

FIFTEEN

The training grounds were meant for warriors. Even this early, there were people training, people who skipped breakfast to improve their strength. No one paid attention to me as I sat in a corner, watching those sparing around me or just warming up for the training ahead.

The alpha came in a long time later with Skylar at his side. She gave me a gloating smile once she saw me sitting in a secluded corner.

"Rise." I stood as my alpha commanded but my eyes were on Skylar's hand on his bicep. She tightened it when she caught me looking, her smile widening.

She most likely had figured out that the alpha and I were mates even if he wanted to hide it. Skylar hated me so she took this opportunity to make me feel miserable and it worked. Seeing her beside the alpha, I realized we would never look so good together. She was a strong alpha female, capable and beautiful. She was everything we expected from an alpha like Valens.

"Skylar tells me she has trained warriors before." I looked from him to Skylar, waiting for the joke. Did Skylar look like she'd ever trained anyone before? She hadn't!

"Yes. I can help train her." She looked up at him with a radiant smile that made my guts clench and fall. I didn't like

the look she gave him. I didn't like the hand she had on him and I didn't like that he allowed it. 2

I was jealous.

"Skylar will be your trainer. Make sure you cooperate with her." He pulled his hand from hers and left the two of us to 'train'. Those around us went back to their training as the alpha left. Skylar gave me an evil smile that made my heart beat faster.

"Are you ready to train, omega?" She cracked her knuckles. Without a doubt, I knew she would destroy me.

"What are you planning, Skylar?" Her fist shut out to crack against my jaw before I even finished saying what I had to say.

"Watch the way you speak to me. I'm your trainer, after all." She smiled at me after giving me a harsh glare. "Now, let's start."

Training, to Skylar, meant beating me up as I expected. By the time she was done with me, every inch of my body hurt. My left eye was healing slowly from a blow and I had blood dripping from my nose. I spat blood out of my mouth, staggering to a stand, dizzy with pain.

"Do better next time." Skylar giggled as she finally left me after two hours of what I could only call torture in daylight.

I staggered all the way to the basement of the pack house only to get there and realize my things had been moved out.

I didn't have a room here anymore. While I recovered, I didn't have a bed to rest on. I had to get up to the penthouse but I couldn't get my legs to work to carry me to the elevator so I lay on the cold, bare ground and gasped for breath.

Skylar tried to kill me and my mate gave her the pass to. I closed my eyes with my back on the floor and pain blooming all over me.

The next time I opened my eyes, I was on a soft bed with voices around me.

"Did I go too far?" The voice sounded muffled from where I was.

"I cannot say, Alpha but that girl has to be punished for doing this." The other voice sounded angry.

"I put her up to it." Regret reverberated in his voice and it made my wolf whine. "She is too weak, Jabari. I cannot have that."

"Help her get stronger."

"How? I will break her with my strength. She will crumble like dust and I cannot have that. She has to be stronger. She needs to be stronger. I cannot hold my beast much longer. He is panting for her and if I have her now, I might break her. If that doesn't happen, then one of my many enemies will ruin her. She is too weak." He ranted.

I closed my eyes tighter wishing I could avoid his words but they were true. I was too weak. I would be nothing but a

weakness to him and he didn't need any weakness.

"It is my duty to protect her. She is awake now so I will take my leave."

I didn't bother trying to pretend to sleep when I heard the Beta leave and the alpha come to stand beside me.

"This is your room now. What were you doing in the basement?" His words were as cold as ice, and sharp enough to cut into my heart. I felt I'd imagined the warmth in his voice, the regret of seeing me so broken because when he spoke to me, I felt worthless again.

"I – I forgot." I looked away from him but he took my chin in his hand and turned me to face him again. He didn't do it forcefully but the injury on my jaw ached and made me wince.

"What am I going to do with you?" He mused. "I cannot let you be my ruin."

"I – I won't do that."

"You're my curse breaker."

"I'm sorry," I apologized because I couldn't read him. I didn't know if he was angry or not.

"You tried to poison me, you kissed a man behind my back and you cannot defend yourself against a fellow female." He listed my faults. Shame burned me from the inside, making my skin red.

"I should punish you." I nodded as I always did when he spoke about my punishment but he didn't say anything after that. I wanted to get the punishment over with as soon as possible.

"I will accept any punishment you deem fit."

"You're my mate. You're supposed to accept anything I deem fit." I blinked at him before nodding.

I reminded myself that the alpha prince was from a time before my father even. He thought of things and saw the world different from me. In his time, females were nothing but accessories. They supported their mates while looking pretty and shouldering all the house chores and bearing children.

After Lucien, I didn't think I would have a mate but before Lucien, I expected love and security. Friendship.

Companionship but now I expected nothing. I'd learnt that if I expected anything, I got nothing so there was no point in expecting in the first place.

"You said you wanted me to stand up for myself."

"Not against me. But then it's not something you can do, is it?" He sounded displeased and my wolf whined at disappointing him. 1

"I can try."

"Not after the beating you've taken today."

"Skylar hates me," I told him. I didn't know why but I wanted him to see me differently. Actually, I did know why. It was because we were mates so even if he wasn't treating me any differently from others, I wanted him to. I'd learnt not to care about how the others treated me so I would learn to do the same with him.

"I know." 1

"Do you know why?" I felt ashamed of my father and what he'd done. I didn't want my mate to discover it so soon.

"It doesn't matter. She hates you so she wouldn't go easy on you. You will keep training with her until you are able to beat her." My heart fell. 4

I expected that but I hoped against it. 1

"Okay."

"You know not to argue. Good. Now, for your punishment, come here."