

A Warrior's Second Chance

Chapter 5

FAYE The pounding in my head greeted me the moment I opened my eyes. I groaned, pressing my palms against my temples. Maybe a shower would help. Maybe it would wash away more than just sweat...the ache, the memories, the nightmare that wasn't a nightmare at all. Because everything that happened last night had been real. I stood under the steaming water longer than I needed to, letting it scald my skin just enough to keep me grounded. No amount of heat could burn away the betrayal, but I needed to be composed. Today, I was leaving Silver Hollow. Today, I would go with Alexander, my mate by duty... to the Blood Crescent Pack. When I stepped back into my room, a fresh towel wrapped around me, I paused in surprise. "Mom?" My mother sat on the edge of the bed, eyes fixed on the mess that had become my room. Clothes, books, pieces of my old life scattered across the floor like broken memories. She didn't look at me right away. "Have you forgotten you need to pack?" Her tone was sharp, but her eyes told a different story... red-rimmed and glassy, trying too hard to look stern. I sighed. "I'll do it... once I'm dressed." She said nothing, but her gaze lingered. I could tell she saw through me...past the calm face I'd forced on, into the quiet storm inside. She knew I wasn't meant to be the one packing up. That this wasn't the path anyone had prepared me for. And that maybe, that's why I hadn't touched a single bag. "How are you feeling, by the way? Did you get any sleep?" she asked me genuinely. I wanted to say so many things... to scream, to cry, to ask why, but I'd already made a decision. No more whining, no more asking questions that wouldn't change anything. I would face whatever was coming with my head high. "Yes Mom, I slept well." I slipped into a simple dress, nothing too soft, nothing too delicate. Just something that wouldn't wrinkle easily under pressure... like me, I hoped. As I reached for the nearest bag to start packing, my mother stood. "Let me help," she offered gently. "You look... tired." I paused, meeting her eyes. There it was... the barely hidden tremble in her lips, the forced calm, the brave mother routine. She was trying not to cry in front of me. She always did that...pretended everything was fine until

the cracks were too wide to ignore. I must have inherited that trait. "Thank you, mom," I said softly. "But I can do it." She sighed and sat back down. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay. That's why I came." For a moment, the silence between us said more than words ever could. And then, without saying anything more, I turned back to my bags and began to pack. — After a moment, the room became quiet...too quiet. My mother was gone. I hadn't heard her leave. Guilt pricked at me, maybe I'd been too hard on her. "Of course you were," I could hear my wolf, Nova judging. But softening now? That would crack everything open. If I let myself be gentle, I might collapse in her arms and cry like I used to when I was little. I didn't need babying, not today. I needed to be strong. A few minutes later, my mom returned, this time tapping lightly on the door before easing it open. "Breakfast is ready," she said softly. I didn't turn around. "I'm not hungry, mom. Seriously, I don't think I can swallow anything right now." She stood still for a moment, then sighed. "Faye, how can you say that? You barely ate anything yesterday. The ceremony kept you so busy..." The word ceremony sliced through me like ice. My hand froze for a moment. Ceremony, Mating, Jason. I had imagined waking up this morning in his arms...warm, safe, loved. Instead, Sage had been the one in his arms. And I was here, folding clothes and packing for a future I never saw coming, bound to a stranger with eyes like frost. "I said I'm not hungry," I replied, my voice tighter now. Mom stepped closer. "You need to eat something, please. You can't go anywhere on empty stomach." This time, I didn't hold back. "I'm not sitting at that table, Mom. Not with her, and definitely not with him if he's there. I don't trust myself not to... not to lose it," I said, and I meant every word. She didn't say anything. I wondered if she could finally see the emotions I'd kept buried all morning. The ones I tried to hide under flat expressions and cold tones. Then, gently, she stepped forward and wrapped her arms around me. I didn't cry. But something in that hug steadied me. Not because it made the pain go away, but because it reminded me that someone still saw me in all this mess. "She's not coming," my mother whispered. "Sage. She won't be at the table." Of course. She'd probably be having a private breakfast with Jason. Like lovers do after a long night together. Naturally. I nodded stiffly and followed my mother to the door, my steps heavy., but at least I was

moving. Halfway there, she turned slightly, trying... always trying...to make things better. "Faye... she's still your sister...your twin sister. No matter what's happened, she's—" I stopped. "Mom," I said sharply, cutting her off. "Do you want me to come to breakfast or not?" Her mouth closed, the rest of her sentence dying on her lips. I didn't want a sermon, not this morning, and certainly not from the one person I needed to just let me be angry, hurt, and betrayed without being told to forgive too soon. She nodded silently, and together, we walked down the hall.