

Chapter 78

Old Roots

"Your face mirrors my thoughts exactly," said Dylan, who stood carefully examining Xavier's expression as he uncovered this surreal truth from his family's history. "How do you figure that went down?"

Xavier shook his head, "A family losing their Alpha status? I couldn't tell you. I've never even heard of something like that happening before."

Dylan spread his hands, gesturing to Victor's well-appointed estate, "It would explain how Victor's achieved so much. You think your father knew about the connection." "It's possible. If Victor showed this to my father, it's not outside of the realm of possibility that my dad decided to repay Victor in whatever way he thought was fitting."

Xavier thought back on what memories he had of Victor from his time as an Alpha and before. In his youth, the older male had always encouraged

his and Sophia's friendship with Sam, bringing her along with him to meetings with August that the girl would otherwise have no reason to attend, making sure that the three cubs were exposed to one another at an early date.

In all of his earliest memories of Sam, Victor was there in the background, ceaselessly currying his father's favor. In fact, Xavier had known Samantha for years by the time he'd been put in classes with Ava.

He recalled a time when he had to have been no more than ten while his sister had been about eight that Sophia mentioned how kind their father must be for him to allow them to play with an Omega so often. At the time, he'd agreed and promptly moved on to other things. Now, though, he could see how atypical that was for someone as socially conscious as August.

Although Xavier truly did believe that his father would raise Victor's status in light of such a revelation, he highly doubted that the reasons were as altruistic as acknowledging familial ties. More like, Victor threatened to go public with the information, prompting Omegas all over to start researching their genealogies in the hopes of discovering some exploitable link to the upper class.

"You think that journal mentions how the split happened?" Dylan asked.

Xavier skimmed through the family tree until he found the branch where the family split, taking on two separate surnames. Above that, told the tale of two brothers - Luis and Elias Michaelis-Braun. Where Elias went on to sire the line that would eventually become the Michaels, Alphas of Red Moon, his brother Luis had a definitive line scratched through the 'Michaelis' half of his surname. From then on, every member of their branch carried the name Braun, and later Brown. Fortunately, Xavier came from a family of diligent note-takers. Taking note of the year marked as Luis and his partner Emilia's marriage year, 1872, Xavier flipped through the journal until he reached the passages that dictated that same year. Scanning through Luis' many entries took a few minutes, but Xavier finally found what he was looking for.

21 April 1872

We leave for the New World on the morrow, but alas, this is no occasion for joyous celebration. I have only recently learned that Elias and his pureblooded female are to make the journey across the sea alongside us. This new land was to be my oasis - an exodus from the archaic bonds my family so dearly clings to.

Together, alongside the more progressive of our Kindred, I was to help establish a new homestead with new ideals in the wildlands of New York. Now, I fear that pretentiousness and bigotry have wormed their way into our home before it was e'en built, poisoning mine and Emilia's dream at the root.

Emilia, dearest of heart that she is, sees this as a chance to reconcile with my brother, but I protest. For as long as I shall draw breath, I will never forgive my family for what they've wrought. Who are they to deny me my goddess-sent mate due to the dilution of her blood?!

The child she is due to bear will never see the name Michaelis and know its taint. I would surely rather die.

- Luis C. Braun

"That's certainly...enlightening," Dylan said as Xavier finished.

"The fact that marrying outside of the Elite can turn Alphas into Omegas?" Xavier asked, hiking an eyebrow. "Among other things," Dylan said, looking acutely disturbed. "The last thing the Council needs is more ammunition."

Xavier hummed in agreement. The Alliance Omegas already had it rough, putting up with a lot of flak in exchange for the safety the Alliance territories offered. If the criticism and lower pay became too much, they could always find solace in the many human societies, which many did. But for the many who found living among humans frightening or distasteful, the Alliance's systematic oppression beat the outright hostility and unrest found throughout the rest of the country. If the Elite found out that their prejudices were even slightly rooted in a modicum of truth, the Omega's already dubious liberties could be forfeit.

Still, the origin of how the Omega lines came to be was a mind-blowing discovery. Xavier had always been taught that, much like the mating bond, the hierarchy was a divine assignment, decided on and bestowed by the goddess. He'd never had reason to believe otherwise, and even if he had bothered to question the validity of those claims, this information was not in their archives. If it were, he was sure his mother, a natural Gamma herself, would have made sure that he and his sister were aware of it.

"Alarming discoveries aside, this is pretty cool, Xavier," Dylan said, gesturing to the book still clutched in Xavier's hands. "That's your family history, right there. Did you even know that you're German?"

"Not in the slightest," he said, lifting the book. "It's certainly fascinating. Although, I'm fairly certain great-great-uncle Luis wouldn't want me anywhere near this book."

"Huh," Dylan said off-handedly. "You and...Sam, was it? To think that you were really cousins that entire time and no one told you."

Xavier frowned, "Yeah. That is curious, isn't it?"

Putting that train of thought aside, Xavier turned his attention to the safe. It was small and rectangular, maybe only slightly larger than a standard letter envelope. A standard digital keypad held it closed. "Try 0117."

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"What's that?" Dylan asked, pressing the numbers in the safe.

"Sam's birthday."

Dylan shook his head as the code came back negative. They tried a few different iterations, as well as a few different dates, Xavier remembered from growing up around Sam - Victor's birth date, her mother's birth date, as well as death date all struck out.

"Must be something really important in here," Dylan said. "Either that or this dude is the stone-cold kind of clinical."

Xavier frowned as Dylan's words sparked an idea. "Try 1872."

As soon as Dylan typed in the numbers, the screen flashed green.

"Damn," Dylan muttered. "And people call me cold."

"Certainly shows where his priorities lie," Xavier spat as Dylan pulled the safe door open.

The first thing that jumped out at him was the sheaves upon sheaves of bound paper, all stacked on top of one another and tied together with twine. Dylan pulled out the first bundle, taking a sheet at random and reading it aloud. V. B.,

I officially offer you the opportunity to call me a backstabbing motherfucker directly to my face at your earliest convenience. I did my part - the Red Moon princess is dead, and as far as anyone knows, a band of rogues is to blame. I even offered up a patsy for your trouble at no extra cost.

I promised you results, and you got them. It's not on me and mine if those results weren't what you expected. As far as I'm concerned, our working relationship has reached its natural conclusion.

On a sincere note, I am sorry that your daughter got caught up in this. I pray to the goddess that you can find a way to live with your decisions.

- M. B.

As you reach the final pages, remember that 000005s.org is your destination for the complete story. Share the joy of reading with others and spread the word. The next chapter is just a visit away! Dylan looked up with flat eyes, "Fuck, Xavier. I'm sorry."

Xavier snatched the rest of the papers from him, his eyes tearing through each letter. All of them were the same, each one equally damning. One-sided as the correspondence was, the picture they painted was clear - Victor Brown had orchestrated the attack that had led to his sister's murder.

"Why?" Xavier's voice shuddered as it left him. Victor had money; he had a station. What would possess him to -

Xavier took a deep, trembling breath, fighting for control over the hot flash of rage that was quickly consuming him. As he inhaled, he caught the very faint but unmistakable scent of violets. He rushed at the safe, grabbing the rest of the letters and shoving them toward Dylan. Lying underneath was the source of the damning scent, a navy-blue hair scrunchie.

Hands shaking, Xavier carefully picked up the hair accessory and brought it to his nose. From within him, Alexandre stirred at the scent of his mate, confirming what Xavier already knew - this hair tie belonged to Ava. The scent was old - years old - but still present enough from where it had been sealed behind the safe door to be irrefutable.

And, underneath the subtle sweetness of his mate's natural scent was the deeper earthier note of musk that filled every inch of this space. Victor.

When he finally looked up, Dylan's naturally fair complexion had taken on a ruddy tint, evidence of his own growing ire. "Is that Ava's?"

Xavier nodded, "She had about a million of them. It wouldn't even clock on her radar if one went missing."

He ran a hand over his own flushed face, "Her scent. It had been at the scene of the attacks. Fuck, Dylan. I put her away over this."

Dylan's hand came down hard on his shoulder, "Stop it. Ava was locked up because some dangerous people wanted her to be. That's not on you."

He didn't agree, but Xavier took the hint and steadied himself. The faster he got through this, the faster he could exonerate Ava. Xavier reached into the safe and grabbed the final item in there, buried all the way at the back and on top of mounds of damning evidence.

"What's that?" Dylan asked.

Xavier stared at the lifeless box in his hand, "What I came here for. Samantha's phone."