

THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 26 Take Care Of Me

Fiona

On the second morning after his brutal punishment at the hands of his father, Alexander woke with a full stomach and a fresh fit of energy. His back was healed, but now it was lumpy, swollen, and covered with bruises in a whole garish rainbow of colors.

“The doctor left these for you,” I told him, passing him a prescription bottle with ten big white pills inside. “For the pain, if you need it.”

Alexander didn't hesitate. He twisted the cap off the bottle and popped two pills in his mouth immediately, swallowing them dry.

Sometimes he hid it so well, I wondered if the golden God even felt pain the way the rest of us do. Even alone with me, and even when he was drifting in and out of consciousness, Alexander hardly betrayed that he was in pain at all, despite the truly disturbing scene on his back and shoulders.

After taking the pills, he rose to stand and began to stretch out his arms.

“Bet it would still be good for you to rest today, though.” I looked up at him with what was supposed to be a strict expression.

But he turned around and smiled at me mischievously. “You just want to keep me in bed, don’t you?”

I chuckled. “Well, yes. At the doctor’s orders. For rest.”

He nodded solemnly, holding back a smile. If there was more, he must have decided to save it for later.

He wanted a shower now that he was feeling up for it. I took the opportunity to get out of the room for some fresh air and instructed a maid to change our bedsheets while I took a walk to the kitchen. I felt light in my step as I walked, surprised at how good I was feeling. I'd spent so much time lately feeling weak and tired.

I knew the reason for it was the close contact I'd had with Alexander this past day, as I'd been lying with him in bed, working to get him well. It wasn't just his own recovery time. It had been healing for me as well.

I returned to our room just in time to lock the door behind me before Alexander came strolling out of the bathroom with a towel around his naked waist, letting

the fragrant steam from the shower billow lazily into the bedroom.

He turned to me and smiled, and I couldn't help but smile back. It felt good to see him looking back to life, after watching his father whip him bloody, and then waiting patiently as he slept it off the next day.

"I think we should clear something up," Alexander said, walking toward me slowly. The swagger in his step and the cocky grin on his face told me it wasn't something serious.

"What's that, hmm?"

"You said we needed to be careful until my back healed, right?" His voice was deep and rich, and I liked the playful tone in it.

I said, "Yes..."

“And the doctor said you needed to keep me in bed, right?”

“That’s correct.”

“Well, my back’s pretty well healed,” he said. “But I wouldn’t say no to another day of bedrest. But only if you stay and take care of me some more.”

I exhaled heavily and gave in before I could overthink a reply. My hand went to his hard chest and I pushed it with two fingers, marching him backward toward the bed. He went happily, wearing a self-satisfied smile.

Alexander

Nothing feels better than being alive and back on your feet after getting the shit beat out of you.

It's true. It wasn't just the pain medication, though that did help me finally get vertical again. But the rush of survival is its own drug with a high that lasts longer than any chemical.

Fiona appeared just as I was walking back into the bedroom. She was glowing, looking healthier than I'd seen her in a while. Her light blue eyes were bright and sparkling.

I told her I needed her to stay with me in bed today, and she didn't resist.

My back was sore, but with the pain killers, it wasn't too bad. It was such a relief to lie with my back flat – finally letting my body rest like it wanted to – and to top it off, I had Fiona on top of me. She was a vision.

I put my hands on her thighs, feeling her soft skin. She let me reach up and pull her panties to the side,

rubbing her clit against my knuckles, and sat into my hand. I spread my fingers and pushed one up inside of her. Fiona gave a tiny gasp, arching her body into mine.

The towel that had been around my waist had now come undone, between the pulsing of my hardening body and Fiona straddling me. She was still fully clothed, having gone out for a walk in a sweet little blue dress. I wanted to tear it off. But I didn't want to interrupt her when she was having fun.

Fiona pushed my hand away, wanting something bigger inside her than my finger. She widened her hips and sat into my lap. I used the skirt of her dress to pull her down into me harder, making her growl each time I felt her core tightening around me.

She put her hand on my face, bringing her thumb to rest on my bottom lip. And for a very brief moment I

thought she was going to lean in and kiss me. But she lowered her face and pressed a kiss to my chest instead, running her lips along the shape of a well-defined muscle.

I couldn't start getting back into my head about that.

I wrapped my arms around Fiona's body and focused on giving her what she wanted. It was what we both needed. Her legs started shaking when I found the right rhythm to start setting her body off, and I kept giving it to her until I couldn't hold back any longer.

But she liked it when I came inside her. She liked feeling my body giving in to its desire for her, I could tell. She wanted to feel me submitting to the pleasure of her touch. She came with me, pressing her eyes closed and digging her nails into my chest. Then she collapsed at my side, chest heaving and smiling blissfully, and curled up into me with her hand on my

chest and her head in the crook of my shoulder.

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THE ALPHA KING CALL BOY

Chapter 27 She Had Every Reason To Lie

[REDACTED]

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“What are you doing here?”

Fiona was walking over toward the practice field where I was training with my men.

I jogged to meet her at the edge of the field. All I could think about was the last time she came by here, when I had to save her from a javelin that had been tampered with mere seconds before it would have impaled her.

“Making sure you’re okay,” she said.

I looked back over at my shoulder. The soldiers were taking the opportunity of my distraction to give themselves a break.

I thought about commanding them to return to their exercises, but then looked at the man I’d been training a moment ago, who was giving me a curious expression. I’d been actively sparring with him when Fiona came walking up the stone pathway, at which point I’d run off without a word. The soldier looked away when I caught his eye, bowing his head slightly and jogging off to meet the rest of the pack at the back of the field.

As a general principle, I didn’t ask my men to do anything I wasn’t willing to do myself. That was true on the battlefield as much as it was in an everyday

training session. If I got to take a break, so did they.

“How’s it feeling?” Fiona asked, jutting her chin at my body.

“Fine,” I said, shrugging.

She gave me a doubtful smile.

“Why aren’t you at your lesson?” A quick memory told me Fiona was supposed to be in another etiquette class this morning.

She laughed dryly. “Am I really supposed to keep following their schedule? Doing their little activities? After what the King just put us through?”

A sting of paranoia had me wanting to put my head on a swivel, looking for any nearby threat that might have overhead her speaking against the King. But it was

only me and my men here in the West Wing. Still, I discreetly darted my eyes to the sides.

I lowered my own voice when I replied, hoping she would understand the need to follow my lead from now on. Keeping her voice down when saying such things.

Though I had to admit, it kind of turned me on. Her brazen disregard for the authority of the reigning King, knowing he was in fact a kind of enemy of mine, albeit one I had to live with and feign submission to – for now. She was fearless.

And flawless. Looking like a smoke show today, skin glowing, wearing a simple but striking lavender dress that fell to the floor.

She shook her head and narrowed her eyes. “What?”

I cleared my throat and said, “Nothing.” But I knew she could tell from the smile I was now trying to shake off that I was thinking about touching her.

“I’ll get out of your way,” Fiona said suddenly. I noticed her eyes flick to the side, looking over my shoulder. She flashed a polite, cheerless smile, quickly turned away, and disappeared up a staircase. I watched her walk away.

I heard snickering laughter behind me and wheeled around to see my soldiers all watching me with mocking smiles plastered across their faces.

My smile suddenly froze on my face, then melted away completely.

My feelings for Fiona were getting a little out of control.

“Something funny?” I asked sternly, crossing the length of the training field swiftly.

One soldier, a young man with short, dark hair, couldn't resist daring to answer me with a sarcastic comment. “Not used to seeing you like that, Alpha,” he said, choking back a laugh. “The usually cold warrior...” he trailed off, but another voice finished his sentence from somewhere else in the group.

“...is now a Virgin Mary!”

I pushed through the group, sniffing out the speaker by smelling a tiny surge of fear in his sweat as I stared down each of them, one by one.

The guilty man cowered before me. I loomed over him, my broad chest casting a shadow over his entire body, and he dropped to his knees, starting to stammer.

“I— it’s just, that—”

“Silence,” I growled.

I turned and locked eyes with the other insubordinate fool, the young one who dared to speak against me first. He fell to his knees as well, hanging his head.

Then I started to look around at the rest of the men. Daring them to speak. They got the message and were on their knees a moment later in a wave that crashed to the ground all around me.

I sent the two young fools to run laps. “Until I tell you to stop,” I instructed them. Their eyes went round and they stole glances at each other. They knew that would not be any time soon.

I let the rest of them off, sending them away for the

day. Kayden hung around after the rest of the men left, waiting to see if I had anything for him. Or maybe waiting to tell me something he had for me. I didn't have the patience for conversation.

I did not have time to waste, either. Two days I had spent without a workout.

Well, I'd had some cardio in bed with Fiona.

I gritted my teeth against a smile that wanted to break through, and internally reprimanded myself for my sudden weakness for this silver-haired goddess that had thoroughly distracted me in only a matter of days.

We had a set of salmon ladders in the back of the training court, near stacks of heavy weights and other climbing equipment. I jumped up and began racing up and down the ladder, landing each bar smoothly and

popping in and out of the rungs without skipping a beat.

Kayden appeared in the corner of my vision. He jumped up into the other salmon ladder at my right side and started climbing.

I didn't take a break. Just pressed on, against the pain searing through my back, neck, shoulders, forearms, wrists, hands, even fingertips... punishing myself.

My beta kept up with me until he couldn't anymore. Kayden's bulging arms shook fiercely before his grip gave out and he fell to the ground, hitting the turf square on his side with a mild groan. I clutched the bar in a white-knuckle grip and forced myself up and down the ladder that became a more and more brutal instrument of self-torture with every clang of metal on metal, until the same thing happened to me.

Splayed on the ground, the both of us past the point of exhaustion, I let a question escape my lips. One I hadn't let fully form in my own mind yet, let alone spoken to anyone else.

“Do you think she's playing me, Kayden?”

He turned to look at me seriously and paused, thinking.

“No,” he said finally. Without any further explanation.

I wished I could believe him. But no one had ever succeeded in distracting me so thoroughly – not once in my lifetime. The insubordinate soldiers had to be punished as a matter of honor. I could not let them speak to me like that without making sure they never did it again.

But I was the one to blame for their disrespect. I had

earned it. I could not let them know that I agreed, of course. But they had in fact witnessed a moment of weakness in me.

I rolled onto my side and gazed down to the other end of the field. The tall young man with short, dark hair was staggering through a lap. The shorter soldier was doubled over, vomiting.

Fiona was from a rival pack, after all. Our union was still suspicious to most who knew anything about it.

I'd even let slip to her once in the bedroom that I had considered killing her father. Fiona had not reacted at the time, though that was unsurprising. She never let go of her mask of neutral regality. That quality of hers was sexy. Almost irresistible to me, in fact. But it also meant that it was going to be hard to tell if she ever lied to me.

And, as the daughter of a man I'd sworn to kill, she had every reason to lie to me.

And enough power over me, already, to destroy me if she wanted.

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Chapter 28 Destroy After Reading



Third person

Scarlet looked around the grand circular table sternly, with fire lighting up her dark eyes.

“I will not be disrespected,” she spat at the small

crowd of nobles, “regardless of the vile rumors that you have heard. I have been falsely accused of these wretched crimes against my own beloved husband.”

The man who had been arguing with her—he was the Alpha of the Red Moon pack, and Fiona’s father—reluctantly sat back in his chair in sullen silence, his face dark with poorly concealed discontent.

“You dare to even show your face here in the noble werewolf meeting, knowing you wouldn’t be able to control yourself. You dare to speak against your queen. You should be put in prison—not even for your petty attitude, but for your very real crimes of greed and manipulation.”

“Hah!” the man shouted, red-faced and no longer able to control himself. His eyes were bulging and wild. He pointed a finger at Scarlet. “You’re one to speak of greed and manipulation! Even the King knows it to be

true. Why else would he not allow his guards to escort you here today? Why else leave you vulnerable like that, my queen...?!”

Scarlet’s face reddened and she clenched her fists behind the podium. The other nobles in the meeting were silent, watching.

The man continued as Scarlet struggled to suppress her anger and rising anxiety. She had lost several of her privately owned properties already, in a mad scramble to undo as much of the damage she had done as was possible before the investigation reached the worst of her secret criminal activities.

She didn’t want to lose anything else. She was afraid of being caught. Of being jailed. And of the King’s personal execution of justice, which he’d wait to dole out until he was positively sure his wife was guilty.

And she was guilty.

Scarlet's hands started to tremble and she pressed her palms flat against the podium to force them still. "This is your foolish daughter's fault," she said, interrupting in the calmest and loudest voice she could manage. "She conspired against the crown to frame me for these things you accuse me of."

The lie was convoluted and did not make a bit of sense. But Scarlet was a powerful woman among the nobles, and they were inclined to stay on her side.

Fiona's father grew even more furious, but he knew he had no social power in this audience. Support for Scarlet was stirring inside the fast-beating hearts of all her allies, which he started to realize was... all of them. Everyone in the room was glaring at him like he was the enemy, the one in the wrong.

He stood and left before any one of them could flinch or even bare their teeth at him.

Fiona

I was in our bedroom when suddenly, I heard footsteps approaching.

I was wearing soft socks and standing on the wood floor, and found myself accidentally doing a comical, full-circle spin on one toe. I chuckled as I stopped, facing the door to Alexander's office. The laugh evaporated into thin air and my whole body froze. I began to worry, remembering the secret passageway that allowed intruders into our private space.

I almost retreated to the position I had taken the last time, when I had crouched behind the sofa and filmed Susan, that traitorous pawn of Alexander's wicked stepmother, as she emerged from nowhere and

traipsed through our private space.

But then I realized that the footsteps were coming from the hallway. I reached the door just in time to see an envelope come sliding underneath it. By the time I could unlock the door and swing it open, the person who delivered it had vanished. They had gone away much more quietly than they had approached.

I locked the door once more behind me before reaching to the floor to pick up the envelope.

It was unmarked on the outside. I fingered the seal to work it open and it tore apart unevenly, almost splitting in half. It had been sealed closed quite thoroughly. The letter inside tumbled to the ground.

I recognized the handwriting the moment I touched the letter. Standing, I started to feel the hair rising on the back of my neck. Like I was in danger.

I wheeled around again. Not laughing this time. All was quiet, on all sides. I believed my instinct when it told me I was alone.

The letter was from my father.

Fiona, You must pay close attention! We are limited in communicating with you, my dear daughter, while you are in the captivity of the enemy that still swears to see to the destruction of your own pack and family.

The paper quivered in my hand. I was shaking with unexpected anger. Alexander may have been my father's enemy, but he was not mine.

At least, I did not feel that he was. Alexander even seemed to... truly care about me.

I shook my head at the thought. He was just an

honorable man. Staying with me to ensure my own health, and that of our child.

Please, my beloved daughter, send word home soon. Below I will detail how to get your letter to our mutual accomplice. He will carry the letter to me directly.

You must uncover Alexander's agenda and strategy. I am sure he will reveal it to you. He is drawn to you, blind to your true alliance, I know it! Use that power, Fiona, for the good of your family!

I heard a popping sound and felt a sharp, stabbing pain in the lower right side of my mouth. I had been clenching my jaw and grinding my teeth together, so tense while reading this insulting communique from my coward of a father.

I slacked my jaw, trying to release the tension and pain.

My father was asking me to be his spy against Alexander.

He was delusional if he thought I would go along with that. He was even stupider than I had ever realized. That, or he didn't know me at all.

As promised, he wrote out instructions for when and where I could drop a message to a mole that he had somehow embedded into the palace staff. This measure was necessary, he said, because my calls would be monitored, and we could not risk detection.

At the bottom of the letter, my father instructed me in all caps:

DESTROY THIS LETTER AFTER READING!

I was tempted to do it. Glancing over the letter once

more, skimming the content and squinting my eyes, I imagined how it would read from Alexander's perspective. My father made it sound as if I were already conspiring with him against my fiancé.

But I didn't want to do what my father told me to. And I thought maybe the letter would be valuable evidence that I'd need to show someone at some point.

I folded it into a small square and tucked it into a zipper pocket in my purse. Zipped my purse closed and hung it in a back corner of my dressing room. Tomorrow I'd find somewhere more permanent to store it, somewhere no one would think to look.

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Chapter 29 Unknown Number

I sent Nina a text and asked her to meet me at the palace the next morning for breakfast.

She was all excitement, saying she would have Kayden drop her off first thing in the morning. I shook my head, wondering if that meant Alexander's Beta was already at her place right now, and planning to stay the night. Probably.

Alexander had returned from his evening training session looking destroyed. Then he spent half an hour soaking in a tub of cold water, silently brooding over something but trying to hide the dark cloud of his mood from me. He didn't do a very good job of it.

I heard the tub draining and the shower turning on. He was heating himself back up after the ice bath, which

was good news for me. I wanted him to touch me tonight with that steamy heat he usually had pulsing off his skin. I hoped he would emerge from the bathroom in a different mood, over whatever had happened on the training field and ready to give himself to me for the night.

It was not until he was turning the doorknob that suddenly I felt compelled to come clean with my fiancé and tell him about everything. Tell him what my father was asking of me, show him the letter, even.

But no. I could not betray the man who raised me like that – no matter how much he might deserve it, considering the shame he had brought upon my family and the Red Moon pack. Alexander had told me once that he could kill my father. I did not know what his reason was, but I suspected there was more to the story than I knew. That the two of them had a history I was not yet aware of.

I could not hand Alexander a reason to hate my father even more. A reason to execute him.

I had a vision of Alexander's face in the moment he knocked his brother Lucas into bloody unconsciousness. The look in his eyes was savage. The speed with which his hammering fist was flying into the young man's face was unbelievable. Alexander's retaliatory attack had happened in the blink of an eye, like something out of a dream.

That had been the first time I started to really think about the rumors I had heard about Alpha Alexander, back before I knew him in the flesh. The rumors stated that Alexander was ruthless, brutally violent, and unstoppable on the battlefield. A force of nature, and someone you did not want for an enemy.

No matter how much I wanted to trust him, Alexander

was not a person I could tell the whole truth about my father to.

If I didn't want to be responsible for my own father's murder.

I texted Nina again in the morning and called off our breakfast date.

I'd slept terribly. Whatever it was that was troubling Alexander, the ice bath did not solve it. He came out of the bathroom with the same gloom hanging over him, and though he held me through the night, his energy just did not feel the same.

It was not my place to ask him what was going on. But he was up all night, and each time I started drifting off, a restless movement of his, a soft stirring under the sheets or shifting of his weight, would startle me back awake.

Nina responded to me with a string of crying face and bloody dagger emojis. I apologized and promised her we'd reschedule.

Nina: When can we talk, though? I still don't even know what happened to you guys the other night!!

I frowned at my phone, thinking about my father's warning. Even if he had an agenda, he was probably telling the truth about the reason he contacted me in such an indirect way.

I was under surveillance in the palace. How much I was being watched, how many of my conversations were being listened in on, I could not know. But surely there was some truth to what my father said about communications being monitored here.

I did my best to assure Nina that everything was

alright and promised I'd explain later. Her agreement was hesitant, but she let it go for now.

My reason for canceling on her was that I felt a sudden need to see my grandfather. I knew he could help me sort my mind out better than anyone. He was, after all, the true leader of our pack, the one who had led it to strength before my father took over and destroyed everything his father had worked for.

I couldn't and wouldn't tell him much, if anything, about my strife with my father. But somehow, I knew just speaking with Grandfather could help me figure out just what I needed to do. How to keep myself and my baby safe amid this tangled web of threats and violence that I'd suddenly found myself right in the center of.

Alexander arranged for a car to take me into town. I told him I would be back in time for dinner, and he

responded with a dopey smile.

Holding back a smile of my own, I remembered my pledge to myself – that I would not encourage him too much. Our sex life was one thing. It was part of our contract, after all, and something my body was telling me it needed right now. But when he gave me those looks like he was starting to get a schoolboy crush on me, I would not let myself get caught up in it.

Because it was not real. It was a fleeting feeling for him, I knew it. I believed what he told me the day he stole me away from my wedding to Baron: that my arrangement with Alexander was a contract marriage, nothing more. And that he was going to divorce me as soon as our child was born.

The car rolled to a stop at the front of the nursing home where my grandfather resided, and my driver hurried to open my door for me courteously. I thanked

him as I stepped out.

I crossed the short distance to the front door to the nursing home just as my phone buzzed in my pocket. The car was already pulling away, floating out of the parking lot slowly. I stopped in my tracks, removing my hand from the big golden handle on the glass door, and stepped to the side, pausing in the shade of a big evergreen. I figured it was a text from Nina and wanted to shoot her a quick reply before I went inside.

But the text wasn't from Nina. It was from an unknown number. And the message was empty.

Suddenly the hair on the back of my neck stood on end.

A bubble with three moving dots appeared on the screen... telling me the person on the other end was typing.

Then another message loaded, containing no text and an image attachment. I was afraid to open it, but I did anyway.

I almost dropped my phone when the image loaded.

It was a picture of me, standing there in front of the nursing home, looking down at my phone.

I looked to my right and saw a large man approaching me. He was big in every way – tall, built, thick around the middle, thick around the neck – and his face was flat, round, and hard like a tombstone.

The giant's narrow black eyes were locked on me. The firm set of his mouth was menacing.

I knew right away that I was in trouble.

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Chapter 30 I Tried Asking Nicely



I should have been able to fight off the attackers.

There were only two of them. The mountain of a man who I spied, too late, approaching from the right. And a second one that I never even saw, who seemed to appear from nowhere. Suddenly he was right behind me with a rough hand reaching around my face, pulling me backwards and down into the crook of his elbow, with something soft pressed hard against my mouth.

I knew there was nothing I could do once I breathed in the sharp smell of chemicals and my vision started tunneling into darkness.

Up until these past few weeks, I had been proud of my fighting skills and fast reflexes. I was one of the best fighters in my pack. But the baby was slowing me down. And I wasn't training anymore, I realized. My new lifestyle had me lazy and weakened. Out of practice, I'd dropped my guard, too.

The giant was coming close, his tombstone head blurring in and out of focus, when my body went ragdoll limp. Then I was looking straight ahead at the blue sky, in which white clouds were jumping around in snowflake patterns like the inside of a kaleidoscope.

I heard a car's tires screeching to a stop. Then, a car door opening and hushed, hurried male voices. The

rough hands on my body shoved me hard down into the back seat of a car and I blinked into the dim light.

I saw my father's face, blurry and doubled, turning around in the passenger seat just before I blacked out. His expression was one of cold disgust.

"I tried asking you nicely, Fiona," my father said, his voice dripping with disdain.

I remained silent. He had me tied to a chair in the garage of our family home, of all places. In a circle around us stood his motley crew of henchmen, only a few of whom I recognized as former business associates of his.

"I asked nicely, and you did not even bother to reply. So now I am asking... not so nicely." He chuckled, running a hand through his beard.

“What do you even expect I could do for you?” I asked him. “I am Alexander’s fiancée. Not his advisor or even one of his soldiers. I do not know anything about his military strategy or secrets.”

“But you can find them out.” Father was annoyed, saying this like he was talking to a slow-learning child. “That’s all I’m asking of you, Fiona. It’s simple enough for a woman like you to bait information out of a man like him.”

I kept my cold, emotionless mask in place. He wanted to rile me up, make me scared and emotional, and I wasn’t going to let him get that out of me.

“And what do you plan to do with the information you’re after, anyway?” I asked coolly. “Are you going to betray your country? Sell his strategy to the vampires, in order to pay off your debts?”

Father paused his anxious pacing, coming to a dead stop just before me, and spat in my face.

“Vile girl,” he muttered, wiping his wet mouth with his hand. “How dare you even speak such a lie about your own father.”

I let his hot saliva drip down my cheek, unflinching.

“No, no. I would never commit a crime against werewolf kind. But there’s someone I believe capable of such a thing.” He resumed his idle stroll across the oil-stained concrete of our big, empty garage, tapping his chin with his index finger thoughtfully. “Yes, someone many among us would believe capable of heretic behavior. Someone famous for his uncontrollable anger and reckless nature.”

“You’re going to frame Alexander?”

Father wheeled around dramatically. “Ah-ha! I never said you were not bright, Fiona. You may be stubborn, rigid, and insolent...” His mouth twisted into a grimace as he started listing all the things he didn’t like about me. “Inflexible, disloyal, and, now we know, a whore... But you were always bright.”

I let his insults roll off me like water slicks off a waxy feather. “And what purpose does that serve you?” If I was going to have to endure being abducted by my father, I may as well get as much information out of him as I could while I was stuck here.

Father made a Hmm sound, pacing again. But he could not help himself. He was too self-satisfied with his plot to hold back from telling me all about it.

“You see, my dear child,” he began, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “It seems that one of my debts owed is, in fact, due to be paid to your fiancé’s stepmother.”

I laughed. “Scarlet? You’re trying to get in with Scarlet by framing Alexander?”

“Not trying,” he said. “It’s already happening. There is nothing you could do to stop it.”

“But you need my cooperation to make your little plan happen, do you not?”

He growled with frustration, his face growing redder every second. I held my eyes locked on his, showing no signs of backing down.

“I could find another means, without your cooperation,” he said.

Somehow, I doubted that. It seemed clear that my father’s whole plan hinged on using my closeness to Alexander. “Then that’s what you’ll need to do.

Because you won't break me. I would never betray him."

Father's eyes were livid. The prominent vein in the center of his forehead was bulging. He coughed painfully or laughed so dryly it sounded like a choke.

"You won't betray him?" he asked. "You won't betray a man you barely know, but you'll betray your own flesh and blood?"

There was no reasoning with this man. I was not the one who betrayed the family. My father was the one whose crimes and greed destroyed the pack. He may as well have been speaking into a mirror.

"I'm giving you one last chance, Fiona. One last chance to pledge your loyalty to me again and swear you'll return to me the information that I need."

I paused. Because I knew that whatever was coming next after this reply, it was not likely to be pleasant.

“Never,” I said. “I’ll never swear allegiance to you again.”

My father gave a nod to one of his men, who stepped behind me and started loosening the restraints that held me to the chair. A tiny flutter of hope stirred, making me feel the impulse of the wolf pressing right under my skin. But this was not my moment. It did not matter if I could get my hands free. I was badly outnumbered and outmatched in this company.

The men shoved me to my feet and led me up the half staircase that went from the garage into my parents’ home, where I had lived with them almost my whole life. Just as I started to wonder where my mother was, I spied her.

She was a tiny figure at the top of the stairs. Still as a statue, and with a wooden, defeated look on her face.

I was taken to the downstairs bathroom, where the lights were all turned on, and I noticed with a sinking feeling that the bathtub was full to the brim with clear, still water.

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