

Broken 261

Chapter 261 Not Today

DANIEL

"That's normal after being on a ventilator," he explained. "It will ease. I'll prescribe something mild, nothing that slows your recovery." She nodded. He moved toward the door. "I'll return in a bit. Call the nurse if she feels dizzy, breathless, or overwhelmed." Amy nodded. She already looked tired again. The moment the door closed, she reached for my hand. "Why... am I here?" she whispered. I wanted to tell her everything. I wanted to tell her what she survived. What she lost. What she fought against. But the doctor's warning echoed in my mind. Her brain was still fragile. And I wasn't risking anything that could push her backward. "You're recovering," I said instead. "That's all you need to focus on right now." Her eyebrows pulled together. "Did something bad happen?"

"You're safe," I repeated. "That's what matters." Amy looked frustrated for a second, then the frustration faded into fatigue. She closed her eyes briefly, opened them, then whispered, "I'm tired." "Then rest," I said softly. "I'm here." She let out a slow breath and settled into the pillow again. Her hand didn't let go of mine. I adjusted the blanket for her and watched as her eyelids drooped. She fought the sleep a little, as though she wanted answers but didn't have the strength to push further. "Daniel," she murmured. "I'm right here." She blinked slowly. "You look tired too." "I'll sleep later." "You should sleep now." "I'm not leaving you," I said. Her eyes softened again in that way only she could manage. Even half-awake, she had a way of pulling emotions out of me. "Just be here," she whispered. "I'm not going anywhere." Her hand loosened a little but didn't drop mine. After a few moments, her breathing steadied. She drifted back to sleep. I sat there watching her, listening to the steady beeps of the monitor. Everything inside me felt tight, like my entire chest had been holding a weight for too long. Seeing her awake helped... but hearing the confusion in her voice reminded me we still had a long road ahead. At least she was alive. That alone was enough to keep me breathing. The door opened quietly. A nurse walked in to check the IV line and the monitor. "She's doing well," she whispered. "Her body is responding better than expected." I nodded. "She's strong." The nurse smiled politely and left. Amy shifted slightly in her sleep, her fingers still curled around mine. Even unconscious, she held on. I took a slow breath and leaned back in the chair. I didn't want to sleep. Not yet. I wanted to be awake the second she opened her eyes again. I stayed like that for a long time, just watching over her. The monitors hummed quietly. Her breathing stayed steady. She looked pale, but peaceful. And for now... that was enough. *** Stepping out of Amy's room felt like stepping out of a pressure chamber. The hallway was quiet, washed in that sterile hospital glow that made everything look colder than it was.

I rolled my shoulders in an attempt to ease the tension that had been sitting there since the attack, and headed straight for the elevator. Cole was waiting downstairs. He stood up when he saw me, reading my expression before I even reached him. "Is she awake?" "Yeah," I said. "She's talking. Weak, but steady. They took her off the ventilator." He let out a breath like he'd been holding it since yesterday. "Good. That's good." "We need to move to the next step," I said. "Security, rotations, personnel—everything we talked about." He nodded, already shifting into work mode. "You want the new team brought in today?" "Yes. No delays. I want them at the hospital within the hour." I lowered my voice. "And I don't want anybody outside our approved list near her. No nurses changing shifts without being double-checked. No room service deliveries. Everything goes through us." Cole didn't argue. "Consider it done." I

stepped aside to make calls. The first went to the head of security, where I went through the list of names Cole and I curated. These weren't average guards. They were loyal, trained, and vetted down to the last detail. "Every one of them stays on high alert," I said. "I don't care if the threat level is officially marked low. Until I say otherwise, it stays high." "Yes, Alpha," he said, firm and quick. The next call was to the patrol team leader. "I want eyes around the perimeter," I ordered. "If anyone approaches the building without clearance, I want to know." When all that was done, I finally stepped outside the hospital for a breath of air. The sky was clear, the kind of bright that annoyed me when my head was full. I leaned against the hood of my car and pulled up my mother's number. She answered, sounding tired. "Daniel?" "Just checking in," I said. "Are you resting like you're supposed to?" She made a small noise that sounded like an annoyed laugh. "Your mate nearly lost her life, and you're calling to make sure I'm napping?" I rubbed my forehead. "That wasn't a real answer." "Yes, I'm resting," she finally said. "The guard is here. He's making sure I don't sneak out." "Good," I said. "Stay that way. I don't need two patients on my hands." "I heard Amy woke up," she added gently. "She did." "That's enough for today. Go be with her." I hung up, feeling something loosen in my chest. Small things helped—clear instructions, cooperation, stability. It made the chaos easier to filter. I jumped into my emails next. My inbox had exploded overnight. Meetings, reports, financial updates, territory concerns, council memos—endless noise. I skimmed just enough to see nothing required my presence immediately. I closed the inbox. "Not today." My head was still circling one thing: Elias. His disappearance was bothering me in a way nothing else was. The blast had been too controlled, too conveniently timed, and the fact that nobody had seen him after the shake was a problem.

Chapter 262 Your Head Not Your Heart

SELENE

I walked into the Southern Alpha's private chamber, my steps measured. The guards barely glanced at me. As I passed, I knew the minute I reached him, I'd have to speak carefully. He didn't look up as I entered. His chair faced the window, arms resting on the desk. The room smelled faintly of smoke, though there was no fire, and I felt the weight of his presence before I even saw him clearly. "I came to talk," I said, keeping my voice even. Finally, he turned to face me, expression unreadable. "Talk," he said simply. I took a breath. "We can't just wait. Sitting around won't solve anything. Clara and Elias—Daniel has them, yes—but the plan... it's failing. We need to act, not wait." He leaned back. "Your plan with Clara was a waste of time," he replied, tone flat. "I'm not starting a war, at least not yet. There's nothing here worth burning everything over." I frowned. "It's not about starting a war. You know that. It's about control, about ensuring no one moves without consequence. You can't just sit while Daniel rebuilds what was broken." He looked at me, "Selene. If you are truly my daughter, your head..." you'll know not to act with your heart but your I bit back a reply. The words stung. His eyes softened only slightly, but the weight in them reminded me I was speaking to the Southern Alpha, not my father but the man. "Clara and Elias are gone," he continued, "found by Daniel. You don't have to waste time hunting them. He will expose them in his own way. Your role here is not to interfere." I pressed my hands against the edge of the desk, feeling the cold metal under my palms. "Then where do I go? I can't just... disappear. Not yet." He shook his head. "Anywhere but the South or the North. Anywhere else. That is your path for now." I hesitated, letting his words sink in. I had expected instructions, a target, a mission. Instead, I was being told to leave, to wait elsewhere. The lack of drama, the cold logic, it was infuriating. "I leave... and I do what exactly?" I asked. He didn't answer immediately. "You survive. You watch. You learn. That is enough for now." I clenched my jaw. "That's all? After everything?" "Yes," he said, eyes unyielding. "You

are not a soldier, Selene. You are my daughter. Your strength is in patience, in knowing when to act. You'll understand it soon enough." I took a step back, still defiant. "I've never been good at patience." Not Your Hear He gave a faint nod. "Then you have much to learn." I let my hands drop, still burning with frustration. "And if Daniel succeeds before I even get to do anything?" "Then you observe. You survive. You will have your opportunity" I exhaled, "You're not worried about him?" "I've watched him," he said quietly. "Daniel is cautious. He does not make mistakes lightly. Clara and Elias falling into his hands was predictable. He will handle it"

And me?" I pressed. "Where do I fit?" He leaned forward, elbows on the desk. "You fit where you have always fit, Selene. Outside the chaos until it's your time." I swallowed, knowing arguing further would be pointless. I studied him, looking for a crack, a sign that he might change his mind. "I'll go," I said finally. "Anywhere but the South or the North. But I won't sit idle forever. You know that." He nodded once. "I do. But you wait. That is enough for now." I turned, stepping toward the door. The silence behind me was heavier than any conversation we'd had. I could feel his presence lingering even after I left. Outside, the guards let me pass without a word. I walked through the halls quickly, already planning the least obvious place to stay, the best way to remain unseen but informed. I could not risk returning to the North—not while Daniel was consolidating his control. Not while Elias' whereabouts were unknown. I paused in the corridor, taking one last look at the door behind me. I thought about what he said: patience, observation, survival. Those were not words I was used to hearing. They were not commands, not threats, not promises—just logic. Logic, I realized, was going to be my weapon now. Not anger, not schemes, not confrontation. I had to be ready, invisible, waiting. And that was the most difficult part. I let my thoughts drift briefly to Daniel, to Amy, to Elias and Clara. Every move had consequences. Every choice would ripple through the North and South alike. I could not afford mistakes, not with all of them. The Southern Alpha would not act yet. I understood that. But I would. In time, carefully, with strategy. Not recklessly, not with emotion. I adjusted my jacket, taking a slow step down the hallway. He had given me space, but it was up to me to use it wisely. I kept my steps quiet, listening for any sign of movement, any hint that someone might be watching me. Your Heat The hall stretched ahead, apply except for the distant hum of ventilation. I tried to push aside the frustration, the need to act, the questions racing through my head. The Southern Alpha's words replayed over and over. "Observe. Survive. Patience." He didn't care about my anger, my ambition. He only cared that I understood my place for now. Anywhere but the South or the North. Anywhere but near the ones who mattered. I reached the main exit, paused, and looked out across the darkened grounds. There were options, yes, but none that felt safe. I needed information. I needed to know how Daniel was handling Elias and Clara, how the pack was stabilizing. But I also couldn't risk revealing myself too soon. I turned and started moving again, mapping out where I could stay without drawing attention. Somewhere remote, but connected enough to see what was happening in both the North and South. I would not fail. And when the time came, I would make my move. But for now, I needed to vanish.

Chapter 263 Defiance

DANIEL

The Council wasn't incompetent. If Elias managed to vanish from a restricted building filled with guards and surveillance, it wasn't luck. Someone helped him. My phone buzzed. A message from the Council. Update: search still ongoing. No sign of Elias. Patrols doubled. An investigation team deployed. We will keep you informed. I stared at the screen longer than necessary. The morning sun hadn't fully risen

when I got the message. Clara had been spotted attempting to escape from the dungeon. My jaw tightened, and I didn't waste a second. I called Cole, told him to get the fastest route mapped, and we left the hospital immediately. I could feel the tension in my muscles, the anticipation thrumming in my veins. When we arrived, the air was unusually quiet. Something about the stillness made me uneasy. I could sense her presence before I even saw her—her energy, the arrogance still clinging to her even in the corner of a cell. The door to her cell was slightly ajar. My eyes narrowed. My wolf instincts flared. Clara had done something. She always did. I shifted. The transformation was immediate, instinctual. Fur sprouted along my body, my claws extended, and my senses sharpened. I could feel every footstep, every heartbeat around me. She thought she could outmaneuver me. She had no idea. Before she could make a move, I was on her. I pinned her to the cold stone floor with my claws pressing lightly but firmly into her shoulders. She froze, eyes wide, staring at mine. Hatred and fear danced across her face. She had never seen me like this. "Daniel...?" she hissed, voice trembling despite her defiance. "No. Not Daniel," I said, my voice low, guttural, and controlled. "Not right now." Her attempts to wriggle were futile. Every movement she made, I anticipated, countered with precision. I could feel the energy radiating from her—defiance, fear, frustration but nothing would let her escape. I dragged her back toward the dungeon, claws digging just enough to keep her under control. The corridor felt endless, but every step was calculated, every inch deliberate. She panted, eyes darting, realizing fully that this wasn't a negotiation. I wasn't giving her a choice. When we reached the cell, I locked the door behind her. The sound of metal clicking into place reverberated through the small space. She immediately started hitting and pounding on it, screaming threats, her voice echoing off the walls. "It's useless," I said, stepping back, letting my wolf form slowly recede. My claws retracted, my breathing heavy but controlled. I could see the fury in her eyes, the desperate calculation. She thought she could manipulate any situation, seduce any guard, slip through my reach—but she underestimated me. "You'll stay here," I said, voice firm. "Until I decide otherwise. You will not leave. Not today. Not tomorrow." She spat toward me, venom dripping from every word. "You think this will stop me? You're insane if you think—"

I cut her off with a glare. "Insane? Maybe. But effective. Don't test me." Her fists banged against the metal again. "I will get out. You can't—" "You can't," I interrupted, watching her closely. "You're done running for now. I won't chase you endlessly, but this cell... this is where you are. And any attempt to push past it will fail." She glared, silence falling for a moment, broken only by the occasional clang of her strikes against the cell door. I didn't move. I stood, watching her, feeling her energy shift from defiance to realization. The reality of her situation was sinking in. I took a step closer, letting my voice drop slightly, "You don't understand what happens when I lose control. You've seen bits of it. You've felt it. This time, I will not hold back." Her eyes widened slightly, and I knew she did. She had glimpsed it before, but not like this. Not the full measure of my power, my instinct, my determination to keep her contained. "You'll stay here," I repeated. "Until you've earned your next move. And even then... I will decide the terms." Her arms fell slightly, frustration and anger warring across her expression. I could sense the calculations running through her mind. She was always thinking ahead, but this time, the board was not in her favor. Every attempt she made would be met, countered, contained. I walked toward the door, my presence still commanding, ensuring she knew she was watched. I didn't have to say more. The fear was already there, subtle but undeniable. She knew I could intervene at any moment. Any slip, and she would find herself back on the floor, under my claws, with no room to breathe. I stepped outside the cell, leaving the guard stationed there. "Keep her here. No exceptions. No conversations. You understand?" "Yes, Alpha," the guard replied, eyes wide. I could see the tension, the respect, the fear. He understood the stakes. I didn't linger. I had other matters to attend to, but my eyes

never left the cell as I walked away. Clara's energy still pulsed, sharp and dangerous, but contained—for now. I knew she would look for weaknesses, but I would not allow any. The dungeon was quiet again. Her shouts had faded to frustrated muttering, and every so often, a knock or bang reminded me she hadn't accepted her confinement quietly. Good. Let her rage. It didn't change the fact that she was contained, and that I had full control over the situation. I left the hall, my mind already shifting to other pressing matters—the pack, Amy, Elias but Clara's presence lingered. Not in a threatening way. I didn't underestimate her, ever. But for now, she was exactly where she belonged. And as I walked through the empty corridors, I knew that any future attempt she made would be anticipated. Every step she tried to take would be met with my presence, my claws, my authority. I had made sure of that. The cell door remained locked.

Chapter 264 The Alpha Challenge

COLE

I walked into the pack house the next morning and I could already tell something was off. Wolves moved around like they were pretending everything was fine, but their silence felt kind of tense. Eyes darted. Whispers cut off the second I stepped into a room. Nothing loud. Nothing obvious. Just tension building under the surface. Clara's return caused this. Daniel dragging her back in that state had shaken people. Some agreed with it. Others didn't. This was the kind of divide that didn't explode right away. It simmered first. That was what bothered me. I made my way to the situation room. A few guards were gathered, talking in low tones. When I stepped in, they froze. "Don't stop on my account," I said, shutting the door behind me. One of them, Marcus, cleared his throat. "We're right." I leaned on the table. "Let's skip the Were just talking about the patrol rotations." mlies. I know you're talking about Clara." Marcus shifted. Another guard, Tyren, crossed his arms. "Some of us think dragging her back the way he did wasn't smart. Word spreads. People start questioning. It makes the Alpha look—" "Finish that sentence carefully," I said. Tyren held my stare. "It makes him look unstable." I felt heat crawl up my spine, but I kept my tone calm. "She ran. She's part of the group that targeted Amy. She's tied to Elias. What did you expect him to do? Bake her a meal?" "That isn't the point," Tyren said. "We've known her for years." "Daniel knows her too," I shot back. "Doesn't change what she did." Another guard, Kellan, spoke up. "There's talk that maybe she should've been dealt with instead of locked up again." "You mean killed?" I asked. Kellan hesitated. "If it prevents another escape." "Great," I said. "Kill a wolf without due process. That won't split the pack at all." Marcus stepped closer. "Cole, people are worried. Nobody knows what Elias is planning. Nobody knows how he escaped. Clara being dragged back in chains only makes it feel like things are slipping." "Things are slipping because some of you keep feeding panic," I said. Tyren scoffed. "We're dealing with facts, not panic" observed him. Something in his tone felt too firm. Too rehearsed. "Facts?" I asked. "Then here's one. Someone in this pack is leaking information. Elias knew our patrol route two nights ago. He knew the gaps. That didn't happen by chance." None of them reacted verbally, but they shifted, Guilt? Fear? Hard to tell. "Does anyone want to explain that?" I asked. None of them answered. "No? Then stop throwing accusations at the Alpha until you clean your own ranks." I left the room before I said something I'd regret. Wolves murmured as I passed. Someone muttered, "He wasn't wrong about the overreaction." Another said, "Daniel's losing it." I clenched my jaw. I found Daniel in one of the conference rooms, staring at files spread across the table. His eyes were tired. "You okay?" I asked. He didn't look up. "I'm working." "You should know the wolves are rattled." "I know." He flipped a page. "They'll adjust." "Not all of them." That made him look up. "Say it." "There's talk that you should've killed Clara." His jaw tightened. I'm not killing anyone

unless necessary." "Some see that as weakness." "If they want an Alpha who kills his own pack members without reason, they can challenge me." His tone didn't rise. It didn't need to. I sat opposite him. "There's more. I think someone is feeding information to Elias."

Daniel leaned back. "Who?" "No name yet." I hesitated. "Tyren looked guilty." "He always looks guilty," Daniel said. "Doesn't mean he's involved." "True." He rubbed his forehead. I don't have time to hunt moles. Amy is barely stabilized. The Council is breathing down my neck. Elias is out there preparing for something. Selene is missing. And Clara—"Clara is in the dungeon." I reminded him. "She's not going anywhere. He gave me a look like he didn't believe that. "Want me to interrogate her?" I asked. "No. Not yet." He paused. "She looked terrified. She wasn't expecting me. Whatever she and Selene had planned... it's bigger than we thought." "I'll check on her," I said. He nodded without speaking. I left the conference room and made my way to the lower floor. When I reached Clara's door, I heard breathing. Fast, uneven. "Clara," I called. She went silent. I unlocked the viewing slit. She was crouched in the corner, hugging her knees, staring at the opposite wall like she could burn a hole through it with her mind. Her hair was a mess. Her wrists were raw from earlier restraints. "Food is on the tray," I said. "You haven't touched it." She didn't answer. "You want to talk?" She finally lifted her head. "Do you think this makes him safe?" "Who?" "Daniel." Her voice cracked. "He looks strong now. But Elias isn't stupid. He won't come at him head-on." "What do you know?" "More than you want to hear." I stepped closer to the door. "Then talk." She swallowed. "Some people here think Elias is the real future. They think Daniel is too careful. Elias promises change." "And you?" "I just wanted survival." She looked down. "Selene promised me protection. I didn't know she was falling apart. "Selene is gone," I said. "Probably running for her life." Clara laughed, short and bitter. "She doesn't run. She relocates." "Why come back then?" I asked. "If you knew we'd catch you." "I didn't know he'd be the one to drag me back." Her eyes unfocused. "I've never seen him look like that. He wasn't angry. He was done. That's worse." I didn't respond. She continued, "People are whispering. Wolves don't like fear. When an Alpha shows too much of it, the pack starts looking elsewhere." "You think Daniel is afraid?" "You know he is. Not for himself. For Amy." I closed the viewing slit. "Eat your food. Someone will come for you later." As I walked away, I heard her speak again, barely above a whisper. "You can't protect everyone, Cole. Someone in your pack wants him gone."

Chapter 265 A Nightmare.

AMY

jerked awake with a scream stuck in my throat. My whole body shook as if I had been dropped from a height. My chest rose too fast, too sharp, and I felt my wolf slam against me like she wanted out. I pressed my hands against my face, but that only made the panic worse. My breath came out rough. My nails lengthened. My vision blurred. The nightmare still clung to me. "Amy." Daniel called out. Daniel moved fast. He was beside me before I could force myself to sit up. His hand pressed gently on my shoulder, calming me with just enough pressure to keep me from losing control completely. "It's me." he said. "Breathe." I tried. I really tried. But my wolf pushed again. My bones shifted. A low growl escaped me before I could stop it. Daniel grabbed both my hands. "Look at me." I raised my head. When our eyes met, something clicked back into place. My claws retracted. My breathing eased, even though my chest still hurt. "There you go," he said quietly. "Stay with me." I nodded, though the tears on my face made it hard to see. My whole body still trembled. "I'm sorry," I whispered. "Don't apologize." Daniel pulled the chair closer and sat down. "Tell me what happened." I swallowed hard. My throat felt

raw. "A nightmare." He waited, not pushing, which made the silence sharper. I wiped my cheeks with the back of my hand and tried again. "I saw her. The old version of her. Angry. Bleeding. Screaming for help. And I was running. Not away. Toward her. And then she kept falling, and I couldn't reach her." Daniel didn't speak. I shook my head, trying to clear the image. "She looked broken. She kept asking why I didn't fight harder. Why I didn't protect myself. And then she turned into Clara who tried to kill me. The face changed, but the voice didn't. It followed me. I couldn't wake up." His jaw tightened just a bit. Not anger—just concern he didn't try to hide. "It was just a nightmare," he said. "It didn't feel like one." "You've been through enough trauma to trigger it," he added, calm but direct, "Your mind is sorting through what happened." Tlooked away. "That's not all."

"Then say the rest," he said. I took a shaky breath. The words stuck for a second, then came out fast. "My memory is back." That got his full attention. His posture straightened a little, and his eyes locked on mine. "All of it?" he asked. "Enough," I whispered. I rubbed my arms as if the room had turned cold. The terror wasn't from the nightmare anymore. It was from the clarity now sitting in my chest. "I remember everything about the attack," I said. "I remember how it started. I remember the pain. And I remember Clara. I remember her trying to kill me." Daniel didn't move. He didn't try to touch me or tell me I was wrong. He just waited. "I remember her eyes," I continued. My hands shook again. I curled them into fists. "I thought it was just fear confusing me," I said. "But it wasn't. She wanted me dead." Daniel leaned forward. "You are safe now. I let out a shaky breath. "I know. But remembering it... it hurts. I didn't expect it to hit this hard." He nodded slowly. "Regaining memories after trauma is never smooth. It comes back in fragments, emotions, flashes. And when the full picture forms, it can hurt more than the injury itself." "I don't want to be afraid of her," I said. "I hate that I am." "It's okay, it means your human side is still present," he answered. "And you're not weak for it."

His tone was steady enough that the tension in my chest loosened. He wasn't judging me. He wasn't trying to make it sound better than it was. He was just honest. I wiped my face again. "I can't stop seeing the moment she lunged at me. It keeps replaying." Daniel rested his elbows on his knees. "You survived." "That doesn't make it less scary." "No," he said. "It doesn't. But it means she failed." 2/4 I stayed quiet. He is me sit in that silence without rushing me. After a while, he asked. "Do you feel your wolf settling?" I nodded. "Yeah. She's tired." "So are you." He checked the monitors and adjusted the blanket over me. 1 looked at him. "Did I scare you?" "When you woke up like that?" he asked. "Yeah." "A little," he answered honestly. "But only because you were in pain, not because of your wolf." Some of the fear inside me cracked, "You're not afraid of her?"

"No," he said. "Not now. Not then. Not ever." That steadiness settled something deep inside me. "Can you stay for a bit?" I asked. He nodded and sat back in the chair. I leaned against the pillow. After a few minutes, he asked, "Do you want to tell me what else you remember? Or do you want to rest first?" I thought about it. "I remember screaming for help," I said slowly. "I remember thinking the baby was in danger. I remember I couldn't shift. My body wasn't responding. And then the pain hit. Everything blurred." Daniel's expression tightened. Not with anger. With something heavier. "I remember your voice too," I said. "You sounded scared. I've never heard you like that." "I was," he admitted. "She didn't hurt you, right?" "No," he said. I exhaled slowly. "I don't want to go through that again." "You won't," he said. "Not if we keep your stress level down and follow the doctor's instructions." A soft knock came at the door. The doctor stepped in with a clipboard. "How are we feeling?" "Tired," I said.

Daniel added The doctor checked my vitals, made a few calm notes, and said, “She needs rest, food, and monitoring for the next few days. No stress. No arguments. No triggers.” Daniel nodded. “She’ll have all of that.” When the doctor left, the room fell quiet again. Daniel stood. “I’ll step out. You need rest.” I grabbed his wrist before he could move. “Stay until I fall asleep.”

Chapter 266 Elias Style

DANIEL

Cole’s call dragged me out of sleep the next morning. The vibration on the bedside table wouldn’t stop. I blinked hard, trying to clear my eyes, and reached for the phone. “Daniel,” Cole said the second I picked up. His voice was sharp. “You need to get to the pack. Now.” My stomach tightened. “What happened?” “It’s bad,” he answered. “Two of our patrol guards were killed.” I sat up immediately. “Killed how?” “That’s why you need to get here,” he said. “Just move.” The line cut before I could respond. I stood up, ran a hand through my hair, and looked at Amy. She was asleep, breathing steady. I didn’t want to leave her, but there was no choice. I called two guards to stay outside her door, added another pair to the hallway, and left only when I was sure nothing would reach her. By the time I reached the pack grounds, the air was already thick with tension. Wolves paced near the border line. Two bodies were covered on stretchers, waiting for the healer to examine them. Cole stood near the perimeter with a hard expression. “What do we know?” I asked as I joined him. Cole pointed toward the stretchers. “Their throats were slashed. No scent. No fur. No trace of a wolf.” “That’s not Elias’ style,” I said. “Everyone thinks it’s him,” Cole replied. “Some of the warriors already want to prepare for retaliation.” I knelt beside the closest body. The wound was clean, straight, and too precise to be from claws. Even a trained wolf wouldn’t make a cut like that. I lifted the edge of the cloth slightly. The skin was burned around the wound. “This was a blade,” I said. “Silver-coated.” Cole frowned. “Elias doesn’t use silver.” “No, he doesn’t.” We moved to the second body. Same type of cut. Same burn. Same pattern. Cole crossed his arms. “Someone is trying to make this look like his work.” A guard rushed toward us. “Alpha—Cole—another attack report came in from the east side.” I stood immediately. “Is anyone else dead?” “Two injured. One missing.” Cole cursed under his breath. “They’re spreading out.” “Take me to the injured ones,” I said. We walked fast toward the infirmary. The healer was cleaning one of the guards’ wounds. The man hissed in pain but stayed still. His partner sat on the opposite bed, eyes wide and shaken. “What happened?” I asked. “Five of them,” the guard said. “We didn’t smell them. They didn’t shift. They moved like humans.” I exchanged a look with Cole. “Humans?” “Yes,” the injured guard said. “But not regular humans. They were fast. Not as fast as us, but skilled. And their weapons—silver blades and those darts. One hit Marcus before he could shift.” My jaw tightened. “What kind of darts?” The guard pointed to a small metal case on the table. Cole opened it. Inside were three silver-tipped darts with old markings burned into the metal. I recognized those markings. Cole looked up at me. “Those look familiar?” “Yeah,” I said. “Very.” The guard spoke again. “One of the men shouted something about a hunt. He said we weren’t supposed to be this deep in their territory.” Cole scoffed. “This is our territory.”

I picked up one of the darts. It was heavier than the newer versions. The kind of thing I had only ever seen in old archives. “These aren’t new,” I said. “They were used decades ago.” “For what?” Cole asked. “To hunt us,” I said. “Wolves. Rogues. Anyone with a wolf spirit.” Cole froze. “You’re talking about those old rogue hunters? The ones that vanished?” “Yes.” The room went quiet. The rogue hunter group wasn’t a myth. They were real. Specialized and trained for one purpose: to wipe out wolves, rogue

packs, and anyone who got in their way. Old packs fought them years before my time. The hunters disappeared after a huge battle that supposedly wiped them out. But these darts were theirs. "Why now?" Cole asked. "No idea," I said. "But they're back." Cole paced a few steps. "Everyone thinks Elias is behind this." "That's the point," I said. "Someone wants us distracted." A younger warrior entered the infirmary. "Alpha our patrol on the west line says they saw silhouettes. No scent. Same pattern." "How many?" I asked. "Seven." Cole muttered, "They're surrounding us." "They're testing our response first," I said. "They haven't gone all out yet." The injured guard winced as the healer wrapped his wound. "They kept saying something about 'cleansing. I didn't understand all of it." Cole's expression darkened. "They're trying to start a war." "They already started it," I said. I turned to him fully. "We can't fight them alone. Not with our pack stretched thin. Not with internal tension after Clara. And not while Amy is vulnerable." Cole nodded slowly. "We need allies." "Even temporary ones," I said. He raised an eyebrow. "Are you planning what I think you're planning?" "Yes." Elias. The bastard was an enemy. A major one. But the hunters were worse. They didn't pick sides. They killed everyone with a wolf spirit. Even children. "We don't know where he is," Cole said. "I may know," I replied. "But if he's alive, he'll hear about the hunters soon. He'll react. He hates them more than he hates me." Cole let out a breath. "So enemies join forces?" "Temporarily," I said. "Only out of necessity." Cole shook his head. "This day just keeps getting better." "We don't have to trust him," I said. "We just have to survive long enough to deal with the hunters first." The healer interrupted us. "Alpha, you're going to need more patrols. These injuries show something else too." "What?" "They're trained to kill wolves without giving them time to shift. They know our weak points. They know where to strike." I nodded. "Prepare a report. I'll send it to the Council." Cole snorted. "You think the Council will help?" "This threat isn't aimed at one pack," I said. "It's aimed at all wolves. The Council won't ignore that."

Chapter 267 Our Enemies Are Multiplied

DANIEL

I stepped toward the door. "Where are you going?" Cole asked. Cole followed beside me. "You know the pack is already unstable because of Clara. If this spreads—" "That's why we fix it now," I said. We walked outside. Patrol wolves shifted and moved along the perimeter. Tension filled the air. As we approached the border, two guards approached with grim expressions. "Alpha," one said. "We found this stuck in a tree." He handed me another dart. Same markings. Same build. Same weight. "They're watching," Cole said. "Let them," I replied. But inside, I knew this was just the beginning. The rogue all of us. hunters were back. And they weren't hunting rogues anymore. They were hunting I clenched the dart in my hand. Elias, wherever he was, wasn't our biggest problem anymore. Our enemies had multiplied. And we needed to be ready. I left the park quietly, not alerting anyone, not even Cole. My car waited in the garage, and I drove out without leaving a trace. By keeping the movement subtle, no one would notice. The sun was still below the horizon as I pushed the accelerator, heading south. I didn't speak to anyone on the way, my mind fully focused on Elias. Every thought circled him. Where was he? And why was he hiding so well? By dawn, I reached the southern territory. The air was cool, and the streets were silent. I parked a few blocks away from the South Alpha's estate and approached on foot, making sure my presence wouldn't be noticed until necessary. I rang the main gate bell. The guard immediately opened the door and directed me to the South Alpha. He was in the study, seated comfortably, as though he'd expected me. "Daniel," he said, raising an eyebrow. "You have a lot of balls showing up here unannounced." "I'm not here for a war," I said firmly. "I'm here for Elias. Where is he?"

The South Alpha leaned back, a slow smirk on his face. "Elias? He's not here. You came all this way for nothing." I frowned, studying him carefully. "Not here?" My voice hardened. "You're lying. He's somewhere close. I can feel it." He laughed, low and even. "Do you really think I'd let you walk in here so easily if he were? You're bold, I'll give you that. But Elias is not in my territory." I pressed forward. "Then tell me what you want from me. Why are you sitting there, acting like this is a game?" He leaned forward, elbows on his desk, fingers steepled. "You've been carrying something that belongs to me for a long time." I blinked. "I don't know what you mean." His gaze sharpened. "Amy." My chest tightened. I took a step back. "You lost your claim the moment you threw her away. That child isn't yours. She never was. And she never will be." He didn't flinch. "You think it's that simple? You think words can undo what you stole? You came here with you. Every choice you make, every decision you take, she's part of it. And now you're here, walking in my territory, challenging me. One wrong move, Daniel, and she disappears? I didn't find either." "I'd love to see you try." I straightened, keeping my voice calm but firm. "I won't touch then, you'll answer to me. Every single one of your guards, every action you take, you'll answer for it." He chuckled, shaking his head. "Brave words for someone standing alone. No one knows you're here. Daniel! You could vanish just as easily." "Try me." I said again, voice steady. "I've faced worse. I'll face you too." The South Alpha leaned back, studying me. "You're reckless, Daniel. I respect that, in a way. But you're also blind. Blind to consequences. Blind to what you can lose." I looked at him and shook my head. "I'm not blind. I know exactly what I stand to lose. But I also know exactly what I refuse to let happen. Amy stays safe. My pack stays safe. And Elias will be found." He raised a brow, considering my words. "You think you can just take what you want? You think you can force me to cooperate?" "I don't need to force you," I said. "You just have to stay out of my way. That's all." He leaned back, smirk fading slightly. "You've grown bold. I'll give you that. But boldness alone won't save you if Elias is smart enough to stay hidden. And I can assure you, he is." — I didn't reply. I knew he was right about one thing — Elias had been careful, calculating. But that didn't stop me. He wouldn't get the chance to move freely, not while I was chasing him. "You'll need to leave," the South Alpha said suddenly. "There's nothing more to do here." I held his gaze. "I'm leaving only when I have the information I need." He sighed, finally. "Then leave, Daniel. Go back north. Search where you think he is. But remember this — you're alone in my territory. One misstep, and you won't make it back." I nodded, keeping my composure. "I know. I'll take my chances." I turned, walking toward the door, but paused before stepping out. "If you touch Amy, it won't end with her," I said quietly. "Everything you know will be at risk. Remember that." He said nothing, only watched me leave. I walked out of the estate without another word, my mind already calculating the next steps. Elias wasn't here, but clues could lead me closer. Amy's safety was still my top priority. By the time I reached my car, the sun was higher, painting the sky with pale light. I climbed in, started the engine, and drove back north, quiet this time, keeping an eye on the road, keeping my plan in mind. Every movement had to be careful.

Chapter 268 Escape From Dungeon

DANIEL

I reminded myself — I couldn't let emotion take over. Amy needed me to be calm, focused. The pack needed stability. And Elias? He wouldn't stay hidden forever. As I drove north, I replayed the conversation with the South Alpha, weighing every word, every threat. He thought he had leverage. He was wrong. By the time I arrived back at the estate, I was already drafting my next moves. Security adjustments, scouting potential hideouts for Elias, contingency plans in case the South Alpha tried anything. Every second counted, every detail mattered. I didn't stop to rest. I went straight to my office,

pulled out the maps, cross-checked recent intel, and called Cole. "We need a full status update," I said. "No delays. Check all territories. Elias has to be found before he makes a move. And make sure Amy is fully protected – I don't care what it takes." Cole's voice was calm but tense. "Understood, Daniel. I'll have the teams report within the hour."

"Good," I said. "I'll be back with updates soon. Stay sharp." I hung up and stared at the maps again. This wasn't over. It had barely begun. Elias was out there, Amy was safe for now, but the South Alpha had reminded me how vulnerable we were. Vulnerable, but not powerless. I leaned back in my chair, clenched my fists for a moment, and let the silence of the office settle. There was no room for mistakes. None at all. "Daniel," he called out the moment he sighted me. "We've got a situation." I raised an eyebrow. "What now?" Clenching his jaw, he held up the tablet. "Clara. She's gone. She escaped the dungeon." I blinked. Then, after a moment, I laughed. "Of course she did." Cole frowned. "You... you're not upset?" I shook my head. "No. Not really. It all makes sense now. The attack, the timing... It wasn't meant to hurt Amy directly. It was a distraction. She wanted me occupied, away from the pack, dealing with threats. Everything else was secondary. But I saw through it." Cole hesitated. "Daniel... She's still dangerous. She could-" "She is dangerous," I interrupted, my tone calm but firm. "I know that. But I also know that she can't escape my attention for long. And that's exactly why I wasn't worried about her disappearing. She wants something, and that makes her predictable." He looked unconvinced. "Predictable? Daniel, she's chaotic. She's been attacking anyone who stands in her way. How can you say that?" I stepped closer, lowering my voice so he could hear every word. "Because chaos still has rules. She wants leverage. She always does. Right now, her only leverage is herself, and that's something I control. She can't move freely without me noticing." Cole looked down, muttering, "I just... we were supposed to keep her locked down. How did this happen?" I shook my head. "She didn't make a mistake. We did. I underestimated her cunning. That's all." I ran a hand through my hair, thinking. "But she made one critical error—she acted on her own. She left traces behind. We'll follow them. We'll find her before she even thinks about hiding."

Cole exhaled sharply. "So... what's the plan?" I smiled slightly, not in amusement, but in strategy. "First, we tighten security around the pack. Nobody comes in or out without my direct approval. Second, I want every loyalist briefed on her habits, her patterns. Third..." I paused, "...we use her own arrogance against her. She'll think she's free, but every move she makes will be tracked." Cole's shoulders relaxed slightly. "And Amy? Should we... increase her protection too?" "Yes," I said firmly. "We double it. No risks. I don't care if it seems excessive. She's already been through enough. Nobody gets close to her without me knowing. Not even for a second." Cole nodded, typing rapidly on his tablet. "Understood. I'll assign teams immediately. We'll also monitor all exits, entrances, and the surrounding perimeter." I walked toward the map table, spreading it out carefully. "Good. Now, let's talk about Clara. She has a routine, even if she doesn't realize it. She acts out of emotion, then retreats to recalculate. That means she'll be back to gather information, resources, or allies. That's our window. We anticipate her, we corner her, and we remove the threat for good." Cole glanced up. "You really think she'll come back?" I didn't answer immediately. I stared at the map, tracing potential routes with my finger. "She has no choice. She needs to see the situation, figure out what she can exploit. That's when we caught her. And she will underestimate me because she always does. That's her weakness." Cole hesitated. "Daniel... do you really think she'll make a mistake that obvious?" I straightened, my gaze hard. "I know she will. She always does. That's why I'm not panicking. She might escape physically, but strategically, she's trapped. Everything she touches, every move she makes, I know about it. And when the time comes, she won't

have anywhere to hide.” Cole nodded slowly, taking notes. “Okay. So, double security, track all movements, predict her patterns got it.” “Cole,” I said, turning back to him, “make sure every member understands this. Clara is dangerous, yes. But she’s predictable in her need to act. That makes her dangerous but manageable. Everyone needs to be alert, but nobody panics. Do you understand?” “Yes, Daniel,” he replied, voice firm. “I’ll handle it. I promise.” I nodded. “Good. Keep the loyalists on high alert, but let’s not spread fear. I want control, not chaos. She wants us reactive, she wants us scared. We won’t give her that.” Cole exhaled, relief mixed with tension on his face. “Understood.” “And one more thing,” I added, voice low, “no one confronts her alone. Understood?” “Understood,” Cole said immediately. I leaned back, my hands clasped behind my head. “Good. That’s all for now. I’ll handle the next steps personally.” Cole hesitated for a moment, then spoke softly. “Daniel... Amy...” I cut him off gently but firmly. “She’s safe for now. That’s all that matters. I’ve got her. That won’t change. She’s not going anywhere while I’m breathing. You focus on Clara and the pack.” Cole nodded.

Chapter 269 Something Bigger

DANIEL

The search team returned just after sunrise. I was already standing outside the estate before they stepped out of the vehicles. Cole walked toward me, his face stiff, and I knew the answer before he opened his mouth. “Nothing,” he said. I looked past him. They were exhausted, mud on their boots, scratches on their arms, and not one of them could meet my eyes. “No scent?” I asked. Cole shook his head. “It’s like she disappeared into the air. No tracks, no sound, no witnesses. Nothing.” My jaw tightened. “She didn’t just vanish. Someone covered her trail.” “Yeah,” Cole muttered. “And they knew exactly what they were doing.” I could feel anger rising in my chest, but I pushed it down. Losing control was pointless. I looked at the guards again. “Go shower,” I told them. “Eat. Sleep. We’ll regroup in two hours.” They nodded and walked off, some limping, some whispering quietly among themselves. I heard one of them say, “We’re not finding her,” and another answer, “She’s probably outside the country by now.” Cole looked at me. “They’re tired, Daniel. We’ve been searching for two days.” “I know.” I rubbed the back of my neck. “Extend the patrols. Not wide. Deep. If she went into the forest, someone had to help her.” Cole hesitated. “You’re still thinking Elias.” “I’m thinking we don’t have many suspects.” He didn’t argue. He never argued when he knew I was past the patient point. Hours passed and still nothing. Every update Cole gave me was the same: no scent, no trail, no clue. By the next night, the whispers in the pack grew louder. Some wolves said Clara was dead in a ditch somewhere. Others said she slipped across the border with help. A few wondered if the Council hid her. Every theory irritated me. By the end of the second day, Cole cornered me in my office. “Daniel,” he said. “You know it’s time.” I stared at the wall behind him. “Time for what?” “To stop wasting guards.” I swallowed, annoyed that he was right. Chasing a missing woman with no scent during a rogue-hunter threat was reckless. I sat back in my chair and let out a slow breath. “Fine. Bring everyone.” Within minutes, the room was filled. Cole stood by my side while the guards and senior staff lined up in front of us. Every face was tense. I looked at them. “We’re suspending the search for Clara.” A few murmurs broke out immediately. One of the guards stepped forward. “Alpha, we can keep going-” “No.” My voice was steady. “We’ve searched every possible location. We’ve covered the borders. We’ve followed every rumor. The trail is cold. Too cold to waste more bodies while we’re dealing with rogue hunters.” Silence followed. Heavy, uneasy silence. “We’re not done with her,” I said. “But right now, we need to protect the pack. And we need to keep the Luna safe.” The mention of Amy made some of them lower their eyes. I dismissed them, then leaned forward with my hands on the table once the room was empty. I

hated giving up the search. It felt like admitting defeat, and I didn't lose well. A soft knock snapped me out of my thoughts. Cole poked his head in. "Amy's being discharged in thirty minutes. We need to leave." I stood up immediately. When we walked into the hospital, Amy was already sitting up on the bed, fully dressed in the clothes Sarah brought earlier. She looked healthier. Color back in her face. Eyes clearer. But she also looked tired in a way only trauma could explain.

She saw me and tried to smile. "They said I can go home." I walked to her and held her hand. "Good. We're leaving as soon as the doctor finishes the last checks." Her fingers trembled slightly. "I'm fine." "You're recovering," I corrected. "You're allowed to take things slow." She looked away. "I hate being watched like I'm fragile." "You're not fragile." I lifted her chin so she would look at me. "But you're coming out of something rough. No one expects you to pretend you're fine." She didn't answer. She just leaned her head against my arm as the doctor walked in. "You're good to go," he said while checking his chart. "Vitals strong. Healing looks normal. Just avoid stress. Eat well. Rest. And make sure she's never alone for the next few days." "I'll handle it," I said before Amy could argue. Amy rolled her eyes slightly. "I can breathe on my own, you know." "You can," I said, "but I'm not taking chances." We left the hospital quietly. As soon as we entered the pack grounds, whispers started. Some wolves waved, trying to welcome her back. Others kept their distance. A few even bowed to her and quickly walked off, like she was dangerous. Amy gripped my hand tighter. "They're scared of me." "They don't know what they saw," I said. "And they don't understand you." When we got inside the estate, she walked straight to the living room couch and sat down slowly. I watched her rub her stomach. She was still worried about the baby, even though the doctor cleared everything. "Are you okay?" I asked. She nodded once. "It's just... everything feels different." I sat beside her. "Because you're remembering more. And because people react differently. Ignore them. They'll adjust." She looked up at me. "What about Clara? Did you find her?" "No." She swallowed hard. "So she's still out there." "Yes." Amy leaned back and closed her eyes. "I don't want to live scared." "You won't," I said. "I'll handle whatever comes." Later, after she went upstairs to rest, I returned to my office. Cole waited for me at my desk. "You think she planned something?" he asked. "She's not quiet for no reason," I said. "Clara is planning something." Cole nodded. "And Elias?" "If he's involved, he's keeping his distance. For now." I walked to the window and looked out at the pack grounds. Everything was calm. Too calm. It bothered me. "Clara not being found," I said quietly, "means she's preparing for something bigger." Cole didn't disagree.

Chapter 270 Dismissed

DANIEL

A few weeks later, the Council had called for a meeting and as I made my way there, the chamber felt different the moment I walked in. Too many whispers. Too many eyes shifted away when I looked at them. Something was off, and everyone knew it, but no one had the spine to say it. I took my seat in the center row. "Let's get to it. I'm assuming this is about the rogue-hunter activity." No one answered. Elder Rowan cleared his throat and stood. His expression was stiff, like he was forcing it to stay neutral. "Alpha Daniel, thank you for attending this emergency session." "That's not an answer," I said. Elder Myra folded her hands. "We... have a conclusion to present before we address the rogue-hunter reports." I stared right at her. "About what?" More whispers. Eyes shifting again. Papers shuffled just to fill the silence. Then Rowan lifted a file, opened it, and read. "After a careful and objective review, the Council has concluded that Clara and Elias are not guilty." The room broke instantly—gasps, curses, chairs scraping. Even some elders flinched like they hadn't expected it to be said out loud. I froze for a second,

just long enough to wonder if I misheard him. Then I stood slowly. "Repeat that." Rowan kept reading. "Not guilty of attempted murder. Not guilty of treason. Not guilty of orchestrating the explosion. Not guilty of endangering a Luna and unborn heir." My chest tightened. Myra avoided my eyes like a child caught stealing. I stepped forward, keeping my voice steady. "Explain." Myra spoke first. "There is insufficient evidence to proceed with any conviction." "Clara escaped custody," I said. "That is not proof of guilt," she replied without hesitation. "Elias vanished into thin air the minute the warrant was issued." "That is also not proof of guilt." I clenched my jaw. "You had declared him guilty before he escaped. This does not make any sense. You have statements, testimonies, recordings—" Grant cut me off. "The explosion has been reviewed again. The revised conclusion is that it was an external attack carried out by unknown forces." I blinked. "Unknown forces." "That is the official assessment," he said. It didn't even sound like he believed it. I stepped closer to the table. I didn't raise my voice. I didn't need to. The tension in the room tightened around everyone. "You're protecting criminals," I said. "Someone in this room is covering for them." Myra shot up from her seat. "Daniel, watch your tone— 99 "I'm watching a lot of things right now," I replied. "But mostly I'm watching the Council twist reality." Rowan lifted a hand. "This meeting is not about your accusations. The decision stands. Clara and Elias are legally cleared." "On what grounds?" I demanded. "Insufficient evidence," he repeated. "Then get more evidence." "The matter is closed." I let out a short laugh. Not amused. Just done. "You're afraid," I said. "And you're hiding something." Grant looked down. Myra tightened her jaw. Rowan's eyes flickered— just for a second. I caught every detail.

We are adjourned," Rowan announced. Just like that, everyone stood. Papers closed. Chairs pushed back. Half the room avoided looking at me as they rushed for the door like guilty children. I didn't move until the room was almost empty. The system meant to protect Amy, me, and the entire North had just thrown everything into a fire and walked away. I left without another word. I drove home with my hands tight on the steering wheel. Every thought hit hard and fast. By the time the estate came into view, my anger wasn't loud. It was cold. Focused. Cole was waiting outside before I even parked. "Alpha—" "Gather everyone," I said. "Staff. Warriors. All senior guards. Now." He didn't waste a second. I walked into the main hall. The weight in my chest didn't loosen. It only settled deeper. Within minutes, the hall filled. Warriors stood straighter than usual. The staff looked nervous. Everyone sensed something happened. I faced them. "The Council has issued a ruling," I began. "A reckless one." People shifted uncomfortably. "They declared Clara and Elias not guilty." The reaction was immediate—shock, outrage, disbelief. A few growled under their breath. A maid covered her mouth. Someone whispered, "What?" like the word hurt. I raised a hand, and the room fell quiet again. "I don't care about the Council's decision. I care about this pack. And I care about the safety of everyone in it." I let the words hang for a moment. "Effective immediately," I said, "under no circumstance are Clara or Elias allowed into this estate, into this territory, or anywhere connected to the Carter name or the North." A warrior stepped forward. "Alpha... the Council—" "I don't answer to a Council that won't protect its own," I said, voice sharp. "I answer to my people." "If they are seen," I continued, "you detain them on sight. No exceptions. No delays. No warnings." Cole nodded firmly. "Understood." Several guards tightened their fists, looking ready. The staff exchanged uneasy looks but no one questioned me. I looked at each of them. "We protect our own. The Council can make whatever decisions they want. But here, in this home, in this pack... my word stands." A quiet chorus of "Yes, Alpha" filled the hall. "Dismissed." They scattered slowly, still absorbing the command. Cole waited until most people were gone. "Daniel... this is going to start something." "It already has," I said. "And I'm not the one who started it." He nodded once and left me alone in the hall. I walked to my office and closed the door behind me. I sank into my chair and

finally let myself breathe. If the Council wouldn't protect us... if they were compromised or scared or bought... then the packs were already exposed. My family, my people—every single one of them was at risk. And if the system failed, then I would do what needed to be done without waiting for permission. The Council had closed their case.