

Chapter 124

Wayward Sons

Twenty-four hours after Ava dropped that bomb, the Green Light Club was in a state of frenetic chaos. Xavier damn near couldn't believe that after months of fruitless probing, Ava had been able to pry something so valuable out of Noah. Not that Xavier didn't have faith in his mate's abilities - by now, she'd gone above and beyond for their cause, even being as far away as she was. They were hardly in a place where his confession would be appropriate, but she'd been his rock those first few goddess-awful weeks he'd spent in convalescence recovering from the extensive wounds he'd sustained during the attack on Alliance Tower.

He'd sustained three broken ribs, a few displaced vertebrae, a myriad of internal lacerations, lesions, and a host of fractured bones. All topped off with burns of various degrees and the effects of smoke inhalation. It had taken hours of daily healing sessions with Jack, followed up with human medical intervention to get him back up and running.

But he had been one of the lucky ones. Every time he sensed Alexandre move within him, he was reminded of the fact that in spite of the pain, he would be fine. As for the rest, they had lost so fucking many people during the attack. The initial bombing had laid waste to the meeting hall, resulting in the deaths of more than a third of the Council members, including Dylan's own father, Wyatt Miller.

The raid that had directly followed the attack managed to further whittle the Council down until only a handful of survivors remained. But, the part that had him startling awake at night in a cold sweat even half a year later was the fact that the Council was only a fraction of the attack's casualties.

There was no sugarcoating the fact that Neia Thomas had fulfilled whatever sick-ass goal she'd intended. The Council had been decimated. The Northeastern Alliance as the world had known it was no more.

In its wake was what could generously be called a resistance; the cobbled together remnants of whoever was left after the Exodus. Thousands of former Pack members fled as quickly as possible, hoping to avoid the imminent raids. And the raids had come; it only took a single squadron of Neia's forces to overtake the Tower. The rest had spread out, attacking Pack strongholds across the mid-Northeast.

Those who could, fled south, west, whichever direction would be their quickest route across a state border. And those who couldn't ended up here or in one of the few other safehouses they'd managed to cobble together in the weeks following the attack. Right now, the Green Light Club was a

patchwork operation stocked full of the young and the elderly, families who otherwise couldn't escape the raids.

But there were fighters, too. Members from the Red, Dark, and Silver Moon Packs who'd braved the literal and urban wildernesses to come take a stand. And they'd desperately needed that firepower. In the ensuing chaos, many humans took the opportunity to turn against the perceived supernatural threat, creating gangs of their own. They patrolled the vast open woodlands between Pennsylvania and New York, wreaking general havoc against any supernatural citizens they could find.

They'd been a pain, making Bella and Dylan's missions to source supply lines even harder. The only silver lining was the headache they proved to be for Noah's and his mother's forces as well. And the threat they now presented to the human governments he supposed now that the governors had sided with the Thomas's.

And all of this happened right underneath our fucking noses, Xavier cursed himself. The plan to bring Noah in had been solid - they'd been so fucking close to a relatively peaceful revolution. But Noah had either overestimated his sway on his own army or underestimated his mother's ability to seed doubt and hate amongst his ranks.

Or both.

Ava did the song and dance, explaining Noah's motivations to anyone who would listen - Noah wasn't involved, he doesn't want war, he's only protecting his mother. Be that as it may, the bastard hadn't left the Bitch in White's side once since she'd plunged their society into chaos, and for what? All to take a seat of power that had already been freely given...justly earned.

As far as Xavier was concerned, Noah Thomas was ranked right at the top of his hit list, right next to the hag who bore him. And Noah knew it. He'd been relatively tight-lipped whenever Ava spoke with him, giving away little more than crumbs, mostly having to do with his own agenda or lack thereof.

But now, they knew exactly where Noah's forces would be. The Red Moon's prison. The pit, the dungeon, it went by a lot of nicknames, but it was where people went to be forgotten. And now it was where the Thomas' and the human governors were sending hostages. Because there was no doubt in Xavier's mind that's exactly what this was. They were smoking the resistance out in the most effective way they knew how, and if they didn't take immediate action to stop them, it was going to work.

"Have you heard back from Miller?" Xavier asked as he walked into their makeshift war room, one of the few spare meeting rooms that had yet to be converted into sleeping quarters for the hundreds of refugees housed within these walls. As deeply unamusing as this entire ordeal was, Xavier still inwardly chuckled every time he recalled Bella's mad dash to transform her prized sex club into a safe haven for the dozens of young families being funneled inside. The club's aesthetic made for an

admittedly cushy, if cramped stay. But the basement now looked like the treasured hoard of some perverted fiend.

"We haven't heard anything from him since last night," Liam announced. He sat looking over handwritten notes and logs, running through scenarios with Gabriel and Craig, two members from Silver Moon who they had entrusted to help train and lead squads of fighters. "His last communication came around midnight when he reached the Syracuse safehouse and linked up with the reconnaissance team there."

"He should have called in by now," Xavier muttered.

"Yeah. He should have." Liam looked as perturbed as Xavier felt. It was supposed to be a relatively low-risk mission; Dylan's team was supposed to join one from their closest neighboring safe house from which they would set out to investigate the Red Moon prison and report back what they'd found. In and out. No engagement.

"How long until we go in after them?" Xavier asked.

Liam threw a dubious look down at the ledgers in front of him and shook his head, "We'll need word from your father about how the negotiations with Buffalo are going. Otherwise, we aren't going to have enough fighters to protect the club if we leave."

Xavier huffed out a disgusted breath, "So only in case of an emergency."

"It's looking that way. Bella was right. Buffalo's been a real tight ass when it comes to offering aid."

"It must be nice being so far removed from the conflict as to ignore it altogether," Xavier spat.

A low growl sounded from the other side of the table as one of the Silver Moon Wolves snarled, "Fucking humans," underneath his breath.

"I know you're frustrated. We all are," Xavier offered. "But it's best to try not to think that way. We're already facing dissent from all sides. If we let grudges fester within our own ranks, this entire operation will self-destruct before our enemies ever get the chance to finish us off."

The male sniffs, looking less than convinced, but ultimately gives a single begrudging nod. Good. They had enough problems as it was, and the last thing they needed was to lose their grip on the rising tempers around them - they'd go from holding the line to creating yet another hate-filled gang to add to the pile of burning fuckery going on outside already.

The other, less visibly pissed-off male clears his throat, "What happens next? After the reconnaissance teams report back and we storm the dungeon?"

Xavier and Liam share a brief look, and in that single fleeting glance, they let each other know that the other was just as much at a loss as he was.

The club was full to bursting at the seams as it was, and if his father and Bella were unable to convince Buffalo to open their gates, there would be nowhere to put the prison's refugees.

Just then, the door to the meeting room bursts open as Bella Sutton storms her way inside. Unflappable as he'd known her to be, Xavier was certain that in the midst of a raging fire, the meticulous female would look utterly unsullied. So when he noted the slight dilation of her pupils and the elevated rise and fall of her chest as she breathed, Xavier was disturbed to realize that, for whatever reason, Sutton was panicked.

"Dylan's convoy," she stated. "They're under attack."