



Chapter 11



Sunday afternoon, my Portland apartment feels too small the second I open the door to find both Fenris brothers standing in the hallway.

I didn't give them this address. Didn't send directions or suggest they visit. Kieran found it anyway—probably had investigators tracking me since the day I walked into his office.

The realization should piss me off. Instead I'm just tired.

"You could have called first," I say, blocking the doorway.

"You would have said no." Kieran's wearing jeans and a sweater instead of his usual suit. Trying to look approachable, less intimidating.

It's not working. He's still six-foot-three of Alpha male radiating intensity on my doorstep.

Lysander's dressed down too, hands in his pockets, that easy smile firmly in place. "We brought pizza. As a peace offering."

"The kids are doing homework."

"Then we'll be quiet." Kieran's already moving forward, not quite pushing past me but making it clear he's coming in whether I invite him or not.

I step aside because what choice do I have? I agreed to this. Slow integration, my schedule, except apparently they're defining "slow" differently than I am.

The kids are sprawled across the living room floor. Orion's got math homework spread out, Luna's reading—of course she is—and Phoenix is

supposed to be practicing writing but is actually drawing wolves in the margins.

Two massive Alpha males walk into our small space and suddenly the apartment feels microscopic.

Orion looks up first.

I watch Kieran's face when their eyes meet—storm-grey locking on identical storm-grey—and something inside him just breaks. His expression cracks wide open, no CEO mask, no controlled Alpha heir. Just raw recognition that hits him with the force of a physical blow.

He goes completely still. Can't look away from the seven-year-old who's a perfect miniature version of himself. Same serious expression, same way of studying someone before speaking, same bone structure that makes my chest hurt to look at.

"Who are you?" Orion asks with that tactical directness that is pure Kieran.

"I'm—" Kieran's voice catches. He clears his throat. "I'm Kieran. This is my brother Lysander. We work with your mom."

Luna's watching Lysander now, head tilted in that analytical way she has. The exact same way Lysander analyzes people, sizing them up before engaging.

Phoenix has zero sense of danger or social boundaries. She abandons her homework and launches herself at Lysander, climbing into his lap before he can react. "Do you want to see my drawings? I'm really good at wolves."

Lysander catches her automatically, adjusts her weight, and I watch something gentle cross his face. "I'd love to see your drawings."

"What kind of car do you drive?" Orion's still staring at Kieran, but now he's interested instead of suspicious.

"Aston Martin," Kieran answers, moving closer, kneeling down to Orion's eye level. "DB11. V12 engine."

"That's fast." Orion's eyes light up with the same interest Kieran shows when talking business strategy. "Can I see it sometime?"

"Anytime you want."

I'm standing in my kitchen doorway watching this scene unfold, and something inside me that's been locked tight for eight years starts to crack. These are their children. Not just biology or DNA results, but actual humans with personalities and interests and Kieran's eyes, Lysander's mannerisms, a combination of both men coded into three impossible kids.

"What's this?" Kieran's picked up Orion's science project—a half-finished volcano that's supposed to erupt tomorrow.

"It's for school. We're studying plate tectonics." Orion launches into an explanation about subduction zones, and Kieran listens with his hands shaking slightly as he holds the papier-mâché volcano.

He keeps looking at Orion, then at me, then back at Orion. Expression saying everything he can't put into words—amazement, grief for what he's missed, desperate want for what he could still have.

"Can you braid hair?" Luna's appeared at Lysander's elbow, holding a hairbrush.

"I can try." Lysander shifts Phoenix to one side, takes the brush, and proceeds to French braid Luna's hair with practiced ease. Better than I usually manage after seven years of doing it.

Luna leans into his hands, comfortable with him already. "You're good at this."

"I had practice." Lysander's smile is soft but there's sadness underneath. "A long time ago."

An hour passes. Then two. Kieran helps Orion with math homework, explains concepts in ways I never could. Lysander reads to Luna from her chapter book, doing voices that make her giggle. Phoenix draws pictures of all five of us—stick figures that she labels carefully, putting "Mama" in the middle.

When Luna announces she's hungry, Kieran's immediately on his phone ordering pizza. "What does everyone like? Orion?"

"Pepperoni."

"Luna?"

"Cheese, please."

"Phoenix?"

"Pineapple!" She announces it with pride, like she knows she's being controversial.

Lysander makes a face. "Pineapple doesn't belong on pizza, sweetheart."

"Does too!"

"Absolutely does not."

And somehow we end up having dinner together. Two Alpha heirs sitting on my worn couch that's seen better days, arguing with seven-year-olds about pizza toppings. Kieran steals bites of Phoenix's pineapple pizza to prove it's terrible, Lysander referees the great debate about whether Die

Hard is a Christmas movie, and Orion explains plate tectonics to anyone who will listen.

It's surreal. Domestic. Everything I've denied them for eight years condensed into one impossible Sunday afternoon.

After dinner, the kids' energy crashes hard. Sugar and excitement wearing off, leaving behind three sleepy children who need baths and bedtime.

"Okay, guys. Say goodnight to our guests."

Phoenix hugs both brothers without hesitation. Luna gives careful, polite hugs. Orion shakes hands—so serious, so much like Kieran—but his grip lingers on Kieran's hand.

"Are you coming back?"

The question hangs in my small living room. Both brothers look at me, waiting for permission I don't want to give and can't afford to withhold.

I force myself to nod.

The relief on their faces is almost painful to witness.

After I tuck the kids in—read three stories, answer forty questions about who those men were, promise yes they can come back—I find Kieran and Lysander standing in my living room exactly where I left them.

They're just staring at me.

Kieran's voice is wrecked when he finally speaks. "They're incredible. They're—"

He can't finish. His hands clench at his sides, throat working as he tries to find words for what just happened.

Lysander's quieter but no less affected. "Thank you." His voice is rough. "Thank you for letting us meet them."

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:

"I said you could." My voice comes out flat because if I let myself feel this, feel what I saw today, I'll fall apart. "I keep my word."

"They look like us." Kieran's still processing. "Orion is—he's me. Everything about him."

"And Luna has your brain," Lysander adds. "That way she analyzes everything before committing. That's pure you."

"Phoenix is both of you," I say. "Your chaos, his strength. Some genetic lottery decided to give her all your dominant traits and none of your self-control."

Kieran moves closer. "How did you do this alone? Raise them, keep them safe, make them into these amazing kids?"

"Because I had to." The words come out harder than I mean them. "You weren't there. Nobody was there. So I figured it out."

"We're here now." Lysander's voice is gentle. "If you let us be."

"I'm not ready to share custody or make this official or—"

"We're not asking for that." Kieran cuts me off. "Not yet. Just let us be here. Let us be part of their lives."

He moves closer still, close enough I have to tilt my head back to meet his eyes. "We're not going anywhere, Thalia. Ever."

The promise in his voice should sound like a threat. Instead it sounds like everything I've been too terrified to want.

End