

Chapter 123

Armageddon

Beep. Beep. Beep.

As was typical, Xavier rose before the sun, and he knew that it would be well past midnight by the time he laid his head back down tonight. He tossed out an arm and quieted his alarm clock with an unceremonious smack of his palm.

He sat up and stretched, letting only the slightest grunt of pain escape his lips as his fresher scars tugged and pulled along with his seemingly perpetually tense muscles. The attack on Alliance Tower had kickstarted his new collection of battle marks, but goddess knew that he'd racked up plenty more since then.

And goddess knew he'd have even more to show by the time this was finished.

Before the attack, he'd start the day with a shower before stopping past a café or a diner for a quick breakfast. Now, After the attack, water was short, food was short, and rationing for three hundred or so lost souls meant that Xavier had a long list of people to ensure got settled for the day before he got either.

Instead, he settled for a cup of black coffee - it used up considerably less water and woke him up all the same. Turning on his television, Xavier listened to the morning's bleak newscast as he prepared for his morning rounds.

A local restaurant has burned to the ground, and two humans and one werewolf have died after a firefight broke out late last night near Highland Park. This, in the latest of a string of interspecies gang attacks following the aftermath of the werewolf-led attack on Alliance Tower in New York City last October.

In the wake of the collapse of the Northeastern Alliance, tensions continue to rise as the terroristic organization led by Noah and Neia Thomas remains at large. The governor advises all current citizens of New York State, both human and supernatural, to heed the active state of emergency and navigate toward the designated refugee sanctuaries located in New York City, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.

Please remember to exercise caution when evacuating, as bands of rogue vigilantes have been reported....

When a knock came at Xavier's door, he may have swung it open a little harder than strictly necessary.

"That bad, huh?" Liam grunted in greeting.

"Another confrontation. This time out by Highland Park," Xavier sighed and let the male past. "Happen to know anything about it?"

"None of ours. In fact, we picked up a few more stragglers."

"Red Moon?"

Liam nodded, "They said their family hadn't lived in Caledonia in a while. Their search came up clean, though. As far as we know, they aren't one of Thomas' spies."

"I'll have my father run their names to be on the safe side," Xavier sighed, passing the other deposed Alpha a cup of morning fuel of his own. "Shit. At this rate, we're going to have to make another rundown South. The Green Light is already at capacity, and it seems as if we get new mouths to feed every few days now."

"That's because we are getting more and more to feed. The governor has the Wolves running scared."

Xavier and Liam turned as Dylan pushed into the room, frustration pouring off of the male like an inky aura. Close behind him was Bella Sutton, the end of their society and her livelihood as she knew it, clearly not reason enough to muss a single hair on her perfectly coifed head.

"What do you mean?" Liam asked.

"I mean, the sanctuaries are bullshit. For us Wolves, at least," Dylan growled.

"We just got finished speaking with our contacts at one of the safe houses in Pennsylvania. They revealed some...troubling, if not unsurprising news," Bella interjected, cool as ever. "The governor has issued a shadow mandate. Any Wolves arriving at the checkpoints are being detained."

"For what reason?" Xavier demanded.

Bella shrugged a slight shoulder, "I know you've heard the news just as well as I have. 'The werewolf-led attack,' 'the Wolven terrorists.' The humans have already decided the Alliance is fallen; it was only a matter of time before they decided to take matters into their own hands."

"Miller, have you had any word from the governors in your territories?" Liam asked, a deep frown lining his jaw.

Dylan shook his head, "They haven't been particularly forthcoming with me, especially since my father passed in the attack. The last I heard was word of the sanctuaries opening up in Pennsylvania. As far as I know, my territories haven't called a state of emergency yet."

"Hmm," Bella pursed her lips, deep in thought. "That doesn't mean that they aren't making moves. After all, we know where the Thomas' are, whether the humans publicly admit it or not. I believe that Dark Moon's refusal to go into lockdown is deliberate."

Xavier's brow lowered, "How do you mean?"

From beside him, Liam grunted in realization, "They're annexing us."

Bella nodded gravely, "Or preparing to."

The pieces began to click together for Xavier, and he didn't like the look of what they spelled out in the slightest. Bella was right, Noah and his mother hadn't made a secret of their escape, and with no Alpha manning the region, their ancestral home was the perfect area for them to take as their base of operations.

The Wolves in the area would, for the most part, recognize Noah's claim to the Alphadom, and the human leaders of the area were already primed, used to benefiting from Montgomery Bennett's crooked business practices flooding wealth into the coastal region.

Hell, Neia probably still had connections from the years she'd spent at Montgomery's side that she was now capitalizing on.

The only other territories further North than Eclipse were the useless pieces of filth up in Grave Crown and the Canadian border.

That meant that, unless they made their way to the Green Light Club or one of the very few other safe house they'd been able to set up in the area or somehow made it across several state borders without being stopped...the Wolves in Xavier and Dylan's territories had nowhere to go but the human's sanctuaries.

"They're gathering up who they can. Tagging us and boxing us in. But why?" Xavier asked.

Liam grunted, "At this point, all we can really surmise is that the humans are trying to get the Wolves out of the way."

"But why only Red Moon and Dark Moon territories?" Dylan growled.

"Grave Crown is small, out of the way, and indifferent," Bella sighed. "And Silver Moon's too big. I doubt they could convince that many legislatures to go along with whatever they're planning."

"So what do we do with this non-information?" Dylan asked. "Right now, all we're doing is grasping at straws."

"At least we might not be taken off-guard when one of the straws comes up short," Bella quipped.

Xavier let out a frustrated breath, "Until then, we redouble our efforts to get refugees out of the line of fire. It's all we can do, and now, we have to figure out how to get them down to Maryland. Fuck! We've sent so many of our people to those sanctuaries."

Bella comforted him with a steady hand on the shoulder. "And no matter what the humans have planned, they'll be safe there," she assured him. "After something as monumental as the attack against the Council, the country's eyes are on what's left of the Alliance. And there may be a lot of human-led states, but there are enough Wolven-led ones to make sure the governors don't forget that."

"Bella's right," Liam nodded. "And they wouldn't want to risk us siding with Eclipse by pissing us off."

The group goes silent, caught underneath the weight of all of the possibilities this unsettling revelation could hold. But enough was enough. They had a safe house to run, and by the sounds of it, probably another to set up.

"Right," Xavier announced, his tone drawing the others from their personal reveries. "First thing's first, we need to shore up our supply chain. The looting in the area hasn't gotten any better. We'll need to branch out soon. Bella, do you have any ideas on that?"

The female nodded, "I have some contacts in Buffalo that I haven't gotten to cash in yet."

"Do you think they can take in some of these mouths?" he asked.

She made a non-committal sound before continuing, "I can see, but I hear tell that humans and Wolves in that are none too pleased with one another at this point."

"Yeah, well, they can get in line. If they haven't devolved into an outright gang war yet, they're an option."

Just then, Xavier's phone rang, causing an immediate injection of adrenaline to start coursing its way through his veins.

"I have to take this," he announced before stepping away to the relative privacy of his bedroom. When he answered, she didn't even give him the opportunity to say hello. "They cut a deal."

The frenzy in Ava's voice gave Xavier pause as he suddenly felt the distance between them as keenly as a freshly sharpened knife.

"You spoke to Noah?" He demanded.

"Of course," she said, rushing on. "He said they cut a deal with the Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York governors. They've started gathering up Wolves being taken in by the designated sanctuaries. "We know about the sanctuaries," Xavier said. "We thought the humans were trying to get us out of the way for something."

"Right," she said. "They're throwing down the gauntlet to you and the other Alphas."

"Thomas isn't an idiot, so I doubt his mother is either. They have to know how much public scrutiny that would put them under."

"That's why Noah said they'd never attack first. They're drawing you in."

"How, Ava?"

The line went silent, but Xavier's connection to Ava still telegraphed the rising panic she was trying to hide, "Ava, I need you to focus. You've done a good job, a damn good job. You're almost done." He heard her breath catch and then a steadying breath, "The detained Wolves, Xavier...they're taking them to the prisons."