

18 - The Dracos Group

(Willa)

Before I could really think this through I was on my way in a taxi. This seemed like an in-person conversation and I was honestly a bit upset, more than a bit, but I couldn't exactly place it.

The longer we drove the more confused and angry I got. I didn't understand why he thought he had to do that. I didn't want him to see me as someone he had to f.ucking save.

"We're here," I paid the fee and almost felt sick, it would probably be half my tips for today, if not more. The drive was over thirty minutes and we barely hit traffic.

"Thanks," I muttered and stepped onto the sidewalk in front of one of those large buildings. The afternoon sun glinted off the upper floor's windows. I felt wildly out of place with my black shirt and dark jeans.

I made it this far so I pushed through the revolving door, and entered a place that was made out of mostly white marble with dark wood accents. I was definitely out of place.

I walked up to the first receptionist that looked at me, her cropped brown hair and red lips twitched up at me.

"Hi," I said.

"Hello, can I help you?" Her voice was like f.ucking

butter. I really didn't fit in.

"I'm looking for Caspien, uh, Dracos. Mr. Dracos?"

"Hm," She clicked on her computer, "And what is your name?"

"Willa Balfour,"

"I don't see you on his schedule,"

I sighed, I didn't even think of that. Why didn't I think of that?

"Does he have any availability?" I asked. The woman looked me up and down.

"No," She responded without looking back at her computer.

"Can you please just tell him I'm here? I'll wait," I crossed my arms and she raised an eyebrow her lips formed a tight line. I knew that was a hard pass.

"Fine, I'll ask him myself," I huffed turning around and fumbling with my phone.

"Willa? Hi, is everything okay?" His gravely voice came after the first ring, making my stomach dip despite myself.

"Sure," I shrugged, but realized he couldn't see the movement, "I'm at your office, are you here? Do you have a minute?"

"You're here?"

"Yes, in the lobby of some white marble castle," I threw a hand up.

He chuckled, "Give me a moment," The phone went

blank and I turned back to the receptionists that were eyeing each other and me now. I crossed my arms not sure what to expect.

One of them picked up the phone, her eyes going wide for a second before whispering to the first brunette I spoke to. The brunette looked back at me and the computer and clicked a few things.

Well, this was even more awkward than I expected.

Minutes later Caspien came down, his face set in a familiar hard stare that didn't make him any less attractive. I could sense the receptionist sitting up and I wasn't sure if it was because of his position or his aura. The receptionists were human but I saw how humans were affected by him when he came to the restaurant.

"Willa," He gave me a smile that wasn't one of his real ones and motioned for me to join him near the long front desk.

"Ladies, this is Willa Balfour. Memorize her face." He paused for a long moment, "She is to be given all security clearances and no matter what I'm dealing with if she shows up she will be shown personally to my office." He said, his voice sounded cold, colder than I ever heard from him.

"Yes, Mr. Dracos," They all said almost in unison.

The first girl handed me a security pass with my name on it. Caspien swiped it from her.

"Come on, I'll show you up,"

I followed a step behind him, not really knowing what I

was planning on saying. I felt a bit stupid now that I wasn't so upset. The awkwardness of the lobby calmed down my anger.

"You said your office was close to the restaurant," I stared up at him, one side of his lips twitched up.

"Close is relative," He looked down at me and I fixed him with a blank stare.

The elevator stopped at what might have been the top floor and he motioned for me to go ahead. I waited at another reception no one was behind the desk though.

"You realize this is my first time here, I don't know where I'm supposed to go," I crossed my arms, trying not to let the way his smile softened his face get to me.

"This way," He put his hand on my back as he led me past the desk and down a long hall of windows showing conference rooms that were empty before we made it to the end of the hall and he opened double black doors that led to his private office. Was anyone else even on this floor?

Another wall of windows showed the sprawling gray buildings beyond, most of them weren't as tall as this one and the view, even during the day, floored me.

In front of us sat a large marble desk with a comfortable-looking black chair and seats across from it. To the left were minimal bookshelves with some chrome sculptures and black books that were definitely staged next to a sitting area to the left with low white furniture around a table.

"Are you some kind of villain?" I smiled forgetting myself.

He sat across the massive desk and placed his palms on it, "Yes," His lip twitched up.

"Can I get you anything to drink?" He asked as he motioned to a seat across from him. I shook my head and stood next to a chair but didn't sit down.

I felt very out of place in my work clothes, even without the stupid pink apron. This place made me feel small, and I didn't like it.

Somehow when he was sitting across from me at the diner in his suit it felt more natural than me here in my dirty black clothes across from his desk.

"Willa?" He asked and I grabbed my arm.

I took a deep breath, "Did you pay for my classes?"

His brows furrowed but he nodded, "Yes,"

"Why?" I demanded. He seemed a little taken aback.

"Because I wanted to do something for you," I jutted out my chin waiting for him to go on, but he didn't.

"I don't need your help,"

"Are you upset with me?" he rubbed his beard and I flopped on the chair.

"Maybe? I'm not sure, I just, I don't feel okay that you did that. I know you have money," I motioned to the marble desk thinking of his band of secretaries as a company with his last f.ucking name on it.

"But you want to do it yourself," He finished for me and I

nodded.

"I don't want you to think that you have to do that, I don't expect that from you, I don't want that from you. This is the first time I've been able to do something for myself and I want to be able to do it for myself, by myself."

"I'm sorry, I made a mistake." He sighed, "I didn't think it through. I thought I was doing something nice for you."

I studied him, he actually looked a little worried and it softened me, "It was a nice gesture, I just can't accept it."

He sat back, "Why not?" He asked.

"I don't want you to have that over me, I would always feel like I owed you something,"

"Willa, you don't. This wasn't to buy your affection or tie you to me. I just wanted to do something for you because I can. I care about you and I know how hard you're working, I don't want you to ever feel behind or get burnt out, especially because there's Emmett involved."

My gaze snapped to his. It made sense, but I could do it. Alone.

"I have it handled,"

"I know you do," His voice softened, "But could I just give you a bit of a buffer while you figure it all out, it would make me feel better."

"Don't do that," I raised an eyebrow.

"Do what?"

"Turn it around so it's like *I'm doing you* the favor by

taking your money."

He snapped his mouth shut but it looked like he was trying not to smile.

"You have to admit you're working a lot, you're paying for it all on your own too, just let me cover your summer classes while you get on your feet, and then we can see from there."

He did have a point, it would be a huge relief, I was already worried about buying Emmett new clothes for winter, and he needed new shoes too, and we still didn't have everything we needed for the apartment.

"I'll pay you back, with interest," I added and he smiled a tiny bit.

"No interest, one date a week, that's my terms," He cocked his head watching me.

"Fine, but I'm paying for the next date," I show back. I would relish in him eating a hot dog from a stand at the park in his suit. I smiled at the thought.

"Deal," He held out his hand and I scooted forward grabbing it and shaking it once.

"Deal," I agreed.

"But I do hope you let me be there to support you," He didn't take his hand from mine, "Not financially, but emotionally. We're friends remember?" He raised an eyebrow challenging me to disagree.

"We are," I agreed, although we were definitely becoming more than that.

There was one knock on his door before it flew open, I removed my hand from his in a second.

"Most of the time it's polite for people to knock and wait for a response," His voice turned hard.

"You didn't have any appointments,"

"Come on, man, maybe he just wanted to j.ack off in peace,"

I turned around to see a tall blonde that looked like he walked out of an ad for surfboards and a shorter but bulkier man beside him with neat dark hair and eyes that looked like obsidian pools.

Caspian sighed, "This is my Beta Griffen," He motioned to the darker one, "And my Gamma, Holden," The blonde nodded and flashed me a smile.

The darker one, Griffen nodded and me in a way that almost mimicked a bow. Caspian sighed behind me.

"They were just leaving,"

"Actually-" Holden started.

"I'm Willa," I smiled at them, trying to ease some tension I felt from Caspian.

"Finally, someone with manners," Holden smiled giving his Alpha a glare.

"It's a pleasure to meet you finally," Griffen looked at me but didn't smile.

"He does that," Holden winced at Griffen's direction, "Don't take it personally, he just doesn't do that whole smiling thing very often. Actually, I have to do it for the whole

group. My jaw is exhausted after one meeting," Holden rubbed his jaw and Griffen gave him a deadpan look.

"I was actually leaving," I stood up looking back at Caspien.

"How about no one leaves and everyone stays," Caspien sighed but didn't take his eyes off me.

"Works for me," Holden took the seat next to me and Griffen stood behind us.

"Do you want my seat?" I asked him, I was quite literally in the middle of their meeting now.

His eyes widened slightly, "No, of course not."

"He likes standing," Holden winked at me, "Just in case an invisible threat comes through the door,"

"What about you?" I asked him.

"Eh," He crossed his hands behind his head and leaned back, "I like to believe I'll be lucky. Too much stress to worry about all that, bad for the frown lines."

Caspien pinched the bridge of his nose, "Holden is my dad's Gamma's son, he inherited the title, he wasn't chosen," He explained giving Holden a look.

"Ah nepotism baby," I remarked earning me a laugh from not just Caspien but Griffen as well.

"So what can I do for you gentlemen since you've barged in here?"

"The new patrols aren't working out as well as we thought. There have been some problems within the groups even though they have been assigned rank." Griffen

stated.

"Within *our* groups?" Caspien specified.

"Yes,"

Caspien turned his gaze to me, "We're working with another Alpha, not in our jurisdiction that borders one side of our pack. It's become a bit messy, mostly because of the other Alpha's incompetence," He filled me in, "Our specialized patrols groups are trained in units based on their skill sets from an early age. They live and train together to become expertly trained units."

"Some of the units have become pretty tight-knit, almost too tight-knit, and aren't used to working well with others." Griffen went on from behind me.

I guess that was one way to do it if you had the resources that their pack did. Blue Ridge just had a small band of warriors, I don't think we had enough to even think about one special unit or whatever they were called.

"Do you need me to go down there and straighten them out or can you?" Caspien turned his attention to Griffen.

"I can, I just wanted to give you the report and let you know." Griffen pushed a folder over to Caspien, who immediately opened it and flipped through the pages.

"I'm sorry, I really should be going, I don't want to intrude on your meeting. This is obviously pack business and I want you to be able to speak freely," I stood up.

"Even though you're not *officially* part of the pack, you can hear this," Caspien looked in my direction, "If your

comfortable, I want you to stay."

I sat back down. Even when I was going to be Blue Ridge's Luna, when Nolan was in a meeting with his dad or his future Beta and Gamma I was expected to leave them to it. His mother caught me sitting in on a meeting once in the beginning and scolded me for getting in the way.

"Are you sure? I'm not going to be upset if that's what you're worried about," I smiled at him.

"I like her," Holden cut in.

"I would love your insights in the future if you're okay with that. Unofficially of course," He gave me a knowing smile and I nodded settling back into the chair as they continued talking.

"It's always Ray's group, they don't work well with others," Griffen's voice came from behind me again, "I might move him back to regular patrols if he can't play nice."

"You're not solving the problem long-term," I surprised myself by saying.

"Go on," Caspien tilted his head towards me.

"I obviously don't know the dynamics, or much about fighting honestly," I shook my head, "I had to give up training when I was studying to become a Luna." I noticed them all staring between each other.

"An outsider's opinion can be beneficial," Griffen said, taking a step forward to the side of Caspien's desk so I could see him too, "Not saying you're an outsider, just a fresh perspective," He added quickly.

"I'm just saying that having a group that you can rely on seems great, team building and all that jazz," I smiled at them, "But if they're only used to working within those units then what happens if they have to work outside of them?"

"They don't usually have to," Griffen responded and I nodded.

"That's great, but what happens if a problem arises from outside the pack?" Griffen shifted towards me and I had to look away from his dark stare, "What happens when they turn to the person next to them in a battle and they aren't part of their unit? What if they're fighting alongside someone who they don't understand their style, or have memorized their weaknesses and can fill in the gaps?" I shrugged, "I can't help but wonder what would happen if the units had to fight together. I doubt the problems they're facing now would disappear just because there was a common threat."

"Go on," Griffen was studying me now, but his face didn't hold any judgment.

"Maybe you could have them train with other units, or swap some or all of them around. Not forever, but they've gotten used to working with the people around them. That's great, but it could make them complacent. When's the last time those in these special teams really had to challenge themselves within their units?" I looked toward Caspien and Griffen, both of them were silent, and I felt like more of an idiot than I did when I waltzed in here.

"Partial rotation," Griffen's brows furrowed.

"How long would that take to implement?" Caspien asked Griffen.

"Depending on the scale of it, not long. A week or two tops."

"We could start with a few, and see how it goes, try different approaches before we do it on a larger scale," Holden added, I looked at him and he was rubbing his chin as if contemplating something, still looking like a damn Hollister Model.

"Let's start with the ones on the border with the rogues. I want them pulled and switched out tonight. Tomorrow they start mingling. Do you have enough time to start on a program?"

Griffen nodded, "Holden come with me,"

"Where are we going?" Holden complained but stood up and started to follow him out.

"We have to work on this and I miss my mate, so we're working from home, my home." Holden sighed and turned around sketching a bow to both of us, "Your majesties, it was a pleasure,"

"Thank you for your insight, Lun- Willa. Willa," He repeated, and I felt my cheeks flush at the almost mention of the title, "I'll keep you both posted on the first phase."

"It was great meeting you both, thank you for letting me intrude," Griffen nodded at Caspien and turned on his heel.

I felt, I don't know, I felt good. Validated, seen, all of the things that I thought becoming a Luna would be, until I was actually in my Luna training.

"Are you expecting to bring us a war, Ms. Balfour?" His smile was wicked but bright.

I shrugged, "Let me settle in first and then I can see what I can muster for you,"

"You are f.ucking brilliant, Willa." He shook his head with nothing but admiration in his eyes.



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