

## Chapter 44

### Plead For Your Enemy?

"I'm coming with you," Ava said firmly. "I want you to take me to him."

Madison bucked in the guard's grasp, "Haven't you already made me look bad enough? All you do is make things worse everywhere you set foot."

The cocktail waitress was gearing up for another tirade but stopped dead in her tracks when Ava shot her a chilly glare. "You need to stop talking, Madison." She muttered, "Quite while you're behind."

Ava might have felt compelled to intervene on the other girl's behalf when it came to Xavier, because she knew just how...unhinged Xavier could be.

No matter what the motivations were behind his twisted recent sense of affection towards her, Ava knew that there was no way he was going to let Madison get away with what had gone down the other night - if for no

other reason than the simple fact that making Ava's life a living nightmare was his job, and his job alone.

But there was no mistake in Ava's mind when it came to the fuming girl before her - Madison was dangerous, both to Ava and to herself. This was no water under the bridge situation. Ava understood exactly what Madison had done to her, the details be damned. And she had no intention of turning the other cheek. There would be no forgiving or forgetting.

If Ava had her way, Madison would be out here tonight. She just had to make sure that the deed was done above board.

Ava turned her attention to the guards holding Madison. She lifted her chin, ready to fight them on allowing her to accompany them to Xavier's office. To her surprise, they only nodded politely, and gestured for her to take the lead. "T-thank you," she said stiltedly, taken further aback when the males gave her a slight deferential bow.

Unsure of how she should respond in turn - should she bow back? - she spun and marched out of the door just to keep from saying 'thank you' again, afraid of causing them becoming stuck in a perpetual loop of politeness. As she led the group down the hall, Ava heard one of the guards behind her place a call, "Alpha Michaels, we're on our way. Yes. And Ava Davis is on her way up, as well. Of course, Alpha."

"Everything okay?" She threw nervously over her shoulder at the males, "I'm not causing any issues for you by insisting I coming along, am I?"

They all ignored Madison's sarcastic snort as the guard gave Ava a small smile, "Of course not, Miss Davis. Just following orders."

Ava turned back around, not certain of what she should make of that statement? What orders were they following?

They took Xavier's private elevator up to the ninth floor where they emptied directly into his suite's sitting room, which acted as a waiting area for his office, and a general stopgap before leading to his private chambers. "We will wait here. Alpha Michaels would like you to go in first, Miss Davis." The guard said.

She nodded and slowly made her way to black frosted French doors that made up the entrance to Xavier's office. Opening a door, she stepped inside finding Xavier at his desk. He leaned back in his chair as she entered, but didn't speak, waiting for her to make the first move.

This was, of course, the first time since they'd seen one another since he'd kissed her earlier that morning. Since Ava had let him kiss her and kissed him back. Goddess, had that only been today? Her days here seemed so ridiculously long, even as they flew by.

After unleashing the weight of years' worth of vitriol on Xavier, only to later reject his advances, she had no idea how he'd receive her at this point. Which Xavier was this one sitting before her, now, dressed in an all-black suite in his black and bronze office, looking for all the world like the king of hell himself.

Would it forever be a tossup between the passionate male who looked at her and touched her like her mate should, eliciting the most tantalizing responses from her body, in turn? Or the cold, conflicted male who couldn't come to terms with his own demons, and so retaliated by tormenting her, the perceived source of his every frustration?

"I take you can guess why I'm here," said softly.

Xavier rose from his large leather seat and made his way around to stop in front of where Ava stood in front of the desk. He leaned casually into the massive solid wood frame and tucked his hands into the pockets of his suit trousers. "I honestly can't fathom why you would be here, Ava?" He nodded at the door, "For Madison?"

Ava took a breath and nodded, "Yes. For Madison."

Xavier scowled deeply, "Why would you do that? Plead mercy for someone who could do something like she did?"

He pushed up from the desk and stepped forward, just barely pushing the limits of crowding Ava's space, "She is the enemy, Ava. Someone like her doesn't deserve your mercy. Or mine."

Ava frowned back at him, "Is that what you tell yourself about me, Xavier? Every time you forget yourself and see me for who I really am?"

She saw his tongue swipe across his teeth from behind his studiously closed lips. His hazel eyes flared with that instinctive temper of his before he reigned it in. He was calm when he finally spoke, "I reserve my judgement, but I'm choosing to believe that this isn't the same. She," he pointed at the door. "Is nothing like you."

Ava rolled her eyes, "Aren't you tired of declaring enemies, Xavier? This path you've chosen for yourself - for us - is exhausting."

He paced away - another effort to keep himself in check. At least she couldn't say he wasn't trying.

Xavier paced back to his desk and leaned on it with both hands, letting out a long breath through his nose, "This is my club, Ava. What I say goes."

"Who are you trying to convince. Me or yourself?" Ava said without thinking, before putting the brakes on her own rising irritation. She let out an impatient huff, "Look, Madison is a problem, not the problem. If you

really need to punish someone, the men who hurt me are still out there somewhere."

Xavier barked out a mirthless laugh, "I really must be a sorry excuse for a mate if you truly believe those fuckers are still breathing.

That brought Ava up short. The implications behind his muttered admission made her shudder. But she couldn't ignore the sick sense of relief that instantly dissolved an invisible weight she hadn't been aware she'd been carrying since she awoke. Ava couldn't advocate for violence in good conscience, but she also wouldn't pretend that she wasn't glad that those men were no longer out there, able to hurt anyone ever again.

Ava licked her lips, choosing her next words carefully, "Good." Xavier raised his head, looking at her with stark amazement at the vehemence behind the word. "Then let this be done, Xavier. Why drag this on?"

He met her eyes, a world of unspoken sentiments giving the look weight, "You know why."

Ava shook her head in bewilderment, "Because of me?" She scoffed, "Then let it go. I don't want it."

He only kept staring at her as if he wanted to say something, but he never did. Ava threw up her arms, "If you're so concerned about me, then actually think about me for once! I'm the one who has to live here.

Whatever you do to her will reflect back on me, and I've lived long enough with a target on my back."

They were at a stalemate, neither side willing to give an inch. The profound realignment of their relationship wasn't lost on Ava. A month ago, she wouldn't have had the nerve to stand in Xavier's territory and stare him down, and she didn't believe that he'd have had the self-control to allow her to voice her opinions and actually listen.

"Whether you understand it or not," she began slowly. "I'm not asking for your mercy on Madison's behalf. Madison could rot, for all I care. But you can't be the one to pull the trigger."

His eyebrows drew down, "What are you saying?"

Ava swallowed. She didn't know what she was saying - she didn't have the words to voice the draw within her that told her that this opportunity was hers to take, to help usher Xavier off of the precipice he was trailing along.

Whatever it was, the voice didn't feel like her own. Whether it was an echo of the dream she'd had of Sophia and Layla, or the urging of her own mating bond, she couldn't ignore it. For as much pain as he'd caused her over the years, it was clear that Xavier was lost.

She didn't know why it was up to her to pull him back from the brink. It wasn't fair. She had her own healing to do, and most of it stemmed from him, in the first place. Even so, she felt compelled to guide him away from the darkness he carried, wherever she could. Dammit.

Ava sighed, "I don't know how to get through to you. You can't relate to anyone but yourself, Xavier."

He frowned, "And why is that?"

She shrugged angrily, "Because you'll never know what it's like to be in someone like Madison's shoes. Or mine. You get off on controlling people, but you'll never know what it's like to have any say in your own life." Finally, she elicited a reaction from Xavier. Only, she didn't expect the turbulent storm that suddenly raged behind his eyes.