

# A Broken Alpha Heiress' Revenge

[ 1,194 words ]

Chapter 51

Riley's POV

I didn't say anything.

Just reached into the shopping bag and pulled out the dress.

د

+8 Pearls

Red. Spaghetti straps. Generic cut. The **kind** of thing you'd find in the clearance bin of any downtown **boutique**. Cheap, boring, **and** completely forgettable.

Even when they tried to pretend they cared—they couldn't be bothered to do it **right**.

"How **thoughtful**, Luna Zara," I said, lacing each word with sarcasm, dragging out "thoughtful" like a knife across glass.

Her smile twitched. She knew exactly what I meant

"If you don't like it," she said awkwardly, "I **can** find something else. Something more your taste."

I tossed the dress back at her. "You do realize I'm still covered in bruises, right? You want me to **show** up at a formal event looking like I walked through a warzone?

my back. And

The welts Alaric left behind with his belt had faded, but the shadows were still there—on my arms, my **thighs**, the worst of it—my shoulder—still bore the angry red stretch of half-healed scars. A strappy dress like this would put every mark on display.

Zara blinked like she'd only just remembered. "I—I didn't think-

"Yeah, I figured. You don't think much when it comes to me."

"I'm sorry, truly," she murmured, lowering her eyes. "I wasn't being considerate. I apologize."

“Forget it. Just give me the money. I’ll buy my own dress—one that actually fits.”

My body had never **caught** up with me. Years of malnourishment behind cell doors will do that. Where I should’ve filled out, I never did. I was small, **fragile**—looking. **Thin** in ways that screamed neglect.

Everyone in the Ebonclaw Pack had model—perfect genes. Alaric stood at 6’1. Kael Vale was even **taller**. Zara had once been a beauty queen at Mooncrest Academy.

Met

I barely hit 53, with bones like bird wings and not a curve in sight. If I didn’t have this face—one that mirrored **every** sculpted feature of theirs—no one would believe I was the Ebonclaw heiress at all.

The dress Zara bought **wasn’t** mine—it **was** tailored to Scarlett’s measurements,

Of course it was.

She turned red **from** neck to ears and fumbled inside her purse before shoving a card at me. “There’s... ten thousand credits on here. If it’s **not** enough, **just ask.**”

And with **that**, she **practically ran**.

I didn’t waste time. Threw on a hoodie **and** left the estate, flagged a hover—**cab** straight to the **Nightshade Mall**.

But I **didn’t** go to a dress boutique.

I walked into a suit tailor’s shop

Formal. Functional. Full coverage.

Exactly what I needed.

The assistant helped me pick a fitted black suit. I took it into the changing room. As I zipped it up and turned to face the mirror, something caught my attention just outside the door.

139 PM d

Chapter 51

+8 Pearls

A guy. Young. Slim. **Clean**—cut. No Pack crest visible, but judging by the leather briefcase and polished shoes, he worked for someone high up.

He held up a **ruined** jacket. “**You** really can’t fix it?”

The tailor grimaced. “It’s Moonfang silk, **sir**. Top grade. **But** the burn is right through the chest. You’d need **a** master stitcher to reweave the fibers, and even then it won’t be perfect.”

The guy cursed under his breath. “Damn it, Our Alpha has a summit tonight—this was supposed to be his custom piece.”

He looked like he was about to cry.

I glanced at the jacket in his hands. It was exquisite. Rich texture. Tailored to someone broad in the shoulders and lean at the waist, I’d only seen this level of craftsmanship a few times—always on visiting Alphas from the Stormridge Pack or Northhaven.

**Moonfang** silk could cost a small fortune per yard.

And repairing it would cost even more.

He turned—and **caught sight** of me.

my bones.

I was still in my black suit, brushing invisible **lint** from the sleeve. The **shoulders** gave me power I didn’t have in The clean **lines** skimmed my **waist** and made my pale skin glow like polished pearl. Under the lights, I didn’t look like a victim. I looked like someone in control.

He rushed over, desperation plain on his face.

“You’re the tailor **here**, right? Can you help?”

I blinked. “What?”

“This **jacket**. Please. If you can patch it before sundown, I’ll pay anything. Anything”

I should’ve told him no.

But the way he looked at me—like I mattered—like he needed me... it made something flicker deep inside. Something **I** hadn’t felt in a long time.

“Say yes,” Nyra whispered faintly. “Let them see what your hands can do. Let them remember who you are.”

“Can I... embroider something over it?” I asked cautiously.

He hesitated. “Like a **patch**?”

“More like a crest. I could use Moonweave—something **detailed**. Artistic.”

The man looked torn.

“You know Moonweave?” he asked, eyebrows rising.

“I learned it... a while **ago**.”

I didn't tell him I learned it behind prison **bars**. That the warden saw potential in my hands and put me under a master seamstress **who'd** been jailed for stealing royal silks.

That **those** women broke me, starved me, beat me—but never let anyone ruin my fingers.

Beordse my **hands** meant profit.

I

I didn't know if I was any good. Maybe I was just better than the rest of the broken women I stitched beside.

But I could try.

“Alright,” he said at last, teeth clenched. “You're right. The hole's visible anyway. Might **as** well make it art.”

Chapter 51

He handed over the jacket like he was handing me his last breath

I took it and sat down, rolling up **my** sleeves.

“Do you have thread?” I asked the **tailor**.

She brought over a box of high—end silks—black, gold, crimson.

I chose gold.

Moonweave embroidery required precision.

+B Pearls +8

Before stitching. I split one thread into forty-eight slivers—each thinner than a hair. The assistant's **jaw** dropped. The guy with the jacket looked like he'd seen a ghost.

I let the needle glide between my fingers, In. Out. Under. Over.

It was meditative. Addictive.

I stitched in silence—just me, the thread, **and** the silk.

Each movement was deliberate. The threads formed the shape of a flower. **A** peony, bold and unfurling. Layer upon layer of golden petals shimmered under the light. I added tiny silver strands in the center, mimicking **morning** dew.

The whole thing pulsed with life.

When I finished, I sat back **and** exhaled slowly.

The guy took the jacket with trembling fingers—and gasped.

“This... this is unreal. You didn't fix it—you elevated it.”

The staff all crowded around, murmuring admiration.

I smiled. faint and tired. “Glad it's good enough.”

“**Good** enough? It's perfect.” He looked dazed. “What do I owe you?”

“Nothing.” I said, “Call it a **favor** to the Moon. I needed something good today. This helped.”

He thanked me **again**—profusely—and hurried out with the jacket,

When I stepped outside, the sky had gone dark.

Streetlamps lit the sidewalk in soft golden hues,

I flagged another hover-**cab**, returned to the estate—only to find it empty.

Alaric, Zara, Scarlett, and Kael were already gone.

I didn't care.

In fact, I was halfway back up the stairs when a black SUV pulled up, window down, driver glaring.

“Get in,” he snapped. “**Alpha and** Luna said to bring you to the auction.”

I didn't move.

He frowned "Well"

I narrowed my eyes. "Get out. Open the door."

He scoffed "**You** don't have hands?"

Wrong answer

3:30 PM

Chapter 51

I took one step **toward** him. My presence alone made him flinch.

"Remind them." Nyra purred. "Remind them who you are."

They still hadn't figured it out.

This wasn't about me begging to be accepted.

This **was** about them needing me to marry into Stormridge for the Pack's survival.

They needed me.

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

[ 868 words ]

Chapter 52

Riley's POV

I slid't spare the driver **another** glance.

→ +8 Pearls.

Turned around and walked straight back into the Ebonclaw estate, heels echoing against the marble like a declaration of **war**.

He barked at me like a nutt, thinking just because he **drove** for **Alpha** Alaric, he could speak down to me. Guess he forgot- Tm not a slog. I'm the daughter they buried and now suddenly need.

Tetum weat

Which **he** did.

It didu beven take a full minute before I heard his panicked footsteps behind me. Gone was the arrogance he was all smiles now, practically **groveling**.

"Miss, please—Alpha and Lama are waiting for you at the summit. If you don't come now, we'll be late."

didn't answer.

it down on the leather couch, poured myself a cup of jasmine tea, and sipped it slowly. Deliberately.

The driver hovered like a fly in summer heat, pacing and fidgeting like a rogue in heat season.

"Please." he tried again, nearly begging, "it's my fault. I spoke out of turn. But the summit's already begun—if we don't leave dow, we'll miss it entirely."

I finally looked up, locking eyes with him.

"Know your place." I said quietly. "You're a driver, not a Pack Elder. If it's **not** your concern, stay out of it."

He paled "Yes, Miss. I understand."

No, he didn't. But at least he pretended to.

I

finished the last sip of tea and checked the clock. 8:00 PM sharp. The summit must've already started.

I let another thirty minutes tick by just to be petty. Then I rose, set the cup **down** gently, and said, "Let's go."

He looked like he'd just been pardoned from a death sentence. Practically sprinted to the SUV to open the door for me.

This time, I didn't argue. Slipped into the **back** seat, one leg crossed over the other, and leaned back with my eyes closed. Nyra stirred faintly inside me.

"You should've made him crawl," **she growled**.

"No." I answered silently. "That comes later. After I've **won**."

Third Person POV

At the same time, the summit was already halfway through

The Ebonclaw delegation **sat** clustered in the front row of the Silverfang Auction Hall—Alpha Alaric, Luna Zara Kael Vale, and of course, Scarlett

Atari's jaw was locked tight, face stormy with barely leashed **fury**. "Where the hell is that ungrateful brat? It's been over thirty

Zata twisted her hands in her lap. "Alaric, **do** you have her number? Just call her."

If I had it, don't you think I would've already tried he snapped. "You don't have it?"

"Thought you had it, she hissed, visibly flustered.

340 PM

Chapter 52

Kael **groaned and** pulled out his phone. "I'll call the driver."

The line connected quickly.

"Where are you?" **Kael** barked. "The summit started half an hour ago.

The driver's voice was hesitant. "We just left the estate, Young Alpha..."

"You what?"

Kael's voice exploded like a whip crack.

"We told you to pick her up before the summit began!"

"She...refused to leave. I tried-"

“I don’t care what she did,” **Kael** growled. “She better be here before the final lot is announced.”

He hung up without waiting for a response.

Across the row, Scarlett was paying attention to something else entirely.

Her gaze **had** been fixed all night on one man—the Stormridge heir from Northhaven.

Lucien Duskgrave.

+8 Pearls

He stood alone, detached from both council and crowd, like a phantom who tolerated no presence but his own. There were whispers everywhere, of course.

That he was

was cursed.

That he couldn’t bond with a mate.

That every Luna chosen for him either ran, died, or lost her mind before the mating bond could fully seal.

They said he was born during a blood eclipse—an omen of doom—and marked by a red peony on his chest, one that no healer could erase and no silver could **scar**

The blood peony. The mark of the Lonely Alpha.

They said he was destined to live without love. To rule without mercy. That even the Moon Goddess herself turned her face from him.

Scarlett had believed the stories.

Until now.

Until she saw him in the flesh.

He was breathtaking

Angular cheekbones piercing silver eyes, a jaw carved like it belonged to a god of war. And that suit—gods, that suit.

It wasn’t just expensive. It was **divine**.

Midnight—black. Hand—stitched. And across his chest, a single, blood—red peony embroidered with **such** precision it looked

Scarlett's breath caught.

No one who dressed like that no one who looked like **that** could be **as** monstrous as the rumors claimed. Could they!

Jealousy twisted in her gut like poison.

Chapter 52

+8 Pearls

Riley.

That monster... was supposed to marry B

Riley, the forgotten daughter. The girl who'd spent half her life in chains, then returned like a ghost the Pack wished would disappear again.

Why should she be gifted a **man** like **that**?

Scarlett's lips pressed into a thin line.

If the Stormridge Prince was truly as cruel as **they** said—so be it. Let Riley rot in that marriage.

But if the rumors were wrong... if this Prince was powerful and desirable... then Riley didn't deserve him.

No.

Scarlett wouldn't stand by **and** let Riley get a single shred of happiness.

Not when she'd spent her whole life **stealing** scraps of attention that rightfully belonged to her.

She grabbed her phone and typed out a message quickly.

The driver glanced at **Riley** through the rearview mirror. She was leaning back in the **seat**, eyes closed, serene and composed.

But in his eyes, a cold glint flickered.

He had just received the message.

And it came from Scarlett.

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[ 611 words ]

Author's POV

Inside the auction **hall**, the atmosphere was electric.

+8 Pearls

A massive screen projected the blueprint and development plan of the East Ridge territory—land that had become the centerpiece of tonight's bidding war. The crowd leaned in, eyes blazing with ambition.

The auctioneer's voice rang out clearly, "Up next, we present the most anticipated item of the evening—the East Ridge territory. Located near Moonshade Bay, this land boasts exceptional spiritual energy and strategic significance. Starting price 10 billion lunar stones. Each raise must be no less than 100 million."

Whispers turned into murmurs, and murmurs into tension—soaked silence.

Everyone knew: securing this land meant controlling the beating heart of East Haven's future.

Kael Vale, heir to the Ebonclaw Pack, was the first **to** raise his paddle. "Ten point five billion," **he** announced with calm authority.

Representing the Vale family. Kael had been sent with a clear directive from **Alpha** Alaric: win this auction, at all costs.

Before **his** voice had even faded, Ronan Duskcliff, the brooding heir of another powerful Blackclaw, raised the **stakes**. "Eleven

billion."

With two Alphas—in—waiting taking the lead, the crowd's blood heated. Paddles flew up like war banners, each bid more aggressive than the last.

But as the numbers climbed past 20 billion, smaller families and corporations began bowing out, resigned to watching the

titans clash.

Then, just as the bidding showed signs of slowing, a voice rang out from the front.

Thirty billion,” said a man with calm detachment, holding up his paddle.

Gasps rippled through the room.

It was Lucien Duskgrave’s assistant—Stormridge Pack’s right hand beta, speaking on behalf of the enigmatic and feared Northern Alpha heir.

**Lucien** himself sat relaxed in the front row, draped in a tailored steel–grey suit that clung to his broad shoulders like it had been **woven** for a god. His silver eyes were unreadable, his presence a cold and commanding as the northern snows he

hailed from.

The Ebonclaw Pack looked stricken.

They’d expected the Stormridge Pack to show strength—but this **was** annihilation.

Everyone else had **raised** their bids in cautious millions or single billions. Stormridge raised **it** by ten.

Karl’s face darkened. He leaned toward **Ronan**, voice **low**. “We’ll need to combine resources.

Ronan gave a short, reluctant nod.

Karl stood and **raised** his paddle again. “**Thirty–five billion.**”

He shot Lucioara defiant glance.

Lucien didn’t even spare him a look.

His assistant raised the paddle. “Forty–five **billion.**”

The room fell into stunned silence.

Karl’s knuckles whitened around the bidding paddle. “Fifty billion”

Chapter 53

Assistant: "Sixty"

Kael: "Sixty-five."

Assistant: "Eighty"

Gasps erupted.

Ronan and **Kael** both stood up. Their stunned expressions were mirrored across the entire auction hall.

Eighty billion?

Kael growled, "Lucien Duskgrave, are you insane?"

At last, Lucien turned his head slightly, his gaze as glacial as ever.

"Bid **again**," he said calmly.

It wasn't a challenge. It wasn't a threat. It was a fact.

**Bid** if you dare—but I won't stop.

The sheer confidence in his **tone sent a** chill down **Kael's** spine.

+8 Pearls

Even **united**, Ebonclaw and Blackclaw's war chests wouldn't stretch beyond a hundred billion—not without crippling their packs financially.

Alpha Alaric sat like a stone statue in the back, lips pressed into a tight line. His fury was palpable, but his hands were tied.

Ronan, too, looked pale beneath his steady exterior. His pack had liquidated assets just to fund this one shot at expansion.

Kael gritted **his** teeth. "Eighty-five billion."

The assistant didn't even blink. "One hundred billion."

Science fell, absolute **and** final..

Kael and **Ronan** exchanged a long look—defeat written clearly on both their faces.

They had lost.

“One hundred billion once. One hundred billion twice. One hundred billion—sold!” the auctioneer called out, dropping the hammer with a thunderous clap.

Stormridge **Pack** had claimed the East Ridge.

Lucien Duskgrave sat hack, still as a mountain, not a flicker of emotion on his face.

Ebonclaw and Blackclaw could only simmer in **their** rage and humiliation.

The night belonged to the North.

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[ 759 words ]

Chapter 54

Author's POV

As expected, the Stormridge **Pack's** Duskgrave family—a lineage of Alpha royalty—had dominated the auction without blinking. Dropping one hundred billion credits as if it were nothing, they crushed the competition with terrifying ease. Kael Vale exchanged a glance with his father, Alpha Alaric of the Ebonclaw Pack. Both understood what had to be done. There was only one way now to tie themselves to the East Crescent project—by marrying Riley to Lucien Duskgrave, the enigmatic Alpha prince of Stormridge.

Kael rose, adjusted his suit, and approached Lucien with practiced calm, extending a hand. “The Duskgrave name precedes you, Alpha Lucien. And tonight proves the legends true.”

Lucien didn't show much expression but accepted the handshake with cold politeness.

Alpha Alanic followed, forcing a **grin** so wide it folded his weathered face. “Now that the auction is over, how about we continue the conversation in the banquet hall? Perhaps over some wine?”

Lucien gave a brief nod. Before he turned, he flicked a subtle glance at his Beta, Duke immediately followed the auction host to complete the transfer paperwork.

By the time they reached the banquet hall, Riley had also just arrived.

The driver spotted Scarlett first. He rushed over to her, slipping something small and discreet into her hand. "Scarlett, here's what you asked for."

He vanished just as quickly.

Scarlett turned her gaze to Riley, who was scanning the opulent **banquet hall**, unaware of the danger stalking her.

Scarlett grabbed a glass of juice from the refreshment **table** and discreetly poured the powder from the packet into it. After giving it a swirl, she waved over a passing **server**.

"Please deliver this drink," she said, nodding in Riley's direction with a smile.

The server nodded and carried the glass over to Riley.

Riley **didn't** think much of it. It wasn't unusual for servers to offer **drinks** at formal gatherings like this. Besides, she hadn't eaten anything all evening. Starving, she took the drink, grabbed a few pastries from the dessert table, **and** started nibbling while sipping the juice.

Scarlett watched as she drank, satisfaction gleaming in her eyes.

She sauntered over, hips swaying like a predator closing in. "Look at you, stuffing your **face** like you've never seen **real** food before. Embarrassing

Riley was just about to take another bite when she heard that smug, nasal voice.

Her gaze sharpened. "Scarlett Are you begging to get slapped tonight?"

"You'd better back off before I smash this **cake** in your face. Let's see **who's** more embarrassed then."

Scarlett's smirk froze, fury bubbling beneath her skin, She wanted to claw the smug expression off Riley's too-beautiful face.

But not yet. Not when victory was moments away

After all, Riley had just drunk the spiked juice.

"You won't be so smug in **five** minutes Scarlett succred

Riley narrowed her eyes. "What the hell does that mean?"

Scarlett leaned in, lips barely moving, mouthing the **words** That juice was drugged. Get ready to make a scene, whore.

+8 Pearls

Chapter **54**

She thought Riley wouldn't catch it..

She was wrong

Riley knew how to read lips—and those words cut through her like a blade.

Her pupils contracted in shock. **And** right on cue, the heat began to bloom beneath her skin—rising, surging, crashing over her in violent **waves**,

Her face flushed crimson. Panic set in.

Scarlett's triumphant stare only made it worse.

Riley lunged for her, but Scarlett dodged **easily**, folding her arms and grinning like a viper ready to strike.

“Aw, what's the matter, slut? Losing control already?” Scarlett taunted. “You think you can marry Lucien Duskgrave? prince of Stormridge? Let's see how much he wants you after tonight—when you're stripping naked and writhing in front of

That every elite Alpha in the room“.

Her laughter rang **out**, sharp **and** cruel..

The world tilted. The chandeliers overhead flickered and warped, casting strange shadows across the hall.

The fire beneath Riley's skin made her want to tear her clothes off. Every fiber of her being screamed to escape, to run, to find cold water—anything-

She dug her **nails** into her arms, clawing her own skin, trying to use **pain** to stay lucid.

No one noticed her struggle. Everyone else was mingling, drinking, laughing.

She couldn't fall apart here. Not in front of them.

She turned and bolted for the exit, heart thundering.

But Scarlett wouldn't let her go that **easily**. She darted forward and grabbed Riley's arm, putting on a sweet, fake smile,

"Riley, come on. Dad and Mom are over **there**. Let's go say hi together, yeah?"

Riley fought her grip, but the heat was making her limbs weak and sluggish, From across the banquet hall, Alpha Alaric, Luna Zara, and Kael heard Scarlett's and looked over.

voice

"There she is Zara beamed. "Riley, come here, sweetie. I want to introduce you to Alpha Lucient"

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[ 791 words ]

Chapter 55

Riley's POV

My body was trembling uncontrollably now, the drug coursing through my veins like wildfire. Beads of sweat gathered on my forehead, dripping down my temples.

I bit down **hard** on the tip of my tongue, forcing a jolt of pain to keep myself grounded, then yanked my arm free from Scarlett with all the strength I had left. I didn't expect the force of it—she stumbled backward and crashed into a side table. knocking over glasses of wine and delicate pastries. The sound shattered the hum of conversation around us, and heads turned instantly.

Gasps erupted from the guests, but I didn't care.

Limping, staggering, I fled toward the exit, **runing** out the furious voices of Alpha Alaric and Luna Zara as they barked my name behind me.

I couldn't stop. I had to get out,

Somewhere in my blurred vision. I caught a flicker of someone watching me. A tall man in a black suit. For a second, his golden eyes narrowed as if something about me felt familiar to him. But he didn't move. He didn't remember. Why would he

I pushed past the banquet doors.

Every step **was** a battle. My legs felt like iron weights, and my balance was gone. I crashed into more flower arrangements, vases shattered in my wake, but I didn't stop. I couldn't. I needed somewhere dark, quiet—somewhere to ride **this** out. Then suddenly, a figure blocked my path.

“Riley? Did you drink?” Maddox's voice. Familiar, confused, too close

He stepped forward **and** pressed a hand to my **burning** forehead.

The moment his **cool** fingers touched **my** skin, something inside me cracked wide open.

The drug surged. My body moved on instinct—mindless, starving for relief from the unbearable heat. My hands rose, clinging to his shoulders, pulling him closer.

My face burned hotter. My vision blurred further. I could barely see his face, but I knew that voice. **That scent.** Maddox. His body stiffened under my touch, and I **could** feel the moment hesitation clawed at him, He should've pulled away. But he

didn't.

We were close. Too close. I could smell his cologne—sharp, **clean**, familiar. I could see the soft down on his cheekbones under the golden light, the way his wolf—dark eyes **traced** my face like he was trying to remember every line.

His hand slipped around my waist. I felt the strength in it. The security. The betrayal.

A thousand memories surged forward. Nights spent wrapped in **that same** embrace, Warmth. Love. **Pain.**

And then the knife he'd plunged into my back.

I gasped, blinking away the heat—induced **haze**, and his face swam into view—Maddox. The man **who'd** once held my heart. then shattered it.

ury

Deanbreak. I shoved him away with everything I had left. My hand struck his **cheek** with a loud, satisfying crack. “**Stay** the hell away from me,” I mapped, my voice raw with loathing

The look on his face was hollow. **Ashen.** He didn't speak. Couldn't.

† didn't give him a chance.

I turned and bolted toward the elevator, stumbling, dragging my legs beneath me. I barely made it inside before the doors closed, sealing me off from the chaos,

3:40 PM

Chapter 55

+8 Pearls

Leaning against the wall, I panted hard, the fire inside me growing more savage by the second. I was losing the fight.

By the **time** I reached the lobby, I could hardly hear anything. The sounds of the hotel were muffled, distant, like I was underwater.

I stumbled out the doors.

The **night** air didn't **help**. The world spun violently, and the lights blurred into ghostly streaks. My knees gave out. I **fell**

forward.

And crashed into something hard. Solid. Warm.

A body.

The impact bounced me back, but before I hit the **ground**, I reached out and **grabbed** the collar of the man in front of me.

He fell with me, pulled down by my weight, and we landed in a tangled heap.

I blinked, dazed—and looked up.

Straight into a pair of cold, piercing eyes.

Silver-flecked. Sharp. Regal.

My breath caught.

He was the tall man I'd seen earlier—the one who'd watched me **as** I stumbled out of the banquet hall.

And the same man I once begged for a cigarette outside the hospital, when my world was falling apart.

I tried to call out to Nyra. My wolf. My anchor. My **last** defense.

Please, I pleaded inwardly, wake up—help me

But there was nothing. No answering growl. No protective surge of instinct.

Just silence.

The bond between us felt muted, like someone had thrown a thick, suffocating blanket over it.

Panic twisted in my gut. Nyra had never ignored me before. Even in the darkest moments, she was always there—snarling, pacing, clawing to protect me.

Now! **She was** gone.

The realization hit me like ice: Scarlett hadn't just drugged me. She'd **used** a witch's brew—something brewed to suppress the

wolf inside.

My blood wasn't just boiling from heat and humiliation—it was cursed.

And without Nyra. I was defenseless.

Alone

And falling deeper into the fire.

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[ 664 words ]

Chapter 56

Author's POV

“Alpha, the East District property transfer is complete..”

Duke approached the sleek black vehicle with a folder in hand and a proud smile on his face—only for **his** words to die abruptly in his throat.

Because what he saw made his brain freeze..

There was his notoriously cold and untouchable Alpha, Lucien Duskgrave, pinning a girl to the hood of the car in a rather scandalous position.

The girl wasn't just any girl either—her cheeks were flushed like ripe peaches, her breathing ragged, lashes fluttering against damp skin. Her soft hands, clearly driven by the **drug** coursing through her, fumbled clumsily at Lucien's chest.

Then came a rip.

A button popped off and rolled onto the pavement. The front of Lucien's shirt tore **open**, revealing a chiseled, toned chest bathed in moonlight.

Duke stood frozen, eyes bulging, mouth open in a perfect "O" expression stunned beyond recognition.

His thoughts raced, Boss? The same Alpha who was practically celibate, who didn't even flinch when courted by she—wolves from noble lineages? The same Lucien Duskgrave who's immune to feminine wiles is now... doing this... in public?

Then, another thought struck him like a lightning bolt.

The Matriarch!

Lucien's grandmother had been worrying herself into old age over his love life. She even sent Duke on a mission to "find him someone decent."

And now.. this?! This was divine intervention. A live—action romance blooming on the hood of a luxury car.

Quick as a fox. Duke whipped out his phone, snapped a photo with a swift click, and sent it straight to the Matriarch. His lips curved into a satisfied smirk.

She's going to be thrilled.

Just as he was relishing the idea of becoming the family hero, Lucien's sharp glare sliced through the moment. Without a word, the Alpha delivered a precise, controlled chop to the back of the girl's neck.

Riley, the writhing, drugged young woman, slumped into his arms and went **limp**.

Duke's smirk vanished. His hopes crumbled into dust.

Wait... what?!

**This** wasn't how these things went in all the Alpha romance novels he'd read. Wasn't this the part where the **Alpha** carried her into the backseat with burning eyes and growled, "You're **mine**"?

Why did Lucien **always** ruin good **narrative** flow?

Duke blinked slowly, confused, until Lucien shot him a flat look. "Seen enough?"

Jolted Lark to reality, Duke coughed awkwardly and **stepped** forward was just **about** to begin **reporting** the transaction

details when his eyes landed on Riley's unconscious face.

"Wait, her?"

Lucien arched an eyebrow. "You know her?"

"She's the girl who stitched the peony into your suit, Alpha," **Duke** said, a **hint** of surprise **still** in his voice.

Chapter 56

**Understanding** flickered in Lucien's eyes. "So it's her."

+8 Pearls

e feeling settled in his chest.

His gaze lingered on the delicate features of the unconscious woman in his arms. A strange feeli

The East District project was critical for his expansion into the Ebonclaw-dominated trade lines. **His** appearance tonight **had** to be impeccable—which was why that particular **custom** suit had been prepared for weeks.

Only, a week ago, a small burn had appeared mysteriously near the chest seam. It had clearly been sabotage, likely from one of the rival Packs that feared Stormridge's influence spreading into the city.

He'd sent the suit for repair, not expecting much. That **embroidery**...

The peony that had replaced the damage was exquisite. The craftsmanship was rare, elite—reminiscent of a masterpiece he'd **once** spent thirty **million** on at an auction: a silk tapestry called Longevity in Pines and Cranes. It had been a birthday gift for his grandmother, who **still** treasured it above all.

He'd tried to acquire more from the same artist, only to learn there were only two surviving works by that mysterious. embroiderer.

Longevity in Pines and Cranes, and one unfinished piece called Blush of the Nation.

The latter had been nearly completed when, for unknown reasons, the embroiderer had abruptly vanished a month ago- disappearing from both the trade registry and the **artisan** circles.

And now, here she was.

Passed out. In his arms.

Lucien's fingers brushed a strand of hair from Riley's damp cheek.

His eyes darkened.

He had questions now. Many. And he would get answers.

Starting with her.

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

## **- in Vengeance 57**

[ 711 words ]

Third Person's POV:

"Alpha?"

+8 Pearls

Lucien Duskgrave snapped out of his thoughts, glancing down at the intricate peony stitched in vibrant silk across his chest, then to the unconscious girl in **his** arms.

If her embroidery skills were truly exceptional, perhaps **she** could even complete The Blooming Grace. That way, he might surprise his grandmother again during this year's Mooncycle Festival.

Without further hesitation, **he** scooped Riley into **his** arms and placed her gently in the car. But the moment he touched her, he **sensed** something was terribly wrong. Her body was **too** hot, her breathing shallow—clearly drugged.

"Hospital. **Now,**" he ordered.

When Riley woke up again, she was in a sterile, white hospital room.

The unbearable heat that had consumed her was gone. Her mind was clear. Too clear.

She sat up slowly, and with each second, the memory of Scarlett's poisonous smile and what she **had** done at the banquet **clawed** deeper into her heart.

Burning with rage, Riley pulled off the thin blanket, got out of bed, and left the hospital.

When Duke returned with hospital documents and a few daily necessities, the room was empty. The bed **was** cold.

Half an hour later, Riley arrived at the Ebonclaw Pack estate by taxi.

The moment she pushed open the door, she didn't even have time to **stand** straight before Alpha Alaric's furious roar slammed into her like **a** storm.

"You've got some nerve coming back, you disgrace of a daughter!"

Before his words finished echoing, a teacup came flying toward her.

**Riley's** eyes narrowed—she sidestepped easily.

The porcelain shattered on the floor with a sharp crash.

Alpha Alaric stormed toward her, veins bulging. "How dare you dodge?! I'll beat some manners into you, you ungrateful

wretch!"

Scarlett stepped in, all feigned sweetness and concern. "Dad, calm down. I'm sure Riley didn't mean it."

"She pushed you down at the banquet in **front** of the entire Stormridge nobility, got you filthy and humiliated! She did it on purpose—she's jealous! Jealous of **you** and wants to ruin our Pack's name!" Alaric's voice cracked like thunder. "Riley, get on your knees!"

But Riley didn't flinch.

She stood tall, eyes locked on **Alaric's** with an icy defiance.

"Why should I kneel? Scarlett drugged me—she wanted to ruin me in front of everyone. And instead of questioning her, you're blaming me?":

Scarlett's eyes welled with tears instantly. "I was the one who got pushed in front of everyone, and I didn't **even** blame you. How could you lie like this?"

Alaric's expression darkened. "Still lying? Scarlett **has** always been kind **and** obedient. She would never stoop to such filth. If you don't apologize right now, I'll teach you what it means to be part of this Pack!"

Zara hesitated, eyes flickering, but in the end she sided with Alaric. "Riley, **just** say you're sorry. Don't let this tear us apart."

+8 Pearls

Chapter 57

Kael Vale's expression was cold. "You **went** too **far** today. Apologize to Scarlett."

Riley looked around at the faces that were once familiar. Now, they felt like masks.

The fire inside **her** exploded.

Her composure cracked, **and** all the grief, betrayal, and rage she'd buried for years surged out of her like a tidal wave.

Her eyes turned bloodshot. Her wolf pulsed beneath her skin.

You all side **with her**. Always her. Fine."

She snapped.

Riley lunged toward the coffee table, grabbed the heavy crystal ashtray, **and** before anyone could react, she had tackled. Scarlett to the floor.

Then she struck.

"AHH- Scarlett screamed, her face twisted in horror.

The ashtray crashed down again and again, Riley's face twisted with fury.

"Die. All of you—just die!"

Alaric roared and leapt forward. "Stop it, you **crazy** bitch!"

He raised his hand to strike her—no hesitation, no hesitation at all.

But Mia, the housekeeper, rushed over and threw herself in front of Riley.

"**Alpha!** No! If you injure her, the alliance with Lucien will fall apart!"

"Move, now!" Alaric bellowed. He grabbed a flowerpot off the table **and** raised it high, aiming for Riley's head.

There was no love in his eyes—only the urge to crush her completely

Every time he struck Riley, it was never discipline. It was annihilation.

**Mia stood** firm between them, refusing to let Alaric go further."

Riley's ashtray kept swinging, blood already staining Scarlett's golden curls.

Kael rushed forward, grabbing Riley's arm and yanking her **back**.

"Enough! How long are **you** going to keep acting like a lunatic?"

But Riley's mind **was** no longer hers.

She had snapped.

And the only thing holding her back now... was **revenge**.

Send Gifts

264

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

[ 777 words ]

Chapter 58

Riley's POV

The moment Kael grabbed my arm, **yelling** at me to stop, something inside me snapped.

All the anger, the betrayal, the years of silent suffering—everything exploded at once.

I didn't think. I didn't hesitate.

I hurled the ashtray with all the rage I'd bottled inside for years.

It struck Kael square in the forehead.

A dull crack.

A splash of blood.

He staggered backward, clutching his face, blood streaming down between his fingers. The look in his eyes wasn't just shock-

it **was** fear.

Good. He should be afraid.

But I wasn't done. Not even close.

I turned my gaze to Scarlett.

She was cowering on the floor, blood already matting her golden hair, smearing across her jaw where I'd landed the first

blows.

But the sight didn't satisfy me.

It infuriated me.

She was still breathing,

I **lunged**.

Slammed into her. My fists rained down like a storm unleashed—left, right, left—each strike more **vicious** than the last. I didn't care about the blood, the sound of bone beneath skin, the gasps from the others.

She shrieked, tried to curl into a ball, but I grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head against the marble floor.

"You think you can ruin me and get away with it?" I snarled, not even sure if it was my voice or Nyra's anymore. "You drugged me. You framed me. **You** took everything."

"Riley, stop! You'll kill her!"

That was Luna Zara's voice. Distant, Powerless.

I didn't stop. I couldn't.

I wasn't Riley anymore

Nyra had risen.

I felt her come to the surface like a tidal wave, crashing through my bones.

My body stretched unnaturally, bones cracking, fur erupting across my skin, my fingers lengthening into claws. Pain lanced through me, but I welcomed it. It felt right.

I felt **like** freedom.

Casps exploded all around the room.

She's—oh Goddess—she's shifting!"

+8 Pearls

Chapter 58

"No one told me she was **a**—wait, is **that**-

"She's a white wolf!"

I could hear them. I wanted them to **hear**.

Because I wasn't just any wolf.

I was the forbidden **kind**. The **kind** whispered about **in** old scrolls and elders' fireside tales. The white-furred omen-

Pure-blooded. Cursed. Untamed.

And now they **had** awakened me.

I turned to them, letting my words echo through the **mind**-link.

"Dark magic potions don't turn anyone into **a** white wolf."

—

Nyra howled a sound **that** split the **air** and made the very walls tremble. Cracks spiderwebbed across the glass chandelier above us. The lights flickered.

Everyone froze.

Even Alpha Alaric—stone-faced and always composed—**took an** unconscious step back. Luna Zara's lips parted in disbelief. Warriors around the hall stiffened, their hands halfway to their weapons but **unable** to move.

I turned on Scarlett.

She whimpered beneath me, trembling like prey sensing death. Her golden wolf should have burst through her skin by now -any true-blooded she wolf would've transformed in the face of danger. But Scarlett just lay there.

Still human.

Pitiful. Weak.

And that **was** when I realized it.

“She can't shift,” Nyra sneered through me. “She **never** could,”

Scarlett shook her head, sobbing. “No-no, 1-1 can-**just** not now, not here-

Lies.

All lies.

Maybe her wolf was stunted. Maybe her bloodline **was** impure. Maybe she'd sold her soul for magic that suppressed her true

form

But she was **no** warrior. She **wasn't** even a wolf. Just a spoiled little girl who thought power was inherited like jewelry.

I raised my **claws**, curved and glowing faintly in the chandelier light.

One final **strike**. A **kill** blow. Justice for the years she stole from me.

“Don't do this!” someone screamed.

But I was already longing

Then-pain

White-hot

Something pierced **my** side with a sickening thunk. A sharp sting spr

I stumbled, my vision blurring

**like** wildfire through my bloodstream.

My head snapped toward the source. Luna Zara. Standing there, arm extended, a silver injector in hand. Her fingers trembled, her lips moving silently in some prayer or curse,

The **suppressant**.

I felt it immediately.

Like ice flooding my **veins**. Like Nyra being ripped from my body. She snarled, thrashing inside me, refusing to go down without a light..

But even she couldn't resist the venom laced in silver.

My transformation reversed. My bones cracked again—this time in agony. Fur receded. Strength fled. My body collapsed. Naked. Vulnerable. Trembling.

The floor beneath me **was** slick with blood—hers, mine, maybe both.

Scarlett crawled away, barely **able** to move, leaving a trail behind her like **a** wounded animal.

No one reached for me

Not Alaric. Not Kael. Not Zara,

They stared at **me** like I was some abomination.

Only Mia ran forward, clutching a blanket, tears streaking her face. She knelt beside me, her small hands shaking as she **covered** my bare **body**.

“Riley she whispered, but I couldn't answer. I was shaking too hard. Cold. Empty. Weak.

But even in that darkness, one truth burned brighter than the pain.

They had seen her.

They had **all** seen Nyra.

They saw what we could do when pushed.

They wanted to treat me like a monster?

Finc.

Next time, I wouldn't stop.

Next time, not even a **Luna's** syringe **would** save them.

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

[ 1,173 words ]

## Chapter 59

Luna Zara's voice sharp as glass, "I always thought that Riley's been using black magic to amplify her wolf's scent. I've seen the signs for weeks. The instability, the surges. **She's** playing with fire."

Zara reached into her coat and pulled out a sleek silver syringe, the liquid inside swirling **with** dull blue shimmer. "That's why I carried a wolf suppressant shot. I knew the day would come when she'd lose control."

Alpha Alaric watched the scene unfold, expression unreadable. Then, with a huff of breath, he waved his hand dismissively. "So what if she's **a white wolf**? She's missing a kidney. Her wolf will **always** be weaker than the rest—**half** of **what** it could be. Barely **alive**. Hanging by a **thread**."

There **was** no awe in his voice. No fear. Not even disappointment.

Just disgust.

"Take her outside, Alaric barked. "Toss her out. She needs to cool off **and** wake up from whatever delusions she's living in"

"Alpha—please, Mia begged. "She's unconscious. The suppressant will stop her wolf from healing the trauma. If she bleeds. out in the cold—"

-She brought this on herself," he snapped. "Let her taste the consequences. Maybe next time she'll think twice before using **tricks** to fake strength she doesn't have."

Zara and Kael didn't object. They simply knelt beside Scarlett, brushing her hair back with shaking hands, murmuring soft comforts like they couldn't even hear the begging behind them,

A few guards hauled Riley's limp body to the door. Cold wind howled through the hall **as** the estate gates opened. A few minutes later, the sound of her body hitting the wet stone path echoed back into the entryway like thunder.

Rain poured like liquid knives from the night sky as Riley stumbled out of the Ebonclaw Pack estate. Her legs were barely able to support her weight, her body burning with

fever, blood still dripping from the gash on the back of her head where Luna **Zara's** blow had landed.

The estate gates loomed behind her, silent and cold. No one **followed** her. No one called out her name.

She was discarded.

Just as she reached the edge of the property, the sound of frantic footsteps pulled her from her haze.

“Miss Riley!”

**Mia**, soaked to the bone, her white hair plastered against her wrinkled face, broke through the rain like a ghost of hope. She'd been waiting outside all this time, in the storm, in the cold—because she never once gave up on Riley.

At the sight of her, Riley's tears finally broke loose. “Mia... I'm sorry... It's all my fault... I dragged you into this...”

But Mia didn't waste breath on scolding or pity. She rushed forward, catching Riley just before her knees buckled again..

“You silly pup, Mia murmured, her **voice** hoarse. “You think I care about consequences when my girl's bleeding out in the

rain

She crouched, her fraif body shaking. “Up. On my back. I'll get you to a healer. Now.”

Riley tried to refuse—Mia was too old, too thin—but before she could protest again, Mia had already knelt in the mud, offering herself **as a** shield against the storm.

Tears antxed with rain on **Riley's** cheeks as she leaned forward and **gently** wrapped her arms **around Mia's** neck.

The old housekeeper rose slowly, every step a battle, every inch forward a **war** against time and age. The rain battered them from all sides, soaking their clothes, chilling their bones, but Mia refused to fall.

With her spine bent and feet slipping through the muddy road, she carried Riley down the long path leading away from the

Ebonclaw estate

Her breath came in shallow gasps, her teeth clenched against the cold.

+8 Pearis

## Chapter 59

“Just a little longer, sweetheart,” she panted. “Hold on for me.”

Riley was slipping again. The fever roared in her blood. Her vision wavered. Her body felt like it was floating—disconnected, heavy, fading

Cars roared past the roadside, their lights gleaming off the rain-slicked asphalt. Mia reached the curb **and** began waving both arms desperately.

“Please!” she cried. “Stop! Someone help us!”

But none did.

Vehicle after vehicle sped past, splashing water across them, drenching them further. Riley’s **blood** mingled with the dirty puddles, painting the road with streaks of crimson.

**Mia** stumbled forward **and** almost fell, **but she** gritted her teeth and pushed on, her knuckles white where they clung to Riley’s legs.

Just as her legs began to buckle beneath her, a sleek black Rolls-Royce rolled up to the curb. It came to a smooth, deliberate

halt

The rear **window** lowered

Inside sat a man whose very presence exuded command. His cold, aristocratic features were barely visible in the shadows, but his silver-gold eyes gleamed through the **dark** like a predator’s in moonlight.

Lucien Duskgrave.

The Alpha Prince of the Stormridge Pack

His gaze swept over them—first Mia, then the broken girl clinging to her back. Recognition flashed in his eyes when he saw Riley’s bruised and bloodied face.

His expression didn’t change. It rarely did

But his door opened.

Mia practically collapsed in front of him. “Please, sir—she’s dying. Her family has disowned her. She has no one else. You’re the only one who stopped.”

Lucien **said nothing**.

He looked **down** at Riley again.

Her scent hit him like a whisper from the past—wildflowers and ozone, with something deeper buried beneath. Something ancient. Something pure.

The White Wolf.

He tilted his head, almost curious.

Without a word, he gave a single nod.

His Beta, Duke, stepped out from the driver's seat and helped Mia and Riley gently **into** the backseat,

Lucien slid in beside her, watching **as** her fevered body trembled uncontrollably. Her head lolled against the leather, blood still seeping from the wound beneath her damp hair.

She looked nothing like the fierce creature he'd glimpsed at the **banquet**. **And yet...** she was unmistakable.

He reached for a blanket stowed beneath the **seat** and draped it over her shivering form, watching closely as she curled into it

with **a** soft, pained whimper.

"Drive," he said calmly.

The engine

erogared to life.

Chapter 59

+8 Pears:

Inside the car, silence hung heavy, broken only by Riley's uneven breathing. **Rain** battered the windows as they sped toward the hospital.

When they arrived, Riley was immediately rushed into emergency care.

Lucien remained in the shadows of the corridor, his arms crossed, eyes unreadable.

Mia clung to the nurses, begging them to hurry. Her heart pounded as a doctor finally emerged from the double doors, his scrubs soaked in sweat and urgency.

“She’s **lost a** dangerous amount of blood and is suffering from severe infection. We need consent to operate. Who’s the legal guardian?”

Mia hesitated. “I—I’m just her housekeeper... Can I—‘

The doctor shook his head. “We need family. Or a mate bond. Otherwise, she’s legally unaccompanied.”

**Mia’s** hands trembled as she pulled out her phone. She tried Kael Vale’s number first.

Blocked.

**Then** Luna **Zara’s**

Straight to voicemail.

**She** dialed **again**—Scarlett, **Alaric**, even the Ebonclaw **Pack** front line.

None answered.

Desperate, she called Kael one last time.

He picked up.

“What?” he snapped, still nursing the bandage on his forehead.

“Please, Alpha Kael—Riley’s dying. She’s hemorrhaging. They need consent to operate-

“She brought this on herself,” Kael snarled. “I told you, she’s not my responsibility anymore.”

**The** line went dead.

Mia stood in the hallway, drenched and shaking. She turned to Lucien with tears in her eyes. “Please,” she whispered. “Sir... if there’s anything in you that still believes in honor, please save her.”

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

[ 958 words ]

## Chapter 60

### Third Person's POV

As someone who had served the Ebonclaw Pack for over a decade, Mia could instantly tell—the man standing before her wasn't just wealthy. He came from power, old and dangerous.

There was an effortless dominance in the way he stood, his cold eyes scanning Riley's blood-soaked figure. An Alpha through and through. And to Mia, right now, he looked like a lifeline.

The doctor was growing impatient. The patient's condition is critical. If we delay surgery any longer, she may not survive, Where's the family? We need someone to sign!"

Lucien Duskgrave's brow furrowed slightly. His eyes flicked to the blood-red peony embroidered on his suit—and symbol **from** a half-completed tapestry called Heaven's Fragrance. For reasons he couldn't explain, that detail pulled his thoughts toward Riley.

"I'll sign, **Lucien** said calmly.

The doctor paused, studying him. Tall. Impeccably dressed. A chilling **grace** clinging to every movement. His presence didn't belong in this sterile, fluorescent-lit hospital corridor—it demanded attention, reverence.

"You are.

?" the doctor asked cautiously.

That gave Lucien pause. What was he to her? A stranger who'd seen her **twice**?

Before he could answer, Mia cut in without hesitation, "He's my Miss's **fiancé**."

Lucien's gaze lingered on Mia for a long second. She looked terrified, desperate, but honest.

He didn't correct her.

Instead, he stepped forward **and** signed his name in a smooth, confident hand.

The doctor rushed into the operating room, and Mia turned to Lucien with tear-brimmed eyes. "Thank you, sir. Truly, thank you. **Without you**, she would've been **lost**."

Lucien said **nothing**. He took a seat on the bench, long legs crossed, expression unreadable as ever.

The hours dragged on. Morning light crept into the sky, pale and indifferent. The doors to the OR remained closed. Lucien hadn't moved.

Then—his phone rang

He opened his eyes slowly, no trace of exhaustion on his aristocratic face. Even in this setting, he exuded an aura of cold- blooded composure.

The caller ID read: Grandmother.

“Grandmother, he answered curtly.

“Lucien, my boy!” The elderly voice on the other end was delighted. “So you finally found yourself a mate and didn't even tell your grandmother?”

Mate

Lucien's brow—lified. He had no idea **what** she was talking about. Probably another one of her tricks to corner him into settling down.

“Do you need something?” he asked dryly.

“Can't a grandmother call her grandson for no reason?”

“**I'm** at the hospital,” he said, tone cooling further. “If there's nothing urgent-

“**Hospital?**” She gasped. “Is it your mate? Is she hurt? I'm coming right away. You tell me where you are, darling.”

“I'll call you later.” He hung up before she could respond.

Northhaven – Duskgrave **Manor**

Matriarch Duskgrave sat back in her velvet **armchair**, **frowning** at the disconnected line. Her white hair was swept up into an elegant knot, **and** her sharp eyes held far too much energy for someone her age.

This stubborn boy,” she muttered. “Always so cold. Not a drop of warmth like his grandfather.”

She glanced at Mrs. Beck, her longtime housekeeper. “People keep saying he's **a** womanizer, but I'd be relieved if he were. Then at least I'd know **he** likes women.”

Mrs. Beck chuckled.

“**At his age**, most Alphas already have pups crawling around. He doesn’t even date! For a time, I wondered if he swung the other way!”

Mrs. Beck laughed politely, though she’d heard this speech a hundred times.

“Do you w

want to know how I found out he has a **mate**?” the matriarch asked slyly. She opened her phone and showed Mrs. Beck a message **thread** with Lucien’s assistant. Duke.

A photo filled the screen.

Riley, pinned against the hood of Lucien’s **black** Rolls–Royce. The streetlamps cast golden halos around their bodies. Her hands fisted in his collar. The pose... was intimate. Telling.

The matriarch: practically squealed with joy. “That’s our future granddaughter–in–law!”

Mrs. Beck leaned in. “She’s very pretty. A bit thin, though.”

“Yes,” **the** matriarch nodded. “We’ll fix that Start packing. I want to go to the coast **the** moment the rain stops.”

“It’s not safe to travel today,” Mrs. Beck warned gently. “The forecast says heavy storms all week in Mooncrest. It wouldn’t be proper to meet your future granddaughter–in–law soaked to the bone.”

The matriarch relented, sighing. “Alright. But we’ll leave the moment the skies clear. This girl is too precious to let slip away.” “**And** bring all the tonic herbs–ginseng, deer antler, spiritroot. We’ll rebuild her strength before winter. This year, we nourish her. Next year, she gives us pups!”

Her joy was boundless

**Mrs.** Beck smiled indulgently. “It’s been a long time since you were this happy.”

“Of course I’m happy” the old woman beamed. “That boy of mine was about to become a monk. Now, maybe I’ll get great- grandchildren before I die.”

She clasped her hands together, laughing like a young girl in spring.

Mooncrest – Ebonclaw Estate

**Hack** at the Pack mansion, Luna Zara **had** finally remembered her eldest **daughter**.

After a night of calm, guilt gnawed at her.

She recalled Riley collapsing, blood gushing from the back of her head, and her heart twisted,

“Why is that girl so stubborn?” she sighed. “Scarlett’s so gentle **and** sweet. Why can’t Riley just accept her?”

She wandered downstairs.

THE DIVOUSTama **carps** Haumany were party siti yumuş luMy spout33, HSIE DAS nuguis LiIOS TAM TIUVET

**Zara** hesitated, then walked to the old storage

room.

Riley was thrown out last night—by now, she should be back..

Zara knocked lightly.

No answer.

“Riley?” she called. “Are you awake?”

Still nothing.

She opened the door. It creaked open—unlocked.

The room was empty.

Her stomach dropped.

Heart racing. Zara lifted her skirts and ran upstairs. She shoved **open** the door of the room they’d redecorated for Riley. The bed was untouched.

Perfectly made.

No scent of her daughter. No warmth. No sign she’d ever returned.

Zara stood frozen in the doorway, the silence louder than thunder..

Her mind flashed back **to** Riley’s pale face, soaked in blood, eyes fluttering shut as she collapsed.

A cold dread began to bloom in her chest.

And for the first time in years, Luna Zara felt fear.

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

[ 773 words ]

Chapter 61

Third Person's POV

Zara rushed to grab a maid, her voice rising with **panic**.

“Where’s Riley?”

The maid shook her head nervously. “We **haven’t** seen Miss Riley since this morning. Luna.”

+8 Pearls

Zara staggered back, her strength leaving her in a wave of dread. She leaned against the wall, her breathing shallow. Just then. Kael Vale stepped out of his room and immediately noticed her disheveled state.

“**Mom?**” he asked, concerned. “Are you okay? What happened?”

Zara looked up at him, her eyes red. Her lips trembled. “She’s gone. Riley’s gone.”

“What do you mean gone?” Kael’s voice tightened. “We **only** sent her out to cool off—she should’ve been back last night!!”

Zara sank to the ground, tears pouring down her face. “It’s my fault. I... I injected her with the suppressant. She was losing control again. But I didn’t mean to hurt her. Gods—**what** if she—”

Kael suddenly remembered Mia’s call the night before. He pulled out his phone and tried calling. Blocked. He handed it to Zara with a frown.

“Try calling Mia.”

Her hands trembled **as** she dialed. Blocked as well.

Kael exhaled sharply. “Let’s check the surveillance.”

They hurried to the security room. As the footage played out, the horror on their faces deepened.

There was Riley, barely conscious, her body streaked with blood, stumbling into the rain. Behind her was old Mia, no umbrella, carrying the girl on her **back** through the storm like she weighed nothing.

Zara let out a broken sob, covering her mouth. "Riley... my child..."

Kael's fists clenched as he stared at the screen. "She must've taken her to Moonhaven Hospital. Let's

Moonhaven Hospital

1. go.

Kael **drove** like a madman through the thunderous rain. The windshield wipers squealed with effort but barely made a

difference.

Zara sat in the passenger seat, **hands** wrung **tight** in her lap. Her **lips** moved in a breathless prayer. "Let her be okay.. please, let her be okay."

Riley stirred in the hospital bed, her eyelids fluttering **open**. Her head throbbed, but it was nothing compared to the agony deep in her chest. She stared at the ceiling, memories flashing **in** cruel clarity.

Zara's cold expression.

The sharp prick of the suppressant **syringe** driving into her neck.

let's face, pale and untouched, **as** Riley's own claws came out, moments from **raking** across her.

And then the ulence. The accusations

almost shredded her own sister someone had shouted.

«tuir wolf—she should ve told us from the beginult

"You know the rules," Kael **had** snapped "No claws against kin. Not in Ebonclaw

3:41PM 0

Chapter 61

+8 Pearls

“And Scarlett? She didn’t even shift. She stood there, didn’t retaliate. That’s what true restraint looks like,” Zara h

had added.

They had praised Scarlett like she was the shining star of the Pack. Noble. Selfless.

But none of them seemed to care—or notice—that Scarlett hadn’t shifted because she couldn’t.

Her scent was wrong. Just slightly off. Riley **could** sense it now that her senses were sharper—now that the suppressant was fading from her bloodstream.

Scarlett had a wolf’s scent, yes.

But **no** wolf inside.

Riley had sensed that emptiness only once before—on the day she was handed to Zara by the cloaked woman with **black** eyes and a voice **that** dripped with spells.

A witch.

Scarlett’s “wolf was fabricated. **An** illusion. A calculated lie.

And if Riley’s instincts were right that witch hadn’t just been giving Zara a child.

She’d been planting **a** weapon.

Just as Riley wiped away the tears stinging her vision, the hospital door creaked open.

She expected Mia.

But in walked Zara, followed by Kael. Both pale. Both visibly shaken.

Zara gasped when she saw her awake. “Riley—you scared me half to death!”

“Why would you sneak off like that? It was storming. You could’ve died out there.”

She stepped forward to hug her, but **Riley sat up** and pushed her back without hesitation.

Zara froze.

Kaci flinched.

Riley’s eyes were flat. Cold. There was no hatred, no rage. Just... nothing,

That nothingness sent a jolt of panic through Zara. “Please,” she whispered. “I know I went **too** far. But I was trying to protect Scarlett. She’s your sister—”

“She’s not my sister, Riley said, voice low, firm.

**Zara’s** face crumbled. “You were about to **hurt** her. You transformed in front of family. That’s **not** who we raised you to be.”

“You raised me to be silent,” Riley muttered.

Kael stepped in, voice sharp **with** authority. “The laws are clear. No claws **against** family. And you’re a white wolf, Riley. **You** have responsibilities. Power comes with restraint.”

He motioned toward Zara “She didn’t sleep all night. We searched all of Stormridge for you. We were terrified.”

But Riley just turned away..

Karl’s voice hardened. “What do you want from us, Riley?”

“What will make you satisfied?”

3:41 PM

Chapter 61

Only the sound of rain tapping the hospital window answered.

But deep down—Kael already knew.

And it terrified him.

Because nothing terrified a Pack more **than a white** wolf with nothing left to lose.

Send Gifts

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[ 893 words ]

Chapter 62

Riley's POV

"How many times have y

on Peads

**you made** a scene in the one **month** since you were released from prison?" Karl's voice rang sharply. through the **hospital** room, cold and full of **judgment**. "The whole family has been spoiling you, tolerating you, loving you- yet you keep pushing us away, again and again."

His words were like **sharp** needles, pricking at my ears.

"Why did Mom inject you with the **suppressant**, huh? Wasn't it because you attackeil Scarlett at the banquet like a feral roppan You shoved her in front of the whole Pack and disgraced our **family**. Then you had the audacity to strike her again after we got home."

"You were in the wrong, Riley. Don't tell me **a** mother doesn't have the right to discipline her own daughter"

I sat there, staring at him in **silence**. My mouth curled into a slow, bitter smile, but my eyes remained icy. What was the point **in** arguing? In this house—this pack—**they** never cared about the truth. Scarlett **was** always the saint in their eyes. The victim. The golden child.

**And** me? I was the rabid white wolf no one wanted to claim.

So I said nothing.

But someone outside the room **couldn't** bear it an

The door burst open, and Mia stormed in. Her usually kind face was tight with fury, her eyes bloodshot, breath unsteady.

She shoved past Zara and **Kael**, heading straight for me. The insulated container in her hands slammed down on the bedside table with **a** sharp thud.)

"I've had enough," she growled. "Enough of this cruelty."

My chest clenched as I watched her trembling hands and the quiver in her voice. I knew what was coming—Mia never raised her voice. Not unless it truly mattered.

"Last night, if it weren't for that kind gentleman who helped carry her out of the estate, your daughter would've died from infection **and** blood loss. **She** hasn't eaten a bite,

hasn't sipped a drop of water since waking. **And** what do you do? **You** show up here to yell at her? To scold her for fighting **back**?"

She looked like she might shatter from sheer rage.

"What kind of Alpha **family** treats their blood like this?"

**Kaci** opened his mouth, but she cut **him** off

"Don't you dare. **You** think the whole Pack loves her? That you've tolerated her? What a joke."

"She **was** tortured in prison for five years. I saw the scars on her back with my own eyes. Not one of you visited her. Not once.. And the last time your father beat her with a belt until she bled, who stopped him? No one."

She turned to Zara, voice rising with righteous fury. "You forced your own daughter to cut off a finger to repay a debt she never owed! And you still stand there **and** say it was for her own good?"

**Zara's** face had turned ashen, her lips parted in silent horror.

Even Karl was stunned, looking at me like I was a stranger.

"Every time she's wronged, you defend Scarlett without asking a single question," Mia continued. "You scold Riley, punish her, **humiliate** her. And now you dare to say it's out of love)"

I couldn't speak My throat was tight.

I reached out and gently touched Mia's hand. "It's okay," I whispered. "They're not worth your anger

Because they weren't

Chapter 62

+8 Pearls

I had cried enough tears for them in my life.

Zara **finally** seemed to come back to herself. Her voice was shaky as she tried to explain, "Mia... we didn't mean to hurt her. Riley is just... so impulsive, so disobedient. We're trying to help her-

“Help her?” Mia **laughed**, and the sound **was** raw, “Look at her now. Is this what ‘help’ looks like to you?”

She pointed to my bandaged arm and bruised collarbone.

“You never loved her. Zara. At least admit that. You didn’t raise her—you never bonded with her—and maybe that’s **understandable**. But **not loving** her doesn’t give you the right to destroy her.”

Zara went pale and turned her eyes to me, seeking something—guilt, sorrow, even recognition.

I gave her **nothing**.

Not a glance.

**Not** a flicker of emotion.

Instead, I turned my eyes to **Mia**—the only one **who** had ever protected me. And I **looked at** her like she was my mother.

Because, in every way **that** mattered, she was

And Zara? She **meant** nothing to me anymore.

I watched as realization began to dawn in her. The regret. The fear,

**That** was when she truly started to panic..

“Riley... no matter what, I’m still your mother,” she whispered, reaching for my hand.

I slapped hers away. “Legally, I have nothing to do with the Vale family.”

The **words** landed like a thunderclap. Zara froze, eyes wide with disbelief.

Kael’s face contorted with anger. “Riley, must you say such cruel, pointless things?”

I turned to **him**, **calm** as ever. “Pointless? I don’t think you understand. The Pack registry—the official family ledger—has never listed my name. Isn’t that right, Zara?”

His gaze snapped to her. “Mother? That’s not true.. right? She came back eight years ago. Her name should’ve been added. long ago.

Zara’s lips trembled. Her hands fluttered uselessly at her sides,

She couldn’t deny it.

She **wouldn't** dare lie.

Karl's

s jaw clenched as the truth hit him like a hammer. "You never added her to the Pack—record? She's not even registered

**as** one of us?"

Zara crumbled, sobbing **into** her hands. "I'm **sorry**, Riley... I'm so sorry"

I stared at her, unmoved.

**Sorry** didn't mean anything when **the** betrayal was carved into your bones.

**And** I'd spent my whole life learning to bleed quietly.

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

[ 739 words ]

Chapter 63

Riley's POV

"Heh

FRIS

A cold laugh escaped my lips before I could stop it. It echoed through the sterile hospital room, sharp as broken glass. "No wonder the maids in the Ebonclaw Pack look down on **me**," I said, my voice low, brittle with irony. "They call Scarlett Young Lady, and me? Just "Miss Riley. And they're not wrong."

I turned my

y gaze on Luna **Zara** and Kael Vale—my so-called mother and brother.

"Because neither of **you** ever intended to acknowledge me as one of your own."

"I've always just been a guest **in** your house. A stray wolf at your doorstep." I tilted my head. "Not family. Not truly."

My voice dropped further, flat **and** void of warmth. “So why are you still here?”

Zara flinched. **Then**, in the blink of an eye, her expression shifted. The motherly sorrow vanished, replaced by cold Luna resolve. She straightened her spine, her jaw set firm.

“Whether you accept it or not. Riley, you are my daughter,” she said. “I carried you in my womb for ten months. You have Ebonclaw blood running through your veins. And that bond can never be broken.”

“Being born of our Pack comes with responsibilities. Sacrifices. As a Vale, you owe your life to this Pack.”

I didn’t respond.

She stepped closer, voice cold as iron. “Don’t forget what you promised me and Alpha Alaric. If you dare go back on your word and jeopardize our alliance with Alpha Lucien Duskgrave, then everything you hope to gain—your freedom, your future, the one million promised—will vanish.”

There it was.

The real reason she came.

Not concern. Not remorse.

Just the deal.

The arrangement.

The damn marriage pact with the Stormridge Pack’s Alpha heir, Lucien.

She hadn’t come to check if I was still bleeding inside.

She’d come to make sure the bride was still intact.

I had long since stopped hoping she’d see me as her **daughter**. What was the **point**? I **was** leverage to **them**. A rare white wolf they couldn’t tame—so now, **they’d** sell **me** off instead.

Her words didn’t surprise me. I had anticipated every single one.

“If you’re finished,” I **uid** coolly, “please leave.”

I turned my face away from her. I didn’t want to see their **expressions**. Not their guilt. Not their lies.

čara i breath caught. She stood there for a moment too long. **Maybe she** still thought I'd cry, beg, scream. But I didn't.

There were no more tears left in me for them.

When she finally spoke again, her voice was icy. "You look fine to me. Recover quickly. **Your** father and I will schedule the meeting with Alpha Lucien You'll do your duty

She turned and left without another glance.

Chapter 63

Karl lingered. His dark **eyes** searched my face—for what, I didn't know. Forgiveness? Weakness?

He found neither.

He sighed and followed her out the door.

Silence settled over the room like snow. Suffocating. Heavy.

I sat

in **that** quiet, my **hands** clenched in the sheets, heart beating hollow in my chest.

I wouldn't cry..

Not, for them.

Not anymore.

Then-

"Miss Riley, you must be starving."

+8 Pearls

Mia's voice cut **through** the fog like warm light. She opened the insulated container, and the scent of slow-simmered bone broth filled the room, **soothing** something raw in me.

I took the bowl in my hands and sipped. The warmth traveled down my throat, but it tasted like nothing.

Almost without meaning to, I whispered. "Carmen's lucky"

Mia paused.

“She’s got you for a mother.”

Her eyes glossed over, but she blinked fast, keeping the tears at bay. She sat beside me and took my hand.

“Miss Riley,” she **said** gently, “let’s leave. You, me, and Carmen. We’ll disappear. Go somewhere the Vales will **never** find us. Somewhere peaceful”

God, how I wanted that

The mere thought made my chest **ache**.

But I couldn’t

Not yet.

If I ran now, they’d crush Mia. They’d revoke Carmen’s Ashmoor scholarship, destroy her future. And the deal with Lucien still hung over me like a chain made of silver.

No

I’d marry him.

I’d take the money.

Then I’d leave—and I’d **take** Mia and Carmen

with me.

Far away from the Ebonclaw Pack. Far from Alaric, Zara, Kael, **and** all their lies.

But I couldn’t tell her that

So I said nothing. Just kept sipping the soup. It was warm, but it **tasted** like **ash**.

“You’ve changed,” she said softly. “You’re not the same girl I **picked** up **from** Mooncrest Penitentiary. I saw it the moment you crossed the gate. You were already planning to leave.”

Chapter 63

“**Why** haven’t you, Riley?” she asked quietly. “Did they threaten you?”

My throat tightened. I stared into the soup.

“No,” I whispered.

But even I didn’t believe it.

And I could see from her face—neither did she.

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

[ 1,073 words ]

Riley’s POV

Morning sunlight spilled through the narrow gap in the curtains, casting a pale gold strip across my hospital bed.

+8 Pearls

Maybe it was the rest, or maybe the meds had finally kicked **in**, but my headache wasn’t as **sharp** today. My mind felt less foggy, more aware.

I got up slowly, slipped on the slippers Mia had brought me, and stepped out of the room. I just wanted some **air**. **A** moment of quiet.

But the universe had other plans.

Just as I turned the corner into the hall

Sweet Coy. **Familiar**.

Scarlett.

hallway. I heard a voice **that** grated on my nerves like claws on bone.

I looked up—and sure enough, there she was, walking shoulder to shoulder with Maddox.

She wore a white dress, her makeup **light** and watery like she was trying to embody innocence itself. A thick bandage wrapped around her forehead, and her whole posture screamed frail and delicate. The kind of look that begged for **sympathy**.

Her laughter died the second she spotted me. She flinched, like she’d seen a ghost. And then, softly—so softly it made my skin crawl—she said. “Riley...”

Maddox paused 100, his eyes flickering with something unreadable. Maybe guilt. Maybe pity. I didn't **care** to dig.

I stopped, just for a beat.

And then I kept **walking Right past** them.

Like they were air.

But Scarlett, **as** always, wasn't content to be ignored. She edged closer with that same mock-timid expression she always wore when she was pretending **to** be fragile.

"Are

you

feeling any better?" she asked. "Maddox and I came to visit you... Where are you going?"

I didn't answer.

Didn't even **look** at her

But she kept inching closer. Kept needling at me with her fake concern. She wanted a reaction. She needed one. So I gave it to her.

I walked up, calm and measured—and slapped her clean across the **face**.

The sound echoed in the corridor like a whipcrack. Her **dainty** little body stumbled backward from the **force** of it, **the** pristine makeup on her cheek **smudging** beneath the vivid red of my handprint.

Maddox caught her before she could fall. His arm went around her waist, and with **his** other hand, he shoved me.

Hard

"What the hell is wrong with you, Riley?" he snapped. "Scarlett came here because she was worried about you. And you just- hat her Without even listening? What is wrong with your

His voice was raised, sharp with anger. A few nurses turned their heads as they passed.

I staggered slightly from his push.

1:47 PM – ©

Chapter 64

And then I slapped him too.

“Don’t touch me.” I hissed.

The shock on his face was almost comical. His eyes went wide **as** if he couldn’t believe I’d actually done it.

But I wasn’t done.

+8 Pearls

“You want to know what’s wrong with me?” I said. “I want to know what Scarlett thinks she’s doing, shoving her fake little wounded doe’ act in front of me like I’m supposed to care.”

“She knows I hate **her**. She knows I want nothing to do with her. But she keeps getting in my face. So yeah. I slapped her. And I’d do it again.”

“And you—what the hell are you, Maddox? What gives you the right to step in like you’re some noble protector?”

He just stared at me like I’d grown another head.

The boy I used to follow around like a puppy. The one I used to call “my Maddox.” My big brother figure. My first love.

He looked at me like he didn’t recognize me anymore.

Hell. I didn’t recognize him either.

“You’ve changed,” he said finally, his voice tight. “You’re not the Riley I knew. What happened to you?”

I laughed. Laughed because if I **didn’t**, I’d scream.

“You’re really gonna pull **that?** Five years, Maddox. Five years locked up in a cell for a crime I didn’t commit. You think that doesn’t change a person?”

“You let them throw me in there. You stood next to Zara **and** said nothing when she labeled me unstable. You defended Scarlett **while** I was in chains.”

I stepped closer.

“You Don’t Know. Me.7

Scarlett let **out** a trembling sob behind him, her eyes all glassy and wet. “Maddox, are you **okay?**” she whispered, conveniently loud enough for me to hear.

Then she looked at me again, tears brimming.

“You hit me. And now you **hit Maddox?** He came because he was worried about you, Riley. Is this how you treat people who

Her **voice** shook, her bottom lip trembling like a scared little pup.

But her eyes-

They were shining with satisfaction.

She was loving this.

She was playing the victim while I **stood** here, hands shaking with rage.

I raised my arm again. Just to watch her flinch.

She squeaked and darted behind Maddox, pecking out from behind his shoulder like some terrified cub.

“Riley, you’re being so cruel.”

Enough

“Looks like the last lesson from the White Wolf wasn’t enough for you—**you** want to experience it again?” I stared him.

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Chapter 64

“Enough, Riley. Scarlett already told me—your White Wolf is just a black magic illusion. Stop lying to yourself.”

Maddox grabbed my wrist this time, harder. His grip was tight, fingers **digging** into my skin.

+8 Pearls

He **growled**. “No one’s going to put up with your tantrums forever. You lash out like this **again, and** don’t expect me to just stand here **and** take it—

Smack.

Another slap.

Lused my free hand this time.

His sentence ended right there.

The crack of **palm** against cheek rang louder than the last.

He stood, stunned.

His jaw clenched. His eyes flickered, wild and unfocused.

Then I hit him **again**.

Third time.

Harder.

His head jerked sideways, and the flush that bloomed on **his** face was near violet. The once-pristine lawyer, the golden boy **of** the werewolf courts, now stood red-faced and speechless.

“Still want to act like my keeper?” I said, eyes like frost. “You think you matter in this? You’re not my mate. Not my Alpha. You’re nothing.”

I stepped around him.

“I may not be loved in the Ebonclaw **Pack**,” I said without turning back, “but at **least** I’m still Scarlett’s sister. On paper. **And** if I want **to** slap some sense **into** my baby sister, **that’s** family business. You? You’re just a spectator. Keep your nose out.”

Maddox stared at me, open-mouthed, like I’d gutted hun.

**His voice** cracked when he finally managed, “You hit me...”

There was disbelief there. Hurt. Like I’d just killed something sacred.

He’d once been everything to me

And now!

He

a stranger I couldn’t stand to **look at**

I said nothing

Just met his gaze.

And in mine, he saw the truth-

That whatever part of me had once cared about him, had once thought he was a hero-

That part was gone

Bundled with the girl he helped send to prison.

And I

was digging it up

again.

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[ 993 words ]

Chapter 65

Riley's POV

Those five years in prison.

Do they even know what I went through?

Every single day was darkness. A void. A hell that never ended. And the person who started it all—the one who pushed me off the edge—was **Maddox**.

After what he did to me, after all the betrayal and cruelty wasn't slapping him the least he deserved:

I could see it his eyes turning red around the edges, like he **was** on the verge of tears. He looked at me like he **was** begging to find a glimpse of the old Riley in my eyes.

But all I had for him **was** cold, bitter contempt.

Scarlett stood quietly beside him, her expression soft and sweet, but I knew better. I **saw** the satisfaction gleaming in her eyes. She was reveling in the chaos, hoping this would be the final wedge between Maddox and me.

Still, **she** played her role.

“Don’t be upset, Maddox,” she said gently, tugging at his sleeve like some helpless flower. “Riley’s probably just... angry. That’s

all-

Then, as if remembering she was supposed to be the victim, she turned to me with teary eyes, her voice full of trembling innocence. “Sister, if **you** must blame someone, blame me. It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have come. If hitting me helps, then.... then hit me again.”

I almost laughed. The way her voice quivered, **how** pitiful she sounded.... Anyone unaware of who she truly was would probably fall for the act.

But not thE.

I let out a dry, cold laugh, “Save it, Scarlett. You think I’ve forgotten what you did? Every lie, every trap—I remember it all. One by one.”

I’d get her back. Just not now. Not while Mia and Carmen were still vulnerable.

But when the time came?

I’d drag her to hell with me.

My body wouldn’t last much longer anyway. I **could** feel it—every **scar**, every bruise lingering beneath the surface. I **had** maybe a few years left.

**So** when I died. I was taking her with me.

I glared at both of them with unfiltered disgust. “You two make me sick. Don’t come here again. Don’t pretend you care. Just stay away from me.”

arlett flinched, but not because she was scared. I **saw** the venom flash in her eyes when she realized I’d caught onto her act. Sell, she tried to maintain her image.

ster, how can you say that

I raised my hand slightly

the shut up immediately.

The way she covered behind Maddox, peeking at me with wide eyes and quivering **lashes** like some cornered cub—it was pathetic. A little too perfect.

Maddon just stood there, staring at me like I was someone else entirely. He looked like he wanted to speak, to reach for me, maybe even to apologize.

Chapter 65

+8 Pearls

But he didn't move.

And after a long, awkward silence, he finally muttered. "Riley- you're not yourself today. I'll come see you again in a few days."

His voice was hoarse. Like saying that hurt more than he expected it to.

Then he turned and walked away. Scarlett **trailing behind him** like a smug little **shadow**.

The second they left. I finally exhaled.

"Foul energy," I muttered under my breath.

Whatever calm I'd managed to scrape together this morning had shattered. My mood had completely tanked.

I just wanted to get out of this damn hospital, breathe some real air, and pretend—for five minutes—that I **wasn't** still stuck **in** the middle of a nightmare.

But then I looked up.

And locked eyes with him.

Dark, penetrating, and **cold** as the northern winds-

Ronan Duskcliff.

No. No, no, no.

Why was he here?

What did he want?

I couldn't breathe.

He started walking toward me, slow and deliberate, like a predator zeroing in on prey. The pressure rolling off of him was suffocating

My heart began to pound wildly. My lungs felt tight. Every nerve screamed for me to run—but my legs wouldn't move.

was the one person I couldn't deal with right now.

Ronan was

The one person I feared most.

He **wasn't** like Maddox or Scarlett or even Kael. **Ronan** didn't use lies or manipulation. He used force. Raw, brutal, terrifying

force

He was ruthless.

Unforgiving.

A nightmare dressed in a tailored **suit**.

The moment I saw **him**, the memories came flooding **back**.

The beatings. The cold stone floor. The way they'd yank my hair back in prison and **hiss** in my ear-

"Don't blame us. Your beloved Alpha Duskliff **said** if we played nice with you, he'd cut our sentences. We're **just** following

order"

They never said his name outright, **but** I knew.

It had to be Konan

Only he had the power to pull strings like that behind bars.

I used to think he was gentle. Refined. A quieter Alpha heir who loved books and chess and **classical** music.

Chapter 65

But that version of him... was **a** lie.

A well-constructed mask.

The real Ronan **was** ice and steel **and** vengeance.

My blood ran cold.

I took a step back.

Then **another**.

But he didn't **stop**..

He kept closing the distance between us, like a shadow I couldn't outrun.

**Panic** surged in my chest. My vision blurred. I stumbled back on shaky legs—and nearly fell.

But his hand shot out Fast. Unyielding.

He caught me by **the** waist and pulled me flush against his chest,

Hard.

Too hard.

His hand gripped my side, and for a moment, he just held me there.

Like he owned me.

Like he **always** had.

+8 Pearls

I could feel the calluses on his palm, the quiet strength in his fingers. Even through the hospital gown, **his** grip was like iron.

His brows furrowed slightly.

Too thin, his eyes seemed to say.

Too fragile.

His concern wasn't comforting—it was terrifying.

My heart hammered against my ribs. My body wanted to break free, but my limbs refused to obey.

I could smell his cologne—clean, sharp, unmistakably him. His presence swallowed mine whole.

I tried to struggle. To breathe. To **think**.

But nothing worked.

He tilted his head slightly, his black eyes scanning mine. I could feel the heat of his gaze,

Like a storm brewing just beneath his **calm**.

“Running away?” he murmured.

The sound of his voice—low, smooth, magnetic—was somehow worse **than a shout**.

slathered into **my** spine like frost.

I pushed against **him** with shaking hands, pressing into the **solid** wall of his chest.

“Let let me go,” I whispered, hating how weak **my** voice sounded.

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

[ 851 words ]

Chapter 66

Third Person’s POV

To Riley, Ronan Duskcliff was like a blade suspended at her throat—one wrong move and she’d bleed. Only distance could offer her **any** safety from a creature like him.

Ronan stared at her, his dark gaze filled with something unfamiliar—hesitation? Pity? But it vanished almost as soon as it surfaced, replaced by his usual cold, ruthless indifference.

“What **are** you so afraid of?”

He was the noble heir of **the** Blackmaw Pack, the favored Alpha heir. And now he stood torn between two women—his own sister and the girl he’d secretly cared about for three long years.

Riley should have been the last person to act wronged. And yet, there she was, cowering like a wounded pup. The worst part? He still felt something. He still cared.

He hated himself for it.

Especially **when** his sister—Tessa—was lying unconscious in a hospital bed, her life shattered.

And Riley **was** the one blamed for it all.

Suddenly Ronan shoved her away, hard.

Caught off guard, Riley stumbled back. Her shoulder slammed into the wall, pain lancing through her already—injured body like wildfire. If **not** for that wall, she would've collapsed completely.

She gritted her teeth against the agony, refusing to **make a sound**. **But** the strain on her pale face, the sweat soaking her temples, betrayed her suffering

Ronan's **hand** twitched.

He almost reached for her.

Almost

But he stopped himself.

What was he doing? Why was he hesitating?

Seeing her in pain **made** something twist inside his chest, something he couldn't name—regret? **Guilt**? Old affection refusing

to die?

Riley slowly steadied herself. Then, taking a deep **breath**, she turned and began to **walk** away.

One step. Two steps. Three

Ronan didn't move.

Didn't stop her.

Didn't call her **back**.

Each step made her heart race faster, but also lighter. It felt like she was walking away from death's grip.

But then

Riley Ronan called, his voice low—softer than she'd ever heard it. Like a breeze whispering her name.

She didn't respond

Not because she was ignoring him—she simply didn't hear him. After the head injury inflicted by Luna Zara, her hearing had.

Chapter 66

+8 Pearls

worsened. Even the one good car failed her at times,

Ronan's brows furrowed. He raised his voice. "Lucien Duskgrave isn't someone you can handle. Don't marry him."

His **voice** was sharp **now**, ringing with urgency.

Lucien—the Alpha heir of Stormridge—was a ruthless tactician, forged in blood and power. No mate of his would be spared the brutal demands of his lineage.

Riley didn't look back.

She still didn't hear him.

She just wanted to e escape. To get back to her room to shut the door, to breathe.

Ronan stood there, watching her limp away, each uneven step cutting deeper into his chest. The space between them felt like an uncrossable abyss, but the thought of letting her go. it burned.

He wanted to chase her.

To stop her.

But just as he took a step forward, his phone rang.

He hesitated.

Then fished it out of his pocket.

It was Tessa's doctor.

He answered immediately, voice tense. "Yes?"

"**Alpha** Duskcliff, you should come quickly. Your sister is showing signs of waking up."

Joy surged through him like wildfire. He glanced toward the direction Riley had gone, eyes lingering a second too long. There was still something there—something **that** hadn't died. But it would have to wait.

He turned and ran toward Tessa's ward, heart hammering in anticipation.

When he burst into the room, he was breathless, eyes searching. "Doctor, **how** is she?"

The physician gestured to the monitors. "We're detecting active brainwaves. And her fingers have twitched multiple times. Your sister is conscious, though unable to respond physically

"She can hear me?" Ronan asked, eyes widening.

"In theory, yes. She's **in** a locked-in state—mind **awake**, body unresponsive."

Ronan sat by **the** bed, grasping her frail hand. "Tessa can you hear me?"

Her eyes fluttered. Her fingers curled **just** slightly.

He choked back a sob.

"You've finally responded. You **have** no idea how long I've waited—**how afraid** I was I'd lost you forever"

ut then his joy gave way to the storm building beneath it. His gaze darkened. He leaned close to her ear, voice dropping to whisper

PL

"Tell me was it Riley who did this to you!"

Five years ago, he'd already gotten the answer. But a part of him still clung to hope. That it had been an accident. That Riley

But when Tessa's eyes glistened with fresh tears, the last of his hope died.

Chapter 66

"It was her?" he asked again, voice as cold as a winter wind.

Tears streamed **down** Tessa's cheeks, silent and steady

She wanted to scream. To tell him it wasn't Riley. That it had been someone else.

That it **had** been Scarlett.

But she couldn't move. Couldn't speak.

Pearls

Ronan's jaw clenched. The pain in his chest twisted like a knife. He **had once** seen Riley as brilliant, **kind**—a girl **who'd** made even the darkest places feel like home,

But **how** all he could see was betrayal.

Still, somewhere deep inside him, something whispered: No. Not Riley. It was someone else.

But Tessa's silent crying drowned out that voice.

"I'll make her pay," **he** vowed through gritted teeth. "**Even** if she's already served five years—it's not enough. Not for this. I will get justice for you, Tessa"

Even as the words left his lips, his heart broke.

Because part of him still didn't want to believe it.

And part of him—deep, dangerous, defiant—still belonged to Riley.

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

[ 747 words ]

Chapter 67

Third Person's **POV**

A few more days passed. That morning, the rain in Mooncrest **finally** stopped.

**Back** in the Stormridge Pack from Northhaven, Matriarch Duskgrave could hardly stay seated.

“Mrs. Beck, is it **still** raining in Mooncrest?” **she** asked impatiently.

“No more rain,” Mrs. Beck replied with a **smile**, clearly reading the Matriarch’s excitement.

++8 Pearls

“Then let’s go! If we leave now, we’ll arrive by noon. I can finally see my future granddaughter-in-law this afternoon!” **she** beamed.

Just thinking about the girl who had managed to make Lucien—the stoic Alpha Prince—fall in **love** made Matriarch Duskgrave feel **younger**.

A she wolf who could melt Lucien’s cold heart must be obedient, well-mannered, and incredibly **rare**.

“Everything’s ready, Matriarch. Let’s set off, Mrs. Beck said, gently helping her up.

The two departed immediately. The whole journey, Matriarch Duskgrave couldn’t **stop** talking about Riley—her voice light **with** joy, lips curled into a constant smile.

But once they arrived in Mooncrest, joy quickly turned to disappointment—Matriarch Duskgrave fell ill from the sudden climate change.

She was old, after all, and her body couldn’t handle the strain.

Mrs. Beck grew anxious. “**Matriarch**, shall we call the young Alpha to pick you up?”

“No!” she waved a **hand**. “What if Riley comes with him and sees me like this? Pale, bedridden/weak—what kind of **first** impression would that be? She’ll think Lucien’s a clingy boy tied to **his** granny. What if she backs **off**? Lucien’s not the kind to fall in love twice!”

Mrs. Beck blinked. “It can’t be that serious”

“It is. We can’t lose her. We finally have a Luna candidate. I’ll never forgive myself if I scare her away.”

With that, she insisted, “Let’s go to Mooncrest First **Pack** Hospital. Once I’m recovered, we’ll call Lucien. I want to meet her at my best.”

Mrs. Beck had no choice but to help her toward the hospital, while the Matriarch muttered, “Curse these old bones, messing up **such** a precious moment.”

Riley’s POV

The past few days had been... peaceful.

My head injury had almost healed. I should've been discharged already, but I wasn't ready to go back to that suffocating place -the Ebonclaw Pack estate. Not yet.

So I stayed.

I lay there, staring blankly out the window, **just** watching the gray sky **part** to reveal fading sunlight.

Two nurses came in to change my bandages

When they peeled the gauze away, I didn't flinch. Pain didn't register anymore. I'd long since learned to ignore it.

As they worked, they chatted, assuming I wasn't listening

"A miracle, truly"

"Right? Five years.

coma patient.

143 PM

다

Chapter 67

"She can't move yet, but her mind's

back."

"Won't be long before she fully recovers."

I turned so fast, one of them jumped.

"Did I hurt you?"

0

I locked **eyes** with her. "The girl you're talking about... is her name Tessa Blackmaw?"

They blinked in surprise. "How did you know?"

I couldn't breathe.

Tessa was awake.

I laughed. Then I cried.

“Are you **okay**?” one asked, clearly startled.

“I’m happy.” I choked out. “Just... happy for her.”

They finished dressing my wound and left, exchanging a glance, but asking nothing more.

Tears streamed down my face..

Five **years** of lies.

Five years of **pain**.

Five years in prison for a crime I didn’t commil

Scarlett pushed her. Not me.

But I was the one who took the fall.

Now, **Tessa was** awake. She could speak. She could tell the truth.

I had to see her.

I had just stood up when **Mia** walked in carrying a thermal lunch container.

“Miss Riley, where are you going?”

I turned to her, my voice trembling with emotion.

+8 Pearls

“Mia, Tessa’s conscious. She can prove I didn’t lure her into the Black Forest with fake messages that night at the Halston Academy **banquet**, It **was** Scarlett.”

Mia gasped. “Are you sure?”

“I heard the nurses. I need to see her.

“But Riley the Duskcliff **family** still **blames** you. If they find you near her room, they night think you’re trying to harm her

again

I faltered. For a second.

Then realization hit me like thunder.

If I knew then Scarlett might know too.

And Scarlett She'd kill to keep Tessa silent.

I have to get there before she does. Tessa needs protection. She's not safe"

+8 Pearls

Rong with you.

343 PM

Chapter 67

Mia looked at me, worry in her eyes, but she nodded. "I'm

We ran

But just as we reached Tessa's room, someone blocked the door.

I froze.

The Ebonclaw Pack's driver. Scarlett's personal lackey.

The same man who drove me to the auction. The one who's served her **since** she was a pup.

If he was here... then Scarlett was already inside..

My **rage** boiled over.

I stepped forward, voice like steel. "Move."

He didn't.

He just stared down at me with scorn in his eyes and sneered like I was dirt under his boot

Scarlett was ahead of me.

Again.

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

[ 846 words ]

Chapter 68

Third Person's **POV**

Riley's anger surged like wildfire. "I said move!"

Her voice rose sharply, laced with desperation and fury. She stepped forward and shoved the driver with everything she had -but the man didn't budge. He was built like a brick wall, broad and unyielding.

**And** then, with no warning, he raised his hand.

was massive, **like** a slab of **stone**, and it came flying toward her face with terrifying speed.

Wind whistled with the force of it

Mia, who had been following behind Riley, **saw** the attack unfold in an instant. Her eyes widened in horror.

Without thinking, she rushed forward.

Smack!

The blow landed squarely on Mia's cheek. Her frail body flew sideways, hitting the **ground** like a crumpled leaf in the wind. "**Mia!**" Riley's voice cracked as she dropped to her knees beside her. Her eyes shimmered with fury **and** grief. "Are you okay?" Blood welled at the corner of Mia's mouth, but she forced herself upright. With **trembling** fingers, she pointed at the driver, her voice rough and shaking,

"You're just a driver for the Ebonclaw Pack... how dare you raise your hand against the Alpha's daughter?"

The driver sneered, his lip curling in disdain.

"Alpha's daughter?" he scoffed, "Don't make me laugh. The Ebonclaws have one daughter, and her name is Scarlett. This one's nothing but trash."

Riley's fists clenched until her nails dug into her palms. Her whole body trembled—not from fear, but from the humiliation, the injustice, the helplessness that had followed her like a shadow ever since she returned to the Pack that cast her out.

Down the corridor, just outside the hospital wing, two figures stepped out of the elevator.

Matriarch Duskgrave, regal and sharp-eyed despite her cane, paused mid-step. Her gaze locked onto the scene unfolding before her—Mia on the floor, a man towering over a bruised young girl with fury **in** his eyes..

“Who's **that** girl?” the Matriarch murmured, narrowing her eyes. “She looks familiar

Mrs. Beck followed her gaze, then blinked.

Recognition hit her like lightning-

“That's her,” she whispered. “That's the girl I told you about. From the South Haven train **station**—the one who called me Mom”

Matriarch Duskgrave turned to her, startled. “The same girl!”

Mrs. Beck nodded, heart pounding. “She was being dragged away by her brother that night. She was terrified.”

The Matriarch fell silent, eyes never leaving Riley. The girl looked thin and worn, but there was something in her- something wild **and** unbroken. Protective

Atud right then, that very girl was being threatened **again**.

The driver raised his fist

Riley flinched

But someone moved faster

Matriarch Duskgrave HumanIYA ISA **MAEN**, LIKE crack.

“You filthy coward!” she bellowed. “You **think** you can lay hands on a defenseless girl in broad daylight? Try it again. I dare you.”

She struck him again. And again.

The driver stumbled back, caught off guard, face twisted in pain and disbelief as the old woman rained blows on **him** with surprising strength.

But rage burned **hot** in his chest.

“Crazy old bat!” he growled. “You wanna die?!”

He grabbed the cane with one powerful tug and yanked it free of her grip.

Without hesitation, he raised it aiming for her head.

Time slowed.

Riley’s breath caught in her throat.

And then, instinct took over.

She lunged.

**Thud.**

The cane struck her back with a sickening sound. Pain exploded through her spine, white-hot and unbearable.

But she didn’t let go.

She wrapped her arms around the Matriarch, shielding her.

The Matriarch’s eyes widened in shock as she looked down at **the** girl trembling in her arms,

“You—you protected me?” she whispered, stunned.

Riley winced, biting down on **the** pain. “I’m fine,” she said, though her voice trembled.

“You’re pale as death, the Matriarch said, voice **tight** with emotion. She hadn’t known this **girl** before. But now, something in her heart cracked.

Riley swayed, pain threatening to drag her under,

**But** still, she didn’t move.

The driver raised the cane again, his face twisted with fury, ready to bring it down once more.

And this time—he **wasn’t** aiming to scare.

He meant to kill.

Riley's vision blurred. Her back **throbbed** with blinding **pain**, her knees nearly buckling. She could barely breathe.

But then-

Something **snapped**.

Not just in her bones

In her blood

A deep, ancient power surged up from her core—wild, uncontrollable, furious. The humiliation. The abuse. The betrayal. The abandonment. All of it ignited **like** dry leaves catching fire

Chapter 68

+8 Pearls

Her fingers clawed into the air. Her spine arched, and a feral growl tore from her throat—a sound no human could ever

make.

The hallway fell silent.

Time froze.

And then-

Riley exploded into **white** light.

Bones cracked. Skin shimmered. The air around her trembled with raw, **untamed** energy.

The driver staggered **back**, his eyes widening in horror.

Before him stood not a beaten girl—but a **massive** white wolf, **tall and radiant**, fur like moonlight, eyes glowing with unearthly silver.

Gasps rippled through the corridor.

Someone screamed.

Matriarch Duskgrave took a shaky step back, her cane forgotten. "A... white wolf"

Mrs. Beck's hand flew to her **mouth**. "That's impossible.

Riley snarled, her massive paws digging into the floor tiles, her body crouched low—ready to strike.

The driver didn't even have time to **run**.

**With** a roar that shattered **glass** down **the** corridor, Riley lunged.

She slammed him into the wall like he was made of paper. He crumpled to the floor, groaning in terror, eyes filled with a fear **he had** never known.

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

[ 734 words ]

Chapter 69

Riley's POV

My claws were inches from tearing into his throat.

+5 PeanS

The bastard lay slumped against the corridor wall, dazed from the impact. Blood trickled down his temple, mixing with dirt and ceramic shards. I didn't even remember grabbing the potted plant, but the crash of it shattering against his skull still rang in my ears like thunder.

He groaned, trying to get up.

I stalked closer, my hackles raised, breath hot and heavy.

He dared lay a hand on Mix. He dared raise a cane at the old woman **who** had shielded me—someone I didn't even know. He dared call me nothing.

I wasn't **nothing**.

I was the damn white wolf of the Ebonclaw Pack, and for once in my life—I wasn't going to run.

A snarl built in my chest, low and deadly. My muscles coiled.

I was ready to end this.

“Riley, stop!”

Mia’s voice cut through the haze **like** a whip.

**I froze.**

“Put your claws down,” she choked **out**, clutching her bruised cheek, **eyes** wide with panic. “You know the law. No bloodshed among Pack unless ordered by Council. You show those claws now—**and** they’ll lock you up again. For good this time.”

Her **words** hit harder than the blow to my back.

The Rogue Tribunal. The isolation cells. Cold steel **chains** digging into my wrists.

No. Not **again**.

My snarl died in my **throat**. I forced the shift back, bones creaking, limbs trembling as fur receded. My vision blurred, but I stayed upright.

My breath came in ragged gulps.

I **was** shaking

Mia reached out, steadying me with **both** hands, then out on my clothes. “It’s over. Let’s **go**.”

Still dazed. I turned and pushed open the hospital room door—just in time to walk into a nightmare.

The air inside was thick with panic. I saw her—Scarlett—claws digging into another girl’s throat. Her name hit me a **second**

Tema

Her lips were blue, her eyes glassy. Her hands scratched helplessly at Scarlett’s wrists, trying to breathe.

switch flipped inside me

I charged forward with a scream, grabbing Scarlett by the hair and yanking her back with every ounce of fury I had left. “Let go of her, you psycho!”

Scarlen shrieked, her grip finally loosening. We both stumbled back, crashing into each other, clawing, kicking. **Gone** was her usual trembling and sweet act—what surfaced now was leral, vicious, real

Chapter 69

Her nails raked down my arm, slicing skin **open** like ribbons.

“Crazy b\*tch!” she screamed, scratching, kicking, flailing

“Keep going.” I snarled, “and I swear, I’ll **show** you what a real Luna looks like.”

+8 Pearl

Mia and Mrs. Beck lunged in, each grabbing one of Scarlett’s arms and **holding** her down as she thrashed and howled like a cornered animal.

I dropped to my knees beside Tessa.

She wasn’t moving.

Her face had gone ashen.

No breath. No heartbeat I could feel.

No..

No.

Tessa?” My voice cracked as I shook her. “Tessa—wake up!”

Nothing

“Tessa!” I screamed, hands flying to her face, **then** her chest. “Breathe! Please—breathe!”

My whole world cracked open. The only person who could prove my innocence.. was slipping away before my eyes.

“Mia!” I turned, **sobbing**. “Call the doctors! Get help! Now!”

Mia let go of Scarlett instantly, bolting for the door

But the doorway **was** already blocked.

Three men.!

Towering. Dangerous.

And one of them, leading the charge, looked like he was carved from rage itself.

Dark brows **drawn** tight. Eyes like knives.

His voice hit me like **a** slap.

“Riley Vale, what the hell are **you** doing to Tessa?!”

I blinked up, stunned by the venom in his tone.

Ronan Duskcliff

His fury slammed into the room like a shockwave. Behind him were **guards**—armed, tense.

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words wouldn't come. The sob stuck in my throat turned into a whimper.

He didn't wait for an explanation.

He stormed forward, grabbed me by the arm, and ripped me away from **Tessa's** body.

stumbled backward-

Straight into another chest.

Hand **Familiar** Burning hot

My breath caught

Chapter 69

I looked up.

And met Maddox's eyes,

Cold. Piercing. Nothing like the ones that used to gaze **at me** with gentle curiosity.

His hands tightened on my shoulders—not with comfort, but judgment,

Pain bloomed across my chest deeper **than any wound**. The look in his eyes wasn't anger.

It **was** disappointment.

“Riley...” His voice was low, full of thunder. “What happened to you?”

I could barely hear myself. “I didn’t—It wasn’t me. She—Scarlett—she was-”

+8 Pearls

“Is this really who you are now?” Maddox’s voice cracked. “Where’s the girl I knew? The girl who once believed in justice? In kindness Bring her back to me, please

I looked at him through the veil of my tears, my skin still stinging from Scarlett’s claws.

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[ 622 words ]

Chapter 70

Riley’s POV

Maddox never admitted he stopped loving me.

Not once.

+8 Pearls

Not even now—**when** his hand released my shoulder like I was something that disgusted him, something unworthy of being touched.

My arms hung uselessly at my sides, trembling. My knees threatened to give. I felt **like** someone had hollowed me out and left nothing but **skin**.

“Maddox.” My voice cracked—hoarse, broken, full of the ache I **could** no longer hide..

But the moment I opened my mouth, everything spilled out **at** once. I couldn’t hold it back anymore.

“IT WASNT ME!”

The scream tore from my throat, raw and ragged.

But he didn’t believe me

None of them did.

Maddox's eyes darkened—not with concern, but with judgment. Cold. Condemning. Like he wasn't looking at the girl he used to call his mate, but at a criminal caught in the act.

Then—Kael.

His fingers seized the back of my head so roughly my neck jerked. He forced me to face the hospital bed.

—“Look!” he snarled. “Look at what you did, Riley!”

Tessa lay there like a ghost—her skin gray, her lips tinged blue, her throat covered in bruises.

“You want to deny this too?” Kael's voice cracked with fury. “If it wasn't **you**, then who left those marks on her neck? Scarlett? **You** really expect us to believe **the** same lie—again?”

His voice trembled with disbelief.

“No,” I whispered, shaking my head, blinking through tears, “I didn't—I didn't do this-”

“You just **woke** up **and** tried to kill her?” he spat. “You couldn't wait even an hour before trying to silence the only witness!”

Witness.

That word struck me like lightning.

Tessa was the only one who could clear my name.

And now they thought I'd tried to kill her.

Maddox's jaw clenched. “Just like five **years** ago—you lured her into the Black Forest with that fake message, **knowing** the Rogues were hunting in the area. She's been in a coma ever **since**. All because you were jealous of her friendship with

I flinched

My heart pounded so hard I could barely breathe.

Scarlett stood behind them, quiet, tearful, covered in scratches from our fight. Her eyes were red. Her voice trembled.

“I wasn't me,” she whimpered, voice catching on a sob. “Riley just—just attacked her out of nowhere. I tried to stop her, **that's** how she scratched me

## Chapter 70

She held up her arms, revealing my **claw** marks.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"You liar." I croaked. "You almost killed her—1"

But **the** room was no longer listening to me.

Kael, Maddox, Ronan—one after the other, they circled in, voices rising like a pack ready to tear me **apart**.

"She hasn't changed."

"She's worse."

"She should've stayed locked up."

I couldn't take it anymore.

Their voices blurred into static. My ears rang.

+8 Pearls

It was just like five years ago. The same people. The same accusations. No matter what I said, no matter how loud I screamed

I was always the villain in their story.

I felt my head spin.

My legs buckled.

Suddenly, I was falling through time—back to that cursed night in the Black Forest. The smell of blood. The Rogues. The silence after the scream. And their voices, echoing like wolves howling in judgment—calling me a monster, a liar, a killer.

And now it was happening again.

Scarlett—the **real** monster—was crying pretty tears, and I was the one they wanted to see burn.

I barely felt it when Kael **shoved** me.

I barely registered the sting in my ribs when Ronan grabbed my arm and slammed me into the **wall**.

The wind was knocked clear from my lungs. My back screamed in pain. My vision flashed white.

He was shouting something.

Accusing, Cursing.

Then his hands wrapped **around** my throat.

Tight

Too tight.

My body jerked.

I clawed at his **wrists**, **but** I was too weak. Too **slow**.

My lungs seized, desperate for air.

“P—please\_” I rasped, black dots dancing in my **vision**.

The room swam. My knees **gave**

Everything faded.

But I forced the words out, one last **time**,

“Get the dortor.”

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

[ 640 words ]

Chapter 71

Third Person's POV

Matriarch Duskgrave was furious beyond words.

At eighty years old, she had never seen such unreasonable and reckless people.

No wonder the girl fought desperately to escape—surrounded by a group of violent fools like this, who wouldn't run?

If it were her, she would have fled long ago.

With anger and urgency, the matriarch slammed her cane against Ronan Duskcliff's arm.

Ronan yelped in pain and instantly released his grip on Riley's neck.

Seizing the moment, Matriarch Duskgrave pulled Riley into her arms tightly, growling, "If you don't call the doctor soon, the patient will be beyond saving!"

Ronan's body trembled. He shot Riley a dark glare but made no further objections and stormed out to find a doctor.

Riley watched his retreating figure, only then realizing something was terribly wrong.

With all the commotion in the ward, no doctor or nurse had come to check on the situation.

It was impossible.

Unless the medical staff had been sent away beforehand.

Her eyes darted to Scarlett, who just happened to flash a victorious gleam.

A chill ran down Riley's spine.

If this was Scarlett's setup, then Ronan wouldn't find a doctor anytime soon.

No, she couldn't just wait to be helpless.

Tessa's life depended on it.

Five years ago, she had already been framed once.

This time, she couldn't let history repeat itself—Tessa had to be saved immediately.

"Madam, please let me go. I have to save Tessa,"

Matriarch Duskgrave hesitated, worry etched across her face, but finally loosened her grip.

Riley took a step forward toward Tessa.

1/3

16:43 Thu, Aug 7

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X

Chapter 71

Finished

Suddenly, Kael Vale blocked her path with a sharp step, Maddox appeared from the other side to intercept.

Kael's gaze was icy as he scolded, "Riley, how much longer will you keep this up? You tried to kill Tessa just now. Now, in front of all of us, you want to finish her off? How did you become so cruel—a venomous woman full of malice."

Maddox wore a deeply disappointed expression as he added, "Riley, I advise you to stop immediately. If you persist, what awaits you won't just be a few years in prison. With the Blackmaw Pack's power, you'll rot in jail forever. Even though we used to be mate, I won't show you any mercy."

"Step aside! If you don't save her now, it'll be too late. Do you really want to watch her die?" Riley shouted, panic and fury burning in her voice.

Kael and Maddox remained unmoved.

Scarlett feigned innocence beside them, "Riley, even if you dislike Tessa, you can't take her life. Even if she wakes and exposes your past crimes, you served five years in prison. The law won't pursue you anymore. There's no need to eliminate her."

Kael clenched his fists and sneered, "Look at you, Riley. You're acting like a madwoman. You deserve to be locked up for life."

Maddox furrowed his brow. "How long will you persist in this madness? Do you want to send yourself straight to jail?"

Their relentless stance ignited a roaring fire of anger within Riley.

She knew reasoning was useless.

No more words.

Her form twisted and morphed.

In a flash, Riley shifted into her wolf form.

Blood-red eyes blazing, fangs bared, claws slashing through the air.

She was no longer the frightened girl.

She was Nyra—the white wolf.

The ward filled with the scent of wild fury.

Kael and Maddox staggered back, startled and cautious.

But Riley's strength was still weak—her transformation recent and incomplete.

Maddox shouted, "Riley! The Wolf Code forbids showing your claws to pack members! If you don't calm down, you'll be sent to the Wolf Prison again!"

Riley's fierce growl filled the room as thick, commanding pheromones radiated from her, forcing everyone to instinctively take a step back, giving her the space she needed.

2/3

16:43 Thu, Aug 7 \

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Chapter 71

"This ends now," she whispered, eyes still burning with fierce determination.

Finished

With the path cleared, she stepped forward toward Tessa—the only one who could prove her innocence- ready to do whatever it took to save her.

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274

3/3

16:45 Thu, Aug

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[ 613 words ]

Chapter 72

Third Person's POV

Kael Vale felt a surge of anger and dread.

His own sister had just nearly torn him apart with her claws.

He had no doubt that Riley hadn't held back.

If he had been a moment slower, the wounds wouldn't have been mere scratches—they could have been fatal.

Still shaken, Kael recoiled and kept his distance, unwilling to get any closer.

Maddox was equally stunned, frozen in place as he stared at Riley with disbelief. The bright, cheerful girl he once knew was gone—replaced by someone fierce, wild, and barely restrained.

“Riley... how did you become like this?” Maddox whispered, voice heavy with confusion and pain.

Riley didn't care what they thought of her. Her mind was focused on only one thing—saving Tessa, the only person who could prove her innocence.

At that moment, Matriarch Duskgrave, Mia, and Mrs. Beck rushed in, stepping between Riley and the others.

As Riley's scent flooded the room, Nyra—her wolf spirit—emitted a calming pheromone that subtly urged the others to step back. Only when a clear path was made did Riley force her claws back into her hands, shifting back toward her human form.

Matriarch Duskgrave quickly draped a heavy cloak over Riley's shoulders, shielding her from the cold hospital air.

Mia's voice was steady and clear: “Mistress Riley, do what you must. I stand with you.”

Mrs.Beck nodded in agreement, her eyes full of trust and encouragement.

This display of support touched something deep in Riley's heart. Tears welled up and spilled down her

cheeks.

Her own family had never believed her, never stopped hurting her.

But strangers, and a few loyal friends, had shown her warmth when she needed it most.

Though abandoned by blood, she was not abandoned by the world.

She didn't know whether this was luck or fate.

Words of thanks flooded her mind, but there was no time to say them.

Riley spun around, leaving behind the bloody memories of her claw marks, and strode toward Tessa's

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Chapter 72

bedside.

Her hands moved with purpose and strength, beginning powerful compressions on Tessa's chest, as she cried out, "Tessa, you have to wake up! You can't die! I've already paid for your crimes with five years locked away. Do you want me to be sentenced to death because you die now?"

She was no stranger to death.

But she could not bear the thought of dying while her enemies thrived.

Time passed in agonizing seconds. Sweat drenched Riley's brow and soaked through her clothes.

Her arms grew numb, almost useless, but her will burned fiercely as she pressed on, precise and relentless.

Watching the stillness of Tessa's face, Riley's heart broke.

Wake up... please wake up...

She carefully pinched Tessa's nose, took a deep breath, and delivered a slow, steady breath into her lungs.

Scarlett watched with a sinister smirk, her hope fading as she believed Tessa was beyond saving.

Kael and Maddox exchanged conflicted glances.

If Riley truly wanted Tessa dead, why risk everything to save her?

Was this some cruel game?

Their distrust twisted into cold contempt.

"Don't think your fake rescue will wash away your crimes, Riley," Kael spat.

Maddox sighed heavily, "Riley, you've disappointed me."

But Matriarch Duskgrave's booming voice cut through the tension.

"Enough!" she commanded, silencing the room with her authority.

Riley felt her strength ebbing, limbs heavy and numb.

Gritting her teeth, she pressed harder on Tessa's chest and tried again to breathe life into her.

Just as hope was fading, Tessa coughed sharply, expelling the breath she'd been holding.

Her eyes fluttered open slowly.

Relief flooded Riley, tears streaming down as she clasped Tessa's hand tightly.

Before she could speak, Ronan Duskcliff burst in with the healer.

His face lit with joy at Tessa's awakening—until his eyes landed on Riley.

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His smile vanished, replaced by a furious glare.

“Riley! Stay away from my sister!”

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Chapter 73

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Third Person's POV

Ronan Duskcliff's furious roar echoed through the room, causing Riley to flinch but quickly steady herself.

Tessa had awakened. Finally, Riley's name would be cleared of murder.

Now, the ones who should be afraid were not her—but Scarlett.

And Kael. Maddox, Ronan—the ones who had wronged her.

Curiosity flickered in Riley's eyes. She wondered what their faces would look like when they learned the truth.

She straightened her back, never feeling more confident than in this moment.

A faint, almost mocking smile curled on her lips as she locked eyes with Ronan.

Her calm gaze made his heart skip a beat.

In that instant, he realized Riley had changed.

Her entire aura had shifted, inside and out.

Once, she had cowered before him like a frightened wolf before a hunter.

Now, she stared at him boldly, her eyes dripping with scorn, as if he were a complete failure.

Riley stood beside Tessa's bed, one hand holding onto the frail figure lying there.

Both were painfully thin and pale; even the bruises on their necks looked eerily similar.

For a moment, Ronan felt a strange pang of empathy, as if Riley and Tessa were bound by the same suffering.

A creeping fear settled in his chest—one he dared not analyze, fearing it would consume him utterly.

He tore his gaze away and forced down the emotions threatening to burst forth, signaling the healers to examine Tessa.

The room fell into a suffocating silence.

All eyes focused on Tessa, except for Riley's, which burned with fierce determination at Scarlett.

Scarlett's face was pale and trembling, like a startled prey, her body shaking uncontrollably.

In her mind, she screamed, Why is Tessa still alive? Why can't she just die?

Scarlett's fear was not only over the failed attempt to kill Tessa but also that every word she and her father had whispered in secret had been heard.

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Chapter 73

If Tessa spoke out, Scarlett and her father would have no hope left.

This was why Scarlett had lured Tessa into the Black Forest, trying to end her life.

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As everyone's attention was fixed on Tessa, Scarlett tried to edge toward the door, intending to alert her father and escape with her family.

But a ghostly voice stopped her cold.

"Miss Scarlett, where do you think you're going? Don't you want to see your best friend safe and sound?"

Scarlett froze, eyes wide with terror as they met Riley's mocking gaze.

All attention shifted to Scarlett.

Her face drained of color, eyes wild with panic.

Kael and Maddox noticed the change and exchanged questioning looks.

Kael asked with concern, "Scarlett, are you alright? Why do you look so pale?"

Scarlett nervously twisted her hands, avoiding eye contact, stammering, "I... I'm not feeling well all of a sudden."

Maddox stepped closer gently. "If you're unwell, I'll take you to see a healer."

He reached to guide her away.

“Stop!” Riley’s shout cracked through the room, making Scarlett and Maddox jump.

Maddox frowned, about to admonish her, but Riley’s cold glare cut him off.

“There’s a healer right here. Taking her out means waiting in line and wasting time.”

Her words silenced Maddox completely.

Though he disliked Riley’s domineering tone, he couldn’t deny the logic.

The healer finished examining Tessa and announced, “Congratulations, Tessa’s awakening is a blessing in disguise. While being strangled, her survival instincts kicked in. Originally, she was only conscious, but fully waking would have taken much longer. The near–death struggle accelerated her recovery.”

“Thanks to the timely rescue, she avoided suffocation and death.”

The simple explanation settled over everyone.

It meant that although Tessa had been unconscious for five years, her body was weakened, unable to resist attacks. But her mind’s fight saved her life.

Kael exhaled deeply and turned to Riley, his anger barely contained.

“Riley, what do you have to say now?”

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

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Chapter 74

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Third Person’s POV

Riley let out a cold laugh, her voice steady and calm. “Alpha Ronan, that question shouldn’t be for me. You should be asking Scarlett. And in case you’ve forgotten, Tessa is alive because I saved her. No one had more reason to keep her alive than I did.”

Mia stepped forward to back her up. “Alpha, while you were out fetching the doctors, our young lady was the only one desperately trying to save your sister. If you don’t believe her, you can ask Kael Vale and Counselor Maddox. They saw everything.”

Ronan turned his gaze to the two men. Their faces were stiff, their expressions unreadable, but far from confident.

“Hah.” Riley let out a scornful snort. “And you still think I was the one trying to kill Tessa? If I really wanted her dead, why would I risk everything to bring her back? The one who’s been hurting her all along is Scarlett. But the three of you were too blinded by her act to see it.”

Scarlett staggered backward in fear, her voice trembling, “It wasn’t me! It really wasn’t! Don’t listen to her lies!”

Riley narrowed her eyes and sneered. “Still trying to deny it? Fine. Why don’t we just ask Tessa herself?”

She didn’t spare another look at Scarlett. Instead, she walked steadily to Tessa’s bedside, leaned slightly, and whispered, “Tessa, it’s me, Riley. Do you remember me?”

Tessa had been in a coma for five years. Riley feared she might’ve lost her memories—that was the only reason she asked.

Her gaze locked on Tessa, refusing to miss even the smallest shift in her expression.

And then it happened.

The moment Tessa’s eyes met Riley’s, tears burst forth like a broken dam. Big, hot tears spilled down her pale cheeks, one after another.

Her lips trembled. It was clear she had a thousand things to say—things that had been buried deep inside her. But when she opened her mouth, no words came out. Only muffled sobs and broken gasps filled the

silent room.

Riley froze.

This wasn’t the reaction of someone who didn’t recognize her.

But if Tessa remembered her, why was she crying?

“Tessa, don’t cry. Tell them the truth first,” Riley urged anxiously,

It wasn't the tears she was afraid of—it was Ronan's tendency to always assume the worst of her.

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Sure enough, before she could say more, Ronan's furious voice exploded across the room. "Riley! You scared Tessa to tears, and you still dare to pretend you're innocent?!"

He stormed forward, grabbed her slender wrist, and yanked her away from the bed.

"How much longer are you going to torment her?!"

Tessa's eyes widened as she watched her brother manhandle Riley. Her tears flowed even more fiercely.

But Ronan didn't notice.

Instead, he turned back to Tessa, his tone softening. "Don't be afraid, Tessa. Just speak up. Your brother's here now. I won't let Riley hurt you."

Riley stumbled from the force of his shove, barely catching herself before she fell.

Tessa panicked. Her hands clawed at the blanket, her lips trembling with desperation. She wanted to scream the truth—wanted to tell Ronan what Scarlett had done. She wanted to defend Riley, the only one who had stood by her.

But her throat felt sealed shut, like a chain was wrapped tight around it. She couldn't force out a single word.

Her gaze bounced helplessly between Riley and Ronan, heart twisting in agony.

Riley had never hurt her. Yet she had taken the fall, spending five years behind bars while the real culprit roamed free—and nearly finished the job today.

And now, after everything, Ronan was still pointing fingers at the wrong person. was still pointing fingers at the wrong person.

Five years ago, Ronan had loved Riley deeply. But now? He treated her like a traitor.

Tessa wanted to shout. Wanted to break through whatever curse kept her silent. But her body wouldn't obey.

The harder she tried, the more her tears streamed.

Her pitiful state only fueled Ronan's rage. His chest heaved with fury, desperate to direct the firestorm building inside him.

And once again, he turned on Riley.

"What did you do to her?! Why can't she speak?!"

Riley didn't have the answer.

Tessa was awake—something she had prayed for day and night. This was supposed to be her redemption, her proof of innocence. But now Tessa was awake... and still silent.

"Tessa, say something!"

"Tell them! Tell them it wasn't me who lured you into the Black Forest that night! Tell them it wasn't me who attacked you today—it was Scarlett! Say it! Why won't you say it?!"

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Chapter 74

"Enough!" Ronan roared, eyes locked on Riley, burning with anguish. "You've scared her enough! How long are you going to keep pretending?!"

"Mmph... Ah... uhh..." Tessa sobbed harder, helpless and furious.

You idiot, she wanted to scream. Stop yelling at Riley. Stop hurting her. One day you're going to regret this.

A thousand truths burned in her heart.

But when she opened her mouth-

Nothing came out.

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

[ 743 words ]

Chapter 75

Third Person's POV

The hospital room was in utter chaos.

Riley took a deep breath, forcing herself to stay calm. Her eyes turned sharply to the doctor. "Doctor, why can't Tessa speak?"

The physician did another round of quick checks. "Physically, her condition is stable," he explained. "But after five years in a vegetative state, her neural and language systems have significantly degenerated. It's completely normal that she can't speak right away. With rehabilitation, she'll recover the ability to talk."

So that was it.

Ronan Duskcliff and the others finally let out the breath they had been holding.

But Riley stood there, as if thunderstruck.

She could wait—but Scarlett wouldn't. Scarlett would do everything in her power to silence Tessa before she could fully recover.

If anything happened to Tessa during this fragile period, Riley knew she'd be the first one blamed.

No matter what it took, the truth had to come out today.

She turned and looked toward Scarlett. As expected, the she-wolf had visibly relaxed. Her lowered eyes darted rapidly as if scheming her next move.

Riley clenched her jaw.

Scarlett. Today, I'll make sure you never rise again.

Her mind worked fast—seconds later, she had a plan.

She stepped toward Tessa's bed, ready to **act**, but just as she reached out, Ronan moved to block her path, eyes dark with warning. "Riley, what are you trying to do now?"

Riley looked him square in the eye, her voice unwavering. "I know how to get Tessa to tell us who lured her into the Black Forest and left her for the rogues."

Ronan froze. For once, he didn't know whether to believe her.

Kael Vale stepped forward and grabbed Riley's arm. "Riley, enough. Tessa's awake and that's all that matters. Let's not dwell on what happened earlier. We'll drop the accusation—you almost strangled her, but we'll let it go."

Maddox approached as well, sighing, "Riley, after everything, you should know better. Apologize to Tessa and Scarlett, and let's end this here,"

Riley's gaze turned cold as she stared at her older brother and her first love—both of whom she now loathed

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Chapter 75

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An Alpha and a Lycan Tribunal member—wolves who should represent justice and wisdom. And yet, when it came to Scarlett, they abandoned all reason.

“You two pretend to be objective, but all you’re doing is shielding Scarlett. What? Are you that afraid I’ll expose her for what she really is in front of everyone?”

“Riley!” Kael snapped, raising his voice.

But hers cut back louder. “Shut up, Kael!”

Maddox stepped forward, but she turned on him like a storm. “And you—don’t you dare speak. The two of you have no right to lecture me. You don’t get to decide what I do next.”

“Push me one more time, and I swear I’ll slap you both just to make myself feel better.”

Kael and Maddox’s expressions soured, clearly humiliated. But they knew what Riley was capable of. If they kept pushing, they’d only embarrass themselves further.

Without hesitation, Riley shoved Scarlett toward Tessa’s bed.

The moment Tessa laid eyes on Scarlett, her already pale face drained of all color. Her body trembled uncontrollably, and her eyes filled with a terror and hatred so intense, it was almost tangible.

Anyone with half a brain could see it—there was no affection, no trace of friendship in her eyes. Only raw fear and fury.

Ronan’s brow furrowed. “Tessa? What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” Riley scoffed. “She’s looking at her would-be killer. That’s what’s wrong.”

“Stop slandering her!” Kael barked again.

“We’ll see if I’m slandering anyone,” Riley replied, her eyes flashing with confidence.

She looked back at Tessa, her tone soft but firm. “Tessa, I know you can’t speak yet, and I’m not asking you to. All I need is your eyes. If what I say **is** correct, blink once. If I’m wrong, blink twice. Blink once now if you understand.”

Tessa blinked once, clearly and deliberately.

A victorious smile broke across Riley's face.

Scarlett, your end starts now.

Scarlett's heart began to race. "Sister... I—I'm not feeling well. I need to see a doctor."

Riley ignored her entirely.

Mia stepped in without a word and helped Riley hold Scarlett in place.

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Chapter 75

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Then, Riley asked clearly, her voice cutting through the tension like a blade, "Five years ago, the day Ebonclaw Pack threw a celebration for Scarlett's enrollment—was it me who lured you into the Black Forest?"

Tessa looked straight into Riley's eyes, guilt swimming in her gaze. Then she blinked—twice. Without a trace of hesitation.

Ronan stood frozen, as if lightning had struck him.

It wasn't her?

It... really wasn't Riley?

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[ 792 words ]

## Chapter 76

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For years, Ronan Duskliff had believed with absolute certainty that Riley was the one who had harmed his sister. He hated her so deeply that he had been willing to use every resource at his disposal to destroy her, going so far as to see her imprisoned for a crime she didn't commit.

But now, Tessa's reaction—so raw and visceral—hit him like a silver-forged hammer straight to the chest, shattering the foundation of everything he had believed over the past five years.

His fists clenched tightly at his sides, knuckles pale from the pressure.

If Riley truly hadn't been the one to hurt Tessa... then what had all those years of revenge been for? What did that make him?

Kael Vale, Alpha of the Ebonclaw Pack and Riley's biological brother, stared at Tessa with wide eyes, disbelief carved across his face. He had always favored Scarlett, tuning out Riley's protests, even helping drag her down when she was at her weakest. He had stood in court and testified against his own sister, claiming with full confidence that Riley was the attacker.

Now, the world spun beneath his feet, and his legs nearly gave out.

Maddox, a respected member of the Lycan Tribunal, looked equally stunned. As a law wolf, his duty was to seek truth and uphold justice—but when it came to Scarlett, he'd let personal bias blind him. He had even tried to convince Riley to take the blame for what happened to Tessa. He couldn't fathom back then that sweet, delicate Scarlett could be the real monster.

He'd accepted the Ebonclaw Pack's narrative without question.

Now he saw how wrong he'd been.

Sweat beaded on Maddox's brow. His gaze flitted nervously between the others, guilt tightening around his throat.

Riley watched all of them, her sharp eyes recording every flicker of their shame. She had once believed their pain would bring her a sense of satisfaction.

It didn't.

Instead, bitterness welled up in her chest like poison. Even if her name was finally cleared, those five years- those blood-soaked, soul-crushing five years-would never leave her. The damage done would haunt her forever.

She didn't want just justice. She wanted them to suffer too.

If she had to drown in that pain, they would drown with her.

She turned toward Tessa again, voice steady and unforgiving, "Tessa. Tell them. Was it Scarlett who lured you into the Black Forest that night?"

Kael, Maddox, and Ronan all froze, holding their breath.

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Chapter 76

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Suddenly, none of them wanted the answer.

Because if it was yes, then every belief they'd clung to would collapse. They would be forced to face a truth. they'd never prepared for-and their own roles in that cruel deception.

Kael stepped forward, his voice sharp. "Riley, that's enough. Tessa's only just woken up. She needs rest. Let's go home."

He reached out to grab her, but Riley slipped out of his grasp like smoke.

Maddox, ever the peacemaker, gave a nervous smile. "Riley... Kael's right. This isn't the time. Let's not upset her. We've already-disturbed her enough for one day, don't you think?"

Her eyes turned to ice. "Oh, I see. You're scared. Scared to know the truth. Scared that your precious Scarlett isn't the pure little saint you convinced yourselves she was. Scared to admit you've all been played for fools."

Their jaws clenched. But neither Kael nor Maddox said another word.

They couldn't. Not after everything.

She turned then to Ronan, who had been watching silently, struggling with the war inside him.

Her gaze pierced through him, sharper than any blade.

Ronan Duskcliff, don't you want to know who really hurt your sister? Or are you going to stand there like a coward and protect the wrong person again?

His face turned ashen. He was caught in a storm—guilt, doubt, rage all swirling together. If what Riley implied was true... then his hatred had been misplaced all along. The punishment he'd dealt her had been unjust. Unforgivable.

But if he knew the truth... could he live with it?

Riley saw his hesitation and nearly laughed. So this was the kind of brother who claimed she could never repay the sin he thought she'd committed. And now, standing at the edge of truth, he balked.

He couldn't even stand up for his own sister.

She took a bold step back and moved beside Tessa, forming a silent but resolute alliance.

"Tessa," she said clearly. "Tell them. Was it Scarlett who lured you into the Black Forest that night—the one who caused your coma?"

Her voice rang with the weight of justice long denied.

The moment of reckoning had come.

Tessa's eyes fluttered shut—deliberate. Definite.

One clear answer.

Scarlett began to shake uncontrollably. Her limbs trembled, and she seemed to collapse inward, curling like

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Chapter 76

prey that had just been spotted by a predator.

The room fell into a deafening silence.

The truth, after five years buried, had finally begun to surface.

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## Chapter 77

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Fear flickered in the eyes of Kael Vale, Maddox, and Ronan Duskcliff. None of them wanted to face the truth. All they wanted was to escape.

Riley took in their distressed expressions with a twisted sense of satisfaction. For the first time in five years, she felt the cold thrill of vengeance. Her lips curled upward slightly.

But just as Tessa's eyelids began to flutter—just as the long-awaited truth was about to be revealed—a sharp, commanding female voice rang out.

“What do you all think you're doing crowding a patient's room like this? Don't you know she needs rest?”

A woman in a white coat stormed in, her tone filled with outrage. Right behind her trailed Alpha Alaric and Luna *Zara* of the Ebonclaw Pack.

eyes *lit*

The moment Scarlett spotted the woman, her like a wolf seeing her pack leader. She nearly lunged forward into the woman's arms to cry her grievances, but held herself back at the last second.

When the woman's gaze landed on Scarlett, it turned gentle—almost doting. But the moment she looked at Riley and the others, her demeanor hardened into stone.

“Are you all deaf? The patient needs rest. Get out,” she snapped.

The doctor Ronan had called in earlier quickly stepped forward and asked with deference, “Dean, I didn’t know you were coming. Why are you here?”

“If I hadn’t shown up, I suspect this entire room would’ve been torn apart. All of you—out. Now.”

Her tone left no room for discussion.

Riley stood her ground, her gaze never leaving the three wolves—Kael, Maddox, and Ronan—whose shoulders visibly relaxed. She hadn’t expected it, but they all looked relieved.

Kael was the first to speak. “The Dean’s right. We weren’t thinking. Let’s give Tessa space. Come on,” he said, tugging Scarlett toward the door.

But Riley’s voice rang out, sharp and unyielding. “No one is leaving until the real attacker is identified.”

Kael paused mid-step. He turned back, clearly annoyed. “Riley, that’s enough. Can’t we talk about this at home? You’re making a scene in a hospital.”

She let out a bitter laugh, full of mockery. “Right when the truth is about to come out, you want to run home? How convenient.”

“Today, we unmask the real culprit. No one walks out until then.”

“You!” Kael trembled with frustration. Scarlett, tucked safely in his arms, looked like a fragile flower on the verge of tears.

“Riley,” Scarlett said, voice quivering with calculated innocence. “I’ve always seen you as my real sister... but

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Chapter 77

why do you keep targeting me? If I did something wrong, just tell me. I’ll change. Please...”

Her sobs began, soft and pitiful.

“Shut up!” Riley snapped, raising her hand to slap her.

Before the blow could land, the Dean's hand clamped around Riley's wrist, yanking her back and shoving her away with surprising strength. Pain radiated through Riley's arm.

"This is a hospital, not a courtroom," the Dean barked. "Take your disputes elsewhere. The patient needs peace, not your theatrics."

Her glare held more than warning—it held disdain.

Behind her, Alpha Alaric and Luna Zara said nothing, but their judgmental stares spoke volumes. If Riley caused any more trouble, they were ready to drag her out by force.

Riley drew in a breath, trying to calm herself.

She narrowed her eyes at the Dean.

Just moments ago, Tessa had been about to name her attacker. But at the exact moment of truth, this Dean had appeared—too conveniently.

Though she addressed the room at large, her gaze had been fixed on Riley. And when Riley moved to punish Scarlett, the Dean had stopped her with nearly bone-crushing strength.

There were too many coincidences. Riley didn't believe in coincidence.

This Dean wasn't just a bystander.

"What's your relationship to Scarlett?" Riley demanded. "Why **is** it that you only protect her?"

The Dean's expression faltered for a split second before regaining composure. "You're being ridiculous. I'm simply doing my job—maintaining order in my hospital."

Riley scoffed. "Order? You mean protecting Scarlett."

"The patient hasn't asked anyone to leave. She's not tired. You're the one pushing us out—because you've got something to hide."

"Watch your mouth," the Dean snapped, her voice rising with fury,

"I'm just stating the truth. You might be the Dean, but you have no authority to silence a witness, especially not one who's about *to* name the wolf who nearly got her killed. If you keep trying to stop her, I'll have no choice but to suspect you're shielding a criminal."

"She will name the one who harmed her. And no one—no one—is stopping that from happening."

Her voice rang like a blade through the tense room.

The Dean's face darkened, veins twitching along her temple. If she could've torn Riley's tongue out right

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Chapter 77

then, she would have.

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"You're being unreasonable," she hissed. "If you don't calm down, I'll call security and have you removed."

Riley stepped forward instead, her eyes locked onto the Dean's like steel on steel.

"Go ahead. Call them. Then everyone in this hospital will know—the Dean of Mooncrest Medical is protecting a would-be murderer. Let's see how long you hold onto that title after that."

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Chapter 76

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She took a bold step back and moved beside Tessa, forming a silent but resolute alliance.

“Tessa,” she said clearly. “Tell them. Was it Scarlett who lured you into the Black Forest that night—the one who caused your coma?”

Her voice rang with the weight of justice long denied.

The moment of reckoning had come.

Tessa’s eyes fluttered shut—deliberate. Definite.

One clear answer.

Scarlett began to shake uncontrollably. Her limbs trembled, and she seemed to collapse inward, curling like

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Chapter 76

prey that had just been spotted by a predator.

The room fell into a deafening silence.

The truth, after five years buried, had finally begun to surface.

**Send Gifts**

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[ 855 words ]

Chapter 78

As soon as Riley spoke, the Dean's entire body tensed. Her hand, already outstretched toward the emergency summoning rune, froze midair.

Finished

Alaric, seeing the Dean flustered, stepped forward with a glint of concern in his eyes. He stormed toward Riley, grabbing her arm roughly. "You insolent girl! Haven't you made enough of a disgrace of yourself today? Get out of here—now!"

Riley yanked her arm free, her eyes blazing with fury. "You want to talk disgrace? You and Zara have spent five years protecting Scarlett—an adopted daughter—while your true-born daughter rotted in a prison cell for a crime she didn't commit. If you two aren't ashamed, why should I be afraid? Today, I'm taking justice

back!”

“You—!” Alaric’s face turned a dangerous shade of red, but under Riley’s determined gaze, he found himself helpless.

Zara, visibly shaken, pleaded with tears in her eyes, “Riley, enough, please. Can we just go home and talk about this? There’s no need to keep making a scene.”

Riley turned toward her mother with ice in her stare. “Home? So you can bury the evidence and protect Scarlett again?”

“You really are a pair of perfect parents—so devoted to your foster daughter, terrified she might suffer the consequences of her crimes. But your real daughter? You never feared my pain.”

With each bitter word, Alaric’s face grew darker, while Zara had already burst into full sobs, barely able to stay upright.

“Riley, no! You’re my daughter—I carried you for ten moons! I would never want you to suffer. Everything I did... it was for your own good!”

For her own good? Riley almost laughed.

“For my good, you let me rot in prison? You let them take everything from me while you stood silent?”

“I’ve carried the blame for five years,” she said through gritted teeth. “All I want is for Tessa to speak the truth—finally. And if you really care about me, Luna Zara, you’ll stop protecting the one who did this.”

Alaric and Zara fell silent, shame silencing their protests.

They knew the truth.

Alaric had seen Scarlett lead Tessa into the Black Forest that day.

Zara had seen the surveillance stone, watched Scarlett abandon Tessa as the rogues closed in.

Back then, Riley had no proof. Her cries for justice had fallen on deaf ears.

But now Tessa, the victim herself, had awakened. And Riley would never let this chance slip through her fingers.

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Chapter 78

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The Dean watched the rising panic in Scarlett's eyes and nearly trembled from the sight. Her heart broke for her. But Riley's unrelenting pressure sent the Dean into a cold fury. She pointed a sharp, trembling finger. "If you don't stop this madness, I will call the Pack Enforcement Bureau!"

Riley let out a chilling laugh. "Oh, please do. That way I can tear off the mask of your precious Scarlett in front of the enforcers."

Of course, the Dean had no real intention of involving the Bureau. She grit her teeth, eyes full of venom.

Something about the Dean's behavior gnawed at Riley.

But now wasn't the time to dig deeper. All that mattered was clearing her name.

Riley stepped forward. "Well? You said you'd call them. What are you waiting for?"

The Dean hesitated, clearly trapped.

Riley pulled out her communication rune—a slick, silver Howler Stone embedded with the sigil of the Northern High Council. "If you won't call them, I will. After five years, it's about damn time we bring the truth into daylight."

She lifted the stone, ready to summon the enforcers.

But a large hand suddenly slammed into hers, knocking the stone from her grip. It shattered on the floor with a piercing crack.

Before Riley could react, the same hand struck her across the face—hard enough to send her flying into Tessa's bed.

Pain exploded through her cheek, her ears ringing.

"You disgraceful child!" Alaric roared like a furious Alpha. "Is dragging the Ebonclaw name through the dirt the only way you'll be satisfied?!"

He raised his hand again, eyes wild, fists trembling with rage.

Riley couldn't focus on him—her gaze shot immediately to Tessa.

Tessa had just awakened from years as a soul-trapped shell. She was already frail. Riley's fall had jostled the bed—and worse, struck Tessa.

She had collapsed, unconscious again.

“Tessa! Tessa!” Riley's voice cracked with panic as she reached for her. “Don't do this, please—just hold on a little longer!”

If Tessa didn't name Scarlett now, it might never happen. And without that, Riley's truth would vanish again.

Alaric, Zara, Kael, even Maddox and the Dean—they all let out small sighs of relief.

But Ronan was the first to act. He shoved Riley aside and rushed to Tessa's bedside.

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Chapter 78

“Tessa—wake up! Come on, little moon, don't scare your big brother like this!”

He shook her gently, his voice cracking. But no matter how he called, Tessa didn't respond.

Pain contorted Ronan's face. Then he turned to Riley with eyes full of blame and fury.

“This is all your fault,” he growled. “If you hadn't kept pushing—if you hadn't dragged this out—Tessa wouldn't have collapsed! If anything happens to her, I swear I'll make you pay.”

But Riley didn't hear him.

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Her hands were trembling, tears blurring her vision.

Because this time—it wasn't just about vengeance.

It was about truth.

And the truth had just passed out in her arms.

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[ 744 words ]

## Chapter 79

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Ronan scooped Tessa into his arms in a flash and growled. "What are you standing around for? She needs help—NOW!"

The hospital director's eyes flashed—just a flicker of something smug and dark—before she grabbed the healer by the wrist and barked, "Clear the corridor! Move! Move!" The staff scrambled to obey as she ushered Ronan and Tessa out of the room.

Riley made to follow, but Alaric blocked her path.

"You disgraceful creature!" he snarled, his canines extending as anger surged. "Get back to the estate before I drag you there myself!"

Everyone—everyone—was stopping her. Stopping her from finally unveiling the truth, from finally destroying the web of lies that had stolen five years of her life.

Riley's vision blurred. The world tilted.

And then-

She laughed.

It started small, but quickly morphed into something raw and unhinged. Her voice rang across the hospital room, wild and hollow.

“You all ruined me. All of you!”

Alaric recoiled for a moment—only a moment—then roared in fury and lunged at her. He raised a clawed hand, intent on knocking the madness out of her.

But Riley didn’t dodge.

Her bones cracked.

Muscles tore and reformed.

A surge of heat burst from her spine as silvery fur exploded across her body.

In a flash, Riley shifted into her wolf.

Not the calm, controlled shift of a trained Alpha.

No—this was raw. Instinctual. Triggered by years of repression and betrayal.

Her silver–white wolf, massive and glowing with the rage of a hundred moons, snarled with fangs bared and eyes glowing like twin moons.

Casps filled the room.

Alaric froze.

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Chapter 79

He was a wolf too—but he hadn’t expected this. Not here. Not now,

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The others—Zara, Kael, Maddox—hadn’t shifted. Whether from fear, restraint, or unwillingness to violate supernatural law by shifting within a human hospital, they remained trapped in their fragile human forms.

The law was clear: unauthorized shifting in human-occupied areas would draw the full wrath of the Werewolf Tribunal.

But Riley? Riley no longer cared about laws.

She pounced.

Her fangs sank deep into Alaric's arm before he could shift. He screamed—his voice no longer the Alpha's growl but that of a man in agony.

Blood sprayed. The scent of betrayal filled the air.

Riley tore into him again—this time across his shoulder.

Alaric tried to shift, but pain slowed him. Before he could finish, she slammed him against the wall, claws tearing through muscle and cloth alike.

"You took everything from me!" she howled through their mind link, her wolf's voice a storm of grief and fury. "Now I'll take it back."

He managed to shove her away—just enough to stagger toward the exit.

But Riley was already airborne again.

This time her fangs sank into his side, and he howled—legs buckling.

In desperation, Zara lunged between them.

"Riley, stop—stop, please!"

Riley's eyes snapped toward her mother.

But there was no recognition. Only hatred.

Zara flinched. She had never seen her daughter like this—her wolf so terrifying, so pure in its wrath.

Kael tried to grab Riley from behind.

He wasn't even a threat.

She spun, slashing across his arm with a single swipe of her claws. Flesh split. He screamed and fell back, blood splattering across his shirt.

Maddox tried next. "Riley—don't do this! You'll be hunted!"

But Riley's wolf didn't care.

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Chapter 79

One by one, they had turned their backs on her.

They'd let Scarlett frame her.

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Finished

They'd let her rot in a cell.

Riley's eyes locked onto Scarlett, who was already scrambling backward.

"P-please..." Scarlett whimpered. "Sister, I-I didn't mean to..."

"Sister?" Riley's wolf growled, blood dripping from her maw. "You led Tessa into the Black Forest. You watched the rogues tear her apart. You wore my face, stole my name... and now you want mercy?"

Scarlett's legs gave out beneath her as Riley advanced.

Desperate, she threw Zara forward as a shield.

Zara gasped.

Riley couldn't stop in time.

Her claws raked across Zara's stomach, slashing deep. Blood soaked through the Luna's gown.

Riley staggered back in horror for just a heartbeat—her wolf blinking as if suddenly aware of what it had done.

Zara collapsed to the ground, staring in disbelief—not at the wound, but at Scarlett.

"You pushed me," she whispered, hand trembling over her abdomen. "You... you pushed me to save yourself..."

Scarlett didn't respond.

She ran.

Without a backward glance.

Zara's tears flowed freely—whether from pain or heartbreak, none could tell.

Riley's wolf stood amidst the carnage, fur matted with blood, chest heaving.

And then she laughed again.

A laugh that didn't belong to a girl or a wolf—but something else entirely.

“You really are the perfect family,” she growled. “You love your little Scarlett so much... you'd die for her.”

Her voice echoed like a curse.

“To be used as a shield by the daughter you chose... what a beautiful bond you have.”

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[ 888 words ]

Chapter 80

Riley's POV

I laughed.

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At first, it was just a low, bitter sound scraping from my throat. But then it grew—louder, harsher, echoing off the blood-splattered walls of the infirmary like a dying beast's cry.

Tears streamed down my cheeks, hot and bitter, mixing with the blood on my face. I could taste both salt and iron. It felt like I'd clawed my way out of a grave just to die all over again.

I pointed to myself, shaking.

"Me. Your blood. Your daughter. I've groveled, begged, done everything to earn a place in this cursed Pack. I've humbled myself, torn myself apart, just to hear you say I was enough. But what did I get?"

Alpha Alaric stood there in silence. Luna Zara clutched her side, blood oozing between her fingers. Kael Vale sat slumped by the wall, blood pouring from his arm. Maddox lingered behind them, unreadable as ever.

"You never saw me," I snarled. "No matter what I did, it was never right. I could bleed for you, and it'd still be worthless. But Scarlett?"

A bitter grin twisted my mouth.

"She could serve you poison, and you'd say it tasted like moonlight. You'd worship her every breath. But when death came knocking, who ran?"

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I turned slowly to Luna Zara, whose wide eyes swam with tears. "She did. She left you all behind without hesitation. Tell me—how does that feel?"

I laughed again—manic and raw. I heard it echo back at me from the tiled walls like the cries of a she-wolf gone feral.

Kael groaned, his pain painting his face in fresh agony.

Luna Zara whispered, "Riley..." like it was a name she hadn't said in years. As if it suddenly meant something.

It was too late.

"Don't call me that," I spat.

Tears blurred my vision, and the fire inside me cooled to ashes. I knew what I'd done. I knew what it meant.

I'd spilled blood.

In front of witnesses.

There was no going back.

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Frushed

Chapter 80

They'd report me to the Wolf Tribunal. The Pack Courts would call for my execution—or worse, send me back to that prison. Five years in that cell had nearly killed me once. I wouldn't survive it a second time.

Since the day I was released. I'd tried everything—running, fighting, seeking justice. I'd tried to end Alaric and Scarlett both, but fate had laughed in my face.

I wasn't the monster. But they'd turned me into one.

And Scarlett? She still got everything. A warm home. Power. A Luna's fake crown. The admiration of fools.

While I—Riley Vale, rightful daughter of the Ebonclaw Pack—was left with scars no one could see and pain no one wanted to believe.

I couldn't kill Zara. Or Kael. Not really. Because despite everything, somewhere deep in my bones, they had once meant something.

And I hated myself for still feeling that.

My life was a sick joke. A tragedy with no end. A wound that would never close.

And suddenly, I was done.

Done with the pain.

Done with hoping.

Done with trying to prove I deserved to exist.

I turned toward the window.

Step by step, I walked to the edge.

The wind outside tugged at my hair and bloodied shirt. I climbed onto the ledge, letting my legs dangle into

the void.

All it would take was one movement.

One jump.

No more fear.

No more dungeons.

Just silence.

Behind me, voices broke the air.

“Child, please don’t-!” Matriarch Duskgrave cried, stepping forward with a trembling hand. “It’s dangerous up there!”

“Riley, sweetling,” came Mrs. Beck’s voice, tear-choked. “There’s no pain that lasts forever. Come back down. Please.”

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Chapter 80

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Mia’s sobs were unbearable. “Miss Riley—Alpha girl—don’t leave us. Whatever happens, I’ll stay by your side. Come down, baby, please...”

I turned my head slowly, the madness in my eyes fading for the first time.

I saw them.

The three women who had stood by me when no one else did.

And somehow... it softened something in me.

I smiled—bloody, broken, but real.

“Mia.” I whispered, looking straight at her. “You’re the only warmth I ever had in that house. If you hadn’t saved me when I came back to Ebonclaw, I would’ve died that winter.”

“You patched my wounds. You let me hide in the kitchen. You fed me when I was locked in the cellar. You gave me my second chance.”

Tears welled in Mia’s eyes. “Baby girl...”

“I always dreamed that if I made it out,” I said, voice cracking, “I’d repay you. I’d buy you a house. I’d send Carmen to Ashmoor Academy, maybe even abroad someday.”

“But all those dreams died the moment they locked me in that cell.”

“They took everything from me—my future, my wolf, my health. I’ve got one kidney, a shattered leg, and no way back to Ashmoor. I’m a broken mess of scars, and nothing’s ever going to fix that.”

Mia sobbed, and Matriarch Duskgrave’s eyes were glassy.

“Come with me,” the Matriarch offered gently. “They don’t want you, Riley? Fine. I do. I’ll protect you from

them all.”

But I shook my head. “You’re too kind. If I go with you, the Ebonclaw Pack will make you pay.”

I turned to Mrs. Beck—Mrs. Beck who once stood between me and the enforcers at Mooncrest’s train station, shielding me like a mother wolf.

“I never forgot what you did,” I whispered. “I called you ‘Mom’ that day. And you acted like one. Just for a moment... I believed I mattered.”

I locked eyes with her, and a soft breath left my lips.

“Mom,” I whispered again, and the word was everything. “Thank you.”

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[ 791 words ]

### Chapter 81

Third Person's POV

She treasured that word-“Mom“-with all her heart.

But in the end, it had all been wishful thinking. Her mother never wanted her. Never valued her. That was why, after being released from prison, Riley had never called Luna Zara anything but “Mrs. Vale.”

And that single word-“Mom“-now spoken to someone else, shattered Mrs. Vale.

Tears finally broke free from Mrs. Beck's eyes the moment Riley uttered it.

Luna Zara flinched. The wistful warmth in Riley's voice had, for a fleeting second, made her think the girl was calling out to her.

She looked at Riley, dazed, eyes glimmering with confusion and pain. But Riley never spared her a glance.

“Riley... I'm your mother,” she whispered to herself.

Why would she rather call a stranger that word than her own birth mother?

The realization that she had truly lost Riley's love sliced through Zara's chest like claws. It hurt worse than any blade.

Riley's tears kept falling.

“Living hurts,” she said softly. “I don't want to keep fighting.”

Matriarch Duskgrave stepped forward, her voice quivering with panic. “Child, please, don't do anything rash! If you jump, my heart will shatter. You're still so young, and there's so much beauty left in this world. Just hold on.”

“Sweetheart,” Mrs. Beck added, near tears herself. “Don’t cry for people who don’t deserve you. If you want, I’ll be your mother. You can be my daughter.”

“Please, Miss Riley,” Mia begged, sobbing. “Please come down. Don’t leave us.”

Riley looked at the three women. Gratitude and sorrow mixed in her gaze,

“I know you care about me,” she whispered. “But I’m so tired. I’ve fought so long, and no matter how hard I try, the world always finds a new way to hurt me.”

Matriarch Duskgrave bit her lip. “I swear to you, child, if you come down now, I won’t let anyone hurt you again. I’ll make sure every last one of them pays for what they did.”

Riley gave a broken smile. “Justice? There is no justice. Not for people like me. Even if they pay, my life won’t be restored.”

Her voice cracked. “I’ll never be whole again.”

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Chapter 81

“I’m sorry... for everything.”

And with that, she closed her eyes and leaned back.

Like a puppet with its strings cut, she fell.

“No!”

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Frustrated

The three women screamed in unison.

At the last second, Maddox lunged forward, catching Riley around the waist and yanking her back through the window.

She collapsed in his arms, unconscious.

Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia rushed forward, encircling Riley with protective arms and whispered prayers.

Maddox trembled as he held her close, afraid she'd slip through his fingers. It was only then that he realized how frail she'd become. Bones pressed through skin. She weighed almost nothing. Like a ghost.

Tears spilled from his eyes and fell onto her bruised and bloodied face.

Kael Vale stood frozen. The image of Riley falling haunted him like a waking nightmare. Her despair etched itself deep into his bones.

Luna Zara crawled toward Riley, choking on sobs.

"Riley... my daughter..."

But Mia blocked her path, eyes blazing.

"Don't you dare touch her," she hissed. "Don't you even pretend to care. She ended up like this because of you—all of you from the Ebonclaw Pack! You don't deserve to call her your daughter. None of you do. Get away from her!"

She shoved Luna Zara back.

The Luna collapsed on the floor, weeping.

Just then, footsteps pounded from the hallway.

Scarlett burst into the room, flanked by the head medic and two enforcers from the Pack Judiciary.

Scarlett pointed at Riley, eyes gleaming with malice. "That rogue tried to kill someone! She should be arrested immediately!"

As long as Riley was behind bars, Scarlett could silence Tessa, eliminate every loose end, and keep her perfect life.

She smiled inwardly, already savoring the image of Riley in chains.

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Finished

Chapter 81

The head medic glared at Riley as if she could rip her apart right there..

“She attacked a patient under our care! She stabbed multiple Pack members! Take her away before she murders someone!”

The enforcers stepped forward, pulling out enchanted restraints.

But before they could grab her, Luna Zara stood up despite her injuries.

“Don’t touch her.”

Her voice was low, but full of unshakable resolve.

For once, she wasn’t afraid.

She would not let her daughter suffer again.

Kael followed suit, his injured arm dripping blood.

“My sister didn’t try to kill anyone.”

Though exhausted and pale, his tone was firm.

Scarlett’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Mom? Kael? She stabbed you! She stabbed both of you!”

“Enough!” Kael snapped. “I said no. She stays. We’ll handle this as a family. Your lies have done enough.”

The enforcers hesitated.

The tension in the room was suffocating.

Scarlett trembled with fury, hiding her rage behind a mask of worry.

Kael turned to the enforcers. “This is a Pack matter. Stand down.”

Slowly, the enforcers lowered their weapons.

Scarlett’s plan—for now—was ruined.

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Riley's body had long since been broken beyond repair—there was no way she could survive another prison

sentence.

Even Tessa, now in a vegetative state, had made it clear that Riley wasn't the one who harmed her. That meant Riley had spent five years in prison for a crime she didn't commit.

She had borne punishments that were never hers to bear.

A crippled leg, a missing kidney—her once healthy body had been reduced to this fragile shell.

She had once been the top student at Mooncrest Academy, a brilliant scholar with a bright future. But all of that had been taken from her the moment she stepped into the prison.

Now, watching Maddox cradle her emaciated form in his arms, Kael Vale felt as if every breath he took came with searing pain. He couldn't stop picturing her five years of suffering behind bars, the endless torment she must have endured.

"Kael..." Scarlett tried to speak, but Kael silenced her with a deadly glare.

The enforcers—wolf—shifters responsible for upholding pack law—understood this was more than just a family matter. After briefly checking the wounds of Kael and Luna Zara, they took their leave, knowing it wasn't their place to intervene further.

The moment the enforcers left, all the tension holding Kael and Luna Zara upright gave way. Exhaustion crashed over them like a tidal wave.

Zara, having lost too much blood, finally collapsed with a heavy thud, her body falling into the pool of blood beneath her.

Kael, ghost—pale and barely standing, swayed on his feet.

Scarlett exchanged a glance with the Matron of the medical center—there was unmistakable

disappointment in both their eyes. Still, they composed themselves quickly and called for aides to take Kael and Zara away for urgent care.

Once they were gone, silence blanketed the room.

Maddox looked down at the unconscious Riley, anxiety etched into every line of his face. Instinctively, he bent to lift her into his arms.

But Mia blocked him, fierce as a mother wolf protecting her pup. She shoved him back, her eyes blazing. "Don't think that saving her just now erases the fact that you helped send her to prison five years ago. You, the Ebonclaw Pack, and Ronan Duskcliff—none of you are innocent!"

Maddox stumbled back, as if her words had struck a vital blow. He felt as though the air had been knocked out of him.

Mia's accusation cut like a blade.

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Chapter 82

His lips parted, searching for a defense, but every word he might've said felt shallow. Useless.

Finished

In his mind, he couldn't stop seeing the moment Tessa—beloved daughter of the Blackmaw Pack—had finally confirmed that Riley was innocent. That memory echoed like thunder, each repetition a hammer striking his guilt-ridden heart.

He had once believed Scarlett to be sweet and harmless. There was no way, he'd thought, she could harm her best friend.

Riley, on the other hand, was stronger. Resilient. Always able to endure. She was Scarlett's older sister—what harm could come from her taking the fall?

He had told himself that five years was nothing. Riley would be twenty-three when she got out. Still young. She could start over.

He'd never imagined that those years would ruin her. That she'd be beaten. Maimed. Broken.

Now that the truth was out, regret consumed him.

Maddox could only stand and watch as Mia knelt and gently carried Riley on her back, treating her like the most precious treasure in the world.

With the help of Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck, they left the hospital room slowly, step by agonizing

step.

Maddox remained frozen, like a statue carved from grief. The sunlight filtering through the windows lit his figure, but none of its warmth reached him.

His soul had already fled, leaving behind only a hollow shell, trembling beneath the weight of guilt.

"Riley..." he whispered finally, his voice hoarse and choked. Tears welled in his eyes—something no one had ever seen from him before.

When Riley awoke, the sky outside was pitch-black.

The hospital room was dim. The only light came from the hallway beyond the door's frosted glass, casting a faint patchwork of shadows on the floor.

the door

She lay in bed, staring blankly at the ceiling, her body motionless, as if the soul had been drained from her. She didn't blink, didn't move, for what felt like an eternity.

Then, slowly, she pulled back the covers and climbed out of bed. Her body moved with the stiffness of someone ancient, decayed.

She opened the door and stepped out without a sound, her footsteps unsteady as she wandered through the quiet corridor.

Dim lights cast her silhouette against the walls—small, broken, and utterly alone.

She kept walking, without knowing where she was going.

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Eventually, she found herself on a pedestrian bridge. She came to a stop, looking down at the black, silent

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Chapter 82

river below.

The night wind whispered against her skin.

She raised one leg and began to climb over the railing.

Then, a deep male voice called out, “Suicide?”

She paused. The voice was vaguely familiar, but her mind was so numb, she barely registered it.

Still, she kept moving, beginning to haul herself over.

The voice came again—calm, emotionless. “If you’re going to kill yourself, could you at least pick somewhere more private?”

That time, she hesitated again. Did it really matter?

Finished

The man’s voice continued, casual but oddly sharp, “If I walk away, I seem heartless. If I interfere, I’m meddling with fate. Either way, there’s nothing in it for me.”

Finally, she turned her head.

And her eyes met his.

It was him—the man from the stairwell. The one who'd offered her a cigarette when she was at her lowest.

He stood there beneath a flickering streetlamp, cigarette between his fingers. Smoke curled upward, catching in the breeze. The faint light traced the edges of his chiseled features, cloaking the rest in shadow.

With a flick of his long, elegant fingers, he tapped ash onto the pavement.

Even that simple gesture looked impossibly refined.

“Want one?” he asked, lifting the cigarette toward her with a raised brow.

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Chapter 83

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Riley's POV

I looked at him, and there wasn't a ripple of emotion in my gaze—just a still, lifeless void.  
A dead lake inside

1. me.

After a moment, I slowly lowered my leg and turned to face him. My voice came out hoarse, as if scraped by sandpaper.

“If you don’t want to interfere with my fate, then why are you here stopping me?”

The man took a drag of his cigarette and exhaled slowly. Smoke curled upward, catching the moonlight and swirling between us like a veil. His eyes locked onto me through the haze.

“Life’s like a play,” he said, his tone calm and unhurried. “Sometimes all it takes is one more audience member to change the story. I’m curious—if you don’t die tonight, what kind of tale you’ll end up telling.”

I blinked, momentarily stunned. His face remained cold and detached, so indifferent it chilled me.

Most people either cared or didn’t. He... hovered somewhere in between, like he could walk away and forget me ever existed.

And yet his words, not quite a plea, not even encouragement—still managed to crack something inside

1. me.

No one really wants to die. Not deep down.

If life could still be beautiful... who wouldn’t want to stay and see it through?

“My story’s already ruined,” I murmured, eyes dropping to the pavement. “There’s nothing left worth watching.”

He didn’t seem fazed.

“Not necessarily. The best parts usually come at the end.”

I went silent. My gaze dropped to my body—bruised, scarred, aching. For a while, I just stared. Thinking.

Then I looked up again, and for the first time in a long while, there was a faint flicker of light in my eyes.

“Do you think I could really start over?”

“Why not?” he replied. “If you want to, you can. Anytime.”

His words settled into me like the first warmth after a long winter. It wasn't hope exactly... but it was close. A small crack of sunlight in the endless dark.

A gust of night wind whipped through the bridge, and I shivered involuntarily.

He noticed.

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Chapter 83

Without a word, he shrugged off his black jacket and held it out to me.

“Put this on. Don't catch a cold.”

I hesitated. Then took it.

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It smelled faintly of smoke, clean cotton, and something else I couldn't quite place—something masculine and steady. The warmth wrapped around my shoulders like a shield, and for a second... I felt safe.

“Thank you.” I said quietly.

“You really want to thank me?” he asked.

“Huh?” I glanced at him, confused.

“You said thank you, didn't you?”

“I... yes?”

He looked at me with a strange expression, like he was both amused and vaguely entertained. His eyes- sharp, unreadable—narrowed slightly.

Then he asked. “You practice Moonweaving?”

My brows furrowed. How did he know that?

He tilted his chin slightly toward me.

I looked down—and froze.

Right there, stitched into the chest of the jacket I was wearing, was a lunar bloom sigil.

And not just any bloom.

Mine.

I recognized the stitchwork instantly—woven threads enchanted beneath moonlight, petals inked with ancient lunar patterns, glowing faintly under the right light. It was unmistakably mine.

I jerked my head up, staring at him.

How...?

He didn't say anything. He didn't need to.

"Your Moonweave is impressive," he said eventually, his voice still cold, but with an odd note of reverence. He pulled out his phone and tapped it.

A photo filled the screen. It was another piece of Moonweaving—this one etched onto silk, shimmering in its unfinished brilliance.

"This sigil is clearly crafted by a true daughter of the old packs," he said. "But it's incomplete. The weaver

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Chapter 83

didn't finish it. If you could complete it for me, that'll be your thank you."

I stared at the screen, stunned.

I knew this pattern. I knew every glowing strand.

It was mine.

I had started weaving that sigil while imprisoned—quiet nights, moonlight filtering through iron bars. I hadn't finished it because I'd been released before I could.

But... how had it gotten into his hands?

"Sir," I asked, voice trembling, "where did you get that Moonweave?"

"Pack auction house," he said simply. "I bought it."

A Pack auction? My Moonweaving? I thought I must've misheard.

I knew I was skilled. The guards used to whisper about my hands like they were sacred. But I'd always assumed I was just... good enough. Nothing more.

And yet...

I clutched his phone tightly. My voice shook as I whispered, "Do you mind me asking... how much did you pay for it?"

He studied me for a moment, then replied, "Twenty million."

I nearly dropped his phone.

Twenty million?

Twenty. Million.

He said it so casually, like he hadn't just dropped a bomb.

And that wasn't even the end of it.

"That was actually a discount," he added. "This piece was supposed to rival the Moonwoven Pines tapestry I bought last year for thirty million. But since this one was incomplete, its value dropped. Still... the sigil on your jacket—it matches flawlessly. If you complete this piece, no one would ever tell it wasn't woven by a single soul."

Moonwoven Pines...

My mind reeled. I had crafted that too.

My hands shook. Without meaning to, I swiped the screen again.

There it was.

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Chapter 83

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A majestic silver crane perched beneath moonlit pines. Threads gleamed as if blessed by a lunar priestess. Every stitch in that piece—mine.

I couldn't breathe.

He went on, calm as ever.

"I gave that one to my grandmother as a solstice gift. She adored it. So when I saw another Moonweave by the same hand, I had to claim it."

Thirty million?

Thirty. Million?

My throat went dry. My vision blurred. I couldn't process it.

Those numbers... I couldn't even fathom them.

And they were attached to something I made with my hands?

No wonder the prisoners never touched my fingers, no matter how cruel their beatings.

No wonder the guards shielded me each time I took up the Moonneedle.

My hands... weren't just skilled.

They were sacred.

A wave of sorrow followed the shock—cold and bitter and suffocating.

If I had known...

If I had known what my Moonweaving was truly worth, maybe I wouldn't have endured all that begging, all that degradation, for ten million promised by the Vales.

The weight of those years, every humiliation, every tear I shed believing I was nothing—crashed down on

1. me.

My eyes burned. I bit my lip, trying to hold it in.

But it was too late.

The tears came anyway.

And all I could do was clutch his phone, shaking under the grief of everything I could've been—and wasn't.

## **Send Gifts**

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

[ 933 words ]

## Chapter 84

Third Person's POV

The more Riley held it in, the more it hurt.

She finally broke down, leaning over the edge of the Moonbridge railing and sobbing uncontrollably under the silver light of the waxing moon.

Lucien Duskgrave—Alpha Prince of the Stormridge Pack—froze.

In all his twenty-eight years, never had a woman cried in front of him. Not like this. Not raw, broken, and loud enough to shake his composure.

With a long sigh, he pulled out a cigarette and offered it to her.

“Want one?”

Riley lifted her tear-stained face, her voice thick and nasal. “Are you trying to comfort me?”

“Yeah,” he answered plainly.

“But I don’t even like smoking,” she hiccupped between sobs.

There was a beat of silence. Lucien’s brow twitched as if instinctively reacting, but then smoothed out again -as if afraid she’d think he was annoyed.

His lips parted. “Then let me buy you a drink.”

“Waaah-” Riley cried harder, her voice trembling. “Will drinking stop it from hurting?”

“It might.”

“Okay... I’ll drink. But I don’t have any money.”

“It’s fine,” he said. “I’ll cover it.”

“You’re such a good man...” she mumbled.

Lucien blinked.

Good man?

That was the first time anyone had described him that way.

He had always seen himself as cold. Detached. A creature who acted solely on intent and strategy, not sentiment. He didn’t care for opinions, reputations, or anyone’s approval. In his eyes, there were no true “good” or “bad” people in this world—only shifting interests and necessary means.

Those whispers about him being ruthless, calculating, merciless?

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Chapter 84

He never denied them.

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They were how he survived. How he maintained control.

But in this moment, the words “You’re a good man,” spoken through a girl’s drunken sobs, landed like a strange force pressing directly on his chest.

He allowed a faint smile to touch his lips.

Well, if the little she-wolf had already given him a “good guy” badge... he might as well play the part to the end.

“Wait here,” he said, turning away.

Riley leaned back against the rail, watching him with bleary eyes. She saw him stride across the bridge and pop open the trunk of a sleek obsidian car parked nearby.

His gaze landed on two bottles of wine tucked neatly in the back.

They were meant for a business deal in the East District—a rare vintage, expensive even by Alpha standards.

He grabbed one and returned to her, holding it out like a peace offering.

“Drink.”

Riley didn’t hesitate. She uncorked the bottle and took a long, unapologetic swig straight from the mouth.

Watching her gulp like a warrior, Lucien’s lips quirked into something close to amusement.

From the car, his Beta-Duke—nearly dropped his tablet.

Was she seriously drinking that wine like it was water?

That wasn’t just any bottle—it was a blood-aged Romani Conti, worth more than half a million credits. A treasured bottle that some Alphas would offer as a dowry.

And she was guzzling it like ale.

Duke's mouth fell open. His Alpha... wasn't stopping her. In fact, there was a ghost of a smile on his usually frozen face.

He had never, in all his years of service, seen Lucien show even the slightest softness toward a woman.

Quickly, Duke pulled out his phone and snapped a picture of them—Riley standing beneath the moonlight on the bridge, drinking straight from a priceless bottle, while Lucien stood beside her, silent but protective.

He sent the photo to Matriarch Duskgrave immediately.

Back at the Stormridge estate, Matriarch Duskgrave had been on the brink of losing her mind.

She wasn't alone—Mrs. Beck, Mia, Kael Vale, Maddox, and Ronan Duskcliff had been frantically searching for Riley since her sudden disappearance. For two hours they'd scoured Mooncrest, afraid she might do

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Chapter 84

something irreversible.

When Matriarch Duskgrave's phone pinged, she nearly dropped it. The moment she opened Duke's message and saw the photo, her lungs filled with air again.

She saw the girl's face clearly in the photo—it was Riley. She was Riley!

So Riley was the mate her grandson had chosen. Matriarch Duskgrave's eyes welled with tears. She thanked the Moon Goddess, grateful that her own kindness had ended up saving her future granddaughter-in-law.

But then she saw Riley's flushed face, the sorrow in her body language, the desperate way she clung to the

bottle.

Matriarch Duskgrave's eyes welled up.

"That poor girl..." she murmured. "How much pain must she be in to drink like that..."

Tradition dictated that nobleborn girls—especially those of Luna lineage—should never drink in public.

But she could only feel pity.

"Let her drink," she whispered. "If it dulls the ache even for one night, let her forget everything."

Wiping her eyes, she quickly called her grandson.

By now, Riley had nearly finished the first bottle. Her face was red, her breathing unsteady, but there was a strange liveliness in her cheeks—a pulse of warmth that hadn't been there earlier.

She picked up the second bottle.

Lucien—still silent, still watching—opened his mouth, about to tell her to slow down.

His phone rang.

He answered.

"Lucien, is Riley with you?" Matriarch Duskgrave's voice rang through the line.

Riley? he thought. So that's her name.

He glanced at the girl, who was already working on the second bottle like a seasoned fighter downing her potion before a battle.

"She's a good girl," the Matriarch said firmly. "And I love her like my own. She's just... suffered too much."

A pause.

"Take her home with you tonight. To your place. Stay with her. Don't let her be alone,"

Another pause—then steel edged into Matriarch Duskgrave's voice,

"And don't you dare hurt her. If you do, you'll have to answer to me."

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He didn't answer right away.

His eyes lingered on the young woman now sprawled on the bench beside the bridge, still gripping the bottle.

The moonlight caught her dark hair, her flushed cheeks, her raw vulnerability.

Riley.

Her name was Riley.

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

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Chapter 85

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Lucien Duskgrave's POV

The longer my grandmother spoke, the more emotional she became—until her voice broke entirely and she started crying.

I gripped the phone tighter, her sobs cutting through the night like claws to the chest. My throat tightened with something I couldn't name—something uncomfortably close to guilt,

"I'll take care of her," I said softly, trying to ease her worry. "Don't worry, Grandma."

But she still wasn't convinced.

"Lucien," she pleaded tearfully, "Riley's in a fragile place right now. Please... be patient with her. Comfort

her."

"I will."

"And she's suffered too much, that poor child," she continued, as if the floodgates had broken open. "Talk to her more. Don't let her bottle everything up. She needs someone to really see her. To guide her out of all that pain."

"I know."

She kept going—concerned reminders to prepare sobering soup, to make sure the blankets were pulled up over her at night, to keep the windows shut so she wouldn't catch a chill. Her voice was trembling with emotion. She cared about Riley in a way I hadn't fully realized until now.

And I listened. I listened to every word, nodding silently even though she couldn't see it.

By the time I hung up, Riley was drunk. Properly drunk.

She tossed the empty bottle aside. Her legs wobbled beneath her. I reached out instinctively, catching her before she could fall.

She leaned against me, soft and warm and helpless, her head tipped up, eyes glazed with confusion.

"Who are you?" she slurred.

I quickly ended the call and steadied her. "You've had too much to drink."

But it was like she didn't hear me. She lifted her finger and pointed it shakily at my face, squinting.

“You’re Kael Vale, aren’t you?” she declared, voice loud and angry. “You’re Kael. Vale!”

Her emotions flipped like a switch. She scowled, brow furrowing in raw, unfiltered hurt.

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“I hate you, Kael. You’re not my brother anymore. Get out. I don’t need a brother like you.”

Then she pushed me. Or at least tried to. Her strength was laughable, kitten–light. But the force threw her

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Chapter 85

off balance, and she started to tip backward.

I caught her again, my arm sliding around her waist automatically.

“I’m not Kael Vale,” I said calmly.

She blinked up at me, confused. “You’re not?”

I shook my head.

“Then... you’re Maddox,” she accused, voice trembling. “You’re Maddox, and you’re no better.”

Her cheeks puffed in frustration, and she stared at me like I was the worst kind of traitor.

Fintsheet

“You were supposed to protect me,” she mumbled, voice cracking. “You promised you’d always keep me safe. But you took her side. You helped Scarlett hurt me.”

Her breath hitched.

“You said you’d study law to protect me. That you’d put the bad people in jail. But I was the one you put

there...”

Her voice broke completely, and tears fell fast and heavy, glistening beneath the moonlight.

“I worked so hard for you. I paid your tuition. I took every job I could find so you could get your damn degree. And I did it all without ever telling you. I didn’t want to bruise your pride...”

She choked, fists trembling in the air.

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“I gave you everything. My heart. My hope. And you let me take the fall for her. You let them throw me in a cell for something I didn’t do.”

The bridge was silent except for her sobs.

And the moonlight—goddess, the way it wrapped around her—made her look like something half—angel, half—ghost. Fragile. Shattered. Still fighting.

“Don’t cry,” I said quietly.

“I want to cry,” she snapped, still hiccupping between gasps. “I don’t need your fake kindness.”

She shoved at me again, stumbling back a few steps, barely staying upright. But she was determined not to fall.

She pointed at me with shaking fingers.

“Maddox, I hate you. I’ll never forgive you. Not in this lifetime. You’re a bastard...”

The breeze stirred her hair, swept the tears from her cheeks, and carried her scent to me—bitter with pain, sweet with buried strength.

And I just... stood there.

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Fint bed

Chapter 85

Watching.

For a man who prided himself on never feeling, never folding. I was folding now. The iron wall I'd built around my chest had a crack.

She didn't even know who I was.

But she'd cried herself into exhaustion.

When her knees buckled and she slumped forward, I stepped in without thinking and caught her in my

arms.

She was so small. Barely reached my chest. And gods, she was light—too light. Like the weight of everything she'd been through had hollowed her out from the inside.

Her head drooped against my chest, hair tangled across her cheek.

I held her tighter and glanced down. The moon stretched our shadows across the pavement like threads, weaving us together in quiet defiance of the world.

In the car, Duke was driving in silence.

Then I asked, "You told Matriarch Duskgrave?"

His tone was neutral, but I caught the glance he threw me through the rearview mirror.

I didn't answer right away. Just stared out the window, Riley curled into my arms.

Duke coughed, then chuckled awkwardly. "Boss, I just wanted her to stop worrying..."

"Don't talk so much," I said flatly.

Duke laughed nervously. "I did it for you, you know. She was practically summoning the Elders."

He peeked at Riley again in the mirror, then muttered, "She's pretty. You two look good together. But damn, she's tiny."

I shot him a look sharp enough to make him flinch.

He shut up.

Riley's breathing had evened out, though she still made the occasional hiccuping sound.

I frowned and gently patted her back, unsure why I even bothered.

She murmured something unintelligible in her sleep, her words little more than breath.

I looked at her for a long time.

Too long.

I didn't like the way she made me feel. Unmoored. Human.

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Chapter 85

I pulled out a cigarette. Flicked it between my fingers, halfway to lighting it.

Then paused.

Glanced at her again.

And slid the cigarette back into the case.

Outside, the lights of Mooncrest blurred past like falling stars. My reflection in the window looked cold. Distant. Familiar.

But something inside me wasn't.

"Duke," I said finally. "By tomorrow, I want a full report on her."

“Got it.”

Because whatever she was running from...

I needed to know.

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

[ 915 words ]

Chapter 86

Third Person's POV

Kael Vale, Maddox, and Ronan Duskcliff had searched all night..

They scoured every street, every possible corner of Mooncrest, but there was no trace of Riley.

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When they finally returned to her hospital room, only to find the bed empty and cold, something inside each of them snapped.

Ronan's face flushed red with a mix of anguish and guilt. His body shook as his wolf clawed beneath the surface, pacing violently in his chest.

Then, like a predator gone mad, he turned toward Kael, eyes gleaming with fury. Without warning, he lunged forward and landed a brutal punch across Kael's face.

“This is your fault!” Ronan snarled, voice like a snarl tearing through the air. “Your pack never treated her like one of your own! If the Ebonclaws hadn't cast her out—she wouldn't have reached this point! She wouldn't have disappeared into the night thinking she was alone!”

Kael staggered back several steps, blood trickling from his split lip. His breath came heavy. His wolf roared behind his ribs.

Just last night, Riley had stood on the edge of that rooftop—ready to end it all.

Kael's expression twisted. Then, with a growl of his own, he swung back, knuckles connecting hard with Ronan's jaw.

“You think you’re any better?” Kael shouted. “You’re the one who let her rot in a cell for five years! The one who stood silent while she was torn apart from the inside out. We may not have loved her right, but at least we didn’t break her!”

Each word stabbed Kael like fangs into flesh. He had already decided to be a better brother. To make things right.

But she was gone.

Why was she so stubborn? Why couldn’t she be more like Scarlett—obedient, soft, easy?

Why did she have to be... Riley?

Tears shimmered in Kael’s furious eyes, but his fists didn’t stop swinging.

Across from him, Ronan was shaking, veins bulging at his temple. “I didn’t let that happen!” he bellowed, his voice cracking. “You think I wanted her to suffer? You think I could bear it—watching her come out of that place covered in scars she didn’t deserve?”

“Then what did you do, huh?” Kael spat, eyes blazing with judgment. “You watched. You let it happen. And you call yourself a man?”

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Chapter 86

Ronan lost it. With a snarl, he shifted—not fully, but enough that the feral edge took over. His claws burst through his skin. His canines lengthened. His eyes glowed the deep gold of a threatened Alpha.

Kael’s own wolf howled in response, bursting forward in a flash of fur and rage. The hospital walls blurred as the two Alpha—bloods collided in a flurry of fangs, claws, and snarls.

Furniture shattered under their weight. The scent of blood and dominance filled the air. They weren’t just fighting each other—they were fighting their own failures, their guilt, the unbearable truth that they had lost

her.

A white wolf.

A once-in-a-generation soul.

And now she was gone.

Maddox cursed under his breath and rushed to pull them apart. "Enough!" he shouted, trying to wedge himself between the two snapping wolves.

But Kael, lost to rage, flung him off with a savage jerk of his arm. Maddox staggered backward, chest heaving.

Before he could catch his balance, Ronan's wild swing hit him square in the shoulder, sending him crashing

into the wall.

Maddox clenched his teeth, pain shooting through him, but it wasn't just physical.

It was fury. And heartbreak.

"You've both lost your damn minds!" he roared. "What the hell is wrong with you?!"

Kael whipped around, eyes bloodshot, and pointed a shaking finger at him.

"You grew up with her! You were supposed to protect her! And yet it was your hand that signed the papers that locked her away. Why?!"

Every syllable hit like a hammer.

Maddox paled.

His throat tightened, and the memories—those dark, gutting truths—rushed in like a storm.

"Shut up," he growled, voice hoarse. "Shut the hell up-

But Kael didn't. Couldn't.

And in that moment, Maddox's restraint broke.

He lunged, landing a solid punch straight into Kael's jaw. Kael reeled, blood spraying from his mouth.

“You bastard!” Kael roared.

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Chapter 86

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The room descended into utter chaos. The floor was littered with broken glass, overturned IV stands, and shards of metal. Blood smeared across the linoleum tiles. Shirts were torn. Claws were out. The three of them fought like wild wolves in a pit, pain driving every blow, guilt fueling every swing.

They didn't notice when the door creaked open.

They didn't hear the soft gasp.

Mia stood silently in the doorway, a duffel bag in one hand. Her eyes swept across the wreckage, her lips curling in disdain.

She said nothing. Just stared.

Riley had loved all three of them—trusted them.

And in return, they had given her betrayal, torment, and five years behind bars.

Now, they dared mourn her like she was dead.

Pathetic.

They didn't even know she had been found.

Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck had already received word. Mia had only come to gather Riley's belongings and finalize her discharge paperwork.

She hadn't expected to walk into this madness.

She turned coldly and walked away without a word.

They didn't deserve to know.

Not yet.

Not until they bled a little more.

Eventually, the chaos burned itself out.

Kael slumped into a chair, face bruised and hands trembling, burying his face in his palms. His shoulders quaked in silence.

Ronan leaned against the wall, gasping for air, his golden eyes hollow and distant.

Maddox stared out the window like a man who had forgotten what it meant to live.

Three powerful men.

Three Alphas.

And none of them had been strong enough to protect her.

Not the rarest wolf of them all.

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Chapter 86

Not their white wolf.

Not Riley.

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

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At the Duskgrave Estate.

Lucien Duskgrave stood silently in front of the floor-to-ceiling window, a thick stack of documents in his hand.

Duke, his ever-efficient Beta assistant, had worked through the night to dig into Riley's past. Every record. Every file. Every secret.

Lucien had read it all.

His expression was grim.

Every word on the page felt like a blade. Riley's twenty-three years of life had been nothing short of a tragedy written in blood..

She had grown up in the rogue orphanage system, never knowing the warmth of family. Then, at fifteen, she was found and brought back to the Ebonclaw Pack, only to suffer three more years of cold silence and calculated neglect.

She was a prodigy-top of her class at Mooncrest Academy for three consecutive years. A dominant force in physics competitions, a record-breaking score of 741 in her final exams-enough to make her a star even at Ashmoor Academy, the most prestigious institution in the werewolf world.

And yet, all of it was stolen.

False accusations. A prison sentence.

Her dreams, her dignity-ripped from her by those she trusted.

Lucien was never one to be easily shaken. His world was one of strategy, discipline, and bloodlines. But even he couldn't stop his brow from furrowing as he read her file.

Behind him, Duke felt the Alpha's aura darken like a storm front. He said nothing, but the weight in the air was suffocating.

Riley... What kind of strength did it take to survive all that? So small. So thin. Yet she'd endured twenty-three years of hell.

Before either of them could say a word, Matriarch Duskgrave arrived, flanked by Mrs. Beck and Mia.

Lucien immediately tucked the documents toward Duke. "Put these away. Don't let Grandmother see."

"Yes, Alpha," Duke said swiftly, disappearing with the file.

"Grandmother," Lucien greeted, "what brings you here?"

Matriarch Duskgrave's eyes sparkled with joy. "Where's Riley?"

"She's still asleep," Lucien replied.

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Chapter 87

"It's already ten. That child's still not up?"

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Matriarch Duskgrave frowned and headed upstairs, concern written all over her face.

Lucien didn't think much of it. Riley had drunk too much last night—it made sense she'd still be sleeping.

But moments later, Matriarch Duskgrave's panicked voice rang down the stairs.

"Riley! What's wrong, child?! Don't scare me like this!"

Lucien's heart seized. He bolted upstairs.

Riley was curled tightly on the bed, her skin flushed crimson, her body radiating a dangerous heat. Her lips were dry and cracked, her breath ragged. She clutched the bedsheets in agony, as if fighting off something ravaging her from the inside.

Matriarch Duskgrave stood nearby, frozen in distress. Mrs. Beck and Mia were on the verge of tears.

Seeing Riley like this—it was as if knives had pierced through their chests.

Lucien didn't hesitate. He strode forward, scooped her into his arms, and charged down the stairs.

She was burning up—literally. Her body heat scorched his arms like fire.

“To the hospital,” he ordered sharply.

The household sprang into motion.

In the car, Mia suddenly spoke, voice urgent. “Not the First Hospital. Go to the Second.”

Lucien glanced back.

“Alpha Alaric, Maddox, and Ronan Duskcliff are all tied to the First. If they see her again, things could spiral. That pack has brought her nothing but pain. Let's not risk it.”

Duke slammed the gas pedal down, sending the vehicle speeding toward Mooncrest's Second Hospital.

They made it in under twenty minutes.

Coincidentally, Theo Hale—now one of the lead physicians at the First Hospital—had just finished an academic conference at the Second. He was laughing with a few fellow doctors, exchanging thoughts about new treatment techniques, his usual careless arrogance masked by his medical brilliance.

As they exited the hospital lobby, Lucien swept past them, cradling Riley tightly and Mrs. Beck followed, gasping for air.

Theo's steps halted mid-laugh. His brow furrowed.

Was that...

No, it couldn't be.

Matriarch Duskgrave, Mia,

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Chapter 87

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That woman—those long dark strands flowing from Lucien’s arms, the way she trembled—looked too much like Riley.

But the Second Hospital? The Ebonclaws never used this facility. They’d always gone to the First.

He shook his head. Probably just a mistake. He’d been overworked lately—his eyes were playing tricks on him.

He turned back to his group, brushing it off with a chuckle.

Meanwhile, in the emergency room, Riley was already being examined.

After a flurry of activity, one of the doctors approached Lucien with a furrowed brow.

“You’re her husband, correct?”

Lucien blinked, caught off guard. “I’m not-”

“He is!” Matriarch Duskgrave interjected before he could finish. She stepped forward, face pale with worry. “I’m her grandmother—in-law. Doctor, how is my granddaughter—in-law doing?”

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[ 1,028 words ]

## Chapter 88

At Mooncrest Second Hospital, the tension was suffocating, the doctor had barely walked out of the emergency ward before his temper exploded.

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“What kind of pack family are you?” he barked, eyes blazing as he looked at Lucien and the others. “Do you know what you’ve done? This girl only has one kidney! And you still let her drink like that? Were you trying to kill her?”

The words hit like thunder.

“One kidney alone already puts massive strain on her body. Now, her blood alcohol level is dangerously high. If the remaining kidney hadn’t been so healthy, she could’ve suffered multiple organ failures—maybe even died.”

“You got her here just in time. She’s stable for now, but this is still extremely serious. We’ll do our best to keep her safe.”

Matriarch Duskgrave staggered, nearly collapsing, and had to be held up by Mrs. Beck.

Mia’s eyes widened in shock, her whole body frozen. One kidney?

How could that be? Their Luna, their beloved Riley—how could she only have one kidney?

The doctor returned to the ward, leaving a stunned silence behind him.

Matriarch Duskgrave turned with trembling lips and a broken voice. “Mia... How could Riley only have one kidney?”

Mia was still in shock. “That’s impossible... When she was sentenced to the rogue prison five years ago, she was completely healthy...”

That sentence fell like a bomb in the middle of the room.

Lucien, Matriarch Duskgrave, and Mrs. Beck all froze.

Healthy before prison. One kidney after.

There was only one horrifying conclusion.

Lucien's mind flicked back to the confidential documents Duke had retrieved. There had been no mention of a missing organ, but the abuse Riley had endured during those years... it all made sense now.

Who could harbor such hatred against such a fragile, young woman? What kind of twisted cruelty could take this from her?

Even Lucien, a hardened Alpha who had seen the worst of war and betrayal, felt a bone-deep fury rising

inside him.

But with that fury came something else—something that chilled them all to the bone.

Chapter 88

“She only has one kidney...” Mrs. Beck whispered, voice trembling. “But... we’ve seen her shift.”

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Finished

The room went deathly still.

“She’s a wolf,” Mia confirmed, voice full of awe. “I saw her that day in the ward—bleeding, cornered, barely conscious—and then she shifted. I didn’t believe my own eyes.”

“But that shouldn’t be possible,” Matriarch Duskgrave whispered, almost reverently. “A wolf needs both kidneys functioning to channel the energy required for transformation. It’s... it’s a biological law of our kind.”

And yet, Riley had done it.

In the face of everything—imprisonment, torture, betrayal, and now this devastating revelation—she had still awakened her wolf.

Lucien lowered his gaze, hands clenched into fists at his sides. His jaw was tight, his chest heaving.

She had no business surviving. No reason she should have become a wolf.

And yet... she did.

Not just a wolf—a white wolf.

A miracle.

A warrior.

“She’s stronger than any of us,” Lucien murmured, voice heavy with guilt and awe. “We should’ve protected

her.”

No one argued. No one could.

Because they all knew—Riley wasn’t just another Alpha.

She was the one who had endured the unendurable and still rose, still shifted, still howled under the moonlight with the blood of warriors running through her veins.

A survivor. A legend in the making.

Meanwhile, at Mooncrest First Hospital...

Kael Vale looked nothing like the proud heir he once was. His beard was unkempt, eyes hollow with regret. He dragged himself toward his father’s recovery room like a ghost.

Just as he reached the door, Dean Elira Blackthorn stepped out. Her face was flushed and her lips oddly swollen. She jumped, clearly startled to find Kael at the entrance.

“Young Alpha Kael,” she greeted with an awkward smile, avoiding eye contact.

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Chapter 88

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Kael merely grunted, not even sparing her a glance. His mind was drowning in chaos. He brushed past her and entered the room.

Inside, Alpha Alaric Vale was fastening his robe, looking rather... satisfied. Kael thought nothing of it—he assumed his father had just come out of the bathroom.

He sank into a chair like a man defeated.

Alaric frowned. “Still no sign of that ungrateful girl?”

Kael’s jaw clenched. “Her name is Riley. And she’s your daughter.”

Alaric scoffed. “She tried to kill me. She’s no daughter of mine.”

Kael turned toward him, disbelief in his eyes. “She’s missing, possibly dying somewhere alone in the wild. And you don’t care?”

“Let her die. Maybe then I’ll finally have peace.” Alaric waved him off.

Kael stared at him, stunned by the inhumanity.

“She gave everything to this family. You used her and cast her aside. Now you want her dead just to avoid guilt?”

Alaric leaned back, cold and dismissive. “She was never valuable. Even if she threw herself at Lucien Duskgrave, he wouldn’t want her. What Alpha wants a damaged she-

Kael’s hands tightened into fists.

“Forget her. Focus on getting Duskgrave to back the Eastern Border development. That’s what matters.”

Kael looked at his father like he was seeing a stranger. “Dad... if you’d given even half the love you gave to Tessa to Riley, she might not have ended up this broken.”

At the mention of Tessa, Alaric’s face darkened.

“She’s the one who caused all this. Don’t act like I’m the villain.”

Kael’s voice trembled now, barely above a whisper. “Was it true... what I suspected last night? You always knew Riley wasn’t the one who lured Tessa to the Darkwoods. You knew she wasn’t the reason the rogues attacked.”

Alaric flinched, his eyes betraying the truth Kael had feared.

“You knew,” Kael whispered. “You knew it was a lie, and you let her take the blame. You made me testify against my own sister.”

“You’re being dramatic. That was years ago. Let it go.”

“Let it go?!” Kael’s laugh was hollow, bitter. “You told me to say she was guilty. You made me look her in the eye and call her a traitor.”

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Chapter 88

“She is my sister. And I destroyed her with my own hands.”

Kael wiped away the tears that now ran freely down his face. “No wonder she can’t forgive me. No wonder...”

Alaric slammed the table beside him. “Enough! We can’t change the past. Focus on the deal with Duskgrave. That’s all that matters now.”

Kael looked up, his eyes colder than ever. “That’s all that’s ever mattered to you, hasn’t it?”

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**- in Vengeance 89**

[ 794 words ]

## Chapter 89

At the Ebonclaw pack house, tensions reached their breaking point.

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Kael Vale's eyes burned red, his chest heaving with fury as he glared at Alpha Alaric. Every word he spoke trembled with rage. "You let Riley carry the weight of a false accusation. You let her rot in a rogue prison for something she didn't do. She was tortured. Her leg was shattered. They took her kidney. And you-" his voice cracked, "you just let it happen. Don't you fear the wrath of the Moon Goddess?"

Alaric trembled with rage, his hand pointing at Kael as his voice rose. "How dare you speak to me like this? Everything I've done was to protect the Vale name. That girl was weak, troublesome. If she had to be sacrificed, then so be it!"

"Sacrificed?" Kael let out a bitter laugh. "She lost a leg. A kidney. She lost everything while we lived comfortably. And you feel no shame?"

Alaric's face twitched at the mention of her missing kidney, but he forced himself to remain stoic. "She probably picked a fight in prison. Maybe she got injured and the healers had no choice. Either way, it's her own fault. She was always reckless."

Kael stared at him in disbelief. "You don't even care if she lives or dies, do you?"

“Enough!” Alaric snapped. “Right now, our business alliances matter more. Did you get Alpha Lucien’s contact like I asked? Set up a meeting. That’s what’s important.”

Kael rose slowly, his eyes filled with bitter resolve. “I used to admire you, Father. I believed in your strength, your judgment. But not this time. This time, I’ll find the truth myself. I’ll clear Riley’s name, even if it means walking away from this family.”

Alaric’s face turned dark. “You walk out that door and investigate this, don’t ever call yourself my son again! And forget about inheriting anything from the Vale legacy.”

Kael didn’t look back. He walked out with unwavering determination. All he could think of was Riley—the sister he had failed. He needed to find her. He needed to make things right.

He had barely reached the hallway when Scarlett Vale, their family’s darling, walked in carrying a silver thermos.

“Father, I made your favorite bone broth,” she said sweetly, stepping into the room with a radiant smile. Her eyes caught Kael’s, and her smile faltered.

Kael’s eyes narrowed. The events of the previous day were still vivid in his mind. His instincts screamed that something was wrong.

But Sedarlett, ever confident in her role as the golden daughter, offered a soft smile. “Brother, you’re here too. Would you like to join us?”

Kael didn’t answer. He marched forward, grabbing her by the shoulders.

“Riley’s gone,” he said, voice like thunder. “Are you happy now?”

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Chapter 89

Scarlett froze, her face turning pale. "I... I don't know what you mean..."

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"Don't lie to me!" Kael growled, his grip tightening. "You wanted her gone. Now you have what you always wanted—Riley out of the picture, and the spotlight all to yourself."

Scarlett burst into tears, trembling as she whispered, "How can you say that? I'm your sister... You've always known I love this family."

And Kael had believed that, once. He'd defended her, trusted her, even when Riley was dragged away in

chains.

He'd believed her innocence.

But yesterday, he'd seen the cracks. The way she'd looked when cornered. The way she hadn't denied what truly happened the night of the rogue ambush.

Kael shoved her back, pinning her lightly to the wall. Scarlett cried out in pain as her back hit the stone.

From the bed, Alaric roared, "Let go of her!"

He struggled to rise, and in doing so aggravated his wound, gasping in pain as he reached for the cane by the bedside.

“Unhand your sister!” Alaric bellowed, and with a surprising burst of energy, slapped Kael across the face.

The impact sent Kael’s head reeling sideways.

Just then, Theo entered the room.

He’d returned from a late consult and had stopped by to check on the Vale Alpha after hearing of the family’s injuries.

Instead, he found chaos.

He quickly stepped between them, pulling Kael back with a frown. “Kael, your father’s still healing. What’s going on?”

Kael’s breath was ragged. He said nothing for a moment, then quietly told Theo about Riley’s disappearance, his fears, and what had happened during the previous day’s confrontation.

“Riley has one kidney,” Kael said, barely above a whisper. “Her wolf form shouldn’t even be possible. But we’ve all seen it. She’s a fighter. She’s survived what should’ve broken her. And now... she’s missing. I don’t know how much more she can take.”

Theo’s expression shifted. His mind replayed the fleeting image he’d seen that morning—Lucien carrying a girl through the ER doors at Mooncrest Second Hospital. Her scent had been familiar. So had the fall of her hair.

“Riley,” he murmured to himself.

Could it have been her?

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[ 859 words ]

Chapter 90

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Back in Mooncrest First Hospital, Theo stood beside the tall window at the end of the corridor, his fingers tapping absently against the glass. Though he had just returned from a weeklong academic exchange in Northern territory, his mind was far from focused on medicine.

He had almost said something to Kael moments ago—about what he thought he'd seen in the emergency bay of Mooncrest Second Hospital. A flash of a familiar figure in the arms of Lucien Duskgrave. A limp she-wolf with matted hair and skin far too pale.

He had convinced himself it wasn't Riley Vale.

But now, doubt crept in like frost.

Theo hadn't been oblivious to the whispers surrounding the Vale family. Though he'd buried himself in academic lectures and clinical rounds, the gossip among nurses and junior healers traveled far and fast.

In the mere two months since Riley's release from the rogue prison, she had been hospitalized several times—each time gravely injured. Once with whip marks across her

back and a shattered pinky; another time, unconscious with a severe head wound and signs of infection.

Every time, it was Riley.

Never her adopted sister, Scarlett.

And yet the pack always insisted it was Riley who “caused trouble,” who “hurt” Tessa.

If Riley was the abuser... why was she the one always lying broken on a hospital bed?

Theo remembered that night weeks ago—when Riley fled to Southend, trying to catch a train to other territory. She had been barefoot, bleeding, and terrified. And he—like Kael—had dragged her back.

He’d believed then that he was helping. That the pack needed her to “come to her senses.”

Looking back now, he saw it for what it was: a desperate escape from a place she never saw as home.

His guilt coiled like a serpent around his heart.

She had tried to run. Again and again. And every time, they forced her back—only for her to end up more broken than before.

Theo’s expression darkened, his jaw clenched.

“Where could she have gone this time?” Kael had asked earlier, brows furrowed in worry. “She’s weak, has no money. What if she’s hurt again—out there alone?”

Theo had only given a vague, “Maybe,” in reply. But inside, he was seething.

Because Kael still didn’t get it.

Riley wasn’t “just being difficult.” She wasn’t running from responsibility. She was running for her life.

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## Chapter 90

He thought back to the report: Riley had a missing kidney. With such a compromised body, she shouldn't even be capable of shifting into her wolf form.

And yet, during the last lunar flare, she had.

Several witnesses saw her half-shift—fur white as snow, eyes blazing silver. It defied logic.

But what broke Theo's composure even more than her resilience... was his own role in her suffering.

He had mocked her.

Dismissed her.

Believed every lie Scarlett fed the pack.

The realization hit like a hammer: he had been someone's weapon, wielded blindly.

Through the frosted glass of the infirmary door, he saw Alpha Alaric gently stroking Scarlett's hair as she cried into his chest. The scene churned his stomach.

The so-called "father" had never once visited Riley in the hospital.

But Scarlett? One snuffle and he came running.

Theo turned away sharply.

"I've got rounds," he muttered to Kael, and stalked down the corridor.

But he didn't head toward the patient ward.

He made for the security office.

Riley's case was riddled with inconsistencies—and Theo wanted the truth."

The door to the monitoring room was locked, but he keyed in his staff code. A monitor flickered to life, showing rows of timestamped footage.

He began typing in the timestamp from the prior night. The moment when Riley was said to have “attacked” Scarlett.

A red message blinked onto the screen: “VIDEO FILE MISSING.”

Theo frowned, tried another angle—from the hallway outside the room.

“VIDEO FILE MISSING.”

His frown deepened.

These videos weren’t simply corrupted. They had been manually deleted.

And only a handful of people in the entire hospital had clearance to do that.

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Chapter 90

Someone was covering tracks.

His mind moved fast.

He pulled up the staff login records.

Only one name appeared on the access log during the deletion window—Dean Elira Blackthorn, the Pack Medical Alpha and hospital administrator.

Theo’s stomach turned.

Why would Dean Blackthorn help erase evidence? And who put her up to it?

The pieces weren’t all there yet, but one thing was certain: Riley was no longer safe under pack protection.

She hadn’t been for a long time.

Theo exited the room with urgency in his stride.

He had one more stop to make.

At the end of the ward, he knocked on a heavy door. A nurse opened it, nodded, and let him in.

Inside, in the dimly lit VIP recovery suite, Tessa lay in bed, her pale skin glowing faintly in the moonlight through the blinds. Her expression was vacant, eyes unfocused, like someone deep in thought—or memory.

Theo stepped inside quietly.

“Tessa,” he said gently.

Her gaze flicked toward him, guarded.

“I need to ask you about what happened last night. And I want the truth.”

She blinked slowly, then looked away, lips pressing into a tight line.

Theo stepped closer, but there was no softness in his voice now.

“Did Riley really attack you? Or were you just afraid she’d speak before you could bury her again?”

Tessa didn’t respond..

But her silence was louder than a scream.

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Chapter 91

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Third Person's POV

Theo Hale stood at the edge of the dimly lit room, watching the she-wolf in the hospital bed. Tessa Blackmaw looked more like a porcelain doll than the feared daughter of the Blackmaw Pack. Pale. Fragile.

Hollow.

He exhaled slowly, then stepped closer. "Tessa," he said softly, his voice a careful blend of warmth and resolve. "I know what happened in your room yesterday."

Tessa didn't respond. She didn't flinch. She just stared at the ceiling, expression vacant.

"You don't want justice for yourself?" Theo asked, his tone tightening. "For Riley?"

She wanted it. Goddess, she did.

But the truth was clear-carved into the expressions she had seen yesterday. Alpha Alaric. Luna Zara. Kael Vale. Maddox. Even her own brother, Ronan Duskcliff. All of them had shielded Scarlett.

All of them had silenced her.

They stopped her from speaking when she had the chance. Held her back. Warned her with their eyes, their words, their unspoken threats.

Scarlett wasn't just the pampered foster daughter. She was the golden child of the Ebonclaw Pack's carefully constructed facade.

And Riley Vale?

She was the stain they tried desperately to scrub away.

So no-Tessa couldn't trust them. And she didn't trust Theo Hale either. He'd always been friendly with the Ebonclaws. He had never stood on Riley's side before.

So she lay still.

Theo kept talking, trying everything—logic, sympathy, even anger. But Tessa remained silent, unmoved. She was the perfect picture of a lifeless puppet.

It frustrated him deeply.

Until he changed tactics.

“Riley’s missing.” Theo said suddenly.

That word—missing—shattered something in the room.

Tessa’s pupils dilated, just for a second. Her fingers twitched. Her eyes, once dull, flickered with a pain so raw it nearly made Theo flinch.

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Chapter 91

He caught it. That flicker of soul.

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And he pressed forward.

“She disappeared last night,” he said, voice low. “No one knows where she is. Alaric, Maddox, even Ronan- they’re all searching. But you know what’ll happen if they find her first.”

Tessa’s breath hitched. Her throat made a strangled sound—more sob than word. And then tears. Hot and fast, trailing down her temples into her dark hair.

She tried to speak, but nothing came out. Her vocal cords failed her—either from trauma or magic Theo couldn’t see. All she managed were broken, muffled vowels and the desperate thrash of a silent scream.

Theo stepped closer, grabbing a tissue and gently wiping her tears.

“Don’t push yourself,” he said softly. “Just rest. When your strength returns, you can still speak the truth. You can help clear Riley’s name.”

Tessa wept silently, curled like a dying ember, while Theo gave her one last nod and turned to leave.

By the time he stepped out into the hallway, Theo’s mind was spinning.

He was going to the Second Mooncrest Hospital to follow a lead. But as he approached the hospital’s underground garage, he spotted two familiar figures through the windshield—Dean Elira Blackthorn, the sharp-eyed Pack Medical Alpha who ran Mooncrest First Hospital, and a man standing too close to her: Scarlett’s driver.

Theo’s brows lifted.

Strange pair, he thought. Elira was always professional to a fault. Why would she be meeting with a lower-ranked enforcer?

Still, he didn’t stop. He had other things to do.

He drove through the late afternoon traffic of Mooncrest, heading toward the Second Hospital—but halfway there, a thought struck him like lightning.

He parked at the curb beside a flower shop.

Today was a weekend, and the place was packed with couples and sweet scents.

Theo—tall, lean, dressed in casual slacks and a fitted black tee—was instantly noticed. With his styled dark hair and effortless swagger, he gave off that careless heir vibe that turned heads.

A young florist immediately rushed over. “Sir, shopping for someone special?”

“Yeah,” he muttered, hands in his pockets.

He didn’t want to admit it even to himself, but visiting Riley empty-handed didn’t sit right. She’d been through too much—and he’d treated her like trash for years,

This bouquet was his... apology. Sort of.

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Chapter 91

He wasn't the kind of guy to say I'm sorry. But maybe the flowers could say it for him.

"Is it for a man or a woman?" the florist asked sweetly.

"Woman," Theo replied.

The florist grinned knowingly. With his looks and aura, she assumed it was for a lover.

"Leave it to me, sir. I've got just the thing to help you win her heart."

He gave her a skeptical look but didn't stop her.

As the florist disappeared to prepare the bouquet, Theo stepped out for a smoke.

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He leaned against the post, cigarette between his lips, gaze lazy but sharp. Passersby slowed down. Girls nudged each other and giggled. A few bold ones lingered, whispering.

One particularly brave girl approached, phone in hand, clearly about to ask for his contact.

Before she could speak, the florist rushed out with a flourish.

"Your order's ready, sir!"

She handed him an enormous bouquet—ninety—nine perfect red roses, wrapped in crimson silk.

Theo stared at it.

Even a romantic idiot knew what red roses meant.

This wasn't a neutral bouquet. It was a full—on confession.

Seriously? He groaned internally. She's a patient recovering from trauma, not someone I'm about to propose to.

He wanted to return it. Badly.

But people were watching. And Theo Hale, prideful Alpha—born and one of Mooncrest's top—ranking Pack physicians, wasn't about to be seen making a fuss over flowers in public.

Besides... Riley probably didn't even know what red roses symbolized.

She'll just think they're pretty.

With that self-justifying thought, he took the bouquet.

The florist winked. "Go get her, Alpha." ◇□◇

Theo sighed.

Yeah. Thanks."

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Chapter 92

Theo's POV

I slid back into the car, placing the enormous bouquet of red roses on the passenger seat. The overwhelming floral scent filled the space, sweet and heavy—almost too much.

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I glanced at the flowers, imagining the look on Riley's face when she saw them. Maybe she'd freeze, startled. Maybe her eyes would well up with tears, her lips would tremble, and she'd finally realize I wasn't such a bastard after all.

A smirk tugged at my lips.

Yeah, right.

I pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward Mooncrest Second Hospital. I wasn't on staff there, but I'd dropped by enough for research collaboration that most of the nurses knew me. Can't say it hurt that I'm easy on the eyes—people tend to remember that.

The moment I stepped into the lobby with a massive bouquet of crimson roses in hand, every nurse at the station turned to stare, eyes wide and brimming with curiosity. The air was practically vibrating with gossip.

“Dr. Hale, bringing flowers for a patient?” one nurse teased, grinning like she’d just caught a live soap opera.

I gave her my trademark half-smile. “Yeah. For someone very sick. In the head.”

She laughed, probably thought I was joking.

I approached the desk. “I’m looking for someone—Riley Vale. She should’ve been admitted recently.”

The nurse blinked, then nodded. “Room 312, third floor.”

She didn’t say more, but I caught the glint in her eyes. Riley must’ve left an impression—and not just because of her injuries.

As I made my way to the room, I couldn’t shake the feeling gnawing at my gut. Last time I saw her, she was barely hanging on. If anything happened again...

I pushed the door open, expecting to see her lying in bed—pale, weak, maybe asleep.

But the room was empty.

My heart stuttered.

Had she run away again?

Then came the sound of water flushing. A second later, the bathroom door opened, and she stepped out, dressed in hospital scrubs.

She froze.

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Chapter 92

So did I.

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Her face went stark white, panic flaring in her eyes. And then—just like that—she turned and bolted.

Hell no.

I tossed the bouquet onto the bed and lunged forward, grabbing her wrist before she could get far. “What the hell, Riley? You act like I’m here to drag you off to the dungeons.”

“Let me go!” she cried, struggling against me. Her voice trembled with fear. “Did the Ebonclaw Pack send you? Did my father-?”

I let go immediately, stunned by the sheer terror in her voice.

“No. I’m not here on anyone’s orders,” I said, trying to sound calm, reasonable. “I just... wanted to see if you were okay.”

Her eyes narrowed. “You expect me to believe that? You’ve always taken their side. You all want me gone.”

Gods.

I sighed and grabbed the bouquet from the bed, shoving it at her. “Would I have brought you flowers if I wanted you dead? Seriously, do you even hear yourself?”

She flinched as the weight of the bouquet landed in her arms. Ninety–nine blood–red roses. A romantic gesture, completely inappropriate for someone recovering from a trauma–induced collapse.

Her hands trembled. And then, to my absolute horror—she started crying.

“What now?” I snapped, voice harsher than I intended. “Is it the roses? You don’t like red? Say something, damn it, don’t just cry.”

I rubbed the back of my neck, frustration bubbling. “Fine. Tell me what kind of flowers you like, I’ll buy them. I’ll buy a damn greenhouse if that’s what it takes to get you to stop looking at me like I kicked your puppy.”

I reached forward, intending to take the bouquet from her and chuck it in the trash—maybe I could salvage a shred of dignity.

Then the door creaked open behind me.

“I seem to have come at the wrong time.”

I turned.

The man who entered the room was tall, with a rigid posture and a glacial expression. He wore a custom-tailored suit like it was part of his skin, and those gold-rimmed glasses perched on his nose did nothing to soften the storm in his eyes.

“Who are you?” I asked, tone defensive.

He ignored me.

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Chapter 92

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His eyes were locked on Riley, or more precisely—on the bundle of roses she still cradled like a shield. His gaze darkened slightly as he stepped forward and, without a word, took the bouquet from her arms and placed it neatly on the table beside her bed.

Then, with a gentle tone that made my skin crawl, he said, “You must be hungry. My grandmother made this herself.”

He opened a polished thermos and began arranging food on the tray table like this was his damn kitchen.

I stood there, feeling like a third wheel to my own intentions.

Who the hell was this guy to waltz in here, steal the scene, and act like Riley was his mate?

I glanced at Riley, waiting to see if she'd protest. She didn't. She looked stunned. Caught between us like prey between two predators.

“Riley,” I said, sharper than I meant to, “I came to see how you were doing. That’s all.”

She blinked at me. “Why? What do you want?”

The coldness in her tone hit harder than I expected.

I was here with roses. She looked at me like I’d brought a weapon.

I clenched my jaw, masking the sting. “So now I can’t visit without an agenda? Great.”

The man remained silent, but I could feel his gaze pressing down on me like a silent threat.

I didn’t like him.

And I didn’t like how Riley looked at him either—like she didn’t know whether to be afraid or grateful.

But I wasn’t going anywhere.

Not yet.

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Chapter 93

Riley's POV

I lowered my gaze.

To someone like Theo Hale, I didn't even have the right to exist in his line of sight—much less expect

concern.

Every time we crossed paths, his words cut sharper than a blade. If that's the reception I always got, why would I ever look forward to seeing him?

And now that he'd found me here... it could only mean the Ebonclaw Pack wouldn't be far behind.

Those lunatics had already tried to trade me off like livestock—wanted me to marry into the Duskgrave family from Stormridge Pack, all for a stake in some damned Eastward development project.

I almost agreed. For Mia's sake. For Carmen's.

But ever since last night, when I learned my embroidery sold for a fortune, something shifted inside me.

I didn't want to keep swallowing dirt just to survive. Not anymore.

But that required time—time to stay hidden, to make enough with my own hands to protect the only people who'd ever treated me like I mattered. Once I could get Mia and Carmen out of Mooncrest safely, I'd have nothing holding me back. No weaknesses left to exploit.

If it came down to war with the Ebonclaws, I'd burn the whole damned Pack down and not flinch.

I tried to focus on the soup in front of me—pigeon broth with goji berries—but it tasted like nothing. Like chewing on air.

Theo was still here, hovering like a storm cloud. His brows were scrunched, clearly pissed I wasn't groveling at his feet. The great Hale heir wasn't used to being unwelcome, clearly.

I watched out of the corner of my eye as he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a cigarette. Typical.

But before he could even light it, a low, commanding voice stopped him cold.

“Don’t smoke in here.”

Lucien Duskgrave. I now knew his name.

And even though his last name was exactly the same as that of the infamous fiancé from the legends, I told myself it had to be a coincidence.

They said the Alpha of Stormridge was old, hideous, and cursed—every mate he’d ever taken had died because of him.

But Lucien... the man standing in front of me...

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Chapter 93

There was no way he could be that Alpha.

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Lucien’s tone wasn’t loud, but it crackled with Alpha dominance so strong even I felt it brush against my skin like static.

Theo visibly stiffened. “And who the hell are you to tell me what to do?”

Lucien didn’t blink. “This is a hospital.”

Theo bit down on his lip and shoved the cigarette and lighter back into his pocket like a sulky pup.

“She didn’t say anything,” he grumbled, gesturing toward me. “Why are you acting like her handler?”

I froze mid-sip, caught in the crossfire. “I... don’t like the smell of smoke.” I admitted softly.

Theo’s expression crumpled in disbelief.

He barked a laugh. “Seriously? Who even is this guy, Riley? You’re defending him like he’s your mate or something. I’ve known you for eight years and never even heard you mention him.”

I didn’t respond. What could I say?

I didn’t even know who Lucien truly was—not yet. Only that he’d helped me, twice now, when no one else had.

Theo fumed in silence for a few moments, then turned on his heel and stomped toward the door like a sulky child.

“Theo—wait!”

He paused, hand on the handle, but didn’t turn back.

Still, my voice must’ve meant something, because the air around him seemed to soften just a little.

“Please,” I said, my voice low, almost pleading. “Don’t tell the Ebonclaws I’m here.”

His shoulders tensed, then slumped.

“I won’t,” he said, quieter now. “And I won’t tell Maddox. Or Ronan either.”

Relief surged through me so fast it left me dizzy. “Thank you.”

Just two words, but Theo looked like he’d been handed a crown.

“Just get better,” he muttered, a little sheepishly. “Maybe I’ll... stop by again sometime.”

And with that, he left.

The silence that followed was like snowfall. Still. Clean.

I picked up my spoon again and resumed eating, more relaxed than I had been in days. Across the room, Lucien sat by the window, sunlight streaming across his profile, casting soft shadows over his angular

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## Chapter 93

features.

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He looked like he belonged in a different world. One of marble mansions and ancient power. Everything about him—his posture, his focus, the way he turned pages of his book with deliberate care—oozed quiet strength. Controlled elegance.

I glanced at him more than once, though I tried not to make it obvious. The way the sunlight reflected off his gold-rimmed glasses made his eyes seem even deeper, darker.

There weren't many people who made me feel safe.

Fewer who made me feel... seen.

Lucien was both.

Most of the wolves I'd known from high-ranking families were cruel behind their politeness, dressed in silk but rotted at the core. Maddox. Ronan. Even Theo, for years. The Ebonclaws, especially.

But Lucien?

He was different.

Steady. Composed. Not just powerful—gracious.

And that scared me more than I wanted to admit.

Suddenly, Lucien looked up from his book, catching me in the act of staring. His eyes locked with mine, and I forgot how to breathe.

"Still hungry?" he asked gently.

I snapped out of it, cheeks burning. "No, it's good. Really good. Your grandmother cooks very well."

I hesitated, biting my lower lip. The memory of last night surfaced—me guzzling down two entire bottles of his wine without offering him so much as a drop.

That car he drove... a Rolls-Royce. Which meant those wines probably cost more than my yearly rent.

Crap.

“About last night...” I started awkwardly, fidgeting with my spoon. “Those two bottles of wine—how much were they? I’ll pay you back.”

Lucien’s lips curved into a slow, deliberate smile. He looked at me for a long beat, and then said, completely deadpan, “Five hundred thousand a bottle.”

My spoon clattered into the bowl.

What?

He said it so casually, like he was commenting on the weather. Five hundred thousand?

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Chapter 93

Was he serious?

My heart sank to my stomach.

And then... the tiniest flicker of mischief flashed behind his glasses.

Oh no.

He was messing with me.

Lucien Duskgrave was teasing me.

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[ 905 words ]

Chapter 94

Lucien’s POV

She blushed, crimson from her cheeks all the way to the tips of her ears.

“I... I’ll repay you,” she said, her voice soft but firm.

I closed my book and looked at her—really looked at her. She was trying her best to stay composed, but I could see the panic hiding behind her lashes. The way her fingers gripped the spoon a little too tightly. The way she couldn’t hold my gaze for more than a few seconds. All of it—delightful.

“And how exactly do you plan to do that?” I asked, my tone light, as if the question wasn’t already loaded.

She was broke. That much was obvious. The hospital bill for a Mooncrest VIP ward alone could make a lesser wolf bankrupt. And yet, here she sat, her dignity as intact as ever.

She hesitated, cheeks burning even more. “I can do Moonstitch embroidery,” she said, barely above a whisper. “If you give me time, I can sell my work to earn the money.”

I almost laughed.

“I don’t need money, Riley,” I replied coolly, leaning back in the chair, resting my chin on my hand.

She blinked, confused and embarrassed. Of course she hadn’t considered that someone like me—Lucien Duskgrave, Alpha Prince of Stormridge—had no interest in coin. For someone who drives a Rolls-Royce and casually opens bottles worth more than most Omegas make in a

use was repayment in copper and cloth?

The real truth?

I didn’t need money.

What I needed was... different.

Something much more complicated.

Because I was cursed.

year,

A blessing twisted into a lifetime sentence by the Moon Goddess herself.

Most Alphas waited eagerly for the bond—a golden thread that would pull them toward their fated mate. A magnetic connection that ignited the moment their eyes met.

But me?

The Goddess marked me differently.

She said I would have a mate. One. Only one.

But she also said I'd never know her—unless she fell in love with me first.

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Chapter 94

No bond. No spark. No scent recognition. Nothing.

Not unless she loved me—deeply, truly, irrevocably.

It was a punishment. For what, I never asked. I didn't care.

But the rest of the world? The Packs? The She-Wolves who carried titles like weapons and used their wombs like war strategies?

They caught wind of my curse.

And they came in droves.

Because what better target than a cursed Alpha Prince?

If I couldn't recognize my mate, if she might as well be a stranger among thousands—then why not settle for power? For bloodline? For the throne?

They circled me like vultures, each one trying to out-charm the last. Each one secretly hoping I never found my mate. Because as long as I remained cursed, I was vulnerable.

I grew tired of it.

So I told my Beta to start a rumor. One that would sink deeper than any fact.

Lucien Duskgrave—Stormridge’s cursed Alpha. Hideously old. Twisted in mind. Perverse. Mate-killer. A monster who buried a dozen Lunas before they bloomed.

Let them talk. Let them stay away.

I preferred solitude over sycophants.

And now, here sat Riley Vale, with her storm-wrecked eyes and pride-shattered spine, offering to stitch her way out of debt like an innocent lamb in a den full of wolves.

If only she knew what she was offering.

She looked down at her bowl again, her soup untouched.

“That... then what do you want from me?” she asked, cautious.

My eyes lingered on her face.

What did I want?

I wasn’t entirely sure. Yet.

But I knew this much—Grandmother had been pressing me to settle down. The pressure had only grown worse over the past year. Every month, a new Luna candidate showed up at the estate with some lavish gift and a pedigree longer than a king’s sword.

I was tired of the games.

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Chapter 94

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And Riley... she was quiet. She was desperate. But more importantly—she didn't want anything from me.

That made her valuable.

She wouldn't cling. She wouldn't plot. She wouldn't beg for a title.

And the more I watched her, the more I realized how perfectly she could play the role of the dutiful "chosen one"—the one woman I allowed into my orbit, if only to silence the bloodhounds of court.

"There are things more valuable than money," I finally said, letting the words fall like bait into still waters.

She looked at me, confused.

"You said you could finish the Moonstitch scroll," I continued. "Blooming Grace, wasn't it?"

She nodded.

"Good. Grandmother's birthday is in a month. If you can complete it without a single thread out of place. I'll consider your debt paid."

Her eyes lit up.

"That's it?" she asked, voice tinged with cautious hope.

I nodded once. "That's it."

She smiled—actually smiled. "I promise I'll do my best."

I leaned back slightly, watching her face.

"Once you're discharged, you'll stay at the Duskgrave estate," I added, almost offhand.

Her spoon paused. Her gaze snapped up.

"L—live with you?"

I didn't let the smirk reach my mouth.

I merely folded my hands together and said evenly, "I paid two million for the scroll. I won't risk you botching it unsupervised."

She bit her lip, and then nodded. "Okay. That's fair."

I inclined my head slightly. "Rest well. You'll need steady hands."

She ducked her head again, shy, and finally began eating her soup.

I reopened my book and leaned into the light spilling through the window. Every now and then, I felt her eyes flicker toward me.

Let her watch.

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Chapter 94

Let her feel safe.

Because the more she trusted me, the closer she'd get.

And if—just if—by some divine mercy, she turned out to be the one...

Then she'd never leave.

Because this time, I'd make sure-

That love would find me first.

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Chapter 95

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Third Person's POV

Outside the infirmary, Duke stood stiffly, as though he'd just chewed a mouthful of bitter herbs. The lines of his face were practically twisted in knots.

Just moments ago, he'd received a call from Alaric of the Ebonclaw Pack.

How the man had even gotten his number was beyond him, but the obsequious tone that rang through the receiver still echoed in his ears. It left a sour taste in his mouth.

The last time the Ebonclaw Pack tried to forge an alliance at a gathering—pushing their daughter into a mating arrangement with Lucien Duskgrave—it had already made Duke want to retch. Now, they had the gall to send women to “accompany” his Alpha to dinner?

Desperation wasn't even a strong enough word. It was insanity.

Duke muttered under his breath, “They tortured their own daughter until she was half-dead, and now they want to curry favor? What a charming bunch.”

He glanced through the hospital window.

Inside, Riley sat quietly at a small table, spoon in hand, sipping soup like a ghost had finally allowed her peace. Across the room, Lucien lounged by the window, sunlight casting a halo around his tall, sharp frame as he read.

The scene was... surprisingly serene.

Though Riley had fallen from grace, it was clear she was different from the rest of the Ebonclaw Pack. A single flower blooming from rotting soil. A rare one.

Duke felt a pang of sympathy. It wasn't often the Stormridge Alpha Prince took a genuine interest in anyone -especially not someone with Riley's history. That alone said enough.

Meanwhile, across town in first Mooncrest Healers Hall, Alaric Vale was fuming.

He hurled his communicator onto the bed, the device bouncing once before landing with a muted thud.

His face was so dark it could smother a fire.

“Father?” came a sweet, calculated voice.

Scarlett Vale, draped in cream silk, approached the bedside with practiced delicacy.

“Did Prince Lucien reject the offer again?” she asked with a tilt of her head.

Alaric clenched his fists.

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Chapter 95

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“That arrogant bastard refuses everything. First, he declined the mating proposal with that useless girl Riley. Then, even after I invited him to a private feast—with handpicked companions, no less—he still turned me down.”

His chest rose and fell in furious waves.

Scarlett frowned. “But I heard he has a reputation for indulgence... for enjoying she-wolves. Why would he refuse you twice?”

Alaric’s lip curled. “Maybe the rumors are wrong.”

Scarlett’s expression shifted subtly. Her gaze sharpened.

“Father... what if the gossip is false? What if Lucien Duskgrave doesn’t care for she-wolves at all?”

Alaric paused, considering. “It doesn’t matter. Whether he does or doesn’t—Duskgrave is the gatekeeper to the Eastern Ridge project. If we can’t secure his support, the Ebonclaw Pack has no standing left in the Alpha Council.”

Scarlett’s eyes glinted.

“Then we change tactics,” she said smoothly. “I heard Matriarch Duskgrave is holding her birthday celebration in Northhaven next month. If we prepare an offering that touches her heart... we may yet forge a connection.”

Alaric’s brow lifted. “That’s... not a bad idea.”

“If we win over the Matriarch,” Scarlett continued, “Lucien will have no choice but to acknowledge the alliance. We just need to send a gift worthy of her attention.”

Alaric grimaced. “She’s the Matron of the oldest bloodline in the North. What could we possibly give that hasn’t already crossed her table?”

Scarlett gave a secretive smile. “If we understand her personal taste—what makes her heart move—we’ll find the answer. I want to go to Northhaven myself.”

“You want to scout her preferences?” Alaric asked, instantly reading her intention.

Scarlett nodded. “This project isn’t just about the Pack—it’s about our future. Once the elders see we’ve brought in Eastern Ridge, they’ll pressure your mate to relinquish her remaining shares. When that happens... the Ebonclaw Pack will be ours. Entirely.”

Alaric didn’t hesitate.

“Go,” he said. “You should lie low anyway. I’m sure Ronan suspects you already.”

Scarlett’s expression darkened.

Yes. Ronan had interfered when his sister tried to accuse her. At first, she thought he was protecting her. Now, she saw it for what it was—he was trying to protect Riley.

He’d always liked that little runt, hadn’t he?

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Chapter 95

Even after everything.

Scarlett's mouth twisted. "Ronan is only shielding her because he's ashamed. Once Riley is proven innocent, he'll look like a fool. And he knows it."

But Scarlett had another reason for going to Northhaven.

She wanted to see Lucien Duskgrave for herself.

It had started that night at the auction.

She hadn't meant to look. Hadn't planned to. But the moment her gaze landed on Lucien Duskgrave across the room, every thought in her mind screeched to a halt.

Tall. Impossibly still. His silver-ringed eyes unreadable under the low chandelier light, like a beast held in check by the thinnest thread of restraint. He hadn't spoken. He hadn't needed to.

She'd seen many Alphas in her life. Fought them, outwitted them, used them.

But Lucien? He wasn't like the others. He was... terrifying. And magnetic.

A prince by title. A storm by nature.

Scarlett had told herself it was just curiosity. Just strategy. Just politics.

But days passed. Then weeks. And still, that one glance haunted her like a brand on her skin.

Yet Lucien wasn't without infamy.

The rumors whispered of a Moon Goddess curse—one that sealed off the mate bond entirely unless the chosen mate fell for him first, without fate's nudge. It was said none had ever succeeded. That Lucien's aura devoured those who dared come close. That dozens of she-wolves, from noble to rogue, had tried and failed.

Some even claimed he'd "cursed" them to death.

And still, packs sent their daughters. Still, mothers schemed to see their line tied to the Stormridge throne. Why?

Because if the curse was real... then Lucien's true mate might never find him. And that meant the position beside him was open—if only one dared to take it.

Scarlett did.

She needed to see for herself. To confirm whether the monster in the rumors was real—or if Lucien Duskgrave was simply a legend shaped by fear.

And if he turned out to be everything they said... then she'd make him hers anyway.

And Riley? Riley would never get near him again.

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Chapter 96

Just then, the door burst open.

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Luna Zara stormed in, her face pale with fury.

“Alaric Vale!” she snapped. “Riley has been missing for weeks! How can you sit here plotting like nothing has happened?”

Alaric didn't even flinch.

“If that filthy little wretch wanted to leave, let her. She's nothing to this Pack.”

“She's your daughter!”

“She's a stain on the Ebonclaw name,” he snarled. “And the sooner she disappears, the better.”

Luna Zara opened her mouth to protest again—but Scarlett stepped in.

“Mother, don't worry. I'll make sure we get what we want.”

And she would.

Riley Vale had stolen enough already.

Now it was time for the 'real' daughter to claim what was hers.

Luna Zara felt as if her heart had plunged into an icy cellar the moment Alaric's ruthless words hit her. Tears welled up swiftly in her eyes, swirling painfully before spilling over.

Her voice trembled as she choked out, "Riley is our daughter too. How can you be so heartless toward her?"

"She was lost because of you when she was little. She suffered so much—don't you feel even a shred of guilt?"

Alaric's face twisted into a mocking sneer. "Heartless? Guilty? Don't forget, it was you who deleted the surveillance footage that could have proved her innocence. You destroyed the only evidence that cleared Riley. If anyone is cruel, it's you."

Zara's body shook, struck to the core by his words. Pain and regret etched deeply across her face, tears streaming endlessly down her cheeks.

She sobbed, voice breaking with helplessness, "I... I did it for Scarlett. She was so young, it was unintentional. I just didn't want her to bear such a heavy burden at such an early age..."

"Now you blame me?" Alaric spat. "I was foolish then—are you any less so now?"

Nearby, Scarlett immediately threw on the most pitiful expression she could muster and clung to her mother, tears filling her eyes. "Mom, I never meant it. I regret it every day. If I had known how badly Riley would be hurt, I would have confessed no matter what."

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Chapter 96

Seeing her daughter so broken, Zara's anger softened, replaced by aching tenderness. She gently stroked Scarlett's hair and said softly, "Scarlett, I'm not blaming you. You're my daughter. No one knows you better than I do."

Scarlett's eyes, however, glinted with cold mockery beneath the tears. So easy to fool. Just a few false tears, a little performance—and they're all wrapped around my finger.

Her glance flicked to the infirmary door, where Dean Elira Blackthorn stood. Their eyes met briefly, both flashing triumphant smiles. Elira even secretly gave Scarlett a thumbs-up.

Scarlett's heart swelled with satisfaction. This was strategy—distract and conquer. To have Luna Zara completely fooled was intoxicating.

Alaric noticed Dean Elira standing just out of Zara's line of sight. With a subtle flick, Elira lifted the hem of her uniform coat, revealing the sheer black stockings beneath—just for a moment, just for him.

His expression softened imperceptibly, recalling her warmth earlier that day. A hunger stirred within him, but with Zara present, he kept it well hidden.

He gave Elira a subtle nod.

Luna Zara, meanwhile, was oblivious to these silent exchanges. She cradled her daughter gently, whispering soothing words, unaware of the betrayal unfolding just outside the room.

Alaric scowled and muttered, "I fear nothing but your crocodile tears. I'll send men to find that wretched girl immediately."

He pulled out his phone, seemingly sending orders to find Riley. Yet the message was actually meant for Elira, and the crude tone made her blush and weaken in the knees.

Throughout this, Zara remained focused on comforting Scarlett, unaware of the hidden games being played between her mate and the dean.

After some time, Zara sighed quietly, thinking of the events five years ago. How could she blame Scarlett?

It all felt like fate.

When Scarlett finally calmed down, she smiled sweetly at her mother. "Mom, I'm sorry. I was foolish. You're still injured, yet you comfort me. Please get some rest in your room. Don't overexert yourself."

Zara's heart softened further, exhaustion ebbing away. She gently patted Scarlett's back and said warmly, "My foolish girl, I'm fine. As long as you're well, I can rest easy."

Then she turned to Alaric with a stern look. "Alaric, send more people to search for Riley. She is our daughter, no matter what she's done. We cannot simply abandon her."

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### Chapter 97

Although Alaric was reluctant, he still gave a perfunctory nod in response.

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After Zara finished giving her instructions, she left the hospital room with Scarlett.

At the door, they ran into Dean Elira Blackthorn, who wore a friendly smile.

Zara returned the smile politely, her tone gentle yet courteous. “Dean Elira, what a pleasant surprise.”

Elira responded warmly, “Yes, I just tried to visit Lady Zara in her room but missed her. So I came to check on Master Alaric instead. I didn’t expect to see you both here.”

“Lady Zara looks much better. I’m sure you are on the mend,” Elira added with concern.

Zara expressed her gratitude. “Thanks to your care, the injury to my abdomen isn’t serious.”

Elira’s tone turned slightly serious. “Even if it’s not serious, you must rest well. Your health comes first.”

Scarlett immediately tugged at Zara’s arm, pouting playfully, “Mom, you have to listen to the doctor. Let me take you back to your room.”

Zara nodded, allowing Scarlett to support her as they slowly walked back to the hospital room.

Watching them leave, Elira’s eyes sparkled with barely concealed satisfaction.

Once Zara and Scarlett were out of sight, Elira closed the door behind her and locked it firmly.

Alaric had been waiting anxiously inside. His eyes glinted with urgency.

To avoid being seen, he pulled Elira into the bathroom, swiftly tearing off her black stockings and pressing her against the wall with barely contained passion.

Elira met his enthusiasm without hesitation, her gaze filled with desire and abandon.

Soon, muffled sounds of their fervent encounter filled the bathroom—low, urgent, lasting for a full five minutes before fading completely.

When Elira stepped back into the hospital room, her expression was calm and composed, the earlier satisfaction vanished without a trace.

“This is getting worse by the day,” she muttered under her breath.

For the next three days, Riley remained in Mooncrest Second People’s Hospital, recovering.

Theo, as if by agreement with fate, appeared at her hospital door every day on time, always carrying a large bouquet of flowers.

Riley was reluctant to see him, fearing the Ebonclaw Pack might notice and come searching for her.

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Chapter 97

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Early on the fourth day, Duke helped her complete the discharge procedures.

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No more than half an hour after she left, Theo showed up with flowers only to be left empty-handed.

When he learned Riley had already been discharged, his nostrils flared with anger.

“Riley! I visit you every day, and you can’t even bother to tell me you’re leaving?”

What made Theo even more furious was that he had no way to contact her.

His frustration boiled over; he tossed the flowers into a trash bin and stormed out of the hospital.

Riley sat quietly in the backseat as Duke drove through the streets of Mooncrest.

Soon, the car stopped at a red light.

She turned her face slightly toward the window and slowly rolled it down.

A gentle breeze caressed her face, bringing a coolness that seemed to sweep away the heavy shadows weighing on her heart.

Closing her eyes, she let the wind soothe her, a faint smile playing at the corners of her lips moment of peace.

The light turned green, and the car slowly moved forward.

Just then, a black Maybach sped past on the opposite lane, brushing alongside Riley’s car.

The driver glanced back by chance and caught sight of Riley raising her window.

Though only her profile was visible, the driver immediately recognized her.

Maddox’s heart leapt violently in his chest, almost bursting out of his throat.

He shouted her name, “Riley-!”

His voice cut sharply through the noise of the street, drawing surprised looks from passersby.

In that moment, Maddox forgot everything else.

a rare

Traffic rules, his safety—all he could think about was catching Riley and never letting her go again.

He slammed the steering wheel hard, reckless of the chaos around him.

The car swerved abruptly, causing surrounding vehicles to brake and honk loudly.

A loud crash followed as Maddox's car collided violently with a neighboring vehicle, jolting harshly.

But Maddox seemed oblivious to the damage.

He flung open the door and dashed toward the direction Riley had gone, shouting desperately, "Riley, don't go-!"

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Chapter 97

The driver of the other car jumped out, furious.

"Can you even drive? You hit my car and want to run?"

Grabbing Maddox's shirt, the man shouted angrily.

But Maddox shrugged off the grip without hesitation.

With no regard for consequences, Maddox punched the man to the ground and continued running after Riley.

Inside the car, Riley had just rolled the window back up when a loud crash echoed from behind.

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[ 697 words ]

## Chapter 98

As soon as Riley heard the crash behind them, she instinctively turned her head. Duke glanced into the rearview mirror, his brows knitting together. "Looks like there's been an accident," he muttered.

Riley's heart sank. She could've sworn she heard someone calling her name through the chaos.

A wave of dread swept over her. "Duke, drive. Quickly."

Suppressing the anxiety threatening to rise in her chest, she urged him *to* speed up.

It wasn't until they safely arrived at the Duskgrave estate that she finally let out the breath she'd been holding.

Outside the villa, Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia were already waiting. The three women looked like anxious hens awaiting their lost chick's return. The moment they spotted Riley, they rushed forward.

But when they saw how pale she looked, their concern deepened instantly.

"What happened to you, child?" Matriarch Duskgrave's voice trembled with maternal worry.

"Are you feeling unwell?" Mia stepped in, placing a hand gently on Riley's forehead.

Mrs. Beck's gaze scanned her face. "You look absolutely dreadful."

Surrounded by their sincere concern, Riley was genuinely moved.

She shook her head slightly, just about to speak when Duke answered in her stead. "Miss Riley was frightened by the accident earlier."

All three women gasped.

"An accident?" Matriarch Duskgrave's face turned ghostly pale. She immediately took Riley's hand. "Did you get hurt? Let me see!"

Riley quickly grasped her grandmother's hands to calm her down. "I'm fine, Grandma. It wasn't us. Someone else crashed."

Only then did the tension in their faces begin to ease.

"Thank the Moon Goddess," Mia murmured. "You scared us half to death."

But the so-called “someone else” who crashed – Maddox – had already been subdued by the local patrol

enforcers.

Even as they cuffed him, his eyes searched wildly, desperate to catch one last glimpse of Riley.

He didn’t fully register the severity of what he had done until he was forced into the back of the patrol vehicle. Only then did it dawn on him: he had made a colossal mistake.

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Chapter 98

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Back at the Duskgrave estate, Duke was reporting to Lucien Duskgrave, the Alpha prince of the Stormridge

Pack.

“Alpha Lucien,” Duke said respectfully, standing in the office. “While escorting Miss Riley from the hospital, we passed a multi-car collision. I thought I heard someone shouting her name. I had the enforcers investigate. One of the drivers was Maddox.”

Lucien’s expression remained unreadable. He sat behind his sleek desk, long legs crossed, his elegant fingers tapping lightly on the surface. The sound was sharp and rhythmic.

Duke continued, “He’s now in custody. Since the incident didn’t cause any casualties, the enforcer’s ruling will likely be a fine between 200 and 2,000 marks, a suspension of his driver’s license, and up to 15 days in detention.”

He hesitated for a beat, then asked, “Would you like us to influence the outcome?”

Lucien’s eyes flickered coldly. “Go with the maximum sentence.”

Duke gave a small nod. “Understood. If there’s nothing else, I’ll take care of it.”

Just as he reached the door, Lucien’s voice called him back.

Duke turned, surprised. “Yes, Alpha?”

Lucien’s eyes narrowed, his thoughts drifting to Riley – the years she had lost, the pain she had endured, all because of Maddox. Prison. A shattered leg. A missing kidney.

Fifteen days in custody? That was far from enough.

Duke noticed his Alpha’s darkening expression and asked cautiously, “Is there something more you wish to be done?”

Lucien’s tone was glacial. “Make sure he’s... well attended to inside. I don’t want him walking out looking the

same.”

Duke’s pupils dilated ever so slightly. The message was crystal clear.

The Alpha was protecting his future Luna – and making a statement.

He suppressed a flicker of excitement. If Miss Riley knew what Lucien was doing for her behind the scenes, she’d be overwhelmed.

“Consider it handled, Alpha,” Duke said with a smirk before quietly exiting the room.

Left alone, Lucien pulled out a cigarette and lit it with practiced ease. The tip glowed softly in the dim study.

As he drew in a slow breath, the smoke swirled and danced, cloaking his face in mystery. The scent curled in the air like a predator’s warning.

There was no warmth in his expression – only the icy resolve of an Alpha who would tear down anyone daring to touch what was his.

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## Chapter 99

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Lucien's POV

I leaned back in the chair, legs crossed with ease, one hand resting casually on the armrest, the other flicking ash from my cigarette with idle grace. The whole room smelled faintly of tobacco and cold silence. I wasn't in a hurry to move—until I heard Mrs. Beck's voice calling from outside the study.

“Young Alpha, dinner's ready.”

“Coming,” I called out.

With a slow exhale, I snuffed the cigarette into the ashtray and rose. Before heading out, I opened the study window to let in a breeze, dispelling the last traces of smoke clinging to my clothes. Riley had just been discharged. Her body was still healing—I wouldn't let even the smell of smoke make her feel uncomfortable.

I adjusted my shirt cuffs and made my way downstairs.

The moment I reached the foyer, I saw Grandma, Mrs. Beck, and Mia all flocking around Riley like mother wolves guarding a precious pup. The sight hit me harder than I expected. Grandma was holding Riley's hand the same way she used to hold mine when I was younger—full of warmth, pride, and love.

“Riley, don't feel shy here. This is your home now. If there's anything you want to eat, just tell me. I'll have Mrs. Beck make it for you,” Grandma said with a kind smile.

Mrs. Beck emerged from the kitchen, holding a steaming plate. “Riley, I didn't know your favorite dishes, so I just made what I'm good at. Please try it.”

Mia chuckled. “Good choice. Our young miss loves braised meat.”

“Really? Then have as much as you want,” Grandma said cheerfully. She picked up her chopsticks and placed a piece in Riley's bowl, her eyes full of expectation. “Go on, give it a try.”

Riley looked dazed, caught off guard by their care. Her eyes glistened slightly—like she was trying not to cry. She whispered, “We should wait for Lucien...”

Grandma waved her hand. “Don’t wait for that brat. If you’re hungry, you eat.”

I walked in right on cue and raised a brow. “Ouch. Looks like I’m no longer her favorite.”

Grandma gave me a sharp look. “At least you remembered to show up. I figured you were planning to

starve.”

I held up my hands in surrender. “My bad. Needed to air out the smoke,”

I was about to sit across from Riley, but Grandma grabbed my arm and shoved me down beside her.

I glanced at Riley, whose wide eyes mirrored my own surprise.

“Alright, time to eat!” Grandma announced, then turned to Riley again and started piling more food into her

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Chapter 99

bowl.

Mia and Mrs. Beck followed suit like synchronized warriors, leaving Riley’s bowl looking more like a mountain. She looked overwhelmed, unsure of where to even start.

I leaned in and said softly, “If they keep going, you won’t need dinner for a week.”

I split her food in half into a side plate and smiled at her surprise.

“Eat up.

You're way too thin."

That made Grandma laugh so hard her eyes turned into slits. "Well, well, my grandson's finally grown a

heart."

Mia and Mrs. Beck giggled too, covering their mouths like gossiping hens. Riley's cheeks turned bright red, and she ducked her head, silently nibbling her food.

The meal was warm in every way. Grandma sat at the head of the table, Riley to her left, and I beside her. Mia and Mrs. Beck sat opposite, sharing stories and gently urging Riley to eat more.

She looked a little shy, but the glow in her eyes told me she felt it too—this rare, quiet moment of belonging.

By the time dinner ended, Riley tried to get up and help with the dishes, but the others wouldn't hear of it.

"You just got out of the hospital," Mrs. Beck scolded gently. "Let us handle it."

"Exactly," Mia chimed in. "We've got this. Go relax."

Grandma didn't waste the opportunity to push her back down next to me. "You two are young. Go talk. Get to know each other better."

With that, she herded Mia and Mrs. Beck into the kitchen like sheepdogs.

Silence settled in the living room as Riley and I sat side by side on the sofa. She looked unsure, her fingers nervously twisting in her lap.

I finally broke the silence. "Embroidery uses all sorts of tools. There's this specialty shop I know that carries every color of silk thread and some decent quality hoops. I can take you there tomorrow, if you'd like."

Her eyes lit up. The tension in her body melted instantly. She nodded, a smile playing on her lips. It was subtle, but real.

And in that moment, watching the way her smile bloomed like something delicate and unexpected—I felt it.

I wanted to be the reason she kept smiling like that.

Not out of gratitude.

But because she was finally home.

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Chapter 100

Riley's POV

"Thank you, Lucien," I murmured softly, barely meeting his gaze.

When he didn't smile, Lucien always looked intimidating—his sharp jawline and icy golden eyes exuded the kind of Alpha authority that could silence a room. But when he did smile, it was like the winter sun breaking through a blizzard—rare, brilliant, and almost impossible to look away from.

I stared a second too long. My breath caught.

From the kitchen, I could feel the not-so-subtle glances. Matriarch Duskgrave, along with Mia and Mrs. Beck, were pretending to be busy, but I could see their shadows moving behind the archway, peeking around the corner every few seconds like curious pups.

"You see that?" the Matriarch's whisper floated in. "He's so soft with her. Our Lucien finally found his match."

"I've never seen the Alpha smile this much," Mrs. Beck agreed in a hushed tone. "He always looked like he wanted to maul someone before."

Every time I turned around, their heads would vanish like lightning, clanging pots to make it seem like they were working. It was adorable and embarrassing.

Lucien and I sat across from each other in the sunlit sitting room, a light breeze drifting in from the open window.

I felt my cheeks flush, looked away. Was I imagining things?

We stood up together. Matriarch's delighted squeal made me jump.

"I told you! They're going out together!" she beamed. "Look at that, an actual date!"

“I haven’t seen our Alpha act like this since he was a pup,” Mrs. Beck added, laughing so hard she nearly dropped a dish.

Matriarch Duskgrave, wiped a tear from the corner of her eye, smiling at me like I’d just been chosen by the Moon Goddess herself.

Lucien drove through the heart of Silvermist City in his sleek obsidian car. It purred like a beast beneath us, graceful yet powerful. We arrived shortly at the Moonthread Den, a boutique nestled between a runestone engraver and an elixirs apothecary.

Lucien parked, came around to my side, and held the door open. His hand hovered protectively over my head as I stepped out.

“We’re here,” he said.

I thanked him again, quietly.

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Chapter 100

The boutique was everything I imagined—warm wooden shelves lined with shimmering silk threads in every color imaginable. Stacks of rune-etched needles, enchanted to resist tearing, glimmered in glass cases. Rolls of enchanted mooncloth, soft as mist, caught the sunlight from the windows.

I was completely absorbed.

Lucien followed silently, always a step behind, his golden eyes never straying from me. When I reached too high, he plucked the item down without a word. When I hesitated, he offered gentle suggestions.

We spent nearly thirty minutes there, and I gathered everything I needed—threads blessed under the Blood Moon, a crescent-shaped hoop crafted from lunar silver, and a fresh set of charm-infused pins.

As we stepped outside, the warmth of the sun touched my skin, and I let out a content sigh.

But the peace shattered in an instant.

“Well, well... what are the odds?”

That voice. My blood turned cold.

Lucien stiffened beside me as a tall male figure strode forward from across the cobblestones. Ronan Duskcliff.

My breath hitched. My body reacted before I could think—I clutched Lucien’s arm tightly, seeking warmth, protection, anything. My legs trembled. My lungs felt like they’d shrunk.

I hadn’t seen Ronan for days. Not since last time we gathered in Tessa’s ward. Not since he ruined everything.

I hid behind Lucien, making sure Ronan couldn’t see my face, though I noticed he was still trying to get a clear look at me.

Ronan was my nightmare.

I hated him.

I feared him instinctively—every fiber of my being recoiled at his presence, screaming for me to avoid him.

“Alpha Lucien,” Ronan said smoothly, though his gaze didn’t shift from me. “What a surprise to see you here. And... this must be your companion?”

Lucien’s voice dropped several octaves, calm but ice-cold. “Do you need something, Alpha Duskcliff?”

Ronan’s smile deepened. “Just passing by. It’s rare to see you in town these days, Lucien. Thought I’d say hello.”

He tilted his head, his eyes narrowing on me like he was trying to see past my changed appearance. I lowered my gaze, tucked closer into Lucien’s side, heart pounding like war drums.

Lucien’s arm slipped around me, drawing me in, shielding me fully.

“She’s none of your concern,” he said, voice now laced with warning.

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## Chapter 100

Ronan hesitated. For a moment, it looked like he might say something more. But Lucien's stance—dominant, protective, powerful—must've changed his mind.

With a shrug, Ronan turned away. "Another time, then."

I didn't breathe until he vanished around the corner. My legs nearly gave out.

Lucien caught me before I fell.

"Are you alright?" he asked softly, his voice now a balm instead of a blade.

I nodded weakly, eyes stinging. "I didn't expect to see him... not here."

"You won't have to deal with him again," Lucien promised. "Not while I'm here."

And just like that, I realized—I wasn't alone anymore.

### **Send Gifts**

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