



Chapter 0009

He grins again and nods to me one last time before turning and running off.

I stay in the shadows for a few minutes, casting out my hearing and making sure that it's absolutely silent around me for a few minutes. And then, when I hear nothing in the grasses around me – not even a single cricket –

I spring from the pool and pull on my clothes as fast as I can – seriously, I've never gotten dressed faster – I have no idea if my pants are even on the right way –

Then, grabbing what's left of my bathing kit, I sprint for the barracks.

My breath is ragged in my lungs, my heart pounding in my chest with more than just exertion – because any second I expect a hand to grab me by my collar, yanking me backward, demanding an explanation –

But I know, above all things, that secrecy is still absolutely necessary. No one can find out that I'm a girl – no one can find out that my mates are here – no one can find out that the Princess is in hiding at



Alpha Academy, or else I'll be forced to marry that jerk or start a war –

God, I've been so stupid and reckless tonight, I should have listened to Rafe –

You should have invited them into the pool with us, my contrary wolf grumbles. Then we could have –

But I shove her voice away as I reach the barracks, my feet stuttering to a stop as I reach the door. I force myself to take slower, softer breaths as I grab the handle and pull it open because I've got to be quiet in here.

And, well, I'm not precisely quiet as I dart to the back corner of the room, my feet slapping against the floor. I'm way too full of frantic energy to help that, but I hope that anyone who wakes up just thinks I'm a candidate running for the bathroom or something –

I hurl my stuff up onto my bunk, grateful that it lands silently, and then leap ungracefully onto Jesse's bed, slamming my hand over his mouth.

His eyes fly immediately open and fear, then rage, then wonder pass over his face in a series of flashes as he sees me above him, a single finger pressed to my lips, my eyes begging him to be quiet. He shouts my name, but it's muffled by my hand, and I glance over

at Rafe's bed, shaking my head frantically, letting Jesse see that we can't wake Rafe up.

Because Rafe? He'll kill me.

Or worse, he'll be disappointed in me.

I don't want to put this on Rafe's shoulders – not yet. And Jesse – he's the one I need anyway.

I lean close to Jesse now that he's fully awake and move my hand away from his mouth. "Jesse," I whisper frantically, my mouth close to his ear, "I took a bath!"

"So what, Ari!?" he hisses, pissed. "Did you seriously need to scare the shit out of me to tell me that!? Congratulations! You're clean!"

I glare at him for a second and then roll my eyes. "No, you idiot, you have to scent mark me! I forgot – I didn't realize that I was going to smell all girly when I washed your scent away!"

He groans then, putting his hands over his face for a second before lifting his wrists to wipe at my neck and my own wrists.

"More," I insist, grabbing his wrist and wiping it down my face. "I can't smell like fricking cloves and honey anymore –"

“Ari!” Jesse snaps, snatching his wrist away from me.
“What the hell is going on!? Why are you being so weird!?”

I take a second to look around the room, scanning in particular for a wide set of shoulders under glowering eyes, or a body that falls naturally into a boxer’s stance...

But the room is...still. Silent.

I...I made it back. Unnoticed, at least for now. I take a second to make sure, but then relief rushes through me.

“It’s nothing,” I whisper, shaking my head. “I’m sorry, Jesse. Just...um, don’t tell Rafe, okay?”

“Don’t tell him what?” Jesse whisper-snaps as I jump off of his bed and start to climb up into my own bunk.
“That you’ve gone insane overnight?”

“You dreamed this all!” I call back over my shoulder, keeping my voice low. “It never happened! Go back to sleep, I love you!”

And then I slip under my blankets fully dressed and put my hands over my face as I curl into a ball.

Two mates – and they know I’m here! And they’re looking for me!



How the hell am I ever going to keep my secret when I've got two guys – two really good-looking guys – out there, doing everything they can to sniff me out?



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