

## Chapter 120

Ava stepped back.

She had known from the first day that she would die in this place, but hearing Mr. Patrick say it hammered it in.

“Who wants to kill me?” she asked weakly.

But she already knew. What she didn't know was why. Did they know what she had done?

“They know everything, Ava. I told you not to go into the forest. Everything in there belongs to them. Do you understand? They know.”

The sudden burst of energy that she'd had was depleted. She dragged her feet to the first bench and gently lowered her body. She felt no pain but still felt as if her body had broken into pieces.

If they knew, why was she still here? That was the number one rule of the academy. Never step foot into the forest.

“And that's what's been keeping me up at night,” Mr. Patrick said.

“Stop that.”

She felt too drained to concentrate on shielding her thoughts.

“You’ve brought attention to yourself, Ava. I gave you that potion so you could spend the rest of the evaluations in the infirmary, but you still came back. It’s almost as if it didn’t affect you.”

It wasn’t a question, yet she could see many of them in his eyes, almost like he was still reading every little thought in her head. She thought of sheep. Of kittens and puppies.

“You can trust me, Ava. You’re not as good at shielding your thoughts as you think,” Mr. Patrick sighed as he went to sit on the seat across the aisle from her.

“I shielded them from the Council,” she pointed out.

Or had she? Was this all happening because of her? Had she given them all the information they needed?

“I’m not like them. And I’d appreciate it if you kept that secret,” he said

“Then what are you? You did the thing with that book; you read minds, I think you even disappear into thin air sometimes, and you’ve enchanted this room, too, haven’t you?”

“Because you’re never alone. I don’t want to be overheard.”

She noticed that he didn't answer her question. Mr. Patrick knew a lot about her, but she knew nothing about him. It wasn't fair.

"The world's not fair," he said. "And there is a whole world out there that the Council will never tell you about."

"Will you at least just stop doing that? Can you turn it off or something? I can't trust you if you keep looking in my head."

She leaned back on the bench and felt even more drained than when she had woken up. Maybe she needed to go to the Infirmary instead of lessons.

"I don't mean to intrude, but it's a habit I've had to maintain. Makes it easier to know when I'm in danger."

She didn't have the energy to ask why he would be in danger. She sighed as she put her head down on the desk.

"You said they're watching me and my pack. I don't think anyone from my pack is on this campus."

Though some of the wolves in her pack had received their invitations from the Council and left the same week she had, she'd seen none of her old tormentors here. Now that she thought of it, that was odd. Why had they separated her from the rest of her pack?

"Not your father's pack. Your pack," Mr. Patrick said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "That's not the point. They've been testing you, and I think you passed."

“That’s a good thing, isn’t it?”

“No, Ava. That’s the worst outcome because now you’re either a threat to them or a tool.”

“I still don’t get it. I met them, but they didn’t mention the forest. I think I got out of that okay.”

“And that was your first mistake. No one gets out okay. And right now, you don’t even look like you spent two days in Isolation,” Mr. Patrick sighed. “Have you been feeling any... changes lately?”

“You think they did something to me?” she asked, her panic rising as she lifted her head. “Everything’s been different since...”

She blanked her mind again.

“Fuck’s sake.” Mr. Patrick muttered as he stood and started pacing in front of the room. “If you can’t trust me, that’s fine, but listen to me. The President of Phoenix Academy is coming.”

“Okay,” she said hesitantly,

What did that have to do with anything? Like all the human universities she had read about, Phoenix Academy had a president Just some faceless person that no one ever saw. Dean Russell’s word was law on the campus, but he still had people to answer to.

Mr. Patrick stopped pacing, looked at her, and then shook his head.

“You’re going to die,” he said. “How can you be that clueless? Who owns Phoenix Academy? All of them across the world?”

“The Council,” she answered slowly.

Maybe it was because she felt so drained that she couldn’t see why he was panicking. Her chest still felt tight from when she had noticed that Zeke hadn’t come home.

“So, who would the President of Phoenix Academy be?”

It took her a moment, but she finally got it.

“The Head of the Council. The Head of the Council is the president. Holy sh-”

“They brought you here for a reason, Ava. They sent three of their strongest members to look at you. And then you still went and dominated an Alpha and an Omega.”

“That was luck-”

“Was it?” Mr. Patrick said sarcastically. “Well, now the Head of the Council, who hasn’t stepped foot in this place for over fifty years, is coming here just for you. I told you, you need to reach your full potential before they come back, but I assumed that would be at the end of semester evaluations. You and Alpha Ezekiel don’t have too long to figure this out. They’ll be here in just over a week.”

She started to panic again until she remembered she'd be gone by then. She felt a little relief wash through her. Meeting Council members was thing, as terrifying as that had been, but the Head of the Council was a whole different ball game. Her dad had told them stories of the atrocities that had been committed in his name.

“You can't escape this place. Whatever you're thinking, don't do it. There is nowhere in this world that you can hide that they won't find you. Stop wasting time and find out who you are.”

She glared at him for going into her head again before his words registered.

“What do you mean?”

As she asked, she felt her body start to relax. She hadn't realized how tense she had been until she felt it all lift away like a heavy load off her shoulders.

“Can't leave you alone for five minutes?” Mr. Patrick snapped in irritation.

The loud banging on the door made her jump, but she already knew who was on the other side.

“Is your father coming for Parents' weekend?” Mr. Patrick asked.

“Yes,” she answered as the pounding continued.

“Then make sure you both come to see me. I can help you prepare as much as I can,” he said as he walked towards the door and put his hand on it. He muttered a few words before he opened the door and allowed the very angry Alpha to walk in.

Zeke’s eyes were red as he glared at Mr. Patrick before his furious gaze landed on her. He let out a low, hair-raising growl as he came closer. Her heart, which had seemed dead only moments ago, started working overtime. Maybe this was how she died instead.