



Chapter 5



** Present **

Seattle rain assaults the windows of Fenris Law Group's corporate monstrosity like it's personally offended by the building's existence.

Eight years of single motherhood and clawing my way through law school have transformed me from a broken nineteen-year-old to a steel-spined lawyer who fixes rich people's problems.

The girl who ran through the forest pregnant and terrified is gone. Replaced by someone who negotiates corporate acquisitions and doesn't flinch at board room power plays.

Except I'm about to walk into a meeting with the two men who could dismantle everything I've built with a single word.

The memory hits without permission. Seventeen hours into labor in a charity hospital in Portland, alone except for my human best friend Rosalie holding my hand while I screamed.

Orion came first. One look at those storm-grey eyes and Kieran's exact bone structure miniaturized onto a six-pound body, and I knew I was completely, utterly fucked. Luna next—quieter but already judging everyone with Lysander's intensity.

Phoenix last, so small the nurses hovered. But her grip? Pure Alpha strength that no newborn should possess.

One heat. Two Alphas. Three impossible children.

The birth certificate paperwork was my first real choice as their mother. My pen hovered over three identical lines: Father's name.

I could have written Kieran Fenris, Lysander Fenris. Let the system link my children to their fathers and pack lawyers find us within hours.

Or I could write what keeps them safe. "Unknown." Three times. Three lies that became the truth. Then came eight years of absolute chaos.

Three jobs while night-schooling law, formula stains on my only suit, crying in the law library at 2 AM while Rosalie forced me protein bars and reminded me why I couldn't just give up and die.

Eight years of nightmares where Kieran's hands were gentle. Where Lysander's attention wasn't a mind game.

Dreams I drowned with wine and work until my body forgot their scents. Mostly.

The acquisition happened so fast our small firm didn't have time to mount a defense. Fenris Law Group swallowed us whole, all employees "strongly encouraged" to transfer to Seattle or lose severance.

I need this job desperately. Orion's braces cost more than a car payment. Luna's gifted program thinks I shit money. Phoenix's "behavioral intervention specialist" charges rates that should be illegal.

So here I am. Walking into the wolf's den because my kids need

food and shelter and all that basic survival shit.

The elevator rises and my body knows before my brain catches up. Every instinct screams '*danger, danger, abort mission*' as familiar scents hit through the ventilation.

Cedar and smoke. Pine and rain. Mixing together in a way that makes my knees weak even after eight years. Like I'm nineteen again and absolutely fucked.

No. Absolutely not. We do not do this. Body, I swear to Goddess—

The secretary is human, thankfully. She smiles with professional warmth as she leads me down a hallway of glass and steel toward massive oak doors.

"The co-CEOs insist on meeting every new senior associate personally. Standard protocol for executive integration."

Right. Standard protocol.

Nothing to do with the fact that my employee file probably pinged some algorithm, flagging a woman who appeared in Portland eight years ago with suspiciously sparse backgrounds..

When she opens the door, I hear the universe laughing.

Kieran stands by the floor-to-ceiling windows, broader now and fuck me, eight years have turned him from cruel pretty boy into something that should require a warning label.

Six-foot-four of carved muscle wrapped in a Tom Ford suit. His dark hair is shorter now, corporate-approved but still thick enough to make my fingers itch with muscle memory I'm

thick enough to make my fingers itch with muscle memory I'm aggressively ignoring.

Those storm-grey eyes are sharper, colder. Like he spent years perfecting the art of eviscerating people with a glance.

The boy's casual cruelty has been refined into a man's lethal control, every inch the Alpha who grew into his birthright.

Lysander leans against the desk, and of course he looks like sin incarnate crossed with a Wall Street Journal cover story. Where Kieran is ice, Lysander is fire—golden skin, honey-brown hair that's artfully tousled in that 'I definitely spent forty minutes making this look effortless' way.

He's slightly leaner than his brother but every inch is predatory grace, like a panther in a three-piece suit. Those grey eyes are doing that thing where they track my every movement like I'm prey and he's calculating the exact moment to pounce.

The cocky grin I remember has been refined into something that probably makes junior partners wet themselves—equal parts charming and terrifying.

They're both staring at me like I'm a ghost.

Recognition hits like lightning striking twice in the same spot because Goddess hates me. Kieran's coffee mug literally explodes in his grip—ceramic shrapnel everywhere as his hand closes into a fist that could crush diamonds.

Lysander goes statue-still, every muscle coiling like a predator who just spotted dinner. His eyes go pure black, and suddenly I'm nineteen again, pressed against a guest house door.

Shit. Shit. Shitty shit shit.

The scent of my fear must be overwhelming. I force myself not to run. Force myself to stay planted in these heels that cost a week's grocery budget, clutching my portfolio like it's a shield.

Because my children need me and I can't afford to run. Not anymore.

"Ms. Blackwood." Kieran's voice could freeze hell. Though his eyes burn with something that makes my flight response scream louder. "We've been waiting for you."

The possessive undertone in "waiting" makes my spine lock.

Lysander's laugh is razor blades and broken promises. Nothing like the gentle teasing from that night that definitely didn't happen and we're not discussing.

"The runaway wolfless girl finally returns." He pushes off the desk with predatory grace that should be illegal in an office setting. "Tell me, Thalia—where exactly have you been hiding for eight years?"

"Portland." My voice comes out steady, professional, giving away nothing. Years of practice lying to myself are finally paying off. "Morrison & Associates. Senior associate for the last three years."

"Portland." Kieran tastes the word like expensive wine that might be poisoned. "Fascinating. How did you manage to stay hidden?"

"I wasn't hiding." I lied smoothly. "I was building a career."

"I wasn't hiding," I lied smoothly. "I was building a career."

"In our territory." Lysander's closer now, close enough that I can smell wild pine and rain. Close enough to make my body remember things I've spent years trying to forget. "Working in law, our specialty."

He tilts his head. "You didn't think we'd eventually cross paths?"

Actually, I'd been praying to a Moon Goddess I don't believe in that I'd never see either of them again. But the Universe has a sick sense of humor.

"Fenris Law Group has an excellent reputation," I say. Defaulting to corporate speak because it's safer than honesty. "I'm honored to be part of the integration."

"Honored..." Kieran scoffed and moved too—flanking me so I'm trapped between them like the world's worst déjà vu.

Same position as eight years ago, except this time there's no heat excuse for why my body's betraying me, no biological excuse for the way my body responds to their proximity.

End *of* *The* **Chapter**

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