



Moon's Call (Royal Lupine Elementals #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Lorelei Chandas blueprints never prepared her for the ground literally shifting beneath her feet. On her thirtieth birthday, mysterious tremors rock the city. Before she can make sense of her world turning upside down, a devastatingly handsome stranger appears with an impossible claim: she's causing the earthquakes with powers she never knew she possessed.

Prince Draken Xander, the commanding alpha of the Moonshadow 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 earth-shattering powers and eyes that make his wolf howl for connection. Tradition demands he reject this match, but every protective instinct in his body roars to claim and protect her.

As Lorelei struggles to control the raw power surging through her veins, an undeniable attraction builds between them—one as primal and unstoppable as the elements themselves. When dark forces close in, determined to harness Lorelei's power for themselves, she must embrace her newfound abilities while Draken faces the ultimate choice: uphold pack tradition or follow his heart to the human mate who's shaken the very foundation of his world.

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ONE

DRAKEN

Moonlight filtered through the dense canopy and cast silver patterns across Draken's gray fur as he bounded through the familiar terrain of his territory. The summer night buzzed with energy, crickets providing nature's symphony while fireflies danced between the trees. His powerful muscles flexed with each leap, and he relished the freedom that came with running in his wolf form.

Race you to Miller's Creek! Chuck's voice echoed through their pack link, followed by the mental laughter of the other pack members.

Draken's wolf huffed in amusement. You're on.

The pack surged forward, weaving between ancient oaks and leaping over fallen logs. The full moon pulled at their wild nature and made their blood surge with primal joy. Pine needles and soft earth cushioned their paws as they raced through the darkness. Their enhanced vision turned the shadowy forest into a playground.

Slowing down in your old age, Alpha? one of the younger wolves teased as he tried to edge past.

Draken responded by putting on an extra burst of speed, easily outpacing the challenger. You were saying?

The cool night air carried the scent of blooming honeysuckle and fresh water from the

nearby creek. Draken's heart pounded with exhilaration, his wolf reveling in this simple pleasure of running with his pack.

Suddenly, the ground beneath their paws trembled. Draken skidded to a halt, his claws digging into the earth as the forest floor shuddered. The vibration traveled up through his legs and set his fur on end.

What the hell? Chuck's surprised voice echoed in their minds.

The rest of the pack clustered around their alpha, their playful mood shifting to alert watchfulness. The tremor lasted only seconds, but it left an unsettling feeling in its wake.

Everyone okay? Draken's mental voice carried his authority, automatically checking on his pack's well-being.

A chorus of affirmative responses came back through the pack link. The woods had gone eerily quiet. The wildlife was equally startled by the unexpected movement.

Since when do we get earthquakes here? one of the pack members asked.

We don't, Draken replied, his hackles rising as he scanned the darkened forest.

The energy signature suddenly hit Draken like a physical blow, resonating deep in his bones. His wolf's connection to the earth picked up something far more significant than a simple geological event. This signature... it sang to him, called to the very essence of his being.

His mate. After centuries of waiting, she'd finally awakened.

Draken's gray fur bristled as the foreign, yet familiar energy coursed through the

ground beneath his paws. Each pulse matched his heartbeat, creating a symphony that only he could fully appreciate. His wolf wanted to throw back his head and howl with joy, but the alpha in him maintained control.

That's weird, Chuck's mental voice broke through Draken's thoughts. Never felt the earth respond like that before.

Draken remained silent as he processed this unexpected development. He'd given up hope of finding his Luna a while ago, focusing instead on leading his pack and managing their sovereign territory. Now? The thought of sharing his carefully ordered life with another made his wolf pace restlessly.

Should we investigate? another pack member asked through their link.

The energy signature pulsed again, weaker this time but unmistakable. Draken's muscles tensed as he fought the urge to chase it down, to track the source of that compelling power. Not yet. He needed time to think and to plan.

Alpha? Chuck's concerned voice cut through his internal struggle. You're being awfully quiet about this.

Draken shook out his fur, buying time before responding. Just analyzing the situation.

Right. Analyzing. Chuck's mental tone carried a hint of amusement.

The pack soon fell silent, though Draken could sense their curiosity through their mental connection. A dark brown wolf emerged from the shadows, his movements deliberate and graceful. Scorpio's presence commanded attention even in wolf form. As Draken's advisor approached, the other wolves instinctively stepped back, creating space for the two dominant wolves.

I know you felt it. Scorpio's mental voice carried centuries of wisdom. The earth responded to her awakening.

Draken's muscles twitched under his gray fur. The whole pack felt it, even those not here?

Every last one of us . Scorpio sat on his haunches with his amber eyes fixed on Draken. Our connection to the earth made it impossible to miss. She's powerful, whoever she is .

The younger wolves shuffled their paws in the soft earth, their excitement crackling through the pack link like static electricity. Draken could sense their eagerness to discuss what this meant, but he needed a moment to process it himself.

A Luna , Chuck whispered through their link, awe coloring his mental voice, after all this time .

Scorpio's tail swished against the forest floor. The earth hasn't resonated like this since your father found his mate, Alpha .

Draken paced a tight circle, his claws leaving deep impressions in the earth. The energy signature still thrummed through the ground, weaker but persistent like a distant heartbeat calling to his own. His carefully maintained control wavered as his wolf strained toward that pull.

Well? Scorpio prompted, a hint of curiosity in his mental tone. Any thoughts you'd care to share with your advisor?

You mean besides wondering how this will complicate everything? Draken shot back.

Heaven forbid something disrupts your perfectly scheduled life, Scorpio chuckled

through their link. Though I suspect she already has .

The truth in those words made Draken's fur bristle. He'd spent decades building the Moonshadow pack into a powerful, respected force. Their territory was prosperous and their pack bonds were strong. Change wasn't something he welcomed easily, especially not one this significant.

The Goddess doesn't make mistakes , Scorpio reminded him gently. If she's chosen now to reveal your mate, there's a reason .

Draken drew himself up to his full height, his massive gray form towering over the younger wolves. The pack's excited energy buzzed through their mental link like lightning in a bottle. He needed to get this under control before speculation ran wild.

Listen up , he projected through the pack link, his alpha authority threading through the command. The mental chatter ceased instantly. Tomorrow at dawn, I'll track down the source of this energy signature. Scorpio and Chuck will accompany me .

Just the three of us? Chuck's mental voice held a note of disappointment. The whole pack could help cover more ground .

Draken's tail lashed against the forest floor. No. Small group means stealth .

He's right, Scorpio added, his amber eyes glinting in the moonlight. Besides, our alpha's internal compass will lead us straight to her. No need for a search party .

The younger wolves shifted their weight restlessly, their disappointment leaking through. One of them, a copper-colored female named Maya, ventured forward.

But, Alpha, what if-

The decision is made . Draken cut her off, though he softened his mental tone. The rest of you will maintain our regular patrol schedule. Business as usual.

Business as usual? Chuck snorted through their link. Right. Because finding your mate after centuries of waiting is totally routine .

Draken turned his head to fix his beta with a stern look, but Chuck just wagged his tail, unrepentantly. The other wolves tried to suppress their amusement, failing miserably as their mental chuckles rippled through the link.

Dawn , Draken repeated, ignoring the pack's barely contained excitement. And not a word of this to anyone outside this circle right now. Clear?

A chorus of Yes, Alpha echoed through their minds, though he could still sense their bubbling anticipation. His own wolf paced restlessly, eager to follow that compelling pull toward his mate. But first, he needed a plan. Strategy before action - it was how he'd always operated.

Now , he projected, let's finish this run. I believe someone was about to lose spectacularly to their alpha at Miller's Creek.

The pack's collective howl pierced the night sky, a harmonious sound that made Draken's chest swell with pride. His own deep howl joined theirs, carrying both joy and authority across their territory. The sound echoed through the trees, sending small creatures scurrying for cover.

Last one there buys drinks at Pack Night! Chuck's mental voice rang out as he darted past, kicking up dirt in his wake.

Draken launched himself forward, his powerful muscles propelling him through the forest. The familiar path to Miller's Creek stretched before him, but his mind kept

drifting to tomorrow's search. What if his mate didn't understand their ways? What if she couldn't handle the responsibilities that came with being Luna of the Moonshadow pack?

The younger wolves whooped and cheered through their mental connection as they wove between the trees, their excitement infectious. But even as Draken led the pack through the moonlit forest, part of him remained distracted by that persistent energy signature thrumming through the earth.

Getting tired there, Alpha? one of the young wolves called out as they pulled ahead.

Draken's competitive nature kicked in. He surged forward, his gray form becoming a blur as he overtook the pack members one by one. The wind rushed through his fur, carrying the scent of victory – and something else. That new energy signature pulsed again, stronger this time, making his stride falter for just a moment.

Chuck darted past, his mental voice teasing through their link. Getting slow for real this time, boss ?

The challenge snapped Draken into action. The creek's rushing water grew louder as they approached. Draken pushed himself harder, his wolf reveling in the physical challenge even as his mind churned with tomorrow's implications. The pack's joy flowed through their bond, a current of excitement and celebration that helped steady his own unsettled thoughts.

Miller's Creek soon appeared ahead, its water gleaming silver in the moonlight. With a final burst of speed, Draken cleared the distance, landing gracefully on the creek's bank several lengths ahead of the others.

"Show-off," Chuck panted as he arrived second, followed closely by Scorpio.

The rest of the wolves tumbled in behind them, their mental voices filled with good-natured complaints and congratulations. Draken stood tall, his fur ruffled by the night breeze, trying to project confidence even as uncertainty gnawed at his gut. What if his mate wasn't what he expected?

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TWO

LORELEI

Lorelei leaned against the rooftop railing, her red cocktail dress catching the breeze as she gazed up at the full moon. The city sprawled below, a tapestry of lights and shadows, but her attention remained fixed on the luminous orb above. Her finger traced the rim of her champagne glass while the sounds of laughter and music drifted from the party behind her.

“The big three-o,” she whispered to herself, testing how the word felt on her tongue as the moonlight painted silver streaks in her brown waves.

The moon had always been her confidant during moments of reflection, ever since she was small. But tonight, it seemed to pulse with an unusual energy that matched her own restlessness.

Her watch ticked to midnight. Happy birthday to me.

Suddenly, the concrete beneath her feet shook. The champagne in her glass rippled, creating concentric circles that caught the moonlight. The tremor built, rattling the string lights that decorated the rooftop. Lorelei gripped the railing as the vibrations traveled up through her bones, bringing with them a strange warmth that spread through her chest.

“What the—“ The words caught in her throat as smaller tremors followed, each one sending peculiar tingles through her fingertips. The sensation felt less like danger and

more like... recognition. As if the earth itself was wishing her happy birthday.

Behind her, glasses clinked, and her friends' voices rose in pitch.

“Did everyone feel that?”

“An earthquake? In this city?”

“Lorelei! Are you okay over there?”

She remained at the railing, transfixed by the way the tremors seemed to sync with her heartbeat. The moon appeared brighter now. Something fundamental had shifted, and not just in the tectonic plates beneath the city.

“I should check the news,” she murmured, pulling out her phone. But her fingers hovered over the screen, distracted by the lingering warmth in her hands. The practical part of her brain - the part that calculated load-bearing walls and stress points - insisted this needed investigation. Yet another part, one she hadn't known existed until now, whispered that some questions weren't meant to be answered through Google searches.

The sudden click of heels against concrete announced the arrival of Lorelei's friends, their cocktail dresses creating a rainbow of silk and chiffon as they rushed to her side. The lingering warmth in her palms faded as Helena's emerald dress brushed against her arm.

“Are you all right?” Helena steadied herself against the railing.

“I'm fine,” Lorelei said softly. “Though I can't help thinking this is some cosmic sign that my thirties are going to be... unstable.”

Isolde's sapphire dress sparkled in the moonlight as she laughed. "Please. The only thing shaking up is your life, in the best possible way." She clinked her glass against Lorelei's.

Her friends' presence settled Lorelei's nerves, even as her fingertips continued to tingle. These women had been her constants through college, through career changes, through every milestone. They'd celebrated each other's promotions, consoled each other through breakups, and now they were all stepping into their thirties together.

"You know what?" Lorelei raised her glass. "Maybe you're right. Maybe it's time for a shake-up. We've mastered our careers--"

"Some of us are controlling actual air traffic," Thea interjected.

"Others are discovering new stars," Seraphina added.

"And one of us designs buildings that could withstand whatever that tremor was," Everly nudged Lorelei.

"The point is," Lorelei continued, "maybe the earth moving under our feet isn't such a bad omen. Maybe it's just the universe's way of saying 'get ready.'"

They all raised their glasses, "To getting ready!" the crystal glinting in the moonlight.

As they toasted, Lorelei couldn't shake the feeling that the universe had something specific in mind for her, something beyond the typical thirty-something shake-up her friends were talking about. But surrounded by the warmth of friendship and champagne, she decided that whatever came next, she'd face it with the same precision and planning she applied to her architectural projects.

"Speaking of getting ready," Helena swirled her champagne, "my mother keeps

asking when I'm going to get married to a nice accountant."

Lorelei suppressed a smile as her friends launched into their familiar finding love discussion. The city lights twinkled below, and she found her attention drawn to the Art Deco building across the street. Its geometric patterns played off the moonlight, creating irregular shadows that were far more interesting than talk of potential suitors.

"What about that structural engineer you met at the conference?" Thea nudged Lorelei's arm. "The one with the dimples?"

"He thought Frank Lloyd Wright was overrated." Lorelei traced the building's silhouette with her finger in the air. "Besides, I'm already in a committed relationship with my drafting table."

"Buildings can't keep you warm at night," Isolde teased.

"No, but they can shelter thousands, shape skylines, and last for generations." Lorelei's fingers tingled again as she gestured toward the cityscape. "Look at that limestone facade across the street. Those corbels have been supporting that cornice for nearly a century. Show me a relationship that solid."

"Oh my god, you're actually serious." Seraphina laughed. "You'd rather date a building than a man."

"At least buildings are predictable. Give me the right materials and calculations, and I can tell you exactly how they'll behave." The warmth in her palms seemed to pulse in agreement. "Plus, they don't text at 3:00 AM asking 'you up?'"

"But don't you want someone to share your life with?" Everly asked, her expression soft with concern.

Lorelei considered the half-finished designs waiting on her desk in her apartment, the way her heart raced when a project came together perfectly, the satisfaction of seeing her visions rise from paper into steel and stone.

“I share my life with every person who walks through my buildings, who lives in them, works in them, and falls in love in them.” She smiled, genuine this time. “I’m creating spaces for other people’s love stories. Isn’t that enough?”

The women exchanged glances, and Lorelei knew they didn’t understand. How could she explain that the curve of an arch thrilled her more than any first date? That the challenge of balancing form and function fulfilled her in ways no relationship had?

“Well,” Helena raised her glass again, “here’s to finding love in whatever form it takes. Even if it’s reinforced concrete and steel beams.”

The night soon turned into something magical, filled with dancing and laughter. Lorelei’s red dress twirled as Helena spun her around, their heels clicking against the rooftop’s hard surface. The string lights swayed in the warm summer breeze, casting moving shadows across their faces.

“Last song,” Lorelei announced, checking her watch. “It’s already two.”

“Birthday girl gets to pick!” Seraphina called out, scrolling through her phone’s playlist.

A shadow suddenly fell across their impromptu dance floor. A man Lorelei didn’t recognize stood by the roof access door, his stance unsteady. The scent of stale beer wafted over.

“Ladies having a party?” His words slurred together. “Room for one more?”

Lorelei's architect brain kicked in, analyzing escape routes. The roof access door behind him. The fire escape to their left. Twenty-eight floors down.

"Private party," Thea said firmly. "Building residents only."

He stumbled closer, his eyes fixed on Lorelei. "Come on, birthday girl. One dance?"

The ground trembled beneath their feet, a subtle vibration that made the string lights sway more violently.

"We're leaving," Lorelei said, gathering her purse. Her palms tingled with that same strange warmth from earlier.

"Don't be like that." He reached for her arm. "I just want--"

The tremor intensified. Glasses rattled on the abandoned table. A crack split the air like a gunshot, and one of the decorative concrete posts broke free from the roof's edge. It toppled, catching the man square in the chest. He crumpled to the ground with a dull thud.

"Oh my god!" Helena's hand flew to her mouth.

Everly was already on her phone. "Yes, we need help on the roof of The Maxwell building. A man is hurt..."

The tingling in Lorelei's palms faded as she stared at the fallen post. Something about its trajectory seemed wrong - like it had moved against gravity's natural pull. But that was impossible.

"I'm calling Marcus," Isolde said, referring to the building manager. "He needs to know about this safety hazard."

Seraphina squeezed Lorelei's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Lorelei frowned at her still-warm hands. "Just ready to get downstairs and forget this happened."

The rooftop door burst open as Marcus arrived, his security team close behind. "Everyone all right? What happened?"

Lorelei explained to Marcus what happened, her architect's mind automatically cataloging the structural implications of the incident.

"The first tremor must have weakened the post's connection," she said, gesturing to where the concrete piece had broken free. "The second one just finished the job."

Marcus scratched his head. "Two earthquakes in one night? In this city?"

"Maybe it's just a sign the building needs a structural review," Lorelei suggested, her professional instincts kicking in despite the late hour.

Back in her apartment, the girls settled into their usual spots - Helena and Thea on the sectional, Seraphina and Everly claiming the oversized armchairs while Isolde spread out on the plush area rug. Lorelei perched on the window seat, watching the city lights flicker below.

"So," Thea broke the silence, hugging a throw pillow to her chest. "We're not going to talk about how weird that was?"

"Which part?" Seraphina kicked off her heels. "The earthquakes or the falling post that seemed to have perfect aim?"

"Both." Helena twisted a strand of hair around her finger. "Either. I don't know."

Lorelei pressed her palms against the cool glass of the window, trying to chase away the lingering warmth. “Can we just... not? It’s been a long night.”

“You’re right.” Isolde yawned, stretching out on the rug. “Besides, you had fun before all that, right? The party was good?”

“The party was perfect.” Lorelei smiled, remembering the dancing, the laughter, the way the city had seemed to pulse with possibility before everything went sideways. “Thank you all for making it special.”

“To your thirties,” Everly raised an imaginary glass. “May they be full of adventure.”

“But maybe not the kind involving falling concrete,” Helena added with a laugh.

They settled into their sleeping arrangements - air mattresses and blanket nests arranged across Lorelei’s living room floor. The city’s ambient noise drifted up through the windows, a familiar lullaby of distant sirens and late-night traffic.

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THREE

DRAKEN

The sleek black SUV glided through the downtown traffic, its tinted windows shielding Draken from the morning sun. He adjusted his crisp navy button-down as the fabric pulled slightly across his broad shoulders. The magnetic pull in his chest grew stronger with each block they passed.

“Take a left here,” Draken said, the leather passenger seat creaking as he shifted his weight.

Chuck smoothly turned the wheel. “Getting closer, boss?”

“Much.” The pull was becoming almost painful now. Draken’s wolf paced restlessly beneath his skin, eager to find their mate after centuries of waiting.

Scorpio leaned forward from the back seat. “You seem tense. Having second thoughts about meeting your Luna?”

“Just wondering how this will change things.” Draken’s gaze swept the bustling sidewalks. The pull yanked sharply right. “Stop here.”

The SUV eased to the curb outside a gleaming office building under construction. Through the glass walls of the lobby, Draken spotted her immediately. His heart stuttered, then began racing. She wore a sleeveless charcoal dress that hugged her curves, and her brown hair was swept into an elegant twist. She moved with quiet

confidence, gesturing at blueprints spread across a table while speaking to a group of suits.

But something was wrong. Terribly wrong. The magical signature surrounding her was unmistakable - the same earth magic that had shaken the ground last night. Yet she was clearly, impossibly human. No shifter blood ran through her veins that he could detect.

Draken's hands clenched into fists. This had to be a mistake. The Moon Goddess wouldn't saddle him with a human mate. His pack would never accept a human Luna. The very idea challenged everything he believed about the natural order between shifters and humans.

Yet his wolf recognized her, yearned for her with an intensity that left him breathless. The earth magic danced around her, wild and beautiful. His own powers reached for hers instinctively, though he forced it back with an iron will.

Through the glass, she smiled at something one of the suits said, and despite himself, Draken felt an answering warmth spread through his chest. The pull toward her was undeniable like gravity itself insisted he go to her. But everything he believed, everything he'd built his life around, screamed that this was impossible. A human Luna would be unprecedented. Dangerous. His wolf whined, wanting nothing more than to go to her right now, human or not.

His jaw clenched as he continued to watch her through the glass. The summer sun caught her hair, highlighting strands of gold among the brown. His wolf started pacing, fighting his steel control to rush inside.

"You know," Scorpio's voice cut through his brooding, "just because it's unprecedented doesn't make it impossible."

“A human mate?” Draken’s lip curled. “The Moon Goddess wouldn’t be so cruel.”

Chuck adjusted the rearview mirror. “With all due respect, boss, she’s clearly got some serious magic. Those tremors weren’t exactly subtle.”

“Magic alone doesn’t make her suitable for our world.” Draken dragged his gaze away from her. “Book us rooms at the Ritz-Carlton. We’re staying through the weekend.”

“Planning to stalk her?” Scorpio’s tone was tinged with amusement.

“Surveillance,” Draken corrected, his shoulders tensing. “Something must be wrong with my inner compass. Centuries of waiting... it’s probably malfunctioning.”

“Right.” Scorpio didn’t bother hiding his skepticism. “Because that’s definitely more logical than accepting the mate the goddess chose for you.”

The SUV pulled away from the curb. Draken’s chest ached as the distance from her grew, his wolf howling in protest. He pressed his knuckles against his sternum, trying to ease the pressure.

“The Four Seasons might be better,” Chuck suggested.

“The Ritz.” Draken’s tone brooked no argument. If he was going to spend time here proving this was all a cosmic mistake, he’d do it in comfort.

An hour later, Draken stood at the floor-to-ceiling windows of his suite, staring out at the city sprawled below. The pull toward her remained steady like a compass pointing true north. His reflection frowned back at him, his brown hair slightly disheveled from running his hands through it in frustration.

“I still think you’re being stubborn about this,” Scorpio announced from the doorway.

“Noted.” Draken didn’t turn around. “ Tomorrow, we’ll start surveillance for a few days. I want to learn as much about her as we can. For now, I need space to think.”

“And brood?”

“Out.”

Scorpio’s chuckle followed him as he left. Alone, Draken unbuttoned his shirt and poured himself some scotch from the minibar. The amber liquid burned pleasantly as he swallowed but did nothing to settle his restless wolf or quiet his troubled thoughts.

A few days later, Draken watched his supposed mate from their parked SUV. She walked with purpose down the sidewalk. The pull in his chest had grown from uncomfortable to nearly unbearable over the past two days.

“She’s heading to that construction site again,” Chuck said from behind the wheel.

“Third time this weekend.” Scorpio lounged in the back seat. “Almost like she’s an architect or something.”

Draken tuned out their conversation. His attention fixed on how the ground seemed to ripple subtly beneath her feet as she walked like the earth itself reached up to cushion her steps. Most humans wouldn’t notice, but his enhanced vision caught every detail.

“Did you see that?” He leaned forward as she paused to check her phone. A crack in the sidewalk sealed itself near her feet.

“Yeah, boss. Just like yesterday when that pothole fixed itself after she complained about it.”

“Or this morning when that tree outside the coffee shop moved its branches so she could see the sunrise better,” Scorpio added.

The evidence was becoming harder to deny. She wielded earth magic as naturally as breathing, though she seemed completely unaware of it. His wolf preened with pride at their mate’s abilities, even as Draken’s human side struggled with what it meant.

“She’s still human,” he growled.

“A human who harnesses earth magic tied specifically to our pack’s powers.” Scorpio’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “Totally normal.”

Movement caught Draken’s eye. A construction worker had lost control of a wheelbarrow full of rocks. It careened toward her, but before Draken could leap from the car, the ground buckled. The wheelbarrow stopped dead, its contents frozen in place by partially liquefied earth that immediately solidified again. She blinked, looked around confused, then continued walking as if nothing had happened.

The magnetic pull in Draken’s chest surged. His wolf howled, desperate to go up to her. He gripped the door handle until his knuckles went white.

“Still think your inner compass is malfunctioning?” Chuck asked.

“Shut up and drive.” Draken’s voice came out rough.

His wolf’s certainty was becoming harder to ignore with each display of her magical powers. Human or not, she was clearly meant to be their Luna. The thought terrified his human side just as much as it excited his wolf side.

He leaned back in the SUV’s passenger seat, his shoulders tight with tension. “We’re leaving tomorrow.”

“What?” Scorpio asked, his voice filled with confusion. “But she’s clearly-“

“There is no Luna.” The words tasted bitter in Draken’s mouth, his wolf howling in utter protest. “Not here.”

“You’re going to lie to the pack?” Scorpio’s eyes narrowed. “That’s not like you.”

“It’s not a lie.” Draken’s jaw tightened as he watched his supposed mate through the tinted windows. “A Luna must be a wolf. That’s how it works. That’s how it’s always worked.”

“Boss-“

“A human can’t handle what comes with being my partner,” he barked. “The politics alone would break her. The physical demands of running with the pack? Impossible.”

“You’re making excuses.” Scorpio’s voice hardened. “And they’re going to cost you.”

“Watch yourself.”

“No, you need to hear this. The moment her powers awakened, the clock started ticking. Every day you spend denying her, your strength will fade. You know the legends.”

“Legends are just stories.” But Draken felt the truth of it in his bones. Already his wolf felt restless, unsettled in a way he’d never experienced.

“Really? Then why did you nearly drop that coffee cup this morning? When’s the last time you fumbled anything?”

Draken's silence was answer enough.

“Just know, the longer you stay away from her, the weaker you'll become. And when you finally accept what's right in front of you - because you will - you'll be more powerful than ever. Her earth magic will amplify your powers tenfold.”

“Enough.” Draken's voice dropped to a dangerous growl. “Take me back to the hotel.”

Later that night, Draken once again stood at his suite's window, staring out at the city. His wolf paced relentlessly, angry at being denied their mate. The logical part of his brain insisted this was the right choice, but every instinct he possessed screamed otherwise.

Sleep would be impossible tonight. Again. He'd have to face his pack tomorrow with this lie heavy on his tongue, all while fighting his wolf's desperate need to run to her.

The following morning Draken adjusted the collar of his charcoal dress shirt, his reflection in the hotel mirror revealing the strain of the past three days. The dark circles under his blue eyes stood out against his tanned skin, and his usually perfect hair refused to stay in place. His hands trembled slightly as he reached for his watch - a simple task that should have been effortless for someone with his enhanced abilities.

“Dammit,” he muttered, fumbling with the clasp. His wolf stirred, practically radiating smugness at this display of weakness. The message was clear - deny their mate, deny their strength.

The magnetic pull in his chest throbbed like a fresh wound. He braced his hands against the marble countertop, meeting his own gaze in the mirror.

“I’ve never lied to them,” he said to his reflection. “Not once in two centuries.”

His wolf’s response was immediate - a surge of joy and anticipation that nearly brought him to his knees. The beast knew they’d already made their decision.

The elevator doors opened to reveal Scorpio and Chuck waiting in the lobby. One look at their alpha’s face told them everything.

“So,” Scorpio drawled, “I take it we’re not heading home empty-handed?”

“We’re staying. And if either of you say ‘I told you so,’ I’ll have you running patrols for the next decade.”

Chuck’s lips twitched. “Wouldn’t dream of it, boss.”

“Good.” Draken rolled up his sleeves, exposing his forearms. “Now let’s go get our Luna.”

His wolf howled in triumph, and for the first time in days, Draken felt his strength beginning to return.

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FOUR

LORELEI

The summer sun beat down on the construction site as Lorelei studied the blueprints spread across a makeshift table. Glass panels of the new building sparkled around her, reflecting the city's energy. A bead of sweat trickled down her neck despite the early hour.

“Mr. Shaw, these support beams need to be—“ She looked up from her conversation with the supervisor and lost her train of thought.

A man who looked like he'd stepped out of her most private fantasies walked toward her. His charcoal button-down stretched across broad shoulders, sleeves rolled to expose forearms that belonged in a fitness magazine. The way he moved reminded her of a predator – graceful yet dangerous.

“Oh, thank you, birthday gods.” The words slipped out. “I was starting to think my thirties would be all work and no play.”

He didn't crack a smile. Not even a twitch. Instead, his intense gaze locked on her with laser focus that made her skin tingle.

“You don't have clearance to be here,” she said, noting his lack of a hard hat or safety vest. “This is an active construction zone.”

“I am Prince Draken of the Moonshadow Pack.” His voice was deep, commanding –

expecting immediate compliance. “You will return with me to become our Luna.”

Lorelei blinked. Twice. She glanced at her coffee cup, wondering if someone had spiked it. Pack? Luna? Was this some elaborate birthday prank her friends had cooked up?

“Right.” She tapped her pen against the blueprints. “And I’m the Queen of Sheba. Did Helena put you up to this? Because if she did, you can tell her nice try, but I’m not falling for?—“

“This is not a joke.” He stepped closer, and the air seemed to crackle between them. “You are meant to be my Luna.”

The supervisor cleared his throat. “Everything okay here, Ms. Chanda?”

“Just fine, Mr. Shaw.” Her voice came out steadier than she felt. “Though I think someone’s acting got a little too intense.”

The man – Draken – narrowed his blue eyes, his jaw clenching in a way that shouldn’t have been attractive but definitely was. The expensive watch on his wrist caught the sunlight as he crossed his arms, and Lorelei found herself wondering what kind of budget this prank needed.

Lorelei’s amusement soon faded as Draken’s expression remained deadly serious. The playful gleam she’d expected to see in his eyes – the telltale sign of a birthday prank – was absent. Instead, his gaze held an unsettling intensity that made her stomach flip.

“Look, this was... interesting, but I need to get back to work.” She gathered her blueprints, trying to keep her hands steady.

“You misunderstand.” He stepped closer, his presence overwhelming her personal space. “This isn’t a request. Your magical powers have awakened. The pack needs its Luna.”

A chill ran down her spine despite the summer heat. Something in the way he spoke – the absolute conviction in his voice – set off warning bells in her head. Yet beneath her unease, an inexplicable pull tugged at her core, drawing her toward him. She blamed it on his ridiculous good looks and whatever cologne he was wearing that smelled like the forest after rain.

“Lorelei!” The lead contractor’s voice carried across the construction site. “Can you come look at something?”

Relief flooded through her. “I’ll be right back,” she told Draken, already backing away.

His jaw clenched. “We’re not finished.”

“Right. Luna. Pack. Got it.” She forced a smile, clutching her blueprints to her chest like a shield. “Just... wait here.”

She hurried across the site, her boots clicking against the concrete floor. Each step put welcome distance between her and the attractive but clearly unhinged man.

Her mind raced. Should she call security? The police? Maybe he was just having some sort of episode. But that pull she felt... She shook her head. No. That was just her hormones responding to a face that belonged on a magazine cover. Nothing more.

Lorelei approached the lead contractor, her heart still racing from the strange encounter. “Bob, could you have security escort that man off the premises? The one in the charcoal shirt?”

Bob turned, scanning the area. “What man?”

Lorelei spun around. The spot where Mr. Tall-Dark-and-Delusional had stood was empty. She blinked, wondering if the heat was getting to her.

“Never mind. I must have imagined it.” She laughed, though it came out a bit shaky. “Too much birthday cake the other night, I guess.”

“Speaking of, how was the big three-oh?”

“Great until some weirdo crashed the party.” She shook her head, focusing on the blueprints. “Now, what do you need me to look at?”

The rest of the morning passed in a blur of measurements and material specifications. Lorelei lost herself in the familiar rhythm of construction supervision, the earlier encounter fading like a strange dream.

Outside, she circled the building’s perimeter, making notes about the glass paneling. The summer breeze ruffled her hair as she studied the way sunlight played across the surface, creating ever-changing patterns.

“The angular cuts catch the light perfectly,” she muttered, jotting down observations. “But we might need additional UV coating on the west-facing panels.”

Her pencil snapped mid-note. She stared at the broken tip, remembering how the strange man’s presence had made the air feel charged like the moment before a storm. What kind of person walked onto a construction site claiming to be a prince? And what the hell was a Luna?

“Get it together, Lorelei,” she whispered, pulling out a new pencil. “This is what happens when Helena convinces you to have a birthday party on a weeknight. It

throws your whole balance off.”

The glass panels reflected her image as she worked – professional, composed, completely normal. No sign of whatever magical powers that guy had rambled about. Just an architect doing her job even if she couldn’t quite shake the memory of those intense blue eyes and the way they’d seemed to see right through her.

Lorelei was looking down at her notebook when rough hands grabbed her from behind. Her heart leaped into her throat as she twisted, expecting to see the self-proclaimed prince from earlier. Instead, unfamiliar dark eyes bore into hers, set in a pale face.

“Don’t scream,” he whispered.

The ground beneath them shuddered. Small at first, then growing until the vibrations rattled her teeth. The half-finished building groaned. Glass panels shattered overhead, raining crystalline destruction. Support beams twisted with metallic shrieks.

“Help!” Lorelei’s cry was lost in the chaos as workers fled the collapsing structure.

The stranger dragged her backward, his grip bruising on her arms. She kicked and thrashed, but he moved with inhuman strength. In seconds, he had her wrists bound with zip ties and was shoving her into a black sedan.

“Let me go!” She writhed against the restraints as he slid behind the wheel. “What do you want?”

“The name is Gideon.” He pulled onto the street, weaving through traffic with dangerous speed. His dark eyes flicked to her in the rearview mirror. “Been trailing that alpha of yours for days, waiting to see if you were really the one.”

Lorelei's mind spun. Alpha? Like that crazy prince from earlier? "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure you do, Luna." He chuckled, the sound devoid of warmth. "Though I'll admit, I'm surprised as hell you're human. No wonder Draken took his sweet time claiming you. Probably hoped he was wrong about the mate bond."

The words tumbled around her head like the debris from her construction site. Luna. Alpha. Mate bond. None of it made sense, yet something deep inside her resonated with each term.

"This is insane," she muttered, testing the zip ties. "I design buildings. I'm not whatever you think I am."

"Those tremors say differently." Gideon's smile showed too many teeth. "You've got power, little human. Power I've been waiting a very long time to harness."

Lorelei shifted against the zip ties cutting into her wrists. The leather seat squeaked beneath her as she tried to find a more comfortable position. "Look, you've got this all wrong. Like I said, I'm just an architect. The most magical thing I do is turn building designs into actual buildings."

"An architect," Gideon scoffed. "Is that what you think you are?"

"I know what I am." She glanced at her reflection in the rearview mirror, checking if maybe she'd grown horns or something equally ridiculous in the last hour. Nope. Same brown eyes, same practical brown waves, same woman who'd spent last night reorganizing her desk drawer by pen color. "And I can prove it. My wallet has about three hundred in cash. It's yours if you let me go."

"Money?" He swerved around a truck, the G-force pressing her into the door. "You

think this is about money? You really don't know what you are, do you?"

The disbelief in his voice made her stomach clench. This wasn't some elaborate scam. He actually believed what he was saying. Earth manipulation powers. Luna. But these aren't real things, at least that she knew of.

Through the window, Lorelei caught glimpses of dense forest replacing downtown's familiar buildings. The road curved dangerously close to rocky cliffs that dropped into darkness. No one would ever find her body this far out.

"Those tremors at your construction site weren't just random." His knuckles whitened on the steering wheel. "Your powers are awakening whether you believe it or not. And once I?—"

The impact came without warning. Metal screamed against metal as a black SUV slammed into their sedan's rear quarter panel. Lorelei's head whipped sideways, her shoulder hitting the door.

"What the—" Gideon swerved, tires squealing.

The SUV rammed them again.

"Friends of yours?" Lorelei asked, trying to keep her voice steady as she worked at the zip ties. Her wrists were already raw, but if there was ever a time to channel her inner escape artist, this was it.

"Draken, damn him," Gideon spat the name like a curse. He yanked the wheel hard, sending them fishtailing across both lanes.

The SUV matched their movements with terrifying precision. Whoever was driving had definitely done this before. The thought should have frightened her, but instead,

Lorelei felt an inexplicable surge of satisfaction watching Gideon's composure crack.

"You know," she said, bracing herself against the seat as they took another hit, "for someone who claims to be so powerful, you're not doing great at the whole kidnapping thing."

Gideon's dark eyes met hers in the rearview mirror. "Shut up."

Another impact sent them spinning toward the cliff's edge. Through the windshield, Lorelei caught a glimpse of the sheer drop waiting for them.

At that moment, Gideon opened the driver's door and bailed, leaving her to die alone. Yup, nobody would ever find her body.

Her heart hammered against her ribs as the car skidded over the edge.

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FIVE

DRAKEN

Draken stalked out of the glass-fronted building into the sweltering summer morning. The summer heat pressed against his skin, but it was his wounded pride that truly burned. His Luna - his destined mate - had just dismissed him like some random construction worker.

The downtown streets buzzed with activity - cars honking, people rushing to work, the constant hum of city life. None of it helped settle his racing thoughts.

“I am Prince Draken of the Moonshadow Pack,” he muttered under his breath, mimicking his own introduction. “What was I thinking?”

A group of women passing by turned to stare at the attractive man talking to himself, but Draken barely noticed. His mind was too full of brown eyes that should have lit with recognition but had only shown polite confusion.

Of course, a human wouldn't understand. He'd approached her like she was one of his kind - direct, authoritative, expecting immediate recognition of their bond. The concrete beneath his feet radiated heat as he paced the block.

“A human,” he growled, earning more strange looks from passing pedestrians. “The Moon Goddess gave me a human mate who doesn't even recognize me.”

His wolf bristled at the slight to their mate even as Draken's rational mind rebelled

against the ridiculous situation. Any female wolf would have felt the pull, would have recognized their fated pair instantly. Instead, he got jokes about birthday presents and dream men.

“This is utterly ridiculous,” he said to himself, running a hand through his hair. “How am I supposed to explain centuries of pack law and shifter culture to someone who thinks I’m just some random crazy person?”

A businessman hurrying past gave him a wide berth, clearly marking him as someone who talked to himself on street corners. Draken couldn’t even blame him. He felt crazy - standing here in his expensive clothes, prince of his people, reduced to skulking around a construction site because his mate had essentially patted him on the head and walked away.

The ground suddenly buckled beneath Draken’s feet, and his wolf surged forward with protective fury. His mate was in danger. The pull of her magic, now familiar after three days of watching her, twisted with fear and confusion.

“Damn it all,” he growled, already stripping off his expensive shirt. His wolf wouldn’t be denied, not with her terror pulsing through their bond.

The shift rippled through him, bones cracking and reforming as his massive wolf burst forth. His clothes shredded, falling away as he launched into a sprint back toward the construction site. Let the humans gawk - his mate needed him.

“Sweet mother of—“ A businessman stumbled backward, coffee splashing across the sidewalk.

Draken’s claws clicked against the concrete as he rounded the corner. The construction site had collapsed inward, steel beams twisted like pretzels. His keen nose detected Lorelei’s scent mixed with a strangely familiar male’s, leading away

from the destruction.

Chuck, Scorpio - get the SUV now , he commanded through the pack link while diving into the wreckage. Someone's taken her.

On it, Alpha . Chuck's steady voice echoed in his mind.

I told you— Scorpio began.

Save the lecture. Draken's massive wolf form shouldered aside a fallen beam, exposing two trapped workers. He grabbed their shirts in his teeth, hauling them clear. Just get here .

His wolf wanted to chase after Lorelei's scent immediately, but he couldn't leave humans trapped in the rubble she'd inadvertently created. One by one, he pulled workers to safety, their shocked expressions at being rescued by a wolf barely registering.

The black SUV screeched to a halt at the curb. Draken shifted back to his human form behind an overturned concrete barrier, yanking on the spare clothes Chuck tossed him.

"You just had to walk away to sulk," Scorpio said as Draken vaulted into the backseat.

"Less talking, more driving," Draken snapped, buttoning his shirt.

The SUV peeled away from the curb, leaving behind a crowd of shell-shocked construction workers and the ruins of what should have been his first real conversation with his mate.

“Left at the next light,” Draken commanded, tracking his mate’s pull. His wolf paced beneath his skin, furious at their earlier retreat. “I can’t believe I just walked away from her.”

“You couldn’t have known,” Chuck said, expertly weaving through traffic.

“I should have.” Draken’s knuckles whitened on the armrest. “She’s my mate.”

Scorpio twisted in the passenger seat. “This is exactly why unmated Lunas are vulnerable. Their powers draw attention, and not the good kind. Without a mate’s protection?—“

“I know.” The words came out as a growl. “Just— not now, Scorpio.”

“Take the bypass,” Draken directed, feeling the connection take him that way. “They’re heading toward the cliffs.”

The SUV’s engine roared as Chuck accelerated onto the highway. Trees blurred past as they left the city behind, the road climbing steadily toward the rocky outcrops that marked pack territory.

“There.” Draken pointed to a black sedan weaving through traffic ahead. “That’s got to be them.”

Chuck’s hands tightened on the wheel. “Want me to run them off the road?”

“Without hurting her.” Draken’s wolf surged forward, lending a golden gleam to his eyes.

He had to get his mate back - his stubborn, beautiful, completely oblivious human mate who could apparently level buildings with a thought.

The vehicle swerved around a curve, and Chuck matched the movement smoothly. They were gaining ground, the gap shrinking with each passing second.

“Ready when you are, Alpha,” Chuck said, hands steady on the wheel as they closed in on their target.

Metal shrieked against metal as Chuck rammed their SUV into the sedan. Draken’s fingers dug into the leather seat, his wolf clawing beneath his skin as his mate’s fear pulsed through their bond.

“Careful with the next hit,” he growled.

“I know how to do my job,” Chuck said, his hands steady on the wheel as he lined up another strike. “Maybe have a little faith in your head of security?”

The sedan swerved wildly across both lanes, tires squealing. Draken’s enhanced vision caught glimpses of brown hair through the back window - his mate, his Luna, who hadn’t even known enough to recognize him thirty minutes ago.

“Left,” Scorpio called from the passenger seat. “They’re trying to make the cliff road.”

Chuck yanked the wheel, keeping pace as the sedan took the curve at dangerous speeds. The rocky cliff face loomed on their right, a sheer drop into darkness made Draken’s wolf howl in protective fury.

“Ram them toward the inside,” Draken ordered, tracking the sedan’s erratic movements. “Force them away from the edge.”

Chuck accelerated, positioning for another hit. The impact rattled Draken’s teeth, but he kept his focus locked on the car. His mate’s fear spiked sharply through their

bond, making his muscles coil with the need to shift and tear apart whoever dared frighten or harm her.

“Not yet,” he muttered to his wolf. “We need to be smart about this.”

“Smart would’ve been claiming her days ago,” Scorpio said, bracing himself as they took another curve. “Instead of sulking about her being human.”

“You really want to have this conversation now?” Draken’s eyes flashed gold as the sedan fishtailed ahead of them.

“Seems like as good a time as any,” Scorpio grumbled. “Since we’re currently chasing your mate down a mountain road because you left her unprotected.”

Chuck lined up another hit, but the sedan’s driver was getting desperate. They accelerated around a sharp bend, forcing Chuck to match their speed to keep up.

“Next curve,” Chuck said tersely. “I can force them toward the guardrail.”

The SUV’s tires squealed as they pursued the sedan through the turn. Chuck timed the impact perfectly, but the sedan’s driver overcompensated. Metal screamed as both vehicles spun, the sedan’s back end swinging precariously close to the cliff’s edge.

Draken’s heart nearly stopped as his mate’s terror flooded their bond.

Through the SUV’s body, he felt the road tremble. Rocks tumbled down the cliff face in an ominous rumble. Lorelei’s powers were lashing out instinctively to her terror.

The sedan tried to swerve out of the way as the avalanche began in earnest, boulders crashing down around them. Chuck had to divert, swerving aside as a massive rock slammed into the spot he’d been aiming for. The sedan fishtailed, its driver finally

abandoning the vehicle as it teetered on the edge of the cliff.

Already shifted into his wolf, Draken leaped out the passenger door, torn between chasing the fleeing abductor and protecting his mate. Lorelei's fear blazed through their bond like a beacon, making his decision for him. He spun back toward the crumpled sedan just as it toppled over the edge.

Without a second thought, he flung himself over the cliff after her.

The wind rushed through his fur as he slipped and slid down the ravine's steep side, debris showering him from the avalanche above. He twisted side to side, desperately trying to pinpoint where the sedan - and his mate - had landed in the chaos.

There. Her scent led him to a crumpled heap of metal half-buried under a fresh pile of rocks. Draken landed hard, bones jarring, but he didn't slow. He dug viciously into the rubble, flinging aside boulders and twisted pieces of the sedan's frame with his enhanced strength.

Finally, he found her - battered, unconscious, but alive. Draken's wolf snarled at the sight of her injuries, but he forced it back. Carefully, he stretched through the shattered window, grabbed her shirt in his powerful jaws, and pulled her free of the wreckage.

"Draken!" Chuck's shout came from above. "We've got rope ready!"

Draken looked up to see Chuck and Scorpio anchoring a rescue line over the edge of the cliff. He gave a soft whine in response, not wanting to let go of Lorelei to shift back, but knowing he had to get her to safety.

Gently, he laid her down and retreated a few paces. The shift rippled through him again, reforming his human body with dull aches from the impacts. He scooped

Lorelei up carefully, cradling her against his chest as he grabbed the line and wrapped it around his wrist.

“Pull us up!” he shouted over the din of shifting rocks. He clutched Lorelei tighter as they ascended, her shallow breaths warm against the bare skin of his chest. Her face was pale, a trickle of blood trailing from her hairline, but she was alive. His mate was alive.

They reached the top and Draken immediately carried her to the waiting SUV, settling her in the back seat with her head pillowed on his lap. Chuck peeled away from the cliffside, leaving the trail of destruction behind them.

“You’re safe now,” Draken murmured, gently brushing Lorelei’s hair back from her face.

SIX

LORELEI

Consciousness crept back slowly. Each throb of Lorelei's head felt like a hammer against her skull. She blinked, trying to focus in the dim light that filtered through what looked like... was that a medieval torch mounted on a stone wall?

"Oh good, I've time-traveled. That explains everything," she muttered, pushing herself up from what felt like solid rock beneath her. Her palm scraped against rough stone, and she realized she was lying on some kind of stone platform.

The room spun as she sat up, forcing her to close her eyes and breathe deeply through her nose. When she reopened them, details of her surroundings appeared from the shadows. Rough-hewn stone walls formed a small cell, maybe twelve by twelve feet. No windows, just that single torch casting flickering shadows. The air held a musty dampness that made her think she must be underground.

"At least the zip ties are gone," she said, rubbing her wrists where the plastic had bit into her skin. Her architect's mind couldn't help but analyze the construction. "Load-bearing walls, probably limestone... definitely pre-modern construction techniques."

She cataloged her injuries: dried blood matted her hair on the right side, various bruises dotted her arms and legs, and her designer shirt was absolutely ruined. "Happy birthday to me. Instead of a much-deserved spa day, I get kidnapped and suffer a concussion."

The events leading up to her current situation filtered back - the construction site, that intense guy claiming to be a prince, then Gideon grabbing her, the car chase, and finally...

“We went over a cliff,” she whispered, touching the tender spot on her temple. “How am I not dead? And where exactly am I?”

She stood carefully, using the wall for support, and made her way to what appeared to be the only exit - heavy iron bars that looked like they belonged in a museum, not actually containing prisoners in the twenty-first century.

“Hello?” she called out, wrapping her hands around the bars. “Is anyone there? I’d like to file a complaint about my accommodations. The amenities are severely lacking.”

Footsteps echoed down the stone corridor, and Lorelei stepped back from the bars. The torchlight caught Draken’s profile as he approached, highlighting the sharp angles of his jaw and those impossibly broad shoulders wrapped in what had to be a custom-tailored charcoal suit. Even in this medieval setting, the man looked like he’d stepped off a GQ cover.

“Thank you for alerting me,” he called out to someone in the shadows. His voice carried authority like someone used to being obeyed without question.

Lorelei crossed her arms, ignoring how the motion made her head throb. “Love what you’ve done with the place. Very thirteenth-century chic.”

His expression remained impassive. “You’re here for your safety.”

“Right. Because nothing screams ‘safe’ like being locked in a dungeon.” She gestured to the stone walls. “You know, usually when someone says they’re keeping you safe,

they don't do it behind iron bars.”

He planted his feet shoulder-width apart and began speaking slowly. “Your car went over a cliff into a ravine. There was an avalanche. The car was buried under rocks. I got you out.”

The memory suddenly flashed through her mind - the terrifying sensation of falling, the crash, the darkness. Her fingers trembled, and she tucked them under her arms. “And your solution was to... what? Lock me up in your personal fortress?”

“I had to prevent anyone else from getting their hands on you.” His intense blue eyes fixed on her face. “You're too valuable.”

The word hung in the air between them. Valuable. Like she was some sort of commodity. Her mind raced through the events of the past few days - the earth tremors, that man Gideon's cryptic words about earth manipulation powers, and now this self-proclaimed prince keeping her locked away like some fairy tale princess.

Lorelei's throat went dry as she studied Draken's face, searching for any hint that this was all some elaborate joke. But his expression remained deadly serious, those piercing blue eyes watching her with an intensity that made her skin prickle.

Lorelei squared her shoulders, fighting to keep her composure despite her racing heart. “Valuable? What could possibly make me valuable to you people?”

Draken's eyebrows drew together, his expression suggesting she'd just asked why water was wet. “Because of your earth-magical powers, of course.”

“My what now?” She barked out a laugh. “Listen, the only power I have is the ability to draft building plans and make contractors cry when they mess them up.”

“The tremors.” He stepped closer to the bars. “All of them. The construction site collapse. They happened because of you.”

“That’s ridiculous. Those were earthquakes.” But even as she said it, something nagged at her. The timing had been... convenient.

Draken turned to the guard in the shadows. “Open it.”

The cell door soon creaked open, and Draken stepped inside. The air seemed to crackle with electricity as he approached her. Every nerve ending in her body came alive like she’d stuck her finger in a light socket. Heat bloomed in her chest and spread outward, making her skin tingle all over.

His nostrils flared slightly as he drew closer, and his pupils dilated. Whatever this was, he felt it too.

“Give me your hand,” he commanded.

“You know, most guys buy me dinner first.” But she extended her hand, unable to resist the pull between them.

The moment their skin touched, a jolt shot through her arm and straight to her core. Energy surged through her veins like liquid lightning. She gasped, and his fingers tightened around hers.

He guided her hand to the wall, pressing her palm against the cool stone. “Focus on the wall. Picture it crumbling beneath your touch.”

“Right, because that’s totally a normal thing to do on a Tuesday.” She closed her eyes if only to humor him. The stone felt different under her palm now - alive like it was breathing. She could sense every crack, every mineral running through it. The

sensation both thrilled and frightened her.

“Focus,” he murmured near her ear, his breath warm against her skin. “Will it to break apart.”

Lorelei imagined the wall dissolving beneath her fingers, pictured the stones separating and falling away. A vibration started in her palm, traveling up her arm. The wall trembled.

Then, with a sound like distant thunder, the stones began to crumble. Pieces fell away, creating a growing hole in the ancient wall. Dust and debris rained down as the opening widened.

She stared at the destruction before her, her hand still outstretched, and her mouth hanging open. The logical part of her brain - the part that understood load-bearing walls and structural integrity - short-circuited completely.

Her fingers tingled where they'd touched the stone, and her skin buzzed with an energy she'd never felt. Draken's presence behind her sent another kind of electricity through her body - one that wasn't caused by her earth magic and had everything to do with his overwhelming masculinity.

“This cell,” he said, his voice a low rumble that seemed to resonate through her bones, “was designed as a tribute to you. No prison could hold an earth Luna.”

“Earth Luna?” She turned around to face him. “I don't know what that means, but as an architect, I can tell you this space needs serious renovation.” She sneezed as more dust settled around them. “Starting with proper ventilation and maybe, I don't know, a bed?”

His lips twitched. “You'd prefer a bedroom?”

“Yeah, a bright one. With windows. And definitely a mattress that isn’t made of limestone.” She brushed debris from her hair, grimacing at the grit that coated her skin. “And right now, I’d give anything for a bath.”

“That can more than be arranged.” His eyes darkened as they swept over her, and heat flooded her chest. He stepped closer, and her breath caught in her throat. “Though I must say, you wear the dust of destruction well.”

“Smooth talker.” She coughed, waving away another cloud of stone particles. “But flattery won’t make me forget you locked me in a dungeon.”

“A tribute,” he corrected, his voice carrying that note of authority that made her knees weak, even as her mind rebelled against it. “One you’ve proven worthy of.”

“By breaking it?” She gestured to the hole in the wall.

His laugh echoed off the remaining walls, rich and unexpected. “You’re extraordinary, Lorelei.” He extended his hand. “Come. Let me show you what that means.”

The sincerity in his voice caught her off guard. Everything logical in her screamed to run, but something deeper, something primal, urged her to take his hand. Maybe it was the same force that had let her crumble solid stone with just a touch.

Lorelei’s fingers tingled where they touched Draken’s hand as he led her through corridors that wouldn’t have looked out of place in a European castle. Marble floors gleamed beneath their feet, and tapestries adorned walls that stretched up to vaulted ceilings.

“So, I caused that construction site collapse.” Her voice cracked. “All those workers could have died because of me.”

Draken's grip tightened. "But they didn't. You protected them instinctively. The building partially fell, but not a single person was seriously injured."

"That's supposed to make me feel better about having earthquake powers?" She stumbled on the polished floor, and his arm shot out to steady her. "What's next - am I going to accidentally create the San Andreas Fault 2.0?"

"I'll teach you control." His voice carried absolute certainty. "You won't hurt anyone."

They stopped before massive double doors inlaid with silver. Draken pushed them open to reveal a suite that made her inner architect swoon. Soaring windows overlooked forested mountains while hand-carved wooden furniture and silk drapes in deep blues and silvers created an atmosphere of understated luxury.

A petite woman with auburn hair stepped forward. "I'm Kelly. I've laid out some clothes and run a bath for you."

"Thank you." Lorelei glanced at her dust-covered clothes.

"I'll leave you to settle in." Draken's eyes lingered on her face. "Kelly will help you with anything you need."

After he and Kelly left, Lorelei called her office. Her hands shook as she dialed.

"Lorelei! Thank god!" Her assistant's voice cracked with relief. "When the building collapsed--"

"I'm okay. Just... taking some personal time."

"Of course, take all the time you need."

The marble bathroom was bigger than her entire apartment. She sank into the deep soaking tub, letting the hot water ease her aching muscles while her mind spun with questions. Earth magical powers. Wolves. A castle in the middle of nowhere. It felt like she'd stepped into some bizarre fairy tale.

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SEVEN

DRAKEN

Draken sank deeper into his leather office chair. The moonlight streaming in through the floor-to-ceiling windows cast long shadows across his mahogany desk, matching his dark mood.

“She thought the stone chamber was a prison cell,” he said, letting out a frustrated breath. “A prison cell. Can you believe that?”

Scorpio’s lips twitched. “To be fair, it does look like a dungeon.”

“It was meant to be a tribute.” Draken’s fingers tightened around the armrest. “Any female wolf would have understood that immediately. Would have felt the connection to their powers, to the pack, to me.”

“But she’s not a wolf.”

“Exactly my point,” he growled. “How can she be my Luna if she doesn’t understand the first thing about our ways? About her powers?”

“At least she agreed to stay in the suite.”

“Only because it looked ‘normal’ to her.” Draken’s jaw clenched. “I expected... I don’t know what I expected. Recognition. Understanding. A partner who could stand beside me from day one. Not someone I’d have to teach everything to.”

Scorpio moved to the window, his reflection overlaying the moon-bathed grounds below. “You want everything to be as predictable as the moon’s cycle. But life isn’t always that simple.”

“Simple would be nice.”

“Would it?” Scorpio turned, raising an eyebrow. “Tell me, what’s more satisfying - winning a fight with one blow, or earning the victory?”

“That’s different.”

“Is it?” Scorpio’s knowing smile irritated Draken. “Think about it. Everything worth having requires effort. Maybe this is the universe’s way of making you work for your mate.”

Draken’s wolf bristled at the suggestion that he needed to prove himself worthy of his own Luna. But something in Scorpio’s words rang true even if he wasn’t ready to admit it quite yet.

“She destroyed an entire construction site today,” Draken said instead. “She has no control over powers that could level mountains. And I’m supposed to... what? Start with Luna 101?”

“Well, it would be better than putting her in a dungeon.”

“It isn’t a dungeon!”

Draken leaned back in his chair, the leather creaking beneath his weight. “Fine,” he said. “You’ve made your point. I can’t expect her to understand our ways without teaching her.”

“Was that actual humility from the mighty Alpha?” Scorpio’s eyes danced with amusement.

“Don’t push it.” Draken stood, his height casting a long shadow across the office floor. “But you’re right. If I want a true partner, I need to earn it. Show her what being Luna really means.”

“And maybe learn something about yourself in the process?”

Draken’s wolf huffed at the suggestion, but he tamped down the instinctive denial. “Maybe. She’s... different. The way she handled herself today – there’s strength there.”

“Strength you didn’t expect from a human?”

“She crumbled that wall like it was nothing.” Pride crept into his voice unbidden. “Raw power, untrained but pure. And instead of freaking out, she complained about the dust.” His lips curved despite himself. “Who does that?”

“Your mate, apparently.”

The word ‘mate’ sent a surge of possessiveness through him. His wolf howled in agreement. “She needs to learn control. Understanding. But maybe...” He walked to the window and stared out at the moon. “Maybe teaching her doesn’t have to be a burden. Maybe it could be...”

“Fun?”

“I was going to say rewarding .” But Draken couldn’t hide his small smile. “Watching her face when she discovers what she can really do – that might be entertaining.”

“Just try not to put her in any more dungeons.”

“Dammit, it is not a dungeon!” Draken’s protest echoed off the walls. “No more stone chambers. I’ll have to win her over the human way.”

“You mean actually courting her? Using charm instead of alpha commands?” Scorpio clutched his chest in mock horror. “Whatever will the pack think?”

“The pack will deal with it.” Draken’s voice held the steel of command. “She’s my Luna. Even if I have to prove worthy of her first.”

“Well, then, I’ll go check on dinner,” Scorpio said, slipping out of the office with a knowing smirk.

Draken remained at the window, his reflection stark against the dark glass. The moon hung brightly, reminding him of the night he’d first felt Lorelei’s powers awakening.

“A human mate.” He shook his head. “Who needs wooing, of all things.”

But the thought wasn’t as distasteful as it had been hours ago. The way her eyes had lit up when she’d crumbled that wall, the sharp wit in her complaints about the dust – she wasn’t what he’d expected. Not at all.

He turned from the window and paced his office, his mind churning with possibilities. “She’s an architect. She understands structure and design.” His fingers traced the spine of an ancient book about pack history. “Maybe start there. Show her the old tunnels beneath the castle, let her see how our ancestors carved homes from living rock.”

His wolf approved, recognizing the strategic value of playing to her interests while teaching her about their ways. But it wasn’t enough. She deserved more than just

lessons.

“Dinner under the stars,” he muttered, planning aloud. “She responds to the moon, even if she doesn’t know why yet. And the garden...” He paused, remembering how flowers seemed to lean toward her as she’d passed. “The roses are in bloom. Perfect place to help her practice smaller manipulations of earth.”

The moon’s light caught on his signet ring as he absently twisted it. “Court her properly. Show her this isn’t a prison, but a home. Her home.” His voice dropped lower. “Our home.”

The possessive growl in those last words surprised him. His wolf had never doubted she was theirs, but his human side was finally catching up to that certainty.

Draken pulled out his phone, his fingers moving swiftly across the screen. “Scorpio, change of plans. Move dinner to the garden. Set it up under the stars. Yes, now.”

His wolf prowled with anticipation as he strode through the castle’s corridors toward Lorelei’s suite. The stone walls seemed to hum as he approached - her power calling to his even through closed doors.

He knocked, and when the door opened, his breath caught. Lorelei stood there in a flowing sundress that Kelly had chosen, the soft fabric highlighting curves his wolf very much appreciated. The dress was the color of spring leaves, making her brown eyes shine like amber in sunlight.

“You look...” His voice came out rougher than intended. He cleared his throat. “Would you join me for dinner?”

“That depends. Is it being served in another dungeon?”

The corner of his mouth twitched. "I told you, that wasn't a dungeon."

"Could've fooled me." She stepped into the hallway, and the scent of her - earth and rain and something uniquely her - made his wolf howl with satisfaction.

He led her through the castle and out into the gardens. Scorpio had outdone himself - dozens of candles floated in glass bowls among the roses, their light dancing off crystal glasses and silver place settings.

"This is..." Lorelei's voice trailed off as she took in the scene.

"Too much?" He pulled out her chair.

"No, it's beautiful. It's just..." She sat, but her shoulders remained tense. "This morning I was worried about building permits. Now I'm having dinner with a wolf prince who says I have magical powers."

His wolf bristled at her tone. A proper Luna would understand the honor being bestowed. Would already know her place in their world. But he remembered Scorpio's words about earning victory.

"Try the wine," he said instead. "It's from our own vineyards."

She took a sip, and finally - finally - her lips curved into a genuine smile. "That's actually amazing."

"We do know a few things about the finer things in life." He leaned forward, letting his voice drop to a playful growl. "We're not all dungeons and stone beds."

Her laugh, when it came, was unexpected and delightful. "Good to know. Though I have to say, as an architect, your castle is fascinating. The stonework alone..."

Her eyes lit up as she talked about flying buttresses and Gothic arches, and Draken found himself entranced. Not just by her beauty, but by her passion. Her intelligence. Maybe there was something to be said for a mate who saw his world through fresh eyes.

“Would you like to see more of it tomorrow?” he asked. “The old tunnels beneath the castle are particularly interesting.”

“Really?” She beamed at him, and his wolf preened at having put that expression on her face. “I’d love that.”

The rest of dinner passed in comfortable conversation, and Draken discovered that making his mate smile was oddly addictive. Perhaps courting a human wouldn’t be such a hardship after all.

Moonlight spilled across the garden path as Draken guided Lorelei around his ancestral grounds. The scent of night-blooming jasmine mingled with her intoxicating natural fragrance, making his wolf rumble with contentment.

“The roses lean toward you,” he said, watching as another bloom tilted in her direction. His own powers thrummed under his skin, reaching for hers like a magnet.

“Maybe they’re just friendly.” She trailed her fingers along a petal, and the entire bush shivered. “Oh! I didn’t mean to do that.”

“Your power responds to your emotions.” He stepped closer, drawn by the way the moonlight danced in her hair. “The more relaxed you are, the more natural the control becomes.”

“Is that why you brought me out here? To relax me?”

“Is it working?”

Her laugh sent a shiver down his spine. “Maybe. Though it could be the wine.”

“Would you also like to learn more about your powers tomorrow?” The words came out deeper than intended, his wolf pushing forward at the thought of teaching her.

“After the tunnel tour?”

“Yes, please.” Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. “Though maybe somewhere less dusty than that stone dungeon?”

“How many times do I have to say that it wasn’t a dungeon?” he growled, but without heat. Her teasing smile was doing dangerous things to his self-control.

Before long, they reached her suite door far too soon for his liking. She turned to face him, and the moonlight filtering in through the windows made her skin glow. His wolf urged him to claim her right there.

“Thank you for dinner,” she said. “And the walk. It was... nice.”

“Nice?” He arched an eyebrow. “I’ll have to try harder tomorrow.”

She slipped inside with another laugh, closing the door softly behind her. Draken stood there longer than necessary. His wolf was already eager for morning.

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EIGHT

LORELEI

The stone steps spiraled down into darkness illuminated only by ancient wall sconces. Lorelei ran her fingers along the rough-hewn walls, fascinated by the construction techniques used centuries ago. The stone hummed with energy.

“These walls are remarkable. The masonry work is unlike anything I’ve seen.” She paused to examine a particularly interesting joint where two massive blocks met seamlessly. “How did they achieve this level of precision without modern tools?”

Draken’s broad shoulders filled the narrow passage ahead of her. “Our ancestors had their own methods. Magic played a role in much of the construction.”

“Magic. Right.” Lorelei shook her head, still struggling to reconcile her rational architect’s mind with this new reality of supernatural powers. “So, you’re telling me someone just...” She wiggled her fingers. “Poof! Built a castle?”

“Not exactly.” His deep chuckle echoed off the walls. “They worked with the earth like you can. They shaped the stone, encouraged it to grow and form in specific ways.”

The tunnel opened into a vast underground chamber. Lorelei gasped at the sight of massive crystalline columns that grew straight from the floor to the vaulted ceiling high above.

“This is incredible!” She spun in a slow circle, taking in the otherworldly architecture. “These formations - they’re natural but also clearly engineered. The load-bearing calculations must have been fascinating.”

“You sound like my great-great-grandfather. He was obsessed with the technical aspects too.” Draken’s eyes sparkled with amusement in the crystal-reflected light. “Most of his journals are filled with structural diagrams.”

“There are journals?” Lorelei perked up. “I’d love to see them.”

“Later.” He stepped closer, his presence making her skin tingle. “First, I want you to try something. Close your eyes and feel the earth around you. These crystals grew through the power of Lunas past. See if you can sense their energy.”

Lorelei closed her eyes, hyper-aware of Draken’s proximity. The stone beneath her feet pulsed with a subtle rhythm like a heartbeat. “I feel... something. It’s like the walls are breathing.”

“Good. Now reach out with your power. Let it connect with the crystal.”

She extended her hand toward the nearest column, gasping as warmth flooded through her arm. The crystal began to glow with a soft inner light.

“I did that?” She stared at her hand in wonder.

“You did.” Pride colored his voice. “And that’s just the beginning.”

Lorelei soon followed Draken through another winding tunnel, marveling at the intricate stonework. Unlike yesterday’s tense interactions, he seemed more at ease, pointing out architectural features she found intriguing.

“These load-bearing arches are remarkable,” she said, running her hand along the smooth stone. “The precision is incredible.”

“My ancestors were master builders.” Draken’s deep voice carried a note of pride. “They understood the marriage of magic and engineering.”

“Speaking of engineering, I should probably learn to control these powers before I accidentally demolish another building.” She winced at the memory. “My insurance definitely won’t cover ‘accidental earth manipulation.’”

A ghost of a smile crossed Draken’s face. “We’ll start with the basics. Far away from any structures.”

They emerged from the tunnels into bright sunlight. Draken led her to a sleek black SUV waiting in the courtyard. As he opened her door, his hand brushed her arm, sending tingles through her skin.

The drive took them deep into pristine wilderness. Lorelei stared out her window, taking in the vast expanse of untouched forest and meadows.

“How much land does your pack own?”

“About twelve thousand acres.” He navigated the vehicle along a narrow dirt road. “We need the space to run freely.”

“Run freely?” She turned to study his profile. “You mean as wolves?”

“Yes.” His jaw tightened slightly. “Though I imagine that concept is strange to you.”

“Actually, I think it’s kind of amazing.” The words slipped out. “I mean, being able to transform into another form entirely? That’s incredible from an engineering

perspective alone.”

He glanced at her, surprise evident in his expression. “Most humans find it unsettling.”

“I’m an architect. I appreciate elegant design in all its forms.” She gestured to the wilderness around them. “Like this land. It’s beautiful.”

The SUV came to a stop in a sprawling meadow ringed by towering pines. As they stepped out, a warm breeze carried the scent of wildflowers and sun-warmed earth.

“This is where we’ll practice,” Draken said, his commanding presence somehow softer in the natural setting. “No buildings to accidentally demolish.”

“Just trees to uproot and boulders to launch?” Lorelei raised an eyebrow. “Should I be worried about accidentally starting an avalanche again?”

“That’s why I’m here.” He moved closer to her. “To help you master your power, not fear it.”

Lorelei followed Draken to the center of the meadow, wildflowers brushing against her legs with each step. Something about being out here with him felt right, natural - as if the ground beneath her feet welcomed her presence.

“Stand here.” Draken positioned himself behind her, his chest nearly touching her back. “Now, reach down with your power. Feel the earth responding to you.”

His proximity sent electricity dancing across her skin. The surge of energy flowing through her felt stronger, more focused, with him this close. It should have felt strange, this instant connection with someone she barely knew, but instead it felt like coming home.

“The ground’s humming,” she said, wiggling her bare toes in the grass. “It’s like it’s saying hello.”

“That’s good.” His voice rumbled close to her ear. “Now, try lifting that small boulder over there.”

Lorelei concentrated on the rock he indicated. When nothing happened, she huffed in frustration.

“Relax,” he murmured, his hands coming to rest on her shoulders. The instant he touched her, power surged through her body. The boulder not only lifted but shot twenty feet into the air.

“Oops.” She bit her lip, watching the rock hover precariously. “Um, how do I get it down without creating a crater?”

“Breathe.” His thumbs traced circles on her shoulders. “Feel the weight of it. Guide it down slowly.”

Following his instruction, she lowered the boulder gently back to earth. “I did it!”

“You’re a natural.” Pride filled his voice.

For the next hour, they worked together, Lorelei growing more confident with each success. Her powers responded eagerly to his guidance, especially when they kept physical contact. It was like his presence amplified everything she could do.

“Let’s take a break.” Draken stepped back, and Lorelei immediately missed his warmth. “Give me a minute.”

As he walked away, Lorelei sank down into the grass, marveling at how different

everything felt from yesterday. Who knew practicing earth-moving magical powers with a wolf prince could be so... fun? She plucked a wildflower, twirling it between her fingers as she waited for him to return.

Lorelei watched Draken stride back from the SUV, a wicker picnic basket swinging from one hand. Her heart skipped at the casual grace in his movements, the way his muscles rippled under his fitted T-shirt. He'd seemed so intimidating yesterday, but now...

"You packed lunch?" She couldn't hide her pleased surprise.

"Can't have you passing out from hunger during training." He spread a checkered blanket on the grass. "Though your control is impressive for a beginner."

"For a human, you mean?" She raised an eyebrow at him.

His lips twitched. "For anyone." He unpacked sandwiches wrapped in brown paper, along with fresh fruit and bottles of water.

She accepted the sandwich he handed her, their fingers brushing. That familiar tingle of energy sparked between them.

She bit into the sandwich - roast beef with an amazing herb spread. "Oh my god, this is delicious. Did you make this?"

"I have many talents." He stretched out beside her, close enough that she could feel the heat radiating from his body.

"Hmm. Wolfy powers, gourmet cooking... what else are you hiding, Your Highness?"

"I excel at chess."

“No way.” She turned slightly to face him, tucking her legs underneath her. “I love chess. We should play sometime.”

His eyes darkened with interest. “Careful what you wish for. I never lose.”

“Neither do I.” She popped a grape into her mouth, letting her gaze linger on his face. “Sounds like a challenge.”

“Perhaps.” He reached out and brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. The casual intimacy of the gesture made her breath hitch. “Though I’m beginning to think you might be my greatest challenge yet.”

“Me?” She affected an innocent expression.

His laugh was rich and deep, sending pleasant shivers down her spine. For all his alpha male intensity, there was something endearing about him when he relaxed like this. Something that made her want to lean in closer.

This was nothing like the awkward first dates she’d suffered through before. Here, surrounded by wildflowers and sunshine, with this fascinating man who could turn into a wolf and packed gourmet picnics... it felt oddly right. As if some part of her had been waiting for exactly this moment.

After they finished their lunch, Lorelei stood, brushing crumbs from her lap. The afternoon sun warmed her face as Draken led her to a cluster of small boulders.

“Let’s try something more complex,” he said. “Instead of just lifting rocks, try reshaping them.”

Lorelei focused on a boulder, picturing the change she wanted. The stone shifted and twisted, morphing into a rough approximation of a chess piece.

“A queen?” Draken’s voice held amusement. “Still thinking about that chess challenge?”

“Maybe.” She grinned, then gasped as he stepped behind her, his chest pressing firmly against her back.

“Try again,” he murmured, his breath tickling her ear. “But this time, feel the structure of the stone. Each grain, each crystal.”

His proximity sent waves of heat through her body, making it hard to concentrate. The earth beneath her feet pulsed in rhythm with her racing heart. When his hands settled on her waist, steadying her, the boulder didn’t just reshape – it transformed into a perfect replica of a chess queen, complete with delicately carved details.

“Beautiful,” he said, and Lorelei wasn’t sure if he meant the sculpture or something else. His thumbs traced small circles on her hips, sending sparks of electricity through her whole body.

“How are you doing that?” she asked, her voice breathier than intended. “Making my powers stronger when you touch me?”

“It’s the mate bond.” His words rumbled through his chest, vibrating against her back. “We’re connected. Your power responds to mine.”

Lorelei tried to focus on creating another sculpture, but her body had other ideas. Every point of contact between them felt electric, charged with an energy that wasn’t due to her earth magic. She turned her head slightly, catching his intense gaze.

“Is it always like this?” she whispered. “This... pull?”

“No.” His grip tightened fractionally. “This is unique to us.”

The boulder she'd been working on suddenly exploded into fine sand, startling them both. Lorelei jumped, bumping back against his solid chest.

“Sorry! I got distracted.”

He stepped back, breaking contact, and Lorelei had to stop herself from swaying toward him like a magnet seeking its pole.

She took a steadying breath, trying to ignore how her body screamed at the loss of his touch. This was ridiculous. She'd known him for barely two days.

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NINE

DRAKEN

D raken leaned against an ancient oak tree and watched Lorelei practice her earth manipulation. She lifted her hands, concentrated, and a large boulder rose from the ground. Her face lit up with pride, and something inside him shifted.

His wolf preened at her accomplishment. The beast inside him had known from the start - this woman was meant to be theirs. He'd been the stubborn one, letting prejudice cloud his judgment.

Power surged through his veins, stronger than he'd felt in centuries. His wolf's strength had returned tenfold since being near her these past two days, and when they touched during her training, the energy between them could have lit up the entire castle.

The memory of her that morning in the tunnels came back to him. The way she'd traced the stone walls with reverent fingers, explaining architectural terms he'd never heard. Her genuine appreciation for his ancestors' work had touched something deep within him.

“Did your ancestors carve those support arches by hand?” She called over to him, focused on her floating rocks. “I was just thinking how impeccable the craftsmanship is.”

His chest swelled. Here was this human woman, appreciating his heritage in ways

some of his own pack never had. He suddenly realized he'd been gifted not just any mate, but one who could truly understand and appreciate the legacy she'd be helping him protect.

“Keep your breathing steady,” he instructed. “Remember, your power flows better when you're relaxed.”

She nodded, adjusting her stance. The rocks lowered gently back to earth. Such control, such precision - and she'd only just begun learning.

His wolf howled with joy. Human or not, Lorelei was who they needed. Who he needed.

His feet moved of their own accord, drawn to her like a magnet to steel. “There's one more technique I want to show you.”

“What's that?” Lorelei turned her head slightly, acknowledging his presence behind her.

“It requires precise control.” He moved in closer, his chest touching her back. “May I?”

At her nod, he placed his hands on her hips. The connection sparked between them instantly, making his fingers tingle. “Raise your arms like this.” He guided her movements, sliding his hands up her sides to position her arms.

The power surged between them, electric and alive. Small stones around their feet began to vibrate in response.

“Now, picture the earth moving in waves,” he murmured near her ear. “Like ripples in water.”

She shivered against him. “Like this?”

The ground undulated in gentle waves, but Draken barely noticed. All he could focus on was the soft press of her body against his, the racing of her pulse beneath her skin.

His wolf demanded action. For once, Draken agreed completely.

He spun her in his arms, one hand sliding into her hair as he claimed her mouth with his. She tasted like summer storms and wild magic. Her lips parted with a gasp, and he deepened the kiss, groaning as she pressed closer.

“I was wrong,” he whispered against her mouth. “So wrong about everything.”

“About what?” She pulled back slightly, her fingers curling into his shirt.

“About you. About us.” He kissed her again, softer this time. “You’re exactly what I need.”

Draken’s hands tightened around Lorelei’s waist as he lifted her effortlessly, her surprised gasp ringing in his ears like music. She didn’t fight him, didn’t protest—just looked up at him with those wide brown eyes that had been driving him insane since the moment he’d first seen her. His wolf howled in triumph. Finally, it seemed to say. Finally, she’s ours.

He carried her to the picnic blanket, the soft grass brushing against his boots as he stepped carefully, as if she were the most fragile thing in the world. Except he knew better. Lorelei was anything but fragile. She was a force of nature wrapped in the softest skin. He laid her down gently, her hair fanning out around her like a halo against the blanket.

“Draken,” she whispered, her voice a little shaky but not uncertain. He could sense

she trusted him. That trust alone made his chest tighten.

“Shh,” he murmured, lowering himself over her. His lips brushed hers, soft at first. But when her hands slid into his hair, tugging him closer, he deepened the kiss, claiming her mouth with a primal hunger. Her taste was intoxicating—sweet and wild.

He smiled against her lips, pulling back to see her face. “You’re perfect,” he said, his voice rough with need. “Every inch of you.”

Her cheeks flushed, and she let out a breathless laugh. “You’re supposed to be teaching me control, not kissing.”

“Who says I can’t do both?” he countered, his grin widening as he reached for the hem of her shirt. He tugged it over her head slowly, letting his fingers graze her skin as he went. Her bra followed, and then she was bare before him, her chest rising and falling with rapid breaths.

His wolf growled with approval, and Draken couldn’t help but agree. She was stunning—her skin like sunlight, her nipples already peaked and begging for his attention. He lowered his head, dragging his tongue over one taut peak, and she gasped.

“Draken,” she breathed, her voice trembling.

He nipped gently, and she arched into him, a soft moan escaping her lips. He repeated the motion on the other side. Her body was so responsive, so perfectly his.

When he finally kissed his way down her stomach, her breath hitched. “What are you?—“

“Trust me,” he interrupted, his hands moving to the button of her jeans. He made quick work of them, sliding them down her legs and tossing them aside. Her panties followed, and then she was completely bare.

He settled between her thighs, his hands gripping her hips to hold her steady. She let out another surprised gasp when he leaned in, his tongue tracing a slow, deliberate path over her most sensitive spot.

“Draken!” Her voice was a mixture of shock and pleasure, and he couldn’t stop himself from chuckling, the sound vibrating against her skin.

“Relax,” he said. “You’re in control, remember? Just let go.”

Her hands tangled in his hair, tugging slightly, and he took that as permission to continue. He licked and sucked, alternating between slow, teasing strokes and faster, more insistent movements. Her moans grew louder, her hips rocking against his mouth as she lost herself in the sensations.

The ground beneath them began to tremble, tiny vibrations that grew stronger with every passing second. Draken smiled against her skin, his wolf preening at the knowledge that they were the ones making her lose control. He pressed harder, his tongue working in relentless circles until her body tensed, her back arching off the blanket.

“Oh—oh my—“ Her words were cut off by a cry of pure pleasure as she came, the earth shaking beneath them in a way that was anything but subtle. Draken held her hips steady, drinking in every last tremor of her orgasm as it rocked through her.

When she finally collapsed back onto the blanket, her chest heaving, he climbed back up her body. “Still think I’m just here to teach you control?” he teased, brushing her hair from her face.

She laughed breathlessly, her eyes still dazed. “I think you’re here to drive me insane.”

“Good,” he said. “Because I’m nowhere near done with you.”

Draken lay back on the picnic blanket, his chest rising and falling as he kicked off his boots and shucked his jeans and boxers. His member sprang free, thick and hard, and he couldn’t help the grin that spread across his face when Lorelei’s eyes widened.

“Surprised?” he teased, his voice low and gravelly.

She let out a breathless laugh, her cheeks flushing. “I mean, I wasn’t expecting... that .”

“You’re welcome,” he quipped, reaching for her hand and tugging her toward him. She faltered slightly, landing with a playful laugh against his chest. “Straddle me,” he commanded, his tone firm but gentle. He needed her to take control—this was about her pleasure, her comfort right now.

She hesitated for a moment, her brown eyes searching his. “I’ve never... been on top before.”

“Then let me be your first,” he said, his grin turning wicked. He guided her hips, helping her position herself over him. “Take your time. Go as slow as you need.”

She bit her lip, her hands resting on his chest for balance as she lowered herself onto him inch by agonizing inch. Draken’s jaw clenched, his fingers digging into her hips as she enveloped him completely. She was so tight, so warm, so perfect. His wolf howled in approval, and he had to fight to keep himself from thrusting upward and taking her fully. This was her pace, her control.

“Good,” he murmured, his voice strained. “You’re doing perfect.”

She let out a shaky breath, her body adjusting to his size. “You’re... a lot .”

He chuckled, the sound ragged. “You’ll get used to it. Now, move when you’re ready.”

Lorelei began to rock her hips, slowly at first, her movements tentative but growing more confident as she found her rhythm. Draken’s hands gripped her waist, guiding her as she set the pace. Her head fell back, her hair cascading down her back as she moaned softly. The sight of her—so lost in pleasure, so beautiful—was almost enough to undo him.

“That’s it,” he encouraged, his voice rough with desire. “You’re in control. Take what you need.”

Her pace quickened, her body moving with a natural grace that made his breath hitch. Draken’s hips began to meet hers, thrusting deeper and harder, driving her to the edge. Her moans grew louder, mingling with his own as the tension between them built to a fever pitch.

“Draken,” she gasped, her nails digging into his chest. “I—I’m—oh?—“

Her climax hit her like a tidal wave, her body trembling as she cried out. The ground beneath them shuddered in response, rocks and dirt moving as her powers surged with her release. Draken grinned through gritted teeth, his own orgasm barreling toward him. He wanted to mark her, to claim her as his mate in every way possible, but his rational mind held him back. She didn’t yet understand what it meant to be his Luna, to be bound to him and the pack. He wouldn’t take that choice from her.

Instead, he gripped her hips tighter and thrust into her one last time, his release

crashing over him with a force that left him breathless. He spilled inside her, his body shuddering with the intensity.

Lorelei collapsed onto his chest, her body still trembling with aftershocks. Draken wrapped his arms around her, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

His heart swelled with a warmth he hadn't felt in centuries. This woman—this human—was more than he'd ever dared to hope for. And he was determined to show her just how much she meant to him.

TEN

LORELEI

Lorelei stared at her reflection in the ornate mirror of her suite in Draken's castle, brushing out her damp hair after another day of training. Her muscles ached pleasantly from the physical exertion of manipulating earth and stone. The past two days had been surreal - both exhausting and exhilarating.

"What are you doing?" she muttered to herself. "This isn't like you at all."

She'd always been the practical one, the planner. Now, here she was, swept up in whatever this was with Draken. Her skin still tingled from where he'd touched her during their practice session, guiding her movements as she learned to channel her newfound abilities.

The memory of their first intimate encounter made her cheeks flush. One moment they'd been practicing, and the next...pure bliss. Since then, each training session had ended the same way - with them tangled together, overcome by an attraction that felt almost supernatural in its intensity.

There was no logical explanation for how natural it felt to be with him, how her body craved his touch like an addiction. Or why he hadn't pressured her about this whole "Luna" situation, instead letting her come to terms with everything at her own pace.

"You're supposed to be focusing on controlling your powers so you can go back home," she reminded herself firmly. But control seemed impossible around Draken.

Something about his presence made her feel more alive than she ever had.

Every night after her training sessions, they'd share intimate dinners in the castle gardens. The moonlit meals were romantic enough to make her forget she was essentially living in a supernatural witness protection program. Tonight, he'd pulled out her chair, poured her wine, and discussed her progress with obvious pride.

But afterward, like clockwork, they'd parted ways at her bedroom door with nothing more than a lingering look. The mixed signals were driving her crazy. One moment, he was all passion and possession, the next keeping careful distance.

Lorelei crawled into the luxurious bed, her mind whirling. She still didn't fully understand what being a "Luna" meant, or this mate bond thing everyone kept dancing around. Draken clearly wanted her to figure it out on her own, come to some sort of conclusion for her own future, but she felt lost in this new world of magic and shifters.

She rolled over, burying her face in the pillow. Her practical nature warred with the undeniable connection between them, leaving her more confused than ever about what the future held. But as she drifted off to sleep, her last thoughts were of Draken's touch, and how desperately she wanted more of it.

Lorelei stepped into the castle's courtyard, the morning sun warming her skin. She'd chosen a comfortable outfit of leggings and a flowing top, perfect for the physical demands of power practice. Her hair was pulled back in a practical braid, ready for another day of working with Draken.

The courtyard looked different in the early light – the ancient stone walls caught the golden rays, creating dancing shadows across the cobblestones. The morning dew still clung to the carefully tended flowers in the garden beds, and birds called from the castle's towers.

But Draken wasn't waiting in their usual spot by the stone bench. Instead, a woman with steel-gray hair pulled into an elegant bun stood there. She wore a tailored pantsuit that probably cost more than Lorelei's monthly rent, and her posture screamed authority.

The woman's heels clicked against the stone as she approached. "Good morning, Ms. Chanda. I'm Marybeth Sheppard." Her smile was warm but professional. "Prince Draken has asked me to spend the day with you. It's time you learned about the Moonshadow pack and what being Luna truly means."

A breeze rustled through the courtyard, carrying the scent of roses from the garden. Lorelei's stomach did a little flip. After days of intense physical training and equally intense moments with Draken, this felt like a test. Or maybe an interview. The architect in her wanted to pull out a notebook and take detailed notes, but something told her this wasn't that kind of lesson.

The courtyard suddenly felt very empty without Draken's commanding presence. She'd grown used to starting her mornings with his deep voice giving instructions and his strong hands guiding her movements. The way his eyes would darken when she mastered a new technique...

Marybeth cleared her throat, drawing Lorelei's attention back to the present moment. The older woman's knowing smile suggested she had a pretty good idea where Lorelei's thoughts had wandered.

Lorelei shifted her weight from foot to foot, feeling oddly exposed without Draken beside her. "Is Draken..." She caught herself, heat rising to her cheeks. "Never mind, it doesn't matter."

"Prince Draken," Marybeth emphasized the title with a slight arch of her perfectly groomed eyebrow, "has duties to attend to today. As both prince of our sovereign

territory and alpha of the Moonshadow pack, his responsibilities are quite extensive.”

The older woman’s voice carried a hint of pride that made Lorelei’s stomach twist. “He’s mentioned being a prince, and obviously we’re in a castle, but what exactly does ‘alpha of the pack’ mean?”

“My dear Luna, Prince Draken is centuries old, beloved by his people. The pack’s devotion to him runs bone-deep.” Marybeth’s smile softened. “That’s part of what I’m here to teach you today - everything about pack politics and who you are.”

Lorelei’s mind stuck on ‘centuries old’ like a scratched record. She knew Draken was different - the whole shifting into a wolf thing was a pretty big clue - but hearing it stated so matter-of-factly made her head spin. Here she was, barely thirty, playing at romance with an ancient prince who commanded an entire supernatural society.

The rose bushes beside her suddenly seemed intensely interesting. “I’m just an architect from the city,” she murmured, more to herself than Marybeth. “I design buildings. I don’t rule kingdoms.”

“You’re far more than ‘just’ anything,” Marybeth said firmly. “Now, shall we begin your education?”

Lorelei nodded, trying to ignore the flutter of anxiety in her chest. She’d always excelled at learning new things, but somehow she doubted her usual study methods would apply to “How to Be a Supernatural Queen 101.”

Lorelei settled into a cushioned chair in what Marybeth called “the morning room,” though it felt more like a museum with its gilded mirrors and antique furniture. Sunlight streamed through floor-to-ceiling windows illuminating dust motes that danced in the air.

“The Moonshadow pack isn’t just any wolf community,” Marybeth explained, pouring tea into delicate china cups. “We’re one of the oldest and most powerful sovereign territories in North America.”

“Like a country within a country?” Lorelei asked, accepting the cup.

“Precisely, Luna. Prince Draken manages both the supernatural and more human aspects of our territory. Everything from pack disputes to economic policies.” Marybeth’s eyes sparkled. “He’s quite skilled at multitasking.”

“How many wolves are we talking about?”

“Over three thousand in our immediate pack, plus others who live and work within our territory.” Marybeth stirred honey into her tea. “There are five other territories like ours, each with their own prince. But the Moonshadow pack is special because of our connection to earth magic.”

Lorelei’s fingers tightened around her cup. “About that... you keep calling me ‘Luna.’ Shouldn’t the Luna be a wolf, not a human?”

“Traditionally, yes. When a female wolf reaches maturity, her Luna powers awaken. The alpha must then find and unite with her, or his powers begin to fade.” Marybeth tilted her head. “You’re certainly unprecedented, but there’s no doubt you’re our Luna. The earth responds to you.”

“And this mate thing everyone keeps mentioning?”

“It’s a soul-deep connection. Two halves of one whole, drawn together by forces beyond our understanding.” Marybeth’s expression softened. “Haven’t you felt it? The pull toward Draken?”

Lorelei thought about how her body hummed whenever he was near, how natural it felt to be with him despite the insanity of the situation. “Maybe,” she admitted.

“He’s waited centuries for you, you know. Running this territory alone, handling pack politics, mediating disputes. A Luna shares those responsibilities, makes the burden lighter.”

The weight of what Marybeth was saying settled over Lorelei like a heavy blanket. Her mind drifted to her apartment in the city, her carefully planned career path, her normal life. All of it seemed very far away from this world of ancient wolf princes and magical responsibilities.

“That’s... quite a job description,” she managed.

“Indeed.” Marybeth set down her cup with a knowing smile. “Shall we continue on with your education? There’s still much to cover about pack hierarchy and protocol.”

Lorelei listened as Marybeth detailed the intricate hierarchy of wolf pack dynamics, her architect’s mind trying to organize it all into neat categories.

“The alpha pair - that would be you and Prince Draken - lead the pack. Below them are the beta wolves, like Chuck, who handle enforcement and protection. Then the delta wolves who manage day-to-day operations...”

Lorelei’s tea grew cold as Marybeth explained the complex social structure, complete with rules about eye contact, proper forms of address, and pack etiquette. It was like learning about a whole new culture, complete with its own customs and taboos.

“Never challenge an alpha’s authority in public,” Marybeth cautioned. “And during full moons, the pack runs together - though you’ll need to learn to ride horseback to join them until you’re properly mated.”

“Properly mated?” Lorelei’s cheeks flushed, remembering her intimate encounters with Draken.

Marybeth’s expression turned grave. “Yes. And speaking of that...” She set her cup down with a sharp click. “We need to discuss your current situation. You’re in considerable danger.”

The morning room suddenly felt colder despite the sunlight streaming through the windows. “Because of my powers?”

“Precisely. An unmated Luna with awakened powers is incredibly vulnerable. There are those who would seek to control your abilities for their own gain - usually dark purposes.” Marybeth’s eyes hardened. “The man who attempted to kidnap you won’t be the last.”

The reality of her situation hit Lorelei like a physical blow. Her carefully ordered life - the projects she was designing, her comfortable apartment, even her weekly game nights with friends - all of it was gone now. She couldn’t just go back to normal, not when she had these powers that made her a target.

“But I can’t just...” The room started to tilt alarmingly. “I have deadlines, and clients, and...”

“Your safety must come first,” Marybeth’s voice seemed to come from very far away. “Until you’re properly mated to Prince Draken...”

Lorelei stood abruptly, her vision swimming. The antique furniture blurred together, the gilded mirrors reflecting a thousand spinning images. Her last thought before darkness claimed her was that she really should have eaten breakfast before this conversation.

ELEVEN

DRAKEN

Draken paced the length of the ornate boardroom. Morning sunlight streamed through the tall windows, casting large shadows across the polished oak table where Scorpio and Chuck sat reviewing reports.

“The pack’s growing restless,” Chuck said, shuffling through a stack of papers. “Three more complaints this morning about the Luna’s absence.”

Draken’s jaw tightened. The weight of his pack’s expectations pressed down on him like a physical force. “They’ll have to wait.”

“With respect, Alpha,” Scorpio leaned forward, “they’ve been waiting.”

“I’m aware.” Draken’s voice carried an edge that made both men straighten in their seats. The pull toward Lorelei thrummed through his body, a constant reminder of their unmated status. “But she barely understands what a Luna is, let alone the responsibilities that come with it.”

“That’s why you sent Marybeth?” Chuck asked.

“Yes.” Draken paused by the window, watching a group of pack members cross the courtyard below. His people. His responsibility. “But teaching her our ways won’t change what she is.”

“Human,” Scorpio supplied quietly.

The word hung in the air like smoke. Draken’s wolf bristled at the reminder, even as his heart rate quickened thinking of Lorelei’s soft skin under his hands during their training sessions.

“The pack hasn’t exactly welcomed humans with open arms,” Chuck said, scratching his neck. “Remember last year’s border dispute?”

“When those hikers wandered onto our land?” Draken snorted. “The council nearly had a collective stroke.”

“And now their Luna is human.” Scorpio tapped his fingers on the table. “It’s quite the turn of events.”

Draken resumed his pacing, his muscles coiled with tension. The irony wasn’t lost on him – he who had always insisted on maintaining distance from humans now found himself inexplicably drawn to one. Her earth magic called to him like a siren’s song, growing stronger each day they trained together. But it wasn’t just her power that attracted him. It was her quick mind, her determination, the way she bit her lip when concentrating on controlling her abilities.

“The pack won’t understand,” he muttered, more to himself than his advisors.

He braced his hands on the boardroom table, his muscles tense beneath his tailored shirt. “What do you suggest I do about this situation?”

“You have two choices.” Scorpio’s voice carried the weight of years of friendship and counsel. “Send her away, tell the pack there’s no Luna like you originally planned?—“

“No.” The word ripped from Draken’s throat before he could stop it. His wolf howled in agreement. The mere thought of Lorelei leaving made his chest constrict.

“Or,” Scorpio continued with a knowing look, “accept that you want her in your life and deal with the consequences.”

Chuck leaned back in his chair. “The pack’s views on humans won’t change overnight.”

“They’ll have to.” Draken straightened, authority radiating from his stance. The memory of Lorelei’s determined face flashed through his mind. “I won’t send her away.”

“Then you need to introduce her,” Scorpio said. “Soon. The longer you wait, the more resistance you’ll face.”

Draken’s wolf prowled close to the surface, protective and possessive. “The pack will accept her because I command it.”

“And if they don’t?” Chuck asked skeptically.

“Then they can challenge me in person.” Draken’s lips curved into a dangerous smile. “Though I doubt any will, considering how much stronger I’ve become since finding her.”

Scorpio chuckled. “Nothing like a mate bond to supercharge an alpha’s powers and cockiness.”

“Even an incomplete bond,” Draken remarked, remembering how he’d stopped himself from marking her. His wolf had fought him on that decision, but he wouldn’t mate her until she understood exactly what that meant. “I’ll introduce her to the pack.

Tonight.”

“Tonight?” Both men straightened abruptly in surprise.

“Why wait?” Draken’s wolf hummed with satisfaction at the decisive action. “The sooner the pack understands she’s here to stay, the better.”

“And how exactly do you plan to do this introduction?” Chuck asked.

Draken’s footsteps halted mid-pace as an idea struck him. His wolf practically shouted with delight at the thought. “We’ll throw a party.”

Chuck choked on his coffee. “A party?”

“Yes, a formal party.” Draken’s tone held the authority that had led his pack for centuries. “In the grand ballroom. I want crystal chandeliers, fresh flowers, the works.”

Scorpio’s eyebrows shot up. “You want to organize a full formal event in...” He checked his watch. “Less than twelve hours?”

“I want the other five princes here too.” Draken strode to the window, energy thrumming through his veins. “Send word immediately.”

“The other princes?” Chuck exchanged a worried glance with Scorpio. “That’s quite a statement, Alpha.”

“Exactly.” Draken turned, a dangerous smile playing on his lips. “I want everyone to know about my Luna. My beautiful, powerful, human Luna.”

The word human echoed off the stone walls. Both advisors tensed.

“This will cause quite a stir in the supernatural community,” Scorpio said carefully. “The other princes might not?—“

“Let them stir.” Draken’s wolf surged forward, protective and proud. “I want Kelly to take our best seamstress to Lorelei immediately. Something elegant. Something that makes a statement.”

“What color?” Chuck asked, already typing on his phone.

Draken thought of Lorelei’s earth magical powers, how they sang to his own power. “Green. Deep green with gold accents. Like the woods at twilight.”

“You’re really going all in on this,” Scorpio observed, his pen hovering over his notepad.

“My Luna deserves nothing less.” Draken’s chest swelled with pride. “Make sure the kitchen prepares her favorite desserts. And have the gardens lit with fairy lights. She mentioned liking them the other night.”

Chuck was typing furiously. “Anything else?”

“Yes.” Draken’s voice dropped lower, letting his alpha authority seep through. “Make sure everyone understands – this isn’t just an introduction. This is a declaration. Lorelei is my Luna, human or not. Anyone who has a problem with that can take it up with me directly.”

His wolf growled in agreement, already anticipating any challenges. Let them come. With Lorelei’s powers amplifying his own, he’d never felt stronger.

“Well,” Scorpio said, standing and straightening his jacket. “We better get moving if we’re going to pull this off by tonight.”

The heavy boardroom door clicked shut behind Chuck and Scorpio, leaving Draken alone with his thoughts. His wolf practically pranced with excitement at their plans for the evening. Electric energy coursed through his veins, making it impossible to stand still.

“Let them try to challenge this,” he muttered, rolling his shoulders. The mere thought of anyone opposing Lorelei as his Luna made his muscles coil with protective instinct.

He strode through the castle’s corridors toward his private gym, his footsteps echoing off the ancient stone walls. The familiar scent of leather and steel greeted him as he pushed open the heavy oak door. Sunlight streamed through high windows, warming the training mats and gleaming off the weights.

Draken stripped off his dress shirt, tossing it aside. His reflection caught his eye in the mirrored wall – he looked different. Younger somehow, more alive. All because of her.

The memory of Lorelei’s fingers trailing down his chest made his skin tingle. How her eyes lit up when she successfully manipulated the earth around her.

“Mine,” his wolf growled as he grabbed a heavy weight bar.

Working through his usual routine, Draken’s mind wandered to tonight’s celebration. He pictured Lorelei in an elegant green gown, standing proudly beside him. His Luna. His mate. Human or not, she completed him in ways he never expected.

“To hell with tradition,” he said between sets, his muscles burning pleasantly. “To hell with anyone who objects.”

The other princes would arrive, expecting the usual formalities. Instead, they’d

witness him upending centuries of supernatural traditions. The thought made him grin.

Sweat dripped down his chest as he moved to the punching bag. Each strike emphasized his certainty. He'd waited centuries for his Luna. Now that he'd found her, nothing would keep them apart – not his pack's prejudices, not other alphas' opinions, not even his own initial doubts.

“You've changed me, little human,” he murmured, landing a particularly satisfying combination. “Made me stronger. Better.”

Tonight would change everything. And for the first time in his long existence, change didn't feel like a threat. It felt like freedom.

Draken soon finished his last set of pull-ups, his muscles burning pleasantly from the intense workout. His wolf prowled, restless with anticipation for tonight's celebration. Grabbing a towel, he wiped the sweat from his chest and headed toward his master suite.

The hot shower eased the tension in his shoulders as steam filled the massive bathroom. He let his mind wander to Lorelei, picturing how she'd look tonight in the green gown he'd ordered.

“All mine,” he murmured, running shampoo through his hair.

The thought of showing her off to the other princes made his chest puff with pride. Let them see what a human Luna could be.

He stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around his waist just as his phone buzzed on the marble counter. Chuck's name flashed across the screen.

The message made his blood run cold: “Luna collapsed while with Marybeth.”

“Fuck!” Draken’s fist slammed into the counter.

He threw on the first clothes he could grab – black athletic pants and a white Henley – not bothering to dry his hair. Water dripped down his neck as he sprinted through the castle’s corridors, his bare feet silent on the marble floors.

His wolf clawed at his insides desperate to reach their mate. Had someone attacked her? Was it the strain of her new powers? Why hadn’t he stayed with her today instead of sending Marybeth?

“Status update,” he barked into his phone.

Chuck’s voice crackled through the speaker. “Still unconscious. Doctor’s with her now.”

Draken’s jaw clenched as he took the grand staircase three steps at a time. “And Marybeth?”

“Says they were just talking about pack stuff when it happened. No warning signs.”

The castle staff pressed themselves against the walls as he passed, heads bowed in submission to their alpha’s obvious distress.

His mind raced with possibilities, each worse than the last. Had he pushed her too hard with training? Was her human body struggling to contain such powerful magic? The thought made his chest constrict painfully.

“I should have been there,” he growled, rounding another corner at full speed.

TWELVE

LORELEI

Lorelei's eyes fluttered open to find herself lying in the plush four-poster bed of her castle suite. The silk sheets whispered against her skin as she tried to sit up, but a gentle hand pressed her shoulder back down.

"Easy there," a woman in a white coat said. "I'm Dr. Sanders. You gave everyone quite a scare when you fainted."

Kelly and Chuck stood on the other side of the bed, concern etched on their faces. The room spun slightly, making Lorelei grateful for the soft pillows cradling her head.

"Everything appears normal," Dr. Sanders said, putting away her stethoscope. "Just dehydration and exhaustion. I recommend rest and plenty of fluids."

Lorelei's mind wandered to her training sessions with Draken - the way the earth responded to their combined touch, how his presence intensified her powers, their passionate encounters afterward. Heat crept into her cheeks.

"Thank you," she managed, reaching for the glass of water Kelly offered.

As the doctor packed up her bag and slipped out, Lorelei's thoughts drifted to everything Marybeth had taught her that morning. Pack politics. Luna duties. Fated mates. A week ago, she'd been focused on building designs and project deadlines.

Now she was supposedly destined to be queen of a wolf pack?

“I should be drafting blueprints right now,” she muttered, pressing her fingers to her temples. “Not learning about moon ceremonies and pack hierarchies.”

“You’ll get the hang of it,” Kelly said, smoothing Lorelei’s blanket. “Chuck was completely lost when he first joined the pack, weren’t you, honey?”

Chuck scratched his neck. “Still am sometimes. But you’ve got a good head on your shoulders. Better than most born wolves I know.”

“Thanks, I think.” Lorelei sighed. “It’s just... a lot. My friends must be worried sick. And that project site...” Her stomach clenched remembering the destruction her uncontrolled powers had caused.

“I’m sure your friends know you’re safe,” Kelly assured her. “And buildings can be rebuilt.”

“Plus, I never believed in destiny or fate,” Lorelei admitted, tracing patterns on the silk comforter. “But then again, I never thought I could make the ground shake with a thought either.”

Kelly’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Speaking of destiny...” She glided to the massive oak wardrobe in the corner of Lorelei’s suite, its carved panels depicting scenes of wolves running through forests.

When Kelly returned, she held what had to be the most stunning dress Lorelei had ever seen. Forest-green silk cascaded like water, catching the afternoon light streaming through the windows. Gold threadwork traced delicate patterns along the bodice and hem, reminiscent of vines and leaves.

“There’s a party tonight,” Kelly announced, laying the dress across the foot of the bed. “The seamstress worked all day on this.”

Lorelei ran her fingers over the smooth fabric. “A party? Tonight?” The thought of socializing after her fainting spell made her head spin, but the dress called to her like a siren song. “It’s beautiful.”

“Wait until you try it on. The cut will show off those curves perfectly.” Kelly winked. “Though I suspect a certain alpha won’t be able to keep his eyes off you regardless.”

Heat crept up Lorelei’s neck as she thought of Draken’s intense stares during their training sessions. “I don’t know about that...”

“Trust me,” Chuck chuckled from his spot by the door. “That man’s been walking around like a lovesick pup all week.”

“Chuck!” Kelly swatted his arm. “Let’s leave so Lorelei can rest before the party. She’ll need her strength.” She gathered up the water glass and straightened the blankets one last time.

Left alone, Lorelei sank back into the pillows, her gaze drawn to the dress. After the chaos of the past week - kidnapping attempts, earth-shaking revelations about her powers, and steamy encounters with an alpha wolf prince - maybe a party was exactly what she needed. A chance to forget about Luna duties and pack politics for one night and just... dance.

She closed her eyes, imagining Draken in formal wear, those muscled arms holding her close as they swayed to music. Her body tingled at the memory of their passionate moments in the wilderness. Whatever this thing was between them, whatever being his “mate” meant, she couldn’t deny the pull she felt toward him.

The dress seemed to whisper promises of the evening to come.

The bedroom door suddenly burst open with enough force to make Lorelei jump. Draken filled the doorframe, his chest heaving beneath his white Henley that clung to his still-damp skin. His hair was wet and tousled like he'd barely taken time to towel it off before rushing to her room. Despite his disheveled state - or perhaps because of it - he looked sexy as hell.

"I heard you fainted." His voice was rough with concern as he crossed the room in three long strides. "Are you all right?"

The mattress dipped as he sat beside her, one hand coming up to cup her cheek. His touch sent tingles through her body, and she had to resist the urge to lean into his palm.

"I'm fine," she assured him, trying to ignore how his proximity made her pulse quicken. "Just got a little lightheaded. Probably shouldn't have skipped breakfast."

His thumb traced her cheekbone. "I've been pushing you too hard with the training." His eyes darkened. "And other activities."

Heat bloomed in her cheeks as memories of their passionate lovemaking flashed through her mind. "No, really. Dr. Sanders said it was just dehydration and exhaustion. Nothing serious."

He didn't look convinced, but his expression shifted to something more determined. "There's something we need to discuss." He glanced at the dress laid out on her bed. "I see Kelly's already delivered your gown for tonight."

"Yes, it's beautiful." Lorelei ran her fingers along the silk.

“The party tonight...” He paused, his jaw tightening. “It’s to formally introduce you as my Luna. The pack has been waiting to meet you since they sensed your powers awakening.”

Lorelei’s hand stilled on the fabric. Her mind raced back to everything Marybeth had taught her that morning about what being Luna meant - about being his mate, about leading the pack alongside him. The reality of it all suddenly felt very immediate and very real.

Draken watched her intently, clearly waiting for her reaction. His body was tense like a predator ready to spring, though whether to chase her if she ran or protect her if she feared, she wasn’t sure.

Lorelei twisted the silk sheets between her fingers, avoiding Draken’s intense gaze. “I don’t think I’m ready to be introduced to the pack.”

“We don’t have a choice,” he stated firmly. “There are already problems brewing because you haven’t been formally presented. Like I said, the pack sensed your awakening. They’re growing very restless.”

“And they’ll be even more restless when they discover I’m human, won’t they?” The words tasted bitter on her tongue. “Because the Luna is supposed to be a wolf.”

Draken’s shoulders tensed. “Yes. But there’s more to it than that,” he replied. “The pack – the entire supernatural community of wolves – we don’t particularly... like humans.”

The admission hit her like a punch to the gut. The silk sheets crumpled in her fists as anger surged through her veins. “Don’t particularly like humans? What does that even mean?”

“Lorelei-“

“No.” She shoved the covers aside, ignoring the lingering dizziness as she stood. “Maybe I should just go home. Screw all of you and your supernatural superiority complex.” The floor trembled beneath her feet. “And what about you, Draken? How do you really feel about having a weak, despised human for a Luna?”

The tremors intensified, rattling the furniture. A vase crashed to the floor, shattering into pieces. Panic flashed across Draken’s face as he crossed the room in two swift strides.

“Breathe,” he commanded, gripping her shoulders. His touch sent sparks of electricity through her body, but the earth continued to shake. “Focus on my voice. Control it.”

Lorelei squeezed her eyes shut, trying to rein in her powers along with her emotions. The reality of her situation crashed over her like a wave – she couldn’t go home, not like this. Not when a moment of anger could trigger an earthquake.

The tremors gradually subsided, leaving her exhausted and shaking in Draken’s grip. She opened her eyes to find his face inches from hers, concern etched in his features.

“I can’t go home yet, can I?” she whispered, hating how vulnerable she felt. “Even if I wanted to?”

“No,” he confirmed, his thumbs drawing circles on her shoulders. “You can’t.”

Her heart thundered in her chest as his thumbs continued their soothing circles on her shoulders. His touch sent waves of warmth through her body, calming her frayed nerves even as it ignited something else entirely.

“What happened just now with the tremors?” He gestured to the shattered vase.

“That’s exactly why we need to handle this carefully. There are things we can control, and things we can’t.”

“Like my apparently destructive powers?” The words came out more bitter than she intended.

“Like how we present ourselves to the pack and other territories.” His fingers tightened slightly on her shoulders. “We can control the announcement, make it clear and decisive. What we can’t control is their reactions.”

“You mean their horror at discovering their Luna is a mere human?”

“Stop that.” His voice carried the edge of command that made her breath catch. “I won’t deny that when I first realized you were human, I was... resistant to the idea.”

“Resistant?” She snorted. “You locked me in a dungeon.”

His lips twitched. “For the hundredth time, it was not a dungeon. It was a tribute with excellent stonework that you proceeded to destroy.”

Despite herself, Lorelei felt a smile tugging at her mouth. “Well, the acoustics were terrible in there.”

“The point is,” he continued, his expression growing serious, “that was before I knew you. Before I saw your strength, your determination. Your ability to adapt to impossible situations.” His hand slid up to cup her cheek. “Now, I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

His sincerity made her chest tight. She searched his face for any sign of deception but found only warmth in those intense eyes.

“So, what do we do?” she asked softly.

“We face this together. Stay strong. See it through.” His thumb brushed her lower lip.
“Starting with tonight’s party.”

Lorelei glanced at the gorgeous green dress still laid out on the bed. She couldn’t go home now – not when she could barely control her powers, not when mysterious wolves were hunting her. And if she was being honest with herself, she didn’t want to leave Draken. Whatever this pull between them was, it felt too important to walk away from.

“All right,” she agreed. “But if anyone tries to bite me, I’m bringing the castle down around them.”

Draken’s laugh rumbled through his chest. “That’s my Luna.”

THIRTEEN

DRAKEN

Draken adjusted his forest-green tie as he surveyed the grand ballroom through the French doors that opened onto the castle gardens. Twinkling lights dotted the trees and hedges, casting a magical glow across the perfectly manicured grounds. Inside, crystal chandeliers sparkled overhead, their light dancing off the polished marble floors.

“Quite the turnout,” Sol Cadoret said, clapping him on the shoulder. “Though I hear rumors your Luna is... unconventional.”

“Since when do you listen to rumors, Sol?” Draken kept his voice level, though his wolf bristled at the implied criticism.

“Since they’re usually true.” Sol’s lips quirked. “But then again, you’ve always done things your own way.”

Before Draken could respond, Nereus Varon approached with Orion Guillaume. “The gardens are spectacular,” Nereus said. “Your Luna’s earth magic at work?”

“She’s still learning to control her powers.” Draken’s chest filled with pride, remembering how quickly Lorelei had progressed. Her determination to master her abilities despite her initial skepticism had impressed him more than he cared to admit.

“A novice Luna?” Zephyr Osman joined their circle, champagne in hand. “That’s...

different.”

“Everything about this situation is different,” Taran Almond added, his meaning clear in his pointed look.

Draken’s jaw clenched tightly. “Different doesn’t mean wrong.”

The other princes exchanged glances. Draken fought the urge to growl. He missed Lorelei’s presence beside him, her quick wit and sharp mind. She would have handled their subtle digs with far more grace than he was managing.

“When do we meet this mysterious Luna of yours?” Orion asked.

“Soon enough.” Draken checked his watch. His wolf paced restlessly, wanting to be near their mate. “Once all the guests arrive.”

“And your pack? How are they taking the news?”

“They haven’t heard it yet.” Draken’s tone carried a clear warning. “Tonight will be her first introduction.”

Sol whistled low. “Bold move, announcing it to everyone at once.”

“Sometimes the direct approach is best.” Draken’s gaze swept the room, noting the growing crowd of pack members mingling with the supernatural dignitaries. His fingers itched to loosen his tie, but he maintained his rigid posture. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have other guests to greet.”

He moved away, his wolf’s agitation matching his own. Soon, he told himself. Soon Lorelei would be by his side where she belonged, human or not.

Draken soon paced near the grand staircase, his wolf's restlessness mirroring his own. The summer breeze carried the scent of roses through the open French doors, mingling with the excited chatter of guests. His pack members bowed respectfully as they passed, their eyes bright with anticipation.

"My prince." Agnes Blackwood, who'd served his family for over two centuries, approached with a warm smile. "The decorations are exquisite. And these tremors in my bones... I haven't felt such power since your grandmother was Luna."

"Thank you, Agnes." Draken's tension eased slightly. If anyone represented the heart of his pack, it was Agnes. "Your support means more than you know."

"Nonsense." She patted his arm. "We've weathered many changes together. The pack will adjust."

More of his people gathered nearby, their expressions open and trusting. The sight settled something in him. These were his people, his responsibility. They'd followed him through countless challenges.

"Getting cold feet?" Chuck appeared at his side, adjusting his own bow tie.

"Never." Draken's wolf growled at the suggestion. "But Lorelei..." He glanced up the stairs again.

"Is probably as nervous as you are." Chuck grinned. "More, actually. At least you know everyone here."

"That's what concerns me," Draken muttered. "I dropped quite a bomb on her this afternoon about the pack's... prejudices."

"She's tougher than you think." Chuck nodded toward the gardens. "Remember how

she handled those accidental earth tremors yesterday? Pure instinct.”

“True.” His mate might be human, but her power was undeniable. Even now, he could feel it thrumming through the castle foundations, responding to her presence somewhere above.

A young pack member approached, barely containing his excitement. “Alpha, is it true? We’re finally meeting our Luna tonight?”

Draken smiled despite his concerns. “Indeed we are, Marcus.”

“I can’t wait to see what she’s like.” Marcus bounced on his heels. “The whole pack’s been talking about nothing else.”

“I hope they’ll remember their manners,” Draken said pointedly, though his tone remained gentle.

“Of course, Alpha.” Marcus straightened. “We’d never disappoint you.”

Those words, simple and sincere, reinforced what Draken already knew. His pack might be surprised, even shocked, but their loyalty ran deep. They would adapt. They would accept.

Draken stepped onto the first riser of the grand staircase, commanding the room’s attention without effort. His wolf preened at the gathered crowd – alpha wolf princes from the other five territories, betas, and pack members alike filling the grand ballroom. The crystal chandeliers cast a warm glow across their expectant faces.

“My friends,” his voice carried easily through the space. “Tonight marks a momentous occasion for the Moonshadow Pack. After centuries of waiting, our Luna has awakened.”

Cheers erupted, the sound reverberating off marble floors and stone walls. Draken's chest filled with warmth, though anxiety gnawed at his gut. His wolf paced desperate to be near their mate.

Then she appeared.

Lorelei appeared at the top of the stairs, and Draken's breath caught in his throat. The deep green gown hugged every curve, its gold embroidery catching the light like actual vines creeping across the fabric. Her brown hair cascaded past her shoulders in waves, framing a face that managed to look both uncertain and determined.

His wolf howled with approval. Mine .

The crowd's enthusiastic applause faltered as Lorelei descended. Whispers replaced cheers, spreading through the room like wildfire. Draken caught fragments of conversation:

“But she's...”

“How can this be...”

“A human?”

The silence that followed felt thick enough to cut. Lorelei reached the bottom of the stairs, her chin lifted proudly despite the tension. She took her place beside him, close enough that he could feel the slight tremor in her hands.

Draken wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her against his side. The gesture was as much for his benefit as hers – his wolf demanding they protect their mate from the scrutiny.

“My Luna,” he said loud enough for all to hear, letting his pride show through. Let them see his certainty, his acceptance. The pack would follow his lead.

The marble floor beneath their feet vibrated slightly – Lorelei’s powers responding to her emotions. Rather than concerning him, it made Draken smile. His mate might be human, but there was nothing weak about her.

Chuck caught his eye from the crowd and raised his champagne glass in silent support. Agnes beamed from her place near the front, nodding in approval. These small gestures of acceptance strengthened Draken’s resolve.

He looked down at Lorelei, finding her brown eyes already fixed on him. Despite everything, despite the weighted silence and judging stares, she managed a small smile that hit him right in the chest.

His wolf settled. Whatever came next, they would face it together.

Draken squared his shoulders and tightened his grip on Lorelei’s waist, drawing strength from her presence. His voice rang out across the grand ballroom with the authority that came naturally to an alpha.

“Yes, the Luna is human.” The words were clear and confident despite the shocked expressions before him. “I was just as shocked as you all are, and you can understand why it has taken a week before Lorelei is being introduced to you.”

He felt Lorelei’s slight tension beneath his fingers and stroked her side soothingly. His wolf preened at how naturally she leaned into his touch.

“Because I myself was concerned with the fact, I took my time to meet her, really get to know her. I feel confident that, though she’s not a wolf, she’s still capable of leading our pack alongside me.”

The murmurs shifted from skeptical to curious. Draken caught Agnes's approving nod from the crowd, and several other pack members began to whisper more positively. His enhanced hearing picked up fragments like "well, if the alpha believes in her" and "she does have strong earth magic."

Pride swelled in him. His pack was already starting to come around just as he knew they would. His wolf sang with satisfaction.

"Humans don't have the fated mate sense like we do," he continued, allowing a hint of humor to creep into his voice. "So I've also been spending time trying to show her how much we have to offer." He glanced down at Lorelei, catching the slight blush that colored her cheeks. "And that's what I'd like to ask of you all tonight. Get to know our new Luna, but make sure to leave a favorable impression and help me woo my future queen!"

Laughter rippled through the crowd, breaking the last of the tension. His wolf practically strutted at how well his words had landed. Even the visiting princes looked more intrigued than judgmental now.

Draken's chest filled with an overwhelming warmth as he watched his pack members already starting to gather closer, their expressions open and welcoming. He'd known his people would follow his lead – they always had – but seeing it happen filled him with a deep satisfaction. His Luna deserved nothing less than their full acceptance.

Draken soon drew Lorelei closer. The silk of her gown whispered against his tuxedo as he bent to whisper in her ear. Her scent - earthy rain and moonlight - filled his senses, making his head swim.

"You're breathtaking," he murmured, letting his lips brush her ear. "The way you're handling this, standing tall despite their stares..." His wolf preened as a shiver ran through her. "You're showing them exactly why you're meant to be Luna."

Her pulse jumped beneath his fingers where they rested at her waist. The marble floor trembled ever so slightly - her magical powers responding to his proximity just as his own powers surged at her touch.

“I’m terrified,” she whispered back, though her spine remained straight as steel. “But I refuse to let them see it.”

“That’s my mate.” When had his opinion of humans changed so dramatically? This woman had turned his world upside down in the best possible way. “Strong. Determined. Perfect.”

She turned those sharp brown eyes on him, a hint of mischief dancing in their depths. “Flattery will get you everywhere, Your Highness.”

“Is that so?” He pulled her impossibly closer, his wolf delighting in her soft gasp. “Then let me add brilliant and gorgeous to the list.”

“Careful,” she breathed. “You’ll make me lose control of my powers in front of everyone.”

“Let them see.” He traced his thumb along her waist. “Let them witness exactly how powerful their Luna truly is.”

Her answering smile lit up her entire face, and Draken’s heart stuttered. How had he ever thought being mated to a human would make him weak? With Lorelei at his side, he felt invincible.

FOURTEEN

LORELEI

Lorelei's heart hammered in her chest as she stood before the mirror smoothing nonexistent wrinkles from her green gown. The intricate gold embroidery glinted in the light, vines seeming to dance across the fabric with each movement. She took a deep breath, watching her reflection's ample cleavage rise and fall with the motion.

"You can do this," she whispered to herself, running her fingers through her loose brown waves. "Just pretend it's like presenting designs to difficult clients."

Except difficult clients didn't turn into wolves. Or hate humans on principle.

The sound of Draken's voice drifted up from below, announcing her presence. Her cue to descend. Her knees trembled as she stepped onto the grand staircase, gripping the banister perhaps a bit too tightly.

"Don't trip, don't trip, don't trip" became her silent mantra. The faces below blurred together into a sea of shocked expressions as the cheering died away into uncomfortable silence. Her earlier lessons with Marybeth echoed in her mind: never show weakness to wolves.

She lifted her chin and straightened her spine, though her insides felt like jelly. Each step brought her closer to Draken, his powerful presence drawing her like a magnet. When she finally reached his side, his arm slid around her waist, warm and steady.

“My Luna,” he announced, his deep voice resonating through the hall.

Lorelei tried not to flinch at the increasing murmurs. A muscle ticked in Draken’s jaw as he addressed the crowd’s obvious concerns about her humanity. His grip tightened protectively around her waist.

“You’ve got this,” he whispered against her ear, so low only she could hear. “Show them the strength I see in you.”

The warmth of his words steadied her more than his touch. She managed a small smile, though her thoughts raced. What had she gotten herself into? Five days ago, she’d been worried about building permits and designs. Now she stood before a pack of wolves as their supposed queen-to-be.

Draken’s words about wooing her brought heat to her cheeks. The crowd’s murmurs turned more positive, though she caught fragments of whispered conversations:

“But she’s human...”

“The prince seems certain...”

“Did you feel those earth tremors?”

She squared her shoulders. If she could handle New York real estate developers, she could handle this. Probably.

Lorelei’s initial tension melted away as she soon moved through the grand ballroom on Draken’s arm. The crystal chandeliers cast a warm glow over the gathered wolves, who proved far more welcoming than she’d thought. Her gown swished against the marble floor as they approached different groups.

“You’re an architect?” A silver-haired woman’s eyes lit up. “My house desperately needs updating. The wiring hasn’t been touched since electricity was first installed.”

“Really?” Lorelei leaned in, her professional interest piqued. “What era is the house from?”

“Early 1800s. Most pack homes are from that period.”

“The structural bones must be incredible.” Lorelei’s mind raced with possibilities. “Have you considered keeping the historical facade while modernizing the interior?”

Soon she found herself surrounded by pack members, all eager to discuss their homes. Her fingers itched for her sketchpad as they described crumbling stonework and drafty windows.

“The pack territory has so much potential,” she said to Draken, gesturing animatedly. “We could preserve the historical architecture while incorporating sustainable technologies. Solar panels, geothermal heating?—“

“We?” Draken’s deep voice rumbled beside her, amusement evident in his tone.

She grinned. “I mean, hypothetically speaking. The buildings here deserve to be honored and updated, not torn down.”

His hand settled on her lower back, warm and possessive. “I think it’s an excellent idea. The pack could use someone with your expertise.”

Lorelei’s heart fluttered at the pride in his voice. She glanced up to find him watching her with intense focus, his eyes dark with something that made her breath catch.

“You’re handling this remarkably well,” he murmured for her ears only.

“Oddly enough, it feels natural.” She surprised herself by meaning it.

“And the Luna aspect?”

“Ask me again when I’m not trying to prevent my powers from accidentally demolishing your ballroom.” She offered him a small smile. “One impossible thing at a time.”

His laugh drew appreciative glances from nearby wolves. “Fair enough.” His grip tightened possessively as another group approached.

Before long, Lorelei tilted her face toward the moon, its silvery light bathing the castle gardens in an ethereal glow. The sweet scent of rosemary filled the air, mingling with the earthy aroma of fresh-cut grass. Her earlier anxiety had all but melted away like morning dew, replaced by an unexpected sense of belonging.

“The gardens are really beautiful tonight,” she said, running her fingers along a stone balustrade. The stone hummed beneath her touch, responding to her earth powers in a way that no longer frightened her.

“They’re yours to redesign if you wish.” Draken’s deep voice rumbled close to her ear as his arm tightened possessively around her waist. “Though I suggest keeping the moon flowers. They’re sacred to our pack.”

“I wouldn’t dream of removing them.” She paused to admire the silvery blooms. “Though this courtyard could use some strategic terracing to create more intimate gathering spaces.”

His chest vibrated with quiet laughter. “Already planning renovations?”

“Force of habit.” She grinned up at him. “But admit it – those stone benches are

practical but hardly comfortable for long conversations.”

A group of pack members passed by, offering respectful nods to Draken while smiling warmly at Lorelei. Their growing acceptance felt genuine, nothing like the forced politeness she'd expected. Throughout the evening, they'd shared stories, asked her opinions, even joked with her about Draken's notorious perfectionism.

“You're thinking too hard,” Draken murmured, guiding her toward a quieter corner of the garden.

“I'm thinking that I might have judged too quickly.” She leaned against the balustrade, watching the party continue around them. “Your pack – they're not what I expected.”

“And what did you expect?”

“Honestly? Snarling wolves ready to chase the human interloper away.”

His eyes darkened possessively. “No one would dare.”

“My big bad wolf.” The words accidentally slipped out, but his pleased growl made her heart skip.

The moonlight gleamed across the angular planes of his face, highlighting the intensity in his gaze as he stepped closer. “Your wolf,” he agreed, his voice pitched low enough to send shivers down her spine.

Draken stood close enough for Lorelei to feel the heat radiating from his body. His scent – pine needles and mountain air – wrapped around her like an invisible embrace.

“Dance with me?” he whispered, extending his hand.

Lorelei’s breath hitched at the intensity in his eyes. “Here in the garden?”

“Inside.” His lips curved into a smile that made her knees weak. “Where I can show off my Luna properly.”

He led her back through the French doors into the grand ballroom where crystal chandeliers cast rainbow prisms across the marble floor. The orchestra played a waltz, its melody wrapping around them like silk.

Draken pulled her into his arms, one hand settling possessively on her lower back while the other clasped hers. His touch sent electricity coursing through her body, making her powers buzz beneath her skin.

“I should warn you,” Lorelei said as they began to move, “I haven’t danced like this since my friend’s wedding three years ago.”

“Trust your body.” His voice dropped to a rumble that she felt in her bones. “Like you do with your powers.”

She relaxed into his lead, surprised by how naturally they moved together. “Is this another wolf thing? Being naturally good at dancing together?”

“No.” He spun her in a graceful turn that made her forest-green skirt swirl. “This is a mate thing.”

The word mate still sent butterflies through her stomach, but she couldn’t deny how right it felt being in his arms. Her body knew its place against his like two pieces of a puzzle finally clicking together.

“The pack seems to be warming up to me,” she said, glancing at the smiling faces around them.

“They’d be fools not to.” His grip tightened possessively. “Though I’d protect you regardless.”

“My big bad wolf indeed.” She grinned at him. “Though I think I proved earlier I can handle myself.”

“That you did,” he said softly. “You’re nothing like I expected.”

“Disappointed?”

“Enchanted.” He dipped her suddenly, making her gasp. When he pulled her back up, their faces were inches apart. “Completely, utterly enchanted.”

The world fell away as they danced, the music carrying them across the floor. Lorelei’s architect’s brain couldn’t help but appreciate how perfectly the ballroom’s acoustics carried the melody, but mostly she focused on the feel of Draken’s strong hands guiding her, the way his eyes never left hers, the electric current that seemed to flow between them.

The last guests filtered out of the ballroom, leaving Lorelei alone with Draken. The orchestra continued playing, their melody softer now, more intimate. Her gown whisked against the marble floor as Draken drew her closer, his muscular frame pressing against hers.

Her heart fluttered as his hand splayed possessively across her lower back.

“You’re perfect,” he whispered in her ear, his breath warm against her skin. “The way you handled everyone tonight, the grace you showed...”

Lorelei's breath hitched as his lips brushed her earlobe, then traced a path down her neck. Each kiss sent electricity coursing through her veins. Her fingers curled into the fabric of his jacket.

"I'm hardly perfect," she managed to say. "I nearly caused three tremors when that one wolf questioned my ability to?—"

"But you didn't." His voice rumbled against her throat. "You maintained control. Proved yourself stronger than anyone expected."

His praise made her feel warm all over. When had she started caring so much about his opinion? About fitting into this world of his?

Draken's hand cupped her cheek, tilting her face up to his. His eyes blazed with a fire that made her knees wobbly. "My Luna," he growled softly before capturing her lips with his.

The kiss started gentle but quickly deepened into something more passionate. Lorelei melted against him, her body molding to his as if they'd been perfectly designed for each other. Maybe they had been.

The earth beneath their feet trembled slightly – not from fear or anger this time, but from the pure pleasure of his kiss. Draken smiled against her lips, clearly pleased by her response.

For the first time since discovering her powers, since being brought to this castle, since learning about wolves and Lunas and mates, Lorelei felt truly content. Maybe, just maybe, there was a place for her here after all – not just as the Luna, but as herself.

FIFTEEN

DRAKEN

D raken's heart thundered with joy as he gazed down at Lorelei. The moonlight shining in through the ballroom's windows cast a silvery glow around them, making her brown eyes sparkle.

"Would you like to come up to my master suite?" he asked, his voice husky with anticipation.

Her lips curved slowly into a smile. "Yes."

That single word sent a thrill through him. He took her hand, leading her across the empty ballroom floor. Their footsteps echoed in the vast space as they approached the grand staircase.

Every other time they'd been intimate it had been outside, primal and rushed after training. But tonight would be different. Tonight, she was choosing to stay in his suite, to be with him properly in his bed. His wolf howled at the thought.

"Your party was quite successful," Lorelei said as they ascended the stairs.

"Our party," he corrected gently. "And yes, it was. The pack seems quite taken with their new Luna." He squeezed her hand. "Did you see how excited everyone got when you started talking about modernizing the pack homes?"

“They did seem enthusiastic about that.”

They soon reached his suite door, and he opened it, guiding her inside. The moment the door clicked shut behind them, he pressed her up against the nearest wall.

“I’ve wanted you all night,” he murmured before capturing her lips in a passionate kiss. She tasted like champagne and possibility, and his wolf growled with desire.

Her fingers threaded through his hair as she returned his kiss with equal fervor. The subtle trembling of the floor beneath his feet told him her powers were responding to her passion. He’d never felt more powerful, more complete, than when they were together like this. This was right. This was perfect.

“I like your suite,” she whispered against his lips.

He chuckled. “You haven’t even seen it yet.”

His hands moved with purpose, sliding down her back until he found the zipper of her gown. The fabric whispered against her skin as he tugged it down, letting it pool at her feet. She stood before him in nothing but a delicate pair of panties, her chest rising and falling with quick breaths. His wolf stirred at the sight, primal satisfaction thrumming through him. She was his, and he was going to make sure she never doubted it.

“You’re beautiful,” he murmured, his voice rough with desire. His hands cupped her breasts, his thumbs brushing over her hardening nipples. Her gasp was music to his ears. He leaned in, capturing one peak between his lips, teasing it with his tongue until she trembled. Her fingers tangled in his hair, holding him close, and he growled low in his throat.

“Draken,” she whispered, her voice shaky.

“Relax,” he breathed, his hand sliding down her side. He paused at the edge of her panties, his fingers tracing the line where the fabric met her skin. “Tell me if you want me to stop.”

She shook her head, her eyes dark with want. “Don’t stop.”

That was all the encouragement he needed. His fingers slipped beneath the fabric, finding her already slick with desire. He groaned, pressing his forehead against her collarbone as he explored her, his touch firm and deliberate. “You’re so wet for me,” he said, his voice thick.

Her hips rocked against his hand, and he smirked, kissing the curve of her neck. “That’s it. Let me make you feel good.” He slid two fingers inside her, curling them just right, and she cried out, her body arching into his touch. His wolf howled with satisfaction as he felt her clench around him, her pleasure washing over her.

“I can’t—“ Her breath hitched, and he kissed her deeply, swallowing her moans as she came apart in his arms. He kept his fingers moving, drawing out her climax until her legs were trembling.

When she finally stilled, he pulled back just enough to see the dazed look in her eyes. “There’s more coming,” he said, his voice low. He dropped to his knees, hooking his fingers into her panties, and slid them down her legs. She stepped out of them, her hands braced against the wall as she looked down at him.

“What are you?—“

He didn’t let her finish. His mouth was on her, his tongue tracing her most sensitive spot. She gasped, her fingers tightening in his hair, and he grinned against her skin. He licked her slowly, savoring her, then increased the pace. His fingers soon joined the rhythm of his tongue.

“Draken!” Her cry was sharp, her body shaking as another orgasm ripped through her. He held her steady, his hands holding onto her hips as she rode it out, her breath coming in short, desperate gasps.

When she finally slumped against the wall, her legs quivering, he stood, pulling her into his arms. “You okay?” he asked, brushing her hair from her face.

She nodded, her cheeks flushed. “More than okay.”

He kissed her softly, tasting her on his lips. “Good. Because I’m just getting started.” His wolf growled in agreement, and he couldn’t help but smirk. Tonight, he was going to make sure she knew exactly who she belonged to.

His breaths came more rapidly as he stripped off his formal wear, tossing it to the floor with a careless motion. His boxers followed, and his large member sprang free, hard and aching for her. He moved to the edge of his massive four-poster bed. His wolf was practically pacing inside him, eager, demanding—this was his mate, and he was going to claim her in every way that mattered tonight.

“Come here,” he said as he sat down, his voice low and commanding, patting his thighs.

Lorelei, still trembling from her climax, walked toward him with a shy smile that made his chest tighten. She hesitated for a moment before climbing onto his lap, her hands resting lightly on his shoulders. Her warmth radiated against him, and he groaned as she slowly lowered herself onto him, taking him inch by agonizing inch. Her tightness was almost too much to bear, and he clenched his jaw, forcing himself to stay still.

“Damn, Lorelei,” he growled. “You feel amazing.”

She let out a soft gasp, her nails digging slightly into his shoulders. “This feels really good.”

He smirked, lifting his hips slightly to press deeper into her. His wolf preened at the thought of her full of him. “Take control.”

And she did, wrapping her arms around his neck and starting to rock her hips against him. The pace was slow, deliberate, and it drove him wild. Her breath hitched with every movement, and he matched her rhythm, savoring every second of the slick, tight heat surrounding him. He leaned forward, kissing and sucking at her neck, marking her in the only way he could—for now.

“That’s it,” he murmured against her skin, his hands sliding up her back. “You’re doing so good.”

Her moans grew louder, her pace increasing as she found her rhythm. He could feel her tightening around him, her body trembling with the building pleasure. His control was slipping, his thrusts becoming harder, faster, but he kept his focus on her. He wanted her to fall apart again, to shatter in his arms.

“Draken,” she gasped, her fingers tightening in his hair. “I’m close.”

“Let go,” he urged, his voice rough with want. “Come for me, Lorelei.”

Her breath hitched, and then she was crying out her pleasure, her body convulsing around him. The room shook violently, the stone walls trembling as her earth magic surged in response to her climax. Dust rained down from the ceiling, and Draken couldn’t help but laugh, holding her tightly as she rode out the waves of her pleasure.

“That’s my Luna,” he said, his chest swelling with pride. “Look at the power you have.”

She slumped against him, her breathing ragged, her body still trembling. “That was... wow.”

He chuckled, pressing a kiss to her temple. His large member was still hard inside her, throbbing with need, but he forced his body to stay still for a moment. This was about her—for now. “You ready for more?” he teased, his hands sliding down to her ass.

She groaned, but there was a smile in her voice. “You’re insatiable.”

“Always,” he said. “Especially when it comes to you.”

He stood with her still intimately wrapped around him, her legs instinctively tightening around his waist. But as he turned to lay her down on the bed, his member slipped out of her, and she let out a small, breathless laugh. He grinned, lowering her gently onto the bed before crawling over her.

“Let’s try this again,” he breathed. His wolf was practically pacing inside him, impatient, demanding.

He aligned himself with her entrance and pushed in slowly, savoring the way her body welcomed him. She gasped, and her hands flew to his shoulders, her nails digging in slightly.

“Draken,” she gasped, her voice trembling.

He smirked, his hands gripping her waist as he began to move. The pace was primal this time, aggressive. His wolf clawed at the surface, urging him to claim her, mark her, and make her his in every way possible. Her moans filled the room, her back arching as she tried to match his rhythm.

“That’s my Luna,” he breathed, thrusting deeper, harder. “Let go for me.”

Her body obeyed instantly, her climax hitting her like a tidal wave. The room trembled slightly, a soft rumble that had him grinning even wider. But he wasn’t done yet. His own release was building, his control slipping.

He leaned down, his lips brushing her ear. “Can I mark you?” he asked, his voice low, almost a growl. “Make you mine officially?”

She froze beneath him, her breathing still ragged. The pause was enough to make his chest tighten, his wolf snarling in frustration.

“Did Marybeth explain what that means?” he pressed, his voice softer now, but still laced with urgency.

“Yeah,” she whispered, her voice small. “She... kind of did. But I don’t—I don’t think I’m ready for that.”

Draken tensed, his movements stopping abruptly. His wolf howled in protest, but he forced it down, pulling away from her and sitting up. The rejection stung more than he cared to admit.

“You can go back to your room now,” he said, his voice clipped. He couldn’t look at her, not right now. His wolf was agitated, and he needed space to calm it down before he said something he’d regret.

SIXTEEN

LORELEI

The sudden loss of Draken's warmth left Lorelei cold and bereft. Her skin still tingled where his hands had been moments before. The abrupt shift from passionate lovemaking to dismissal hit her like a physical blow to the chest. She pulled his silk sheet around her bare body, the fabric a poor substitute for his touch.

Her throat constricted. The dismissal hurt more than she'd expected. But as she watched his broad shoulders tense, noticed how he wouldn't even look at her, that hurt crystallized into something harder. The crystal vase on his bedside table rattled - her powers responding to her emotions. She gripped the sheet tighter, forcing herself to breathe deeply and maintain control.

"No," she said as she sat up and stayed firmly planted on his massive four-poster bed. The carved wooden posts cast long shadows in the dim light of his master suite.

The single word seemed to vibrate through the room. A low growl rumbled from Draken's chest, and she could see the way his muscles coiled beneath his skin. The wolf was there, just beneath the surface, its presence making the air thick with tension. But she refused to back down.

"A relationship isn't just about following orders," she said, keeping her voice steady and lifting her chin. "It's about communication. Both ways."

He turned then, his eyes flickering with that otherworldly amber glow that meant his

wolf was close. “What more is there to say? You’ve made yourself quite clear - you don’t want to be my mate because you don’t want my mark.”

Lorelei’s fingers clenched in the silk, her mind racing with all the things she wanted to say, but the words stuck in her throat momentarily as she met his intense gaze. His accusation made her chest ache. The hurt in his eyes made it worse. Her powers stirred again, making the heavy drapes flutter despite the closed windows.

Draken stood in one fluid motion, his muscles rippling as he strode across the room. He yanked on his black athletic pants, the fabric settling low on his hips, leaving his sculpted chest bare. The moonlight streaming through the window highlighted every defined muscle, reminding her of just how powerful he was.

Lorelei adjusted the silk sheet around her body, sitting up straighter against the ornate headboard. Her heart thundered in her chest, but she refused to let his imposing presence intimidate her. “That’s not what I said or what I was implying when I told you I didn’t want to be marked.” She took a steady breath. “This is exactly why we need to talk about this.”

When he remained silent, his jaw clenched and shoulders rigid, she seized the opportunity to explain herself. “I didn’t mean I never wanted to be marked.” The crystal water glass on the nightstand vibrated slightly with her rising emotions. She forced herself to remain calm, remembering her practice sessions with controlling her powers. “I’m just not ready right now. How can I be? I barely understand what being marked would mean for my life.”

She watched his back muscles tense further, but he didn’t turn around. The moonlight cast his shadow across the plush carpet, making him seem even larger and more imposing. She clutched the sheet even tighter, wishing she had more than silk between them for this conversation.

“I’m an architect, Draken. I plan things. I analyze. I need to understand the structural integrity before I build.” She paused, wondering if he’d appreciate the metaphor. “I need to think through all the implications before I make a choice this big.”

Draken finally turned to face her, the moonlight playing across the defined muscles of his chest. His eyes held such raw vulnerability that Lorelei’s breath caught in her throat. The sheet wrapped around her suddenly felt inadequate protection against the intensity of his gaze.

“This feels like rejection,” he said, his voice thick with emotion. “I’m in love with you, Lorelei. But it seems like you don’t feel the same way.” He raked his hand through his hair, mussing the short brown strands. “What more am I supposed to do to convince you?”

The hurt in his voice broke her heart. She wanted to wrap her arms around him, but she needed him to understand first. Her fingers traced the intricate pattern woven into his silk sheets as she gathered her thoughts.

“Things have been truly amazing with you,” she said softly. “These feelings I have for you... they’re growing stronger every day.” She met his gaze, willing him to understand. “Humans don’t usually fall deeply in love overnight.”

The crystal water glass trembled again as her emotions swelled. She steadied herself, remembering her practice sessions. “But this isn’t just about falling in love. You’re asking me to become Luna of a wolf pack, to leave behind my whole life, my career...” She gave him a small smile. “That’s a lot for a human architect to process, even one who can apparently move mountains.

“I know your wolf nature makes everything immediate and certain. But humans...” She shrugged one bare shoulder. “We usually need time to accept big changes like this. It doesn’t mean I don’t care about you. It just means I need to be sure before I

make such a life-altering decision.”

She watched his jaw clench, the muscle ticking as he processed her words. His broad shoulders remained tense, and she could practically feel the alpha energy radiating from him.

“I just announced to the entire pack that you’re their Luna. They’ll expect the mating bond to be completed very soon.”

“I understand the urgency, I do. But this pressure... it’s too much. I don’t want it to be like this.”

She took a deep breath, steadying both herself and her powers. The words she needed to say next felt heavy on her tongue, but she knew they were true the moment she thought them.

“I think...” She paused, watching his muscles tense further. “I think I need to go home for a while. Back to my old life, to process everything about you, this supernatural world, and what being Luna means.”

The moment the words left her mouth, she felt their truth settle deep in her bones. Five days. That’s all it had been since her entire world had turned upside down. Five days since she’d learned about wolves, powers, and fated mates. Five days since she’d last seen her best friends or worked on her beloved building designs.

“I can’t just abandon everything I’ve built,” she continued, her voice soft but firm. “My friends, my favorite coffee shop where the barista knows my order by heart, the antique bookstore where I spend Sunday afternoons. My job...” She let out a small laugh. “God, I miss my drafting table.”

Draken remained silent, but his reaction was written in every line of his body. His

shoulders were rigid, his hands clenched into fists at his sides. The moonlight caught the amber flecks in his eyes, making them glow with an otherworldly light that reminded her just how different their worlds were.

The silence stretched between them, heavy with unspoken words and barely contained power. Through their growing connection, she could feel his wolf prowling beneath the surface, agitated and unhappy. But she needed this - needed time to find her footing in this new reality without feeling like she was being swept away by it.

Lorelei stood and slipped into her gown, trying to steady her breathing and her racing heart.

“Chuck will drive you home in the morning,” Draken said, his voice tight with barely contained emotion. “Though I wish you’d reconsider. The kidnapper that tried to take you is still out there.”

“I know.” Lorelei smoothed down the front of her dress, buying time to steady her voice. “But I can protect myself now. You taught me well.”

She crossed the room to where he stood, rigid and brooding, by the window. When she wrapped her arms around his waist, she felt the slight tremor that ran through his muscles. His chest expanded with a deep breath as he enveloped her in his arms, his embrace conveying everything his pride wouldn’t let him say.

The familiar scent of pine and wilderness that clung to his skin made her heart ache. Walking away from him felt like trying to separate two magnets - every cell in her body protested the distance. But she needed this. Needed to process everything that had happened since her birthday.

“I’ll miss you,” she whispered against his chest.

His arms tightened briefly before he released her. “Be careful.”

The walk back to her suite felt longer than usual, her heels clicking against the marble floors of the castle corridor. Her mind wandered to her apartment, her drafting table, her friends. She missed the simple pleasure of grabbing coffee with Helena or discussing the latest architectural trends with her colleagues.

Yet as she reached for her door handle, her powers tingled beneath her skin, reminding her that she’d never truly go back to who she was before. The earth itself sang to her now, a constant hum of potential and power that had become as natural as breathing.

But that didn’t mean she had to give up everything else. She could be both - the architect who loved clean lines and urban planning, and the Earth Luna who could shift tectonic plates with a thought. She just needed time to figure out how those pieces fit together.

As she stepped into her suite, she smiled, thinking of how Draken’s wolf would probably pace all night, fighting its instinct to keep her close. But if they were truly meant to be together, their bond would only grow stronger for letting it develop naturally.

SEVENTEEN

LORELEI

The sleek black SUV purred through the city streets as Chuck navigated morning traffic. Lorelei watched the familiar buildings slide past, each one a comfort after days in the castle's stone walls.

"Draken paced all night, you know," Chuck said, breaking the comfortable silence. "He barely slept. Kelly said she heard him prowling the corridors at dawn."

Lorelei's chest tightened. "I hate that I'm causing him distress."

"Don't. He respects that you need time. Besides..." Chuck's eyes crinkled with amusement in the rearview mirror. "It's good for alphas to learn patience."

When they pulled up to her apartment building, Lorelei's fingers traced the smooth leather seat. "Thank you for the ride, Chuck. And for everything else this past week."

"Just be careful. Call if you need anything."

The moment Lorelei stepped into her apartment, tension melted from her shoulders. Everything was exactly as she'd left it - her drafting table by the window, architecture magazines scattered across the coffee table, her favorite throw blanket draped over the couch. The familiarity wrapped around her like a warm hug.

She kicked off her shoes and pulled out her phone, dialing her office.

“Jaime? Hi, it’s Lorelei. I’m back home and planning to work remotely today to catch up on everything I missed.”

“Thank god! The Davidson project needs your input desperately. I’ll email you the latest revisions.”

“Perfect.” She settled at her drafting table, spreading out her tools with practiced precision. “Send everything over.”

For the next few hours, Lorelei lost herself in the clean lines and precise measurements of her designs. This was her element - where everything made sense, where problems had clear solutions. No complicated pack politics or mysterious powers, just the elegant simplicity of architecture.

But as the morning wore on, an odd heaviness settled in her chest. Her hands felt clumsy, her concentration wavering. She caught herself touching the spot where Draken usually rested his hand on her lower back when teaching her to channel her powers.

The ache intensified like a physical pull urging her back to the castle. Back to him. She rubbed her sternum, trying to ease the strange hollow sensation.

“It’s just nerves,” she muttered, forcing her attention back to the blueprints. But deep down, she knew it was more than that. Every fiber in her body seemed to protest the distance between them, growing with each passing hour.

Still, she pushed the feeling aside. This was what she needed - time to process, to find her footing. Even if her heart disagreed.

Later that night, Lorelei sank into the plush booth at Velvet, their favorite cocktail bar. She was grateful for the familiar comfort of meeting her friends. The warm

lighting and soft jazz music helped ease the strange hollow feeling that had plagued her all day.

Helena slid a cosmopolitan across the table. “Spill. Where have you been? We’ve been worried sick!”

“Yeah, especially after that construction site collapse,” Thea added, stirring her martini. “Thank god you weren’t hurt.”

Lorelei took a long sip of her drink, buying time to carefully word her response. “Actually, I met someone. The guy who helped me after the incident - Draken.”

“Ooh, details!” Helena leaned forward, her eyes sparkling. “Is he hot?”

“Incredibly.” Lorelei couldn’t help but smile, thinking about his muscular build and intense presence. “He insisted I stay at his place while I recovered. He’s very... protective.”

“Like, controlling protective or sweet protective?” Thea asked.

“Both?” Lorelei laughed softly. “He’s definitely alpha male - used to being in charge. But also genuinely caring.”

Helena raised her eyebrows. “And you stayed at his place for days? Something must have happened.”

Heat crept up Lorelei’s neck as she remembered their passionate encounters. “Maybe.”

“Girl, your face says everything!” Thea giggled. “So are you seeing him again?”

The ache in Lorelei's chest intensified. "It's complicated."

"Ah, the classic commitment-phobe male," Helena nodded sagely.

"Actually, he's the one pushing for commitment," Lorelei corrected, thinking of his desire to mark her. "I'm the one who needs space."

"A hot guy who actually wants commitment? Keep him!" Thea declared.

Lorelei swirled her drink, watching the pink liquid catch the light. "I just need time to figure out if I can handle all the... changes that would come with being with him."

"Changes like what?" Helena asked.

"His lifestyle is very different from mine," Lorelei hedged. "It would mean adjusting to a whole new world."

"Sometimes the scariest changes bring the best rewards," Thea said softly.

Lorelei nodded, her throat tight. If only they knew just how different Draken's world really was.

Lorelei's heels clicked against the sidewalk as she made her way home. The cool night air was a welcome relief after the warmth of the bar. The streetlamps cast shadows between the historic buildings she'd always admired. The Hanover Building's art deco facade caught her eye - she'd referenced its elegant lines in three different projects.

Suddenly, a hand clamped over her mouth from behind. Her body tensed, ready to summon the earth's power, but she caught herself as she glimpsed the beautiful limestone cornices above. One tremor could bring tons of carved stone crashing down

on innocent passersby.

“Miss me?” Gideon’s voice slithered against her ear. “I’ve been waiting for you to leave your wolf prince’s protection.”

She twisted in his grip, managing to break free enough to speak. “How did you even know I left?”

“I have eyes everywhere. The pack isn’t as loyal to Draken as he thinks.” He spun her to face him, keeping a bruising grip on her arms. “Now, about those earth powers of yours...”

Lorelei’s gaze darted around the street. A couple walked past on the opposite sidewalk, completely oblivious. A taxi cruised by, its yellow paint gleaming under the streetlights. She could bring this whole block down with one focused thought - but at what cost?

“Smart girl,” Gideon said, noting her internal struggle. “You won’t risk hurting your precious buildings or these humans, will you? That’s the difference between you and me. I don’t care who gets hurt.”

“What do you want from me?” The words came out steady despite her racing heart.

“Your power. The ability to control earth itself.” His eyes gleamed with an unsettling hunger. “And you’re going to help me get it, or I’ll start taking down these architectural masterpieces you love so much, one by one.”

A group of teenagers were walking toward them. There would be mass casualties if she tried to fight here. She wouldn’t have the blood of these innocents on her hands. She had no choice but to surrender to him. For now.

“Fine,” she said, letting her shoulders slump in defeat. “I’ll go with you.”

“See? Humans are so easy to manipulate. All you need is the right leverage.” He steered her toward a waiting car. “Your wolf would have died fighting. But you? You cave at the first threat to some old stones.”

If this bastard thought she was relenting because of threats to some buildings, then let him think that. She’d get the upper hand soon enough.

Lorelei forced herself to stay still and calm as Gideon bound her wrists with rope and shoved her into the back seat of another black sedan. The rope bit into her wrists, but she focused on channeling her inner strategist. As they drove out of the city, a plan began forming in her mind.

“So tell me,” she said, injecting just the right amount of bitterness into her voice, “what’s your beef with Draken? Because honestly, that arrogant wolf can go howl at the moon alone for all I care.”

Gideon’s eyes met hers in the rearview mirror. “Oh? What happened to the precious Luna-to-be?”

“Please. He took one look at my human face and decided I wasn’t good enough.” She let out a convincing scoff. “Kept going on about how a human Luna would weaken the pack.”

“That sounds like Draken.” Gideon’s grip on the steering wheel loosened slightly. “Always so concerned with appearances and power. You know why he kicked me out? Because I couldn’t control my shifting perfectly. Like that makes me less of a wolf.”

“What a jerk,” Lorelei agreed while privately noting how Draken’s decision showed

wisdom. An unpredictable shifter could endanger the entire pack.

“And get this - he called me unstable just because I got into a few fights. So what if I roughed up some packmates? They deserved it.”

With each revelation, Lorelei’s respect for Draken grew. He’d protected his pack from this loose cannon, made the hard choice even knowing it would create an enemy.

The city lights faded behind them as they wound into dense forest. Perfect. Her powers would be strongest here, surrounded by earth and stone. She just needed the right moment.

“You know what the worst part was?” Gideon continued. “He acted like he was doing me a favor. ‘This is for your own good, Gideon.’ Such a self-righteous bastard.”

“Totally,” Lorelei agreed absently, her mind elsewhere. The truth crystallized with stunning clarity - she belonged with Draken. Not just because fate said so, but because she chose it. Because he was exactly the kind of leader, protector, and mate she wanted.

Now she just had to escape this idiot and get back to him.

Trees pressed closer on both sides as they turned onto a dirt road. Lorelei hid her smile. Gideon couldn’t have picked a better location for what she had planned. She just had to bide her time and play this smart.

“Looks like we’re almost home,” Gideon said. “Ready to learn what real power feels like?”

“Can’t wait,” Lorelei lied, already cataloging the terrain around them. Somewhere in

these woods, she'd find her opportunity.

EIGHTEEN

DRAKEN

Draken's footsteps echoed through the empty stone corridors of the castle. The ancient tapestries and portraits of his ancestors seemed to mock him as he paced past them for what felt like the hundredth time that night. His wolf prowled restlessly beneath his skin, urging him to shift and howl his frustration to the moon.

The night stretched endlessly as he wandered from room to room, unable to settle. The thought of sleeping in his bed, still carrying Lorelei's scent, was unbearable.

"This is what she wants," he muttered to himself. "She needs time. Space." The words tasted bitter in his mouth.

Dawn's first light began creeping through the tall windows, casting long shadows across the polished floors. Draken paused at the entrance to the east wing, drawn to the window overlooking the circular drive where Chuck waited with the SUV.

His hands clenched the stone windowsill as Lorelei emerged from the castle entrance below. She looked small from this height, but no less beautiful in her simple sundress. The sight of her walking away from him sent a physical pain through his chest.

His wolf howled inside him, demanding they stop her. It would be so easy to order Chuck not to drive away, to keep her here where she belonged. Where he could protect her.

But that wasn't what she wanted.

"I could assign guards to follow her," Scorpio suggested, materializing beside him. "Keep her safe without her knowing."

"No." Draken's voice came out rough. "She's powerful enough to handle herself. And I won't betray her trust by having her followed."

His wolf snarled in protest as Lorelei slipped into the back seat of the vehicle. Every instinct screamed at him to race down there, to wrap her in his arms and never let go. To mark her as his mate so no one could ever take her from him.

But he refused to be the kind of alpha who forced his will on others - especially not on his mate.

"She'll come back when she's ready," Scorpio offered quietly.

"If she comes back." Draken pressed his forehead against the cool glass, watching the SUV disappear down the winding drive. "She has to choose this. Choose me. Otherwise, none of it matters."

The emptiness in his chest expanded as the vehicle carrying his mate vanished from view. He fought the urge to shift and chase after her. But he had to let her go - had to give her the freedom to choose this life, to choose him, on her own terms. It was the hardest thing he'd ever done.

He turned away from the window and headed to his master suite. He'd survived centuries alone - he could survive giving her the time she needed. Even if every minute felt like torture.

Draken slouched in his leather office chair, staring unseeing at the budget reports

scattered across his antique mahogany desk. The light cast elongated shadows through the windows, but he couldn't focus on work. His thoughts kept drifting to Lorelei.

The phone's sharp ring cut through his brooding. He grabbed it, hoping against hope it was her.

"Prince Draken speaking."

"Is this the mighty Alpha of the Moonshadow pack?" The voice dripped with mockery.

Draken's fingers tightened on the receiver. "Who is this?"

"Someone who knows where your precious Luna is being held."

Ice shot through his veins. "What are you talking about?"

"Gideon sends his regards. He's quite pleased with how easily he snatched her up. Humans are so fragile, aren't they?"

Draken's wolf surged forward, a growl rumbling in his chest. The wood of his desk cracked under Draken's grip. "If you're lying?—"

"One million. That's my price for her location."

His wolf clawed at his insides, demanding blood. "You think I need you? I don't."

"Better hurry then. Gideon's not known for his gentle touch."

The phone cracked in his grip. He hurled it across the room, watching it shatter

against the stone wall. The impact left a satisfying dent in the centuries-old masonry.

“Fuck!” His fist slammed into his desk. Papers scattered across the floor like autumn leaves. He surged to his feet, his chair crashing behind him. His wolf howled for vengeance, but cold fear threaded through his rage.

He should have protected her. Should have assigned guards despite her wishes. Should have?—

Scorpio burst through the door. “What happened?”

“Gideon has her!” he shouted. “That bastard took my mate.”

Scorpio’s eyes widened. “How?—“

“Because I let her go!” Draken slammed his fist into the wall, leaving a crater in the centuries-old stone. “I knew the dangers. Knew what could happen. But I let her walk away.”

“You respected her choice,” Scorpio said quietly. “That’s what a good mate does.”

“A good mate keeps her safe.” Draken’s wolf was nearly feral, desperate to shift and hunt. To tear apart anyone who dared touch what was his. “I failed her.”

His advisor’s face hardened. “We’ll find her.”

Draken stilled. The bond might be unmarked, but it was there, just as it had been since the day she awakened. He closed his eyes, focusing on that invisible thread connecting him to Lorelei. It pulled west, strong and sure.

“Get Chuck.” His eyes snapped open, determination replacing self-recrimination.

“We’re going hunting.”

Draken burst through the castle’s massive oak doors, his muscles coiled with tension. The cool night air hit his face as he sprinted down the stone steps, taking them three at a time. His wolf tore at his insides desperate to break free.

“Through the gardens,” he called back to Chuck and Scorpio. “We’ll pick up her trail faster that way.”

The moment his feet touched grass, he let his wolf take over. He started shifting - his bones cracking, muscles reforming, and gray fur sprouting across his skin. In seconds, a massive wolf stood where the man had been. He threw back his head and let out a commanding howl that echoed across the grounds.

Scorpio shifted beside him. Chuck’s sturdy brown form appeared on his other flank.

He lifted his muzzle to scent the air, searching for any trace of Lorelei’s unique fragrance - earth and rain with an underlying current of raw power. Nothing yet. She was too far, but the pull was there. Northwest.

Draken’s powerful legs bunched beneath him as he prepared to sprint in that direction. But before he could move, howls erupted from all around the castle grounds. His pack members appeared from various buildings and paths, shifting into their wolf forms as they ran.

We’re with you, Alpha , came dozens of voices through the pack link. The Luna needs us .

Pride and gratitude swelled in his chest. Despite their initial reservations about a human Luna, they were rallying to help find her. His wolf preened at this show of loyalty.

Thank you, he projected to them all. But remember - Gideon is mine to deal with .

Agreeing growls echoed through the link as the pack fell into formation behind him. Draken took off at a ground-eating lope, his massive paws barely touching the earth as he ran. The bond pulled him forward like an invisible rope, leading him toward his mate.

Hold on, Lorelei, he thought, though she couldn't hear him. I'm coming for you.

As one, the pack moved like shadows through the moonlit forest, a deadly force of nature following their alpha's lead. Draken's heart swelled as he ran with his wolves, all of them united in purpose. Lorelei might not know it yet, but she already had a family here - one that would fight to protect her.

Now they just had to find her.

Draken's paws pounded against the forest floor as he followed the invisible thread pulling him toward Lorelei. Her scent grew stronger with each stride, mixed with the musty wood of an old cabin that materialized through the dense trees.

The earth beneath his paws trembled, making his wolf's hackles rise. Through the cabin's grimy window, he spotted Lorelei bound to a chair, her face set in fierce concentration. The tremors intensified, controlled and purposeful - nothing like the chaotic quakes from when they first met.

She's using the cabin's foundation, Scorpio's voice echoed through the pack link. Smart girl.

Pride flooded Draken's chest. His mate wasn't some helpless human. She was learning to harness her power even under extreme duress.

A crack splintered through the cabin's wooden floor. Gideon stumbled, cursing as he tried to keep his balance. "Stop that!" he snarled at Lorelei.

"Make me," she shot back, her chin lifted in defiance.

Through the pack link, Chuck's amused voice rang out. I like her style.

Spread out, Draken commanded his pack. Block all escape routes.

The wolves moved silently into position as another tremor rocked the cabin. A support beam groaned ominously.

"The building's going to collapse," Gideon growled, lunging toward Lorelei.

Before he could reach her, the floor buckled. Lorelei rolled with the chair, dodging Gideon's grasp. The move was so smooth, Draken wondered if she'd planned it.

Now! Draken burst through the door, shifting mid-leap. His human form crashed into Gideon, tackling him away from Lorelei. They tumbled through the disintegrating doorway onto the forest floor.

Behind him, he heard Lorelei's triumphant laugh. "Took you long enough."

His lips twitched despite the situation. Even tied up, his mate had sass. "Are you okay?"

"Oh, you know." The ropes around her fell away as another tremor shook loose the chair's damaged legs. "Just practicing those earth manipulation skills you taught me in a real-life situation."

Gideon snarled and tried to break free, but Draken's grip was iron. "You've lost,

Gideon. She's not some weak human you can control."

"She's mine!" Gideon thrashed wildly. "Her power belongs to me!"

Lorelei stepped through the crumbling doorway, dusting splinters from her clothes. "Actually, I belong to myself."

Gideon's body suddenly contorted, bones cracking as black fur erupted across his skin. His wolf form - smaller and mangier than Draken remembered - lunged at Lorelei with yellowed fangs bared.

Draken's shift was instant, his massive form intercepting Gideon. Their bodies collided with a thunderous impact that shook the trees. Through their tumble, Draken positioned himself between Gideon and Lorelei.

His opponent fought with desperate fury, but Draken's movements were controlled and precise. Years of leadership and dedication had honed his skills while exile had left Gideon sloppy.

"You know," Lorelei mocked, "for someone obsessed with my powers, you're doing a terrible job of watching your footing."

The ground beneath Gideon's paws suddenly softened. He stumbled, his strike going wide. Draken seized the opening, his powerful jaws closing around Gideon's throat. One sharp twist was all it took. The threat to her life had been ended.

Draken shifted back into human form, then found some clothes in the cabin's ruins. "I must admit, that was some impressive timing with the ground manipulation."

"I had a good teacher." Lorelei's eyes sparkled.

He pulled her close, wrapping his arms tightly around her. “You’re the strongest Luna this pack could ask for.”

NINETEEN

LORELEI

Moonlight filtered through the trees and cast silver shadows across the ruins of the wooden cabin. Lorelei's heart pounded as Draken held her close, his muscular arms wrapped protectively around her.

"I thought I'd lost you," Draken murmured against her hair. "When I found out you were in danger..." His arms tightened. "I'm sorry I didn't understand before. This whole situation - it must have been overwhelming."

Lorelei pressed her face into his chest, breathing him in. "I'm the one who should apologize. Running away from you was stupid. Once I was back home, I realized my old life doesn't fit anymore." She pulled back to look up at him, taking in his sharp features softened by the moonlight. "My apartment felt empty. My work felt hollow. Everything I thought I needed just... wasn't enough for me anymore."

"Because you want me in your life?" His voice was barely a whisper.

"I do." She traced her fingers along his jaw. "I love you, Draken. And I want to be your Luna. I want that life with you in the castle, helping the pack and being there to support you." She paused and took a deep breath. "I just thought I needed time away from the whirlwind. I've never been one to rush into anything or follow my heart blindly, especially with love. But it only took me one day apart to realize that we belong together."

He grabbed her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. "I should have given you that time more willingly instead of expecting you to adapt instantly. You're the strongest person I know - human or wolf. I was a fool to ever doubt you."

"A stubborn fool," she teased, earning a playful growl.

"Watch it," he teased back. "I'm still your alpha."

"My Alpha," she agreed softly. The words felt right on her tongue. "Take me home?"

"In a minute." His eyes glowed with possession as he dipped his head to capture her lips. The earth trembled beneath their feet - just a tiny shiver of happiness this time as Lorelei melted into his kiss, finally exactly where she belonged.

When their kiss broke, Draken's eyes sparkled with mischief. "Want to experience something amazing?"

Lorelei's heart skipped. "What do you have in mind?"

"How about a moonlit ride back to the castle?" He stepped back, that dangerous grin still playing on his lips. "On my back, in wolf form."

The idea sent a thrill through her body. "Really? You'd let me?"

"Let you? I've been wanting to share this with you since the moment I met you."

Lorelei watched in fascination as Draken shifted, his massive wolf form emerging where her sexy alpha had stood moments before. He was magnificent - powerful muscles rippling beneath thick fur that gleamed silver in the moonlight. He lowered himself to make it easier for her to climb on.

Her fingers sank into his soft fur as she settled onto his broad back. The connection between them intensified like an electric current running through every point of contact. She could feel his power, his strength, his wild nature calling to something equally untamed within her.

Ready? His voice rumbled through their mental connection, making her gasp in surprise.

“You can talk to me like this?”

Only because you’re my Luna. Possession colored his words. He let out a howl strong enough to shake the trees, calling his pack to head home. Hold on tight.

The world blurred as Draken took off through the wilderness. Wind whipped through Lorelei’s hair as they raced beneath the stars. Her thighs gripped his sides while her fingers clutched his fur, but she wasn’t afraid. She felt safer than she ever had.

They flew past ancient trees and leaped over fallen logs, moving as one being. Lorelei’s laughter rang out across the night as pure joy bubbled up inside her. This was freedom. This was magic. This was where she truly belonged.

When they finally reached the castle grounds, Draken slowed to a stop. Lorelei slid off his back, her legs shaky from the ride and the rush of adrenaline. He shifted back to human form and retrieved pants from behind a nearby boulder.

“That was incredible!” Lorelei bounced on her toes, still buzzing with energy. “I’ve never felt anything like it. The speed, the power - it was like flying!”

Draken pulled her close, his bare chest still radiating heat from the run. “Most humans would have been terrified.”

“Well, I’m not most humans.” She poked his chest playfully. “I’m your Luna, remember?”

His expression softened as he cupped her face. “My Luna. My everything.”

Draken’s hand was warm and firm around hers as he led her through the grand halls of the castle. Lorelei’s heart raced, a mix of excitement and nerves fluttering in her chest. The castle’s stone walls, ancient and imposing, seemed to hum with a quiet energy tonight as if aware of the significance of the moment. She glanced down at their joined hands, marveling at how effortlessly they fit together despite their differences.

When they reached his master suite, Draken pushed the door open with a quiet confidence, guiding her inside. The room was as she remembered it—spacious, warm, and distinctly his. The scent of pine and earth lingered in the air, mingling with the faint aroma of the fireplace that crackled softly in the corner.

Draken turned to her, his eyes dark and intense, the kind of look that made her stomach do a little flip. “You’ve been in here before,” he said, his voice low and slightly teasing. “But this time, it’s different.”

“Very different,” Lorelei agreed, her voice steady despite the butterflies in her stomach. She took a step closer to him, tilting her head up to meet his gaze. “Draken, I’m ready.”

His brows lifted slightly, a flicker of surprise crossing his face before it melted into something warmer, more possessive. “Ready for what, exactly?” he asked, though the smirk tugging at his lips told her he already knew.

She rolled her eyes, though her cheeks burned. “Don’t make me say it.”

He chuckled, the sound deep and rich, and pulled her into his arms. His lips brushed against her ear as he murmured, “Say it. I want to hear it.”

Lorelei huffed but couldn't suppress her grin. “I want you to mark me when you—“ He cut her off with a kiss that was as possessive as it was tender.

“Good,” he growled softly, pulling back just enough to look at her. “Because I've been waiting desperately for this moment.”

Before she could respond, he was already moving, his hands deftly undoing the buttons of her shirt. She shivered as the fabric fell away, the cool air brushing against her skin. His hands were everywhere—tracing the curve of her shoulders, skimming down her arms, cupping her waist. She reached for his shirt, yanking it over his head with a little more force than necessary, eager to feel the heat of his skin against hers.

He laughed, a low rumble that vibrated through her as he lifted her off her feet and carried her to the bed. The moment her back hit the sheets, he was on her, his body solid and unyielding as he bracketed her with his arms. His lips crashed down on hers, hungry and demanding, and she met him with equal fervor, her fingers tangling in his hair.

When he finally broke the kiss, he breathed, “This is it. No turning back.”

“I'm not turning back,” she assured him, her hands roaming over the hard planes of his chest. “I'm yours, Draken. Completely.”

That was all the encouragement he needed. His hands moved to the waistband of her pants, yanking them off with a growl of impatience that made her laugh. “Someone's in a hurry,” she teased, though her breath hitched as he kissed a trail back up her stomach.

“You have no idea,” he said, his voice muffled against her skin.

When he finally settled between her legs, he slowly entered her, inch by glorious inch. His eyes locked on hers, and Lorelei felt a surge of anticipation so intense, it stole her breath. His thrusts started off slow but soon became relentless. He thrust into her with a deep, primal rhythm that made her toes curl and her back arch. Each movement was deliberate, each stroke sending sparks of pleasure through her body.

The connection between them was palpable, a current of raw energy that tied them together in ways she couldn't fully understand. She clung to him, her nails digging into his shoulders as she gasped for air.

Her thoughts were a blur, a mix of pleasure and exhilaration. This is it, she thought, her heart pounding in time with his thrusts. This is where I'm meant to be. She could feel the tension building in him, the way his muscles coiled like a spring ready to snap. His lips brushed against her neck, a silent promise of what was to come.

“Draken,” she breathed, her voice trembling, “don't stop.”

“Never,” he growled softly, his movements becoming even more intense, the pace almost frantic.

The room was filled with the sound of their breathing, their mingled gasps and moans, the soft creak of the bed beneath them. Lorelei's world narrowed down to Draken—his scent, his heat, the feel of his body against hers. She was so close, teetering on the edge, but she held on, waiting for that final moment when he would claim her as his.

He paused, pulling back to meet her gaze again. His eyes were wild, glowing with an intensity that made her shiver. “Lorelei,” he said, his voice raw, “are you sure?”

“Yes,” she whispered, her voice steady despite the storm of emotions inside her. “I’m sure.”

He groaned, a sound of pure raw pleasure. She could feel the tension in his body, the way he was holding himself back, waiting for her. And she was so close, so very close, teetering on the edge of something immense and overwhelming.

“Draken,” she gasped, her back arching as her body tightened around him. “I’m—I’m?—“

Her words cut off as the world seemed to explode around her. Pleasure surged through her in waves, crashing over her with a force that left her gasping for air. She clung to him as the intensity of it threatened to consume her. Draken’s movements became erratic, his own release cresting and exploding as he buried his face in the crook of her neck, his breath hot against her skin.

And then she felt it—a sharp, searing pain at the base of her neck that made her gasp. His teeth sank into her, marking her, claiming her as his mate. For a moment, the pain overwhelmed everything else, but then it melted into something else entirely—a warmth that spread through her body, a tingling sensation that started where his teeth had marked her and radiated outward, filling her with a strange, electric energy.

He pulled back slightly, his lips brushing against the mark he’d left, and Lorelei could feel the warmth of his breath on her skin. “Mine,” he whispered, his voice soft but no less possessive.

“Yours,” she agreed, her voice barely a whisper as she tried to catch her breath. Her body felt like it was humming, the tingling sensation growing stronger, spreading through her limbs and into her chest. It wasn’t unpleasant—if anything, it was exhilarating.

TWENTY

LORELEI

The tingling sensation intensified until Lorelei's skin felt like it was on fire. Her bones suddenly started to shift and crack, a searing pain shooting through her body. She tried to scream but all that came out was a whimper.

"What's happening?" she gasped, but her words morphed into a strange growl. Her vision blurred, the world tilting sideways as her body contorted and changed.

Draken's eyes widened in shock. "This is impossible," he breathed, pulling away from her. "You're shifting."

Panic seized her chest as white fur sprouted across her skin. Her hands—no, paws—scrambled against the silk sheets. The room spun as her senses heightened, overwhelming her with new smells and sounds. She could hear heartbeats from two floors down, smell food in the kitchen, and detect the musty scent of old stone in the walls.

"Lorelei, stay calm," Draken's voice cut through her panic.

But she couldn't stay calm. This wasn't what she signed up for. She'd agreed to be his mate, yes, but becoming a wolf? The rational part of her brain short-circuited. Fight or flight kicked in, and flight won.

She leaped off the bed, her new four legs tangling beneath her as she crashed to the

floor. The door was open a crack—thank god for small mercies—and she nudged it open wider and bolted out it, her claws clicking against the marble floors.

“Lorelei, wait!” Draken called after her, but she was already racing down the corridor.

She darted through the castle, her white fur a blur as she navigated the twisting hallways purely on instinct. Her architect’s mind, even in panic, mapped her escape route. Through the great hall, past the kitchens, and out the service entrance.

The cool night air hit her fur as she burst out of the castle. The forest beckoned, dark and mysterious, and she plunged into it without hesitation. Her new wolf body moved with surprising grace once she stopped fighting it, her paws finding purchase on the forest floor as she weaved between trees.

This is insane , she thought, her mind still human even as her body had transformed. I’m running through the woods. As a wolf. A WHITE wolf. What the actual hell?

The moon hung big and bright above her, its light filtering through the canopy and illuminating her path. Part of her wanted to howl at it, which only freaked her out more. She pushed deeper into the forest, trying to outrun her own transformation.

Lorelei’s paws pounded against the forest floor, her new wolf instincts guiding her through the darkness. Her white fur caught moonbeams as she darted between trees, her heart racing with each leap and bound. The forest filled her enhanced senses - pine needles crunching beneath her paws, owl calls echoing overhead, the musty scent of deer trails.

This seriously can’t be happening , she thought, her rational mind struggling to make sense of her transformation. I design buildings, I don’t turn into a wolf!

Lorelei . Draken's deep voice resonated in her head, making her stumble slightly. Stop running, my love .

Great, now I'm hearing voices. Just perfect. She pushed herself faster, her muscles burning.

It's the mate link, he explained, his mental voice tinged with amusement. All wolves can communicate this way. And you, my beautiful mate, are most definitely a wolf.

Oh, right. How could she forget? Get out of my head! She wasn't sure if he could hear her thoughts, but his chuckle confirmed he could.

The Moon Goddess knew what she was doing all along , he continued. You were always meant to be this way - both Earth Luna and wolf. I was too stubborn to see it before.

Lorelei's new wolf form sailed over a fallen log. That's rich coming from you. Mr. Humans-Aren't-Good-Enough.

I deserve that , he admitted. She could hear him gaining on her, his powerful form closing the distance. But you need to stop fighting this. Open your heart to your wolf, just like you opened it to me.

That's your solution? Just trust my feelings? She darted around a massive oak tree. I'm an architect! I work with rulers and straight edges, not mystical wolf transformations!

And yet you're running through these woods like you were born to do it , he pointed out. Your wolf knows what to do. Trust her. Trust yourself.

His words made sense but panic still gripped her chest. She couldn't stop running,

couldn't face this massive change. Not yet. Her paws carried her deeper into the moonlit forest, Draken's steady presence following behind her.

Take all the time you need, he said softly in her mind. I'll be right here. But know this - you were never just human, Lorelei. You were always meant to be extraordinary.

Lorelei's frantic pace gradually slowed as her racing thoughts finally settled. Her white paws padded silently across the forest floor, each step more deliberate than the last. The moonlight filtered through the canopy, casting dappled shadows across her fur.

A strange calm washed over her as she let her analytical mind step back. The forest spoke to her differently - not just through her earth magical powers, but through her heightened wolf senses. She could feel the vibrations of small animals scurrying underground, smell the rich loam beneath her paws, hear the whisper of wind through leaves with crystal clarity.

This feels... right, she realized with surprise. Her wolf form moved with natural grace as if she'd always known how to inhabit this body.

Finally accepting what you are? Draken's deep voice rumbled through their mental link. His massive animal emerged from the shadows behind her, powerful and commanding.

I suppose I am, she thought back, turning to face him. I guess you're right. I was always meant to be this extraordinary.

She padded closer to him. She pressed her muzzle against his neck, breathing in his wild, masculine scent. His larger form curled protectively around her, a low rumble of satisfaction vibrating through his chest.

My beautiful white wolf , he said through their link, nuzzling her ear. The Moon Goddess knew better than both of us.

Does this mean I get to redesign the pack houses AND run through the forest whenever I want? she asked, playfully nipping at his jaw.

Whatever my Luna desires , he replied, though his mental tone carried a hint of alpha male authority. As long as you remember who you belong to .

Lorelei bumped her shoulder against his. I belong to myself first. But I choose to be with you.

His form pressed closer, asserting his dominance even as affection flowed through their bond. Stubborn woman .

You wouldn't want me any other way , she replied, feeling truly content for the first time since her powers awakened.

The snapping of twigs and soft padding of paws drew Lorelei's attention. Through the trees, two wolf forms emerged into the moonlit clearing. Her new wolf senses identified them immediately - Chuck's sturdy brown form and Scorpio's sleek dark brown coat.

Welcome to the family, Chuck's voice echoed through the pack link, his tail wagging as he approached.

The wolves circled around her and Draken, their noses twitching as they took in her new scent. Lorelei held still, letting them investigate.

A white wolf, Scorpio observed, his mental tone impressed. The Moon Goddess certainly has a flair for the dramatic.

Draken pressed against her side possessively. My mate, he declared through the link, his tone carrying an unmistakable note of pride and warning. His massive head swung toward the other two. Not a breath of this to the others yet. We wait until the time is right.

She was fine with that. She wanted to wait until she had fully accepted this part of herself before letting the whole pack know.

Come run with us, Luna , Scorpio's voice sang through the link. The moon is bright, and the night is young.

Lorelei's new wolf instincts thrummed with excitement at the invitation. The moonlight pulsed through her veins, calling her to run wild and free.

What do you say, my love? Draken asked, his form coiled with barely contained energy. Ready to run?

Without waiting for her response, he took off into the forest, his powerful form cutting through the shadows. The others followed, their bodies moving in perfect synchronization.

Well , Lorelei thought, her paws already carrying her forward, I always did like group projects . She launched herself after them, her white form gliding through the moonlit forest as naturally as she once walked through construction sites.

The small group ran together, weaving between trees and leaping over streams, their movements a beautiful dance of power and grace. Lorelei found herself matching their rhythm instinctively, her wolf form knowing exactly what to do even as her human mind marveled at the experience.

TWENTY-ONE

DRAKEN

Draken's heart soared as Lorelei kept pace with him through the moonlit forest. Her white wolf form moved with natural grace. His heart swelled with pride at how quickly she'd adapted to her wolf nature.

Ready to shift back? he asked through their mate link.

Her wolf gave a happy yip in response. They stopped in a moonlit clearing near the castle walls. Draken shifted first, then watched in amazement as Lorelei transformed back to her human form with perfect control.

"That was incredible," Lorelei said, wrapping her arms around herself. The summer night air brushed against their bare skin. "But I didn't exactly plan ahead for the clothing situation."

"I've got you." Draken swept her into his arms, cradling her against his chest. Her soft curves pressed against his muscles, sending electricity through his body. "Though I must say, I prefer you like this."

"You would." She laughed, nestling closer. "But I'd rather not give the entire pack a show."

Using his bulk to shield her from view, Draken carried her through the castle's side entrance. The stone corridors were mercifully empty as he made his way to his master

suite. His wolf preened at having his mate so close, so trusting in his arms. He shouldered open his bedroom door and headed straight for the massive en suite bathroom.

“This shower is bigger than my first apartment,” Lorelei marveled as he set her down.

“One of the perks of being a prince.” He adjusted the water temperature and activated the multiple shower heads.

Steam filled the marble-lined space as he guided her inside. Water cascaded over them both as he reached for his soap. The scent of sandalwood filled the air as he worked the lather across her shoulders.

“Mmm,” she hummed as his hands moved lower. “That feels amazing.”

His fingers traced the curve of her spine. “You’re amazing. The way you shifted, how naturally you took to your wolf form.” Pride surged in his chest.

She turned her body to face him. “It felt right. Natural. Like that part of me was just waiting to wake up.”

The sight of her - wet, naked, and completely his - sent desire coursing through him.

“May I wash your hair?”

Her eyes softened. “I’d like that.”

Draken turned her around and worked shampoo into her hair with gentle fingers, massaging her scalp.

“That feels soooo good,” she sighed, leaning back against his chest.

“You were meant for this world. Meant for me.” He pressed a kiss to her wet shoulder.

“I can’t believe I ever doubted it.” She turned back to face him, water droplets clinging to her lashes.

He couldn’t resist her any longer. He captured her lips in a passionate kiss, pressing her against the shower wall. Her hands slid up his chest as she returned the kiss with equal passion.

His hands slid down her slick body as he deepened the kiss, his wolf growling with approval as her fingers tangled in his wet hair. The steam from the shower wrapped around them like a warm embrace, but it was nothing compared to the heat radiating between them. He broke the kiss just long enough to hoist her up effortlessly, her legs wrapping around his waist like they were made to fit there.

“Draken,” she gasped, her breath hitching as he nipped at her neck, his teeth grazing the spot where he’d marked her. The sound of his name on her lips sent a jolt of desire straight to his core.

“You’re mine forever,” he growled, his voice low and rough, the alpha in him unable to hold back the possessive claim. His hands gripped her thighs, holding her steady as he pressed her back against the cool marble wall. The contrast of the cold stone against her heated skin made her shiver, and he smirked, trailing kisses down her throat.

Her eyes fluttered shut as he rocked his hips against her, his arousal pressing insistently against her warmth. She let out a soft moan, her fingers digging into his shoulders. “Draken, please?—“

With one fluid motion, he entered her, his length sliding deep inside her. Her soft

gasp turned into a moan, her head tipping back against the wall as he started a pace that was as primal as it was relentless.

“That’s it, my love,” he murmured. “Let me hear you.”

Her moans grew louder, echoing off the shower walls as she clung to him, her nails leaving faint marks on his skin. The sensation spurred him on, his wolf reveling in the way she responded to him, the way her body tightened around him.

“You feel--“ she whispered, her voice trembling with pleasure. “Draken, I’m?—“

Her words broke off into a cry as her orgasm hit, her body trembling wildly in his arms. The walls of the shower shuddered with the force of her earth powers, water sloshing over the edges as she pulsed around him. He growled, her pleasure driving him to the edge as he thrust deep, surrendering to his own release with a low, guttural groan.

For a moment, they stayed like that, pressed together as the water cascaded around them, their breaths mingling in the steam-filled air.

“Well,” Lorelei finally managed, her voice still breathless, “that was... intense.”

Draken chuckled, nuzzling her neck. “You’re telling me. You’re lucky we didn’t bring the whole castle down.”

She laughed, the sound light and carefree, and he felt a warmth spread through his chest that wasn’t because of the shower. “Guess we’ll have to work on controlling that part.”

He pressed a soft kiss to her lips, his hands still gripping her thighs. “That can be arranged.”

She smiled wide, her eyes meeting his. “You’re insatiable.”

“Can you blame me?” he teased. “When I’ve got the most beautiful mate in the world?”

Draken turned off the shower with a flick of his wrist, reaching for the softest towel he owned. He wrapped it around Lorelei first, drying her with gentle, deliberate strokes. She shivered under his touch, her skin still warm from the water and their shared passion. He couldn’t resist pressing a kiss to her damp shoulder.

“You’re perfect,” he said, his voice thick with need despite having just claimed her in the shower. His wolf stirred again, restless and hungry for more. He quickly dried himself off, tossing the towel aside before scooping her into his arms.

“Draken!” she squealed, laughing as he carried her out of the bathroom and toward the massive four-poster bed. The silk sheets shimmered under the moonlight coming in through the windows, and he laid her down gently, his eyes drinking in the sight of her sprawled across the silken expanse.

“Cold?” he teased, crawling over her. His body hovered above hers, his muscles flexing as he braced himself on his arms.

“Not anymore,” she whispered, her hands sliding up his arms to his shoulders. Her touch sent a jolt of electricity through him, and he lowered himself, pressing his lips to hers in a searing kiss. Her response was immediate, her fingers tangling in his hair as she arched into him. The taste of her drove him wild.

His hand roamed over her body and soon reached between her thighs. She was slick with desire already, and the scent of her arousal made his head spin. “Tell me you’re ready for me again.”

She smiled, her eyes dark with longing. “Always.”

He guided her onto her hands and knees. The sight of her like this, so primal and vulnerable, sent a surge of possessiveness through him. His hands gripped her hips, pulling her closer as he positioned himself behind her.

“So beautiful,” he said, his voice thick with admiration. He traced the curve of her spine with one hand.

Draken entered her slowly, savoring the way her body welcomed him. “You feel incredible,” he groaned, his hands grabbing her hips tighter as he began to move. The slow rhythm soon became fierce as pleasure coursed through his body, his thrusts plunging deeper and harder. He reached around her, his fingers finding her most sensitive spot, and massaged her in time with his fast movements. Her cries of pleasure filled the room, and her body tightened around him, pushing him closer to the edge.

“Draken—“ Her words broke off into a gasp as she came apart, her body trembling violently. The walls around them shuddered, but not as much as before. He growled low, his own release crashing over him as he spilled himself deep inside her. For a moment, he stayed like that, his forehead resting against her back as they both caught their breath.

“That,” she panted, turning her head to look at him with a grin, “was... something else.”

He chuckled, shifting to pull her into his arms. She curled against his chest, her fingers tracing his skin.

“Get some rest,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. “We’ve got a big day tomorrow.”

“Mmm, sounds ominous,” she teased, her eyes already drifting shut.

“Nothing you can’t handle,” he replied, his voice warm with pride. As her breathing evened out, he watched her sleep, his heart full in a way he’d never imagined possible.

Her soft breathing filled the quiet room as moonlight spilled through the windows, casting a silvery glow across their tangled forms. His finger traced her neck, right over the mark that claimed her as his.

He smiled as he remembered her transformation. His Luna, his beautiful mate, had been a wolf all along. The realization should have brought him more relief than it did. But as he gazed down at her sleeping form, he found himself chuckling softly at his own stubborn prejudices.

“I would have loved you either way,” he whispered, careful not to wake her. The truth of those words settled deep in his chest. Somewhere between teaching her to control her earth powers and watching her stand up to Gideon, he’d stopped caring about what she was and started caring about who she was.

Her strength, her wit, her determination – those qualities had nothing to do with being human or wolf. They were purely Lorelei. His wolf rumbled in agreement, completely content with their mate pressed against them.

The earth trembled slightly beneath the castle, responding to whatever she was dreaming about. Draken tightened his hold on her, nuzzling her hair. His fierce, powerful mate who could shake mountains in her sleep. Human or wolf, she was exactly what his pack needed. What he needed.

Sleep began to tug at his consciousness, but he fought it for a few more moments, wanting to savor this perfect peace. His last thought before drifting off was that

perhaps it was time for the Moonshadow pack to revise some of their old beliefs about humans. After all, their Luna had proven that power could come in unexpected packages.

TWENTY-TWO

LORELEI

S unlight streamed through the tall windows of the pack's event center. Lorelei stood beside Draken, her heart racing as she surveyed the hundreds of pack members gathered before them for the celebration. Lorelei's stomach did a little flip as Draken squeezed her hand, his presence beside her both commanding and reassuring.

"My people," Draken's voice carried across the room, commanding attention without effort. "Today we celebrate not just our Luna's official marking, but a revelation that proves the Moon Goddess works in mysterious ways."

Lorelei stepped forward, her silk dress rustling against the wooden platform. The crowd's attention fixed on her, a mix of curiosity and anticipation in their eyes.

"Show them," Draken whispered, pride evident in his tone.

Taking a deep breath, Lorelei focused on the shift. The sensation was still new, but exhilarating. Her bones reformed, fur sprouted, and within moments, a wolf stood where she had been. Her new wolf form stood proud beside her mate, her coat gleaming like fresh snow in the afternoon light.

Gasps and excited murmurs rippled through the crowd. Someone whooped, starting a chain reaction of cheers and applause that thundered through the event center.

Through her enhanced hearing, Lorelei caught snippets of conversation:

“A white wolf!”

“She’s one of us after all!”

“The most beautiful Luna wolf I’ve ever seen!”

Feeling playful, Lorelei trotted through the crowd. Pack members reached out to touch her fur reverently as she passed. The joy in the room was infectious, making her tail wag despite her usual reserved nature.

The door to the side garden beckoned. She slipped through it, hearing Draken’s footsteps following behind. Once hidden by the rose bushes, she shifted back and quickly pulled on the spare dress she’d stashed there earlier.

When Draken approached her, he wrapped his arm protectively around her waist. “That went well,” he said, his voice deep with satisfaction. “Though I think you enjoyed showing off a little too much with that dramatic exit.”

“Maybe a little.” She grinned. “Did you see their faces? I think we surprised them.”

“Well, you definitely surprised both of us.” He kissed her neck softly where his mark sat. “My clever mate, keeping secrets even from herself all these years.”

Draken led Lorelei back inside to celebrate her new role as the Moonshadow Luna. She gracefully and confidently circulated through the event center, moving from group to group. The joy radiating from the pack members warmed her heart more than she’d expected. Their acceptance meant everything, especially after the rocky start.

“Luna Lorelei, do you have time to look at these blueprints?” an elderly wolf named Martha pulled sketches from her bag. “Our senior center’s falling apart, but we can’t

figure out how to expand without losing the historical elements.”

Lorelei’s eyes lit up as she studied the drawings. “The foundation’s solid. We could preserve the original stonework while adding modern amenities. Maybe a glass atrium to bring in natural light?”

Martha clasped her hands together. “That would be perfect for the pack gatherings during full moons!”

From across the room, Draken watched her with unveiled pride. Their eyes met and he winked, making her cheeks flush. Even as she continued her rounds, she felt his protective presence, tracking her movements.

“The pack houses need better insulation,” Gregory, one of the construction workers, mentioned when she reached his table. “But we’re not sure how to retrofit without damaging the structures.”

“I know exactly what you need.” Lorelei grabbed a napkin and sketched quickly. “See? If we use this new eco-friendly material, we can preserve the aesthetic while improving efficiency.”

A deep chuckle behind her made her spine tingle. “Already revolutionizing our territory?” Draken’s arm slid around her waist.

“Someone has to drag you into the modern era.” She tilted her head back to smile at him. “These buildings have good bones, but they need more love.”

“And you’re just the Luna to give it to them.” His kiss on her temple sent shivers through her. “Though I hope you’ll save some of that love for me.”

“Always.” She turned back to Gregory. “Send the current blueprints to our office

tomorrow. I'll start drafting proposals.”

“Our office?” Draken asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, I was thinking we could possibly put my drafting table in your office” she smiled back at him.

He couldn't hide the excitement in his eyes at the idea of sharing his space with her.

“Anything for my Luna.”

As they moved through the crowd, Draken kept her close, his presence both possessive and proud. “You're a natural at this,” he murmured. “I've never seen the pack so excited about changes before.”

“That's because you were too stubborn to ask for help.” She poked his ribs playfully.

“Good thing you got stuck with an architect for a Luna.”

His growl was playful. “Stuck? I think you mean blessed by the Moon Goddess.”

Draken extended his hand to Lorelei, his eyes gleaming with joy. “Dance with me, Luna?”

Lorelei placed her hand in his, letting him guide her to the center of the marble floor. His touch sent familiar tingles through her body.

The music shifted to something slow and romantic. Draken pulled her close, one hand splayed possessively across her lower back. His warmth seeped through the silk of her dress as they swayed together.

“What's going on in that brilliant mind of yours?” Draken's breath tickled her ear.

Lorelei smiled, resting her head against his chest. “Just thinking about how different everything is from what I expected. A week ago, I was worried about turning thirty. Now I’m a wolf shifter with earth magical powers, mated to an alpha prince.”

“Having second thoughts?” His grip tightened slightly.

“The opposite actually.” She lifted her head to meet his gaze. “It feels right here like I’ve finally found my true home. I’m really excited to start redesigning the pack houses, maybe add some sustainable features. And you have to admit, my drafting table will look absolutely perfect in your office.”

“Our office,” he corrected, spinning her in a graceful turn. “Though I might get distracted watching you work.”

“I think you’ll manage.” She smiled up at him. “I was also thinking that I could work remotely for my old firm too. Best of both worlds.”

His eyebrows drew together. “You still want to work for humans?”

“Hey, those humans pay me well and my connections might just help us out here too.” She poked his chest playfully. “And... if you’re not opposed to the idea, I was thinking of inviting my best friends over for sleepovers. This castle has way more space than my apartment.”

“Sleepovers?” He looked scandalized. “This is a royal residence, not a-“

“Perfect place for girl’s night?” She batted her eyelashes. “Come on, Alpha. You can hide in your wolf form if it bothers you that much.”

His laugh rumbled through his chest. “You’re lucky I love you.”

“I know.” She stretched up to kiss his jaw. “And I love that I don’t have to choose between my old life and this one. I get to keep both.”

“As long as you always come home to me.” His tone held that commanding alpha note that made her wolf want to roll over.

“Always,” she promised, letting him pull her closer as they continued to dance.

Later that night, the moment the door to Draken’s master suite clicked shut, Lorelei felt the air shift between them. His presence was overwhelming, as always, but tonight, something sparked in her that she couldn’t ignore. She faced him, her back against the door, and smirked. His eyes darkened, a low growl rumbling in his chest as he took a step toward her. But Lorelei wasn’t about to let him take control—not this time.

She pushed off the door and closed the distance between them, her hands immediately going to the buttons of his dress shirt. He watched her with a mix of curiosity and hunger as she stripped him of his shirt, her fingers trailing over the hard planes of his chest.

Lorelei didn’t wait for him to make the next move. She shoved him backward until his legs hit the edge of the bed, and he let out a surprised chuckle as he sat down. “Feeling bold tonight, aren’t we?” he teased, but the heat in his eyes told her he wasn’t complaining.

“You have no idea,” she said, climbing onto his lap with a predatory grace that made his breath hitch. Her dress hiked up around her thighs as she straddled him, her hands braced on his shoulders. She leaned in, her lips brushing his ear. “Tonight, I’m in charge.”

Draken’s hands settled on her hips, his grip firm but yielding. “Is that so?” he

murmured, his voice thick with amusement and desire.

She pulled back just enough to remove her dress over her head. “You’re mine, Draken. And tonight, I’m going to remind you exactly what that means.”

Her lips crashed onto his, fierce and demanding. Draken responded instantly, his hands tightening on her hips as he kissed her back with equal fervor. But Lorelei wasn’t content to let him take the lead. She nipped at his lower lip, eliciting a growl from deep in his throat, before pulling away and rising to her knees.

Her hands moved to the waistband of his pants, and she made quick work of them, freeing him with an ease that made Draken’s breath catch. She didn’t give him a moment to recover. Settling back onto his lap, she guided him inside her, her breath hitching as she sank down, inch by inch, until she was fully seated.

Draken’s hands gripped her thighs, his muscles tense as he fought to let her set the pace. “Lorelei,” he rasped, his voice strained.

“Relax,” she teased, her hands moving to his shoulders for balance. “I’ve got this.”

She began to move, her hips rolling in slow, deliberate circles that made Draken’s breath come in sharp gasps. His hands slid up to her waist, his fingers digging into her skin as she picked up the pace, riding him with a confidence that left him utterly at her mercy. Her own pleasure built with every thrust, her moans mingling with his as she lost herself in the rhythm.

Her inner thoughts raced, a mix of pride and exhilaration. This is what it feels like to take control, she thought, her nails scraping lightly over his chest. He’s mine, and he’s letting me have this. Letting me take what I want.

Draken’s growls grew louder, his hips lifting to meet her thrusts as his control began

to fray. “Lorelei,” he growled, his voice raw with need.

She grinned down at him, her fast pace never faltering. She leaned down to capture his lips in another searing kiss.

The tension between them suddenly snapped as their climaxes hit, their bodies shuddering against each other as they rode out the waves of pleasure. Lorelei collapsed against Draken’s chest, her breathing ragged, but a satisfied smile played on her lips. She had taken control, and he had let her—something she knew wasn’t easy for an alpha like him.

LORELEI

Lorelei bent over her drafting table as her fingers traced the lines of her latest housing design. The morning sunlight streamed in through the large windows of the office she shared with Draken, casting a warm glow over her work. The scratch of her pencil mixed with the sound of Draken typing on his laptop, creating a comfortable symphony she'd grown to love over the past six months.

She glanced up at her mate, admiring how the sun caught the angles of his face. Even focused on pack business, he radiated power and authority. A smile tugged at her lips as she remembered how adamantly he'd once believed a human couldn't be his Luna. Now here she was, not just his mate but a wolf herself, and more importantly - his equal partner.

"You're staring again," Draken said without looking up from his screen, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Can you really blame me?" stretched, rolling her shoulders. "I'm married to the sexiest alpha in North America."

He finally looked up, his eyes darkening with desire. "Just North America?"

"Well, I haven't met all the alphas worldwide yet." She winked at him, loving how his possessive growl filled the room.

Turning back to her drafting table, she studied the housing plans spread before her. "The pack deserves better than these outdated homes. Look at these foundation plans

- they're ancient.”

“And my Luna’s going to fix that.” Pride colored his voice as he stood and moved behind her, his hands settling on her shoulders. “Though I hope you’re not planning to demolish the castle.”

“Of course not.” She leaned back against his chest. “But these family units need updating. Modern amenities, better insulation, proper ventilation. Our people deserve homes as strong as they are.”

His chest rumbled with approval as he studied her designs. “You’ve thought of everything.”

“That’s why you mated me. My brilliant mind.” She tilted her head up to look at him.

“Among other things.” He dropped a kiss on her forehead. “Your earth magical powers certainly help with the construction costs.”

She laughed, her heart full of joy. She traced her finger along the blueprint’s edge. “Remember, my friends are coming over tonight for a sleepover. Like old times.”

“All five of them?” Draken’s hands tightened slightly on her shoulders. “I better make myself scarce. Last time they were here, Helena kept staring at my abs when I walked through shirtless.”

laughed, tilting her head back to look at him. “And if I recall correctly, you deliberately flexed.”

“A wolf prince has to maintain his reputation.” He dropped a kiss on her nose. “But tonight, I’ll stay in my study. Let you girls have your fun.”

Later that evening, settled into the plush cushions of her private sitting room as her

friends sprawled around her on the floor, couches, and oversized chairs. The castle's stone walls glowed warmly in the firelight, and empty wine glasses littered the coffee table alongside half-eaten snacks.

"I still can't believe this is your life now," Thea said, hugging a velvet pillow to her chest. "Married to a smoking hot wolf prince, living in a castle, and oh yeah - you can literally move mountains."

"Small ones," corrected with a grin. "And only when Draken isn't distracting me."

"Girl, I told you thirty would shake things up!" Isolde raised her wine glass. "Though I was thinking more along the lines of a promotion, not becoming an actual wolf princess with magical powers."

"Luna," Seraphina corrected, always the precise one. "Though I have to admit, the astronomy geek in me loves that title."

"Remember when we thought the earthquake on your birthday was a bad omen?" Everly grabbed another chocolate. "Turns out it was just you coming into your powers."

Helena leaned forward, eyes sparkling. "Speaking of powers, how's married life with Mr. Alpha? Still as intense and spicy as ever?"

"Better." felt her cheeks warm but couldn't stop her smile. "He's still the most stubborn, protective, occasionally infuriating man I've ever met. But he's all mine."

"And you're all his," her friends chorused, dissolving into giggles.

slipped into their master suite, the morning sun casting dancing shadows across Draken. He lay sprawled across their massive bed, the sheets tangled around his waist, leaving his muscled chest bare. Her wolf stirred inside her at the sight of her

mate, and she padded across the room.

“Missed you last night,” Draken rumbled without opening his eyes, lifting his arm in invitation.

crawled into bed and curled against his warmth. “You survived.” She traced her fingers along his chest, smiling as his muscles twitched under her touch. “Besides, I needed girl time to decompress from all these renovation plans.”

“What’s the status update?” His hand stroked up and down her spine, making her melt further into his embrace.

“The foundation work on the Thompson pack house starts next week.” She yawned, inhaling his familiar scent of pine and mountain air. “Then the Martinez family after that. I’ve got the next six months mapped out.”

“My efficient Luna,” he whispered into her hair. “The pack really loves what you’re doing with their homes.”

smiled against his skin. “It feels good using both my powers and my professional skills to help them. Though juggling that with my remote work for the firm and pack duties keeps me busy.”

“Too busy to start thinking about pups?” His hand stilled on her back.

Heat rose in her chest. “Never too busy for that.” She propped herself up to look at him. “Though fair warning - our kids will probably redesign their rooms weekly with their earth powers.”

“As long as they don’t bring the castle down.” His eyes sparkled with amusement and love.

settled back against him, contentment washing over her. Who would have thought turning thirty would lead to all this? She'd gone from being solely focused on her career to becoming a wolf shifter, pack Luna, and mate to the most powerful alpha in the region. And somehow, she'd managed to keep both worlds - still designing buildings while using her earth powers to help her pack thrive.

nestled deeper into Draken's embrace, her body molding perfectly against his muscular frame. She pressed her palm against his chest, feeling his steady heartbeat beneath her touch. Their mate bond hummed between them, a constant reminder of their connection that still amazed her daily.

Draken's chest rumbled with contentment as he tilted her chin up with his free hand. His eyes, dark and intense, held hers with that possessive gleam that never failed to make her breath catch. Even after six months, one look from him could still make her heart race.

"I love you so much," he said softly, his voice thick with emotion.

Before she could respond, his lips captured hers in a kiss. It wasn't demanding or urgent like their passionate encounters - this was something deeper and sweeter. A promise wrapped in a caress. His fingers threaded through her hair as he deepened the kiss, pouring all his love and pride into the gesture.

melted into him, her wolf preening at the attention from her alpha mate. Through their bond, she felt his joy, his fierce protectiveness, and his dreams of their future together - of little ones with her earth magical powers and his strength running through the castle halls.

When they finally broke apart, she couldn't help but smile. "I love you too."

The look he gave her was pure alpha male - possessive, protective, and utterly devoted. It still amazed her how far they'd come from his initial rejection of a human

Luna. Now here they were planning a future that seemed bigger and brighter than any full moon.