

CHAPTER 146

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146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... Lucas watches me with concern and care, but all I can say is, "Oh." Some part of me had expected Mom to stay in a coma forever. Or die. I didn't think about her much. Ignoring her existence is easier than dealing with—well, everything. "I would have to return to Blackwood in order to question her." Every word is careful and measured, as though he's not sure how I'm going to respond. He doesn't invite me to go. I'm not sure I want to. He probably realizes that. Selene glances toward us, her ears flicking as she listens. "I don't think that's the best idea. Your pack needs you here. They need to see their alpha." I'm hesitant to speak up, but Selene's watchful gaze gives me a little confidence. "Alpha Clayton is still there, isn't he? I think he should lead the interrogation." It's our first time saying his name between us and I 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... can feel Lucas' muscles tense. Trying to give him a little comfort, I grab his hand, threading our fingers together. A silent message that I'm still here. That I've already made my choice. My heart hurts when I realize how little I've really thought about the damage I've done to this man. He relaxes, drawing me closer, his thumb rubbing against the back of my hand. "You're right. I'll call him." It's amazing how warm my heart feels, knowing that I've given Lucas a little peace of mind, with a hint of my heart. I've wasted so much time worrying about his intentions. Worrying about being trapped in a gilded cage. Being brave is easier than I thought it would be. He brings our joined hands to his lips, pressing a gentle ki*s against them. "I have to meet with Kellan and discuss everything, but I'll keep you updated. I promise." *** The front door closes with a soft click, and Lucas' 10:06 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge warmth disappears with him. I pace across the floor, my arms wrapped around my middle, hugging myself as if that'll hold all the broken pieces inside of me together. Mom's awake. Lisa's gone. Vampires attacked. Sister Miriam's trying to get in touch with me. My father might be hiding in a city of vampires. It's a lot to think through. To process. You're going to wear a hole through the floor. She watches me pace, her attention distracted from her show. Why don't you summon Sister Miriam and see if you can get some answers? That might help you. I pause mid-step, thinking about Lucas. About the baby steps we managed today. "I can't." Why not? Isn't that what you wanted to do? "Yes. No. I don't know." I rake a hand through my hair, frustration huhhling un inside mo ingida ma "It's not that 16:08 3/8 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... simple." Because of Lucas. It's not a question. Selene's too perceptive for that. She sees right through me. I groan, sinking back onto the couch. "I don't want to lose his trust by going behind his back. But I can't risk Lisa's life over him, either." So, tell him everything. My voice cracks. "What if he looks at me differently? What if he doesn't want me anymore?" Selene is quiet for a long moment. Then she nudges my leg with her nose, her fur soft against my skin. He could have given up on you a long time ago. 1 She sounds half-strangled to even admit it, and I laugh a little. She's not wrong. He's still here, despite everything. He's nothing like my parents. My family. Lucas makes you happy. I want you to be happy. Selene's words are simple, but my heart fills. "You always call him my ex-fated." 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... Is your mate bond based on fate or choice? It's on the tip of my tongue to say fate, of course. But then I think back. Despite our bond insistently tugging us together, it isn't the reason I want to connect with him. It's just Lucas. How he cares. How he came for me. How he's been there, no matter how much I run from his feelings. "Choice," I decide, feeling the truth deep in my heart. Our fated bond drives us together, but it's not why I want to be with him. Then he is your chosen mate, even more than he's your fated one. "But what if-" You can't build a relationship on secrets and lies. But it's your choice. I will be here, regardless. Even so, it feels like a betrayal to put my bond with Lucas over Lisa's life. Maybe it's the wrong decision. I'm actually half-convinced it is the wrong decision. 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge. That I should have taken the opportunity while I was here to talk to him. But I grab the candle. "I'll explain it to him after I talk to her. I can't wait around just because I'm worried about his reaction." Ignoring that little tug at my gut trying to me about future problems, I grab the candle and light it, sneezing at the smell of burning dust. Selene sneezes beside me. It's awful. Like burning dust and a dead fly. I ignore her complaint, too focused on the task at hand. Squeezing@Ww.NoVelmORM.COM

Updates... my eyes shut, I picture Sister Miriam in my mind—her dark hair, pale skin, and those disconcerting red eyes that seem to see right through me. "Sister Miriam," I whisper, my voice barely audible even to my own ears. At first, nothing happens. The room remains silent save for the soft hum of the television in the background. But then, "omething shifts. The image of Sister Miriam in my mind grows clearer, more vivid. It's as if she's standing right in front of me, those 148 Ava: Without His Knowledge.... unsettling eyes boring into mine. A shiver runs through me, and I feel a strange sensation wash over my body. It's like I'm being pulled forward, tugged towards something I can't quite comprehend. The room around me seems to fade away, replaced by an endless expanse of red that matches the color of Sister Miriam's eyes. Ava? Selene's concerned voice sounds distant, muffled, as if she's speaking to me from underwater. What's happening? I try to respond, to tell her I don't know, but the words catch in my throat. The red engulfs me completely now, surrounding me on all sides. It's suffocating, overwhelming, and I feel rising panic in my chest. Just as I'm about to succumb to the fear, the red dissipates. The change is jarring. My eyes take several rounds of rapid blinks to adjust. I'm no longer in my apartment. Instead, I'm standing in the middle of a brightly lit room. It's a cozy little space, an eclectic mix of vintage and modern. It should look haphazard and nieced 10:09 7/8 146 Ava: Without His Knowledge... together, but it looks almost quaint. Cozy. Clean. Soft, plush armchairs with sleek, minimalist end tables. Colorful throw pillows scattered across an elegant, if worn, leather couch. There are bookshelves everywhere, each filled to the brim. Recognizable modern books mixed with ancient encyclopedias. Some spines show different languages. There are even fabric-covered books that have my fingers twitching with the need to run my finger down the length of them. A bibliophile's dream. Where the hell are we? "Welcome to my home, child." Comment1 View All > A Leave the first comment for this chapterWw.NoVelmORM.COM

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