

Chapter 95

Moving Forward

Ava didn't want to think about how she'd had Aiden stop by Marnie's for one final favor of a piping hot shower to wash the scent of her mate off of her skin before she made her way back to her boyfriend's home. It felt too much like a secret. She also didn't want to examine too closely how she'd come to find herself sneaking back into the bedroom she shared with Noah, not to mention the fact that even after she'd been gone for hours in the dead of night, the light in his office was still on, and the sounds of his typing were still the only sounds in the large, lonely house. It just felt sad.

No, life in the lake house was certainly not the same candy-coated dream it had been the day before. As it always did, reality had wormed its way into the cracks in the foundation of her perceived happy home and settled in like a giant, ugly earworm.

And while it was true that she didn't have the full picture at her disposal, the information Xavier had shared with her just made too much damn

sense for her to not wonder if she'd made yet another mistake by not telling Xavier what she knew about Noah and his crusade against the Council.

Ava sat alone in the soft, cushy bed and the wonderful male who'd made it for her...and she contemplated her brother's offer of escape. She could accept that Noah's path wasn't for her - despite the rift between herself and the world she'd been raised in, she knew enough to know that the war Noah was fighting was very likely a losing one. Admittedly, though, it was a much harder pill to swallow that in order to choose her own path, she might have to diverge from his completely. At least for now.

Because she wouldn't risk putting her neck on the chopping block again. Not for love. She'd felt it more than once, and by this point, Ava just wasn't sure it was fucking worth it.

Not when the men she loved had the nasty habit of loving revenge more.

Xavier pulled up to the psychiatric hospital feeling lighter than he had in years. Not only had the immense burden of guilt he'd carried for Ava been lessened with the gift of their truce, but he also couldn't remember a time when he and his father had ever been completely on the same page. And that fact, alone, left him feeling emboldened - a feeling that he wouldn't take for granted, especially with the talks with the Seelie Court looming so close on the horizon. The unsatisfying truth was that they had no idea what to expect of the fae and no idea if the very people they were inviting across the veil were actually the ones who'd torn it in the first place.

As far as anyone knew, the Seelie Court was good, and the Unseelie Court was bad. But Xavier knew better than most that things were never so black and white. If anyone could help him read up on their guests, though, it would be his mother. Renata Michaels had spent her entire adult life studying and keeping their Pack's historical records. Thankfully, she seemed to be in a far better state to pick up her old mantle.

As glad as he was to see his mother healing, the circumstances around her recovery still left him feeling...unsettled. For one, he was decently sure that his father didn't know about his mother's new relationship status, and Xavier truly couldn't picture how the male would react when he finally heard the news.

The chasms that marred his family were deep and spanned more lifetimes than Xavier could have fathomed only weeks ago. It seemed as if every time he navigated one, another fissure opened before him. He saw a lot of pain in the future, but for the first time since before he'd become Alpha, he saw hope on the horizon, too.

"Ma?" Xavier knocked and opened the door to her suite only to stop dead in his tracks. Every time he'd visited this room over the last three years, his mother had been safely tucked away inside. Now, the room was empty, completely devoid of all of her belongings, and he had no idea where she could have gone.

Xavier turned away from the vacant room and rushed to the closest nurse station. The woman there greeted him with a warm smile that he half-heartedly returned out of courtesy.

"Excuse me, the patient who lived in the room two doors down, Renata Michaels...where is she?" It was a struggle to keep his voice level, as the unexpected panic that gripped him hit him hard and fast.

The nurse looked at him with a perplexed expression, as if she didn't understand his question. "I'm sorry, sir?"

Xavier gritted his teeth but maintained his composure. "The female who's been living in Room 107 for the past three years isn't in there anymore. Where. Is. She?"

The nurse blinked rapidly before turning to her computer. After a few moments, the confusion on her face disappeared, replaced by relief. She smiled up at him and replied, "Oh! No worries, Mrs. Michaels was recently discharged." "Discharged? By whom?" He demanded.

"Our records say that she released herself."

With that admission, Xavier felt his thin grip on his patience snap. "She was fully dissociative a couple of months ago. Where the hell do you get

off letting my mother just walk out of here without so much as a fucking phone call?" "Because I asked them to, Xavier."

He whipped around to find his mother standing behind him, dressed fully in civilian clothes for the first time since she'd been carted away all those years ago. She held a box in her hands marked 'Paint Supplies,' and the smile on her face was completely unreserved if tinged with a little guilt.

"Mom," Xavier gestured to her outfit, the box, the room.... "What is this?"

She shrugged and gave him a small smile, "I'm moving on."

Renata nodded for him to follow her, and he did, reigning in his agitated energy as not to accidentally outpace her. "What does that mean?"

"I'm a lot better now, Xavier," she sighed. "And you know what I mean by that. My connection with my Wolf is reforming and getting stronger every day. And with that came my hold on my mind. So, I'm leaving." "Without telling anyone?"

"I fully intended to let you know. That's why I came back to finish gathering my things on a day when you'd visit without your father. That's a conversation meant for a later date."

Xavier stopped in his tracks, "Because you're leaving him." He took a moment to take in his mother's reaction, and the steely resolve in her eyes spoke louder than any verbal confirmation could. "I knew that this was coming. But so soon?" She reached out and put a gentle hand on his arm, giving him a squeeze. "I love your father. Even after everything, I still do. But my future doesn't lie with him anymore, and I've spent...far too long living in the past already. And, if I'm honest, Xavier, I hope that you take my lead. After all, we've been through, you, me, August...we all deserve to find happiness. A better happiness."

Xavier pressed his lips together but nodded despite his misgivings. The path seemed clear enough for his mother and himself, but what did that mean for his father? Their relationship had its share of pitfalls, but his mother's peace would mean his father's pain, no matter what.

He cleared his throat, "Actually, that's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. I saw Ava last night. I wanted to tell her what we'd learned about Victor, but she already knew." "She always was quite bright."

"Yeah, she was. Anyway, we spoke - hashed out some of the mess between us, and she's agreed to give me the chance to repair our relationship. For the sake of her Wolf if nothing else."

"That's encouraging to hear, my love! Remember to take it all one step at a time," she let out a heavy sigh as he opened the hospital's front door to let her through. "Trust is always the hardest part of a relationship to regain."

When they reached the parking lot, Xavier noted the dark blue SUV they were moving towards. As they drew closer, the driver-side door opened, and the same doctor he remembered from his last visit stepped out and reached for the box in his mother's arms.

"Thank you, dear," she said as he stowed the box away, and when he returned, she gave Xavier's arm another squeeze. "Xavier, this is Dr. Wesley Fjord. Wesley, this is my son, Xavier."

The smile she gave the other male was so warm that Xavier felt his instinctive guard drop ever so slightly. He didn't know this male, and he wasn't a fan of the situation that had cropped up in his mother's life, but at the end of it all, it was her life. His only place in the scenario was to be supportive.

It was a hard-won lesson he'd learned, but it applied to so many areas of his life. So, when the doctor presented his hand, Xavier didn't hesitate to take it.

"I'm not one to make excuses," Wesley said in greeting, his dark eyes shining with sincerity. "So, I'll make you a promise, instead. Your mother will be safe with me."

Xavier nodded slowly as he met the other male's assured gaze, "Good. Then you need to leave. The both of you."

Renata's eyes widened in reprimand at his warning, but he didn't back down. "The other thing I came to tell you about, Ma. The situation with the rogues is escalating. I want you as far away from the epicenter as possible when it all goes to shit."