

CHAPTER 111

LISA Three f@cking weeks. No matter how many times I count, it's been three f@cking weeks. The calendar on my wall mocks me, today's date staring me in the face from any particular point of my kitchen. Selene whines when I nearly step on her paw for the third time this morning. "Sorry, girl. Give me a second, and we'll go see her." I'm drenched in sweat. Jericho hasn't blinked a single eyelash over Ava being in the hospital, and we've all settled into a new kind of normal. It's not normal at all, but it's life now. At least until Ava wakes up again. I'm stronger. Faster, though nothing compared to these shifters who surround me. I'm learning some basic self-defense, and Selene has helped with the hands-on training to evade and defend against wolf 15:28 117 111 Lisa: Ava's Absence (IV) attacks. I have bruises and wounds everywhere, and a few of them have even gotten infected, but Healer Vanessa is a godsend who always has some magical cream on her somewhere. Antibacterial, antifungal, prevents scarring, and smells divine. I have no idea why they don't sell it in the human markets. Probably because they'd never be able to keep up with the demand. For all I know, it probably reduces wrinkles, too. Shifters age well, though, so who knows. Maybe they don't need wrinkle cream. I slip into the shower, with Selene's reproachful blue eyes watching me. The water pounds against my back, a blistering reminder of just how tense I've been. I want to scream. I want to cry. I want to punch something. Preferably Kellan, if he was even here. He's not as scary as Lucas, but just high enough in the pecking order to earn my rage. He hasn't been around much lately, too busy running the Westwood pack while Lucas plays vigilant mate at the hospital. I get it, I do. Lucas has every right to be 111 Lisa: Ava's Absence (IV) there, and Kellan has every responsibility to keep things running smoothly. But f@ck if I don't feel like I'm drowning in this new world without any sort of lifeline. Vanessa's in the same boat. She hasn't seen her mate, some high-up shifter in the pack called Vester, in two weeks, not since he left for the Blackwood territory to keep things running there. I can't even imagine how she's holding up, but she never lets it show. Always the consummate professional, that one. I shut off the water and step out, wrapping myself in a towel that feels too soft against my skin. Everything in this place is too soft, too luxurious. I miss Ava. She should be here with me. Selene's finally here. We should be connected, a trio whose first priority is always what fun is around the corner. Instead, she's lying in a hospital bed, unresponsive to the world around her. And the rumors are already flying. I can hear them whispered in the halls, see them in the sidelong glances thrown my way. The Blackwood 111 Lisa: Ava's Absence (IV) daughter, unconscious in a Westwood hospital. It's a political nightmare, even I can see that. The Council is rallying behind Westwood, but Jericho says there's a lot of movement in the shadows. He's been training me harder than ever, teaching me how to defend myself against any threat. "Trouble follows the Grey girl like ducks to their mamas," he told me yesterday, his scarr

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ed face grim. "And you're her best friend. That makes you a target." I dress quickly, pulling on leggings and a tank top. Selene is waiting by the door, her tail thumping against the floor. She's been my constant companion these past few weeks, a comforting presence in a world turned upside down. We make our way down to the hospital, the route so familiar now I could walk it in my sleep. The guards nod at me as I pass, their eyes scanning the hallway for any potential threats. They ignore the guard following me in silence. I pretend not to notice him, too. It's easier that way. Kellan might be too busy to do the pick ups and drop offs, giving me a little freedom to move around as I wish, but I'm always followed by Always. Lucas is in his usual spot by Ava's bedside, his hand clasped tightly around hers. He looks up as I enter, his eyes bloodshot and weary. "Any change?" I ask, though I already know the answer. He shakes his head. "Nothing yet. But she's strong. She'll come back to us." I nod, not trusting myself to speak. I take my usual seat on the other side of the bed, reaching out to brush a strand of hair from Ava's face. She looks so peaceful, so still. Like she's just sleeping, and any moment now she'll wake up and start cracking jokes about how we all look like shit. But she doesn't. She hasn't for three f@cking weeks. Selene jumps up on the bed, curling up at Ava's feet. She's been doing that more and more lately, like she's trying to protect her. I lean back in my chair, closing my eyes for a moment. I'm so tired, so f@cking tired of all of this. 111 Lisa Ava's Absence (IV) Lucas is nearly feral with his intense devotion to Ava, and I worry about their future when she wakes up. I have a feeling he's going to go a little overboard. There was the incident last week when Clayton, the Aspen alpha, came to visit. It had taken five shifters to get Lucas calmed down enough to let Clayton in to visit, especially when he'd heard about the pregnancy test Vanessa had to run. I can only imagine how bad it would have been if Ava were pregnant with Clayton's kid. Yikes. But that's a conversation to have another day, when she's awake and back with us. For now, he never leaves her side. Every so often Kellan drags him off to shower and shave, and Vanessa always leaves him meals that he barely picks at, muttering that he can't eat when Ava can't eat. Vanessa loves to point out that Ava is eating, through her veins, courtesy of a giant bag that looks like milk going through her IV. She calls it TPN. Some kind of liquefied food. It smells disgusting, like vinegar and feet, but at least it's keeping An alive 111 Lisa: Ava's Absence (IV) I settle in for another day of waiting and praying, curling my hand around hers. That's when Selene's head jerks up, her ears pricked forward and tail wagging just a little. Lucas doesn't seem to notice; he ignores Selene's presence, to the point I'd almost be convinced she doesn't exist. Then I feel it. Ava's hand twitches. Comment R Post your first comment! [VoteW@.N0v@lwor@.coM](#)