

Chapter 112

A Red Moon Welcome

Xavier shared a brief, steady look with his father before turning to silently gesture to the team of trained guards trailing behind them. On his signal, they would storm Victor Brown's home and collect him for his due trial at the Town Hall. This wasn't going to go down like it had when Ava had been arrested. Victor's trial was going to be methodical and fair, and Xavier's ruling would be based on truth and proven fact, not Pack Law alone. There would almost certainly be pushback with the devastating allegations being brought forth against their Pack's trusted vizier, but this time, he'd be ready for it.

What he was less certain of was what to expect when Ava finally set foot back in Red Moon territory. He'd already briefed his own security detail to expect her arrival and to treat her as a respected guest for the duration of the trial. That was easy enough; they were on his payroll. As for the rest of the Pack...if things weren't handled carefully, Xavier could have a public riot on his hands.

Xavier gave the signal, and as one, they moved in. Kicking in the door was the work of a moment before they flooded into the house, spreading out to cover each room, searching for Victor. Given the sudden commotion in the middle of the night, he wasn't too hard to find.

"What in the goddess' name is going on here?" He shouted as he stumbled down the stairs in his pajamas.

He was too shocked to do much more than gape as armed guards took him by each arm and wrestled him into silver-lined cuffs.

"Xavier? August, what is the meaning of this?!"

"Victor Brown," Xavier announced, stepping forward. "You're under arrest for the murders of Sophia Michaels and Samantha Brown."

"So, how's it feel to be back?"

Ave threw her brother a droll look as he pulled up the Town Hall, their accommodations for the evening, "As Red Moon's only recorded serial killer? Not great, Aiden."

"You think we should have brought Noah along with us?" He asked, frowning. "For moral support, if nothing else."

"Nah, for once, I'm the one who's off on business," she quipped, trying to hide just how uncomfortable that thought made her. "In all honesty, though, I wouldn't want him to have to witness this."

"What? The male who ruined your life is finally going to be punished," Aiden countered. "I bet you anything he'd love to see it."

"I know that he would, but it's not that," she said. And she did. Still, the thought of those two worlds clashing terrified her. "I mean, I don't want him to see Red Moon. Mom and Dad...."

"I get it," he said softly, placing a gentle hand on her arm. "There are going to be a lot of...charged conversations by the end of this."

"Yeah, exactly, and when those conversations are finished, so am I. I'm never setting foot in Red Moon again."

"A clean break, then?"

"There hasn't been anything clean about it, brother," she scoffed. "But yeah, this is my past. Noah's my...future. Never the two shall meet."

Aiden suddenly went silent as he looked away from her. When he turned back to her, he looked preoccupied. "Hmm. Speaking of the future, I had something that I wanted to run past you." "What is it?"

"So, you know how Bren's been going to school, right?" He probed.

"Yeah, Aiden," she laughed. "I know you've been all over each other, but she was my friend first."

In fact, after she'd urged him to spend as much time with Bren as he could so that she could do all of her clandestine bullshit, this was the first time she'd seen her brother in a while. As he shifted uncomfortably, Ava realized that she wasn't the only one keeping secrets.

"Well, she got invited to study abroad next semester to study the Californian Federation," he finally said. "She'll be moving to California in a couple of weeks."

"Okay...and why are you the one telling me this instead of Bren?"

"Because I'm going with her."

Ava felt her mouth go dry, "Oh."

"Only if you're okay, though," he rushed on. "I left the forces to watch over you, and that's what I'm going to do, Ava. You seemed like you were in a pretty good place with Noah...."

"Yeah." Ava didn't know how to expand on that because she was still so unsure of how she felt herself. All she knew was that she'd just gotten her brother back, and he was ready to leave her again.

As if he felt her rising panic, Aiden leaned forward and placed a steadying hand on hers, "But, if you're not or you're just looking to try something new, California is only a plane ticket away." Only a plane ticket away. Something about the way he phrased it seemed so much more...tangible than ever before.

Ava felt her heart begin to race and her breath grow short as she could see Layla's dream suddenly fall within her reach. She couldn't ignore how appealing the idea was to escape across the country with her brother and best friend for a few months. It was her something else, even if her goal was foggy at best.

But that was such a drastic leap from where she was now...everything she knew. All of a sudden, Ava's racing thoughts became all too much to handle. An all-new avenue of nerves opened up, dumping a wave of anxiety onto what was already going to be a stressful day.

"Can we put a pin in that, Aiden? It's just...a lot to think about."

"Damn, you're right. I shouldn't have brought it up right now," he muttered.

"No, I'm glad that you did," she reassured him as she unlocked her seat-belt. "I just don't have an answer for you."

He gave her what she was sure he thought was a reassuring smile, "Don't worry, Ava. You have time."

"That's the thing, though, right?" She sighed, "It should feel that way, but it doesn't."

The crowd amassed in the front courtyard of the Red Moon Town Hall bristled with restlessness as Xavier took up his spot at the podium before them. The disquiet and confusion were almost palpable in a way that made it painfully clear how little this sort of event took place in their tiny town proper.

So infrequently, in fact, that their Town Hall wasn't nearly big enough for everyone gathered to fit indoors since the closest thing their Pack came to regular prosecution was the daily resolution of minor grievances and neighborly disputes. Stuff worthy of a human HOA board, not murder trials. The mere mention of Victor's arrest last night had spread throughout the town like wildfire, ensuring a full house come daybreak. At this point, the cause for his arrest and the reason for the trial had been kept under tight wraps, but the Pack had only been gathered like this once before in

recent history, and that cause for that trial was still fresh in everyone's minds.

"Mothers and fathers of Red Moon. Brothers and sisters," Xavier began, quickly garnering the full attention of the eager crowd. "You're gathered here today to witness justice be served, and it's a fate that is unfortunately long overdue." Concerned murmurings scattered throughout the crowd as Xavier nodded toward his father, who, in turn, signaled for the Town Hall doors to be opened as armed guards escorted a cuffed Victor out onto the raised stairs beside him. "Members of Red Moon, I'm afraid we've been led astray, and in doing so, we've allowed a snake to roam free in our midst," Xavier announced, raising his hand to hush the increasingly agitated assembly. "Please, please. Now, under the light of new information, my father and I have spent the last several months conducting a brand-new investigation into the tragic events that rocked our community only a few short years ago."

He looked out over the crowd, scanning each face, gauging each reaction as he continued.

"We've determined that the trial held three years ago was grossly mishandled," he stated gravely. "We're gathered here today to set the record straight."