

A Broken Alpha Heiress' Revenge

[1,214 words]

Chapter 301

Riley's POV

I was running out of time.

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My body felt like a broken bow, its string stretched to the limit, ready to snap. Every breath burned through my chest, every movement dragged knives through my veins. And yet, I refused to let my life end

quietly, like a candle suffocated by the wind.

I thought of Carmen—her face twisted in bloodlust, her hands dripping with the lives she had stolen for me. Four people. Four corpses staining her soul because of me.

Because of Riley.

If I had never stumbled into her world, her wolf would never have been dragged into the shadows of vengeance. If Mia hadn't been cast out of the Ebonclaw Pack's household for my sake, she would still be tending her herb garden with quiet joy. If Lucien hadn't met me, perhaps his legs would never have been crushed under falling stone. Their fates had shifted because of my existence. I was a curse—a sweeping star that ruined every orbit it touched.

And now... my wolf whispered that if I was going to die, at least I should make that death mean something.

Mia had spoken with Caelum, Theo, and Jace, her voice grave as he listed my injuries, but hid the part about my wolfsbane. My body was weak, infection spreading through me like fire licking up dry wood. My organs faltered, one after another, as though my wolf was already preparing for the long silence of the

grave.

I forced a smile at the men who watched over me, their worry written plainly in their eyes.

“I’ll be fine,” I lied, because what else could I say? They didn’t need the truth—not yet.

My gaze settled on Caelum. His loyalty was unshakable, his presence a steady flame in the storm. “Caelum... don’t tell Lucien what happened to me. Please. He has enough burdens to bear. I don’t want him to worry.”

He hesitated, his mouth tightening. I saw the war in his eyes—the instinct to protect Lucien’s heart, clashing with the promise to honor my plea. At last, he gave a single, quiet nod. My chest loosened with relief.

I turned next to Theo. “You’re a healer, Could you... give me something for the pain? I’m not afraid of death, but... I’m afraid of what it will feel like getting there.”

His hands stilled. For a heartbeat, Theo just stared at me, his wolf flickering in his eyes, as though he couldn’t believe I was the one asking. I never admitted pain. I swallowed it, hid it, fought it. For me to speak the word aloud... it must have broken something in him.

At last, his voice came low and hoarse. “I’ll fetch the medicine.”

When he left, I told Caelum and Jace, “I’m tired. Just a little rest, that’s all.” My body sagged, too heavy for my bones to hold. They lingered, reluctant, but finally followed Theo out.

The room fell silent. Only me and the hiss of the monitor beside my bed.

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I turned toward the window.

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The Moon was absent tonight, but the sunlight earlier had been golden, pouring into my room as if the heavens themselves had tried to remind me of warmth. I remembered stretching my fingers into that light, hoping it would thaw the frost lodged deep in my veins. It hadn’t. My body was too cold, my wolf too

weak.

But the world outside was beautiful, and the thought of leaving it left me aching in ways no wound ever

could.

Theo returned soon after, carrying the small vial. "Here. This will ease it."

I took the pills obediently, even managing a smile. He lingered for only a few words of comfort before slipping away again, his wolf sorrow written in the way he avoided looking directly at me.

When the medicine numbed the sharp edges of agony, I rose. My legs trembled beneath me, but I forced them to move. Every step felt stolen, borrowed from death itself.

I found myself outside Lucien's room. Through the glass, I saw him.

My Alpha. My storm.

He lay trapped in plaster and pain, his proud frame bound, his wolf snarling inside the cage of his body. The Alpha Prince of Stormridge, reduced to stillness. Caelum sat at his bedside, speaking quietly, though I couldn't hear the words.

My throat closed. My wolf whimpered.

This was my fault. All of it.

If Lucien had never known me, he would still be fierce and unbroken, leading Stormridge with unshakable strength. Instead, I had dragged him into ruin.

Tears slipped down my face unchecked. I pressed my palm to the cold glass, as though I could etch his image into my skin. I memorized him—the curve of his jaw, the defiance in his eyes even while broken, the way his presence filled every corner of the room like a tide.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, though he could not hear. "I can't even say goodbye. Because if I tried... you would never let me go,"

I turned away, forcing myself down the hall before my wolf shattered into pieces.

Outside the hospital, the air was bright, almost cruel in its cheer.

I slipped into the small apothecary nestled between the rune-marked stone alleys. The scent of herbs, dried moss, and ironwood clung to the air. Behind the counter stood a young omega tending shelves of tinctures and spell-woven remedies.

“One vial of Wolfsbane,” I said. My voice was steady, though my wolf shuddered at the word.

The omega froze, eyes darting to me with suspicion. His wolf stirred uneasily—he knew what Wolfsbane meant. It wasn’t for healing. It was poison, bane of our kind, outlawed except for sanctioned trials of

execution.

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“You don’t look like a warrior preparing for sanctioned use,” he said carefully, nostrils flaring at the scent of sickness still bleeding from my pores. “We don’t sell death to the desperate.”

For a moment, I faltered. My reflection caught in the obsidian mirror behind him: a thin figure in tattered clothes, eyes hollow, aura fading. No wonder he denied me. I looked like a wolf already half-dead.

I left, empty-handed, my chest caving with shame.

But shadows grant second chances.

In another shop—one cloaked in incense and shadow-charms—I bought fresh garments, a long cloak that hid my broken frame. A mask of black silk veiled my face, and smoked glass lenses covered my eyes. By the time I stepped into a different apothecary, no one recognized me.

This time, the vial slid into my palm easily, its contents dark and shimmering with death. Wolfsbane. The end of wolves, the end of me.

I tucked it close to my heart and summoned a carriage from the Mooncrest streets. The driver asked my destination.

“The Tribunal Hall,” I answered, my voice low, final.

The horses stamped nervously at the name. Even they knew the place was heavy with judgment.

As the carriage rolled toward the Elder Council’s stronghold, my hand tightened around the vial. If I had to vanish from this world, then I would make sure my last act mattered.

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[1,031 words]

Chapter 302

Riley’s POV

The Elder Council precinct loomed before me, austere and imposing. Its white stone walls gleamed under the midday sun, and the

argent crest of the Council glinted like a sentinel’s eye—watchful, unyielding, a symbol of law and order that demanded respect. I took a deep breath, feeling my chest tighten with a mix of fear and determination. This was no ordinary path I was walking; there was no turning back now. Whatever lay beyond those doors, I had chosen it, and it was the only way I could protect Carmen.

I stepped forward, each footfall heavy on the polished steps. My wolf instincts hummed in my blood, coiled and alert, sensing the tension in the air. The lobby was empty except for a lone packwarden behind a wooden dais, his eyes flicking up at me with mild curiosity that sharpened into full attention as I approached.

“I... I wish to surrender myself to the Council,” I said, voice low but resolute.

The warden straightened, his posture stiffening, tail flicking slightly in agitation.

“Surrender? You... what have you done?”

I removed the hood and scarf that had shielded my face, revealing the exhaustion etched into my features. The scars of the past five years weighed on me like chains, each one a testament to the torment I had endured.

“I killed them,” I said, letting the words fall with deliberate weight, tasting like ash in my mouth.

His amber eyes contracted sharply. Murder. Blood spilled under my claws. His hands moved instinctively toward the Council's signaling horn, but he hesitated, unnerved by the quiet conviction that radiated from me like heat from a wolf in full winter fur.

The cold iron shackles clamped around my wrists when he finally acted. The sensation was familiar, spine-tingling—not from fear, but from habit. Five years ago, I had taken the fall for Scarlett, carrying guilt that wasn't mine. Five years later, I chose to shoulder Carmen's survival. The irony cut sharp and bitter.

They led me into an interrogation chamber within the precinct—a small, circular room built with stone and reinforced oak, the walls echoing like the hollowed lair of a mountain wolf. My senses were alert, every scent, every subtle vibration in the air, picked up by my wolf. The warden's fear, his controlled composure—it all flavored the tension like iron in the wind.

"Sit," he commanded, his voice firm, carrying the authority of the Elder Council. A carved obsidian slate and a stylus rested on the table before me, ready to record every word, every confession.

I obeyed, hands gripping the edges of the chair so tightly that my knuckles whitened. My pulse thrummed in rhythm with the memories clawing at the back of my mind.

"Tell me in detail. Who did you kill, where, how, and why?" His questions struck like throwing knives. I inhaled slowly, letting the memories sharpen in my mind like hunting blades in moonlight.

"I killed Otto Wilson... Selene Ashford. Maddox... and..." My voice cracked, raw and hoarse. Each name was

a shard of memory, bloodied and jagged. The visions surged: Carmen's eyes blazing, the twisted faces of my enemies, the screams, the betrayal.

The warden's eyes widened fractionally with each name. He hadn't expected the woman before him-

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slim, fragile, almost ethereal—to wield death with such precision. He tried to mask his shock, but the stylus scratched furiously across the obsidian slate, desperate to keep pace with the story.

“Are you certain these four were killed by you?” he asked again, probing for a crack in my resolve.

I met his gaze, unwavering. “Yes. I killed them. Each of them deserved what came to them.”

He scribbled furiously, disbelief etched in every line. “Explain... why?”

I closed my eyes, letting the memories wash over me. The humiliations, assaults, betrayals—they came back in brutal clarity. Otto Wilson’s violence, Selene Ashford’s schemes, Maddox’s treachery, the beatings and torment in the cell when I was blamed for crimes I did not commit. Each wound, each scar, was real, etched deep into my bones and blood.

I told the truth. Lies would have been poison; the facts were potent enough, and my wolf’s reasoning was imprinted in every strike, every act.

The warden continued to probe, asking and repeating questions, testing the boundaries of my resolve. There was no break, no falsehood. My memories were my shield, my wolf’s instincts sharpened as both sword and armor.

Finally, he closed the slate, preparing to have me escorted to a holding chamber pending further investigation. But before he could call for the pack guards, I moved.

From my coat, I produced the vial of wolfsbane extract. The cork twisted off with a hiss. In one fluid motion, I drank it, the bitter liquid burning a path down my throat like fire and ice entwined. The vial clattered to the stone floor as my body trembled violently.

The warden froze, eyes wide with horror. “What are you doing?!”

But the act was complete. My wolf roared inside me, furious, protective, instinctively knowing that this was the only way to ensure Carmen’s safety. If I lived, she would face retribution. If I died, the weight would rest solely on me, and justice—even wolf justice—would balance, if only partially.

Carmen... you are too good for this world. Mia needs you. Lucien, Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck... don’t grieve for me. I have walked with death before, and I will walk with it again if it means you live. My life, **my** suffering, my final breath—they are yours, and yours alone.

I felt the wolfsbane begin to work, cold seeping into my veins like the howl of a distant alpha under a blood moon. But even as my body weakened, a strange clarity overtook me. I had fought. I had endured horrors few could imagine. I had protected, avenged, survived. And even in my final act, there was power.

Because I am a White wolf. I am of Alpha blood. And even if the world seeks to break me, even if my body falters, my wolf—my essence—remains untamed.

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[1,164 words]

Riley's POV

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The fire in my stomach spread like a wildfire, scorching through my veins, radiating into every limb. It was a deep, visceral pain, gnawing at my organs, twisting inside me like knives forged in ice and flame. Not even the strongest alchemical sedatives Theo Hale had once administered could dull this agony.

I bit down hard on my lip, tasting copper, tasting the dark truth of what I had done. A cough tore through me, and a dark rivulet of blood sprayed onto the cold stone floor of the infirmary chamber. It hissed faintly, the smell of iron sharp in my nostrils. Yet, despite the searing torment, a strange smile tugged at the corner of my lips—a smile of bitter release.

If I died here, it would all end. Carmen would be free of murder's stain, her wolfborn life untainted, able to walk proudly again among the Ashmoor Academy and Stormridge circles. Lucien... my prince of the Stormridge Pack... would be able to bury the memory of my suffering, to continue leading his pack without this shadow weighing him down. Mia, my surrogate mother, and Mrs. Beck, who had cared for me as though I were her own, would no longer fear for my survival.

The thought, cruel as it was, gave me purpose. Even in death, I could offer value to those I loved.

Tears slipped down my cheeks, stinging in the burning heat of the poison coursing through me. My eyes blurred, and when they opened again, I was no longer in the interrogation room but in the stark white confines of the Stormbrige infirmary.

The room swarmed with concern, the scents of worry thick in the air. And there he was. Lucien, sitting in a wheelchair, gaunt and pale, his crimson eyes fixed on me as though

burning through my very soul. Our gaze locked, and I tried, weakly, to smile. I lifted a trembling hand to touch his face, but my arm faltered halfway, drained of strength.

He caught my hand, pressing it to his cheek, his voice hoarse with anguish. "Why... why would you be so foolish?"

I swallowed, struggling to keep the pain from my throat. "Lucien... it's me who dragged you into this. Please... when I'm gone, promise me... forget me quickly, alright?"

The tears he had held back finally broke free, tumbling down his face in thick, unrelenting streams. His shoulders shuddered as the composed alpha façade cracked completely, revealing the raw, human despair beneath.

"You promised... you promised you'd be mine," he rasped, his voice quivering with the deep ache of betrayal and helplessness. "How... how could you go back on your word?"

I brushed at the tears streaking his cheeks, my fingers numb, my lips trembling. Every touch sent a jolt of pain through me, but I couldn't stop. "Don't cry.." I whispered, the words barely audible, but soaked in all the warmth I could summon.

Lucien roared, "Professor Maeryn! Go find Professor Macryn, she has to have a way to save her!"

Caelum stood silently to the side, struck by the sight of his Alpha wracked with such pain. After a brief hesitation, he murmured, "I've already tried to contact Professor Macryn, but she isn't in the East. Her assistant said she left temporarily, and they don't know where she went. She's currently out of range of the comm stones, but I've left a message. As soon as she returns, she'll come for Riley immediately,"

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Then Carmen appeared, rushing through the crowd, her small frame trembling, eyes red and swollen. She fell to her knees beside the bed.

"Riley... why?" Her voice cracked, each syllable a knife in my chest.

"I... I've taken lives," I said, pressing my remaining strength into the words. "I surrendered myself to the Council. Those who commit crimes must face the consequences. My body... it's failing. I cannot endure this pain any longer. I chose this path so that none of you would bear my burden."

Carmen's gaze sharpened. She saw it immediately—my intention, as plain and raw as the silver crest of the Elder Council.

"No... this isn't what I want. I don't need this from you!" She collapsed onto the floor, knees giving way, her arms clutching me as though she could physically anchor me to this world. Her wolf instincts, so in tune with mine, sensed the imminence of death and recoiled in terror.

Her body shook violently, her wails guttural and raw. "Riley... don't die... don't leave me... I'd rather die myself than let you go!"

I could feel the poison pulling at me, a tide of cold ice creeping through my chest, filling my lungs with burning shards. The wolfsbane would scar the tissue irreversibly, a death sentence in any other scenario. But Carmen's fear, her desperate claws on my arms, urged me to speak softly, to anchor her to reason as much as I could.

I leaned toward her ear, whispering, voice threadbare yet firm. "Carmen... this ends here. Live your life fully.. for me. Don't let my death be meaningless. This... this is all I can do for you now."

Her body stiffened, disbelief and grief warring across her features. "Ends here?" How could it? Caden, Elira Blackthorn... they were still alive. How could this possibly be the end?

She nodded frantically, tears spilling over like storm-swollen rivers. "I promise... as long as you live, I'll do everything you ask."

Her hands clutched mine as if holding me could anchor me to life itself. "Riley... you have to hold on. The healers will save you."

Each breath was agony, blades scraping through my lungs, every inhale a fresh stab of fire. Blood mixed with bile rose in my throat, yet I swallowed it back, unwilling to give her further fear.

"Carmen... don't cry..." I murmured again, voice a ghost of its former strength. My wolf stirred inside me, coiling, alert, desperate to shield her from this moment even as it raged against the helplessness of my failing body.

She tried to wipe her tears, but they came faster than she could stem, flowing like the mountain streams after spring thaw. Even through the haze of pain, I caught the scent

of her fear, of her determination to protect me, and it filled me with warmth and sorrow all at once.

I could feel life slipping away, but in this small, stark chamber, I sensed a fragile peace. My pack, my bonds, my choices—they mattered, even here at the edge of mortality. I had walked through darkness and come out biting, clawing, surviving. And even as my body betrayed me, my wolf—the untamed essence of my being—remained unbroken, snarling softly in the shadows, a sentinel over those I loved.

Because I am Riley. My blood is wolfborn. My will is untamed. And even as my body falters, my legacy will roar louder than any mortal death.

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[1,304 words]

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Third Person's POV

Riley's hand trembled as she lifted her skeletal fingers, fragile and cold, brushing away Carmen's tears with the last strength left in her body. Her voice was hoarse, faint as smoke in the wind.

"Don't... cry."

The more she tried to soothe them, the more unbearable the grief in the room became.

Carmen, curled against the edge of the hospital bed, could no longer restrain herself. Her sobs shook her slender frame, her shoulders rising and falling with violent rhythm, her breath quick and ragged like she might collapse at any second from sheer sorrow.

Around them, the others—Lucien, Duke, Caelum Knox, Mia—stood stricken in silence, their eyes glistening red, their jaws clenched, unable to contain their grief. Even hardened warriors of the Stormridge Pack had moisture in their eyes, as if the sight of Riley's suffering tore something deep within them.

Riley herself felt torn in two. She had not expected to be here, lingering in this half-state between life and death. She had thought the poison—the brutal, unforgiving draught of pesticide she had swallowed—would end everything quickly. That was why she had chosen it. Pesticide was nearly impossible to recover from. No healing salve, no wolf's accelerated regeneration could combat it fully. She had drunk the whole bottle with grim determination, expecting to leave this cruel world behind at last.

But fate had mocked her. The Moon had mocked her. She had been dragged back into the land of the living, her agony prolonged.

Now, instead of fading quietly, she had to watch the devastation in the faces of those she cared for most. The sight cut her deeper than any blade, the guilt and sorrow clawing at her soul until she wanted to

scream.

She opened her mouth to whisper something—anything—but instead of words, thick gouts of blackened blood burst forth, spilling from her lips in a torrent.

The stench of iron filled the air.

Her body convulsed violently as blood streamed not only from her mouth but from her nose, her ears, even her eyes. The crimson and inky liquid seeped across the pristine sheets, a grotesque contrast against the white, spreading in cruel blossoms of scarlet. Her face twisted in agony, painted with blood, until she looked like a revenant risen from the abyss, a tormented soul clawing out of the underworld.

“Riley-!” Carmen’s scream ripped the air, raw, feral, like the howl of a wolf who had just lost her mate. Her voice cracked, shredded by the pain. She lunged forward, but her grief overwhelmed her, and her body gave way beneath it. Her eyes rolled back, and she collapsed unconscious to the floor.

Lucien —Alpha prince of Stormridge—staggered, every muscle trembling. His usually commanding voice now cracked with terror. “Doctor! Healers—now!”

His shout pierced the sterile air, summoning every medic on duty.

Riley’s consciousness dimmed. Through the haze of her pain, she saw Carmen’s crumpled form, **lifeless**

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on the tiles. She **saw** Lucien's face—ashen, wild with despair. She saw Duke's wide **eyes**, Caelum's **rigid stance**, **Theo and Jace** standing hollow with helplessness. **The** world blurred, **slipping** away as the **last threads of** awareness tore.

Then—blackness.

Chaos erupted in the ward. The sound of boots on the tiles, the sharp command of healers, the squeal **of** the bed's wheels as they rushed Riley's limp body down the hall.

The others could only watch as she was wheeled into the surgery chamber.

Time dragged, every second an eternity. The red light above the operating room glowed like **an** unholy omen, casting the hallway in a deathly huc.

Lucien sat in his wheelchair, his once—proud figure slumped, his body motionless. The Alpha prince who once commanded armies and bent wolves to their knees now looked more like a hollow husk. His **tears** had long since dried, his muscles numb, his soul suspended in torment. He stared at the light above the door as though sheer will could force it to change.

The others lingered in silence, every pair of eyes fixed on the same red glow, every breath tight in their lungs.

Finally—after what felt like centuries—the light flickered and went out. The door creaked open, and the surgeon stepped out, his robes stained with sweat, his face drawn with fatigue and quiet dread.

Lucien's heart clenched. A wolf's instinct told him before the words were even spoken: the truth would shatter him.

Still, his voice, ragged and trembling, broke the silence. "Doctor... how **is** she? Tell me Riley's alive."

The surgeon lowered his gaze, his voice soft, heavy with finality. "We... did everything we could. I'm sorry. She's gone. May the Moon guide her spirit."

The words struck like lightning.

Lucien's chest constricted as if a steel claw had pierced through his ribs. His lungs burned, and his heart convulsed violently.

"No. No! That's a lie! Riley can't be dead!" He surged forward, wild and desperate, shoving the surgeon back with a strength born of madness. "You're the healer of Stormridge! You'll go back in there and bring her back! She's not gone! She promised—she promised me she'd marry me! I haven't claimed her before the Moon, I haven't taken her home. You will save her!"

His voice, once regal and commanding, was now the raw cry of a wolf stripped of everything, a howl of loss and denial.

Duke lunged forward, grabbing his shoulders, but even the loyal aide's voice cracked. "Alpha, stop! Please

Caelum Knox closed his eyes briefly, grief heavy in his features. His voice, low but steady, broke the final truth into the silence. "Lucien... Riley has gone."

The words twisted through the air like blades.

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Lucien's entire body seized. He coughed violently, and blood erupted from his **lips**, staining **his** robes, his **strength giving** way beneath the weight of despair..

And it was then, as if the Fates had orchestrated the cruelty, that Carmen awoke. She stumbled **forward** just in time to hear Caelum's words.

Her **steps** faltered. She froze, her eyes locked on the still-swinging doors of the surgical chamber, For a long moment, she didn't breathe, didn't move.

Then, like a ghost drawn by an unseen force, she began to walk forward. Step by step, until she passed Duke without so much as a glance, ignoring his trembling hand reaching for her.

"Carmen" Duke whispered, but his voice broke in futility.

She did not stop. Her eyes were fixed only on the doors, on the place where Riley had been carried away, where her soul had been torn from the world.

She crossed the threshold and disappeared into the chamber.

Behind her, silence thickened.

The wolves of Stormridge—proud warriors, heirs, sons of Alphas—stood defeated, staring into the abyss Riley's death had left behind.

And the Moon hung silent in the heavens, merciless, offering no comfort.

This was no ordinary death. This was the cruel end of a girl who had been abandoned by her own families, cast aside into the Rogus settlement. Brought back home only to suffer cruelty, betrayal, false accusations, and years imprisoned in the dungeons of the Wolf prison..

Released, only to be hounded again, scapegoated, cornered at every turn until despair finally drove her to poison.

The Fates had toyed with her life. The Moon had shown no mercy.

And now Riley—good, pure—hearted, strong, and undeserving of such torment—was gone.

The pack whispered their silent questions, rage burning beneath their grief.”

Why?

Why would the Moon forsake her?

Why would such cruelty befall one who bore no malice, who carried kindness in her veins?

Why would the spirits take Riley when monsters still walked free?

No one could answer.

Not even the Alpha Prince of Stormridge, broken and bloodied, could understand.

Only the silent Moon knew, and she did not speak.

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[1,136 words]

Chapter 305

Third Person's POV

Riley's body lay motionless upon the cold slab of the surgical chamber. The harsh white **lights** above **made** her skin look even paler than the sheets beneath her, drained of every trace of warmth. The thin hospital gown was torn and stained, streaked with blood both scarlet and black. Her lips were cracked, still **tainted** by the poison she had vomited in her final moments.

When Carmen entered the room, her knees nearly buckled. The sight of Riley—once vibrant, once fierce, once stubbornly alive against all odds—reduced to a fragile corpse, gutted her soul.

Her hands trembled as she reached out, brushing Riley’s hollow cheek with frozen fingertips. The touch was reverent, almost worshipful.

“Riley...” Her voice rasped, the sound breaking like a bowstring. “You’ve left me. You really left me.”

Her chest heaved, but no more tears came; she had already cried herself dry. She had nothing left but pain and fury.

Yet even as her grief consumed her, the doors burst open.

Lucien Duskgrave staggered in.

The Alpha Prince of Stormridge, heir of the Duskgrave bloodline, was broken beyond recognition. His hands shook violently as he pushed his wheelchair forward, only to abandon it halfway and drag himself across the floor, his paralyzed legs scraping uselessly against the tiles. His wolf’s howl echoed in the silence, reverberating inside his chest, a desperate call to the mate lying lifeless before him.

He gathered Riley into his arms, clutching her against his chest, his lips pressed to her bloodied hair.

“No... no, Moon above, no!” Lucien’s voice shattered as he rocked her body. “Wake up, Riley! Please... you promised me. You promised to stay.”

Then—something impossible happened.

A faint glow began to emanate from Riley’s body. It shimmered like moonlight through fog, soft but undeniable. Lucien froze, his breath catching as his wolf surged forward.

Mate!

The voice of his wolf thundered inside his soul, louder, clearer than it had been in years. His curse shattered like glass. His blood burned with power as his wolf roared, calling for Riley, calling for their m

to answer.

But there was no response.

Riley’s wolf did not stir. Her body glowed, yes, and the curse broke, yes—but she remained silent, lifeless

in his arms.

Lucien gasped as sensation returned to his legs. He was originally very powerful, but the Moon Goddess cursed him to not be able to find his destined mate. But now, he has found it, and his wolf nature has become even stronger. At this moment, his legs are healing rapidly. He stumbled to his feet, staggering as

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he realized he could stand again, walk again, **fight again**.

Yet none of it mattered.

He pressed desperate kisses against Riley's cold skin—her eyelids, her nose, her lips—trying **to coax** life back into her. "Breathe, Riley. Just breathe, damn you! Come back to me! Don't leave me here **alonel**

But she did not move. Her chest did not rise. Her lips stayed cold.

Lucien howled, a sound so raw and primal that the walls themselves seemed to tremble. The grief of **an** Alpha whose mate had been stolen was the most terrible sound in the world.

Carmen collapsed to the ground, covering her ears, her own wolf wailing in unison with Lucien's. Her heart cracked open as she watched Riley remain unresponsive.

Mia, the old housekeeper who had loved Riley like her own, knelt beside Carmen and wrapped her **arms** around the trembling girl. "Hush now... child. Don't shatter yourself. Riley wouldn't want that..." Her voice quivered, but she held Carmen tightly as though to keep her from breaking apart entirely.

Moments later, Matriarch Duskgrave herself entered, her noble figure trembling with grief, tears streaming down her face. Lady Seraphina Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck followed close behind, each pale and broken.

They had truly loved Riley—loved her for her spirit, her kindness, her unyielding strength. And now, seeing her gone, they mourned as though their own blood had been stolen from them.

"My granddaughter..." Matriarch Duskgrave whispered, her voice as fragile as winter wind. She reached for Riley's still hand but faltered, unable to bear the cold of it.

Carmen, holding herself steady only through fury, lowered her head. Inside, a vow etched itself into her soul, carved deep as a scar.

Elira Blackthorn. Caden Wilson.

You will die for this.

If Riley was gone, if Lucien's soul was torn apart, then Carmen would carry the burden of vengeance. She would hunt them both, rip them apart piece by piece, and lay their blood at Riley's grave.

-As dawn broke, the funeral rites of the Stormridge Pack commenced.

By ancient custom, a wolf who died in tragedy was given to the Moon through a sacred ritual of fire and earth, their bodies burned so that their spirits might run free under the Moon's eternal light.

Lucien resisted with all his might, refusing to let Riley's body go. "She is mine! You will not take her from me!" he snarled, clutching her to his chest like a beast guarding his kill. His eyes were bloodshot, his **teeth** bared, the Alpha power in him wild and unstable.

But Duke knelt before him, his own tears staining his cheeks. "Alpha... please. It is her right. She belongs to the Moon now."

Caelum Knox stood at his side, his hand firm on Lucien's shoulder. "This is the way of our kind. If you her, let her run free beneath the Moon's gaze. Denying her will only chain her spirit."

love

2/3

Chapter **805**

Lucien trembled, his breath breaking into sobs. Finally, with a sound **that was neither human or wolf** i **something** broken in between, he let them pry Riley from his arms,

Her body, pale and **fragile, was** placed upon the funeral bier and wheeled toward **the sacred grounds**. The **pack bowed** their heads as **she** was taken away.

Lucien collapsed to his knees, his hands clawing the earth, his throat raw from screaming her **name**.

The bier reached the secluded place of the Moonlit Pyre, deep within the woods where no outsiders **dared** to tread. The pack waited outside as the priests prepared the rites.

And then-

In the hush, in the shadows unseen, a flicker of darkness moved.

A shadow slipped between trees, faster than any eye could follow. The bier was left unattended for only a heartbeat... but when the priests returned, Riley's body was gone.

Vanished.

The bier lay empty, the air tinged with the faintest scent of smoke and shadow.

None of the pack knew.

None of them saw.

The Alpha Prince still knelt in grief, unaware.

But somewhere, beyond their sight, Riley had been taken.

By who—or by what—none could say.

Only the Moon bore witness.

And the story of Riley was not yet finished.

3/3

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

[967 words]

Chapter 306

It had been one month since Riley was taken from them.

On that bleak dawn, the pack had gathered in silence as her body was wheeled into the shadowed forest. toward the Moonlit Pyre. Carmen remembered the way Lucien had fought, how his growls had shaken the earth, how even Duke and Caelum Knox had struggled to hold him back. But tradition was stronger **than** even an Alpha's grief. By law, by blood, by vow to the Moon, the dead belonged to Her.

And so, with their hearts breaking, they had let Riley go.

From afar, they saw it—the faint curl of smoke rising above the trees, drifting upward into the gray **sky**. That was the sign, the elders had said. The Moon had claimed Riley. Her spirit now ran beneath eternal silver light, free at last from mortal pain.

But the smoke brought no peace.

The Duskgrave household locked itself in grief, their mountain villa in Stormridge cloaked in silence. Mrs. Beck wept nightly, her voice hoarse from calling Riley's name. Matriarch Duskgrave had not once worn her jewels since that day, her hair unkempt, her once-proud smile withered. And Lucien—Alpha Prince of Stormridge, heir to one of the oldest bloodlines—vanished into his chambers. He had not stepped outside his door since the funeral. His wolf prowled within him endlessly, restless and wounded, its cries echoing through the stone halls at night like a ghostly howl.

Carmen knew. She had heard him, each time. His torment carved itself into her own bones.

But Carmen was not like the Duskgraves. She could not sit idle, drowning in sorrow. She had work to *do*. Now, a month later, sunlight streamed through the tall windows of Duke's residence, spilling across the sofa where Carmen sat. The golden rays touched her skin, painting her in a fragile glow like a veil of spun silk. To any passing eye, she might have looked at peace, her face warmed with a faint blush, her *body* restored from the shadows of despair.

Only Carmen herself knew how false that picture was.

She had spent the last month under Duke's roof, refusing to return to Ashmoor Academy. Duke, ever watchful, had taken her in without hesitation. He fed her, cared for her, even kept her distracted with endless comforts. At first, her body had been so frail she could barely stand. Now, her strength had returned, and with it, the fire in her blood.

Duke's voice carried from the kitchen, warm and steady. "Carmen, lunch is ready."

She turned her head, watching as he emerged with careful hands, setting dish after dish upon the table. His gaze softened when it fell on her, heavy with affection, with relief.

"Come, eat."

Carmen rose silently and joined him at the table. She ate in silence, her motions slow, deliberate. Duke's eyes lingered on her with quiet devotion, and when he noticed her bowl empty, he leaned forward to place another serving onto her plate.

For a moment, it might have looked like an ordinary afternoon between two people bound by companionship.

Chapter 306

But beneath **the** surface, the truth **was** darker.

Duke,” Carmen said suddenly, her voice cutting through the stillness.

He froze, chopsticks poised in the air. “What is it?”

She looked at him directly, her eyes clear, unwavering. “You’ve cared for me for a month. My **health** is restored. It’s time I returned to Ashmoor Academy.”

Duke stiffened. “Carmen... what if I arrange a leave of absence instead? There is no need to rush back?”

She shook her head firmly. “No. I want to graduate as quickly as I can.”

“But-

“You’re afraid I’ll go after Elira and Caden, aren’t you?” she interrupted, her tone calm, almost too calm. “Don’t worry. I promised Riley before she left. I won’t seek them out.”

Duke studied her face carefully, searching for cracks in her resolve. “Are you telling me the truth?”

“Yes.” Carmen nodded quickly, her lips tightening. After a pause, she added softly, “If you still don’t trust me, you can drive me to school every morning and bring me home each evening.”

Duke fell silent. He weighed her words, torn between suspicion and hope. At last, he gave a slow nod. “Very well. If that’s what you want.”

Relief flickered across his face. He believed her. He wanted to believe her.

Carmen lowered her gaze, allowing her lashes to shield the storm that brewed within her eyes. Beneath the mask of obedience, her wolf snarled, restless and vengeful. She would not let Riley’s death go unanswered.

The truth was, her month of healing had not been only about her body. Each night, while Duke slept, Carmen slipped into the glow of her computer screens, her fingers flying across the keys. She left no trace, masking her trail with the cunning of a rogue hacker. With each keystroke, she unraveled threads, followed whispers, and hunted shadows.

Bit by bit, she pieced together the trail of Elira Blackthorn and Caden Wilson.

The ones who had destroyed Riley.

The ones who had shattered Lucien.

The ones who still drew breath when they should already be ash beneath the Moonlit Pyre.

A sharp light glinted in Carmen's eyes as she ate another bite, her expression calm, betraying nothing. Duke thought she was healing, thought she was at peace.

But inside, Carmen's wolf bared its teeth.

Soon, she promised Riley in the silence of her soul. Soon, I will finish what you could not. Soon, their blood will stain the earth, and you will have justice.

She swallowed the thought with her food, hiding her fury beneath the same mask she had worn for a

2/3

Chapter 306

month

The **Moon** may have taken Riley, but Carmen still walked the earth. And Carmen **did not** forgive

3/3

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

[817 words]

Chapter 307

After a full month of relentless tracking, Carmen finally locked onto the scent trail of those two beaut

A month of breathing while Riley's blood still cried out from the earth was far too long. Tonight, **they** would pay.

The following dawn, sunlight spilled over the towers of Ashmoor Academy. Duke himself drove Carmen to the gates, watching as she slipped into the campus halls before pulling away. He thought she would spend her day buried in lectures. He thought wrong.

As soon as his car vanished from view, Carmen turned on her heel and quietly left the grounds.

By nightfall, the city glowed with neon and steel. Duke returned to the Ashmoor Academy gate, waiting at the curb in his car. He checked the time again and again, each minute clawing at his nerves. **Half** an hour passed. Still, no Carmen. He dialed her number—no signal, no answer.

Something in his chest tightened like a wolf sensing a kill gone wrong.

But Carmen was nowhere near Ashmoor. She had already crossed into another city, stalking her prey to a run-down housing block that reeked of mildew and old iron. The stairwell was poorly lit, shadows clinging like wolves to the corners. She stopped before a weather-worn door, lifting her hand. Three sharp knocks split the silence.

Inside, Elira and Caden were speaking quietly. The sound stilled them both. They shared a wary glance.

“Who is it?” Caden growled, voice cautious, wolf-tinged.

“Your delivery,” came the muffled reply, soft and neutral.

They exhaled, shoulders loosening.

“Didn’t expect dinner to come this quickly,” Elira muttered.

“I’ll get it,” Caden said, padding to the door. He swung it open to find a slim figure standing in the gloom, face hidden by a mask, carrying a bag. Judging from the outline, it was a woman.

He relaxed completely, lips parting to speak—

And froze.

Carmen’s eyes snapped up, silver-bright and brimming with hatred. “I finally found you.”

Steel hissed through the air. The blade in her hand drove straight into his gut with a wet crunch.

“You-” His eyes bulged wide in shock, blood bubbling on his lips.

“What about me?” Carmen snarled, ripping off her mask to reveal a face twisted by grief and rage, wolf-fire burning in her gaze. “You love hurting my Riley? Then let me hurt you. Tell me how it feels.”

She wrenched the knife free and drove it in again, and again. Each strike a howl of vengeance, each thrust fueled by memory of Riley's suffering.

1/2

Chapter 307

With a savage kick, she sent Caden sprawling backward into **the room, blood splattering** across the walls **She shut the** door behind her with a deliberate click, sealing them **in**.

Elira came rushing at the sound, only to freeze at the sight of her mate crumpled in his **own blood and** Carmen standing there, blade dripping red, her clothes already spattered.

A scream ripped from Elira's throat. She turned to flee, but Carmen was faster. In a blur she seized Elira by the hair and slammed her against the wall, then threw her to the ground like prey beneath a predator's paw.

"You two vermin destroyed Riley," Carmen hissed, voice colder than a moonless night. "Tonight, you die."

Elira scrambled, crawling, blood matting her hair, tears streaking her face. "Please... mercy! We know we were wrong!"

"Wrong?" Carmen crouched low, pressing the edge of her knife to Elira's throat. "Too late."

With a vicious flick, she slashed—not deep enough to kill, but enough to sever. Tendons parted. Elira shrieked, body jerking violently as pain racked her frame.

Caden, half-conscious on the floor, groaned and stirred. His eyes flicked open just enough to see Carmen looming above them, her blade glowing with reflected light. Recognition dawned, and terror consumed him.

"You... it's you," he rasped, pupils dilating in fear.

Carmen smiled, a slow, merciless curve. "You're so cruel. I wonder—" she tilted her head, gaze glittering— "is your heart as black as your soul? Or will it bleed red when I tear it out?"

"No! Please! Don't!" Caden begged, voice cracking as panic shredded his pride.

Elira sobbed, bloodied hands clawing at the floor. "We repent! We'll pay! Just spare us-

Carmen's wolf was already prowling beneath her skin, claws scratching, fangs aching to rip. She no longer saw them as people, only as prey, the ones who had brought Riley to ruin.

She raised her blade higher. Steel caught the dull light of the stairwell. Then, with deliberate slowness, she dragged it across Caden's abdomen. Flesh parted. Blood welled, hot and dark.

His scream echoed down the narrow hall, sharp and raw, the sound of a man being unmade.

Carmen's face was calm, almost serene. "This is only the beginning."

And in that moment, predator and prey were clear. Carmen was the wolf, and the Blackthorns were nothing more than meat.

2/2

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[1,089 words]

Chapter 308

Crimson blood gushed forth, splattering across the warped wooden floor, the metallic scent filling the room like a storm that could drown the senses. Caden's body convulsed violently, his eyes bulging wide, pupils blown out in pure terror. Fear coated them, thick and black as tar, drowning out the last of his defiance.

"No... please," he gasped, voice trembling, his hands slick with his own blood as he tried to hold himself together. "Spare me—I'll do anything, anything you ask!"

Carmen stood above him, her gaze colder than a moonless night, sharper than any blade in her hand. Her expression carried no mercy, no hint of hesitation—only the hollow fury of a wolf who had lost her pack-

sister.

The image of Riley's pale body lying on that cold, merciless operating table surged back into her mind, burning like a brand across her heart. Her voice was low, guttural, vibrating with the echo of her wolf.

"You beg me to spare you... Tell me, who spared Riley?"

Her grip on the blade tightened, her knuckles turning white.

“My Riley,” she whispered, her voice breaking into a snarl, “born under the moon of Ebonclaw blood, destined to be a daughter of a noble pack, to live with dignity, draped in silks, shielded by power. And yet —because of the two of you-” she spat the words like venom, eyes narrowing on Caden and Dean Elira Blackthorn “-her life was stripped away, her blood spilled, her destiny broken.”

The knife descended again, piercing flesh.

“AHHHH!” Caden’s scream tore through the silence, raw and ragged, echoing off the walls. His body arched, trembling violently, his voice cracking as pain ripped through him like claws through fur.

Carmen’s face remained unreadable, eyes burning with a cold fire as she cut him again, each strike slow, deliberate, a judgment that would not end quickly.

“Riley was the gentlest soul in this cursed world,” Carmen hissed, the words vibrating with the growl of her wolf. “And she is gone. Tell me—why should filth like you breathe when she no longer can? You do not deserve this life. You deserve the pit.”

Her strikes grew crueler, each one carving through sinew and bone. The room grew thick with the reek of blood, iron, and bile until even the air was choking.

For three relentless hours, Caden remained alive, awake, forced to witness his own body split apart under Carmen’s hand. Piece by piece, she cut him down until he was barely human, his howls echoing until they fractured into whimpers, then silence.

Dean Elira Blackthorn was forced to watch every moment. She was frozen at first, her body rigid, her eyes wide and glassy, like prey locked in the stare of a predator. Too much fear froze her in place, leaving her **as** lifeless as a doll carved of wood.

When at last Caden lay broken, his corpse little more than a ruin on the floor, Carmen turned her eyes toward Elira.

“You’re next.”

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Chapter 308

Those two **words** struck Elira like lightning splitting a tree. She snapped out of her frozen **stupen**, gaping, shaking her head violently.

No—**no**, please!” she sobbed, tears spilling down her face in rivers. She trembled so hard she **could** barely form words, her body curling in on itself as she clawed against the floorboards. “Spare me!”

Carmen’s eyes narrowed, cold and unyielding.

“So even those who wield power in this world of wolves tremble before death. Even monsters can beg like dogs when their lives are threatened. Pathetic.”

Her blade flashed, glinting in the dull light of the room. She pressed it against Elira’s face, letting the steel kiss her skin. The older woman shook so violently that a wet stain spread across her clothes.

“Do not fear,” Carmen said softly, her lips twisting into a cruel smile. “I’ll reunite you with your beloved. He’s waiting for you in the abyss.”

The blade arced downward.

Elira’s eyes flew wide in terror. “No—you can’t kill me!”

The knife stopped a breath away from her eye.

The room fell into suffocating silence.

Elira dared to open her eyes again, only to find the blade poised so close that one twitch would end her. She screamed again and clamped her eyes shut, her body quaking with fear.

“You think you have the right to tell me what I can or cannot do?” Carmen’s smile curved darker. “You *are* nothing. You deserve to die, and every soul who touched Riley deserves to die. I’ll hunt you all, until the last of your line is ashes.”

Her hand pushed the knife closer.

“No! Wait!” Elira shrieked, her voice ragged with desperation. “If you kill me, you’ll never know—there’s a secret. A secret about Riley.”

Carmen froze.

The words cut through her rage like a *bl*

through bone. Her wolf stilled inside her chest.

The knife hovered, trembling. Elira cracked her eyes open, heart hammering, and saw Carmen hesitate. She latched onto that moment like prey grasping at air.

“If you care about her,” Elira said, her voice breaking, “then you need to hear it.”

“Speak.” Carmen’s voice was a growl, low and vibrating, eyes flashing like molten silver.

Elira clamped her lips shut again, defiance flickering for one heartbeat. If Carmen wanted the secret, she would have to bargain.

Carmen’s eyes narrowed. “You think silence will save you?”

With a vicious thrust, she drove the blade into Elira’s shoulder.

2/3

C

Chapter 308

The dean screamed, her **voice** echoing **like a wounded** beast, **eyes flying open** in shock.

“**Say it**, Carmen ordered, her tone like steel, her face splattered with blood and **shadow**. “Or I will make **your** death slower than his. Every heartbeat will be agony.”

Elira’s resolve cracked. “I’ll speak! I’ll say everything!” she howled, tears streaming.

Carmen wrenched the blade free, her lips curling in cold disdain. “Pathetic. Crawl and beg **if you must** But if your secret disappoints me, I’ll flay you alive and scatter your bones for the crows.

Terror consumed Elira. In that moment, she realized Carmen was no longer merely a girl of Ashmoor Academy. She was something more. Something monstrous. Something wolf.

Elira’s voice shook as she began to whisper the truth about Riley—truth Carmen had never expected. **The** revelation struck her harder than any blade could, freezing her in place, her breath catching in her chest.

For the first time that night, Carmen faltered.

The secret was not just about Riley’s suffering.

It was about Riley’s blood.

And what still lived within her.

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[1,290 words]

Chapter 309

Chapter 309

Blood pooled across the cold floorboards, seeping into every crack. Elira Blackthorn's body **convulsed** under Carmen's blade, her cries echoing like a wounded animal's last howl. But the words **that** slipped past her bloodied lips struck harder than any scream could,"

"Now... now you know the truth about Riley." Elira's voice wavered, ragged with pain. "**Spare me.**"

Carmen froze. For an instant, her chest constricted, her breath lodged in her throat. Her eyes, already bloodshot, darkened further as if the wolf within her had clawed its way to the surface.

Her snarl ripped from her throat. "You dare lie to me? Riley was locked in Wolf prison five years ago. **You** expect me to believe she bore a child while shackled like prey?"

Her hand tightened on the knife. Rage consumed her, and the scent of her fury was sharp as steel.

"You mock her name even with your dying breath?!" Carmen roared, slamming Elira back against the bloodstained wall. "Riley is my reverse scale. I will not allow filth to drag her through the mud!"

Her red-rimmed eyes glowed like coals, veins standing out against her pale skin. She looked less like a woman and more like an avenging spirit, risen from the ashes of a slaughtered pack.

Elira stammered, her voice fractured by fear. "N-no... no trick. It's true."

"Lies!" Carmen lifted the blade, its tip aimed for Elira's eye.

The dean screamed, desperation tearing her words apart. "If you kill me—you'll never find Riley's child! Only I know where the pup is!"

“Do you know why Riley never recovered her strength after her kidney was stolen? Why her wolf still weakens, even now? It is not only the loss of the organ. From the day she was dragged back into Ebonclaw. Alpha Alaric himself ordered chronic wolf-poison to be slipped into her veins. Small doses, every **day** Enough to corrode her spirit, to keep her wolf chained, to make sure she would never rise against him. He feared her Alpha blood, Carmen. He feared what she would become.”

The words struck Carmen like silver knives. Her knees buckled, and she fell to the floor, shaking.

Her mind raced—memory after memory aligning with this cruel revelation. Riley’s constant weakness. Her body’s slow collapse. The way her wolf never fully emerged, never healed as it should have. The truth had been hidden in plain sight, cloaked beneath years of torment.

Carmen’s vision blurred. She saw Riley’s face, pale and weary, yet always carrying that stubborn spark in her eyes. She saw the girl who should have been celebrated as a daughter of Ebonclaw, who should *have* been raised in moonlit honor, condemned instead to misery, betrayal, and slow destruction at the hands of her own blood.

Hot, scarlet tears streaked Carmen’s face. Blood-tears, thick and metallic, fell like rain.

“Why?” she cried out, her voice raw, echoing like a wolf’s mournful howl under a cursed moon. “What crime did she commit, to suffer like this? She bore the blood of Alphas, and you-” Carmen turned her burning gaze on Elira “—you butchered her like livestock, drained her like a vessel, condemned her child *to* a fate worse than death!”

Her body shook violently. The wolf inside her clawed at her chest, demanding blood, demanding vengeance.

Carmen’s snarl grew feral, and she drove the knife into Elira’s flesh again and again, each thrust punctuated with her rage.

“Die! Die for what you’ve done to her!”

Elira’s screams filled the room, shrill and broken, until they dissolved into a wet, ragged whimper.

But when the dean gasped out her final desperate cry, Carmen halted once more.

“You’ll... never find Riley’s pup... if you kill me...”

The words slithered into Carmen’s fury, coiling tight around her heart. Her wolf raged to finish the kill, but her human side wavered/She could not—would not—risk losing the last living piece of Riley’s blood. Elira sensed the hesitation. Despite the blood dripping from her wounds, a mad, triumphant laugh broke

Chapter 809

past her lips.

“**Hahaha**... I struck **your** weakness. You want that child.” Her **face** twisted, grotesque with **pain and** cruelty “Obey me. Take me to the hospital. Heal me—or you’ll never find where she is. The bastard **pup** will **vanish** forever.”

Her arrogance stank in the air, foul and heavy.

But Carmen only smiled. A smile colder than winter winds, sharper than silver claws.

She stood, walking into the adjoining kitchen. When she returned, her hands carried a pouch of **coarse**, white salt.

Elira’s eyes widened, her face draining of all color. She thrashed weakly against her bonds, terror flooding her scent.

“No—don’t! You wouldn’t dare-

Carmen said nothing. She tore the pouch open and, with merciless precision, poured the salt across Elira’s raw wounds.

The dean’s scream was inhuman, her body twisting and convulsing like prey in a snare.

“Talk,” Carmen said flatly, her voice colder than an Alpha’s judgment.

Elira writhed, sobbing, clawing at the floor until her nails split. “I’ll tell you—I’ll say everything—just stop -please-”

Carmen dropped the salt bag to the ground, her eyes blazing like a wolf staring down its speak. Where is Riley’s child?”

prey.

“Then

Elira gasped, desperate, shaking violently. “Not yet. If I tell you now, you’ll gut me where I sit. Let me live -let me take you to her myself. Then you’ll know I’ve spoken the truth.”

Carmen’s gaze cut through her lies, cold and unyielding. She could smell the deceit woven into Elira’s words. The dean thought she had found Carmen’s weakness.

But she forgot—wolves do not bow to prey. Wolves tear. Wolves consume.

Chapter 310

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[1,048 words]

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Chapter 310

Carmen's blade gleamed darkly beneath the dim light, its edge hovering over Dean Elira Blackthorn's chest. Blood already slicked her clothes, pooling on the floor, but still Elira's trembling lips clung to **life** through words.

"I'll give you two choices," Carmen growled, her voice low, trembling with the force of her fury. "One—**tell** me exactly where Riley's daughter is, and I will grant you a swift death. Two—you refuse, and I'll **carve** your body apart the way I carved Caden's. Even if you never speak, it won't matter. If I tell Lucien Duskgrave, the Alpha Prince of Stormridge, he'll find the child no matter how deep you bury her."

The dean's gaze wavered, trapped between terror and the primal instinct to cling to life. She trembled, **lips** moving soundlessly before she rasped out, "If I tell you... you'll really spare me?"

Carmen's laugh was low and hollow. "I've slaughtered enough that the authorities would hang me a hundred times over. Do you really think I fear mortal chains? But yes—do as **I** say, and you'll find mercy."

Hope flickered in Elira's eyes. Faced with survival, she gave up the secret. Her words spilled, broken but clear: Riley's daughter had been born of her stolen blood. Eggs ripped from her while she lay unconscious, fertilized and forced into a surrogate. A child, two years old now, abandoned in a village far from Ebonclaw territory, hidden but not protected.

The truth settled in Carmen's chest like poison. Riley's agony was already unbearable, yet it had been deeper still—her body stolen not just for her organs but for her bloodline, her legacy twisted into a living harvest.

"I told you," Elira whispered hoarsely. "Now... let me go. You promised."

Carmen's lips curled into a smile so cold it could have frozen the marrow of any wolf. "You did one thing right, at last. And for that..." She pressed the blade down, plunging it through the dean's heart in one clean thrust. "I'll grant you swiftness."

Elira's eyes widened, betrayal flooding them. "You... lied..."

Carmen tilted her head innocently. "I promised mercy. I never said mercy meant sparing your life."

The second strike shattered the dean's heart into ruin. Her scream cut off mid-breath, collapsing into silence.

When the room stilled, only the stench of blood and the weight of secrets lingered. Carmen rose, her boots splashing through the crimson puddle. She left their bodies for carrion, her wolf pacing beneath her skin, howling in anguish.

By dawn, others would find Dean Elira Blackthorn and Caden's corpses. By then, Carmen would already be gone.

The roads blurred beneath her as she drove, rage and grief pulling her forward like a storm wind. Elira's final revelation replayed in her skull, each word another cut: Riley's stolen bloodline. Riley's lost child. Riley's silent suffering.

And then the cruelest truth of all—Elira's whispered confession about Alpha Alaric. From the very day Riley had been dragged back into Ebonclaw, her own father had ordered chronic wolf-poison to be administered. Doses **so** small they would not kill, but relentless enough to weaken her spirit, chain her

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wolf, corrode her strength day **by** day.

That was why her wolf had never healed even after her kidney had been restored. That **was why the** remained frail, her Alpha wolf stifled beneath invisible chains. Her father, the one who **should have** shielded her, had been the one slowly murdering her soul.

The truth broke something inside Carmen. Hot tears welled in her eyes—red, thick, streaking down her cheeks like blood itself. "Riley... gods, what else have they stolen from you?"

Her wolf howled in grief, the sound echoing inside her ribs like a dirge.

By the time Carmen reached the remote village, the horizon had dipped into twilight. She followed the directions Elira had gasped out, her heart pounding with each turn of the road. When she finally stopped before a crumbling house without so much as a boundary wall, she caught the sharp scent of cruelty **in the**

air.

A scream pierced the dusk.

“Filthy brat! You dare steal from your brother? You’re nothing but swine—eat pig slop and be grateful!” Carmen’s head whipped toward the voice. A small figure, no more than two or three years old, was hurled from the doorway like discarded trash. The child hit the dirt hard, curling up and wailing.

“Momma, I didn’t steal! He dropped it, and I was so hungry-”

But her cries were cut off as a heavyset woman stormed after her, a chicken–feather whip raised high.

“You dare talk back, mongrel? Born without honor, without blood! I should never have taken you in. You shame my house, you shame my son!”

The whip cracked down. The girl screamed, her tiny body curling tighter, her voice breaking. “Momma, please! I won’t do it again! I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

The blows fell harder, again and again, her skin splitting, blood soaking through her thin, ragged dress.

Carmen’s heart clenched. The child’s face—those eyes, that fragile jawline—*it* was Riley reborn, smaller, softer, but unmistakable.

Her wolf surged forward, eyes blazing crimson.

In two strides she was there, her hand snapping up to catch the descending whip. The woman turned, startled, glaring at the intruder.

“Who the hell are you? Stay out of this, girl. She’s mine *to* discipline.”

Carmen smiled, though there was no warmth in it, only cold death. “Tell me, is this child’s name really what you call her? ‘Bitch–spawn’?”

The woman’s eyes narrowed, suspicion flickering. “How do you know that? Who told you?”

Carmen’s smile widened, sharper, hungrier. “So it’s true. I’ve found her.”

The woman opened her mouth to retort, but the words never came. A flash of steel, the bite of Carmen's knife, and her belly split with hot pain.

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Chapter **310**

Her eyes bulged in horror, staring down at the blade buried deep in her **gut**. **Carmen's** wrist twisted. **grinding the** steel cruelly inside her.

Touch Riley's blood again," Carmen whispered, her voice low, guttural, dripping with the **snarl** of her. wolf, "and your precious son will grow up without a mother."

The woman's scream split the night.

And in the dirt behind her, Riley's daughter sobbed, the wolf-blood of Ebonclaw shining through her

tears.

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[918 words]

Chapter 311

Chapter 311

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The woman's face twisted into something grotesque as pain ripped through her belly. "You... you dare kill me?" she croaked, her voice broken, trembling with raw

terror.

Carmen's wide, dark eyes blinked innocently, almost doe-like. She looked, for one fleeting second, like a harmless girl playing at rebellion—fragile, harmless, a rabbit trembling in a den of wolves.

“Yes,” she answered softly, almost sweetly. “Why not? I’ve already killed six. One more makes no difference. And you... you made the mistake of hurting the child of the one I love most.”

Her voice floated like smoke, deceptively light. But to the woman writhing on the floor, it was the whisper of a demon bending close to her ear.

Blood seeped between her fingers as she clutched at the wound, her back bent with the weight of agony. “Please,” she rasped, desperation cracking her tone. “Spare me. My son—he’s only a year old. He’s too young to live without his mother.”

But Carmen's knife never paused. Her wrist twisted cruelly, the blade churning deeper, stirring through organs with sickening precision. The woman's scream tore the night like a beast in a trap.

Carmen's eyes hardened to steel. “Your son is small? And my Riley's child is any larger? You ask me for mercy when you showed none? No. The only balance is blood for blood.”

The woman thrashed, sobbing, her pleas tumbling into madness. “Don't kill me! I was wrong, I'll repent! I'll never hurt her again—I'll raise her as my own, I swear it!”

—

The words “raise her as my own”—might have meant salvation to someone else. But one slip of the tongue destroyed her last chance.

“You dare call her that again?” Carmen snarled, eyes blazing crimson.

The words “Bitch—spawn” hung in the air like poison. They touched Carmen's wolf the way fire touches dry tinder. In a flash of fury, she ripped the blade free and slashed upward, cutting deep across the woman's throat.

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Blood fountained hot and violent. The woman collapsed like a toppled wall, body seizing as her breath rattled into a wet gurgle. Her eyes bulged, wild with the primal hunger to

live. But no wolf, no spirit, no mother's instinct could save her from drowning in her own lifeblood.

She died there, wide-eyed and shuddering, the last of her breath spilling crimson into the dirt.

Carmen's dagger dripped a scarlet thread that glimmered in the dying light. She wiped it lazily on the corpse's dress before lifting her gaze to the tiny child cowering in the dust.

The change in her was instant—where moments before she had been a blood-drenched Alpha's executioner, now her wolf softened, the predatory air falling away like a discarded pelt. Her eyes warmed, and when she spoke, her voice was gentler than spring wind.

"Little one," Carmen whispered, crouching low. "Don't be afraid. No one will ever hurt you again."

The girl's tear-stained face was pinched and hollow, her body trembling violently from shock. Wide, frightened eyes fixed on Carmen. "A-auntie... who are you?"

Carmen's hand, slick with another's blood, cupped the child's fragile cheek. The gauntness of her face—those eyes, so hauntingly large—stabbed Carmen with memory. She saw Riley's face after the dungeons, after Ebonclaw's cruelty had stripped her to bone and pain.

Tears welled unbidden in Carmen's eyes, streaking hot down her cheeks. "I'm your mother's sister," she whispered hoarsely. "Your little aunt. You must call me Carmen."

The girl blinked, confusion flooding her gaze. She pointed at the corpse sprawled in the dirt. "She... she's not my mother?"

Carmen shook her head, fury rippling beneath her grief. "No. She was a trafficker. A thief. She stole you from your blood."

The girl's expression transformed in an instant, terror melting into hope. A trembling smile lit her bruised face. "Auntie... can you take me to my real mommy? I don't want to stay here. Everyone here hates me. They never feed me. I'm always hungry."

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The plea shattered Carmen. Her tears broke loose like floodwater. She pulled the frail body into her arms, clutching her tight, as if her embrace alone could shield the child from every cruelty past and future.

“You’ll never be hungry again,” Carmen swore, her voice raw with vow. “I’ll take you to her. I’ll take you home.”

Carmen’s sobs burned her throat, her tears falling hot into the child’s tangled hair. “Gods, Riley... how much more will they take from you?”

Her wolf keened inside her chest, the cry of mourning carrying sharp as steel.

She rose, child in her arms, determined to carve a path of blood if that was what it took to carry her niece away from this hell.

But as she stepped toward the doorway, a man’s shadow filled it. His eyes fell on the corpse, then on Carmen, then on the girl she held. His roar was guttural. “You! Did you kill my wife?”

His gaze fixed on the girl, twisted with hate. “Where are you taking that filthy wretch? That’s mine. She belongs here!”

He bellowed toward the village, voice echoing like a drum. “Murderer! She killed my wife! Someone help!”

The child shuddered in Carmen’s arms, her little body seizing with terror. Carmen’s wolf surged forward, lips curling back over invisible fangs.

If they tried to take Riley’s daughter now, this village would drown in blood.

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[1,087 words]

Chapter 312

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The child whimpered in a voice so small it was nearly lost in the heavy air.

“Daddy...”

Carmen’s eyes sharpened with murderous light. So this man had beaten Riley’s daughter often enough to earn her fear. That settled it—his death would be slow.

She stepped toward him, blade ready, but before she could strike, a crowd of villagers surged from the shadows and blocked the doorway.

“Outsider!” one growled, teeth glinting in the torchlight. “You dare spill blood in our village? You won’t leave alive!”

“Hold her! Call the Enforcers!” another snarled.

The man’s spine straightened with new-found courage, emboldened by the pack’s support. He stomped forward, hand outstretched to rip the child from Carmen’s arms.

But Carmen was already moving. One hand cradled the trembling girl to her chest. The other drew the dagger up, poised to tear his throat open.

Then—sharp, piercing howls split the night. The sound of Council Enforcers closing in. Iron authority threaded through their song, the kind of power that made even seasoned Alphas pause.

Carmen’s wolf stiffened. Her stomach sank. Escape was no longer an option.

The pounding of heavy paws and boots followed, and within moments, the Enforcers swept into the village square. Their presence was overwhelming—black-clad warriors, their eyes gleaming with silver fire, blades strapped across their backs. Their voices boomed like thunder.

“Stand down! Lay down your weapon!”

The villagers shrank back in awe, some muttering prayers to the Moon. Guns had no place here—these were wolves who wielded claw and steel, enforcers trained to break rogues and execute traitors.

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Carmen's grip tightened on the man she had seized. Her dagger pressed against his throat, just enough to draw a line of blood.

"You move, he dies," she warned, her voice low, steady, wolf-like.

The man quivered, his bravado shattering. "I—I won't move! Please don't kill me!"

The Enforcers advanced, their formation unbreakable. "Release him. Submit. You cannot fight us all."

Carmen knew they were right. From the moment she killed her first tormentor, she had accepted this fate. Tonight, the circle closed. If death came, so be it. Every enemy of Riley lay in the dirt, their blood spilled. She could leave this world without regret.

Except for one.

Her gaze dropped to the little girl pressed against her leg. Riley's daughter clung to her, trembling, sobbing into the folds of her tunic.

The wolf in Carmen's chest keened.

She bent low, her voice softening. "Little one, don't be afraid. No one will ever hurt you again."

The girl's face was wet with tears, her eyes red from crying. Her tiny hands clutched desperately at Carmen's thigh.

"Auntie, are they bad wolves?" she asked, pointing at the advancing Enforcers.

The words pierced Carmen's heart. She swallowed hard, forcing strength into her tone. "No, child. They are not bad. They are the Moon's hounds. They will not hurt you."

But the girl only shook her head violently, pressing herself deeper against Carmen's leg. "No! They're scary. I want Auntie. Auntie said she would take me to Mommy. I don't want them—I only want you."

Carmen's throat closed with grief. She had expected screams, rejection, even terror. Not this unshakable trust. To be clung to so tightly, after a lifetime of blood and exile—it was almost unbearable.

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Tears blurred her vision. She stroked the girl's hair with her free hand, her smile trembling. "Listen to me, pup. Go to them. They will keep you safe. I cannot."

But the child wailed louder, small body racked with sobs. "No! I don't care! You said you'd take me to Mommy! Don't leave me! Please don't leave me!"

The words shattered Carmen's iron will. A howl rose in her chest, broken and grieving. She wanted nothing more than to run, to take this girl far away, to raise her as her own. But she had no illusions. Her blood-stained hands had run their

course.

"Pup," she whispered, kissing the child's damp hair. "I will protect you until my last breath. But I cannot walk where you must. You must go on."

The girl's cries filled the night, sharp as claws against Carmen's soul...

And then—"Carmen!"

The name thundered across the square. Carmen's head jerked up, stunned. Her gaze locked with Duke, who stood among the Enforcers. His eyes blazed, not with condemnation, but with anguish.

"Carmen," he called again, his voice breaking. "Stop this. No more blood. Come with us. Surrender."

Her lips twisted into a bitter smile. "Duke... I don't fear death. My only regret is this child."

She cupped Riley's daughter's cheek tenderly. "This is Riley's pup. Her daughter. When they carved out her kidney, they forced her body to bear eggs. They planned to raise a child only to harvest her organs when needed."

Her voice cracked. "Riley never even knew. She died without knowing her pup lived."

Gasps rippled through the Enforcers. Duke's eyes went wide, the weight of her words striking him like a blow.

Carmen's tears poured freely now. "Do you understand? Riley was poisoned from the day Alpha Alaric dragged her back to Ebonclaw. Chronic wolfbane-fed to her like

medicine. That's why her wolf never healed, even when her kidney was restored. That's why she was always weak. Her own blood cursed her."

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The crowd murmured, horror spreading like wildfire. Even the Enforcers shifted uneasily.

Carmen sobbed openly, clutching the girl one last time. "She is all Riley left. behind. Please, Duke. Protect her. Don't let her fall into their hands again."

The girl lifted her tear-streaked face. "Auntie, don't go. Don't leave me. I'm scared."

Carmen pressed her forehead against the child's, her wolf crying its last. "I love you, little one. You are your mother's light. Walk in it."

Then, with the strength of an Alpha, she pried the girl's arms away, pushing her gently toward the Enforcers. The child screamed, fighting to cling to her, but an Enforcer lifted her carefully, shielding her from the scene.

Carmen straightened, knife still pressed against her hostage's throat, her body coiled like a wolf ready for its final stand.

Her eyes locked on Duke's. "Take care of her. Swear it."

"I swear it on the Moon," Duke rasped, his own eyes wet.

Carmen smiled, broken but fierce. Her wolf howled inside her, a requiem to the stars.

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in Vengeance 313

[677 words]

Carmen exhaled a trembling breath. Her gaze lifted to Duke, her eyes dark with unshed tears. “Duke. For the bond we once shared... protect her. Please.”

Duke’s heart roared inside his chest, a storm of grief and rage. “I will. You have my word. But come with me now. Submit, Carmen, before it’s too late.”

Carmen’s laugh was brittle, tinged with bitterness. “Submit? I’ve spilled too much blood. There’s no path back for me.”

Her hair whipped across her face in the night wind, eyes flashing with the resolve of a wolf that had already chosen death. She raised her blade high, silver catching the moonlight like a shard of winter ice.

The Enforcers shifted their weight, ready to strike. Their orders were clear: if Carmen made one fatal move, they would tear her down.

Time thickened. The crowd held its breath.

Then Carmen moved, dagger poised to end the man’s life.

But before steel could meet flesh, a blur of black fur exploded across the square. Duke had shifted mid-stride, his wolf massive, his coat dark as obsidian. He crashed into Carmen with devastating force, his weight pinning her to the ground, claws sinking into the dirt on either side of her.

Carmen's dagger clattered from her hand. Her eyes widened as Duke's muzzle pressed close, his snarl not of threat—but of desperation.

“Stop!” he thundered through the bond. His voice burned in her skull, raw and guttural. “Do you want them to kill you?!”

She froze, chest heaving beneath his weight. For the first time, Carmen's fire faltered. Her gaze darted past him to the ring of Enforcers, their weapons raised, their killing intent thick in the air. If she struggled again, they would not hesitate.

Her lips parted, voice breaking. “Duke... let me go. Don't chain yourself to my fate.”

“Never,” his wolf growled, his golden eyes burning into hers. “If you keep fighting, they'll strike you down. I won't let you throw your life away here.”

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The Enforcers surged forward, seizing the moment. Shackles of silver laced with wolfsbane were clasped around Carmen's wrists, forcing her wolf to recoil in agony. She gritted her teeth, refusing to make a sound, though the fire in her eyes dimmed as the toxin bit into her veins.

The villagers whispered in awe and fear. Some spat curses, others wept, but all knew the Council's judgment was final. Carmen, once a Ashmoor Elite, was now a captive.

Duke shifted back to human, sweat dripping down his temples, his chest heaving with exertion. He knelt beside her as the Enforcers hauled her to her feet, silver chains glowing cruelly in the moonlight.

Her eyes met his one last time. "Don't waste yourself on me, Duke. My path is already written. Death is all that waits."

He shook his head violently, voice cracking with fury and promise. "No. I'll fight for you. I'll stand before the Council myself. I'll tell them why you did this, why you struck down those who wronged Riley and her pup. I'll seek clemency for you."

Her lips curved in a bitter smile, though her eyes shimmered with something softer. "You were always the fool willing to carry my sins."

As the Enforcers dragged her toward

waiting transport, Duke's voice rang

across the square, carrying the weight of an oath that could not be broken.

"I swear, Carmen. I will not abandon you. I'll make them listen. I'll see you freed."

Carmen's heart twisted. For the first time that night, she allowed herself to close her eyes.

And though her body was bound in silver and wolfsbane, though her fate lay in the Council's unforgiving hands, a spark of warmth lit in her chest at his vow.

The crowd parted as the Enforcers led her away, their chants and murmurs fading into the wind.

Above them, the moon bore silent witness, its silver gaze steady and unblinking, as though the Moon Goddess herself waited to see if Duke's promise could rewrite destiny.

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[872 words]

The reports spread like wildfire through Mooncrest and the bordering packs.

[In recent weeks, the Enforcers of the High Council completed an arduous investigation and pursuit, successfully bringing closure to a string of bloody retaliations... Carmen of Ashmoor Academy, accused of multiple killings, was seized alive after resisting arrest. In custody, the Council determined through evidence provided by Duke that all slain bore blood-debts of cruelty-wolves who had brutalized Riley of the Ebonclaw Pack and her daughter. While her methods were deemed merciless, her acts were not wholly without cause. The Council, weighing both justice and mercy, sentenced her to five years of confinement rather than execution.]

Public reaction was divided-some called her a monster, others whispered she had only done what every wolf silently wished they could do.

Duke walked down the cold corridor of the Council's fortress-prison, chains echoing faintly from deeper cells. His boots struck stone with steady rhythm, but his heart pounded unevenly, knowing she would be behind that door.

Carmen sat cross-legged on the bunk, her once-wild hair now tied back, her wrists scarred faintly from silver manacles. She looked up when the lock clicked.

For a moment, she smirked. "I thought the Council would forget about me the second the bars shut."

Duke stepped closer, jaw tight. "I told you I wouldn't, You should know me by now."

Her eyes softened, only slightly. "Five years in here... it might as well be a lifetime."

"I'll wait." His voice was iron, steady as the mountains of Stormridge. "When you walk free, I'll be there. You won't *be* alone again."

Carmen's throat tightened. Wolves like her were not supposed to cry—but the tremor in her hands betrayed her. "You stubborn fool. Don't waste your life chained to mine."

"I chose this chain," Duke replied, his wolf voice rumbling beneath his words. "And I will carry it until you are free."

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For a long moment, silence lay between them, thick with things unspoken. Finally, Carmen's lips curved in something between a smile and a grimace.

"Then promise me one thing."

"Anything."

"Riley's daughter... protect her. She's the last piece of Riley left in this world. Don't let her grow up alone. Don't let her forget who her mother was."

Duke's chest burned as though his wolf claws scraped against it. He nodded. "On my life, I'll guard her."

Carmen leaned back against the wall, her gaze shifting to the barred window where moonlight spilled in. "Then I can endure this cage. Five years, ten... if she's safe, it's worth it."

Far away, in the Stormridge stronghold, grief still hung like a storm cloud.

The Duskgrave estate had fallen into silence. Lucien Duskgrave, Alpha Prince of Stormridge Pack from Northhaven, was a shadow of himself. Once proud, unyielding, untouchable—now he sat slumped in the embroidery chamber that still smelled faintly of roses and thread.

The once—vibrant chamber was now a tomb. In his hand lay the delicate piece of silk Riley had embroidered before her death, her touch still lingering in every threaded line. Lucien’s fingers traced the pattern over and over, as if by doing so he could summon her warmth back into his arms.

He had not hunted in weeks. He had not shifted. His wolf paced endlessly in the dark of his soul, restless and grieving. His eyes—once sharp as a blade—were now hollow, as though carved out by sorrow.

The door creaked open. Mrs Beck stood hesitantly, tray in hand. “My lord... you must eat something.”

Lucien didn’t move. His gaze never left the silk.

Behind her, Matriarch Duskgrave approached, her once—straight spine bent with exhaustion. Her voice cracked as she addressed her grandson. “Lucien... I know your pain. I feel it too. Riley was family to us all. But if you continue like this, even your wolf will abandon you. And Stormridge cannot survive without its Alpha

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Lucien finally blinked, his voice hoarse, unused. “Without her, what is there to survive for?”

The old matriarch’s eyes glistened. She steadied herself against the doorframe. “The pack. The bloodline. The child you might still leave behind. Lucien, you are the heir of Stormridge. If not for yourself, then for the pack, you must rise again.”

Silence filled the chamber, heavy as snow.

After a long, torturous moment, Lucien's lips moved. "The Stormridge vault holds my seed. Use it. Let the healers and their sciences find me an heir. I care not who bears it. It doesn't matter."

The matriarch closed her eyes, pain carving deeper lines into her aged face. She had prayed he would never reach this point—where even love could not anchor him, and only duty remained.

"Very well," she whispered, tears brimming. "If this is the path, then the pack will obey. But Lucien... know this. Riley would never have wanted you hollow."

Lucien said nothing. He stared down at the embroidery, his soul echoing with the memory of Riley's laughter.

Somewhere deep in his chest, his wolf howled, long and mournful, a cry for a mate lost and a future that felt like ashes./

And still, beyond grief, the Alpha Prince of Stormridge was being dragged

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[828 words]

Chapter 315

Lucien's POV

I had thought my soul had already rotted, buried alongside Riley beneath the earth. For days—weeks, perhaps I had become little more than a hollow shell. My wolf prowled in the darkness of my chest, restless, but even he could not rouse me from the fog of grief.

The embroidery she had once touched lay in my hands, soft silk threads beneath my calloused fingers. I clung to it like a dying man to air, because it was all I had left of her. Nothing else mattered. Not Stormridge, not the throne, not even my own survival.

When the door opened, I barely lifted my gaze. It was Caelum. His footsteps were urgent, his scent sharp with adrenaline and dread. He clutched a thick file in his hands, his expression grim.

"Alpha Lucien," he said, voice low, but edged with something fierce. "I've uncovered something... something you must hear."

I gave him nothing but a hollow look, my voice a rasp. "Say it, then."

He hesitated for a moment, then drew in a deep breath. "The vault at Stormridge Hospital—the one where

years ago."

your

seed was

stored—was tampered with. Over two

I only blinked. My lips moved in a flat, disinterested murmur. "Oh."

It was like he had told me the weather, something entirely divorced from the ashes of my world. For what did it matter? Riley was gone. My wolf still howled each night for his mate, and no answer came.

Caelum's jaw clenched, his eyes narrowing with frustration at my indifference. But then he pressed on, his words striking like claws to the chest.

"Alpha Lucien... you and Riley have a daughter."

The world stopped.

The embroidery slipped from my hands and fell to the floor, forgotten. My breath

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caught, ragged and uneven. For the first time since Riley's death, fire surged through my veins.

My gaze locked on him, sharp as a blade unsheathed. "What did you say?" My voice cracked, gravel and thunder.

He nodded fiercely, like a wolf confirming a kill. "Yes. A child. Your child with Riley. Conceived after she was forced... after Dean Elira Blackthorn and Caden Wilson manipulated her and stole her eggs. They took your seed from the vault. It wasn't meant to succeed, but by chance, by fate—it did. She carried your blood, Lucien. And she lives."

My body trembled violently. The wolf inside me surged, ramming against the confines of my ribs, snarling, demanding I act.

“You’re certain,” I growled.

“I have no doubts.” Caelum’s eyes glimmered. “I traced it all. When Carmen struck, she found the child, and before her arrested she entrusted her to Duke. Your loyal Duke. The girl is with him now—or at least she was. I’ve been unable to reach him. His line has been silent. That’s why I came. You need to know.”

For the first time in endless days, I felt my spine straighten, my shoulders braced. Life returned to my limbs like blood to a limb long numb.

A daughter. Riley’s daughter. My daughter.

It was as though the moon itself pierced the darkness of my chest, lighting the path forward.

I staggered to my feet too quickly, and the room spun around me. I had not eaten properly in days, perhaps longer. My body was weak, but my wolf snarled at me, driving me upright with sheer will.

I nearly collapsed back into the chair, my breaths ragged, but my hands gripped the armrest like claws into earth. “Where is she?” My voice trembled, raw with need. “Where is my pup?”

Caelum’s throat bobbed. “With Duke. Or so it should be. If he’s hidden her, it is only to protect her until you are strong enough to claim her.”

The thought of Duke hiding my daughter churned a possessive fury in my gut. But

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beneath it was gratitude. Duke was loyal. If he carried out Carmen’s wish, then my child had been guarded, even while I lay rotting in grief.

I forced myself upright again, swaying but unyielding. My wolf braced me from within, his growl echoing through my bones.

“I’m coming,” I said hoarsely. “Now. Take me to her.”

Caelum reached out as if to steady me, his face tight with concern. “Lucien—you can barely stand—”

“I don’t care.” My voice cut sharp as a blade. “She’s mine. Riley’s blood and mine. I won’t waste another breath here while my daughter waits.”

The silk embroidery lay abandoned at my feet, but the ghost of Riley’s scent clung to me still. For the first time since her death, my heart did not only ache with grief —it burned with a savage, primal hope.

My wolf roared inside me, not with mourning, but with purpose.

I had a daughter. And I would tear down the world itself to bring her home.

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hapter 316

Lucien’s POV

The moment the words left my mouth—Let’s go now—I froze. No. Not like this.

I turned toward Caelum, my Beta, my brother—in—arms, and asked the question already gnawing at my wolf. “Look at me. Do I seem fit to greet a pup? Do I look like an Alpha or a half-starved shadow?”

Caelum hesitated, lips pressed tight. His silence was answer enough.

If I appeared before Riley’s daughter in this hollow, wasted shell, I would only frighten her. A child deserved strength. She deserved safety, not the ruin of a wolf who could barely stand upright.

“I must wash the stench of grief from me first,” I said, voice ragged. “I’ll not face my pup looking like a broken wretch. She will see her father as he is meant to be. As Alpha. As Stormridge’s heir.”

My body was still weak, but my pulse hammered, the wolf in me pacing, restless.

I forced myself to rise. Caelum reached out as though to steady me, but I shrugged him off and staggered into the washroom.

Half an hour later, I emerged. My frame was leaner, my face carved by sleepless nights, but I had bound my hair, straightened my posture, donned the black leathers of Stormridge royalty. I was no longer the husk I had been; I carried myself with the poise of my bloodline, even if beneath the surface shadows lingered.

The car roared down the dark road, Caelum at the wheel. I sat in the passenger seat, every muscle taut, claws half–pressing through my skin with restraint. My fingers gripped the handle until the leather creaked. The night air beyond the window was thick with ping and the scent of rain, but I smelled nothing except the imagined trace of Riley—her laughter, her warmth. And now, a pup.

Caelum’s voice was quiet but steady. “She’ll be safe, Lucien. Duke is loyal. He would give his life before letting harm touch her.”

I said nothing. My throat was too tight. My wolf growled low, not in denial, but in

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yearning.

In my mind, I tried to imagine her face. Would she have Riley’s eyes? My jaw? Would she know me when she saw me? The thought of her voice—small, calling me Papa—was enough to drive nails of longing through my ribs.

If only Riley were here. If only she could stand at my side when we brought our daughter home. A family. Whole, at last.

When we reached Duke's dwelling, the car screeched to a halt. I was out the door before the engine quieted, heart pounding like a war drum. Together, Caelum and I knocked.

Silence.

Caelum frowned and knocked again, louder. "Duke! It's Caelum. Open the door."

No answer.

My gut twisted. Duke had not reported for weeks, not since Carmen's sentencing. He had vanished from Stormridge's halls, and I had told myself he needed space. Now my instincts screamed otherwise.

I slammed my fist against the wood, my voice breaking into a growl. "Duke! It's Lucien. Open this door!"

Still nothing. My body swayed, exhaustion gnawing at my knees, and I stumbled against the wall. Caelum caught my shoulder. "Lucien, breathe. Don't-"

"I'm fine," I rasped, though my lungs burned. My wolf clawed within, demanding to be unleashed, to tear the door from its frame,

Caelum's voice softened. "Perhaps we should come back. He could be—"

And then-

A creak.

The door opened just enough to reveal a sliver of light inside. And then, a head- small, round, crowned with hair the color of late-autumn wheat, though dull and thin from want of care.

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Two wide eyes blinked up at us, luminous and wet like fresh-fallen dew.

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"Sir?" the little girl asked softly, voice high and sweet. "Who are you looking for?"

My breath stopped.

The world fell away, leaving only her.

She was Riley reborn. Her nose, her brows, the curve of her cheeks—each feature mirrored the mate I had lost, softened in youth, yet seared into me like a blade. My chest convulsed, and before I could stop myself, tears blurred my vision.

I dropped to my knees, trembling, my hand half-outstretched. “I am...” My voice broke, but I forced it out, low and raw. “I am your father.”

She froze, confusion flickering across her delicate face. Her small hands clutched the doorframe.

I leaned closer, leveling my gaze with hers, desperate not to frighten her. “Pup,” I whispered, softer than I ever thought my voice could be. “It’s me. Your father. I’ve come to take you home.”

She tilted her head, lashes fluttering, her scent washing over me—faint but achingly familiar, Riley’s blood woven with mine. “Papa?”

The word shattered me.

“Yes.” My lips trembled into a smile as wet as it was fierce. “Yes, I’m your papa.”

Her eyes widened, and for the first time she smiled—a fragile, beautiful thing. “Papa, are you really here to bring me home?”

I nodded, voice breaking with a joy so sharp it hurt. “I am. You’ll never be alone again.”

Her next words cut like knives. “And... and when we get home... will I see Mama too?”

The world reeled. My wolf howled, grief tearing through me anew. Riley’s face flashed in my mind—her smile, her touch, the bond between us severed by fate.

My chest split with the pain, but I held myself steady for the pup’s sake. I forced a

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smile, though my heart bled.

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I drew a shaking breath, my hand trembling toward her small frame. “We’ll talk about Mama, little one. For now... all that matters is that I’m here. And I’ll never let you go.”

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[1,048 words]

Chapter 317

Lucien's POV

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My throat felt as though a blade had lodged itself there, sharp and merciless. I couldn't force sound out at first, only the ragged pull of my breath. Grief surged like a flood through my chest, drowning reason, drowning restraint.

And then I looked down—into the eyes of my daughter. Eyes wide, bright, filled with expectation so pure it carved me open.

Steel spikes drove into my heart. My wolf clawed inside me, howling against the cruelty of truth. How could I speak it? How could I tell this pup—so small, so fragile—that her mother, Riley, the very soul of my being, no longer walked this earth?

But I was Alpha-born. Lies curdle in the blood. To deceive her would be a wound she'd carry forever.

So I forced the words out, though they shredded me. "Little one... your mama has gone very far away. But she watches you always from above, and her greatest wish is for you to grow strong and happy."

She tilted her head, trying to comprehend, her young heart catching only the edges of the truth. A flicker of sorrow touched her eyes, but then she smiled with brave sweetness. "Then, Papa, can we go home now?"

The innocence of it broke me further. I pulled her against me, her tiny frame too light, too thin, pressing her against my chest where my heartbeat thundered like a storm. She smelled faintly of Riley—wildflowers and pine, though dulled by hunger and neglect.

Wolf instincts burned. I would never let her go again.

Her little hand reached up, brushing my hair, her voice so soft it nearly undid me. "Papa, don't cry. If you cry, I'll be sad too."

The wisdom in her tone—far too old for her years—seared me. My arms tightened. "I won't cry, pup. I promise. I'll take you home now."

I moved to lift her, but she squirmed. "Papa, I didn't say goodbye to Uncle Duke

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yet."

I paused, then carried her into Duke's house.

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The scent hit first—ale, bitter and sharp. But the place was not chaos. The hearth swept, floors clean. My wolf bristled with pride and pain at once. She had done this. My two-year-old pup, left alone among grief and drink, had kept the den in order. She had carried burdens no child should bear.

I found Duke slumped on the floor, hollow-eyed, as though his soul had been torn free the night Carmen was sentenced. My chest ached with old loyalty. I knelt, speaking low. "Duke. We all bear scars, but time drives us forward whether we wish it or not. I give you three days. In three days, you will come back to Stormridge Hall and resume your post. Busy hands forget pain."

He lifted his head. His gaze was an empty well, lifeless. His lips parted, then shut again. Silence swallowed him.

I shifted my daughter in my arms, but she pushed free, toddling to Duke. She reached up with her tiny hand and pressed it against his face. "Uncle Duke, you must get better, okay? My papa came to take me home."

Duke's vacant eyes blinked, confusion flooding in as he glanced from her to me. "Papa?" he croaked, like the word itself didn't belong in his mouth.

I stepped closer, resting a hand on his shoulder, steady but unyielding. “It’s a long story. She’s Riley’s and mine. Our blood. One day, I’ll tell you everything.”

He sagged further, but I could feel his pulse quicken—beneath my touch. He understood enough.

I gathered my pup into my arms again and carried her out. The night air felt sharper, cleaner, as though the world itself acknowledged the truth at last.

The ride back to Stormridge Manor was swift, the car slicing through the darkness. My daughter nestled in my lap, wide-eyed, marveling at the leather seats, the flick of lights, every new sound. Her wonder filled the silence, and for the first time in years, the heaviness inside me lightened.

Home.

The gates of the Duskgrave estate opened, iron bars groaning as though they, too,

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recognized her blood. The moment we crossed the threshold, Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck hurried forward.

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I set my daughter down, steadying her on the gravel. “She is mine. Riley’s and mine,” I told them, my voice low but resonant with the bond of truth.

For a moment, they froze. Their eyes widened, disbelief painted across their faces. My grandmother’s hand flew to her lips, her body trembling, and Mrs. Beck swayed, as though her legs had forgotten how to hold her.

Caelum filled the silence, recounting every step. of the story, each scar Riley had carried, every shadow that had touched this pup. Their faces fell deeper and deeper into grief.

The Matriarch bent, her aged knees shaking, until she was level with the child. Her eyes brimmed, tears falling freely as she reached trembling arms forward. "Little one... come to Great-Grandmother."

My pup hesitated, gaze flicking to me for reassurance. I nodded, my wolf urging her forward.

She padded into my grandmother's arms. The Matriarch gathered her as if she were spun glass, clutching her to her chest with a ferocity only blood can summon. Her voice shook with anguish. "Sin upon sin. What suffering Riley endured, and now our little one *too*... how much cruelty must the Fates demand?"

Tears carved paths down her wrinkled cheeks.

But my daughter, my fierce pup, reached up again, wiping those tears with her tiny fingers. "Don't cry, Great-Grandmother. I'll be good. I can wash clothes, cook, clean. You won't have to worry."

Her words cut through me. Too much burden. Too much understanding for one so young.

The Matriarch broke, sobbing into the child's hair. "You're already the bravest, most precious treasure we could ever ask for."

And I stood there, fists clenched at my sides, wolf howling within, swearing silently that never again would she have to carry weight alone. She was mine. She was Riley's. And she would know what it meant to be loved by the Stormridge Alpha line.

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Third Person's POV

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The Matriarch Duskgrave's tears had barely dried when she steadied herself, inhaling the thick scent of bloodline that clung to the child in her arms. Her voice, though softened with tenderness, still carried the Alpha steel that had once commanded Stormridge warriors.

"Little one, what is your name?" she asked gently, brushing a strand of tangled hair from the girl's cheek.

The child's face lit up in a bright smile. Her voice rang out, sweet yet cutting as a blade:

"My name is Bitch."

The air in the hall dropped ten degrees. Every wolf present stiffened. Even the flames in the hearth seemed to falter.

The Matriarch's gaze darkened, fury flashing in her eyes. Her jaw clenched hard enough that her wolf stirred beneath her wrinkled skin. She longed to hunt down whoever had dared brand Riley's blood with such poison. Her fingers curled into trembling fists—but when she looked down at the girl's innocent face, her rage shattered against her grandmother's heart. She forced her voice into softness.

"No, pup. That is not your name. That is not what you are. Great-Grandmother will give you a new one, a name worthy of who you are. Would you like that?"

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The little girl clapped her small hands together, her joy bubbling despite the weight in the room. "Yes! Yes!"

The Matriarch turned her head toward Lucien Duskgrave, the Stormridge Alpha Prince, seeking his word. His golden eyes softened, though grief still shadowed his face. He saw Riley's smile in the child's lips, her fire in the stubborn lift of her chin. The wolf in him rumbled with longing, and with grief.

After a moment's silence, he spoke, his voice rich with memory. "Aurora. She will be Aurora Duskgrave."

The name was chosen from the marrow of his soul. It was his mourning for Riley,

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his vow that their daughter would carry the light of dawn even after the longest night.

The Matriarch's lips trembled as she repeated it, testing the weight of destiny. "Aurora... Rory, my precious one. Do you like it?"

The child nodded vigorously, eyes crinkling into crescent moons. "I like Aurora! It's better than Bitch. It sounds like the stars." She grinned, flashing milk-white teeth.

Relief swept through the room like a cleansing wind. Yet behind every smile lingered sorrow and rage. How much had Riley suffered, and how much cruelty had her daughter endured to accept such a name?

From that day forward, Stormridge Manor bloomed anew. Aurora's presence was like fresh spring rain, stirring life where despair had festered. The Matriarch devoted her days to teaching the pup letters and old pack stories. Mrs. Beck filled the kitchens with scents of roasted meats and sweet pastries, spoiling Aurora until her once-thin frame rounded with healthy weight.

And Lucien—Alpha Prince, battle-forged wolf, scarred by loss—healed in ways he never thought possible. He returned to his duties with Stormridge Pack and its alliances, yet no matter how late the meetings ran, he always came home in time to tuck Aurora into bed. He told her stories of wolves beneath the moon, of Riley's courage, of the bond that blood could never sever. He took her walking in the gardens under starlight, teaching her how to breathe in the night air like a wolf on patrol.

In two years, Aurora grew strong, lively, radiant. Her—cheeks flushed with health, her limbs sturdy. By the time she turned four, she was ready to attend Mooncrest Academy's preparatory school.

Lucien himself insisted on escorting her every morning and retrieving her every afternoon. To the Alpha Prince, there was no duty greater than this.

One afternoon, as parents gathered to collect their pups, the courtyard slowly emptied until only Aurora remained beside her young teacher. The pup waited patiently, her hands clasped behind her back, eyes calm.

"Aurora, are you tired of standing?" the teacher asked kindly, crouching beside her. "Do you want me to carry you?"

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Aurora's moon-bright eyes sparkled. She shook her head firmly. "No, teacher. If you carry me, you'll get tired. I can wait."

The teacher nearly melted on the spot, her heart seized by the girl's pure spirit. She thought to herself: So this is the daughter of Lucien Duskgrave... strong, bright, endlessly kind. The bloodline of Alphas runs deep in her.

But before another thought could take shape, a shadow fell across them.

A woman appeared, her scent wild, fractured, tinged with madness. Her eyes burned with fevered obsession. Without warning, she lunged and snatched Aurora into her arms, clutching her like prey claimed by a starving beast.

"Riley... my Riley. You waited for me, didn't you? Mama has come to take home." Her voice shook, sharp with desperation.

The teacher's scream split the air. "Who are you? Put Aurora down!"

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She rushed forward, but the woman's grip was iron. Aurora whimpered, shock paling her little face.

"I'm not Riley—I'm Aurora!" she cried, her voice cracking with fear. She kicked and squirmed, but the woman's claws dug deeper.

"No," the stranger hissed, nails sinking into the child's skin until red welts bloomed. "You're my Riley, my little girl. You're mine. This time, I won't let anyone steal you away."

Aurora's cry pierced the courtyard, wolf-pup instincts wailing for her pack. "Papa! Great-Grandmother! Help me!"

The teacher stumbled back, shouting frantically. "Guards! Someone's trying to steal a child!"

Security wolves from Mooncrest Academy rushed forward, their growls echoing off the stone walls. "Release the girl now, or we'll tear you down!"

But the woman's madness was untamed. Her arms cinched tighter around Aurora, her gaze feverish. "She's mine, My everything. No one will separate us. Riley, don't be afraid. Mama will protect you this time. No one will take you."

Aurora's sobs filled the air as the wolves closed in, a pack on edge, every heartbeat

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Chapter 318

bracing for blood.

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The woman's voice cracked as she clutched the trembling child in her arms, tears spilling freely.

"It's all Mama's fault. Mama didn't protect you... that's why the bad ones stole you away." Her body shook, desperation radiating from her like a fever.

Aurora's tears streamed down her round cheeks, her little fists clutching the stranger's tunic. "I don't know you! Let me go! I want my Papa, I want my Great- Grandmother..." Her voice broke into sobs, raw and terrified,

Pain and madness flickered in the woman's eyes—Luna Zara, once mother of Riley of the Ebonclaw Pack, long broken by guilt. She pressed the child tighter against her chest, as though she could will time itself to turn back.

“No, you are my daughter. My Riley. Come home with me. We'll never be apart again.”

Aurora's wails grew sharper, her wolf-pup instincts calling out for her blood pack. And it was then that Lucien Duskgrave, Alpha Prince of the Stormridge Pack, arrived.

From the courtyard gates, he caught sight of his daughter ensnared in the arms of a raving woman. The sound of Aurora's cries tore through him like claws raking down his heart. His wolf surged to the surface, eyes blazing gold, fangs lengthening. His blood roared with killing intent.

In a blur, he crossed the space. His hand clamped onto Luna Zara's arm like an iron vice. With a savage twist, bones cracked beneath his grip. Zara's shriek split the air as her balance broke.

Lucien pulled Aurora free, sweeping her into his arms with the swiftness of a predator reclaiming what was his. With one brutal kick, he sent the madwoman crashing across the courtyard stones.

Aurora buried her face into his chest, her tiny hands clutching his neck as her sobs turned frantic. “Papa—I'm scared!”

Lucien's rage melted into anguish. He rocked her gently, one massive hand cradling her back, his voice low and soothing despite the storm of violence in his

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veins. “No more fear, little one. Papa's here. I should have been faster. I won't let anyone hurt you again.”

Aurora lifted her tear-streaked face, eyes wide and glassy. Through her sobs, her voice carried a child's fierce conviction. "Papa is the best... the very best Papa in the whole world."

A softness broke through Lucien's Alpha ferocity. He pressed a kiss to her damp forehead, whispering against her skin, "I promise. I will never be late again."

Aurora nodded, her small head tucking beneath his chin, though her little body still shook with fright. Each sob was a dagger to Lucien's chest. In those days of raising her under Stormridge's protection, she had never cried like this. Today, a single deranged wolf had managed to terrify his pup. His fury sharpened.

When his gaze fell upon the woman sprawled on the ground, recognition struck. Beneath the madness, the gaunt features belonged to none other than Luna Zara—Riley's mother.

Zara staggered to her knees, reaching out toward Aurora, her voice raw with obsession. "Riley... my Riley..."

Lucien's lips curled in a cold snarl. His wolf growled deep in his chest, every note dripping contempt. Late love is cheaper than ash.

When Riley had been alive, she had been beaten, scorned, discarded by her own blood in the Ebonclaw Pack. Not once had Luna Zara raised her voice to shield her daughter. And now, with Riley gone to the grave, Zara emerged, mistaking Aurora for the child she had abandoned. Lucien's rage was molten.

"Chain her," Lucien ordered, his tone carrying the weight of an Alpha's decree. "I never want to see her face near my pup again."

Caelum stepped forward without hesitation. His grip locked onto Zara's shoulders, forcing her down. She fought like a cornered animal, her nails clawing at empty air, tears streaming. "No! I won't go back! I only want my daughter! Give her to me -Riley, come back to Marna!"

Her eyes, wild and unhinged, never left Aurora. "Please... come with me. Mama misses you. I'll protect you this time, I swear it..."

But Aurora buried herself deeper in Lucien's embrace, trembling. The Alpha

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Prince lifted her, turning away from the scene, shielding her from Zara's madness. His stride toward the waiting car was swift, each step a vow carved into stone.

Behind him, Zara screamed, thrashing against Caelum's grip. "Don't take her from me! She's mine! She's my daughter!"

The warriors of Stormridge closed in, their growls vibrating through the courtyard. Zara's scent was madness and decay, her wolf broken beyond repair.

Caelum's voice cut through her cries like a blade. "Your daughter has been dead for two years. What you clutch at is nothing but a ghost."

"No!" Zara's howl shook with denial, her body convulsing. "You're lying! My Riley is alive—she has to be alive! She will live forever. She will never leave me!" Her voice dwindled into muttering, her form crumpling beneath the Beta's grip.

Even when the iron chains were fastened around her wrists and ankles, she continued whispering Riley's name, as though summoning a spirit that would

never return.

Caelum's face was carved from stone as he dragged her back to confinement. "The Alpha commands: guard her well. She escapes again, you answer with your lives."

The terrified wardens of the Mooncrest asylum swore their oaths, promising vigilance.

Thus Luna Zara was cast back into the iron darkness, shackles biting into her limbs. Never again would she walk free beneath the moon. For the rest of her days, she would be left with nothing but chains, regret, and the endless echo of Riley's name—her prayers unanswered, her wolf rotting in madness.

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Chapter 320

Five years later...

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The Stormridge Pack had grown quieter in the years since Riley's passing, but within the walls of the Duskgrave estate, life still pulsed with warmth.

Aurora Duskgrave was no longer the tiny pup Lucien had once carried from danger. Now, at seven years old, she was already a spark of life within the Pack, her wolf-blood stirring early, her lessons at Mooncrest Academy filling her days. Each morning she trotted into the lower-year halls with her books pressed to her chest, her braid swaying, and every elder in the academy whispered how sh

e was becoming the mirror of Riley Vale.

For five years, the Duskgrave household treated Aurora as their jewel. Matriarch Duskgrave spoiled her with heirloom trinkets and wolf-lore bedtime stories. Mia baked her favorite honey cakes each week. Even the hardened warriors of Stormridge softened when she ran past them, her laughter echoing across the courtyards. For Lucien, she was not only his daughter but his vow made flesh: the one thing in the world he would never fail to protect again.

On a gray morning, Duke strode toward the iron gates of the Werewolf Detention Bastille. Carmen was waiting on the other side. The gates clanged open, and the woman stepped out into the sunlight for the first time in five years.

Her eyes squinted against the brightness, disbelief painted across her face. She had braced herself for scars, for ruin, for the cruel madness that broke most wolves in the prison. Instead, she was whole. Tired, yes, and thinner than before—but not broken.

Every month of those five years, Mia and Duke had been there to see her through the glass walls, to remind her she was not forgotten. Jace Hale had come on rare days, leaning close to the phone to tell her about the training grounds, about the politics beyond the walls, about Aurora learning her first letters. Because of Duke's influence within Stormridge, no guard had dared to torment her. Compared to Riley, who had endured chains and silence with no one to visit, Carmen had been blessed.

As she breathed the free air, Carmen's wolf trembled with shame and gratitude. Riley had suffered alone. I had people. She had no one.

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Duke laid a steadying hand on her shoulder. "Come," he said. "Mia is waiting."

At the Stormridge estate, Mia was already running down the steps before the car had fully stopped. She collided into Carmen's arms, and the two women clung to one another, their tears soaking into each other's shoulders.

"You're home," Mia whispered, voice breaking.

"I shouldn't be," Carmen replied hoarsely, but Mia shook her head fiercely.

Then another shadow approached, tall and commanding. Lucien Duskgrave, with Aurora beside him, came to greet her. Carmen's breath caught when she saw the child.

Aurora ran forward, flinging her arms around her aunt. "Thank you auntie," she said in her small; ringing voice. "Thank you for bringing me back five years ago."

Carmen's arms tightened around her, tears spilling freely now. Aurora's face, with each passing year, was becoming Riley's reflection. The curve of her cheek, the storm-bright eyes—it was as if Riley lived again through her daughter. Carmen's wolf keened inside her, mourning and grateful all at once.

"You've grown so much," she whispered, voice trembling. "You're so strong."

Aurora only smiled, though her words were innocent. "Mama would be proud, right?"

Carmen broke then, her tears falling unchecked. She nodded, unable to form words.

Later that evening, as the firelight glowed in the great hall, Caelum burst into the manor. His boots struck hard against the stone floor, his scent sharp with urgency.

"Alpha Lucien," he called, his voice carrying the weight of storm and blood.

Lucien rose from his chair/his eyes narrowing. Aurora had already been ushered away by Mia, sensing the tension in the room.

“What is it?” the Alpha Prince asked,

Caelum’s jaw was tight, his wolf pacing beneath his skin. “The balance is breaking. The Alliance can no longer ignore it.”

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For five years, the West had been shifting. Once they had kept to their borders, their rivers, their trade routes. Now their claws stretched farther each season. They had cut into southern trade, strangled northern caravans, and sent their fangs into every border they could test.

Lucien had ignored it. He had made a vow that his world would be only Aurora, her safety, her growth. He had no time for foreign campaigns.

But now, Caelum’s report shook the hall.

“Three months ago, the North and South finally rose together,” Caelum said. “They forged a war pact to push back the West. At first, they had the upper hand. But...” He exhaled sharply, anger flashing in his wolf-gold eyes. “The West’s army is not what it once was. Their strength has multiplied. The North-South alliance was crushed in battle outside the Silvermarch plains. Many Alphas have fallen. The West’s banners rise higher each week.”

Lucien’s frown deepened, the weight of his pack pressing against his instincts. “And you think Stormridge will be next.”

Caelum nodded. “The West is no longer content with isolation. Their hunger is spreading east. And if they take the east, the Stormridge Pack will be forced into war, whether we wish it or not.”

The fire crackled in the silence that followed.

Lucien’s wolf growled low in his chest. He had promised himself he would not be dragged into politics again, not after Riley, not after Aurora. But the storm was coming to his doorstep.

Caelum’s final words dropped like a stone into the hall.

“Word spreads of their champion. A white wolf—born once in a millennium. A female warrior. Her battle power is said to be unmatched.”

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in Vengeance 321

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The gates of Stormbane Citadel groaned open as the war horns faded into the cold dusk air. Aria rode at the head of the column, her armor still streaked with soot and blood. Behind her stretched ranks of battered but triumphant warriors, their howls rising like thunder to the night sky.

The West had claimed another victory. The Northern and Southern Packs lay shattered, their armies broken across the fields. And at the very front of the carnage had been Aria—the White Wolf whose legend now spread farther than any battle standard.

As she dismounted, the courtyard erupted. Wolves pounded their chests, warriors bowed low, and the chant rose again and again:

“The White Wolf!”

“Stormbane’s champion!”

“Aria the Unyielding!”

Aria’s boots struck stone as she walked through the corridor of reverence. Every bow, every howl pressed against her shoulders like iron weights. She was their weapon, their savior, their prophecy made flesh. And yet, beneath the roar of adulation, her wolf shifted restlessly, as if the name they called her was not truly hers.

From the citadel steps descended Aedric Stormbane, Alpha of the West. Tall, broad, every inch carved by power and ambition, his silver eyes locked only on her. The crowd fell silent as he approached, his presence enough to command stillness.

“Aria,” he said, his voice a velvet growl laced with pride. “You return victorious again. The North and South lie in ruins because of you.”

The wolves cheered once more, but Aedric did not break his gaze. He took her hand before the entire Pack, lifting it high.

‘Look well upon her!’ he proclaimed. “The White Wolf stands with the West. With her at our side, no Pack can resist us—not North, not South, not even the East!”

The courtyard shook with the answering howl. Some fell to their knees. Others reached skyward as though calling down the moon to bless her.

Aria bowed her head slightly, her expression unreadable. This was the role expected of her: the White Wolf, conqueror of armies. She played it well, but her chest ached with something she could not name.

When the noise ebbed, Aedric leaned closer, his voice for her alone. “Aria. You know I will not wait forever. A wolf such as you deserves a mate strong enough to match your fire. Together, we would rule every

horizon.”

Her throat tightened. He had asked before—after battles, after victories, when blood and glory still burned in the air. Always he asked, and always she refused him without refusing outright.

In her mind’s shadows lingered an image she could never banish: the silhouette of a man, faceless yet fierce, a voice whispering her name. Not Aria. Something else. Something older, truer. Every time Aedric’s touch lingered, that phantom flared, and her wolf recoiled.

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She steadied her voice. “There is still the East, Aedric. The Stormridge wolves have yet to kneel. Until that is done, I cannot bind myself to anything else.”

The words were not a promise. Only a delay. But it was enough for the Alpha. His jaw tightened, then softened into a smile sharp as a blade. He turned to his Pack once more, raising Aria’s hand as if sealing

her fate.

“Soon the East will fall,” he declared, “and when it does, the world will belong to the West!”

The courtyard erupted again, a storm of devotion. Wolves knelt, others howled their worship, the name “Aria” echoing from the citadel walls like a hymn.

Aria stood rigid in their adoration, her eyes hard, her wolf restless. She felt none of the triumph they gave her. Only the weight of chains invisible, forged from a name that was not hers, a past she could not touch, and a shadowed memory of someone she could not forget.

As the crowd dispersed, as Aedric’s smile burned into her back, Aria turned away from the citadel steps, her cloak swirling in the torchlight.

And when the firelight caught her face, the truth struck like lightning-

The White Wolf of the West, their champion, their feared conqueror-

Her face looks exactly like Riley’s.

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

in Vengeance 322

[1,028 words]

The war drums had quieted, but they still echoed in my bones. We had crushed the alliance of the North and South; their banners lay trampled beneath our claws, their warriors broken across the field. Tonight, the West was drunk on victory.

Stormbane Citadel glowed with fire and song. The courtyard blazed with torches, wolves howled their praises, and the halls brimmed with feasting. All for me. The White Wolf. Their champion.

I should have been there—sitting beside Aedric, letting him lift my hand before the Pack as though I were his destined mate. Instead, I slipped away. The noise, the worship, the weight of belonging to something I did not feel a part of—it strangled me.

I walked alone through the cold corridors until I reached my quarters. The moment the heavy doors closed behind me, silence rushed in like a wave. My armor was still dusted with blood and ash, but I had no strength to remove it. I sank into the chair by the window, staring out into the night where the moon bled through clouds.

No matter how they knelt before me, no matter how they whispered my name with reverence, I did not belong here. The West adored me, yet I felt nothing in return. No pride. No home. Only distance.

Three years ago, I had opened my eyes for the first time in this very stronghold.

I remembered it vividly: waking to the scent of burning herbs and the low hum of voices. My body had felt like stone, my wolf like a shadow torn apart. And beside me, seated with his silver eyes unblinking, was Aedric Stormbane—the Alpha of the West.

“You are safe,” he told me. “You are Aria. You were born of the West. Our strongest White Wolf.”

I had believed him because what else could I do? My mind was a hollow cavern, stripped of memory. He told me I had fought bravely, struck down in battle, and dragged home by my mentor, Maeryn. That I had been comatose for two years. That only the Pack’s rarest moon-blessed herb, Moonshade Veyra, had saved me and my wolf, Sia, from death.

He called my amnesia a wound of war. He said the past would return, piece by piece.

But it never did.

Whenever I pressed Sia, she gave me nothing but silence or vague unease. My wolf was as blank as I was, though her strength burned fierce and untamed. She was my only anchor in the confusion. At least that much had survived—the White Wolf’s power.

Still, fragments haunted me. Not of parents or a childhood—I found myself recoiling at the very thought of parents. The word itself sickened me, filled me with inexplicable hatred. No, the shadows that followed me were not of family.

They were of him.

A man who came to me in dreams. Towering, golden-eyed, his presence heavy as thunder. He never spoke clearly, but my chest ached whenever he appeared. Each time I reached to see his face, the dream dissolved, leaving me gasping with tears I could not explain.

1/3

11:47 pm

Chapter 322

+20 Free Coins

And so I buried myself in battle. It was easier to wield my claws than to confront the emptiness. Easier to guard the borders, to drown in war cries, than to sit beneath Aedric's unyielding gaze.

Because Aedric was always there.

Alpha. Conqueror. With his sculpted frame and silver eyes that gleamed like steel under moonlight, he was every wolf's vision of power. His jaw sharp as a blade, his hair dark as obsidian, his smile dangerous enough to break oaths. To many, he was perfection—the kind of Alpha others would gladly kneel for.

And to me? He was a snare.

I was not blind. I saw the way his eyes lingered, the way his words curled with hunger. I knew he wanted more than my loyalty as a soldier. But my soul recoiled whenever he touched too close. My body stiffened as though betraying something I could not even remember.

A knock rattled against the door, sharp and commanding.

'Aria.' His voice. Deep. Smooth. Inescapable.

I swallowed, forcing the calm back into my voice. "Enter."

The door opened, and there he was—Aedric, in black trimmed with silver, the flicker of torchlight gilding his features. Even after battle, he looked immaculate, untouchable, as though the blood of war had never lared stain him.

You weren't at the feast," he said, stepping into the room. His gaze swept over me, assessing. "Are you inwell?"

I shook my head. "My body is sound. I just... needed quiet."

He came closer, and I stiffened as his shadow fell across me. The scent of steel and cedar clung to him. His hand reached, not for my face but for my shoulders, as if to draw me into his arms.

I moved without thinking—just a shift of my weight, a breath of space—but it was enough. His embrace faltered in the air between us.

For a heartbeat, his silver eyes burned with something raw. Then the anger broke through, sharp and unmasked.

Three years," he said, voice low, dangerous. "Three years, and still you recoil from me. What are you waiting for, Aria? A ghost? Some shadow from dreams?"

My chest tightened. His words cut close—too close.

"Tell me," he pressed, his voice rising with frustration. "Are you waiting for Storm-"

He stopped abruptly, as though the next word had betrayed him. But I had heard enough.

"Waiting for what?" I demanded, heart pounding. "What did you almost say? For who?"

His jaw clenched, the fury in his eyes glinting like ice. He said nothing. He only turned, his cloak snapping behind him as he strode out. The door slammed shut, and silence crashed down once more.

I sat frozen in the emptiness he left, but my mind was no longer blank.

2/3

11:47 pm D

Chapter 322

+20 Free Coins

Storm...

He had almost said it.

Storm.

The word burned in my chest like fire.

And for the first time in three years, I wondered if the life I had been told was mine was nothing but a

cage.

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

[1,120 words]

Chapter 323

Chapter 323

Lucien's POV

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The council chamber of Stormridge was heavy with voices, each Alpha speaking over the other, each park lord from the East straining to make his concern the loudest. The map stretched across the oak table was littered with markers—red for the West, blue for the North and South, green for us. And every time a red marker shifted, I felt the walls of the East close in tighter.

The Western Pack had been nothing more than a distant power when I first took my throne. They kept to their mountains, traded when it pleased them, fought when it was in their favor. But five years had changed them. They were no longer content to remain a power in isolation. They had devoured the trade routes, starved the South's markets, crippled the North's fleets. And now, with both North and South bloodied by their last failed war, the West turned its eyes to us. To the East.

To Stormridge.

“Alpha Lucien.” Caelum’s voice cut through the din, clear and steady. He had been at my right hand long enough to know when I was drifting. “You asked about their tactics. Let me show you.”

I inclined my head, forcing myself to focus.

He spread a series of parchment sheets across the map—sketches, notes, reports written by spies who had barely escaped with their lives. “The Western Pack fights unlike the others. Brutal efficiency. They don’t waste motion, don’t waste energy. Their

warriors are trained to break lines in one decisive strike. But what truly gives them their edge..." Caelum paused, his jaw tightening. "Is her."

My gaze sharpened. "The White Wolf."

Even the words left a raw ache in my chest.

Caelum nodded grimly. "She leads the charge. Wherever she fights, the enemy falls. Her strikes are calculated—every blow meant to kill, not maim. Entire battalions have scattered at the mere sight of her shifting on the field. She is more than a warrior, Alpha. She is a symbol."

The council murmured uneasily at that. I said nothing, though my pulse was no longer steady.

White Wolf. The title tasted like ash and longing on my tongue. For years, it had been Riley's name—her curse, her gift, her fate. A rare creature, destined for greatness, and yet what had she been given? Chains. Scorn. A prison cell. She had been cast aside by the very pack that should have worshiped her.

And I had not saved her.

I closed my eyes, Riley's face flashing like lightning in memory. I had thought myself strong once, thought I could shield her from the cruelty of this world. Yet she had slipped through my grasp, bled and broken beneath the very moon that should have blessed her. When she died, the curse upon me shattered, and my wolf surged free again. But it was a hollow victory, bought with the price of my mate's life.

Perhaps Ebonclaw's ruin had been justice. The Moon Goddess's punishment for how we treated her chosen white wolf.

I forced the thought away, jaw tightening. This was not the time to drown in grief.

1/3

Chapter 323

"Go on," I said, my voice rougher than I intended.

+20 Free Coins

Caelum's hand hovered over a sketch. The drawing depicted a tall, lithe figure, clad in dark armor, a wolf's head mask obscuring her face. "She never removes it in public. No one has seen her true features. Only her form in battle—swift, unyielding, almost inhuman in grace. He flipped the parchment, revealing written records. "Her history is..."

blank. Nothing before three years ago. No birth pack. No family. No *trace*. She simply appeared on the battlefield, and from that moment the West began its rise”

My eyes lingered on the final page. A name was inked at the bottom.

Aria.

A simple name, almost too plain for the legend she was becoming. Yet my gaze refused to leave it. Something about the curve of the letters made my chest tighten with unease.

I exhaled slowly, steadying myself. Perhaps it was only because she was a White Wolf. The word alone cut too deep.

“She is said to rival even an Alpha in combat,” Caelum added. “Some call her Aedric Stormbane’s sword. Others whisper she is his mate. Whatever the truth, she is dangerous.”

My wolf stirred inside me, restless for the first time in years. The memory of Riley’s death had left him silent, dulled, chained in grief as I had been. But at the mention of this Aria, the beast within me clawed to the surface, teeth bared, eager.

A challenge. A mirror of what had been lost.

I flexed my hands against the table until the wood creaked. “If she truly is the core of their strength, then to understand the West we must understand her. And if she bleeds, then so does Stormbane’s ambition.”

The council exchanged wary glances.

Caelum lowered his voice. “What do you intend, Alpha?”

I leaned back in my chair, gaze hard on the map. “For five years, I have stood aside, guarding only my daughter, giving the world no more of my strength. But the time for isolation is over. Stormridge will join the alliance. If the West comes for us, they will find we are not prey.”

Relief rippled through the chamber, though unease still lingered in every pair of eyes.

Caelum bowed his head, his expression grim. “Then we must prepare for war. The first strike should be a test at their borders. Nothing large—just enough to measure their response. And perhaps...” His eyes flicked to mine, cautious. “Perhaps enough to draw the White Wolf herself.”

I did not answer at once. My gaze had fallen back to that single word, inked in bold strokes on the page.

Aria.

I whispered it under my breath, tasting it like a question.

Something about the name gnawed at me, as though the shadows of memory were stirring, restless and unsatisfied.

Riley, my wolf growled inside me, her name a scar.

2/3

Chapter 323

But Riley was gone. And Aria.. Aria was real.

I straightened, forcing all hesitation from my voice. Then it is decided. The alliance will move. We will strike the West's borderlands and see what manner of warrior this Aria truly is*

A murmur of assent rose through the chamber. The strategy began to take shape troop numbers, routes, supplies. But my mind was no longer in the war room.

It lingered on the face I had never seen, on the mask that hid her. On the possibility that somewhere in this world, a White Wolf yet lived, not cursed but revered.

But my Riley, my white wolf, was gone.

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

[915 words]

Aria's POV

The war table stretched before us like a battlefield in miniature, a sprawl of parchment, inked borders, and crimson markers scattered across the map like spilled blood. Torches guttered along the walls, their flames hissing and bending, shadows clawing at the stone ceiling above. Every detail of the chamber whispered war—steel along the walls, armor resting at the ready, and the sharp tang of blood and oil that never seemed to leave this place.

Acdric stood at the head of the table, broad-shouldered and unyielding, his palm pressing firmly against the lands we had already conquered. His voice, low and measured, carried the weight of command.

“The East,” he said, and the word itself hollowed the chamber, dragging the air into silence.

A ripple of unease moved through the gathered generals. Even the most hardened among them shifted in their chairs, jaws tightening, shoulders stiffening. Their silence said more than fear would have—because to speak of the East was to summon an old shadow.

Stormridge.

And the Alpha who ruled it—Lucien.

Aedric’s gaze swept the table like a blade. “Do not underestimate him. Lucien is not like the others we’ve crushed beneath our boots. He commands more than men. He commands the storm itself. To face him unprepared is to court death.”

At the mention of his name, something moved in me. A blurred silhouette in the fog of memory—too faint to grasp, too haunting to ignore. It was as if some forgotten part of me stirred awake, whispering that I had once known him, once lost him, though such a thought was madness.

A general cleared his throat, the sound rasping in the tense quiet. He leaned forward, a flicker of defiance -or recklessness—in his eyes. “With respect, Alpha, Stormridge no longer stands as it once did. The Eastern Triad is broken. Blackmaw lies fractured. And Ebonclaw...” His voice lowered, as though speaking the name invited ghosts. “Ebonclaw once had a white wolf. A rare one. But—”

The weight of Aedric’s stare cut him off instantly. The words died in his throat.

My pulse sharpened. My eyes pinned him like prey. “But what?” My voice was steady, though fire burned beneath it. “What happened to the white wolf?”

The man shifted uneasily, throat working. “She... she died.”

The simple words struck like claws to my chest. My lungs clenched, as though I had taken the blow myself. A hollow ache expanded inside me, a pain that felt unearned yet undeniable. “How?” I demanded, my tone dropping low, my fingers curling into the edge of the table. “How did she die?”

No one answered. Eyes slid downward, avoiding mine. The silence grew heavy, suffocating, as if every man here knew the truth yet feared to breathe it aloud.

Before I could force it from them, footsteps thundered down the hall. The great doors swung wide, and the chamber shifted as a presence strode in—calm, commanding, undeniable.

1/2

11:25 pm P

Chapter 321

Professor Marryn

Her cloak swirled around her ankles as her sharp eyes, cold as winter frost, cut straight to me. Her voice rang clear, filling the chamber without effort. "She was betrayed. By her own blood. That is how the white wolf perished"

The words carved into me like a brand. Pain lanced through my veins, fierce and inexplicable I pressed a fist to my side. but the ache remained, gnawing deeper. Betrayed by her own blood. The thought coiled inside me like a serpent, whispering truths I could not place.

"Enough." Aedric's growl shattered the moment, sharp and furious. His gaze locked with Maeryn's, a warning smoldering in the air between them. Remember what you swore.

Maeryn's lips pressed into a thin line, but she said no more.

I barely heard them. My mind was a storm of grief and rage, grief that did not belong to me but felt as though it had been carved into my bones. My heart thundered, each beat echoing with a pain I could not

name.

Then the chamber doors burst open again—this time not with composure, but with chaos.

A Gamma stumbled in, cloak torn, blood soaking the fabric. His breath rasped in gasps, his eyes wide with urgency. "Intruders on the border!" he cried. "By their scent—it is the East!"

The chamber erupted. Gasps broke out, chairs scraped against stone, voices rose in panic.

"It's Stormridge!" another spat, voice sharp with fear. "It's Alpha Lucien!"

For a moment, even the bravest of them looked stricken. The air thickened with dread.

Aedric's expression hardened. For the briefest second, shock flickered in his eyes, then vanished, buried beneath steel. He straightened, his voice rising above the chaos, firm and unyielding.

“So, the storm comes to us.” His tone cut through the room like thunder. “Let it.” He slammed his hand onto the table, the map quivering beneath the force. “We are not the ones who should tremble. We have Aria. The white wolf of the West. With her, we are unstoppable.”

All eyes turned to me. Expectant. Trusting. Terrified.

And in that moment, something ignited inside me. A fire that burned away the fog of doubt and grief. Fear, rage, and sorrow twisted together into something sharper, stronger—a resolve that demanded blood.

I stepped forward, my voice steady though my pulse hammered. “Then let me prove it. Let me face them.” I let my gaze sweep across the room, daring any to challenge me. Then I put on my own mask “I will fight.”

2/2

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[999 words]

Chapter 325

Chapter 325

Lucien's POV

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The night air was sharp, brimming with the scent of pine and blood. My wolf stirred restlessly beneath my skin as I led the small strike force through the borderlands. The earth was damp with an earlier rain, the sky heavy with clouds that threatened a storm. Perfect. The storm was mine to call, mine to wield.

This was no campaign of conquest. Not yet. Tonight was reconnaissance. A test of the West's defenses, a taste of their mettle before we bared our fangs fully.

We moved in silence, shadows weaving through the trees. Every step brought us closer to the Western border, closer to the wolves who had been carving eastward with ruthless precision. Closer to the rumors of their weapon—the white wolf.

A legend. A ghost. Some swore she was touched by the Moon Goddess herself. Others whispered she was nothing but smoke, a lie to make cowards tremble.

But when the first howl ripped through the night, I knew at once that the legend was real.

The trees around us erupted with motion, shadows breaking free of shadows. Wolves poured in—faster, sharper, more disciplined than I had expected. Steel flashed, claws tore bark, the forest itself seeming to shudder beneath the collision. My men roared, meeting the assault head-on.

And then I saw her.

At first, only her eyes. Piercing, unrelenting, visible even through the wolf-head mask that obscured her face. They caught the torchlight like twin blades. She moved with lethal precision, every strike calculated to kill, every step a dancer's balance on the edge of death.

My wolf jolted inside me, recognition flaring like lightning across a storm sky. Her movements—something about the tilt of her shoulders, the ferocity of her strikes—it was achingly familiar. My breath hitched before I forced myself back into focus.

No. There was no time for ghosts.

I drew my blade, meeting the first of her soldiers. They were skilled—trained in her image, perhaps—but my wolf was older, darker, carved by years of blood and the weight of Stormridge. Steel rang against steel, claws against claws. The air thickened with snarls, shouts, the stink of sweat and iron.

Through it all, I kept her in sight. The white wolf of the West. Masked, anonymous, but impossible to ignore. She cut through the fray like a storm given flesh, her wolf aura crackling in the air, demanding all attention.

Our eyes locked across the chaos, just for a heartbeat.

And in that heartbeat, something inside me fractured.

I knew her. Not her mask, not her title, but the way her body moved as though the battlefield was her birthright. The way her wolf's presence pushed against mine, fierce and unyielding, like two storms colliding. Memory surged in jagged fragments—laughter in the dark, the glint of golden eyes, the brush of a hand against mine. And then nothing. The images slipped away, too elusive to grasp.

1/3

11:38 pm PP

Chapter 325

+20 Free Coins

A snarl ripped from my throat as I threw off another attacker, blade sliding through fur and flesh. I pushed forward, cutting a path toward her.

She met me in kind. Our clash was not spoken, not planned, but inevitable.

Steel met steel, claws met claws. Her strength was staggering—she pressed me back with a ferocity I had not felt in years. Every strike was a death sentence, every feint a predator’s game. My wolf strained against my skin, eager to break free, to meet her wolf fang for fang.

And yet beneath the violence, that maddening familiarity gnawed at me. I knew this warrior. I knew her the way I knew my own scars.

But how?

The battle surged around us, tearing us apart before I could demand the answer. Her soldiers closed in, her wolf aura pushing me back, commanding me to retreat. Not with words—no, she never spoke a word -but with sheer, merciless presence.

My men regrouped, bleeding but alive. This was meant to be a test, not a slaughter. I clenched my jaw, forcing my wolf to heel as I raised my hand in signal. “Fall back,” I commanded, my voice carrying over the clash.

We withdrew, step by step, the night swallowing us as the Western wolves howled their victory.

But I did not feel defeated.

I felt haunted.

Long after the sounds of battle faded, long after the forest quieted once more, I could still see her eyes through that mask, sharp and unrelenting. I could still feel the weight of her strikes reverberating through my bones.

And beneath it all—the unshakable certainty that I had fought her before. Not here. Not now. Long ago, in a life torn from me by blood and betrayal.

Aria. That was the name whispered by reports. The white wolf of the West.

But my heart, traitorous and wild, whispered another name.

Riley.

But no—it could not be. Riley was dead. I had seen the smoke rising from her funeral pyre, watched as she was given back to the Moon herself. And Aria’s scent... it bore no trace of Riley. They could not be the same. This was nothing but my grief weaving illusions, my longing playing cruel tricks on me.

If she truly were Riley, why would she not come to me? Why would she strike at me with such merciless precision, showing not a shred of recognition? My Riley would never raise her blade against me so coldly.

No. It was madness. A ghost conjured by memory.

I exhaled, shaking my head, a bitter laugh curling in my throat. I could not see every white wolf and name her Riley. I would drown myself in phantoms if I did.

“It’s a hallucination,” I muttered, self-mockery cutting sharper than any blade.

2/3

11:38 pm P P

Chapter 325

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Still... when I closed my eyes, it was her eyes—those sharp, burning eyes—that followed me into the dark.

11:38 pm P

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[1,187 words]

Chapter 326

Lucien’s POV

20 Free **Coins**

The gates of Stormridge loomed tall and black against the moonlight when we returned. The storm above had not yet broken, but the clouds hung heavy, as if the sky itself was holding its breath. My men filed in behind me, tired but alive.

Aurora was the first thing I saw when the doors of Duskgrave manor opened. My daughter stood there in her nightgown, curls wild around her small face, her wide eyes searching desperately for me. She wasn't alone. The Matriarch, regal even in her age, lingered close, her presence steady as stone. Beside her, Mrs. Beck and Mia wrung their hands, worry etched deep into their features.

The moment my boots touched the stone steps, Aurora ran forward. The women were quick to follow, surrounding me like a tide. Their hands checked my arms, my chest, even brushing my jaw as if they needed to make sure I was flesh and not a fading ghost.

"You're not hurt?" Mrs. Beck pressed.

"No wounds, no broken bones?" the Matriarch added, though her sharp eyes already scanned me thoroughly.

I caught Aurora as she flung herself at me, her small arms wrapping around my neck with surprising strength. My heart softened instantly. For a moment, the storm inside me calmed.

"Papa," she whispered, pulling back just enough to look into my face. Her eyes, gods, they were Riley's eyes. "Is it true? Did you fight the white wolf? My teacher says white wolves are gifts from the Moon Goddess herself. Are they really that powerful?"

Her voice was so pure, so unguarded, that for a moment I could not breathe. Against my will, my thoughts dragged me back to the masked warrior I had faced only hours ago—the way her strikes cut through the night, the way her aura clawed at my wolf like an equal. And then further still, deeper, to memories of Riley. The way she had once moved with the same reckless grace. The way her presence had once filled every corner of me.

The ache was sudden, dangerous. I forced it down.

I knelt, cupping Aurora's cheek with a hand still stained faintly with the scent of blood and steel. "Yes, little one. The white wolf is strong. Stronger than most Alphas."

Her lips parted, her eyes shining with awe. "Did she really come from the Moon Goddess?"

"She did," I said softly. My voice cracked before I caught it. "And so did your mother."

Her mouth fell open in wonder. "Mama too?"

I nodded, and when her arms squeezed me tighter, I let out a breath I hadn't known I'd been holding. "Your mother was one of the strongest white wolves the world has ever seen. And one day, Aurora, you will be too."

Her face lit with a joy that chased the storm from my heart. “Really?”

“Really.” I kissed her forehead, tasting salt and rain in her hair. “She watches over you still. She’d want you

1/3

11:38 pm PPSS

Chapter 326

+20 **Free** Coins

to remember that.”

The Matriarch’s eyes softened, Mrs. Beck brushed her handkerchief across damp eyes, and for a heartbeat the war felt far away. But only for a heartbeat.

“Go with Mrs. Beck,” I told Aurora gently. “Get some rest. We’ll talk more in the morning.” She pouted, but obeyed, casting one last shining smile over her shoulder before Mrs. Beck led her down the hall.

The Matriarch inclined her head, regal and silent, before stepping aside. She knew I had no luxury for fatherhood tonight.

I straightened my shoulders and walked into the council chamber. The air inside was thick, waiting. Around the long table sat the lesser Alphas and Betas of the Eastern packs—men and women who had come here not out of loyalty, but fear. They feared I would falter. They feared the storm had finally broken me.

They rose when I entered. I didn’t ask them to. Power demands acknowledgment.

“Sit,” I ordered, and they obeyed.

I stood at the head of the table, my hands braced against the carved wood. “Tonight was not conquest,” I began. My voice carried, low and sharp. “It was a measure. A test of the West’s border strength.”

They leaned forward as one, eager. I let them wait, let the silence stretch long enough that their nerves showed.

“The West is disciplined,” I said at last. “Their forces respond swiftly, coordinated, sharper than I anticipated. Their defenses are not scattered. Every soldier fights like a piece of one body, one mind. They do not break easily.”

A murmur rippled around the table. Some frowned, some clenched their fists, but all listened.

“And the white wolf?” someone asked, his tone laced with both fear and hunger.

I let the question hang before I answered. “She is real. And she is dangerous.”

They shifted uneasily. I let my gaze sweep across them, pinning each in turn. “Her presence alone bent the battlefield. Her aura pressed like an Alpha’s—no, stronger. To face her without strategy is suicide. Do not mistake brute strength for victory. If we are to crush the West, it will not be through force. It will be through wit. Through their weakness.”

“Then what is their weakness?” one pressed.

I leaned back, crossing my arms. “That is what I intend to discover.”

Gasps, whispers, a swell of apprehension. I silenced them with a look. “I will infiltrate their territory. Myself. I will see their strongholds, their patrols, their supply lines. And I will find where they break.”

“Alone?” Caelum’s voice cut through the chamber. He had been silent until now, his eyes blazing with loyalty and defiance. “Then I go with you.”

“No.” My answer was immediate, final.

His jaw tightened. “You cannot expect me to remain behind while you—”

2/3

11:38 pm P P S S

Chapter 326

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“I can, and I do.” I met his gaze, hard as stone. “More wolves mean a larger target. A louder scent. This requires silence. Stealth. I will mask my scent, suppress my wolf. It will take everything I have to keep myself unseen. If I am discovered, I cannot even risk shifting, not without giving away who I am.”

The council stirred, realizing the risk.

Caelum’s fists clenched. “Then all the more reason you need me.”

“No.” I growled. My voice cracked like thunder. “Your duty is here. To the pack. To my daughter. If I fall, Stormridge cannot.”

Silence fell heavy. The Matriarch’s face was unreadable, but I saw approval flicker in her gaze.

Caelum swallowed hard, then inclined his head, though I read the frustration in every line of him. “As you command.”

I turned back to the table. “Prepare our forces. Hold the borders. Await my return. We will not fight the West in blindness. We will not throw our wolves into slaughter. When we strike, it will be precise. And it will be final.”

The storm outside cracked with distant thunder, and I felt it in my bones.

Aria. The white wolf of the West. Masked, untouchable.

But not for long.

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Alpha daughter Ch 327

[1,034 words]

Chapter 327

Aria’s POV

It had been a week since the clash on the border.

A week of silence.

Too much silence.

+8 Pearls

The East had not returned, not even to harry our patrols. The borderlands remained untouched, the forest quiet but for wind- and birdsong. To the others, it was a blessing. To me, it was a warning.

“Just a probe,” I muttered under my breath, the word like iron on my tongue. A test.

That was all the last skirmish had been. Lucien had not come to conquer. He had come to measure us.

The realization set my blood burning.

I strode through the halls of the keep, ignoring the startled looks of the guards, and made for the border myself. If I was right

-and I knew I was—their calm was nothing but the calm before the storm.

But when I arrived, what I found nearly sent me into a fury.

The watchtowers were lax. Warriors lounged against the walls, half-hearted in their patrols. I caught two playing dice in the dirt, another with his eyes half-closed as though sleep could be stolen on duty. Their postures told me what my nose already had: there was no edge in them, no fear of attack.

“Complacent fools,” I hissed, my wolf surging forward with a snarl.

I let my aura loose.

The weight of my presence crashed over the border post

Wolves gasped, clawing at the earth as my will pressed down a storm wind, bending spines and forcing knees to the ground.

on them. A few whimpered outright.

My voice cut through the air like a blade. “Do you think they tremble

“Do you think the East cowers because of one battle ng me

behind their walls because you had the fortune of

One brave—or stupid—warrior daredmer, Perhaps, Commander... perhaps they:

“-and what?” I roared. “Decided to bow their heads and Ver

think Alphas test with blood and then vanish out of fear?”

The soldier paled, bowing low.

rise

your strength and-”

again? Do you

take Lucien

Stormridge for

a fool? Do you

“Punishment,” I snapped, my tone brooking no argument. “Every wolf who neglected his watch will run drills until his paws bleed. Let the sting remind you that the East has not gone. They are watching. Always watching.”

The men lowered their heads, chastened. But it wasn’t enough.

I stayed. I would not allow my wolves the excuse of idleness. I stood sentinel at the border myself, eyes sharp, aura heavy over the land. Outwardly, I was steel. Inwardly, I was fire.

Because I knew.

Lucien was no coward. His retreat had been too sudden, too precise. He had left before the fight could tip into its true weight. If he had unleashed his wolf that night, if he had met me claw for claw—Moon above, I wasn’t certain I would have walked away whole.

The thought unsettled me. Excited me. Frightened me.

My grip on my sword tightened until my knuckles ached. I forced myself to stillness. I could not afford distraction. Not now,

Night fell, draping the forest in shadows. I remained at the watch, pacing the ramparts, senses stretched thin. The men thought me relentless; in truth, I was hunting. For hours there was nothing. And then-

1/2

10:40 AM PP.

Chapter 327

A prickle at the back of my neck.

+8 Pearls

The air shifted, faint but sharp, like lightning caught in the lungs. I froze. My wolf's ears twitched, straining. Somewhere beyond the treeline, too subtle for the others to notice, a presence lingered. Not the blunt stink of rogues. Not the familiar musk of my own wolves. Something colder, sharper—disciplined. Suppressed.

Eastern Wolf.

I did not see him at first. He was good. Better than most spies I'd crossed blades with. His aura was folded so tightly it was almost absent, a void where life should have been. But no wolf alive could erase himself completely. Even a storm behind walls leaks thunder.

I slipped from the wall and into the forest without a word. Branches whispered against my armor as I moved, light-footed, every sense fixed on that invisible thread.

The moon broke through the canopy in fleeting shards of silver, and in one of them I saw him.

A shadow where none should be, his form shifting with the trees, his movements quiet as a stalking predator.

Lucien Duskgrave.

The sight struck me with the same force as it had on the battlefield: lean strength, fluid grace, every inch of him sharpened for war. But there was no battlefield now. No army. Only him, alone, moving through my woods as if he belonged here.

I held my breath, watching.

He crouched low, scanning the border posts with eyes like molten gold. Calculating. Measuring. Not attacking—never that. He was counting numbers, memorizing rotations, studying weaknesses. A wolf preparing not for today, but for the war to

come.

My heart thundered, and yet I moved not an inch. His Alpha aura was wiped out, I couldn't even feel his wolf nature, I wanted to see what he was going to do. He had chosen his ground well, where shadows and silence shielded him.

Still, the urge tore at me. To challenge him. To rip that calm mask from his face and force the storm out into the open.

Instead, I shifted back a step, letting the darkness swallow me. My wolf snarled inside, unwilling, but I mastered her. There would be a time to strike. Tonight was not it.

He paused suddenly, head tilting. My breath stilled. For a heartbeat I thought he had sensed me, but his gaze swept the border again, sharp and intent, before he turned and melted back into the deeper forest.

Gone.

I exhaled slowly, unclenching my fists. My chest was tight with fury, with admiration, a dangerous thread of something I dared not name.

With

Lucien Stormridge was not content with probing my defenses in the open. Now he walked in my lands, silent as a ghost, a storm cloud drifting where it pleased.

And I knew then, beyond any doubt-

The next time we met, it would not be by accident.

It would be war.

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

Alpha daughter Ch 328

[1,217 words]

Chapter 328

Lucien's POV

The forest was a living thing.

84

+10 Free Coins

Every branch creaked like a whisper, every shift of shadow a predator waiting to pounce . I had spent my life slipping through places like this—enemy lines,

contested borders, ambush fields—
but never had I felt the weight of eyes quite so heavily as I did tonight.

I knew the risk when I crossed into Western territory alone. My generals had begged me not to, but I needed more than patrol reports. I needed *to* see their defenses myself. To scent the earth, to taste the rhythm of their watch rotations, to understand the pulse of the wolves who would soon stand against mine.

But stealth has a price.

Hours before I crossed the border, I had stood in the witch's chamber. Her firelit den smelled of smoke and bitter herbs, the vials on her shelves glinting like captured stars. She had offered me the potion with a thin smile.

"A single dose," she warned. "It will mask your scent, drown your wolf's voice, even bury your Alpha aura. No nose will track you. No wolf will sense you. But—"

"But it weakens me," I had finished, staring at the black liquid.

She inclined her head. "A blade cuts both ways. Take it, and you walk invisible, But you walk half a wolf."

And I had taken it. For the sake of my pack, for the sake of strategy, I had let the burn of the potion slide into my veins. My wolf had snarled in protest, his strength muffled, his senses dulled. I felt hollow, muted.

It had worked—
too well. I slipped past Western patrols, unseen, unheard. I memorized their rotations, their weak points, the gaps in their vigilance. For a time, everything went according to plan.

Until the rogues came.

1/5

8:02 Tue, **Sep 9**

Chapter 328

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+10 Free Coins

They poured from the trees like smoke—half-starved, wild-eyed, their howls shattering the silence. Not Western wolves, not disciplined soldiers, but scavengers who had scented prey. They shouldn't have noticed me at all... but the potion that cloaked me from the West had stripped me of my aura. To them, I wasn't an Alpha. I was prey.

One lunged, its claws raking across my ribs before I could strike back. The pain tore through me, hot and ragged. Another hit me from the side, teeth sinking into my shoulder. I fought—Moon above, I fought—but without my wolf's full strength, every movement dragged like lead.

By the time I broke their necks and drove them off, my shirt was slick with blood. My body screamed with each step. I staggered deeper into the forest, cursing the witch's potion. If I'd had my full strength, they never would have touched me.

And yet... fate is cruel.

"Enough."

The voice stopped me cold. Low, commanding. Familiar. But it was unusually hoarse.

Aria.

She emerged from the shadows, moonlight glinting off the wolf-head mask that hid her features. Her blade gleamed wet with rogue blood, her presence heavy enough to silence the surviving strays. They fled before her aura as if driven by fire.

I leaned against a tree, breath ragged, watching her advance.

Of all the wolves in the West, it had to be her.

Her eyes, sharp and silver beneath the mask, fixed on me. She could have called the guards. Could have dragged me before Aedric and declared me an enemy spy. My fate should have been sealed the moment she recognized me.

But she didn't move.

2/5

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+10 Free Coins

Instead, she stepped closer. Her gaze swept over the blood soaking my ribs, my shoulder. Something flickered in her stare—anger, perhaps, or... hesitation.

“Stormridge,” she said, her tone edged but not final. “What in the Moon’s name are you doing bleeding on my border?”

I let out a dry laugh. “Admiring the scenery.”

Her head tilted. “You’re a terrible liar.”

I expected her blade. Instead, I felt her hand grip my arm. Firm. Strong. She half-dragged, half-guided me through the trees. My wolf snarled at the indignity, but my body betrayed me. The wound throbbed too sharply for resistance.

We reached an abandoned outpost, little more than a stone shelter swallowed by moss and ivy. She pushed me inside, shutting the door behind us. The night sounds dulled, leaving only the rasp of my breathing and the faint clink of her

armor.

“Sit,” she ordered.

I should have refused. Should have reminded her that I was her enemy, that her mercy was treason. But my legs buckled before my pride could form words. I sank onto the bench, clutching my side.

She knelt before me, pulling a satchel from her belt. Herbs, cloth, a flask of water. A commander prepared not only to kill, but to mend. My eyes narrowed.

“Why?” I demanded. “Why not hand me over?”

Her hands moved with steady precision, tearing the fabric of my shirt to expose the wound. “Because you intrigue me, Eastern Alpha. And because...” Her voice faltered, just for a breath, before steel returned. “Because you’re more useful alive than dead.”

I watched her work, her fingers brushing close enough for my wolf to bristle at the contact. Yet there was no mockery in her touch, no triumph. Only focus. Only...

care.

3/5

8:02 Tue, **Sep 9**

+10 Free Coins

At one point she reached for a vial, her mask slipping slightly as she bent to pour its contents. With a hiss, she tugged it off entirely for a heartbeat, wiping sweat from her brow.

And in that instant-

I saw her profile.

The curve of her cheekbone caught the moonlight, the slope of her nose, the line of her lips. My heart slammed against my ribs. It was Riley. Or rather—so like Riley it was impossible not to see her ghost.

My breath caught. My chest constricted. My mind screamed denial even as my eyes begged for another glimpse.

But then she slipped the mask back on, faster than a blink, her expression shuttered.

I blinked hard, heart pounding. Had I imagined it? Was it just delirium, blood loss twisting memory into flesh?

“Hold still,” she snapped, as if nothing had happened.

I obeyed, too shaken to argue. The burn of herbs filled the room, sharp and grounding. She bound my ribs with cloth, firm enough to sting, steady enough to anchor me.

When she finished, she sat back, her masked face unreadable.

“You’ll live,” she said. “But if you value that life, you’ll get out of here before dawn.”

I met her gaze, silver eyes boring into mine. The mask hid her face, but not the pull between us, raw and unspoken.

I should have left it at that. But the words slipped from me before I could stop them.

“I saw you,” I whispered. “Just now. Your face—it’s—”

8:02 Tue, Sep 9

Chapter 328

84

+10 Free Coins

Her hand shot out, gripping my throat—
not to crush, but to silence. Her eyes flared, warning and electric.

“You saw nothing,” she said, voice low, dangerous. “Remember that, Stormridge. Or it will be the last thing you ever see.”

And yet, beneath the steel, I swore I felt her fingers tremble.

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Alpha daughter Ch 329

[880 words]

Chapter 329

Lucien's POV

+8 Pearls

“Forget my face,” Aria said, her voice sharp as a blade drawn in the dark. “Every soul who has ever seen me... truly seen me... is dead. You don't want to join them.”

Her words coiled around me like a curse, and I frowned, trying to make sense of them. Her face was shadowed beneath her hood, her tone carrying the conviction of someone who had killed before—more than once.

“What are you talking about?” I rasped, my throat still raw from blood loss. “Why hide yourself from me?”

She didn't hesitate. Her answer came swift and brutal.

“In battle, no prey is allowed to see the hunter’s true form. That’s the rule I live by. Anyone who does—doesn’t live long enough to speak of it.”

A chill ran down my spine. Wolves didn’t talk like that. Warriors didn’t hide their scars or their faces. But there was something feral in her, something more beast than woman.

And yet... something inside me stirred. Reckless. Hungry. I wanted to see her. To strip away the veil of shadow and stare her straight in the eyes. I wanted to know if she was flesh and blood—or the ghost that haunted me.

But when I dared to meet her gaze, her eyes flared with the threat of death, cold and merciless, and it stopped me in my tracks. My breath caught, pinned under the weight of her unspoken promise.

It was madness. Pure madness. Riley was gone—burned to ash in fire and memory. This woman was not her. She couldn’t be.

And yet the thought clawed at me.

Aria moved closer, kneeling beside me. Her hand pressed against my chest, firm but not cruel. Heat spread through me, strange and soothing, and pain ebbed from my ribs where claws had torn me open. A soft glow trembled beneath her palm, not light exactly, but a pulse of energy, raw and alive.

Healing. She was healing me.

“Consider yourself lucky,” she said flatly. “I’ll spare you once. Only once. Next time, there will be no mercy.”

I clenched my fists, my pride bristling at her words. “Why?” My voice broke low, rough. “Why let me live at all?”

Her lips curved—not a smile, not kindness, but something darker. A cruel reminder.

“Because you’re weak right now. That witch’s brew you drank has chained your wolf. I don’t strike those who are already bound. I prefer a fair hunt.”

Her words cut deep, sharper than any blade.

Aria rose to her feet, her cloak whispering against the floor. “A week from now, the full moon will rise. The Western Pack’s defenses will falter. Then I’ll let you go. You’ll return to Stormridge, heal, and when you’re ready...” Her eyes gleamed, savage and unyielding. “We’ll finish this properly.”

I stared up at her, my chest tight. Her confidence was unshakable, her promise of battle ringing with hunger. It wasn't about cruelty. It wasn't even about vengeance. She wanted the fight itself, wanted it to mean something.

And so I stayed.

Two days passed beneath the Western sky, two endless days of waiting, watching, and recovering. My strength returned slowly, though the potion's grip lingered like chains around my soul.

During those hours, I found myself speaking to her more than I should have. I told her of the East—the frozen rivers that cut through valleys like silver veins, the iron forests where no sunlight could pierce, the bitter winters that forged warriors sharper than steel. She said little, only listening, but I could tell she was memorizing every word, her silence heavier than speech.

1/2

10:26 AM P P

Chapter 329

And I watched her. Gods, I watched her.

+8 Pearls

The way her head tilted when she listened. The impatient drumming of her fingers against her arm when she thought no one noticed. The sharp flicker in her eyes when something caught her off guard.

They were Riley's habits. Riley's eyes.

The first time I noticed it, I told myself it was coincidence. The second time, my gut twisted. By the third, my heart was pounding so hard I could barely hear my own words.

Gods help me, they were Riley's.

Every passing hour my suspicion grew, gnawing at me like a beast from the inside. My mind whispered lies, my heart clung to ghosts, and I was caught between the two, torn apart.

It couldn't be her. Riley was dead. I had seen the flames. I had felt the hollow grave she left in me.

And yet...

That night, she left the narrow room where I was hidden, her hand on the rough wooden door. I expected her usual cold · stride, her blade–sharp composure. But instead, she froze the instant the door opened.

Her body stiffened.

Her breath caught audibly in the silence.

And for the first time, Aria–the woman who had threatened to kill me without blinking, the hunter who swore no prey saw her face and lived–looked as though the ground had been ripped out from under her.

A shadow loomed in the doorway.

Aria’s lips parted. But no sound came.

And my pulse thundered, because if something could shake her... then whatever stood outside was more dangerous than I had ever imagined.

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Alpha daughter Ch 330

[761 words]

Chapter 330

Aria’s POV

Maeryn.

+8 Pearls

I blinked, heart skipping a beat. She stood there, silent and composed as always, yet there was a sharpness in her eyes that immediately set my nerves on edge.

“Professor...” I whispered, disbelief coloring my tone. “What are you-“.

Her gaze didn't soften. Instead, it pierced me, sharp and calculating. "Aria," she said quietly, her voice steady, almost casual, "your behavior has raised suspicions. Alpha Aedric is watching you. He has sent others to observe your movements."

I froze, my pulse hammering in my ears. Aedric. My Alpha. Watching me.

"You... you knew?" I asked, my throat tight.

Maeryn gave a faint nod. "I detected the surveillance. Quietly, I've been masking your traces, covering your tracks. But you cannot remain in the underground chamber for much longer. He's already beginning to notice discrepancies. You must move him."

I glanced at the heavy wooden door, then back at Maeryn, panic and frustration twisting inside me. Lucien was supposed to be safe here no one came down here. This was my carefully chosen refuge.

But Maeryn's eyes didn't waver. "It is no longer safe," she said. "You must find a more secure location. Quickly."

Then my eyes drifted to the man inside the reason for my agitation. Lucien. He had risen slightly when he heard Maeryn, and his golden eyes widened in disbelief.

"Professor?" he breathed, astonished. "I... I didn't expect... you..."

I blinked at the exchange, my mind racing. They knew each other. They had history. The shock on Lucien's face mirrored the one I felt in my chest. I had never seen him look so exposed, so... human.

Lucien's gaze flicked between Maeryn and me, suspicion and curiosity written across every line of his face. "You..." he began, voice tight, almost hesitant. "You're my professor. But... I have so many questions..."

Maeryn's lips curved faintly. "Not now, Lucien. There is no time for questions. Aria must relocate you, or Aedric will discover your presence, and then all of this-" She gestured toward me and the chamber, "-will be undone."

My stomach twisted. Aedric had been subtly suspicious, but I had hoped the underground storage would hold. Now it seemed even that wasn't enough.

I bit my lip, considering options. The chamber was secure—but too visible in the long run, and the risk of discovery was growing by the hour.

Maeryn looked at me, then at Lucien again, and shook her head. Her expression conveyed everything without words: caution, warning, and finality.

“Your bedroom,” she said finally, her voice quiet but firm. “It is the most secure place you could choose. No one would dare enter the room of a White Wolf warrior, not without good reason. That will keep him safe.”

I felt my jaw tighten. My bedroom. My private sanctuary. A stranger—an Alpha of another pack, no less—hidden in there? The very idea made my wolf bristle. It was not something I wanted, not something I could allow lightly.

I looked at Lucien, who met my gaze with a silent trust that sent a jolt of responsibility straight through me. He had survived so much already, and I had saved him. If I refused now, all my efforts would be in vain.

Four days until the full moon. Four days to keep him alive, hidden, and strong enough to face what would come. I could not afford to falter.

I exhaled, forcing my hesitation down, and pointed at him. My voice was steady, clipped, betraying none of the turmoil inside me. “You. Follow me.”

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+8 Pearls

Lucien’s golden eyes flicked to me, then to the corridor beyond, and he nodded once. There was no hesitation, only quiet acknowledgment. The trust in his gaze tightened something inside me, a mixture of tension and reluctant responsibility.

I led him through the corridors, every shadow scanned, every step measured. The corridors of the pack were never truly empty, and even a single careless guard could undo everything. Yet Lucien moved silently beside me, careful and still, like a predator accustomed to the night.

When we finally reached my bedroom, the door felt heavier than usual in my hands. I opened it slowly, eyes scanning for threats, for any indication that we had been followed. Nothing. Safe—for now.

I gestured to the far corner, where a small cot and blankets were already laid out. “Here,” I said. “Stay here. Do not leave this room. Do not test me. Any misstep, and you will regret it.”

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Alpha daughter Ch 331

[1,006 words]

Chapter 331

Aria's POV

I never should have agreed to this.

+8 Pearls

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A day had passed since I smuggled Lucien into my bedroom, and already the walls felt too close, the air too heavy. My sanctuary—the one place where I was untouchable—now carried his scent. It clung to the blankets I'd given him, faint traces of iron and smoke laced with something wilder, something that stirred my wolf in ways I couldn't name.

He didn't move much the first night. His body still fought the remnants of poison, his strength only beginning to return. But tonight, as the moonlight spilled through the window and brushed against his skin, I could see the way his chest rose stronger, steadier. His wolf was healing.

And I hated the way that reassured me.

I sat at my desk, pretending to sharpen blades that didn't need sharpening, while my eyes betrayed me—sliding toward him, drawn again and again to the golden gleam of his eyes. Even dimmed by exhaustion, they were fierce, catching every flicker of light like molten fire.

He caught me staring once.

I snapped my gaze away, jaw clenched, but my wolf betrayed me with the faintest thrum of interest, a restless energy in my blood. It was the same hum I'd felt in my dreams.

Dreams that would not leave me alone.

Last night I had seen us—him and me—standing at the edge of a battlefield, his hand gripping mine, our

Olves circling each other like twin shadows. His voice had whispered my name, not the one the world knew, but something softer, buried deep, as if he had known me all along. I had woken with my heart hammering, my lips tingling with the ghost of a kiss that had never been.

Even now, remembering it, heat pooled in my chest.

I pressed the thought away, but Lucien spoke, his voice low, rough with something unspoken.

“You’re restless.”

I froze, then forced myself to glance at him. “You’re imagining things.”

He shook his head, golden eyes narrowing as if he could see straight through me. “No. I can feel it. The way your wolf shifts when you look at me. You dream, don’t you?”

My throat tightened. He shouldn’t know that. He couldn’t.

“You presume too much,” I said coldly.

But his eyes softened, the hard Alpha edge giving way to something raw, something that stripped the air bare between us. “I know because I dream too. Of someone I lost.”

The words struck like a blade. I turned toward him fully, unable to stop myself. He leaned forward slightly, his body taut with restrained emotion, every muscle alive with it,

“I had a mate,” he said, voice breaking on the edge of memory. “Or at least, I thought I did. She was my light, my anchor. And then she was gone. Taken from me. My wolf has never been the same.” His hand flexed against the blanket, claws threatening to break through. “Every night I see her face in the fire. Every night I hear her scream.”

Pain lanced through his words, so raw it made even my wolf still. I should have stayed silent, let him drown in his own grief. But instead, I found myself whispering, “What was her name?”

He looked at me then, truly looked at me, and for a moment his eyes widened as if he saw something there—something he dared not believe. He didn’t say her name. He only swallowed hard, his voice shaking. “She had eyes like mine. And she never feared the dark.”

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Chapter 331

+8 Pearls

The room was too quiet. My pulse thundered too loud in my ears. My wolf pressed against me, restless, uneasy, and I forced myself to stand, to put space between us.

But the moment I turned, fragments tore through my mind.

Flashes of gold. A hand clasped in mine. A voice—his voice—calling me by a name that wasn't Aria.

I staggered, gripping the desk, breath shallow. It wasn't a dream. Not entirely. My body remembered something my mind refused to yield.

Lucien's scent brushed against me as he rose unsteadily to his feet. His wounds were still raw, but he moved with Alpha determination, his wolf clawing back control. He came close—too close—and I felt the heat of him at my back.

"You felt it too," he said, low, dangerous, not quite a question.

I whipped around, my hooded cloak shifting with the motion. "Stay back."

www

But he didn't move. His eyes burned, not with dominance, but with desperate need. "Tell me I'm wrong, Aria: Look me in the eye and tell me you don't feel the bond scratching at the edges of your soul."

My lips parted, but no sound came. Because gods help me, I did feel it. Every breath I took near him stirred something buried, every glance at his golden eyes cracked another piece of the wall I had built around myself.

I remembered Maeryn's warning—Aedric was watching me. One misstep and everything would fall apart. Yet in this room, with Lucien's wolf pressing against mine in invisible waves, it was as though the world beyond no longer existed.

The dreams weren't dreams. They were memories clawing their way back into me. And Lucien..

Lucien was the key.

I took a step back, forcing air into my lungs, forcing control into my words. Three days,” I said harshly. “Three days until the full moon. Stay alive, stay hidden, and then you leave. Whatever this is “I gestured sharply between us, trying to mask the tremor in my hand, “-it changes nothing.”

He tilted his head, wolfish, dangerous, yet almost tender. “We’ll see.”

The silence stretched, thick with the things neither of us dared say. I turned away first, retreating to the window, clutching the sill until my claws bit into the wood. The moon hung heavy above us, bright and accusing.

And all I could think of was how wrong it felt to be standing apart.

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Alpha daughter Ch 332

[1,116 words]

Chapter 332

Aria’s POV

The dream came like a storm.

+8 Pearls

It began with fire in my veins, the bitter burn of wolf poison coursing through me. My body writhed in agony, every breath clawing against lungs that no longer obeyed me. I choked, coughed and hot blood spilled from my lips, dark and endless.

Faces swam above me, blurred by tears. Dozens of them. Packmates? Strangers? I could not tell. But their eyes... gods, their eyes were full of grief so sharp it felt like claws raking my heart. They cried for me, voices breaking, hands clutching, and in every sound there was loss.

They called a name—again and again, desperate, pleading. Not Aria. Something else. Something buried deep in my bones. I strained to hear it, to grasp it, but it slipped away like water through my fingers.

Then he appeared.

A man's arms gathered me up, strong yet trembling with devastation. His roar split the night, torn from a chest that could not bear what it held. I wanted to answer him, to tell him I was still here, still fighting, but when I opened my mouth no sound came. My voice was gone.

Pain lanced through me—not just mine, but his. His grief hollowed me, pulled me under until I thought my soul itself would

shatter.

I tried to see his face. I needed to. But every time I looked, the world blurred, shadows stealing his features away one thing.

His eyes.

Golden. A storm trapped in molten fire. They burned through the haze, searing me with recognition.

Lucien.

The name tore from me in a scream-

—and I woke with a gasp, chest heaving, sweat slick on my skin.

My eyes

flew

open to find him.

All except

Lucien sat at the edge of my bed, one arm resting lazily on his knee, golden eyes glinting with dark amusement. He was watching me, as though the dream had poured straight into waking reality.

I bolted upright, fury covering the raw terror clawing at my ribs. “Don’t ever ever—watch me while I sleep,” I snapped, my voice harsher than steel. “If you do, you will die.”

He tilted his head, wolfish, unbothered. “Funny,” he said softly, “you just screamed my name. In your dreams, you’re already calling *for* me. Somehow I doubt you’ll kill me.”

Heat rushed to my face—anger, shame, something else I dared not name. “You—” The words tangled in my throat. I shoved the blanket aside, standing so fast the bed creaked. “You know nothing.”

Without another glance, I yanked the door open and strode out, slamming it behind me.

But I didn’t see the look he gave me as I fled—the weight of thought in his eyes, sharp as a blade hidden beneath the gold.

My steps were quick, my heartbeat quicker. The dream still clung to me, every image etched into my skin like scars. The blood. The grief. That name I could not hear.

And his eyes. Always his eyes,

I needed answers.

The night air bit at my cheeks as I crossed the compound, but I hardly noticed. My wolf was restless beneath my skin, pacing,

1/3

10:27 AM P P

Chapter 332

+8 Pearls

snapping, urging me forward. By the time I reached Professor Maeryn’s dwelling, my hands were fists, nails biting into palms.

The door opened before I knocked.

Maeryn stood there, calm as ever, her gaze ancient and knowing. It was as though she had been waiting.

“Aria?” she asked, her voice low.

I stared at her, throat tight. “I dreamed,” I whispered. “Or.. no, it was more than a dream. I was dying. Poison burning me alive. People were crying over me, calling me by a name I couldn’t hear And then—” My voice faltered. I forced myself to continue. “A man. Holding me. Screaming for me. His pain was like... it was mine. And I saw his eyes.”

“Gold,” Maeryn finished for me.

The word made me flinch. I wrapped my arms around myself as if to keep from unraveling. “What does it mean? Why do I feel like I’m living someone else’s life when I close my eyes? Why does it hurt so much?”

She stepped aside, letting me enter, and I obeyed, sinking into the chair she gestured to. The room smelled of herbs and old parchment, steadying in its familiarity.

“You’re not living another’s life, Aria,” she said gently. “You’re remembering your own.”

Her words struck like lightning. My chest clenched. “That can’t be. I know who I am.”

“Do you?” she asked, tilting her head. Her eyes pierced through me, kind yet merciless. “Memories buried do not die. They resurface when the soul is strong enough to bear them. Do not fear them, child. The pain you feel is proof that the truth is returning to you.”

I shook my head, pressing my palms to my temples. “But I had another name. I heard it—felt it—but I couldn’t grasp it. Who

was I?”

Her silence was heavier than any answer.

“Please,” I said, my voice breaking. “Tell me. Tell me who I am.”

She sighed, old sorrow etched into the sound. “Not yet. The time is not right. For now, you must endure. The truth will come, but if you reach for it too soon, you will destroy yourself—and perhaps others as well.”

Frustration burned in my gut, but I swallowed it. “And Aedric?”

The faintest shadow crossed her face. “He suspects something. Your movements, your defiance... they haven’t gone unnoticed. He has eyes on you.”

I stiffened. My wolf bristled, lips curling in a silent snarl.

“Be cautious,” Maeryn warned. “Guard your steps, and above all, guard him.” She didn’t say Lucien’s name, but she didn’t have to. “If Aedric learns you’re hiding an enemy Alpha, it will be both your doom and his.”

I looked down, my fists trembling. Lucien’s face rose in my mind unbidden, that infuriating smirk, those impossible eyes.

“I can’t lose him,” I whispered before I could stop myself.

Maeryn's gaze softened, though sorrow lingered. "Then you must walk a knife's edge, Aria. Hide your heart as well as you hide him. Because if Aedric sees even a spark, he will snuff it out."

Her words chilled me more than the night ever could.

When I left her chambers, the moon hung heavy above the pack grounds, silver light cutting sharp lines across the shadows. My wolf prowled restlessly beneath my skin, caught between fear and longing.

And though I told myself to push the dream away, to forget the man's anguished cries, I couldn't.

Because when I closed my eyes, I still saw them—those storm-tossed golden eyes.

Lucien's eyes.

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Alpha daughter Ch 333

[1,080 words]

Chapter 333

Aria's POV

Two days.

Only two more days until the full moon—until Lucien must leave.

+8 Pearls

I walked out of Professor Maeryn's cottage with my chest tight, every word she had spoken still pricking at me like thorns beneath the skin. Memories stirring. Secrets buried. Aedric's suspicions sharpening. The weight of it all pressed down until I felt my wolf pacing restlessly inside me, claws scraping against the walls of my ribs, urging me to run.

The night air was sharp with damp earth and pine, the kind of cold that slid beneath the skin. I inhaled deeply to steady myself—only to freeze.

There.

A trace on the wind.

It wasn't the smell of the forest, nor the faint smoke of distant hearth fires. It was something sharper. Human, but not just human. The musk of a wolf soldier masking his presence in the dark.

A tail.

My jaw clenched. My wolf bristled.

I didn't need to turn to know who had sent him. "Aedric," I whispered under my breath, low enough that only the wind carried the name.

Of course. He wouldn't trust me. My erratic behavior, my secrecy these past nights—it had drawn his suspicion. And instead of facing me directly, he had set shadows to follow.

I bit down hard on my tongue, tasting the iron tang of blood. Anger burned in me, but beneath it—something colder. Guilt.

I quickened my steps, boots striking the packed dirt path with sharp, clipped rhythm. My wolf urged me to move faster, to shed

my

skin and outrun them all. But I couldn't—not now, not with Lucien hidden in

my den.

By the time my door came into view, my heart was hammering. I reached for the handle, desperate to slip inside before whoever stalked me made themselves known.

"Aria."

The low voice rumbled behind me, deep and edged with steel.

I stiffened. My hand froze on the handle. For a moment, I couldn't breathe..

Slowly, I turned my head. Aedric stood only a few paces away, tall and broad—shouldered, moonlight glinting off the scar at his jaw. His eyes burned like frostbitten embers, locked on me with the weight of Alpha authority,

I forced my hand off the handle and pulled the door shut behind me, blocking his view inside. My heart was a wild drum in my chest, but I schooled my face into calm.

“Aedric,” I said evenly. You startled me.”

He didn’t answer right away. His nostrils flared, sharp and subtle, as he tested the air around my door. I felt every muscle in my body tighten. Was he scenting Lucien? Could he?

“You’ve kept yourself locked away these last few days,” he finally said, voice smooth but coiled. “Are you unwell?”

“I’m fine,” I replied too quickly, then steadied my tone. “Training’s been exhausting. I needed rest.”

He took a step closer, the pressure of his aura brushing against mine like a blade against skin. “Then perhaps I should come in. Sit with you. Make sure you are truly recovering.”

1/3

10:27 AM P

Chapter 333

+8 Pearls

“No.” The word snapped from my mouth before I could leash it. I softened my expression quickly, forcing a small, polite smile. “I mean—I prefer privacy in my own quarters.”

His eyes narrowed, suspicion flaring. My wolf growled inside me, sensing the danger.

“You’re hiding something.”

The words were a knife. He didn’t ask. He stated.

I met his gaze with fire. “You think I’d lie to my Alpha?”

He didn’t blink. “A wolf on the border was bitten by rogues the other night. The very next morning, he vanished. That night- you were on patrol.”

My stomach dropped. He knew. Or at least, he guessed.

I lifted my chin, baring my throat in defiance instead of submission. “So you suspect me? You think I helped him escape?”

His silence was damning.

Heat flared in my veins. I spun on my heel, shoved the door open with a crash, and threw my arm wide. “Then go on, Aedric. Search. Tear my den apart if you must. I told you I don’t let men into my chamber unless they are my mate, but if it will ease your mind, then by all means—inspect every corner. See for yourself if I am hiding anyone.”

The words spilled like venom, my wolf snapping at his. My pulse pounded so loud I could hardly hear.

7

For a long moment, he simply stared at me, fury battling with doubt in his eyes. Then, slowly, he stepped back.

“You think this is a game, Aria,” he said, voice low, nearly trembling with restrained rage. “But this is about more than you. Our Pack stands at the edge of war. We need strength. Stability. Loyalty.” His gaze hardened, Alpha authority rolling from him like thunder. “It’s time you stopped resisting. Time you accepted me as your mate. With our bond, the Western Pack will rise untouchable.”

The air around us thickened, choking. My wolf snapped, baring teeth inside me, but I forced myself *to* hold his gaze. I didn’t speak. If I did, the scream clawing up my throat would spill out, and I would shatter.

Finally, with a frustrated snarl, he turned and stalked into the night. The tension in the air eased, but it left me hollow, trembling.

I slammed the door shut, leaning against it as my breath came in ragged gasps. My nails bit into my palms, leaving crescents of blood.

Duty. Loyalty, My Pack.

And then—Lucien. His face. His golden eyes that haunted my dreams. The strange ache of memory I couldn’t shake.

I pressed a hand to my chest, caught between two worlds tearing me apart.

“Aria.”

The voice was softer this time, close. Too close.

I spun around.

Lucien stood only a few steps away, shadows clinging to him as though he’d grown out of the night itself. His wounds had mostly healed, the strength in his frame unmistakable even beneath the plain clothes I’d given him. His golden eyes glowed faintly in the dimness, catching every flicker of my turmoil.

“I heard,” he said quietly, his gaze never leaving mine. “You told him your room has never been open to another man. That only your mate may cross that threshold.”

My heart stuttered. “And what of it?”

He tilted his head, studying me with something that made heat rush to my cheeks. Then, with the faintest curl of his lips, he asked,

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Alpha daughter Ch 334

[1,101 words]

Chapter 334

Aria's POV

For one suspended heartbeat, I thought the air had stopped moving.

+8 Pearls

Lucien's words—"Does that mean I need to take responsibility for you?"—still rang in my ears like the aftershock of a strike. My chest tightened, my pulse skipping as though my wolf itself had stumbled. His golden eyes held mine, storm-bright and unyielding, as if daring me to deny the bond threading invisible between us.

My lips parted, but no sound came out. I could feel the heat rising in my face, betraying me, and I hated myself for it.

I dragged in a breath, sharp and burning, and forced steel into my voice. "I don't need you to take responsibility for me, Lucien. You are not my mate. Not now. Not ever."

His jaw tightened, but I pressed on, each word sharpened into a blade to cut apart the dangerous warmth blooming in my chest. "I am a White Wolf warrior. My loyalty belongs to my Pack and my Alpha. Saving you doesn't change that. I only kept you alive because I don't want you dying too soon. After all..." My throat bobbed as I forced the lie out. "...one day we'll meet on the battlefield, and when that day comes, I'll be the one to tear you down."

Lucien's gaze burned hotter, not with anger but with knowing. He saw through me, I could feel it—through every layer of armor I tried to wrap around myself. His lips parted, like he meant to speak, to unravel the truth I refused to acknowledge.

But then-

BANG.

The door crashed open, the sound splitting the air like thunder.

I jerked around, blood freezing in my veins.

Aedric.

He filled the doorway like a storm, broad shoulders nearly brushing the frame, eyes lit with an Alpha's fury. His scent rolled into the room—sharp, commanding, laced with dominance. My wolf shrank back against my ribs, a primal reaction to his unchecked rage.

How had I not sensed him?

Then I realized the truth. He hadn't left at all. He had cloaked his aura, hidden his presence, waiting. And I—fool that I was—had been too consumed by Lucien to notice.

I bit down hard on my tongue, self-loathing churning hot in my chest.

Lucien moved instinctively, placing himself half a step forward, protective, even wounded. But it was useless. Aedric had already seen enough. His nostrils flared, eyes narrowing on Lucien like a predator locking on prey.

"You dare," he snarled, voice thick with betrayal, "hide him beneath my nose?"

His command aura snapped out, slamming into the room like a wall of fire. I staggered but forced my shoulders back, locking my knees against the instinct to bow.

Guards flooded the threshold at his back, weapons half-drawn, waiting for his word.

"Aedric "I started, but he cut me off, his voice cracking like a whip.

"Silence! You've defied me, Aria. You've dishonored your Pack, your bloodline, me!" His eyes flared darker, Alpha power coiling like chains. "Guards—seize him!"

The air shifted as the soldiers moved.

“Wait!” I snapped, throwing myself between them and Lucien. My wolf roared, white fire bristling along my skin. For a moment the guards hesitated, but Aedric’s rage pressed harder.

Γ

1/2

10:27 AM P p

Chapter 334

+8 Pearls

“What excuse could you possibly give?” His gaze skewered me, unforgiving. “Why protect an Eastern wolf? Why endanger us

all for him?”

Every word was a blade, cutting deeper because they were questions I had no right answer for.

But I couldn’t—wouldn’t—let them take Lucien like this.

I lifted my chin, forcing calm into my voice, even as my heart thrashed. “I did not keep him to betray you. I kept him because I will not let him die like a dog in the dirt. He belongs on the battlefield, Aedric. He belongs to me, as my opponent. I want to meet him blade to blade, claw to claw, when the time comes. Not watch him waste away in shadows.”

The truth in my voice was half a lie, half the only way I could live with myself.

Aedric’s glare didn’t soften. Suspicion still burned in his eyes, his wolf prowling close beneath his skin. “And if I doubt your word? If I doubt your loyalty still?”

The words came out before I could stop them, raw and desperate. “Then bind me to you. If my loyalty is still in question—let us pair.”

The silence that followed was absolute. Even the guards froze.

Aedric blinked, as if he hadn’t heard correctly. “What?”

I forced my voice steady, though my hands trembled at my sides. “Two nights from now. At the full moon. Let us pair, and I will stand as your Luna. Then you’ll have no reason to question me again.”

Shock rippled through the room. I could feel Lucien's gaze boring into me, golden eyes blazing.

"No," he ground out, voice low and furious. "Don't. Aria, I know you don't want this. I know you don't want him."

My throat closed. My heart screamed. But I didn't look at him. If I did, I'd shatter.

I kept my eyes locked on Aedric's, even as my hands trembled so hard my claws nearly pushed through skin.

For a long breath, Aedric only stared, weighing my words, my soul. Then, slowly, a smile spread across his face, savage and triumphant.

"At last," he murmured. "At last you see sense." His gaze flicked to Lucien, venomous. "Guards. Take him to the dungeons."

"Wait." My voice cracked, but I forced it steady. "On the full moon—release him. Send him back to the East. He belongs to me, and I will have him on the battlefield when his wolf is strongest. Only then will it be worthy."

Aedric considered, then nodded sharply, still glowing with joy from my vow. "So be it. Two nights from now, Lucien returns. to the East. And you" His eyes gleamed as he looked at me. "You will be mine."

He turned, signaling his men. "I will begin preparations for our bonding ceremony. Our Pack will finally rise."

The guards dragged Lucien toward the door.

"Aria!" Lucien's voice cracked like a whip, fury and hurt mingling, but I couldn't meet his eyes. Couldn't let him see the tears burning mine.

My wolf howled inside me, torn between duty and the truth clawing at my chest. My hands trembled uncontrollably, but I kept them at my sides, forcing my spine straight.

This was the only way. The only way to protect us both.

The only way not to lose everything.

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Alpha daughter Ch 335

[1,158 words]

Chapter 335

Aria's POV

The moon was almost full, two nights since the gates had closed behind Lucien.

+8 Pearls

For forty-eight hours I had shut myself away, refusing the light, refusing the whispers of the pack outside my chamber. The Omega attendants came and went like shadows, their hands gentle, their words muted. I let them dress me, feed me, braid my hair, but my mind was elsewhere—always elsewhere. I forced myself not to think of him. Not of Lucien's defiant eyes. when he was dragged away. Not of the way his wolf had howled through the bars, promising he would never bow, never break.

I told myself Aedric was an Alpha of honor. If he said Lucien would be released, then he would be. He wasn't the kind of male to kill in the dark. Still, my wolf stirred uneasily beneath my skin, restless with every heartbeat that dragged me closer to tonight.

The coronation.

The night I would be bound.

The night I would no longer be free.

The attendants fussed around me, fastening the silver-threaded cloak across my shoulders, smoothing the midnight-blue gown that trailed like a river behind me. Their hands smelled of lavender and fear. I sat there, unmoving, my body nothing but a vessel for the ceremony to come.

When the door burst open, I almost didn't look up. But the scent hit me before the voice. Old parchment, herbs, the sharp bite of wolfsbane.

"Aria."

Professor Maeryn.

210

Her footsteps were quick, furious, the heels of her boots clicking across the marble floor. I lifted my eyes and saw her face- lined with worry, her wolf close to the surface.

One glance at me, and her expression collapsed into sorrow.

“You don’t want this,” she breathed, her voice trembling.

My throat was tight. “It isn’t about what I want.”

She crossed the room in three strides, lowering herself before me until her hands cupped my face, forcing me to meet her gaze. The touch of her palms was warm, grounding, the way it had been years ago when she taught me my first runes, my first discipline of wolf and mind.

“Child,” she whispered, and I hated the crack in her voice. “You do not belong here, I always believed you would find yourself again, that your path would return to you in its own time. But the Moon Goddess—she has twisted the weave. She has forced your hand too soon.”

Her thumb stroked my temple as if she could wipe away the truth. “If you bind yourself to Aedric, you will regret it until your last breath.”

Something inside me flinched, a spark of rebellion. But I crushed it.

“Professor.” My voice was steel wrapped in silk. I took her hands from my face and held them between mine. “You think I don’t hear the same whisper? You think my wolf doesn’t rage against these walls?”

Her eyes searched mine desperately, as if she could still reach me.

“But listen,” I continued, softer. “Three years I have bled for the Western Pack. Three years I have fought in their ranks, sworn their oaths, carried their scars. Every warrior here knows my name. Every pup here looks to me with trust in their eyes. I will not abandon them.”

1/3

10:27 AM P P

Chapter 335

+8 Pearls

How

“Aria-”

“No.” I cut her off, shaking my head. “Perhaps I had another life. Perhaps once I belonged elsewhere. But that past is a ghost. This pack—this soil soaked in blood and sweat—this is what I am bound to now. Protecting it is my duty. My honor.”

Her lips trembled with unspoken words, but she never had the chance to speak them.

The door opened again.

His scent reached me first—iron, smoke, the commanding weight of an Alpha.

Aedric stepped inside, his presence filling the chamber as though the walls bent to him. His golden eyes flicked from me to Maeryn, his mouth curving into the faintest of smiles.

“So,” he said smoothly, “she’s already decided.”

His tone left no room for argument. He strode forward, not sparing Maeryn another glance. “Professor, your place is in the hall. Not here, not now. When the moon reaches her height, you will sit with the others and watch as Aria is crowned with the Luna’s diadem.”

CHIR

Maeryn stiffened, her wolf bristling beneath her skin. For a heartbeat, I feared she might defy him. But then her shoulders slumped, and her eyes found mine once more.

There was sorrow there. Regret. And something else—warning.

But I held her gaze steady, showing her my resolve, even if my wolf clawed against it.

Finally, she turned and walked out, her cloak sweeping behind her like the last whisper of freedom.

The door shut. Silence pressed down.

Aedric’s eyes softened as he looked at me. Slowly, deliberately, he extended his arms, as if to draw me into his embrace.

And my body—my traitorous body—flinched away.

It was instinctive. The recoil of a wolf refusing the collar. My heart thundered, shame burning my cheeks.

His arms froze midair. For a long moment, the silence was suffocating.

Then he lowered them with a quiet chuckle, rubbing the bridge of his nose as though brushing away the sting.

"I understand," he said lightly, though his voice carried a hidden edge. "You want to wait. Until after the ceremony."

He smiled then, wide and confident, as if my rejection hadn't cut at all. As if he were so certain that once the moon bore witness, I would yield.

"I will be waiting for you, my Luna," he promised, bowing his head slightly.

Then he turned, speaking over his shoulder to the attendants. His words were crisp orders about timing, about my veil, about the sacred procession through the hall. They nodded furiously, their hands trembling.

Aedric lingered only long enough to let his dominance fill every corner of the room, then left with the easy stride of a male already victorious.

The door closed behind him, and the chamber felt colder.

The Omega attendants hovered in silence, adjusting my gown, smoothing my hair again. But my wolf thrashed inside me, slamming against the cage of my ribs.

had spoken of honor. Of duty. *Of blood and soil.* And yet, **as** the moon rose higher, I could not silence the echo of Maeryn's voice in my ears.

You do not belong here.

Her words clung like a scent I couldn't shake, like a shadow at my back.

2/3

+8 Pearls

10:27 AM

Chapter 335

And for the first time in days, Lucien's face surged to the forefront of my mind—his eyes, fierce and unbroken, like a promise.

I bit down hard on the inside of my cheek, until I tasted blood.

Tonight, under the full moon, I would be crowned Luna of the Western Pack.

And yet a part of me—the deepest, wildest part of me—howled in protest.

THE

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Alpha daughter Ch 336

[1,123 words]

Chapter 336

Aria's POV

+8 Pearls

The hall was alive with the scent of anticipation, coppery from blood and the faint tang of wolf fur. Torches lined the wide marble floor, their flames dancing in reflection off polished obsidian pillars. Elder warriors, their faces etched with age and wisdom, sat in rigid silence, eyes sharp as hawks. Around them, the younger warriors shifted with barely concealed excitement, a low hum of growls and whispers threading through the room like a living current.

I walked through it all, my hands held gently but firmly by the Omega attendants, each step weighted with the echoes of the past three years. My gown, woven of midnight-blue silk and embroidered with silver threads that shimmered like stars, brushed against the polished floor. My wolf, Sia, trembled beneath my skin, restless and coiled like a spring. I kept her caged, just barely, forcing my breath steady as the crowd's gaze pressed down on me.

At the center of the hall, the altar rose in solemn majesty. A circular stone platform, carved with the phases of the moon, caught the torchlight in a way that made it seem as if the moon itself had descended into the chamber. Moonstones embedded along its rim glowed faintly, pale and cold, yet alive. I could feel the weight of it—the history of every Luna who had stood there, every oath sworn in silver light.

The elders watched me with quiet intensity, some nodding approvingly, others scrutinizing every movement. The warriors flanking the aisle stiffened, their paws brushing against the hilts of their swords, the scent of their bloodlust mingling with reverence. I had been one of them for so long; I knew the eyes that admired, the eyes that feared. And tonight, all of that would converge onto me.

Then Aedric stepped forward, tall, commanding, a shadow of gold in the torchlight. His gaze locked onto mine, his aura radiating control, dominance, and an unspoken hunger that made Sia snarl in caution. He reached out, his hand warm, strong, brushing my wrist first, teasingly, drawing a spark from Sia and me both. My pulse leapt.

“You are ready,” he said, his voice low, commanding, and I could smell the predator beneath his Alpha control. He slid his hand over mine, but when I didn’t fully yield, he tightened his grip just enough to remind me I could not resist completely.

The Moon Ring hovered above the altar, a silver halo that would crown me, seal me as Luna, bind me to him. The attendants began their chant, low and resonant, in the ancient tongue of the Western Pack. Every word vibrated in my bones. Sia surged, coiling and pressing against my ribs as if she wanted to tear free. I swallowed, forcing myself to step closer to the altar, each motion measured, though Aedric’s hand now pressed against mine like an anchor and a chain.

Aedric leaned closer, murmuring, “Feel the power, Aria. Feel what it means to be mine.” His fingers brushed my knuckles, sending sparks up my arm, tugging not only at my body but at Sia, at something deep and primal inside me. He pulled me a half-step forward, then another, guiding me to the Moon Ring with a possessive insistence that made my wolf growl in frustrated caution.

“Do not resist,” he commanded softly, and I could feel the weight of his scent, strong and intoxicating, pressing into me. I wanted to pull away, to run, to leap into the wild and leave the ceremony behind, but my purpose today kept me tethered. The wolf inside me coiled tighter, muscles tensing, claws scratching at the urge to erupt.

He slid his hand up my arm, brushing the soft curve of my shoulder, a delicate yet undeniable claim, and I froze. My breath caught. My instincts screamed, my heart thumped erratically, but I held steady. I could not yet give in—not here, not now. My wolf whined in protest.

“Good,” he murmured, sensing my hesitation and tightening just slightly again, a predator testing the bounds of his prey. “You are mine, and tonight, the pack will see it.” His voice carried through the hall, a warning and a claim, his dominance radiating outward, brushing the other wolves like a wave.

I forced a deep breath, letting Sia settle just a fraction, and took the next step toward the altar. Aedric’s grip never loosened. His thumb brushed mine in a slow, deliberate caress, his scent wrapping around me like chains of fire. The crowd watched, some murmuring, some stiffening in anticipation, all aware of the tension coiling between us like a drawn bowstring.

The Moon Ring glimmered above the altar, silver and cold, and I could feel the pull of destiny pressing on my shoulders. Aedric’s eyes never left mine, the unspoken command clear: belong to me, now and forever. I nodded slightly, swallowing the tight

knot in my throat, forcing Sia into silence, even as every instinct screamed that my freedom—and my truth—was elsewhere.

I was poised to speak the oath but...

1/2

10:28 AM P P.

Chapter 336

“...Aria... you are mine!”

+

+8 Pearls

The words tore through the hall like a blade. My breath caught. Every wolf in the chamber froze mid-growl. My heart leapt violently, Sia screaming beneath my ribs, claws raking against my restraint. I spun around, almost stumbling on the polished marble, and there he was—Lucien. His golden eyes blazed, an Alpha storm incarnate, and his scent crashed into me in wild, intoxicating waves. My wolf screamed recognition, pure, urgent, untamed.

The elders stiffened immediately, their paws twitching toward weapons, eyes narrowing. The younger warriors growled low in warning, nostrils flaring. And Aedric....

His fangs glinted in the torchlight, and a low, guttural growl rolled from his chest. “Lucien! What... are you doing here?” His voice was sharp, brittle with anger, and his aura snapped outward like a whip, challenging Lucien with the full force of his Alpha dominance.

Lucien stepped forward, unfazed, chest rising and falling with controlled power. The scent of his wolf assaulted every sense, golden and sharp, unrestrained. My knees trembled, Sia writhing beneath my skin, desperate to leap, to claim, to answer the pull that had haunted my blood for years.

Before Aedric could roar again, a shimmer of shadow appeared near the entrance. Professor Maeryn stepped into the hall, her

cloak whispering like silk in the torchlight. Her hands rose, weaving subtle magic, creating a protective ward around the altar. “I brought him,” she said, calm and commanding. “It was my doing, Aria. He is here because of me. And now... the five-year bond, the Alpha’s promise—it is time you know the truth.”

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1.6K

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Alpha daughter Ch 337

[659 words]

Chapter 337

Aria's POV

+8 Pearls

Aedric's roar ripped through the chamber, a sound so powerful the torches flickered violently, casting jagged shadows across the marble. His wolf pressed against my senses, furious and hungry, and Sia responded in kind, coiling and growling like a living whip inside me. My heart thumped wildly, every nerve on fire.

The moon reached its zenith, spilling silver across the altar, painting the hall in ethereal light. Every shadow sharpened, every breath crackling with power. Sia screamed, urging me forward, guiding me toward Lucien's golden blaze. My feet moved on instinct, stumbling, leaping over the polished floor until I was in front of him.

"Mate!" The word tore from my throat before I could stop it. My body moved of its own accord, arms wrapping around him, and he caught me without hesitation. The world contracted—no elders, no warriors, no Aedric—just us. The scent of his wolf wrapped around me, solid and real, grounding me.

Aedric's crimson face loomed above us. "Aria! You will refuse him! You are mine!" His roar shook the hall, reverberating against pillars and marble alike, his wolf straining to break free.

Lucien planted himself in front of me, chest out, fangs bared—not in aggression, but in absolute protection. His eyes held mine, golden and stormy. "Back off," he growled. "She is not some Aria you think you know. Her true name... her real name... is Riley. She has always been mine."

My mind spun. My heart thrashed. Sia's claws dug into my ribs, urging, begging, demanding. The scent of Lucien, raw and possessive, wrapped around me like a

second skin. I turned to Maeryn. She gave the slightest nod, just enough to grant permission, guidance, and reassurance.

I inhaled sharply, feeling the weight of centuries of Luna before me, the moonlight kissing my skin. The oath I was meant to speak to Aedric, the bind I had been raised to accept, shattered in the presence of truth. My fingers clenched around Lucien's, his strength anchoring me against the chaos.

"I am yours," I whispered. The words were mine and Sia's, my heart and my wolf claiming him in full, without hesitation or regret.

Lucien's eyes softened, relief and triumph warring with the golden storm of his Alpha dominance. He held me close, grounding me, claiming me, our wolves intertwining, singing together in a way that made the very stones beneath our paws

vibrate.

Aedric's growl was a low, furious rumble now, hands clenching into fists at his sides. He demanded, "Riley! You will reject him! Now!"

Lucien tightened his grip around me. "She is not yours. She is mine," he said, his voice low, deadly, and final. Every Alpha instinct he had flared outward, repelling Aedric's claim like a shield of pure storm.

I staggered, overwhelmed by scent, sound, and raw power. Thoughts collided: the pack I had sworn to serve, the duty I had embraced, the vows of blood and moonlight—all collided with the truth that had been buried inside me, the memory of a bond older than years, older than ceremony.

Maeryn's hands glowed faintly, her protective magic forming an unbroken circle around us. The elders' murmurs turned to shocked silence, the younger warriors frozen in awe and disbelief. The Moonlight spilled across us, silver and infinite, marking a moment that would be etched in the pack's memory forever.

"Leave with me," he murmured. "I will tell you everything. Your name, your past, the bond we share... and we will never look back."

Sia roared in affirmation, raking the air, claws grazing the marble. Lucien's wolf intertwined with hers, forming a shield of power and possession. Together, we stepped back, away from the altar, away from Aedric's enraged roar.

The full moon crowned us in silver light. The ceremony that was supposed to bind me to another, that was supposed to mark me as Luna of the Western Pack, was broken—not by treachery, but by destiny.

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Alpha daughter Ch 338

[881 words]

Chapter 338

Aria's POV

+8 Pearls

The forest roared around us, alive with snapping branches, jagged roots, and the coppery tang of blood and fear. My lungs screamed, my legs burned, and yet Sia surged beneath my skin, coiling and stretching with raw power, pushing me faster than I thought humanly—or wolfishly—possible. Lucien was beside me, every muscle taut, his golden eyes scanning the shadows with predatory precision. His scent poured into the air, a fierce, golden blaze that made Sia roar in recognition and hunger.

Behind us, the Western Pack's pursuit was relentless. Growls cut through the night, paws pummeling the earth; scents thick and bitter, trailing like a curse. Every step I took, I could feel their desire for blood closing the distance. And yet, weaving through the chaos, I sensed the faint ripples of magic in the air. Maeryn. Silent, unseen, she bent the forest to our favor—fallen trees tripping our pursuers, roots twisting to delay them, mist rising to cloud their vision. Without her, we wouldn't have survived the first ten minutes.

I tried to focus on the present, but fragments of memory clawed at the edges of my mind, unbidden. Dark cells, the smell of rot, the cold weight of chains pressing into my wrists. Faces I loved—and who had betrayed me. My father, mother, even my brother... all turned against me, leaving me alone in a black pit of despair. Pain, hunger, abuse. Every scream, every insult, every lash pressed itself into my soul.

And then, as if stepping out from the shadows of memory, a face appeared. A man I had seen in my dreams, a vague shadow that had haunted my nights. He held me, his arms a sanctuary, whispering that he would always protect me. The memory shivered and flickered, details sharpening... until the shadow coalesced into the golden-eyed man running beside me now. Lucien. It was him. It had always been him. Riley. That was my name. My true name. The truth slashed through me with all the force of a wolf's bite.

I gasped, Sia surging in frantic excitement. “Lucien...” The syllable burned on my lips, half in disbelief, half in relief.

He turned to me, the storm in his golden eyes colliding with mine. “Riley... *my* Riley,” he whispered, voice breaking, trembling with raw emotion. “It’s really you... you’re alive.”

Before I could respond, before I could even process the truth, his hands were on my face, ripping away the mask that had hidden my identity for so long. His touch was electric, reverent, desperate. And the moment our eyes locked fully, tears streaked down his face. He pulled me into a fierce embrace, trembling, his wolf snarling in pure, uncontained joy. “Riley... it’s really you... my Riley... alive...”

The relief was almost overwhelming, almost. Almost, because the sounds of the Western Pack grew louder again—snapping branches, the barked orders, the pounding of paws against earth. We had only a few seconds to savor recognition before the hunt resumed.

We ran again, hearts pounding in synchrony, wolf and human, mate and mate, bound *by* instinct and fate. We darted through thick underbrush, leapt across fallen logs, ducked under twisted vines. Every corner held death, every shadow a threat. But with each pulse of adrenaline, more fragments of memory returned. Hints of my childhood in the Eastern Pack, lessons learned under cruel eyes, the training that had shaped me, the whispers of a destiny I had almost forgotten. And through it all, the golden thread of Lucien’s presence held me upright, grounded, tethered to truth.

Hours or maybe minutes—passed in a blur of motion. Exhaustion clawed at my muscles, Sia coiled tightly, claws slicing the dirt, teeth bared in unrelenting determination. The Western Pack had narrowed the gap, relentless as wolves in hunger. And then, the forest opened into a ravine, sheer walls on either side, rocks jagged and treacherous. Ahead, a dead end. Behind us, relentless pursuers. Trapped.

Lucien’s hands pressed firmly against my shoulders, grounding me. “Riley... stay with me. Focus. We survive. Together.”

I nodded, letting Sia surge forward, leaping instinctively with him, trusting his body, trusting his wolf. My memory flickered again: the prison, the chains, the screams, the nights of torment. And over it all, his promise—golden eyes, warmth, protection. The bond was undeniable. I was Riley, and he was mine.

We landed on the rocky outcrop, panting, hearts hammering. The Western Pack was still closing, snarling, teeth bared. And then... the wind shifted. A scent, clear and sharp, cutting through the fear and smoke of the hunt. East Pack. The insignias gleamed in the moonlight, banners snapping, paws pounding the earth with precision. Reinforcements. Rescue.

Lucien's arms tightened around me, his wolf coiling protectively around mine. "They're here," he growled, golden eyes blazing with triumph and relief. "Riley... we're safe. For now."

1/2

10:28 AM **PP**

Chapter 338

+8 Pearls

I exhaled shakily, letting the moment wash over me. Sia purred, twisting and snapping in celebration. For the first time in years, clarity returned. I was Riley. Alive. Unbroken. And in Lucien's embrace, I felt the world stabilize, even as danger still lingered.

Lucien lowered his head, golden eyes scanning mine. "Riley... this is just the beginning. But you're mine. Always."

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Alpha daughter Ch 339

[984 words]

Chapter 339

Lucien's POV

+8 Pearls

The forest reeked of blood and pursuit. My wolf strained against my ribs, urging me to turn and fight, to rip through the Western warriors baying for our blood. But I couldn't—not when her hand was locked in mine, trembling yet unyielding. Not when fate had given her back to me after five long years of tormenting silence.

Aria—Riley. Even with her face hidden beneath the mask, even when doubt clouded her eyes, I felt the truth in every heartbeat that tethered us. She was mine. She had always been mine.

But the West would not stop. Their growls rolled through the trees like thunder, their footsteps pounding the soil in relentless rhythm. I pulled her forward, lungs burning, refusing to slow even as the terrain tore at my boots.

And then—paws. Heavy, disciplined, coming from ahead. The scent hit me—sharp steel, cold wind, home. Eastern Pack Relief washed through me like ice water. They had come.

From the darkness burst Carmen and Duke, their soldiers at their heels, armor glinting faintly beneath the moonlight. Carmen's sword caught what little light there was, her aura blazing with authority. Duke's wolf padded beside her, low growls promising blood.

They had come because I had ordered them to. If I did not return by the full moon, they were to march west. And they had obeyed.

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The Western pursuit faltered the moment they saw the Eastern crest. Growls turned uneasy, the pack shifting as hesitation rippled through them. They might have hunted us, but they would not provoke outright war with the East. Not tonight.

Carmen's eyes snapped to mine as she broke through the line, urgency tightening her words. "Alpha. You gave the order. If you hadn't returned, we were to bring you home. We waited until the last hour. And then we came."

Duke shifted back from wolf to man, his broad shoulders gleaming with sweat. "We'll clear the path. You've been gone too long."

My chest tightened. For the first time in weeks, I felt the tether of my own pack tighten around me. "Good. Hold them off."

The Eastern warriors spread like a wall, shielding us from the West's advance. Carmen and Duke pressed close, guiding us until the forest swallowed sound and pursuit dulled behind us. Only when we reached the cover of a cliffside hollow did we

stop.

Carmen turned on me then, her eyes sharp as daggers. But it wasn't me she looked at—it was her. At Riley. At the masked

woman still

"Who is this?" she demanded, voice cold, laced with suspicion. "I heard the whispers on the way. The white wolf of the West. Their champion." Her gaze hardened into steel. "Tell me you didn't drag her with you."

Riley stiffened, her wolf bristling in answer, but before she could speak, I stepped between them. My chest rose and fell with the weight of what I had to say. "She is mine. My mate."

Carmen's face twisted in shock, pain flashing raw across her features. "Your mate?" Her voice cracked, grief bleeding into anger. "Lucien, no. She is the enemy. The white wolf who tore through our warriors, who carries Western blood on her claws. And you claim her?"

Her words cut, but I did not yield. My wolf surged with dominance, my voice low, certain. "She is not my enemy. She is fate."

Carmen flinched as if I'd struck her. Her hand flew to her sword, blade sliding free with a hiss. Her pain was naked in her eyes. "How dare you? Riley's body is barely cold in our hearts, and you would forget her for another? For this?"

Riley. Her name on Carmen's lips nearly undid me. My throat tightened, memories clawing forward—her laughter, her scent, the bond that had been ripped from me. Five years of silence, five years of believing her gone. And now—now she stood beside me, her identity veiled only by a mask.

But Carmen couldn't see it. Not yet.

Her blade leveled toward Riley, her voice trembling with grief and rage. "I will not let you disgrace Riley's memory. I will not

1/2

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Chapter 339

let you betray our pack by claiming a Western wolf."

+8 Pearls

Riley's breath hitched, and my own wolf snapped, golden eyes blazing as I stepped closer, dominance pressing hard. "Put your sword down, Carmen."

But Riley's hand rose—not to strike, not to shield, but to her mask. She tugged it free, slow, deliberate, her gaze locked on Carmen's.

The world held its breath.

Carmen's sword slipped from her grip, metal clattering against stone. Tears welled instantly, her lips trembling as recognition crashed through her. "Riley..." Her voice was broken, hoarse. "It's Riley..."

And then she surged forward, arms flung around Riley, clinging to her as if afraid she might vanish again.

SCAIN

My chest ached watching them—sisters not by blood, but by something deeper, stronger. Carmen wept openly, her body trembling against Riley's.

"I am Carmen...Riley...I am your sister, do you remember me?"

Riley gasped against Carmen's embrace, clutching her back. "I remember you," she whispered. "Always calling me sister, Always by my side."

Carmen sobbed, pulling back just enough to cup her face. "We thought you were dead. We mourned you. We buried you in our hearts."

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My hands shook as I touched Riley's back, needing the anchor of her warmth, her reality. My voice broke as I spoke the truth I had carried like a blade in my chest. "I told you," I said to Carmen, to the world, to anyone who would listen. "She is mine. Fate does not lie."

"Her memory is only temporarily sealed, but she is Riley."

Carmen's gaze flicked between us, still dazed, still swimming with grief and wonder. She shook her head, choking emotion. "Why? Why here? Why with them? Why now?"

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Alpha daughter Ch 340

[1,247 words]

Chapter 340

Aria's POV

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+8 Pearls

and steel-

The moment Carmen's arms locked around me, something inside me cracked open. Her scent—wild wrapped around me like it always had in my earliest, hazy dreams. My body stiffened at first, but then her voice trembled against my ear, a single word breaking through years of fog.

“Riley...”

It hit me like lightning. Riley. My name. My real name.

The world tilted. I clutched at her leathers, and flashes ripped through my skull. Carmen was smaller once, barely tall enough to reach my shoulders, always darting around me like an impatient pup.

“Big sister!” she used to call, her dark braid flying behind her as she laughed. “When I grow up, I'll be just like you!”

The memory stabbed through the hollow shell I had been living in. Not Aria, the mask, the blade forged for the West. Riley. I

as my wolf

was Riley. Carmen's sister in arms. The white wolf who had once belonged to Stormridge Pack. My chest ached Riley. I

stirred inside me, stretching against the chains of years stolen.

“I remember...” My voice cracked. Tears blurred my vision as Carmen pulled back just far enough to search my face, her own cheeks streaked with wetness. “You... you were always chasing after me. Always laughing. Always...” My words faltered. The memories came like broken shards—bright, sharp, incomplete. My family. The prison. The darkness. Screams. Betrayal. And above it all, the faceless man who once swore to protect me. His face finally sharpened in the storm of my mind. Lucien.

But why... why was I in the West?

The answer stepped out of the shadows.

“Because of me,” came Maeryn’s voice.

I froze. Carmen stiffened, her sword half–lifted, but Lucien’s low growl held her back. The old professor walked toward us, her robes marked with the stains of battle and ash, her eyes far older than when I last remembered them. She looked at me as though seeing a ghost she had carried for too long.

“You deserve the truth, child,” she said, her voice trembling.

I pulled away from Carmen, meeting Maeryn’s gaze. “The truth? What truth? Why can’t I remember? Why did you give me another name?”

The air grew heavy, charged with the scent of blood and betrayal. Maeryn folded her hands in front of her, as though bracing for judgment.

“Five years ago, the wolf poison ravaged your veins. It killed you, Riley. You lay still in your coffin, and the pack mourned. But on the night of your funeral, when the moon rose high, I... I could not let you go.” Her eyes glistened with unshed tears. “I *took* your body. I carried you to Stormbane Pack, into the heart of the West.”

Every hair on my body stood on end. I wanted to move, to snarl, to deny her words, but I couldn’t.

She continued, voice low. “There was only one thing that could restore you. The Moonshade Veyra. A relic locked away in the vault of Aedric Stormbane, Alpha of the West, once my student. He laughed at me when I begged him. Until I told him who you were. A white wolf once in a thousand years. The power you carried could change the balance of the packs.”

Lucien’s fists clenched. His wolf surged against his skin, a snarl vibrating his chest. But Maeryn’s next words softened the blow.

“He agreed.... but demanded a condition. That when you rose again, your memories would be erased. That I would weave the spell myself. You would forget Stormridge, forget Lucien, forget Carmen. You would wake as Aria, a soldier of the West, bound by loyalty to him for three years.”

My breath tore from my lungs. The ground tilted beneath me.

Maeryn fell to her knees, her face etched with anguish. “I saved you. Or I damned you. Perhaps both. I see now the price was

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Chapter 340

+8 Pearls

too great.”

For a heartbeat, silence pressed down on us like a mountain.

Then Lucien moved first. His wolf burned in his eyes, but his voice

from the grave. You fought for her life when the rest of us had alres rough with something deeper. “You carried her body

her again. Whatever mistakes you made after... you gave her back

said goodbye. Without you, I would never have seen us. For that, I can only thank you.”

Carmen dropped to her knees beside the professor, clutching her hands. Her tears fell freely now, but her smile wavered through them. “You saved my sister. You gave me another chance to hold her. How can I curse you for that?”

My own heart twisted. If not for Maeryn’s defiance, I would still be ashes beneath the earth.

Slowly, I knelt before her and took her trembling hands in mine. “Professor... You gave me a life I wasn’t meant to have. Yes, it **was** stolen. Yes, it was twisted. But I’m breathing. I’m here. And for that... I am grateful.”

Maeryn’s tears spilled at last. She bowed her head into my hands. “Thanks dear.”

The tension broke like a storm passing. For the first time since I had woken as Aria, I felt the weight shift—not gone, but shared.

Carmen wiped her face with the back of her hand, her wolf aura flaring with stubborn strength. “Then let’s stop mourning the past. We need to decide what comes next. If the West learns Riley is alive, they’ll march on Stormridge. We can’t let them ignite another war.”

Lucien’s jaw tightened. “Then I’ll face them all myself.”

But I shook my head. “No. Too much blood has already been spilled. This war can’t be won with steel alone.”

Both of them turned to me. My wolf pressed against my skin, demanding I speak the truth clawing at my chest.

“I need to face Aedric,” I said. “He brought me back. He chained me. If this is to end, it must start with him. Maybe... maybe I can convince him to stand down.”

Carmen’s eyes widened with fear. “Are you insane? He’ll kill you—or worse.”

Lucien snarled, his grip on my hand like iron. “I won’t let him near you again.”

“You can’t protect me from everything.” My voice trembled, but my resolve held. “The West wants their weapon back. The East won’t forgive their crimes. If I don’t face him, this will spiral into war. Maybe I can use what he did to me against him.”

Maeryn lifted her head, her face streaked with tears but steadier now. “If this is your choice, Riley, then I will not leave you unguarded again. My magic will shadow your steps. This time, you will not face him alone.”

I let out a long breath, my wolf pacing within me, restless, hungry for answers. Scars burned on my soul, but scars could become armor.

Lucien pressed me to his chest, his heartbeat fierce and unyielding. “If you go, I go. Nothing will tear me from your side again.”

And Carmen—sweet, stubborn Carmen—raised her chin, her sword gleaming once more. “If my sister walks into the lion’s den, then I’ll walk with her. To the end.

I looked at them all—Lucien’s fire, Carmen’s loyalty, Maeryn’s guilt and love—and for the first time in years, I felt whole.

“I am Riley,” I whispered, the name anchoring me as the moonlight poured over us. “And I will take back what was stolen.”

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