

# The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 561

Rafe's eyes fly wide as he stares at his cousin, shocked.

What...what the fuck is this?

"Hey, guys!" Jesse says, his voice tight and falsely cheerful as he strides over to his family, all of them staring at him, agape. Jesse keeps his smile fixed on his face even as he glares around at his parents, his uncle, and his favorite cousin, silently demanding that they play along. "This is my mate, Midnight! She's really fantastic and I'm sure she'll be glad to meet you soon but she...she did not like the helicopter."

"Infernal machine," Midnight hisses, lifting her face. Cora gasps at the sight of the hollow pits of darkness in the place of the girl's eyes, the shadows that stream from the dark ruin of her mouth. "Cursed metal bird – carrying people in its belly like eggs! We are lucky to have survived! It should be destroyed – I will destroy it!"

She spins then, casting shadows out from her hand that streak towards the helicopter. Rafe gasps as the pilot's eyes go wide, but Jesse turns and grabs at the shadows himself, almost like grabbing a cat by the tail, hauling them back.

"Mids," Jesse growls down at the girl still in his arms. "What did we agree on, regarding the destruction of vehicles?" The shadows suck neatly into his outstretched hand, obedient and trim.

Midnight's face turns down in a trembling little frown, her personal shadows receding almost completely from her visage so that Rafe can see that she's not some kind of monster just...

Just a girl. A really, really frightened, tiny, skinny girl with big brown eyes and a sweet, heart-shaped face that has masses of dark curls tumbling around it.

"We agreed to temporarily contain the urge for destruction," she whispers. "Until we have more information and can make an informed decision regarding whether or not it a vehicle or...a foul beast that needs to face a bloody end."

"You got it," Jesse says, grinning at her, laughing a little bit. When he turns his face back to his family, Rafe is shocked to see a little more of his cousin there now – more relaxed, more full of humor.

But one glance around at all of his family's faces assures Rafe that everyone else is just as freaked out about the Goddess's choice for Jesse's mate as he is.

“So,” Jesse says, grinning around at everyone. “Can we...go inside?”

Twenty minutes later Jesse’s family is gathered in the living room around a crackling fire, watching Midnight work her way through her fourth bowl of ice cream. The Atalaxians begged to be let to rest and so Ben was charged with showing them to their room and ensuring that they settle in.

Ella, predictably, softened towards Midnight the moment she heard even the barest outlines of her story, gasping and ushering the girl to a warm seat by the fire, covering her with blankets and ordering her up a great deal of food even before she took the time to wrap Jesse in a warm hug and tell him how glad she was that he’s safe and home, how very much he was missed and worried for.

Not to Jesse’s surprise, Cora is...taking a bit more time in her assessment of Midnight.

“So,” Cora murmurs, sipping a cup of coffee and standing close to her son while Dominic, Roger, Rafe, and Ella talk to Midnight, getting to know her and being incredibly kind – as Jesse knew they would be. “What’s...what’s really going on there?” She raises an eyebrow at her son, letting him know precisely what she’s asking.

Jesse sighs and smiles, shaking his head as he crosses his arms. “It’s...very complicated, Ma. Midnight really is the best and incredibly important to me, but I had no idea, really, how...intense it would be, meeting my mate. But she’s still very much a child in her heart and her mind and I worry about her a lot. I want the best for her – and so a romantic connection...it’s not even on my mind.”

Cora hums consideringly as she turns her eyes back to the poor girl, though inwardly her heart sings with pride for her son, for his restraint in tucking away any romantic impulses he might have towards his mate, putting her needs first. “I’m very proud of you, Jess,” she says, soft.

“Aw shucks, ma,” Jesse says, his face breaking into that pretty smile that reminds Cora so much of his father. “You’re going to make me blush.”

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“Good, you should blush more often,” Cora says on a laugh, bumping her shoulder against her son’s. “You’ve lived far too much of your life without shame.”

“My profligate youth!” Jesse sighs, mock nostalgic.

Ella gracefully stands, taking Midnight's finished bowl of ice cream and putting a sack of sweets in its place. Jesse laughs as the girl eagerly digs in, talking to Rafe with a mouth full of caramel as Ella quietly comes to stand with her sister and her nephew.

"So," Ella says, beaming at Jesse. "What are your plans for our little girl here?"

"Ours, is she?" Jesse says, his voice pretending to be full of doubt. "And here I was, thinking she was mine."

"Oh, she's ours," Ella says, wrinkling her nose at her nephew. "You know I can't resist an orphan. So? Plans? Should we just let her loose in the pantry and let her eat her fill so that she can fatten up a bit?" She looks over her shoulder, letting her eyes move slowly over Midnight's spindly legs, her too-thin wrists and shoulders.

"I'm all for feeding her up," Jesse says with a nod. "But...Ella, could I beg you to please let me have free reign over the roof garden, just for a little bit? I promise not forever but...I need some safe outdoor space and that's the only place that makes sense to me. And it has plumbing which...I'm gonna need."

Ella looks at Jesse like she never imagined that sort of request but then laughs and nods eagerly. "Sure, Jesse," she says. "Whatever it is you need. Now, let me get some more of this," she says, tapping on the side of the ice cream bowl.

"Not too much, Ells," Cora calls after the Queen. "You're going to make her puke, with all that dairy!"

Ella just waves a hand over her shoulder, dismissing the concern, making Jesse laugh.

"So," Cora says, her voice low and a little more serious now.

Jesse turns to her, his smile fading.

"Well?" Cora says, crossing her arms over her chest. "When are you going to ask me about Daphne?"

Jesse sighs, dropping his face and staring at his feet. "How about right now?"

"As good a time as any," Cora says softly, sensing her son's agony and putting her hand on his shoulder, giving it a squeeze. 2

I lay sprawled naked across my mate's chest, sweaty and panting. His body rises and falls with slow, deep breaths that are very different from the gasps and pants that rang through him just a few minutes ago. I smile, remembering it – how this time – unlike last night – we really took our time with each other. Tender, and sweet, and slow...

“How many different ways are there to have sex?” I murmur, wondering it for the first time.

Jackson laughs, soft and low, his fingers playing idly with the ends of my hair. “I have no idea, Ari.”

“I guess we’ll find out,” I say with a happy sigh.

“Why do you ask me?”

“Because you’ve done this before,” I say, turning my head to prop my chin on his chest and grinning up at him.

He huffs another laugh and shakes his head. “Not like, a lot. I’m no Jesse -”

“Is Jesse a sexpert!?” I ask, my eyes flying wide at the idea.

“A...a sexpert?” Jackson asks, going still and staring at me.

I grin back, letting him figure out the roots of the word. When it clicks together a second later he bursts out laughing.

“I don’t know, Ari,” Jackson murmurs, covering his eyes with one hand and shaking his head like he doesn’t want that mental image in his head while I continue to laugh. “The way he talks about it, he certainly has had much more sex than me - ”

“Has he really?” I ask quietly, eyes still wide. “Wait, when do you talk about this sort of thing?”

“I don’t know, Warrior Track stuff, I guess. Locker rooms.”

“And not around me!?”

Jackson drags his hand away from his eyes and smiles down at me. “Yes, Ariel. Explicitly away from you. I have a feeling that your brother and your cousin are quite eager to keep their discussions of sex away from you, and especially as they know they’d involve both of us, I don’t think they’d want to hear your stories either.”

“That’s so unfair,” I grumble, laying my cheek down on his chest, fuming a bit. “How the hell am I supposed to learn stuff?”

My mate’s big arm sweeps down my body, settling below my ass and scooting me up along his body in a flash. I laugh when I suddenly find myself face-to-face with him.

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“You can talk to me about it,” he says, smiling up at me, tucking my messy hair back behind my ear. “I might like that. A lot.”

“Yeah, but you’re more of a learn-by-doing type,” I say, grinning down at him. “I think I need more girlfriends.”

Jackson hums consideringly, nodding as he runs his hands slowly up my sides, his palms sliding over my ribs. “Only problem with that is that I have no intention of ever being separate from you ever again. Not even in another room. Not even on the other side of the room. So, your girlfriends will be my girlfriends.”

“That’s so creepy,” I whisper, beaming at him, kind of loving it. “You’re so obsessed with me.”

Jacks snarls his confirmation and grabs me to his chest, turning me over and making laugh delightedly as he presses kisses all over my neck and my cheeks, my mouth and my chest, lingering again and again on the mark he gave me last night.

“How’s that looking?” I whisper, trying to peer down at it. I mean, with my wolf healing and Jackson passing me power, I know that it’s well on its way towards being all healed up. But still, it’s not there yet.

“It looks perfect,” Jackson murmurs, pulling back a little to get a better look and then leaning close to give it a long lick with his tongue, wolfish and sweet. “Much better than the others, if I’m honest.”

I laugh again. “You’re biased.”

“I am,” he says, nudging it proudly with his nose. “But even if I weren’t, I’d be right.”

I smile and run my fingers through his hair, believing him, and Jackson presses a lingering kiss to the soft skin beneath my jaw. Then he delivers a smart smack to the side of my ass that makes me yelp in surprise and then burst out laughing.

“Come on, Princess,” he says, sitting up with a sigh. “Let’s get you home.”

“Nooo,” I moan, sitting up too and wrapping my arms around him again, trying to tug him back down. “Let’s stay – this tent is nice! We’re so cozy and alone with no one to bother us – ”

“Your family is going to be worried,” he says, grinning, running a hand over my hair.

“Oh, let them worry,” I sigh, beaming up at my pretty mate. “Who cares.”

“You care,” he says, laughing and cupping my cheek in his palm. “Besides, we’re gross. We need showers – lets get home and all cleaned up.”

“And by showers....you mean just one shower, yes?” I say, raising an eyebrow at him.

He laughs and gives my ass another smack before grabbing his clothes and smoothly stepping out of the tent, fully naked in the early-morning Atalaxian sun. “Whatever you want, tiny,” he says, stretching with his back to me. “Whatever you want.”

I grin, watching him for a moment as he gets dressed, and then I sigh, and turn, and grab for the backpack my mom sent for the two of us, rifling through it. It only takes a moment to find the bottle of medicine at the bottom. I laugh when I pull it out, shaking my head at my mom who of course thought of this.

“Mommy,” I sigh, pulling the top off and taking a swig of the potion that will keep me from getting pregnant. “So practical.” “You ready?” Jackson calls to me from outside.

“I’m still naked!” I call back, re-capping the potion and slipping it back into the bag.

I grab my dress and peer outside to see him fully dressed, the ATV already prepped and ready to go.

“Well come on, Ariel,” he says, shaking his head at me like I’m bafflingly slow. “I can’t take down the tent with you in it.”

“Listen, I just saved the world,” I say, pointing a finger at him even as I pull the stupid Atalaxian dress over my head. “I can take my time getting up in the morning.”

“I always thought Rafe was exaggerating when he called you a lazy riser,” Jackson murmurs, turning away again and shaking his head. “But now...he has a point..”

I snarl playfully at my mate even as I climb out of the tent and stand, zipping my dress up, a little sad to leave the peaceful quiet time alone with my mate but...

Well, yeah. Excited to get home too. After all, my family is waiting for me.

And I really, really love my family.

## **The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 564**

Today, since I'm feeling a bit better, I ride in front of Jackson on the ATV, leaning back against his chest as he steers the vehicle with an arm on either side of me. Well, not that there's much steering to do – it's mostly a straight shot across the desert and prairie that creates a border between Atalaxia and Moon Valley. 1

“How do you know where we're going?” I murmur, snuggling back against my mate, more comfortable than I thought that I'd be.

He presses a kiss to my hair, his wolf hearing making him perfectly able to hear me. “It took longer getting here because I had to figure out where things were. But now that I have a mental map, it's a pretty straight shot to the closest border town.”

I sigh happily. “You're so smart and capable. And good with directions.”

“Yeah, you just sit there and look pretty, Princess,” he murmurs, laughing. I laugh too because we both know that I'm capable of so much more than that, even though we have learned that – as Faiza thought – it's a very good disguise.

I snuggle back against Jacks, letting my mind wander as the miles pass, letting my eyes slip over the scenery. It really is beautiful out here – and a part of the country which I haven't explored before. The tensions with Atalaxia had always made it too dangerous for a camping trip or any hiking when we were younger. But now that the war is hopefully ending, a little hope for the future rushes through me.

The end of a war. It opens just...so many possibilities to better the lives of so many people. All that energy that went towards destruction and defense – now it can be turned towards building and learning. I buzz a bit with energy as the possibilities whirl through my mind.

The only thing that puts a dampener on it is the memory that Juniper is still gone and in trouble – or at least, she was as far as I know. I sigh, wondering what she's up to, worrying for her. Junie – she's so tough and strong, but she's got a very tender heart beneath it all.

Even if she is a grumpy little thunder cloud sometimes, she's still my sister. I love her a lot and want her to be okay.

“What's wrong?” Jackson murmurs in my ear, sensing my change in mood.

“Just thinking about Junie,” I reply, distracted, staring off into the distance as Jackson keeps us moving steadily towards the horizon.

“Oh, don't worry about June,” he says absently. “She's fine.”

I go a bit still, half turning in the seat to look at my mate. “How do you –

“Face forward,” he growls, taking one hand from the handlebars and wrapping it tight around my waist to keep me from flying off.

I laugh and do as I’m bid, turning back and settling back against him, pressing my ass back perhaps a little tighter against him than it needs to be. He snarls a bit in my ear, keeping that arm tight around my waist.

“How do you know she’s fine?” I ask, not letting myself get distracted from the topic.

“Jesse says she is,” he says, quite simple.

Shocked, I start to turn again but Jackson tightens his arm and snarls. Still, I turn my head as far as it can go, doing my best to stare at him in shock.

“How does Jesse know!?”

“Because,” Jackson says, glancing down at me. “He visited her there, in the Underworld. With Midnight. He says she’s in a world of mess – got herself caught up in some kind of competition to marry some Prince of Death – but that she’s also got them all wrapped around her finger – ”

“What!?” I shriek, appalled not only by the news but by the fact that my stupid mate knew all of this – has apparently known it all – and didn’t bother to tell me! “Jackson! Why didn’t you fill me in on this!?”

“Oh, um,” he says, glancing down at me, a bit guilty. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you. Jesse said...well. Just pretend I didn’t tell you, okay?”

I shriek again, appalled, and he laughs, tightening the arm around me.

“Would you stop doing that? I’m trying to drive.”

“Why doesn’t Jesse want me to know!?”

“He says there’s a surprise and he doesn’t want anyone to tell you. Because you’re going to flip. So everyone is sworn to secrecy not just me.”

“Jackson,” snarl, tense and livid. “You’d better tell me. Right now.”

“No,” he murmurs, pressing a loving kiss to the side of my head in apology.

“Jacks!”

“I promised!”

“You promised Jesse – a promise Jesse doesn’t matter! Your allegiance to me takes priority!”

“No, he said you’d say that, and he told me to remind you that he’s my best friend.”

I shout now in appalled horror at how Jesse has constructed this. Jackson just laughs, holding me close.

“Is it a good surprise or a bad one?” I hiss.

“A good one,” Jacks says. “You’ll like it, I promise. I almost cried when he told me.”

“What!?”

Jackson hums in confirmation and my mind whirls with possibilities. But I can’t think of anything – anything at all – that would fit this situation. A surprised related to stupid Juniper in the Underworld that almost made Jackson cry!?

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What the hell!?

“Tell me.” I command.

A single growl rumbling in his chest signals Jackson’s refusal.

I take a different tack, pressing my ass backwards against him, arching my back a little. “Please tell me, Jackson,” I beg, my voice softer now.

He goes still behind me and I smile, pleased.

“Please, Jackson,” I beg, my voice softer and breathier now as I snake a hand backward, letting it slip up the side of his neck, my fingers tangling in his hair. “Please, I’ll give you anything you want in return.”

The entire time I speak I let my ass wriggle against him. I smile, devilish, when a stiffening in Jackson’s pants let me know that my efforts are working.

“Stop,” he growls.

“Please, Jacks,” I whisper, tilting my head back, letting a little moan slip from my lips. “Tell me. I won’t tell anyone you spilled – I’ll play along!”

He snarls, his arm tightening around my waist and I grin, thinking that I’ve got him. I press my ass back hard, rubbing it all along the thick length of his cock.

But suddenly I gasp when Jackson cuts the power to the ATV and we come skidding to a stop, because not half a second later my mate is pulling me with him off the vehicle and dragging me down into the dirt, setting me before him on my knees as he kneels behind me, my back flat to his chest.

It only takes a moment to figure out what’s going on as my snarling mate uses one hand to turn my face up to him, claiming my mouth as his other hand dips low and makes fast work of his belt, shoving his pants down.

I groan, wanting him already – falling to my hands and yanking hard at my stupid Atalaxian skirts, wanting them up and out of the way as Jackson takes my hips firmly in his broad hands and pulls me sharply back against him.

A cry breaks from me as Jackson’s cock presses into me in one fluid motion, my pussy wet and ready for him in an absurdly short amount of time. A heady moan falls from me as I press my hips back, wanting more of him, as much as fucking possible as Jackson, snarling, begins to pound himself into me at a steady, harsh pace. His hands pull me back and back as my mate fucks me almost furiously, completely lost to his lust, the want of me that swept over him – over both of us – in almost an instant.

And me? I want him just as bad, my mouth hanging open as huffing gasps break from my lips at every stroke, as my eyes go hazy with how fucking good it feels – Jackson’s thick, veiny cock, pounding into me again and again. Half of it is sheer physical pleasure, but my mind is also drunk on the knowledge that I drove him to this. That all it took was the press of my ass against him and he had to throw me down in the dirt –

God, fuck but we’re in trouble. Jacks – I want him in me all the time. I pant, going to my elbows to get a deeper angle, feeling the round head of his cock hitting that point so deep within me that makes my eyes roll back.

He doesn’t last long, not at this furious pace, and I bite my lip as my mate roars, bending over my back as he comes, hot and thick. The feel of it, sticky and wet and filling me up, sends me over too and I pulse and shudder, my arms giving out under my weight as my orgasm shakes through me.

Jacks collapses along with me, pulling me into his arms as he falls to the side, and we both pant and work hard to catch our breath as we lay in the prairie grass, me wrapped loosely in my mate’s arms with my back pressed again to his chest, his cock slowly going soft inside of me.

“Fuck,” Jackson whispers, soft, still catching himself.

I laugh, shaking against him. “We’re in so much trouble, Jacks,” I whisper.

“Why?” he murmurs, cuddling me close, pressing kisses to my neck and hair.

“Because,” I groan, turning, moaning a little as the action makes his cock slip from my tender flesh. He gasps too, a long and steady shudder passing through him, making me smile. I laugh a little again and cup his cheek in my palm, looking up at him. “I think we’re both going to have a little trouble controlling ourselves. And with family and paparazzi around...”

“Whatever,” he mutters, snuggling me close, his eyes closed. “You’re mine now. Everyone can just...deal with it.”

I laugh, resting my head happily on his chest, thinking...well, at this rate, that it might take us a little longer to get home than we thought.

“Okay, now tell me,” I whisper. “What’s the secret you’re keeping about the surprise in the underworld?”

“Not a chance, Princess,” he says with a laugh, shaking his head. “You’re going to have to try a lot harder than that to get it out of me.”

A little tingle rushes through me and I smile, looking forward to the challenge.

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The gas station clerk pages languidly through the magazine he’s read a hundred times already this month, bored as hell. He sighs, lifting his head to look around the tiny room of this little desert outpost – the room that serves not only as a convenience store, but also a bar, and a tiny casino. There are also rooms upstairs for rent – not that anyone stays more than a day.

“Boring as hell today,” he murmurs, returning his eyes to the page. “But it’s a living.”

A rumble outside makes the clerk stand up and peer out the window behind him at the waste, wondering who would come in this close to sunset. There are some locals who make a living out here, and some adventurer types who want to see the sights in their camper vans and motorcycles, but he wasn’t expecting anyone to return today...

He frowns as he watches a single ATV approach, kicking up dust behind it towards the setting sun. The clerk's eyes go wide as the ATV pulls close enough for him to see the seriously gigantic guy driving it – clearly a wolf, and an Alpha at that.

But seated on the ATV front of him –

The clerk's lips part in surprise as the little blonde haired woman hops off the ATV, laughing as she turns to look up at her huge scarred protector, her lovely rose-gold hair flowing all around her as she smiles and takes his hand. The Alpha likewise stands, towering over the girl, tugging her towards the shop.

The clerk just continues to stare as the pair come into the gas station, the bell ringing above the door because...

Well, it's like something out of a damn movie.

The scariest damn wolf he's ever seen walking into his store – his store, out in the middle of nowhere – with...with a damn princess on his arm.

“Hi!” the girl says, smiling a wide dazzling smile as she strides confidently up to the counter. “I'm Princess – ”

“Oh, I know who you are,” the clerk murmurs, taking a step back to get a better look both at the beautiful girl and the man standing behind her, who growls a soft warning. And as much as the clerk's eyes want to stay on the angel before him, his instincts won't let him take his sight away from the snarling, ragged Alpha – because is that – is that...blood all down his front? The clerk goes pale and still.

“Oh, great!” Ariel Sinclair says, laughing and leaning against the counter, perfectly casual. “I guess my reputation precedes me.” She grins and glances at the magazines in the rack next to the checkout, several of which read Kidnapped Princess! The clerk blushes when he realizes that he's also carrying several more scandalous titles, the covers of which declare her a traitor to her nation and show pictures of her in an Atalaxian crown, beaming at their damned prince.

“Phone,” the Alpha snarls, drawing the clerk's eyes back to him. “Now.”

“Easy, Jacks,” the Princess says, putting a soft hand on his arm as she laughs and looks up at him. The clerk just stares between them, baffled and terrified and charmed all at once. He nearly jumps when the Princess turns that stunning gaze back on him. “But yes, um. Would you mind? If we made a call?” She points at the phone on the counter behind him. “Our phone ran out of battery.”

“Um, sure,” the clerk says, stumbling into action immediately and grabbing for the old lined telephone, nearly ripping it off the wall as he hurries to place it on the table before her. “Anything...anything you need.”

“Thank you” Ariel says, beaming at him as she picks up the receiver and begins to dial a number.

The clerk’s eyes move back to the Alpha when he hears, almost absurdly, the big man’s stomach turn over in a growl. The Alpha stares for a moment at several individually wrapped pieces of meat jerky on the counter, popular with travelers and truckers. Then he snatches them all up into one fist. “I’m going to eat these,” he says, glaring at the clerk, almost challenging him to say he can’t.

The clerk eagerly nods, desperate to do...whatever the hell this dangerous man wants.

“We’ll pay for that later,” the Princess hisses to the clerk in a whisper, covering the receiver with one hand, “sorry, we don’t have any money right now. But we’re good for it! Oh, Jacks, get me one of those caramel ones -” She points eagerly at the candy selection.

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The Alpha nods, grabs two, and hands them to the girl before beginning to unwrap the meat and eat it at a rather incredible pace. The clerk just...watches. Fascinated.

“Oh, hey!” the Princess says into the phone after a few moments, balancing it against her shoulder as she unwraps a candy bar with both hands. A huge smile breaks out on her face. “Hey, dad! It’s me!”

The clerk’s eyes go wide. Is...is the King seriously on the phone right now!?

“Yeah, I’m fine! I’m perfectly fine, can’t wait to get home!” the Princess says, her eyes watering with tears even as she laughs in delight. “I’m with Jacks. We’re...um, actually...wait one second.”

Then, still smiling, the girl takes the receiver in one hand and offers it out to the clerk, giving him again that pretty, obliging smile. “Do you mind telling my dad where we are so he can come and get us? It would be a big help.”

Slowly, the clerk reaches out to take the phone and raise it to his ear. “Your...your highness?”

“Now,” the voice growls on the other end of the line, making the clerk jump nearly out of his boots. “Tell me where my daughter is. Right. Now.”

I squeal with joy as the door to the helicopter finally, finally unlocks and I can throw it open.

“Ari,” Jackson growls behind me, frustrated as I stumble out of the aircraft. “Please be careful

”

But I ignore him, regaining my feet and dashing across the rooftop, hurling myself into my dad’s waiting arms. I laugh, delighted, as my dad wraps me up tight, pressing my cheek to his chest, barely noticing the tears that streak down my face. My dad groans in relief, like he hasn’t even let himself even consider relaxing for a moment until I was here again, safe and happy, under his protection.

“Ariel, my baby girl,” dad murmurs, bending to tuck me in close and press his face to my hair. “My sweet girl, god damn it, I was so sacred...” (1

“I’m okay,” I say, laughing and sniffing and nodding all at once. “I’m fine, dad – it’s all all right -”

I try to tug away, wanting to look up into his face, but dad just snarls and holds me close for a few moments more. “Oh, Dominic,” my mom says, her voice thick with tears. “Let her go – you’re being selfish. She’s my daughter too!” 1 Dad grumbles about it but does as mom bids, loosening his arms and pressing a kiss to my hair and then to my cheek before passing me over to my mother. My mom gives a terrible little cry as we throw ourselves at each other, joy and agony mixed in our voices. We both blubber for a bit, crying and hugging and telling each other how much we missed each other and how worried we were.

Behind me, just passively, my ears attune to my father greeting my mate – the sound of their hands clasping, and then Jackson being pulled into a hug, and then some murmured words of greeting and gratitude. I smile even as I tuck my head against my mom’s shoulder, relishing the feel of her in my arms and then her arms around me.

“Little baby trouble,” mom coos, stroking my back and then my hair. “You smell different, you know.”

I pull back a little, eagerly biting my lip, and mom pushes my long hair back over my shoulder, her eyes darting immediately to the fresh mark low on my neck. She squeals with happiness and excitement, wrapping me up in a big hug and rocking me back and forth, delighted. I burst out laughing and hug her tight to me, delighted too.

“What is it?” dad asks, and I can hear the frown in his voice.

“We’re not only celebrating a homecoming, but the addition of a son-in-law too,” mom says, laughing and turning me towards dad.

Dad goes a bit still, looking between us, his eyes moving immediately to my neck.

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My heart pounds for a long moment before dad's face shifts into a wide, happy smile.

"Welcome to the family, son," dad says, holding out a hand again towards Jacks.

Jackson stares down at it for a second and I hear mom sniff next to me, working hard to hold back her tears, because she very well knows what this kind of welcome means to him. To a boy who has never had a family before.

"An honor, sir," Jackson says after a moment of pause, his voice thick, lifting his blue eyes to Dad's green ones and smiling as he takes his hand, giving it a hearty shake. "The honor of my life, to be mated to your daughter."

"We're honored to have you, kid," Dad says, laughing and smiling, and then slipping an arm around Jackson's shoulders, turning him towards the door. "Downstairs, then! Everyone's waiting."

The two of them set off and I look at mom, a bit baffled. "It's that easy?" I whisper. "I kind of...thought dad would flip at me being mated to anyone -"

"Oh, baby, we kind of saw it coming," mom says with a laugh, giving me a squeeze. "Dad's had months to adjust. And considering that Jackson has saved you twice now, rather spectacularly? And that he's smart and cute and a good boy? And he's an orphan, which means we don't have to share you for holidays!? Come on. Your dad is well aware that he can't ask for more than that."

I laugh a little, leaning against my mom, incredibly happy and relieved that Jackson is being so warmly welcomed. I mean, not that I ever thought he wouldn't be, it's just...Alpha dads can be notoriously volatile when letting their daughter's care and safety pass to another man.

But mom is right - with Jackson as that other man? God, who could complain.

"Hope you're ready for a party," Mom hums, light and sing-song, giving me another squeeze, in no hurry to take her hands off me. "Everyone is here!"

"Everyone!?" I gasp.

“Oh, we couldn’t keep them away,” Mom says, wrinkling her nose at me.

I laugh but then shake my head, glancing down at myself. “But we’re all dirty – and bloody – and I have to fill you in –” “Oh, all of that can wait, daughter,” mom says, pressing a warm kiss to my cheek. “We all want a moment to feast our eyes on you, ensure ourselves that you’re alive and okay. Besides, wait till you see what Jesse did on the roof!” 1

I burst out laughing and follow my dad and my mate into the palace, my arm wrapped around my mom, my heart totally full of love. 1

A huge cheer bursts out in the room the moment we step inside and I tightly clasp Jackson’s hand even as tears again come to my eyes. I laugh a little, looking up at Jacks as I feel him tense and fight the urge to step back, still not used to the onslaught of love in a big family.

Fight or flight kicking in? I ask, mentally, beaming up at him. Atalaxian army you can handle, but all of Jesse’s siblings are too much?

He narrows his eyes a little at me, smirking as he stands straight. But there’s no time to reply as our family swarms around us, hugs going around liberally as well as shouts of joy. 1

I take my time holding each member of my family close, taking special time to cry over my sweet baby Markie, and my little cousins, and my grandfather, who each tell me how much they missed me, how worried they were. Rosie, in particular, whispers in my ear that she never thought I’d betrayed the nation, no matter what the news said.

I laugh and kiss her warmly, releasing her from my hug just in time to hear Seraphina shriek “Puppy!” and hurl herself up into Jackson’s arms. He gasps, snatching her out of the air like he’s scared she was going to hurt herself or go crashing to the floor, the true fear on his face making me again burst into laughter.

## **The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 569**

“Hello, trouble,” Cora murmurs, turning me away from the sight of her youngest child clambering over my mate like a jungle gym. “We were so worried for you!”

“We were,” Roger sighs, wrapping his arms around both me and Cora at once, making me grin up at him. “But clearly we should have just chilled out and let you handle it. Honestly we were all so stressed when we could have just had a spa day, letting you and Jackson end the damn war -”

“Hey, I helped,” Jesse says, and I grin as I peek over Cora’s shoulder to see him standing there next to Rafe, both clearly waiting to greet us last so they can take longest. My heart swells to see them standing side-by-side, remembering that they fought last time I saw them together. But clearly they’ve patched things up.

“Hey!” I say, laughing, reaching for both my brother and my cousin at once as Cora and Roger release me. Tears again stream ridiculously down my face. “Oh god, I missed you two jerks -”

“No, you didn’t,” Jesse murmurs, wrapping me up warm and tight. “Please, it’s creepy if you were missing me while you busy were getting that pretty new mark -”

I gasp, scandalized, and shove him away even as I crack up laughing, smacking him liberally on the shoulder and chest. ” You’re such a creep! How could you even think that -”

“Two marks, right?” Rafe says, smirking at me and reaching for my bandaged wrist. “Damn, one or two weeks in Atalaxia sure turns a girl into a tramp, doesn’t it -”

I gasp, utterly scandalized again, and start to smack at my brother in turn as he roars with laughter and wraps me up in his arms.

“Jerks,” I grumble against him, not really meaning it, relishing their stupid teasing. Rafe hums his agreement, giving me a squeeze, and I sigh and shut my eyes, loving my brother a great deal.

“I’m happy for you, Ari,” he murmurs, kissing my hair and taking a whiff of my new scent. “Jacks smells good on you.”

“Thanks,” I sigh, pushing away a bit to smile up at him. “I think so too. Hey,” I glance around the room. “Where - where are Pippa and Elias and Benny? And Midnight?”

“Ben and Elias are going to come down in a bit - Pippa has begged off from the party.” He looks at me seriously now. “She says she’s been having minor labor pains for a few days now but...” he shrugs. “I don’t really know what’s going on. I don’t get the feeling that that’s the whole story. And Ben like...weirdly just wants to hang out with Elias. I don’t know. I don’t get it. Ten hours in Atalaxia and Ben is like...very dedicated to the two of them. It doesn’t make any sense.”

Rafe frowns and glances towards the door, clearly confused and waiting for our friend to come in.

Slowly, my face spreads into a grin as I look between Jesse and Rafe’s baffled expressions.

“Seriously?” I whisper, beaming, delighted to have a secret they haven’t figured out yet. “You don’t know?” “Know what?” Rafe asks, snapping his head back to frown at me. He

narrows his eyes. “Wait, what do you know?” “Oh, nothing,” I say, crossing my eyes and looking directly at Jesse. “At least no more than what you know.”

Jesse narrows his eyes at me in turn. “What are you talking about?”

“Finally,” Jackson murmurs, coming up behind me and draping his arms over my shoulders, pulling me back against his chest. “It’s nice having a family and everything, but do I have to hug all of them every time I see them?”

“Jacks spilled the beans,” I say, haughty, leaning back against my gorgeous mate and grinning deviously at Jesse.

“Jackson!” Jesse gasps, his eyes flying wide to stare at Jackson. “You didn’t!”

## The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 570

“I – what?” Jackson sputters out, looking between all of us. “What beans?”

“I explicitly asked you not to, Jacks!” Jesse says, appalled. “As a favor to your best friend!”

“I didn’t spill any beans! I didn’t even have any beans!”

“I still maintain that I am his best friend,” Rafe murmurs, looking smugly up at the ceiling.

“It’s a turn of phrase, Jacks!” Jesse continues, ignoring Rafe and pointing an accusatory finger at Jackson. “It means you told her what I told you about the Underworld!”

Jackson gasps, satisfyingly scandalized, and steps back a little to glare at me, his hands still on my shoulders. “Ariel! I did not!”

“He told me a little bit,” I say, smirking at Jesse.

“Jackson!” Jesse gasps again, smacking his hand to his chest, the picture of betrayal.

“I hate this,” Jackson groans, tilting his head back in agony and closing his eyes. “Can we go back to the desert? This is so much – there are so many people here, and every other word is some kind of verbal trap “ 1

“That is your family, Jackson,” I say, grinning at him, kind of delighting in his torture. “How dare you insinuate that they’re too much –”

“Puppy, again!” Seraphina shrieks, dashing over to wrap her arms around Jackson’s leg and smile up at him, her sharp little baby teeth flashing. “Carry me! Pig back ride!”

He just stares down at her, completely baffled.

“Jacks how much did you tell Ariel, because seriously – that was a secret! I’ve been looking forward to spilling that to her for days!”

“All right, all right,” Cora says, coming over with a whiskey and a big, big glass of white wine her hands, pressing them towards Jackson and I. “Let him go, Fifs. Puppy and cousin are going to go clean up, because they’re all bloody and gross,” she grins between us and we laugh. “And then they’re going to come back and tell us everything. Yes?”

Seraphina sighs but releases Jackson from her grip as we take our drinks and turn towards the hallway with our bedrooms. “Don’t you think this is done,” I say, narrowing my eyes at Jesse. “I want to know this secret. Jackson said it made him cry.” Rafe and Jesse gasp, pretending to be scandalized by this, making me laugh.

“Almost cry,” Jackson grumbles, glaring a warning at the two of them before wrapping an arm around my waist and tugging me close to him. “Damn it, Ariel, why do you always have to cause so much – ”

“Trouble?” I ask, grinning up into his face and then bursting into laughter when Jackson realizes that he walked right into that.

“Yes, trouble,” he sighs as we pass into the relative dark and calm of the hallway. He pauses, dipping his head, and I stand on my toes and press a kiss to his mouth. “Always so much damn trouble with you.”

“Oh, you like me troublesome,” I murmur, biting my lip and snaking an arm around his waist.

He pauses for a moment, considering. “Yes,” he sighs, defeated and starting off down the hall again, taking me with him. ‘ Yes, I suppose I do.’

I laugh and lean against him, happy and warm and safe and delighted.

“Do you think I could get something to eat?” he murmurs.

“Yes, baby,” I sigh, leaning happily against him. “We’ll have them send up a whole feast while you take a shower.”

Jackson hums, excitement running through him, making me laugh.

