

CHAPTER 27

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27 Ava: Watched I step into my apartment, muscles aching from another grueling self-defense session with Kyle. Despite the pain, I can feel myself getting stronger. A heavy sigh escapes my lips as I kick off my shoes, relishing the feeling of being home, safe within these walls. Selene's thoughts brush against my consciousness, a comforting feeling after an awful day, as she pads over to the couch to take a nap. You did well today. You're progressing rapidly, as I knew you would. I nod, offering a weary smile. "Thanks. I feel like a truck hit me, but in a good way, you know?" A low chuckle reverberates through our bond. Rest, my human. You've earned it. Peeling off my sweat-drenched clothes, I make my way to the bathroom, the promise of a hot shower beckoning me. As the water cascades over my aching muscles, I allow my mind to drift, replaying the events of the day. 17 27 Ava: Watched And inevitably, my thoughts turn to him. Lucas. Just the mere thought of his name sends a shiver down my spine, a heady mixture of longing and resentment coiling deep within me. I can still see the intensity in his golden eyes, the way his gaze seemed to strip me bare. Unbidden, my body responds to the memory, a traitorous flush creeping up my neck as desire unfurls in my core. I curse inwardly, hating the way he still has this effect on me, even after everything that transpired between us. Selene's disapproval washes over me, a cool balm against the raging inferno of my emotions. He threw you away like trash, she growls. It does him no good to come around now, begging for forgiveness. I wince, her blunt assessment striking a chord deep within me. She's right, of course. Lucas had his chance, and he squandered it, crushing my heart beneath the heel of his contempt. The pain of that rejection still lingers, a raw, festering wound that refuses to heal. The ache will never go away. Stupid fated mates 14 217 27 Ava: Watched bullshit. "I know," I murmur, rinsing the shampoo from my hair. "Believe me, I haven't forgotten." And yet, a treacherous part of me yearns for his touch, his embrace, his acceptance. Selene's presence ebbs and flows. Do not let him in just because the bond tries to call you, she finally says. You are worth more than the demands of a bond. With a deep breath, I push him from my mind. He hasn't done anything to me in weeks, if you don't count breaking into my apartment when I'm not home. Even at work, he'd stepped aside as soon as I brushed him away. So far, he isn't dangerous. Well—not that kind of dangerous. My heart, though... That, I need to guard carefully. *** The next week passes in an odd manner. Every morning, there's a note on my apartment door. It only says, "I'm so sorry," with Lucas' signature at the bottom. 3/7 27 Ava: Watched I see him around lunch every day at work. He orders. something different each time. Every time I take his card, he looks me in the eyes and says, "I'm sorry. I don't need you to answer me; I just need you to know that I mean it." And then he takes his coffee and leaves. He doesn't sit there watching me for hours, li

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ke the first day. It's bizarre. Selene grumbles in the back of my head every time she sees him. I'm grateful that Lucas has yet to realize she's anything more than dog. Every night, there's a warm dinner waiting for me at home. Granted, he's broken in to leave it on my table, but—it's free dinner. I'm not going to complain if that's all he's doing. Clearly I can't keep him out, anyway. There was even a new bag of dog food the first time I came home to dinner, though Selene announced that she was not eating out of that bag under any circumstances. 14.47 AFT 27 Ava: Watched I donated it to the animal shelter. I can't lie; there's a part of my heart that wavers, just a little. But a week of cute little notes and simple apologies and the occasional meal aren't enough to make up for what he did, so I just ignore it all. It isn't until I hear a shifter muttering to his friend about how the Westwood alpha has been spending a lot of time in the Aspen Pack territory that I realize there's a real problem with what Lucas is doing. I wonder if the Aspen Pack alpha knows that Lucas is here. Clearly, he's unsettling the shifters. With the complaints about tensions between Westwood and Blackwood, it makes no sense that he's still here. I wait for Lucas to show up at lunch, tapping my pen restlessly against the counter. The cafe is fairly empty today, just a few regulars tucked into their usual corners. Mrs. Elkins shoots me a questioning look from the kitchen, but I just shrug, feigning nonchalance. Twelve-thirty comes and goes without any sign of him. Selene snorts in the back of my mind. You shouldn't be 27 Ava: Watched worried about that arrogant alpha. Focus on yourself, little one. I frown, refilling a customer's coffee mug. "I'm not worried about him, per se. It's just..." An image of snarling wolves flashes through my mind, claws and fangs bared. The memory of screams and the coppery scent of blood assaults my senses. I shudder, pushing the vision away. Don't embroil yourself in pack politics, Ava, Selene chides. "But what if a war erupts because of me?" I protest, gripping the counter until my knuckles turn white. "I can't have that on my conscience." Selene is silent for a long moment. That isn't your responsibility. Alphas make their own decisions. Lucas will either return for his alpha duties or not. That isn't on you, but him—he wouldn't have to be here if he had done the right thing in the first place. I open my mouth to argue, but she cuts me off. No, little one. Listen to me. You have finally found a semblance of peace and freedom here. Focus on that. 14:40

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