Chapter Two

She stood several inches taller than my five foot four, blonde hair and soft caramel brown eyes. Thea was stunning, anyone could tell. Her long slender legs were always visible, and her clothes always accentuated her best features in whatever outfit she wore. It was easy to see why Aleric had fallen for her.

"Aria!" she yelled out to me.

She was at the end of the hallway towards the community living room, looking as if she were waiting for me. But I didn't stop to talk with her. No, instead I choose to pretend I didn't hear her at all, and left towards my room.

"Aria, wait!" she called out again. I could hear her begin to quickly chase after me.

Thea was easily the last person I wanted to deal with right now. Why was she trying to pour salt into the wound before I'd even had time to fully process what had happened?

But before I could make it to the stairs, her hand grasped around my wrist, forcing me to spin around to face her. And instantly, I growled out sharply at her touch. How could she so carelessly touch me? I was still her Luna even if she was carrying the heir.

Her brown eyes went wide in surprise over my reaction and immediately dropped my hand, now looking as if she was about to cry.

"Aria, I'm so sorry!" she whimpered. "I didn't want it to be like this."

Thea was always the same. Acting as though we were sisters instead of a Luna and her mate's mistress.

"He's the Alpha, how could I deny him?" she said as tears began to fall from her eyes. "You know I never wanted things to go this far, but I love him too. And I love this pack as much as you do. Please don't hate me or this child." She rested a hand on her belly as if to emphasise her point.

Suddenly, everything turned red. I could feel my pulse beating loudly, deafening my ears. Everything about her made me want to rip her to shreds. The audacity she had to say that to me as if *she* were the victim in this whole situation.

Not I, who had suffered and laboured for years, since even before we had been mated.

Not I, who had sacrificed everything to stay with him, to be treated as coldly as he treated me. Somehow, she dared to come to me now with her tears for my sympathy.

Being the Beta's daughter, naturally, everyone had assumed Aleric and I would be mated. I had trained for Luna duties long before we had even discovered we were mated officially. In fact, I had given up years of my life for him. Thea was nothing. She was a fling everyone said would end once I came of age to feel the mate bond… Only it never ended.

Ordinarily, I would have ignored her. I would have given her a faux smile and uttered a few small words before leaving to keep the peace. But not today. Not today when she had crawled her way in and diminished any hope I had left to stay with Aleric.

"Get a hold of yourself, you pathetic woman," I snapped, my eyes narrowing. "You are carrying the heir to this pack and yet you conduct yourself like a child? Did you honestly think I would have sympathy for you? That I would console you? What did you hope to achieve by coming to me now? Did you want to rub in my face how you got pregnant by *my mate*?"

I could feel the stares of people around me as members of our pack gathered to watch the exchange. They all looked on with mixed expressions ranging from sadness, anger and compassion… however, I couldn't tell if it was for me or for Thea.

Thea broke down into heavy sobs before me, her legs giving out, but I simply looked down at her in disgust. She was mistaken if she thought I would console her. In fact, I was determined not to move even an inch to help her.

"Thea!" one of the onlookers shouted out, running to her aid.

Brayden, the Gamma and third in command of the pack, rushed to Thea's side to comfort her. His eyes looked up at me with burning hatred to which I only responded back with uncaring eyes.

"She's pregnant, Luna! With the Alpha heir no less. How can you say such horrible things to her when she only wanted to make amends?" Brayden said angrily.

I had a higher status than him and yet he still felt he could talk to me in that manner. To his Luna. I wanted to lash out at him as well, but it was enough. I had done enough already.

"I'm retiring for this evening and don't want to be interrupted. See to it that my area of the packhouse is not disturbed," I said, giving the order to Brayden. I decided to ignore his outburst given the circumstances and the eyes that were watching us.

His jaw clenched in anger, but he bowed his head nonetheless.

'That's right,' I thought. '*At least someone is forced to show me the respect I deserve even when they do not want to.'*

I normally conducted myself properly, as a Luna should, but this girl deserved no courtesies. She was just as vile as the treatment I received from my mate.

I quickly left up the stairs to the top floor where my quarters were. I had my own private kitchen, dining area and bedroom all to myself where I would not be disturbed. The only people allowed access to this area were Sophie, my attendant, and Aleric, if he so wished. Not that his presence was felt here anymore.

"I'm back!" I called out, removing my shoes at the door.

A sad-looking Sophie then appeared at the kitchen doorway, her eyes full of pity. She had obviously heard the news.

I turned my face, not wanting to look at her expression, and my own tears welled to the surface.

"Oh, honey," she soothed and rushed to me, embracing me in her warm arms. Instantly, I began to softly sob in her arms and grabbed onto her as if I was grabbing onto my own life.

Sophie was an older lady with greying dark hair who had acted as a mother to me ever since I'd become Luna. My own mother had passed away not long after I had taken the rank and so I never had her presence to help me through all the heartaches I'd endured. Over the last five years, Sophie had looked after me as if I were her own daughter and showed me so much love.

"Shh, it's okay, my love," Sophie whispered, stroking my silver hair. "It's not the end of the world. You are still okay and healthy, and that's all that matters. You were chosen by the Goddess and they can't take that away from you."

She was right, of course. I felt like my world was ending but, in reality, it was just the pettiness I felt about dedicating my life to a man who did not love me.

"I'm thinking about running away, Sophie," I mumbled against her chest. "I can't do this anymore. I have nothing else to give."

My interaction with Thea just now had only solidified in my mind that running seemed like the best option.

"Don't say that!" Sophie scolded. "You feel terrible now, I know, but the pack still needs you. You are their Luna. They love you."

My mind wandered, remembering the faces that had surrounded me during my altercation with Thea. I was sure by now they were in sympathy towards Thea, not me; especially thinking back to Brayden and his look of hatred. They held no love for me anymore. I had helped raise this pack to the top but I knew their respect for me was

dwindling. I was sure it would continue to diminish more as the days of Thea's pregnancy went by.

I shook my head and pulled away from Sophie. "Their love is for the one who can provide the most for this pack. I can see that clearly on their faces. They love Thea more than me because she has given them a gift that I can't give them."

Sophie looked at me with uncertainty. I knew it would be difficult for her to hear me say I wanted to leave, but I felt I needed to do this for me. I needed to do the one selfish thing I had ever done in my life. It was something I knew my father would be disappointed in me for doing, but I couldn't do this anymore.

No, this was the final straw. I would finally run away for good.

"I've made up my mind, Sophie, I'm sorry." I reached my hand out and gently clasped hers in mine. "This is for the best, I'm sure you can see how miserable I am. I've dedicated my life to the pack, to Aleric, I need to do this for me now. I'm wasting away here, unwanted, discarded, humiliated in my own pack. Don't I deserve better? Don't I deserve a chance to be happy for once?"

Sophie opened her mouth to reply but, before she could say anything, the door then suddenly burst open behind me.

I gasped and turned my neck sharply towards the sudden intrusion but there wasn't any need to guess who it was.

There was only one person I could think of who would dare to make such an entrance to my room…

…And their familiar cold green eyes met mine, filled with hatred.