

## CHAPTER 18

18 Lucas: Realization (1) 18 Lucas: Realization (1) LUCAS The frost of winter thaws, giving way to the brisk air of spring. The days drag on, each moment blurring into the next as my frustration builds. Weeks have passed since that fateful night at the Lunar Gala, and still, the Blackwood Pack's intentions remain shrouded in mystery, even with summer peeking around the corner. My wolf paces restlessly within me, yearning for answers, for action, for her. My obsession grows. I slam my fist on the desk, the impact reverberating through the room. Kellan, ever the loyal beta, barely flinches. He knows better than to disturb me when I'm like this, consumed by the need to unravel the web of secrets that surrounds us. A missive arrived last week from Alpha Blackwood, a terse notification that his beta's daughter, Jessa Grey, would be attending the local university here in Granite City. The balls on that asshole, sending her into our territory without so much as a proper request for 14:42 17 18 Lucas: Realization (1) permission. It's an unspoken rule among our kind, a courtesy extended to the ruling pack when an outsider plans to stay within their domain. I can't help but wonder if this is another ploy, another move in the twisted game that Blackwood seems intent on playing. Jessa's presence here, so close to the heart of our pack, sets my teeth on edge. What secrets does she carry? What lies will she spin to further her alpha's agenda? My thoughts drift naturally to her, the girl who haunts my every waking moment. Ava. The memory of her scent, her touch, the way she surrendered to me in the garden—it's seared into my very being. And yet, my hatred grows by the day. I push myself away from the desk, pacing the length of my office like a caged beast. The cool air brought in by an open window does little to soothe my restless spirit. I need answers. "Kellan," I bark, my voice slicing through the silence. "I want eyes on Jessa Grey the moment she sets foot in Granite City. I want to know her every move, every breath she takes. And if you find even a whisper of information about her sister..." 14:43 – 2/T 18 Lucas: Realization (1) I leave the sentence hanging, the implication clear. Kellan nods, his expression grim. He understands the gravity of the situation, the weight that rests upon our shoulders. The silence stretches between us as I once again contemplate the possible motives behind the Blackwood Pack's actions, like we have a thousand times. But this time, I let my mind linger on Ava. On the garden. On that scent that I can never forget and how there was something different about it all. My mind races, trying to piece together the fragments of information we've gathered. "What if they've developed some kind of pheromone enhancer?" I muse aloud, my eyes focused on something beyond the walls of this room. "A way to force a mate connection, to manipulate the bond between wolves." Kellan frowns, shaking his head. "I don't know, Lucas. When I met Ava that night, I didn't sense anything unusual. No hint of artificial pheromones or manipulation." I scoff, turning to face him. "She probably applied it in the garden, knowing I was watching her. It's the 14: 317 18 Lucas Realization (1) perfect setup, don't you see? Lure me in, make me believe there's a connection, and then use that to gain a foothold in our pack." Kellan hesitates, his brow furrowed in thought. "I suppose that's possible, but her relationship with her family seemed strained. The way they interacted, the tension between them, wasn't faked. It didn't feel like a united front." I grimace. "Exactly. And that's why it's even more likely. Think about it, Kellan. If Ava's relationship with her father is rocky, she'd be even more desperate to prove herself, to earn his approval. Sacrificing herself, using her body as a tool to further their agenda... it's exactly the kind of [www.NoVeloRM.com](http://www.NoVeloRM.com)

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thing a desperate wolf would do." Kellan's eyes widen. "I hadn't considered that angle. It does make a twisted sort of sense." I turn away, my hands curling into fists at my sides. The thought of Ava being used in such a way, of her willing participation in this deception, fuels the rage that warms my skin. "We need to be prepared for anything," I growl, my voice low and dangerous. "The Blackwood Pack is up 14:43 ) 47 18 Lucas: Realization (1) to something. I won't let them destroy everything we've built, everything we stand for." Kellan's expression is grim. "I know. We all do. We're behind you, Lucas. We'll keep a close eye on Jessa, and if we find any evidence of foul play..." "We'll show them what happens when they try to mess with the Westwood Pack." There's no other option. I turn to face the window, my gaze sweeping over the city that is mine to protect. The Blackwood Pack may be able to hold their secrets, but they have no idea who they're dealing with. I will uncover the truth, no matter the cost. \*\*\* A sharp knock at the door jolts me awake, scattering the papers strewn across my desk. I blink, trying to clear the fog of sleep from my mind as I realize I must have dozed off while poring over the latest reports from Granite City. "Come in," I call out, my voice rough. The door swings open, revealing one of my deltas, Ryder Thorn. He enters the room, his posture stiff and his expression guarded. I can sense his unease. the 14:43 5/7/ 18 Lucas Realization (1) way he seems to be holding back. "What is it?" I ask, straightening in my chair. No alpha should be caught sleeping on the job. He clears his throat, his eyes flicking to the mess of documents on my desk before meeting my gaze. "One of our scouts sent an update from Blackwood territory. I thought you'd want to see it immediately. It was sent to my e-mail in urgency in a private attachment, printed, and sealed with no eyes upon the contents." He hands me a sealed envelope, the paper crisp beneath my fingers. I nod, setting it aside for the moment, trying not to show how hard my heart is jolting in my chest. But before I can dismiss him, he speaks again, his tone hesitant. "Alpha, if I may... Do you really need to spend so much time and energy chasing down this girl from the Blackwood Pack? Shouldn't we be focusing on our own pack, on the issues that directly affect us?" Irritation hits me harder than it should. I have always refrained from dismissing sensible inquiries, because shutting down their voices is a slippery slope to 14:43 677 18 Lucas: Realization (1) despotism. Like the Blackwood Pack. And yet, I can't help the words that come out anyway. "Are you questioning my judgment, Delta?" Comment [www.NoVeloRM.com](http://www.NoVeloRM.com)

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