

Chapter 81

Wolf Mother Pt.1

"So, I take it you've fixed the Ava Davis problem?"

The expression on Jack's face told Xavier just how unlikely it was that the healer would believe him whether he told the truth or not. Jack was loyal as the day was long, but he was by no means a yes man. Goddess, but the male was opinionated.

"In a sense," Xavier said, getting out of his car to greet his friend.

"That sounds suspiciously like a no, Xavier," Jack's brow furrowed as he scolded him.

"I haven't seen you in months, and this is how you greet me?"

Save for the rare times when Xavier needed his help to diagnose and treat wayward mates, Jack's primary duty was to the Pack, so he spent the majority of his time traveling around Red Moon territory providing medical aid to Pack members in need.

"And I bet no one else told you how bad it was to keep Ava around in all of that time, did they?" Jack went around to the back seat of his own car to grab his sizable traveling medical kit.

A savant in the medical field, Jack could do anything from minor dental surgery to delivering babies. In addition to his duties as the Pack's primary acting physician, he was also responsible for training the most promising young healers Red Moon had to offer, making him an incredibly busy and sought-after male.

"Believe me, I've heard my fair share of thoughts on how to deal with Ava," Xavier said. "I have it well under control."

"Not from the sounds of it," Jack exclaimed. "Goddess, Xavier. How many people know about her?"

"Look, I'd love to stand around all day hearing about all the ways you'd do my job better than me, but I called you in for a reason, Jack." Xavier didn't try to hide the exasperation in his voice since Jack wasn't the best at social cues - he could read them fine; he just usually chose to ignore them en lieu of brutal honesty.

"The wellness center isn't your solution for Ava, is it?" Jack asked, eyeing the building skeptically. "I mean, I want her gone as much as the next Wolf, but that seems a little extreme, Xav."

"For once, we agree on something wholeheartedly," Xavier said. "And that's part of the reason I wanted you to come with me today. You didn't tell anyone that you were coming to see me, did you?"

"You told me not to." From Jack's lips, those words were as solid as gold. Xavier had asked him to keep this meeting between the two of them, and so he had.

"Perfect. Everything you're about to see needs to be kept on the hush, too." Xavier said, turning on his heel and setting off for his mother's room.

While most everyone who lived in Red Moon proper knew that a little over two years ago, Luna Renata Michaels had had some sort of medical emergency and hadn't been seen since, absolutely no one save for his father, himself, and his mother's health coordinators knew exactly what had come of the grieving female.

And no one was dumb enough to ask.

As with so much else that was going on in Xavier's life, he was wondering if it weren't time for that to change. He hadn't missed a single scheduled visit with his mother since she'd dressed him down and set him straight all of those weeks ago. And not once during that handful of visits, did she have one of her dissociative episodes.

Xavier had asked her all of the regular questions like if her doctors had readjusted her medication or perhaps prescribed a new treatment - hell, he'd even wondered if she'd secretly began flushing all of her pills down the toilet while no one was looking. All she did was give him a small smile and say that she was, "Just feeling more herself, lately."

Still, what he'd learned about his mother losing her Wolf, much like Ava had temporarily lost hers, had eaten at him ever since he'd learned of it. Xavier had every intention of learning as much as he could about the condition in order to help Ava if the need arose, so bringing Jack in to interview his mother seemed like the natural next step.

As he led Jack around the corner to his mother's room, he spotted an unfamiliar male open the door to his mother's medical suite. The male was around his father's age, tall with warm dark skin and closely cropped dark hair. From his crisp white coat, Xavier gathered that he must be a new doctor assigned to his mother's detail.

Strange, Xavier thought, that his father didn't mention a change in her staff to him. His mother was one topic that August was consistently open with him about. Before the male exited the room, he turned back with a smile,

saying something that was too low for Xavier to catch. When he finally closed the door behind him, he exited down the corridor in the other direction without ever seeing them coming.

Xavier waited until the male was out of sight before knocking on the door.

"Good morning, Ma," Xavier said in greeting.

Renata looked up from where she sat in one of the armchairs facing her bay window. Xavier was surprised to find her sitting in front of an easel instead of her usual book or crochet project. His mother used to be an avid painter before Sophia had died. And after being admitted, she'd regularly been so thoroughly tranquilized that it was nigh on impossible for her to feel inspired.

"Xavier!" She replied, only for her eyes to light up as Jack walked in behind him. "And is that little Jackie Williams?"

"It's good to see you, Mrs. Renata. It's been a long time."

Xavier hugged his mother, and Jack followed suit, wrapping the older female in a tight embrace. Jack had enough social graces to let that be the extent of his shock at seeing what had become of Xavier's mother, for which he was grateful. Hopefully, with his help, Xavier's mother's situation would be changing very soon, anyway.

"To what do I owe the honor of such a pleasant surprise?" She asked, still smiling.

Xavier cleared his throat and took a seat on the window bench as Jack perched in the other armchair. "I've been having Jack do some research into Ava's case," he began. "You remember how I told you what had happened to Ava's Wolf?" "Of course," she nodded. "You suspect that the same thing happened to mine."

"Yeah. Would you mind if Jack took a look at you to see if he can make any correlations?"

Doubt crept into her eyes as she shifted her gaze between himself and Jack. "Oh, I don't know about that, Xavier," she said and placed a hand on Jack's arm. "I don't mean to offend. I just think I'd rather let... pardon the pun, let sleeping dogs lie. I feel better than I have in ages, already."

Xavier sat forward in his seat, "But don't you want to know why? Your recovery has been miraculous, Ma. Pretty soon, you might even be able to come home!"

Renata shook her head, "This is my life, Xavier. I know that it is peculiar and uncomfortable to look at, but it's all I know anymore."

Xavier opened his mouth to retort, but Jack held up a hand, stopping him. He nodded, answering the question in Jack's eyes to interject. "Mrs. Renata, if I may," he began. "I hope that I don't sound too single-minded when I say that there simply aren't many cases like yours available to study. Examining you may be the only viable way for me to help Ava and her Wolf."

Xavier cringed internally at Jack's blunt statements. Weren't doctors supposed to learn proper bedside manner when speaking to patients? And yet, the look in his mother's eye softened.

"Ma, you're the one who told me that I had to put in work to prove that I'm a better male for Ava now than I was before. I have a lot to make up for, and finding out what happened to her Wolf is my final gift to her."

Her eyes widened, "Does that mean...."

Xavier nodded, tears filling his eyes. It still felt surreal to him, knowing the truth. It was almost an out-of-body experience being able to tell his mother that he had the evidence - the real, cold, hard evidence - needed to finally make Sophia's murderer pay.

"I found it," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "I found what we needed to put Victor away."

Her own eyes began to water as Jack looked on, stoically containing the shock he must be feeling. Xavier hadn't yet had the time to fill him in on the results of his investigation. "So, it really was Victor?" She whispered.

Xavier nodded, "He wasn't working alone. There were no rogues, Ma. Just hitmen gunning for Soph."

His mother raised a hand to her mouth as silent tears spilled over. "And Ava and Sam?"

"They purposely framed Ava to throw us off the scent," he said before taking a deep painful breath. "And Sam was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Goddess," she and Jack breathed at the same time. Awful. The entire sordid tale was heinous through and through, but at least now they knew the truth. But not all of it.

"I'm going to find out the rest, Ma. Who Victor was working with," he swore. "And then, I'll figure out how to present the truth without upending the Pack."

His mother's eyes grew hard with determination. "No, Xavier," she said firmly. "You upend it. It's the only way to make sure nothing like this happens again."

It was easy to forget, given her circumstances, that Renata Michaels was a Luna, a leader in her own right. But the full force of her decades of experience navigating the same muddy waters he now did flooded over him. Before he consciously thought to do so, he was nodding, Jack along with him.

Satisfied, Renata sat back in her seat, looking resolved. "Good," she said. "Then I want to do my part for Ava. The child's been through enough."

Xavier closed his eyes, relief washing over him, "Thank you, Mom."

She nodded absently, her gaze drifting to the outside, "Before we continue, then, I have something I should disclose."

They waited, holding their breath so as not to disrupt Renata as she took a moment to come to some internal conclusion. "My Wolf," she finally spoke. "I've felt her. Recently."