

## Chapter 108

Brother's

"You have a lot of fucking nerve showing up here," she heard Rhys snap the moment the office door closed behind them.

Luckily, the office shared a wall with the closet she'd hidden in, making it easy for her to overhear their conversation. She pressed an ear against the wall and listened. "Do I? And here I thought I belonged here. After all, my father grew up here, same as you, and our forefathers before them," Noah said. "Hell, I was even born here." Rhys growled, "Make no mistake, you were born outside the gates like the mongrel you are."

She couldn't see him, but she could only imagine the derisive look on Noah's face. It was the same one he got whenever he talked about the Council or his father. "Never been one to hold your emotions close to your chest, have you, Rhys?"

"Don't you presume to know the first thing about me."

"I don't need to know you, brother," Noah replied. "I know that you're sitting on something that belongs to me. And I have designs to get it back."

She heard Rhys scoff and the sound of heavy chairs being pulled back, "A signed letter of disownment bearing the Council's seal says otherwise. The Eclipse Alphadom belongs to me."

"Call this a warning, Rhys. I'm coming to you in good faith to tell you that this won't end well for you. Unless you cede Eclipse over to me. Believe it or not, I don't want to see you hurt." "Now you're threatening me? In my own home?"

"I told you that I'm not here to confront you. Not yet," Noah paused. "Whether or not you choose to listen to me is entirely up to you."

"You'll have Eclipse over my stiff corpse, you half-breed piece of shit!"

"Rhys, please. You have no idea what's coming."

The smaller male let out an ugly laugh like stone on glass, "What, that Pixie Dust bullshit? That's all your doing? What's to stop me from going to the Council with this information the second I throw you out on your ass."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Noah calmly replied. "And even if I did, I know how much your word means to the Council. That corrupt bunch of cocks wouldn't risk so much as a hangnail over your frenetic diatribe."

"You don't know shit about what you're talking about," all traces of laughter gone.

"Don't I? In less than two years, you've managed to nearly bankrupt the most lucrative territory on the Eastern seaboard. Damn near every backdoor relationship our father made, you couldn't nut up enough to maintain. Every contact you had in the Council has found more reliable partnerships elsewhere," Noah snorted. "It wasn't much of a legacy to be proud of, but you still managed to ruin it, Rhys."

"And you think you can do better?"

"In more sense than one. I have the resources to bring Eclipse back, better and cleaner than it ever was," Noah replied.

"If you think the Council would ever accept a half-blooded mongrel into their ranks, you're even more pathetic than father always knew you were."

"You underestimate them. They're a pragmatic lot, if nothing else. I only need them to see more value in me than they do in you," she could practically hear the scornful smirk in Noah's voice. "And, in that regard, you've done all the work for me. I should thank you for that, brother."

There was the sound of shattering glass and wood scraping against wood as if a chair had been thrown back.

"You have no idea the lengths I've gone to in order to secure my legacy," Rhys snapped through gritted teeth. "You might think you've got it all figured out, but you don't know who the fuck you're dealing with. Brother."

Rhys' loafer heels clicked against the floor as Ava heard the sound of the door next to her hiding spot swing open. "Guards! Get this filth out of my sight."

She heard Noah rise out of his seat and take slow, measured steps toward the office door.

"No need. I've said my peace. I'll be going."

"And if you know what's good for you, you'll stay away," Rhys' hiss deepened into a threatening snarl. "You're not the only one who knows more than you think, Thomas. Trust me; you don't want to push my hand. That trashy little redhead won't thank you for it."

Ava's lip curled in disgust as she caught the male's insinuation, but she was already far too tense to give any further credence to his words. She couldn't see Noah's reaction, but right after Rhys' threat, she heard him pad off down the hall and, soon after, the office door slammed shut.

"Sonofabitch!" She heard him scream as soon as Noah and the guards were out of earshot.

"Who the fuck does he think he is?!" Rhys' pacing became louder and more frenzied as he continued to curse and mutter to himself.

Ava jumped as something thudded and shattered on the other side of the wall right in front of her face. A puff of dust and grit flew into her face, forcing her to bite her lip to keep from crying out. When she finally blinked her eyes back open, she saw that whatever he'd thrown had punched a quarter-sized hole through the drywall.

Cautiously, she peered through the hole, ready to dart away at a moment's notice, but the male was far too busy throwing a temper tantrum to notice the damage he was causing to his own office, much less a single observing eye watching him rant and rave.

"Goddess be damned if I let some bastard take my throne from me!" He threw his head back, his eyes wide with agitated mania pinned on the ceiling - looking past - the ceiling as he began to turn in a slow circle, one

accusing finger raised toward the sky. "You hear that, father? I'd damn the goddess...just like I damned you...."

Abruptly, he snapped out of whatever fevered trance had overtaken him, a look of pure hatred overtaking his fine features. He stormed toward his desk and threw open a drawer, lifting a few papers in his hand. Without a word, he pulled out a lighter and set the sheets on fire, dropped them into the trashcan, and marched out of the room.

It practically physically hurt Ava to sit still long enough for Rhys and his security detail to exit the hall. The second the coast was clear, she darted out of the closet to reach for the office door. She quickly entered the access code and pushed her way in, making a beeline for the flaming trashcan.

She reached in, searing her fingers as she snatched the smoldering papers, stifling the flames with the nearest thing she could find, which just so happened to be Rhys' nice silk curtains. Fortunately, the flames consuming the papers went out. Unfortunately, the curtains caught the blaze and went up...well, like highly flammable fine silk.

"Shit."

The fire quickly began to spread, engulfing the column of fabric in practically no time at all. Ava didn't wait to see what happened next, and by the time the fire alarm began to shriek, she was already hidden safely

away in the servant's corridors, where she could blend in with the hectic rush of workers rushing to make their way to the nearest exit.

Obvious safety hazard aside, the chaos made it simple for Ava to slip unnoticed out of one hallway and into another. The hidden panel leading to the tunnel was only a few feet ahead of her. She slid the marred documents, along with her phone, into the waterproof she and Xavier had both brought and made her way down the hall.

She'd blame it on the clamoring of bodies rushing through the walls or the ear-piercing wail of the alarm, but in truth, her nerves had gotten the best of her, causing her not to sense anything amiss before the hand came down on her shoulder.

She startled and tried to move forward out of the grip, but the hand clamped down on her shoulder and spun her around. When she saw who it was, she went stock-still.

"Ava...it is you."

Her mouth dropped open, but no sound passed her lips as she stared up at Noah, confusion and anger turning his beautiful face to stone.

"I'd thought I scented you upstairs," he whispered, his voice low and deliberately devoid of any telling emotion. "I figured I'd just spent too long away from home. Now, I don't know what to think...."

Before she could come up with some half-assed response, footsteps sounded down the hall, and they were incoming fast. Ava shrugged out of his hold and backed her way down the hall. It stung how easily he let her.

"I-I'll see you at home, Noah," she breathed. "We have a lot to talk about."

With that paltry parting, she slipped into the tunnel and kept going at a dead sprint. If it weren't for his diligent lookout, she would have crashed right into Xavier - or a wall, or right off the ledge or something else equally moronic. "Hey! What the hell happened?" He asked.

"No time," she rushed, grabbing his arm and pushing him ahead of her. "We need to go. Now!"

Without another word of question, Xavier picked up his pace, quickly leading them away from the mayhem. Even with her ears straining for the slightest sounds, their footsteps were the only ones in the tunnel. Noah hadn't followed her, and that fact both relieved and devastated her.

Trust had been broken tonight, in a way so unexpected as to be damn near inconceivable. While Ava dreaded the conversation that would be coming when she got home - if she even had a so-called home to go back to - there was also the undeniable feeling of a weight being lifted from her shoulders. It might not have been in the way she'd planned, but the cat was out of the bag, and soon, everything would be out in the open.



Xavier barely paused long enough to sight the boat before diving off the edge of the cliff. He sliced through the freezing water, and the muted splash beside him told him Ava had done the same. Within a matter of moments, he was back on the boat and pulling Ava up out of the water beside him.

"You find what you need?"

Xavier looked over his shoulder to where Liam slid behind the wheel while Dylan looked on, slowly shuffling the deck of cards in his hands. He almost laughed at the mundane sight, so starkly juxtaposed to the shitshow they'd left in their wake. "Yeah," he sighed. "I did."

Dylan looked over to where Ava sat looking deathly pale, and he didn't think it was because of the icy dip they'd just taken. "What about you, sweets?" The blond male asked, "Did you find what you were looking for?" Slowly, as if it took a lot to pull herself away, she looked up from the half-burnt papers in her hand. When she did, her eyes were unfocused, and she'd begun to tremble.

"Yeah," she swallowed. "I think I did."