

Chapter 180

Ava tried not to react, but she could feel Zeke's anger. They had a job to do here, which wouldn't be done if they both gave in to their true natures.

"Don't hurt her," Zeke growled.

"Then answer my question. We can't proceed until I know what the fuck is going on."

She had not expected Mr. Hansson to swear, but she could feel the frustration in his words. He really didn't know what was going on. His forest wasn't working as well as he said it was, and that calmed her down a little, even though the magic was restricting her breathing.

And when she calmed, she felt Zeke calm, too. Whatever Mr. Hansson did to her mark was not enough to break the bond.

"How did someone so young tame their beast? You're in perfect control. Even now, I have your mate by the neck, but you're not reacting," he said, cocking his head to the other side. "Do you know how long it took Diego? Decades. Decades of destruction and bloodshed."

Zeke remained silent again; this time when the magic squeezed her, she felt a rib or two crack. Her scream echoed through the forest behind her, but the pain cut the sound short.

She heard Zeke growl and felt as desperation to act through their bond. He was very close to going against the plan. Her head became foggy as she tried not to focus on the pain. If only she could mind-link with Zeke like other mated wolves to reassure him. She could take this She'd been hurt more in training. All he had to do was get through this with as much information as they could. Mr. Hansson wouldn't kill them; he still wanted something from them.

At least, she hoped so.

"I apologize" he said as the pressure eased on her body, and she took a deep painful breath. "Sometimes I get carried away. I don't want to hurt either of you. Ezekiel, but I need answers before we can move forward."

"I don't know how I did it. I just did it," Zeke said. "Let Ava go."

"Okay," he answered, and the next instant, the pressure eased completely. All she had left was the hold on her body, keeping her frozen in place.

But it was Zeke who grunted in pain next. She felt it as if she was the one still being suffocated by that magic, and something in her wanted to lash out at Mr. Hamson to stop hurting her mate.

“I understand I’m distressing you,” he said as he came back to stand in front of her. “But something is not right here. There’s something I can’t see that’s messing everything up. Too many unanswered questions.”

She could see his frustration, but she was focusing on Zeke’s pain. It was her turn to be tested on her control, and everyone already knew she had none.

“For instance, how did you survive Isolation without your wolf? How are you hiding your thoughts from me? I need to trust you, Ava, if you want to stay alive. And I must tell you. I’m running out of patience.”

Zeke grunted again, and she knew the pressure had been increased. Her anger rushed forward as her gaze clashed with the purple one. Not just anger, a white-hot fury as the need to rip this man apart took her over so quickly that she couldn’t process her emotions in time. It disregarded the magic that was supposed to help her protect her thoughts, and a warning growl left her mouth. All she could see in her mind was her jaws clamping around Mr. Hansson’s throat and snuffing the light out of his eyes, sending him to the depths of hell where he belonged. She wanted to rip him apart.

Mr. Hanson didn’t look scared, but it looked like he had figured something out as he studied her face. And then looked behind her to the forest with a frown.

When he looked back at her, he was more curious than angry.

“You are quite an enigma, Miss Morgan,” he mused. “How are you doing that?”

His question didn't make sense to her. She was still held in place by his magic, but her claws extended, and she felt her face tighten and start to change shape. Her growl became deeper. She could feel it coming from somewhere deep within her, somewhere full of rage and darkness.

She would end the bastard. How dare he hurt her mate!

"I'm okay. Ava. Calm down."

Zeke's voice pulled her away slightly from her murderous thoughts, but that was all it took to remember what was at stake. Too much.

Everything she felt the bond and realized he had calmed himself, and the pain was minimal. She could have ruined everything for nothing. She took a deep breath to calm herself and felt her claws start to retract.

When she returned to her senses, she saw Mr. Hansson looking from her to Zeke and back again.

"I admit, when I came here. I didn't know whether I was coming to kill you or take you with me," Mr. Hansson started, "but now I think this is the best thing to fall into my lap since my lovely Iulia."

She felt Zeke's dread. Had she revealed something? Had he read her mind when she had been gripped by her rage

"I came here with two options, but now you have only one," Mr. Hansson said as he stepped back from her. "I suppose there are still two options. Join the Council or die."

What?

“Don’t act surprised. You’re stronger than anyone here,” he said. “And while I know that’s unprecedented, given your age, you will train for your roles until you’re old enough. I was going to offer you the chance to join my soldiers, but you are meant for far greater things.”

He looked back at the forest again, and that was when she sensed the difference. The silence. No sounds were coming from the forest. Like whatever she had heard before was gone.

“What roles?” Zeke asked.

Mr. Hansson grinned before he spoke again. He looked directly into her eyes, and her sense of dread increased.

“You will build my army, just like you did before. Exactly like you did.”

She felt bile rise up her throat. She hadn’t expected that. Becoming a soldier? Yes. Training to be a Council member? No. Ripping other students apart to throw them into the forest? Never.

“I’ll give you time to decide. But don’t forget that you’ve killed students at my academy, Ava, and the penalty for that is very, very steep.”

And that was the reason that trap had been set. To make sure she couldn’t refuse their offer.

Mr. Hansson inclined his head, and the councilors stepped out from behind her to stand beside their leader. The four monsters who had come to destroy her life.

“There are things here we must attend to before we leave. When I summon you, I will need at least five students of your choice as your first candidates.”

His magic released them, and she dropped to her knees. The force jarred her injured ribs and made her grind her teeth together.

“Oh, how is your father, Ava? Is he coming over for dinner tonight? I’ll make sure he joins us when you make your momentous decision,” Mr. Hansson said with a grin.

And then he and the three councilors disappeared, leaving her and her mate alone at the boundary of the forest.