

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna chapter 81-90

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

"Sleep. Grieve. Forget," I whispered.

I watched her eyes flutter closed, her lashes brushing her cheeks as her body began to give way. Before she could hit the ground, I moved. One flash, and I was there, catching her.

She felt so small against my chest. My little mate. The thought settled over me the way grief does, quiet but total.

The pain that came after was immediate, sharp, and unforgiving. I hated what I'd done. What I'd had to do. But as I stared down at her face, some selfish part of me savored the quiet, the stillness on her features. I hadn't seen her look like this in so long, not since before I dragged her into my world.

I pulled her closer and held her, uncaring of the pack members watching. Let them watch. Let them see the Lupus Deus made quiet by a woman. There were worse things for them to witness.

I inhaled slowly, deliberately, committing her scent to memory the way you memorize something you know you're about to lose. Then I pressed a kiss to her forehead, her cheek, and finally her lips. The same lips that had been driving me to the edge all evening, and that would haunt me through whatever came next.

Albericus approached. His footsteps were hesitant. He laid a hand on my shoulder and I didn't acknowledge him, not yet. Not while I was still holding what I couldn't keep.

Finally I stood.

Still holding her, I signaled to her guards. They stepped forward. Johnson reached out, and I made myself transfer her into his arms, hating every moment of it.

"Guard her with your life," I said.

They nodded. Solemn. Silent. Then they carried her away into the forest shadows, and I kept watching until there was nothing left to watch. Until the silence was all that remained, and the echo of something that had been mine and wasn't anymore.

Then I let the mask come back down.

The beast inside me rose, dark and vicious. With every step I took into the forest, the fury built. Albericus trailed behind me, quiet, probably trying to gauge which version of me he was dealing with.

"I'm sorry," he finally said. "If I'd known, I wouldn't have mind-linked you. Maybe then you wouldn't have had to lie to her. Or leave that kind of impression—"

A growl tore out of me, hard enough to scatter birds from the canopy.

"Enough."

It wasn't his fault, and I knew that. But I wasn't in the mood to soften anything right now.

"This is on me," I said, quieter. "I should've seen it coming. But there's a reason you take a wound clean rather than let it fester. A clean break seals. If she'd felt something die without knowing why, it would have hollowed her out instead of just hurting her."

The bond between us twisted with agony as I said it. The distance was already stretching, growing colder. My beast was furious at being denied what was his.

Albericus tried again. "Still—"

I gave him a look that ended that sentence.

"Take me to Aurora," I said, voice flat with steel. "That witch has some explaining to do."

The forest felt darker as we moved. Heavier. When Vivian's father had tried to drag her away from me, I'd held myself together for her sake. And then the mind-link had come, carrying everything Aurora had seen. A premonition. And I'd known immediately what had to be done.

I could protect her on this island from a great many things. But not from what was coming. Not from this particular storm, which had no clear shape yet and no clear origin, only Aurora's certainty that it was real.

Even if it meant she hated me. Even if the distance became permanent. I'd take that over the alternative, every time.

"She might be lying," Albericus said carefully. "You know how she plays things."

"She might be many things," I said. "Scheming. Manipulative. An absolute pain to deal with. But Aurora Pattsen doesn't lie when she sees something. And she's never been wrong. I'd be an idiot to ignore it."

He didn't argue. He walked quietly beside me as the full weight of the evening settled over my shoulders like something I'd earned.

I'd sent away the only thing that had made my existence bearable in centuries. I'd forced the distance myself, to shield her from a storm I couldn't fully see yet. War was coming, and I could prepare for many contingencies, but not every one.

I hadn't expected her to fight the way she did. Standing between me and her father like something made of fire, commanding him to stop, issuing orders that overrode mine. She was brave in the reckless, infuriating way that made it impossible not to respect her. I hadn't been going to kill her father, just make a point that couldn't be misread. I was furious, yes, genuinely furious, but not that far gone.

And then she kicked me in the groin.

That part still genuinely stunned me.

I'd thought she was about to throw herself at me. Not that. But I respected it. I respected her more for it than I probably should have.

My chest ached with everything I hadn't said.

And then the building came into view, the one where we were keeping Aurora. Just looking at it pulled the words of her prophecy back through my head like something dragged across a wound.

Whatever lay ahead, I'd pull the full truth out of her with my bare hands if I had to, methodically and without remorse. Because no matter how far Vivian was from me right now, she was still mine.

And I was still hers.

"What you hold closest to the heart will not survive. War doesn't follow rules or honor, and you know that better than anyone. But the final pieces are in place now, because you stayed the course. And in war, there's only one rule, unspoken but always followed: go for the heart. And what does an immortal man hold close that he never could before? His mate."

"Me."

We moved past the guards in the corridor and made our way down into the holding chambers.

That was where she was waiting.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

Aurora sat strapped to a chair, blindfolded with thick black cloth that stole away her sight. We'd learned the hard way that she was sharper when she could see her surroundings, her magic more focused, her mind faster. She worked better with visuals, not because she was a spiritual witch, but because her magic required precision and calculation. That little vulnerability was courtesy of her bitter mate, who shared it during one of his angrier moments.

Even after all this time, forty years since I last saw her running from Albericus, Aurora hadn't lost her beauty. Her long raven-black hair framed fierce features, and though I couldn't see her eyes under the blindfold, I knew they were as dark and intense as ever. Tall and willowy, she stood as an odd contrast to her mate, but somehow the two of them had always just fit.

For a while, at least.

Until it all fell apart.

Now, all that remained between them was the tension of things never resolved, lust and bitterness and unresolved rage all braided together into something neither of them had ever found a way to cut clean. It clung to the air like smoke. I ignored it and kept my face neutral.

"Aurora," I greeted, voice low.

Her head jerked toward me, a sly smile curling her lips. "Zaliver. Always a pleasure. Or in this case, I suppose I should say it's nice to hear you." Her tone dripped sarcasm. "Let me guess, this charming little blindfold was your idea? Or was it Albericus, remembering how much I hate the dark? My dear mate, are you sulking in the corner?"

She leaned back with an exaggerated sigh, one leg draped over the other like she had all the time in the world. Despite the years apart, the bond between them clearly hadn't weakened. She could still sense his exact position in the room without her eyes, and she hated that she could.

Albericus didn't respond with words. Just a low grunt. Arms crossed, shoulders tense, green eyes locked onto her. He didn't move, just stared. I knew that look. If I hadn't needed her for information, I would've left him to handle this his own way.

"I expected more of a warm welcome, mutt," she taunted, voice sharp. "What, not happy to see me?"

His only answer was a narrowing of his eyes.

"Aurora, I need—" I started.

She cut me off. Of course she did. Decades had passed and she was still the same infuriating woman.

"Let me guess, you want me to explain the cryptic little message I sent. Same old Zaliver. Straight to the point." She tilted her head as if studying me, even without the ability to see. "But before we go there, tell me, what do you hold close to your heart these days?"

My jaw clenched. A flicker of violent temptation moved through me. If it weren't for Albericus, I would've already forced the answers out of her. Slowly. Methodically.

Instead, I glanced at him and gave a sharp nod.

He stepped forward, canines extending as he moved. I couldn't touch her, but he could. Just not the way I wanted.

Aurora flinched, trying to press herself back into the chair, but the restraints held. Albericus reached down and brushed her hair aside to bare her neck. He leaned in, close enough that his breath would have ghosted across her skin.

The man had remarkable restraint. I'd always known that about him. If it had been Vivian sitting in that chair—

A jolt ran through me. I shoved the thought aside before it could pull me down. I couldn't afford that spiral right now.

As expected, Aurora cracked.

"Okay! Okay, I'll talk!" she yelled. "Just get his fangs away from me!"

Albericus stepped back, face unreadable. But I caught the pain in his eyes before he locked it down.

Aurora's freedom, her bond, her mate, those were the only things she truly valued and had never been willing to admit out loud. It made her vulnerable in ways she despised.

I pulled up a chair and sat across from her. "Tell me everything you know about the premonition."

She inhaled slowly, lips pressed together. I could practically feel the glare behind the blindfold.

Then, finally, she began to speak.

"Well..."

I rubbed the back of my hand slowly across my eyes, feeling the familiar sting of exhaustion burrowing into the edges of my control. Lack of sleep made me volatile, more than usual, and less capable of the restraint I generally preferred. Not that the damage

mattered much, I could heal anything I caused, unless I crossed that final line and someone didn't survive it. No amount of power could undo that.

Before Vivian, I could go days without rest or food. I'd never needed comfort or warmth. I hadn't wanted it. But now my body craved things I'd spent centuries convincing myself I was beyond. Rest. Peace. Her.

My mind was fracturing across too many directions at once. I was mind-linking with wolves across the globe, scanning for signs of betrayal. Coordinating missions. Tracking rogues. Sitting in on alpha councils from a distance, filtering through conversations layered with half-truths. Every order I issued pulled more from me, and still the one connection I needed most, the one I was deliberately keeping silent, stayed untouched.

Hers.

And to compound everything, there was a traitor somewhere in my pack. Someone had been quietly feeding information about Vivian to the wrong people while I was too distracted to notice. Whoever it was had been patient, careful, skilled. I hated that I was chasing a shadow instead of dragging them into the light where they belonged.

The faster I found the snake, the faster she could come home.

Four days.

Four days since I'd forced her away. Since I'd watched her face move from confusion to heartbreak and stood there and let it happen anyway. Since I'd made the worst decision of my long life, dressed it up in the language of protection, and walked away from it. I was running out of the steadiness it took to keep operating like everything was under control.

It wasn't.

Not without her. And the sooner I accepted that, the sooner I could do something about it.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

Before Vivian, I could go months without the serum that dulled the beast inside me. I could fake normalcy, even civility. Now it clawed at me daily, whispering dark thoughts, urging me to tear and shred and maim anyone who dared breathe wrong in my direction. I'd nearly taken off the head of my best friend's ex for spouting vague warnings without any actual answers.

And yes. I might've spent an hour curled up with her pillow like a love-struck idiot.

Her scent still clung to the fabric. Sweet, warm, and somehow still wild, like vanilla tangled with a storm. It wrapped around me and dragged me back to memories I hadn't earned. Her soft hair, always slipping in front of her face. The way her eyes lit up at the simplest of things, and how she had this infuriating talent for turning the mundane into

something worth paying attention to. Her laugh. Her sharp tongue. Her curves. I missed all of it and hated that I did and missed it anyway.

This was my penance.

I leaned back in the chair and stared through the window, eyes tracking nothing, waiting for Albericus to report in. He was working through every corner of the pack, looking for the mole. If he didn't bring me results soon, I'd start going through people myself until someone gave me a name.

My jaw clenched.

Aurora's warnings had painted a target without giving me anything to aim at. I needed more. Digging through layers of secrets while trying to keep the beast from surfacing was wearing me down faster than I wanted to admit. And still, despite everything, the worst part wasn't the betrayal or the threat. It was knowing that while I was completely and stupidly consumed by her, someone used that gap to move against Vivian. Against her specifically.

I'd failed her.

I'd chosen every pack member by hand, vetted them, given them purpose and shelter and my trust. I'd believed I'd built something that couldn't be cracked. And yet someone had moved right under my nose and played me for a fool. I wasn't just angry at them. I was disgusted with myself.

I didn't regret being with her, not for a single second of it. What I regretted was bringing her into a world that was never safe to begin with. I should've been more careful. Should've made sure she'd never be touched by the kind of filth I waded through daily. Bringing her here was supposed to mean protection. Instead, I'd handed her directly to the thing I swore she'd never face.

And now I was one of the things she needed protection from.

A rookie mistake. The kind I hadn't made in a very long time. And now it was sitting on my chest like something I'd earned.

I had suspects. Too many. Under normal circumstances I could narrow it down quickly, calculate patterns, motives, likely windows of opportunity. But right now my mind was fractured and I hated knowing the reason. Vivian. Every line of thought eventually traced back to her, and the ones that didn't were fighting harder than they should've had to.

When she saw me again, I fully expected her to try to tear me apart. And honestly, I'd let her. After everything I'd done, all the control I'd forced on her, all the truths I'd wrapped in half-explanations and timed silences, I deserved worse than whatever she'd throw at me. I could acknowledge that, even if a part of me still defaulted to calculating bastard as a coping mechanism.

The truth was that before she came into my life, I simply didn't care. About anything in particular. I went where I wanted, did what I needed, and if I left wreckage behind me, I moved on without looking back. Death was background noise. Chaos was something I lived in like it was a second skin. I didn't hesitate before stepping into bloodshed because

there was no one waiting on the other side of it. Now every step had a weight I hadn't accounted for. Every decision circled back to her without my permission.

Vivian had changed something structural in me, and even when I tried to sever the connection to clear my head, I couldn't. Blocking the bond was necessary, I couldn't risk her sensing what I was planning, but she was still sending things through anyway. Longing. Anger. Hurt. Confusion. She didn't even know she was doing it.

Which confirmed the thing I'd been watching: the command I'd given her wasn't holding like it should. Maybe it never had, not fully. She was changing, evolving into something I hadn't predicted, and resistance was coming with it. Soon whatever influence I had over her would be nothing more than an echo. It might still reach her, but it wouldn't dominate her anymore.

And then there was the mark.

She hadn't noticed it yet. I'd made sure of that. While she slept, I'd brought in another witch, one who owed me a favor, and ordered a concealment spell similar to the one cloaking the island. The bite I'd left on her neck was still there, still pulsing with everything it meant, but hidden from her eyes. Even looking in a mirror, she wouldn't see anything unusual. Not even that the mark of her original pack had vanished the moment mine took its place.

Getting her and her parents reintegrated into the pack without raising questions had taken considerable work. Changed memories, adjusted stories. To everyone around her, she'd simply gone to visit a cousin after the attack and returned a few days later. Clean. Simple. A carefully constructed lie.

But it was almost up.

Two weeks were nearly gone, which meant the command would dissolve, and the part of her that had been steadily getting stronger and less predictable would take over completely. Anything, even something small, could break through and bring the memories back.

I'd placed guards around her, people she could feel safe near without knowing they were watching. Part of me, the part I didn't examine too closely, hoped one of them would slip. That something would spark in her before I'd finished cleaning up my mess.

The rest of me wanted to do this right.

Fix what I'd broken. Clear the threat. And be standing there when she remembered everything, ready to take whatever came with it.

Because she would remember. And I'd be there.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

I felt them before I heard them, two wolves approaching my office, their scents carried on the stale air like a warning. I exhaled sharply, my thoughts reluctantly pulling away from Vivian. The heaviness in my chest tightened into irritation as I leaned back in my chair. The moment the door creaked open, Albericus entered with Hogan at his side.

Hogan had been with me for about two decades, picked out of the sea of hopefuls for his precision and work ethic. He always looked put-together, the kind of professional presentation that should've inspired confidence, black slacks, deep purple shirt, sleek black tie. His neat brown hair matched his steady brown eyes, though today those eyes were avoiding mine. Arms crossed, shoulders tense. He knew he'd messed up.

Albericus closed the door behind them and stepped quietly to Hogan's side. He gave me a look. The kind that said you're not going to like this. I didn't need the warning. I could already feel my temper building beneath the surface.

I nodded once, silently urging him to start.

"I did the interrogations like you ordered," Albericus said carefully, "but no one admitted to sending anything outside the island. Still, while going over the administrative files with Hogan, we found that one person submitted a request to leave within the last two weeks."

I stiffened, foot beginning to bounce restlessly against the floor. Departure requests weren't uncommon, but this was not the time for standard protocols to go unexamined. These were details I had trusted them to manage.

"Was it a temporary departure," I asked, voice low with irritation, "or were they asking to leave for good?"

Hogan finally spoke, his usually composed voice just a shade too rough. "Permanent."

My gaze snapped to him. He shifted under the weight of it.

"You authorized it without looking into the reasons or the timing?" My voice dropped into something cold and quiet.

"I, I checked," he stammered, already cracking, "but—"

"But what?" I ground out, fingers digging into the armrest hard enough to leave dents. Albericus instinctively stepped a few paces away from him.

Hogan swallowed. "The request came from someone who wasn't under any sort of watch. I assumed it was routine."

He had the nerve to look guilty after the fact.

Before I even processed the decision, I was on my feet and my hand was at his throat.

I lifted him effortlessly, his feet leaving the floor, his hands clawing at my grip. He tried to push back with whatever wolf strength he had, and it did nothing. I brought him close until we were nose to nose.

"I don't care about your assumptions," I said, voice a low growl. "You don't get to assume when the safety of this pack, when she, is on the line. When you speak to me, Hogan, you come with facts and logic, no hesitations, no vague excuses. I don't have the patience to drag answers out of you."

I dropped him.

He crumpled to the floor, coughing, hands going to his throat. I turned my back and returned to my chair, deliberately slow.

He wheezed behind me. I didn't look at him.

"Start over," I said, clipped. "Everything this time."

Because one mistake was already too many, and I wasn't about to let anything else slip while Vivian was out there unaware of how close everything was to unraveling.

"He had a mate," Hogan blurted, voice trembling, one hand still at his throat like he wasn't sure he'd be keeping it. "He said he couldn't stay on the island with the one who killed her. Said it didn't matter who you were."

I stiffened.

Albericus turned his head toward Hogan slowly. "Who?" he asked, voice low and edged.

Hogan stared at the floor, refusing to look at either of us. This was always why he was third-in-command and not Beta. Good with logistics, reliable with paperwork, but there was a hesitancy in him when it counted, a reluctance to hold conviction under pressure, that kept him exactly where he was.

"Martha," I said, as the pieces aligned.

Of course. It had to be her. She was the only one I'd killed recently. That troublesome little she-wolf who'd been more bark than damage, and somehow even in death she was still managing to cause problems. My beast snarled inside me.

Albericus frowned. "That girl who tripped you during training? I thought you said she didn't have a mate."

"She didn't," I confirmed. "Not officially. The bond had just formed. Apparently she wanted to feel him out first, wasn't sure he was worthy."

"She didn't think he was worthy," Albericus repeated, scowling at the ceiling like it had personally offended him.

Hogan finally raised his head, eyes fixed somewhere over my shoulder. "That's what he told me. They were going to take it slow."

I clenched my jaw.

"So let me understand this," I said slowly. "You let a man walk free, a man whose newly-found mate I killed, because you felt bad for him."

Hogan went pale. "I—"

"Did it not occur to you that he might want revenge? That he might be looking for the perfect opportunity to come at me through something I care about?" My voice rose. Teeth grinding. Claws pressing against the inside of my fingers.

Albericus muttered something beside me. My focus stayed on Hogan.

"What was his name?" Albericus asked, already pulling out his phone.

Hogan hesitated. "I, I don't know."

My eye twitched.

"You don't know," I repeated, perfectly flat.

He wiped his forehead. "I didn't give him clearance to leave, if that helps."

That brought both of us to stillness.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Hogan fidgeted. "That same day you had me compiling pack progress reports, internal and external. So I told him he'd have to wait for an official decision. One week, standard protocol."

The thing that moved through me then wasn't nerves. It was something much closer to satisfaction.

My voice dropped. "Are you telling me he's still on this island?"

He nodded, looking sheepish and also relieved that my full attention had moved somewhere else.

"Name. Now."

"Jack Ruston."

The moment the name left his mouth, I reached for my magic. Out of the thousands of sparks I held awareness of across the island, one flared brighter than the rest. My instincts locked on immediately. I could see where he was. Where he was hiding. He wasn't moving, not yet. He was waiting, biding his time, hoping the storm would pass him by.

It wouldn't.

I'd found him.

And he wouldn't be leaving. Not alive.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Zaliver's POV

Slipping back into my own skin, I let the shadows curl around me like an old friend. Whatever worry lingered in the air around Albericus and Hogan didn't faze me. If anything, their unease only fueled the slow, dangerous grin spreading across my face. I nodded once at Albericus, and I could see the sharp awareness flash through his eyes. He knew what was coming next. The time for restraint was over.

Every trace of exhaustion in my limbs vanished like it had never existed. My spine straightened, and I rolled my shoulders back until a satisfying crack echoed through the room. The tension in the air thickened. I didn't bother pushing my hair from my eyes. Let it hang wild. I welcomed the eerie effect it gave me.

I lifted a single finger and pointed it at my Beta, my voice like steel wrapped in velvet.

"Jack Ruston. You'll find him holed up four blocks from his mate's last known residence, in a crumbling place called the Legrove Hotel. Room 42. If he catches wind of you, he'll bolt for the roof. Drag him back and toss him into a holding cell beneath the compound. I want him untouched, but not unshaken. Go."

Albericus didn't waste a second. He barked commands into his phone, emerald eyes gleaming with that barely-contained feral energy he was infamous for. He knew what this meant. We were back in the game, and blood was on the line.

I turned toward Hogan with a flick of my wrist. I didn't need words for him to feel the full weight of my displeasure.

"You. You're lucky, Hogan," I said, letting each word drip with quiet promise. "Protocol is the only reason you're not currently torn apart and dropped into shark-infested waters. Now, I want every name, every call, every meeting Jack Ruston's had over the past three months. Leave no shadow unsearched."

Hogan was already moving before I'd finished, practically leaving scorch marks on the floor. I could still smell the sweat on him.

I didn't care.

I had my rat. Now I needed the web he'd scurried through.

And when I found the one who'd dared orchestrate this, I would show them exactly why even demons hesitated before crossing me. I'd lived through centuries of war, blood, and betrayal. I hadn't just survived them. I'd mastered them.

With a slow exhale, I let a smile stretch across my face.

It was time to let the beast play.

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Vivian's POV

The scent of sizzling food stirred me awake. Warm and comforting, but it didn't stop the heaviness in my chest as I glanced at the empty side of the bed.

I bit down on my lip.

Every morning, the same thing. I'd wake, reach without thinking, and find nothing but cool sheets. I didn't know why I kept doing it.

Sighing, I swung my legs over the edge of the bed and stretched, letting my joints crack and pop as I made my way downstairs. The smell of bacon got stronger, but so did the tension. As I stepped into the kitchen, the awkward energy hit me immediately, thick enough to choke on.

Dad sat at the table with a strip of bacon halfway to his mouth, posture stiff like a guilty schoolboy. Mom was leaned against the fridge, arms crossed over her neatly pressed shirt, giving him the kind of glare that could turn steel molten. I paused in the doorway taking it all in.

I couldn't help it. I laughed.

They both looked at me. Dad seemed relieved to have a buffer. Mom was decidedly less welcoming about my presence.

I sat at the far end of the table where a warm plate was waiting. Even with food in front of me, I couldn't ignore the weight in the air. Mom kept glancing at me, eyebrows raised, silently begging me to ask something. Anything.

That classic look. Like she was sitting on a piece of gossip and trying very hard not to be the one who brought it up first.

I sighed through a mouthful of eggs and gave in.

"All right. What is it?"

"So, how was your date last night?" I asked, trying to suppress a smirk. Twenty years together and they still went on little dates. I always thought it was sweet.

I hoped I'd get that someday. With my mate.

A sudden ache pulsed in my chest.

Ugh. Where did that come from?

My dad groaned from across the table, snapping me back. He shot me a look of pure betrayal for asking the question. I just shrugged and bit back a grin. With a dramatic sigh, he dropped his head onto the table.

Mom, on the other hand, looked more than ready to talk.

"Oh, don't even get me started. You won't believe what your father did last night," she huffed, voice thick with indignation.

"Honey," Dad groaned without lifting his head, "how many times do I have to tell you? I was not flirting with that woman. I only have eyes for you."

The helpless way he muttered it made me chuckle. Poor guy.

"What happened?" I asked, glancing at Mom.

Her eyes practically lit up with fire. "This man right here," she began, pointing at him like he was on trial, "this same man I chose to marry and start a family with, despite his many screw-ups while we were dating, was flirting with the waitress."

"Was not!" Dad lifted his head with a look of genuine disbelief. "And do you really have to bring up all my old mistakes? I said sorry about the hair thing. It grew back, didn't it?"

"You set my hair on fire, Chace!"

"It was an accident!"

Mom wasn't buying it. "Shut your face, Chace, before I shut it for you."

Dad dropped his head back onto the table with a defeated groan.

I was genuinely laughing now.

"As I was saying," Mom continued, shooting me a long-suffering look, "we were just ordering dinner when he found out the restaurant served organic food. Suddenly he's asking the waitress everything. 'What's your name?' 'How long have you worked here?' 'Has the place always been organic?' All wide-eyed and charming."

Dad shot me a helpless look. I raised a brow.

"Mom. Dad's a food critic," I reminded her gently.

She waved a hand. "Excuses. I expected loyalty. Especially from you. I was in labor with you for twenty hours."

She pointed a dramatic finger at me like she was about to declare war.

I raised both hands in surrender and stood, picking up my plate. "I'm not on anyone's side."

Then I paused.

"Actually, scratch that. I'm on the side that feeds me. Or wins. Good luck, Dad."

I walked out of the kitchen with a laugh, heading for the living room.

"Gee, thanks, sweetheart! Really feeling the family support!" Dad called after me.

I laughed harder.

Despite everything, I knew they were fine. Dad adored Mom's fire, and Mom needed someone who would argue with her and then forgive her every time without question. It was chaotic, but it was theirs, and it worked.

I flopped onto the couch and grabbed the remote. I needed noise. Their voices faded into the background, though lately my hearing had sharpened enough that even muffled sounds came through more clearly than they used to. One of the many things changing in me whether I asked for it or not.

I flicked through channels without settling on anything.

Everything felt heightened lately, louder, more textured, like someone had turned up the dials on the world just to test me.

Channel after channel flashed past.

"How could you—"

"Buy this now for only—"

"Delivered fresh to your—"

"Squat, ladies! Feel the burn—"

"Tú quién piensas—"

"...not the father—"

"Damon, this is serious!" Elena screamed from the TV.

I snorted. The number of times someone screamed that name on that show was genuinely impressive.

Still, for a little while, it felt good to get lost in the noise. Even if my thoughts were still tangled and my body felt like it was operating on someone else's settings, at least this was something like normal.

Just for a little while.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I paused my clicking and let The Vampire Diaries play on. The second Damon appeared on screen, something in me stiffened. Not the usual breathlessness women tended to have around him. This was different. My thoughts went completely blank. My fingers hovered over the remote, unmoving. I blinked once, twice, and wrinkled my nose. A strange tug scratched at the back of my mind.

Black and blue.

The colors danced in my memory like they'd been stitched into something I couldn't quite see clearly.

Déjà vu hit hard.

I squinted, trying to shake the feeling, and resumed flicking through channels.

"Somebody saaave meee—"

Click.

"I got in one lil fight, and my mom got scared—"

Click.

"Next up, Hannah Mon—"

"I'm not your dad—"

Click.

"...tana."

Wait.

I paused.

My brows drew together. That name.

"Hannah," I whispered. Then again. "Hannah. Hannah?"

Why did that name feel like a trigger? It spilled out of my mouth without thought. Familiar. Weighted.

Too strange.

I shook my head. "I'm too old for this show anyway," I muttered to myself.

Suddenly: slap.

"Whore!"

"Okay, nope." My hand darted to the remote. "Let's not." Click.

The next commercial started. "What are you wearing, Jake from State Farm?"

I tilted my head.

"Uhh, khakis."

"She sounds hideous."

The corners of my mouth twitched, but my heart didn't laugh with me. I turned the TV off completely.

Why did I have the strangest feeling I'd made that exact comparison before? My head felt like it was swimming in fog.

Ever since waking up last Tuesday, things had been off. Not terrifying, just strange. Déjà vu came in waves. And not just feelings. Emotions that weren't mine would pulse through me out of nowhere, like they were being picked up from the air, or from someone else.

Other wolves? Could that even happen?

Maybe I was going crazy. Or psychic.

I snorted.

"Nope," I whispered, looking down at myself. "Don't own any crystals. And definitely not the right personality for that job."

My mom's voice drifted from the kitchen. "Sweetie, heading to work. If you need anything, ask your father. He's not leaving till later. Bye!"

I nodded as she kissed my cheek and headed out, keys jingling behind her.

Silence filled the house.

Great. Nothing to do. Nowhere to go.

My dad's familiar heavy footsteps preceded him by a few seconds before he flopped onto the couch next to me. He dragged a hand down his face like the full weight of adulting had just caught up with him.

I turned slightly. "So," I drawled, eyebrows lifting.

He gave me a side-eye. "I know, I know," he mumbled, like he already regretted sitting down.

"Where are you taking Mom tonight?" I pressed, crossing my arms.

If he didn't plan something soon, she'd be grumbling about the last date for the next two weeks. And even if she stayed quiet, her face would do all the work. One look and you'd know exactly what she was thinking.

He exhaled dramatically, then grinned like he'd cracked the code. "Forget restaurants. I'm cooking, we're going on a picnic. Just us. No one around."

His chest puffed like he'd solved something significant.

I nodded slowly. "Solid plan. Unless she catches you staring at a duck again. She might bring it home as competition."

He laughed, a full-bellied laugh that shook the couch. "True." He smirked, then tilted his head. "So what about you? Planning to rot on the couch all week, or you got something going on that I don't know about?"

I opened my mouth, but the words stalled.

It wasn't offense that made me quiet. It was that deeper ache. The feeling of being genuinely lost.

What was I supposed to do?

Here. That word echoed strangely. Why did here feel so off? So unfamiliar?

A cold shiver slid down my spine.

"Nah, I'll head to the park or something. Maybe swing by a couple friends' places," I said, saying it aloud as the idea started to sound more appealing the more I turned it over. Just getting out felt necessary. Dad gave an approving nod.

"If you go, let me know. I'll give you a lift if you want," he offered as he stood.

I stood with him, stretching. "Okay."

I headed upstairs two steps at a time, grabbed an outfit from my closet, changed quickly, and made a beeline for the bathroom. The moment I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, I froze.

My hair had grown. A lot. It was longer than I remembered, brushing the middle of my back now. When had that happened? I narrowed my eyes and ran a brush through the thick waves slowly. Where had my head been that I hadn't even noticed my own reflection changing?

After tying it into a high ponytail, I checked my outfit, black jeans and a soft, oversized jumper. Casual. Comfortable. Not like I was planning on bumping into anyone important.

I snorted quietly at myself.

But I still didn't move. The brush sat untouched on the counter. My gaze stayed on the mirror, not out of vanity but something else. Something pulled at me. Something felt off in a way I couldn't name.

My reflection stared back. Wide brown eyes, familiar but somehow unsure. I looked pale. Not sick, just washed out. Maybe the lighting.

I tilted my head slightly. She tilted hers. But it still didn't feel right.

There was a pull in my chest, a quiet, persistent voice whispering that I was missing something, that there was something behind the glass I couldn't quite see unless I looked harder. The sensation stayed at the edge of my awareness, not going anywhere.

I leaned closer and studied my eyes. Just brown. Nothing unusual. And yet I felt unsettled in a way that had nothing to do with what I could actually see.

Then I felt it. Not saw it, felt it. A stir somewhere deep in my head, not quite a sound, not quite a thought, just a faint movement like something shifting in sleep. My breath caught.

I jerked back instinctively, heart thudding, and stood there for a moment with my hand pressed to my sternum.

Nothing moved in the mirror. Everything looked exactly as it had.

Slowly, carefully, I leaned in again, holding my breath.

There. Just for a second, just long enough to be certain it wasn't my imagination.

It wasn't my wolf. She was quiet, tucked somewhere distant and still. This was something else. Something that felt older, like it had been there for a very long time and was only now starting to stir. The sensation was gone before I could get a grip on it.

I blinked hard.

No. That was impossible.

I shook my head, gave myself one last look, and left the bathroom, grabbing my phone and keys from the nightstand. Maybe I really was going stir-crazy. Some fresh air would sort me out.

Or at least give me something to do with the feeling that wouldn't leave.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV

I headed downstairs and knocked on my dad's office door. He looked up from his computer with his usual tired smile.

"You need a ride?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Nah. Us chubby girls gotta earn our cardio somehow."

He chuckled and leaned back in his chair. "You're not fat."

"I said chubby."

"You're not chubby."

I smirked. "Fine. Fluffy, then."

"You're not—"

"The next one's gonna be a word you'll regret, so tread carefully," I warned with a pointed finger.

He groaned dramatically, rubbing his forehead. "Why do the women in this family always back me into corners like this?"

"Because Mom threatened to castrate you if she had to pop out another kid," I said dryly, dropping onto the little couch in his office.

Dad tilted his head, as if genuinely considering it. "Oh. Right."

Moms. Gotta love them.

"Hey, Dad," I started, my voice trailing off with uncertainty.

He looked up from his desk, frowning at the tone. "What's up?" he asked, turning his chair toward me.

I let out a groan and threw my head back. "Do you ever get that feeling like you've forgotten something really important, something you are not supposed to forget?" I asked, sitting up and placing both hands on my knees. "Not like where you left your keys. More like you're doing everything that makes sense, but deep down it feels like you're supposed to be somewhere else entirely. Doing something else. Like you're in the wrong place and you can't figure out why."

Dad leaned back, folding his hands. "Plenty of times. Just the other day I forgot to—"

"No, not like that." I shook my head. "Not forgetfulness. More like... absence. Like there's a shape of something missing and you don't even know what shape it is."

Understanding flickered briefly in his eyes. I hoped he got it.

"Is this about college? Because if you are feeling overwhelmed it's fine to take a year off—"

I made a frustrated sound and stood, pacing. "No. That's not it."

Something shifted in his face. Confusion, and then something else. Something that felt a lot like fear. I stopped pacing and looked at him.

He was scared for me.

"Vivian, are you feeling okay?" He started rising from his chair. "Maybe you should stay in today."

I backed toward the door, hands up. "I'm fine. I just need air. I'll call you when I get back."

Before he could push further, I slipped out.

Being part of a gated pack community had its pros and cons. Safe, yes. Protected, definitely. But sometimes it pressed in on you, and the only way to breathe was to put some distance between yourself and all those familiar walls and faces.

I headed toward the old park, the one buried deeper into the forest, away from the daily hum of the pack. It was older than most of the playgrounds, predating the modern equipment by decades. I'd found it during a middle school project and had kept coming back ever since when I needed to think. When I told Dad I was going to the park, I wasn't lying. It was a park. Or it had been, once.

Along the way I nodded at a few familiar faces. Short greetings, brief eye contact. But something was off. Everyone I passed seemed vaguely uneasy, glancing away a beat too quickly, shifting their weight. I didn't try to figure it out. Maybe I was giving off strange energy. Or maybe I was just strange.

The further I got from the houses, the clearer my head became. The noise fell away, the smells thinned, and I could finally breathe without it feeling like effort. I stepped over broken branches, skirted puddles, and turned at the foot-shaped boulder that had always been my landmark. Twenty steps past that, and I was there.

The abandoned playground stood like something the forest had half-claimed. Vines along the fence. Rust on the climbing frame. I'd never played on the swings or the slide, it had always felt wrong somehow, like disturbing something that had decided to rest. I always went straight for the long, smooth rock bench near the back. The only thing that had aged gracefully here. Thank the moon it was stone and not wood.

I sat down, closed my eyes, and let the quiet settle over me.

The air was different here. Cleaner. Untouched. My limbs relaxed by degrees, and my thoughts slowed until they stopped snagging on each other. At some point, without meaning to, I drifted.

I wasn't worried. No one came here. Pack land was safe land.

Then it came. That particular feeling you get when someone's about to knock while you're half-asleep. Your body clocking something your mind hasn't caught up to yet.

Soft footsteps. Deliberate. Close.

My eyes stayed shut. My body didn't move. But something behind my ribs quietly shifted to attention.

Then: thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

Four heartbeats. Distinct, steady, and near.

My foggy, half-sleeping mind turned that over slowly. Four heartbeats. That was odd. I wasn't sure why it was odd, exactly, the thought floated just out of reach, but it was odd, the way a detail is odd when it doesn't fit the pattern of what's normal and you can't immediately say why.

I breathed in, slow and shallow.

Their scents reached me.

Familiar. Too familiar, in the specific way that meant something rather than the vague way that meant I'd passed them in the street. I knew these people. I was almost certain of it. But the certainty kept slipping before I could pin it down.

Their steps grew closer, careful and hesitant.

"We shouldn't be this close. It's a risk," a male voice whispered.

"Yeah, but she's asleep. We can't just leave her out here. Its not safe for her and besides You heard his orders," a female replied.

I kept my face still, kept my breathing even, trying as much as possible to not get caught.

His orders.

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivians POV

"Trick is waking her up and getting her back home without being noticed," the same male said. Then a low curse.

"Maybe if we throw something, she'll wake up and get scared enough to leave," another male suggested, sounding overly enthusiastic about this plan.

A smack followed. "Quiet! No, you idiot," a new female snapped. "She's a wolf. If something spooked her, she'd probably run toward it, not away. And stop talking. Her senses are like his. He told us to be extra cautious around her."

My heart picked up speed.

His?

What was going on? And why did I suddenly feel like I was sitting at the center of something much larger than I understood?

"Why do we always get the tough gigs? I heard the others are having the time of their lives beating down every idiot trying to sneak in," one of the women groaned.

My brows pulled together.

Wait. Someone was trying to get in? Now?

That couldn't be right. My parents told me the random abductions had ended last week while I was away with... who was I with again? My cousin. Lily. Yeah. I remembered now. But even that memory felt hazy, like smoke that kept slipping away before I could hold onto it.

"Because he trusts us with her more than the rest," a man answered, voice low and serious.

Her. Did that mean they were guards? Watching someone? Watching me?

Then why were they at the park?

"So, what's the plan?" another asked after a moment.

My brain was still groggy, not quite firing on all cylinders, but curiosity was starting to win over the fog. I stayed completely still and listened.

As they argued, I peeked one eye open. The sun was still hanging lazily in the sky. I must've been out for twenty or thirty minutes. My eyes slid carefully toward the voices, which were gradually getting louder.

Through the trees, I could see them clearly even from this distance. Too clearly. I wasn't using my wolf's senses, or at least I didn't think I was, and yet there they were, visible in detail I shouldn't have been able to make out from here.

I frowned and pushed the thought aside. I had more pressing curiosity to deal with.

Something inside me urged me to get closer. My mom had always said I was nosey. Maybe it was finally a useful quality.

I tensed my muscles, preparing to move carefully. I wasn't sure if I should go slow or fast to avoid detection, so I trusted my instincts and called on my wolf's strength. I counted silently to three and started to rise.

And realized I was already standing before I hit two.

I blinked at the ground, then at my own feet, then back at the group in the trees who still hadn't noticed me.

That was... not normal. I'd gone from seated to upright without consciously deciding to do it, like the motion had just happened ahead of my instruction. I stood there for a second, a little stunned, waiting for some explanation to arrive. None came.

Huh. That was new. And, weird as it was to admit, kind of awesome.

I started moving.

"We're not about to chuck rocks at her—"

I shifted direction toward the trees and found myself at the nearest trunk before I'd taken what felt like more than one step. The moment I thought about moving, my body was already there.

"We're also not going to set her lawn on fire and hope her parents call her out."

I eyed the next tree. I was there in a blink. Quiet. Fast.

"What if we lit a tree up?" someone offered.

"And what? Hope she puts it out with her mind? No thanks."

Their backs were still turned to where I'd come from, so I kept using it. I circled through the trees, moving between shadows.

"Then come up with a better idea!" a woman snapped.

"Uh, guys—" a more timid voice tried to cut in.

"Fine. We send an animal over. A rabbit or something."

"Right. That means one of us has to actually catch a rabbit. In the sun. While running."

The tallest one, with curly blond hair that bounced with every shift of his weight, kept moving restlessly. I ducked behind a trunk before he could turn my direction.

"Guys—"

"That's a terrible plan. Even if we caught one, how would we get it to go exactly where we wanted?"

I blinked. I was close. Genuinely close. Not a rustle. Not a snap of a branch. Nothing had given me away, and I was standing maybe twenty feet from them. Maybe I really could be a spy.

"You guys—"

"Why don't we just call her?" someone finally suggested. "We all have her new number, right?"

A pause. Then, the collective dawning realization.

"Oh yeah."

Pocket-patting commenced. They all searched for their phones simultaneously. All of them dressed in black, all of them somehow managing not to look suspicious.

"Hey!"

"What?!" they all snapped at the tall guy.

He didn't flinch. "She's gone."

"Told you," muttered the enthusiastic one, in a tone that suggested he'd been waiting for this.

Tense silence. Then someone let out a strangled sound. They shuffled, backs still turned. I sighed quietly. Still no look at their faces.

"Damn it. Call her. If she picks up, we'll get her location. Say it's a wrong number."

I watched the red-haired one yank out his phone and start dialing.

That was enough hiding. I walked out from the trees, quiet as a breeze, until I was a few feet behind them. They didn't even notice, too focused on the ringing tone coming from his phone.

I could help. I hadn't seen anyone else around, and honestly, it beat going home to stare at the walls and feel sorry for myself.

"Who'd you lose?" I asked loudly.

They all froze. Not even a breath.

I waited for them to turn. Nothing. They stood like statues.

Then my phone rang.

My hand moved slowly to my pocket. I looked down at the screen. I looked back up at the group, still completely motionless.

The curly-haired tall guy slowly raised one hand and slapped his own forehead with conviction.

"Bruh."

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

Vivian's POV.

The four strangers didn't move. They just stood there, rigid, backs still turned to me like statues. Even my phone had gone silent, the ringtone abruptly cutting off like it had never existed. The tension hanging in the air was thick enough to choke on.

"Maybe if we don't move " the tall blond man began, his whisper low and hopeful.

"Shut up!" the red-haired guy hissed, elbowing him sharply in the side.

"This is ridiculous," muttered a tall woman with her raven hair tied back so tightly that her ponytail swished with every frustrated shake of her head.

"We're absolutely screwed," another chimed in, her tone resigned and equally tense, her dark hair nearly identical to the other woman's.

I didn't know what to do. Their odd behavior had me stuck somewhere between amused and concerned. They kept muttering under their breaths like they were in some kind of panic. None of them had turned to face me, but the thing with my phone? That was... off. Suspicious, even. Could they have called me somehow? That would mean they knew who I was. That they were talking about me.

No. That couldn't be right. There's no way strangers just show up in the middle of nowhere for *me*. Right?

Any sane person probably would've turned and walked away without looking back. But me? No. I stayed rooted in place, something deep inside whispering that these people weren't a threat. They might *look* intense dressed for trouble and clearly on edge but I didn't feel danger from them. At least not yet.

And something *darker* something primal and quiet inside me told me that even if they *were* a threat, I could handle them.

All of them.

"Hey!" I called out, trying to break through whatever spell they were under.

When none of them reacted, I narrowed my eyes and started circling to their side, determined to get a look at their faces.

Or at least I *tried*.

Every time I moved, they shifted too like some weird coordinated dance always keeping their backs to me, no matter how I moved. My confusion turned to suspicion fast.

"Seriously? Why won't you face me?" I asked, frustration bubbling up in my voice as I stepped again, only to be met with another group shuffle.

"Well " The blond started to speak again, lifting his head slightly.

"Don't you dare talk to her, idiot!" the tall woman snapped, smacking him upside the head. He winced and muttered something under his breath.

Okay, this was officially bizarre.

"Why not?" I demanded, my patience wearing thin. "Just turn around already!"

I hadn't meant to sound so commanding, but I was done playing whatever game this was.

Slowly, like puppets on a single string, they all began turning toward me. Hands clenched at their sides. Jaws tight. It was almost... robotic.

"Resist " one of the women whispered through gritted teeth.

"I can't," someone else groaned.

I watched with narrowed eyes as they finally faced me.

And then I froze.

Red curls. Green eyes.

Golden-blond waves. Sky-blue irises.

Midnight-black hair, brown eyes, and a faint scar slashing across his cheek.

Another girl same dark hair and brown eyes looking eerily familiar.

A heavy, unexplainable wave of *something* slammed into me. Like crashing into a wall of memories I couldn't quite see. A strange, aching déjà vu swallowed me whole, blurry flashes racing through my mind, brushing the edges of recognition but never sticking.

I stumbled back, barely catching myself. My heart pounded.

They weren't part of my pack. I knew that instinctively. But I also knew just as clearly they weren't here to hurt me.

Were they visiting? Passing through? If so, why did they look at me like that?

Each of them took a slow step forward, arms half-outstretched like they expected me to fall again.

Then I heard myself whisper names I hadn't even realized I remembered.

"Luke... Johnson... Mila... Courtney..."

The second the words left my mouth, their eyes widened. Panic. Maybe fear. It hit them all at once like I'd said something dangerous.

"I... I'm sorry," I stammered, blinking at them. "Do I know you? Have we met before?"

Their eyes met each other, quick glances filled with silent conversation. No one answered right away. Their expressions shifted from stunned to solemn. Tension laced their posture.

The blond Luke, apparently took a shaky breath and looked straight at me.

"Do we look familiar?" he asked, his voice low and careful, his eyes darting across my face like he was searching for something.

The others stepped closer too, leaning in like they needed to hear my answer.

"Are those your names?" I asked instead. My voice was quieter now, full of uncertainty and disbelief. I tried to brush it off maybe I just had a weird talent for guessing names but the longer I looked at them, the more I *knew*.

I *had* seen them before.

Somewhere.

Sometime.

Even if I didn't remember how... my soul did.

It was the red-haired man with striking green eyes who spoke first. As I stared at him, a strange vision flickered through my mind a girl with the same vibrant hair and eyes, though softer, more delicate. Feminine. Shorter. The memory felt real, yet distant. My gaze shifted to the blond guy beside him, and again, something stirred. Her face came through clearer this time. Familiar. Friendly.

"Y-yes," he finally answered, his hesitation thick in the air.

I blinked in disbelief. So... I was right? I guessed their names correctly. But how?

"So, we *have* met before?" I asked again, needing confirmation. He gave a small nod.

I wanted to scream out of frustration. "Where?" I demanded, my tone sharper than before, suspicion blooming fast. They'd acted like strangers moments ago, but now they were squirming under my gaze. Just earlier, they were determined about something what was it? What were they pushing for so hard?

My eyes narrowed. All four of them were dressed in sleek black gear that hugged their bodies like uniforms. Not casual. Not coincidence.

"Uh..."

"Well..."

"You see..."

"The thing is..."

The Wolf God's Unwanted Luna

They all tried to talk at once, stumbling over each other like kids caught sneaking out.

Something wasn't right. Not just about *this* moment, but the entire past week. Every encounter, every odd whisper or shadow in the corner of my vision... it had built up to this. I took a step forward, feeling that if I could just reach them, I'd get the answers I needed.

"What exactly were you doing just now?" I asked, voice low but firm. "Who *are* you really? Guards? Patrol? Who were you calling? Someone was just here I heard you."

None of them looked me in the eye. Their silence screamed guilt.

Finally, the tall woman with the scar slicing through her brow stepped forward. She chose her words carefully. "We are guards, yes... but we're special guardians. We're not allowed to say what we protect. Please don't ask." Her voice dropped to something firm and unyielding. "And we weren't calling anyone."

My eyes locked with hers, trying to see past the rehearsed expression.

Why did it feel like they were lying through their teeth?

"So you didn't just call out to 'her'?" I asked, crossing my arms. "It was just my imagination then?" They all shook their heads. No.

"I'm imagining voices now?" Still, not a single word in response.

That sinking feeling deepened in my gut. I could feel it now this wasn't just weird. This was *wrong*. And these four were in the thick of it.

Without a word, I slipped my hand into my pocket and pulled out my phone. All their eyes immediately locked onto it, wide and tense. Like prey spotting a trap.

"What are you doing?" the redhead asked, his voice rising a little, green eyes flicking rapidly between my face and the glowing screen.

I shrugged, trying to look casual. "Just returning a missed call."

The number was still there in bold red. No caller ID. That call had come for *me*.

"I'm sure it's nothing important," said the girl without the scar, flashing a too-wide, too-sweet smile. It was fake. I could smell the panic on her.

"Yes, nothing important at all," the scarred woman echoed, stepping forward, hands out like she was preparing to snatch the phone from my grip.

"Yeah, and besides," the blond guy jumped in, his voice scolding, "didn't your parents teach you it's rude to make a call in the middle of a conversation?"

I stared at them, heart thudding in my chest but not from fear. From *knowing*. Their feet were shifting closer, slow and subtle. Their breathing quickened. I could hear the way their pulses raced beneath their calm masks.

"You're right," I said slowly, voice even. "Maybe it's nothing. And yeah, my parents did raise me with manners."

They all relaxed at once, releasing a unified breath like a wall had just lifted off their backs.

Beep.

I hit the call button anyway.

Chapter 64: Echoes of the Unfamiliar

Vivian's POV

"But I really should return this. Might be important," I said with a small smile, watching their expressions shift from surprise to something bordering on panic.

My ears twitched, catching the subtle hum of a phone vibrating. It was faint, but the sound was unmistakable. I scanned the group, narrowing in on the redhead. The buzz was coming from him.

I raised a brow. "Aren't you going to answer that? Could be important."

He hesitated, then sighed and slipped his hand into his pocket, pulling out the phone like it physically hurt to touch it. His face, already pale, lost what little color it had as he hit the answer button. The screen lit up, and he brought the phone to his ear, his gaze locking with mine.

"Hello?" he said flatly.

My voice echoed back through the speaker from my own end. "Mmhh," I mumbled, then ended the call and slid my phone back into my pocket.

"Alright, enough games. Who are you, and why the hell do you have my number? More importantly, why have you been following me?" I kept my tone calm but firm. I needed answers. These strangers felt too familiar. Too intentional.

The tall blond stepped forward, the serious set of his face confirming I wasn't imagining the tension. "If you want answers, we'll give them to you. Tomorrow. Same place."

My eyes narrowed at the vagueness. Around him, the others looked confused and immediately began to protest, but a single look from him silenced them. That look whatever it was had weight. Pack link, maybe?

After a beat, they all nodded in unison, then turned their attention to me again with unreadable expressions.

"Yes," another one said, "meet us here. Same time tomorrow."

Everything in me told me this was a setup. My gut twisted with unease. "Wait " I started, reaching out, but it was too late.

They bolted.

Each one of them vanished in a different direction like shadows dispersing into the wind. Even with my new, enhanced senses and speed, I couldn't keep track. They moved with the kind of precision and confidence that screamed they'd done this before.

With a frustrated sigh, I looked around the empty street. They were gone.

Fine.

Turning back, I made my way home, hoping the quiet of my room would help me piece this together. The whole encounter had eaten away more of my morning than I realized. When I walked through the door, the house was silent, empty.

I headed straight for my room and dropped onto the edge of my bed. But I couldn't sit still. I popped right back up, pacing in short, tight strides.

Who were they? What did they want with me? And why did I know them? I replayed their faces, their voices, their urgency.

Were they really talking about me like they knew me like I was supposed to go home with them? What home?

The questions tangled in my brain like barbed wire, but one stood out: Where had I met them before? I felt like if I could just answer that one question, everything else would unravel with it.

I tugged out my ponytail and shook my hair loose. It fell around my face in a messy curtain. Lately, déjà vu had been slamming into me in waves, triggered by random, meaningless things. Why? And why did I feel like some hollow part of me filled up the moment I saw those four? Like puzzle pieces quietly locking into place?

Inside me, my wolf stirred.

She paced back and forth in my mind, agitated, then suddenly froze. Confused. She shook her head, slow at first, then violently, like trying to rid herself of something clinging.

Without realizing it, I mirrored her movements. My head swayed, gently at first... then harder. I wasn't even sure what I was trying to shake loose. The fog? The memories? The lies?

I stopped abruptly as a sharp pain bloomed behind my eyes. "Ugh," I groaned. That was a bad idea.

But something had shifted.