

# The Secret

Based on The Brothers Hawthorne by Jennifer Lynn Barnes

Xander Hawthorne was...distracted. Like always. Even while playing the old man's games, he almost always got distracted by something. Most of the time it was machinery. But for him, the distraction was not only because of his general wandering mind. When he was younger, it had also been somewhat intentional to him. It gave him time to talk with the old man. It had proved helpful in a way, like when Avery had been given the entirety of Tobias Hawthorne's inheritance. But the old man had told Xander more than that. Xander knew more than he let on. He knew things that could be dangerous. He knew what had happened at Prague. He knew that he shouldn't. He also knew that Jameson probably knew.

It had been 5 months since Jameson had told Avery about what happened at Prague. He had been too careful for his taste to make sure his brothers wouldn't know. *If they knew...* he thought. He shook off that thought. He didn't dismiss the thought fully though. Never rule out any possibility. *Never.*

Xander was a cheerful person. But sometimes, even he had to be serious. Some things are too important. *I shouldn't ask Jameson*, he thought. What if he didn't know? Not asking would be the smartest thing to do. But Xander wasn't very good at making smart decisions. Besides, the secret was killing him more than any secret ever had. *They deserve to know*, he thought.

*Am I protecting them by doing this?* That was Jameson's big question. He was pacing his room. Ever since Prague, he had this exact thought almost every night.

Xander was at the door of Jameson's room. Xander *never* took the normal way to *anyone's* room, but this was too important. He could hear Jameson pacing inside. He burst into the room. "We need to talk Jameson," he heard himself say.

Jameson narrowed his eyes, amused "You never use the normal doorway. And you're never this serious"

"It's about Prague," Xander said

Jameson somehow narrowed his eyes even more, "What do you know?" His tone became serious.

Xander took a deep breath and said, "I know that Alice Hawthorne isn't dead."

Jameson's eyes widened, "How do you know?"

Before he could answer, Grayson and Nash burst into Jameson's room. Xander had secretly called a 911 meeting without Jameson before he entered Jameson's room. He figured that Jameson didn't want anyone to know, considering that he still hadn't told them all about it. He had texted them to wait outside Jameson's doorway and listen in. They probably knew it was serious, considering that he hadn't made a *single* funny remark. Grayson's expression was icy cold as always, but his muscles were taut. Nash's expression was fiery.

"Out of my way little brother," Nash growled

Xander stepped out of his way. Even *he* knew better than to argue with Nash when his expression was fiery like that. Grayson on the other hand, seemed frozen in shock.

"When did you find out about this?" Grayson whispered to Xander.

Jameson somehow heard him even through the midst of Nash yelling at him.

“Damn it, Jamie!” He yelled, “Why in the almighty universe would you not tell us? And how did Xander know?”

“Nash, would you have told us if you knew?” Jameson asked. Nash didn’t answer. Jameson had him there and they both knew it

“Now back to Xander,” Jameson’s blazing eyes shot back to Xander, “How *did* you know?”

Xander calmly looked him in the eye and said “The old man gave me a clue before he died. Said I shouldn’t tell anyone, not even you three until you found out for yourselves.”

“Clue? What kind of clue?” Jameson was smoldering, but hooked.

“Quite an easy one. But there is still more to it. It was a piece of red acetate in one of the old man’s photo albums. A flash drive is what I got from the clue. When I plugged it in I found out about her”

“He would never have made it that easy.”

“Which is why I said there is more to it. The flash drive contained some extra information too. I don’t know what it meant though.”

“Then let’s go find out.” This time Nash spoke.

“We can’t leave Avery alone,” Grayson said

At this, Xander perked up, “Then let’s bring her along!”

“When do we go?” Nash asked.

“Now,” Jameson said, “We go now.”