

## NINE

A new week came with a new administration. I hadn't set eyes on Alpha Valens but I saw the changes. One by one, his men filled every top spot in the pack. Beta Jabari became the pack beta, a new witch who we didn't know became the pack's oracle, his men replaced the head warriors of each brigade and Skylar didn't step on people as much as she used to.

Alpha Valens, in a rare show of mercy, banished Alpha Xavier from the pack lands rather than kill him as any other alpha would have done in a takeover. Skylar and Bethel refused to leave with their father to become rogues or solitary wolves so the Alpha left alone, shamed and disgraced with his pack watching forlornly. 1

None of this affected me in any way. All the changes happened at the top and people like me at the bottom weren't affected in any way. People like Skylar and Lucien suffered but people like me who never had relevance or status still had no relevance or status after the violent takeover.

I only pitied Celeste as her parents had to move out of the house the pack availed the beta and his family. They lived in the pack house now so we spent more time together. More time wasn't a lot as I still had my duties to carry out.

"Hey, you!" I turned, already used to people addressing me with everything bar my name. To my surprise, the new chef who made the Alpha's meals hadn't been referring to me but Skylar who'd been passing by.

"Me?" Skylar placed her hand on her chest, looking behind her in surprise. All of us in the kitchen paused to observe what was happening.

"Who else would I be referring to? Get in here!" The woman made a gesture with the spoon in her hand, splashing oil about. "You've wandered in here three times already. I take it you have nothing to do so I will give you work." Skylar came back into the kitchen with a confused frown on her face.

Even though her father wasn't the Alpha anymore, we all deferred to her by default, used to doing so for the nineteen years we'd known her.

No one from the Alpha Pack disrespected the former alpha's children. In fact, the thirty or so men that remained after the takeover didn't disrespect anyone. The men neither mingled nor tried to converse with anyone from Redville. They kept to themselves even during breakfast in the pack house where everyone ate together. The men sat at one end of the table and no one sat close to them. They conversed amongst themselves, no one daring to butt into their conversations. Sometimes they laughed out loud but their jokes were shared between themselves and no one else.

"I can't cook." Skylar spat when Beta Astrid handed her a spoon to stir the mix on fire.

"At this age? Shame on you." She grabbed the spoon from Skylar and gave it to another girl. "Wash the dishes. That requires zero talent." She turned back to her own duty. "Hurry!" She barked at Skylar who had no choice but to comply.

Beta Astrid spoke with a defined authority. I suppose after years of following her Alpha about and conquering with him, she had no time for nonsense or petty talk. She cooked all the food the Alpha Pack ate, with the rest of us assisting her. They were just thirty-something wolves but she cooked more than half the quantity we cooked for the whole pack house just for her wolves.

Skylar spilt some water on the ground as she washed the plates with unnecessary aggression. A spoon went flying at her head from behind. She moved just in time to avoid the attack from Beta Astrid. Some girls giggled as the spoon sailed into the sink.

"Are you a child? You cannot cook, you cannot wash the dishes but you can eat? Do you want me to ban you from eating anything from this kitchen?" She snarled at Skylar.

"I – I –" Skylar looked on the verge of tears – angry tears. I snickered at her helplessness. A short while ago, that used to be me stuttering at her hands. She raised her head and shot me a stern glare before she stomped out of the room

with curses following her.

"Take it easy on her. She's the Alpha's daughter," Monica said to Astrid, her voice low and tight at the insult to Skylar. Monica didn't dare say anything in the kitchen once Astrid came in. As a matter of fact, we all kept mute the moment Astrid bounded into the kitchen each morning to start barking out orders. The woman, although small, was just too terrifying to be taken lightly.

"You spoil the children. All of you. It is why someone of – how old is she? Seventeen? Eighteen? It is why someone of such an age can neither cook nor clean. Spoilt rotten, I tell you!" She roared the last of her words, flipping the fish she was frying with aggression, not minding the hot oil that splashed out of the pan. In reality, Skylar was almost twenty years old.

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After breakfast, I and two other omegas cleaned up the dining room and the kitchen after which I had to fold the laundry. Most people did their laundry themselves to avoid clothes getting mixed up but for the past year, it became more sensible for them to bring down a labelled basket which they came back to pick up after I did the laundry. After all, why would they do something themselves when they had the traitorous bitch to slave away doing it?

I folded the laundry till it was time to start making lunch. Wiping sweat from my brows, I got out of the laundry room

and made my way to the kitchen, only to get snatched from the stairs by muscular arms. I screamed.

"Shut up! It's me Bethel!" The former alpha's son said as he dragged me out of the pack house to a small shed behind it. He let me go, shoving me to the ground after that. "You're the little bitch who was laughing at my sister, huh?" The hard edge of his boot made contact with my ribs, making me whimper.

The chaos in the pack for the past week took some attention away from me but I'd wondered since, when next I'd take a beating. I didn't have to wait long as Bethel kept kicking me, his hard boot bruising my hand, my chest, my ribs, every part of my body bar my face which I covered with my hands.

"Leave her," Skylar commanded and Bethel stopped kicking me. I stayed on the ground, my hands still clutching my head and my whole body shaking from the brutal onslaught. Yet again, I found myself on the receiving end of hardship and I just wished all of these people would drop dead this minute. I wished Alpha Xavier didn't choose to take the coward's way out. I wished there had been a fight. I'd have loved to watch a wolf tear out Skylar's throat.

After a minute, she wrenched my hands from my face, forcing me to look into her hate-filled eyes. I'd done nothing to Skylar but since we were kids, she made it a point to make my life hell. She ridiculed me as a child but it got worse as we got older, reaching a climax when we entered

high school.

"Look at me." I was already looking at her but she held my chin in a steel grip. "Take this." She forced something into my hand. A small velvet pouch. "Put this in Valens meal this night."

"W – what?" I felt something cold against my throat. A knife. Goddess!

"This is your one chance to prove your worth to this pack. You're worthless but after what your family did to us, you owe us more than what you could ever repay. This is your chance to clear the filth off your name." She let me go. "If you don't do it, you can be sure of losing that bitch you call your best friend. I'll frame her and we all can watch her rot in the dungeons after the savages in the Alpha Pack take turns using her." She'd chosen the right words to break me and ensure compliance.

I'd never bargain with Celeste's life but those crude words affected me more than the image of her being in the dungeons. I knew what she'd suffered as a child at the hands of a middle school teacher and how much she feared physical contact with men.

Goddess, how could one person be so cruel? I didn't know the Alpha pack so I couldn't even say if their men were like that or not. But one thing was certain – I wouldn't risk finding out. Celeste had stuck her head out for me a lot of times. I could do the same for her this once.