

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna chapter 61-70

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I groaned and rubbed at the persistent itch on my nose, hoping it would stop long enough to let me drift back to sleep. No such luck. It returned just as quickly, dragging me out of whatever fragile dream I'd been clinging to.

Blinking open my eyes, I squinted against the soft blur in front of me. Something feathery and white hovered right in my line of vision. I blinked again, more awake this time, just in time to hear a low, amused chuckle.

The feather belonged to none other than Zaliver, who was crouched beside my bed with that signature smirk tugging at his lips. He looked far too pleased with himself, clearly the one behind my rude awakening. I almost smiled out of reflex, but then everything from last night hit me again like a crashing wave.

My smile died before it could surface. I pressed my lips together and said nothing, letting silence be my answer. His expression faltered slightly. He didn't try to explain, and I didn't ask for one.

Then came the smell, warm, delicious, and way too close. My stomach betrayed me with a loud growl. Zaliver gently moved the feather aside, revealing a breakfast tray resting over my lap, complete with a single red rose.

I looked at it for a long moment. The rose was fresh, not store-bought, the kind that meant someone had gone looking for it early. The food was still warm, which meant he'd timed it. He'd thought about this, planned it, arranged it, and then woken me up with a feather so the tray would be the first thing I properly saw. It was so specifically, deliberately him that I felt the tightness in my chest pull in two directions at once.

I still hadn't forgiven him. But I wasn't made of stone either.

"Good morning, beautiful," he said softly. "Breakfast in bed to start your day."

I didn't meet his eyes. "Thanks," I murmured, picking up the fork just to give my hands something to do. I wasn't all that hungry yet, and the weight of his gaze made it worse. I hated eating with someone watching me like that, especially him. It felt too intimate, too vulnerable.

As if sensing that, he shifted his focus, reaching for a loose strand of my hair. He started playing with it, then twisting it experimentally. I didn't stop him. I don't think he even realized he was doing it at first. Eventually, he attempted to braid it, fumbling awkwardly. I could feel the gentle tugs and restarts as he tried again and again until he finally got the hang of it.

Once I was done eating, though I barely touched half, he noticed immediately.

"That's all you're eating?" he asked, clearly worried.

I nodded.

He stared at me a little longer, like he wanted to say something else, but stopped himself. With a quiet sigh, he set the tray down on the floor and sat at the foot of the bed, just near my legs.

Silence settled between us again, but not the comforting kind. It was the kind that came after things were said and done and couldn't be taken back.

"I'm sorry," he finally said, his voice low and honest. His hand rested gently on my thigh, grounding and warm.

"I know." And I did. I could feel his emotions through the bond now, the way his remorse bled into mine. But it wasn't regret. That's what gnawed at me. He wasn't sorry for what he did, just that it upset me.

I needed space. Not from him exactly, but from the pull of him. The bond was new and raw and it kept trying to override my own thoughts with his presence, his warmth, the steady beat of him that I could now feel like a second heartbeat beneath my own. It was disorienting in a way I hadn't anticipated. I needed quiet that was just mine, thoughts that didn't have his fingerprints all over them.

Without a word, I slid out of bed and stood. Zaliver rose with me, watchful as I moved about the room. I didn't bother explaining. I didn't know how to put it into words. I grabbed a pair of black jeans and a fitted long-sleeved shirt and stepped into the bathroom to change.

When I came out, tying my shoes, he was still there. Close. Too close.

"What are you doing?" he asked, stepping forward as I straightened.

"I'm going for a walk," I said calmly, keeping my tone even.

"I'll come with you," he offered immediately, already reaching for his own shoes.

"No." I turned to face him fully. "I want to go alone."

He stopped, eyes narrowing just slightly. His jaw tightened, but after a pause, he gave a slow nod.

"I'll call your guards, then—"

"Alone," I repeated firmly, folding my arms across my chest to make it clear I meant it.

We stared at each other in that thick silence again. He didn't like it, I could tell. His fists clenched at his sides, and I could see the argument forming somewhere behind his eyes, sharp and defensive. But he bit it back. He turned away. Silent.

That in itself was shocking.

"But you have to take your phone," he finally said, voice clipped.

There it was. He had to get the last word in. Still, I didn't argue. I simply nodded. That was fair enough, not unreasonable.

He stepped around the bed and pulled open the drawer on his side. Then he handed the phone to me, his fingers brushing against mine as he did.

Neither of us let go right away. His eyes held mine for a moment, searching for something I wasn't sure I had to give yet. Then I stepped back, tucked the phone into my pocket, and walked to the door without looking at him again. I needed the walk. I needed the air. I needed ten minutes of not feeling him in my chest like a second heartbeat, just so I could figure out what I actually felt on my own.

I'd figure out the rest when I got back. And maybe, just maybe, by then I'd have something real to say to him instead of silence.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

His touch lingered longer than necessary. Warm and feather-light, it made a shiver skitter down my spine, like the contact left a ghost behind on my skin.

"Call me if anything happens," he said, watching me closely. "Or if you want me to pick you up, or bring you something. Anything, okay?"

His voice was soft but edged with something tight, like he was holding in a thousand other words.

"Okay," I murmured. I didn't look back as I turned and walked out of the room. No dramatic goodbyes. I needed air.

My feet carried me in the direction of the forest, though I stayed at its edge. I wasn't reckless enough to wander into it, not today. The cool breeze brushed against my skin and carried the scent of earth and pine, wrapping around me like a calming blanket.

As I walked past familiar faces, I returned their smiles and waves out of habit, but my mind was far away. There was a stillness in the air, one that helped the chaos in my head quiet just enough to think. Not to solve anything, not to make peace with any of it, but just enough to sit with it without drowning.

I found a tree with a thick trunk and soft grass beneath, and I sat down with a sigh. From here, I could see the houses and little shops dotting the land, peaceful and untouched. I stayed there, probably for an hour, just breathing, letting my thoughts unfold and unravel until they didn't feel quite so tangled anymore. The grass was cool and slightly damp through my jeans, and I didn't move from it.

What surprised me most was that Zaliver hadn't sent out the entire patrol to drag me back. Or come storming in himself, demanding I return. That had been my expectation, but maybe this was his way of proving something. Maybe this was him giving me space.

For once.

I closed my eyes and let my thoughts drift to my family. My real family. Mom and Dad. My chest ached at the thought of them. No matter how much time passed, I missed them like a phantom limb. Even with Zaliver and my new life here, that hole hadn't closed. If anything, it felt sharper right now, because what I was going through was the kind of thing I would have called my mother about at two in the morning, and I knew without question that she would have picked up on the first ring and stayed on until dawn if I needed her to.

He'd said something about bringing them here. I still didn't know if he'd meant it, or if it had just been a comfort tossed out in a desperate moment. But gods, I wanted it. I wanted to see my mother's face when she realized her daughter had fallen for a powerful, broody Alpha-mate with a divine curse, a lycan's blood, and a temper that could level forests. Would she be terrified? Protective? Would she see something in him that I didn't?

Would she see something in me I didn't?

I had so many questions. So many things I'd never asked. Things only a mother could help me untangle. Would she understand the bond? The pain? The strange, stubborn hope that came with it anyway?

Then there was Joshula. Zaliver's brother.

That still felt unreal. I couldn't picture Zaliver having a sibling, let alone a brother he'd been forced to kill with his own hands because gods demanded proof of loyalty. The image of it sat wrong in my chest, heavy and cold. Were they close before it happened? Did Joshula know what was coming? Did Zaliver?

And what did any of it mean for me? Zaliver was made by gods as a weapon. His brother was taken from him as a test of loyalty no one should ever be given. What was I supposed to be in this pattern? Another test? Another tool? Another sacrifice dressed up as a gift? I felt like a game piece being moved across a divine chessboard, only I had no idea what the rules were or which side I was on.

I hated that feeling. Hated how helpless it made me.

And I hated Zaliver for marking me without asking.

He did it just like that. No pause. No question. As if the decision had already been made for both of us, and my consent was a technicality the universe hadn't bothered to include. And now I was stuck in this in-between state, trying to make peace with something I hadn't been ready for.

He said I'd keep my wolf. That I'd still be me. But what did that even mean anymore?

If I couldn't handle seeing his true form without completely breaking down, how was I supposed to survive being made into one of them? He didn't hesitate. But I did. And now I was the one carrying the weight of that decision. The fear. The unknown. The silent scream in the back of my mind that kept asking, what if you lose yourself?

What if I changed so much I didn't recognize the girl looking back in the mirror?

Pain I could handle. The transformation, the burning, whatever it came with. I could brace for that. But mentally? I wasn't so sure.

I was scared.

Angry.

Not just at him, but at myself for letting it happen. For falling so hard, so fast, I didn't realize I was already past the point of no return.

I opened my eyes and stared at the quiet stretch of land in front of me, the little houses and shops and wolves going about their ordinary day in an extraordinary place. I was sitting under a tree on a hidden island in the Bermuda Triangle, bonded to an immortal lycan who had killed his own brother and built an empire out of his grief, and somewhere behind me in a room I was not yet ready to go back to, I had probably left fifty percent of an uneaten breakfast on a tray with a single red rose.

I didn't know what I was becoming.

But I knew this much, and I knew it with complete clarity. I wasn't the same girl anymore.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

A sharp snap jolted me out of my thoughts. I turned instinctively toward the sound, my senses already stretching far beyond what they used to. Then came the shuffling, followed by the rhythmic pounding of something moving fast. It wasn't just any noise. It was the heartbeat and footfalls of a wolf, running hard.

What startled me most wasn't the sound itself, it was the distance. The wolf was still miles away, but I could hear it as if it were near the treeline. My ears twitched, the world around me suddenly sharper, clearer, and painfully loud in spots.

Was this normal? I blinked, heart thudding softly. It hadn't even been a full day since Zaliver bit me. He said I had a week or two before the shift started, but this? This didn't feel like waiting. It felt like I was already changing.

And fast.

The wolf was getting closer, barreling through the forest without hesitation. In just seconds, it broke through the tree line.

A sleek brown wolf charged into the clearing, its paws kicking up dirt as it ran. It hadn't noticed me at first, but the second it lifted its head and locked eyes with me, it stumbled. Hard. Its front legs froze mid-step, but its back legs kept going, sending the poor thing tumbling nose-first into the ground.

I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing.

The wolf gave a frustrated huff, shaking its head before shifting back with a ripple of fur and energy. My gaze lingered, curiosity blooming as a tall, lean guy walked toward me, brushing leaves from his light brown hair. He looked a bit familiar.

His cheeks were flushed pink with embarrassment as he approached, dark brown eyes avoiding mine.

"You alright there?" I asked, amusement bubbling in my voice.

"Yeah," he muttered, rubbing the back of his neck, not daring to meet my eyes. "Man, this is so embarrassing. Out of everyone, I had to trip in front of the Luna." He glared at the ground like it had betrayed him.

That made me chuckle. "How do you know I'm Luna?" I didn't remember telling anyone. Then it hit me, Zaliver's gathering last night. I opened my mouth to wave it off, but he beat me to it.

"My wolf just knew. The moment he felt your presence, he told me to stop running. I didn't get it at first, but then I saw you," he said with a frown, like he was trying to puzzle it out himself. "He felt your wolf."

My eyebrows lifted. He could feel my wolf? Even mine hadn't said anything about that.

I glanced inward. My wolf was just as confused as I was.

I'd definitely be asking Zaliver about that after I was done giving him the silent treatment.

Still puzzled, I gave him a polite smile as he reached out his hand. I shook it.

"You might not remember me, but I'm Bl—"

"Blake," I interrupted, a smile tugging at my lips. "And your twin is Drake. I remember now. Hi."

Recognition hit me. He was one of the twins from the kitchen. The one with high cheekbones. Drake had the sharper jawline.

His eyes widened a little, impressed. "Yeah, I'm Blake. You're really good at telling us apart. Not many people can do that."

He gave an awkward little laugh. The way he fidgeted and smiled, there was something so endearing about how bashful he was.

I couldn't help but grin back. He was so adorably awkward, it was impossible not to like him.

"I'm sorry. I'm usually not this weird," he said, eyes darting everywhere but at me.

I waved a hand, brushing it off with a half-smile. "It's fine. I get it. He's just, uh," I hesitated, trying to find a nicer word than weird or strange.

"Awkward?" he offered, then quickly shook his head. "Nah, he's an asshole, I mean, a mean person! Yeah, mean person!" His eyes went wide with panic.

I let out a soft laugh. "So if your brother's such a, uh, mean person, then why aren't you two hanging out now?"

His shoulders relaxed like he hadn't expected me to joke back. Then suddenly, his whole body lit up with excitement as he gestured wildly.

"Oh! So, Drake invited Leslie to this get-together. You actually met her and Amber and Angela too when you met me and my brother. Anyway, we were playing this non-alcoholic version of truth or dare because Leslie's brother Luke was there. And wherever Luke goes, Johnson follows. His pregnant sister came too and said if she couldn't have alcohol, then none of us could. So we were just playing, and then Amber dared me to—"

"Hold on," I cut in, blinking. "Did you just say Luke and Johnson? And Johnson's pregnant sister, she wouldn't happen to be named Hannah, would she?"

He blinked in surprise and gave a slow nod, clearly unsure where I was heading with this.

"Oh, wow," I murmured, my eyebrows rising. "Small world." Or maybe just a very tangled pack.

His expression shifted into concern. "Is something wrong?"

"No, no! Just surprised. I actually know Luke, Johnson, and Hannah," I told him.

His eyes lit up instantly. A wide grin stretched across his face. "That's good to know, Luna. Some of the pack were worried you might not like it here."

The way he tapped the toe of his shoe nervously against the ground tugged at something soft in me.

"Well, that's sweet of them," I said warmly. "Really."

Then, remembering I'd interrupted him, I tilted my head. "Sorry for cutting in. What was your dare?"

He burst into laughter, his whole body shaking as he threw his head back. "Oh, it's not nearly as exciting as bumping into the Luna."

I winced a little at the title but didn't interrupt.

"All I had to do was run from our house to this part of the forest while Drake held his breath," he explained, like it was no big deal.

My stomach dropped.

"You're kidding," I said slowly. "You mean to tell me, while you and I have been talking, your brother's been holding his breath?"

He blinked. Then his whole expression froze in realization.

"Oh my god. I've killed my brother. My mom's gonna kill me!" he shouted, panic flashing across his face.

Without another word, he spun around and bolted in the direction he came from.

"Wait!" I shouted, my instincts already taking over as I chased after him. My wolf stirred uneasily beneath my skin, alert to the fear in his tone.

Leaves and twigs crunched beneath my boots as I ran, dodging branches, keeping my eyes locked on his fast-moving form. For someone so awkward, he was surprisingly quick.

Then my phone rang. I didn't bother checking the screen.

"Hello?" I answered between ragged breaths, not slowing down for even a second.

A pause. Then Zaliver's voice cut through, sharp with concern.

"Vivian? Why are you running? Are you alright? What's going on?"

Of course he could hear me. Even through the phone, he could pick up the pounding of my feet and my heartbeat.

"Can't talk right now," I panted. "Trying to prevent murder. Or at least murder charges. Call you later!"

I hung up before he could respond.

Just before I clicked the button, I heard him shout my name, his voice flaring with worry and something fiercer underneath.

As the call ended, a grim thought flashed through my mind.

I probably shouldn't have said that last part.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian Grey's POV

Blake slammed through the door, and I followed close behind him. Inside, a small group had gathered, all focused on the guy in the middle who was nearly the color of wine, his face a deep red that edged into purple. He looked just like Blake, only flushed and frantic. That had to be his twin Drake.

"Breathe, you idiot! It's not worth dying over!" Hannah was yelling at him, her voice sharp and panicked.

"I'm back! Breathe!" Blake cried, but he barely got the words out before Drake inhaled hard, the gasp jagged and desperate like he was clawing air back into his lungs.

"Jesus Christ, took you long enough!" Johnson shouted, clearly flustered as he tugged at his wild curls, which for once weren't tied back. "A few more seconds and I'd have to tell Mark that Hannah and I were behind bars because we just stood there and watched a murder go down!"

Someone laughed, one of the girls. "He looks like a tomato. We should totally get a picture."

"Shame," another girl muttered, less amused.

Then came a softer voice, gentle and full of concern. "Are you okay, Drake?"

I spotted her, a redhead with sharp green eyes, leaning over Drake. She shared Luke's features, so she had to be his sister, Leslie. Drake just held up a finger in response, too winded to speak.

Hannah dropped onto the couch beside another girl who had deep brown skin, short dark hair, and light brown eyes that sparkled with mischief. She munched on popcorn with a smug grin. I could already tell she had the kind of humor that could cut both ways. Beside her sat another girl I guessed was Angela, dark hair, dark eyes, caramel skin, and a quiet, unreadable expression that hinted she wasn't enjoying the chaos.

Drake finally spoke through heavy breaths. "Were you trying to kill me, you little shit?" he huffed. "As soon as I catch my breath, I'm gonna chop you into tiny pieces and, damn, I'm exhausted."

Leslie and Luke helped him into a sitting position as he swayed on his feet.

"Sorry, bro. I was running, and then I bumped into—" Blake started, clearly flustered.

I was still standing behind him, unnoticed so far, while everyone's attention remained glued to Drake.

"If you say a girl, I swear I'll tell Mom you were plotting to murder me," Drake snapped, though the fury on his face was starting to fade.

"No! Well, yeah, actually, it was—" Blake fumbled, rubbing the back of his neck.

Suddenly, a primal yell rang out, one only a warrior would make, and heavy footsteps pounded toward us, straight for Blake.

"You dick!" Drake roared, launching himself toward his twin with the full intention of tackling him. But Blake stepped aside just in time.

"No! Luna!" Luke shouted, locking eyes with me as Drake stumbled forward, unable to stop his momentum.

"What?" Drake sounded confused and horrified, but it was too late. His speed made it impossible to slow down. Everything shifted.

Time slowed. Each step Drake took was sluggish and exaggerated, like the world had fallen into syrup. Around me, faces froze in various stages of panic. Luke reached forward, trying to stop him. The girls on the couch were rising in slow motion, hands mid-air. Johnson was lunging, frozen halfway, like a scene from a dream.

I stepped to the side, calmly avoiding Drake as he hurtled past me. My eyes tracked him. If no one caught him, his head would slam straight into the wall.

My gaze moved to Leslie, whose hands were drifting toward her mouth in dread. Calmly, I strolled over and picked up a fluffy pillow from the couch.

I placed it carefully on the floor in Drake's likely crash zone. "Perfect," I muttered, satisfied.

I returned to stand beside Blake, whose eyes were beginning to widen.

And then my wolf stirred.

My vision flashed.

Everything snapped back to real time.

Johnson's body collided with Drake's just in time to shift his direction. Drake slammed straight into the pillow I'd set down. The girls shrieked, jumping up. Johnson didn't even wait to check on him, he popped back to his feet immediately and turned to me, eyes wide with confusion and worry.

Everyone stood frozen, waiting to rush to my aid, only to realize I was perfectly fine.

"What the fuck?" someone mumbled in disbelief.

"Well, that was dramatic," I quipped with a small smile.

Blake let out a sharp gasp beside me, his head snapping toward me. All eyes turned, their expressions ranging from stunned to relieved.

"Luna, are you okay?" Luke asked without missing a beat.

"Oh, I'm good," I replied casually. Then I turned my eyes toward Drake, who was groaning on the floor. "How about you, Drake? Did the pillow save your brain?" I asked with an amused tilt of my head.

His only answer was a grunt.

And just like that, the chaos had a quiet moment to breathe.

He nodded slowly, his expression caught somewhere between baffled and stunned. Johnson turned his body fully to face me, his golden curls bouncing slightly as he gawked.

"Damn, you're fast. You've been holding out on me, haven't you?" Blake asked, squinting at me like I'd just revealed some hidden secret. "Back when we were running here."

I gave him a small, tight smile, still unsure myself. My heart was calm, oddly calm. Should I be panicking right now? I wasn't. I had an idea of what had just happened, just enough to stop myself from spiraling.

"Viv? Are you sure you're okay?" Hannah's voice cut through the tension. She came over and wrapped an arm around my shoulders, gently steering me toward the couch. The girls stepped aside to make space.

"I'm really fine," I said, trying to reassure her. "It's Drake I'm more worried about—"

"I'm fine," Drake interrupted, his voice steady but laced with guilt. "I'm sorry, Luna. I didn't see you. I accept full responsibility for putting you in harm's way. I'll take whatever punishment you see fit." He stood tall but lowered his chin, baring his neck to me in submission.

My breath caught.

"Same here, Luna," Blake added, stepping beside his brother. "If I hadn't moved when I did, you wouldn't have been put in danger." He also bowed, neck exposed.

"Whoa, whoa, okay, boys. Let's not go full dramatic here," I said quickly, lifting my hands as if to calm a rising storm. "It was an accident. These things happen. No one was seriously hurt. Well, maybe Drake got a little bruised, but I'm okay. Let's just move on, alright?"

I thought that would be the end of it, but then Luke stepped forward, frowning.

"I'm sorry, Luna, but they endangered your safety. There should be consequences," he said.

Johnson nodded beside him, and they both loomed behind the twins like stern statues.

"But seriously, I'm fine," I tried to reason.

"As your guards, it's our job to protect you," Johnson said, clearly still not letting it go. "And these two—"

"It's your day off," I interrupted sharply. "You're not working. This never happened."

Johnson looked like he wanted to argue, and sure enough, he did. "But Luna, the Alpha should be made aware—"

Were they trying to get the twins exiled, or worse?

"Enough," I said, sharper than I intended.

The room dropped into silence instantly. Heads lowered. Everyone went still.

Something strange stirred in me, something deeper, older. I wasn't sure what it was exactly, but the moment my words left my mouth, I felt my body shift ever so subtly. Not a transformation, but power. It hummed beneath my skin, rolling outward like a pulse. I lifted my chin, narrowing my eyes slightly, and it felt like I was projecting something I couldn't quite name.

"Let it go. No one got seriously hurt. This was a minor accident, and it ends here. We keep this between us. Zaliver doesn't need to hear about it."

Whatever I had done, it worked. One glance passed between them all, and they nodded. Just like that, the tension melted from the room.

"Thank you, Luna. You're very kind," Drake said with genuine relief.

Off in the corner, Hannah and Leslie resumed a quiet conversation. Amber stayed perched near the snacks, still munching away on popcorn like none of this had happened. I hadn't spent much time with her, but I had a feeling we'd get along just fine. Angela, however, stood near Blake, watching him a little too closely.

I lingered a few minutes longer, offering polite smiles and soft reassurances before excusing myself. They tried to convince me to stay, to join whatever game they had planned next, but I gently declined with a promise to join next time. Truth was, I needed to breathe. Alone.

I walked down the street, head down, ignoring the curious stares. I could feel eyes following me, whispers trailing in my wake. I exhaled slowly, finally pulling out my phone. It was time to check in before he assumed the worst.

Zaliver answered on the first ring.

"Vivian, what the hell—" His voice was raw, strained.

"I'm fine," I said quickly. "Everything's fine. Don't worry."

"What happened? Where are you?"

I looked around. Nothing stood out. "Honestly, I don't know. I'll head back soon."

"No. Stay where you are. I'm coming."

"But you don't even know where I—" I started, confused.

"Stay there."

Click.

He hung up.

The air around me changed. Subtle at first, like a thread pulling tight. My head felt light, like I was floating instead of walking. The world dulled for a moment, muffled. I blinked, trying to clear the haze, and looked around.

That's when I saw them.

Silver eyes. Staring. Everywhere.

Teens, elders, even children paused mid-step, their gazes locked on me. The entire street froze, watching in eerie silence.

Then, one by one, their eyes shimmered and flickered, and they looked away, resuming whatever they were doing like nothing had happened.

But I'd seen it. Felt it.

Something inside me was changing.

And everyone could see it.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I barely registered the thudding rushing toward me before Zaliver was suddenly there, scooping me into his arms without a word. I didn't even have time to react. With me clutched to his chest, he ran at a speed that forced me to squeeze my eyes shut and hold on. My heart hammered the whole way, my stomach twisting, until he came to a sharp halt in front of our room.

He let me slide down the length of his body, and even through my still-rattled nerves I felt every inch of it. Then he leaned over to open the door. I didn't wait, just slipped inside quickly, grateful for something solid under my feet.

"What happened? Are you hurt?" he asked instantly, stepping close.

I threw up a hand. "Zaliver."

He paused, clearly wanting to close the distance, but I backed up a step.

"I'm fine. Really. Nothing to worry about," I said. "I just ran into someone new. We had a weird moment, but it's sorted."

He narrowed his eyes. "What new friend? And I'm almost certain I heard something about murder—"

I laughed, a little nervously. "Yeah, I might've said that. No one's dead, though. It's fine. You didn't need to come get me, but, thanks." I bit my lip. My body still buzzed from the way he'd held me, from the involuntary safety I'd felt pressed against his chest.

But I couldn't let that feeling win. I had to hold the line. If I let this go every time he showed up looking like that, he'd never understand that marking me didn't mean he owned every decision I made.

Zaliver's eyes dropped to my lips. I pulled in a breath.

His chest started to rise and fall heavier. His nostrils flared. He began walking toward me, each step measured and deliberate, and I backed up with every one. My back hit the desk.

I tried to slide sideways, hoping he'd stop. He didn't. He followed, arms bracketing me on either side, blocking me in. His face came down close to mine, a few strands of dark hair falling forward.

"Vivian," he said, voice low and rough.

The sound of my name in that voice did things I didn't want to acknowledge. He leaned in, skimming his nose across my cheek, trailing it slowly toward my neck, toward the mark. The moment he got close to it, it started to burn, not in pain exactly, but in that deep, aching way that made it hard to think.

One arm coiled around my waist and pulled me closer. My hands found the fabric of his shirt without me deciding to put them there.

Then, just above the mark, he pressed a soft kiss.

A sound came out of me that I'd never made before. His mouth hovered there, featherlight kisses trailing across the heated skin, close but never quite landing directly on the mark, teasing me, and my hands moved under his shirt and gripped his sides.

"I want you so badly it physically hurts," he said against my ear, voice tight with restraint. "Tell me you feel it too."

I did feel it. Every part of me did. My thoughts had gone soft and slow at the edges, like trying to think through water.

"W-what," I managed, which wasn't really a sentence.

"Let me take care of you."

He kissed the mark, fully, deliberately.

A shock of heat tore through me, pulling a moan out before I could stop it. My body moved on its own, arching into him, and then his mouth was on mine and I stopped trying to think entirely.

The kiss was rough and hungry and I kissed him back just as hard, my walls coming down in a way I hadn't planned for. He pulled my leg around his waist and pinned me harder against the desk, and I was dimly aware that a soft noise was coming from my own chest, some wolfish sound I had no control over.

But then something snagged.

Sharp. Wrong.

I gasped and pulled back just enough to think, and the moment my focus cleared I looked at my hand and felt my stomach drop.

My nails had extended into claws, curving and shifting, and I'd dug them into his back without realizing. Four punctures in the black fabric of his shirt. Blood on my fingertips.

I shoved him back hard.

"I'm sorry!" The words came out broken. "I didn't mean to, I didn't even feel it happening, I'm sorry—"

My voice shook. I was already fighting tears, which I hated, because this wasn't what I wanted to be right now. Zaliver stepped forward, and his expression had shifted into something softer than I deserved.

He cupped my face in both hands. "Hey. Shh." His thumbs moved across my cheekbones. "What are you talking about, little cloud? What's wrong?"

"Doesn't it hurt?" I whispered.

He tilted his head. "Hurt what?"

I pointed at his back. "That. I clawed you. You're bleeding."

I glanced over his shoulder, then back at me with an expression that was somehow both gentle and quietly amused at the same time. He pulled up the hem of his shirt and turned slightly. The blood was there, but his skin was already smooth. No wound. Nothing.

"But I saw it," I said, hating how uncertain my voice sounded. "I felt it."

"I heal remarkably fast," he said simply. He took my hand and used his shirt to wipe the blood from my fingers, unhurried, like it was nothing at all. "I didn't even notice until you said something."

I stood there watching him carefully clean my hands and tried to get my head back together.

"That shouldn't have happened," I said finally. I meant the claws. I also meant everything before the claws.

"Why not?" he asked, voice dropping again.

"You know why."

"I actually don't," he said. "Is this still about last night? Because if it is—"

"No, you don't," I snapped, and started for the door.

His hand shot out and caught my arm. I tried to pull free. He held on.

"Then say it," he said, quieter but firm. "Tell me what's actually going on."

Fine.

He wanted the truth? He was finally about to get all of it.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

"You really screwed up, Zaliver. On so many damn levels, it's honestly a miracle I'm even speaking to you."

My voice was shaking, but it wasn't from fear, it was from everything boiling inside me. I took a deep breath, trying to steady myself, and looked him dead in the eyes.

"Let me try to explain how I'm feeling right now. Yes, you told me you'd mark me someday. I remember that. But what you didn't say was how you'd go about it. You left out some crucial, life-altering details, like, oh, I don't know, the part where you'd bind me to you for eternity without mentioning that you're a freaking Lycan. A species I thought was a damn myth, everyone thought so."

I stepped back, pacing now, heat creeping up my neck as the memories surged.

"And how could I forget the part where you chased me through the forest in your monstrous form like I was some terrified prey? Zaliver, I swear to the moon, you might as well have been coming at me with a knife. You expected me to stay calm while you looked ready to tear through my throat with those massive teeth of yours?"

My voice cracked, but I kept going.

"And if you honestly think that's the only reason I'm angry, you couldn't be more wrong."

I stopped pacing and crossed my arms over my chest. My heart was pounding, but it wasn't just adrenaline, it was hurt, betrayal, disappointment.

"I'm furious, Zaliver. Furious that you forced the mark on me. You made the decision for both of us, knowing full well what it meant. After telling me that once it was done, I'd become the very thing that made me run from all of this in the first place. You wanted obedience, submission, and blind faith without giving me truth, explanation, or even a shred of respect. You kept me in the dark about everything. Like I was supposed to be okay just following your orders, never questioning, never asking."

The words were sharp, but they were honest. I had held them in too long, and now they were pouring out.

"I hate feeling like a pawn. Like some offering handed to you for the sake of peace. Do you even realize how wrong that feels? How belittling it is to be treated like some pretty little trinket to calm the Lupus Deus?"

I blinked fast, angry at myself now. My fists clenched at my sides.

"And you know what? I'm mad at myself, too. For not seeing the signs. For not pushing harder. For ignoring every instinct that told me something was off. For hitting that metaphorical red button you kept waving in my face like a challenge."

I paused, and this time my voice softened, but only barely.

"But above everything else, I'm disappointed. So damn disappointed."

He flinched. I saw it. And a part of me wanted to take it all back. But I couldn't. I wouldn't.

"I always thought marking your mate would be this deeply emotional, beautiful moment. Messy, maybe. Not perfect, sure. But special. Intimate. Sacred. Something we'd share together, not something you'd take from me without asking. Now that moment is gone. And no matter what happens next, we'll never get to have that first step into something new, together."

I looked at him then, really looked. His expression was pained, tortured even. Every time I listed something he'd done wrong, he winced, like the truth cut deeper than a blade. And maybe it did.

But I couldn't stop myself. Not yet.

"There. I said it. You wanted to know what I was feeling? Now you do."

Silence settled between us like smoke after a wildfire. My chest was tight, throat raw. The words had been like thorns, and now that they were out, I didn't know whether to feel better or worse.

Part of me thought maybe I'd gone too far. I wasn't the kind of person who usually rubbed people's mistakes in their faces like this. But holding onto this anger was poisoning me, and letting it go wasn't as simple as taking a breath and moving on.

Not this time.

His head hung low, those dark strands of his hair casting shadows across his face, hiding it from me. I searched through our bond, hoping to sense something, anything, but it felt like he'd shut me out completely. That stung worse than I expected. How did I get here? I started off furious at him, ready to scream the world down, and now I just felt hollow. Guilty.

"Zaliver—"

"No." His voice was rough, like gravel scraped across steel. He raised his head slowly, and when our eyes met, the breath caught in my throat.

He looked empty.

His blue eyes held so much sorrow, but his face gave nothing away. No hint of emotion. Just a wall. Cold and bleak.

"I should've known how you felt," he said quietly, every word landing like a weight on my chest. "Even if you hated me, I still needed to hear it."

"I don't hate you, Zaliver," I whispered, honestly. "To be honest, I don't think I even could. But I don't trust you. Not right now. That's just the truth."

The words cut both ways, but I didn't flinch. If he was going to rebuild what he broke, he had to start with honesty, even if it hurt. Especially if it hurt.

I watched his jaw tighten, his features twitching like he was forcing himself not to crumble. Zaliver always wore armor in front of everyone else, but here, with me, it finally cracked. Deep down, I knew all he ever wanted was to protect what he cared about. Maybe that's what made this worse, he thought control meant love.

But did that justify anything he'd done? Not even close.

He gave me a strained smile, the kind that was more pain than peace, and slowly leaned down to press a gentle kiss to my forehead. I closed my eyes and breathed him in, warm and familiar. When he pulled away, I already felt the absence.

Then, without a word, he pulled out his phone and tapped a few buttons. I raised an eyebrow, watching his face settle into a look of quiet determination.

"If we're going to move forward," he murmured, "and if I want a chance at making this right, then I know where to start."

I blinked. "Who are you calling?"

But instead of answering, he simply handed me the phone.

Cautiously, I took it from him. My heart thudded in my chest as I pressed it to my ear, unsure what to expect.

"Hello?" The voice on the other end was raspy and soft, but unmistakably familiar.

I froze.

No. It couldn't be.

But it was. That voice had tucked me in at night. Whispered lullabies. Offered comfort through every scraped knee and heartbreak.

I turned to Zaliver, eyes wide in disbelief. He gave me a small nod.

"Mom?" I breathed.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

"Mom?"

The second the word left my lips, the other line went completely silent. For a breathless heartbeat, I thought maybe the call had dropped, until I heard the sound. A soft, choked sob that shattered something deep inside me.

"V-Vivian? Is that really you?" Her voice trembled with disbelief and aching hope.

Tears pricked the backs of my eyes. My throat tightened. "Yeah, Mom, it's me," I whispered, barely able to hold myself together. Just hearing her voice brought on a wave of homesickness so strong it felt like it might drown me. I'd missed her, of course I had,

but nothing could have prepared me for how much hearing her would hurt and soothe me all at once.

"Oh my god, my baby girl!" she cried. "You probably don't have much time, go ahead, speak quickly. Where are you? Who took you?"

Her questions made my heart twist. For a moment, I didn't understand. Then it hit me. She thought I'd somehow managed to make a call while still being held captive. That I was in danger. To her, I was the kidnapped daughter calling home in secret.

I blinked away the burn behind my eyes and took a breath. "No, Mom. It's okay. I can talk to you for as long as I want." I glanced at Zaliver, momentarily forgetting he was even in the room. When our eyes met, I silently dared him to try and take the phone from me. But he didn't move. He just stood there watching me, eyes unreadable, head slightly tilted in thought. I turned back to the call.

"There are things I should probably explain," I murmured, already unsure of how to even begin.

"Wait, are they making you say this?" she asked suddenly. Her tone shifted, sharper now, on the edge of panic. "If I went to the store, what would I see first? Skittles, Snickers, or Hershey?"

I let out a shaky breath and couldn't help the small laugh that escaped me, even as my chest ached. Of course she remembered that.

When I was younger, I'd been a little different. Anxious, maybe, in the way certain kids are, the ones whose imaginations run faster than their ability to separate real from possible. I constantly convinced myself people were out to get me and insisted we needed an emergency code in case I ever got kidnapped. I remembered sitting at the kitchen table with a box of crayons, completely serious, laying out the whole system for my mother with the gravity of a field general. She'd been washing dishes, and she'd turned around, dried her hands on a tea towel, and looked at the paper I'd pushed toward her. She'd humored me, eventually, after I'd thrown what I could only describe as a very passionate and well-reasoned tantrum about the reality of kidnappings in the modern world.

Skittles meant I was out of state or out of the country.

Snickers meant I recognized my kidnapper.

Hershey meant I was being forced to speak.

I'd been eight. My mother had kept it anyway.

"I can't believe you remembered that," I whispered, smiling despite everything. "That was such a long time ago."

"So no Hershey?" she asked, voice shaking.

"No candy, Mom. I'm okay. Really. I promise." I tried to keep my tone light, but I could feel Zaliver's gaze boring into the side of my face, and it made my stomach twist.

"Then where are you?" she asked, and I could hear the pain she was holding back. "Why haven't you come home? Are you in danger? If you are, you know we'll protect you here. Just come back, Vivian. Everyone's so worried. We've been searching for you. Your father even tried convincing the alpha to send a search party, but he said he couldn't feel your pack bond anymore. He still senses you, but not your connection."

Guilt hit me like a punch to the chest.

I hadn't thought about how deeply this had affected them, how terrified they must have been, wondering what happened to me after I disappeared along with so many other girls. How helpless they must've felt, sitting at home with no answers, not knowing if I was still alive somewhere or already gone.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I'm so sorry, Mom. You and Dad must've been going out of your minds. I didn't mean to scare you. I'm not hurt, I'm just..." The words clogged in my throat. How do you explain any of this in a single phone call? How do you say I found my mate, he's a lycan god, I'm bonded to him against my will but also maybe not entirely against my will, and I'm on a hidden island in the Bermuda Triangle, and by the way I think I might be turning into something that isn't entirely human?

You don't. Not yet. Not all at once. "It's complicated," I said finally. "So much has happened, and I don't even know where to start."

"Then start anywhere," she said quietly, her voice soft and certain. "I have time. I'll always have time for you, no matter what."

Something cracked open in my chest.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling the mattress dip beneath me. The air around me buzzed with unspoken tension, every nerve in my body aware of Zaliver standing somewhere behind me. I didn't know if he was waiting to stop me from saying something, or if he was just letting me have this moment.

A part of me, the broken, furious part, still whispered that he didn't deserve my trust. That if he really cared about me, he wouldn't have ripped me from my life, my family, my home. That this call should never have had to happen in the first place.

But another part of me, the one that had started to feel things I didn't want to name, argued that he did care. Maybe more than I could understand. That every time he looked at me, something shifted in him. And in me.

I pressed the phone closer to my ear and let my mother's steady breathing settle something in me that had been rattling loose for days.

"Okay then," I said softly. "Here's where I'll start."

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I didn't know which part to believe anymore. So I clung to the voice on the phone like it was the only real thing left.

My mom was still waiting on the other end. And for now, that was enough.

"I'm so confused, Vivian. What's going on, honey? You can come home, baby. Whatever is happening, we'll face it together."

My mother's voice cracked through the phone and broke me in ways I wasn't ready for. The second her words wrapped around me, the fragile dam I'd been holding up inside me collapsed. Tears streamed down my face, hot and blinding, and my chest clenched painfully with each breath. I balled my fists tightly against my thighs, trying to stay grounded as my vision blurred.

"M-Mom, I missed you and Dad so much. I-I just don't know, it's, um, I'm not..." My voice trembled, collapsing under the weight of everything I couldn't say.

Where would I even begin?

Should I tell her I'd been kidnapped? That I was safe now, but not really? That I was mated to someone whose name alone stirred fear in thousands? I wanted to explain it all. I wanted to scream that I hadn't chosen this, that Zaliver was more than a captor, more than a name etched in dark history. But how could I explain a mate bond to someone who lived mostly outside the supernatural chaos, who went to church on Sundays and made lemon cake on weekends and believed, above all, that her daughter was capable of taking care of herself? How could I tell her that Zaliver Azralla, the Lupus Deus, was now a permanent part of my life, written into my blood, whether I liked it or not?

How could I tell her that some mornings I woke up and wasn't entirely sure anymore which parts of me were still mine, and which parts were becoming something none of us had a name for yet?

My thoughts came to a halt when the bed dipped beside me.

I flinched, startled, but then looked up and met Zaliver's eyes. My gaze was pleading, full of confusion and desperation. I hadn't planned to call out to him. I hadn't even consciously decided to, but somewhere between the tears and the sound of my mother's voice breaking on the other end of the line, I'd reached for him through our bond without realizing it. Like a reflex. Like he was already the thing I went toward when everything else was falling apart, which was a thought I had no idea what to do with.

That thought sat uncomfortably in my chest, partly because it was true, and partly because I was starting to think he might already know it too.

Without a word, he pulled me gently into his side, his arm wrapping around me with surprising tenderness. His other hand moved slowly, carefully prying the phone from my trembling grip before he switched it to speaker.

"Mrs. Gray," he said, calm and composed, his voice like steel wrapped in velvet. His face matched the tone, unshaken, unreadable, in control.

"W-Who are you? Where's my daughter? Vivian! Vivian!" my mother's voice spiked in panic.

"I'm right here, Mom. You're on speaker now," I said hoarsely, my voice cracking.

"Vivian, tell me what's going on!" she cried.

Zaliver stepped in smoothly, his voice steady. "Mrs. Gray, please stay calm. Your daughter is safe. She's being taken care of, and everything she wants is provided. She is in no danger."

Sure, if we ignored the emotional torment of being claimed by a living legend who moved through centuries like most people moved through a bad week.

"Who the hell are you?" she snapped, her tone edged with maternal fury.

I felt Zaliver's body go rigid beside me. That tone probably didn't sit well with him, but he didn't lash out. He just stayed calm, annoyingly calm.

"My name is Zaliver Azrala. I'm your daughter's mate."

There was a heavy, weighted pause on the line. Then silence. The kind that stretches just long enough to make your chest tighten.

Suddenly, a loud, very broken wail pierced the silence.

I leaned closer to the phone, heart pounding. "Mom? Mom?! Are you okay?!"

Sniffles came through next. "Oh, Vivian! Why didn't you just say you're with your mate? You're safe! Oh, thank the Moon. Thank you, Mr. Azrala. Just knowing my baby's with her mate brings me peace."

I stared at the phone like it had grown horns.

What?

"Uh, Mom, it's not that simple—" I started, panic creeping into my voice. I didn't want her to think everything was sunshine and roses. It wasn't.

"And why didn't you just call and let us know, Vivian? We were all so worried! Poor Lily, after her Alpha died, she was in such shock she fainted. She doesn't even remember picking you up from the airport. The poor girl's been blaming herself and searching for you non-stop."

Guilt crashed down on me like a wave. While I'd been adjusting, crying, and even laughing with strangers, my family had been tearing themselves apart with worry.

But Lily didn't remember picking me up?

Then it clicked.

Albericus. When he took us, I'd heard him command someone to erase memories, like we'd never even been there.

"Mom, you have to know—" I tried, wanting to finally spill it, to give her the truth.

But then, "That I've arranged for you and your husband to be brought to our location as soon as tomorrow," Zaliver said, cutting in smoothly.

My head snapped to him so fast I nearly got whiplash.

My mother gasped on the other end. "Oh! We're coming to you? Oh, sweetheart, your father will be beside himself. He's been a complete wreck, you know. Won't stop pacing. He hasn't slept properly in weeks, I don't think."

I was still staring at Zaliver. He was looking back at me, steady and utterly calm, like he hadn't just rearranged the next forty-eight hours of multiple people's lives without asking a single one of them first.

What the hell was he doing?

And why, underneath the shock and the whiplash and the very reasonable outrage building steadily in my chest, did some small, quiet part of me feel nothing but relief?

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

We stared at each other. He looked calm, serious even, but I was a whirlwind of confusion. Still, I held back my questions when I heard my mother's voice on the line.

"Oh, that's wonderful, but how? And why can't you two come here?" Her voice held a mix of joy and curiosity. Hearing I was safe and with my mate, no less, seemed to settle her nerves. She'd always believed that a mate would protect me.

"For many reasons, Mrs. Gray. But wouldn't you like to see where your daughter is living now?" Zaliver's tone turned smooth, persuasive. If I were in my mom's shoes, I'd be curious too.

"Uh, yes, I suppose I would. So, you two are living together? I don't know how your father and I feel about that, Vivian. You barely know each other. Maybe you should come home, and the both of you can—"

Zaliver's arm suddenly tightened around me. What was once a comforting hold became possessive, almost as if he feared she could somehow pull me away through the phone. He yanked me closer like I was his and his alone.

"I don't think that's a good idea," he said firmly. "There's a lot we need to talk about, which is why I've arranged for both of you to come here. It's important we all get to know one another. Don't you agree, Vivian?" His eyes pinned me, dark and unyielding, daring me to say anything different. There was something simmering beneath the surface, anger maybe, or fear. He hated the thought of my parents separating us, even just hypothetically.

"Uh, yeah," I said softly, unable to look away or go against him. "We should meet here, Mom. It'll be great."

"Well, I'll speak with your father, sweetheart. My heart feels so much lighter now. Thank you for looking after my daughter, Mr. Azrala." My mom's warmth made me wince inwardly. She had no idea she was thanking the same man who had kidnapped me, my mate yes, but also the feared Lupus Deus.

"The pleasure is mine. She's wonderful. I'm honored to have her by my side for the rest of our lives," Zaliver replied smoothly, watching me with burning eyes. Through the bond, I felt a teasing wave of heat and something darker, mockery maybe. I turned away.

"Oh, how adorable! I can't wait to meet you," my mom gushed. I felt my stomach twist. She thought the "forever" part was a cute exaggeration.

"Mom, I think you should know about—"

"We'll send over your flight details soon," Zaliver cut in again, his voice all business. "I hate to end the call, but we must. You should be here in two days."

I opened my mouth to protest, to finally say what needed to be said, but she beat me to it. "Where are you two exactly?"

"Let's keep that a surprise," he said with a smile in his voice. "But pack like you're going to Hawaii."

Mom squealed into the phone. "Oh, thank the Lord! You're safe and sound. We're going to Hawaii! I'm so happy!"

"Mom—" My disbelief was all over my face.

"We'll be in touch soon, Mrs. Gray. See you then," Zaliver said easily, as if he wasn't pulling the wool over her eyes.

"Goodbye, Mr. Azrala. Bye, sweetheart! Your father will be so thrilled to hear the news."

"Mom—"

Click.

I turned to Zaliver, watching as he stood there calmly, back to me, his fingers flying across his phone. That conversation had gone completely sideways. While I was relieved my parents would be coming, I still didn't understand why we couldn't go to them. Every time I tried to explain things, he'd cut in with charm and control.

"What the hell, Zaliver? Why didn't you let me tell her the truth? And why are they coming here instead of us going there?" I snapped, the anger pouring out of me.

He turned slowly, one brow raised slightly, and tucked his phone into his back pocket.

"For a lot of reasons, Vivian. That's not the kind of conversation to have over the phone, especially not without your father present. And I've got more to explain than you do." His

tone was steady but firm. "As for bringing them here, it's simple. If they're here, they'll see how well you're doing. They'll know you're safe with me. But if we leave the island, things could get dangerous. The moment word spreads that you're my mate, you'll become a target. Here, I can protect you. Out there, it could be catastrophic."

His words landed heavy. I hated that he made sense. Still, I didn't like the way he took control, not just of the situation, but of me. And yet part of me didn't want to leave him either.

I pressed my lips together, holding back more words even though part of me still burned to argue. But deep down, I knew he had a point. As much as I hated being kept away from them, I would rather my parents be safe, even if it meant I couldn't be near them. He must've sensed that shift in me because his posture eased, some of that edge fading from his frame.

"Thanks for..." I started, nodding slightly in his direction. But the words died in my throat.

What was I even trying to say? That I was grateful? I was. That brief call with my mom, despite all the times we were cut off, had settled something restless inside me. Just hearing her familiar voice, knowing she was okay and that she'd actually heard from me, had untangled something I hadn't realized was coiled so tightly in my chest. The guilt wasn't gone, but it sat lighter. The homesickness was still there, but it was no longer the only thing filling my chest, pressing out everything else.

I looked at Zaliver, this man who had upended my entire world and then, quietly and without fanfare, handed me back my mother's voice like it was the least he could do.

"Just, thanks," I said finally.

He didn't say anything back. He just looked at me for a long, quiet moment, then gave a single, small nod.

That was enough. For now, it was more than enough.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

But questions still buzzed around my mind, tugging at the edges of my calm.

"Why did she say the alpha couldn't feel my pack link but can still feel me? And Lily, why doesn't she even remember picking me up from the airport?" I asked quietly, eyes fixed on him.

He crossed his arms and leaned back a little, taking on that calm but authoritative tone he always used when explaining werewolf things.

"Well, now that you're marked as my mate, you've stepped into a different kind of connection. Every wolf has different kinds of bonds. There's the pack link, everyone feels

that. Then there's the mate bond, which is between, well, mates. Alphas have an alpha link, which keeps the hierarchy in line. And then there's the semi-complete link to me."

"Semi-complete?" I echoed, confused.

His eyes did that strange glowing thing again, flashing with unnatural light before settling back into that stormy blue.

"You still have to shift into your other form," he said, voice smooth and even, like it wasn't a big deal. But it made me go quiet. I didn't want to talk about that. Not yet.

"What about Lily?" I asked, trying to steer the conversation elsewhere. He gave a small nod, though I wasn't sure if it was in agreement or because something had clicked in his memory.

"I had Albericus erase the memory of her picking you up. Just a precaution," he explained casually.

That made sense, I supposed. It still felt strange, but I was learning that a lot of things in this world did.

"Okay. So what about my parents? What's the plan?" I asked, pacing a little, my nerves taking over. I didn't want them left out in the open or in danger. As I walked back and

forth, the worry rose in me again, but I forced myself to breathe and think of the positives.

"Don't worry," he said, trying to reassure me. "I've got it covered. They'll be picked up tomorrow and brought here. You can talk to them, tell them how happy you are, make them see this is where you want to be."

I paused and looked at him, squinting slightly. He sounded so sure of himself.

"So they'll be staying here? With us?" I asked slowly.

"No."

I blinked, confused. "What do you mean, no? Where are they staying then?"

He looked at me for a long, unreadable moment, then stood up.

"Come on," he said, already walking toward the door and grabbing his keys.

I followed him, a tight ball of anxiety forming in my stomach. Where was he taking me? What did he mean by no? He better not be thinking about putting my parents in some hotel on the island.

We drove down the long path behind the pack house, deeper into the forest. The further we went, the more uneasy I felt. Trees swallowed the road, and I was starting to worry that maybe he was planning something drastic. I opened my mouth, ready to yell at him for even thinking about locking them away, when suddenly the trees cleared and a house came into view.

Scratch that. A mansion. Or maybe even a castle.

It looked like something from a dream or a movie. Grey stone walls rose high with elegant arches, balconies, and massive boulders framing the entrance. It had the same feel as the pack house, but older, more ancient, majestic.

Zaliver pulled the car up to the front steps and parked.

"Wow," I whispered, staring out the window.

"Here. They'll be staying here."

Something about the way he said that made me pause. I turned to look at him and really looked. His jaw was tight. His hands gripped the wheel harder than necessary. Shoulders

squared. His eyes flicked between the house and me. And for once, they weren't filled with the usual confidence or calculated calm.

He was nervous.

I tilted my head and felt along our bond, searching. My eyes widened slightly as I realized I was right. He was nervous.

I turned back toward the house, staring harder. It didn't look abandoned. In fact, it looked immaculately cared for. But it gave off an unmistakable air of loneliness, like something beautiful that had been kept ready for a long time, waiting. Whoever this place was meant for, it meant something to him. Enough to rattle Zaliver, the same man who terrified everyone else.

"Zaliver," I said quietly, "who owns this house?"

He glanced at me, then sighed, dragging a hand through his thick dark hair. For a long moment, he didn't answer. But then his shoulders sagged slightly, like he was giving in.

"We do."

Shock rippled through me like a jolt of electricity. That wasn't the answer I was expecting, not even close.

"W-what? You mean your house, right?" I asked, blinking at him. He bit his lower lip, and for a brief moment, I had the wild urge to lean forward and bite it too. But I shoved that thought away.

He shook his head slowly, eyes not leaving mine. "No. Our house. I, I had a house built for us."

My breath caught in my throat. My eyes went wide, partly because I had never seen him stutter from nerves before, and partly because he had a house built for us.

"When?" My voice was barely above a whisper. I turned in my seat to look at the house again. It was beautiful, modern but cozy, and it definitely looked untouched, like no one had ever lived there.

"I-I, umm," he let out a low, frustrated growl and dragged a hand over his face.

I watched him for a moment and felt something shift quietly in my chest. This was the man who had commanded armies, who had made gods answer to him, who had outlived everything and everyone for six centuries without so much as a tremor in his voice. And right now, he couldn't finish a sentence.

Because of me.

Because of a house he'd built for us and wasn't sure how I'd take it.

My lips parted slightly. The sight before me wasn't the untouchable, powerful god the world feared. Right now, he looked like a man, nervous, raw, uncertain, trying. A small smile tugged at my mouth despite the shock still lingering in my chest.

He was struggling to find the words, and that meant something. That meant a lot.