

The Dark Side of Fate

Chapter 358



Telling Justin

~Liam~

The hospital wait proved challenging as time seemed to drag while we remained motionless. Josephine and I took short strolls occasionally to stretch our legs. I permitted her to rest on the couch while I remained standing. Despite the unspoken nature of the situation, I anticipated that questions would arise soon.

Seated on my lap, Josephine inquired, “Are we still planning to visit the food truck?” Justin observed us, prompting his interruption, “What food truck?”

“It’s a little place we checked out yesterday before all of this happened,” Josephine replied, intentionally vague about the location.

“I understand. However, you two shouldn’t go anywhere without a couple more people at least,” he remarked, his tone resembling that of a protective figure. I almost let out a chuckle at his statement.

“Point taken, Alpha,” I replied, and he wasn’t still smiling. Whatever he was seeing bothered him a lot, and I knew I was the bad guy in the eyes of those who did not know what was going on.

“Join me in the cafeteria, Li. I have something to discuss with you,” Justin stated, rising from his seat. It was clear that the conversation intended for the pack house, either in his room or office, would now transpire in the hospital cafeteria. The restlessness and tension in Justin’s gaze were evident, and I dreaded the confrontation.

Josephine appeared to share my unease, her expression reflecting worry. Likewise, Charlotte seemed puzzled and disapproving. It was apparent that all of them were protective of Josephine. But what puzzled me was the underlying assumption that I could ever purposefully cause harm to Josephine or anyone else.

I had never dated anyone before. This was my first relationship. I might have crushed on Sophia and believed I was in love by the time of graduation, but I never made a move on her.

Seeing my impulses a few weeks ago, I realised I might have made that move because I liked having my life in order. I wanted the relationship part taken care of, so I could forge ahead.

Usually, when most people turn eighteen, their parents are on the lookout for their mates, if any, because it is a rare occurrence, and a lot is damaged for those who find their mates later in life after being mated.

Finding Josephine was all I needed for me to know that I was about to tow the wrong path with Sophia.

Truly, regardless of the nature of my relationship with Sophia, I am committed to investing the same level of effort in locating her. She’s my friend, and her well-being matters to me. However, my emotions have become distinctly clearer, and my heart beats exclusively for Josephine.

Moreover, my motivations aren’t driven by our bond. Spending time with Josephine allowed me to realise how mistaken I was about her true personality. She turned out to be an exceptional person. In all honesty, even with the eyeliner, she retained her unique charm.

Josephine shifted from my lap, prompting me to rise, prepared to accompany Justin to the cafeteria. Similar to Uncle David, Justine possessed a stern side, and I understood that this time, I would be on the receiving end of it.

As we exited, the remainder of the team seated outside regarded us with surprise.

“Facing some trouble?” Noah reached out through our link, and I found myself at a loss for words.

“What’s going on between you and Justin?” Oliver’s message popped up in our mental connection.

“Josephine,” I responded, and a hush fell over our conversation.

Considering the current trajectory, it seemed the entire team would uncover the truth before Josephine did. It was inevitable since I couldn’t address the situation with Justin without disclosing the truth about us.

I was reluctant to confide in Josephine directly. I did not want to tell Josephine anything; I wanted her to find out on her own. I did not want to rob her of the feeling of discovery.

If everyone on this team knows, and she is the only one that does not know, I believe it would be unfair. It was messy, but I prayed for wisdom to get through it.

Justin and I proceeded in silence. Observers turned their attention toward us, offering respectful greetings, particularly directed at me. This was a consequence of recognition—people were aware of our identities, mine in particular.

It didn’t sit well with me that, despite being the Beta, I garnered more reverence than Justin. Nevertheless, it was an anticipated outcome. My history within Grizlo was extensive, and the community there held a deep affection for me. However, the contemplation of the events that had compelled our return to this place cast a sombre shadow over the situation.

We stepped into the cafeteria, Justin and I, purchasing some food upon entry. Hospital cuisine wasn’t exactly my preference, but I was prepared to make do. The meagre offering of sandwiches and water hardly constituted a satisfying meal.

Opting for a table tucked into a corner, we settled into our seats.

“I’m sure you’re aware of the reason I asked to speak with you,” Justin inquired calmly, and I feigned a lack of understanding.

Truthfully, beyond the matter concerning Sophia, I hadn’t committed any wrongdoing. It left me puzzled as to why others weren’t receiving similar inquiries about their choices. Oliver’s attachment to Elaine was evident, and he was almost always by her side when she was around. Miles and Marvin were frequently seen with the Corrigan sisters. So why was my situation treated differently? Was I not allowed to form a connection as well?

“What is with you and Jo?” he asked, and I did not know how to answer.

“She is like family, Li. Lord Alexei and his siblings are like family, Li. Our parents forged that friendship and alliance through fire and blood; why would you want to act irresponsibly?

I understand you are hurting and miss Sophia so much, but relying on Josephine for emotional support and bandage is wrong.

What do you think is going on in her head? The both of you went from not being able to stand each other and never speaking to each other to this. Do you think we can’t see it?

It is wrong to use people like that.

What do you think will happen when we find Sophia Li?

Do you expect to revert seamlessly?

How do you think that will impact Josephine? She holds affection for you; it’s evident in her eyes. You do a convincing job of showing her she matters, but we both know that Sophia is your sole priority. That’s why we’re all in Grizlo.

My advice is that you end this now before it escalates and jeopardises our unity. Believe me, if we encounter conflicts, they will extend to our parents.

I trust you’ve studied history well, including the Volkovs and Stepanovs, especially the actions of our great-great-grandfather, Dimitri. He falsely accused Adrik of treason to eliminate competition. It was Lord Alexei, his siblings, Eric, and ten Stepanov families who resolved that crisis. Let us not create another problem because you were looking for a substitute,” he warned, and that word ‘substitute’ echoed once more.

The term ‘substitute’ had surfaced thrice that day—first from Josephine in the morning, then Noah at my grandparent’s home, and now Justin. I pondered how this word had become linked to my relationship with Josephine.

I shook my head and directed my gaze at my cousin.

“Justin, I understand your concern, but you can trust that Josephine’s well-being is genuinely important to me. My intentions are sincere, and my feelings for her are authentic,” I asserted, and he let out a chuckle.

“Much like how they were sincere the last time we discussed Sophia?” he questioned, and I averted my eyes.

“Yes, Justin. I admit I did say I would reject my fated if the situation ever arose,” I responded, knowing that those words had indeed escaped my lips and had crossed my mind. However, circumstances have since shifted.

“Those words weren’t spoken in haste, Li. You meant them. Josephine has been a constant presence, and yet you never pursued her. Meanwhile, Marvin, Miles, and Oliver have been upfront about their intentions. You were with Sophia throughout. Now that Sophia is missing, you suddenly start spending time with Josephine. Do you truly believe people won’t notice?” he pressed, causing me to shake my head in response.

“I genuinely care for Josephine, Justin. I truly do. I understand if you have doubts, and it’s your prerogative not to believe me, but I’m speaking the truth. It took me some time to untangle my feelings concerning Sophia. I never had the opportunity to express those sentiments, but I believe my emotions for her were born out of familiarity and the expectation of the next logical step. It felt like a natural progression. At that point, I didn’t grasp the intricacies of relationships or love. I thought I had a concept of what they entailed, but I was mistaken. I misinterpreted my infatuation as love.

Sophia is an incredible person, and being around her was enjoyable. This might have misled me into believing I had deeper feelings,” I conveyed, meeting his gaze.

“All this time, I refrained from pursuing Sophia or asking her out because I held out hope of meeting my fate. When I reached eighteen and still hadn’t found her, my plan was to wait until Sophia turned eighteen before making any moves. However, something changed during graduation week, and the notion of waiting didn’t feel right anymore.

I had a desire to accelerate things, to get that aspect of my life settled and move forward. So, I intended to speak with her, to lay bare my feelings, but the universe had its own designs. Now, I find myself grappling with the task of rescuing her,” I explained with a sigh.

“But with Josephine, it’s an entirely different situation. I had no choice but to obey and accept the gift I was given. She’s exceptional, Justin,” I shared, and his eyes widened as the weight of my words sunk in.

“Are the two of you destined for each other?” he inquired, prompting me to nod in confirmation.

“She’s unaware of our connection, and I’m hoping she’ll come to realise it naturally. I discovered our bond during dinner in Mountain, and to be honest, I pondered it extensively before fully embracing it. The more time I spent with her, the more I recognised how mistaken my initial judgments were. The tension between us was rooted in a misunderstanding from two years ago in Lucland when she overheard conversations between me Marvin, Miles, and Oliver talking about her.

Honestly, my intentions are pure. I’m still determined to locate Sophia, as she remains a dear friend who needs support right now. However, my determination regarding Josephine remains unwavering. I haven’t revealed our bond to her because I want her to choose me without the influence of our connection. I also wish to preserve the wonder and happiness of her discovering our bond, which is why I’ve kept quiet,” I explained, causing him to be taken aback. He downed his water and stared at me in disbelief. Gradually, a smile crept onto his face, and he burst into laughter.

“I told you you stood no chance with the bond,” he remarked, prompting my memory of our prior conversation.

“I really wish you could have witnessed your demeanour that evening. I’m definitely going to have some fun teasing you about this,” he continued to chuckle, his amusement still evident as he turned his gaze toward me.

“A Stepanov queen might be the missing piece to solidify the reconciliation between our lineages. So, if I understand correctly, our forthcoming King will be a blend of Volkov and Stepanov bloodlines? It’s almost like coming full circle,” he mused a notion that seemed rather distant to me.

“Isn’t that thinking a bit too far ahead?” I questioned, furrowing my brow at him. His perspective seemed to be quite forward-looking.

“It’s the future, Li, whether you’re ready for it or not. It’s what lies ahead,” he responded, taking a bite of his sandwich and radiating a sense of relief and contentment.

“That’s assuming she won’t reject me,” I interjected, and he burst into laughter.

“Reject you?” he echoed, amusement colouring his tone.

“Have you noticed the way she gazes at you? Have you observed her behaviour when she’s around you? Have you truly seen it? During breakfast, when Noah and Sebastien mentioned Sophia, she appeared incredibly uneasy. She couldn’t even finish her meal. I assure you, she won’t reject you, Li,” he affirmed confidently.

Justin observed me intently for a moment.

“You’re quite fortunate,” he commented, and a pang of guilt swept over me.

I couldn’t ignore the fact that Justin’s single status was solely due to his ongoing search for his destined mate. He deliberately refrained from entering any relationships to avoid complicating his life in case his fated partner emerged. I couldn’t help but ponder how much longer he intended to maintain this approach.

We finished our sandwiches, and Justin made the decision to grab some more to take back to the room for the team to have something to eat. Taking Josephine’s sandwich, we headed back to the room. Once there, Justin distributed the food, and I handed Josephine her meal.

She rose from the couch, offering me the seat. Although part of me wanted to remain standing, another part wished to hold her close. So, I settled down. As Josephine perched herself on my lap, I enveloped her waist with my arms to keep her comfortable and secure.

“Am I the only one noticing this, or have you two gotten quite cosy?” Charlotte inquired, a curious tone in her voice. Answering her in Josephine’s presence was out of the question. She would need to keep speculating.