

## Chapter 0015

When Rafe strides away, Jesse finishes dressing and sits down on his bunk, patting the spot next to him in invitation. Knowing I can't avoid it, I sigh and sit down.

"Come on, Ari," he says, friendly but stern. "Spill. I know something's up."

"It's nothing," I mutter, not able to look him in the eye, but desperately tempted to tell him. Jesse – he's always been a friend and a great listener, and I'm dying to talk to someone about this. I'm having trouble processing how I'm feeling about it all by myself.

But still – if he knows? Will he make me leave?

Jesse sighs. "Ari, either you talk to me about it, or I tell Rafe and let him interrogate you about it. Pick your battle."

"Can't you just trust me?" I ask, looking up at him with big pleading eyes that usually work.

"Normally I would, cousin," he says, bumping his shoulder into mine. "But when tackle me in bed and make me scent mark you at 2 AM, panting like you've

just run a race? I've gotta know."

And I sigh, realizing that there's no way out of this, and I...tell him.

Well, I tell him some of it – about how I wanted to get clean, and how the showers were gross, and so I went out to the hot springs –

Jesse groans when I say that, covering his face with his hands and falling back on his mattress. "Who caught you?" Jesse's words are muffled by his palms. "Did they figure out that..."

"No," I say, shaking my head even though he can't see me. "Secret's safe."

"So?" he asks, dragging his hands down a little so he can see my face. "Who was it?"

I bite my lip for a second, deciding whether or not to tell him, but I'm bursting to talk to him about it.

When my wolf gives me an encouraging little prod with her nose, telling me to trust him, I lean forward.

"Jesse," I whisper, "it was my mate –"

Jesse stares at me in shock, his mouth hanging open for way too long – until I start to worry that he's like... frozen like that or something.

"Jesse!" I hiss, giving him a sudden shove on the

shoulder.

"Ari," he says, snapping out of it and sitting up fast. He grabs me by my shoulders. "Are you...are you serious? Your mate is here!?"

His face is deathly pale, his eyes wide and scared like I've told him the worst thing he's ever heard.

Well, my wolf says, turning in an anxious circle inside of me. At least you only told him about one of them...

I hesitate, scared of his reaction and wanting to take it all back, but before I can say anything Jesse's eyes flick to the side.

"Whatever you do, do not tell Rafe," my cousin hisses, leaning forward to make me hear him. "He will kill every guy in this room rather than let one of them touch you, let alone claim you –"

"What?" I ask, shocked. "Why does he –"

"Promise me!" Jesse snaps, shaking me once, hard.

"Okay!" I burst out, surprised into agreeing. "Okay, I won't tell him!"

Jesse lets out a long breath and lets me go, turning away just as a wrapped sandwich lands in my lap.

"Roast beef," Rafe says, his face pleased. I look down

at the sandwich in my lap, but I don't touch it or say anything. I mean, I know my brother and my cousin are protective of me, but –

“What's going on here?” Rafe says, and I look up to see him staring between Jesse and me. “What's wrong?”

I shake my head, not saying anything, but Jesse fumbles out some lie about being worried about the rankings. Rafe looks at me sympathetically, leaning forward to give me some kind of pep talk or advice, but before he can start a Lieutenant suddenly appears at the end of the bed, a tablet in his hands.

“Candidate Rafe Sinclair?” the Lieutenant asks.

“Yes?” Rafe asks, standing, suddenly all business.

“A video call,” the Lieutenant says, holding the tablet forward, “from...the Palace.”

My eyes go wide because...well, obviously I know who's calling.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Rafe says, nodding to the man and dismissing him even though he clearly outranks my brother.

Rafe turns to me and Jesse, and I can see his mind working fast. He beckons Jesse forward, but I stay on

the bed. When Jesse's standing next to him and I'm sufficiently out of frame, Rafe presses the button to take the call.

"Hey mom," he says, pasting a big smile on his face. "Hey dad. What's up?"

 Comments

 Vote (515)