

Chapter 130

Revisionist History

"Tell me, who can remember what our most important weapon is?" Ava asked as she paced back and forth, addressing the class of eager youngsters.

Space was limited in the small room that had been set aside for their practice gym, but for their purposes, it worked just fine. Ava walked the length of the foam exercise mat and surveyed her class. Her class! It still floored her that Elodie had entrusted her, a perfect stranger, to instill their children with this vital information that very well may make a critical difference for them one day.

Her first few lessons, she'd been a nervous wreck, stumbling her way through a homemade handout that she'd spent hours meticulously drafting at the local library the day before. Thankfully, the kids were patient, used to as they were with meeting new people with a wide variety of personal baggage.

Now, two weeks and a handful of classes later, Miss Ava was far more comfortable with her students. But what was more important was that she felt that her students were now comfortable enough with the source material to move onto practical learning.

"Anyone?" She prompted. "I know it's been a while since we covered it on our first day, but remember, I told you it was the most important thing we'd be learning. Your most important weapon is...."

A hand shot up from one of the older girls in the group, and Ava pounced, "Yes, Raisa? What's your most important weapon?"

"My magic!" She quipped, prompting a smattering of giggles throughout the group.

Great, I'm being hazed by a fourteen-year-old.

But Ava just responded with a thoughtful nod. "Fair enough, I happen to know an incredibly powerful witch, and I certainly wouldn't want to mess with her!" She said. "But what if the person attacking you has magic, too? Then you're on an even playing field, and you'll need something else to give you an advantage."

A zing of satisfaction as she practically watched Raisa along with a few of the other magic users in the crowd come to the world-altering realization that magic might not get them out of everything.

"And what about those of us who can't use magic?" Ava continued. "Ricard and Dani face a lot of obstacles as humans, but that doesn't mean they're sitting ducks. And as a fae, Eliza can't use magic Earthside."

The more contemplative nods she drew from her little crowd, the more self-assured and confident in her own words Ava became. "And speaking of what happens if you lose your magic, Raisa? It's a frightening possibility, but it happens. I know it happened to me when I lost my ability to shift."

As one, the children gasped, especially the littlest of the bunch, Gio. "Nuh-uh!" He shouted, aghast. "Our Wolves are a part of us. You can't lose them!"

"Unfortunately, you can, Gio." Ava walked over to where he sat and crouched down until she was at his level, "I lost my ability to shift after my Wolf, Mia, got hurt really badly. It took a really long time, but I eventually healed enough to regain my shifting, but that's never a guarantee. I had to learn to fight in other ways when I didn't have Mia to guide me anymore."

"And that's why you're teaching us?" He asked, his small voice barely above a whisper.

She nodded and rose to her feet, "And that's also why, even though magic and Wolves are great and all, the most important weapon you can have is-

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"Your mind!" Piped up Eliza, Elodie's little girl.

"That's right, Eliza," Ava agreed. "Making wise choices can help keep you safe and out of danger, in the first place. But we all know that no matter how vigilant we are, sometimes the option just isn't in our hands. In those cases, your chances of survival go up exponentially when you're able to keep calm enough to think."

Ava pointed at a kid at random, Ricard, an extremely sweet human boy around the age of nine. "Quick, why is it important to be able to think?" She asked.

Ricard's eyes went wide as she put him on the spot, but he quickly recovered, "Because when you can think, you can plan!"

"That's right!" She said and pointed to another of her students, this time a pre-teen witch named Lauren, "Why is it important to plan?"

"Because plans help you gather important information and set goals?"

"Good job, Lauren. Remember, your plan doesn't have to be big or groundbreaking. It just has to keep you going."

The kids sat in determined silence as they took in her lesson until Gio once again raised his hand, "Miss Ava, have you ever had to make a plan?"

Every eye was on her as she chose her words carefully. She might be new to this hanging out with kids thing, but she knew damn well that there was a lot of her story that was decidedly unsuitable for young ears.

"I try to have something in mind to move toward every day," she said, finally. "There were many years when that something was survival, yes. And then there were other times when that something was healing. Now, it's to give you some tools to make sure that you know how to keep going, too."

Ava found herself blinking back the sting of tears before she embarrassed herself in front of the kids. "Alright, now that that very important information is out of the way," she yelled, forcing herself to sound peppy and upbeat. "This is a self- defense class! Who wants to learn how to fight?"

The small gym erupted into enthusiastic cheers as a dozen eager kids jumped to their feet.

Ava was positively knackered by the time she left Bright Light. Although the lessons were fairly simple, mostly perfecting defensive stances and blocking, wrangling that many kids for an hour was downright exhausting. Lunch was about the only thing on her mind when her phone rang. She looked down and saw Bren's name on the caller ID, "Hey, Bren! What's up? I thought you were studying on campus today."

"That's where I am," she said, her voice pitched low to appease the librarians but still filled with excitement. "I found something that I really want you to take a look at. Do you think you could meet me here?" Ava's stomach growled again, "They have a café, right?" "Yes?"

"See you in twenty minutes!"

As soon as Bren spotted Ava rounding the political science aisle, her friend sprang into motion, rushing her to the cozy little nook where she had a very large mound of very thick books piled high across the table around her. Ava's eyes flitted across the different tomes, and even just their titles were difficult to pronounce, much less read. Who knew that there was that much Latin in politics?

"I know that I didn't go to college or anything, but whenever I saw stuff like..." she gestured at the general pile of knowledge surrounding them. "This on tv, that someone somewhere had to be exaggerating."

Bren laughed and cleared a space for Ava to take a seat, "Sometimes it doesn't feel too far off, but most of these books aren't for my classes. They're for you?"

"For me?" Ava cast a dubious glance at the pile, "Oh, Bren. That's sweet of you to think of me, but I just don't know how much I'll really get out of... Democracy and the Cartelization of Political Parties." Bren shot her a look of her own and set that particular book aside, "That one actually is for one of my classes. But never mind that it's not about the books, it's about what's in them." "What did you find?"

"If Red Moon was anything like Silver Moon, a whole lot of stuff that contradicts pretty much everything I'd ever been taught to believe."

Bren pulled out another book written in what looked like German, "This is a book documenting world religions and cultural sub-groups at the time. Have you ever heard of Los Nietos, Miltonburg, or Loch Mac Tíre?"

Ava shook her head, and Bren continued on animatedly, "Neither had I! But they're all small independent cities, each nearly completely populated

by shapeshifters, spellcasters, and Wolves, respectively. All were operating in the 17 and 1800s. All in the US."

"But the Alliance was revolutionary, the first of its kind," Ava argued. "That's what I thought, too, but that's far from the truth. The Alliance isn't even the first multi-Pack cooperative in the US, much less elsewhere. But what made these particular cities stand out is that they were the cooperative, Ava."

Ava struggled to follow Bren's mental trail, but when it finally clicked, it made her jaw drop, "There was an all-species Alliance?"

"Named New Rhodes, but there were more, here and in a few other places around the world. Not a single one made it to the twentieth century. By the nineteen hundreds, they were all gone."

"But why?"

"I couldn't find an explanation anywhere, but I think it may have to do with the fall of New Rhodes."

"I thought there wasn't any information about how the cities fell."

"There isn't any specific information about how New Rhodes fell. But all records of it stop after 1875."

The breath chilled in Ava's lungs, "That's around the time the Alliance was founded."

Bren nodded, "And I'll give you one guess where in North America it was said to be located." Goddess...