

Chapter 87

“You could have woken me before leaving, you know,” I grumbled as a way of greeting once I got into Valens’ office. “Oh.” I colored when five heads turned to look at me, one of them with a particularly spiteful glare.

“We are in the middle of a meeting,” the man with the harsh glare said, his expression turning more unpleasant with each second that passed with me standing at the door like a dimwit.

“Right,” I said with a smile, fighting the burst of magic that came with the anger I felt at his dismissive tone.

There were speculations about my magic since the display I had in the dungeons with Zavier. The guards were more discreet than I gave them credit.

No one knew for certain that I had magic and Valens cautioned me against outing myself to the world. He didn’t want the reminder of what my hands could do and I understood why.

“Did you sleep well?” My mate asked as I was about closing the door to his office.

I could feel the anger radiating off the other man.

He was a distant relative of Strauss’ wife so naturally, he hated me.

“Yeah, it was fine.” I was going to respectfully leave the office and go about my duties but Valens had other ideas.

“Did you bring lunch? I haven’t had breakfast so I’m ready to eat now.” He poked at his tie while I just stood awkwardly at the door with the other people in the room looking from me to him.

“We are in the middle of a meeting,” the grumpy man said again, this time directed at Valens.

“Consider yourself dismissed, Elder James.” He pulled off his tie.

You can’t dismiss me in the middle of an important meeting because your mate walked in.”

My b***d ran cold at his words. My heart fell to the bottom of my stomach, red flashed through my vision and I felt a now familiar whisper of something ethereal in my b***d.

The way he said ‘mate’ as if – the way a snob would say ‘whore.’ As if I was nothing more than a passing fling.

“What did you just say?” My mind had interpreted the derogatory way he pronounced ‘mate’ as ‘wh0re’ and my mouth reacted accordingly.

“Stand, ” Valens was standing as he said that. I fully entered the room, leaving the door open behind me.

“You are formally dismissed from your position as an Elder in Redville.” The man stood, aggression in his stance.

“I have been an Elder in this pack for all my life. I come from a long line of Elders that have served Redville since her inception. If you think you can do to me what you did to Alpha Zavier and Beta Strauss, then you have another thing coming. The Jameses will not let a tyrannical Alpha bully us into submission!” To reiterate his point, he stamped his feet into the ground, squaring his shoulder.

“Are you challenging me, James?” Valens’ voice went calm but Elder James was not to be cowed.

“Yes.” He puffed out his chest.

I stood at the corner, trying to get my magic under control. I practiced a bit of meditation and breath work over the last few weeks just to be able to manage my magic but my practices were failing me at that point.

“Are you sure you want to go down this lane with me, James?” I read something sinister in Valens’ tone. Something James could not read, or did not care to acknowledge.

“What will you do? Banish me?” The Elder sneered.

“You cannot banish me. I belong in Redville more than you and your ‘luna’ do.” He crossed his arms.

The other men sitting around looked uncomfortable. They followed the conversation with their eyes, some looking at me at intervals.

Was I to intervene?

“You are right; we cannot both continue in Redville. “

The expression on James’ face would make me laugh if I didn’t already pity him. Somehow, I knew what to expect and it was much worse than getting banished. “As your Alpha and prince, you have challenged me. There’s no need to accept your challenge when you are so far beneath me.”

“Alpha -” One of the other elders suddenly jumped to a stand, his eyes blown wide.

“Sit.” He fell back into his seat after that simple command. “This is between me and the James family.” I swallowed, as did Elder James. “I do not accept your challenge but to stop this increasing trend of people underestimating me in a pack I rightfully conquered, I will make a scapegoat of you.”

He smiled a smile that sent chills down my spine.

“Do your worst,” James said in a shaky voice.

“No, I will not do my worst. None of you are ready for that.” Again, he looked around the room. “But I will deliver a swift punishment. Elder Manson,” He turned to another elder. “Alert the pack. We shall have a gathering tonight.” He smiled for the umpteenth time.

“What sort of gathering?” Elder Manson asked in a nervous voice.

“An execution.” One could hear a pin drop in the room after he said that. James went stiff as a board. Manson looked like he would rather be the one getting executed than be the bearer of bad news.

The other elders tried to curve into themselves.

“May I advise -” An elder started but Valens cut him off.

“Keep your advice, Slade.” I did a double take when he mentioned the man’s name. He was the only elder in the room that I didn’t know but I knew his name. He was the Alpha’s adviser! “If anyone needs advice, it is James but it is too late now. He set himself up to be unfortunate.” To James he said, You can try to run but there are men waiting outside for you.” He paused then said, “Get out. All of you.”

The elders saw themselves out one after the other.

I saw James bundled right as he stepped out of the office. I turned to Valens who was wearing an impassive expression.

“I hope you are bluffing,” I took a seat opposite him.

“Did you sleep well?” He asked instead. “You do not look like you have rested enough.”

“Valens, that’s beside the point. You are not executing him, are you?” I tried to make my voice stern but I failed.

“He asked to be executed. There is very little I can do for him. Are you going to answer my question now?!”

“You can’t just – kill a man!” Exasperation leaked into my voice.

“Why not?”

“That’s brutal and uncalled for!” He didn’t look bothered by my exclamation.

“What am I?” I didn’t know what to respond. “I have been called cold, brutal, unapologetic, a maniac at some point. I want to be someone else for you but I will not be underestimated,”

“I won’t let you act unreasonably,” I said, squaring my shoulders. He opened his mouth, about to say something but it must have gotten stuck in his throat. “There will be no execution.”

“I cannot take back my words.” He frowned. “He has had it coming, really.” His expression softened and with time, he started to look annoyed. “He has spoken out of turn more times than I would usually allow, undermined my authority, and insulted my luna,”

“You are not killing him, Valens. He will certainly be punished but he will not be executed.”

“Ahh, you are going to make me take back my words?” He shook his head. “He may not be executed today but he will certainly be my scapegoat tonight.”

“Right. Skylar? That’s what I am interested in right now.’

There is a report sitting on your desk but you didn’t even stop there, did you?” He smiled. “A hunter found her. She has been captured alive and will be here in a few hours.”

“Oh.” I couldn’t take a breath of relief as I realized that just gave me more work. “I have to ready her trial.”

“Jabari will take care of that.”

“No way. It is my duty. Besides, Jabari deserves to catch a break.”

“You have never done this before and Jabari has caught enough breaks for this year. You can assist him in the trial but I have already given him the task”

“I -” I was a bit relieved. I didn’t want to handle something like that.

“She is being tried for murder, right?” My hand grazed my stomach.

“Yes and the verdict is death.”