

Chapter 199

So many guards lined up along both sides of the road as the students walked to where the dean had directed them in after lunch.

Ava could sense the unease. She had walked down this road once, the day she had tried to walk away from Zeke after she had been discharged from the Infirmary. It was one of the few roads too close to the forest. She could already feel that darkness from it looming over her.

Her palms felt sweaty, and she couldn't stop her heart pounding hard against her chest. The students walking in front of them kept turning back, so she was sure they could hear it. The bag on her back felt even heavier than in the morning when Derek had handed it to her.

The students were walking silently, but the guards still looked at each of them as they passed as if they were watching over prisoners. Of all of them, only Zeke and her were holding hands. She couldn't remember when the last time she had worried about breaking the rules was,

As they approached the dead end of the road, she noticed that a stage had been set up there, right in front of the forest.

Right where she was to sacrifice five of her peers.

The students at the from left a healthy distance between them and the stage, but she and Zeke pushed forward until they stood at the front. She couldn't believe her eyes when she saw the stage. It was decorated with balloons as if they were there to celebrate. As if this was a party. The disrespect made her angry as she looked at the enormous, glittery 'congratulations' banner across the top of the stage.

How was he going to dress up the murder of five students? Would he do it now, in front of the whole school?

She didn't know how long they had all stood there when some of the staff started arriving. They went to stand to one side of the stage, talking among themselves as they looked at it. She could hear from their whispers that they also had no idea why they were there.

Mr. Patrick was not among them. Understandably, he hadn't been to any assembly since the Council arrived, but she prayed he was close. Nothing could start without him.

And then they were waiting again, It was the waiting that was wrecking her nerves. Part of her wanted to get this over and done with, and another part wanted to prolong it, knowing that whatever decision they made, people would die that day.

She was starting to breathe heavier as she tried to get her heartbeat under control.

'I've got you. Ava. Trust yourself,' Zeke said in her head.

Seconds later, the people with her life in their hands appeared on the stage. The crowd whispered and gasped when the Council members appeared out of nowhere, showing their strength in that one move.

Mr. Hansson stood at the front with a deceptively friendly smile, with the three councilors behind him. Beside them was her dad.

She sucked in a breath as she met and held his gaze.

He'd healed, and they had given him a suit to wear. His long hair was tied back neatly. She'd only seen him in a suit a handful of times; he didn't like wearing them. He only wore them to weddings and funerals. Seeing him in one now felt like a very bad omen.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen," Mr. Hansson started as he looked over the sea of students.

Her father nodded as if to say he was alright. She had to believe him. She had to believe what he and Zeke both said. They were ready to see this through to the end.

She wasn't tall enough to see past the students behind her, but she knew they had reached as far back as the beginning of the road. The students at the back probably had a better chance of escaping if things went wrong.

"I apologize for pulling all of you away from your busy schedules, but today, you are going to witness history in the making," Mr. Hansson said.

His gaze landed on hers, and when Zeke gently squeezed her hand, she remembered to lower hers.

“Mr. Michelson, Miss Morgan, please join us on the stage,” Mr. Hansson said.

Her heart started to pound again. She hoped that this was just an announcement and that Mr. Hansson wouldn't ask her to pick her death list to execute them in front of the whole school. But she knew he was sadistic enough to want to put that show on display. He wasn't concerned about what their parents would say.

As she started to follow Zeke, she felt her wolf stand alert inside her. Her senses got sharper. Her heart calmed down even though she was terrified. She looked at her father again and saw his small smile before she fully turned to face the rest of the school.

Hundred of them with their heads lowered, with no idea of the horror that was about to start.

“Today, we are here to congratulate these two exceptional students,” Mr. Hansson said. “They are officially training to be Council members” She saw some students raise their heads and lower them quickly. The teachers couldn't hide their shock. But it was the fear she felt from them the most. With Nyx enhancing her senses, she felt all of it.

“It's an unprecedented move, but they have shown they have what it takes to make the hard decisions. To lead. To be on the frontlines when called on,” Mr. Hansson continued. “Please give them a round of applause.”

The whole school did as they were commanded, but any idiot knew that being on the Council was not something to be proud of.

“And to mark this special occasion, they prepared a special demonstration.”

She’d been right. They were expected to slaughter the students in front of everyone.

‘Where is he?’ she mind-linked.

‘I can’t sense him. But it’s okay. We can do this.’

Zeke sounded less confident now.

“Ezekiel and Ava, please call the five students you have chosen.”

She looked back at her father just as Mr. Hansson walked to stand next to him. So close that it was only to remind her what was at stake if she didn’t do as she was asked. Andrei stood on his other side. Her father wouldn’t be able to make a move; they would stop him in a fraction of a second,

She looked over at the sea of students. How many parents and guardians would have to bury their children after today!

She closed her eyes and felt Nyx’s presence.

Trust her. Zeke had said. So she did. This job was bigger than she could handle, but Nyx would manage it.

When she opened her eyes again, she knew they were red.

“I love you, Ava.” Zeke said in her head

It sounded a lot like he was saying goodbye.