

Chapter 11

Haven Kramer POV:

Mrs. Villarreal's face, already plump, swelled with rage. The accusation from Phoebe, a mere maid, was a lit firecracker tossed at her feet.

A harsh, ugly laugh scraped its way out of her throat. She pointed a fat, trembling finger at Phoebe. "And what are you? A little girl sent along with the luggage, and you dare to question me?"

Phoebe flinched back, her face losing its color, but she held her ground, her small chin jutting out stubbornly. She didn't take back her words.

I watched the exchange from behind her, my fingers curling into the fabric of my skirt. The coarse wool bit into my palm.

If I didn't speak now, Phoebe would be devoured in this house. Every servant would know she can be stepped on. That was a cost I couldn't afford.

I moved forward, a slow, deliberate step that placed me just in front of her. The movement was small. The message was not. I was a wall.

My eyes landed on Mrs. Villarreal's face. My voice was quiet when I spoke. "She is with me. Her words are my words."

The housekeeper's furious gaze finally shifted from Phoebe to me. It was filled with a thick contempt. She looked me up and down, like I was a cheap dress she was considering for rags. "Oh? The new lady from the Kramer house? You think you're the mistress here now? I raised the Alpha!"

She added, puffing out her chest. Her tone was one of magnanimous pity. "Everything here is my decision. A wolfless stray from the Kramer family should learn her place!"

Behind me, I could feel Phoebe trembling with indignation at the insult.

My own expression didn't change by a flicker. I even allowed the smallest



hint of a smile to touch my lips. It made the triumphant sneer on Mrs. Villarreal's face falter.

She had expected tears or shouting. She got neither.

I let the silence stretch.

One breath.

Two.

Three.

Long enough for the other servants in the room to shift uncomfortably, long enough for Mrs. Villarreal's sneer to begin to crack. She opened her mouth to fill the void.

"Are you finished?" I asked softly, as if inquiring about the weather.

The interruption caught her mid-breath. Her jaw snapped shut. My calm seemed to unnerve her more than any shouting could have.

A flicker of uncertainty crossed her features before she buried it in a renewed wave of bluster. "What is this attitude! Someone, take this disrespectful woman and—"

"Disrespectful?" I interrupted, my voice still quiet, but each word was a chip of ice. "Mrs. Villarreal, you seem to have forgotten something very important."

I took another step forward, closing the distance between us until I could smell the cheap, cloying perfume she wore. I was inside her space now—the kind of invasion that made a bully's instincts scream danger.

Phoebe watched me, her breath held. She could feel the shift in the air, the sudden, sharp authority that had been absent when I was under my father's roof.

I could feel it too. I lowered my voice, speaking just loud enough for her and her closest servants to hear. But as I spoke, I let my gaze flicker—just for a fraction of a second—toward the bed. Toward the still figure lying there.

He was listening. I needed him to hear this part.



"My father, Gordon Kramer, is very concerned about my treatment here. He mentioned that he will be sending representatives from the Kramer pack in a few days to ensure that I, and my mate, are receiving the appropriate care."

It was a complete lie. But I was betting my life she wouldn't dare call my bluff.

Mrs. Villarreal's pupils contracted. The Kramer family, for all their disdain for me, was still a powerful Alpha's line.

She was just a housekeeper. She couldn't afford to make an enemy of them.

She tried to rally—I could see it in the way her shoulders drew back, the way her mouth opened for a retort.

But I didn't let her get a word out. Seeing the crack in her armor, I pressed on, "And your neglect of my mate is tantamount to murder." My voice was a low, steady blade. "How do you suppose the Kramer representatives will report that to the Alpha Council?"

Her mouth stayed open, but no sound came out. The blood drained from her face, leaving it a pasty pale. Her lips began to tremble. For the first time, she looked afraid.

She reached behind her, grasping for Holly's arm, for something to steady herself. Her fingers clawed at the younger maid's sleeve.

I gave her no time to recover. I was already playing my trump card. I took a breath—deep, filling my lungs—and when I spoke again, my voice was no longer quiet. It rose, clear and sharp, ringing through the entire room like a bell being struck. "More importantly, I am his legal mate, joined under the eyes of the Moon Goddess and by the decree of the Alpha King. Any obstruction, neglect, or harm done to an Alpha's mate is a direct challenge to the authority of the King himself!"

The words landed like a bolt of lightning. Every servant in the room froze. A maid near the window dropped the pitcher she'd been holding—it hit the floor with a hollow thud, but no one even turned to look at the mess. Their eyes were fixed on me.

In the world of werewolves, the Alpha King's law was absolute. Mrs.



Villarreal could bully an unloved bride, but she would never dare to defy the throne.

Her knees buckled. Holly, the maid beside her, had to grab her arm to keep her from collapsing.

For a moment, I thought she might actually fall. The thought made something cold curl in my stomach—not pity, but recognition.

She was not used to losing. That was why she was shaking. She had been utterly defeated by the very rules she claimed to uphold.

I looked down at her, my gaze cold. "Now, take your people and get out of this room. No one is to enter again without my permission."

She didn't move at first. Her whole body shook—humiliation and terror warring on her face. Then, under the awestruck gazes of the other servants, she finally broke. Leaning heavily on Holly, she stumbled from the room, a graceless, frantic retreat. The heavy door clicked shut, plunging the room back into silence.

Phoebe stared at me, her eyes shining with pure adoration. I could see her forming words, could see the excitement threatening to spill out of her.

I didn't turn to her yet. I let out a slow breath—and let my legs buckle for just a moment. I caught myself on the back of a chair before anyone could see. The confrontation had drained me more than I let on.

"Phoebe," I said quietly, "close your mouth before you catch flies."

She snapped it shut, then immediately grinned. "My lady, that was—"

"I know."

I finally turned away from the door. And then I looked at the bed. The still figure lay motionless, wrapped in bandages and silence. But I was almost certain that, beneath those closed eyelids, his ice-blue eyes had followed every word, every gesture, every calculated pause.

This performance was for him. I needed him to see it. I had wanted to show him several things that I wasn't a victim who needed his protection; that I could command a room without shifting a single bone in my body;



that I was useful, even valuable, as an ally.

Whether he believed it yet was another question. But I'd planted the seeds. Now I had to let them grow.

Phoebe tugged at my sleeve. "My lady, are you all right? You're pale."

I looked at her. At her worried face, her unwavering loyalty. Then I looked back at the bed, at the man who was pretending not to have heard a single word.

I wasn't a victim. I was a player. And I was valuable. Now I just had to make sure he knew it.