

Chapter 9

I ran- I ran as fast and as far as I could without shifting and letting Trixy take over. I was still faster than a human but slower than an Alpha and by my counting I only had three minutes of running before they were unleashed and sent after us.

All of the girls scattered, running in different directions and exploring various edges of the forest. I tried to see what was in front of me or hear anything that would take me to the nearest road but I couldn't- I couldn't even hear the other girls so I just ran. My bare feet were cut on rocks and sticks poked into my heel but the worst was the thorns from the veining branches that stabbed into the soles of my feet and wrapped around my ankles; I hissed as part of my skin was cut off and left behind. Branches on trees and wild grown bushes slapped me in the face when I ran through them.

The moon was my only source of light but covered by the red shadow it did little to help show me a path through the forest. With every drop of blood that stained the leaves, I left more for the alphas to smell. It would be child's play for them to find us when we left so much of our scent behind. The earthy aroma and damp smell of the grass from rain that had poured before we arrived would normally calm me. My soul would heal from a walk or a run in these woods if I wasn't about to be chased and stripped of my freedom. It wasn't exactly a serene promenade.

I froze for a second- one second to long- when one loud slam against the gong let us know that it was time and the Alpha's had officially been released. They would walk at first, laugh to themselves as they sniffed us out and once they caught the scent of the girl they wanted, they would go for the attack and they would run until they caught her.

I was trying to touch as little as possible to leave behind less of a scent but

the blood trail from my feet would more than give me away. If an alpha caught my scent and I was the girl he wanted to claim, there was little I could do to sway him.

I groaned when I missed to duck for a branch and it nicked my lip.

“Fuck,” i touched the blood with my fingers and saw the perfect crimson color melting into the creases on my finger.

I should've left when I had the chance. It was an idea I'd had for a year leading up to today; I would go to the chalice ritual, let them rank me and degrade me and then, when they put the blindfold on and loaded me into the truck I was going to wait until they'd driven for a while before I jumped out. They wouldn't care that they were one girl down, they probably wouldn't even have noticed my absence. I should've made a run for it, it was too late now and all I could do in this moment was hope that the Alpha's hunted the other girls and left me be.

“Trixy, come on!”

I could feel her getting tired and it was understandable, the timing just sucked.

“I need a break, and food” she growled.

Food, I can find you food. I ran down the declining leaf covered grass and continued to a clearing. My feet were now mostly covered in blood and left traces the size of footsteps but if I could find a doe for Trixy then she could eat and we could continue. Maybe if she had the strength, we could run away from here before we were caught.

“You dream to big” she snidely remarked but I rolled my eyes and ignored her.

I stopped and I waited, knowing that this was the last thing one wanted to do during the Hunt. The alpha's wouldn't stop, they wouldn't sympathize with your starving wolf or your injured body. They would see prey and jump, and I would be finished. But it wasn't over until they found me; until then I had a shot. Until then, I could still win. Seeing what they did to Liv simply because she could was motivation enough to keep running. If they could do that in a room full of people, what could they do in a room with one of us alone? I wondered what had happened with Illiana and the king. They had been alone, no witnesses or spectators. Just them. And she walked out...different.

"Keep running" Trixy said but I heard in her voice how she was getting weaker.

"No you need to eat,"

"I can't" I heard the snap of a branch not too far away and felt how every muscle in my body froze. It should come around those trees and the wild berry bushes- they love those berries.

"Why not?" I asked while keeping full focus on the hooves moving closer.

"We can't shift, it's the chalice, Hazel. I'm not of any use to you until the Hunt is over"

I watched the doe step out with the big eyes on alert darting around the clearing to make sure it was safe.

"So even if you eat-"

"I still won't be able to take over" she said.

The ears on the doe fluttered and she saw the wild berries. I narrowed in on her chest, saw the beat of her heart and tasted the bloody meat on my

lips as though I had already sunk my teeth into her.

My stomach growled, she turned her head and looked at me - straight into my eyes as though she could my mind - and I knew she could sense that she wasn't alone. I didn't have a knife to use on her and if I couldn't shift and let Trixy go for the kill then this was all futile.

I pressed my hands against the tree and pushed back. I needed to keep running before they caught up but just when I turned to run I heard a scream that filled the air. Birds flew from their trees leaving behind a single feather that glided in the wind until it landed at my feet. A loud howl followed the silence of the girl and I knew that someone had just been claimed and marked.

One girl down.

I hadn't experienced it myself but I had heard about the pain that accompanied being marked. When an Alpha took his chosen mate and sank his teeth into her, marking her flesh for all eternity and tying them together through a soul string - it's an unimaginable pain. I once heard from a wanderer, a human, about a form of torture that they used on those who had committed crimes - extract information or simply because they had done something unforgivable. I could imagine the torture of which he spoke was equivalent to the pain of being marked.

Us wolves have high tolerance for pain, so I could only imagine how much it had to hurt to be marked if even we cower at the impact. The pain wasn't for the fated mates, they would experience euphoric highs. It was for the chosen mates alone, when the male sent his venom into our veins.

I shivered at the thought and preyed to the gods that I wouldn't have to go through it.

The doe behind me she saw me stagger back and we both stopped and stared at each other. She backed up, one step and then two and I stayed put- she jumped up on her hind legs and spun around like in a dance before she took off running into the woods. I watched her disappear between the trees and decided to turn the other way, no need to frighten the poor animal further by running after her.

Running far and fast was my only option so I took one step ready to surge through the woods when I saw the shadow of a beast for a single second before he slammed me into the ground.

No. Shit.

His yellow eyes bored into mine and his lips curled displaying his white teeth, including the canines he so shamelessly let show.

The leaves covered my face and my body brushed against the rough ground when he pulled my ankles, dragging me across the dirt.

I looked around to find something- anything- that could be used as a weapon. I couldn't be marked if I was not caught.

As though the gods heard my pleas I saw the phallic shaped rock by the pile of debris to my right. I gasped, my nails dug into the damp ground and I couldn't turn to see what was happening but I could feel it; his claws pressing into my skin, cutting through my flesh layer by layer.

I reached out, my fingers grazed the stone as I saw it passing in my vision and I tossed my body with the little strength I had and grab it as I was being dragged.

Trixy pushed through for her last will and we kicked one time- one hard time- enough to free one foot and feel his claws dragging down until he

lost his grip. A low vibration growl rumbled from his chest and I knew he enjoyed that I put up a fight but I didn't recognize the sound.

Panting and heaving I turned on my back and watched his shadowed face under the branches of the trees.

"Dom."

He growled, his lip curled exposing his teeth and a dark chuckle rumbled from him.

"Did you think I wanted the one I fucked?" He asked.

He pulled my ankle, leaned down and grabbed my arms. He lifted me into a standing position and his whiskey covered breath was fanning my face and the bastard was laughing at me. His entire face shifted in amusement.

He leaned in closer and his lips pulled back over his canines, "I prefer mine untouched." He said in a sneer laced with promise.

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