

CHAPTER 62

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62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) This is insane. This can't be happening. My feet carry me from one end of my room to the other as I pace, nibbling ferociously on a nail as I think. Alpha Renard's sons have all died. I'm not sure on the circumstances of the first two, but the third one died a few years ago in a skirmish with rogue wolves. He's had no success in bearing a new child, with no pregnancy making it to the end—so Phoenix was brought in as the alpha heir, due to his alpha level of strength. But, from what I've heard, the alpha still has multiple lovers. Dad and Phoenix have talked about how Phoenix cannot walk with arrogance in the pack, because Alpha Renard is still seeking to create a new heir. It's an open secret within the pack, but I've never spent time thinking about it before. 12:42
62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) Now, I am, and the implications make me want to vomit. He knows I'm an omega by birth. If that's so, isn't my ability to carry a baby to term much better than that of other she-wolves? Wouldn't it be easier for me to get pregnant? The omega designation is not given to the weakest in our pack—though they are—but to the ones mated off for the purposes of bearing pups. He'd already planned for me to mate with more than one of our warriors. Now, is he on that list with them? Or has he taken over the list? It doesn't matter; neither option makes it okay. No wonder Todd and his cronies kept their hands off me. Alpha Renard's intentions are already known. f@ck. I'd never once thought that my own pack would know about these rumors. The sound of feet stomping through the hall has me twirling, facing the door in a defensive posture, hands up and ready. But it's just Phoenix. 217
62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) He looks me over with a slight curl of his lip, as though my attempt at self-defense is laughable, before twirling me around and throwing me onto my bed. I land with a thud, my head slamming into the wall and my knee into my bedframe. Shit. That hurt. When I roll over, Phoenix sits on my leg and pins me down with a hand to my shoulder. I stare up at Phoenix in shock as he looms over me, his expression twisted with a mix of anger and something else I can't quite place. The weight of his body pins me in place, and for a terrifying moment, I think he might actually hurt me. "What the hell, Phoenix?" He growls low in his throat, a rumbling sound that sends a shiver down my spine. "Calm down, Ava. I'm not going to hurt you! Despite everything, I believe him. I relax a little, aware of the tension radiating from his body. He's not here to hurt me, but something is clearly wrong. My body goes limp against the mattress as I stare up at him, waiting. 12:42
3/7 62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) Phoenix studies me for a long moment, his eyes searching mine. "You have a wolf, don't you?" "No." I'll die before admitting it. "Then how did you go into heat?" "I don't know. They assumed I had a wolf, but I have none. You think I'd be here if I didn't? I would have shifted and run." My words have an effect, because he lets go, letting me sit u

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p. I thrash my leg until he shifts over, no longer parking his ass on it. "Cut your shit and tell me the truth. Are you really an omega?" he asks, his voice tight. My heart stutters in my chest as the realization hits. me. Phoenix is worried about losing his status as the alpha heir. If Renard manages to get me pregnant, any child I bear would take precedence over Phoenix. Then why did he bring me here? "No," I say, because it's the truth. There's no way he's going to scent any deception from that. A flicker of hope ignites deep in my heart. Can I use this to my advantage? If Phoenix sees me as a threat to 12:42
62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) his position, maybe I can leverage that to secure my safety. But I can't push too hard. He's still loyal. He brought me here, knowing I can be the one to ruin his position in the pack. "I don't know why they keep saying I'm an omega," I say, looking away and holding my arm. I let some of my fear come out, my body shivering as I think of the things Alpha Renard is planning. "Alpha Renard is the one who wanted me to become a breeder. That's why I ran." Well, it's one of the reasons. "How did you know that?" "Todd told me, when he..." I duck my head further, my heart pounding. Please, Phoenix. Please have just a little bit of that sweet big brother left in you, even for your defect sister. Phoenix grunts. "Figures." My body continues to shake, and I tell Phoenix some of the truth of my time with the Aspen pack, along with plenty of lies. I don't mention Selene. I go along 12:42
577 < 62 Ava: Homecoming (IV) with the premise that Clayton forced me during my heat. I tell him that I just wanted to be away from all shifters and live a quiet life, and the heat came on unexpectedly. All true. Technically. But I also tell him about how frustrated I am because I have no wolf, and have had to lie and pretend during my time in the Aspen pack. I paint a picture of innocence and ignorance, and how Todd was the reason I couldn't handle the idea of life as a breeder. I downplay our family dynamics. Phoenix looks thoughtful at times, impassive at others. I'm not sure how much he believes. I'm not sure what he thinks. Pain splinters through my knee when he reaches over to grab it, his fingers flexing with whatever emotion he's holding back. "You'd better hope you can't breed," he growls. "Because if Renard gets his claws into you, your life is over." But is he saying that because he's worried about me? Or is he saying that for himself? 12:42
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