

Chapter 22

Need To Pay

Xavier's phone rang just as he stepped out of the hospital and into the brisk night air. When he looked down, it was Bella's name he saw flashing across his screen. Instead of picking up immediately, he walked to his car, pressed the button on his key fob to activate the vehicle's gull-wing doors, and slid inside.

He needed the extra moments to collect his thought and tamp down the white-hot irritation that felt damn near all-consuming. Xavier didn't know who he was angrier at, Ava for refusing his help, or himself for creating a breach so wide that it was impossible for the female to meet him half-way.

Xavier grimaced. The knotted web of feelings he felt for Ava were far too volatile, too complex for him to bother considering at the moment. Thinking about his wayward mate sure as hell wasn't going to do anything to help improve his mood.

The phone was just shy of disconnecting when Xavier finally answered.
"Speak."

"How is she?" The mistress's concerned tone was tinged with apprehension.

"Do you mean before or after I left her?" The following silence caused his anger to peak. Lately, it seemed as if he couldn't make a move without his subordinates questioning his every motivation, and he was about goddamn tired of it. "She's fine, Bella. What do you want?" He held on to his temper with a white knuckled grip. If he didn't he wasn't sure Bella Sutton would have a job at the end of this phone call, and that would be a shame for a litany of reasons. "There was an...inciting incident, right before Ava collapsed. I think that it should be addressed." She said before continuing in a rush, "Not only does it personally involve Miss Davis, but such actions have the potential to endanger everyone working in the Green Light Club."

"What happened?"

"There was a photo."

"What *kind of photo?" Xavier said through gritted teeth. He had a hunch where she was going with this and the thought of dealing with leaked nudes within a glorified brothel was so plebian it bordered on absurd.

"It was one of Miss Davis, from her most recent appointment on the eighth floor." She said.

Xavier leaned his head back and focused on breathing deeply in through his nose and out through his mouth. Fucking hell. He'd seen it coming, but still wasn't ready to deal with this shit.

Not only were the implications of a sabotaging mole within his sex club something he needed to deal with immediately as the club's owner, but he also wasn't in any type of headspace to confront what Ava may or may not have done in that suite after he'd left.

Which was ridiculous, in and of itself, because just like Ava had said, she was only doing what he'd instructed her to do. Because he'd been angry, and had felt pressed into a corner, with a convicted murderer on the loose and an unwanted mating bond coursing through his veins.

He'd wanted her hidden, and he'd wanted her gone. But, most of all he'd wanted her close enough to punish and protect as his wildly converging instincts saw fit. And now that he was facing the consequences of his actions, he had nerve enough to act all chicken shit.

"How bad is it?" He asked gruffly.

"That's rather subjective," she bristled. "But all sessions are meant to be strictly confidential in order to protect my escorts, as well as the club..."

"And?" Xavier wasn't in the mood to sit and coax the truth from his employees.

"As with most targeted attacks, the photograph wasn't received well among the staff. I believe some things may have been said to Miss Davis."

Xavier exhaled so hard his breath whistled through his clenched teeth. "You're telling me a bunch of sex workers were caught slut-shaming one of their own for doing their job?"

"Power is power, Alpha."

"For fuck's sake," he muttered. "Who did it? Don't tell me you brought this to me without a name."

"Of course not, sir. I think I know who is responsible," she hesitated. "However, I think it would be best if I handled this matter internally."

"It's my club. It doesn't get more internal than me."

He heard the female sigh over the phone. "With all do respect, sir, The Green Light Club is a carefully curated microcosm built on a foundation of shared experiences and trust. That trust has been broken, and only I have the qualified experience to get my escorts to open up. You can rest assured that the matter will be taken care of."

"I know the hell it will, because I'll be the one taking care of it." Xavier spat, fuming. The one thing he had any real control over was this club, and it was becoming increasingly clear that he his grip on its inner workings wasn't nearly as concrete as he'd once presumed.

"Alpha Mich- "

"I have half a mind to raze the whole damn place to its studs and start fresh, so if you plan on living to pimp another day, you'll shut your mouth and meet me in my office in twenty minutes."

He killed the line and simply sat in silence for a minute, letting his roiling emotions roll through him. It sure as hell wasn't going to be pretty, but Xavier had finally found the outlet he'd been yearning for. Whoever had targeted his mate, they were going to pay.

Xavier thundered into his office, pleased to find Ms. Sutton where he'd instructed her to be.

"I want names."

"I have questions."

Both questions were asked simultaneously and then followed by terse silence.

"What are you planning to do to the ones who posted the photo." Bella demanded.

Xavier stalked toward her, intentionally crowding her space. "I think there have been some misunderstanding in this club's chain of command. I employ you. It's not your concern how I choose to discipline my own employees, Ms. Sutton." Bella didn't back down, but met his blazing eyes, "I've seen your brand of discipline and tried to pick up the pieces of Ava afterward. If that's how you treat someone you claim to care about, then excuse me for being alarmed." "I told you Ava wasn't any of your business."

"I've been running this club since you were in diapers, Alpha Michaels. Despite your insistence otherwise, everything that takes place under this roof is my business."

Xavier wanted to retort, lash out and stake his claim, but he saw the territorial in her eye and recognized the spark of leadership. The building

might be his, but everyone who worked here belonged to Bella, and he couldn't help but respect her for it.

He'd known the woman for years, since his first visit on his eighteenth birthday. When he'd taken over the mantle of Alpha from his father, he'd inherited ownership of the club, as well.

The relationship between himself and the proprietress, had remained fairly cool, with Xavier allowing himself and his peers far too much reign to push the club's boundaries during their frequent parties. In return for her casting a blind eye as long as no one went too far, he didn't tell her how to do her job. Until recently, of course. It was clear that their change in dynamic was grating on the proud businesswoman.

“I seem to have that effect on people, lately”, he mused. It seemed like the more he tried to follow his gut, the more it put out everyone around him.

A quick sharp pain bloomed behind Xavier's ribs. He knew from experience that there would be nothing there to mark his discomfort if he looked down, so he didn't. As was becoming increasingly common, Alex was making his displeasure known.

“Because you're an asshole, Xavier. You've lost us our mates!”

The Wolf had barraged him with similar sentiments over the last few weeks, and just as always, he told the upset beast to shut it down. He had work to do.

Xavier stepped into the suite he'd left Ava in two nights before. Now, it was pristine, utterly devoid of any evidence of the debauchery that was regularly contained within these walls.

Inside the room, he found two of Bella's girls, dressed in lowcut dresses and blushing prettily like virgins. They looked at him eagerly, clearly anticipating the special visit from the club's elusive executive. It was true that while he visited the club regularly, he hadn't called upon the services of one of Bella's court in years. The fact that he'd requested them specifically had to be special indeed.

"Lola and Grace, I presume?" He asked, crossing the room to take a seat on the couch. He leaned back casually and loosened his tie.

"I-it's an honor, Mr. Michaels." Stammered the taller brunette. Grace. The petite blonde beside her nodded emphatically.

"Good, come closer. Let me see you." The girls quickly stepped further into the light, keen to meet his wishes.

"You two were the only ones to serve this suite this weekend, correct?"

Both females hesitated until Grace, seemingly the braver of the two, finally answered. "Y-yes, sir. The wait staff was short-handed, so we had to fill in."

"Along with that redhead. Ava." Lola mumbled, eyes darting between Xavier and the floor. "It was a big party, but she was the only one who got to entertain that night."

Xavier nodded, the petty pieces clicking together. "Right. Come in!"

The girls startled as he called out and turned to the door where Bella and one of his guards walked in. The girls looked worriedly between Xavier and the two blocking the door.

As they stumbled over their confusion, Xavier reached into his pocket and pulled out a stack of one-dollar notes and threw them on the ground.

"Kneel down and pick it up. And I want to see a smile on those pretty faces."

Both females looked at the money, crestfallen, clearly realizing what they'd been brought here for. "I-it was just a joke. Everyone gets pranked when they're new!" Lola cried, turning to Bella for reassurance.

Bella slowly shook her head, "Discretion isn't a game. You knew the rules when I brought you in. At the very least, you should know by now that there are no secrets in the Green Light Club that I wouldn't sniff out." Bella nodded toward the money littering the floor, and the shellshocked girls slowly bent to gather up the bills.

When they were finished, they looked to Xavier with large smiles plastered across their lips. He smiled back.

"Put them back where you got them."

The female's smiles morphed into looks of horror as the implications of his order set in.

"No!"

"Please! W-we didn't m-mean..."

The guard picked the despondent girls up from the floor and carted them out of the room, singular bills fluttering behind them as the door closed on their wailing.

Finally, it was just him and Bella alone in the suite. Xavier noted the female's deliberately neutral expression.

"Any objection to sending them back?"

Bella stared at him for a few long moments before giving him a slight shake of her head. "Discretion isn't a game."

He nodded, pleased that they'd finally found something to agree on.