

The Dark Side of Fate

Chapter 344

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Misunderstanding

~Liam~

I had never been so uncomfortable in my life. Normally, I should have been overjoyed that we were finally going to investigate the matter, and I should have been grateful for Uncle Leo's determination to explore the islands in the east. However, an unsettling thought lingered in my mind—I would be spending more time with Josephine than I had expected. Being away from her would certainly make dealing with the bond a lot easier. I couldn't trust myself to behave appropriately with her close by. As our parents assigned roles for the investigation, I stood there silently, unable to voice my concerns. I knew I should simply be thankful because they were all going above and beyond for my sake.

When my father dismissed the rest of us and asked Justin to stay, I wanted to remain too, but it seemed I wasn't meant to be privy to their private conversation. Justin, being the oldest, would be responsible for all of us, and I assumed there would be additional instructions that we wouldn't be informed about.

"Come on, Li," Charlotte exclaimed, her excitement evident. She seemed thrilled about being drafted into this endeavour.

I was tempted to decline, but I knew it would be impolite. They were all going out of their way to assist me, and I genuinely appreciated their efforts. Even Josephine had the right to refuse, yet here they were, willing to help me unravel this mystery.

Perhaps we could become as close as our parents had hoped.

"It's not fair that our fated is assisting us in the search when you might end up rejecting her for the person she is helping us find,"

Alex whispered in my mind, causing a pang of guilt to wash over me. I hadn't planned on rejecting Josephine, but I wanted to get to know her better first to see how things would unfold. I couldn't make a snap decision about such an important matter.

In agreement with Charlotte, I followed the group to the living room. It was evident that Miles wasn't too thrilled about not being officially on the team, given the gloomy expression on his face. Sarah stood by his side, attempting to lift his spirits. I decided to connect with him telepathically.

"Look at the bright side; you get to do whatever you like and join us in four months. I'm sure you won't miss out on too much," I

linked him, but he shook his head in response.

"I'm coming with you guys; my father said it's okay," he replied, which left me puzzled by his lingering gloom.

"So what's with the face?" I asked, seeking to understand his emotions.

"Alpha Devin won't allow Sarah and Layla to visit," he revealed, and I sympathised with his predicament. I wasn't entirely sure about the depth of Miles and Marvin's feelings for the Corrigan sisters, but I hoped everything would work out for them and they wouldn't end up in a situation like mine. For so long, I had been infatuated with Sophia, only for fate to introduce Josephine into my life. I wished that wouldn't be the case for them.

“I’m sure we can work something out,” I reassured him through our telepathic connection before finding a seat on one of the couches.

I couldn’t really immerse myself in the celebration or engage in mingling. Thoughts of the mate bond still lingered, and the scent of dill stung my nose. Thankfully, Alex seemed to be handling it better than I was, but I knew coping with this on a daily basis would be a real challenge.

Amid my contemplation, Josephine came to sit beside me. I sensed Elaine’s stare, and when I glanced in her direction, she quickly averted her eyes back to Oliver.

“Our father said the three of us can go to Grizlo,” Josephine mentioned, referring to her siblings. I nodded in response, not wanting to engage in a full conversation with her to avoid saying something foolish.

Josephine stayed silent for a moment; then, she touched my shoulder. The sensation was overwhelming, and I gently shrugged her hand off. I could tell from her expression that my action wasn’t well-received, as she realised I didn’t want her touching me.

“Sorry,” she said, withdrawing her hand to her lap. I felt like a jerk, aware of how my actions must have seemed to her. If only she knew the turmoil I was going through at the moment, she wouldn’t be upset.

“No, it’s not what you think,” I tried to explain, feeling guilty for my behaviour. “It’s just that I’m not in a good frame of mind,” I added, which was genuinely true. She nodded, gazing ahead.

“I know you don’t want me on the team, Li,” she unexpectedly said, leaving me stunned. How did she reach that conclusion?

“Well, that’s not...” I began to respond, but she shook her head and locked her eyes on mine. I found myself drawn into a trance, noticing her features more closely than ever before. I had often wondered why she wore contact lenses. In truth, she had Aunt Amelia’s stunning eyes, and perhaps transparent lenses would have been a better option.

“You have your reasons for not liking me, and I understand that. I might come off as arrogant and difficult, and my sense of style might be unconventional. Nevertheless, rest assured that it won’t impede my investigative skills. I know how much Sophia means

to you, and I'm willing to put in the effort to help you solve the mystery and save her. But I want to plead with you, Liam, to give me a chance and make my work a bit easier. We can't function effectively as a team if you harbour such strong dislike towards me," Josephine spoke with a serious expression, and I shook my head in response.

"I do not dislike you, Joe," I said, hoping to clear any misunderstanding, and she smiled faintly, looking away.

"Maybe not to my face," she replied, catching me off guard. I couldn't fathom where that notion came from.

"I beg your pardon?" I asked, seeking clarification, and she chuckled before meeting my gaze.

"Two years ago, during the summer gathering at the Volkov Mansion, I overheard you and your cousins talking about me. You

were laughing at my fashion sense, my appearance, my makeup, and my attitude. I was the subject of your jokes," she revealed, and I racked my brain, trying to recall the conversation she referred to.

As I struggled to remember, she continued, "So you see, I know exactly what you all think. I only came to tell you to set aside

your feelings so we can work together effectively. I don't expect everyone to like me, but I promise to always give my best."

Her words left me utterly speechless. Josephine stated her piece and stood up, walking away before I could respond. I sat there, dumbfounded, on the living room couch.

I tried to recall the conversation from two years ago, and while we may have discussed Josephine, it was never meant to be

malicious. We might have shared opinions, and perhaps there was a hint of jealousy toward her intelligence, but it was all

harmless. I could only assume she had overheard a fragment of that conversation and misconstrued our feelings towards her.

A week went by, and there was still no news about Mike. It felt as if he had vanished from the face of the earth. Max and Kyle

joined our group, bringing along their wives and young children.

Max's oldest child was Celia, an eight-year-old girl, and his son Jacob was five years old. Meanwhile,

Kyle had two adopted sons

named Luke and Ashton. Max's mate, Ingrid, was a lovely brunette, and Josephine, Elaine, and Luis seemed to have a great

fondness for her. Considering Max was also their uncle on their mother's side, it made sense that they were close. The story of how their families became connected was quite amusing and bizarre. It was hard to believe that Lord Alexei had cheated Max during an Alpha challenge and ended up taking over his pack. Our parents would occasionally joke about it, particularly Uncle Leo, who loved to recount how Max had sought his help after facing a Stepanov. No one would have guessed that Max would eventually forgive his cousin Alia and accept Alexei as his in-law. It spoke volumes about their big hearts and the strength of their friendships and bonds that had endured for so long. As for Kyle, his mate Veronica was known for her spirited nature, and everyone enjoyed being around her. They had chosen to adopt children when they discovered that Kyle had reproductive issues. They were incredibly happy with their sons, and aside from their different features, one would never suspect that they weren't biologically related. Kyle had triplets he lovingly cared for, children that his fated mate had tricked him into accepting as his own. Now that they were grown, the triplets had moved away,

but Kyle still kept in touch with them, cherishing the connection they had formed.

When Max and Kyle learned about Mike's crime and our assignment, their reactions were just as I had anticipated. They were

immediately intrigued and eager to be part of the investigation, so Uncle Leo assigned them the task of secretly looking into

Kaizen and Braile.

I hoped that their involvement would yield valuable information for our sake. Alpha Devin also instructed them to explore other

islands, and Lord Alexei granted them permission to check the Islands in the west as well. The truth was, Mike and his family

could be anywhere, possibly scattered across different locations. I hadn't received any communication from Sophia since that

day, but I held onto hope that she was still alive.

Expanding the search perimeter was crucial in this situation.

The aim of our mission in Grizlo was to uncover the root cause of the crime. Understanding the cause could potentially lead us to

a solution. Our parents believed that investigating the reasons behind the crime would be less confrontational and dangerous

than actively chasing Mike, where we might encounter serious obstacles.

Justin made sure we used the week to plan and strategise our approach in Grizlo. None of us had ever undertaken such a responsibility before, so we were excited about what lay ahead.

Throughout the preparations, Josephine kept her distance from me and only greeted me when we happened to be in the same vicinity. I felt terrible about this situation, and I couldn't help but think that she might have truly overheard our conversation two years ago. Looking back now, I regret not keeping my thoughts to myself.

It was a stark reminder of how our careless words and jokes could unknowingly hurt others. Even though Josephine seemed tough on the outside, our remarks affected her. It made me realise the importance of being mindful of our words and treating others with kindness and respect.

Noah and Sebastien were busy organising a picnic on one of the mountain tops, and everyone seemed to be looking forward to it. It promised to be a fun time away from our parents' watchful eyes.

Harper, Charlotte, and Lilly were taking charge of the event planning, while Noah, Sebastien, Gemma, and Jewels worked on figuring out the evening's entertainment. I had a strong hunch that they intended to sneak some alcohol into the gathering, and I suspected Miles or Oliver might be the ones behind it. While everyone was eagerly anticipating the picnic, I couldn't shake the feeling of being out of place, as if I were somehow doing something wrong.

At first, I tried convincing myself that my unease was due to Sophia's perilous situation, but deep down, I knew it wasn't the real reason. What truly bothered me was Josephine's avoidance. Despite my best efforts to hide my feelings about it, her distance affected me more than I wanted to admit.

Before the mate bond revelation, being around Josephine was effortless. Even though she was reserved, she still found time for small talk and greetings. But ever since the bond came to light, everything changed. My uneasiness about the situation caused me to act like a jerk, and she misinterpreted my behaviour. Now, any possibility of a friendship seemed distant. I couldn't help but

worry that she would outright reject me if she ever discovered that we were mates. In theory, it shouldn't have bothered me so much, but in reality, it gnawed at me deeply. It bothered me far more than I cared to admit.

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