

Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted #181 - Read Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted 181

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181 Ava: Twenty Laps Around the Track

Muddy Blue Eyes turns back in my direction, and while I can't sense any sort of real respect or care, he at least reclaims a

professional air when he addresses me.

Before he can ask anything important, I have an odd, niggling little bug in my car from what he'd said a few moments ago. "Five miles around the track is

1—what? His confusion is clear in his wrinkled brow and hesitation. "Yes. Twenty laps."

"Not twelve?"

"No. It's twenty. Four laps to a mile

My memory is very clear of my torture during training, and I know that can't be right. "Jericho told us to run five miles, and it was always twelve laps."

"Beta—Mentor Ashbourne?" Muddy—Blue Eyes looks astonished, his brows rising. "Only twelve laps? Are you sure?"

"Positive. He had us count them. The memory of my jello—legs after each lap have me shuddering. "It was torture."

"Torture? She's been blessed by the Moon Goddess for his favor, and she calls it torture," Muddy—Blue Eyes' partner mutters, looking out the window and bringing his hand to his lips in a gesture of faith I've seen often in Westwood, but almost never in

"Perhaps Beta Mentor Ashbourne

oft on newbies? I suggest

soft

and Muddy Blue Eyes shakes his head in a firm negative. Then I pause, rolling that name over in my head. "Wait. Ashbourne... isn't that Kellan's family n

"Beta Mentor Jericho is Beta Kellan's father, Muddy Blue Eyes confirms. "When he stepped down as beta to focus on training young wolves, Beta Kellan

Ah.

The odd feeling between them now makes sense. It doesn't seem like a favorable father-son connection, somehow.

"I see." In a few minutes, I've learned more about the man who spent ages training me and Lisa for hours every day than I did. when he was training us.

Another eye-opening experience.

Thinking of how he cut our laps nearly in half, instead of forcing us to run the full five miles- while Lisa and I bemoaned every mile, thinking we were really running five miles-I rub my thighs, fighting against the remembered aches and pains.

The cantankerous old man's ranking in my heart rises significantly.

Five real miles might have actually killed us.

"He's very kind," I say after a while, realizing both men seem to be waiting on some sort of response.

The other two have long since left, and I shift uncomfortably on the bed. It seems their constant presence has been replaced with these two, which somehow makes everything worse.

At least the other ones hated me and I didn't feel obligated to try and strike up conversation with them.

These two...

I've seen them before. I know they've guarded Lisa's apartment more than once.

And I don't even know their names

Muddy Blue Eyes snorts, before walking to the window and peering outside. "Kind isn't a word anyone uses to describe the Beta

Mentor.

Nodding in silence, I can only agree. Kind is not really a word that fits his crotchety personality.

But it's there, hidden in his gruff words and demands for more,

Both men stiffen, turning to glance at each other. Neither of them say a word, but their faces show how distracted they are inside their heads.

My shoulders tense again, and Selene perks her ears. Something's happening. Maybe they'll explain it when they're done talking.

Without thinking, I twist one of her ears. I don't mean to; my fingers have been fiddling with them for a while, and my skyrocketing anxiety brought it to a new level.

Ouch!

I wince as her claws dig into my thigh. Sorry. But my stomach is churning, acid eating through its lining as we wait.

When Muddy Blue Eyes seems to be done talking, I lean forward.

"What's going on?"

He glances toward me and shakes his head. "No one's injured. that's what you're worried about

Well, that's good

But that doesn't answer my question.

Both men seem on edge, taking station on either end of the room Muddy Blue Eyes stays near the window, scanning outside without

pause.

His partner stays by the door, opening it only when someone approaches. It must be the new guards, because he shares a few quick words before closin

back down the hall.

Every movement is tense. Jerky. Restless.

Whatever happened—it's significant.

"What's going on?" I press, unable to ignore the palpable shift in the atmosphere.

The guard by the door finally speaks up, his words clipped and devoid of emotion. "The bodies were taken."

My heart lurches in my chest. "How is that even possible?!"

The guards remain silent, their faces unreadable. Selene shifts beside me, her hackles raised, sensing the unease permeating the room.

She was right, that dhampir. This is far worse than expected.

Selene's grim words only give me the urge to vomit.

What could they possibly want with the bodies?

151 Avariwal, Lane wound the Tygak

The words hang in my throat, choking me, until I can barely breathe. My mind races, desperate for understanding, but any possible motive is an elusive w
behind.

The guard's gaze darts around the room. "We don't have details yet. Just that the pyres were disturbed and the bodies are gone."

Gone. The word echoes in my head, bouncing off the walls of my skull until it's all I can hear. Those wolves, those lives lost because
of my actions, my choices... and now even their final rest has been
violated.

Selene presses closer to me, her warmth a small comfort against the icy dread seeping through my veins. It's not your fault, Ava, she murmurs in my mind

All those families. All the loved ones who will now be denied even the small solace of a proper farewell. The weight of it...

So heavy. Overwhelming.

There are no words for this pressure crushing every bit of my soul.

"How could this happen?" I whisper, more to myself than the guards. "For so many bodies to disappear, how many are involved?"

Muddy-Blue Eyes shakes his head, his jaw tight. "We're looking into it. Alpha Westwood is handling the situation. Just relax until they
return."

Lucas. The thought of him out there, dealing with this new horror on top of everything else, makes my heart ache. I know he'll blame

himself.

I'm utterly useless. What good is my identity, my supposed power, if i can't even protect my own pack?

Selene nuzzles my hand, sensing my spiraling thoughts. You're not useless, Ava. You're doing what you can, what you must.

But it doesn't feel like enough. It feels like I'm sitting on the sidelines while everyone else fights my battles for me. While Lisa suffers, while the pack grieves, while Lucas carries the weight of leadership alone.

I close my eyes, trying to center myself, to find some shreds of calm amidst the chaos. But all I can see are the faces of the dead, the accusations in their

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182 Lucas: Ghoulish Discovery

LUCAS =

Who the fuck steals burning bodies of the dead?

The motive is completely unfathomable.

Angry flames lick at the night sky, smoldering remnants of what should have been a sacred night, with souls returned to the embrace of the Moon Godde

Instead, there are eighteen disturbed mounds, with no bodies to

be found.

Nude after my shift, my bare feet sink into the sodden earth as I move closer, mud squelching between my toes.

"Alpha." Kellan's voice cuts through the haze of my thoughts. He holds out a bundle of clothes, emergency spares we keep on hand

for situations like this.

Grabbing only a pair of jeans, I pull them on with a vicious yank, fury boiling just beneath my skin. The breeze, cool and oblivious to the undercurrents of the night, is almost soothing against my heated skin.

Around me, my wolves move through the clearing, noses to the ground as they try to parse out any lingering scents. But there's nothing. The air is too clear

before us.

"I don't understand," I mutter, more to myself than anyone else.

"How can there be no scent? It's like the area's been sanitized."

Kellan frowns, his brow furrowed in concentration. "It's not just the scents of the offenders that are missing. I can't even catch a whiff of Ava"

It's true. Even her scent has been erased from the very air around

16. 16.

I turn in a slow circle, taking in the scene with growing frustration. The disturbed heaps continue to burn, casting an eerie glow across the clearing.

My wolves move like shadows, their movements precise and focused as they search for any clue, any hint of who could have done this.

But there's nothing. No scent, no trail, no sign of the monsters responsible for this atrocity. It's as if they never existed.

"Keep searching I order, my voice rough with emotion. "There has to be something we're missing"

But even as the words leave my lips, I know it's futile. Whoever did this was meticulous, leaving no trace of their presence behind.

Of course it's probably the vampires. But if it's not, we risk a war that will take too many lives.

So many wolves are already clamoring, screaming for the streets to run crimson beneath our silver moon. A true war hasn't come to any pack in a long time

in this moment.

It's real.

ICCs Devery

So many have already died, but for what?

As much as I love her, as much as my life revolves around her, Ava alone can't possibly be the reason.

There's something else. It feels like we're all being led to one conclusion, like sheep to slaughter,

Closing my eyes, I breathe.

Deep.

Slow.

Anger will only lead to misstep. There's no more leeway for mistakes and second chances.

Too many wolves rely on me for their safety, their futures.

"What do you think?" Kellan asks, his voice so soft not even the wolves near us would be able to decipher his words.

We need to talk to Ava. Connect with her Sister Miriam. The connection I share with my beta is tight, so no others can interfere or listen in.

He nods, knowing how much this decision galls me.

Every part of me rebels against the idea of establishing any sort of connection with those bloodsucking monsters, but we're operating too blind, and the s

This isn't a time to wait around for the scraps any spies might bring

1. us.

We can't keep getting jerked around.

Opening my eyes again, I square my shoulders

e

lace my wolves. They're looking to me for guidance now more than ever before. And I won't let them down.

"Is everyone accounted for?"

Two are still missing.” Ryder reports, ever the responsible delta as he strides toward me. “I’ve already updated Vester at Blackwood, and they’re on full a

There’s no warmth or solace in the intense heat radiating from the funeral mounds, made of hay and dried wood, to burn through the night.

My mind is reeling, grasping for answers that refuse to come.

How did this happen? How did we let ourselves become so vulnerable? So exposed? The questions gnaw at me, bringing no answers, only confusion.

“Keep guards on the pyres. Make sure the ground stays wet. We don’t need a forest fire on top of this shit.”

Ryder salutes in acknowledgement before loping away, presumably to gather his wolves for the night watch.

“And Ava? Is she still okay?”

Kellan’s eyes lose focus for a moment. “She’s fine. There was some incident with the guards in her room—she’s fine, so calm down, Alpha— and they replaced the guards around her. It’s probably inst

sour feelings. There’s a lot of that among them tonight. People weren’t thrilled to hear our future Luna wouldn’t be at the rites. Especially after…”

When my hand raises to cut him off, he stops immediately, looking almost apologetic.

Ava has few supporters in my pack there have been rumors and whispers going around since the evening of the party.

Keeping things quiet is always impossible in a pack of this size. Between the mind links and our social nature, it’s almost guaranteed for a secret to fly fa

“Under no circumstances is she to have a dissenter in her guards. Make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

“Of course, Alpha.”

I turn away, my mind already racing with the next steps we need to take, when Kellan’s voice cuts through my thoughts like a knife.

“Shit.”

The word is sharp, laced with an undercurrent of fear that sends a chill down my spine. I spin back around, my eyes locking onto his, searching for an ex

A vampire was in Ava's room. His mental voice is strained, the words tumbling out in a rush. It's gone now, and she's unharmed, but fuck, Lucas. A vamp

Every muscle in my body tenses, ready to sprint towards the lodge, to tear apart anything that dares to threaten my mate. But Kellan's next words soothe t

Jericho's already on the premises. He's checking it out now.

I take a deep breath, forcing myself to stay calm, to think rationally. Jericho is a former beta, one of the men I most respect in this world. He's been there since I was a pup, and I can trust him to keep her safe.

If anyone can handle this situation, it's him.

"You're lucky your dad is here to save your ass," I mutter, the words coming out harsher than I intend. A gentle smack to his shoulder as we fall in line helps brush over the flare of temper.

Kellan's mental chuckle is grim, devoid of any real humor. "No shit."

Comentario

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1. 183 Ava: Jericho's Acceptance

Since neither shifter seems very interested in talking, I sit with only my thoughts for company.

Even Selene is silent in my head, though she rests her chin on my leg, her eyes deceptively closed.

She's not asleep, but still dealing with whatever demons are inside of her right now.

Both guards tense as Selene's ears flick around.

Someone's coming, she says, lifting her head to stare at the door. When both guards relax after that distracted look from them linking with someone

Jericho, she says, as the door opens and his grizzled head pokes into the room.

Jericho glances around, looking at both guards with clear contempt, before nodding to me. "Girl," he says gruffly.

in

My lips twitch into a faint smile, an unexpected warmth blooming

my chest at his informal address. At least one thing hasn't changed. He still treats me the same, even after everything that's happened.

"Wait outside," Jericho orders the two ill-at-ease shifters, jerking his head toward the door. They hesitate for a moment, exchanging an uncertain look, but a single raised eyebrow from Jericho

The door closes with a soft click, and Jerich

Jes

Acceptanés

back to me. "How're you doing? Feeling okay?"

I open my mouth, ready to assure him that I'm fine, but the words lodge in my throat. Am I okay? After the riot, Todd's mother, the vampire attack, and all the little truths Vanessa has managed to open my eyes to... I don't think I am.

But complaining about it doesn't seem right, either.

Jericho seems to sense my inner turmoil. He sighs, running a hand over his stubbled jaw. "Listen, girl, all young pups make mistakes. It's part of gro

"Young pup?" The term catches me off guard. I haven't been called that since I was a child.

Maybe a few times, but I don't really remember them.

A wry smile tugs at the corner of Jericho's mouth. "You're still young, a baby in my eyes. I've been around long enough to see countless pups stumble and fall. Done it m

"Yourself?" It's hard to imagine him, a grizzled old man of little praise and a lot of torture, making mistakes as a child.

It's hard to imagine he even had a childhood.

In my head, he just appeared in this world one day, old and cantankerous, yelling at innocent out-of-shape wolf shifters until they run out of sheer terror.

"You need to manage your expectations," Jericho continues, his gaze intense. "But I like the look in your eyes now. You seem like you've gotten a litt

Stronger? His assessment comes as a surprise

stronger. In fact, I feel embarrassed by how strong I thought I was

not so long ago.

Blinded by peace.

"I really need to go back to training" I mutter, rubbing Selene's head. She's already lowered her head and closed her eyes again, leaving me to Jeric

Jericho's eyebrows raise a fraction. "Are you an idiot? Muddle-headed sheepdog, maybe?"

Rude. But I don't have the energy to rise to his bait. "What do you

mean by that?"

Answering with nothing but a curt grunt, he instead takes the opportunity to pace my room in short, slow strides. It takes a little time for me to realize

"Nothing," he says, sounding surprised. "Not even a hint."

"Of what?"

"The vampire." Turning, he gazes at me, his face stern. "Explain what happened. Leave nothing out.

Explaining everything to his grizzled face is somehow easier than I thought it would be.

Maybe it's because it never changes, never shows its judgment.

He just nods and asks questions when he has them.

When I finish explaining my vague connection with Sister Miriam, he stares at the ceiling in thought, one booted foot tapping against the floor as time

"As crazy as it sounds, girl, my gut's telling me this vampire's more

of an ally than an enemy."

Surprised, I scoot a little further off the edge of my bed. "Why? Lucas doesn't trust her at all."

"Oh. I don't trust any vampire that sounds so long in the tooth. But." and his eyes snap down from the ceiling to meet with mine, "no vampire acts like

The doubt on my face must be crystal clear, because he barks out a laugh. “Even vampires have their own politics. They’re deeper and murkier than you ever want to be knee—

deep in, but there is no loyalty in their blood. They don’t have the sense of pack that we do. It’s all power and control in their cities.”

“How much do you know about vampires?” The question slips out before I can stop myself. Curiosity has me over-eager.

Jericho’s weathered face splits into a grin. “More than these young pups, that’s for damn sure. They’ve grown up in a time of peace, never had to fig
our toes.”

“You fought vampires?”

“Not exactly fought. More like... disagreements that got a little physical. They sometimes came to the city, you see. Before all the laws came into effe

Unregistered cities. They’re not nearly as isolated as most wolves
think.”

“What do you mean?”

Jericho shrugs, the moment of nostalgia passing. “Ah, it doesn’t matter. No one wants to listen to the ramblings of an old man
anyway.”

“That’s not true,” I protest. “I’m sure Lucas and Kellan would want to hear what you have to say. They respect you.”

Jericho slaps his knee, a bark of laughter escaping him. “I like you, girl. You’ve got spirit. But you’ve learned very little during your time in this pack.”

More proof that I’ve been so focused on my own problems, to the detriment of anything around me. I squirm beneath his regard. “I’m
sorry.”

He waves a hand. “Girl, it’s no secret that my son avoids me. He’d rather catch the plague.”

“Oh. I’m sure its not-

"It's that bad," he cuts me off, all traces of mirth disappearing from his face. "But don't worry yourself over it. A runt like you has no business dealing

This is a pack dynamic I should have known, considering how much time I've spent with both of them.

na Jencho's Acceptance.

I rub my eyebrows with a sigh. "I've been selfish."

Jericho's expression softens for a second. It's so fast that I'm not sure if it was even real.

He's back to his grunting, cantankerous way within moments. "Selfish? I suppose. But you're young. You have a lifetime of

mistakes coming your way. You'll probably kill a few more people. What are you going to do about that?"

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184 Ava: What Are You Going to Do About It?

Staring at Jericho, I don't know how to respond.

The idea that I might cause more deaths moving forward is so horrifying, it's paralyzing.

That's not something I ever want to happen again.

"You have a long way to go yet before you can claim that spot by the alpha's side. Sit up straight, girl." Jericho's finger jabs the air, pointing right at me. "Why are you wallowing in fear instead of forging

My mind goes blank. No words come to my defense, no clever retorts or explanations. Just... nothing, too surprised by the confrontation, too confused o

words.

"I came back to see the rites-"

He slaps his thigh with a groan that sounds like it comes from the depths of his soul. "Is this the future of the Westwood Pack? We've gone too soft on a future Luna, I see."

My spine stiffens at that, a spark of indignation flaring to life. But before I can grasp onto it, Jericho's voice cracks through the room like a whip.

"You killed eighteen people. Nearly twenty more are still in the hospital, healing. Yeah? So what?"

Horror floods through me, dousing that tiny ember of defiance.

"You shouldn't treat their lives so lightly. I whisper. "They would still be alive it..."

Jericho roars, the sound ricocheting off the walls, and I flinch from

its volume. "I'm not taking them lightly! I'm asking you-" he leans forward, his eyes blazing, "-what are you going to do about it? Stop acting like a mouse and act like a wolf!"

My heart hammers against my ribs. What does he want me to say? That I'm sorry? That I'll do better? The words tangle on my tongue, trapped behind th

Somehow, I know that's not what he wants.

He's looking for more.

Jericho waits, his gaze unwavering, demanding an answer.

I swallow hard, forcing myself to meet his eyes. "I... I want to become strong enough to stand legitimately beside Lucas. Save my friend. Save this pack. I don't want to cower behind any of you. I want to be stronger than you."

For a long moment, he just looks at me, his expression unreadable. Then, slowly, he nods. "That's all I needed to know."

Relief floods through me, so intense it leaves me lightheaded. But before I can fully process it, Selene's voice cuts through the silence.

His wolf talked to me.

I whip my head around to stare at her, my eyes wide. "What?"

Jericho looks at Selene, clicking his tongue. "Wolves have no business running around like mutts," he mutters.

My fond reels, living to make sense of this new information. Jericho's wolf talked to her? How did they even know...?

You know about Selene?" I demand, my voice cracking with

Surprise.

Selene tilts her head, her blue eyes fixed on the grizzled man, the demon of Westwood's training center. He knows much. He is a wise wolf.

"No dog could handle living on pack lands. Never heard a wolf outside of us, but strange things exist in this world."

Jericho's weight settles on the window ledge, the leather of his jacket creaking as he leans against the frame. His gaze, sharp as a blade, cuts through th

"Can you contact this Sister Miriam yourself?" His voice is low, gruff, the words scraping against each other like gravel.

I nod, my fingers twisting together in my lap. "Yes, I think so,"

He grunts, the sound more contemplative than dismissive. "Do you trust her?"

"I don't know," I admit, the words bitter on my tongue. "But she's the only one who seems to have any idea what's going on with me. With all of this. It ma

Jericho's jaw tightens, his gaze drifting back to the window. "She assumes you'll be entering the Unregistered city."

It's not a question, but a statement.

"What does she mean by applying under her grace?" I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

Jericho's eyes snap back to mine, the intensity in them making me want to shrink back. "It means she's offering you protection. A way in without being detected."

Protection. The word echoes in my mind, both a promise and a threat. What would it mean to accept Sister Miriam's grace? What would I be agreeing to

"Is that even possible?" I ask, my brow furrowing. "I thought the Unregistered city was impenetrable."

Jericho's lips twist into a wry smile, devoid of humor. "Nothing is impenetrable, girl. Not even the strongholds of the supernatural."

I let that sink in, the weight of it settling on my shoulders like a physical burden. If Sister Miriam can get me into the Unregistered city, then maybe, just m chance of finding Lisa. Of bringing her home.

But at what cost?

Selene's presence brushes against my mind, a gentle reminder that I'm not alone in this. We must be cautious, Ava. The vampire's offer may come with

Of course it does.

There's no way it doesn't.

I can't rush into this blindly, no matter how desperate I am to save Lisa. A deep price has already been paid. I don't want to have that happen again.

"What do you think I should do?" I ask Jericho, curious to his thoughts.

He regards me for a long moment, his eyes searching mine as if he's trying to see into my very soul. "Once you step into that world, there's no turning ba

I think of Lisa, trapped and alone, waiting for someone to save her. I think of the pack, the lives lost and the ones still hanging in the balance. I think of Lucas, fighting to keep me safe, even against my

will.

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185 Ava: Can't Sacrifice the Pack for One

Person

"I don't mind sacrificing my life for Lisa's. But I can't sacrifice this pack for her. I'm struggling to know how to juggle these feelings."

The truth has my shoulders sagging, but he only nods.

"Responsibility will always be a shackle to your decisions. It's a good lesson to learn."

"Better if I'd learned it before lives were lost," I mutter, full of self-deprecation.

"Sit up straight," Jericho snaps, his voice cracking like a whip. "Feeling sorry for yourself doesn't help anyone."

My spine stiffens even as I flinch, scrambling to obey the older wolf before my brain catches up to his demands.

Training is a scary thing.

Selene's ears perk up, and his head swivels toward the door. A few seconds later, I hear the thud of approaching footsteps. Jericho grunts, "That alpha s

The door bursts open, and Lucas strides in, Kellan at his heels.

Lucas's amber eyes lock onto me, wild and desperate, and he rushes to my side. His hands skim over my arms, my face, as if reassuring himself I'm un

"Are you okay? Did the vampire hurt you?" His words tumble out in a frantic rush, even though I'm sure he's been informed of my

↑ Devacho summarizes the situation in clipped tones. Skuter Mirams

gason, her cryptic warning, the oddly incapacitater guarde acas's face darkens with each word, a growl rumbling in his chest.

"I knew we couldn't trust her," he sparis, pacing the room like a caged predator. "She's toying with us."

Jericho mutters under his breath, "Raised an impulsive beast, I did:

wince at the harsh words, but I can't deny the truth in them. Lucas is letting his emotions cloud his judgment, jumping to

conclusions without evidence.

seems to be his weakness when I'm involved.

"We don't know that for sure," I say softly, reaching for Lucas's

hand. "Sister Miriam's motives are unclear, but I don't think she

means us harm."

Lucas whirls on me, his eyes flashing. "How can you say that? With this timing?"

"Because she's had plenty of opportunities to hurt me, but she hasn't, I argue, my voice gaining strength. "She's cryptic and

dustriing, but I don't believe she's our enemy. She's warning us.

nor frinderiing us ve

Kellan clears his throat, drawing our attention. "Ava's right. We can't afford to make assumptions. We need more information

before we act"

The fight drains out of Lucas, and his shoulders sag a little beneath the weight of this past week. Running a hand through his hair, he growls, "I know. I ju fuck. These damn bloodsuckers keep coming onto my lands, and I don't know how."

Jericho snorts. "I've told you both a thousand times, never become complacent in the power of the pack. Get too proud, and you'll be brought to your knees."

"Jesus, Dad, not now-"

Jericho's lip curls as he eyes Kellan, a low growl rumbling from his chest. "Watch your tone, boy."

The air crackles with tension, their wolves bristling beneath the surface as Kellan stiffens, his shoulders squaring. He meets his father's gaze head-on, and dominance radiates off them in waves.

Lucas steps between them, his own power flaring to life. "Enough." he commands, his voice ringing with authority. "We don't have

time for this."

The two men back down, but the animosity lingers, simmering just beneath the surface. One day, I'll learn more about this history

between them, but now isn't the time.

Lucas turns to Jericho, his brow furrowed. "What do you mean, we're too complacent? We've been on high alert since the attack."

Jericho scoffs, shaking his head. "High alert? You call this high alert? Your borders are as porous as a sieve, and you're letting your emotions cloud your guards around and hope it

works."

"Then what do you suggest?" Lucas asks, his jaw clenched.

Jericho's gaze slides to me, a calculating gleam in his eye. "You need to use every resource at your disposal. Including the ones you're not comfortable w

I swallow hard, my heart hammering in my chest. He means me. My connection to Sister Miriam, to the vampire's world.

Lucas follows his gaze, his expression darkening. "No. Absolutely not. I won't put Ava in danger."

"She's already in danger," Jericho retorts, his voice sharp. "You're just too blind to see it."

Selene whines softly, pressing her nose into my hand. I can feel her concern, her fear for me. But beneath that, there's a steely resolve. A determination

My pack. The thought has settled deep into my bones, a weight and a warmth all at once. These people, this place— they're mine now. My responsibility. My family.

And I'll be damned if I let anyone hurt them,

I square my shoulders, meeting Jericho's gaze head-on. "What do you think we should do?"

Lucas whirls on me, his eyes wide. Ava, no. You can't-

"I'm not saying I'm going to run into danger again," I assure him, grabbing his hand. "I'm just willing to do things. Within reason. Without hiding. Without s

"We don't," he snaps. "It's not safe."

"And how would you have kept her safe if this Sister Miriam had spirited her away, right out of this room?" Jericho interjects. "I think it's better to learn a I do you know about their cities? You've been throwing lives there, what have you gotten in return? It's time to set aside pride and look at the bigger picture. There's a war coming, and we'll all lose if you can't open your damn eyes."

Comentario

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186 Ava: Lucas, Short-Sighted

"A war would decimate our world," Kellan says. "The vampires won't take that risk. They're outnumbered by our packs."

"Outnumbered, yet they waltz into our lands as they please and have taken how many of our young lives?" Jericho counters. "Do you even know how m

"One, of course-

"And what are you going to do when only one vampire can breach your defenses so easily? Imagine when twenty of them join hands."

Kellan's mouth snaps closed, and Lucas growls in frustration. "You have something to say, old man. Spit it out."

"You've been taking this threat too lightly. Too focused on your mate to see the forest for the trees. No vampire would do this for one little thrall. What do

"They're working with Renard. He's always been out to increase his land and power."

Jericho's gaze bores into Lucas, a withering stare that seems to strip away years of authority and experience, reducing my mate to nothing more than a

through the tension like a razor, each syllable dripping with disdain.

"Why in the seven hells would vampires ever ally with an idiot like Renard?"

17:50

The question hangs in the air, a challenge and an accusation all at once. Lucas stiffens beside me at the challenge, but the old wolf isn't finished.

"Not all vampires live in the Unregistered Communities," Jericho reminds us, his tone sharp with impatience. "Only the ones who refused to submit to hu

A war between vampires and shifters, spilling out beyond the borders of our territories and into the human world? The thought alone is enough to make m

But Lucas isn't ready to concede the point. "If that's true," he counters, "then why aren't other packs reporting similar issues? Everything that's happened for Ava."

"Until now." Jericho jabs his thumb over his shoulder, out the window. "They took the bodies tonight. What does that have to do

with Renard or Ava?"

Lucas goes quiet, because we all know there's no answer to that.

Jericho sighs and shakes his head. "You're still young, Alpha. Too inexperienced. Keep your eyes and ears open, if you want to keep your people alive."

It isn't until Kellan and Jericho leave that the tension in the room. dissipates.

Lucas sits beside me, petting Selene with absent-minded strokes

17 BU

of his hand, oblivious to how her hackles raise at his touch.

Watching him process the events of tonight, the long arguments between the three men, I can see his exhaustion in the wrinkles around the corners of h

in his mind.

The old Jericho is wise, Selene muses, her voice echoing through my mind. Lucas never took advantage of the resource right in front of him. He should

The dynamic between the three of them is odd. Jericho seems. command respect from both the pack and Lucas himself, yet at times, he's dismissed as nothing more than an old wolf. Kellan se

Selene's curiosity mirrors my own.

to

It should all be set aside in order to work together against the enemy. Someone like Jericho should have been leading tonight. It is. odd, his place in the

Lucas lets out a heavy sigh and reaches for me, pulling me into his lap and resting his chin atop my head. The warmth of his embrace envelops me, a momentary respite from the chaos of the night.

"Were you scared?" he asks softly, his breath tickling my ear. "When

Sister Miriam came?"

I hesitate, searching for the right words. "I was worried," I admit, my voice barely above a whisper. "But I truly believe that Sister Miriam doesn't mean us

17:50

188 Avi Lucas, Short-Sighted

Lucas tenses, his arms tightening around me.

“She has a plan, though,” I continue, choosing my words carefully. “And I’m not sure if it’s a plan we should support. I don’t know what it means for our p

“Everything’s falling apart,” Lucas mutters, his voice laced with. frustration. “My authority and strength is undermined with these attacks on our land.”

Twisting in his lap, I meet his gaze with a reassuring smile. “You’re doing great, Lucas. But maybe... Just maybe, you should listen to the people around

I don’t want to say Jericho’s name out loud, feeling like those waters are too deep for me to dip my toes into.

A flicker of amusement dances in his eyes, a brief respite from the gravity of our situation. “You just want to run headfirst into danger again, don’t you?”

Selene sneezes.

Shaking my head, my expression turns serious. “No, Lucas. I don’t want to go into danger. I’m starting to understand the immense responsibility you hold

The words tumble out of me, a confession long overdue, as I lower my gaze to his chest.

He’s still shirtless from his shifting, but our fated bond is quiet, content to let the gravity of the moment reign. It’s a relief to be close to him without desire

17:50

180 Ava Luns, Short-Sighted

Or is it because I’ve finally accepted the bond in its entirety? My place within the pack? The responsibilities of Luna?

“I’m sorry, Lucas. I’m sorry for my demands and for holding myself apart from the pack. As your mate, know I fall short. I haven’t been the partner you ne centered and short-sighted.”

Tears prick at the corners of my eyes, but I refuse to cry.

I don’t want him to respond out of guilt for my emotions; I want him to hear my apology. Not shrug it off because he just wants me to be happy.

Lúcas cups my face, his calloused hands gentle against my skin. “Ava,” he whispers, his voice filled with understanding and love.. “You’re not falling sho

“No.” I push his hands from his face as gently as I can manage, though I thread our fingers together. No sense in having him think I’m pushing away or d I was too desperate and self– absorbed to see anything except what was in front of me. All I cared about was not being hurt again, or losing the independence I’d fought so hard for. T

Lucas rests his forehead against mine, his breath fanning across. my face. “I don’t want you to worry about these things, Ava.”.

I shake my head, determined to make him understand. “You have to stop treating me like glass, Lucas. I need to shoulder the responsibilities of the pack with you, or else we’ll never progress Dast where we are. And you’re right: I shouldn’t just run off and

17 1

summen Sieter Muriam without telling you.” My lips quirk, and so do his. A moment of humor shared in this distressing day.

I know you want to keep me safe. But that doesn’t mean that sitting in my room and being protected is the only other option for my life”

A sigh escapes his lips, and he nods slowly. “I’ll try.”

“I don’t want to be brought into the pack until they’ve accepted me as Lama, either, I continue, my voice firm despite the racing of my heart. “I need to sh same person I was before. I don’t want them to feel I’m a choice that’s been shoved

down their throats.”

Lucas opens his mouth to protest, but I cover it with my hand, silencing him. “I already know how they feel about me, Lucas. I have a lot of growing to do

He kisses my hand, a faint smile playing on his lips. “Okay.”

He’s not really okay—I can see how little he likes that idea. Becoming pack is one step closer to completing our mating bond, and I’m pushing that off.

But I hope he understands that it isn’t him I’m avoiding.

This time, when I enter my pack, I want to do so with my head high, knowing I belong.

Knowing that they’ll have my back, and I’ll have theirs.

187

187 Lisa: Fae Blessed

LISA

Eternity is a bitch.

That's the conclusion I've come to after being locked in this room.

Living forever, with nothing ever changing? That's enough to drive anyone crazy. No wonder that asshole vampire is the way he is.

Sometimes, I think I've been awake for days; other times, I think I've been asleep for longer. My meals don't seem to come at any consistent time, and M

her.

Today, she's cold, nearly throwing the tray in my direction.

Cold soup splatters. The strawberries look wilted. Still, no utensils. to make my life easier.

At this point, I'm used to the filth of living here, and even the disgrace of utilizing a waste bucket.

Still, compared to before...

It's pretty good.

That crazy vampire hasn't returned, and I'm never going to complain about his absence.

It's as if Marisol can read my mind, because she suddenly says, sounding childish and petulant, "Master's been searching for a friend for you."

A wilted chunk of strawberry drops from my fingers, gathering dirt

17:51

107. Line: Fan Blessed

as it rolls across the stone floor. "A friend?"

My heart rate increases drastically as I think of Ava.

"A unicorn," she sneers.

Unicorn?

Living as I am in a tiny stone room, chained to the floor with manacles that have my wrists rubbed raw and bleeding, with no clothes, by an insane vamp I probably shouldn't be so skeptical at the idea of hunting down a unicorn.

But that very human side of me just stares, flabbergasted.

"A real unicorn?"

She rolls her eyes in a bratty way, and a part of me wonders if that's how I look to my parents.

I miss them.

I try not to think about them too often.

"A Fae—blessed human. Like yourself." She points to the underside

of her breast.

This is the most interesting conversation she's ever offered, and I straighten, my food forgotten in my hunger for information. "Fae—blessed...? What do you mean?"

Marisol sighs, before clomping her way over and grabbing my left breast, pulling it up and poking beneath it with one elegantly manicured finger. "There. blessed. It left its Mark."

Yanking away from her, my entire body shudders in rejection at her touch. My skin crawls, though she clearly has no prurient

17:51

— 10) (as as far

design.

Her lips curve in dark amusement, her green eyes sharp as they take in my every reaction.

The Marisol today is nothing like the girl I met for the first time. Then she was timid, perhaps even naive, and living in her own world.

Today, there's a wicked glint in her eye and a devious curve to her lips. She's harder, harsher, and very much mentally present.

I don't like this Marisol very much.

It's then that I realize there are no bite marks on her body. No -bruises. Her skin is clear and unblemished, though still sickly, with

that odd translucent sheen to it.

Is it a reaction to his absence? To the lack of feeding?

"Look for yourself," she says, her words too coy to be friendly. Her head tilts at an unnatural angle, her eyes not blinking as they hold my stare. "You mus

My fingers tremble as I lift my breast, peering at the underside. There's nothing there except the birthmark I've always had— an irregularly shaped patch of skin that's almost golden against the

rest of me.

I've never thought much of it before. Just an odd quirk of genetics, something that made me unique. My mother used to joke that an angel kissed me the

Marisol clicks her tongue, a sharp sound in the stillness of the room. "You must feel so proud to have such a strong blessing."

10: The Fon Bassed

Her voice drips with a strange mix of envy and derision that makes my skin prickle.

"What are you talking about?" I demand, crossing my arms across my chest for the little bit of privacy it allows me. The sudden movement makes the chains rattle. "What blessing? What does my birthmark have to do with anything?"

But Marisol only looks at me, her green eyes cold and flat as glass. "Are you finished with your food?"

The abrupt change in subject catches me off guard. I glance down at the sad little meal congealing on the tray. My stomach twists, though whether from hunger or nerves, I can't say.

"No," I snap, "I'm not finished. And you didn't answer my question. What do you mean, blessing? What does this—"I gesture to the underside of my breast, "-have to do with anything?"

Marisol's lips thin. She looks like she's debating with herself, some internal struggle playing out behind those eerie eyes.

Then she just turns away, no longer looking at me.

Like I'm not there.

Like ignoring me will just make my questions disappear.

"Marisol! What are you talking about? Explain it to me!"

The chains bite into my wrists as I surge forward, ignoring the fire blazing along my raw skin. "Why are you doing this?" My voice cracks as I scream at h

"How can you just stand there while he keeps me locked up like this?!"

387 Uma Fan Blessed

Marisol's eyes narrow into slits as she looks at me again. Her lips. curl back from her teeth in a sneer that twists her delicate features into something ugly. "You think I c

The venom in her words has me recoiling, stunned by the vitriol coming from such a sweet face. But the fury in my heart grows. "I didn't ask for this. I do

"Too bad." Marisol's voice is cold, devoid of even a shred of empathy. "The Master gets what the Master wants. And right now, he wants you."

She takes a step closer, looming over me, her words a hiss. A. warning. "Don't think for a second that you're special. You're just a passing fancy. I'm the

Why she would even see someone like me as a threat to her is a mystery to me, but this woman is unhinged.

I grab at the tray, my fingers scrabbling for a firm purchase. If I swing it at her head, maybe she'll go down. Maybe I can find some keys on her. Maybe I c

This nightmare.

But Marisol is faster. She snatches the tray away, holding it out of my reach. "Ah, ah, ah," she tuts, like I'm a naughty child. "Mustn't touch what isn't yours."

17:61

187 Lisa, foe Blessed

I make another desperate grab for the tray, but the manacles binding me hold me fast, yanking more of my skin away.

It's no use. Marisol dances back, the tray held easily in her hands. She's too strong, too quick. I don't stand a chance.

With a final, mocking smile, she turns and glides out of the room, taking the tray—and my last shred of hope—with her.

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188

188 Ava: Mom's Legacy (1)

Two days later. I'm back at Blackwood, with a few changes.

Like Jericho, and an entire security detail under his charge.

And Kellan, who seems like he'd rather eat shards of glass than be in his father's presence.

All the new bodyguards are older wolves, with scars and a grim look in their eyes. Once retired, and brought back for my benefit.

Selene approves of all of them, saying their wolves all reached out to her.

Every single one of them is an upgrade from Tall Asshole—sorry, Alex—and Jason.

While these shifters must have a bad opinion of me as well, they don't act like it. They treat me with complete professionalism.

It's odd that they're retired, considering how quickly they've jumped back into their roles. None of them seem old enough to have left active lifestyles behind.

I settle into Lucas' room at the alpha lodge, surprised by how comfortable it feels despite my last stay being so brief. The familiarity washes over me as

One of the guards, a grizzled shifter with a head full of gray hair that belies his muscular build, stands sentinel in the corner, while two more keep watch outside the door.

Because Sister Miriam entered my room before, they're
me alone anymore.

It's unnerving, but I swallow the instinctive frustration at my lack of
privacy.

The last time I fought back, people died.

My privacy isn't worth more lives.

You seem at ease here, Selene observes, her voice tinged with curiosity. She lounges on the bed, her icy blue eyes fixed on me as I put my clothes into

I pause, considering her words. With the guards already knowing Selene is my wolf (and despite the mild panic I feel at having her secret known by even more pe

It really helps with that stuck in a gilded cage feeling. Especially because I know I can switch guards with a single word to Jericho. Having a little power o

"I suppose I am. It's strange, isn't it? Considering everything that's happened."

Selene tilts her head. Weren't you comfortable in Lucas' room at Westwood?

The question catches me off guard. I chew on my lower lip, mulling over my response. "No," I admit. "It didn't feel like home there."

And this does? Selene presses, her gaze intensifying.

Rubbing the tip of my nose, I glance around the room, taking in the

dark interior or RUN

once housed Alphard and t

many devious plans were deaded pom www

How many horrors have bewar und the f***

And yet, a part of me clings to this,

Like the long here,

became

"I don't know, Maybe it's just me, ** wilde it was, 1 wwwborn and rwwed here, you www

Selene hums wordless acknowledgement in my head,

Her uncharacteristic silence weds on our bond and 1 gjeK* her, wondering how long this
sued wrsion of my common will persist, Vaness, words seem to her the impact they've
had is out of the ordinary

Ready to talk? 1 ask, domy, the dregner drawer. My voter in safe, tentative. The last
thing I want is to push Setene before she's ready She doesn't move from her spot o

Turning to the gard, 1 offer him a small smile, "Would you mind stepping outside for a
bit? Maybe twenty minutes OF S

His eyes warrow slightly, and I can see the hesitation in tik pome Bot undike before,
Infalso in charge of my cursecurity, and he

THE Aus Mom's Legacy to

knows it.

Tll be making periodic checks, he warns, his voice gruff. "Every five minutes.

"Of course, I agree readily. "I appreciate your diligence."

He nods, then steps outside, closing the door behind him with at soft click.

I abandon my unpacking, leaving the rest for later. Right now, Selene needs me.

Settling beside her, the mattress dips under my weight, sliding her furry body against
my leg. She doesn't move away, which I take as a good sign.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

Selene sighs, a sound that echoes through our bond. Too many memories are missing,
she confesses. Or they're murky, unclear. But I know they were o

I frown, trying to understand. She'd mentioned her missing memories before, but I didn't
follow up—too busy in my own head, in my own revelations.

"I don't really get it," I admit, reaching out to stroke her fur. She leans into my touch, and I feel a flicker of comfort through our bond. "How can memories

I was allowed to keep them, Selene explains, her voice distant, as if she's lost in thought. In exchange for certain vows.

Vows? What kind of vows could a wolf make? And to whom?

17:51

188 Ava: Mom's Legacy (1)

Questions swirl in my mind, but I don't voice them all. Not yet.

Selene is opening up, and I don't want to overwhelm her with my curiosity.

"What kind of vows?" I ask instead, keeping my tone gentle, encouraging.

Selene shifts, her fur brushing against my hand. I can't remember, she admits, frustration lacing her voice. That's the problem. I know I made them, but I

Well, that makes things harder. "That must be really unsettling," I murmur. "To know you've forgotten something so important."

It is, Selene agrees. As though there's a hole in my mind. A blank space where those memories should be.

"Do you have any idea what caused it?" I ask, trying to be helpful. "Did something happen to make the memories disappear?"

Selene is silent for a long moment, and I worry that I've pushed too far. But then she speaks, her voice barely a whisper in my mind.

I think it has something to do with you, she admits. With our bond. Me? Our bond? How could I have anything to do with Selene's missing memories?

"What do you mean?" I ask, trying to keep the surprise out of my voice. "Did I do something?"

No. If anything, I did. Her frustration is palpable through the link, so stifling that I almost pound at my chest to get rid of the heaviness there. Only it isn't m

188 Ava Mom's Legacy (1)

I remember flashes of my past life. I remember being given a

choice, and meeting your soul. I remember choosing to come here. And I remember swearing vows in return for my memories. Until I met with you, I rem

“So you knew everything... until we came together?”

Yes..

“How can you remember knowing, but not remember what you know?”

I don't know.

It's like going in eircles. No wonder she's been so quiet. “You were always very cryptic from the beginning, so it doesn't feel very different to me.”

Her ears perk up at that. Some things are not for you to know, at least not yet.

“Why?”

It is the natural order. I am outside of that order, and so is the knowledge I possess. Otherwise, the balance of this world can fall.

As much sense as that makes, it's just... frustrating. “Are you saying you knew the horrible things that would happen ahead of time?”

Of course not. Her tail flicks against the comforter. I am not all-knowing.

189

189 Ava: Mom's Legacy (II)

Rubbing Selene's head, my own spins when trying to understand the things she's saying.

Honestly, it's no wonder she's been so subdued.

There are things that clash within me, she says, resting her head on her paws.

“Like what?”

Her eyes roll in my direction. Like my past as Lycan Queen. remember that I— ruled, but I don't remember how. I fear I will not be able to guide you along as a Luna as well as I once thought I would.

“Does it matter? We can learn together.” Trying to soothe her

worries, I run both my hands down her spine, giving her a little dog massage. She seems to enjoy it, because she nuzzles a little deeper into the bed, str

I want to help you, but it’s fuzzy. I hate it.

There’s a little worry in my head, like this is some portent of some future danger. But how? It’s a few missing memories. When you’re a soul from the pas

I don’t know. I’ve never done it before.

She sounds miserable, so I rub a little harder. “You’ll be okay. I don’t need you to be overly wise. I just need you to be you. We can figure out all the growing pains as we go.”

10:20

160 Ava: Mom’s Legacy

Selene’s tail wags a little as she flops onto her back, paws flailing in the air. A soft whine escapes her throat, her eyes pleading with me to rub her belly. I

For all her wisdom and cryptic warnings, and the soul of a Lycan within, she’s still a dog where it matters.

A little to the left, she instructs, her e echoing in my mind. No, no, back to the right. Ah, perfect.

My fingers find the spot she’s indicating, and I scratch it vigorously. Her hind leg starts thumping against the bed in a steady rhythm, a sign of pure canin

A sharp knock at the door interrupts our bonding moment. Three precise raps, followed by the creak of the door as it inches open.

The bodyguard pokes his head in, just as promised, his eyes scanning the interior with a practiced efficiency.

“Doing okay in here, ma’am?” he asks, his voice gruff but not

unkind.

Feeling a little sheepish, I give him a nod in response. “Yes, everything’s fine. Just giving Selene a belly rub.”

The guard's expression remains stoic, but I swear I catch a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. "Very good, ma'am. I'll be right outside if you need anything. Ten more minutes."

He starts to withdraw, but I call out to him. "Wait, what's your name? I'm sorry, I should have asked earlier."

He pauses, raising one weathered brow, surprised by the question. "It's Marcus, ma'am. Marcus Finley

10:26

"Thank you, Marcus. I appreciate you."

His posture remains ramrod straight as he gives me a curt nod in response. "Just doing my job, ma'am. With that, he closes the door, leaving me alone w

Suddenly self-conscious about sitting on the bed playing with my dog, I stand up and stretch. Selene rolls back onto her stomach, her head cocked to the side as she w

You don't have to be embarrassed, shys. It's good for you to relax sometimes.

"I know," I sigh. "But I should finish unpacking. We might be here for a while."

There's no rush. Didn't you say Vanessa wouldn't be here until dinnertime? Let's just watch TV instead.

Selene perks up at the idea of her shows. She hasn't watched them much since the party.

We haven't had much time to breathe since then, and I've spent most of my time pacing around, wondering how to save Lisa.

At this point, it's very obvious it won't be happening anytime soon. I've been avoiding thinking about it too closely, clinging to Sister Miriam's words that s

he's looking for.

Outside of marching my weak ass to the vampire's city and

demanding her return, there's not much I can do without a lot of help. And all that help requires time for them to figure things out. So I'm doing my best to leave Lisa in Lucas' capable hands, trusting him

189 Ava Mom's Legacy (11)

The more trouble I get into, the more time will be wasted when he drops everything to rush to my side.

"Let me put everything away, and you can watch something while I order dinner. Jericho said he wanted to talk to us about a few

things anyway."

It's just about you starting your traini again. I heard him talking to the guards about you being softeran room-temperature

butter, and fatter too.

Fatter?!

Staring at Selene, I'm not sure how to take that statement.

I think he was talking about your fat-to-muscle ratio.

"No, I figured that part out."

It didn't sound very derogatory.

"It sounds pretty derogatory."

I don't think he meant it that way.

"I'm sure he didn't."

Still, feeling appalled that my body weight was even in discussion, I find myself in front of the mirror, twisting back and forth, scrutinizing every curve and

Do I look that bad?

Am I really that out of shape?

I poke at my stomach, frowning at the slight give. Maybe I have let myself go a little, but it's not like I've had much time for exercise lately.

10:26

189 Ava Mom's Legacy (1)

Not that kind of fat. He called you skinny-fat, Selene pipes up from her spot on the bed, her tone matter-of-fact.

“Skinny-fat?” I echo, my brow furrowing. “What does that even mean?”

You know, like when someone looks thin but has no muscle tone.

Staring at her in exasperation, I take one last look in the mirror, sucking in the little pooch of my belly.

Skinny-fat.

I guess I could be considered that.

My body shape is a little weird, with hips that are a little wider than my shoulders and a little more curve to me than Jessa or Mom has, where they’re mo

But I have a little muscle now when I flex my arms, and my legs feel stronger than ever, with all the training I’d gone through with

Jericho.

Even so... I guess, compared to the wolf shifters he’s used to training, I guess I would be filed as skinny-fat’.

No point in moping over my body shape. Lucas likes it well enough, and I’m stronger than I used to be the only two things that should.

matter.

Sighing, I turn my attention to the suitcase.

There are only a few things left to put away. As I pick up a soft blue shirt, something small and shiny tumbles from its folds, hitting the floor with a soft clink

My heart dings. then races.

10:20

189 Ava: Mom’s Legacy (1)

With trembling fingers, I reach down and pick up the object. A delicate necklace with a slender amethyst pendant.

The same necklace that obfuscated my power to any keen

observers, lost during my escape and final fight with Todd Mason.

How did it end up in my suitcase?

Comentario 0

190

190 Ava: Mom's Legacy (III)

"What the hell?" I mutter, turning the necklace over. There's some dried blood on the chain, and it's broken.

The blood, I'm sure, is mine.

Selene pads over, her ears perked. This is...

"My necklace. Yeah. How the fuck did it end up in my suitcase? And even that was packed all the way in Westwood territory, yet I lost this during the fight."

Her nose flares as she sniffs at it. It's a message.

"A message? From who?"

That cagey feeling again, as Selene avoids a direct answer. One who can teach you.

"Selene— we're not doing this cryptic bullshit again. Who is this a message from, and how? In fact, how did it ever show up in my apartment the first time?"

Her huff irritates me like nothing else, and I snap, "Selene, this isn't funny. I'm sick of the secrets. You're always waiting until too late to tell me things, and

It isn't always a choice to hide things from you, she mutters. I'm bound by too many things.

"I swear to the Moon Goddess, if this is one of those things you said about the natural order of the world..." My threatening tone has nothing behind it, but

No. This is a vow given to the Moon Goddess, in exchange for your

10:26 C

100 Ava: Mom's Legacy (1)

security. In fact, you can consider the Moon Goddess the messenger in this instance. Her scent is all over that necklace.

I drop the necklace as though it's on fire. "What do you mean, her scent?"

The thought of touching something with a divine scent on it is abhorrent. Like I'm defiling a precious artifact.

I look around for a tissue.

Selene snorts. Her presence won't be erased by your touch. You can hold it. You can even put it in your mouth.

Disgusting. Why would I do something like that?

I'm just saying you could. She noses at it on the ground. The magic within is gone. Depleted. Holding it won't do anything. You can keep it or get rid of it.

"Why would it return to me? How did it return to me?" Maybe it's less about defiling the divine after all, and more that it feels kind of gross to touch something that's been magicked into my suitcase.

I don't know enough about those talents to say, but you can always ask your teacher when she arrives.

My teacher. Right. "What do you mean, a teacher?"

The growl that comes out of Selene isn't aggressive, but more of a wolfish grumble as she snaps at the air. I told you a long time ago, I have my ways.

Did she?

Now that she mentions it, there's a vague memory of a conversation like that.

10:26

100 Ava: Mom's Legacy (10)

Honestly, I'd placed all my hopes on Sister Miriam, and now I feel terrible for forgetting my own wolf was supposed to find a teacher. But then again, how

I can talk to anyone I wish to. I've been speaking with Jericho's wolf. And Vanessa's.

"What about Lucas' wolf?"

No.

Her answer is too terse, ringing warning bells in my head. “Do you have a problem with him? Did you know him in your last life?”

Her silence tells me I’m on the right path, but I reel in my curiosity for more important matters. “When will my teacher be here?”

I don’t know. Probably soon. You should prepare yourself.

Her ominous words have my stomach sinking to my toes. “Why?

What now?”

Not everything is as it seems, and you might be upset with us, even when you understand why it had to be this way.

Serene’s still terse, but I can feel misery coming off her in waves. She won’t even meet my eyes, even when I walk around her to force it. She just moves

“Selene...”

I can’t talk about it until she’s made herself known.

Her words are firm, even as she slinks off the bed to crawl beneath

1. it.

10:20

100 Avi Mom’s Legacy (il)

Don’t be angry with me.

Her soft mental whisper brings frustrated tears to my eyes,

“Selene, I won’t be angry with you. Just come out here and talk to me.”

I’m on my hands and knees, trying to coax her out from beneath the bed, when the guard knocks again and pecks his head in. “Ma’am, it’s been twenty

“Oka—ouch.”

The back of my head slams againsts

e frame when I try to get up

too fast, and I curse as the pain flares, strong enough to make my belly roll. "Fuck. Shit. God damn it."

I'm sorry.

"It's not your fault. Fuck." Rubbing the back of my head, I scowl in the direction of the guard, even though it isn't his fault, either.

"Come in."

"Do you need more time...?"

It's the first time a human expression has really crossed Marcus' face since he's been here. There's a faint quirk at the corner of his lips, and his brows a

"It's fine," I snap, and I swear a snort comes out of him.

But he closes the door behind him and takes up his position by the window once again, otherwise unfazed by the sight of me trying to coax my wolf/husky out from beneath the bed.

"Selene, I'm going to let you sulk, but I hope you're over it by the

10:26

190 Ava: Mom's Legacy (III)

time Vanessa gets here. We have a lot to do."

I'll do what I have to.

+10

That isn't much of a promise, but I take it anyway, leaving her beneath the bed to mope with a sigh. I guess this is how everyone else felt when I was born

It's frustrating.

And embarrassing to look back on.

Trying to shake off those thoughts, I snatch the necklace off the floor and toss it into a drawer, slamming it shut with finality, even as I wonder...

Who the hell is this supposed teacher of mine?

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