

Chapter 7

Sage

“C-, C-, Cassius. Th-, Thank G-, G-, Goddess!” My teeth chatter so hard my jaw aches, making speech difficult. But despite the bone-chilling cold, my heart warms at the sight of him. “P-, p-, please, h-, help me!”

“Oh, little bird. What have you done?” He tsks as he closes the cell door behind him.

His tone is almost giddy and there’s an excited glint in his eye that makes my stomach swoop nervously. The friendly, caring Cassius, the one who always has an easy smile for me, is nowhere to be found. My eyes dart around the small space but there is no place to hide. Just a concrete room, bitterly cold and empty.

“N-, nothing.” I stammer as I shrink away, scooting into the farthest corner. “I s-, swear!”

“That’s just not true, now is it?” His calm words belie the violence I see simmering just under the surface, waiting to be unleashed. “I don’t want to hurt you, little bird. But I’ll have to if you won’t tell me the truth.”

I don’t believe him. He wants to hurt me, is going to hurt me, no matter what I say. But I beg anyway. “Please, Cassius!” I break out into sobs, red-hot terror instantly heating my frozen form. “I don’t know any rogues!”

“I saved a man who’d been injured by rogues. He stumbled into the pack to hide from his attackers. He was just an omega, so weak his aura was undetectable. I wasn’t involved in any conspiracy, I swear!”

“Lies!” Pain explodes across my cheek, so intense I’m sure my eyeball will burst from the socket. He shakes out his hand, knuckles stinging from the brutal strike. Then he snatches my arm in a bruising grasp and yanks me to my feet. “Get up!”

“If you refuse to cooperate, I’ll just have to make you!” He shoves me face first into the wall, pinning me there with one hand as he rips the back of my dress down with the other. “Don’t fucking move!” He barks and I’m forced to obey.

“Wh-, what are you doing?” My voice trembles as I listen to the sound of him removing his belt.

“I’m going to show you what happens when you lie to me. I’m going to beat the truth out of you!” He answers, a gleeful edge to his tone.

How could I have been so blind to this side of him, never seeing the heartless, cruel demon lurking underneath? It’s the last thought I have before the unforgiving leather of his belt cracks across my back, my knees buckling from the sting.

He whips me again and again, unrelenting lashes that rip and tear at my flesh. I scream and sob until my lungs seize from the agony, but still he flogs me. Even though I’m still bound by his command, I’m so weak my body gives out and I collapse on the hard concrete. But he doesn’t relent, kicking me between lashes.

Someone pounding at the metal door to my cell grants me a reprieve. He pants from the exertion expended on my punishment as he crosses the room and drags open the door.

“Alpha, it’s time. Your father says to bring the prisoner to the square for execution.” I hear a voice say. I know I should be terrified, begging to be spared. But I welcome death if it will end this torture.

“Look at her! She can’t walk! You don’t expect me to carry the traitorous bitch do you? Pick her up and take her yourself.” Cassius snarls. “I need to clean up. Don’t kill her until I arrive. I have a special farewell planned for her.”

Footsteps echo in the room and then I’m lifted from the floor and flung over a man’s shoulder. Pain flares but I only manage a whimper before I pass out completely. When I wake, it’s to the jeers of the pack, calling for my death. I’ve been placed on my knees, my hands tied behind my back, and my head lolling on my chest, unable to face my accusers.

“Let this traitor’s death be a warning to you all. ConspiratorsIf you conspire with rogues, you will be caught and you will pay with your life!” The Alpha bellows out over the crowd.

“Father, wait!” Cassius interrupts and a foolish hope surges in my chest. But after the way he just beat me to a bloody pulp, I should have known better. Of course he’d want to gut me one more time before I die. “I have something I’d like to say to the wolfless bitch before you end her pathetic life.

“I, Cassius Blackthorn, future alpha of the Blackthorn pack, reject you, Sage Starling, as my mate and future Luna.”

I thought the sting of his belt left me in agony. But the pain of his rejection is soul-crushing. The scream that tears from my lips pierces the shocked roar of the crowd, a gut-wrenching, desolate sound. But Cassius just laughs.

He knew! All this time he watched the hatred and abuse I suffered every single day. He knew I was his mate and he did nothing!

Cassius never wanted me, never believed in me the way he pretended to. He was always waiting for this moment, this chance to reject me when it would hurt the most.

I’m glad I’m about to die. This heartache, this emptiness is more than I can bear. There was never much happiness in my world to begin with, but what there was is crumbling around me, in ruins.

I want to scream, to rage against the unfairness of it all, but all I can manage is a hollow laugh. A brittle sound, ready to shatter just like I am.

As the Alpha extends his claws, ready to rip out my throat, ending my life, I close my eyes and think back to my happiest memory, something to hold onto so I don’t fall apart. I remember my handsome stranger, my only true friend. He was gruff and moody, but also kind, and so gentle with me.

I hope he made it home safely, wherever home is. I wish I could have seen him one more time. I wish his beautiful face could be the last thing I see before I die.

I expect the blow to come any moment, but instead a deafening roar thunders “Stop!” The force of the command takes my breath away. I crack an eye open to see the Alpha frozen with his claw in the air, about to strike, and the entire pack knocked to their knees with the weight of it.

“Who dares kill this woman?” My savior bellows.