

Chapter 103

HQ

The dark, moody color scheme sat pretty much in line with what Ava remembered of the rest of the Green Light Club - a vintage meets modern look that closely rode the line between expensive and gaudy.

It wasn't surprising that Xavier's private rooms held more dark natural wood tones and far less black lacquer to ground the space, giving it a more cozy, masculine feel, rather than a dark Liberace-esque wonderland.

If she wasn't mistaken, it also looked more lived-in than it had before. Random papers were scattered around the living area, several pair of suede boots lay haphazardly strewn around the edges of the room, and a more than one jacket had failed to make its way past the arm of a couch and into the closet.

Ava fought back a smile as Xavier be-lined toward a wall panel of buttons, pushing one that, when pressed, closed the thick privacy drapes hung above the wide set of French doors that led into the bedroom. The scene was very reminiscent of the teenaged Xavier who'd always been so viciously on top of everything from his studies, to training, to being the perfect son, that his inner teen angst manifested in the most innocuous way that he could manage, a messy room. What was utterly new, though, was the Nintendo Switch tucked underneath the entertainment stand. As far back as she could remember, Xavier had never touched a video game in his life. And, comparatively, they'd spent far-and-wide a lot more time together than apart, so it's presence was nothing if not baffling.

"You a gamer, now?" She asked.

His brow lowered and he looked for all the world as if he had no earthly idea what she was referencing. Ava pointed to the gaming system and his expression cleared.

"Goddess, no," he scoffed. "Miller bought me that. "He said I needed to learn how to relax."

"And have you?" Ava asked with an eyebrow raised. "Learned how to relax?"

He gave her a droll stare, "What do you think?"

He sighed before walking to a hutch that hid an oversized mini-fridge and grabbing a handful of bottled waters. "I mean, I don't have one of those signs that says, 'It's been thirty days since Xavier last kicked in a door,' or some shit." He handed her a bottle and she took it, "Only thirty days?"

"The point is that I'm trying," Xavier said, sinking into the couch with a hard sigh. "I was in a terrible headspace back then. I mean, I'm in a not the best headspace now, but...it's a lot better now than it was before."

Ava took a long sip of water, drawing out the moment before answering, "I noticed."

"I'm glad that one of us can find the humor in my behavior."

"Oh, there's absolutely nothing funny about what you did, Xavier. At all." She made sure to keep eye-contact with Xavier and felt the smallest seedling of respect plant itself as he met her unflinching stare without wavering. "But we both know that. And I've decided that I'm not interested in holding grudges. If I did, I'd have no room in my heart for anything else."

For a precious few moments, their energies synched as the two of them connected on a deeper level. Ava knew that it must be a new aspect of the mating bond, but it was much more...cordial than they'd felt before. Instead of flaming the heat between them, as if trying to push them

together, this new connection felt like an anchor built on mutual understanding, keeping them from drifting apart again.

The Wolves took full advantage of the moment, brushing against one another in a way that was perceptible to their human counterparts. Although Ava was aware on some level that Mia and Alexandre liked to communicate whenever she and Xavier were in close proximity, the Wolves were keenly aware of the fragile ground their humans walked on around one another.

Now, they cautiously peered outside and found the path to one another pleasantly stable enough for them to connect in the strange, ethereal way that Wolves did.

Where that brought Ava peace, though, Xavier looked troubled, a frown marring his Romanesque features.

"Still, Ava, I-"

A loud rapping of knuckles sounded on the front door to Xavier's sitting area. Knowing who was on the other side, Ava didn't think twice before making her way to the door and opening it. Before she knew it, she was swept off her feet as Dylan lifted her into a mammoth hug.

"Look who finally came crawling back to us!" He crowed, his steely arms clenching her tight.

"Sure, that's what happened," Ava rolled her eyes, but squeezed the blond male back. "We can go with that if you want."

Dylan set her back on her feet and, as she stepped back, she couldn't help but notice that despite his smile, a healthy dose of apprehension had made its way into his glacial eyes. That was only to be expected, but it didn't necessarily bode well for their upcoming conversation.

Liam stepped up from behind Dylan and gave her a nod of acknowledgment and a smile.

"Glad to see Michaels took my advice."

Even though his gestures were far more reserved than Dylan's, his smile was sincere, and that fact had warmed Ava as she thought of their shared moment of connection, so fleeting and seemingly so long ago now.

That moment had meant a lot to her, to form a bond during that dark period, no matter how odd the circumstances surrounding it. And it almost blew her mind that those two males, Liam, and Xavier, who'd both been so closed off and angry in their own ways, had found their way into one another's confidence.

Looking at the three of them, the present and future of the Alliance Alphas, Ava suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of...rightness in her spirit. Without a shadow of a doubt, she knew that she was on the right track.

That these males who she knew in such different ways - who she knew to be three drastically different people were the way forward for their broken society.

And, if the stars aligned and the goddess stayed at her back, she knew that Noah would make a powerful, valuable addition to their number. The four of them could represent the majority, both among the Alphas and for the people of the Alliance. Together, they could stand up to the Council and bring about real change.

There's still so much that has to go right, though. So many concessions still have to be made, and slights need to be forgiven, in order for that goal to become reality.

"So, where's the fire?" Dylan asked before taking a seat on Xavier's dark loveseat.

"Too many to name, Miller," Xavier muttered from his spot at one end of the sofa.

Liam followed suit, settling into one of the matching armchairs, all placed facing the wide live-edge and iron coffee table. The males looked comfortable in their positions, as if they'd chosen their spots long ago and spent many a night planted right where they were now.

Ava felt like an intruder as she stepped into their ranks and took a place at the other end of the sofa. Where she sat, she was acutely aware of Liam and Dylan's attention, carefully directed away from her, making their silent questions all the clearer.

"Okay," she started, clearing her throat. "Should we start with the Ava in the room?"

"I mean, it did cross my mind," Dylan quipped.

"Yeah, I bet," Xavier replied, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, a contemplative look on his face. "Ava's here because the landscape of our situation's changed. And she's got her own intel that I think will help us."

"With?" Liam asked, his head cocked slightly to one side.

"The rogues," Xavier answered. "Among other things."