

CHAPTER 108

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108 Lisa: Ava’s Absence (l) LISA Lucas is bigger than I thought he’d be. The thought comes randomly as I stare at him across Ava’s bed. He never spares me a glance; he’s attuned to her every breath. There’s pain etched across his face that makes my heart ache for him. I’m hurting, too. But this fated mate connection that shifters have... It’s on another level. ki*sing the back of Ava’s hand, I lower my head to pray for the hundredth time today. Dear Lord, please hear my prayer. I know I don’t go to church and I don’t follow your commandments. I know I’m a terrible Christian. I’m not even sure I am Christian. But I know you’re supposed to care about all of us, so please—if you’re listening—please, save Ava. She deserves so much more than this. Of course, there’s no answer. Half of me is hoping for a miracle, but the other half knows the prayer’s 15:25 1/9 108 Lisa Ava’s Absence (1) pointless. There’s nothing any of us can do. The doctors are confused. All they can say is that she’s stable and should wake up when she’s ready. But why is she even in this bed in the first place? We didn’t do anything extra strenuous. She’s been healing fine. So why? Vanessa’s words about Ava’s wolf have me worried, but I can’t just tell them about Selene. These are Ava’s secrets. Even if keeping the secret means Ava never wakes up? the logical side of me whispers. I don’t know. So I stay silent, because there isn’t much to say. I traveled here with little notice to my friends and family. My parents are still pissed at me, I’m pretty sure. Mom’s changed our group chat name from My Happy Randalls to Empty Nest Randalls with a sad emoji, and she hasn’t spoken in there since the day I 16-20 2/9 108 Lisa Ava’s Absence (1) told her I was moving. Dad still puts money in my bank account every week. He’s not thrilled, but he’s not about to let me go homeless or anything. Ava’s the only thing for me here in Granite City, and now I’m terrified that she won’t be here much longer. Dramatic? Maybe. But there’s been so much lately... She’s even worried about being pregnant. Wait. Pregnant. Did she ever get an answer on that? Could... she be pregnant? Could that be why? The thought settles like a lead weight in my stomach as I glance toward Lucas. His presence is intimidating on a good day, but right now, with Ava unconscious in the hospital bed between us, it’s suffocating. The urge to ask him about shifter pregnancies rises in my throat, but I swallow it back down. How do you even bring up that kind of question? Hey, Alpha of the Westwood Pack, you don’t know me, but 15:20 3/0 108 Lisa: Ava’s Absence (1) I’m Ava’s best friend. Quick question, could getting knocked up by a werewolf, who by the way wasn’t you, cause a girl to go into a coma? Asking for a friend. Yeah, no. That’s not happening. But the question lingers, nagging at the back of my mind. Ava mentioned worrying about being pregnant, but we never really circled back to that topic. There was always something else going on, some new crisis. to deal with. Now, with her lying so still and pale against the white hospital sheets, I can’t help but wonder if that could be the reason behind all of this. I need answers, but I can’t bring myself to ask Lucas directly. He looks like he’s barely holding it together as it is, his eyes never leaving Ava’s face, his hand gripping hers like he’s trying to anchor her to this world through sheer force of will. No, I can’t put this on him. Not now. But there has to be someone else who can help, someone who knows about shifter biology and pregnancies. Vanessa. 15.20 108 Lisa Ava’s Absence (1) The name pops into my head, and I latch onto it like a lifeline. She’s the healer who’s been taking care of Ava, the one with the kind eyes and gentle voice. If anyone can answer my questions without making me feel like an idiot, it’s her. Decision made, I lean down to press a soft ki*s to the back of Ava’s hand. “I’ll be right back,” I whisper, even though I know she can’t hear me. “Just gonna go ask Vanessa a few things.” I straighten up, my gaze flickering to Lucas. He doesn’t acknowledge me, but I get the sense that he’s aware of my every move. It’s unnerving, but also strangely comforting. At least I know he’s not going to let anything happen to Ava while I’m gone. With a final squeeze of Ava’s hand, I slip out of the room, letting the door click shut softly behind me. The hallway is quiet, the fluorescent lights casting a harsh glare against the white walls and tiled floor. I take a moment to orient myself, trying to remember which way Vanessa’s offi

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ce is. Left, I think. Or maybe right? I choose left, figuring I can always backtrack if I need 108 Lisa Ava’s Absence (1) to. As I walk, my mind churns with questions and worries, each one more unsettling than the last. If it’s not pregnancy, then what is it? What could possibly cause her to just collapse like this? The possibilities are endless, and each one sends chill down my spine. I wrap my arms around myself, trying to ward off the sudden cold that seems to have seeped into my bones. Please be okay, Ava. Please wake up. I round a corner, and nearly collide with someone coming from the other direction. I stumble back, an apology already forming on my lips, but it dies in my throat when I see who it is. Vanessa. She looks just as surprised as I feel, her eyes widening as she takes in my disheveled appearance. “Miss Randall? Is everything alright?” I open my mouth, but no words come out. Suddenly, all of my carefully planned questions seem to have vanished, replaced by a thick, choking lump in my throat. 16:26 6/0 108 Lisa Ava’s Absence (1) Vanessa’s expression softens, and she reaches out to place a comforting hand on my arm. “Why don’t we go office?” she suggests gently. “We can talk there.” to my I nod, not trusting myself to speak. Vanessa leads the way, her steps sure and steady, and I follow numbly behind her. Her office is small but cozy, with a plush couch and a few potted plants scattered around. She gestures for me to take a seat, then settles herself into the chair across from me. “Now,” she says, her voice calm and soothing, “what did you want to ask me?” I take a deep breath, trying to steady my racing thoughts. “It’s about Ava,” I begin, my voice shaking slightly. “Is it possible for her condition to have anything to do with pregnancy? Like, if she was pregnant, could that cause her to go into a coma like. this?” Vanessa is quiet for a moment, considering my question. “It’s possible,” she says finally. “Shifter pregnancies can be complicated, especially if the mother is human. The hormonal changes, the physical 15:26 108 Lisa: Ava’s Absence (1) strain... it can take a toll on the body.” My heart sinks at her words, a cold dread settling in the pit of my stomach. “So... do you think that could be what’s happening with Ava?” Vanessa sighs, leaning forward to rest her elbows on her knees. “I can’t say for certain,” she admits. “We would need to run some tests to confirm a pregnancy, and even then, there’s no guarantee they’re related. But it’s definitely something we should consider. Is it Alpha Westwood’s pup?” I shake my head. She rubs her forehead with a sigh. “Okay. I’ll look into it. Discreetly.” “Thank you.” I hesitate. “What would happen if she is pregnant? Would she be okay?” Vanessa reaches out to take my hand, her touch warm and reassuring. “We would do everything in our power to ensure the health and safety of both Ava and the baby,” she says firmly. “But I don’t want you to get ahead of yourself, Lisa. We don’t know anything for certain yet.” I nod again. blinking back the tears that burn my eves. 8/9 108 Xisa Ava’s Absence (1) “I just feel so helpless. I don’t know anything about shifters. I’m just a human.” Vanessa squeezes my hand, her eyes full of sympathy. “I know it’s hard,” she says softly. “But the best thing you can do for Ava right now is to be there for her. Talk to her, let her know she’s not alone. Sometimes, that can make all the difference.” I take a shuddering breath, trying to absorb her words. “Okay,” I whisper, wiping at my eyes with the back of my hand. “Okay, I can do that.” Comment View All > A

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