

Chapter 4

Sage

There's a spring in my step as I stride toward the packhouse. It's selection day for Chief Omega and I plan to slide my name onto the list before sign-ups close this morning. I know I can win! Cassius will see my worth, I'm sure of it!

I hustle into the kitchen, dropping my bag and strapping my apron on. The room is empty, but I peek over my shoulder, toward the door just to be sure no one's watching. After scribbling my name on the list of contestants quickly, I'm just shoving the pen back in my pocket when Daphne's shrill screech has me jumping out of my skin.

"What do you think you're doing?" She demands.

"N-, nothing. Just getting ready for work." I glance toward the clock to double check the time, verifying I'm still early.

"Well you're not needed here. Find something to do out back where you won't be in the way!"

I practically skip out of the kitchen on my way to the backyard. I like working in the garden. It's beautiful and peaceful out there. But it doesn't take long for me to realize I've been set up..Trouble is waiting for me right outside the back door.

"Where are you going, you filthy wolfless whore?" One of Daphne's friends pokes me in the chest.while her gaggle of accomplices snigger behind her. I try to side step her but she mirrors me, blocking my path. "Did you actually think we'd let a waste of space like you participate in the Chief Omega contest? What a joke! As if a worthless piece of shit like you could be Chief of anything!"

She shoves my shoulder hard, making me stumble. Before I can catch my balance, she cocks her arm back and punches me in the nose. I hear a sickening crunch and my head spins from the impact, blood pouring from my nostrils and running down my chin.

I fall backward, losing my balance and smacking my head on the concrete. Before my vision clears, another blow lands in my gut, knocking the air from my lungs.

They take turns kicking me over and over again. One of their feet connects with my ribs and I hear it crack at the same moment a white-hot stabbing pain sears through me.

Dark spots dance before my eyes, consciousness quickly slipping away as I struggle to suck in enough oxygen. Their voices become muffled as my hearing tunnels out until there's nothing but blissfully silent darkness.

"Don't touch me!" I scream, coming to with a start and scooting away from the cool hands touching me.

"Shh! It's okay, sweetling. It's just me." The deep tenor of my handsome stranger's voice instantly soothes me. "Hold still so I can finish cleaning your wounds."

As the fear-induced adrenaline dwindles away, the pain of my injuries comes roaring back. I suck in a sharp breath as my broken rib sends a fiery jolt up my side. It's quickly followed by the sting of whatever he's dabbing on the cut above my brow.

"How did I get here?" I look around, noticing I'm on the cot he's claimed as his own all week.

"I was out for a walk when I saw a group of she-wolves tossing your unconscious body across the border. Don't worry!" He holds up his hand to silence me when I open my mouth to scold him. "They didn't see me. But lucky for you, I saw them."

He lifts my shirt to reveal an already blackening bruise over my rib cage. He tears a strip from my sheet and wraps it tightly around my ribs. It's excruciating but after the initial pain subsides, I can actually breathe a bit easier.

"Oh no! The Chief Omega selection! What time is it?" I blurt out, remembering suddenly.

"You're in no shape to participate in some demeaning contest for that idiot Alpha's entertainment." He growls. "If the Alpha's pup needs some showy contest to make a decision instead of taking into account how hard you work everyday, he deserves whatever useless bimbo he gets stuck with!"

"This is important to me. It could change my life." I pout. "I would be respected, not just the pack outcast."

His eyes soften as he listens and understanding colors his features. "You'd better hurry then."

I flash him a brilliant smile and slide off the cot, wincing at the ache that rockets through. Pulling myself together. I head back to the packhouse as quickly as my injured body will tolerate. I'm late of course, but the look on Daphne's face when she sees me walk in is worth it.

"Sage! What on earth happened to you?" Cassius demands. Daphne narrows her eyes at me, promising a world of hurt if I dare tell the truth but there is no room in my head for her when Cassius is waiting for an answer.

"I'm sorry I'm late." I lock eyes with him, ignoring the whispers around me. "I wanted to participate in the contest but I-, I had an accident."

He crosses the room to me and examines the damage to my face and limbs, clucking his tongue and shaking his head.

"There's not enough time to let you complete all the tasks and it wouldn't be fair to choose you over those who did. Besides, you seem too accident prone for someone in such an important position." My face falls at his pronouncement. "But . . ."

He tips my chin so I'm looking up at him. "I've noticed your talent in the kitchen, your desserts are delicious. How would you like to be our new head pastry chef?"

"Really? Thank you!" I stretch up on my tiptoes and press a kiss to his cheek before I can think better of it.

I hear someone snarl and my cheeks burn with embarrassment but Cassius' wolfish grin is back. "You're welcome, little bird."

As soon as I can, I head home, anxious to tell my new friend the amazing news. I burst through the door and the words come spilling out, my excitement bubbling over. I thought he would be happy for me but he levels me with a frown instead.

"Doesn't that seem odd to you? Why would the Alpha's son do something so nice for the pack outcast?"

I flinch at the demeaning tone in his words but ignore the hurt and decide for once to stand up for myself. "I have worth! Just because you and the rest of this pack can't see it, doesn't mean he can't!" I snap haughtily.

A frustrated growl rumbles in his chest. "I'm just warning you to be careful. Alpha's are known to use omegas then toss them away. Don't let him flatter you right into his bed."

If my cheeks were red before, they're flaming now! But I'm as furious as I am humiliated. "Maybe you're the one who should be careful! I told you not to walk around outside. You'll get us both killed!"

I turn on my heel and storm away with all the indignation I feel, heading for the only room in this house with a door, the bathroom, and slamming it in his stupid face!