

CHAPTER 158

158 Ava: From the Past “Ava, is that you?” The familiar rasp has me frozen, my heart lurching into my throat. Slowly, I turn around, coming face-to-face with a ghost from my past. Our neighbor. Margot Mitchell. Her once vibrant auburn hair is streaked with silver, her face a roadmap of wrinkles and scars. It’s her eyes that haunt me. Piercing green eyes that see everything and do nothing. “Margot,” I greet, my voice tight with caution. “What are you doing here?” She limps toward me, her gait uneven from some injury she incurred long before I was born. I remember asking about it once, and my mother slapped the back of my head, admonishing me for my rudeness. “Oh, Ava. I’m so happy to see you again.” I tense as she reaches out, half-expecting her to grab me, to drag me back to the hellscape I escaped. But she merely places a hand on my arm, her touch feather-light. “I’m sorry,” she whispers, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. “I’m so sorry for everything. For not intervening when...” She trails off, her gaze flickering to the ground. The shame she tries to portray leaves me feeling dirty. Unclean from her mere presence. Memories flash through my mind, unbidden. Margot’s face in the \$2.00 150 As from the Pant window, watching as I was taunted and beaten, even by her own son. Listening at the front door as my parents berated me, their voices carrying through the window. Her figure rushing inside. when I tried begging her for help during one particularly brutal group assault led by Todd Mason. I was thirteen. He broke my wrist. I cried for hours that day. Hours. Until my parents, tired of my whining, finally dragged me to the healers. Margot, always watching. Never helping. I yank my arm away, taking a step back. “You’re sorry?” Anger surges through me, hot and bitter, fueling my words. “Why are you even saying that? What does that do for me now?” “Ava. You have to understand, none of us could help you. Please.” She grabs at my arm again. “We need you to understand us. To speak for us.” Ah. She needs something. No wonder she’s here. The bitter anger continues to boil in my veins, even as my stomach churns. There’s a tiny part of me, almost miniscule, that was hopeful her apology was genuine. It’s dead now, like so many other little parts of me over the years. “How did you know I was here?” I step back, avoiding her grip, and she stops trying. Margot shakes her head. “I am hired to clean the lodge. I didn’t 158 Ava From the Past know until I saw you.” Her eyes fill with tears. “Please, Ava. Think of your pack. So many of us are separated now. Taken from our mates. Forced to cut ties with the alpha. Westwood is tearing us apart. They should promote your brother, bring us back together.” “No.” My voice is cold as I take another step back. “No,” I repeat. “I have no intention of helping you or anyone else. from that pack. Not after everything I endured.” Margot’s face contorts, her features twisting into an ugly mask of rage. “You ungrateful little-” A low growl cuts her off. Selene stalks into the room, her hackles. raised, teeth bared. She positions herself between Margot and me, a living shield. Margot returns the growl, her eyes flashing amber. For a moment, I think she might actually shift and attack. My heart pounds against my ribs, adrenaline surging through my veins. Then Vanessa walks in, and Margot’s demeanor changes instantly. She straightens, smoothing her expression into one of neutral politeness. “I’ll find you again later,” she says, her tone clipped. “We can talk when you’ve settled in.” With that, she turns and flees the room, brushing past a bewildered Vanessa. Vanessa watches her go, then turns to me, curiosity etched on her face. “Who was that?” I swallow hard, trying to steady my racing heart. “An old neighbor,” I manage, my voice shaking slightly. “From... before.” 316 The Aws: From the Pink Understanding dawns in Vanessa’s eyes, followed by sympathy. She starts to say something, but I don’t hear her. I’m already sinking to my knees, burying my face in Selene’s thick fur. She whines softly, nuzzling against me as I tremble, overwhelmed by the unexpected confrontation with my past. Memories assault me, vivid and visceral. The jeers and taunts of my packmates. The pain of their blows, both physical and emotional. The sinking realization that no one, not even our neighbors, would help me. Breathe, Ava, Selene murmurs in my mind. You’re safe now. She can’t hurt you anymore.*wW.nOVêL(®)vR(®).çOm*

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I know she’s right, but it doesn’t stop the flood of emotions. Fear, anger, betrayal—they swirl inside me, a maelstrom threatening to pull me under. “Ava?” Vanessa’s gentle voice breaks through the chaos. “Are you alright?” A shuddering breath. A few beats of my heart, slowing down. Meeting her concerned gaze, I give the faintest smile. “I’m fine.” She nods, understanding in her eyes. “I’ll be in the other room if you need me.” She pauses, then adds, “Therapy isn’t something to be ashamed of. If you’re interested, just talk to me. Everything will be kept between us.” Gratitude wells up inside me, and I manage a shaky smile. “Thank you.” As Vanessa leaves, I turn my attention back to Selene, running my fingers through her soft fur. Her presence is a balm, soothing the 158 Ava: From the Past jagged edges of my memories. I’m sorry you had to face that, she says, her voice a gentle caress in my mind. But you handled it with strength and grace. A bitter laugh escapes me. “Strength? I’m shaking like a leaf.” Strength isn’t the absence of fear, Ava. It’s facing it head-on, even when it terrifies you. And that’s exactly what you did. Her words sink in, and I feel a glimmer of pride amidst the turmoil. She’s right. I did face Margot. I said what I wanted to. I refused to be pulled into the past. It’s a small victory, but still a victory. Every mile starts with a small step forward, Selene points out, and I rub my face against her. These small steps started a long time ago. With your alpha. You regret your actions now, but look at the strength you have managed from standing up to him. Leaning back, I narrow my eyes at Selene. “Are you sure you’re not just trying to put a positive spin on things now that you’re stuck with him?” No. Her tongue lolls, though, making me doubt her. I have always told you to ask for what you want, to stand up for what you feel. Even if you regret it now, these are the stepping stones to the strength you found today. “That’s like saying I should just argue with everyone all the time to become stronger.” No. She shakes herself, as if someone had dumped a bucket of 158 Ava: From the Past water on her. Me. I’m the water. Letting her go, I stand slowly, taking a deep breath. My heart is beating normally now, no longer thudding with anxiety. Now that you’ve learned how to say no, it’s time to learn when to say no, Selene continues, sounding prim and proper. I stare at her suspiciously, that damn husky smile throwing me off. I still can’t tell if she’s serious or not. I am, she insists, panting. “Fine. I believe you.” Comentario Ver todos > Deja el primer comentario para este capitulo*WwW.nOVêL(®)wÓrm.co®*

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