

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 266: Memory lane 2

FIA

I snorted before I could stop myself. The sound came out sharper than I intended, but I didn't take it back.

"The pack of Omegas," I said. "The one that got exterminated."

Morrigan nodded.

"I'm sure you know how the story goes then," she said. "My husband was part of the Alphas urged by the Alpha King and Queen to settle the mess."

I did know. Everyone knew. It was the kind of story that got told at dinner tables and in Pack halls, always framed the same way. A cautionary tale. A warning about what happened when the natural order was disrupted.

The Omega-only packs had Omega leaders. That was the first thing every wolf learned about them. And that was the thing that made them illegal under true hierarchy. Not because they were dangerous. They weren't. Not really. It was because they threatened the very structure the whole system was built on. Alpha at the top. Beta in the middle. Omega at the bottom. That was how it had always been. That was how it was supposed to stay.

But certain Omegas had grown tired of it. Tired of being told they were lesser. Tired of being treated less like members of a pack and more like property. Like livestock. Like things to be owned and bred and kept quiet. So they left. They formed their own groups, chose their own leaders, built something from nothing. And for a while, it worked. It was small. It was fragile. But it existed.

Then we were told that the true rogues came. Wolves who had been cast out, or were about to be. Some of them had actually done something wrong. Others claimed they had been set up. The pack justice system wanted clean answers and easy punishments, and when the truth was messy and complicated, it was far simpler to just point at someone who wouldn't be missed. And what was easier to point at than an Omega? Especially one who had already stepped out of line?

So the rogues joined the Omega packs. Not out of solidarity, not at first. Out of survival. They needed somewhere to go, and the Omega packs were the only door still open.

Then the new shaky system was hijacked and they became an actual problem.

And then the Alpha King decided the whole thing had to end.

"The Northern Ridge's Nocturne and our pack, Skollrend, were allied," Morrigan continued. "As willed by the King. For an attack on a branch of the rogues."

Her voice had gone quieter. The kind of quiet that came from saying words you had said a hundred times before and still hadn't made peace with.

"The rogues were already being decimated badly on all sides. So this would have been light work."

I swallowed. The food on the trolley suddenly felt very far away.

"Is that how he died?" I asked.

Morrigan nodded.

She didn't look away. She held my gaze, and I watched something move behind her eyes. Something old. Something that had been sitting in her chest for years, untouched and unresolved.

"It's still so cruel to think about," she said. Her voice wavered, just barely. "There were only three casualties from our side. And one of them was my husband."

She paused and drew a breath.

"Gabriel seemed to believe that a mole revealed the attack. That was why his brother died. But it was all just for him to take power for himself. None of it was about justice." She shook her head, slow and firm. "He wanted to blame Nocturne. But the Alpha King tribunal judged the case themselves. And Nocturne was innocent."

The words hung in the air between us. Nocturne was innocent. A verdict handed down by the highest authority in the land. A closed case. A settled thing.

And yet...

"But while everyone wanted a face and a warm body to punish," Morrigan said, "I was just there. Numb."

Tears formed at the edges of her eyes. She didn't wipe them right away. She let them sit, let them catch the pale morning light filtering through the curtains.

"I felt him die, Fia."

The words hit me like a physical thing. A blow to somewhere deep and unguarded. I reached out without thinking and took her hand. Her fingers were warm and slightly

trembling. She squeezed mine once, then lifted her free hand and wiped at her cheeks with the back of it. A quick, practiced motion. The kind that said she had done this before. She has cried, cleaned up and fucking carried on.

That was life.

"So," she said, sniffling once. "To see my son almost go through the same thing." She stopped and took another breath. "Goddess. It hurt me."

She looked at me then. Really looked at me. And there was so much in her expression that I didn't have a name for all of it.

"I am truly glad you are alright," she said.

I held her hand tighter. I didn't let go.

"You two have to be happy," she said. "And live very long lives."

She sniffled again, lighter this time. Then she pulled her hand back gently, straightened her shoulders, and turned toward the trolley with a resolve that felt almost deliberate. Like she was choosing to move forward because staying still wasn't an option anymore.

"Let me serve you," she said.

I nodded. I let her.

I watched her lift one of the domes off a plate. It had eggs that had been scrambled soft and golden. She spooned them onto a smaller dish with care, and added a slice of toast that had already been buttered, and set it in front of me on the bedside table. Her hands were steady now. Practiced in a different way than the Omega who had wheeled in the trolley.

I picked up the fork and ate.

My mind drifted back to the book, still sitting on the mattress between us. To the pages I had been studying before sleep had dragged me under. The entry on Athena. Brief. Almost nonexistent. A footnote in a larger history, easy to miss if you weren't looking for it.

I had been looking for it.

The thing about packs was that leadership was almost always a family affair. Alpha to Alpha, generation after generation. The bloodline carried the authority. The same went for Omegas too. Since I wanted to understand Athena, I had to go further back. I had to trace the line. Find the older ruling wolves. See where Athena's family sat in the web of pack politics before she ever became a name anyone cared about.

It would have been nice if Cian had mentioned that Nocturne and Skollrend had history. That part stung a little, if I was being honest with myself. Not because I thought he owed me every piece of information he had. But because it was relevant. Directly relevant. And he hadn't said a word.

But then again, the mention of Ronan being a traitor, and even Aldric, and the fact that he could not shut out what he had seen, the evidence burned into his sight, probably did a number on his psyche.

Even if that was not part of the equation, I got why he hadn't. A case had been made. A verdict had been handed down. Nocturne was found innocent, and the matter had been closed. To Cian, the enemy had always been his father's brother Gabriel. The man who had allegedly tried to kill his mother and done even more horrific things. The man who had manipulated and schemed and wrapped his poison around everyone close to him. Of course Cian believed the threat had been Gabriel all along.

But Gabriel being an enemy didn't mean Nocturne was clean.

Alpha Aldric. The name surfaced in my thoughts like something rising from deep water. He was affiliated with Nocturne. That much I had pieced together. And he had wanted Hazel alive, or at least, he had acted like he did. For whatever reason. Whatever game he was playing, Nocturne seemed to be part of it.

If Aldric had any real connection to that pack, then he would have been neck deep in all of it. The rogue faction. The massacre. The trial. The verdict. He would have known every detail. Every angle. Every way the story could be twisted or buried or reframed.

So the question had to be asked. Even if I knew it would hurt the Grand Luna to hear it.

"Mother in law," I said.

Morrigan looked up from the trolley. She had been arranging another plate, her hands moving with quiet efficiency. She set down the spoon and turned to face me fully.

"Yes?"

I held her gaze. I kept my voice steady, but I didn't dress it up. There was no point in pretending this was casual.

"Do you think Alpha Gabriel was the one who did it?"

She didn't blink. She didn't hesitate. The answer came out of her like it had been sitting on the tip of her tongue for years, waiting for someone to finally ask.

"Think?" She shook her head. "It is a fact that he did it."

Her jaw tightened. Something cold and certain settled over her features. The warmth from before didn't disappear. It just moved aside to make room for something harder.

"That man is a monster," she said. "And hiding is the best thing he can do right now. For all the sins he committed and refuses to pay for. He will get what is coming to him soon regardless. All his secret plots have failed. He'll take the bait eventually."

The words filled the room and stayed there. Heavy. Final. The kind of statement that didn't invite a response, because there was nothing left to say after it.

But I had things to say. Despite knowing Aldric would have done his big one poisoning this well and her reasoning, I had to open Luna Morrigan's eyes as well. I had to try.

"And where was Alpha Aldric during all of that?"