

Chapter 83

For The Good Of The Pack

Xavier was careful not to let any of his misgivings show on his face as he stood in front of his father the day after learning that after nearly twenty years of marriage, his mother had found her true love in another male. The concept felt preposterous to him, and he felt ridiculous for feeling that way.

Their parent's marriage hadn't been intact for over three years. What truly stung was the death of a stunted spark of hope that he hadn't realized he still harbored until he'd realized that his mother was finally going to be able to leave the hospital, but when she did, it wouldn't mean that his family would go back to the way things were before his sister had been murdered.

It was a childish assumption, but it was one that hurt to be dashed. Even without the complicated and unexpected addition of a mate, his mother would still be burned by her time in the hospital - even if it had ultimately

saved her life, living the last few years in a drugged haze would have to leave a mark.

His father had never been particularly warm, ever the austere leader, and overly concerned about public perception. But he'd been honest and fair before Victor had permanently altered the course of all of their lives. And no matter what the circumstances or how poor Xavier's opinion of his father grew, he'd known the male loved his wife. Hey may not have known how to show it anymore, but the emotion was still there.

Maybe that was the source of the pain in his chest he'd carried over the last twenty-four hours. His father would be crushed by this news at best. At worst, he might retaliate against the male Xavier had yet to meet. He wondered if his father had ever crossed paths with the doctor who was his mother's mate.

Apparently, he was a recent transplant from Silver Moon - Perhaps Liam knew of the male since he was an accomplished psychiatric biochemist. He hadn't been assigned to his mother, but they'd crossed paths when she'd made requests to have her medication re-evaluated. Though they'd never met, his mere presence in the building had been enough to jog her from her perpetual fog.

That's how she'd been lucid enough to school him on his behavior in the first place. Just her mate's presence had been enough to give him his mother back. It pained him to think of the ways he could have helped Ava

if only he'd stopped to think. The wasted time and his guilty conscience ate at him night and day.

But that was why he'd come knocking on his father's door, ready to present his findings on Victor's plotting. Despite the fact that even standing here made him feel sick. He felt like a child who'd just caught their parent in their first lie. Santa wasn't real. The moon doesn't really follow you home every night. By the end of this conversation, whatever vestiges of love and respect he held for the man who - despite his faults - had raised him, given him a stable home, and taught him to be a male, would either be intact or nothing but ashes.

This was one of those points of no return that Xavier was becoming increasingly familiar with. At other crossroads, he'd had to kill his ego and need for vengeance. Now, it was time to kill what remained of his inner child and finally step into the role he'd assumed over three years ago.

"Xavier," his father said as he poured them some drinks from the whiskey decanter Sophia had gifted him just the Father's Day before her death. "You've taken care of Ava Davis, I hope."

"Actually," Xavier said, dropping the pile of printed evidence on the desk between them. "That's what I'm here to speak with you about."

His father looked down at the pile of photos but didn't move to pick them up. "Can you be a little more succinct, son," he said, taking a sip of his whiskey. "I'm busy running your Pack."

The barb made him feel small, but then again, it was meant to. But he wouldn't let his father's constant string of cheap powerplays get to him. He couldn't. This was a test to August. It was always a test, and Xavier usually failed. Not today. "Much appreciated since I've been busy saving it," he said.

August nodded slowly, "I admit you did well sniffing out those rogues. Now, did you find their leader?"

"You know there's not much to do until the meeting with the Sidhe," Xavier rebutted. "Not unless we want to escalate an unknown situation even further by storming random black ops sites, we have no further knowledge on." "And the cipher? Have your people been able to decode any of those documents?"

Xavier gritted his teeth but managed to force out, "It's an ongoing investigation."

He jabbed a finger into the pile of evidence, "But you'll be happy to know that in my free time, I figured out your biggest failure."

Xavier knew he'd hit a nerve by the way his father's jaw clenched so hard it twitched. It was a trait they shared. "First off," he stated. "I know about the Michaelis and the Brauns."

August's eyes widened a fraction of an inch. "What have you been getting into, boy?" He'd officially jostled the hornet's nest.

"Why did you feel that you couldn't share that information with me?" Xavier demanded. "They were in our lives, anyway, so why keep it secret?"

August sneered, "Because I'll not have generations of prestige and good standing within the Council be tarnished by a random bit of nineteenth-century trivia. Especially not when it comes to a conniving piece of trash like Victor Brown." Xavier rocked back on his heels, taken aback by the unmasked disgust in his father's tone.

"Victor blackmailed you into promoting him, didn't he?"

A low growl emanated from his father's barrel chest, "The pissant didn't even stop to consider that I'd do it for free."

Xavier cocked an eyebrow, "Would you have?"

"Maybe not to my Gamma position," August said, hiding a hateful smirk behind his glass. "But maybe a secretary?"

Xavier shook his head in wonder at his father's casual classism. He couldn't entirely fault him since he'd been complicit his entire life until only very recently during his harrowing but brief foray into soul-searching.

His father only shrugged. "I let you play with the girl, didn't I?" August made a disgruntled face, "Although, I think she started to take a liking to you. I probably would've had to put an end to that."

"For fuck's sake, Dad. I need you to stop speaking and listen to me."

Xavier didn't raise his voice. Instead, he injected as much command and authority into his measured tone as he could. Just like his father had taught him.

"I know who killed Sophia," he said and gestured to the desk. "It's all here."

August finally put his glass down, "The fuck are you pulling, Xavier?"

"Not a damn thing," he said, holding his father's increasingly angry gaze. "I did what you were too afraid to do. I chose to stop pinning my sister's

murder on an innocent girl, so the real murderer could see the justice he deserves." Xavier stood to his full height, "And I'm only telling you before I make my intentions public out of respect for the family you built for Sophia and me. I'm not ungrateful. But am finished ruling under your thumb. ” August didn't reply. He was too engrossed in damning letter after damning letter. "Where did you find this?"

"Victor had a hidden safe."

"Leverage," August spat.

"Like you said, conniving piece of trash."

August sat back in his chair and ran a hand across his suddenly ashen face, "Goddess above...I'm going to kill the motherfucker."

Xavier started, "You're going to let justice play out. Correctly, this time."

August rocketed to his feet, filling the room despite being a few inches shorter than his son, "That sonofabitch put a hit out on my daughter." Rage blazed in August's every fiber as he stared his son down, daring him to deny him this vengeance. It took everything in Xavier to do just that. "No," he said, not backing down at his father's low growl. "You had the opportunity to finish this, and you chose to play into Victor's hands." His father bared his teeth in an unbridled snarl, "Their goal was to throw this

Pack into chaos, and I prevented that very thing from happening." "At the expense of letting Victor and his accomplice go free."

They stared each other down in tense silence as his father's chest heaved, and Xavier struggled to keep his grip on his sparking temper. "Well then, Alpha," August sneered. "How do you plan on fixing this?"

"Internally," he said. "This is Pack business, and it can't interfere with the meeting with the Seelie Court."

His father begrudgingly nodded, "Agreed. We need to be fully present at those discussions."

"In the meantime, we find out who M.B. is, and we make both those fuckers pay."

Xavier walked into this room expecting his relationship with his father to change, but he couldn't have anticipated how - as he held out his forearm and his father clasped it with his own - it felt to look into his father's eyes and finally see respect reflecting back.