

CHAPTER 80

80 Ava: Moonlight and Peace The stench of blood and death clings to my skin, my clothes, invading my senses with its coppery tang. Yet the moon spreads its light over my face, blessing me with its ethereal glow. It's surreal, an entire world away from the violence. I laugh as my mind wanders into memories of science class. Of planets and space. The moon truly is an entire world away. Thirty whole worlds, in fact, would fit between here and the bright satellite that decorates our night.

Thanks, Mr. Finnegan. I always did like science. The dead weight pinning me to the ground and obstructing a lungful of air is yanked off me, just as strong arms encircle me, pulling me upright.

Lucas. His human face swims into view, those striking golden eyes filled with concern as he looks me over. I can see his lips moving, but his words are muffled, as if reaching me through a thick fog. It's not until his calloused palm cups my cheek that the 13 11 80 Ava Moonlight and Peace numbness shatters. A strangled cry escapes my lips as agony lances through my abdomen. All my wounds come to life in an instant, informing me of their presence. "Ava? Ava, can you hear me?" Lucas's voice breaks. through the screams of my injuries, his tone laced with urgency. Answering is impossible, so I give a weak nod, my gaze flickering to the gruesome scene behind him. Lifeless wolves litter the forest floor, their bodies twisted and mangled. The price of freedom. Even knowing that they wouldn't reciprocate the sentiment, their lives weigh heavy on my soul. "We need to move," Lucas says, still supporting me. "Can you walk?" The world spins with every movement I make, so I just blink at him. I can't shake my head. If I do, it just might fall off. Without another word, Lucas scoops me into his arms, cradling me against his bare chest as he rises to his feet. BD 80 Ava: Moonlight and Peace "Wait," I croak. "Clothes." "No time." Howls break the relative peace after so much death, and Lucas tenses. His grip on me holds tight as he breaks into a run, his long strides eating up the distance. One of their wolves is missing, and a pang of fresh guilt hits my heart. An innocent. Someone who was never involved in my abuse. He should still be here. Does he have a mate? Family? Friends? God, does he have pups who will wonder why Daddy's not coming home? Tears come hot and steady against my cheeks, burning and stinging against fresh wounds. "Not far," Lucas grunts, his breath coming in harsh pants. "We need to hurry." 11: 80 Ava Moonlight and Peace Someone must have asked him a question. Pack links are so convenient, and yet I've never had access to one. The only person to enter my mind has been Selene, and for a brief moment, Clayton's wolf. Even after she appeared, I never had a link with my pack. Lucas dashes through the city naked, followed by wounded wolves. Seeing over his shoulder, I can see the bloody prints left by foot and paw. They're injured, and still running. For me. My heart aches more than the wounds shrieking in -agony with every jarring step Lucas takes. He slows as we approach a white SUV, and the other wolves shift as they come to a standstill. Vester swears in frustration as he digs through the backpack he'd carried from the ambush site, hunting for the keys. It takes a minute or two, as howls rend the air. The telltale unlocking clicks have them all breathing in 13.11 80 Ava: Moonlight and Peace relief, and Lucas sets me in the back gently. Vester throws on a pair of pants and hops into the seat beside me, apologizing as he shoves a shirt against my abdomen, soaking up the blood flowing freely. It hurts like f@cking hell, but I try not to whine about it. It would be pathetic to whine when they lost one of their own. Lucas slides into the driver's seat, fully dressed within seconds—a talent most shifters learn after a few naked shift—backs

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—and the SUV roars to life with all the energy of a new car. The world blurs in front of my eyes as Lucas drives through the quiet streets. My head lolls against the seat, boneless now that I'm in a safe place. Beside me, one of the unfamiliar shifters rummages through a medical kit, retrieving supplies to tend to my wounds. The other two ran to a different car, I think. I can't really remember anymore. Everything's a little fuzzy. I think I might be melting into a puddle of Ava goo, because nothing seems to be working right now. "This might sting a little" the unrecognizable voice RO Ava Moonlight and Peace warns, his voice gentle as he dabs at my face with an antiseptic wipe. I hiss, the sensation of sharp prickles and burns intensifying the throbbing ache of my cheeks. Despite the pain, I force myself to remain still, not wanting to make his task any more difficult. Focusing on the astringent scent of alcohol keeps me centered and present, even as my mind keeps trying to run away into a hazy white world devoid of sensation. In the front seat, Lucas lets out a low, rumbling growl. Vester growls in return. "Keep your eyes on the road, or pull over and let me drive," he snaps. "You need to get those mating instincts under control." -My brows furrow in surprise at Vester's blunt tone. I've never heard anyone speak to an alpha that way. Alpha Renard would have never allowed a subordinate such liberties. As the nameless shifter continues cleaning my wounds, I study him through half-lidded eyes. He moves with a practiced efficiency, his touch gentle yet firm, and I'm struck by the care he takes in tending to < 80 Ava: Moonlight and Peace me despite our lack of familiarity. Even in my loosey—goosey mental state of the moment, I can appreciate that. "Thank you," I murmur, my voice hoarse and strained. Is it mine? It should be. I can feel it coming out of my throat. He pauses, meeting my gaze with a small, reassuring smile. "You're welcome. Just try to relax, okay? We'll have you patched up in no time." I nod, but I can't really feel the action. Maybe I don't nod. Exhaustion pulls and tugs at me, cajoling me into oblivion. The adrenaline that had fueled me during the confrontation in the woods faded long ago, leaving me drained and aching in its wake. As the car continues its journey, I find myself drifting in and out of consciousness, my mind replaying the events of the night in a hazy loop. The sound of howls echoes in my ears, mingling with the metallic scent of blood that still clings to my skin. Every so often, I startle into consciousness, striking out with my hands in panic. Vester sports a new bruise 7/8 80 Ava: Moonlight and Peace on his cheek from my overachievement in self-defense, and the new shifter keeps one eye closed from the irritation in his eye when my nail scratched it. I apologize both times, but Lucas tells me not to worry about it. "It's fine, Ava. Your body's been under a lot of stress. It'll take you some time to realize you're safe," Vester says with a smile. Lucas growls again, and Vester snarls, "f@cking drive, Alpha!" Comment View All > H Post your first comment! Vote 12 Fandom Swipe left to continue >W@w.nóVēLŴo⊙m.čóm