

A Broken Alpha Heiress' Revenge

- in Vengeance 25

[955 words]

Chapter 25

Riley's POV

+8 Pearls

By the time I returned to the Ebonclaw Pack manor, the night had fallen completely. The courtyard was quiet under the cloak of darkness, the scent of roasted meat and pine smoke drifting faintly through the wind.

Mia was already **standing** outside the front **gate**, her wrinkled hands anxiously wringing the hem of her apron. The moment she saw me limping toward her, her tense shoulders sagged in relief and she rushed forward.

“Miss Riley! Thank the Moon Goddess, you’re finally back.” Her voice trembled with a mix of concern and affection.

Before I could answer, her gaze swept over me, catching the gauze on my forehead, the **blood** crusted around the edges, and the bruises creeping up my arms. Her eyes filled with pain.

“What happened to you?” she **asked**, reaching out carefully.

“I’m fine,” I said quietly, shaking my **head**. My throat was dry, and even that small lie tasted bitter.

Mia wasn’t convinced. “Are you really? You look like-”

“I said I’m fine.” I cut in gently but firmly, trying to push down the heat rising behind my eyes. I needed to be strong. Not for me—for Carmen. “How’s Carmen? Did anything happen while I was gone?”

Her expression shifted, softening with a smile. “She’s okay now. Thanks to Master Kael, the **school’s** decided not to expel her after all.”

I froze.

So that’s how he wanted to play it..

Mia sighed in deep gratitude, completely unaware of the poison underneath **it all**. “**You** know, Miss Riley, Master Kael isn’t a bad person. He helped a lot behind the scenes, if the two of you could **just** talk things through... he really would make a good brother.”

I didn’t respond. I just stared at her, lips curling into a faint, bitter smile.

A good brother?

Kael Vale had always been two-faced. Charming in public, ruthless in private. And somehow, **he made** even those he hurt feel like they owed him something.

He used Carmen to get to me. This time it was her next time it could be Mia. That’s who he was.

And still, I couldn’t **walk** away. Not without leaving the people I cared about behind.

I forced a smile. "I'm glad she's okay."

Then I walked toward the manor.

Inside, the grand dining hall was lit with golden warmth. I could hear laughter before I even stepped in

Kael, Scarlett, Alpha **Alaric**, and Luna Zara were all seated around the table, eating and **chatting** like the perfect Pack family.

A roast boar, honey-glazed root vegetables, and fine wine sat on polished plates. The air was full of warmth, clinking glassware, and carefully crafted lies.

And the moment Lentered, the mood shifted.

Kael's eyes snapped to me, the smile on his face vanishing like smoke, "Oh. So you remembered where the Pack lives."

His words dripped with sarcasm, no concern in sight. Just contempt.

Luna Zara frowned slightly and gave him a warning glance. "Kael, don't speak to your sister like **that**."

Then she turned to me with a forced warmth. "Riley, don't **mind him**. Come, eat with **us**."

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Chapter 25

I shook my **head**. "No need. You go ahead."

She persisted, still trying to wear her mask. “Skipping dinner isn’t good for your health. Just **have** a little.”

I glanced at the table—empty platters, stripped bones, half—drunk glasses.

“I’m not in the mood for leftovers,” I said flatly.

Her smile froze.

* +8 Pearls

Tension immediately thickened the room. Alpha **Alaric’s** face darkened as his gaze cut across the table toward me.

Scarlett, ever the little angel, set down her utensils with practiced gentleness. “**Riley**, we waited a long time. When you come, we thought you’d already eaten. We just **started** a moment ago, really.”

“**Yeah**,” Luna Zara jumped in, nodding. “Everything here is your favorite.”

That was a lie. I could smell the seafood from across the room.

I took a slow breath, letting the fury simmer just below the surface.

didn’t

“Really? Then tell me something. Out of six dishes and a soup, three of them are things I’m allergic to: crabs, shrimp, and pineapple. I thought you said it was all my favorites?”

Zara’s expression faltered. Her eyes darted **away**..

I didn’t stop.

“You never even asked me **what** I liked. You never remembered. You just **sa**
said whatever sounded nice.”

Kael slammed his chopsticks onto the **table**. The noise cracked through the air like thunder. “That’s enough, Riley. Mom and **Dad** were worried about you. Scarlett too. Don’t come **back** here acting like the whole world owes you something”

I looked at the faces around me. All so perfectly composed, so hollow,

They wanted peace? They wanted quiet?

They should’ve left me the hell alone.

I smiled, slowly. Coldly

“You said everything was just prepared, right? Then tell me why are all the plates empty? Want me to lick them clean?”

Scarlett’s expression twitched.

I turned to Zara. “Or maybe you can remind me what exactly are my favorite foods??

She opened her **mouth**, but nothing came out.

I chuckled darkly. “Don’t worry. I’ll remind you. I don’t have favorite foods, Luna **Zara**. I was raised not to be picky. Anything **that** didn’t make me sick was good enough.”

I **took** a step closer to the table, eyes locked on Kael now.

“But I do avoid **what** I’m allergic to. **You** knew that. You all knew **that**. And **you** still served it.”

My voice dropped to a near-growl. “Is **that** what you call kindness?”

Karl’s face darkened, the fury in his eyes barely restrained.

Alaric rose slowly **from** his seat, the weight of the Alpha thick in the air. “**You** ungrateful brat. We gave you a roof, food, a second chance-”

“I never **asked** for any of it. I cut in. “Did I beg you to bring me back? Did I ask to be paraded as your long-lost daughter, just to be treated like dirt in my own home?”

3.35 PM

Chapter 25

His voice boomed. “We gave you lif
life!”

I stared him down, rage searing through every nerve.

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have.”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,060 words]

Chapter 26

Riley's POV

Alpha Alaric was **trembling**.

His fists clenched tightly on the edge of the table, chest heaving with each ragged breath as if trying to hold back an explosion.

+B Pearls

Across from him, Luna Zara had broken into tears, her face pale with distress. Her hand clutched her chest as she sobbed.

"Riley," she choked out, voice cracking with pain, "that's not true... Your father **and** I—we had you because we loved you. You have to believe that"

I laughed.

It wasn't a laugh filled with joy. It was cold, hollow. A sound scraped from the bottom of a ruined heart.

"Love?" I echoed.

I gestured to my head, where fresh gauze still clung to a crusted wound. "I walked in like this. **Mia** noticed. And yet the two people who claim **to** love me didn't say **a** word."

My voice rose, sharp and unfiltered. “Not one of you asked what happened. You just sat there. Eating, Laughing, **Judging** me.”

My eyes burned **as** rage swelled in my chest.

“Has it been ten minutes? Maybe more. Ten minutes since I walked through **that** damn door. And not one of **you** asked about my injury.”

“Did you not see it?” I snapped. “Or did you just choose not to care?”

I turned my glare on Luna Zara, watching her flinch beneath it. “You say you love me—but you stood there and watched them ruin me. I **lost** my hearing. My leg. My kidney. My future. You let it happen. You let it all happen and now you say **you** love me?”

My words echoed off the walls like blades, cutting through the air, slicing straight into their polished lies.

L

“Where was your love when I was locked away like **a** rabid stray?” I shouted. “When I was dragged into that courtroom. already convicted by your silence?”

Tears finally spilled from my eyes, hot and unstoppable, clouding my vision.

Luna Zara took a hesitant step forward, her arms slightly extended like she wanted to embrace me.

I stepped **back**.

She froze mid-step, her eyes flickering **down** to the **gauze** and the blood staining my clothes, her breath catching like she’d **only** now realized I wasn’t bluffing.

Kael narrowed his **eyes**, **scoffing**.

“Well, that **explains** the dramatics,” he muttered. “So that’s why you’ve been playing the victim tonight. A little blood to gain. attention! You’ve really lost your edge, Riley.”

His laugh **was sharp, grating**. “You’re not fooling anyone with this poor-little-me act. Stop trying to manipulate everyone.”

una Zara’s expression faltered. She looked between me and Kael, visibly

y torn.

“Kiley, is that true?” she asked softly, brows furrowing “Did you were you just trying to scare us?”

Alpha Alaric scoffed **from** the head of the table, his voice thunderous. “Typical. A wolf can’t change its blood. No matter how well we **raise** her, she still reeks of the rogue blood she was raised **in.**”

And just like that, I froze.

3:15 PM

Chapter 26

Speed 8+

For a moment, my brain didn’t process what I’d heard. I stood there **in** stunned silence, the words crashing into me like **a** frozen tide.

Manipulative. Attention-seeking. Worthless.

That’s all they saw when they looked at me.

Not a daughter. Not a victim. Not a girl who’d been mutilated and left for dead.

Just an inconvenience..

A mistake.

My spine stiffened, and I swallowed back the sob rising in my throat.

“Think whatever you want,” I said, my voice cold, steady, almost detached. “I’m done trying to explain myself to people **whot** never really wanted me.”

I turned ommy heel and walked toward the side hallway, toward the old storage room I’d claimed because **no** one else in this house wanted to see my face.

“Stop right there!” Kael snapped.

His voice cracked like a whip, the force of an **Alpha**–in–training trying to reclaim control.

I stopped. Slowly turned.

The look I gave him must have hit its mark, because for the first time tonight. Kael faltered. His mouth opened, then closed again, like he forgot what he was about to say.

I stared at them all–at Alpha Alaric’s cold fury, at Luna Zara’s crumpled disappointment, at Scarlett’s tremulous concern- and 1 saw them for what they were

Not family.

Not Pack

Just strangers who shared my blood but not my pain.

Scarlett clung to **Luna** Zara's arm. "Mom... her eyes... they're scary.

Zara patted her daughter's **hand**, her own face **pale**. "She's not the same girl we brought back. Something's **changed** in her."

"She's feral." Alaric spat. "Ungrateful. If I had known she'd grow into this, I'd have left her in that Rogue camp to rot."

"Alaric!" **Zara** snapped. "She's still your daughter."

"I gave her too much grace, that's the problem!" he roared, the sound echoing down the corridor like a whip crack. "She needed discipline from day one! If I'd set the rules, she wouldn't be this wild!"

I heard it all. Every **word**.

Even **as** I shut the storage room door **behind** me, their voices still rang in my ears.

I slid down **against** the door, body trembling, arms wrapped tightly around myself.

The **room** was pitch-black. Cold, Smelled of cedar and **dust**.

I curled into **a ball** on the thin cot, burying my face in my knees as tears streamed freely down my cheeks.

So this **was what** it felt like.

To realize home was just another cage.

They'd carved out a **space** in the Ebonclaw manor for me, sure—but **not** a place in their hearts. Not really.

I wasn't Riley, their **daughter**.

I was a walking reminder of a mistake they regretted claiming.

I cried until my **throat burned and** my shoulders ached.

Eventually, the sobs softened, my body gave into exhaustion, and I lay **flat** on the cot, staring into the void above me.

Sleep pulled at my edges like a tide, but it offered no peace.

In my dreams, the prison came back.

The fists. The boots. The pain.

My voice cracked as I screamed in my sleep.

“Help me. **Mama**, please. **Mama**...”

But no one came,

Except...

A hand. Warm, Gentle. Calloused.

Someone was stroking my back.

“It’s alright, pup. You’re safe

now...

Mama’s here”

That **voice**. It wasn’t **Luna** Zara’s,

It was older, Softer. Full of quiet love.

Mia.

Even **in** my dream, I leaned toward the sound, toward the comfort. My muscles loosened slightly, the screams died on my lips.

Somewhere far away, I felt her hand keep patting my back, slow **and** steady.

When I woke, **the** light **through** the small window was pale and blue.

I sat up slowly, **dazed** and hollow.

For a split second, I thought I’d dreamed the whole thing—that Luma Zara had held me and whispered soft things.

But no.

I let out a soft, bitter laugh.

Even in dreams, I couldn’t pretend she loved me.

Only **Mia** ever stayed.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,023 words]

Chapter 27

Author's POV

The Ebonclaw Pack dining hall was unusually quiet that morning.

+8 Pearls

Alpha Alaric, Luna **Zara**, Kael Vale, and Scarlett had already taken **their** seats—but none of them had touched their food yet. For once, the usual clatter of silverware and forced pleasantries was absent.

When Riley finally emerged from the corridor, the atmosphere shifted.

Luna **Zara** immediately stood, walking briskly toward her with **a** strained smile.

“Riley, you

must be starving. Come, have some breakfast,” she said warmly, **grabbing** her hand and guiding her to the table, Alpha Alaric occupied the head seat. To his right sat Kael; to his left, Zara. Scarlett, as always, nestled close to her mother.

The only remaining seat was between Kael and Scarlett. Neither of them were welcome options, but if Riley had to choose. she'd rather sit beside Kael.

At least she knew his malice was honest.

Riley sat down silently, expression unreadable. She picked up her spoon and began eating the small bowl of dumplings in front of her delicate wolfbone broth with wild herbs, prepared by Mia. She didn't say a word. Didn't look at any of them,

All four members of the Alpha family watched her.

Alpha Alaric's eyes were hard, his jaw clenched **tight**, restrained only by Zara's silent warning glance.

Zara, for her part, wore a tight, polite **smile**, clearly torn between managing appearances and managing the brewing tension. She opened her mouth, likely to remind Riley to greet her elders, but whatever she had planned to say died on her lips.

Scarlett, ever the peacemaker, tried a softer approach. “Sister, **Mia** made this especially for you,” she chirped, forcing a sweet smile. “Is it good?”

Riley didn’t reply. She didn’t even glance at her.

Kael drew a sharp breath through his nose, clearly struggling to keep his temper in check. His lips curled into a tight, disingenuous smile.

“Riley,” he said, voice low but tense, “when you’re done with breakfast, take that damn **bandage** off your head. You’re not actually injured. Walking around **like that** makes it look like someone in this house abused you.”

Riley’s hand paused slightly, spoon mid-air. The corner of her lips twitched—not in amusement, but in bitter contempt. Then she resumed eating, as if he **hadn’t** spoken at all.

She finished her meal quickly. After wiping her mouth with a **napkin**, she stood.

“I’m done,” **she** said coldly. “Enjoy the rest of your breakfast.”

Kael slammed his palm on the table. “What the hell is your problem, Riley? Do you think we owe you something? You walk around with that miserable face like the whole Pack **has** wronged you.”

Riley turned to look **at** him, eyes like cracked ice—void of warmth or expression.

That look only enraged Kael further.

He stood, grabbed her arm, and with a sharp, angry gesture, ripped the bandage from her forehead.

Till **prove** you’re faking.” he growled. “You’re addicted to playing the victim.”

The moment the gauze came off, the scab beneath tore open. Fresh blood gushed from the wound, sliding down Riley’s **face** in thin, crimson rivers.

The room fell silent.

Karl’s hand dropped like it had touched fire. His **pupils** contracted.

36 PM.

Chapter 27

He hadn't expected real blood.

Zara gasped, eyes filling with tears. "Riley... What happened to your head?"

+8 Pearls

Scarlett's eyes gleamed for a heartbeat with something unreadable—satisfaction, maybe—but she quickly masked it with a frightened expression.

"Are you okay, sister?"

But Riley didn't flinch. Didn't cry out. Didn't even blink. The blood streaked down her pale cheeks, soaking into her collar, but her gaze remained hollow, unflinching.

She looked at them like they weren't her family at **all**.

Like they were monsters.

"Is this what you wanted?" Her voice was hoarse, distant. "Does this satisfy you?"

No one answered.

Alpha Alaric's face didn't even twitch. "It's just **a scratch**," he said gruffly. "No need to be dramatic."

The silence that followed was deafening

Riley's fingers curled around the edge of the table, knuckles white with pressure. The table creaked under her grip, threatening to buckle.

Kael, Scarlett, and Zara all immediately moved to steady the table—clearly remembering the last time Riley lost control and flipped it.

"Calm down," Zara said quickly. "Your father didn't mean it that way. He just—he just didn't realize it was that serious. He cares. We all do..."

Even she didn't **seem** to believe her **own** words.

Riley stared straight through her, gaze sharp enough to pierce bone. Zara looked away, unable to meet her eyes.

The air **was** thick with tension.

Blood continued to drip from Riley's head onto the tablecloth, bright and vivid against white linen.

"Care?" she echoed. "What a lovely word."

She turned slowly, her voice quiet but soaked in contempt.

"**Thank you** so much for your concern, Alpha Alaric. Luna Zara. I'll treasure it."

Without giving anyone the chance to respond, she turned and walked out of the room.

Kael sat back down, jaw clenched. He shoved his bowl away, appetite gone. "I'm heading to the office," he muttered, already storming out the front door.

Inside his car, Kael leaned **back** in the leather seat, staring at the blood-stained gauze in his palm.

Something twisted deep inside his chest-tight, unfamiliar.

Riley had left the house just fine yesterday morning

But **that** night, she returned **with** a head wound.

What the hell happened?

He closed his eyes, mind flashing **back** to her pale face and dead eyes. His stomach churned.

3:36 PM

Chapter 27

She's still my sister.

o matter **y**

No

what she did five years ago,

She's still a Vale.

Hands clenching on the wheel, Kael finally reached for his phone and **made** a call.

Ronan," he said through gritted teeth. "Was it you? Did you hurt Riley?"

There was a beat of silence.

Then **came the** voice on the other end—calm, emotionless, unreadable. “Is that why **you** called me?”

+8 Pearls

“I’m warning you,” Kael snarled. “I don’t care what she did in the past—she’s paid for it. She’s the daughter of **Alpha** Alaric. If you ever touch her again—

Click.

Ronan hung up without a word.

Kael cursed and hurled **the phone** onto the passenger seat. “Fuck!”

He sat in the car for a long time, jaw clenched, throat dry.

Finally, **he** started the engine and drove to the Pack’s central tower—but work was impossible. All he could see was her face.. Her blood.

After nearly an hour of fidgeting **and** frustration, he picked up his phone again **and** dialed Mia.

“Mia. **How** is she? Did someone treat her wound? Riley... is she okay?”

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[1,120 words]

Chapter 28

Karl’s POV

+8 Pearls

“Don’t worry, young Alpha,” Mia’s voice came gently through the phone. “I’ve already cleaned and dressed Miss Riley’s

wound.”

“Mm.” My voice came out flat.

I hesitated for a second, then added, "Clear out my bedroom. Riley's not staying in that damn storage room anymore." There was a pause on the line. Then her voice softened with **relief**. "Yes, young Alpha. I'll get started right away. Miss Riley has truly suffered these **days**..... it's time she had a proper place to rest."

I hung **up**.

My phone screen stayed **dark** in my hand for a long time.

She's

s my sister. My blood. No matter how difficult **she's** become, that bond still exists. Still matters.

She'll understand this, won't she? She'll see I'm **trying**.

Maybe she'll even smile again. Maybe things will go back to the way they used to be—when she'd bring food to my office. without fail, no matter how tense things got between us.

Even when I snapped at her. Even when I defended Scarlett and hurt Riley in ways I didn't realize at the time... she still came, lunch in hand, with that quiet little smile **that** didn't quite reach her eyes..

Luca would knock **and** say, "Miss **Riley** is here."

I'd pretend not to care, keep typing like nothing happened.

But I always waited for her.

Always.

That memory sat heavy in

chest

now, warm and hollow at the same time.

Maybe tonight, she'll do it again. Maybe she'll see I've changed.

When the sun went down and the headquarters started to empty, I stayed. Staff filtered out one by one, footsteps fading into silence. I remained in my office, tapping at meaningless reports, checking the time every few minutes.

Any moment now.

Luca came in, knocking lightly. “Alpha Kael, everyone’s headed out. Aren’t you going to dinner?”

I leaned back in my chair. “My sister’s bringing food.”

He grinned. “Must be nice, having a sister who dotes on you, I wouldn’t know.”

I **didn’t** respond. **Just** offered a lazy shrug **and** a **half-smile**.

But as the minutes dragged on. then an hour... then two... my smile-faded..

The building started to refill with night shift staff. Still no Riley.

A cold weight began to settle in my gut.

Talled home.

After a few rings, **Mia** picked up.

“Mia,” I said tightly. “When did Riley leave the house?”

She sounded confused. “She didn’t, **young** Alpha. **Miss** Riley has been in her room **all** day.”

Chapter 28

My grip on the phone tightened.

She never left?

She didn’t bring me anything?

That **can’t** be right.

+8 Pearls

She used to love doing that.

Even when I hurt her without realizing—taking Scarlett’s side, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time—she still showed up with food. Like nothing **had** happened. Like some part of her still believed in me.

And now she didn’t?

That stupid hope I’d been feeding all day suddenly turned bitter in my throat.

It **had** all been in **my** head.

A delusion. A fantasy where she forgave me, where things could go back to normal.

She's not **coming** back.

Not to me.

Not like before.

Mia's voice broke through again, cautious. "Would you like me to fetch her?"

"No," I said quickly. Sharply. "Forget it."

I ended the **call**.

A **minute** later, Luca walked back in—damn good timing, as always.

"So?" he said, **half**-laughing. "What did Miss Riley bring you today? Don't tell me she made you wait again-

I shot him a look that could've frozen fire.

His **mouth** snapped shut.

"**Alpha** Kael, this folder is the info you asked me to compile a few days ago on the Eastwood sector. Reliable sources say that land will be auctioned off in two weeks."

I muttered, "**Leave** it."

After Luca left, I stared blankly at the desk for a long while before starting to deal with the work at hand.

The new policy planned to develop Eastwood into a commercial district. As long as the policy held, securing **that** land would be a **guaranteed** big win.

But we weren't the only ones eyeing it.

The Stormridge Pack from Northhaven also showed **serious** interest.

Scarlett was betrothed to Ronan, and a joint development between Blackmaw and Ebonclaw on Eastwood would be a perfect

What I wasn't sure about was Stormridge's attitude.

Stormridge was one of the most powerful **Packs** in the northern capital, with a heritage **far** exceeding **that** of Ebonclaw. If they decided to take Eastwood all for themselves, then Ebonclaw and the Blackmaw would be out of luck.

Work was a

a mess. Family **was a** mess.

I felt like my head was about to explode.

+8 Pearls

Chapter 28

I stared at the desk.

About the bandage soaked in my sister's blood.

I'd seen it with my own eyes.

Who the hell did that to her?

Was it Ronan?

That smug bastard from the Blackmaw Pack!

My fists curled until **my knuckles** ached.

Riley might've messed up. Might've made enemies. Might've torn this family apart.

But **she's** still my sister.

Still Ebonclaw blood.

And she didn't deserve to be thrown around like some rogue trash because that bastard lost his precious little Tessa.

I barely made it through **the** rest of the day.

Midnight came. I didn't go home.

I drove straight to the Silverfang Den—one of those upscale dens where bored nobles drank away their honor and wolves. forgot who they were for a **night**.

It was dark inside. Loud music, Low lights. Shadows dancing on leather couches. The air thick with **alcohol**, perfume, and Pack musk..

I went straight to the bar and dropped onto a stool.

“Something strong,” I said.

The bartender gave me a look, then slid me a glass. I tossed it back without thinking. The burn hit my throat hard. It helped. Barely.

I downed another.

And another.

Riley had **changed**.

So much.

Too much

She used to look at me like I was her brother. Like I mattered. Like my approval meant something.

Now she barely looked at me at all.

She didn't even try anymore.

And it pissed me off more than I wanted to admit.

I slammed my **glass** down and reached for another.

But someone beat me to it.

A pale, long-fingered **hand** slid across the **bar and** snatched it **first**.

I turned, pissed off. “The hell-

The guy didn't respond.

+8 Pearls

Chapter 28

Just threw the drink back like water.

a

It took my eyes a second to focus under the strobe lights.

And then I saw him.

Ronati

The prince of the Blackmaw Pack.

My blood boiled.

“You bastard,” I growled. “You split my sister’s head open. You call yourself a man?”

I swung

He didn’t flinch

Just moved. Effortless. Quick..

My

y punch missed, and I stumbled into the bar like a damn drunk.

1

Liquor flew, Classes clattered.

I turned again, ready to go for round two—but he **caught** my wrist and slammed it **into** the **bar**, hard enough to rattle my

bones.

“If you want to act like a **feral mutt**,” he said coldly, “go do it on your

ir own t

turf. Not in my **den**.”

“You think you’re **innocent**?” I spat. “You laid a hand on Riley. **That’s** a line you don’t come back from.”

His eyes narrowed, cold as moonlight.

“I didn’t touch her,” he said. “But even if I did it would be what she owes. To Tessa.”

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[764 words]

Chapter 29

Author's POV

Kael slammed his **palm** against the bar, his voice hoarse with fury. "That's bullshit! The law already gave Riley five years- she's paid her dues!"

Ronan's icy expression didn't waver, "**Paid?** She served her time and walked out alive. My sister will spend the rest of her life in a hospital bed, barely breathing. **And** you want to call it even?"

His voice dropped, low and venomous. "As long as Tessa remains trapped in that shell, Riley's debt is far from paid?"

"**Shin** up!" Karl growled. His eyes were bloodshot, his **voice** rasped from the strain. "Riley was beaten in prison. She was mocked, stabbed, forced to kneel until her knees bled. Her leg was shattered. You ever seen someone go from a bright-eyed.

girl to..., to that? Cold. Quiet. Hollow. She was sunshine. Now she's shadow. How is that not enough?!"

He staggered backward, knocking over a stool behind him. His balance was gone, but he didn't notice. His chest heaved with every breath. "She's a cripple now. Is that what you wanted?! Are you happy?!"

Something flickered in **Ronan's** gaze—guilt? No. Not guilt. But something like a flinch passed behind **his eyes**.

He shouldn't feel **anything** for her.

She hurt Tessa. She ruined everything. She was the reason for the endless nights spent by **a** motionless body in the Frosthelm. medical ward.

He had no right to pity her.

He swallowed it down. "She deserved every second of that sentence. Don't compare a few bruises to my sister's ruined future. Tessa was brilliant. She was meant to lead, to innovate, to serve the Pack Council with honor—and Riley stole **that**."

Ronan's voice turned cruel. "And don't forges, Karl—it was you who testified against her. You backed Scarlett. You helped bury her. **You** think **she's** forgotten that? You think **she** doesn't hate you for it?"

Kael **flinched** like he'd **been** slapped.

He had hoped Riley would come out of prison with new perspective. Stronger. Wiser.

He **hadn't** known **she'd** come out broken.

The anger erupted again—white hot. He **swung** at Ronan.

Ronan dodged **easily**, stepping aside like a breeze. Kael slammed into the **bar**, panting, dizzy.

“More,” he gasped at the bartender. “Give me something stronger.”

The man poured silently. Kael grabbed the **glass** and downed it, liquor spilling from the corners of his mouth.

Ronan sat beside him, knuckles white around his own drink. He looked calm, but his thoughts were chaos.

Riley... why couldn't you have just stayed the perfect little **prodigy** you were meant to **be**?

The **music** throbbed around them. **Lights** spun, people laughed, bodies danced—but the world outside was crumbling.

Back at the Vale manor, things weren't much better.

Scarlett sobbed into **Luna** Zara's arms. Her delicate frame trembled with each breathless hiccup.

Zara stroked her **hair** gently, but her **eyes** glinted with **disapproval**.

Alpha Alaric's face was carved from stone. He pointed at Riley, voice thunderous. “You pushed her. You wanted to paralyze her like you did Tessa That's what you've become. A savage. A threat. Kneel and beg for forgiveness.”

Riley stared at him, numb,

She didn't even flinch when he called her savage.

Pears

Chapter 29

She'd stopped expecting kindness from him long ago.

But still something twisted inside her. Something old and sharp and buried deep.

“You watched Scarlett shove Tessa five years **ago**. You did nothing. You watched me get sentenced for it. Again, you did nothing. **And now**, you let her throw herself down a flight of stairs just to frame me again, and still—you. Do. Nothing.”

Her voice was calm. Too calm.

Alaric’s face darkened with rage. “How dare you-

“Am I really your daughter? Or was I just some mistake you never wanted to claim? You protect Scarlett like she’s your blood. Maybe she is.”

The words hit like a slap.

Alaric’s composure shattered. He roared, snatching his belt from around his waist.

Zara gasped. Scarlett clung tighter to her.

He raised the leather and brought it down hard.

The crack of impact echoed through the room.

Riley didn’t scream, She didn’t cry. She only staggered back, her shoulder ablaze with **pain**.

The second strike came. Then the third.

She dropped to her knees, arms bracing her weight, body trembling.

Mia burst into the room. “Alpha, please! She’s already injured-

“**Move,**” Alaric snarled.

Mia didn’t move. She knelt beside Riley, shielding her with her own back. The next blow landed on her.

Riley gasped. “Mia, don’t-

“You’re the Alpha’s daughter, Mia whispered. “You don’t deserve this.”

That’s when it happened.

Riley’s eyes widened,

Something inside her cracked—**no**, awakened.

Her blood **ran** hot, her vision doubled. The lights blurred. Her heartbeat thundered in her ears. The pain vanished, replaced by something primal.

The scent of anger. The tang of iron. The feeling of her bones pulling, reshaping.

Her will

For the first time in five years, the creature inside stirred.

And it **was** furious.

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[788 words]

Riley's POV

My fingers trembled as I shielded Mia with my body, her cries echoing in my ears as Alpha Alaric—my father—raised the belt again. The pain lashed across my back, fire blooming along my spine, but I barely felt it.

Something inside me had cracked open.

A voice growled in my mind, low and vicious.

“Let me out.”

I froze.

The voice wasn't mine.

“Nyra,” I whispered without thinking. The name came to me like a memory from another life.

“They hurt us. Again. Again. **And again.** You won't stop them. But I will

My vision blurred. Heat rushed through my veins, pulsing in time with my heart. My nails blackened, lengthening into curved claws. My teeth ached—no, grew. My spine stretched, bones shifting, cracking, I could feel my ears sharpening, hear every heartbeat in the room. My pupils split and narrowed, golden and gleaming like molten metal.

“Kill them.” Nyra hissed. “Make them pay?”

“**I am** still trapped and unable to shift, but I will give you the power.”

I shoved Mia aside, ignoring her gasp, and staggered to my feet. Blood dripped from my arm where the belt had torn skin, but I barely noticed.

I limped **into** the kitchen.

The moment my hand closed around the hilt of the knife. I knew it wasn't me anymore.

We were one.

When I stepped back into the living room; the entire Vale family went still.

“Riley, put that down!” Luna Zara cried.

I didn't answer. My grip tightened on the blade. My gaze locked onto Alpha Alaric.

“You touch Mia again, I snarled, my voice deeper, layered with Nyra's resonance, and I'll tear out your throat.

As I lifted my head and met **Alpha** Alaric's eyes, **the** full force of his Alpha aura slammed into me.

The air thickened like a storm front crashing through the room. My lungs refused to expand. My limbs trembled—not from fear, but from the sheer weight of his dominance. Even Scarlett, cowering behind the couch, whimpered and bowed her

head.

“You dare raise a blade **in** my house?” Alaric roared. His voice cracked through the air like a thunderclap, resonating with years of unquestioned authority.

He took a step forward, and the power of his wolf surged, pressing down on everyone in the room. Luna Zara stumbled back. Mia whimpered. The chandelier trembled overhead

But I didn't flinch.

Nyra surged within me like a wildfire refusing to be snuffed out.

“Let him roar. He's not our **Alpha** anymore,” she growled. “We are

A low snarl escaped my throat—feral, unrecognizable, mine and **not** mine.

I took a step forward, cutting through the weight of his **dominance** like a blade through fog. My body trembled, but I kept **walking**. Nyra's power pushed back against his **aura**. The pressure on my chest lessened. The fear in my limbs evaporated.

He tried again.

"Put the blade down, Riley, Alaric ordered, voice thick with **Alpha** compulsion.

My ears rang. My knees almost buckled—but I didn't obey,

Instead, I smiled.

"No."

A flicker of uncertainty crossed his face.

"I'm not that girl anymore." I said. "The one you locked away. The one you silenced. The one who bowed **her** head."

My claws gleamed under the chandelier. I held them up for all of them to see.

"This bloodline you're so proud of? It runs through me too. But I'm done letting it **chain** i

Alaric's lips curled into a sneer.

me-

"You expect me to believe this show? You're clearly performing for attention, but it's pathetic.

He took a step closer, nostrils flaring.

"I don't smell a wolf on you, Riley. Not a single trace.

He tilted his head mockingly.

"Or maybe there's something. Faint. Sickly. Like she's dying. I'd wager you **haven't** even completed your shift, **have you?**"

His voice dropped into a cruel whisper.

"Keep defying me, and you might just kill your wolf before she ever gets free."

Nyra snarled. My chest constricted—not from fear, but fury.

I took another step.

“You **were**,” I said softly, “but I don’t feel your power anymore.”

Everyone froze.

I was panting. My eyes burned. My fingers ached from gripping the knife too hard.

But Nyra **was** laughing-

“He’s scared now. They all are. Good.”

“Riley, please—Luna Zara tried to step between us.

I **shoved past** her.

“I’m done asking nicely. I’m done surviving. I want justice

“You’re going to kill someone!” Zara screamed.

Maybe that’s **what** it takes!”

Scarlett whimpered behind the couch.

*She deserves it, Nyra **hissed**. “She ruined us. Let me end her.”

My body shook. I raised the knife again.

Chapter 30

+8 Pearls

“No,” Luna **Zam** cried, wrapping her arms **around** me. “Riley, please. Please don’t. I know I failed you. **But** I’m still n

mother.

I froze.

“You’re not,” I **said** flatly. “You’re just the one who **gave** birth to me.”

Her eyes widened in horror.

I held up my free hand. My claws gleamed under the chandelier.

“You want repayment for giving me life? Fine. I’ll give it back.”

I slammed **my hand** onto the table, **spreading** my fingers **wide**.

“A child owes nothing to a parent who only gave her **pain.**”

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[818 words]

Chapter 31

Karl's POV

The moment I stepped into the Vale estate, the scent of blood hit me like a punch to the gut. Then something else—fear. Raw, stifling fear.

Before I could take another step, the door flung open.

Scarlett crashed into my chest, trembling like a leaf. She looked up at me, tears streaking her face. “Kael, save me! Riley’s gone crazy—**she** tried to kill me!”

My mind reeled, still fogged by the alcohol, but those words cut through it like ice water. I stepped forward, but then I heard

it-

Zara’s scream.

I turned sharply. My gaze snapped to the living room, where Riley stood in the center, her left hand dripping blood, the knife slick with crimson. **A** finger—her own **damn** finger—lay on the **floor**.

My heart lurched,

“Riley!” I shouted. “What the hell are you doing?!”

She didn’t even flinch. Her face was blank, **distant—as** if her soul **had** checked out.

“That’s the debt of birth repaid,” she said to **Zara**, her voice eerily calm. “We’re even now.”

Zara paled, her lips moving without sound. I moved to approach Riley, but Scarlett clung to me again, sobbing harder.

“She’s insane, Kael! She said we **all** have to die! She

I shoved her off.

She stumbled back, her mouth open in shock.

I didn’t care.

I rushed toward Riley, just in time to see her raise the blade again—this time aimed directly at Alaric..

“You beat me half to death, she growled, stalking toward him. “Now you can die with me.”

Alaric backpedaled, his face pale, his limbs trembling. I’d never seen him like that our father, our Alpha, reduced to a frightened old wolf. But then I sensed it too—the surge of dominance, thickening in the air like a storm.

He wasn’t just afraid. He **was** about to shift.

The power crackling off him was enough to freeze most Betas where they **stood**. If he shifted **now**, Riley wouldn’t stand a chance. She’d be dead in seconds.

Zara must have realized it too. Her face twisted with horror. She stepped forward, not toward him—but toward her. Riley lunged.

“Kael! Stop her!” Alaric roared.

I had **no** choice

surged forward and wrapped my arms around her from behind, locking her elbows down. Her strength surprised me—she thrashed and kicked like **a** cornered **beast**.

“Riley! Stop! You’ll kill someone—damn it, **you’ll** kill yourself!”

She screamed, her voice not quite human. Her eyes were wild, glowing faintly gold. My arms trembled holding her.

And then **Zara** struck

3 36 PM

Chapter 31

Her palm cracked across Riley's cheek like a whip. The sound rang out like a gunshot, Everything stopped.

+8 Pearls

“What are you trying to prove? Zara's voice sliced the air like a blade. “Ever since **you** came back, this house **has known** nothing but chaos. You want to die? Fine! Just don't drag the rest of us down with you!”

Riley froze. Her breath hitched. She stared at Zara as if she didn't recognize her.

The knife slipped from her fingers.

“You want to **know what** regret looks like, **Riley**? Take a good look. Because you're the one destroying this family.”

Riley's lips parted, but no **sound** came.

Then her knees buckled.

I caught her before she hit the floor.

Her head lolled against my shoulder, her eyes fluttering closed. Blood smeared across my chest. I could feel her going cold.

“Riley—Riley! **Stay** with me!”

Mia burst into the room, pale and shaking. “Young Alpha—she's lost too much blood. You have to take her now!”

I didn't hesitate.

I lifted her into my arms, holding her like I used to when she was a pup afraid of thunder. Mia snatched something off the floor—her finger—and followed close behind.

“Open the damn gates!” I bellowed to the guards outside.

Alaric's voice snarled behind me, full of venom. “Let her die out **there** like the rabid thing she is.”

I didn't stop. Didn't even look back.

But I heard the slap.

Zara. Furious. Screaming.

Good.

Let him feel it for once.

The hospital lights were cold and sterile. I sat hunched in the emergency room waiting area, my shirt soaked with her blood, hands clenched into fists.

Every second dragged.

Mia sat beside me, her hands twisted in her apron. I could tell she wanted to **speak**, but I couldn't handle small talk. Not now. Finally. I looked up. My voice came out low.

"Mia... **what** happened? Why did she—why did Riley do this?"

Mia's eyes welled with tears.

"She tried to hold it in, young Alpha. For days. But they kept pushing her. The Alpha... your father... he beat her, tried to force her will to **subinit**. And Scarlett."

She looked away.

I swallowed the lump rising in my **throat**.

I'd known they were cruel. But this? I hadn't seen. Hadn't wanted to.

Chapter 31

My gaze drifted to the emergency room door.

And for just a second... I smelled it.

Something beneath the **blood**.

A scent. Faint, but **undeniable**.

+8 Pearls

Wolf.

Not **just** any wolf.

Alpha—blooded.

It shimmered in the air like a pulse of heat, brushing **against** my senses—feral, feminine, raw—and then it vanished.

I blinked,

Had I imagined it?

leaned **back** slowly, heart pounding.

Riley had never shifted. We all thought she couldn't. That she was defective. Broken.

But now...

Now, I wasn't so sure.

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[678 words]

Chapter 32

Kael's POV

Mia's words hit me like **a** claw to the chest.

"Miss Riley was beaten, young Alpha. By the Alpha himself

I had already noticed the bruises—angry red welts **and** purpling stripes cutting across Riley's too-pale skin. But **all** my focus had been on her severed finger. I hadn't truly seen the rest.

Now I did. And I couldn't unsee it.

My fists clenched **as** I tried to breathe through the storm building inside me.

"Why?" I asked, voice low, struggling to stay in control. "Why did he **hit** her?"

Mia hesitated, eyes darting toward the closed doors of the operating room. I could see the conflict warring in her gaze. She didn't want to speak—but she was more afraid of what would happen if she didn't

Scarlett claimed Riley pushed her down the stairs." Mia said finally. "Alpha Alaric didn't even question it. Just... snapped. Took his belt and-

She trailed off, eyes watering.

I shut my eyes.

It **wasn't** like I didn't know **what** my father was capable of when he was angry. I just never imagined it'd be turned on Riley like this. Not to this degree.

Mia's voice trembled. "Young Alpha... forgive me, **but** don't you think the whole **pack's** been too harsh on her? Even you..."

I looked up sharply.

She flinched and bowed her head.

Good. She should. I wasn't in the mood for lectures.

But the guilt crept in anyway.

Because she was right.

I'd seen Riley's pain. I'd ignored it.

Now it was bleeding all over me.

I stood and paced outside the emergency ward, every second dragging like a chain around my throat.

Finally, the door opened, and Theo Hale—our lead healer—stepped out, pulling down his **mask**.

"Is she- My voice cracked.

Theo **gave** a short nod to Mia. "Take her to recovery."

Mia bowed and wheeled Riley's bed toward the private ward,

When we were alone, Theo turned to me, face grim.

"It looks worse than it is," he said. "The injuries are mostly superficial. The finger was reattached. She'll heal

I exhaled **slowly**.

But Theo didn't **move**. He looked troubled.

I knew that look

336 PM d

Chapter 32

1

+8 Pearls

“What is it?” I asked.

He hesitated.

Theo. **Say** it.”

He sighed. “While treating her, I noticed an old scar. Lower left side of her back. It’s **clean**, surgical. Maybe a year old.”

I **frowned**. “And?”

“Kael. Riley’s missing **a** kidney.

Everything inside me stilled.

“What

“Her left kidney. It’s gone. Removed cleanly, with precision. Likely during her time in confinement. I don’t know how the hell it happened—those records are sealed tighter than a vault—but it’s gone.”

My legs almost gave out

Theo saw **it** and reached for me, but I waved him off.

I stumbled **back** a step, then caught myself. My chest heaved with every breath, the air feeling thick, poisonous.

She’d lost a kidney.

In prison.

And we’d **never** known.

No—worse.

We’d never asked.

Theo stepped forward. “Kac!... that **kind** of trauma? It might explain something else.”

I looked up.

“Riley’s wolf”

My heart skipped.

“**You’ve** always wondered why she never shifted. Why her bond with her wolf never formed. Well, if her body **was** mutilated, if her wolf was forced into deep submission from pain or betrayal, it could suppress the transformation.”

He paused.

“She didn’t reject the wolf. The wolf was caged”

Based on the faint trace of wolf pheromone I just caught from Riley, it suddenly all made sense.

I had always **assumed** she was too weak to complete her shift—but it wasn’t that she didn’t have a wolf.

Her wolf had been trapped all along... because she was missing a damn kidney.

I’d forgotten—she carried pure **Alpha** blood. She was supposed to have a powerful Alpha wolf.

I stood there, reeling. My sister **had** been torn apart, piece by piece, inside and out, while I sat on my throne and believed every word Scarlett fed me.

I didn’t deserve the title of Alpha.

Theo placed a hand on my shoulder, then walked off.

I stood **there** a long time.

Chapter 32

+8 Pearls

Eventually, I went to her.

At the threshold of her room. I hesitated. I wasn’t ready to face her—not like this. Not when the truth **had** stripped me bare.

I heard Theo’s voice from inside. “You’re awake!”

A long silence. Then a rustle of sheets.

“You know, every time I see you, you’re covered in wounds. It’s like you’ve made it your thing

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[733 words]

Chapter 33

Riley’s POV

+8 Pearls

I stared at the ceiling, numb and hollow. The sterile scent of antiseptic clung to the hospital room, and the cold IV fluid snaked into my arm. My entire body ached, but the pain barely registered—**just** another echo beneath everything else.

Theo’s voice **came** from the side of the bed, low and clinical. “You’re awake.”

I didn’t answer.

A soft rustle of paper, the sound of a stool being dragged closer.

“You don’t have to act like this,” he **said**. “You scared **a** lot of people last night.”

Still, I stayed quiet,

Theo let out a breath, his tone shifting. “How do you feel?”

“How do I look?” I asked flatly, turning my head toward him.

He flinched. “Like hell”

I didn’t laugh. I didn’t even smile. I let the silence stretch until he broke it again.

“Your injuries weren’t life-threatening. The finger was reattached. You’ll need some time to **heal**... but physically, you’ll

recover.

Physically.

He didn't mention the emotional **damage**. Or the kind of wound that wasn't visible under a hospital gown.

He hesitated, then said, "When I was treating your back, I noticed an old scar. About the length of a hand. Lower left side. Riley you're missing a kidney."

I didn't react

He continued, slower this time. That scar—it's been there for at least a year. Probably longer. I don't know what happened in that prison, but it wasn't just bruises **and** cold floors, was it?"

I turned away from him.

Theo pressed, "Do you even know when it happened?"

"Does it matter?"

"You should've told **someone**-

I cut him off. "You think they didn't know?"

He went still.

I looked at him, my voice steady despite the tightness in my throat. "The reason I couldn't shift all these years... it wasn't because I **was** weak or broken. It was because they took a part of me. A piece of my body. And maybe... a piece of my wolf."

He swallowed hard, clearly shaken.

"You stood there and asked why I didn't dodge the belt," I whispered. "Theo, I couldn't even run."

He looked away, ashamed. But then—like always—he couldn't leave it alone.

"You're not exactly easy to help," he muttered.

I laughed, dry and bitter. "And you're not exactly helpful."

His jaw clenched. "You're always the victim, huh?"

Chapter 33

I stared at him. “Get out.”

He blinked. “What?”

“Out.”

His mouth twisted into a sneer. “You know what? Maybe everything that’s happened to you—maybe it fits.

I closed my **eyes**.

The door slammed shut behind him.

Author’s POV

Back at the Ebonclaw estate, the morning sun filtered through the tall windows, illuminating the spacious kitchen in golden. light

Mia was carefully packing wolfbone congee and a few other tonic dishes into insulated containers. She had been up since dawn preparing food that would **nourish** Riley’s body—what little was left of it, anyway.

Just as she **reached for** the silver lotus **and** bloodroot soup, a delicate **hand shot** out and **grabbed** the bowl.

Mia looked **up** and froze. Scarlett.

Scarlett raised the bowl and smirked. “This looks nice. I’ll take it.”

Mia quickly stepped forward. “Miss Scarlett, that’s for Miss Riley. She’s still recovering.”

Scarlett’s eyes narrowed. “And who are you to tell me what I can or can’t eat in my own house?”

Mia hesitated. She knew better **than** to challenge her openly. But she **had** to try.

“Miss Riley needs **it** more. The doctor said her internal balance is still unstable-”

“Oh, because the broken little bird needs special treatment now?” Scarlett snorted. “Please. She’s not even a proper Ebonclaw. She didn’t **shift** until yesterday. If that.”

Mia flinched.

“You think just because the Alpha let her stay here that she’s earned anything? My father still says she’s **an** embarrassment.”

“She’s still his daughter,” **Mia** murmured.

“Barely.” Scarlett sneered. “And don’t **forget**, I’m the one he chose to inherit the northern estates.”

Before Mia could respond, heavy footsteps echoed down the hall.

Alaric and **Zara** entered.

“What’s this noise?” Alaric’s voice was sharp as a whip crack.

Scarlett immediately switched gears, voice trembling, eyes shining with unshed tears. “Father, Mia said I wasn’t worthy of eating the family **food** because I’m adopted.”

Mia’s jaw dropped—1 never said—”

Zara’s face twisted with disgust. “Is that true, Mia?”

I swear—1 just **said** Miss Riley needed it for recovery-

Alaric slammed a hand on the counter. “You dare question who’s worthy in this household? Scarlett is my daughter in all the ways **that** matter Riley? That little criminal should be grateful she hasn’t been **cast** out like the stray she is.”

He snatched the bowl from **Mia’s** hands and shoved it into Scarlett’s.

And with that, she sauntered off.

Mia stood frozen in place, trembling.

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[760 words]

Chapter 34

Karl’s POV

Outside the hospital room.

+8 Pearls

Theo and I ran into each other head-on. He didn't bother hiding his annoyance. "I'd advise you not to go in there. She's pissed off, and if you walk in now, all you'll get is yelled at.

I didn't **answer**. My eyes locked on the hospital bed through the narrow glass window. Riley's frame was so small, so bruised, it was like staring at the aftermath of a war. My wolf growled low in my chest, a restless thrum of fury.

"How's **she** doing?" I asked, my voice hoarse from everything I hadn't said.

Theo scoffed, "She had enough energy to argue with me, so I'd say **she's** fine."

Then he **paused** and looked at me more seriously: "Why did your dad beat her like that, anyway? That was.. excessive."

I clenched my jaw but didn't speak. I couldn't.

Seeing my silence, Theo kept poking "What, was it because she **hurt** Scarlett or something-?"

"Don't talk nonsense. I cut him off sharply, the words like a whipcrack. My brow furrowed **deep**, my entire body tense.

"It wasn't?" he pressed.

"It wasn't," I repeated coldly.

"Alright, alright." He raised his hands and backed off. "I've got stuff to do anyway. You should go home and get some rest." I didn't respond. I just kept staring at Riley through the window like I could somehow reach her **across** the glass.

It was a long time before I finally turned and walked away, my steps as heavy as my heart.

The moment I stepped into the kitchen of the Vale estate, I caught the scent first. Not just the lingering aroma of herbs and wolfberries in a tonic, but something sharper—burnt pride, fear, and old **blood**.

Mia stood stiffly near the counter, her eyes wet, **hands** clenching a cloth that had long since stopped wiping anything. Across from her stood Scarlett, holding a porcelain bowl of tonic. The steam curled upward like smoke from a wildfire.

I **knew** what it **was**. I'd smelled it yesterday in Riley's hospital room. The same tonic Mia made to help her recover,

Scarlett always said she hated it—bird spit, she called it. Said it made her gag

But now? She was guarding it like a prize.

“That’s for Riley, **Mia** said. Her voice **was calm**, but I could hear the quake in her chest.

Scarlett snorted. “You forget your **place**, Mia. You’re a servant. This isn’t your decision.

My jaw clenched.

Mia stayed quiet, but I saw the fury in her. She didn’t say it, but I could feel it in her scent. She was reliving everything Riley had suffered the orphanage, the prison, the injuries, the **missing** finger. The fact that she had to beg for her own recovery.

And here Scarlett was, holding that bowl like it was a trophy. Like Mia hadn’t spent hours preparing it before dawn.

gripped the railing at the top of the stairs.

CRASH

A vase exploded against the marble floor below.

Scarlett shrieked. Zara and Alaric jumped.

I was already descending, each step slow, deliberate. My boots echoed like war drums.

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Chapter 34

Scarlett’s smug smile vanished, She clutched the bowl tighter, shrinking back.

I didn’t stop

I reached her, snatched the bowl from her hands, and hurled it at the **floor**.

It shattered, herbal broth splattering across tile and cabinets.

Scarlett screamed.

“You were smiling.” **I said** coldly, staring into her widened eyes. “What was so funny?”

T–I wasn’t!” she stammered, **grabbing** onto Zara’s arm.

Zara turned pale. Alaric’s expression darkened.

+8 Pearls

“You weren’t smiling?” I challenged, stepping closer. “So I imagined it? The same way Riley imagined being framed? Imagined being beaten until her bones cracked? Imagined carving off her own finger in this very house?”

Nobody answered.

I turned to Zara, You knew Scarlett hated that tonic. You knew Riley needed it more **than** anyone in this house. And you let her have it

Zara’s mouth opened, but no sound came.

“She’s your daughter!” I snapped “**She’s** your blood.”

Her face crumpled. Tears welled in her eyes.

“If you really cared, you’d be in that hospital room right now, not babying the girl who damn near drove her sister to suicide.” Alaric growled, low and warning. That’s enough. You forget who you’re talking to?”

“No,” I said. “I know exactly who I’m talking to. **An** Alpha who let his daughter rot in prison. A Luna who let her scream in silence. **And** a so-called sister who steals from her while she bleeds.”

My voice was a snarl now.

Zara shook her head. “Kael... you’re out of line.”

“No. 1 hissed. “This whole pack is.“.

I turned, stormed out the door, and slammed it behind me. But in my chest, I carried the weight of Riley’s silence. And I knew **this** wasn’t over.

It was just beginning.

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[709 words]

Chapter 35

Author’s POV

Alaric's roar still echoed through the Vale estate when his words struck like venom in the **air**:

+8 Pearls

"What sin did I commit to deserve a daughter like Riley Vale? She's rotten to the core. She's hated for a reason. She's always been cursed"

His tone was venomous, **his** lies stacking one atop another **as** if he truly believed them.

"She chopped her finger off willingly! No one forced her! In fact, I think she should lose both hands—maybe then she'll stop pushing **people** down the **stairs!**"

It was madness. Unrepentant. Cruel.

Kael met his gaze from across the room, not with rage but with cold, quiet disappointment—disappointment that cut sharper **than** any blade.

"You want to talk about sins?" Kael said, his **voice** low but unwavering. "When Mom gave birth to Riley, she begged you to stay awake and keep her safe. You fell asleep, remember? That's how she was stolen. That's how all of this started."

His fists clenched at **his** sides.

"If she'd grown up with them, gotten the love and education she deserved, she wouldn't be like this. She wouldn't be broken. But she didn't. She grew up in Rogue settlements just like an orphanage while they coddled a stranger. And now you call her unworthy?"

Kael took a step forward.

"She was born into the Vale family and raised like a stray. And now you dare say v she deserves this?"

Alaric's face turned beet red. His body trembled with rage. It wasn't guilt—it was the **loss** of control that infuriated him.

"You" he bellowed. "You ungrateful little bastard!"

Before Kael could brace himself, the slap came. Alaric's hand cracked across his face with Alpha strength, splitting the inside of Kael's mouth **and sending** blood trickling down his chin.

The sharp, metallic taste didn't dull the ache in his chest.

Any lingering hope **Kael** had for this man—the father he once admired—**was** snuffed out.

He laughed. It was a bitter, hollow **sound**.

“She must regret ever coming home,” Kael said quietly, wiping the blood from his mouth.

Then he turned to **Mia**. “Go. Take the food to Riley. Get her whatever she wants. If anyone dares stop her, I’ll cut off their hands myself.

His voice **was** as cold as the steel buried in his tone. **Mia**, eyes glassy, nodded firmly, “Yes, young Alpha. I’ll go now.” Kael didn’t **wait** another second. He turned and left without sparing anyone else a glance.

Mia was just about to follow when Zara’s voice stopped her.

“I’m going top

Zara gently removed Scarlett’s clinging arms from around her waist and straightened her shoulders.

Scarlett’s eyes widened slightly in panic. Kael’s threat had clearly been for her, and she knew it. If she’d realized Kael was on **the** second floor watching the entire scene, maybe she wouldn’t have tried to steal Riley’s food.

Now It was too late.

Scarlett turned pitiful eyes toward Zara. “**Mom**, I want to come too. I want to visit Riley”

| +8 Pearls

Chapter 35

Zara hesitated but eventually said, “She... she doesn’t want to see you right now. Stay here.”

And with that, she and Mia left.

Scarlett was left alone with Alaric.

Her tears vanished. Her pout twisted into a scowl.

“She’s poisoned him,” Scarlett snarled. “Kael used to hate her. Now he’s threatening me over her! You’ve got to do something before she takes them both away from me!”

Her voice had sharpened, shrill and venomous—gone **was** the fragile, innocent girl she pretended to be. Now she sounded like a petulant snake who’d **lost** her bite.

Alaric sat heavily on the couch, arms crossed, face dark as a thunderhead. Then slowly... he smirked.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “That mongrel pup won’t get far.”

Scarlett’s eyes lit up. “You have a plan?”

Alaric nodded. “The Stormridge Pack from Northhaven **is** arriving soon to bid on the Eastside territory. If they’re serious about the project even the Ebonclaw Pack and Blackmaw pack working together won’t be enough to outbid them.”

Scarlett’s brows furrowed. “Are you saying we should marry Riley off to one of them? You’re going to reward her by marrying her into a royal bloodline?”

Alaric laughed darkly. “**Reward**? No. The Alpha heir of Stormridge—he’s a monster. Sterile. Violent. Dominant to the point of sadism. Rumor has it he breaks wolves the way one breaks wild dogs.”

Scarlett’s lips parted in surprise, then curled into a delighted smile.

“So we send Riley to him. Let him tame her.”

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[548 words]

Chapter 36

Author’s POV

Back at the Vale estate, Scarlett’s excitement only grew the longer Alaric spoke.

+8 Pearls

She laughed coldly. “If **that’s** the case, then perfect. With Riley’s crippled body, I doubt she’d last a day under that Stormridge Alpha’s hands. She’ll die before I even lift a finger.”

Scarlett leaned in close to Alaric, her eyes gleaming with malice. “When are you planning to act, Father? Just don’t let Kael find out. He’s completely on Riley’s side now. If he knew, he’d raise hell.”

Alaric scoffed. “I’ll handle it. You keep playing innocent. Don’t slip up.”

Scarlett nodded eagerly. “I’m just waiting to watch that little bitch scream for mercy when Northhaven’s Alpha gets his hands on her.”

At the hospital, Riley sat upright in bed, staring blankly out the window. Her body was still aching, wrapped in gauze **and** shadows of exhaustion.

The door opened. Zara walked in with Mia close behind, carrying a thermos of hot food.

Riley slowly turned her head. Her eyes landed on Zara—and chilled over.

Zara approached cautiously and sat beside her, her tone soft. “Sweetheart, you must be hungry. I brought-

“You’re **not** my mother,” Riley said flatly.

Zara’s breath caught. The air seemed to still between them.

“Whether you accept it or not, I am your mother. **That** won’t change.”

“It already **has**,” Riley replied, her voice cold as the frost “Birth without care is no bond at all. I gave you back what I owed. **That** was the end.”

Zara’s eyes welled with tears. “You really hate me that much? What do I have to do, Riley? Tell me. What **will** make forgive **me!**”

Riley didn’t answer.

Not because she **didn’t** have one—but because there was nothing left to say..

Zara tried to compose herself. “Just eat something, okay? We can talk after-

“Leave.”

The word cracked like a whip.

Zara flinched. “Riley, **please**...

Riley didn’t raise her voice. **She** didn’t **have** to..

“Looking at you kills my appetite.”

you

Zara stumbled to her feet like she'd been struck. Her hand flew to her mouth to muffle the sob threatening to break free. She rushed out the door.

Outside, she collapsed against the wall, trembling, holding back her tears with a force that made her shoulders shake. She wept silently, **ashamed** to let the **nurses** see her fall apart.

Minutes passed. When she looked back into the room through the glass **pane**, her heart twisted.

Mia sat by Riley's side, **feeding** her gently with a spoon. Riley—cold, silent Riley—was **smiling**,

Chapter 36

A real **smile**..

Her eyes glowed softly. Her lips moved in conversation. She was laughing. With Mia.

Zara's heart clenched.

She had never seen that smile directed at herself. Not once.

Not even as a child.

It was Mia who received her daughter's warmth.

A truth settled over her **like** ash: Riley didn't want her. Might never forgive her. Might never even try.

She waited **until Mia** stepped out.

Mia jumped slightly, startled to see Zara still **there**. "Luna Zara, I thought you'd already gone."

"Go on ahead," Zara said curtly. "I'll stay."

Mia hesitated. "Luna, Riley is very tired. Maybe it's better if—"

Zara's expression darkened. "Are you telling me when I can see my own daughter?"

Mia lowered her gaze. "Of course not. I'll wait downstairs."

Zara didn't wait. She pushed the door open.

Riley didn't react.

But this time, she didn't send her away either.

She turned her face toward the window again, as if preparing for a storm.

And deep inside, her wolf stirred again—quiet, alert, ready.

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[696 words]

Chapter 37

Riley's POV

+8 Pearls

I didn't look at her when she stepped inside. I didn't need to. I could feel her energy shift the moment she crossed the threshold—hesitant, nervous, layered **with a desperation** she tried to hide behind **motherly** guilt.

She was quiet at first, maybe hoping I'd soften. I didn't.

Before she could sit beside me, I pointed at the **chair** across the room.

"Sit over there."

She froze. For a heartbeat, I thought she **might** argue. But she didn't. She obeyed.

Good.

She needed to understand: whatever thread once connected us had already frayed to nothing.

She hadn't even opened her mouth when I said, "I know why you're here. **You** want me to forgive you. Maybe that's not impossible. But if you want redemption, you'll have to earn it"

Her eyes lit up with hope, as if I'd thrown her a lifeline. "Riley, anything. Just tell me what you need me to do."

“I smell the alpha pheromones in you, Riley, you have a wolf”

Her voice was trembling with emotion, her wolf’s scent shifting **from** guilt to something almost hopeful.

I almost pitied her.

Almost

“Is that so?” I said, flat and calm.

She nodded eagerly. “Please, Riley. Just trust me this once. I promise, I won’t fail you **again**.”

I stared straight **into** her eyes.

Then I said it.

“Get Scarlett out of the Vale estate. Cut all ties. Formally, permanently. No daughter of yours, no Luna training, no inheritance.”

She flinched **like** I’d slapped her.

Her fingers twisted into the hem of her coat, her eyes darting toward me with uncertainty, then fear. “Riley... she’s lived with us for

years. Your father and I raised her like our own. To just cast her out—what **will** the pack think? What will the Elders say?”

I laughed.

Cold. Empty.

“If she’s done nothing wrong, then why’d you erase the security footage?”

Her mouth clamped **shut**.

I had her

“You care more about appearances than justice,” I continued. “When the Enforcers dragged me away in front of the entire **Council**, where **was** your concern about the Vale family’s reputation then? Or was it only embarrassing when I survived?” She winced like the **words** cut deep. Good. Let them bleed.

“You’ve always **loved** Scarlett like gold,” I **said**. “And me? Just a weed growing where you didn’t want **one**.”

+B Pearls

Chapter 37

Her eyes welled again. She clutched her chest like my words physically hurt her. “Riley, please...”

“Don’t. I don’t need you to lie again.”

Her wolf was trembling inside her—I could smell the shift, the way it recoiled in guilt and shame.

“I knew you wouldn’t do it,” I said, voice cold as stone. “So don’t bother pretending **you** would’ve.”

“No!” she surged forward, grabbed my **hands**—clutched them like a drowning wolf
“Please, Riley, just give me one more chance. I’ll do anything. Anything! Just don’t shut me out again.”

I didn’t answer right away. I let the silence stretch.

Let her drown in it.

Then met her eyes and said, “Fine. One more chance.”

Her breath caught. Her fingers squeezed mine. “**Thank you**—thank you-

“But I addell, voice razor-sharp, “if you want forgiveness, if you want to keep Scarlett in your precious house, you’re going to climb all 999 kreps of Sacred Howl Ridge to the summit temple. Kneel. Prostrate. **And** beg the Moon Priest for a blessed protection charpe Then bring it back to me,”

She paled instantly.

The **climb** to Sacred Howl Ridge wasn’t for the faint of heart. **Even** warriors trained in endurance struggled to complete the ascent. The elevation was brutal. The stone stairs **were** steep, uneven, sacred. Most wolves attempted the **climb** as part of a coming-of-age trial—at sixteen.

She was fifty. A Luna intitle. A stranger in truth.

Her lips trembled. “Riley, that climb is dangerous. I—I’m not as strong as I used to be. Even the Alpha hasn’t done it since his twenties. What you’re asking..”

“Isn’t **even** close to what you **owe**,” I said.

I didn't yell. I didn't growl.

I just looked at her.

And I watched her break.

Just a little.

Enough to make me wonder if she would actually do it.

Enough to **make** my wolf, Nyra, growl softly in the back of my mind: She won't climb. She's already chosen the other one.

I didn't answer her.

Because I **knew** Nyra **was** right.

But still I wanted to give her the **choice**.

Let her fail on her own this time.

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[762 words]

Chapter 38

Riley's POV

Zara **stood** there, almost in tears, her voice trembling. "**Riley**, please. One last chance. Whatever you want—tell me. I'll give it **to** you I swear."

I closed my eyes and inhaled slowly, steadying the turmoil inside me.

When I opened them again, I was ready.

"Fine." I said coldly. "One last chance. But if you fail me again—if you lie, hesitate, or make excuses—we're done. Forever. You'll be nothing more **than** a stranger."

She nodded eagerly, as if she'd been waiting her entire life to hear that from me. "Yes, of course. Anything. Just tell me what you need."

I looked her dead in the eyes. You raised Scarlett for twenty–three years. She’s worn designer clothes, driven imported cars, traveled the world, and had every privilege thrown at her feet. **You** spent more than a fortune on her.

Zara blinked, unsure. “Are you asking for money?”

“I’m asking for the only thing you can give,” I said without emotion. “I want ten million credits. That’s all. Give me that, **and** I’ll forgive everything.”

She looked stunned. Ten million was **a** lot, even for her. Not impossible, but not something she could just hand over today.

But

compared to **what** I had demanded before—to cast out Scarlett and sever the blood–bonded tie of guardianship—this wa

a walk in the park

She was so terrified I might change my mind that she didn’t even hesitate. “Okay. I agree. I’ll get it for you.”

I nodded. “Good. Then **leave**. I’m tired”

She practically fled in relief, clinging to the promise of redemption like it was a lifeline.

I watched her and a small smirk curled at the corner of my lips.

That **was** always the plan.

I never expected her to exile Scarlett. And climbing the sacred nine hundred and ninety–**nine** stairs at **Ashfang** Temple? Please. I knew she couldn’t do it.

I gave her impossible choices first **so** that when I **finally** asked for the money she’d jump at the chance.

She would never have agreed to ten million upfront. Not when she couldn’t even bear to give me a proper allowance before.

But now?

Now, I **had** what I needed,

The next **day**, Mia returned **as usual** to bring me food—but this time, she wasn’t alone.

Carman came with her.

She was only twenty, **but** she radiated a light I hadn't felt in a long time. There was no **pain** in her eyes, no cynicism—just the brightness of a **young** she-wolf with a **future**.

I was only three years older, but in my reflection, I barely recognized myself. My eyes were hollow. My skin pale and bruised. My hands scarred

Carman's gaze landed on my bandaged hand, and her eyes **filled** instantly with tears. She stepped forward and gently cupped my wrist, her fingers trembling. "Riley... What did they do to you..."

The bruises were still vivid. The belt wounds from Alarie's rage cut across my
y arms in ugly, swollen marks.

Carman's **voice** cracked. "You can't stay
y with them. The Vales **are** monsters. Leave them. Please,"

Chapter 38

+8 Pearls

I knew she meant it. She **and** Mia were the only ones who ever visited me in prison. Not Kael. Not **Zara**. Not Theo.

Just them.

And for that **I** would protect them with everything **I had**.

I gave her a small smile. "Okay, I'll listen to you, Carman."

Her eyes widened. "Really?"

I nodded. "Really."

But before I walked away from the Vale estate for good, **I** needed to make sure **they had a** way out too. If Kael ever tried to use them against me again—I wouldn't **survive** it.

So I shifted the topic. "How are your classes?"

She beamed. "Pretty **good**. **I've** been **making** the Dean's List every semester."

I felt a flicker of warmth. "That's my girl. Do you want to study abroad?"

She hesitated. The light in her eyes dimmed.

I'd love to," she admitted. "But there's no way. Mom's already doing everything she can just to keep me in school here. Studying overseas? That's a luxury we can't afford."

I leaned forward. "What if—just what if—you didn't **have** to worry about money? Would you go?"

Carman laughed softly, shaking her head. "In a heartbeat. But dreams don't work like that, Riley. It's just a fantasy."

No. Not a fantasy.

A plan.

Once I got that **ten** million, they were the first ones I'd send **away**. Carman would finish her education in another country- far from the Vale Pack. Far from Alaric. Far from Kael. Far from **pain**.

And Mia would go **with** her. She deserved peace.

I would tie up the last of my loose ends.

Once they were safe—no one could use them against me.

And then?

I'd burn the **rest** down.

Let the Vales come for me if they dared.

Because **this time**, I wasn't afraid to take every last one of them with me.

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[887 words]

Chapter 39

Author's POV

That morning. Scarlett came downstairs after washing up, only to find the dining room eerily quiet.

The **breakfast** table had already been set—steaming meats, warm bread, and freshly poured blood—orange tea—but Alpha Alaric, Luna Zara, and Kael were nowhere to be

Scarlett's brows furrowed slightly. She turned to a housemaid **standing** nearby. "Where's my **father**? **And** Kael? They didn't come down yet?"

The maid **responded** promptly. "Alpha and the young Alpha left at dawn. Something urgent with the Northern Territory council. Luna Zara had a few bites, then left as well."

Scarlett nodded absently. Her father and Kael had been constantly tied up with the approaching land tribunal concerning the contested, eastern ridge bordering the Stormridge Pack. But her mother leaving this early? That was strange.

"Did **she** say where she was going?"

The maid **hesitated**, "Not exactly. But... she took several chests from the vault. The ones holding her personal ceremonial bone relics. **And** a few Alpha—level crest accessories. Looked like she was heading toward the Nightfang Exchange.

Scarlett's expression shifted.

The Nightfang Exchange was no ordinary market—it was where rare magical items, enchanted jewelry, and heirloom—level totems were traded or pawned, often for **large** sums,

Her mother pawning things? Her most prized Alpha—**heirloom** relics?

That didn't make sense.!

Zara wasn't one to part with her treasures, not even for internal Council politics.

Unless

Scarlett's eyes narrowed. A sinking feeling churned in her stomach.

Unless it was for Riley.

She left the estate at once, driving straight to the Lunar Crest Plaza, The Eastern Ridge auction gala **was** coming up in a few days, and she was scheduled to make **a** grand appearance. If Riley dared try and steal the spotlight—or worse, her family's assets—Scarlett would make sure she was destroyed socially before that ever happened.

She stepped into one of the most exclusive designer halls in the city. A boutique reserved for the elite of the packs. The moment she entered, attendants rushed to greet her.

“Miss Scarlett! What a **divine** surprise. You’ve come at the perfect time. We’ve just received several custom gowns—fresh off the courier from the Parisian Pack Enclave. One of them is made entirely from whisper—silk and lunar thread. It’s practically singing your name.”

Scarlett smirked, preening slightly as she trailed her fingers over the delicate gowns shimmering under moonlight—filtered chandeliers.

She already pictured it—her arrival at the Eastern Ridge Gala jaws dropping, eyes burning with envy. She’d wear dominance **like a** second skin.

Finally, she chose a gown covered in black stardust crystal embroidery—dramatic, bold, lethal. Just like her.

As she **was** about to move to the fitting room, one of the staff suggested, “Miss, we also just acquired some high—tier accessories—claw—tipped collars, jeweled fang pendants, and a rare runed alpha **brooch**. They’d pair beautifully with your

Take me to them,” she **said**, already **walking**

When she reached the relic display wall, she froze.

Her eyes locked on a few **pieces** sitting behind a velvet rope.

Bone—charmed bracelets. An old silver sigil crest. A ceremonial hairpin made from shadow antler.

All pieces she’d seen before.

Her mother’s.

Scarlett’s pupils dilated slightly. “These.. where did these come from?”

The staff, **oblivious**, replied casually, “Oh, those? A noble Luna came by earlier. She said she needed to trade in some private family items. Seemed urgent.”

Scarlett’s jaw tightened.

So it was true.

Zara had traded off her ancestral heirlooms—just to get money.

And now she was on her way to the hospital.

Scarlett didn't need to be told what for

She grabbed her phone and called her mother.

The line connected. **Zara's** voice came warm **and** unsuspecting, "Sweetheart, are you up already?"

"Yeah, Mom. Where are you?"

"I'm heading to the healing ward. I thought I'd visit Riley. She needs support right now."

Scarlett's tone was deceptively sweet. "Okay, be careful on the road."

The moment she ended the call, she dialed Alaric.

"Dad, listen to me. Mom just traded off a bunch of our ancestral totems—and she's heading to give the money to Riley. **Stop** her before she hands it over."

Alaric growled on the other end. "I'll take care of it."

Scarlett hung up **and** smiled.

Let them fight each other all they wanted.

She'd still come out on top.

At the hospital, Zara's demeanor was radiant.

Riley could tell the moment she entered—Zara had succeeded. Her request, the one million lunar credits, must have been. fulfilled.

Cara sat beside her bedside, beaming, and placed a small rune-locked pouch into Riley's hands. "Darling. I told you- whatever it takes, I'll do it. Inside is the full amount you **asked** for. From now on, we forget the

past."

Riley stared at the pouch. A **million lunar** credits. Freedom. Power.

She reached for it—when the door slammed open.

Alaric stormed in, eyes blazing.

Before Riley could move, he slapped the pouch from her hand and snatched it away.

Zara jumped to her feet. “Alaric! What are you doing?”

“You should’ve consulted me!” he barked. “You want to hand our family fortune to the girl who nearly gutted me?!”

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“It’s not that much,” Zara tried to soothe him. “**She’s** our daughter-”

“She’s not fit to carry our **name!**” Alaric snarled. **That** little traitor should be grateful we let her live!”

Riley’s injured hand **throbbed** from where he struck her. But she didn’t wince.

She just stared at him, eyes burning with defiance.

+8 Pearls

Alaric met her gaze and sneered. “You want money? Fine. You can have it—on one condition. **You** accept the bond. You’ll be mated off to the Stormridge heir. The credits will be your dowry.”

Riley didn’t move. But her wolf stirred deep inside her, growling in disgust.

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[739 words]

Chapter 40

Riley’s POV

They said family was supposed to protect you. But as I stood in that sterile hospital room, every word out of Alaric’s mouth twisted that lie a little deeper into my bones,

“She’s a danger,” he spat. “Anyone who dares lift **a** knife against her own father will do it again.”

Zara’s voice was **tight** with hesitation, but she didn’t argue. Not really. She never did when it involved Scarlett. Not when it meant **choosing** between me and her precious adopted jewel.

“She’s your daughter too, **Alaric,**” she whispered, voice **trembling**.

“**And** exactly for that reason, **she** needs to be gone.

Gone

Like trash. Like a burden.

Like a weapon they couldn't control.

They wanted to marry me off. To bind me to the Alpha of Stormridge Pack from Northhaven—because I was expendable, and they needed a business deal. That's what I was to them: leverage with a heartbeat.

Zara looked back at me before they walked out—**guilt** in her eyes, but no courage in her bones. She said nothing. -Cowards, all of them.

They thought I couldn't hear through these thin hospital walls. They forgot I was a wolf too.

The second the door closed, I clenched my fists so hard my healing fingers throbbed in protest. My claws nearly pierced my own palm.

Alaric wanted to use me to broker a merger.

Zara just didn't want Scarlett to suffer.

And me!

I was just a pawn with a price tag.

Laughter burst from my chest, hollow and sharp. The kind of laughter that didn't bring relief—only a burning clarity.

Fine. If they wanted to use me, I'd let them think they'd won. But they'd regret underestimating me.

I slipped out of the room.

My leg was still dragging slightly from the injury, but the burn of betrayal gave me enough strength to limp through the corridor without stopping. I didn't know where I was going. I just needed to breathe

I pushed open the stairwell door, expecting silence.

But there was someone already there.

A man leaned against the wall, **half**–shrouded in the shadows. The scent of smoke **hung** in the air–rich, dry, **with** a hint of crushed pine ash. Not **cheap** cigarettes. Something darker. Earthier.

My steps slowed as I looked up.

He stood on the upper landing, half a flight above me, but it wasn't the angle **that** made him look like **a** god.

It was everything.

The way his suit clung to a tall, broad–shouldered frame **built** like it had been honed for battle. The subtle silver lining on his cuffs. The glint of **a** signet ring on his right hand. But more than that.....

His face.

Moonlight through the stairwell window sliced across sharp cheekbones, a defined jawline, **and** lips shaped like a cruel promise. His eyes, **deep**–set and impossibly dark, watched me like a predator sizing up something unfamiliar–but not uninteresting.

His aura was crushing.

Not **wild**, not reckless–controlled. Deliberate. Dangerous

He was the kind of man you felt before you saw,

And my wolf... stirred.

It blinked inside **me**. Awake. Alert. Curious.

I should've turned around. Should've excused myself **and** found another corner to suffer in peace.

But I didn't

Because he was looking at me **too**.

Our gazes **met** across the **stairwell**. Neither of us **moved**.

Then his brow lifted just barely, and he exhaled another long stream of smoke. The scent curled toward me, invasive and heady. It made **my** lungs tighten

I stopped halfway down the stairs, clutching the railing with a tremble I hoped he couldn't see.

“Sorry,” he said, his voice deep, quiet. Measured. Like thunder you only heard once it passed.

He made a motion to put out the cigarette.

But something inside me—something sharp and bitter and reckless—snapped.

“**Wait**,” I said hoarsely. “Do you have another?”

His head tilted. His eyes didn’t widen. He wasn’t surprised.

Just intrigued.

“Thought you didn’t like the smell,” he said.

“I don’t, I admitted. “But I need something to burn.”

He studied me for a moment longer, then reached into the inner pocket of his coat and pulled out the silver tin. He tossed it

to me.

I caught it with one hand, wincing at the jolt it sent up my sore wrist.

He watched that too.

“**You** don’t look like you should be walking,” he said.

“You don’t look like someone who loiters **in** stairwells,” I **shot** back.

He **smirked**. It **was** a **small** thing, but it was lethal.

“I **don’t** loiter,” he **said**, “I wait. There’s a difference.”

I pulled out a cigarette, lips trembling as I raised it to my **mouth**. I didn’t even smoke. But I needed the taste of something bitter. Something that wasn’t blood.

He thcked a flame for me.

The fire caught.

A DIOKENT Alpine ni

ss nevenge

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[914 words]

Chapter 41

Riley's POV

"Thanks," I said, my voice barely audible, husky **from** fatigue and something heavier I didn't care to name.

I mimicked his motion, placing the cigarette between my lips, though I'd never smoked a day in my life. It wasn't about nicotine. It was about pretending I wasn't on the verge of falling apart.

The sound of a lighter broke the stillness. Then his hand appeared—lean, strong fingers and a flickering flame illuminating the shadows of the stairwell.

I hesitated, then leaned down, lighting the cigarette from his.

The first drag hit my lungs like fire.

I coughed violently, doubling over, the taste of nicotine **and** ash clawing down my throat. I spat the smoke out quickly, blinking away tears.

He arched a brow. "You don't smoke"

I shook my head, trying to steady my breath. "Just figured I'd try it... seemed fitting."

He didn't reply. Just leaned back against the wall **and** stared into the **silence** like he belonged to it.

I sank down onto the stairs, the concrete cold beneath me. The cigarette trembled between my fingers as I forced myself to **take** another drag—shallower this time.

Didn't help.

Didn't ease the ache in my chest or the weight in my bones.

It was the kind of **silence** that didn't **need** words. The kind that swallowed sound, leaving behind only questions no one wanted to answer.

He smoked in silence too. When he finished, he crushed the butt beneath his heel and rose.

Step by step, he ascended the stairs, boots echoing like a **war** drum.

And just before he reached the exit, he turned back.

He looked at me—really looked. At the hunched shoulders. The gauntface. The spark at my fingertips that barely passed for fire anymore.

Then he walked **away**.

And I sat there for a long time.

Eventually, I stood. My body felt like stone. I just wanted to lie down. To not feel anything anymore.

But when I opened the door to my hospital room, any hope of rest was obliterated.

He was there.

Maddox.

Sitting by the window, sunlight casting a halo around him **like** some divine lie. His tailored clothes. His clean-cut face. **That** soft, familiar scent that used to bring comfort.

Now it made my stomach twist.

He stood the second he saw me. “Riley-”

I stepped aside, letting him **reach out**, and then brushed past his hand like it meant nothing.

His hand hovered in the air for a beat, then curled into a fist. “Where **did** you go?”

Chapter 41

Let outes us the best and turned my back to him.

“Tho

te met agam “Do you want fruit? I can peel you an apple

+8 Pearls

My laugh was humorless “The honorable Judge Maddox is a busy man. If you’re here, it’s not to peel fruit. Just get to the

That but him I didn’t care

He sighed “Did you pushy Scarlett down the stairs?”

Estibald’ve known.

Not a word in five years. Not a visit during my sentencing But now that Scarlett had a scratch on her porcelain skin, suddenly he had done for me.

I looked at him, voice cold. “Yes, I did it.”

He reeled slightly. “You’re not even going to deny it?”

Why should I? You’ve **not here** for the truth. You never were.” I **gave** him a flat, bitter smile. “So what’s next? Another sentence? Five years? Ten? Just tell me how long this time, and I’ll pack my bags”

He stared **at** me, stunned silent. “Riley.. you are **my** mate and I’d never want to hurt

I nearly laughed.

But it wasn’t funny

“You’ve already done worse,” I

Is

dangerous. You rejected me as your mate. And now you want to talk about **what** you would **never** do?”

I said souly. “You stood on the witness stand and let them cage me like a beast. You called me

His jaw clenched. “I came to check on you.”

I turned my back, “I don’t need your concern.

His voice cracked. “What do you want from **me**. Riley? You think I haven’t suffered too? I’ve been trying to reach you ever since you were released, but you won’t **even** look at me. What do you want me to do?!”

I finally looked at his eyes like ice. “I want you to understand what it means to be falsely accused. To be betrayed by the people who were supposed to protect you

He froze

I didn't stop. "You talk about pain **like** you invented it. But I lived it. Maddox. Every minute of those five years, **And** you want me to move on! Let it go? Just because it's convenient for **you**?"

His eyes were red "Scarlett saved **my** life. She paid for my education. I owed her

"No" My voice **was** steel. "You repaid that dela by sentencing the wrong person. Don't tell **me** about honor. You weaponized the **law** to bucak me

He opened his mouth, then closed it.

I

I stool. "If you're not here to put me **back** in chains, then get out. If you are—**well**, I'm not afraid of prison anymore."

"I'm not here to hurt you" **he** whispered

That **you** already have"

He stepped forward "Please, Riley-

+8 Pearls

Chapter 41

He moved too fast.

His hand clamped over my mouth. His weight crushed me into the mattress. I thrashed, trying to break free, but he was

stronger.

He was always stronger.

His hand shifted, covering not just my mouth—but my nose.

Panic exploded in my chest.

I couldn't breathe.

Couldn't scream.

The world spun, stars bursting behind my eyes.

And then-

“LET HER GO!”

Mia’s voice.

A flash of silver.

The clang of a thermos crashing against his head.

He let go.

doll.

And in the same second—he snapped. Maddox whirled **and** kicked Mia across the room like a rag doll. She hit the wall with a sickening **thud**.

“MIA!” I screamed, staggering toward her, blood roaring in my ears.

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[655 words]

Chapter 42

Riley’s POV

The thermos hit the ground with a loud clang, hot soup bursting from its **mouth** in every direction. Some of it splashed straight onto Mia.

Her scream pierced the air, high and sharp.

I turned my head in time to see her stumble back, clutching her red, blistering arm. Her face twisted in pain, and angry welts had already begun to form.

“Mia!” My vision went red. Fury roared in my chest, hotter than any scalding soup ever could. I didn’t **think**. I just moved.

The apple on the nightstand was heavy in my hand, but not nearly as heavy as the hatred building inside me.

I hurled it with all the force I had.

It struck Maddox squarely in the shoulder, and he jerked backward a step.

GET OUT Isergamed, voice shaking with rage. "I never want to see your face again!"

His expression shifted—first disbelief, then something uglier

"You want me to leave?" His tone turned sharp, mocking. "You **think** you have the right to tell **me** anything?"

He took a step closer, face darkening. "I protected you, Riley. All your life. When you were bullied at the Ebonclaw, who fought for you? When you **cried**, who wiped your tears? **You** wanted fruit, I brought it. I gave you everything I had! What have you ever done for me?"

Trembled—part rage, part disgust. "You think that earns you the right to hurt me?"

"I made you who you are!" he started. "Back in that pack, you were just a scared little girl until I stood up for you. You didn't tell me to leave then.

He took another step.

My hands closed around the handle of the fruit knife in the basket.

"Don't come closer."

He froze, eyes narrowing on the blade. "Riley, you've lost your mind. You'd really use that on me?"

"I am mad. Because you made me this way!" I shouted.

The knife trembled in my hand, but I held it between us like a shield. My breathing was ragged. My pulse roared in my ears. like a storm.

And then it happened.

Something inside me snapped.

My vision blurred—not from tears, but from the sudden surge of something ancient and wild. It started in my chest, spreading out like wildfire.

My skin burned

My limbs locked

Pain wracked through my bones like they were being broken and rebuilt all at once. My scream echoed **through** the room- half-human, half-beast.

Maildos stepped back, eyes wide “What the hell-”

Then I wasn't Riley anymore.

Chapter 42

I shifted.

Fur exploded **across** my body, white as snow and glowing under the flickering hospital lights. My bones cracked, reshaping. stretching, **snapping into** something massive.

A **snow**–white wolf, twice the size of a normal one, now stood in the middle of the room–my fur bristling, my eyes glowing

silver.

Maddox **stumbled**, genuine fear now **replacing his** arrogance. “R–Riley?”

I snarled and lunged.

My claws raked across his chest, slicing through his shirt and skin like paper. He crashed into the IV stand with a gasp, blood blooming through the **fabric**.

“Riley, stop!”

Another strike. Another growl. I didn't care what he had to say. He wanted to see the monster? Fine. Let **him** meet the white wolf cursed to live in **chains**.

My jaws snapped near his throat, just enough to make him scream. He scrambled back, slipping on the spilled soup, crawling toward the door like the coward he **was**.

“You're... one of them...” he gasped. “A highblood...”

I could've ended it. Could've torn him apart for every betrayal. Every lie.

But something held me back.

I wasn't him.

I wasn't a killer.

And **then**–my strength wavered.

The rush of power that **had** surged through me now started draining fast. My legs buckled. My vision dimmed. Maddox had already fled, his blood marking a trail on the floor.

I stumbled. The pain of the **shift** slamming into my muscles. Bones twisting back to human, fur receding

My knees hit the cold floor.

And then—arms,

Mia’s arms.

She **caught** me before I collapsed fully, wrapping herself around my **naked**, shaking frame with trembling hands. “Riley!” she cried. “Stay with me!”

I tried to answer-

But darkness swallowed me whole.

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[1,119 words]

Chapter 43

Riley’s POV

I woke up not to the antiseptic scent of a hospital **ward...** but to the cloying sweetness of **artificial** roses **and** pastel-colored.

curtains.

My lashes fluttered. The bed was too soft, the pillow too scented. Everything around me was pink. Frills, Lace. A chandelier dripping fake crystal tears above my head.

What the hell...?

I sat up **too** fast.

Pain seared through my shoulder like lightning, I hissed under my breath, clutching at the bandage. The white gauze was clean, but not fresh—blood was already beginning to soak through..

I pushed back the blanket and climbed out of bed.

Barefoot.

Weak.

But awake.

I crossed the room and opened the door—and then it **hit** me.

Ebonclaw Pack estate.

I was back.

Not in the dungeon. Not in the hospital. Not alone.

Back here

In Kael's old bedroom—though someone had turned it into a frilly nightmare. Pink satin on every **wall**. Princess wallpaper. Stuffed wolves on the shelves. Like some designer had tried to cover up history with pastel lies.

My grip on the doorknob tightened.

I looked down over the stairwell.

The living room was full.

Father—Alpha Alaric—sat at the head of the pack like always, arms crossed and jaw—tight. Luna Zara by his side, back straight, expression unreadable, Scarlett practically glued herself to Mother's side, and Kael sat stiffly on the armrest, watching something with barely restrained **tension**.

And then—Ronan.

Of course he was here. Ronan is Scarlett's fiancé, serving as a bridge between the two pack alliances, so he will appear here

The Blackmaw Pack's **Alpha** heir, looking every inch the polished predator—tailored suit, emotionless expression, golden eyes that missed nothing.

Scarlett was the first to notice me.

Her voice pitched high, sugarcoated as always. "Riley! You're finally awake."

Awake!

I stared down at them, heart still **sluggish** in my chest, blood like ice in my veins.

I hadn't been sleeping.

I had been **unconscious**. I'd shifted. For the first time in my life, I'd felt my wolf—really felt her—and now she was gone.

I called to her, mentally, desperately.

Nothing answered.

Scarlett's words twisted that truth into something soft **and** stupid.

Like I'd just taken a long nap.

I said nothing-

I simply looked at her. Cold and **still**.

She shrank beneath my stare, her voice trembling. "D—did I say something wrong?"

Of course not. Not in their eyes.

Zara instantly reached to soothe her adopted daughter, stroking her back like I was the bully. She didn't say a word to me, but her look said enough: You're scaring your sister again.

Then **Father** spoke.

And like always, he didn't bother softening the blow,

"You're really standing there glaring at your sister?" he snapped. "You're over twenty already. You sleep like the dead, and when you're **awake**, you're either stuffing your face or sulking. We brought you home yesterday and you were out cold. One full day and night passed, and still—nothing but sleep. You tell me, Riley, **what** exactly are you good for?"

His voice rose with each word.

"You've got no mate. No job. No wolf. Nothing. Just **dead** weight on this Pack."

There it was.

The truth under the venom.

No wolf. No **value**.

They still believed it.

Didn't matter that I'd shifted. They didn't see it. Didn't feel it. And now, neither could L.

My father thinks the last time I bared my claws in front of him was just for show.

He still believes I'm weak and powerless.

Also **it** seems my dear former mate Maddox hasn't told them that I've shifted into a white **wolf**.

That's fine.

It's only fair they witness it with their own eyes.

So I stared down at him, my voice cool. "Are you done, Alpha Alaric?"

The room tensed.

He blinked, caught off guard. Probably expected me to cry, **or** at least look ashamed.

Instead, I turned to go back to the room.

"Don't **you walk** away from me!" he roared. "Come down here. We have something to discuss."

I didn't want to.

Every instinct in me screamed to stay away from them. From this whole polished performance of a family.

But then I remembered.

Chapter 43

The million-dollar deal.

My ticket out.

So I descended the **stairs**, each step measured. I took a seat in the middle of them all, like I was on **trial**.

I guess **I was**.

Father sipped his tea, voice casual. "You're not a child anymore. It's time you stop leeching off the Pack and do something useful. Your mother and I have arranged a match."

My stomach tightened.

“Northridge. The Stormridge **heir**. You’ll marry into their family. It’s a **good** match for someone like you.”

Someone like **me**.

Meaning: a daughter without a **wolf**. A daughter they couldn’t parade. A daughter too troublesome to keep.

He kept talking.

-Your manners are poor. Your temper is worse. But you are still technically our **blood**. We’ll prepare a decent dowry. The rest

up to you.”

is

Ronan’s knuckles went white on the teacup. I saw it—the moment he realized exactly what kind of trade had been made.

His eyes didn’t flicker.

But his energy **changed**.

Luna Zara reached across the table, laying a hand on mine like we were close. “We’ll miss you, sweetheart. But girls your age don’t stay single forever. It’s time. You don’t want to be left behind, do you?”

I slid **my** hand **away** slowly, letting my silence speak for itself.

If this match were so desirable. why hadn’t they given it to Scarlett?

Because I was expendable.

And she was the precious, sweet-mannered she-wolf with perfect lineage and a sob story the Elders adored.

They knew I wouldn’t refuse.

Because I couldn’t afford to.

I said nothing.

But Kael exploded.

“Wait—what? You’re marrying her off to him? Without even talking to me?”

Alaric’s face **darkened**.

Zara quickly cut in. “Kael, this isn’t your concern—”

“The hell it isn’t!” he snapped. “Riley doesn’t even know him. She’s not—she’s not like Scarlett. She hasn’t even fully shifted. She’s not ready—

“Enough!” Alaric thundered.

Kael’s **jaw** clenched. His fists curled.

And then—everyone looked at me.

Waiting for my answer.

I lifted my **chin and** met Kael’s gaze. My voice rang clear.

“I accept.”

The room froze.

Zara’s lips parted in joy. Alaric **gave a** satisfied grunt. Scarlett blinked like she didn’t expect me **to** say yes, kael’s **face** crumpled with something dangerously close **to** heartbreak.

And Ronan?

His cup shattered.

Glass sliced into his palm, blood blooming bright and fast.

Scarlett gasped. “**Ronan!** You’re bleeding—Mia! Get the med kit!”

But he didn’t flinch.

He didn’t move.

He just stared at me

Like he **was** trying to see something through the **fog**.

His blood dripped steadily onto the white carpet, spreading like a rose in bloom.

And I...

I didn't look away.

Didn't **move a** muscle,

Didn't feel a thing.

He stared at me like I was a stranger.

And maybe **now** I was.

Because the girl who once skipped her only national academic competition to care for him during a 39-degree fever?

She was gone.

That Riley—the one who cried when he was sick, who dragged him to a clinic on her back, who held his hand while he slept? Buried. In the same grave where they'd put her future.

All that was left now... was this.

A girl who would marry **for** survival **and** never look **back**.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[944 words]

Ronan's POV

Blood seeped through the gauze on my palm **again**.

Mia had just finished wrapping it up, but the second Kael stormed out and Riley stood there like the world couldn't touch her, I clenched my fist **too** tightly,

Again.

I didn't even feel it.

Just a dull, distant throb. A whisper compared to the chaos inside my chest.

Scarlett was gone upstairs—following her parents, trying to “smooth things over,” no doubt. The room emptied out in minutes, like they couldn’t wait to let the dust settle.

Now it was just me.

And Riley.

She stood across the room, her hands clenched at her sides, her chin lifted like a wolf ready for the next hit. She looked... tired. **Not** the kind of tired that could be fixed with sleep. The **kind** that **seeps into** the bones after years of holding yourself together while everyone else tried to tear you **apart**.

I stood. I didn’t **even** know why.

She moved too—too fast, too sudden—and bumped hard into the edge of the coffee table.

She winced, but didn’t make a sound.

She didn’t **even** glance back.

She just walked away.

Not to Kael’s room. Not even to her assigned bedroom. She headed toward the far end of the hall—toward the old supply closet the Pack used to throw things they didn’t want.

Of course.

The unwanted daughter returns to the unwanted room.

Before I realized I’d moved, I **was** already behind her.

The second she stepped inside, I slammed the door open. She jumped, turned—and I kicked it shut, hard.

My hand shot out.

Pinned her to the wall.

Her breath caught, chest heaving against my palm.

Our faces were **inches apart**.

Close enough for me to see the way her pupils flared. Close enough to smell the faint trace of antiseptic and blood under the synthetic rose perfume clinging to her hair.

She trembled under my **hand**. Not from **weakness**. From trying too hard not to show fear.

I hated how much I noticed that.

I hated how it still made me want to protect her.

I should've walked away. Should've said nothing.

But my voice came **out** anyway—sharp, biting, soaked **in** something I refused to name.

“So you're really that eager to get married?”

Her lips parted, her eyes flashing. She shoved at my chest with both hands—small, pale fists that didn't budge me **an inch**.

Ronan.”

“It's none of your business, R

My name in her mouth didn't sound like it used to.

No softness.

Just, finality.

I leaned closer, unable to stop myself.

“None of my business? After what you did to Tessa? After what you did to my family? You think you **can** just walk out of here and marry into Stormridge like none of it matters?”

I could feel my voice rising, heat crawling up my neck.

But I couldn't stop.

I didn't want to stop.

She went still.

And then, her **voice**—flat, cruel—cut through the air.

“Better Stormridge than this house. Better being a stranger's bride than your family's burden.”

The words hit harder than I expected.

And then she looked **me** in the
eye.

“Tell me, Ronan... Is the Stormridge heir more dangerous than you?”

That made my breath catch,

Just for a second,

I saw the flicker in her gaze. The fear. The memory of that night,

Of what I did.

of how low I sank **when** they told me what she did to Tessa—and I believed it. Of how I
stood in that courtroom and let her

fall

I'd buried that memory for years.

Now it stood between us again, more **real** than ever.

She looked at me like I was **a a** monster.

And maybe I **was**.

Maybe that's why stepped closer again—until there was nowhere left to go.

Because this wasn't just about jealousy. It was about control. Territory. Duty.

The alliance between Blackmaw and Ebonclaw had to happen. That much was clear.

As the heir to Blackmaw, I would have to choose a daughter of Alpha Alaric..

IT

you asked me who I wanted—it would've been Riley.

Chapter 44

Always Riley.

But she attacked my sister Tessa. She went to prison.

My mate can't carry that kind of stain.

But that doesn't **mean she** can belong to someone else.

"You think I'll let you marry him?" I asked, voice like gravel. "You think I'll just watch you **walk** away after everything?"

She didn't flinch.

Bubher voice was **low** now. Cold.

"Who marry has nothing to do with you."

I laughed.

Short. Biner. Twisted.

"In what world, Riley? You think you're free? You think because you've been paroled you're clean?"

I reached out again, not to hurt—just to remind her. My fingers brushed her shoulder, just above the bandage. **She** didn't cry out, but her body flinched.

I hated that.

Hated how her **pain** still felt like mine.

"You're still marked by what you did. And as long as my sister doesn't wake up, you belong to the Blackmaw Pack. **You** belong

to me.

Her eyes widened.

She looked up at me like I'd struck her.

And still she said nothing.

Just stared.

And in her silence, something inside me cracked.

I remembered her tears when I had a fever. I remembered her skipping her only national academic competition to sit by my bedside. I remembered how she used to whisper her dreams of Ashmoor Academy at midnight.

And I remembered that I'd crushed every one of those dreams.

Her eyes **now** were nothing like the girl I knew. Just grey glass, frozen to survive.

I loosened my **grip**.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Like I was afraid she might shatter if I touched her too long

Her breath came out **shaky**, but steady. **She** didn't **move**.

And I.....

I couldn't look at her anymore.

I let go

The warmth of her body slipped out from under my palm. She didn't say thank you. She didn't curse me.

She just stood there. Quiet. Proud. Unbreakable.

I turned away before she could see the worst of it

Before she could see that the **Alpha** heir of **Blackmaw**—Scarlett's fiancé, their future alliance's keystone—had almost begged a convicted traitor to stay.

And worse?

That a part of him still wanted her to say yes..

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[769 words]

Chapter 45

Author's POV

Inside the Study Ebonclaw Pack

The study was thick with tension.

Kael Vale stood in front of **Alpha** Alaric and Luna Zara, his voice rising with disbelief. “Dad, Mom—you know exactly **what** kind of reputation the Stormridge heir has. How can **you** still force Riley to marry into that Pack? She’s your **blood**. Even if you’ve never shown her the same love, how can you send her into something that could destroy her?”

Alaric slammed his palm on the desk with a resounding thud. “Enough! Watch your tone. What do you mean destroy her! **With** her background, being accepted by Stormridge is a gift. A rare one. She should be grateful.”

Kael stared at his father like he no longer recognized the man. His lips trembled. “Her body’s already broken, Dad. Prison destroyed her health. You’re giving her **to a male** known for violence, aggression—and you expect her to survive that?”

Just imagining Riley—frail and wounded—thrown into the hands of a brutal Alpha made Kael’s heart twist with both fury **and** dread.

Alaric’s expression darkened further. “If she doesn’t go... **what**, you want Scarlett to marry him instead?”

Kael froze.

He turned his gaze toward the girl standing silently beside them—Scarlett, with her downturned lashes and soft trembling lip. She looked up at him, eyes filled with sorrow, and he flinched.

to be sacrificed.

He didn’t want Riley

But sacrificing Scarlett?

“I... I just... Kael faltered.

“There is no just.” Alaric cut him off, his voice a bit calmer **now**, but no less firm. “In a few days, the land auction at East Borough will begin. Stormridge **Pack** is hell—bent on acquiring **that** territory. Even if Ebonclaw and Blackmaw combine forces, we still might not outbid them.”

He leaned forward, voice heavy. “The regional council has already designated East Borough as a central economic zone. When it’s developed, all major commerce will shift there. Whoever owns it—controls it. And if Stormridge wins it... Ebonclaw will lose its foothold in Mooncrest”

Alaric's jaw tightened as he continued, "We can't fight the Stormridge Alpha, So we do the only thing we can—we join them. **An** alliance through marriage is the most direct path."

Kael's knuckles were bone white from how hard he clenched his fists. The guilt gnawed at him.

Zara wiped away a tear, voice low and trembling. "Kael... Do you think this is easy for us? We're not heartless. We haven't slept. for days thinking about **this**. But the Pack—our company—feeds hundreds of wolves. We can't afford to be sentimental."

"I'm her mother," she whispered. "I carried her for nine months. I know how fragile she is... I love her, **Kael**. Just as much as you do. But sometimes love **means** sacrifice."

"Stormridge might not be as bad as the rumors say," she added weakly. "Maybe... maybe their Alpha heir isn't as cruel as they

claim

Kael **said** nothing.

He understood the logic. He understood the stakes. But that didn't make it right. The silence hung heavy over the room—until Scarlett's soft sob broke through.

Til go," she said, voice hoarse. "I'll marry **into** Stormridge in Riley's place." The three of them turned toward her.

Chapter 45

Scarlett stood with tears **pooling** in her lashes, but she forced a smile. "If marrying him will help the Ebonclaw Pack then I'll do it. I'm not even your real daughter. When Riley came home, I should've stepped aside."

Her voice cracked "But I **loved** you both too much. I **couldn't** leave. I know **now**... I should've done something sooner."

Karl's heart twisted.

Scarlett smiled again, even as her tears fell freely. "Even if you **don't** see me as your daughter after this... I'm **willing** to do. what's best for the family."

Zara broke down, pulling Scarlett into her arms. "Don't say such things! You'll always be my daughter, my baby girl. I would never let you marry someone so dangerous. You have a future with Ronan. You're already promised."

She stroked Scarlett's hair gently. "**Don't** worry. When the East Borough project stabilizes, we'll **finalize** your marriage with the Blackmaw heir. You were **meant** to be his Luna."

Scarlet blushed, eyes shyly bright with **anticipation**,

Watching the mother–daughter display, Alaric finally smiled. "Go back to Ronan. Spend time with him. Your mother **and** I need to speak **with** Kael"

Scarlett and Zara left the room hand in hand.

Kael stood frozen, watching them go.

Riley was to be offered up–again.

She had always been the one who could **endure**.

She was always **the one** expected to endure.

Kael's heart twisted painfully

Behind him, Alaric slumped into his chair and rubbed his temple. "**Kael**, I know you care for your sister. **But** this is bigger than you or her. The survival of Ebonclaw rests on this marriage. None of us have a choice."

Kael closed his **eyes**,

"I know..."

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[694 words]

Scarlen's POV

I looked toward the sofa but didn't see Ronan, nor Riley anywhere around.

Just as I was wondering, Ronan appeared from the far end of the first–floor corridor.

I froze for a moment–why would Ronan go that way?

Then it hit me.

The storage room at the end of the hall was Riley's "room." Could it be....

A dark thought rose inside me, a sharp and bitter hatred bubbling up.

Riley, you shameless bitch. How dare you seduce Ronan right under my nose? Seems like I haven't taught you a proper lesson

yet.

Thought my face wore a sweet smile, my words were sharp and poisonous when I called **out**, "Ronan, where have **you** been?"

He answered casually, "Just wandering around. It's late, I'm heading back."

His expression was calm, unreadable.

I tried to persuade him, "Why not stay for lunch?"

"No, thanks." Without another glance, he left the Vale pack house.

My eyes followed his retreating figure until **he** disappeared completely.

Then I glanced at the closed door at the corridor's end, my eyes narrowing. Jealousy slithered inside me like a venomous snake.

Turning to Mom, I said cheerfully, "Mom, it's almost mealtime. I'll go **upstairs** to call Riley down."

Mom nodded with a contented smile, watching me run upstairs **with** an indulgent gaze.

But my real goal wasn't to call Riley for lunch.

I needed to check if she was actually in Kael's bedroom.

I pushed the door open—and as I expected, Riley wasn't there.

The room was decked out in high-end princess style decor.

I clenched my teeth in fury.

Since Riley was hospitalized, Kael had immediately hired people to renovate the room.

I'd underestimated Riley. She'd only been home a few days and already stolen Kael's attention away from me.

A cruel light flashed in my eyes.

If she **wasn't** in Kael's room, then she must be in the storage room.

The thought of what might be happening between her and Ronan in that cramped, dark space nearly set my sanity ablaze.

Kael's affection belongs to the

Ronan belongs to me too.

Riley, you shameless wretch. You're trying to snatch what's mine. You deserve to die.

Hatred blazing like wildfire, I had my plan in an instant

I stomped down the stairs.

Mom **saw I was alone and** asked, "Scarlett, where's your sister?"

I put on a disappointed face. "She's not **in** Kael's room. Probably back in her own room.

Mom's expression stiffened.

She already knew Riley was living in that windowless, damp storage room.

When Kael took Mom there, her heart almost shattered.

She couldn't bear the thought of Riley **living in** such a dark, cold place for three whole years.

So when Kael renovated his room in that princess style to surprise Riley, Mom fully supported it, hoping to mend their mother–daughter relationship.

But since Riley woke **up**, she **had** neither thanked them nor shown **any** gratitude.

And now she's gone back to that storage room, like she's deliberately stabbing a knife in Mom's heart, refusing to let her rest.

Mom looked sad and angry, frustrated by Riley's stubbornness and cold attitude..

She was about to head for the storage room when I stopped her.

"Mom, I should go," I said, "Since Riley and I are closer in age, it's better if I talk to her."

Mom nodded and sat back down. She agreed—why should she, as the elder, **stoop** to beg a rebellious junior?

I turned, but the moment I faced the storage room door, my expression hardened like stone.

Without **knocking**, I pushed the door open.

“Wow! Sleeping soundly in broad daylight, aren’t you lucky, sis?”

Riley’s cold eyes snapped open, icy as ever.

“**Get** out!” she said flatly.

I laughed, scorn dripping from every word. “Get out? As if you have the right!”

Crossing my arms, I looked her up and down with utter disdain.

“Don’t think being Mom and Dad’s ‘real’ daughter gives you the right to boss me around. Take a look—who do they actually care about?”

“Born with a **silver** spoon or **not**, you’re **still** an unwanted bastard.”

I lifted my chin high, **as** if Riley were some worthless dust beneath my feet.

“Listen carefully. Ronan’s mine. Not some trash like you.”

Riley sat **up** slowly from the fold-out bed, then stood **and** faced me calmly.

“Yours? **You can’t** even keep him.”

“If you could, Ronan wouldn’t be chasing me all the **way** to the storage room—and I wouldn’t be stopped from marrying the prince of the Stormridge pack.”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,333 words]

Riley’s POV

My lips curled slightly as I leaned toward Scarlett, voice dripping with mockery.

“Want to know what Ronan told me?”

Scarlett gritted her teeth, “What did Ronan say to you?”

“He said the prince of the Stormridge Pack isn’t someone I should mess with. But Ronan—he said I’m allowed to mess **with** him.”

Her expression twisted in pain, instantly turning fierce and ugly.

Before I could react, Scarlett raised her hand and slapped at my face, shouting. “You shameless bitch!”

I barely dodged, then swung my palm back hard against her cheek—no mercy.

Growing up. I’ve done all the hard, dirty work. My strength isn’t something a pampered heiress like Scarlett can compare to.

The slap cracked her lip, blood immediately dripping down, staining the carefully chosen white dress she wore.

Scarlett froze, eyes wide with disbelief as she stared at me.

When reality hit, hatred surged inside her like a tidal wave, drowning out everything else. She probably wished she could kill me right there.

“You bitch, how dare you hit me? I’ll make you pay dearly for this!”

She screamed and fled from the storage room.

Mom was calmly sipping tea in the living room. Scarlett’s scream made her jump to her feet.

The next moment, Scarlett came **rushing** in, clutching her face, sobbing, “Mom, help me-

Her cries were full of helplessness, like the world was crashing down on her.

Mom hurried over, steadying Scarlett as she examined the injury with concern.

When Scarlett lowered her hands, the vivid red palm print was impossible to miss.

“Scarlett, what happened?”

Mom’s voice trembled with anger. She had no doubt who was responsible.

Scarlett sobbed, her tears streaking down her face. “Mom, it’s Riley. I just went to call her for hunch, and without a word, she hit me. What did I do wrong? Why does she hate me so much? Sniffle...”

Mom’s **whole** body shook with rage. “Riley, come out here right now!”

I wasn't surprised by Mom's shout—I'd expected **this the** moment I slapped Scarlett. But I didn't regret it.

Calm and steady, I stepped out to face Mom's fury.

"Riley, how could you hit Scarlett? She's your sister!"

Mom's words were **about** how I could hit Scarlett—not why I did it.

That told me everything. She didn't **care** why I hit her. She only cared that Scarlett **got** hurt.

She was quick to blame me, no **questions** asked.

I looked Mom in the eye, a bitter smile tugging at my lips.

"Don't you want to know why I hit her, Mrs. Vale?"

Chapter 47

Mom faltered, momentarily lost for words. But when she looked down at Scarlett, still crying in her arms, her heart.

hardened.

"No matter what the **reason**, you can't hit someone. Look at your sister's face—what have you done? Riley, stop being so willful Apologize to your sister"

"No matter what the reason.

I knew Mom was biased. Asking her to be fair was pointless.

She'd **protect** Scarlett no **matter** what, even if it meant sacrificing me—her own daughter.

Still, I refused to give in. "What if I said she hit me first, and I was just defending myself?"

"That's impossible. Scarlett's always been so well-behaved. She wouldn't hit **you** for no reason. You've only been home a few days and already caused chaos. I think you're doing it on purpose..."

Her words poured out like gunfire, eager to pin the blame on me.

gaze grew, the weaker her words sounded.

But the colder my gaze

“Well? Why’d you stop talking?” I clenched my fists tight. “Don’t you have **the** guts to say it? Or are you too scared?” “Since Mrs. Vale **won’t say** it, I will.”

“You call your perfect daughter the one who, five years ago, lured her best friend into the Black Forest—got her attacked by Rogues, and left her in a coma ever since.”

“You call her perfect, yet on the day I came home, she framed me for ruining her birthday dress, humiliating me in front of everyone at Mooncrest City

“You call her perfect, but she did it again, framing me for pushing her down the stairs, so my father punished me with a belt. I had to cut off my finger to repay that debt, and even in the hospital, she didn’t stop—she told Maddox **everything**.”

“What? She’s just waiting for Maddox to sue me?”

My words hit Mom like knives. Her chest tightened painfully; tears started falling uncontrollably.

“Riley…”

“Mrs. Vale!” I raised my voice sharply. “Do you really not know what Scarlett has done? Or are you just pretending?”

“Do you not know the hell I’ve been through? Or are you glad to **see** me suffer?”

“No, it’s **not** like that… Mom sobbed, crocodile tears failing to soften me, only fueling my disgust.

“You’ve done all these things, yet you still try to deny it? Treating me like an idiot, laughing behind my back while I wait for your mother’s love like a **fool**—does that make you proud? Do **you** laugh in the middle of the **night**?”

“No, I don’t. Riley, please listen to me. I **love** you just as much as I love Scarlett,”

I burst out laughing—a bitter, painful laugh that shook my whole **body** and made the wound in my shoulder throb sharply. Pain **brought** me clarity,

“**You** say you love me, but you’re the one who drove me insane.

“I, Riley Vale, **was** the top student at Mooncrest Academy **five** years ago, the provincial champion, an Ashmoor University. scholar.

And now? What am I? A madwoman, a cripple, a prisoner who will never hold her head up again.”

“My fate was sealed by you. You chose to shelter Scarlett **under** your wing, and you chose to push me into hell. What right do you have to say your **love** for **us** is equal?”

Moin shook her **head** desperately, “No, **that’s** not true.”

+ Pearls

Chapter 47

Scarlett put on her innocent little act, tears welling up as s

she looked at me.

“Sis, I know you hate me. You bully me alone, but why does Mom have **to join** in?”

Mom held Scarlett, crying with her, “Scarlett, stop it. It’s all Mom’s fault.”

They clung to each other, crying in unison.

I watched the two of them, cold and detached—nothing but a pitiful show.

Just **then**, **Kael** and Dad came out of the study.

Dad didn’t hesitate. He snarled at **me**, “You ungrateful brat. You come home and start causing trouble **again**. When you were in the hospital, your mother and sister worried themselves sick, unable to eat or sleep. Do you have no heart?”

I looked Dad dead in the eye, no respect, only endless contempt.

My cracked lips curved into a smirk that said more than words could.

Dad’s face **darkened** with rage; veins bulged on his **forehead**.

He stormed down the stairs, raising his hand to strike me.

Kael quickly stepped in, blocking him.

“Dad, calm **down**. Let’s talk.”

Dad glared fiercely at me, “Kael, let go. I have to teach this disrespectful girl a lesson today!”

Kael held Dad tightly, not letting him get closer.

I **stared** at Dad with utter disgust—the man was the epitome of “bite the hand **that** feeds.”

He'd been scared witless when I fought him with a knife, yet just days later, he dares to raise a hand again.

I could feel the pure hatred radiating from him. Unlike Mom and Kael's controlled coldness, **this** was raw, visceral loathing.

He was supposed to be my father, but he looked at me like a sworn enemy.

Dad shouted, "Apologize to your mother and Scarlett now!"

"Apologize? Why should I?" I shot back.

Dad's eyes bulged, "You hurt Scarlett and made your mother cry. Don't you think you owe them an apology?"

"I hit Scarlett because she deserved it. As for Mom crying, that's her problem—she's done plenty of shameful things, not

mine"

Dad trembled with rage, lunging at me again.

Kael held him back desperately, "Riley, can you just say less?"

I crossed my arms **and** sneered, "Dad's about to hit me. I can't even talk back?"

"Riley," Kael frowned, disapproving. "He's still your father."

I **scoffed coldly**, "My **father** died a long time ago. I'm an orphan."

Dad's fury exploded like a volcano. His eyes wide, veins pulsing, cheeks puffed out like a toad.

He shook his finger at me, screaming. "You curse upon this house. Ever since you came back, there hasn't been a single peaceful day. You're **just** here to collect debts!"

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[736 words]

Chapter 48

Riley's POV

+8 Pearls:

Hearing his furious accusations, a cold smile curled on my lips as I shot back, “I refuse to take the title of bad luck charm. Honestly, Alpha Alaric fits that name far better.”“”

“**Back** then, you were like a dead weight, completely ignoring me the moment I was born. How else could I have been stolen. away and turned into an orphan? If it weren’t for you insisting on **adopting** Scarlett, I wouldn’t have been schemed against by that fake heiress once I came back to the Vale family.”

“The chaos in **this** house, the turmoil tearing us apart—it’s all because of you, a useless coward. Yet you have the nerve to **pin** every **fault** on me, **a weak woman.**”

“You’re not just a curse, you’re a spineless failure.”

Each word cut into **him** like a blade.

Alpha Alaric, as the Alpha of the **Ebonclaw** Pack and head of the Vale family, was used to **being** worshipped, living high **above** everyone else,

Though he was over fifty, he kept himself in great shape—tall, commanding, definitely not someone you’d call a loser.

But here he was, being roasted by his own daughter, chest heaving with rage, breathing short **and sharp.**

He tried to speak, but something seemed to catch in his throat. No words came out.

-I wasn’t about to hold back. “What do you mean ‘you? If I were you, I’d be too ashamed to live the moment I lost my child.

But look at yourself—no guilt, living comfortably, **and** still daring to hit and scold me. Why? Because you’re old, so you think you’re right?”

The fire inside me flared brighter. No more pretending. No more bending under their torment,

If they won’t let me live in peace, then I’ll make them pay.

Alpha Alaric’s eyes bloodshot, rage swelling like a raging bull as he wrenched free from Kael’s grip and raised his fist to strike. Luna Zara and Kael **exchanged a** glance but didn’t move to stop **him**—almost daring him to “teach me a lesson.”

Just as his fist came down, I suddenly revealed my claws—long, sharp, gleaming under the light.

A powerful alpha aura burst from me, filling the room with an oppressive energy that made everyone stagger back. Their breaths **caught**. Eyes widened.

I locked **eyes** with Alpha Alaric, cold as ancient ice, and growled low, "Try to move again. You want to hit me? Let's see who's faster your fist or my claws."

The raw force of my wolf energy crashed over him like a tidal wave.

Alpha Alaric's face twisted in shock and disbelief.

Scarlett gasped, stumbling back as **if** seeing a ghost.

Luna Zara's eyes went wide, almost afraid to believe what they saw.

Kael's **mouth** fell open in shock.

They'd always thought I was just putting on a show, pretending to have any wolf blood in me.

But now, the sharp gleam of my claws and the surge of wolf power made it painfully clear—this was no **act**.

"This... this can't be," Alpha Alaric whispered, clutching her chest. "You—you're missing a kidney! Your wolf should be dying!"

Scarlett staggered forward, voice laced with disbelief and venom. "No way... You really have a wolf?"

Kael frowned, staring at me like I was a puzzle with too many missing pieces.

"No, **that** wasn't fake. That pressure... it felt like at full-blooded **Alpha**. But—how? What the hell did you take, Riley? Some kind of black magic **potion**? Is that how you faked this display?"

Alpha Alaric staggered, gasping under the overwhelming pressure.

Then, with a heavy thud, he collapsed to the floor.

Luna **Zara** rushed to his side, shaking **him** frantically. "Alpha Alaric! What's wrong? Don't scare me!"

Scarlett's tears dried as she glared at me, eyes filled with fear and hatred.

"Riley, **you** did this to him."

I shrugged casually, a faint smile playing on my **lips**.

Mia stepped forward nervously. "Miss Riley, what's happening? Why did he collapse?"

“Hyperventilation,” I said flatly. “Too much **carbon** dioxide expelled from his lungs, causing blood alkalosis. His blood pH rose—basic respiratory alkalosis.”

Mia blinked, confused. “What does that mean?”

“It means his breathing went haywire. Basically, he passed out.”

Everyone stared at me, stunned—not just by my knowledge, but by **the** undeniable proof of the wolf inside me,

Even after their insults, none of them dared move. Not **when** the air still buzzed with my aura. Not when their **old** scapegoat now stood taller than any of them.

“**Miss Riley**, what do we do now?” Mia asked anxiously.

-What d

do

you mean “do something? If he can be helped, fine. If **not**... then he can g

Send Gifts

go to hell

€10

264

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,547 words]

Chapter 49

Riley’s POV

“Riley!” Kael’s voice snapped across the room like a whip.

+8 Pearls

“You think this is strength?” Kael spat, voice shaking with fury. “You think flashing claws and a bit of borrowed aura makes you unstoppable?”

That's not real power, Riley. It's desperation. **And** it reeks."

He pointed **at** me, eyes narrowing. "Just like I told them—you probably used some **kind** of black magic tonic to force your wolk out. That scent? It's unstable. Fading. A trick."

"Wolves like us earn power through blood, through battle, not shortcuts. Keep chasing easy paths and you'll destroy yourself."

His words were like a desperate mantra, a way to comfort himself—denying the truth of my strength while trying to shove me back into the box they'd always **kept** me in

I looked at him coldly and said quietly,

"Then pray I don't take the hard path. Because if I do, you'll be the first one down."

"Keep dreaming. Riley,"

You'll burn out within arlett sneered **from** behind **him**. "Whatever you took to summon that wolf of yours? It won't last.

Zara's voice followed, soft but **sharp** like the edge of a poisoned dagger. "No amount of dark magic **can** rewrite fate. You were born to kneel, not rule. And when **that** twisted power turns on you—don't expect anyone to catch you."

"Mark my words," Scarlett added, eyes gleaming with bitter fire. "That wolf will devour you from the inside out. It's not strength. It's a curse."

I didn't even flinch.

I walked straight into the dining hall, pulled out a chair, and sat down like I hadn't heard a damn thing. I picked up my fork and started eating slowly, deliberately, like their panic and screeching didn't exist.

The roast venison was delicious—tender, marinated just right, juices still warm from the hearth.

Funny, **isn't** it?

I've lived twenty—three years. And this was the first time I've ever tasted meat this rich, this full of flavor.

In the orphanage? We were lucky to get dry bread and overcooked stew.

Back at the Ebonclaw estate? I only got cold leftovers—sometimes even discarded bones scraped clean by others.

It was only when I was thrown into prison that I tasted actual warm, decent food.

If Ronan hadn't ordered the guards to "look after me," I would've sworn **that** a cell was still better than this damn house.

I chewed slowly, savoring each bite, letting the flavor sit on my tongue before swallowing

When I finally spoke, my voice was calm and crisp, cutting like ice.

"You think your **opinions** matter to someone **who** crawled out of a grave you dug?"

"**Save** your breath. You'll need it for the next time I knock the **air** out of yo
your lungs.

"My heart? You're **asking** if I **have** one? That's rich, coming from a family that trampled mine until there was nothing left Why? Because I'm treating you the same way you treated me, and **now** it's suddenly a problem?"

Zara's tears flowed freely now. "Riley, how can you be so heartless? Your father's barely breathing, and you still **have** the nerve

I didn't even look at her. I stabbed another piece of meat and placed it in my mouth.

Chapter 4U

8 Pearls

They say when you're dying, your senses sharpen Eremembered thus from prison. Ed almost died there too. But here, in this ding, surrounded by people whas calles themselves family, Frealized something else

My soul **shied** long before Lever set foot in a cell.

I swallowed and met Zara's tearful gaze with utter indifference,

"You want to talk about heartless? Let me remind you what heartless really looks like

I was the Spring Moon Festival during my final year at Monnerest Academy. I was burning up with fever—three days **and** ights of pure hell. I couldn't shift, couldn't move, couldn't even crawl from the freezing storage rooms they locked me in.

No water. No food. Just cold shadows and silence.

It Mia **hasn't** returned from her huslislays and found me **half**—dead on **the** floor, I'd be rotting beneath the Ebonclaw Pack's sacred tree by now.

And when she confronted Alaric and Zara?

Maric shrugged, "She's taking it. Always is. Trying to win sympathy again. I know her game"

Zarasighed, ever so gentle. "Riley really shouldn't stay in her room three days without eating. It's **not** healthy for a young

She knew. They knew.

But they didn't lift a claw.

I remember dragging myself to the kitchen to find water, and Laverheard everything

That night, the frost in my veins was no fever—it was the truth finally settling into my **bones**.

They didn't care if I lived or died.

Hell, even Scarlett's **mutt** was worth more than me.

When that decrepit old hound fell ill weeks later, the entire family went into mourning. They spent tens of thousands on herbal healers, rune—charged diagnostics, moonstone therapy—you name it.

The dog died of old age, obviously. It was eighteen. Could barely **walk**,

But they cried like they'd lost a firstborn

They held a moon—blessed funeral, **Chanted** prayers. Burned sacred sage.

And then Scarlett said it was **my** fault.

That I'd cursed her dog by being sick near it.

Of course, Alaric believed her.

He forced me to kneel barefoot in the snow to "repent."

It was during my heat cycle. I was still a late bloomer, barely had my moon blood then.

I fainted **Agalli**

Atia **saved** me. Again.

That **sickness** lingered for weeks. My cycles were delayed for months after. **And** when they returned, they brought pain sharp enough to make me wish I never shifted at all.

All of that—because of them.

Chapter 49

And like a fool, I used to still want their approval.

Scarlett's **voice** snapped **through** my haze. "If anything **happens** to Father, I swear I won't forgive you!"

I set my fork down—hard.

The clang echoed in the room.

"Forgive me? You must be delusional"

I stood and walked slowly toward her, every step deliberate, steady

"You think I don't remember? You broke into my room first. You threw the first punch. You ran to Zara, sobbing lies. Your precious father saw your crocodile tears and flew into a rage. Now he's collapsed."

I raised my voice with each word,,

"He's suffering from **aura** imbalance and spirit chamber overload because he lost control of his wolf. Because you set the fire and watched it burn. And now you want to pin the ashes on me?"

I reached her and, without warning, slapped her across the face—hard.

Another **neat** red print bloomed beside the **one** I'd left earlier,

"Perfect symmetry," I sneered.

Zara screeched and lunged at me, but I stepped aside. She tripped and **hit** the ground hard.

Kael finally snapped. He shoved me backward, fury in his eyes. "That's ENOUGH!"

I stumbled, but Mia caught me.

Kael's hand hovered midair—then dropped. So did his concern.

He pulled his **hand** back slowly, like I burned him.

“You still think I’m the villain here?” I laughed bitterly. “Alaric’s turning purple on the floor, and **you** haven’t even summoned a healer. You’re just standing there waiting for him to die so you can finally take his place as Alpha, aren’t you?”

“SHUT UP!” he roared, voice cracking.

Then make me.”

As we traded barbs, Alaric’s limbs began to stiffen. His face twisted, eyes rolling back. The telltale signs of lunar suffocation- when a wolf’s spirit detaches from their breath due to emotional overload. The sacred breath **stops** syncing with the body, and without swift intervention-

Death follows.

Scarlett screamed. “Do **something!** He’s going to die!”

Kael fumbled with his comm, trying to reach Theo,

No answer.

Zara **was** pacing, hands shaking like brittle leaves in the wind.

And me?

I stood above them all, watching it unfold **like** a bad dream finally coming true.

A part of me wanted to let him go.

But if he died, they’d blame me. Take my money. Hunt me like prey.

I sighed and turned to Mia.

Chapter 49

“Bring me a stormleaf sack from the kitchen,” I ordered.

She blinked. “A what?”

“Top shelf. Behind the healing salts.”

Mia ran and returned moments later with the woven dark-blue p
pouch.

+8 Pearls

I stepped forward and pulled it open, placing it gently over Alaric's face.

Everyone lost their minds.

Scarlett screeched. "You're killing him! You witch—you're trying to suffocate him!"

I shoved her back. "Be quiet if you don't know what the hell you're talking about."

They gaped at me in silence.

"Stormleaf is a grounding herb," I explained coldly. "It traps a wolf's own breath **aura**. He's over-ventilated—his body's expelled too much primal energy **and** lost balance. He's not dying. He's resetting."

I **glanced** at Scarlet.

"Didn't you place top ten at Halston Academy? What, no basic understanding of wolf physiology?"

She flushed but **said** nothing-

A few tense minutes later, Alaric stirred.

He ripped off **the** sack and gasped for breath, his pupils finally returning to center.

Then, like the brute he **was**, he launched up—trying to attack me,

"Careful," I said icily. "Lose control again, **and** next time, I'll let the spirits finish what they started."

You ungrateful-

I turned away, already heading for the stairs.

"Stay out of the upstairs rooms!" he bellowed. "You belong in the storage den!"

I stopped halfway up the steps.

Then turned slightly and looked down on him.

"Before, I stayed out of guilt," I said. "Now, I stay out of pity: I saved your pathetic life. That room? It's your debt to me. Be grateful I don't charge more. Because if I did..."

I smiled coldly.

“I’d be taking this whole damned house.”

Alaric’s eyes bulged. “You—1”

Kael hurriedly shoved the stormleaf sack back **over** Alaric’s head

I watched him wheeze into the bag, the pouch inflating and deflating like a balloon.

li was almost funny.

I smirked to myself.

Turns out, once you stop giving a damn, you get to enjoy the chaos.

And for the first time in years, I was starting to feel alive.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,354 words]

Chapter 50

Riley’s POV

The moment I closed the door **behind** me, I collapsed onto the bed with a long, weary sigh.

Moon above, how I’d missed the feel of an actual mattress.

If I hadn’t been stolen at birth, if fate had played fair just once, I’d have woken up on a bed like this every single morning for the last twenty–three years. Not on concrete. Not on wood. Not on moldy blankets **in a** storage closet.

I closed my eyes and tried to absorb the rare silence. The rare stillness. For once, no screaming, no threats, no footsteps. outside my **door**.

Just... quiet.

Ten minutes passed—maybe more—before I heard the knock.

Three taps, Rhythmic. Gentle. Predictable.

I didn’t even have to guess.

“Come in.”

Mia stepped inside. careful as ever, holding a bowl that steamed like a dream. The smell hit me first—rich, warm, comforting. “Miss Riley,” she said softly, “you should eat something. You barely touched your dinner earlier.”

I sat up, accepting the bowl with a nod, but didn’t eat right away. Instead, I glanced at her..

“They all think my wolf showed up because of some black magic tonic,” I said, voice low and almost bitter. “Even Kael. No one’s asked how or why. Not even you.

Mia met my eyes, unflinching.

“I didn’t **need** to ask,” she said simply.

I blinked. “Why not?”

She sat beside me, hands folded in her lap. “Because the day you took that belt for me the day you raised your arm and your claws came out just to shield me...” Her voice trembled, just slightly. That’s when I knew, Your wolf never left.”

I looked away. Something hot and sharp twisted in my chest.

“I just didn’t know what they did to you,” she continued, quieter now. “What they put you through in that prison. What kind of pain would make an Alpha wolf go so quiet... so still.”

She reached out and gently touched my bandaged hand.

“But I never once believed she was gone. Only that you were protecting her. Or maybe she was protecting you.”

I didn’t trust my voice, so I said nothing.

She gave a small, sad smile. “They can talk about curses and potions all they want. I saw **what** real strength looks like. And it **wasn’t** borrowed. It was yours.”

I sat up, leaning against the headboard **as** she handed me the bowl. It was her usual sunfire noodles—handmade, served in clear broth, topped with moonleaf **greens**, a poached egg, and just enough wild chive oil to make your mouth water. The scent alone made my stomach grumble.

I blinked **quickly**, suddenly fighting the sting behind my eyes.

“Thanks, Mia,” I murmured, my voice cracking

She was the only one in this house who had ever treated me like I mattered. She noticed when I **was** cold, She brought me

+8 Pearls

Chapter 50

food when I was locked away. She stood between me and Alaric's lists more times **than** I could count.

If not for her... I wouldn't have survived..

"Truly," I added, my fingers tightening around the bowl. "I'm still alive because of **you.**"

Her eyes welled up, but she smiled gently.

Then, after a pause, she whispered. "Miss Riley... maybe you should run. Tonight. Slip away while they're distracted."

Her words hit like a gust of wind through my already cracked defenses.

For a split **second**, I wanted to say yes. Gods, I wanted to say yes.

But then Nyra stirred inside me.

"Run?" her voice was faint, almost a sigh. "You've run enough. We both have. You know what must be done."

I exhaled slowly and looked back at Mia. "I can't,"

Her face crumpled. "Why not? You don't owe them anything. You- Her voice broke. "**You** don't know what he did while you were unconscious.

I didn't need to ask. I already knew.)

Nyra's presence pulsed gently in my chest, coiled but aware, She never truly slept—not when danger was near.

Mia tried to keep her voice calm. "They dragged you out of the hospital bed, Riley. The wound on your shoulder split open. You bled through your gown, and he still forced you **into** the car like you were **a** sack of grain."

I swallowed hard.

Nyra growled softly in the back of my mind. "Cowards. Bastards. They will pay, Riley. I'll make sure of it."

I forced a smile onto my lips. “Maybe marrying into the Stormridge won’t be so bad.”

Mia stared at **me**, horror on her face. “You **can’t** mean that.”

“I don’t, I whispered.

But she and her daughter were the only two people in the world I cared about.

And I knew one thing as long as they remained within Alaric’s reach, I would never be free. So I had to stay. I had to play along until I had what I needed.

One **million** credits. **That was** the bride price.

Enough to **get** Mia and her daughter out of the country,

They were my weakness. My soft spot. If they stayed, the Vales would always have a chain around my neck.

“I should eat this before it gets soggy,” I said, changing the subject **and** shoving a mouthful of noodles into my mouth before **Mia** could argue.

She watched me, sadness etched into every **line** of her face.

Late the entire bowl—soup and all.

When she left with the empty dish, my smile dropped instantly.

I sat in the silence and made a silent vow.

“Just a little longer, Mu. Hang on. Once I get that money, I’ll burn this house to the ground if I **have** to.”

The next seven days **passed** in uneasy calm.

Chapter 50

I barely left my room except to eat. I avoided everyone else like the plague. Even Scarlett, for once, kept her distance.

But I knew it couldn’t last.

That morning, after brushing my hair and slipping on something simple, I opened my bedroom door and nearly ran face-

first into Zara.

She was smiling. Too widely. Too fake.

In her hands was a glossy shopping bag-

I froze. "What do you want?"

Zara kept her tone light, sugary sweet. "I just wanted to give you something. A gift."

She held up the bag like it was the moon itself. "I **had** this dress specially picked for you. For tonight."

I didn't **take** it.

"I'm not in the mood for charity, Zara, Just say **what** you want and go."

The fake smile twitched. "Riley, do we really have to keep fighting? I'm still your mother."

I let out a sharp, humorless laugh. "You're my mother now? Since when? When you ignored me in the storage room? When you let your husband beat me bloody?"

"Don't you

want to try on the dress?" she asked weakly. "Let me be a mother **to** you, just once?"

"Why now?" I snapped. "What's **so special** about tonight? Wait—let me guess. There's a banquet. Some public event where you want me **to** show up like a good little daughter, arm candy for the Stormridge heir."

Her **silence** was answer enough.

I stepped back and crossed my arms. "If you really cared, you'd give me money. I could buy my own dress. Something I actually like. But no, you want me to **wear** your pick, smile on cue, and impress your precious guests."

"You think I want to sell you off?" **she** whispered, eyes welling with tears on command.

"Yes," I said bluntly. That's exactly what you're **doing**."

"I'm trying to help," she pleaded.

"You're trying to look like you care. But you don't. You never have."

I could see it in her eyes—guilt and shame fighting for dominance,

“Let me guess,” I **said**. “The banquet’s tonight, right? The Stormridge prince will be there, and you want me to dazzle him with my charming **personality**?”

“Riley...

“Save it,” I cut in, stepping forward. “We both **know** I don’t have a choice. You want me to go because you think it’ll make you look good. **And** if I refuse, you’ll **find** a way to punish me.”

She said nothing.

That silence told me everything.

Nyra stirred again, her voice low and lethal. “Let me out, Riley. Let me **speak through** you. Let me show them **what** a real Alpha looks like”

“Not yet,” I whispered back. “Soon”

Zara tried to smile again, but I could see the cracks.

“**You’ve** always wanted to be accepted,” she said gently. “Maybe tonight’s your **chance**.”

Chapter 50

“Maybe,” I murmured, reaching for the door.

“Riley-

“Don’t worry.” I said without looking back. “I’ll wear the damn dress.”

And I will.

Because when I burn this family to ash, I want them all dressed for the occasion.

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