

CHAPTER 74

74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst The sun is beginning to set when a slight detour from the circular thoughts I've had about tonight finally occurs to me. A weapon. Who says I have to accept my fate without fighting? No one. I can at least try to arm myself. But with what? I have knives in the kitchen, of course. I'll grab a couple. But they'll be too large to keep in my pockets. What else can I use? I'd grab a rock, but I'm not even allowed in the yard to find one. A pen? I can stab someone in the eye with a pen, so I grab a few of them and put them in either pocket. After some hesitation, I grab an old belt. I can try to swing it at someone and hit them with the buckle, right? I put it on, without sliding it through any belt loops. 1504 12 C 74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst The easier to get to, the better. Desperation creeps in as I realize how ill-prepared I am. My gaze lands on a can of hairspray, and I snatch it up, tucking it into the depths of my backpack. Not ideal, but it's better than nothing. Sneaking downstairs is easy. Mom's ignoring me, as usual, as she sits in the living room and watches TV. Jessa's with her, doing something on her phone. Neither look up as I pass by. Dad's probably in his office. In the kitchen, I wrap up a couple knives with kitchen towels. A penlight in the everything drawer is my favorite find, and a small folding utility knife that probably belonged to Phoenix a long time ago. Those go in my pocket. I make a small plate of food in an attempt to disguise the knives I bring upstairs in case Mom or Jessa looks my way. Of course, they don't. Closing the door behind me with a soft exhale of relief, I jump and almost spill my food when I hear the burner vibrate twice against the desk. 27 < 74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst Setting my plate and knives down, I fumble to retrieve it, hands shaking. [PHOENIX: I'll swing by around midnight when everyone's asleep. Be ready.] A wave of nausea washes over me as the reality of the situation sinks in. I'm really doing this-leaving everything behind on the mere promise of freedom. My fingers hover over the keypad, contemplating a response, but what is there to say? Instead, I let the phone slip from my grasp, clattering onto the desk as I sink onto the edge of my bed, burying my face in my hands. The weight of my decisions presses down on me, threatening to suffocate me. A voice in the back of my mind whispers that I should just run-leave this place behind and figure out the rest as I go. But they'll catch me within hours, if not sooner. I can't shift, and everyone else can. My gaze drifts to the backpack, now stuffed with the meager belongings I've managed to gather; I add the knives into it. What about Selene? She still hasn't made it here. I 2017 74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst. have no idea how long it would normally take a dog to make it to this territory, but I'm sure she's still far. We're over a thousand miles apart. The thought of never feeling her warm fur beneath my fingers, never hearing her playful yips, is almost too much to bear. I feel another ominous shudder go through my body, and I glance towards the window, searching for any sign of what could be causing this uneasy feeling. The sky's color has deepened, the last vestiges of twilight having faded away. Trees sway gently in the evening breeze, in an illusion of a moment of peace after a tiring day. Wrapping my arms around myself, I turn away from the window, pacing. It's what I do

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est these days. My footsteps seem unnaturally loud against the hardwood, the only sound aside from the pounding of my heart echoing in my ears. I pause in front of the mirror, studying my reflection. My eyes are wide, my face pale and drawn. Brushing my fingers over the crescent-shaped scar on my neck, I take a deep, steadying breath. 74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst I jump at the sudden vibration of the burner phone on my desk, the noise cutting through the heavy silence like a knife. Snatching it up, I read another message from Lisa, just asking me to please message her back. I send her a quick GIF of two cartoon bears hugging. Midnight... Just a couple short hours from now. Clutching the phone to my chest, I close my eyes, drawing in a deep, steadying breath. I can do this. I will survive. I have to survive. There's no other choice, not anymore. An unfamiliar sound distracts me from my thoughts, like something heavy falling onto a soft surface. I glance outside the window, but it's impossible to see outside. The lights in my room glare against the glass, obstructing any possible vision into the darkness. It's probably nothing, but my paranoia is on high alert. I walk to the light switch, giving it a soft click and blinking my eyes until I adjust to the darkness. The shadows outside seem to shift and undulate, but I can't make out any clear shapes or movement. Shouldn't there be a guard out there somewhere? Doonito the family haina hama thou ugually laua Ana 5/7 <74 Ava: Preparing for the Worst or two guards patrolling at night. Frowning, I lean closer to the glass, my breath fogging up a small patch as I squint into the dark, beyond the reach of the dim porch lights. There's nothing out of the ordinary that I can detect. And yet that nagging sense of unease refuses to dissipate. My instincts are on full alert, hissing at me that something's wrong. That I should run. It's like a painful itch that I can't quite reach. I open my window. The hairs on the back of my neck prickle as a strange, indistinct rustling drifts to my ears. I freeze, hardly daring to breathe as I wait for the sound to repeat itself and give me a clearer sense of its source. Seconds stretch into minutes of tense silence. Nothing stirs except the whisper of leaves in the faint breeze. I let out a slow, shaky exhale, chastising myself for letting my nerves get the better of me. Of course there's nothing amiss-the guards are likely just out of line of sight for the moment. I need to get a grip before I completely unravel. mywww.NovelWorm.Com

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