



## Chapter 20

It started with a spilled glass of orange juice.

Blake knocked it off the kitchen counter reaching for a banana, and the glass hit the tile and shattered, and Blake startled backward and his eyes went wide and Nova said "it's okay, bub, just glass" — and then something in the air changed.

Ryder went rigid at the table.

A sound came out of him that was not a sound three-year-olds made. Low. Resonant. The kind of vibration that Nova felt in the back of her teeth.

Blake's eyes, wide with fright, changed.

The whites went gold.

Nova was already moving toward them — she didn't know for what, her whole body just moved — and then Jax was there, faster, between the glass and the boys, crouching low and saying their names quietly.

"Hey. Hey, look at me. Look at \*me.\*"

Ryder's sound stopped.

Blake blinked.

The gold faded.

For exactly three seconds no one in the kitchen moved.

Then Blake burst into tears, which was a completely normal three-year-old response and somehow made everything feel more manageable.



Nova got to him first, picked him up, held him against her shoulder while he sobbed about the broken glass and the banana and a grievance that was quickly becoming about something else entirely.

Jax stayed crouched beside Ryder.

Ryder was looking at his own hands.

"What was that?" Ryder asked. His voice was completely calm — which was, in some ways, more unsettling than tears.

"That," Jax said quietly, "was the beginning of your wolf."

Ryder looked up. "It happened because Blake was scared."

"Yes."

"My wolf came out because Blake needed it to."

"Yes." Jax's voice was steady and careful. "That's a twin bond. Alpha twins — when one is frightened or in pain, the other's wolf responds." He met Ryder's eyes. "It means your wolves already know each other. They've been talking to each other since before you were born."

Ryder processed this with his characteristic thoroughness.

"Is that why I always know when Blake is going to cry before he does?" he asked.

"Probably."

"I thought I was just smarter," Ryder said.

Despite everything, Nova laughed.

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They called the pack doctor — a steady, practical woman named Dr. Wren who had been on retainer for Jax's household since his appointment. She arrived within the hour, examined both boys thoroughly, and declared them entirely healthy.

"First partial shift response," she told Nova and Jax privately in the hallway. "Earlier than average, but not abnormally so. Alpha twins often trigger each other's development — the bond accelerates the timeline." She paused. "You should know that when this happens fully — the first complete shift — it's going to be significant. Alpha heirs with a twin bond shifting for the first time together can generate a resonance that the whole pack will feel."

Nova looked at Jax.

"How significant?" he asked.

"Every werewolf within a mile radius will know something changed," Dr. Wren said. "It's instinctive pack response — the whole territory will feel new alpha presence." She closed her bag. "It's also going to be the most public possible announcement that those boys exist and are powerful."

"Which means Voss will know," Nova said.

"Yes," Jax said.

The three of them stood in the hallway with that fact sitting between them.

"How long?" Jax asked Dr. Wren.

"Weeks. Maybe days, given today. The bond is active now — once it starts it accelerates quickly."

She left.



Nova stood in the hallway looking at the closed door of the boys' room. Inside she could hear them talking to each other — Blake still slightly sniffly, Ryder explaining something in his steady small voice.

Jax moved to stand beside her.

"We need to be ready," he said.

"I know."

"When it happens —"

"I know," she said again. She turned to look at him. "I need more training sessions with Sera. Every day until then."

"Done."

"And I want the boys in the room when it happens. Not shipped off somewhere safe with a stranger. \*With us.\*"

He looked at her.

"The safest place in any emergency is next to me," she said. "I'm their mother and I am going to be standing next to them when their wolves come in for the first time, threat or no threat."

He was quiet for a moment. She could see him weighing it — the Alpha King calculation against something else, something that looked like respect.

"Agreed," he said.

She looked back at the door.

From inside, Blake's voice: "Ryder, do you think the dragons could feel it



too?"

From Ryder: "Dragons aren't in the pack registry. So probably not."

From Blake: "I think they felt it."

From Ryder, a long pause: "...maybe."

Nova pressed her lips together.

"They're going to be something," she said quietly.

"They already are," Jax said. Just as quiet.

They stood there in the hallway — shoulders almost touching, voices low, facing the same door.

The closest thing to a united front they'd managed yet.

Outside, the city moved on, unaware.

Three miles south, Harlan Voss received a report.

He read it twice.

Then he picked up his phone.

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\*The boys' wolves were awake.\*

\*Voss knew.\*

\*The clock had started.\*



will sleep with you."

Once in the room, the children all lay down, and Caitlin snuggled with Patricia on the smaller bed, telling them stories.

It wasn't until all the children were asleep that Caitlin finally slipped out of the room.

As soon as she opened the door, she was startled to see Sebastian, dressed in a bathrobe, standing at the door waiting for her.

"Are they all asleep?"

"Mm."

"Good. Now, it's my turn to have your attention."

Sebastian's eyes burned with desire as he pulled her into his arms, and the two of them kissed their way toward the master bedroom...

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