

Forever in the Past and Forever in the Future Chapter 99

Chapter 99

Delilah and I meet with the bakery managers in the afternoon and make sure they understand all of their responsibilities, give them back up contact information, and reassure them we trust them completely. It's the first time we are both going to be gone at the same time, so we do our best to hide our nerves and give them as much encouragement as possible. We help prep dry ingredients for a couple hours so there will be less work for them to do without us there.

Marco holds the back door open for us when we are ready to leave. Bronx's midnight blue Aston Martin Superleggera is idling in the alley. Bronx tinted the windows dark enough that I can't see him inside, but I can't imagine him letting anyone else drive it. I look down the alley and don't see any of the sedan's the guards usually drive, except the one Marco drove us to the bakery in. Bronx's car only has two seats. He had to have it specially made because he is so tall. There's definitely no room for guards.

"He said it's a surprise and no guards tonight," Marco shrugs, feigning innocence.

"You knew? Delilah? Are you in on this too?" I put my hands on my hips.

"Je ne sais pas de quoi vous parlez [I don't know what you are talking about]," she shrugs as well, but doesn't feign innocence nearly as well as Marco. Probably because of the light blue color in her eyes.

I look down and realize I'm wearing leggings, a black zip-up hoodie with flour streaks where the apron didn't completely cover me, and a purple t-shirt with the bakery logo on it. I feel my face flush, knowing I'm about to get in a car that costs more than most people's homes, looking like this. Delilah licks her thumb and wipes some sugar off the side of my face, and helps me fix my ponytail.

"You two are traitors," I growl a little at them when Bronx steps out of the car looking drop dead gorgeous in a dark gray suit with a white shirt. He walks over to the back door of the bakery and takes my hand, giving it a little kiss. The little sparks from his lips touching my hand make my face feel hot. I breathe out a deep breath, feeling self-conscious with Bronx giving me this type of attention in front of Marco and Delilah.

"Don't worry, boss, I'll have her home by midnight," he winks at Marco before leading me to the passenger side of his car and opening the door for me.

He gets in the driver side and leans over, putting my seatbelt on for me, "Bronx, where are we going? I'm dressed for work, not to go anywhere I need to be dressed up." °

He takes my hand and kisses it again and gives me a sexy smile, "Don't worry, Baby. You don't need to be dressed up. I just have a little surprise for you, not to mention, I wanted to spend some time with you."

He revs the engine and slowly makes his way out of the alley, "If you're worried about what I thought about your outfit, you haven't seen how many photographers are out front today. They caught wind I was on my way here." "Oh, crap," I take a second to decide. If I try to hide my face, stories will come out that there is some reason for me to hide. If I accept my fate and let them take my picture with no mind, they might say that I'm not feeling well, but they may just say I'm too comfortable around my husband and I need to try harder if I don't want to lose him. Right? I choose to accept my fate. I wiggle out of the dirty hoodie and shove it onto the floor. As Bronx pulls out of the alley, dozens of flashes go off in front of us. I realize as I squint at the lights that most of them are being directed toward Bronx, not me.

"Bronx, is this the first time you've been in the human world without an eyepatch on?" I ask through my teeth, giving a big grin for the cameras as the car crawls forward. Bronx goes as slowly as possible, trying to avoid hitting anyone who's leaning over the car to take pictures.

"Yeah, why do you- oh. Right. We, uh, we need to come up with some sort of alibi," he looks at me with a smirk, "Miracle recovery?"

"Experimental surgery?" I raise my eyebrows.

"How about a prosthetic eye?" He sticks his bottom lip out at the idea.

"Yeah, that's probably more believable. Otherwise they are going to post stories about you stealing one of Lenora's eyeballs or something as equally ridiculous," I nod in agreement. "Agreed. You wanna talk to them real quick? It's the only way they're going to let us through. Besides, they all like you," he blinks hard at the flashes still going off.

I resist rolling my eyes at him and roll down the window partway.

"Hi guys! Can you let us through, please?" I ask in a pleading voice, giving them my best smile.

"Kas, where you two love birds headed?" "Where are your guards?" "Is it date night?" "Do you have an appointment?" They all speak at once.

"Yeah, a surprise date night," I look at Bronx with a smile. He squeezes my hand and smiles back at me.

"Mister Mason, where's your eye patch?" One photographer finally asks. Bronx points below his fresh eye, "Prosthetic eye. Looks real, doesn't it?" "Yes, sir. It sure does." "Who is your doctor?" "What company made it for you?" "Kas, do you like his new look?" The photographers all start speaking at the same time again.

"Okay guys, please let us through. You can get pics of us on the red carpetina couple of weeks in Greece. We are going to the Santoro Enterprises charity event," I ignore their questions and give a little wave before closing the window. Satisfied with the prospect of getting pictures of us at a formal event, the sea of photographers parts and we can drive away.

"You're so good at that," he says, kissing my hand again.

"Thank you. Good enough to be told where the heck we are going?"

"Oh, you're not that good, Mrs. Mason," he winks at me as he gets on the highway and slams on the accelerator so no one can follow us.

I watch the passing landscape as he drives, the beautiful mountains painted with tree leaves turning the distinctive colors of autumn. My mind wanders as I think about the trees at the end of this cycle of their life, getting ready for a long winter's sleep before they are reborn in the spring.

The thoughts lead to my sisters in a similar phase. Preparing for the end of this life to be born anew. Preparing to end their reign as powerful leaders caring for others, only to become vulnerable children who need protection themselves. I consider my role among these women and how my actions have affected their lives in the past and will continue in the future. I now understand the reasons for my past actions, but were they my decisions to make? The implications have lasted and will continue to last for centuries.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Bronx quietly pulls my attention, giving me a quick look, then turning his eyes back to the road. I realize my cheeks are wet with tears and quickly wipe them away. "Bronx, you think I'm a good person, right? Like, you know I would never hurt anybody on purpose, regardless of my abilities or not. Right?" I lace my fingers together and watch my hands. My breath gets heavier as I try to compose myself, but my voice wavers when I speak, "I-I want to be a good mom to Cora. I mean, I know I'm not her actual mother, but I kind of am. It's important to me to just be a good example for her. I don't want her to grow up thinking that...I-I don't know..."

I look up and realize Bronx has pulled over on the side of the highway. I can't read his expression. He taps the steering wheel with his fingers a few times, then gets out of the car and comes over to my side. He opens my door and squats on the ground next to me. I lift my arms slightly when he leans in to unbuckle my seatbelt. He puts his hands on my hips and gently turns me to face him.

"Kas, I have never met a more caring, compassionate werewolf in my life. I don't care about the name of your faction or what it has represented in the past. All I care about is who you are now and you are perfect. I'm not just saying that because I'm your mate. I'm saying that because I don't think you realize the effect you have on the people around you. You are such a good person, that you make the people around you better people too."

"You mean because of my abilities?" I sniffle, wiping the tears from my eyes.

“Actually, I think it’s the oatmeal chocolate chip cookies,” he smirks.

Bronx cracks jokes so rarely that I can’t help but laugh. Unfortunately, letting myself laugh lets other emotions go, too. Tears stream down my face while I confess how I really feel, “Bronx, I know I have no control over it, but I’m scared of the future. What if I can’t be there for Cora? Like, the way she needs me until she’s old enough to be on her own. All my lives have been so short. W-what if I die before-I mean-”

“Kas, it’s all going to be okay. You just need to have faith. In the Moon Goddess, yourself, and even the people around you. We are all supporting you and nothing will change. Especially after Cora is reborn. She will be a welcome part of our pack until she is ready to find Dante and go out on her own,” he leans forward and wraps his arms around my waist, bringing his face so much closer to mine. I look at how beautiful his eyes are as he admires me and how his olive skin tone creates shadows in the perfect places around his face to make him look so handsome.

“If there is anything that prevents you from being there, just know that she won’t be on her own. I promise. There will always be wolves in our pack who are there for her. Regardless of what the future holds for us,” he caresses my face, letting our mate bond comfort me along with his words, “I don’t care how many premonitions you have. We don’t truly know what the future holds for us. We just have to live our lives to the fullest and enjoy the time we have left.”

He always knows just what to say. I throw my arms around his neck and hug him tightly, “Thank you, Bronx. I love you.”

“I love you too, Kas. Forever,” he murmurs in my ear. He pulls me tightly against him and rubs my back until I kiss his cheek and let him go, “Ready to go now?”

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going?”

“Nice try, but nope,” he puts my seatbelt on, then goes around to the driver’s side, and pulls back out onto the highway.

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Chapter 100 Half an hour later, we exit the highway and drive another twenty minutes down a country road. Eventually, we pull up to a little restaurant that has a handmade sign that says “Jimmy’s BBQ” with a silhouette of a hog under it.

There are a few other cars in the parking lot, but it doesn’t look like a place that ever gets too busy.

“You got dressed like that to eat barbeque?” I ask waving at his suit.

He just smiles as he gets out of the car and jogs over to my side to open the door for me, "You're going to love this place. I promise."

A short, plump woman in jeans and an oversized blue sweater greets us, "Bronx! Long time no see, darlin'. This must be that adorable wife we see in the papers."

"Hi Shelly. Yeah, this is Kas. I thought it was about time to bring her to my secret spot," he smiles and gives the woman a big hug. I take a deep breath and stop myself from growling at the interaction. There is a hint of a werewolf's scent in the air, but she is definitely human.

"It's nice to meet you, Kas," Shelly reaches her hand out and I shake it, "You must be a pretty special young lady to win this grump's heart."

"It's nice to meet you too, Shelly." I say cordially. She is so friendly, it's difficult not to like her. I look at Bronx, "He can be a grump, can't he? You're right. I must be pretty special to put up with him."

"Ha! She's got a sense of humor, too. Come on you two, your usual table is right where you left it, Bronx," she smiles as she leads us to a booth at the back of the restaurant. Once we have seated, she lets us know she is going to get us some fresh iced tea and Bronx's usual order, then walks away.

"Your 'secret spot'?" I look at Bronx with genuine curiosity.

"Yeah, when things were really bad for Saint and I, he would go for runs with no destination in mind and we would end up all over the place. We ended up here one day. Shelly is human, but her husband is a hybrid. Werebear, werewolf. His werebear side is more dominant, so he tends to be a loner, but he makes a mean smoked trout. How they ended up as mates, I don't know, but they are madly in love. More importantly, they didn't know or give a shit who I was. They let me borrow some clothes and fed me until I was stuffed. They treated me so well, even though I was a stranger to them," he stops and looks around at the rustic decorations on the wall. I look around too. There are taxidermied animal heads, old photographs, and vintage tin signs screwed into the walls. It is very comfortable and quaint. The smell of smoked meat is like a delicious perfume.

"Shelly told me they help wandering werebears and the occasional errant wolf all the time. I told them I had just shifted, so I didn't have any money. They didn't care. They let me bus tables to pay for whatever I ate. Coming here was one of the first times I was treated just like a regular person. They just wanted to make sure I was okay. I came back a week later and paid them back every penny and more. They keep my table open in gratitude. I've brought Milo here once. I've never even brought Reggie."

He looks at his fingernails for a moment then gives me a guilty look, "I would even come here on Sundays sometimes when I was supposed to be in the apartment with you. I wasn't always out in the woods drinking and smoking. I mean, a lot of the times I was, but sometimes when I wanted to be alone, I would come here."

"How come you've never told me about any of this?" I place my chin in my hand and give him time to answer.

"I-I guess I wasn't ready. We were talking about it during my last therapy session and realized I want to share more places like this with you. I mean, most of them are just spots in the woods or at the tops of mountains, but you know, I figured start with one that will at least get us a dinner worthy of your culinary expertise," he confesses. Shelly comes back with a giant tray filled with plates of various barbecued meats. She piles the plates on the table and even pulls up the table beside the booth for the platters that don't fit. It all smells so good. I can feel my mouth watering.

"I hope you're hungry, Kas," Shelly quips with a giggle.

"Shelly, I'm never not hungry," I respond, eyeing a plate full of delicious looking rack of ribs.

"Well, just one more reason you're a perfect match for this guy. Ha ha!

Bronx, let me know if you need anything else, hon. I'll leave you two to it," Shelly says as she walks away, to greet a group that walked in the front door.

"Before you dig in," Bronx puts his hand up, "I have something for you."

I sit back against the bench seat. He knows I hate when he buys things for me 'Just because', "Bronx-

"This isn't just a gift, Kas," he pulls out a jewelry box and hands it to me, "It's not what it looks like."

I glare at him as I open the box to see a white gold necklace with a beautiful pendant that looks like a cluster of diamonds. I snap the lid closed and hand the box back to him, "Bronx, no. Take it back. No. I don't want it."

"Hear me out, please," he puts his hand up and presses the box toward me, "The tech guys at MasonCo have been working on a new technology. After you disappeared, I had them speed up development. Once James took on his new role, he helped them refine the requirements, and they created this for you."

I look at the necklace again and hold up the box, "So you're telling me there aren't thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds on this necklace?"

"Oh, no, I didn't say that. There is," he smirks while I roll my eyes and place the box on the table, "but there are also two very important safety features. The pendant has a microscopic tracker that's undetectable to anyone's equipment. It won't set off any alarms or scanners. If something happens and we need to find you, the pendant will lead us right to you. Anywhere in the world." I look at the necklace again. It just looks like a necklace. I could probably wear it all the time and not draw too much attention, "What's the other safety feature?"

"There is a silent alarm in the clasp. If you take it off, Marco, James, and I all get a text notification. If you're in trouble, we can check the tracker location and come find you," Bronx explains.

"So, like a luxury MasonCo ankle monitor?" I say dryly, holding the box away from me. The idea of being perpetually tracked is not appealing in any way, especially if I decide I want to spend time with any the Mavri Magea. "Kas, please. You know it's not like that. I don't know how else to keep you safe. You literally disappeared out of my arms during a grappling match," he looks at me desperately while he explains, "I have my best guys following you at all times, people monitoring threats against both of us, and now we've added a bunch of disgruntled goddesses in the mix. It is just a precaution, Baby. I can't lose you again. I just... I can't. We won't track you unless you're unexpectedly missing or the alarm on the clasp goes off letting us know you need help."

I open the box one more time and look at the necklace. If I argue about it too much, he is going to get suspicious. I sigh and take it out of the box, putting it around my neck, "It's not too over the top to wear everyday?"

"Maybe for someone else, but not for Bronx Mason's wife," he gives me a lopsided smile as he watches me latch the clasp on the back of my neck, "It's perfect. Now here, start with some brisket, it's the best."

I purse my lips in displeasure at the thought of wearing a glorified dog collar, but the smell of the brisket he places in front of me pushes the thought to the side long enough for me to enjoy dinner. I can figure out how to slip out of it some other time.