

Chapter 13

Third Person's POV

After ending the call, Kael Vale sat stiffly in the high-backed leather chair in his study. The lights were dim, but his thoughts were darker.

He had just learned what truly happened to Riley during her five years in the rogue prison.

And it was worse than anything he could've imagined.

He stood up slowly, as if gravity had doubled its pull on him. Step by step, he walked to the door of the guest room—his room now, where Riley lay unconscious, healing.

But he couldn't bring himself to open it.

That single door might as well have been a mountain. A barrier between his cowardice and her pain.

She had always been a problem to him.

A burden.

A threat to Scarlett's place.

So why was his chest tightening like his wolf was clawing at his ribs?

Just then, a young servant wolf came running. "Alpha Kael, the banquet is starting. The Luna's celebration is about to begin."

Scarlett's birthday banquet.

Kael closed his eyes for a moment, then nodded.

He turned and left Riley behind again.

The ballroom inside the Ebonclaw mansion gleamed like a dream. Light from hundreds of crystal orbs rained down in gold hues. The air was thick with perfume, status, and perfectly polite deception.

Scarlett stood at the center, wearing a shimmering pale pink gown. Her golden hair curled like a doll's, and her smile was delicate and soft. She was surrounded by noble wolves—Alphas, Betas, even pack Elders.

All of them adoring her.

All of them blind.

She blew out the candles on a six-tiered cake shaped like a blooming moonflower. Glittering ribbon cannons exploded, and the room erupted in applause.

Kael stood in the crowd.

But all he could see was Riley.

Curled up on that narrow bed. Her body frail. Her leg bent at a painful, unnatural angle.

He reached for a glass of sparkling wolfwine and downed it in one gulp.

Then another.

And another.

The laughter faded around him. Every cheer felt like claws against his ears. His vision blurred, and his feet grew heavy.

Stumbling out of the hall, he found his way to a washroom and collapsed over the sink, emptying his stomach.

He stared at his reflection—wet hair, pale skin, haunted eyes.

“You didn’t do this,” he whispered to himself. “You didn’t hurt her.”

But that was a lie.

He’d let them.

He turned on the tap, washing cold water over his face until his skin stung.

Then his phone rang.

Luca.

Kael snatched it up. “Talk.”

“I have the full report,” Luca said, voice low. “But... Alpha, you might want to sit.”

“I’m standing. Say it.”

Luca hesitated, then began.

“Riley was regularly beaten. Slapped. Denied sleep. Forced to drink toilet water. They made her crawl through dominance rituals. Sometimes they'd stab her with silver needles meant for embroidery training. When she disobeyed... they broke her.”

Kael’s fists clenched.

“Needles?” he bit out.

“They had her doing ‘rehabilitation work’ in the stitching units. That’s where they came from.”

“Go on.”

“The worst incident—six wooden batons, thicker than a grown male’s forearm. Snapped across her legs. Her tibia was shattered. She was hospitalized, barely conscious.”

Kael’s jaw clenched so tight, his teeth groaned under pressure. His claws unsheathed without him realizing it.

“And... the inmates who did it were rewarded with sentence reductions.”

Kael’s voice dropped to a growl. “Someone ordered it.”

“Yes. We traced it. It was Alpha Ronan.”

Kael’s blood turned to ice.

Ronan.

The Alpha Heir of the Blackmaw Pack, Tessa’s elder brother.

Kael knew that Ronan was doing this to Riley in order to avenge his sister.

Kael didn’t speak for a long time.

“Alpha?” Luca prompted softly.

Kael’s voice, when it came, was dead calm. Cold as the Frostfang borders.

“Terminate all contracts with Blackmaw Pack.”

“Alpha—our trade lines will suffer.”

“I said do it. And those rogues who laid a hand on Riley—make sure they never leave prison alive.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

Kael hung up and dropped the phone to the floor.

He leaned forward, his breathing heavy. Memories of Riley laughing, once.

Then screaming. Then begging, in her dreams.

He staggered out of the bathroom and back down the hallway.

He stopped in front of her door again.

His hand reached for the knob.

Then—

He heard her voice.

A whisper.

“I’m sorry... please don’t hurt me... I didn’t mean to...”

His heart shattered.

He turned away again.

And this time, he ran.

Later That Night

The mansion was still.

His phone rang, and rang, and rang.

He didn’t answer.

Until it cut off.

Across the estate, Alpha Alaric—Kael’s father—was jolted from sleep by the sound of his own device.

He picked it up, groggy. “Hello?”

Something was said.

Then he sat up like lightning.

“What did you say?!”

His mate, Luna Zara, groaned beside him. “What is it now?”

“Kael just canceled the Ebonclaw–Blackmaw Pack alliance. Ebonclaw Pack lost ten billion credits in less than a night!”

“That’s impossible.”

“He just called me himself demanding answers.”

Snarling, Alaric threw on his robe and stormed down the hall.

With a loud crash, he kicked open Kael’s door.

“Kael Vale, are you trying to destroy the Ebonclaw Pack?!”