

Chapter 3

“You can’t let them win,” I repeated my mantra in my head as two men held me down while a third lashes at me. The wounds on my back never healed. I didn’t go a week without being introduced to one or more new ways of torture. I’d developed a high tolerance to pain and to keep me down, Redville pack got more creative in their methods.

“They won’t break your spirit.” If I probed deeper, I’d find my spirit in shambles – what was left of it – but my mantra kept me going. The Redville wolves used me as their lab rat – the victim that they tested out new methods of torture on.

“I’ll be strong.” These words repeated in my head, a steady mantra that lived with me for the past eleven years.

Eleven years ago, my parents betrayed the pack. I had friends and a good life until they ruined it. They wanted more. My father wanted Alpha Xavier’s position and he went for it. My mother never learnt not to support her mate so through it all, through the secrets, the going about behind the pack, the infiltration of the Alpha’s circle and the subsequent attack, she supported him. I’d been nothing but a nine-year-old whose parents turned traitors.

They didn’t even get to rain down fire and brimstone as they planned. A close friend – a man my father promised would be his Beta at the end of the coup – chickened out at the last minute and went running to Alpha Xavier. He played double-agent for my father and Alpha Xavier but really, all his loyalty shifted to the Alpha. He didn’t believe my father could pull it off so thanks to him, the mission failed before its completion.

My mantra couldn't help me this time. The chants in my head, the desperation to hold on to something, to find a bit of inner strength so I didn't break, failed me that day. It had become too much. This, heaped on everything else I endured since yesterday, went past the mental barrier I struggled to keep in place all these years.

They'd broken me.

It was my worst fear coming to bitch-slap me. I tried to keep a part of myself, hold on to a bit of strength so I didn't come off as a loser like my father but it ran in my b***d. I couldn't succeed. Whatever I did had to be wrong. Everything I laid my hands on failed.

It was the truth.

A truth I ran from for eleven years. A truth I welcomed now. If it didn't get better for eleven years, it wouldn't get better now. I'd never lead a better life. I'd let them win. I couldn't be strong and they'd won before I even joined the game.

"That's enough." Alpha Xavier called. The sounds of whips coming down one at a time stopped. It became obvious then that they weren't the sounds filling the room. No, those were my screams, my pleas and apologies because while I tried to be strong in my mind, I failed to be strong in reality.

Who's wouldn't cry if they got beat up every day? Who would endure as I had? I'd exhausted my strength. I'd cry and beg and feel sorry for myself as I tried not to. When Skylar asked me to kiss her feet, I would fall on my face and slobber all over her feet. When Lucian asked me to take off my clothes, I would rend them in a minute.

What good was resistance? What good had keeping my spirit brought me all this while? They broke me. They won. I didn't have it in me to care anymore.

They left me in the cold cell room with me huddled into myself. The pain in my back warmed me. B***d trickled out of it to soak into my clothes, Tears didn't stop streaming down my cheeks. My nose was blocked with snot that ran down my chin.

I closed my eyes wishing everything would stop. I tried running away once and the torture I endured when they found me was not worth the initial excitement I had of freedom.

Hell itself had to be better than this pack. The devil must be nicer than Alpha Zavier. He hated me. Oh goddess, how he hated me.

I looked too much like my father for his sins not to reflect against me. I think when he looked at me, he saw the person who stole his world – killed his mate.

'I wish I hadn't killed your father,' he once said to me. 'I should have kept him around to make him see what I'd do to you. To deal with him more than I could ever do to you.' Hatred didn't begin to describe what he felt for me. He loathed me, anchored me – he spat on the ground I walked on and hated the air I breathed.

The sounds of approaching footsteps made me break out in cold sweat. When the key to the dungeon cell the Alpha kept me rattled, I closed my eyes, a chill going down my arm and spreading goosebumps.

Back so soon?

He'd kill me this time and I would welcome death with open arms at this point.

"Goddess, it stinks in here." I froze, even more, when I heard Lucien's voice. 'I would welcome death with open arms but he would make death even more painful.'

Lucien, as hard as it may be to believe, had been my friend. As a child and even after the pack ostracized me. Everything changed a few years ago in an unfortunate turn of events that I wished never happened.

“Keep your voice down. She may be sleeping.” When I heard Celeste’s voice after his, some of the knots in my stomach loosened. I didn’t dare move as the pain on my back and sides intensified with every small twitch of a muscle.

“What did they do to her?” Was that pity I heard in Lucien’s voice? It couldn’t be. This man made my life worse by simply being in the same room as me.

Skylar would come for my head if she found out we were in the same room without her present. Half the curses I endured from this pack that didn’t come from the Alpha came from him or his gang.

I hated him.

More than I did the Alpha. He’d been my friend. I’d convinced myself that he loved me but his betrayal stung.

“We’ll get you out, Aysel.” I flinched from Celeste’s touch on my face. Everyone felt like my enemy in this state, even my best friend.

“How do we get her up without aggravating her injury?” I heard her ask Lucien.

How would he know? Why would he care?

“I’ll carry her.” From my weakened state, from deep within a mind hazy and delirious from pain, I knew nothing good could come from him touching me. I didn’t want his hands on me. I didn’t want him near me. I didn’t even want him in the same cell as me!

“You’ll have to be careful.” Celeste took a step back. All their movements registered from a faraway land, a land I didn’t inhabit with them.

“What could she have done?” He whispered. He’d come too close to me. I felt him reach out a hand but halt when I started to shiver violently. I didn’t have the strength to run but I didn’t want him touching me.

“The same thing she did to you. You held her down while Bethel belted her just yesterday.” Celeste didn’t sound impressed with the softness of his voice.

“That’s – that’s different. It was only six strokes we gave her.” Six? It felt like something between twenty and a hundred. Six!?

“Whether it’s six or sixty, you’ve been a part of this. You’re only helping her because I’m blackmailing you so don’t try sounding as if you’re a saint here!” Her sharp voice pierced my eardrum. “The lot of you are disgusting. You, your stupid girlfriend and your stupid best friend. I hate all of you!”

“Leave Sky out of this. You don’t know what she’s suffered.” I didn’t want them fighting in my cell. I had enough on my plate without adding loud sibling spat that they would make my fault again.

“Fuck you and fuck Sky. She’s using you but you’re too blind to see.”

“She loves me.”

“You’re just her shiny boyfriend. She doesn’t give a damn about you but that’s your business. I’m here for my friend. Let’s get her out before Alpha Xavier returns.” Celeste ran her hand through my hair again and I felt myself being pulled up. I gasped as pain bit into my skin from numerous open wounds.

“I’m so sorry.” She kept whispering until they somehow got me on Lucien’s back. I still trembled, my tremors now accompanied by soft whimpers. I feared Lucien would drop me despite his hands clasped on my thighs so I tightened my hands around his neck. This could be another cruel joke of his.

“We’ll get you home.”