

Chapter 44

It had been a strange morning.

Ava had seen people whispering about her every time she had passed them, and no one had shoved or pushed her yet. It felt a lot like just before Claire knocked her out the first time. They would whisper and then look at her or go still as if they were mind-linking each other. Then, they would get a certain excited look that made her worry. What were they planning now? The fact that she had yet to see Claire was worrying in itself, but now she was being paranoid about everything.

Instead of being angry as usual, she was jumpy. She had more needle pricks on her fingers than usual because she couldn't concentrate on anything in Needlework, and she probably had to refold the table napkins a hundred times in Housekeeping. And for a change, she didn't get any detentions at all.

By lunchtime, she was a wreck. She couldn't handle going to the dining hall to face the crowds even though she was starving, so she hid in one of the bathrooms.

She was being a coward. Yesterday, she'd finished the day on such a high that she'd felt invincible. Now, she was jumping at every little sound when nothing had happened to make her feel like this.

Ava splashed some water on her face and looked at her reflection in the mirror. She looked paler than usual, so her freckles were more prominent. Her eyes were too wide and bright, as if she was on something, and she could hear her heart pounding in her chest constantly. She couldn't calm down.

She decided to go to the training center early instead of hiding the rest of the lunch break. At least after that, she would be safe in detention and then Jared would pick her up.

She was drying her hands when the bathroom door opened, and the last person she wanted to see walked in.

"Did you really think you could hide from me, human?" Claire sneered as she strolled in. "I can smell you from miles away."

Her minions came in after her, but one remained by the door, blocking the only exit and probably also stopping anyone else from coming in

Ava stepped back as Claire approached. Her heart started hammering louder. This was different from being pummeled in a class in front of witnesses. At least in class, they had to stop Claire at some point and take her to the Infirmary. There would be no one to stop her here.

Her courage deserted her completely as she kept her gaze on the floor. She wasn't going to intimidate her now, not when she had nothing to defend herself with

"You think you're special just because you're stringing one Alpha along by his balls and another Alpha falling all over himself to keep you in his house?" Claire continued.

Ava hit the back wall and the panic started to rise in her throat.

"I didn't ask anybody to help me," she whispered.

"And yet here we are," Claire snarled. "Zeke is mine! He would never be with a filthy human like you, even if his pack allowed it. So what did you do? Cast a spell? Promise him a taste?"

"I've done nothing!" she said in a panic.

Claire was just inches away from her now. She could see the wolf's spotless, expensive pumps as she stepped closer. Her breathing became labored as the panic attack started to take its hold on her. She felt lightheaded as she struggled for breath. The last time she'd had an attack, she had imagined Ezekiel had come onto her bed and soothed her. There would be no such rescue today.

A little voice asked her when she had ever needed anyone to rescue her, but she shoved it away. It was different here. None of these people knew or feared her father, they wouldn't hold back.

“I don’t know how you keep getting back up to your feet every time I take you down, but mark my words. I will end you. I will make sure you never get up again,” Claire said in a whisper, so close to her ear that a shiver flashed down her spine,

Her vision started to fade. She blinked the darkness back as much as she could because passing out now was not an option. She had to scream so someone could hear her. She opened her mouth to try that, but her voice stuck in her throat. The more she struggled to draw air into her lungs, the worse her vision became. Pressure built up in her head, making it hard for her to think straight.

Something started burning through her body, something she had never felt before. It felt like her veins were on fire, and combined with her burning lungs and almost exploding head, her panic got worse

“I will never understand why they brought something like you here. Look at you,” Claue chuckled. “I haven’t even done anything yet.”

The other girls in the room laughed and called her pathetic. Their laughter echoed in her head as if they were speaking from a distance or in a tunnel.

And she was pathetic. She had been a little fish in her small pack, and now she was less than plankton in this vast ocean. She didn’t stand a chance.

She felt something start to bubble up her throat, and her whole body started to tremble. Only the wall behind her held her up. She was going to die here; she knew it.

The burning in her veins spread to her limbs. The pressure was too much in her head and her body. She had never had a panic attack this bad before she knew instantly that this one would end her

Then, the air shifted.

A subtle change that made her tense more.

A low, menacing growl sounded clearly above the chaos in her head. It was a familiar growl, and she had never been more thankful for that arrogant Alpha than she was at that moment. Though some relief washed through her body, she still struggled to breathe.

“Zeke... We were just talking” Claire’s voice echoed.

There was another growl, and this one made the hair on the back of her neck rise even though she knew it was not directed at her. It sounded deadly. It sounded so dangerous. It promised a lot of pain, and something told her Ezekiel would deliver on that promise. He had too much darkness in him.

Claire backed away from her immediately, and she heard the clicking of their low heels on the floor as the girls rushed to leave the room.

And then those huge arms surrounded her, drawing her into their safety.

“Breathe.” he whispered

She did. She drew in such a huge lungful as if she had only needed Ezekiel's command for her body to work. She went limp in his arms, but he had no trouble holding her up. Her body felt like it was still shutting down even as the burning stopped and the pressure reduced.

"Breathe. Ava" he repeated,

She didn't know how long he stood there with her, leaning against the wall with his nose in the crook of her neck, just as he had done the day before she didn't know why his huge hand slowly rubbing her back soothed her. And she didn't know how he had found her in there or knew she was in danger, but she was grateful, Claire would never have stopped. Even if she hadn't said the words out loud, Claire's intention to kill her was undeniable

"I have to get you out of here. Ezekiel whispered. "Before they fucking kill you."