

Alpha Nox - Chapter 0005

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It wasn't nearly as difficult getting Harriet to let Hakeem come with us to the Midnight Falls Pack as I'd initially thought.

She must've really had a lot on her plate because she barely put up a fight. All it took was a short glance at the muscle compacted onto his lean frame, and my promise that he moved almost as quickly as I did, and she was sold.

There were six charter busses primed and ready to take the four-hour long journey to the nearest airport. The airport was small with a whopping two lanes, which meant more planes had to be flown in to carry us all. The others from the Lycan's second and third divisions would be making the trip from Russia and Africa sometime this week.

Nox had no clue the chaos that was headed his way.

It took some serious effort not to squeal when I stepped onto the charter bus. Two plush, padded seats sat next to one another on either side, separated by a long aisle that led to the bathroom in the back. Television screens were mounted every other row, playing some overly cheery advertisement for Alaskan hot springs.

"I'd take this over the shit beds they gave us any day." Hakeem muttered, his dark eyes scanning the heads that filled the other seats.

I snorted, fiddling with the controls that allowed the seat to recline. I slowly went from a sitting position to practically lying flat on my back. The entire time Hakeem watched with one of his eyebrows raised, clearly finding some semblance of amusement in my actions.

"Four years, Hakeem. Four years of that pathetic piece of fabric and cotton they called a bed. Four years of being jabbed in the ass by rusty springs. If you get tired of me, I'm sure one of the trainee's wouldn't mind you sitting with them." I lowered my voice and leaned into him, my eyes flickering towards the front of the bus. "They can't take their eyes off of you."

His lips were round, larger on the top than they were on the bottom. It made his sneer positively threatening. "They see me as their whore."

Disgust oozed from his voice, which he hadn't bothered to lower. It made me wonder who his disgust was towards, the trainee's or himself.

"You did what you had to do to survive." I said sharply, careening my eyes towards the massive bus window, watching as puffs of exhaust filled the air, listening to the hiss of the driver letting off the breaks.

With a slight groan, the bus began to move.

I still wasn't looking his way when I said, "...if anyone's disgusting, it's them."

Before we could really take off and leave this cursed camp, the charter bus squealed to a stop. With another hiss, this one quieter than the breaks, the doors slid open. A pleasant pang of surprise smacked me square in the chest when Delphine's head of kinky hair came into view.

Before we piled onto the bus, she promised the favor I asked of her was tucked away in the carry-on compartments above our heads. It was risky considering anyone could stumble upon it, but I trusted her.

She walked down the length of the aisle, all the way to the back of the bus where Hakeem and I sat.

"Your aura lit up like a damn firework the second you spotted me." She whispered, leaning across the aisle. "And here I thought you only enjoyed my company because you had to."

I glanced up the aisles to make sure none of the trainees were listening. Thankfully, most of them had headphones in or were messing around with the televisions.

"You know you're the only person I'll spare once I burn this place to the ground." I winked.

Hakeem tilted his head but said nothing.

The trip on the charter bus was long and drawn out, but not nearly as bad as the flight from Alaska to Oregon. From there, we took a train all the way down to Nevada. It was there, in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest that the massive Midnight Fall's pack called home.

None of it, not the bus ride or the flight, felt real until I followed the crowd out of the train station.

There was a thin veil of humidity hanging in the air, one that would fade as the afternoon came to an end. Through the tall peaks of the tree's, the last embers of sunlight peered through, as though they were welcoming me home.

White fir and ponderosa pine trees jutted up from the earth as far as the eye could see. No matter where you were in the Midnight Fall's pack, if you delved deep enough, you'd always be able to pick up on their scents.

Delphine stood at my side, watching with obvious curiosity as I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. The tangerine-like scent of the white fir's washed over my senses, mixing with the vanilla undertones that only the ponderosa could emit.

My shoulders slumped lower than they ever had before, and if I were capable of it, I might've even cried.

“Your home is beautiful, Lilac.”

In another life, I might’ve thanked her for the compliment, but only one thought stood out in my head. It was a realization of sorts, one that must’ve changed my aura to some capacity because Delphine’s lips quickly curled into a frown.

I didn’t break my stare from the sky as I replied.

“It is stunning, but it’s not my home. Not anymore.”

From there, we traveled to the bustling town of Primrose, the capital of the Midnight Fall’s pack.

I’d walked down these roads a million times, visited each and every store, and stared into the eyes of every towns person as Alpha Oliver’s warriors walked me to the courthouse, to my prison sentence I’d been serving for four long years.

With every memory that came rushing back, I was reminded of the girl that died that day, and of the monster that was birthed in her place.

By tomorrow, every single hotel in the pack would be filled to the brim. From what I heard eavesdropping on the other trainer’s gossip, there wasn’t an unmated she-wolf in the second or third division that wasn’t frothing at the mouth at the chance to become Nox Griffin’s mate.

It wasn’t until we made it to the hotel room that Delphine, Hakeem, and I shared, that she broke open her suitcase and pulled out the dress bag from inside.

I unzipped the bag and stared down at the sea of silky fabric, admiring the gown I’d asked Delphine to acquire. She’d gotten everything correct, right down to the smallest of details. Excitement curled in my belly, and a grin slashed itself across my face.

“Perfect. Absolutely perfect, Delphine.”

Harriet, the Crawford twins, and the other trainers were remapping the layout to adjust to the changes in the land, which meant Hakeem and I had one day—one single day to relax. After that, we’d have to endure the pure chaos of setting up every obstacle and trap for the circuit.

Lounging about in a three-star hotel room with greasy take-out food, reality television shows, and a working shower might’ve not seemed relaxing for most, but after four years without a single day off, this was easily the equivalent of a luxury cruise.

Hakeem was sprawled out on one of the Queen-sized beds, which was where he’d spent the majority of the day. It seemed like my quiet friend here liked reality television even more than I did. It made me want to uncover the mystery of why he was sent to the Lycan’s training camp even more.

That would have to wait until later though because I had a Mate Ball to crash.

Delphine, being the multi-talented Goddess she was, did my hair and make-up for the event. I hadn't yet told her who the Alpha was to me or what he'd done, but she knew that tonight I needed to be a showstopper. She curled my hair until it fell down my back in waves of gold.

Before all of this, I had brown hair like my mother, cropped close to my shoulders. Over four years it had grown down my back, and with just a smidgen of hair dye, it was the same silky blonde as my father's.

She dusted my lids with a dark shadow, blending it outwards to create a smoky eye that made the green within my hazel iris's shine. After applying two wings of liner, sharp enough to slit the throats of my enemies, it was time to put on my dress.

"You're aware this is a black and white themed event right?" Delphine met my eyes through the mirror as she zipped the back of my dress—a dress that was most definitely neither black nor white.

"Sure do." I smirked.

Hakeem's head popped up from the bed, his eyes taking in the entirety of my form.

"Damn." Was all he said, but I had a feeling that was a major compliment coming from him.

To save her ass from Harriet, who would blow a gasket once she realized I disobeyed her, Delphine left for the ball first. I waited an hour, listening to the two posted guards outside our hotel room pace. My opportunity came when both guards ventured down to the vending machine at the end of the hall. A quiet knock sounded at the door, and I opened it to see the maid Delphine had sent up.

Climbing into the massive laundry basket, I burrowed under the mountain of dirty sheets and held my breath as the maid wheeled me down the hall and into the elevator. From there, it was all too easy to hail a taxi to the extravagant country club Nox's Mate Ball was being held at.

Showing up over an hour late meant that not only did I slip inside the building with ease, but there was little to no faces to gawk and stare at my dress. Those who did linger in the massive corridors, admiring the artwork and sculptures placed in their own unique alcoves, quickly scurried inside the ballroom when the announcement was made that it was time for line-up.

Even from the hallway, I could hear the hundreds of she-wolves preening, chittering with excitement and the start of what would soon be vicious jealousy.

I peeked my head into the ballroom, glancing up at the arched ceiling and the orbs of light that hung suspended in the air. They were the product of Photokinesis—a wolf with the ability to manipulate light. Lining the walls were actual trees. Their vines, speckled with milky flowers, spiraled around each marble pillar in the ballroom. The plants were the result of another ability, this one known as Chlorokinesis—plant manipulation.

It seemed Nox went all out for tonight.

Rather than enter the ballroom, I slipped back into the corridor and made my way around, searching for the entrance to the balcony that overlooked the entire event. Nox must be making his way through the crowd, because almost all the guards were in the ballroom. The few that patrolled the halls were easy enough to avoid.

By sheer luck I found the right door and slipped inside, taking the steps two at a time until I reached the top, where another door stood.

As it swung open, spilling pale light from the orbs that hovered in mid-air, the sounds of the party slipped through. The laughter and twinkling music spurred my adrenaline until my entire body vibrated with it, drowning in the sheer anticipation of what was to come.

I stepped through the door, onto the balcony where the great Alpha Nox Griffin himself had made his grand entrance mere minutes ago.

Both the platform and its railing were made of pale marble, the same as the staircase that led to the ground level. It took several seconds for anyone to notice me standing up here, giving me plenty of time to scour every head in the massive ballroom. When I finally spotted him, I thought my heart might stop. The way it slammed in my chest overshadowed everything else—even the music that thrummed throughout the room.

Everything I'd endured these last four years, every horrible, gruesome thing, rose up from the depths of my mind and sunk its claws into my heart. Black and white began to bleed into one flat shade of grey, only separating when I dug my nails into my arm and reminded myself of the truth.

This is real. I'm here. I'm home.

From all the way up here, I couldn't catch his scent. It didn't matter, though. I had every facet of it committed to memory.

Nox's back was turned as he talked to a gaggle of she-wolves all clad in black and white gowns, but I'd recognize that head of hair anywhere. It had always been darker than midnight itself, always untamable on his head. He must've switched up his hairstyle, because it was now shaved short on the back and sides, but the top was as unruly as ever.

His shoulders had filled out considerably, as did his torso and legs. I could only see the outline of his arms from where I stood, but all things considered, Nox truly looked the part of a man.

One of the she-wolves in the group glanced my way, doing a double take before settling on where I stood. Her red-painted lips moved, the sound drowned out by the music and chatter. When her hand lifted to show a finger pointed in my direction, I knew the moment I'd been waiting four long years for had finally come.

At long fucking last.

Nox turned, and time itself slowed. The illusive and cruel God that counted every moment of our fickle lives stretched this one moment into an eternity, giving me the chance to relish every emotion on Nox's face as his eyes climbed the steps and settled on where I stood.

Those eyes of his hadn't changed one bit. They still held every ounce of the sea, every wave as it crested the shore. They sparkled as they saw me—*sparkled*.

He didn't recognize me, nor did I expect him to. Heads began to turn in my direction, eyes in every color trained on my face and gown. They saw the same thing Nox saw: A beautiful girl with long honey-colored hair and eyes dusted with ash. A gown not black or white, but a color both pale and bold, overlaid with dark lace and gems that caught the light and twinkled as I moved.

Just as I began to descend the stairs, Nox turned away from the other she-wolves, granting me his full attention. With a swipe of his hand, he waved away the guards that were inching closer.

Three steps and every head in the room was turned my way, but it wasn't until the tenth that Nox's scent hit me like a ton of bricks, more painful than anything I'd endured these past four years.

Just as it had at fourteen, Nox's scent embodied everything beautiful about this pack. It carried the vanilla and tangerine notes of the white firs and ponderosas, interwoven with the spiciness of tree bark, and the freshness of the crisp breeze.

It stirred the bloody and broken parts of my soul, the shards quivering as they sliced into my flesh. The girl I once was sobbed at the realization that she was getting everything she'd ever wanted, but that she could keep none of it. My wolf lifted her head and unleashed a sorrowful howl.

Mate.

"Mate." Nox whispered as I reached the last step.

His lips were just as soft and full as they were at fourteen. Even now, I was caught in his web, watching them dance over every syllable.

He held out his hand. "May I have this dance, mate?"

Not trusting my words, I stayed silent as I placed my hand in his. I held my breath, schooling my face into neutrality to keep from being swept away by the sparks that consumed my skin and set my nerves aflame.

We glided to the center of the dance floor, moving in tandem, flowing the way the ocean's waves did as they drifted further and further up the shore. I'd known it since I was a little girl—in my heart of hearts—that Nox and I were meant for one another.

Music trickled into the air, slow at first as Nox pulled me close and began to sway. He blinked wildly, taking me in.

“You have no idea how long I've been waiting for you.” He purred, ever the gentleman.

Somehow, in the midst of the storm, I found my tongue.

“The best things in life are worth waiting for.” I replied, a coy tilt to my lips.

He lifted his arm and spun me in a circle, making the bottom of my dress flare out. I was pulled back into his chest, the breath knocked from my lungs as I felt bands of hardened muscle beneath my palms.

“Tell me your name, beautiful. I can't spend the rest of our lives calling you mate.” Nox said, sounding just as breathless as I felt.

I leaned into whisper in his ear, my breath catching at how close my teeth were to his neck. With one swift move, I could tear his throat out.

“You mean you don't recognize me? Take another look at my gown. Tell me what you see.”

Still dancing, he wracked his eyes up and down my body. The lazy smirk his lips melted into fit perfectly with every sharp angle of his face.

“Well, it fits you like a fucking glove and makes your tit's look perfect. It's low in the back, draws the attention to your amazing ass. Oh, and it's purple.”

Purple? The man didn't know his colors, it seemed. It was too pale, too dusty to be called something as basic as purple.

A giggle slid past my lips, tainted with venom that Nox failed to notice. Like a snake, my beauty distracted him from how deadly I truly was.

Shaking my head, I whispered. “Silly, Alpha Nox. It's not purple.”

“It's not? Then what is it?” He tilted his head curiously.

A savage grin slashed its way across my face.

“It's *lilac*.”

