

## Chapter 176

“Wait. Say that again,” Ava said,

He looked down at their entwined fingers and brought her hand to his lips. He should have told her before he marked her. Told her he was bonding them for life.

But there had been no other choice for either of them.

“You’re my true mate, Ava. The perfect half of me,” he said. “It’s why our bond was so strong before I even marked you. I only had to catch your scent for Shadow to know you were ours.”

“So when you say my fate is your fate, what exactly do you mean?”

This would be the most challenging part of her, as much it hurt him to admit that. When Mr. Patrick told him about True Mates, it had been easy to accept because he wouldn’t want to live without her, anyway. He and Shadow agreed on that. But Ava’s wolf was complicated. She and Ava were at odds, and he didn’t know how that would affect their bond.

“If you die, I die,” he said simply.

Ava gasped and pulled her hand out of his. Her shock and disappointment shot through him. It felt like she regretted mating him, and that made a knot tie in his chest.

“Zeke, you know that’s the likely outcome of all of this” she said shakily.

“I know, But there’s also a small chance we will come out of this alive with Mr. Patrick’s help. No one else would know Mr. Hansson’s weaknesses better than he does.”

If there were any, That magic Hansson used bind to that chair had felt impenetrable.

He could see the doubt and worry on Ava’s face as she hugged herself.

“You and I are different from the others in more ways than I can show you right now,” he said, taking her hand again. “We are so much more. You don’t know your strength yet, Ava. I’ve had to suppress my urge to hide what I am, but everyone has every reason to fear us.”

“But I have not time to learn all off that. I don’t know why my wolf isn’t speaking to me,” Ava whispered. “Tm sorry you tied yourself to me, Zeke.”

“I’m not. I was lost without you. I had all this rage inside me, rage I had to fight every day, or I would have killed everyone,” he said. “Despite all the shit we’re going through, I’ve never been more settled, more content. No matter what happens, I’m glad I found you.”

He could feel she was still very upset with his revelation, but she had to accept their reality. Whether they were ready or not, they had to prepare to meet with Mr. Hansson to find out what they really wanted. The Head of the Council could invade their minds as easily as Mr. Patrick, so they had to concentrate on learning how to shield more than anything. Mr. Patrick's life depended on that.

The door opened moments later, and the others walked back in. He could still sense Derek and Myles' wariness despite him assuring them that Ava wouldn't shift and rampage.

"Can we please hurry it along?" Mr. Patrick said as he came down. "If I don't mind maintain my routine I'll come under more scrutiny. I'm already having to mask myself as well as hide Roland."

Ava's father was staying with Mr. Patrick at his house in a different restricted part of the school. Ava's father would be in danger if the Council looked too closely at him.

Alpha Morgan came to sit on the other side of Ava and put his arm around her. He was glad that he hadn't rejected her. When he had first shifted, his relationship with his father had turned to shit. It had been his mother who'd remained steady in her love and belief in him. His father had only started to speak to him when he had realized he could use Shadow as his one person army, but their relationship had remained broken.

"May I ask a question?" Derek said as he and Myles sat on the other bench opposite them. "How did it happen?"

Ava didn't answer. It was Roland who spoke to her. He squeezed Ava's shoulder and said. "Ava first shifted as a child under very traumatic circumstances. They say that's usually the trigger. Her wolf was but a pup, but it had to emerge before it was ready and do terrible things to save her."

"And she most likely has powerful Alpha genes, too," Mr Patrick said. "I have not heard of any wolves like Zeke and Ava since Diego Lupei. I suspect they forced the shift yesterday to make sure Ava is what they thought before proceeding with their plan. I think they really want you to work for them, but if they can't make that happen, they will kill you. Because they kill all the threats to the Council."

He felt Ave's apprehension.

"And you already know they use all the dirty tricks in the book, so you have to prepare yourselves to play dirty. Be who you truly are, I guess."

Be the monsters they were. That's the only way they could win.

"I told you your bond will be to our advantage, but there's something else," Mr. Patrick said. "Away from this forest, I would have had a chance to stop the Head of Council by myself, but here the forest mutes my strengths. I suspect it's the same for Oskar Hansson. It's probably why he hardly ever visits and has brought the Council members to do most of his dirty work."

"So, can we take him down?" Zeke asked.

“He’s still the strongest person here,” Mr. Patrick said. “And there’s still something here that keeps feeding the forest and weakening me. A spell or charms or something I’ve spent years looking but can’t find it.”

“I can look around,” Myles offered.

If anyone could find anything, no matter how big or small, it was Myles.

“Keep in mind that you’re being watched, too, because you’re Zeke’s Gamma,” Roland said.

“Okay, so what do we do about tomorrow?” Zeke asked. “His magic is unlike any I’ve seen before. I don’t know how to fight it.”

“You have seen it. In the forest,” Mr. Patrick said. “And you’ve fought it just fine. You need to trust yourself. Oskar Hansson is a man, just like any of us, and he has weaknesses. The Fae can command all four elements to some degree, but we are usually more proficient in our own element. I’m not entirely sure which element Oskar commands, but I suspect it’s the earth. It has to be how he’s created these forests around all the academies and controls the creatures within.”

“So how does one get rid of an earth Fairy?” he asked.

“Fae,” Mr. Patrick said with a sigh. “Until I know what he is, we have to wait, I could end up making him stronger instead of weaker,”

“So how can you help us?” he growled.

Mr. Patrick had all but begged them to stay, but now he was making it seem like they were in an impossible situation.

Mr. Patrick's eyebrow arched, and then he lifted his palms. He felt the energy in the room change and the static in the air. The air turned cold, and he felt a jolt through his body as if he was being revitalized. Shadow growled, unsure of what was happening.

"I can help you, Mr. Michelson. Don't worry about that."