

CHAPTER 134

134 Ava: The Party (V) He seems nice, Selene says. Yeah, he does. When we part so I can return to Lisa’s side, he doesn’t cling or say anything, just waves me off and wanders back into the crowd. Feeling buoyed by my success at dancing with a stranger and managing a conversation with someone. in the pack, I hunt Lisa down. The dance with Teddy has cemented something inside of me; no matter how handsome another man is, he doesn’t bring about the flutters that a single word from Lucas can stir in my belly. I need girl advice tonight. Trying to find Lisa in the throng of shifters is impossible. She’s nowhere to be found. My skin prickles with the sensation of being watched, assessed. Whispers hiss through the air, just quiet enough that I can’t make out the words. But I can imagine well enough what they’re saying. Mia and Chloe are holding court with a group of male shifters. Mia’s dark hair tumbles over her shoulder as 17:00 1/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) she laughs, leaning into the broad–shouldered man beside her. Chloe’s green eyes flick to mine, a smirk curling her lips. I quickly look away. I don’t know what their goal was in bringing me here, but I don’t need to know. They’re not on my side. That’s enough to know I want nothing to do with them. Someone jostles me from behind and I stumble, barely keeping my balance. A red plastic cup is shoved into my hand, sloshing sticky–sweet punch over the side. “Oops, sorry!” a male voice calls, but when I turn to look, he’s already disappeared back into the crowd. I stare down at the cup in my hand, the sickly artificial scent of fruit and alcohol wafting up to my nose. My stomach churns. I don’t want to be here anymore, suffocating under the weight of shifter superiority and teenage hormones. I just want to find Lisa and go home. Clutching the cup, I weave my way through the mass of bodies, heading for the refuge of the kitchen. It’s quieter there, only a few people milling about. I set the cup down on the counter with a shaky hand and pull 17:00 2/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) out my phone. [AVA: Where are you? I can’t find you anywhere.] I hit send and lean back against the counter, watching the three dots that indicate Lisa is typing. They disappear. Reappear. Disappear again. [LISA: sry went 2 get air, u ok?] I snort. Air. Right. More like she snuck off with Brendan to make out in a shadowy corner somewhere. Not that I can blame her. But then I stare at her text, a sinking feeling in my belly. Lisa never uses text spea’ [AVA: I’m fine. Think I might head out soon though. Not really feeling the party vibe.] [LISA: kk where r u?] [AVA: Kitchen.] The cup I’d set on the counter draws my gaze, the sticky–sweet scent of punch mingling with the bowl beside it. I still don’t understand why someone would just shove 17:07 3/8 134 Ava. The Party (V) it in my hands. Did they think I wanted one? Did someone think I was just picking up trash? It’s clear that parties aren’t my scene. I feel lost here. Something’s not right, Selene whispers in my mind, her presence a comforting warmth. Stay alert. I nod, more to myself than to her. She’s right. Something is off. Between Lisa’s sudden use of text speak and that odd wrong feeling that’s been plaguing me since I got here... The hairs on the back of my neck prickle, a shiver running down my spine despite the warmth of the room. A familiar face appears in the doorway. Teddy. His warm brown eyes meet mine, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as he weaves his way through the small clusters of people. “Hey, you okay?” he asks, his brow furrowing as he takes in my expression. “You look a little...” He trails off, shrugging. “I’m fine,” I say automatically, the lie tasting bitter on my tongue. “Just tired, I think. It’s been a long day.” 17:07 4/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) Teddy nods, his gaze dropping to the cup next to

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me. Something flashes in his eyes, too quick for me to catch, but it makes my stomach twist. He reaches out, plucking the cup from my fingers before I can react. “Here, let me take that,” he says, his voice light but his expression serious. “It’s probably better if you don’t drink this.” I blink at him, confusion warring with a sudden surge of unease. “What? Why?” Teddy doesn’t answer, just turns and dumps the contents of the cup into the sink. The sickly sweet smell is stronger for a moment but he turns on the water and rinses it all down the drain, his movements quick and efficient, before tossing the cup in the trash. When he turns back to me, his expression is carefully neutral. “Just trust me on this one, okay? There’s some stuff going around that you don’t want to mess with.” I stare at him, my mind racing. What does he mean? What kind of stuff? And why would someone give it to me? “Who are you?” I ask, hating that I’m suspicious of the one person at this party who’s treated me well. 17:07 5/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) “Just a wolf who cares about his pack,” he says, with a faint smile. “The alcohol level in the punch is a bit much for a newbie. You don’t drink much, do you? I can tell by the way your nose wrinkles every time you look at a drink.” “Okay,” I say slowly, my voice sounding small even to my own ears. “Thanks, I guess.” Teddy nods, his shoulders relaxing a fraction. “No problem. You sure you’re okay? You need me to walk you out or anything?” I shake my head, still feeling uneasy. “Thanks, but I’m good. My friend’s meeting me here.” Teddy hesitates, looking like he wants to say something more, but then he nods. “Alright. Well, take care of yourself, okay? And if you need anything, just let me know. I know how it feels to be new around here.” New? It’s unusual for a pack to get new blood, but it feels awkward to pry. He hadn’t mentioned it, even when he talked about his job and aspirations. It might be private, and I don’t want him to feel the way I did 17:07 6/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) when Mia cornered me with questions. “Thanks, Teddy. I will.” He gives me one last smile, his eyes holding mine for a long moment, before he turns and disappears back into the throng of the party. I watch him go, my heart racing in my chest. Something’s off. And I can’t help but feel like Teddy knows what that something is. He’s a good one, Selene murmurs. You can trust him. It’s the first time I truly doubt Selene’s judgment. He’s hiding something. Selene huffs a little in my mind. He has no intention of hurting you. Maybe. But... Not everyone who watches is going to hurt me. But that doesn’t mean they stop what they’re seeing. Selene goes silent. Good people aren’t always good. Sometimes, a good verson to another is just another villain in someone 7/8 134 Ava: The Party (V) else’s story. But I’d like to hope that Teddy’s not hiding something. That he’s just a nice guy, and we shared a friendly dance, and his light flirtation and quick smiles are there because he genuinely likes me, not because he’s up to something. I want to have more friends. Not more reasons to hide. As I pull out my phone to text Lisa again, a commotion in the living room catches my attention. Sounds like a fight, only- There’s the sound of breaking glass. Of growls and snarls. Through the doorway, I can see people running. Some have shifted. There’s something wrong.WWW.NovelWorld.com