

CHAPTER 91

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91 Ava Clearing the Air (0) 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (I) All my thoughts circle into some sort of insane melodrama right out of Selene’s favorite TV show, and I slap my hands against my face, rubbing hard against my cheeks, as though I can push the tears right back into my eyes. “Sorry,” I say, as Lucas rests a worried hand against my back, stroking me like you would pet a puppy. It’s cute. He doesn’t seem to know what to do with me, while I’m just grateful that he’s trying. Once I’m sure my tears are gone, I smile up at him. “I’m just frazzled.” “You’ve been through a lot. Did I upset you when I took -the phone call?” “No!” The word bursts from me in horror. Does he think I’m that kind of person, who gets upset when he has to do important things instead of watching me sit in a hospital bed? “Not at all.” He blows out a breath in what I’m sure is massive relief. No one wants a mate that high maintenance. “Are you upset that I have to leave?” DE 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) I cringe. “It isn’t that.” I just came to some insane levels of assumptions. “Why... do you have to go?” “Ah.” Now he looks uncomfortable, and takes a seat on my bed, grabbing my hand. Oh, God. This can’t be good. “Once we were safe, Kellan—my beta—led a force of my men into the heart of the Blackwood pack.” I must not look devastated enough, because he clarifies, “In an act of war.” Since he seems to want some sort of input from me, I nod to show that I’m following. “Unfortunately, in the chaos, your family and Alpha Renard escaped, but the territory is under our control.” I nod again. “We took over your pack,” he says, as if I’m not understanding. “I heard you.” I tilt my head. “I don’t care what happens to them.” Too bad all the important people escaped. “Your mother is in the hospital. She’s in critical condition due to the wolfsbane I injected her with.” 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) I think I’m probably supposed to feel a lot of things right now. Like sadness, anxiety, worry, or other emotions that would be applicable to a good daughter. Instead, there’s a huge demon of vengeance in my soul that is happy at his words. “Oh,” I say, because I don’t want to show my possible future mate that I’m a raging psychopath. He’s treating me so carefully as he tells me all these things, and not a single one has me fazed. Lucas reaches for my hand, sliding his rough fingers between mine. He must think I need comfort, and I’m not sure how to break it to him. “I have to go because there’s a lot of work to be done. We are working on disavowing every wolf from the Blackwood Pack and integrating them into ours, or letting them go as rogues. I’ll be back every few days. Right now, another alpha is helping me keep things in control over there, but I can’t just let other people do my work for me, even if I want to stay here.” He looks agonized, and I don’t resist the urge to reach out and rub the lines on his brow. “You’ll do great,” I assure him. “But before you go, I have to tell you 317 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) something.” My stomach twists. The “other alpha” must be Clayton; that’s why he called. Maybe Clayton doesn’t realize who I am yet, but they’ll figure it out soon. I have to head this off before he goes. Lucas checks his watch. “I o

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nly have a few minutes. There’s a flight tonight that I have to make.” “A few minutes is all I need. I just need you to promise to listen without getting too upset.” His hand tenses, but his face is admirably calm with my words. “Whatever you have to tell me, don’t worry, Ava. I won’t think less of you.” His words seem odd, but I don’t have time to worry about them. “When I was taken from Cedarwood, it wasn’t by my family.” Surprise has his fingers going slack against mine, and his brows come together in thought. “No? Then who...?” I take a deep breath. “There were some rogues in Cedarwood who caught my scent. I was going into heat-” 417 01 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) “How can you go into heat without a wolf?” Lucas asks, and I freeze. “How do you know about that?” His eyes meet mine, unwavering. “At the Gala, I’d been under the impression you were working with your family—with the alpha of your pack.” So that’s why he looked at me with such intense hatred. “After the Gala, I looked into you. It took us a long time. to get someone into the pack to get the information, but I heard that you were wolfless and not treated well because of it.” There’s regret all over his face, and his thumb rubs over the back of my hand, over and over, in silent contrition. “I’m so sorry, Ava. If I had just kept my head out of my ass, I would have brought you back with me that night. You would have been safe. I was so focused on how I felt about your alpha that I didn’t stop to think that I should have trusted in my fated mate.” I look down, guilt stabbing into me with even more famior 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) “The past is the past,” I murmur, shoving aside memories of the deep pain that ached in my chest every day for months. “Yes,” he agrees, with such relief that tears come to my eyes. I hope he’s as fervent about this once I get the words out. “So... I was going into heat, and some rogues found me. They kidnapped me off the street, calling me an omega.” Lucas leans forward, taking in a deep whiff of my scent with a frown. “Omega? A true omega? You’ve never smelled like one. In fact, aside from smelling like all the wolves you surround yourself with, you never smelled much like a shifter at all... Something I should have recognized earlier.” I shrug. “Apparently, I smell like one when I’m in heat.” He nods, accepting this without comment. Being wolfless means nothing makes sense. “How did you get away?” “I was in the car with them, and the local pack ran us off the road. I had a few injuries and was brought to their pack hospital.” 13-27 617 91 Ava: Clearing the Air (1) “Wait, the local pack—Aspen?” He stiffens, suspicion finally dawning. I squeeze his hand. “They had no idea who I was. I only gave them my first name. But, I went into a severe heat. It was affecting everyone around me.” He doesn’t withdraw his hand, but it goes slack, his face expressionless and he begins to truly process my words. His eyes go for my neck, but everything is covered beneath bandages. Comment R Leave the first comment for this chapter,

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