

Chapter 45

"Come on, Maxim. Please. This is important!" I groaned for the umpteenth time, but my mate was just stuck on being stubborn.

"Nope," came his simple but stern reply, and I groaned internally again.

This had been the fifth no that I had gotten from Maxim, and quite frankly, it was hurting my feelings.

"Why not? I mean, it's for the best, you know?" The annoyance in my voice was evident, but Maxim didn't seem phased by it.

He was stern in his decision. And I hate to admit it, but I sort of found his determination sexy. I knew I was whipped, but this was bad.

"Because it goes against everything that I believe in," he replied sternly. "I know you think this is for the best, Mel, but no."

I groaned and accepted defeat, flopping back on his bed. "Fine. But if this all comes crashing down because you didn't want to knock me out, then that's on you."

He stared at me with squinted eyes. "Melissa. Do you really think that taking a rock and banging it against your head so you can know if Toya's recipe worked or not is really a good idea?"

Now that he said it aloud, I could hear how ridiculous it sounded. But I was desperate, and if I admitted it, a bit scared.

What if the moon goddess figures out what we were doing and takes it out on me? What if she finds out that I no longer trusted what he said about the moon shards, and I now needed to figure it out on my own?

There are two ways this could end. I could learn that the moon goddess was completely innocent in this, and I misinterpreted everything Toya told me, or I could lose everything, including my life, to the sun dragon.

I was just so confused.

"Hey, baby, what's wrong?" Maxim pulled me onto his lap and cupped my cheek in his hands. I met his eyes, and I noticed that he was all blurry.

I didn't even realise I had been on the bridge of breaking down.

"Melissa, you do understand why I can't do this, right?" he asked softly as he caressed my cheek.

I nodded. "I know, Maxim. I knew it was stupid. That's why I didn't even bother asking Fiona. But, I just... I don't know what to do anymore. Why didn't my parents leave something that could help me find out the truth? I just want this to be done, Maxim. I will even give the damn shard to the moon goddess the second I find it just to be done with this."

"Hey, hey, look at me." Slowly, I obeyed his request and met his blazing eyes. "You trust Toya, no?"

"Yes," I sighed. "I do."

"And from what you've told me, the Alexis family has been guardians of the shard for

generations, right? So, this is a part of your destiny, Melissa. What you're going through is nothing that any of your ancestors haven't gone through. You were made for this."

I shook my head as my eyes stung even more. "At least they had their parents. They knew what they were to do, and they did it. I don't. I don't know what to do. And when I find it, what do I even do with it, huh? According to Toya, I can't give it to the moon goddess, so what should I do? What on earth did my mom and dad want me to do?"

"They'd be so disappointed." And that did it. That caused the tears that were desperately dying to fall, finally spilt.

"Melissa," Maxim sighed. "No, they wouldn't. Anyone would be so proud of the strong, wonderful woman you've become. You hear me?" He used his thumb to wipe my tears away, but I didn't reply. "And you may not have your parents, but you have me. You'll always have me."

I gazed at my mate in utter and complete gratitude. When I just came here, I never imagined that Maxim would be this type of person. And now, look at him.

His eyes were glistening in admiration and confidence in me. And I knew that if I didn't believe in myself, he surely did.

"I love you," I whispered, meaning it with all my heart. His eyes widened for a while until his lips broke out in a huge smile. It was the type of smile that did wonders to my heart.

"I love you too," he mumbled before connecting our lips.

Fiona was right. When it was time for me to say it back, it would be natural and wonderful. And right now was just that.

I was still freaking out about the possibility that my plan of not seeing the moon goddess again would work or not. But Maxim did a pretty decent job at calming me down.

He pulled away after a while, leaving my lips tingling and pulled in a smile.

"Feeling better?" he asked, and I nodded.

"Good." He pecked my lips softly. "I'll make you feel great later." He smirked at me, and it actually took me a while to figure out what he meant. But when I did, I blushed like a twelve-year-old with a crush and prayed that the night would come fast.

"You tease me too much," I mumbled, trying to get control over the heat in my cheeks. He liked it, though. I could tell.

"Actually, not enough. But it works, especially when you're stressed like this." He picked a white piece of lint from my hair before continuing. "And I don't like to see you stressed."

I sighed. "I know. But there's just so much that needs to be done."

"Yes, but for now, let's just focus on getting you inducted into the pack. Then, you will have a mind link with everyone like Fiona, Leonardo—"

"And Lukas?" I asked with a raised eyebrow. I didn't know how to bring it up earlier, but it made itself present.

Maxim stopped to look at me for a while. "Yes," he mumbled. "Just in case by some highly unlikely instance that I'm not close enough when something happens, you will be able to call for help."

It seemed like it pained him to even think about the possibility that I might be in trouble,

and he wasn't around. Or maybe it was the thought that maybe one day, Lukas would save me when he couldn't. Not that I needed saving from any of them. I'm highly capable of taking care of myself, but Alpha males will always believe that their mate is only safe when being protected.

It's like a toxic masculinity trait that they all have.

"When are you going to talk to him? You can't hate him forever, you know?" I asked carefully. If it was even possible, I knew what Lukas did hurt Maxim more than me.

The betrayal alone was a lot, then to throw in everything else with me, and you have yourself a valid reason why this man might hate his brother.

"I... I don't hate him. I just can't bear to see him or be near him anytime soon," he finally said.

"But, eventually, right?"

He sighed. "Yes, eventually."

"Before my induction? You have to be in front of the pack when it happens... together. So..." I trailed, leaving him to fill in the rest.

He didn't.

"At least talk to him about it. He knows I'm marked now, so he knows it will happen. You two have to perform the ceremony together," I pointed out. "Look, I'm not too big one he did either. But we live together. We're all bound to cross paths, and quite frankly, this is not about us. You're the heads of the pack, and what happens in this house will affect them too."

He ran his fingers through his hair and heaved out a deep sigh. "I know."

I held his hand. "So, talk to him, will you?"

"Fine." He sighed in defeat and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, I noticed that they were glazed over. He was mind-linking someone.

Seconds later, his grey eyes were back to normal, and his expression remained toxic.

"Who were you talking to?" I asked out of curiosity.

"Lukas," he replied in a 'duh' tone. "You told me to."

I simply gawked at him. "I mean in person! What did you say?"

"I only told him about your induction. He said he assumed, so we'll talk about the details at dinner. The induction of a Luna is much more complex than a regular pack member. Our parents will have to be there-well, our dad at least. But everything else is business as usual."

"And that was it? No brotherly bonding or anything?"

He actually seemed a bit annoyed, and I assumed I was being a bit too persistent.

"Melissa, I wished I was like you, okay? What he did to you was unforgivable. If it was anyone else, we'd have them chained in the dungeon by silver for five days with no food and little water. That's how serious of a crime it is. I can't deal with him right now, okay? I shut him out of my mind. I'll see him when I see him, and maybe things will go back to some sort of normalcy over time. But I don't think I'll ever forgive what he did to you. He not only betrayed and violated my bond with you, Melissa. He betrayed the bond we've built as brothers for over two decades. There's no coming back from that," he ended stiffly.

My heart ached for him. The sadness in his voice was evident throughout his entire speech. So, I hugged him.

"I'm sorry, Maxim. I just hate thinking that I caused you two to be like this, so the guilt pushed me to push you. I was selfish, only trying to soothe my mind when I didn't consider how hard it must be for you to be in the same space as him."

He sighed as he hugged me back. "You have nothing to be sorry about, Melissa. You didn't cause anything. Lukas fell in love with you, and to be honest, who wouldn't? You're awesome and practically irresistible. Both Lukas and I could've done many things differently, but we chose not to. That's on us, not you."

"Still, I wish it weren't like this. I've heard too many stories of how strong you both are together. And since I have a shitty relationship with my only sibling, I don't want that for anyone else."

He pushed back a little so that we were face to face. "I know," he mumbled, caressing my cheek with his thumb. "But shit happens. The pack will be fine, you will be fine, and that's all that matters to me right now. There's always later to make things right with Lukas. We have all the time in the world."

"I guess," I shrugged as I snuggled my way back in his neck. "Just do me a favour and don't let it be too long."

"We'll see."

"And Maxim?"

He drew circles in my back as he answered. "Yeah?"

"Isn't induction done on the night of the full moon at the barbecues?" I asked again, bringing up a thought that had been nudging at my brain all day.

"Yeah, why?"

I giggled. "You marked me, remember?" I asked, leaving him to pick up the rest.

"Yes, but what does that have to do with- Oh! Oh my gosh, you're going to be in heat!" He jumped up a little, almost making me fall to the ground, but he caught me skilfully as I erupted in laughter.

"As the moon bids it, yes, I will be," I managed to say through laughs. He joined in soon after with light chuckles of his own.

When our laughter died down, he hauled me onto his lap again and kissed my cheek. "Don't worry. We'll pull a few strings because that night is going to be just you and me."

The way his voice dropped an octave gave me excited chills, yet I frowned. "You're not cancelling the barbecue, right? That's the pack's tradition."

He chuckled with a single shake of his head. "Why would I cancel it when instead, we can do the inductions in the morning or the day before, then when everyone is at the barbecue in the night, I can have you here all to myself." He nibbled on my neck as his fingers dug into my back.

I suppressed a moan as I bit my lips. "Okay, that could work."

"But I won't promise you that I won't have you before the full moon," he mumbled against my breast. "You're mine now, and resisting you have become hard."

I nodded eagerly. "Do whatever you want, Maxim. Even now." I rubbed myself against him as he sucked on my nipple through my blouse.

But just as a moan rose from my throat again, my stomach made the most awful rumbling sound, making its evident emptiness known.

Maxim paused his teasing as he stared at me with a twinkle in his eyes. "Someone's hungry." He chuckled as he rolled me from his lap.

"Wait, no, I'm not. Come back," I whined, but my stomach protested again with another horrible sound.

Maxim laughed out loudly this time. "Come on. Let's go get you something to eat." He stood and held out his hands for me to take.

Huffing, I stubbornly grabbed his hand and allowed him to lead me to the kitchen. For once in my life, I was actually angry at food.



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