

## Chapter 5

Elena POV:

The motel was a rat trap on the edge of the human town, ten miles from the pack border. The neon sign buzzed with an annoying \*fzzzt-pop\* sound. It was the kind of place Rogues went to die.

Fitting.

I lay on the lumpy mattress, staring at the water-stained ceiling. It was night now. The wolfsbane was no longer just hurting; it was dissolving me. My bones felt like they were made of molten glass.

I reached under the bed and pulled out a bowl of soup I had bought earlier. I couldn't keep it down, but the warmth on my hands helped.

The door creaked.

I froze. I hadn't locked it? No, I had. The lock had been picked.

Lydia stepped into the room.

She wasn't wearing her 'victim' face now. She was dressed in black leather, looking every bit the warrior she claimed to be. She closed the door softly behind her.

"You're hard to track without a scent," she said, wrinkling her nose at the smell of mold. "But I figured you wouldn't get far."

"Here to finish the job?" I whispered. I tried to sit up, but my arms gave out. \*I carefully slid my hand under the pillow, tapping the screen of my phone.\*

Lydia laughed. It was a cold, ugly sound. "Oh, Elena. The job is already done. You're practically decomposing."

She walked over to the bedside table and picked up my bottle of water. She unscrewed the cap and poured a small vial of clear liquid into it.

"Concentrated silver nitrate," she explained casually. "Just to speed things up. I can't have you lingering as a Rogue. What if you found a cure? What if you came back?"

"Why?" I asked, \*forcing my voice to sound weaker than it was. I needed her to gloat.\* "I gave you everything. You have the Alpha. You have the rank."

"Because as long as you breathe, his wolf knows," she hissed, her face twisting into a snarl. "Even with the bond severed, he looks for you. I see it in his eyes. He hesitates."

She grabbed a handful of my hair and yanked my head back. I gasped, tears leaking from my eyes.

\*"You were always so clever, Lydia," I wheezed. "Even the tea... nobody ever suspected the tea.\*"

\*"Exactly," she smirked, leaning in close. "Wolfsbane in your morning brew for ten years. Ten years! And you just kept surviving. You stubborn bitch."\*

"You... you admit it," I choked out.

"Who am I admitting it to? A corpse?" She shoved my head back onto the pillow. "Nobody cares, Elena. Mom and Dad know I'm ambitious. They prefer a winner. And Caleb? Caleb is so blinded by my performance he'd thank me for putting you out of your misery."

She kicked me in the ribs-the same ones Caleb had cracked earlier. I screamed, curling into a ball.

"Die quietly," she said. "I have a wedding to plan."

She turned and walked out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

I lay there, blood bubbling on my lips. The pain was blinding, encompassing my entire world.

But I smiled.

With a trembling hand, I reached under the pillow. I pulled out my phone.

The screen was glowing. The voice recorder app was running.

\*Stop Recording.\*

\*Save File.\*

I didn't have the strength to stand. I didn't have the strength to fight. But I had enough strength for one last click.

I opened the email draft I had prepared. I attached the new audio file.

\*Recipients: Alpha Caleb, Beta John, The High Elder, Pack Council.\*

I pressed \*Send\*.

The little 'sending' bar moved across the screen. It felt agonizingly slow.

\*Sent.\*

I dropped the phone. It clattered to the floor.

The darkness was closing in now. Real darkness. Not just the night.

"Checkmate, Lydia," I whispered.

Then, the pain finally stopped.