

## Chapter 26

I had a stupid smile on my face as I shifted back to human form.

I just got back from my first run in the Primal Pack, and it was all because I needed to calm my mind. My head would not stray from the memory of my kiss with Maxim earlier today, or kisses, rather.

Lukas noticed our expressions when we got home and grew grave all evening. At the time, his eyes flashed to my neck eagerly, as if checking if Maxim had gone ahead and marked me. But luckily, he didn't say anything, even about the kiss.

In fact, he wasn't in the dining room at dinner. He had locked himself in his office all evening, and he didn't come out. Of course, again, I felt awful. I simply wanted to please both brothers, even when I knew I couldn't.

Someone had to lose. Someone had to get hurt. I only wished it was me and not them. I came into their lives and ruined their brother-like relationship, even though they pretty much communicated just the same. But the silent vendetta was evident.

Nonetheless, Fiona had noticed my flushed features and knew it wasn't only about the herbs. I promised her that I'd fill her in soon enough, but I wasn't trying to brag or have a girl moment. I was still feeling pretty much guilty about the kiss with Lukas and the fact that I kissed Maxim only the day after. As if I was having some sort of trial run before getting a product.

They were more than just pawns in my game of love. In fact, it wasn't a game at all. Lukas was a great friend to me, and I wouldn't try to do anything that would jeopardise it. Maxim was just the same. Especially after our kiss, I felt more connected to him than ever before, and I'd be damned if I lost him over something as petty as a jealous kiss.

I just had to be honest. That's all. Besides, it'll be better to tell him myself rather than someone else telling him. That'll be a tragedy.

Hence why my run was greatly needed. The sun had just sunk behind the clouds, and the crescent moon sat neatly above me along with the twinkling stars. I didn't tell anyone but Fiona that I was going for a run, simply because I knew Maxim would insist that I didn't go alone. That was the agreement, after all. And Lukas wasn't exactly on speaking terms with me.

It wasn't easy getting away from Fiona either. I had to tell her that I wouldn't go far, and I didn't. I didn't know the pack that well either, so I wouldn't do something so stupid, even though I had a great sense of direction.

The run went great, as expected, and it was exhilarating to be with my wolf again without summoning her to fight dragons for me.

I grabbed my clothes in the shifting shack in the backyard of the Alpha house before slowly and quietly creeping back inside.

But to my surprise, Maxim wasn't pissed when I entered. In fact, he was calmly sitting at the kitchen island with a cup of coffee in his right hand and his phone in the next.

He raised his head as I closed the back door, and a beautiful smile pulled on his lips as he dropped his phone and coffee to cross the room towards me.

"There you are," he mumbled as he quickly pecked my lips. "How was your run?"

Confused and a bit scared, I narrowed my eyes. "It was... good. Why are you not mad?" I just went right out and asked. I wanted to know if this was just a gist to get me relaxed, then he would explode.

He chuckled a bit before replying. "You're not a prisoner, Melissa. Just because I am protective doesn't mean I

will forbid you from doing something as natural as going for a run. Besides, my border patrol is working tonight as they are every night. The minute the border is breached, I'd know."

I nodded slowly as I accepted and appreciated his honesty.

"At the barbecue, there were fewer people on patrol seeing that they were enjoying themselves at the gathering too."

"Yes, I am afraid so. But don't worry. No dragon is getting past that easily again. Why do you think rogues fear our pack?"

"Because the Alphas are ruthless," I scoffed. Those were the stories I heard.

He rolled his eyes with a chuckle of his own. "That too, and we have the strongest border patrol in the country."

But as he said this, something strange came to my mind. I feared sharing it with him because I didn't want to worry him. But I knew it was the right thing to do.

"Um, Maxim," I mumbled as I fiddled with my fingers. "How would the dragons know that that night was a barbecue and, in other words, a gateway to the pack? How did they even know which sections of the border had no patrol that night?" I asked, and I could tell that my question threw him off a bit.

Just as I said this, Lukas entered the room, and the look on his face showed that he heard my question too.

"I don't want to be the one to say it...." I trailed without finishing. I really didn't want to say it. I had no idea what their pack was like and if they had ever had loyalty issues. I didn't want to be the one to suggest anything, especially since I knew so little about them.

The last thing I wanted to do was offend them.

"It's okay, Melissa," Lukas said, deeming this the first words he had said to me since we came home earlier today. "You're right. We might have a mole present. But this person would have had to know about you, and the only persons who do know are those in the Alpha house. Unless there's someone living in the pack who somehow managed to cross our borders and mix his scent with ours."

"We will start looking into it first thing in the morning," Maxim announced, and Lukas instantly agreed.

I saw why they worked so well together as Alphas. They kept the pack forefront at all times, even amid the tense atmosphere.

Lukas cleared his throat as he finally looked at me again. "Well, I came to tell you that there was a call for you from your previous home. It's on hold."

"For me?" I asked in confusion. The only person I'd consider calling me was Toya, but she had my cell number.

"Pretty sure he said Melissa," he said in a bored tone. "Do you want to pick up the call or not?"

I stared at him for a while in offence, but I decided I wouldn't start anything in front of Maxim. "Coming," I said instead of the hundred things I wanted to.

Maxim returned to his seat at the island as I followed Lukas up the stairs.

"So, you've decided, huh?" he asked out of the blue.

"Excuse me?" I questioned. He stopped suddenly, causing me to bump in his back.

He spun around so that he was facing me. "What happened out there today?"

I shrugged. "We got my herbs for my nightmares."

"Stop toying with me, Melissa," he growled, and I grew more annoyed.

"I am not toying with you, Lukas!" I growled back through clenched teeth. "I told you that I wanted Maxim. I apologised for wasting your time and messing with your emotions, but you only wanted to complicate things further by kissing me. What did you expect would've happened? That you could kiss me and suddenly claim me?"

"Lest you forget that you are still mine legally," he said threateningly. "And are you saying that you told brother dearest of our kiss?"

"No, I did not tell you that YOU kissed me. It didn't come up."

As I said this, his face grew smug again, just like yesterday, right before he kissed me.

"I won't fight him for you, Melissa. I respect your decision," he said, taking me off-guard.

"Um, what?"

"I said I won't fight over you. As you said, I was one of your first friends here, and I wouldn't want to jeopardise that."

I sensed a 'but' coming.

"But," he said, confirming my thoughts. "That doesn't mean that I have given up."

"What do you want, Lukas?" I was growing frustrated with him. "Do you want to claim me as yours and watch your only brother suffer all his life? And for what? Ego?"

He was silent for a while, as it seemed like I hit a nerve. I rubbed my temples as they ached. I missed the Lukas I met weeks ago. This part of him—the jealous part of him was far too much than I could handle.

"Well, when you put it that way...."

"That is exactly what it is, Lukas," I told him. "If you force this, and if you somehow manage to steal my hand, that will leave Maxim with nothing. I'm sorry about your mate, Luke. I really am. But just like you have fallen for me, you can fall for someone else too. Maxim won't, not while I'm alive. And this is just a version of what can happen because you and I both know that Maxim won't be so willing to let me go like that."

He sighed as he hung his head. "You're right. I'm sorry. It's just that... Melissa, you have no idea how special you are. There's just something about you that makes me want to take you all for myself at the expense of everything and everyone around me. But I was also the one who told Maxim that if he found his mate, I'd be happy. Too bad I'm falling in love with her."

His eyes were peering into mine as he said this, and my heart stopped. Did he just say love?

Lukas was falling in love with me?

"I can't promise you that it'll be easy, but I'll try to accept that this is what it is. It won't be easy, though. I think my wolf imprinted on you."

This was yet another bomb dropped. His wolf imprinted on me?

When a wolf imprints, he has basically chosen another mate for himself. If Lukas wolf imprinted on me, then it won't be as easy as we both think. His wolf will become restless and believe that Maxim is taking me away from him.

My head was fully throbbing as he said this.

This wasn't what I anticipated. Not even in the least.

"I mean, it's the only explanation I have," he added. "Why else would I feel so strongly for you?"

"You have to tell Maxim," I blurted out as panic rose in me. It might not be significant to him, but to Maxim, and to me, it will be.

My wolf was still entirely devoted to Maxim, and I shared no bond with Lukas. But for him, it wasn't the same.

"I will," he mumbled. "I owe him that much."

I nodded slowly as I caught my breath, and to my surprise, Lukas laughed.

"Relax, my little muse. We'll go back to how things were before. I promise."

"You sure?" I asked like a child asking for a cookie.

Chuckling, he pulled me to his chest as his answer. "I'm sure. Now, remember that phone call I was telling you about?"

"Oh shoot!" I jumped away from him as he laughed, and I followed him towards his office, where the phone was neatly perched on the wall.

He sat behind his desk again, seeming much more relaxed than he had been all evening. At least that much was a relief. After he tells Maxim about his wolf imprinting on me and all, we can go back to how things were.

Hopefully.

I pulled the phone from its holder and perched it against my ear as I plopped down on Lukas's large sofa.

"Hello?" I spoke to tell the person that I was present. But there was only silence. "Hello?" I repeated a bit louder.

There was shuffling on the line until the person finally answered.

"Hi, Melissa," he said, and my entire body froze.

"Logan?"



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