

Chapter 36

Where Is She?

Xavier sped down the highway on his way back to the Green Light Club. He had only just touched down after his private redeye flight had ferried him upstate in record time. It was nearly four in the morning, but the urgency twisting his gut wouldn't settle for waiting for a proper morning flight.

His entire trip to New York, Xavier had been plagued with a low-level feeling of anxiety that refused to go away. He was in the middle of important talks, the kind that held the authority to keep the American Northeast a peaceful region or bring about war between his kind and the humans.

The Alliance, unscrupulous as it was, was also the only entity actively working to keep the systematic subjugation that had already festered across so much of the United States, as well as the world at large, out of the Alliance territories. As the reigning Alpha of the Red Moon Pack, his

presence wasn't only mandatory at these conferences, it was essential. He was expected to meet with the president of the United States in approximately four hours.

But, instead, here Xavier was across the state, racing toward the family pet project, all based on a feeling.

Or was it more than just a feeling? Xavier couldn't be sure. He had been fighting against his mating bond ever since it had spung up on them all of those weeks ago. If he were honest with himself - which he rarely ever seemed to be - he'd been trapped in a constant cycle of suppressing his emotions and urges, only for Xavier to detonate in an excessive show of force. More often than not, Ava had ended up being the unfortunate recipient of these episodes, falling prey to either his lust or ire - whichever primal urge won out that time.

By the time it had been time for him to leave town, Xavier had been relieved for both Ava's wellbeing, as well as his own. He had needed as much of a break from her as she did from him.

But the decision had felt wrong ever since his plane had touched down in New York, and the feeling had only grown since then.

Xavier had meant to assuage his itching curiosity when he'd placed that call to Bella under the guise of checking in on the club. Maybe if he had a verbal confirmation that Ava was safe and sound, the nagging anxiety

would finally go away. Instead, the madame had informed him that Ava was seeing someone. A stranger, no less. That had been the final straw. Even Alex, who had been stubbornly giving him the cold shoulder recently, had urged him to get his ass back home. Xavier pulled into the club, tossing his keys to the valet without a word and quickly made his way to the second floor, where Bella's court resided. He pounded on the door and waited, waited, waited for a reply. When he pounded again - even louder this time - a few doors down the corridor opened and groggy heads popped out, wondering what the fuck was happening.

Xavier only had to shake his head once, and the curious onlookers' eyes went wide before each of them beat a hasty retreat. This didn't make him feel any better, though. Clearly, most of the workers should have been in bed at this hour. He knew for a fact that Ava hadn't had any appointments scheduled for tonight and should have been among those sleeping.

Then where the hell is she?

Xavier didn't give it a second thought before he reared back and slammed his boot into the door. Shards of wood tore from the doorjamb where the lock latch had been forced straight through to the other side. The solid wood door flew open, banging off of the wall behind it with so much force that the crystal handle pierced the wall behind it and stayed there.

"Fucking hell." He muttered as he looked around the empty room. Signs of Ava were everywhere, from her unmade bed to her scent that was still strong, unmuddled by the constant barrage of smells that permeated the

club on a regular basis. Ava had been here very recently. But she wasn't here now.

Reaching into his pocket, Xavier pulled out his phone and dialed his head of security. "I need you to station someone at every exit and start a grid patrol. And get someone to check the closed-circuit footage and get back to me with whatever they find asap." Xavier's voice felt like granite leaving his throat. His hand tightened on the phone, "If Davis has run again, I want her found now."

Xavier stalked into the barren room, scoping around for clues that might lead him to wherever Ava may have gone. He reminded himself to keep things clinical. It wouldn't do for Ava to come back to a wrecked room if this all turned out to be some sort of misunderstanding. But if she'd taken off again...

He stalked around the room, especially careful to leave everything exactly how he'd found it. All the while suppressing his need to lash out at the thought of Ava defying him again. Leaving him again.

He hadn't found anything out of the ordinary in the room. There weren't very many clothes tucked away in the dressers, and if this had been anyone other than Ava, he'd find that suspicious. Her toothbrush and toiletries were all accounted for, and he'd been surprised to find an impressive collection of shoes stashed under the bed.

Her bedroom was a dead end. Moving to the hallway, Xavier met a group of his men, ready to assist him in searching this entire building, room by room, if need be.

"Ridge, Holloway, and Hicks, you start from the basement up. Gage, Jones, and I will be taking the top floor down. I expect you to be efficient, but I want you to keep it quiet. I don't want it getting out what or who we're looking for." He waited for their nods of agreement before continuing, "I've texted you a list of the rooms to skip. I'll be checking the booked suites myself."

As he'd expected, his suite on the ninth floor had been clear, but when Xavier said 'no stone left unturned' he meant it. After going room-by-room, they soon cleared the eighth floor, as well. Almost immediately after setting foot in the seventh-floor corridor, however, Alex's hackles rose.

"Xavier."

He nodded a greeting toward Dylan who'd just come through the hall entrance behind them. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for Ava. No offense to your fine establishment, my man, but she's the most interesting to happen to this place in ages."

Xavier snarled, rounding on his friend, "Why? What do you want with her?"

Dylan looked exaggeratedly from side to side, "I mean...have you seen the mouth on that one?"

Xavier was stepping forward before he'd even fully processed what the fool had said. Dylan took a quick step back and raised his hands to tell Xavier to cool off, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! I was just kidding, man." He shrugged. "Mostly." Xavier abruptly turned on his heel and paced away down the hall, cracking his knuckles to relieve the pressure that formed when they were on the brink of shifting into claws.

"Look, Ava's great crack. I like spending time with her." Dylan caught up to him and continued, a smile creeping onto his face, "Whip smart, that one. And funny! The sort who'll crack jokes throughout a movie ten times better than anyone in Hollywood could write, you know?"

Xavier shifted his neck from left to right, only incrementally appeased when his vertebrae popped, releasing more of his growing tension. Cause yeah, he did know. Ava could outwit just about anyone back in the day, and he was glad that it seemed she hadn't lost that part of herself.

He told himself that it didn't matter, she'd never share that part of herself with him again. Apparently, that was reserved for Dylan now. The fucker.

"The Alpha Prince of Dark Wood strikes again, right?" Xavier scoffed.

Dylan's eyes narrowed, "Careful now. You might start sounding like you're staking a claim."

Xavier leveled him with a dire stare, "Just stay away from her."

Dylan smiled his infuriating carefree smirk. The laissez faire bastard always had a way of making you feel like he had the secrets to the world that no one else was privy to. "Sure, I'm an accommodating man." He ignored Xavier's tense stature and swung an arm around his shoulders, "Just tell me flat out that you like her - and I mean *like her, like her*, and I'd be happy to back off!"

Xavier stopped and shrugged Dylan's arm off his shoulders hard. He made sure to meet the cocky bastard straight in the eye without blinking, "She's mine. That's all you need to know."

One of Dylan's eyebrows peaked in interest. He opened his mouth the needle Xavier, but an ice-cold chill shot through Xavier's veins, making him shudder. He held up a hand, cutting Dylan short. For all of his lackadaisical attitude, Dylan wasn't stupid. He immediately sensed the change in Xavier's demeanor and took it for the sign it was.

"What are you feeling?" He asked in a low tone, not wanting to break Xavier's concentration.

Xavier didn't answer, but slowly followed his feeling to the source. He turned his head to the door behind him where the cold, panicked feeling felt strongest. Room 701 was the originating point. Ava was in there.