

Chapter 21

Talk With Jack

"The both of you need to leave." Ava stated firmly as Xavier and his friend re-entered her room. She didn't make eye contact with either male, unwilling to give Xavier any feasible reason to pounce on her again. "I'm not interested in fucking your friend just you can spite-watch, or whatever."

The stranger's eyes went wide, but he wisely kept any questions he had to himself, as Xavier glared at her. Instead, he primly cleared his throat and stepped forward.

"I think we may have started off on the wrong foot. My name is Jack Williams," he walked up to her and presented his hand for shaking. "I'm the Red Moon Pack's Chief Healer. My only priority today is to make sure that you're back to feeling good as new."

Ava looked at his outstretched hand and scoffed. "No thanks. I think the humans have everything under control."

As far as Ava was concerned, anyone associated with the Red Moon Pack was bad news. She didn't know whether or not Jack realized who she was, but she wasn't interested in letting the healer anywhere near her body. "Ava, I assure you that he's here to help." Xavier said, and Ava was shocked to hear the genuine concern in his voice. "Jack is one of my closest friends and he's excellent at his job. He'll take care of you, I swear." Ava looked between the healer and Xavier, before crossing her arms defensively across her chest. "I've been *taken care of* by your friends before, Xavier. I'm not interested."

Jack could see that the gaunt girl before them wasn't going to budge. He didn't know everything that had gone down between the two, but the animosity radiating off of Ava Davis seemed to go deeper than a simple murder conviction. Needless to say, she didn't trust them. More specifically, her intense aversion stemmed from her bad blood with his Alpha. If Xavier stayed looming over her, she'd never let her guard down enough to let Jack cure what he could and get Xavier away from the girl.

"Alpha, if I may, I think Ava might feel a little more comfortable if you waited outside." Jack said, fully anticipating the irritated stare Xavier threw his way.

His friend's shoulders tensed for a moment, as if he were about to argue. Luckily, he came to his senses and nodded his acquiescence. The last thing

either of them needed was the increasingly volatile male causing a scene that would isolate Ava even more.

"I'll be just outside if you need me." Jack was pretty sure the statement was meant to comfort Ava, but from what he could sense, the girl was relieved when the door closed behind his broad form.

As soon as the door closed, Jack felt the tickle on the back of his conscience letting him know that his Alpha would like to open a private mental pathway. Jack sighed. While he knew that it was an honor to have had the opportunity and ability to forge such a connection with his leader, but the feeling of a neural link being established always made the inside of his skull itch.

"What have you found?" The consternation in Xavier's voice was as sharp in Jack's head as it ever was in real life.

"Well, since you only just left, we haven't said two words to one another yet", Jack replied, making sure Xavier knew just how much Jack would not appreciate frequent interruptions. "Although, I do sense a disruption in her."

"A disruption? Elaborate."

"I can't yet, but it sure as hell isn't the flu. She's hiding something." It was true that Jack would have preferred to be just about anywhere else than

helping his Alpha aid and abet a serial killer, but he had to admit that he was intrigued.

As a healer, Jack was able to sense the natural ebbs and flows within another person's body, making it easy for him to locate areas where the body was failing to work as efficiently as it was meant to. His ability went deeper, however, when it came to examining Wolves.

Similar in the way he could sense the many connections happening simultaneously throughout the human body, he could also sense the physical and metaphysical connections between a host and their Wolf counterpart.

For the most part, the Wolves were psychic beings, interacting with their hosts and one another in an extra-sensory manner. It was as if the Wolves operated on a different layer of existence than their human hosts, and Jack was particularly sensitive to that other plane.

That was how he knew, just via a cursory overview, that there was a major disruption between Ava and her Wolf. Jack wondered if that could have anything to do with Sam and Sophia's murders. Conditions that affected Wolves were exceedingly rare, but Jack could imagine that if such an integral connection were at stake, it could drive someone to drastic ends.

Yes, Jack was now very interested in spending some time with Ava Davis.

Jack gestured to the empty chair at her bedside, "Do you mind?"

"Exceptionally so." He was taken aback by the venom in her voice. It appeared that the beaten down little Beta wasn't nearly as defenseless as she seemed. "It doesn't take a psychic to diagnose and treat the flu, so we both know your talent is wasted here."

Ava's eyes flashed toward the door before settling back on the healer, "So, what does he really want you in here for?"

Jack chuckled, "It looks like you're just as smart as I remember."

Ava froze as she gauged Jack's reaction, "I think you have me at a disadvantage."

"Almost certainly. I was a few years younger than the rest of you, and my clinical training kept me...preoccupied most of the time. I wouldn't blame you for not remembering me." "Hm, but you remember me."

Jack nodded but didn't go into detail.

"And you're okay...with this?" Ava gestured to herself.

Jack felt the corners of his smile go tight, but he nodded. "I am but a humble servant, after all."

Ava rolled her eyes, "Because Xavier is such an infallible leader."

Jack's grin came a little more easily, "He hasn't led me astray, yet."

"Lucky you."

Her tone was bitter, but Jack noted that her emotional current had settled a little, and she leaned more comfortably into her hospital-issued pillows.

"I remember talk about a child prodigy, but Gammas were never really on my radar back then." She said before she realized how Jack might take her dismissive words, "Sorry."

This time, Jack's laugh was harsh, "Of course. Can't expect a Beta to care about us plebs in the lower ranks."

He saw the girl swallow hard and pulled back, adding some extra joviality to his demeanor, "I'm only kidding. Rest assured that your secrets are safe with me."

Ava's eyes darted back toward the door.

"Within reason, of course," he shrugged. He studied her, bringing up a hand to stroke his beard in contemplation. "I am terribly curious, though...what happened to your Wolf?"

Ava's body began to tremble uncontrollably. She'd begun to let her guard down around this strange male and his easy banter. She'd even let herself feel a little remorseful for ignoring him as a child... Even now, she had underestimated him. She'd never met a healer who could see into their Wolves, so his question rocked her.

"Lay a hand on my and you'll pull back a stump." She growled.

Jack's head tilted dubiously, "You sure about that? Without your Wolf, I imagine that could get messy." He stepped forward and Ava scooted as far back as she could on her bed. "Calm down, Ava. I just want to help-" "Get. Away!" Memories were flooding back as she was forced to think about Mia and the severed connection that had left her Wolf inexplicably changed.

Ava heard Mia's pained howls and saw flashes of thick red liquid dripping from curly dark hair. Wild tears streamed unchecked down Ava's face as she began to hyperventilate.

BANG

The hospital room door crashed open as Xavier stormed back inside and placed himself between Ava and the healer.

"You've been alone all of ninety fucking seconds, Jack." Xavier snarled. To his credit, Jack looked bewildered, completely at a loss for what he could have said or done to prompt such a strong reaction.

If she were being honest, Ava wasn't sure of that herself. Unlike Sophia and Sam's murders, Ava's mind refused to go back to the night Layla had died, only recalling bits and pieces in painful flashes. Therefore, Ava didn't have a clear recollection of the events of the night; the only thing she was certain of was that Mia had gotten hurt, and Ava felt a fierce need to protect her Wolf from any further trauma. "She was fine. Just the flu..." Jack said, eyeing Ava suspiciously. "I'm going to leave you two alone," he said before backing out of the doorway.

Ava sniffed her tears back hard right after the door clicked shut, "What is it that you want from me, exactly?" Her hoarse voice was heavy with accusation, "You stated your terms and I'm abiding by your stupid rules. I don't need you checking in on me. I don't need to be introduced to any more of your skeevy friends. I want you to leave me alone!"

Ava expected Xavier to retort, lash out. Instead he just stared at Ava looking curiously crestfallen. She didn't care if she'd hurt the big bad Alpha's feelings. She was tired of his never-ending games.

When he finally replied, his voice was quiet. "I'll leave you to rest."

With that, he left the room, making sure that the door snicked softly shut behind him.

Ava sat, upset, and confused in the silence. She was quickly coming to realize that the only thing scarier than angry Xavier, was caring Xavier. Ava didn't know what to do with these rare, fleeting moments where Xavier seemed to genuinely care about what was happening to Ava.

Still, she reminded herself, that even in his pseudo-kindness, he'd never once acknowledged his role in her suffering. She had to remember who he was, so she'd never fall victim to her own emotion like she had three years ago. No, she thought. That's one thing he'll never take from me again.