

01 | Chosen Luna

Snow crunches under my feet as I walk along the mountain path. The hoot of an owl mixes with the faint voices of people partying in the valley below. I envy them. They get to celebrate the exact thing that's caused me three mental breakdowns and a stomach twisted with dread.

I sigh, slowing my pace. I can't stop it at this point. But I'll sure as hell stall for as long as I can.

Maybe the alternative isn't so bad. Being invisible and ignored might be better than being tied to a narcissistic asshole.

I come to a high point in the trail and step out of it. A moth flutters up from a patch of tall, dead grass. It dances around in front of my face for a second before disappearing up into the black, starry sky until it's too small to see anymore. Likely out to hide somewhere else. I'm jealous of its freedom. It can hide from its problems. I can't.

Through a gap in the trees I look down to where the pack members are preparing in the clearing. Their bonfire is burning bright and tall, disrupting the otherwise black shadows and creating a spot of warmth among the cold landscape. Even with the distance, I can see the snow sparkling in the firelight.

A beautiful winter night has never looked so ugly.

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4 Days Earlier...

"This one or this one?"

I wonder if squirrels live in neighborhoods. If a squirrel lives a couple trees away from another, does that make them neighbors? Or what if a squirrel builds a nest in a tree that already has one? Do they fight or do they coexist?

"Adrienne? Opinion?"

They probably get along. They probably go over to each other's nests and ask to borrow sugar. No, not sugar. Acorn dust... like squirrel cocaine.

A hard smack to my leg makes me jump.

"OW! What the hell?!" I rub my burning thigh and give Aimee a death glare. What did I do to displease Her Highness now?

"You aren't even paying attention! You're laying there staring at the ceiling like a washed up cucumber," she accuses. So maybe I'm not giving her my undivided attention. She has a fair argument there. But in my defense she can usually carry on a conversation just fine with herself as long as I give the occasional nod and grunt of acknowledgement.

I realize she's standing in front of me, holding a silver and black dress in each hand. After a quick game of eeny, meeny, miny, moe I point to the black one in order to avoid further abuse.

That simple action is all it takes to perk her back up.

"Great. I thought so, too," she says. She hauls the dresses back across the room, hanging the silver one in the closet and draping the black one across the back of an armchair.

"You know I really wish you would go to this party with me. Make some friends. It would do you good to talk to someone else besides me for once," she lectures as she plops down at her vanity. She opens a small glass bottle and starts smearing skin-colored paint on her face. It matches her cocoa tone perfectly.

"I'm starting to regret doing that much," I grumble in return. Aimee is the only person I truly consider a friend. I've known her for about as long as I can remember, though it wasn't until about a year and a half ago that we became close.

"Oh please. Your bitch ass loves me and you know it. And since you love me so much, you should come with me." Her words are mumbled as she puckers her lips to slather her dark purple lipstick on.

I don't waste time in shooting her down. "Not a chance."

"Oh, come on! It'll be fun. I hear Oarcan boys are a sight to see. Tall and sleek. With water dripping from their silky hair, down their chiseled abs and right to their--"

I gag. I actually gag. When that's not enough to stop her, I throw myself into an exaggerated coughing fit to get the point across. The last thing I need to hear about are Aimee's fantasies. Her many, many fantasies. And believe me when I say they're sickening. Her ones for the males of the Oarca pack-- another tribal pack, whose members have a special affiliation with water-- are exceptionally disturbing.

"You can act grossed out all you want now. One day is coming when the high and mighty Adrienne Gage is going to find someone attractive. And when you do I'll be there to rub it in your face." She pauses from meticulously tracing over her eyebrow with a pen. An ornery smile is stuck on her face as she looks in the mirror to see my reaction.

I roll my eyes. I'm skeptical. Extremely skeptical. Aimee embraces her sexuality fully, while I on the other hand, am not interested in the subject. Yet somehow we still get along, despite being the equivalent of polar opposites.

"Yeah, whatever." I stand up from her bed, grabbing my black jacket. "I'll see you later."

She looks up at me with one eyebrow matching her chocolate colored hair and the other barely visible under all the other products that are professionally caked on.

"Where are you going?"

"I have to help clean up for the party. Another celebration for that mightier-than-thou asshole I'm assuming. Who knows what for now," I say bitterly. My blood nearly boils with irritation just by thinking of that spoiled brat. In addition to that, I can feel my hair already falling out with the thought of putting up with Anthony the rest of the day.

Aimee laughs. She's always found my hatred for that asswipe to be entertaining. Needless to say, I don't find it so amusing. Just looking at him makes me homicidal.

"You can always come with me," she chimes with a cheery voice, wiggling her one visible eyebrow.

I snort and turn to leave. "Okay, laugh it up. You're next on the list."

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The sun is warm against my back, making it seem more like mild fall than early winter.

"You missed a spot," Anthony nags for the millionth time from down below.

I can feel my patience deteriorating.

"Does it look like I'm done?" I glare down with the hatred of a thousand suns where he's busy steadying the ladder and critiquing my every movement. Even the top of his head-- covered by moderately long, brown hair-- annoys me.

I've never liked Anthony. He's the kind of person that could drive a Buddhist to take a swing at him. I'm not sure why this unlucky fate picked me as it's target, but I somehow always end up getting stuck with him, be it pack errands or border patrols.

"No, but you should get it before you forget. Right there, up in the corner." His innocent, completely clueless tone of voice only makes him all the more irritating.

I clench the sponge tighter, causing all the water to run out and down my arm. "Shouldn't you be hanging ribbons or something?"

"I'm just trying to help you, okay? This party is for you, you know." He points to another spot on the second story window that I've been cleaning for half an hour because it's impossible to satisfy this annoying freak.

"For me? What do you mean for me? It's for Nathan just like everything else." I say, scrubbing the window like I have a vengeance to settle with it.

Nathan is the Alpha's son. Along with his upcoming 18th birthday, the title will also be given to him. And just like all Alpha children, Nathan's a spoiled brat. Anything we ever do as a pack is always for him.

One time his father even made us throw a party for his first chest hair. What was even worse is that it was a dinner party. Of course I couldn't eat anything without throwing it right back up because one thought was always on my mind, and that was the fact that we were celebrating a chest hair.

"You haven't heard? Nathan picked you as his Luna."

Right then my foot slips off the ladder, sending me plummeting downward. My stomach is skinned on the steps before my hands gain purchase where my feet once were.

"WHAT?!" I choke on my own saliva while trying desperately to reattain my footing.

"I thought you would've known by now," He shrugs simply.

"No. There's nothing to know, because it's not happening." I state firmly and begin to climb down the ladder.

"Wait what are you doing? Adrienne we're not done! Adrienne!" His yelling falls on dismissive ears because there's no way in hell I'm walking back there, or letting this happen to myself.

There's a lump stuck in my throat and I'm so angry that my jaw quivers if I'm not grinding my teeth together. My stomach is in knots, but not the good, excited kind of knots. Instead, it's the kind of knots that urge breakfast to make a reappearance.

I storm my way towards the Alpha's house, on the hunt for a certain ego inflated, soon to be Alpha. The angry and quick pace I keep earns me some concerned stares from the pack members as I march through our little village.

I try to ignore them as I make a beeline for the house. Now that I think of it, everyone has been treating me differently. I've been getting dirty looks and side-eyed glares all week, and I'm just now noticing it.

They could only be thinking one of two things. Why her or thank the gods it's not me.

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