

## Chapter 22

JAKE

I followed her as soon as she walked away and with just a few strides, I was already beside her.

I reached out and took the gym bag from her shoulder, placing it on mine. She stopped in her tracks and looked at me, clearly not in favor of my action.

"I can carry my own bag. And it's not like there's something heavy in it." She said and extended her hand, waiting for me to hand over her bag.

Instead, I took her hand and entwined it in mine before pulling her beside me as we started to walk again.

"I didn't say you're not capable of carrying your bag. I just want to carry it for you." I explained, letting a smile grace my face.

Her gaze fell to the ground, and I noticed her cheeks turning pink as she let me lead the way.

Sometimes I wondered if I rendered her speechless when I knew she had a sassy mouth, but she seemed

to forget how to talk whenever I was around. That, or I was a terrible conversationalist. 1

"How have you been? Did you like it there with the pups?"

She nodded, and a real smile started to show on her face. "I do. I felt like I had a purpose in staying here. It keeps me from being bored." She chuckled at the last part. "And you? How have you been, Alpha?"

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled weakly. "The usual. Work. Meetings. Building Alliances. Making strategies..."

"It sucks to be you..." She softly giggled, taking my breath away.

I chuckled. "You can say that, but I want this more than anything else."

She scrunched up her nose and asked again. "You mean the power that comes with it?"

I shook my head and pulled her closer since she seemed to put some distance between us, my hand still holding hers. 1

"No, not that. The responsibility that comes with it. Seeing the pack thrive, keeping them safe, pups running free, my people happy and content, and my

people trusting me." I let out a sigh before I added the last part. Sadness clouded my senses.

I felt her squeeze my hand before she glanced at me, her eyes beaming. "Why are you sad? You know, your people trust you. I mean, we trust you. You've been doing so much for this pack and we wouldn't be where we are now if not for you."

"But I know it's not enough for them. These past few days, I've been out of my head thinking I'm not good enough for the pack. They wanted more."

She stopped in her tracks and pulled her hand away from me. "What made you think that?" 1

I looked around and saw we were in the residential area already. It might not be a good place for a conversation, but the area was deserted at the moment.

When I returned my gaze to her, confusion was still written on her face. "Can I confide in you something? Something that's been bothering me this whole week?"

She nodded as she pursed her lips.

I pointed to the bench nearby and motioned for her to follow me as I walked toward it. She sat beside me, putting a distance between our bodies.

"Talk." She said coldly.

"So bossy." I chuckled but let out a deep sigh before continuing. "I need to have a Luna. The Elders and my council are pressuring me."

"And what's wrong with that? You're 22, Jake. Some Alphas had their Luna when they were sworn into their position." She said nonchalantly, and just by the way she said it, it seemed like she didn't care who I chose for my Luna.

"What's stopping you from having one?" She added, that if she felt bad about this whole ordeal, she was good because I didn't see any hint at all.

"It's not that easy, given that my whole life I never wanted to meet my mate."

"Could you please be honest with me and tell me why you abhor the mate bond?"

I winced at her word before a soft chuckle flew out of my lips. My eyes smiled in fascination as I looked at her once again. "You used such a strong word. Do you even know what that means?"

"Don't go all smart on me, Jake! Of course, I know, otherwise, I wouldn't use it on you, smarty pants!"

I just shook my head before tearing my eyes away

from her and focusing on the road ahead of us. My arm leaned on the back of the bench, brushing lightly against her shoulders.

"It's such a strong word, I don't 'abhor' mate bonds. It just doesn't appeal to me."

"And why?" I felt her gaze fixed on me.

I closed my eyes and prepared to let my heart out.

"I've seen enough damage that a mate bond can do, especially to an Alpha. Being one, we are capable of experiencing things to their extremes. Stronger in every sense, including the pull of the bond.

Alphas from my family have it bad with their mates. In short, bad things happen when we give in to the pull. One Alpha died after they were attacked, and his fated died. He followed shortly with a broken heart. Another went crazy when his fated ran away with one of his warriors. It wasn't even a year after they mated. Another was so in love and waged a war with another pack just because his fated had a feud with the other pack's Luna.

It went on like this. It seemed the Alphas from our families couldn't hold their senses together when it came to their fate. Which ultimately always leads to the Alpha's demise, not even a year or two after they

mate with their fated.

But strange as it seems, our bloodline never seemed to meet their fated mates until they already had an heir. Thus, the bloodline continued.

That went on until recent forefathers started rejecting their mates. They had a chosen instead and stuck with them regardless of whether their fated mates showed up or not. And everything went smoothly.

Until my Father. He couldn't stop the pull.

My father, he has his Chosen - my mother. I had a nice family, Clair. A doting mother and a responsible father. He was supposed to be the next Alpha. And he wanted and was looking forward to it.

And then she appeared out of nowhere. He found her. And then everything went downhill. Instead of rejecting her, he let the mate bond control him.

My father went crazy for her and left us, his family. I was only seven and have no idea why he left.

I thought it was my fault. My mother accepted it like it was nothing. But she never looked at me the same way again. I guess I reminded her of my father. I lost both my parents the day he left.

And then my mother took her life after a couple of years. I suppose she never really accepted it, the pain, the shame of being left alone.

I thought after she died, he would come back. My grandfather, the Alpha, invited them. He wanted my father to come back so he could take over the Alpha post. It was long overdue.

I was nine. I was excited. I even prepared a cake for him and his mate, so they would stay. They didn't. He didn't want to be an Alpha anymore because his mate didn't see herself as a Luna. She would rather live a 'simple life' and my father goes where she does.

How could a pure-Alpha blooded person turn his back on his people? I was sure he would be a great Alpha. Everybody told me how he could be greater than my grandfather. But then he never did. He threw it all away.