

CHAPTER 5

As I sat there, taken aback by what my mother was saying, a wave of nervousness washed over me. Mom was trying to downplay the seriousness of our situation.

"Mom, I don't get it. If this isn't related to me since I'm part of a different pack, then why have you been reaching out to Alpha Gideon?" I asked.

"He told you?" she replied, looking genuinely surprised.

"Yeah. He said I should talk to you about it," I explained.

"Alpha Axel knows I was friends with the previous Luna, which led him to assume that you were close to Atticus," Mom elaborated.

"I was only friends with that jerk until I was old enough to decide whether or not to visit the packhouse and see him. As soon as I had a choice, I stopped going," I insisted firmly.

"I know. That's why I've been reaching out to Alpha Gideon. Alpha Axel thinks I sent you away to keep you safe because you were friends with Atticus, and now he's trying to figure out when you left the pack. I'm working to gather as much evidence as I can to prove that you've been here longer than Alpha Axel has been in charge," she explained.

"He still believes I'm in touch with Atticus? Didn't he kill him?" I asked, feeling bewildered.

"No. Atticus surrendered and then took off. He abandoned us, and no one knows where he is," she clarified.

"That son of a b***h," I muttered.

"I know. That's why I'm doing everything in my power to prove you're not hiding a fugitive. He's looking for Atticus. He hasn't reached out to you, has he?" she probed.

"Of course not. He knows better than that," I scoffed. "Look, he's not going to uncover anything. There are plenty of people who will back me up. They'll say I've been here for a year."

"I get it. That's exactly why I'm trying to gather evidence—I need to obtain school records from Alpha Gideon and anything else that shows you left long before Atticus had that fight with Axel," she replied.

"Wow. We always knew that prick would screw things up for the pack. I really didn't think he'd take it this far," I said.

"None of us did. But we knew he was bound to do something reckless that could put us all in danger," she responded.

"Okay, just remember to call me if you need anything. You don't have to go to Alpha Gideon—just reach out to me," I insisted.

"I will. I'm sorry I kept you out of the loop. I thought I was protecting you," she said.

"I don't need protection; I just need you to be honest with me," I replied.

"Alright. I promise I will," she assured me.

After hanging up the phone, I made my way to the diner. Even though I was early for my shift, I didn't mind. I changed into my work clothes and dove into my tasks, trying to push aside my worries about everything happening at home and just hoping my mother was safe—praying she wouldn't get caught up with Alpha Axel, who was looking for me.

I even considered calling him myself, but I realized that would only make things worse. My mother was trying to manage everything on her side, so I decided to step back and let her handle it before I jumped in to defend myself.

That night, I stayed behind at the diner to help clean up, then made my way to the gym, where I ended up sitting outside, waiting for training to wrap up. As I noticed they were still in the thick of their session, I pulled out a cigarette and took a seat in a chair by a tree. I scrolled through my phone until the session ended, and when Angel came to the door to lock up after the warriors left, he stopped short when he saw me outside and walked over.

"Why didn't you come in?" he asked, a look of concern etched on his face.

"I just couldn't face it tonight," I admitted, my voice shaky as I glanced away, avoiding the intensity of his gaze.

"What's going on?" he asked gently, picking up on the turmoil churning inside me.

"There's a lot happening back at my home pack, and I'm genuinely worried my mother might be in danger because of me," I confessed, my heart racing as the gravity of the situation hit me.

"What do you mean? How could you have put her in danger?" he asked, concern carved on his face.

"The new Alpha who took over our pack is digging into my past. He's convinced I'm a traitor," I explained, my words tumbling out in a rush. The memory of the Alpha's piercing glare twisted my stomach into knots.

"Why would he think that?" Angel asked, his brow furrowing as he grasped the seriousness of my situation.

"It's a long story. Honestly, I'm not ready to get into it right now," I admitted, feeling the weight of my troubles pressing down heavily on my shoulders.

"That's understandable," he said, his voice calm and reassuring. "Do you need anything? I heard about what happened today," he added, his eyes drifting to the white plaster cast on my arm.

"It's nothing serious," I replied, forcing a weak smile. "I might go for a run. It'll help me clear my head and get my hand moving," I said, already imagining the soothing rhythm of my feet hitting the ground.

"Yeah, that might help clear your head, too," he replied, his expression softening as he recognized my need for some time alone.

"Exactly," I agreed, a sense of determination swelling within me.

"If you need anything at all, don't hesitate to call me," he said sincerely, his eyes locking onto mine with a promise of support.

"I will. Thank you for being so understanding. I'll see you tomorrow," I assured him, feeling a flicker of reassurance as I turned away, ready to embrace the solitude that awaited me outside.

I got up and made my way toward the forest near the gym.

I carefully removed my clothes, folding them neatly to make it easier to grab later. Shifting into my large black wolf, with white paws and a distinct white diamond pattern between my eyes, I felt the cast on my arm break away and shatter into tiny pieces.

"Good evening, Mara," I greeted my wolf in my mind.

"You haven't gone for a run in a while," Mara replied, her voice echoing in my thoughts.

"That's because you stopped communicating with me," I shot back.

"I only went quiet after you put that snake in the teacher's office," she countered.

"The teacher accused me of cheating! You know I didn't cheat," I insisted.

"That doesn't give you the right to pull stunts like that. You could get us kicked out of here," she cautioned.

"No way! Everyone around here adores me," I replied with a smirk.

"Alright, I'll drop the silent treatment," she relented.

"Great! Let's get going then," I said as I stretched my paws into the ground, feeling the dirt beneath my claws. I shook out my fur, standing tall and letting the breeze weave through it, making me feel free—truly free for the first time.

As I gazed around the forest, my werewolf vision kicked in, sharpening my sight exponentially. I spotted the guards patrolling the area but stayed well out of their line of sight. Even among werewolves, I was considered a large wolf, and I understood that my size could be intimidating. That's why I preferred to run only at night, avoiding the patrols—I didn't want to be perceived as a threat. Although I wasn't part of this pack, I didn't mind connecting with them from time to time; I just preferred maintaining a safe distance. Still, whenever stress or worry weighed on me, a simple run through the woods lifted my spirits, putting my problems into perspective.

When I returned to the house, I shifted back into my human form and quickly got dressed. I climbed the stairs and tried to open the door, but true to her word, Martha had locked me out. I made my way around to the back of the house, and as I reached my bedroom window, I carefully pried it open from the outside and slid my bag inside. Just as I was about to jump in, someone grabbed my shoulder, nearly giving me a heart attack and causing me to let out a startled noise. I turned around to see who was sneaking around at this late hour.

"Atticus," I exclaimed, taken aback.



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