

Chapter 21

Riley's POV

Those warnings echoed like thunder in my skull.

My chest heaved with fury, and the strands of hair on my forehead trembled with the force of it. I glared at Kael, my so-called brother, with a look that could flay a wolf's hide.

"Was it you?" I demanded, my voice razor-sharp.

Kael sat leisurely, fingers laced over his lap like the purebred Alpha heir he was bred to be. His expression remained unreadable—cold, superior.

"Was what me? I've no idea what you're talking about," he replied smoothly.

I took a threatening step forward, barely able to keep my wolf from surging to the surface.

"Did you order the council to expel Mia's daughter from her academy? Did you threaten her?"

His gaze narrowed, something dangerous glinting in those pale gold irises. I could see it—he didn't like how much I cared for someone who wasn't blood. Someone who wasn't him.

"And if I did? What would you do about it?" he sneered.

"I will tear you down, Kael," I said, voice low, trembling with barely restrained rage. "I will burn everything down, even if it takes me with it."

Kael's expression twisted. "I'm your brother. Is that how you treat your Alpha blood?"

I didn't answer. I didn't need to. He could see the truth in my eyes.

Then his phone rang. Kael checked the screen and lifted it to his ear, eyes never leaving mine.

I saw the flicker of something behind his gaze—satisfaction.

He pressed the button and Mia's voice spilled out through the speaker.

"Master Kael, please, I didn't know who else to call. The school... they're talking about expelling Carman. She's worked so hard, she's a good girl. If she's expelled now—please, can't you help?"

I didn't need to hear the whole thing. I could read the desperation on her face.

Because I was staring straight at her, through the pack estate's exterior gate camera.

Someone had locked her out, left her at the iron bars like a stranger. But she didn't hang up. She stood there, face pressed close to the callbox's camera, praying someone would answer.

I saw her lips moving. I understood every word.

I'd learned to read lips in prison—when my wolf was collared, my hearing gone, and silence was more common than kindness.

Kael muted the call and looked at me. "Help her? Fine. But you're going to Blackmaw Pack House. You'll kneel beside Ronan's sister's bed and apologize. Beg for forgiveness."

My throat closed up. "You want me to beg the wolves who put me in a cage?"

Kael's lips twitched. "You want Mia's daughter to finish school, don't you?"

My hands trembled.

"Fine," I said hoarsely. "I'll do it."

Kael turned back to the phone, voice honey-sweet. "Don't worry, Mia. Everything will be fine."

Then he stood. "I'll drive."

"I'll take a cab," I snapped.

"I'm faster."

"Looking at you makes me sick."

The blow landed. Not physically—but Kael flinched like he'd been struck. Then, with a roar, he kicked the coffee table, sending porcelain crashing across the floor.

"Riley, you've gone too far!"

I didn't respond. I turned and left.

Outside the manor gates, I ran straight into Theo Hale.

He leaned against his car, sunglasses low on his nose, and gave me a slow once-over.

"Damn. You look like you got hit by a bus. Twice."

I brushed past him.

Theo frowned. Once, I used to wait on him like a maid—pouring tea, smiling like a fool. He'd barely noticed me.

Now I ignored him completely.

"Where are you going? Need a lift?"

I said nothing.

He jogged to catch up and grabbed my wrist. "Hey, I'm talking to you. You deaf or—"

I wrenched my arm away. "If it makes you happy, Theo, you can think of me as deaf. Or mute. Or dead. I don't care. Just pretend I don't exist."

He looked genuinely taken aback. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I'm a lunatic," I snapped. "Stay away from me."

I left him standing there, confused.

Behind me, he called out, "Crazy bitch."

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The Blackmaw Pack infirmary towered like a fortress—cold and sterile. The Alpha's sister, Tessa, lay comatose in a private wing.

I stepped into her room.

My breath hitched.

I remembered Tessa as a stunning she-wolf. Curled golden hair, fierce smile, voice like a silver bell.

But now—

She was pale and skeletal. Her once radiant skin clung to brittle bones. Her magic—gone. Her light—extinguished.

I should've felt nothing. She'd always hated me, always chosen Scarlett.

But I pitied her.

Because I knew exactly what it felt like to be alive and buried.

She had hated me based on lies—Scarlett's lies.

Scarlett had pushed her.

Alaric had seen it. He'd watched. And instead of stopping it, he let me take the blame.

They knew I hadn't done it.

But I had been in the wrong place. At the wrong time. The only one who knew the truth.

So they buried me instead.

And now, here I was, standing over the broken shell of the woman I supposedly tried to kill.

Kael wanted me to grovel. Ronan wanted blood.

But I...

I wanted justice.