

Chapter 56

Mad House

Every moment in the maze was more heinous than Ava could have possibly imagined. It was becoming increasingly clear why this stupid place was all but abandoned - no one would just willingly subject themselves to this kind of psychological warfare, much less the children this was made for.

Ava bounced off of more trick walls than she cared to admit - nearly every time the unending line of goof mirror's threw one in that didn't reflect anything but an empty hallway. Why would they do that?!

She was constantly off balance as each step brought her across a different mirror, morphing her reflection into a perpetually shifting, amorphous blob. All the while, the demented circus music and barrage of flashing lights continued, turning this thrill house into a pure eldritch horror.

She certainly wasn't being quiet as she crashed through the winding corridors, but the people tailing her weren't either. Even if they were following her scent, it was useless because this was a maze and Ava was fucking lost, so her sent had to be all over this place by now, sending them in useless loops.

Ava rounded a bend and nearly shrieked when she suddenly saw a face that wasn't her own. Surprise registered on his face, too, right before they did begin to yell.

"OVER HERE!"

Ava raised her hands in an attempt to placate the angry male, "Wait! Can we just talk for a fucking second?"

Apparently not. The much larger male barreled toward her in a straight line, so Ava dashed at him, taking him by surprise as she dropped to the floor and slid between his massive stride. On her way through his legs, she stuck her hand out and pulled, yanking one of his ankles from under him and sending him to the ground.

Ava popped up and kept going, only for another one of her pursuers to immediately round the corner in front of her. This one was a female, not much bigger than her, so Ava tucked her shoulder and charged, careening right into the unsuspecting female, and sending them both crashing into the mirror behind her.

She hadn't known these people well enough that she remembered their interests, but they clearly hadn't gone down the fighter route. As soon as they connected with the mirror, Ava heard a snap! and the girl immediately crumbled to floor, taking Ava with her.

For a second, Ava panicked until she realized that crack had only been the mirror breaking, instead of one of their bones. She didn't need to give these creeps a reason to actually hate her.

"Hey, are you okay?" She poked the girl, who looked dazed, but otherwise fine.

A hand clamped down on Ava's ponytail, and she was abruptly yanked to her feet. Instead of grabbing for her scalp, like her attacker probably assumed she would, Ava turned all the way around and headbutted the closest thing to her. Unluckily for the girl holding her hair, her nose was directly at forehead level.

That snap! was accompanied by a splash of red, and Ava pretty much kissed any hopes of getting these people on her side goodbye. So, she took off into the labyrinth again, this time with the Pack members hot on her tail.

A big arrow appeared as she rounded a corner, pointing down a corridor. And like a fucking moron, she took it, thinking that it would finally lead her to the exit. Instead, it corralled her into a dead end.

"This. Place. Is. A. NIGHTMARE!"

Ava turned and didn't have to wait long before her Pack mates surrounded her. Mia began to rise as Ava took in their rumped, and irate stances. They were ready for violence, especially now that she was cornered. Ava tried to tamp down, Mia's urge to change - if she changed, they certainly would, too, and that was a scrape she didn't think she could weasel out of.

"I don't know how you got out of the hole you should be rotting in, but you're dead, Davis."

They began moving forward and Ava brought up her fists, ready to do she didn't know what, when a deep, sonorous howl suddenly cut through the discord. It was a howl indicative of a much higher Pack ranking, and one that Ava recognized on a spirit deep level, even if the male who stepped forward looked like a complete stranger to her.

"Stand down, Red Moon."

The bloodthirsty Pack members immediately ceased their movement, the will to obey the command of their superior ingrained in them from birth. The male who stepped through and stood before her wasn't at all the

teenaged boy she last remembered, but if his call hadn't resonated with her, his teal eyes would have. They were the same as her own. "Aiden?" She whispered.

He didn't answer, but the small smile he gave her before turning to face the Pack members was achingly familiar. "Red Moon."

His voice had the harsh clip of years spent in military service, and the Pack members instantly responded. They ducked their heads in deference, their postures relaxing out of necessity rather than want. Any show of aggression, no matter how passive, could be seen as an act of defiance in the face of their superior.

"Beta," they said as one.

"This is how you go out into the world and represent our Pack?" Disapproval dripped from every word as he studied each Wolf one by one. "By wreaking havoc in our own territory. Frightening the humans we're honor bound to protect and serve? Your actions are an embarrassment."

At this, the male lifted his head, an inferno of anger raging in his eyes as he looked right past Aiden to glare at Ava. "Our actions are in service to the Pack! She," he pointed a trembling finger in her direction. "Is a traitor to the Pack. A murderer. She escaped our justice once; I'm not letting her do it again!"

The male took them all by surprise by suddenly transforming into his half-formed state. The already sizable male grew another two feet in length and width, bulging muscles tearing through his clothes. The giant Wolfman didn't get more than a step before he was yanked back with such force that the momentum ripped the eight-foot-tall beast right off his feet.

His attacker continued their rotation, sending the Wolfman's head straight through a nearby mirror, where he stayed, his body going limp before slowly shifting back into its natural form.

Noah didn't spare a second glance at the behemoth he'd just downed as he strode forward, looking more irritated than she'd ever seen him. When he passed between the two females, they cowered back in apprehension, even as their eyes stayed glued on his striking visage.

"Attacking females, ignoring their superiors...I hadn't realized Red Moon was so," Noah leveled Aiden with an antagonistic glare. "Liberal, with the code of decorum."

Aiden's shoulders went taught at the perceived new threat, "I appreciate the helping hand, but this is Pack business. You're not needed here." Noah nodded toward Ava, "I don't leave unless she comes with me."

Aiden went from wary to protective in a heartbeat, squaring up to Noah, and letting his Wolf's shadow rise to the surface, "Who are you?"

Noah bared his teeth in a glaring approximation of a smile, "Her date. And you?"

"He's my brother."

They both froze as she finally spoke up, putting into words what she'd been too shocked to fully comprehend. Aiden, her big brother, was *here*. She hadn't seen him in over five years, and they hadn't had any form of communication since she'd been arrested. But he was here.

The two males continued to size one another up for a few moments, before Noah stuck out his hand with a much more natural smile. "Then we have no quarrel, soldier."

Aiden responded in kind, clapping forearms with Noah in a show of brotherhood, "Good. The way you just bodied that heavy motherfucker, I'm glad you're on Ava's side." Noah grinned, an eyebrow raised, "Runs in the family."

Before Aiden could question that, Ava stepped forward. "Can we go?"

"Beta, you can't let her go!" One of the females had roused their dazed friend while the one who spoke stood looking at Aiden pleadingly. "She

has to pay for her crimes!" "What crimes?" Aiden demanded, as Ava shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot.

"Ava Davis is a murderer."

Aiden stepped closer to the female who stood her ground, "You must be mistaken."

She shook her head vehemently, "No. Not about this. She should be in the pit right now, paying for her transgressions against the Pack. But instead, she's here playing carnival games!"

The girl turned from Aiden to glare at Ava, "Sophia and Samantha will never get to do something so frivolous as visit a carnival ever again. Did you even consider that, traitor?"

"Enough," Noah didn't move, but his dark voice carried. "You can rest assured that Ava is under the supervision of both a Red Moon Beta and an Alpha of the Eclipse. Now, take your friends and go."

"And this stays here, between us. I'll be speaking to Alpha Michaels myself." Aiden said.

The group reluctantly acquiesced and retreated, dragging their stumbling friend down the other corridor that presumably ended in the real exit.

As soon as they'd wandered from sight, Aiden turned to her, consternation written across his face, "Ava..."

She shook her head, rubbing her throbbing temples, "I don't want to talk about this here."

He nodded, "Fine, then I'll take you home and we can straighten things out." Aiden turned to Noah who was noticeably not questioning Ava, which she found off-putting considering what he'd just overheard. "I'm sure you don't mind if I take things from here. My sister and I have a lot of catching up to do."

Noah slowly shook his head, "No can do. I picked her up, so I have to drop her off."

Aiden frowned, "From where."

Ava huffed lowly, pushing through both males to march her way down the hall and out of this godforsaken creep show. "The Green Light Club," she muttered as she passed them.

Ava heard Aiden's sharp intake of breath, "The brothel? The fuck are you doing there?"

Ava stopped and turned, "What do you think?"

With that, she spun on her heel and continued on, leaving her stunned long-lost brother and confused pseudo-boyfriend behind her.