

Chapter 91

Zeke led Ava into the Assembly Hall. He didn't make an entrance like Jared had done on the first day of school, but the students who had already arrived turned around to watch them walk in anyway.

Ava kept her eyes down and only looked up to look around for a seat. When she started to walk to a group of Omegas, he pulled her back and led her to his section. She didn't protest, but once they sat down, she looked at him as if to ask what he was doing. Maybe Ava finally realized that Jared had purposely sat her in the Alpha section on her first day.

But she wasn't scared as she had been that first day. All he could sense from her was anxiousness.

Jared walked in last with a few of his pack mates and didn't even meet his gaze as he found a seat behind him. He'd yet to speak to that asshole, but he had expected that by now, there would be whispers around the campus of his activities in the training room. There had been nothing.

An Alpha being with a human was unheard of. It was one thing for everyone to whisper whatever they wanted when he put Ava under his pack's protection. It was another to have somebody confirm those rumors. Once his father and his enemies heard about this, he would be

forced into action earlier than he was prepared for, Jared was quiet now, but he was sure that asshole would find a way to exploit the situation sooner or later. Once he cornered Jared, he would know the terms required for his silence.

Derek had been right to worry about putting a target on Ava's back. Even now, he could see the blatant heated looks being thrown at her.

The room quieted as the dean walked in with some faculty heads and stepped onto the stage.

"Good morning," the dean started. "I know you're all eager to start, so we'll keep this brief. Over the next few days, please remember that these are only the mock evaluations. I expect you all to showcase your skills but still show good sportsmanship. Remember the school values, and show mercy when it is required."

He didn't like how the dean looked at Ava when he said that. The dean had never encouraged mercy before, so doing that now meant he deliberately pointed Ava out as the weakest among them.

"The rules were posted on the notice boards and your tablets, and I hope you have all memorized them. For the new students, the instructors for each discipline will briefly explain what is required of you. Some of you have already shown significant progress by being moved out of the beginner classes and may do well today. But remember that this is only the beginning. At the Council evaluations, I expect much more out of you."

He tuned out the instructors as they explained the structure of the day to concentrate on Ava's reactions. Her heartbeat remained steady. Maybe she was prepared. He had already explained all of this to her as he had trained her so she wasn't caught out. Today and the last day would be the hardest for her. Hand to hand with no weapons first and no supernatural abilities. Everyone here was naturally stronger than her, so that would be a challenge for her. And then, on the last day, they were allowed to go all out—weapons, as well as lighting in their other forms if they wanted to.

His anxiousness increased again. He should have just marked her. Or he could have made Prince Gideon give her his blood. If she made it out okay today, he would speak to her about this. What good would it do to wait for her to accept him if she died in the next few days?

When all the instructors had spoken, the dean returned and dismissed them.

He didn't realize he was bouncing his leg until Derek mind linked him and told him. He forced himself to calm down as he watched the other students file out of the hall.

'Mark her,' Shadow growled.

Could he? Ava melted when he touched her, she wouldn't even know he was doing it until it was done. But if she didn't accept the mark, it would be all for nothing, and he would be stuck forever with a hole in his heart.

And there was the mutter of what would actually happen in Ava if he bit her. She hadn't turned after Claire had bitten her, so maybe he didn't

have to worry about that, but Shadow was different. Maybe his bite would turn her.

“What are we waiting for?” Ava whispered beside him.

He pulled himself out of his thoughts to look around the room. Everyone else was already gone.

“Well wait outside,” Derek said as he and Myles stood and headed out

“I need to get to the arena. I’m sure the coach will want me to go first again,” Ava said.

“I’ll tell them you’re sick,” he said. “I tell them you lost consciousness and can’t attend.”

“They made for go back to training after being near death several times. I doubt that would make them let me sit this out.”

She was right. The only way to miss evaluations was if you were dead or incapacitated. Like Claire and her friends.

Shit. Did he have to worry y that they would be at the arena to finish the job? Where the hell were they now?

“You’re making me feel more anxious, Zeke. First, you tell me not to die, and then now you’re trying to get me out of this,” Ava said.

And sure enough, her heart rate, which had been perfectly fine during the assembly, started going crazy again.

“Shit. I’m sorry. You’re ready: I don’t know what I’m thinking. Let’s go.”

‘Mark her!’ Shadow growled again.

He had been getting along with the beast lately, but now he felt Shadow trying to push his way out.

‘If she rejects our mark, that will be no good for anyone,’ he reminded Shadow.

‘If she dies that will be no good for anyone.’

‘I’ll intervene. I’ll stop the match if I have to.’

But he knew it wasn’t an ‘if’ but a ‘when’. He could feel it in his bones that today would be a bad day.

He followed Ava as they left the building and started heading to the arena. It was attached to the training center and big enough to accommodate the whole academy and any invited visitors. Would it be the scene of a bloodbath today?

The walk seemed shorter than usual, and they were entering the large building before he was ready. All the sections were clearly labelled from the beginner to the expert levels, with large squared rings in front of them. For the first part, they were expected to fight hand to hand until ten people were left standing in each section. Then, the winning beginners would have to fight the intermediate–level winners.

Ava would blow the beginners out of the water, but the next level would be a challenge for her. And if she somehow survived that? She would have to fight the next.

“I can’t sit here with you, but I’ll be watching,” he told her.

And then he walked off before he could do something stupid. The last thing he wanted was to be thrown into Isolation again when it was clear they had to leave the campus as soon as possible.

‘We’ll watch her, too,’ Derek assured him through the link. He just nodded and went to sit in the bleachers of his section. He was still a student there, so he had to do this, too.

The first thing he heard, even all this way across the arena, was Coach Baxter’s whistle and then his voice as he called out the first name.

“Ava Morgan!”