

Chapter 9

Ava looked around to see if anyone else was around before she looked at the angry man in front of her. Jared's car was long gone; there would be no one to hear her screams. She should have asked Jared to wait until she was inside. She should have remembered what always happened when she was cornered alone.

Challenging a wolf in unfamiliar territory was a bad idea. She looked down as her brothers had always taught her to do. With her cap on, she couldn't see him at all. This man was clearly an Alpha; there was no mistaking the aura of danger surrounding him. Her heart hammered in her chest even though she tried to calm it. Fear always made Alphas crazier, like it was an aphrodisiac.

“Did you hear me?” he growled.

“Yes,” she answered quickly.

The door to her dorm was right behind him, but she knew nothing would prevent a determined werewolf from ripping it off its hinges, even if she managed to escape. She couldn't run from a wolf.

“Phoenix Academy is no place for humans. Don’t unpack your bags. Leave, or they’ll carry you out of here in a body bag.”

She knew that. If Mrs. Benton had listened to her, she wouldn’t be in this situation, but she couldn’t just walk out. That would be defying the Council, which would lead to dire consequences for her and her family. She would wait it out. They would see the truth themselves.

“I don’t-”

“You can,” the man growled, stepping so close to her that she could see his shoes and feel the heat from his body. With how loud her heart was beating now, she could have woken the whole dorm. “You’ll leave, or I swear to the Goddess I won’t be held responsible for what I do to you.”

She swallowed, still looking at his shoes.

“I’m going to try to sort it out,” she whispered.

Over the years her skin had grown so thick that her pack members couldn’t get a reaction out of her. But this man, with all anger, was filling her with so much fear that her whole body trembled. She tried to take deeper breaths, but all she got were lungfull of his cologne—something spicy that she would have appreciated in a different situation.

“Look at you. Trembling like a little bird. They’ll smell your fear miles away and rip you apart,” he whispered.

She could feel his warm breath against her ear, and now that he wasn’t growling, his voice washed over her like a balm. Though she wasn’t

looking up at him, she heard his deep breaths, as if he was taking her scent in. Her heart beat a little louder. When wolves went on a hunt, once they caught their prey's scent, there was nowhere it could run that they wouldn't catch it.

“Do you know why this place is named after the Phoenix? Because it's designed to break us, burn us down until there's nothing left. But you, little human, you'll never rise from the ashes,” he said.

She didn't understand why his voice eased her when he was saying things that should have ramped up her anxiety. But whatever the reason, it gave her enough of a backbone to take a small step away from him.

He growled in warning so she didn't move anymore.

“Thank you for the warning. I'll stay out of the way until the Council tells me I can leave,” she whispered.

She had to remember her father's words. He had been teaching her to survive as a human among wolves since she was fourteen after puberty had hit and they'd realized she wouldn't shift.

Her stomach growled loudly at that moment, uncaring of the danger she was in. The man stepped back from her, and she held her breath, anticipating something bad. Her fingers gripped her bag of food tightly as she closed her eyes. Maybe she should have packed a weapon after all, even though they were forbidden. How would she protect herself if everyone was like this?

When nothing came, she opened her eyes and risked a look at the man. She had been right about his eyes. They were glowing red, and his fists were clenched at his sides. She had never seen any red-eyed wolves before, but she felt the chill to her bone as if she were standing in the presence of evil. His jaws were tightly clenched, and he looked like he was fighting something

“Did they not feed you at home? Were you mistreated?” he growled. “You have no meat on your bones.”

The change in topic made her frown in confusion as she searched his face. Was he being serious? Or was this a trick question?

“I was fed.”

His eyes stopped glowing, and for a second, she forgot he was the psycho who intimidated others for no reason. His eyes were the most striking, beautiful amber color she had ever seen. This close, she could see his hair was such a rich dark: brown color with a few perfectly blended blond highlights, and the rare amber eyes completed the breathtaking look. Why did all the handsome ones have to be certifiably insane?

“Then why are you so fucking thin?” he snarled.

She wasn't. Humans would probably tell her she needed to lose a few pounds. Not that she could remember seeing them. but she read many human books and magazines. Going to a human college would have been her first interaction with them, so she had been looking forward to it.

“Genetics, I guess,” she answered with a shrug.

The man in front of her frowned and cocked his head to the side. And then his snarl returned. She didn't know why he was getting angry again when she had just answered his questions. And then she realized she was looking directly into his eyes.

Her eyes widened as she looked down at her shoes again. Rule number one in her pack was to never antagonize an alpha. Never challenge them. Alphas always won.

“Go and eat your food. Then, at first light, take your bags to the office and tell them that there has been a mistake. Leave. You need to leave.”

With that, he stepped forward again and took her scent in again. Was this a threat? Would he hunt her down if she wasn't allowed to leave?

When he finally walked away, she remained frozen in place for a while. What would happen if the Council refused to hear her? Would he be the one to tear her apart?

She took a shaky breath and then finally lifted her head. The entrance to her dorm had glass doors. She could see several people standing in the lobby when there had been none before. They had obviously been listening. She pushed the doors open and walked past their snickers and whispers.

By the time she entered her empty room, she was still shaking, and she had lost her appetite. Someone at the school office would have to listen to her tomorrow. She wouldn't survive here without her family.