

EIGHT

"It's no secret that the Alpha Pack has taken up residence amongst us." As Alpha Xavier spoke, a few members of the Alpha Pack walked by without sparing him a glance. No, it wasn't a secret. "It's also no secret what they want." A few people began muttering as Alpha Xavier drew out his speech, keeping us all in suspense.

Everyone already went into hiding but he called us all out of hiding. For what? A speech without a head or tail? The two girls behind me fidgeted, tapping their feet and holding on to each other as the entire shifted wolves in the pack gather in the arena in response to the second Alpha's Call of the night.

"I had a brief conversation with him and we agreed on a method that will save us from war." He took a deep, stuttered breath, his loud voice subdued as he spoke. It made the wolf in me lower her head, placing a paw across her eyes at the weakened state of our Alpha.

In less than twenty-four hours, another Alpha came to throw our lives on its head and made our Alpha quiver as he spoke, his hands balled into fists with his gaze trained far, unseeing into the crowd.

He lost before the battle even started.

"I will fight Prince Valens." Murmurs exploded around us, growing louder with each moment that passed with Alpha

Zavier waiting for us to calm down.

I will fight. Not he will fight. Alpha Xavier already gave up his rights to this pack. His Alpha pride didn't delude him into thinking he could take on the werewolf prince and succeed.

"You can't fight him!" Someone from the crowd shouted and everyone joined in.

"Prince Valens is a conqueror!" Another person inputted.

"You will lose! You can't gamble with our lives like that! What will happen to us when you lose?"

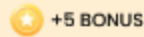
"We don't want another Alpha!"

Everyone had something to say. Together people poured out their displeasure at the Alpha's choice. Secretly, I applauded him.

Everyone else was too scared to admit it, too scared to see the sense Alpha Xavier put into this negotiation but I applauded him for it. He was giving up his position as the Alpha of Redville, and willingly too because there was no way in heaven, earth or hell that he would win against Prince Valens in one-on-one combat.

Most packs that he invaded chose to fight as a pack to stop the invaders but they all lost. Every. Single. Time. As we would too if our Alpha charged us to drive out the invaders that had casually taken over our homes.

"I cannot gamble with your lives!" The Alpha exclaimed, his



sharp words cutting off the mutterings and exclamations. "I'm your Alpha. I am responsible for your protection. I can't have my people hiding out forever in their land. The earlier we do this, the earlier we can start our new lives."

"I refuse! This is nonsense!" Beta Osiris exclaimed, drawing attention away from the Alpha. "If you fight and lose, he will become the rightful Alpha of Redville. Redville is yours! The people are yours, the grounds are yours! The fucking air in this place belongs to you. Why let another man steal it from you?" Even from where I stood, I saw the redness in his cheeks and the pursing of his thin lips. "We will fight behind our Alpha for what is ours." He beat his chest, once then again.

"That is a touching speech, Osiris, but I'm not giving you a choice here. I am still the Alpha. My word is the law. I won't risk my wolves to maintain my position."

"Aren't you concerned about what he would do to us when he becomes Alpha?" Skylar's angry voice called from behind. I turned, as did many people, to see her wipe tears off her cheeks with Lucien by her side. I shivered at the look in his eyes when I faced him.

"He is a wicked man! He could slaughter us the minute you hand over!" Murmurs broke out again, loud enough to drown the Alpha's voice.

In truth, if Prince Valens wanted to slaughter us, even an underground sanctuary wouldn't stop him. Thinking of the

prince made me shiver. His presence alone had scared the wolf out of me! I swallowed down cold fear.

"What about me? If you hand over what will I inherit?" Bethel shouted from behind. People turned to look at him and they all forgot about their annoyance with the Alpha.

"Foolish boy! Your sister would make a better Alpha!"

"Is that what you're thinking of at a time like this? Succession? You need a pack to inherit anything!"

"Close your mouth child and hide your stupidity!" An old woman interjected before Alpha Xavier called us back to order. 1

"I have made my decision. Prince Valens agreed to stay out of the pack house until the battle which will be this evening." He took another stuttered deep breath. "By six in the evening, whoever is interested can come out to watch the battle for leadership." I swallowed down my pity for him.

Alpha Xavier's reign had been the toughest in our history. First, an inside coup, then having to lead alone and raise his kids alone, and now, an invasion from an unstoppable pack. I hated the man but I took off my cap to respect his decision.

"On a final note, whatever happens, whether I remain Alpha or he wins the fight, I urge you all to take the results without complaint." People broke into shouts again but not for long. " Prince Valens assured me they'll leave if he loses and I promised him my pack would honour his leadership if I lose.

I ask that you don't make my promise a lie by being strong headed."

In the end, we all trudged back to our homes after the Alpha's speech, our heads downcast and feet dragging. We'd heard the first crow of the cock for the day but even after staying awake throughout the night, no one yawned as we moved.

Along the way, many people diverted to the sanctuary while the rest of us continued to the pack house. I went down to my room to sleep off the hectic, crazy day but like everyone else in the pack, sleep eluded me.

I tossed and turned for what felt like hours until I gave up on sleep, picking up one of the few books I still owned from school to read a bit. My mind kept straying to what the Alpha said and what it could mean for me. 1

I'd shifted now so I didn't run the risk of being pushed out of the pack by the new Alpha. Most packs didn't tolerate latent wolves. Alpha Xavier only kept me around despite my deficiency to torment me and use me as a pack slave, after all, he would need to pay someone a hefty fee to do the work I did. That person would also need sick leaves and breaks which I didn't get.

In the end, I slammed my book closed to take a walk around the small woods behind the pack house. There I met a man built like a bear, even bigger than the prince himself.

"No need to run." He had a deep and calming voice devoid

of emotions and warmth. His dark eyes, when I dared stare into them, were cold and lifeless, like a man who'd given up on the world. "I was just leaving," I said nothing as he left, carrying the stench of power with him.

Beta Jabari – the prince's best friend and beta, cursed to wander the world with his master and the rest of his people. He was a strange man – as strange as he was reckless. [1](#)

I wandered the pack lands for a long time. All the shops were closed. No one walked the street at mid-noon and the skies looked wary as the world prepared for a battle that would change the lives of a hundred and twenty thousand wolves, both old and young.

I didn't make it back to the arena as fighting didn't appeal to me but I felt the searing burn in my chest as Prince Valens fell Alpha Xavier and took the mantle of leadership from him, making Redville the forty-seventh pack he'd conquered in his lifetime.

I doubled over at one of the benches at Silver Square, the pain of a breaking bond sending me to my knees. In a flash, it ended and Alpha Xavier stopped being my Alpha.