

The Billionaire Alpha's Contract Lover

Chapter 41

Somehow, that small amount of Jell-O managed to fill me up. I put down the spoon and asked Harper, "Shouldn't you be getting to work?"

"I've taken two days off to take care of you. You can't just be in the hospital alone."

Harper lay down on the empty hospital bed next to me. "Plus, I can take this opportunity to get some rest."

I smiled gently, knowing better than to argue. "Thank you, Harper," I said softly.

Harper waved her hand and yawned. "I'm gonna take a nap. Yell if you need anything."

I nodded. "The nurses are here if I need anything. Don't worry, and go to sleep."

Only then did Harper close her eyes.

Harper worked in a nightclub. Most of the time, she was on the night shift. Since her hours were awful and she had to cram her daytime chores and errands into a few hours after she woke up, she was always very busy and tired.

Had she been adopted into a pack, her life would have been very different. I'd always hoped for that for her. Once I didn't get my

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wolf at puberty, I knew there was no hope for me. But Harper? She had her wolf, and she was so smart.

Without a pack and a family, she wasn't able to go to college, and without a bachelor's degree, there wasn't much else she could do other than a service industry job.

After graduating high school, she didn't find a good job, but she wanted to settle in Arcadia. So, the nightclub it was.

At first, she worked bottle service. It didn't take her long to be promoted to a management position, though, because she was damn good at her job. She was great at everything she did, and I was super proud of her.

She was even able to buy a house and a car after a few years, which was a huge achievement for an orphaned she-wolf with no pack.

To top it all off, Harper had met the man she was going to spend the rest of her life with, and their mating ceremony was next month. After she mated, she'd finally belong to a

pack and have the family she'd always dreamed of.

No more struggling for her. She'd finally have everything she wanted.

Unlike me. I'd never have the chance for that.

But I wouldn't have any regrets as long as I could live until Harper's wedding and see her get married.

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After staying in the hospital for a night, my high fever had completely subsided. I was still weak, but I could go home.

As soon as we got home, Harper went straight to the kitchen. I wanted to help, but Harper refused.

"Go to bed and rest. You need it. I'll take care of this."

Harper waved her hand and drove me out of the room.

Sure, my fever had subsided-but my heart failure had worsened.

My chest felt tight, and I was in a lot of pain. Because my heart wasn't pumping enough blood throughout my body, which meant everything wasn't getting enough oxygen, I was weak and dizzy. I couldn't even stand without swaying.

Even though I want to help Harper, I couldn't. There wasn't another choice for me but to go lie down.

After getting in bed, I fell right to sleep.

Almost.

Until my phone dinged with a text message. Entertainment news.

I knew so little about Griffon's schedule even when I was staying with him, so I'd started paying attention to some of the "celebrity entertainment" accounts after seeing that they occasionally covered the Knight pack Alpha.

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I opened the text and clicked on the link. The paparazzi had snapped a picture of Griffon carrying Tara into the emergency room. The content reported that their old relationship had rekindled.

I scrolled down to the comments, and they all praised Griffon and Tara, from their looks to their money to their powerful pack standings... They all said that they were a perfect match.

And even I had to admit...they were. Griffon was like a gorgeous statue in a museum...close enough to touch, but you'd get your hand slapped if you did. While Tara was elegant, beautiful, and kind. They were indeed a good match that balanced each other out.

I smiled bitterly and swiped the text message to delete it. When I went to turn off the phone, I saw a text message from an unknown number that I'd missed while in the hospital.

I clicked on it.

What did you go to the hospital for yesterday?

I was stunned for a moment. How did this person know that I had gone to the hospital?

I looked at the time. It was sent last night after I woke up in the hospital...

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I read the message again and again, feeling disbelief.

The only person I had seen in the hospital last night was Griffon. Did he send it? But...he hadn't even looked at me. He'd been focused on Tara.

My hands trembled as I typed, Who is this?

I hadn't thought that the other person would reply so quickly, but in the next second, there was a new text.

Answer me, it said.

My heart was pounding. The cold tone was similar to Griffon's.

However, intuition told me that he'd never text me like this.

Frowning, I typed, Who the hell are you?

This time, silence. Until almost an hour later.

Roman, it read.

I took a deep breath, almost relieved it wasn't Griffon.

Though...this wasn't Roman's phone number...

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Something seemed off.

I lay in bed thinking about it, but I couldn't figure it out. Why would Roman have a different number?

Scroll it. I decided to call it.

It rang and rang with no answer. Instead, he texted: I'm in a meeting.

I rested my chin on my hand, pondering the situation and what to do.

Picking up my phone again, I called the Starke pack offices- where Roman worked for his family.

This time, he answered quickly. His voice was low and carried a hint of impatience. "I'm in a meeting. What's the matter?"

I hadn't actually expected him to be in a meeting, so I quickly replied, "Nothing," then hung up.

What a psycho! Texting me with a strange number during a meeting. Did he have nothing else to do? If he was so busy in his meeting, what the hell was he doing texting?

Then again, he'd changed his number before when I'd blocked him. Maybe he'd had to change it because he'd been harassing

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some other woman who'd blocked him.

I put down the phone, planning to ignore him, but I didn't expect to see another text message.

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He returned to the first question: Answer me. Why did you go to the hospital?

Goddess, he was crazy. He wouldn't speak when I called, but he'd just continue to ask the same question over text. What the hell?

I didn't want to talk to him, but I was afraid that if I didn't reply, it would just irritate him. So I gritted my teeth and typed: I had a high fever and went to the hospital for IV fluids and antibiotics.

I was prepared for more questions, but he didn't text back. So I put down my phone and fell asleep.

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My phone vibrated on my nightstand, waking me up.

I peeled open my tired eyes, struggled to pick up the phone, and answered.

"Baby." Roman's voice came from the other end of the line. "I heard you had a high fever yesterday. How are you now?"

Good lord, this guy was strange. Did his wolf take over sometimes and make him forget things? We'd already been over the fact that I'd had a high fever and gone to the hospital.

Plus, why did he care? He'd only wanted to sleep with me, so why the questions about my health?

Could it be...he knew I was dying?

I managed to shut that thought away and replied calmly, "I'm fine."

"Okay, good, good. That's great," Roman said mechanically. Then his tone changed, grew more eager. "So, did you finish that thing?"

And there it was. His real reason for calling me.

I sat straight up in bed, supported my forehead with one hand. "I went to Alpha Knight, and he said he would think about it."

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The excuse I'd used to get away from Roman wasn't one I could do...and the last thing I was going to do was actually talk to Griffon about Roman. I had no videos or pictures, and no way would Griffon ever listen to me and give the Starke Pack the Westen City project.

All I had to do was delay with Roman until after Harper's wedding was over.

Then, I would give my life in exchange for peace for the rest of Harper's life.

Roman seemed impatient. "The bidding conference starts on the tenth of next month. When is he going to consider it?"

Shit. Harper's wedding was on the ninth of next month.

I had wanted to wait until Harper got mated before going to die with Roman.

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Think fast, I told myself, tapping a finger against my chin.

Crap, crap, crap...

"On the ninth of next month. He said he couldn't give me an answer before then."

"Damn!" Roman cursed. "Give me the video. I'll talk to him then."

My palms broke out in a cold sweat, and I racked my brain for something else.

"Beta Starke, using this method to threaten Alpha Knight to help you secure the project has already made him very dissatisfied with you. If you bring the video to him, it will only further anger him. Then, not only will you offend him more, you will also prevent yourself from getting the project-or any other projects in the future. Do you think that is the right strategy to take right now? You'll have much better luck if you let me handle it. Don't you agree?"

Roman was silent while he thought about it, and I waited for his response with baited breath.

He had to know that threatening Griffon in this way wasn't honorable, that he would already be treading on thin ice.

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powerful pack.

He finally spoke again. "I must see the contract on the ninth of next month. Otherwise, it won't be your best friend's new mate claiming her after the ceremony...it'll be a group of my men."

My heart skipped a beat-or ten. Roman knew the date of Harper's wedding? Just how close of an eye had he been keeping

on us?

Now, not only Harper but also her new mate might be implicated. I had to think fast.

Real fast.

I put down the phone and struggled to get up.

I went to the desk, pulled open the drawer, and took out a few medicine bottles.

Taking out the sleeping pills, I put them in another empty bottle.

Then, numbly, I picked up the other pills for heart failure and stuffed them into my mouth.

So help me goddess, I would see Harper mated, and I would see Roman pay.

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There were about ten days left before the ninth of the next month.

Every day, I went to different hospitals and got prescriptions so I could accumulate sleeping pills.

After coming home one day and placing the medicine on the table, I glanced at the box setting to the side.

I hadn't returned the dress and necklace to Roman yet. I was surprised he hadn't asked for it back given how expensive the necklace must be. I quickly picked up the phone and made arrangements to deliver them to him.

Although I had to deal with Roman, I would return what did not belong to me.

The delivery man arrived quickly. After sending the package out, I felt much more at ease.

When Roman saw the dress and necklace being returned, he was pleased, and his wolf pawed at him.

"I know, I know," he soothed.

If it were someone else, they would have already sold the

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necklace, but Taya had returned it. Which meant she cared about him enough to return something that belonged to him, and she didn't care about the money.

Sure, she was resistant, but he'd dealt with this before with

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women. He loved a challenge. Right now, he just needed her to secure the project...and then he'd secure her.

Once I sent Roman's things back to him, I took a nap.

Harper calling woke me up.

"It's ready!" she screamed excitedly into the phone.

"On my way!" I answered.

The wedding dress Harper had custom made was ready.

As poorly as I felt, there was no way I was missing this, and I was genuinely excited with her.

I gathered myself and tried to forget about the exhaustion I was feeling. When I got to the bridal shop, Damian, Harper's fiancé, was also there. When he saw me coming in, he greeted me warmly.

"Where's Harper?" I asked him excitedly.

Damian raised his chin toward the fitting room. "She's trying the dress on. I saved you a seat over here."

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Oh, thank the goddess there was someplace to sit.

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It was getting harder and harder to stand for long periods of time. My body could never get enough oxygen anymore. The weaker my heart got, the worse the symptoms were. I knew it wouldn't be long for me, but I HAD to see Harper and Damian's mating ceremony if it was the last thing I did.

And...it might possibly actually be the last thing I did.

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Fortunately, Harper soon came out of the fitting room quickly.

Just sitting here had made me nod off a bit.

Harper called my name softly, and my eyes snapped open.

I was thankful Harper didn't seem notice my strangeness. She was too wrapped up in her dress...as she should be. She lifted the hem of the big mating dress and walked around in front of her and Damian.

Wolf shifters didn't have the same superstitions about mates seeing the dress before the wedding, which I'd always loved.

And I really loved the look on Damian's face right now. It was one of absolute awe and worship.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"It's beautiful," I gushed.

"My baby looks beautiful no matter what she wears," Damian replied, a huge grin on his

face as he looked at his future mate.

Harper beamed and walked over to kiss his cheek.

Damian caressed her face affectionately.

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I was so excited for them. They'd been together for a long time, and they'd already gone through so much. They'd been apart while Damian had gone to college, and Harper had confided in me that his childhood had been a bit rough, even though his situation was different than ours and he still had a family and a pack.

But it definitely made him understand Harper more, and I knew that he would cherish the family they built together. They would both be amazing parents for their pups.

I wished I had found a man like Damian. Life would have been a lot easier and happier.

"Are you ready to pick your dress, Taya?" Harper asked me when the sales associate came over with a rack of dresses.

Harper's dress had cost a small fortune, so the store was providing my dress.

"Umm..." I hemmed and hawed. I was so thin and pale, nothing would look good on me or fit properly. I didn't even want to think about how awful any of these colors would look against my ghostly complexion. "They're all so gorgeous, I don't even know where to start..."

"Oooh! I'll pick!" Harper clapped her hands together, her eyes gleaming.

Whew. Exactly what I'd hoped for.

Harper quickly picked a champagne-colored dress and asked me

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to try it on.

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Once it was on, I stared at myself in the dressing room mirror, shaking my head before walking out. There was no way Harper was going to NOT see how much weight I'd lost.

Harper touched my waist. There was no flesh, only bones.

She looked at my pale face as if seeing for the first time how truly washed-out I looked. She narrowed her gaze on me, her face stern. "Taya, why have you lost so much weight?"

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Luckily, I'd already thought about this.

Now I just needed Harper to be so consumed by her mating ceremony preparations that she believed me.

"I lost weight for your mating ceremony."

Harper frowned. "You're practically skin and bones, love. Why are you still losing weight?!"

I opened my mouth to brush her off and tell her that I had stopped, but I was saved by one of the girls in the shop coming over and ushering us toward the makeup counter to decide on our look for the day-of.

After we finished at the dress shop and getting dresses and makeup decided on, the three of us went to the hotel for a final meeting with the mating ceremony coordinator. Since Harper wasn't officially part of Damian's pack until after they were mated, she hadn't wanted to have their ceremony at his pack center. A hotel was neutral territory and it would make Harper feel more comfortable.

"Let me take you both out to dinner when I get off work." Damian kissed Harper's cheek as we exited the hotel.

"I'd love that, babe," Harper replied, standing on her tiptoes to return his kiss.

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When Harper and I returned to the house, Harper started fussing around with packing. Damian had bought a house for he and Harper to live in after they were mated. It was on his pack's land, so that they would be closer to his family, and they would have help with their pups once they started their family.

"I'm so glad you're staying here," Harper said as she packed. "Buying this house was the first thing I ever really accomplished, and I don't like the idea of a stranger living here."

Just another reason she was going to be devastated when I was gone.

I nodded with a smile, not able or wanting to verbalize how I was feeling right now.

"I'm going to leave a few things here, though. For when I stay over for girls' nights," Harper said, going through some of her pajamas and setting them aside.

I didn't say anything. I couldn't.

Better to change the subject. "I have a wedding gift for you."

"Oh?!"

"Wait a minute," I said, then went to my bedroom. I opened the drawer, took out a debit card, and handed it to her.

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"This is a dowry that I saved for you."

Harper took the card and looked back and forth between it and me, a confused expression on her face.

"But... what do you mean? Why?"

"I know Damian's family said they didn't need one, since they know your history. I just... I want to make sure you start off on the right foot with them, that they don't hold it against you later."

It was an old-fashioned practice, but wolf shifters typically received dowries when someone from outside of their pack married into their pack. Essentially, packs cared for their packmates. Everything from child care to school to food to medical. Anything that was needed, if you were part of a close-knit pack that abided by the "old ways" like Damian's did, it was tradition for the she-wolf's family to give a gift to help with the cost of anything needed for her or future pups.

Was the money actually needed? Nah. It was more a gesture of goodwill between the packs.

Over the years, I'd divided my salary into several parts-one for Griffon, one for Harper, and the other for living expenses.

I wasn't a lot, but if something didn't go smoothly for Harper

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fter marriage, having some extra money on hand could give her peace of mind.

Because if Damian and Harper split up, the pack would return the dowry to Harper, per pack law.

Harper was more than a little shocked when Taya handed her a debit card.

She didn't think there was anything left after Taya paid Griffon back.

He ll, she'd thought about how she could help Taya out with expenses...not the other way around. So this? This was surprising to say the least.

No wonder Taya was so thin. She'd been scrimping and saving to not only pay Griffon back, but to do this.

Harper touched Taya's cheek and shook her head. "Taya... You didn't have to do this

for me.”

Taya smiled gently and said, “I wanted to.”

Harper shook her head again and pressed the debit card back into Taya’s hand. “I can’t take this. I’m older than you; I’m basically your older sister. Only older sisters prepare dowry for younger sisters if their parents aren’t around. Besides, since you aren’t a shifter, it’s not your responsibility.”

“Harper-”

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‘Uh-uh. You need to keep this for yourself. Without a pack to rely on, I worry about you.’

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Seeing that Taya was upset, Harper hurried forward to stop her from leaving the room, but Taya pushed her away.

Harper sighed helplessly. “Why are you so dam n stubborn?”

“You’ve cared for me since I was young, since I didn’t have a wolf to rely on. I’ve never been able to do anything for you. I’ve always been the poor little human who couldn’t fend for

little herself.” Taya paused. “Just think of it as a gift from your sister. A thank-you for everything you’ve done for me.”

Harper still didn’t agree. Taya’s life was already difficult enough, and she wasn’t sure how things would go now that she didn’t have Griffon taking care of her and now that Harper was moving. How could she ever accept Taya’s money when she didn’t know what was going to happen to her?

But...what she could do right now was just take the card, don’t spend anything, and give it back to her later. Maybe when Taya got married. Taya would be happy, and they wouldn’t fight. Plus, one good dowry deserved another, right? Or something like that.

After packing some more of Harper’s belongings, they lay in Harper’s room on the bed.

Just like when they were younger, applying face masks and hout the future.

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Harper talked to Taya about getting mated, told her that breaking up with Griffon was good for her because a man of his status would never marry someone without a wolf.

An Alpha like him needed a Luna, and unfortunately, no matter how much Taya wished

for it, she couldn't be that for him.

"There are some humans around here, you know. Or at least men without wolves who were born into shifter families. You should find a nice guy at some of the human bars. It'll be too hard for you to mate a shifter. There are too many expectations regarding mating and pups."

She also mentioned that no matter what happened to either of them, they would always have this house to come back to. Harper didn't plan on selling it. The orphan in her would never NOT let her have a backup in case things went wrong.

With this house, they would always have security.

I sat in bed, agreeing with everything Harper said. I didn't dare let her notice anything unusual.

I simply hugged her, feeling at peace and enjoying this moment with her.

Life might not have always given me the best, but it gave me Harper, my chosen sister.

I could die knowing at least I'd had this.

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I slept peacefully with Harper in my arms, just like when we were children.

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This was the most calmly I had slept in the past few days. The time passed too quickly.

In the blink of an eye, it was the day of Harper's mating ceremony.