

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0393 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0393

The next few hours move strangely, some minutes flying by so quickly that I'm shocked to see the clock when I next glance up, others dripping by so slowly that it agonizes me. Dad organized us quickly, gathering everyone involved in the military together, including us Cadets. He calls in a few of his military advisors as well, wanting their opinions, but he fields suggestions from the rest of us as if we're just as much a part of it.

I keep my mouth shut more than the others, listening and considering, not really feeling like I have anything to add. But Jackson and Rafe surprise me especially, chirping in with shockingly helpful suggestions and rather brilliant insights regarding our future plans. Mom, Cora, Juniper, Mark, and Daph all do what they can to pitch in and help out, even if they aren't directly engaged in the conversation. Instead, they arrange for meals to be brought up and ensure that the military minds all have paper and pens and maps and schematics and everything else that we need to work.

But eventually, even the most stoic amongst us grow exhausted. And our time runs short.

Dad glances up at the clock, its hands showing that it's well past midnight. "All right," he murmurs, his chin pressed between the fingers of one hand. "I'm calling it. Everyone get a few hours of sleep. You all," he says, eyeing his advisors, "I'll see in the morning."

We break up then and I stretch my hands over my head as I watch everyone begin to move, stretching tired limbs. We made some important, big decisions tonight, but the one that affects me most directly is the choice to call the Cadets back to school the day after the Midwinter holiday. It was a choice that surprised me, but which Rafe argued made sense.

"It's a military academy," he had said, his hands spread wide, his voice angry at the protestations against the idea. "Not a repository for charming young schoolboys. We should be preparing to serve - as reinforcements, if not active duty. Though honestly, I'd argue for the latter."

My eyebrows had gone up at this - me? My brother, my cousin, my mates, my friends - on the war front? God, I mean, I knew that's where this was heading -

But so soon?

For better or worse, my father and Roger had agreed, and the decree had gone out quietly to Cadets and their families. The rest of the nation will be informed about the increased Atalaxian threat the day after the holiday, at my mother's insistence.

As people begin to stand and stretch, my eyes start to search the room, looking for my mates. Jackson, I'm interested to see, stands with his arms crossed, speaking quietly with my dad, and brother, and Roger. But Luca...

I turn around, frowning a bit, searching for him. And I go still when I find him standing at the door, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, his eyes on me. Looking utterly exhausted.

Immediately, I make my way across the room to him.

"Luca," I murmur, frowning and reaching up for his face. He hesitates for a second but then lets me touch him, leaning his cheek into my palm.

"I have to go, Ariel," he murmurs. "I am...exhausted, and my mom and Gran are going to be so worried about me."

I bite my lip, not wanting him to leave, but...well. He has a family - I'm not his entire world. But still, I can't let him go without knowing. "What happened, Luca?" I ask quietly, searching his face. "With my dad?"

He just sighs, hard, his eyes drifting shut. "He told me what I needed to hear," he replies, frustration lining his words - but I can tell that it's only at himself.

I murmur his name, pressing myself closer, wanting to comfort him. Because I've been on the receiving end of some of dad's lectures before and it is...not at all pleasant. Still, Luca looks...shattered. Like his whole world turned upside down.

Luca wraps a single arm around me, tender and soft, his fingers tracing lightly the dip of my spine. He touches me like he's not sure if he should, like I'm a treasure forbidden to him. And I frown, hating it, pressing myself closer, letting my weight fall against his, letting him feel that I'm real, and warm, and that he's mine.

He lets me, just for a moment, before he stands up straight and opens his eyes, obliging me to take a step back. "Can I take you out tomorrow?" he asks softly, looking down into my eyes. "I'm sorry, I want to stay tonight, but," he lifts a hand and briefly scrubs it down his face. I follow the line of it, taking in the stubble on his cheeks, the circles starting under his eyes. "I...I need to sleep. In my own tiny, pathetic, childhood bed."

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy
#Chapter 0394 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys
Alpha Academy Chapter 0394

I grin a little, thinking of him curled up in it. But then I think about what he's requested. "Tomorrow?" I ask, biting my lip a bit. "On...Midwinter Eve? Luca...why don't you just come here for the party?"

He sighs and looks down at me, quickly shaking his head, letting me know that... plans have changed. "Just for a few hours, Ariel, in the afternoon. Just...an hour before sunset, and an hour after."

I hesitate again, knowing that it's going to be hard - mom, she makes a big deal out of Midwinter, and even if things will be strained this year I know she's going to need my help. But when I look up into Luca's eyes, and see how badly he needs this...

"Okay," I say, nodding, letting my hand fall from his face and trailing it down the length of its arm. "For a little bit, yeah. And then I have to get back."

"Thank you," Luca whispers. Then he dips a quick kiss to my mouth and turns, heading out the door. I blink, kind of surprised at the speed at which he left, staring after him.

When I turn back to my family, I can tell that they're pretending to not notice how quickly Luca bailed after our official dismissal. Jackson, in particular, keeps himself distracted. But Daphne raises an eyebrow at me, asking if I'm okay. I give her a quick nod, because I am.

I am. Of course I am. What's mate drama, after all, when your nation is on the brink of destruction?

I exhale a long breath, smoothing my hands down over my dress as I head back to the group at the center of the room just in time to catch a kiss from Cora as she and Roger and Jesse make their goodbyes. Jesse tosses me a wink and I give him a small smile as he goes.

"What's the plan?" I ask my mom quietly.

"Bed," she says with a sigh, reaching out and pulling me into a brisk hug. "Unless you need something?"

"No," I say quietly, shaking my head.

"Don't let it stress you, baby," mom says, giving my shoulder a squeeze as she reaches out a hand for Juniper, pulling her up out of the armchair where she's dozing. "We've been in worse spots as a nation. We'll get out of this too."

I nod, smiling at her, believing it. She moves away, she and dad shepherding Mark and Juniper to bed. My eyes immediately move to Ben, Rafe, Daphne, and Jackson - the only people left.

"So, what," Rafe says quietly, raising an eyebrow as the last door snicks shut and the room falls quiet. "Do we stay up and drink away our sorrows? Or sleep 'em off?"

"Bed," Ben and Daphne say immediately, and I laugh at their simultaneity as the two look at each other and grin.

"Bed it is, with a little nightcap to send us off right," Rafe murmurs, heading over to the bar and prepping five glasses of whiskey. Jackson goes over to help, knowing that though Rafe has big hands, he's only got two of them.

"A literal night cap," Daphne murmurs. "That's...cute."

I nod to her but then catch Ben's eye, nodding intently to my left, asking for a moment.

He sighs, like he knew it was coming, and steps aside with me. Daphne lets us, not asking any questions and moving over to the bar with Rafe and Jackson, because she's both canny and a gem.

"Ariel," Ben sighs, shaking his head. "Please -"

"Ben, cut it," I snap, crossing my arms and giving him a little glare. "Something is up with you - you almost passed out last night at the fight, and today you were all sweaty again after the meeting! What the hell is going on with you!?" I step forward, sniffing him a little, my eyes narrowing. "Are you like...sick?"

"What," he mutters, looking anxiously around as he gives me a tiny shove on the shoulder and pushes me away. "Do you think you could smell it if I was?"

"Well, maybe!" I snap back. But then my face falls, and my heart fills. "Benny, if you're sick, I'll go get mom - she can heal like, anything! It's easy -" "Ariel," Ben sighs, dropping his voice lower and speaking through his teeth. "I'm not sick, all right?"

My eyes go wide. "Then you know what's...wrong with you?"

"Yes, I know what's wrong. Can we please drop it?"

"What is it!?" I gasp, worried and quite desperate to know. "Benny, you don't look healthy -"

"I'm fine!"

"You're not!" I give him a little shove now, getting angry about it.

Because whatever it is, Ben is determined to keep it a secret. But I am just as determined to find out.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0395 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0395

"Would you stop it!?" Ben growls, his voice a little frantic now, looking over at the bar where Rafe is finishing up. "I'm never going to see the Atalaxians again, so it won't matter and I'll be fine, just drop it —"

I gasp, going still. "So, it has something to do with the Atalaxians!?"

He groans, turning away from me and clenching his jaw, clearly pissed at himself for letting that slip.

"What did they do to you!?" I growl, grabbing his arm, livid now.

"Nothing!" he snaps, turning his head to glare at me. "They did nothing, Ariel, just drop it!"

"NO!"

He grabs me by the arms then, dragging me to the corner of the room, giving up at any attempt to be inconspicuous. "If I tell you, will you drop it, and tell no one!?"

I glare at him a little, not sure if I trust this. "I agree, if you tell me everything," I say, snapping my finger up to point into his face. "And if you don't need healing. Because if you're sick! I'm taking you to mom!"

"Fine," he bites out, glaring hard at me and then glancing over at the bar, where the other three have their back turned. But still, Rafe is picking up the glasses, and I know that we only have instants left. "It's my...my fucking mate, Ariel."

My jaw drops utterly open and I just stare up at him. "What?" I breathe, utterly shocked.

"Yes, okay? So, can you please just let it go, and stop bringing attention to this!?" He looks anxiously over at where Rafe is turning back towards the room, looking for us.

"One of them," I whisper, grabbing Ben's arm, dragging his attention back to me. "One of them is your mate!?"

"Yes!" he snaps, frantic now, wanting to get back to the group before someone notices.

I hang back, grabbing his hand and putting my weight into my heels, not letting him get away. "Which one!?" I hiss, desperate to know. "The...fucking cute one! Obviously!" He hauls his hand back to his side, tugging me with him and making me stumble back into the center of the room. But I gasp in delight, ignoring my stumble as I trot along at his

side back towards our friends, because I know instantly which one the cute one is – the tall and lanky one with the blue eyes, standing next to the prince.

The one who sent a little shudder through me too.

My wolf perks up at the thought of him, both of us wondering what on earth that was, that shiver when we met his eyes? Was I just feeling the residual effects of his mating bond calling to Ben? I mean...I guess that's possible....but...

No, his wolf looked at me too, my wolf murmurs inside my chest, curious and interested.

But there's no time to think on it further, because Rafe and Daphne and Jacks are already looking at us with curiosity. I scowl up at Ben a bit, letting him know that this conversation is not over. Ben just rolls his eyes.

"What were you two up to?" Rafe asks, smirking as Ben and I come back to the group.

Ben just scowls at me. "Ariel just needed my advice on a very embarrassing situation. But I'll never tell," he clenches his teeth here on the words, clearly reminding me of my promise. "Because I would never do that to her."

I beam at him, nodding, a silent promise that I won't tell anyone. "Yup!" I say, turning my grin on Rafe. "It's very embarrassing. I'm mortified. Thank god I have Ben to advise me - I'd never survive if I didn't."

Jackson just frowns at me, baffled, while Daphne laughs, not buying it, before she lifts her drink to her mouth and takes a long sip.

"Cool, well, I'm taking this nightcap to bed," she says, sighing with exhaustion. Then to my surprise she stands on her toes and presses a kiss to Rafe's cheek. "Night, everyone!"

Daphne waves a hand over her shoulder as she heads to my room, where we agreed she'd sleep again tonight. Mom gave her her own suite, like she did Jackson, but tonight? After the events of the day? I think we all want to stay close.

Rafe clears his throat, blushing adorably as he presses a glass of whiskey into my hand and then another into Ben's. "Ready for bed, Ben?" he asks, raising an eyebrow his way.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0396 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0396

"More than I have ever been," he says, heaving an exhausted sigh and then draining his glass. Rafe laughs and pats him on the shoulder.

"Come on, then," he says, nodding back towards the family bedrooms. "Bunk with me tonight, like you did the first night. No sense in wandering the palace trying to remember which room is yours when you're already dead on your feet."

"Youuu got it," Ben murmurs, smirking at Rafe and wandering away with him.

I smile after them, shaking my head a little, because...well, in many situations, I imagine that Rafe inviting Ben to his room for the evening would be kind of a dream come true. But are things different now that Ben has discovered that he has a mate? And a really cute one? Or does he still have a crush?

"What's going on there?" Jackson asks, making me jump a little out of my reverie.

I turn my head to stare at him, my mouth making a little "o" of surprise.

He just smirks at me. "I know something's up. I felt your shock and surprise and delight coming down the bond. Are you going to tell me?"

Grimacing a little, I step to Jackson's side and wrap my arms around his waist, careful not to spill my glass of whiskey. "I promised Ben that I wouldn't," I say in a whisper. "Do you mind?"

"No, I don't mind," he murmurs, lifting a hand and drifting his thumb softly over my cheekbone. "Keep your promises to your friends, Ari. Though..." he hesitates here, and I grin. He just sighs, shaking his head down at me. "I never liked gossip before I got all wrapped up in your family, Ariel. But now I'm like...dying to know. What have you done to me?"

"You're one of us!" I squeak, delighted at the revelation, smiling so hard my eyes crinkle up into little half moons. "We've converted you! Aw, Jacks, that makes me so happy - I'm going to tell you everything -"

He laughs, pulling me tighter and taking a tiny sip of his drink. "Please, start me off easy, Clark. I'm a gossip novice, after all."

"Okay," I say with a sigh. And then I surprise myself by breaking into a big yawn.

He grins down at me. "Tired, little mate?"

"Yeah," I sigh, leaning my full weight against him, happy and content even after such a harrowing day.

"Ready for bed?" he murmurs, his eyebrows going up.

I grimace a little, not wanting to leave him but...well, knowing I need sleep. "Yeah, I think so," I whisper, nodding.

"Good!" he says, and then Jackson shocks me by moving fast, ducking his shoulder down, tucking it beneath my waist, and then wrapping an arm around the back of my thighs as he stands up straight.

I gasp as I'm quickly lifted high in the air on his shoulder, shocked and confused and -

But then I burst into laughter, even as half of my whiskey sloshes out of its glass. "Jacks!" I half shriek, working hard to keep my voice quiet even as I vent my shock. He ignores me, striding for the door to the hall.

"Jackson!" I burst out again, laughing, pounding my free hand on his back as I use my stomach muscles to hold me up so that I'm not just dangling over his shoulder with my head down, like I was at the examination. "Put me down! What are you doing!?"

When Jackson doesn't respond to my smacking him, I use that hand pressed tight to his spine to prop myself up, looking backwards over his back even as he carries me away.

"I'm taking you to bed, Princess," Jackson murmurs, pulling open the hallway door and stepping swiftly out.

"What!?"

"I have no intention, Ariel," Jackson says, his voice joyful even as I can tell that his words are dead serious, "of ever going to bed without you ever again, if I can help it. Starting...now. Or, well. Last night."

I'm completely shocked by this declaration even as I can't keep the smile off of my face. "You know, I can walk to your bedroom," I murmur, twisting to grin at him.

"I'm faster than you," he mutters. "And feeling impatient tonight."

And I just laugh again, shaking my head, letting my mate carry me away, pleased to bits at this surprising turn to the evening.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0397 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0397

Despite the rather dramatic way in which Jackson carried me to his room, about half an hour later the vibe is very different - calm, easy and simple, honestly like we do this every night. I'm freshly showered and dressed in another ridiculously large set of his

pajamas as he comes out of the bathroom in his own set of pajama pants, towel-drying his hair.

I grin, delighted, when I see that our pajamas match.

Jackson just raises his head and smiles at me, glad to feel my happiness down the bond, not really needing to know the reason. Just...happy I'm happy.

"You come here," I murmur, opening my arms as I lean back against the headboard. To my distinct pleasure, my mate obeys, neatly draping his towel over his desk chair and crawling onto the bed, turning so that his back is to me and I can wrap my arms around him from behind.

I take a long, deep sniff of his delicious scent, clean and fresh now after the shower. "You smell amazing," I murmur, a little drunk on it.

"So do you. I know everyone teased about it today, but I think your scent improves with a little of mine thrown in the mix.

I hum my approval, kind of wishing I could smell it, thinking that it's a shame that one can't smell their own scent. I'd like to know what it was like - honey, and clove, and pine, and ember. It sounds...nice.

"It is nice," he murmurs, nodding. I smile. And then Jackson leans more of his weight back against me and lets me feel - a little - how tired he is. But still, tired as he is, he takes a minute to check in.

"Are you all right?" he asks. "I feel...you're unsettled. Or something."

I smirk a little. "It's been an unsettling day," I murmur, tracing my nails lightly, passively, over his skin. He shivers a little and hums, giving me time to find my words. "I guess I felt...a little stupid tonight."

"Stupid?" he asks, going still and turning a bit sharply to look up at me. "What? Why?"

I grin at him, pleased slightly that he's angry even at the idea that I'd ever feel stupid. "Well, all of you were really in on the planning - you, and Rafe, and Jesse, and Ben, and Luca, when he could lift his head up. But especially you and Rafe. I...didn't have anything to add. I felt...well, kind of left out, and like I was not as good at being a Cadet as you all."

"But you're espionage," he replies, frowning at me as I start to run my fingers through his damp hair, my nails scratching gently against his scalp. "Ariel, this is what we're trained for. I know that sometimes Warrior cadets get marked as brutes who just run around all day, but we do a lot of studying too. Not as much as you, granted, but we

read military theory and study strategy for a reason. Plus, I've been studying military history since I was a child - I was literally raised for this."

I frown a little, Jackson's words having - I think - the opposite effect. "Well, I want to learn all of that too," I say, feeling left out. "I want to be...helpful. And not just know a bunch of chemistry and poisoning stuff."

"Ariel," he growls, shaking his head at me, and I grin at his frustration. "Do you distrust Neumann?"

"What?" I frown at him. "No, absolutely not."

"Do you think he's easy on you? That he gives you less work than the rest of us?"

I guffaw at him a bit at the understatement, because I work way harder at my studies than anyone in our little group - and I let Jesse and Rafe put me through my athletic paces. If he were actually accusing me of taking it easy in the Academy then I'd truly give Jackson a real piece of my mind. But, I'm aware that his question is rhetorical.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0398 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0398

"Exactly," Jackson says, nodding solidly as he holds my gaze. "Trust your course, Ariel. An effective military needs people with many branches of expertise. Neumann is requiring you to learn your stuff because that's what he believes you need to know - not military strategy like the rest of us. He will turn you into the spy this nation needs."

"Fine," I sigh, resting my cheek down against his head as he turns his face away from mine, respecting his logic and deciding to just trust the process, as he suggests.

"What about you? You okay?" I whisper, genuinely wanting to know. "Are you like...afraid? Of what's to come?"

"Afraid?" he muses, truly considering it. But then he shakes his head. "No. I've been preparing for war my whole life, Ari. It feels...inevitable. Like this was always coming."

"That's not a reason to not feel afraid," I whisper, my mind wandering as I tighten my arms around him.

"Are you afraid?" he asks, raising a hand to rub slowly over my forearm, up and down, a soft, comforting motion.

"Yes," I whisper, knowing it's no good to lie. Our bond is open again, like it was last night, and he can feel all of my emotions as I have them. "I'm afraid...of losing people. You, my family, my friends. Luca. I...don't think I'm ready for this."

"We won't let that happen," he murmurs, warm and utterly assured.

"You can't promise that," I whisper. Not doubting him just...knowing that it's impossible.

Jackson takes a long moment to respond.

"What?" I prompt.

He takes another few seconds to gather his thoughts, and when he speaks, I listen quite closely.

"I'm not particularly religious, Ariel," he says, soft. "I mean, we know that the gods are real - you yourself, bizarrely enough, are proof enough of that. But in general I don't think they care too much about the majority of mortal lives - and I never thought they cared about mine. But after all of this? Of finding you in one of the darkest moments in my life, and then coming here, and finding myself in a war council with the King and all of his advisors?"

Jackson shakes his dark head and I consider him carefully, seeing the situation anew from his eyes.

"It just feels...bigger, Ariel. And it all feels very possible. And I don't think that... that she would have brought all this together if there wasn't some bigger purpose."

"Well, what if that bigger purpose is to win the war?" I whisper, tightening my arms around him, my fear welling up in me again. "And what if the price of that win is...us? Some of us, all of us? A sacrifice, to save the lives and freedoms of many?"

Jackson is still for a moment, but then he turns so that he faces me, slipping an arm around me, raising his other hand to cup my cheek. "No," he murmurs, quite simply, looking seriously into my eyes. "Goddess plans or not...we're living through this, Ariel. I just got you. I'm keeping you, and you're keeping me." He shrugs, like that's the end of it.

I grin, and decide to believe him, because...well. What's the point, if you don't have faith, and something to fight for?

And Jackson...he's worth fighting for.

So I lean forward, and kiss my mate, and let him wrap me up tight in his arms. A short while later I fall asleep that way too, with Jackson curled up around me, happy and safe and perfectly content.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0399 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0399

The palace is quiet as Daphne slips out, stifling a yawn as she trots down the front steps, her bag slung over her shoulder and a portfolio clutched in her arms. She shivers a bit in the cold as she hails a cab from the busy street in front of her, sending one last wistful look at the sleeping palace before she climbs into the car. Because she left too early to say a proper goodbye - everyone's still asleep after the late night last night. But Daphne has an early train to catch home for the holiday, and an errand to run first.

Daphne smirks as she settles into the back of the cab, thinking about how Ariel didn't come to bed last night - didn't even make an appearance before sneaking out to Jackson's room. It's a shame, really, that Daphne didn't get to say goodbye to her but...well, she understands. Plus, the allure of your mate sleeping all alone a few hallways down?

A temptation that Daphne, herself, wouldn't have even bothered to try to resist.

She takes a deep breath, resting her head back as she watches the city flash by, heading off to the wealthy semi-suburban area where the other branch of the Sinclair family lives. As she travels, Daphne wonders, passively, if she should have had her own midnight adventure, sneaking off down the hall to rap quietly at Rafe's room, steal a few hours for herself...

But her little wolf turns once in her soul, discontented at the idea, so Daphne just brushes a warm mental hand over her wolf's fur and turns away from the thought. Her wolf is right, after all - it's not really worth wondering about. Not when there's so much to do.

The cab pulls up in front of a large, beautiful house, pulling through the open gates into the driveway. Daphne and the cabby both peer up at the house, which looks quite quiet.

"Are you...expected, miss?" the cabby asks, clearly wondering if everyone inside is asleep.

Daphne grimaces a little. "Sort of," she murmurs. "Um, do you mind waiting?" she asks, knowing she'll need a ride to the train station after her errand. "Not a problem," he murmurs, "as long as you know this is running." He taps the top of the meter with a cheerful finger.

Daphne agrees, thanking him and climbs out of the cab, leaving her bag and taking the portfolio with her. She starts eagerly for the house, thinking that if everyone is still asleep - which makes sense, after such a long night of strategizing - she can just leave the portfolio. She walks eagerly to the door and lifts a hand to knock on it but...

Well...

The door's open, just a crack. And cheerful yellow light is streaming through the thin aperture, along with some light laughter. Daphne drops her hand, leaning closer, and then bursts into a smile when she hears the sound of children inside - yelling and laughing. Not hesitating anymore, she pushes the door open a bit and peeks inside.

"Hello?" Daphne calls, curious.

"Daphne!" a voice calls, instant. And then there's a series of shrieks, and three little kids come dashing for her - Jesse's three youngest - with their hands outstretched.

"Come in!" sings Bella, delighted, grabbing Daphne by the hand and tugging her inside. "Oh, please come in! Come play!"

"Hi! Hi Daphne!" Chase calls out, desperate for her attention, jumping up and down and shooting his hands up in the air. Daphne grins, a little delighted by the reception. She's not used to little ones and is quite pleased to find that she's already so popular a guest after only knowing them for a few days.

The littlest one - a little girl only four years old - just grins and wraps herself eagerly around Daphne's leg, holding on for dear life. Daphne bursts into laughter, looking between the three kids, not knowing what to do next.

"Good god, they've got you now."

Daphne's head snaps up and her face breaks into a grin when she sees Jesse standing in the doorway to the living room, leaning casually against the door jamb. "You're their captive - you're never getting out."

"Yessss!" Chase hisses, victorious. "We've got her! Captive! Prisoner! Yes!"

"Bring her in, then," Jesse calls, still beaming at Daphne as he turns into the living room and waves for them all to follow. Bella and Chase dash after him, but the little one just grins up at Daphne, not moving.

"Well?" Daphne asks, playfully raising an eyebrow at her. "How do we do this?"

"Up!" the littlest Sinclair commands, releasing her arms and holding them up to Daphne. Daphne laughs and obeys, leaning down to scoop the little girl up into her free arm, balancing her on her hip as she, too, follows Jesse into the living room.

Daphne eyes go wide when she sees the chaos inside. Just - toys, and candy, and children all over the place.

The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy

#Chapter 0400 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 0400

"Come here, Fifs, you disaster, let poor Daphne go," Jesse calls, holding his arms out for the baby in Daphne's arms. He's sitting on the floor in front of the couch now, a puzzle spread out before him, both Chase and Bella on either side of it, sorting through the pieces. Seraphina - called Fifi by those who love her best - wiggles in Daphne's arms, struggling to be put down, so Daphne places her back on the floor and she dashes immediately to Jesse, throwing herself in his lap.

"Hi, Daphne!" Rose calls, waving from her spot in front of the television where she's playing some dance game, her movements tracked by the device. Chase, the eldest after Jesse, is slumped over an armchair, playing a game on his phone. Daphne grins at the fact that he completely ignores her.

"This is...quite a scene," Daphne murmurs, looking around, kind of impressed. "What on earth are you all doing up after a late night?"

"Come sit," Jesse says, patting the spot next to him on the fourth side of the puzzle.

Daphne obeys as Jesse wraps his arms tight around his youngest sister, planting a solid kiss on her head while Daphne settles in.

"Unfortunately," Jesse says, smiling softly at Daphne as he rests his head against Seraphina's, "even if their parents stay up until two in the morning worrying about the state of the nation, the children still wake up at the crack of dawn, demanding sustenance."

"Sustenance!" Fifi shouts, throwing her fists in the air.

Jesse laughs but otherwise ignores her, keeping his attention Daphne.

"But why are you up?" Daphne asks, grinning at Jesse, charmed by it all. She doesn't have any siblings, so sitting in a house so cozy and warm and noisy with love? It's a welcome change. "You were up late worrying too."

"The demons demanded my presence," Jesse replies, raising one of his feet to give Chase a little kick that topples him over a bit. Chase growls, playful, and sends Jesse a wicked grin before leaping on his foot and pretending to attack it. "They like my scrambled eggs better than mom's. Because they have taste buds, you see."

"But isn't that a lot to ask of you?" Daphne asks softly, leaning against the couch with her portfolio still tucked under her arm. "You're one of them, after all. A sibling."

"Yeah, but mom and dad need a break," Jesse replies, equally soft, holding Daphne's gaze as he speaks honestly for once instead of cracking a joke. "Besides, I miss my buddies, and I can sleep at the Academy when I only have Rafe and Ariel to take care of." He grins, looking over his siblings with very clear affection.

Daphne laughs a little and he turns his smile back to her. "What do you have there?" he asks, lifting his chin at the portfolio under her arm. "Oh!" Daphne says, looking down at the neatly bundled papers and then hesitating before pulling them out and settling them on her lap.

"Gimme!" Bella says immediately, snatching the portfolio out of Daphne's hands.

"Oh, um!" Daphne gasps, hesitating.

"Bella," Jesse scolds, his voice low and slow. Bella stops instantly with her hand on the cover, grimacing and looking up at her big brother. "What do we say about important paperwork?"

Bella sighs, looking down, ashamed. "No sticky fingers."

"I washed mine!" Chase declares, reaching for the portfolio with his apparently clean hands.

Jesse raises an eyebrow at Daphne and she shrugs, thinking that it's just some preliminary ideas, it wouldn't really matter if they got smudged. Everyone leans forward - even Caleb, clearly eavesdropping from his place on the armchair - peering at the designs as Chase reverently opens the portfolio and quickly spreads them out.

"Oh, ew, girl stuff," Chase sighs, jumping to his feet and running across the room - though Daphne doesn't know where he's going or why.

"Girl stuff!?" Rose gasps, turning immediately and abandoning her dance game as she falls to her knees and starts to sort through the sketches. Bella likewise leans in, curious.

"They're designs," Daphne says, unable to keep the pride from her voice. "Your mom asked me to think up some dresses and outfits for her. These are the ones I thought of this morning."

"Just this morning?" Jesse murmurs, raising his eyes to her. "Talk about getting no sleep."

"Hard work takes the time it takes, Sinclair," Daphne replies, mock-haughty and raising her eyes to his.

Immediately, he grins. "I wouldn't know, Baros."

Daphne just wrinkles her nose at him, just a little. Because she knows he's lying – that he pretends to be lazier than he is. Because how can he call himself lazy when he's clearly gotten up early to let his parents catch some sleep?

As Jesse smirks at her, Daphne just turns her head slightly to study this boy, who is constantly revealing himself to be more and more of a mystery.