

## Chapter 15

The letter arrived on a Tuesday.

Official seal of the United Packs Council. Heavy cream paper. The kind of stationery designed to remind you who had power and who held it on their behalf.

Jax read it at his desk. He read it twice. Then he put it down and stared at the city through the window for a long moment.

"What is it?" Nova said from the doorway.

He looked up. She was in the frame with her arms crossed and fresh bruises from Sera's training on her forearms — she'd refused to wear the full padding, which had led to a forty-minute argument that Sera had lost. Her chin was up. Her eyes were on him.

He handed her the letter.

She read it standing.

He watched her expression as she went through it — neutral at first, then something tighter around the eyes, then the jaw setting the way it did when she was deciding not to react the way she actually wanted to react.

She set it on the desk.

"They want you to reject us," she said.

"That's the polite version of what they want."

She picked up the letter again and read the key line aloud, steady-voiced:  
\*"The Alpha King's continued association with an unmated omega of no pack standing, and the unverified pups attributed to this union,



represents a threat to the dignity and stability of the United Packs throne.

"\*

She put it down.

"Unverified pups," she said.

"The DNA tests are being submitted to the council today. They'll be verified by Thursday."

"And then?"

"And then they'll find another word."

She looked at him. "What do you want to do?"

The question surprised him — he could tell from the slight lift of his brows. She had asked it deliberately. She wanted to see what he said when given the choice instead of the pressure.

"I want to formally recognize the boys," he said. "Publicly. As my heirs." He held her gaze. "I want to present you to the council as my intended mate."

The room was very quiet.

"Your \*intended\* mate," she said carefully.

"Not a done thing. Not a command." His voice was steady. "An intention. Something I'm asking for. That you would be given full right to refuse at any point."

She looked at the letter. She looked at him.

"How bad does it get," she said, "if you defy the council?"



"Three of the seven members will push back hard. They'll go to the press. They'll call the boys' bloodline into question even with DNA. They'll position you as an omega who trapped the Alpha King."

"Will anyone believe that?"

"Some people believe whatever serves them." He leaned back. "It won't matter if we're a united front. Pack members follow strength and they follow family. The moment Ryder and Blake are seen as legitimate Wilder heirs, the political ground shifts completely."

She was quiet for a long time.

She walked to the window and stood with her back to him, looking out at the city. He waited. He was learning to wait where Nova was concerned — to not fill the silence with his own need.

"I grew up without pack standing," she said finally. "Scholarship omega. No family name anyone recognized, no alpha father, no claim to anything. I spent four years at that university being nobody." She paused. "I built something anyway. Without any of the things they said I needed."

"I know."

"I need you to understand what it would mean — to walk into that council room." She turned around. "It's not about whether I'm scared of them. I'm not. It's about making sure you understand that I'm not doing this \*for\* a title. I'm not doing it to stop being nobody."

"I know that too."

"Then why would I do it?"

He stood up. He crossed to where she stood at the window and he stopped an arm's length away, the city bright behind her.



"Because those boys deserve a world that sees them coming," he said. "Not a world they have to fight their way into from the outside." His voice was quiet. "And because I spent four years being exactly the kind of person who takes good things and throws them away and I am done doing that."

She looked at him for a long, measuring moment.

Outside, down the hall, Blake's laugh rang out — the big full-body one — followed by Ryder's voice delivering some kind of verdict.

"The council meeting," she said. "When?"

"Friday."

"I want to be there."

He blinked. "Nova—"

"I'm not sitting in the penthouse while someone tells you to throw my sons away." She met his eyes. "I want to be in that room."

He studied her face.

"It'll be hostile," he said.

"I grew up hostile," she said. "What time?"

The corner of his mouth moved.

"Ten a.m.," he said.

She nodded once and walked back toward the door. She stopped.

"Jax."



"Yeah."

"The letter says \*unverified pups.\*" She looked over her shoulder. "On Friday, let me talk."

She walked out.

He stood at the window looking at the space where she'd been and felt something he hadn't felt in years — the particular, terrifying feeling of standing next to something that mattered enormously and not wanting to run from it.

His phone buzzed. His security chief.

He picked up.

"Rogue movement two miles south," Marcus said. "Three vehicles. Circling."

The feeling went cold and hard and purposeful.

"Get everyone inside," Jax said. "Lock it down."

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\*The council wanted them gone.\*

\*The rogues were circling.\*

\*Nova was walking into both with her chin up.\*

\*She had no idea yet that by Friday, everything would change.\*