



Chapter 7

I pressed my hands against my mouth to keep from screaming.

A car door slammed outside.

I rushed to the window and peered through the blinds. Darrell's BMW was pulling into the driveway. Through the windshield, I could see two figures.

They're back.

I grabbed my suitcase and headed for the stairs. Halfway down, I heard voices outside the front door.

"Relly, I can barely walk." Camila's voice was slurred with alcohol and satisfaction.

"I've got you, baby." Darrell's voice was tender in a way he'd never used with me.

The door opened as I reached the bottom step.

They stumbled inside together, Darrell's arm wrapped possessively around Camila's waist. Her dress was wrinkled and her lipstick was smeared. Dark hickeys covered Darrell's neck.

The smell hit me immediately. Sex. Sweat. The unmistakable musk of two people who'd been fucking in a car.

So that's what the crushing pain in my chest was. The mate bond had

felt his betrayal in real time while I was packing upstairs.

She was on her period, I thought numbly. *They fucked anyway.*

"Oh!" Camila spotted me first. Her surprise looked genuine for half a second before transforming into smug satisfaction. "Sable! You're still awake."

Darrell's eyes fixed on my suitcase. His expression shifted from post-sex bliss to mild annoyance.

"What's with the luggage?" He didn't move away from Camila. "Are you trying to get my attention?"

I gripped the handle tighter. "I'm giving you two some space. Don't want to be the third wheel."

Camila's smile widened. "Oh sweetie, you don't have to leave because of me..."

"You don't need to go anywhere." Darrell's relief was barely concealed. "This house is big enough."

"Is it now?"

"I mean, we're all adults here. We can handle this maturely."

Camila's face darkened. "Darrell, what exactly are you suggesting?"

"I'm saying there's no reason for anyone to make dramatic decisions

tonight."

I adjusted my grip on the suitcase. "I'm not being dramatic. I just think some time apart would be good for everyone."

His shoulders relaxed. "Exactly. Just some time to... adjust to the new situation. You're being incredibly understanding about this, Sable."

Understanding. The word tasted like poison.

"So where will you stay? Nearby?"

"Close enough. I have some things to think about."

"Things?"

"About what I want. What I'm willing to accept."

His eyes lit up with barely hidden excitement. "Take all the time you need. I'll be here when you're ready to talk."

He actually thinks I'm going to come crawling back. That I'll accept being his side piece while she gets the throne.

"Let him think that," Esme advised coldly. *"*Let him dig his own grave.*"

*

"I should get going." I pulled the suitcase toward the door. "It's late."

"Drive safe." Darrell's voice carried false concern.

Camila giggled and pressed closer to him. "Come on, let's go to bed. I want to show you how much I missed you."

The door closed behind me just as I heard Camila's breathy moan: "God, Relly, I need you inside me again..."

My hands shook as I loaded the suitcase into my car. The engine turned over on the second try, and I pulled out of the driveway without looking back.

The Moonridge Grand Hotel's lobby was empty except for the night clerk, who didn't bat an eye when I requested the presidential suite at 4:30 AM.

When the elevator doors finally opened to reveal two thousand square feet of luxury, I walked straight to the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city.

Moonridge sparkled below like scattered diamonds. Somewhere out there, Darrell was probably buried between Camila's thighs, finally getting what he'd wanted all along.

I reached for the cheap bracelet on my wrist – the one Darrell had given me for our six-month anniversary. The clasp broke easily between my fingers. The fake silver fell into the wastebasket with a hollow clink.

My fingers found the turquoise bracelet underneath. The one Dad had given me on my eighteenth birthday. The stone felt warm against my skin, like a reminder of who I really was.

Sable Crawford. Alpha's daughter. Not some abandoned orphan begging for scraps.

My phone buzzed. Dr. Martinez from Moonridge General:

"Sable? Sorry to call so late. We have a complex cardiac surgery scheduled for next week - Gabriel William. The patient specifically requested you as his surgical assistant."

I frowned. "Isn't Dr. Peterson handling his case?"

"Peterson's willing to operate, but Gabriel refuses anesthesia unless you're in the OR. Says you're the only one who's treated him with dignity." Martinez sighed. "Look, I know you're just a resident, but this guy has severe trust issues after what his pack did to him."

Gabriel William. A fifty-year-old silver miner whose pack had cast him out after a mining accident damaged his heart. No insurance, no support - just a broken wolf who'd been surviving on charity care.

"When is the surgery?"

"Five days from now. Can you assist?"

"I'll be there."

Five days to assist in Gabriel's surgery and officially close this chapter of my life.

I pulled out my phone and typed a message to Caelan:

"Have to assist in a surgery case in five days. Patient specifically requested me. Then I'll come home."

His reply came within minutes:

"Handle what you need to handle. I'll be waiting."

I stared at the phone, surprised he'd responded so quickly at this hour. He was probably dealing with pack business - the Lycan King's work never really ended.

A second message appeared:

"Are you alright? You sound different."

Even through text, he could read me. After all these years apart, Caelan still paid attention to details others missed.

I typed back: *"Just tired. Had a patient today who kept insisting his chest pain was because his ex-girlfriend was 'stealing his heart.' Turns out it was just gas."*

"Get some rest. I have a surprise for you, but it can wait until you're properly awake."

The simple kindness in his words made something tight in my chest loosen. When was the last time someone had told me to rest because they actually cared about my wellbeing?

"Goodnight, Caelan."

"Goodnight, Sabi."

I set the phone aside and walked to the bathroom. The woman in the mirror looked different now. Stronger somehow. Like she'd finally remembered who she was supposed to be.

"We're going home," Esme said quietly.

Not yet. We have work to finish first.

"And after?"

I touched the turquoise bracelet again. *After, we become who we were always meant to be.*

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