

# **Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted #Unshift 201 - Read Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted Unshift 201**

## **Unshift 201**

201 Ava: Steve (1)

Steve taps her pen against her lips as the kid from the reception desk leans in to whisper something in her ear. I can't make out the words, but whatever he says makes Steve's eyebrows shoot up @

She nods slow; her gaze flicking back to me with renewed intensity

Shifting uncomfortably in my chair, I glance at Kellan. What I want is reassurance, but instead I notice the tense set of his jaw, the new wrinkles around the corners of his eyes, and a slight tie in his

cheek.

It's a subtle tell, but one I recognize. He's on edge.

And that's when it hits me. Kellan may be willing to work with these people, but that doesn't mean he trusts them. It doesn't mean they're on our side.

Who are these strange, unsettling children?

I swallow hard, my mouth gone dry. Kellan's tension is contagious, seeping into my own muscles, coiling them tight.

What's going on, Ava?

Selene's mental voice is too soft, probably from the distance

between us.

Things are weird here, Selene.

I don't feel like we're in danger, but there's definitely something that leaves me unsettled, with chills rushing down my back and

arms.

201 Ava: Steve (1)

Her worry carries through the bond between us. Be careful, Ava,

Straightening in my chair, I take a deep breath. Then another. If Kellan brought me here, there's a reason for it. Lucas trusts him. I

do, too.

My attention snaps back to Steve as she asks me a question.

"How long have you been in contact with the Fae, Ava?"

"Fae?"

Thrown off-balance by her bizarre question, I turn to Kellan, whose jaw tightens even further, then back to Steve.

The pink-haired girl leans forward, elbows propped on the desk as she peers into my eyes with unsettling intensity. A wave of dizziness washes over me, and I fight the urge to retch.

"I've never had any contact with the Fae," I manage, averting my gaze. The nausea subsides almost immediately.

Steve's expression remains skeptical. "Only Fae magic could interfere with a wolf's hearing like that."

Glancing back, the nausea returns at eye contact, and I look away again. "I swear, I've never interacted with any Fae."

After a long moment, Steve sits back. "Alright, I'll take your denial at face value. For now."

Kellan clears his throat. "Can you look into the call? Find out where it came from?"

Steve shrugs, her demeanor nonchalant. "I can try, but no guarantees."

14:52

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201 Avs Steve (th

Kellan extends his hand towards me, and I blink, realizing belatedly that he wants my phone. After fumbling in my pocket, I retrieve it and place it into his palm, watching as he passes it to Steve.

She arches an eyebrow.

"I don't need the actual phone to check the call," she says, her tone

almost amused.

Heat rises to my cheeks as embarrassment mingles with the lingering nausea. Once prompted, I mumble my phone number, watching as Steve's fingers fly across the keyboard. The room falls silent save for the clacking of keys.

Minutes crawl by, and my skin itches from waiting.

Shifting to sit more comfortably on the chair, my head twinges, a dull ache settling behind my eyes.

"Got it," Steve announces, shattering the silence. "The call came from the general area of Dakota Sanctuary"

Kellan and I exchange a confused glance, but Steve continues before we can question her.

"Your lot prefers 'Unregistered city! I believe.

The name sends a chill down my spine. Dakota Sanctuary. It sounds almost mystical, a far cry from the ominous reputation of the Unregistered city.

"You're sure?" Kellan asks, leaning forward.

Steve nods. "As sure as I can be. It's hard, though. That area is a dead zone for most technology to access. Intentionally so."

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201 Ava: Blove (0)

"Thank you" I say to Steve, my gratitude genuine despite my unease. "For your help"

She waves a dismissive hand. "Don't mention it. Seriously, don't. I have a reputation to maintain"

A bark of laughter escapes Kellan, and even I manage a weak smile. In this world of wolves and magic, it seems even children have images to uphold.

We take our leave, stepping out into the harsh glare of daylight. The warehouse seems even more derelict after the bright

ambience of the basement office.

“Why did you bring us here?” I ask Kellan as he slides into the

driver’s seat of our SUV,

“I wanted to make sure the caller was really from the city. We now have a tangible link to the city. This gives Lucas a little traction with the Council” He glances at me with a frown. “Buckle up, Have you called him?”

“Not yet. I tried last night and this morning, but no answer”

“He won’t risk bringing attention to you” Pulling out of the dilapidated parking lot, he checks his phone for a second before setting it in the console between us. “Text him for me. Tell him that he needs to call me if he can’t call you”

“If he can call you, why wouldn’t he call me?” Vague irritation stirs in my belly, but it’s doused with his response.

“They can hear you over the phone, He doesn’t want anyone questioning your existence or looking into you?”

Right.

Because there’s enough trouble after me.

[AVA: Kellan needs you to call him, if you can’t call me.]

[AVA: Also, I miss you. I know you’re busy. Call me when you can.] [AVA: And get some sleep and make sure you’re eating.]

Leaving my phone on our conversation screen, I wait, but after a minute there’s still no indication of him reading the messages.

“Don’t be upset,” Kellan says, glancing in my direction as he drives. \*Council meetings can usually go for days as they all argue over stupid details. An emergency Council meeting like this is only going to be worse.”

I shake my head as I turn off my display. “I’m not upset.”

His silence sounds doubtful, which probably makes no sense, but it does.

“I’m really not upset. Lucas is the alpha. There are a lot of

responsibilities that come with his position. I just don’t want him to worry.” With all the secrets I’ve held from him before, I’m surprised he lets me out of his sight at all.

He tends toward overbearing, only backing off when I complain. “That’s good, then.”

## **Unshift 202**

202 Lucas: Council (I)

Alphas arguing with alphas is nothing but a waste of time.

The dregs of cold coffee stick in my throat as I set my mug down with a thud. Fuck. I’m exhausted. My eyelids feel like sandpaper against my eyes, and I rub at them with the futile hope of easing the discomfort.

Forty–eight hours.

Two damn days since I’ve seen the inside of my eyelids for more

then a blink

I haven’t had a chance to even speak a single word with Ava. Not

even a text

It’s impossible to keep her a secret forever, but without knowing how far I can trust these other alphas—bringing her into this mess

is a risk I refuse to take.

The last thing I need is for the Council to push back and demand that Ana be returned to Alpha Blackwood in order to prevent any more vampire attacks.

Jericho’s worries have set root in my belly, growing an entire forest of doubt and concern. He’s right. Ara’s not enough of a reason to Breach the peace we’ve upheld for so long. Far longer than any of our lifetimes.

There’s something else there. Something I was too blind to see. And we need to act. \*

Now. Before any other tragedies come to be.

The stink of unrest taints the air, setting my teeth on edge.

I glance across the conference table, meeting Clayton’s steely gaze. He’s been the ally in my corner, standing steadfast beside me in my

concerns.

Even Alpha Xavier, our strongest ally in the Council, isn't convinced that there's a concern to the entire territory. Oh, he believes that there's danger—at my front door.

He thinks it's as simple as reinforcing our boundaries in Blackwood and Westwood. As sending a few troops of fighters to shore up our numbers.

But everything inside of me, inside my wolf, screams that he's wrong.

There's a war coming for all of us, and anyone who isn't ready will be slaughtered without a chance to fight back. We've already witnessed how easily they can invade our lands and fight when we're vulnerable, caught with our fucking pants down.

Those blood-sucking leeches crossing into Westwood territory, bold as brass, are just the beginning. A first strike in a war that can bring us all to our knees.

But convincing the rest of these stubborn old bastards? It's like herding cats. Suspicious, prideful, territorial cats, who'd rather bury their heads in the sand than acknowledge the danger breathing down our necks.

Xavier clears his throat, his rumbling baritone cutting through the murmured side conversations.

"Let's get this meeting back on track. We've argued enough. Alpha

34:52

Westwood, state your request again, and we'll vote once more"

I push to my feet, the chair groaning across the floor. All eyes snap to me.

This stalemate needs to end,

"The encroachment on Westwood

woodland is no isolated incident. It's calculated. Deliberate. A test of our defenses, of our ability to react. It's the first steps of war. We are all at risk. Westwood is nothing more than the first step to whatever goal they seek"

A scoff from the end of the table—neutral party in Alpha Ezekial Talon of Whispering Pines. He was friend to both Xavier's

Silvermoon pack and that bastard Blackwood, with his territory between both.

He's older, fully gray in his hair with wrinkles and scars all across his face. Even so, it's a testament to his power that no alpha challenge has unseated him in all these years.

He's showing his true colors of late, despite having helped Xavier during my attack on Blackwood. Of course, then we had only asked him to turn a blind eye. Here, we're asking for action.

Neutrality always sounds moral. Waiting to hear both sides of the story, refusing to take sides in a personal battle...

But neutrality is also cowardice.

He's waiting to see what benefits his pack the most, instead of acting in the best interest of all.

"You're paranoid, Westwood," he diawls. "A few Unregisteredds step out of line and suddenly it's Armageddon? We've dealt with their

202 Lucas: Council (0)

kind for centuries. It's nothing new They've been holed up in their little sanctuaries for so long, I'm surprised they haven't all turned into dust. With our numbers and strength, we could crush them in

a moment."

I clench my fists, biting back the growl building in my chest. Shortsighted fools.

"It's different this time," Clayton interjects smoothly. "They're able to move without detection, to appear and disappear at will. They're striking without warning, and we have no way of fighting back. No matter how strong we are, it's like fighting ghosts."

The same argument that we've been making for two goddamn days, falling on deaf ears.

"We'd be wise not to underestimate the threat," I agree, between clenched teeth.

"You're just repeating yourselves. Alpha Westwood, what is your proposal?" This from Alpha Twilight Ridge, an older woman with a shrewd gaze. She's old enough that no one remembers her given name, only addressing her by title. One of the few female alphas in the country.

I meet her stare head-on. "We need to shore up our defenses. Coordinate our efforts. Present a united front before they-"

“What does that entail, Alpha Westwood? There’s no point in arguing about the hypotheticals. What I want to know is what you expect from Twilight Ridge moving forward.””

I take a deep breath, fighting back the urge to slam my fist into the mahogany table. The wolf inside me snarls, hackles raised, ready

14:53

202 Lucas: Council (1)

for a fight. But I force myself to breathe through it, to push down the rage bubbling in my veins. Losing my temper here won’t do any good. It’ll only prove their point that I’m too young, too

inexperienced to handle this.

I’ve given them all this answer several times over the past two days.

And I give it again.

Through gritted teeth.

Plastering professionalism all over my face, even as my wolf snarls in my head.

Comentario 0

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Deja el primer comentario para este capítulo

Vote

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FANDO

## **Unshift 203**

203 Lucas: Council (II)

“We need a show of force,” I say, meeting each alpha’s gaze in turn. “A coordinated effort to secure our borders and protect our people. Every pack needs to increase patrols, double up on security. We need our best trackers on the ground, searching for any signs of vampire activity. We need to know which cities to keep an eye on. We need to find out who’s involved. And we need to know where to defend.”



I turn to Alpha Talon, holding his stare. "Whispering Pines will be the first to fall if Blackwood does. It's in your best interest to help us hold our line. If you can send more scouts, more enforcers, it would go a long way in establishing a solid defensive wall against their efforts."

He scoffs, leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed over his chest. "And what do you expect us to do? Abandon our own territory to play guard dog for you?"

It's hard to bite back the retort on the tip of my tongue. "No. But we need your cooperation and your vigilance."

There aren't enough warriors to be counted on in the Blackwood territory. Westwood is already spread thin to cover both packs, and too many untrusted Blackwood wolves remain.

We're going to have to do something about that, too.

Alpha Twilight Ridge clears her throat, drawing my attention. "And what of Twilight Ridge? What would you have us do?"

"We need your scouts," I say plainly. "Your pack is known for

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knowing your enemy Your scouts fare more expertly than any other. We test semasance. Menee ko

what they're planning With Westwood and Blackwood under our surveillance, we need some one else to break our

valemate We've been made therapist an eligibility system in

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The pups slowly considering Andin er? What do we get for putting our necks on the line?

I resist the urge to growl Always a bargain with these old wolves. Always looking out for their own interests above all else.

"The safety of your pack I say struggling to keep my voice even. "The knowledge that you're doing your part to protect our way of life. Isn't that enough?"

She arches a brow, a faint smirk playing at the corners of her mouth. "Pretty words, Alpha Westwood. But we both know that's not how this works."

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I take another breath, forcing myself to think past the anger, frustration. “An alliance, then. A promise of aid if Twilight Ridge ever finds itself in need. My word as an alpha that Westwood will stand with you.”

She holds my gaze for a long moment, but doesn’t respond.

A silent veto.

“What of Aspen?” I ask, turning to Clayton. “Can we count on your support?”

He nods without hesitation. “Of course. Aspen stands with Westwood, as always”

2018 Lucas Coun

Gratitude helps ease the frustration within me. Despite his feelings for Ava, Clayton has stepped forward as an alpha—a Council member—should. He’s helped more than strictly necessary.

If I didn’t want to punch him in the face every time I think of him and Ava together...

But even those thoughts are distant these days, crushed between the mountain of stress that Blackwood and their vampire friends have brought to my door.

“Then let’s put it to a vote,” Xavier says, his deep voice cutting through the tension. “All in favor of Alpha Westwood’s proposal?”

Clayton’s hand shoots up immediately, followed by my own. Xavier raises his a moment later, his expression grim, and my heart jumps. Finally, Progress.

But Alpha Talon and Alpha Twilight Ridge remain still, their arms crossed over their chests.

“All opposed?” Xavier asks, a note of resignation in his voice.

Two hands raise, slow and deliberate.

“The motion is carried.” Clayton says, a note of triumph in his voice. “We move forward with Alpha Westwood’s plan.”

But Alpha Talon shakes his head, a sly smile spreading across his face. “Not so fast. You’re forgetting the Blackwood vote.”

I stare at him, incredulous. “What Blackwood vote? Blackwood is gone. Westwood controls their territory now.”

He shrugs, leaning forward to rest his elbows on the table. "Maybe

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203 Lucas: Council (11)

1. so. But their vote still stands. And I say it sides with me and Alpha Twilight Ridge.

I'm on my feet before I realize it, my chair clattering to the floor behind me. My words come out more growl than English. "You can't just claim their vote for your own."

But he just smirks, unfazed by my outburst, his eyes flaring yellow for just a moment. "Can't I? Seems to me like the Blackwood vote is up for grabs. And I'm grabbing it."

Clayton stands as well, his jaw clenched tight. "That's not how this works. The Blackwood vote goes with the majority. You can't just choose it arbitrarily."

Alpha Talon spreads his hands, a picture of innocence. "Who's to say it's arbitrary? Maybe I have inside information. Maybe I know something you don't."

I can feel my control slipping, my wolf clawing at the edges of my mind, desperate to break free. This is insanity. Pure, unadulterated insanity.

The Council's going to fall, because I'm going to kill this  
motherfucker with my bare hands.

"This is absurd," I snarl, my hands curling into fists at my sides. "The  
Blackwood vote is irrelevant."

But even as I say it, I can see the satisfaction in his eyes, the smug curl of his lip. It doesn't matter what I think; he's just here for the power play. Posturing

Neutral party? Fuck neutrality. He's nothing more than a snake. Just like Blackwood, only his real self had hidden in plain sight,

203 Lucas Council (0)

overshadowed by Blackwood's antics.

"Enough, Xavier says, his voice cutting through the chaos like a knife. "This bickering solves nothing. The Blackwood vote is null and void. We move forward with the original tally."

Alpha Talon opens his mouth to protest, but Xavier silences him with a glare. "I said enough. The decision is made. Westwood has the majority. We will lend our support, as agreed."

Alpha Twilight Ridge nods, and Alpha Talon grimaces. "Fine."

I let out a breath, my shoulders sagging with relief. It's not a perfect solution, not by a long shot. But it's something. A step in the right direction.

And right now, that's all I can ask for.

Comentario

Deja el primer comentario para este capítulo

Vote

## Unshift 204

204 Ava: You Know About the Fae?

My phone rings just as Kellan pulls into the driveway of the alpha lodge, waking me from a light doze

"Hello?"

"Ava."

Lucas' voice is warm and soft, despite the edge of exhaustion I can hear within it.

"Hey, handsome." My lips curve even as my cheeks heat; being flirtatious doesn't come naturally.

Kellan's stare in my direction doesn't help the embarrassment churning in my gut, and I hop out of the SUV as quickly as I can.

Of course, I stumble, my foot somehow catching in the seatbelt in my hurry, and the phone clatters out of my grasp, skittering across the driveway as I shriek, falling onto half my face and scratching up both hands.

My knees are somehow spared, but there are a lot of people helping me to my feet.

Too many people. All of them careful not to make eye contact, even as Kellan rushes over to check me for injuries.

“My phone. I need my phone.” Lucas is probably freaking out.

“Marcus has it. He’s talking to him.” After reassuring himself that I haven’t broken anything and am— more or less—intact, Kellan steps back and Marcus slides my phone into my hand.

“Ava? Are you okay?”

14:54

204 Ava: You Know About the Fae?

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just got tangled up in the seatbelt and fell.”

Having to actually say it out loud somehow makes the entire situation even worse.

“Pretty sure I taught you how to fall. Never once did I teach you to land on your damn face,” Jericho barks from behind the crowd, and Lucas laughs quietly in my ear.

The old shifter’s voice is way too loud.

“He’s going to be drilling you on falls again tomorrow morning,” my mate says, sounding way too amused at my plight.

“Oh, my God,” I mutter into the phone, feeling my cheeks burn. I can practically hear the old wolf’s smirk, even with my back to him.

Kellan and Marcus lead me into the lodge, which somehow feels more humid than outside. Comfortable silence settles between me and Lucas over the phone all the way to my room, though I can feel Kellan’s gaze on me every few steps, as if he’s making sure I’m not about to face-plant again.

As soon as I open the door, a blur of white and grey fur barrels into me, nearly knocking me off my feet. Selene’s tongue is everywhere, her entire body wiggling with the force of her wagging tail. No

one would expect her inner soul to be wolf with the dog-like

overreaction to my return.

“Oof. Hi, Selene.”

You smell weird.

“So do you.” And she does. Kind of like pot roast. And potatoes. “Have you been sneaking food from the kitchen?”

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204 Ava: You Know About the Fae?

I didn't sneak it. They gave it to me

Wolf shifters seem to like having a dog around, because the list of people feeding Selene food is getting longer by the minute.

“Is that Selene?” Lucas asks.

“Yeah. I just got to my room.”

He makes a soft sound, before saying, “My wolf misses her. He's been whining about it. He misses you, too. And so do I.”

“I miss you, too.”

Words like that come much easier after having said them several times before.

Flopping onto my bed with a sigh, I realize Marcus hasn't followed me into the room. “Oh, that's weird. Where's Marcus?” I ask Selene.

But of course, Lucas hears me, since he's on the phone. “No one wants to eavesdrop when I'm on the phone with you. They know better.”

Warmth blooms in my chest. “Sounds like you're in a good mood. How did the Council meeting go?”

Almost immediately, I can feel the shift in his demeanor, even through the phone. He sighs heavily, the sound crackling in my ear. “Negotiating with alphas is much like negotiating with children. They're all so damned self-absorbed.”

I settle onto the bed, Selene curling up beside me. “You're not self-absorbed.”

“Aren't I?” There's a bitter edge to his laugh. “I've done plenty of

14:54

204 Ava: You Know About the Fao?

things for the good of my pack, Ava. I went after Blackwood

without going to the Council for permission because I knew they'd try to stop me."

I go silent, chewing on my bottom lip. It's not like I can argue with him. Before I can formulate a response, he continues.

"I'm worried about Alpha Talon of Whispering Pines. He's been an absolute fuck during these meetings."

"Alpha Talon?" I frown. "But I've heard he's a neutral and fair alpha." Though, granted, it's not like I know that much about any of them.

"That's only because you've never met him, love. Trust me, he's anything but neutral. I need you to promise me you'll stay away from the Whispering Pines pack."

"I promise," I say without hesitation. "I have no reason to go near them anyway."

"Good." He exhales, some of the tension leaving his voice. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to unload on you. I just... I miss you. And I

worry."

"I know." I wish I could reach through the phone and smooth the furrow I know is between his brows. "I miss you too. But we'll be together again soon."

"Not soon enough," he grumbles, and I can't help but laugh.

We talk for a while longer, about everything and nothing. He tells me about the alphas visiting Westwood, and I fill him in on the strange phone call. He isn't thrilled about that—of course.

"Be careful, Ava. I don't like that they're calling you."

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204 Ava: You Know About the Fae?

Rolling onto my stomach, I pet Selene, who's snuggled beside me. "I know. It doesn't sound like they're allied with the vampires,

though. The way they talked about Lisa... I'm not sure. It's a weird feeling I have."

"We can't just go off feelings. You're in too much danger for that."

"I know, I know. I'm not going to run off doing anything crazy. We don't even know who these people are."

"If they're Fae..." Lucas sounds doubtful. "Dealing with the Fae is tricky—business. They're usually busy in their own realm and don't come here. Those that do usually want something. They're single-minded in their goals."

"You know about the Fae?" Somehow, this fact startles me.

Comentario Q

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Deja el primer comentario para este capítulo)

Vote

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FANDOM

Deslizar a la izquierda para continuar >

## Unshift 205

205 Ava Past Ava Was Stupid

205 Ava: Past Ava Was Stupid

"I had to look through history books," Lucas explains.

"What are they like?"

"Selfish. Arrogant. They like mysteries and intrigue. They'll never

enter a losing bet, and they'll ensure they never lose. Some say they can't lie, and others say they're full of deceit. The stories don't tell us much, except not to trust a Fae."

The lack of consensus on their truth-telling abilities has me thinking. "Maybe that's why people think Fae can't lie," I muse aloud. "Because of their food." The implications unsettle me. If Fae food can compel honesty, what other powers might they possess? Steve had mentioned that the callers seemed to use Fae magic.

What are the limitations of such a power?



Lucas's voice cuts through my reverie. "Are you worried, Ava?"

I hesitate, not wanting to add to his burdens, but the truth spills out anyway. "Yeah, I am. The person on the phone... They were so insistent that I need to learn my powers before something terrible happens."

My mind flashes back to first learning of my power, which I still can't wield properly. It feels like it's been so long since then, but hasn't it only been a few months? How does it feel like forever already?

"Selene said many people died trying to learn their powers before they started learning from others. It's worrisome."

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205 Ava Past Ava Was Stupid

His silence speaks of his concern, and I can imagine the worry etched into Lucas' handsome face.

"I don't like the sound of that." He pauses, seeming to weigh his next words carefully. "They said you were given a book from Mrs. Elkins. But how exactly did she even get there? Kellan's text message didn't make sense."

I can't help but chuckle at the memory of Mrs. Elkins surrounded by perplexed guards. "That's because it doesn't. She claims it was divine intervention from the Moon Goddess."

To my surprise, Lucas' response is a simple grunt of acceptance, accepting this outlandish explanation with ease.

"That makes sense to you?" I ask, incredulous.

"Ava, after the vampire attacks and discovering your existence, let's just say my horizons have broadened recently."

He has a point. A very good point. "I guess we're all just navigating uncharted territory."

He chuckles. "We'll figure it out together."

His words wrap around me like a soothing balm, temporarily quieting the whirlwind of worries in my mind. Together.

To think that it wasn't so long ago when I was questioning his motives. When I was sure his feelings weren't real. When I didn't believe him to be my safe place.

Past Ava was stupid.

Just in a different place than present Ava. Selene's words interrupt my thoughts, and I smile, realizing I've been petting her this entire

time.

205 Ava: Past Ava Was Stupid

"Ava, how dangerous are your powers?"

Sighing into the phone, I roll onto my back, absently tugging at Selene's ears as she rests her head on my belly. "I don't know. I can't even access it when I want to. You saw me running; that's the first and only time I've really been able to tap into it."

"Running fast doesn't seem that dangerous, so there has to be more to it."

"Mm. Selene thinks it might have to do with the elements, but so far, that's only a theory."

He goes quiet again. Probably worrying about me, when he already has so much to deal with.

"I'll figure it out, Lucas. You focus on the Council."

Lucas groans over the phone, a sound that brings an amused smile to my lips. "Sorry for reminding you of them," I say, my voice light despite the heaviness that seems to have settled over my heart.

"It's been a nightmare." There's a pause, a heartbeat of silence, before Lucas speaks again. "Ava, I heard about your mom. I'm so sorry."

His words hit me like a physical blow, knocking the breath from my lungs. In the chaos, I'd almost forgotten. No, not almost. I had forgotten, purposely shoving it so far in the back of my mind that it couldn't even pop up at quiet moments to remind me.

Vanessa would probably tell me how unhealthy that is, but...

I grimace at the ceiling, tracing the faint patterns in the paint with

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205 Ava: Past Ava Was Stupid

my eyes as I try to sort through the tangled web of emotions in my chest. It's like trying to untangle a ball of yarn that's been played with by a kitten—a mess of knots and loops, with no clear

beginning or end.

"I don't know how to feel," I admit, my voice barely above a whisper. "It's like... most of me doesn't realize she's really gone. Like I'm waiting to hear her voice any minute. Like she's going to walk through the door, take one look at me, and say, 'Can't you at least try to look less pathetic?'"

The words taste bitter on my tongue, like the dregs of coffee left too long in the pot. I can almost smell the acrid scent, can almost feel the gritty texture on my teeth. It's a sensation that's perfectly

synonymous with my relationship to my mother—unpleasant, and lingering long after it should have been thrown out.

Lucas is quiet for a moment, and I can almost see him in my mind's eye—brows furrowed, jaw clenched, golden eyes dark with concern. "Are you going to hold a funeral for her?" he asks after a while, his voice gentle.

I think about it for a moment, turning the idea over in my mind. A funeral. A chance to say goodbye, to lay her to rest. But the thought leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

"No," I say finally, my voice firm despite the slight tremble in my fingers. "No, I don't think I will."

"Are you going to bury her, then?" Lucas asks, and I can hear the slight confusion in his tone.

He can't see me, but I shake my head anyway. It's like a physical denial of the influence she still has over me. "No. I'd rather burn

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205 Ava: Past Ava Was Stupid

her." The words come out harsher than I intended, sharp and jagged. Like broken glass. "I don't want her toxicity to have a permanent place on this earth."

Lucas lets out a surprised laugh, the sound startling in the heavy silence of the room. Most wolf corpses are not burned; the funeral pyres of the vampire's victims are an anomaly. Burned so they can't rise again.

“That’s a bit symbolic, don’t you think?”

But I’m not laughing. “I’m serious, Lucas. No part of her needs to remain in this world. I want her gone forever. Nothing but dust in the wind. No name. No presence. Like she never existed.”

My voice cracks on the last word, and I feel a hot tear slide down my cheek. Furious with how much her loss hurts, even after everything she’s done, I brush it away with angry movements.

She doesn’t deserve my tears.

“Okay,” Lucas says softly, and I can hear the understanding in his voice. “If that’s what you want, then that’s what we’ll do. I support you, no matter what.”

His words wrap around me. Comforting. Secure. The warm sun on a cold winter’s day.

Thank you,” I whisper, my voice thick with emotion.

“Always,” he says, and I can hear the fierce promise in his voice. “I’ll always be here for you, Ava.”

## **Unshift 206**

206 Lisa: Hearing Voices

It’s disgusting to admit that I look forward to Marisol’s presence, even though her treatment has only gone downhill. At least she brings food.

The first day I was brought here, there were voices. Whispers. Noises through the walls.

Lately, it’s nothing but silence.

Every so often, there’s that dripping water sound that lasts for hours, which used to drive me mad but is now a break from the monotony of nothing.

The clinking of the manacles around my wrists and ankles echoes in the dank cell as I gnaw at the hunk of bread in my hands, its crust stale and unappetizing. But hunger gnaws at my stomach, and this is my only way to fill it.

Marisol is crouched mere feet away, her eyes wide and curious as she watches me eat. It’s unnerving the way she observes me like I’m some sort of exotic creature in a zoo. I try to ignore her, focusing instead on the meager meal in front of me.

The soup is a sickly shade of green, its scent reminiscent of rotting vegetables. I wrinkle my nose as I bring the bowl to my lips, but I’m surprised to find that it doesn’t taste as

bad as it looks. It's thin and watery, but there's a hint of something savory that makes it almost palatable.

As I sip, I watch Marisol out of the side of my eye. Sometimes she seems so naive, like a child who doesn't understand the world

206 Lisa: Hearing Voices

around her. But other times, there's a sharpness to her gaze that makes me think she's far more cunning than she lets on. It's like playing a game of Russian roulette every time she comes to my cell -I never know which version of her I'm going to get.

Marisol shifts, her bare feet scraping against the rough floor. She leans in closer, her breath hot against my skin as she whispers, "You eat like an animal."

I flinch at her words, my cheeks burning with shame. I want to

snap back at her, to tell her that I'm not an animal, that I'm a person with thoughts and feelings and a life outside of this cell. But I bite my tongue.

Instead, I focus on the bread, tearing off another piece and shoving

it into my mouth. The crust scratches at my throat as I swallow. I should have soaked it in the soup. Maybe I will.

Marisol watches me with a twisted sort of fascination, her head

cocked to the side like a curious bird. "Do you dream of freedom?"

she asks, her voice barely above a whisper.

I pause, the bread halfway to my mouth. Do I dream of freedom? Of course I do. Every moment of every day, I dream of breaking free from these chains and running as far away from this place as I can. But I know better than to say that out loud.

"I dream of many things," I say instead, my voice hoarse.

Marisol smiles, a slow, creeping thing that sends shivers down my spine. "I dream too," she says, her eyes glazing over as if lost in thought. "I dream of the day when the master will make me his

queen, and I will rule by his side for all eternity."

15:49

206 Lisa: Hearing Voices

My stomach twists with revulsion. How can she possibly want that? How can she desire a life of servitude to a monster who keeps her locked away in the dark?

The soup is gone now, the bowl empty save for a few stray drops of green liquid. I set it aside, my stomach still grumbling with hunger. Marisol watches me, her eyes glinting in the dim light.

“You’ll learn to love it here,” she says, her voice soft and almost dreamy. “Just like I did. The master will make you his, and you’ll never want to leave.”

I shake my head, my heart pounding in my chest. “Never,” I whisper, my voice trembling with fear and defiance. “I’ll never belong to him. I’ll never stop fighting.”

He hasn’t been around since the first time, and I’m immensely grateful. Still, every day is just another day of anxiety twisting in my gut, wondering when he’ll be back.

Marisol just smiles, a knowing look in her eyes. “We’ll see,” she says, rising to her feet with a grace that seems out of place in this dank cell. “We’ll see.”

Soon enough, she’s gone again and I’m back to silence, my belly full and my heart cold.

I’m starting to lose hope.

Shouldn’t they have been here by now?

Have they given up?

Do they think I’m dead?

Is Ava dead?

206 Lisa: Hearing Voices

The questions are never ending, driving me insane. I almost miss the feverishness after the vampire drank from me, the misery of weakness. At least then, I didn’t notice when the time passed.

Trying to get comfortable is an impossible endeavor, but I try anyway, tucking a threadbare blanket Marisol had brought me around my shoulders. It wasn’t out of kindness—she was tired of seeing me naked and didn’t want to share clothes—but it’s still a

small comfort in this awful existence.

Just as I’m about to close my eyes and attempt to drift off into a fitful sleep, an unfamiliar rustle catches my attention. My heart leaps into my throat as I freeze,

straining my ears to listen. It's a soft sound, like something brushing against the stone walls. I hold my breath, wondering if it's just my mind playing tricks on me.

But then, to my utter shock, a crumpled piece of paper flutters into my cell, landing on the floor just a few feet away from me.

Is this real?

Or have I finally succumbed to the madness of isolation?

With trembling hands, I reach out and grasp the paper, my fingers shaking as I unfold it. My heart pounds in my chest, hope and fear warring within me. Could this be a message from the outside

world? A sign that someone knows I'm here, that they're coming to

rescue me?

But as I smooth out the creases and look down at the paper, my hopes are dashed. There's nothing there.

It's just a blank sheet, devoid of any words or markings. A bitter laugh bubbles up in my throat, the cruel irony of it all threatening

15:49

206 Lisa: Hearing Voices

to overwhelm me. Of course it's empty. What did I expect? A detailed escape plan? A heartfelt letter?

I crumple the paper in my fist, ready to toss it aside in frustration, when a soft whisper emanates from it. I freeze, my breath catching in my throat. The whisper is faint, barely audible, but I strain my ears to listen.

"We're coming."

Three simple words, but they hit me like a bolt of lightning. My heart races and I gasp, staring down at the paper in disbelief. Desperate for more, I smooth out the paper again. I bring it close to my face, my eyes scanning the blank surface for any hint of a message. But there's nothing.

I hold it against my ear.

Nothing.

Just those three whispered words echoing in my mind.

We're coming.

Who?

Ava.

There's no one else. It has to be Ava.

Ava is coming.

## **Unshift 207**

207 Ava: Falling Again

207 Ava: Falling Again

"If you want your throat torn out and your blood sucked dry, keep thrashing like a dead fish."

Jericho's lovely training flavor assaults my ears in a way that's way too comforting, considering the vitriol that comes out of his mouth.

"I like fish," I pant, giving up for a second. Lucas was right. Jericho's been drilling me on falls again.

This time, my arms and legs are tied.

Because, apparently, "I need practice."

Pretty sure Jericho's an old sadist, but at least he chose bodyguards who don't snicker and smirk the entire time they see their charge getting battered and bruised. Or, in this particular case, flopping like a fish.

Gritting my teeth, I thrash against the ropes digging into my wrists and ankles, chafing my skin raw. They'll be healed by tonight, but for now, it hurts like hell.

"Bend your knees!" Jericho barks. "Roll onto your side and use the momentum to sit up. Then bring your feet under you,"



Easy for him to say. He's not the one trussed up like a turkey. After far too long on my back, half- convinced my true identity is a turtle, I manage to flop onto my side, panting. Blades of grass tickle

my cheek. From this vantage point, I can see Selene sprawled in front of a portable fan, tail wagging lazily. Traitor.

207 Ava: Falling Again.

It isn't even that hot outside. Everyone's just worried about her because she's a husky, like they aren't wolves themselves who understand that she's just fine in this mild weather. All because she pants a lot.

She's milking it—but no one will believe me.

With a grunt, I rock back and forth until I gain enough momentum to heave myself into a sitting position. "Well, at least you haven't tied me to a chair," I mutter under my breath.

Jericho's keen ears pick up on it anyway. "That's next week's lesson." The sadistic glee in his voice makes me shudder.

I groan, picturing the bruises those sessions will paint across my body.

You really need to stop giving him ideas, Selene remarks dryly in my mind.

I shoot her a glare but keep my mouth shut this time. Bending my knees, I wriggle and strain, trying to get my feet underneath me so I can stand. My muscles scream in protest, sweat dripping into my eyes and running down my back.

I'd thought I was getting more athletic and in shape, but right now I feel like a tied-up sausage roll.

"Would you like to take a short break, dear?" Mrs. Elkins calls out from her perch, a camping chair someone brought the elderly woman so she can watch in relative comfort.

She's supposed to be driven back to Cedarwood, but of course everyone's fallen in love with her. Especially Selene, who admitted last night that Mrs. Elkins has been feeding her entire plates of

207 Ava: Falling Again

food leftovers.

Blinking sweat from my eyes, I think about it. Yes, I would kill for a break right now. An ice cold glass of soda, ten minutes in the shade... But then I catch sight of Jericho's face, his eyebrow arched expectantly. Waiting for me to give up.

Nope, not happening.

"I'm good, Mrs. E," I wheeze, even as my abs quiver with the effort of holding myself upright. "Just need a sec."

Liar, Selene accuses. You forget I can feel your exhaustion.

Hush. I'm trying to concentrate here. I know she means well, but her commentary isn't helping.

Or maybe she's just screwing with me, blissful in her artificially created breeze.

I'm screwing with you.

I knew it.

Mrs. Elkins frowns, looking between me and Jericho uncertainly. Bless her heart, but I wish she'd read the room. Or the training yard, as it were. Granted, we're just on a vast field of grass, but it's where Jericho wants us to practice.

The point is, there's no way I'm tapping out now, not with Jericho watching me like a hawk.

Channeling what little energy I have left, I plant my feet as best as I can and push off the ground, grunting with the effort. My thighs tremble and my hamstrings burn, threatening to give out yet again. For a precarious second, I teeter, sure I'm about to

207 Ava: Falling Again

face—plant right back into the dirt.

But somehow, miraculously, I find my balance. I stand there, swaying slightly, hands still tied behind my back, my legs bound together at the ankles. It's not pretty, but I'm vertical. I'll take it.

Jericho nods, something almost resembling approval flashing in his eyes, "Better. Now hop over to that oak tree."

Incredulous, I stare at the tree in question—a good twenty yards away, across uneven ground.

He can't be serious.

"Sometime today, Grey," he prompts, making a 'get on with it' gesture.

Gritting my teeth, I awkwardly jump forward, trying not to picture what I must look like. Some deranged cross between a bunny and a worm, probably. Each hop jars my bones and makes the

ropes cut deeper into my skin.

There's a point where I almost fall over, and I'm positive sheer force of will and a lucky breeze keeps me upright.

This is a lot harder than it looks, and sweat soaks my hairline as I struggle to keep my entire body balanced. It's amazing how much your arms do for balance. Now that I'm little more than a human worm, I regret not appreciating my arms a little more.

Or I'm a little dramatic, as I tend to be under Jericho's not-so-gentle coaching.

"We don't have all day, princess!"

You're doing great, Ava, Selene encourages. Just a little further.

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207 Ava: Falling Again

I don't waste breath responding, too focused on not breaking an ankle in a gopher hole. The tree looms closer, its trunk promising blessed support if I can just reach it. Ten more hops. Five. Shit, almost fell over.

Nope, I'm okay.

Four,

Three.

Two.

Teeter. My entire torso windmills until I catch myself, and I slow down my breathing.

One.

With a final, wheezing grunt, I all but collapse my face against the rough bark, using it to hold myself upright as I gasp for air. I made

1. it.

“Adequate,” Jericho allows. “Now let’s see you get out of those ropes.”

I rest my head against the tree with a groan. Still, this is nothing compared to whatever Lisa’s dealing with. And if it helps me get any stronger, every moment of this torture will be worth it.

Comentario 0

R

Deja el primer comentario para este capítulo

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11

1

FANDOM

## Unshift 208

208 Ava: Moon Goddess (1)

208 Ava: Moon Goddess (1)

At least the physical pain is over, Selene says as I’m groaning on my bed, limper than an overcooked noodle.

“It isn’t over. I’m still dying.”

You’ll be fine. This is why you should have kept up with your exercise. Even a few days off and you’re already back to being out

of shape.

“Must be nice to be a dog. You never get sore.”

That’s because I don’t sit around like a couch potato.

Harsh.

But true.

Sliding off my bed in the most dramatically sore fashion I can muster, I ignore Selene's snort and tremble—walk the entire length of the room to the closet where I set the magic book.

Mrs. Elkins goes home today, right?

"Right. They're driving her to Cedarwood. Lucas sent scouts to make sure she gets there okay."

"Enforcers," Marcus corrects me from his corner.

He doesn't offer to help me get what I want, but he's quick to make sure I'm calling his comrades by the right title. Giving him a sour look, I amend, "Enforcers."

Grabbing the book off the top shelf, I decide to sit on the floor in front of the closet, not really wanting to walk on sore legs all the

208 Ava Moon Goddess (1)

way to the bed. My muscles protest even this, quivering more than a leaf in the wind.

Look at you, taking the lazy way out, Selene mocks, her voice echoing in my mind with a teasing lilt.

"I'm not being lazy," I retort, settling cross-legged on the plush carpet. "I'm being efficient. Why waste energy when I can just sit

here?"

Selene snorts, her furry head shaking in amusement. Don't come crying to me when your butt goes numb.

Deliberately tamping down on the urge to stick my tongue out at her like a child, I turn my attention to the magical tome in my lap.

The ornate silver clasp is cool to touch, almost unnaturally so, and I suppress a shiver.

With a soft click, it releases, and I carefully open the book. Once again, I'm met with a sea of blank pages.

Frowning, I thumb through the pages. It doesn't make sense. It has to be some kind of magical lock to keep its contents secure, but how is someone without the knowledge supposed to open it?

Learning it from a mentor, of course.

Well, yeah. But I don't have one, so that doesn't help at all.

As I flip through the pages, my fingertips start to tingle, a sensation that's almost familiar. It's like a gentle current of electricity

dancing across my skin, warm and inviting. I pause, staring at my hand, trying to figure out why it's triggering some sort of memory buried deep in my subconscious.

208 Ava Moon Goddess (1)

It feels like being gently shocked, doesn't it? Like a low level of a shock collar.

I have no idea how she knows anything about shock collars.

Shaking my head, I mutter, "No, it's more than that. It's like..." I trail off, struggling to put the feeling into words.

The tingling intensifies, spreading up my arm and into my chest. My heart beats faster, and I feel a strange pull, as if the book is drawing me in. I close my eyes, letting the sensation wash over me, trying to make sense of it.

And then, like a bolt of lightning, a memory flashes through my mind. "Selene, where's that necklace?"

Maybe the suitcase? Or the dresser? She sounds hesitant, and I block out the pain and exhaustion in my legs as I stumble around looking for it.

It takes only a few minutes before I'm back at the book, necklace in hand. "At the apartment, I touched this once, and it had this same feeling on my fingers. I was shocked. I didn't know that it was magic at the time."

When it activated. Selene sounds excited, then dubious. But unlike then, there's no scent of activation

"Is there a scent?"

There was then, is her answer.

So, she doesn't know..

I don't spend that much time around magicians, Ava.

"Sorry sorry."

20:17

208 Ava Moon Goddess (1)

The amethyst pendant gleams in the light, its silver chain cool against my fingertips, much like the clasp holding the book closed.

And yet there's warmth emanating from its pages.

It's an odd sensation, like it's alive, pulsing with an energy I can't quite understand.

Selene watches me intently, her blue eyes fixed on the necklace. What are you thinking?

"I'm thinking that I have to try."

Taking a deep breath, I place the pendant on the blank page. For a moment, the world seems to freeze. The air grows heavy, thick with anticipation. Even the dust motes hanging in the sunbeams streaming through the window appear suspended, as if time itself is holding its breath.

I wait, my pulse pounding in my ears. One second. Two. Three.

And...

Nothing.

Disappointment threatens to suck me under the waves of anticipation, holding me deep in its depths.

Slumping back, I rest my hands on the ground behind me and stare at the ceiling. I was so sure they were related somehow, that the

necklace would be the answer.

But no.

Just a whole lot of nothing.

Marcus, who had been standing as still as a statue in the corner,

208 Ava: Moon Goddess (1)

suddenly exhales. The sound draws my attention, and I glance over at him, at the way his brow relaxes

“Seriously?” I scowl in his direction. “You’re an absolute rock over anything else, but the possibility of magic turns you into a nervous wreck?”

He meets my gaze, his face an impassive mask. “Magic is against the natural order of the world.”

A soft snort. “Says the guy who turns into a giant wolf.”

He has a point, Selene chimes in, her tone amused. Shifters are a part of nature. Magic... I don’t know. It may pull from the elements, but it doesn’t seem very natural to have that much power.

Of course they feel that way. They’re shifters. To them, their abilities are as natural as breathing. I open my mouth to argue, but a sudden flicker catches my eye. Frowning, I lean closer to the book. Did the page just... move?

No, that’s impossible. There’s no breeze in here, no reason for the paper to shift. And yet, as I watch, the page ripples, as if wind has swept across its surface.

a gust of

My breath catches in my throat. “Selene, are you seeing this?”

Seeing what? She pads over, her nails clicking on the hardwood floor. The page is blank, Ava.

But it’s not. Not anymore. As I stare, transfixed, inky lines manifest. At first just a hint of their existence, until they darken, swirling and twisting like living things. They coalesce into shapes, into

symbols I’ve never seen before. Ancient runes, perhaps, or some

long-forgotten language.

208 Ava: Moon Goddess (1)

A magical language?



The tingling in my fingers intensifies, spreading up my arms and into my chest. It's like the book is calling to me, reaching out with tendrils of power that wrap around my soul.

I'm dimly aware of Marcus shifting uneasily behind me, of Selene's worried whine. But they seem distant, unimportant compared to the revelation unfolding before my eyes.

The symbols glow, pulsing with an inner light. They're beautiful, mesmerizing. I can't look away. Can't move. Can't breathe,

And then, with a flash of blinding white, the world falls away, and I'm falling.

Comentario 0

R

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FANDOM

Deslizar a la izquierda para continuar >

## Unshift 209

209 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)

209 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)

Traveling like this is nothing like appearing in Sister Miriam's home. O

It's just a rush of white and nothing.

A lack of sound.

There's no wind. No air to breathe. And yet I don't suffocate in its absence, almost as if I don't need to breathe at all.

Even so, I'm falling.

I can feel it deep in my soul.

Until I crash into a nebulous something and the world coalesces around me again.

The world blinks into focus, and I find myself somewhere... else. Somewhere decidedly not my room at the lodge.

I spin slowly, taking in my new surroundings. Towering rock cliffs encircle me, their jagged peaks reaching into an impossibly blue sky, uninterrupted by even a wisp of cloud. The air carries a crisp, clean scent, untainted by the usual odors of civilization. It fills my lungs with a refreshing coolness that I've never felt before, Something I may never experience again.

In the center of this hidden vale, a crystalline pond sparkles, its aqua waters more vivid than any I've seen before. The surface is still, like a polished mirror reflecting the heavens above. I'm drawn to it, my feet moving of their own accord until I stand at the water's edge.

As

209 Ava: Moon Goddess (1)

Stare into the mesmerizing depths, a thought drifts through mind—that this place is imbued with magic. It's a strange

notion, but one that feels undeniably true. The very air seems to

hum with an unseen energy, making my skin tingle.

"That's because it is," a melodic voice says from behind me. "It's the magic within your soul."

Startled, I whirl around to face the speaker. A woman stands before me, her beauty almost ethereal. Silver hair spills over her shoulders, puddling against the ground. And yet there's no frizz. Not a single hair out of place. Impossible, with that length.

And her eyes? Bright and colorless. Inhuman. And yet somehow kind.

She regards me with eyes that seem to hold the secrets of the universe, a gentle smile playing on her lips.

"Who are you?" I ask, my voice sounding small in the vastness of this place. "Where am I?"

The woman

takes a step closer, her movements fluid and graceful. "I am known by many names," she says, her voice like a soothing lullaby. "But you may call me Selena. And this," she gestures to our surroundings, "is a reflection of your inner self."

I frown, trying to make sense of her words. "My inner self? I don't understand."

Selena's smile widens. "You are a being of great power, Ava Grey. The magic that flows through your veins is ancient and potent. This place is a manifestation of that magic, a sanctuary created by your own soul. This world has been screaming in drought, without

17:37

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209 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)

its children to bring life."

Her words make no sense at all. "What drought? The world is thriving." At least, that's what the news says.

"Is it? I suppose that would be how humans perceive it."

She extends a hand towards me, palm up in invitation. I hesitate, my mind reeling. But something deep within me, a part of myself I've always known existed but never fully acknowledged, draws me toward her.

The identity of this woman is no secret.

There's only one person she can be in this world.

Slowly, I reach out and place my hand in hers. Her skin is warm and smooth, and a tingling sensation spreads up my arm at the contact. Selena smiles, her eyes sparkling with otherworldly light.

"Come," she says, gently tugging me towards the pond. "Let me show you the depths of your own power."

As we approach the water's edge, I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the still surface. But instead of my usual self, I see a glowing figure, radiant with an inner light. Selena's reflection stands beside mine, her own form shimmering. She's a vast light, contained and

still.

Mine? My glow is wild, like a living fire in the water.

The difference between a master and student.

“Look deep within yourself, Ava,” Selena murmurs, her voice seeming to echo from the very rocks around us. “Embrace the magic that is your birthright. It’s been locked away for far too long,

3:5

209 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)

and the earth begs for its return.”

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes and letting the tranquility of this place wash over me. And as I do, I feel a stirring deep within my soul, a spark of something vast and powerful. Something I’ve never been able to access before.

It grows, expanding outward until it fills every fiber of my being, until I am one with the magic that surrounds me.

When I open my eyes again, the world has changed. The colors are brighter, more vibrant. The air hums with a tangible energy, and I can feel the life force of every living thing around me. And at the

center of it all, I sense the pulsing core of my own magic, a wellspring of power that has always been there, waiting to be tapped.

It’s tiny—little more than a spark.

And when I glance within the water, my reflection is no longer blazing with light. It’s just me, with the faintest glow in my chest.

Selena squeezes my hand, her smile radiant. “Welcome home, child.”

“What am I supposed to do with this power? Why am I so special?”

Selena’s expression grows serious. That is for you to discover, Ava. Your path is your own to walk. But know that you are not alone. There are others like you, others who will guide and support you on your journey.”

“So—not the chosen one with the entire world on her shoulders?”

Even her laugh is musical. “No. Just a new beginning, returning

## 209 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)

what was lost.”

She steps back, releasing my hand. “Trust in yourself, Ava Grey. Trust in the magic that flows through you.”

With those final words, Selena fades, her form growing translucent until she vanishes entirely. And as she does, the world around me starts to shimmer and dissolve, the colors blurring together until everything is consumed by a blinding white light.

I feel myself falling again, tumbling through that endless nothing once again.

## Unshift 210

### 210 Ava: Moon Goddess (III) — END Season

3

Ava?

Ava!

Selene’s mental shout has me shaking my head, startled. I’m back, and it’s like I was never gone.

Ava, are you listening?

“Sorry. What is it?”

Selene stands in front of me, her ears twitching. You were here, but our bond was silent. Like you were far away.

“Ah.” Clearing my throat, which is parched now that I’ve returned, I blink until I adjust to the darkness of my room, compared to the brightness of that magical place I was in just moments ago.

“Selene, what does the Moon Goddess look like?”

Why do you ask? Selene’s head tilts, her icy eyes studying me with an intensity that would be unnerving if I wasn’t so used to it by

now.

I glance at Marcus, who stands sentinel by the door, before focusing my thoughts inward. It's so much harder to think this way, and I wonder if it will ever feel completely natural. I think I met her. The Moon Goddess.

Selene's confusion ripples through our bond. She was never here,

Ava.

210 Ava: Moon Goddess (1) END Season 3

I know. We were somewhere else.

You never left the room. Selene's voice in my mind is tinged with concern, her mental words hesitant.

I think my consciousness did. It was like my spirit traveled to this magical place. I struggle to find the words to describe the ethereal experience. Even my body felt real there.

Selene's worry intensifies, a cold thread winding through my thoughts. Will it happen again?

I don't know. Absently stroking the pages of the book in my lap, I think back, trying to focus on the details. Yet the memories are already fading, vivid pictures blurring in my mind's eye. There was a woman there. She called herself Selena. She spoke to me about my magic, about embracing it.

I don't know what the Moon Goddess looks like. I can't remember, Selene admits. Though, they say she appears differently to everyone who sees her. Some even see her as a wolf. She pauses. think I saw her as a wolf.

Nodding, I look down at the book again, my gaze drawn to the strange runic text that dances across the pages. Each symbol seems to breathe with a life of its own, pulsing in a mesmerizing rhythm.

What are you doing? Selene's question breaks through my fascination.

I

"Looking at the text. Trying to figure out how I'm supposed to learn to read it." My finger traces the graceful lines of a particularly

intricate rune.

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210 Ava: Moon Goddess (II)—END Season 3.

Ava, there is no text. Selene's voice is slow, cautious.

I blink, my finger stalling on the page. "What do you mean? It's right here. Can't you see it?"

Selene's ears flatten to her skull. The pages are blank, Ava.

Confusion swirls through me as I stare at the book, at the undeniable presence of the runic words.

"Marcus, can you come here for a second?"

The older wolf shifter approaches with caution, boots heavy, each thud a countdown to the answer I know he's going to give. "Yes,

ma'am?"

I point to the open book. "Can you see anything?"

Marcus leans over, his brows knitting together as he studies the pages. "Nothing."

A chill skitters down my spine as I look between Marcus and Selene. How is it possible that I can see these cryptic words so clearly while they perceive only emptiness?

Ava, what does this mean? Selene's question echoes my own racing thoughts.

I don't know. Resting a hand on a page, I can feel the warmth and tingling against my palm. I think it has something to do with what happened earlier.

Selene noses at my hand, offering silent comfort. We'll figure it out. That's what we're always saying.

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We'll figure it out together.

We'll get through it together.

We'll do it together.

But somehow, we're never together for the things that matter.

My heart twists at the thought of Selene being somehow separate from my magic. Why can't she see what I can? Why can't she feel what I can?

I hope it isn't some sort of terrible omen for the future.

It isn't, Selene insists.

I can't tear my eyes away from the graceful lines dancing across the pages, each stroke imbued with a meaning that hovers just beyond my grasp. It's like trying to remember a dream—the harder I focus, the more it slips away, leaving only a tantalizing impression, of something profound and powerful.

The runes almost seem fluid, as if they shift and change in my peripheral vision, then breathe in static form as I focus on them. They flow across the pages with a simple, elemental beauty. Like

water. Ink spilled from an artist's brush. Each symbol is a

masterpiece, a work of art that speaks to my soul even as my mind- struggles to comprehend.

I've never seen anything like this before. The runes are alien, yet somehow familiar. They tug at something deep inside me, at that core of glowing warmth within my chest. It's as if they're whispering secrets, ancient knowledge long forgotten by the world.

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Only, I can't hear them.

Ava, what do you see? Selene's voice is a distant echo, a whisper in the back of my mind.

Beauty, I breathe, my fingers trembling as they hover over the pages. Mystery. Magic.

I can feel Selene's frustration, her longing to share in this experience. But no matter how hard I try, I can't seem to project. the images into her mind. It's like there's a wall between us, a barrier that keeps this magic separate from our bond.

I'm sorry, I whisper, my heart aching at the distance between us. I don't know how to show you.

Selene presses her nose against my leg, offering silent comfort even as I sense her unease. It's okay, Ava. We'll figure it out.



As I stare at the pages, I feel the familiar tingling sensation in my fingertips, a warmth that spreads up my arms and into my chest. It's like the book is calling to me, urging me to delve deeper into its

secrets.

And then, to my amazement, the runes begin to move in a way that I can observe.

They swirl and dance, rearranging themselves into new patterns, new shapes. I watch, transfixed, as they slowly coalesce into something recognizable.

Letters.

Words.

A message.

C

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For me?

My breath catches in my throat as I read the words, each one searing itself into my mind with the force of a brand.

"Embrace your destiny, Ava Grey. The time has come to..."

The runes shiver, their edges blurring as if they're struggling to maintain their form. I lean closer, my heart pounding as I wait for the rest of the message to reveal itself.

But instead of clarity, the symbols dissolve into chaos, their meanings lost in a swirl of ink and magic. I blink, my eyes straining to make sense of the jumble, but it's like trying to catch smoke with my bare hands.

Selene, something's happening, I whisper, my voice trembling with a mixture of awe and fear. The runes, they're trying to tell me

something.

Her warmth by my side keeps me grounded, with half my mind deep in this weird place between here and there—between reality and the magic of this book.

What do they say?

"I don't know... They're fighting. Trying to break through..."

My breath catches as the runes continue to shift and change, growing more frantic as each second passes.

Then, as suddenly as it began, the chaos stills.

One by one, lines emerge,

“Your teacher awaits. Enter the sanctuary of wizards, Ava Grey.” What the hell does that mean?

17:38)

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What sanctuary?

Wizards? Yet a new term brought to my ears. First magicians. Then witches. Now, wizards?

My phone rings, a quick musical note. A text message.