

CHAPTER 32

Ava: Omega? (V) I study the large, imposing building as we approach, my brow furrowing slightly. The sleek, modern architecture is striking, but it's the logo that catches my eye—a stylized wolf's head, rendered in shades of gray, "This is one of our pack's facilities," Clayton explains, no doubt noticing my curiosity. "A hospital, of sorts." A hospital run by shifters? The concept is as unsettling as it is intriguing. I can't help but wonder what sort of medical practices they employ here, how different they might be from human hospitals. Clayton ushers me through the ambulance bay, and I can't resist glancing around, taking in the flurry of activity. Nurses and orderlies bustle about, their movements crisp and efficient. For a moment, it all seems so... normal. Like any other hospital. But then I catch a glimpse of a patient being wheeled by on a gurney, and I suck in a sharp breath. His face is twisted in agony, body contorting unnaturally—no doubt the result of an uncontrolled shift. A stark 14: 1/7 32 Ava: Omega? (V) reminder that this place is anything but ordinary. We step into an elevator, and Clayton punches the button for one of the upper floors. As the doors slide shut, I find myself keeping close to him, seeking reassurance in his steady presence. It's like an aura around him that keeps me calm. The ride is mercifully brief, and soon we're stepping out onto a hushed hallway, our-footfalls clacking away on the tile, echoing around us. Clayton leads me to a private room, the door ajar. "You'll be comfortable here," he says, his deep voice a low rumble. "One of our nurses will be in shortly to check on you." "Thank you." I slip into the room, sinking gratefully onto the edge of the neatly made bed. Clayton leaves once I'm settled, and it's as if I'm drained the moment he walks away. The room is spartan and sterile, but it has a large window that faces the mountains. The soft click of the door opening pulls me from my observation, and I turn to see a young woman in scrubs entering the room, a clipboard in hand. She 14:51 ▶ ' 217 32 Ava: Omega? (V) offers me a warm, reassuring smile as she approaches. "Good evening, Ava," she says, her voice gentle. "I'm Nurse Jenna. I'll be taking care of you tonight." I manage a small nod in return, suddenly self-conscious under her attentive gaze. She begins checking my vitals, her movements deft and practiced, and I can't help but marvel at how... normal it all feels. Almost like being in a human hospital. Almost. "How are you feeling?" Jenna asks, her brow creasing ever so slightly as she takes note of my various cuts and bruises. "Any dizziness? Nausea?" I shake my head, finding my voice. "Just... sore," I murmur, flexing my fingers gingerly. "And tired. And cold." Jenna nods, making a note on her clipboard. "That's to be expected after what you've been through," she says, her tone sympathetic. "We'll get you something for the pain

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, and you can rest." Rest. The word is tantalizing. "Let me finish a few more questions, dear. How old are 14:52 377 32 Ava: Omega? (V) you?" I blink at Jenna's question, feeling a flicker of uncertainty. "My age? I'm twenty." She makes a note, her pen scratching across the paper. "And how many cycles have you experienced so far?" Cycles? I blink at her. Jenna looks up, her gaze appraising. There's a hint of surprise in her expression, but she schools her features quickly. "Heat cycles? When a female shifter goes into heat—when she becomes fertile and experiences an increased drive to mate." Oh. Realization dawns, heat creeping up my neck. Of course. That's what she's asking about. For a second, I forgot that I was at a shifter hospital. I shift uncomfortably on the bed, acutely aware of the dull aches all over my body. "This... this is my first. time." "Your first heat?" Jenna's brows lift, but she doesn't seem scandalized—just curious. Professional. "I see. And have you noticed any changes in your body or 14 62 32 Ava: Omega? (V) behavior recently? Increased s@xual desire?" I shake my head. "No, nothing like that. I feel normal." Jenna makes another note on her clipboard. "Interesting," she murmurs, more to herself than to me. "We'll have to monitor you closely, then. It's rare, but some omegas can experience delayed or irregular cycles, especially if they've been suppressed." Suppressed? The word niggles at the back of my mind, but I don't have a chance to ask about it before Jenna is rising to her feet, all business once more. "For now, rest up," she instructs, offering me a reassuring smile. "We'll keep you comfortable here until your heat passes safely. Don't hesitate to let one of the nurses know if you need anything at all." I nod mutely, watching as she slips from the room, the door clicking shut behind her. Alone once more, I let out a slow breath, sinking back against the pillows. My first heat. It feels weird to say those words. I'd never been in heat before—I'd never had a wolf before. But I can't shift, so how am I in heat? It makes no sense. 14.52 6/7 32 Ava: Omega? (V) I feel nothing. No raging hormones, no insatiable urges. Just the dull, lingering ache from my injuries and exhaustion from everything that happened today. Selene? I call, but it's still silent. I glance down at the ring on my finger, twisting it to watch the purple crystal glint in the light. Too bad it can't give me the answers I need right now. Sighing, I heave myself onto my feet. I don't want to lay in bed like this; I'll shower first. It might help calm me down. The bathroom is as clinical and stark as the rest of the room, but the sight of the spacious shower stall is inviting. I peel off my tattered clothes, wincing as the fabric catches on my various scr@pes and bruises. The warm water that cascades over me is blissful, and I tilt my face into the spray, letting it sluice away some of the grime and tension. of It's not until I reach for a towel that I catch a glimpse my reflection in the mirror—and freeze. My breath catches in my throat as I realize the crystal pendant I'd fashioned into a makeshift necklace is no longer resting against my chest. 14:52 6517 33 Ava: Selena's Retim

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