

18 Time To Go

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~Liam~

The run felt like pure magic. I had never experienced anything quite like it before. Instead of hunting creatures, we simply revelled in the soft glow of the moon and listened to the sounds of the woodland creatures around us, shielded by the protective canopy of trees. It was a truly beautiful and serene experience. At that moment, all my troubles seemed to fade away, and I found myself no longer consumed with worry about Sophia. Somehow, I had discovered a sense of peace.

We spent a good while embracing this tranquil moment, but eventually, we decided to make our way back to the settlement rather than return to the picnic.

A week passed. Josephine and I were getting along remarkably well, and no one seemed to suspect anything. I wondered if I was exceptionally skilled at hiding my feelings, or perhaps people were simply oblivious to it since they only ever saw me with Sophia. Regardless, I knew it wouldn't remain hidden for long, especially with how Alex was always eager to be near Josephine.

During breakfast and dinner, I noticed Josephine blush a few times when I sat beside her. I deliberately left the head of the table open for Justin, so I could sit next to Josephine, and no one found anything unusual about my actions, thanks to the precedent set during our first dinner together. Everything seemed perfectly normal.

Josephine was at ease with me, and we engaged in various discussions during our time together.



Uncle Leo called for a meeting with just the Grizlo team and our parents present. We made our way to Uncle Leo's office, knowing that summoning everyone there meant whatever they had to discuss was of great importance. Josephine and I met at the entrance on our way out, and she seemed to be in high spirits.

"I heard Uncle Max and Kyle are back," she said, and my heart skipped a beat, hoping they had uncovered something useful for the investigation. A breakthrough in the case would be a welcomed relief.

Oliver joined us, followed by Charlotte and the rest of our team as we walked together towards Uncle Leo's office. Among us, I was the most eager, and Justin seemed to walk faster than the rest.

Upon our arrival, we found my father, Uncle Leo, Max, Kyle, Uncle Dominic, Uncle David, and Uncle Vino, who always appeared displeased, already there. Uncle Theo, Uncle Marcel, Alpha Devin, and Lord Alexei were also present, waiting for us.

Since all the seats were occupied, we stood in a group. I noticed that Uncle Leo had made some modifications to his office, as it seemed bigger than it was a year ago. I couldn't help but wonder if the expansion was necessary, but given how comfortably we all fit inside, it seemed like a wise decision on his part.

While standing together, Josephine playfully pinched my hand, causing me to flinch slightly, which made her giggle. I smiled too, appreciating this playful side of her that I hadn't seen before. It saddened me to think that a few careless words had caused a rift between us. She was truly enjoyable to be around, much like Harper, who held a special place in my heart, making it unfair to compare anyone else to her.

"You seem to be in a good mood, princess?" Alexei inquired of Josephine, and she composed herself.

"I guess she's happy about the challenge," Uncle Leo chimed in, and I smiled, moving closer to Josephine until there was no space between us, and I gently touched her hand. She held on for a moment before letting go.

"We've called you all here today because you're set to depart for Grizlo the day after tomorrow," my father announced, and I was taken aback by the sudden news.

"Alpha Christian needs the officers replacing Thompson and his crew to resume their duties so he can focus on his current task. They've declared Mike a wanted man, and Christian intends to concentrate his resources on catching him. Investigating what really happened will be our responsibility. Next week, Christian will present the matter before the council, and we'll officially take it up, giving us a more unrestricted hand in the matter," he explained. I felt a sense of relief that we could finally take action, but I also held onto the hope that our efforts wouldn't be in vain, despite the time that had passed.

"Have you heard from Sophia since the last time she spoke to you?" My father inquired, and I shook my head in response.

"She hasn't reached out since then," I admitted, and he nodded before turning his attention to Max.

"Well, we spent three days investigating Kaizen and Braile, but nothing substantial came up. I doubt they'll be forthcoming with information; their alphas seem to be quite tight-lipped. We can't forcefully search the islands or prevent people from travelling there, so we need to find a more subtle approach to our investigation. At

this point, we're not entirely sure, but we plan to check other islands in different regions," Max explained.

"That means the only thing that could potentially provide a proper lead on the matter is your investigation in Grizlo," Lord Alexei stated, looking directly at Josephine. She nodded, smiling. I knew there was a possibility that her father had linked her on the matter.

After discussing our strategy with our parents, they dismissed us so that we could start packing and preparing for our journey to Grizlo. Once we resumed our positions, our belongings would be sent there as well.

While everyone else moved ahead to get ready, I walked a bit more slowly. Josephine walked beside me and reached out to hold my hand, causing me to come to a stop.

"I understand how you're feeling right now, Li; we will do everything within our power to find her," she assured me, and I looked at her. She had a beautiful smile on her face, and somehow, the eyeliner had grown on me. Strands of her hair fell across her face, and I wanted to gently brush them aside, but I restrained myself. As she was about to release my hand, I held on tightly, surprising both of us. She then surprised me even more by hugging me, resting her head against my chest. I wasn't sure how to touch her or respond to the gesture.

"I know you need a hug right now, Li, so consider this one a sign of hope. We will find her and her mother," she said, breaking away with a smile.

"I don't want to see you looking gloomy. You look better when you're happy," she added, and I managed to muster a smile, though I was still trying to keep my emotions in check. Her comforting presence meant a lot to me in that moment.

As we walked back to the mansion together, we eventually parted ways, each heading to our respective rooms. Once I entered my room, I noticed Oliver was already packing.

"What's going on between you and Joe?" he asked me as I brought out my bag. I frowned at his question.

"What do you mean, Oliver?" I replied, trying to play it off, but he had a knowing look on his face.

"Don't lie to me, Li. You're always staring at her, touching her hand whenever you can, sitting next to her during dinner, and you haven't mentioned Sophia in a while until today's meeting," he said, pointing out the obvious. How much longer could I hide this?

"I want to know what's really happening between you two because I'm having a hard time figuring it out. Are you crushing on her too? Are you trying to be her friend out of guilt for what she heard us saying about her, or is there something more going on?" Oliver pressed, and I sighed. It was getting increasingly difficult to keep it all hidden.

"She's an amazing person," was all I could manage to say, but Oliver shook his head.

"You lost your composure during the picnic last week when that guy was talking to her. You whisked her away and never returned. I've seen you caress her hand several times, even during today's meeting. Have you changed your mind about Sophia, or are you just confused?" he asked with genuine concern, and I found myself staring at him.

It became evident that Oliver was genuinely looking out for Josephine. He seemed concerned that I might unintentionally hurt



her, and I could see it in his eyes. Our close friendship meant I couldn't deceive him.

"Don't hurt her, Li. You can't play with people's emotions like that. The way she looks at you, blushes, and giggles—it's all so apparent. I'm worried that when Sophia is found, Josephine might end up hurt," he confessed, expressing his genuine concern. While I hadn't viewed the situation from that angle, I realised that Oliver deserved to know the truth so that he wouldn't worry any longer.

I sighed, feeling nervous and frustrated. Running my fingers through my hair, I looked at Oliver, studying his face for a moment.

"If I tell you this, promise me you won't tell anyone, not even Elaine," I requested, and his curiosity peaked as his eyes widened.

"I won't, I promise," he assured me, and I knew he was being truthful.

"Josephine and I are fated, but she doesn't know it," I managed to say, and he was frozen for a minute before a stream of expletives escaped his mouth.

"Fuck! Fuck! fuck What the Fuck!" he exclaimed, and I felt a bit embarrassed by his reaction.

"Shit! What about Sophia?" he asked, showing concern for our friend, and I had no answer.

"I haven't confessed anything to Sophia or asked her out," I replied, and he moved to sit beside me.

"This is messed up, Li. What are you planning to do?" he asked, sounding worried.

"I want to get to know Joe and see how it goes," I said, and he sighed.



"So, you're no longer pursuing anything with Sophia," he clarified, and I shook my head.

"I don't think I can, not when all I can think about is Joe," I admitted, and he sighed, realising the complexity of the situation.

"Why were you able to feel it so soon? Isn't she supposed to be of age before you find out?" he asked, and I nodded in agreement.

"That's what I thought too, but it seems fate had other plans this time," I replied, feeling a tinge of sorrow.

"It sucks to be you right now. Do you plan to tell her?" he inquired, looking concerned. I shook my head, contemplating the best course of action.

"If I tell her, she might think I'm only getting close to her because of the bond, and any progress we've made will lose its significance. I want her to discover it on her own. I'll pretend I'm also just realising it, so that the bond doesn't overshadow the connection we build before she finds out," I explained, though I could sense he didn't fully agree with my decision. However, I feared Josephine's reaction if I were to tell her we were fated. She might think everything I've done and said was solely driven by the bond, and our relationship wouldn't feel genuine to her anymore.

"Well, figure it out quickly, Li, and get on track. You two do look good together, and it would be a perfect combination, reuniting the two families properly," he said, focusing on the political aspect of the potential match. However, at that moment, my mind couldn't fully grasp the implications of such a union.

As we finished our tasks, dinner time approached, and I found myself

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eagerly anticipating the meal. It was a chance to sit beside Josephine and savour her company. The upcoming journey to Grizlo promised to be a grand adventure, especially when it came to matters of the heart.

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