

## Chapter 0046

(James POV)

The drive back to West Mountain Pack felt like it took twice as long as the original drive to Red River.

I was dreading having to explain to my father that two important treaties were being rescinded, much less that one of his good friends now seemed to hate him.

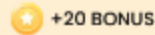
I was also having trouble wrapping my mind around what Alpha Brett and Dr. Hyder told me about why it was all happening. I really had no idea what to think.

Were they really suggesting that females had been abused in our pack? And that we had allowed it to happen? Or that our pack had intentionally used the mate bond as a form of torture?

I mean, Lily had not had an easy life for the past six years, and I did threaten to use the mate bond to get revenge on her. But that was punishment for her actions that led to Stephanie's death. Surely, they could not blame us so severely for simply punishing a wrongdoer... even if they had a soft spot for her.

No, I was certain that whatever had triggered them, it went beyond Lily. But what was it? Was this Tyler person somehow connected?

Or was it possible that Lily set all of this up as some sort of bizarre revenge? Had she found a way to fabricate evidence



and turn our allies against us? If so, why would she do that? Her family still lives in our pack. Even if she wanted to hurt me, why would she hurt her family as well?

I could not figure out what made more sense: that my father would have allowed abuse to occur in our pack unchecked, or that Lily would fabricate evidence against our pack in an effort to get revenge on me. Honestly, I had no fucking idea. 1

And unfortunately, I knew it was going to be a while before I could find out. Ultimately, we did not get back to West Mountain pack until around 2 am. Although my brain was still spinning and I was not tired, it was far too late to talk to my parents and get any answers.

It was also too late to call any of my friends and go out drinking, which had been my regular go-to in the past when I needed to take a "brain vacation." Eventually, desperate for a distraction, I decided to make friends with two large bottles of wolfsbane vodka.

The vodka bottles ended up making for fabulous company. In fact, I was so enthralled with them that I took them to bed. That, of course, is why Nick found me the next day passed out in my bed, hugging one of the empty bottles as I embarrassed myself by moaning Lily's name over and over.

"Dude, get up!"

I groaned as I rolled over. "What time is it?"

"It is 3:30 in the afternoon. Get up!"

"Leave me alone, Nick. I got home late."

"Yeah, and apparently you lost your mind too. Why the f&&k are you moaning Lily's name in your sleep?"

"Shut up and get out. Next time, mind-link or message me before waltzing into my room. Haven't you ever heard of knocking?"

"I mind-linked you multiple times, as did your parents. You were not answering. I do not know why I would bother to message you if you are not picking up the mind-links. And I tried knocking on your door, but you obviously did not hear that either."

"Go away."

"No. Get up."

I pulled the pillow over my head and tried to cover my ears. "Go away, Nick."

"Dude. Your father is spazzing in his office." <sup>2</sup>

"What else is new? What's his issue this time?"

"I guess Red River was supposed to place some big order last night --"

Sh&t. That caught my attention. I pushed the pillow away as I felt my body suddenly sobering up.

--but the order did not come in, so about an hour ago, one of the warehouse managers called to follow up. The manager was told that you were informed last night that Red River was cutting off trade, and that they would be mailing a formal notice later today. Dude, do you have any

idea what is going on?"

I groaned again, and then forced myself to sit up. I threw my legs over the side of my bed and started looking for my clothes.

"Yeah, Alpha Brett told me last night that he is cancelling the peace and trade treaties."

Nick gasped. "What?!?! WHAT DID YOU DO?"

I glared at him. "I did nothing. The decision was made before I even got there. Alpha Brett just told me about it."

"Trade with Red River represents about 10% of our pack's annual income. This is a huge blow. If you didn't do it, who did? Why would Alpha Brett pull out like that?"

"I do not know, Nick. Something about our values not aligning with theirs anymore."

"So you did do something! What did you do, James? Did you bang his mate or something?" he asked me in an accusing voice.

"F&&k you, Nick. No, I did not bang his mate."

"What about his sister? Did you bang his sister? Or what about Dr. Hyder's daughter? I remember her being pretty cute, but it has been a few years since I last saw her."

"Nick, shut up already. I already told you to f&&k off and I mean it. I did not bang anybody. I do not know what else to tell you. The whole thing makes about as much sense to me as it does to you."