

Chapter 60

Isolation.

The Council called it that like they were in a human prison. But this was a lot worse.

Zeke sat in the unnatural darkness—inky blackness that even his superior senses couldn't penetrate. But it wasn't the darkness getting to him. His bonds with his pack were dampened, almost as if they had been severed. If his father hadn't been aware that something was wrong from how he had walked away from their phone call, he would feel this. His pack would feel the loss as if he was dead. Just as he now felt the loss of everyone in his pack all at once.

It was a cruel punishment, but it wasn't even the worst of it. Already, he could feel the invasive, icy tendrils of the magic trying to seep into his mind, into his body. He would suffer less if he kept it at bay longer, but it had only been an hour and he was struggling. He wouldn't last four days.

Sweat poured off him as he gritted his teeth. All the pain he felt from losing his bonds was real, even though, in his mind, he knew they were

perfectly okay. His heart hurt and there was an aching emptiness in his soul

Which meant he was right about what would happen if he rejected Ava now. The pain he'd felt when he had thought she was dying had been worse than this, worse than losing his whole pack combined.

They were bonded. It was too fucking late

Little stabbing pains hit the back of his head as the magic found a weak spot, making him wince and focus. Focus was crucial. If he slipped even a little bit, then the Council would be in his head, destroying and distorting everything he held dear. He could not let them find out about Ava.

‘Shadow. We need to do this together.’

The beast remained silent. He knew it was too much to ask. He was the one who had poisoned them with silver, and then Shadow had to fight off the evil magic in the forest in that weakened state. Though he knew he would physically recover from that, he had no idea what it would do to him mentally. Shadow had been psychotic to start with, he might have made him worse.

The magic in Isolation felt a lot like what he had felt in the forest, like it would invade his mind and make him relive all his nightmares over and over again until it broke him. He had too many of those. He and Shadow had earned their reputation, sometimes by choice, sometimes because of his father's command. His soul was blacker than most Isolation would destroy him.

He had been allowed a mattress on the floor and nothing else. The Council didn't want any students hurting themselves on their watch to maintain their reputation, but he had no idea how they got away with this in the first place. But no one dared oppose the Council. They had kept order among the species for over a century, and their word was law. Speaking against them was treason.

He felt the pain again and forced himself to focus again.

Breath in.

Breath out.

Keep the mental wall intact.

Keeping the mental wall up was something he had to do constantly with Shadow, so he knew it was strong, but he had never once thought that he would have to hide behind it, too.

He didn't know how long he had been sitting there when he felt the first crack in his wall. How would this change him! The Council's goal with Isolation was to make the students submissive enough to follow their rules and not even think about breaking them again. To build a nation of people who fell in line without question. It was one of the punishments reserved for the worst offenders but far from the worst that the Council could do He didn't think Shadow would ever submit to anyone, but if that beast didn't help him, then he would have no choice. The Council's magic was too strong for a student, even one with Alpha blood.

The crack widened.

Immediately, he felt the darkness start to slowly invade his mind. The worst day of his life started playing in his head, like a horror movie. The attack. Finding his mother's body. The pain. His fists clenched and unclenched as his nightmares attacked him.

'Shadow— Fight this,' he begged.

If they saw all his thoughts, his plans. If they saw Shadow's thoughts and plans then that would be the end for both of them. No one knew just how fucked up and dangerous his wolf was. The Council was known to make people disappear for less.

Like the ones who ended up messed up by the magic in the forest. Those poor souls' minds had been infected, but none of them were as depraved as Shadow. He had always known Shadow was a lot worse than that. And this wasn't an infection; this was how he was born. He had hidden the worst from people ever since he first realized his wolf was unhinged. Now, the Council would be privy to everything.

'Shadow...'

He tried to clear his mind so the magic wouldn't have anything to latch on to. The nightmares slowly dissipated as he focused on his favorite memories. Sitting on the cliffs that overlooked the beach and miles upon miles of calm, blue nothingness. But that didn't last very long. The ocean swelled as the waves got bigger. It crashed relentlessly into the rocks as the blue skies became covered with huge black storm clouds. Rain started pouring, and lightning hit close to his spot on the cliffs

They had invaded his peaceful memory. He would always remember it like this now.

‘Shadow...’

The beast stirred, as weak as he was. And then, finally, he felt a little relief as his wolf gave him some strength. The storm raging in his mind slowed down until it finally stopped. The black clouds were pushed back until the sun shone in the blue skies again. The tide receded and the waves calmed down and started to gently roll onto the beach again.

The icy tendrils of magic released him, and Shadow reinforced their mental walls.

But it took a lot out of the beast, just as it had done to him. How long would they manage to do this before the inevitable happened? Would they be just a shell of themselves by Friday? Would they lose everything?

“No, Shadow growled.

And then the stubborn beast took over. He felt too vulnerable, and having no control in such a dangerous situation was not a good idea. But Shadow was not like him. He had no conscience. He reveled in all the atrocities he had already committed and the ones he intended to commit. The horrors in their mind wouldn’t break him.

It occurred to him that against such a force, he hadn't stood a chance of keeping him away from Ava anyway. Shadow was stronger than he would ever be and would have Ava whether he liked it or not.