

Chapter 118

“Where exactly are we going?”

Zeke looked back at Ava and squeezed her hand in reassurance. He’d still sensed her fear when she woke up, which increased when she realized they were heading into the woods.

“You’ll see.”

It would have been quicker if he’d shifted and carried her there or even run with her on his back, but she didn’t seem to want any contact with him at all. Understandable. It had been torture having her rub her body all over him earlier when he could sense how hot for him she’d been. And now she’d only allowed him to hold her hand once they had come deeper into the woods. It was a lot darker under the canopy of the trees, but he knew it wasn’t the darkness that was making her so scared. The woods blended into the cursed forest surrounding the academy, so few people ventured this far. There wasn’t even a path for them to follow, so Ava was relying on his sight to lead the way.

“I think we can talk here. We’re far enough away from anybody else

Just be patient a little longer,” he said gently.

He helped her step over fallen tree trunks and branches until they came to a small clearing. And through here, the sun shone and bathed everything in its glow.

“Here?” Ava asked

He let go of her hand to walk over to a thick tree trunk and picked up a picnic basket he had put behind it when she had been sleeping.

“Almost. You sound like a child asking if we’re there yet,” he grinned as he took her hand again.

He led her just over the ridge at the edge of the clearing and then stopped to watch her reaction. Ava let out a soft gasp as she looked around. He had discovered this lake during his first week at the academy in his first year, and his reaction had been the same. The lake was so deep that it was startlingly blue, and on one end was a small waterfall where a stream fed it. On the other side of the large lake, the stream disappeared into the cursed forest. He’d ventured too close to it once and had felt the dark magic that reminded him every time what this academy was all about.

But on this side, with the grassy bank, the ivy and blooming flowers growing over fallen tree trunks and rocky outcrops, it looked like a fairytale. With nothing but the sound of chirping birds and wildlife all around them, it felt like they were the only two people in the world. This was the perfect spot to be alone with his little virgin mate.

It wasn't as beautiful as the place she had shown him while she'd been in Isolation, but it came pretty close.

"I made a picnic."

Ava pulled her gaze away from the scenery to look at him.

"Like... Is this a date?" Ava asked

He couldn't tell if that was something she wanted. He still felt only fear from her, and it had him and Shadow messed up.

"I thought we came here to talk," she stated, looking away from his gaze.

"Among other things," he said, letting go of her hand to walk over to the bank.

He couldn't deny he'd wanted privacy for another reason. It had been hours since he left Ava in his room after their talk, but his body was wound up. He had gone from anger to wanting to blow her back out instantly. The need had been so overwhelming that if he hadn't left her and gone for a run instead, they would have been having a different conversation

When he spread a blanket over the best spot and set out to unload the basket, he saw Ava still standing where he'd left her. Her indecision was shouting at him, across the space between them, and he couldn't lie, It hurt.

What would he do if she rejected him outright?

“You know we need in talk. We night as well eat while we do it. Come, Ava,” he urged.

Her steps were hesitant when she finally did as he asked. He wouldn't have been unsure of where she stood if she'd been a wolf. Her wolf would have wanted him just as much as he and Shadow wanted her. They would have mated the first night. But Ava was his fate. A little breakable human with the heart of a wolf. it may have taken him some time to accept it, but he couldn't see himself with anyone else now.

They are in silence while they watched the lake. It was so tranquil it felt a little like being on his favorite cliff on the beach.

Maybe Ava felt it too because he felt some of her fear ebb and her tension ease.

“Can we swim in there?”

“Yes, there's nothing dangerous in there. Would you like to swim now?”

“I don't have a bathing suit.”

“You don't need one.” His voice was lower and broke when he spoke.

He cleared his throat and looked away from her. He couldn't help himself. It had been years since he'd hit puberty and had sex on his mind constantly, but this felt a lot worse than dealing with all those hormones. And it wouldn't stop until she was finally his.

Maybe after that, his body would allow him to think with the right organ and have complete conversations. The longer he sat next to her, the more difficult it was to remember all the important things they needed to discuss.

“You know who caused all this shit, don’t you?” he asked.

“I think it’s the Council. I don’t know why they would play these games. Maybe they know what happened to Claire and her friends but can’t punish us without proof,” Ava answered somberly. “Whatever the case. I need to get out of here before they come back.”

“I told you not to worry about that, I won’t let them get you, I can get us out, but it has to be after my father has gone. There are things happening at home that I can use as an excuse to go, but if we wait for after the weekend, we can buy ourselves more time before they realize we’re gone.”

“You can actually just leave?” Ava asked incredulously.

“With permission. But it’s an Alpha privilege.”

“Of course it is,” Ava snorted. “This place needs to change. I hope my brothers won’t start acting douche when they start here.”

“You know they won’t be able to attend the academy after you escape, don’t you?” he asked gently.

Leaving against the Council's wishes would have far greater consequences than Ava probably realized. It wouldn't just be their families put at risk, and the Council had far worse punishments than the Isolation room.

Ava's shoulders sagged

"Maybe it's a good thing. There's nothing this place would teach them that our father hasn't already taught us," she said as she put her sandwich down and started pulling at a bit of fluff on the blanket. "I just hope they won't hate me. I'm being selfish, aren't I?"

He felt her helplessness cut through him like a knife

"There's nothing selfish about wanting to stay alive," he said gently as he pushed the food between them out of the way and moved closer to her. "I can keep you alive if you let me, Ava"

There was confusion in her eyes for a moment, and then they widened when she understood his intent. His eyes lowered to her lips as the heat spread like wildfire through his body. He'd tried, but he would die if he didn't have her underneath him in the next few seconds.

"Say you're mine, Ava, he whispered. "Say the words, and I will never let anyone hurt you again."