

## Chapter 85

Tears welled up in her eyes. She had fought so hard to rise above her past to find her strength and forge her path. She wouldn't let the echoes of her pain diminish her newfound resilience.

"Shut up. Stop lying!" She screamed. Her parent's voices faltered, momentarily silenced by her defiance. "You were the ones who failed me," she continued, her voice growing stronger. "I may have been given away, but I refuse to believe that I am worthless. I am capable of love and strength, and I will prove it."

But the voices shifted again.

"You're nothing but a thief," Asha's voice chimed in with venom. "You don't deserve the happiness you've found. You'll always be a lowly Omega. Useless stupid bitch."

Nicole heaved, her chest was clogged.

"Did you really think you were special?" Maya's voice taunted. "You're just gullible, easily manipulated by anyone who comes your way."

"You took my brother away from me," Lillian's voice seethed with rage. "I'll make you pay for that, one way or another."

"You're trying to take my position as Alpha's favorite," Rose's voice hissed, dripping with jealousy. "I won't let you steal what's rightfully mine."

Nicole's breath came in ragged gasps as the voices reverberated in her mind, the barrage of accusations battering against her willpower. She fought to maintain her composure, to drown out the haunting echoes with the knowledge of her own growth and transformation.

I won't let your jealousy poison me," Nicole screamed. "I deserve the happiness I've found and I won't let your bitterness diminish it."

The voices of Maya, Lillian and Rose trembled with uncertainty, their accusations losing their sting. "I won't be held responsible for your grievances," Nicole retorted. "I didn't steal anything or take anyone away. I found my place, my family and I will protect them."

The voices shifted again. "No matter what you do or who you become, you'll always be useless," Shane's voice growled with malicious satisfaction. "You can't change your true nature."

"Fuck you! I'm no longer the trembling girl you once knew and deceived. I'm the fucking witch bane. And we meet again, you're going to fucking bow to me and grovel at my feet."

Her words echoed through the forest, the voices began to fade, their power diminishing.

Sudden humorous laughter filled the air.

"Dear Nicole. You're really proving yourself worthy."

Nicole paused, this was a new voice that she didn't recognize.

"You're doing well for someone with a past as mentally distorted as yours."

Nicole's head spun as she tried to comprehend the revelation. The unfamiliar voice continued to taunt her, its words filled with a sinister delight.

"Oh, dear Nicole. Did you really think you were immune to me? You may be resistant to my magic, but I found another way to affect you, didn't I?" The voice taunted.

Nicole's vision blurred as she struggled to stay upright. Anger mixed with confusion and betrayal welled up within her.

"Who are you? What have you done to me?"

"Ah, the confusion is delightful, isn't it? Let me enlighten you, my dear. You see, I paid a little visit to your precious friend Asha. She was more than willing to help me. A simple touch and the drug she administered would ensure your vulnerability."

Nicole's heart sank as the realization hit her. The only way the witch could get her was by distorting her reality. It seemed like that was what she did. Asha must have administered her wolf lichen or wolfsbane when they met. Nicole's heart broke. She trusted Asha.

"Trust is such a fragile thing, my dear." The voice cackled, "Easily shattered, easily manipulated. And you, dear Nicole, were the perfect target."

Nicole's legs gave way, and she stumbled, barely able to keep herself from falling to the ground. The voice's cruel laughter echoed through the forest, intensifying her feelings of helplessness.

"Why? What do you want from me?"

"Oh, my dear, it's simple. I want to see you suffer. I want to break you, just as I have broken so many others. You thought you were invincible, didn't you? But now, you're at my mercy."

Nicole's body trembled with a mix of anger and fear. She couldn't believe she had fallen into this trap, that she had been so easily deceived.

"Lies. You're a chronic liar," Nicole breathed out.

"Good discernment. I can see that the wheels in your head are finally working. I don't want you. I didn't care for you. But you stupidly stood in my way. Now, I have plans for you, plans that will shatter your spirit and bring you to your knees. You will regret ever crossing paths with me."

Nicole gritted her teeth, refusing to succumb to despair.

The voice erupted into malicious laughter that seemed to echo through the trees. All at once, Nicole realized that this was a distraction.

She remembered Liam's words clearly. If anything happened to her, he would lose his mind. The witch must have wanted him to think something had happened to her.

Determined, she pushed herself up.

"Stay down, bitch," the voice growled.

"No, you're just a coward and a faceless bitch. We're winning. We will defeat you."

Suddenly, Nicole was thrown into the air by a physical force. It grappled her neck and flung her in different directions. As Nicole fought against the unseen force that threatened to suffocate her, she summoned every ounce of strength within her.

She kicked, clawed and thrashed, desperate to break free from the grip that held her captive.

Nicole's instincts took over, her body moving with fluidity and precision. She delivered swift punches and kicks, aiming for her assailant's vulnerable points. The form recoiled, momentarily releasing its hold on her.

Gasping for air, Nicole quickly took advantage of the momentary respite. She scrambled to her feet, her eyes scanning the area for any sign of her attacker. But to her surprise, there was no one in sight. The forest was eerily quiet, as if it had absorbed the violence that had just unfolded.

Nicole's heart raced as she tried to make sense of what had just happened. Who or what had thrown her into the air? And where had her assailant disappeared to?

"Okay enough of this Nicole," the voice growled.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps and she turned around. Her eyes widened and her jaw fell open as she recognized who it was.

Everything suddenly made sense.