

Chapter 19

Avoiding Him

Xavier's mad dash to the hospital was a blur of phone calls and righteous fury. He cursed Bella for not taking better of the girl, despite her direct orders to keep an eye out for Ava.

He queued up his contact list via the large Bluetooth enabled screen in his car. He nearly hit the button to call Lance, but quickly dismissed that option. After his showing last month, it was best if the brutish male stayed as far away from Ava as possible.

Not to mention how handsy he'd gotten with the human waitress, who barely looked old enough to be legally serving alcohol. Xavier knew things went down in his club between consenting adults, and sometimes those things were better enjoyed when it looked as if one or more of the involved adults were less than willing.

He drew a line at blatant assault, however. Even if Xavier felt the situation hadn't escalated to a point that called for a public reprimand, it still needed to be addressed. Besides, the idiot was showing up with coke nose more often than not, these days. Xavier considered his future with the Red Moon Pack officially under consideration. Xavier continued to scroll until he found the exact person he needed right now. The phone didn't ring for more than a few seconds before the call connected. "Jack," Xavier said.

"Ya, boss!" His Gamma was as cool as ever, ready to report to the call of duty, and as trustworthy as they came. He was also the best damn healer The Red Moon Pack had seen in generations.

Xavier wanted Ava better, and he wanted it done now. Years of working alongside the Gamma assured him that Jack was the best man for the job.

"I need you to grab some of the guys - a three-man team should do, for now. Gather the list of items I give to you and report to Rochester General."

"Aye, aye, Captain!"

Xavier rattled off a list of supplies Ava would most likely need during her recovery. He instructed Jack to pick Ava up a few changes of clothing and a kit of toiletries because the stuff they provided at the hospital were about as delicate as battery acid.

At the last moment, he added an order of the spicy chicken noodle soup Ava used to order every time they came into the city for Pack meetings.

He hung up the call and sped his way to the hospital, easily finding her room thanks to the detailed text he requested from Bella, updating him on Ava's status. He tried to ignore the simmering resentment he felt toward the female for failing to notify him as soon as she'd found Ava passed out on the floor of his club.

He pushed into the dimly lit room to find Ava asleep on her cot. He walked up to the bed and studied her sleeping form. She slept with on her side with her knees pulled up to her chest and her hands tucked under cheek. She had a slight, content smile edging at the corners of her lips.

Ava looked much more similar to the girl he'd grown up with while she slept, than she did while she was awake. Asleep, she seemed more relaxed, completely devoid of the baggage that managed to haunt their every interaction.

There had been a time when she looked like that all the time. She would curl up just like she did now, like a puppy, and he'd poke fun at her for it. She'd open an eye and swat his arm before falling back to sleep almost instantly. She'd always had the uncanny knack for falling asleep almost anywhere, at any time, and when Ava was out, she was basically useless thereafter. He used to tease her about that, too.

He frowned at the newly resurfaced memory; Xavier had used to love teasing Ava, and she'd enjoyed being teased by him. That really wasn't the case anymore, was it?

Somewhere along the line, that sweet girl who'd taken a quiet boy's hand and promised to be his friend for the rest of forever, had become lost to him. Now, she was locked behind an impenetrable fortress forged in the inky black flame of their anger and regret.

The thought made him feel lonely and filled him with indignant fury.

Reaching out, he brushed a finger along her temple where a small white scar was visible through her curtain of dark red hair. Now, that Xavier didn't recall from their shared childhood. When he bent to look more closely, he noticed for the first time that the small scar wasn't alone; Ava's hands and neck were also dotted with new scars.

He lightly ran the pad of his thumb across a tiny divot on her jaw when her eyes suddenly snapped open.

Confusion quickly turned to alarm when Ava fully realized who was standing above her.

Ava felt like jumping out her skin when she awoke to find Xavier looming over him, watching her while she slept, unconscious and vulnerable. She seriously considered diving from the bed to put some distance between them, but the tug of her freshly changed IV stopped her.

"What are you doing here?" She asked, while sitting up in the bed. She put her finger on her call button, ready to have Rochester General's finest descend on her room at a moment's notice. "You sound awful. What happened?" He demanded.

Ava rolled her eyes at his presumptuous attitude, "Just a sore throat. Nothing a cup of tea wouldn't fix."

Xavier moved closer to the bed and raised a hand to push aside the bangs hiding the scar on her forehead. "Where did this come from? The other's, too?"

The sides of Ava's mouth drew down in a frown as she retreated from his touch, "Nothing."

Ava wanted no part of this line of questioning. She was supposed to accept that, out of the clear blue, Xavier was suddenly...what? **Worried** about her? How he could force her into emotionally taxing situations one day and presume to care for her physical well-being the next was beyond her.

But that was just it, wasn't it? Where was the fun in a broken toy? Xavier had to keep her in tip top shape so that she'd be nice and ready to receive the next volley of his mental battle games.

Careful not to disturb her IV, Ava slid out of her hospital bed on the side furthest away from Xavier. Willfully ignoring the fact that she'd just deliberately put space and an obstacle between them, he made his way around the bed. "Did you get those scars from the dungeon, Ava? Who gave them to you? What the hell happened down there?"

Ava bulked, "As if you care!" She sneered, "You- "

He cupped her head in his hands and pressed his lips to hers.

Ava's eyes widened in shock. She'd known Xavier to be a self-serving prick, but his sudden, uninvited imposition of himself on her yet again, made her see red.

She was in a hospital room, for goddess' sake!

Ava wrenched herself from the kiss, pulled a hand back and smacked it across Xavier's face hard enough to make his head whip to the side.

He pulled back and, somehow, it was disbelief written across his face. At what she'd just done.

That same nasty little urge from last night rose up in her again. It told Ava to play with Xavier's emotions just as hard as he liked to play with hers. Ava smiled sweetly at her tyrant, "I told you before, Mr. Michaels. You need to pay first."

He rolled his eyes and lifted both arms to trap her against the wall. He leaned back in for another kiss just as the hospital room's door burst open.

In came another male, this one brunette with a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. He stopped dead in his tracks as he took in their compromising position. "My bad! Wasn't expecting that. I can totally come back later if you want?" Ava's face burned in embarrassment, but Xavier just righted himself and snapped back into Alpha mode.

"She's in need of a check-up. Give her the full rundown." He ordered.

The male fully entered the room, eyes widening in aghast recognition as he took in Ava's face for the first time.

"A-aren't you..."

To say the least, the feeling was mutual because Ava recognized the male, as well. She didn't recall his name, but he'd been an accomplished healer among the Pack, even three years ago.

Ava ducked her head to avoid the intense scrutiny. Her body buzzed anxiously. The last thing she needed was to run into a Pack member.

She didn't know what she'd do if she came face-to-face with one of the faces who haunted her nightmares, tormenting her before sentencing her life away.

Jack turned to Xavier, mouth agape, "Is that- "

Xavier took the Gamma by the arm and pulled him out into the hallway.

"Yes, that's Ava, and yes it's complicated. We can gab later - right now, I need you to focus on doing your job."

Jack sobered, his expressive face settling into a small frown. "Are you sure about this, Xavier?"

A muscle in Xavier's jaw twitched, "There's nothing to be sure about. And this stays between us, understood? All of it."

Slowly, Jack nodded, "Of course. But..." He pointed to the door, "there's a powder keg in there, Xav. If the Pack finds out their most notorious murderer is walking free, it would be an all-out shitstorm. An end to all of our hard-won peace." Xavier glowered and moved to go back into the

room. Jack threw out a hand, catching Xavier by the arm and pulling him back. His friend's eyes were earnest and tainted with worry.

"And, if they find out you're in love with her, Xavier...that could be the end of *you*."