

Chapter 106

Into The Lion's Den

The tunnel leading into the Eclipse was long, nearly a full mile out from the compound, but the two made quick work of it, even with the careful pace they'd set. There was no light in the darkness, so Ava kept her eyes fixed on Xavier's back as he led her through the darkness.

It was an unwelcome but unsurprising realization that her night vision wasn't nearly as good as it had been while she'd been locked up, much less before her arrest. Where she should have been able to see in this cave almost as well as she would have in stark daylight, she'd wager that her sight was only slightly above a human's.

Ava probably wouldn't have realized that Mia's blindness had affected her vision at all if it weren't for how oppressively dark this cave was. As long as there was some source of light around, even if it was just the light of the moon, her own naturally heightened vision was enough to make up for Mia's inability to see at all. Now, though, she had to keep her eyes locked

on Xavier's back, and even then, in his black clothing, she was more tracking the slight shifting of his movement more than properly seeing him.

"You still okay back there?" Xavier whispered, periodically checking in on her.

"Yeah," she bit her lip, debating whether or not to confide in him.

There was still a sizable part of her that balked at the thought of being vulnerable around Xavier. It urged her to keep her weaknesses to herself, but the more pragmatic part of her recognized the danger they were in simply by being here. Keeping relevant information from Xavier could get them both hurt or worse.

"I'm having trouble seeing."

Xavier came up short as he whipped around to face her. Proving her point, Ava didn't react in time, slamming face-first into his chest.

"Damn it, Ava," he cursed as he brought his hands up to clasp your shoulders, bracing you. "How long has this been going on?"

She shuddered at his touch and shrugged out of his grasp, "Only while we've been in the cave. Mia...I think her injury means that she can't enhance my vision anymore. I didn't even notice until now."

Ava saw the faint glow of Xavier's hazel eyes as his gaze flicked back toward the far-off mouth of the cave, but not much else.

"Don't you fucking dare tell me to go back to the boat," she gritted out between clenched teeth.

"Trust me, that's not an argument I feel like having right now," he muttered. "Besides, the compound will be lit, so it shouldn't be a problem then, right?"

She nodded but saw that his shoulders were still tensed as he turned around to continue forward. "What are you thinking, Xavier?"

"Nothing that you need to worry about," he replied.

"I very highly doubt that."

"I mean it, Ava," he said. "Right now, we need to keep our head in the game."

Ava opened her mouth to argue when she picked up the faint sounds of shuffling and muffled voices. They rounded a bend in the cave, and Xavier came to a halt.

"A door. We're here," he whispered. "Do you have your route mapped out?"

"Yes."

They went silent as the shuffling grew louder and then increasingly faint as the person passed.

"Good, then make sure you meet me back here in thirty minutes," he threw her one final look before cracking open the door. "Don't be late, Ava."

Xavier bit down every protective instinct he had, making his hair stand on end as he slipped out of the hidden wall panel hiding the tunnel entrance. It was risky as hell to split off from Ava in enemy territory, and despite this being a fellow Alpha's compound, there was no doubt in Xavier's mind that they were deep in the trenches.

The four of them had discussed their plans ad nauseam and each time had come to the same conclusion - he and Ava could cover more ground if they separated. The compound was simply too big for them to make any meaningful headway if they stuck together.

Eclipse was the smallest and wealthiest territory in the Alliance, and their Alpha's home base reflected as much. The sprawling Cape Cod estate made his ancestral Colonial-style home look like a dollhouse in comparison. Needless to say, there'd been more than a few different locations demarked on Ava's maps that could have held the information they were looking for.

They'd divvied up the locations based on floor - Ava taking the second floor to search what looked to be Rhys' office and surrounding rooms, while he took the third to search what Noah's notes said would be Montgomery's old suite. Right now, they were on the first floor, where the tunnel let out into a secluded hallway off the main kitchen that was reserved for the help to be neither seen nor heard ferrying carts back and forth from the dining room.

Xavier slipped a pair of dark sunglasses out of his pocket and slid them on, blending in seamlessly as a member of Bennett's expansive security team. His part in their infiltration was the easier one by far since he could hide in plain sight. Ava, however, would have to stick to the shadows since Rhys didn't believe in letting females serve and protect. Well, protect, at least. From what he saw of the house staff rushing around the back corridors as he made his way upstairs, Rhys had no problem enlisting females to serve in a more traditional role.

It was a relief that none of the staff seemed to look his way. Either they were too busy cleaning after the dinner rush, or Noah's intel had been correct in surmising that plenty of Bennett's security staff made frequent use of the servant's quarters for dalliances while they were off duty.

Soon enough, Xavier made his way up to the expansive third floor, stepping out of yet another hidden wall panel into the main corridor. Like they'd hoped, this section of the home was all but empty, with Montgomery's security being reallocated downstairs where Rhys' rooms were held. Thomas' surveillance was spotty at best on this floor, but Ava was certain that it was because whomever he had on Bennett's payroll didn't think the added cameras up here were necessary since the hall saw minimal use since Montgomery's death.

They were, however, kind enough to rig all of the access panels up with keypad loggers that recorded and stored every access code used over the last six months. Xavier had to hand it to Thomas; the bastard was thorough. It was a bitch to admit, but the male had clearly inherited his father's shrewdness, and that would make him a hell of an ally.

After all, it had made him a nearly imperceptible enemy. If it weren't for Ava's whistle-blowing, the Council would be in deep shit. From what they'd been able to decode so far of the papers they'd gathered from the bunker, Thomas' plans ran deep. Batshit deep. They had the names of nearly two thousand individuals, all under his payroll and stationed all throughout each Alliance territory.

While they'd figured as much had to be going on, they'd had no idea just how large the operation had been. Wolves, humans, witches, sifters, fae...all seemingly ready to strike at a moment's notice. How, they were

still unsure. Other than what evidence they'd found of the Pixie Dust, they hadn't found a single weapons log, order for ammunition, nothing.

On the one hand, it gave credence to Ava's insistence that Noah didn't plan to immediately resort to violence, but Xavier couldn't ignore the fact that the evidence proved that the male was prepared for it, nonetheless.

Trusting the male was going to be a gamble for sure, but it would be a true testament as to whether he stood with them or against him if they asked him about the specifics of his plan and he lied. There was too much at risk in this little song and dance to withstand any more lies. While he trusted Ava's opinion of the male enough to hear him out, he was only one of a collective.

Liam was objective enough to see how siding with Thomas could pan out for the better, but Dylan was prone to sticking with the devil he knew, and that wasn't Noah Thomas. It was a mindset he'd inherited from his father. And without Wyatt Miller's support, they wouldn't have the majority vote against Eclipse and Grave Crown to officially overturn Rhys' inheritance.

If that happened, it wouldn't matter if Ava found the evidence she was looking for. Their coupe would be dead in the water before it ever got the chance to see the light of day.