

## Psycho Shifters Chapter 13

SADIE

STONE COLD KILLER

I stumbled as the beta's leg slammed against my sternum and knocked the wind from my lungs. We were sparring one-on-one and working on our form.

Thankfully, the red-haired beta threw a slow punch that I easily ducked. He was going easy on me, and I was glad for it. I'd woken up this morning feeling nauseous and weak.

The aftermath of the numb sucked, and today was worse than usual because I'd held it so long.

A headache throbbed through my skull, and I tried to not let the pain show on my face.

If we had to do King of the Hill again, I would be writhing on the ground like a little b~~~h.

I thanked the moon goddess that Jax had said we needed to work on precision and control. A small miracle.

"You're probably still recovering from the battle. You saved all our asses." The red-haired beta smiled kindly and threw another slow punch. "Practice breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. It always helps me."

I nodded and held my arms in front of my face like Jax had instructed. The beta telegraphed his next punch, but I was so weak I barely got out of the way in time.

The aftermath of the numb sucked balls.

"I'm John," the red-haired beta said conversationally.

"I'm Sadie," I replied after an awkward silence. Sometimes, I forgot that people tried to bond with each other. It was easy to keep your head down and focus on survival.

The more people I interacted with, the more names and faces I had to keep straight and the more chances they had to betray me.

“Your saber-toothed tiger is sick. I just wanted to let you know that. Some betas were afraid of your answer to Auntie, but I wasn’t. You’re a beast, and I get that. It’s sick that you’re a female alpha.” John easily ducked my kick and smiled at me warmly.

“Uh, thanks.” John’s niceness made me feel weird. My gut told me not to trust him, which made no sense.

Sighing heavily, I mentally berated myself for being dramatic. I also wanted to kick my numb self for revealing itself in Auntie’s classroom. After I had answered Auntie, even in a numb state, I had been shocked by my own words.

With a few sentences, I’d managed to make most of the betas terrified of me and I’d alerted the other alphas to my unwellness.

“Saber-toothed bitch,” betas whispered as I walked into the gym for training.

A part of me preened at the nickname. It was better to be thought of as cold and strong than weak and quivering.

Slowly, it felt like I was actually taking the power back from Dick and becoming my own person.

It was nice to make a name for myself, even if the name was an insult.

“Let me know if you need help with anything.” John smiled kindly as he slammed an uppercut into my stomach.

Bile filled my throat, and I just barely choked it down. If I spewed chunks, I would definitely lose my badass reputation. I tried to smile back at him, but it came out as an awkward grimace.

“Will do.” I gasped as I struggled to bounce on my toes.

Next to me, Aran jumped high in the air and impressively scissor kicked his partner, his blue hair flashing. The much larger beta hit the mat with a thump, passing out cold.

Aran was lanky, but an insane fighter. He stood over his partner's prone body and gently prodded the downed beta with the toe of his boot.

"She already has all the help she needs." Aran stomped over to where I was getting my a~s kicked.

"I know. I just wanted to also offer my cap into the ring. You can never have enough help around here." John flashed his perfect white teeth at Aran and gave a shrug.

He seemed like an easygoing guy, which was an extremely rare trait among betas.

Instead of smiling back or nodding, Aran aggressively punched the air in front of John's face.

I raised my eyebrows at Aran's antics. While I appreciated his support, he was acting a little ridiculous. John had just asked me if I needed help with anything.

"It's fine, Aran." I choked down a laugh and dodged a punch. The blue-haired beta's eyes were twitching like he was struggling to hold himself back.

I didn't know what I had done to earn such unwavering loyalty, but I was grateful for it.

Aran was a great friend to have. I wasn't the only one trapped fighting a war I didn't care about.

"Thanks, John. I'll take you up on it," I said honestly.

John visibly relaxed, and a massive grin split his face. Clearly, the guy was dying to be my friend, which was not something I usually experienced. Since most of the betas were now terrified of me, I wasn't going to look a gift horse in its mouth.

His massive shin bone slammed against my ankles as he swept my legs from underneath me.

Lying on the mat, staring up at the ceiling, I wondered how long my body was going to stay weak. John offered me a hand and hauled me up easily.

He patted my back, and the action sent me sprawling forward. At this rate, my new friend was going to accidentally k~l me.

“Time for media interviews.” Zed’s voice echoed through the gym. “Alphas must leave now.”

Relief coursed through me. Blessedly, I didn’t have to keep getting beat up by John. I wasn’t in any shape to fight.

“Great working with you, Sadie.” John shook my hand aggressively, with more strength than Aran had.

I didn’t know what energy I was giving off lately, but men kept giving me firm handshakes.

I guess my b~~h energy was shining through. Finally, I was getting the respect I deserved.

“You too.” I smiled and detangled myself from the red-haired beta’s grasp. John was really laying it on thick.

“Let’s go, Sadie,” Jax alpha-barked at me from across the room. His voice was filled with command and annoyance.

Immediately, my feet began to move toward the door. So much for respect.

After a few steps, I gritted my teeth and fought the persuasion. He hadn’t put the full force of his bark behind it.

I gave Aran a hug goodbye. The blue-haired beta was a hugger, and I decided I liked it. Before he’d hugged me the other day, I had only ever hugged Lucinda. It was a comforting experience to embrace a friend.

I wanted to practice it more often. So I could get good at it.

“Remember, you’re a badass. Also, remember we have therapy tomorrow with Auntie.” Aran squeezed me tight to his lanky body, and a scratchy laugh b~~t out of my throat.

“Stop holding us up,” Ascher snapped angrily from across the room.

I said goodbye to Aran and dragged my aching body toward the other alphas.

Of course Ascher would be excited about the media. He loved to talk about the alpha fame and riches. Jax stood calm and collected, and Cobra looked downright bored.

“Should we change?” I turned to Zed and ignored the three annoying alphas.

“No, the media likes it better when you’re sweaty from training. They say it makes it more authentic.” Zed rolled his eyes like he wasn’t a fan of the media circus.

“Let’s not keep them waiting.” Ascher stalked ahead of Zed, in a hurry to get his five seconds of glory.

After an hour of riding horses through thick snow, we arrived at the neighboring town. Towering stone buildings and trees decorated with twinkling lights greeted us.

Thankfully, Zed had given us all thick winter coats, gloves, hats, scarves, and boots, so the biting cold was kept mostly at bay.

I still shivered and had barely managed to mount my horse. It was my first time riding one while conscious, but Zed had assured me the horses knew the route and practically rode themselves.

He had been right.

When we got to a stable in the middle of town, it was time to dismount. Everyone gracefully jumped off their horses.

In a show of pure alpha athleticism and strength, I tipped off my horse’s furry back headfirst. Before my face could k~s a snowbank, Cobra stepped forward and grabbed me.

Although, his scent made me feel like I had face-planted into the snow. For a second, I was stunned.

My breath left my face in a frosty puff as I stared up at Cobra’s perfect features. Up close, he really did look like a god carved from ice. No man should be so beautiful.

His strong arms tightened around my body, and his emerald eyes burned with a strange light.

It was almost as if a piece of his soul had sparked back to life.

He leaned forward slightly, snowflakes dancing around us like magic. My heart stilled in anticipation.

Perfect mouth curling at the corners, Cobra dumped my body into a snowbank and walked away.

Lying in a thick pile of snow, I slumped backward and scolded myself. Instead of “saber-toothed b~~~h,” my nickname should be “pathetic ninny.” That was how I was acting.

“Let’s go!” Ascher yelled in a huff and stomped into a large brick building with “Broadcasting” carved on the pediment.

Zed gave me a hand up, and he patted me on the back. Neither of us said anything, and we both pretended I hadn’t just embarrassed myself.

Inside the building, a wall of warmth greeted me. My teeth chattered as my body slowly thawed.

A tall, gorgeous, dark-haired woman ran forward and helped Ascher out of his coat. She gushed over Ascher’s horns and asked about his tattoos while running her fingers over his biceps.

Ascher grinned, white teeth flashing against his golden skin, as he soaked up her attention.

Next, the woman moved to Jax.

She visibly jolted at his massive frame, and a delicate waft of fear trickled through the room. She quickly took his coat and turned toward Cobra.

Unlike with Jax, she leaned forward into Cobra and made moon eyes up at him as she caressed the diamonds and emeralds that trailed up his forearms.

Watching her antics, I couldn’t swallow the chuckle that bubbled up. Since my voice was shredded, the noise came out in a loud squawk that made everyone stare at me.

A flush of embarrassment burned my cheeks, but I couldn’t keep the humor off my face.

What kind of idiot was scared of Jax and not of Cobra? Any creature with a shred of instincts would recognize the soulless depths in Cobra's gaze.

"The first female alpha. You're much smaller than I expected," she said with a nasal voice and looked down at me with a classic sneer of dismissal. Word sure got around fast in the shifter realm.

Then she walked away. I was glad she didn't take my coat, because I was cold.

Cobra looked over at me, eyebrows raised, and Jax barely contained a smile. "What's so funny, little alpha?" Jax asked.

Ever since I had come out of the numb, Jax had been way more relaxed around me.

"Just can't believe she feared you and not Cobra. Like is she blind?"

My stomach dipped as I spoke and laughed. My voice was harsh and rough compared to the gorgeous woman's high-pitched twinkle. I tried to remind myself I didn't care.

Jax laughed and smiled back at me. "She must be crazy." He gave an exaggerated wink at Cobra, who glared at us all like we were ridiculous.

"Down this hall!" the same lady yelled, and Ascher charged ahead. The rest of us followed with less excitement.

When we entered the studio room, I was immediately attacked by a lady holding a tan powder and a man holding a hairbrush. Luckily, at the last moment, I realized they weren't coming at me with knives, and I refrained from punching their throats.

I was a beacon of self-control and grace.

The other alphas were given similar treatment, and a man even tried to put mascara on Cobra's eyes.

I was busy being attacked by my stylist, but I was pretty sure the mascara man now had three broken fingers, and Cobra had thick sooty lashes. Every time I looked over at him, I chuckled.

The stylist working on Ascher kept making comments about his tattoos and traced over them with a sparkly powder. When the stylist tried to do the same to his horns, Ascher leaped out of the way like he had been scalded.

The only person a stylist didn't manhandle was Jax. They kept a respectful distance and asked him politely if they could arrange his braids or powder his face. He smiled and told them "sure" good-naturedly, but the stylists' hands still shook with terror when they touched him.

I guessed being seven feet tall and covered in hundreds of pounds of muscles made other people scared.

It was still weird to me. Cobra was clearly unhinged, Ascher was a hothead, and I had a homicidal voice inside my head. Jax was the calmest and least terrifying of all of us. People were dumb.

Before I knew what was happening, we found ourselves standing in front of a small crystal that was enchanted to broadcast throughout the realm. The crystal glowed purple and sat on a metal stand.

A man standing next to it held a small screen in his hand and adjusted the crystal back and forth. He spent forever changing the crystal stand's position and grumbling that I was too short to get a good shot.

Eventually, he gave up and made me stand on a massive box in front of the men.

I felt ridiculous. The men were in formfitting T-shirts showing off their impressive muscles. Meanwhile, I was still in my puffy winter coat.

"Hello, shifter realm, I have a treat for you!" A blonde bombshell appeared out of nowhere.

I estimated she was over six feet tall, and her silky blonde hair hung in perfect curls down her curvy body. Her boobs were bursting out of her low-cut dress, and her long legs went on for miles.

I wasn't into women, and I was attracted to her. Her pale skin was completely unblemished. She was perfect.

"Everyone knows portal three is the most dangerous battlefield in the endless fae war, and here with us today, we have the impressive alphas that guard it.



We also have a special treat for our viewers today. The first female alpha, who our sources have revealed saved the other alpha Ascher during the last portal breach, is here with us today.”

A cloud of perfume choked me as the perfect woman leaned the microphone into my face.

“Tell the realm, what is it like being the first female alpha?”

Fear climbed up my throat at her question. If the entire realm was watching, that meant D~~k was watching. The television was always on in his tavern.

“A lot.” I bit my l~p, unsure of what I was supposed to say. My voice was grating compared to the sultry drawl of the announcer lady. All I could think about was D~~k watching. Listening.

“Oh my sun god, what happened to your voice?” The microphone was shoved back into my face, and my stomach plummeted.

I had no idea what to say.

“Did it happen while battling the fae?” Her eyes gleamed with excitement at the possibility of a big story.

“Yep,” I said weakly, glad she had given me an out.

The announcer paused like she didn’t know what to do with my one-word answer and then pivoted the conversation.

“We are excited for you to join us for the Ianuarius celebration. As you know, all the alphas, betas, and omegas attend the annual holiday. It is a designated day of cease-fire in the never-ending war. As the first female alpha, do you have a date yet for the party?” The announcer’s bright-red l~~s smacked as she shoved the microphone into my face again.

“Um, I haven’t found one...yet.” My palms were clammy, and the puffy jacket was suffocating. Nothing in the realm sounded worse than having to attend a stuffy ABO party and parade about like a stuffed chicken.

I’d seen the party broadcasted on the television before, but I hadn’t thought anything about it. No one had told me I had to attend.

The announcer grimaced, like I was a failure of a woman for not having a date and a dress picked out for a party I hadn't even known about.

She leaned more into my personal space, desperate to salvage the interview. Since I stood on the dumb f~~~~g box, we were eye to eye.

“So, what is your alpha form? Rumors have been spreading all over the realm, and the speculation is endless. Because of your small size, the most popular rumor is that you are a small predator. Is that true?”

“Yes,” I answered quickly, eager to have the spotlight turned off me. “Well, actual—actually—” I was cut off when she whirled her head around and took the mic away.

Great, now the entire realm thought I was a small beast when I was a massive saber-toothed tiger.

“Ascher, what was it like being saved by Sadie?” The reporter moved on and interviewed the other men. The only humorous part was when she tried to talk to Cobra, and he said nothing. He really had issues talking with women, and I wondered why I was different.

Still, the announcer's confusion when he wouldn't answer her wasn't funny enough to stop me from spiraling. I slumped forward and focused on breathing through a panic attack.

Bright lights were pointed at us, and the glowing purple crystal looked so inconspicuous on its stand.

Bile filled my mouth as I stared at it. D~~k was staring at me right now. Through it. For a second, I almost blew chunks on the realm television.

I pinched the skin of my hand to ground myself.

My thoughts spiraled as I thought about D~~k watching me right now. He can't hurt you, I reminded myself desperately.

Absorbed by my panic, I barely noticed when the interview ended.

The gorgeous announcer drooled over all three of the other alphas, and the lights were turned off. Someone came to collect the stone and put it in a shiny metal box.

Barely aware of my surroundings, I stumbled to the side of the room and leaned against the wall.

People milled around the room while I drifted off untethered.

From what seemed like far away, the announcer ran her long fingers over Ascher's and Cobra's chests. At the same time, she made googly-eyes up at Jax and rubbed against his large muscles.

Even as I panicked, my stomach clenched uncomfortably. I wanted to break her hands.

"Hey, do you dye your hair?" A dark-haired stylist who had sprayed gloss on my hair walked up to me.

I shook my head and tried to clear my thoughts. He was tall and wide and built more like a warrior than a hair stylist. Objectively, he was handsome.

"No, it's always been white since I was a little girl." I fingered the long, silky locks that I never really thought about.

"Your white hair, with your red eyes and high cheekbones, is stunning." He blushed as he smiled down at me.

"Thanks," I mumbled awkwardly, and dragged my hands over my face.

"My name's Cam. I know you're an alpha and I'm a null, but we'll probably be seeing each other around a bunch with the whole media thing, so it would be good to get acquainted." He held out his hand, and I gave him a shake back. I noted that his hands weren't calloused, like Aran's or mine. They were smooth.

He had lived a pampered life. Lucky bastard.

Also, something about me really must have been screaming at men, "Shake my hand." I couldn't decide if I was flattered or worried.

I was so used to men groping me at the tavern that it was weird they wanted to shake my hand. What did it mean?

Cam smiled at me expectantly.

“Cool.” I pointed a finger gun at his chest and pretended to shoot him. It was official: I had lost my mind.

Abruptly, a cold frost bit my nose.

“Don’t touch her.” Cobra grabbed my forearm and yanked my hand out of Cam’s grip. The null shifter sputtered in confusion, and I gritted my teeth at the gall of the alpha.

Warm chestnuts and musky pine joined the mix. All three alphas stood behind me and cornered Cam against the wall.

Of course, the blonde announcer tittered and still hung onto Jax like she was an alpha attached to a fae in battle. I wanted to bite her.

“Cam is harmless.” The announcer smiled and flipped her luscious blonde locks off her exposed chest while she made moon eyes up at Jax.

Instead of Jax agreeing with her and scolding Cobra, because Jax was usually not insane like his fellow alphas, he leaned forward and growled in Cam’s face. “Stay away from Sadie.”

The big man softened and turned to me with a shrug. “You can never be too careful, little alpha.”

Poor Cam gulped and started to shake.

Ascher glared at Cam while draping a hand over the announcer’s shoulder. She tittered some more and transferred her claws from Jax to Ascher. Her pelvis ground against the side of the horned alpha.

Rolling my eyes, I thanked Cam and shoved Cobra out of my way.

Well, I tried to shove Cobra.

His large body didn’t move an inch, so I squirmed my body past his. Even in a big puffer jacket, my breath caught as my chest dragged across his steel-hard body.

Jax, with his massive body, was standing next to Cobra, so my b~t dragged against his front as I shoved by.

For a second, I was in a sandwich of alpha pheromones, and my knees went weak at the overwhelming strength on both my sides.

I stilled as the air became saturated with the scent of frosty chestnuts. My mouth watered, and I gulped.

Both men moved forward at once and pinned me between them.

An unnatural warmth burned my core, and the queasiness came back with a vengeance.

The announcer giggled, and I turned to look at Ascher.

I tried to break myself out of whatever spell Jax and Cobra had me under. Their bodies were rocks on either side of mine, and my skin began to heat feverishly. Desire pooled in my core, and my face flushed.

Instead of staring down at the gorgeous woman whose a~s he was groping, Ascher stared directly at me. His amber eyes swirled with heat, and his horns lengthened atop his head.

The tattooed flames that snaked up the side of Ascher's face rippled as he bit his lush l~p.

Jax growled behind me as Cobra shifted his h~~s forward until I was painfully pinned between them.

Dragging my eyes away from Ascher, I stared up into Cobra's perfect face.

The sneer that contorted his l~~s and the hatred radiating from his emerald eyes reminded me of all the reasons I shouldn't be fooling around with alphas. They were overbearing, rude, and misogynistic jerks.

Thinking about jerks reminded me why I'd been panicking in the first place. D~~k had just watched me on the television.

The panic returned like a splash of glacial water to the face. I threw my body violently to the side and extracted myself from the alphas.

Gasping, I stumbled out of the room and down the hall in a haze of desperation.

I barely noticed as the other alphas followed and we climbed back onto our horses. The pressure on my chest was so heavy that I didn't notice the cold or the movements of the horse beneath me.

The furry horses moved painfully slowly through the cold snow, and each second we traveled felt like a lifetime.

As if he sensed my panic, Jax gently helped me off my horse and carried me back to our room. I was too terrified to reprimand him.

Like a zombie, I crawled into bed and hid under my covers.

D~~k knew where I was, and he might come after me, but that was the least of my problems. I had two years to come up with a plan to eliminate D~~k or get Lucinda away from him.

Overwhelmed by the fae war, I hadn't thought about Lucinda in a while. She was still away at school, but in two years, she would come home, and I wouldn't be there. The thought of her devastation, D~~k turning on her, or her thinking I had abandoned her, made me ill.

Shivering from fear under my covers, I mentally prayed to the moon goddess for strength.

Somehow, I had to survive a war against fae monsters, survive D~~k, survive the alphas, and save my sister. Fear expanded in my chest until tears silently tracked down my face.

The little shadow snake zinged across my arm and offered me comfort. As I ran my fingers over its tiny body, my chest felt a little looser, a little less painful.

I wished more than anything that the numb had recharged. Everything was so much easier when I felt nothing.

Now the world burned around me.