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I forced myself to get up, my newly scarred body protesting every movement.

Marcus's study was just next door. The safe in his desk had a familiar combination - the date we first met.

"I'll never forget this day," he'd told me then, eyes shining with what I'd thought was love. "The day my wolf first recognized her mate."

But nothing inside belonged to our story.

Instead, I found dozens of bottles of prenatal vitamins for werewolf mates, still sealed, pressed against Rachel's pregnancy test results.

The most recent date was three years ago - the very day Marcus had proposed to me.

A phone lay among the evidence. Its cloud storage synced to a folder labeled "Our Pup's Journey."

Weekly ultrasound images filled the screen. Each one had Marcus's handwritten notes: "Oliver's first heartbeat!"

"Look at those tiny paws!"

"Our little princess is growing so strong!"

There were pages of carefully crafted recipes - special dishes to support a pregnant werewolf through each trimester. Marcus had noted Rachel's cravings and reactions to each meal.

The nursery plans were elaborate.

"Oliver's room should face the morning sun," he'd written. "My little wolf will love watching the sunrise."

The messages showed bookings at the pack's premier birthing den. The date matched exactly when Marcus claimed he'd be away on pack business.

I remembered how he'd insisted he wasn't ready for pups, how he'd said we should wait until after the marking ceremony.

"I want to focus on us first," he'd said. "Pups can come later."

Now I understood - he didn't want pups with me because he already had the family he wanted.

The safe's lower compartment held the design for a marking ceremony ring, sized for Rachel's finger.

Then I found the notifications Marcus had sent to neighboring pack Alphas. From the very beginning, he'd introduced Rachel as his true mate to everyone.

The sacred scrolls bore both their signatures - Marcus and Rachel, Alpha and Luna.

His message to the ceremonial master was clear: "Ensure everything is perfect for my true mate's ascension to Luna. The other matter will be handled discretely."

The "other matter" was me.

I laughed until the sound turned to sobs.

With shaking hands, I messaged my friend in the Northern territories.

"I need a healer," I wrote. "Someone who can reverse silver poisoning. And I need to disappear."

I began the formal process to remove myself from the pack registry. Let them think I was accepting my fate as an Omega.

My friend didn't question much, assuming I'd finally seen Marcus's true nature.

Her messages radiated relief that I was escaping.

I put down the phone and let exhaustion pull me into darkness.

But this time, when I closed my eyes, I didn't dream of Marcus.

I dreamed of freedom.

I woke to the sound of Marcus's sobs.

He clutched a report from the pack healer, his broad shoulders shaking with what appeared to be grief.

"Sarah... the healer discovered during the examination. Your wolf was critically damaged in the fire. She can't heal herself."

"Without your wolf's strength, you'll never be able to bear Alpha pups. Our bloodline..."

He reached for my hand, his touch gentle but calculated.

"But I won't abandon you. No matter what happens, you'll still be my mate."

"Once you're released from the hospital, we can adopt a pup. A strong Alpha pup to carry on the pack line. Having a child to care for will help you heal."

I was the one who had lost my wolf, yet he acted more devastated than I felt.

His performance was flawless. I didn't bother exposing the lie.

After a long silence, I stared at the report in his hands and nodded slowly.

Marcus's eyes welled with tears as he pulled me into his embrace.

"I'll take care of you, always. Don't be afraid. No matter what anyone says about an Alpha with an Omega mate, I'll stand by you."

"After the marking ceremony, I'll transfer ownership of the northern pack territories to you. It's the least I can do to secure your future."

Our chests pressed together, but our heartbeats told different stories.

His heart raced with hidden excitement while mine beat steady with cold understanding.

Finally, Marcus spoke hesitantly:

"About the marking ceremony... it's all prepared, but with your condition..."

"Find someone to take my place," I interrupted. "We can't let the pack lose face."

I knew exactly what he wanted to say.

Better to suggest it myself than be cornered into it.

At least this way, I could maintain some dignity.

Marcus seemed amazed by my sudden compliance.

But with his goal achieved, he didn't question my change of heart.

His phone rang, shattering the moment.

He glanced at the screen, then looked at me in confusion.

"Sarah, why are you canceling your pack registration?"