

CHAPTER 120

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120 Ava: Vampire's Call 120 Ava: Vampire's Call "If you ever need me, child, simply light a candle and call my name. I'll find you." My eyes snap open in the middle of a deep sleep, and my heart races, a thunderous pounding in my chest that shakes my entire body. The dream was too real, too close to memory. Selene's ears perk up as she lifts her head from the foot of the bed. What's wrong, Ava? I shake my head, eyes darting to the door. Kellan's somewhere in the apartment, ever present, always listening. I think I know how to contact Sister Miriam. The maybe-vampire lady. Selene's blue eyes widen. How? She sits up, her full attention on me. When she visited me before the ceremony, she said if I needed her, I should light a candle and call her name. That she'd find me. 1 Tell me everything, Selene says, her voice gentle in my mind. Every detail. 15:46 1/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call I recount the memory, the cloying scent of incense, the invasive way she touched me, her cryptic words. The dread and intrigue she instilled in my mother. Your mother fears her, Selene muses. As she should. Vampires are not to be trifled with. But she might have answers. About what I am. What's happening to me. She seemed to know. Selene is quiet for a long moment. Vampires are ancient, powerful creatures with their own agendas. She may help you, but there will be a price. There always is, with their kind. I swallow hard, a shiver running through me. I'll be careful. I promise. Try to sleep, Selene says, curling back up. We'll talk more tomorrow. I nod, sinking back against the pillows. But sleep is elusive, my mind spinning with possibilities and fears. Sister Miriam's red eyes follow me into my dreams, her silken voice a whispered promise. "I'll find you." I toss and turn, the sheets twisting around my legs. Power pulses under my skin, a restless itch I can't 15:46 2/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call scratch. What if she's the key? What if she can unlock the mystery inside me, teach me to wield the elements like weapons? But Selene's warning lingers, a cold weight in my stomach. There will be a price. With vampires, there always is. Shadows play across the ceiling, indifferent to my struggles. Outside, the moon is bright, almost full. Its call sings in my blood. * * * The days pass in a blur. Lucas comes and goes between Blackwood and Westwood. I don't know the details, but I do know that the search for my parents—and Alpha Renard—is heating up. From what I'm told, they're no closer to finding them. But the fact that they've been so silent, so underground, has everyone nervous. Jericho still runs me and Lisa ra things have changed. I'm strong ery day, but and he's 15:46 3/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call begun incorporating real self-defense. Mainly, falling. "You need to learn to fall," he declares out of no-f@cking-where, popping into my field of vision like one of those winding pop-up toys. I manage to keep my face blank even as my heartbeat spikes for a second from the scare. "Fall?" The word seems to echo off the exposed brick walls of the gym, bouncing back and smacking me in the face. It's raining outside, and he's decided to show us a little mercy by letting us do all of our torture indoors today. Jericho's scarred lip curls. "Yes, Ava. Falling." "But I thought we were going to learn actual fighting today." "And how do you think you're going to learn that without first learning how to fall?" He has a point, I think. No, I know he has a point. But I don't want to admit he does, so I cross my arms and scowl at him. "I know how to fall." "Oh, do you now?" 15:46 4/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call He moves faster than I can track, from weathered and unimpressed to having my entire body slammed into the mat. All the air rushes out of my lungs in the space millisecond. of a It takes time to re-learn how to breathe after the shock. "Get up," he barks. Scrambling to my feet is an effort, my tailbone throbbing with every movement. "You call that a fall?" Jericho scoffs. "You hit the ground like a sack of potatoes. Bend your knees, tuck your chin, slap the mat with your palms." There's no point in telling him that he never taught me shit before throwing me down. He'd just laugh. So I grit my teeth and nod, determined to figure it out. He comes at me again, and I try to remember what he said. Bend the knees, tuck the chin, slap the- My back hits the mat, and I wheeze. "Again," Jericho orders. 15:46 5/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call And so it goes. Over and over, he knocks me down, and over and over, I struggle to my feet. Each time, he barks out a correction. It's always something. How I hit the ground. How I get up. How my body moveŴww.NovélWorm.com

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s. Every part of my body is connected into one giant bruise, and the mat becomes a nightmare I'm never going to forget. For being something foam and giving, it feels like stone when I land on it. Pretty sure my butt has left permanent imprints on it. From the corner of my eye, I catch a glimpse of Lisa. She's with Kellan, who's putting her through some kind of calisthenics routine. Pushups, sit-ups, lunges, weird walking crab-like movements. It looks exhausting, but at least she's not getting thrown around like a child's playtoy. Longing tugs at my heart as I watch them. What I wouldn't give to trade places right now and free myself of my vicious tyrant overlord of a trainer. 3 But then Jericho is coming at me again, and I have to focus. Bracing myself, I do my best to anticipate the fall, determined to do it properly. 15:46 120 Ava: Vampire's Call I don't, of course. The mat slaps the air straight out of my lungs once again as I groan in very, very real pain. "You're not concentrating," Jericho growls. "Get your head in the game, Ava." I push myself up to my hands and knees, panting. My arms tremble with the effort, and I can feel the sweat dripping down my face. My shirt is stuck to my body, positively soaked, and I think I popped a stitch in the crotch of my leggings. "I'm trying," I grumble through clenched teeth. "Not hard enough." He's right, of course. As much as I hate to admit it, I know I'm not giving it my all. I'm too busy feeling sorry for myself, too busy wishing I was doing something else. Too busy hurting. But this is important. I know it is. If I'm going to survive in this world, if I'm going to protect myself and stop needing to be rescued like some damsel in distress, I need to learn how to fight. And that starts with learning how to fall... apparently. Taking a deep breath I force myself onto my feet, avoving a litt14 15:46 My hodu soraama in 7/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call protest, but I ignore the pain as best as I can, squaring my shoulders. I meet Jericho's gaze head-on. "I'm ready." And so we go again. And again. And again. After what feels like an eternity, there's some progress. I get a little better. Sometimes I avoid landing on my back. Every so often I manage to pop up in a decent time frame, despite Jericho complaining that I'd be dead in a real fight. I still end up on my ass more often than not, but I can feel myself improving. Jericho seems to sense it too. His corrections become less frequent, his nods of approval more common, always interspersed with grumbling insults. By the time he calls a halt, I can't feel my hands or feet anymore. But there's a sense of accomplishment thrumming through me, a pride in what I've achieved. I glance over at Lisa again. Her face is flushed and sweaty as she downs a bottle of water with Kellan standing beside her, saying something. She catches my eye and grins, giving me a thumbs up, before turning to scowl at the beta. Apparently she doesn't like the sound of whatever he's saving. Will 15:47 8/9 120 Ava: Vampire's Call those two ever get along? "Not bad," Jericho says, drawing my attention back to him. "We'll make a fighter out of you yet." I nod, too exhausted to speak. He tosses me a towel, and I catch it gratefully, wiping the sweat from my face. "Hit the showers," he orders. "We'll pick this up again tomorrow." My legs tremble with every step, but I swivel and escape before he has a chance to change his mind. Comment 3 View All > 15:47 R Leave the first comment for this chapter. Vote 13 1 Fandom Swipe left to continue > Send Gift 9/9

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