

Broken 391

Chapter 391 Been Aware

DANIEL

"I don't know what she's planning," Amy said. "But I know she thinks she's ahead." "She usually does," I said. Amy turned to me. "Promise me something." "What?" "That no matter how loud this gets, you won't try to protect me by stepping in front of me." I considered it. "I won't undermine you." "That's not the same thing." "I know," I said. "But it's the promise I can keep." She accepted that. Amy always did. She didn't ask for more than what was real. Later, as we got ready for bed, she paused at the door. "This mattered," she said. "I know." "For me," she added. "I know." When the lights were off and she settled beside me, her breathing slowed faster than usual. That told me more than anything she'd said all day. I lay awake a while longer, thinking about what was coming. About how fragile belief was, and how easily it could be shifted. But for that night, I didn't plan counter-moves or responses. I stayed still. Because sometimes, holding space was the strongest thing an Alpha could do. The morning after the dinner felt quieter than it should have. Not calm. Quiet in the way that comes before people start choosing sides. I woke before Amy. She was on her side, facing the window, one hand curled near her chest. Sleep had softened her expression, but not erased the tension. Even at rest, she looked like someone bracing for impact. I stayed where I was for a few minutes, listening to her breathe, letting myself exist without planning. That didn't last. My phone vibrated on the bedside table. I silenced it immediately, but the damage was done. I was awake now in the way that mattered. I slipped out of bed and went to the study. By the time I closed the door, three messages were waiting. Two from internal security. One from corporate legal. Nothing dramatic. That was the problem. A report had gone missing overnight. Not deleted. Misfiled. Just enough to delay a response window. Another department had approved a request that should have stalled in review. Again, not wrong. Just early. Someone was smoothing the path for mistakes. I pulled up access logs and sat there longer than I should have, scanning names, timestamps, overlaps. Clara's name appeared once. Not in a place that proved anything. Just adjacent. Close enough to be noticed, far enough to be denied. Amy came in quietly a few minutes later. "You're already working," she said. "Yes." She leaned against the doorframe. "Anything urgent?" "Nothing loud." "That's worse," she said. I nodded. "Sit." She did, folding her legs beneath her. She didn't reach for my hand this time. That told me she was listening, not leaning. "There's movement," I said. "Small. Clean. Designed to look accidental." "Corporate or pack?" she asked. "Both." She looked down. "Clara?" "I can't say that yet." "But you think it." "I think someone wants me to react," I said. "And someone else wants you to be seen as unstable if I don't." Amy's jaw tightened. "Then we stay steady." "Yes." She studied me. "You're already isolating." "I'm narrowing," I corrected. "There's a difference." She didn't argue. That worried me more than if she had. After she left for the day, I went to the office earlier than usual. I wanted to arrive before people adjusted their posture. You learn more that way. Mark was already there. He looked surprised to see me.

"Morning," he said. "Morning," I replied. "Walk with me." He did. Too quickly. Eager. That meant guilt or hope. Possibly both. "I heard about the dinner," he said as we moved down the corridor. "From whom?" "Amy mentioned it." "Yes," I said. "We ate." "That's good," he said. "She needs support." "So do you," I said. He hesitated. "I'm trying." "I know," I said. "That's why I haven't cut you off." That landed. He stopped walking. "You could," he said. "Yes," I agreed. "But I haven't." He nodded slowly. "I want to make things right." "Then be honest," I said. "Even when it costs you." He swallowed. "Clara's

been... careful." "With what?" "With what she says. With where she goes." "That's not an answer," I said. "It's all I have," he replied. I let that sit. "Be careful who you protect by staying vague," I said, then walked on. By midday, I had confirmed what I already suspected. The Southern acquisition hadn't expanded, but it hadn't retreated either. Whoever was behind it was content to wait. Pressure without force. Doubt without proof. I met with two senior enforcers in the afternoon. No council. No record. "Morale is holding," one said. "But people are watching you more closely." "They always do," I replied. "This is different," the other said. "They're waiting to see if you blink." "I won't." I said. They exchanged a look. Not doubt. Expectation. When I returned home that evening, Amy was already there. She was standing at the window, phone in hand, expression closed. "Something happened," I said. "Yes," she replied. "Clara filed her application today." I paused. "And?" "And HR flagged it as unusually fast-tracked," Amy said. "By someone who doesn't usually move without clearance." "Did you approve it?" "No," she said. "But I didn't block it either." I stepped closer. "Do you regret that?" "No," she said. "But I'm aware now." "So am I." She turned to face me. "Daniel, I need you to hear this clearly. Whatever she's planning, she wants me to react publicly." "I know." "And if I don't," Amy continued, "she'll escalate until I look cruel." "Yes." Amy exhaled. "Then we let her think it's working." ended her. Not for fear. For fracture. "You're holding," I said. "I am," she replied. "But don't confuse that with forgiveness." "I won't." We stood there in silence, aligned without touching. That was how things were now. Not fragile. Just precise. Later that night, after Amy went to bed, I reviewed one last report. A small one. Easy to miss. It showed Clara's access permissions had updated automatically after her application submission. That should not have happened. I stared at the screen for a long moment, then shut it down.

Chapter 392 Who Is Standing With You?

CLARA

I left the house after midnight, when the guards changed shifts and the hall cameras looped their routine checks. I had timed it over several nights. People always grew lazy when nothing happened. That was when movement mattered most. I dressed in dark clothes and tied my hair back. No jewelry. No scent markers. I rubbed neutral oil on my wrists and neck, enough to blur my trail without raising suspicion. Wolves noticed these things even when they pretended not to. The north air felt sharp when I stepped outside. The cold carried sound farther, but it also kept people indoors. I moved along the tree line instead of the main path. Gravel remembered footsteps. Dirt did not. I didn't shift fully. Not yet. I stayed half-aware, letting my senses stretch without changing my form. My hearing sharpened first. Then the smell. Pine, damp earth, old metal from the fence. No unfamiliar wolves nearby. The pack patrols were on the western edge tonight. Daniel had tightened security there after the recent issues. That worked in my favor. I crossed the boundary markers and kept going until the land sloped downward. This area sat between territories, not claimed but respected. Meetings happened here when neither side wanted witnesses. Elias was already waiting. He stood near the fallen log, hands in his coat pockets, posture relaxed. Southern wolves carried themselves differently. Less restraint. More confidence in space. His scent reached me before his voice. Heat, iron, and something sharp beneath it. Power that had not dulled with time. "You're late," he said. "I had to be careful," I replied. "The north watches everything right now." He smiled slightly. "They always think they do." I stopped a few steps away. Close enough to speak. Far enough to leave if needed. "You shouldn't have come in person," he said. "A message would have been safer." "This can't be written," I said. "And it can't be overheard." That got his attention. His eyes sharpened, pupils narrowing. Alpha instinct responded before thought.

“Talk,” he said. “There’s a supply coming north,” I said. “Within the next five days.” He didn’t react. He was good at that. “What kind of supply?” he asked. “Medical compounds,” I said. “Silver suppressants. Blood stabilizers. The kind used after long shifts or forced transformations.” His jaw tightened slightly. “Those aren’t traded lightly.” “They aren’t supposed to be traded at all,” I said. “Not in bulk.” He studied me. “Who authorized it?” “Amy,” I said, without hesitation. “Officially.” That part was true enough to matter. “And unofficially?” he asked. “Daniel approved the logistics,” I said. “Security clearance, transport routes, escorts.” That was also true. He had no reason to suspect the request when it came through the right channels. Elias exhaled slowly. “Why tell me this?” “Because that supply changes the balance,” I said. “And because you should know before it arrives.” He tilted his head. “You’re assuming I don’t already.” “If you did, you wouldn’t be standing here alone,” I replied. A corner of his mouth lifted. “You’ve grown sharper.” “I had to,” I said. Silence settled between us. The forest shifted. A night bird moved overhead. My wolf stirred under my skin, restless but contained. “How important is this supply?” he asked. “It can keep a pack fighting longer than they should,” I said. “It can hide injuries. Delay weakness. It can make wolves look stronger than they are.” “And?” he pressed. “And it can be used to test loyalty,” I added. “Who gets access. Who doesn’t. Who becomes dependent.” That earned a low sound from him. Not quite a growl. Close enough. “You’re certain?” he asked. “I saw the request myself,” I said. “I saw the delivery code. Northern routes. Cold storage clearance.”

“You shouldn’t have access to that,” he said. “I didn’t,” I replied. “Not officially.” He watched me carefully now. Measuring risk. “Why betray them?” he asked. “I’m not,” I said. “I’m protecting myself and doing exactly what you asked of me.” “That’s never the whole truth,” he said. I met his gaze. “They’ll blame Amy when this goes wrong,” I said. “They always blame the one who stands in front.” “And you?” he asked. “I’ll look loyal,” I said. “Concerned. Caught in the middle.” He nodded slowly. “You always were good at that.” “I learned early,” I said. “From watching you.” That landed. He didn’t deny it. “When exactly does it arrive?” he asked. “Before the council reconvenes,” I said. “They want it secured and distributed before questions start.” “And the route?” he asked. “Through the eastern pass,” I said. “Night transport. Guarded by north enforcers.” Elias paced once, then stopped. “If this supply disappears,” he said, “there will be consequences.” “Yes,” I agreed. “That’s the point.” He looked back at me. “You’re certain Amy doesn’t know the full risk?” “She knows the logistics,” I said. “Not the politics.” “And Daniel?” he asked. “He trusts systems,” I said. “Not people.” He huffed quietly. “That’s his mistake.” I held my ground. “This information costs me,” I said. “If you act too early, they’ll trace it back.” “I won’t act early,” he said. “I’ll act clean.” I nodded. “Good.” He stepped closer, close enough that my wolf stiffened in response. “You’re walking a narrow line,” he said. “Between packs. Between lives.” “I’ve been doing that for years,” I replied. “And when they fall?” he asked. “Who do you stand with then?” I didn’t answer right away. Truth mattered only when it served survival. “I stand where I’m still breathing,” I said. He studied my face, then stepped back. “You should leave,” he said. “Before someone notices your absence.” “I will,” I said. “One more thing.” “Yes?” he said. “The supply isn’t the only move,” I said. “It’s a test. Of leadership. Of reaction.” He smiled again, this time without warmth. “Then let them fail.” I turned away before he could say more. Conversations like this ended best when un. I moved quickly on the return path, senses wide open now. I shifted briefly when I reached the deeper woods, letting my wolf run long enough to clear distance and scent.

Chapter 393 Mark Suspects

CLARA

Muscles burned, lungs pulled cold air hard, and the ground blurred beneath me. It felt good Controlled Honest. I shifted back before reaching the boundary. Calm mattered more than speed now. When I slipped back into the house, everything looked the same. Lights low. Silence intact. No alarms No questions. I washed my hands, changed clothes, and sat on the edge of my bed, Amy trusted routines. Daniel trusted systems. Neither of them watched faces closely enough. Soon, the north would receive its precious supply. And when something went wrong, they would look exactly where I wanted them to look Mark did not confront me directly. That was how I knew he suspected something, It started in the morning. I felt it the moment I came down the stairs. His attention lingered longer than usual. Not protective. Not casual. Measuring. His wolf brushed mine in a way that was not affectionate. It tested distance, pressure, intent. I kept my posture relaxed and did not react. Wolves notice reactions more than words. He asked if I slept well. The question sounded normal. The timing did not. I told him I hadn't. I said the house felt heavy lately. Too many eyes. Too many rules. I made my voice tired but calm. Not defensive. Defensive wolves look guilty even when they are not. Mark nodded, but he didn't look away. He followed me into the kitchen. Watched as I poured tea. Monitored my movements. His scent sharpened again when he noticed the faint scrape on my wrist. Not a wound. Just skin rubbed raw. Still, he noticed. "What happened there?" he asked. I glanced down like I had forgotten it existed. I shrugged and said I must have caught it on the gate the night before. I smiled a little, like it didn't matter. I did not rush to explain. Over-explaining is a mistake Wolves fill silence with their own logic. Mark reached for my wrist without asking. His touch was gentle but firm. He checked my pulse, my temperature. Old habit. He had always been like that when he cared. His wolf brushed mine again, slower this time. Curious, not alarmed. "You've been going out late," he said. There it was. Not an accusation. A statement. I met his eyes. I didn't rush to deny it. I let my shoulders lower, let a breath out. I told him I'd been taking walks when I couldn't sleep. I said the air helped me think. I said being inside too long made my wolf restless. That part was true. Truth mixed with lie is easier to swallow. He frowned. "You didn't tell me." "I didn't think I had to," I replied. My tone stayed even. No edge. No challenge. "I'm not doing anything wrong." That mattered. Wrong is a moral word. Wolves respond to it strongly. Mark studied my face. I let him. I did not shield my thoughts too tightly. I let surface feelings show: stress, frustration, the need to belong. I did not let him see direction. Purpose is dangerous when exposed. "You've been different," he said after a moment. I nodded. Again, no denial. "I know." That unsettled him more than arguing would have. I told him the truth that worked best. I said being allowed closer to Amy's space had changed things. I said the pressure of being watched made me careful with every step. I said I felt like one mistake would erase everything I had worked to regain. I let my voice soften on regain. Wolves understand hierarchy and loss. Mark's jaw tightened. His wolf stirred, protective now. Not suspicious.

"She doesn't trust you," he said quietly. "I know," I answered. "That's why I'm careful." That was the turning point. Careful is a word Mark respected. Reckless wolves get people hurt. He asked where I went when I walked. I named places that were real and boring. The outer path near the trees. The old fence line. Areas with patrols. Areas that made sense. I did not mention distance or direction. I kept everything local. Mark leaned back against the counter. His shoulders eased slightly, but his eyes were still sharp. He wasn't convinced. He was deciding whether suspicion was worth acting on. "You should tell me next time," he said. I tilted my head. "Why?" He hesitated. That told me enough. He didn't want to admit fear. Fear weakens authority. "So I don't worry," he said instead. I stepped closer then. Slowly. I lowered my voice. I told him I appreciated his concern. I told him I hadn't had many people worry about me lately. I let gratitude show. Not desperation. Gratitude disarms. His scent shifted. Warmed. His wolf

pressed closer, not invading, just present. He believed me more now. Or wanted to. Still, he wasn't done. "There are things happening in the pack," he said. "Quiet things." I kept my face neutral. Inside, my wolf went still. Listening. "I know," I replied. "Everyone feels it." True again. The best lies walk beside truth. He asked if anyone had contacted me, I shook my head once. Firm. No hesitation. That mattered. Wolves read hesitation like blood in water. "No one," I said. "I wouldn't hide that from you." That was the boldest part. Saying it without flinching. Trust, offered calmly, puts pressure on the other person to accept it. Mark watched me for a long moment. His wolf searched mine one last time. I let him find surface sincerity. I let him feel that I was not afraid of him. Fear would have confirmed guilt. Finally, he stepped back. "Just be careful," he said. "This place eats people when they move the wrong way." I nodded. "I know." He left the kitchen after that. Not convinced. Not alarmed. Balanced on the edge of both. That was enough. I stood there a few seconds longer, breathing normally, letting my wolf settle. When I was sure he was gone, I allowed myself one small release of tension. Not relief. Focus. Mark suspected something. That much was clear. But suspicion without direction fades if fed the right signals. I had given him concern, honesty, and familiarity. Things he trusted. As I carried my tea upstairs, I caught my reflection in the window. Calm face. Soft eyes. No cracks. I had learned long ago that survival was not about strength. It was about control. And control, for now, was still mine.

Chapter 394 Outside Hindrances

SELENE

I did not go to the Northern office. That had been the original plan. Walk into a controlled space, request an audience, say my piece, leave. Clean. Predictable. But the closer I got to the city, the more I understood that offices were where information went to die. Too many filters. Too many eyes that did not need to see me yet. So I redirected to Carter Estate. The guards noticed immediately. Northern sentinels always did. Their posture shifted when my name was confirmed. Not hostile. Just alert. Amy Carter's territory carried a different weight from the rest of the North. Wolves behaved better there. Or pretended harder. I stepped out of the car alone. No entourage. No banners. I kept my wolf close to the surface, not pressing. just present. A visiting Alpha daughter who hides her wolf looks dishonest. One who flaunts it looks like a challenge. The first delay came at the gate. I was asked to wait. Then asked again. Then asked if I would consider scheduling through official channels. I declined politely every time. "I came to speak," I said. "Not to negotiate access." That earned me another wait. I stood there longer than was comfortable. Long enough for my patience to be tested. Long enough for my wolf to bristle at the deliberate inconvenience. I kept it in check. This was not a border dispute. This was a message. They wanted to see if I would push. I did not. Eventually, a senior house guard approached. Older. Scar across his jaw. His wolf brushed mine briefly, formal and assessing. "You may enter," he said. "But expectations are limited." I nodded. "That's fair." Inside the estate, the air felt controlled. Not cold. Measured. Everything had its place. Wolves passed without staring. Humans did not rush. This was a house that ran on routine and restraint. I was led through three checkpoints. No weapons taken. That mattered. They trusted me enough not to disarm me, but not enough to relax. I respected that balance. I was made to wait again. This time in a sitting room with windows and no view of the inner grounds. I smiled at that Courtesy without access. When Amy entered, I felt her before I saw her. Her wolf was quiet, but not distant. It watched. Alert. Not aggressive. The kind of wolf that had learned when not to react. Daniel followed her. His presence filled the room more obviously. Alpha weight. Authority shaped by pressure rather than comfort. He did not hide his assessment of me. Neither of them offered a seat immediately. I did not ask for one. "I didn't expect to see you here," Amy said. Her voice was level. No warmth. No

hostility. Controlled. "I didn't expect to come," I replied. "But plans change." Daniel folded his arms. "You bypassed protocol." "I avoided obstruction," I said calmly. "The result is the same." That earned me a look from him. Not offended. Curious. Amy gestured to the chair across from her. "Speak." I sat then. Straight-backed. Open posture. No leaning. No claiming space that wasn't offered. "I came to the North because something is moving," I said. "Quietly. And it's not meant to favor you."

Daniel's eyes sharpened. Amy did not react at all. That told me who truly listened first. "You already know that," Amy said. "Yes," I agreed. "Which is why I'm here now and not later." Daniel stepped closer. "Why bring it to us?" I met his gaze directly. "Because I don't benefit from the South becoming reckless. And because someone close to you is already being used." Amy's wolf stirred then. Not outwardly. Internally. I could feel the shift. "You're assuming a lot," she said. "I'm stating pattern," I replied. "And patterns repeat unless interrupted." The kind that measured worth. Daniel finally spoke. "What do you want in return?" There it was. The real question. "I want alignment," I said. "Not an alliance yet. Not loyalty, just the understanding that when information moves, it does not always move in straight lines." Amy studied me. Her gaze was steady, calculating. She was not looking for truth. She was weighing risk. "You expect us to trust you," she said. "No," I answered. "I expect you to listen. Trust can come later. Or not at all." That made her pause. Wolves noticed when someone didn't beg for belief. I continued. "The Southern Alpha is repositioning assets under neutral fronts. Supplies. Routes. People who don't look important until they are. Someone inside your reach is feeding small details. Not enough to trigger alarms. Enough to shape timing." Daniel's jaw tightened. "Names." I shook my head. "Not yet. You wouldn't believe me if I gave them to you. And you'd expose yourself trying to verify." Amy leaned back slightly. "So what are you offering?" "Warning," I said. "And a different lens. Watch who grows comfortable. Watch who benefits when you hesitate." She was quiet for a long moment. Then, "Why you?" I answered honestly. "Because if the South fractures the North from inside, the balance shifts. And I won't pretend that shift wouldn't reach my borders." Daniel exhaled slowly. "You're asking us to believe you're acting out of self-interest." "Yes," I said. "That's the most reliable motive there is." That almost earned a smile from him. Almost. Amy stood then. She walked a few steps away, then turned back. Her control never slipped, but I could sense the strain beneath it. Someone who had learned to stand while bleeding. "If we're interested," she said, "how does this continue?" "I don't stay," I replied. "I don't linger. I don't attach myself to your decisions. I pass information when it matters. You decide what to do with it." Daniel nodded once. "And if we decide we're not interested?" I met his eyes. "Then nothing changes. Which is exactly what your enemies want." Silence settled again. Amy returned to her seat. "You'll leave contact," she said. "Indirect. No trace." "I already have," I said. "Through channels you don't monitor daily."

Chapter 395 Only This Time

SELENE

That earned me their full attention. Daniel studied me like a chessboard. "You planned this." "Yes," I replied. "I wouldn't have come otherwise." Amy nodded slowly. "Then we'll listen. For now." That was enough. I stood. "That's all I'm asking." As I was escorted out, I felt the estate watching me again. Not with suspicion this time. With calculation. Outside, when the gates closed behind me, my wolf finally stretched. Not relaxed. Ready. I had planted a seed. Whether it grew into cooperation or conflict would depend on who moved next. But one thing was certain. The North would not be blind anymore. The second meeting happened two days later. Not at Carter Estate this time. That had been intentional on

their part. You do not invite a potential ally into the heart of your home twice without deciding whether they are useful or dangerous. This meeting was held in a Northern administrative wing just outside the city—clean, quiet, guarded by wolves who did not bother hiding their strength. I arrived alone again. The guard who escorted me did not speak. His wolf brushed against mine in passing, formal and restrained. The North trained its wolves well. No wasted signals. No emotional posturing. Amy and Daniel were already inside the room when I entered. They stood, not seated. That told me this was not a discussion meant to linger. Decisions had already been shaped. What remained was confirmation. Amy gestured for me to sit. Daniel stayed standing. “We’ve reviewed what you said,” Amy began. “Separately. Together. And through channels you don’t know about.” “I assumed you would,” I replied. Daniel crossed his arms. “You were right about movement. There are small irregularities. Not enough to matter.” I nodded once. “That’s how destabilization works. Loud moves get blocked. Quiet ones get absorbed” Amy watched me carefully. “We’re willing to exchange information, Limited, Controlled.” “That’s reasonable,” I said. Daniel added, “This is not an alliance.” “I didn’t come for one,” I replied. “I came to slow damage.” Amy leaned forward. “Then here are the terms.” She laid them out plainly. No ceremony. No flourish. I would provide names, routes, or signals tied to Southern interference as I confirmed them. Not rumors. Not instinct alone. Verified connections. In return, the North would not treat my presence or movements as hostile so long as I stayed within agreed boundaries. No sanctuary. No protection. Just space. “If you cross us,” Daniel said, “this ends fast.” “I wouldn’t expect anything else,” I replied. Amy’s wolf stirred then. Not aggressive. Focused. “And you will not insert yourself into our internal conflicts.” “I won’t need to,” I said. “You already have someone doing that.” Silence followed. Daniel’s gaze sharpened. “Say it.” I inhaled once. Steady. This was the part that mattered. “The name is Elias,” I said. “He is active. He is resourced. And he is not working alone.” Amy did not react outwardly. But her wolf shifted. Alert. Contained. Daniel’s jaw tightened. “Elias has been a problem before.”

“He has evolved,” I replied. “He no longer leads from the front. He uses intermediaries. People who can move inside your structures without triggering immediate resistance.” Amy’s voice stayed calm. “Who?” “I don’t know yet,” I said honestly. “But I know how he operates. He does not invest in assets without leverage. And he does not gamble on unstable players unless he already holds something over them.” Daniel paced once, slow and controlled. “You’re telling us someone close is compromised.” “I’m telling you someone positioned for trust is being used,” I corrected. “There is a difference.” “Why give us Elias now?” “Because he’s the spine,” I said. “You cut around him, the network adjusts. You expose him, the network panics. Panic makes mistakes.” Daniel stopped pacing. “And if we move too soon?” “Then you confirm his narrative,” I replied. “That you react emotionally when pressured” Amy looked at Daniel. A silent exchange passed between them. Years of shared leadership allowed for that kind of communication. She turned back to me. “You’re asking us to wait.” “I’m asking you to watch,” I said. “Closely, Without signaling that you are” Daniel exhaled slowly. “We can do that.” Amy nodded. “The deal stands, Conditional” I inclined my head. “Understood.” She stood then. “One more thing.” I waited. “You said before that someone inside our reach is feeding small details,” she said. “Not enough to alert us. Enough to shape timing.” “Yes.” Amy’s eyes held mine. “If you identify that person before we do, you tell us.” I did not hesitate. “I will.” Daniel studied me. “Even if it complicates your position?” “Yes,” I said. “Because if Elias succeeds here, there won’t be a stable North to complicate anything.” That earned me a long look from him. Then a nod. The meeting ended without ceremony. As I was escorted out, I felt the shift in the wolves around me. Still cautious. But no longer dismissive. They had recalibrated me from visitor to factor. Outside, I paused before getting into my car. Elias had always

preferred shadows. He liked believing he was unseen. But shadows behave differently when light changes direction. I did not yet know who he was working with inside the North. Only that the connection existed. The patterns were there. The confidence. The timing. Someone believed they were untouchable. That belief would not last. As my convoy pulled away, my wolf stretched beneath my skin, restless but focused. The deal was made. The name was given. Now the real work began. I did not contact anyone after I left. No calls. No messages. Silence was part of the agreement, even if they had not said it aloud. The North would move carefully now. That meant Elias would feel delayed pressure, not resistance. He would start checking his lines, questioning his sources. When that happened, the weak link would surface. And when it did, I would be watching. I did not intend to warn anyone when the fracture finally showed itself.

Chapter 396 Internal Adjustment

AMY

The morning after Selene left Carter Estate, I woke with like something had changed. Not exploded. Not resolved. Shifted. Those were always the most dangerous changes. Loud problems drew attention. Quiet ones rewrote rules while everyone pretended nothing had happened. Daniel was already awake. He sat at the small table near the windows, scrolling through reports on his tablet. His posture was calm, but I knew him well enough to read the restraint in it. He hadn't slept deeply. "She didn't lie," I said, breaking the silence. Daniel looked up. "No. She didn't." That was the problem. Selene had come without drama, without threats, without demands. She had offered alignment without submission. Information without proof. And she had left us with a single un sentence: Elias is working with someone inside the North. We hadn't said Clara's name out loud. We didn't need to. "She wants leverage," Daniel said. "Not protection." "And she wants distance," I added. "From whatever is coming next." Daniel nodded. "Which means it's already moving." Later that day, the first sign appeared. Not from Clara. Not from Selene. From operations. A shipment scheduled to arrive through Northern-controlled channels was delayed without explanation. Not blocked. Not seized. Just delayed. Paperwork clean. Authorization intact. Timing altered by hours that didn't make sense. I reviewed the notice twice before calling the logistics head. "This wasn't rerouted by council order," I said. "No, Luna," he replied carefully. "The system shows an internal adjustment. Approved." "By who?" A pause. "It doesn't list a name." That was rare. Not impossible. But rare. When I ended the call, my wolf stirred. Not in anger. In alert. This wasn't chaos. It was coordination wearing calm. I didn't think of Clara immediately. That came later. First, I thought of exposure. Of access. Of who benefited from delays that looked harmless on paper but carried consequences in practice. the delay had spread. A second shipment. Smaller. Medical supplies intended for outer territory clinics. Same pattern. Clean. Quiet. No signatures. Daniel convened a short meeting with his inner circle. No raised voices. No accusations. He listened. Took notes. Asked questions that seemed almost gentle. Afterward, one of the senior wolves pulled me aside. "People are talking," he said. "Not loudly. But they're watching." "Watching who?" I asked. He hesitated. "You." That landed harder than the reports. By evening, the narrative had begun to form. Not officially. Socially. That was always faster. Amy has been distracted. Amy has been unstable lately. Amy has too much personal history tied to recent decisions. None of it was said directly. It never was. At dinner, Clara sat across from me. Calm. Attentive. Concerned in the way that drew sympathy without inviting scrutiny. "I heard about the delay," she said quietly. "That must be stressful." I met her eyes. "It is." "I hope no one thinks you mishandled it," she added. "You've been under so much pressure." There it was. Not blame. Framing. I felt it then. Not certainty. Recognition. Clara wasn't reacting to events. She was anticipating

them. When I looked away, I caught it. Just a second too late. The corner of her mouth lifting. Not a smile. Satisfaction. That was when the chill settled in. I didn't confront her. Not then. Confrontation without proof would only feed the version of me already being shaped. That night, I stood alone in the study, reviewing access logs Daniel had quietly shared with me. Restricted. Partial. Enough to see patterns but not enough to accuse.

Someone had touched systems they shouldn't have. Someone careful. Someone who knew how to disappear inside structure. And someone who wanted the blame to land on me. I closed the file and leaned back, steadying my breathing. For the first time since this began, I understood the full shape of the game. Clara wasn't trying to destroy me loudly. She was letting the world do it for her. And if I moved too fast, too hard, or too visibly, I would help her succeed. I went to find Daniel. "We're being tested," I said simply. "Not for control. For reaction." He didn't argue. "Then we don't react." "No," I agreed. "We prepare." As I left the room, I glanced back toward the hallway where Clara's footsteps had faded earlier. She thought I hadn't noticed. She was wrong. And this time, I wouldn't walk into the trap blind. I stayed awake long after Daniel went to bed. Not because I was afraid. Because I needed the silence to think clearly. Clara's satisfaction stayed with me. It wasn't loud. It wasn't careless. It was the look of someone who believed a step had gone exactly as planned. That meant there were more steps already set in motion. The next morning, I changed my approach. I didn't pull files. I didn't call meetings. I didn't question the staff. I did something simpler and harder—I showed up everywhere I was expected to be, exactly as I always had. I attended briefings. I signed approvals. I spoke calmly. I didn't rush. I didn't correct rumors. Wolves read steadiness better than explanations. By midmorning, another update came in. The delayed shipment had resumed. Quietly. No announcement. No apology. As if the pause had never happened. That confirmed it for me. This wasn't sabotage meant to cripple the North. It was pressure meant to test credibility. To see how fast doubt could be seeded and whether I would scramble to clean it. I didn't. Instead, I asked Daniel to reduce my visible involvement in logistics for the next few days. "Let them think it's space," I told him. "Not retreat." Daniel studied me. "You're certain it's Clara?" "I'm certain someone wants it to look like me," I said. "And she's the only one close enough to enjoy that outcome." That afternoon, Clara approached me again. Same concern. Same careful tone. "I hope you're taking time to rest," she said. "People worry when leaders don't." I met her gaze. "Worry travels fast," I replied. "But it also exposes who spreads it." Her expression didn't change. But her wolf shifted. Just slightly. That was enough. As she walked away, I made a decision I hadn't voiced yet—not even to Daniel. I would let this continue a little longer.

Chapter 397 Today Is Important

AMY

I woke up that morning with a clear head, which was rare lately. The North had been restless for weeks, but for once, things were finally lining up. The joint Carter Holdings–Northern pack operation was ready to move into its public phase. It wasn't flashy, but it mattered. Supplies, logistics, shared oversight. The kind of structure that told both investors and wolves the same thing: leadership was still intact. I reviewed the final framework before sunrise. Every line. Every approval. I signed off knowing exactly why visibility mattered right now. People didn't need speeches. They needed proof that nothing was falling apart. By midmorning, the building was already buzzing. Daniel stopped by my office with coffee, his expression calm but alert. He leaned against the desk, scanning my screen. "Today's important," he said. "I know," I replied. "That's why I'm not rushing it." He gave a small nod. "Clara already submitted

her coordination notes.” That gave me a brief pause. Clara’s role in this had been limited. Scheduling access. Internal routing. Minor coordination. Nothing strategic. Nothing sensitive enough to cause damage. I had been careful about that. After everything that had happened, I didn’t hand out trust freely anymore. “Did anything stand out?” I asked. “No,” Daniel said. “Clean. Normal.” I exhaled and turned back to my work. The first alert came an hour later. It wasn’t loud. No alarms. Just a quiet ping from internal compliance. Then another. Then my assistant knocked on the door, her face tight. “Amy,” she said carefully, “you need to see this.” She handed me a tablet. At first glance, it looked harmless. Approval logs. Timing records. Internal route permissions tied to Northern supply movement. All real documents. All approved by me. But something was wrong. The pages weren’t complete. Context was missing. Notes stripped out. Cross-approvals removed. The documents, laid out like this, told a different story. One where safeguards were skipped. One where I had signed off without proper review. “This isn’t public,” I said sharply. “Not yet,” she replied. “But it’s spreading internally. Fast.” My chest tightened. This wasn’t an accident. These weren’t random files pulled by mistake. Someone had chosen exactly what to release and exactly what to leave out. Daniel was already on his feet. “Who had access to these logs?” “A small list,” I said. “Very small.” We both thought the same name. Before either of us said it, the door opened again. Clara stepped inside. She looked unsettled. Pale. Concerned in a way that read as genuine at first glance. “I just heard,” she said softly. “I came as soon as I could.” I studied her without speaking. She moved closer, holding up her phone. “I’ve already sent my access logs to compliance. Everything I touched, every file I opened. I don’t want there to be any confusion.” That was fast. Too fast. “I trusted the process,” she continued. “I trusted that everything had been reviewed properly. If something slipped through, I want to understand how.” She wasn’t accusing me. That was the clever part. Daniel crossed his arms. “You didn’t send anything out?” Her eyes widened. “Of course not. I wouldn’t even know where to start.” Her pulse stayed even. Her scent stayed calm. No fear spike. No guilt signal. Wolves noticed things like that. Within hours, the atmosphere changed.

No one confronted me directly. Instead, they asked questions. Calm ones. Polite ones. Why certain safeguards hadn’t flagged earlier. Why oversight seemed thin at this stage. Why timing mattered so much now. Each question landed like weight. By afternoon, internal chatter had grown louder. Not rebellion. Doubt. The worst kind. Doubt spreads quietly and settles deep. I stood before a small review panel, Daniel beside me. I answered every question clearly. I explained the missing context. I pointed out what hadn’t been included. They listened. They nodded. But I could feel it. This wasn’t about truth. It was about perception. In pack logic, intent mattered less than control. A leader didn’t need to be corrupt to lose ground. She only needed to appear stretched. During a brief recess, I stepped into the corridor to breathe. That’s when I saw Clara again. She was speaking softly to two senior staff members. Her posture open. Her tone careful. She glanced up and met my eyes. For a second, she forgot herself. The look crossed her face quickly. Controlled. Small. Satisfaction. It was gone almost immediately, replaced by concern. But it was enough. My stomach dropped. That night, the decision came. It was delivered with calm words and professional distance. “For stability,” one of them said. “For now. Just until things settle.” I was asked to step back from direct oversight. Temporary. Precautionary. Necessary. I agreed. I had no choice. In the quiet of our room, I sat with Daniel. The city lights outside felt distant, unreal. “This was planned,” I said finally. He didn’t interrupt. “She didn’t leak lies,” I continued. “She leaked structure. Timing Pieces that could stand alone.” Daniel’s jaw tightened. “Do you have proof?” “No,” I admitted. “Just patterns. And instinct.” That scared me more than anything Clara had learned how to move without leaving marks. She hadn’t attacked me directly. She had shifted the ground beneath me and let others question my footing. I understood then what access really meant. She hadn’t

entered my space to destroy it outright. She had entered to reshape how others saw me inside it. And this time, I was blamed not for cruelty or ambition—but for being careless. That accusation lingered longer. And I knew, with cold certainty, that Clara would do it again if I let her stay close. I didn't sleep much that night. Every sound in the house felt louder than it should have. I kept replaying conversations, messages, moments I had dismissed as harmless. Clara had never rushed. She had never pushed. She had waited to be useful, then necessary. By morning, the news had spread beyond internal walls. Not accusations, Questions. Careful wording. The kind that lingered. I got dressed slowly and left my office untouched. Stepping back felt like surrender, even though I knew it wasn't meant to be permanent. As I walked out, I caught Clara watching me from across the hall. She lowered her gaze first. She already knew she had won this round.

Chapter 398 End Of The Line

AMY

I stayed away from the main office for three days. It was framed as procedure. A review window. A chance for systems to be audited without influence. Everyone used calm words, and no one raised their voice. That made it worse. Silence carries judgment better than shouting ever could. Daniel checked on me often. He never asked if I was okay. He asked what I needed. That mattered. I told him I needed time and access. Time to think without interruption. Access to records that were not part of the formal review. I didn't stop working. I just worked from the edges. The first thing I did was map the leak again, step by step, without emotion. I wrote down who touched what, when, and why. I listed permissions. Temporary access windows. Shared schedules. Minor overrides that looked harmless on their own. When placed together, they formed a clean line. The line didn't end with Clara. That was the problem. Clara had not accessed the final files. She had touched earlier layers. Routing. Timing. Support data. Things that looked like background work. Anyone auditing surface activity would see nothing wrong. Anyone digging deeper would need to already suspect her. I didn't have that luxury. Daniel brought me updates from inside. People weren't hostile. They were careful. Meetings paused when he entered. Conversations lowered. No one wanted to be seen choosing sides. Mark visited once. He spoke gently. Too gently. He said the review was standard. He said he trusted me. He said things would settle. I watched his eyes when he said Clara's name. There was concern there. Protective concern. Not doubt. That told me something else had gone wrong. On the fourth day, Clara requested permission to check on me. She didn't come directly. She sent a message through admin. Polite. Considerate. She said she wanted to make sure I wasn't isolating myself. I declined. Not sharply. Not coldly. I thanked her and said I needed space. An hour later, Daniel told me she had asked if I was angry with her. I wasn't angry. would have been easier What I felt was focus, That evening, Tree viewed the moment I couldn't stop thinking about. The hallway. The look she didn't hide in time. It hadn't been joy. It hadn't been relief. It had been certainty. People don't look like that unless they know the outcome already, The next morning, I asked Daniel for a favor. I told him not to protect me openly. I told him to act normal. To stay visible. To let people see him working with compliance and oversight as if nothing was wrong. He didn't like it. I could see that. But he understood. By midday, a second issue surfaced. A supply delay. Minor, on paper. A reroute caused by a scheduling conflict. No loss. No breach. Just inconvenience. Enough to irritate pack leaders who were already tense. My name was on the approval chain again. This time, I knew I hadn't touched it. That was when something shifted inside me. This wasn't about a single scandal anymore. This was pressure. Repetition. A pattern meant to reinforce doubt. I went back through the supply issue. Slowly. I found the pivot point. A message timestamped late at night. A confirmation sent

from a shared terminal. Clara had access to that terminal. So did six other people. Still nothing I could use. That afternoon, I was asked to attend a limited meeting. Advisory only. No decisions. I agreed. Refusing would have looked defensive. The room was full. Not crowded, but dense. Wolves watched posture more than words. Humans watched tone. Clara sat across from me.

She didn't avoid my eyes. She didn't stare. She looked concerned. Supportive. She spoke once, briefly, to say she hoped clarity would come soon. That leadership stability mattered. No one could fault that. I said nothing. has weight, but it also creates space. People filled it with their own thoughts. Some of those thoughts were not kind to me. When the meeting ended, Clara stood at the same time I did. She fell into step beside me like it was natural. "I know this is hard," she said quietly. "I wish I could help more." I stopped walking. She stopped too. I looked at her then. Really looked. Her breathing was steady. Her scent was calm. Too calm for someone caught in uncertainty. "Be careful," I said. She blinked. "Of what?" "Of proximity," I replied. "It creates assumptions." Her mouth curved into something small. Not a smile. Not a frown. "I only want things to improve," she said. I nodded and walked away. That night, I couldn't ignore it anymore. I wrote everything down. Not as accusations. As observations. Timing. Behavior. Opportunity. Emotional consistency. Clara appeared during every point of transition. Not as a cause. As a constant. I didn't know how to expose that. I only knew I couldn't rush it. Daniel read what I wrote. He didn't interrupt. When he , he exhaled slowly. "She's setting you up to react," he said. "I won't," I answered. "I know," he replied. "That's why it's working." He asked what I planned to do. I told him the truth. "I'm going to let her think I'm still stepping back," I said. "I'll stay quiet. I'll follow process. I'll let her grow confident." Daniel frowned. "And then?" "And then she'll make a mistake," I said. "People always do when they think the ground is stable." alone, I stood at the window and looked out at the North. Lights. Movement. Order held together by belief. Clara had shaken that belief without breaking rules. I understood then that this wouldn't be solved by exposure alone. It would be solved by timing. She had blamed me for being careless. I would let her believe that was true. For now. I closed the file and shut down the screen. Tomorrow, I would act compliant and quiet again. I would follow every instruction and smile when required. Clara would read that as surrender. That misread would cost her later. I just had to wait long enough for her to forget caution.

Chapter 399 Covert Mission

DANIEL.

I called Cole into my office just after midday. He stepped in without hesitation, closing the door behind him. "Sit," I said, gesturing toward the chair across from my desk. "I have a job for you. High priority. Full discretion." Cole raised an eyebrow. "Clara?" I nodded. "Yes. I want you to monitor her. Every movement, every interaction. I don't want speculation- just facts. Times, places, people involved, nothing missed." "Direct observation? Or covert?" he asked. "Covert. Amy doesn't need to know. Mark certainly doesn't. If Clara suspects she's being watched, it changes everything. We're trying to understand patterns, predict moves, not trigger defenses." Cole leaned back, considering. "Understood. Any particular points of focus?" I opened a file on my desk. "Meetings with staff, any interaction with the Northern pack, schedules she accesses, documents she requests. Small things matter. How she positions herself, who she speaks to, when. Record it all. Report only to me. No one else." He nodded. "And if she notices?" "Then nothing changes. You maintain distance, never intervene. Observation only. Nothing confrontational. Do you understand?" "Yes," he said firmly. "I'll start today." I watched him go, already feeling the relief of having eyes on Clara. I couldn't let my own instincts act recklessly. Clara had

proven she could manipulate perception perfectly. If she sensed me doubting her, she would turn it into leverage. Later, I reviewed the past week's movements. Clara's schedule wasn't irregular, but patterns were shifting. Small deviations—lingering near certain offices, asking unusual questions, subtle timing changes. She had access to enough internal information that if she wanted to, she could create chaos without anyone immediately knowing who was responsible. That's why Cole's reports had to be precise. That evening, Cole returned for a briefing. He set his bag down and pulled out a small notebook. "I tracked her interactions with the staff today. Mostly routine, but she stayed near Amy's assistant longer than expected, and there were two small conversations she initiated with finance that seemed unusual." I leaned forward. "Details. I need specifics. Times, duration, content—everything you can confirm." Cole scribbled quickly. "She requested access to the Northern supply logs for next week, then asked the assistant about recent shipment delays. Nothing flagged officially yet, but the questions were pointed. She didn't mention why, and she left the office before she got answers."

"Good," I said. "Keep tracking. Cross-reference with any changes in scheduling, or documents that are later flagged as missing or delayed. If she tries to manipulate anyone, we need to know immediately." He looked up, expression serious. "You think she's planning something?" "I know she is," I said, my voice calm but firm. "She isn't reckless. She's calculating. Every move she makes has a purpose. Our job is to see that purpose before it affects Amy or the North" Cole nodded. "Understood. I'll cover every angle. Even casual interactions. Nothing is too small."

"Exactly," I said. "Nothing is too small. And Cole... be careful around Mark. He has no idea of Clara's intentions. She uses his trust. Your observations need to include any influence she has over him." "I can handle that," he said. As Cole left, I sat back, letting the weight of the week settle. Clara wasn't just a risk—she was a living, moving puzzle. The slightest misstep could have consequences for Amy, for the North, for Carter Holdings. The next morning, Cole began shadowing her. I got the first report before lunch: she met with a junior staff member about a document transfer, lingered longer than protocol allowed, and left with nothing logged. Then another small interaction near the executive floors. Innocuous, but enough to suggest awareness. I called Cole into my office immediately. "Everything you've seen today?" "Yes," he said. "Nothing overt, but she is testing boundaries. Timing, positioning, accessibility. Every small step she's taking is deliberate." "Good. Keep tracking. I want notes every evening. No interpretations unless they're facts. No opinions, no assumptions." "Yes, sir." I turned back to my desk, reviewing documents Clara had accessed in the past month. Shipping logs, internal memos, staff schedules. Nothing out of place on paper—but Cole's eyes would catch the subtle shifts. She had access. Now we'd see what she intended to do with it. By midweek, patterns became clearer. Clara's steps weren't random. She deliberately sought proximity to Amy and key staff. She positioned herself to see and hear, but never to be noticed as a threat. It was subtle manipulation, invisible to anyone not actively observing. I met Cole late that evening. "She's good," I said. "Too good. But every pattern leaves a trail. Keep tracing hers." "I've started a timeline," Cole said, flipping the notebook. "Every movement, interaction, request logged. We can map her influence." I nodded. "Perfect. That timeline will be our safeguard. If anything goes wrong, we'll know the first point of contact, and we'll know it wasn't random. Clara's control relies on perception. We need facts." Cole paused. "She hasn't done anything overt yet."

"Exactly," I said. "And that's the danger. Her next move could be under everyone's nose, and if we don't see it coming, Amy takes the fall." I spent the next hours reviewing past incidents in my mind, comparing what I knew of Clara's behavior with what Cole was observing. She was patient, strategic, subtle. The

kind of risk that escalates slowly. unnoticed until it's too late. By the end of the night, I had a plan. I would continue observing, maintaining layered oversight through Cole, while leaving Amy confident in Clara's apparent usefulness. My wolf instincts were alert, but my human judgment dictated patience. Reaction without evidence would play into Clara's hands. The next day, Cole reported again. Every micro-behavior noted. Every minor deviation from protocol tracked. With this, I could predict patterns, anticipate moves, and, if necessary, intercept before consequences escalated. I realized then that control wasn't about confrontation. It was about knowledge. Observation. Understanding who Clara was, what she wanted, and how she would achieve it without anyone realizing she had already drawn the map. By midnight, I reviewed Cole's cumulative notes. Clara's behavior was increasingly deliberate, increasingly calculated. I felt a rare feeling of clarity amidst the tension. We weren't reacting blindly anymore. We had insight.

Chapter 400 An Edge

CLARA

I left the house just after dusk. Mark was in the lounge, reading, pretending not to notice me slipping my jacket over my shoulders. His gaze lingered longer than usual. "Where are you headed?" he asked casually, but there was an edge. I smiled lightly. "Just a walk. I need some air." He narrowed his eyes but said nothing. I could feel it—his wolf smelled caution, suspicion creeping under the surface. I let him think he'd caught something, but the subtle tension worked in my favor. By the time I reached the northern edge of the estate, I was already shifting, letting my senses stretch into the dark. The forest welcomed me differently than the city streets—quiet, open, easy to listen to. My wolf hummed with awareness, every leaf and shadow noted. Elias was waiting where the old supply route intersected the trees. He didn't speak immediately, just observed. "You're late," he said finally, his tone sharp, but not angry. "Timing is everything. The northern supply is sensitive." "I had to make sure I wasn't followed," I said smoothly, stepping closer. "Mark might notice too much if I leave too obviously." Elias's eyes flicked toward the city lights in the distance. "Careful. Your presence in the north has already raised questions. Too visible, too convenient. You need to be invisible until it's necessary." I shrugged, letting the faintest trace of amusement show. "Invisibility is my specialty. You've seen it before." He didn't answer, just handed me a small tablet. "Here. Northern shipment details. Crates, arrival times. transport routes. All critical. If this goes wrong, everything shifts. You understand the importance?" I nodded. "Completely." Elias gave me a look that could cut through steel. "I don't just mean operational importance. I mean political. Every Northern wolf involved is watching. Any error, any deviation, and blame will fall. Not on me, not on them—on you. Or whoever appears closest to you." I took the tablet and scanned the routes. My wolf noticed subtle changes in patrol rotations and unusual timing of cargo shifts. These weren't mistakes—they were deliberate, set by someone calculating risk and visibility. "Do you trust your Northern contacts?" Elias asked quietly. "Partially," I said. "Some are predictable. Others... they react to perception, not reality. I'll adjust." He nodded, satisfied, and handed me a small comm device. "Check in only once. I don't want chatter. If you need extraction, you improvise. You are the vector. Do not expose yourself unnecessarily." I folded the tablet into my jacket. "Understood." The walk back was slower. My mind sifted through the northern routes and schedules, overlaying what I knew of Northern patrols and Amy's oversight. My wolf remained alert, stretching its senses, detecting distant scents of other wolves and the faint edge of Mark's lingering suspicion somewhere behind me. When I returned to the estate, Mark was sitting by the window. His posture was neutral, but his scent told me he had been aware of my absence and was trying to figure out why. "Everything okay?" he asked, eyes narrowing slightly.

“Yes,” I said lightly. “Just needed to think.” He stared a moment longer, then muttered, “Be careful.” I let a faint smile slip. “Always.” Later that evening, I accessed the northern supply logs through a secure channel. Each crate, each route, each patrol alignment was mine to observe. The north relied on precision; I had the timing and placement, and my wolf thrummed with awareness, picking up even the smallest shifts. Halfway through the logs, my comm device buzzed. Elias’s voice was low, clipped. “Status?” “All accounted for. Adjusted minor deviations in patrol alignment. No detection so far. Supply integrity intact.” “Good. Remember, the north is watching. Amy’s presence doesn’t extend here. Do not let familiarity weaken you.” “I know,” I said, voice calm. The line went silent. I allowed myself a breath and then reviewed the schedules again. Patterns emerged. Minor inconsistencies, easily masked by normal operations, could be leveraged. This shipment wasn’t just crates—it was influence. Whoever controlled this data could appear competent or careless, depending on timing. I smiled faintly. Control was almost complete. I the night with a full report typed and ready for Elias. My wolf shifted restlessly, aware that even inside the estate, small movements, faint noises, could indicate observation. I moved carefully, leaving no trace of where I had been or what I had accessed. Before heading upstairs, I paused by Mark’s office door. He was still there, reviewing some documents. Our eyes met briefly. A flicker of suspicion, yes—but it was not enough. He wanted answers, but I had given him enough half-truths to remain comfortable. “You’ll be busy tomorrow,” I said casually. “Yes,” he replied. “Try not to overextend yourself.” I nodded, stepping away. My wolf relished the balance—knowing he suspected something but could not would work in my #potwire, I at the pader and comm device wide and prepared for dreg. My wolf weed worthy kommene ingred even in the quiet, reminding use of the northern supply, the onervation, for carrie weps P’ttravel worry Heaton, Every Yement, could be observed or nets. Tomorrow, the northern delivery would proceed, be under my orchestration. I would ensure the trening and placement seed no intence, but the ile tandis would weer gereptions in ways harry could never trace, Vorry Northern wolf and every internal oberver would see stability. They wouldn’t know who truly guided in And as 1 drifted into a light deep, I allowed myself a small, satisfied though control was never d visibility. It was about positioning, observation, and subtle pressure. Tonight, the north was mine to watch. wibile and no one suspected the hand behind it 1 woke early, before anyone che. The northern shipment would move at first light, and I needed eyes on it before it left. Mark was already up, pacing lightly, pretending to review papers, but I could smell the question lingering in his thoughts. “Anything I should know?” he asked casually, but the tone was pointed I smiled, keeping my voice neutral. “Nothing that concerns you. Routine checks.”