

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 896: Discussing conditions (1)

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Owen pushed himself into a seated position and he cleared his throat before saying to Zina, "I am Owen of the Red Moon pack. I am a Lieutenant and... I guess that's it."

Zina cocked an eyebrow at him. "That's not much to go with." There must be more. What was he hiding?

"I am an orphan. I don't remember if I ever had a family. Most of my time is spent on the training grounds, so... there isn't much to say about me."

"Oh..." Zina was not sure how to respond to that.

Zina thought of sharing something about herself. "I am Zina of the Dark Howlers pack. I am an Omega who works in the packhouse, and I came here to visit my friend." Zina realized that her status might be a problem. "Do you dislike that I'm an Omega? Will you reject me for it? Or..."

"No, no," Owen was quick to say. "I have nothing against Omegas. I would be one if I didn't become a warrior."

"That is true for any warrior, yet it doesn't stop them from bullying Omegas," Zina said. "Even Omegas are bullying Omegas in this pack."

"I won't mistreat you because of your status, Zina of the Dark Howlers pack."

Zina was not sure if she should believe him. She heard a lot of scary stories about members of the Red Moon pack. "You won't?"

Owen shook his head, and asked, "Will you look down on me because I have no background?"

Somehow, his question dispelled Zina's worries. Mostly because she could feel his insecurities. He really wanted her to accept him.

"You are not a nobody. You are Lieutenant Owen. My mate."

Owen's face lit up and his eyes moved to Zina's lips. He really wanted to kiss her.

Dawn entered the room to see that Owen and Zina were staring at each other and inching closer.

"Am I interrupting something?"

Zina rolled her eyes. Well, that broke the lovey-dovey bubble.

She waved at Dawn to come with the bowl of water she brought in.

"Give me that. I want to wash away the blood from Owen's face, so I can see him properly."

Dawn clicked her tongue. "He is your mate. He might have a body covered in scales, yet you will still think that he is the sexiest man alive."

Zina wiggled her eyebrows at Dawn. "Well, I can't help it if my mate is sexy."

Dawn made a face. "Pleeeeeease, spare me before I gag."

"I was listening to your stories about George, Mr. Perfect. Now it's my turn to fill your ears with stories of my mate..."

Owen listened to the spiky exchange between Zina and Dawn, and he liked that Zina was standing up for him.

Zina turned to Owen while holding a damp cloth and he got worried. What if she doesn't like how he looks? What will she think after she finds out who he is? He was a Lieutenant, and other than that, he didn't have much to offer to his mate.

Zina pushed Owen to lay on the bed.

"Let me know if it hurts," she said, and then she started cleaning up the dried blood from his cheeks.

Owen closed his eyes, and he enjoyed the treatment. He didn't want to say how he had much worse injuries than a broken nose, and he mostly tended to his own wounds. This was different. It was the first time for a female to handle him with such care. And this was not just any female, this was his mate, an alluring Goddess with fiery red hair.

Owen was dazed by the occasional sparks that stirred whenever her skin touched his.

Zina was super-gentle, and she grimaced while pressing a damp cloth on his face.

"So much blood..." Zina said with her brows coming together in concern.

Owen's mood dropped when he realized how he got hurt.

"Are you the reason why George is skipping work?" Owen asked Dawn grumpily.

"OWW!" He exclaimed when Zina pressed the cloth close to his nose.

"Dawn is my best friend," Zina said with a warning in her voice. "Mate or not, no one gets to talk to Dawn like that."

Dawn was glad to see that Zina stood up for her, but at the same time, Dawn didn't envy Zina's situation. Owen was a big variable, and he already knew too much. What if Owen works against George? Will Zina and Dawn need to pick between their friendship and their mates?

Dawn was anxious and she decided to probe the situation.

She exposed the left side of her neck, where George's mark was.

"I am George's fated mate."

Owen's eyebrows shot up. He suspected that George had a woman, but a fated mate?
"Why is he hiding you?"

"I'm sure you know that with George's status, people would try to use me against him."

Owen knew that, but... "Do you plan to hide forever?"

Dawn was not sure how to respond to this. Telling Zina that this was temporary was one thing, but she didn't trust Owen. What if he spreads it around and it reaches Alpha Edward? Commander George leaving the pack would be a big deal. Huge!

"Instead of meddling in other people's relationships, why don't you worry about ours?" Zina asked, getting Owen's attention. "What are we going to do? You said that you won't reject the bond, and I won't do it either as long as you show an intention to treat me well. So, what's next? Are you planning for us to stay in the Red Moon pack? As a Lieutenant, you don't have a private residence. Are you expecting me to go into barracks where you are sharing living areas with others? How many roommates do you have?"

Zina didn't know about the Lieutenant's living conditions, but she knew that only Generals and Commanders get private residences.

Owen needed a moment to process this. "As a mated couple, we will get a bedroom." Most of the mated warriors with a rank got apartments, but that was based on availability, and he didn't dare to promise her an apartment and then not deliver on it.

Zina cocked an eyebrow. "A bedroom? What about the kitchen? Living area? I heard that newcomers here are treated horribly. Are you expecting me to stay locked up in our bedroom while you are working, or should I go out so Omegas like Ana can take a swipe at me?"

Owen's mind was spinning. They just met, and she was asking about living conditions. Of course, none of those would matter if he was a General and if he had his own home. Damn it!

But then... even if he had his own home, incidents like the one with Ana would happen when she was not with him.

"Do you have a suggestion?" Owen asked.

"Yes!" Zina exclaimed. "Come with me to the Dark Howlers pack."

Owen froze. "What?"

"At least, consider it. OK? Me leaving my pack to be with you shouldn't be easier than you leaving your pack. I have an apartment and a steady job. Alpha Damon will give you a chance to prove yourself and he won't thwart your progress just because you are a newcomer."

Owen licked his lips. "Angel, listen. I'm not a man who can live off a woman."

It was sexist, but Zina found something good in his answer. He didn't dismiss the Dark Howlers pack.

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Chapter 897: Discussing conditions (2)

"If you come to the Dark Howlers pack, you won't live off me. You will live WITH me," Zina said to Owen. "I have a job and you will get one also. I can't promise you will keep your status as a Lieutenant, but Alpha Damon accepts newcomers as warriors. The Dark Howlers pack accommodates people from other packs, and no one will bully you."

Dawn nodded in agreement. "Actually, people in our pack welcome newcomers. We see that as proof that our pack is better and that's why outsiders choose to join."

Owen didn't miss that Dawn spoke about the Dark Howlers pack like it's hers, but he didn't want to probe into it. He had more important things to figure out.

He never considered leaving the Red Moon pack. Yes, things were not ideal, but he was just one step away from being a General, and that would be a big jump in his status.

No one told him that this was George's villa, but Owen figured it out right away. Just this room was so much better than his current accommodations or anything he saw before, other than the packhouse, of course. Wasn't something like this only one promotion away? How long will it take? A year? Five? Will Zina wait so long for him?

Zina could feel that Owen was considering his options but was not convinced, so she decided to try a different approach. "Don't think too much about it now."

Owen was confused. "I thought you want me to think about joining the Dark Howlers pack."

Zina didn't want him to think about it. She wanted him to do it!

"It is a big decision, and it shouldn't be done on the spot. For now, I want two things from you. First, I want you to keep an open mind. Second, I want you to talk to my Alpha. Alpha Damon will be here with his Luna tomorrow." Zina turned to Dawn. "We can invite Talia and Damon here, right?"

Dawn confirmed. "I can make it happen under one condition."

"Which one?" Zina and Owen asked in unison.

"Until you figure out where and how you will live, don't let him mark you."

Zina reached for the left side of her neck. That was the place where Owen's mark should come. Her eyes moved to meet Owen's and she swallowed hard. Will he sink his fangs in there to release his venom and mark her? Will that happen during steamy sex? Will she see stars in broad daylight while he rams himself inside her?

Zina pressed her legs together and she could feel her wolf urging her to pounce on a honey-scented man in front of her. Did he taste as good as he smelled? There was only one way to find out, but Dawn was watching.

However, Dawn's request was reasonable. Hold off with marking until they figure out the important stuff. One day, at most. How hard can that be?

Zina often imagined what her mate will look like and now that she found him, Zina was happy and nervous and she regretted that she couldn't just jump into it without care, but Dawn was right. They shouldn't rush this.

Zina didn't want to seal the mate bond that was getting stronger by the second, and end up miserable just because he was handsome, and he smelled edible, and she was horny.

Normally, fated mates would do anything to make each other happy, but there were exceptions. Sometimes, people would go with their beliefs and habits, and neglect the pull. Zina didn't want to risk it. She already had a wonderful life and many friends. Leaving that behind for a man who won't treat her well was not worth it.

"I think that's fine," Zina said to Dawn and turned to Owen. "What do you think?"

"I agree to hold off with marking." He wouldn't mark Zina against her will anyway. It would seal the bond, but it wouldn't turn her stupid. Marking was once in a lifetime and it should be wonderful, for both of them.

Owen's wolf was howling in his head to claim the female that belonged to them, but he also wanted to make her happy.

"Also, I will talk to your Alpha if he wants to talk to me," Owen said. "I hope you will guide me through this. I don't want to risk offending him." Alpha Edward was unapproachable to anyone below the rank of a General, and Owen didn't know what to expect of Damon whose reputation was vicious. Damon was the most powerful Alpha and that wouldn't be the case if he was easygoing.

Zina smiled at Owen. "Thank you."

Sensing that Dawn relaxed, Zina focused on cleaning Owen's face.

Little by little, Owen's features were revealed. Light brown hair in a military-style buzz cut, thick and unruly eyebrows, a few days old stubble... she frowned at the sight of purple lines and swelling on his nose, but he assured her that it will heal completely in a few days.

Owen was handsome, but not fierce like warriors. Every curve of his face was pleasing to the eyes and inviting, and Zina wondered if that was how she saw him because he was her mate.

Zina had difficulty looking away from his light gray eyes that stirred with endless desire. She really wanted to kiss him and much more, but Dawn was watching them. Can she ask Dawn to leave without being too obvious about it?

"When is George coming back?" Zina asked.

"Later," Dawn responded.

"Don't you need to prepare something before he comes?"

"We agreed to cook dinner together," Dawn reminded Zina.

Zina whimpered. Dawn was doing this on purpose!

Zina turned to Owen. "What about you? Do you have somewhere you need to be?"

Owen froze. Was she sending him away? He didn't want to leave! His eyes lost focus for a moment. "Someone took over my unit. Can I stay with you? I can help with cooking."

Zina would prefer that they could roll in the sheets compared to working in the kitchen, but something was better than nothing. "You know how to cook?"

Owen shrugged. "I don't know how to cook but I can wash stuff and I am pretty good at tasting dishes."

Zina giggled. "Alright."

...

George rushed home as soon as his meetings ended.

Estelle mind-linked him that Owen didn't leave, and George was worried.

Estelle and other Omegas working in George's villa stayed away from outsiders to avoid incessant bullying and bad treatment overall. He created a small oasis of safety in his home, and why was Owen lingering?

What George didn't expect was to find Owen in the kitchen with Zina and Dawn.

Owen was wearing an apron and smiling while mixing the salad like he owned the place.

"You are back!" Dawn exclaimed when she spotted George. Normally, she would pick up his scent from the moment he entered the villa, but now the kitchen was full of aromatic dishes, so she didn't pick George's scent until he reached the kitchen.

Dawn was about to jump on George, but she paused halfway when she realized that his mood was off. "Did something bad happen?"

"Why is he here?"

"I am helping my woman prepare dinner," Owen responded matter-of-factly.

George saw red. His woman!?

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Chapter 898: In this together (1)

A ferocious growl ripped from George. "What did you say!?"

Owen frowned at George. "Did you think that enjoying with a woman is reserved only for you?"

George's whole body twitched as his muscles rippled and his aura burst in anger.

George's vision narrowed at Owen who was recoiling from George's aura, but Owen managed to pull Zina to stand behind him.

George tensed in preparation to jump at the bastard in an apron when he felt a splash of cinnamon scent and a small body clinging to him.

"Not me!" Dawn exclaimed. "He is talking about Zi!"

George looked at Dawn with a deep frown. "What!?"

Dawn smiled helplessly. "Can you calm down and see what's going on? Owen and Zi are mates."

George closed his eyes and released a sharp breath while retracting his aura. "What the hell!? Is this a joke? It's not funny."

"Why are you acting like this impacts you in any way?" Owen asked angrily and then he turned to check on Zina who assured him that she was fine.

"This is between me and my mate," Owen said.

George's nostrils flared. "You talk big for someone who is cooking in MY kitchen!" And Owen was wearing George's apron, damn it!

Owen sneered. "Me in your kitchen is the least of your problems right now. Was that Alpha aura you hit me with? How come you have it?"

Zina felt George's Alpha aura also, but she was levelheaded enough to know not to bring it up in this situation.

"Owen, can you focus on what's important?" Zina asked.

"Do you expect me to focus on anything other than my attacker?"

"Attacker!" George seethed. "You are making yourself at home in MY house with MY mate, and I am the bad guy?"

Zina stood in front of Owen and faced George. "George, I understand that your relationship with Owen is not the best, but can you try to tone down the hostility? I'm sure this can be resolved with a talk."

George had difficulty controlling his temper. "You want me to play house with a guy who is sabotaging me for years!? Should we kiss and make up? Or do a pinky promise to be friends?"

Dawn put her palm on George's cheek. "No one is asking you to be friends. How about just talking? There must be a way to settle this without a fight."

George looked at Dawn and he realized she was right. It's not that he wanted to be civil with Owen, but he knew that if he hurts Owen, he will enrage Zina, and that will make Dawn not happy, and Dawn always came first.

"Maybe we can talk about this during dinner," Dawn suggested.

"Talk about what?" Owen asked. As he saw this, everything was fine until George came and started a ruckus. George should apologize. Why was Dawn looking at Owen?

"For starters, you can explain why you turned on George," Dawn said. "I heard that the two of you were friends and then things changed. What made you hate him?"

Owen paused. Should he just admit that he was jealous? He worked hard, but he couldn't catch up and everyone talked highly of George while Owen became invisible and he channeled his helplessness into anger. Owen knew that it was not fair, but he couldn't help it.

"I don't hate him," Owen said.

"Why are you on his case then?" Dawn asked.

Dawn's head snapped to George as she sensed that something was off. And sure, it was, his eyes were out of focus. Someone was mind-linking him, and only a selected few had that access.

Three long seconds later, George pressed his lips into a line. "I need to go."

"Where?"

"It's Alpha Edward. He wants an explanation why Ana was detained for the afternoon."

Dawn's brows came together in worry. "Will he punish you?"

"I don't think so." Normally, Alpha Edward wouldn't bother with these pack-squabble things, and even if he wanted some information, he would do it through the mind-link, or request a report in the morning, unless... George's attention went to Dawn and his mark on her neck. Ana definitely went to tattle on what happened, which meant that Alpha Edward found out about Dawn and Zina. Damn it!

George looked at Owen. "You are coming with me."

Owen was alerted. "Why me?"

"Do you want to save your mate?"

"Save her? From what?"

"Come with me and you will find out," George responded.

Dawn hugged George and turned to speak to Owen. "George has a plan. If you want this to work, you better collaborate with George, or all of us will be in trouble."

George was touched by Dawn's trust in his abilities. He didn't have a plan. Not yet, at least. He will come up with something on the way. He had to.

...

Owen's anxiousness skyrocketed when he realized that they were going toward the packhouse.

"Are we going to meet Alpha in person?" Owen asked George.

"Yes."

"Are we in trouble?"

"Probably."

Owen swallowed a mouthful of air. "You can't use me as a sacrificial lamb. I can tell Alpha about your mate and your aura and..."

Owen groaned when George's Alpha aura pressed on him.

What the hell? Owen was issuing empty threats to remind George that he was not without weapons. Why did George resort to violence?

"If you rat on me, what do you think will happen to your mate?" George squeezed through his teeth and then he retracted his aura. "I will end her before Alpha Edward gets a chance to put a finger on her."

"You won't harm Zina. She is Dawn's best friend."

Of course, George wouldn't harm Zina, but Owen didn't know that.

"Expose my secrets and see what I will destroy to stay alive."

Owen didn't want to argue. With George's aura, he had no chance of winning anyway. But why was George making him go to meet Alpha Edward? "If this is about the incident at the market, Ana was after Dawn. You should thank me and not drag me into this. I'm sure you can talk it out with Alpha Edward and I can go back to my mate."

George snorted. "Dawn and Zina are best friends since childhood. I'm sure you understood that I didn't rip your head off only because that would upset Dawn. By now, you should be certain I can defeat you without lifting a finger."

Owen's displeasure skyrocketed. He already had an inferiority complex. George and he were about the same age, they started at the same time, yet George was a Commander while Owen was just a Lieutenant.

Only a few years back, both of them were Lieutenants. Now, George was a Commander, while Owen's career stagnated

George had a villa and Omegas serving him, and a mate, and even Alpha aura, while Owen... he only had a mate he still didn't claim as his. Was he even a man?

Owen was tempted to peer into his pants to confirm that his meat whip and twins were still there or did he lose those also.

Owen pushed his grievances down. "I won't tell Alpha about your secrets."

"What caused this change of heart?"

Owen didn't feel like explaining.

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Chapter 899: In this together (2)

"I assume you have a plan," Owen said to George. "Will you tell me about it, or are you expecting me to just nod at whatever you say?"

George glanced at the packhouse in the distance. "Ana believes that you stepped in to protect your mate. We will go with that. Dawn is your mate who is working in my villa."

Owen saw so many holes in that story. "I am sleeping in the barracks. I spend days at the training grounds and with the guys, and we are not exactly close. When did I find time for a mate?"

"Alpha Edward won't bother with details," George said with confidence. "However, if the topic arises, Dawn has a room in my villa, just like any other Omega working for me. You are spending time with her at my place. Since you don't have private quarters, it will be believable. Pick one of your missions outside the pack as the one when you met Dawn, no less than two months ago. Dawn didn't join the pack yet because she is acclimating, but you will do that formality soon and at that time you will announce her as your mate and request private quarters." George thought how that was a good story. It was more-less what he was planning to do with Dawn before he considered the risks of exposing that he had a mate. "Because Dawn didn't join our pack, I'm keeping an eye on her in my villa, to ensure she is not a spy."

Owen was impressed with George's plan. No wonder people spoke highly about him as a Commander. But Owen had other concerns. "What about Zina?"

"Zina is Dawn's friend and is considering joining our pack, so she is staying at my villa. She arrived today."

"Will Alpha Edward buy it?"

"As long as our stories match," George said, and he hoped he was right about this.

Owen had many questions, but they were approaching the packhouse and he knew that he needed to keep those for later.

Meeting with the Alpha was nerve-wracking.

...

Owen followed George into Alpha Edward's study. It was the first time for Owen to come here.

George and Owen saluted and stood straight in front of Alpha Edward and Beta Raymond, waiting for the duo to acknowledge them.

James was also sitting on the sofa chair. After exchanging nods with George, James returned his attention to the reports in his hands.

George stood in front of Alpha Edward in silence. He hated this silent show of power. It was Alpha Edward's way to reinforce his position as the important one and how others need to wait for him.

George was uneasy about Owen's presence. Owen was necessary to make George's story believable, but it could also backfire big time.

Sure, there was a time when Owen and George were close. Actually, Owen was one of the few people George could call friends. However, those days were long gone as George became a General and Owen didn't, and since then, the rift between them was only increasing and now George didn't know where they stood.

What if Owen says that Dawn was George's mate? What if he exposes George as an Alpha?

In the worst case, George will fight his way out. Taking down Alpha Edward won't be a big deal. However, what about Beta Raymond and Owen? If they manage to land a single punch, it can get George out of balance. What if Alpha Edward calls for reinforcements?

James was also there. Considering that George kept Cornelia's secret, the teen will definitely come to his aid, or at least not act against him. Probably.

"Commander George," Alpha Edward called. "Thank you for coming here on short notice. Did I disturb your dinner?"

George was confused by this question. "No. I didn't get a chance to eat."

"That makes us even," Alpha Edward said and when he saw that George didn't understand, he explained, "You detained an Omega who is organizing our meals, so our dinner is late. I hear your Omegas are capable. Should I ask them to work in the packhouse and serve high-ranking members?"

George was not sure if Alpha Edward was serious or if this was some kind of test, but George's answer was the same.

"Are you telling me that this whole packhouse relies on one Omega? I will be glad to lend you my Omegas, but I will say in advance that you can't keep them, no matter how good their cooking is."

Alpha Edward narrowed his eyes at George. "Will you fight me over a few Omegas?"

"Not a few. Only one. Estelle is with me for a long time, and she knows my preferences when it comes to food. I'm not sure if her cooking will suit your taste. An Omega of her age is not easy to learn new recipes."

Alpha Edward stared at George for a long second, and then he chuckled. "Let's stop with this nonsense and tell me why you disturbed the rhythm of the packhouse over a spat between Omegas at the market."

"I'm sure you heard what happened."

"I want to hear it from you."

George told what he prepared in advance. How his Omegas were shopping for ingredients, and Ana got in their way.

"They are my Omegas, and it would look bad on me if I let others prevent them from completing their tasks."

"Your Omegas?" Alpha Edward asked. "And are you saying that your Omegas are above mine?"

"I didn't realize she was yours, Alpha," George responded right away. "I thought she worked in the packhouse, which meant that she works for the pack."

George could see that this won't work, so he switched to plan B.

"The thing is that one of those Omegas is Lieutenant Owen's mate. He saw his mate in trouble and his wolf took over."

Alpha Edward was eyeing Owen who was quick to lower his head.

"Alpha," George called. "If this was an argument between two warriors, I would tell them to take it outside the market. Lieutenant Owen warned Ana that she should step away from his mate, yet she refused. After that, I asked warriors to detain her. I did it to teach her obedience. Omega can't go against a warrior. It was a policy we always enforced. Is this something worth your time? I am aware of rules and I did what's best for the given situation."

Alpha Edward nodded after a long second and George felt like a big burden fell off his chest. In the next moment, Alpha Edward spoke again, and George's insides tightened.

"I hear that there was a new face present as well."

"Yes, we have a guest..." George told the story of how the newcomer (aka Zina) is an Omega from a small pack and is considering joining the Red Moon pack because Dawn is her friend.

"It is nice of you to keep two Omegas in your house for observation," Alpha Edward said.

"I do what I can, just like anyone else in this pack."

Alpha Edward approved. "Did you hear that, Raymond? This should be spread so that no one dares to question if George became a Commander too soon. This type of dedication and loyalty is difficult to find."

George lowered his head. "Your words honor me, Alpha."

Alpha Edward turned to look at Owen. "I guess I should congratulate you on finding your mate, Lieutenant Owen. When will I get to meet her?" Before Owen could respond, Alpha Edward was talking again, "How about you join us at the event tomorrow? Make sure to bring your mate's friend as well..."

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Chapter 900: In this together (3)

Owen and George walked back to George's villa, and Owen's mind was spinning.

"How are we going to pull through tomorrow's event?" Owen asked. "Are you really expecting me to go there with your mate? What about mine?"

George was lost in his thoughts, and he tuned out Owen. Owen was a good warrior, but his go-to solutions to almost any problem were physical altercations. A typical werewolf.

While they were in the study, George knew that James was paying attention. And he hoped that James had some ideas on how to deal with this because George had none. Unfortunately, they played right into Alpha Edward's hands and now Dawn and Zina were stuck with going to the party to be exposed... in front of Alpha Edward and many other lecherous bastards.

The moment George realized that Alpha Edward got his way, George wanted to ask James for advice, but he couldn't risk Alpha Edward noticing they were communicating through the pack link. It would only bring James into this whole mess.

To make things worse, Beta Raymond suggested that Nora comes tomorrow to George's villa to help Dawn and Zina prepare for the event.

How will Dawn react when she finds out that she should come to James' birthday party as Owen's mate? George knew that the upcoming event will be stress-inducing, but he had no idea it will be this much!

Owen was nervous. Why was George silent? How was he supposed to go to a party with another man's mate and act lovey-dovey when his fiery Goddess will be right there!? If George said that the blonde was his mate, they wouldn't find themselves in this sticky web of lies.

"Why didn't you tell Alpha about Dawn?" Owen asked.

Dawn's name got George's attention. "Are you forgetting who Alpha Edward is?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think I want to expose Dawn's existence and give him a chance to take her to bed?"

Owen's face fell. "He wouldn't..."

"He would! He already did it many times! Alpha Edward doesn't care if someone is mated or willing. He will use his position and take what he wants, and your options are to submit or to suffer the consequences of going against your Alpha!" George shoved a hand into his hair angrily. "Fuck! I will be damned if I let him put a finger on my mate!"

Owen pressed his lips into a line. His mood was dropping with every next step he took. George was visibly upset about this, but what hit Owen hard was that if someone like Commander George can't protect his mate, how will lowly Lieutenant Owen achieve that? Maybe he really didn't deserve a mate.

Owen remembered one thing. "Alpha Damon will be here tomorrow. We can talk to him and..."

"And what?" George interrupted him. "Are you expecting him to back you up and risk provoking Alpha Edward?"

"Are you saying that we are alone in this?"

"WE?" George snapped. "How bold of you to assume that we are in this together. For the last few years, every time I see you, you are either talking shit or trying to make me look bad. Do you think I will stick my neck out in order to help you?"

Owen extended his next two steps so that he can get in George's way and force him to stop walking.

"Listen, George... I fucked up. OK? I know I am at fault here. Tell me, how can we fix this? I mean, no matter how much you dislike me, the reality is that we need to collaborate because Alpha is expecting me to show up at that party tomorrow with YOUR mate by my side. Unless you are planning to challenge Alpha Edward's authority, you need to hide her. Are you going to send her to the Dark Howlers pack? Send me with her." And Zina as well. The females already told him that Alpha Damon is accepting newcomers.

George knew that Owen's point was valid, but he was not in the right state of mind to make reasonable decisions.

George stepped to the side and moved around Owen. "Let's talk about it later."

"Later? We don't have time," Owen protested while rushing to catch up with George.

"And I have no ideas," George admitted. "Unless you have something good, we will wait."

"Wait, for what?"

George didn't respond. What were they waiting for? A divine intervention?

Owen's face was arranged into a deep frown as he followed after George.

Owen was trying to come up with options, but he knew there were only two. Submit to Alpha Edward or run. Anything else would result in his death or going into the dungeon and Owen was not keen on any of those.

Was Owen ready to leave the Red Moon pack? If he wanted to stay with his mate, he needed to make that decision sooner than he thought. Can he uproot his life for a person he met only a few hours ago? They didn't even kiss! But she was his other half, and she was beautiful and kind and funny, and... Owen was unsure of what to do.

...

"George!"

A scream was heard the moment George opened the door of his villa and Dawn-bullet ran to him.

George's grumpiness melted away when the petite cinnamon-scented blonde hung on him like a koala.

George never imagined that a silly and loud female could make him feel at home, yet here was Dawn, clinging onto him and rubbing her face on the side of his neck, and he

tightened his hold on her in a desire to merge with her completely and never separate.

Owen stared at the scene in front of him. Did he ever see George smile before? Owen didn't remember.

Dawn giggled as George planted kisses all over the place and Owen had difficulty looking away.

"Did Alpha Edward bully you?"

Owen whipped his head to see Zina approaching him. He wished that Zina jumped on him, just as Dawn did on George, but he knew that their relationship was not at that stage. He didn't mark her, claim her, kiss her, or... he didn't do anything. Will he ever be able to walk with Zina by his side and his chin raised proudly?

Zina put her hand on Owen's cheek, and he leaned into her spark-infused touch that had the power to dispel all his worries.

Owen stared into Zina's blue eyes that smiled at him and the world faded as he realized that her scent of chamomile was more distinct than before. When they met the first time, it was in the market that was filled with scents, and then his nose was filled with blood, and the kitchen had various spices, but now he was confident that he didn't imagine it. Zina smelled of chamomile.

Owen loved eating and drinking chamomile and he would always pluck a few flowers when available or have a few dried ones in his pocket. Can he put Zina in his pocket?

"Owen? ... Owen?"

Zina's voice reached him, and he blinked into reality.

"Sorry, did you say something?"

"I asked, did Alpha Edward give you a hard time?"

Owen didn't want to lie, but he couldn't say anything that would make Zina worry.

What if Zina hears about trouble and says that he was not worth it, and she leaves? Or what if she likes the idea of going into Alpha Edward's grasp? His stomach cramped painfully at this last thought.

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