

CHAPTER 24

4 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (V) I stare at Selene in utter confusion. “Dig? What do you mean, dig?” Precisely what I said, she replies, her tone brooking no argument. Dig. I glance around the small clearing, taking in the soft carpet of moss and fallen leaves. “With what? My hands?” The mere thought of digging into the earth with my bare fingers fills me with a strange revulsion. Selene lets out a huff of annoyance. Yes, with your hands. I would do it myself, but... She pauses, eyeing the ground with distaste. I don’t like to get mud between my claws. I can’t help but snort at that. “Are you sure you’re not just a husky after all? Because that’s a very husky–like attitude.” In response, Selene snaps at the air, her jaws closing with an audible click. Enough stalling, she growls. Dig. With a sigh, I sink to my knees and begin to dig, scooping handfuls of damp earth aside. Selene 14:40 1/7 24 Ava Paranoia and Secrets (V) watches me intently, her tail swishing back and forth. Deeper, she urges after a few moments. I grimace as my fingers sink into the cool, loamy soil. “This is so gross. You owe me a manicure after this.” Selene merely flicks an ear, unimpressed by my complaints. As I continue to dig, my arms quickly grow tired from the exertion. Sweat beads on my brow, and I can feel the grime caking beneath my nails. Ugh. Finally, my fingers scr@pe against something hard and unyielding. I pause, brushing away the remaining soil to reveal...a box? Keep going, Selene prompts. With a grunt, I manage to pry the box free from the earth. It’s a simple wooden affair, unremarkable save for a strange symbol carved into the lid. I shoot Selene a questioning look, but she merely inclines her head toward the box. Taking a deep breath, I lift the lid. Inside, nestled amid a bed of soft fabric, is a ring. But not just any ring—the centerpiece is a large, faceted 14:46 27 24 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (V) crystal in a deep, vivid purple hue. It’s almost identical to the one I currently have in my pocket. You’ll need to wear them both, Selene says, as if reading my thoughts. At all times. I frown, gingerly lifting the ring from its resting place. “But why? What’s so special about these crystals?” Selene shakes her head. It’s not yet time for you to know that. For now, you must simply trust me. “Well, that’s ominous,” I mutter, but I obediently slip the ring onto my finger. An odd tingle dances across my skin as the two crystals are united. Good. Selene’s tone is one of satisfaction. Now, let’s get out of here before I have to groom myself for days to get all this filth out of my fur. I can’t help but giggle at her disdainful expression as she eyes the mud clinging to her paws. “Whatever you say, princess. I’ll make sure to book you a grooming appointment first thing in the morning.” With a huff, Selene turns and begins to lead the way back through the trees, leaving me to hurry after her. I eye Selene warily as we walk, the empty box tucked 14 317 24 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (V) under my arm. “So, are you going to explain what all that pain was about? And what did you mean by me ‘becoming“?” Selene chuffs, twitching one ear in irritation. It means precisely what I said. You were becoming. I frown. “Yeah, but becoming what, exactly?” Sometimes being cryptic is the best thing for everyone involved. Selene’s tone is firm as she pads across the small clearing toward the park trail. Rolling my eyes, I hurry to catch up, leaves crunching underfoot. “Well, it’s not the best thing for me. I’m so confused right now.” Selene doesn’t reply, leaving me to stew in silence as we retrace our steps back toward the main path. It’s only when we reach the trailhead that I realize something feels... different. I pause, taking a deep breath. There’s a lightness to my body that wasn’t there before, a sense of renewed energy thrumming through my veins. The aches and pains from earlier have faded, leaving me feeling almost refreshed. Don’t even think about it Selene’s voice cuts through 14:40 – 24 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (V) my thWw.nOveŀWōRm.coM

Updates...

wWw.nOveŀWōRm.Com

oughts in a sharp warning. I blink, shooting her a perplexed look. “Think about what?” Running, she replies flatly. Unless you want the attention it will bring. “Attention?” I echo, baffled. “What are you talking about? How would me running bring any attention?” Selene shakes her head, clearly exasperated. It’s better you don’t find out. Not yet, at least. I open my mouth, ready to protest, but she silences me with a stern look. Gritting my teeth, I swallow back my questions and continue toward the parking lot in silence. I’d dreamt about getting my wolf. Never once had I dreamed I’d get a cryptic wolf who refuses to answer questions and pretends she’s a husky in her free time. The entire walk back to my apartment, I can’t shake the strange, restless energy buzzing beneath my skin. It’s like every cell in my body is thrumming with newfound vigor, just waiting to be unleashed. Part of me—the curious, reckless part—wants nothing 14:46 6/7 24 Ava Paranola and Secrets (V) more than to take off at a sprint, to push my body to its limits and see what this strange feeling is all about. But Selene’s warning holds me back. Attention is the last thing I want or need right now. I’m still trying to wrap my head around the fact that my dog is apparently not a dog. By the time we reach my front door, I’m practically vibrating with pent–up energy. I shoot Selene a sidelong glance as I fumble for my keys. “Are you at least going to tell me what’s going on? Why I feel like this?” Wait, she snaps, staring at the door and growling. I remember now. I didn’t lock the door; I’d thought we would walk a few minutes, at most. So stupid! I sniff, but I can’t smell anything. While my sense of smell is better than a human’s, it isn’t as good as that of a dog, much less a wolf. We can enter, she says after some time, and I open the door with some hesitation. Nothing seems different. As I walk into the living room, a familiar, tantalizing scent hits my nose. I jerk my head around in panic, but -no he isn’t here. 14.40 6/7 24 Ava: Paranola and Secrets (V) “Selene. I can smell

Lucas.”Www.(n)OveŀWōRm.coM

wWw.mOveŀWōRm.Com