

17 17-Red Jacket Holders

Helanie: 1

"Take your bag and leave," my mother said, shoving it into my hands before folding her arms across her chest.

The storm had just subsided after two days, and though the rain hadn't completely stopped, my mother was already telling me to go. I didn't even get to share a meal with them after eating like a savage at dinner the other night.

At least, that's what Charlotte had said—that's why I wasn't allowed to join them.

"Go!" my mother repeated, refusing to look at me. She had woken me up early, demanding I leave.

It was freezing, and I had nothing but the old pink sweater I was wearing. I didn't have socks or gloves either, and my slender fingers were already numb from the cold. The light drizzle of rain would soon soak me if I didn't find shelter.

"Fine!" After staring at her for a moment, I



turned around to leave.

"And tell your father I'm so happy with the best mate ever," she called out bitterly, her words biting even though I had my back to her. I kept walking, gripping the small bag in my hands. She really thought I would go back home. I couldn't blame her, though—I hadn't told her anything because she hadn't asked. 2

Once I was a little further from the mansion, I realized I'd have to climb the mountain, then descend again to even get away from their territory. They had secured a large stretch of land, including the mountains where the academy stood and the area behind it where the mansion was located. It was a massive piece of land. So, when they said I needed to leave, they meant I had to get far away from their territory.

I hadn't seen the brothers for the past two days. They had been busy dealing with the storm and its aftermath. So many trees had been uprooted, and the beautiful rose gardens had been destroyed. I wondered what this storm was about—why it had only hit this particular area. I didn't remember anyone in the pack preparing for such a deadly storm.



When I reached the base of the mountain, I let out a deep sigh. Am I really leaving? Where would I even go?

I sat down on the damp ground, looking around as I watched birds fly freely overhead.

"How did they survive the storm without shelter?" I wondered aloud. They were so small, yet they had such courage and strength to survive alone.

Inspired by them, I rose to my feet, newfound determination surging through me. I began the climb up the mountain.

Once I reached the top, I scanned the surroundings, checking to see if anyone was around. The academy's front garden had people working to clean up the damage caused by the storm. I guessed the academy had been closed but was reopening today.

I noticed a young man in a red uniform, wearing glasses, walking toward the academy. He carried a shoulder bag and some papers in his hands.

As he made his way to the garbage truck, he snatched the wet and torn notices from the



trees, adding them to the papers already in his hands. I assumed he was clearing away the damaged notices. He was tall and slender, but his posture was perfectly upright.

After tossing the papers into the garbage truck, he nodded in acknowledgment to the waste collectors before heading toward the academy's entrance. His steps briefly slowed as he glanced at me, acknowledging my presence for a split second before disappearing from view.

The collectors were preoccupied, so I rushed to the truck and quickly grabbed the discarded papers. Once I had them, I snuck away into the distance. There were large trees surrounding the academy, but the space between the trees and the building itself was vast. The front and backyard had been cleared of trees and bushes, likely to make space for training.

I sat down behind one of the trees and unfolded the wet papers in my hands. To my surprise, it was an admission notice.

"Everyone is welcome, but only a few are selected. Grab one of these and present yourself before the principal. Your name will be added to



the candidate list. After that, you will stay in the candidate shelter—"

I paused, raising my head to look behind the academy. I couldn't see any sign of the shelter. Where was it?

"—deep in the woods, away from your loved ones," I continued reading, but rolled my eyes at the emphasis on being away from loved ones. Maybe it was for those who came from packs or homes where they were cherished. For me, if I got the chance, this academy would be my only home.

The academy had two tall buildings standing side by side with only a narrow space between them. One was the academy itself, and the other was the hostel. But that wasn't the candidate shelter.

"While you stay at the shelter, you will be subjected to many tests, and the one who passes the most will be the selected candidate."

I finished reading the key parts. Now I couldn't help but wonder why Norman didn't even give me a chance. It says right here that anyone can apply. 2



I guess all I needed was to appear before him with one of these notices. The deadline for submissions was today, which explained why the notices were being torn down. I had to hurry and get to the office before noon.

I waved the least damaged paper, hoping it would dry out soon. Rising to my feet, I shook the dirt from my dress and headed straight for the entrance. There weren't any other students around, which made me wonder why that guy had come to the academy today. My question was answered as I climbed the brown steps, entering the academy with my breath caught in my throat.

The moment I stepped inside, I knew I wanted to be part of this place.

There were only a few students gathered in a group, holding papers and discussing something among themselves. I guessed they were monitors or some kind of authority figures in the academy.

All five of them turned to look at me. A girl with blonde and pink ombre hair raised a perfectly arched eyebrow at my appearance, her blue eyes



scanning me from head to toe. Her nose wrinkled in disgust.

The guy I had seen earlier was standing with them, but I quickly looked away, focusing on the door marked *Admission Center*.

Ignoring their stares, I stepped into the room and came face-to-face with someone seated in a chair, their back turned to me. I marched up to the table and dramatically slapped the paper down on it.

"I want to be part of this academy," I declared, my voice echoing in the room. ¹

The man slowly turned in his chair, and I found myself staring into the hazel eyes of Norman.

Shit! Why did he have to be here?