

Alpha Nox - Chapter 0003

Chapter 0003

“Yep. That’s me, orphan Annie over here.” I smirked at the three musketeers. “My parents didn’t want me, so they gave me up. Better than what yours did, Kaylee. Late term abortions are bad enough, but to try it when the child is outside the womb? Ouch, that must’ve stung. Can’t say I blame them, though.” I said, inspecting my nails. “What family would want a magicless wolf?”

It was a cheap shot for sure, but so was the time when Kaylee poisoned my food with wolfsbane for a week straight. If I thought hard enough, I could still taste the blood-tainted vomit in my mouth.

Besides, nothing I said was a lie. It was common knowledge Kaylee’s mother tried to murder her as a child—all because Kaylee here didn’t have abilities of her own.

“You slick bitch. You think you’re so funny, don’t you?” Kaylee hissed.

“I’m hilarious, ask anyone.” I deadpanned.

I ran through the different scenarios that could get me out of this, but there weren’t many. All three were approaching from various sides and I had a gaping pit of snakes at my back. Even with my father’s training, and the lessons I’d learned from spying on the recruits’ sessions, I wasn’t going to make it out unharmed.

My abilities could get me out of this, but that was a box I could never, ever open. If I was going down, you could bet my perky ass was taking one of them with me.

Ivy Davenport whipped her bleached ponytail over her shoulder. “She won’t be laughing when she’s being strangled by a boa constrictor.”

A what now?

“Have you even seen a boa constrictor, Ivy?” I asked, my eyebrows sky high in the face of her sheer dumbassery. “For crying out loud, these are Black Mamba’s.”

“Same fucking thing.” She spat; her toilet water eyes narrowed into slits.

I scoffed. “Yeah. Totally, same fucking thing.”

“Darlin,’ last I checked it don’t really matter. Either way, you’re going to meet them bad boys up close and personal. I’ve been dyin’ to try out this new move we just learned in Krav Maga class.” Weston drawled, rubbing his hands together, looking like a predator in the bad way (if you catch my drift).

Laughter tickled the back of my throat. Jokes on him, I knew the move too.

Kaylee and Ivy closed in on my left and right, crouched in fighting positions with their hands out, ready to grab hold of me incase I tried to flee. I braced myself for the impact of his meaty fist. As it hit my cheek and the blunt pain of busted blood vessels slapped me upside the face, I made a show of falling to the ground.

“Get the hell up.” Ivy snarled.

“What a fucking weakling.” Kaylee laughed.

Oh, if only they knew. If I wasn’t worried about getting my revenge on those who sentenced me here, these three would be dead in the dirt. Easy peasy lemon squeezy.

I whimpered, my lower lip quiver pathetically. All three exploded in laughter, and while the sound made my eardrums contemplate suicide, it kept them from noticing the fist full of dirt I held in my hand. I didn’t give him time to make the first move. That punch of his had my adrenaline flowing, singing its siren-song of blood, agony, and beautiful pain.

Since Kaylee was such a grade-A bitch, I threw the fistful of dirt in her face and swung without abandon. She let out a squeal of outrage that quickly turned into hacking and sputtering. I ducked in time to dodge Ivy’s heavy-handed punch, but not in time to miss Weston’s knee-kick.

It hit me in the gut hard enough to rip the air from my lungs.

Mid-kick, time slowed, and I noticed something about Weston’s form. While his kick was solid, his balance was subpar. I wasn’t usually a glutton for pain, but once the idea popped into my head, it was just too sweet to resist.

The force of his kick made me stumble back, but there was only open air and a pit full of snakes to break my fall. Flailing, I reached out and snagged the back of Weston’s shirt. The second the ultra-soft cotton brushed my fingertips, I grabbed on for dear life and used his body weight to pull myself closer.

The seductive purr of victory washed over me as I wrapped my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. I grinned without abandon because even Weston Phillips couldn’t fight gravity.

Weston let out a wail that would put Kaylee’s hyena laugh to shame, trying valiantly but failing to free himself from my hold. Didn’t he know? Once I sink my claws into something, I never let go.

As for me, I tossed my head back and let loose a wild laugh, pulling us both into the pit of angry venomous snakes.

Delphine Hawk, my favorite Medic in all of the First Division, took one look at me, covered in blood, hair tangled to hell, and a snake still dangling from my back, and let out a string of curses that made me blush—and I had the potty mouth of a sailor.

It was Delphine that took care of me the first time Harriet knocked me unconscious. When I'd made the grave mistake of pissing off Phineas Striker and received those ten lashings, she was who I called out for in those blurry moments before the numbing relief of unconsciousness took hold.

"I am going to be the youngest wolf in history to die of a heart attack, and it's all because of you, Lilac." She groaned, rubbing at her eyes. "You're not even a recruit here and I swear I see you more than any other patient. I've got your aura practically memorized at this point."

I made a sound of agreement deep in my throat. Delphine was the one person in this entire shit hole that I semi-trusted. Delphine was easily the best aura reader in the country, and even she could barely get a read on me. It meant my emotions were tightly under wraps, easy to tuck away in some dark corner of my mind where they would never again see the light of day.

I batted my eyelashes at her, swaying on my feet since the Black Mamba's venom was currently coursing through my body. I'd lost all feeling in my left leg on the walk here, which wasn't a good sign at all.

"Aw, you care." I cooed.

"Hush up, troublemaker." She grumbled, side eyeing me.

Delphine ushered me into one of the examination rooms. She flitted to the tall medicine cabinet against the wall and snatched the key from out of her pocket. Pill bottles rattled on the shelves and prepackaged syringes clattered to the floor in her hasty search.

"Tell me how you're feeling, Lilac. I can see you fighting to stay awake. You know by now that you got to stay conscious for me."

Fuck, it felt like my body was on fire. Was my blood actually boiling in my veins, or was that just the venom? I hadn't felt pain like this since the Crawford twins made me play punching bag for entire class of trainees.

"Like, emotionally or physically? Because emotionally, I'm a ray of fucking sunshine. Physically? Eh, I could be better."

Delphine turned to face me with a syringe in one hand and a large pair of forceps in another. She had that loathsome look on her face, like she was seeing me. I didn't fucking like it, even half-dead from the Black Mamba's venom.

"Is it time for my annual pap smear already?" I teased, straining my eyes as my vision blurred.

Delphine snorted, utterly unamused by my bullshit. “This is not the time for jokes, Lilac. You know if you were a human you’d be dead right now?”

“It’s not like I had a whole damned parade to escort me to the Medic’s unit. I walked here on my own two feet.” I snarled weakly.

Poor Weston had to be fished out, then carried away by Ivy and Kaylee. I had garnered a few more bites by wrestling him back in a second time, but I didn’t regret in the slightest.

Delphine pulled the Black Mamba from my back and chucked it into the trash can, slamming a textbook on top to keep it from springing back out. She forced me onto the padded seat, and while she hooked up a heart rate monitor and jabbed a needle into my arm, I continued to fight to stay awake.

The two of us fell into a comfortable silence and I watched her closely as I had every other time I came to her for mending. Her eyebrows were always pinched, that much remained the same. Sometimes her nose would wrinkle, but only when the wound was severe. If it was messy, her lips would part, and the tip of her tongue would rest against her canine.

It was her ability that made her so skilled at her job. Reading auras was a lucrative business, one that could reveal a lot of secrets about a person. There was a reason many of the werewolves steered clear of Delphine, choosing other medics to tend to their wounds.

She had skin as dark as the night sky, warm from its rich brown tint. There were splotches of white skin around her mouth, left eye, down her neck, and on both arms that she’d once told me was due to a skin condition called Vitiligo. I’d found the two contrasts in colors interesting as a young teen, and Delphine had been more than happy to educate me.

“Alright, I’ve got you hooked up on a slow intravenous injection. The anti-venom will take about an hour or so to get into your system, but I need to monitor you the entire time incase you have a bad reaction.” She huffed, her shoulders slumping as she settled into her chair.

“Yes, Ma—” I began, grinning when her face morphed into a death glare. “Yes, Delphine.”

If there was one thing Delphine hated, it was being called ma’am.

“Now, why don’t you tell me what happened at the snake pit. Clearly you managed to fill it up.”

“It was an accident.” I stated plainly.

Delphine lifted an eyebrow, pinning me in place with those smoky eyes of hers. I’d been around her enough to know her tells, and right now her expression was telling me she smelled bullshit.

“Mmm, okay. An accident, I see. Let me guess, Weston falling in was an accident too?” She mused, her voice taking on a smart-ass tone.

I fought a grin. I liked Delphine more when she got snarky.

“Yep.” I popped the ‘p.’

“Really?” She pressed, then leaned back in her chair. “Then what’s this I heard about you trying to strangle him with a snake.”

I held back a laugh. Again, it garnered me a few more bites, but it was so worth it.

“There wasn’t any trying—” I started but caught myself when Delphine’s eyebrows shot up. “I mean, an accident. It was an accident, of course.”

“Right, that makes sense.” Delphine drawled, not at all convinced by what either of us were saying. “And you cackling as you and Weston “fell” into the snake pit?”

I grinned manically. “That? Oh, that was on purpose.”

Then, Delphine did the one thing I could’ve never anticipated. She flicked the lock on the door and rolled over to my bedside. Leaning in much too close, she lowered her voice to a whisper.

“I want to help you, Lilac. I can’t stand seeing you here anymore. Every day I think that this will be it, that this will be the day they bring your body in here.” Her smoky eyes were tight with fear even though the room was thoroughly sound-proofed. She wouldn’t just be punished for this. She’d be killed. “I want to help you escape.”

“You can’t be serious, right now. Even if I escaped this place, what do you think my life would look like? They’d hunt me, Delphine. I’d be a rogue, fair game for any werewolf in the country to kill. Besides, I wouldn’t run.”

“What would you do, Lilac?” Delphine asked.

The thought was so sweet, so fragrant that I couldn’t help but smile.

“I’d find my father. I’d kiss him and tell him how sorry I am for what I was about to do. Then, I’d find the boy that betrayed me—though, he’s more than likely a man now, and I’d end his life. Once I drained him of his blood, I’d come back here. I’d come back to this hellhole...and I’d burn it to the fucking ground.”

By the time Delphine cleared me, night had fallen and most of the recruits had ventured back to the barracks.

It was now 9 p.m. and despite the fact that the sun was still out, it had lost most of its intensity. The rays of gold which were responsible for lightening my hair over the course of four years, had softened into mellow tones of yellow and orange. They trailed along the horizon, weaving in between the snowcapped mountaintops in the distance, like streaks of bleeding water paint.

The rumbling of my painfully empty stomach brought me back to the present. I hadn't eaten since this morning, when I woke up at the crack of dawn to sneak into the kitchens. It was the only way I could scrounge up a decent meal considering the lunch staff were a bunch of heartless fucks.

It took energy I didn't have to trudge across camp to the barracks. There were two of them, both sitting next to one another. The plain brick buildings were unassuming, lined with windows that looked into the trainee's dorms. They were long and about three stories high. Wedged in the middle of the barracks was a smaller and equally plain building with rows upon rows of showers inside.

My room, if it could even be called that, had nothing of the sort. It was a glorified coat closet with a cracked mirror, stained toilet, and a sink that spewed water that smelled like sewage. The one and only time I'd asked to have the sink fixed I was laughed at, then thrown into the mud for daring to speak in the first place.

Every step was calculated so that my busted sneakers didn't squeak against the tile. My room was two doors away from the staircase that led to the second level. With my shiv gripped in my hand, I nudged open my door and crept inside.

After a quick scan of my room, I shut the door behind me and set to work rearming my make-shift security system. It wasn't much, just a bunch of empty soup cans I fished out of the trash, held together by decaying string, but it gave me a head start if anyone decided to break into my room.

Keeping my blood-stained clothes on, shoes included (you never know when you might need to run), I crawled onto the lumpy mattress sitting in the corner of the room. There had once been a bed frame in here, but it had been so rusted that the smallest bit of weight made it collapse.

With a groan, I curled up on my side and stuffed my shiv under my pillow. It was never too far from reach.

"Monday's suck ass." I muttered into my scrappy, moth-eaten blanket.

Holding close the promise of the breakfast I'd steal tomorrow morning, I let the thoughts of bacon and scrambled egg chase me into heavenly oblivion.

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Chapter 0004

The Mess Hall had just a tad bit more personality than the barracks, but not much. If I wasn't constantly on alert, I might've even liked sitting in there, surrounded by the floor-to-ceiling windows and cushy booths that gave the same relaxing feel as a restaurant.

As soon as I'm within sniffing distance, I notice something's off.

Trainee's and the occasional Trainer are all showing up for lunch, but there's a pulse of electrifying excitement in the air that ripples along my skin and fills my mouth with the tang of metal. Outside of the Mess Hall, lingering around the bulletin board where all of the camp's announcements are posted, were groups of trainees in private conversations. Heads were hunched and whispers were exchanged, but no eyes trailed my way.

"I'll take some of the lasagna." I said as sweetly as I could manage, even more starving after waiting fifteen minutes in line.

The lunch lady peeled her mustached lip back in a sneer. I let my bullshit sweet act drop, giving her a flat stare that was very much a threat, though I doubt she'd pick up on it.

Darlene wasn't known for being smart.

"Can't have that."

I exhaled sharply through my nose. "A burger then."

"Nope, try again."

"Sweet and sour chicken."

"Nuh uh." She shook her head.

"Then what can I have, Darlene?" I asked, grinding my molars together.

Darlene, being the sweetheart she was, let out a wet cough inches from my face and spun around. She waddled somewhere across the kitchens, then waddled back with a saran wrapped tray in her hands.

"Here you go." She smirked, the wrinkles on the left side of her face becoming more prominent. "Sandwich is past its date, not that it matters. Eat up."

Staring down at the pathetic sandwich with it's two slices of lunch meat, the bruised apple, and milk carton, an explosion of frustration began to boil my blood. I clenched my fists, snatching the tray off the metal track. If looks could kill, the glare I was giving Darlene would stop her damn heart.

I couldn't help myself. Really, I couldn't.

I leaned in and bared my teeth in a smile that made my face ache.

“You’ve got a lot of lip for a fucking lunch lady. Wait until I find out where you sleep at night, Darlene. Just wait.”

Darlene wasn’t as dimwitted as the other servants insisted she was because she had the common sense to be afraid. It was hidden well behind her wall of wrinkled skin, but I caught it in her dull as dishwater eyes anyway.

“Next!” She rasped, her voice cracking as she ushered the next person in line forward.

“Bitch.” I hissed under my breath and scurried off to find somewhere private to inhale my food.

The furthest corner of the Mess Hall is where I chose to eat my lunch. It was far enough away from the crowd, and I’d be able to see anyone that dared approach. Even better, there was an exit just a couple of feet away, which meant I could haul ass if needed.

The bread on the sandwich was definitely stale, but I didn’t see any mold, which meant it was good enough. Eating around the browned parts of the apple, I lifted the carton of milk to my mouth and recoiled the second the chunky liquid hit my lips.

It wasn’t just expired; it was cottage cheese level expired.

I got the hell out of there fast after that, washing my mouth out using the water fountain just outside the doors. While I was bent over, straining my ears for anyone that dared to approach, I heard a group of female trainer’s giggling.

“It’s a grand celebration, Cindy.” One tittered.

Another chimed in, sighing dramatically. “One where there’s a chance to become a Luna—an actual Luna. Ugh, I just can’t believe it.”

“Neither can I. Between us three, I’d pick being a Luna over this shit any day of the week.” A third groaned, lowering her voice. “Apparently, the Head Trainer’s are talking about moving the Circuit to the Midnight Falls pack so we can make the ball in time.”

Every other sound, from the birds cawing in the treetops, to the chattering of the trainee’s, evaporated into thin air. The only sound that was left, whispering in my ears like the heavy swipe of a razor blade, was those two words.

I never thought I’d hear them again.

Midnight Falls.

Home.

It took a few minutes, but the second there was an opening in the crowd, I crept over to the bulletin board. My heart hammered with each step I took, and for the first time in four years, staying hypervigilant became difficult. The only thing I seemed able to focus on was the blue pastel paper nailed to the bulletin board, swaying in the chilly breeze.

Digging my toes into the dirt, I scoured the page from top-to-bottom.

Dead center, in bold font, were the words, “Mate Ball.”

As interesting as they were, they paled in comparison to what came next, to the name that stuck out the same way the stars lit up the sky. My mouth moved with every syllable, stopping at that name—the name I refused to utter aloud, even after four long years.

“Newly appointed Alpha Nox Griffin is in search of his mate and requires all unmated she-wolves to attend this grand celebration. Upon identifying his mate, the she-wolf will be excused from all duties, responsibilities, and legally binding contracts, to take her place at Alpha Nox Griffin’s side as Luna of the Midnight Falls Pack.”

An idea, a beautifully twisted idea, came to life inside my brain. With it came a thin, rubbery smile that slashed itself across my face, weeping blood the way everyone who wronged me would soon be.

Finally, after all this time, I had found my one-way ticket out of here.

Watch out, Nox.

I’m coming for you.

All week I waited for Harriet’s call, for her deep voice to echo across the entire camp like a banshee’s shrill scream. The ground would quake, buildings would fall and crumble. Trainees would scatter, running for their lives as—

Alright, I was being a bit dramatic, but I’d definitely earned it. This was the first and only opportunity to present itself in four years and with each day that passed I became increasingly paranoid that the chance would slip through my fingers.

“You want me to put the snakes back into the barrels?” I deadpanned.

One small slip up, one twitch of a single facial muscle and Harriet wouldn’t hesitate to lay into my ass. Any other time I wouldn’t give two shits about pissing her off, but I needed to be on whatever smidgen of a good side Harriet had.

She whipped around, her greasy ponytail stiff as she did so. “Did I stutter, worm? You having a hard time understanding English now?”

Grinding my teeth, but not hard enough for my jaw to clench, I shook my head. “No, ma’am. I just wanted to make sure I heard you correctly.”

Considering she didn’t deck me right away meant she was definitely neck deep in work. I planned to use that to my advantage.

“The lot of us will be leaving for the Midnight Falls Pack by the end of the week. I expect you to be on your best behavior while we’re gone. You understand, worm?” She drawled, giving me the opening I’d been waiting for.

“I was actually wondering if I might go as well.”

Harriet threw back her head of greasy hair and laughed, spewing her onion breath like a geyser of pure nastiness. If only she knew how predictable she was, and how dangerous of a quality it was for a warrior to have. The urge to hurt her, to sink my teeth into her and use my ability to make her scream was strong, but I had to remain cold and diplomatic or else I’d never get what I wanted.

“You think I don’t know what pack you come from, worm? I know the new Alpha’s father is the one that sent you here. You think you’ll waltz in there and show him up? You think you will be his mate?” She rasped, barking out another slew of laughter.

“Will you be helping the other servants set things up for the Circuit, ma’am? You know how slow they are. It took Annie two days to set up the first half of spike wall. I had my half up and running in an hour.” I shrugged nonchalantly, ignoring the flare of her nostrils and flash of heat in her mud puddle eyes. “With the other servants doing things up, you’ll need another three months before everything’s ready.”

Harriet’s thin lips puckered, and from the silence that spanned between us, I knew well enough that she was deep in thought. Her eyes narrowed and victory flared in my chest.

“I’ll let you come, but on one condition.” She drawled, and from the smug tilt to her lips, I knew this condition of hers was going to be a good one.

Sure enough, she planted her hands on her hips and said haughtily, “If you can pack everything up for the Circuit by the end of this week, I’ll grant you permission to come. Mr. Striker was already furious enough that we’d have to cut out some of the obstacles this year, but if you can manage the workload, we won’t have to make any cuts. Think you’re up to the task, worm?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’m very much up to the task.” I turned to leave when she called out to me.

“One last thing. Don’t think you’re going anywhere near that ball because you’re not.”

Delphine’s head snapped up from her desk the second I busted into the examination room. My shoulder stung a bit from slamming into the door, but pain was an afterthought to the sheer excitement I felt.

The way her eyes flickered, darting around the space that spanned my body, told me she was looking at my aura.

Her lips parted in shock. “Your aura is full of color, just like a sunset. You’re happy, aren’t you? Who did you kill?”

Aura reading wasn’t a cut and dry ability, apparently. Not only did the colors mean a variety of different things, but the amount, shade, and the way it moved all came into play. Once, she’d told me about Phineas Striker’s aura and how it had been almost entirely green. Typically, a green aura might mean luck, healing, or wealth, but Delphine had said that the shade of green reminded her of mildew and wet dollar bills. As for myself, I didn’t need to see his aura to know he was as greedy and vicious as they come.

Planting my hands on my hips, I flashed her a victorious smile and said, “I didn’t kill anyone, yet. Guess what, though? I’ve got a way for you to help get the hell out of this place.” I wagged my eyebrows at her. “You in?”

After a quick run-down of my plan, Delphine sat back in her seat with her arms crossed over her chest, mulling things over.

“That’s all you want from me? Are you sure?” She frowned, confusion evident on her face.

“That’s it. No muss, no fuss.” I clapped once, then spread my hands. “Think of it this way, Delphine. If you get caught, you’ll get fired instead of murdered. Isn’t that a plus?”

“Lilac, you’ve got your ‘I’m going to murder someone’ smile on and it’s freaking me out a little bit.” She huffed. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, Lilac. You know I care about you like a little sister, but...I feel like by agreeing to help you, I’m letting a monster out of its cage. Just promise me you won’t go on a killing spree and hurt innocent people.”

My grin turned positively savage. I leaned forward and patted the top of her hand gingerly.

“I promise, Delphine. You have nothing to worry about. There’s nothing innocent about the people I’m going to hurt.”

I went for the servants with the most muscle and motivation, the one’s I could easily bribe into lending a hand.

Nathan wanted a pack of cigarettes. Annie was desperate for a break from being the resident fuck toy, Derek needed another toothbrush (he wasn’t the only one), Cecil requested a hot meal once a day—

On and on the list went. Some were harder than others, like the new set of clothes Chyna demanded, while others were downright impossible.

“It’s not going to happen. There’s no way in hell I can help you escape.” I, very much exasperated after the week I’ve had, told the servant who had followed me into the forest, all the way to the snake pit.

I bit my lip, staring at the muscular, dark-skinned servant that had asked for my aid in his escape. It was a tough call. The guy had that guarded look in his eye that I knew so well. It had been in my own once, the stare of an animal slowly turning rabid.

He had strength to him, though. His body was stacked with muscle, taut with a six pack one only saw on the warriors here. I knew all of the servants at camp, and this one had only been here for ten months.

After taking one look at him, I knew why he was so well fed.

It wasn’t only the male warriors that enjoyed having a servant warm their bed. While I’d judge the trainees to hell and back, I knew what it was like to do anything to survive. I didn’t blame this guy for doing what he had to do—for using his body to get the things he needed. Too bad it couldn’t offer him an escape.

The servant guy wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his arm and leveled me with a knowing look. “Look, I got a sister in the Midnight Falls pack, alright? I know you’re not trying to go there on some whack ass vacation. She’ll help us both, hide us where no one will think of looking.”

I felt no sympathy for him, not even a speck. Sacrificing my soul and everything good about myself was a necessity to survive in this place, but one thing I did value was revenge.

And this guy, he was craving it.

“What’s your name?” I asked him.

“Hakeem Wilson.” He replied, then fell silent.

The fact that he used his last name was important. Servants forfeited their last name once they stepped foot into camp. We relinquished all ties to our family, to the world we had come from. In doing so, we were accepting that we were vermin, beneath even the lowest of Werewolves.

The sun’s light dimmed as it drifted below the tree line. Streams of gold peeked through the foliage, hitting Hakeem along the slope of his lifted cheekbones. There was something beautiful about the searing look of vengeance and how it could both erase one’s humanity while also enhancing it.

Hakeem’s dark, smooth skin soaked up the rays of gold, reflecting them in his eyes and bringing out their hidden wisps of color.

“I’m Lilac Einar.”

He didn't blink as he said, "I know who you are."

...and I know what you've done.

He didn't say the words, but his tone alluded to them.

"You're asking for my help in escaping knowing who I am. Are you insane, Hakeem? Has ten months sapped all of your sanity?"

The left corner of his full lips lifted, drawing my eyes to the deep curve of his cupid's bow.

"What if I said it has? What would that mean for you? You've been here longer than the others. Four years if I'm not mistaken." He drawled in a voice like melted honey, nothing like Harriet's rasp. "How insane does that make you?"

"Enough for me to agree to help you." I smirked.

I'd made my decision, and although I had no clue how I'd pull it off, it felt almost nice to have a partner in my revenge scheme—no matter how short lived it would be.

