

CH 8 - Amber

AMBER POV

George Ezra’s warm, deep voice crooned me awake, dragging me from the clutches of sleep like a reluctant toddler being pulled out of a toy store. Groaning, I fumbled blindly on my nightstand until my ngers closed around the phone, silencing the alarm. I’d picked his music as my wake-up call for a reason—he was handsome, and his songs were soothing enough to trick me into starting my day without smashing my phone. But today, I needed more than his charm. Five more minutes of sleep? No, ve hours sounded better.

My night had been a mess. No nightmares about the triplets for once, but that tiny voice in my head—the one that sounded suspiciously like my mother—kept whispering that I needed to be *strong*. Strong for what? To survive another day in the circus that was my life? Thanks, Mom. Those words had wormed their way into my brain and twisted into a vivid, sweat-inducing dream. I spent half the night trying to escape a nightmare that felt like *Hunger Games*, except it featured savage wolves instead of arrows. When I nally woke, soaked in sweat and gasping for air, I couldn’t fall asleep again for what felt like hours.

I grabbed my phone off the nightstand. Still no text from Christian. My stomach sank. I told myself not to care. After all, I had more important things to worry about. But the little sting of rejection was there, mocking me. With a resigned sigh, I swung my legs out of bed and trudged downstairs in search of salvation: coffee.

Mom’s humming greeted me as I stepped into the kitchen, and the smell of fresh coffee and pancakes wrapped around me like a comforting hug. She was ipping pancakes, swaying her hips in rhythm to some tune only she could hear, while Dad sat at the table grinning at her like a lovestruck teenager. The sight warmed my heart and twisted it at the same time. I wanted that—a love so deep it made the world disappear. But, well, I doubted I’d nd it here.

As I poured my coffee, the stampede arrived. Rett and Robert burst into the room like overexcited buffalo, diving for the mountain of pancakes as if they hadn’t eaten in a week.

“Leave some for your sister!” Mom scolded, waving her spatula at them.

Rett shoved a pancake into his mouth and grinned at me, syrup dripping down his chin. “Want one, sis? Better hurry before they’re gone!”

I stuck my tongue out at him, grabbed a plate, and snagged two pancakes before they could inhale the rest.

After eating, I barely had time to thank Mom before dashing upstairs. Victoria was picking me up in fteen minutes, and I needed to get ready fast. I ried through my wardrobe, groaning at my limited choices. The only clean pair of jeans *was* my light-washed, high-waisted ones, which t a little too snugly for comfort. I tugged them on, pairing them with a white hoodie in an attempt to cover up as much as possible. As I grabbed my bag, the honk of a car startled me.

“Crap!” I muttered. Vic was early. Victoria *was* never early, which made me double-check the time.

Grabbing my backpack, I bolted downstairs and out the door, yanking open the passenger door of the waiting car.

“Finally! You’re—” My words died in my throat.

This wasn’t Vic’s car.

Sharp jawline, piercing green eyes, light stubble, and shaggy blond hair. Oh, no. *Not* Vic. Denitely not her.

Shit.

Alek.

“Sorry, I thought—” I started, but his glare cut me off.

“You thought I’d give you a ride, nerd?” he sneered, his voice dripping with disdain. His words stung, but the venom in his tone hit harder.

“No, I—”

“I *could* give you a ride,” he interrupted, leaning closer. “But you’d have to pay me.”

He leaned closer, his green eyes locking onto mine, and for a second, I couldn’t move. My breath hitched, my heart hammering against my ribs. I hated him for the way he made me feel—trapped, powerless, and so damn angry all at once.

Then it hit me. Why was I letting him do this? Why was I letting him win?

“No, *Alpha*,” I said, emphasizing the title. I knew it would piss him off since technically Alan, not Alek, was the future Alpha. “I thought you were Victoria. Now, if you’ll excuse me…”

I reached for the door handle, desperate to escape, but his hand shot out, gripping my arm like a vice, holding me in place. In one swift motion, he yanked me so close I was practically in his lap. My mind screamed at me to ght back, but my body froze under his heated glare.

“What if I don’t excuse you?” His voice was low, dangerous.

My heart pounded in my chest. Why was he affecting me that much? And what was he doing? What was I supposed to do?

So damn frustrating.

My instincts screamed at me to submit, to avoid provoking him further, but I couldn’t. Not this time.

“Then what?” I shot back, mustering whatever courage I had left. “You’ll make my life miserable? Flash news, you already do that every single day. Nothing new there.”

For a split second, something ickered in his eyes—was it shock, amusement, or anger? I couldn’t tell. Whatever it was, it was gone as quickly as it appeared, replaced by the familiar coldness I’d come to expect from him.

His wolf was close to the surface, and for a moment, I wondered if I’d just made the biggest mistake of my life.

The sharp blare of a car horn shattered the tension, snapping Alek out of whatever trance he’d been in. I took the opportunity to wrench my arm free and bolted out of the car, diving into Victoria’s waiting vehicle.

My heart thundered in my chest as I slammed the door shut, the sound echoing in my ears.

“Amby, are you okay?” Vic asked, concern etched across her face.

“Fine,” I lied, forcing a smile. “Let’s go. We’re going to be late.”

As we sped toward school, I clenched my sts in my lap, trying to shake off the encounter. Alek was a nightmare, and his brothers weren’t much better. But I wasn’t going to let them ruin my day. Not today.

The drive to school was lled with Victoria’s chatter, which was a blessing. Her energy was infectious, and for a moment, I let her voice drown out the memory of Alek’s grip on my arm and the glint in his eyes.

“...and then he *actually* had the nerve to ask me if I’d tutor him!” Vic exclaimed, her hands gesturing wildly as she drove. “I mean, sure, Kevin’s cute and all, but does he think I’m his free pass to pass calculus? Please.”

I nodded absently, my mind replaying the encounter over and over, as if trying to make sense of it.

“Amber?”

I blinked, realizing Vic was staring at me as we pulled into the school parking lot.

“Huh?”

“You’re quiet. Spill.” She parked and turned to face me, her eyes narrowing. “What happened? And don’t you dare say ‘nothing.’”

I hesitated, debating whether to tell her about the run-in with Alek. On *the* one hand, Vic would blow a gasket, marching straight up to him and giving him a piece of her mind whether he wanted it or not. On the other hand, I didn’t want to make a scene.

“It’s nothing,” I said nally, forcing a small smile.

Her gaze lingered on me for a moment longer before she sighed. “Fine, but you’re a terrible liar. Let’s get to class before the triplets decide to pick someone to torment for being late.”

The mention of them made my stomach twist, but I forced myself to nod and followed her inside, trying not to show how much they affected me.