

Alpha Nox - Chapter 0002

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Four Years Later

“Worm! Get your ass over here!” The one voice I hated more than anyone else’s screeched.

It was much raspier than I’d ever heard from another she-wolf, if one could even call Harriet a she-wolf. I liked to think of her as a toad. A fat, wart-riddled toad that couldn’t stop itself from croaking every single chance it got. Unfortunately, she was a poisonous toad, and I had no choice but to bow to her every whim or risk becoming her next victim.

I’d made that mistake four months in and learned the hard way when she punched me so hard I took an involuntary three-day nap. Wolves with the ability of enhanced strength had a knack at hitting you where it hurt most.

It wasn’t the worst I’ve endured, but it certainly made an impression.

I entered the Trainer’s compound where all of the higher-up’s gathered for circuit week. Harriet stood with her back to me, hunched over the table as she reviewed this year’s circuit map. Her muddy brown hair looked exactly the same as when I’d first met her four years ago, pulled into a bun so tight that I just knew she had chronic headaches.

“Yes, Ma’am.” I announced myself, standing erect and holding my breath until my lungs burned with need.

“Have you filled the snake pit yet?” She called over her shoulder, her voice crackling like she’d just smoked a pack of cigarettes.

I gritted my teeth. “No, Ma’am. I was ensuring the spikes along the climbing walls were operating correctly.”

Her fear was ripe and salty as it stained the air.

Snakes—that’s what she feared most. The irony of it was sweet on my tongue, like the chocolate chip pancakes my father would make every single morning. Someday, when revenge was no longer a concept but a reality, I’d use her fear against her.

The phantom pain of silver thorns digging into my flesh speared my mind. Their little circular scars were added to my collection. As though I could still feel the heavy shackles on my wrists, my eyes trailed down to stare at the slightly darkened skin.

“Get on with it then!” Harriet snapped, smacking her meaty hand down on the table. The mess of maps, battle arrangements, and little figurines shuddered upon impact. If she had used her full

strength, the table would've likely shattered. "We can't have the second and third Division's arrive until everything is prepared. Do you understand how poorly that would make us look?"

I rolled my eyes at the back of her head, silently wishing she'd come up with a vicious migraine.

The Circuit is the biggest event, apart from Graduation, that the Lycan's held. It's occurred once a year, its location switching between the three divisions. When I first arrived at camp, the event had just come to an end. The next year it was held at the second Division, all the way in Northern Russia, and last year it was held at the third Division in Africa.

Both times I was left behind, forced to stay here in Juneau Alaska while most of the camp left for the other Divisions. As incredible as it would be to visit both the Taiga Forest and Congo's Rainforest, this was the one time of the year where I was left the hell alone. There were no beatings, no public humiliation, no looking over my shoulder any time I dared to eat, sleep, or shower.

It was the worlds greatest injustice that this year the Circuit would be hosted here, at the first Division.

Lucky me.

Harriet spun around; her spine stiff from the stick she kept lodged up her ass. Her thin, puckered lips were flattened, vanishing since she didn't have that much to begin with.

"The last thing we need is Phineas Striker on our asses, worm. So help me, if you don't get this shit done, I'll tell him exactly who's at fault. You hear me?" She sneered, barring her yellowed teeth, sending a wave of garlic and curdled milk scented breath my way.

Harriet really needed to lay off the onion and cream cheese bagels.

I waited for my body to react to that name, for a jolt of fear to encase my heart or for my adrenaline to spike, but nothing happened.

"Yes, Ma'am." I replied with a scathingly fake amount of sincerity.

Her eyes flashed with anger before narrowing into tiny slits.

It was hilarious, really. There probably wasn't a Werewolf in this world who wasn't afraid of Phineas Striker. Well, except for me, but I didn't feel much of anything these days. How could I when this place had beaten, burned, sliced, and diced every emotion from beneath my skin? Each one slipped through my fingers, watering the earth along with my blood until almost nothing was left.

Phineas Striker, a man who spent as much time on his appearance as he did torturing people, was the first Division's Executive Director, a.k.a. the big man in charge. My first year I'd made the grievous mistake of insulting him. It didn't matter that I was fourteen years old or that all I'd

done was snicker at his perfectly pressed suit and teal handkerchief. He still punished me like I'd committed a war crime.

The memory of being tied against a wooden stake at the center of camp was still fresh in my mind. On bad nights, I could still hear the crack of the whip slicing through the air, and the slap it made as it hit my back.

Ten lashes, and he made me count out loud for each and every one.

It was the last time I allowed them the pleasure of hearing me scream. Now, they see nothing but the monster they turned me into, a vast pit of emptiness so feral and hungry that they know if I were to *ever* be released, I'd swallow them fucking whole.

In those precarious moments where I hovered between life and death, there was one thing I managed to hold onto, and it alone was what kept me sane.

Vengeance.

Harriet snapped her fingers, then pointed at the ground right in front of her gargantuan feet. Seriously, her combat boot was bigger than my head—something I also learned the hard way.

“Here.” She said curtly. “Now.”

I already knew what was coming, which is why I couldn't bite back the eager smirk that tugged at my lips. I did as she said and stopped just a foot away from her, my feet planted firmly where she had pointed just three seconds ago. Garlic and rancid cheese surrounded her in an aura of filth.

Harriet cocked her meaty fist back and decked me square in the face.

One wet crunch and a flash of electrifying pain later, and I knew my nose was broken.

Twinkling stars danced behind my eyes even though the warmth of sunlight soaking into my skin told me it was still daytime out. Hot rivulets of blood spilled from my nostrils, tickling my upper lip as it dribbled down my chin and into the grassy floor.

I'd endured worse, so much worse.

Pain was a fickle thing, and at the thought of the more gruesome things I'd endured, it quickly faded into the background.

Harriet's upper lip quivered spitefully, and not a second later she spat at my feet. Her foaming wad of saliva mixed with the droplets of blood that splattered on top of my busted up athletic shoes.

“If I didn’t need you to finish setting up for the Circuit, I’d backhand you into next Tuesday. Get the hell back to work, worm.”

My smirk deepened, blood filling my mouth.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

After setting my broken nose and washing the blood from my face at one of the water fountains, I made my way to the outskirts of the Camp, past the Mess Hall, Barracks, and the Kitchens, towards the small brick building and rows of wooden sheds that served as our storage facility.

The sun was shining bright overhead and would be for the next sixteen hours since June had just rolled around. I still wasn’t used to Alaska’s strange daylight hours, but I found myself preferring the winter. Despite the fact that I loathed the cold, it was much easier to evade punishment in the dark.

My father taught me from an early age how to use my surroundings to my advantage. I’d never been large or tall in stature, which meant I had to be quick and silent. My true strength, however, is the one thing that would ensure my death.

My abilities.

I peeled the neckline of my ratty sweatshirt away from my chest, scowling down at the splotch of dried blood. Before long, I’d be stealing from the other recruits just to keep myself clothed. As a servant, you did not want to be caught naked around here.

That was just asking for trouble.

Doing laundry was chore since the recruits liked to destroy what little clothing I had. There was a nearby stream I used whenever the chance presented itself, but with the Circuit coming up, I barely had the time to eat and shower.

Nestled directly in between six wooden sheds was a building comprised of auburn brick. It stood out in the winter and blended in during the summer. The Armory, as many called it, was where every blade, sword, and gun was stashed when not in use.

During my first year, I’d snuck in with the hopes of stealing a weapon to protect myself with, but that was before I realized how thoroughly this camp kept track of things. Anytime someone wanted to check out a case of throwing knives, or perhaps a machete or two, they had to be signed in and out.

Stealing weapons around here was an impossibility, which is how I became skilled in the dubious art of shiv whittling.

I patted the waistband of my ratty sweats, making sure it was still there. Approaching the second wooden shed in the row, I plucked the key off its nail and jimmied the door open. The scent of

lumber and gasoline permeated the air. It would've been pleasant if not for the undertone of hissing coming from the eight large oil barrels inside.

The key remained clenched in the palm of my hand as I entered. A lot had happened my first year here. I'd been knocked out, whipped, beaten, had my hands broken and smashed, among many other things, but one event in particular that stood out the most was when I was ambushed in the storage shed.

I'd been ordered to grab some sparring pads and made the mistake of hanging the key back on it's hook after unlocking the door. The moment I stepped inside, my stomach contracted with dread. I'd heard the snickers then, but it had been too late. The door was slammed shut, and the lock bolted in place.

It had taken three whole days for someone to find me, and even then I'd been punished for never returning.

Grabbing the metal dolly off the wall, I swatted away the spider webs and got to work wedging the platform beneath the bottom of the first barrel.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm not happy about this either." I said in response to the snakes voracious hissing.

The snake pit was a measly three-minute walk from the sheds. I stuck to the outskirts of the camp, avoiding the recruits as they went to and from their training courses, conserving my energy for what was to come.

Why they couldn't pick a simple garden snake was beyond me, but what did I know? I was just the help.

Lugging eight giant oil barrels full of venomous snakes was no easy feat, but I relished the burn in my arms and calves. The pain reminded me that I was alive, and that the possibility of revenge was still feasible.

The pit I spent the last month digging was just outside of camp, only a few feet inside the forest. This part of the circuit had four rows of monkey bars stretched over top a long, rectangular pit of what would soon be filled with vicious snakes. The recruits would race through the various traps the circuit had to offer before making it here.

Taking my time, I situated each barrel at the edge of the pit. Using the strap I'd taken from the shed; I wrapped it around the neck of the barrel and looped it so that it couldn't slip off. I then popped the top off the barrel and hastily shoved the entire thing into the pit, holding onto the straps for dear life.

I'd end myself right here if I had to wade through poisonous snakes to fish out these stupid oil barrels.

It took a few minutes, shimmying the barrel left and right to make sure all of the snakes had gotten out, but I managed to pull it out with zero injuries.

Rubbing my hands together, I stared pointedly at the others.

“One down, seven to go.”

Repeating what I’d done with the first barrel, I worked down the line until each one was empty. The floor of the pit was no longer brown and coarse from compacted dirt but was now a writhing mass of slithery bodies and angry-looking eyes.

“Don’t worry, soon enough you’ll have some juicy recruits to sink your fangs into.” I told them.

A branch snapped in the distance, and I spun around, facing where the sound had come from. The air was heavy with silence that made my finely tuned intuition scream out in danger, flashing its neon signs and effectively turning my insides to mush. There was no fear. Fear was for those who weren’t steeped in rage and brewed in mania.

“How’s about they start with you first?” A voice with a heavy Southern twang called out.

I groaned inwardly, cursing myself for having even the smallest shred of joy that I’d finished this idiotic task without a single injury.

Of all people to come and fuck with me, it had to be Weston Phillips.

He came from the front, all swagger in his muscle tee and cut off jeans. His shit eating grin made the she-wolves swoon, but not me. The man had the sex appeal of a wet sock.

I contemplated making a run for it when two more faces appeared from the brush. After four years in this hellscape I made it a point to remember every face and name of those who hurt me. These two pig-nosed bitches were towards the top of my long list of people to maim, torture, and kill.

Kaylee Smith, who was creeping at me from the left, had thin lips that looked like chewed bubblegum and the laugh of a toothless hyena. To the right was Ivy Davenport, a resident mean girl who I’d made the mistake of laughing at when she claimed her blonde hair was natural.

Nothing about those roots were natural.

Both Weston and Ivy were a bit of a big deal around camp. When a Werewolf had a coveted ability, it gave them more than just bragging rights. Weston here was a shifter, a wolf that could take the form of other animals, while Ivy could cloak the scents of over a dozen wolves. It not only meant they were hot shit to the Lycan’s, but that their pedigree was strong.

“Hah. Funny, West. She’s not even a recruit.” Kaylee sneered, rattling out her high-pitched hyena squeal. “She’s a lowlife servant. An orphan.”

Most of the servants were magicless orphans. They weren't just at the bottom of the totem pole; they were the dirt it sat upon. That's what the recruits assumed I was as well, and I never cared to correct them. The only ones who knew the real reason for me being here was Phineas Striker, Harriet, and the Crawford twins.

I shouldn't strike back, but I really couldn't help myself. Keeping quiet, being obedient—it just wasn't possible for me.

