

## CHAPTER 55

55 Ava: Shopping With Ivy For someone who doesn't want children, he could have fooled me last week, Selene says, yawning in amusement. Shut up, I hiss at her, smiling at Ivy. "I'm sorry for startling you." "It's fine." She waves a hand, looking me over with some caution. "As long as you're okay." I continue eating, trying to keep my composure after that awkward moment. Ivy hesitates, seeming unsure if she should continue eating as well. The silence between us grows thick and uncomfortable. I rack my brain for something to say, but the tension is stifling. Finally, Ivy clears her plate and stands. "Well, I should get going. Thank you for having me over." I stand as well, unsure of the protocol. "Of course. Thanks for the gifts." She steps forward and kisses both my cheeks, catching me off guard. "I'll see you around, Ava." And with that, she's gone, leaving me alone in the 12. 1-8 C 55 Ava: Shopping With Ivy apartment. I collapse onto the plush couch, mentally exhausted from the visit. What was the point of all that? She seemed nice enough, but there's just something so weird about how she acts. Judgment? Suspicion? I can't quite put my finger on it. Selene pads over and hops up beside me, resting her head on my lap. She certainly is an interesting one. "You're telling me," I mutter, running my fingers through her soft fur. "I can't figure out her angle." I wouldn't trust her as far as I could throw her. There's something off about that one. I frown, staring at the gifts she left on the counter. "You think so? She seems harmless enough to me." Famous last words, pup! Selene huffs out a breath. Just be careful around her. And her brother, for that matter. "Clayton?" The memory of our intimate encounter flashes through my mind, heat creeping up my neck. "What's wrong with him?" If you aren't willing to be his mate, you need to be careful. His wolf thinks of you as his mate. He's been trying to reach me. 12:36 2/6 55 Ava: Shopping With Ivy I stare at Selene. "You guys can talk to each other?" Of course. Her blue husky eyes seem to find my intelligence lacking. It's only humans who are limited in their communication. I see. Rubbing her ears, I ask as casually as possible, "And Lucas' wolf?" Selene jerks her head away with a sharp snort. I don't talk to the unworthy. Ouch. \*\*\* I wake up to the sound of Selene's excited yips and the thump of her tail against the bed frame. Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I peer over at her lounging on the couch, watching the same cheesy shifter romance, but this time on the bedroom TV. "Morning, you lazy mutt," I grumble, throwing a pillow in her general direction. She dodges it easily, not even bothering to look away from the screen. Good morning sunshine, she replies, her tone dripping with sarcasm. Sleen well? 12:35 3/8 < 55 Ava: Shopping With Ivy "Well enough to know that show is garbage," I shoot at her, before heading into the bathroom for a shower. As I'm drying off, my phone chimes with a new text message. It's from Ivy, asking if I'm free to go shopping with her today. I grimace, not exactly thrilled at the prospect. You should go, Selene's voice echoes in my mind. It'll be good for you to get out of the apartment for a bit. Don't give up what freedom you can get. "I don't know," I murmur, typing out a non-committal response. "Ivy kind of makes me uncomfortable sometimes." A little while later, there's a knock at the door. I open it to find Ivy standing there, looking impeccably put together as always. She gives me a once-over, taking in my ratty t-shirt and sleep shorts. "Good, you're ready," she says breezily, brushing past me into the apartment. "I took the liberty of picking out an outfit for you." She holds up a garment bag, unzipping it to reveal a silky turquoise blouse and lightweight gray pants. My eyes widen when I spot the pair of heels peeking out 12.35 4/8 55 Ava Shoppi

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ng With Ivy from the bottom. "Ivy, you already brought me clothes yesterday," I protest weakly. "And I don't really wear heels." "Nonsense." She waves a dismissive hand. "You'll look great. Now go get changed—the car is waiting downstairs." Even without the clothes... I never once agreed to go shopping, did I? I check my phone, and the text. Nope, didn't agree. Said I wasn't sure what I was planning on doing today. I guess she took that as an invitation to make the decision for me. Knowing there's no use in arguing, I take the outfit and head for the bathroom, dressing quickly. The blouse is loose and flowing, but the pants cling to my legs in a way that makes me feel exposed. And the heels... I wobble precariously, using the counter for support. When I emerge, Selene lets out a low whistle. Looking good, pup. You clean up nicely. I shoot her a glare, but Ivy seems pleased. "Much C 55 Ava Shopping With y better. Here, put these on—" and she tosses a few accessories at me, statement pieces that probably cost more than my annual salary, "and grab your things. and let's go! We've got a full day ahead of us." Reluctantly, I follow her out of the apartment, leaving my burner phone behind. I don't want to risk Ivy seeing it and asking questions. As we step out onto the sidewalk, a sleek black sedan idles at the curb, the driver hopping out to open the door for us. "Where are we going, exactly?" I ask as we slide into the plush leather seats. Ivy gives me a conspiratorial grin. "You'll see. Just sit back and let me take care of everything." Then she looks me over with some suspicion. "You don't have a purse?" I shrug. "I was kidnapped, remember? Aside from my house keys, phone, and some cash for a ride, I didn't have anything on me at the time. I leave my purse at home a lot." A habit I'd learned after being routinely mugged by members of my own pack. Getting a replacement ID is hard enough; trying to convince my parents to take me to get one increases the difficulty by way too much. 55 Ava: Shopping With Ivy I carry cash and leave my identification at home. I might be screwed if I'm ever pulled over, but I've never had to show my ID for anything outside of getting hired or signing up for college, so I take my risks. "Oh, right. There was something like that, wasn't there?" Ivy muses. "Well, let's get you a purse anyway. Accessories make the outfit, Ava." I feel a bit like I'm being prepped for some kind of final exam as Ivy drags me from store to store, explaining trending fashion in a way that goes over my head. The driver trails a few steps behind us, dutifully collecting the mounting pile of shopping bags and ferrying them. out to the car at regular intervals. At the first boutique, Ivy immediately starts pulling dresses and blouses off the racks, holding them up against me to assess the fit. "This one's cute," she declares, adding a floral sundress to the growing pile over her arm. "And this too. Oh, and we simply must get you this top..."wvw.VelwO(r)m.Com