



Chapter 8



The morning starts like any other lie I'm living.

Coffee from the break room that tastes like corporate despair. Emails about discovery deadlines and depositions. The comfortable rhythm of pretending my life isn't a house of cards one strong wind away from total collapse.

Then my inbox pings with a forwarded email from Rosalie.

Subject: FW: Emergency Contact Forms - Blackwood Triplets

My blood turns to ice.

The email was meant for someone else—probably the school secretary—but Rosalie's been helping me coordinate everything from Portland while I'm stuck in Seattle. She must have hit reply-all or forward without thinking, sending the triplets' emergency contact forms straight through the firm's network.

I open it with hands that won't stop shaking. There they are in brutal digital clarity: three names, three birthdates, three sets of information that connect directly to me.

Mother: Thalia Blackwood. Father: Not Listed. Three times.

The firm's IT system logs everything. Every email, every attachment, every goddamn keystroke.

If anyone with access decides to look—

My desk phone rings. Internal line.

"Ms. Blackwood, Mr. Lysander Fenris requests your presence in his office. Immediately."

The assistant's tone says this isn't a request.

Fuck.

I grab my phone to text Rosalie a warning but there's no time. No damage control, no excuse prepared, no way to spin this that doesn't end in disaster.

I walk to the executive floor on legs that feel disconnected from my body. Every step is a countdown to detonation.

His assistant waves me through without a word. The door closes behind me with a click that sounds like a cell locking.

Lysander sits behind his massive desk. The emergency contact forms are spread out in front of him like evidence at a crime scene.

"Sit." His voice is deceptively soft. Dangerous.

I stay standing. "If this is about the Silverton case—"

"Sit. Down."

I sit.

He picks up one of the forms. Studies it with that predatory focus that makes my pulse spike. "Interesting email that came across our network this morning."

My mouth goes dry. "That was a mistake. Personal correspondence that —"

"Three children." He cuts me off, eyes locking on mine. "All age seven. All with you listed as single mother."

His fingers trace the paper where 'Father: Not Listed' appears three times. "So. The wolfless girl who ran away came back with three cubs."

The way he says it—like I'm a fascinating specimen he's dissecting. "Tell me about him."

I force my voice to stay level. "That's not appropriate workplace conversation."

"Puck appropriate." He stands, moves around the desk with that liquid grace that reminds me he's a predator. "Tell me about the father of your children, Thalia."

I stay silent. Every word is a potential trap.

He moves closer. Caging me against the desk, hands braced on either side of my chair.

"Is he human? Some nice, safe man who doesn't know what you are?" His voice drops. "Or another wolf? Someone who actually wanted the wolfless girl?"

The words are cruel but his eyes burn with something raw. Something that looks like pain.

"Did you fall in love?" He leans in, invading my space until I'm drowning in pine and rain. "Did someone finally choose you first?"

I'm trembling. Terrified he's already doing the math, calculating that seven-year-olds means conceived eight years ago. The night I spent with him and his brother in that guest house.

"My personal life isn't your business," I manage. But my voice cracks, betraying everything I'm trying to hide.

His hand cups my face. The gentleness is shocking, completely at odds

with the intensity burning in his eyes.

"Everything about you is my business." His voice goes rough, possessive.

"It has been since the night you disappeared."

His thumb traces my lower lip and I stop breathing. "I searched for you. Three years, Thalia. Hired investigators, tracked every lead, drove myself insane trying to find you."

He leans closer. "And the whole time, you were playing house with someone else? Building a family? Giving him what should have been..."

He stops himself. Jaw clenching so hard I can see the muscle jump.

"Mine."

The word detonates between us.

"Those children should have been mine." His voice goes ragged. "If I hadn't been such a coward. If I'd claimed you properly instead of playing games and letting Lia manipulate everything—"

His confession hangs in the air. Heavy. Devastating.

He presses closer and his scent overwhelms me—pine and rain and something uniquely Lysander that makes my body remember things I've tried to forget.

"I used to imagine it," he admits against my ear. His breath on my skin raises goosebumps I can't control. "If you'd stayed. If I'd been brave enough to claim you in front of the whole pack."

His hand slides to my throat. Not threatening, just feeling my racing pulse.

"Our cubs would have had your eyes. My bone structure. They'd be

beautiful and fierce and absolutely perfect."

He pulls back just enough to meet my gaze. "But you gave that to someone else."

The possessiveness in his voice makes my knees weak. Makes my traitorous body remember exactly what he felt like during my heat.

His mouth moves to my neck. Finding the exact spot where he marked me eight years ago, where his bite left a scar only wolves can see.

When he kisses it, my body remembers him instantly.

The pull I felt during my heat returns with violent force. Biology overriding eight years of running, of hiding, of building walls. His hands slide into my hair and I'm falling into his touch like the broken girl I was, not the woman I've become.

His mouth moves up. Claiming my jaw, my cheek, heading toward my lips.

"Stop." The word rips out of me. "Please."

He freezes. Pulls back just enough to meet my eyes, and the want there is devastating.

"Tell me his name." His voice cracks. "Tell me who got everything I threw away."

The guilt and hunger in his expression breaks something in me. But I force myself to lie, to protect my children the only way I know how.

"He's gone." My voice comes out barely a whisper. "Left before they were even born. It doesn't matter anymore."

Lysander's eyes narrow. Studying me too carefully, seeing through every

word.

"Seven years old," he murmurs. Still holding my face, still close enough that I can feel every word. "Which means conceived eight years ago."

My heart stops.

"Right after that night—"

I jerk away. Grab my bag with shaking hands. "I have to go."

"Thalia—"

"I have to go." I'm already moving toward the door, panic clawing up my throat.

"Don't walk away from me."

His voice holds Alpha command that makes my body want to obey. But I force myself to keep moving, hand on the door handle.

"The timeline, Thalia." His voice stops me. "Eight years ago. That guest house. You, me, and Kieran."

I can hear him doing the math. Hear the exact moment it clicks.

"Were you already pregnant when you ran?"

I don't answer. Don't turn around. Just open the door and flee before he can see the truth written all over my face.

Before he can put together what I've spent eight years hiding.

That the three children with "Father: Not Listed" on their forms?

They have his eyes. And his brother's bone structure.

And the walls I've built to protect them are crumbling faster than I can

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:

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End *of* The Chapter

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Comments

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Gifts

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