

CHAPTER 45

45 Ava: Clearminded A week has passed since that first fateful night with Clayton, and the haze of my heat is finally fading. Clayton rarely left my side, and every time I think of him, I blush. To go from a virgin with almost no experience to so many memories of his naked body over mine, his large hands rough on my skin, and the near-violent collision of our passion, over and over again...? It's like a different world. I can't help looking at men a little differently, with a little bit more suspicion. If someone as polite and gentlemanly as Clayton can have that side of him, aren't they all just brutal beasts in bed? Well, your heat experience is a little unique, Selene says dryly. Clayton's back with his pack today, doing alpha-things, I think. I'm not sure. He was gone when I woke up. The nurses haven't discharged me yet, saying they just want to make sure I'm okay. I'm more than okay. I feel 14:58 — 45 Ava: Clearminded strong and refreshed. Even some of the scars all over my neck from failed claiming marks—so many failed attempts, because heat—Ava apparently really likes when he tries—are slowly fading from the first night. They'll be gone in another week, Selene agrees. It looks brutal, like I've been attacked by a wild animal. In a way, I guess I was—Clayton wasn't in his right mind, either—but claiming marks by nature have always healed quickly. The scars usually stay, though. Now that I can feel my heat is done, I feel embarrassed and guilty more than anything. I'm sure it must be awkward for Clayton, as well. I'll be able to see you soon, I tell Selene, who gives a little rumble of excitement. She's been hanging out near the hospital, frustrated because she can't get to me. She can apparently?—scale the building to my window, but could never come in because of Clayton. Neither of us want to give up our secrets, so she stayed outside, parted from me. Don't lose the necklace this time, Selene orders me, frustrated as she too thinks about this past week. 28 45 Ava Clearminded It's been rough. I won't. She found it near my self-defense classes. The clasp had broken, and it didn't take long for my heat to take over. Selene still hasn't explained the ins and outs of that, but I'll get it out of her eventually. Right now, I'm just anxious to go home. I was given the option of using Clayton's phone to get in touch with anyone worried about me, but I don't want any of them to know who I am—so, I didn't. If he knows about The Novel Grind, he can find my information easily. If he knows my information, he can figure out what pack I'm from. If that happens... Clayton is a good man, but he's an alpha who needs to put his pack first. I don't know what he would do if my pack asked for me back. Once I'm discharged, I plan to sneak back into obscurity. I don't want to take any chances. I sink back against the pillows with a sigh. I want to go for a walk, but the nurses won't let me leave the isolation room for another day. Think Lucas knows I'm missing? 36 45 Ava Clearminded Selene scoffs. Who knows. Who cares? He's just your ex-fated. It isn't likw(w)w.n(o)Velwo@m.com

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e she's wrong, but I can't help but think about him anyway. During my heat, that ever-present ache in my chest had disappeared... but it's back now, and filled with a decent amount of guilt over how I've spent the last week. Nothing to be guilty about. You aren't mated. Also true. But still. The door to my hospital room suddenly swings open, and a woman strides in with an air of confidence. She has the same striking green eyes as Clayton, her chestnut hair pulled back in a sleek ponytail. "You must be Ava," she says, giving me a warm smile. "I'm Ivy, Clayton's sister. It's a pleasure to meet you." I move to stand as Ivy enters, but she waves a hand dismissively. "No need to get up. Rest, you've been through an ordeal." I sink back onto the bed, a little self-conscious under her scrutinizing gaze. It's like she's checking to see if 14:58 45 Ava: Clearminded I'm worthy of her brother. Which I'm not. I can tell her that any day of the week. Clayton's an accomplished alpha with a pack who reveres him. I'm a pack defect who ran away. I'm not about to try to get any favors from Clayton; I just want to disappear quietly. I resist the urge to squirm or cover myself with the thin hospital blanket as she continues to assess me. "It's nice to meet you too," I say, extending my hand. Ivy grasps it firmly, her grip surprisingly strong and her palms and fingers callused. Our handshake is brief but allows her to lean in close, nostrils flaring slightly as she gets a subtle whiff of my scent. I hold myself still, fighting the instinct to pull back or bare my neck in submission. This woman may be Clayton's sister, but her dominant energy makes me wary. "So you're the mysterious omega who has my brother all worked up," Ivy murmurs, her tone light but her green eyes glittering with sharp intelligence. "I can't say I blame him. Your scent is quite... enticing." I swallow hard, my mouth suddenly dry. Is she flirting 45 Ava: Clearminded with me? Or just making an observation? Is she disapproving of how he fell into bed with me? It's not like I tried to have that happen. "I didn't mean to cause any trouble," I say carefully. "It was never my intention to, um, entice anyone." Ivy arches one elegant brow. "Of course not. True omegas can't help their allure, it's simply part of their nature." Her gaze drifts down to the fading marks on my neck, and she clicks her tongue, muttering under her breath, "Although it seems my brother struggled to keep his wolf in check around you." Comment 7 View All > H Post your first comment! Vote wWW. @dvèLwovm.cOm