

## Chapter 25

"He's going to love these! I can't wait to show him them all. Ooh, and we'll have to go shopping again so we can decorate the infirmary."

Fiona had been rambling all the way home from the baby store. As anyone with eyes could tell, she had a blast shopping for baby clothes. And she was more than ready to do it again.

I chuckled as I grabbed a few bags from the trunk.

"Well, at least wait until we learn the gender. We can't buy all green things," I suggested. Her face fell in thought for a while until she finally shrugged.

"I guess. But hey, at least I'm a wolf. The baby grows fast in my tummy," she beamed like a three-year-old on a swing.

I tried not to laugh. "As we all are, Fiona. But yes, in a few days or a week, you should be able to learn the gender."

"Will you come with me to the doctor?" We walked up the steps towards the front door, and I had to use my bum to push it open.

"Of course!" I instantly agreed. "You wouldn't have to ask twice."

She seemed relieved. "Good, because Leonardo refuses to learn the gender until our baby is born. According to him, it's more traditional that way." She rolled her eyes dramatically as we hauled the bags up the stairs.

This caused me to actually laugh. "So I guess he won't help decorate the infirmary?"

"Nah. But I don't mind. He has no designing skills," she said, and we shared a quick laugh. But as we broke the corner, we were face-to-face with Mr Beta-dad himself. He did not look pleased, but there was a teasing glint in his eyes.

"I have no design skills, huh? But I have other skills," he mumbled the last part as they leaned in to share a kiss. I instantly dropped the bags in front of them and turned in the opposite direction.

I knew they'd be there for another five or so minutes until one of them needed air, so it made no sense for me to wait.

But seeing them kiss brought back a memory I had tried to avoid since yesterday. I could still feel Lukas's lips on mine, even though I didn't kiss him back. I also tried to avoid Maxim only because of guilt. But I knew I couldn't do it forever. Soon, I'd have to face him, and I dreaded the moment I had to.

I have to tell him. I wanted to start our relationship on the right foot, and honesty was the right way in my book.

I mean, if he kissed someone, I'd want him to tell me instead of finding out somewhere else. But I simply had no idea how to tell him. Do I just go up to him and say, 'hey, Maxim? Your brother kissed me because I implied that I had feelings for him. But I want you, so let's move past this.'

Yeah right.

I rubbed my temples as I tumbled down the stairs. Both their scents lingered in the air and grew stronger as I moved towards the kitchen. It was around midday when they usually took lunch breaks. I contemplated turning around, but I'd have to face them sooner or later.

I always preferred sooner rather than later. Later caused problems and prolonged issues. I had no energy to

deal with problems further down the line, especially with everything I needed to learn about myself and this moon shard.

I pulled up my big girl shorts and took confident steps towards the kitchen entrance. I found them sitting and talking as they ate lunch. Since the kiss, I hadn't seen Lukas, and I only saw Maxim a few times until we went to bed when I pretended I was sleeping when he entered my room. Thanks to him, I had no nightmare, but I did dream about a certain grey-eyed man's lips on mine while my mate watched in complete horror. I guess one could describe it as a nightmare, too, seeing that Maxim witnessed the kiss in my dream. That was detrimental for me.

"Hey," I greeted vaguely with a quick wave before ducking in the fridge to get a cup of orange juice.

"Hi."

"What's up?" They both answered at the same time.

Lukas didn't raise his head from his phone as he answered, but there was a ghost smile on his lips.

"How was shopping?" Maxim asked as he pulled out a stool for me.

I shrugged. "It was fun. Fiona got a tonne of stuff, and that's only the beginning." I chuckled at the memory of her excited face. I could tell that this baby meant everything to her already. I wanted it someday, too, when all this is over, and I have no dragon or mate issues.

"Good. Well, are you too tired to do a second round of shopping?" he asked, which only confused and amused me.

"You want to go shopping?" I questioned, and he mimicked my smile. Lukas watched our interaction in silence.

"Well, not exactly. I was going to take the afternoon to search for that plant for you. Since I have no idea what it looks like, I figured you'd come with me."

My heart soared at the thought. "I'd love to. Gosh, I didn't even remember. You're a lifesaver, Maxim. Really."

"More like a sleep saver," he joked. I giggled a little as I shuffled from my stool.

"I just have a call to make to the border patrol, and we'll be on our way," he announced as he stood too, and I noticed that he was going to leave-as in leave me with Lukas again. I trusted Lukas with everything in me, but I didn't trust what he'd do while Maxim was gone.

"Wait!" I held onto his arm urgently. Lukas tried to hold back a laugh, and I resisted the urge to punch him.

"Can't you mind link them?"

He shrugged. "I guess I could. Melissa, are you okay?" He was worried now, which was exactly what I wanted to avoid.

"I'm fine. Just really eager to get those herbs." I laughed a bit to sell my half-lie. He regarded me oddly for a while before he finally nodded.

"Okay. Let's go then." He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and led me to the backdoor. I could feel Lukas's gaze burning into my back, and he didn't speak until we were almost out the door.

"If you see any tulips, take a bunch back for me, will you?" he shouted after us, and I stiffened. I wanted to turn around and beat him with a frying pan, but Maxim only chuckled in obliviousness.

I had to tell him. I had to tell him today.

I threw a death glare over my shoulder in Lukas's direction, and he simply winked in return.

"When did he become interested in flowers?" Maxim mumbled as the sun welcomed us.

I shrugged as if I had no idea what had happened. "You tell me. He's your brother."

"Yeah, well, sometimes we learn things about each other every day."

"I can imagine," I mumbled.

He held onto my hand as we walked into the forest. I assumed it would be easier to go in wolf form, but I felt at home being with him like this. Soon, the view of the Alpha house disappeared, and it was just the two of us.

It was heavenly.

"I'm sorry if this makes you upset. You don't have to answer if you don't want to. But, was there ever a time when you and Logan were close?" he asked after a moment of silence.

"It's okay," I told him. "I'm not upset. And yes, but I have no memory of it. Two years before my parents disappeared, which is two years of my life. Toya, my uncle's mate, told me that Logan cherished me. I still find it crazy, but that's what she said."

He pondered for a while before talking again. "I know this is probably a stupid question, but did you ever wish that things were different with him? Or did you hate him equally as he did you?"

I didn't know how to answer right away. There were times when I hated him for sure and times when I'd spend sleepless nights plotting ways to get rid of him, but there was always a tiny part of me that wanted him to be a brother to me.

I guess it was sort of the same with Maxim. I hated him for years even though I didn't know him, and now being reunited with a significant contributor to my childhood sadness, I tried to hate and hurt him in every way. But there's always that tiny part of me that chooses to give them the benefit of the doubt even if the bigger part believes they don't deserve it.

"There were times when I wanted more, but I guess I can't complain. How Logan treated me shaped me into the woman I am today. I mean, I haven't been out much, and I might not know how to do a lot of things, but I have grown to be hella, hella strong."

"I admire that," he mumbled, but his voice was sad.

I stopped and grabbed his other hand. "Hey, what's wrong?" I searched his eyes for answers, but they were guarded.

He shook his head. "You know, I keep asking myself why I deserve you, and I always realise that I don't. Logan wasn't the only reason why you had to learn on your own to be strong. I had something to do with it too."

"I forgive you, Maxim. We just need time to get past it," I told him truthfully, ensuring that I was gazing into his eyes as I spoke.

"That doesn't change the fact that I did you wrong, and I am eternally sorry for it." He raised my hand to his lips and left a lingering kiss on my knuckles. What I noticed was that my body instantly erupted in the craziest tingles at the simple gesture, something that didn't happen when Lukas kissed me.

My breath grew short and heavy, and my chest heaved until his lips left my hand.

"And I don't want to just try to be better anymore. I'm going to be better. I promise," he added.

"Maxim, I already told you that it's okay."

"But I am sorry. You know that, don't you?" This actually made me chuckle.

**"You mean did I hear after the last fifty times? Yes, I did."**

To my delight, he too smiled as he kissed my hand again, but this time it was faster.

**"Good. Now, onto other business. I am a completely different person with you and when I'm around others, so if this gets out, you and I will have a long, serious talk,"** he said. I could tell that he was joking, but there was a seriousness to his words too.

I rolled my eyes with a light smile. "Oh yes, Maxim. I know that no one can know that the big, mean alpha has feelings."

"I have feelings. But only for you and my brothers."

"Brothers?" I echoed.

He shrugged as we resumed walking. "Leo, Lukas and I basically grew up together. I consider him my brother as much as Lukas. I love Fiona too, of course. She's our beta female and has been doing a terrific job at taking care of three grown men for years. My parents too, and my last living grandparent. But that's as far as feelings go for me."

"And the pack?"

"Oh, of course. I cherish and protect my pack with everything in me, but as far as personal feelings go..." he trailed as he left me to fill in the rest. I nodded in understanding.

I reflected on what he had just revealed to me as we walked in silence. He held Lukas in high regard, even when he knew that Lukas was still pursuing me. I felt even more guilty for keeping the kiss from him.

My heart raced as I tried to form a proper sentence to confess. I didn't do anything wrong, so why did I feel guilty? Deep down, I knew the answer. Lukas was right in one thing, and that was the fact that I might've had feelings for him. But it was nothing compared to what I feel for Maxim.

"Maxim, I have to tell you-"

"Hah, here it is," he cheered as he rushed over to the root of a tree. I watched as he rooted a bunch of Yamen herb from the tree foot, and I joined him shortly after.

"I thought you didn't know what it looked like," I pointed out with narrowed eyes.

He scratched the back of his head with guilt on his face. "I only said that to get your company."

"I would've come either way," I told him.

"I assumed. But I didn't want to take any chances." He winked at me as he stood to his full length.

I chuckled with a simple shake of my head. These Alpha brothers are going to be the death of me.

"The Brosquite shouldn't be too far," he announced. "They usually grow together."

"Awe, you did research for me," I gushed, but I only did it to mess with him. I knew being a softie was new for him, and I relished in the power of being the one to cause it.

His ears burnt pink as I teased him, but he didn't turn around.

"I just want you to be rested."

**"Don't feel weird."** I moved faster so I caught up with him. I took us both by surprise as I wrapped my arms around his waist. "Get used to it." I smiled up at him. It was in that position with my head inclined that I caught a peek of the plant we were looking for, perched on a branch in the tree.

I pointed at it. "I didn't know Brosquite grew on vines. We would've been searching the entire forest ground."

Maxim followed where my finger pointed. "I didn't know either. Well, I'll go get it."

"Not so fast, mister," I said as I stopped him. "Ladies first."

"You are not climbing a tree." He sounded unamused but challenging. I loved a good challenge.

"Watch me," I smirked as I used a stone to hoist myself up.

I heard his chuckle as he followed behind me, and I couldn't help but enjoy the thrill I felt being with him like this, so playful and free, doing something that normal mates would do.

"You are going to be the death of me, Melissa Alexis," he mumbled to himself.

I glanced down, catching him climbing up behind me. I sat on a branch with enough space so he could join, and when he did, it was like I saw him in a completely different light.

Without thinking about what I was doing, I leaned forward slowly, and he didn't move. I parted my lips and fluttered my eyes closed as I finally pressed my lips against his. They tasted heavenly, and they were everything I dreamt of as a child.

They fit perfectly with mine, and it was like a fulfilment of fate itself, as it felt as if it was all-natural.

He wrapped his arms around my waist, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, ensuring that we were positioned rightly, so we didn't fall. He moved his lips slowly, and I followed in perfect sync.

My entire body, cells, and veins blazed like fire, but it never burnt. I felt at home. It felt right, and I knew that this that I shared with Maxim was definitely my first kiss.

I almost whimpered as we pulled away, but as I opened my eyes, I was no longer looking at my mate. I saw my everything... my soul-mate.

"Hi," I mumbled, as I didn't know what else to say.

His face broke out in a breath-taking smile that I loved so much, and I knew for sure that I couldn't spoil this moment with the truth about what happened with Lukas.

"Hi," he returned, cupping my cheek in the process. And just like before, his lips were on mine, taking me to another level of euphoria all over again.



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