

# The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 641

“Oh, come on, Luc,” I say, laughing a little, delighted at the shock on his face. “Of my three mates, you were never the one who I thought needed the ‘where do babies come from’ chat -”

“Who the hell was he sleeping with!?” Luca whispers, shocked, still staring up at Jackson and his little girl in the window. Luca runs a mystified hand through his hair. “He’s such – he’s so awkward – how did he get a girl -”

“He’s also insanely hot,” I point out, raising my brows at him. “I don’t think it’s very hard for him.”

Luca scowls a little, snapping his eyes back to mine. “He’s not that good looking.”

I just lift a hand to tap at the magazines still pressed to my chest. “The people are with me on this one, Luca. Jackson’s a babe.” Luca ignores this very valid point. “Is that – is that like his biological kid!? Or did he just like, snag one off the street -”

“Please, he’s not my mom,” I say, rolling my eyes. “She’s his! That’s his daughter, Marigold. She’s great!”

Luca’s eyes flash back to me. “She’s great!?”

I raise an eyebrow at him, challenging him to try that again.

“I mean, I’m sure...she’s a great kid,” Luca says, shaking his head as if to clear it. “But Ariel, you can’t tell me that you’re actually happy about this - ”

“Why not!?” I scoff, kind of appalled at his reaction.

“Because – because – that’s someone else’s kid, Ariel!” he says, taking a step closer, shaking his head at me like I’m a little crazy. “Now Jackson’s what, a dad? And you have to change your whole life to accommodate that!?”

“He’s my mate, Luca,” I say, my voice deepening as I start to get mad. “What did you expect I’d do, just kick him out the door at the first big challenge? I love him, of course I’m going to welcome his daughter into my family!”

“You deserve better,” Luca snaps, shaking his head and crossing his arms, standing up to his full height. “You shouldn’t have to raise someone else’s kid just because Jackson made some kind of youthful mistake.”

“The only mistake here, Luca,” I say, quite low, my magic beginning to simmer in my heart. “Is you thinking that it won’t be the honor of my life to raise Marigold at Jackson’s side.”

“Ariel,” Luca says, leaning closer and reaching for me with both hands. My glare stops him before he touches me and his arms fall to his sides. Still, he persists, holding my gaze steadily. “I’m serious – you deserve your own family without these complications!” He shakes his head, pressing a hand to his chest. “Come with me – you want kids? Let’s have kids! But they’ll be our kids – kids produced from a goddess-blessed bond – we’ll be so happy

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“Or,” I say, tilting my head to the side, ironic. “If I want goddess-blessed kids, why don’t I just go back to Atalaxia and take Gabriel up on the same offer? Be his Queen and have a whole bunch of Princes and Princesses with pretty black hair and blue eyes!”

Luca scowls as he stands straight, as he realizes that his offer to me is not as unique or shining as he thought it was.

“If y.. If you think the problem here is that I don’t understand my options, Luca,” I say, stepping towards him and tilting my chin up as I hold his gaze. “Then you’re very mistaken. I choose Jackson. I choose that little girl.”

I point solidly up to the window, where I can feel Jackson still standing, steady and...well, not precisely patient. But enduring. “They’re mine,” I say, firm. Possessive. Right.

Luca just sighs, hanging his head for a long, long moment.

I let Luca take the time and space to think, dropping my hand. As I do my anger floods from me and my wolf presses herself warm against my heart. Because it’s hard – all of this is hard. Luca is right – it is a surprise and a challenge to have Marigold show up on my door.

But his suggestion that I should walk away from her, that there’s a child that I might want more?

God, it just solidifies for me, in my heart, precisely how much I really want her.

“Where does this leave us?” Luca whispers, raising a hand to his face, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers like he does when he has a headache.

And my heart goes out to him too because...well, he broke our bond. And I came out of it whole and strong. And he...

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He has much less, doesn't he?

"It leaves us as friends, Luca," I say quietly, meaning it very much. He lifts his eyes to me with a sigh. "We...start over from there. See where it goes." I smirk a bit. "I still own half your gym, after all."

He huffs a laugh, looking to the side. "I know. My uncle is pissed."

"Your uncle is a dick," I say, dry. Luca laughs harder at this, turning that gorgeous smile on me. And, as usual, my stomach flips a bit at the sight. "Are you coming back to school?"

He shrugs, clearly implying that he's unsure.

"Think about it," I say on a long exhale. "And...we'll go from here. But I'm sorry, Luca. And I forgive you and I care about you a great deal. I'm...very happy that you came today."

"Yeah," he says on a sigh, slipping his hands into his pockets, regret taking his features as I take a step away. "I'm glad too." "I'll see you soon?"

He shrugs, tacitly agreeing to it but unhappy that this apparently didn't go as planned. "I love you, Ariel."

I give him my best smile – a true one, not a Princess Ariel smile. "I love you too, Luca. Just...in a different way, now.'

He sighs as I turn away, clutching the magazine to my chest and hurrying into the palace. As soon as I get inside I turn my mind away from Luca, knowing I've got more important things to deal with right now. I rush up the stairs, eager as hell to find my mate and fill him in, to assure him that everything is fine.

When I hurry into the living room my eyes quickly sweep around, taking in Rafe, Mark, and Ben sitting around the coffee table with Jesse, a sleeping Seraphina sprawled chaotically over his lap. My cousin grins at me as I immediately stride across the room, heading for the hall and my room beyond.

"Hey, cuz," Jesse says, grinning wickedly at me. "What have you been up to?"

"Try me not, fiend!" I call to him over my shoulder, lifting a hand and letting a bit of my blue fire burn there. "I've gotta go find my mate!"

“Hey, what was that magazine?” Rafe calls after me, cheerful and entertained. “Seriously, who’s the mystery hunk!? Is it me!?”

I ignore them all, darting down the hall and working to steady my breath as I push open the door to my room. My eyes move immediately to the big Alpha sitting on the edge of the teeny tiny bed in the corner of the room, stroking his hand over the hair of the little girl who struggles to keep her eyes open.

“Hi,” I whisper, instantly becoming softer as I realize that Jackson wasn’t avoiding me – it’s just that Marigold, like Seraphina, is exhausted and needed to go to bed. Relief flies through me as I push the door shut behind me and cross to them, only wondering for half a second how a kid bed got in here when neither of us were here all day.

Because mom did it. Of course she did. My wonderful, sweet, thoughtful mom.

“Hey,” Jackson says, reaching for me, pulling me close and letting out a possessive little growl as he does. I grin at that, liking it very much that he perhaps wasn’t completely immune to the sight of me speaking with Luca.

I slip onto my mate’s lap, running a hand through his hair and pressing a kiss to his cheek, taking a moment to let my eyes move over his face. But he sends a calming pulse down the bond, letting me know that it’s all okay. I smile at him, loving him a great deal and letting him feel it. I kiss him again, on the mouth this time, and then turn my attention to the sleepy little girl.

“Hey, Goldie,” I whisper, moving from Jackson’s lap to the bed next to her, laying my body horizontal and propping myself up on my elbow, laying the magazine face-down next to me. “Did you have a busy day?”

“Yes,” she whispers, happy and sleepy, looking up at me. “Ariel.”

“Yeah, that’s me,” I whisper, laughing a bit, reaching out to pet her little dark head. “You feeling sleepy?”

She nods, taking a deep breath. “Can Fifi come tomorrow?”

I laugh lightly, delighted at their growing friendship. I glance at Jacks, who shrugs, letting me know he has no idea what the plans are. “We’ll see. Hey, I brought you an amazing story book,” I say, grinning wickedly, turning the tabloid over and handing it to her.

Jackson leans forward, confused and curious.

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“You’re going to love it -” I say, grinning at Marigold, who sits up, as intrigued as her dad. “It’s called Mystery Hunk saves - ”

“Give me that - ” Jackson snarls, snatching for it. But I burst out laughing, pressing it closer to Marigold instead.

“It’s her present, Jacks, you can’t take away her present -”

“Dad!” Marigold bursts out, desperately pleased, pointing at the image of her father on the front of the magazine.

“Oh my god, Marigold,” Jackson groans, leaning far over and reaching for it. But when his fingers curl around it Marigold gasps, clutching it to her.

“My mystery hunk!” Marigold protests, her eyes going big and round with worry.

“Yeah, Jacks!” I say, cackling a bit with glee, grinning at my mate. “It’s her book!”

Jackson sighs and releases the magazine, letting her have it. “I’m taking that back the moment you learn how to read, Marigold.”

She brushes that point aside, smiling down at the magazine. “Mystery hunk.”

“Yes, that’s daddy!” I say, laughing, a little delighted. “What a great story!”

“You’ll pay for this,” Jackson sighs, turning his eyes to me.

My grin widens as I crawl closer to him, snuggling up and letting him pull me into his lap. “I’d better,” I murmur, passing him a sultry little pulse down the bond. He laughs at that, low and deep, pulling me close to his chest.

“You good?” he murmurs, pressing a kiss to my cheek just below my ear.

“I’m amazing,” I whisper, turning my face and pressing a kiss to his mouth in turn - much more chaste than I’d like it to be, for Marigold’s sake.

I end the kiss quickly, turning my eyes back to the little girl as she flips through the pages of the magazine, fascinated, squeaking happily when she finds more pictures of her dad somewhere in the middle.

“I’ll tell you everything,” I say softly, glancing up at my mate. “But...let’s put her to bed first, okay?”

“Sounds good to me,” Jackson says, giving me a squeeze. Then together we lean forward to Goldie, telling her the story of the Mystery Hunk that we make up as we go, doing our best to make it make sense alongside the pictures and failing pretty astoundingly. But Marigold doesn’t care, laughing softly at us before her eyes slip shut and her cheek rests softly against the pillow, falling quickly asleep, her little hand flat on the open pages of the tabloid.

“She’s so perfect,” I whisper, leaning forward to brush a soft finger across the swell of her lovely little cheek.

“Yeah, she really is,” Jackson sighs. I turn to smile at him, loving how much he loves her already, how easily he’s fallen into his new role. “She’s a miracle.”

“So are you, Jackson,” I whisper, sitting up, reaching for him.

Jackson gives a quiet little snarl, bundling me up in his arms and standing as he grabs the baby monitor, accomplishing it all in one sweeping move. “Come on, Tiny,” he says, nudging his nose against mine. “Food first, then you tell me everything that jackass said to you in the courtyard, then I’m taking you to bed too.”

I bite my lip, swinging my legs a little in anticipation, my stomach fluttering with happiness as my mate carries me from the room.

Jackson carries me through the living room and we give a little wave to the boys who are gathered there, but I murmur him to keep going, wanting privacy tonight. Following my directions, Jackson carries me to one of the dining rooms very close to the family apartments. This dining room is my favorite because it’s so tiny and cozy – really only suitable for two or three people. Mom and dad use it for their date nights, or for one-on-one meals with each of us kids.

I use an intercom to call a request for some simple food down to the kitchens and then settle in close to my mate, filling him in on everything that happened in the courtyard. Jackson listens quietly but intently, nodding along, only snarling softly to vent his anger about Luca’s behavior. But as I tell him everything that happened over the next twenty or so minutes until the food is delivered, keeping absolutely nothing back.

And as we begin to eat the simple but full charcuterie board, I can’t keep my smile from growing. Because even though I can feel that Jackson is unhappy about Luca’s audacity in coming here, trying to start things with me again, he never, not once, directs a single ounce of anger, or distrust, or hesitation towards me.

Instead, my sweetheart mate only listens and trusts, knowing with his whole self that I’d never betray him. Not even for a moment does Jackson begrudging me my right to speak

alone to anyone on earth – even Luca or Gabriel – because Jackson trusts in me, believes in us.

And if anything, my love for him only grows richer and deeper in this moment. My Jackson – he’s all warmth and support. I steel my heart again in my determination to do everything I can in this world to deserve him.

“Luca Grant,” Jackson murmurs, reaching across the table for a slice of apple and cheese as he shakes his head with a bit of bafflement. “He should bottle and sell his confidence. He’d make a fortune.”

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“If he could,” I sigh, pulling a grape off a stem and popping it into my mouth. “His uncle probably would have already done it.” I pause a moment, looking my mate up and down. “So, you’re okay with all of that? The whole conversation?”

Jackson shrugs. “Rafe said Luca came around and was all contrite when we were in Atalaxia. I don’t like that he was hiding out in the courtyard like a coward. I didn’t like the sight of you standing alone with him after he hurt you -”

“But “I protest, sitting straight.

Jackson puts up a hand, smirking at me, silently begging me to let him finish. I grin and sit back. “But,” he says, putting steady emphasis on the word. “You’re a powerful goddess. You can handle yourself. So, yes, Ariel, I’m good with it. As long as you are.”

“Yeah, I am too,” I say quietly, beaming at him.

Jackson leans forward, capturing my hand, pressing a kiss to my knuckles. “The conversation was inevitable. And he’ll try it again. You just let me know if I ever need to come in and smack him. You know I’d only be pleased to so.”

I grin at Jacks and nod, stretching my hands above my head and yawning.

We spend a little more time just like that – quietly talking together, turning over the events of the past few days, adjusting to our new roles. Eventually we find ourselves curled up in the little loveseat in the corner of the room, sitting quietly, passing emotions passively back and forth down the bond as we sort through our thoughts.

I sip my second glass of wine, my mouth turning slightly down in a frown, my eyes distant as I get a bit lost in my thinking.

“What is it?” Jackson murmurs, pressing a kiss to my hair.

“Hmm?” I say, jumping a little, turning my face to him.

“You’re...unsettled,” he murmurs, tightening his arms around me, pulling me more completely into his lap so that we’re face to face again. “You can talk to me about it, if you want to.”

I sigh, thinking that...yes. That I have a question for him, and even if I haven’t figured out quite how to phrase it, I may as well ask. I finish my glass of wine and put the glass on the floor before slinging my arms around Jackson’s neck, looking him steadily in the eye.

“Jacks,” I say, quiet. “I didn’t like it, at all, when Luca suggested that I wouldn’t, or shouldn’t, want to raise Marigold with you because she’s not the result of a goddess-blessed bond. It gave me...a very bad feeling in my stomach.”

Jackson hums, considering it, watching me carefully. “Why didn’t you like it?”

I sigh, my shoulders slumping. “Because it was mean. Because it implied that Marigold is...lesser. Than our other children will be”

Jackson quirks an eyebrow. “We’ll have other children?”

My face bursts into a grin. “You think we won’t?”

“Ariel,” he replies, laughing a little and leaning towards me. “I cannot emphasize to you enough how little thought I have given to the question of whether or not you and I will have kids -”

“What!?” I screech, even as I laugh.

He laughs along with me. “It’s not a no, Ariel – I just haven’t thought about it – for heaven’s sake, I just found out how kids are made like eight months ago, after I already had one, apparently. I am... behind on these conversations.”

“Well, we’re having them, Jacks,” I say, a bit of a snarl in my voice, even as I smile at him. “And if you give me any flack about it I’ll go full Midnight and demand eighteen pups -”

Jackson bursts out laughing at this, pulling me close, shaking his head. “Please,” he says. “You’re you’re trying to kill me with that – I’m still adjusting to one. Hypothetical I can do, but don’t hit me with a number like eighteen right now, okay?”

“Okay,” I whisper, smiling at him and brushing my thumb slow over his cheek, across the soft hair of his beard. “But...I do want more kids, Jacks. Some day. Hypothetical.”

“All right, Ariel,” he murmurs, leaning forward, pressing a kiss to my mouth. “You got it. Are you still upset?”

I sigh, brought back to earth a bit by the question, and nod. I lean back against his arm, dropping my face a bit and biting my lip. “I am,” I say, nodding, sure of it now. “Because I...I hate the idea that people even beyond Luca will think that Marigold will be different than our other kids. Even potentially lesser. And worse, I never, ever want her to think that.”

“So, what do we do?” Jackson asks, his voice genuinely wondering. “She...she will be slightly different, Ariel. She has a different history, a different starting point. We can’t change that.”

“Well,” I say quietly, hesitant, raising my eyes to his. “What...what would you say to the idea that I... that I become her mother?”

Jackson just stares at me, shocked.

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I wait for a second, grimacing a bit, watching Jackson’s face for a reaction. But he just stares at me, completely blank.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, shaking my head, reaching for him. “I’m sorry, Jacks – I didn’t mean anything bad by it -” “No, Ariel...” he replies, blinking out of his frozen state and clearing his throat. “I just – I just don’t understand -”

I frown at him, not getting what he doesn’t get.

He narrows his eyes and leans closer to me. “How...how would you become her mother?”

“Well,” I say, twisting my fingers together, feeling tense. “I would...adopt her. Legally, she would be mine as well as yours – I’d have all the rights as her mother and she as my daughter. And there’s a ceremony that you can perform at the Temple before the Goddess’s sacred pool – people do it all the time when they adopt kids. You ask the Goddess to bless the union so that the child is spiritually yours, as well as legally.”

Jackson continues to just stare at me, though I can see his mind at work now, putting it all together.

I do my best to give him a moment to think, but eventually I can't bear the silence anymore, guilt and worry rushing through me. "And I'd never want to replace Tasha – "I say softly, all in a rush. "We wouldn't like – erase her memory, or pretend that she's not real, or keep anything a secret from Marigold – we can find ways to honor Tasha and find ways to help Marigold remember her first mom."

Jackson sighs, his head dropping like he hadn't even considered that point.

"But if...if Marigold has someone in her life who desperately wants to be her mother," I whisper, lifting a hand to cup Jackson's cheek, hope and love surging through my chest. "Then a mother is a wonderful thing to have. And I really...really want to be her mom, Jacks."

Jackson raises his eyes to mine and as soon as I see the wetness of his lower lashes tears spring to my eyes as well.

"Ariel," Jackson says, shaking his head, disbelieving that such a thing can be true. "It's it's so much to ask of you -"

"But you didn't ask," I reply, shaking my head, smiling at him even as tears streak down my cheek. "I asked. And if you say no I'll understand. But...I really hope you say yes. I want to do this – I want to be a family. I want...Marigold to be mine as well as yours, a full sister to all of her future siblings."

"All eighteen," he sighs, shaking his head, resting his forehead against mine.

I burst into laughter, pulling him close, loving him a great deal. I smile, letting my eyes fall shut, breathing in a deep breath full of his scent. "Is that a yes?"

"Of course it's a yes," he whispers, pulling me close and cradling me to him. "Unless...unless Marigold won't like it? Like you said I don't...want to wipe away Tasha from her life. Maybe...maybe we give her a minute to adjust."

"Yeah," I say, smiling and pressing a kiss to my mate's mouth. "Yeah, we'll give her plenty of time. There's no rush, right? But ..." I bite my lip a little, suddenly incredibly happy at this new thought. "I really like now that...I have a little girl."

He grins at me, likewise pleased. "You like it?"

"Yeah, she's really cute!" I say, laughing a bit and winding my arms around his neck. "She reminds me a lot of this guy I have a really big crush on -"

Jackson laughs, tucking his head down next to mine, pressing a kiss to my neck, to my mark. “I love you, Ariel.’

“Yeah, I love you too,” I say on a happy sigh, snuggling closer, if it’s even possible. “I think...I think it’s going to be really great, Jacks. Challenging but... I really like our new tiny family.”

“Me too,” he murmurs, raising his head and pressing a kiss to my mouth this time – a real one, true and deep. I kiss him back, giving myself into it, wrapping my hands into the fabric of his shirt and pulling him closer.

Things get heated...very fast.

“Ariel,” Jackson pants, stopping himself with a force of will that I...absolutely do not have. He glances towards the door, anxious.

“Oh whatever,” I mutter, wrapping a hand behind his neck to pull him close again. “It’s locked. Who cares.”

Jackson hesitates for a second more, glancing at the baby monitor, but then he groans, bringing his mouth again to mine and fully giving in. I moan as Jackson lays me out on the little couch, slipping his hands beneath my shirt and against my bare skin, moving them steadily down.

## **The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 646**

My head falls back as my mate kisses his way steadily down my neck, my chest...

And my eyes drift shut as I think – just to myself – that I’m really, really going to enjoy the rest of my life with this man.

“Okay, little baby,” Pippa whispers, pressing the fussing infant close to her chest as she pulls the door softly shut behind her. “You want to try a little walk? You liked this when you were

“

But Pippa goes still when she turns and sees the Alpha sitting with his back against the wall, his arms resting over his knees, which are bent up before him. He looks up at her with sad, exhausted eyes.

Pippa gasps at first and freezes but then whips her head left and right before storming over to Mark Sinclair. “What on earth are you doing here!?”

“Pippa,” Mark says, looking up at her, flipping his hands over, helpless. “What...what else am I supposed to do?”

“You’re supposed to...to be elsewhere!” Pippa hisses, her eyes darting up the hall. She spins back towards her door, a bit frantic that her Alpha will come out of it and witness this encounter.

“I can’t go elsewhere, you’re here -“

“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” Pippa snarls, turning back to Mark with a frown. She presses the still-crying child even closer to her chest and jerks her chin at him before starting down the hall. “Come on! We have to go somewhere we won’t be seen.”

Mark sighs as he gets to his feet. Because even if his wolf howls with eagerness to go with his mate, he knows this isn’t going to be good. Mark follows Pippa, his heart attuned both to the sound of them and to the baby’s soft cries.

Pippa rushes forward, her quick steps doing nothing to outrun Mark’s long stride, until she finds a dark alcove. She rushes inside, turning her face up to Mark as he follows her in, a frown on her lips. “Are we going to be overheard here?”

“No,” Mark says, giving a shrug. “It’s the middle of the night – and no one uses this wing, mom wanted you to have privacy – Pippa, do you want me to take her?” he reaches for the baby, who cries louder now. “She’s very fussy – “

“No!” Pippa growls, clutching the baby tighter and turning her half away. “She’s my baby! I can take care of her!”

Mark hesitates, letting his hands drop a little. “I never thought you couldn’t,” he murmurs. “I just thought you might...want some help, you must be exhausted -“

“My exhaustion is none of your business,” Pippa bites out, looking down at her baby girl with a frown, bouncing her a bit to comfort her.

Mark sighs, letting his hands drop fully, putting them on his hips to have something to do with them. “I mean, it kind of is my business,” he murmurs, annoyed and sad and...a bit at the end of his rope regarding what to do next. “Considering you’re my mate.”

Pippa whips her face up to him, her eyes full of rage. “How dare you, Mark Sinclair!”

“How – how dare I!? Pippa, it’s true!”

“I have an Alpha, Mark!” Pippa snaps, her voice wavering with emotion. “An Alpha who I love very much, to whom I have always been faithful! We have a child together!”

Mark sighs, his head dropping. “I’m aware of all of this, Pippa.”

“Then you should be aware of the necessity of leaving me alone! We shouldn’t – we shouldn’t even -!” she gasps, the sound putting Mark’s nerves on edge. He whips his head up to see her smack her hand across her mouth, horrified.

“What?” he asks, taking a step towards her, worried.

She takes a step back, shaking her head rapidly. “I – I shouldn’t even be alone here with you – this is uncouth, and unmatronly this is unchaste -“

Mark can’t help it, he laughs – just a tiny bit. “Pippa, we’re just talking -“

“In private! Alone! I – I have never been alone with a man who wasn’t my Alpha, or a member of my immediate family!”

Her face goes as white as snow and Mark takes a step back, realizing that she’s genuinely uncomfortable. “I’m...not going to touch you, Pippa. It’s okay. I just wanted to...talk.”

“We have nothing to say to each other, your highness,” Pippa snaps, her chin held high, her voice wavering. Mark sighs, leaning back against the wall of the alcove, studying her.

Because even as every atom in his body wants to be here, right now, with her, in this little alcove, Mark has to admit that he is ...completely out of ideas regarding how to handle this.

## **The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 647**

Mark watches Pippa carefully, still completely at a loss regarding what to do or say to calm her down, to let her know that it’s all right. Because she’s right – completely right. None of this is simple. She is, by all accounts, married to another man and newly the mother of his child.

But despite all of that, besides her slim little chest heaving with anger, Mark notes that...Pippa doesn’t leave the alcove.

And it’s not because he’s keeping her here by force.

Be cool, be cool, his wolf cautions, even as he fails to take that advice himself and darts anxiously back and forth in Mark’s soul.

Mark exhales slowly and holds Pippa’s gaze. “Your situation is even more complex than you’re painting it,” he says, doing his damn best to stay calm.

Pippa stiffens, her shoulders straightening as she glares at him. “By which you mean?”

He raises an eyebrow at her. “You’re leaving out the fact that your Alpha is mated to someone else as well. Happily so, by all accounts.”

Pippa inhales deeply through her nose, her eyes flaring as she glares at Mark.

His wolf howls in his soul, anguished, wondering if it was the wrong thing to say.

But damn it, what the hell is the right thing to say in a situation like this?

“Elias will never leave me,” Pippa says, her voice tight, lifting the baby higher in her arms. Mark’s eyes move for a moment to little Bianca, seeing that she’s calming somehow, his heart gladdening for it. Because that little baby – she’s not even his child, and he feels...such a tie to her. His mate’s little girl – of course she’s precious to him.

“I’m not really...concerned with Elias right now,” Mark says quietly, sighing as he runs his hand through his hair. “Pippa, can we just...talk? Normally? I mean, you’re so resistant to this, but I’m not going away.”

“I wish you would!” she snaps.

“What, so you can hang out alone in the alcove?” Mark asks, sarcastic, waving around to it. But then he drops his hand, a little ashamed at himself for snapping like that.

Pippa just glares at him, so Mark carries on.

“Pippa, you are my mate,” he says, sighing, shaking his head at her, pressing a hand to his heart. “I know that you feel it too. Can we just...calm down? Take a minute to get to know each other?”

“Is that seriously what you want to do, Mark?” she snaps, taking a step towards him, her mouth pulling down at the corners. “You want to just take some time to get to know each other?”

“Well, yeah?” Mark says, wary, knowing that this is a trap but not understanding it yet.

“And how would you suggest we do that?” she snaps, glaring hard.

“Um, we could...hang out?” he says, awkward, curling in on himself a little as he realizes that he has...absolutely no answer to that question and feeling like an absolute idiot. “We could...have dinner? Talk?”

A rough little laugh breaks from Pippa’s mouth. “My entire life is falling apart, and you want to hang out?”

He grimaces, not getting it, but knowing that this is bad. “Um, yes?”

“And what does one do when they hang out?”

Mark sighs. “I don’t know, Pippa. We could...get some pizza? Just...relax? And talk?”

“I am a Luna and a mother,” Pippa snaps, advancing on him again, cradling her baby close. “I am fighting to adjust to the loss of my family and my position in society so that I can give my little girl a better life. And while I am happy to make that sacrifice for her, I am struggling at every turn to understand who I am in this world! Not to mention that my Alpha has fallen in love with another man – an act that would result in his death in our home nation. And that might very well result in me being abandoned and alone here -”

“Pippa, we would never let you be abandoned, of course we’d always support you -”

“My life is falling apart!” she shouts, breaking in, desperate, her voice cracking. “And I am trying to hold it together with the bare edges of my nails! I have all the responsibilities of a grown woman, Mark Sinclair – I am the mother to an infant child, I have my Alpha’s household to establish and run, and you want to...hang out!?”

Mark groans a little, hanging his head, seeing her point.

Because even if he and Pippa are the same age...their lives are completely different. And his suggestion that she act like any other nineteen-year-old girl and just hang out with him – grab some pizza, watch a movie, chat about their interests – utterly neglects to take into consideration who she is and what she needs.

## The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 648

“You’re a boy, Mark,” Pippa says, soft and sad. He raises his head enough to see her looking down at her baby, tears clinging to her lashes, threatening to fall. “I – I already have one child, I don’t need another. I’m sorry – I’m being cruel but...” she takes a deep breath and raises her eyes to his, her mouth trembling a little. “I don’t accept this bond, Mark. I – I can’t. It’s too hard – I have an Alpha I very much like, and he...I need to concentrate on that relationship before it all collapses before me. I’m sorry. I...I’m very sorry to cause you pain, but no.”

She turns sharply, moving swiftly out of the alcove and back down the hall towards her room, her head tucked low as she goes. Mark watches her until he can’t see her anymore, his heart aching to see her go, his wolf howling for her to come back. But even as his wolf

howls and nips and scratches him internally, urging him to go after her, Mark keeps his place.

After all, he knows better than to press a lady when she says no.

And it's not that he's given up...he just...needs time to think. After all, not accepting the bond is not precisely the same as a rejection, is it? Even if it is not a fantastic start.

No, Mark sighs, thinking that even if it pains him, it may be best to just give Pippa what she needs and asks for right now, even if that is for him to step away and give her space. Because she is his mate, and what she needs is now, incontrovertibly, his top priority. 1

Mark's wolf grumbles, discontent as he pushes up from the wall and begins to walk away in the other direction, his head hanging low. But he clenches a fist as he goes, ready, for the first time, for some big changes in his life.

I groan a little, nuzzling closer to Jackson's bare skin, wanting desperately to go back to sleep. Because I'm tired – and I was having just the best dream, which was mostly just a rehashing of what happened after Jackson laid me back on that couch in the little dining room, and slipped his hands down over my hips...

I smile, remembering it, sighing happily and turning my face over on his chest, wanting to go back to all of that...

But my eyes fly open when I realize that my wolf is standing very still in my soul.

Just...staring.

At it.

What, she whispers, her eyes wide. What...the hell is that...

I gasp, sitting up straight, instantly awake and starting to pant with fear because...

Because what the hell is that!? That...that new blue line in my soul...leading off to...

Oh my god.

Oh my god.

It's...it's a fucking bond... 3

My mind begins to race as my wolf tosses her nose back and howls in fear, turning hastily away from the new bond, her feet scrabbling for purchase in my soul as she sprints away from it – sprints far away – getting as far as she can as fast as possible

Because how the fuck did this happen!?

I smack my hand across my mouth, horrified. A new bond, a new...mate!? Fucking – how!?

My mind instantly flashes through memories – Jesse waking up in the middle of the night wreathed in shadows –

Because Midnight found him in the night, but he couldn't see her, but it developed –

A bond, a mating bond became apparent between them even if he hadn't seen her yet –

My head spins around, looking frantically –

But Jackson is still beneath me, thankfully sleeping peacefully through my panic. I slam down on the bond between us, not wanting him to wake, because this is going to kill him –

And Marigold, there, in her little tiny bed in the corner – my little girl – I sob against my hand, because I –

I can't handle this –

So many changes, so fast! And now another fucking bond – another fucking mate!? And a shadowed one, like Midnight!?

What the hell is my grandmother trying to do to me here!?

## The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 649

My eyes flash down to Jackson, still asleep beneath me, and grief floods me. My poor mate – he's been so good to me, and we've been through so much, and it was finally, finally getting good. And now this! Another bond, another mate!?

A fourth mate!? Who – who the hell needs four!?

Jackson stirs, sensing a change in the room, a little frown coming to his lips. I freeze for a moment, watching as he turns his head and then exhales slowly, peacefully falling back to sleep.

I exhale too, my breath shaky, and then quickly climb off of him. Because I can't – I can't wake him now – he'll flip out, and I'm already flipping out –

Suddenly, completely unable to think of anything else to do, I rush for the door, pulling it open and dashing out into the hall. I pull the bedroom door shut behind me as quietly as I can and then stride for the living room, desperate to get away – to get my thoughts together –

“Baby?”

I moan at the sight of my mom in the living room, sitting with a cup of coffee in her hand in the pre-dawn light, already at work.

My lip immediately starts to tremble as I stop in my tracks, staring at her. “Mom, something’s wrong,” I whisper, shaking my head.

“Oh, sugar,” mom says, immediately standing and dropping her cup, coffee splashing all over the table. She reaches for me.” Come here. Come here right now.”

I run for her and my mom wraps me up in her arms, pulling me close. “What’s wrong, baby?” she whispers, her voice as terrified as mine.

I tuck my head against her and begin to spill everything out.

But I get about twelve words in when my mom goes stiff against me, sniffing at my hair, and then steps back.

“Mom,” I gasp, staring at her, appalled. “Why – why the hell are you smiling!? This is a disaster!”

“You come with me, trouble,” mom says, working hard to wipe the smile from her face and simply turning away from me when she fails. She takes my hand, tugging me with her as she pulls me towards her bedroom.

“Mom!” I protest, trying to pull my hand away, but she has an iron grip.

She laughs.

Laughs!

I snarl, pissed as hell at her for laughing at me.

“Just come in here, Ariel,” she says, shaking her head, her pretty rose-gold hair falling back over her shoulders as she tugs me into her room. “Let’s sit down.”

I stumble after her, still frantic, looking into the room and absurdly relieved that my dad isn’t here. Because while he’s been very good to me throughout all the news of my three mates and my mate’s new daughter, I don’t think he’s any more prepared than I am to hear the news that there’s a fourth. 1

“You come here, baby,” mom says, pulling me over to her bed and then sitting me down on it, urging me to sit back amongst the pillows and put my feet up. I just stare at her, confused and wary as she sighs contentedly and then sits down across from me, pulling her own feet up.

“Mom?” I ask, my voice hesitant with fear. “Why...why are you being so...cool about this?”

“Because, baby,” mom says, giving me a pretty smile and leaning forward to cup my cheek in her hand. “I don’t think it’s all quite as horrible as you think.”

“How could a fourth bond not be as bad -” I snap, glaring at her.

But she laughs again, silencing me, and shakes her head. “Let’s just...check it out together, okay, kid?”

I scowl at her, hating her for being all calm and practical in the face of my meltdown, but I nod slowly to her, agreeing to it. Mom is usually right, after all – uncannily so. So if she’s telling me to calm down and look at it...

I guess...that’s the best thing to do.

Trusting my mother, as I always do in times of crisis, I take her hands and close my eyes. “Breathe out,” mom urges. “I’ve got you. You’re safe.”

I nod, believing her, especially as her magic begins to sweep through me, all lavender and soft and warm. I exhale, long and slow, feeling her magic begin its little healing touches within me, ensuring that everything in my body is okay. Calm comes with them, as it always does.

## The Hidden Princess At All-Boys Alpha Academy Chapter 650

Mom’s magic sinks lower and so does my attention. My wolf begins to creep back in my soul, turning towards that new bond, prowling slowly, warily towards it, her ears pricked forward.

“There now,” mom says on a happy sigh. “See? It’s not scary.”

“It’s not the bond that’s scary mom,” I growl, shaking my head even as my wolf steps closer, sniffing softly at the bond, peering out over the edge of our soul, looking for....whatever is on the other side of it. “It’s what it implies. A fourth mate!? I can’t handle that -”

“Look closer at them, baby,” mom urges. “See?”

I do as I’m told, paying close attention, my wolf nudging the bond with her nose...

And as she does I realize that it’s...different. Different from anything I’ve ever felt, different from my bond with Jackson, or Luca, or Gabriel. Somehow...smaller, more silvery and light, and incredibly, incredibly thin-

And...

And cute.

And that it’s not one bond at all, that it’s... 2

My eyes fly open. “Two?” I breathe, awed, mesmerized, terrified.

My mom’s face breaks into a big smile. “Two!” she says, delight all over her face.

I just stare at her, dumbfounded. “Mom,” I whisper, horrified. “I can’t... I can’t have five mates...that’s insane.”

She bursts out laughing, making me jump a bit. “Baby, you don’t have five mates. Look again. What...what else could it be?” She bites her lip, incredibly excited.

I just stare at her, my face wrinkled in confusion, and turn my attention inwardly to see –

To see my insane wolf –

Laying on her belly between the two tiny, tenuous bonds, nuzzling them warmly with her snout, each in turn – howling for joy because –

Because –

Because they’re...they’re ours.

Our –

Our...

“Babies,” I whisper, my eyes flying wide.

Mom stays still, a little creaking squeak of joy barely suppressed in her throat as she tries so, so hard to let me feel however I want to feel about this.

Even though she is clearly, clearly fucking overjoyed –

“Oh...oh my god...” I whisper, shock running through me even as my wolf prances between the two little bonds, licking each in turn before throwing herself down on the ground and rubbing her body all over them as best she can, claiming them as her own.

“I know!” mom says, all squeaky and thrilled, raising her hands to her mouth and pressing her fingertips to her lips. “You’re \_”

“Pregnant!” I whisper, my eyes flying as wide as two round moons.

Mom starts to dance in place, her shoulders shaking for joy, and suddenly – as my shock breaks – a smile starts to spread across my lips.

She shouts then, seeing me accept the reality of it, and throws herself forward, grabbing me into a big hug. “Oh my god, Ariel! Congratulations, baby!”

“Mom,” I whisper, still awed, laughing a little. “There...there are two of them!”

“Twins!” she says, a little shrill and shrieky. “It’s so great! Two little babies! Two little baby babies, all at once!”

I just hug my mom back, barely breathing, still awed and completely freaked out even if my wolf yips with happiness, loving her little soul pups already, celebrating their existence by dancing from paw to paw.

“Oh, sugar, how are you feeling?” mom asks, doing her best – and failing – to rein in her own emotions so that I can figure out my own. “I’m sorry I’m having trouble – ”

“No, it’s okay,” I whisper, sitting up and pushing away from her a little, fear and joy and wonder and terror racing through me all at once. “Mom, how did this happen?”

“Well,” she says, tilting her head to the side. “Were you...slacking on your medicine?”

“N-no!” I sputter out, shaking my head fervently. I go back in my mind suddenly, trying to remember everything, but honestly I have been diligent. “Mom, I’ve been very careful...”

Mom just grins at me, biting her lip.