

Chapter 142

Watch Them Scatter

First came the rat-a-tat-tat of machine guns. Then came the screams.

All around her, bodies flew into motion as she stood with her phone gripped numbly in her fist.

"Ava," she heard Noah's desperate voice faintly through the other end of the line as if through a fog. "Ava, what's happening? Talk to me! Has it already started, damn it?!"

Without a word in response, Ava ended the call with a flick of her thumb, far too thrown by just how quickly the tide had shifted today. Neia hadn't just crossed a line - she'd obliterated it and re-drawn a new one in her image.

Ava sprung into action, doing the first thing that came to mind as she ran to the nearest emergency call button and smashed it. The system was relatively shiny and new, having only been installed after her run-in with those sadistic bastards in room 701.

Now, flashing warning lights lit up every hallway in the building. The blaring alarm made it impossible for anyone to mistakenly ignore commotion happening on the ground floor, and every room and meeting room was now hearing a pre-recorded message alerting them of an impending emergency and to stay put until further notice.

"Quick thinking, Ava. We need to get this place evacuated now," Liam yelled through a crackling transponder. "Someone get to the garage: I want as many civilians loaded into vans as you can cram."

A tense voice sounded from the other end, "No can do, boss. The enemy came up through the garage." The voice cut out as another round of gunfire sounded. They held their breaths until the radio hissed back to life, "We're holding them off, but we got nowhere to go."

"Shit, we'll figure it out," Xavier snarled. "Right now, we need to cut off the stream of attackers on the bottom floor."

"Those portal things the witches did would sure come in fucking handy right about now," Dylan muttered. Xavier frowned, "Yeah, they would."

He made a quick call and returned, a grim look of determination on his face as, a few moments later, a blindingly bright void split the air in two, making Ava's jaw drop. Even if they'd seen it before, she didn't know how no one else was utterly floored when Marnie stepped through the gap in time and space.

"We've got a portal opened on every floor," the witch said. "You'd better make sure that your people are the only ones that make it through."

"Wanna do that neat lightning trick again? Save us all the trouble," Dylan quipped snidely.

Marnie sent him an equally derisive smirk, "Not unless you want this entire building reduced to a pile of smoldering rubble with you underneath it."

"Enough," Xavier snapped as he turned to Liam, Dylan, and herself. "Make sure there's someone covering the portals and get as many people through as you can. If you see a bastard in white, end them. We're through playing games."

Once again, the presence of the witches turned the tide of a potentially devastating conflict. There were casualties, of course. But it seemed to Ava that Neia's forces were more focused on seeding terror rather than outright eradication. When they fired their weapons, resistance soldiers were their primary targets.

And, Ava noticed, just like reports from the ambush at the prison, their army seemed to be suspiciously short on the spellcasters that had previously been a major contributor to Neia's army. Now, it was a majority of humans, Weres, and shifters, most of which defaulted to using human weapons.

Ava ducked into a room to find a family cowering inside, clutching one another against the far wall of the room as she walked in. Hands raised in a sign of peace, she slowly crept forward.

"I'm with the resistance! I'm not going to hurt you," she softly placated. "If you'll follow me, I have a way to get you to safety."

A little boy among them began to cry. Loudly. "I don't want to go out there! I don't want to go out there!"

Ava hurried to hush him, but it was already too late. The door behind her burst open as a couple of enemy combatants rushed in, guns pointed straight at her.

"Where's the portal?" One demanded. "Take us to the witch or die!"

The family began to scream, and Ava took the small distraction as her opening, rushing them while they debated where to start shooting. She

grabbed one gun and pushed it up as the shooter squeezed the trigger, sending a line of bullets pelting across the ceiling. She used her momentum to send the assailant crashing to the ground, where she quickly silenced them with two sharp blows to their temple.

Behind her, the patriarch of the civilian family had also taken up arms, shifting into a Wolfman and sending the remaining soldier face-first into the far wall with a powerful backhand before he could get a shot off. It wasn't until the gun fell limply from the soldier's hand and onto the floor that a loud POP ricocheted through the room and a sudden punch of pain sent Ava to her knees.

"Goddess!" Someone cried, and a pair of hands gingerly grasped her shoulders. Ava waved them off and, gritting her teeth, hefted herself to her feet.

"The portal," she panted. "We need...to hurry."

Without waiting to see if they got their shit together, Ava made her way through the door, stopping only to make sure that the coast was clear before hoofing it down the hall, one hand clamped tightly to her side. She didn't dare look down, or else she'd probably lose her nerve, so she kept going.

When she came to the darkened meeting room where that floor's portal was hidden, she ushered the family along and through the other side,

barely registering their muttered thanks as they passed. When the resident witch holding the portal open took a look at her and gulped, "Uh-oh," though, that's when Ava finally glanced down to see the bloody, gaping mess that was somewhere where she thought maybe her appendix was supposed to be.

And then and there, just as she'd feared would happen, Ava fainted.

"We come as our ancestors underneath the light of the next Blue Moon."

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That evening, televisions across the United States, no matter the local creed or contempt, were all tuned in to the same eerie display. It was practically impossible to miss, given the fact that it was being broadcasted across every major and minor news network.

"We come as our ancestors underneath the light of the next Blue Moon."

Aiden Davis sat with a comforting arm around his shivering partner, Bren, as he used every ounce of his years of military training to keep from doing the same as he watched the crowd of bloodied and soot-covered militia stumble as one through the streets of Rochester, New York.

"We come as our ancestors underneath the light of the next Blue Moon."

Overhead helicopter footage played over and over of the terrorists, dressed in the telltale white of Neia Thomas' army, shuffling out of the burnt-out husk of the club that they had presumably just finished raiding. He knew from his contacts there that the resistance had managed to retreat to their converted prison stronghold with only minor casualties, but he knew that the rest of the world wasn't privy to this information.

To most everyone else in the country, they were witnessing the baffling and terrifying aftermath of a very public act of war. But then again, this display wasn't for the rest of the country to understand. No, the horde of mindless zombies shambling through the city with self-inflicted claw marks slashed across their faces, chanting as one, was a message meant for one person and one person alone.

"We come as our ancestors underneath the light of the next Blue Moon."

And Aiden had no doubt that Noah Thomas had received it.

"What does this mean, Aiden?" Bren whispered.

"It's the final challenge," he answered morosely. "One way or the other, by this time next month, this war will be over."