

The Alpha's Forbidden Bite #Chapter 8: A Warning Ignored - Read The Alpha's Forbidden Bite Chapter 8: A Warning Ignored

The elders met at dawn.

There were five of them, the inner council of Ashveil Pack, the oldest living members of the community whose authority operated in a different register than Axel's. He held the power of decision. They held the power of memory, which in a pack that had existed for three centuries was not a lesser thing. They remembered the truce signing. They remembered the last time a vampire had stood on Ashveil ground, which had been thirty-seven years ago and had ended in consequences that had taken a decade to fully resolve.

Elder Malka called the meeting, which was her right, and Axel attended because he had been Alpha long enough to know that the elders' objections were better heard in a room than allowed to ferment in corridors.

Malka was eighty-one years old and had the energy of someone sixty years younger and the patience of someone who had outlived enough urgency to understand which urgencies were real. She sat at the head of the elders' table in the lower chamber and looked at Axel with eyes that had watched him grow from an infant to a man to the Alpha of their pack, and she said what she had to say without preliminary.

"She needs to leave."

"She's leaving this afternoon," Axel said.

"She should have left last night."

"She gave us information last night that we needed. Sending her away before I had extracted what was useful would have been poor strategy."

"Sending her away before the pack's morning instinct reacted to her presence would have been better strategy." Malka folded her hands on the table. She was a small woman who had never been physically intimidating and had never needed to be. "The pack felt her, Axel. Not the senior circle the full pack. By sunrise, a third of this community was unsettled and didn't know why. By midmorning they'll know why."

"Then we'll address it."

"With what?" Elder Sorn a lean, angular man with white hair and a permanent expression of careful attention leaned forward. "You've been back for four days. The pack is still recalibrating to your presence, which they needed. Now you've placed a vampire in the east wing, and you're going to stand in the common room and explain to three hundred wolves that this was operationally sound."

"It was operationally sound."

"That's not what they'll hear."

Axel looked around the table. Five faces, all of them people he respected, all of them

carrying the weight of history he had only read about. He understood their position. He understood it clearly and without dismissiveness, which he thought was important to communicate.

"The information she brought us changes the threat picture significantly," he said. "We are not looking at a border dispute with Halvern Pack and some isolated provocation from the corridor. We're looking at a coordinated campaign with a specific end goal. The Hollow a faction inside the Voss Clan is working toward a justification for all-out conflict. Everything that's happened at the eastern border in the last months has been deliberate preparation." He let that settle. "If she hadn't come here and told us that, we would still be reading it as isolated incidents. We would still be calibrating a response that was exactly what the Hollow wants. A vampire standing in the east wing for one night is the least costly intelligence asset I've ever acquired."

The silence in the chamber was the particular silence of people who understood the argument and were not fully appeased by it.

"She is Voss," Malka said. "Her clan is the threat."

"A faction of her clan. She made that distinction clearly."

"And you believe her."

The question landed with more precision than its simplicity suggested. Axel looked at Malka and understood what was actually being asked not whether the information was credible, but whether he had assessed Reyna Voss as a person with the appropriate distance, or whether something in that east wing room had compromised the distance. He met Malka's eyes without flinching.

"I believe the information is credible," he said carefully. "The specific details she provided are verifiable against our own observations. The pattern she described maps onto incidents we had already documented. The intelligence holds together too precisely to be constructed." He paused. "As for her personally I've assessed her as far as one meeting allows. She's disciplined and she calculates. I haven't determined whether her calculations currently align with ours or whether she's using a real threat as a mechanism to position herself."

Malka studied him.

"That's an honest answer," she said finally.

"I try to give those."

"Then hear an honest one in return." She leaned forward slightly. "The Mark of the old truce exists for a reason. The boundary between our kinds was not drawn by weakness or ignorance. It was drawn by people who understood what happens when wolves and vampires occupy the same spaces, breathe the same air, allow themselves to see each other as something other than adversaries. The truce has held because the distance has held." She held his gaze. "You are your father's son in most ways. Be his son in this one too."

The room was very still.

Axel held the elder's gaze for a long moment. Then he nodded, a single, respectful inclination of his head that acknowledged what had been said without committing to what she was asking him to commit to.

"I hear you," he said.

It was not the same as I agree.

Malka knew the difference. She was eighty-one years old.

He went to the east wing at nine.

Reyna was ready to leave. She had whatever she had arrived with which appeared to be nothing, no bag, no equipment, nothing that suggested she had planned to stay longer than the conversation required. She stood in the room's center and looked at him when he came in with the same composure she had held throughout.

"The elders want you gone," he said. Not cruelly. As information.

"I expected that." She moved toward the door, which he was standing beside, and then stopped when he didn't immediately step aside.

"I want a way to reach you," he said. "If what you've told me about the Hollow's timeline is accurate, we have weeks rather than months before the next escalation. I need a reliable contact point."

She looked at him. Something moved briefly in her expression something that recalibrated, fractionally.

She told him a location. A specific point in the neutral zone between the pack territory's eastern edge and the corridor, not inside the corridor, but close enough to the boundary that it was unambiguously on the edge of both their worlds.

"Leave a black stone at the base of the split oak," she said. "I'll see it."

"And when I see it?"

"You won't. I'll come to you." A pause. "I move better at night."

"Most dangerous things do."

Something shifted in her eyes. Not offense. Something more complex than offense, something that had awareness of irony in it. "Keep your border tight, Alpha," she said.

"What comes next is going to test it."

He stepped aside.

She walked out into the corridor and through the packhouse and out into the thin morning light, and Axel stood in the east wing doorway and watched her go and did not think about the way she moved or the particular quality of attention she had brought to every moment in that room.

He thought instead about Malka's words.

About distance. About the truce. About what his father would have done.

Then he went to the war room and began preparing his pack for what was coming.

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