

Chapter 16

The three vehicles circled the block twice and disappeared.

Marcus tracked them south toward the waterfront before losing the signal at a dead zone near the old shipping docks. No engagement. No direct approach. Just presence — deliberate, unhurried — like someone wanted them to know they were being watched.

Nova stood at the window of Jax's office at one in the morning and looked at the city below.

"They're not attacking," she said. "They're measuring."

Jax stood beside her. "Yes."

"They want to know the layout. The response time. How many enforcers, where the exits are." She turned. "This is reconnaissance."

He looked at her for a moment. "How do you know that?"

"I spent three weeks in their safe house." She crossed her arms. "I wasn't blindfolded the whole time. I paid attention." She met his eyes. "They're organized. Whoever is running them isn't rogue in the way we usually mean — scattered, territorial, reactive. This is structured. These people have a chain of command."

Jax was already pulling up something on his laptop.

"Show me," he said.

She spent the next hour telling him everything she remembered from those three weeks — the safe house layout, the rotation schedule of the guards, the coded language they used for council versus field operations, the name she'd heard twice that she'd never been able to place.

"Harlan," she said.



Jax went still.

"You know that name," she said.

"Harlan Voss." His jaw was tight. "Former pack enforcer. I had him removed from my security rotation eight months ago — behavior concerns. We thought he went independent." He looked at her. "You heard his name three years ago?"

"Twice. They were careful about it. One of the guards said it and another one told him to shut up fast." She held Jax's gaze. "He was involved from the beginning."

"He has connections to two of the three council members who sent that letter," Jax said. He was thinking out loud now, the Alpha King's brain running fast. "If he's been building this for three years—"

"Then the letter wasn't a warning," Nova said. "It was a pressure test. They want to see if you'll fold before they escalate."

He looked at her.

She looked back.

"You could have told me this three days ago," he said.

"I needed to know if you'd actually listen." She uncrossed her arms. "Or if you'd do the thing where you decide you already know everything and my information is a footnote."

A beat.

"Do you trust me now?" he asked. Quietly.

"I trust that you listened tonight," she said. "That's a start."

He nodded once. He turned back to the laptop. "I'm bringing in two additional tracker units and pulling the council meeting forward to



Thursday morning. I want this on record before Voss has time to move again."

"Good."

She walked to the door.

"Nova." His voice stopped her. "What you just did — connecting those pieces, the timeline, Voss — that's the kind of thinking a Luna Queen does."

She looked at him over her shoulder.

"I'm not a queen," she said. "I'm a woman who paid attention when nobody thought she mattered." She paused. "Get some sleep."

She went to her room.

She lay in the dark and listened to the building hum around her — wards and enforcers and forty-two floors of carefully maintained protection — and thought about Harlan Voss. About three weeks in a safe house while she was three months pregnant, listening through thin walls because she had nothing else to do.

She thought about the way Jax had leaned over his laptop and taken notes while she talked.

That's a start, she'd said.

Her wolf thought it was considerably more than that.

"Quiet," Nova told her.

Her wolf settled — but smugly.

In the morning, the boys found the glow stars in the main hallway.



Someone — Jax, clearly — had pressed a new set onto the ceiling above the kitchen island. Not Orion's belt this time. Ryder studied them from the counter with narrowed eyes for a full minute before announcing: "That's the Big Dipper. But it's upside down."

"It looks better upside down," Jax said.

Ryder considered this. "Debatable," he said.

Blake had already moved on to eating toast.

Nova stood in the kitchen doorway and looked at the ceiling and felt something warm move through her chest before she could redirect it.

She left it there.

Just this once.

Harlan Voss was three miles south.

The council meeting was in forty-eight hours.

And Nova Ellis — invisible omega, scholarship girl, nobody — was about to walk into the most powerful room in the Pacific coast packs and make every person in it remember her name.



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