

CHAPTER 57

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57 Ava: Stunned I scream, my voice raw with terror as the door beside me is wrenched open. Before I even look, I throw a punch in their direction. But it's not one of the armed assailants—it's Phoenix. My brother's face is set in grim lines, his mouth a tight slash of determination. My fist is held by his hand as though I'm a child throwing a tantrum—with the ease of someone far more powerful than me. He lets go and cuts my seatbelt with a knife before grabbing me in an almost painful grip. Ivy is still slumped in the backseat beside me, a trickle of blood oozing from the gash on her forehead. She's completely still, her head lolling at an unnatural angle. My stomach roils violently, and I have to swallow back a surge of nausea. Is she...? "She's alive," Phoenix says gruffly, as if reading my mind. "For now." "Come on, we have to move," he growls, already tugging me out of the wrecked sedan. 12:36 1/7 57 Ava: Stunned I stumble after him in a daze, my mind whirling. Phoenix? Here? How-? What's happening, Ava? Selene's voice, taut with concern, rings in my head. I shake my head mutely, too shaken to articulate a response. Phoenix is already hustling me towards one of the blue sedans idling in front of Ivy's car. The driver, a tall, powerfully-built shifter I don't recognize, jumps out and rushes to open the rear door. "Get in," Phoenix barks at me, giving me a firm shove towards the open door. I scramble inside without protest, my entire body quivering with a bone-deep chill. The rear door slams shut, and Phoenix is already circling around to the passenger side. "Airport," he snaps at the driver as he clatters inside. "And step on it." We peel away from the curb with a violent squeal of tires, the force slamming me back against the seat. Ava, talk to me, Selene urges, her mental voice tinged with a rare edge of panic. What's going on? Who are those men? I 2011287A mu ouer chut fighting to rothar mu 12:36 57 Ava: Stunned scattered thoughts. The image of the driver crumpling to the ground is seared into the back of my eyelids, making my stomach churn. My self-defense class isn't enough. It was all false confidence. I don't know. They were following us. The one who pulled me out of the car... is Phoenix. My brother. I have to swallow hard, struggling to compose myself. I'd tried so hard to hide. How did they find me? I feel Selene's calming presence wrapping around me like a soothing balm. It's okay, Ava. I'm coming. I swallow hard, my throat feeling tight. Selene, you're never going to make it in time. We're heading for the airport. That means they're going to fly me back to the pack. And there's no point running. They have more people. They have cars. They have guns. Ones that can kill shifters. Phoenix turns around in the passenger seat to face me, his gaze raking over me, assessing. "Why do you smell like a shifter?" he demands. < 57 Ava: Stunned I force myself to meet his stare, keeping my expression carefully neutral. "Probably because I've been living with other shifters," I lie. "The girl in the car is a shifter, too." Phoenix shakes his head, his mouth tightening into a grim line. "No, it's different. More than just proximity to the Aspen alpha." Shit. He knows about Clayton. What else does he know? "I don't know what you're talking about," I say evenly, lying through my teeth. He knows damn well I don't have a wolf of my own, and they can never prove that Selene exists. I can't shift. Phoenix's eyes narrow, but he doesn't press further, turning back around to face the front. I let out a slow, shaky breath and lean back against the couch, cursing everythingw@w.n@ve(l)wOrM.cm

Updates...

I can think of in my head. I just got that damn burner phone. I just started getting comfortable, expecting to be able to go home at some point. And now this. 12:36. 57 Ava: Stunned It's like I'm being punished for having a few months of peace in Cedarwood. "Have you been with Shadowpine this whole time?" Phoenix asks, breaking the silence again as we merge onto the interstate. I can't tell if he's asking me a trick question to see if I'll lie to him, or if he genuinely doesn't know. I hope he doesn't know. If he doesn't, that means Cedarwood is still safe. "He's out of town," I say, deliberately misinterpreting his question. "I'm not sure if he comes back today. Do you want me to call-" "No!" I can see how tense he is by the prominent veins in his neck, so I shut my mouth. Phoenix turns around to look at me again. "We've been worried sick about you, Ava. You disappeared right after the Lunar Gala without a trace." I blink at him, trying to hide my incredulity. That's complete bullshit—they've made it abundantly clear they don't give a damn about me. 12:36 5/7 57 Ava: Stunned "Really?" I say flatly. "Because I can clearly remember a time when you should have been worried about me, but you decided to play nice with the man who assaulted me. Seconds after it happened." Phoenix's jaw tightens, a muscle flexing. I don't know if he remembers what I'm talking about, but it doesn't matter. I do. I always will. "You're our family, Ava. Of were upset when you vanished like that." course we I have to resist the urge to snort derisively. Family? Is that what he calls the cold indifference and outright cruelty they've shown me for as long as I can remember? Apparently sensing my skepticism, Phoenix shakes his head, his expression sobering. "Look, I know things haven't been great between us lately-" "Lately?" Hah. There's nothing lately about the way they've treated me my whole damn life. Phoenix exhales a frustrated breath. "Okay, fine. For a long time. But you're still part of this pack whether you like it or not, Ava. And family means something—it means we protect each other and stick together, no matter how much we might disagree sometimes." 6/7 57 Ava: Stunned "Stop the shit," I snap. "What is it that Dad wants from me?" A low growl comes out of Phoenix, but I ignore him. Instead of answering, he turns around and snaps at the driver to hurry up. Comment 3 View All > R Post your first comment! Vote 12 1 Fandom Swipe left to continuewW.N.ve(l)wOrM.cm

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