

Chapter 8

Riley's POV

My life had already been destroyed, and now he suddenly cared about my education?

How ironic.

I had spent my entire youth chasing the light—ten years of studying until my fingers bled, just to rewrite the fate I had been handed. I dreamed of breaking through my circumstances with nothing but sheer determination. My dream was Ashmoor Academy, the most prestigious institution in the Werewolf Alliance. I wanted to become a combat instructor, stand at the front of a classroom, and help kids like me escape the chains of their birth.

But dreams are fragile things.

The Vale family crushed mine with one careless decision. A single false accusation, and I was sentenced to five years in hell. All my hard-earned potential, all those sleepless nights... buried.

Because in their world, effort meant nothing. Power and bloodline ruled all.

The ache in my chest flared as I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palms, but I barely noticed.

"Mooncrest Academy," I said softly.

The moment those three words left my lips, the atmosphere shifted. Alpha Alaric. Luna Zara. Kael. Their faces went pale.

Because Mooncrest wasn't just any school. It was the top-ranking academic institution in Mooncrest City. Entry wasn't bought with gold or influence—it demanded scores.

Unlike Halston Academy, where Scarlett had studied.

I smiled bitterly. "I didn't go to Halston Academy with Scarlett. We were never classmates. Never even had breakfast together. Mooncrest's morning study sessions started at six. I left home every day at four a.m., riding my old bike for two hours just to get there on time."

I took a breath. "I never came home for lunch—there wasn't time. And I had no money, so I just drank water and pushed through until the day ended. When I

finally got home, you'd all already eaten. I ate leftovers, if there were any. And when I did, you called me a stray. A parasite. Greedy, disgusting."

Luna Zara started to cry. "Riley... I didn't know it was this bad. I'm sorry. It's all my fault."

I looked at her, calm as still water. "You have nothing to apologize for," I said coolly. "You didn't raise me. I was just the daughter you abandoned. I don't expect anything more from you."

Her sobs choked in her throat.

My memories burned behind my eyes—

Riley, I know you're stronger than Scarlett. You survived Rogue Pack. I know you'll adapt to prison too. Please... take the blame for her. For your sister.

That voice had haunted me for five years.

Kael snapped, trying to save face. "We may have neglected you, but that doesn't mean you're blameless. You've always hated Scarlett. You used every chance to retaliate against us. You're bitter, jealous, mean."

I didn't even blink.

Luna Zara grabbed his arm. "Don't talk to her like that."

But Kael shook her off. "She framed Scarlett over Tessa's disappearance in the Black Forest, and now she's putting on this show in front of the guests. She's manipulative, vindictive, and ungrateful."

Zara looked at me, eyes darting like a trapped animal. I knew that look. Guilt.

She had deleted the only surveillance footage that could have cleared my name.

"Enough." Alaric finally stepped in, his Alpha authority darkening the air.

"Riley, if you were coming home today, why didn't you say something? We could've prepared a proper dress."

I stared at him.

"You didn't know I was being released today?"

He blinked. "Of course not. If we had, I'd have sent the driver. How did you get home?"

"Alpha Kael picked me up. He said you were throwing me a welcome banquet."

Gasps spread across the hall.

"Welcome banquet? Isn't today Scarlett's birthday party?"

"That's what my invitation said—Scarlett Vale's birthday celebration."

"What kind of family throws a release party for a convict?"

The whispers started. Gossip buzzed like flies.

Kael's face burned red. He opened his mouth but couldn't say a word.

And there it was—the truth. I wasn't being welcomed. I was a footnote in Scarlett's day. An afterthought.

What did I expect?

Tears pricked the corners of my eyes, but I blinked them back and turned to leave. I'd had enough.

But fate wasn't finished humiliating me.

A blur of white lace came barreling into me. I didn't even have time to dodge.

CRASH.

Pain exploded in my elbow and leg as I hit the ground hard. My breath caught, my limbs screaming.

When I opened my eyes, I saw them.

Alpha Alaric. Luna Zara. Kael.

Hovering over Scarlett, who lay at the center of their protective circle, wailing like a porcelain doll.

"Scarlett, are you okay? Did she hurt you? Did Riley hurt you?!"

Kael's voice cracked with rage. "What the hell is wrong with you, Riley? Can't you even watch where you're walking?!"

I stared up at them, lying on the cold marble floor.

My blood seeping out.

My dignity gone.

My crime? Being born into the wrong life.