

## Chapter 189

Ava stopped meditating to open her eyes and look at Zeke. He was feeling restless, probably like how she was. Maybe he could feel it, too. Their time was up.

“Why do you hate Jared?”

Zeke’s attention came back to her, and he frowned.

“We’re here to try to speak to your wolf, not worry about that bastard.”

“I think my wolf will make herself known when she wants to,” she said as she stretched her legs out on the lawn and then lay back to look at the night sky.

They had come out to the backyard again. The moon was almost full, and the stars twinkled in the sky. If she had been back home, the pack would have been preparing for their monthly pack run on the full moon while she decided on which books she would read while they were gone. Simpler times.

“We can’t mess around, Ava.”

“I can’t force this. What else am I supposed to do? We’re better off going to train than wasting time on that insane wolf.”

Zeke sighed and lay beside her.

“You can’t call her that. She’s an extension of you, and she’s not crazy. Our wolves aren’t meant to reveal themselves until we are physically ready, so she was just a pup when she forced your first shift,” Zeke said. “Your dad was right about the trauma. It changes us.”

She felt something stir in her at his words.

“How old were you?” Zeke asked.

“Six.”

“Your wolf was still finding her feet, too. She wasn’t mentally ready, but she came out and did what had to be done when she probably knew the risks. Survival instinct. I think you should be proud of her because she was probably terrified, too,” Zeke said. “She’s not insane, you just need to understand her.”

Something stirred in her again, and she turned her head to look at Zeke. He was already facing her, and he sucked in a breath when their gazes locked. She felt like she was having an out-of-body experience as she fell into his amber gaze.

Zeke smiled—a smile that changed his whole face and made her forget what they were dealing with. For a moment, everything was right in the world.

“She is beautiful,” Zeke whispered. “And she doesn’t need to be scared. She has me and Shadow, She can be herself; we will never judge.”

Without her trying, her senses opened up. Without the noise or the chaos, she heard Zeke’s heart beating away. She felt his sincerity.

“We love her just as much as we love you,” Zeke whispered. “She was meant for us, scars and all. Because we’re all scarred, but we deserve to be loved, too. No matter what happens next, no one can take that away from us.”

Zeke brought his hand to her face and gently pushed strands of her hair away before he pulled her into a gentle kiss. She was left breathless. Her heart beat in sync with his, drowning out everything else. And when he lifted his head, he locked his gaze with her again.

“You’re right. She’ll speak to you when she’s ready,” he said.

His voice was husky and heavy with emotion; she felt it through her whole body.

“Let’s go to bed,” he added.

He stood and held his hand out to help her. And then, instead of letting her walk, he picked her up like a bride and walked into the house. He didn’t break eye contact as he walked up the stairs or when he finally lay her down on their bed. Not when he whipped his T-shirt off and then his sweats.

When he finally joined her, she felt a part of her click, like something that had been missing had been restored. Zeke was so gentle as if she would break. She couldn't explain why, but she felt as if he was reassuring her that everything would be okay now, whether they lived or died.

She was still smiling when they drove to their classes in the morning, as was Zeke.

“You guys are disgusting.” Derek said from the back.

She chuckled even as her cheeks heated. Wolves were never shy about public displays of their affection, but she wasn't like that, and she didn't see that changing now that she knew she was one of them.

She was getting ready to leave the car when the mood in the car changed. She could feel it as if her own mood was being affected. Zeke's gaze was locked on something outside, and when she followed it, she saw Jared getting out of his car.

Looking back, she saw the other two wolves were looking at Jared, too. And she realized Zeke never answered her question when she had asked last night.

“Isn't it time you put aside whatever issues you have with him? You can't really mean to kill him when...if you graduate,” she asked gently.

Zeke turned to look at her as if she had said something wrong.

“You can't keep protecting him, Ava. He will die,” Zeke growled.

“Why? You can’t ask me to be okay with something like that if you don’t explain.”

Zeke looked outside again and watched Jared disappear as he headed towards the Fourth–Year block. His fists were clenched, and his eyes shifted between amber and red.

“He could have stopped an attack on our pack, but he didn’t. He’d known his father had been planning it for months, waiting to defeat my father and take over the pack. All he had to do was speak up,” Zeke growled.

He looked back at her, and she felt his pain. She felt Derek’s and Myles’ pain.

“We lost many pack members that day. My mother. Myles’ brother. So many friends. Just because he’s a coward. He’s as responsible for their deaths as the bastard who spawned him. And if we can’t get out of this thing with the Council, he is first on the list. One way or another, he will get what’s coming to him.”

She gasped and brought her fingers to her lips. She couldn’t imagine having to live with a reminder of her pain for years, unable to do anything because they had rules to live by.

“What happened to his father?”

“He already paid for his sins. He and all the pack members who thought they stood a chance of dethroning my father if they incapacitated him by killing his mate.”

So Jared's crime had been because he couldn't pick between his father or his pack? Surely he had already paid for that crime by losing his father, Too?

But there was too much anger in the car for her to risk saying anything in his defense. She put her hand over Zeke's and squeezed it gently before she got out. But she could tell by the look he gave her that he was disappointed in her.

Maybe she had not shown enough anger. Maybe her sympathy for Jared had shown. But she felt like crap when she finally walked through the doors of her block to start another day of playing Alpha while she waited for Mr. Hansson to make his move.