

Chapter 12

Third Person's POV

The room was barely a room at all.

Cramped. Damp. Mold clung to the walls like parasites. A single folding cot occupied the far corner, surrounded by a scatter of worn clothes and lifeless daily necessities. The sour scent of mildew hung in the air, thick and suffocating. Cobwebs draped the ceiling like a burial veil.

Kael stood at the doorway, fists clenched at his sides.

His heart pounded with a fury he didn't quite understand—not yet. Not fully.

“Mia,” he growled, his voice tight and low, “what the hell is this? Who let her live in a place like this? She's my sister!”

Mia flinched, clearly startled by his sudden outburst. “Young Master... it was you who told us to arrange her stay here. Don't you remember?”

Kael's mouth opened, a retort forming.

Then—

Nothing.

No words.

Just silence.

The memory crashed down on him.

Eight years ago, when Riley had first been brought home.

He had told her to choose a room.

She picked the one beside his own. He'd refused.

“That's my future study,” he'd said curtly.

She picked the one next to Scarlett's. Again, he refused.

“That'll be Scarlett's art room. Pick another.”

She offered to stay in the attic.

“No way,” he had said. “You're still a daughter of this house. People would laugh if they knew you were staying in an attic.”

Then Mia had spoken. “There's only the storage room left...”

“Fine. Clean it out. She can stay there temporarily.”

He never checked again.

In his mind, it was just another guest room—well-lit, comfortable.
But now, seeing the truth with his own eyes, the lie shattered like glass.
Three years she lived here.
Three years in a mold-ridden cage while servants enjoyed their own full rooms.
Kael couldn't breathe.
He couldn't think.
The guilt hit him in waves, cold and merciless.
Mia wrung her hands, voice trembling. "The storage room is too damp. Maybe... maybe we should let Miss Riley sleep in my quarters tonight."
"No."
The word came like a whipcrack.
Kael tightened his hold on Riley's unconscious form, jaw taut with tension and shame.
"Tell Theo to come. Tell him to meet me in my room."
He didn't wait for a response. He turned, carried Riley through the villa like a man possessed.
Behind him, Mia's eyes misted with relief.
At last, she thought, the young master sees her.
Five minutes later, the bedroom door slammed open.
Theo stepped in—his voice preceding him, dry with sarcasm. "Kael, for the love of the Goddess, how obsessed are you with your sister? Scarlett's sick and you drag her all the way to your—"
His words stopped cold.
Because it wasn't Scarlett on the bed.
It was Riley.
Her face pale as death, her frame limp and crumpled, curled against the pillows like a wilted flower.
Theo's smile vanished.
His brows drew together, and the temperature in the room seemed to plummet.
"I don't heal convicts," he said, slinging his satchel over his shoulder. "You know my principles."
"She's my sister," Kael said tightly. "Don't call her that again."

Theo's lips curled into a smirk—mocking and sharp. “Is that so? Because as far as I recall, your ‘sister’ nearly killed the Blackmaw Pack’s heiress and got a five-year sentence for it. I don’t care what she is to you. I don’t heal poison with legs.” Kael's eyes narrowed, his voice low and steady. “Check her. At least her right leg.”

The two men stared at each other—one cold with pride, the other burning with shame.

In the end, Theo looked away first.

He sighed, long and reluctant. “Fine. I’ll examine. But I’m not promising miracles.”

He knelt beside the bed, dropped his satchel, and lifted the blanket with clinical disinterest.

“Honestly,” he muttered as he began unrolling the bandage, “I don’t know what spell she cast on you to make you act like a damn knight—”

He stopped speaking.

His hands froze.

Because what lay beneath the blanket was not a leg.

It was devastation.

Riley’s right leg was deformed—bone twisted at an unnatural angle, skin stretched tightly over the sharp ridges. Faint bruises stained the pallid flesh, scars overlapping like broken glass. One gash hadn’t even closed. A raised, jagged seam ran across her calf like a monstrous centipede.

Theo stared.

He reached out, almost hesitantly, his fingers brushing the skin with the lightness of reverence.

“She...” he said hoarsely. “Her leg... has it always been like this?”

Kael's breath hitched. “No. She was fine. The entire time she lived here. That leg was never injured.”

That was all Theo needed.

He didn’t speak, just resumed his examination with a grim face and shaking hands.

Minutes passed. The silence was oppressive.

Finally, Theo stood and said in a raw voice, “We need to talk. Outside.”

Kael followed him to the study.

Theo didn’t sit. He stood by the window, arms crossed tight, as though afraid he’d shatter from within.

“Do you know how strong werewolves’ bone is?” he asked quietly.

Kael blinked. “No.”

“The tibia and fibula—shin bones—are some of the densest bones in the body. To break them like that? It takes high-energy trauma. Car crashes. Falling from multiple stories. Or... being beaten with something very heavy.”

Kael froze.

Theo looked him dead in the eye. “There’s no sign of surgical treatment. No healing intervention. That leg was broken and left to rot—then healed on its own, in the wrong position. You want to know what that feels like? It’s like someone hammering nails into your bones every time you move.”

The world tilted.

Theo continued. “And that’s not all. Her body shows clear signs of chronic malnutrition. Muscle wasting. Repeated lash trauma. Most of these wounds are layered—old and new. Someone wasn’t just punishing her. They were making a point.”

Kael couldn’t feel his hands.

His fists clenched. Then released. Then clenched again.

“She was in prison,” he whispered. “She was just a girl...”

“She still is.”

Kael staggered back a step.

“What do we do?” he croaked. “Can her leg... can it be saved?”

Theo shook his head.

“Too late. That damage is permanent. Three years ago—maybe. But now?” He exhaled shakily. “There’s nothing I can do but stop it from getting worse.”

Kael stared into nothing.

He didn’t even hear Theo leave.

By the time he sank into the chair, he was trembling.

He fumbled for a cigarette, but his fingers shook so hard he couldn’t light it.

The lighter fell to the floor with a hollow clatter.

Finally, Kael crushed the cigarette between his fingers and buried his head in his hands, breathing like a man suffocating under guilt.

He stayed like that for a long, long time.

Then, slowly, he sat up.

Face pale.

Jaw clenched.

Eyes like ice.

He grabbed his phone, dialed a number with mechanical precision.

“Luca,” he said, voice flat and emotionless, “I want a full report on Riley’s time in prison. I don’t care how long it takes or what it costs. I want everything—every name, every day, every injury.”

He paused.

Then added, cold as death:

“Leave nothing out.”