

Damon POV

My mother's soft hand came to rest on my shoulder. "Don't feel guilty, Damon," she said, making my eyes snap to see her. There was much love and admiration in her eyes. But how was this possible? I was responsible for her mate's condition.

"Mother... I— I—" I just couldn't form words.

"Damon, after the first attack, your father wanted to know as to what happened that triggered an attack from the Howlers," she said. "His people called the academy and came to know about you. They mentioned a girl called Poppy..." Her voice trailed off as she looked at me with questions in her eyes. "If you are in love with her, then you should leave her because this wouldn't convert into a marriage. Monica is your betrothed. If you choose not to go with Monica, we can take down the Howler pack easily, but would that be necessary? This has become too murky and only because you have interest in a girl. So unless you have a very serious explanation of what you are doing, we will have to go back to where we were. Maybe, I will ask the academy to expel Poppy. You know that I will do anything to keep the pack alive and in a good condition. Even if that means that I have to sacrifice your love for that."

"Mother..." I pursed my lips, seeing the tightness in her features. She was a strong Luna and I could not jest with her or play with her emotions. She would look right through it.

"Damon," she said. "You will have to tell me the truth."

"Yes..." I lowered my head. This chaos happened because of how I remained loyal to Poppy. I should have killed her. No. The thought ripped my heart like hell. The thought of causing her any harm, mentally or physically, was disgusting and abhorrent.

"You have to explain everything to me," she said in a soft and encouraging voice.

My gaze swiveled to Jack and Killian who were listening intently to us.

She followed the line of my sight. "Go out and wait for us," she ordered them.

They both got up immediately, bowed to her and walked out, closing the door behind them.

"Now, tell me everything from the beginning."

"I will," I said. "But you have to tell me how serious is dad?"

My mother's lips trembled and fresh tears flooded her eyes. But she held them back. With her chin high, she replied, "He is in a very bad state and I don't think he will survive. Only Jack and the doctor know about his situation other than you and me."

I closed my eyes and pressed my forehead to his hand. I was

responsible for his situation and I promised to myself that I was going to punish all those who did this to him. With a ragged breath, I got up from my place and came to sit on the sofa. I started, "Poppy is my mate."

"Really?" My mother almost squealed with joy. "That is wonderful!"

I was sure that she was going to hate me when she would hear who she was. "She is the granddaughter of James Vincent, Alpha of the Shadow pack," I said in a broken voice.

"I know!"

I jerked my head back and was shocked when I saw approval in her eyes that shone. When I frowned at her, she chuckled. "Your father was told that you were very serious about Poppy and because of her you had rejected Monica. He was pretty furious and he called you back to talk to you about it." The sadness in her eyes returned when she gazed at him. However, one look at me and she had a glint in her eyes. "But now—" She clasped her hand with. "Now you are saying that she is your mate?"

"She is, mother," I said, letting my shoulders drop. "Trust me that I tried resisting her charm. I can't tell you how far I went because—" I licked my dry lips. "Because I wanted to kill her."

"What? Why?" My mother sounded aghast, even appalled.

"Because she is our enemy's daughter," I clarified.

"And?" she asked, her eyebrow raised in suspicion.

"And I failed," I said, agreeing to my defeat. "I just couldn't kill her. Every time I thought I would reject her, I couldn't. It would be better to claw my heart out than to bear the agony of not being with her."

"Oh Damon!" My mother breathed and got up. She came to sit on her knees in front of me. "You are such a fool. Why didn't you tell me about Poppy earlier? I know she is the heir of the Shadow pack. Do you know that means she has Alpha blood? And you are an Alpha. That means that your pup with Poppy is going to be the strongest in the world! There is no other Alpha in this world mated to an Alpha!"

My mouth fell to the floor not because of the Alpha-Alpha mating, but because my mother sounded so excited. She was bursting with this enthusiasm to see my pup. I could feel that she was actually dreaming of my pup. And here I was— thinking that she would hate Poppy. I blinked my eyes and then blinked again.

"Mother..." I was unsure of her reaction. Was I dreaming? I had spent two months with Poppy and hadn't shared her details with my parents only because I was too scared of her safety or too scared that they would reject her. "What are you saying?" I had to ask to be sure that she really meant it. I really hoped that she wasn't playing with me.

She smacked my upper arm. "You dimwit!" she snarled. "Where is Poppy now?"

"Umm... at the academy."

"Get her here. How could you leave her unprotected? She is your mate, for goddess sake!"

"But mother, her grandfather is James Vincent, our enemy," I said in order to probe her feelings.

She gritted her teeth. "Of course, I know!"

"Then why are you agreeing? Father won't agree. He will chuck her out the moment she steps on Umbra territory," I reasoned. "That's the reason I never brought her here."