

His Rejected Second Chance Mate

Chapter 1: The Claim

Zara's POV

"Wow!" Levi gasped beside me and pointed to the door where one of the pack Alphas had just entered. "That one seems even more appetizing than the one before him!"

Two beautiful she-wolves, who looked like twin sisters, flanked the Alpha, and his Beta and Delta followed closely behind.

"Yes, Levi," I said, raising my glass to my lips and taking a sip. "He certainly does."

Levi was my best friend. We grew up together, and we were inseparable from the age of four. He towered over my small 5'2 frame at 6'3. He had an impressive physique, featuring massive biceps, a six-pack to die for, and a firm yet powerful body. He had the most beautiful golden locks that stood proudly in every direction, giving him the iconic appearance of having just rolled out of bed. To top it all off, he had the most beautiful deep blue eyes I had ever laid eyes on.

Levi was flawless in every way, and even though he drew attention wherever we went, he had one little secret — he was gay.

A breath escaped my lips as I rolled my eyes for the hundredth time.

We were at our annual Mating Festival, hosted by the Full Moon Pack, who had been selected to lead the celebrations that year.

I was not overly thrilled to be there, but Levi wanted to come. He was hoping to find his fated mate that night.

My gaze traveled over the sea of wolves; a few had already found their mates, and the joy and happiness radiated around them. Some were anxiously waiting and hoping; I could sense their worry. Meanwhile, I hid in the ballroom's shadows, praying that no one would notice me.

"Take a look at that one!" Levi yelled above the music. "He is even more attractive than the last one!"

Unwillingly, my eyes darted to the door, and my heart skipped a beat and dropped to my shoes.

Noah Flinch!

One of the most desirable Alphas on the continent, yet the most arrogant one I had ever met.

"What the f*ck is he doing here?" Kaya, my wolf, growled. "He is mated; he should not be at these kinds of celebrations."

Noah and I locked eyes, and when he briefly smiled, my heart leaped inside my chest.

"F*ck, he saw me!" I muttered under my breath, dropped my gaze, and turned my back to him.

Maybe he had not realized who I was.

"He is coming over," Levi mused next to me, licking his lips hungrily as his gaze scanned over the delicious 6'5 wolf with ash-blond hair, green eyes, and honey-colored skin.

"Oh, Goddess, no!" I muttered in disbelief. I didn't have the stomach to talk to him.

Levi furrowed his brows, perplexed by my unexpected response.

"What's gotten into you?" He asked, bewildered.

"Long story," I replied. "Hide me!"

"Why?" he asked, surprised by my plea. "He seems to be interested in you."

"That is exactly what I do not want!" I let out a groan.

"Well, it is too late now!" Levi said, and I glanced up to look at him.

Levi had a smirk plastered on his thin lips.

Was he having fun with this?

"Evening, Zara," Noah's deep voice chimed in my ears.

I turned to face Noah, dropping my shoulders in defeat and glaring at Levi.

"Alpha Noah," I uttered while attempting to compose myself. "What a surprise!"

"Sure is," he said, extending his hands for me to take. "I was hoping to find you here tonight."

I fixed my gaze on Noah's hand as though it were a snake about to strike.

Levi rescued me by taking Noah's hand in his and shaking it.

"Nice to meet you, Alpha," Levi said, glancing between the two of us. "I'm Levi Hallowell, the Beta."

"Likewise," Noah replied, keeping his eyes fixed on me.

With each passing second, the tension between Noah and me grew.

Levi observed us for a minute, and then a smile appeared on his lips.

Was it possible for him to sense that something was off?

Could he sense my hatred towards that wolf?

"Are you acquainted with him?" Levi mind-linked me.

"Yes," I replied with a hiss.

Shocked, Levi narrowed his eyes.

"I wonder why he is here?" Kaya commented.

"I do not give a damn about his reason," I snarled. "His presence is uncalled for! He has no place among unmated wolves!"

With a quick glance toward the door, Levi's eyes brightened slightly. Something must have alerted his wolf.

"If you would excuse me for a moment," he suddenly said, and before I could say anything, he left my side and headed toward the door.

"Sh*t!" I groaned to myself. I couldn't believe he had just done that!

"Finally," Noah grinned and returned his focus to me. "I was wondering when your bodyguard would get the message and walk away."

I refocused my attention on Noah and squinted at him.

"Why do you look so upset about seeing me?" Noah asked, scratching the back of his head nervously at my response.

"Wouldn't you be too?" I growled lowly at him. "You rejected me; remember!"

"Let bygones be bygones," Noah said, and anger sprouted inside me.

"You are so full of yourself!" I snapped and turned to leave. "Go sell your bullsh*t to what's her face!"

"I am unable to," he declared calmly.

I stopped dead in my tracks and slowly turned back to confront him.

"Why not?" I asked. "You two looked so cozy together!"

"We broke up," he replied, keeping his composure.

Was he kidding me right now?

Was that some kind of sick joke?

My heart prickled in my chest, and my breath caught in my throat as my mind raced back to our last encounter.

I had met Noah Flinch a year ago at a similar festival.

It was only a week after my eighteenth birthday.

Levi couldn't come; he hadn't gotten his wolf yet. He didn't seem too disappointed that I wasn't bringing him along to the celebrations, but he did appear anxious.

Levi didn't stop me from attending the ceremony, and I was impressed by his selflessness.

That night, just like Levi wanted to do that night, I had looked forward to finding my fated mate.

My mind wandered, and images from that evening suddenly appeared in front of my eyes.

"Have fun, Zara-bear!" Levi said, tucking my black, curly hair behind my ear and lifting my chin. "You know I can't, but I wish I could go with you to the festival tonight."

I smiled at my best friend and wrapped my arms around his waist to hug him. I was certain that a nice, cozy hug from him would instantly dispel all of my worries and anxieties.

"When I get back, I will tell you everything," I said, bubbling with excitement as I made the promise to him. "I may even have the opportunity to introduce you to my mate later on!"

Levi threw back his head and laughed. He had such a powerful laugh that whenever someone heard it, they had to stop, turn, and look at us. Fortunately, we got smiles in return, and the best part was that I got to hear it every day.

"I will love that!" He gave me a quick kiss on the forehead and then assisted me in getting into the car.

Ever since my parents, the Alpha and Luna of our pack, the Silverback Pack, met, their story was reminiscent of a fairytale, and I always wanted mine to be equally lovely and unique.

It wasn't a long drive to the rival pack, and before I knew it, my parents and I were standing at the massive wooden doors that led to the ballroom — the venue for the festival.

My inner wolf began to pace tensely up and down in my head. I had never seen her act like that before.

A second later, when the guards opened the enormous wooden doors, my nostrils were filled with the aroma of grasslands.

"F*ck!" I muttered to myself. "It smells so good. I wonder whom it belongs to."

I accompanied my parents to our table and waited for the proceedings to begin, but I became restless and uneasy in my seat. I needed to find the owner of that scent.

How much longer?

Why couldn't they just skip the proceedings?

I shot to my feet as soon as the speeches ended, excused myself from the table, and followed my nose down the ballroom.

It didn't take me long to find him; my nose led me right to him. He smelled even more lovely than before.

"Mate!" Kaya yapped excitedly in my mind.

I could not believe I had been paired with someone as attractive as him!

The blonde Greek deity was seated at the bar, chatting idly with a she-wolf that was perched on a bar stool next to him.

I watched him in silence, taking in his powerful, commanding stance. He was handsome, and his laughter was powerful.

Kaya purred at the sight of him.

"He must be an Alpha," she said. "Let us go meet him!"

I felt a lump form in my throat, and butterflies bloomed in my stomach. I was incredibly anxious.

I began to take a step forward, forcing myself to calm down as I swallowed hard, but I stopped when my mate abruptly leaned forward and kissed the stunning brunette she-wolf.

Unable to comprehend what I was seeing, I let out a growl, which caused the two to pull apart.

The she-wolf let out a gasp behind her hand.

"It looks like you have found your fated mate," she said, wide-eyed.

He helped the girl off the bar stool, lifted her hand, kissed it, and grinned.

"Rather, she found me," he said sourly. "My darling, I will see you in a minute."

Darling?

Had he found a mate?

With a blush and a giggle, the girl nodded and headed back to their table, and with a seemingly annoyed look, my mate turned to face me.

"What is your name?" he asked, and a cold chill went down my spine.

"Zara." I stumbled uneasily.

"Zara," my name rolled over his lips, and for a moment it sounded so pure, so perfect. "I don't want to be with you."

I squinted my eyes in disbelief, unable to process the information. Did he just say what I thought he did?

Kaya howled and ran off to the depths of my mind; sadness radiated from her.

He went on when I remained silent.

"She is my chosen mate," he explained. "And I love her."

He turned to face his table, and a foolish smile appeared on his lips. He shot her the kind of look I had always desired from my mate.

"I want to mate her by the end of summer," he said, gradually turning his gaze to face me. "I, Alpha Noah Winslow of the Red Howl Pack, reject you, Zara, as my mate and Luna."

I gasped for air as the most excruciating pain shot through my body, leaving only a cold feeling in my heart.

"You need to say that too," Noah remarked nonchalantly. "If not, you will be in agony when I am with my mate."

I had no desire to be aware of the times when my mate was busy with someone else!

I inhaled deeply.

"Alpha Noah Winslow," I uttered as my throat constricted. "I, Zara Silverwood of the Silverado Pack, accept your rejection."

Noah gasped, his eyes wide, but before I let him say something, I headed for the door.

"Who needs a stinky mate anyway?" Kaya growled, clearing my mind.

I turned my focus back to Noah.

"Why?" I growled. "Has she found her fated mate and turned her back on you, just as you turned your back on me?"

"No," he said, shaking his head, and stepped forward. "She didn't."

I arched my eyebrows in confusion.

What did he want from me?

Why had he come there?

"Then tell me why the sudden change of heart?" I asked, looking him square in the eyes and straightening my back.

While most Alphas would have found the gesture a challenge, Noah simply grinned. His breath fanned the side of my neck, making me shiver as he lowered his head to my ear.

"I came to claim you, little mate!"

Chapter 2: Never!

Zara's POV

"Over my dead body," I spat. "You had your chance!"

"Zara!" Noah grabbed my arm, and anger flared up inside me, making Kaya release a warning growl. Nevertheless, Noah disregarded the warning, tightly gripping my arm to keep me in place.

"I think you should let go of my arm before my wolf rearranges your pretty face," I growled. "She will not hesitate to strike; she is very protective of me."

Noah winced, but he held onto my arm.

"You believe I have a pretty face?" Noah taunted, a grin on his lips. "I feel flattered."

"Let go!" I hissed. "Before —"

"Come on, Zara," Noah said, lowering his head down to my ear. "Do you really think that your wolf would hurt her fated mate?"

"Do you want to put that theory to the test?" I roared, moving nearer and cocking my head to meet his gaze.

Noah and I started staring each other down as our tension increased.

I refused to back down. He had better step down before I let Kaya have him.

"Luna Zara, Alpha Noah," the hosting Alpha called. "Is there an issue?"

He must have noticed the commotion.

"No," Noah replied, a smile playing at the corners of his lips and a look of amusement crossing his eyes.

With a slow motion, Noah released my arm, raised his hands in the air, and retreated one step.

"Now if you would excuse me," I hissed, anger radiating off me as I straightened my midnight blue dress. "I have better things to do than talk to my two-minute ex-mate!"

Noah opened his mouth to say something, but I flipped him the bird and bolted as fast as I could down the hall, heading in the direction I had seen Levi go.

No matter how good his excuse was, there was no way I would give that son-of-a-bitch another chance.

Noah appeared unfazed. I could hear his shoes squeaking on the polished floor behind me. He was clearly determined to speak with me.

"There is something off about Alpha Noah," Kaya remarked. "He seems incredibly eager to make his point."

"Too eager," I agreed.

Didn't Noah understand that he had rejected me and I had moved on? The bond was severed. It was nonexistent. I had no feelings whatsoever toward him.

"Where the hell is Levi?" I growled. "He is meant to stick by my side and shield me from my obnoxious, conceited ex-mate."

I lifted my nose in the air and took a whiff while searching for Levi.

I narrowed my eyes when his scent led me down a long and dark corridor.

What the devil had happened to him?

A few minutes later, I discovered a door that led to the garden outside.

After several minutes, I finally noticed Levi sitting by himself on a bench near the Goddess's feet. He had his hands buried in his hair.

"He seems sad," Kaya whimpered, and a cold feeling washed over me.

I hurried over to be by Levi's side.

"Levi?" I called. "Are you alright?"

Levi shook his head, but he avoided turning to face me.

"What the heck happened?" I asked, moving closer.

"I should have realized it was too good to be true," Levi whimpered to himself.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, startled.

Oh, Goddess. Tell me this was not what I believed it to be.

"That he didn't want me," Levi sobbed.

Sh*t!

"You found your mate?" I questioned carefully.

Was that the reason why Levi rushed out of the hall, leaving me alone with Noah?

"Yes," Levi cried, his lower lip trembling.

"What happened?" I asked, sitting down next to Levi and placing my hand on his back.

"He rejected me," Levi said, and he sniffed. "He spared me not even five minutes of his time."

I felt a surge of anger.

Who would do such a thing? Levi was the kindest and most compassionate person I knew.

"Who is this guy?" I asked, curling my hands into fists. I was already furious. I wouldn't have minded extending my claws and taking a big chunk out of the wolf.

"Alpha Harrison," Levi mumbled, and fresh tears streamed down his cheeks.

My heart skipped a beat, and I sighed, relieved. The rejection was a blessing in disguise.

Alpha Harrison was a jerk. He was a heartless, ruthless Alpha who cared more about his wallet than his pack. Everyone despised him. I could not bear the thought of my closest friend being paired with that awful Alpha.

I took Levi in my arms and gently placed his head on my lap. While I attempted to comfort and reassure him, he silently sobbed from his broken heart.

I knew Levi was depressed, so I inadvertently began to play with his hair, an old habit of mine.

I sighed.

Knowing how much pain Levi was going through on the inside broke my heart, and I had a feeling that after that, he would be very brittle and wary of love.

I turned my head as my eyes noticed movement, rolled my eyes, and grunted when I saw Noah standing a few feet away. He was leaning against the pack house wall, grinning as he watched us in silence.

Could he give his stalking a break?

"The nerve he has," Kaya growled. "To think that, after rejecting us, he was now stalking us like some wild animal."

"Ignore him," I said, turning my attention to Levi. He was whimpering, even though his crying had stopped.

"I tell you what," I said. "I have something at home that can help mend a broken heart like yours."

I gently wiped the tears from Levi's face as he straightened up. His skin had already become scarlet from the tears.

"You do?" He asked, a sob escaping his lips.

"I do," I said tenderly. "Come on. Your name is written on a large bucket of ice cream. And you are welcome to add as many toppings as you would like to go with it."

"Even strawberries?" He asked.

Levi loved strawberries, and they were one of my favorites too.

"Even those," I said. "On the way back, we can make a stop to get you some juicy red ones."

I stood up and extended my hand to take Levi's. "Come on. Let us get going! Let's not waste another minute."

The return trip home was a quiet one.

The desire for his mate lingered in Levi's eyes as he gazed out of the window.

A year ago, when Noah rejected me, I had the exact same dejected expression.

My mind drifted back to that horrible evening.

I didn't take the car home. Kaya took control, shifted, and took off, running into the rain as fast as her legs would carry her, away from Noah.

We simply ran through the forest for hours on end in an attempt to find relief from the constant ache in my chest.

I eventually returned home, shivering, exhausted, and cold. The pain would always be etched in my heart, a scar that would never truly go away. There was no way for me to overcome it.

I hurried straight to my room when I got back to the pack house. I didn't even bother to inform Levi that I had returned.

I was heartbroken to no avail — inside, I felt so empty and cold. The fact that my mate had chosen someone else over me made me feel ashamed.

I allowed myself to be miserable for just one night.

I kept the rejection to myself, and I never told Levi about Noah. I didn't want Levi to feel sorry for me.

I noticed a black SUV trailing behind us.

"It never ends," snarled Kaya. "Allow me to have him!"

"Calm down," I replied. "I think we could lose him in the forest."

Kaya scoffed at me, but she was aware of the reality. Compared to regular wolves, silverback wolves were significantly faster and stronger.

I told our driver to pull over, and he brought the car to a stop.

"What's going on?" Levi asked, surprised.

"Our wolves could use a little run to release some steam," I remarked as I opened the car door. "It will improve their mood."

"What about our clothes?" He asked. "Your dad —"

"Levi," I interrupted him. "I am sure you will never put those clothes on again. Not after tonight, and my father will understand."

With a defeated sigh, he unlocked the car and got out.

I quickly gave the driver his orders, shifted into my black and silverback wolf, and darted toward the forest with Levi's wolf nipping at my tail, hoping to outrun Noah that night.

Chapter 3: Meeting

Zara's POV

"Levi, get up!" I yelled, snatching the blanket away from him.

"No! Leave me alone!" With a cry, he took the blanket from me and covered his head.

"Let me sulk in peace!" He mumbled from under the blanket.

"No!" I snarled. "It has been three freaking days. You can't stay in bed. We have training to go to. You cannot miss one more day!"

"Who cares! My mate certainly doesn't!" he yelled.

I took a deep breath. I was going to snap, yank Levi by the collar, and drag him down to training because I had reached my breaking point.

"Levi," I said as I sat down on his bed beside him. "You are now taking this rejection way too far. Other wolves accepted it and moved on."

"Name one?" He growled, moving the blanket from his face.

Oh no. I was not prepared to break the news of my rejection to Levi.

"You know, other wolves," I said, getting to my feet.

With a roll of his eyes, Levi covered his head with the blanket.

"I saw that!" I growled. "Now, get up and go get ready for training. That's an order, Beta!"

Levi ignored me, and that was enough to tip me over the edge.

I reached for the blanket and gave it a rough tug, bringing him and the blanket to the ground.

"Ow!" He hissed and massaged the lump on his head. "What was that for?"

"For ignoring your Luna!" I snarled. "Now, get your ass in the shower!"

Levi showed up fully clothed thirty minutes later, and we made our way to training.

"Ah," Beta John, Levi's father, said when he noticed us coming. "Did the future Beta finally decide to peek outside his room?"

John was the Beta of the pack and my father's second in command.

At six feet nine, he was a towering dark-headed wolf with the palest blue eyes that gave me the impression they could see right through me.

Beta John growled and rushed forward, infuriated at being treated disrespectfully, as Levi folded his arms across his chest, sighed, and rolled his eyes.

"You have been missing training," he roared. "I am very disappointed in you. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Levi brushed off the question and lifted his chin to meet his father's eyes directly.

"Beta John, morning," I said, moving between them just before John could explode and give Levi a proper dressing down. "I apologize for being late. Which training session is planned for today?"

Beta John squinted his eyebrows as he gradually turned to face me.

"Sparring and tracking," he growled through his teeth. "Ten miles in human form."

I shot Levi a warning glare as he huffed from behind.

Did he have a death wish? He was aware that his father would never back down from a fight.

"Excellent," I replied, grinning, and hurriedly nudged Levi in the direction of the ten-mile path.

"You should have let him give me a beating," Levi said when we were out of earshot.

"Even if it was only for a brief period, it would at least make me feel something."

"You are being stupid right now," I snapped, cutting him off. "Let us finish this run before your father decides to add more training. I am already exhausted just thinking of it."

The fact that we had hardly covered ten miles in human form meant that Beta John was intentionally punishing us.

We entered the sparring ring a little over an hour later, and it didn't take me long to pin Levi to the training mat.

"I submit!" Levi called out.

"Do not give up so easily!" I hissed. "Fight!"

Levi and I would usually spar for a lot longer than two minutes. All I could hope was that Beta John had been blind to Levi's poor performance that morning. He would inform my father, which might lead to issues when I assumed Luna's role in the pack.

"As if you have any experience with rejection," he scowled and shoved me away. "Just let me be!"

"I can't do that, Levi," I said. "You are my friend and Beta. Your suffering is my suffering."

"Give it a rest, Zara," Levi said, getting to his feet. "I am leaving to go clean myself up."

Had his broken heart cost me my friend forever?

"What's his story?" Kevin, one of the head warriors, asked when Levi hurried toward the changing rooms. "He appears to be depressed."

"He is just having trouble focusing," I answered. "He is going to be fine."

I headed to the changing room and had a quick shower.

As I was leaving, I noticed Levi and his dad arguing angrily in the hallway.

Oh, Goddess, what now?

"Beta John, is something wrong?" I asked, maintaining my composure, as soon as I got there.

"No," he said, giving his son a fierce look. "Everything is now in order."

"Alright," I said, noticing Levi maintaining his neutral composure. "Then we will be on our way."

I reached out to take Levi's hand, but he shook his head and retreated.

What the hell was going on?

"Zara," Beta John said, and my gaze snapped toward him. "The Alpha desires a meeting with you."

"I know," I replied. "We are meeting for lunch today."

My folks had returned the night before from a trip to a rival pack where they had been signing a treaty.

Beta John took a step forward. A blank expression filled his face. I detested it when he behaved that way — there was clearly trouble ahead.

"I want to clarify that he is currently waiting for you in his office," Beta John answered.

"As in right now?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, right now," he answered, his normally icy, light blue eyes growing even colder.

"Very well," I responded. "Levi —"

"He is not coming with you," Beta John interrupted, pinning my gaze.

Shocked, I knitted my eyebrows together. Such a reaction from him was unprecedented.

Levi shuddered visibly as my eyes slid towards him.

Had Kevin said anything about Levi's performance that morning?

"He has no right to try and scare you," Kaya growled in my head. "You are ranked higher than him."

Kaya was right. I straightened my shoulders and regained my composure.

"I am sorry, Beta, but I need to have my Beta by my side," I said. He opened his mouth to protest, but I held up my hand to silence him. "If my father, the Alpha, has rescheduled our meeting for earlier, then I, the future Luna, have the right to have my Beta by my side. This meeting seems important, and I am pretty sure my father would agree that Levi needs to attend."

Beta John's jaw tightened, and anger flashed in his eyes. He didn't expect me to pull rank on him.

He nodded stiffly and stepped aside.

I grabbed Levi's hand and dragged him along as I rushed past him. I knew whatever my father wanted to talk about had to be important, but I had no idea it would permanently alter my course in life.

Chapter 4: Agreement

Zara's POV

"What the heck was that about?" I asked when we entered the hallway, heading toward the offices.

Levi appeared even more withdrawn and melancholy after talking to his father.

"It's nothing," he said.

"Do not lie to me, Levi," I growled. "I am just as familiar with your father as you are. What were the two of you fighting over?"

"Dammit, Zara!" His hands clenched into fists as he snapped. "Leave it alone. I am capable of handling it on my own."

I wanted to say something, but the sound of laughter erupted from my father's office, cutting me off.

"It seems like someone is with him," Kaya remarked, causing a shiver to run down my spine.

"Is it someone we know?" I asked.

Kaya took a whiff, her eyes narrowing.

"I am not sure," she uttered. "Yet there is a familiar scent lingering in the air, and it is coming from your father's office."

The door to my father's office screamed on its hinges less than a second later, and when it opened, I saw the enormous wolf I called father. He was grinning and appeared to be content about something.

"Damn," Levi mind-linked. "Your father appeared to be pleased with something."

I supposed the treaty-signing process went according to plan.

"Ah, there you are, Zara," my father said. "We were expecting you."

"We?" I asked, startled, looking back at Levi.

I had never seen my father that happy before. For an Alpha with a short fuse, he was behaving a little strangely. That was not how he usually behaved.

I quickly turned to look at my father again, hoping to pick up some clue as to what the devil was going on, but all I saw were his beautiful, joyful gray eyes.

"We should probably head inside to see what all the excitement is about," Levi mind-linked me, sounding like himself again.

"Levi's mood swings are going to give me whiplash," Kaya remarked.

"I suppose so," I replied to Levi, as my heart began to race.

"Come, come; we cannot have our guest waiting," my father said, extending his arm and waving us in.

As we followed my father into his office, Levi and I shared the same expression of confusion on our faces. His massive back was facing us, obstructing our view.

My eyes swept over the 6'9" Alpha; his gray hair was neatly combed, and for once, he appeared to be completely rested.

Was that what the quick trip away had done to him?

I froze in my spot when I smelled the faint scent of grassland, making my heart skip a beat.

"No! It can't be!" I let out an internal hiss. "He would not dare come here!"

"What the f*ck, Zara!" Levi bumped into me and growled behind me.

"Sorry," I mumbled, wide-eyed.

"What's going on with —" Levi's voice faltered when my father turned away from us and approached his table, confirming my worst fears — Noah f*cking Flinch!

"Is that?" Levi mind-linked, and I nodded my head.

"What brings him here?" He mind-linked.

"Come, come, have a seat, Zara," my father called out to me. "We have a lot to discuss."

I gave a nod and walked stiffly over to the lone chair that was left open in front of my father's desk.

"Beta, you are welcome to sit," my father gestured toward the lover's couch near the wall.

Levi cast a sidelong glance at Noah and shook his head.

"Thank you, Alpha," Levi grinned stiffly. "However, I would prefer to be at Luna's side."

My father's eyes swept over the two of us, expressing confusion with knitted eyebrows.

"Very well," my father said. "Suit yourself."

"Zara," he uttered next. "I understand that you are familiar with Alpha Noah."

I forcefully swallowed the lump that had appeared in my throat, and I slowly nodded my head.

"Great," my father said, sitting back in his chair with a smile forming on his lips. "Alpha Noah has also informed me that you are his fated mate."

"What is your father talking about?" Levi growled over the mind-link. "Is he your mate? How come you have not told me? Are you keeping secrets from me?"

"Don't play the protective Beta now," Kaya barked back at him, making Levi quiet. "You are giving me a bloody headache!"

I gave a nod in response, staying silent throughout.

I wanted to rip the smile from Alpha Noah's face as it appeared on the corners of his lips.

"Superb," my dad went on. "Alpha Noah has requested your hand."

All the hair on my body rose. The bastard was using my father to approach me.

"Is that so?" I finally found my voice.

Both my father and Alpha Noah nodded.

"Interesting," I said as I stood up. "Were you told by Alpha Noah that he rejected me more than a year ago?"

My father's smile wavered as Alpha Noah's face turned to ash.

Did Alpha Noah really believe I would just blindly obey an order from my father without a fight?

"He did what?" Levi roared behind me.

"There is more," I said. "He rejected me in favor of a mate he chose."

"Is that true?" My dad questioned; his face hardened, and his eyes shifted black — Marcus, his wolf, must have been fighting for control.

"It is," Alpha Noah admitted. "Nevertheless, I can explain. I was given a love potion by my chosen mate in hopes that I would fall in love with her and make her my Luna. It was not until I rejected Zara, feeling her pain, that the spell broke, and I came to my senses."

"Liar!" Kaya growled, grabbing control and extending her claws. She wanted to rearrange Noah's face.

"Calm your wolf, Zara," my father ordered.

Levi's arms snaked around my waist, and he pulled me back to the back of the office. Kaya was outraged, and she didn't stop fighting against his hold.

"Why haven't you told me?" Levi eventually asked when I could regain control. His eyes revealed pity, which was the exact reason why I didn't want him to know.

I inhaled deeply. Since the secret was already known, lying about it wouldn't make things better.

"There wasn't much to tell you," I said. "He kissed his chosen mate and rejected me in less than two minutes."

"Damn, I am sorry," Levi said, pulling me into a bear hug.

"Don't be," I said as I slowly withdrew. "It is better this way."

I sighed.

In less than a day, word of my rejection would get around the pack, and everyone would feel sorry for me.

My gaze moved toward my father; he and Alpha Noah were in a heated argument. All of a sudden, my father's smile returned as he nodded.

"Oh, no!" Kaya grunted. "What did Alpha Noah say?"

"We better find out!" I hissed.

"Are you still in control?" Levi asked, seeing my face harden.

I gave a nod.

"Kaya is just upset," I explained. "She doesn't like Noah much."

With a nod from Levi, we headed back to my father's desk together.

"Zara," my father said gently. "After discussing the situation with Alpha Noah, I have made a decision."

"Decision?" I gasped, feeling my heartbeat racing. "What kind of decision?"

"Well," Alpha Noah said. "I am willing to give us another chance since you have not found a second chance mate yet."

Was he f*cking serious? And my father had agreed to that?

I turned to look at my father; he seemed happy with the arrangement.

"Willing?" I glowed with disgust. "I am not interested."

"Zara," my dad glared at me menacingly. "You will not be able to assume leadership of the pack if you are not mated."

I wrapped my arms around my waist. I was familiar with the pack regulations. Without an Alpha, a she-wolf couldn't lead a pack; however, an Alpha could lead a pack without a Luna.

I rolled my eyes. Our pack's politics were so incredibly complex and unfair.

"Who said that I don't have a mate?" I asked.

That startled all three of the wolves, who were now staring at each other, confused.

"Levi and I have agreed to be chosen mates," I continued. "It's better this way. Levi is well-versed in all the rules and regulations and is well-liked by all. He will be a wonderful and just Alpha."

The three wolves gave me a skeptical look.

"What are you doing, Zara?" Levi mind-linked me when he finally realized what I had just said. "That is not something we have ever agreed upon. You know I can't..."

"Just go with it," I mind-linked back.

"No!" He growled over the mind-link. "I can't lie to your father. This isn't right!"

"We are not lying," I mind-linked. "We are just buying some time."

"Beta Levi, is this true?" My father asked.

My heart hammered against my rib cage as Levi appeared like a deer caught in headlights. I crossed my fingers and hoped that Levi would go with it.

"Come on, Levi," I mind-linked him. "I am unable to pair with this cunning weasel. Look at him. Something is not quite right in this situation. He cannot become the leader of the pack. He will destroy everything our fathers built."

Levi looked at me, then back at my dad.

Shutting his eyes, he forcefully swallowed.

"Yes, Alpha," he replied as he gradually opened his eyes. "We have put such an agreement in place."

I interrupted Noah as he was about to say something.

"Are we done?" I asked, getting to my feet. "Can we leave now?"

My father nodded but cleared his throat when Levi and I both reached the door. Both of us looked back at my father, anticipating his final comment.

"Oh, no!" Kaya whimpered. "I know that look!"

"It means trouble is..." I started.

"Zara. Beta Levi," my father turned serious. "Kindly be aware that your mating ceremony will occur on the next full moon."

My heart plummeted — that was this weekend.

Chapter 5: Turn My World Upside Down

Zara's POV

"I cannot believe you are doing this to me," Levi groaned, which seemed to be the hundredth time that hour. He had been complaining about our mating arrangement, and the subject was now officially getting on my last nerve.

Was it even possible for him to simply comply with my request and follow along without all the extra drama? The mating ceremony wasn't such a big deal.

We were just claiming to be chosen mates until we found a more suitable mate, or maybe our second chance mate — that was if such mates still existed.

I sighed, closing my eyes, as I counted to ten. I didn't want to lose my cool composure; it was moments before the mating ceremony, and my father would notice if something was wrong.

"Come on, Levi," I said, taking his hands in mine. I was about to beg. That was important to me. He had to help me, or else I would be forced to mate with Alpha Noah, and that thought revolted me. "The concept is not all that bad. At least you are aware of the kind of mate you will have. You are familiar with me. We will be fine."

"Are you serious?" he snarled, pulling his hands out of mine. "What excuse will you offer the pack when we do not mark each other?"

"I will come up with something," I replied with a sigh.

My father had put a lot of effort into that mating ceremony. He even went as far as to invite every Alpha on the continent to attend.

There was no way we could back out. The pack house was already filled with Alphas, Lunas, and ranks from all over who had come to witness the exchange of our mating vows.

Levi started to pace back and forth with his hands in his hair.

"I do not think I can do this, Zara," he remarked. "I cannot lie in front of all those wolves. They will know the ceremony is just a lot of bullsh*t!"

"Levi, you are not lying," I snapped. I was about to lose my temper. I took a deep breath. "You are simply protecting your future Luna from her has-been-mate, and by doing that, you are keeping the pack safe and out of his hands. Stop worrying now. Everything will work out the way it should."

"It is easy for you to say," he snapped. "You are not the one who will not be able to fulfill his obligations to his mate. Or did you forget that I am gay?"

"Seriously, Levi?" I scowled. "I have not forgotten about that. That is the exact reason why this would work out perfectly."

"You have got to be kidding me," he growled. "Have you even given this plan of yours much thought?"

I shook my head.

"Nope, not really," I replied and shrugged. "But think of it this way. We can simply reject each other as soon as we find our second chance mate, and everything can go back to normal. I promise you, everything will work out just fine. Trust me."

"You think that by finding your second chance everything will go back to normal?" Levi shrieked, throwing his arms in the air. "It is easier said than done!"

"What is?" I asked, knitting my eyebrows together.

"Finding a second chance mate!" Levi snorted. "You have about a one in a million chance of getting one."

"No, it is not," I argued. "Second chance mates still exist. Rejected wolves can still find love a second time."

"What happens if we don't?" he asked. "What are you going to tell the pack when we can't give them the next heir?"

"That will not happen," I muttered. "The Goddess will not let the pack go without an heir."

I hadn't given much thought to the implications of mating with Levi.

Even if we couldn't work out the dynamics surrounding our mating arrangements, I still believed it was the best option.

It was true that Levi was gay, but I never put much thought into his sexual preferences. I loved him for who he was; I saw him for him. I trusted him with everything I had.

If Levi chickened out, I would have no choice but to accept the proposal to be Alpha Noah's mate and Luna; otherwise, he would have the power to challenge my father for the Silverado Pack Alpha title.

"Are you sure?" Levi asked, coming closer and placing his hand on my shoulder.

I nodded. The Goddess always made sure there was an heir to her blessed packs. I doubted she would turn her back on us then.

My gaze roamed over our reflections. If we were a normal couple and that ceremony wasn't staged, we could have easily come across as an ideal power couple.

I sighed, laid my hand over his, and raised my eyes to meet him in the mirror.

"I am," I said. "Our love for one another has never changed. We trust one another. All you need is a little faith. We can do this. The Goddess will provide; I know she will."

A knock on my bedroom door startled both of us, and a moment later, the door opened to reveal Janey. The redhead omega had been tasked with helping me get ready.

"Zara, can I come in?" She asked, knitting her eyebrows together when she saw Levi. He was not supposed to be with me before the mating ceremony.

I gave her a nod and returned my attention to Levi.

"Go get dressed," I said. "I will see you shortly."

"Very well," Levi said with a sigh. "I will wait for you at the altar."

"I will be the one dressed in white," I chirped, a little too excited. Levi huffed and rolled his eyes before walking out the door and shutting it behind him.

Janey seemed curious, but she decided to keep quiet and started with my hair.

I watched as her hands skillfully transformed my hair.

"Did you finish your studies at beauty school?" I asked in an attempt to strike up a conversation.

"Next week, I will be taking my final exam," she stated, glancing up to meet my gaze in the mirror. "Hopefully, then, I will get my diploma."

"You certainly know what you are doing," I said. "I love my hair like this."

"Thank you," she muttered. "However, I am far from having your hair done perfectly."

"That is absurd," I said. "My hair looks amazing. There is no doubt that you will ace your exam."

Janey blushed at that, and a smile appeared on her lips.

"Thank you for the compliment," she uttered.

After Janey finished my hair, she moved on to my makeup, and once she was done, she turned me to face the mirror.

My hands were drawn to my red lips as I gasped in shock when I saw my reflection in the mirror.

I had never been one to wear a lot of makeup — I usually just wore foundation and eyeliner — but I looked like a magazine cover model.

"Are you pleased with how you look?" Janey asked anxiously when I didn't say anything.

"Yes," I replied. "It is perfect, beyond my expectations."

"Do you think Beta Levi would approve?" She asked.

It surprised me that she asked if Levi would approve instead of my father.

"He would love it," I said. "Thank you."

Janey headed toward my closet and carefully pulled my mating dress from the hanger. My mother had given me the dress as a gift; it was her old mating outfit, passed down from Luna to Luna.

The dress had undergone some modifications, which I was excited to see.

My heart leaped out of my chest as soon as Janey revealed the dress. It was even more exquisite than the original.

"Amazing!" Janey said. "Is this Luna's old mating dress?"

"Yes," I replied, touching the pearly top and the modifications I had made to the old dress.

"Beta Levi is one lucky wolf," she said. "The Alpha ought to feel pleased by your choice."

"He is," I replied.

Janey helped me get dressed, and tears sprung to my eyes when I saw my reflection in the mirror. The dress was a perfect fit!

The moment Janey tied the last button, there was a soft knock on my bedroom door, and my father, appearing as though he had been called, peered around it.

"Bloody hell!" he exclaimed when he saw me. "Zara, is that you?"

He flung the door open, shock, amazement, and disbelief visible on his face.

"Hello, Dad," I said, feeling my face turn crimson under all the makeup.

"Wow!" He gasped once more. "You look amazing! I almost didn't recognize you!"

"Thank you, Father," I said, turning my gaze toward Janey. "However, Janey is solely responsible for this picture-perfect image of me."

After thanking Janey and extending his arm to me, my father and I left my room to go down to the proceedings.

However, I never thought that the most intoxicating scent would turn my world upside down.

Chapter 6: Even Worse

Zara's POV

The inside of the mating hall was beautifully decorated. White wildflowers were hanging from the ceiling, and red rose petals were scattered on the floor, creating a beautiful flowery path to the altar.

My father had made sure that that stunning ceremony would be remembered for years to come.

The hall was packed and overcrowded with huge wolves, and there were even wolves standing outside hoping to get a glimpse of the mating proceedings.

Levi was anxiously fiddling with his cufflinks as he waited at the altar. Next to him stood his two brothers, Jack and Frank, three years older than him, playing the best-man part.

My gaze roamed over Levi. He looked so handsome in his black tuxedo, white dress shirt, black dance shoes, and navy blue bow tie. His golden hair was neatly combed back, and he had a deep and serious frown stuck on his face. He didn't seem to be too happy about that day, but as my best friend, I knew he wouldn't let me down.

On the other side of the altar, my cousins, Jeanie and Sandra, stood, both dressed in navy blue dresses flowing down to the floor. They were each holding a small white bouquet of roses.

"Did Janey do Jeanie and Sandra's hair too?" I asked my father.

"She sure did," he replied.

"I am impressed by her work!" I commented.

"So am I," he replied.

Levi caught a glimpse of me standing at the entrance, and he stopped fiddling with his cufflinks and froze in place. He blinked a couple of times before his jaw hit the floor. It took him a few seconds before he could fix his composure, and a smile appeared on his lips.

"Wow!" he mind-linked. "You look gorgeous!"

Levi's facial reaction got a lot of attention, and the whole hall turned to look back at me and my father.

My face heated, and I bit my lip. I wasn't used to that kind of attention.

"So do you too, handsome," I replied, embarrassed.

"I feel kind of honored to be the one standing next to you at the altar," Levi said, a beautiful smile on his lips.

My father chuckled next to me, finding the situation humorous.

"It seems like no one expected to see you this beautiful," he said proudly. "You should dress up more often."

I raised an eyebrow, huffed, and rolled my eyes. It wasn't at all true. I regularly went and dressed up for events.

"But you never looked like this!" Kaya mused. "You look amazing! Janey did an excellent job. People will now expect you to look this way more often."

"Not going to happen," I replied.

The wolf howl marked the start of the proceedings, and my father pulled me forward toward the path to the altar.

The moment had come. I would stop at nothing to ensure the safety of my people.

My father and I strolled down the path together until the sweetest smell of honey and vanilla attacked my nostrils.

I became intoxicated by the aroma and started to move more slowly. The scent was overpowering my senses, and I was dying to have a taste of it!

"Mate!" Kaya howled and fought for control. Startled by what she said, my body stiffened, and my heart rate escalated. I was unable to control my breathing. I managed to push her back.

"Mate is here!" she grumbled angrily at me. "Find mate! Find mate now!"

Why now? Why here? Why always at the most inconvenient times and places?

Was that some kind of fluke or my punishment for deceiving everyone with my plans?

"Are you nervous?" My father whispered in my ear. He must have noticed my reaction a few seconds ago.

I looked up at him and shook my head.

"No," I lied. I was now beyond the word nervous!

"You can always cancel if you are not sure about Beta Levi," he said calmly.

That made me smile. My father was always so patient with me.

"I know you two have been friends for, like, forever," he continued. "But I never thought that you two would actually go and tie the knot."

Neither did I. That subject never even made it onto my personal agenda.

"You know," he said, side-glancing at me. "Alpha Noah..."

Kaya growled in my mind. Alpha Noah's name only brought her pain and suffering. I would not want to go through that pain with her again.

A scene from that night, when Alpha Noah rejected me, flashed through my mind. The rain was pouring down on me, and it was shivering cold outside. The more I ran from the pain, the colder I became — it was the emptiness that Alpha Noah left inside my heart, growing like cancer inside me.

Kaya was devastated and even more heartbroken than me. She couldn't understand what he saw in his chosen mate.

Kaya pleaded with me to give Noah another chance. She begged me to go back and search for him.

I sighed, remembering that I had given in to her request.

We sneaked into the Red Howl Pack and easily found Alpha Noah's chambers. His pack seemed to be laid back, with minimal guards on duty. I could hear him inside his room.

Someone was with him. Was it her?

My heart broke, sending another painful feeling through my body. I knew what it meant, but Kaya refused to give up and leave. She wanted to claim her mate.

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard as I slowly pushed the door open.

I wanted to turn around and run away, but Kaya refused.

What I saw next shattered the last of my hope and confirmed everything I needed to know about Alpha Noah Flinch.

I had given Kaya her chance. And now, whatever happened next, she could never say I didn't try.

"No," I said quietly, looking up at my father. "I am fine."

I was sick of hearing about that foolish, obnoxious wolf who thought he owned me. After that night, he would have to move on and find another she-wolf to amuse himself. He had his chance.

My father nodded, and we headed forward. My gaze unintentionally moved over the sea of wolves, searching for the person behind the delicious vanilla and honey scent.

I could not help but notice Alpha Noah. He and his Beta were seated in the third row from the front. His stunning face was contorted with utter fury.

"He has some nerve to come to the proceedings!" Kaya growled in my mind. Just the mere thought of having Alpha Noah there angered her.

"My father must have invited him," I replied. "And to think I once found him good-looking."

"I hope he is not going to do or say something stupid today," Kaya said, the hair on her back raised.

"I doubt that my father would allow that," I replied. "My father made sure to put extra precautions in place in case someone tried to sabotage the proceedings."

My father stopped a couple of feet from the altar and Levi came closer, shaking my father's hand.

"Look after my daughter. Treat her with love and respect," my father said seriously. "Or else..."

Levi's eyes grew wide, his back stiffened, and he shivered and swallowed hard. All the while, I muffled a chuckle behind my hand.

Levi had always been very careful of my overprotective father, and I couldn't blame him.

I was the only child, not because my parents didn't want more pups, but because my mother lost her ability to conceive more pups due to a rogue attack.

My mother was pregnant with me when the attack happened, and my father almost lost us both that night. My father didn't speak about that night, but my mother told me how painful it was for him to see her on the verge of dying.

"Yes, Alpha," Levi said, his voice breaking. "I will take good care of your daughter. You have my word."

"You have my blessing," my father said. He nodded, lowered his head, kissed my cheek, and handed me over to Levi.

I found the proceedings dragging and boring. I had never been one for long speeches.

The elder doing the proceedings was giving us a lecture on how to live our lives as a mated pair, and I wasn't really focusing on any of it.

We were not planning to do the deed; I would never expect Levi to go that far.

"Why are you not listening to the elder?" Levi mind-linked.

"I am," I replied via the mind-link.

"You are not," he argued.

"Are you calling me a liar?" I asked, raising a perfectly molded eyebrow and turning my gaze to look at him.

"Yes. No. Maybe," he replied.

"Which is it?" I mind-linked, shifting my eyebrows together.

"I don't know," he mind-linked me, looking down at me. "You seem very distracted. Even more distracted than your normal self."

"It is because I am," I replied, turning my attention back to the elder.

I couldn't help but wonder to whom that intoxicating scent belonged. I could taste it on my tongue, and my mouth watered just thinking about it.

I was even more curious to know which pack he came from.

I was dying to know what he looked like.

My heart pinched hurtfully inside my chest. So far, he had made no effort to stop the proceedings and claim me.

Was he scared, or had he just accepted the fact that I had taken a chosen mate?

"Why?" Levi asked. "Do you have cold feet?"

"No," I said. "But I'm pretty sure that my second chance mate is watching the ceremony."

"What?" Levi gasped, making the elder stop talking, and murmurs followed from behind us.

That was not the reaction I was hoping for at a time like that!

"Is there a problem?" The elder asked, removing his reading glasses and placing them on the podium.

"No, no, no," I said, giving Levi the death glare. "Please continue, elder."

"Are you sure?" He asked, searching for any traces of dishonesty.

"We are sure," I said. "Please continue."

"Beta Levi," the elder asked. "Are you fine with proceeding?"

Levi opened his mouth, yet he didn't say anything; his gaze slowly shifted toward me.

"Levi, don't do this. I beg you, don't you dare say no," I mind-linked him.

"Yes, elder," Levi said. "Please proceed."

"Very well," the elder said, returning his glasses to his eyes.

"Where were we? Ah, yes," the elder said as he continued to search for where he had stopped.

"Zara, I think we should stop the proceedings," Levi linked after a moment. "Your mate will be hurt if we —"

"If he really wants me, he can come and claim me right here," I replied.

"Oh," Levi said, a naughty smile on his lips. "Caveman style. You like it rough, huh?"

"No," I replied, rolling my eyes. "That way, I would know that he really cares and wants me, but so far, he hadn't made any effort to stop this ceremony."

"Maybe he is shy," Levi replied.

"I doubt that," I said. "Wolves are not shy about claiming their mate. They make a big fuss about it to ensure that everyone knows that they have found their mate and are now taken."

"Maybe he is cautious," Levi commented. "Maybe he was rejected before."

"Maybe," I replied, and a breath escaped my lips.

For some reason, that almost felt even worse than Alpha Noah's rejection.
