

CHAPTER 60

WwW.m0V@Lw0r.com

60 Ava: Homecoming (II) When Mom and Dad walk through the door, dinner isn't ready, because I haven't once left the couch. I'm two episodes into a back-to-back marathon of Selene's favorite show. Todd and his two goonies have tried to get me to cook, but I've ignored them at every turn. I find it interesting that they never once tried to physically drag me into the kitchen. They would have before. I don't think it's my attitude; they're the kind who would beat it out of you, not back down. So, it's the order Phoenix gave. But why? What's planned for me? Before I left, it was to use me as a breeder for the pack. That isn't the kind of future where I'm protected from beatings. That means there's something more... My stomach clenches. Do they know about my heat? They have to.. There's no other explanation. 18 60 Ava: Homecoming (II) If they know I went into heat, then they'll likely know about the supposed 'true omega' designation Clayton's pack had given me. And if they think I'm that... Shit. When the front door opens, I don't budge. Not a muscle twitches. I can smell Mom's perfume before her heels click against the floor. Even without looking, I can imagine the pinched look on her face. "Ava Grey. Your brother spends all this time to find you and bring you home safely, and you can't even make dinner to repay him?" I don't respond, keeping my eyes trained on the flickering TV screen. "You may go," she says, ostensibly to the shifters guarding me. I can feel Todd get up from the couch. The absence of his presence is a relief, even with my parents home. Dad follows behind her, his broad frame filling the doorway. His eyes find me on the couch and his expression darkens. Without a word, he strides forward planting himself directly in front of the TV. 12.39 2/8 60 Ava: Homecoming (II) I tilt my head back to meet his gaze, unflinching. His eyes bore into mine, a storm of emotions swirling in their depths. Anger, disappointment, id something else I can't quite place—a hint of wariness, perhaps. The tension in the room is palpable, thick enough to choke on. Mom's cold stare digs into the side of my face, but I refuse to break eye contact with Dad. I won't cower, not this time. His jaw clenches, the muscles flexing beneath his weathered skin. For a moment, I think he might speak, might unleash the torrent of reprimands I've come to expect. But the words never come. He simply stands there, his gaze locked with mine, as if searching for something he can't quite find. Then he looks at Mom and says, "Have something delivered. The alpha will be here soon." The triumphant smile I want to have has to be hidden deep in my heart. There's no point in pushing the victory. I return my gaze to the TV. "So good to see you've been so worried about me. So many questions about 12:39 3/8 C 60 Ava: Homecoming (II) how I'm doing, where I've been, am I okay. What a loving, caring family. We're so close." Okay, maybe I should learn to keep my mouth shut, too. When did I develop this level of spine? But honestly—two parents come home after their daughter's been missing, and not a word out of their mouth is even fake concern. Living my life like this for two decades is more than enough. I can't do another second. "Ava," my dad says in his warning tone. "Beta Alexander," I say, refusing to call him any form of father. His brow twitches and a muscle in his jaw clenches. "I see that you've become a degenerate in your absence. I'm letting it pass today because you've been through a lot, but make no mistake, Ava—you will behave when Alpha Renard arrives." If Selene were here, she would have repeated his words in a mocking tone that made me laugh. But she's not, so I just turn up the volume on the TV, only < 60 Ava: Homecoming (II) for Mom to snatch the remote from my hand and turn it off. "You cannot be watching that level of trash, Ava," she admonishes, her voice like ice. "Get dressed in something more presentable. You look like a homeless person." Sardonic humor has several responses coming to mind as I look down at my worn-out jeans, with holes in the knees and in a couple places along my thighs, and my faded t-shirt that might have seen better days a hundred years ago. Mom's gaze is cutting, appraising me from head to toe with an expression of utter disdain. She's dressed to perfection, as she always is, in a designer dress that could put a down payment on someone's house, tasteful glittering jewelry dripping from her neck and ears. I wave a hand down my body with a bright s

Updates...WwW.No0E@Lw0r.com

(w)W@.m0V@Lw0r.com

mile. "This is as presentable as I get," I say, each word enveloped in wry amusement. "Since I don't have parents who actually take care of me. I'm the orphan of the family." The slap comes before I can even register the 5/8 60 Ava: Homecoming (II) movement, a sharp crack of flesh on flesh ringing through the room. My head snaps to the side with the force of the blow, and I taste copper as my lip splits open. Stars dance across my vision as the sting radiates through my cheek. Shifter strength is great when you have it. I don't. Dad does. 27 I blink rapidly, trying to regain my bearings, but my father is already looming over me, his face twisted into a mask of rage. "You ungrateful little bitch," he snarls, grabbing a fistful of my hair and yanking my head back. "After everything we've done for you, this is how you treat your mother?" His words are punctuated by flecks of spittle hitting my face, and I flinch instinctively. "Done for me?" I manage to choke out through the pain. "You've never done anything for me except make my life a living hell." Another slap, this one hard enough to make my teeth rattle. "We've given you a roof over your head, food on the table," he growls. "We have protected your place in this pack. We looked for you when you left. You call that nothing?" 6-9 60 Ava Homecoming (II) I can taste blood now, but I don't back down. "A roof and food? That's the bare minimum, you asshole. Where was the love? The support? The basic human decency? Did I choose to come into this world? No. You f@cked Mom and made a baby. You're the ones that are obligated to care for me. I'm not obligated to respect shit parents like you." His grip on my hair tightens, and he jerks my head back further, exposing my throat. For a terrifying moment, I think he might actually try to strangle me. But then my mother's voice cuts through the tension. "Enough, Alexander." She sounds bored, as if this is just another tedious chore to get through. "The alpha will be here any minute. We can't have her looking like a mess." My father holds my gaze for a few more heartbeats, his eyes burning with a fury I've never seen before. Then, with a grunt of disgust, he releases me, shoving me back against the couch. Mom is the one to come to me, a cool finger pushing my chin up so she can inspect my face. "Only the strong survive, Ava. We've kept you alive with our protection. Don't spit on it. If we wanted to, you could Ava: Homecoming (II) be erased from this world without a tear. Now, go upstairs and clean your face. Change your shirt, too." She flicks a finger in the direction of some blood that spilled on the soft fabric. Then they're both gone, leaving me in the living room with every assumption that I'll do as they ask. A bitter laugh escapes my lips, the sound hollow and devoid of any real mirth. Sinking my face into my hands, I wish more than anything that Selene was here with me. Her calming presence, her unwavering support, would be a lifeline in this suffocating place. Comment + View All J Leave the first comment for this chapter

WwW.NoV@Lw0r.com