

Chapter 131

In Sear Of New Rhodes

The topic of Bren's studies swirled around in Ava's head for days after their meeting in the Berkeley library ended. It was the sort of information that could mean nothing or everything depending on how just a few missing details panned out. If Bren's library books were correct, the Northeastern Alliance had been built on a lie. If her hunch was correct, one of the United States' largest free regions had been built on genocide.

As if there weren't enough of that in this country's history, Ava sighed.

But this was something that had always bothered her during her studies growing up. Red Moon's personal records had always been in tatters if they had ever been intact at all. But the fact that there was no definitive record about the specific events leading up to the Alliance's founding? It was the second-largest social institution in the United States! And what had made it into her lessons read more like a manifesto than a historical account.

What were the chances that out of all of the Packs and the Alliance, not a single institution could manage to maintain a reasonably complete historical record? It was beginning to sound less like an unfortunate coincidence and more like a convenient excuse.

In fact, the more she thought about it, the more some things made sense. How many times had she been reminded that the reason that their records had been lost and scraped together time and time again was all thanks to the ongoing conflict between their people and the many, many enemies who coveted their wealth and vision, their mutually beneficial partnership with the humans?

All of which conveniently consisted of every other species.

She'd grown up hearing how shifters couldn't be trusted because they were liars, witches because their magic bordered on unnatural, only slightly less dangerous than the fae. And humans were the most dangerous of all, but since they had the numbers, they were worth dealing with, and it was because of our civility and eye for innovation that the humans sided with us and helped aid in the foundation of the Alliance.

The issue was that there were still many unknowns. Why was New Rhodes expunged from recorded history? This wasn't just the Alliance and the Council covering up their usual misdeeds; if the Wolves partnered with the humans of the area to wipe out an entire society in order to build a new one up from its ashes, others had to have known about it!

What would anyone else have to gain by helping them cover it up? And how in the hell did the demise of one society lead to the disappearance of every other one of its kind in the entire world?

Come the next Saturday, Ava made her second trip to the Berkeley library that week, but this time, instead of making her way to the political science section, Ava tracked down the area dedicated to really, really old maps.

The way she figured, the founding fathers of the Alliance could track down and burn whatever documentation they pleased, especially if they had help wiping this entire culture off of the face of the planet.

What they couldn't do, however, was destroy the maps. At least, not everyone's maps. The founding of the Alliance took place during a time of exploration and expansion, so pretty much anyone who needed to get anywhere needed a map of their own. And Ava was willing to bet that at least one depicting the Northeast pre-New Rhodes' destruction had made its way west. And if it existed, she'd find it.

At least, that was the plan in theory. In reality, just like she'd figured, there were a lot, a lot, of maps, making it difficult enough to find ones matching the time period and specific region she was looking for. What she'd completely failed to take into consideration? The practice of hand drawing maps before the time of cameras, by memory, was decidedly not the most accurate art form.

Even when she did manage to scrounge up more than one map that met her ballpark criteria, a ballpark was exactly what it was. No two maps matched, and not a single one yielded anything close to what she was looking for. After about an hour of coming up empty, Ava was seriously questioning the point of this library's insistence on keeping partially accurate documents and whether or not she'd be doing them a favor by throwing them away, given how they were completely fucking useless.

"Ava, is that you?"

Her head whipped up, looking in the direction of the familiar voice to find Elodie smiling back at her, "Elodie!"

"I thought that was you," she said cheerily as she moved to take a seat at your study table. "It's nice to see you someplace else for a change. Do you come to the library often?"

"Oh no, not usually," she sighed. "You managed to catch me in the middle of a...project that I'm working on in my spare time."

"How fortuitous," Elodie beamed. "I don't come here too often either, but I'm filling in for someone."

"At the library?"

"Yes! Bright Light works pretty closely with this library. Every Saturday, we send a staff member over to assist the librarians. It was supposed to be Maurice's day, but he didn't show up."

Ava's eyebrows lowered in concern, "Oh no, do you think he's okay?"

"I'll be sure to check in on him, but he's young. And a Berkeley student himself. Let's just say this isn't the first time he's not managed to make it across campus in time for his volunteer shift."

Ava laughed, "Man, sometimes I wonder what I would have been like in college."

"I do that, too!" Elodie exclaimed. "I'm far past my university years, though. Not to mention, I lived in an entirely different dimension up until about a decade ago."

"Do you mind if I ask how you came to be Earthside?" Ava cautioned, not wanting to come off as rude but ridiculously curious all the same.

Fortunately, Elodie waved off her concern, "Oh, it's no secret. I was young...well, younger, dumb, and I risked it all for love."

"Eliza's father?" Ava asked, and the fae woman nodded her confirmation.
"Was he fae, too?"

"Yes, and Unseelie at that."

Ava gasped, "What happened?"

"Eliza happened. It isn't exactly illegal for Seelie and Unseelie to cross-procreate in Axis, but since the twain should never meet, it is highly frowned upon and considered an ill omen," she said. "Eliza would have to hide her heritage for the rest of her life. So, when Emil convinced me that hiring an Unseelie black market dealer to open a portal Earthside so that we could be together, I believed him."

"I take it by your tone that wasn't exactly the case?"

As you reach the final pages, remember that 000005s.org is your destination for the complete story. Share the joy of reading with others and spread the word. The next chapter is just a visit away!

Elodie barked out a harsh laugh, "Hardly. The bastard had used me for a ticket across the Divide. Apparently, even black-market magicians have a code of honor, and this one refused to risk opening a portal for less than the most desperate of causes."

"What was Emil running from?"

"What wasn't he running from? He had debts from here to sunset, and he never once mentioned it to me. He knocked me up, convinced me to cross the portal with him, and took off later that very same night. I don't want to upset you with the gory details, but my path to California was neither direct nor easy. It did inspire me to eventually found Bright Light, though."

Ava placed a hand over Elodie's and squeezed, "Believe me when I say that I can relate to the sentiment."

"Is this related to why you managed to miss out on your college experience?" She gently probed, which only seemed fair considering how Ava had just prodded her for her own origin story.

"I was in prison," she offered. "For a crime I didn't commit, mind you. But my Pack's judicial system wasn't much known for its diligence. Or rehabilitation...Or human rights, come to think of it."

"What do you think you would be doing if you hadn't been arrested?" Elodie asked, sincere concern clear in her sparkling topaz eyes.

Ava thought about it and ultimately shrugged. She still had no idea what she was good for out in the real world. "I honestly don't know. Full transparency, I'm still kind of new to this whole 'making decisions on my

own' thing. I went straight from my parents' house, to jail, to...other unfortunate circumstances. For now, I really like teaching the kids how to protect themselves. And in my free time, I guess I'll be here...trying to find any information about New Rhodes." Elodie's eternally pleasant face soured, "I haven't heard that name in a very long time."

Ava leaned in, probably invading her friend's personal space, but too excited to care, "Elodie, have you heard of New Rhodes?"

The fae woman chuckled and threw her a placating look, "I'm over two-hundred and fifty years old, Ava. I've heard of a lot of things."