

Broken 171

Chapter 171 Toughest Decisions

AMY

“I won’t,” I said firmly. “I’ve been careful so far. I’ll continue to be.” We spent the rest of the morning cross-referencing anomalies with employee access logs, internal communications, and financial flows. Cole handled the digital surveillance side, mapping out access points, while I coordinated the corporate analysis. Mrs. Carter provided insight into executive behavior, adding context that numbers alone couldn’t reveal. The more we delved, the more it became clear that Elias had been meticulously orchestrating influence in two arenas at once. Not just the pack and its political alliances, but Carter Holdings itself. Every subtle shift, every overlooked decision, every manipulated transaction was part of a larger strategy. By early afternoon, I made a decision. If Elias thought I was unaware of certain pieces of his plan, I could use that assumption against him. I would let him believe there were gaps in my knowledge while I quietly built leverage: duplicated files, encrypted communications, and secure evidence channels. I wasn’t just reacting anymore, I was setting the stage for control. Cole looked at me, raising an eyebrow. “You’re serious about letting him think he has an advantage?” “I have to,” I replied. “If he believes he’s manipulating us, he’ll make a mistake. And when he does, we’ll be ready.” By the time Daniel returned, I had compiled a preliminary report of inconsistencies and subtle interferences. He reviewed it quickly, frustration evident in the tight lines around his mouth, but he didn’t question my authority. He trusted my judgment, even if he didn’t fully understand the scope yet. “Good work,” he said, nodding. “Keep tracking it. Let me know if anything concrete shows up.” “I will,” I replied, careful to maintain a neutral tone. Late that evening, after Daniel had left for a private meeting and Cole had gone home, I returned to the data one last time. That’s when I noticed something new. A personal note buried within a folder labeled ambiguously under Elias’s files. It was brief, typed with that same meticulous precision he favored. The message hinted at a betrayal from within Carter Holdings, an insider feeding him information, someone with access to critical corporate intelligence, word, My heart didn’t race. I didn’t react emotionally. Instead, I leaned forward, studying every implication. Whoever this insider was, they had provided Elias the tools to manipulate the company and the pack simultaneously. Whoever they were, they were dangerous and I needed to know their identity before Elias could leverage them further. I copied the note into a secure, encrypted drive, cross-referencing it with every employee access log, communication trail, and recent movement within the company. The search had to be precise. A wrong move could alert both the insider and Elias. The game had changed. I wasn’t just reacting anymore, I was in control of information, leverage, and strategy. The trap was set, and the pieces were beginning to fall into place. But the insider’s identity remained hidden, a shadow in the corporate corridors, silently feeding the manipulations that had weakened Daniel’s authority.

I stared at the screen, understanding the truth that Elias had prepared this moment, yes, but I wasn’t powerless anymore. The next move would determine not just the pack and Carter Holdings, but the people closest to me. I arrived at Carter Holdings early the next day, my heels clicking against the polished floor as I carried a leather-bound folder filled with all the evidence Elias had left behind. Today wasn’t about reaction, it was about control. Daniel and Cole followed, both aware that this wasn’t just another strategy meeting—it was a confrontation carefully planned to force Elias into a corner. The boardroom was empty when we entered, sunlight cutting through the tall windows and casting long shadows across the table. I placed the folder in front of me, making sure it was visible but not yet open.

Mrs. Carter arrived last, she gave me a small nod, her expression neutral. Her presence wasn't interference, it was validation. The boardroom, the corporate setting, the evidence in front of me, all of it was strategically mine. I spoke first, "Elias knows I have evidence. He knows I'm aware of his manipulations in Carter Holdings and in the pack. But he hasn't faced me directly. Today, that changes." A soft chuckle echoed through the room before I could continue. Elias stepped in, leaning casually against the sideboard, as if he owned the space. His confidence made my skin crawl. I stayed still, letting him make the first move. "Ah, Amy," he said, smirking. "You really do like to set the stage." I didn't respond. I opened the folder just enough for him to see its contents: transaction records, digital trails, intercepted communications—all pointing to his influence over both pack politics and corporate operations. "I see you've been busy," he said, still grinning. "But you think you've got me cornered?" "I don't think," I said, locking eyes with him. "I know. I've traced your influence, your manipulations, your financial channels. I've reviewed every subtle move you've made in Carter. And I've accounted for the pack dynamics you've tried to bend in your favor." His smirk faltered, replaced by a glimmer of interest. "Bold words. And here I thought a woman in a boardroom might get nervous." I ignored the taunt. "Tell me about Marielle. Tell me what you've done to keep her name buried, and why you've twisted information to control perceptions in both packs. I want the truth." Elias leaned back, folding his arms. "Straight to the point. I like that. But you think the truth is simple. You think you can challenge me without consequence." "I don't think," I said again, firmer this time. "I act. And today, you're the one being challenged, not the other way around." He studied me, tilting his head slightly. "Do you understand the risks, Amy? You're playing with fire. Your real father isn't the man you think he is. Your decisions here affect more than your pride or Daniel's stability. They affect lives. All of them."

Chapter 172 He Is Untouchable

AMY

The mention of my father triggered a quick pulse of anger, but I suppressed it. Elias thrived on reaction. I would not give him that. "I understand perfectly," I said. "And I'm not here to react. I'm here to confront and control." Elias shifted, trying another tactic. "And what about Daniel? You think you can protect him while exposing me? He's vulnerable, Amy. He trusts you. But his trust won't shield him from what's coming." I leaned forward, placing a hand flat on the table. "I've accounted for Daniel. I've accounted for Cole. And I've accounted for myself. None of us are naive. You underestimate what we can do when the truth is clearly in our hands." He chuckled again, but it sounded forced this time. "You're stubborn. Clever. Dangerous. And yet... naive. Let me show you something." Elias pulled a confidential file from his jacket, placing it on the table with deliberate care. The folder was marked with high-security stamps—information not just about corporate channels, but about Southern Pack politics. He slid it toward me slowly. "You think you understand your father," he said, voice low. "But this... this will change your perspective. There are layers you haven't seen. Actions, decisions, alliances you didn't know existed. And if you continue down this path without knowing them..." I opened the folder just enough to glance inside. My stomach didn't drop, but my mind raced. The documents suggested my father's involvement in the South Pack extended far beyond what Elias had previously revealed. Political influence, covert alliances, even financial maneuvering that could compromise not just me personally, but Carter Holdings as well. I closed the folder slowly, meeting his gaze. "You're trying to intimidate me," I said. "You're trying to make me doubt, to make me pause. But I've been collecting information for months. I'm not naive about risk. You've underestimated my ability to plan and anticipate." Elias studied me for a long moment, the casual mask slipping just enough to reveal something sharp behind his eyes. "Interesting,"

he said. "You're no ordinary strategist. But do you understand the consequences of what you're holding? If this goes public..." "I understand perfectly," I replied. "And I'll decide when it goes public, not you. You've been operating in shadows long enough. It's time someone brought you into the light." He leaned back, his smile returning, but I could see the calculation behind it. Elias knew he hadn't won this confrontation yet. But he had one last card to play. "Keep your folder close, Amy," he said. "Because there's more you don't know. And when you find it, you'll understand the real edge you're standing on." you I didn't flinch. "Then show it, or step aside. I'm done being manipulated." He shrugged lightly. "Patience, Amy. Patience. The game has just begun." And just like that, he left, leaving the confidential file on the table—a single thread promising revelations far beyond anything I had prepared for.

I exhaled, keeping my composure as I glanced at Daniel and Cole. They were tense, but I held their focus. "We've got work to do," I said, my voice steady. "This isn't over. Not by a long shot." The boardroom felt charged, every quiet echo of the windows and walls carrying the weight of what Elias had just exposed. I picked up the file, already forming strategies in my mind. The boardroom confrontation with Elias had left more questions than answers. His final words still echoed in my head, but I pushed them aside as Daniel and I sat across from each other in his office later that night. The city lights reflected off the glass walls, the quiet hum of traffic below barely reaching us. Between us lay the confidential file Elias had left behind, its contents now dissected, catalogued, and still no closer to giving us peace. Daniel looked exhausted, though he tried to hide it. "He's several moves ahead, Amy," he said, rubbing his temple. "Every time we uncover something, he's already calculated our reaction." "He's not untouchable," I said. "He depends on information. Someone's feeding him from inside Carter Holdings. That's his strength. If I can trace the source, we can control the flow." I turned to my laptop, opening the internal communication logs of the company. As one of the directors, my access was extensive, and I'd already narrowed the possibilities. Certain emails, encrypted under finance updates, showed unusual patterns forwarded attachments that shouldn't exist, subtle digital fingerprints connecting back to an unknown external server. Daniel leaned forward. "You think it's someone from the company?" "Yes," I said. "And not just someone low-level. Whoever it is knows our internal structure too well. They're covering their tracks with professional precision." Cole entered then, holding two mugs of coffee. He handed one to Daniel and sat quietly beside me, scanning the screen. "That's not random," he said, pointing to a string of encoded timestamps. "Those patterns match the same ones from the intercepted messages Elias used weeks ago." "Which means," I added, "whoever is feeding him information is still active." Daniel's jaw tightened. "Find them before they find out we're looking." I nodded and got back to work. The more I dug, the clearer it became that Elias's manipulation wasn't just political, it was embedded in the company's infrastructure. He'd been redirecting resources subtly for months, altering minor logistics decisions that, when combined, created pressure points inside the Northern Pack's finances. It was brilliant in its simplicity. He didn't need an army, he needed a very powerful influence. By morning, I had identified three possible suspects inside the company's administration. I needed confirmation before moving further, and that meant bringing in Mrs. Carter. When I entered her office, she was already reviewing reports. Her composure never wavered, even when I told her about the suspected infiltration. "So," she said, setting her reading glasses down, "he's infiltrated both our family and our business. Typical of him." Her calm annoyed me, but I understood it. Mrs. Carter had survived decades of internal wars—business, pack, and political. Emotion didn't drive her; results did.

Chapter 173 High Level Clearance

AMY

"I'll monitor all company communications discreetly," she said. "But the board must not know. If they sense instability, they'll panic and panic is good for Elias." "I've already started encrypting all internal correspondence," I said. "Cole's handling the digital trail. Daniel will keep the board distracted. You should handle any inquiries that come through about the financial inconsistencies. We can't let anyone outside suspect that the pack's internal problems are spilling into the business." Mrs. Carter gave a small approving nod. "You've learned quickly." Then, her expression softened. "But don't let your emotions cloud your decisions. You carry too much already." I didn't answer. My emotions weren't a distraction, they were fuel. Later that day, I met with Daniel again. We sat in his private office, overlooking the compound that housed both the Carter Holdings headquarters and the Northern Pack administrative wing. The duality of our lives—business by day, pack survival by night had never been more fragile. He looked at me with concern. "You've barely slept," he said. "I can't afford to," I replied. "Elias is using everything against us. Corporate power, political leverage, personal secrets. If we don't close every door, he'll walk straight through one we didn't see." Daniel reached across the desk, his hand covering mine for a brief moment. It was rare for him to show emotion so openly, but the gesture grounded me. "We'll deal with him together," he said. I nodded, pulling my hand back gently. "Then we need to start acting like it. No more waiting. We have to move before he does." Cole entered, holding a report. "I traced one of the data breaches," he said. "It originated from a subnetwork used only by senior management. Which means whoever's feeding Elias information has high-level clearance." Daniel stood. "That narrows it down." "It also means," I added, "that whoever it is has been in this building recently. Maybe even today." Silence settled over the room. The weight of suspicion was suffocating. I could feel Daniel's frustration, he hated that we had to doubt our own people. But I had already accepted that loyalty meant nothing to someone who saw opportunity in betrayal. By evening, Mrs. Carter confirmed what I already suspected. Financial transfers had been rerouted to accounts associated with shell companies tied to the South. The same entities Elias had used months ago during his secret dealings. That night, I sat alone in my office. The city lights glimmered outside as I stared at my computer screen. My world was starting to overlap in dangerous ways. Pack, business, and bloodline all connected by one man's manipulation. And somewhere inside this building, someone was still helping him. I opened a new encrypted folder and labelled it. Inside it, I began cataloguing every piece of data we had. Elias's communications, his financial manipulations, his links to the South. Every move, every transaction, every word mattered.

My phone buzzed. It was a secure channel notification—one only a handful of us could access. The sender was anonymous. I opened it. The message was brief, coded in the same encryption Elias had used before: "The walls have ears. Someone you trust speaks for me." I froze, rereading it. The timestamp was current. The message hadn't come from outside, it had been sent from inside the Carter network. My heart pounded, but I stayed calm. This was confirmation. Elias still had an insider, and whoever it was had access to everything including my communication systems. I encrypted the message again and locked the file. There was no point in showing it to Daniel yet. Not until I could verify where it came from. I stared out the window, the city's reflection staring back at me like a warning. The real war wasn't between packs anymore. It was here—inside our walls, inside Carter Holdings, inside the people we trusted. And someone close to me was already feeding the enemy. The rest of the day passed in a blur and we all went home. Daniel and I barely saw eye to eye lately. We were overwhelmed and terribly occupied with the whole Elias drama. The following day started like any other at Carter Holdings—or at least, I made it appear that way. On the surface, everything was normal with board meetings, financial reviews, and the occasional casual greeting from colleagues who had no idea the storm that was

brewing beneath. But I knew better. Every file, every email, every whispered conversation could be a thread leading directly to Elias. And that thread could unravel everything Daniel and I had been trying to protect. I arrived early, before most of the staff, and headed straight to my office. I had set up discreet surveillance across several key departments, ensuring that nothing unusual would go unnoticed. My strategy was subtle—no alarms, no overt accusations. If the insider suspected they were being watched, they'd retreat, cover their tracks, or worse, accelerate their leak. Cole had insisted on being involved, but I told him I needed to keep some steps to myself. "If you're too close, you'll panic," I had said. "And panic clouds judgment." He had reluctantly agreed, his protective instincts battling with the trust he placed in me. I started by reviewing access logs and cross-referencing who had been handling sensitive data tied to Elias's interests. The patterns were nuanced, slight deviations from routine file transfers, encrypted communications that didn't fit the company's standard protocols. Each anomaly was small, but together they painted a troubling picture. During a mid-morning meeting with the finance team, I observed more than just numbers. I listened to the tone, watched for hesitation, and noted who avoided direct eye contact. Every conversation, even casual chatter about quarterly projections, became a tool. I asked pointed questions about recent transactions, subtly probing for inconsistencies without revealing my intent. The insiders didn't even realize they were being tested. By late afternoon, I had narrowed my focus to three employees. One, a mid-level analyst, had access to sensitive corporate financial data.

Chapter 174 Someone Wants Her Gone

AMY

Another, an administrative coordinator, managed internal communications and schedules, giving them potential insight into Daniel's movements and pack matters. The third, a senior executive, seemed untouchable at first glance but their access to board-level communications made them a potential high-risk target. I paused at my desk, rubbing my temples. Every decision I made had consequences, not just for me, but for Daniel, Cole, Mrs. Carter, and the Northern Pack. Elias's influence was already evident in the subtle ways the company had been manipulated, decisions stalled, funds shifted, and loyalties tested. If the insider remained unchecked, we'd face a catastrophe not even Daniel could contain. Mrs. Carter's presence in the office that afternoon was timely. She observed quietly as I briefed her on my findings, though she didn't need every detail spelled out. She had always known how to read the room and the people in it. DOZ ZEFFE DE P "You've done well to remain focused," she said, "But remember, protecting the company and the pack means making hard choices. Some truths will hurt, and some people will disappoint you. That doesn't mean you fail, it means you're leading correctly." Her words struck a chord. I knew she was right. Leadership wasn't about avoiding pain, it was about managing it and making calculated moves when everyone else panicked. With determination, I continued my surveillance late into the evening. I cross-referenced recent communications with financial records, looking for overlaps that could indicate who had been feeding Elias information. And then I saw a subtle but undeniable pattern connecting the administrative coordinator to multiple instances of sensitive data leaving the company network. The logs aligned perfectly with the times Elias had sent messages referencing internal decisions. I leaned back, processing the betrayal. This was someone I had trusted implicitly, someone I had worked alongside for years. The depth of the deception made my stomach turn, but I couldn't let it paralyze me. Elias's network was more extensive than I had anticipated, and his ability to manipulate people close to me made him dangerous. Cole entered the office quietly, sensing the tension. "Find something?" he asked, his voice low. "Yes," I said, keeping my tone neutral. "And it's

worse than I imagined. The insider has access to both corporate strategy and Northern Pack operations. Everything we've been guarding, they've been feeding to Elias." His eyes widened, but he stayed composed. "Do we confront them?" "Not yet," I said firmly. "If we act prematurely, we risk tipping them off. I need confirmation, and I need leverage. Once I have both, I'll act decisively." Daniel arrived shortly after, unaware of the depth of my progress. I kept him in the dark on the specifics- for his own safety, and to avoid unnecessary panic. He trusted my judgment, and I couldn't risk breaking that trust while the traitor still operated undetected.

The following morning, I implemented additional surveillance measures, tightening monitoring on all high-access personnel. I coordinated with Mrs. Carter to ensure any irregularities in company files or financial records would be flagged immediately. The insider wouldn't know we were closing in, but I wanted to be ready. By late afternoon, I had sufficient evidence to confirm the coordinator's betrayal. The final piece came from a chain of encrypted emails inadvertently left open on an unattended workstation. The timestamp, recipient, and content matched Elias's earlier instructions, leaving no room for doubt. My hands trembled slightly but not from fear, but from the weight of betrayal. I leaned back in my chair, exhaling slowly. The revelation cut deep, but it also gave me the clarity I needed. I could now plan my move with precision, controlling the timing and minimizing collateral damage. Then my phone buzzed, an encrypted alert that made my heart skip. I opened it carefully, expecting another routine update on company communications. Instead, it was a confirmation from a source I trusted: Elias had confirmed his intention to attend the next Carter Holdings board meeting. The personal and corporate worlds were about to collide in a way none of us had anticipated. The insider, now identified, was the key to Elias's reach. And with him planning a direct appearance, every move I made from this point on would have immediate consequences. I sat quietly, Elias was coming, and I needed to ensure that when the boardroom doors closed, he would face not only the company's scrutiny but the full extent of my strategy. Cole, standing behind me, glanced at the phone. "This just got personal," he said. "Yes," I agreed, my voice steady. "And we're ready." I began mapping out the confrontation in my head, accounting for every possible scenario. The insider would be neutralized, the board protected, and Elias exposed but timing would be everything. One misstep and the entire operation could collapse. As the evening stretched on, I reviewed my plan, double-checking surveillance logs, financial discrepancies, and communication channels. Every piece had to align perfectly. Elias may have controlled the past, but I intended to control the present and the future. edge, but my Elias's announcement about attending the next board meeting had set the entire company on mind was somewhere else entirely. It was on Marielle. My mother had always been the mystery no one wanted to touch. But I couldn't ignore her anymore, not when every thread I pulled led back to her. The next morning, I called in every resource I had-Carter Holdings' data analysts, private investigators, and a handful of loyal pack informants. If Marielle was alive, someone had gone to great lengths to bury her. And if she was dead, I needed to know who had erased her from existence. I started with the basics. Her old hospital records were all gone. The birth certificate had been deleted from every local and national archive. Even her bank accounts/ the ones Mrs. Carter once used to pay for her care, had been scrubbed clean. Not frozen, but wiped. As if she had never existed. I leaned against my desk, staring at the blank monitor screen. "This isn't just data removal," I muttered. "Someone powerful wanted her gone."

Chapter 175 Walking Into A Trap

AMY

Daniel entered quietly, his expression already wary. "You've been at this all morning. You need to slow down." "I can't." He came closer, placing his hand on the desk to calm me. "Amy, we can't chase ghosts without proof. Whoever did this is baiting you. You know how Elias works." I met his eyes. "This isn't bait. This is deliberate cover-up. Marielle's life was erased systematically—file by file, name by name. Someone in the South is protecting his secrets." Daniel exhaled in frustration, "Then let's be smart about it. Rushing only gives Elias what he wants—control. We need a clear trail, not chaos." I pushed myself away from the desk, "You think I don't know that? But every hour we wait, more data disappears. If I stop now, we will lose the last traces." Before he could argue further, Brian appeared at the doorway, his expression serious. "Amy, you might want to hear this." Daniel straightened. "What is it?" Brian hesitated, clearly uncomfortable. "Someone tampered with our internal security systems two nights ago. I thought it was just a routine data ping until I checked the access logs again this morning." My stomach tightened. "Show me." He handed me a tablet displaying the system's network activity. The timestamp was precise—two nights ago, just after midnight. Access points spiked from an unknown location, encrypted with an old Carter Holdings internal key, one that hadn't been used in years. "Could Elias have used it?" I asked. Brian shook his head. "Not directly. The encryption pattern doesn't match his usual network signature. But..." He paused. "It aligns with one of our older system IDs. I think whoever did this used a stolen internal key." Daniel frowned. "Who had access to that key?" Brian hesitated. "That's the problem. The ID belongs to Clara." The room fell silent. I blinked, trying to process it. "Clara?" Cole, who had been listening from the doorway, stepped forward. "I checked the server backups after Brian called. He's right. There's a digital trace of Clara's old login signature. She was inside Carter Holdings' private archives, but only for a few minutes before vanishing again." I felt my pulse quicken. "So Clara accessed company data right before my mother's records disappeared." Cole nodded grimly. "And whatever she took, she covered her tracks too well. She wiped her trail on the way out, but she left just enough for us to know she was there." Daniel ran a hand through his hair. "You're saying Clara might be tied to Marielle's disappearance?" "It fits," I said quietly. "Elias had the reach, but Clara had the access. Together, they could erase anyone and anything." Brian crossed his arms. "If that's true, then whatever connection exists between Marielle and Clara isn't random. This was planned." I turned back to the monitors, scanning the data feed for any surviving traces. "I want every digital path Elias could've used mapped out. Emails, security cams, data transfers—everything. Start from two nights ago and trace backward." Brian frowned. "That's a tall order, Amy. Whoever did this knew what they were doing. It could take days."

"Then start now," I ordered. "We don't have days." He nodded and left without argument. Once we were alone, Daniel leaned against the wall, watching me. "You're letting this consume you." I looked up from the screen. "You think I care about that?" "Yes, I do," he said evenly. "You're walking into a trap. Elias wants you distracted. He wants you chasing after ghosts so you'll leave the company vulnerable." I stepped closer, "This isn't about ghosts. This is about my mother. About why her name keeps showing up in every shadow Elias leaves behind. You think I'm emotional? Fine. But emotions don't erase government records. Someone did this deliberately, and I'm going to find out who." His jaw tightened. "And if you find something you're not ready for?" "Then I'll deal with it." The silence between us grew thick. Daniel finally turned away, muttering, "You always have to take the hard road." I didn't respond. There was no point. He didn't understand what it felt like to be erased from your own history, to have your mother's existence vanish like smoke. Hours passed as I dug through fragmented files, corrupted data, and buried code. The more I searched, the clearer it became that this wasn't a recent cover-up. Someone had been scrubbing Marielle's records for years. Elias might have triggered the final deletion,

but the groundwork was old and carefully maintained. When Brian returned later that evening, his face was pale. "You need to see this," he said, holding out his phone. On the screen was an encrypted video file. The metadata was traced back to a southern port, timestamped three weeks earlier. He pressed play. The footage flickered before stabilizing. A woman stepped into frame, cloaked and wearing dark glasses. Even through the grainy quality, I recognized the tilt of her chin and it was the same as mine. Marielle. She approached a dock, a small ship waiting under minimal lighting. She handed a passport to an attendant. The name was fake, but the face was unmistakable. She boarded the vessel, and then nothing. The video cut off abruptly. Daniel leaned closer. "Is that—" "It's her," I whispered. "She's alive." Cole exhaled. "Where did this come from?" Brian replied quietly, "Anonymous drop into our secure inbox. Whoever sent it wanted you to see it." I froze, the realization sinking in. Someone wanted me to chase this. Someone was watching. I turned to Brian. "Trace the ship. Immediately. Find its route, its last location, any digital footprint it left behind. If Marielle's out there, I'm bringing her back." Brian hesitated. "Amy, this could be a setup." "Then we'll deal with that when we find her," I said, my voice steady. "Start tracing now." He nodded and left to begin the search. Daniel remained silent, his expression unreadable. Finally, he spoke. "You're really going to do this." "Yes," I said. "Because whoever tried to erase her made a mistake, they left me."

Chapter 176 Dangerous Alliance

AMY

Floated As the office lights dimmed and the night deepened, the image of Marielle stepping onto that ship replayed in my mind. She was alive. Somewhere out there, she was running or hiding. And I intended to find out why. Cole drove. He didn't say much on the way to the docks, but his eyes tracked every vehicle we passed. I sat with my phone closed in my hand, replaying the video Brian had shown us. The footage had looked authentic enough—Marielle stepping onto a small cargo vessel under a fake name. It was enough to force action. That was the point, I thought. Someone wanted me to take the bait. The dock was gray and ordinary when we arrived. Shipping crates, forklifts, workers with safety vests. The office where the footage supposedly originated was a small glass-front room above the pier. The manager met us there with a grin that didn't reach his eyes. "You're Amy Carter?" he asked, offering a formal handshake. "Yes," I said. "We need to see the original footage and any logs from three weeks ago." He led us in without argument. The security monitor looped through a dozen camera angles. I watched the timeline Brian had given us and matched it to the feeds in real time. There was a gap, exactly where the clip should have been. The manager said the system was updated and that old footage was overwritten. Cole was already speaking to his tech through a secure line. "Run a recovery trace. See if anything was exported from this system time-stamped around that date." The manager shrugged. "We stick to retention policies. We don't keep files past a certain window." I watched the faces of the dockworkers passing below, then noticed the marks of small tattoos under the sleeves, a pattern I had seen before in reports: Southern pack insignia. Several men had them. The realization hit me, Clara's people had access around here. That matched the trace we'd found of her login, and it fit the pattern of access to Carter Holdings' archives. I asked the manager directly, "Do you have any contracts with companies registered in the South? Any subcontractors who use those insignia?" He hesitated. "We've handled shipments for third parties. Some go through brokers in the south. Nothing out of the ordinary on paper." Cole's voice was flat. "On paper, sure. Off the record it is different." We left with more questions than answers. The manager insisted the footage was fabricated, that the clip Brian had sent could have been doctored and inserted from an external source. That was possible, and it

was exactly what Elias would do, plant a plausible lead and watch me run. Back at Carter Holdings, Mrs. Carter called an emergency meeting in the boardroom. The executive team filled the room, coffee in hands, faces taut. She started immediately. “We have withdrawals in subsidiary accounts that don’t match our approved disbursements,” she said. “They

total six figures across three accounts. They’re routed through shell companies. I want a full audit by the end of the day.” I passed the summary of the dock visit to her as quietly as I could. She read it and didn’t look surprised. “Elias doesn’t touch accounts directly,” she said. “He uses intermediaries. But these shell companies look familiar. Parallels to past dealings we have linked to southern networks. Pull the transaction timestamps against known southern activity.” I did. The pattern was exact: each transfer aligned with a movement of Southern pack resources we’d tracked through border reports—supply runs, troop dispersals, logistics relocations. Whoever was laundering money for the South had timed it to coincide with physical movements. Daniel found me in the corridor after the meeting. He didn’t wait for the ceremony. “You left the estate,” he said, voice low. “You took Cole. You left the perimeter with fewer eyes than usual.” “I went to verify a lead,” I said. “The dock had Southern markers. That’s not nothing.” “You left in the middle of a fragile hour,” he said. “We had patrols stretched thin. I asked for stability, Amy. You undermined that.” “You asked for proof before moving,” I said. “You also asked me to find Marielle. I’m doing both. The withdrawals and the dock traces are linked. They aren’t random. They’re financial moves meant to corner Carter Holdings and destabilize our support for you. If we let them continue, this becomes a corporate coup as much as a political one.” He stepped closer, lowering his voice. “You’re mixing personal questions with operational security. That’s dangerous.” “I understand the danger.” I kept my voice calm. “But I’m not acting on emotion. I’m acting on patterns. If we respond only when our hands are forced, we lose control.” His face hardened. “So you think you can control the fallout better than I can?” “I don’t think I can,” I said. “I know I can. We have leverage in the company. We have information. We need to use both.” He looked at me like he wanted to argue more, then closed his mouth. The argument ended unresolved. We didn’t say the things that would have hurt more than our raised voices. While I spoke to Daniel, Claire—Clara’s watcher, the contact Cole had snagged on a tail and sent a text with a short update. Selene was meeting an Elias lieutenant in a safe house on the edge of town. Selene wanted power. Elias wanted influence. The math was simple, and reckless. Selene arrived at the meeting on time. She was focused, composed. The lieutenant was careful, the kind of man who measured words and waited for agreements. They discussed shifting loyalties and promises: Selene would consolidate local support, Elias would supply funds and quiet authority in the shadows. It was a bargain as old as politics, power traded for loyalty. Clara didn’t trust Selene. She had sent one of her people to shadow the meeting. The watcher relayed that Selene looked sincere, but Clara’s instincts didn’t lie. Selene stood to gain more than she admitted, and her alignment with Elias would make her a dangerous ally if left unchecked.

Chapter 177 More Fraudulent Acts

AMY

The board meeting later that afternoon focused on the withdrawals. Mrs. Carter laid out the audit findings and froze accounts tied to the shell companies. She instructed the legal team to prepare subpoenas in case the paper trails led to identifiable entities. The language was careful, professional. It had to be. If the public smelled the pack’s tensions, Elias would have the advantage of chaos. When I returned to my desk late in the day, my inbox held one new message. No signature, no header, just a

single line. "Stop searching for Marielle or Daniel will pay for it." I read it twice, then three times, as if the words would change. I felt the old, raw terror of fear, but it was distant and precise. Elias knew how to threaten. He knew how to place leverage where it hurt most. I stood up, closed my laptop without replying, and walked to the window. The city was a grid of office lights. The threat was specific and immediate. It named Daniel, not me. That was deliberate. Whoever sent it wanted me to make a choice. I had no intention of stopping. The only response I considered was the one that gave me more control, not less. I turned back to the desk and typed a single line into a secure file: trace sender. Then I encrypted it and sent it to Brian with instructions: find the origin, whether southern relay or local operator. Find who made it possible, and nail them publicly if possible. Elias wanted us to stop. That was either arrogance or fear. Either way, he had underestimated me. Daniel didn't waste a second after that email. By dawn, he had doubled the guards at the estate, locked down communication lines, and issued strict orders that I was not to step out alone, not even to the garden, Brian and Cole became my shadows, hovering close enough that I could hear them breathe. It felt suffocating, but after what happened, I couldn't argue. Whoever sent that message knew too much. Still, I hated the feeling of being handled. Every time I moved, one of them followed. Even in the office, their presence drew stares. Cole kept scanning corners like we were in enemy territory, Brian stood near the windows, arms crossed, eyes cold. I buried myself in Carter Holdings' files, pretending not to notice the way Daniel's orders trailed behind me. The deeper I dug, the more the numbers stopped making sense. Elias wasn't just bleeding the company, he was twisting its arteries. Dozens of fake companies tied to legitimate Northern contractors, each one siphoning small amounts, just under audit thresholds. It was a quiet, methodical theft and the money always ended up in shell accounts linked to his network. Mrs. Carter summoned me mid-morning. The tension in her office was heavy enough to taste. She stood by the window, her usual grace strained by fatigue. "Amy," she said without turning, "I've started reviewing the board's communications. Some of them have ties I don't like." I closed the door-behind me. "You think someone inside is feeding information to Elias?"

Her silence was enough. When she finally turned, her expression was hard. "One of our board members has been in contact with someone using the alias 'C.L. The messages are encrypted, but the initials alone..." "Clara," I said before she could finish. My stomach twisted. "It has to be her. She's too careful to use her full name, but not careful enough to hide her hand completely." Mrs. Carter nodded grimly. "That's what I fear. If she's inside our network, the leak isn't new, it's been ongoing." I felt the room tilt slightly. "Then Elias isn't the only one coming for us. Clara's playing her own game." "She always has," Mrs. Carter murmured. "Be cautious whom you trust. The rot may already be at our table." That warning stuck with me long after I left her office. By afternoon, chaos struck. Clara moved first. Half our internal communications were hit with a data breach, selected files released to the press. Not everything, just enough to paint a picture. Fake invoices. Misleading transfers. The headlines came fast: Carter Holdings under fire for Southern manipulation. It didn't take long for the board to panic. By evening, an emergency meeting was called, and the tension was so thick it was almost physical. Voices clashed across the conference room table. Words like "conflict of interest," "breach of ethics," and "leadership crisis" filled the air. Daniel sat at the head of the table, calm but unreadable. When someone suggested I step down pending investigation, he slammed his hand against the table hard enough to make everyone jump. "She's not the problem," he said. "She's the reason we even know about this." The room went silent. His defense wasn't just professional, it was personal, and everyone knew it. The way his eyes flicked toward me, the sharpness in his tone, the way no one dared challenge him afterwards all screamed one thing: he wasn't just protecting a colleague. He was protecting me. After

the meeting, I found him in his office, sleeves rolled up, the weight of the day visible in every line of his posture. “You didn’t have to do that,” I said quietly. He looked up, “Yes, I did.” “They’ll come after you next.” “Let them.” He took a step closer. “You think I’d let them turn on you after everything everyone has done to keep this company alive?” His voice was low, edged with anger, but underneath it was something calm. I wanted to argue, to tell him that he was risking too much but instead, the air between us just... shifted. For a second, neither of us spoke. The office lights hummed faintly. His hand brushed mine as he reached for the file I was holding, and I froze. “We’re not losing this,” he said finally, his gaze steady. “Not to Elias. Not to Clara. And not because of fear.”

Chapter 178 A Lead

AMY

I wanted to believe him. I wanted to believe that we could still control something in this mess. But the truth was, Clara’s reach had grown deeper than either of us realized. Across the city, she was already moving her pieces. From a hidden location, she watched the fallout unfold with satisfaction. Her goons whispered updates while she traced my communications, reading half my messages before I even sent them. The breach at Carter Holdings wasn’t just a strike, it was bait. And she wasn’t done. That night, Selene met one of Elias’s men behind the derelict train yard. A man I later learned went by Vance. He wore Southern insignia beneath his coat and spoke like someone used to giving orders. Selene’s tone was sharp, transactional. “You get me what I asked for,” she told him, “and I’ll make sure the Northern Pack bends to your side when this ends.” Vance smiled faintly. “Careful what you promise, princess. Clara doesn’t like competition.” Selene crossed her arms. “Clara doesn’t have to like it. She just has to stay out of my way.” What she didn’t know was that Clara already had someone tailing her one of her own spies. Trust wasn’t a word in Clara’s vocabulary; everyone around her was just a tool to be replaced when dull. — By midnight, when I returned and got in, the estate was locked down, the guards stationed outside my door. I sat on the edge of my bed, trying to make sense of the puzzle pieces Elias’s phantom companies, Clara’s interference, the fabricated ship. Every thread I pulled led back to the same place: someone wanted me blind, chasing ghosts. My phone buzzed. No caller ID. Just a notification — an email. For a moment, I hesitated. Every instinct told me not to open it. But curiosity won. The message contained only one sentence, it was still the same threat. My heart stopped. — No signature. No traceable metadata. Just a clean threat — the kind that meant whoever sent it wasn’t bluffing. I stared at the screen until the words blurred. Then I locked the phone, shoved it into the drawer, and sat in the dark. Whoever they were, they weren’t after money anymore. They wanted control and Daniel was the leverage. The war had officially gone personal. The threat on my phone hadn’t left my mind since the moment I read it. Whoever sent it knew exactly where to strike. Daniel was the one thing I couldn’t risk losing. So I did what I always did when fear tried to corner me I buried it under work. But Elias was playing a deeper game. He wasn’t just tearing through the packs anymore, he wanted Carter Holdings from the inside out. The company wasn’t just business to him, it was legacy. The Carters had built their empire on alliances between the packs, and if he could own that, he could control everything. By the next morning, news of the leaked documents had pushed the board into a frenzy. They called for an immediate audit and summoned me to defend myself. I didn’t even get a chance to finish my coffee before Cole appeared at my office door. “They’re gathering in the main boardroom,” he said. “And Daniel’s already there.” I took a breath, grabbed my files, and followed him. The walk down that hall felt longer than it ever had. Inside, tension hung thick. The board members sat shoulder high, faces tight with worry or suspicion. Daniel was at the far end of the table beside Mrs. Carter. She looked calm, but

her eyes were sharp – like she was daring anyone to move against me. “Amy,” the chairman began, voice clipped, “you’ve been accused of manipulating southern contracts and authorizing unauthorized transfers. You’re here to respond.”

I kept my tone even. “Show me the evidence.” They slid the report across the table. Dozens of pages, transaction logs, timestamps all designed to paint me as the mastermind behind the mess. I scanned the data, my mind racing. On the surface, it looked solid. Too solid. That’s what bothered me. Then I saw a pattern that didn’t fit. The timestamps were consistent to the second. No system produced that kind of uniformity unless someone had manually altered them. “May I?” I asked, pulling the document closer. “You said these were original copies from the finance servers?” “Yes,” the chairman replied. “Then explain this,” I said, tapping the page. “The server clocks for Carter Holdings aren’t synchronized across regions. Each location runs its own system, which means there should be at least a two-second variation between time logs. But every single entry here is identical 13:00:05. That doesn’t happen naturally.” A low murmur spread through the room. One of the auditors leaned forward, frowning at the document. “So you’re saying these logs were—” “Fabricated,” I said. “Or at the very least, manipulated before being submitted.” The room went silent. Daniel’s gaze met mine, and for the first time that day, a flicker of pride crossed his face. I leaned back in my chair, steadying my voice. “You’re accusing me with falsified data. Whoever planted this didn’t just want to ruin me, they wanted to destroy Carter Holdings’ credibility.” Mrs. Carter stood then, her tone cool but cutting. “And you all accepted this at face value? Without verifying the system logs?” No one answered. “I think this meeting’s over,” she said sharply. “Amy stays. Until we find the real leak, no one will touch her department.” the tide shifted. The same people who lacked ready to meet my eyes. to hang me five minutes ago couldn’t When the room finally cleared up, Daniel lingered behind. He wed until the door shut before speaking. “You handled that well,” he said quietly. “I learned from the best,” I replied, though my hands were still trembling. “But this isn’t over. Someone in that room helped forge those files.” He nodded, “Cole’s already digging.” He wasn’t exaggerating. By afternoon, Cole had found a lead, a mid-level executive named Lewis.

Chapter 179 Fast Movements

AMY

The kind of man no one paid attention to. Too quiet, too compliant. But his emails told another story. He’d been sending encrypted updates to an address tied to Clara’s old network. When Cole confronted him, the man broke fast. Years of guilt or fear and maybe both poured out. “They said they’d kill my family,” he told him, voice shaking. “I didn’t want to help them, I swear. But if I didn’t—” Cole tried to press for more, but before Lewis could reveal who “they” were, he bolted. They found him that night slumped behind the wheel of his car, engine still running. No sign of struggle. Just silence and the kind that feels too perfect to be coincidence. When Cole called to tell me, I felt a cold wave roll through me. “She’s cleaning her trail up,” I said. “Yeah,” he replied. “And she’s not done.” Meanwhile, Selene had started playing her own game. She began feeding Clara information of half-truths, rumors, fabricated reports about internal operations. On the surface, it looked like betrayal. But she slipped word through Brian that she was only pretending to align with Clara to keep her close. I wanted to believe that. But Selene wasn’t exactly trustworthy. Every alliance with her came with a stab. Still, I didn’t have the luxury of refusing intel, even if it came from a viper. One night, Brian met me outside the estate library, voice low. “Selene says Clara’s next move isn’t financial. She’s targeting physical assets.” I frowned. “Warehouses?” He nodded. “She didn’t say which, but... she’s moving fast.” I didn’t realize how fast until

it was too late. Just after midnight, the phone on my bedside table started buzzing. I turned to check and saw Cole's name flash on the screen. "Where?" I answered immediately. "Regional depot. East sector. There was an explosion." For a second, I couldn't process it. "What do you mean explosion?" "It's gone, Amy. The whole building. Fire's already reached the shipment yard." My chest tightened. That depot stored more than inventory – it held company records, distribution maps, supply contracts. Everything Elias would need to cripple us completely and not have pinning evidence against him. Daniel stormed into the room moments later, half-dressed, phone in hand. "You heard?" Cole's voice came through the line again, harsh over the sirens in the background. "No survivors found yet. We're still counting bodies." The rest of the night was terribly restless. We were yet to hear from the spy Daniel had sent to the south to help find anything useful to help our course. I woke up with a tight feeling in my chest, the kind that didn't announce danger but warned me something was off. The room was quiet and the first thing my mind landed on was the spy Daniel had sent South. He hadn't checked in. Not last night. Not this morning. That silence settled over me like a weight. I pushed myself out of bed and headed to the study, hoping distraction would calm me down. It didn't. I kept checking my phone every few minutes, even though I knew it wouldn't magically solve anything. Daniel walked in a few minutes later with a tray in his hands. Breakfast. He set it down without pushing me to eat and sat beside me instead. "You didn't sleep," he said. "Neither did you." He gave a small shrug. "You were restless. And the spy still hasn't called." I nodded. "Something's wrong." "But we don't react until we know what we're reacting to," he said. His voice was steady, not dismissive. "We stay calm." That was what surprised me most these days, how solid we had become in the middle of everything falling apart. We didn't agree on every strategy. We argued. But the ground between us stayed firm. Before either of us could reach for coffee, Daniel's phone rang.

Both of us went still. He answered immediately. "Where the hell have you been?" A distorted voice came through the speaker. "You're on speaker?" the spy asked. Daniel glanced at me. "Yes." "I need her to hear it anyway," the spy said. That wasn't reassuring, but I leaned forward. "What happened?" I asked. There was a rustling sound on the other end, like he was hiding somewhere. "I found something in the South. I couldn't send it until I cleared my tracks." Daniel stiffened beside me. "Just tell us." "It's about Selene," the spy said. "You need to prepare yourself." I didn't flinch. "Say it." "I traced her movements. Her alliances. And a DNA file she's been hiding. It links her to the Southern Alpha. Your father." I sat back slowly, trying to make sense of the words. Selene. My father. My bloodline. All wrapped in a connection I had never imagined. "So she's my step-sister," I said. "Yes," the spy answered. "And it's not a coincidence." I waited for sadness or anger to hit, but none of it came. What I felt was confusion, and a sense of pieces falling into strange places. Daniel rested a hand on my back. He didn't try to calm me. He stayed close, steady, present. That helped more than words. The spy kept talking. "She didn't enter your lives by accident. She's known who you were for years. Her sudden move to the North was planned. Someone pushed her here with purpose." "Elias," Daniel said under his breath. "Not just Elias," the spy replied. "There are threads from Clara too. Selene has been around your shadow longer than you think. She's been targeting you in ways you couldn't have noticed." I let out a slow breath. "Why me?" "Because of your bloodline. Because of what you might inherit. Because your father's name still holds power in the South." Daniel's jaw tightened. "What else did you find?" "I have another file coming your way," the spy said. "I couldn't send it yet. It's safer if I deliver it through a coded route. Give me twenty-four hours. It will explain everything you're missing." I leaned forward again. "Listen to me carefully. Are you in danger?" A small pause. "Everyone who touches this is in

danger.” I hated vague answers, but this one had truth behind it. “Then don’t risk sending a report halfway,” I said. “Send the entire thing at once. Don’t leave gaps for anyone to intercept.”

Chapter 180 We Need Privacy

DANIEL

I received the second file early in the morning. It showed up in a secured inbox that only a handful of people knew existed. The alert on my phone dragged me straight out of the half-sleep I had been drifting in. Amy was still asleep, and I didn’t want to wake her until I knew what I was dealing with. The last thing she needed was another piece of information that hit her without warning. I downloaded the file and locked myself in the study. My pulse stayed steady, but my mind kept running through every possible scenario. The first file had already thrown Amy into a chaotic mental space. If this second one pushed her any further, I wanted to be ready to manage it. When I opened the file, the first image hit instantly. Clara was sitting across from Selene in what looked like a private lounge somewhere in the South. The date stamp was three months ago. Nothing about it surprised me, but irritation tightened through my chest. Clara had already caused enough damage. Seeing her plotting again made me want to end this whole mess myself. I scrolled through and I saw more photos, more meetings, different locations. Some indoors, some outside. Always the same two people. Always the same tension in their posture. It wasn’t casual. Then the audio files loaded. I listened with my jaw locked. Their voices were clear. They were talking about Carter Holdings. They were talking about Amy. They were talking about weaknesses, about timing, about who could be influenced inside the board. They had a plan, and they weren’t guessing. Someone had been feeding them information for months, maybe longer. I saved the recordings, backed everything up, and went to the last page in the file. It held a family registry form. At first glance, it looked like a normal genealogy report. Then I saw the names. Selene’s mother. Clara’s mother. The listed guardian for Clara and Amy in early years was Mrs. Smith. The biological mother of Clara and Amy was documented as Marielle. Amy’s mother. My breath stopped for a second, not because I believed it instantly, but because the possibility was now on the table. If it was true, it meant Clara and Amy shared a bloodline none of us knew about. It meant Marielle wasn’t just missing, she was tied into all of this in ways we had never imagined. I sat back and tried to make sense of it. There was no immediate logic to it. No timeline that neatly explained how these pieces fit. And that was exactly why I needed to bring it to Amy without filtering anything. She deserved the whole truth, even if it made everything messier. I closed the file, locked the study, and went to find her. She was in the kitchen, talking to Brian about something work related. She looked tired but stable. I told Brian to give us space, and he left without question. Amy looked at me, reading my expression before I said a word. “You got it,” she said. I nodded. “We need privacy.” We went upstairs. She sat on the couch while I remained standing, unsure how to ease into it. There was no good way to soften something like this. I handed her the tablet with the file open to the first page. She went through the photos slowly. Her face didn’t twitch, didn’t give away anything. She had been ambushed enough times to learn how to keep herself steady. When she reached the audio files, she listened with calmness, even though I knew the content was hitting her hard. When she finally spoke, her voice was flat. “Clara hasn’t stopped. She never planned to.” “She didn’t,” I said. “And Selene has been involved longer than she let on.” Amy set the tablet down and leaned back. For a moment, she seemed like she was somewhere else, sorting through her own memories, looking for cracks that matched the new information. I sat next to her, close enough so she felt my presence, but I did not touch her until she reached for me first.

Then she got to the last page, she froze. She just went still, like she was holding her breath while trying to understand what she was seeing. "That's my mother's name," she said quietly. "Yes." "And Clara's mother." "Yes." "That makes no sense. It shouldn't be possible." "It shouldn't," I agreed. "But the investigator doesn't include information he isn't sure about. He marked the source as confirmed."

She looked at the screen for a long time. She didn't cry. She didn't break. She didn't even look shocked. She looked confused, maybe even frustrated. Confusion had become a familiar state for both of us, but this hit in a personal way I couldn't fully gauge. "I don't understand," she said. "Why would Marielle be tied to Clara? Why would she hide that? None of this fits." There was nothing useful I could say except the truth. "We don't have enough information yet." She pressed her hand to her forehead. I pulled her in gently, giving her space to lean or not. She leaned. Her shoulders eased just enough for me to know she needed the contact, not words. After a while she spoke again. "We need to confirm everything. Not just the file. Not just the DNA connections. All of it. And we need to confirm whether Marielle is alive." "I already planned on that," I told her. "One PI isn't enough anymore. I'll activate another one today, someone who specializes on people off the grid. No pack ties. No trails." Amy nodded. "Good. This isn't about how I feel. I answers. All of them." Her voice was calm again. That was something I admired about her. Even when she was shaken, she didn't fold. She reorganized herself and kept moving. "I'll start the process within the hour," I said. She tightened her grip on my hand. "Thank you." I didn't reply because there was nothing to thank me for. It was my responsibility to keep her safe, and that meant chasing the truth even when the truth led into dangerous places. When she let go, she stood and paced for a moment, thinking through the next steps the way she always did. "If Marielle is alive," she said, "then she knows everything. She might be involved. Or she might be trapped somewhere. Either way, we need to find her."