

Chapter 77

Victor

Perhaps it was due to the fact that Xavier had been feeling introspective lately, taking a long hard look in the mirror and finding what he saw reflected back utterly distasteful. Or it could be the fact that as of about two hours ago, the Northeastern Alliance could be well on its way to war. Either way, Xavier was feeling the call of absolution.

The last hour and a half of his life had been spent running damage control with his father and the rest of the Red Moon Council representatives. After a brief back and forth, the Council had ultimately decided to vote along with Xavier and Liam's plan to invite the Seelie Court earthside in order to better gauge how the other realm was faring.

Whether it was out of an unavoidable sense of dread at the thought of an undetermined amount of loose pixie dust floating around the Territories, or a basic need to be on the proactive side of what could ultimately

become an interdimensional war, all save for representatives from Eclipse agreed to the plan.

Even Grave Crown refused to miss out on this monumental decision, sending in their vote via an express bike courier service, not three hours after the other votes had been tallied, officially solidifying the Alliance's plans to move forward with the meeting. In what had to be the most surprising turn of events for the day, the elusive Pack promised to send a representative to the meeting with the fae. The tides truly were turning, indeed.

That was why Xavier needed to seize the opportunity to act while it presented itself. Although the meeting had been concluded for hours, the Council members would be preoccupied for the next day or so, colluding amongst one another, desperately searching for the best angles to make this entire clusterfuck somehow fall in their favor.

For once, being little more than a figurehead for his father was going to work for Xavier's benefit. No one in the Council really expected him to be present since, after being properly filled in, August was expected to take the reins on all of Red Moon's involvement, just like he always did. This time, Xavier didn't mind because he had somewhere else to be.

And since there was one other person on the Council who was sure to not be missed, Xavier decided to cache in that promise sooner rather than later.

Xavier arrived at the hotel room the minute he was free to. "Dylan," he called, knocking on the door. "Open up."

When the door opened a few moments later, Xavier was relieved. While he didn't think enough time had passed for Dylan to find some shit to get into, it was always a toss-up. The male loved New York City, if for no other reason than the fact that they could've been banned from any other city a dozen times over for the shit they regularly pulled in the City that Never Sleeps.

"How bad was it?" The male asked, his blond brows furrowed. Xavier knew exactly what he was referring to.

"About as poorly as could be expected," he sighed as Dylan stepped aside, letting him into the room. "If there's one thing my father doesn't tolerate, it's being left out of the loop."

"Ah, well, I'm sure the sentiment will change once the Sidhe arrive in all their weird magical glory," Dylan said as he poured them a couple of drinks. "I bet he's got all kinds of ideas what to do with all of this newfound access to Axis." Xavier downed his drink in one long pull. "That's an understatement if I ever heard one," he said. "Fortunately, that's a problem for another day."

Dylan gave him an inquiring look, "Meaning?"

"I'd like your help with something while the Council is otherwise engaged."

"Any Council members in particular?" Dylan asked, the familiar glint of anticipation practically turning his glacier blue eyes silver.

"No, actually," Xavier said. "Council adjacent is more like it. Victor."

Understanding made Dylan's face light up, "While he's here kissing August's ass, we take a little trip upstate?"

Xavier nodded, "Victor almost never leaves the Red Moon compound. Now's the perfect opportunity to do some real digging into Ava's case."

Miller didn't hesitate. "When do we leave?"

"The sooner, the better."

Dylan grabbed his coat, already making his way to the door, "Any chance Liam's free?"

Xavier followed him out, shutting the hotel door behind him, "Negative. He's eye-deep in pissed Council members. They're convinced these rogue attacks have something to do with the recent skirmishes on Silver Moon's

borders." "Even if they do, what more could he have done than he already has?"

Xavier shook his head, "We both know how little water logic holds here. They're looking for someone to blame."

"Constantly jockeying for power," Dylan muttered.

"Yeah. Too bad the ones who want it most are almost always the ones who least deserve it."

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Two hours later, Xavier pulled up to his father's left-hand man's home with the headlights intentionally turned off. The fewer people who noted their presence, the fewer questions would likely be asked later on. "Nice place," Dylan said. "How do we get in?"

"I don't actually know," Xavier admitted. "Despite our ties, I don't recall ever actually having been inside of Victor's house before."

He was putting that lightly, of course - being seen in an Omega's home would be viewed as beneath his station. Whenever he and Samantha had

hung out, it had been on either his own turf or neutral ground, like the Davis home. Rounding the small Victorian, Xavier took a chance and tried opening the back door, unsurprised when it didn't budge. Given the area and the insular community, it wasn't uncommon for doors to be left unlocked. But if Victor had as much to hide as he and his mother suspected, the extra precaution was probably warranted.

"Pft, amateur."

Xavier turned to see Dylan at a nearby window. As he watched, the male reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a butterfly knife. Flicking it open, he slid the tip of the blade into the window's middle divider, sidling the blade right up next to the lock

With a twist of his wrist, the blade nudged the lock along its hinge until he could switch sides and finish dragging the lock into its open position. After that, it was just a matter of using the knife's blade to leverage the window open enough to be hauled open.

Dylan stepped aside and gestured to the now open window with a flourish. Shaking his head, Xavier hefted himself through the opening while Dylan followed. "In another life, you'd be a straight-up criminal, Miller."

Stone cold satisfaction played across the male's face as he shrugged, "In another life, in this life...it's all a matter of whether or not you're sloppy enough to get caught, no?"

"If that's the case, let's hope Victor's a slob," Xavier said, carefully making his way into the house. They'd entered into the dining room, and even though he wasn't familiar with the house's layout, he figured looking for Victor's office was probably a safe bet.

"Why this guy, by the way?" Dylan asked, looking around the stately home. "You said this guy's an Omega? He lives pretty damn nice for someone of the subclass."

The bitterness in Dylan's tone was clear. He and his father had always opposed the Alliance's rigid class system that put a vast majority of Weres at the bottom of the social pecking order. While it wasn't at all impossible for an Omega to work their way up the ladder, Victor's station was unusual.

"Our families go way back. Our Gamma line hasn't produced a male heir since my grandfather was alive, so my father opted to promote an old friend instead."

Together, they made short work of clearing the bottom floor, making their way upstairs. One of the first doors they came to looked to be a home library complete with a sturdy mahogany desk.

"Here we go," Xavier called to Dylan. "I'll take the desk. You search the bookshelves. Look for anything hand-written, like a ledger or a journal."

They set to work searching the office for what they could find, making sure to carefully place everything back as they'd found it. Rifling through the ledgers and reports on the desk came up empty, noting nothing but ordinary Pack affairs such as neighborhood disputes and commercial permit requests - little more than busywork. Then, Xavier opened a drawer and paused. Inside was a framed picture of Victor with his late wife and a pre-teen Sam.

Thinking back, this was the first photo of either Sam or her mother he'd seen in the house so far, but what was truly strange was the fact that the frame was badly cracked right over Sam's face. The damage was concentrated in a single spot as if it were done on purpose.

"Xav, I found something."

Casting a final lingering look at the photo, Xavier turned his attention to where Dylan stood in front of a section of the bookcase. Walking over, he saw that Dylan had removed several thick antique books to reveal a compact safe built into the back wall of the bookcase.

"Great work, Miller."

Dylan shook his head, his focus on the handbound leather journal in his hands, "Yeah, that too, But I think this is more interesting."

He handed it over for Xavier to scan. Opening the front cover, the first page read, Johannes Michaelis-Braun, 1778. Xavier turned the page to find that the next one unfolded into an illustrated familial tree. It was clear to see where the original writer left off and new ones began. From what he could tell, this journal had been passed down for nearly two hundred years, each generation dutifully recording their line.

Xavier's brows drew down as he looked over the myriad of names, birth dates, and death dates. The tree began with the grandparents of the journal's owner, Johannes, who'd been an only child but sired enough children to more than secure the family name.

By the time the family split in two, presumably around their immigration to America, Xavier had a feeling he knew where the line of names would lead. He tracked the Braun line down a few generations, unsurprised when one of the final names listed was 'Victor Jonathan Brown.'

And when he finished tracing the Michaelis line, he already knew whose name would be listed at the bottom, 'Xavier Mathias Michaels.' "We're related," he said aloud to no one in particular. "Victor is descended from Alphas."