

A Warrior's Second Chance

Chapter 6

1666 Words

Breakfast had gone by in near silence. Everyone seemed to be walking on eggshells, careful not to stir the air wrong...not because of the food, but because of me and my emotions of course. I ate what I could manage, barely tasting any of it, and left the table as soon as it was acceptable. As I made my way back to my room, I noticed someone standing just outside my door, back turned to me. Tall, broad-shouldered, dressed in black. I didn't need to ask who it was. I only needed to know what he was doing there. "What are you doing in my room?" I asked flatly, not bothering to mask my irritation. Alexander turned slowly, those cold grey eyes meeting mine without a flicker of emotion. "Is that how you were raised to greet your mate first thing in the morning?" he asked coolly. "No 'good morning'? No courtesy?" I crossed my arms. "Good morning," I said carelessly. "Now, what are you doing in my room?" He didn't answer. Instead, his gaze sharpened. "Check your tone when you speak to me." I blinked at him, unimpressed. Is he being serious right now? "I walked into my room and found you standing here like some abandoned ghost, so forgive me if I don't feel the need to curtsy." His jaw twitched, just slightly, enough to tell me I'd hit a nerve, but otherwise, he didn't react. He simply brushed past my question as if it had been a fly in the air. "I came to inform you," he said, voice clipped, "that I'm leaving." I raised a brow. So he expected me to just run and grab my bags to follow him? He'd be shocked to know I hadn't even started anything yet. And I didn't really care. "That's too bad. Because as you can see, I'm barely figuring out what to pack and what not to. So, no, I'm not ready yet, you have to wait," I said. "Firstly, you won't need to pack anything," he replied calmly. "Arrangements have already been made. Anything you need will be provided for you." If someone else had said that, maybe it would've sounded thoughtful...romantic, even. But coming from this man? It made me feel like a stray dog someone had taken pity on. My irritation surged. "How generous," I said. "Anything else,

Your Highness?" "Yes," he said. "Secondly, you're not coming with me." I blinked. "What?" Did I hear him right? "There's something I need to attend to," he explained. "Someone will be here tomorrow morning to collect you." I narrowed my eyes. "We were supposed to leave together. Can't you just go handle whatever and I'll..." He smirked. "Careful. If I didn't know better, I'd think you couldn't wait to follow me. Getting a little carried away already, are we?" The audacity of this man could drive me insane. But I wasn't going to go easy on him either. I mirrored his smirk. "Funny. You're the one who changed your mind on a spot immediately you saw me, remember? So quick to accept me in place of Sage. That felt a little too desperate... Alpha Alexander." The twitch at the corner of his mouth betrayed the hit. A crack in his perfect mask. But instead of responding, he simply turned toward the door. "See you tomorrow," he said smoothly, and walked out. I stared after him, a hint of satisfaction warming my chest. Annoying him might just be the only enjoyable part of this arrangement. — ALEXANDER The door clicked shut behind me, and I slid into the back seat of the car. Roland nodded from the driver's seat and pulled off as I settled back, trying to shake off the tension that clung to me like smoke. But it lingered. Faye. Even now, with miles starting to stretch between us, she was still in my head. Not for good reasons...no, not at all. She had a way of digging under my skin...deliberate, sharp, like she enjoyed provoking me. The way she looked at me, the way she spoke to me. Like she wasn't impressed. Like nothing about me was worth her respect. She did it on purpose, I was sure of it. And still, beneath all my irritation, my wolf, Aiden, stirred... entertained. "She disrespects you to your face," I muttered to myself. "And you enjoy the challenge," Aiden said. "I do not," I said. I realized I was scowling at the tinted glass as my own voice echoed in the quiet car. "Maybe I do enjoy the challenge," I said under my breath. "Sir?" Roland's voice came carefully from the front. "Sorry, did you say something?" I blinked. Had I said that out loud? "Never mind," I said quickly, leaning back and running a hand down my face. Great. Now I was voicing thoughts I didn't even know I had. — BLOOD CRESCENT PACK HOUSE As we pulled into the pack house driveway, I spotted Irene on the front steps, practically bouncing on her toes. Her face lit up with excitement...the kind I hadn't seen in years. That was

the problem with my sister: she loved fairytales, and today she'd decided to cast herself as the welcoming committee for the prince and his new princess. Roland hadn't even killed the engine before she was halfway down the stairs. I stepped out of the car, and she launched herself at me in a hug that nearly knocked the air out of my lungs. "Oh my Goddess, you're back! How did it go? Where is she?" Her words spilled out fast, one tumbling over the other. She didn't wait for an answer. She darted to the passenger side, then to the backseat, craning her neck to peek inside like she'd lost something in there. Of course, she, like everyone else, had been expecting me to arrive with my mate...the new Luna. The grand prize of a successful mating ceremony. I watched her eyes scan every inch...back seat, foot mats, even the front passenger side. What did she think? That I tied my mate up and stuffed her in the glove compartment? "Irene," I said, rubbing my forehead. She was probably scanning the floorboards now...not wanting to face reality. "Is she hiding? Is she shy? Alex, don't tell me you made her..." "Irene," I said again, sharper this time. "She's not here." She froze. Slowly, she turned to face me. "What do you mean she's not here? You called. You said it was successful, the whole pack is waiting. Everyone's...Alex, what happened?" "I'll explain inside." I didn't have the patience to keep repeating myself, and certainly not out in the open where the rest of the house could peer through the windows and start their own commentary. Irene followed me, her excitement now turned into confusion and irritation. We were just heading up the steps when my beta, Cole stepped out. The grin on his face told me he'd been hoping to see something worth teasing me about for the next month. His eyes darted behind me, then inside the car. When he didn't see what he expected, the grin fell like a dying ember. Still, he gave a polite nod. "Alpha Alexander" "Cole." Unlike my sister, he was considerate enough not to ask anything yet. He could read the air... I pushed the door open and stepped inside. — As soon as we stepped into the house, I didn't bother with formalities or greetings, I headed straight for my office. Irene and Cole trailed behind, thankfully quiet for once. The door shut behind us, and I sank into the leather chair behind my desk. I could feel their eyes on me—full of questions, confusion, maybe even a little fear. I didn't blame them. The moment called for clarity, not comfort. "I need to tell you

both something,” I started, my fingers drumming once on the armrest before folding into my lap. “There was... a change. A slight one.” Irene raised an eyebrow. Cole folded his arms. I took a breath. “The twin who was promised to me—Sage—she wasn’t the one I ended up being mated to.” They both stared at me like I’d just spoken in tongues. Then their eyes shifted to each other, exchanging the silent panic of people who knew how deep this might go. Cole was the first to speak. “What do you mean?” he asked, brows furrowed. “You didn’t end up mated to her? Did the ceremony fail?” “No,” I said, shaking my head. “It went through. Just... not with Sage.” I could see Irene’s patience thinning, so I pushed forward. “Sage gave herself to someone else before the ceremony...willingly. Her sister—Faye—was offered in her place. We completed the ritual. She bears the mark now.” Irene took a sharp breath. “Alex, that’s not good.” I sighed, leaning back. I knew what was coming. “They promised you Sage,” she continued. “Sisters or not, they broke the agreement. The elders won’t care that it was a twin. The alliance was supposed to be built on a specific bond...on her. You going through with it without telling them—goddess, they’re going to lose it.” “I know,” I muttered. “That’s why I came back ahead of her. Faye’s still with her pack. I needed to prepare the ground here before she shows up.”

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Cole exhaled slowly, his eyes narrowed. “This isn’t going to be easy. Some of the council already think we gave too much in the negotiations. If they think you let sentiment or desperation make this decision...” “It wasn’t desperation,” I said firmly. I can’t believe Cole of all people would believe I made such an important decision out of desperation. “It was strategy. If I refused, it would’ve collapsed the treaty on the spot. They offered an alternative, and I took it. I couldn’t afford to make enemies in that moment.” Irene ran a hand through her hair. “Are you really ok with this?” I looked at her. “That doesn’t

matter.” She scoffed. “It will. Especially if the elders think she’s a consolation prize.” “She’s not,” I said quietly, more to myself than to them. Because even now, hours after the ceremony, my mind kept circling back to the strange calm in Faye’s eyes, the strength in her voice, the way she didn’t flinch when the mark burned into her skin. She hadn’t asked for this, but she didn’t run either, she brave. She wasn’t Sage. And maybe that was the point. Cole was still looking at me like I’d completely lost my mind. If there was anyone, apart from Irene, who could speak to me without holding back, it was him...and not just because he was my beta. We’d been through everything together since we were boys. He didn’t need permission to question my decision. “You have no idea what’s coming, Alpha Alexander,” he said, his tone sharp with disbelief. “The elders are going to flip. You made a decision they were supposed to be consulted on, and you didn’t even give them the courtesy of a heads-up. That alone is bad. But if this gets out to the pack...” I didn’t respond at first. I understood where he was coming from, I had already thought about it all through last night after the ceremony. I met his stare squarely. “I’ve mated with her, Beta Cole,” I said firmly. “The bond is sealed, and there’s no going back now.” Cole sighed under his breath and shook his head like he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. I turned to Irene, half-hoping she might see it from my side, but her brows were drawn together, lips tight. I guess I’m on my own. “You know this isn’t going to sit well with the council,” she said. “They’ll see it as a broken promise...Sage was the one chosen, and even though Faye is her twin, that doesn’t change the fact that you were promised someone else. And then you went ahead with the mating without their blessing? Alexander, you know how they are. What were you thinking?” “I know all that, Irene,” I said. Irene exchanged another look with Cole. Neither of them seemed convinced. “And like Cole was trying to say, even if you can get the elders to swallow this, you’re not thinking about the pack. If word spreads—and it will—they’ll see Faye as nothing more than a replacement. That’s not something you can control just by barking orders.” That got under my skin. I sat up straighter and let the weight of my voice fill the room. “Replacement or not, she’s my mate, which makes her Luna. And anyone...elder, warrior, kitchen hand, anyone at all...who thinks otherwise will have to deal with me directly.” Irene

didn't flinch. Maybe she understood why I did it, or maybe she was just bracing for the fallout. "I'll speak to the elders tonight," I added. "They deserve to hear it from me, not through whispers or gossip. I'll make it clear that this was my call...and that it stands. I stood up because I needed to stretch my legs and ease the stiffness from the trip, but mostly because I was exhausted and just wanted to lie down for a while. Before I left the room, I turned to Cole. "Let the elders know I'm back," I said. "We'll have a meeting later tonight." He gave a short nod and stepped aside so I could pass. As I walked through the hall, a few pack members crossed my path and greeted me. I could see the curiosity in their eyes, the unspoken question hanging between every nod and bow: Did he return with the Luna? None of them dared ask, of course....smart of them. I wasn't in the mood for questions, especially not ones I hadn't answered for myself. Once I stepped into my chambers, I shut the door behind me and sighed. I peeled off my jacket, tossed it over the back of a chair, and sank into it with more weight than I meant to. My shoulders ached, but not half as much as my head. Truth be told, I hadn't thought any of this through. When the elders of Silver Hollow pack first brought up the idea of Faye—a replacement, as if a promised mate could be swapped like a broken weapon—I'd rejected it without hesitation. I was clear, certain. I didn't want a stand-in for what I'd lost. But then... she walked into the room. Faye. And without even pausing to think, I heard myself say I'd take her. Now, here I was...Alpha of one of the most powerful pack...trying to figure out how the hell I was going to get everyone else to go along with it. "Why in the world did I do that? And why do I not regret it as I should?" "Maybe because we like her." The voice came from deep within. Aiden, my wolf. I rolled my eyes and leaned back in the chair. "I didn't ask for your opinion." "You didn't need to. I'm just saying...I mean nothing has ever changed your mind so fast." I exhaled slowly and closed my eyes, pressing my fingers to my temples.

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A knock at the door jolted me awake. I blinked, disoriented. My muscles were stiff, my shirt rumpled. I must've passed out the moment I sat down, and the dimness in the room told me evening had already arrived. The trip had taken more out of me than I thought. "Come in," I called, rubbing my eyes and sitting upright. The door creaked open and Cole stepped in. "Alpha Alexander, the elders are waiting," he said evenly. I glanced at my watch. Shit...I'd meant to rest for ten minutes. Apparently, my body had other plans. "Let them know I'm on my way," I said, pushing myself off the couch. Cole gave a small nod and exited, closing the door behind him. I stood for a second, willing my thoughts to align. Then I headed to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and splashed cold water on my face. I stared at my reflection for a moment, the water dripping down my jaw. No time to dwell on anything now. The elders would be waiting with their arms crossed and their judgments sharpened like blades. The Blood Crescent elders had to be the most petty, paranoid, and power-hungry council members you can imagine. Even my father, the previous Alpha—gods rest him—struggled to maintain control over them. But I wasn't my father. I had my own way of keeping wolves in line. By the time I made it down the corridor and entered the council chamber, I could already hear the low, agitated murmurs, and I wondered if gossip had already reached them that I returned alone. The moment the door opened and they saw me, the noise died as if someone had flipped a switch. "Alpha Alexander," one of them greeted formally. "Elders," I acknowledged with a curt nod and walked to my seat at the head of the long table, and the rest of them took their seats too. I didn't waste time. "You all know the reason for my trip to Silver Hollow," I began, leveling a hard gaze across the room. "I went to claim the mate promised to me since the alliance agreement." A few of them leaned forward, while others stilled, waiting. "Upon my arrival," I continued, "I was informed that the girl, Sage...had already given herself to another, which meant she was no longer qualified." The reaction was immediate. "What?" "How dare they!" "That's an insult to our pack!" "So Alpha Damian spat on the agreement and thinks we'll just accept it?" I raised my hand. "Let me finish." The noise died, though I could see the tension, tightening jaws and clenching fists. "In response," I said, "they offered me the twin sister, Faye." An elder, Brayden, scoffed. "So we were insulted,

then mocked. They offered the spare...what a joke!" "They dared assume we'd accept a lesser offering?" snarled another. I remained composed. I'd predicted this word for word, so I wasn't even surprised, or bothered in the real sense of it. "This is beyond disrespect," Brayden added, his voice rising. "This severs the alliance." Cole, standing just behind me, spoke up, his tone even. "Perhaps the Alpha should be allowed to finish." "Unless he's about to say he burned Silver Hollow to the ground, I don't want to hear it," muttered a wolf named Garrick. I'd had enough. "There will be no war," I said sharply. The room went quiet. "No retaliation," I added. "Because I accepted the offer." Silence took over the entire room. "I was mated to Faye," I continued. "The ceremony was completed successfully." For a moment, the chamber was frozen in stunned disbelief, and I knew it was just the calm before the storm. No one moved, no one breathed out loud. Brayden's face contorted first, eyebrows furrowing in confusion, then twisting into disbelief again. "You what?" "I accepted Faye, Sage's twin as my mate," I said again. "She is now Luna of the Blood Crescent, and she'll be joining the pack tomorrow." The uproar was worse than before. "That's impossible—" "You dishonor your title—" "We were played! You can't possibly mean to let this stand!" "You should have consulted the elders." "Enough," I snapped. They went quiet again, though the anger in the room was obvious. I stood slowly, leaning my hands on the table. "This council doesn't tell me who I take as mate, the gods chose her. The success of the mating ceremony confirmed it, and she bares the mark now." "The gods chose Sage," Garrick argued. "She was promised." "Promises made by men can be broken by men. The gods made no such vow. Faye is my mate and your Luna. And that's final," I said. "Alpha Alexander, that was not the right way to handle the situation. The elders of this council were supposed to be consulted first," Garrick said. "I understand that I should have informed you before taking the decision, but even though I didn't, I believe I took the right step by giving the alliance another chance," I said. They probably hate me more than they hate Alpha Damian right now, but I don't really care. "I expect you all to extend full recognition to Luna Faye," I said, voice hard. "She will be introduced formally to the pack in the coming days." Brayden opened his mouth but I cut him off. "This discussion is over." Brayden never lacks a comeback, he

always has something to say. He fancies himself the wisest of them all, and it makes me sick. I turned and walked out of the chamber before they could protest again. Cole caught up with me in the hallway. "That went well," he said dryly. "They'll fall in line...they always do," I said. He arched a brow. "Don't be so fast to assume that. Did you see their faces when you said the discussion was over?" "I've done well to let them know the latest development, anyone of them is free to do their worst. Then I'll remind them what happens to wolves who forget their place." Cole gave a short, sharp nod. "I'll see you later," he said before turning towards another hallway. As I moved down the corridor, my mind wasn't on the council. It was on Faye. On the way her eyes narrowed when she was angry. The way her mouth curved, not quite into a smile, but something wittier...sharper. The way she stood toe-to-toe with me when I pushed her. I told the elders I accepted her because I wanted to give the alliance another chance. That was true. But there was more...she challenged me, confused me, got under my skin. And I hated how much I didn't really hate it.

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SILVER HOLLOW FAYE I needed air, I couldn't stay in that house a second longer...not with all the whispers, the forced smiles, the weight of everything pressing down on my chest. I thought I could handle it, but it still stings. I walked out into the woods behind the pack house, hoping to catch my breath. Tonight, Jason became Alpha of Silver Hollow, and my sister—Sage—sat where I was supposed to be as his Luna. I was supposed to be long gone before this celebration even started, but Alpha Alexander left without me. He said someone would come for me tomorrow. Just like that, like I was luggage to be picked up...like I hadn't just been handed off to a stranger to salvage an alliance. I didn't realize anyone was following me until I heard my name. "Faye." I stopped and turned...it was him. Jason. He was still wearing the same ceremonial cloak from the crowning ceremony. There were pine needles in his hair. His expression was half smug, half... I don't know, something else. Like he still thought he had some kind of claim over me. I didn't want to look at him, but I held my ground. "What do you want, Alpha Jason?" He gave me that stupid

smirk. "You don't have to call me that. Come on, Faye, we both know things could've gone differently. You were supposed to be the one sitting beside me tonight as Luna." I stared at him, my nails dug into my palms. He went on like he hadn't just ripped me in half. "But fate had other plans...I saw something in Sage, something I couldn't ignore. I know you only found out yesterday, but it didn't just start yesterday...we wanted to tell you but the time never felt right." "Oh, did you?" I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm. "At what point did you finally decide it was better I found out myself, was it before or after you marked her while still mated to me?" He flinched...barely, but I saw it. Good. "Look, I know it wasn't ideal," he said, trying to sound reasonable. "But everything happened so fast, I didn't plan for things to go that way." "You didn't plan?" I almost laughed. "That's your excuse? So what, you just... fell into bed with my sister? By accident?" "I was confused, alright?" he snapped, then softened his voice again. "You know how complicated these bonds can be, I didn't want to hurt you." "You didn't want to hurt me?" I repeated, voice rising. "Jason, you almost destroyed me." He stepped closer, and I could smell his scent... it used to draw me in, but now it just makes me want to hold my breath. "I just don't want bad energy between us, Faye. I know you're leaving soon, but the packs are allied now. We should be able to move forward... stay friends." Friends. I looked at him like he'd lost his mind. "Let me get this straight. You humiliated me, broke our bond without warning, and paraded my sister in front of me as your Luna—and now you want to be friends?" I know I was supposed to just brush everything off and act like I didn't care, but the wound is still fresh, how could I not care? "Faye," he said, reaching for my arm, "I never stopped caring about you...I swear." I pulled away instantly. "Don't." "Just hear me out—" "No, Jason! You had your chance to talk. You had every chance to be honest." "You have no idea what it was like," he said, frustration creeping in. "I had pressure from the elders, from my father, from the pack. Sage—she was there, and she understood me in ways you didn't." I laughed...cold and bitter. "Wow! So now it's my fault? I didn't understand you? Is that your justification for betrayal?" "That's not what I'm saying," he muttered. "Don't twist my words." "Then maybe say what you mean for once," I shot back. "Instead of hiding behind excuses and half-truths." He

sighed and raked a hand through his hair. "Look, I didn't come here to fight." "Then why are you here?" I demanded. "To ease your guilt? To see if I still care? What exactly do you want from me, Alpha Jason?" He hesitated. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay." I stared at him for a long moment. "You don't get to care now." I turned to leave, but then he grabbed my arm. I froze. "I'm not here to fight," he said quickly, still holding on to me. "I just didn't want you to stay mad at me. Please, Faye." I looked down at his hand like it disgusted me... It did actually. "Let go of me," I said through gritted teeth. "And don't ever try that again...not even in your dreams." He raised both hands in mock surrender and released me. "Okay, okay. No need to get hostile. I'm just saying... maybe we can forget what happened and start over." I actually laughed. "Oh really?" I asked, raising a brow. "You want me to forget that I walked in on you and my sister in bed on the night of our mating ceremony? Or forget that neither of you had the decency to even look sorry?" He stepped closer, reaching out again like a fool. So I slapped him...hard. SLAP! The sound echoed through the trees. Birds scattered above us. "Don't you ever touch me again," I said coldly. "How dare you." He just stood there, holding his cheek, stunned. "You don't get to rewrite this story, Jason," I added, voice low. "You made your choice. You threw me away like I meant nothing, so don't come crawling back trying to make it right now. Go back to your Luna...go back to your lies." He swallowed hard, still stunned silent. "Enjoy your crown," I whispered. "Just don't choke on it."

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Then Sage appeared, apparently having seen me slap Jason from a distance on her way to fetch her beloved mate.

Her brows were furrowed, her arms swinging at her sides as she stormed toward us, yelling, “How dare you slap Jason?” before rushing to his side like some overprotective guardian.

She gently touched his arm, brushing his shoulder like she thought she was comforting him. “What are you even doing here?” she asked him, her voice shifting from anger to concern as quickly as a flick of a switch.

Jason, like a good little puppy, straightened himself up and replied, “I saw her walking into the woods and I thought... I thought she might be going to hurt herself. I mean, she’s been distant since the bond broke, and seeing you and I together has been hard on her, so I just... I wanted to make sure she was okay. That’s all.”

He glanced at me as if expecting me to validate that version of the story, I didn’t. I just raised a brow.

“She told me to leave her alone,” he went on, playing victim now. “I didn’t listen, and then she slapped me.”

Sage gasped and cupped his cheek dramatically, turning his face so she could examine it. “You poor thing,” she whispered like we were in some twisted romantic drama. Then she turned her attention back to me, angry. “I know you’re still upset that Jason chose me instead of *you*, and that makes you want to ruin our day,” she accused.

I blinked, slowly.

“But you have your own mate too, don’t you? That should be consolation enough. There’s no need to be this bitter,” she continued. “Especially when all he did was try to stop you from doing something stupid to yourself.”

My lips twitched into a smirk. I was supposed to feel angry, embarrassed maybe, but honestly? I just felt... sorry *for* the both of them.

Jason, acting like a coward in front of Sage, twisting the truth so she wouldn’t be upset. And This chapter is updated by find*~*novel.net

Sage, swallowing every word that came out of his mouth like it was the purest form of truth. I didn’t know which of them was more pathetic.

“Are you done?” I asked.

Sage raised her chin. “No. You should apologize.”

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I tilted my head. “To who?”

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“To Jason,” she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.
“You slapped him, and that’s assault. He’s the Alpha now.”

I let out a short laugh. “Is that supposed to scare me?”

Jason stepped in, looking uncomfortable. “Faye... maybe you could just say you’re sorry, and we can all move past this.”

“Jason,” I said, calmly. “You followed me even when I told you not to. You cornered me in the woods with your unsolicited concern and tried to guilt me into talking to you. That slap was restraint.”

His mouth parted, but nothing came out. Sage, however, wasn’t as easily stunned.

“He’s the Alpha!” she repeated, this time with more emphasis. “You don’t get to disrespect him like that. You could be punished.”

“Punished by who?” I asked, eyes locking onto hers.

She opened her mouth to reply but I cut her off.

“Jason is the Alpha of Silver Hollow. Technically, I am not a member of this pack anymore. That means he is not my Alpha. And you,” I smiled slightly, “are definitely not my Luna.”

That silenced her for a second. Jason looked at her, then at me.

“You think that changes anything? You’re still a Silver Hollow wolf by birth,” Sage said, folding her arms.

I nodded. “Actually, yes. It changes a lot. I’m mated to Alpha Alexander of the Blood

Crescent.”

That got their attention.

“And so? His authority does not extend to our territory,” Sage spat.

“You can keep telling yourself that if it helps you sleep. But let’s just say... if even a single hair on my head is out of place when they come for me tomorrow, I wouldn’t want to be in the position of having to explain that to Alpha Alexander.”

Sage's confidence faltered, and she took a step back. Jason still looked like he didn't know

what to say.

I turned to walk away, but of course, she wasn't done.

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"So what? You think being Alpha Alexander's mate makes you untouchable?"

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I looked over my shoulder with a cool smile. "I don't think it, I know it. And you know it too,

dear sister.”

Jason finally spoke up. “Faye, it didn’t have to come to this. We could’ve handled it

differently.”

I scoffed. “You had your chance to handle things better, but you chose betrayal. *You* rejected me after I caught you. And now you want to play the good guy? Sorry, Jason, that version of you doesn’t exist in my story anymore.”

He frowned. “That’s not fair, I never wanted to hurt you.”

I stepped closer, just enough so he had no choice but to hear me. “But you did...”

Sage interjected, clearly bothered. “You’re just using Alexander as a rebound, that’s why you agreed to be my replacement. He’ll get tired of you and realize he doesn’t want a mate like

you.”

“Then let him,” I replied. “But I’ll still have more dignity than you—because at least I didn’t throw myself at him.”

Jason flinched, and Sage’s nostrils flared.

I started walking again.

Jason called after me, desperation finally peeking through. “Faye, wait—‘

I didn’t stop.

“Faye!”

This time I paused but didn’t turn around. “Yes?”

He hesitated. “I *know* things ended badly between us...” He stopped himself.. I’m sure he realized Sage wouldn’t have liked whatever it was he wanted to say. “I..I didn’t follow you to hurt you, I just didn’t want you to feel alone,” he finally added. A more polished version of whatever he had in mind, I guess.

I faced him. “Then maybe next time, respect someone’s silence. Not everyone who walks away is broken. Sometimes we just don’t want to be followed.”

Sage’s voice was lower now. “You’re so rude you know? You really think Alpha Alexander’s going to protect you forever? You think being his mate gives you power?”

Seriously, why does she seem so concerned about that part?

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I turned fully to face them, the wind catching the loose strands of my hair. “No. I don’t need Alexander to protect me, and you of all people should know that. But I know he would, if he has to. Just like I would protect him if the tables were turned, that’s what being mated means. That’s what loyalty looks like...”

Sage was quiet now, and Jason looked... lost.

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