

CHAPTER 65

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65 Ava: Homecoming (VII) – Season 1 END Phoenix stops by not long after I give up talking to Jessa, letting my words germinate in her mind.” It’s lunch, and I don’t do much, just throwing together some simple sandwiches and some vegetables that are left over from last night’s dinner. I watch Phoenix enter the room, my heart picking up speed. He gives me a curt nod before settling into the chair across from me and Jessa. There’s a tightness around his eyes that I recognize—he’s troubled about something. Finally, Phoenix sets his food down and leans back in his chair, his gaze flickering between Jessa and me. “I need to talk to you both about something.” Jessa raises an eyebrow, her expression carefully neutral. “About what?” Phoenix hesitates, and for a moment, I think he’s going to brush it off. But then he lets out a heavy sigh. “About Ava and this whole omega situation.” 12.45 —). 18 < 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII)– Season 1 END My breath catches in my throat. This is it. “What about it?” Jessa asks, her voice sharp. Phoenix’s jaw tightens. “I don’t like it. If Renard gets an heir out of her, everything I’ve worked for will be gone. I’ll still be beta when Dad’s gone, but I’ve worked too hard for this to go away just because Ava shoots some kid out from between her legs.” Relief floods through me, and I have to resist the urge to reach out and take his hand. Finally, someone in this family is on my side. Well, he’s on his own side- but right now, that’s my side. #1 “What do you expect us to do about it?” Jessa’s tone is dismissive, but I can see the flicker of uncertainty in her eyes. Phoenix leans forward, his gaze intense. “If Ava isn’t here, he can’t mate her.” Yes. Yes. But Jessa’s shaking her head. “Dad will just send you after her again. Don’t be stupid. We need a more permanent solution.” 12.45 218 < 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII) – Season 1 END Damn it. Hope was given life and snuffed out within a moment. Phoenix opens his mouth, but Jessa cuts him off with a wave of her hand. “Besides, we have time. Ava hasn’t had her period yet.” Phoenix’s brow furrows in confusion. “What does that have to do with anything?” Jessa rolls her eyes. “It means she could have the Aspen heir in her womb, you moron. Renard won’t mate her until he knows it’s clear.” The blood drains from my face as the realization hits me. She’s right—if I’m pregnant with Clayton’s child, Renard won’t touch me. At least, not until he can force me to abort it. Or until they give birth and use the baby as a pawn. My hand drops to my stomach, and I swallow hard. Could I be...? No, it’s too soon to tell. But the thought sends a shiver of fear down my spine. If I am pregnant, it buys me time. Time to figure out a way to escape, to get back to the Aspen Pack and Clayton. But it also means I’m carrying a child—a child 12:45 3/8 < 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII)– Season 1 END that will be caught in the middle of this war between packs. I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to push the thought away. One problem at a time. First, I need to get out of here. Then I can worry about the rest. I try to keep my face impassive as Phoenix and Jessa argue, but it’s difficult to hide my discomfort as they talk about me like I’m not even there. “If she has to stay here, then we need to prove she’s not an omega,” Phoenix insists, his jaw clenched tight. “If we can do that, then Renard has no reason to keep her around.” I can’t help but scoff. As if Renard needs a reason to torment me. Even if I’m not the omega he wants, I’m still going to be used as a breeder. My fate doesn’t change then, only Phoenix’s. Still, I know this is my chance to try and sway them to my side. “I’m definitely not an omega,” I interject, my voice firm. Jessa barks out a harsh laugh, her eyes glinting with cruel amusement. “And how the hell would anyone prove that, genius? It’s not like there’s a test for it.” My heart sinks as I realize she’s right. There’s no way 4/8 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII)– Season 1 END to definitively prove whether I’m an omega or not. It was all speculation off my heat. I’m not an omega, and no one believes me. “Well, we have to do something” Phoenix growls, his hands clenching into fists on the table. “I’m not going to let everything I’ve worked for be taken away just because Ava can’t keep her legs closed.” White-hot anger flares in my chest at his words, and I have to bite(w)Ww.NOvElw@rm.cOm

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my tongue to keep from lashing out. As if I had any choice in the matter?! “Maybe we should just kill her,” Jessa muses, her tone casual as if she’s discussing the weather. “That would solve the problem, wouldn’t it?” Kill me? My heart stutters, and I can feel the blood draining from my face. She can’t be serious. But one look at her cold, calculating expression tells me that she is. My own sister is contemplating murdering me, all to protect her own interests. I open my mouth, desperate to defend myself, but Phoenix cuts me off with a shake of his head. “No, we can’t do that,” he says, his voice low. “Renard would never forgive us for killing his only chance at an 12:45 5-8 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII)-Season 1 END heir. He’s crazed for one. I’ve always only been his second–best option. We need to find another way.” Relief and fear war within me as I realize that, for now at least, my life is safe. But the fact that they’re even discussing this, that they’re so willing to discard me like a piece of trash, cuts me to the core. These are my siblings, my own flesh and blood. I’ve been betrayed by them, abused by them, neglected and dismissed. And yet, it still hurts. I swallow hard, forcing down the lump of emotion that threatens to choke me. Instead, I lift my chin and meet Jessa’s gaze head–on, refusing to back down or show. any weakness. “You’re right,” I say, my voice steady despite the turmoil raging inside me. “There’s no way to prove whether I’m an omega or not. But what you’re forgetting is that it doesn’t matter.” Jessa’s eyebrows rise skeptically, but I press on, determined to make them see reason. “Whether I’m an omega or not, Renard is going to use me however he sees fit. He doesn’t care about any of us, not really. We’re just pawns to him, pieces on a 12:45 6/8 65 Ava: Homecoming (VII)– Season 1 END chessboard to be sacrificed or protected as he pleases.” Phoenix shifts in his seat, a flicker of uncertainty crossing his face. Good, I’ve struck a nerve. “The only way any of us are going to get out of this unscathed is if we work together,” I continue, holding both of their gazes. “We need to stop fighting each other and start fighting him.” The words hang heavy in the air, and for a moment, no one speaks. Then Phoenix sighs and stands up, turning to Jessa. “We’ll figure it out later.” Okay. They’re willing to go against his wishes, but not stand up against him yet. Jessa’s right. I have time. I just need to bide it carefully. Thank you 66 all for supporting me through the first season of TIMU! <3 LenaleiwWw.n@V(e)l@orm.cómm