



Star's Howl

Author: *Milly Taiden*

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Description: Seraphina's predictable life never prepared her for the visions overtaking her mind at the worst possible moments. On her thirtieth birthday, mysterious glimpses of the future disrupt everything—sometimes putting her in real danger. Before she can make sense of her world becoming a constant stream of prophecy, a handsome stranger tells her she's got the power to see the future. Prince Orion, the patient alpha of the Moonvision pack, has spent his life waiting for a wolf mate worthy of standing beside him as Luna. Instead, fate delivers him a human woman with future-sight powers and a skeptical nature that makes his wolf determined to prove their destined bond.

As Seraphina struggles to control the raw visions surging through her mind, an undeniable attraction builds between them—one as mysterious and powerful as fate itself. When Seraphina discovers that Orion's presence calms her chaotic visions, she must decide how to handle the powers that defy logic. Orion must protect his mate while convincing her that their bond means more than just partnership—it means ruling together as king and queen.

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ONE

SERAPHINA

The warm glow of string lights reflected in the wine glasses at Azul, one of Miami's trendiest waterfront restaurants. Outside, palm trees draped in holiday lights swayed against the backdrop of Biscayne Bay. The December evening was balmy in typical South Florida fashion.

Seraphina Lucero sat at a circular table, surrounded by friends whose faces blurred slightly from the two glasses of wine she had already consumed. The restaurant hummed with conversation and laughter, mingling with Latin jazz playing softly in the background.

"Make a wish, Sera!" Abby leaned forward, her blonde hair cascading over her shoulders, the tight white dress she wore accentuating every curve. Her blue eyes sparkled with mischief. "Thirty is when the real fun starts."

Seraphina rolled her eyes but couldn't suppress a smile. "That's what people say when they've accepted their youth is gone."

"Speak for yourself, grandma." Abby winked, raising her wine glass.

Seraphina took a deep breath, gazing at the thirty candles burning atop the decadent chocolate cake. The flames danced, hypnotic and golden. Thirty. How had that happened? It seemed like yesterday she was finishing her doctorate mapping celestial bodies and plotting her career path. Now here she was, a full-fledged adult with a

mortgage and a 401k.

She closed her eyes, made a silent wish for something—anything—exciting to happen in her methodical life, and blew out the candles in one breath. The table erupted in cheers and applause.

"What did you wish for?" Abby nudged her with an elbow.

"If I tell you, it won't come true." Seraphina reached for the cake knife.

As she positioned the blade above the cake, something strange happened. The restaurant seemed to blur around her, sounds fading as if someone had turned down the volume. In perfect clarity, she saw a waiter approach their table, a tray balanced on his palm with a single glass of red wine. The waiter moved closer just as Abby, laughing at something, pushed her chair back and stood. Their trajectories were set to collide.

Seraphina watched, frozen, as Abby bumped the waiter's arm. The wine glass toppled, its contents pouring like crimson rain over Abby's pristine white dress.

"No!" Seraphina gasped, dropping the cake knife with a clatter. She lunged toward Abby, napkins clutched in her hand.

Abby stared at her, mid-laugh. "What's wrong?"

Seraphina blinked. There was no waiter. No spilled wine. Abby's dress remained immaculate white. The restaurant noise returned to normal volume.

"I—I thought—" Seraphina looked around, disoriented. "I saw wine spilling all over your dress."

The table fell silent before breaking into laughter.

"Did you start the party without us, Dr. Lucero?" one of her friends teased.

"Hazard of turning thirty—hallucinations!" another chimed in.

Abby's smile softened. "You okay, Sera? You look pale."

"I'm fine." Seraphina forced a laugh. "Too much wine."

She put down the napkins in her hands, suddenly needing space. "I'll be right back."

"Don't fall in!" Abby called after her, already turning back to the conversation.

Seraphina headed toward the restroom, her heart pounding against her ribs. What had just happened? It had felt so real—not like imagination or daydreaming, but like watching a scene unfold before her eyes.

Seraphina soon dabbed her face with a paper towel, the cool water helping to clear her mind. Her reflection stared back at her in the bathroom mirror, her green eyes wide with uncertainty. What had that vision been? A trick of the light, maybe. Too much wine. Stress from turning thirty. There had to be a logical explanation.

"Get it together, Sera," she whispered to herself, tucking her black hair behind her ear. "You study stars, not futures."

She straightened her emerald cocktail dress and headed back toward the table, her mind still racing with scientific explanations for what she'd experienced. Stress-induced hallucination. Minor temporal lobe dysfunction. The neural pathways?—

"Oh my GOD!"

Abby's shriek sliced through Seraphina's thoughts. Time seemed to slow as she watched the exact scene from her vision unfold before her eyes. The waiter—the same one she had seen in her mind—stumbled as Abby pushed back her chair. The glass of red wine tipped, its contents arcing through the air in slow motion before splattering across Abby's white dress.

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"Are you kidding me?" Abby jumped back, her arms outstretched, the crimson stain blooming across her chest. "This dress cost more than you make in a week!"

"I'm so sorry, ma'am, I—" The waiter fumbled for napkins.

Abby's dramatic backward step knocked her into another server, sending a tray of empty glasses crashing against the table. The domino effect sent water glasses toppling, bread baskets overturning, and silverware clattering to the floor.

Seraphina froze, her mouth hanging open. It wasn't in her head. This was happening exactly as she'd seen it.

"Sera!" Someone called her name, snapping her from her trance.

A restaurant manager soon appeared while servers rushed to clean the spilled drinks. Seraphina barely registered the action, her mind swimming with implications.

"Nice birthday surprise," Seraphina said with a weak laugh as the manager apologized profusely, offering free desserts and drinks.

Abby, dabbing at her dress with club soda, shot her a concerned look. "Are you sure you're okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Not a ghost," Seraphina said. "Something far stranger."

"Well, your night can only get better from here." Abby's smile returned, irrepressible as always. "And this dress was last season anyway." She leaned closer, lowering her

voice. "Plus, the cute waiter who ruined it gave me his number while apologizing."

Despite everything, Seraphina laughed. "Only you could turn this disaster into a date."

"Speaking of which," Abby's eyes glinted mischievously, "we're still hitting Eclipse after this, right? Birthday girl needs to dance off her weird incident."

"I don't know if?—"

"Non-negotiable," Abby cut her off. "Thirty means you party harder, not smarter."

Twenty minutes later, Seraphina absently traced the edge of the tablecloth while the dessert plates were cleared away. The restaurant staff had been falling over themselves to make amends after Seraphina's freak accident.

"So, ready for Eclipse?" Abby leaned in, her blue eyes sparkling despite the dried wine stain across her chest.

Seraphina hesitated. All she wanted was to curl up at home with a book on astrophysics and try to rationalize what had happened. But the look in Abby's eyes made her pause.

"Fine." She sighed. "But I'm not staying too late."

Abby squealed and clapped her hands. "Perfect! We'll swing by my place first. I need to change out of this disaster, and you need to borrow something that screams 'I'm thirty, flirty, and thriving.'"

Thirty minutes later, Seraphina sat perched on the edge of Abby's king-sized bed, surrounded by discarded dresses. Her mind kept replaying the restaurant incident

while Abby fluttered around her walk-in closet like a hummingbird on espresso.

"What's happening to me?" Seraphina whispered to herself. The analytical part of her brain—the astronomer who mapped celestial bodies and calculated orbital trajectories—searched desperately for explanations. Stress? A minor stroke?

"What about this?" Abby emerged in a crimson dress that hugged every curve. "Does it scream 'I laugh in the face of wine stains'?"

Seraphina forced a smile. "It looks amazing."

"You're still freaked out about that weird prediction thing you mentioned in the car, aren't you?"

"Wouldn't you be? I saw it happen, Abby. Exactly as it did."

"Maybe you're psychic now." Abby shrugged, twirling to check her reflection. "Happy birthday, you got a superpower!"

Seraphina rubbed her temples. "That's not how the real world works. There must be a rational explanation."

"Or maybe there isn't." Abby sat beside her, surprisingly gentle. "Who knows? Maybe turning thirty opened some cosmic door. Either way, let's dance it off."

Before she knew it, Seraphina was standing in the middle of the dance floor of Miami's most popular nightclub. Eclipse pulsed with neon blue lights and deep bass that Seraphina felt in her chest. The nightclub's dance floor was packed with bodies moving like a single organism. Normally, she'd have planted herself at a corner table with a drink, but tonight, Abby dragged her straight to the dance floor when they'd arrived.

"Let loose!" Abby shouted over the music, already moving with the beat. "Best cure for an existential crisis!"

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Seraphina tried to surrender to the rhythm, but her eyes kept darting around the room. Was that man going to drop his drink? Would that couple start arguing? Every movement seemed like potential déjà vu.

Then she saw it—a bartender reaching for a bottle that teetered dangerously on the edge. Without thinking, she began counting.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

Nothing. The bottle remained intact on the bar and the bartender was nowhere in sight. Seraphina exhaled, relieved that her mind was just playing tricks after all.

Until the bottle crashed to the floor a few minutes later.

"Oh god." Her heart hammered in her chest. This wasn't normal.

"Shots!" Abby appeared with two glasses of electric blue liquid. "Birthday medicine!"

"I can't." Seraphina stepped back. "Abby, something's wrong with me. I just saw that bottle fall before it happened."

"You're just hyperaware of everything because of earlier tonight." Abby held out the shot. "Drink. Dance. Worry tomorrow."

Seraphina forced herself to stay another hour, declining every drink after that first shot. The music blurred with laughter, but she couldn't shake the feeling of time

folding in on itself.

"I think I need to go home," she finally said, her voice tight. "My head—I can't think straight."

"I'll call you an Uber." Abby squeezed her arm. "Is the birthday curse still bothering you?"

"Something like that." Seraphina leaned against the wall, watching the crowd with new eyes. "I just really need to lie down right now."

Seraphina stepped outside Eclipse, tugging at the hem of the black cocktail dress Abby had insisted she borrow. The fabric hugged her curves in ways her usual attire never did, making her simultaneously self-conscious and oddly powerful. Miami's cool December night air felt refreshing carrying the scent of salt water from the nearby bay and the faint sweetness of night-blooming jasmine.

She checked her phone. Three minutes until her Uber arrived. Seraphina leaned back against the brick wall, watching other club-goers stumble out into the night, their laughter echoing down the street. The soft glow of the club's neon sign painted the sidewalk in electric blue, creating surreal shadows that danced with each passing car.

Then it happened again.

The world blurred at the edges, sounds fading as her vision sharpened with crystalline clarity on a specific point. A woman in silver heels leaving the club, checking her phone as she walked. In Seraphina's vision, the woman's ankle twisted, sending her tumbling into the street just as a black sedan began backing out of its parking spot. The impact wasn't deadly, but the woman crumpled to the ground, clutching her hip in pain as onlookers rushed to help.

Seraphina gasped, the vision dissipating. Her heart raced as she soon spotted the woman from her premonition exiting the club, silver heels glinting, phone already in hand.

"I can stop this," Seraphina whispered to herself.

Instead of charging forward as instinct dictated, Seraphina made a split-second calculation. The trajectory needed changing.

"Hey!" She waved to the woman. "Excuse me! Do you have a lighter?"

The woman looked up from her phone, momentarily confused. "What?"

"A lighter?" Seraphina repeated, gesturing for her to come over.

The woman hesitated, then changed direction, stepping toward Seraphina and away from the path that would've led to her accident. Behind her, the black sedan backed out of its spot, passing harmlessly through the space where the woman would've fallen.

"I don't smoke, sorry." The woman gave Seraphina an apologetic smile before continuing down the sidewalk, unharmed.

Seraphina staggered back slightly, her breath coming in short gasps. "Holy shit," she whispered. She had changed it. She had prevented the accident.

Her Uber pulled up then, a silver Honda with a slight dent in the passenger door. Seraphina slid into the backseat, her mind racing.

"Good night?" The driver glanced at her in the rearview mirror.

"Interesting one," Seraphina murmured, staring out the window as Miami's lights blurred past.

As the car navigated through late-night traffic, Seraphina's thoughts drifted to her office at the university observatory. Her star charts and calculations, the predictable patterns of celestial bodies she had devoted her life to studying. Was this somehow connected? Had a lifetime of staring at the cosmos somehow attuned her to patterns in time itself?

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She had always found comfort in the stars, and in their ancient light telling stories of the past. As a little girl, she'd lie on the grass behind her grandmother's house, connecting constellations and imagining their movements. Astronomy had given her order in a chaotic world, explanations for the unexplainable.

Late that night, as she curled under her duvet, Seraphina stared at the glow-in-the-dark stars she'd stuck to her ceiling years ago. Turning thirty had seemed like such an arbitrary milestone this morning. She'd done her usual birthday ritual of worrying about her biological clock, and about the relationships sacrificed for research grants and academic papers.

Now, those concerns felt minor compared to whatever was happening to her perception of reality.

"Happy birthday," Seraphina murmured into her pillow as sleep finally pulled her under, dreams of falling stars and blood merging as she drifted off.

TWO

ORION

Orion tapped his fingers on the ancient oak desk, the centuries-old wood worn smooth beneath his touch. Quarterly pack finances should have commanded his attention, but tonight, the numbers blurred before his eyes. The clock on the wall struck eight, each chime echoing through his royal study like a heartbeat in the otherwise silent castle.

"Damn these reports," he muttered, undoing the top two buttons of his crisp black shirt. His powerful frame strained against the confines of the tailored fabric.

His mind drifted as he looked out the arched window at the mainland glittering across the water from his private island. The lights of Miami competed with the stars above. The artificial brightness was a glaring reminder of the human world he'd kept at arm's length for four centuries. So much chaos, and so many complications?—

Suddenly, a jolt shot through his body, electric and primal. Orion jerked upright, knocking the inkwell across territory allocation maps. The sensation cascaded through his veins, a warmth he'd never experienced in four hundred years of existence.

His wolf, always present beneath his skin, surged forward with a clarity that stole his breath.

Our Luna has awakened.

Orion braced himself against the desk, his knuckles whitening as he gripped the edge.

"Impossible," he whispered.

Yet, the wolf inside of him insisted differently, clawing at his insides and demanding release to go find their mate.

He crossed to the window, throwing it open to the December night. The sea breeze carried salt and possibility as he lifted his gaze to the stars scattered across the velvet sky. The constellations that had guided his kind for millennia seemed to pulse with new energy.

"Four centuries." His voice was rough, laced with disbelief and something

dangerously close to hope. "Four centuries of waiting."

Orion paced the length of the study, unable to contain the restless energy coursing through him. His rational mind needed confirmation of what his wolf already seemed to know. Bertram, his royal advisor and trusted friend, would be able to clarify what had just happened. The elder's wisdom reached back further than even Orion's considerable lifetime.

The ancient corridors of the castle blurred as Orion strode purposefully through them, nodding curtly at pack members who bowed in deference. When he reached the eastern tower, he didn't bother knocking.

"You feel it too." Bertram stood at his own window, his weathered face turned skyward. No surprise marked his features when Orion entered, just quiet understanding.

"Is it true?" Orion demanded, his natural authority filling the room. "After all this time?"

Bertram turned, his eyes bright with centuries of wisdom. "The stars have shifted their alignment tonight, My King. Something has awakened."

"My Luna?"

"Only the King can truly know." Bertram stepped closer, studying Orion's face. "The mate bond is fragile at first, easily misinterpreted. What does your blood tell you?"

Orion closed his eyes, focusing inward past the noise of his rational mind. There—pulsing beneath everything—was the tether. New, delicate, but unmistakable.

"She's there." The words emerged as a growl, his wolf rising closer to the surface. "I

can feel her."

"Then it is true." Bertram's voice carried reverence. "After four centuries, the Starlight pack will finally have its queen."

Orion's chest expanded with a deep breath as the reality settled into his bones. Centuries of ruling alone, of empty ceremony and hollow traditions maintained simply because they must be.

Bertram's gnarled hand gripped his walking stick as he moved toward the door. "We must go to the sacred fountain. Only there can we see her clearly."

Orion followed the elder through the winding stone corridors of the castle. Guards stationed at intervals straightened as he passed, their eyes lowering in respect. He acknowledged none of them, his mind consumed by the persistent tug in his chest—the invisible thread connecting him to a woman he'd never met.

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The December night air hit his face as they stepped into the castle gardens. Moonlight bathed the ancient topiaries and flowering winter jasmine in silver light. The scent of the sea carried on the breeze, reminding him of the separation between his island kingdom and the mainland.

"Four hundred years," Orion murmured as they approached the fountain. "Why now?"

Bertram's lips curved in a knowing smile. "The stars align when they choose, not when we demand."

The sacred fountain stood in the center of the garden, carved from a single piece of moonstone by the first Starlight alpha two millennia ago. Water bubbled up from an unseen source, spilling over into a basin wide enough for three men to stand in. Runes of protection and clarity were etched into its rim, glowing faintly in the darkness.

"Allow your connection to guide the seeing." Bertram dipped his hands into the crystalline water, gesturing for Orion to do the same.

Orion rolled up the sleeves of his shirt before plunging his hands into the icy water. The cold shocked his system, but he kept his face impassive. Kings didn't flinch.

"Focus on the pull," Bertram instructed. "Let your wolf guide you to her."

Orion closed his gray eyes, feeling his wolf surge forward again. The beast's eagerness was overwhelming, nearly forcing a shift right there in the garden. He

controlled it with iron will, channeling the energy down through his arms and into the water.

The fountain began to glow, light emanating from beneath the surface. Ripples spread across the water's face despite the absence of wind.

"Look, My King."

Orion opened his eyes. The water's surface had transformed into a mirror-like vision. Buildings of glass and steel reflected colorful lights. Streets packed with humans. And there—a flash of dark black hair, a woman's profile.

"Miami." His voice sounded foreign to his own ears. "She's in Miami."

Bertram's bushy eyebrows rose in surprise. "A bustling city? Not the forest settlements or the mountain enclaves?"

"Directly across the water from us." Orion stared at the image, his jaw tightening. "In that chaos of concrete and complications."

"Many wolves have adapted to human cities in these modern times," Bertram offered. "Perhaps it's a sign that our pack must evolve as well."

Orion straightened, water dripping from his muscular forearms. The water glistened like liquid silver against his tanned skin, catching the moonlight as it trailed down to his fingertips. The wolf inside him paced impatiently, urging him to take action immediately.

"It doesn't matter where she is," he stated, his voice deep and commanding. "She belongs with me and with her pack."

The elder's weathered face creased with amusement. "The Moon Goddess sure has a sense of humor though." Bertram chuckled, leaning on his gnarled walking stick. "Centuries of waiting, only to discover your mate is from the human world you've avoided."

Orion's jaw clenched as he wiped his hands on his pants, leaving dark streaks across the expensive fabric. He cared nothing for appearances tonight—not with his blood singing with newfound purpose.

"All these wolves are choosing to live among humans these days." He cast his gaze across the water toward the glittering skyline of Miami. "They pretend they are something they're not and conform to human thinking and customs."

His wolf bristled at the mere thought. "I could never do it," he added, raking a hand through his dark gray hair. "Human politics and social hierarchies make no sense—all those unspoken rules, the deception, and the masks they wear."

Bertram arched an eyebrow. "And yet your Luna has been raised in that world."

The thought sent a jolt of electricity down Orion's spine. His. She was his—even if she didn't know it yet.

"As a royal, I've never considered anything but living among my pack." He began to pace, unable to contain the energy surging through his powerful frame. His wolf urged him to shift, to run, and to swim across the channel separating him from his mate. "My duty has always been clear. But I can see how someone not raised with royal responsibilities might not have the same..." He searched for the right word, unwilling to sound judgmental about his mate before he'd even met her. "...the same sense of pack obligation."

The wind shifted, carrying the scent of sea salt and promise. Orion inhaled deeply,

wondering if he could detect even a trace of her scent from this distance. Ridiculous, yet he couldn't help himself.

The muscles in Orion's neck and shoulders were tight with anticipation. "I have to find her."

"Eager, after four hundred years of solitude?" Bertram's tone was teasing, but respectful.

"Four centuries was nothing." Orion's voice dropped to a near growl as his eyes flashed with primal intensity. "But now that I know she exists, every minute apart is an eternity."

Orion stalked toward the edge of the castle gardens, his gaze fixed on the distant lights of Miami. The wolf inside him paced restlessly, urging him to move. But the king in him knew better than to act on impulse.

"I'll take my boat at sunrise," he decided, already mapping the journey in his mind. "The Moonchaser is fast enough to get me there in less than an hour."

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Bertram joined him at the garden's edge, his walking stick tapping softly against the stone path. "And once you reach the city? Miami has thousands of humans."

A smile tugged at the corner of Orion's mouth. He tapped his chest where the faint pull of the mate bond thrummed like a second heartbeat. "I can track her. The bond may be new, but it's strong enough."

"The council will want to send guards?—"

"No." Orion's tone left no room for argument. "The last thing I need is a pack of wolves drawing attention in downtown Miami. This is something I must do alone."

Bertram sighed but nodded. "Years as our king has earned you that right, I suppose. What shall I tell the council?"

"Tell them I'm handling a delicate diplomatic matter that requires my personal attention." Orion started walking back toward the castle, his stride purposeful. "Because that's exactly what this is."

"And when you find her?"

Orion paused, the question stirring something possessive in his chest. "When I find her, I bring her home where she belongs."

Back in his royal chambers, Orion paced rather than slept. The elegant four-poster bed with its meticulously arranged pillows and linens remained untouched as the night hours slipped away. He stood at the window instead, watching the stars wheel

across the sky, counting the minutes until dawn.

When exhaustion finally claimed him, his dreams were vivid and insistent. A woman with flowing black hair and eyes like emeralds walked through mist. He could never see her face clearly, just glimpses—the curve of her cheek, the fullness of her lips, her fingers reaching toward the night sky as if counting stars. Every time he approached, she slipped away like smoke, leaving behind a scent he couldn't quite capture but desperately wanted to breathe in.

He woke before his alarm, drenched in sweat and painfully aware of the empty space beside him. Space that had been empty for years but only now felt like a void.

"Enough," he muttered, throwing off the tangled sheets. The eastern sky showed just the first hint of gray as he showered and dressed—dark jeans, a white Henley that stretched across his broad chest, and a leather jacket. Clothing that would help him blend into the human world while still allowing freedom of movement if trouble found him.

At the private dock, The Moonchaser bobbed on gentle swells, its sleek lines cutting a distinguished silhouette against the lightening horizon. Forty feet of expertly crafted luxury that would serve his purpose perfectly—fast enough to slice through the waves to Miami, sophisticated enough not to draw the wrong kind of attention when he docked.

He jumped aboard with practiced ease, his body remembering the rhythms of the boat despite years since he'd last taken it out. Why bother with mainland excursions when the island provided everything he needed?

Until now.

The engines rumbled to life beneath his hands, and he felt a surge of anticipation that

matched the purr of the finely-tuned machinery. As the eastern sky bloomed with the first golden rays of daylight, Orion guided the Moonchaser away from the dock, leaving the ancient castle silhouetted against the dawn.

"I'm coming for you," he whispered to the bond pulsing inside him, stretching across the water toward Miami. "Ready or not, Luna."

THREE

SERAPHINA

Seraphina jolted awake the next morning and found her sheets twisted around her legs. The sunlight streamed through her bedroom window, gentle and warm, but did nothing to ease the chill that had settled in her bones. She rubbed her eyes as the remnants of her nightmares clung to her consciousness.

"What is going on with me?" she whispered to the empty room.

Images from her birthday flashed through her mind—the spilled wine on Abby's white dress and the woman in the parking lot nearly getting hit. Predictions. Visions. Impossibilities that science couldn't explain.

Seraphina reached for her phone on the nightstand, squinting at the time. Already past nine. Her head throbbed with exhaustion. No way she could focus on star charts and celestial calculations today. She dialed Dr. Whitman's number, pressing the phone to her ear.

"Astronomy department, Dr. Whitman speaking."

Seraphina cleared her throat. "Hi, Dr. Whitman. It's Seraphina. I'm not feeling well this morning. I think I need to take a sick day."

"You never take sick days, Seraphina." His voice carried a note of concern. "Is everything all right?"

"Just... didn't sleep well. Probably overdid it at my birthday celebration."

"Ah, the big three-o. Take care of yourself. We can manage the observatory data today."

"Thanks, I appre?—"

The words died in her throat as her vision blurred. The phone slipped from her fingers, clattering to the floor as the room around her dissolved.

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A man stood at the helm of a sleek boat, his powerful hands gripping the wheel with easy confidence. Dark jeans hugged muscular thighs, a white shirt stretched across broad shoulders, and a leather jacket completed the effortlessly masculine look. His gray hair was expertly styled—short on the sides, longer on top—and his beard framed a jawline that could cut glass. But it was his eyes that caught her—piercing gray like storm clouds, ancient and knowing.

Something about him tugged at her core, a recognition that defied logic. She had never seen this man before, yet something whispered that she knew him.

The vision vanished as quickly as it came, leaving Seraphina gasping for air, her heart hammering in her chest. She scrambled to retrieve her phone.

"—still there? Seraphina?" Dr. Whitman's voice sounded far away.

"Yes, sorry. Dropped my phone." She pressed a palm to her forehead. "I might actually need to take the rest of the week off."

After Dr. Whitman told Seraphina she could take all the time she needed, Seraphina ended the call. She took a steadying breath, and then headed toward the bathroom. Once inside the tiny space, she glanced up at herself in the circular mirror. The woman staring back looked like a stranger—dark circles under green eyes, and her usually shiny black hair a tangled mess.

"You're just hungover," she told her reflection. "Or going absolutely insane." She let out a laugh that bordered on hysteria. "Thirty years old and developing schizophrenia. Lucky me."

The bathroom tub beckoned, promising warm relief. Seraphina turned the faucet, watching steam rise as hot water filled the basin. She added lavender bath salts, breathing in the soothing scent.

As she slipped into the water, she tried to rationalize everything that had happened. "You're a scientist," she murmured, sinking deeper until the water reached her chin. "There has to be a logical explanation for all of this."

But logic couldn't explain the man on the boat—the stranger who somehow didn't feel strange at all.

Before long, Seraphina stepped out of the bath, wrapping herself in a plush towel as steam clouded the bathroom mirror. The lavender scent clung to her skin but did little to calm the storm of questions swirling in her mind. She patted herself dry, trying to focus on mundane sensations rather than the impossible visions that kept intruding on her reality.

She slipped into a soft yellow sundress that skimmed her curves and fell just past her knees. The light cotton fabric felt reassuring against her skin—normal, real, and tangible. Seraphina combed her fingers through her damp black hair as she padded across the cool hardwood floor to her kitchen.

"Coffee," she murmured, measuring grounds into the filter. "Coffee will fix this."

The familiar ritual brought comfort—the rich scent filling her cozy kitchen and the gurgle of the machine as dark liquid dripped into the carafe. Seraphina leaned on the counter, tracing her fingers along the cool granite.

"Okay, Seraphina. Think logically." She reached for her favorite astronomy mug. "You drank more than you usually do, so your brain is just processing random imagery."

The first sip of coffee burned pleasantly down her throat. She closed her eyes, willing clarity to return with each swallow.

Then, like a television changing channels without warning, the kitchen vanished.

Moonlight bathed ancient stone walls, casting long shadows across a room unlike anything Seraphina had ever seen. An arched window soared toward a vaulted ceiling, and tapestries adorned walls that had witnessed centuries pass. Beyond the window lay dark waters surrounding an island, the castle perched upon it like something from a medieval fantasy.

And there he was again—the stranger from her earlier vision. He stood before the towering window, his powerful profile outlined in silver moonlight as he gazed at the stars. His posture spoke of authority and ancient strength, the gray in his styled hair gleaming like polished steel. His hands were clasped behind his back.

Something about the way he studied the night sky resonated within her—an astronomer recognizing a kindred spirit. But deeper than professional recognition was a faint pull that defied explanation as if his very existence called to something dormant within her.

Seraphina gasped as reality slammed back into place. Coffee sloshed over the rim of her mug, burning her fingers. She set the cup down with shaking hands.

"This isn't happening." She pressed her palms against her eyes. "I'm just... projecting. Creating some fantasy man because my love life is pathetically nonexistent."

She laughed shakily, remembering the romance novels she'd devoured in college. Her friends—Lorelei, Thea, Everly, Isolde, and Helena—used to tease her about her weakness for stories featuring powerful, mysterious men.

"That's it," she decided, grasping at the explanation. "I'm just remembering that Scottish laird from that book Thea made us all read." But even as she said it, Seraphina knew this was different. The man in her visions didn't feel fictional—he felt inevitable.

Her phone buzzed from the counter, startling her. Abby's name flashed on the screen. She quickly answered it, desperate for the distraction from her tumultuous thoughts.

"Hey, birthday girl, how's the hangover?" Abby's cheerful voice came through the speaker.

"I'm not sure if 'hangover' covers whatever I'm feeling this morning," Seraphina mumbled, rubbing her temple.

"Want me to come over? I make a mean hangover breakfast." Abby's voice carried that signature pep that somehow never diminished, even through the tinny speaker of Seraphina's phone. "We could binge-watch something mindless and pretend last night didn't happen."

Seraphina sank onto a kitchen stool, her free hand still clutching her coffee mug. The warmth against her palm anchored her to reality—this reality, not the stone castle or the mysterious, gray-eyed stranger who kept invading her thoughts.

"That's sweet, but I think I just need some rest." She traced the rim of her mug with her fingertip. "I'll take a walk along the beach. Clear my head a bit."

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"Are you sure?" Abby asked, concern evident in her voice. "You're not still freaked out about your weird vision thing, are you?"

Seraphina glanced down at her yellow sundress, smoothing a wrinkle with her palm. "No, I'm fine. Just need some quiet time today."

"Quiet time. Always with the quiet time." Abby's dramatic sigh made Seraphina smile despite herself. "You know what I think? You need to get out more. And by 'out,' I mean out of your astronomy tower and into the real world where interaction with others happens."

"I do plenty of interacting." Seraphina rolled her eyes. "I'm interacting with you right now."

"Not what I meant, and you know it." The playful lilt in Abby's voice suggested where this conversation was heading. "When was the last time you went on a date? And no, taking your telescope to some remote field doesn't count as a romantic evening."

Heat crept up Seraphina's neck. "I've been busy with work."

"For thirty years?" Abby laughed. "Come on, Ser. A little distraction might be exactly what you need. Something—or someone—to take your mind off whatever's going on in that big brain of yours."

Seraphina caught her reflection in the window above her kitchen sink. The woman looking back seemed uncertain and vulnerable. A far cry from the confident

astronomer who pinpointed celestial bodies with precision. "I don't think dating is the answer to... whatever this is."

"Sex always makes everything better," Abby declared with such conviction that Seraphina nearly spit out her coffee. "Trust me on this. A hot, sweaty night with a gorgeous man would reset your entire system."

"Oh my god, Abby!" Seraphina laughed, feeling some of the tension leave her body. "Is that your prescription for everything? 'Feeling sad? Have sex. Stubbed your toe? Have sex. Experiencing inexplicable visions? Definitely have sex.'"

"Hey, it works! Don't knock my methods until you've tried them."

Seraphina shook her head, smiling. This was why she loved Abby—her friend's unapologetic approach to life was the perfect counterbalance to Seraphina's cautious nature. Where Seraphina analyzed and overthought, Abby dove in headfirst, consequences be damned.

"I'll keep your prescription in mind," Seraphina teased. "But for now, I'm sticking with my sea air therapy."

"Fine, fine. But if you see any hot guys on the beach, get their number. Doctor's orders."

"Good-bye, Abby."

Seraphina hung up, setting her phone down with a soft chuckle. Her friend's vibrant energy always left her feeling lighter, even when her world felt like it was tilting on its axis.

Seraphina locked her front door and stepped out into the Miami morning sunshine.

The yellow sundress fluttered around her knees as a gentle breeze carried the scent of the ocean and promised temporary relief from her chaotic thoughts. She slipped her feet into the sandals she'd left on her front porch and headed toward the beach, her sanctuary when life became too complicated to untangle.

Ten minutes later, the sand shifted beneath her feet as she kicked off her sandals, relishing the warm grains between her toes. She inhaled deeply, letting the rhythmic crash of waves against the shore calm her frayed nerves. Science had always been her anchor—predictable, explainable, and governed by immutable laws. These visions defied everything she believed about the universe.

"Focus on what's real," she whispered to herself, digging her toes deeper into the sand. "The beach is real. The ocean is real. These weird premonitions are?—"

"More real than you might want to admit."

Seraphina whirled around, nearly losing her balance. Standing there was the man from her visions—impossibly, inexplicably real. Same storm-gray eyes that seemed to carry years of wisdom. Same expertly styled gray hair. Same powerful build beneath a fitted Henley that did nothing to hide his muscular frame. Her heart stuttered in her chest.

"How..." The word came out as barely a whisper. Her scientific mind scrambled for explanations. Coincidence? Hallucination? Had she somehow seen him around Miami before and incorporated him into her visions without conscious awareness?

"I'm Orion." His voice carried the same rich timbre she'd somehow known it would. He extended his hand, his eyes never leaving hers. "I've been looking for you."

"I'm Seraphina. But I don't... I can't..." Seraphina stepped back, wrapping her arms around herself.

"You're confused. I understand," he said, pulling his hand back.

"How could you possibly understand?" The words tumbled out before she could stop them. "I don't even know you, yet I've been seeing you in my—" She cut herself off, unwilling to admit to the visions aloud to him.

"In your visions." He completed her sentence, his expression infuriatingly calm. "It's perfectly normal, given what's happening to you."

A chill raced down Seraphina's spine despite the warm sun beating down on them. "I'm sorry, but I've been ill lately. I'm not really up for talking right now." She took another step back, desperate to put distance between herself and this handsome stranger who couldn't possibly know what she'd been experiencing. "I should go."

She turned to leave, her mind racing with questions. How had he known about her visions? Who was this mysterious man?

"Seraphina," he called after her, his voice rising over the sound of crashing waves. "You're not ill. You've manifested your Luna powers."

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She froze mid-step, her breath catching in her throat. Luna powers? The term was completely foreign yet somehow stirred something deep within her. Before she could respond, her phone buzzed in her hand. The doorbell camera app showed someone at her front door.

"I... I really have to go." She snatched up her sandals and hurried across the beach, confusion and fear tangling in her chest.

As Seraphina neared her house, something felt wrong. The hair on the back of her neck stood up as she noticed her living room window—shattered, glass glittering on the front lawn. Through the jagged opening, she could make out a shadowy figure moving inside.

Common sense screamed at her to run, to call the police, and to get as far away as possible. But as she reached for her phone, another vision slammed into her with such force that she staggered.

Unlike her previous glimpses of the future, this vision transported her completely. Seraphina found herself in a crowded auditorium, facing a stage where a distinguished man with slicked-back gray hair and piercing blue eyes stood at a podium. His tailored suit and commanding presence screamed politician, though she couldn't place his face.

"We will reshape this nation," he was saying, his voice carrying an undercurrent that made Seraphina's skin crawl. "We will create a new order."

Before her horrified eyes, the man's features began to contort. Bones cracked and

shifted beneath his skin as his face elongated into a muzzle filled with razor-sharp teeth. His elegant suit split at the seams as his body grew, massive and terrifying, covered in gray fur. Not a man anymore—a beast. A wolf twice the size of a normal one.

The crowd around Seraphina wasn't running in terror. Instead, they too began to change, bones breaking and reforming as they transformed into smaller versions of the creature on stage. Then, as one, they turned toward a group of normal humans backed against a wall, terror etched on their faces.

"No!" Seraphina screamed as the wolves lunged forward, jaws snapping.

The vision held her in its grip, forcing her to witness the carnage as humans fell beneath claws and teeth. Blood splattered across white marble floors. Screams echoed off vaulted ceilings. And through it all, the lead wolf—the politician—watched with cold, calculating eyes that seemed to look right through the vision and find her.

Seraphina's scream tore from her throat, ripping her back to reality.

FOUR

ORION

Orion maintained a careful distance as he followed his Luna through the Miami streets. Her yellow sundress fluttered in the breeze, a bright beacon against the morning sunlight. He pressed his phone to his ear, never taking his eyes off her.

"Chance, I've found her." His deep voice rumbled with barely contained excitement.

"Already? You just docked this morning." Chance's surprise carried through the line.

"The mate bond led me straight to her. She was walking along the beach—" Orion paused, watching as Seraphina glanced over her shoulder. He ducked behind a parked car. "She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Black hair that catches the light, and green eyes that pierce right through you."

"So you approached her? What happened?"

Orion ran his large hand through his hair, still frustrated by the encounter. "I tried introducing myself, but she got spooked. Said she had to go and practically ran away."

"The mighty Alpha King getting rejected?" Chance chuckled. "That's a first."

"She looked down at her phone when I mentioned she'd manifested her Luna powers. Got some alert, I think." Orion's jaw clenched. "Something's off, Chance. The pull in my chest is undeniable—stronger than anything I've ever felt—but there's something impossible happening."

"What do you mean?"

Orion lowered his voice, even though no humans nearby would understand the significance. "She's human, Chance. Not a trace of wolf in her scent."

The line went silent for a moment. "That's not possible. A Luna has to be a wolf."

"That's what I thought." Orion tracked Seraphina as she turned down another street. His instincts sharpened, the predator in him mapping her every movement. "Either she's human and can't be my Luna, or she's my Luna and somehow a wolf shifter without me knowing it."

"Could be someone who hasn't transformed yet?"

"Unlikely." Orion's leather jacket creaked as he quickened his pace.

"What are you going to do now?"

Orion watched as Seraphina stopped at a crosswalk, her posture tense like prey sensing a predator. His wolf stirred beneath his skin, urging him to claim what was his.

"I'm going to catch up to her. Figure this out." He rolled his shoulders, feeling the tension of the hunt. "Something's odd about all of this. She seemed... confused."

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"Be careful, Orion. Humans are unpredictable even if they're your destined mate."

"I have to go. She's getting too far ahead." Orion's eyes never left the yellow dress.

"I'll call you back."

"Good luck. Try not to terrify the poor woman."

Orion hung up, slipping the phone into his pocket. His wolf pressed against him desperate to claim what belonged to them. The bond, though faint, pulled taut like a fishing line connecting their souls.

After centuries of waiting, he had found her. And yet nothing was as it should be. A human Luna? Impossible. But the mate bond never lied.

One way or another, Seraphina belonged with him.

Orion broke into a quick jog, his muscles coiled with tension as he closed the distance between himself and Seraphina. His instincts screamed at him to move faster, the pull in his chest tightening with each step.

Two blocks had never felt so far.

The yellow material of the dress shone in the sunlight like a lighthouse, guiding him toward Seraphina. Seraphina. Even her name sounded right to his ears, a melody he'd waited centuries to hear. But something wasn't adding up.

"If I could just touch her, I would know instantly that she's my Luna," he muttered

under his breath, weaving between pedestrians with predatory grace. His hand flexed at his side, itching to touch her, to confirm what his wolf already knew. One touch. That's all he needed.

Her pace quickened as she approached a small yellow bungalow with blue trim—her home, he presumed. She slowed suddenly, her body language shifting from hurried to alarmed. Orion's senses heightened immediately, scanning for threats. His eyes zeroed in on the broken window, glass shards glittering on the ground.

Then he caught sight of movement inside—a shadowy figure prowling through what appeared to be a living room. Suddenly, she let out a terrified scream that pierced the air.

"Seraphina!" he called out.

But before he could take another step, she crumpled to the sidewalk, her body going limp in an instant.

Orion's heart pounded in his chest as he sprinted the final distance. A growl built within him when he spotted another man approaching from the opposite direction—tall and lean, with eyes fixed on Seraphina's unconscious form. The stranger's body language spoke volumes. Predator stalking prey.

"Mine," Orion snarled under his breath, positioning himself between the approaching threat and his fallen mate. The conflict tore at him—rush inside to neutralize the burglar, or stay and protect Seraphina from this new threat.

His wolf made the decision for him. Kingship had taught him many lessons, but one remained paramount—protect what was yours.

"Step back," Orion commanded, his voice dropping to the alpha register that made

lesser wolves submit. The authority in his tone made the approaching man hesitate.

"This doesn't concern you," the stranger replied, his eyes never leaving Seraphina.

Orion's lip curled as he knelt beside her, one hand hovering over her forehead, frantic to touch her but wary of overwhelming his senses at such a critical moment.

The stranger took another step forward. "You really should mind your own business."

"She is my business." The words came out as a territorial declaration. Orion's eyes flashed with a hint of gold, indicating his wolf was close to the surface now.

Inside the house, the burglar was moving toward the back rooms. Orion's heightened hearing picked up the sound of drawers being opened and closed. Every instinct demanded he hunt down the intruder, but leaving Seraphina vulnerable wasn't an option.

The approaching man reached inside his jacket, and Orion's patience snapped. In one fluid motion, he scooped Seraphina into his arms, cradling her against his chest.

The moment his skin touched hers, electricity coursed through him, lighting up every nerve ending in his body. The mate bond flared, humming with a resonance that left no doubt in his mind.

She was his. Human or not.

"She's mine," Orion growled, the simple declaration rumbling from deep in his chest.

His decision made, Orion pivoted away from the stranger and took off at a dead sprint. Seraphina weighed almost nothing in his arms, her small frame nestled snugly against his chest. Her scent—jasmine and starlight—filled his nostrils, making his

wolf howl with possessive delight.

Footsteps pounded the pavement behind him. The stranger had given chase.

"You have no idea what you're interfering with!" the man shouted.

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Orion didn't waste his breath responding. With his Luna unconscious in his arms, this was not the moment for confrontation.

He cut sharply down an alley, hearing the man curse as he tried to follow. Orion's supernatural speed gave him the advantage, his powerful legs eating up the ground as he navigated Miami's maze-like streets. Left, right, another right—he zigzagged through the city, letting instinct guide him.

Seraphina stirred in his arms, a small whimper escaping her lips.

"I've got you now," Orion murmured, adjusting his hold to cradle her head more securely against his shoulder. "No one's going to hurt you."

Her proximity was intoxicating. Every point where her body touched his sent tremors of recognition through him. How was this possible? Her lack of shifter scent defied everything he knew about mate bonds, yet the connection between them vibrated with undeniable truth.

A human Luna. The concept would upend centuries of pack tradition.

And he didn't care. Not when holding her felt like finding a piece of himself he hadn't known was missing.

Orion glanced over his shoulder, pleased to see no sign of pursuit any longer. He must've lost the stranger several blocks back. Good. His wolf settled slightly, satisfied they had protected what was theirs.

The scent of the ocean grew stronger as he approached the marina. The dock came into view, and relief washed through him. The Moonchaser bobbed on the swells of the vast ocean.

He slowed his pace as he approached, not wanting to jostle Seraphina unnecessarily. Her eyelids fluttered, but she remained unconscious. What had caused this? Was it related to her awakening Luna powers?

The gangplank welcomed him home, the familiar creak of the boat a comfort after the chaos of the last few minutes. Orion carried Seraphina below deck to the master cabin, gently laying her on the queen-sized bed. He allowed himself one moment to stroke her cheek, marveling at the softness of her skin.

"Who are you exactly?" he whispered, tucking a strand of black hair behind her ear.

Her brow furrowed in unconsciousness as though she could hear his question.

Orion straightened, forcing himself to step back. There would be time for answers once they were safely away from Miami and whoever had been after her today.

Orion bounded up the stairs to the helm, his wolf still prowling beneath the surface of his skin, hyperaware that his mate lay unconscious below. He fired up the engines with practiced efficiency, the Moonchaser's powerful motorsrumbling to life. As he steered away from the marina, Miami's skyline receded behind him, the distance easing some primal part of him that demanded he put space between his Luna and danger.

With one hand on the wheel, he pulled out his phone and called Chance.

"Orion? You headed back already?" Chance asked, his voice tinged with surprise.

"Change of plans." Orion kept his eyes fixed on the horizon, navigating the boat through the choppy Atlantic waters. "She's with me now."

"Your Luna? You kidnapped her?"

Orion bristled at the accusation. "I protected her. She collapsed outside her home right after some intruder broke in. Then another man approached—clearly threatening. I didn't have a choice."

"So, you're telling me she's unconscious on your boat, and you're bringing her to a remote island full of wolf shifters she knows nothing about." Chance's voice held a hint of amusement despite the seriousness. "Solid plan, My King."

"What would you have done?" Orion growled, the wheel creaking under his grip. "Let her be taken by whoever was after her?"

"Hey, I'm not judging. Much." A low chuckle filtered through the phone. "Macie's going to have a field day with this."

The mention of Chance's wife brought a practical thought to Orion's mind. "Tell Macie to prepare the east suite for our guest. Something comfortable. She'll need clothes, toiletries, things of that nature."

"Macie will handle it. She'll be thrilled to finally meet the woman who's captured our fearsome alpha's attention after centuries of determined bachelorhood."

Orion increased the throttle, the boat cutting through the waves with sleek precision. "I don't know what's happening, Chance. She's clearly human, but the bond is undeniable. When I touched her, it was like—" He paused, searching for words. "Like touching a live wire. Everything in me recognizes her."

"The pack elders will have opinions about a human Luna." Chance replied, his voice heavy with implication.

"The elders can keep their opinions to themselves," Orion snapped, his wolf pushing forward at the mere suggestion of resistance. "She's mine."

The island appeared on the horizon, its lush greenery a welcome sight. The castle, constructed of ancient stone brought over from Europe centuries ago, crowned the highest point of the land, its turrets reaching skyward like fingers grasping for the stars.

"We'll be ready for your arrival," Chance assured him.

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Orion ended the call, his thoughts soon fixating on the woman below deck. His Luna. Human.

The contradiction both confused and fascinated him.

When the Moonchaser finally docked at his private pier, Orion wasted no time returning to Seraphina. She remained as he'd left her, peaceful in unconsciousness, the yellow fabric of her dress bright against the dark bedding. He gathered her in his arms, marveling again at how perfectly she fit against his chest, as though she'd been crafted specifically to nestle there.

He carried her up the winding path to his castle. Her weight barely registered to his supernatural strength, and he found himself deliberately slowing his pace to prolong their contact. Several pack members stopped to stare as he passed, no doubt catching his scent mingling with hers. Let them look, his wolf thought possessively. Let them see who their king had chosen.

The east suite waited, prepared as promised—fresh linens on the four-poster bed, a vase of island flowers on the nightstand, and the windows open to let in the ocean breeze. Orion placed Seraphina gently on the bed, carefully arranging her limbs in a comfortable position.

Alone with her in the safety of his castle, Orion allowed himself to truly look at her. The yellow sundress showcased curves that made his mouth go dry—the swell of her hips, the dip of her waist, and the fullness of her breasts rising and falling with each breath. Her black hair fanned across the pillow like spilled ink, framing a face that could've been carved by the gods themselves.

"How are you possible?" he murmured, his voice hushed in the quiet room.

He sank into the chair beside her bed, drinking in the details he hadn't been able to fully appreciate during their frantic escape. The delicate arch of her eyebrows. The soft fullness of her lips. The gentle curve of her jaw. Each feature etched itself into his memory, his wolf memorizing every aspect of their mate.

Unable to resist, Orion leaned forward and brushed his lips against her forehead in the lightest of kisses. Electricity jolted through him, stronger than before, a current of pure recognition that left him breathless. His wolf howled in triumph inside him.

Mine.

Yet how could a human woman be destined for an alpha wolf? Centuries of tradition stood against it. Centuries of certainty that a Luna must be a wolf to lead alongside her alpha.

But as Orion watched her sleep, her chest rising and falling in gentle rhythm, ancient traditions seemed suddenly less important than the woman before him. Human or wolf, she was his now, and he would move heaven and earth to keep her safe.

FIVE

SERAPHINA

Seraphina awoke with a gasp, and her mind immediately started racing to process her surroundings. Sunlight filtered through gauzy white curtains that danced on a salt-tinged breeze. She lay beneath crisp linens on an enormous four-poster bed, the dark mahogany frame carved with intricate patterns of what appeared to be stars and moons.

"What the hell?" she whispered, her voice startling in the quiet room.

Her fingers traced the Egyptian cotton sheets—definitely not the bargain-bin cotton she had at home. A crystal vase filled with exotic flowers she couldn't name sat on an ornate nightstand beside her. Their scent—bold and intoxicating—mingled with the fresh ocean air.

The ocean.

Seraphina pushed herself up against plush pillows, wincing at the dull throb in her head. The windows were open, revealing a panoramic view of turquoise waters stretching to the horizon as the sun began its descent, painting the sky in shades of amber and rose.

"I'm not in Miami anymore," she muttered, memories flooding back. The broken window. The shadowy figure in her home. That horrifying vision of wolves tearing through crowds of screaming people.

She pressed her palms to her eyes. "Get yourself together."

A logical explanation existed. There had to be one. Science didn't allow for wolf monsters or psychic visions or... whatever this was.

Her gaze darted around the room—tastefully decorated with art that looked expensive enough to fund her research for years. Polished hardwood floors spread beneath a plush area rug. A door that presumably led to a bathroom stood ajar, revealing marble fixtures.

"If I've been kidnapped, this is the nicest prison cell in history," she said to the empty room.

The windows weren't barred, but peering out from her position on the bed, she could tell she was fairly high up. Jumping out the window meant death or, at minimum, shattered legs.

Her mind churned through possibilities. Had she been drugged? Was this some elaborate setup?

"Think scientifically," she told herself, trying to quell the panic bubbling in her chest. "Observe. Gather data."

The sun sinking toward the horizon suggested it was early evening. She'd been unconscious for hours. She laughed at the absurdity of her situation, the sound coming out slightly hysterical. Yesterday, her biggest concern had been turning thirty without having a more adventurous lifestyle. Now, she was having visions, possibly developing psychic abilities, and waking up in what looked like a luxury island resort.

"Be careful what you wish for," she sighed, thinking about her silent birthday wish last night, wishing for something exciting to happen to her.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, her bare feet meeting the cool hardwood floors. Her yellow sundress was wrinkled but intact—the same outfit she'd worn for her walk on the beach. She steadied herself against a wave of dizziness before taking better stock of her surroundings.

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The bedroom was more opulent than she'd initially realized. The walls were painted a deep midnight blue, adorned with what appeared to be constellations picked out in silver leaf. As an astronomer, she couldn't help but notice they were accurate—Cassiopeia, Orion, and the Big Dipper all precisely mapped as they would appear in the northern hemisphere's winter sky.

"Someone did their research," she murmured, tracing a finger along the silver stars. "Or they're really into astronomy."

A massive armoire stood against one wall, its doors inlaid with mother-of-pearl moons. She opened it cautiously, revealing rows of women's clothing. Her size. Her preferred style.

"Okay, that's creepy," she whispered, closing the doors with a soft click.

The en suite bathroom gleamed with marble and gold fixtures. Thick towels hung from heated rails, and the shower was stocked with expensive products.

Back in the bedroom, she surveyed for potential weapons. A brass lamp? Too unwieldy. A letter opener by the desk? Too flimsy. Her gaze landed on a heavy silver candlestick atop the mantelpiece—substantial enough to do damage if necessary.

"This will have to do," she said, gripping it firmly. Its weight was reassuring in her palm.

She suddenly remembered her phone and patted her dress, finding the tiny pocket that still held her slim smartphone. Relief washed over her until she pressed the power

button. Nothing.

"Dead. Of course, it's dead," she muttered, searching drawers and cabinets for a charging cable. She found stationery, books, even a small sewing kit—but nothing electronic.

"What kind of kidnapper provides Egyptian cotton sheets but no phone charger?"

She approached the door leading out of the suite, adrenaline heightening her senses. With her ear pressed against the cool wood, she listened. Not a sound penetrated from the other side—no voices, no footsteps, nothing.

"Here goes nothing," she whispered, gripping the candlestick tighter as she tested the door handle.

To her surprise, it turned easily. Not locked.

Seraphina opened the door a crack, peering into the corridor beyond. The hallway stretched in both directions, lined with similar doors spaced at regular intervals. Crystal sconces cast warm light on walls covered in silk damask. Plush carpet muffled any sound her feet might make. Like the bedroom suite, everything spoke of wealth and refined taste.

But most striking was the absolute silence. No guards. No captors. No other people at all.

"I'm either in the world's most luxurious abandoned resort or the strangest five-star hotel on earth," she whispered.

She stepped back into her room, leaving the door slightly ajar. "Okay, Sera. First step: figure out where you are. Second step: figure out who brought you here. Third

step: get home without being eaten by wolf monsters."

She ventured back into the hallway, her bare feet sinking into the lush carpeting as she moved. The corridors twisted and turned, revealing the building to be far more extensive than she'd initially imagined. Tapestries depicting forest scenes and night skies adorned stone walls, while sconces cast flickering amber light that danced across ancient-looking wooden beams overhead.

"This isn't a resort—it's a castle," she whispered aloud, running her fingers along the cool stone wall.

She peeked into rooms as she passed: a music room with a grand piano positioned before floor-to-ceiling windows, a library with shelves that soared two stories high, and a formal dining room with a table long enough to seat forty people. Each space was immaculately maintained but eerily vacant.

The scientific part of her brain attempted to catalog every detail, searching for patterns or clues. The astronomer in her couldn't help but notice celestial motifs repeated throughout—star-shaped door handles, crescent moon carvings on furniture legs, and constellation patterns woven into rugs.

Rounding a corner, Seraphina nearly collided with a young woman hurrying down the hall.

"Oh!" the woman gasped, almost dropping her armload of neatly folded clothing and toiletry items. She took a startled step back, her brown ponytail swinging.

"I'm so sorry," Seraphina said, reaching out instinctively to steady a sliding bottle of what appeared to be expensive shampoo. "I didn't realize anyone else was here."

The woman regained her composure quickly, adjusting her crisp uniform—definitely

maid attire, but with an unusual silver emblem pinned at the collar. "No need to apologize, miss. I'm Verna." Her smile seemed genuine if somewhat nervous. "I was just taking these to your quarters."

"My quarters?" Seraphina glanced at the luxurious items. "That's really not necessary. Actually, I'd like to go home right away. Could you tell me who's in charge here?"

Verna's expression flickered with uncertainty. "I can't really say anything about that, miss. I'm just following orders to make sure you have everything you need."

"Orders from whom?" Seraphina pressed, trying to keep the desperation from her voice.

"I can't say, miss." Verna shifted her burden, her eyes filled with wariness. "These really should be delivered to your room. If you'll excuse me."

Verna slipped past her, continuing down the corridor toward the room Seraphina had awakened in. Seraphina watched her go, torn between following to extract more information and continuing her exploration. The maid clearly wasn't going to share any information right now about Seraphina's situation.

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"Maybe she was forbidden to?" Seraphina wondered aloud.

She turned away, pushing deeper into the castle's labyrinth of corridors. The nautical-tinged breeze suggested they were indeed somewhere by water, and from the little she'd glimpsed through windows, somewhere remote. The wealth on display was staggering—genuine oil paintings, antique furniture that belonged in museums, and fixtures that gleamed with what seemed to be real gold.

Wherever she was, whoever had brought her here commanded resources far beyond anything she could comprehend. The thought made her stomach tighten with unease. What did they want with an astronomer who'd suddenly developed bizarre psychic abilities? And how had they known to take her just as her life had spiraled into chaos?

Seraphina paused at a tall, arched window overlooking a courtyard below. Manicured gardens stretched toward cliffs that dropped steeply to the sea. Beautiful and remote—a gilded cage.

"I need to find a working phone," she decided. "Or a boat. Or someone who'll actually tell me what's going on."

The castle's silence seemed to mock her determination as she pressed onward, her scientific mind struggling against the growing realization that she might have stumbled into something far beyond the realm of rational explanation.

She turned, and headed down another corridor. She hesitated at a set of double doors at the corridor's end, their surfaces inlaid with silver constellations rendered with scientific precision. She adjusted her grip on the candlestick and pushed the doors

open.

Her breath caught. The enormous circular space that greeted her wasn't just a room—it was an astronomer's paradise.

"Oh my god," she whispered, momentarily forgetting her predicament.

The observatory stretched before her like something from a dream. A massive telescope—larger than any university model she'd ever worked with—dominated the center, its brass fittings gleaming in the dim light. The cylindrical room rose three stories high, ending in what appeared to be a retractable dome ceiling currently closed against the early evening sky. Smaller telescopes of various designs stood at intervals around the perimeter, each one more beautiful than the last.

Seraphina moved forward, candlestick temporarily forgotten in her hand, drawn by the gravitational pull of equipment she'd only seen in professional journals and historical texts.

"The refractor alone must be worth millions," she murmured, running her fingertips reverently along the brass tube of the central telescope.

Star charts and celestial maps lined the walls, expertly rendered and framed in dark wood. A control panel stood near what must be the dome mechanism—complicated enough that she couldn't immediately decipher its operation. She studied the array of switches and dials, her analytical mind already attempting to decode their functions.

"If I could just get this open," she said, her fingers hovering over what appeared to be the main controls, "the view would be incredible from this height, especially away from city light pollution."

"The third lever opens the eastern quadrant. The fourth, the western." A deep voice

reverberated through the observatory.

Seraphina whirled around, the candlestick instinctively raised as a weapon, her heart pounding in her chest.

A man stood in the doorway, his powerful frame silhouetted against the corridor light. As he stepped forward, recognition hit her like a physical blow.

It was him—the stranger from the beach, the one who'd spoken to her before she'd discovered her home had been broken into. The one who'd mentioned "Luna powers." Seraphina backed up against the control panel, her knuckles white around the candlestick.

His features came into sharper focus as he advanced—the strong jawline accentuated by a neatly trimmed beard, the striking gray eyes that seemed to hold centuries of knowledge, and dark gray hair styled meticulously. Tattoos peeked from beneath the rolled sleeves of his white shirt, intricate designs wrapping around his muscled forearms.

He carried himself with the confident ease of someone who knew his own power and didn't need to flaunt it. Every movement suggested controlled strength like a predator comfortable in his territory.

Another memory flashed through Seraphina's mind—wasn't this the same man from her visions?

"You," she breathed, studying him. "Beach guy. Luna powers guy." She swallowed hard, raising the candlestick higher. "Kidnapper guy?"

Something sparked in his gray eyes, something that almost looked like amusement. He moved with casual grace toward one of the smaller telescopes, adjusting its focus

with practiced hands.

"Are you the one who brought me here?" Seraphina pressed, fighting to keep her voice steady. "What is this place? And what do you want with me?"

His gaze lifted from the telescope to meet hers. The air between them seemed to crackle with unspoken energy. But he said nothing. He just continued to stare at her with an expression that oddly resembled longing.

SIX

ORION

Four centuries of ruling a pack, and he'd never encountered anyone who dared threaten him with a candlestick. The woman had spirit.

He moved with casual grace toward one of the smaller telescopes, adjusting its focus with practiced hands. The brass instrument felt cool beneath his fingers, a familiar comfort in this suddenly unfamiliar situation.

His gaze lifted from the telescope to meet hers when she pressed him for answers. The air between him and Seraphina seemed to crackle with electricity. But he remained silent for a moment, mesmerized by the fierce green of her eyes, and the way her black hair caught the dying sunlight filtering through the dome above them.

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Verna had informed him that Seraphina was awake. He had tracked her movements through the castle, watching through security feeds as she discovered the observatory. When he'd seen her face light up at the sight of the astronomical equipment, something inside his chest had tightened. His wolf had all but purred with satisfaction. Her wholesome appreciation for the stars aligned perfectly with their pack's reverence for the night sky.

But now, all that joy had vanished from her face, replaced by suspicion and anger. The candlestick trembled slightly in her grip.

"Kidnapper?" Orion's voice came out deeper than intended, a rumble that echoed through the domed room. "Is that how humans thank those who save their lives?"

He straightened to his full height, shoulders back, chin lifted. "I rescued you," he stated flatly. "Your home was broken into. You collapsed on the sidewalk. Another man was approaching your unconscious body with intentions I wouldn't care to guess at." He stepped closer, unintimidated by her makeshift weapon. "Would you have preferred I left you there?"

Seraphina's eyes widened slightly, but her grip on the candlestick didn't loosen. "If you rescued me, why not take me to a hospital? Or the police?"

A short, humorless laugh escaped his lips. "As the Luna, you should know we don't use human services to handle pack matters."

Orion watched her face, expecting recognition, understanding—anything but the blank confusion that greeted his words. His wolf stirred uneasily beneath his skin.

How could she not know what he meant if she was the Luna?

The thought that had been circling his mind since meeting her on the beach returned with unsettling force. She felt like his Luna, his mate, his other half—everything in him recognized her. But if she truly didn't understand what he was talking about...

Seraphina stood frozen, confusion evident in every line of her body. She didn't respond to his statement about being the Luna. She just stared at him as if he were speaking another language.

His wolf pushed forward, demanding he claim what was his, and protect what belonged to him. But the man in him hesitated, sensing the delicate balance of the moment.

"You truly don't know, do you?" Orion asked quietly, the realization dawning on him with uncomfortable clarity. "What you are. What I am. What's happening to you."

He watched the play of emotions across Seraphina's face—confusion, fear, disbelief—and felt his wolf stir restlessly. This wasn't how finding his Luna was supposed to unfold. Their meeting should have been filled with recognition, not this bewildered standoff with a candlestick between them.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Seraphina said, her knuckles white around the brass candlestick. Her green eyes flashed, defiant despite her obvious confusion. "What do you mean by 'pack matters'? And who's 'we' versus 'humans'?" She swallowed hard, the pulse at her throat quickening. "Aren't you human?"

The question struck Orion as so fundamentally absurd that he nearly laughed. Four centuries of existence, and he'd never once been mistaken for merely human.

"No," he said simply. "I am a wolf shifter."

A startled laugh burst from Seraphina's lips, high and brittle with nervousness. "Right. And I'm Little Red Riding Hood." She backed up a step, brandishing the candlestick. "Is this some kind of cult thing? Because I'm not interested."

Orion's jaw tightened. His wolf clawed at him, demanding he prove their nature, and show this woman exactly what they were. But centuries of self-control kept the beast leashed. This situation required finesse, not dominance—a concept his wolf struggled to understand.

The realization that his Luna had no knowledge of shifters sent a chill through him. How could she be his mate and not know what he was? What she was meant to be? The mate bond pulsed between them, unmistakable to him but apparently imperceptible to her.

"I need a second opinion," he muttered, more to himself than to her. He moved toward the intercom on the wall, his eyes never leaving her. "Bring Bertram to the observatory," he instructed the staff member who answered. "Tell him it concerns Miss Seraphina."

"I don't know who Bertram is," Seraphina protested, shifting her weight as if preparing to make a run for it. "And I don't want to meet anyone. I want to go home."

Home. The word twisted something in Orion's chest. She didn't understand that this was her home now, that she belonged with him, with the pack.

"Your home was broken into," he reminded her, his voice gentler. "Remember? You collapsed outside. I brought you here for your safety."

"Then I'd like to go to the police here," she countered, lifting her chin. The defiance in the gesture sent a surge of heat through his blood. His Luna was no cowering female, even when afraid.

"There are no police on the island."

The words hung in the air between them. Orion watched comprehension dawn in those bright green eyes, followed swiftly by alarm. Her gaze darted to the windows of the observatory, where the last rays of sunset painted the sky in reds and purples over an endless expanse of ocean.

"Island?" Her voice was barely a whisper.

Orion felt the mate bond pull taut with her distress. It took every ounce of his control not to go wrap his arms around her and soothe away her fear. But his wolf knew better—a cornered creature was dangerous, even one as seemingly harmless as his human Luna.

Humans. Always so complicated. This was exactly why he avoided their world whenever possible.

He watched the color drain from Seraphina's face while she was processing this revelation. The candlestick in her hand dipped slightly as her attention shifted to the darkening horizon visible through the observatory's windows.

"Yes, my private island. About thirty miles off Miami's coast," he replied, keeping his voice deliberately even. The less alarmed she appeared, the calmer his wolf remained. "You're perfectly safe here."

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"Safe?" Seraphina's voice rose, tinged with hysteria. "You've taken me to some private island without my consent, and you expect me to feel safe?"

Orion folded his arms across his chest, the muscles of his forearms flexing unconsciously. The woman before him—his supposed Luna—clearly knew nothing about shifters. His pack had survived for centuries on this island by keeping their existence hidden from humans. Why break that secrecy for someone who might simply be triggering a false mate bond?

"I expect you to be grateful I didn't leave you unconscious on the street for that stranger to grab you," he replied, his tone sharper than intended. His wolf didn't appreciate his tone with their mate, but the man overruled the beast. "I think there are wolves after you, Seraphina."

"Wolves? Actual wolves? In Miami?" She looked at him like he had lost his mind.

He almost smiled. If only she knew just how accurate his statement was.

"You'll understand more after you speak with Bertram," he said, deliberately withholding further explanation. The fewer complications now, the better. "He's very knowledgeable about... your situation."

"My situation?" Seraphina's grip tightened on the candlestick again. "I don't have a 'situation' except being kidnapped by a man who thinks he's part wolf!"

"I don't think I am part wolf," Orion corrected, a hint of amusement darkening his gray eyes. "I am wolf. There's a difference."

Her eyes flashed with emerald fire. "This is insane. I demand you take me home immediately."

The commanding tone in her voice stirred something primal in him. His Luna was finding her voice, whether she realized it or not. But being alpha meant no one—not even his mate—gave him orders.

"You're free to leave whenever you wish," he said, gesturing toward the observatory door with mock graciousness.

Her expression faltered as reality sank in. "But... we're on an island."

"Indeed."

Orion moved closer, close enough to catch her subtle scent—jasmine and something that reminded him of starlight. His wolf reveled in it.

"Take me home," she demanded, her voice lower but no less forceful.

"I will not," he replied simply. "Not until I have my answers."

"Answers to what?"

"To why my Luna appears to be completely human, for starters." He circled her slowly, admiring the way she pivoted to keep him in sight. His wolf approved of her vigilance. "And why she manifested powers on her thirtieth birthday."

Seraphina froze. "How do you know about that?"

"I know many things about you now, Seraphina Lucero. Astronomer. Thirty years old as of yesterday. Recently experiencing... visions." He stopped directly in front of her,

close enough to see the faint dusting of freckles across her nose. "What I don't know is why you're triggering a mate bond when you're clearly human."

"A what bond?"

"Answers for answers, Seraphina." His voice dropped to a rumble. "You can leave after we're both satisfied."

The double meaning wasn't lost on either of them. A faint blush colored her cheeks, and Orion felt a surge of satisfaction. She might not recognize him as her mate yet, but her body responded to him, nonetheless.

The intercom on the wall buzzed with an unwelcome interruption. Orion turned, lifting his chin impatiently as a voice crackled through the system.

"Excuse me sir. But Elder Bertram sends his regrets. He's detained in a meeting. He says it will be at least another hour before he can join you."

Orion's muscles tensed. Another hour meant another hour of uncertainty—another hour of his wolf prowling beneath his skin, demanding answers about this woman who smelled like his mate yet appeared entirely human. He resisted the urge to snarl.

"Fine," he growled into the intercom, not bothering to mask his irritation. Patience in matters of the heart had never been his strong suit.

When he turned back to Seraphina, her face had hardened with determination. The candlestick remained clutched in her hand like a talisman against him.

"Well, if you're not going to help me, I'll find someone else on this island who will take me home," she announced, her green eyes flashing with defiance.

Something primal and possessive surged through Orion's blood. His wolf howled in protest at the mere thought of her seeking assistance from anyone else. The idea of her leaving the island—leaving him—before he'd even figured out what she was to him sent panic clawing through his chest. It was an unfamiliar sensation for a king who had spent centuries in perfect control.

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"You will do no such thing," he said more sharply than intended, then immediately regretted his tone when her eyes widened. This approach would only drive her further away, and some instinct deep within him knew he couldn't allow that to happen.

Orion drew a steadying breath. "You must be hungry," he said, deliberately softening his voice. He gestured toward the darkening sky visible through the observatory dome. "It's past dinner time, and you've had quite a day."

His gaze swept over her, noting the slight slouch of her shoulders that spoke of exhaustion and stress. His wolf urged him to care for her, and to provide for her needs. The man in him recognized the strategic advantage—a shared meal meant time to observe her, to understand what she was, and why his instincts screamed that she belonged to him.

"Join me for dinner," he continued, making it sound more like an invitation than an order this time. "The castle chef prepares an excellent meal, and the dining room offers a view of the night sky that should interest an astronomer."

He watched her face carefully, noting how her expression shifted at the mention of food. The slight parting of her lips, and the momentary softening around her eyes—hunger was winning over caution. She hadn't lowered the candlestick yet, but her grip had loosened ever so slightly.

Orion allowed himself a small, satisfied smile. His wolf preened at the thought of providing sustenance for their potential mate. Whether she was truly his Luna or not remained to be seen, but the prospect of sharing a meal with her awakened something long dormant within him—a desire for companionship that went beyond the duty and

formality that had framed his existence for centuries.

"I make no promises about taking you home," he added, unwilling to surrender that ground, "but I do promise excellent food and, perhaps, some answers to some of your questions."

Her stomach growled audibly in the quiet observatory, and Orion's smile widened. Some battles were won with strength, others with strategy. This one, it seemed, might be won with seafood and aged wine from the castle cellars.

SEVEN

SERAPHINA

Seraphina's fingers loosened around the candlestick, its cool brass weight providing a small comfort in this bizarre situation. She glanced around the domed room with its gleaming telescopes and star charts. It was paradise for an astronomer. Yet right now, she felt like Alice falling through the looking glass.

"Fine," she conceded, tilting her chin up defiantly. "Food first, then answers, then we discuss my departure."

Orion stepped closer. "You'll find no captain willing to sail against my wishes. No pilot brave enough to defy me."

Heat suddenly flushed through her body at his proximity. Why did this stranger affect her that way?

"You think keeping me prisoner in here is going to make me cooperative?" She kept the candlestick between them, though some traitorous part of her wanted to drop it and close the distance.

"Prisoner?" Orion's laugh was warm and deep. "The doors aren't locked, Seraphina. You're free to explore my home as you wish."

"Your home?" She swept her gaze across the magnificent observatory. "What are you, some eccentric billionaire with a wolf fetish?"

Something flashed in his eyes—amusement, challenge, hunger maybe? "Something like that."

He gestured toward the doorway, and Seraphina's stomach rumbled again, this time louder. The absurdity of her situation hit her—kidnapped (rescued?), taken to a private island, and now being escorted to dinner by a man who claimed he wasn't human.

"This way," Orion said, extending his hand.

Seraphina ignored it and moved past him, still clutching her makeshift weapon. "I can walk just fine."

As they stepped into the corridor, Seraphina marveled at the grandeur surrounding them. Ancient tapestries depicting forest scenes and hunts lined walls of polished stone. Crystal chandeliers cast a warm glow over everything, making the world feel dreamlike.

"How long was I unconscious?" she asked, counting the hours in her head. The sun had been setting when she woke, and she'd last remembered it being early afternoon.

"Several hours. Your body needed rest after what happened."

"And what exactly happened?" She stopped walking, forcing him to turn back to her. "Because from my perspective, I was having a bizarre vision and then woke up on an

island with a man who thinks he's a wolf."

Orion's eyes—those remarkable gray eyes that flickered with something ancient—studied her face. "As I said, Seraphina, I am a wolf."

A shiver ran through her that had nothing to do with fear. His conviction was absolute, and something deep inside her responded to it. Something primal that had awakened with her visions.

"And what am I exactly in this fantasy world of yours?" she challenged.

His gaze intensified. "That's what I intend to find out."

Her breath hitched. The way he looked at her—like she was a puzzle he was desperate to solve, a treasure he'd searched a lifetime to find—made her pulse race. This magnetic pull between them defied logical explanation.

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Seraphina's stomach growled again, breaking the tension.

"Your body has needs," Orion said, his lips curving into a knowing smile. "Let's address the simplest one first."

Heat rushed to Seraphina's face. The implication in his tone suggested something far more intimate than food, and her traitorous body responded with a flush that spread from her cheeks down her neck. What was wrong with her? This man had essentially kidnapped her, yet her body hummed with awareness whenever he looked at her that way.

"Food would be great," she said quickly, gripping the candlestick tighter. "Just food."

Orion's eyes glinted with amusement as he guided her down a corridor lined with ancient tapestries. Seraphina recognized the dining room from her earlier exploration—an immense space dominated by a table that could easily seat dozens. What she hadn't expected was the crowd.

At least twenty people turned as they entered, conversations halting mid-sentence. All eyes focused on Seraphina with an intensity that made her want to retreat into the hallway. She felt like an exhibit at a museum.

"Why are they all staring?" she whispered.

Orion gently pressed his hand against her lower back, steering her toward an empty seat. "They're just curious."

"About what?"

"About you."

The table overflowed with platters of roasted meats, colorful vegetables, and breads that smelled like heaven. Despite her anxiety, Seraphina's stomach reminded her that she hadn't eaten all day. She reluctantly set down her makeshift weapon and piled food onto her plate, trying to ignore the whispers and glances directed her way.

A woman with warm brown waves cascading over sun-kissed shoulders slid into the vacant seat beside her. Her hazel eyes sparkled with friendliness.

"I'm Macie," she said, extending her hand. "You must be Seraphina."

Seraphina took her hand cautiously. "Everyone seems to know my name."

"Word travels fast here." Macie grinned, passing a basket of warm rolls. "I'm married to Chance—he's the tall one over there talking with Orion."

Seraphina followed Macie's gaze to a handsome man with dark features who was indeed in deep conversation with Orion. The two seemed comfortable together, like old friends.

"So your husband is friends with..." Seraphina trailed off, realizing she didn't know how to categorize Orion.

"With the king?" Macie nodded. "They've been best friends for a very long time. Chance is his beta—his second-in-command."

Seraphina practically choked on her food. "King? Orion is a king?"

"Of course." Macie's brow furrowed. "Didn't he tell you?"

Seraphina set her fork down, her appetite suddenly diminished as she stared at the man down the table. Orion was gesturing emphatically about something, his presence commanding the attention of everyone around him. Now that she knew what to look for, she could see it—the regal bearing and the easy confidence of someone born to lead.

"No," Seraphina said finally. "He neglected to mention that detail."

Macie took a sip of deep red wine. "I heard from Chance that your arrival wasn't exactly... conventional."

"You could say that," Seraphina muttered, watching Orion. Even at a distance, something about him drew her gaze like a magnet. "One minute, I was having visions outside my broken-into home, the next I'm waking up on a private island with a man who claims he's a wolf and is apparently also a king."

Seraphina set her napkin beside her plate. "I don't understand any of this. Why am I here? What do these people want with me?"

Macie's expression softened with sympathy. "I know it's confusing. Trust me, I've been in your shoes."

"You have?"

"Different circumstances, but yes." Macie leaned closer. "Look, I know this isn't ideal. But you're safe here, and that's what matters right now."

"Safe from what?" Seraphina asked, increasingly frustrated.

Macie's eyes darted to Orion and back. "That's probably something he should explain."

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Seraphina pushed her plate away, her appetite completely gone despite the delicious array of food. She studied Macie's face, searching for deceit but finding only genuine concern. From across the room, she felt Orion's gaze on her like physical heat against her skin. When she glanced up, he was indeed watching her, his expression unreadable but intense beneath the warm glow of candlelight.

"He doesn't strike me as the explaining type," Seraphina muttered, reaching for her water glass.

Macie laughed, the sound bright and musical. "Give him a chance. The king may seem... intimidating, but he brought you here to protect you. If there had been any other way, I'm sure he would have done things differently."

"By not kidnapping me, you mean?" Seraphina's fingers traced the condensation on her glass. "There's a novel concept."

"Was your house not burglarized? Were you not in danger?" Macie's hazel eyes held a surprising steadiness.

Seraphina's protest died on her lips. The woman was right – someone had broken in. Someone apparently had been after her. And these strange visions...

"So, just curious," Macie continued casually, "did you by any chance have a birthday recently?"

Seraphina's eyes widened. "How could you possibly know that?"

"Just a hunch," Macie said with a mysterious smile. "Let me guess – your thirtieth?"

A chill ran down Seraphina's spine. "Yes. How did you?—"

"And I'm willing to bet things haven't been quite... normal since then, have they?"

The visions. The premonitions. The feeling that she was losing her mind. Seraphina's mouth went dry.

"Do you know what's happening to me?" she whispered.

Macie placed a warm hand over hers. "You're changing, awakening. And people might want to use what you're becoming for their own benefit."

Seraphina looked around the dining room at these people who seemed so normal yet claimed to be something else entirely. Across the room, Orion stood with casual dominance, his broad shoulders and commanding presence drawing every eye when he spoke. There was something primal about him, something that called to a newly awakened part of her she hadn't known existed until now.

"And what exactly am I becoming?" Seraphina asked.

"That's for Orion to tell you," Macie replied, squeezing her hand. "But I think you already know something special is happening."

Seraphina exhaled slowly. She was a scientist. She believed in evidence and logical explanations. But what was the logical explanation for seeing things before they happened? For the king of wolf shifters bringing her to his island?

"I haven't had a vision since I got here," she realized aloud.

"That's interesting." Macie's eyebrows rose. "Perhaps being this place is stabilizing you somehow."

For the first time since waking up in this strange place, Seraphina felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe these people did have answers. Maybe staying wasn't the worst idea, at least until she understood what was happening to her.

Across the room, Orion's gaze caught hers again. His eyes – those impossibly gray eyes that seemed to see right through her – held an unspoken question. And despite everything, Seraphina found herself wanting to answer it.

Suddenly, as if sensing her unexpected longing for him, Orion excused himself from his conversation and crossed the dining room with purposeful strides. The crowd parted for him naturally like waves before the prow of a ship. Seraphina's heartbeat quickened with each step he took, and she found herself straightening in her chair.

"Would you care for dessert?" His deep voice rumbled over her, sending an unexpected shiver down her spine.

Seraphina's mind instantly conjured images that had nothing to do with cake or pastries – his hands skimming her waist, his mouth capturing hers, and those strong arms pulling her against his broad chest. Heat bloomed across her cheeks and spread downward, warming her from the inside out. She swallowed hard, mortified by the direction of her thoughts.

"I... um..."

Orion's lips curled into a knowing smile as he set before her a glistening confection – layers of dark chocolate and what looked like berries, topped with a delicate gold leaf.

"Our chef's specialty," he said, settling into the chair Macie had vacated moments earlier. "Chocolate infused with local berries that only grow on this island."

Seraphina felt utterly foolish. Of course, he meant actual dessert. What was wrong with her? She'd just met this man – this king who'd essentially abducted her – and here she was having inappropriate thoughts about him.

Yet she couldn't deny the pull she felt between them. Despite his age – she guessed at least twenty years her senior based on the distinguished gray at his temples – something about him called to her on a primal level she'd never experienced.

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"Thank you," she managed, taking a small bite of the dessert. The rich chocolate melted on her tongue, followed by an explosion of tart berries that made her close her eyes in appreciation. "This is incredible."

"I'm pleased you approve." Orion watched her with undisguised interest. "How are you finding your accommodations thus far?"

Seraphina dabbed her lips with a napkin. "The observatory is magnificent. I've never seen telescopes that advanced outside of major research facilities."

"You're an astronomer." He made it a statement, not a question. "What drew you to the stars?"

The familiar topic helped calm her racing pulse. "I've been fascinated by them since I was a child. My father would take me camping in the desert, away from city lights, and we'd spend hours identifying constellations." She took another bite of the dessert, savoring the complex flavors. "There's something comforting about their constancy, you know? No matter what chaos happens here on Earth, the stars remain unchanged, following patterns we can predict and understand."

"Some things defy understanding, though." Orion leaned closer, and Seraphina caught his scent again – something wild and earthy. "Like your visions."

"How do you—" She stopped herself. "Macie knew about them."

"She's perceptive." He nodded. "So, tell me more about your work. Do you teach or do research?"

"Research primarily. I study stellar nucleosynthesis – how stars create elements through fusion." She found herself relaxing despite her situation, drawn in by his genuine interest. "It's fascinating to think that every atom in our bodies was once forged in the heart of a star."

"So we're all made of stardust," Orion mused, his voice deepening. "That explains the light I see in you."

Seraphina nearly choked on her dessert at the unexpected compliment. She looked up to find him watching her with a burning intensity that made her heart skip.

"That's a rather poetic way of looking at basic astrophysics," she managed.

"I find that science and poetry often describe the same truths, just in different languages," he said, watching as she took the last bite of her dessert. "Perhaps you could show me your favorite constellations sometime. The view from the observatory tower is unparalleled on clear nights."

The invitation hung between them, weighted with possibilities that Seraphina wasn't ready to examine. Part of her wanted to accept immediately, while another part reminded her of the absurdity of her situation.

EIGHT

ORION

Orion leaned closer to Seraphina, his voice dropping to a timbre reserved for her alone. "The observatory is yours to use whenever you wish."

The candlelight caught the flecks of gold in her green eyes as he watched her reaction to his offer. Her lips parted with unspoken interest. His wolf purred with satisfaction

at her response.

His hand moved across the polished mahogany table toward hers, drawn by an instinct older than civilization itself. He stopped himself mere inches from her skin. Too soon. She still viewed him as her captor, not her destined mate. The delicate bond forming between them needed nurturing, not force. Still, his wolf chafed at the restraint.

Her scent shifted subtly – jasmine with an undercurrent of something warmer, more primal. Her pulse quickened visibly at the base of her throat, and Orion found himself leaning even closer, his face near enough to feel the warmth radiating from her skin. The emerald of her eyes darkened as her pupils expanded, a physical reaction she couldn't control.

"I'd like that," she whispered, her voice carrying a huskiness that sent a jolt through his core. "The stars have always made more sense to me than people."

Orion felt the corner of his mouth lift. "Perhaps we can change that... about the people part."

The air between them crackled with potential and possibility. Four hundred years of solitude, and now this woman – human, bewildered, but magnificent – sat within his reach. His wolf paced anxiously beneath his skin.

"Your Majesty."

Orion didn't turn at first, refusing to break the moment. Jared, his communications councilman, cleared his throat more forcefully.

"Your Majesty, forgive me, but there's an urgent matter requiring your attention."

Orion's jaw tightened, a muscle flexing visibly beneath his neatly trimmed beard. He pulled back from Seraphina with physical effort, her confused expression twisting something in his chest.

"This had better warrant interrupting my dinner, Jared." His voice carried no hint of the warmth he'd shown moments before.

"Perhaps somewhere private, sire." Jared's eyes flicked meaningfully to Seraphina.

Orion stood forcefully, the chair legs scraping against the floor. "Excuse me, Seraphina. It seems the world cannot survive without my attention even for one meal."

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She nodded, her fingers absently tracing the rim of her water glass. The image stamped itself in his mind as he followed Jared to a corner of the dining room.

"What is it?" Orion demanded, positioning himself to keep Seraphina in his line of sight.

Jared shifted uncomfortably. "The United States Senator from Florida has contacted us directly. He's demanding the return of Miss Lucero immediately."

"He's what?" Orion's voice dropped to a dangerous whisper.

"Her friend has reported her missing. The senator claims you've illegally transported an American citizen across international boundaries and is threatening diplomatic consequences if she isn't returned to Miami immediately."

Heat crawled up Orion's neck. "She is my Luna. I'll take her wherever I damn well please."

Jared winced. "With respect, Your Majesty, in the human world, that's considered kidnapping. Their laws don't recognize mate bonds."

"Their laws," Orion spat. "Their laws mean nothing to me or my pack. We've governed ourselves for millennia before their republic was even dreamed of."

"Yes, but we exist in their world now. We need their continued ignorance of our true nature. A diplomatic incident would bring scrutiny we cannot afford."

Orion's mind raced, his eyes finding Seraphina across the room. She was watching him, a crease of concern between her brows. Something about this situation felt wrong – calculated.

"How would he know to contact us directly?" Orion asked, suspicion taking root. "It's been less than a day."

"I... don't know, sire. The timing is unusual."

Orion's wolf senses prickled with warning. Leadership had honed his instincts for detecting traps, and this reeked of one. Someone knew too much. Someone was moving pieces on a board he couldn't fully see.

Orion's nostrils flared, a low rumble vibrating in his chest. "How exactly would anyone know I took her? Let alone that she's on this island?" he demanded, his voice pitched low enough that the diners around them wouldn't hear, but carrying enough authority that Jared flinched.

The communications councilman shifted nervously. "Well, Your Majesty, I believe... she may have had her phone with her when you brought her here."

Orion's eyes flashed dangerously. "Her phone."

"Yes, sire. Modern smartphones have tracking capabilities. If someone knew her credentials, they could locate?—"

"I know what a damn phone does," Orion growled, running a hand through his hair. The realization of his oversight struck him like a punch to the gut. Such a simple thing. Such a human thing. "I should have thought of that."

His gaze traveled back to Seraphina, watching her tuck her raven hair behind her ear.

In that moment of rescue, with her unconscious in his arms, his wolf had taken over completely—protect, shelter, and secure what was his. The tactical, calculating king had surrendered to base instinct.

"I've spent centuries outsmarting enemies, outmaneuvering political opponents, and I get undone by a piece of technology that fits in a pocket." Orion clenched his jaw tight. "What else does the senator know?"

Jared swallowed. "He specifically mentioned Starlight Island, and addressed you by name, Your Majesty."

Orion's tattoos seemed to burn against his skin beneath his tailored shirt. Someone had recognized him in Miami. Someone connected to the senator. The pieces were aligning in a way he didn't like.

"This goes beyond mere phone tracking," Orion muttered, more to himself than to Jared.

"What shall I tell the senator, sire? He's demanding a response within the hour."

Orion's lips curved up into a smile that held no warmth. "Tell him nothing."

"But, sire?—"

"Since when does Starlight Island answer to American politicians?" Orion straightened to his full height, his shoulders squaring. "The last time I checked, we don't have an extradition treaty with the United States. They have no jurisdiction here."

Jared paled. "But they're threatening other diplomatic consequences."

Orion laughed, a sound like thunder over distant mountains. "Empty threats. What are they going to do? Invade a sovereign territory over one woman?" He leaned closer to Jared. "A woman who, may I remind you, was in immediate danger. A woman I rescued."

"With respect, sire, humans don't recognize our laws of?—"

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"I don't give a damn what humans recognize." The words came out in a near-growl. "She is my Luna. Mine to protect. She stays."

Across the room, Orion caught Seraphina watching their exchange with curious green eyes. Something within him softened, even as his resolve hardened.

"Send a polite but firm refusal. State that Miss Lucero is safe and receiving medical care after an attempted assault in Miami. Add that she is free to leave whenever she wishes, and we would be happy to arrange communications with American authorities once she has recovered." Orion's tactical mind was working again, finding the balance between truth and diplomacy. "That should buy us time."

"And if they escalate?" Jared asked.

Orion's gaze never left Seraphina. "Then they'll learn what happens when humans meddle in wolf business."

He dismissed Jared with a nod and strode back toward his seat beside Seraphina. Let them come with their politics and their threats. He had stood against enemies far more formidable than a single American senator.

What troubled him more was the question of how someone had recognized him in the first place. His pack had maintained careful isolation for centuries.

And why would anyone care so desperately about claiming Seraphina that they'd involve high-level government officials within hours?

The wolf inside him knew the answer: she was precious beyond measure.

And now, approaching her at the table, Orion knew one thing with absolute certainty—he would burn the human world to ash before he'd let them take her from him.

A large hand suddenly clapped onto his shoulder, halting his forward momentum mere steps from his Luna. Orion whipped around, a growl building in his throat, only to find Chance's familiar dark features watching him with concern.

"A word, My King?" Chance's voice was quiet but insistent.

Orion glared, his nostrils flaring. His eyes flicked toward Seraphina, who was now engaged in conversation with Macie again. "You have terrible timing."

Chance guided him away from the table, toward one of the enormous windows overlooking the moonlit ocean. "I couldn't help overhearing about our American senator friend who's so desperate to get your lady back."

"It's absurd," Orion's muscles tightened across his shoulders. "Humans complaining about jurisdiction while their officials are likely the ones who broke into her home in the first place."

"You think it's a setup?"

"My instincts are screaming it." Orion watched his reflection in the glass, superimposed over the dark sea. "How would anyone know to find her here within hours? Someone targeted her, and now they're trying to force my hand."

Chance leaned against the stone wall, considering. "Well, she'll probably want to go home anyway, so what's the big deal? Maybe let her go and court her properly on her

turf?"

The temperature around them seemed to drop several degrees as Orion turned, his eyes flashing dangerously. "What did you say?"

Chance held up his hands. "Easy, old friend."

"She was about to be attacked. Outside her home. And you suggest I send her back there?" Orion stepped closer, his voice lowering to a lethal hush. "I didn't spend four centuries building this kingdom to have some human politician dictate who stays within my walls."

The muscle in his jaw worked furiously as his wolf's agitation fed into his own. Seraphina was his to protect—his Luna, his destiny, his responsibility. His weakness, too, though he'd never admit it aloud.

"All I'm saying," Chance continued, carefully neutral, "is that all hope isn't lost even if she does go back. You just need to convince her to want to stay."

Orion's brow furrowed. "Convince her? She's my Luna. The mate bond?—"

"—means absolutely nothing to a human woman who until today had no idea shifters existed." Chance's smile softened his words. "She's not some she-wolf who recognizes the honor of being chosen by a king. She's an astronomer. A scientist. You need to appeal to her humanity."

"And how exactly do you suggest I do that?" Orion crossed his arms, his biceps straining against the fine fabric of his shirt.

Chance's laugh was low and warm. "You may not have had to woo many women in your time—they usually just fall at your feet—but I know you're smart enough to

figure it out when the need arises."

"I don't have time for games," Orion growled, but the heat had left his voice.

"Lavish gifts might work," Chance mused, his eyes twinkling. "But honestly? Just listening to her might go further. Get to know her. Let her get to know you—the real you, not just the intimidating king. And if all else fails..." He clapped Orion on the shoulder. "There's always the lure of power and status."

Orion's gaze found Seraphina again across the room. The candlelight caught in her raven hair, illuminating the delicate curve of her neck as she laughed at something Macie said. Something unnamed and ancient stirred in his chest.

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"I think..." Orion's voice softened. "I think helping her understand her powers might be the best approach. She's confused and frightened by what's happening to her. I can offer answers."

"Now you're thinking." Chance nodded approvingly.

Orion watched as Seraphina twirled her hair around her finger, a gesture so human, so vulnerable, it almost hurt to witness. His wolf, usually so demanding and possessive, seemed to purr with contentment at the sight.

"I've faced down armies," Orion murmured. "Led packs through famine and war. Built an empire that has stood for centuries." His fingers tightened on the windowsill. "How is it that the thought of talking to one human woman makes me feel like a pup again?"

Chance's grin widened. "That, my friend, is the universe's greatest joke on alphas. The mightier they are, the harder they fall."

Suddenly, Orion caught movement at the dining room's entrance, his sharp eyes instantly recognizing the stooped figure of Bertram making his way into the room. The elder's gnarled hand gripped his ancient walking stick carved from blackthorn wood, the same staff he'd carried for as long as Orion could remember. Despite his obvious physical frailty, Bertram's eyes remained keen and alert, missing nothing as they swept across the room.

"Perfect timing," Orion muttered to Chance. "Bertram's arrived."

Chance followed his gaze. "Want me to keep your Luna entertained while you two chat?"

"Yes." Orion's voice was suddenly clipped and impatient. His wolf was torn between the need to return to Seraphina's side and the necessity of consulting with his most trusted advisor. "Tell Macie to keep her occupied."

Chance nodded and slipped away toward the women, while Orion strode purposefully toward Bertram. The old wolf's scent—faint notes of sage and weathered parchment—reached him before he'd closed half the distance.

"My King." Bertram inclined his head, the gesture respectful despite its minimal depth—a privilege earned through centuries of loyal service.

Orion clasped the elder's shoulder firmly. "Walk with me."

He guided Bertram to a shadowed alcove far from curious ears, particularly those of a certain green-eyed astronomer. Orion couldn't stop his eyes from darting back to Seraphina though, watching as she laughed again at something Macie had said. His wolf growled with satisfaction at the sound, even as his human side bristled with confusion.

"I see you've found her," Bertram remarked, following Orion's gaze. "She's striking."

"She's human," Orion bit out, turning his attention fully to the elder. "My wolf insists she's my Luna, but I sense no wolf in her. None."

Bertram's weathered face revealed nothing. "And yet your bond calls to her."

"It makes no sense," Orion growled, tugging at his hair. "How can my Luna be a human? She knows nothing of our ways. She thinks I'm insane for saying that I'm a

wolf."

A muscle twitched in his jaw as he glanced back at Seraphina. Something primal and possessive twisted in his chest despite his intellectual rejection.

"The stars have strange ways of bringing balance to power," Bertram said, leaning on his walking stick. "You aren't the first alpha royal to face this... situation."

Orion's head snapped back. "What?"

"There have been reports from three other packs. Lunas awakening who appear completely human with no knowledge of our existence." Bertram's voice dropped lower. "The consensus among the elders who've studied this phenomenon is that these women carry dormant wolf bloodlines."

"Dormant?" Orion's brow furrowed.

"Ancient shifter heritage, diluted through generations of human breeding," Bertram explained. "They appear human in every way—until they're claimed by their mates."

Orion's nostrils flared. "Are you suggesting?—"

"The mate mark." Bertram nodded slowly. "Once you've completed the bonding ritual and marked her as yours, her dormant wolf should awaken."

Relief and disbelief warred within Orion's chest. His wolf hummed with satisfaction—their instincts hadn't been wrong after all. But his king's mind recoiled at the implications.

"She's culturally human," Orion said, the words tasting bitter on his tongue. "Four centuries I've ruled, keeping our pack isolated from human interference, their fickle

politics, and their shallow, transient values." His lip curled. "And now my queen, the mother of my future heirs, was raised in that world?"

Bertram's eyes narrowed. "Is your distaste for humans greater than your respect for fate, My King?"

"I can't deny the strong pull," Orion admitted grudgingly. "When I'm near her, my wolf claws to get closer. To protect her. To claim her."

"Then perhaps it's time to reconsider some of your... prejudices," Bertram suggested mildly.

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Orion's eyes narrowed dangerously. "History of the human race gives my prejudices ample foundation."

"And four centuries without a Luna has left our pack magic weaker than it should be," Bertram countered. "The pack needs her, human upbringing or not."

Orion exhaled sharply through his nose, his gaze drawn once again to her. Her laughter floated across the room. His wolf responded with a surge of possessive heat that threatened to override every logical objection.

"I need a moment to think," he growled, though his body was already leaning toward her, drawn by forces older than reason.

Bertram's knowing smile only irritated him further. "Of course, My King. Though I suspect your wolf has already made up its mind for you."

NINE

SERAPHINA

Seraphina twisted her napkin in her lap, feeling like an exotic bird in a gilded cage. The dining room's vaulted ceilings and medieval tapestries only amplified her sense of displacement. When Orion excused himself to consult with another serious-faced advisor, she slumped slightly in her chair, grateful for the momentary reprieve from his intimidating presence.

"That look on your face—I've worn it myself." Macie slid into the seat beside her, her

warm smile bracketed by sun-kissed dimples. "First week here, I was convinced I'd accidentally joined some kind of island cult."

Despite herself, Seraphina laughed. "That's still on my list of possibilities."

"Along with alien abduction and elaborate birthday prank?" Macie's eyes danced with humor.

"Those are numbers three and four, respectively." Seraphina found herself relaxing as Macie's easy manner created a pocket of normalcy in this bizarre situation.

"The visions—they're overwhelming at first." Macie spoke in a hushed, understanding tone. "Mine started with small things—knowing exactly when the kettle would boil, seeing who was calling before picking up the phone."

Seraphina set down her napkin. "Wait—you have them too?"

"Not exactly like yours. Each of us manifests differently." Macie traced the rim of her wine glass. "But I remember that feeling of thinking you're losing your mind."

"How did you handle it?" Seraphina leaned forward, hungry for answers.

"Not well." Macie grinned. "I may have thrown a blender through Chance's window."

A deep chuckle preceded the arrival of the man in question. "I needed to replace that window anyway." Chance pulled up a chair, his tall frame somehow managing to appear relaxed and alert simultaneously. "I'd figured her hormones were just acting up."

Macie playfully smacked his arm. "Never tell a woman experiencing supernatural phenomena that it might be PMS."

Chance winked at Seraphina. "Lesson learned with the business end of a Cuisinart."

Their easy banter unwound something tight in Seraphina's chest. These people didn't seem like kidnappers or cultists—they felt... real.

"So, Orion really is a king?" Seraphina asked, glancing across the room where the man in question stood in deep conversation with an elderly gentleman.

"Four hundred years running," Chance nodded. "Longest-serving monarch in our history."

Seraphina nearly spit out her water. "Four hundred?—"

"Years," Macie confirmed. "Wolf shifters age differently."

"When he took over, the pack was scattered across three continents," Chance continued. "When the witch hunts started getting too close, he united our species and created safe havens like this island."

"He gives off that whole brooding tyrant vibe," Macie added, "but you should see him with the pack children. They climb all over him like he's a jungle gym."

Seraphina couldn't help but glance toward Orion again. This time, she caught the briefest glimpse of a smile breaking through his stern expression as he spoke to the elderly man. The small gesture transformed his face, softening the hard angles into something devastatingly handsome.

"He feels it, you know," Macie whispered, catching Seraphina's wandering gaze. "Every time you look at him."

Heat rushed to Seraphina's cheeks. "I don't know what you mean."

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"The connection," Macie said simply. "It only gets stronger."

Across the room, as if on cue, Orion's eyes lifted to meet hers. Even from this distance, the intensity of his gaze sent a current through her body that made her fingers tingle. The room seemed to shrink, the space between them charged with something Seraphina couldn't name but felt down to her bones.

Seraphina couldn't look away. Orion's steel-gray eyes held hers across the crowded dining room, and something primitive and electric arced between them. Her heart skipped several beats before settling into a rapid rhythm that matched the pulse now throbbing in her neck. The sensation wasn't entirely unpleasant—rather like standing at the edge of a cliff and feeling the vertigo of possibility.

Macie cleared her throat beside her. "And that's our cue," she murmured, nudging Chance with her elbow.

"Right." Chance pushed back from the table with a knowing smile. "We should check on... that thing."

"Very subtle." Macie rolled her eyes, but her smile was kind as she touched Seraphina's shoulder. "We'll catch up later."

Seraphina barely registered their departure. She sat alone at the massive table, her palms sweating against the fine linennapkin while Orion continued his conversation with the elderly gentleman. The man nodded several times before glancing in her direction with undisguised curiosity.

When Orion finally approached her, his presence filled the space like gravity, unavoidable and all-encompassing. The elderly man followed, his face kind but deeply lined as though he'd spent centuries smiling.

"Seraphina." Orion's voice was a physical caress that raised goose bumps along her arms. "I'd like you to meet Bertram, one of our most respected elders."

Bertram extended a weathered hand. "The pleasure is mine, young lady."

Something about his grandfatherly demeanor instantly put Seraphina at ease. She took his hand, surprised by the strength in his grip. "It's nice to meet someone who doesn't look at me like I'm either cargo or crazy."

Bertram chuckled, the sound warm and rich with genuine amusement. "I've seen too much in my years to find anything truly crazy anymore."

"Then maybe you can tell me what's happening to me? These visions I keep having—seeing things before they happen. I thought I was losing my mind," Seraphina said quietly.

"Your powers have awakened." Bertram stated plainly, as though discussing the weather. "It's a remarkable gift, though disorienting at first, I imagine."

"Powers?" Seraphina repeated, the word both exhilarating and terrifying. "How? Why? I've spent my whole life in the realm of proven science."

"Perhaps we should continue this conversation somewhere more private." Bertram glanced around the dining room. "The observatory might be fitting, given your profession."

"I'd like to join you," Orion interjected, his tone making it sound less like a request

and more like a statement of fact. Noticing Seraphina's hesitation, he added, "I promise to let Bertram do the talking."

"Fine." Seraphina stood, smoothing her dress. "But I have questions—lots of them."

"As you should." Bertram's eyes crinkled at the corners.

The observatory felt different in the late evening hours, more intimate somehow. Seraphina felt a twinge of professional excitement despite her circumstances.

Bertram moved directly to a wall of leather-bound books, his fingers skimming the spines with practiced familiarity before pulling out a large volume. The cover was worn at the edges, the title embossed in faded silver: "The History and Lineage of the Starlight Pack."

"Your visions," Bertram began, opening the book to reveal handwritten pages and delicate illustrations, "are the first manifestation of your Luna powers."

"Luna?" Seraphina glanced at Orion, who stood with arms crossed near the doorway, his expression unreadable.

"The mate to the Alpha King," Bertram explained. "Each Luna's powers awaken on her thirtieth birthday, preparing her to stand beside her mate and guide the pack."

Seraphina's scientific mind rebelled. "That's... that's not possible."

"Says the woman who sees the future," Orion commented dryly.

Bertram turned a page in the book, revealing an illustration of a woman surrounded by stars, her hands raised toward the moon. "The Luna is the heart of the pack—our spiritual center. Her powers complement the king's strength, bringing balance."

Seraphina stared at the illustration, the woman's face eerily similar to her own. A chill ran down her spine as pieces began clicking into place. "And you think I'm... this Luna?"

"We know you are," Orion's deep voice resonated through the room. His eyes flashed with something ancient and primal that made Seraphina's breath hitch.

Bertram gestured toward Orion, his weathered hands moving with deliberate purpose. "Step closer, Orion. Let her feel your presence. She needs to understand the bond that exists between the Alpha King and his Luna."

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Seraphina's stomach tightened as Orion's gaze locked onto hers. He moved with the deliberate grace of a predator, each step calculated and measured. The way he looked at her, like she was the only person in the room, in the world—made her pulse quicken. She took an involuntary step back, her hands gripping the edge of the observatory table for support.

"I don't think this is necessary," she protested, her voice trembling slightly. "I'm not?—"

"Trust me, child," Bertram interrupted, his tone gentle but firm. "There's a reason for this. The bond between a Luna and her alpha is unlike anything you've ever experienced. It's not just about power—it's about balance. Let us show you."

"I can't just summon these visions," Seraphina argued, her knuckles whitening as she gripped the table harder. "They happen when they happen. I don't have any control over them."

"That's where you're wrong," Bertram said, a knowing smile curving his lips. "You can learn to manifest them. To control them. But first, you must allow yourself to feel the connection."

Orion was close now, so close she could smell the faint scent of pine and sea salt that clung to him. His presence was overwhelming, a force that demanded attention. "Close your eyes," Bertram instructed, his voice low and soothing.

Seraphina hesitated, her eyes flicking between Orion and Bertram. "This feels...ridiculous."

"Close them," Orion said, his voice a deep rumble that sent a shiver through her body. She couldn't refuse him, not when he spoke like that—like a king who expected obedience but wasn't cruel about it. Reluctantly, she let her eyelids flutter shut.

The moment her eyes closed, she felt it—a spark of electricity that seemed to ignite every nerve in her body. Orion's hand brushed against hers, and she gasped softly, the contact sending a jolt of heat straight to her core. Her mind spiraled, and suddenly she wasn't in the observatory anymore.

She saw herself—her hair wild, her skin flushed—standing in the center of a grand, moonlit bedroom. Orion was there, his hands on her waist, and his lips trailing fire along her neck. She could feel his breath hot against her skin, the roughness of his beard sending tingles through her body. His voice was low, a growl that vibrated through her chest as he whispered her name like a prayer.

His hands moved lower, his touch possessive but gentle. She arched into his touch, her body responding instinctively. The vision was vivid, every detail sharp—the way his muscles rippled under her fingertips, the way his eyes darkened with desire, and the way he looked at her as if she were the only thing that mattered. Heat pooled low in her belly, and she felt herself trembling.

When the vision faded, Seraphina's eyes snapped open, her chest heaving as if she had been running. She stumbled back, her face burning with a mix of embarrassment and lingering arousal. "What...what was that?" she stammered, her voice but a whisper.

Orion's expression was unreadable, but his eyes burned with something fierce and primal. "The bond," he said simply, his voice rough. "Our bond."

Bertram's gaze was steady, his hands folded calmly in front of him. "The Luna and her alpha are two halves of a whole. When you're near each other, the connection

becomes stronger. What you saw—what you felt—that's just the beginning."

Seraphina shook her head, trying to clear the haze of desire that still clung to her. "This can't be real. I'm not—I don't—" She stopped, her mind spinning with questions and doubts.

Orion stepped closer again, his presence grounding her even as it unsettled her. "It's real," he said, his voice firm but not unkind. "And whether you believe it or not, it's part of who you are now."

She looked up at him, her eyes wide and searching. "How am I supposed to make sense of this? You're telling me I'm some kind of... queen? That I'm supposed to be with you?" She gestured weakly between them. "This doesn't make sense."

"It will," Bertram said gently. "In time, it will. For now, just know that the visions you've been having—they're not a curse. They're a gift. And they're meant to guide you toward your destiny."

Seraphina's shoulders slumped, her defiance wavering. "I don't even know what that means."

She backed away from Orion until her spine pressed against the cool glass of the observatory window. Moonlight spilled across her shoulders, bathing her in silver as she struggled to process everything. The intimate vision still burned in her mind—his hands on her body, his lips on her skin—and she couldn't meet his eyes without feeling heat bloom in her cheeks.

"I need space," she managed, her voice barely a whisper. "This is too much."

To her surprise, Orion's lips suddenly lifted into a knowing smile. His eyes gleamed with something primal that made her stomach flip.

"That vision..." Orion said, his deep voice sending shivers through her. "It was quite illuminating."

Seraphina frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Because we were holding hands during your vision, I saw it too." His smile broadened, revealing perfect white teeth. "Every detail."

"You're lying." The words tumbled out reflexively, but uncertainty gnawed at her. The way he looked at her, like he'd seen her naked soul, made her heart race.

Orion took a step toward her, his movements fluid and deliberate. "Should I describe what I saw? How my hands traced the curve of your hips, the softness of your?—"

"Stop!" Heat rushed to her face. The scientific part of her brain scrambled for explanations—coincidence, suggestion, mind-reading—but none felt adequate. "That's impossible."

"Much like seeing the future?" He arched an eyebrow, closing more distance between them.

Bertram cleared his throat loudly, reminding Seraphina they weren't alone. The elderly man looked distinctly uncomfortable, his eyes fixed firmly on the astronomical charts on the wall.

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"I believe I should retire for the evening," he announced, edging toward the door. "These old bones need their rest."

Before leaving, he turned to Seraphina, his expression softening. "Should you choose to stay, you'll have help—from me and many others—in learning to control these powers. Our pack has awaited a Luna for centuries." His eyes twinkled. "No pressure, of course."

The door clicked shut behind him, leaving Seraphina alone with Orion and the weight of expectation.

"He means well," Orion said, his voice gentler than before. "They all do."

Seraphina gazed out at the stars, finding comfort in their distant, scientific certainty. "Yesterday, I was worried about the funding for my research project. Today, I'm apparently a wolf queen with psychic powers."

"Luna," he corrected, moving to stand beside her. Not touching, but close enough that she felt the heat radiating from his body. "And yes, you are."

The moonlight caught the silver in his hair, and despite everything, Seraphina couldn't help noticing how handsome he was—strong jawline softened by the hint of a smile and eyes that held centuries of stories.

"How can you be so certain?" she asked, genuinely curious. "What if your instincts are wrong?"

Orion's expression grew serious, his gaze intense. "Four hundred years, I've ruled alone. Four hundred years, I've felt something missing." He gestured toward the space between them. "Then this—this connection that sparks like lightning when we touch. That's not coincidence, Seraphina."

The way he said her name—like he was savoring each syllable—caused her heart to race. For a moment, she allowed herself to imagine what it might be like to belong here, to understand these powers growing inside her. To be with him.

"I need time," she said finally. "This is all happening so fast."

Orion nodded, respect tempering the desire in his eyes. "Time you shall have. But know this—" He moved closer until she could see the flecks of silver in his gray eyes. "What we saw in that vision? That's only the beginning of what we could be together."

The promise in his words sent a thrill through her that was equal parts excitement and terror. For the first time, Seraphina couldn't calculate the odds or predict the outcome. And somehow, standing in the moonlight with this impossibly sexy man, that uncertainty felt strangely like freedom.

TEN

ORION

Moonlight filtered through the massive observatory window, bathing Seraphina in an ethereal glow that made the yellow sundress she wore seem almost luminescent against her tanned skin.

She stepped away from Orion slightly, her fingers brushing nervously against the fabric of her dress. "I have a lot to think about. I should go back to my bedroom

suite."

Something primal in him bristled at her retreat. The wolf would have to wait a little while longer.

"That's fine," Orion said, tamping down his desire to chase. "But before you go, would you like to see the stars?"

Her hesitation told him everything. The astronomer in her couldn't resist, no matter how much she wanted to maintain her distance.

Orion strode to the control panel with the confidence of a man who had operated it countless times. His fingers moved with practiced precision across the switches and dials. "The third lever opens the eastern quadrant," he explained, pulling it down with a smooth motion that sent a mechanical hum reverberating through the room. "And the fourth, the western."

The domed ceiling parted like a blooming flower, and the night sky revealed itself in all its glory—stars scattered across the darkness like diamonds on black velvet. Orion watched her reaction, drinking in the wonder that transformed her face.

Her professional curiosity overrode her caution. She moved to the central telescope, her fingers caressing the brass tube with the reverence of a devotee. She adjusted the eyepiece and leaned forward to look.

"Oh!" The soft exclamation of awe was better than any declaration of intent. Her body relaxed, her guard lowering as she lost herself in the celestial display.

Pride swelled in his chest. His ancestors had built this observatory six centuries ago, constantly improving it over the generations. Now it served its most important purpose—captivating his Luna.

Orion folded his arms across his chest, watching as Seraphina forgot all about returning to her room and instead moved from telescope to telescope, making adjustments with expert precision.

"Everything in here can belong to you," he said, his voice resonant in the cavernous space. The wolf in him recognized this as a gift offering—the oldest form of courtship. "Anything missing, I'll make sure we acquire it. Whatever your heart desires can be yours."

She looked up from a particularly powerful reflector telescope, her green eyes wide. "You can't just give away an entire observatory."

"I'm king," he replied simply. "I can give whatever I wish to my queen."

Her cheeks flushed at that, and she turned quickly back to the eyepiece.

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Orion smiled to himself. The human woman might resist, but her body knew the truth. They belonged together, bound by forces older than them.

As he watched her looking through the telescope, he couldn't shake the memory of her vision from earlier. The moment their skin had touched, it had flooded into him—her precognitive ability sharing the intimate scene with such visceral clarity that he could still feel the phantom sensation of her skin beneath his fingertips. In the vision, his hands had explored every curve of her naked form, and his lips had traced a path from her neck downward with deliberate intent.

Orion moved closer to Seraphina, his wolf demanding proximity. His footsteps were silent as he positioned himself directly behind her while she peered through the telescope. Her scent—a combination of jasmine and something uniquely her—filled his nose, making his body tighten with need.

"Your vision," he murmured softly. "The one you shared when we touched. It could become reality." He placed his hands on either side of the telescope, not touching her but effectively creating a cage of his body around hers. "I want it to be reality."

He felt her breath catch and saw the slight tremor that ran through her body.

"What exactly did you see again?" she whispered, still not turning around.

Orion leaned closer, his breath warming the shell of her ear. "Everything. My hands mapping every inch of your skin. My lips on your neck..." He let his words trail off, allowing her imagination to fill in the blanks. "May I kiss you, Seraphina?"

She turned slowly within the confines of his arms, her green eyes wide with a mixture of desire and uncertainty. For a moment, her gaze dropped to his lips, and he could sense her indecision—the war between what her body wanted and what her mind feared.

Orion waited, his wolf snarling with impatience inside him. He would not rush this. A king took what was his, yes, but a true alpha earned what was offered.

Just as she swayed slightly toward him, something shifted in her eyes. She placed a hand on his chest, not pushing him away but creating distance.

"I should go back to my room now," she said, her voice unsteady. "This is all... too much, too fast."

The wolf in him howled in frustration. Orion straightened, stepping back to give her space, though every instinct screamed to pursue.

"As you wish," he said, his voice controlled despite the fire coursing through his veins. "I'll escort you."

The walk back to her suite was silent, tension crackling between them like electricity before a storm. At her door, she looked at him with those emerald eyes that seemed to see straight through the centuries of his existence.

"Goodnight, Orion."

"Sleep well, Luna," he replied, the title slipping out without thought.

Once alone back in his chambers, Orion stripped off his clothing with barely contained aggression. The fabric of his shirt nearly tore under his hands as he unbuttoned it. His muscles rippled with tension as he moved around the spacious

room, trying to burn off the energy surging through him.

Naked, he fell onto his bed, the cool sheets doing nothing to soothe the heat of his skin. His body ached with unfulfilled desire, the centuries of waiting for his Luna now compounded by her physical presence under his roof but not in his arms.

Sleep, when it finally came, offered no relief. His dreams were filled with Seraphina—her soft skin under his hands, her voice whispering his name, and her body moving beneath his. His wolf ran alongside her through moonlit forests, chased her, caught her, and claimed her.

Orion tossed and turned, caught in the purgatory between waking desire and dreaming fulfillment, his body responding to visions that existed only in his mind... for now.

Orion woke with a growl the next morning, the faint light of dawn filtering through the heavy curtains of his royal chambers. His body was taut with unresolved tension, his cock already hard and aching. Disgusted with himself, he threw off the sheets and sat on the edge of the bed, running a hand through his dark gray hair.

The scent of Seraphina still lingered in his mind and it drove his wolf mad with need. He wasn't used to this kind of frustration. Four centuries of pleasure, always within reach, and now he couldn't bring himself to crave anything but her.

The door suddenly creaked open, and a familiar figure slipped inside, naked and confident—a woman whose name he barely remembered. She was just one of the many who had shared his bed over the decades. She approached with purpose, her hips swaying and her hand already reaching for him.

"Good morning, My King," she purred, her fingers brushing against his thigh as she knelt between his legs.

Orion's jaw tightened. Before her hand could close around him, he caught her wrist in a firm grip. "Stop."

She blinked up at him, confusion flickering across her face. "You usually?—"

"Things are different now." His voice was low, edged with finality. He stood, towering over her, his naked form radiating dominance. His wolf snarled, rejecting her proximity and her scent. Seraphina had ruined him for all others. "The Luna is here."

Her eyes widened, realization dawning. "So it's true," she whispered, pulling her wrist free and stepping back. "The pack has a Luna."

"Yes," Orion said, his tone softening slightly. "Inform the others. I'll have no need for any of you moving forward."

She nodded, a small smile tugging at her lips despite the rejection. "It's a good thing, My King. The pack has waited too long for this."

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When she left, Orion took a deep breath. His cock throbbed, a painful reminder of his unfulfilled need. He stalked into the bathroom, turning on the shower to cold in an attempt to curb his desire, but the icy water did little to help.

He leaned against the tiled wall, his hand drifting down to grip himself as images of Seraphina flooded his mind—her lips parted, her body arching against his, and the way she'd felt in the vision they'd shared. His strokes were rough and desperate, his breath coming in ragged gasps as he imagined her beneath him, her green eyes hazy with desire.

"Seraphina," he growled, her name a prayer and a curse as he spilled into his hand, the release doing little to satisfy the ache in his chest.

He washed quickly, the cold water doing its job to clear his head. Drying off, he caught his reflection in the fogged mirror—his gray eyes stormy and his tattoos stark against his tanned skin. He dressed with deliberate precision, the crisp white dress shirt and tailored slacks a stark contrast to the chaos inside him. His pack needed him, and he couldn't afford to let his personal desires interfere with his duties.

Orion strode through the castle corridors with purpose. The morning sunlight streamed through the arched windows, casting geometric patterns across the plush carpeted floor.

His royal study awaited at the end of the west wing, a sanctuary of power where he'd conducted pack business for centuries. As he approached, the ornately carved wooden door opened before him—Jared, his communications councilman, having sensed his approach.

"Your Majesty," Jared said with a bow, his voice tight with anxiety. "There's been a development with the American senator."

Orion's muscles tightened as he entered the study, the door closing behind him with a heavy thud. The room smelled of ancient books and the lingering scent of the cedar logs that had burned in the fireplace overnight. His chief councilman, Marcus, stood by the massive oak desk, a tablet in hand and worry etched into his features.

"Tell me," Orion commanded, not bothering to sit.

Marcus cleared his throat. "Senator Iverson has sent his personal assistant to the island. A human named York. He arrived by private helicopter twenty minutes ago and is demanding an audience."

Orion's eyes narrowed, a low growl rumbling in his chest. "What are his instructions?"

"According to our intelligence, he's been ordered not to return to the mainland without Miss Lucero."

The wolf inside Orion snarled, bristling against the audacity of another male attempting to take what was his. His fingers gripped the edge of the desk, the wood creaking under the pressure.

"The senator received our message?" Orion asked, his voice dangerously soft.

"Yes, Your Majesty. We sent exactly what you dictated—that Miss Lucero is safe, receiving care after an assault attempt, and free to leave whenever she wishes." Marcus hesitated. "He appears to have disregarded it entirely."

Orion's first instinct blazed hot and primitive—eliminate the threat. His wolf

visualized ripping out York's throat, ending the problem with blood and finality. It would be so simple. He could shift and be upon the human before anyone could intervene. One less lackey in Iverson's arsenal.

But killing a human diplomat, even one as insignificant as York, would only escalate matters. Iverson would simply send someone else—perhaps military next time—and the bureaucratic nightmare would multiply.

"Where is he now?" Orion asked, releasing his grip on the desk.

"In the main conference room. Requesting to see you immediately."

Orion paced to the window, looking out at the crystalline waters that surrounded his island kingdom. Seraphina was somewhere in the castle, perhaps still asleep in the guest suite. The thought of her soft curves tangled in sheets sent a wave of heat through him.

"I need more time," he murmured. Then, with renewed determination, he turned to Marcus. "Delay him. Book his day solid with meaningless meetings. Have him speak with every councilman about island protocols. Give him the full bureaucratic treatment."

Marcus's lips twitched with understanding. "The human experience, Your Majesty?"

"Exactly." Orion's eyes glinted with satisfaction. "Tell him I'm occupied with urgent matters until this evening at the earliest."

"And Miss Lucero?"

"She stays undisturbed. I don't want York anywhere near her." The wolf in him snapped possessively at the mere thought.

Marcus nodded, making notes on his tablet. "I'll arrange everything. Though I should mention, York seems quite... persistent."

"So am I." Orion's voice held centuries of iron will. "I need today to convince Seraphina to stay willingly. Once she understands what being Luna truly means—what I can offer her—she'll choose us over returning to Miami."

The confidence in his tone masked the unfamiliar flutter of uncertainty in him. For the first time, something vital lay beyond his control. His Luna's heart couldn't be commanded or claimed by royal decree.

"Prepare the royal gardens for a private lunch," Orion continued. "And have the kitchen prepare their finest. I want everything perfect."

"Of course, Your Majesty."

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Orion moved to his desk, pulling out a sheet of parchment. "One more thing. Send Verna to get the necklace from the vault, and include this note." He scribbled a note quickly, his handwriting bold and decisive. "Have it delivered to Seraphina's quarters within the hour."

ELEVEN

SERAPHINA

Seraphina stretched beneath the Egyptian cotton sheets and was momentarily disoriented by the unfamiliar texture against her skin. Sunlight streamed through gauzy curtains, illuminating the opulent bedroom with its ornate furniture and high ceilings.

For one blissful moment, she forgot where she was. Then reality crashed back like a wave.

"Wolf shifters. Psychic visions. Kings and Lunas." She covered her face with her hands. "And me caught in the middle of it all."

The silk pajamas she'd found in the massive armoire last night whispered against her skin as she sat up. They were the exact shade of emerald that matched her eyes—a coincidence she found unsettling.

Seraphina padded to the window and gazed out at the private island. Crystal blue waters, lush tropical vegetation, and beyond that... nothing but ocean. Miami felt a lifetime away, though it had been less than twenty-four hours since she'd been

kidnapped—or rescued, depending on whose version of events you believed.

Her fingers traced the window frame. "I should be freaking out more than I am."

The strange part was, she wasn't panicking. Part of her wanted desperately to return to her orderly life of research and telescopes, of data and predictability. That was the rational astronomer in her—the woman who lived by science and logic.

But another part...

Heat flashed across her skin as memories of last night in the observatory flooded back. Orion stood so close behind her that she could feel his body heat radiating against her back. His scent—woody and primal—enveloping her senses as she looked through the telescope.

"Your vision," he'd said, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through her core. "The one you shared when we touched. It could become reality."

The way he'd placed his hands on either side of the telescope, creating a cage of his body around hers without actually touching her had left her breathless.

Seraphina shivered, remembering the vision they'd shared—her naked body in his royal chambers, standing vulnerable yet empowered as his hands and mouth explored every inch of her.

The raw hunger in his eyes last night had fully awakened something primal inside her. She had nearly let him kiss her. She had wanted it with an intensity that frightened her.

A soft knock at the door jolted her from her reverie.

"Miss Seraphina?" a female voice called through the door.

"Just a minute."

As she moved toward the door, she caught her reflection in the mirror. The woman staring back looked the same—black hair, green eyes, curves she'd always felt self-conscious about—but something had changed. A new awareness flickered in her eyes.

"What are you going to do, Seraphina?" she asked her reflection. "Run home to your telescope and pretend none of this happened? Or stay and discover what these 'powers' really mean?"

And what about Orion? The vision of them together flashed through her mind again, sending heat spiraling through her body.

Her old life beckoned with its comfortable predictability. But it couldn't explain the visions. Or the electric connection she felt with the wolf king.

"One day," she decided. "I'll give myself one more day to decide."

Seraphina finally opened her door, and Verna stood in the hallway. Her brown ponytail bobbed as she gave a small curtsy, balancing a silver breakfast tray in her hands.

"Good morning, Miss Seraphina. I've brought your breakfast."

"Thank you." Seraphina tugged at the emerald silk pajamas that clung to her curves, suddenly aware of how exposed she felt. "Please, come in."

Verna swept into the room with practiced efficiency and set the tray on the small

table by the window. The sunlight that streamed in through the white gauzy curtains highlighted an array of fruits, pastries, and what smelled like the most divine coffee Seraphina had encountered.

But what caught her eye wasn't the food. It was a small velvet box positioned prominently on the tray.

"What's that?" Seraphina asked, though she already suspected.

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"A gift from His Majesty," Verna answered with a knowing smile. "He instructed me to deliver it personally."

Seraphina's fingers hovered over the box. Part of her—the logical part—warned that accepting gifts from a man who'd essentially abducted her was a slippery slope. But another part—the newly awakened woman who'd shared that electric vision with Orion—trembled at the thought of what might lie inside.

She opened the box.

A sapphire pendant nestled against black velvet—deep blue like the night sky, suspended from a delicate platinum chain. Seraphina gasped at its beauty, at how the gem seemed to capture light and transform it into something magical. As an astronomer who spent her life studying celestial bodies, she recognized craftsmanship that mimicked the cosmos.

A small note rested beneath the necklace. Seraphina unfolded it to find elegant handwriting: Remember, whatever your heart desires can be yours. -O

Heat flooded her cheeks. Because in that moment, staring at Orion's words, Seraphina realized what her heart truly desired wasn't the necklace, or freedom, or even answers to her strange new abilities.

It was him.

The thought shocked her. She barely knew the man, yet the pull toward him felt as inevitable as gravity.

"Could you ask Bertram to come see me?" Seraphina asked, setting the box down carefully. "I have more questions."

"Of course." Verna nodded. "Would you like me to help you dress first?"

"No, I'll eat while I wait. Food first, then questions, then clothing." Seraphina managed a smile. "One overwhelming thing at a time."

Verna departed, and Seraphina was halfway through a perfect croissant when a gentle knock announced Bertram's arrival. The elderly man entered, leaning on his walking stick, his face crinkling with a warm smile that immediately put her at ease.

"Good morning, Miss Seraphina." Bertram's eyes twinkled. "I hear you have some more questions."

"About a million." Seraphina gestured to the chair opposite her. "Please, sit. Coffee?"

"Thank you." He settled into the chair with a satisfied sigh. "Where shall we begin?"

Seraphina poured him a cup. "Let's start with the whole 'people turning into wolves' thing. Because I'm still trying to wrap my head around that."

Bertram chuckled, accepting the coffee. "The Starlight pack has inhabited this island for centuries. We live as humans do, but we carry the spirit and abilities of wolves within us."

"And I'm supposed to be part of this... how?" Seraphina bit into a strawberry, its sweetness a counterpoint to her skepticism.

"You have a dormant wolf inside you, Seraphina." Bertram's voice turned serious. "It will emerge when you're mated to Orion, when you receive his mate mark."

The strawberry nearly lodged in her throat. "Mate mark? Like... a bite?"

"It's more sacred than that. It's a bond of souls." Bertram's eyes grew distant. "When a king claims his Luna, their wolves recognize each other. The mark is physical, yes, but it's also spiritual."

Seraphina's rational mind rebelled at the notion. Dormant wolves? Spiritual bonds? It sounded like fantasy. Yet somewhere deeper, in a place she couldn't explain with science or logic, his words resonated like a tuning fork striking perfect pitch.

"That's..." She struggled for words.

"Hard to believe," Bertram finished with a gentle nod. "Yet you feel it, don't you? The connection to Orion. The visions that began on your thirtieth birthday. These aren't coincidences, child."

Seraphina touched the sapphire necklace box, her fingers tracing its edges. "Part of me understands what you're saying. It feels... right, somehow. But the rest of me?—"

"Needs proof," Bertram said. "As any good scientist would." He set down his coffee and rose slowly. "The proof will come in time. For now, I'll leave you to your breakfast and thoughts."

After Bertram excused himself, Verna returned, her expression bright with anticipation.

"Shall I help you prepare for the day now, Miss Seraphina? His Majesty has arranged quite a selection of clothing for you."

Seraphina fingered the sapphire pendant, thinking of storm-gray eyes and the man who owned them. Whatever her heart desires. Did she dare admit out loud what that

truly was?

"I noticed the clothes yesterday," Seraphina said, setting the velvet box on the vanity.

"Every piece appears to be exactly my size and style. How did he manage that?"

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Verna smiled with a knowing look that made Seraphina's cheeks flush. "His Majesty has exceptional instincts. The mate bond has already begun to form."

"Mate bond," Seraphina repeated, testing the strange term on her tongue. The one she heard Orion say once before.

Verna moved to the armoire and pulled out a flowing dress in a rich emerald shade. "This would complement your eyes beautifully," she said, laying the dress on the bed.

Verna then turned and grabbed the velvet box off the vanity. As she carefully lifted the sapphire necklace from its box, something flashed across Seraphina's vision—a glimpse of Verna's fingers slipping, the priceless pendant tumbling to the hardwood floor, shattering into two pieces.

"Wait!" Seraphina lunged forward, her hand closing around Verna's wrist. Her heart pounded in her chest. "Let me do it."

Verna's eyes widened. "Is something wrong?"

"I just saw..." Seraphina's voice trailed off. "I saw you dropping it. It was about to break."

Verna's mouth formed a perfect O of surprise. She carefully placed the necklace into Seraphina's palm, then stepped back, her eyes glittering with excitement.

"You just had a vision. You saw it before it happened!"

Seraphina nodded, fastening the clasp herself. The sapphire nestled against her collarbone, cool and heavy. "It's been happening since my birthday. Glimpses of things before they happen. Usually accidents or dangers."

"What a magnificent gift!" Verna clasped her hands together. "Do you know what this means for our pack? Precognitive abilities in our Luna will keep everyone safe. We'll be able to anticipate threats and avoid calamities!"

Seraphina's stomach twisted uncomfortably. "About that... I'm not sure I'm staying, Verna."

The joy drained from Verna's face like water from a broken vessel. "Not staying?" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "But you must."

"Must?" Seraphina raised an eyebrow. "I was brought here against my will. I've only just learned about all this—wolves, packs, and Lunas business. It's overwhelming."

"The Starlight pack has waited four hundred years for you." Verna's voice trembled. "Some packs never find their Luna. If you leave us now, we'll have no Luna at all. Ever again."

Seraphina turned to the window, watching the sunlight sparkle on azure waves. "That can't possibly be true."

"It is." Verna stepped closer, her usual cheerful demeanor replaced by something desperate and afraid. "Without the Luna, we'll be vulnerable. Another pack could take over. When that happens, they usually—" her voice broke, "—they usually wipe out the original pack completely."

"And Orion?" The question slipped out before Seraphina could stop it.

"Without his Luna's power to balance and strengthen him, he would be weakened. He would fight to the death to protect us." Verna's eyes filled with tears. "He would die, Miss Seraphina."

The thought of Orion's lifeless body hit Seraphina with unexpected force. She barely knew him, yet the image sent a physical pain through her chest.

"I need more time," Seraphina whispered, fingering the sapphire necklace at her throat. "This is all very hard to process in just one day."

"Of course." Verna brushed away a tear, resuming her professional demeanor. "I shouldn't have burdened you. Let's finish getting you dressed."

As Verna helped her into the emerald dress, Seraphina's mind raced. Everything in her scientific background screamed that this situation was impossible. Wolf shifters? Psychic bonds? Predestined mates?

Yet the pendant around her neck was real. The vision had been real. And the way her body responded to Orion's presence—that had been undeniably, uncomfortably real.

Suddenly, a sharp knock resonated through the room, startling her from her thoughts. Verna smoothed down the last fold of fabric and hurried to the door.

Orion filled the doorway, his imposing frame nearly touching both sides. He wore tailored black slacks that hugged his powerful thighs and a crisp white dress shirt with several buttons undone, revealing a tantalizing glimpse of tanned skin. A black sport coat completed the ensemble, giving him an air of casual authority that made her breath catch in her throat.

The moment his gray eyes landed on her, they darkened with unmistakable hunger. His gaze traveled slowly from her face down to the sapphire nestled against her

collarbone, then lower, tracing the way the emerald silk hugged her curves. Seraphina felt that look like a physical caress, heat blooming across her skin.

"The necklace looks perfect on you." His deep voice was a low rumble that reverberated through her. "Though I suspect it's the wearer that makes it beautiful, not the other way around."

Seraphina's cheeks flushed. "Thank you," she managed, instinctively touching the pendant. "It's exquisite."

Verna discreetly slipped out, leaving them alone. The air between them seemed to crackle with electricity.

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"Would you walk with me?" Orion extended his hand. "The beach is particularly beautiful this time of day."

Scientific curiosity warred with caution. "I have a few more questions," she said, not moving toward him yet.

One corner of his mouth lifted in a half-smile that sent her pulse racing. "I expected nothing less from a scientist. Walk with me, and I'll answer what I can."

Against her better judgment, Seraphina placed her hand in his. The contact sent a jolt through her system, and for a moment, another vision threatened to overtake her—but she pushed it away surprisingly, determined to stay present.

Orion led her through the castle's corridors, his presence commanding acknowledgment from everyone they passed. Staff members bowed their heads respectfully, their eyes darting curiously to Seraphina. Being the subject of so much attention made her uncomfortable, but Orion's steady hand at the small of her back grounded her.

When they emerged from the castle onto a private stretch of beach, Seraphina gasped. The water sparkled like diamonds under the morning sun, and white sand stretched in either direction.

"This is breathtaking," she whispered, trying to reconcile the beauty before her with her bizarre situation.

"It's been my home for four centuries." Orion slipped off his shoes, nodding for her to

do the same. "Join me."

Seraphina removed her sandals, the cool sand between her toes a welcome sensation. They strolled in silence for several moments before she gathered the courage to speak.

"You realize this is all absurd to me, right? Wolves and psychic powers and four-hundred-year-old men who look like—" She cut herself off, embarrassed suddenly.

"Like what?" Orion's eyes gleamed with amusement.

"Like you should be on a magazine cover, not ruling some secret wolf kingdom," she finished, feeling her face heat again.

He laughed, the sound rich and unexpected. "I'll take that as a compliment, although 'wolf kingdom' lacks the dignity I prefer."

The wind picked up suddenly, sending her dark hair flying. Seraphina shivered as the cool breeze hit her bare shoulders.

Without hesitation, Orion shrugged off his sport coat and draped it over her shoulders. "Here."

The fabric enveloped her in warmth and his scent—pine, cedar, and something wild and untamed that made her dizzy with want. She pulled it tighter, inhaling deeply without meaning to.

"Thank you," she murmured, overwhelmed by the intensely intimate feeling of wearing his clothing. It was like being wrapped in his embrace, surrounded by his essence. The sleeves hung well past her fingertips, emphasizing the difference in their sizes, making her feel delicate and protected simultaneously.

The wind tousled Orion's hair, making him look slightly less regal and more approachable. Something in Seraphina responded to that vulnerability.

She stepped closer to him, drawn by an instinct she couldn't explain.

Orion's eyes darkened, and he wrapped a strong arm around her shoulders, tucking her against his side. His heat seeped through her dress, and the hard planes of his body against hers sent liquid fire coursing through her veins.

"Seraphina," he breathed her name like a prayer, his face lowering toward hers.

Her lips parted, her body leaning toward him of its own volition. Every rational thought fled her mind as his scent enveloped her, as his warmth beckoned. For one wild moment, she wanted nothing more than to fling herself into this madness completely.

TWELVE

ORION

Orion stood utterly transfixed as Seraphina's lips hovered mere inches from his. The morning sun cast a golden glow across her face, illuminating those bright green eyes that seemed to see right through his centuries of careful control. Her scent—a heady mixture of jasmine and something perfectly her—wrapped around him, clouding his judgment and awakening his wolf. The beast inside him prowled, desperately urging him to claim what was rightfully his.

His arm tightened possessively around her shoulders, the thin fabric of her emerald dress doing little to mask the heat radiating from her skin. The sapphire necklace he'd gifted her that morning glinted in the sunlight, resting perfectly against her collarbone. His mark of intention.

"Seraphina," he breathed again, her name a prayer on his lips. Years he'd waited for this woman, and now every cell in his body strained toward her like she was the gravitational center of his universe.

The wolf in him howled with triumph as she leaned into him farther, her body softening against his hard frame. Her parted lips beckoned, promising secrets and pleasures he'd only glimpsed in their shared vision.

"I've never felt this way before," she whispered, her breath warm against his mouth.

For one wild, primal moment, Orion considered sweeping her into his arms and laying her on the white sand. The thought of claiming her beneath the open sky, with nothing but the rhythm of the waves as witness, sent a surge of heat through his veins.

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A sudden rush of cold water crashed against their legs, drenching his black slacks up to the knees and splashing against Seraphina's bare calves.

"Oh!" She jumped back reflexively, breaking the spell between them. Her laugh rang out over the beach, genuine and slightly embarrassed. "I guess the ocean had other plans."

Orion didn't share her amusement. He'd been fantasizing about capturing her lips with his ever since he saw her on the beach yesterday, and it nearly became a reality. It took everything in him not to growl in frustration. His wolf paced angrily at being denied.

"The sea is temperamental today," he remarked, his voice rougher than intended as he smoothed down his wet slacks. "Much like fate."

She tugged his coat tighter around her shoulders, her fingers tracing the necklace at her throat. "This place is simply beautiful, Orion. I can see why you love it here."

"It could be yours too." The words escaped before he could stop them, raw and honest.

Seraphina's expression softened. "I'd like to spend today exploring more of the island, if that's all right. But tomorrow..." She hesitated, her eyes dropping to the sand. "I should really go home tomorrow."

Orion felt his wolf rise to challenge her words. The mere thought of her departing tomorrow made his chest constrict with a territorial possessiveness he hadn't

experienced in centuries of ruling. The mate bond pulsed between them, practically visible in the salty air.

"Tomorrow is a long way off," he said, his voice dropping to the commanding timbre he used when addressing his pack. He stepped closer, eliminating the space between them created by that infuriating wave. "The island has much to offer someone like you."

Seraphina's eyes widened, and Orion caught the subtle quickening of her pulse in her throat. Good. She wasn't immune to him.

"I could give you anything your heart desires," he continued, reaching out to brush her black hair from her face. "The sapphire is merely the beginning. I have diamonds that would make the stars you study seem dim in comparison."

She shook her head, looking almost amused. "I've never been one for shiny things."

Undeterred, Orion gestured toward the castle looming majestically on the hill behind them. "Then perhaps the privacy of the eastern wing—quarters where no one or nothing would disturb us. Moments like this," he trailed his finger down her arm, "but with no interruptions."

Her breath caught, her body unconsciously swaying toward his touch before she steadied herself.

"Or perhaps," he pressed on, recognizing an advantage when he saw one, "you'd be interested in what it means to be Queen of Starlight Island."

He circled her slowly, his wolf enjoying the hunt. "You would rule by my side. Every decision and every council, your voice would carry the same weight as mine." His hand found her lower back, possessive yet gentle. "The pack would look to you for

guidance and wisdom."

Seraphina tilted her head, her eyes narrowing. "Power and status? That's what you think I want?"

Orion paused, studying her expression. Most women he'd encountered over his long life coveted exactly that—the prestige of standing beside a king. Her reaction was... unexpected.

"I've been perfectly content with my telescopes and my small house," she explained. "I've never needed fancy titles or authority over others."

"Then what do you need?" he asked, genuinely curious now.

She stared at him, those green eyes holding his gaze with unexpected boldness. "I've always valued simple things. Independence. Purpose. Connection."

The last word hung between them, heavy with meaning. Orion felt the mate bond pulse stronger, responding to her unconscious acknowledgment of what was growing between them.

"And do you feel it?" he asked, his voice rough with unexpected emotion as he stepped closer. "This connection?"

Her eyes fluttered closed momentarily as his hand cupped her cheek. The bond between them flared hot like a star going supernova. When she opened them again, Orion saw his answer.

"Yes," she whispered. "That's what scares me the most."

Orion's chest swelled with satisfaction as Seraphina acknowledged the force pulling

them together. Her admission—even with its cautious edge—was enough to make his wolf howl with delight. Her fear didn't concern him. Fear could be overcome. The connection between them couldn't be denied, and that was what truly mattered.

"That's precisely why you need to stay," he said, his thumb tracing the delicate curve of her cheekbone.

The contact sent electric pulses through his palm, confirming what his instincts had been telling him since the moment he'd spotted her on that Miami beach.

"These visions you're experiencing, Seraphina—they're not random. They're your Luna powers manifesting and growing." His voice deepened with authority. "You need to learn to control them before they control you."

Her bright green eyes widened slightly, and he could see the analytical part of her mind—the scientist—wrestling with concepts that defied her understanding of reality.

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"And what makes you think I can control them?" she asked, folding her arms protectively across her chest, and stepping away from his touch.

Orion smiled, recognizing the defensive gesture. His Luna had spirit. "Because you already are." He gestured toward the castle with a confident sweep of his arm. "Since arriving on my island, have your visions been as chaotic? As frequent? As overwhelming?"

Her hesitation told him everything. His wolf preened with satisfaction.

"That's because of me," he stated matter-of-factly. "Our proximity strengthens your control. The bond between Luna and Alpha is ancient and powerful." He allowed his fingers to trail over her arm, feeling the goose bumps rise in their wake. "I can help you master these abilities, Seraphina. Together, we can ensure they serve you rather than disrupt your life."

Seraphina's brow furrowed, suspicion clouding her expression. "Wait. Are you manipulating me? Making promises just to keep me here for... for whatever strange reason?"

The accusation stung his pride. He clenched his jaw, his eyes flashing with momentary anger. No one questioned his honor—not even his mate.

"I am a king," he stated firmly, drawing himself to his full height. "I have ruled the Starlight pack for four centuries. I do not need to resort to manipulation to get what I want."

Her eyes widened at his sudden change in demeanor, and Orion immediately regretted his harsh tone. This was his Luna—untrained in their ways, unaware of the respect his position commanded.

He softened his expression, though his stance remained proud. "Yes, I want you to stay. I would move mountains to make that happen." His voice dropped lower, the rumble in his chest almost a growl. "But I genuinely want to help you, Seraphina. Whether you choose to remain here or not."

The thought of her leaving made his wolf snarl in protest, but he pushed on. "I would hate to see you go, but if you must, I'd rather you at least know how to control these powers." He reached for her hand, enveloping it in his much larger one. "Living in fear of when the next vision might strike is no life at all."

Seraphina studied him intently, clearly weighing his words against her instincts.

"I just..." she began, then paused, her free hand unconsciously touching the sapphire necklace at her throat. "I don't understand any of this. It's not... scientific."

Orion chuckled, the sound warm and sincere. "Not everything in this world follows your human sciences. Some things are older and more wild." He brought her hand to his chest, pressing it against his heart. "Feel that? That's not just a heartbeat. That's the rhythm of something ancient in my blood—the same blood that calls to you."

Her fingers splayed against his chest, and he felt her pulse quicken in response.

"I suppose..." she said slowly, her scientific mind clearly still struggling with acceptance, "learning to control these visions would be beneficial." Her eyes met his, still wary but with a newfound determination. "But I'm not promising to stay."

Orion smiled, satisfied with this small victory. His Luna would come around

eventually—the mate bond would ensure that. For now, he had bought himself time.

"Let's start today," he said, leading her farther down the beach, his hand possessively settled on her back.

The late morning sun beat down on them as they walked, warming Orion's skin. The scent of salt mixed with Seraphina's natural jasmine aroma created an intoxicating blend that made his wolf pace restlessly inside him. Strict discipline was the only thing keeping him from pulling her against his chest and claiming those full lips that had been tantalizingly close just moments ago.

Seraphina shrugged under his touch, her shoulders stiffening slightly. "I don't think it really matters much if I learn more control. I'll keep having visions. I'll just have to accept it and deal with it."

Her dismissive tone grated against every alpha instinct in Orion's body. Did she not understand the gift she possessed? The power she held? His muscles flexed under his white dress shirt as he fought the urge to simply command her to listen to him. That might work with his pack, but his Luna required a different approach.

"You don't truly believe that," he challenged, his voice lowering to a deeper register. "Have you already forgotten what happened outside your house? The vision that terrified you so much you passed out after screaming?"

He stepped in front of her, halting their progress along the shoreline. The waves crashed behind him, mirroring the intensity in his eyes as he stared down at her. His Luna was stubborn—a quality that both infuriated and impressed him.

"What if your visions get worse?" He traced a finger along her arm, feeling her shiver beneath his touch. "What if they become increasingly terrifying? How long do you think you'll last in the human world if you randomly dissociate and start screaming in

the middle of a meeting?"

The wind whipped Seraphina's black hair across her face, and Orion gently tucked it behind her ear, using the gesture to maintain physical contact with her. The bond between them hummed with each touch, strengthening his resolve to keep her with him.

"No one there will understand you or what's happening to you," he continued, his tone softening even as his words grew more direct. "They'll think you're unstable. You'll be locked up in a mental institution for sure."

Orion watched the flash of indignation spark in her bright green eyes. His words had hit their mark—perhaps too effectively. Her body tensed, her fists clenching at her sides as color rose to her cheeks. He could practically feel the heat of her anger, but he wasn't about to back down. He was her alpha, and it was his duty to protect her, even from herself.

"You'll never get to fully live a life of freedom," he pressed on, his voice becoming a seductive rumble as he leaned closer. "You won't understand your true nature or become who you were always meant to be."

Her eyes narrowed dangerously, her mouth opening to deliver what he was certain would be a sharp retort. Orion felt a surge of pride at her fire. His Luna was no meek follower—she was worthy of standing beside the King of the Starlight pack.

Orion studied her beautiful face, now flushed with anger. She hadn't responded to his statement about being locked away, but her rigid posture and flashing eyes told him everything. She was fuming at the implication that she could be considered unstable or crazy.

Despite the tension, Orion couldn't help admiring how the sunlight caught in her hair.

Even angry, she was breathtaking—and entirely his, whether she accepted it yet or not.

THIRTEEN

SERAPHINA

The audacity of this man—king or not—to suggest she would end up institutionalized because of her psychic powers was infuriating. Seraphina inhaled sharply, the salty breeze doing nothing to cool her rising temper.

"How dare you," she hissed, shrugging his coat from her shoulders and thrusting it toward his chest. "You don't get to decide my fate or tell me I'm unstable. I've managed my entire life just fine without your help or your island of wolf people."

Orion caught his coat with one hand, his expression softening as he studied her. The wind tousled his hair, those bright eyes never leaving her face.

"That's not what I meant," Orion said, his deep voice gentler now. "You weren't experiencing visions before your thirtieth birthday. The world you knew made sense to you—the stars in their predictable orbits, the laws of physics, and the comfort of scientific explanation." He stepped closer, not intimidated by her anger. "But now you're experiencing something science can't explain, and the human world has no framework for understanding it."

She crossed her arms but found her anger beginning to deflate. He wasn't wrong. What would she tell her colleagues? Her friends? That she could see the future? They would think she had lost her mind.

"I don't want to control you, Seraphina," Orion continued. "I want to help you control

this gift, so it doesn't control you."

The sincerity in his voice made her pause. "How?"

"Let me show you." He set his coat onto the white sand and extended his hand. "A simple meditation exercise."

Seraphina hesitated before placing her hand in his. The connection sent an immediate warmth shooting up her arm, but no vision this time—just an awareness, a heightened sense of him.

"Close your eyes," he instructed, his thumb making small circles on her palm. "Focus on your breathing first."

She did as he asked, feeling slightly foolish standing there on the beach with her eyes closed. The sound of waves crashing against the shore filled her ears.

"Now, instead of waiting for the visions to assault you, I want you to reach for one," Orion said softly. "Picture something—anything—and try to see beyond its present state."

Seraphina furrowed her brow. "That sounds impossible."

"You're an astronomer. You understand that stars exist in states we can only predict because light takes time to reach us. Your gift works similarly. You're seeing light—information—from moments that haven't reached everyone else yet."

The scientific analogy resonated with her. She squeezed his hand and concentrated, picturing the observatory where they'd stood yesterday.

At first, nothing happened. Then, like a lens coming into focus, she saw the

observatory—not as it was yesterday, but as it would be tonight. The ceiling opened to the stars, a meteor shower streaking across the sky.

Her eyes flew open. "There's going to be a meteor shower tonight."

Orion's smile was triumphant. "You called the vision. You controlled it."

"But how do you know I'm right?"

"Because I've lived under these stars for a bit. The Leonids peak tonight." His eyes sparkled with appreciation. "That was remarkable, Seraphina. Most novice Lunas take weeks to achieve that level of control."

Pride bloomed in her chest. "It was... easier than I expected."

"That's because we're together." Orion stepped impossibly closer. "Our energies complement each other. The bond enhances your ability to channel your gift rather than being ambushed by it."

Seraphina found herself leaning toward him, drawn by some invisible force. "And if I leave?"

"You'll learn to manage it, eventually, but it will be harder, and probably lonelier." His hand moved to cup her cheek. "Everything is easier when mates are together. It's how we're designed."

"Mates," she repeated, testing the word on her tongue. Two days ago, she would have laughed at the concept. Now, standing before this alpha male who commanded not just a pack but her very senses, it didn't seem so absurd.

"Try another one," he encouraged. "Something more challenging."

Seraphina nodded, closing her eyes again. This time she pictured Orion himself, curious what the future might show her.

The vision that formed wasn't what she expected. It wasn't Orion in danger or Orion at some royal function. It was Orion laughing, his head thrown back in genuine joy, as she said something that amused him. The intimacy of it, the easy companionship it suggested, made her heart ache with longing.

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"What did you see?" he asked when she opened her eyes.

"You," she admitted. "Happy."

Something shifted inside her like puzzle pieces clicking together. The warmth of his hand in hers seemed to travel upward, spreading through her body and into her mind—transforming the fear that had been clouding her thoughts since her birthday. Where she once saw a burden, she now recognized a gift.

"It's not a curse," Seraphina whispered, almost to herself. "These visions... they're windows, aren't they? Glimpses of possibilities that I can help shape."

The gentle pressure of Orion's fingers tightened around hers. "That's exactly what they are. Your power isn't meant to terrify you, it's meant to guide you—guide us."

She gazed up at him, the sun casting golden highlights across his chiseled features. His bright eyes focused on her with such immediate intensity that it took the breath out of her lungs for a moment.

"Could you see it?" she finally managed, remembering how he'd shared her vision the night before. "What I just saw of you?"

A knowing smile curved his lips, revealing his perfect white teeth against his neatly trimmed beard. "Yes. I saw myself laughing with you. Being... unburdened. It's not something I experience often."

"It looked good on you," she said, surprised by her own boldness.

"You bring it out in me." His voice dropped lower, rumbling from his chest. "One day with you has done what centuries couldn't."

The ocean breeze lifted strands of her black hair, and Orion reached out to brush them away from her cheek. His fingertips lingered, sending shivers throughout her body.

"This is crazy," Seraphina said, yet she didn't pull away. "I barely know you, and yet..."

"And yet?" The question was a challenge and an invitation.

"And yet I feel like I've known you forever." The words tumbled out. "It's not logical. I'm a scientist. I should be questioning everything about this situation, but when I'm with you..."

"When you're with me?" Orion prompted, leaning forward until the fabric of his shirt brushed against her bare shoulder.

Seraphina took a steadying breath, gathering her courage. The rational part of her brain—the astronomer who calculated celestial movements and probability factors—was screaming that this was absurd. But her newly awakened senses told her something different: that this connection with Orion was as real and powerful as gravity.

"When I'm with you, I want things I've never wanted," she whispered. "I'm drawn to you in ways that defy explanation. I've been... thinking about you. Wanting you. Since the moment I saw you."

Orion's eyes darkened, stormy gray like thunderclouds gathering on the horizon. His posture shifted slightly—shoulders squaring, chin lifting, every inch the alpha male claiming his territory.

"I've wanted you from the moment I first sensed your awakening," he confessed, his thumb tracing a path along her jawline. "For centuries, I've ruled without a true partner. I've led my pack, fought battles, protected my people—but always doing it alone. Then you appeared, and suddenly everything I thought I knew about myself, about what I wanted, changed."

"What do you want now?" Seraphina asked, unable to look away from his intense gaze.

"You," he said simply, the word carrying the weight of four hundred years of solitude. "In every way possible. As my Luna, my partner, and my lover."

The possessive growl underlying his words sent a delicious shiver through her. Whatever strange magic bound them—whether it was wolf instinct or cosmic fate—Seraphina could no longer deny its power.

Her mind raced with the implications of everything she'd learned since her birthday: psychic visions, wolf shifters, and being someone's destined mate. It was beyond overwhelming.

"This is all so much," Seraphina said, her voice catching as she gazed at him. "Can we just... forget about it all for a moment? The Luna responsibilities, the powers, everything you've told me in the last day."

Her eyes searched his face, drinking in the sharp lines of his jaw, and the subtle curve of his lips beneath his neat beard.

"Could we pretend that nothing else is going on in the whole world? That only we exist in this mere moment—just a man and a woman who both clearly want each other?"

The corners of his mouth lifted in a smile that sent her heart racing. He raised one hand to cup her cheek, his thumb grazing her lower lip in a touch so light, it might have been imaginary.

"This is much more than a mere moment to me," Orion said, his voice lowering to a silken rumble that seemed to vibrate through her bones. "And I'm going to make sure you remember this no matter what else happens between us."

Before she could respond, he dipped his head and captured her lips with his. The kiss started soft, almost tentative—a question more than a demand. But when Seraphina sighed against his mouth, something primitive and powerful uncoiled within him.

His arm snaked around her waist, pulling her flush against his solid chest. His other hand threaded through her hair, angling her head to deepen the kiss. His lips became fierce, claiming her with a possessiveness that should have frightened her but instead ignited something primal within her own body.

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It was the best kiss Seraphina had ever experienced, and yet somehow it felt like coming home to something familiar deep in her body and soul. As if her cells recognized his on a molecular level, as if every kiss before this one had merely been practice for this moment of perfect communion.

Seraphina's analytical mind tried briefly to catalog the sensations—the slight rasp of his beard against her skin, the taste of salt and something uniquely him, and the solidness of his body against hers. But then his tongue swept against the seam of her lips, and all scientific inquiry dissolved into pure sensation.

Her hands, which had been pressed against his chest, slid up to his shoulders and around his neck. She pulled herself closer, rising onto her tiptoes to press herself more firmly against him. A small sound—half sigh, half moan—escaped her throat.

Orion growled in response, the sound vibrating from his chest into hers. His kiss turned deeper, more demanding, as if he were trying to consume her. One large hand splayed across her lower back, his fingers pressing into the curve just above her backside, while the other cupped the back of her head.

When they finally broke apart, both breathing heavily, Seraphina felt dazed. Her lips throbbed pleasantly, and her whole body hummed with awareness. The logical part of her brain seemed to have short-circuited.

"That was..." she whispered, unable to find words adequate to describe what had just happened.

"Only the beginning," Orion promised, his eyes darker with desire. He pressed his

forehead against hers, his breath mingling with her own. "Tell me you felt it too."

"Yes," she admitted, her voice barely audible above the sound of the waves. "It's like... like finding a star you've been searching for your whole life without even knowing you were looking for it."

He smiled then, a genuine smile that transformed his usual stern features. "My astronomer," he murmured, placing a softer kiss on her lips. "Finding poetry in the stars."

Before Seraphina could truly process what was happening, Orion swept her up in his arms with an effortless motion that left her breathless. Her feet dangled in the air as he cradled her against his chest, one arm supporting her back, the other beneath her knees.

"What are you doing?" she gasped, instinctively wrapping her arms around his neck.

"Honoring your request," he replied, his voice a rumbling baritone against her ear. "Forgetting the world."

He strode across the white sand with determined steps, her weight seemingly nothing to him. Seraphina felt the solid warmth of his chest against her side, and the steady rhythm of his heartbeat beneath her fingers. This close, his scent enveloped her—pine and ocean uniquely male that made her head swim.

"I can walk, you know," she protested weakly, though she didn't truly want him to put her down.

"I know." His eyes never left the path ahead as they approached the castle. "But I've waited centuries to carry my Luna to my bed. Indulge me."

The possessiveness in his tone sent delicious shivers through her. She had never been with a man so unapologetically dominant and so certain of what he wanted. The scientist in her observed with fascination how her body responded to his alpha presence—her temperature rising, her breathing quickening, and her skin hypersensitive where it touched his.

Through the grand entrance they went, past startled staff who quickly averted their eyes with knowing smiles. Up the sweeping staircase, and down corridors lined with ancient tapestries and ornate sconces. Orion carried her as if she weighed nothing, his breathing steady, and his pace unhurried yet purposeful.

"Your castle is like a maze," she murmured, trying to memorize the route.

"You'll learn every corner of it," he promised, the certainty in his voice making her heart flutter.

They reached an imposing set of double doors carved with intricate wolf motifs. Without putting her down, Orion pushed them open with his shoulder, revealing a sumptuous chamber beyond.

"Welcome to my private sanctuary," he said, finally setting her gently on her feet.

Seraphina turned slowly, taking in the massive four-poster bed draped in midnight blue silks, the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the ocean, and the fireplace crackling with golden flames. It was masculine yet elegant, powerful yet inviting.

Just like its owner.

FOURTEEN

ORION

Orion set Seraphina gently in the center of his royal chambers. His hands lingered on her waist as she turned to take in the space. Her emerald dress shimmered in the firelight, the fabric catching the golden hues of the flames. The room was a reflection of himself—powerful, commanding, yet undeniably sensual. The scent of sandalwood and sea salt filled the air, mingling with the faint crackle of the fireplace.

He didn't wait for her to speak. He couldn't. His lips crashed against hers in a kiss that was both a demand and a promise. It was fierce, unrelenting, and yet there was a tenderness beneath it that made her knees weaken.

His hands moved to the zipper of her dress, the sound of it sliding down like a whisper in the quiet room. The fabric pooled at her feet, leaving her in nothing but lace. He stepped back for a moment, his gaze raking over her with a hunger that made her shiver visibly.

"You're even more beautiful than I imagined," he murmured, his voice thick with desire. "And I've imagined this moment more times than I can count."

Seraphina's cheeks flushed, but she didn't look away from his gaze. He closed the distance between them again, his lips trailing down her neck, his teeth grazing her skin in a way that made her gasp. His hands found the clasp of her bra, and with a deft movement, it was gone, leaving her bare to his gaze.

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He didn't hesitate. His mouth found her breasts, his tongue swirling around one peak while his fingers teased the other. Seraphina arched into him, her hands tangling in his hair as she let out a moan that sent a jolt of heat straight to his core.

"Orion," she breathed, her voice trembling.

He growled in response, the sound vibrating against her skin. "You have no idea what you do to me," Orion said, his voice rough with need. "No idea how long I've waited for this exact moment with my Luna."

His lips continued their descent, trailing kisses down her stomach until he reached the edge of her panties. He hooked his fingers into the lace and pulled them down, his eyes never leaving hers. When she was finally bare before him, he paused, taking in the sight of her.

"Perfect," he whispered, the word barely audible.

He guided her backward until the back of her knees hit the edge of the bed. She sank onto the silken sheets, her breath coming in shallow gasps as he knelt between her legs. His hands slid up her thighs, spreading them apart as he leaned in, his breath warm against her skin.

"I'm going to make you feel things you've never felt," he promised, his voice a low growl.

And then his mouth was on her, his tongue tracing slow, deliberate circles that made her gasp. Her hands fisted in the sheets as he worked her with a skill that left her

trembling. He was relentless, his tongue movements alternating between soft and teasing to hard and demanding, until she was writhing beneath him, her moans filling the room.

"Orion, please," she begged, her voice breaking on the words.

He didn't stop. Instead, he added his fingers, sliding them inside her with a precision that had her crying out. He curled them just right, his tongue never ceasing its assault on her most sensitive spot. He could sense the pressure building inside her, coiling tighter and tighter. And then, with a final flick of his tongue, she shattered, her body convulsing as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over her.

He didn't let up though, drawing out her orgasm until she was limp and trembling, her breath coming in ragged gasps. Only then did he pull back, his eyes dark with satisfaction as he looked up at her.

"That," he said, his voice rough, "was just the start."

Orion climbed onto the bed, his body hovering over hers as he captured her lips in another searing kiss. His hands roamed her body, exploring every curve, committing her to memory. She was soft, warm, and utterly intoxicating. His wolf stirred, a low growl rumbling in him as he deepened the kiss, his tongue sliding against hers in a rhythm that left them both breathless.

"Mine," he growled against her lips, the word a declaration and a promise. He meant it in every sense—she was his mate, his Luna, his everything.

Seraphina's hands moved to his chest, her fingers fumbling with the buttons of his white dress shirt. He could feel the slight tremble in her touch, the nervous excitement that made her movements clumsy. He smiled against her lips, letting her take her time. When she finally pushed him off her and laid him back onto the bed, he

let out a low chuckle, his eyes dark with amusement and desire.

"Taking charge, are we?" he teased, his voice rough with primal need.

He propped himself up on his elbows, watching her with a mixture of pride and hunger as she undid his belt, and slid his pants and boxers down his legs. His cock sprang free, hard and aching, and her eyes widened in surprise and awe.

For a moment, she hesitated, her gaze flicking up to meet his. He could see the uncertainty in her eyes, the flicker of doubt that made her pause. But then something shifted—a spark of determination, a flash of confidence—and she leaned down, her lips brushing against the tip of his cock.

Orion's breath hitched, his hands gripping the sheets as she began to lick him slowly, her tongue circling the sensitive head. The sensation was electric, sending jolts of pleasure straight to his core. He groaned, his head falling back against the pillows as she took him deeper into her mouth, her lips wrapping around him in a way that made his entire body tense.

"Damn, Seraphina," he growled, his voice strained. Her name was a prayer on his lips, a plea and a praise all at once. He could feel the pressure building, the heat coiling in his gut as she worked him with a skill that left him shuddering.

But he didn't want to come—not yet. Not like this. He wanted to savor every moment, to make this last as long as possible. With a low growl, he reached down and gently pulled her up, his hands gripping her hips as he positioned her over him.

"That's enough," he said, his voice thick with hunger. "I want to feel you. All of you."

Orion watched her with a mix of pride and hunger as she took him in her hand, guiding him to her entrance. The feel of her, so warm and ready, made his wolf stir

hungrily, a primal growl rumbling in him. She hesitated for a moment, as if questioning whether she could trust him completely. Orion reached up, cupping her face with one hand, his thumb brushing against her bottom lip in a gesture that was both tender and possessive.

"Look at me," Orion said, his voice low but firm. She obeyed instantly, her eyes locking with his. "You're mine, Seraphina. My Luna. My mate. I'll never hurt you."

Her breath hitched, and he saw the flicker of trust in her gaze, the way her body relaxed slightly. With a slow, deliberate movement, she lowered herself onto him, inch by agonizing inch, until he was fully seated inside her. His hands tightened on her hips, his jaw clenching as he fought for control. She was tight, so damn tight, and the warmth of her body enveloping him was almost too much to bear.

"Seraphina," he growled low, his voice raw and unfiltered. His wolf surged forward, threatening to take over, but he forced it back. This was about her. About them. He wouldn't let his primal instincts ruin this moment.

She let out a shaky breath, her body trembling slightly as she adjusted to his size. Orion gave her a moment, his hands moving to her thighs, gently stroking the soft skin there.

"Breathe, sweetheart," he murmured, his voice softer now, laced with a tenderness that surprised even him. "You're in control. Take what you need."

Seraphina nodded, biting her lip as she began to move. Slow, tentative at first, her movements hesitant as if she were testing the waters. But then, something shifted. Her body seemed to respond to his instinctively, her hips rocking against his with a rhythm that made his breath catch. He could feel her pleasure building, the way her inner walls fluttered around him, and it was intoxicating.

"That's it," he encouraged, his voice rough with desire. His hands moved to her waist, guiding her movements, helping her find that perfect rhythm. "You feel so good, Seraphina. Like you were made for me."

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Her breath hitched again, a soft moan escaping her lips as she picked up the pace. Orion's hands moved to her breasts, his thumbs brushing over her nipples, teasing them into hardened peaks. She gasped, her hands moving to his chest, her nails digging into his skin as she lost herself completely in the sensation.

"Orion," she whispered, her voice trembling, and the sound of his name on her lips sent a shock of heat through him. He could feel her teetering on the edge, the way her body tightened around him, and he knew she was close.

"Let go, sweetheart," he urged. His hands moved to her hips, guiding her movements, driving himself deeper into her with every thrust.

She let out a cry, her body shuddering as her orgasm hit her with full force. Orion felt her inner walls clench around him, and it was the most electrifying sensation he'd ever experienced. He couldn't hold back any longer. With a final, powerful thrust, he followed her over the edge, his release surging through him like a tidal wave. His body convulsed as he spilled himself inside her, a low, guttural growl escaping his lips.

For a moment, neither of them moved. Seraphina's body slumped against his, her head resting on his chest as they both caught their breath. Orion wrapped his arms around her, holding her close, his lips brushing against the top of her head. The room was quiet, the only sound the crackling of the fire and the steady rhythm of their breathing.

"Seraphina," he murmured, his voice low but filled with emotion. "You're everything I never knew I needed."

She lifted her head, her green eyes meeting his, and he saw the vulnerability in her gaze. The fear, the doubt, but also the hope. He reached up, brushing her dark hair from her face, his touch gentle.

"I don't know if I can be what you need," she whispered, her voice trembling.

Orion's heart ached at the uncertainty in her voice. He cupped her soft face with one hand, his thumb stroking her cheek. "You already are," he said, his voice firm but gentle. "You're my Luna. And I'll spend the rest of my life proving that to you if I have to."

She searched his eyes, and for a moment, he thought she might argue. But then she let out a shaky breath, her body relaxing against his. "I'm just scared and unsure about what's happening," she whispered.

Orion's arms tightened around her, holding her close. "I know," he murmured. "But you don't have to be. I'll protect you. Always."

For a long moment, neither of them spoke. The fire crackled in the background, and the room was filled with the scent of their passion, mingling with the faint aroma of sandalwood and sea salt. Orion's hand moved to her back, gently stroking the soft skin there, his touch soothing.

"Stay with me," Orion said, his voice soft but filled with determination. "Not just today. Always."

Seraphina didn't respond, looking very conflicted. Her bright green eyes held a mix of desire and doubt, hope and fear. Orion could sense her internal struggle, and though every fiber of his being wanted to demand an answer, he restrained himself.

Instead of forcing the issue, he decided to savor this moment a while longer. With a

fluid movement that showcased his strength, he gently rolled them both onto their sides, pulling Seraphina into the curve of his body. Her soft curves fit perfectly against his hard planes, and he relished the warmth of her skin against his.

"We don't need to decide everything right now," he murmured, his lips brushing her ear.

His arms tightened around her, and he inhaled deeply, drinking in her scent - an intoxicating mix of jasmine and starlight.

"This feels right," he whispered, more to himself than to her. His wolf stirred contentedly within him, satisfied with their mate's proximity.

Seraphina relaxed slightly in his embrace. Orion allowed himself a small smile, feeling a sense of triumph in this moment. He knew she was scared and overwhelmed by the sudden changes in her life. But he also knew, with a bone-deep certainty, that she belonged here. With him.

FIFTEEN

SERAPHINA

Seraphina's mind whirled as she tried to process the last few hours. The weight of Orion's muscular arm draped possessively across her waist anchored her to this surreal reality. She had known this man for barely a day, yet she'd just given herself to him completely. Her body still hummed with aftershocks of pleasure that rippled outward from her core.

"I've never..." she whispered, trailing off as she struggled to find words adequate enough to describe what she had experienced.

Orion's chest rumbled against her back. "Neither have I. Not like this."

She almost laughed. A 400-year-old wolf king who'd surely had countless women, claiming she was somehow different? Yet the conviction in his voice made her believe him.

His earlier words echoed in her mind: "Stay with me. Not just today. Always." The request still hung between them, unanswered.

Seraphina traced the edge of his intricate tattoo on his arm. "How can this situation even be real?" she asked. "I'm apparently some wolf queen with psychic powers lying naked with the Alpha King of Starlight Island."

"Luna," he corrected, his breath hot on her neck. "And you're not 'apparently' anything. You are my Luna."

The possessiveness in his voice sent a fresh wave of desire through her body. Part of her—the growing, wild part—wanted to surrender to this pull between them. To believe in mate bonds and wolf shifters and her place as his queen.

But the logical astronomer in her brain flashed warning signals. "My whole life is back in Miami."

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Orion's fingers splayed across her stomach, pulling her impossibly closer. "Your power is here. Your purpose is here." His voice dropped lower. "I am here."

Seraphina closed her eyes, torn between worlds. Her body had never felt so alive and so connected to another person. Every cell seemed attuned to his presence as if they'd always been meant to find each other.

"I don't know the first thing about being a Luna," she admitted.

"You know more than you think." His lips brushed against her shoulder, sending shivers down her back. "You controlled your visions today. Imagine what you could accomplish with proper training and practice."

The memory of that breakthrough—of calling forth a vision rather than being waylaid by it—gave her pause.

She turned in his arms to face him, meeting those intense eyes that seemed to see straight through her. "And if I stay? What happens then?"

Orion's hand cupped her face. "Then we build something extraordinary together. My pack becomes your pack. My strength becomes your strength." His eyes burned with intensity. "And I spend every single day showing you that this decision was the right one."

Seraphina's heart fluttered at his words. Yet before she could respond, Orion's expression shifted. A shadow crossed his face, and the corners of his mouth tightened almost imperceptibly.

"There's something I need to tell you." His thumb traced her cheekbone. "I was hesitant at first, but now that our bond is stronger?—"

"What is it?" Seraphina asked, tension suddenly coiling in her belly.

"There's a man on the island—an aide to a U.S. senator named York. He's been here since early this morning, wanting to speak with you," Orion confessed, looking away from her gaze. "Senator Iverson has been trying to contact you since yesterday on behalf of a friend in Miami. When you didn't respond, he sent York here today."

Seraphina froze, the warmth of their intimate moment evaporating instantly. She pushed herself up, clutching the sheet to her chest. "You've had someone here looking for me, and you didn't tell me?"

"I was protecting you," Orion said, his voice taking on that commanding tone she was beginning to recognize as his default when challenged.

"Protecting me?" Heat rose to her cheeks, but not from desire this time. "Or keeping me in the dark so I'd stay with you?"

She scrambled from the bed, wrapping the sheet around herself as she searched for her clothes. Each piece she found and put back on felt like armor against his betrayal.

"You don't understand what's at stake," Orion said, rising from the bed in all his naked glory, seemingly unconcerned with his state of undress. His powerful muscles rippled as he moved toward her. "This senator—there's something not right about him. My instincts tell me?—"

"Your instincts?" Seraphina laughed, the sound brittle even to her own ears. "What about my right to know? To choose? Not more than five minutes ago, I was considering giving up my entire life to stay here with you, and all that time, you were

hiding this from me."

"Seraphina—"

"No." She held up a hand, her fingers trembling. "I can't believe I was about to blindly trust you. What else aren't you telling me? What other choices have you made on my behalf?"

Orion's eyes flashed dangerously, a rumble emanating from deep in his chest. "I am protecting what's mine."

"I am not yours!" The words exploded from her. "I am my own person. Even if we are... whatever we are, destined mates or whatever. I still get to make my own choices."

His nostrils flared, and his body tensed like the predator he was. For a moment, Seraphina's heart raced with something between fear and excitement—the wild pull of their connection at war with her sense of betrayal.

"Take me to York," she demanded, gathering her dignity despite her rumpled appearance and tangled hair. "Now."

"Seraphina—"

"Immediately, Orion." She lifted her chin, refusing to back down. "Or I'll find him myself and tell him exactly how I've been kept in the dark since arriving on this island."

Orion's jaw worked as he stared her down, the battle between the alpha king and the man who desired her trust playing out across his features. Finally, he gave a curt nod.

"As you wish." His voice was ice, the tenderness from earlier locked away as he reached for his clothes on the floor.

Seraphina's sandals soon whispered against the plush corridor carpet as Orion escorted her toward the conference room. His imposing presence beside her made her hyperaware of every breath and every step.

Orion's expression had hardened into something regal and distant. Gone was the passionate lover who'd held her nakedbody so tenderly just an hour ago, replaced by this commanding king in tailored black slacks and a crisp white dress shirt that strained slightly across his broad shoulders. The transformation was both fascinating and infuriating.

"I'll wait here," Orion announced as they reached an ornate wooden door. His voice was clipped and controlled. "Remember who you are, Seraphina."

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She bristled at his tone. "And who is that exactly? The astronomer from Miami, or the magical wolf queen you've decided I am?"

A muscle twitched in his jaw. "Both. You're always both." His gray eyes locked with hers, sending a jolt of electricity racing through her veins. "Don't let this... politician's lackey manipulate you."

"Like you've been doing?" The words slipped.

Orion stepped closer, the heat of his body surrounding her like a physical force. "Everything I've done has been to protect you and to show you what we could be together."

She swallowed hard, fighting the magnetic pull between them. "I need to talk to York."

With a reluctant nod, Orion opened the door for her but remained in the hallway. Seraphina squared her shoulders and stepped inside.

A tall, lanky man with auburn hair rose from the conference table as she entered. His blue eyes assessed her with clinical precision, taking in the elegant dress, the sapphire necklace, and her slightly disheveled hair.

"Miss Lucero," he said, extending his hand. "York Dennison, aide to Senator Iverson. I'm relieved to see you well."

His handshake was firm but somehow insincere. Seraphina took the seat across from

him, smoothing her dress nervously.

"This all feels like a dream," she admitted, gesturing vaguely around her. "Being here on this island the past day has been... surreal."

York leaned forward, his expression softening with practiced concern. "I can imagine."

Seraphina let out a tiny laugh. "Especially given the circumstances with the shifters and?—"

"Shifters?" York's eyebrows knitted together in confusion.

Seraphina's heart skipped. She'd slipped up. The man clearly had no idea what she was talking about. If York didn't know about wolf shifters, perhaps Senator Iverson didn't either. Maybe Orion was right to be suspicious of these people.

"Sorry, I meant the staff," she recovered quickly. "They've been shifting around me constantly, attending to my every need." She forced another laugh. "It's all very overwhelming."

York smiled, but the expression didn't reach his eyes. "Miss Lucero, I need to be direct. What Orion Guillaume has done—taking you from your home—is a crime. The federal government is prepared to take action against him."

"That's not what happened," Seraphina countered, surprised by her own defensive tone. "I went with him voluntarily."

"That seems unlikely." York's smile turned patronizing. "Your house was clearly broken into when you were taken."

Seraphina straightened in her chair. "Someone else broke into my place, not Orion. He actually saved me from whoever it was."

"Are you sure about that?" York pressed. "You have no idea who was in your house. And according to reports, you passed out at the scene."

The truth of his words stung. She didn't know for certain what had happened. Her memories were a blur of fear and confusion at best.

"After I woke up, Orion and I went on a date in Miami," she lied, the words tumbling out with surprising ease. "I came back to the island with him afterward."

York tapped his pen against his notepad. "Then why haven't you contacted your friend Abby? She's been looking everywhere for you, worried sick."

Guilt crashed over Seraphina. Abby. Her vivacious, loyal friend who'd been by her side through everything. The thought of her worried and searching made Seraphina's chest tighten.

"I..." she faltered. "I got caught up in everything." It sounded weak even to her own ears.

"Miss Lucero," York said, his voice gentle now, "I understand you may feel obligated to protect Mr. Guillaume, but your safety is our primary concern."

Seraphina inhaled deeply, trying to steady her growing nerves. The weight of the sapphire necklace at her throat felt like a silent claim—Orion's 'mark' upon her. She ran her fingers over it absently.

"I appreciate that, but I'm here of my own free will." The words felt both true and false simultaneously. "But you're right about Abby. I should talk to her and tell her

I'm fine."

Suddenly, the heavy wooden door swung open on silent hinges, and Orion strode in. His very presence seemed to compress the air in the room. Relief flooded through Seraphina unexpectedly at the sight of him. His eyes swept the room before locking on her, concern visible beneath his commanding demeanor as if sensing an imminent threat.

"Everything all right in here?" he asked, his voice low and authoritative.

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York straightened in his chair, his relaxed demeanor instantly replaced with tension. "We were just discussing Miss Lucero's return to Miami."

Seraphina watched Orion's jaw tighten almost imperceptibly. She rose from her chair.

"I need to see Abby," she said, meeting Orion's gaze directly. "She's worried about me. I can't just disappear from her life without explanation."

Something softened in Orion's expression—a gentle understanding that made her heart skip. "Of course. I'll take you back to Miami myself tomorrow."

"That won't be possible," York interjected, standing now. His lanky frame seemed impossibly frail next to Orion's solid presence. "There are some legal matters to address. The senator is quite concerned about this... situation."

Seraphina's stomach twisted with anxiety. Was Orion in actual legal trouble because of her?

York turned to her, his expression seemingly crafted to convey sincerity. "Miss Lucero, if you come back with me, you could speak directly with Senator Iverson. Explain that you weren't coerced, and smooth things over. It would be the quickest way to resolve any potential... misunderstandings."

The implication hung in the air. If she didn't go with York, Orion might face legal consequences. The thought of him in trouble because of her made her heart constrict painfully.

"All right," she agreed, ignoring the flicker of hurt that flashed across Orion's face. "I'll go back with you. Just to clear things up."

The conference room door burst open again, and Chance strode in, his dark features arranged in a jovial expression that didn't quite mask the urgency in his eyes.

"Sorry to interrupt the diplomatic summit," he announced, flashing a disarming smile, "but there's a storm system moving in fast. All flights are grounded until tomorrow morning at the earliest."

York's face fell. "That's impossible. I need to get back today."

Chance shrugged, his broad shoulders rising and falling with casual indifference. "Take it up with Mother Nature. Unless you've got gills or wings, you're stuck here tonight."

Seraphina bit the inside of her cheek to suppress a smile as York's controlled facade cracked slightly. Was it wrong to feel relieved that she didn't have to leave yet?

"Fine," York conceded, checking his watch. "I have matters to attend to privately. I need to update the senator on this... development."

"Of course," Orion's voice rumbled with barely concealed satisfaction. "Chance will show you to suitable accommodations."

Chance clapped a friendly hand on York's shoulder, nearly causing the slimmer man to buckle. "This way, my friend. We've got a lovely room with an ocean view. Can't promise mermaids, though."

As they departed, Orion turned to Seraphina, his eyes burning with fierce intensity.

"Have dinner with me tonight," he said, more command than question. "We have much to discuss."

She should refuse. The memory of his earlier deception still smarted. And yet...

"All right," she agreed, surprising herself.

When they were completely alone in the hallway, Orion's fingers brushed against hers—a touch so light, it might have been imagined, yet it sent electricity racing through her arm.

"You do look stunning in that dress." His eyes traced her form with such frank appreciation that heat flooded her face.

"I didn't exactly pack for an extended stay on Wolf King Island," she replied, attempting levity despite the thick tension between them.

"Wolf King Island," he repeated, the corner of his mouth lifting. "I like that."

He led her down the corridor, his hand coming to rest on her lower back. Even through the fabric of her dress, his touch burned, branding her. The possessive gesture should have irritated her, yet she found herself leaning into it despite her lingering anger.

"I'm still furious with you," she said, glancing up at his chiseled profile. "You should have told me about York immediately."

"I know." The simple admission surprised her. "But I wanted you to choose to stay after getting to know me better. Getting to know us."

Seraphina's heart fluttered treacherously. "And you always get what you want, don't

you?"

Orion stopped walking, turning to face her fully. His eyes blazed with something primal that made her knees weak.

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"Not always," he murmured, his gaze dropping to her lips. "Not yet."

SIXTEEN

ORION

Orion watched the emotions play across Seraphina's face, feeling the subtle shifts through their nascent mate bond. The tension in her shoulders had eased slightly, but her eyes still held a shadow of distrust. Fair enough. He hadn't been entirely forthcoming about York's presence. But he'd be damned if some human politician's lackey would take his Luna from him before he'd had the chance to show her what they could be together.

The pull between them was magnetic and visceral. Four centuries of existence had not prepared him for the raw intensity of finding his true mate. He allowed himself a moment to drink her in—the emerald dress hugging curves that his hands still remembered from their earlier intimate encounter, and the sapphire necklace he'd given her resting against her collarbone, catching the fading sunlight.

"This way," he insisted softly. He guided her with a light touch at her back, feeling a surge of satisfaction when she didn't pull away.

When they reached the observatory, he heard her soft gasp of surprise. He'd instructed his staff to transform the space—a small table draped in white linen, two chairs positioned intimately close, and candlelight casting golden shadows across the stone walls. Above them, the dome had been retracted, revealing a sky painted in fiery oranges and deep purples as the sun began its descent.

"You did all this? For me?" The wonder in her voice made his chest tighten.

"I wanted tonight to be special." He pulled out her chair. "Before you make any decisions tomorrow."

The wine was already breathing, a rich Cabernet he'd chosen personally from his cellar. He poured her a glass, then his own, before taking his seat across from her. Their knees touched beneath the small table.

"The seafood risotto is one of our chef's specialties," he explained as servers appeared with their first course. "The shellfish comes from our waters."

"It's delicious," she said after her first bite, genuine pleasure replacing some of the wariness in her expression.

Orion took a sip of his wine, gathering his thoughts. "I should've told you about York immediately. That was... a mistake." The admission felt foreign on his tongue. Kings didn't admit to errors in judgment.

"Yes, you should have." Her directness surprised a laugh out of him.

"Four hundred years of command, and I'm still learning." He held her gaze. "My instinct is to protect what's mine."

"I'm not yours, Orion."

"Aren't you?" The wolf inside him growled at her denial. He tempered it, forcing himself to speak calmly. "The bond between us says otherwise."

When she didn't respond, he decided to change course. "Let me tell you about my pack. About our history."

As they ate, he told her how he'd gathered his wolves from across three continents, offering sanctuary to those persecuted, hunted, or simply displaced by humanity's endless expansion. How he'd secured this island as their haven and built a community that blended ancient traditions with enough modernity to survive in a changing world.

"Four centuries," she marveled. "I can barely imagine it."

"It hasn't always been easy." He found himself revealing more than he'd intended—the early struggles, the territorial wars with rival packs, the sacrifices made to ensure their continued safety. "Loyalty is everything to us. To me."

The candlelight caught the planes of her face, illuminating her expression as she listened intently. His wolf preened under her attention.

"And you think I could be part of this? Your Luna?"

"I know you could." He reached across the table, taking her hand in his. "My pack would adore you, Seraphina. They would protect you with their lives, as would I."

His thumb traced circles on her palm. "I've lived for a long time, ruled just as long, and never have I felt for anyone what I feel for you."

He hadn't planned to say it, hadn't even fully acknowledged it to himself until the words were hanging between them. "I've fallen in love with you. Completely."

Her eyes widened, lips parting in surprise.

"You are fierce and brilliant, worthy in every way to stand as my equal." His voice deepened, the wolf in him needing her to understand the depth of his claim. "I want nothing more than to have you by my side, ruling together."

His heart pounded against his ribs, an unfamiliar vulnerability coursing through him. In all his centuries, he'd never laid himself bare this way. His wolf bristled with impatience, wanting to claim what was his, but the man in him waited, watching her expression shift like shadows across the moon.

Seraphina's silence stretched between them. She traced the rim of her wine glass with a delicate finger, her brow furrowed in contemplation.

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"I feel that way too," she finally admitted, her voice a whisper. "Back in your bedroom, I was going to tell you I wanted to stay with you."

Something hot and primal surged through him. His wolf howled with joy.

"But it's happening way too fast," she continued, cutting through his celebration. "I'm just not entirely sure what to do." She paused for a moment. "Though I can't deny this... bond, this connection between us."

Relief flooded Orion's system. She wasn't rejecting him outright. She felt it too—the unbreakable tie that bound them together as surely as the moon pulled the tides. He could work with uncertainty; he couldn't have taken outright refusal.

"That's all I ask," he said, squeezing her hand. "That you acknowledge what's between us. Time is something I have in abundance."

His instincts urged him to press his advantage. "Come," he commanded gently, rising to his feet and drawing her with him. "I want to show you something."

He led her to the massive central telescope, positioned perfectly beneath the open dome. The night had deepened to velvet black, and stars blazed overhead with an intensity only found far from the pollution of human cities.

"Look," he urged, positioning her at the eyepiece.

Orion stood behind her, close enough to breathe in her intoxicating scent. His hands rested lightly on her hips, a possessive gesture he couldn't help.

Just as she bent to the telescope, the heavens erupted in brilliant streaks of light—meteors burning across the darkness in a celestial dance.

Seraphina gasped, jerking away from the telescope to stare at the open sky. "I saw this! This is exactly what I saw in my vision today when we were on the beach practicing!" Her voice trembled with wonder. "The exact same pattern, the exact same moment."

Triumph blazed through him. "This is undeniable proof that you are our Luna," he said, his voice certain. His hands tightened on her waist, turning her to face him. "There should be no doubt in your mind anymore."

She stared up at him, the meteor shower reflected in her emerald eyes. "I can't deny it," she whispered, then shook her head slightly. "But I don't fully accept it either. Not yet."

It was enough. For now.

Orion lifted one hand to cup her face. "You will," he promised.

He claimed her lips then, pouring all of his longing and newfound love into a kiss that demanded surrender. His wolf surged forward, demanding more, urging him to claim her completely, and this time, he didn't rein in the beast.

His hands moved with precision, unzipping her dress in one swift motion, the fabric pooling at her feet. The sight of her in lace panties sent a primal surge through him, but her hands were already on his shirt, fumbling with the buttons. Her eagerness matched his own, and the thought that this might be their last night together only fueled the fire coursing through his veins.

He wasted no time. Her bra and panties were gone in a flash, tossed aside as he

helped her remove his slacks and boxers. The cool air of the observatory was nothing compared to the heat radiating between them. Orion turned her so she faced the massive central telescope, her hands gripping the cool metal. He stepped behind her, his strong hands gripping her hips as he positioned himself at her entrance. The sight of her bare, curved body against the backdrop of the meteor shower above them was almost too much to bear.

He pushed into her slowly at first, savoring the way she gasped at the intrusion. But restraint was not in his nature, not with her, not tonight. His thrusts quickly grew deep and hard, each one driving a desperate moan from her lips. Her body met his with equal intensity, her hips rolling back to meet each thrust. The sound of skin against skin echoed in the cavernous room, the primal rhythm of their coupling drowning out all else.

"God, Orion," she cried, her voice trembling with need. "More. Please."

He obliged, his hands sliding up her sides to cup her breasts, his thumbs brushing her nipples in teasing circles. She arched into his touch, her moans growing louder. His wolf reveled in her pleasure, in the way her body responded to him. He was her alpha, her mate, and he would leave no doubt in her mind about that.

But it wasn't enough. He wanted her to shatter, to feel every ounce of pleasure he could give her. One hand trailed down her abdomen, his fingers finding the sensitive bundle of nerves between her legs. He worked her with expert precision, his fingers moving in time with his thrusts. Her breath hitched, her body stiffening as she teetered on the edge.

"That's it, Seraphina," he murmured softly against her ear, his voice rough and commanding. "Come for me."

She did. Her orgasm crashed over her like a tidal wave, her body trembling as she

cried out. The sound of her pleasure was the sweetest music to his ears, and the way her walls clenched around him pushed him over the edge. With one final, deep thrust, he shuddered, his release flooding her in hot, pulsing waves. He buried his face in her neck, breathing in her scent as the world around them faded into nothingness.

For a moment, they stood there, still connected, their bodies entwined as the meteor shower danced above them. Orion's heart pounded in his chest, and for the first time in his long life, he felt truly complete. She was his Luna, his mate, and no power on earth could take her from him.

"Stay with me," he pleaded again, pressing a kiss to her shoulder.

She turned her head to look at him, her eyes soft but filled with determination. "I want to. But Orion, this... is pretty overwhelming. I need time to think."

He reluctantly pulled out of her and turned her to face him. "Take the time you need. But know this—you are mine, and I'm not letting you go."

She gave him a small smile, though her eyes still held uncertainty. "You're not exactly giving me a choice then, are you?"

He grinned, the alpha in him rising to the surface. "When it comes to you, Seraphina, there is no other choice. You're my Luna. You'll see that soon enough."

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She laughed softly, the sound like a balm to his soul. "You're impossible."

"And you're perfect," he replied, his voice fierce with conviction.

He kissed her again, this time with a tenderness that belied the intensity of their coupling. When he pulled away, they stood there for a while, wrapped in each other's arms. For Orion, there was no one else, and no other place he would rather be.

SEVENTEEN

SERAPHINA

Early the following morning, Seraphina smoothed the silken fabric of the blue-green sundress against her thighs, admiring how the color reminded her of the ocean surrounding the island. The dress was one of many exquisite pieces Orion had provided for her, each seeming to complement her form perfectly. She turned in front of the mirror feeling sexier and more confident after her night of passion with Orion. The memory of his hands on her naked body made her blood heat with fresh desire.

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts.

"Come in," she called, expecting Verna.

Instead, Orion's imposing figure filled the doorway. His eyes immediately locked with hers, possessive and magnetic. The tailored black shirt he wore strained against his muscular chest as he moved toward her.

"You look beautiful," Orion said, his voice low and intimate.

Something in her chest tightened. "Thank you for all the lovely clothes."

"They pale in comparison to you." Orion closed the distance between them, his hands finding her waist. "Please don't go."

Seraphina's heart skipped. "Orion?—"

"I'll handle Iverson myself." His jaw tightened, that alpha dominance radiating from him. "This whole thing feels wrong. Let me protect you."

She pulled back, though every cell in her body protested the separation. "I need to do this. I can explain everything to the senator and clear your name."

"You don't understand human politics?—"

"And you do?" she challenged.

His mouth curved into a reluctant smile. "Enough, but fair point. I do fully understand danger though, and something about York feels... calculated."

Seraphina reached for the sapphire necklace he'd given her, unclasping it from around her neck. "Here. Hold onto this for me." She pressed it into his palm, curling his fingers around it. "A promise that I'll return."

Pain flashed across his features, quickly masked by cautious hope. "You swear it?"

"I do." She meant it despite the uncertainty churning in her stomach. The intensity of her feelings for this man—this wolf king—terrified and thrilled her simultaneously.

He bent down, claiming her lips in a kiss that started tender but quickly blazed into something fierce. Seraphina melted against him, her hands pressing against his chest as he tightened his arms around her waist. The kiss promised reunions and possibilities that made her head spin.

When they pulled apart, Orion pressed his forehead against hers. "Let me at least escort you to the plane."

The small island airstrip felt impossibly final as they approached. Chance stood beside the small aircraft, his tall frame relaxed but vigilant. York paced nearby, checking his watch repeatedly.

"Finally," York muttered when he spotted them. "The weather window is closing."

"The next storm's moving faster than predicted," Chance explained, offering Seraphina a friendly smile. "Better get going."

Seraphina turned to Orion one last time. "I'll be back before you know it."

He didn't respond. He just stood there frozen, his broad shoulders tensed, and a stoic expression plastered on his face. But his eyes burned with emotion.

She fought back tears as she climbed the steps into the aircraft. York followed closely behind her, his expression unreadable as he directed her to a seat.

Through the small window, she could see Orion still standing like a statue, his powerful presence commanding even from a distance. As she buckled her seat belt, an unwelcome vision flashed—darkness, confinement, fear—but it vanished before she could grasp it fully.

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Unease settled in her stomach as York took the seat beside her, his smile too practiced and cold. She wondered if she had just made a terrible mistake. But before she could further assess the situation, the plane's engines roared to life, drowning out her thoughts momentarily as they taxied down the runway.

"So," she began, twisting her fingers in the soft fabric of her dress, "how exactly did Abby figure out I was missing so quickly? We're close, but she doesn't typically check up on me throughout the day."

York's fingers tapped an impatient rhythm on his armrest. "Miss Jenkins was quite concerned when you missed your lunch date."

Seraphina frowned. "Lunch date? We didn't have plans."

"Perhaps you forgot in all the excitement," York replied, his thin smile not reaching his blue eyes.

The plane lifted into the air, and Seraphina watched Orion's island shrink beneath them. Her mind drifted back to his intense gray eyes, and the protective posture of his broad shoulders as he'd stood watching her board. Those final words echoed in her head: I'll handle Iverson myself. Perhaps she should have listened.

"And how exactly did anyone know to look for me on Orion's island?" she pressed. "It's not like he advertises his location."

York's jaw tightened imperceptibly. "Senator Iverson has extensive resources."

"Does he make a habit of tracking down random astronomers?"

"You're hardly random, Miss Lucero." York's gaze flicked to her face, then away.

"The senator has been following your work."

"My work on stellar cartography?" Seraphina asked incredulously. "I didn't realize celestial mapping was a political priority."

York cleared his throat. "Perhaps you should rest. You must be exhausted after your ordeal."

After thirty minutes, Seraphina turned and looked out the window, watching clouds drift by. Something wasn't adding up. She realized they should be approaching Miami's coastline, but there was nothing but endless ocean below.

We're going the wrong way.

Her heart rate accelerated, but she kept her face neutral. Orion had been right. This felt wrong—dangerously wrong. She wished she had trusted his instincts, his protective nature that she'd initially mistaken for possessiveness.

"Seems like we're taking the scenic route," she remarked casually, though her palms had begun to sweat.

"Just weather patterns," York replied mechanically. "Nothing to worry about."

The plane banked left, and Seraphina caught sight of a small landmass in the distance—definitely not Florida's distinctive peninsula.

"That doesn't look like Miami," she said, unable to keep the edge from her voice.

York's expression shifted, the practiced pleasantness fading into something harder. "Just relax, Miss Lucero. We'll be landing very soon, and you can see your friend Abby and speak with Senator Iverson. Everything will be just fine."

The predatory way his eyes tracked her movements made her skin crawl. It wasn't the appreciative gaze Orion gave her that made her feel beautiful and desired. This was calculating, measuring her worth like livestock at auction.

"I think I'd like to speak to the pilot," she said, unfastening her seat belt.

York's hand shot out, gripping her wrist. "That won't be necessary. We're beginning our descent."

The plane dipped, and through the window, Seraphina could see they were approaching an island with a small airstrip cut into dense jungle. A gleaming white mansion sat on a cliff overlooking the sea. This wasn't Miami—this was someone's private retreat.

Her throat tightened as she realized just how far she was from Orion, from his safety. Her fingers unconsciously reached for the sapphire necklace she'd returned to him, wishing she had that token of protection.

Orion was right. I should have stayed with him.

The plane soon touched down with a jarring thud, rattling Seraphina's teeth as it skidded along the small jungle airstrip. Through the window, emerald foliage blurred past.

"Welcome to Senator Iverson's private retreat," York announced, his voice too smooth and too rehearsed.

Seraphina's stomach knotted as the aircraft slowed to a halt. This was definitely not the bustling Miami airport she had been promised—this was isolation packaged in luxury. The sapphirenecklace's absence felt like a phantom limb. She kept reaching for it only to find bare skin where Orion's gift should have rested.

"I don't understand," she said, infusing her voice with confusion rather than the fear clawing at her throat. "Why are we here instead of Miami?"

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"Senator Iverson prefers to handle delicate matters personally. Privacy is paramount in cases like yours," York explained, his voice laced with practiced sincerity.

"Cases like mine?" Seraphina unbuckled her seat belt with trembling fingers. "I'm an astronomer who went away on a short vacation without telling anyone, not a political prisoner."

"Of course not." York chuckled, the sound hollow as he gestured toward the open cabin door. "After you."

The tropical air hit her like a wall—thick, humid, and heavy with the scent of salt and flowers too sweet to be natural. At the bottom of the stairs, a sleek black limousine waited, its polished surface reflecting the dense jungle surrounding them.

A man stepped out of the vehicle, his gray hair immaculately styled, wearing a tailored suit that showcased his athletic build. Recognition crashed through Seraphina like a wave, freezing her mid-step.

It was him.

The monster from her vision.

The man who must've broken into her home.

Senator Iverson approached with the practiced smile of a career politician, but his light blue eyes held the cold calculation of a predator. "Miss Lucero, what a pleasure to finally meet you properly."

A vision slammed into Seraphina without warning. Her surroundings dissolved, replaced by blood and fur and teeth. Orion, magnificent in his wolf form, gray and powerful, locked in mortal combat with another wolf—black and vicious. Senator Iverson. Blood matted Orion's fur as he struggled, fought, and ultimately fell beneath Iverson's crushing jaws. The vision panned outward—Orion's island overtaken, his pack in chains, serving Iverson's twisted ambitions. The Starlight pack bowed beneath whips and threats while Iverson stood triumphant on Orion's throne.

"Miss Lucero? Are you feeling unwell?" Iverson's voice pulled her back to reality, his hand on her elbow.

Every instinct in her body screamed at her to run, but where? They were surrounded by jungle, on an island she didn't know, miles from safety. From Orion.

Survival meant playing along. For now.

"Sorry," Seraphina forced a smile, blinking rapidly. "Just a bit disoriented from the flight. It's been quite the adventure."

"Indeed." Iverson's grip tightened momentarily before he released her. "Please, allow me to escort you to the estate. Your friend Abby is waiting for you there."

Liar.

"Abby's here?" Seraphina widened her eyes, injecting hope into her voice. "That's wonderful! I've been so worried about what she must think."

"She's understandably curious about your sudden disappearance." Iverson guided her toward the limousine, his hand hovering at her back—not quite touching, but present enough to make her skin crawl. "But don't worry, once we're at the estate, you can catch up over drinks by the pool. Consider it a mini-vacation after your ordeal."

As she slid into the plush leather interior of the limousine, Seraphina closed her eyes briefly, concentrating on the strange warmth that had bloomed in her chest the moment she'd touched Orion—that connection Bertram had called a mate bond.

Orion, please. I need you. It's a trap. He means to kill you. To enslave your pack. Find me.

The intensity of her mental plea surprised her—part desperation, part instinct she didn't fully understand. She had no idea if such connections were real or simply pack mythology, but at that moment, she clung to the possibility like a lifeline.

"The island is beautiful," she commented as the limousine purred along the winding jungle road. "Have you owned it long?"

"For decades," Iverson's smile didn't quite reach his eyes. "It's my sanctuary from the political circus. Speaking of which, I understand King Guillaume was quite... hospitable during your stay."

Another vision crashed over her—darkness, metal against her wrists, a windowless room. Senator Iverson's voice echoing: "You will use your powers for me. You will see my path to victory. You will help me take what's mine."

Seraphina blinked it away, careful not to let her expression change. "Everyone was very kind. It was all a misunderstanding, really."

"Oh?" Iverson leaned forward, those cold eyes suddenly intent. "What kind of misunderstanding?"

"Just cultural differences." Seraphina kept her voice light while her mind raced. "He saw me in distress and assumed I needed rescuing. Very old-fashioned chivalry."

"And did you need rescuing, Miss Lucero?"

"From a break-in, yes." She met his gaze directly. "Someone entered my home. I'm not sure who."

Something flashed behind Iverson's eyes—amusement, perhaps? "How frightening for you. But you're safe now."

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No, I'm not. I'm in more danger than I've ever been.

Seraphina looked out the window, watching the jungle press close against the road, feeling more trapped with every passing second. "I can't wait to see Abby. Is it much further?"

"Just around the bend." Iverson's voice held a promise that made her blood run cold. "And then we can truly get to know one another."

EIGHTEEN

ORION

Orion's broad shoulders tensed as Seraphina climbed the stairs to Senator Iverson's private jet. The blue-green sundress she wore billowed slightly in the morning breeze, making her look like a siren being swept away from her rightful home. His fingers tightened into fists at his sides, the black shirt stretching across his tense shoulders.

He wanted to snarl. To shift. To claim. But centuries of discipline kept him rooted to the tarmac.

"I'll be back before you know it," she'd promised moments ago, her voice carrying a tremor that set his instincts on high alert.

He hadn't responded. Couldn't. The wolf inside him was too busy howling at the wrongness of it all.

York followed close behind her, his lanky frame casting a predatory shadow. The aide's practiced smile did nothing to mask the victorious gleam in his eyes as he cast a final glance back at Orion.

Through the tiny window, he caught Seraphina's gaze—tears glistening in those green eyes he'd lost himself in just minutes before. But beneath the sadness lurked something darker. Fear. Raw and unmistakable.

"She had another vision," he muttered, not looking away from the plane.

Chance shifted beside him. "You think?"

"I know." Orion reached into his pocket, his fingers closing around the sapphire necklace she'd pressed into his palm before leaving. "She's worried about something she's seen."

The plane began its taxi down the runway, carrying his heart away with each foot of distance gained. Without her presence grounding them both, her powers would be running wild—ambushing her with visions she wasn't prepared to handle alone.

"Was it done?" Orion asked, his voice dropping to a dangerous rumble as the jet lifted off.

Chance nodded, his dark eyes tracking the plane's ascent. "The tracker's in place, just as you ordered. Embedded in the undercarriage where they won't find it."

"And our jet?"

"Fueled and ready. We can be airborne in ten minutes."

Orion's eyes never left the departing plane, even as he felt something shift in his

chest—the mate bond stretching thinner but vibrating with increasing intensity. Through it came waves of rising panic, sharp enough to make his teeth ache.

"They're not heading toward Miami."

Chance pulled out his tablet, tapping the screen to bring up the tracking information. "Son of a bitch. You're right. They're veering northwest toward?—"

"The senator's private island." Orion's voice was lethally quiet.

"What's the plan, boss?" Chance asked, already pulling out his phone.

Orion's fingers closed tighter around the necklace, the sapphire's edges biting into his palm. "We're going after them. Now."

"The diplomatic approach? Or are we going full wolf on this one?"

A dangerous smile crept across Orion's face, one that hadn't been seen in centuries of peaceful rule. "Get the helicopter too. And tell the team to bring weapons—both kinds."

"The council?—"

"The council can go fuck themselves." Orion turned, his eyes flashing with predatory intensity. "That's my Luna they've taken. I'm done playing by human rules."

Through the bond, he sent a silent message of reassurance—though he knew she couldn't hear his thoughts, perhaps she could feel his determination.

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"No one takes what's mine," he growled, striding toward the helicopter. "And that senator's about to learn exactly what it means to challenge a four-hundred-year-old alpha."

The next ten minutes passed in a blur of efficiency as the Starlight pack members assembled on the airstrip. Orion paced like a caged predator. Centuries of control couldn't quell the primal rage building inside him. His wolf clawed under his skin, demanding release, and demanding blood.

"ETA on our arrival?" Orion barked at the pilot as he climbed into the helicopter, Chance following close behind.

"We'll reach Tristan's island in forty minutes if we push it, Your Majesty."

"Then push it." His voice left no room for debate as he settled into his seat. "The dozen we selected for the plane?"

Chance nodded, his eyes reflecting the same determination. "All armed and ready. Elite guards only—the ones who can shift quickly and silently."

"Good." Orion clenched his jaw as he stared out the window, watching his island shrink away. The mate bond tugged painfully in his chest—a compass pointing toward his Luna. "She's terrified, Chance."

"We'll get her back."

"It's not just that." Orion closed his eyes, concentrating on the bond that stretched

between them. "Her fear... it's different. Sharper."

"The visions?"

"They're getting stronger without me there to ground her." He slammed his fist against the side of the helicopter. "That bastard has no idea what he's dealing with."

As the helicopter cut through the clouds, Orion felt something shift within the bond—a pulling sensation so visceral it made him gasp.

Orion, please. I need you. It's a trap. He means to kill you. To enslave your pack. Find me.

Her voice whispered through his mind, clear as if she stood beside him. His wolf howled in response, every muscle in his body tensing.

"She's calling to me," he growled, his eyes flashing gold. "The mate bond—it's evolving. I can hear her."

Chance leaned forward. "What's she saying?"

"Iverson means to kill me. To enslave our pack." A deadly smile curved his lips. "Looks like the good senator forgot the first rule of hunting wolves—don't corner what you can't kill."

Forty minutes later, they touched down on Tristan's island. The lush jungle island sat adjacent to Senator Iverson's private retreat—close enough to see the senator's compound through high-powered binoculars.

Tristan, a tattooed shifter with ties to multiple packs, met them at the landing pad. "King Orion. It's been decades."

"I need your boat, Tristan. The fastest one you've got."

"I gathered as much from your urgent message." Tristan's eyes darted between Orion and the armed shifters disembarking from the plane. "Must be important to bring this much firepower."

"The senator has my Luna."

Tristan's eyebrows shot up. "You found her? After all this time?"

"And lost her in less than two days." Orion's voice was pure steel. "I won't lose her again."

"My speedboat's yours. It can get you there under the radar—the cove on the east side has minimal security."

As they headed toward the docks, the mate bond flared with such ferocity that Orion stumbled. Images flashed through his mind—Seraphina, bound to a chair. The senator, shifting partially, claws extended as he towered over her.

"We need to move. Now." Orion's eyes blazed, his canines lengthening despite his iron control.

Chance grabbed his arm. "Steady, brother. We go in smart, or we don't go in at all."

"If he touches a single hair on her head?—"

"Then we'll rip him apart together," Chance finished, his usual humor replaced by cold determination. "But getting yourself killed won't help her."

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Orion took a long, deep breath.

"We'll take two boats," he ordered as they reached the dock. "I want a team on each side of the island. Radio silence until the signal."

Chance nodded. "And the signal is?"

Orion's smile was all teeth, predatory and ancient. "When you hear the senator screaming, that's your cue."

Orion soon stood at the bow of Tristan's speedboat, the ocean spray kissing his face as they cut through the turquoise waters toward Iverson's island. The salt air filled his lungs but did nothing to calm the storm brewing inside him. His knuckles whitened as he gripped the railing, each minute of separation from Seraphina like a physical wound.

"ETA three minutes, Your Majesty," the shifter at the helm called out.

Orion nodded curtly, his jaw clenched so tightly, he tasted metal. The mate bond pulsed beneath his skin—no longer just a whisper but a thundering drum that guided him toward her. Through it, he felt her fear, her determination, and something else... hope. She knew he was coming.

"I need eyes on security positions," he barked to the team huddled behind him.

One of his elite guards handed him binoculars. "Six human guards patrolling the beach perimeter. More inside, no doubt."

Orion scanned the white mansion perched on the cliff like a vulture surveying its domain. Pristine and gleaming in the afternoon sun, it masked the corruption festering within. His wolf snarled at the thought of Seraphina trapped inside those walls.

"Remember," Chance said, appearing at his side, "we're here to extract her, not start a war." His dark eyes held a knowing gleam. "Yet."

Orion's lips curled into something resembling a smile. "I've exercised restraint for several lifetimes, old friend. What's another hour?"

"That's what worries me." Chance tapped the comm unit in his hand. "Team Two, head for the west shore and await orders."

The speedboats separated, curving around opposite sides of the island. Orion's boat approached a small, secluded cove partially hidden by overhanging vegetation. Perfect for a stealth landing.

As they killed the engine and drifted silently toward shore, Orion closed his eyes, focusing on the bond. I'm here, sweetheart. Hold on.

The sensation that returned was electric—a jolt of recognition as if she had heard him. The bond was strengthening with each mile closer he got to her.

They disembarked with practiced efficiency, three pack members securing the boats and establishing a perimeter while the rest followed Orion and Chance into the dense tropical foliage. The humidity wrapped around them as they moved silently through the undergrowth, communication reduced to hand signals and knowing glances.

"Two guards, northwest corner," one of his men whispered, pointing ahead.

Orion inhaled deeply, catching their scent on the breeze. "Human. Not shifters."

Easier to take down, but also a complication—humans meant potential witnesses, potential exposure of their kind.

"Allow me." Chance disappeared into the foliage with another guard, returning minutes later in a security uniform two sizes too large. "Christmas came early. Got enough for the team."

Orion slipped into the dark blue uniform, his nose wrinkling at the human smell clinging to it. "The senator spares no expense, I see." The material was high-quality and the gear top-of-the-line.

"The man's got aspirations beyond the Senate, clearly." Chance adjusted his earpiece. "Ambition like that makes men dangerous."

"So does taking another alpha's mate," Orion growled.

As they approached the mansion's rear entrance, the mate bond flared so intensely, Orion had to stop, bracing himself against a tree. Images flooded his mind—metal biting into Seraphina's wrists as she struggled against handcuffs, the gleam of the senator's too-white teeth as he leaned over her, demanding she use her powers to advance his ambitions.

The wood splintered beneath Orion's grip.

"She's in the east wing. Underground level." He straightened, eyes flashing gold before he forcibly reined in his wolf. "He has her restrained."

Chance placed a steady hand on his shoulder. "We'll get her out. But we need you sharp, not feral."

Orion took another deep breath, centering himself. "I've been king for quite a long

time. I think I can manage ten more minutes of self-control."

"Sure you can." Chance's skeptical tone was accompanied by a knowing smirk. "Just like that time in Barcelona when?—"

"Not helping."

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They approached the service entrance, two of Orion's men taking point. Inside, the marble floors gleamed under recessed lighting, the décor screaming old money and new power. Orion's tactical mind catalogued exit points, security cameras, and staff positions even as his wolf zeroed in on Seraphina's scent—jasmine and stardust, now tinged with terror.

Each step deeper into the compound made the bond pulse stronger, guiding him through the labyrinthine hallways. His blood burned with the need to shift and tear through walls and guards alike to reach her.

"Sub-level elevator requires keycard access," one of his men murmured, gesturing to a discrete door guarded by a single uniformed human.

Orion's smile was all predator. "Then let's acquire one, shall we?"

Minutes later, they stood in the elevator descending to the lower level, the guard's keycard in hand and the man himself conveniently taking an unscheduled nap in a supply closet.

As the doors slid open, the mate bond no longer just pulled—it sang, vibrating through his entire being. Seraphina was close. So close.

"She's in the third room on the left," Orion whispered, not needing surveillance to confirm what the bond told him with absolute clarity. "Two guards at the door. Iverson is with her."

The hallway stretched before them, sterile and white, a stark contrast to the opulence

upstairs. This level wasn't for show—it was functional, designed for privacy and containment.

Chance checked his weapon. "Plan?"

The wolf inside Orion howled for blood, for vengeance, and for the satisfaction of tearing out Iverson's throat. But the king within him, the strategist who'd ruled for centuries, knew better.

"We go in clean. Secure my Luna first, then deal with the senator." His voice was deceptively calm, belying the storm within. "But make no mistake—he will pay for putting his hands on her."

NINETEEN

SERAPHINA

The limousine glided to a stop in front of Senator Iverson's private island estate. The white mansion's imposing structure perched dramatically on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean. Seraphina shifted uncomfortably, the fabric of her dress suddenly feeling too thin against her skin as a chill ran through her body. The material that had felt perfect for Orion's private island now seemed inadequate protection against what she knew was coming.

Her mind raced with the horrific visions that had assaulted her since leaving Orion's island—Iverson transforming into a monstrous wolf, tearing Orion apart, and enslaving his pack. Then the even more immediate vision of herself handcuffed to a chair, trapped and powerless.

"Welcome to my humble abode." Senator Iverson's voice was smooth as silk as he opened the limo door himself, offering his hand with practiced charm.

Seraphina hesitated before accepting it, forcing a smile. "It's... impressive."

"Wait until you see the inside. I designed it myself." He guided her up the marble steps, his fingers gripping her elbow just a little too firmly. "Abby's been quite anxious to see you."

The mention of her friend gave Seraphina a momentary spark of hope. If Abby was truly here, maybe she could signal her somehow to get help.

The mansion's interior was a study in cold elegance—white marble floors, crystal chandeliers, and artwork that probably cost more than her entire year's salary. Two men in dark suits flanked the entrance, their eyes watchful beneath expressionless faces.

"Where's Abby?" Seraphina asked, turning in a small circle, searching for any sign of her blonde friend.

The distinct sound of a lock clicking into place behind her made her stomach drop.

"About that..." Senator Iverson's charming smile twisted into something predatory. "Abby never knew you were gone."

The two suited men moved to block the entrance completely, their jackets shifting to reveal holstered weapons.

"What are you talking about?" Seraphina backed away, her heart pounding.

"I made that whole story up." He shrugged, looking almost proud of himself. "I needed your cooperation, and what better way than to convince you that your best friend was worried?"

"It was you," she whispered, realization dawning with crystal clarity. "You broke into my house in Miami."

"Guilty." He spread his hands. "When I found you weren't home, I had to improvise. Found your friend Abby's picture and contact information in your papers. It provided the perfect cover story."

Rage bubbled up inside her. "You invaded my home and then manipulated me? Why would you do all this?"

"Because you're special, Seraphina." His ice-blue eyes glinted with ambition. "Those visions of yours—they're going to help me achieve greatness. We could be partners."

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"Partners?" She let out a hollow laugh. "I'm not some tool to be used."

Seraphina spun on her heel and bolted deeper into the mansion, her sundress fluttering behind her as she raced through opulent rooms, desperately seeking an exit. She spotted French doors leading to a terrace at the back of the house and lunged for them.

She never made it.

One moment she was running, the next Iverson was in front of her, moving with impossible speed. His hands clamped around her wrists.

"That was rather disappointing." He clicked his tongue. "I'd hoped you might be more reasonable."

"Let go of me!" She struggled against his grip, but it was like fighting against steel.

"I'm afraid we need a more secure location for our discussion." He dragged her toward an elevator tucked discreetly in a side hallway, swiping a keycard before punching a code into the panel.

The doors slid open with a soft chime that seemed obscenely pleasant given the circumstances. Seraphina fought every step, but his strength made her efforts futile. The elevator descended smoothly, opening onto a stark white corridor that looked more like a laboratory than a home.

"Third door," he said, more to himself than to her, pulling her down the hallway.

The room was small and clinical with a single metal chair bolted to the floor in its center. Seraphina's vision from the plane was materializing before her eyes.

"Please don't do this," she pleaded as he forced her into the chair.

"I didn't want to resort to this," he said, securing metal cuffs around her wrists. "But since you refuse to be cooperative, you leave me no choice."

Seraphina tested the restraints, finding them unyielding. "You'll never get away with this."

"I'm a United States Senator with connections in every branch of government." He straightened his tie. "I already have."

As the door closed behind him, Seraphina slumped in the chair, momentary despair washing over her.

Within minutes, the door to the small room swung open with a metallic clang. Senator Iverson strode in, carrying a metal chair. He'd removed his suit jacket, and the sleeves of his crisp white shirt were rolled up to his elbows, revealing tanned forearms corded with muscle.

"Have you calmed down enough for a civilized conversation?" He pulled open the metal chair and sat across from her, his legs spread wide in a display of dominance.

Seraphina tested the handcuffs once more, wincing as the cold metal bit into her wrists. "What exactly is there to discuss when I'm chained to a chair?"

"Our partnership, of course," he drawled, leaning forward slightly. "Your visions combined with my influence—we could reshape the world."

"World domination? Seriously?" Seraphina kept her voice level despite the panic bubbling underneath.

Iverson chuckled. "I prefer to think of it as global restructuring. And just so you know, you're not the first Luna I've tracked, but you're certainly the most promising."

Seraphina's mind raced. Her vision showed her refusing him, and that path led to disaster. She needed to try something different, and just maybe, it would lead to a better outcome.

"You know," he continued, leaning forward further, "I've been alive just as long as your precious Orion. Four centuries of watching him squander the power he never deserved."

"Four hundred years?" Seraphina widened her eyes in feigned surprise.

"Our packs were rivals. I should have been the one to rise to power." His jaw tightened. "But Orion played to the masses, cultivating their loyalty with his bleeding heart and noble gestures." He spat the last words like they tasted bitter.

"So this is about revenge?" Seraphina asked.

"This is about claiming what should have been mine all along." His eyes glinted with cold ambition. "With your visions guiding me, I'll finally take everything from him."

Seraphina remembered her vision of Orion's death and swallowed hard. She had to play this carefully.

"You know," she said, her voice softening to a conspiratorial tone, "Orion wanted to use my powers too. That's why he took me from my house. He said he had plans for me."

Iverson straightened, interest piqued. "Go on."

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"But I have no idea how to control these visions. They just... happen." She slumped her shoulders, projecting helplessness.

"You'll learn," he said dismissively. "I'll give you time to figure it out, but not too much. We need to move quickly before Orion catches on."

Seraphina thought about how Orion had tried to originally win her over with lavish gifts and promises of power. Someone like Iverson would believe those tactics worked. She just needed to make him think she could be bought.

"I'm not opposed to working with you," she said, meeting his gaze directly. "But what's in it for me? I mean, besides avoiding these lovely accommodations." She rattled her handcuffs for emphasis.

Surprise flickered across Iverson's face before his expression settled into smug satisfaction. "Name your price. Money, I presume?"

"A girl's got to eat." Seraphina shrugged, forcing a smile. "And preferably in places with better views than this."

Iverson laughed, the sound echoing off the stark walls. "If you earn your keep, you'll be rewarded handsomely. We could make quite the team, Miss Lucero."

"Your plan is brilliant," she gushed, swallowing her disgust. "Using a Luna's power to amplify your own abilities... I'm surprised no one's thought of it before."

His chest puffed with pride. "Few have my vision or determination."

"I can see that now." She glanced meaningfully at her restraints. "Any chance we could continue this discussion without these? Hard to feel like a partner when I'm chained up."

He studied her for a long moment, then reached into his pocket for a small key. "I suppose we should start building trust."

As he unlocked the cuffs, Seraphina rubbed her wrists, relief flooding through her. "Thank you. And maybe... could I use your phone? Just to call Abby?"

Iverson raised an eyebrow.

"To tell her I've accepted a job with the esteemed Senator Iverson," she explained quickly. "She'll be so jealous when I tell her about all this." She gestured vaguely around them.

Pride and vanity won out over caution. He pulled his phone from his pocket and handed it to her. "Keep it brief."

As her fingers closed around the device, a sudden warmth flooded through Seraphina's veins, radiating from her core to her fingertips. The sensation was intimate like being wrapped in a familiar embrace. Then came the voice—not audible but resonating within her mind.

I'm here, sweetheart. Hold on.

Orion. The certainty of it took her breath away. Somehow, impossibly, she could feel him getting closer, his determination a tangible force pushing through the distance between them.

Seraphina clutched the phone tighter, hope blooming in her chest. She just needed to

stall a little longer.

Orion was close—she could feel him like a warm current flowing through her veins. As her fingers gripped the sleek device, a brilliant plan crystallized in her mind, so sudden and clear it felt like another vision.

She glanced down at the screen, noting with silent triumph that Iverson's Instagram was already open. The Live feature beckoned like a lighthouse.

"Hi, Abby!" Seraphina injected false cheer into her voice, not dialing anyone but watching Iverson's reaction. "I know, I'm so sorry I haven't called you in a few days."

Iverson folded his arms, his stance relaxing slightly as he observed her performance. Seraphina paused naturally as if listening to Abby's response.

"No, no—you won't believe what happened!" She twirled a strand of hair around her finger. "Senator Iverson approached me with this amazing job opportunity. Can you believe it? Me, working for someone so important!"

She caught Iverson's pleased smile from the corner of her eye. Men like him were all the same—susceptible to flattery, arrogant enough to believe their own myth. The scientist in her found his predictability almost disappointing.

"Yes, I'm at his private island right now. It's absolutely gorgeous!" Seraphina continued, pausing again. "Oh, I'm learning so much from him. He's absolutely brilliant."

Iverson preened, turning briefly to look at his Apple watch. In that precious moment, Seraphina's thumb darted to the livestream button and pressed it. A subtle red glow confirmed the broadcast had begun as she continued her fake conversation.

"I'll call you later with all the details, promise. Love you too, bye!" She held the phone out to Iverson with a small smile. "Abby says congratulations on your brilliant new hire."

Iverson took the phone, slipping it back into his pocket with an indulgent smirk. "Now, where were we?"

"You were explaining your plan," Seraphina prompted, widening her eyes in feigned admiration. "I'm still trying to understand how everything fits together. Your vision is so... complex."

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The word stroked his ego exactly as she'd intended. Iverson straightened, expanding his chest like a peacock displaying its feathers.

"The brilliance lies in its simplicity," he began, pacing the floor with self-importance. "With your visions to guide me, I'll anticipate my enemies' every move. I'll know which senators to blackmail, which judges to bribe, and which legislation to push through."

Seraphina tilted her head attentively while silently counting the seconds of the broadcast in her head. Every moment he spoke was another nail in his political coffin.

"And the wolf packs?" she asked innocently. "You mentioned reshaping them too?"

"The packs are weak, divided by outdated traditions," he scoffed. "My first target is Orion's pack. Once I eliminate him and claim his Luna—that's you, dear—other packs will fall in line or face extinction."

Seraphina's stomach churned at his casual mention of Orion's murder, but she kept her expression neutral. "And what happens to the humans who get in your way?"

"Humans?" He laughed coldly. "They'll remain blissfully ignorant cattle, serving their purpose until we no longer need them. Those who resist will become prey."

A series of vibrations suddenly emanated loudly from Iverson's pocket. At first, he ignored them, but as the buzzing continued insistently, annoyed confusion crossed his face. He yanked the phone out—and froze.

His face transformed before her eyes, draining of color before flooding crimson with rage. His cold blue eyes widened, darting from the screen to her face as comprehension dawned.

"You conniving little bitch," he snarled, fury distorting his handsome features. "Do you have any idea what you've done?"

Seraphina backed away as Iverson jabbed frantically at his phone screen, but the damage was done. Comments were already flooding in. His carefully constructed political persona unraveled with each passing second.

"My career... my reputation..." He stared at the screen in horror before hurling the phone against the wall where it shattered into pieces. "It's all gone!"

Seraphina edged toward the door, but Iverson moved with unnatural speed, blocking her path. His eyes had changed, a yellow glow now infusing the blue.

"Nothing more dangerous than a man with nothing left to lose," he growled, teeth elongating slightly as he spoke. "And you've taken everything from me."

In two quick strides, he crossed the room and slammed her against the wall, one hand wrapping around her throat. Seraphina gasped as his fingers tightened, cutting off her air supply.

Black spots danced at the edges of Seraphina's vision as she clawed desperately at his hand. She had gambled everything on her plan—had it all been for nothing?

TWENTY

ORION

In a mere two days, Seraphina—his mate, his Luna, his everything—had shattered every defense he had built over these long years. The idea of her in danger in this moment sent a primal rage coursing through him that threatened to overwhelm his legendary control.

"I've got your back," Chance whispered, his usually jovial face hardened into something dangerous. "Always have."

"Just like Budapest," Orion murmured, the corner of his mouth twitching upward.

Chance snorted. "We remember Budapest very differently."

They moved silently, Orion tracking Seraphina's scent. The trail led to a reinforced door at the end of the corridor.

Orion didn't hesitate. He kicked it open with enough force to tear it from its hinges.

The sight before him stopped his heart. Senator Iverson had Seraphina pinned against the wall, one hand wrapping around her throat. Her green eyes bulged as she clawed at his fingers, desperately fighting for air.

Something primeval broke free in Orion.

"You know, Senator," Orion said, his deep voice dropping to a deadly rumble, "there's actually nothing more dangerous than an alpha king protecting his Luna."

Iverson's head whipped around, his cold blue eyes widening at the intrusion. His fingers tightened around Seraphina's throat.

Orion's supreme control finally snapped.

His bones cracked and reformed in an instant, his clothes tearing as his body transformed from man to beast. His magnificent gray coat rippled over powerful muscles as he dropped to all fours, his lips curling back to reveal gleaming fangs.

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He lunged, a silver blur of fury and purpose.

Just before his claws could sink into Iverson's flesh, the senator released Seraphina and shifted with practiced speed. Where the polished politician had stood seconds before now crouched a massive black wolf with eyes like arctic ice.

Seraphina collapsed to the floor, gasping for breath, her eyes wide with shock and awe as she witnessed his transformation for the first time.

Iverson's wolf snarled, saliva dripping from yellowed fangs. The scent of ambition and madness rolled off him in waves, tainting the air.

From behind, Orion heard the commotion as two more wolves sprinted down the hallway, aiming straight for Chance and the elite guards who flanked him. His packmates shifted in response, their bodies twisting and changing in fluid, practiced motions.

The room and hallway erupted into chaos—snarls and snapping jaws, bodies colliding with bone-crushing force. Fur, teeth, claws everywhere.

Orion circled Iverson, his massive gray form positioning itself between the senator's wolf form and Seraphina. Every muscle in his body was coiled tightly, ready to strike.

Mine.She is MINE.

Iverson feinted left before attacking right, his jaws snapping at Orion's flank. The

king was faster, twisting away and countering with a slash that opened a red line across the senator's shoulder.

For a moment, their gazes locked over bared teeth—ancient power against blind ambition, tradition facing corruption.

Between rapid breaths, Seraphina's voice cut through the growls. "Orion..."

The sound of her voice, raspy from Iverson's assault but still strong, fueled something deeply primal in him. His Luna needed him. Nothing else mattered. Not his kingdom, not his pride, and not his centuries of careful diplomacy.

Iverson lunged again, but this time Orion was ready. His massive jaws clamped down on the senator's foreleg with a sickening crunch. The black wolf howled in pain, trying to twist free.

Behind them, Chance, in his dark brown wolf form, was making short work of one opponent while the elite guards cornered the other.

Orion released Iverson's leg only to circle again, his gray fur raised along his spine, and his eyes glowing with centuries of power and the promise of retribution.

No one touches what is mine.

As Orion stalked around his opponent, the black wolf's features suddenly struck a chord deep within his memory. The way Iverson's ears twitched backward, the unusual pattern of his stance, and the calculating glint in those ice-blue eyes—Orion had seen them before. Four centuries ago.

Ambrose Renehan.

The realization crashed through Orion's consciousness like a thunderbolt. This was no mere power-hungry senator. This was the wolf who had nearly torn the packs apart with his machinations all those centuries ago.

All this time... hiding among the humans, consolidating power.

The pieces fell into place with sickening clarity. Ambrose had always been patient, playing the long game, waiting for his opportunity to seize what he believed was rightfully his.

The assembly of packs had chosen Orion over him four centuries ago for exactly this reason—Ambrose's hunger for domination rather than protection, his willingness to sacrifice others for personal gain. While Orion had dedicated himself to preserving their ways, building alliances, and protecting their kind, Ambrose had apparently been nursing his grudge, waiting for revenge.

He would twist Seraphina's gift to corrupt everything I've built.

The thought of his Luna being forced to serve this creature's ambition made Orion's blood boil. A deep, rumbling growl emanated from his chest, the sound of ancient fury finally unleashed. The room seemed to vibrate with it.

"Finish this," Chance's voice broke through in the wolf's telepathic channel that all shifters shared. "I've got these jokers handled."

Chance slammed his opponent against the wall, teeth bared inches from the struggling wolf's throat. Behind them, the elite guards had their adversary pinned, outmatched and outmaneuvered.

Iverson—no, Ambrose—sensed his disadvantage. His wolves falling. His schemes unraveling. The black wolf made a desperate lunge toward Seraphina, clearly

intending to use her as leverage.

It was exactly the opening Orion needed.

Orion had learned many things over his years of being king. Patience. Strategy. Diplomacy. But it had never dimmed the primal instinct that came with being alpha—the drive to protect what was his at all costs.

With a burst of speed that belied his massive size, Orion intercepted, his body a wall of muscle and gray fur between Ambrose and Seraphina. The impact sent both wolves skidding across the polished floor, claws scraping for purchase as they tumbled in a tangle of teeth and fur.

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Ambrose fought with the desperation of a cornered animal, slashing and biting with wild abandon. One lucky strike caught Orion across his muzzle, sending hot blood spattering across the floor. The pain focused him further.

Four centuries I've carried the weight of our people. Four centuries I've built peace and prosperity while you plotted in darkness.

Orion fainted right, drawing Ambrose into overcommitting. The black wolf stumbled, off-balance for just a fraction of a second—all the time Orion needed.

He struck with the collective force of four hundred years of responsibility, his massive jaws closing around Ambrose's throat. His teeth sank through fur and flesh, meeting no resistance until they closed on the vital pulse beneath.

Ambrose's struggles grew weaker, his eyes wide with the realization of final defeat.

For my Luna. For my pack. For the peace you would have destroyed.

With one powerful twist, Orion ended the threat that had haunted their kind for centuries. The body beneath him went limp, the light fading from those cold blue eyes. Justice, four hundred years delayed.

Across the room, Chance and the guards had finished their own battles. The silence that followed seemed deafening after the chaos of combat.

Orion stood over his fallen enemy, blood matting his gray fur, his chest heaving with exertion. The wolf inside him howled in victory, but he kept the sound contained.

This was no moment for celebration—merely necessity.

From the corner where she'd pressed herself for safety, Seraphina watched with wide eyes, her hand at her bruised throat, her breath coming in shallow gasps.

Mine to protect. Mine to cherish. Mine to love.

Orion approached Seraphina cautiously, his wolf form padding silently across the blood-spattered floor. The scent of her fear stung his nostrils, but beneath it was something else—wonder and a spark of recognition. He kept his movements slow and deliberate. The last thing he wanted was to frighten her more than the carnage around them already had.

She's seen too much violence in one day. My Luna shouldn't have to witness such brutality.

Seraphina's breathing was rapid, her heart hammering like a frightened bird's. Yet as he drew closer, she didn't shrink away. Instead, she lifted a trembling hand toward him.

"Is it... is it really you in there, Orion?" she whispered.

He rumbled low in his chest, a gentle sound meant to reassure, and moved closer until her outstretched fingers connected with his fur. The first touch was hesitant, her fingertips barely grazing the silver-gray coat along his muzzle. Then her hand flattened, stroking along his head with growing confidence.

Orion closed his eyes, savoring her touch. No female had ever touched his wolf form with such gentle curiosity. Her fingers traced the path where Iverson's claws had marked him, careful around the drying blood, and something possessive and primal stirred within him.

He felt her heartbeat slowing, her breathing evening out. The sharp tang of fear in her scent gradually mellowed into something sweeter. When he looked up, her face had transformed—reverence replacing terror.

Only then did he step back, focusing on the shift. His bones realigned, fur receded, and within seconds he stood before her in his human form, naked and unashamed. Blood from his injuries streaked across his muscular torso, but he paid it no mind as he reached for her.

"Come here," he commanded, his voice rough with emotion.

Seraphina launched herself into his arms with surprising force. He caught her effortlessly, crushing her against his chest, one hand tangling in her black hair while the other spanned her lower back.

"You came for me," she whispered against his skin.

Orion pulled back just enough to look into her eyes. "I would tear apart the entire world to find you. There was never any question."

She nodded, tears welling in those bright green eyes. "I want to go with you—back to the island. Your island. Our island."

Something fierce and territorial expanded in his chest at her words. "Say that again."

"Ourisland," she repeated, stronger this time.

Orion captured her mouth in a searing kiss, pouring immense longing into it. She responded with equal passion, her body molding against his as if she'd been made for him alone.

"As touching as this reunion is," Chance interrupted, clearing his throat dramatically, "maybe we should get moving before the senator's other goons figure out what happened here."

Orion reluctantly broke the kiss, though he kept one arm firmly around Seraphina's waist. "Always the mood killer, Chance."

His beta grinned despite the blood spattered across his face. "One of my many talents. That, and impeccable timing."

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Orion retrieved the tattered guard's uniform he'd been wearing, grimacing as he pulled it on. The fabric was ripped in several places, but it would have to do until they reached the boat.

"Stay close to me," he instructed Seraphina, his tone brooking no argument.

She nodded, pressing against his side as they made their way through the corridors. Chance and the two elite guards formed a protective formation around them. Every sense remained on high alert as they navigated through the estate and into the jungle beyond.

The dense vegetation provided welcome cover as they moved swiftly toward the hidden cove. When they reached his stashed clothes, Orion changed quickly into his dark jeans and crisp black dress shirt, making sure to keep Seraphina in his sight.

Chance radioed the second team. "Package secured. Heading to extraction point. Meet you at Tristan's."

Static crackled before a voice responded. "Copy that. Western perimeter clear."

The speedboat sliced through the water, carrying them away from Iverson's island. Orion kept Seraphina tucked against his side, his arm a steel band around her shoulders. The salt spray misted her face, giving her skin a dewy glow that made his wolf rumble with appreciation.

"You were magnificent," she said softly, her fingers tracing patterns on his thigh. "Terrifying, but magnificent."

"Did I frighten you?" The question revealed more vulnerability than he'd normally allowed himself to show.

"No," she answered immediately. "You made me feel safe. Even as a wolf—especially as a wolf—I knew you wouldn't hurt me."

Pride swelled in him. His Luna was not only powerful but brave. The perfect match for a king who'd waited several lifetimes.

Within the hour, they had boarded the helicopter for the final leg home. As the aircraft lifted, giving them a panoramic view of the turquoise waters below, Orion reached into his pocket and withdrew the sapphire necklace.

"I believe this belongs to you," he said, the deep blue stone shimmering in the sunlight.

Seraphina's eyes widened. "You brought it with you?"

"I knew I would find you and bring you back home where you belong."

She turned, lifting her hair to expose the delicate nape of her neck. Orion fastened the clasp, then bent to press his lips against her skin, inhaling her intoxicating scent.

"Everything I have is yours," he murmured against her ear, "When we get home, I intend to show you exactly what that means."

TWENTY-ONE

SERAPHINA

The helicopter lowered onto the small airstrip on Orion's island, and the vibration

beneath Seraphina's feet gradually stilled as the engine powered down. Through the tinted window, she could see the castle—Orion's castle—standing tall against the backdrop of the setting sun. It looked different now. Not like a cage but a sanctuary.

Orion opened the helicopter door and jumped down first, his powerful frame moving with fluid grace. He turned, extending his hand toward her.

"Let me help you, Luna," he said, his deep voice carrying easily over the dying whine of the rotors.

Seraphina placed her hand in his, feeling the warmth of his skin against hers as she stepped down, her sundress fluttering around her knees.

Chance approached them, flanked by the dozen pack members who'd assisted Orion in rescuing Seraphina from Iverson's estate, their eyes shining with victory.

"Thank you for coming for me," Seraphina said, her voice filled with emotion. "All of you."

Orion squeezed her hand before turning to his beta. "Chance, I owe you more than I can express."

Chance's mouth quirked in a half-smile. "Just doing my job as your beta. Plus, I thought we might need to leave some evidence behind, make it look more like an act of revenge from his enemies. Disposing of a U.S. Senator would've raised questions otherwise."

"The world is better without him," Orion said firmly. "His ambitions would have brought destruction to humans and shifters alike."

One of the elite guards stepped forward. "We would do anything for our alpha." His

gaze shifted to Seraphina. "And for our Luna."

A warmth bloomed in Seraphina's chest at the word. Luna. She had resisted the title, fearing the responsibility it carried. Now, looking at these faces—these people who had risked their lives for her—she felt a sense of belonging she had never experienced.

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"Thank you," she said again, unable to express the depth of her gratitude.

After the pack dispersed, Orion turned to her. His gray eyes gleamed in the fading sun, making them shine like polished silver. "Would you like to take a walk on the beach? After everything that's happened, I think we both could use some peace."

"I'd like that," she replied, suddenly aware of how tense her muscles still felt.

He led her down a winding path to the shore where pristine white sand met the gentle wash of turquoise waves. The setting sun painted the sky in bold strokes of orange and pink, reflecting off the water like scattered diamonds.

"It looks like a painting," Seraphina murmured, slipping off her sandals to feel the cool sand between her toes.

"One of the reasons I chose this place," Orion said, watching her. "I've never tired of this view."

They walked in companionable silence for a while, the rhythmic sound of the waves soothing Seraphina's frayed nerves. When they reached a secluded curve of the beach, Orion stopped and stepped behind her, wrapping his strong arms around her waist.

Seraphina leaned back against him, savoring the solid warmth of his chest. His chin rested atop her head as they watched the sun sink lower toward the horizon, painting the sky in ever-deepening shades of crimson and gold.

"I thought I might've lost you today," he whispered, his breath stirring her hair.

She placed her hands over his where they rested on her stomach. "For a moment there, I thought my vision would come true—that he would kill you."

"It would take more than a power-hungry wolf to separate me from my Luna." His arms tightened possessively around her, and she felt the rumble of his next words against her back. "You're mine to protect. Mine to cherish. Mine to love."

Seraphina turned in his embrace, tilting her face up to his. The intensity in his gaze took her breath away. The man before her—this powerful alpha king—had crossed islands and battled enemies for her. And here, with the dying sun gilding his features, she knew with absolute certainty that she belonged with him.

"And you're mine to honor, to support, and to love," she whispered back.

Seraphina's heart raced as Orion's lips claimed hers. The kiss was a soft brush of reassurance before deepening into something more. His hands cradled her face as if she were something infinitely precious. She melted into him, her fingers tangling in the fabric of his shirt, pulling him closer until their bodies pressed together beneath the glow of the setting sun.

When they finally parted, both breathing raggedly, Orion's eyes gleamed with a possessiveness that sent a thrill through her. "You're all mine now," he growled softly, the alpha in him unmistakable. "And I'll spend the rest of my life making sure you never doubt it."

Before she could say anything, he scooped her up effortlessly. Seraphina laughed, a breathless, surprised sound, as her arms instinctively looped around his neck. "Where are you taking me?"

"Somewhere I can show you exactly what you mean to me," Orion said, his voice a deep rumble that vibrated through her. He carried her down the beach, his strides long and sure, until they reached a private tented cabana nestled on the shoreline. The white curtains billowed in the ocean breeze, and the interior was lit by the soft, emerging moonlight.

Orion laid her on the plush bed, the sheets cool against her skin. He loomed over her, his eyes dark with desire as he stripped her sundress away with deliberate slowness, his fingers trailing over her body as if memorizing every curve.

"You're magnificent," he murmured, his voice husky. "Every inch of you."

She shivered under his gaze, her skin tingling where his fingers lingered. When she was bare before him, his lips brushed against her collarbone, then lower, tracing a path of fire across her skin. His beard scraped lightly against her, the sensation sending jolts of pleasure through her.

"Orion," she gasped, her hands fisting in the sheets as his mouth found her breast, his tongue circling her nipple before drawing it into his mouth. She arched into him, her body alive in ways she'd never imagined.

He shifted lower, his hands sliding down her thighs as he settled his face between her legs. His breath was warm against her most sensitive flesh, and she trembled in anticipation.

"Relax," he whispered, his voice a command she couldn't ignore. "Let me take care of you."

His tongue flicked against her, a slow, teasing stroke that made her gasp. He took his time, exploring her with an intensity that left her breathless, his movements deliberate and unhurried. Her hips pressed into him, her fingers threading through his dark hair

as she lost herself completely in the sensations he was drawing from her.

"You taste like heaven," he murmured, the rumble of his voice sending vibrations through her. His lips closed around her, sucking gently, and she cried out, her body tightening as pleasure coiled deep within her.

"Orion, I—" Her words broke off into a moan as he increased the pace, his tongue circling her clit with unrelenting precision. She was spiraling, her body trembling on the edge of release. "I can't—oh, please?—"

"Come for me, Luna," he growled, his voice a command that sent her crashing over the edge.

Her body convulsed, waves of pleasure washing over her as she cried out his name. He didn't stop, drawing out her orgasm until she was quivering beneath him, her mind blank except for the knowledge that this man—this alpha—had known exactly how to satisfy her.

When he finally pulled away, she was boneless, her chest rising and falling rapidly as she struggled to catch her breath. Orion crawled up her body, his eyes burning with satisfaction.

"That's just the first round," Orion growled softly. "I'm going to spend the rest of the night showing you exactly what it means to be mine."

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Seraphina's heart swelled, her body still humming with the aftermath of pleasure. She reached up, her fingers tracing the strong line of his jaw. "Orion," she whispered. "I want to be yours. Completely."

His gaze softened for a moment, a flicker of tenderness breaking through the raw desire. "Then let me claim you, Seraphina. Let me give you my mate mark. I'll do it as we both come undone. You'll feel it—our bond, our connection—like nothing you've ever known."

Her breath hitched, her eyes locking with his. "Yes," she said, her voice steady despite the sea of emotions swirling inside her. "I want your mark. I want to be yours forever."

Orion didn't hesitate. He stripped off his black dress shirt, the muscles of his chest and arms rippling with the movement, and then his dark jeans and boxers followed, leaving him gloriously bare. Seraphina's breath caught at the sight of him—his powerful frame, the intricate tattoos on his upper arms that marked him as alpha, the sheer dominance that radiated from every inch of him. He was magnificent, and he was hers.

He settled over her, his weight pressing her into the soft sheets as he positioned himself between her thighs. His large member, thick and throbbing, brushed against her entrance. She gasped at the sensation, tilting her head back.

"Look at me," he commanded softly.

She obeyed, her eyes meeting his as he slid into her in one smooth, deliberate stroke.

Her breath left her in a rush, her body stretching to accommodate him, the fullness of him making her head spin. He paused, giving her a moment to adjust, his gaze never leaving hers.

"You feel incredible," he murmured, his voice thick with need.

"So do you," she whispered, her hands sliding up his arms to grip his shoulders.

He began to move, slow and deliberate, each thrust drawing a soft moan from her lips. But as her body responded, her hips rising to meet his, he increased the pace, his movements becoming harder, faster, and deeper. The sound of their bodies coming together filled the air, a primal rhythm that matched the pounding of her heart.

Seraphina's world narrowed to the feel of him inside her, the heat of his skin against hers, and the way his muscles flexed with every thrust. The bond between them sang, a connection that went beyond the physical, and she could feel it now with a clarity that left her breathless. It was as if their souls were intertwined, each movement bringing them closer together.

"Orion," she gasped, her nails digging into his shoulders as pleasure coiled tight in her core. "I'm so close."

"Not yet," he growled, his voice rough with restraint. He grabbed her legs, pushing them up to her chest, and the new angle allowed him to drive into her even deeper. She cried out, her body trembling as he hit a spot inside her that sent sparks of pleasure shooting through her veins.

"Now," he commanded, his voice a low, guttural growl. "Come for me."

She didn't hold back any longer. Her body convulsed, her inner walls tightening around him as her orgasm crashed over her in waves. She cried out, her vision

blurring as pleasure consumed her. At the same moment, Orion leaned forward, his teeth sinking into the soft flesh of her shoulder. The sharp pain mingled with the overwhelming pleasure, and she felt the bond between them solidify, a connection that was unbreakable now.

He spilled himself inside her, his release hot and deep, and she felt another, smaller orgasm ripple through her as he licked the blood from the bite mark he'd left on her shoulder. The sensation was intoxicating, a mix of pain and pleasure that left her trembling in his arms.

Orion pulled back slightly, his eyes meeting hers. "You're mine forever," he said, his voice gentle but filled with possessiveness.

"Forever," she echoed. She reached up, her fingers tracing the mark he'd left on her shoulder, a symbol of their bond. "I'm yours, Orion."

Suddenly, a wave of intoxicating heat washed through Seraphina's body, radiating from Orion's bite. The mark on her shoulder throbbed, but the pain quickly transformed into something else entirely—a tingling sensation that spread through her veins like liquid fire. Her skin prickled with an unfamiliar energy that made her gasp.

"Orion—something's happening," she whispered, her voice tight with confusion. Her muscles twitched and spasmed beneath her skin, and a peculiar pressure built in her chest. "I feel...strange..."

Orion pulled back, his eyes widening with recognition as he gazed down at her. A smile of pure masculine satisfaction spread across his face.

"Your wolf is awakening," he said, his voice a low rumble of approval. He brushed his fingers over the mark on her shoulder. "The mate mark has awakened what was dormant inside you."

Seraphina's breath came in short gasps as the sensation intensified. Her bones felt too large for her skin, and her vision sharpened until she could count the individual beads of water clinging to the cabana curtains in the moonlight.

"It hurts," she panted, panic rising as her fingers began to elongate. "Orion, I'm scared!"

He gathered her trembling body against his chest, his strong arms anchoring her to reality as the transformation took hold. "I've got you, Seraphina. Don't fight it—let your wolf come forward."

"How?" she gasped, tears pricking her eyes as her spine arched involuntarily.

"Listen inside yourself," he murmured into her ear, his voice steady and commanding. "She's calling to you. She's always been there, waiting. Can you hear her?"

Seraphina closed her eyes and focused inward. Beyond the discomfort, beyond the fear, she sensed something wild and beautiful stirring to life—an ancient consciousness stretching awake after years of slumber. The presence was distinctly feminine, powerful yet playful, and utterly, unquestionably hers.

"I feel her," Seraphina breathed, wonder replacing fear. "She wants out."

"Then let her come," Orion encouraged, his hand stroking along her spine. "Surrender to the change. I'll be right here with you."

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Seraphina inhaled deeply and stopped resisting. The transformation accelerated, her bones cracking and reshaping as fur sprouted across her skin. The pain was intense but fleeting, and within moments, she found herself on four paws, her senses exploding with new information.

The world had transformed. Scents bombarded her—the salt of the ocean, the musk of Orion's skin, and the subtle perfume of tropical flowers carried on the breeze. She could hear the heartbeat of a bird nesting in a palm tree fifty yards away. The moonlight painted the beach in shades of silver that her human eyes could never have perceived.

Orion shifted beside her, his massive gray form materializing with practiced ease. His wolf was magnificent—powerful shoulders, intelligent silver-golden eyes, and a coat that shimmered like smoke in the moonlight.

You're beautiful, his voice resonated in her mind, their mate bond allowing communication without words. A white wolf with markings like the night sky. Perfect for the Luna of the Starlight pack.

Seraphina glanced down at her paws, then caught her reflection in a puddle of seawater nearby. Her wolf was elegant and lithe with pristine white fur dotted with black patches that indeed resembled stars scattered across a snowy landscape. Her eyes remained the same vibrant green.

This feels...incredible, she projected, amazed at the ease with which she'd taken to this new form. It felt right as though she'd been incomplete her entire life without knowing it.

Orion gently nudged her shoulder with his muzzle. Come. Run with me, Luna.

He took off down the beach, and without conscious thought, Seraphina bounded after him. Her new body moved with breathtaking speed and grace, paws digging into the cool sand as she chased her mate under the silver moon. Every muscle worked in perfect harmony, and freedom—pure, unadulterated freedom—coursed through her veins.

She caught up to Orion, playfully nipping at his flank before darting ahead. His answering growl was one of delight rather than warning, and he redoubled his pace to give chase. They raced along the shoreline, weaving between driftwood and splashing through the shallow surf, their movements a perfect dance of push and pull.

I never imagined feeling this alive, Seraphina marveled as they paused atop a small dune, the island spread out before them. Is it always like this?

Orion's wolf pressed against her side, his larger form providing warmth in the cooling night air. It gets better. You're part of something ancient and beautiful now. You're home, Seraphina. You've finally found where you truly belong.

She looked out at the ocean, then back toward the distant lights of the castle, and finally at her mate beside her. For the first time in her thirty years, the pieces fell into perfect alignment. The stars she'd spent years studying now seemed to shimmer in approval from above, and the wolf inside her howled with joy.

Without thinking, Seraphina tilted her head back and let out a long, melodious howl that carried across the island—the first of many as the Luna of the Starlight pack.

EPILOGUE

Seraphina stood before the full-length mirror, hardly recognizing the woman who

gazed back at her. Three weeks ago, she had been an astronomer with a logical worldview. Now, she was a wolf shifter with precognitive abilities about to marry the four-hundred-year-old alpha king of the Starlight pack.

The transformation wasn't just spiritual or supernatural—it showed in her physical appearance too. Her skin glowed with vitality, her green eyes sparkled with newfound confidence, and her black hair, styled in loose waves cascading down her back, shimmered with starlight.

"Hold still," Macie instructed, adjusting the crystal hairpiece that anchored Seraphina's simple veil. "If you keep bouncing, I'm going to stab you with this pin."

"Sorry." Seraphina inhaled slowly, trying to calm the excitement bubbling inside her. "I just can't believe this is happening."

Abby circled her, her blonde friend's reflection appearing beside Seraphina's in the mirror as she tugged at the strapless bodice of the wedding gown. "I mean, seriously? You disappear for a few days, and come back engaged to a freaking wolf king with a private island? And now you can turn into a gorgeous white wolf and see the future?" She threw her hands up dramatically. "And I thought I was living my best life when I scored free VIP passes to Eclipse last summer!"

Seraphina laughed, the sound lighter than it had been in years. Her wolf—that once-dormant part of herself—hummed with contentment beneath her skin, recognizing that in less than an hour, she would be officially bound to her mate in human tradition as well as wolf.

"You look absolutely stunning," Verna said, her normally efficient demeanor softened with genuine emotion. She straightened the train of Seraphina's gown, the delicate fabric embroidered with tiny crystals that caught the light like stars. "The king won't be able to take his eyes off you."

A flush crept up Seraphina's neck at the thought of Orion waiting for her at the end of the aisle. Even after three weeks of sharing his bed, his castle, and his life, her body still responded to his mere presence like a compass finding true north.

"Speaking of hunky wolf kings," Abby said, wiggling her eyebrows as she applied a final touch of blush to Seraphina's cheeks, "any chance there's a spare royal shifter lying around for me? I'm not picky—prince, duke, knight of the realm. I just need someone with those gorgeous wolf eyes and preferably abs like your man."

Macie snorted. "Trust me, you don't want to get mixed up with shifters. They're all insufferably stubborn. Just ask Chance how many arguments we've had about proper surfboard storage."

"But the making up must be worth it." Abby winked.

Seraphina felt another wave of heat rush to her cheeks, thinking of how Orion's stubbornness manifested in the bedroom—his dominant need to claim her and possess her completely. The mate bond between them thrummed with anticipation.

"Trust me," Seraphina murmured, a small smile playing on her lips, "it is."

A gentle knock at the door preceded Bertram's entrance, the elder's face creased with a smile. "It's time, my Luna."

His announcement sent a thrill through Seraphina. Not just to be Orion's wife soon, but to officially be the Luna of the Starlight pack—a leader, protector, and the spiritual center of the pack. The responsibility had terrified her at first, but now it felt right, as if she'd been preparing for this role her entire life without knowing it.

"How does he look?" Seraphina asked, her voice slightly breathless.

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"Like a king who's found his queen," Bertram replied. "And like a man who might tear the island apart if he has to wait one minute longer."

Seraphina laughed, picturing Orion pacing impatiently on the beach, his powerful body restless, and those intense gray eyes scanning the path from the castle. Their mate bond allowed her to sense his anticipation, his desire, and his absolute certainty that she was his destiny.

"Well," she said, gathering her bouquet, "we shouldn't keep him waiting."

Seraphina's heart pounded wildly as she stood at the end of the path leading from the castle. Before her, two hundred guests sat in white chairs adorned with silver ribbons and stargazer lilies that lined a pathway of scattered rose petals leading to a flower-draped archway. Beyond that, the ocean stretched endlessly, its azure surface catching the golden light of the setting sun on this final day of the year—December 31st. The perfect ending, and the perfect beginning.

Her fingers tightened around her bouquet, a collection of white lilies and stargazer orchids interspersed with sprigs of lavender and baby's breath. The sapphire necklace Orion had gifted her three weeks ago rested against her collarbone, its cool weight a reminder of his first attempt to win her heart and how far they'd come since that awkward offering.

She took in a deep breath, inhaling the salt air mingled with the fragrance of flowers, and then her gaze found him.

Orion stood tall and regal at the end of the aisle, his broad shoulders encased in a

tailored black suit that emphasized his powerful physique. His dark hair was styled neatly, his sharp jawline was accentuated by his neatly trimmed beard, and those intense gray eyes—those eyes that had seen centuries pass—were fixed solely on her.

The moment their eyes locked, the bond between them flared, a vibrant pulse of emotion that nearly stole her breath. Need. Devotion. Possessiveness. Love. All these and more flowed from him to her, almost overwhelming in their intensity.

"Oh," she whispered, feeling tears prick at her eyes.

"You look magnificent, my dear," Bertram said, stepping to her side and offering his arm. The elder's eyes crinkled with genuine affection, his weathered face a picture of paternal pride. "Are you ready to make an old king very happy?"

She nodded, blinking rapidly to clear the emotional haze. "I'm ready."

Music swelled—a quartet playing a melody that Orion had insisted was part of ancient pack tradition—and the guests rose to their feet. At the front, Orion stood straighter, his shoulders squaring as if preparing for battle. But as Bertram led her forward, Seraphina noticed something she'd never expected to see: moisture gathering in those steely eyes.

Her own eyes welled up in response. The big, fierce alpha, her warrior, her protector, was fighting tears.

"He's been waiting a long time for you," Bertram whispered as they approached the halfway point. "I've never seen him like this."

The walk seemed both eternal and far too brief. With each step, memories flashed through her mind—their first meeting on the Miami beach, their first kiss on his private beach in the bright sunlight, and their first run together as wolves on that same

beach beneath a big and bright moon. Three weeks that had changed everything.

When they reached the arch, Bertram placed her hand in Orion's much larger one. His fingers closed around hers with gentle possessiveness, his thumb brushing over her knuckles in a subtle caress that sent a delicious shiver through her.

"Finally," Orion murmured, his deep voice rough with barely contained emotion.

The officiant—Chance, sporting a grin that threatened to split his face—began the ceremony, but Seraphina barely heard the words. All she could focus on was Orion, his presence, his scent, the heat radiating from his body, and the electricity that sparked where their skin touched.

When the time came for vows, Orion spoke without notes. "Seraphina. My Luna." His fingers tightened on hers. "For four hundred years, I've ruled alone, convinced that power and duty were enough. I was a fool." He swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing. "You've shown me that strength comes not just from control, but from connection. From vulnerability. From love."

His eyes brimmed with emotion. "I vow to protect you with every breath in my body. I vow to cherish you with every beat of my heart. I vow to be not just your king, but your partner, your lover, and your friend. For as long as the stars shine above us, you will never walk alone."

Tears spilled freely down Seraphina's cheeks. She had prepared vows, had written and rewritten them a dozen times, but in this moment, looking up at this powerful man who had claimed her so completely, the carefully crafted words fled her mind.

"Orion," she began, her voice trembling. "Three weeks ago, I was lost—a woman with powers I didn't understand in a world that suddenly made no sense. You found me. You showed me who I truly am." She reached up to touch the sapphire at her

throat. "I was afraid of belonging to anyone, of being possessed. But now I know that belonging to you means finding my true self."

Her voice strengthened. "I vow to stand beside you, to support you, and to challenge you when you need it. I vow to be your Luna, your wife, and your partner in all things. I may have only known you three weeks, but my soul recognizes yours across lifetimes."

A rumble of approval rose from Orion's chest, and for a moment, the wolf showed in his eyes—possessive, primal, and proud.

Chance cleared his throat. "The rings?"

They exchanged bands—a band of hammered platinum with a subtle engraving of wolf paws running its circumference for him and a delicate band of platinum set with tiny sapphires and diamonds that complemented her sapphire necklace for her.

"By the power vested in me by, well, this guy right here," Chance grinned, nodding at Orion, "I pronounce you husband and wife, Alpha and Luna, King and Queen of the Starlight pack. You may kiss your bride—although I'm sure nobody here could stop you if they tried."

Orion's hands framed her face, his touch surprisingly gentle for a man of such strength. "Mine," he whispered, the single word carrying the weight of centuries of waiting.

"Yours," she agreed, rising onto her toes to meet him halfway.

His lips claimed hers in a kiss that quickly ignited into something more—a promise, a claim, and a declaration to everyone present that she was his and he was hers, now and forever. His arms wrapped around her, lifting her slightly off the ground as the

cheers of the pack surrounded them.

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Before long, they broke apart, breathless and laughing. As she watched Orion in that moment, laughing and happy, Seraphina realized with startling clarity that this was the vision she'd had three weeks ago where she saw him laughing with her. The realization made her heart swell with pure joy.

Seraphina's heart fluttered as Orion's strong hand guided her through the castle's grand double doors into the ballroom. She gasped, momentarily overcome by the transformation of the space. Crystal chandeliers cast a warm glow over tables draped in midnight blue linens adorned with centerpieces of stargazer lilies and silver candelabras. The ceiling had been decorated to mirror the night sky, stars twinkling above them just as they did outside.

"Do you approve, my Luna?" Orion whispered, his breath warm against her ear.

"It's magical," Seraphina breathed, squeezing his hand. "Like dancing under the stars without leaving the castle."

Her attention was suddenly captured by three women rushing toward her from across the room, their faces alight with joy. Lorelei led the charge, her brown hair swept up in an elegant updo, her earth powers evident in the subtle glow of her skin. Behind her was Helena, her flame-red hair cascading down her back, tiny sparks dancing in her hazel eyes. Isolde followed, her blonde hair shimmering with what looked like droplets of water that never fell, her sea-green eyes bright with emotion.

"You did it!" Lorelei exclaimed, pulling Seraphina into a tight embrace. "You're one of us now!"

Seraphina returned the hug, her heart swelling. She stood among her college friends who had all, remarkably, undergone similar transformations.

"The Luna Life Club is complete," Helena laughed, joining the hug. "Though I still can't believe you snagged the oldest, grumpiest alpha of them all." She winked at Orion, who surprised Seraphina by not growling at the teasing.

"Hey, watch it," Seraphina said with a grin. "That's my mate you're talking about."

"And don't you forget it," Orion rumbled, his arm sliding possessively around her waist. The heat of his touch through the delicate fabric of her wedding dress sent warmth pooling low in her belly.

Isolde's eyes were bright with unshed tears. "When my powers manifested and caused that tidal wave, I thought my life was over. I never imagined..." She glanced over her shoulder at Nereus, who was deep in conversation with Draken and Sol across the room, the three alphas cutting imposing figures in their formal wear.

"That you'd find your own sexy wolf?" Seraphina finished for her, laughing. "I know exactly what you mean. I was convinced I was going crazy, and now..." She leaned into Orion's solid presence, drawing strength from his warmth.

"Now you're the Luna of the Starlight pack," Lorelei said, her tone part proud, part impressed. "Draken says Orion's pack is one of the oldest and most powerful."

"Second only to mine, of course," Draken called over, his enhanced hearing picking up their conversation. The alpha of the Moonshadow pack lifted his glass in salute.

"In your dreams, pup," Orion shot back, but Seraphina felt his chest rumble with amusement against her back.

Helena twirled her red hair, tiny flames dancing harmlessly across her skin. "So, what's next for the astronomer turned wolf queen?"

Seraphina's eyes brightened. "Actually, Orion's given me the observatory. I'm establishing my own research facility here."

"So, you're still going to work?" Helena asked.

"Of course, she is," Orion answered before Seraphina could, his voice firm but filled with pride. "My Luna has one of the finest minds in astronomy. Why would I keep her from the stars that led her to me?"

Seraphina tilted her head back to look up at him, her heart expanding with love. For all his dominant alpha tendencies, Orion understood her need for purpose beyond being his mate.

The music shifted, a slow, haunting melody filling the air. Orion's grip on her waist tightened infinitesimally.

"Ladies," he nodded to her friends, his tone polite but brooking no argument, "if you'll excuse us, I'd like to dance with my wife."

The possessive rumble in his voice when he said "my wife" sent a delicious thrill through Seraphina. Her friends exchanged knowing looks before stepping aside, returning to their own mates who waited patiently nearby.

"Marking your territory?" Seraphina teased as Orion led her to the center of the dance floor, which cleared immediately for them.

"Always," he replied unapologetically, turning her to face him. One large hand settled on the small of her back, the other capturing hers as he pulled her close enough that

she could feel the heat radiating from him. Her body responded instantly, melting against him as if they'd danced together for centuries.

The pack watched from the perimeter as Orion guided her in slow, graceful circles. For a man so physically powerful, he moved with surprising elegance.

"Happy?" he murmured, his eyes locked on hers with an intensity that still took her breath away.

"Deliriously," she admitted, feeling the bond between them pulse with shared joy. "I never imagined this would be my life."

"I waited four centuries for you," Orion said, his voice lowering to a register only she could hear. "Every starry night, every century that passed, was leading me to you."

Tears pricked at Seraphina's eyes. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting so long."

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"It was well worth it," he said softly, spinning her in a slow circle before drawing her even closer, his lips brushing her temple. "Every moment with you is worth centuries of being alone."

As they turned, Seraphina caught glimpses of her friends with their mates—Draken whispering something that made Lorelei actually blush, Sol's hand resting possessively on Helena's hip, and Nereus looking at Isolde with undisguised hunger. All of them had found their other halves, all of them transformed by love and magic.

"What are you thinking?" Orion asked, his thumb caressing the sensitive skin of her wrist.

"That I'm the luckiest woman alive," Seraphina replied honestly. "I have powers I'm learning to control, friends who understand what I'm going through, and you." She rose onto her tiptoes, pressing a soft kiss to his lips. "My alpha."

Orion's eyes flashed with heat, his grip on her tightening. "Say that again," he demanded in a low growl that vibrated through her.

"My alpha," she whispered, feeling the wolf inside her rise to the surface, responding to his dominance with a willing submission that still pleasantly surprised her.

"My Luna," he replied, his voice low and possessive.

He pulled her flush against his body and captured her mouth in a kiss that began gentle but quickly deepened into something that had the Starlight pack hooting and whistling around them. In that perfect moment, under the decorative twinkling stars,

Seraphina truly knew she was home.