

CHAPTER 139

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END SEASON TWO “You’re making this so much harder than it should be. I was hoping to savor this moment, but now I have to rush my meal, instead.” He sounds disappointed, not angry, and the difference makes me shudder. It’s worse than him being infuriated. It shows that my struggles are no more than an inconvenience to him. When his fangs break skin, the pain is unbearable. It’s worse than fire in my veins. It’s an ache so deep that my entire body throbs and burns, I open my mouth to scream, but no sound comes out; I can’t breathe. Skimming over the pain is an ecstasy that taunts me with bliss, tantalizing with its lack of pain. I yearn for it, wanting to sink in, wanting to escape this torture- Eyes, Ava! Selene shouts. Go for the eyes! With a desperate cry, I jab my fingers toward his face, aiming for those cold, mocking eyes. He jerks his head back and I can feel my neck rip and tear, blood 18.10 1/11 139 Ava A Shocking Finale (il)-END SEASON TWO pouring. But not before I feel my nails sink into something soft and yielding. He howls, his grip loosens, and I wrench myself free, staggering away. The vampire clutches at his face, blood seeping between his fingers. One eye is a ruined mess, but the other glares at me with unadulterated hatred. “You’ll pay for that, bitch,” he spits, his voice a guttural rasp. I hold my hands against my neck, against the blood pouring out, gasping for air to fill my lungs. It’s like they can’t inflate fully, can’t fill with oxygen. This time rage fuels his movements as he lunges for me, messy and uncoordinated. My brain’s already off, moving on instinct, through repetitive motions in training. A quick sidestep. A knee to the groin, a practiced weak point. He’s wide open and doubles over with a grunt as I follow up with an elbow to the back of his neck, sacrificing blood loss for success. He hits the ground hard. Good to know pressure points also work on vampires 18/10 211 139 Ava: A Shocking Finale ()-END SEASON TWO He won’t be down long—may seconds. I dart to Lisa, grabbing her under the arms and dragging her back, scrabbling for purchase with my hands slick from blood. My neck screams in pain and my vision blurs from darkness to light, spotted with prismatic shapes. The vampire rises to his feet, his face a mask of rage. Blood drips from his ruined eye, painting a gruesome picture. He stalks toward us, his movements jerky, unhinged. He’s a far cry from the elegant monster from before. He’s lost reason. Lost control. I have a chance. “I’m going to rip you apart,” he snarls, spittle flying from his lips. “Piece by f@cking piece.” I brace myself, shielding Lisa with my body. I know I can’t outrun him, not while carrying her. My only choice is to stand and fight, to buy time until help arrives. If it arrives. Something sparks to life inside of me, a crackling current that dances along my nerves. I feel it building, 15-11 211 130 Ava A Shocking Finale (1) END SEASON TWO swelling, thrumming beneath my skin. It’s electric. It’s terrifying. It’s hope. The vampire charges with a loud snarl and I trust the power within me, meeting him head on. The flow of time itself changes. A punch that before would have been impossible to track is now something I can not only see, but think about. All my training comes to me without thought. How to block. How to move. Simple things. How to press my hand against his arm, how to utilize his momentum to throw his body as I please. How to step as I dodge. I’ve had little training in offensive strikes, but I’ve practiced defense to exhaustion every day. And so every time he tries to grab me, he’s shoved forward for god to regain his balance 13 11 4/11 139 Ava A Shocking Finale (1) END SEASON TWO But this can’t go on forever. I can feel the wooziness in head, the way my knees shake, how my crop top is soaked in blood... Shouldn’t I be unconscious already? Just a little longer, Selene says, an encouraging presence in my mind. They’re almost there. It’s only then that I notice the sounds outside of our little area. The howls in the distance. The sound of sirens. The snarling and growling of wolves here, fighting. Perhaps they’re on the other side of the house. There’s an occasional crash. A lot of slurs. It’s crazy how it’s so relatively peaceful back here, with only Teddy and Bren’s corpses, Lisa’s unconscious form, and the vampire in front of me. He’s changing tactics, his fury fading, his face wary. “Come with us, kitten. I’ve been searching for so long. Don’t you want to know the truth of your story?” My story? 18:11 5/11 “Don’t you hate these stupid ke? Their rules? Their old ways?” He reaches out a clawed hand, all the deranged anger gone, his face once again settled into that pale, death-transcendent beauty. Come with me, kitten. I’ll keep you safe, teach you your powers. Tell you the truth about that wolf inside your soul.” Don’t agree with him. You’re half in contract. Any agreement will bind you. Selene’s words are urgent, and I have so many f@cking questions, but I’m swaying on my feet, even with this energy flowing through my body. “No.” Honestly, I’m shocked I can even speak. I don’t know how bad the damage to my neck is, but it can’t be small. Yet when I bring my hand to my neck again, the skin is smooth and unblemished beneath my fingers, beneath the blood coating every part of me. No wonder I’m not unconscious. The pain is there, throbbing, but the damage has disappeared. Only the faint outline of my coar remaine 139 Ava: A Shocking Finale (III)-END SEASON TWO “Come along, kitten. You and your friend, too. I’ll give you the freedom he can’t. I’ll give you the knowledge she won’t. Come, Ava Grey, Ward of the Witches. You seek a home, and I have one to give.” That little girl inside of me, the one desperate for the love of my family, sways toward him. But the rest of me holds her back, despite the faint tingle of the ecstasy I’d felt taunting me from beyond the pain when he bit me. “No,” I say again, trying to make sense of it all. “I’m not leaving here.” He steps closer, and I fall to my knees with a groan. I can’t hold on to the power, feeling it pour out of me. For a second, I can almost imagine golden strands connecting me to the earth, but they disappear in a blink. My vision’s still spotty. The vampire kneels before me, cupping my cheek with a soft croon. A lullaby, I think. Ava! “No,” I whisper, not sure if he asked me any questions. 18:11 7/11 139 Ava: A Shocking Finale (D)—END SEASON TWO Everything’s a blurry mess. I can’t see him anymore, the only sound a roaring in my ears. My blood, maybe, rushing through my veins. There’s pain on my wrist, the feeling of something slicing skin. Then something cold against it, and power infusing into my blood again. One heartbeat. Two. My vision clears a little, to see the vampire ki*sing my wrist. It’s a soft, sweet movement that sends pleasure through my pain-wracked body. Pain. That’s what I’m feeling. MywW.W.N(ø)vE/WôR@.côM

Updates... body feels like it’s tearing apart, and the only relief from it is his lips on my skin. He laughs, I think. It’s hard to tell. I can see his tongue lapping at my wrist, and I’m surprised to see it’s so pale, disgusted to see the blood -my blood—on it. 18:11 8/11 139 Ava: A Shocking Finale (III)—END SEASON TWO “What a good little kitten,” he croons, and danger signals in the back of my head. I yank at my arm, but he holds it tight, leaning forward to press his bloody mouth against mine. It’s iron-rich and disgusting, this brief press of our lips. “You’ll be begging me to fulfill our contract,” he breathes. “Don’t worry, kitten. I’ll come back for you.” I hate that I sway toward him, desperate for more contact. For relief against the pain. He knows it, too, because he laughs. It’s definitely a laugh. And then he’s gone, and something inside of me rebels, wanting him back. Ava! Selene’s mental presence seems to fill my head, buffering me against the pain in my body. I’m almost there. Just hold on a little longer. The blood haze won’t last once he’s gone. Once he’s gone? Something in the back of my mind niggles at me, and I 18:12 9/11 blink against my darkening vision. He disappeared from view, but now he’s back. But he’s walking away from me. Holding a body. Wait, no. That’s not a body. That’s Lisa. “Wait-” But he disappears, the world shifting around him like a heat mirage, distorting for moments before returning to normal. Only he isn’t

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