

## Chapter 105

### Infiltration

Ava held his gaze for only a second before she had to look away, "I don't have an alternative." "Then make one."

He didn't elaborate, and she didn't ask him to. Silence once again blanketed the back of the speed boat, but this time, instead of being tinged with awkward tension, it only held a profound sense of melancholy as both Ava and Dylan considered what lay ahead.

"Head's up! Were here."

Liam's voice draws your attention to the front of the boat, where a tall craggy outcropping loomed out of the darkness. Like a disconcerting portent, a clap of thunder sounded, deafening on the open sea, and the murky sky finally opened, sending a torrent of rain pouring down on their small boat.

"Shit," Xavier cursed. "This is going to make climbing this rock face a bitch and a half."

Ava shielded her eyes with a hand and looked up...and up, and up. And, still, she couldn't see the mouth of the cave they were aiming for.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" She asked, sidling up to the front of the boat.

"Based on the coordinates we cross-referenced with your blueprints, it should be."

"Hang on a second," Liam said as he moved the boat forward a few feet and swung it around so that the opposite side was nearly pressed up against the sheer cliff face. "There."

Ava followed where he pointed and, sure enough, from this angle, about fifty feet above the sea line, there was...not so much a cave, but a dark fissure that looked about wide enough for a fully-grown adult to fit through one at a time. Dylan let out a low whistle as he joined them, "No wonder they don't bother patrolling this tunnel. What the hell did old man Bennett even use this for?"

"Smuggling would be my guess," Liam said as he flipped open a storage box and took out a gun, checked it, and handed it over to Dylan before grabbing one for himself.

"How, though? Getting cargo up and down this cliff would be a hell of a hassle."

"Not if the cargo is people," Xavier muttered, flexing his hand so that his Wolf's claws shot from his nail-beds. He threw her a questioning glance. "Ready to go?"

Ava looked at her hands and reached inward toward Mia, who, thankfully, immediately responded. Feeling her Wolf react with such vigor was still new to her, but she was grateful when her fingers flexed, and claws replaced her nails, as well. All the while, she could feel Mia and Alexandre brushing up against one another, sharing their strength and bolstering Ava and Xavier in turn.

She nodded and saw a glint of what looked like relief, with maybe a hint of respect, flash across Xavier's face right before he stepped up onto the lip of the boat in a crouch and leaped the five or so feet from the boat onto the cliff wall, his preternaturally strong claws plunging into the stone and digging in, providing all of the climbing gear they needed.

"Start the clock," He called over his shoulder, his voice nearly drowned out by another clap of thunder. "Ninety minutes."

Ava heard the sound of guns cocking as Liam replied, "We'll be at the ready,"

Taking a deep breath, she followed Xavier's example and stepped up to the edge of the boat before leaping, her thighs easily taking her the distance to latch onto the cliff. A few months ago, she wouldn't have been able to do that, and the fact that she could after spending years feeling herself waste away was nearly euphoric.

The boost of energy brought on by pushing her body and feeling it meet the challenge spurred her on as she and Xavier began to climb, side-by-side, up the rock face. There was a thrill in her that she hadn't expected, a rush of adrenaline that was damn near intoxicating in its headiness.

Ava hazarded a glance over at Xavier and felt her breath stall in her throat for a moment when she met unexpectedly met his gaze. He'd been looking at her, too, and she knew they saw the exact same thing mirrored in her.

The heavy rain beat down on them, sending rivulets down his sculpted face, and lightning flashed, sending streaks of gold running through his amber eyes. The determination on his face was accentuated with a slight smirking, twist of the lips. He felt it, too, this rush. This inexplicable feeling of being in synch, and not just with one another. With their Wolves...with nature itself, as if they'd finally taken a turn down the right path.

There was a rightness to the two of them working in harmony for a singular goal.

Ava licked her lips and looked away, putting her focus back into climbing, pulling ahead of Xavier. They might be working at the same task, but she and Xavier weren't working toward the same goal, and she would do well to remember that. Her goal had warm eyes, an open heart, and a tremendously bad idea.

She was here doing this for Noah because he'd do nothing less for her. He'd already done so much for her, and this was the first way she'd found to repay him. She wouldn't let herself get distracted by whims of the past.

Ava panted as she pulled herself up over the lip of the cave. Just like she'd surmised below, it was a tight squeeze as Xavier hauled himself up behind her.

"You good?" He asked.