

Chapter 13

She knocked on his door at eleven-fifteen.

He opened it immediately — still dressed, papers spread across the desk behind him, like he hadn't tried to sleep at all. His eyes dropped to her phone, held out with the message on screen, and she watched his expression do something she had never seen from him.

Pure, quiet fury.

Not loud. Not performed. The kind that lived deep and stayed cold.

He took the phone. Read it twice.

"Come in," he said.

His office was more lived-in than the rest of the penthouse — books stacked on the floor, a world map pinned with markers, two empty coffee cups on the windowsill. This was where Jax Wilder actually existed. The rest of the apartment was the Alpha King's. This room was his.

She sat in the chair across from his desk and watched him call Marcus — not the Marcus from her editing network, his head of security. Within four minutes there were two extra enforcers on the building's perimeter. Within ten, someone was tracing the number.

"It's a burner," his security chief said through the phone. "Activated three hours ago. Tower ping puts it six blocks east."

Six blocks.

Nova kept her hands flat on her thighs.

"Upgrade the perimeter wards," Jax said. "Full rotation overnight. No one in the elevator bank who isn't on the cleared list." He paused. "And pull the car we had on her apartment. If they've been watching, that location is burned."

He hung up.

He looked at her.

"You're safe," he said. "Both of them are safe."

"I know." She held his gaze. "I'm not panicking. I'm angry."

"Good." Something moved in his eyes. "Angry is useful."

She breathed in slowly. Out slowly. The text sat in the back of her mind like a hot coal — *what doesn't belong to him* — like her sons were objects to be claimed and disputed. Like she was part of that transaction.

"Who are they?" she asked. "The rogues. You said this same group has been building for six weeks. Who sent them the first time?"

His jaw tightened.

"We don't know yet," he said.

"But you have a theory."

A pause. "Yes."

"Tell me."

He looked at her — measuring, she thought. Deciding how much to say. She straightened slightly and watched him notice that she wasn't going to accept a partial answer.

"There's a council faction," he said. "Three senior members who opposed my appointment as Alpha King. They've been working quietly to destabilize my position — create enough chaos that the vote gets revisited." He set her phone on the desk. "If I have no heirs, no mate bond, no legitimate pack claim beyond my own blood — I'm a caretaker king. Replaceable."

"But if you have sons—"

"Sons who carry Wilder blood." He met her eyes. "The oldest twin inherits the Alpha King title. That's not just a threat to a political faction. That's a dynasty."

She sat with that for a moment.

Two three-year-olds asleep down the hall who had no idea that they were the reason someone wanted her dead.

"How long have you known this was about them?" she asked.

"I suspected when the intel came in six weeks ago," he said. "I didn't know they were *yours* until the gala." His voice was even but his eyes weren't. "Nova, if I had known — if I had known for one day that you were alive and they existed — I would have —"

"I know," she said.

He stopped.

"I know," she said again, quieter. "I'm not relitigating the past tonight. I'm thinking about what comes next."

He was quiet for a long moment. Something settled in his face — not relief, exactly. More like the particular stillness of a person who has been bracing and just discovered they can stop.

"I want to hire you a personal trainer," he said. "Pack combat. Starting next week."

She blinked. "What?"

"You were almost taken at that stadium because you hadn't trained. I watched the footage." His jaw was tight. "You held your own for longer than most omegas would have and then they overwhelmed you because you didn't have the conditioning." He held her gaze. "I want to fix that. Not because I don't think you can handle yourself — because I watched someone drag you away once and I am not watching it again."

She looked at him.

"You watched the footage," she said.

"Six months of trying to find you. I watched every frame of that night a hundred times."

The room was very quiet.

She didn't have anything safe to say to that, so she didn't say anything at all.

"Think about it," he said. "The trainer."

"Fine," she said. She stood up. "Fine. But I pick the sessions."

"Of course."

She walked to the door.

"Jax."

She turned without planning to. Old reflex. His face was open and tired

and there was something in his eyes that had been there every time he looked at her since the gala — something that looked a lot like a man slowly understanding the full weight of what he'd thrown away.

"I'm glad you're alive," he said. Just that.

She nodded once and went back to her room.

She did not sleep for a long time.

Her wolf, pressed close to the surface, was not helping.

The rogues were six blocks away.

Jax was thirty feet away.

Both of those facts were keeping her up for very different reasons.