

Chapter 145

Into The Woods

Ava and the Alphas gaped as the two embraced. One female, one woman. One Wolf, the other a human witch. And yet, somehow, they claimed to be sisters. It wasn't just a turn of phrase or empty words, either. Now that the idea had been spoken, Ava saw the glimmers of recognition solidify into irrefutable shared features between the two.

The piercing emerald green of their eyes, the deeply rich, almost black of their hair, even the shapes of their noses and their general bearings were the same.

"You're sisters?" Ava asked.

"You're Alpha?" Liam asked even louder.

Emmaline cocked her head to the side in the same bold challenge that Marnie was good for adopting pretty much anytime she found herself speaking with any Wolven male. Ava was beginning to realize that the habit was probably born of more than simply dealing with male bravado.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Emmaline asked, her supple voice thick with saccharine innocence. "Because I'm a female?"

Liam hesitated, and she smirked rakishly. "Oh, don't balk now," she goaded. "Can't just back out of what you said, just because it's neither accurate nor particularly unique."

"Is this why Grave Crown all but disappeared and abandoned their oaths to the Alliance?" Xavier spat. "All because you didn't want to admit that your Alpha is a girl?"

Ava bit back her knee-jerk response to get offended at Xavier's tone, simply because his words, at least, were valid. Would the knowledge that Grave Crown had defaulted their lineage to a female have shaken a lot of feathers on the Council? Oh absolutely, it would have wreaked pandemonium. After all, there had never been a female Alpha to lead an Alliance Pack, and that wasn't for lack of available applicants.

If somehow, Xavier had been the one to die young instead of his sister, Sophia still wouldn't have been the next in line to lead Red Moon. The

title would have gone to the next available male in the Alpha line, in Red Moon's case, Xavier's cousin Garrett.

If no other eligible male were available from the reigning line, the honor would go to some other sodding male with a high percentage of Alpha blood. Even though this practice had only needed to be implemented a few times since the Alliance's founding, Ava knew that a ledger of suitable bloodlines was kept in the Alliance records for just such a case.

Even so, the backlash of such a decision didn't warrant Grave Crown's abandonment of their station. In fact, such a stance against the overbearing rules impressed upon them by the Council could have been the spark the Alliance had so desperately needed to finally invoke some kind of change, long before they'd come to this desperate point.

Therefore, Ava couldn't bring herself to fault Xavier his ire. But the Grave Crown Alpha only smiled in the face of his accusation.

"You think that we exited the fold because we were wary of informing the Council that Grave Crown was being led by a female?" She scoffed. "No, we were wary of informing you bigoted bastards that Grave Crown is being led by a witch."

"A hybrid," Liam muttered, almost to himself. Even now, much later, as they sat over steaming cups of tea, the initial shock still hadn't quite worn off.

Ava didn't blame him; this was all...a lot to take in. Not only had they just become privy to Grave Crown's greatest secret, but they had also somehow stumbled into as yet unearthed depths of the supernatural world. Hybrids. Crossbreeds. The knowledge managed to simultaneously put so much into perspective while completely setting so many other things they'd thought they'd understood aflame.

"For lack of a better term," Emmaline offered as she took a sip of her tea. "I suppose that's on me, though. As the first recorded of my kind, it would fall on me to figure out a proper name, then, wouldn't it?" "My money's still on Lycan," Marnie smirked, causing Emmaline to roll her eyes. "Granted, it works better on paper than aloud, but it's a gem."

"I'm sorry, but can we get back to how all of this is possible?" Dylan demanded. "How you're possible?"

"Agreed," Xavier said. "Novelty aside, this secret has caused a rift between our people that has had devastating consequences. It's in all of our best interests to put all of our cards on the table and start fresh."

Emmaline set her teacup down and sat back in her chair imperiously. "It may surprise you to learn that I actually agree. The situations leading to and directly following the collapse of the Alliance were unprecedented, at least for us. When the Council decided to meet with the Fae, It became clear that we'd spent too much time in the shadows. The paradigm was beginning to shift, and we were at risk of missing out."

"Then why didn't you act sooner?" Liam demanded.

"Due to my...mixed heritage, Grave Crown is governed by forces older and greater than the Alliance. It's one of the main reasons we chose to go into reclusion in the first place," she finally said, her gaze coming to rest on Ava. "But it's also due to recent efforts to turn the tide of the Alliance that the Powers That Be, have deemed it time to come out of hiding. You've proven yourself more...receptive to change."

"So, you were there at the meeting," Xavier pushed, and Emmaline nodded.

"In a sense," she acquiesced and gestured toward Marnie. "And we've been present ever since."

"You're the reason why the witches came to help when I called for backup during the prison ambush?" Ava asked.

"That was a favor to a friend," Marnie corrected. "She's the reason why we stayed."

"The prison restoration...."

"Guarding your new safehouse, making sure your refugees made it out of the old one alive...yes, all of our involvement thus far has been on Emmaline's orders."

"Because the 'Powers That Be' gave you the go-ahead?" Liam countered; his eyes narrowed.

Emmaline met his hard gaze with an unphased grin, "Blessed be."

"And are we allowed to know who these Powers That Be are?" Ava asked.

Emmaline studied her for a beat, her vivid eyes giving her the sense that she saw beyond Ava in much the same way Marnie often did. "First," the Werewitch finally stated. "Tell me why you're here." "We're looking to create a new beginning," Ava answered. "A new society built on the cooperation of all supernatural species."

"Like New Rhodes?" Emmaline asked, giving her a small, knowing smile.

"Y-yes. Something like that," Ava gasped. "You know about New Rhodes?"

"And Isla de las Estrellas, and Minoa, and dozens of other great civilizations scattered across the globe throughout the sands of time,"

Emmaline laughed. "Each one founded on the belief that the supernatural community is stronger together than we ever have been apart."

"And yet, none have survived," Ava sighed.

"That, my friend, is where you are mistaken," the Grave Crown Alpha countered. "As with all great societies, not all have managed to stand the test of time, but those that have are still around today. Just, hidden from view and safe from human interference."

Ava's brow furrowed, and she wasn't the only one. "By these Powers again, right?" Dylan asked.

"The Consortium," Marnie corrected him. "The global governance for all spellcasters. It's an institution that's been around for a Millenia since the Axis Wars."

"After the sacking of New Rhodes, a disturbing trend arose when different factions of supernatural species realized that there was opportunity to be had in selling one another out," Emmaline continued. "The rest of the pan-supernatural communities across North America were quickly wiped out. When the trend spread across the Atlantic, the Consortium stepped in."

"They hid the remaining ones," Ava concluded.

"And soon, the world forgot about them altogether," Emmaline agreed.

Xavier shook his head in amazement, "So there are just these utopias out in the world just thriving?"

Emmaline shrugged, "Not necessarily. The Consortium doesn't oversee these cities. It just cloaked them. As I said, the landscape of these societies has changed over the last couple hundred years the same as any other. They've just been shielded from the particular brand of greedy interference that's plagued North America."

"If you knew that this was possible, then why hasn't Grave Crown joined them?" Liam asked.

Emmaline tossed her hands in a duh motion. "If my father hadn't unexpectedly mated with a witch, much less one who was a current member of the Consortium, Grave Crown would have no association with any of this in the first place." "Your mother is a member of the governing body of all witches?" Liam challenged.

Emmaline gestured to Marnie, "Our mother, yes."

Ava sent her secretive friend a look, but Marnie only shrugged. "I told you the Prescott's go way back."