

Chapter 7

Riley's POV

The crowd was growing around us.

Everyone had heard the voice coming from the speakerphone.

Stunned silence followed. Even the music in the distance felt like it had dulled to a whisper.

The Ebonclaw Pack might not be the most powerful in the South, but they were certainly one of the most respected elite packs. In circles like these, it was unheard of for a daughter of the house to receive nothing—not a single cent in allowance each month. But here I was. The only daughter by blood. Not even a dime to my name.

And suddenly, everything about me made sense to them. The worn-out high school uniform. The lack of even a halfway decent dress for a formal event. The hollow eyes.

They started whispering.

“No wonder she looks like that...”

“Isn’t she the real daughter? And Scarlett’s the adopted one?”

“She didn’t get a penny? Not even once?”

“Wow... the Vale family’s really something.”

They weren’t wrong. It was laughable. Born into privilege, yet stripped of everything. Scarlett—their darling—was pampered with a monthly allowance of a hundred thousand. While I, their actual daughter, was left with nothing but an old school uniform and the sting of forgotten birthdays.

I stood there silently, watching the truth finally sink in for them. For Kael. For my so-called parents.

Kael, his face turning crimson with shame and disbelief, tried one last time to salvage the family’s dignity.

“Even if finance didn’t send you money, surely Mom and Dad gave you some personally, right?” he snapped, clinging to denial.

I smiled, not kindly. My gaze slid to Alpha Alaric and Luna Zara—my “parents.” “If they did, you can ask them directly. After all, you never believed a word I said. But surely, you’ll believe them.”

Alaric looked like he’d been punched. His shoulders stiffened, avoiding my eyes. “I thought... I assumed you two were giving her money,” he muttered, voice barely audible.

Luna Zara looked like she wanted the ground to swallow her whole. Tears welled in her eyes—crocodile tears, if you asked me. “Sweetheart, if you were struggling, you should’ve said something. I would have helped you right away,” she said, voice trembling. “It’s my fault for not noticing sooner, but please know—I’ve always loved you just the same as Scarlett.”

I stared at her, my expression void of emotion, only a faint smile lingering at the corners of my mouth.

The woman who had ordered the finance department to cut me off. Who increased Scarlett’s allowance out of pity—for her, not for me. The same woman now pretending she hadn’t noticed my threadbare clothes, my shrinking presence, my desperation.

She wasn’t blind. She simply didn’t care.

This whole display of remorse was for the audience. Nothing more.

And fortunately, I’d already shed my illusions. I had no expectations left, which meant they had no power over me.

I caught Kael’s flicker of guilt—and just as quickly, the frustration overtook it. “What, you couldn’t just say something?” he barked. “We’re not mind-readers, Riley! If you needed money, all you had to do was ask. You think we’d just let you go without?”

“I did ask,” I said quietly, my voice like ice. “You just didn’t care.”

He opened his mouth to argue—but I saw it, that flicker of doubt.

A memory was returning.

I saw it in his face.

An afternoon, years ago.

We were all in the living room. I approached, fingers twisting the hem of my too-small school blouse, cheeks burning.

“Dad... Mom...” I had murmured. “Can I... have five thousand? For school... tuition...?”

Kael had slammed his newspaper down. “Money, money, money—that’s all you ever talk about!” he’d snapped. “Is that what you came back to this house for? To leech off us? If the Vales weren’t rich, would you have stayed away?”

I remember my hands trembling. My voice had broken when I whispered, “I just need it for school...”

He scoffed. “You want money? Scarlett just got top ten in her class. What did you get?”

“I... I was first...”

“First from the bottom, I bet,” he barked, rolling his eyes. “Unbelievable.”

I had felt so humiliated I ran from the room.

Later, I overheard them chuckling as Scarlett tugged Kael’s arm. “Brother, I did so well this month! Can I have a reward?”

He had immediately brightened. “What does my baby sister want?”

“I saw a purse—ten thousand. Can I have it?”

“Of course! If Scarlett wants it, even a hundred thousand is worth it!”

And I—I was forgotten.

Snapped back to the present, I saw Kael’s face contort with a storm of emotions.

“Is that what you’re remembering now, Kael?” I asked softly. Coldly.

He flinched at the use of his full name. Not “brother.” Not anymore.

That word had died the moment they let me rot in prison.

He clenched his fists, scowling. “Well, it’s not like you deserved a reward! You were failing all your classes! Coming in last—how dare you even ask for money!”

I tilted my head, my voice sharp as glass. “I was first in my year. All three years of high school.”

His expression cracked.

I smiled coldly. “But of course you didn’t know that, did you? You don’t even know what school I went to.”

His face turned pale. “You weren’t at Halston Academy?”

Halston Academy—the most prestigious private school in Mooncrest City. Scarlett’s school. The school he just assumed I went to.

He turned abruptly to Alaric and Luna Zara, his voice hoarse. “Did you transfer her into Halston when she came back?”

Neither answered.

Alaric’s face went ashen, his lips moving uselessly.

Luna Zara just stood there, eyes wild, lips trembling, mascara streaking.

Their silence said everything.

And in that silence, Kael’s carefully constructed world began to crumble.

He looked at me, barely able to breathe. “Riley... then where did you go to school all these years?”