

Chapter 48

Talks Between Alphas Part 1

"I hate coming to these things." Xavier looked over to where Dylan was sullenly ricocheting a stress ball off of a nearby plated glass window, only to catch it in his lightning quick hands and begin the process over again. "How could you possibly? You almost never show up when you're supposed to," Xavier scoffed.

Dylan's lips curled up into a self-serving grin, "I'm no one's Alpha yet."

"Because you don't come to the fucking meetings. I've been attending these things practically since I was old enough to walk."

This time, Dylan tossed the ball and kept it after he caught it, "And you were crowned one of Red Moon's youngest Alpha's and it's only been three years and you're so happy." Xavier frowned, "Fuck you."

Dylan only sent him a sardonic grin in return. He wasn't kidding, Miller really did hate coming to these conferences. Ever since they'd first set foot in the Alliance's New York office building, the male had been moody and sarcastic. Normally, he couldn't get the lackadaisical princeling to shut the hell up, but after hours of his moping, Xavier would kill for him to return to his typical gregarious demeanor.

It didn't help that they were the first to arrive. Xavier had grown up learning from his authoritarian father that being on time was as good as being late, so he'd developed a habit of showing up to things even before his father could. As for Dylan, well, he had the misfortune of rooming on the same floor as Xavier. And after learning more about how his friend had become so buddy-buddy with Ava during the last couple of meetings, Xavier didn't feel very inclined to let the male sleep in.

One by one, the Alphas of the Northeastern Alliance began filing into the high-rise conference room. First came Liam Smith of the Silver Moon Pack, the male who'd called this emergency meeting. As he strode in, he nodded politely at them, but his flint-hard eyes lingered on Xavier. They were on the same page, then.

Like Liam, Xavier vividly remembered the night he'd interrupted the male's evening with Ava. They'd crossed paths plenty of times since then, given the previous public relations meetings, and every time they did, they never spoke, but the loaded acknowledgment in their stances spoke volumes.

Liam wanted Xavier to be assured that Ava was being taken care of, and Xavier wanted Liam to mind his fucking business.

The last to arrive was Rhys Bennet, the reigning Alpha of the Eclipse Pack. As usual, he rolled in with a full security detail, including his Beta in tow. If Xavier weren't so thoroughly trained in the art of social graces, he might have allowed his lip to curl at the untoward show of mistrust.

It was a matter of good faith that the Alliance Alphas arrived at these gatherings with minimal backup. Even more importantly, it was a passive show of strength. Everyone in this room was essential equal in strength to one another, at least symbolically if not literally. If an Alpha wasn't confident in his ability to hold his own with those of his own caliber, then was confidence was there in his ability to lead his people? No Alpha worth his title should feel the need to be so heavily guarded.

But Rhys Bennet wasn't an Alpha worth his title and counting him among their caliber would be laughable if it weren't a clear sign of the gross mismanagement of the Eclipse Pack. Every other Alpha in the room was aware of this, and more importantly, Bennet knew it, too.

"It's safe enough to assume that everyone who is coming is already here." Liam's voice was matter of fact, as he nodded for his guard to close the room doors.

Xavier and Rhys nodded in agreement. There were only four representatives out of the expected five, just as always. At this point, if the Alpha of the Grave Crown Pack were to suddenly appear, his presence would be the greatest cause for concern.

Dylan looked toward the closed door, "I take it Grave Crown isn't showing?"

Liam snorted, "Not unless the sky started falling. And even then, he'd probably only send an Omega just to tell us we could save our fucking selves."

Rhys trained his flat gray eyes on Dylan, as if offended that he'd even dare to speak since he was the only non-reigning Alpha in the room, "Speaking of unexpected guests, what brings you to this meeting in your father's stead, Miller?" The look on Dylan's face spoke volumes about why he detested attending these gatherings, "Unfortunately, my father is ill and unable to perform at this particular dog and pony show." He bared his teeth in an intentionally poor approximation of a smile. "So, here I am."

Rhys looked smug as he sat back in his chair, "Interesting. Should we be expecting you to finally take up your father's mantle at some point in the near future, then? Perhaps sometime before your children are eligible for the role." Dylan kept his face intentionally blank as he replied, "When the time comes, I'll make sure that you're the very first to know."

The two glared at one another in brief, tense silence, before Liam curtly cleared his throat.

"As I'm sure you're all wondering, I've gathered you here today, because of potential threat that has recently made itself known at the borders of my territory."

Xavier spoke up for the first time since the meeting had started, "What sort of threat are we talking about?"

Liam pulled out a map of the Silver Moon Pack's territory where a disconcertingly large circle surrounded the lower right-handed quadrant of the region. "We've been seeing a lot of abnormal creature activity. Mainly animals who should be preparing for hibernation keep turning up in swimming pools and picnic baskets."

Xavier studied the map more closely, paying particular attention to the notable topographical details, "Dense forest backed into a mountain range? Looks like the perfect hide-out to me."

Liam nodded morosely, "Our thoughts exactly." He leveled the group with a pregnant stare before continuing, "We're worried that recent history may be repeating itself."

Xavier swore inwardly, as he caught Liam's meaning. Three years ago, similar sightings had taken place near the Red Moon Pack's territory. His

father hadn't wanted to run the risk of causing panic to spread within the Pack, so he'd elected to take care of the issue internally, instead of involving the Alliance.

August's investigation hadn't turned up anything, and the Red Moon Pack's peace continued unmarred. They had just settled into the belief that it had all been a false alarm when Sophia and Samantha had turned up dead.

If Liam dared to even bring up that dark period in Alliance history and was actually concerned that similar events were rolling out within his own territory, that could only mean one thing. "Rogues," Xavier said low and slow, in order to hide the gruffness that had entered his tone.

"Well, if that isn't perfect. Right, Michaels?" Rhys said snidely. Xavier didn't know what twisted sense of superiority the male was getting from rubbing the past in his face, but he'd soon find himself at the wrong end of a real Alpha, if he didn't watch himself.

"Come again, Bennet?" Xavier did the male the service of allowing the ring of warning to slip into his voice, but of course the male didn't bother taking the hand-out.

"Just saying that this is right up your alley, isn't it? Only Liam had enough sense to contact the rest of the Alliance before the rogues could gain a foothold, putting all of our Packs at risk."

Before Xavier could retort, Dylan leaned forward, "We know that you're prone to scare easy over at Eclipse, but a single attack does not a rebellion make. There haven't been any significant rogue sightings before or since that incident." Rhys gave a Dylan a contemptuous smile before continuing, "Look who's suddenly found an interest in Pack affairs. It's funny how the ones who least deserve to sit in this room speak so loudly."

Xavier cast a long look at the Eclipse Alpha, "Yes. Funny how."

Rhys sent Xavier a menacing glare that he returned full force. Bennet was the first to break.

"Either way, it's not true."

"What isn't?" Dylan asked.

"There have been rogue attacks. Devastating ones. Am I correct in saying this, Alpha Smith?"

Liam gritted his teeth for a moment, but ultimately nodded, "Yes. Silver Moon has experienced rogue activity since the Red Moon incident three years ago. We didn't see it coming." Xavier and Dylan sat in stunned silence. There hadn't been any word of an attack at Silver Moon. If that were the case, it made sense for Liam to be so proactive this time around.

Rhys sat back in his seat with a grotesquely satisfied look on his face, "See? The similarities are uncanny."

He sniffed haughtily, "Well, I mean. At least Red Moon caught a traitor for their troubles."