

## CHAPTER 89

89 Ava: A Mild Overreaction I glance away from Lucas, unable to hold his intense gaze. My heart sinks like a stone, the weight of the secrets I've kept pressing down on me." It isn't even like I've been keeping them on purpose, but I feel like a she-wolf caught cheating on her mate. And yet no matter how innocent it was at the time—no matter what state our mate connection was in—these are the types of secrets that can bury our relationship before it ever starts. Honesty is the best policy. Better to get it all out in the open, even if he rejects me again. Even if he formally rejects me. Last time, the rejection was implied; this time... I shudder at the thought and take a deep, steadying breath, trying to psych myself up. I have to talk about my stay with the Aspen pack. About Clayton. I'll have to explain about my heat, too. As soon as I gather an ounce of courage, Lucas' phone rings again. I gróan audibly, the sound ripping from my throat before I can stop it. "Are you serious?" It's the 13:24 C 扫越 89 Ava: A Mild Overreaction middle of the night! Who the hell calls someone in the middle of the night?! Lucas' brows furrow in apology, clearly thinking I'm upset that he's taking calls during our conversation. "I'm sorry, it will only be a moment." "No, no," I rush to assure him, waving a hand. "That's not it at all. I'm just..." I trail off, unsure of how to explain. He leans forward to ki\*s my forehead. Apparently this is something he's going to do often. I don't mind it, but it doesn't quite feel like we're at that point yet. I really need to talk to him. "I'm sorry, Ava. This is another alpha. I'll be right back." "Go, go." I wave him off. It isn't like I don't understand the weight of such a call. But then he utters words that make my blood run cold. "Hey, Clayton, is everything okay?" I'm frozen. I'm a frozen glacier of wolfless shifter, stuck on the 2/8 89 Ava: A Mild Overreaction hospital bed, staring at the back of my fated mate as he walks out the door, talking on the phone with my... My what? My lover? He's not my lover. We had s@x, yes. Lots of s@x. Oh, and I might be pregnant. Which... I don't think I am. Because wouldn't they have checked that already? Shit, I'm going to have to somehow discreetly inquire about this. No. No, not discreet. I need to tell Lucas, now, because he's going to find out anyway. Why is Clayton calling him? Does he know who I am? Is he wanting me back? Shit. My breath catches in my throat as anxiety grabs me by the neck, squeezing as hard as it can. Clayton. Of all the worst timing that could ever happen. 3/8 89 Ava A Mild Overreaction I stare at the door, closed behind Lucas. He's already in the hall, talking to the man who saw all of me, naked as the day I was born. The man who took the virginity that should have been saved for m

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y mate. Oh, f@ck. I'm dizzy with all the emotions and thoughts dashing through my head, back and forth without end. What on earth could they be talking about for so long? Why isn't Lucas back in here, raging? No, wait—maybe it isn't my Clayton. No, not my Clayton. Aspen's Clayton. Maybe it's some other Clayton. Hell, the name Clayton doesn't even sound real anymore, after repeating it so many times in a row. Maybe he doesn't exist at all, and my time in Washington was just a figment of my imagination. Hah. Wouldn't that be nice? God—I'm getting loopy. I'm starting to think ridiculous 4/8 89 Ava: A Mild Overreaction thoughts, all because of panic. Breathe, Ava. Breathe and prepare for the conversation. Lucas will give you a chance to explain. You're not in Blackwood anymore. Curling my knees to my chest, I hug them tightly and practice deep breathing, filling my lungs as best as I can. In through my nose, out through my mouth. Slow and steady. I close my eyes, trying to focus solely on the rhythm of my breath. My heart's rhythm is loud in my ears, almost headache-inducing, the pulsing whoosh so strong that I can feel it echoing through my entire body. The anxious thoughts continue. Clayton. Lucas. What they could be discussing. What Lucas will say or do when he finds out the truth. Magicians and Lycans. Selene. In. Out. In. Out. Spiraling into a panic attack isn't an option. I'm a grown woman. I can handle a situation like this. Life. isn't always going to be roses. It never was before, and it's not going to be now. 13:24 5/8 B0 Ava: A Mild Overreaction When Lucas returns, he'll give me a chance to explain myself fully. My breathing begins to even out as I concentrate on the simple act of inhaling and exhaling. The tension in my shoulders releases its grip. In. Out. In. Out. The sound of footsteps in the hallway brings anxiety flaring up inside of me, but I soothe its presence with a few more cycles of breathing as Lucas steps into the room, his phone no longer pressed to his ear. When he gets closer, I turn my head to peek at him through the hair that's fallen over my shoulder. He looks perturbed and thoughtful, which brings up my hope meter by a drastic amount. "I'm so sorry to do this, Ava, but I'm going to have to leave," he says, coming out of f@cking nowhere with that one. "Leave?" I ask, flummoxed. Why leave? We have a conversation that needs to be had. He scratches at his hair with a groan. "So, I haven't told you everything yet." 13:24 Ava A Mild Overreaction My heart rate skyrockets. Shit. It never occurred to me that Lucas would have his own secrets. Is it another girl? Did he choose another mate? Is there a real Luna in his pack? f@ck. How could I ever think that he wouldn't have chosen a mate himself? After everything that happened with Clayton, I should have assumed it would be the case. I try to keep the tears out of my eyes, but by the blurring of my vision, I can tell it isn't working well. I pull off my glasses, setting them on the nightstand as I rub my eyes, trying to wipe away the tears before he notices. "Wait a—Ava, are you crying?" 12 Fandom Swipe left to continue > 5

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