

Broken 341

Chapter 341 Cooperate Sabotage

AMY

I returned to Carter Holdings under my own supervision, but the weight of the last few weeks still lingered. Even with pack monitoring lifted, I could sense the quiet scrutiny from staff, executives, and security. Whispers followed me, subtle but persistent. My role as Executive Liaison Administrator demanded awareness, and after everything, I had to be careful. The morning started normally enough, reviewing reports and approvals, but soon I noticed small irregularities. Contracts were delayed in ways that didn't make sense. Data pipelines were altered, with no explanation. Nothing illegal on the surface, nothing that would draw attention at first glance, but it was organized. Someone was trying to disrupt the company without leaving a trace. I looked at Bella. "Check the approval logs for the last two weeks. Compare them with internal records. Anything unusual, mark it." "I already started," she said, handing me a folder. "Three contracts last week didn't have supervisor reviews, and some subsidiary approvals were rerouted. It's subtle, but it's there." I examined the files. The changes were deliberate, calculated. This wasn't impulsive like Mark or Clara. Whoever did this had a plan and the patience to execute it. "Show me the consultant's audit logs," I said. Bella hesitated. "He's clean. Nothing unusual." "Check everything," I said. "I want acquisition histories, board approvals, every document he touched." Hours passed as we went through files. Every minor delay, every rerouted approval, every unusual log entry formed a pattern. Someone was positioning themselves to weaken the company from within, to bypass me and interfere with my authority. Then I found it—a clause slipped into a recent board motion. If triggered, it could temporarily suspend my authority as Executive Liaison Administrator. The conditions were vague and legal, but the intent was clear. Someone wanted to sideline me. I called the consultant. "This clause. Who inserted it? Why wasn't I notified?" "It's board-approved," he said. "I can't comment on my motivations. Standard procedure." I narrowed my eyes. "I need full access to the communications, the votes, and the drafting history." "Understood," he said, calm and professional. I turned to Bella. "Run a shell company check. See if there's unusual ownership or transfers in subsidiaries I manage." Minutes later, she returned. "Northern Pines Investments has been acquiring stakes quietly in three subsidiaries under your supervision. Nothing illegal yet, but it's deliberate positioning." I exhaled. The threat wasn't immediate theft—it was careful maneuvering to limit my influence, to create opportunities for someone to interfere legally. I kept reviewing documents, cross-referencing contracts and board motions. Every detail reinforced the same conclusion: this was an organized attempt to weaken Carter Holdings from the inside. The consultant called again. "You'll have full access to all requested records. I can provide any cross-verification you need."

I kept my response short. "Good. Make it complete and transparent." Bella asked, "Do you think it's internal or external?" "Could be both," I said. "They understand both corporate and pack dynamics." I spent the afternoon mapping everything out, noting who could benefit from these changes, how authority could be challenged, and which contracts were vulnerable. I had to make sure I didn't miss anything. Finally, I had a full picture of what had been happening. Shell companies, rerouted approvals, altered data—all pointing toward a coordinated effort to interfere with me and my role. I felt steady, in control, even as I noted the scale of the threat. I would handle this. Carter Holdings was my responsibility. My role in the company, my partnership with Daniel, and the integrity of the pack all depended on addressing this properly. I looked at the consultant one more time. Calm and professional,

but now under watch. Whoever was testing the company, I was going to see it through and respond strategically. By the end of the day, every suspicious contract and transaction had been flagged. I would approach the board and Daniel with clear evidence. This wasn't about confrontation yet—it was about preparation. I sat back and reviewed the notes, feeling the work ahead but confident in my plan. Whoever tried to manipulate the company, to manipulate me, would face consequences. I wouldn't let Carter Holdings be undermined. I focused on the files, the documents, and the timeline of events. The situation was clear, and I would act when the time was right. For now, my attention stayed on the work—verifying every detail, confirming every suspicious activity, and making sure no step went untracked. I was in control, and that meant nothing would be left unchecked. I kept my eyes on the consultant as he organized the documents for me. His calm demeanor didn't reassure me—it was almost too precise, too controlled. Something about him felt off, even though nothing concrete had come up yet. "Have you cross-checked the subsidiary acquisition chains?" I asked, keeping my tone professional. "Yes," he said, neatly tapping a folder. "Everything aligns legally. Nothing actionable outside standard corporate procedures." I narrowed my eyes. "Procedures don't explain why contracts were rerouted, approvals delayed, or why a clause was inserted to limit my authority. Someone is positioning themselves to interfere with me specifically. I want full disclosure of every stakeholder involved in recent acquisitions, no matter how minor." He nodded, still calm. "Understood. It will take some time to consolidate everything." I exhaled slowly. Time was something I didn't have much of. Every delay allowed the person- or people—behind this to gain leverage. Daniel trusted me to manage Carter Holdings, and I wouldn't let him down. I had to uncover this quietly, systematically, and make sure nothing slipped through. Bella leaned closer, whispering, "This feels like more than just corporate sabotage." I agreed silently. Whoever was behind this understood both the business and the pack. That meant the threat could reach beyond contracts—it could strike at us personally if I wasn't careful. I leaned back, considering every angle. Whoever was orchestrating this knew our moves almost as well as we did. One mistake, one overlooked detail, and they could destabilize everything Daniel and I had built.

Chapter 342 Protecting Amy

DANIEL

I walked into the private meeting room, aware of the quiet tension. The northern alphas were already seated, their expressions professional but cautious. Each of them held corporate stakes in Carter Holdings, and I knew their loyalty was complicated—not only to the pack but to the business. "Thank you for joining on short notice," I began, keeping my tone even. "We have a matter that requires clarity and discretion." They nodded, their eyes trained on me. I didn't need to elaborate yet. I already knew they had been hearing rumors—whispers of maneuvering against Amy. One of the older alphas spoke first. "Daniel, we've noticed unusual lobbying. Certain board members and external investors have been quietly questioning Amy's influence. Nothing open, nothing overt, but consistent. Someone is positioning themselves to limit her authority." I listened, taking in every word. My wolf stirred beneath the surface. It wasn't the kind of challenge that demanded a fight. This was strategy. Whoever was behind it didn't want chaos. They wanted control. "And you believe this is deliberate," I said. "Not just disagreements among executives?" "Yes," another alpha replied. "The timing, the contracts being flagged, the external inquiries- it's all coordinated. The person doesn't want the company to fail. They want to steer it in a specific direction." I considered the implications. Amy's position as Executive Liaison Administrator had been under scrutiny ever since the video incident. I had defended her publicly, but now I had to protect her position in ways that went beyond words. "My wolf agrees with me," I said.

“This is not force. It’s calculated. Someone is testing our ability to respond.” They nodded, aware of the subtle warning. I could feel the tension shift in the room as I continued. “We need to consolidate our voting power,” I said. “Alpha-backed ownership rights exist for a reason. Carter Holdings is not up for a quiet takeover. Any attempt to undermine Amy will be addressed immediately, with full authority under pack law and corporate bylaws.” I paused, letting the weight of the statement settle. The room was silent, but I could see the understanding on their faces. These alphas weren’t inclined to challenge me, not openly, but they needed guidance. “The company operates under our oversight,” I said. “Board influence can be subtle, but it can’t replace direct authority. Amy’s role is essential. Any attempt to manipulate that, any outside interference—we will act.” I shifted slightly, glancing at each of them. “We’ll need to review all recent motions, vote tallies, and executive proposals. I want a report within twenty-four hours. Any irregularities flagged should be investigated immediately.” A younger alpha spoke up. “Daniel, do you think this is internal only, or is there an external hand guiding it?” I paused. The answer was evident, though I didn’t yet know the full extent. “There is an external presence,” I said. “I’ve noticed it myself. There’s a consultant working with the board. Officially, he’s a compliance consultant. Unofficially, he represents interests that have old pack wealth, connections that predate any of us.” The room stirred, subtle but noticeable. I didn’t need them to panic. They just needed to understand the stakes. “This is someone who has never led a pack,” I continued, “but has influence over many. They control quietly, strategically. Our job is to ensure they do not overstep, and that Amy’s position remains secure.”

One of the older alphas leaned forward. “Are we prepared to confront this openly if necessary?” “Yes,” I said. “Not recklessly, but decisively. Any action taken against Amy that undermines her role or reputation will be met with both corporate and pack authority. Our first step is consolidation, not confrontation. We will know more after reviewing the voting records and recent proposals.” I could feel my wolf’s restraint beneath my skin. It wanted action, wanted to assert dominance, but I held it in check. This was not a matter for raw aggression. Strategy demanded patience. “There’s also the matter of the consultant,” I added. “His presence is unusual. His access is extensive. He has the authority to request records and monitor board activities. That will continue. But we will not allow him to compromise Amy’s authority or the company’s -direction.” I leaned back slightly, observing their reactions. Their loyalty to the pack was clear, but they were cautious around the external influence. They had seen enough corporate maneuvering to know the subtle signs. “We’ll implement background checks and audits,” I said. “All acquisitions, all subsidiary activity, all board votes. Amy oversees this. We will review her work, but the objective is to confirm integrity, not undermine her authority. This will provide transparency and prevent manipulation.” One of them nodded. “It will also show the consultant that we are aware, and we are prepared.” “Exactly,” I said. “Carter Holdings is strong because of our oversight. Amy is an essential part of that strength. Any external player attempting to destabilize her or the company will find that strength uncompromising. It is not an invitation to challenge.” I let the statement hang in the room for a moment, letting the gravity settle. They understood. This was about authority, about protection, about reinforcing the structure that kept both pack and business aligned. “Finally,” I said, “we must be aware that this consultant may have his own agenda. His role is subtle. I do not yet know the full extent, but we will remain vigilant. Observe, report, and verify before taking action. Do not act on assumptions.” I could feel my wolf’s tension as I added, “And remember, anyone who questions Amy’s loyalty or ability again will answer to me personally.” There was a pause, a quiet acknowledgment. My wolf relaxed slightly but remained alert. The consultant’s presence had a distinct energy. It was controlled, neutral, but precise. I could sense him monitoring, calculating. “We’ll need to

track all interactions he has with the board,” I said. “Any requests for information, any inquiries, any irregularities. Nothing should be overlooked. Amy’s position must be protected, and the integrity of Carter Holdings maintained.” One of the alphas raised an eyebrow. “And if he asks for historical acquisitions and executive oversight documents?” “Provide access,” I said. “With oversight. Amy will remain in control of her department. Any external review will be monitored, but we will comply within limits. Transparency is our shield. Manipulation is theirs. We cannot allow the latter to succeed.” detail. I stood, signaling the end of the meeting. “Report within twenty–four hours. Verify every Keep your channels secure. Amy’s position is not negotiable. Carter Holdings is not negotiable. Our oversight will be absolute.”

Chapter 343 Small Inconsistencies

AMY

I was in the office when Daniel finally came in. Not just for a quick check–in, but with the kind of look that meant he had something serious on his mind. I felt it immediately–the air between us shifted. No tension, no walls. Just him and me. He closed the door gently behind him. “Amy,” he said, voice low, careful. “I need to apologize.” I raised an eyebrow. “For what?” “For hesitating,” he admitted. “For letting doubts linger, even for a moment, about your loyalty or your judgment.” I shook my head. “You don’t need to apologize. I understand why you acted the way you did. And I forgive you.” He let out a quiet breath of relief and stepped closer. “I can’t tell you how much that means.” We sat across from each other No interruptions, no distractions. For once, the office felt like a space just for “I want us to be clear,” I said. “No more distance. No more hesitation. You’re Alpha, I’m Luna. CEO and Executive Liaison. We handle Carter Holdings together. And we handle the pack together.” Daniel nodded, leaning back slightly. “I agree. We’ve been through too much to let anything interfere with that. I trust you completely.” The way he said it didn’t leave room for doubt. I felt the tension in my shoulders ease. The past weeks had been hard, but we were finally aligned. I glanced at him carefully. “But Daniel... this isn’t just about us. The consultant, the subtle disruptions we’ve noticed–they’re not targeting you directly.” He frowned slightly. “What do you mean?” “They’re after influence,” I said. “Legacy. Control, pack economics. They’re trying to shift power without a fight, without overt aggression. It’s precise, measured, and almost invisible.” Daniel leaned forward. “And they’ve been doing this under our noses?” “Yes,” I said. “Small inconsistencies, altered approvals, delayed responses. It’s legal. Clean. They’re positioning themselves strategically. Whoever is behind this isn’t reckless–they want authority with exposure. They want control over decision–making and influence over the pack, through Carter Holdings.” Daniel exhaled slowly. “That’s clever. And dangerous.” “I propose we counter it,” I said, leaning in. “Transparency. Exposure. We set a corporate trap. Let them think they’re invisible. Monitor their moves. Document everything. Make every step of theirs visible to the board, the pack, and to our own team. Then we act decisively. We don’t just defend; we take the initiative.” Daniel’s gaze hardened slightly, focused on me. “I like it. Full support. Whatever you need to make it happen, I’m behind you.” I felt a wave of relief. Not just because he trusted me, but because we were aligned again. Alpha and Luna. CEO and Executive Liaison. No more uncertainty. “We’ll need to coordinate with Bella and the internal auditors,” I said. “I want everything monitored. All subsidiaries, all acquisitions, all board decisions. Nothing should slip through the cracks. We document, we verify, and we expose any irregularity at the right moment.” Daniel nodded. “Do it discreetly. We don’t want them realizing we know. If they notice too early, they’ll change tactics.” “I’ve already started,” I said. “Bella flagged a shell firm tied to hostile acquisitions circling some of our subsidiaries. That’s where we begin. We watch, we

record, and then we can isolate the actors responsible.” His expression softened slightly. “I don’t like that someone’s trying to touch the foundation of this company, or you.”

“You don’t have to like it,” I said with a small smile. “You just have to support the plan, and you do. That’s enough.” We sat in silence for a moment, both of us processing. I felt the strain of the last few weeks begin to fade. Not completely gone, but diminished. Daniel’s presence grounded me, and I knew we were on the same side again. “Do you think they expected us to react this quickly?” he asked quietly. “Maybe not,” I said. “They underestimated us. They assumed subtlety alone would be enough. They forgot who we are. And they underestimated how closely we watch each other’s moves.” Daniel smirked slightly. “They’re going to regret underestimating us.” “I don’t want regret,” I said. “I want control. We expose them before they even realize they’ve stepped into the wrong place.” He nodded, eyes steady. “Agreed. And Amy...” He paused, and I waited. “I trust your judgment. In every step of this. You know what to do.” “I know,” I said firmly. “And you do too. We move together, always.” We didn’t need to say more. The plan was simple: monitor, record, and expose. The execution would be precise, just like the threat we were countering. Then my phone buzzed on the desk. I glanced at it and froze. A secure message from the consultant appeared: “You’re impressive, Luna. That’s why you’re the problem.” I stared at the message. The tone was neutral, almost respectful, but the content made the warning clear. He saw me as an obstacle. And he had reason to. I had already noticed the subtle disruptions in the company, and now I knew he was aware I had en through it. I put the phone down slow and look at Daniel. “He knows,” I said quietly. Daniel didn’t flinch. “Good,” he said. “That means we’ve been noticed. Now we control the narrative.”

“Yes,” I said. “And that’s exactly what we’re going to do. We don’t react emotionally. We react strategically.” He leaned forward and placed a hand on mine. “We’re doing this together. Alpha and Luna. CEO and Executive Liaison. No gaps, no hesitation.” I nodded. “Exactly. And he’s going to realize quickly that underestimating me, or us, will only cost him more.” Daniel smirked slightly again, a small shadow of amusement passing over his face. “I like your confidence.” “I have to be confident,” I said. “If I show weakness, that’s where he’ll attack. If we’re consistent, precise, and coordinated, we control the situation. Not him.” We reviewed the immediate steps. I would continue monitoring corporate communications. Bella would provide financial tracking and subsidiary updates. Daniel would use his authority to maintain influence over the board and keep the executives aligned. Every small move would be documented. Every discrepancy would be flagged. “Do you think he’ll try to test us directly?” Daniel asked. “Eventually,” I said. “But he can’t act recklessly. Not yet. And we will be ready when he does.”

Chapter 344 Nostalgic Feelings

AMY

I was still at my desk, reviewing reports, when Daniel came back into the office. He didn’t say anything at first. He just leaned against the doorframe, watching me the way he used to before everything became complicated. “You’ve been working nonstop,” he said finally. I closed the file on my screen. “So have you.” He nodded once. “Come with me.” I frowned slightly. “Where?” “Out,” he said. “Not a meeting. Not a briefing. Just... out.” I studied his face. There was no command in his tone. No Alpha pressure. Just Daniel. That alone made me stand up. “Give me ten minutes,” I said. He smiled, small and careful, like he wasn’t sure he was allowed to. “I’ll wait.” We didn’t take separate cars. That surprised me. He opened the passenger door himself, waited until I was seated, then closed it gently. The drive was quiet at first. The city lights passed by as we moved farther from the business district. He drove

without urgency, one hand on the wheel, the other resting loosely near the console. "I didn't plan this days ago," he said after a while. "It wasn't strategic." I glanced at him. "That's new." He let out a short breath. "I know. But today felt like the wrong day to pretend we're fine when we haven't actually dealt with what happened between us." I didn't answer right away. I didn't need to. He was finally saying the things I'd waited for. We stopped in front of a quiet restaurant tucked away from the main roads. It wasn't flashy. No press. No pack presence. Just a place that felt... normal. Inside, the lighting was soft. We were seated quickly, away from other guests. The waiter recognized Daniel but didn't linger. That alone felt like a small mercy. When we were alone again, Daniel folded his hands on the table. "This is me apologizing," he said. "Formally. Properly." I tilted my head. "Go on."

"I was a dick," he said plainly. "I let fear speak louder than trust. I let my wolf react before my mind did. And I hurt you." I didn't interrupt him. "I know I had reasons," he continued. "I know the situation was complicated. But none of that excuses how alone I made you feel." My fingers tightened slightly around my glass. "You did." "I know," he said. "And I hate that I was the one who caused it." The food arrived, giving us a pause. We thanked the waiter, then sat there for a moment, neither of us touching our plates. "I didn't stop loving you," I said quietly. "Not even when you pulled away." He looked up sharply. "I never stopped either." "Then why did it feel like I lost you?" I asked. He swallowed. "Because I was trying to protect you by standing apart. And that was the worst decision I could have made." I studied his face. There was no defensiveness left. No pride. Just honesty.

"I don't want us to survive this," he said. "I want us to be happy again. Like we were. Before the games. Before the manipulation. Before everything started pressing in on us from all sides." I nodded slowly. "I want that too. But happiness doesn't erase responsibility. We still have a company under threat. A pack watching us. Enemies who are patient." "I know," he said. "This isn't an escape. It's a reminder. Why are we fighting so hard?" We finally started eating. The conversation eased, drifting into smaller things. The food. The city. Memories that didn't hurt to touch anymore. "Do you remember the first time we went out like this?" he asked. I smiled despite myself. "You wore a suit that was too stiff and kept checking your phone." "I was terrified," he admitted. "I kept thinking someone would challenge me or call me back to pack business." "And I thought you'd leave halfway through dinner," I said. "I didn't," he said. "And I wouldn't now." That mattered more than I expected it to. After dinner, we walked outside instead Daniel slowed his steps to match mine, "leading straight back to the car. The night air was cool, steady. "I don't want to lose us again," he said. "You won't," I replied. "Not if we keep talking like this." He nodded. "I'll do better. Not just as Alpha. As your husband." I stopped walking and looked at him fully. "I don't need perfection. I need honesty. Even when it's uncomfortable." "You'll have it," he said. "Every time." We stood there for a moment, close but not rushed. No pack bond flaring. No dominance. Just two people choosing each other again. On the drive home, the weight felt lighter. Not gone. Just manageable. Back at the house, the lights were low. Familiar. Safe. Daniel stopped near the doorway instead of heading inside immediately. "Thank you for coming with me," he said. "Thank you for asking," I replied. He reached for my hand, like he was checking if the bridge between us still held. I laced my fingers with his. It did. Inside, the quiet felt different than it had in days. Not strained. Not heavy. As we moved through the space, I realized something important. The chaos wasn't gone. The threats hadn't disappeared. But we weren't facing them apart anymore. And that made all the difference. Later, as we settled into the night, Daniel's voice was soft but certain. "We'll deal with the consultant. The board. The pack politics. All of it." "Yes," I said. "But us?" he added. "We protect that first." I closed my eyes, finally allowing myself to rest. "Always." And for the first time in a long while, I believed it without fear.

*** I woke up to the sound of movement beside me. I opened my eyes and turned my head slightly. Daniel was already awake, propped on one elbow, watching me like he had nowhere else to be. "You're staring," I said, my voice rough with sleep.

Chapter 345 Husband Or CEO

AMY

He smiled. "You're awake." "Barely," I replied. "What time is it?" "Early enough to ignore meetings for a bit." I shifted onto my back and looked at the ceiling. "That sounds weird coming from you." He leaned down and brushed a light kiss against my forehead. "I already made the call." I turned to him fully. "What call?"

"I told the chef not to prepare breakfast." That got my attention. I pushed myself up on my elbows. "You canceled breakfast?" "Yes." "Daniel," I said slowly, "do you know how much chaos that causes in this house?" He chuckled. "I can handle it." He looked relaxed. No suit. No phone in his hand. Just him, wearing a simple shirt, hair still slightly messy. "I wanted us to do it together," he said. "Cook. Talk. Be... us." Something settled in my chest. "Okay." We got out of bed and changed casually. No rush. No guards hovering. When we walked into the kitchen, it was quiet. The staff had stepped back like Daniel asked. The space felt bigger without all the movement. I leaned against the counter. "So," I said, "what exactly is plan, Alpha?" He opened the fridge and looked inside. "Eggs. Toast. Maybe something simple." "That's your apology meal?" I teased. "It's a start," he replied. I moved beside him and reached for a bowl. "Then at least let me help. You don't get credit if I just watch. He handed me the eggs. "Deal." we had done this a hundred times before. He cracked eggs We moved around each other easily, like carefully, concentrating more than necessary. I noticed. "You're overthinking it," I said. "I don't want to mess it up," he replied. "It's eggs," I said. "Not a merger." He glanced at me. "Everything feels higher risk lately." I softened. "This isn't." That seemed to help. He relaxed a bit. As I whisked the eggs, he set the pan on the stove. Our arms brushed once, then again. Neither of us moved away. "This feels... good," he said quietly. "It does," I agreed. He added butter to the pan and waited for it to melt. I poured the eggs in slowly. "You know," he said, "I missed this more than I realized." "The cooking?" I asked. "No," he replied. "The quiet. The normal moments." I nodded. "So did I." We worked side by side, talking about small things. The garden. A meeting that could wait. A movie we never watching months ago. At one point, he reached past me for the salt, his hand resting briefly on my waist. It wasn't possessive. Just there. I looked up at him. "You're being very touchy for someone handling hot pans." He smiled. "You make me forget where I am." I shook my head but smiled back.

We plated the food together and sat at the kitchen island instead of the dining table. It felt right. "This is actually good," I said after the first bite. He raised an eyebrow. "Actually?" "I had low expectations," I admitted. He laughed. "Rude." We ate slowly. No phones. No inter s "I meant what I said last night," he said between bites. "About wanting us to be happy again." "I know," I replied. "And I believe you." He reached for my hand across the counter. "I don't want to let fear make decisions for me anymore." "Then don't," I said. "We're stronger when we choose each other first." He squeezed my fingers. "Always." After breakfast, we cleaned up together. I washed while he dried. It was simple. Comfortable. "You realize," I said, "this might be the most rebellious thing you've done all week." He smiled. "Skipping meetings or cooking with my wife?" "Both," I replied. When we were done, he leaned back against the counter and pulled me gently toward him. I rested my head against his chest. His heartbeat was steady. "This is what I want to protect," he said softly. "We will," I answered. "Together." For the first time in

days, the house felt like home again. I didn't realize how much I missed routine until it returned without resistance. The day after we cooked together, Daniel and I slipped back into our usual rhythm. Not the cold, distant version we had been stuck in for weeks, but the one that existed before suspicion crept into everything. We woke up early. He reviewed reports at the dining table while I skimmed emails on my tablet, our legs brushing under the wood like it was the most natural thing in the world. No guards hovering unnecessarily. No tension thick in the air. Just us. By the time we arrived at Carter Holdings, the building felt different again. Familiar. The staff greeted me normally—no hesitant pauses, no forced politeness. People looked up when I passed, acknowledged me, and went back to their work. Respect had returned, and not because Daniel stood beside me, but because my position had been restored where it belonged. I spent most of the morning catching up on approvals that had been delayed during the investigation. Procurement contracts. Inter-departmental transfers. External partnerships that required my sign-off as Executive Liaison Administrator. Everything was intact, but someone had tried to slow the flow while I was sidelined. Bella joined me mid-morning with her tablet tucked under her arm. "They didn't break anything," she said quietly once the door was closed. "But they nudged a lot of processes just enough to frustrate departments." "Enough to make it look like inefficiency," I replied. She nodded. "Exactly." I exhaled and leaned back in my chair. "We'll reverse it quietly. No announcements." Bella smiled. "Already started." That was normalcy, too. Trusting the people who had always been competent. Moving forward without theatrics. Daniel checked in around noon, stepping into my office without knocking, like he used to. "Lunch?" he asked. I looked up from my screen. "Are you asking as my husband or my CEO?" He smiled slightly. "Both. But mostly your husband." We ate in the executive dining room, just the two of us.

Chapter 346 Intentional Act

AMY

No security briefings. No council members. He talked about an expansion meeting with the northern subsidiaries, and I told him about the friction points I'd noticed. We didn't avoid the tension surrounding the consultant or the quiet pressure building in the corporate space. We just didn't let it own the conversation. That too felt earned. The days that followed settled into a pattern. Work remained demanding, but manageable. Daniel and I started leaving the office together again, sometimes talking, sometimes just sharing the same quiet space in the car. At home, we cooked more often. Sometimes together. Sometimes separately, but always eating at the same table. One evening, I watched him loosen his tie and lean against the counter while I stirred a pot on the stove. "You're staring," he said. "I'm observing," I replied. "Should I be worried?" "No," I said. "I'm just reminding myself that this version of us still exists." He didn't joke this time. He stepped closer instead. "It never stopped existing," he said. "I just let everything else get louder." I turned off the stove and faced him. "We can't afford that again." "I know." There was no argument. No dramatic reassurance. Just agreement. Later that night, we reviewed documents in bed, shoulders touching. His phone buzzed once. He glanced at it, then set it aside without answering. "Something important?" I asked. "It can wait," he said. That mattered more than he probably realized. Normal life didn't mean the threat disappeared. It meant we learned how to live without letting it consume. By the end of the week, I noticed the consultant again. He wasn't intrusive. He attended meetings quietly, took notes, and asked questions that sounded harmless. Financial structures. Historical acquisitions. Governance procedures. The kind of curiosity that fit his title. Still, I felt it. Not fear. Awareness. During a board subcommittee meeting, I caught him watching me—not openly, not challengingly. Just assessing. Like someone deciding how much pressure a structure

could take before shifting. After the meeting, Daniel walked me back to my office. “He’s careful.” Daniel said. “He’s patient,” I corrected. Daniel nodded. “That worries me more.” “It should,” I said. “But patience cuts both ways.” That evening, we attended a small pack gathering at the northern estate. Nothing formal. Just alphas and their families. No politics, no council agendas. Daniel introduced me simply as his mate, not his Luna, not his executive. It felt intentional. Later, as we stood near the edge of the gathering, he leaned closer. “Are you okay?” he asked quietly. “I am,” I said. “Being here helps.” “I thought you might feel watched.” “I am,” I said honestly. “But not threatened.” That earned me a look of quiet pride from him. When we returned home, we didn’t talk about work. We watched something mindless on the screen and shared a bottle of wine we’d been saving for no reason at all. At some point, Daniel reached for my hand and laced our fingers together without thinking. That was the point. No strategy. No damage control. Just connection.

The next morning, we woke almost at the same time. Daniel glanced at the clock and sighed. “I’ll cancel breakfast,” he said. I frowned. “Cancel?” “With the chef,” he clarified. “I want us to do it.” I raised an eyebrow. “Are you cooking again?” “With supervision,” he said. We moved around the kitchen together, bumping into each other, laughing quietly when things went slightly wrong. He cracked eggs badly. I corrected him without mocking. He burned toast and tried to hide it. I pretended not to notice. “You’re enjoying this too much,” he said. “I’m enjoying you not running a boardroom for once,” I replied. We ate standing at the counter, talking about nothing important. The weather. A book I’d started reading. A stupid comment one of the department heads made during a meeting. It felt ordinary. And that was the point. Normal life didn’t erase the threat. It reminded us why we were fighting it in the first place. Later that day, as I returned to my office, a secure notification appeared on my tablet. Internal system. Restricted channel. I opened it. It was brief. Polite. And deliberate. “You’re adapting well,” the message read. “That usually means you’re ready for the next phase.” I didn’t reply. Instead, I locked my screen, stood, and walked toward Daniel’s office. Normal life didn’t mean complacency. It meant readiness. I knocked once before stepping into Daniel’s office. He was standing near the window, jacket already on, phone in his hand. He turned the moment he sensed me “You felt it too,” he said. “I got a message,” I replied. His jaw tightened slightly. “So did I.” That was how our normal life worked now. No panic. No raised voices. Just confirmation. We didn’t sit. Sitting made things feel heavier than they needed to be. “He’s pushing,” Daniel said. “Not openly. He wants to see how we respond.” “I’m not responding yet,” I said. “That’s the response.” Daniel studied me for a moment, then nodded. “Good.” We left the office together that evening like we had every day that week. Same route. Same quiet exchange with security. Same ride home. Anyone watching would have seen stability. Routine. A company and a couple that had recovered. That was intentional. At home, I changed out of my work clothes and tied my hair back while Daniel loosened his cuffs and rolled up his sleeves. “Are you cooking or am I?” he asked. “You owe me after burning toast,” I said. He smiled faintly. “Fair.” We worked around each other easily. No crowding. No awkward pauses. He washed vegetables while I handled the pan. He reached past me once and brushed my arm without thinking. I didn’t pull away. “You’re quiet,” he said. “I’m thinking.” “About him.” “Yes.” Daniel didn’t push. He knew better than that. After dinner, we sat in the living room with our laptops open, reviewing different things. He focused on regional reports. I scanned internal memos that Bella had flagged.

Chapter 347 Agreement

AMY

There were more inconsistencies. Still legal. Still subtle. Still designed to move influence rather than money. I saved copies. Tagged them. Said nothing. When Daniel closed his laptop, it was already late. "Come to bed," he said. "You'll see it clearer in the morning." I followed him without arguing. We slept well. That mattered more than either of us admitted. The next few days passed the same way. Work. Home. Quiet coordination. The consultant remained present but distant. Always polite. Always professional. Always watching. I finally requested a brief meeting with him. Nothing formal. No boardroom. Just my office. He arrived on time and took the seat across from me without hesitation. "You wanted to see me, Mrs. Carter," he said. files. "Yes," I replied. "I noticed you've been requesting access to historical acquisition files." He nodded. "Part of my review." "You'll find them clean," I said. "They've been audited repeatedly." "I don't doubt that." "Then what are you looking for?" I asked. He smiled slightly. "Patterns." I didn't react. "You oversee those records personally," he continued. "That level of consistency is rare." "I'm good at my job," I said. "I've noticed." There it was. Respect without warmth. Interest without friendliness. "You should be careful," I said calmly. "Carter Holdings doesn't respond well to internal pressure." "I'm not applying pressure," he replied. "I'm observing." I leaned back in my chair. "Then observe quietly." He stood. "Of course." When he left, Bella stepped in moments later. "He's not hiding it anymore," she said. "No," I agreed. "He doesn't need to." That night, Daniel and I talked openly again. No coded language. No half-truths. "He's not after you," Daniel said. "He's after what you represent." "I know," I replied. "He wants access without confrontation." Daniel exhaled slowly. "That won't happen." "It doesn't have to," I said. "We let him think it might." He looked at me carefully. "You're setting a trap. "I'm setting a process," I corrected. "He'll step into it himself." Daniel reached for my hand. "I trust you." That was all I needed. Normal life continued. Meetings. Meals. Mornings together. Even laughter, sometimes. But underneath it all, I was preparing. Quietly aligning departments. Reinforcing reporting chains. Making sure that if influence shifted, it would be visible. One evening, Daniel surprised me again. "No work tonight," he said, taking my tablet from my hands. "Daniel-" "No," he repeated gently. "Just us." We went out. Nothing extravagant. A small restaurant we used to visit before everything got complicated. No guards inside. Just enough distance to feel human. He reached across the table and took my hand. "I meant what I said before," he told me. "About wanting us back." "I know," I said. "And I'm not letting go again."

"I won't let you," I replied. When we returned home, I felt lighter than I had in weeks. That feeling didn't last long. The next morning, a flagged document appeared in my queue. Board-level. Pre-approved motion. Quietly inserted. I read it once.

Then again. Then I closed my eyes. The clause was clean. Legal. Precise. If triggered, it would temporarily reassign executive liaison oversight "pending operational review." Me. I stood slowly and walked to Daniel's office without my tablet this time. He knew something was wrong the moment he saw my face. "They've moved," I said. He stood. "How far?"

"Far enough." I handed him the document. He read it once. Then twice. "They think they're subtle," he said. "They are," I replied. "That's the problem." Daniel looked at me steadily. "What do you want to do?" I met his gaze without hesitation. "We let them try." His expression didn't change. "And then?" "Then we end it." No security briefings. No council members. He talked about an expansion meeting with the northern subsidiaries, and I told him about the friction points I'd noticed. We didn't avoid the tension surrounding the consultant or the quiet pressure building in the corporate space. We just didn't let it own the conversation. That, too, felt earned. The days that followed settled into a pattern. Work remained demanding, but manageable. Daniel and I started leaving the office together again, sometimes

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Chapter 348 Connecting Back

AMY

Later, as we stood near the edge of the gathering, he leaned closer. "Are you okay?" he asked quietly. "I am," I said. "Being here helps." "I thought you might feel watched." "I am," I said honestly. "But not threatened." That earned me a look of pride from him. When we returned home, we didn't talk about work. We watched something mindless on the screen and shared a bottle of wine we'd been saving for no reason at all. At some point, Daniel reached for my hand and laced our fingers together without thinking. That was the point. No strategy. No damage control. Just connection. The next morning, we woke almost at the same time. Daniel glanced at the clock and sighed. "I'll cancel breakfast," he said. I frowned. "Cancel?" "With the chef," he clarified. "I want us to do it." I raised an eyebrow. "Are you cooking again?" "With supervision," he said. We moved around the kitchen together, bumping into each other, laughing quietly when things went slightly wrong. He cracked eggs badly. I corrected him without mocking. He burned toast and tried to hide it. I pretended not to notice. "You're enjoying this too much," he said. "I'm enjoying you not running a boardroom for once," I replied. We ate standing at the counter, talking about nothing important. The weather. A book I'd started reading. A stupid comment one of the department heads made during a meeting. It felt ordinary. And that was the point. Normal life didn't erase the threat. It reminded us why we were fighting it in the first place. Later that day, as I returned to my office, a secure notification appeared on my tablet. Internal system. Restricted channel. I opened it. It was brief. Polite. "You're adapting well," the message read. "That usually means you're ready for the next phase." I didn't reply. Instead, I locked my screen, stood, and walked toward Daniel's office. Normal life didn't mean complacency. It meant readiness. I knocked once before stepping into Daniel's office. He was standing near the window, jacket already on, phone in his hand. He turned the moment he sensed me. "You felt it too," he said. "I got a message," I replied. His jaw tightened slightly. "So did I." That was how our normal life worked now. No panic. No raised voices. Just confirmation. We

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Chapter 349 He Is Coming Back

CLARA

I woke up without the sharp pressure in my chest for the first time in days. The nurse noticed it before I did. She said my vitals were stable, that my body had finally stopped fighting itself. I nodded and let her talk. I had learned that silence made people explain more. By noon, the doctor came in with a clipboard and a neutral smile. "You're cleared to go home," he said. "There's no street. No exertion. Follow-up in a week." I almost laughed. Stress was a luxury I didn't have the option to avoid. Mark arrived not long after. He stood by the door while I signed the discharge papers, his arms crossed, his face tired. He hadn't shaved. His shirt smelled faintly of coffee and something sharper. "You ready?" he asked. "Yes," I said. He didn't argue. He took the bag with my medication, held the door, and stayed close as we walked out. He didn't touch me unless he had to. That was new. The drive home was quiet. Not uncomfortable, just careful. He kept both hands on the wheel. I watched the road pass and tried to decide what version of him I was getting today. When we got home, he helped me inside and set my bag on the couch. "I'll make soup," he said. "Doctor's orders." I raised an eyebrow. "You cook now?" He shrugged. "I can follow instructions." He moved around the kitchen like he'd done it before. Not gracefully, but with intent. He checked labels. Set timers. Asked once if I was cold and brought me a blanket before I answered. I didn't thank him. I didn't want to turn it into something sentimental. He didn't seem to expect it anyway. I sat on the couch and let my body rest. For the first time in a long while, I wasn't planning three steps ahead. I was just there. After we ate, I took my medication and lay down. Mark sat in the chair across from me, scrolling on his phone, glancing up every few minutes like he was counting breaths. "You don't have to babysit," I said. "I know," he replied. "I'm choosing to." That should have meant something. I didn't let it. Later that evening, my phone rang. The number wasn't saved. I knew who it was anyway. I answered without speaking. "I heard you were discharged." Elias said. My stomach tightened. "Hospitals talk." "They do," he agreed. "I'll be in the area in a few days." I sat up slightly. "I don't think that's a good idea." "That wasn't a question," he said. I closed my eyes. "I don't want to be seen with you." "You don't get to want things right now," he replied calmly. "We're past that?" I lowered my voice. "I told you before, I don't want attention." "You already have it," Elias said. "Whether you like it or not." I swallowed. "Why are you calling now?" "Because you're useful again." he said. "And because my time isn't mine? That wasn't a threat. It was a statement." "I'll be careful," I said. "You'll be available," he corrected. "Those aren't the same." The line went dead. I stared at my phone for a long moment before setting it down. Mark looked up from his chair. "Who was that?" "A friend," I said.

He studied my face. "Didn't sound like one." "I didn't say he was kind." Mark stood and walked closer. "Is this about the mess we're already in?" I hesitated. "It's adjacent." He sighed and rubbed his face. "Clara, I'm tired of surprises."

"So am I," I said. He looked like he wanted to push. He didn't. He nodded once and stepped back. That night, I couldn't sleep. My body was calm, but my mind wasn't. Elias coming back into my space meant things were moving again. Whether I liked it or not. I didn't trust him. I never had. But trust wasn't the currency here. Leverage was. If his plans hurt Amy, then maybe this all had a point. I told myself that over and over until it stopped sounding forced. The next morning, Mark made breakfast. Toast and eggs. Simple. "You don't have to go to work today," he said. "I know." "Stay home," he said. "Rest." I nodded. "I will." He left after that, pausing at the door like he wanted to say something else. He didn't. Once I was alone, I walked through the house slowly. Everything felt too quiet. Too normal. I picked up my phone and opened my messages. No new ones. Elias didn't follow up. He never did. He liked leaving things unresolved. I sat by the window and thought about Amy. About her walking through offices with her head high. About Daniel standing beside her. About how the world kept bending in her favor no

matter what I tried. I didn't want chaos. I wanted balance. I wanted her to feel what it was like to lose control. If working with Elias meant that happened, then I would endure him. Not because I trusted him. Because I didn't have another way forward. When Mark came home that evening, he brought groceries and asked how I was feeling. He listened to the answer. He didn't rush me. He stayed. I let him. But in the back of my mind, I counted days. Elias was coming. And whether I liked it or not, I would. I knew Elias would not give me much notice. That was how things worked with him now. No preparation. No space to think. Just movement, decisions made somewhere above my head, and the expectation that I would fall in line. A call came early in the morning. "We're meeting today," he said. "Get dressed. Someone will pick you up." I sat up in bed, my pulse already quickening. "Meeting who?" "The Southern Alpha," Elias replied. "In person." My fingers tightened around the phone. "You could have said that first," I said. "It wouldn't have changed anything." The line went dead.

Chapter 350 The Wrong Step

CLARA

I stayed there for a few seconds, staring at the wall. My chest felt tight, but not from illness this time. From awareness. From the knowledge that whatever was happening was moving past the point where I could pretend I was only reacting. Mark was already gone for the day. He had been careful with me since the hospital, attentive in a way that felt deliberate, almost guilty. I didn't question it. I needed the stability. Or at least the illusion of it. I showered, dressed simply, and tied my hair back. I didn't want to look weak. I didn't want to look eager either. Somewhere in between was safer. The car arrived exactly when Elias said it would. The drive was quiet. Too quiet. The driver didn't speak, didn't look at me longer than necessary. That told me enough about whose authority this was under. When we stopped, I recognized the place immediately. Southern territory always felt different. Not hostile. Controlled. Everything was measured. Every structure placed with intent. Power didn't shout here. It waited. Elias was already there. He stood near the entrance, hands in his pockets, dressed neatly, looking nothing like the man who had once vanished for weeks and returned changed. He glanced at me, his expression unreadable. "You look better," he said. "I am," I replied. "Physically." He nodded once. "That will have to be enough." We walked inside together. The meeting room was large but not extravagant. Clean lines. Dark wood. No unnecessary decoration. The Southern Alpha sat at the head of the table, his posture relaxed, his presence anything but. I felt it immediately. The pressure. The awareness that he was watching everything, even before his eyes settled on me. "Clara," he said calmly. I inclined my head. "Alpha." His gaze lingered for a second longer than it needed to. Not warmth. Not hostility either. Assessment. "You've recovered," he said. "Yes." "Good," he replied. "You'll need your strength." Elias took a seat to my left. I stayed standing until the Southern Alpha gestured for me to sit. Even then. I chose my movements carefully. "This arrangement," the Alpha began, "requires clarity. Elias has explained your previous role. I kept my face neutral. "And your expectations?" A corner of his mouth lifted. "Straightforward. You follow instructions. You do not improvise without approval. You do not act emotionally." That last part was intentional. I knew it. "I can do that," I said. "I'm sure you believe you can," he replied. Before I could respond, the door opened. Selene walked in. I didn't need to look at her directly to feel it. The shift in the room. The tension. Her steps stopped when she saw me. Her eyes moved from Elias to me and then to her father. "What is she doing here?" Selene asked. The Southern Alpha didn't look at her right away. "This is not your meeting." Selene's jaw tightened. "You told me I was not needed. And yet she is?" I finally turned toward her. She looked exactly as she always did. Controlled. Perfect posture. Anger carefully held back, but present all the same. I smiled. Not because I

wanted to provoke her. Because I couldn't stop myself. There had been a time when Selene treated me like I was nothing. Like I was an inconvenience she tolerated because she had to. Seeing that balance shift, even slightly, felt like reclaiming something I had lost. Her gaze snapped to me. "You think this is funny?"

"No," I said lightly. "I think it's interesting." "That's enough," the Southern Alpha said. Selene looked at him. "You would rather work with her than with me?" He met her stare without flinching. "Right now, yes." The silence that followed was heavy. I watched Selene's hands curl into fists. She didn't look at me again. That hurt more than any insult would have. "This meeting is about logistics," the Alpha continued. "Not family grievances." Family. The word landed in my chest in a strange way. I was his daughter. Biologically. A fact I had learned too late to matter in the ways people imagined. He hadn't raised me. Hadn't protected me. Hadn't even acknowledged me until it was convenient. Selene had grown up with him. Under his name. His authority. And now she stood here, watching him choose me for something important. The irony wasn't lost on any of us. "Clara will assist Elias," the Alpha said. "Her role will be limited but necessary." Selene let out a sharp breath. "So this is it. You replace me." "I did not replace you," he said calmly. "You removed yourself." Her eyes flashed. "By following your orders." "By questioning them," he corrected. The room felt smaller. Elias remained silent. That told me more than words ever could. He was here to observe, not intervene. The Southern Alpha stood. "This conversation is over." Selene looked like she wanted to argue. Instead, she turned sharply and walked out. The door closed behind her. I exhaled slowly. The Alpha looked at me again. "Do not mistake this for favor." "I won't," I said. "Good," he replied. "Because this path does not protect anyone." Elias stood. "We understand." As we left the room, I felt the weight of what had just happened settle fully. Selene would not forget this. And neither would I. Whatever came next, there was no pretending I was on the sidelines anymore. I did not sleep much that night. I lay on the edge of the bed long after Mark's breathing evened out, staring at the ceiling, listening to the quiet sounds of the house. The place still did not feel like mine. It never had. I had moved in because I had nowhere else to go, and now I stayed because leaving would mean admitting how little control I actually had. That truth settled heavy in my chest. For the first time in a long while, I understood something clearly. I was no longer the one shaping events. I was being moved. Watched. Measured. And if I made the wrong step, I would not get a second chance.