

Chapter 10

Caden POV:

The moment I stepped out of her apartment building and into the cool night air, the warmth of her small, cluttered kitchen evaporated, replaced by the familiar chill of command. The man who washed dishes was gone. The Lycan King was back.

I slid into the back of the Maybach, which had been waiting silently at the curb. The door closed, encasing me in a tomb of tinted glass and black leather. The pressure in the car dropped.

Ian sat in the passenger seat, a silent sentinel, the glow of a tablet illuminating his face. He didn't speak, merely watched my reflection in the rearview mirror, awaiting his orders.

I closed my eyes for a moment, savoring the ghost of her scent on my clothes, the memory of her leaning against the doorframe, her guard finally, momentarily, down. She was strong, but she was tired. And they had made her tired.

My eyes snapped open, the cold fury returning sharp and precise.

"Robert Miller," I said, my voice flat and hard. "Director of Research and Development at Sinclair Global. I want his complete file. Now."

Ian's fingers flew across the screen of his tablet. Seconds later, a detailed profile appeared on the monitor in front of me. I scanned the data - his career trajectory, his accomplishments, his investments. And his mistakes.

A cruel smile touched my lips. "There," I said, pointing to a series of offshore transactions. "He's been selling proprietary research to a competitor. Sloppy. Dig. I want undeniable proof on my desk by morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Next," I continued, the plan forming in my mind with crystalline clarity. "Draft a new internal directive for the Apex Ventures project. Audriana Sullivan's authority is to be elevated to Level Ten. She will have absolute operational control, bypassing all departmental heads. Including R&D. Any and all requests she makes are to be fulfilled within one hour. No exceptions. No delays."

Ian's fingers paused their rapid flight. He glanced back at me, a rare flicker of concern on his face. "Sir, a Level Ten authorization is unprecedented for a director. It grants her more power than some board members. It will cause... friction."

I leveled a cold gaze at him. "Let it. If anyone has a problem, they can bring their concerns to me. Directly."

"Understood, sir," he said, his fingers resuming their work.

The car pulled away from the curb, melting into the river of headlights flowing through the city.

Audriana POV:

After Caden left, the apartment felt too quiet, too empty. I showered, the hot water washing away some of the day's grime but not the exhaustion that had settled deep in my bones.

Wrapped in a fluffy robe, I sat down at my laptop. I pulled up my bank account, the one my grandfather had so gleefully frozen. The zero balance stared back at me, a digital monument to my family's betrayal.

I took a deep breath and closed the window. I navigated to a hidden, encrypted partition on my hard drive. I entered a 32-character alphanumeric password, followed by a biometric scan of my thumbprint.

A new desktop appeared, stark and black. The only icon was a stylized letter 'A'. I clicked it.

A secure portal opened, requesting a final voice-print identification.

"Aura," I said, my voice clear and steady.

The screen flickered and resolved into a series of bank statements for an offshore account. The name on the account was a shell corporation. The balance at the bottom of the screen was a long string of numbers. Enough to buy the Sullivan family estate ten times over and still have change left for a controlling interest in their failing shipping company.

This was my power. The power I had built for myself, one anonymous, high-concept design at a time. The world knew "Aura" as a reclusive genius, a designer whose work commanded astronomical prices. They didn't know she was a "weak" Omega from a backwater pack.

A surge of confidence, pure and potent, flooded through me. I was not a victim. I was not a pawn. I had my own arsenal.

I opened my design software, the half-finished sketch of a diamond-and-sapphire necklace appearing on the screen. It was a commission for a

European royal. It would fund my war chest for the next year. I lost myself in the intricate lines, the play of light and shadow, the familiar comfort of creation.

In a lavishly decorated bedroom in the Blackwater Pack territory, Hailee Crosby giggled, snuggled in Gabe Black's arms. She scrolled through her phone, reading the fawning comments on the pack's social media about their "blessed union."

"They love us," she purred, kissing his jaw. "They all know we were meant to be."

Gabe grunted in agreement, his mind already on the grand ceremony he would plan. He would show everyone what a powerful and benevolent Alpha he was, with his beautiful, adoring Luna by his side. They were on top of the world, convinced they had crushed Audriana, their only obstacle, into dust. They were fools, celebrating on the slopes of a volcano, utterly oblivious to the magma churning beneath their feet.

Caden POV:

The Maybach sped silently through the city. My phone buzzed with an encrypted message from my Beta.

'Alpha Summit confirmed for the end of the month. The old guard is restless. They will challenge your authority.'

I stared at the message, my thumb hovering over the screen. The annual gathering of all the Alphas on the continent. A den of posturing politics, and predators. This year, they would be expecting me to present my chosen Luna. They were expecting Juliana Beaumont, or someone like her. A predictable choice from a powerful family.

They were not expecting Audriana.

A dark, possessive smile touched my lips. Let them be restless. Let them challenge me.

"It's time," I murmured to the empty car, "that everyone is reminded who the true king of this continent is."

The car plunged into the darkness of the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, the lights of the city vanishing behind us, a fitting metaphor for the storm that was about to break.