

5

Author: Alyssa J

Marcus's parents, the pack's former Alpha and Luna, glared at me with open hostility.

Oliver was sobbing uncontrollably beside them.

"Bad witch! Bad witch hurt Mommy! I don't want her in our pack!"

"I want Mommy! I want my real Mommy!"

Rachel leaned weakly against Marcus, her wet clothes clinging dramatically.

"I'm sorry... I just told Sarah I'd agreed to stand in for her at the marking ceremony. I never thought she'd react like this..."

"Don't blame her, Marcus. She's been through so much..."

I lay awkwardly on the deck, a bitter smile twisting my scarred lips.

"Marcus, don't I deserve an explanation? The fire, my wolf's damage, the pup - was any of it real?"

Marcus's brow furrowed, but I caught the flash of panic in his eyes.

"What are you talking about? The fire was a tragic accident. Rachel's just trying to help by taking your place in the ceremony."

"She's being kind, and you attack her? What's happened to you, Sarah?"

"Apologize to Rachel. Now."

Before I could speak, the pack elders stepped forward.

"Worthless Omega, you dare cause trouble? You think you're still worthy of being an Alpha's mate?"

"Who else would take a wolf-less mongrel except our son's charity?"

"Enough! Let this be her punishment for her arrogance. Get Rachel to the healer, make sure she's not injured."

My claws - the only part of my wolf I could still access - cut into my palms as blood dripped onto the deck.

Marcus gathered Rachel in one arm, took Oliver's hand with the other.

They walked away as a family, leaving me broken on the ground.

Five years of love turned to ash in my mouth.

I pulled myself back into the room, my burns screaming in protest.

I booked a spot in a convoy leaving the pack for the day of the marking ceremony.

Checked into a hotel far from pack territory.

That night, Marcus sent a message:

"Rachel's still going to stand in for you at the ceremony. Your attack on her looks bad, so the apology was just for show. Don't overthink it. The elders were just upset - I'll make them apologize after everything's done."

"Rest well. I have a surprise coming for the ceremony. You'll love it, I promise."

But I understood now.

The performance wasn't for Rachel's benefit.

It had all been for me.

He'd played the devoted mate for five years.

Now it was time for the final act.

I stayed away from the pack house for the next two days.

Marcus didn't return either.

He was too busy preparing for the marking ceremony.

Insisting on overseeing every detail personally.

The morning of the ceremony, I called him one last time.

He was preoccupied with his Beta, barely acknowledging my call.

"Alpha, are you certain about transferring half the northern territories to Rachel? She's not pack-born. It's risky to give an outsider so much power."

"Do as I say. That half is compensation I promised her. The other half is for Oliver's inheritance."

"And handle the ceremony guests yourself. Watch for any trouble from Sarah's old pack."

Only after the Beta left did Marcus remember the open phone line.

"Sarah? Sorry for the wait. The ceremony's about to begin. I'll come back to you as soon as it's done. Don't be upset."

I stared at the convoy reservation in my hand, keeping my voice carefully neutral.

"Don't worry about it. I won't keep you."

"Marcus... congratulations on your mating."

He paused for a moment, then laughed.

"You mean our mating. Be a good girl and wait for me at home."

As the call ended, I walked onto the plane.

The silver in my veins burned less now.

My wolf stirred more strongly each day.

We both knew this wasn't the end.

Just a new beginning.

When the confirmation of my pack registry deletion came through, I erased every trace of him from my life.

Phone numbers.

Photos.

Messages.

All gone, like smoke in the wind.