

## Chapter 20

### His Suspicion

Xavier stood glowering at his friend, not quite able to wrap his mind around the other male's bold accusation.

"I don't know what you're talking about." He snatched his arm from out of Jack's grasp.

"Really?" Jack's eyebrow twitched upward as he gestured to Ava's hospital room, "Since when is it protocol to bring in the cavalry to cure colds?"

"Is that what ails her? Even though you barely looked at her?" Xavier's voice was heavily laden with sarcasm, even as he attempted to deflect his friend's line of questioning, "I knew you were good at what you do, Jack, but damn - you might need a raise."

Jack pursed his lips slightly and slowly shook his head back and forth, completely unfazed by Xavier's foul nature. But, of course, that was one of the reasons Xavier had bonded with the Gamma in the first place and continued to keep him around the male was too intelligent to scare easily.

"We both know that what's really keeping her in that hospital bed is something more than a dose of Robitussin and some bedrest will fix."

In a world where Xavier was surrounded by easily cowed yes-men, Jack was one of the few Xavier could trust to see past his bullshit and give him a real opinion. There were times - like now - that he resented that fact.

Yes, he knew full well that nothing, but time and a steady diet would reverse the hollowing effects of Ava's years of malnutrition..., but he couldn't stand the niggling feeling of guilt that plagued him whenever he looked at her diminished form.

Xavier glanced between Ava's door and his friend, nearly completely unwilling bring up the topic that truly weighed on his mind. "You were there during their autopsies. And you're sure there wasn't anything suspicious about their bodies?" Jack sighed, "I've told you before, there was everything suspicious about their bodies, Xav. They were murdered."

"But were they murdered by her?" He asked pointedly.

Jack shook his head again, "That's still inconclusive. Whether she did the deed herself or used her rogue allies, the Pack's investigation found Ava guilty..."

"And the Pack never makes mistakes." Xavier finished the unofficial saying that had been passed down throughout the leading ranks for years. Even though it was usually said in jest, the motto had been carried out to deadly results more than once.

Admitting to making mistakes was a sign of weakness within the Alliance, and an Alpha who failed to navigate the complex social politics of the Alliance could put their entire Pack in jeopardy. In order to keep the collective safe and secure, after a conviction was carried through, it was best for everyone to move forward.

This rang especially true in Sophia and Samantha's case, since no one wanted to linger on the brutality of the murders, or the torrid allegations behind it. For a long time, Xavier had been among the many to share that point of view, eager to forget the past, but unable to heal in the process.

"We both know that nothing good is going to come from this, Xavier." Jack fervently whispered, "We can keep this on the down low all we want, but her very presence jeopardizes everything you've worked so hard for."

Silence stretched between the two of them as Xavier contemplated the Gamma's words. After years of apprehension and mistrust following

Sophia and Sam's murders, the Red Moon Pack had finally settled back into a semblance of peace. It had been a veritable witch hunt after Ava's incarceration, with Pack members calling for blood, demanding that the higher ups find and eradicate every last Rogue sympathizer in our ranks. The problem had been that there was no way to tell who secretly sided with the Rogues, but that hadn't mattered. The Pack had been in shambles, with neighbor accusing neighbor, and trust in their leaders dwindling by the day.

"The Pack is in better shape than ever, right now." Jack continued, "Your father's so proud of the work you've done to preserve our legacy. What would he think about all of this?"

At that, Xavier's teeth clenched. His father. He knew exactly what August would say to him if he knew that his son was currently harboring the Pack's most notorious criminal.

The Pack comes first. That's all the former Alpha said. It's all he'd been saying to Xavier for the last two fucking decades. Xavier had grown up knowing that his wants and needs would always take a backseat for the greater good. For years he'd accepted that, even welcomed the challenge. But after Ava...

The things I've done for the good of the P-

Xavier cut the thought off before it could grow legs, just as he had a thousand times before. He bet his father *\*was\** proud of him. After all, it was easy enough to meet expectations when you were a glorified puppet.

It had been three years since Xavier had taken over as Pack Alpha, and it had been just about as long since he'd taken an active role in running the Pack. For the majority of matters, Xavier found it was less of a headache to simply agree to his father's suggestions. It had become so second nature, that even without his father in his ear, Xavier could easily make determinations that he knew his father would approve of.

And every time he did, the world kept turning, and the Pack continued to thrive. So, Xavier continued to act as a mouthpiece, whether or not he agreed with the direction he was leading them. Weak, he thought. You're weak. "Do you believe that Ava Davis killed my sister?"

Jack started to blink rapidly, struggling to process the true meaning behind Xavier's question. Too bad, Xavier wasn't even sure of it, himself. "I already told you- "

"That the case findings were inconclusive, yeah, I know. That's not what I'm asking you, Jack." Xavier met the healer's eyes, "Do you think that the female in that room conspired with Rogue forces and murdered two of our own three years ago?"

Jack only stared at him, and Xavier stared back. "Do you know something that I don't, Alpha?"

Xavier's shoulders dropped as he shook his head. He'd had his fleeting suspicions over the years but had easily dismissed his doubts as the pittances of a boy who'd lost his last friend. So, he'd focused on following he father's lead and made new friends, befitting of a leader.

And at night, he indulged himself in the Alliance's underbelly to drown the rest of his aching apprehension.

Ever since Ava had weaseled her way back into his life, however. Those faint, beaten down noises kept growing louder and louder, until the electrified current of suspicion buzzing through his bloodstream made it nearly impossible to sleep. At first, Xavier had chalked it up to the mating bond, pushing Alex and himself to defend their mates. But no, if Xavier were honest with himself - and he almost never was, these days - his uncertainty didn't lie with Ava. It was Victor.

The man had rubbed Xavier wrong for years, even if he couldn't put his feelings into words. Every time he was near the Omega, Alex bristled in his chest, clearly also put off by the male. But Xavier had written it off as grief over losing his only daughter.

After spearheading Ava's arrest and trial, Xavier would have thought the man would have found some modicum of peace, bet he'd been cagey and

dismissive during and after the investigation, refusing to diverge from his warpath against Ava. Of course, his doggedness had paid off.

Still, Xavier wished he'd been assertive enough back then to get a hold of Samantha's cell phone. Now, it was missing, and Xavier was stuck with the feeling that he'd overlooked something.

"You should let the past rest, Xavier." Jack said solemnly, "But first, we need to deal with her."

"We don't need to do anything. She'll be staying at the Green Light Club."

Jack squeezed his eyes closed and massaged the bridge of his nose, staving off the raging headache he knew was coming. "What is she doing at the club?"

"That's not important. Just know that she'll be decently hidden there while I reopen her investigation."

"While you do what?" Jack exclaimed.

"It's not up for debate, Jack. The fact remains that something doesn't add up about that night."

It all kept coming back to that damn cellphone. It had been the smoking gun in Victor's case against Ava, but barely anyone but Victor had ever had access to it. The one time Xavier had gotten his hands on it, he'd seen unlisted numbers in the contact list, but there had been no messages or call logs.

And when Xavier had requested to see the phone just last week, Victor had claimed it was gone.

"But the Pack-"

"She is part of the Pack, Jack."

And if, by the end of this, Xavier found that someone had been making a fool of him for the last three years, there would be hell to pay.