

Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Ava: Planning

The next three days pass in a haze as I endeavor to leave my room as little as possible. I spend the time trying to make a plan to escape; there's no way in hell I'm staying here to become the pack's omega whore. My brain skirts past everything that happened with Todd, deciding ignoring it all was much cheaper than therapy.

2

The walls of my room close in on me. My heart pounds in my chest, and I can't stop the tears from falling. I try to distract myself with books, but every word seems to mock me, every page a reminder of my trapped existence. I've given up on my classes, because—well, I'm not coming back. Obviously.

I conclude that my best bet is to run from the gala itself, while everyone is too distracted to notice I'm gone. I pack a bag with escape in mind, filling it with clothes, food, and the balance in my bank account, after withdrawing it all. I don't know where I'll go or what I'll do, but I can't stay here anymore.

I buy a burner phone and program Lisa's number into it, but I'm not sure if it will be safe to text her when I'm gone. Like a coward, I say nothing about my plans, and find myself pre-mourning the loss of my best friend. If I tell her anything, she will be in danger, assuming my pack cares enough to hunt her down for information. It's better to act like everything's normal.

At dinner on the third day, I sit at the table, pushing food around my plate as my Dad drops the bomb. We're going to the Silvermoon Pack's territory for the gala.

It's happening.

Composure is hard to keep when a million fire ants are crawling around inside your skin in a psychosomatic manifestation of anxiety, but somehow, I manage. Either that, or my family doesn't care enough to notice anything off about me.

1

In two days, I can't believe I'll be surrounded by shifters looking for their fated mates, while I'm just trying to find a way out.

Dad clears his throat and I glance at him, surprised to find his eyes locked on me. "Ava," he says, in this weird cadence that I think was supposed to be... soothing? "This is a big event for all of us."

"Yes, Father."

"I think you would understand why I would prefer to keep you home, but it would look odd to leave my unmated, eligible daughter at home when Jessa is also attending."

Oh, wow. He's explaining something to me. I glance around the table, unsurprised to find Jessa grimacing at her plate and Phoenix studying me with his trademark detachment. He has an easy, loving relationship with Jessa, but me? He inspects me like I'm a bug.

I guess, to all of them, that's exactly what I am.

Dad's fingers tap in staccato rhythm against the table. "I expect nothing but your best behavior while we are there, Ava." His eyes trail to the bruises at my neck, and I flinch. They weren't as bad as I thought they would be, but I can only hope they fade in time for the gala.

I lower my head, prodding at my green beans with my fork. "I understand, Father."

"Since you don't have a wolf, it isn't like you'll find your mate there. So just try to stay out of trouble and keep your mouth shut." He returns his attention to his dinner, and I clench my fist in my lap, hidden beneath the table.

There's no point in feeling hurt by his words.

* * *

The trip to Idaho is done like most of my familial interactions—in silence. Mom, Dad, and Jessa are in their own vehicle, while I accompany Phoenix in Jessa's truck.

The hum of the engine and the rhythmic thud of the tires on the road lull me into a state of numbness. Phoenix drives with the arrogance of an alpha, one arm draped across his door and his entire body relaxed. The radio is off, because of course it is. He looks so much like Dad. Cold and distant, just like all of them.

The hours pass, and rolling plateaus give way to the mountains of the northern boundaries of the state. My thoughts drift to Lisa, wondering what she's up to and if she will forgive me for disappearing.

"You're not planning on doing anything foolish at the Lunar Gala, are you, Ave?"

My entire body twitches in shock, first from the sound of Phoenix's voice, and then by his question. I stare at the side of his face, wondering if he somehow knows, and fight to stay calm. "Of course not. Dad would beat me. He's made it perfectly clear what he expects of me."

Phoenix grunts. I'm not sure what that means. Oh, Lord, or Moon Goddess, or whoever is the real deity out there—if only I could read my siblings like they can read me.

I return to staring out the window, trying to sound nonchalant. "Besides, it's not like anyone can mate a defect." Oops, the bitterness came out anyway.

This time, Phoenix doesn't make a sound. I guess he approves of my bleak outlook on my life.

"At least Mason will take you in. You won't be his mate, but your kids will be legitimate and treated well."

2

I can't help the near-violent flinch at the sound of his name. "As long as they have wolves, you mean."

Phoenix flicks a glance toward me. "Right."

Nope. There's no way in hell I'm staying with these people.

He *knows*, and he's sitting here telling me to be thankful *that man*, someone who's beaten me relentlessly through the years, is willing to take me as his breeding whore.

2

I let out a slow breath and go over the topography of the area in my head. I'm not well versed, but there's several cities around Shadowvale, and the city itself is huge—at least four times as large as White Peak. I should be able to muddy my tracks somehow. There's a few different train stations in White Peak, but I'm hoping to make people think I escaped to the suburbs.

As we approach Shadowvale, my chest tightens with anxiety. The thought of being in the Silvermoon Pack's territory fills me with a strange mix of dread and hope. It's like stepping into a world where anything could happen, where I might have a chance at freedom.

I glance over at Phoenix, who is still focused on the road. His stoic expression sends a shiver down my spine, and I mourn the older brother of my memories. Then I start imagining a mental wall around all those memories of Before. I can't let my sentimental side take over.

I return to plotting my escape in my mind. My heart races with a mixture of fear and determination. I'm going to make it out of here. I have to.

The tension inside me coils tighter as we draw closer to our destination.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS

Lenaleia

Every time I type "Gala", I can hear the Grand Galloping Gala song from My Little Ponies in my head.

This makes it really awkward in a few more chapters.

Random insights behind the scenes~

Please add this book to your collections! This is a Cupid's Quill entry~