

The Warrior's Broken Mate Chapter 02

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As soon as I heard Father's voice echoing down the corridor, a wave of fear gripped my chest. My heart raced—so violently I thought it might burst from my ribcage. Dizziness crept over me, blurring my vision.

"There's someone locked behind this door," the man said.

"Oh, her? She's not worth worrying about. Just an omega who tidies up the place," Seraphina replied effortlessly.

"I'd like to meet her," the man pressed.

"That's not an option," Thorne interjected tersely. "She's... unstable. A troubled girl who needs to be kept away from others."

Sitting on the other side of the attic door, I caught every word of their conversation. My chest tightened; I should have predicted their contempt, but hearing them say it out loud stung sharp as a fresh cut. I fought the urge to scream that it wasn't true—that I wasn't broken or unstable. Was this the lie they fed to everyone? Did every guest already have my story written for me before they even glanced my way?

"That's quite unfortunate," the man remarked.

"Come now, Alpha Elias. You're missing the entire celebration we've planned in your honor," Seraphina coaxed.

Their voices gradually faded as they walked away. I let out a slow breath. Crawling back up the stairs to the cot that served as my bed, I finally relaxed. At least the party would last for hours; that meant I was safe—for now, at least. Exhaustion washed over me. After all the cooking and cleaning I'd done that day, it was a miracle I was still on my feet. I slipped beneath the thin covers and allowed myself to drift off once more.

I jerked awake to blurred vision. Thorne stood beside my bed, metal flashing in his hand. Before I could react, he struck.

Pain exploded—silver whip. Another strike. And again.

"I warned you never to speak to anyone," he snarled.

"I didn't! I just told him to leave. I didn't even open the door. I swear!" I cried out, my voice shaky with fear.

“You spoke. That’s all it takes.” Another lash.

“He said he could hear me! My breathing—my heartbeat!” I pleaded, desperate, knowing deep down it wouldn’t change anything.

Silver sliced deep; even werewolf healing couldn’t help. Thorne whipped me until, breathless, he dropped the weapon.

“I should have gotten rid of you long ago,” he hissed. “Get downstairs. Make breakfast before our guests wake up.”

He turned and walked away, leaving me collapsed on the cot. My body screamed in agony. Every inch of my skin stung or bruised. I couldn’t lie still. The pain was relentless.

Eventually, I sat up with a hiss, peeling off the torn dress that was now in tatters and stained with blood. I grabbed a baggy, grey dress that was a couple of sizes too big and quietly made my way down from the attic, careful not to be seen. I slipped through the hidden back stairwell that led to the kitchen.

The wall clock read 4:00 a.m. Not surprising. I had to get everything ready before the house came to life.

I started by preparing tea and coffee, setting up the drink table in the ballroom since it was the only room spacious enough to accommodate all the guests. Once that was done, I returned to the kitchen and began making breakfast—everything from scratch, as I always did.

I was halfway through cooking when cheerful voices drifted in from the ballroom. I didn’t recognize them. Still, their laughter and chatter made me imagine what it would be like to sit among them. Not as a servant, but as someone welcomed—a person who was seen.

Shortly after, Thorne and Seraphina arrived. A few moments later, she excused herself and entered the kitchen just as I pulled fresh muffins and croissants from the oven.

She didn’t say a word; instead, she stood there with her arms crossed and foot tapping impatiently while I arranged everything on trays. She wouldn’t dare risk being seen talking to me, especially not with Alpha Elias in the house, because revealing my role could create problems she wanted to avoid. He might recognize my voice.

“They’re training at dawn. Hurry up,” Seraphina hissed under her breath.

I scrambled to finish plating the eggs, placing the last of the trays on the counter just as the servers came in to carry everything out. Then I was quickly ushered out of sight. I crept up the servant stairwell, pausing to peek through the gaps in the wall. I couldn’t

see anyone in the ballroom, but I could imagine it—their laughter filling the air, a world forever closed to me. Existing on the edge, I felt like a ghost haunting spaces where I'd never belong.

Seraphina had mentioned they'd train early, so maybe I'd catch a glimpse of them later.

There were always stories about the Vanguard Pack—how skilled they were in combat and how packs called upon them in times of crisis. They were legends, admired by everyone.

Once I was sure they had all headed out to the training grounds, I returned to the first floor to clean their rooms. I changed the bedding, set out fresh towels, and restocked toiletries. Thorne and Seraphina always ran the packhouse like a high-end inn when we had guests.

These warriors weren't just passing through; they were staying for a while.

The last room I cleaned belonged to Alpha Elias—the same one who had talked to me through the attic door. I recognized his scent the moment I stepped inside: warm hazelnut and cinnamon. It made my head spin.

I lingered for a moment, breathing it in, before forcing myself back to work. His room had a private bathroom, so I changed the bedding, vacuumed the carpet, and went into the bathroom to replace the towels and restock supplies.

As I turned to leave the en-suite bathroom, I froze at the sound of voices drifting in from the hallway.

"Hang on a sec, man. I forgot something in my room," a male voice called out casually, his tone light and easy.

Without thinking, I shut the bathroom door and locked it. My heart raced as I heard footsteps enter the room, then suddenly stop. It was as if he was standing perfectly still, just listening.

A sharp knock against the bathroom door startled me, making me flinch.

"Is someone in there?" he asked.

I hesitated, hoping he would simply walk away. But then I heard the handle jiggling as he tested it.

"You're the same girl from the attic, aren't you?" he asked, curiosity lacing his voice.

"Please," I whispered, barely audible, "let me finish tidying up and I'll be gone."

“Open the door,” he said gently.

“I can’t,” I replied quickly. “You’re not supposed to see me.”

“But I want to,” he said, leaning his weight against the other side of the door.

“You can’t. I’m not allowed,” I insisted more firmly.

“Then what? Should I kick the door in?” he asked, his tone half-playful, half-serious, taking a step back.

“If you do,” I said, my voice trembling with determination, “I promise you’ll never see me again. Ever. I can’t risk them finding out.”

The silence that followed was so thick it felt like time had stopped. I held my breath, praying he would just leave. But then, after what felt like an eternity, I heard him return to the door, leaning against it again.

“At least tell me your name,” he coaxed gently. “That can’t be too much to ask.”

“I’m no one,” I responded automatically, reciting the only truth I’d been allowed to claim for years.

“I don’t believe that,” he said softly. “I think you’re someone. I want to know who that someone is.”

The sincerity in his voice sent a strange warmth into the hollow places inside me. Did he really mean that? Did he actually want to know who I was? No one ever asked. No one ever cared.

No one wants to know the girl who killed her own mother.

“I... I—” I began, unsure of what to say, when the sound of sharp heels clicking against the hardwood floor broke through my thoughts.

“Alpha Elias, there you are. I’ve been looking everywhere for you. You weren’t at the training session,” Luna Seraphina’s smooth, calculated voice chimed in.

“I just needed to grab something from my room,” he replied easily, like nothing was amiss.

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“You know what? Forget it. I need to get back to training,” Alpha Elias said, positioning himself squarely in front of the door, using his body to block it completely. His reputation in the pack depended on discipline—he couldn’t let Luna Seraphina undermine that right now. The doorknob went still in an instant. I could see the shadow of his boots just under the crack—he wasn’t letting Luna Seraphina open it.

“Well, my husband’s been searching for you everywhere,” she replied with a hint of irritation in her voice.

Their footsteps retreated down the hallway, finally fading into silence. I slumped back against the bathroom door and exhaled in relief, my heart pounding far too loud in my ears.

Eventually, I finished cleaning his room. Curiosity won—I peeked out the window. Everyone had gathered on the south training field.

Alpha Elias stood at the center, giving sharp instructions and demonstrating battle techniques. Warriors from the Vanguard Pack worked with ours, mimicking the stances.

The Vanguard wolves were massive. I couldn’t stop comparing—how could we ever match their strength? My stomach knotted with anxious doubt. Was I destined to always feel smaller, weaker, never measuring up?

I lingered too long, fixated on the field. What would it feel like to be strong, to run free? The craving stung, pulling me from the grim reality of my own weakness. The sudden footsteps jolted me—proof that my brief escape, even in thought, was dangerous.

As the footsteps passed, a faint scent drifted to me—feminine, polished. Luna Seraphina. I stayed hidden, completely still, until I was certain she had gone. I had no desire to cross paths with her again, not after how close she came to unlocking that door.

By the time I finished tidying Alpha Elias’s room, the others were returning inside for lunch. I rushed to the kitchen just in time to start preparing the meal. My body screamed in protest, every silver burn a fresh reminder of what disobedience earned me, but I ignored the pain because I knew failure meant punishment. I forced my hands to keep moving.

Steak and vegetables—simple, filling, and expected. I moved as quickly as I could, every second counted. That’s when my father, Thorne, walked into the kitchen. One look at his face told me exactly what he thought of my performance: I was too slow, too weak. He didn’t even need to speak.

I didn’t dare meet his eyes.

I worked in silence, pushing through the burning ache in my arms, until the food was plated and ready. The kitchen staff came in to take it to the dining room, and I seized the chance to get out of there. I slipped away quickly, praying Father wouldn't follow.

He didn't. Not yet.

But I knew his anger hadn't faded. It never did. I would face the consequences later. I always did.

For now, I climbed the stairs up to the attic. My prison. My hiding place. My only sanctuary. Once inside, I sank down onto my bed, every part of me tensed in dread. I could already feel my pulse racing. My hands trembled slightly as the familiar panic set in.

To calm myself, I picked up a worn paperback from the stack beside my bed. Reading was the only thing that helped. It didn't always stop the anxiety, but it dulled the edge. It made the loneliness a little more bearable.

Books were the one place where I felt seen. Like the characters were speaking to me, like the author had written those words just for my eyes. In those stories, people had lives—real lives. They walked freely, spoke freely, lived without fear of punishment.

I envied them so deeply it hurt.

They weren't locked away. They weren't beaten for speaking out of turn. They didn't flinch every time someone entered a room.

I've spent my entire life in this attic. Father controls everything—my world shrunk to this room, my memories blurred by loneliness. I can't remember what it feels like to meet someone new. Hiding seems permanent, as if I was never meant for more.

And still, I wonder what things would be like if my mother were alive.

Would she have protected me?

But I'll never know. That's not something I get to have. She's gone, and I can't undo what happened. I can't undo what I did.

Everyone assumes she died by accident, but I know the truth. I was the cause. That's not something people forgive. Not something anyone wants to understand.

I'm supposed to be the heir. But hearing Father whisper to his Beta, I knew: he hopes Seraphina gives him a son. My existence doesn't just disappoint him—it's inconvenient, something he buries in silence.

A son. Not me.

Maybe that's why I'm tucked away here—just a girl, unseen, silenced, always somewhere I don't belong. Father says girls belong in kitchens, not leading packs. Sometimes, I almost believe him.

And I guess he must be right. Because all I ever do is cook. And clean.

Once lunch had ended, I made my way cautiously down the attic stairs. Pressing my ear against the door, I listened intently for any sounds in the hallway. Hearing nothing, I slowly pushed the door open and stepped out.

"Well, so there is someone living up in the attic," a male voice came from behind me. I spun around so quickly that I nearly lost my balance, and the man reached out, gripping my arm firmly to steady me. Where his hand met my skin, an unfamiliar jolt of warmth—like tiny electric sparks—raced up my arm. He must have been curious about rumors of someone hidden away.

Then I got a proper look at him. He was stunning—messy sandy blond hair that somehow looked effortlessly good, tall and athletic, wearing nothing but workout shorts that exposed his chiseled torso and a defined V-line that disappeared into the waistband.

I stood frozen, staring like an idiot. My mind was reeling; I couldn't think properly. He was easily the most attractive man I had ever seen. But then reality snapped back into focus. I was speaking to someone. That wasn't allowed. I wasn't permitted to talk to anyone except Father and Luna. Instantly, I dropped my gaze to the floor in shame.

"I'm Alpha Elias. And you are?" he asked softly.

"I'm... no one," I stammered.

"You're clearly someone. You're standing right in front of me," he replied calmly.

"What's going on here?" boomed a voice from the far end of the hallway—Father. My heart lurched violently in my chest, and I felt dizzy. Alpha Elias had to steady me again to keep me upright.

"Who is this girl?" Alpha Elias demanded.

"She's no one," Thorne replied coldly.

"That's what she told me. But who is she really? What is she to you?" Elias pressed.

Father's glare slices through me. I always drop my head—that's what he expects. But why do I feel so much guilt? I didn't choose to be his daughter. My pulse flutters with the desperate wish for a different fate, one where I'm wanted, one where I didn't ruin everything.

“She’s a mistake,” Thorne growled.

“The only mistake I see here is you—and that venomous woman you call your mate,” Elias snapped, his tone sharp with anger. Seraphina placed a hand over her heart, clearly offended.

“Watch your tongue. You’ll regret speaking of my wife that way. And who do you think you are, addressing me like that?” Thorne barked, stepping forward.

That’s when Alpha Elias shifted his stance. He reached around me and pulled me behind him, shielding me with his body as he faced off with Thorne.

“Why do you even care?” Thorne spat. “She’s nothing. She’s no one.”

“She’s my mate,” Alpha Elias roared, his voice echoing through the hall like thunder.

Everything went dead quiet.

Especially me.

The Warrior's Broken Mate Chapter 04

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ALPHA ELIAS POV

Leading a pack is no small burden — not even for me. At 25, I’ve fought through blood, sweat, and sleepless nights to build the Vanguard Pack from nothing. We are warriors, forged by hardship. Some of my packmates have found love, started families—little joys to anchor them. But I haven’t had that. I crave a Luna not for power, but for connection, for someone who understands the weight I carry. Yet, I refuse to betray my own heart for a title. I’d rather walk this path alone than let someone undeserving stand at my side.

Our reputation has grown over the years. We’ve become so skilled in combat and strategy that other packs call on us to help train their members. It’s a point of pride — and honor.

This time, we were heading to the Crystal River Pack, led by Alpha Thorne and Luna Seraphina. I didn’t know how long we’d have to be there, or how much work their warriors needed. They’d arranged a formal black-tie event to welcome us—something outside our experience. Warriors like us don’t usually deal with tuxedos or etiquette dinners. We had to shop for suits, practice tying ties, and follow unfamiliar customs. It felt awkward, but Luke, my Beta, insisted it would help us make a strong first impression.

Limos picked us up like we were royalty. It was overkill; we were there to help, not be pampered. But with the treaty signed, we accepted the hospitality.

I didn't know much about the Crystal River Pack, other than that Thorne had lost his mate and child fifteen years ago. Supposedly, that loss sent the pack into disarray.

On the way there, I kept pulling at my tie like it was strangling me. Miles kept swatting my hands away.

"What's bothering you?" he finally asked, noticing how quiet I'd been.

"I'm not sure about this," I said, staring out the limo window. "Thorne's mate died in childbirth fifteen years ago. The pack fell apart afterward."

"Maybe his new Luna has something to do with the change," Luke suggested. "Maybe she gave him a reason to pull things together again."

"Maybe," I said—doubt scratching fire inside my chest. My instincts wouldn't quiet; something about this whole setup felt... wrong, unsettling in a way that wouldn't leave me.

Luke nodded. "Your gut's never wrong. If you say we leave, I'm behind you. No questions asked."

I gave him a grateful nod. "Thanks. That means a lot."

Their packhouse was massive, unnecessarily extravagant. Why did Thorne and his Luna need a mansion?

As I stepped out of the limo, a scent slammed into me—rich, sweet, impossibly intoxicating. Chocolate and cherries. It stole the breath from my lungs and turned my bones electric. My wolf, Kael, crashed forward with a frantic howl, the force of his need nearly ripping me apart. I barely held him back, shaken and breathless.

But the scent vanished just as quickly, and I couldn't see anyone nearby. Confused, I followed the others into the house, where we were welcomed by Alpha Thorne and Luna Seraphina. The grand ballroom looked like something out of a designer magazine.

The buffet dinner fit us better. The food was incredible. I wondered who cooked it. She must be a goddess in the kitchen.

Seated beside me was their head warrior, Darius.

"So," I asked mid-bite, "what kind of trouble are you having with training?"

Darius sighed. “Since the tragedy, training declined. Thorne lost his mate and daughter. Only when Seraphina came did things start to turn around.”

Luke raised a brow. “The baby was a girl?”

“Yeah,” Darius said. “But really, it doesn’t matter. A child is a child.”

I nodded. “That kind of grief could shatter anyone.”

Darius agreed. “Training just... stopped. Honestly, I’m surprised we were never attacked. But I guess we kept to ourselves so much that other packs forgot we existed.”

“Well,” I said, “we’ll help you whip your warriors back into shape.”

“We appreciate it,” he replied sincerely.

Later, as I walked the halls with Thorne, discussing the upcoming training plans, that same scent hit me again — stronger now, richer. It was definitely inside the house. I knew then, without a doubt: my mate was here.

And I had to find her.

It was faint where I stood, but still present. After exchanging a few more words, Alpha Thorne personally showed me to my room. The room was spacious, complete with an ensuite bathroom. As soon as I entered and Thorne left, I paused in the doorway—the scent intensified, as if she’d only recently been there. Driven by instinct, I waited several seconds for the hall to clear, then slipped outside to follow the trail. The scent seemed to lead everywhere, making me realize she had access to most of the house.

I walked to the far end of the third-floor corridor, noticing a single door tucked in the corner—its location drew me in. I approached, gently testing the handle; it was locked. Then, I heard soft footsteps on the stairs behind the door, the careful sound of someone settling down. No movement followed, just silence. The scent was almost overwhelming now, lingering on the door and in the air, making it difficult to restrain my urge to break through and see her.

Kael, my wolf, was restless, pacing in my mind.

Then I heard her voice—soft, almost aching, pleading for me to go away. It splintered me instantly, pain twisting deep in my chest, sharp and raw. Her fragility echoed in every trembling note, every shallow, shaking breath. My heart pounded to her rhythm—fear, not of the unknown, but of me. That realization stabbed deeper than any wound. I answered her gently, my words colored with more sorrow than I meant to show, begging her trust. She still wouldn’t open up.

Then footsteps thundered down the hall—Alpha Thorne. His presence felt like a storm tearing through fragile peace, and every part of me braced for the worst. The girl's panic behind the door exploded—her fear wild and agonizing, as if she might shatter at his approach. No pack member should feel terror like that for their Alpha. Not unless...

Kael let out a warning growl in my head, low and lethal.

Something in this house was broken to the core. I'd sensed it the moment we arrived, but now it roared through me. My blood pounded with the question: Who was this girl locked away above everyone else? What secret demanded she be hidden—what pain kept her captive here?

I had followed her scent up here, and Kael was nearly frantic to reach her. The timing could not be a coincidence. Was she truly my mate? I didn't have absolute proof, but my instincts wouldn't let the matter drop. I decided—we weren't leaving this pack until I discovered who she was.

When Luna Seraphina later brought up the girl, she dismissed her as a troublemaker—damaged and unstable. The instant Seraphina spoke those words, Kael snarled inside my mind, furious at the accusation. He knew it wasn't true and despised her lie. But I stayed calm, listening and hiding my reaction, determined to gather more information for both our sakes.

Thorne's stories frayed at the edges. Seraphina's condemnation—calling the girl unstable—felt like poison. Kael snarled in my mind, his hatred scorching, his rage barely containable. I buried everything behind a neutral mask, every muscle tight with the effort. I couldn't risk letting them see, for both our sakes.

I'd heard of Alphas like this—cruel leaders who punished and abused their pack. This might be one of those.

And I was in the middle of it.

We returned to the grand ballroom. I scanned the space until I found Luke, leaning casually against the wall, talking with a Crystal River warrior. I made my way toward him and waited until the other man stepped away before speaking in a low voice, barely above a whisper.

"I need you to do something, Luke. It could put us in danger, but we need to act. Watch Alpha Thorne and Luna Seraphina closely. If necessary, spy on them, and report anything unusual you notice. We must figure out the truth about what's going on here."

The Warrior's Broken Mate Chapter 05

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ALPHA ELIAS POV

The next morning, I woke up to the most mouthwatering scent imaginable — a full, hearty breakfast clearly prepared just for us. I didn't waste time getting dressed and headed toward the kitchen, eager to dig in.

I was just about to step in when Luke entered the room and clapped a hand on my shoulder. He grabbed himself a mug of coffee, and we both settled near the window, taking a moment to observe the other guests trickle in. I wanted to discuss what we'd overheard last night, but waited for Luke to bring it up.

Luke leaned in, voice low. "Thorne locked himself in the attic last night—with a silver chain."

"That would burn him," I growled, frowning.

"Not with gloves," Luke snapped. "He was shouting. If someone was in there, they stayed silent."

I clenched my jaw. "That bastard. He's probably conditioned her into silence."

Luke narrowed his eyes. "How do you know it's a girl?"

"I spoke to her last night. She's there. I'm sure," I said, meeting his eyes, rage simmering.

Luke nodded. "Keep quiet. Training's this morning—then we check the attic."

"Distract Thorne this afternoon," I ordered. "If she's in danger, she's leaving with us. I won't support him."

"You got it," Luke agreed.

After breakfast, we joined Crystal River Pack's warriors on the field. The problem was obvious: Thorne's fighters were out of shape and struggled with even basic combat.

My headache worsened with every sloppy move, my team outpacing theirs easily. I excused myself, seeking relief, when the alluring scent returned—stronger than before. She was here.

I glanced at the bathroom door. It was shut. But I hadn't closed it that morning. And I could just barely see the shadow of her feet beneath the door. I approached, gently trying the handle. Locked.

Once again, I spoke to her through the door, pleading for her to come out. Her response was the same — a firm refusal. This time I nearly forced the door open. But then she said something that froze me in place.

“If you break this door, you’ll never see me again.”

It was the only time her voice didn’t tremble. She meant it — every word. And I wasn’t willing to risk losing her. Not now.

Just then, Luna Seraphina entered the room. She immediately sensed something was off and started eyeing the closed bathroom door with suspicion. She wanted to open it, but I knew that couldn’t happen. It wasn’t safe for the girl.

Kael, my wolf, began scratching at the inside of my head — agitated, on edge. There was danger near. I blurted out some excuse, just enough to get Seraphina to leave the room with me.

Back at the field, Crystal River’s warriors dragged themselves through exhausted motions. I called lunch, shaking my head in disbelief as they limped away.

We headed back to the packhouse and into the ballroom. The smell hit me again — that unmistakable, addictive scent. But there was no food in sight. I was about to head into the kitchen when Alpha Thorne stepped into my path.

“Please. Just take a seat,” he said, “Sit,” he said, gesturing to the chairs. “Lunch is coming.” at down next to Luke, who was already frowning.

“Weird,” Luke muttered, as Thorne entered the kitchen and locked the door. “That’s weird,” Luke muttered as Thorne entered the kitchen and locked the door. He ordered the servers to bring out the food, and they scurried into the kitchen to retrieve it.

I ate quickly, knowing I had a narrow window of opportunity. As planned, Luke went to join Thorne and Seraphina for lunch to distract them. I was determined to search the house undisturbed, and this gave me the perfect cover to slip away.

Back in my room, I waited, listening. As soon as the commotion downstairs faded and people started heading back to the training field, I crept out and returned to the attic door.

I could hear movement behind it — soft creaks on the stairs, muffled steps. Then suddenly the door opened. I barely had time to move aside and stay hidden.

As it swung open, that scent — her scent — wrapped around me like a drug. She was the one. No doubt remained in my mind or in Kael’s restless energy. She stepped out and quietly closed the door behind her.

I reached out and grabbed her arm.

Sparks exploded across my skin, traveling up my arm like fire. I froze, stunned.

She was small, painfully thin. Her hair hung in messy strands, and her skin was pale. One eye was badly bruised, her lip swollen. She wore a shapeless gray dress far too large for her. But what truly caught my attention were the fresh, open wounds on her arm — angry welts that refused to heal.

Silver.

Just like Luke had warned.

“So there was someone in the attic,” “So there was someone in the attic,” I said, voice cold. I stood utterly still, like a statue carved from fear and disbelief. Her wide blue eyes were locked on mine, and I wasn’t sure if she was seeing me or just some ghost of her past. I had turned her around so fast she nearly lost her balance—I caught her, hands on both arms, and the instant my second hand touched her, the same electric jolt surged through me.

Again, sparks.

She was still staring at me, as if trying to understand something that didn’t make sense. I didn’t know what to make of it either. Was it recognition? Fear? The bond calling to her like it was to me? Or was she terrified out of her mind?

Her face told a thousand stories, all tangled together—none of them good. Then, suddenly, she blinked, lowered her head like she’d remembered her place, and stared at the floor with the practiced submission of someone who’d spent her life beneath others’ feet.

“I’m Alpha Elias,” I said quietly. “Your name?”

“No one,” she whispered.

The words “No one,” she breathed. Hit me like a wave of shock and disbelief surging through me.

How could someone believe that about themselves? No one. Like she didn’t even think she deserved to exist.

Before I could say anything else, a sharp voice cut through the hallway.

“What the hell is going on?” Alpha Thorne was marching toward us, all righteous fury and false authority.

The girl—Lyra—instantly tensed. I could feel the panic rolling off her. Her heartbeat spiked, breaths turning shallow. She was on the edge of a breakdown just from the sound of his voice.

“Who is she?” I demanded, stepping in front of her.

“No one,” Thorne said coldly.

“She said that too. I want the truth—who is she to you?” My voice dropped. Kael bristled inside me, already angry.

Thorne sneered. “A mistake.”

The growl that escaped me wasn’t voluntary. It came from somewhere deeper than instinct, something primal. I looked at Lyra—and the way her face twisted in silent pain shattered something in me. She didn’t flinch. Didn’t react. Like she’d heard that word her entire life.

I stepped forward.

“The only mistake here is you,” I snarled, “and that venom you mated with.”

Thorne bared his teeth. “Watch your mouth, Elias.”

He moved toward us. Without hesitation, I pulled Lyra behind me, wrapping my arm around her waist and shielding her with my body. I wasn’t about to let him hurt her again—not while I was breathing.

Why was he even pretending to care? He’d treated her worse than dirt, like someone who didn’t exist.

But she did. She was mine. My mate. And I had every right to be furious about how she’d been treated—like trash, like a prisoner, like something shameful.

Silence fell around us. My claim was unspoken, but clear.

I turned to her. She was still staring at the ground, her face pale, lips parted in disbelief, the weight of everything crashing down on her.

“I’m an Alpha,” I said gently. “That means you answer my questions, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir,” she murmured, her voice barely audible.

“What’s your name?”

“...Lyra.”

I nodded. "And Alpha Thorne. What is he to you?"

She hesitated. I could feel her struggling with the answer, but she forced the words out anyway.

"He's my father."

I stared at her, stunned. Then whipped around to glare at Thorne. "Didn't you say your daughter and your mate died in childbirth?"

"She did die," Thorne growled. "That thing killed my mate when it was born."

"You actually believe a newborn is responsible for that?" I shouted.

He flinched but stood firm. "She killed her."

"No," I snapped, stepping forward. "You've had fifteen years to convince yourself of that—and to punish her for it. To make her believe it too. Fifteen years of torture."

I grabbed Lyra's hand and turned toward the stairs, resolved to get her out of that place and to safety, driven by the need to protect her from further harm.

"You're not taking her anywhere!" Thorne barked, storming after us with Seraphina behind him.

I caught the motion from the corner of my eye—Thorne reaching for her again—and instantly shifted her to my other side, my arm wrapped tight around her, keeping her out of his reach.

"She's coming with me. The Council will hear what you've done. You won't get away with this."

I pulled her with me, down the stairs and out into the training field, where my men were still sparring with warriors from the Vanguards Pack. Everything stopped when they saw us. Lyra flinched in the sunlight, her arms instinctively raising like she wanted to shield her face. She was too pale. She looked like she hadn't stepped outside in years.

"Elias?" Luke jogged over, confusion on his face. "What's going on?"

"This is Lyra," I said loudly. "Alpha Thorne's daughter. Not dead. Fifteen. And locked away like a prisoner her entire life."

A ripple of shock ran through the warriors around us.

"You're not taking her!" Thorne's voice roared from behind. I turned and saw him mid-shift—fur sprouting, claws extending, teeth elongating.

“Luke, take Lyra,” I commanded, my voice sharp. I could feel Kael rising under my skin, my own teeth beginning to lengthen.