

Chapter 175

Ava felt like her stomach was eating her when she opened her eyes. Her body felt tender, but she didn't feel any pain. She stretched and sat up in bed, not surprised that she was in Zeke's bed again. The room was dark, and the clock beside the bed said it was barely nine o'clock, which was odd. Wolves tended to sleep and recuperate for a day or two after the first shift,

But then again, her wolf was...

She could still smell the blood that had covered her body despite Zeke washing it off in the lake. Quickly, she shoved the covers off and rushed to the bathroom. Food could wait. The insane Council members could wait. She stood under the shower spray before it had warmed up and started to scrub her body, but no matter how raw her skin looked, she didn't feel clean.

Would she ever?

The Council had not been surprised that she had shifted into that thing, so they had already known. That was the reason they had come: she was sure of it. Mr. Patrick had been right after all.

Her stomach growled loudly, reminding her again that she needed to refuel. She shut the water and rushed to dry and dress. She was still pulling her underwear on when she picked up the scent of food. Her sense of smell was stronger now. Not as strong as when she had been in her wolf form. but she could smell the feast that the Omegas must have made. She couldn't wait any longer. She pulled a T-shirt over without looking and headed out the door as she pulled it over her head.

She was already down the stairs when she realized she had taken Zeke's T-shirt. It fell almost to her knees and slipped off her shoulder, but she couldn't think about anything besides food. She followed the scent to the dining room, where there was indeed a feast on the table. She ignored the plates and attacked the food with such single-mindedness that she was glad she was alone. Nobody needed to see this ugliness.

When she finally sat back in a chair, patted her stomach, and let out a satisfied smile, she was glad she had chosen Zeke's T-shirt to hide her round stomach. She'd always assumed her fast metabolism was just good human genes, but now she knew the truth.

And now she had to deal with the truth.

Her wolf was damaged and liked to kill.

With a sigh, she stood and walked to the kitchen to wash off the mess she'd made on her hands and face. While drying with the paper towels, she caught her father's scent again.

She sniffed the air. Yes, that was his scent. Was he here? It occurred to her that she hadn't seen or heard anyone since she woke up, but she

could sense that Zeke was nearby. And her dad and Mr. Patrick. An ordinary wolf would have picked up on that straight away

She sighed as she threw the paper towels in the trash and walked to the basement door. What would her father think of her now? Would he still love her the same? Her hand hesitated on the door handle, and then she lowered it.

It wasn't just her father who would be scared of her now. The whole school would be.

The Council had set her up to shift and attack in front of everyone so she couldn't hide what she was.

She was backing away when the door opened, and Zeke stood there. Without the magic of the room muting her limited senses, she felt his love for her soothe her worries.

Was it love? Or was it the bond?

"It's okay. Ava Come," he said gently, reaching out to take her hand.

Her little one fit perfectly in his as she allowed him to pull her in and close the door behind her. She concentrated on the feeling of his touch instead of what reactions she would see once she got to the bottom of the stairs. How was it that she was so small, yet something so huge had come out of her? Something so unhinged?

She didn't look away from their joined hands even when Zeke stopped in the middle of the basement. It wasn't just her dad and Mr. Patrick in

there. She could sense Derek and Myles, too. The wolves who had backed away from her in fear and horror.

From the corner of her eye, she saw her father approach and tensed. But seconds later, she was in his embrace, inhaling the scent that had always calmed her. Zeke released her hand, and she put it around her father. With her head against his chest, she could hear his steady heartbeat. And she didn't sense any fear. That made her brave enough to pull away and look up at the man who had loved her from the moment he had adopted her.

"How are you feeling?" he asked as he tucked her hair behind her ear.

"Awful," she whispered.

"You were set up, sweetheart. What happened is not on you; you were just trying to protect your friends."

She glanced at Derek and Myles, but all she could see was the horror that had been on their faces in the training room. She looked down at her bare feet.

"We made you something to eat. Did you see it?" Derek asked.

"We knew you'd be starving. I remember Zeke ate us out of house and home after his first shift." Myles added.

She looked at them again.

"You made it?"

“We made some of it. Samantha and Julie insisted on cooking as well,” Derek answered with an eye roll and a smile.

Did that mean they weren’t scared of her?

“Oh, I’m sure they are,” Mr. Patrick said.

She frowned as she turned to look at where he was sitting, invading her thoughts as usual.

“People will always be a little bit scared of you, Ava. It’s something you’ll have to learn to live with. But I’m sure your mate can help you with that,” he said as he stood and walked to her.

“A little fear isn’t always a bad thing.” her father said as he released her completely and smiled down at her.

As a white wolf, he had always been feared in the pack, but she knew he was also respected because he ruled fairly. But his wolf wasn’t bloodthirsty like hers, so she couldn’t compare herself to him.

“Why don’t we sit down and talk about what comes next? I hear you’ll be summoned tomorrow, and you’ll have some choices to make,” Mr. Patrick said.

Tomorrow. So the Council was finally going to lay their cards on the table? And she would have to choose whether to protect her family or protect everyone else. Or between life and death.

She wrapped her arms around herself and sat on a bench beside Zeke. His eyes were on her bare legs, and she suddenly felt self-conscious because she wasn't fully dressed.

"You look good in my clothes," Zeke said huskily.

And her toes curled as if she hadn't just been thinking of how she was going to die tomorrow,

"I don't think the Council realize the nature of your bond," Mr. Patrick mused, "or they would have separated you already. They already knew about your wolf, but your bond will tip things in our favor if we can get it right. A normal bond answers some of their questions. It's why Isolation didn't hurt you. Why you can shield your thoughts from them."

His words pulled her gaze from Zeke to the professor pacing in the middle of the basement like he was lecturing them.

"What do you mean a 'normal bond'?"

Mr. Patrick didn't answer. Instead, he looked at Zeke as if he wasn't impressed with him. Everybody looked at Zeke, so she also turned her gaze to him.

"Do you know what a True Mate is, Ava?" Zeke asked, taking her hand and linking their fingers.

The sparks danced all over her skin. Her worry once again calmed down as the rush went through her body. She didn't even notice when the room cleared because she got lost in his eyes,

“I didn’t just choose you, Ava. You were made for me, and I for you. We are one in a way other mated wolves cannot be,” Zeke whispered. “One mind, one soul. Your fate is mine, and mine is yours.”

Wait... What?