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HUNTER

“Idon’t want to talk about it.” I snatched my clothes out of the sand and shook them.

Giselle shouldn’t have shown up. She knew that she would get her due soon enough. I didn’t get why she had to poke her damned nose into my business and ruin what little I had left. The whole point of the contract was that I would be able to enjoy a bit of happiness before I died.

Yet, Giselle seemed determined to rip it out of my hands.

And now Audra stared at the back of my head like she could open it and read the secrets I kept locked inside. Giselle had outed a few of Audra’s secrets, but I knew to be kind enough to leave the mysteries alone.

No matter how badly I wanted to know.

I stole a glance at Audra and considered everything Giselle had given away. It seemed that Audra was powerful, strong enough to be considered a danger to everyone. Though, I often thought that of myself, too.

Earlier I’d learned that Audra was old, possibly immortal.

Despite everything, a grin reached my face.

Audra cocked her head like a curious animal. Her hair had grown all the way down to her ankles while talking to Giselle. It made her look divine. Somewhere, there was a shrine to her that no one visited anymore. Perhaps it would be overgrown and crumbling and beautiful just like her.

“What are you smiling for?”

“I’ve never been against older women. They usually know what they want, and their bodies are always the softest.” My beast growled with hunger as I thought of lying with Audra.

Her nose wrinkled, and I knew I’d fucked up.

“I’m not saying you’re fat,” I said, trying to backpedal best I could. “I’m just saying the MILF thing is kind of hot.”

No, that wasn't the right thing to say. I was blathering again, stammering over my words while I broke what I was trying to fix.

She turned away, her hair falling like a veil over her features. I wanted to pull the curtain back and see her face again, but I knew she probably didn't want to be touched right now. There was no way she would want me near her after I called her an old MILF.

Today just was not going the way I'd wanted it to. I'd come out here to enjoy the last of my time with Audra. Instead, Giselle had driven a wedge between us.

"You know I don't care who you used to be, right?" I said.

Audra winced as if I'd struck her.

What could I do? Nothing I said seemed to be right.

I took a half step back and hesitated. My beast snarled and told me to go to her. I could take her in my arms and hold her until the pain went away. But the problem was that *I* was the source of her pain. As much as it bothered me, I couldn't make this right.

"I think...I think I need some alone time." Audra turned away from me. "Don't worry about driving me back to town. I can find my own way back."

I gaped at her. "The drive out here took about two hours! I can't let you walk back."

Audra didn't answer. She tucked her hair behind her ear and walked away, leaving me alone on the beach.

So much for my day off.

Audra

I wanted Hunter.

Every word he said made me want him even more. His goofy demeanor and accepting ideals were so endearing that my heart ached with a need I'd never felt before in my life.

But his days were limited.

I couldn't fall for him. If I did, everything would unravel. I'd rather endure a millennia in a stone prison than live with the heartache of a lost lover. It was the one thing I'd avoided in all my years.

No man or woman had ever had the chance to break my heart because I knew that I could not withstand it. I was not cruel or selfish like my sisters. If anything, I was too kind and loving. They always said it would be my downfall.

Apparently, they'd been right.

My demon came forward and offered a reprieve. For once, I took it. I could not count the number of years it'd been since I'd last let the nine-tailed fox out, but I needed her today. I needed to embody the demoness that I'd been holding back if only so that I could stop feeling for a little while.

When I changed forms, I did not bend and break like a shifter. My body didn't twist itself into something new. The metamorphosis was quite different.

Spirit fire washed over me. It burned away my body. Flesh vanished and spirit came forward. Glowing pink and white paws touched the ground. This time, my form stayed small. While I could manifest larger than life, I remained around the size of your average wolf shifter this time.

The glow of my form illuminated the trees of this sparse woodland. Glimmering petals drifted from my tail like falling stars drifting out of the night sky. I lifted my head and savored the ocean wind to my right. There was no shrine for me to sleep upon, but a flat expanse of rock that looked out over the ocean was good enough for now.

Later, I would rise, hunt down Giselle, and devour her with one bite. She'd been right to warn Hunter that I could be a danger. However, I was only a danger to her. She and everything she loved would fall to ruin under my spirit fire.

I would make sure of it.