

The Alpha's Forbidden Bite #Chapter 5: First Scent of Danger - Read The Alpha's Forbidden Bite Chapter 5: First Scent of Danger

Three days passed before the next incident.

Axel used the three days. He ran his pack through an accelerated version of what he privately thought of as recalibration not punishment for the drift that had occurred in his absence, but a deliberate return to form. Extended training rotations. Patrol schedules tightened and randomized so that any external observer tracking the pack's movements would have a harder time finding the gaps. Senior warriors assigned to secondary mentorship roles, passing standards down to the younger members who had spent the past fourteen months developing habits that hadn't been sufficiently challenged.

He worked alongside them. That was important. An Alpha who directed from a distance was a manager. An Alpha who ran the dawn patrol and worked the training yard until his knuckles bled alongside his warriors was something else. Something the pack's biology understood at a level below language.

He did not explain himself or announce his intentions. He simply appeared in the places where the work needed to be done and did it, and the pack recalibrated around him the way iron filings recalibrate around a magnet.

By the third day, the packhouse felt different. Still tense the situation with the corridor hadn't resolved and wouldn't resolve quickly but centered. Grounded in a way it hadn't been the morning he arrived.

Daren noticed. He said nothing about it, but Axel caught the expression on his Beta's face on the morning of the third day, watching the training yard from the steps of the packhouse, and what Daren's expression said without words was something like there it is.

The incident on the third evening began as something small.

A patrol team on the eastern line four wolves, experienced, running a dusk sweep reported unusual activity at the corridor boundary. Not intrusion. Not aggression. Something subtler. Two of the four had caught the cold-clean scent that Eli Farrow had described, drifting out of the corridor on a wind that was moving the wrong direction for natural dispersal.

The patrol leader, a steady woman named Corr, had the good judgment to hold her team at a safe distance rather than approach. She documented the scent signature, direction, intensity, duration and brought the report in clean and detailed.

Axel received it in the war room at nine that evening and read it twice.

"She's right that the wind direction doesn't explain it," Daren said. He had the topographic map spread open and was tracing airflow patterns with one finger. "For that scent to reach the boundary at that intensity, the source would have had to be

moving toward the line. Not stationary inside the corridor."

"Moving toward it," Axel said. "Or standing just inside it."

Daren looked up. "Deliberately projecting."

"It's a known thing." Axel set the report down. "Older vampires can push scent signature. It's a control technique territorial communication. Like leaving a mark, but impermanent."

"You think someone is standing at the boundary and sending us a smell."

"I think someone wants us to know they're there without giving us anything actionable." Axel stood and moved to the window. The night outside was dense and moonless, the kind of dark that forest made when there was no ambient light to borrow. "It's a patience play. They're not threatening. They're not retreating. They're just... present."

Daren was quiet for a moment. "What do we do with that?"

"Nothing tonight." Axel turned from the window. "Increase the corridor boundary patrols to four teams, staggered. No single point should be watched by the same eyes for more than two hours. I want overlapping coverage all the way from the northern junction to the southern marker." He paused. "And nobody nobody crosses the boundary under any circumstances. I don't care what they see. I don't care what they smell. You cross that line, you answer to me."

Daren nodded. "Understood."

But it was later that night past midnight, when the packhouse had gone to its version of quiet that the second thing happened.

Axel was still awake. He had not been sleeping well, which wasn't unusual for him in the early days of a tense situation, when his mind ran inventory too frequently and too thoroughly for proper rest to take hold. He was at the desk in the Alpha's quarters, working through patrol logs, when the window that faced east went cold.

Not a draft. Not a change in temperature that came from weather or movement of air through the building. This was different — a focused cold, distinct and pointed, the way a held breath was different from an empty room.

He was at the window in four steps.

The grounds below were still. The training yard empty. The distant shapes of the outbuildings dark and settled. The eastern tree line was a black mass against a slightly less black sky, no movement, no light.

He opened the window.

The cold hit him immediately the same clean, charged cold he had felt at the corridor boundary. Closer now. Much closer. He breathed it in fully, not flinching from it, mapping it the way he mapped everything. It wasn't threatening in the way aggression smelled threatening. But it wasn't neutral either. It was aware. Self-possessed. The cold of something that was precisely where it intended to be.

He searched the treeline with eyes that could find shapes in the dark that ordinary men would have missed entirely.

For a long moment, he found nothing.

Then he found it.

A shape, just at the far edge of where the packhouse grounds ended and the forest began. Still enough to have been a tree trunk or a shadow trick. Tall and lean, standing with the absolute motionlessness that only two kinds of things achieved — something that was frozen, or something that simply didn't need to move.

It wasn't frozen.

He knew that because, as he watched, it turned. Just slightly. Just enough to indicate awareness of being observed, which meant awareness of him specifically because no one else in the packhouse had an eastern window opened at this hour.

Something at the edge of his forest had seen him in the dark from a distance of two hundred meters.

He held the window frame and looked back, because he was the Alpha of Ashveil Pack and retreating from a window in his own house was something he simply would not do.

The shape held for another five seconds.

Then it was gone not walking away, not retreating into the forest with any visible movement. Simply gone in the way that some things were gone, between one moment and the next, with no transition to observe.

Axel stood at the window for another full minute.

Then he closed it.

He stood in the middle of his quarters in the dark and breathed carefully and thought about what he had seen and what it meant and what it was the beginning of.

His wolf was restless, pacing somewhere beneath his skin with the contained energy of an animal that knew something was near and wanted very much to run toward it or away from it and had been given neither option.

He put the wolf back down with the practice of long discipline.

Then he went back to his desk, and his patrol logs, and the slow, careful business of preparing his pack for something he couldn't yet name.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.