

Chapter 31

Lily

Dimitri landed on top of me, his hand around my throat. I pushed him off, groaning.

"Where are you today? That's the tenth time I've taken you down."

I scowled at him. "I'm just not in the mood."

It was just us today. Karla was on border patrol, and I was silently grateful. She'd have my head if she saw how badly I was slacking off this morning. I couldn't focus on anything it seemed. Nightmares had invaded my mind all night, making me feel like I hadn't slept at all. My subconscious kept dredging up my past, making me relive it almost every night. I was exhausted from the effort of trying to deal with it.

Dimitri pursed his lips. "You want to talk about it?"

I shook my head.

He sat next to me. "If you're not up for training, what do you want to do?"

"I-I don't know."

"Why don't we go somewhere?"

"You mean, a run?"

"No. You and me, why don't we go do something together?"

I stared at him, unblinking. Did he just... ask me out?

"You want to do something."

"Yes."

"With me. Together." I clarified.

"Yes."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "Why not?"

I could voice a hundred reasons to that. The only times we spent together, ever, were training and letting our wolves out. We were speaking more, I guess, and considerably more civil with each other. But going out together? Was this even Dimitri next to me?

"Where?" I asked.

"Where would you like to go?"

Was he being considerate? Had this man killed my mate and taken his place?

"I don't know any places here. I haven't gone out much."

He thought for a minute. "I know somewhere. Let's go." He stood and held his hand out to me. I stared at it, confused.

"You're serious about this?"

"Do I look like I'm joking?"

Hesitantly, I took his hand and he pulled me up. The whole time I followed him back to the packhouse, I searched for any giveaways to say this guy wasn't Dimitri Varlos. He looked like him, and his scent was the same. Perhaps I was still in bed, dreaming? I wouldn't consider this a nightmare, not yet. I looked around, waiting for monsters to come from the forest. Something to prove I wasn't awake.

He led me to a red mustang parked in the drive. Pulling out a set of keys, he unlocked the car, motioning for me to get in.

"Uhm, shouldn't I change first?" I was having Deja vu. This was like our first encounter, right after our wedding.

"You don't have to, not where we're going."

That response wasn't like the first time. He almost sounded.... nice?

I got in the car, buckling my seatbelt. We drove for about thirty minutes and I couldn't stop starrng at him; He turned on the radio, drumming his fingers along with the music, and I think I was slowly going into shock.

"Why are you staring at me?"

"Who are you?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, who are you and what have you done with the real Dimitri?"

He smirked and glanced at me as he turned a corner.

"I'm right here Lily. You didn't want to train, and I don't want to go to do paperwork. This is me trying to do something nice, for once. Can you just go with it?"

"I'm not sure. I'm still deciding if this is real or not."

"Well, if you decide it's not, then stop thinking about it and just have some fun with me. Okay?"

Fun? He knew how to have fun? Yeah, this totally wasn't real.

"Sure..."

"Good, because we're here."

He turned off the ignition, and I finally looked around. Oh, my Goddess.

"You brought me to the beach?"

"I did."

Sand dunes rose in front of us, a small sand covered walkway cutting through. I could hear waves crashing distantly and looked up to see gulls flying overhead. The air smelled sweet and fresh, with a hint of the salty

ocean. I'd dreamed of being able to come here, a small wish that was never granted. I unbuckled my seatbelt in a hurry, eager to see what I'd missed out on. Wither or not this was real, I didn't care anymore.

Dimitri followed me as I made my way. I stopped at the end of the path, taking it all in. The sun shining down on the sand, the water. The white tips of the waves before they met the sand. Patches of light green seaweed were dotted near the shore, contrasting with the unbelievably blue water. I could make out a few boats far off, possibly people out fishing. I quickly discarded my shoes and socks and stepped onto the sand, surprised by how warm it was. The grains dipped between my toes as my feet sank in, and I loved the feeling.

Grinning, I grabbed Dimitri's hand, pulling him with me. The sparks erupted at our contact, but for once, I didn't ignore them. It only made this experience better. I walked straight to the water, looking in to see small fish swimming around near the shore. Various types of shells were settled in the sand below the water as well, glistening between waves.

There were so many things I wanted to do; I couldn't pick just one. So, I decided to start with the basic. I turned to Dimitri.

"You're going to build a sandcastle with me. Right now."

"Am I?"

"Yes. Let's go."

We settled down with the sun on our backs, and got to work. It wasn't the best; in fact, it wasn't even great. Dimitri was my go-to guy for running to the water's edge to get the finely packed sand. Together, we constructed an oddly shaped, slightly slanting sandcastle. I wiped my hands together, satisfied with it all the same.

"What now?" He asked.

"Now... we destroy it."

He chuckled, but he helped me kick our creation until there was nothing left. I giggled the whole time.

"Come with me." I took his hand and let him pull me this time. We walked past the many sand dunes to an area where the beach was less sand and more rock. A jagged cliff loomed over us, casting a shadow onto the water. Dimitri led me around the bottom of the cliff to a space where the rocks flattened out into a large open circle. It was filled with small and big pools of water, and when he stopped beside one, I gasped.

Inside was what seemed to be a mini-ocean. Tiny fish swam around and around, and starfish clung to the rocks. A crab peered at me, seemingly confused. Barnacles covered the sides and bottom, and bright, colorful anemones swayed back and forth. I walked to the next pool, astounded that so much life could fit in such a tiny amount of water.

"What are these?" I asked Dimitri.

"They're called tide pools. They're pretty, huh?"

"They're beautiful!"

Kneeling down, I examined the little wildlife zoo in front of me more carefully. It was incredible. Dimitri knelt beside me and pointed.

"See that there?"

He pointed to an odd slug looking thing.

"Is that some kind of plant?"

"It's a sea cucumber."

"Seriously? It looks nothing like a cucumber!"

He chuckled. "I didn't name it; I just know what it is. Dried sea cucumbers are actually a delicacy in many Asian cultures."

I wrinkled my nose. "You know this because you've had it?"

"I have. It's not as good as it's made out to be, in my opinion."

"Ew."

"I try everything once. But you're right, it was pretty gross."

I laughed at the look on his face. We stayed and examined each pool, Dimitri pointing out different creatures and giving interesting details about them. He educated me on how you should never pick up a starfish, as it could cause them to suffocate, and how to handle a hermit crab. I picked up various shells that had washed up on the rocks, which ended up in Dimitri's pockets since I was wearing leggings.

Once we got back to the main beach, I put them in my shoes so I wouldn't lose them.

"Swimming?!" I asked him excitedly.

"No point in coming to the beach if you're not going into the water, right?"

"I don't know about that. It's been pretty amazing so far."

He smiled and my breath caught.

"Race you?" I suggested.

"You're on."

I took off towards the water with him on my heels. I think he let me win, but I didn't care. I jumped into the water, relishing in the coolness on my skin. I waded in until it was just above my waist, unsure about going further. Where did it drop off?

"Hey, where does the water-" I was interrupted by a splash of water to my face. "Hey!"

Dimitri grinned at me, and I immediately splashed him back. "You're an ass!" I laughed.

"Just trying to give you the full beach experience!"

I chased him around and it didn't take long until we were both soaked and laughing like kids. It was a side of him I'd never seen, but would really

like to see more often. He ducked underwater and out of my sight, only to appear right in front of me. I knocked water into his face and he coughed.

"That's what you get for cheating." I laughed.

"Come here you." His arms snaked around my waist as he lifted me up, flushing my body against his. My arms went around his neck for something to hold onto, bringing our faces very close together. My heart picked up speed as we looked at each other, the waves moving around our bodies effortlessly.

"Did you have fun today?"

"The most. Thank you, so much, for bringing me here. It's was the best."

"You're welcome. I think I needed it too, to be honest. But it was more for you."

He tucked a stray piece of hair behind my ear, his hand lingering on my cheek. Unconsciously, I leaned into his touch. He looked into my eyes, and all I wanted was for him to kiss me. His gaze dropped to my lips, his eyes darkening a little. But then he let me go. Disappointment flooded through me, but I kept my face neutral.

"We should head home. I still have that paperwork to do."

"Okay."

We left the water and grabbed our stuff. I tried not feel bad, because at the end of the day, this was still one of the best days of my life. And I got it share it with my mate, which somehow made it better. So, as we drove back home, I leaned my head against the window, a light smile on my face. I would never forget today.