

CHAPTER 87

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87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN Panic has me looking around the room, as if they would just be sitting somewhere. It's most likely that someone took my jewelry off when I was brought in. My gaze falls upon the various wires and tubes tethering me to the bed. A thin IV line snakes its way into the crook of my elbow, delivering fluids and medication. A catheter bag hangs from the side of the bed, freeing me from any need for the bathroom. All great, until I need to get up and look for something. Son of a bitch. There's a wheeled table for meals, but all it has is some paperwork that seems to be welcoming me to the -hospital. Does anyone even read those things? Panic is well on its way to blowing its top inside of my head and setting off a full-scale anxiety attack. My eyes dart from the nightstand to the small closet, but there's no sign of my jewelry anywhere. I keep trying to fiddle with a ring that is no longer on my finger, and it's driving me crazy. 87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN Finally, I remember the call light. With a trembling finger, I depress the button. Seconds feel like an eternity as I wait, my mind racing with possibilities. What if they were lost in the woods, during the attack? I hadn't stopped to see if they'd fallen off. If they're all the way out there, how the hell do I get them back? I don't know a lot about Lucas, but I know alphas. He'd never let me go back there, and it would be impossible to explain how important the jewelry is. I can't just tell him that they're used to keep my power hidden. The gentle click of the door opening draws my attention, and a kind-faced nurse steps into the room. "She's older, and smells of human and rubbing alcohol. "Did you press your call light, dear?" "My necklace and ring," I blurt out, struggling to keep my voice calm despite the desperation seeping into it. "I can't find them anywhere. Do you know what happened to them?" The nurse's expression softens with understanding. "I'm afraid I wasn't here when you were first admitted, 28 17 Aus MosNE JOAN sweetheart. But let me check with the security team. It's standard procedure to put any valuables in a safety box, especially when the patient isn't conscious." Relief washes over me at her words, and I nod gratefully. "Thank you. Those items mean so much to me. "Of course, dear. I'll be right back" Now to wait. lean back against the pillows, my fingers idly tracing the bandages wrapped around my neck. Memories of the past few days flood my mind—the terror, the pain, the overwhelming sense of liberation. And my mate. The word still feels foreign, even as it ignites a flicker of warmth within me. So much has happened. It's hard to think that a few short weeks ago, I was indignant at his presence in Cedarwood, thinking the worst of him as he tried to show me he cared. Am I caving too soon? But even if I'm willing to give him a chance, nothing can happen until I talk to him. 87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN And even then... There are other secrets. Like my powers. And Selene. It feels like there are a thousand reasons against reconnecting with Lucas. Waiting is an exercise in patience. I drum my fingers against the quilt, because I have no ring to twirl. Every steady beep from the machines around me only amplifies the anxious, never-ending cycle of worry taking over my mind. Without my necklace and ring, what will happen to me? At what point will the people around me recognize that I'm different? How soon before I hit another heat? So far, there are no signs—but, I just had my heat a few weeks ago, with Clayton. Will my powers begin to manifest against my will? The gentle creak of the door opening forces me out of the vicious cycle of questions with no answers, and I feel hope rise in me, only to be dashed a moment later by the look on the nurse's face. 418 87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN "I'm so sorry, dear," she says. "The security team hasn't called back yet. It might take some time." A knot of worry bounces around in my belly, like a hyperactive raccoon. "Thank you for letting me know." "In the meantime, why don't we get you up and moving a bit?" she suggests brightly, even as she approaches with a no-nonsense gait, her eyes already on all the cords keeping me in place. "It'll be good for your recovery." It isn't really a question, but an order in that way nurses do. With a gentle touch, she flips the blanket off my legs and helps me wiggle over to the edge of the bed, her movements careful and deliberate. A sharp twinge of "pain stabs through m

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y abdomen as I swing my legs over the side, and I wince. "Deep breaths," the nurse coaches, steadying me with a hand on my back. "One step at a time. Hold on, let me get you some socks." I breathe as directed, waiting for the wave of pain to recede as she opens a clear package of giant yellow socks. They have little rubbery circles on the bottom, 5/8 < 87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN probably to keep me from slipping. Leaning my body forward, I ease my feet against the floor. It's tile, yet the cold doesn't reach through the thick fabric now snuggling my feet. They aren't cute, but right now, I love them more than anything I've ever worn. Cold floors are the worst to walk on. The nurse hooks the catheter bag onto the IV pole, and I grip the metal rod for support as I heave myself into a standing position, taking in deep gasps of air as I fight against the pain wracking my body from such an ambitious movement. "That's it," she encourages. "Now, let's try a few steps." Lady, I feel like I'm dying. Give me a second. But the words can't come out, because I'm too busy heaving air into my lungs as best as I can. She waits without pushing me, and I lean onto the giant pole. Without it, I'm going to fall on my ass, and they'll probably need to bring a second person in to get me off the floor. My entire body is weak and shaking with the effort of 87 Ava Missing, AGAIN moving. I'm in awe of how quickly strength cant disappear. Hasn't it only been two days in bed? "Your body's been through a lot," the nurse says, still upbeat and perky as she speaks. She doesn't meet my eyes, too busy watching me, with one hand hovering just in front of me, in case I need to be saved. "You had a lot of blood loss and required a few units of blood to be transfused over the past couple days. Your anemia is severe, and you're still fighting a strong infection, even though it's under control with antibiotics. Give yourself some grace." "I feel like I've been in a coma for a year and am learning to walk again," I mutter between steps. Each one is agonizing, and sweat pops out of every pore on face with the effort I'm giving to these few steps across the room. I push through the pain with sheer force of will. my We make it to the bathroom door, a sad triumph for someone who's been walking since she was a toddler, and each step is a little easier, as though I've warmed up my joints and muscles. It still hurts like hell, though. 1173 VIS <87 Ava: Missing, AGAIN Step by step, I make my way around the small room, the nurse hovering nearby, ready to offer assistance if needed. "You're doing great," she praises, with that professionally reassuring voice. A weak smile is the best I can manage as I pant with the exertion. As I complete another lap around the room, the nurse gently guides me back to the bed. "That's enough for now. I'll let the doctor know how you did; I'm sure we'll be pulling your catheter tonight if you can keep this up! One less thing tying you down, right?" Sinking onto the mattress, I let out a shaky exhale, my body trembling with fatigue. The pain is still there, a constant throb informing me of my bad decisions. Comment1 View All >

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