

## Chapter 61

Screams. Blood. Crunching sounds. Huge, bloody black paws with deadly claws. Her hands covered with it.

Screams. Blood. Crunching sounds.

Over and over again

Darkness. An evil, almost tangible darkness all around her.

A woman, lying prone in the woods. Lifeless, the same as others around her.

A beach. It was so calming, so peaceful. But the darkness bled in, ruining the moment, sucking her back in.

Ava shot up with a jolt, fighting the darkness. It was all around her, on her skin, seeping into her body. Her heart was pumping triple times as she fell off the bed and jumped to her feet immediately, still swinging her fists.

It took her a moment to realize she was standing in Ezekiel's bedroom and there was nothing to fight. But it still felt like there was, as if she

was drowning in something. Her head felt like cotton wool, her thoughts disappearing the moment she had them. Was she awake? Or was this still a nightmare? Everything had a hazy, dreamlike quality as she looked around the expansive room. She took deep breaths as she sank onto the bed and tried to calm herself. But her body was trembling too much and remained in fight mode.

It looked like she was awake, but how? Why was she back here? She had been trying to escape, and then...

The purple eyes, the snakes, the living trees...

She pulled her feet up to her chest and continued breathing deeply. Those images remained in her head instead of disappearing like everything else. The forest... It was evil. It wasn't supposed to exist. She shivered as she felt the sickly feeling sliding down her skin again and hugged herself tighter. She didn't want to be here. She didn't want to be so close to something like that, something that trapped her in the academy to meet her death. And that was all she could feel around her. Death.

The door opened slowly, and she held her breath, expecting to see Ezekiel and face his anger. Her thoughts about him were crystal clear despite everything else being hazy.

She was sure he was the one who had got her out. The huge, red-eyed creature had felt familiar even though he had looked as dangerous as everything that had been around her. Was he even a wolf?

But it wasn't Ezekiel who came in.

The other wolves he lived with walked in, their eyes sharp as they looked at her. She couldn't think of their names or remember if Ezekiel had introduced them. Her mind was too hazy to think properly. It felt like they were stalking her as they circled the bed, watching every little move she made. They sniffed the air the way Ezekiel usually did, but without crossing her personal space

She didn't know why they were there, but she was not scared of them. It was the forest that still held her in its grip-

“What are you?” one of them asked.

She looked down, not daring to meet their angry gazes. Without Ezekiel here, and while she felt so vulnerable, she didn't want to be seen as challenging anyone. She was still trembling, her heart was still pounding, and her head. She couldn't even understand some of the things running through her mind. Memories but not memories. So much horror. But she had never seen any of those things in her life.

“Human,” she whispered. “I have to get out of here.”

“You will stay here until Zeke returns. He's not going through all that shit just to find you gone,” the other wolf growled.

She had passed them off, which was the last thing she wanted to do. But his words penetrated her foggy mind, and she looked up to meet his gaze, His eyes were glowing blue as he growled at her.

“What do you mean? Where's Ezeki - Alpha Michelson?”

Was he still in the forest?

Her heart started to hammer again as she slipped off the bed. Her legs felt like jelly, but she forced herself to move. Yes, something was definitely wrong, she could feel it. He was still in the forest. Had he been trapped? She could still hear the growling and gnashing of teeth, and she could hear His pained howls. He couldn't survive out there by himself

“He needs my help,” she whispered.

It was her fault he was there. If she hadn't gone there in the first place....

“You can't even walk. How are you going to help him?”

She remembered the wolves in the room. How had she even forgotten about them? Their auras were strong and pressing into her. Something was definitely wrong. She had completely forgotten about them when she looked away from them.

“He's stuck in the forest... The monsters...”

How was he going to fight them? She hadn't been able to help herself; her years of framing had been worth nothing in the forest.

She looked away from the wolves in front of her again as she looked out the windows. It was dark outside, and she was sure there had been half a moon out. But now it was just the darkness. As if it was coming into this room pouring through the cracks.

“Hey!”

Startled, she sucked in a breath and turned around quickly, her eyes widening when she saw the two wolves. What the fuck was happening? She had forgotten about them again.

“Did you hear us?”

She shook her head. All she could hear now was the pounding of her heart.

“You need to shower and eat and then go back to sleep. You still need to recover.”

Sleep? Now? Her gaze drifted back to the window. The darkness was starting to cover the floor now. She stepped back but fell onto her butt when her legs didn't work properly. An inky black substance was dripping around the window frame and the walls.

“Hey!”

Startled again, she looked back and saw two wolves,

This was wrong. Something was happening. Maybe she was still in her nightmare. Perhaps she would wake up and find Ezekiel next to her again.

The wolves spoke to each other, and one of them rushed out of the room.

“You need to rest. You're not okay,” one of them said.

“Ezekiel... I have to save him.”

She didn't know why she even said that. Ezekiel was an Alpha, and he could handle the forest better than she could.

The wolf in front of her frowned and then walked forward and gently grasped her hands.

“Zeke is fine. He'll be back soon,” the wolf said as he led her back to the bed.

But she knew that wasn't true. Something was very wrong.

Another wolf walked in, and she remembered he had been there before. He had a bag in his hand, which he placed on a table and ruffled through. The next thing she knew, he was approaching her with a needle in his hand.

“Something is wrong,” she told them, her heart still hammering

But she felt the sting in her arm, and her vision started to fade.

“No... I need to get out. He needs me...”

And then there was nothing but darkness again.