

## CHAPTER 7-1

I stood there, gazing up at Alpha Axel, whose intense demeanor could easily intimidate anyone. He motioned for me to head into the kitchen, and I exchanged a quick glance with my mother before stepping inside. My dad leaned casually against the counter, while another man I didn't recognize stood nearby—presumably Alpha Axel's Beta.

Alpha Axel pulled a chair out from the table, and I took a seat. He settled in across from me, a beer resting in front of him, while I dropped my bag on the floor beside me.

"So, what's going on?" I asked, my voice coming out a bit hoarse.

Mom began brewing coffee for both of us as I continued to meet Alpha Axel's steady gaze.

"You must be worn out after such a long day," Mom remarked.

"And what about the rest of us? It's my house, too," Martha shot back at her.

"What about you?" I retorted before I could stop myself, quickly slapping a hand over my mouth as I glanced nervously at Alpha.

"So, how's training treating you?" Mom asked, trying to keep the mood light as she handed me my coffee.

"It's going well. I skipped it tonight since I had to stay late at work," I replied.

"I'm sure they'll understand," she said.

"Yeah, I hope so," I answered, feeling a slight weight of concern settle over me.

I noticed another man walk into the room. I hadn't even realized he was here; he had slipped in through the front door without me knowing. It was my mother's mate, Walker. I actually liked him—much more than I did Martha.

"She only goes to training every night because she's in love with the head warrior," Martha snickered from her corner.

"Are you jealous? At least he gives me the attention you wish he'd give you," I shot back at her defiantly.

"I told you not to talk to Martha like that," Dad barked, his tone sharp. I glanced at him, feeling nothing but contempt.

Mom looked over at Peter, her expression a mix of shock and disbelief as she tried to take in his reaction.

"She started it," Mom said, defending me. It felt reassuring to have her backing me up—she had always stood by my side.

But then I remembered that Alpha Axel was still sitting at the table, his gaze locked on me without a word. I turned to face him, determined not to show any fear.

"So, you wanted to talk to me?" I inquired.

"We received a report that Atticus was seen near this pack recently. I thought that couldn't be just a coincidence," Alpha Axel replied.

"It's no coincidence. He was waiting for me outside after training last night," I explained.

"Where is he now?" Alpha Axel pressed.

"I told him about a cabin beyond the border, but I made it clear I wouldn't risk my safety for him. If anyone asks, I'll be honest. The cabin is northeast in no-man's land," I replied as Axel linked up with his warriors.

"People say you moved here a year ago," he remarked.

"Yeah, Atticus took over, and he's a complete fool. Mom knew he'd mess up the pack," I shot back, holding his gaze without flinching. I refused to show any fear.

"And feel free to take her back anytime. This has been the longest year of my life," Martha scoffed.

"Oh really? Try living with a narcissistic witch like you for a year," I shot back.

"And who do you think you are?" Martha retorted.

"Do you want me to staple your mouth shut? Because I could easily do that," I threatened.

Martha glanced at Peter, who quickly averted his gaze, knowing she'd turn on him next.

"Why would Atticus come to you?" Axel asked.

"I have no idea. He mentioned he had nowhere else to go, which just seemed sad. We weren't friends; I kept my distance because he was such an entitled brat," I replied.



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