

## CHAPTER 101

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101 Ava: Calling Clayton A plate of mixed greens, topped with an obscene amount of sliced chicken and shredded cheese, is slid in front of me as I wait for Clayton to answer the phone, There's a lot of sound in the background, and I can hear Vester shouting that I'm on the line. Stabbing a bite of salad, I crunch at it, the sound grating against my eardrums as I wait. "Ava?" Clayton's voice, usually so strong and assured, wavers with a vulnerability that catches me off guard. The sound tugs at my heart, a pang of guilt piercing through the layers of confusion that has settled between us. I should have asked Lucas to let me talk to him a long time ago. He's probably been worried. He's too responsible and caring to have just let things go without wondering how I'm doing. I'm a terrible person. I never really thought about him in this time. 1/7 101 Ava Calling Clayton "Hey," I manage, my throat tightening around the word. "How... how have you been?" Lisa's eyebrows shoot up at the sound of my words, her gaze fixed on me with an intensity that suggests she's hanging on every word. I ignore her, focusing instead on the static-laden silence stretching across the connection. "How are you feeling?" Clayton asks, dodging my question with one of his own. "Are you healing alright?" There's a lump in my throat at the sound of his concern. Damn. I swallow hard. "I'm fine," I assure him, though the words feel hollow even to my own ears. "I actually called because... well, I was worried about Ivy. I wanted to know how she's doing. And I wanted to talk to you." He's silent for a long time. "Ivy's doing well. She's healing, but slowly. She doesn't heal much faster than humans." I know that pain. My serious wounds have healed, but my daily soreness from exercise remains stubborn, not disappearing 15:19 101 Ava: Calling Clayton with any haste. I'm not sure what it means or why my body's acting this way. "You... wanted to talk to me?" he says, hesitant. I switch the phone to my other ear as Lisa watches, her eyes sparkling. She loves a good romantic drama, and my current love life is her biggest fascination. "I haven't talked with you since everything happened. I figured you would be worried." "I am, Ava. I'm still worried. I want to know how you're doing. If you're okay, if you're healthy, if you're healing." "I'm doing really well." I sound lame. "My best friend is here, so I'm not alone. I'm sure you know everything that happened by now, so I won't rehash it. I'm glad I'm not with my parents anymore." Clayton's silence is unnerving. The cacophony in the background has disappeared since he answered the phone, and I wonder what he was doing before I called. "I miss you, Ava." His admission is so startling that I almost drop the 15:19 101 Ava: Calling Clayton phone. "I miss you, too." How else am I supposed to answer? I don't miss him? I don't think of him very much? Now I'm starting to feel awful about myself. I haven't even thought about Lucas very much. Well, not a lot... but a lot more than I ever think about Clayton. "Do you?" The hope in his voice breaks my heart. I do miss him. He's a nice person. Responsible. Steadfast. He took care of me, even though I'm a stranger. Of course, he'd also kept me locked away for my own safety, but it isn't like Lucas has done much better. "Yeah." My mind flashes to other things, like the sound of his voice in my ear, the way his gentlemanly demeanor changes when my heat has him consumed. Heat floods my cheeks, and I shake my head at Lisa as her eyes widen. She can't hear him on the other end, so she has no idea what's happening. "So, yo *ur* @w.(n)@vELwOrM.co(m)

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haven't chosen Lucas?" "No?" I frown at his odd question. "About Lucas... I'm 15:10 w I didn't tell von about him. Us It seems like the Aund of thing I should apologize for. He knows about it now, though don't care. Ava is words are like a caress, and I feel like we're on slightly different wavelengths. It sounds like I've said something that's soothed him in some way. T'll never hold that against you." "I know" I can almost hear his happiness at my response, and that niggling feeling inside of me grows. I'm not sure what it is. "Anyway, I was just calling to check on Ivy. I guess I'll let you go. I'm sure you're busy." "Phone number Clayton blurts out. "Give me your number, so I can call you." "My number?" Lisa's nodding enthusiastically, mouthing, YES, YES, YES! at me. "It's the same one I'm calling from "Can I call you tonight?" "Um. Yes?" I wasn't planning on talking to him again today, but how can I say no when he asks me that in 101 Ava: Calling Clayton such a vulnerable way? The low rumble of his voice sends little shivers through me, reminding me of our time spent together. It makes me feel guilty, but I remember what Selene said. Lucas isn't my mate. He's my fated, who rejected me. We're working past it now, but that doesn't mean I've been claimed. But I still feel horrible that I can feel little shivers over the sound of another man's voice. "I'll talk to you tonight, Ava." His words are smooth. s@xy. Loving. When I hang up the phone, I hold it in my hand, staring at it in confusion. What just happened? I'd called to ask about Ivy, all because I was explaining to Lisa about my time in the Aspen pack again. Remembering her had made me realize I should reach out to the people who'd taken care of me and make sure they're all doing okay—considering they got hurt because of me. And now, I'm hot and bothered by the sound of 15:20 < 101 Ava: Calling Clayton someone else's voice. "Oh, my," Lisa sighs from across the table, and I throw a piece of lettuce at her. "Shut up. God. What the f@ck." "I couldn't hear most of it, but the man sounds like pure s@x. No wonder you f@cked him like an animal. Does he talk like that in bed?" "Yes. No. Wait." I squint my eyes closed, rubbing against them with one finger. "Why the f@ck do I feel like I just had phone s@x and cheated on Lucas?" "Because his voice is s@xy. It's s@xier than Lucas', I think. How was it, anyway? The s@x?" "Lisa," I warn her, feeling guilty again. "Okay, okay. We'll talk about that when bodyguards aren't on the other side of the door." Comment 2 View All > 102 Lucas Je