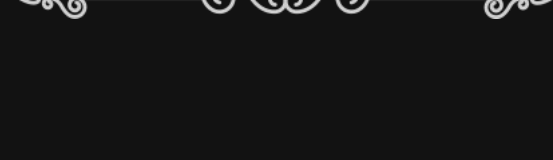


The Dark Side of Fate

Chapter 357



The Dark Side Of Fate By Karima Sa'ad Usman Chapter 357 Being On Guard ~Liam~

Upon arrival at the street, we noticed that everything remained undisturbed, just as we had left it. The crime scene was still cordoned off with tape.

"Does it look the same as last night?" Justin inquired, and Josephine confirmed with a nod as he parked the van.

"I instructed them to maintain the integrity of the scene. We can't be sure if the perpetrators tampered with it as well, so let's not give them any confidence that they followed my instructions," Justin warned, and we all understood the importance of preserving the evidence and the likelihood that the pack members were corrupt.

"Marvin, Charlotte, Sebastien, and Oliver, you'll investigate the exterior. Check the tire tracks from grandma's gate leading to the burnt van," Justin directed.

"The rest of us will head inside. Once you're done outside, join us indoors to discuss your findings," he continued, efficiently dividing us into two teams to make the most of our investigation.

Josephine, Noah, and I accompanied Justin as we entered the building for the investigation. As soon as we stepped inside, Justin inquired about the location where the body was found, and I provided him with the details. He and Josephine went to explore that particular room, while Noah and I were assigned to search other areas.

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Investigating Grandma's house felt bizarre. Only a few weeks ago, I was living here peacefully, but now it had become a crime scene. The question that haunted me was: why did they target the housekeeper?

"I bet they thought your grandparents were home," Noah commented, scanning the surroundings.

"But what did my grandparents ever do to them?" I questioned, seeking an explanation. He simply shrugged in response.

"After watching that video where they mentioned instructing the council to do something for them, I wouldn't be surprised if they had plans to target your grandparents. Holding your girlfriend wouldn't necessarily force your father or mine to comply with their demands. It might pressure you, but you don't have the final say. Your grandparents, on the other hand, are a different story altogether. Both our fathers would be more inclined to bend, especially yours. Lady Stephanie is his mother, and I know I'd do anything to protect my own mother, just like you would for yours. Now imagine your father's situation," Noah explained, connecting the dots eloquently.

"It was quick thinking to prevent them from coming home," he praised, and hearing Noah piece everything together, I realised how much sense it made.

"Sophia isn't my girlfriend," I corrected him, and he nodded, chuckling.

"Yeah, right. So we all got involved in something that wasn't our business because you wanted some excitement, Li?" he questioned, leaving me unsure of how to respond.

He then revealed something embarrassing, saying, "Your mother told mine that you confessed your feelings for Sophia to her and your father." My impulsive actions left me feeling utterly embarrassed.

In my defense, I tried to explain, "I wanted them to take the situation seriously."

Noah countered my argument, saying, "You didn't need to confess your feelings unless they were genuine, Li. You were planning to ask her out the night she went missing. You've been through a lot of emotional trauma."

He paused and fixed me with a serious gaze. It was an unusual expression for Noah, who, along with Sebastien, usually appeared playful and carefree. However, their sharp eyes betrayed their keen awareness of their surroundings. It was impossible to fool them; their ability to quickly piece things together made lying futile.

"You're my cousin," he sighed, "and so is Josephine," he added, hinting at the direction of the conversation.

"I'm aware of what's going on between you two. Your silent gestures and secret mind links don't fool me, which is why I brought up Sophia during breakfast. I'd hate to see Jo hurt. She's kind-hearted and sweet, and she doesn't deserve to be caught up in your issues with Sophia. If she's just a substitute until Sophia is found, I promise you, Li, you'll have a problem with me, and I am sure it is the same for the others because we expect better from you.

Jo may seem tough, but she has a gentle soul that can be easily bruised. I see the way she looks at you, the way she laughs and acts around you. She's falling for you, Li, and if you were oblivious to that fact before, I hope you understand it now and do what's right. She shouldn't be anyone's substitute," he said with genuine concern evident in his eyes.

"She isn't Sophia's substitute. I..." I struggled to find the words, and he patiently waited for me to speak.

"If I tell you this, you have to promise to keep it a secret. It's crucial," I requested, and he furrowed his brow, considering my words before nodding in agreement to keep my confidence.

"Yes, I had feelings for Sophia. I confessed it to everyone and was quite adamant about it. It's all true, but I don't have those feelings anymore. I..." I hesitated, and he remained silent, waiting for me to continue.

"Jo and I are fated," I blurted out, causing him to gasp, his eyes widening in surprise.

"I found out during dinner when we arrived at Mountain. I swear, I fought against it, but in the end, I decided to give fate a chance," I confessed, and he frowned, concerned.

"But she isn't eighteen yet. You can't know. She can't know," he argued, and I nodded in agreement.

"I thought the same at first, but fate seems to have different plans for me. She still doesn't know, and I don't intend to tell her anytime soon. I want her to discover it on her own, in a natural way, and decide if she wants me or not," I explained, and he studied me closely, trying to grasp the complexity of the situation.

"And what about you? Bond aside, do you want her?" he asked, and I nodded without hesitation.

"More than I've ever wanted anyone," I admitted, and he bowed his head in understanding.

"I believe you, Li. Alex just flashed while you were talking about her. He never did that with Sophia, so I believe you," he reassured me, taking note of the bond's response.

"Your secret is safe with me. I won't tell her or anyone, and I genuinely wish you two the best. Congratulations, by the way," he said, and with those words, his serious expression softened into a relaxed one once again.

It will be stupid to believe that the Albert twins were as oblivious as they seemed. They just seemed the type to choose to ignore things.

"I want to ask you about your friends in Mountain, the ones you invited to the picnic?" I inquired, and he burst into laughter.

"The social climbers?" he chuckled, surprising me with his awareness.

"Honestly, we thought you didn't know," I admitted, and he laughed again.

"Of course we know, but it gets lonely in the east. You have everyone up north, so you don't need any extras, but it's just us, so we make do," he explained with amusement.

"Sebastien and I find their efforts entertaining. We invited them for amusement, and boy, they didn't disappoint. Charlotte, Jewels, Gemma, Lily, and Harper had their hands full with those boys," he said, laughing, and I could tell it was all deliberate.

"You should have seen Harper lose her cool. The guy just kept going on. She had to tell him to literally shut the fuck up! You two missed it, but I guess you guys were busy in the romance department," he added, slipping his hands into his pockets before walking away.

I never realised my Eastern cousins were this mischievous until now.

As we explored the ground floor, meticulously examining surfaces for any traces of clues, we came to a surprising observation – someone had returned to clean the house. The ground floor appeared immaculate, with the floors mopped and all surfaces meticulously tended to.

However, it was evident that the cleaning couldn't have been done by the housekeeper. Had it been her, the lingering scents of Josephine and me would still be noticeable. Instead, the house exuded a faint aroma of disinfectants, indicating that the place had been thoroughly aired after the cleaning.

It became apparent that whoever was responsible for this had worked tirelessly throughout the night to achieve such a thorough cleaning. The dedication to erasing any evidence left us both intrigued and concerned about the extent to which they were involved.

"You are right; it seems like there's nothing to be found here," I concurred, acknowledging the fruitless search. We then made our way upstairs to the room where we had found the housekeeper earlier. Josephine and Justin appeared puzzled, examining the environment.

"It's evident that someone did an exceptional cleaning job," Justin remarked, and we nodded, already having reached that conclusion.

"They must have worked tirelessly through the night and ventilated the place," Josephine added, acknowledging the thoroughness of the cleaning.

"I suppose our best hope now is to rely heavily on the housekeeper waking up," Noah suggested, and it dawned on me that we needed to ensure her safety. If these individuals could clean the house so meticulously, they could also take measures to prevent her from regaining consciousness.

"You're right," I continued, feeling the urgency in my voice.

"We have to send men from Lucland to guard her in the hospital. In fact, I think we should stay with the housekeeper until they arrive to relieve us. If these perpetrators are going to such lengths to cover their tracks, the housekeeper is the only loose end. Even if she didn't see their faces, she might have interacted with them or overheard their conversation before they harmed her."

As I spoke, Justin's eyes widened, clearly understanding the gravity of the situation and the importance of protecting the housekeeper from any potential danger.

We quickly exited the building, and Justin communicated with everyone through the mental link, instructing them to return to the van. Once inside, I wasted no time and dialed Bryce's number. I knew we couldn't afford to wait for Justin to make the call – time was of the essence. Bryce picked up on the first ring.

"Your Highness," he greeted, and I skipped the pleasantries to get straight to the point.

"Bryce, send Kappa Levi with at least four other kappas to Grizlo immediately. They need to guard a witness," I instructed urgently.

"Yes, your Highness. I will dispatch them right away," Bryce responded promptly, and I found it interesting that he didn't ask for confirmation from my father or uncles. It appeared that he trusted my judgment and request.

"What did he say?" Marvin inquired anxiously.

"He said he would send them right away," I replied.

"I guess he understands the severity of the situation and the urgency of our task. Your father must have removed the limitations on our requests," Charlotte added, acknowledging the significance of the situation.

"You mean they had enough time to clean grandma's house thoroughly?" Sebastien questioned, and Josephine nodded solemnly.

"It was spotless, and there was no trace of mine or Li's scent. They even took the time to air out the place," she explained, and Oliver let out a low whistle.

"This is troubling, Justin. It indicates that the corruption here runs deep. How did we not realise there was such corruption in Grizlo?" Oliver pondered, voicing the concerns we all shared.

"Because it never hit close to home," Charlotte replied with a sombre tone. She was right; we had never encountered corruption on such a personal level before, and it was disheartening to realise that it might have been ongoing for quite some time.

"It's possible that the pack officers and warriors might be compromised. If Mike was the odd one out, then he might have actually been the good guy, because this level of corruption can only be possible through the Alpha," I suggested, and a heavy silence fell over the group.

"Let's not jump to conclusions, Li, but it does seem likely. I hope you're wrong, because if you're not, then we'll have to put a lot of trust in Kappa Levi and his team to ensure that woman comes through. That is, of course, if the senior staff hasn't already done something to her," Justin said, and his reasoning was valid. The situation was increasingly precarious, and we had to proceed cautiously with the information we had at hand.

"We need to thoroughly search Sam Street. Someone must have seen something. Even if some of them are corrupt, it's unlikely that everyone is involved," Sebastien suggested, and his point was well taken.

"We'll have to do that after we secure the housekeeper. As it stands, we can't afford to have fewer than four of us in any given place in case of an attack. Personally, I'd prefer all eight of us to stick together to better defend ourselves until we figure out what's going on. Without knowing the full extent of the situation, we're walking blind," Justin stated, and everyone agreed with his cautious approach.

"Let's hope they reveal their demands before the council so we can have a better idea of what we're dealing with," Marvin added, voicing our shared hope for more clarity in this intricate situation.

We drove to the hospital, and upon our arrival, the staff seemed on edge. Justin firmly demanded that they take us to the housekeeper's room, leaving them no choice but to comply.

As we entered the room, we found the housekeeper connected to various machines. Given our suspicions about potential corruption, we couldn't entirely trust the medical staff, making it challenging to assess her condition accurately.

Charlotte approached the woman carefully, examining all the equipment and treatments.

"I think we should call my mom for guidance to ensure she's receiving the right treatment," Charlotte suggested, and it was indeed the best course of action. Aunt Claudia would have the expertise to guide us.

"Alternatively, we could explore the possibility of transporting her to either Lucland or Gad. Grandpa Eric possesses incredible healing abilities," Noah proposed, and we began brainstorming potential solutions. Our enthusiasm quickly prompted Justin to subtly quiet us down, reminding us to approach this situation with the utmost caution.

"After the council meeting, we'll have a better understanding of what steps to take. Let's not forget that this woman isn't originally from Grizlo, so she might have brought some external issues into the mix. We could be overthinking this situation, and it might be an attempt to divert our focus from the real priority, which is finding Sophia," Justin communicated through the mental link, reminding us to stay grounded.

We all felt a sense of calm because Justin's perspective was valid. It was easy to get carried away by the complexities of the situation and lose sight of our primary goal: finding Sophia. We were still relatively inexperienced in handling such high-stakes situations and had a lot to learn.

The attending doctor came to brief us on the housekeeper's condition, and while the prognosis was grim due to the time lapse, the doctor maintained hope. Despite the bleakness of the situation, we remained determined and hopeful, knowing that we had to continue our efforts to uncover the truth and protect those we cared about.

In the hospital room, we found a two-seater and a single couch. Justin and Charlotte settled on the two-seater, while I opted for the single couch, not wanting to sit on the uncomfortable bench in the corridor. With limited seating, I suggested to Josephine that she sits on my lap, knowing we might be there for a while. Despite the public display of affection, we were both aware that the others wouldn't speak about it, but I anticipated a conversation with Justin later at the packhouse.

Previously, I had been resolute in my pursuit of Sophia, but my feelings for Josephine were growing stronger, and I was determined to make our relationship work. It was my first real relationship, and I hoped it would be my last. Josephine settled comfortably on my lap, while the rest of our team took the available seats outside the room.

Justin stayed inside with Charlotte, Josephine, and me, occasionally glancing in our direction with evident disapproval in his eyes. I understood his reservations; my actions and words in the past had not been ideal, and it was natural for him to be cautious about my intentions. However, I knew in my heart that I wanted to keep Josephine safe and that my feelings for her were genuine and steadfast. When he confronts me on my intentions, I will assure him Josephine was safe. I had no intention of letting go.