

## CHAPTER 10

10 Ava: Freedom I make it two days before I give up and call Lisa, ten minutes before her shift. She doesn't answer the first time, so I call again. This time, she picks up, and her annoyed voice brings tears to my eyes. "Hello?" that wonderful voice snaps into my ear, suspicious and guarded. She thinks I'm a robocaller. "Hey, Lise." Somehow, I manage to sound normal. "Ava? This isn't your number. Did you lose your phone?" I pick at the inseam of my jeans, staring out the train window, focusing on the rolling hills beyond the raindrops splattered against my window. I've switched trains a few times and bought multiple tickets at each station, just in case someone figures out how I left the city. In the end, I've managed to take an odd, loopy route that has me now in Washington. "Yeah. Look, if anyone from my family tries to contact you... Um. God, this is going to be a lot that I can't explain before your shift starts, but the main thing is that if my family contacts you, tell them you don't know anything. Save 34:30 1/6 10 Ava: Freedom. this number under a random name. Call me Ashley or something." "Okay." Her instant acceptance warms my heart. My nose tingles as a few tears escape, sliding down my cheeks. It's enough to take the edge off that pain in my chest that refuses to leave, as though something important is missing. It has to just be in my head, though, right...? If he was my fated mate, he would have never looked at me the way he did. I've never heard of a fated who hates their mate. Even the abusive ones. But I know he is. It's a knowledge deep in my bones. Damn it. "I, uh, ran away from home. Long story. I'm not going to be back. My family's not going to let me go that easy." Or maybe they'll just be happy to get rid of me. That would be nice. I wait for her response, but there is none. Lisa's silence has anxiety clawing up my belly and death gripping my throat. "Lise?" "Yeah, I'm here. I'm just in shock. I can't believe you ran away. I want to say congratulations, but I'm not 14:30 228 10 Ava: Freedom sure if that's being insensitive. When will you come back? A month? Two?" I bite my lip. "Never." "Never?!" "There are things I've never told you, and I promise I'll explain it all. But the first thing is the most important. I'm not human, Lise. Not exactly, anyway. My entire family, we're shifters. I'm from the Blackwood Pack, and my dad is beta there." "The Blackwoods are the wolf shifters, aren't they? The ones that rule over the entire area?" Her voice is a higher pitch than normal, but at least she isn't screaming. I make a little sound of agreement, and she goes quiet again. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you," I whisper, distress shuddering down my back. What if she doesn't want to talk to me anymore? I know I had pre-mourning her several days before, convincing myself that I had to leave her behind for her safety. But after everything—I need a friend. Someone on my side. Someone to talk to. Someone who cares. A strangled half-laugh sounds from my phone. "Girl, I 276 10 Ava: Freedom don't care about that. I'm just... processing. Holy shit. The Blackwoods. No wonder you said you'd never be able to move out." "Mhmm." "And that's why you've just... run away. And not answered my texts in days, by the way." Guilt hunches my neck down

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until I resemble a turtle. "I know. I'm sorry. I ditched my phone and thought I shouldn't contact you, in case they—well. In case." "Do you think they will... Oh, shit, hold on. f@ck, Shelby just poked her head in here and stared at me. I need to clock in. Look, Ave. I'll save your number, and we are going to talk, okay? Should I get a different phone in case they like, tap mine, or something? Can they do that? I know they control the police and everything around here." I can't help the hysterical giggle that escapes. "I have no idea. Oh, God. I hope they can't. I got a burner. Maybe you can, too." "I'll stop by the store on my way home. Are you safe right now? God, Shelby's right here. I have to go, but I need to know you're safe." 14:30 10 Ava: Freedom I nod, even though she can't see me. "I'm safe," I promise, hoping I'm right. "Okay. I love you, girl. I'll call you as soon as I can." A smile, my first in days, tugs at the corners of my mouth. This is why I gave in. This was what my broken, bleeding heart needed. Love. Not rejection. Not my family. Not him. "I know. I love you, too." I stare at my phone long after Lisa hangs up, my mind a whirlwind. The train rocks beneath me, the steady rhythm a stark contrast to the chaos within. I'm still not sure how far to run or where is safe. The Blackwood Pack's influence stretches far and wide, their tendrils reaching into every corner of the Northwest Territories. Once again I consider leaving the region entirely, starting fresh somewhere new. But the thought is fleeting, replaced by grim knowledge that I know nothing about any other wolf packs. Their territories, their customs, their laws—all a mystery to me. I've spent my entire life within the confines of the Blackwood Pack, never daring to venture beyond its borders. The few things I know are about the packs within the Northwestern territories. 14:39 5/0 10 Ava: Freedom My heart beats in an erratic rhythm as I entertain a different thought, equal parts exciting and terrifying. What if I don't seek out another pack at all? What if I choose to live as a human? The idea sends a shiver down my spine, a mix of fear and anticipation. To leave behind everything I've ever known, to navigate a world I've only ever observed from the sidelines... There's a certain allure to it, the promise of freedom, of anonymity. In the human world, I won't be Ava Grey, the beta's daughter, the disappointment of the pack. I can be anyone I want to be, free from the expectations and judgments that have weighed me down for far too long... Comment 5 View All > Post your first comment! Vote 11 1 Fandom Swipe left to continue >[www.nOVeLorm.COM](http://www.nOVeLorm.COM)

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