

Chapter 19

Julian sat behind his desk, the glow of his computer screen casting pale light across the office. Spreadsheets filled the screen, reports detailing supply shipments and land contracts. His eyes moved steadily, as though order on the page might impose order everywhere else.

The door opened with a quiet knock. Jace stepped inside, a few files under his arm.

"Alpha." His voice was crisp, businesslike. "Border scouts reported no disturbances today. The new patrol rotations have been implemented without issue."

Julian gave a curt nod, eyes still on the screen.

Jace set another file on the desk. "Also—financial records from the west holdings. The tax revisions will benefit us more than projected."

Another nod.

Finally, Jace hesitated, the last folder still in his grip. "And... the test came back negative."

Julian's hands stilled over the keyboard. For a fraction of a second, the silence stretched taut. He knew exactly what test Jace meant. His expression, however, never shifted. "Good."

Jace slid the folder across the desk. "These are the results, along with everything I could find out about her."

Julian glanced at it once, then swept the file into the trash bin at his side without breaking stride. "I didn't ask for anything beyond the result."

Jace's jaw shifted slightly, like there was more he wanted to say. But in the end, he decided against it.

"Understood, Alpha."

Julian resumed typing, posture unchanged, as if the exchange had never occurred.

Jace inclined his head once more. "If there's nothing else, I'll leave you to it."

The Beta slipped out, the door shutting with a muted click. Silence settled heavy over the office, broken only by the low hum of the air vent. Julian returned his gaze to the spreadsheets, fingers poised over the keyboard.

But the lines blurred. Numbers that had always anchored him wavered, meaningless. His hand flexed once, then stilled.

The result was good. Clean. Exactly what he wanted. No complications. No ties. It should have been finished.

So why didn't it feel finished?

Why did she continue to push through the cracks of his control, unbidden?

Why did her voice cling in the back of his skull, low and soft, whispering his name? Why did his sleep betray him, dragging her into his dreams when he had sworn he was done with her?

His grip tightened around the mouse. He forced his eyes back to the

screen, but the columns might as well have been blank. The only thing he saw was her—always her.

With a sharp exhale, he leaned back, gaze sliding to the door. Still closed. No footsteps in the hall. No prying eyes.

Julian reached down. The folder lay where he had tossed it, half-buried in the wastebasket. His hand hovered for a breath—the hesitation foreign, unwanted. Then, with a decisive motion, he plucked it from the bin.

He flipped open the file, eyes skimming the first lines. The name of her pack leapt out at him. A pack he knew far too well. His brow ticked. “Small world,” he muttered under his breath.

Rank: Omega.

His gaze dragged lower.

Lineage: Unknown. Orphan.

He read on.

Failure to thrive.

Possible human origin.

Exiled at eighteen.

The words landed heavy, catching him off guard.

His gaze snagged on the photograph clipped inside. A grainy image taken for pack records, the kind no one ever expected to matter. She

looked no more than fifteen or sixteen, her hair pulled back for formality, her expression reserved. Yet her eyes—sad, guarded—pulled at something in his chest he hadn't realized could be touched.

And then, beneath the picture—her name.

His eyes lingered on the letters. His finger brushed across the page, tracing the curve of her name as it echoed in his mind.

Kaelani.

His wolf stirred, a restless ripple beneath his skin.

The door burst open.

Julian's head snapped up, the file slamming shut. In the same breath, he slid it into the top drawer of his desk just as Elara waltzed in as if she owned the place.

"You need to knock," he said sharply, his tone edged with command.

She arched a perfectly shaped brow, lips curving into a smirk. "And what? Wait out there like some servant until you decide I'm worthy of being let in?" She let the door fall shut behind her with a careless flick of her hand.

"Please, Julian, I'm not some insignificant omega. I'm your future Luna."

"What do you need, Elara?" Julian asked, keeping his voice measured though his jaw tensed with irritation at her entitled tone as she drifted closer, eyes glittering with intent.