

CHAPTER 47

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47 Ava: The Apartment 47 Ava: The Apartment The apartment Clayton talked about is in the middle of the city, in a high-rise that towers above every other building in the area. It reeks of money. I follow Clayton through the opulent lobby, cringing as my sneakers squeak against the polished marble floor. I don't belong here, in this sleek, luxury-through-minimalism space. Two large men in crisp suits stand by the entrance, their eyes following our every move. "Guards?" I murmur to Clayton, trying to keep my voice casual despite the unease prickling up my spine. He nods once, ushering me towards the elevators. "For the human residents, yes. We aim to avoid any incidents between humans and shifters." My eyebrows lift at that, and I risk a sidelong glance at him as we step into the empty elevator car. "Incidents happen often around here?" Clayton's expression darkens momentarily as he hits the button for the top floor. "Not often," he allows. 14:59 1/7 47 Ava: The Apartment "But no pack is immune. There are always hotheads who lack control, rogues who seek chaos. We have to take precautions." I absorb that silently, my mind whirling. It was not infrequent to hear my father complaining about young idiots who wandered into the human territory and harmed or killed humans. The Blackwood Pack didn't treat humans well. It's different here. I've seen the differences firsthand, but I still didn't expect humans and shifters to live in the same building. The top floor is exclusive. You can see it at first glance; there are only two doors, despite the long hallway. There should be plenty of room for other apartments, yet there aren't any. Clayton guides me down the corridor to the door on the left, his hand a warm weight against the small of my back. I tense at his touch, my skin tingling with wariness. "Home sweet home," he says, unlocking the door and waving me in. The apartment is stunning. There are huge windows 14:59 2/7 47 Ava: The Apartment all along the back of the apartment. It has an open floor plan, bringing in all the natural light, and even with the furniture that Clayton has provided, I could easily go bowling in the free space. Or roller skating. I turn in a slow circle, taking in the high ceilings, the modern furnishings, the state-of-the-art kitchen tucked into an alcove. "Wow," I murmur despite myself. "It's..." "Suitable?" Clayton prompts, watching me closely. There's a glint of something like pride in his eyes as he surveys my reaction. "I had it outfitted with everything you might need." I swallow hard, feeling a surge of discomfort at the thought of him making such personal arrangements for me. "It's very nice," I manage. "But really, it's too much. I'm happy to find a place on my own-" "Ava." Clayton steps closer, his height and physical presence suddenly overwhelming. "We've been over this. For now, you need to remain under my protection. This is non-negotiable." I bristle at his words, that simmering sense of independence that has kept me going all these years 14:59) 317 47 Ava: The Apartment flaring to life. "I don't need your protection," I argue, lifting my chin to meet his piercing gaze. "I was doing just fine on my own before-" "Before you were kidnapped by rogue shifters?" Clayton cuts me off, his tone laced with a sharp edge. "Before you went into a heat so potent that even an alpha as disciplined as myself was rendered powerless against it?" I flush hotly at the memory, heat unfurling low in my belly. Clayton holds my stare, his eyes glittering with a mixture of challenge and something darker, more primal. "You may think you have everything under control," he continues in a low rumble. "But the truth is, you're a rare thing in our world, Ava. An omega with immense power that you don't fully understand yet. You need guidance and protection until you can learn to master it." I open my mouth to protest, but Selene's warning rings in my mind. Don't fight him, Ava. Play along for now, at least until we can find a way out of this mess. Safely. 14.59 417 47 Ava: The Apartment Grinding my teeth, I force myself to nod. "Fine. I'll stay here for now." The words feel like shards of glass in my mouth. A muscle ticks in Clayton's jaw, but he inclines his head in acceptance. "Good. Get settled in. My apartment is across the hall, so I won't be far. There are clothes in the bedroom; I had my secretar

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y shop for them. Of course, we can go shopping if they aren't in your taste "You went shopping?" I hadn't even thought about a change of clothes. I'm wearing some that Clayton had brought over, but I didn't think he'd bought an entire wardrobe. "You have nothing," he says, as if that's all the explanation that's needed. "The fridge is also stocked, but I'm not sure if anything is to your taste. Someone did bring some dog food and bowls..." I can feel a thin thread of panic wiggling in my chest. The weight of this kindness is suffocating. I feel like I'm trapped in a gilded cage. How am I supposed to leave when he's taken care of every need before I can even voice it? 14:59 47 Ava: The Apartment Clayton must sense my distress because his expression softens into one of concern. "We can pick up your dog tomorrow if you'd like," he offers, misreading the source of my turmoil. "Though... has someone been taking care of it while you've been gone?" I latch onto that, grasping at the chance to deflect. "Oh, no need to worry about my dog," I assure him hastily, the lie tripping off my tongue with surprising ease. "I'll take care of it." He frowns, clearly wanting to protest, but I quickly change the subject. "I actually really want to shower, if that's okay?" Clayton's jaw tightens minutely, but he nods. "Of course. Fresh towels are in the linen closet, and there are toiletries in the shower. Let me know if you need anything else. There's a new phone in the bedroom. It hasn't been set up yet, but we put your SIM card in it. I assume your phone was the one with the purple case." I nod. "Once you have it set, add my number. I have it written down in your room." He hesitates, then steps 14:59 817 47 Ava: The Apartment forward and pulls me into a hug. My entire body stiffens, and he ki*ses the top of my head gently. "I know this is weird," he says, his voice soft and understanding. "I'm not going to push you into anything you don't want. I promise, I won't keep you here against your will forever." And yet-why does that promise feel so hollow to my ears? Comment E Post your first comment! Vote 11 1 Fandom Swipe left to continue > View All >