

Chapter 12

Role Change

Madame Bella paused as she stepped through the door, clearly not anticipating finding one of the club's luminaries alone with one of the maids. The statuesque female only let the surprise show on her face for a split second before a silky smile slid over her features.

"Mr. Michaels, a pleasure to say the least," her generous hips swayed as she sauntered over and extended a fiercely manicured hand out for Xavier to shake. Never once did the woman spare a second to acknowledge Ava's presence. "Please, allow me to assist you in any way I can."

Xavier had to be a very special guest here indeed if Madame Bella deigned to descend from her leather-clad tower to not only answer his summons, but personally offer him her services.

Of course, Ava didn't have much of a frame of reference where it came to Madame Bella. She'd barely seen the woman in the three months since she'd been...recruited to work at the Green Light Club. To be fair, this was by design, since it was a well-known unspoken rule among the club staff that if Bella bothered to acknowledge you, it probably meant bad news was coming your way.

Anyone who managed to find themselves on Bella's radar usually went missing shortly after.

Ava didn't know what Pack Madame Bella had originated from, if any, but the female exuded enough natural confidence and smarmy coyness that she would've fit right in with the Alliance aristocracy.

"Bella, a vision as always," Xavier's eyes grazed over where the female's ample bosom spilled over the top of her fitted bodice. Bella's predatory smile grew as he leaned forward to kiss both of her cheeks. "Please, have a seat."

Ava wasn't necessarily shocked that someone as domineering as Xavier would extend an order to the Club's proprietress, but she was dumbfounded when Bella quickly complied with the command. The other female took a seat, making sure to angle herself toward Xavier in a way that better displayed her curves, still never so much as sending a glance in Ava's direction as Xavier took his own seat between them.

"I called you here to discuss a few things that I believe will be of import to you," he started, and then pivoted in his seat to reveal where Ava sat tensely behind him. "You know Ava, correct. No introductions are in order?"

Bella blinked once, slowly, before finally answering, "I do. A newer member of our housecleaning staff, if I remember correctly. She hasn't acted out of turn, has she? I can assure you that she'll be dealt with directly, if that is case." Xavier chuckled, "That she will be. But first, I'd like to inquire how she came to work here."

Bella's head cocked to one side in response to the hardening of his tone and the sudden line of questioning. Ava could tell that the normally intimidating figure was scrambling to gather her thoughts in order to formulate a response that wouldn't bring her entire organization crumbling to the ground.

Everyone who worked at the Green Light Club, whether they be Werewolf or human knew that a substantial portion of Madame Bella's staff were un-gainfully employed. Bella kept a mix of both humans and Wolves to satisfy the mix of clientele that patronized the club.

Every human who worked at the club had been formally hired, and what Wolves that filled out the wait and cleaning staff were usually Packless or out-of-towners looking for a quick buck. For the majority of the sex workers, though, Bella had found it more fiscally gratifying to pursue backdoor recruitment to fill the ranks.

She had dealings with Pack prisons across the Alliance Region, where she'd scout prisoners for a cut of their profit. The recruits could choose to stay or be sent back to prison, and those who stayed were offered a cut of their profits and were able to buy their way out of the club after a while. Whenever that happened, Bella started the cycle over again.

Ava had been relatively certain that her shady dealings weren't sanctioned by the Alliance, what with the clandestine kidnapping that had brought her here in the first place. Based on the madame's graying complexion, it seemed as if the jig was up.

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean, Mr. Michaels."

Xavier smirked unkindly, reveling in seeing the other female squirm, "Dumb doesn't look good on you, Ms. Sutton."

Bella cleared her throat and straightened her posture, unconsciously reacting to reprimand. "Of course. If I do recall, she interviewed and was recruited only a month or so ago."

Ava was careful not to react to the obvious lie. She expected Xavier to call the female out after catching her in her own web, but instead he just nodded solemnly. "That so?"

"Y-yes. If I do recall. As you know, I'm quite busy-"

"And she applied to be on your housekeeping staff?"

Another delicate clearing of her throat, "I don't...no, she didn't. It was a suitable alternative due to her d- "

"I did," Ava cut in, afraid of what the proprietress had narrowly revealed. They both turned to look at her blankly, as if astonished that she was there despite their conversation revolving around her. "Excuse me, ma'am, but I think you have me mistaken for another girl. It's understandable due to your busy schedule, by I **did** apply for a cleaning position."

Bella nodded immediately, simply grateful for the corroborating story. Xavier, however, just lingered on her face, no doubt searching for the reason why she'd bother trying to bail out the mistress when he already knew how she'd come to be at the club.

Ava met his stare and gave nothing away. Better he thought she was just messing with him than he realize there was something wrong with her Wolf. She didn't understand what was going on with Mia herself, but whatever it was, Xavier couldn't be trusted with the information.

He turned back to Bella, "We'll finish this later," he leaned into her making sure she met his steely gaze. "I expect you to keep your house in order, Ms. Sutton."

Bella stilled and nodded tersely before Xavier leaned back, "For now, I think training is in order."

"I-I'm sorry, Mr. Michaels?"

"The training that you give your *finest* employees," he gestured toward the display room. "Tell us your process, so Ava can get a feel for the environment." It was Ava's turn to go still.

Ava wasn't the only one who had no idea where Xavier was going with this. Madame Bella cocked her head again, "And why would she need that? If I might ask, sir. She's already quite familiar with all of the necessary protocols required of the cleaning staff."

Xavier grinned, "Oh, I know what your cleaning staff are paid. Far be it for *me* to tell you how to run your business, but for our intended purposes, a working female's wages would suit our Ava much better."

"What did you just say?" Ava felt she would burst at the seams, her body was vibrating so acutely with rage.

Xavier turned to her fully and leaned back languidly in his seat, "As your Alpha, it's my duty to help you in your time of need, just as much as it is for me to take care of the Pack." He waved a hand freely as if he were

referencing the weather instead of pimping out his childhood friend, "You're in need of cash and the Pack is in need of justice. Ergo, a fine solution to both our problems."

The fine tether reigning in Ava's patience snapped, "My problem? The only problem I've ever had was you, Xavier!"

Xavier slammed to his feet, shoulders hunched and fuming as he crowded Ava's space, "Is that why my sister is dead?"

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Instead of cowering like he expected, Ava launched to her own feet and met his accusatory glare with one of her own, "If you spent less time trying to ruin my life and more time *listening to me*, we might both have an answer to that by now."

"*Enough*!" Xavier lashed out with one hand sending his chair flying into the door. "I'm done playing these fucking mind games with you, Ava."

Ava narrowly avoided flinching at his outburst, "You're one to talk."

"I **am** talking, and you're going to start listening," he jabbed a finger into Ava's sternum. "One way or the other."

She bared her teeth and leaned into the pressure, "What are you saying?"

"I'm giving you an out when your traitorous ass doesn't deserve one. You can either stay up here and earn your freedom like a female of worth, or you can sit in a cage and rot."

"Fuck you, I lived and breathed that prison for three years. You think I can't handle more?" She said it with purposeful bravado, knowing full-damn-well she'd never survive it if she was sent back to the dungeon. Xavier just smirked viciously, "I never said anything about the goddamn prison. Did I?"

There was no hiding the shudder that shook through her body at the loaded threat. "You're a monster."

"And you're a murderer. So, maybe the goddess did know what she was doing, after all."

The room grew silent as they stood before each other, panting.

"Hm, so...you mentioned some training?"

Bella's interruption broke their heated faceoff. Xavier was the first to pull back, reassembling his features and turning his back on Ava to solely address Bella. They were back to pretending she was no longer there. "Yes," he said. "Ava's in need of a career change. She won't be working as a cleaner anymore."