

CHAPTER 6-1

As I stood outside my bedroom window, trying to calm down after Atticus's unexpected arrival, I had to ensure Peter and Martha wouldn't hear me when he startled me. I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him around to the back of the house, hoping to keep them asleep.

"What the f**k are you doing here?" I demanded.

"I had nowhere else to go," he replied.

"Seriously? If I'm your last option, you must be in real trouble," I retorted.

"Please, Mad. You need to help me," he begged.

"I don't need to do anything. And don't call me Mad," I shot back.

"I don't know what to do," he confessed, looking lost.

"Yeah, that's pretty clear," I said, eyeing him up and down. He had only been on the run for a few days, yet he looked like he'd been wandering in the wilderness for months. It was obvious he didn't know how to take care of himself.

"Atticus, I'm not going to risk my life for you. Honestly, I don't like you that much. If anyone asks me if I've seen you, I'll tell them the truth. Now get out of here and don't come back. I don't want you messing up my life like you did yours," I stated firmly.

"I know I've made some mistakes..." he began.

"Some mistakes? Are you f*****g serious? You lost your pack, you chose surrender instead of standing your ground, and you turned your back on your people when they needed you most. That's not just a mistake; that's downright pathetic," I told him.

"I never meant for any of this to happen," Atticus said, trying to defend himself. "He reached out to me, and I told him where to go. He didn't take that well and came onto our territory without my approval."

"Wow, it seems like that little bit of power really got to your head," I replied.

"Madison, can you help me out? I honestly don't have anywhere else to turn," Atticus pleaded.

"That's not my concern. If you had actually been a decent Alpha and hadn't gone looking for trouble with every pack, you'd still have a home and a loyal following. Your father would be ashamed of you," I snapped back. I could see his expression crumble; I knew it was harsh, but it needed to be said. His father had been a great Alpha, and Atticus had squandered the pack in less than a year.

"What am I supposed to do now?" he asked, desperation creeping into his voice.

"I don't know. How the heck did you get past the patrols?" I questioned.

"It's a long story, and it wasn't easy," he replied.

"I'm glad to hear that it was difficult," I said firmly. "Now can you please just leave? Right now?"

As I turned to head back around the house toward my bedroom, Atticus suddenly grabbed my arm to stop

me.

"What can I say to convince you to help me?" he asked earnestly.

"Nothing. I'm not putting my life on the line for you, especially since you're the one who got us into this situation. Just go," I insisted.

I turned away and made my way back to my bedroom. I climbed in through the window, shutting it behind me without bothering to glance at Atticus again. I set my things down, grabbed some clothes and a towel, then walked across the hall to take a shower.

After I cleaned up, I crawled into bed and turned off the lamp. I didn't have any homework to catch up on since I hadn't gone to school that day, but that didn't mean I could sleep. I tossed and turned all night, managing only a few minutes of rest at a time.

My anxiety was through the roof knowing that Atticus had been there, and I was terrified that Alpha Gideon—or even worse, Alpha Axel—would somehow find out. Realizing I wasn't going to get any decent sleep, I got out of bed at 5 a.m., threw on a loose-fitting shirt, a pair of track pants, socks, and sneakers.



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CHAPTER 6-2

I left the house and began jogging down the street until I reached the forest. I even ran through the obstacle course set up for the warriors during training, pushing myself even after I passed it. It felt like that course was just in my way, so I kept going and continued jogging.

As I headed back toward the tree line, I saw something moving inside a cave I passed.

I stopped abruptly, straining to see what lay ahead, but the darkness obscured everything. After an hour of running and breathing heavily, I approached the entrance and heard someone shuffling back.

With my hands on my hips, I let out a frustrated sigh before stepping closer to the entrance. "Atticus," I called out.

"Madison? Is that you?" he asked, peeking out from the shadows.

"What are you still doing here?" I demanded.

"I told you, I don't have anywhere else to go," he replied.

"Great. You're really determined to get me killed, aren't you?" I shot back.

"No, that's not what I want," he said earnestly.

"Really? What if one of the warriors found you? Don't pretend you wouldn't drop my name to save yourself," I pressed.

"I'm sorry," he admitted, looking down at his feet.

He looked just as worn out as he had the night before. I stood there, hands on my hips, trying to collect my thoughts for a moment.

"There's a cabin northwest, just over the border. Get there, and you'll be off their radar. It hasn't been used in years, so it'll have no electricity or water, but at least you'll have a place to sleep," I explained.

"Thank you," he replied, relief evident in his voice.

I shook my head and turned away, picking up my jog toward the treeline of the forest. When I got back home, I took a quick shower and got ready for school. Just as I was heading for the front door, I heard Martha come out of the kitchen behind me.

"How did you get in last night?" she snapped.

"I broke in," I replied, pivoting to face her.

"I could have you arrested for that," she shot back.

"Go ahead. Call the head warrior or the Alpha and tell them I broke into the very house I'm supposed to live in. What do you think they'll say when they find out you locked me out?" I challenged.

I noticed Martha's eyes change color as her temper flared, realizing she had no grounds to have me arrested for what she had done.

"Well?" I pressed.

"Get the hell out of my face," she retorted.

I turned, stepping out the front door while she slammed it shut behind me.

Peter was outside loading his car for work while I could hear Martha and me arguing inside. He shot me a sympathetic look, but I just rolled my eyes and walked away from the house.

Upon arriving at school, I made a beeline for my first class, where Dante was sitting next to me.

"Are you okay?" he asked, glancing at me with concern.

"Yeah, why?" I replied, feigning indifference.

"You look a bit distracted," he noted.

"I'm fine. Just have a lot on my plate," I said.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" he offered.

"No, I'll manage," I insisted, not wanting to dive into my issues.

"Are you sure? I'm here if you want to talk," he said softly.

"Dante, just drop it. If I wanted to talk, I would," I snapped, watching him nod and look away.

The entire day felt like I was just going through the motions, both at school and during my shift at work. I trudged home that night, ignoring Angel's messages about training.

I took my time walking home; the idea of facing it all weighed heavy on me. As soon as I opened the front door, I was met with Martha standing right in front of me in the hallway.

"What the hell have I done now?" I snapped, already dreading her drama.

I hear footsteps coming from the kitchen—there's more than one set. A five-foot-six woman with strawberry-blonde hair steps into the hallway.

"Mom, what are you doing here?" I ask as I rush over to hug her. She embraces me warmly, but her expression remains serious.

As I turn to glance towards the kitchen, another figure approaches. I have to tilt my head back to take in the sight of a massive man standing in front of me, towering at six-foot-seven. His menacing look sends a chill down my spine, and the scar cutting across his cheek only adds to his intimidating presence. His long brown hair falls to his shoulders, and the brown goatee gives him a rugged, badass vibe. My stomach drops as I instantly recognize him, even though we've never met before.

"Alpha Axel," I exclaim, stunned.



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