



45 Chapter 45 The Truth Beneath the Surface

Elara 1

Hannah caught up with me outside the store, as she asked hesitantly, "Elara, are you okay?"

I took a deep breath and turned to face her, feeling restless energy under my skin. "Hannah, there's something I need to tell you."

"Zack and I used to date."

Hannah's jaw dropped. She looked shocked and confused. She clearly hadn't figured that out.

"Remember when you called about his Luna announcement?" I gave a bitter laugh.

"You've been wondering about my relationship with Selina..." I continued, finally telling the truth. "Selina is my stepfather's daughter. My mother loves her way more than me."

I shrugged, trying to look casual though I was still angry. "But it doesn't matter anymore. I'm done trying to make her happy."

"Elara..." Hannah's eyes filled with tears, clearly feeling bad for me. "I'm such an idiot! If I'd known about you and Zack, I never would have



done those stupid things!"

I could see her remembering all those times she'd invited me to pack parties where Zack and Selina showed off their relationship. The camping trip where they targeted me.

"Elara, yell at me, hit me, anything! I was so stupid!" Hannah said, looking totally guilty.

I smiled, feeling lighter now that the truth was out. "Don't be silly. Why would I blame you? You didn't know. I hid it from you."

Hannah hugged me tight, getting protective. "Elara, if you need to cry, I'm here!"

I knew if this happened to Hannah, she would be crushed. But I just smiled, feeling surprisingly okay. "I'm fine, really. I got over it a long time ago."

"And there's something else, Hannah. I'm married now."

"To Dominic."

Hannah's mouth opened in shock. "A-Alpha King?"

"Oh my God, Elara! You married the most powerful Alpha in this entire region!" Hannah's voice dropped to almost a whisper. "That



explains everything. But wait..." Hannah bit her lip, looking worried. "Isn't he... you know, a total playboy? You're not just his cover story, are you?"

I could see the worry in her eyes. Hannah wanted to protect me. She thought I deserved someone who would really love me, not someone using me to hide the truth.

"It's not what you think. He's actually gay, so I'm totally safe around him," I explained calmly. "Dominic and I have an arrangement. Marriage on paper only - a one-year contract. After that, we divorce."

"I get full control of my father's hotel shares, and he gets his family off his back. His personal life is his business."

Hannah nodded slowly, understanding.

"Elara, I swear I won't tell anyone about this, especially not Zack!" Hannah clenched her fist with excitement. "I can't wait to see his face when he finds out you married the Alpha King. He's going to lose his mind!"

I laughed at her excitement. Using Dominic to make Zack jealous had never been my plan. From the start, this marriage was just a business deal to get my company shares.



"Elara, I know I'm not the toughest wolf in the pack, but if Dominic ever hurts you, I'll personally kick his royal ass!" Hannah promised.

"Just be careful. His social circle is pretty wild, and there are rumors about... diseases and stuff..." Her eyes went wide as she realized what she'd said. "Not that I'm trash-talking your husband! Just... keep everything strictly business, okay? No physical contact!"

Suddenly, I remembered yesterday's kiss, and heat rushed to my cheeks. My wolf practically purred at the memory.

"Don't worry, I won't," I told her, even as my body remembered how Dominic's lips felt.

Once burned, twice careful. After Zack's betrayal, my wolf and I had agreed - we would never be stupid enough to fall first again.

Hannah was scrolling through her phone when she suddenly stopped, her face scrunching up in disgust. "Elara, isn't this your husband?"

I leaned over to look at the screen, my eyebrow shooting up at the sensational headline:

"Scandal Alert! Alpha King Caught on Video with Male Model! Luna Wolfe Left Humiliated!"



"Pretty over the top," I said dryly. But something twisted in my stomach as I stared at the blurry photo of Dominic with some gorgeous guy. Something that felt suspiciously like jealousy, which was ridiculous.

Hannah's face turned red with anger, her protective instincts kicking in full force. "Aren't you angry? That jerk! I actually thought he might be decent. I'm not judging, but couldn't he at least keep his affairs private? This is so disrespectful to you!"

I found myself in the weird position of defending my fake husband, my voice staying surprisingly steady. "Don't be upset. I'm the one who's supposedly being humiliated, and I'm not bothered."

Hannah stared at me like I'd grown a second head, her hands gesturing wildly. "Elara, you're too nice! He's going to walk all over you! Even if this is fake, you still deserve basic respect!"

I forced a smile, shoving down the uncomfortable knot in my chest. "You can't get hurt if you don't let yourself care. I've always been clear about what I want from this marriage."

"Don't worry about me, girl," I told her, my



voice a little too bright as I pushed away the weird flash of possessiveness that had absolutely no right to exist.

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