



## Chapter 0280

I have to admit, I'm excited too. This is what I have been dreaming about ever since I found out about the Elite Warriors. Working in the shadows, no one really knows who you are. It's not about the glory for them, well most of them, I think as Audrina's face pops into my head. They are the ones who take care of the really hard stuff and never get any public recognition. They make pack life better and most don't even realize it.

"We better get the homework done then, and maybe a nap if we're going to be up all night." I move towards my books.

"Wwwhhhhyyy?!" Mina whines. "We are like two weeks ahead on everything. I hate your classes, have I ever told you that?"

I laugh. "Maybe once or twice. But we don't know what this new training is going to do to us. If we can't stay ahead, it's going to be a bigger pain in the ass, trust me. Let's get this out of the way and then we can actually focus for the next week on training."

"Ugh, I hate it when you make sense!" She moves for her backpack. "At least most of the classes are starting to make sense. Math might kill me though. I may just have you take the test for me so the professor doesn't have to wait a week for me to finish it." We both start to giggle.

For the next two hours we work through everything that we can. Mina asks for help every now and then, but mostly we just work in comfortable silence.

By 6pm we are starving and as far as we can go with all of our subjects so we head downstairs to see if we can grab food before one of the warriors picks us up for training.

Stella and Jack must have been told what was going on in some form, because when we walked into the kitchen two heaping plates were set aside with our names on them. I just smiled, something about the way they take care of us feels like what Luna Ava and Alpha Lucas would do. Parents secretly caring for the kids that want to grow up, but doing it without hovering.

We take our plates out to the dining room. While we are eating Audrina, Bridget and Chelsea walk by laughing about something. They all stop at the same time. It's almost like they share a brain. Now that I think about it, maybe they do since they have all been branded, maybe they were talking over the shared link and somehow knew to stop together. I don't know.

"What the hell?" Chelsea asks.

"Since when do we get to eat in the middle of training? And where's the spread?" Bridget says looking around, like maybe she could get in on the action.

"We have orders and need to eat earlier than usual." Mina

keeps her tone level and reasonable. She really is so much more calm when dealing with people. The way she acts out in public, you would never know her real age. The way she whines about homework is another matter altogether. 1

"That's just code for the spoiled princess gets whatever she wants." Audrina snarks, but the cold stare of her eyes says she's not amused.

"We did extra training earlier, still met you this morning before the rest of the warriors are due to come out and like I said, we have orders. We've done the time and then some. If you don't like our arrangement you will need to take it to the warrior who will be here to pick us up around eight." Mina stares them all down. For a Delta her presence is strong. The difference is, she doesn't use it to make people bow down to her, more as a pressure to help them understand she's serious and rethink certain actions or thoughts. 1

"Whatever. You two are so lazy just hanging out here in the compound while the rest of us actually work. You'll never get called up if you can even manage to graduate." Audrina shrugs and starts to walk away.

Neither of us respond. It's not worth mentioning, again, that we train more than she does with all the extra that I force my friends to put in and whatever hairbrained thing she has us do every morning trying to wear us down so we make a mistake in front of the lead warriors. It has actually become



a part of our routine that we plan for each day. 1

"She's so jealous of you it's kind of disturbing." Mina says around a mouthful of food.

"What are you talking about? I don't think it's me she's jealous of. You walked in here like you owned the place and then owned the sparring mat your first night. I think I might still have a couple bruises left over." I laugh at her.

"Shut up, we both know you healed in like five minutes. I'm a warrior, my presence is supposed to be known. You came in unknown. No one knew you, or had heard of you. You're this tiny little snack sized person..." I cut her off with a laugh. "What?"

"One of my friends nicknamed me 'Bite Size.' That eventually got shortened to 'Bitty.' Actually, all my friends had some stupid small nickname for me. I laughed thinking about the way that all started, then sighed. I miss them.

"Was he special?" She asked with a funny look on her face.

"They were all special and stubborn and overbearing and wonderful and I miss them."

"They? How many hearts did you break when you left?"

"Wait, what? Breaking hearts? What are you talking about?"

"That look in your eyes tells me Mr. Bitty was more than just a friend to you, he was special. But you just said 'they.' How many boyfriends did you have back home? And how did you

handle all of them? I had one boyfriend once and he was enough guy to handle. I can't imagine having more than one." She fans herself.

"WHAT? No! No, no, no! I didn't have a boyfriend, I've never had one." My voice is getting high and kind of raspy and I can't control it.

"So, you're telling me that you had guy friends and did nothing with any of them? No dating, kissing, hand holding, anything?"

"Sometimes they would hold my hand, especially when the trials were going on, it helped to calm my nerves and they all used to kiss me on the cheek or forehead, things like that. But, no, I didn't date any of them."

"So they were all touchy feely with you, but you did nothing back. Girl, you missed all the signs." She's laughing now.

"Huh? You make no sense. There were no signs. These are my brother's friends, they are all like extensions of that. They are just over-protective." I roll my eyes. 1

"You keep telling yourself that." She laughs again. "You may have missed your chance to have all your firsts with a future Gamma, Delta and Alphas. I bet they have plenty of experience for you." She winks.



## Chapter 0281

"Back to Audrina though. She's jealous that you came in and took her place as the favorite. Although, I think being the favorite was all in her head. From what I hear, most people didn't like to work with her because of her superiority complex. She tears people down and makes them, instead of giving constructive criticism to work on and get better like you do." 1

"I still think you're crazy. There's nothing to be jealous of. I'm just me, I just want to fight, nothing spectacular."

"We'll agree to disagree, I'm not arguing with you about this. It's almost time, do you think we should grab anything? We're going overnight, but didn't get a whole lot of information."

"I guess I might bring a sweatshirt to have a layer if they make us shift on the fly. I wish someone would teach me the whole 'shift and keep your clothes' thing." I say as we take our things back to the kitchen.

We both run upstairs to grab an extra layer and then sit and wait in the foyer. Neither of us talk or discuss anything. I know we are both nervous and excited all at the same time, but one of the best things about Mina is she doesn't need to fill the silence with noise or talking, we are both just here, together, and that's all that is needed for comfort at this

point.

At eight on the dot the door opens with Warrior Nickolas' wide imposing frame filling the doorway, but not stepping in. His light hair and blue eyes normally leave him looking, not inviting, but not scary. But just like at the meeting his gaze is hard and judgemental. He was forced to collect us and he is openly not happy about it. He does not want us or me on this mission and my heart falls a little more. Those old feelings of not being wanted, not being good enough from my dad creeping back in. I have to mentally shake it off. I can't go back to being that girl again, she was abused and neglected and everything that I have worked for is to make sure no one feels like that ever, including myself.

Do I confront him? Say anything? Or just live with this, pretend like it isn't the elephant in the room and hope for the best? At least Mina is with me, we'll just truck through this recon mission and I will keep my eye on the goal, to gain experience and knowledge about mission protocols. Nothing else matters, not him and his feelings, Audrina, Kaley, the guys, no one. I am here, living out my dream. That has to stay my focus.

He turns from the door without a word and walks off. We hurry behind him not wanting to be left behind. There's a black SUV parked out front with dark tinted windows. We both move to the back and climb in. No one is in the passenger seat, but neither of us want to be alone with Nickolas in whatever neverending mood he seems to be





stuck in.

He looks in the rearview mirror from the driver's side, huffs a sound out of his nose and then shifts his eyes back to the front before he starts to drive away. The windows are so dark that it's hard to see out in the last rays of light from the day. We are traveling away from the compound and the castle and everything I have been to since being in this pack. The butterflies in my stomach are back and my senses are on fire waiting to be used. I have to fight the smile that really wants to spread on my face. A real mission where I get to use real skills.

I sink back into the seat and just watch the forest fly by in blurred shadows and silhouettes thinking about all the training I have ever gone through, all the skill building games I did with the kids to hone isolated senses. 2

One game I miss is hide and seek. My wolf and I loved that game so we could refine our sense of smell. The kids would mill about in a section of forest near the training grounds, leaving their scents behind and one would hide when the rest came back to me and I had to figure out who was missing and then find them. We always had a great time. It taught them to start to use the forest around them to mask their scent and as they got better I had to improve my tracking skills to find them.



## Chapter 0282

We hit a bump in the road that brings me out of that happy memory.

"Hang on. The rest of the ride is going to be rough. We usually run out here." Nickolas' gruff voice carries back as we slow down slightly to accommodate the dips and bumps in the trail.

"Why not make us run then? I don't understand why we are being driven in if that isn't the norm."

I don't mean to sound like a teenager, but frankly I am and my anger at my situation, the way some of the trainers and some of the warriors view me and my position here, while better than when I started still isn't the best and it's pissing me off. But I can't blame them either. When I'm supposed to be doing the same things as everyone else, told what to expect, but not a minute later someone is trying to intervene and make something more comfortable and change the directive we were all given, but the change is only for me. It's bullsh\*t and I'm over it.

"I don't understand the motive here. Do you and the mission team think we're too weak to do this and want to prove that by making us take a car? You clearly don't want us here. Audrina and her idiot cronies think that I'm sleeping with all of you to keep my place here, thanks to the perceived

special treatment. Even though all of you have a brand that should make that physically impossible. I just wish someone would explain what the hell is going on already and give me real expectations." I rub my face and take a deep breath to try and calm down. "If I'm not ready, or if you think I should go home, then send me home." 1

"Do you want to leave?" His voice sounds too hopeful.

I scowl at him in the rearview. "Of course not." Now both me and my wolf are irritated, which is not a good combination. "That truly is a stupid question and shows you know nothing about me at all. This is the one thing I have worked for. The only thing I have ever wanted for myself. The one thing that I chose, with no outside influence. The one thing I am good at. I need to be here, but that doesn't mean I have to be here now if my age or inexperience or whatever the hell is going on is a problem. I'm here to get better, not ruin everyone's chances by being a distraction." I finish by rolling my eyes and look out the window at nothing now that the darkness has fully taken over in the 45 minute drive.

Mina is tense next to me. She knows a little of what has gone on with me, but I try to keep what happened in my past, back home, tucked away in a tight little corner of my mind. I am here now, away from all of that sh\*t and I really want it to stay that way, but I can't seem to get people to see past my physical presence. My age and my size will always be a problem, no matter what I do. I get that now. I just have to continue to be more. I have to work more, study more,

prepare more, show up more. It's the only thing I can control.

I hope when I get my brand some of the emotions surrounding these thoughts are tamped down, cause I am so tired of the emotional roller coaster.

Nickolas growls in his chest. Good, at least he feels some of the irritation that I do.

"You have to understand. All the trainers are aware of you and your affiliation with the Alpha King..."

Oh hell no! I cut him off. "I'm going to stop you right there." I raise my hand up. "You don't give Xander the same porcelain doll treatment, and he's the next in line to be king! So rethink your argument."

He grunts again. "You're right, I don't want you on this mission, I have a bad feeling about it. I have since we started it. I can't explain it, so I'm not going to try since you have a death wish anyway." He just leaves it at that answer finish the drive in silence.

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