

## Chapter 64

Ava sat by herself while she waited for the coach to arrive. She ignored the others, even Emily, as she stared blankly ahead of her. There was an ache... a hole in her chest. Like something had been taken from her in that forest that she would never recover again.

She should have listened to Mr. Patrick, but she had been desperate—and she was still desperate. She could feel death looming over her. It would only be a matter of time before Claire succeeded:

“Ava Morgan!”

She was startled when she heard her name and looked around to find the coach had already come in, and the others had already started the warm-

“If you are still sick, you shouldn’t have come back. I will not tolerate your laziness. Everyone participates in my class!” the coach snapped.

She didn’t look him in the eye today. It wasn’t worth it. She could only get her head around one fight at a time, and the fact that the coach hated her wasn’t at the top of her list. She slowly got off the bench and started slowly jogging.

But as with every step she had taken today, the pain was unbearable. It had been getting progressively worse throughout the day. Every part of her seemed to want to shut down.

“Move it, Morgan!”

One foot in front of the other. She knew what she was doing couldn't be considered a jog. She was walking. Slowly.

“I will give you a week of detentions if you don't move your pathetic ass!”

The coach's inappropriate language didn't even spark a little bit of fear today. She had felt real fear. She could still feel it.

She continued to move slowly around the vast room and thought the coach would tell her to get off his floor as he always did once the others had finished. But he didn't. Long after the other sat down, she was still trying to drag herself around the room to finish her laps.

The coach stood in the middle, and the one look she had given him showed that he was enjoying this. He could see her pain, and he loved it. He was indeed a monster.

“Keep running, or whatever you call the shit you're doing,” the coach said. “The rest of you pick your weapons and get into o your assigned pairs. We can't let one weak human bring the whole class down. One more week until your mock exams.”

Ava ignored the bustle around her. She ignored it when her classmates ‘accidentally’ came at her with their weapons. The rage she usually felt towards them was just... gone.

So empty.

She felt something fall down her cheeks, and when she wiped them, she was surprised to see tears. She never cried in front of people. She’d probably had several meltdowns, but she hadn’t cried. Now, she couldn’t seem to control herself.

“Are you crying?” Coach Baxter asked.

And then he started laughing, a hearty laugh that had the rest of the class stop what they were doing and join in.

“Not so tough now, are you, Morgan?” the coach continued.

He thought he had broken her. She knew that; she knew that had been his aim in every training session. But something else had broken her, she just couldn’t put her finger on it. Maybe it was the disappointment of the failed escape attempts. Perhaps she was tired of being on her toes and watching her back all the time. Or she was tired of being so scared all the time.

Whatever it was had succeeded. She was broken.

She gave up trying to jog and dragged herself around the room at a snail’s pace, and after a while, she couldn’t take even that. She sat down on one of the benches while her classmates trained.

“Did I tell you to sit down, Morgan?” Coach Baxter spat out.

She didn't acknowledge him even though she knew that was a big mistake. He would make her life hell, even more than he had been doing. But she didn't feel any fear about that. Just this hole that kept getting bigger.

“One week's worth of detentions!”

Detention. Mr. Patrick. That was who she needed to see. He could do whatever magic he did in her head and tell her what was wrong and what was going on. She didn't wait for class to finish. The coach shouted and insulted her the whole time as she walked out. It would have been epic if she could have stormed out and then slammed the door, but she was moving so slowly that the coach's insults had run out long before she made it to the door. When she picked her stuff up from the locker room and finally made it to detention, she wasn't early, she was just on time.

But when she walked into the detention room, it wasn't Mr. Patrick who sat at the front of the room, it was an older woman whom she had never seen before.

“Where's Mr. Patrick?” she asked without thinking.

The woman frowned, and her eyes became cold as she inspected her from top to bottom.

“None of your concern,” the woman said. “Sit down.”

Someone told her it was worse to walk out of detention than an actual lesson. Jared or Emily, she couldn't remember which, She didn't want to find out if those backstabbers had been telling the truth that time, so she sighed and dragged her feet to the nearest chair.

What was happening here? Why did she feel so awful? Why did she keep seeing these things?

The beach was back on her mind, and she took a deep breath, It was still the same. She closed her eyes to see it better, and it was still as peaceful as the first time she saw it. She needed some of that. She needed anything to stop these extreme thoughts and feelings.

She decided to keep her eyes closed a little longer. Everything looked so real it felt like she had been there before—like she was there now. And her mind was playing tricks on her because when she looked around this imaginary world, Zeke was there right beside her. He turned in face her, and she met those beautiful amber eyes. Though he looked different in her imagination, he was still breathtaking. Still the most handsome man she had ever seen.

But he looked shocked to see her. She saw so many emotions in his eyes but couldn't decipher any of them. She couldn't tell if he was happy or sad. Maybe she just wanted to see him so much that she was now daydreaming about him.

“Why are you here the imaginary Zeke asked.

She looked over at the waves gently rolling to the shore. The motion was calming, as was the sound.

“To escape,” she whispered.

“Miss Morgan!”

She almost jumped to her feet at the sound of a ruler hitting her desk and the teacher’s harsh voice.

“Stop daydreaming and go to your dorm. Detention has been over for ten minutes

The teacher stormed out and left her sitting there in shock. She had just sat down, she was sure of it. But when she looked at the clock, it had moved an hour.

She was right. She was going insane.

When she made it outside, she heard a car horn and realized Derek and his friend had come to pick her up. She was so grateful when she got into the back seat. The two of them studied her for a moment before they looked at each other, and then Derek started the car. They were going to have to tell her what was happening because she couldn’t take it anymore.