

Chapter 0011

“No time,” Rafe snaps, grabbing my arm the second I finish tucking my hair in and hauling me to my feet. “We go now or we miss breakfast. And if we miss breakfast, we miss rankings, which we desperately need to know. So, let’s move!”

Jesse still smirks at me as we both hurry along behind my brother, raising an eyebrow and clearly demanding an explanation for my midnight assault. But I just hastily shake my head and glance at Rafe, silently begging Jesse to keep it a secret. Jesse shrugs, tacitly agreeing but letting me know he’s not happy about it.

The three of us barely skirt through the door before it closes. A few candidates call out behind us and bang on the door, but the Captain clearly wasn’t kidding about getting to breakfast on time. I move through the line with my brother and my cousin, filling my tray with food, but being last through means slim pickings. I get a sausage, two cartons of apple juice, and a very sad little orange.

When we take the final three seats at the edge of a long table, Rafe rolls his eyes at me and shoves two

biscuits onto my plate.

“Hey!” I protest. “I don’t even like biscuits –“

“It isn’t about like, Ari,” Rafe mutters, tucking into what looks like a bowl of cold oatmeal. “It’s about calories, and you need them, so eat up.”

I do as I’m told, forcing myself to chew the dry biscuits and washing them down with apple juice. Passively, I hope that the food at the Academy is way better than this. As I eat, I look around, and as much as I pretend that I’m not looking for them...

Right over there, my wolf cheerfully points out, focusing my eyes immediately on Luca, who laughs at the center of a group of guys two tables down, and then the other one, who sits by himself, moodily eating a gigantic plate of food.

I quietly peel my orange, letting my eyes drift between both of them, studying their movements, wondering why on earth my grandmother the Goddess picked them out for me –

When Rafe stands up to get a napkin, Jesse elbows me, making me jump.

“What the hell is going on with you?” Jesse hisses, and I blush, shaking my head.

“Nothing,” I murmur, concentrating on my orange. God, I can’t believe I just let myself stare at my mates – what was I thinking –

“I know something’s up Ariel,” Jesse growls, and I spin to look at him wide-eyed, not only because he used my real name but because my sweet-tempered cousin never growls.

“Jesse,” I say, my eyes pleading. “Look, I’ll tell you, all right? But…” I nod hastily at my brother, who is on his way back.

Jesse sighs, clenching his jaw. “You promise you’re all right? And you’d tell me if you weren’t?”

“I promise,” I say, my voice pleading. Jesse sighs, nods once, and then turns back to his nearly empty tray. Rafe sits down with a fist full of napkins, looking suspiciously between us. But before he can say anything, all heads in the room turn towards the Captain, who has just stood up at the head table.

“Candidates,” he says, his voice booming out over us. “Today we will post the first ranking.” He points above his head at a giant black screen, indicating where the ranking will be listed. “Rankings will be calculated according to your performance in all training activities, as well as aspects like adherence to

the rules, prompt attendance, and decorum. At the end of the first two weeks, the bottom 20% of candidates will be dismissed from the academy. As this is an entering class of 120, that is the bottom 24 candidates. I suggest you take your rank seriously.”

The Captain glares around at all of us and then nods once. “Agility training is next. You have five more minutes for breakfast, and then will report to the gym at 08:00.”

Without another word the Captain leaves his place at the head of the table and, as if on cue, the screen flashes on, our names already arranged.

My eyes fly over the board and my heart sinks to find my name exactly where I thought it would be.
Spot 120. Ari Clark.

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