

Broken 321

Chapter 321 Four Hours Of Footage

DANIEL

I watched the footage again, even though I'd seen it a dozen times already. My hands were tight on the edge of the desk, and my wolf kept shifting beneath the surface, restless, taut, ready to strike. That video didn't make sense. Amy... she wasn't acting on her own. She couldn't be. Something -or someone- was behind it. I called Cole into my office. "I want you and two of our cleanest wolves at the hotel," I said. My voice was calm, but the tension behind it made the air thrum. "No one else. I don't want leaks." Cole nodded immediately. "Understood. Which one?" "The one from the footage," I said, sliding him the hotel info. "And start with the cameras. Every angle, every timestamp. And be discreet. I don't want anyone panicking or hiding things because they know we're watching." Cole left, and I sank back into my chair, trying to push down the anger, the protective rage. My wolf was snapping at every corner of my mind, warning me, urging me to go there myself. But I couldn't risk losing control in front of staff or witnesses. Not now. Hours later, Cole reported in. "We checked the footage," he said over the secure line. "The manager's acting nervous, and four hours of footage are missing. Someone paid well to clean it out." I slammed my fist on the desk. The sound rattled through the office, but I kept my tone low on the call. "Any idea who?" "No," Cole replied. "But the manager's sweating bullets. We also spoke to the night attendant. Claims Amy could barely walk straight, looked disoriented. We think she was... drugged." My wolf stirred violently. Fury and fear tangled together, raw and immediate. My hands clenched, jaw tight. "She was guided," I said quietly, almost to myself. "This wasn't her choice. She didn't wander. She was led." Cole's voice was calm, precise. "Sir, she didn't choose that path. Whoever did this made sure she followed it." I ran my fingers through my hair, trying to think. Trying to focus. The anger shifted slowly from Amy because she was never the target to whoever orchestrated this. Whoever had manipulated her, used her, and then tried to frame her. My wolf growled low in my mind, but I held him back. I couldn't confront anyone yet. Not here. Not without a plan. "Good," I said. "Check the financial records. See if anyone paid the hotel any unusual transfers. Find out who had access to that room or the surveillance system. I want everything we can get on them. And keep Amy out of it. She's not to know." "Yes, sir," Cole replied. After the call, I grabbed my jacket and left the office. The drive was silent except for the engine hum. My mind replayed the video over and over, focusing not on Amy's face, not on Mark, but on the subtle clues—the way she moved, the way her hand lingered on the rail, the slight hesitation in her steps.

She hadn't been walking freely. Someone had been pulling her, guiding her through the hotel, orchestrating every motion. I pulled my truck into a quiet spot near the edge of the territory and closed my eyes for a moment. My wolf stretched inside me, tense, anxious. I could feel him tracking, sensing the subtle vibrations left by whoever had done this. The fear they'd instilled in Amy, the manipulation—it was personal. "Not her," I whispered aloud. "Not Amy." Cole called again, voice steady. "Sir, we tracked the hotel manager's movements after that night. Nothing concrete yet, but he's been in contact with someone off-property. We're cross-referencing names with past rogue activity and known associates of Mark. Could take a few hours." I exhaled slowly. I needed to trust him, trust the team, but my wolf's instincts wouldn't let me. I wanted to hunt. I wanted to track. I wanted to find whoever had done this and tear them down before they could even think of touching Amy again. But I couldn't. Not yet. Instead, I focused on what I could do—gather facts, gather proof, and protect her. I tapped my

fingers on the wheel, eyes fixed on the road, replaying the hotel's hallway, the room layout, imagining the path she had taken. My stomach tightened. Whoever had done this knew her, knew us, knew how far they could push. And that scared me more than I wanted to admit. Finally, I stopped at the edge of the packhouse. The sun was dipping low, casting long shadows over the land. I stayed in the truck for a moment, letting the silence settle around me. But my wolf's energy didn't settle. He wanted action. He wanted answers. Cole called one more time before I could even step out. "Sir, the room attendant mentioned someone paid in cash, but the denominations were unusual. Couldn't track the source. But they had access to the staff keycard system. That's how the video block happened." I ground my teeth. "Keep digging. Whoever did this is trying to make her guilty, make me question her. We don't let them win." "Yes, sir." I hung up and leaned back, letting my head rest against the steering wheel. My thoughts were still racing. Amy... she wasn't to blame. She was a victim. And every instinct in me told me that someone had set her up, orchestrated every step, and filmed it to hurt both of us. The worst part? My wolf could sense it. There was more. A trace of someone else, lingering just beyond our detection. Someone with subtle power, someone who knew exactly how to manipulate both pack and corporate worlds. I could feel the faint pull even now, a residue left in the environment, like the echo of their presence. Whoever this was, they were skilled, methodical, and patient. And they'd likely planned for every move we made. I slammed my hand against the steering wheel, the action more out of frustration than anger at Amy. My wolf flared violently, ears back, teeth grinding beneath the surface. I couldn't go in unprepared. I couldn't let her see me like this. Not now. I started the engine and drove slowly back to the house. Every light along the road seemed sharper than usual.

Chapter 322 Mixed Emotions

AMY

I sat on the low stone wall outside the house, my legs swinging back and forth, the evening air brushing against my skin. My thoughts were messy, looping around themselves, trying to fill the gaps from the night I couldn't remember. Every fragment I tried to grasp slipped away, leaving a hollow frustration behind. I closed my eyes and let the silence press in. I needed something—anything—that could tell me what had happened. The feeling of confusion wasn't just emotional; it was physical, a weight in my chest that wouldn't ease. I kept thinking about the video, about Daniel's eyes, about how he'd looked at me that morning. The anger, the disbelief, the hurt—it had cut deeper than I'd imagined. And then, out of nowhere, a fragment hit me. Sharp, quick, and entirely unbidden. I gasped and pressed my hands against my face. I was in the parking lot... a hand grabbing my wrist, firm and unyielding. There was a smell, sweet and thick, almost syrup-like, clinging to the air. My vision had started to fade, and a heaviness took over my body. My limbs felt like they didn't belong to me. I remembered a pull—strong, insistent, guiding me somewhere, but not my choice. I stumbled to my feet, my heart racing, every instinct on high alert. My wolf stirred beneath the surface, tense and angry, matching my own unease. I wasn't imagining this. I hadn't walked to that hotel willingly. Someone had made me go. I fumbled for my phone and dialed Bella. I needed her insight, her clarity. "Bella," I said the moment she picked up, voice tight. "Something's... it's not right. I remembered a fragment. I was... controlled. Pulled somewhere. There's this smell—sweet, syrup-like. Do you know—does that mean anything?" There was a pause on her end, and then her voice, calm but serious, came through. "Amy... that's exactly what it sounds like. That scent—sweet, sticky, overpowering—is often associated with compulsion or influence

spells. Could be wolf magic, could be witchcraft. Whoever did this made sure you couldn't resist, couldn't act on your own will." I pressed my forehead against the stone wall, trying to process the words. Compulsion. Influence. Someone had forced me. The thought brought a mix of relief and terror. Relief, because I knew now I hadn't betrayed Daniel by choice. Terror, because someone had the power and audacity to manipulate me like that. "I... I didn't—" I started, voice trembling, "I didn't choose any of it. I wasn't... myself." "I know," Bella replied firmly. "You were targeted. That's clear. Whoever did this is skilled. And Amy, you need to be careful. They're not done. They might try again." I nodded, though she couldn't see me. My wolf stirred again, protective, restless. I wanted Daniel here, wanted his reassurance, but I knew he was still holding himself back. I tried to reach out through our mind-link, calling for him silently. Nothing. He was blocking me. I could feel the barrier, firm and unyielding. I swallowed hard and let the frustration roll off. I couldn't force him. Not yet. I walked slowly back inside and sank into one of the chairs by the window, staring outside. The memory fragment replayed in my mind. I dialed Bella again. "Can they—can someone really make me do something against my will like that?" I asked, voice barely above a whisper. "Yes," she said without hesitation. "It's rare, but it happens. Experienced wolves, powerful witches, can manipulate someone without leaving obvious marks. But it also leaves traces—the scent, the memory fragments, the disjointed feeling you're describing. You got a fragment, Amy. That means the spell wasn't perfect. You resisted enough to remember. That's a good thing."

I nodded to myself, though she couldn't see it. Good thing. But it didn't feel good. It felt like a violation, a breach of trust that I hadn't asked for. My mind kept returning to Daniel, to his pain, to the distance he was keeping. He didn't know this yet, and I couldn't blame him. I would have reacted the same way if I had seen the footage first. I set the phone down and leaned back in the chair, letting my wolf sense the perimeter, the house, the property. My senses were heightened, alert, scanning for any anomaly. But nothing. Quiet. Safe. For now. I glanced at the clock. Daniel would be home soon. He pulled up in the truck, engine quiet as he shut it off. His posture was rigid, shoulders tense. The wolf beneath me sensed it immediately, tensing further in response. I stepped out, keeping my distance. Initially. I approached him slowly, carefully, aware of the tension between us. "Daniel..." I said softly, unsure how else to begin. He didn't answer. His wolf growled low, restrained but present. "I need to tell you—" I began again, but he cut me off before I could finish. "Don't," he said, voice low and firm. His eyes locked onto mine, every inch of him radiating authority. "I need to see it for myself first. Then we talk. Until then, I'm not letting my guard down." I nodded, swallowing hard. I could feel his mind probing, testing, sensing. Our wolf senses brushed in the quiet, both tense, both waiting. I took a deep breath, forcing myself to stay calm. Daniel's eyes softened ever so slightly, just enough that I could read it, just enough to know that but he was starting to sense the truth behind my confusion. He stayed back, giving me space, the tension was undeniable. We stood there in silence for a moment and my wolf shifted slightly, leaning into his presence, protective but aware of the fragile state between us. Finally, I broke the silence. "Daniel... I remember a piece of that night. I wasn't walking on my own. Someone—someone forced me. I don't know how or why, but I wasn't in control. I didn't His jaw tightened, and he didn't respond, only nodded once, acknowledging the words without letting any relief show. I could feel the storm inside him, still churning, still wary. I swallowed, steadying myself. "I'll wait. I'll wait for you. I'm here. I won't let this destroy us. He finally met my gaze fully, and I could see the mix of emotions.

AMY

The next day, I followed Daniel into his office, my footsteps slow. The tension between us still hovered like a shadow, heavy and unyielding. I felt the pull in my chest, the lingering unease from everything that had happened, but I also felt a cautious thread of hope. Maybe this time we could talk. Maybe this time he would understand. He didn't look at me when I entered. His shoulders were tight, jaw set, and there was that wolf-edge in his posture, the alertness that came from being on guard. I could smell the tension in him, sharp and restless. "Sit," he said finally. I did, my hands folded in my lap. I observed him. He looked exhausted, but it wasn't fatigue—it was the weight of trying to process a betrayal he didn't fully understand. "I got the full report from Cole," he started, finally meeting my eyes. His gaze was sharp, searching, trying to see if I was hiding anything. I shook my head. "Go on," I said quietly. He exhaled, leaning back slightly in his chair. "At the hotel... footage missing. Four hours wiped clean. The manager was nervous, couldn't answer questions properly. The room attendant said you... couldn't walk straight. They said you looked... drugged." His voice was tight, controlled, but the words hit me like stones. I swallowed hard. "I... I don't remember any of that. I remember a fragment, though. Just a piece. I was in the parking lot. Someone grabbed my wrist... I could smell something sweet, syrup-like. Then I felt myself... being pulled. I wasn't in control, Daniel. I didn't choose any of it." He leaned forward abruptly, elbows on the desk, eyes narrowing. "Pulled?" His wolf stirred at the word, taut beneath his skin, scenting the fear and confusion in me. Explain." I recounted the memory fragment, as carefully as I could, focusing on the physical details, the strange smell, the feeling of being guided somewhere against my will. I kept my hands visible, trying to show him I wasn't hiding anything. Daniel stayed silent for a long moment, just staring at me. I could feel the shift in his energy, the wolf quivering, reacting to the threat in the air, ready to act. His jaw worked as he processed everything, anger and concern coiling tightly together. Finally, he said, "So... someone manipulated you. They made you go there. They drugged you or used some kind of... compulsion." He trailed off, voice rough, and his wolf growled low, a rumble beneath his words. "Yes," I whispered. "I couldn't stop it. But now I know. I remember a piece. That's all. It's not my fault." My voice cracked slightly, but I refused to apologize. I didn't do anything wrong. Daniel's expression softened a fraction, but his tension didn't fade. "Amy... I want to believe that," he said, leaning back in his chair. "I do. But seeing that video... I don't even know what to think anymore. My wolf... my heart... they're in chaos. I feel everything, and I don't know where to start." I reached out slowly, placing a hand on his arm. He didn't pull away, but he didn't respond either. I let the silence hang for a moment, giving him the space to breathe. "You're scared," I said gently. "I get it. I would be too. I would've reacted the same way if I'd seen myself in that video." His eyes softened for the first time, just a little, but the wolf beneath him shifted restlessly. "I am," he admitted quietly. "I'm scared, Amy. I'm scared for you. And I'm scared for us. I don't know who did this, or

why, but... my instincts tell me you were never in control. My wolf... it senses that too." A shiver ran through me, a mix of relief and lingering anxiety. "I'm not lying, Daniel. I don't even know why I was there. I can't explain why Mark... why I... it doesn't make sense." Daniel's hand covered mine now, "It doesn't matter why Mark is involved. It doesn't matter what happened there. Right now, what matters is that someone forced you. Someone used you. And I swear... if I find them, Amy, I'll make them pay. I don't care who they are. My wolf doesn't care either." I felt tears prickle at the corners of my eyes. Relief and fear collided, but I didn't try to stop them. I let them slide quietly down my cheeks, the first real release I'd had in days. I didn't apologize for something I didn't do. I just let him see the truth. "I... I

don't know what else to tell you," I said, voice trembling. "I can't remember everything, but I remember enough to know I wasn't acting on my own. I was pulled. Someone wanted this to happen." Daniel nodded slowly, hand still holding mine, thumb brushing over my skin. "I know. I believe you. And that's what matters. We'll figure this out. Whoever did this... they're going to regret it." "Do you... do you have any idea who could have done this?" I asked cautiously. "Someone had access, someone skilled." Daniel's gaze darkened. "I have my suspicions. But I need more evidence before I act. No matter how much my wolf wants to lash out, we can't make mistakes. Not now. Not with you at risk." I nodded, leaning closer slightly. "I can help. I'll retrace my steps, try to remember more fragments, anything. We can find out who did this." He gave me a small, almost imperceptible smile. "That's my Luna. Strong, even when confused, even when scared. We'll do this together. But Amy... don't try to handle it alone. Not anymore. You have me. You have the pack. You have us." I blinked back the tears, swallowing the lump in my throat. "I just... I feel so lost. I don't even know where to start." "Start here," he said, tightening his untangle this together." ip on my hand. "Start with us. Start with the truth. Step by step. We'll "I... I trust you, Daniel," I said quietly. "I know? you believe me. I... I believe we'll find who did this."

Chapter 324 Alpha Born

ELIAS

I woke up again on cold stone. That part hadn't changed. What had changed was how wrong I felt inside my own body. I sat up slowly, testing myself the way I always did. My muscles responded, but they felt dull. Heavy. When I tried to reach for my wolf, there was nothing waiting for me. No growl. No tension. No heat under my skin. Just silence. It scared me more than the chains ever could. I stood and crossed the small cell, gripping the bars. The metal was thick, old, reinforced with something I didn't recognize. I'd tried bending it before. Tried shifting. I tried tearing through it. Nothing worked. I had no sense of time. No day or night. No scent trails. Whoever put me here knew exactly how to keep a wolf blind. Footsteps echoed down the corridor. I felt it before I saw him. The pressure. The authority. The weight of an Alpha entering territory that was undeniably his. I straightened instinctively. The Southern Alpha stopped outside my cell. He looked calm. Too calm. Dark clothes. On trolled posture. His scent filled the corridor, thick with dominance and something colder underneath it. Calculation. "So," he said, voice even. "You're awake." I lunged at the bars. The reaction was instinct. Rage. Humiliation. I slammed my hands into the metal, snarling. "What did you do to me?" He didn't flinch. I tried again, pushing harder, calling my wolf the way I always had. Nothing answered. My chest tightened. I felt human. Too human. The Southern Alpha tilted his head slightly, studying me like I was a problem to be solved. "You're not dead. That should count for something." I growled and reached for him again, this time with everything I had left. He moved. I barely saw it. One second he was standing there. The next, his hand was on the bars, palm flat, and the force of his dominance slammed into me. My knees buckled. Pain shot through my spine, sharp and immediate. I hit the floor. That alone told me everything. I stared up at him, breathing hard. "You did something to my wolf," I said. It wasn't a question. "Yes." The word landed clean and final. I pushed myself up, fury burning through me. "Undo it He watched me with mild interest. "No." I laughed, sharp and humorless. "You think you can keep me like this forever?" He stepped closer to the bars. "Yes." That made my chest tighten again. "How?" I demanded. I'm Alpha-born. You don't just take that away." His mouth curved slightly. Not a smile. "You forget something." I glared at him. "I'm Alpha-born too," he said calmly. The words hit harder than any blow. I stared at him,

really looking this time. The control. The precision. The way his wolf didn't leak dominance -it held it tight. That wasn't a weakness. That was discipline. "You think being Alpha means you're untouchable," he continued. "It doesn't. It means you're dangerous when you're allowed to run free." My hands curled into fists. "You drugged me." "No." "You cursed me." "No." "Then what?" I snapped. "I subdued your wolf," he said. "Not killed. Not removed Restrained." My stomach turned. "Only witches can-" He cut me off. "Only fools think power comes from one source."

Silence filled the corridor. I tested myself again, reaching inward. Still nothing. My wolf was there—I could sense it faintly—but it was trapped. Pressed down. Muzzled. "Only I can undo it," he added. Rage surged. I rushed the bars again, snarling, teeth bared. "When I get out of here-" "You won't," he said, still calm, "unless I let you." I froze. He studied my face, then nodded once. "Good. You're listening now." 39 I swallowed, forcing myself to stand straight despite the tremor in my legs. "Why am I here?" He met my eyes directly. "Because I need you." I barked a short laugh. "You need a prisoner?" "I need a right-hand man." The words didn't register at first. Then they did. I stared at him. "You locked me in a cell, stripped my wolf, and now you want loyalty?" "You misunderstand," he said. "I didn't do this to punish you. I did it to stop you." "From what?" I snapped "From ruining useful plans." I shook my head slowly. "You don't want a right-hand man. You want a lap dog." His eyes narrowed just slightly. "If that's how you want to frame it." That was answer enough. I stepped back, chest heaving. "You're insane." He shrugged. "Maybe. But I'm also winning." I glared at him. "What do you want from me?" He didn't answer immediately. Instead, he turned slightly, as if considering the corridor beyond the cell. "Before I tell you anything, you need to agree." "Agree to what?" "To serve as my right hand." I laughed again, louder this time. "And if I don't?" He looked back at me. His gaze was flat. "Then you stay here." "For how long?" "A century," he said. "Two. Time passes differently when you're contained." My jaw clenched. "You won't age much," he added. "Your wolf will keep you alive. Just quiet. Just... present." The image made my skin crawl. He stepped away from the bars. "Think about it. When you're ready to answer, signal." "How?" I demanded. He glanced over his shoulder. "You'll figure it out." Then he walked away. His footsteps faded. The silence returned. I stood there long after he left, staring at the empty corridor. My thoughts churned, sharp and chaotic. I tried to feel the outside world. Tried to sense territory lines. Nothing came. I had no idea how long I'd been locked up. No idea what was happening beyond these walls. No idea who thought I was still pulling strings. Anger burned hot and useless in my chest. I slammed my fist into the wall. Nothing answered. I slid down slowly until I was sitting on the floor, head tilted back against the stone. My wolf stirred faintly, frustrated, restrained, alive but trapped. Right-hand man. Lab dog. Rot for centuries. I closed my eyes and breathed. Whatever game the Southern Alpha was playing, he had the upper hand. And I hated that the choice in front of me wasn't simple defiance. It was survival.

Chapter 325 Binded

ELIAS

I sat with the decision longer than I wanted to admit. The cell didn't change. The cold didn't soften. My wolf stayed locked behind that heavy wall inside me, restless but useless. I tried to get angry. I tried pacing. I tried forcing myself to sleep. Nothing worked. What finally broke me wasn't fear. It was the certainty that if I stayed, I would be forgotten. Whatever game was unfolding outside these walls would move on without me. My name would fade. My leverage would rot in silence. And I would exist only as a body breathing in the dark. That was unacceptable. I stood and walked to the bars. The guards were always there. Quiet. Watching. Their faces gave nothing away. "I'll agree," I said. One of them tilted his

head. "Say it clearly." "I agree to be his right hand," I said. "Take me to him." The guard studied me for a moment, then turned and left without another word. Time passed. Or maybe it didn't. I couldn't tell anymore. When they returned, there were four of them. They unlocked the cell without ceremony. Cold cuffs snapped around my wrists, heavier than any restraints I'd worn before. They didn't drag me. They didn't need to. I followed. They led me through corridors I hadn't seen before, deeper underground. The air changed as we moved. Damp. Old. Charged with something that made my skin prickle. I was taken into a small room with stone walls and a single drain in the floor. "Strip," one guard said. I hesitated. He didn't repeat himself. I did it. They hosed me down with cold water, scrubbing off sweat, dried blood, the stink of confinement. No gentleness. No cruelty either. Just efficiency. Someone cut my hair shorter. Someone else checked my arms, my neck, my chest, like they were inspecting equipment. When they were done, they tossed me clothes. Simple. Clean. Dark fabric. Nothing decorative. Nothing that belonged to me. I dressed without comment. Then they hooded me. The walk after that was longer. Uneven ground under my boots. The sound of dripping water. Echoes that suggested open space. The air grew colder, sharper. My instincts screamed, but my wolf stayed silent. That silence hurt more than anything. When the hood came off, I was standing inside a cave. Not a tunnel. Not a chamber. A cave that opened wide above us, the ceiling lost in shadow. Pale light filtered down from somewhere unseen. Symbols were carved into the stone floor in wide circles. Old markings. Power sat heavy in the space, pressing against my skin. I turned slowly, taking it in. "What is this?" I demanded. No one answered. The guards moved to the edges of the cave and stopped. Still. Alert. Watching me like they expected something to go wrong. I laughed once, sharp. "You bring me here and don't bother explaining?" Silence. I clenched my jaw. "You think fear makes me obedient?" A presence entered the cave. I felt it before I saw him. The Southern Alpha stepped into the light. He wore a white robe, loose and unadorned, the fabric brushing the stone as he walked. It made him look nothing like a warrior and everything like a man who had already won. My muscles tightened. "So this is it," I said. "You finally decided to show me the trick." He stopped several steps away from me. His gaze swept over me slowly, assessing. Calm. Controlled. "This isn't a trick," he said. "This is a contract." I glanced at the symbols under my feet. "This looks more like a sentence."

Chapter 326 Trouble

CLARA

The witch manor sat at the edge of the old road, stone walls blackened by time and bad decisions. No guards. No lights. Just the low hum in the air that always made my skin itch. I shoved the door open and stepped inside. "Come out," I said. "Now." Candles flared to life along the walls, one after the other. The smell hit me next—sweet and sharp, like burnt sugar and herbs left too long in water. "You're loud tonight," the witch said from the shadows. That usually means regret." I turned toward her voice. She stood near the long table at the center of the room, sleeves rolled up, hands stained dark from whatever she'd been grinding. Her eyes flicked over me, slow and knowing. "You lied to me," I snapped. She raised a brow. "Did I?" "The potion," I said. "You said it would twist her emotions. You said it would make her reckless. You didn't say it would wear off this fast." The witch sighed and wiped her hands on a cloth. "I said it would soften her will. I never promised permanence." I stepped closer. "She's remembering." That got her attention. The witch straightened. "Memory fragments?" "Yes," I said sharply. "Which means your work was sloppy." Her mouth curved into something like a smile. "Or it means she's stronger than you planned." I clenched my fists. "Don't turn this on me." She tilted her head. "You came to me. You asked for something subtle. Something that wouldn't leave marks. I delivered." "You

delivered a mess," I said. "I wanted her to destroy herself quietly. One mistake. One scandal. Enough to put the Council on her back and Daniel at odds with her "And she did kiss Mark," the witch said calmly. "Publicly enough to be recorded." I swallowed. The memory still made my stomach twist. Amy's face. Confused. Soft. Trusting the pull I fed her. "Yes," I said. "But now Daniel is digging." The witch shrugged. "Alphas dig. That's what they do." "I paid you," I said. "Well." "You paid for influence," she replied. "Not in control." Anger surged hot and sharp. "You're playing word games." She stepped closer, her eyes cold now. "You're the one who pushed for more. You wanted the bond shaken. You wanted the Luna humiliated. You wanted the pack divided." I didn't deny it. "She doesn't deserve what she has," I said. "She walked in and took everything. The title. The power. Him." The witch studied me. "And Mark?" My jaw tightened. "Mark is useful." She laughed quietly. "You altered Amy's emotions to pull her toward a man she despises. You made her follow a scent that wasn't hers. That takes precision." "And you failed," I said again. Her eyes flashed. "Careful." I leaned forward. "Fix it." The witch's expression hardened. "No." "What do you mean no?" I demanded. "I mean you're done," she said. "The moment memory started creeping back, the risk doubled. I won't have an Alpha's mate tearing my doors down." "You already have one tearing them down," I snapped. She lifted her hand. The air shifted. Pressure slammed into my chest, forcing me back a step. Then another. My ears rang. My wolf snarled inside me, confused and furious. "I warned you," the witch said, her voice steady. "You came angry. That makes you sloppy." I braced myself. "You don't scare me." "You should be terrified," she said. "Because you don't understand what you stirred." The candles flared bright. The symbols etched into the floor glowed faintly. I tried to step forward again. The floor buckled. Pain shot through my legs as I was thrown back toward the door, invisible force slamming into me like a wall. I hit the wood hard, breath knocked out of me.

"Get out," the witch said. "And don't come back." I struggled to my feet, shaking. "You owe me." "I owe you nothing," she replied. "And if you're smart, you'll disappear before this turns on you." The door flew open behind me. I stumbled out into the night, the cold air biting into my skin. The door slammed shut on its own. I stood there for a moment, chest heaving, anger buzzing under my skin. Then I turned and left. The house was dark when I got back. Too dark. I slowed as I stepped inside, my senses stretching out. The air felt heavy. Familiar. Sharp with a scent I knew too well. "Where were you?" The voice came from the sitting room. I froze. Mark sat in the chair by the window, body relaxed, hands folded. The lights were off, but his eyes glowed faintly in the dark, his wolf just close enough to the surface to make a point. I forced a laugh. "Out." His gaze didn't shift. "Out where?" I kicked off my shoes, keeping my movements casual. "Does it matter?" "Yes," he said quietly. I swallowed. "I needed air." "You smell like herbs," he said. "And old magic." My pulse jumped. I turned toward him, folding my arms. "You don't get to interrogate me." He stood slowly. "You don't get to lie to me." "I'm not lying," I snapped. "I just didn't think you needed details." His eyes narrowed. "You didn't tell me you were seeing witch." I stiffened. "I didn't see anyone." "Clara," he said. "Don't insult me." I stepped closer, trying to control my voice. "Even if I did, what would it change?" "It changes everything," he said. "Especially after that video." I forced my face into confusion. "What video?" His lips pressed into a thin line. "You think I don't notice patterns?" My heart pounded. "You're imagining things." He took another step toward me. "Did you touch Amy? The question landed like a blow. I scoffed. "Why would I?" "Because she doesn't wander into my arms," he said. "Not without help." I laughed, sharp and brittle. "So now I'm responsible for your mistakes?" Silence stretched between us. Mark studied me, his eyes searching my face. "You wanted chaos." I lifted my chin. "I wanted fairness." He exhaled slowly. "You're playing a dangerous game." "So are you," I shot back. "You kissed her too." His jaw tightened. "And I regret it." That

surprised me. I covered it quickly. "Then forget it." He looked away, toward the window. "If this comes back to us—" "It won't," I said too fast. He turned back to me, eyes sharp. "You sure?" I held his gaze, my heart racing. "Yes."

Chapter 327 Anger Talking

AMY

I woke up thinking something was wrong. It wasn't a nightmare. It wasn't the room. It was the weight. An arm lay over my waist, solid and familiar, and my body reacted before my mind did. I turned my head slowly, breath caught halfway in my chest. Daniel was in my bed. Our room. For a second, I just stared. His hair was messy like he hadn't bothered fixing it. His face looked tired, rough around the edges, like sleep hadn't done much for him. He was on his side, facing me, eyes closed but not deeply. The kind of sleep you fall into when your mind refuses to shut off. I smiled without meaning to. The tension I'd been carrying for days loosened a little, like a knot finally giving way. He stirred, his arm tightening slightly, then his eyes opened. We looked at each other. Neither of us spoke at first. "You're here," I said quietly. "Yes," he replied. His voice was low, still thick with sleep. I shifted onto my back, staring at the ceiling. "I thought you were still avoiding me." "I was," he said. Then, after a pause, "I stopped." I turned my head toward him again. He was already watching me. "I owe you an apology," he said. I blinked. "That sounds serious." He exhaled through his nose. "I was a dick." That made me laugh. A short, surprised sound that escaped before I could stop it. "You were," I agreed. He winced slightly. "I shut you out. I assumed instead of asking. I let my anger do the talking." I studied his face, the tension still sitting beneath his skin. "You were hurt." "That doesn't excuse it." "No," I said. "But it explains it." He was quiet for a moment. "I should have tried to understand things from your side," he said. "I didn't. And I'm sorry." I turned fully toward him. "I understand, Daniel. I really do. As long as we catch whoever was behind it." His jaw tightened. "We will." He sat up, running a hand over his face. "I'm going to Mark's house later. To question him." Something cold slid through my chest. "Can I come?" I asked. He looked at me carefully, like he was measuring the weight of that question. Then he nodded. "Yes." "I want to look him in the eyes," I said. "I need to." "I figured you would," he replied. We left later that afternoon. The drive was quiet but not uncomfortable. Daniel kept one hand on the steering wheel, the other resting against my thigh like he was grounding himself. The road stretched ahead, familiar and dull, while my thoughts stayed sharp and restless. Mark's house came into view far too quickly. Daniel parked. We got out. The place looked exactly the same. Neat. Quiet. Too quiet. Daniel knocked. Nothing. We waited. A minute passed. Then another. "Nobody's home," I said. Daniel's shoulders tightened. "Or nobody wants to be." He knocked again, harder this time. Still nothing. I glanced around, my senses prickling. "I don't like this

"Neither do I." We stood there a moment longer, and that was when I noticed movement down the street. A familiar scent hit my nose. Clara. She walked toward the house, heels clicking softly against stone. Her phone was in her hand, her fingers moving fast across the screen. Too fast. Too focused. Daniel noticed too. "She's texting," he murmured. I narrowed my eyes. "Or warning." We stayed where we were. When she finally looked up and saw us, her steps slowed just a little. Not enough to seem obvious. Her face shifted into a smile that didn't reach her eyes. "What are you doing here?" she asked as she approached. I didn't answer right away. I just stared at her. "Didn't you see me?" I said finally. "How the fuck do you not greet?" Her eyes flicked over me, then Daniel. Her smile sharpened. "Oh," she said. "Greetings, Luna." The word came out wrong. Flat. Disrespectful. Like she was daring me to react. Daniel smiled faintly, like he was amused rather than irritated. "Where's Mark?" She shrugged. "No

idea." "No idea," he repeated calmly. "He doesn't tell me where he goes," she said. Daniel nodded once. "Tell him he's expected at the Council chamber tomorrow morning. For questioning." Her lips twisted. "Questioning?" "Yes." She rolled her eyes. "Okay." "Make sure he comes," Daniel added. "I said okay," she replied, already turning toward the door. I stepped closer. "Funny," I said. "You always act like you're above this." She paused and looked back at me. "Above what?" "Consequences." Her smile widened. "You always think everything revolves around you." I leaned in slightly. "Because lately, it does." Daniel placed a hand lightly at my back. "We're done." We turned and walked away. Behind us, Clara let out a short laugh. The moment we were back in the car, I exhaled sharply "She's involved," I said. "I know it." Daniel didn't argue. "I do too." "She's too calm," I continued. "Too smug. Like she already knows how this ends." Daniel's jaw tightened. "That's because she thinks she's smarter than everyone else." "She always has," I said. "She mirrors people. Matches their tone. Their expressions. It's how she hides." He glanced at me. "You've noticed that before." "Yes," I replied. "She copies confidence. She copies charm. She copies innocence when it suits her." Daniel's grip on the wheel tightened. "And now she's copying concern." I nodded. "She's been doing it for years." We drove the rest of the way in silence. But it wasn't empty. It was heavy with certainty. And whatever Clara thought she'd done so perfectly was already cracking. The hours passed and before I knew it, it was already morning. I barely slept the night before. Every time I closed my eyes, my mind replayed pieces I didn't fully own. A kiss I didn't choose. A moment I couldn't remember clearly. Faces watching me like they already had a verdict. By morning, my head hurt. I dressed slowly, choosing neutral clothes. Nothing soft. Nothing sharp. I didn't want to look guilty or defensive. I wanted to look steady, even though I didn't feel that way.

Chapter 328 Straight Lines

AMY

Daniel didn't say much as we walked to the Council chamber. His presence beside me was firm, silent, protective without being obvious. Our hands brushed once, briefly. He didn't pull away. That helped more than words. The chamber was already full. Council members sat in a half-circle, their expressions tight and unreadable. Pack elders lined the walls. Whispers stopped the moment we entered. Mark stood in the center. He looked worse than I expected. His shoulders were tense, his eyes darting too much. He kept rubbing his palms against his trousers like he couldn't get rid of something on his skin. He looked at me. I didn't look away. "Begin," one of the elders said. Mark swallowed. "I already said everything I know." "You will say it again," another councilman replied. "And you will say it clearly." Daniel moved slightly forward. "Proceed." The elder turned to Mark. "Why did you kiss the Luna?" Mark shook his head. "I don't know." A ripple went through the room. "You don't know," the elder repeated. "Yes," Mark said quickly. "I mean—I do know it happened. I'm not denying that. I just... I don't know why."

"That is not an answer," someone snapped. Mark ran a hand through his hair. "I swear. I wasn't planning it. I didn't go there thinking I would do anything with her." "Then why did you?" another voice demanded. "I don't know!" he said louder. "It just happened." A councilwoman leaned forward. "You expect us to believe that you kissed the Luna without intent?" "I didn't force her," Mark said quickly. Too quickly. I stiffened. Daniel's head snapped up. "That was not the question." Mark glanced at him and swallowed. "I'm saying I didn't plan it." "And yet," the councilwoman said, "you were seen leading her away." Mark shook his head again. "She followed me." That stung more than I expected. Gasps filled

the chamber. Daniel growled low, the sound vibrating through the room. "Choose your words carefully." "I'm just saying what happened," Mark replied, voice shaking now. "She wasn't resisting. She didn't look angry. She didn't tell me to stop." "That doesn't make it acceptable," an elder snapped. I stepped forward before Daniel could. "I don't remember that night," I said. "So don't pretend you know what I felt." Mark's eyes flickered. "You looked fine to me." A councilman slammed his hand on the table. "Enough. You are lying." "I'm not!" Mark insisted. "I don't know why I kissed her. I don't know why she followed me. I don't know why any of it happened." "And yet," the elder said calmly, "you remember the kiss." "Yes." "You remember leading her." "Yes." "You remember the place." "Yes." "So what you are saying," the elder continued, "is that the only thing you do not remember is your intention." Mark opened his mouth then closed it. "That is convenient," the elder said. Voices rose around the room. "He's lying." "He planned it." "No one just kisses a Luna." "He wanted to provoke the Alpha." "He wanted attention." I stood there, listening, my chest tight. Daniel stepped forward again. "Enough." The room quieted.

"You will not turn this into a public execution," he said. "Answer the questions properly." The elder nodded. "Then answer this. Did anyone influence you that night?" Mark hesitated. Daniel's eyes sharpened. "Answer." "No," Mark said. "No one told me to do anything." "Did anyone give you something?" another elder asked. A drink. A substance." "No." "Did anyone suggest you meet the Luna?" "No." The room buzzed with disbelief. "You expect us to believe you acted alone," the councilwoman said. "Yes," Mark replied weakly. I clenched my hands. "Then explain the pull." The room stilled. Mark frowned. "What pull?" "The pull I felt toward you," I said. "Explain that." His eyes flickered. "I didn't feel anything like that." Daniel turned to the council. "That answers enough." The elder shook his head. "It answers nothing." Mark looked like he was unraveling. Sweat dotted his forehead. "I don't know why you think I'm lying," he said. "I didn't do anything wrong on purpose." "You kissed the Luna," someone shouted. "And that alone is wrong," another added. "I didn't mean to hurt anyone," Mark said, voice cracking. "I don't even know why I wanted to kiss her." "That's the problem," the elder replied coldly. "Want does not appear from nowhere." Silence settled heavy and thick. Daniel spoke again, controlled. "This session is not . But this man is not the only one who will be questioned." The elder raised a brow. "You believe there is another hand involved." "Yes." "And your proof?" "We are still gathering it." The council exchanged looks. "Until then," the elder said, "Mark will remain under watch. He is not cleared." Mark's shoulders sagged. "And the Luna?" another asked. Daniel didn't hesitate. "She remains under my protection." The meeting ended without resolution. As the room emptied, Mark looked at me again. "I really don't know why," he said quietly. I studied his face. And for the first time, I believed one thing. He didn't know. But that didn't mean he was innocent. Whatever happened that night wasn't simple. And the truth was still hiding, waiting for someone to drag it into the light. The chamber emptied slowly, but the weight of what had happened stayed with me. Daniel didn't touch me as we walked out, but he stayed close enough that I could feel his presence. His silence wasn't cold this time. It felt focused, like his mind was already moving ahead of the room we had just left. Behind us, I heard raised voices. Some council members were still arguing. Others sounded frustrated, almost disappointed that the questioning hadn't ended cleanly. Outside, the air felt different. Sharper. I took a deep breath, trying to steady myself. "He's hiding something." I said quietly. Daniel nodded once. "Yes." "But I don't think he understands what it is," I added. Daniel stopped walking and turned to me. "That's exactly what worries me." I looked up at him. "They all think he planned it." "They think in straight lines," he said. "This wasn't straight."

Chapter 329 Surprise Gone Wrong

CLARA

I sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the wall for a long time. The house was quiet in a way that made my thoughts louder. Mark hadn't come back yet. The council meeting replayed in my head, the whispers, the way things were starting to tilt in directions I hadn't fully planned for. Amy wasn't broken the way she was supposed to be. Daniel hadn't turned on her. That part bothered me more than I wanted to admit. I needed control back. Sitting still wasn't going to give me that. I grabbed my bag and left the house without locking the door. The boutique was only a few streets away. I walked in like I belonged there, nodded at the attendant and went straight to the racks I knew would get attention. I picked lace, soft fabric, things that looked delicate but were meant to pull focus. Black. Wine. Something pale and sheer. I didn't overthink it. I paid and left. Next stop was the grocery store. I kept it simple. Meat. Fresh vegetables. Wine. The kind of things Mark liked when he was trying to pretend his life was normal I made small talk with the cashier. Smiled. Acted calm. By the time I got home, the sun was already dipping. I cooked carefully. I seasoned properly. I cleaned as I went. The smell filled the kitchen, warm and familiar. I set the table even though I wasn't sure he'd sit. Part of me knew he wouldn't. I did it anyway. After that, I took a long bath. I used the scented shampoo I had bought earlier. It smelled sweet, clean, and soft. I washed my hair twice. Let the water run longer than necessary. I needed the time to think. I needed to feel like I was still in control of my own body, even if other things were slipping. When I got out, I dried slowly and put on the lingerie. I fit the way it was supposed to. I sprayed perfume. lightly, once on my wrist, once behind my ear. I didn't want it too strong. Just enough. I laid back on the bed and waited. When the door finally opened, I heard it before I saw him. His steps were heavy. Tired. Angry. He stopped when he saw me. The surprise crossed his face fast. Not desire. Not relief. Just shock. "Get up," he said. "Get dressed. Get out of my house." I didn't answer. I shifted slightly on the bed, crossed my legs, leaned on one elbow. I watched his face closely, waiting for something to change. Nothing did. "Clara," he said, his voice lower now. "I'm not in the mood for games." I stood up slowly and walked toward him. I reached for his arm. He stepped back. "Don't," he said. I ignored that and touched his chest. "Mark, please. You're angry. I get it. But we can fix this." His eyes started to glow. That was when I knew I had pushed too far. "Leave," he said again. "Before I lose my temper." His claws slid out. Not fully, but enough. His wolf was close. Too close. I wrapped my arms around him anyway. "I'm trying to help you," I said. "I'm trying to calm things down."

He shoved me away. Hard. I stumbled back and hit the edge of the bed. The air left my lungs for a second. "Get the fuck out of my face," he snapped. "Do not touch me again. I straightened, my heart racing. "You're acting like I'm the enemy." "You made me do something against my will," he said. "against Amy. And now I'm standing in front of the council like a criminal." "That wasn't my intention," I said quickly. "I was trying to make things work in our favor." He laughed once, sharp and humorless. "Do you hear yourself? How does ruining her and dragging me into it help anyone?" I swallowed. "If you and I were connected—really connected—things would settle. Daniel would have no choice but to move on." "You tried to force a bond that wasn't yours to touch," he said. "And now Amy's being questioned. Daniel's watching my every move. My name is dirt." I stepped closer again, slower this time. "I did it for us." "There is no us," he said. "Not like that." Silence stretched between us. "I'm going out," he said finally. "When I come back, I want you gone." Wrong I opened my mouth to argue. He didn't give me the chance. The door slammed behind him, the sound echoing through the house. I stood there alone, still dressed in lingerie, the dinner cooling in the kitchen, the perfume starting to feel too strong. My hands

shook. I sank onto the bed and stared at the ceiling. If he had just touched me back. If he had just let it happen. Everything would have been simpler. A pregnancy would have tied him to me. Forced choices. Forced loyalty. Forced silence. Now I had nothing. And the thought burned in my chest as the house stayed quiet around me. I stayed on the bed long after the door slammed. The silence pressed in. Not the calm kind. The kind that made my thoughts circle the same point over and over. I sat up and grabbed my phone. My fingers hovered over Mark's name for a few seconds before I typed. "I'm sorry." I stared at the screen, then deleted it. Too small. Too weak. I typed again. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I was trying to protect us. Please come home so we can talk." I sent it before I could change my mind. The message was delivered. No reply. I waited. A minute. Two. Five. Nothing. I paced the room, phone in my hand, checking the screen every few seconds like it might light up if I stared hard enough. My chest felt tight. Not fear. Panic mixed with anger. I wasn't used to being ignored. I typed again.

Chapter 330 Perfect Opportunity

CLARA

"Mark, please. I have nowhere else to go. You can't just leave me like this." Still nothing. I sank back onto the bed and rubbed my face with both hands. The Southern Alpha's warning echoed in my head. Stay away until I call for you. I had listened. I stayed quiet. I had done what I was told. And now even Mark was slipping out of reach. I sent another message. "I can't do this without you. I'm falling apart." The dots never appeared. My grip on the phone tightened. The house felt smaller by the second. I thought about packing, then realized I didn't even know where I would go. Every door I had leaned on was closing. I typed again, slower this time. "If you don't come back, I don't know what I'll do to myself." My heart was pounding as I sent it. Still nothing. I stood up and walked to the mirror. I barely recognized the woman staring back. My eyes looked sharp, desperate. I told myself this was just to get his attention. Just words. Just enough to pull him back. I sent one last message. "Please. I'm serious. Don't make me be alone tonight. The phone stayed silent in my hand. I dropped onto the couch and stared at the dark screen, waiting for it to vibrate, to ring, to do anything at all. It didn't. And for the first time, I wondered if I had finally pushed too far—and if no one was coming to save me now. Hours later, Mark came back close to midnight. I heard the door before I saw him. The lock turned slowly, like his hand wasn't steady. I stayed where I was, sitting on the couch with the lights dimmed, pretending I hadn't been waiting for hours. He stepped inside and shut the door harder than he meant to. His jacket slipped off one shoulder. His scent hit me immediately—alcohol, stress, anger. His wolf was quiet, dulled, not gone but pushed down. "Mark," I said softly. He looked at me like he'd forgotten I existed. "What are you still doing here?" he asked. His words were slurred, but the edge was still there. "I told you to leave." I stood up slowly. I didn't argue. I didn't remind him of anything he'd said earlier. I walked toward him instead. "You're drunk," I said. "Sit down." "I don't need you telling me what to do." He tried to step past me. He stumbled instead. I caught his arm. That was when I knew. This was my opening. "You can barely stand," I said. "Just sit. I'll get you some water." He didn't pull away. He let me guide him to the couch. His head dropped back, eyes half-closed. He looked tired in a way I hadn't seen before. I went to the kitchen and poured water into a glass. When I came back, he was already leaning sideways, his eyes shut. "Drink," I said, pressing the glass into his hand. He took a few sips, then pushed it away. "I just need to sleep." "Not like this," I said. "You'll wake up sick." He muttered something I couldn't make out. I took his jacket off. Then his shoes. He didn't stop me. His body was heavy, loose. I told myself not to think too much. Thinking made room for guilt. I helped him to the bedroom. He fell onto the bed face-first. I stood there for a second, watching his back rise and fall. This wasn't how I imagined it would happen. But I was

walking away. I turned him over and pulled the covers back. His shirt was damp with sweat. I wiped his face with a towel, slow and careful. "You came home," I whispered. "You chose me."

He didn't answer. I slid in beside him. At some point, he woke enough to pull me closer. His hands moved without thought. His mouth found my shoulder. There was no conversation. No clarity. Just instinct and heat and the fact that he didn't push me away. I let him lead what little he could. I told myself this was what he wanted. By the time we were done, he was asleep again. Deep this time. I lay there staring at the ceiling, listening to his breathing, my mind racing. I didn't feel satisfied. I felt calm. Like I'd tied a knot that couldn't be undone. Morning came too fast. Light crept through the curtains. Mark groaned beside me and rolled onto his back. His hand brushed his head. "Fuck," he muttered. "My head." I stayed still. He sat up slowly and looked around. His eyes landed on me. He froze. "What the hell?" he said. I pulled the sheet up calmly. "You're awake," I said. "Good." He looked down at himself, then back at me. "Why am I naked?" "You came home drunk," I said. "You passed out. I cleaned you up." His brows pulled together. "And... this?" He gestured between us. "You don't remember?" He shook his head once. "No. I don't." I watched his face carefully. Confusion. Not anger yet. Not accusation. "You were a mess," I said. "You could barely stand. You kept saying my name." "That doesn't mean-" "You pulled me to you," I said quietly. "I didn't force anything." That part was true. Not the whole truth, but enough of one. He rubbed his face with both hands. "This shouldn't have happened." "But it did," I said. "And now you're acting like I tricked you." He looked at me sharply. "I didn't say that." "You're thinking about it." Silence stretched between us. He swung his legs off the bed and stood up, unsteady. "I need a shower." "Mark-" "Not now." He disappeared into the bathroom and shut the door. I stayed in bed, staring at the ceiling again. My heart was racing, but I forced myself to breathe slow. I couldn't fall apart now. Not after everything. The water started running. I replayed the night in my head, piece by piece. The door. The stumble. The way he didn't stop me. He came back out wrapped in a towel. "I don't want this to be a thing," he said. "Last night doesn't change anything."