

CHAPTER 58

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58 Ava: Return Home I settle into the chair beside Phoenix, my soul crushed under the weight of despair. The plane hums to life around us, a mechanical beast ready to whisk me back to the hell I'd escaped. Phoenix barely spares me a glance as he crowds me against the window, effectively trapping me in my seat. Even going to the bathroom will be impossible without him knowing about it. Selene's whimpers echo in my mind, a mirror of my own anguish. Ava, I'm so sorry. I tried... I'm still trying... I know, I whisper back, my heart clenching. It's okay. It's not your fault. No matter how fast she is, a wolf can't outrun a car. And even if she did—what are we going to do, against the people under Phoenix's control? Honestly, it's not okay. Nothing about this is okay. I'm being dragged back to the very place I'd fought so hard to escape, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. 12:37 58 Ava: Return Home Selene, listen to me. I picture my parents' house in my mind, every detail etched into my memory. The sprawling ranch—style home, the meticulously manicured lawn, the wrought—iron fence that always felt more like a cage than a boundary. This is where they're taking me. The Blackwood pack territory. My parents' address is- I rattle off the information, each word feeling like a nail in my coffin. Selene absorbs it all, her presence in my mind a flickering candle in the darkness. I'll find you, she promises, her voice fierce despite the tremor of fear. No matter how long it takes, no matter the distance. I'll never stop looking. Tears prick at the corners of my eyes, but I blink them back, refusing to let Phoenix see me cry. I know you will. But Selene, it's far. Really, really far. Even as I say it, I feel her running, her paws pounding against the pavement as she races toward the airport. But we both know it's futile. She'll never make it in time. I don't care, Selene growls, her determination a living, breathing thing. I won't give up on you, Ava. Never. 12:37 27 58 Ava: Return Home +35 A sob builds in my throat, but I swallow it down. I won't give up either, I vow, meaning it with every fiber of my being. We'll find a way back to each other. Somehow. Phoenix reaches over and buckles me in, his movements brusque and impersonal. All of the announcements are done, and I didn't even notice. them happening. The plane's moving. I close my eyes, feeling the distance between Selene and me growing with every second, an invisible tether stretching taut. I love you, I whisper, pouring every ounce of my heart into those three words. I love you too, Selene whispers back, her presence fading as the plane gains speed. And then she's gone, the connection severed by miles of empty sky. *** The plane ride goes smoothly. I sleep for most of it, because there's no point in being awake. I don't want to see Phoenix's face, much less talk to him. The ride home is just as silent, but as soon as I see the forest near home my stomach clenches

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in drand mu alanahan 12:37 – 317 58 Ava Return Home How many times have I driven through here myself? How many times have I had pack members stalk me through the woods, waiting until I arrive home, just to taunt me? To throw stones? To kick and punch and bite, all because I had no wolf? I can't remember. It's impossible to remember. It's happened so often, everything blurs together. It's like asking about every time you ate lunch: You can't count them all. You can't keep track. It's just life. Vomit gathers up the back of my throat as familiar neighborhood streets populate my view. I was hoping to never see this place again, and now I'm here. If I had hackles, they'd be raised. I wish desperately that I could talk to Selene, but the distance is way too far. There's a nasty lump in my throat as Phoenix escorts me inside the house that fills me with such dread. His lip curls in disgust as he sniffs me. "Get the Aspen stench off you before Dad gets home," he orders. There isn't a hint of big brotherly affection in his words or demeanor. "I'm sure you still have clothes in 58 Ava: Return Home your room. Don't dawdle; Alpha Renard will be here for dinner. He's been worried about you." Gritting my teeth, I resist the urge to snap back at him. Worried, my ass! Old habits die hard, ingrained from a lifetime of following their rules and commands. Doing as he says. comes so naturally that my shoulders slump as I head to my room for some clothes. There aren't many of them, and I find myself missing my little wardrobe in Cedarwood. Or even the clothes Clayton and Ivy had gathered for me. Those were less my style, but at least they weren't worn out and threadbare. Without a word, I head to the bathroom, stripping off my clothes and stepping into the shower. The hot water stings my skin, but I welcome the pain, scrubbing furiously to remove any lingering traces of Clayton's scent clinging to me. If they can still smell it, I won't hear the end of it. I'm worried about my scent changing. About my heat. About Selene. But there's nothing I can do about it right now. I'll just have to think of something to throw them off. They 12:37 577 58 Ava: Return Home can't prove I have a wolf, so it should work out- eventually. Lathering up the scratchy washcloth, I scour every inch of my body until my skin is raw and pink. Cedarwood and Clayton's pack—it all washes down the drain in a swirl of soap suds. Just like that, the life I'd begun to build for myself disappears, erased with the simple order from Phoenix. I have to be careful. Rinsing off the last stubborn suds, I shut off the water and step out, grabbing a towel to dry myself. My old room feels like a stranger's space, the walls closing in with every passing second. It's been ransacked, likely to look for any hint of where I might be. Which begs the question—how did they find me? 58 Ava Return Home 66 Thank you for all your support! I am working to finish filling all my privilege tiers and continue my stockpile of chapters! I set my privilege tiers up to 30 chapters, so I Lenaleia Creator's Thought Comment 5 A Leave the first comment for this chapterwww.NoVë/W(ø)rm.com

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