

## Chapter 172

“Alpha Diego is going to explain more,” the coach said before walking to sit at the front.

“We are going to learn what is expected of us as members of this community,” Alpha Diego started as he stepped forward. “Sometimes things happen in the world, and we are called upon to serve. This is why you train so hard. So you are ready to face trials when you return to your Communities.”

Ava looked around at the other students and saw they all had their heads down, but the tension was palpable. Yesterday’s training taught them what The Council’s lessons were all about.

“Some of you may think our methods are a little outdated. Or barbaric,” the Alpha continued. “But they are necessary. Without them, the whole world would be in chaos. It is your duty to understand where you fit in the wheel that keeps everything running smoothly. It’s your duty to follow the rules given to you. Or you will suffer the consequences.”

Like Emily: He didn’t say that out loud, but she was sure that was the picture they all had in their heads.

“We understand that you are all here to learn. Some of you are still new here and may think the rules are meant to be broken or bent. But you have not earned that right yet. You have not earned that privilege,” he said, looking directly at her this time. “Some of you are exceptional and will have the honor of being called to serve the Council. You are here to learn what that entails. But if you do not learn those lessons, if you feel that our ways are not your ways, then you have no place in our community.”

That was it. That was what they wanted. For her to follow the rules and do as they asked, or she would be considered a threat.

It meant they had not decided which she was yet. They were still testing her.

“So for today’s training, you are to sit back and watch those who know what it is to serve, fighting the Fourth–Year Advanced and Expert level students who should have learned this lesson by now,” the Alpha continued. “And after today, we hope you will take your training more seriously.”

Her body went cold. She looked around the room but didn’t see Zeke.

Where was he? What had they done?

Her heart was in her mouth when the training room door opened, and some students from the other levels started to shuffle in and find seats. Zeke wasn’t with them. She looked at the Council members and saw they were watching her. Whatever they were about to do was something

that would affect her profoundly. She would follow what rules they wanted if they left him alone.

“If only it was that simple. But we like to deal with certainties, Alpha Diego said directly to her.

And then the door opened again, and Derek, Myles and Jared walked in. They all looked at her as they walked to the mats that had been placed in the middle of the room. She knew they were strong, but at that moment, they were just little boys being used in a game by the Council.

“Boys, you are on a battlefield. In a team or individually, it is up to you. You can fight however you want,” Alpha Diego said as the three of them walked to take their seats. “And those are your opponents.”

When he said that, Claire and her friends stepped up to the mat opposite them on the other side of the room. There were seven of them! She had felt how strong Claire had become, the match would be a massacre! Where was Zeke

“Coach, blow your whistle,” Iulia said as if she knew the coach was reluctant to do so.

It took a while, but the shrill sound of the whistle came, and Claire and her friends settled into fighting stances. They looked like soldiers from hell. They had no expressions on their faces as they looked at the three wolves on the other side.

Her heart started to pound. Her vision began to blur. This match couldn't happen. The three of them had done nothing wrong, but they were still going to pay the price. She stood from her seat.

"Please," she whispered. "I'll do whatever you want."

"I said it doesn't work like that, Miss Morgan," Alpha Diego said.

And then Claire and her friends started advancing. Her body shook as she pushed past the other students to get out of her row.

Derek and Myles did not look scared, but she could feel they were. And she could see it on Jared's face.

Halfway across the room, Claire launched into the air and then shifted. As her clothes ripped from her body, she saw the monstrosity that Claire had become. Her wolf had patches of black that had not been there the night she had attacked her at Jared's party.

And her eyes were purple.

As she landed on her paws, froth formed around her mouth as if she was rabid. And her canines were mottled and brown.

The evil from the forest overtook the room. Fear filled the room as the rest of the students were introduced to the monsters from the cursed forest that she had already met before.

And they were still advancing on her friends.

Her friends had done nothing wrong!

White-hot fury filled her as she ran towards them. A red haze covered her vision, and the most excruciating pain filled her body. It was like last time, and she knew she was about to black out. But the pain continued even as she ran towards the threat to her friends. She felt like her whole body was being ripped apart from the inside, but she didn't stop. She didn't black out.

She launched herself at Claire just as the rabid wolf was about to snap its jaws around Jared, knocking it against the wall as she fell to her knees. Then she felt her whole body tighten as if she had outgrown her skin. Her bones broke, bringing her to the floor as she writhed in pain. One by one, making her nauseous as she heard the cracking sounds. She wanted to scream, but the pain snatched her voice away. She knew what was happening, but nothing would have prepared her for this.

But she could still see Claire rising and the rest of her friends starting to shift too. They were still going to hurt her friends, but she was stuck on the floor.

Something settled in her mind—something calming—as she looked at Derek. Myles and Jared shifting to defend themselves. They would not die today.

As she rose to her feet, she attacked Claire before the rabid wolf had a chance to reach her friends again. Her jaws snapped down on Claire's torso and threw her to the side like a rag doll before she ran through the other wolves like they were bowling pins. And then she felt her.

Her demented, psychotic wolf.

She felt her in her head as she revealed her intentions. And she was all for letting her do her thing.

When she threw the last wolf against the wall, she walked through the wreckage towards her friends. They looked a lot smaller than she remembered. And they were inching back, terrified. The purple-eyed wolves were not something any of them had ever seen, so she could understand their fear.

She looked across at the three councilors because, in this form, she could sense their threat much clearer. The purple-eyed wolves had been nothing compared to them.

The three of them stood and looked at the mess she had made. She lowered her head and growled, ready to defend her friends again.

But the councilors started to cheer. And clap.

“This is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.” Councilor Andrei said.

She looked back at the room. At the carnage. The chaos.

And she looked at the bleachers, which had cleared of other students except a few, who were cowering in fear. She looked at her friends.

And that was when she realized she had fallen right into their trap.