

# **The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy**

## **#Chapter 51 - Read The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 51**

### Chapter 51

Luca's lips just barely, barely brush mine before I gasp and shove him away. "Luca!" I shout, stumbling backwards a few steps and staring up at him with wide eyes.

"Oh my god, Ari!" he shouts, digging his hands into his hair and turning from me in frustration, clenching his jaw. "What are you seriously!? What are we even here for if we're not going to —"

"Luca!" I shout again, stomping my foot and going completely rigid with my own

anger. "You are not being fair — you told me to come here tonight for a conversation, and then you try to —" I hesitate now, stumbling over my words in

my embarrassment, "what, make out with me!?"

Luca laughs an ironic little laugh and turns back at me, glaring. "Well, isn't that the point, Ari? What do you want from me? Why are you pulling me into a secret

dream if not to —"

"I don't know!" I half shout, half moan, my arms stiff at my side as I turn my head

up to the sky and press my eyes shut, overwhelmed and frustrated. "We just —"

we are not on the same terms here! And I don't want to do anything with you unless —"

And then [I halt my words, my cheeks blushing scarlet as I realize that I just admitted that I would want to kiss him if the terms are right.

When I tentatively open my eyes, I see that Luca picked up on it too. He's smirking a little

to discover that he wasn't wrong about this thing now, still frustrated but pleased

— I think that's between us. That it is not at all one-sided,

"Fine," he snaps, taking another step closer to me. "Let's have this conversation

then. Why won't you let me kiss you?"

I blink in shock at the bluntness of his words, but the way his smirk deepens

makes me realize that he did it on purpose that he's trying to unnerve me, probably because he's pissed.

I just narrow my eyes, pissed in turn that he's deliberately not playing fair. "Because, Luca," I reply, a bit through my teeth. "I don't know your motives for wanting to kiss me."

"Do I need motives?"

"A little!" I say, taking a step back as he takes one forward. Elsewhere in the dream, my wolf gives a few happy yips of excitement, but I just scowl at her, annoyed. "I mean, I don't want you to kiss me, Luca, if you're just trying to... figure out your sexuality or something! I am...I am a whole person..."

He stops when I say this, turning his head to study me, suddenly more curious than he was before.

I lift my chin, continuing. "And I don't want to be kissed as an experiment. I want to be..." I bite my lip now.

"Tell me," he says, his voice soft.

I take a deep breath, not really knowing even what I mean. "I want..." I say softly, speaking the words as my mind finds them, "you to kiss me...because you want to kiss me. Not just some...shrimp you find yourself weirdly attracted to."

"Ari," Luca murmurs, still looking at me curiously, his expression and his stance somehow softer now. "What makes you think that I felt otherwise?"

"Well, I don't know!" I burst out, throwing my hands to the side. "Are you — are you gay, Luca!? Do you like boys!?"

He laughs, shaking his head at me and slipping his hands into the pockets of his

sweatpants. "Haven't I already told you the answer to that, several dreams ago? I

didn't think I was attracted to guys, but then I met you, and everything got tossed up into the air —

"Well," I interrupt, staring at him, baffled. "Doesn't that...does that bother you?"

"No," he says instantly, narrowing his eyes at me a little. "Does it...bother you?"

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"No," I reply, but I turn my head at him, considering. "Wouldn't it like...affect

you,  
though?”

“What?”

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“I mean, you're a celebrity, Luca!” I gesture towards him like it's obvious. “I know

that we live in a pretty progressive country and time, but it will affect your status

in the world if people find out that you're at Alpha Academy making out with a little shrimpy boy.”

Luca laughs and strides forward, surprising me by taking my face in his hands again. “Ari,” he murmurs, “I don't care about any of that. All of that is outdated moral bullshit that should be tossed out the window. We get one life, and when

you meet someone that you have a connection with? A connection like this?”

He

shakes his head, staring into my eyes, suddenly looking so overwhelmed and baffled by the connection between us that it breaks my heart.

“Ari,” he murmurs, dropping a hand from my cheek and wrapping his arm tight around my waist, pulling me suddenly flush against him. “Who fucking cares?”

And I stare at him, searching for words, for some kind of response —

But then he moves, dipping his head low, pressing his lips to mine again, more

firmly this time like he means it.

And damn it, I break.

I'm out of protests, out of words, and I just...kiss him.

My bodily response to him is immediate, and visceral, and intense.

A tiny moan escapes me as my eyes flutter shut and arms wrap around his neck.

I lean my entire weight against him, not really intending to do it my body is moving beyond me now. His lip slants over mine, his tongue pressing into my mouth in a way that sends shivers streaking through my entire body.

Luca's mouth moves swiftly over mine, and every single second of it just sings to

me with how right it is. I pull my mate closer as his arms wrap tight around my waist, forcing me to bend my head back on my neck, to submit to him completely.

And I do — I let Luca claim me with his mouth, with his arms, with his body pressed against me. I kiss him right back, marvelling at the way that his soft lips can

press so hard against

mine, at how his tongue moving over my lower lip can make my breath come so

short. God it's insane, the sudden relief and solace that floods me, because it feels so incredibly right.

I realize, quite suddenly, that I waited far too long for this  
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that my soul has been aching for him,  
for the feel of his mouth against me,  
his body pressed close. I am hungry  
for Luca in a way that feels  
desperate, like an animal long denied

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water. And like I've suddenly found a  
pool after days alone in the desert, I  
throw myself into this with abandon.

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The fervor with which I kiss Luca suddenly intensifies, and I open my mouth to  
him completely. He takes full advantage of the situation, deepening the kiss,  
his

tongue

sweeping against mine, a hard shudder passing through him as one of my  
hands

wraps in the fabric of his sweatshirt and pulls him close

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But it's not enough, none of it's  
enough none of it is getting him as  
close as I need him to be. My other

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hand tangles in Luca's hair as he  
moves his lips from my mouth,  
dragging his tongue across my jaw  
and down my neck like he could  
devour me The content is on

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A groan escapes Luca as he stumbles forward a step, as lost in me as I am in  
him, and then the hand that was around my waist dips lower, sliding down

over

my ass to grip me high on the back of my thigh.

gasp, a shiver running through me, and I pull back for a moment as Luca's hand

moves — because no one has ever touched me there —

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But he holds my gaze and just

shakes his head, determined, before

he presses his mouth back to mine

and tightens his grip, pulling me up —

up into his arms, so that our faces

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are level, so that he's actually holding

me against him, my feet no longer on

the ground. The content is on

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chapter there!

I groan, wrapping my legs around his waist, knowing full well that I am in deep trouble here and not giving a damn.

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## Chapter 52

Luca's stumbles again as he holds me up with one arm below my ass, the other

still around my waist — but I don't care.

I don't care at all — don't care about anything except the taste of his mouth, the

feel of his lips pressing against mine again and again. I can only concentrate on

the way his tongue feels as he licks me, promising without words all the different

ways he wants to taste me, all the different parts of my body he wants to taste —

God, fuck, if we fall to the ground in this damn dream forest, I don't care

Might be better, honestly, so I could feel the weight of him on me, pressing me inexorably down, into the ground —

But Luca finds his footing, his grip on my thigh moving upwards to tighten at the

soft place right at the crease of my ass. He moans again, that hard shudder passing through him as I wrap his hair in my fist and tilt his head backwards an

an

inch, taking control of the kiss, pressing my tongue into his mouth this time. He shakes his head, panting against me, his eyes flicking open just for a second,

hazy with lust. And slowly, deliberately — not knowing at all what makes me do it —

I pull back just incrementally to lick the length of his lower lip, wanting to taste him there. The feel of the stubble on his chin against my tongue makes my eyes

flutter shut with want.

“God damn it, Ari,” Luca murmurs before sealing his mouth hard to mine, his hand drifting higher on my back, up my neck, his fingers brushing the hair at my

nape. I lose myself to him completely, to the feel of his body pressed tight to mine, to his heartbeat my own — pounding in his chest.

as vivid as

But suddenly his fingers move higher, burying themselves in my hair that is longer than it should be, for a boy —

And my cap, it falls sideways off my head —

All of my hair tumbles down a moment later, cascading around my shoulders.

Luca's eyes fly open as I gasp, pulling back just an inch

Chapter 52

But it's enough.

Enough, as his fingers run once through the length of my hair.

I freeze. Completely freeze like a panicked animal, staring at him.

Togs

I see every second of it as Luca's eyes go wide, taking in the rose—gold expanse

of my hair as it pools around my face.

“Ari...” he whispers, mystified.

And something about him saying my name — it breaks me out of my shock.

I shriek and shake my head, pressing my eyes shut —

Willing the dream to end.

I groan the moment I wake up, burying my face into my pillow and shrieking again unable to help it, but also desperately hoping that my deep-sleeping brother and cousin don't hear me.

Because I desperately, desperately can't let them know how completely I've fucked this up.

I roll onto my back when I feel capable of controlling myself, covering my face with my hands and staring up at the ceiling of my tiny, perfect nook, totally ashamed of my loss of control.

This

this could be the end of everything, couldn't it? All because I was so stupid and weak and couldn't resist kissing him couldn't keep myself from absolutely losing control with him, climbing him like a stupid little monkey just because he kissed me.

And god, what a kiss — I

“Ve kissed boys before, but not like that —

But even as I being to reminisce, I scold myself. Even if it was a shatteringly good, life- changing kiss this isn't precisely the time for kissing, is it!?

I have thing to do! I have goals!

Chapter 02

And even if I don't think that Luca would spill my secret, anything could happen

right now. He's probably waking up in his own room right now, completely freaked

out and baffled about what's going on, desperate to know more

I mean, he could storm into breakfast tomorrow and just absolutely blow my cover! And considering how moody he was this morning when he didn't even know if the dream state was real, imagine how he's going to react now!

I am miserable all night long, going over all the possible scenarios in my mind.

Whether or not Luca actually figured out I'm a girl when my hair fell down...

But, of course he did. Of course! He's not stupid, after all.

But also...did he? Did he think it was just dream magic? Or...

And, I mean, is he going to hate me for keeping even more important truths from

him? I can't blame him for that.

But how will he actually react to it?

What will he do?

But surely, surely he'll refuse to keep my secret any more with Rafe and Jesse,

wanting everything out in the open...but then!

Rafe!

Rafe thinks that Jackson is my singular mate! What the hell is he going to do when he figures out I'm making out with Luca in a dream state!?

I

groan again, sick of myself, sick of trying to balance all these secrets, sick of my

complete loss of control.

I'm completely miserable for the next several hours, which I spend in bed

loathing myself with my eyes pressed shut. But sleep does not find me, not an ounce of it. I don't know why — I'm completely exhausted, but somehow it just doesn't. Maybe because I'm terrified of entering the dream state again, of facing him —

Or that he won't be there, because he's too mad at me —

Or maybe I don't sleep because I've convinced myself that I don't deserve sleep,

because I put my enrollment in the Academy at risk because I was too weak to

resist a kiss.

As the night starts to turn towards dawn, I give up on the prospect of sleep all together and sit up, pulling my chemistry book closer. I light the little lamp on my

tiny bedside table and, ensuring that the curtains around my nook are tightly shut

so that my family can't see it, I lose myself in my studies for as long as I can.

I jump almost out of my skin a few hours later when Rafe pulls back

my

curtain.

"What are you doing?" he asks, frowning at me when he sees me slumped over

my chemistry text.

"Studying," I murmur, glancing up at him from where my face is pressed miserably to the page. I'm too close to read anything, but also too miserable and

exhausted to get up.

"Ari," Rafe snaps, scowling and coming forward, putting a hand under my chin and obliging me to sit up so that he can survey my face. "You look like shit did you get any sleep at all last night?"

Still wretched, I just shake my head.

He sighs, glaring at me a little before dropping my chin and stroking his palm once over the head, like a pet. "You have to sleep, Ariel. You're not going to make

it through this if don't rest. What, are you anxious about something?"

you

Not lying at all, I slowly nod

my head.

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« " .

About what?" he asks, sinking down



to sit on the edge of my bed and  
stare at me, worried. "Ari, you have  
nothing to worry about — you're the  
smartest girl I've ever met, smartest  
person, full stop! And Jesse and I —  
we're going to kick your ass at  
workouts so that you're ready when  
the Examination comes around!  
You're going to be fine!" The content  
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chapter there!  
I sigh, my eyes filling with  
tears at my sweet brother's pep talk,  
and I push my chemistry book away,  
crawling across the bed a few feet  
and pressing myself warm against  
his side, resting my head on his  
chest. Rafe sighs, wrapping his arms  
around me and rocking me back and  
forth just like mom does when we're  
sad. The content is on  
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chapter there!

"Don't get overwhelmed now, baby trouble," he murmurs, using my family's  
pet  
name for  
1. me. "We've got you."  
"Thank you. Rafe," I murmur, sniffing a little, gratitude overwhelming my worry  
for

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just a second. "You're the best."

"Don't thank me yet," he says, smirking at me as he tilts my head up so that I look into his face. "I'm in charge of your workout this afternoon, and I'm going to

make you suffer, little Shrimp."

I can't help the little smile that finds my lips, the tiny laugh that pulses through me. "Nooo, go nice on me, big brother," I sigh, putting my head back down.

"I'm tired."

"Coffee will patch you up," he says, patting me on the back and standing up abruptly so that I flop onto the bed in a heap. "Now get up! The day is not waiting

for lazy girls!"

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I sigh, watching him stride towards the bathroom and then shifting my eyes to Jesse as I see him start to stir in his bed, stretching his arms over his head in a yawn. His face bursts into a grin as Rafe pulls the bathroom door shut and his eyes focus on me. The content is on

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"Hey, tiny cousin," he says, wicked. "How'd you sleep? Any interesting dreams?"

But I just scowl at him and burrow under my blankets, not needing any of Jesse's nonsense today.

Because I have to prepare myself for breakfast.

And Luca's definitely, absolutely going to be at breakfast.

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## Chapter 53

Jesse is really nice to me for the rest of the morning, slinging his arm around my shoulders and cracking jokes all the way to breakfast. Even I can't help laughing,

even as a deep pool of dread forms in my stomach, because I have absolutely no

control over how Luca is going to react to any of this.

My mind keeps running through scenarios — is he going to storm in demanding

answers? Is he going to declare to the entire Hall that I'm a girl? Is he going to just pull me aside and-

“Hey,” Jesse says, using the arm around my shoulder to tug me incrementally closer. “Whatever it is, Ari? It can't be that bad.”

“What?” I ask, looking up at him as we walk, glancing at Rafe, who chats amiably

with Ben as they walk down the hall ahead of us.

“Whatever drama went down last night in your little dream state?” Jesse says, raising an eyebrow at me.

I

gape at him — how did he...!?

He just laughs at me, my face making the admission even if I don't confirm with

words.

“Seriously, Shrimpy, it can't be that bad. You're going to get through it! Don't worry so much.”

I sigh, hanging my head back and leaning against him, more relieved than I thought I'd be that he guessed and I have someone to talk to about it.

“I'm just...I have no idea how to handle this, Jess,” I murmur as we walk into the

Hall. “You're more experienced than me, how do you handle...” I glance again at

Rafe, lowering my voice, “romance drama?”

“Well, in my experience, you just gently dump them and move on the moment things start to get even remotely complicated,” Jesse says, his voice breezy.

I gasp and gape, looking up at him. “Jesse!” I scold, aghast.

“What!?” he says, grinning at me even as I shove him away. “I enjoy other people's romantic drama, not my own. Plus, I said gently —

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“I didn't know you were a heartbreaker,” I growl, glaring at him. “And also! This advice does not apply to me!”

“I know, you poor thing,” he murmurs, laughing at me a little. “None of my methods will suit you, you should probably just call your mom —”

“We don't even have phones, you idiot,” I groan, shoving him away from me further, disappointed that he is so nice to me but also so useless. My eyes

scan

the room, going first to our usual table and then into the room at large...

But Luca's not here yet. I let out a little huff of relief.

Jesse smiles at me, kind, and pulls out my chair for me before going to sit next to

Ben, deliberately leaving the seat next to me open. I glare at him, hoping he can

read the word "traitor" all over my face.

He grins back at me, devious, as he accepts the coffee pot from the approaching

waiter, murmuring his thanks.

I scowl as Jesse pours coffee in the cups all around the table. The waiter delivers

my plate of eggs and sausage and I do my best to lose myself in Rafe and Ben's

conversation about fighting techniques for smaller bodies, but I keep losing track

of it and instead just concentrate on drinking cup after cup of coffee, trying to wake the hell up.

"Better slow down on that, Shrimp," a voice says above me.

I jump, my eyes going wide as I turn my face up towards Luca, who smirks down

at me before sinking into the chair next to me.

"Save some for the rest of us," he says, lifting the now—empty coffee carafe with

a frown.

I just gape at him, my breath coming short as I wait to see what the hell is going

to happen

next.

"Hey, Luc!" Jesse calls from across the table, friendly. Ben and Rafe also smile at

him, saying their goodmornings as Luca snags a fresh muffin from the basket, tossing it in the air once

Chapter 53

before taking a bite.

"Morning, all," Luca murmurs, dead casual as he catches the eye of a waiter and

orders more coffee for the table. The waiter nods, walking briskly away as I just

continue to stare.

“So, Luca,” Jesse says, and my eyes whip to him as I hear the mischief in his voice. “Was your sleep any better last night? Any...bad dreams?”

+5

I glare at my cousin, murder in my eyes. If I were closer and it wouldn't absolutely

blow my cover, I'd wring his neck.

“Nah, I slept great,” Luca says, smiling warmly at Jesse and thanking the waiter,

who comes back with the coffee pot. “Completely dreamless for once, which is a

blessing. I feel amazing today.”

“Good,” Jesse says, his eyebrows going up in surprise.

I forget to draw breath as I just stare at Luca, aghast.

What...what the hell is he playing at?

Does he...really not remember what happened?

Or is he just playing it off!?

I'm still gaping at him when he turns to frown at me, looking me up and down.

“Seriously, Shrimp,” he says, completely casual. “You'd better eat, we have like,

fifteen minutes before class.”

Slowly I turn back to my eggs, pushing them around with my fork, completely, completely baffled as to how Luca is this calm and collected when I am a wreck.

My daze continues as Rafe walks me to my Marksmanship class, which begins

at roughly the same time as the Warriortrack training. He made us leave breakfast a few minutes early so that he has time to walk me, so I don't even have the opportunity to speak to Luca for a minute alone.

All the way to class, Rafe babbles on about some kind of sporty nonsense — fighting techniques, how to throw a javelin, who the hell knows and surprise about Luca's reaction.

as my mind just spins in shock

+5

I mean, yesterday, when he just suspected something was up, he was moody all

day and basically had a meltdown at breakfast. But today, when he finds out my

deepest secret, he's completely cool?

What the hell is going on?

And why is my mate so complicated — why didn't I get stuck with some nice simpleton —

“Hey,” Rafe says, grabbing my sleeve. “Stop — we're here.”  
I fall back a step, realizing I walked right past the classroom door.  
“Oh,” I say, my shoulders bunching in embarrassment. “I'm sorry.”  
“Are you all right?” he says, looking me over. “You had enough coffee at  
breakfast to fuel a rhinoceros  
you should be good. Is there anything I should be...worried about?”  
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No,” I sigh, looking up at him and  
shaking my head, doing my best to  
will some energy back into my body.  
' : “ .

Who's being moody now? “Seriously,  
Rafe, I just need to get more sleep

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tonight. I'm sorry — please don't  
” :

worry.” The content is on

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chapter there!

“All right,” he says, giving me a little smile and looking down the hall. “Good  
luck  
in there!”

“Thanks!” I call as he starts away from me, clearly eager to get to his own  
class.

And then, with a big sigh, I push all of the Luca drama out of my brain and  
step

into my Marksmanship classroom.

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« » .

Oh,” I say, the word popping out of  
my mouth without my intending to

> rn

say it. Because this it's huge, more  
like a gym, except long and narrow  
instead of a wide rectangle. The

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classroom

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« » .

Clark!" a loud voice says, not unfriendly, and my eyes move immediately to the man standing at the front of the room, the lines of his body locked into military precision. My eyebrows raise when I see that or .

it's the Captain. The content is on [! Read the latest chapter there!](#)

"Sir!" I say, hurrying across the room towards him. As I walk, my eyes flick to the two other students, both of whom I recognize from my Chemistry class yesterday.

"Good," he says, nodding me towards a spot next to the other two so that the three of us stand in a neat line. "Glad you're all here."

My eyebrows go higher, if that's possible, when I understand that he means that

this is our entire class. Rafe and Jesse — they're in huge classes, packed with cadets.

Mine have all been tiny.

The Captain smiles at me, just a little lift of his mouth. "Surprised?"

"Just didn't expect such individualized attention," I respond, honest.

"Yes, individualized is right," the Captain says, looking at the other two young men before his eyes settle on me. "Considering that I picked the three of you by hand."

And my breath suddenly catches as my eyes meet his because he looks at me

with such... assurance. Like he knows everything about me.

Can he, like Professor Alvez, have already guessed my secret?

Have we fooled ourselves into thinking that we could really keep it from the people who run this school!?

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## Chapter 54

But the Captain just smirks at me and turns his attention back to the group of us,

beginning his lecture.

“Espionage Track splits its chosen cadets further into specialties so that we can

have a

variety of agents trained for our nation’s particular needs. All of you will be trained

by Dr. Neumann so that you can each handle the chemical tools that you'll need

to perform your jobs on the battlefield, wherever that may be. Some of the cadets

in your track are spending their alternate days taking lessons with Ambassador—

track students, so that we can have agents trained to go into political situations.”

I dart my eyes towards the two young men standing next to me, wondering if they, too, are relieved to be spared those classes. I had enough political training

as a Princess — I have no real urge to further study how to handle myself in government negotiations.

No, I want to get to the good stuff.

“Other cadets,” the Captain continues, his voice snapping my eyes back to him,

“within Espionage track, are being trained in disciplines which are classified. Your

discipline is likewise classified, so I would urge you to be close-lipped with your

peers regarding what it is, precisely, that you learn in this class.”

My eyes go a little wide with excitement, because a classified discipline? This, I

think, is where it starts to get good.

“I chose the three of you,” the Captain says, folding his arms, “because of your

high marksmanship rankings combined with your excellent scores on the intelligence examination. And I get first pick of cadets, so you should see your position here as...elite.”

A little thrill of joy runs through me, because even if I was ninetieth through the door into the Academy? Clearly, the Captain wanted me here.

“Come,” he says, turning sharply and marching towards the back of the room.



The other two cadets and I follow immediately. I take a moment to glance up at them, noting the excitement on their faces as well. One of them, I'm surprised to see, is a blonde that I noticed on the first day of candidacy — tall and quiet with a jawline as sharp as a knife. The other is a dark-haired young man only a little taller than me, his face serious, perhaps a little taciturn. Though I've got no real reason to, I like them both immediately. But before I can consider them further, the Captain presses a button on the back wall. A metal partition begins to raise, tucking itself neatly against the ceiling above us like a garage door. And beyond it I gasp a little, unable to help it, at the incredible expanse of weapons that sit beyond it.

"You three," the Captain says, a distinct hint of pleasure in his voice, "are going to be trained as marksmen. Snipers, specifically, if we can get you there. But experts in long-range projectiles of a variety of classes. You will each find your specialty as the course progresses."

I'm practically vibrating with excitement as I survey the collection of rifles, bows, crossbows, and even shoulder-mounted missile launchers that range before me, each of them top of the line and state-of-the-art. I mean, I'm not a gun nut or anything, but even I have to admit that this is insanely cool.

"May I ask a question?" the blonde next to me asks, drawing my eyes to him now.

"You're encouraged to, Cadet Baumann" the Captain says, nodding to him.

"We can be more casual here than we are elsewhere — I expect a distinct camaraderie to build within this group, presuming that you can indeed make it through the Examination."

The blonde nods. "Is this...everything? All the weaponry at our disposal?" I smirk, because he sounds a little disappointed.

The Captain laughs a little, clearly feeling as I do. "It is not," he says, shaking his head. "There is a great deal more — this is simply what has been made available as preliminary weaponry for the course. Is there something in particular that

you'd like to see?"

"At home," he says, folding his arms over his chest, "I trained a little in drone strike technology. I would be...interested to continue those studies."

"We'll see what we can do," the Captain replies, his eyebrows raised, "provided

you prove adequate with this," he nods now towards the weapons behind him. weapons and

The cadet nods and the Captain moves on, going through each of the explaining

what it is, how it's going to be used. And then he hands each of us a bow, explaining that we'll be moving from oldest to newest technologies, hoping to master each

over the course of the next few months and, in doing so, revealing where our particular aptitudes lay.

I'm grinning with excitement by the time that the Captain hands me my bow, offering a quiver of arrows that I sling over my shoulder.

"Do any of you have experience with archery?" The Captain asks.

"I do!" I quip, cheerful, but I grimace a little when I realize that I'm the only one who spoke. The other two glare at me a little, perhaps resenting my leg-up.

The

marksmanship test we took as candidates, after all, only measured our expertise

with guns.

"Um," I say, retracting my excitement just a bit. "Just...some target practice at summer camp," I lie. Because I have that, but also a few years of private tutoring.

Jesse and Rafe got hand-to-hand combat lessons which dad decided were too

rough for me, so mom? She hired a world-class archer to teach me this more "delicate" sport.

The Captain smirks at me, clearly seeing through my lie, but he gestures towards

the range of targets at the far end of the room. Humans, I know, would struggle to

make out the details that far down the room, but our wolf eyesight has no trouble

making out the bullseye at the center of each.

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The three of us line up at the red line painted across the floor, paying close attention to the Captain as he gives

us all a brief introduction to the bow and basic instructions on how to fire : : o )

it. I listen closely even if I don't need it, wanting to soak up every bit of instruction available to me. The content is on ! Read the latest chapter there!

Because I am quite determined to do well in this course, and I suspect that it

— like our Chemistry exam — has cuts at the end of term. Cuts which I'm going to do

everything in my power to avoid.

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We start shooting as the Captain stands aside as watches us from behind. My muscles sigh happily as I step into the familiar stance and draw the bow. The string pulls back easily on the unfamiliar compound weapon I trained on recurve, which requires more strength. But I take aim and let my first arrow fly, following it up with three more as I get used to the feel of the weapon.

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All four of my shots hit the target, though none of them come close to the bullseye. I'm frowning, disappointed, until I glance over at the other targets and

see that...none of the

other two made any of their shots.

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Retrieve,” the Captain orders, calm, and I sling my bow over my shoulder before starting the long trek to the target, even though there are morePlease bookmark site to read lastest content. If you want to read please visit to read fastest content.

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arrows already in my quiver. Still, it's nice to have a clean target as well as an opportunity to talk to my fellow cadets. The content is on

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"I'm Ari," I whisper as the three of us walk side-by-side.

"I'm jealous," the small dark-haired cadet says, shooting me a little glare, though

I can tell by the way that his lips curl up that there's not an ounce of malice behind his words. "Tell the truth — did you grow up doing this?"

Chapter 55

I shrug a little, letting him see through my summer camp lie. He just laughs, shaking his head as we draw close to our targets.

"Bullshit, if you ask me," the tall blonde says, sighing as he gathers his arrows off

the floor and I pull mine from the target's body. "We're forced to embarrass ourselves on the first day just because we haven't trained in an antiquated form

of weaponry? I mean honestly, who even uses archery anymore on the battlefield?"

"I don't know," I say, popping my arrows into my quiver as we turn around and start back. "I see the logic in being able to handle all weapons."

The blonde shrugs, conceding the point but clearly expressing that he's still not

happy with it. "I'm David, by the way," he murmurs.

"And I'm Hai," the other says, nodding to both of us.

I smile at them, but we're all lost in our thoughts about how to improve as we make our way back to the line.

"Again," says the Captain, nodding. We all get into our stances and raise arrows

to bowstrings, ready to fire.

The Captain has us going for hours, until my arms ache from drawing my bow. As

we fire round after round, he works with each of us, giving more basic pointers to

the other two and working with me to refine my shot. By the end, I hit the bullseye

with consistency, and I can't keep the smile from my face.

At the end of our four-hour class, the Captain tells us to return our bows, his face

blank. We do as he says as he gives us instructions for how and when to practice, letting us know that this gym will be available to us twenty—four hours a

day and suggesting that we make use of it. My smile deepens at the prospect — I

like marksmanship, always have. The idea of having this be my homework, when

I get sick of Chemistry?

God, does that sound like a relief.

As we finish hanging our bows the Captain tells us we're dismissed and we troop

for the

Chapter 55

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door, me going last as I stack my arrows neatly in the quiver, probably being more picky than I need to be.

As I turn towards the door, I'm surprised to hear the Captain's voice call to me lightly.

"I've got quite literal money on you this year, Clark," he says, leaning against the

wall and giving me a little smirk. "Don't make me regret it. I don't like to lose."

"Really?" I ask, turning to him with wide eyes.

"Surprised?" he asks, quirking an eyebrow.

"By the fact that you've bet on me, or by the fact that the professors actively gamble on the success of their students?" The words fall from my lips before I have time to consider them, but to my relief the Captain just laughs, pleased.

"Not with the other professors," he says quietly. "With some old friends who have

a stake in the Academy itself. Though I do admit," he says, cocking his head a little, "I was surprised when your Uncle Roger didn't take the opportunity to bet on his own nephew. Didn't comment at all when he saw your name on the list of

Marksman cadets."

I do my very best to keep all emotion off my face as the Captain studies me, and

I wonder again how much he knows.

The result is that I awkwardly stand stock still in front of him, saying nothing for

far too long. The Captain just grins, shaking his head and laughing as he lifts his

chin towards the door. "Get out of here, Cadet. Good work today — keep it up.

Don't embarrass me."

I nod, eager, and head out.

Because even if the Captain knows my secret, or is starting to suspect? He's clearly not pushing me to reveal anything.

I hurry out of the classroom and down the hall. I have an empty afternoon next,

so that I can study for our Chemistry class tomorrow, and I'm on strict orders to

head directly back to the rooms with no pit stops. Rafe, predictably, flipped out about the idea that I'd be walking through the castle by myself, but even Jesse had taken my side and told him he was going a bit overboard with the protective stuff.

I'm a cadet, after all. If I can't even survive walking from the classroom to the dorm, what chance do I have on the battlefield?

I consider that, a little, as I head for the brass elevator at the end of the hall, climbing in and pressing the button for the dormitory floor. Because today, in Marksmanship, I considered for the first time — perhaps naively that we really are

being trained for combat.

I don't know why I hadn't really thought about it before — perhaps I'm just naive

but...I don't know. Something about running obstacle courses and getting class

schedules and learning the chemical makeup of poisons had made it seem... theoretical. Part of a game, and a class, rather than preparation for the real world.

But today, shooting real weapons?

I don't know — something about it made me really realize that...I'm being trained

as a weapon myself. And that I'm going to be asked to kill people.

Especially if I become a sniper, as the school clearly hopes I will be. Am I prepared for this? For the reality of looking down a scope at a human being, and

pulling the trigger?

A shiver runs through me as I consider it, and honestly I don't know what the answer is to that question. I gnaw on my lower lip, troubled by it, as I cross the hall and head up the winding stairs to our top floor, still completely distracted as I

work the key in our door and push into our room.

The only thing that breaks me out of my reverie is the...silence.

I look up and around the room suddenly, and realize that actually for the first time

in weeks I am...completely alone. Like completely alone not just in absence of my brother and my cousin, but by myself.

And a grin takes my face, even despite my troubled thoughts.

I push the door shut and lean back against it, heaving a long sigh. I'll talk to Rafe

later, I decide, about my bigger questions of what it means to be part of a military

organization at

war.

Because right now, for a few minutes? I am going to just be alone.

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I immediately indulge, whipping my hat from my head and then stripping my shirt off, dropping it onto the floor before working at the clasp of my pants, stepping out of them as I walk towards the couch in my stupid boys underwear and the chest—flattening sports bra Daphne made me, my hands already unbraiding my hair so that I can run my fingers luxuriously against my scalp. The content is on

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chapter there!

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I sigh, collapsing onto the couch, my mind flashing — just a second hands felt in my hair, however briefly they touched it. But then I scowl at myself,

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and sigh, — to the way that Luca's and will my mind to turn elsewhere, desperate to think of something else.

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Because Luca — he's being so weird. I mean, at least he didn't blow my secret at

breakfast, but what the hell is he doing, pretending it never happened?

I mean, is it possible? That he...actually forgets? We forget dreams all the time, but the dream state...it's different, right? I, for one, remember everything. But it was my dream — Alphas, they're just the guest stars. Could he really have forgotten...

I groan, and shake my head, realizing that I'll never know.  
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But that tonight, it's my turn to corner him and make demands of my own. I absolutely need to know what he

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knows, and what he's got planned if, indeed, he has figured out the secretPlease bookmark site to read latest content. If you want to read please visit to read fastest content.

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that I'm a girl. The content is on

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And not just a girl — the nation's Princess, and his mate.

Chapter 56

I lounge for a good ten minutes in perfect comfort, letting my mind turn where it

will, brushing my fingers through my hair and wishing for a proper brush instead

of the scanty little combs that the Academy provides to its boys, who apparently

have no real need for hair care.

I'm passively wondering if there's some way to requisition'a proper brush when

suddenly the little bell on the dumbwaiter rings. Eager, a little excited, I jump up

and scurry over to it, delighted when I open the door to find a little plated lunch waiting for me — just a sandwich and a glass of apple juice, but still.

I mean, it's not a power bar, right?

I whisper my thank-you to the dumbwaiter, which I realize is stupid even as I do

it, pressing the door shut with my shoulder as I carry my food over to my nook.

There, I climb into bed with it, digging into my sandwich as I simultaneously open



my Chemistry book, getting started where I left off this morning. The material is fascinating to me, thank goodness. I mean, I've studied chemistry before, but as I work my way through our assigned chapters I realize that this text has been specifically designed for precisely the kind of chemical study that an assassin might need. I frown for a moment but am ultimately unsurprised when I flip to the front of the book, looking for the author's name. I find it, immediately under the title. Dr. Francis Neumann. I laugh, shaking my head — of course he wrote it, just for us. The next few hours pass easily as I sink into the text, eagerly consuming the information and taking notes that I hope will be useful for review tomorrow morning. As I read I rebraid my hair on my head, gathering my discarded clothes and putting them back on after a trip to the bathroom to take a hasty shower and get cleaned up. Because as much as I'm enjoying my alone time, I am aware that my brother and my cousin are going to come back eventually, probably with Ben and Luca in tow. And even though I suspect that all of the boys know my secret now... Well, it's not going to be good to get caught in my underwear, is it? So towards the end of my study hall I pull my cap back onto my head and tuck myself beneath by blankets fully dressed, wanting to be cozy and warm while I have the chance, as Rafe's probably going to make me go work out in some cold gym. The plan backfires, unfortunately, and I get a little too cozy. So cozy that my eyes start to drift shut bit by bit, my exhaustion from yesterday catching up with my sleepiness night, which combines with the fascinating but difficult information in the book. Eventually I stop fighting it, letting my eyes close and my head drift back onto my pillow, promising myself...just a moment to rest my eyes... Aaaand I fall in to a deep, consuming, dreamless snooze that lasts way, way longer than five minutes. The next thing I know, something is gently drawing a line down my cheek...

I breathe in a deep breath, my eyelids slowly lifting, and I turn towards whatever is touching me, confused. My eyes focus, a little, on a hand that pulls away from me, tucking itself into the pocket of a pair of black pants. "Time to get up, Shrimp," the voice says, and my eyes widen. "You were really out." I stare, and then startle, and then sit up dead straight to stare up into Luca's face, my mouth slightly open. What what the hell is Luca doing here during my study break!? Why But then I glance past him, seeing that the room is bizarrely full. Rafe and Jesse, sitting on their armchairs, talking easily about their workouts that day. Ben sitting on the floor, cushions spread out around him, leaning back on his hands, laughing at something Jesse said... What...what the... "It's almost dinner time." Luca says, laughing a little. "Seriously, that was one hell of a nap." "Luca," I whisper, looking up at him, my eyes suddenly full of pleading. Because I want nothing more than to know that it's okay between us that he forgives me for the secrets I had to keep from him. But Luca — either he doesn't notice the question in my eyes or he ignores it. Because he just shrugs and turns back to the room. "Come on," he calls back to me, heading for his corner of the couch. "Let's eat." I just stare as I watch him — because this was our moment. No one was going to notice if we had a private chat for a few seconds — But Luca, he walked away like...like he doesn't want to have that chat. Or doesn't know we need it? I groan a tiny little groan, putting my face in my hands for a second, trying to deal with my frustration even as I simultaneously try to wake up. "Are you okay, Ari?" Rafe says as Luca falls gracefully onto the sofa, grabbing a

book out of his bag as he stretches out his legs, taking up nearly the entire length. “We had a consultation about whether or not to wake you a fairly loud consultation — and when you slept through it Jesse persuaded me to let you out

of workout tonight and let you rest.”

“You’re a prince, Jesse,” I call to him, my words muffled against my palms.

“Duke,” he corrects, standing and heading for the dumbwaiter when the bell sounds again.

Seriously? How can it be time for dinner, when I just ate...

But when my stomach grumbles, I realize that I must have slept much, much more than I thought.

I get up, stretching myself before heading to my corner of the couch, but when I

get there... Luca doesn’t move his feet.

“Luca,” I say, swatting the toe of his boot with my hand. “One, boots off the furniture.”

He smirks, but doesn’t look up at me.

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“And two,” I continue, putting my hands on my hips. “Move! You’re in my spot.”

“Sorry, Shrimp,” he murmurs, turning his page, his eyes fastened to his text.

“You’ll have to find a new space we’re having a studious dinner tonight, and I need to lounge while I study. Otherwise the info doesn’t stick.” He taps his temple

with his finger, letting me see precisely where he wants the info to go.

My jaw drops. “Luca!” I say, swatting him again. “This is my room! My furniture!”

“And you,” he says, looking up at me now with a little smirk on his lips, “have an

entire nook to yourself, complete with bed and desk! I would suggest you make

use of your surplus of study spots and leave me to the paltry couch!”

I just stare at him, realizing, quite suddenly that...

That Luca is icing me out.

That he doesn’t give a shit about studying that he’s actively refusing to talk to me.

As Luca sees me put the pieces together, his smirk grows.

Oh my god, I say internally, glaring at him. You are so god damn petty.

He grins, shaking his head almost like he understood my words through my expression, dropping his head again to his book.

Punishment! I can almost hear him saying, every smug line in his body

confirming it. You're withholding secrets from me for weeks? Time for a taste of your own medicine.

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I scoff, bitter, but storm away, climbing back into my bed and pulling my chemistry book into my lap, so angry that I could spit. I mean, seriously? He wants to play games now!? The content is on

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Fine. Fine. If Luca wants to be petty, then two can play at this game. I seethe, attempting to concentrate on my textbook, blocking out all sound and distraction from the outside world. I scribble furiously in my notebook, not truly processing the information, but not caring because

i s

I'm so livid at my stupid mate that I 'y

can't even The content is on

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A plate appears in front of me, wrapped knife and fork perched neatly on its side.

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Chapter 56

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Oh," I say, and then I laugh at myself for being surprised. I mean, obviously

I knew dinner was coming, I heard the dumbwaiter and saw Jesse get

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up to receive it. "Thanks," I murmur, lifting my eyes to show my gratitude to whoever... The content is on

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But I freeze immediately, completely shocked to see my mate holding the plate out to me.

But not Luca.

The other one.

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Chapter 57

"Sorry," Jackson says, frowning a little at me as he continues to hold the plate out, his own dinner plate in his hand. "You...said to come for dinner. Should I...

not have come?"

"N-no," I stammer, taking the plate from him and shaking my head. "Of course, Jackson. Forgive me...I just... lost track of time."

He shrugs, the corner of his lip turning up. "Happens to the best of us. So..." he

says, straightening up and holding his plate with two hands, glancing over his shoulder at the packed room. "Where should we..."

I look with him, a little surprised to see all four of the usually chatty boys eating

quietly, bent over their own textbooks. And then I scowl, realizing that there's absolutely no room for Jackson and I to comfortably sit.

"Best plan," Luca offers, glancing up towards us, "is probably just to settle yourself into the Shrimp Nook. Plenty of room in there."

Rafe snaps his head up, scowling at Luca, and I clench my own teeth.

Because Luca — he doesn't know just how far he's pushing his "I don't care" attitude. He's trying to embarrass me, but if he knew precisely who he was inviting to sit in my bed with me? He'd flip out.

Luca just smirks, unable to hide it as he focuses on his book.

Jackson turns to me, raising an eyebrow.

But I just sigh and gesture at the other half of my bed, inviting Jackson to take a

seat.

As he does, my wolf yips with happiness, pouncing excitedly in my soul. Close the curtain!, she urges, nearly delirious at the smell of Jackson so close in our personal space, see if you can get him to take off his shirt!

I grown inwardly, trying to shove her away, but she just ignores me, continuing to spin.

Rafe clears his throat and my eyes dart immediately to him as he glares at me.

But I just

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sigh, and shrug, and look meaningfully at the curtain, which is wide open.

His glare intensifies but I roll my eyes. Because honestly, even if Jackson is my

mate and is technically on my bed, what the hell does Rafe think is going to happen with the curtain open and an audience of four spread directly in front of

us?

Lots can happen! My wolf unhelpfully provides. Just, see if you can get Jackson

to slip under the covers with us...

“So,” Jackson says, turning towards me as he unrolls his fork and knife from his

napkin and settles his plate on his knee. “Where do we... start?”

I stare at him for a long moment, completely blank as he twines egg noodles onto

his fork before stabbing a meatball, lifting both to his mouth. I can't help it when

my eyes drift to the way his biceps swell, even the muscles of his forearm defined as he moves...

It's only when he starts chewing and frowns at my elongated silence before I that

out of my reverie —

God, why is he so gorgeous even when he's just eating?

I force myself to concentrate, to remember what he's here for. “Oh, um,” I say, suddenly turning towards my bedside table and looking for the marble.

Jackson's

hand snaps out, catching the edge of my plate before it falls from my lap.

“Careful,” he murmurs.

“Thanks,” I reply, stretching behind me and grabbing the marble, setting it between us when I sit back up straight.

“Alvez said...an hour,” Jackson murmurs, looking down at the marble. “Are you

comfortable?”

I sigh, looking at the scattered remains of my bed, and my pillows, and my

chemistry book, and my dinner. And then I get to work, shoving a forkful of food into my mouth before straightening pillows, closing my books, and pulling myself on top of my blankets.

I take another bite of my dinner before putting the plate on my bedside table and finally placing the marble on top of my chemistry book, which I've placed before us.

When I turn to Jackson, swallowing my food, I'm shocked to find a little grin on his mouth.

"What?" I ask, confused.

"You're just...funny," he murmurs, dropping his eyes a little bit. I frown, staring at the strong lines of his profile — his straight nose, his square jaw, the shaggy brown hair that he's tucked behind his ear. I blink only when he clears his throat,

raising his eyes to the marble. "Ready?" he asks.

I, too, shift so that I can focus on the marble, though I admit that my gaze drifts

up to where Rafe is scowling in his chair and Luca looks completely unperturbed,

reading his text like it's the most fascinating thing that's ever presented itself, ignoring me completely.

"Ready," I say, holding out my hand to Jackson. When he doesn't take it, I turn to him, surprised — because...I mean, Alvez said we had to have body contact to do this...

Jackson lifts his eyes from my hand to meet my gaze. "I mean," he says, soft enough to not be overheard, "what if the...thing happens."

I blush, suddenly, to hear him address the connection between us. Because even

though I know we're both aware of it, this is the first time either of us has acknowledged it.

I stare at him for a second and then shrug. "Maybe it will help," I whisper back, dropping my hand to the blanket between us but still keeping it palm up. "I mean,

isn't that what Alvez was saying? That magic calls to magic? Maybe that... thing...is just our magic trying to talk to each other."

Jackson keeps his eyes on mine, though his narrow a bit. Then he glances,

just

for half a second at everyone else in the room. "But why," he says, frustration on

the edge of his voice, "does your magic call to mine? Or vice versa? Or... whatever..."

And guilt floods me then, because I know the answer to that question.

And I'm deliberately keeping it from him.

My wolf howls inside me, begging me to just tell him, to let him smell my scent, to

let him

know it.

But I just...I just can't. There's still way too much at stake.

"I don't know, Jackson," I whisper, and the frustration with which he sighs lets me

know that he's well aware that I'm lying. He doesn't know what, but he knows I'm

keeping something from him. He turns his eyes away from me, focusing on the

marble.

"Fine, whatever," he murmurs, "Let's just...do this."

"Jackson," I say again, pleading in my voice. But before I can say more,

Jackson

just reaches out his hand and grabs mine, our palms pressing flat together, his

fingers folding around mine in a way that just...hums, filling me with warm vibrations.

I have to catch my breath at the swell of warmth that floods my body as the magic again pulses between us, as it always does when my hands touch him.

My eyes instantly dart to the room as Rafe and Jesse look up — not towards me,

me, towards us, but past them whatever force Jackson and I created brushed by

them like a ghost, dragging its fingers across their skin.

as if

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Jackson's hand tightens and I look

up at him to see that his face is

tense. He shakes his head at me,

confused and angry about it. But I

just sigh, and tighten my fingers too,



and turn my attention back to the marble. The content is on ! Read the latest chapter there!

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« » . :

Come on," I say, feeling guilty and overwhelmed, still buzzing with the warmth of him flooding through me.

« ) . "

Let's try to...float this damn marble. Please bookmark site to read latest content. If you want to read please visit to read fastest content.

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"Whatever you say," he replies, his shoulders slumping as he rests his chin in his

other palm, likewise staring at the little ball of glass.

Half an hour passes.

Nothing happens.

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I still feel the heat passing between us, just in the same way that it did

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when I held Tony's hand in class.

There is something about our magic that calls to each other, I can

definitely feel it, but as for

manifesting anything? For making

anything happen at all? The content

is on ! Read the latest

chapter there!

Zip.

"Are you trying?" I whisper, spinning my head to him.

"Trying to what?" he replies, his voice equally soft, glaring at me a little.

"To lift it!"

"Well how the hell am I supposed to do that!" he says, frowning at me, lifting his

face from his hand.

"I don't know!" I reply in a rush, exasperated. "I'm trying!"

"Trying to do what?"

“To lift the marble into the air!”

“With like, your mind?” he asks, shaking his head at me. “Clark, that’s a waste of time.”

I stare at my mate, shocked. Is he finally showing his true colors to me? Is this the side of him that Luca sees?

Was I just so blinded by his handsome face that I didn’t see it before?

Chapter 58

“It's not a waste of time,” I counter, glaring at Jackson. “It's the assignment.”

“The assignment was to get the marble to do something. If your powers aren't telekinesis, why would you try to lift it?”

I stare at him, confused. “Well, how do you know my powers aren't telekinesis?”

He smirks a little. “Because if they were, you'd probably have lifted the marble by now.”

I blink at him, half baffled by his logic and half...well, half persuaded. I turn back

to the marble, which hasn't moved an inch.

“Maybe you're right,” I murmur. “Tony wasn't able to move the marble because

his magic has nothing to do with lifting marbles.”

“Alvez is just spinning his wheels, having us all take shots in the dark, hoping we

turn something up. Next week he'll have us trying to do something else.”

“Well, that sucks,” I sigh, slumping a little. “I really wanted to make it float.”

There's a long silence between us as I scowl at the marble, my hand pressed to

his, wondering what the hell 'm supposed to do next.

“Wait, really?” Jackson softly asks.

I turn to him, confused.

He stares at me, and despite any efforts to concentrate on the assignment I find

myself again a little lost in the dark blue of his eyes. Such a rare color — I lean a

little closer, trying to see the details of it.

“You want to float the marble?” Jackson says softly, his hand tightening just incrementally around mine. “That's what you'd pick, of all the possible magical gifts you could have?”

I turn my head to the side, considering it. “Well, I mean, it wouldn't be a bad one...” I murmur, and then I smile softly. “But you're right. I guess that I don't

want to float the

We

Chapter 50

marble.”

He smiles too. “Well then. Mission successfully completed,” Jackson says, turning back to the marble. “A+ on this one, candidate Clark, if that's the new goal.”

I laugh a little, still studying his face. “What would you pick?” I ask.

He shrugs a little. “Don’t know,” he murmurs, “Never thought about it. You?”

I bite my lip, because I mean...I have thought about it. We've known about our potential gifts since we were teens. I'd bet that Rafe and Jesse have also spent a

couple of idle hours wondering what they will be.

“I think I'd want something useful,” I sigh, and he turns his face back to me, interested. “I mean...well, I'm not really supposed to tell you this,” I say, grimacing a little and deciding to do it anyway, especially as my wolf prods me with her nose, urging me to trust my mate. “But my aunt Ella — she can heal people. Like really heal them — that's her magic. She accesses her gift and their

wounds just knit together.” I snap, emphasizing my point.

“That's amazing,” Jackson says, his eyebrows going up. “So, that's what you'd pick?”

I sigh and he grins at me.

“Well, I should pick that,” I say, tilting my head and looking at him with a little bit

of guilt. “It could help so many people. But...I mean, if I'm really telling the truth?

I'd want something cool. Like flying. Or talking to animals.”

Jackson laughs openly at this, and from the corner of my eye I see Luca turn his

head towards us, frowning.

“You want to talk to animals?” Jackson repeats, shaking his head like he clearly

does not see why that is as cool as I think it is.

“It would be awesome!” I insist, squeezing his hand, willing him to believe me.

“Like, even beyond just having chats with your pets, you could persuade an army

of bees to attack people! Or, during a famine, you could persuade all the fish into

the sea to jump into a net

“That's cruel,” Jackson says, shaking his head at me, “you can't use your

powers  
to convince  
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## Chapter 58

an animal to sacrifice itself.”

My mouth twists a little. “You're right. I would only use my powers for good.” Jackson smirks at me before peering around the edge of the curtain, looking for

the window. “So, do you want to go outside? Try to...talk to a bird or something?”

I laugh now and Jackson turns back to me, surprise and delight suddenly on his

face. And my smile deepens as I study him, because I've just realized that...he probably doesn't make people laugh very often, does he?

And he quite distinctly enjoyed the experience.

“No,” I say, still smiling at him. “Let's just...save that for another time. Maybe we

can try to... explode the marble a little bit. See if one of us is a blower-upper?”

“Be my guest,” Jackson says, gesturing towards the marble.

“Hey,” Luca calls from the couch, drawing both of our gaze to him. “How much longer is this little homework session going to last? Getting a little...loud. Over there.”

Jesse, his eyes still on his book, smirks at Luca's clear jealousy.

“Fifteen more minutes,” Jackson calls back. Luca narrows his eyes but turns back to his homework.

“I mean,” Jackson murmurs, leaning close to whisper in my ear, “if you want to refocus the exploding attempt on a new target, the couch would also be... fine...”

I burst out laughing at this, slapping a hand over my mouth to muffle the sound

so Luca doesn't know how hard Jackson has made me laugh, but also because I

remember what Ben said about me laughing like a girl.

When I look back at Jackson, I see he's doing his best to suppress a smile.

“All right,” I say, straightening my shoulders and focusing again on the marble.

“Let's try again.”

We spend about ten minutes sitting in silence then, with me focusing hard, Jackson's hand

3/6

## Chapter 58

tight in my own. As we go, heat wells in my body, building and building. I'm

fascinated by it, especially by the comparison with Tony's magic, which cooled me down.

But no matter what I do...nothing happens to the marble.

I'm trying a new tactic — attempting to transform the marble into something else,

rather than move or destroy it — when Jackson startles me a little by speaking again.

“Hey, is she...is she okay?” Jackson whispers.

I almost let go of his hand, spinning my head towards him.

“What?” My word is nothing more than a puff of breath.

“My mate,” he says, studying my eyes seriously.

I just stare at him.

and I

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“ »

Please,” Jackson says, all earnest

«

honesty. “I know we got off to a bad,

weird start really am sorry for that.

But I know you remember that first

night, out by the pool. My mate —

,

she's around somewhere, I keep

catching whiffs of her all over this

ce

castle and campus. But I can't figure

5 ) 5

out for the life of me what's going on.

"oa

But,” his brows draw together now as

“

he frowns at me, “I know you know

something, Clark. I know this is

n

somehow connected to you.” The

content is on ! Read

the latest chapter there!

I begin to lean away, a little afraid, and he clicks his tongue, sighing and

leaning

closer to me, keeping our intimate distance the same.

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« » wp

Please," he murmurs, "I'm sorry — I

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don't — I'm not very aware of like,

SR H ps +

when I'm being intimidating or

): "

whatever. I'm not trying to..." he

hesitates, at a loss for words, and I

exhale an unsteady breath, sitting

back up straight. The content is on

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chapter there!

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I am not trying to...do anything,

" . :

Clark," Jackson says, still peering at

ee wr

me, almost unblinking. "It's just...god,

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she's my mate!" His voice cracks a

- . " 7

little, breaking my heart. "You don't

» 5 5

have to tell me anything," he insists,

o : " <

shaking his head. "But...if you know

: s . "

something..... just...is she okay?

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"Jackson," I sigh, my wolf nipping at me, her whole body pressed against my

heart, urging me to tell him everything, to let him off the hook he's clearly

hanging

from by the tips of

4/6

his fingers. "Jackson, she's fine, all right?"

He exhales a huge breath then, staring at me in both disbelief and relief at once.

“She’s okay,” I insist, nodding earnestly to him. “Just...that’s all I can say, all right? There’s... reasons for it. But I promise you that she’s fine, that you don’t have to worry about her.”

“Well of course I’m going to worry about her,” he snaps, his brows knitting together again.

And despite myself I laugh, just a little bit. “But you don’t need to. She’s cared for

— I promise. In good hands.”

Jackson takes a deep breath, and as he exhales it he tilts his head back and closes his eyes, a whole well of tension I didn’t realize he was holding leaving his

muscles in a rush.

And as the tension goes, I am suddenly flooded with warmth. So much so that I

gasp aloud, and drop his hand, and almost yelp a little bit, skittering away from

him across the bed.

“What?” he gasps, snapping his face back to me. “What, Clark!?”

But I just stare at him, shocked, the warmth still rushing through me, though it’s

starting to fade now.

“Whoa,” a voice says from the room beyond my nook, and both Jackson and I turn our heads to see Jesse staring at my bed.

My eyes move immediately to the marble on my chemistry book and I gasp again.

“Hooooooly shit,” Jackson murmurs, leaning forward to stare.

Because the marble it melted. Completely melted into a little puddle of glass that

is now again hardening against the ruined cover of my textbook.

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## Chapter 59

“Well,” Jackson whispers, half to himself, “I guess we don’t need to go outside anymore to try to talk to any birds.”

“Not unless we want them to melt,” I say, grabbing my knife off of my dinner plate

and leaning forward to prod at the glass.

There's a tiny moment of silence before Jackson bursts out laughing, but before I

figure out what's so funny, the four other boys in the room come to stand at the

edge of my bed, staring down at the glassy puddle that was a marble a few seconds ago.

"What the...fuck is going on here?" Ben asks, looking between the marble and me and Jackson. "What kind of weird—ass homework is this?"

"Seriously," Luca says, crossing his arms and frowning. "You guys just hold hands for an hour and then..." he shakes his head, baffled, "I mean, I don't even

have an ending to that sentence. What is going on here?"

"None of your business," Jackson says, gruff again as he starts to get up from the

bed. I snap my head to him, realizing that while he's fine with me, he is not okay

talking about this with the four other young men in the room. "I think that successfully concludes the homework, Clark. See you in class tomorrow."

"Wait," I say, leaning towards him, wanting to talk to him about this more — to figure out what the hell just happened. "Jackson, stay —

"It's late!" he calls, standing to his full height and striding for the door. "I've got Warrior track homework too, need to finish it up before morning."

"Jackson!" I call again, a little angry now. Rafe grabs for my arm as I push myself

up out of the bed, but I just glare at him, moving away and chasing Jackson out

the door.

Jackson's already halfway down the hall on his long legs by the time I pull the door shut behind me, wanting a little privacy. He pauses, though, and turns when

he hears me shout his name again as I run down the hall towards him.

"I'm not going to tell them!" I say, gesturing down the hall towards the room.

"Ben

and

Chapter 59

Luca? I'm not going to tell them anything — I would never —

"Tell them whatever you want, Clark," Jackson says with a shrug, "it's your magic."

+5

"Alvez said to keep it between us — maybe it was a mistake to even try to do



the

homework with them in the room..." my words fade off as I frown at Jackson, taking in the meaning of his words. "Wait," I say softly. "What do you mean it's my magic?"

Jackson scowls, looking down the hallway at the stairs, clearly aggravated with himself and wanting to get away.

"Tell me!" I insist, the word squeezing between my teeth as I reach out a hand and smack him on the chest.

But, perhaps unluckily, that little pulse pounds between us when I do.

"Tell you?" Jackson snaps, knocking my hand away so that I'm not touching him

anymore. "Tell you when you won't tell me —"

"I did tell you something today!" I protest, whipping a finger up and pointing it into

his face. "And don't try to pretend that I didn't! You asked me if she was okay and

I told you!"

"Doesn't mean you're not still keeping secrets," he hisses, glowering down over me.

"Don't throw that in my face," I snap, narrowing my eyes at him. "I have been fair,

as much as I am able. You owe me this — if you are insisting that that was my magic in there, I have a right to that proof. So tell me!"

Jackson grits his teeth, turning to glare towards the stairs, clearly torn.

But suddenly, I don't need an explanation as the pieces snap together in my mind. "Oh my god," I murmur, my hand falling to my side. "You know that it's my

magic because. ...it's not yours. You already know what yours is."

Jackson sighs, his eyes closing as his head drops. And he looks so defeated, suddenly, that I have the impulse to reach out and comfort him. I stop myself, though, remembering that pulse. Not wanting to remind him, again, of this thing

between us.

I stand for a long moment, waiting for him, and slowly Jackson raises his head,

opening his

2/5

Chapter 59

eyes. He glances quickly towards the door to my room, still closed, before looking at me with a serious gravity in his expression. "I need you to promise not to tell anyone," he says softly, looking at me with such pleading in his eyes that I can hardly bear it.

"Jackson," I respond, staring up at him, meaning every word, "I promise. Never, not Alvez, not Jesse, not Rafe — nobody."

"And not fucking Grant?" he growls, his expression suddenly harsh. And something about it...I don't know. I can't help the grin that twists my lips. "Especially not Grant," I promise with a steady nod.

"Fine," he sighs, standing straight and running a hand through his hair. "Then yes, we know that that's your magic because it's not mine."

"And?" I say, raising an eyebrow at him as I cross my arms over my chest. "Yours is?"

Light floods down the hall as the door to my room opens and Rafe pops his head out. He's frowning, of course.

"Too long a story to tell before Rafe Sinclair storms down this hallway," Jackson murmurs, making me smirk.

I sigh, shaking my head at him.

"Look, I'll tell you, all right?" Jackson promises, turning towards the stairs. "Just...

later. When there's more time."

"Okay," I say, nodding to him, hoping that he does.

Not because I particularly need to know but because...

Well, because I want Jackson to have someone he trusts, someone he tells his secrets to.

And, perhaps selfishly, or maybe naturally...I want that naturally... want that person to be me.

"Fine," he says, starting to stride away.

I scoff a little, shaking my head as he goes. "Goodnight, Jackson!" I call after him, annoyed.

3/5

Chapter 59

He turns to me. "What?"

“Goodnight?” I reply, raising my eyebrows at him wryly. “You know, the thing people say to each other when they part for the evening?”

He stares at me for a long second and then laughs, turning again and continuing

towards the stairs. “Whatever, Clark. Goodnight, if it's so important to you.”

“It's just polite,” I insist.

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Ari,” he says, a shiver running down my spine at the way he says my

name, his voice cool and rich and

low. He turns and walks backwards

away from me, a little smirk on his

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lips, “when did I ever give you the

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impression that I was polite?” The

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the latest chapter there!

I can't help the grin that spreads all the way across my face as I bite my lip, watching him walk away.

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I'm so completely distracted by the sight of his tall frame starting down

the stairs, the way his shoulders

move, curling in slightly as he

retreats back into his own lonely

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world, that I jump a little when Rafe's

hand wraps around my arm. The

content is on ! Read

the latest chapter there!

“Come on,” he murmurs, his voice exhausted. “You can moon over your mate in

the safety and warmth of our room.”

“Ew, Rafe!” I gasp, trying to tug my arm away from him and failing. Rafe just rolls

his eyes at me, dragging me back.

“Whatever, Ari, if I was ten seconds later you'd have been chasing him down the stairs.”

“I would not!”

But when Rafe snaps his eyes back to me, his expression exhausted, I have to laugh.

Because...well, maybe because he's just a little bit right.

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Luca's moody when Rafe and I come back into the room, and as Rafe presses the door shut behind us, I

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don't miss the fact that Luca has curled his legs up, leaving half the couch open. It's a silent invitation, I

know, for me to join him. The content is on ! Read the latest chapter there!

But quite frankly, he's burned his chance for that tonight.

“I'm going to take a long bath,” I sigh, grabbing my pajamas out of my nook and

heading for the bathroom. I don't need it to get clean but I definitely want it, just to relax.

“You're seriously not going to explain how that marble changed states of matter?”

Ben gasps, watching me move towards the bookshelf that doubles as a door to our bathroom.

“Use your imagination, Ben,” I sigh, pulling the door open and slipping inside. My last look, however, is reserved for my mate, who glares at me from the couch.

Because I am well aware that he expected to have the upper hand tonight. And it looks like beyond all odds, I'm the one who walked away with it.

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## Chapter 60

Time at the Academy presents neat little patterns for us, and Rafe, Jesse, and I

fall gratefully into them. Because life? It is busy. Every morning Jesse gets me up

early, making me go for a run with him even before we go to breakfast. I'd enjoy

these moments with my favorite cousin more if I wasn't so damn tired every day.

"Can we get a coffee maker in the suite," I pant, my breath puffing in little clouds

in the damp and foggy air. "I can't go for these runs without the aid of caffeine."

"Come on, Scrimpy!" Jesse laughs, putting on a burst of speed and swatting me

on the shoulder as he pulls ahead, obliging me to keep up. "Let your zest for life

wake you in the morning! Not caffeine!"

"Life would be much more zesty with a little espresso," I growl, sighing and speeding up to keep pace. "With a side of biscotti!"

After our run, we hastily get dressed and go to breakfast with our group. Luca, to

my chagrin and agony, continues to ice me out. He sits with me at every meal, and at dinner he jokes with me and the rest of our group like nothing's changed.

But not once does he try to pull me aside, to make a moment to talk about what

happened between us in the birch forest.

What he maybe, probably now knows the incredible secret he's carrying, that I'm

trusting him with.

Breakfast, of course, wouldn't be the best time to talk about anything, gathered

as we are around our little round table, but still I'm dying to talk about what happened, to learn what he figured out about my secret, and he just...won't let me.

"Luca," I growl the next morning when Rafe and Jesse get up to go speak to some other warrior candidates about a group project they're working on and

Ben

obligingly tucks his nose into a book. "What are —"

"No here, Shrimp," Luca replies, his voice low. "This is a way bigger conversation

that we're not having in the Hall."

"Well then why won't you meet me in the..." I hesitate, glancing Ben's way, because I almost

said dream. Ben just turns his page, looking for all the world like he's completely

lost in his textbook. "Forest," I conclude, the word pressed between my teeth.

Luca narrows his eyes at me. "Oh, you want to meet in the forest?" he says, his

lips turning up with the irony of it. "The one you can just make disappear whenever you're done talking? Come on, Shrimp. You haven't played fair for weeks, and you're still not. I need... more than that."

My mouth falls at his stubbornness and I realize, quite suddenly, that Luca — whatever he has figured out — is not at all freaked out.

He's mad at me.

And my heart sinks as he sips his coffee, turning his eyes back to his textbook —

we all pretty much read at breakfast today, trying to cram everything in while we

can — because... Luca is right. I have not been fair, and while I'm not sure that I'd

have made any different choices...

I've really made my mate take the brunt of it, haven't I?

"I'm sorry," I whisper, looking down at my plate, feeling forlorn.

"We're good," Luca says, his voice still soft so only he and I can hear. I snap my

head up, looking at him with wide eyes. "Don't worry about it," he says, glancing

over at me. "Just... not here. Not at dinner, either. We need a space where it's just us, and a long time to chat."

"So when..."

"I don't know, Ari," he says, a little exasperated, lifting his eyes to meet mine.

"Considering how your cousins never let you out of their sight, that's going to be

a little difficult, isn't it?"

I blush at the way that he emphasizes the word cousins, wondering if that means...

But before I can consider anything, Rafe and Jesse return to the table.

“Ready?”

Rafe asks, looking towards Luca as he lifts his coffee to his lips and swigs it down in one go.

“Yup!” Luca says, cheerfulness immediately returning to his expression as he gets to his feet.

“You’ll get Ari to Chemistry?” Rafe asks Ben as Luca and Jesse collect their things.

Ben shoots a thumbs-up over his shoulder, still concentrating on his book, as the

Warrior-track boys start to head towards their early class. As he leaves, Luca brushes his arm against mine casual enough that it could be accidental.

But lingering enough that, when I look up at him, and see him looking down at me, his eyes warm?

God damn it, but it makes me want to jump right back into his arms, my legs wrapped around his waist.

I sigh, returning to my own textbook, forcing my mind onto Chemistry, because I

know that Neumann is going to quiz us hard today to see who has been able to

keep up with the insane amount of homework he has assigned.

“Don’t worry too much about it,” Ben murmurs from his spot a seat away from me, his voice so soft that he could be talking to himself.

“Huh?” I say, looking up at him.

He keeps his eyes down, but I see the way his lips turn up. “He’s obsessed with

you too, all right?” My jaw drops open a little bit. “Whatever little lover’s quarrel you’re going through here it’s going to get sorted out. Trust him — he’ll come around when he decides to.”

Ben flicks his eyes to me now, and I turn my head to the side, still shocked but also incredibly interested. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that Luca’s the definition of an Alpha — he’s used to getting his way.

He’s

a great guy, but he wants the upper hand.” Ben shrugs. “But think about who you

are, Ari. If you owe him an apology, give it, but don’t crawl after him begging him

to accept it. You,” he says, looking at me significantly, “bow to no one.”

I sit up very straight in my chair for a second, staring at my very perceptive friend

with an open mouth, before my face bursts into a smile. “When did you get so

wise, Ben?"

He shrugs, smirking down at his textbook as I change seats, moving closer and

bringing my book and coffee along. "Like I told you, four sisters. Luca's no puppy

dog that's going to follow you around begging for treats, but trust me — he likes

you. Big time. So...just let him

work it out. And get back to work," he says, nodding to my homework. "You've got

bigger things to worry about."

"I love you," I murmur, bumping my shoulder against his.

"Right back at ya," he sighs happily. And then we study, my mind successfully turned to the more pressing matter right now: not failing out of school.

Mates can wait, I think to myself, concentrating. My wolf huffs in discontentment,

but she doesn't stop me.

Unfortunately, my own life proves me wrong again, because obviously I see my

second mate that afternoon in magic class. He doesn't greet me as I slip into the

seat next to him, settling my chemistry books on the text in front of me.

Instead,

Jackson just glances my way before turning his attention back to the board, where Alvez is drawing out some complicated diagrams.

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I laugh to myself, shaking my head at

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Jackson's perpetual lack of greetings, allowing myself to get

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distracted by Rafe's conversation with Jesse about how combat went

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that morning. They've moved on from hand-to-hand to working with

swords, apparently, which Jesse thinks is incredibly cool but which

Rafe argues is impractical. The

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I'm half lost in their argument when Jackson's deep voice makes me jump. "How'd that go?" he asks.

I turn to him, surprised, and just stare into his face. "What?"

He smirks and then nods down at my chemistry book, a little burned mark still on

the cover where I pried the melted marble away. Dr. Neumann had raised an eyebrow at the condition of my text, but hadn't asked any questions.

"How did class go, Clark?" Jackson says, his words snapping a little more than

necessary. But I just smirk at my mate, wrinkling my nose, because I know him

enough now to know that he's not being nasty — he just doesn't have a lot of social graces.

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It went great, actually," I say, sitting up straight, excited that he asked.

Rafe had been distracted on our walk

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here I haven't had a chance to brag

« :

yet. "We had a pop quiz and I am fairly certain that I did not disgrace myself. I really like the material too —

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I didn't realize how much biology I'd have to learn alongside the

chemistry. I mean, not only do we

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have to think about how the poison itself is made, but we have to understand what it does in the body as well. I never thought about..."

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Jackson lets me prattle on for awhile while Alvez finishes up his writing on the board, and while his

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expressionless face doesn't really

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give me a lot to go on, I think he's at  
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least a little bit interested. He doesn't  
interrupt, at least. Instead, he props  
his chin on his palm and just listens,  
looking at me, until Alvez clasps his  
hands at the front of the room,  
drawing our attention to him. The

content is on ! Read  
the latest chapter there!

“So,” Alvez says, smiling his dark smile as he looks slowly around at us.

“Any...

results? From your experimentations?”

Anxiety floods me

because I'm suddenly torn between wanting to explore my magic and keep my  
promise to Jackson that I won't tell what I know about his.

But still, I'm dying to know both what his gift is, and why for some reason he's  
not

telling

anyone.

Not even the professor who stares at him so, so eagerly from the front of the  
room.

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