

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 891: Friends and rivals

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"I'm happy you didn't forget about me," Zina said.

Dawn was surprised to hear this. "Why would I forget about you?"

Zina shrugged. "Well, now you have your mate and the endless orgasms you always wanted. It would be easy for you to forget your life before George appeared."

Dawn giggled. "I won't deny it. It's great. But I will never forget who I was and my friends because of that."

Zina sighed audibly. "I wouldn't know."

Dawn reached to hold Zina's hand. "You will find your mate soon, Zi. He is out there, waiting for you, just how you are waiting for him. Believe in the Moon Goddess, and don't lose hope. The more hardship you go through before you meet your mate, the better it will be when you finally find each other. You will see that a mate is a wonderful addition to what you have already. You will want to make him happy, and he will want to do the same for you in return. Just how I couldn't ask George to leave his work and his life..." Revenge was a better word, "He wouldn't ask me to drop the things that are important to me."

Zina thought how it sounded fantastic, but... "Not everyone is the same."

"I assume you have someone on your mind," Dawn said cautiously.

Zina nodded. "Steph."

Dawn was alerted. "Is her mate abusive?"

"It doesn't look like it. I mean, they seem to be smitten and happy, but..." Zina hesitated. "You know that Steph was always hovering around Lisa. Lisa was in the Lightclaw pack, but Steph knew where Lisa was and with whom. Is it possible that the mate bond impacted Steph so much that she doesn't care if Lisa is in trouble?"

Dawn knew that Zina blamed herself for the rogues' attack on the Blue River pack. One of the theories was that Zina told Steph about Talia's whereabouts, and Steph was the one who gave that information to Lisa (and rogues). Those were just guesses, and they didn't have proof it actually happened, but Zina still felt guilty about it, and now it seemed that Zina blamed Stephanie.

"Tell me from the beginning," Dawn demanded.

"There is not much to tell, and that's the problem. Steph and Richard stop by every few days to catch up. Richard goes into the garden, and Steph helps out in the kitchen, or she makes coffee for Trisha and me. Steph talks about anything and everything except Lisa. Maya hinted that we don't know anything related to Lisa's mate and that he should come so we can all meet him, and Steph brushed it off, saying how he is busy."

"Did Steph meet him?"

"No. And that's another red flag. Steph said she doesn't know who Lisa's mate is or where Lisa is. Don't you think it's strange? She should at least tell us which pack Lisa joined."

Dawn agreed with this. Stephanie was known to hover around Lisa, yet now she acted like Lisa was unimportant. "Don't overthink it, Zi. You know that Lisa caused a lot of trouble recently. She is not a child anymore, and now she also has a mate. Maybe Steph finally decided to be happy and let Lisa take responsibility for her actions."

"Do you believe that? This is Steph we are talking about."

Dawn puffed her cheeks. Did she believe that? No. She was just comforting Zina. But there was a point... "If anything is off with Steph, I'm sure Damon and Talia are on top of it."

Zina leaned into her chair and stared at the sky that had a few clouds on it. "I don't know, Di. Our Alpha has a soft spot for a woman who raised him after his parents died."

"You don't think that Steph is coming to the packhouse with the purpose of getting information for rogues, do you?" When Zina didn't respond, Dawn continued. "You know Steph, just as I do. She takes pride in the Dark Howlers pack and would never do anything against it. Everything Steph did was for the pack. She lost her mate and even sent her daughter away."

Zina knew all this, but she couldn't help the doubt that swelled within her. Something was off with Stephanie, and it seemed that only Zina saw it.

...

George was at the training grounds. His Lieutenants were monitoring their units and taking notes of the performance of each soldier.

Before meeting Dawn, George would spend here most of the day.

Since Dawn came to the Red Moon pack, George would be at the training grounds in the morning, afternoons he would spend in his office, meetings were somewhat random and on a need basis, while he would look for opportunities to take his work with him and finish it from the study. During those times, Dawn would be in the study with him, reading a book or watching a video with a headset on. He loved those moments when Dawn was in his visual range.

George checked the time. It was dragging. If James was present, George could use an excuse of training the future Alpha to leave earlier, but James was studying with another tutor now, so that was not an option.

George knew that Dawn was with Zina because he could feel her happiness, and it made him happy also. He remembered the promise of joining them for lunch, and he didn't want to miss it. George knew that Estelle was preparing a feast.

Most of the warriors would go for lunch to the canteen. It was close and convenient since they didn't need to prepare a meal, and the food was decent.

It was not unusual for mated pack members who lived nearby to head home for lunch or for their mates to join them. Unfortunately, that didn't apply to George. He didn't announce that he had found his mate and if Dawn appeared there, it would raise many questions.

George couldn't risk Alpha Edward finding out about a new female. Dawn was attractive, and George could see the old fart setting his sight on Dawn. George wouldn't allow that to happen, and then he would reveal his identity, and a decade of planning would go down the drain.

Just a bit more, George told himself.

It was close to eleven-thirty when George raised his arm, making hundred-something warriors stop moving and look at him.

"Let's break for lunch. We will continue at one o'clock sharp!" George announced and turned to leave.

"You are in a hurry," a condescending voice came from the side. "If I didn't know better, I would assume you have a sweet pussy waiting for you. Is it possible that a woman caught the eye of monk George?"

George frowned while turning to look at the familiar face he didn't want to see. It was Owen. He was a Lieutenant of a battalion that was not under George.

Owen and George had been rivals since they started climbing ranks.

George and Owen were both orphans. They became warriors at the same time, and their promotions were always close to each other. Since George became a General (and then Commander), Owen's rivalry intensified, and George didn't hold back his punches either.

"Is there a reason you are here, Lieutenant?" George asked, emphasizing Owen's rank. "I assume you are not here to discuss women."

"Does Alpha know you are cutting short training for your warriors?"

"Does Alpha know you were watching my people when you were supposed to watch yours?" George returned the question.

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Note: you can find Owen's pic in comments

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Chapter 892: Best friends (D&Z) (2)

Normally, George and Owen would engage in verbal spats, but he didn't have time to waste today. Every minute with Dawn was precious.

"Why are you here, Owen? Don't tell me you wanted to invite me for lunch?" George asked.

"What if I did?"

"Then, I will need to decline."

"Is there a reason?"

"Of course, there is," George responded. "Other than not wanting your ugly face to give me indigestion, I woke up craving dumplings, so I asked my Omegas to prepare them for lunch. You would know how that feels if you had Omegas serving you. Oh, how inconsiderate of me. Lieutenants don't get Omegas to serve them; that's only for Generals and above."

Owen's jaw ticked, and George shook his head.

"If there is anything official, schedule an appointment. If you have time to spare, I suggest you return to the training grounds. When you feel you have a fighting chance, issue me a warrior's challenge. I won't refuse."

Owen watched bitterly George's retreating back, noticing that George's steps were getting faster until he broke into a run, and then he took a turn and disappeared out of sight.

...

George opened the door of his villa and stepped inside when...

"WAAAH!"

A Dawn-bullet jumped on George with an enthusiastic scream, and he was quick to catch her.

Dawn rubbed her face on the side of his neck. "I thought you won't make it."

"What made you think so?" George asked through chuckles. Dawn was adorable, and her happiness spilled on him. He had never felt so welcome before Dawn came into his life.

"I sensed your displeasure not so long ago, so I assumed that you had something unexpected and... you know... that you will be too busy to come home for lunch. You didn't miss anything important for this?"

George squeezed Dawn against him and took a deep breath to fill his system with her addictive scent of cinnamon.

"It was nothing much. Just Owen."

"When will the two of you stop acting like high school kids?" Dawn never met Owen, but George told her about him.

"Hey, hey," George protested. "He is the one coming onto me. Are you expecting me to stay quiet and let him use me as a doormat?"

Dawn released George and touched his cheek. "No, I don't. But I wish that you could talk it out. Didn't you say that the two of you used to train together and help each other? If he sees that you are still the same man, he might be a friend. A good one."

George smiled helplessly. Talking was not the way of people at the Red Moon pack.

Here, George was a Commander, cold, ruthless, and calculative.

"This reasonable and soft Commander George is only for you, Dawn."

Dawn grinned. She loved to know that she was special.

"I wouldn't call you soft," Dawn said while wiggling her eyebrows, and George growled lowly in approval while leaning to capture her lips with his.

"How easy is it for you to forget about me?"

Zina's voice reached them from the side, and Dawn and George smiled.

Dawn spoke about Zina a lot, and George visited the Dark Howlers pack more than once, so they were familiar with each other. The only thing new about this was the location.

"Hi Zi," George greeted her. "I assume you had a pleasant morning with my mate."

"I did. And now I'm starving. Can we eat?"

They kept the chat during lunch on light topics, and Zina wished she could be this close to Dawn daily.

"What are your plans for the afternoon?" George asked.

"We will prepare dinner," Dawn responded. Other than chatting with Zina, she didn't have other plans.

"I was hoping you could show me around," Zina said.

George paused. "Around?"

Zina looked at Dawn. "Around. Outside. Are you telling me you don't leave this villa?"

Dawn released a long breath. "I do get out, but... this is not a good environment for an Omega, Zi."

"I came to see how you are living here. Show me. I don't want to see only pretty things."

George didn't like it. "Due to the preparations for James' birthday, I have meetings this afternoon and can't accompany you."

"Dawn can't leave this house unless you are with her?" Zina asked incredulously.

"No, no," Dawn said quickly. "I go out on my own, but..." Dawn puffed her cheeks. "Fine. We will go."

"Dawn," George called, his low voice full of warning.

"We won't stir trouble. I will take Dawn to the market and back. Maybe Estelle will join us also. What can happen?"

...

Eventually, George left, and Zina asked when it was just the two of them, "Tell me straight, what's the big deal with us going out? Will people beat us?"

"No. It's just..." Dawn was not sure how to say this. "In general, Omegas are treated like dirt here. Then there is a distinction between Omegas who were born with a bloodline of the Red Moon pack, and Omegas from other packs. People will scrutinize you and assume the worst. Things don't get physical. Don't respond to provocations, and we will be fine."

Zina cocked her eyebrow. "Oh? There are noble Omegas and peasant Omegas?"

Dawn would laugh at the sarcasm, but this affected more than just Dawn and Zina, and it was not funny.

"Something like that."

Zina didn't like this, not even a little bit. "How can you stand that? Why are you here? What happened with mates doing what's best for the other? How can George make you stay in this pack and be bullied? Why don't you ask him to come to the Dark Howlers pack? You know that Alpha Damon will welcome both of you. How much I know, Alpha Damon and George are getting along well. Don't tell me you are happy being confined in this villa."

Dawn couldn't tell Zina about George's plan for revenge. That was George's big secret, and she had no right to share it, not even with Zina. But Dawn couldn't leave Zina's questions unanswered.

"It's not so bad, Zi," Dawn said. "I'm just telling you the worst, so you are not surprised if something like that happens."

"And what if the worst happens? Are you expecting me to lower my head and let them insult me? What if they hit me? Is that what happens when you go out? How can you live like that?"

Dawn puffed her cheeks and spoke through their pack mind link. 'Zi, didn't you notice that I didn't leave the Dark Howlers pack?'

Zina realized that Dawn was right. Normally, the two wouldn't talk through the mind link because they didn't care who was listening.

Zina continued through the mind link, 'Are you saying that George will come to the Dark Howlers pack? What's with the delay?' Wouldn't that be wonderful? Dawn would be with her mate, Zina would get her bestie back, and everyone would be happy.

'He is not opposing the idea,' Dawn responded. This was the truth. 'George has some matters to deal with here. Once that is settled, we will decide what to do next.'

George was unsure if he wanted to start his own pack, but he wanted to provide better conditions for people who didn't want to stay in the Red Moon pack. All this was under the assumption that he issues an Alpha challenge and wins.

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Note: Owen's pic is in the comments of the previous chapter (#891)

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Chapter 893: Visiting the market

Zina was pacified by Dawn's answer. "I hope George finishes his work quickly, so you don't need to suffer long. I know you won't move in back with me, but we could still work in the packhouse together and hang out while George is busy with warriors..."

Dawn felt guilty for not telling Dawn the truth. But this was for the best. Zina didn't know that George was an Alpha, or that he wanted to kill Alpha Edward, or that Dawn had a complete Alpha aura that could rival Alpha Edward's.

Dawn was dreading the day when those would come to light, and she hoped that Zina wouldn't be too angry because Dawn was keeping all those secrets from her.

...

Zina observed the change in Dawn's demeanor from the moment they left the villa, and Zina didn't like it. Her cheery friend became quiet, and Dawn lowered her gaze even before they met anyone.

Zina and Dawn were accompanied by Estelle and Adele, older female Omegas who were quiet anyway, so Zina wouldn't notice if they quieted down, but with Dawn it was obvious. Dawn acted like she had done something wrong and was waiting for her punishment.

The narrow path meandered through the forest, and they crossed several intersections before they reached a paved road where people walked, and some rode bicycles. Everyone looked busy.

The buildings had an industrial feel. They were made of stone, wood, and metal, with minimalistic windows and doors, without curves or details that would make them pretty.

Zina thought how this was different than Darkbourne, which had stores and buildings no different than any average town in North America. People in Darkbourne were more relaxed; they would make eye contact and stop to chat, and some would linger on benches or outside seating in front of shops to indulge in a beverage or a sweet treat.

Compared to that, the atmosphere in the Red Moon pack was stifling, and Zina didn't like it.

The most repressive was that Dawn was quiet, just like Estelle and Adele. When Zina asked something, they would respond with only a few words, and that dampened Zina's mood as well, and she eventually stopped asking questions.

They reached a big building that looked like a hangar. Double doors were wide open, and people were coming in and going out non-stop. It was the busiest building Zina had spotted so far.

"This is the market," Dawn explained to Zina. "It's indoors, so it's working regardless of the weather. Estelle will buy some things for the villa. Let me know if you want to get something."

Zina cocked an eyebrow at Dawn. "I have money." She didn't need Dawn to pay for her expenses.

"We don't work with money here."

Zina was confused. "How do you pay for things?"

Dawn reached into her purse and pulled several coupon-looking things. "We exchange goods and cover the difference with these. These are like money in the Red Moon pack."

Zina took one coupon and felt that it was made of rough paper that had writing "worth 10 units" and there was a stamp of a red moon.

"How do you pay for things outside Red Moon pack?" Zina asked.

Dawn shrugged. "This is the economy we have here. Money from outside is valuable only for people who go out."

Zina was about to ask more, but she heard Dawn's voice in her head, 'Can you keep other questions for later? We can also talk through the mind link.'

Zina saw Dawn giving eye signals toward Estelle and Adele, and she understood that her questions made the other two Omegas uncomfortable.

They were in the Red Moon pack for a long time, some were born here, and they didn't know how the world outside of the Red Moon pack functioned.

'Alright,' Zina said to Dawn through the mind link. 'You know that this is how Alpha Edward is preventing his pack from integrating with the rest of society. Right?'

'I do. But these people don't have a choice. Just saying openly how it's wrong won't solve anything. If we tell them how good life is outside the Red Moon pack, they will not believe us.'

'Or they will believe us and will retaliate against this system.'

Dawn shook her head. 'They are Omegas, not revolutionaries. Most are happy to have a roof over their heads and food on the table. They grew up here, and this is their normal. Even if they knew that life in another pack was better, they wouldn't have the courage or skills to fight for it. Those few who show potential are either silenced, or they get promotions and a good lifestyle that makes them not care about Omegas.'

Zina hated that Dawn was right. Little people won't fight, and anyone with potential was dealt with before he became a threat. It was not fair, but it worked in favor of the minority at the top of the hierarchy.

Inside, the hangar-like market was livelier than it hinted from the outside. Numerous stalls were lined up in rows with merchandise that consisted of clothing, shoes, hand-crafted accessories and jewelry, and food items. Some people stood behind their stalls, and people moved to see what they were offering. The noise of haggling for a better price made Zina squint, and the scents that filled the air were overwhelming.

Zina decided to follow after Dawn and observe. She didn't need anything but was curious about how things worked in the Red Moon pack.

Estelle and Adele carried baskets with pastries which they exchanged for eggs and cheese.

Zina spotted freshly caught rabbits, and she said to Dawn through their mind link, 'We can make those for dinner.'

'Let's not waste money on something my George can catch for free.'

Zina rolled her eyes at Dawn's words. 'Do you need to boast how awesome your mate is?'

Dawn stifled a giggle. Her George is awesome.

Dawn's smile froze when she felt hostility from her left. Since George marked her, Dawn's senses were sharper.

"Let's go this way," Dawn said while grabbing Zina's elbow.

"Look who showed up here," A singing voice reached them, and Dawn cursed under her breath.

'Don't talk, Zi,' Dawn told Zina before turning toward her left.

Estelle and Adele stood in front of Dawn and Zina. "Miss Ana, we are here to get the ingredients for dinner that Commander George requested."

Ana made a face at Estelle. Commander George's name guaranteed they won't be bullied, so Ana didn't dare to give her a hard time, but Ana had a different target.

"I was not talking to you," Ana said to Estelle while extending her hand and nudging the latter to move to the side. Ana wanted an unobstructed view of Dawn and Zina.

Ana tried mind linking Dawn several times, but she was unsuccessful. It was visible that Dawn was marked, and even though Ana couldn't confirm who Dawn's mate was, she was fairly confident that the male was from the Red Moon pack. Ana didn't have the ability to verify if Dawn joined the Red Moon pack, so she assumed that Dawn was shutting her out on purpose, which only enraged Ana further.

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Chapter 894: Commotion at the market

'Who is this?' Zina asked Dawn. It was obvious that the three females didn't approach them with good intentions, and Zina wondered if Dawn had some history with them. It seemed like it.

'The one in the middle is the leader. Her name is Ana. All three are Omegas who work in the packhouse, so they consider themselves above others. The word is that Ana is sleeping with Alpha Edward, so no one will dare to offend her.'

Zina couldn't believe this. 'An Omega is spreading her legs for a mated Alpha and thinks...'

'Zina, please,' Dawn interrupted her. 'Let us handle this.'

Zina released a long breath. 'Fine.'

Dawn had difficulty controlling her wolf. After George's marking, Dawn's spunky attitude morphed into one of an Alpha. Dawn was now an Alpha female with an Alpha wolf, and

her wolf couldn't stand anyone talking to them in a demeaning way, especially not an Omega.

Dawn feared that if she lost focus, her wolf would jump on Ana, and her aura would leak, which would put George in danger. Dawn would never say she was an Alpha because of his mark, but she also knew that George wouldn't allow anyone to interrogate her, so it would be obvious they were mates.

"Who is the new face?" Ana asked while eyeing Zina.

"She is..." Estelle stopped talking when Ana raised her hand.

Ana pointed at Dawn. "I want her to respond."

Among so many people who walked with their heads lowered, for Anna, Zina stood out as a sore thumb. Zina was not submissive, and there was also a matter of Zina's clothes. Zina didn't have makeup or excessive jewelry, but those were definitely good-quality blouse and jeans. Ana also noticed Zina's red hair, sharp grey eyes, flawless skin, and curvaceous figure... and it was only a matter of time before Zina caught the eye of someone important. How could Ana allow some no-name nobody (aka Zina) to get such a chance? What if she ends up working in the packhouse and takes over Ana's position?

"She is my friend," Dawn responded to Ana while pushing Zina behind her.

Ana cocked an eyebrow at Zina. "A friend? Do you have the right to accept friends?"

"The right channels approved," Dawn responded ambiguously.

"Did they?" Ana asked with a sneer. "Somehow, I doubt it. Give me names I will check."

Dawn's jaw ticked in annoyance as her wolf started emerging to the surface. "I thought your duties are to take care of the packhouse. Unless I see in writing that you are in charge of protocols for visitors, I won't give you anything."

Ana's eyebrows shot up at Dawn's lack of cooperation, and she folded her arms over her chest.

"Disobedience is punished in this pack. I thought we already established that last time when I hit you. Should I give you another lesson?"

Zina's temper flared. "She hit you?"

"Zi..." Dawn pleaded. Ana wanted to slap Dawn, but Estelle got in the way and received it instead.

"No, no," Zina was shaking her head. "I don't care about rules and keeping a low profile. No one..." She turned to Ana. "NO ONE gets to hit my friend, especially not bitches with an overinflated ego."

By now, most of the market was silent, and they watched the showdown.

Dawn cursed under her breath. She feared something like this might happen. This was not good, and her wolf was scratching to come out.

"Zi," Dawn held Zina's arm. "Let's just go about our business. Forget about this. Ana is not important."

Ana's expression flared in outrage. "Not important!?"

Ana reached to grab Zina, but Dawn got in the way, Estelle and Adele stood rooted in place, and then...

"STAY AWAY FROM MY WOMAN!"

A roar shook the market, and everyone froze at the scene of a guy clutching Ana's neck and lifting her off the ground.

Ana's eyes bulged in shock, and it took her a moment to start clawing at his wrist, but it was like trying to pry open a metal lock with a feather.

Dawn's brows came together in confusion. Who is this guy, exactly?

Before Dawn could recover, the familiar scent of clover reached her, and she saw George rushing toward her like his life depended on him.

George's furious gaze moved over the people, paused slightly at Dawn, and then locked on Ana.

George wanted to get his hands on Ana, but the male holding her was in the way.

The male growled when George came close. "She is mine to..."

Before he could finish, George's fist landed on his face violently, and the guy blacked out.

George grabbed Ana before she could fall to the ground.

Ana was coughing, and she was glad that George had rescued her from the brute, but her fear was back when she realized that George's grip on her shoulders was increasing. Was he about to shatter her bones?

Dawn panicked. Will George expose himself?

Estelle was first to react, and she stood next to Ana to be in George's visual range.

Estelle bowed her head. "Commander George, Ana was curious about our guest, and Owen reacted."

George blinked at Estelle's words. Owen?

He didn't pay attention to the male, but he saw him close to Dawn and shouting how that was his woman, and George lost it.

George looked down to see that Owen was out cold, and his face was bloodied.

"I'm sorry..." Ana squeaked. "I didn't know that Dawn was Owen's woman."

Another wave of rage rippled through George.

"Say that again!" George squeezed through his teeth angrily. How dares this Omega nobody claim that his mate belongs to someone else?

'Didn't you want to conceal that Dawn is your mate?' Estelle's voice sounded in George's head. 'Like this, they will think she is Owen's mate.'

George couldn't believe this. 'Who thinks that Dawn is Owen's mate? Why would they think that?'

'Let's talk about this later. Ana was annoying, but she didn't step over the line,' Estelle responded.

...

Owen's vision was blurry, and his nose hurt like hell. What happened? And where was he?

Before he could see, he heard voices...

"Are you sure he is your mate?" A female voice asked.

"I think so." Owen was confident that an angel responded.

"You think so, or you know so? This is not something to guess."

"I would be confident if you brute didn't knock him out."

"George is not a brute!"

"Really? Does he say hello with his fists every time? My mate was defending us, and your mate caused a mess."

Owen remembered some things. After lunch in the cafeteria, he wanted something sweet, so he headed to the market, and then his wolf urged him to take a left, and there he saw the most beautiful woman in the world. She had a head full of red hair, and he knew that was his fiery Goddess. But she was bullied, and his wolf took over, and... then Owen blacked out. Wait! Did they say that George hit him!?

Owen decided to stay still until he got a grasp on the situation.

Was that his fiery Goddess talking? Why did she sound angry? Was it because he was hurt?

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Chapter 895: Malia strikes again! (Z&O)

Zina was still upset about the incident with Ana. "I wanted to show that nasty Omega where she belongs. How dares she act all mighty just because she is cleaning the packhouse? And how can you live while lowering your head to such trash?"

"Zi, you don't understand..."

"I don't. I want you to come back home with me. Right now."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can!" Zina said sternly.

"Even if I come, what about him? Will you leave your mate behind? Maybe that's for the better."

"Hey, hey! How can you say that? Isn't finding a mate a good thing? Finally, Malia worked for me as well."

"Maybe it would be better to pass on this one."

Zina couldn't believe her ears. "What?"

"Look at him, Zi. He is a warrior in the Red Moon pack, with emphasis on the pack to which he belongs. They treat Omegas like crap."

"Really? What about George?"

Dawn released a sharp breath. "George is different. I'm sure you have noticed that by now. Staying here is dangerous. Do you think I'm stuck at home because I like it?"

"You said you are not afraid of Omegas like Ana."

"I am not. But going against her will attract attention. I can defeat Ana. I can defeat ten Anas, but what will happen when guys like your mate appear? And before you say that George can protect me, that will also put him in danger."

"If he is dangerous, why did George leave him here?" Zina asked.

After the mess in the market, George called nearby warriors to escort Ana for questioning why she attacked a mate of a high-ranking officer. George knew that not much would come out of it, but he hoped it would be a warning for Ana to stay away from Dawn.

George didn't like the idea of people thinking that Dawn was Owen's mate, but it served the purpose of protecting Dawn without exposing their relationship as mates.

George hoped that Owen's status as a Lieutenant would be high enough to deter bullies yet low enough not to attract Alpha Edward's attention.

George hoisted Owen over his shoulder and took him to his villa. Unfortunately, George had important meetings, and if he missed them, people would start asking questions, so he had to leave.

He explained to Dawn that was Owen, and only after George left did Zina say how she thought the unconscious man in the guest bedroom was her mate.

"George has important meetings," Dawn responded.

"More important than you?"

"Damn it, Zi! I didn't want things to come to this, but you need to put your safety first. Finding your fated mate is great, but that can't compare to your life."

Owen panicked. Was his fiery Goddess thinking of leaving him? He needed to snap out of it and tell her to stay right now!

A low groan got Zina's and Dawn's attention, and Zina quickly moved to sit on the edge of the bed where Owen was.

Owen blinked to confirm that the blurry face in front of him was his fiery Goddess. There was a sweet scent coming off her, but he couldn't identify it clearly because his nose was broken, and everything smelled of blood.

"Can you hear me? How do you feel?" Zina asked while her eyes nervously roamed Owen's bloodied face. They didn't dare to clean him up because they feared how he would react if a damp cloth woke him up.

Owen reached to touch Zina's cheek, and his hand jolted when he felt sparks prickling the tips of his fingers.

"Are you an angel?" He asked.

Zina's lips stretched into a smile. "Oh, honey... If you think I'm an angel, you didn't look deep enough."

"Honey?" It was Dawn who asked.

"Mhm," Zina confirmed with a hum. "He smells like maple honey, the one I use as a glaze for roasted ham." And for pancakes and sweetening the tea and many other treats. Zina loves honey.

"Pft!" Dawn burst into laughter. "You see him as a ham?"

Zina glared at Dawn. "Not a ham. Honey. Ho-ney. Why are you laughing? Didn't you say that George smells to you like clover?" She turned to look at Owen. "This man smells of honey, and I want to lick him everywhere."

Owen swallowed hard. His face was numb, and his heart was beating wildly, but he definitely felt the pressure in his groin area increasing. The fiery Goddess wanted to lick him everywhere, and he found himself unable to move. Will she lick him now? He hoped so. From where will she start? Ah, the possibilities!

Zina waved at Dawn. "Instead of standing there and staring, how about you bring me a cloth and water so I can wash his face?"

Dawn folded her arms over her chest. "I'm not going anywhere. George told me about him. Owen was a good guy before he became a jealous prick who is trying to sabotage him. What if he is hostile? What if he looks down on you because you are an Omega? What if he rejects you as his mate? You didn't think about that, did you?"

Zina pressed her lips into a line. She didn't think about that.

Zina turned to Dawn. "If you think he is a bad guy, why are you talking about George so freely? Isn't your relationship with him a secret?"

Dawn shrugged. "People are already suspecting, and after today, I'm done hiding. If anyone dares to cause trouble, I will teach them a lesson."

Dawn spoke bravely, but the truth was that she decided not to leave the villa until George made his move with Alpha Edward. No one will come to the house of Commander George to stir trouble. That was a fact, and if any disturbances are noticed, she can always flee to the Dark Howlers pack with Cornelia. This secret exit strategy boosted Dawn's confidence. The only thing Dawn was not confident about was if George would come with her. And what about Omegas staying here?

Zina turned to Owen. "What do you say, handsome? Will you reject me as your mate?" She bit her lip nervously while waiting for him to answer. What if he rejects the bond? He is from the Red Moon pack, and they are known as brute and unreasonable and... did she even want a mate from the Red Moon pack?

Owen blinked. "No."

Zina smirked at Dawn, but her gaze now carried some doubt. "See? He won't reject me. Now get that water and cloth so I can see what he looks like."

After a long second, Dawn gave a small nod and left the room with, "I will be back in a minute. Don't do something you will regret."

Zina was not sure what Dawn was talking about. Was it related to rejecting the mate bond or getting frisky? Probably both.

Owen reached to touch Zina's cheek again.

"Are you not happy about me, Angel?" Owen asked. He could feel insecurities swelling within Zina. "I am not a violent man." Lies. He would end up in squabbles often, but mostly with warriors.

Zina laughed nervously. "How can I be unhappy about you? I don't know you."

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