



Chapter 0014

“Ari’s just curious, Rafe,” Jesse says, still laughing and grinning, looking around to see if anyone noticed, but there’s no one behind us in line for the shower stalls yet and everyone else is too busy to care. “He’s led a sheltered life.”

“And he’s going to continue to lead a sheltered life,” Rafe growls, glaring first at Jesse and then at me. “I’m serious, Ari – this is not...” he stumbles now, searching for words.

“A meat market?” Jesse whispers wickedly, making me blush again.

“Fine,” Rafe snaps, taking another step forward as another shower clears. “For a lack of a better term, yes.” He grabs my arm, leaning down to hiss in my ear. “We took you from home a virgin, Ariel, and whenever it is that you go home? You’ll be returning the same way. So, if you had any ideas otherwise, get them out of your head now.”

I gasp, appalled, and shove my brother away. “Ew, Rafe! How did – how do you even know that!?” I look between Rafe and Jesse, shocked.

“Oh, come on, Ari,” Jesse says, giving me a sad little smile. “When would you have had the chance? Uncle Dominic keeps you locked down – “

My jaw drops again as I stare between them, realizing that...that...

“Oh my god,” I gasp, looking between them. “Are you two...are you not virgins!?”

Jesse laughs and gives a little shrug, playing it off like it's not a big deal, but Rafe just clenches his jaw and stares forward at the shower stalls. Only a faint touch of pink on his cheekbones gives away the fact that he's hiding something from me.

“Rafe!” I shriek, swatting at him. “Who was it!?”

“Stop. Shrieking,” he snaps, glaring at me and knocking my hand away. I purse my lips, tucking my hands behind my back and admitting, at least internally, that – okay – maybe that was a little more girlish than I'd like. But still!

“Seriously, Rafe,” I say, lifting my chin at him and demanding an answer. “Who did – who did you – “ I blush again and curse my stupid cheeks.

“We're not talking about this,” Rafe snaps, ending the conversation as he strides into a newly vacated

shower stall, whipping the curtain closed behind him.

I spin on Jesse now, the same question in my eyes.

“I don’t kiss and tell,” Jesse says, shaking his head with a smirk. I glare at him and he laughs, but then he gestures forward to an empty stall. “Go on, Ari. I’ll see you on the other side.”

I give my cousin a glare and hurry into the stall, yanking the curtain closed and stripping down before letting the hot water run all over me, fuming over the hypocrisy of my brother and my cousin who are apparently insisting on my celibacy even if they themselves...

Well. I guess the less thought on that, the better.

But still, as I hastily soap down and let the hot water do its work unwinding my muscles, I wonder...

Is that even something I want to do? I mean, my attraction to my mates is undeniable, and my wolf basically salivates after them all day – but emotionally, am I ready for that? And even if I were... the Academy is notoriously rigorous, and there are more cuts once you’re admitted as a cadet. Half the reason that the academy is male-only is so that those enrolled can concentrate completely on their studies.

Won’t having two mates just be an incredible

distraction, if I even get inside the castle walls? Am I really willing to sacrifice everything the Academy offers just to...I don't know, kiss them?

Or more?

I sigh as I turn the water off, shaking my head, not knowing at all how I feel or what I want. But...maybe I don't have to decide today, right now. There's time, right?

At least I hope there is...even though the way Jackson smells, and the way Luca looks when he's naked?

God, the memory of both sends shivers down my spine.

When I emerge from the shower fully dressed in my dirty clothes – a little chagrined that I didn't realize that I should probably have brought a set of fresh fatigues or something else to change into – I still haven't decided what I think or feel about any of it. Jesse steps immediately forward and subtly scent marks me at my neck and wrists while Rafe watches, his arms crossed.

“Probably good you're wearing your dirty clothes,” Jesse murmurs, slinging an arm around my shoulders as the three of us head towards our bunks, my brother and cousin just dressed in a towel wrapped around

their waists like most of the other candidates. “ Nobody’s going to be able to smell your girl scent in those.”


I twist my head to the side, glancing to the right to where Luca and Jackson’s beds are, subtly considering that maybe it’s in my favor to be dirty, at least for a little while.

“I’ll go get dinner,” Rafe says, quickly pulling on a t-shirt and a pair of soft pants that he’ll sleep in before heading off to the mess hall. Evening meal is simple for the first couple of months – they give us hot breakfast in the morning and a big lunch, but it’s just wrapped sandwiches and bottled water at night in the twenty minutes before lights out. Candidates eat in bed or gathered in small groups around our bunks.

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