

Psycho Shifters Chapter 1

SADIE

I waited until D~k's heavy footsteps stopped.

The tavern was eerily silent now that the beast was gone.

A smile split across my face, and I jumped off my bed. Although, bed was a generous term—I slept on a scratchy blanket spread across the hardwood floor.

Still, it was a great day. It was time to get my younger sister, Lucinda, so we could enjoy our freedom.

I dug out my stolen paper clip and began to work it into the door's lock. It took me a while, my small ten-year-old fingers slipping and cramping as I contorted them.

Click.

The door opened, and I hurried to free Lucinda from her bedroom, which had a normal bed, desk, and dresser, unlike my mostly empty room.

We were both D~k's servants, but he hated me and seemed to tolerate Lucinda. I didn't know why he treated us differently, but Lucinda was a six-year-old angel of sweetness, so I hoped it stayed that way.

I could handle his anger.

Giggling and laughing, we grabbed our old wool coats and laced up our boots. Mine were a couple sizes too small, but I didn't care; I was too excited to go out into the woods and away from the tavern.

I held Lucinda's tiny hand as we stepped out into the cold temperatures of the shifter realm.

Cold wind howled, and a thick layer of snow covered the ground like usual.

Today, the red sun was high in the sky and blazed with warmth.

The brutal cold didn't smack us in the face and steal our breath like normal. Instead, snow flurries drifted lazily from the partially blue sky.

It was a glorious summer day, and probably the warmest of the year.

I looked back and forth across the cobblestone street that ran in front of a few shops, the public library, and D~k's tavern.

The library was the only place D~k let us occasionally visit, and we loved it there, but we couldn't visit today because someone might see us and tattle.

D~k was our master; we were his servants.

This morning, he'd locked us in our rooms and taken his Yukata horse to do business in a neighboring town. Since we'd both been orphaned at his tavern as kids, we were D~k's property.

Everyone in town knew it.

Now none of the realm's furry horses clopped past. Usually I loved seeing the horses with their long, shaggy fur, which let them survive the realm's freezing cold.

But at the moment, I was glad no people were riding them about, since it meant we could escape without being caught.

I held Lucinda's hand tight as we sprinted across the road into the thick forest. We ran, and ran, and left the sprawling valley town behind us.

"Finally, we are free of the beast!" I yelled as we hurtled deeper into the forest, weaving around thick tree trunks.

Pine needles blotted the sky, and the gaps through the branches revealed the towering white mountains that surrounded the valley.

Lucinda ran ahead of me, giggling like a maniac. She loved when we played "explorer" and chased each other through the mountainside.

"I'm going to get you!" I hollered and gnashed my teeth in her direction.

With my hands in front of me like claws, I pretended to be an alpha warrior.

Lucinda screamed louder and turned around. She pointed a finger gun at me and said, "Pow, pow."

My body shook as I trembled from the force of fake bullet wounds, but I kept prowling forward and snapped my teeth at her like a beast.

The shifter realm had two classifications of people.

In the bottom tier were null shifters, who were unimpressive and made up the majority of the population. The realm had about fifty thousand people, and 99 percent of them were nulls.

That was us.

In contrast, the top tier consisted of ABOs.

Betas were the most common ABO. They were the realm's soldiers. Stronger and faster than nulls, they had extended lifetimes but couldn't shift. D~~k was one of them.

Alphas were the coolest ABOs. They were the realm's war generals, huge and immortal, and each one shifted into a unique beast of lore.

Finally, omegas were highly revered and immortal. They shifted into small, harmless creatures, but stories said they were physically perfect and alphas were obsessed with them.

But lately the lady on the news had been saying alphas were dying out because omegas were the only shifters who could birth ABOs and there were none left in the realm.

I didn't understand how ABOs were disappearing when they were immortal, but I figured I must be too young to understand.

Most nulls got tested at the sacred lake when they turned twenty, to discover if they were an ABO. But ABOs were physically impressive even before they underwent their transition.

Even if I weren't short and scrawny, it wouldn't concern me.

Servants never got tested, because ABOs came from elite families with elite bloodlines. They weren't scrawny, unwanted orphans left at a bar.

I shrugged it off; I was used to not being special.

In front of me, Lucinda jumped up and grabbed a tree branch. Her long blonde hair billowed behind her little gold body as she fearlessly climbed the branches.

I followed close behind, the cold bark digging into my palms. We jumped and leaped from branch to branch as we overcompensated for our small size.

I laughed with exhilaration.

As we climbed higher and higher up the massive coniferous tree, raccoons chattered, and we waved to the fluffy little guys.

One of them hissed aggressively, and Lucinda giggled, her red doe eyes large on her little face.

“It’s a fluffy bunny,” she said while laughing uncontrollably.

I nodded because I didn’t have the heart to correct her. Lucinda loved bunnies.

Finally, we made it to the very top branches of the massive pine tree. Snowcapped mountains towered around us, and everything as far as the eye could see was cold, white, and uninhabited.

The shifter realm was a cold, barren place.

It felt even colder and more miserable when you were two null servants under a beta’s thumb.

Up atop our perch, I wished for the billionth time that we could sprout wings, fly away to a portal, and travel to a different land. Somewhere, hidden in the snowy woods, there were a few portals to the fae realm and one portal to the human realm.

At least that was what I had read in a book. It had described them as swirling black vortexes that sucked a person in if they got close enough. No one ever spoke about them.

But it didn’t matter anyway. The portals weren’t safe.

Currently, shifters were at war with the fae queen—she sent monsters into the realm, and ABOs fought them back. Rumor was, she wanted the land for herself.

I tried to imagine a big beast roaring through the forest.

As the large trees swayed in the howling wind, it wasn't hard to picture. The cold gusts rippled through the treetops, and we giggled as our perch swayed precariously.

For a long time, we sat in the treetop and told each other about our favorite stories from the library: tales of fantastical creatures from faraway realms.

Birds perched around us, and squirrels and raccoons rustled branches below. The red sun kissed our upturned faces, and we basked in our day of freedom.

Finally, when the sun drifted low and the wind began to shriek with frigid intensity, we climbed down from our haven and trudged back to our prison.

That night, back in the rickety old tavern where we lived, D~k returned from his trip.

He freed us from our rooms and informed us that a shifter from town had spotted us climbing through the trees.

D~k glared down at us both, but I stepped in front of Lucinda to protect her.

She wasn't just younger than me; she was smaller and more delicate. Her large ruby eyes and blonde hair matched her shy, sweet personality.

We both had red eyes, but people described mine as burning flames of trouble and hers as beautiful, sparkling rubies.

I wouldn't let the monster take the sparkle from her; in contrast, I'd never had any sparkle to begin with.

"It was my fault. I picked our locks and dragged her out with me. She didn't want to go," I said while I stared him down.

D~k ground his teeth, and his eyes crinkled with annoyance like they always did when I glared at him. He said my red eyes were unnerving.

Lucinda grabbed the back of my frayed coat with both her little hands, and her fingers trembled against me. I wanted to gut D~~k for scaring her.

“All you do is make trouble,” D~~k said.

He grabbed me by my long white ponytail and dragged me down the hall.

Lucinda cried and ran after, but I motioned at her to stay put. With a quivering chin, she nodded and went to hide under her bed like she always did when he hurt me.

I bared my teeth as D~~k grabbed my neck, but I was no match for his beta strength.

He shoved me into my empty room, slammed the door, and removed his belt.

I bit down hard on my l~p and pretended I was a great alpha warrior.

In my mind, I turned D~~k’s violence back on him.

For every stroke of his belt, every drop of blood that left my body, I hurt him.

He screamed and writhed—he begged me to stop—as I beat him with my massive fists.

I didn’t stop; I showed no mercy.

That was only in my imagination.

Tears streamed down my face, and I screamed until my voice was hoarse and broken.

D~~k whipped me endlessly.

When the beating finished and D~~k left—when I slipped in my blood as I tried to stand up—I promised myself I wouldn’t cry next time.

In the library books, great adventurers never cried, so neither would I.

Even if I wasn’t an alpha, I could be strong like one.

There was no way I would survive otherwise.

