

Poppy POV

The driver dropped me to the railway station in less than an hour. And for the entire journey he didn't speak a word to which I was thankful. Anna made sure that I reached the train station securely. As soon as we reached here, I picked up my satchel, lowered my black cap and handed cash to the driver.

"Oh no, thanks," he said with a grin. "Anna has already paid."

Surprised, I managed to smile at him and then hurried inside. I bought a ticket to the farthest station from here. Mixture of nervousness and anticipation swirled inside me as I walked to the platform where the train was parked. In a few minutes, I located my coach and sat down. The train would be traveling far west. There was no turning back. Minutes later a few humans came in and sat down around me. The train was largely empty and I was thankful for that too.

A little girl smiled at me and then poked her tongue out. I chuckled and poked my tongue out at her. She narrowed her eyes and tugged her mother's shirt. "She is bad," the little one complained, pointing at me. Her mother smiled at me in a you-know-it way and dragged her daughter away.

I kept myself low after that and waited for the train to move. I just wanted to get out of here. The ticket in my hand read Vancouver. I had already researched, as to where I would go. From Vancouver I was planning to go to Point Harrow, the last city in Alaska that was near the Arctic Circle and probably the best place to get lost. To hell with grandfather and shenanigans. He could rule the Shadow Pack for all I cared. I was sure that once I disappeared, he wouldn't even bat an eyelid.

The train started with a jerk and I stifled a gasp of excitement. Blood rushed to my cheeks, thinking of the freedom I was going to have now. I was going to call Anna one day and thank her for helping me out.

It was a long journey and as soon as the train picked up speed, I couldn't help looking outside at the dense forest and distant snow peaks that I was leaving behind. The



thought about a bright future made me feel giddy. I rested my head back on the seat and slumbered off into deep sleep. My dreams were full of a rose valley, arctic blue eyes and father... leaving. Then suddenly the dreams turned into nightmares. Wolves with golden eyes chased me, snapped their teeth and yipped at me.

I opened my eyes with a start and found myself staring into the coldest blue eyes I had ever seen. I jumped up, stifling a scream. Damon Lombard was sitting right in front of me, looking ferocious and angry. His muscles were bulging as his irises were wild—a hypnotic bronze and golden swirl. There was a clanging of every survival instinct inside me and I felt like bolting up and running away. The humans around us were getting uncomfortable in his presence. Damon was so huge that his persona was enough to make others bow to his power and aura automatically. He was least bothered about his effect on them. His full focus was on me. I felt like a caged bird.

“Do you know what is the punishment of escaping from the Umbra Academy?” he said, his voice a rumble from his chest.

I gulped. My throat was dry as paper. I stopped my teeth from chattering. But I replied, “None.”

A feral smile came to his lips. “Your absence will be reported to your family.”

“You may report to them,” I replied, my gaze fixed at his eyes, my fists curling up in tight balls. As if I cared. I was sure that my grandfather would love to hear that.

He narrowed his eyes. “And to the Umbra security,” he added, a low growl rumbling his throat.

“I don’t care,” I said with my chin up. He couldn’t force me. “You may own the academy, but you aren’t its police.”

He leaned forward a little, eating up my space. “You should care. Because when they find you, they will drag you back to the academy and put you into a grind so hard that you would either live or die.” He leaned forward a little more and in a deep throaty voice that inched towards huskiness, he added, “And little wolf, I am going to inform the security if you don’t come back.”



My stomach twisted with a thousand knots at the threat. That was the most awful thing I could imagine. How the hell did he come to know that I had escaped and that I was in this train? Did he come here by chance? Goddess, why did I have the shittiest luck in the world? I had planned so much on escaping.

Why was he so hell bent upon taking me back? I recalled how he fought in the ring in the secret circles of the academy. Surely, he was doing this for money. His girlfriend must be betting and together they must be making a lot of money. Money.

I opened the zip of my satchel and dug out my envelope of money. I counted a thousand dollars and held it in front of him. "This is yours if you let me go!" With my eyes wide, almost going round at the corner, I waited for him to take the cash. He looked at it with a raised eyebrow as if contemplating on what to do next. So I shook the bills in front of his eyes to entice him further. "Take it, Damon. This is the price of my freedom. I can afford only this much now, but I promise that I will give you more when I start earning." I looked hopefully at him. Please Moon Goddess, make him go.

A smirk came on his face. "A thousand dollars?" he said as if I was humiliating him with such a small amount. With a little inside struggle, I took out another four hundred dollars and added to the bundle. "That's it. Fourteen hundred dollars. I can't give you more than this, but please don't report me," I squealed with desperation, lacing my voice.

After a moment of staring at the cash, his lips curled up. He said, "You know what little wolf. No amount of money is going to convince me. Even if you give me the whole world, I will still choose you. So quit bribing me. If you won't come back willingly, I will take you back forcibly. And that's a promise."

Shocked, my shoulders slumped as dread slammed in my chest. "No!"

