

4

Author: Alyssa J

I didn't stand firmly enough, and the door swung open under my weight.

Marcus's eyes flashed with panic.

"Sarah, what are you doing here?"

"Don't overthink it," he rushed to explain. "Rachel is the guard of our pack's orphan den, protecting all the pups. She just happened to be here today to discuss Oliver's adoption..."

Rachel stood, holding Oliver close as she gave me a casual wave.

"Sarah, it's been a while."

From my position by the door, I forced a smile, swallowing my pain as my burns throbbled.

"It's fine. I was just looking around. Since you're busy, I won't disturb you. I'll wait in the car."

I turned to leave, my legs still unsteady from the silver coursing through my veins.

Marcus thought I was upset and followed me, explanations tumbling from his lips.

"Please don't misunderstand. She's here all the time as the den's guardian. All the pups call her mother - it's just a title. Once the adoption is complete, I'll explain everything to Oliver."

Watching him fret over my supposed jealousy, I felt an hysterical urge to laugh.

All this elaborate planning, just to bring his secret pup into the pack legally.

He hadn't hesitated to orchestrate the fire that scarred me.

Hadn't flinched when ordering the silver injection that killed my wolf.

And now he had everything he wanted, yet still played the concerned mate.

"Don't worry," I said softly. "I'm not unreasonable. Go handle the paperwork. I'll wait quietly in the car like a good Omega should."

Relief flooded his face as he watched me walk away.

Every pack member I passed looked at me with barely concealed contempt.

Their whispers followed me:

"Poor thing doesn't even realize..."

"At least the burns will give her an excuse to hide away..."

"The Alpha's being kind, taking in an Omega..."

I ignored them all, pulling out my phone to begin the process of removing myself from the pack registry.

My fingers shook as I typed, but not from weakness.

Through the window, I could see Marcus and Rachel bent over paperwork, Oliver playing happily at their feet.

The perfect family picture.

Built on my destruction.

To celebrate Oliver's adoption, Marcus booked an entire cruise ship for a charity dinner.

I hid on the top deck, away from the festivities below.

Even there, I could hear the whispers and laughter of the pack elders, their mockery carrying on the sea breeze.

From my position near the railing, I watched the perfect family scene unfold below.

Marcus stood proudly, presenting Oliver with the pack's Alpha token - a silver medallion passed down through generations.

Rachel touched his arm playfully. "He's so young... are you sure he can handle such responsibility when he grows up?"

Marcus just smiled, ruffling Oliver's hair. "My son will be the most powerful Alpha this pack has ever seen."

The bitterness in my chest finally overflowed.

I pulled out all the letters Marcus had written me over five years, watching them burn to ash in my hands.

Suddenly, Rachel appeared behind me, her form shifting fluidly into her wolf shape.

Her claws pressed into my burn scars as she pinned me down.

"Does it hurt, being an Omega?" she taunted. "You're just like these ashes now - worthless garbage he can't even look at without disgust."

Her claws dug deeper, reopening my barely healed wounds.

"How does it feel, watching him give my pup the Alpha token? Watching him build the future you thought would be yours?"

Before I could respond, she suddenly leaped back.

With a dramatic cry, she stumbled and fell over the railing.

I hadn't even moved, but her scream echoed across the water: "She pushed me!"

Marcus reacted instantly, diving into the dark waves after her.

Moments later, he emerged with Rachel clutched safely to his chest.

His eyes found mine, burning with fury as he carried her back onto the deck.

"What the hell were you thinking, Sarah? Have you completely lost your mind?"

"Rachel came to kindly invite you to join us, and you attack her? Is this how an Omega repays our generosity?"