

## Chapter 124 - The Beastly Alpha's Mute Omega

Riley POV

I heard a long, suffering sigh come from behind me, and then a familiar voice sounding wistful "even the vampire king has managed to find his mate" Damien said as I turned my head to regard him with sympathetic eyes, my mate tightening his hold on my hand "Some people have all the luck" he commented with a sigh.

"We've been through this Damien", I kept my voice even, maintaining patience with my brother, noting the sadness in his eyes and the resolve on his face. "You will find your mate, it just takes time."

"I won't find my mate if I stay here, Riley," he shot out, "You heard Dustin and the others. The dragon shifters could be persuaded to become allies, if you would just let me go and seek them out. Maybe on the way I will find my mate at the same time."

I was apprehensive about Damien leaving for the dragon shifter's territory. "You also heard Dustin say how dangerous it was and that it could result in your death," I said between gritted teeth "are you so desperate to leave that you would go before I gave birth? Before you have a chance to meet your niece and nephew? I need you right now, Damien. As selfish as that might seem, I want my brother around me, just for a little longer."

He looked at me, torn, expressions shifting across his face. Anger, frustration, exasperation, resignation.

"You know I love you Riley" he said quietly as I blinked back tears, overcome with emotion as Bailey placed an arm around my waist and drew me closer to him. "I would do anything for you. I want to be an Uncle to your children. God knows that you've given me far more than I deserve, but I can't put off my whole life. Eventually, I will need to separate from you, forge a path of my own" he told me solemnly. "Even if it hurts."

I felt a sense of guilt as I nodded, before Bailey let go of me instinctively, and I walked towards Damien, burying my head against his chest, sniffing his familiar scent. "I know it seems selfish, but you're the only family I have left" I murmured as he wrapped both of his arms around me and embraced me back tightly "and I feel like if you leave, I won't see you again."

"Of course you'll see me again" Damien soothed, rubbing circles on my back as I blinked back tears threatening to fall "I wouldn't abandon you Riley, never. But you also have your own mate now, and a family of your own. You have everything you've dreamed of since you were a

teenager" he teased, pulling away and shucking me under the chin, "and you are one of the strongest women I know. You'd be fine without me. Don't forget," he added "Thomas, Callum and Cody will also be here."

I laughed "I haven't forgotten, but Damien, don't tell me you intend to go alone when you leave?" I asked, narrowing my eyes.

He shifted on his feet as I stepped back and regarded him, a look of discomfort on his face. "You heard Dustin, they don't like strangers. Bringing a bunch of warriors with me is not the best way to gain their trust or attention" he said, shaking his head.

I opened my mouth to protest further, but Bailey quickly swooped in before things got out of hand. "Okay, well, Damien's staying until you've given birth, so that's still a fair way away" he declared, putting a hand on my shoulder as I glowered at my brother "why don't we go inside and have a celebratory drink or two?"

My brother's face lit up as we began to walk towards the front door of the pack house. As we entered, we spied Marigold, who had been waiting for us to come back. "Marigold," I said, sensing that she was about to impart some not so welcome news, by the expression on her face- "is something wrong?"

I glanced over her shoulder but saw no sign of Tiana anywhere. Marigold bit her lip. "I wanted to talk to you both" she said, peering at me and Bailey.

My brother took that as his cue to leave, subtly disappearing in the direction of the kitchen as I watched the back of him. I frowned and then turned back to Marigold, whose expression was deadly serious.

"What is it?" I asked, dreading the answer.

She had such a strange look on her face. Her eyes were shiny as though she was holding back tears. I struggled to remain calm while my mate cocked his head and observed Marigold quietly, waiting for her to speak. She looked as though she was struggling, before her mouth finally opened. Instinctively, I could tell that this was bad.

"It's about Tiana" her voice broke slightly.

"Is she sick?" my voice was panicked as I automatically began to turn around "we can get a doctor to look her over, that's no trouble, Bailey can mind-link one from the hospital". I continued, before Bailey caught my hand and made me look back at Marigold who was shaking her head and looking at me with regret.

"No, she's not sick" she said softly, looking down at her hands. "Far from it, in fact."

"I don't understand". I was puzzled by Marigold's strange behavior. I didn't understand what she was so hesitant to talk about when she knew that Bailey and I would support her no matter what.

I loved Tiana, like a daughter and I knew that Bailey was just as fond of the little girl we had helped to save. She was like a little shining light wherever she went, and her laughter couldn't help but fill you with joy.

"I don't know how to say this, but" Marigold's voice was trembling now, "I want you both to adopt Tiana as your own."

Silence. To say that Bailey and I were shocked was an understatement. It had always been understood that Tiana was to be raised by Marigold and neither I nor Bailey had interfered with that. It had been Tiana's mother's wish and we respected it. I had thought that Marigold loved Tiana just as much as we did and didn't understand why she was trying to have her join us when she already had a mother.

"I'm sorry Marigold, but why?" my voice was strangled as I stared at her, "You are Tiana's mother, her guardian. Her mother chose you to guide her daughter down the right path and protect her. That little girl adores you," I added with a puzzled frown.

Marigold's eyes were pained. As I looked at her, I was struck for the first time how pale she was, even for a siren. I also noticed with surprise that she had been losing weight recently, her slim figure now almost gaunt in nature, big dark circles underneath her eyes.

"You would only ever ask us to look after Tiana if something happened to you", Bailey's voice was gruff next to me, "or if you knew something was about to happen."

I glanced at my mate and then back at Marigold. "Is that true? Did Sarah or Queen Titania say something to you?" I demanded "are you afraid that something is going to happen, because we can protect you," I added, taken aback when Marigold let out a small bitter laugh.

"It's not that, Riley. I was never the right person to raise Tiana. I am not the one she needs, you are. Your strength, your powers, your ability to interact with various races. You are the one who will guide her to her destiny, who will ensure that she gets the life she truly deserves and raise her as though she is a daughter to you. I can't give her what she needs. I'm not strong enough, not like you or Bailey. Sarah saw everything" she said quietly, "and I know what my purpose is now."

"You're being rash Marigold" my voice was slightly accusing, "you can't just abandon Tiana like this. Just because Sarah saw..."

"My death Riley" she said with a crooked smile, "I'm sick. I've been feeling sick for a little while but Sarah confirmed it. The cancer inside me is spreading, slowly but surely. It's killing my insides. I can feel it spreading through my body, like a plague."

"We can get the Fae to heal you" I suggested wildly. "We can get them back or why can't Sarah or..."

"Sarah tried," Marigold interrupted, "but this was created by a concoction given to me at the compound. Whatever they injected me with, it started attacking my cells and DNA. I was a guinea pig for their new drug" she smiled sardonically. "You were to be the next one, but they never got around to you."

"Why didn't you say anything?" I demanded "we might have been able to get the doctors to do something or..."

"If a witch cannot heal me, then I daresay the doctors and fae cannot. I do not fear death, Riley, but I have no desire to leave Tiana without knowing she will be cared for."

"How long" my voice was a whisper. "How long do you have?"

She sniffed. "The drug or cancer is slow acting. I have a few weeks, but I intend to use them, finding some more sirens and sending them to you. Sarah gave me the coordinates of a location to check out where they are hiding. One last good deed before I leave this earth" she said, pinning her gaze on me.

No. I refused to believe it. Tears flooded my eyes. "No" I choked, while Bailey wrapped his arms around me. "No, Marigold, I refuse to give up," I told her, a tear trailing down her cheek.

"Riley, don't cry. This is my destiny" she said lowly, "and I have come to terms with it. Just like your destiny is to be Queen. Please, ease my conscience and tell me that Tiana will be taken care of, that you will treat her as one of your own."

"You know that I will" I told her unsteadily, "that's not even a question. But what do I tell her? Have you let her know?"

"I told her I was leaving for a while". Marigold's voice was soft. "The sirens will bring news of my death and my body back with them" she sounded certain "please, tell her how much I loved her and how much I wished things could have been different. Tell her that I'll always watch over her, and that I'm with her mother."

Her voice was barely a whisper, filled with pain and anguish. I sobbed, even as Bailey extended his hand out to Marigold and shook it.

"When are you leaving?" my mate asked hoarsely, looking close to tears himself.

Marigold smiled sadly. "Now" she said, wiping her eyes, "I intend to travel on foot, for the territory they reside in is filled with caverns and cliffs. I have my bag by the door" she pointed, "and I've already said goodbye to Tiana. She is in the kitchen eating and talking with Thomas" she whispered, "forgive me for the short notice, but I'm on a short timeframe."

I hugged her tightly, before watching her make a rush for the front door, grabbing a large rucksack and putting it over her shoulders, a gleam in her eyes. Tears trailed down my cheeks as she opened the door and looked over her shoulder, before shutting the door behind her. I knew

then, as I let out a sob and put my hands to my eyes in distress, that this would be the last time I would ever see my friend again.