

## CHAPTER 161

161 Ava: Mom (I) Selene perks her head up before there's a knock rapping against my door. Vanessa, she confirms before I open it. "The boys have dialed in," Vanessa announces as soon as she sees my face. "It's up to you. We can head straight to the hospital, or you can settle in and wait until tomorrow." My stomach twists, heartburn coming out of nowhere to spread fire through my esophagus. "Oh." I could almost forget why I'm here, distracting myself with everything else. "Tomorrow's just fine-" "No," I cut in, shaking my head. "I need to talk to her now. The quicker we get answers, the sooner we can get Lisa back." Vanessa searches my face, her brows drawing together as she weighs the situation in her mind. After a moment, she steps back, motioning me out of the room. "I'll let Ves know." "Ves? Oh. Vester." I've never heard her talk about him before, and their curious interactions earlier have me wanting to ask her what's going on. But I'm not exactly sure how to casually bring up such a level of gossip. Is it gossip when you're talking to the person in question? Either way. 17:33 16 161 Ava Mom (0) "You can stop staring at me like that." Vanessa smiles at me as we head out of the lodge, flanked immediately by two burly wolf shifters I don't recognize. "Like what?" I ask, feigning innocence for as long as I can. It's embarrassing that she caught me. Once we're both buckled in and Vanessa shifts into reverse, she says, "Vester and I aren't exactly on talking terms right now." "Oh," I say, trying to ooze casual, even if my ears would be perked as high as hell if I was a dog right now. "He and I don't agree about how to deal with you," she adds, flicking a faint smile in my direction. "He thinks you should stay in Granite City, on Westwood lands, under guard at all times." "Oh." Distaste is about the only thing oozing out of me now, and she laughs. "Exactly. We are in disagreement. He thinks it's better to keep you under guard and safe so his alpha is not distracted during this time of crisis. I think he needs to get his head out of his ass. And as for Alpha, well..." "Lucas is trying," I defend immediately, and she nods. "He's been doing that. However, there has been some push-back with his long absences, his search for you, and how he prioritizes you over the pack." She glances at me again, then back to the road. "It's rough when you have a fated mate. The pull is strong." I nod, remembering that she and Vester are also fated mates. "It is. How do you two handle the distance?" 17:33 2/6 101 AM "We've been mated for six years. We're at a different place than you and Alpha are. Slowing for a red light, she leans back in the seat, glancing in her rearview mirror. "And none of you are hearing a single word of this, or I will personally inform your mates that you've contracted a terrible, newly discovered, wolf-borne STD and let you guys feel their wrath." Turning, I watch the bodyguards in the backseat, who all seem to shrivel at her words. "That's an abuse of power," I whisper, even though they can hear every word because... well, wolves. "Isn't it great?" She winks at me. "Gotta stop the gossips before they start, Luna." "I'm not your—" "Yes, yes, I know. Not yet." I like her, Selene says, but I don't like that she's put me in the back with all the storage. You can always hop over the seat and come up front. Her scoff is so loud it almost blows out my mental eardrum. With those hulking brutes? No, thank you. Did you know they picked me up and put me in here? My lips quirk as I gaze out the window, watching the familiar scenery pass. You're the one who showed up as a dog. Selene howls in the backseat, startling all of us. "Does she hate the car?" Vanessa asks me in confusion. "I heard she's great with all the travel." 17:34 310 181 Aw Mon "Nope." I pop the 'p' hard, and Selene begins to yowl like a cat in heat. "She's just upset she's in the trunk. Thinks she's a wolf." Vanessa pecks into the rearview mirror, shaking her head. "The fact that she's able to be around all of us without slinking away is a sight I've never seen. Dogs usually run from us." "Yeah." My lips quirk as the dog in question begins to sing the song of huskies everywhere. "She's a bit... special." Selene's singing punctuates the rest of the drive, until one bodyguard finally gives in and reaches into the back, coaxing her up front like he's talking to a baby. By the time we make it to the hospital, she's sitting in the middle seat, accepting the pets of both bodyguards as her due. Vanessa shakes her head. "Your dog is odd." "You have no idea," I mutter, though my mind is elsewhere as the tallw@w.NoVEL(w)@Rm.coM

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building looms before us. My heart races as we approach the entrance, each step bringing me closer to the inevitable confrontation with my mother. Vanessa glances at me, her eyes filled with concern. "How are you feeling, Ava?" I take a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves. "Nervous," I admit, surprised at how calm my voice sounds despite the turmoil within. "What are you afraid of?" Vanessa asks, her words soothing, a balm to the anxious bubbling of my thoughts. Her question catches me off guard What am I afraid of? I nause 17:34 Le my mind whirling with a myriad of possibilities. The weight of the past, the scars left by my mother's neglect and disapproval, the fear of once again being trapped liga life I never wanted... I guess? "I'm not sure." Vanessa studies me for a moment before asking, "What's the worst thing your mother can do to you today?" The answer comes to me in an instant, with a sharp pang in my chest. "Withhold information about Lisa" Vanessa nods, her eyes soft as she holds my gaze. "Ava, your mother no longer has any power over you. All the power she holds is in the past, in memories." Her words hit me like a revelation, and I fall silent, letting the truth sink in. It doesn't feel right. Her words settle on me like a scratchy blanket. It's uncomfortable, even if it's warm. But she's not wrong. Mom is no longer someone who can walk into a room and change the course of my life. I don't need her approval, I don't need to worry about what she thinks. I don't have to ask for her permission. There's no more begging for her affection. She can do nothing to me. She can't take away my car or my freedom. I can't be forced into chores. She can't punish me for my thoughts, or the look on my face, or just for existing. My mother's influence, once an oppressive force in my life, is now 161 As Mom (13 nothing more than a shadow. I wonder if that fact will ever feel real Comentario úbrica tu primer comentario! Voto FANDOM Deslizar a la izquierda para continuar > Ver todos > ENVIAR REGALO 17:35