

Broken 361

Chapter 361 Another Alpha

SELENE

I moved differently after that decision settled in me. The Southern estate woke early, but I had learned its rhythm. Guards rotated at fixed intervals. Patrol logs were updated before dawn. Elias preferred efficiency; my father preferred control. Between the two of them, patterns formed. Patterns always told the truth before people did. I waited until my father left for the inner council chambers before I made my first move. I didn't contact Daniel. That would have been reckless and obvious. Instead, I reached out to someone I knew stood close enough to him to matter but far enough not to raise alarms. Rowan Hale. He had once served as a border coordinator between the North and South, back when cooperation still existed on paper. He was Northern by loyalty, neutral by history, and careful by nature. The kind of man who survived political storms by standing still and watching. I sent a single message through an old encrypted channel we'd used years ago. I have information about the rogue movements. It involves Southern patrol manipulation. If you want proof, respond with a location. The reply came an hour later. You shouldn't be using this channel. That was his way of saying he was listening. I sent coordinates for a supply route inspection site near the western ridge. Officially abandoned. Quiet enough to talk. While I waited, I gathered what I could. Accessing patrol records wasn't difficult. Elias trusted systems more than people. He assumed numbers couldn't lie if formatted cleanly enough. I pulled movement logs, cross-checked timestamps, compared them to incident reports from the Northern border that had been shared through council briefings. They didn't align. Southern patrols were listed as having passed through certain corridors hours before rogue attacks occurred. Clean entries. No delays. No abnormalities. But scent maps told a different story. Wolves didn't move in straight lines, no matter how disciplined they were. Yet the reports showed uniform spacing, repeated routes, predictable timing. Someone was staging a presence. I saved copies. External drives. Physical backups. Redundancy mattered. Then I followed Elias. He didn't notice me. He rarely did unless he wanted to. He moved through the estate like he owned it, issuing quiet instructions, receiving nods instead of questions. Guards deferred to him even when my father was present. That alone told me how much authority had already shifted. I listened from behind a half-closed door as he spoke with two patrol leaders. "Reduce visible numbers along the northern-facing routes," Elias said calmly. "Rotate in smaller units. Make it look like resource strain." One of them hesitated. "Sir, that leaves gaps." Elias didn't raise his voice. "Temporary gaps create reactions. Reactions give us data." "And the civilians near the woods?" the other asked. Elias paused just long enough to acknowledge the question. "They are collateral to a larger correction." I stepped back before I was seen. My chest felt tight, but my thoughts were clear. This wasn't incompetence. It was design. By the time I reached the inspection site, Rowan was already there. He leaned against his vehicle, arms crossed, eyes sharp. "You shouldn't be here," he said. "Neither should you," I replied. He studied me for a moment, "You're Southern Alpha's daughter." "Yes." "And you're contacting me instead of your father." "Yes." That earned a long look. "Talk," he said. I handed him the data drives. "Southern patrol movements are being altered. Reports are falsified to show presence where there is none. Rogues are being guided into Northern gaps created on purpose." He plugged one drive into a secure tablet and skimmed. His jaw tightened. "This isn't random," he said. "No." "Elias?" "Yes." "And your father?" I hesitated. "He knows something is happening. I don't know how much he understands." Rowan exhaled slowly. "If this is accurate, Northern civilians are being

exposed to apply pressure on Daniel.” “That’s the intent.” He looked at me again. “Why are you telling me?” “Because if I tell Daniel directly, it becomes personal. This needs to be strategic.” He nodded once. “You’re choosing sides.” “I’m choosing consequences,” I said. When I returned to the estate, Clara was waiting. She stood in the east corridor, arms folded, expression composed in that way she used when she wanted to appear unbothered. It didn’t fool me anymore. “You’ve been busy,” she said. “So have you,” I replied. She smiled faintly. “Careful. That tone makes people nervous.” “I’m not talking to people. I’m talking to you.” Her eyes narrowed slightly. “About what?” “About your visit to Amy. About your meetings with Elias. About how often your access aligns with new information leaks.” She laughed softly. “You think I’m running this?” “I think you think you are,” I said. “But you’re not.” That wiped the smile away. “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said. “I know enough,” I replied. “You’re being positioned. Access without authority. Visibility without control. If this collapses, it won’t be Elias who takes the fall.” Her jaw tightened. “You’re jealous.” “No,” I said calmly. “I’m warning you.” She stepped closer. “You’re assuming I don’t know what I’m doing.” “I’m assuming you don’t know how little Elias values you,” I said. Silence stretched between us. “You think you’re better than me,” she said finally. “I think you’re useful to people who won’t protect you,” I replied. She turned away first. That night, I sat alone in my room and drafted the final message. No names. No signatures. Just verified data, patterns, and a warning. The rogue attacks are being guided. Southern patrols are creating controlled gaps. This is pressure, not chaos. Watch the western ridge. Watch the people you think are neutral. I routed it through three dead channels and one Northern relay node. When I sent it, my hands were steady. I knew what it meant. If discovered, I would lose my father’s protection. I would lose status. I might lose my place entirely. But silence would cost lives. As I shut down the terminal, my wolf stirred, not with fear, but resolve.

Chapter 362

I didn’t receive the warning as a confession or a plea. It came as fragments—data points, patrol gaps, timestamps that didn’t line up. No names attached. No emotion layered into it. That alone told me it came from someone who understood how dangerous this had become. I sat in my office at Carter Holdings when the packet arrived. Amy was in the adjoining conference room, finalizing supply approvals for Northern clinics affected by the border unrest. The timing wasn’t lost on me. Nothing ever was anymore. I read the report twice, then a third time slower. Southern patrol movements. Controlled gaps. Rogue coordination. Promises of land. I closed the file and leaned back. This confirmed what my instincts had been pushing at me for days. The attacks weren’t meant to wipe out border settlements. They were meant to force me to react badly. I stood and walked into the conference room. “Amy,” I said, keeping my voice level. “I need you to lock down discretionary spending tied to border logistics. Quietly.” She looked up from her tablet. “Are we escalating?” “No,” I replied. “We’re preparing.” She nodded once. “I’ll reroute approvals through my office only.” “That’s what I need,” I said. “And if anyone from the South requests emergency cooperation, you delay. No refusals. Just delays.” Her eyes sharpened. “Understood.” I left the building within the hour and shifted as soon as I cleared the city limits. My wolf took over easily. It had been waiting. At the Northern border, the damage was visible but contained. Burned fencing. Broken doors. People shaken but alive. My patrols had done their jobs even before I arrived, but my presence mattered. The Alpha showing up always did. I addressed the settlement leaders first. “You stay inside the perimeter tonight,” I told them. “My wolves will handle the rest.” One of the men hesitated. “They keep coming back.” “They won’t tonight,” I said. That wasn’t bravado. It was planned. I gathered my pack leaders near the treeline. Maps were spread across the

hood of a patrol vehicle. "We're not scattering," I said. "No wide hunts. No chasing." Kara frowned. "They're hitting multiple points." "On purpose," I replied. "They want us stretched." I tapped a location on the map. "We form a narrowing corridor here and here. Let them think they're slipping through." "And when they do?" Rowan asked. "We close it," I said. "Alive." That earned a few looks. "Alive?" someone repeated. "I want leaders breathing," I said. "Dead wolves don't talk." The first engagement happened just after dusk. Exactly where the report said it would. The rogues moved in groups of five. Tight. Disciplined. Not starving. Not desperate. That alone told me enough. We let the first wave pass the outer line. My wolf paced but held. When I gave the signal, we closed the corridor from both sides. No chaos. No unnecessary force. One tried to break through toward the woods. I intercepted him and took him down hard enough to stun but not break bones. "Enough," I growled, shifting back as my pack secured the others. They were bound and separated before fear could turn them reckless. I questioned the first one myself. "Who paid you?" I asked. He spat blood and laughed weakly. "Didn't say paid us. Said promised." "Promised what?"

"Land," he replied. "North Park edges. Said once the lines moved, we'd have space." "Who said that?" "A Southern broker," he answered. "Didn't give a name. Didn't need to." "Who guided you here?" I pressed. "Southern patrol routes," he said. "Cleared paths. Told us where you'd be slow." That settled it. By morning, we had three leaders contained and a dozen statements that all matched. Payments routed through shell channels. Instructions delivered through intermediaries. No direct signatures. Clean enough to deny. Dirty enough to destroy trust. I returned to headquarters before dawn. My elders were already waiting. "This confirms proxy use," one of them said after reviewing the reports. "Old Southern tactic." "They want you to strike openly," another added. "Make an example." I shook my head. "They want me to overstep." Silence followed. "If I retaliate directly," I continued, "I become the aggressor. If I declare war without public proof, I lose legitimacy." "So what do you do?" Kara asked. I looked at the map again. "I tighten the board." Over the next two days, we reinforced civilian protections and publicly announced humanitarian patrols only. No mention of the captured rogues. No accusations. Just stability. Behind the scenes, I moved quietly. Intelligence teams expanded. Supply chains hardened. Amy received more authority internally, not less. If they were attacking my economy alongside my territory, I wouldn't leave either exposed. Then I received confirmation from a secondary source. Southern influence had been detected in scent trails near the western ridge. A mark I recognized. Not official. But known. That was when it clicked fully. They didn't want me dead. They wanted me desperate. They wanted me to lash out, violate accords, claim emergency powers too broadly. They wanted other packs to question my restraint and my control. I called a private meeting with my inner circle. "We continue as planned," I said. "No escalation. No declarations." "And if the South pushes harder?" Rowan asked. "Then we document everything," I replied. "And we let them make the first undeniable move." As the meeting broke, my wolf stirred again. Not restless this time. Focused. This wasn't about surviving an attack anymore. It was about staying inside the lines while my enemies tried to force me outside them. If I lost legitimacy, I lost everything. So I would not move when they expected. I would move when they couldn't stop me. I stood alone after they left, listening to the quiet of the building settle back in. Every move from now on would be measured. Every response would be deliberate. They thought pressure would make me careless. They were wrong. I would let them tighten the trap themselves, step by step, until even denial stopped working.

Chapter 363 Disappearing

AMY

I woke before dawn, not because something was wrong, but because my body hadn't caught up with the silence yet. The room was still dark, the curtains barely letting in the early light. Daniel lay beside me, on his back, one arm resting where it always did. His breathing was steady, even, but I knew him too well. He was awake. I didn't say anything. I just lay there, listening to the space between us. Silence used to be normal. Now it felt rare, almost fragile. For weeks, every waking moment had been filled with decisions, voices, problems that didn't wait their turn. Lying there without urgency felt unfamiliar, but not unwelcome. Daniel shifted slightly, then turned his head toward me. His eyes were open. "You're up early," he said quietly. "So are you," I replied. He gave a small nod, accepting that there was no point pretending. For a while, we stayed like that, neither of us reaching for the other, neither pulling away. After a moment, he spoke again. "Let's leave today." I turned my head to look at him. "Leave?" "For the day," he said. "Just us. No guards. No meetings. No pack visits." My first instinct kicked in immediately. My mind started listing reasons why it wasn't practical. Security risks. Missed calls. Responsibilities that didn't pause just because we wanted them to. I felt the tension build in my chest before I stopped myself. I knew that reflex. I'd been living inside it for too long. Daniel watched my face carefully. He didn't interrupt. He didn't argue. "I don't mean running away," he added. "Just being gone." I exhaled slowly. "We can't just disappear." "We can," he said. "For a few hours." I looked at the ceiling, then back at him. "No entourage?" "No entourage." "No council updates?" "They'll survive." I hesitated, then nodded. "Okay." He didn't smile, not fully. But some of the tension left his shoulders. We left just after sunrise. No convoy. No waiting staff. Daniel drove, something he rarely did anymore. I sat beside him, watching the road pass by, noticing how strange it felt not to be surrounded by movement and noise. For a while, neither of us spoke. "I'm sorry," Daniel said eventually, his eyes still on the road. It wasn't dramatic. It wasn't rehearsed. I didn't answer right away. "I know I've said it before," he continued, "but I needed to say it without explaining it." That caught my attention. I turned toward him. "Without explaining it how?" "Without defending myself," he said. "Without trying to justify why I hesitated." I folded my hands in my lap. "That hesitation mattered." "I know." "It wasn't about whether you believed me," I said. "It was about knowing you might not." He nodded once. "I understand that now." I let the silence sit between us again. It wasn't uncomfortable, just heavy in a way that felt honest. We stopped somewhere small and quiet to eat. Nothing private or exclusive. Just a place where no one stared and no one whispered. We sat across from each other, the table between us cluttered with simple dishes. "This feels strange," I said. "Good strange?" he asked,

"Necessarily strange." He smiled faintly at that. I caught him watching me when he thought I wasn't paying attention. Not in the way people watch someone they need something from, but the way he used to look at me when our lives hadn't become so layered. "What?" I asked. "Nothing," he said. "I missed this."

"So did I." After we ate, we walked. Not far. Just enough to stretch our legs and exist without purpose. We didn't hold hands at first. Our shoulders brushed now and then, close enough to remind me that he was there. "I don't want us to turn into something that only works on paper," Daniel said quietly. I glanced at him. "We're already close to that." "I know," he replied. "That's why I'm trying to fix it before it becomes permanent." I stopped walking and turned to face him. "This can't just be about today." "It isn't," he said immediately. "I want time. Real time. Scheduled time that can't be overridden." I raised an eyebrow. "You, asking for structure?" He gave a brief, humorless laugh. "Apparently I need it." I considered that. "And when something urgent comes up?" "Then it waits," he said. "Or someone else handles it." I studied his face, searching for hesitation. There was none. "Okay," I said. "But it goes both

ways.” “I wouldn’t have suggested it otherwise.” We started walking again. By the time we returned to the estate, the day felt fuller than it should have, given how little we’d actually done. That surprised me. Later that evening, we sat together in the living room, not working, not planning. Just there. Daniel reached for my hand, slow enough that I could pull away if I wanted to. I didn’t. “I don’t want to lose us,” he said. “You almost did,” I replied honestly. He didn’t flinch. “I know.” I leaned back against the couch, his arm around me. It wasn’t dramatic or overwhelming. It felt earned. Love wasn’t gone. It had just been crowded out. And for the first time in a while, it felt like we were making space for it again. We stayed like that for a long time. No phones. No interruptions. The house felt different when it wasn’t being used as a command center. I realized how often I’d forgotten that this place was also our home. “I should have protected you better,” Daniel said after a while. “Not just as my Luna. As my wife.” I didn’t look at him right away. “I don’t need protection from the world,” I said. “I need to know you won’t doubt me when the world gets loud.” He tightened his arm slightly, not possessive, just present. “I won’t.” I believed him. Not because of the words alone, but because of the effort he was making now. He was here. Fully. We talked about small things after that. Things that had nothing to do with power or strategy. Meals we missed. Places we wanted to visit but never did. It felt strange how easily those conversations returned once we allowed them to.

Chapter 364 Taking Back

DANIEL

I woke up before the alarm, the way I usually did, but this time my first thought wasn’t borders or reports or meetings. It was quiet. The house was still. No guards moving through the halls. No aides waiting outside the door. Just the steady rhythm of Amy’s breathing beside me. I lay there for a minute, staring at the ceiling, and made a decision that felt heavier than most orders I gave. I wasn’t going to lead today. Not the pack. Not the company. Just this house. I slid out of bed carefully and pulled on a shirt. When I stepped into the corridor, one of the guards straightened immediately. “Morning, Alpha.” “Morning,” I said. “Stand down for the morning. All staff. I’ll call when I need anyone.” He hesitated. Just for a second. “Is everything alright?” “It is,” I said. “That’s why.” He nodded and passed the order along. As I walked toward the kitchen, I felt the odd discomfort of it. I was used to eyes on me. Used to being followed, recorded, accounted for. Moving through my own home without that weight felt unfamiliar, almost exposed. Amy was already awake when I returned to the bedroom. She propped herself up on one elbow. “You’re dressed early.” “I told the staff to take the morning off,” I said. Her brows drew together slightly. “Why?” “I want to cook.” She stared at me. Not suspicious. Just surprised. “You?” “Yes,” She sat up fully now. “Is this a peace offering or a power move?” “It’s neither,” I said. “It’s an apology that takes time.” That earned a quiet laugh. “Alright,” she said. “But I’m not rescuing you if you burn something.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to.” ^{u:} In the kitchen, I realized how long it had been since I’d done anything like this. I opened cabinets I rarely touched. I found ingredients that had clearly been stocked by people who knew my preferences better than I did. Amy leaned against the counter, watching me. “What are you making?” “I was thinking eggs,” I said. “Maybe toast. Something simple.” “Bold choice,” she said. “Try not to intimidate the stove.” I ignored that and cracked the first egg straight into the bowl. The second one followed. The third one slipped and splattered on the counter. She smiled. “That one didn’t make it.” “I noticed.” She handed me a towel. “Here.” As I wiped it up, she moved closer, reaching for a pan.

Our shoulders brushed. It felt normal in a way I hadn't felt in weeks. "You're stirring too fast," she said, peering into the bowl. "I like them fluffy."

"You like them rubbery." I paused. "You're questioning my technique?" "I'm correcting it," she said, calm and unapologetic. I let her take the whisk. Watching her do something so ordinary felt grounding. She wasn't managing a crisis. She wasn't defending herself. She was just here. "I've missed this," I said quietly.

She glanced at me. "Being told you're wrong?" "That too," I said. "But mostly being corrected without consequences." She went back to the eggs. "You used to listen better." I nodded. "Power changed that." She didn't argue. "I stopped asking for things," she said. "I didn't want to sound like I was competing with everything else." That landed harder than I expected. "You never competed," I said. "I know," she replied. "But I felt like I was." B I poured the eggs into the pan and watched them set. I stayed quiet. Listening felt like the right thing to do. "When we fell in love," she said, "we planned everything together. Even the arguments felt shared." "I turned conversations into decisions," I said. "And decisions into commands." She nodded. "And I adjusted. I shouldn't have." We stood there until the eggs were done. I plated them without ceremony. We didn't bother setting the table. We ate standing at the counter at first, then moved to the kitchen table without talking about it. "This is good," she said. I smiled. "Low expectations help." She reached for my hand. Just for a second. It wasn't dramatic. It was enough. "I don't get to do things like this often," I admitted. "Without thinking about who it affects." "That's the problem," she said gently. "You're always thinking about everyone." "I thought that was my job." "It is," she said. "Just not all the time." After we finished eating, we stayed where we were. No rush. No next item on the schedule. She brought up Mark and Clara then. Not defensively. Just honestly. "I haven't shut them out," she said. "Not because I trust them. Because I want to understand them." I felt my instinct rise immediately. "They've caused enough damage." "I know," she said. "But cutting them off completely pushes them deeper into corners. That's when people get reckless." I wanted to argue. I could already see the risks. The variables. The possible outcomes. I stopped myself. "I don't like it," I said. "But I trust you." She looked at me then, really looked at me. "That's new." "It's deliberate," I said. She reached across the table and squeezed my hand. "That's all I need." Later, when the house began to stir again and responsibility crept back in, I felt steadier than I had in days. Alpha didn't mean dominating every space I walked into. It didn't mean controlling every outcome. The thought stayed with me as the morning moved on. Strength didn't always announce itself. It didn't need witnesses or obedience to exist. Sitting there with Amy, unguarded and unmeasured, reminded me why I fought so hard in the first place. Not for territory. Not for control. For this quiet stability we almost lost. When I finally stood to return to my duties, I did it without urgency. The pack could wait a few more minutes. The company would survive the delay. What mattered was that when I walked back into the world, I would do so calmly, carrying her trust with me, and determined not to misuse it again.

Chapter 365 Sense Of Humor

CLARA

I woke up earlier than I wanted to, though not by much. The sun hadn't fully climbed past the horizon, and the room was quiet except for the subtle hum of the air conditioning. I sat on the edge of the bed, straightening my clothes, fixing my hair, and rehearsing what I would say. This wasn't about feeling ready or letting guilt wash over me. This was about strategy. Every movement, every word had a purpose. I reminded myself of that as I glanced at my reflection. Mark wasn't my enemy in this. He was a

tool, an opening. And I needed to handle him carefully. When he appeared in the living room, dressed neatly as always, I noticed the way his eyes lingered for a fraction longer than normal. He wasn't hostile anymore, not fully. But the caution was there, just below the surface. I let myself smile gently and approached. "Morning," I said. My tone was soft. He nodded. "Morning. You look... different." He sounded curious, not accusing. "I wanted to apologize," I said, straightforward. "I know I've caused problems. More than I can account for." He raised an eyebrow. "Since when did Clara Pioli start apologizing?" There was a trace of humor, but the caution didn't fade. "I mean it," I said quickly, letting the sincerity sink in, though carefully measured. "Not everything. But enough that I realized my actions were wrong. I don't expect forgiveness. I just... wanted to acknowledge t." He rolled his eyes slightly. "You've got an interesting sense of timing." "I know," I said, holding his gaze. "But I'm serious." He paused, studying me. "Alright. I'll listen. Don't expect more than that." I nodded. That was enough for now. I didn't need immediate acceptance. I needed proximity. I needed him to lower his guard, even a little. We left the apartment soon after. I let him choose the route, the destination. I allowed myself to be guided, which wasn't a weakness. It was deliberate. As we drove, I asked questions about his day, his work, and the things he was allowed to share. He responded cautiously, but the more he spoke, the more I collected. Every hesitation, every tone shift, every word he omitted—it all mattered. "Has Amy changed much?" I asked casually, letting my voice be neutral. He glanced at me briefly. "Yes. She's... different. Stronger, I think. Less likely to let people manipulate her. She's focused. More precise. But she's still Amy." I kept my expression neutral. I didn't let the information affect me outwardly. "That sounds.... impressive." He shrugged. "It is. And frustrating at times." He sighed. "I'm trying to make things right, for what it's worth. But she doesn't make it easy." I nodded slightly. "Maybe that's because she knows who she is. That's not a bad thing."

The conversation was calm, almost mundane. But that was the point. I didn't push. I let him talk. I let him open up without realizing I was watching and learning. Every glance, every pause, every shift in posture told me more than he knew. We stopped at a small café. He ordered, I ordered, and we sat together, not too close, not too far. I let him take the lead again, letting him feel in control. I asked gentle questions about work and the office, carefully steering him to mention interactions with Amy. When he did, I listened, storing the information for later. "You know," he said quietly, "I'm trying to apologize to her properly. I want her to see that I'm sincere." I nodded. "That's good. She'll appreciate the effort, if it's genuine." I emphasized the word "genuine" deliberately, letting it feel like advice, but also observing how he responded. He didn't argue. He was listening. Later, walking back to his car, I let him take my arm lightly. Not for comfort, not for closeness, but for appearance. This wasn't a display of affection. It was a calculated gesture to maintain trust. "I don't know if she'll forgive you," I said casually, "but showing up and trying is the first step." He glanced at me, frowning slightly. "And you? Are you trying to forgive too?" I let a soft smile form, the kind that wasn't revealing. "I'm learning to separate actions from intentions," I said carefully. "Some things are easier to work with if you understand the why behind them." He didn't press. He didn't challenge me. He seemed satisfied with the response. That was all I needed. Back at the apartment, I watched him defend me to a colleague on a call, explaining something I'd said earlier. But because he was unknowingly validating my strategy. Every word he spoke in my favor strengthened my position. As he hung up, he looked at me, a small smile forming. "See? You're influencing things even when you think you're not." I returned the smile, careful to make it light. "I suppose that's true." Inside, I reminded myself of the larger picture. This wasn't about friendship or forgiveness. It was about access and opportunity. Every bit of trust I could gather, every small moment of apparent closeness, brought me closer to understanding Amy's world, to anticipating Daniel's moves,

to observing weaknesses I could exploit. And yet, a flicker of unease passed through me. A thought I refused to dwell on. One wrong move, one miscalculation, and everything could collapse. But I pushed it aside. Control required focus, and I couldn't afford distraction. I watched Mark settle back into his routine, speaking to staff, answering emails, and moving through the apartment as if it were his own domain. I maintained a polite distance, pretending to be interested in trivial things, but internally noting every detail. The route he took, the papers he prioritized, the way he interacted with Amy indirectly—it all mattered. By evening, we returned to his apartment quietly. I kept my movements calm, measured. No emotion betrayed my intentions. I said my goodbyes, letting him believe the day had been ordinary, even pleasant. In reality, every interaction had been a careful maneuver. Every conversation had been a tool, every smile a calculated offering. Once alone, I allowed myself a brief pause. I acknowledged the effort it had taken to maintain the mask, but I also reminded myself of the goal. Amy's position, Daniel's attentiveness, Mark's trust—all were variables I could use. And I would use them. I closed my eyes for a moment and allowed myself a small, controlled exhale. I had played the day correctly. I had positioned myself carefully. And while the outward appearance suggested growth, sincerity, or reconciliation, inside, the strategy remained intact. Every move I made, every expression I offered, had a purpose. Tomorrow, I thought, would be another day. Another chance to strengthen access, to observe, to learn. And I would not waste it.

Chapter 366 Apology

AMY

I had made it clear before the meeting even began that there would be boundaries. Clara and Mark would be seen together, in a supervised environment, not privately, not in any way that allowed manipulation or emotional leverage. I didn't ask Daniel to attend, but I informed him. He nodded, understanding the importance of transparency. That was all I needed from him. The conference room was neutral. The morning light filled the space without spilling over in dramatic shafts. I sat at the head of the table, papers and tablet in front of me. Mark and Clara entered together, careful, measured, both unsure what the reception would be. I gestured to the chairs. "Have a seat," I said. My tone was calm. Clara's apology came first. She spoke carefully, as if rehearsed. I listened without interruption. I didn't flinch. I didn't shift. My silence unsettled her more than anger ever could. Her voice wavered slightly as she searched for approval in my expression. I offered none. "I wanted to apologize again," she said. "For everything I've done that caused harm or complication. I understand if it's not enough. I... I just wanted to acknowledge it." I nodded once, slight, neutral. "I hear you," I said. Nothing more. No reassurance, no emotional reaction. Just acknowledgement. That was all she needed, and all she got. Mark spoke next, his voice firmer, more direct. "I've been trying to make amends too. I know I've made mistakes. I'm accountable for them. I'm not asking for forgiveness, but I want to be transparent." I looked at him, noting the effort. "I understand your effort," I said. "Trust is not restored. That is clear. But effort is recognized." There was a pause. They both studied me, searching for a sign of softness, of leniency. I gave none. I stayed steady, observing. The small details, the hesitations, the choice of words—they all mattered. Clara spoke again, trying to reinforce her sincerity, but I noticed inconsistencies. Not outright lies, just omissions, small gaps that could reveal intent if pressed. I did not press. Confrontation would only harden defenses and close channels. I needed access, not opposition. Mark shifted slightly, leaning forward. "I hope this demonstrates that we're trying to change. That's all we can do right now." I nodded again. "It does. And that is all I require from you at this point." I held my gaze on him. "Further access, information, or involvement will depend entirely on consistency and transparency going

forward.” Clara swallowed and looked at Mark briefly before meeting my eyes again. She tried another small statement of accountability, but it lacked substance. I allowed her words to remain unanswered. Silence can communicate more than any argument. The meeting ended without resolution. There was no forgiveness offered, no emotional closure. But it was intentional. I wanted them to leave with clarity, not hope or resentment. Control does not come from exclusion alone. Sometimes observation and measured access reveal more than confrontation. As they left the room, I allowed myself a brief exhale, sitting back in the chair. I glanced down at my notes, reviewing the statements, the inconsistencies, the tone, the pauses. Every element mattered. I was not making judgments yet. This was intelligence gathering, not adjudication. Later, when Daniel came in, he did not question or argue. He simply observed. “How did it go?” he asked. “Controlled,” I said. “I did not offer forgiveness. I did not reject them. The goal was clarity, not resolution.” He nodded, understanding. “And the result?”

“They left knowing where the boundaries are,” I said. “They understand that their access is limited and that trust must be earned. They also revealed more than they intended about priorities, omissions, and motivations.” Daniel moved closer, leaning against the edge of the desk. “You handled it well. I don’t need to influence this. You are in control.” Transparency matters,” I said. “Exclusion only hides. Access, even cautious access, allows observation. We know more now than before we sat together.” He smiled faintly, approving. “You are thinking strategically.” I didn’t respond with words. My internal acknowledgment was enough. He understood. That was all that needed to be said. As the day moved forward, I reflected quietly on the session. Later, while reviewing operational reports from Carter Holdings, I noticed small gaps in the submissions, minor discrepancies in project timelines. They were not malicious, not deliberate sabotage, but they were enough to be noted. Even in control, I remained aware. Being Alpha-adjacent, being Luna, does not give one the luxury of distraction. I considered Clara and Mark again. They were in proximity, but the balance was delicate. Any misstep could shift the dynamic. I had to maintain focus, both on their actions and on their potential influence. Each word, each action, each choice mattered. I would watch, but I would not act impulsively. When Daniel returned later that evening, he found me reviewing reports quietly. “You didn’t wait,” he said lightly. “I didn’t need to,” I replied. “Observation continues regardless of his presence.” He leaned against the doorway. “Good. I trust your judgment.”

“Thank you,” I said simply. I did not elaborate. That trust was a tool, yes, but also a reassurance. It did not require words. As I closed the office and prepared to leave, I acknowledged the state of things: clarity does not equate to safety, and access does not equate to control. But both are necessary for strategy. Both are necessary for understanding the people around me, the wolves and the humans, those who act openly and those who conceal intentions. I left the office knowing that Mark and Clara had left with knowledge and perception of me, but not influence. That was intentional. That was calculated. And as I walked past Daniel’s door, I noted that he did not follow, did not interject, did not question. His restraint reinforced my own control. That was as much a statement as any word could have been. The day ended with me reflecting on the deliberate balance I had maintained. Observation without confrontation. Access without trust. Clarity without resolution. That was my approach, and it would hold firm, because discipline and strategy were now stronger than reaction or emotion.

Chapter 367

CLARA

I didn't wait long after leaving the estate before Elias called. I had just pulled into my apartment complex, the engine still running, when my phone vibrated in the console. I knew who it was before I looked. He never rushed. He always waited just long enough for silence to feel unsafe. I answered. "I just got back." "I know," he said. His voice was calm. "Tell me how it went." I stayed in the car. I needed the small barrier. "Amy agreed to meet. Mark was there. It was controlled. No drama." "That's not detail," Elias said. "That's summary." I exhaled slowly. "Clara and Mark apologized. Amy listened. She didn't forgive them, but she didn't shut the door either." "Did she react," he asked. "Emotionally." "No," I said. "That's the point. She stayed neutral." There was a pause on the line. Elias didn't interrupt. He let silence do the work. "And Mark?" he asked. "He's trying," I said. "He wants back into her good graces. He's careful. More careful than before." "And you," Elias said, "Where do you stand with her now." I chose my words. "She's allowing proximity. Nothing more. But she didn't reject me." "That's not enough," Elias said. His tone didn't change, but the pressure underneath it sharpened. "Proximity without influence is wasted space." "I'm aware," I said. "But pushing would have closed the door." "Or clarified it," he replied. "Which would still be useful." I tightened my grip on the steering wheel. "Amy isn't reactive anymore. That makes her harder to move." "She's still human," Elias said. "And humans respond to pressure, even when they pretend they don't." "I didn't pretend anything," I said. "I observed. That was the right call." Another pause. Longer this time. "What did she notice," he asked. I hesitated. Just enough. "She listened carefully," I said. "I don't think she trusts me. But she's curious." "Curiosity can be leveraged," Elias said. "Trust is optional." "Only to a point," I said. "If she feels cornered, she'll shut everything down." "And if you feel cornered," he said, "what will you do." The question wasn't theoretical. It never was. "I'm handling it," I said. "You're balancing it," Elias corrected. "And balances fail when weight shifts." "I know what's at stake," I said. "So do I," he replied. "That's why I expect more than survival. I expect results." "I just came out of the meeting," I said, keeping my voice level. "Nothing could be rushed." "Then don't rush," Elias said. "But don't stall either. Amy's restraint is not kindness. It's calculation. If she's watching you, it's because she thinks you'll show her something." "I will." I said. "You'll show her what she needs to see," he said. "Not what you want her to believe." The call ended without goodbye. I sat in the car for another minute, phone still in my hand. My reflection stared back at me from the darkened window. I looked composed. That was the problem. I had learned how to look calm while calculating my next move. Mark was starting to trust me. Not fully, but enough to soften. He listened when I spoke. He defended me earlier, without being asked. That hadn't been part of the original plan, but it was useful. Trust opens doors faster than pressure ever could. Amy was different. She didn't lean toward trust or anger. She stayed still and let others move around her. That kind of control didn't come from confidence alone. It came from knowing exactly how much power you held.

Elias wanted influence. Amy offered access. Mark offered trust. None of them wanted the same version of I went upstairs and locked the door behind me. The apartment felt too quiet. I dropped my bag on the chair and leaned against the counter, staring at nothing. I told myself, again, that I was surviving. That I was adapting to a system that had never given me space to stand without fighting for it. I hadn't been handed protection. I had earned relevance. That mattered. I replayed the meeting in my head. Amy's eyes when I spoke. The way she didn't interrupt. The way she didn't reassure. She wasn't cold. She was measured. That was worse. Mark had looked at me when Amy spoke, searching for my reaction. I'd kept my face neutral. That had helped. It always helped to give less than expected. My phone buzzed again. This time, it wasn't Elias. It was Mark. "Are you okay?" he asked when I answered. "I'm fine," I said. "Just tired." "That meeting wasn't easy," he said. "Amy's different now." "Yes," I said.

“She is.” There was a pause. “I meant what I said in there,” he added. “I’m trying to do better.” “I know,” I said. And I did. He wasn’t pretending. That made him more dangerous in some ways. Honest people assume others are playing the same game. “I shouldn’t have let things get that far,” he said. “With you. With her.” “I had my part in it,” I said. Partial truth always landed better than denial. “I appreciate you not pushing,” he said. “You could have.” “That wouldn’t have helped,” I replied. He hesitated. “I defended you earlier. To one of the senior advisors. They were questioning your intentions.” “I heard,” I said carefully. “I meant it,” he said. “You’re not what they think.” I closed my eyes briefly. “Thank you.” After the call ended, I sat down slowly. Mark’s trust wasn’t something I’d planned on earning this quickly. It complicated things. People who trusted you expected consistency. They noticed shifts. Amy allowed access because she wanted information. Elias demanded results because he wanted leverage. Mark trusted me because he thought I was honest. None of those expectations could coexist for long. Later that evening, Elias sent a message instead of calling. Progress requires movement. Don’t confuse proximity with safety. I didn’t respond. Instead, I thought about escape. Not physically. Strategically. Every path I saw closed in another direction. The closer I moved to Amy, the more Elias tightened his expectations. The more Mark trusted me, the harder it became to justify betraying that trust when the time came. I told myself that if Amy fell, it wouldn’t be my fault alone. Systems failed people before individuals ever did. That was how power worked. It shifted blame downward and called it necessity. Still, the justification felt thinner than it had before. I went to bed late. Sleep came unevenly. In the dark, I acknowledged something I had been avoiding. The closer I got to everyone, the fewer exits I had left. Playing all sides required distance. Intimacy collapsed margins. When things finally broke—and they would—there would be no clean way out. I turned onto my side and stared at the wall, knowing that survival was no longer just about staying upright. It was about deciding which fall I could live with when the ground finally gave way.

Chapter 368 Signs Of Instability

CLARA

I woke before Mark did, the way I had learned to. Not because I needed to, but because it was safer to be awake first. The room was quiet except for his breathing, slow and even. I lay still for a moment, listening, measuring the space between us. Living with Mark meant there was no room for carelessness. Every look, every pause, every word had weight. I turned my head slightly and caught his scent. It had shifted over the past few weeks. Less guarded. Less sharp. It told me more than his words ever did. He was starting to trust me again. That knowledge didn’t calm me. It made me more careful. I slipped out of bed and moved through the room without noise. I dressed simply, nothing that would stand out. Mark preferred things uncomplicated, even when his life wasn’t. In the kitchen, I made coffee and waited for the sound of him waking. He came out a few minutes later, hair still messy, shirt half-buttoned. “You’re up early,” he said. “I couldn’t sleep,” I replied. That part was true. He poured himself coffee and leaned against the counter. “I’ve got meetings all day. I’ll be back late.”

“I’ll be here,” I said. “I might work a bit.” He nodded, distracted, then paused. “You’ve been... different lately.” I looked at him. “Different how?” “Quieter. Not in a bad way.” He shrugged. “Just different.” “I’m trying,” I said. That earned me a look. Not suspicion. Something softer. He didn’t ask more, and that told me everything I needed to know. When he left, I waited until I heard his car pull away before I checked my phone. One message. A location. A time. No greeting. No explanation. Elias. I stared at the screen for a long moment. He didn’t need to say more. When Elias sent something like that, it wasn’t an invitation.

It was a reminder. I left the house shortly after, careful to erase any sign of urgency. The drive south took longer than usual. Patrols were heavier near the border now. Wolves noticed things like that, even when humans didn't. Territory mattered. Who crossed it, who lingered, who acted like they belonged. The meeting place sat just outside recognized pack land. Officially neutral. In reality, watched from every direction. Elias was already there when I arrived. He stood near his car, relaxed, like he had all the time in the world. He didn't move when I approached. "You're late," he said. "Traffic," I replied. He looked at me then, really looked. "You're living with him now." I didn't deny it. "Yes." "And?" "And nothing. It gives me access." "That's what I wanted to hear." We walked a short distance, enough that anyone watching would assume we were just talking. Elias always chose his ground carefully. Wolves respected that instinct. "How did it go with Amy?" he asked. "She allowed the meeting," I said. "She listened." He waited. "She didn't forgive us so it's just same as before," I added.

"Us?" He glanced at me. "Mark and me." "That wasn't the question." I met his eyes. "She didn't shut the door." That pleased him. I could smell it in the slight change in his scent. Satisfaction, controlled, "You're moving too slowly," he said. "Daniel is tightening his grip. Northern wolves are loyal, but loyalty depends on confidence." "I know." "Then act like it. I need signs of instability." "You said not to push directly."

"I said not to attack. There's a difference." He explained his plan without raising his voice. Delayed patrol responses. Confusion over jurisdiction. Complaints filed through neutral councils that would take time to resolve. Nothing illegal. Nothing obvious. Just enough to make people question whether Daniel was paying attention. "It won't look like chaos," Elias said. "It will look like neglect." I understood then what he was doing. Wolves didn't abandon an Alpha because of one failure. They left when doubt settled in and stayed. "My role?" I asked. "Social," he said. "You listen. You repeat concerns without sounding like you own them. Mark helps. Amy helps more." "And if people get hurt?" I asked. Elias didn't answer right away. "That's not your concern." It was a lie, but one he believed. When I returned to Mark's house, the place felt quieter than before. I stepped back into the role easily. By the time Mark came home, I had dinner ready. He looked tired. Frustrated. "Amy's still keeping her distance," he said. "But she didn't shut me out." "That's good," I told him. "It means she's thinking." "I want to fix this," he said. "I really do." "I know," I said, and meant something else entirely. He talked about regret. About wanting things to go back to how they were. I listened, nodded, encouraged him. Inside, I noted how his loyalty worked. He followed emotion, not structure. He wanted resolution, not control. That made him predictable. Later, standing alone in the kitchen, I heard the news alert on the screen. Northern border patrols delayed. Residents complaining about slow response times. I knew exactly why. I stood there longer than necessary, listening to the report repeat. I had helped set this in motion. The damage wouldn't be obvious yet. It never was at first. For the first time, I understood that when the pattern became clear, it would already be too late to undo it. I turned the screen off and leaned against the counter. The house smelled familiar now, like I belonged there. That unsettled me more than Elias ever had. Mark trusted easily when he wanted peace. Amy trusted cautiously, which made her harder to reach. Elias trusted outcomes, not people. I told myself again that I was adapting, not choosing sides. That surviving meant staying useful. Still, the thought stayed with me longer than I liked. If Northern wolves started to doubt Daniel, they wouldn't blame the right people at first. They never did. And when questions finally turned into anger, everyone close to the center would be exposed. Including me.

Chapter 369 Rogue Incidents

CLARA

I got dressed carefully for a social function with which a lot of high class wolves would be in attendance. Even though Mark kept saying it wasn't formal. In pack terms, informal was often worse. Councils had rules. Social functions had memory. Wolves remembered what was said there, who stood where, who laughed too easily, who stayed quiet. Mark watched me from the doorway as I adjusted my sleeve. "You're overthinking it," he said. "I always do," I replied. That much was true. I just didn't tell him why. We drove together, his hand resting briefly on my knee before he pulled it back, like he wasn't sure if he was allowed to keep it there. I didn't comment. I let him decide the pace. That had become my rule with Mark. Let him feel in control. Let him feel safe. The gathering was at a restored lodge on Northern land, not deep territory but not neutral either. Wolves were already there when we arrived. I felt it immediately. Scent, posture, awareness. Northern wolves carried themselves differently. Less rigid than the South, but sharper when it came to territory. Mark greeted people easily. He belonged here in a way I never had. When he introduced me, he didn't hesitate. "This is Clara," he said. "She's with me." With me. The phrasing mattered. I saw the reactions shift. A few nods. A few longer looks. One woman near the bar tilted her head slightly, assessing. A man I didn't recognize glanced from Mark to me, then away. I stayed close to Mark but not clinging. Wolves noticed balance. I matched his pace, his pauses. When he stopped to talk, I waited a half step behind, then stepped forward when invited. It was subtle, but it mattered. Conversation flowed easily at first. Work. Territory repairs. A joke about Northern winters. I listened more than I spoke. When I did speak, I kept my tone light. At one point, someone mentioned the border settlements. "They've been restless lately," a man said. "People are nervous." Mark frowned. "About what?" The man shrugged. "Patrols have been late a few times. Not by much, but people notice." I didn't jump in. I waited. "That's odd," I said finally. "I thought Northern rotations were tight." "They usually are," the man replied. "That's why it stands out." Another wolf joined in. "My cousin lives near the woods. Said help took longer than usual last week." Mark looked thoughtful. "Daniel wouldn't let that slide." I smiled slightly. "Of course not. He has a lot on his plate, though." That was it. I didn't add more. I didn't criticize. I let the silence do the work. As the evening went on, I repeated the pattern. Questions, not statements. Curiosity, not judgment. "Do patrol leaders rotate reports directly now, or through command?" "Has anyone heard if border staffing changed recently?" "Do you think corporate pressure is pulling attention away from territory?" Each time, someone answered. Each time, the answers didn't quite line up. I felt it in my chest before I saw it. A tightening. Awareness. My wolf stirring, alert. Someone across the room was watching me too closely. Not hostile. Observant. I met his eyes briefly. He didn't look away. He smiled, just enough to be polite. I turned back to Mark and forced myself to relax. Retreating now would draw attention. I stayed. On the drive home, Mark was quieter. "You handled yourself well," he said after a while. "Thank you." He hesitated. "Some people seemed surprised to see you there." "I know," "But they weren't unfriendly."

"No," I agreed. "They weren't." At the house, he poured us each a drink. I took mine and sat on the couch, curling my legs under me. He sat across from me instead of beside me, like he wanted space to think. "I really think Amy might come around," he said. "She listened last time. Not fully, but more than before." "That's good," I said. "You've been honest with her." "I have," he insisted. "I know I messed up. But I'm trying."

"I can see that," I said. I meant that part. He was trying. That was what made this harder. My phone buzzed a few minutes later. A secure line. Elias. I excused myself and went into the bedroom, closing the door softly. "You're moving faster than expected," Elias said when I answered. "I'm doing what you asked," I replied. "The Southern Alpha is satisfied so far." The words settled heavily. Satisfaction wasn't

approval. It was expectation. "What's next?" I asked. "Pressure," Elias said. "Not violence. Timing. Information. The North needs to feel uncertain." "And my role?" "You're close to Mark. He's close to Amy. Amy is close to Daniel. You already understand." I did. I didn't say anything. "Rogue movement will increase near the border," Elias continued. "Guided. Limited. Daniel will have to respond." "And if he responds wrong?" "He loses trust," Elias said. "That's enough." The call ended. I stood there longer than necessary, phone still in my hand. My chest felt tight again, sharper this time. My wolf wasn't afraid. It was warning me. I went back into the living room. Mark looked up. "Everything okay?" he asked. "Yes," I said easily. "Just a work thing." He nodded, accepting it without question. Later, in bed, he fell asleep quickly. I stayed awake, listening to his breathing, steady and unguarded. He trusted me enough to sleep like that. My phone buzzed once more. A message. Coordinates. Time stamp, Confirmation. The first rogue incident had crossed into Northern territory. I stared at the screen until it dimmed. It was working. The conversations. The timing. The pressure. I turned onto my side, careful not to wake Mark. I told myself again that I was surviving. That I was adapting. That this was the only way forward. But lying there in the dark, I knew something else too. I had stepped too far onto the board to pretend I wasn't playing. I closed my eyes beside him, already calculating the next move, knowing sleep would come slowly now, and that waking up clean from this would no longer be possible.

Chapter 370 Unsettling Feelings

AMY

I didn't realize how tense I was until we got home and the doors closed behind us. The gathering had been civil on the surface. Polite words. Neutral smiles. Nothing openly hostile. And yet my body hadn't relaxed once while I was there. Sitting in the same space as Clara again had done something to me that I hadn't expected. I thought time and distance had dulled the reaction. It hadn't. Daniel noticed the moment we were alone. He didn't ask right away. He never rushed me anymore. That was new, and I appreciated it more than I said out loud. I took off my shoes and sat on the edge of the couch, pressing my feet flat against the floor like I needed the contact to steady myself. "I didn't like it," I said finally. Daniel sat across from me instead of beside me. Not distant. Just giving me space. "You held it together." "I wasn't falling apart," I said. Then I stopped and corrected myself. "Not outwardly." He nodded. "Tell me." I took a breath. "Being in the same place as her for that long was harder than I thought it would be. I could feel her watching me. Measuring. I don't know if she was nervous or confident, but it didn't matter. My body remembered everything before my mind caught up." Daniel's jaw tightened, but he didn't interrupt. "She almost killed me," I continued. "And she did kill something else. She was the reason I lost the baby. I don't think people understand what it's like to sit across from someone who did that and smile like nothing ever happened," "You don't owe her anything," Daniel said quietly. "I know." I looked up at him. "That's the problem. Everyone thinks forgiveness is the end goal. Like it's proof of strength. But forgiveness isn't something I can just decide to feel." Silence settled between us, heavy but not uncomfortable. "I saw Mark with her," I added. "I saw how comfortable he was standing next to her. How easy it looked. And it unsettled me more than I expected." "Because of him," Daniel asked, "or because of her?" "Both," I admitted. "Mark being there reminded me how much damage was done without him ever fully understanding the cost. And Clara..." I shook my head. "She knows how to play remorse. She's always known." Daniel leaned back slightly. "You think it's an act." "I think parts of it are real," I said carefully. "But not the parts that matter." He studied my face. "And yet you approved the meeting. You let them stay in your orbit." I nodded. "Because pretending peace

gives me more information than open hostility. I don't trust her. I don't forgive her. But I can pretend I do for a while." Daniel's eyes darkened. "You shouldn't have to do that." "I don't have to," I said. "I'm choosing to. There's a difference." He didn't argue. That mattered. "I can play along," I went on. "Smile. Accept apologies. Act civil. It doesn't mean I've forgotten anything. It means I'm watching." Daniel exhaled slowly. "And Mark?" "I think he wants forgiveness," I said. "Genuinely. I also think he doesn't fully understand what he was part of. That makes him dangerous without meaning to be." Daniel was quiet for a long moment. Then he said, "I'll support whatever boundary you set. Public or private." "I know," I replied. "That's why I'm telling you first. Transparency matters now. No surprises." He shifted closer. Not touching yet. Just close enough that I felt his presence. "I hate that she still affects you," he said. "So do I," I answered. "But pretending she doesn't would be a lie." I leaned back against the couch. Fatigue crept in now that the tension had somewhere to go. "For the next few weeks," I said, "I'll act like things are improving. I'll let her think she's getting closer. If she's hiding something, proximity will show it." Daniel didn't like it. I could see that. But he respected it. "Just don't carry it alone," he said.

"I won't." A soft chime cut through the room. My phone vibrated on the table beside me. I frowned and reached for it, expecting an internal report or a delayed approval request. What I saw instead made my stomach tighten. It was a corporate alert. Not a rumor. Not a projection. A confirmed transaction. I stared at the screen, reading it twice to be sure. Ten percent stake acquisition. Southern-linked holding company. Carter Holdings. My pulse picked up. "Daniel." He looked at me instantly. "What is it?" "The Southern Alpha just acquired ten percent of Carter Holdings," I said. My voice was steady, but only because I forced it to be. "It cleared less than an hour ago." Daniel stood. "That's not possible. Any movement that large would've crossed my desk." "That's what I thought," I said. "But it didn't." He took the phone from my hand and scanned the details. His expression hardened, not with anger, but with focus. "This wasn't a hostile takeover," he said slowly. "It was quiet. Clean." "And deliberate," I added. My mind raced ahead, already connecting lines. Ten percent didn't give control. But it gave influence. Board leverage. Access to discussions that weren't meant for outsiders. "And I didn't know," Daniel said. Not as a complaint. As a fact. I swallowed. "Neither did I." The silence that followed was different from before. Sharper. Alert. "Mark," I said quietly. Daniel looked at me. "He works close enough to corporate channels that this shouldn't have gone unnoticed," I continued. "I'm not saying he did it. But I don't understand how something this big moved without him hearing a whisper." Daniel didn't defend him. That alone told me he was thinking the same thing. "This changes things," he said. "Yes," I agreed. "It means the Southern Alpha isn't just circling the pack. He's inside the company now." Daniel handed my phone back. "We'll investigate quietly." I nodded, anger simmering under control. "I will too." I looked down at the screen again, the confirmation still there, undeniable. Clara. Elias. Mark. The Southern Alpha. They weren't just testing boundaries anymore. They were buying them.