

CHAPTER 112

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112 Ava: Waking Up Darkness. Light. So cold. It burns. My lungs ache. Something's holding me down. There are whispers. Prayers, I think. Chaos reigns in this hazy world. Something beeps. incessantly. I'm sweating. My hands are too warm. up. What's that? ... Ava, you... Who's that? can you hear me? I struggle to reach the voice that calls me, but 15:30 1:10 112 Ava: Waking Up something sucks me away again. Frustration simmers, but I'm too tired to fight it. Ava, you have to wake up. There it is again. I know you can hear me, because I can finally hear you. Hear me? Hear me what? Am I talking? Yes. No, I don't think I'm talking. I'm too tired. My body is crushed beneath the earth. Fire ate every last bit of me. I drowned. The air was sucked away. You're alive. You're asleep in the hospital. You're just fine. You just need to wake up. No, no. No, no, no. Waking is pain. I remember the pain. There will be no pain, Ava. Just wake up. Come back to me. No way. 15:30 2:10 < 112 Ava: Waking Up It's peaceful here, in this hazy place. Ava, you have to come back. This is not where you should be. No place for me? But I'm here, in this serenity of darkness. I feel pain, but it doesn't kill me. It isn't enough to kill me. You won't die, Ava. You're alive. Alive. Alive means death- Ava, that's enough. Wake up. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You never died. Wake. Up! *** My eyes crack open. They feel like sandpaper scraping against my lids. Everything is blurry, shapes indistinct. White. Harsh lights. Ava. Selene. Her voice is warm honey in my mind, comforting. Grounding. I try to speak but my throat is parched, voice a ragged whisper. "Selene?" A wet nose presses into my palm. The slight weight of 15:00 3/10 112 Ava Waking Up her head resting on my hand. I turn my head slowly, painfully. She's there, silver fur shining, blue eyes bright with intelligence and worry. You're awake. Relief colors her tone. I swallow dryly, my tongue heavy and thick. "What happened?" The words scr@pe out. Later. Rest now. She nuzzles into my arm. I want to protest but exhaustion drags me under again. Someone's calling my name, but I'm already gone. *** Awareness returns gradually. The steady beep of a heart monitor. The chemical scent of disinfectant. Starched sheets rough against my skin. An IV pinches the back of my hand. My eyelids are heavy but I force them open. The ceiling swims into focus—white tiles, fluorescent lights. A hospital. Selene is curled up beside me, a comforting warmth. Welcome back. Her relief washes over me. Lucas and Lisa are here. They're asking me questions, one talking over the other. It's painful to my ears. 16:30 W10 112 Ava Waking Up "How long was I out?" I rasp, my throat raw from disuse. Three weeks, Selene whines softly. We were so worried. "Are you okay?" Lucas asks, way too close to me. "How are you feeling?" Lisa pipes up, from my other side. Three weeks. The news hits me like a punch to the gut. I struggle to sit up, my muscles weak and uncooperative. Selene helps, bracing her body against mine, and both Lisa and Lucas rest their hands on my back to lead me up until I'm sitting. It's an entire process that leaves me exhausted. Once upright, I take stock. My limbs feel stiff, atrophied. A needle pinches my hand, connected to an IV pole with a few bags hanging off it. One of the bags looks like milk, and that one's connected to yet another IV line in the elbow of my other arm. I'm in a hospital gown, blankets pooled around my waist. My hair is lank and greasy against my neck. Easy, Selene cautions as I waver, dizzy. You've been 15:30 5410 112 Ava Waking Up through a lot. Understatement of the century. I cast my mind back, trying to piece together how I ended up here. Training with Jericho and Lisa. Collapsing on the couch. Then... nothing. A yawning black hole in my memory. "What happened to me?" Lucas reaches for my face, his fingers hesitant and gentle against my skin. Warmth flows between us, a feeling of comfort, and the urge to press my cheek into his hand, nuzzling close. "We don't know for sure. Vanessa thinks your wolf is trying to emerge. Do you feel any different?" For so long, I yearned to shift, to run beneath the moon. To be whole. But now, with all the strangeness surrounding my heritage, the idea fills me with trepidation. I flick a glance toward my wolf, disguised as a husky for a reason she has yet to explain, and her ears flick as she licks my face, settling into my lap as though she's a lap dog. She's not. She's way too big for that. Don't be afraid, Selene soothes, sensing my unease. This is natural for you 15:31 6/10 112 Ava Waking Up Natural. The word tastes like ashes on my tongue. Nothing about my life has been natural. Is Vanessa right? Are you going to be a part of me now? Selene presses her head against my chest, but Lucas and Lisa are talking. "Are you okay, Ave? Do you remember anything?" The feeling of my best friend's hands enveloping mine is... Nice. Like family. Like coming home. A few tears try to make their way out of my eyes, but I blink them away as best I can. I don't need to cry just because there are two people on this earth who cares about what happens to me. "I'm sorry, I'm still a little g112 Ava: Waking Up Darkness. Light. So cold. It burns. My lungs ache. Something's holding me down. There are whispers. Prayers, I think. Chaos reigns in this hazy world. Something beeps. incessantly. I'm sweating. My hands are too warm. up. What's that? ... Ava, you... Who's that? can you hear me? I struggle to reach the voice that calls me, but 15:30 1:10 112 Ava: Waking Up something sucks me away again. Frustration simmers, but I'm too tired to fight it. Ava, you have to wake up. There it is again. I know you can hear me, because I can finally hear you. Hear me? Hear me what? Am I talking? Yes. 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He's so careful, treating me like I'm made of glass. 7/10 112 Ava: Waking Up I want to protest, to insist that I'm not an invalid, but the words die in my throat as he draws me into his embrace. His warmth envelops me, chasing away the chill that seems to have settled into my bones. I can't help but lean into him, my head coming to rest against his chest. His heartbeat is strong and steady beneath my ear, a soothing rhythm that makes my eyes flutter closed. For a moment, I let myself sink into his comfort, drawing strength from his presence. "Ava," he murmurs, his breath stirring my hair. "I was so worried." The raw emotion in his voice makes my heart clench. I tilt my head back to look at him, meeting his golden gaze. There's so much there—relief, concern, and something else that I can't quite name. "I'm okay," I whisper, even though I'm not sure if that's entirely true. My stomach chooses that moment to let out a loud growl, and I realize with a start that I'm absolutely ravenous. It feels like there's a gaping hole in my midsection, a yawning emptiness that demands to be 6/10 112 Ava Waking Up filled. Lisa leans in, patting my arm. "Don't worry, Ave. You're getting all the nutrients you need through that." She points to one of the IV bags, the one that looks like it's filled with milk. I eye it skeptically. The idea of being sustained by a bag of liquid doesn't exactly fill me with confidence. You need real food, Selene chimes in, her voice, echoing in my head. To regain your strength. She's right. I can feel the weakness in my muscles, the way my body seems to have wasted away during my time unconscious. The thought of solid food makes my mouth water, my stomach clenching with anticipation. A movement at the door catches my eye, and I look up to see Vanessa stepping into the room. Her gaze sweeps over me, assessing, and I can't help but shrink back against Lucas's chest. "How are you feeling, Ava?" she asks, coming to stand at the foot of the bed. "Hungry," I admit, my voice still raspy. "And weak." She nods, as if that's exactly what she expected to 15:31 (—) 19/10 112 Ava Waking Up hear. "That's normal, given how long you were out. We'll start you on a liquid diet and gradually work up to solid foods." I must make a face at the mention of a liquid diet, because she gives me a small smile. "I know it doesn't sound appealing, but we need to be careful not to overwhelm your system. Your body has been through a lot." That's an understatement. I still can't wrap my mind around the fact that I was unconscious for three weeks. It feels like I just closed my eyes for a moment, and now everything has changed. Lucas's arms tighten around me, as if he can sense the direction of my thoughts. "We'll get through this, Ava. Together." Comment 1 View All > A Leave the first commentroggy." And my throat hurts. Lucas shifts on the bed, moving slowly so as not to jostle me or the wires that seem to be everywhere. 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