

## Chapter 111

Ava Laughed. She sat facing her imaginary Zeke, who had been amazing to talk to. She hadn't been this free since arriving at Phoenix Academy, and his dry sense of humor had cracked her up for...

Well, she had no idea. The sun was still up in the sky, and she knew it was all imaginary anyway, so she couldn't use it to judge how long she had been stuck in isolation. And even though this Zeke was imaginary, too, she couldn't help wondering what it would be like if this was the real him.

The conversation had been light and carefree. She hadn't steered it towards what she imagined was happening to her body in that dark room or what was happening to Zeke now.

A dark cloud formed quickly and blocked out the sunshine.

“Focus on me, Ava.”

She quickly did just that. Every time she had even the slightest thought of how terrifying her reality was, the weather in this place changed.

“I wonder how I’m even here,” she mused as she watched the dark evaporate. “I’ve never seen a beach before. Our forest has plenty of lakes and rivers, but we’re not near the ocean.”

“This is my favorite place.” Zeke said.

But how could she have known that? Was it the magic in the Isolation room that made this possible?

“Why don’t you tell me about your favorite place,” Zeke suggested

Could she bring it to life like this place: She closed her eyes and imagined the one place besides her house where she had been free, where she had been safest. And when she opened her eyes, the scene had already started to change. It was blurry at first and slowly came into focus.

On the western border of their territory, there was a wide river that was either calm or deadly depending on the season. She preferred it when it was calm and not threatening to flood the valley below it. There were no wolf territories beyond the river, so it was usually very safe and quiet. And even when it was not, she could usually see the danger right away because her favorite spot was an abandoned forest fire lookout tower,

It was huge and spacious, like her very own treehouse away from everyone else. And from there, she could see miles all around her. It was so green and spacious, untouched by humans. She was away from the large school that had brought her nothing but trouble- the packhouse, the training grounds.

Here she wasn't Ava, the human. She was just Ava.

"It's beautiful" Zeke said. "You should bring me here one day."

"I really doubt you'd want to visit here," the snorted.

The future Alpha of the largest pack in the country would have better things to do, and she couldn't imagine him not getting bored in her pack after a day.

"Of course, I'll want to see where you're from." Zeke said. "You're not getting rid of me now, Ava. You're the most important person in my life."

She felt the heat in her cheeks and wondered why she had to blush if it was all imaginary. This Zeke had said in many different ways that they belonged together. Her subconscious had to be making all of this up from all the dirty dreams she'd had about Zeke since she arrived. She had only seen Zeke laugh once, but here he had laughed several times; he had smiled several times. Here, there was no coldness or anger. The real Zeke wasn't like this. She had to remember that before she fell for her own imagination.

Zeke looked behind him as if he could see something she couldn't, and then he turned back to her with a big smile.

"You made it. I'll see you real soon."

And then he vanished.

She felt so bereft when she was suddenly alone in her tower until his words clicked. She'd made it? Had it been two days already? Impossible. It had been just a few hours at most.

A sharp pain in her side had her gasping in pain as she was harshly brought back to reality. She rolled over to her side with her arms protecting her stomach as she looked up at the huge security guard standing over her.

He'd kicked her His boots were poised to strike again when she rolled further away and glared at him.

"Get out," the guard growled.

Her body was stiff from lack of movement when she went to do as he said. Light flooded the room as if moments ago it hadn't contained the worst evil she had ever felt. She shivered, partly from being on the cold, hard floor the whole time and partly from the lingering darkness she felt. If the Council used this room to punish students, did that mean they also controlled the vast forest surrounding the school and village?

She was limping as she walked up the stairs, the guard shoving her forward every few steps, and then she was finally out in the hallway of the main administration offices.

Who would ever think something so sinister lay below such a beautiful building?

The dean was standing outside his office when she approached it, and his eyes remained as cold as when he had left her down there. He also

looked completely pissed off, like he had been hoping she would be a mess. Broken like Jared had warned her she would be if she ever went into isolation. What sort of dean hoped one of his students would get hurt like this? He was as bad as the coach.

She didn't look away from his gaze as she walked past him. Maybe it was stupidity or the fact that she was still trying to process how her punishment was already over when it felt like no time had passed, but she didn't acknowledge his authority or give him the respect that he usually demanded.

She walked past him without a word, her head held high, with her escort following her until she was out of the office area.

She survived Isolation. She had found a way to escape the darkness that often attacked her since escaping its clutches in the forest. It took a moment for that to sink in as the guard shut the door behind her.

“Ava.”

She whirled around from the door to see Zeke standing not too far away. Without thinking, she threw herself into his arms, holding onto him for dear life. And in those arms, she found peace. All the fear, all the depressing thoughts she had before being thrown into Isolation melted away.

Zeke's arms tightened around her as he picked her up, leaving her feet dangling and his lips only inches from hers. She wanted to kiss him. For the first time since she met him, she closed the gap between them without fighting it. His lips were soft and warm beneath hers, igniting

feelings in her that were terrifying in their intensity, but she still greedily accepted them.

She felt like she had been deprived, and his kiss brought her back to life. Like she'd been missing a part of herself even when she had retreated into her own mind. The cold that had seeped deep into her bones dissipated with every second that she hungrily explored his mouth.

Zeke lifted his head before she was satisfied and met her gaze. His eyes were red, and in them, she saw a reflection of her feelings—wild, turbulent feelings that would consume her the moment she gave in.

“Let’s go home,” Zeke whispered. “We’ll be much more comfortable without an audience

With her cheeks heating, she looked around the lobby and found it full of students who were not hiding the fact that they were shamelessly watching them. There was a lot of disgust. A lot of confusion. And it all hammered in the fact that nothing had changed. She was still human, and he was an Alpha. She would never be accepted.