But I get to share all this power with you."

Then he struck.

His fangs sank into my skin, and I screamed.

A fire like nothing I'd ever felt surged through me. My blood spilled into his mouth as he bit deeper. I clawed at his arms, weakly trying to push him away, but he only pulled me closer.

His voice slipped into my mind, like silk over a blade.

Give in to it. Feel me.

I didn't want to.

I wanted to resist.

But the pain was too much. I couldn't hold on.

So I let go.

And in that surrender, something happened that I hadn't expected.

I felt him.

Not just the warmth of his body against mine, not just the sound of his voice in my mind. I felt him the way you feel a song that knows you better than you know yourself. The grief he carried in his chest like old stone. The fierce, desperate tenderness underneath all that cold authority. The centuries of loneliness that had calcified into armor, and the single crack running through all of it, shaped exactly like me.

I finally understood.

We had danced around each other. Played games. Pretended we were something other than what we really were. But this, this bond, it stripped all of that away.

We weren't two people anymore.

We were one truth.

Two souls crashing together, choosing to fall not despite the risk, but because of it.

Zaliver was there in every breath I took, every tremor in my bones. I could feel him, the immense power flowing through his body like lightning. It was raw, primal, and impossible to pull away from.

I was burning.

Every nerve in me lit up. I hadn't even realized I was moving, pressing my hips against his with a needy grind, until he let out a rough groan that matched my own.

He pulled back from my neck, licking the wound, his mark.

I gasped, shaking.

It was like he'd tattooed himself into my soul.

Reality slammed back into me all at once, like surfacing from deep water. The forest. The dark. The cold air against my skin. I was in his arms, and I was changed, and somewhere underneath the exhaustion and the fear and the lingering fire of the bite, something in me had gone quiet in a way it never had before.

Not empty. Settled.

And the first thought in my mind?

Zaliver. Naked.

I remembered the chase. The beast hiding in his skin. The danger, the fear, and the thrill.

In a blink, his arms were around me. He lifted me easily and began walking, carrying me like I weighed nothing.

I scowled up at him, too exhausted to protest physically, but not about to go silent.

"You do realize you're completely naked, right?" I asked dryly.

He looked down at me with that annoyingly smug grin and a glint of calm satisfaction in his eyes.

"Yup."

I rolled my eyes and stared ahead, trying to will myself not to pass out in his arms.

He sighed, voice lower this time. "You're angry with me. I know."

I didn't look at him. "That's putting it mildly. I don't even want to see you, much less be carried by you."

He let out a laugh, deep and rich, shaking both of us as he walked. It made my glare deepen.

"Well, then that's my cue," he said.

"Cue for what?"

"To start wooing you."

I turned my head, startled by the softness in his tone. His smile wasn't cocky now, it was warm. Almost hopeful.

He leaned down and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

I flinched, but he didn't pull away.

He just kept walking, holding me close.

Like I was his.

Because now, I was.