

## CHAPTER 21

21 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (II) [LISA BURNER: Your brother's looking for you. I think he believes me that I don't know anything, but I'm not sure. I'm deleting everything off this phone just in case. I have a bad feeling about this] [AVA: Be careful. It might be better if we don't talk for a few weeks. I just heard two shifters talking earlier today; it looks like they're finally searching.] [LISA BURNER: I love you, Ave. I'm worried. Have I been watching too many crime documentaries? Anyway, I'll text you when it's safer.] I clutch my phone in fear, the plastic case digging into my palm as I rush out of the lecture hall. My heart pounds with a frantic rhythm, echoing the chaos in my mind. The two shifters' words replay in an endless loop, fueling the fear that coils tighter with each passing second. Escape. I need to escape. I weave through the throngs of students, desperate to put as much distance between myself and those who might be searching for me. The world around me blurs

14:45 17 21 Ava: Paranola and Secrets (1) into a kaleidoscope of colors and faces, each one a potential threat. I can't shake the feeling that eyes are watching my every move, that danger lurks in every shadow. The bus stop offers a brief respite, and I collapse onto the bench, gasping for air. My eyes dart back and forth, scanning the crowd for any sign of pursuit. The minutes crawl by, each one amplifying the tension coiled within me. Finally, the bus arrives, and I board with a sense of urgency, clutching my bag close to my chest. As it lurches forward, I sink into a seat near the back, my gaze fixed on the window, searching for any suspicious figures or movements. The ride is a blur of paranoia, every passenger a potential enemy. I study their faces, their mannerisms, looking for any telltale signs that might give away their true nature. But all I see are ordinary people, oblivious to the fear that grips me. When the bus finally reaches my stop, I practically leap from my seat. Relief washes over me as I spot Selene waiting patiently, her bright blue eyes a beacon of familiarity in a world that suddenly feels so hostile. 14:45 — ). 217 21 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (I) "Selene," I breathe, my voice trembling. She trots over to me, her tail wagging, and for a moment, the weight on my shoulders eases. Together, we hurry towards the safety of my apartment, my steps quickening with each passing block. The moment I step inside, the floodgates open. I slide down against the door, burying my face in my hands as sobs wrack my body. Fear, frustration, and a deep sense of isolation crash over me in waves, threatening to drown me in their depths. Selene whines softly, nuzzling against my side, her warmth a comforting presence in the midst of my turmoil. I cling to her, my fingers tangling in her soft fur, drawing strength from her unwavering loyalty. The tears flow freely, a release of the pent-up emotions that have been building within me. I cry for the life I've lost, for the family that has turned their backs on me, for the constant threat of discovery that looms over me like a dark cloud. I startle awake, my cheek pressed against my knees as the last vestiges of a nightmare cling to the edges of 10: 21 Ava Paranoia and Secrets (i) my consciousness. Disoriented, I blink away the haze of sleep, taking in the familiar surroundings of my apartment, lit only by moonlight peeking in through the window. A soft whine draws my attention to Selene, curled up at my feet, her piercing blue eyes regarding me with concern. A wave of affection washes over me as I reach out to stroke her silky fur, her presence a constant reminder that I'm not truly alone in this world. As the tension in my body begins to uncoil, my stomach

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h rumbles, reminding me that I haven't eaten properly since breakfast. With a groan, I push myself up from the floor, my limbs protesting the prolonged period of inactivity. "Dinner time, girl," I murmur, offering Selene a weary smile as I make my way to the kitchen. The familiar motions of cooking are soothing, a welcome distraction from the turmoil that had consumed me earlier. I move through the motions with practiced ease, the sizzle of the pan and the aroma of sautéed vegetables filling the air with a comforting warmth. 21 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (11) As I work, my mind drifts back to the events of the day, replaying the hushed conversation that had sent me spiraling into a panic. The fear that had gripped me so tightly begins to loosen its hold, replaced by a steely resolve. I cannot let the threat of discovery paralyze me; I won't go back. I am free now, and I won't ever give that up. A noise draws me from my reverie, and I turn to find Selene sitting in the doorway, the unmistakable glimmer of the purple crystal clenched between her jaws. A surprised laugh escapes my lips as I cross the room, reaching out to gently pry the object from her mouth. She's obsessed with it, and I've had to hide it from her several times over the past few months. "Where did you find this, you little troublemaker?" I chide, holding the crystal up to the fading light. As my fingers curl around the smooth surface, a jolt of energy courses through me, setting my nerves alight with a tingling sensation. I gasp, nearly dropping the crystal in surprise, but something holds me transfixed, my gaze locked on the mesmerizing play of light within its depths. And then, a voice, soft and melodic, like the purr of a 14 57 21 Ava: Paranoia and Secrets (1) contented feline, whispers through the recesses of my mind. It's time. The words reverberate through my very being, sending a shiver down my spine. I whirl around, searching for the source of the voice, but the apartment is empty save for Selene, who regards me with a tilted head, as if sensing the shift in the air. "Who's there?" I call out, my voice wavering slightly. But there is no response, and the crystal in my hand is now devoid of any of that energy I'd felt just a second ago. 66 TIMU has been contracted! Please remember to add to your library, comment, and throw gifts at me to keep me motivated. It's been a bit of a slow start, but there are some incredible arcs Lenaleia Creator's

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