

Psycho Shifters Chapter 5

SADIE

CHOKING ON EMOTIONS

A sweet-scented bubble popped on my face and jolted me awake. Sputtering, I took a second to orient myself.

I had fallen asleep in the bath, and I hadn't been transported back to D~~k's tavern.

Instantly, regret and melancholy weighed me down.

Sweet Lucinda was going to be devastated if she came back from school in two years and found me gone. I couldn't let that happen.

Hazy steam swirled around me as I sprawled in the massive bathtub filled with bubbles of deliciously warm water.

Sleep had made the numb go away. I tried to sit up straight but groaned as every muscle in my body screamed in protest.

My favorite thing to do growing up was to read books from the library. In the dusty cellar, they had bootleg books from faraway realms.

I had loved to read about the half warriors from the fae realm: half alphas, half fae. They were crazy, overpowered warriors who traveled the realm, fighting evil.

As a kid, I had found the idea of physical training and fighting all the time so exciting.

I'd thought if I could take a beating from D~~k, I could fight mythical beasts.

Holy mother of the moon goddess, I'd been wrong.

Every single inch of my body ached, and I was surprised I hadn't drowned in the warm water.

I had meant to stay awake, but the bath was too soothing, and my body was beat-up after the training session. D~k had only let us shower with cold water, and the tub of fabulous warmth was low key changing my life.

Too bad vomit was currently traveling up my throat and ruining the delicious experience.

In the aftermath of the numb, every repressed emotion battered through my head.

Dragging my body on aching arms, I crawled out of the warm water until I lay belly first on the cold tile.

My head swam, and I fought not to pass out.

Nausea swirled heavily in my gut, and I vomited water onto the ground.

Pain coursed through every cell in my body.

The longer I held the numb, the harder the recovery.

I didn't know how long I lay buck n~~d in the bathing room, but eventually the pain left my stomach and sanity returned.

Thank the moon goddess the shifters had given me a private bathing room.

Gingerly, now that I no longer wanted to die from endless pain, I felt my face, my ribs, and my ankle. The salts had definitely accelerated my healing because my nose was back in its rightful place.

Slowly, I tested my legs beneath me and sighed with relief when my ankles easily supported me and there was no bone-crushing pain. I had cracked my foot training this morning.

Nothing was broken anymore.

However, it felt like I had been flattened by a building and then beaten by a hundred beta shifters. I basically had.

Now that the numb was gone, emotions whipped through my psyche.

It sucked.

Thinking about D~~k made my skin crawl with anger and disgust.

The clock on the wall said I had napped for thirty minutes.

Thankfully, it was still lunchtime. I had just taken a quick nap. Zed had said to meet in the alpha dining hall after training.

I avoided looking in the large mirror as I dressed in the green training sweats and sweatshirt.

Quickly, I covered the scars that mottled my torso, chest, and arms from D~~k's belt.

F~~~~g D~~k loved his belt and had made me hideous.

With tired arms, I barely ran a brush through my hair and left it down to air-dry.

It hung in straight white strands down to my lower back.

A quick glance showed the purple bruises under both my red eyes were even darker. Plus, there was now a matching purple bruise across my golden jaw and forehead.

Apparently, the healing salts helped heal bones quicker than bruises. Or, as an alpha, I could heal my bones quicker?

It didn't make any sense, and I rubbed at my forehead tiredly.

"Look good, feel good," I had heard a woman at the bar say before.

"Look like shit, feel like bigger shit," I said to the mirror and gave myself a thumbs-up.

I turned to walk to lunch—and fell over.

My legs gave out beneath me.

Sure, my broken bones were healed, but I still hurt everywhere.

Heaving myself up, I smacked my face a couple of times. "Don't be a little b~~h." I locked my knees and lifted with my back.

Half shuffling, half hobbling like a two-legged horse, I made it to the dining hall without falling over again.

It was a miracle.

Desperately, I needed to find the mental strength to be the coldhearted b~~~h that I was with the numb. The shifters had watched me fight without wincing once.

Now that the numb was gone, everyone was going to find it suspicious when I turned into a drama queen.

I'd never told anyone about the homicidal voice in my head, not even Lucinda, because it sounded crazy. I didn't want to be sent to the clinics where they kept the shifters who lost their minds.

In the cold, brutal realm, people lost their minds more often than you would think.

Of course, because my life was a series of depressing events, when I got to the room, all three alphas sat at a table together.

Since it was the alpha dining hall, they were the only inhabitants. It was impossible to avoid them.

All three men whipped their heads to stare at me as soon as I entered.

Trying to look like a strong, competent woman was hard when I was pretty sure I had pulled both my a~s cheeks.

Somehow my broken bones were healed, but everything still ached.

Tensing every limb, I just barely hobbled over to the buffet. Fighting for hours had really taken a toll on my body.

The only things that kept me upright were the smell of bacon and a single shard of dignity.

It was a close one.

After what felt like hours of shuffling down the buffet line, I turned to grab the closest seat next to me.

“Sit with us,” Jax alpha-barked, and my knees immediately locked in compliance.

Before I could even think and show him my middle finger, my aching feet carried me over to the table.

Rolling my eyes at Jax’s high-handedness, I collapsed into a chair across from them.

Immediately, I began to inhale my food.

After I polished off three burgers and a pile of bacon in less than thirty seconds, I looked up at the three alphas.

All their mouths were open.

“Did you grow up in a barn?” Ascher had a horrified look on his face. “That was pathetic and embarrassing. We’re alphas. Try to act like you have some dignity.” His strong jaw and chiseled cheeks tensed, his tattoos pulled taut as he looked down at me with disgust.

“She has no manners.” Cobra said to Ascher. His green eyes were once again filled with endless hatred.

I never knew green could be so menacing and cold.

Cobra ran his red tongue across his lush l~s.

I pressed my knees together as my core throbbed.

From the glare on Cobra’s face, it was clear we were not having the same thoughts.

He was probably fantasizing about breaking me and pummeling me with his fists.

Taking a deep breath, I reminded myself that I wasn’t a hussy, and I did not find big, scary men attractive.

Cobra sat next to me, so I inhaled his alpha scent.

Unlike Jax, who smelled like warm chestnuts and Ascher pine trees, Cobra’s scent was frosty and slightly burned.

It was like burying my head in a snowbank. I couldn't tell if I wanted more or less of it.

Instead of sniffing the air near Cobra like a weirdo, I focused on my unanswered questions. "So alphas heal quicker than normal, I take it? Or are those healing salts magical?"

I rolled my foot that had been badly broken this morning and marveled that it felt fine. The times D~~k had cracked my ribs, my arms, and my legs had taken me at least two weeks to recover.

Now I was good as new.

Jax said, "Alphas heal broken bones in about a day, but the salts are actually enchanted chips of unicorn bone. They accelerate the healing of broken bones. We heal bruises and muscles quickly on our own, but it usually takes about a day."

I blew a raspberry, and my mind mentally exploded. There was so much to unpack in his statements.

First, I hadn't even known unicorns were a thing. Second, I was going to pretend it was salt and not whatever the hell he'd just described. Third, it seemed lame that I couldn't heal bruises and muscles immediately.

Jax narrowed his eyes like I was a puzzle he was trying to figure out. He seemed to think I was way more mysterious than I actually was.

I didn't know why they were convinced I was a spy after fighting. It seemed much more probable that I had a homicidal voice inside my head and turned into a killing machine.

I ignored all of them and ate my food as they looked on in horror.

They had not been fed one meal a day for sixteen years of their lives, and it showed. Prissy b~~~~s.

The pit in my stomach was endless, and I had a feeling that no matter how much I ate, it would never be full. I had gone hungry for too long.

There was a basket of bread rolls in the center of the table.

Greedily, I grabbed about five with one hand and positioned them neatly on my plate.

My knuckles were scabbed over, but when I opened my hand quickly, the scabs cracked, and blood dripped out.

I winced when I got a little blood on my bread. Embarrassment pooled through me as I brushed it off as much as possible.

A small, girlish part of me was embarrassed that the men thought I was disgusting. I tried to ignore those emotions because I was starving.

Since I was only half-unhinged, I had standards to uphold. One of them was not eating blood like a sadistic fae vampyre of lore.

Staring down, I concentrated hard on biting around the bloody edge of the bread.

Even though it was gross because it had blood on it, I was too hungry to let food go to waste.

“Oh my sun god, this is pathetic to watch.” Ascher put his bread roll onto my plate. “Just eat this one and try not to bleed all over it.”

I made the mistake of glancing up into his striking amber eyes.

The three alphas were so physically gorgeous it was nauseating. They reminded me of how hideous I was.

“You did well for your first day of training.” Jax smiled, and his praise warmed me like a hug. Of the three alphas, Jax seemed the nicest. A shocking character trait for a shifter.

“I wonder who trained her?” Cobra asked coldly to Jax.

I leaned my head slightly to the side and discreetly inhaled their potent alpha pheromones.

Jax’s warm chestnuts, Ascher’s strong pine, and Cobra’s frosty ice scents mixed in a mouthwatering combination.

“No one.” I sighed heavily and shoved more bread in my mouth.

Don't worry, there is just a numb sensation in my brain that takes over my body and makes me into a homicidal killing machine. But in the aftermath, I'm overwhelmed by my own emotions like a sissy. Also, go f~k yourself.

"You go f~k yourself, little girl." Cobra leaned forward.

Oops, must have said the last part aloud.

The emeralds and diamonds embedded in his cheeks sparkled in the dimly lit room. The jewels twinkled so much it almost looked like they were moving.

He sat back and stared out the window like I was too disgusting to even look at.

Jax's eyebrows rose as he looked back and forth between us.

I realized it was the first time Cobra had addressed me directly. Such a minor thing, but for some reason, it felt important.

With a heavy sigh, I focused my attention away from the gorgeous-confusing alpha and drank the cup of hot coffee that a servant had placed in front of me.

It warmed my tongue deliciously.

"Why are you so short? I've never seen a shifter so physically pathetic." Ascher laughed at me like my entire existence was a joke.

Clearly, he was gearing up for "interrogate Sadie over lunch and try to make her our little b~~h."

I looked up from my fourth bread roll and glared at all three of them. I had been told that from this close, my red eye color was extremely unnerving.

Hot rage at their vitriol twisted in my gut, and I wanted to scream at them like a child.

I'd dealt with D~~k my whole life. There was no room left in my miserable existence for bullies.

New life motto: anyone who bullied me was getting shanked.

Hard.

I forced myself to keep my voice low. When I talked loudly, its scratchy, broken sound was unbearable.

“My name is Sadie. Two days ago, I was living in less-than-ideal circumstances, but just because I haven’t lived with luxuries doesn’t mean I’m going to roll over and play b~h. You’re all big, bad alphas. Well, kudos to you. The fact that I don’t have a d~k doesn’t mean I’m any less likely to slit your throats if you treat me like shit. I can learn to piss standing up too, fuckers.”

Heaving with anger, I gripped my coffee in my hands. It took all my willpower not to throw it across the room and scream at them like a lunatic.

I missed the numb. It kept all my emotions at bay.

Ascher opened his mouth like he was going to say something, and I quickly cut him off.

“Stop trying to interrogate me. I’m not a spy for the fae queen, and I don’t want to be here anymore than you want me here. Understood?”

“Understood.” Jax smiled at me like I was a cute little kitten and not a bruised girl who had just yelled nonsense about pissing while standing up.

A part of me cringed at my own statements.

“No one cares about your sob story.” Cobra rolled his eyes and hung his arm across the back of Jax’s chair.

His jeweled fingers caressed Jax’s large bicep, staking a claim over the big alpha.

Once again, Jax looked between us like he was shocked the gorgeous alpha was addressing me directly.

I rolled my eyes and made a childish face at Cobra.

He just stared back at me with his soulless eyes. Either Cobra had been born cruel or he had been hurt very badly.

“I never asked you to care.” I drank more coffee, and it soothed my boiling rage.

The coffee was delicious, and I m~~~~d a little. I had never had anything so bitter and rich at the same time.

It was divine.

Abruptly, all three alphas leaned forward.

Three sets of eyes glowed. Two with blown pupils and one with snake eyes.

I started with shock.

Cobra's eyes had transformed to slit pupils. It didn't take a genius to figure out that he was a snake and Ascher was some sort of horned ram creature.

Jax's gray eyes glowed almost white, and I wondered what his alpha form was. From his size, it was something large and menacing.

Not understanding what had caused the sudden shift in their eyes, I looked around the room for threats.

My body ached all over, and I was weak because I needed at least a day and a half to recharge the numb.

I looked back at the three men, and they were eating like nothing had happened.

Had I imagined it?

"I find it hard to believe you aren't some spy for the fae queen. She's been known to use her enchantments to play tricks and trap alphas." Ascher cut at his steak savagely.

Rage bubbled inside my chest, and I had to forcibly swallow it down.

I didn't give a single flying shit about the queen, the war, or other shifters.

I was a lowly servant.

As a servant, they gave me zero rights in the realm, but then they just dropped me off at a portal and expected me to fight for them? They were disgusting.

I let my hatred show on my face. “I hate the fae queen and shifters equally. Why would I take sides?”

Ascher shook his head like he didn’t believe me, but said nothing else. In fact, no one said another word for hours.

It was bliss.

Thankfully, the rest of the day passed quickly in a blur of exhaustion. The morning’s training had felt like an entire week.

The afternoon was spent in a classroom, learning battle strategies with the betas.

An old lady at the front of the room named Auntie droned on and on about battle tactics.

Apparently, battle fae took the mutated forms of animals. They were strong, but their overly large sizes hindered them in the shifter forest, and the best tactic was fighting in groups.

Alphas were used as to fight them.

Auntie explained that lots of fae creatures had natural armor that was hard to penetrate with just bullets and knives. Which was what betas used to fight.

You needed beasts to fight beasts. That was where the alphas came in.

Thankfully, Auntie said the fae realm usually only sent one creature through the portal at once. Only a few times in the last thirty years of the war had they sent more.

No one knew why the fae queen didn’t send a ton through at once, or why there wasn’t talk of a truce.

The entire war was shrouded in mystery.

Still, I couldn’t really focus on the battle formations. Most of my attention was consumed by the beta with the bushy beard who had called me a little girl during training.

The bearded beta didn’t look away from me for three straight hours. Every time I glanced across the room, he was staring at me.

Hatred wafted off him in tangible waves, and there wasn't a doubt in my mind that he wanted to harm me.

He wasn't the only one.

All twelve beta women were glaring at me with disdain.

When Jax had pulled the chair out next to him and told me to sit down, the first female had glared at me.

When Ascher had given me a pen and said, "You better return it," every female in the room had glared.

When Cobra had scoffed and told me I was pathetic for forgetting my notebook, everyone in the room had gaped at me.

Men and women alike.

I was confused because the men were literally not being nice to me. Shifters made no sense.

When class was finally over, I got stuck behind a group of beta women gossiping. They had at least half a foot of height on me and didn't even notice that I was trying to discreetly get by.

I might have shoved past them, but my self-preservation kicked in and I waited for an opening.

"Did you see that Cobra talked to her? He never talks to women, like ever." The beta woman scowled like I had committed an atrocity.

Of course, the frosty bastard would refuse to talk to women. He seemed like the a~~~~~e type.

Another woman sighed dramatically with longing. "The things I would let that alpha do to me. He's literally perfect, like a pale god. But there is no way he would ever go for the new alpha. She's pathetic and weak. Everyone knows he likes strength."

"She did fight pretty well today, for being so small," the other beta said.

I swallowed down a scoff. I fought amazingly when numb.

Also, while Cobra was the most gorgeous man I had ever seen, he was also the most terrifying.

Hatred wafted off of him in palpable waves, and my skin smarted with phantom pain where beta knuckles had pummeled me.

My gut told me I wouldn't recover if he ever punched me.

There was nothing romantic or swoon-worthy about Cobra. He was a predator and should be treated as such.

He 100 percent broke his weird rule about not talking to women because he wanted to beat the shit out of me.

The other beta said dramatically, "Whatever, she's still small. Cobra's so gorgeous, but Ascher is also hot. I prefer his tattoos and horns. Plus, rumor has it he's tattooed everywhere, like everywhere. I also heard he comes from money and, unlike Cobra, he loves women."

All the women laughed like it was hilarious. I didn't get the joke.

"Ugh, who doesn't love the horns? The man's a beast. Although, I still can't get over how gorgeous Cobra is."

Finally, the betas turned to the side, and I was able to slip by them.

Hurrying down the hall, I made it to the alpha dining room without running into more gossipers.

That night, dinner with the alphas was a silent affair.

Jax wrote up a report while he ate. Cobra glared at me, and Ascher glanced over every couple of seconds like he wanted to say something to me, but then thought better of it.

Studying the three men while I scarfed down four steaks and a small mountain of potatoes, I couldn't understand why none of the betas had mentioned Jax.

Jax was just as handsome as the other two men, and his mountains of muscles were physically impressive.

Sure, Cobra was gorgeous, and Ascher was tantalizing with his horns and tattoos, but Jax was handsome and the strongest.

Also, they must have been wrong about Ascher's d~k being tattooed. That had to hurt too much, right?

Shaking my head, I tried to stop salivating over the alphas and instead focused on eating my food.

After dinner, I went back to my small room and inspected it. My door had a weak lock that could easily be broken.

I sat down on the cold, hard floor and slumped back against my door, clutching a knife I'd swiped from the carving station at dinner.

If anyone tried to open my door, I would immediately feel it.

I wasn't a heavy sleeper.

As I looked at my warm bed with longing, a part of me rationalized I was overreacting.

Still, I didn't allow myself to go to the warmth.

I hadn't survived twenty years because I ignored my instincts.

The hard floor was a familiar bed, and I fell asleep in seconds.