

Chapter 0042

(James POV)

I knocked on my father's office door and waited. I heard hushed voices and what sounded like a couple of people scrambling about.

Finally, my father hollered through the door that I could enter.

When I walked in, I saw my father sitting behind his desk. My mother was sitting next to him with a sheepish look on her face. Both sets of their clothes were wrinkled, and my father's dress shirt was buttoned incorrectly. There was the unmistakable scent of sex in the air.

"Seriously? It is 2 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. At your ages, I would think you would have a little more restraint."

My mother rolled her eyes, but I could tell from the pink in her cheeks that she was embarrassed. "You will understand when you find your m----" 1

Wow. I cannot believe she just went there.

"Oh, no, please do not stop yourself, Mother. Go ahead. Finish that thought. I will understand when I find my mate? Hmmmm. Great way to rub it in your son's face that his first mate died and his second mate was ... Lily Brogan. Anything else you want to say on that front, or should I just

bring you some literal salt to rub in my wounds?" I responded bitterly.

"James...."

"Forget it. That is not why I am here anyway."

"You need to drop the attitude with your mother if you want anything from us," my father scolded.

"Whatever. May I sit?"

My father gave me a displeased look, but nevertheless signaled for me to sit down. "What can we do for you, Son?"

"I came for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"I want you to lift the alpha orders that prevent pack members from talking to me about Lily. I also want you to tell me where Lily is."

My parents exchanged looks.

"James, I do not think that is a good idea," my mother responded. "You heard what Dr. Miller said about it being important for you to avoid stress."

"Yes, and you also heard him say that the restrictions did not have to be forever. Just for a while. It has been four weeks. It is time for the restrictions to be lifted."

"Is Luke talking to you again?" my mother asked hopefully.

I said nothing; I just stared at her.

"Look, Son, I will lift the alpha orders regarding Stephanie," my father offered. "The orders regarding Lily will remain in place."

"I did not ask you to lift the alpha orders regarding Stephanie. I asked you to lift the alpha orders regarding Lily."

"James, I have been talking to Margie –"

"So what, Mother? Why do I care if you have been talking to Margie? Why does Margie always get to have so much control over what happens in my life?"

"Let her finish," my father growled. "No one gets to disrespect your mother and my mate in this office, no matter who they are."

I rolled my eyes. "Fine, whatever. Do share, Mother. What wonderful insight did Margie have about the situation?" I asked sarcastically.

My mother looked at me with exasperation. "When did you become such a snotty a&&hole, James? We did not raise you this way!!!"

"Oh, I don't know, Mother. I think it sort of happened on its own. The funny thing about grief is that it makes you a little grumpy at times. Well,that and sexual frustration."

I winked at my mother for added emphasis. My mother's jaw dropped. She did not know what to say.

I knew that I was pushing my limits right now, but I could not bring myself to care. I just stared at my parents, waiting for one of them to speak.

Finally, as I expected, my mother broke.

"Look, James.... Margie and I have been talking about what happened at Stephanie's death anniversary memorial. As you know, the behavior of you and Lily was out of line and embarrassing to everyone. It took the attention away from where it should have been, which was on Stephanie.

Because of that, it is important to Margie —and therefore to your father and I— that Stephanie's birthday memorial be even grander and more special than normal. We need to show a united front at that event.

It is in just two months from today. If you want to talk about everything with Lily, we can do that after the event. Until then, Margie and I agree that your focus needs to be on Stephanie."

I chuckled bitterly. "Seriously, Mother? You want me to spend the next two months focused on someone has already died? I have already focused on Stephanie for the past six years! How much more focus does it take to put on a memorial? Besides, I am not an event planner. Let someone else do that!"



It felt weird to think about Stephanie as "someone who has already died" ... and it felt even weirder to say it out loud ... but it also felt sort of good. Stephanie was the love of my life, and I miss her, but I am so tired of pretending like we are living in an alternative reality.

"Margie wants you to give a speech. Not just a speech, but a grand speech," my mother said softly. I could tell she was almost embarrassed to say it out loud.

"What? Why?"

"She thinks the pack needs proof that Stephanie is still important to you. That you still care about her. Your little stunt at the death anniversary called that into question."

"STEPHANIE IS DEAD, MOTHER!"

My mother gasped. "James! How dare you!"

"How dare I what? How dare I acknowledge the facts? Weren't you and Daddy Dearest telling me just a month ago that it was time to move on, marry, and produce an heir? Now you are telling me that I have an obligation to give a speech —no a 'grand' speech— at what has to be the FOURTEENTH or FIFTEENTH remembrance event that we have held for Stephanie in six years? Don't you realize how crazy this sounds?"

"James! One more rude word out of you and I will send you to the dungeons for the night," my father growled. "I have already warned you that you need to watch your tone with

your mother. I will not warn you again.”

I took a deep breath and put my hands over my face.

“What do you want me to do?” I said in a defeated voice.

“Give the speech. I know it sounds a little over the top, and it probably is, but you have to understand how much Margie is suffering. If it will make her feel better, please just do it for her,” my father responded.

I did not say anything for a few more minutes. A part of me thinks that the mere fact that I am considering this shows just how out of touch with reality I have become. I do not even know what normal is anymore.

Finally, I made a decision.

“Fine. I will give the GRAND speech about Stephanie. But on two conditions. Number one, you lift the alpha orders. Not just the ones about Stephanie, but all of them. And number two, you tell me where Lily is.”