

The Unclaimed Human Luna

Chapter 51

Conner POV

Conner and his warriors arrived and were greeted by Alpha Thomas and his Unit, were shown to a place for them all to rest and get food. They'd gone in human form, but had run pretty much the entire way, kept themselves to the woods and away from roads where possible.

They kept their eyes peeled for any rogues, saw only one here or there, mangy looking critters with wounds all over and matted fur, dispatched them, had to, in case they were Victor's and made to look like that, to throw anyone off, in letting them go. Sent up a quick prayer with each one that was dispatched, to the Moon goddess herself, to give them a better life in their next life and to apologise if they were not part of Victor's army.

He didn't much like killing other wolves that didn't need it, though he would protect his pack fiercely against incoming rogues. But out here, if they saw one in passing, he just left them alone normally, if they weren't hurting anyone, he left them to their lives. Who knew why they went rogue? There could be any number of reasons.

They set up their own camping gear. There wasn't room here for as many wolves as were all coming, and Alpha Thomas told him he had three other packs coming to help with the defence. His place was more like luxury camping than a real pack, but the man had been a gypsy once and this was all he needed. How he and his pack liked it to be.

Once they'd found that place that was special to them, they had built themselves small comfortable places to live. It was only a pack of 300, easily defendable because it was small, but that also meant it was easy to attack as well. It was small and defenceless against anything with a larger incoming number of warriors, like his hundred that he brought here himself. He could take down the entire New Moon Pack, and then take those who were left alive back to the Wandering Moon Pack to be initiated into his pack and just claim them all.

This was not his goal, nor was it his fathers. They were a large pack and he'd only brought a third of their warriors today. He would be setting up his men to pair up with Thomas's border patrol and likely have roaming patrols out from the pack or stationary watches on any place that was thought to be a good place to sneak in from, to attack them.

He and his unit set themselves up on the southern end of the pack, and he was standing in the Alpha's office with his unit, looking at the pack map, and the current map of the lands between here and the Bloodless Moon Pack. There was a lot of territory between here and there, Victor's pack was situated in the north-eastern corner of Oregon. That man was going to have to come across the entire state of Idaho to get here.

His father was right. The man was not coming on foot, he would arrive in vehicles, but the question was, where would he opt to disembark those cars and cross the last leg of his journey on foot? They had nothing to do with Victor or his pack, they didn't know his tactics. Alpha Thomas, on the other hand, did apparently. Had a run in with him years ago before this pack settled down, lost a few she-wolves to that man, lost a lot of wolves trying to get them back, had been warned to stay the hell away, or have the rest of his pack destroyed.

They'd had to leave his she-wolves there to protect the rest of his pack. It had been ten long years now, and Victor had not come near him. Not once, he had stayed true to his word. Alpha Thomas didn't understand his reasoning for that man to come for him once more. Or at least he wasn't willing to put it into words.

Three other packs arrived during the course of the day, and the pack went from 300 to 700 in the matter of a day, and 400 of those were well trained warriors, along with their Alpha and their Units, or the Heirs to their pack. Two of them he recognised from the last mating ball here in the pack, Alpha Drake of the Blue River Pack and Alpha Bryant of the Red Wood pack. The last pack he knew nothing of, hadn't seen them before, but they strolled on in with three witches attached to the Gamma, likely the man's Mate. Alpha Rafe of the Black Forest Pack he introduced himself and then his Beta Jack. Shook both their hands.

His eyes moved to the witches and watched them as they strolled about looking at everyone, had one of them stop and stare right up at him, saw her nostrils flare and then just snort, look to her sisters, and they all laughed. It was quite rude, he thought.

"Don't take it offensively, they see a lot. Likely saw something you know nothing of yet." It was the Gamma. "If they didn't like you, you would know, I assure you."

"Good to know. Your Mates, I presume, could see the triple mark on the man, also noted it was red and not silver."

"Yes." He smiled proudly, "they are checking everyone is all?"

"For what?"

"For ill intent against their Mate. You don't want that, likely end up dead before you know it." he chuckled. "You'll likely get to see it at some point though." He saw that man turn and look at them. "They don't normally come to aid, heard the word Gypsy Wolf

come from them, and then they simply put themselves in the car.” Shook his head, “Not even I understand them most of the time. But I do love them.”

There was a massive meeting held and the new warriors were all set up to patrol much the same as his were, and then roaming bands of patrolling wolves, groups of twenty out in all directions, five from each pack and then one gypsy wolf, due to their unique ability to mind-link to anyone they so chose to. They set up roaming patrols all the way around the pack, just because Victor’s pack was west of them didn’t mean he wouldn’t come from the east, go round the long way and try to surprise them.

He noted that at least a third of the warriors were female. If they were here over the full moon, not something he wanted at all, it was possible that some of these wolves might find their mates while here for war. He was standing looking at his wolves, those that were not as of yet on patrol were all mingling and getting to know each other. Including his unit, they were out there chatting away to the un-marked wolves and she-wolves. Shook his head, even amidst the threat of war, wolves’ natural instincts were to hunt out a Mate for themselves.

He told them there would be no going and getting high down in the greenhouse, nor would there be any fraternization between them and the other wolves from other packs. They were not here to get distracted, they were allowed to sit and chat but were not here to f**k.

He not only wanted them well rested, he needed them to be battle ready at any given minute day or night for the entire time that they were there, and that was as of yet an undetermined amount of time. One of them snorted “Does that go for you, Alpha?” an Elite warrior, his cousin in fact.

“Yes, that goes for me as well. I shall lead by example, shall I?”

Half his warriors had snorted with amusement, and he’d shaken his head. It also made him realise that they all thought he was a man w***e, which up until a month ago he guessed he was. Hadn’t touched a single she-wolf since El. Was never going to either, sighed at the thought of her being back in the pack, so far away from him.

Saw Adam chuckle from where he sat. He knew Conner wasn’t about to go touching any she-wolf at all, so him leading by example was a given. His eyes wouldn’t even wander over the female population that was here. He didn’t care for anyone of them, none of them interested him or his wolf.

He turned in early, hadn’t gotten all that much sleep. A few hours at best, the minute his head hit the pillow he was out cold, slept till a boot hit him. “Stop doing that Adam.” He muttered “I might just let Atlas return the favour.”

“Up Conner, a meeting has been called.”

His eyes opened and he sat up, rubbed his chest, that bloody dull ache was back, though previously it had been because of words El said to him, he knew now it was just because she was so far away from him. Back in the pack.

‘Miss her do you?’ Adam’s amused voice rolled down the mind-link.

He looked to his Beta with a confused frown and saw him mimic Conner’s actions. ‘I see father do that, when he’s away from mother, does it more with bigger distances between them.’

He looked down at his hand and realised he needed to curb that, it was very much a Mate thing to do. Sighed, needed to keep himself in check or everyone was going to know he’d met his Mate and both Brayden and Cameron were going to question him.

Got up and sighed “Might want to kick me when I do it.” he muttered. He hadn’t known he was doing it. It was automatic, he thought.

“Mm, or Brayden is going to be on you so fast it ain’t funny. Lucky for you.” he jerked his thumb at the Gamma “He did the night patrol and is out cold right now, huh.”

Conner sighed and nodded, ran his hand through his hair and then pulled a shirt and pants on, “I’m ready.” They walked to the packhouse, and he accepted the coffee handed to him by a small petite dark-haired she-wolf. Omega, he thought to himself, thanked her and heard her voice inside his head, a very seductive. ‘Anytime alpha.’ Whipped his head around and stared right at her.

Had completely forgotten Gypsy wolves could communicate with anyone they so choose to. “No.” he shot right at her “And stay out of my head.” Saw her pout a little and then just turned and walked away.

“My apologies Conner, she’s newly gotten her wolf and is on the hunt for a good strong Mate.” Alpha Thomas chuckled a little.

“I’m not it.” He muttered.

“Ah son, the full moon is not here yet, she could be.”

He sipped his coffee and said nothing.

The day was all about strategizing, but Atlas was restless by lunch time and irritable by dinner time. Adam asked him half a dozen times if he was alright. He’d just nodded. But he had Adam call his father and check on the pack. Everything was fine, everyone was inside pack grounds and accounted for.

Though this didn't calm his wolf at all, that ache in his chest was near on constant and making him very uncomfortable. He pulled his phone out and excused himself after dinner, to text EI. "Hi EI, are you alright?"

It took several minutes to get a reply, "yes." Simple and straight forward. She'd never once answered any of his texts before, likely that was all he was going to get. But he and Atlas alike were happy to have her reply, even if it was just a simple one-word answer. She had at least answered him. Hadn't the last time he'd messaged her, he could see the entirety of his texts to her.

Just four of them, two when he'd been tracking her down, that one the other morning and this one. Wondered if he should try and make an effort, would rather talk to her but couldn't do that around here. His own wolves would hear him, they were all over the place. It would only take one of them to hear him say something nice or meaningful to the girl to have them become suspicious.

He returned to that meeting to have Adam look right at him. 'She alright?' he asked down the mind-link, still found it amusing, it seemed.

'Yes.' He sent right back, and returned his attention to the meeting.

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Chapter 52

EI POV

Her Aunt Juliana was waiting for her as she was told she would be. She was a tall slender woman, with long black hair, much like her grandma and father, she also had those same silver-grey eyes. She smiled right at her and waved, then just hugged her good and tight, "Not such a little kit now are you."

"No. It's good to see you. Thank you for helping me."

"That's perfectly alright. What is family for? Now let's get you in the car. It's a bit of a long drive."

"How long?"

"Five maybe six hours depending on traffic, but at such short notice, we couldn't get you on the flight we actually needed. Closer to home. So here I am. It was a nice drive for me though. I got in last night and stayed in a really nice hotel and did some shopping this morning. My family is going to love me." She grinned at her."

"You shopped for your family?"

"I shopped for everyone, got me a bootload of things, let's hope your suitcase fits." She chuckled, it did fit, though in the back seat. Her aunt wasn't kidding when she said she went shopping. The back of her four-wheel drive was piled high with shopping bags and boxes. El looked at her questioningly. "We don't get down here often, live up near Pisogne, I actually don't live that far from your university."

"Oh, how far?"

"Close enough for you to commute if you want, it's just over an hour each way, so if you don't want to stay on campus you don't have to, and your more than welcome to come out on weekends and school breaks."

"I didn't realise it was so close."

"You weren't looking for a university last time you were here."

"I wasn't. I don't really remember much about the drive to be honest, just hanging out with my cousins."

Aunt Juliana laughed, "They are excited to have you visit and two of them will be starting at the same university as you this year as well. Though most do duck off to Bologna, which I heard you were supposed to go to."

El nodded "My new stepfather took it upon himself to yank me from my degree to study in Utah."

She saw her aunt shake her head. "Well, here you can study anywhere you like, you might even be able to transfer in your second year to go to the university of your choice."

"That would be nice." El smiled.

"So, let's get you some food, something better than aeroplane food and we'll be off on our long drive, but that just gives me plenty of time to ask you a million questions."

"Do you know how grandma is?"

"I do, she's handling your stepfather and your mother. No problems so far. Don't you worry about Sloan." She chuckled "She bites really good and most will back off when

she's in full fight mode, and don't really know how to handle her. She's got one hell of a mean streak and protecting our kits. That is what she does no matter where she is, or where they are, for that matter."

"I'd like to call her."

"Ah, yes. Now, I did get you a new phone, but." She laughed "It's back there in amongst all that shopping. You can use mine." Pressed a button on her steering wheel and spoke her native tongue to have her car call Sloan's number.

"Is El with you?"

"I am here, grandma."

"Ah, good. All's going well on my end. I only have one question for you?"

"What's that?"

"Your stepbrother texted you, now I noticed he's sent a few before, you've never once replied to him. I sent a single reply, of 'yes.' To his question. Would that be appropriate?"

"What was the text? I don't talk to him normally." It was true she didn't talk to him. It was just s*x, always just s*x and nothing else.

"Hi El, are you alright?" Her grandma told her.

"I don't know why he would do that, and I likely wouldn't have replied at all. Just ignore him, it's what I do."

"Alright, he was the one sent after you the last time you left. Is he the one going to be coming for you again?"

"Probably, Marlo said that it was Conner and Adam's job to do that, retrieve people. So, I guess." Was not going to tell her grandma she was having s*x with him and that he had told her she was never allowed to leave, that he would hunt her down every time, or that he thought her body belonged to him. She was here to get away from that man.

"Hmm, then I guess I might interact a little with him."

"Don't bother grandma." El shook her head, "I just stay away from him. He's not there anyway, off on some company retreat for a few days is what I heard Logan state, along with like a hundred others."

There was quiet for a long time, and she could feel her aunt looking at her as well. Turned to find those eyes so much like her own right on her. Then she was speaking

fluent Italian to her sister. El only understood a few words of it. Not enough to glean what the conversation was, as they talked between themselves.

Then her grandma just sighed heavily “El, I’ll chat with you later, got to go check something out.”

“Okay grandma.”

The line clicked closed and she looked at her aunt, who smiled at her. “Ah don’t worry about it, I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“Did I just cause more trouble?”

“Hmm, unknown at this point. But really, you’re here in wonderful Italy, home where you belong. What really can any of them do now? Can’t force you onto a plane and make you go back. Nope, that would cause a massive inquest and you could just claim being kidnapped. They’ll all be arrested.” She chuckled. “So don’t concern yourself with it.”

She nodded, “Alright. I didn’t pick up much from your conversation with grandma, I really need to work on my Italian.”

“Likely haven’t spoken it in a while, huh?”

“Yeah, mum never tried to learn it and so dad always spoke English at home. I know a little, but growing up in California not many others spoke it. Or at least not many I knew.”

“That’s okay, El. You’ve got plenty of time to pick it up from all of us. We’ll all help you so you’ve got some better understanding before getting started at Bergamo.”

The food was delicious, and the drive was nice. They got to drive through lots of the countryside and her aunt talked to her about the places they were passing, and laughed a little at El’s attempts to speak some of the words back to her, there was some language lessons in that car.

They arrived at her home late in the afternoon and grandma wasn’t wrong, there were lots of small homes dotted around, and lots of people as they passed through the gates. “Now El, I hear you’ve been living inside a gated community?”

“Locked inside, I was not allowed to leave it.”

“Well, here you can come and go as you please. All the cars here have a sensor which activates the gate. So, although we are similar to that in which you just came from, we don’t enforce people to stay here. Most want to be here, some come and go of their own accord over the years. The young ones all go to school here and then off to the local high school and then,” she smiled, “Well, they may go anywhere in the world to study.”

“That’s nice.” It did sound nice.

“It is, Sloan hopped on over to America decades ago. I have a sister in Japan, and two brothers who knows where, somewhere in Asia,” she chuckled. “My eldest is here, she’ll take over this place with her husband when she’s ready, still a wee bit free-spirited. Not quite ready. My other children are all over the world. We like to wander, our people.”

“So, I can go anywhere, anytime is what you’re saying.”

“Yes, honey you can.”

El smiled. That was a really nice feeling to have, “Logan was always concerned about his company and his rivals, apparently that’s why I wasn’t allowed out.”

“Hmm, well we don’t really have rivals like that, we’re pretty laid back, my company is managed mostly from here all online, and many will go off and just live their lives. We’re quite different to other big corporations. Some of those will even let us live within them, like Sloan. Her talents come in handy for people like Logan.”

“She’ll be alright though, if Logan or Conner hunt her down, right?”

“Oh yes, don’t you worry about Sloan. She also knows quite a few people, just like Logan. He won’t want to take her on. Though I imagine once he finds out, a lot of things will happen over there. Considering who your mother is now.”

“His wife.”

“Hmm, we’ll discuss that a little later,” she smiled and pulled the car up to a lovely but grand villa, “Come now let’s get you settled in.”

Many people came from the villa to help unload the car, lots of children all over the place, running up to Juliana, talking a mile a minute and tugging at her dress a little. El didn’t understand a single word except for ‘dolci’. They were all looking for sweet treats. Loved sugar, it seemed.

It was very cute. She was shown to a room on the second floor and then brought back downstairs to help prepare a big outdoor dinner. She saw several of her cousins, who she knew from chatting online with them, over the years growing up and she helped them to set up for the big dinner. Everyone smiled at her and hugged her.

Most of them spoke English and lots of them ribbed her about her lack of Italian, but she was going to pick it up quickly, she thought, and by the time dinner was ready she was sitting and was laughing, felt like she fit in here. It was really nice to be here, with her father’s side of the family. She’d been given her bank card and accounts by her aunt Juliana and that phone that was buried in amongst all the shopping had finally turned up, and it already had her grandma’s number in it.

Several of her cousins put their numbers in it as well. It was a very lively dinner with lots of people, the children were up and gone off to play the moment dinner was over, and she couldn't help but smile. For the first time in a long time, she felt like she was home. That constant ache she'd had the whole time in Utah was almost gone right this minute.

El turned in by nine, tired from her long flight and her long drive. Took a long hot bath and then just crawled into her bed, to sleep. She was finally here where she was supposed to be. It was in the very room her father had used when he was here. Something her Aunt told her when she'd shown her to the room, there were even a few pictures of him and her grandma in the room. Though there were no pictures of her grandpa, she'd never seen pictures of that man. Grandma never talked about him either and neither had her father. Kind of a taboo subject, she thought. Or perhaps there was just nothing to tell, maybe they had just gotten together and it hadn't worked out. Grandma found herself pregnant and alone. Who knew? She wasn't about to go bring it up. It was a long time ago and if she'd not heard the tale by now, she likely wasn't going to.

Though a part of her was now curious, she could see some of these photos were taken here, and she knew her dad had grown up here, till he was like 13 and then he and his mother had moved to America. He'd come back here to study, but then met her mother on a trip to visit his mother, and that had been it. Told her he'd been smitten by Brittney and just couldn't see himself with anyone else.

They'd been married within a year, but it had taken a few years for her to come along, and no other children. Not for lack of trying, he'd always chuckle. Though he'd never seemed all that concerned about it, there was no blame ever laid on either of them, she'd been told once. We will have what we are meant to have.

She was all they were meant to have, apparently. Their life had been good, she'd grown up happy with a loving mum and dad, it had all been nice until he'd died, accidentally shot by a hunter out in the woods while he'd been working on some project. And now he just wasn't here anymore, and life had fallen apart for her.

She reached out and touched his photo, smiled at it and picked it up to look at it, her eyes moved to the background and there were foxes off behind them. Blinked at that, maybe this was where their love of foxes had started. Smiled at the thought of seeing some here just like he had. Yawned to herself and settled down to sleep finally.

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Chapter 53

Conner POV

He was woken from sleep barely three hours after going to sleep, and everyone was up and on the move. He could hear the sounds of fighting, he was gone from the tent he was sleeping in, as was Adam, hot on his heels.

Sounds of battle were coming from the west and the east. A double-sided attack on this small pack. He linked instantly to all his wolves and any that were asleep were now up and awake and on the move, each had their own designated area to protect.

He and Adam, however, were on the way to the packhouse, as were many women and children. Thankfully, the building wasn't all that large, but it also didn't have a lockdown mode. So all the Alpha's and their units were here. To protect them, there was a full double ring of warriors here around the building.

The only person he didn't see was the Gamma, Allan from the Black Forest Pack. He was the only one not going to be here, was out there in the woods fighting, it seemed. Though that in itself was a curiosity, his Mates were all here, and to his surprise, standing with a particular young girl, they were all standing in a circle around her, hands held.

Something else was going on here, it seemed. It looked to him that Victor was in fact likely coming for this girl herself. She was just an omega, from what he could tell, but likely that was not the case by the way she was being protected. Which meant Alpha Rafe and his whole pack knew this pack very well. Those witches had come here to protect the girl. She couldn't have been more than 14 or 15 by the look of her.

"What the f**k is that?" He heard Adam's shocked voice, grabbed his attention and Conner turned to look where he was looking, a plume of red mist was hanging in the air for a moment and then just fell like rain.

He had no idea what it was, then there was another, and another, whatever it was, it was moving through the battle that was going on, and quickly so. He could hear wolves screaming and others yelling to get away from that man.

Was it a man doing that? He watched on for several minutes as more plumes of red mist seemed to just explode out of nowhere, and then fall down like red rain to the ground. He was connected to all his men, none of them had been affected by it, from what he could tell. But he knew he had at least 30 over there.

Then there was a battle suddenly going on to the north of them. Their layer of wolves protecting the packhouse was gone, it was just them, the battle had been brought to

them while most of their troops were dealing with the western and eastern attack. His instincts were to go with his men, but found a hand on him to halt him.

It was Alpha Thomas “No Conner, that is Victor himself. Your father has orders not to let you near him.”

“I can help.”

“Stay here, protect our princess, with the witches. She is the last of our royal bloodline, for our kind.”

His eyes moved to the girl between the witches and then back to Thomas, a gypsy princess here in a tiny little pack of hippy wolves. “Alpha Rafe and his Gamma are more than capable of dealing with Victor, I imagine.”

“Who are her parents?”

“Her mother died a little while back. The girl felt her sever from her, and now he’s here to claim the next in line. Excuse me son.” He headed off to have a quiet word with the witches.

“Sweet goddess, Conner, look at that.” Adam muttered and drew his attention, a hand gripping tightly on his arm, to a man running full tilt across the pack. He was covered in b***d and had a whole bunch of wolves trailing him. Most of them were also covered in b***d.

Conner could smell it from here, so much of it. His eyes widened as he saw a bunch of incoming wolves launch themselves at the man and just explode into red mist right before his very eyes. “What the f**k?” He uttered as he realised that man was Allen the Gamma of the Black Forest Pack. He didn’t even have to fight, it seemed anyone attacking him was just obliterated into a bloodied mist, the man didn’t even stop. Neither did those behind him, anything that didn’t explode into red mist was taken to by those following him.

Everything he’d been watching before was this man running through the battle area allowing enemy wolves to attack him at will, disposing of them in an instant. His eyes turned to those witches. They were focused on the girl, their Mate of no concern to them.

Oh, he got it. The man was charmed by them, protected by what he could only think to be some sort of b***d magic. Nothing and no one was allowed to hurt their mate, they had him well protected. His eyes moved to the ongoing battle. Enemy wolves were trying to avoid the man now, it seemed. They realised what was going on, shot away from him, which allowed others to take them down, the western battle seemed to be over, and their forces were headed to the eastern side, splitting themselves between the eastern and northern side fronts.

The fighting was everywhere, he could smell rogues all over the place, the sun was going down and the battle was still raging on to the north of them. Every wolf they had was on the front-line fighting Victor's forces. He had brought more than enough to win this, it seemed. Everyone standing here, was holding the line to protect the young gypsy princess. The only ones not here were Alpha Thomas and his Unit. All other Alpha's were standing around letting their men do the fighting, though the atmosphere was tense and they were all at the ready.

His head whipped round to the south as night completely fell, and wolves descended in mass into the pack, rushing for the packhouse. Their entire forces were on the northern side and what he saw coming right at them was at least a hundred wolves in wolf form. Atlas shifted him as did many others around him. He had no choice. Their forces were occupied else were further off in the woods, pushing the enemy forces back and away from the pack.

This man was clever, had likely sat back and waited it out letting them all think that was the main assault and now here he came while the majority of their defences were away and busy. They came from the completely opposite direction, and these wolves were not rogues, these were the real pack warriors.

He shot down the mind-link to his men to get their asses back here. They were being distracted, that the main attack was happening now. Coming from the south. To leave that battle and come to this one.

He knew they would be tired, but they were going to be needed. He watched as those wolves raced towards them, and had no choice but to get into the battle himself. Atlas launched himself at the oncoming wolves, his entire unit right there with him. Taking them on four to one, to dispatch them quickly and move on to the next. It was how they trained to work in unison. How all Alpha Units trained.

The battle was bloody and those witches he hoped were damn good at whatever they were doing. They were now alone inside the pack house, the princess's only defence against the one coming for her. She wouldn't be able to defend herself, wouldn't even have her wolf yet.

It took a good 30 minutes before their back up arrived and they were all still fighting. Another wave of warriors were coming from the southern end, just as they thought they were winning, more enemies poured into the pack, and the fighting started all over again. Though these wolves smell different, a different pack from the last one.

Victor had brought allied packs with him. Conner didn't even know if they had yet to fight any of Victor's pack members, he hadn't seen the man himself at all either. More wolves were pouring in now from the north, other Alpha's had called for back-up and it had arrived.

His wolf's attention was drawn to a red plume going up just to the left of him, and there was a wolf drenched in b***d. It looked right at him, snorted out a bunch of red b***d from its own nose and shook itself off, then just charged head long into the battle once more.

Atlas turned himself right back into the battle that was raging. He felt some of his men get severed from him and knew they had been killed. Not much he could do about it mid battle, would have to deal with it if he survive this.

The war just seemed to rage on for hours, wave after wave of men and then it all just stopped, a massive explosion stopped everyone dead in the middle of the fighting as the sky lit up. Atlas's head lifted to see the packhouse blown to bits. His jaw clamped down on the neck it had hold of and ripped the throat out of his enemy and then just dropped the lifeless body, as the sky darkened once more, and wood started to rain down everywhere. Then, enemy wolves were in full retreat and bolting away, he stayed with his men. There was no need to go after them.

The glow around the packhouse lessened but the ground was still lit. He could see one wolf racing towards it, knew instinctively it was Allen, the witch's Mate. Ran head long into that glowing half-destroyed building. Conner truly hoped his mates were alright.

Atlas shifted him back, it appeared whatever had happened had ended the battle. He looked around at the dead, hundreds of wolves, enemy and allied, unallied, all injured or dead around him. He didn't even know himself how many men he had lost today.

Though he was certain his father would, he would have male and female wolves back in the pack in agony at the loss of their mates. They would have all felt them being severed and their Mark burned from their skins.

He turned to find his unit bloody and wounded, much like he was himself. As were many around him, that glow of the packhouse was dying right down now. He heard a howl go up and it was long and sad. He knew it was the Luna, her mate was lost to her. The Alpha of the New Moon Pack had been killed, likely in his effort to save his women and children, his princess.

Sighed heavily, no wolf wanted to hear that, regardless of who you were, a lone Luna howl was always filled with sorrow, in a moment like this. Even Atlas huffed inside his mind, as Conner picked his way through the ground littered with the dead. "Adam check our warriors." He called to him.

"Yes, Alpha," He answered.

Conner made his way to the packhouse. It was dark now. The glow had subsided, he'd expected to see burning wood and smell ash, but nothing, it seems that explosion was of magical proportions. He walked into the packhouse along with the other Alphas to

assess the damage. The roof was gone, as was the entire eastern side of the building, blown out by magical force by the look of it.

He found all the women and children fine, all in the western corner, the princess held in the Luna's arms sobbing horrendously. The poor child knew this battle had raged because of her. They were her people. She was their last princess, and she knew it. So much death and destruction over one little wolfen girl that hadn't even shifted yet. He could actually hear her pain and sorrow, her own heart break for the loss of those around her, who died to protect her.

His eyes moved to the witches. Two of them were knelt down by the third and she was in her Mates arms. He was talking softly to her, telling her she was amazing, he was so very proud of her, loved her.

Conner wondered if she was dying, had she used all she had to protect that one little girl. There was a soft golden glow coming from both the other witch's hands, healing her, he thought. They didn't look to be concerned, just knelt there chanting softly, likely didn't need their Mate to heal her, but even Conner knew, his presence would help ease her pain. Watched her reach up and touch his face, a soft smile touched her lips and then her hand just fell away from him.

He was expecting to see the man roar in pain at the loss of his mate, but he didn't. He just brushed his hand through her hair and continued to look down at her. Her sisters didn't stop either, wasn't dead, he realised, just rendered unconscious from the use of her full powers, he imagined. They all had to be tired. But yet they stood there and didn't stop chanting to heal their sister.

He'd never really had anything to do with witches, never heard anything good about them, but right that minute he knew they were not all bad. These three had not only come of their own choosing but had protected that girl without even being asked to. Wondered just what type of witches they were, but triplets made them powerful witches indeed. Likely blessed by the goddess herself.

He found Alpha Rafe. "Is your Gamma's mate okay?"

"Yes, unconscious is all."

"Where is Alpha Thomas?" He murmured.

"I don't know to be honest, was out there fighting with you."

"There is not much left and without an Alpha to protect them," Conner sighed.

"We need to wait for the sunrise, the full extent of the damage, it's likely the Luna will accept sanctuary with one of us."

Conner nodded "That princess," he looked at the girl "...likely needs to go with you and your witches."

"Agreed." Rafe nodded and turned to see his Beta step up to him, he watched the two of them openly hug each other. That was a little weird. It was an overly long hug with what Conner could only discern as real affection, "Good to see you're alright Jack."

"A few war wounds, nothing Flare can't heal."

Saw them both looking at him and his curiosity, and both of them laughed. "We rule together." Rafe told him.

"Oh, I've heard about dual reigning packs. Never met one though. How does that work?"

Jack clapped him right on the shoulder. "Drop by one day young man, we'll have a chat and show you."

"Where are you from?" Conner asked, they weren't allied.

"Up north, I'll send a mating ball invite. You never know you might find your mate with us, we're one of the largest around."

"Hmm, the invite we'd accept." He nodded "I'd better go hunt my men."

"Good, the witches told me you'd make for a good alliance," Jack told him.

Conner smiled, "Well, that will be up to my father. But I'll let him know."

"Hmm," was all he got in return. Conner looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

"The witches said you, not your father." And then he headed off to presumably check his own men, who had survived and who had died. Much the same as Conner was about to do now.

It was an interesting comment though. The witches had said him not his father. Perhaps they had seen something when checking him over. Who knew, shook it off and headed off to find Adam and his unit. Tracked that tether to find him.

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Chapter 54

EI POV

EI spent the next few days hanging out with her cousins. They were really nice, she got to help pick fruit from the orchard and nuts from the trees as well. Everyone was happy to have her here. She went swimming in the lake with all of them and watched movies in the evenings, lazed about with all of them, tried to pick up the language once more. It was going to be a good summer. Finally, things were getting back to normal for her.

Though there was a massive celebration about to happen tonight, the outside area was being all hung with lanterns of all colours and more tables were being set up in a large u-shape. She was helping like so many others were, asked what was going on and most just smiled at her, a few chuckled and told her it was some of the kid's birthdays.

Her Aunt smiled at her, linked arms with her and said "Come for a walk with me, EI, let's have a little chat about the family traditions. Tonight is the full moon and we always celebrate it around here. Lots of wonderful things come on full moons."

They walked along a path and sat down on a stone bench under the shade of a large pear tree. She smiled at the daffodils that were planted around the base of the tree, reached down and picked one, before sitting next to her aunt. "Your father always liked those."

"So does grandma." She chuckled.

"Actually, your grandma much prefers gardenia's but because Taro loved them so much, she planted them everywhere, always with the hope that one day she'd find him just curled up amongst them in his true form."

"True form? What do you mean?"

"Hmm, that's a bit more difficult to understand. Could I ask you something, EI? And have you be completely honest with me."

She nodded as she smelled the daffodil and smiled at its sweet aroma. She could see why her father liked them so much.

"Did your father ever talk to you about shape shifters, or I don't know, mythical creatures?"

"Yes, well, only Kitsunes and foxes, the man was obsessed with them." She chuckled softly "told me they were misunderstood and not evil nasty things that are written about in books."

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know...I guess it’s a really nice idea. To think there are things out there that are still hidden in the world. Mythical creatures that might still exist somewhere away from man.”

“Kept a secret from the humans. Who would likely kill them?” Her aunt nodded.

“I guess so.” She nodded “Dad always believed he was going to catch one.”

Heard her aunt laugh now. “Well, I think he did that just fine.”

“What?” she asked, confused.

“It took him a long time to do so, but he did get his Kitsune. Never thought it was going to happen, having a human for a father and all.”

El frowned right at her now, didn’t understand that phrase at all, having a human for a father, that was an odd expression. “I have something for you El, look over there.” She pointed across the grass.

El turned and looked and found herself staring right at a large black and white fox. Its amber eyes looked right at her, and then it’s tail lifted and there were 5 of them. They all stood straight up. “What?”

“Relax, El, he won’t hurt you. You know him actually, have been hanging out with him the last two days you’ve been here.”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Yes, you have, that is your cousin Alonzo, or Al as you know him.”

Her eyes turned to look at her aunt and she smiled right at her. “Do you want to know why you feel so at home here, El? We are your people. You belong here, are one of us.”

“I..I don’t understand.” El stammered.

“You will, honey. You are about to get your own Kitsune, I believe.”

“Wh..What?” El shot to her feet. “I’m not.” She shook her head.

“Your father was half Kitsune, your grandma is full kitsune. Honey, you told Sloan you didn’t feel like yourself anymore, that were so very confused.”

“Yes, but that’s a different thing. That was...”

“Was what? Sit down, El, I’m not going to bite you.”

She turned and looked at that black fox, or Kitsune. She realised it was not a fox. It was just sitting watching her now. Wagging all its tails at her, they fanned out and swirled about before settling back on the ground behind it. She shook her head. “El, sit down, tell me what happened in that gated community.”

Her eyes moved to her aunt, they were narrowed on her. She didn’t want to tell anyone what happened there, no one needed to know about Conner. “Did you meet someone perhaps, a boy or a young man?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” She snapped and ran off back towards the house. Got stopped by a rather large kitsune all Black with white tips on its tails, backed up away from it and to her shock watched it morph into her Aunt Juliana.

“Relax El, I’m not going to hurt you, none here will. You’re one of us, we just didn’t know if you would shift is all.”

She shook her head. “I’m going crazy.”

“No, you’re not El. Just being crash coursed into your own world, because we think your about to get your Kitsune tonight when the moon sets. If you’d grown up here, you wouldn’t think anything of it. Just breathe honey.”

She was trying to breathe, staring at her now naked aunt before her, “Y...You, it’s so big?” she finally managed to stammer.

“All shifter creatures are bigger than normal. Wolves especially. Did you happen to meet any wolves El, in Utah?”

That whipped her head up, and she saw her aunt nod and then sigh “How big was he?”

El lifted her hand to indicate her chest height. “Am I in trouble?”

“Considering your mother is likely Mated to the Alpha Wolf of a pack, it could be a potential problem.”

That sent her brain buzzing like fire, “Mated to?”

“Hmm, we don’t call it married, only humans do that. Most shifters like us, including you, El will Mate off instead of Marry off. You were not in a gated community, El. You were inside a wolf pack.”

“What? No..” she shook her head, that couldn’t be right “I...I” her heart was starting to hammer inside her chest as her brain fired off in a thousand different directions, if she

was inside a wolf pack and her mother was mated to a wolf, that meant that...her hand snapped to her mouth, as she realised Conner was likely to be wolf as well.

She took a stumbling step back and shook her head. "Breathe El, tell me what's going on inside your mine."

"Conner?" She gasped.

"Your stepbrother, not human, El. Likely a wolf shifter."

Oh, that was not good, she'd been sleeping with him, stared up at her aunt nearly horrified by the thought of it. Conner had always been right there when that wolf he'd called Atlas was there. Just minutes afterwards, Conner always appeared out of nowhere, always nearly naked, only ever in a pair of shorts. Was that his wolf?

She shook her head and didn't know if she could handle that, sleeping with a wolf. Wondered if that was why it was so primal, why he also told her she smelled so good. "El honey, were you and Conner sleeping together?" Aunt Juliana asked her as she took a slow step towards her, saw that hand reach out towards her, her eyes lifted right to her aunts, as she felt fear welling inside of her, stared right up at her aunt "It's alright El, you can tell me." Her hand slid along her jaw to cup her face and she could feel calmness rolling over her from just the woman's touch. Felt like she could trust her with the truth.

She nodded slowly. "I..I don't."

"It's alright." Found herself enfolded in her aunt's arms and just leaned on the woman.

"I couldn't."

"Shh, we can discuss that later." She was rubbing El's back gently. "Let's deal with one thing at a time. Come on, let's go find me some clothes, and get you a glass of wine to calm your nerves."

"I'm not old enough to drink." El murmured.

Heard her aunt laugh softly "You are here, allowed to drink at 18."

"Then can I have something stronger than wine?" El muttered "I think I need it."

"Yes, I got a really nice bourbon if you like that." She was walked back into the villa and her uncle was waiting for her aunt with a silk dressing gown. "How'd it go?" He asked casually.

"She needs a drink." Aunt Juliana chuckled.

"I'll get that for her, you go up and dress."

She sat with a glass of bourbon in her hands, had drunk that first one like a shot, it burned all the way down, but at least she was somewhat calm right this minute. Her uncle Angelo, had stood by and poured her a second one, was now just sitting smiling at her. "Bit of a shock, huh?"

"Yeah, you could say that." She nodded "Is everyone here? Well..."

"Yes, this is our pack. You, my dear, are inside the Den. Your aunt is the Alpha here, runs the place. Took it over from her parents."

"And you're?" she asked quietly.

"I am not as pretty as your aunt, but yes, a Kitsune. We do just have fox shifters. Quite a few of them, not all are Kitsune. About 10 percent of the pack only. Had one settle here a couple hundred years ago, and started its own pack. Juliana's ancestor, your Aunt, would know more about that."

"And grandma?"

"Ah Sloan, cheeky that one is. Should be here ruling with her sister, but no, she is too curious a creature to be tied down here, has to be out there exploring the world like her brothers."

"Does my mum know?"

"I doubt it, though Sloan would know the answer to that. Your dad is another thing altogether. Has a human father, like you have a human mother."

"So, I'm human."

She saw his eyes move to the door behind her and her Aunt Juliana walked in. "Part human," she nodded. "We had you brought here as a child, to see if we could sense out any shifter in you. Dormant it is."

"Dormant."

"Mm, she's in there. I can sense her now. Likely being inside that wolf pack, perhaps that young man brought that side of you out. Or nearly did anyway."

El's eyes dropped away from her. "There is no one there of importance."

"Hmm, if you say so. Now come on, let's go and join dinner. We have a few new foxes to shift tonight."

“What?”

“Yes, come on, don’t you want to see your cousins shift for the first time? It’s a special treat, you only get to see a first shift once. We celebrate every one of them. Some will get theirs tonight, others not. A fox will come when a fox is ready.”

“So..., I have a fox?”

“Honey, you have a Kitsune in there. She’s shy and probably scared. Living with wolves and not knowing what they were, might have frightened her, likely accounts for your need to run away and hide. We can be solitary creatures and with you, not knowing what you are. More difficult, being here with us should help her.”

It was a real lot to take in, though when she sat and looked around her, her cousin Alonzo smiled right at her. He didn’t seem scary at all. “Akon said to say hi, he was happy to be the first of us you saw.”

“Akon?”

“My Kitsune, when you get yours, she’ll have her own name too, and you want the real weird stuff. She can talk to you anytime she likes. Kind of like talking to yourself, but your Kitsune will have her own mind, her own thoughts.”

“That is weird.” She muttered.

“You’ll get used to it pretty quick, Akon never shuts up, a chatty beast he is, very opinionated.”

She just nodded to him “I don’t have that.”

“You will at some point.”

El looked around her at all the people who lived there, at her extended family, they all seemed so nice, no one here made her feel threatened and she didn’t fear any of them, she realised. She also still felt like she belonged here, no one treated her any differently. Wondered if that’s why everyone back in Utah treated her differently. Could they tell she wasn’t human but was a shifter that didn’t belong inside their pack?

As she sat there eating dinner with them all, she realised she had grown up with tales from her father all her life, tales that made for happy memories with him, all of foxes and kitsune’s. Obviously, his way of trying to get her to think they were real, perhaps he thought that one day she would get one and that was all he could do, talk about them with her, as a way of easing her into it.

Looked to her Aunt, she’d said he had found his Kitsune, wondered what that meant. She was going to have to question her about that. Did it just mean her? That her father

knew she would get one or had he finally shifted himself. She didn't know, had no idea how it worked.

But tonight, she was going to witness people shifting for the first time in their lives, wondered when it would happen to her? Would she even know when it was going to happen? It could take years from what she'd gleaned. A fox will come when it wants to come, rubbed her chest absently. That bloody ache was back, and she didn't know why. It was much stronger than before.

El sat and watched on with all the others as three teens between 16 and 18 walked into the middle of all the tables. All of them were wearing a simple but long tee-shirt, they all looked excited at the prospect of getting their foxes, she realised. Not one of them was afraid, saw as three teenagers shifted into their foxes, heard their bones c***k and saw fur sprout along their bodies as they morphed into their foxes, two red and one brown. She stared wide-eyed at them. They were all larger than normal foxes.

But her attention didn't stay on them for very long, for she herself was suddenly hot all over, and her chest hurt to blazes, was clutching at it gasping as pain radiated through her body, heard a massive whining noise and squeezed her eyes shut, struggled to breath and fell off her chair to the ground, tears of pain burned out of her as she lay there on the ground.

She had no idea what was wrong with her, found her aunt and uncle right there in front of her, "What's wrong with me?" She managed to ask.

"You want to shift but can't. Something is stopping you." her Aunt rolled her onto her back and looked down at her. "Don't fight it El, breathe and try to let it happen."

"It hurts", both her hands clutched at her chest, as pain ripped through her like nothing she'd ever felt before, then there was just nothing, darkness claimed her.

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Chapter 55

Conner POV

It was not an easy thing for any of the Alpha wolves to deal with. Most of them had lost wolves here and he himself had lost 27 during the course of the battle that had raged

around them. Victor's forces had suffered more, though from what anyone could tell, most of those dead wolves were rogues, at least 200 of them; the others they had no idea if they belonged to Victor at all.

It had been noticed by all that many pack scents had been smelt during the course of the battle. The report that an Alpha and his unit had snuck into the pack house undetected via the back entrance. Had been why the witches had taken matters into their own hands, shot all their power at that man and his unit, though he had gotten away, must have realised what was about to happen.

The Luna of the New Moon Pack, Kinsey, had stated she'd seen Victor and his unit come to a complete halt on seeing the three witches around the girl. He had backed up extremely fast. She'd also stated she'd heard Victor himself curse out loud. He had not been expecting the witches, it seemed. And the moment that one of them had raised a hand towards him and his unit, the four of them had fled.

They were no match for the witches, and he knew it. Their power had been released just seconds after that man and his unit fled, it was too late to stop it. Conner knew the retreat had been called a moment later, which meant that Kinsey was right. Victor knew he couldn't fight those witches, and from what he'd seen the raw power, he didn't think that many could either.

There was clean up to be had, he didn't need to report to his father. The man would know all that died if they were mated. But they couldn't haul 27 bodies back. They'd come on foot, so a call was placed solely to let his father know he was going to burn the bodies. Did he want to send their mates for the burning or leave them to grieve inside the pack?

Only 20 of them had been mated off. The other 7 were not yet mated, he had to report them to his father. A few of them didn't have family here, lost in other battles or they'd been orphaned early on in life. Waited for the return call. Asked him to wait, their mates would go to say goodbye. He would send them in cars. Only take a few hours, to please place the body's away from the others.

Then he asked how he was and the unit to? All were anxious about them. He relayed they were all fine, a few wounds that would heal up with time. Asked him about bringing any remaining New Moon Pack members home to the pack after the clean-up was attended.

Was told "Any and all that are willing son, remember they were gypsy wolves, may want to wander once more. Find a new place that feels special to them."

He moved all his dead to the most southern part of the pack's territory, to await the grieving Mates that were coming. It took nearly three and a half hours for them to get there. He left several to guard the bodies and the rest of them headed back to help with the mass pile up of all the enemy dead. Saw the three witches standing by the

destroyed packhouse all with their arms around their Mate. He was all cleaned up and no longer covered in b***d. Smiled at that man, he nodded right back, it took several hours to search out and drag all the bodies back into the pack. They were piled up in front of the packhouse, surprisingly.

When he questioned why, Alpha Rafe smiled right at him. "Our witches will get rid of them in a blink of an eye. But its best to have them all in one place, after the toll they've already taken using their magic."

"Your men, they are happy to send off as well. You came on foot, I believe."

"We did," he nodded, "it's actually quicker for us in a straight line, even in human form, than to drive."

"So not that far."

"Bear Lake."

"Wandering Moons, right?"

"Yes." Conner nodded and turned at the sudden presence of more of his pack "Excuse me, I have grieving Mates to attend to."

"Of course."

Conner returned to his pack. All of them were there, not a nice thing to see grieving she-wolves kneeling by their now dead mates. He knew his father would have already told them their Mates were brave and fierce, that he too was sorry for their deaths.

Many of them just looked hollowed out and knelt with a hand on their loved one. He had one look right up at him, a newborn pup in her arms, and his heart ached instantly, barely a day old, likely gone into labour with the severing of her Mate.

He sank down next to her and hugged her gently. "He was so very brave, we couldn't have won this war without him. His sacrifice saved a gypsy princess today. A young girl much like your little daughter."

"She'll never know him." She whispered.

"I know," he sighed softly, sadly. "but you tell her, her father died saving the last gypsy princess of the wolfen gypsy's. That he was her protector, just like he would be your little girl."

He felt her nod her head against his chest, and could see many of the other Mates looking right at him "Your Mates all died to save the last wolfen Gypsy Princess. Their

deaths were not in vain.” He told them all and watched many of them nod their heads before turning back to their dead.

Those witches came and they magicked away their dead at sunset, only after all of them had been explained what was going to happen and were ready, there would be no rush, that they should take as long as they needed. magicked away and a feild of pretty white daisy’s appeared in their place.

Once it was done, he was helping them to get into the pack cars, when that one she-wolf Silvia, looked up at him “We hadn’t picked a name.”

He sighed, didn’t really know what to say to her, didn’t have to “I’m going to call her Gypsy, I think she will grow up and be proud of her father, I think he would like that too.”

“It’s a good name.” Conner smiled at her gently, looked down at the little sleeping girl in her arms, and touched her small head, run his fingers across her forehead.

“An Alpha’s blessing, I bestow on you little Gypsy, may the moon goddess Selena herself, protect you well.” He said softly, and then looked at Silvia.

Saw tears fall from her eyes “Thank you Alpha.”

He nodded to her and helped her into the pack car, so they could all be taken back to the pack. His work here was yet to be done. They still had to sort out the Gypsy’s themselves. They too, were grieving not only the loss of their Mates, their Alpha. They were not willing to talk to anyone at this point, all that were left of a 300 strong pack was now barely 110 and most of them were women and children, all the men had gone off to fight. Anyone who had a wolf had been out there fighting to protect their home pack, regardless of their skill, it was their way.

They were taking a full day of grieving so none of them would be speaking at all until tomorrow midday. It was just a waiting game, the witches stayed with the remaining gypsies and the four allied packs set up roaming patrols for any signs of Victor and his pack coming back. But with the witches here, Alpha Rafe didn’t think it was likely going to happen. He had retreated once seeing them. He also noted that he had not attempted to come into the pack or try to come into the packhouse until his Gamma was well away from it.

He obviously knew what happened when anyone got near him, and Allen wouldn’t have any qualms in launching himself at that man or his unit, he’d snuck around the ensuing battle to try and sneak in and take that little girl.

This made Conner wonder if the princess’s mother had been the one Victor had taken and the one Alpha Thomas had tried to get back and been warned off of. He’d said the girl’s mother only died a little while ago, could be something happened to her or it could be she killed herself in order not to have been taken by Victor or his men.

Her bloodline would be strong and important. Victor producing an heir with her could have been seen as making his pack stronger. He didn't know the truth about the woman, but if the mother died and then suddenly someone was coming for the child, it was a good assessment to make. He'd been coming to this pack for years and not even he knew there was a princess amongst them.

It made him curious if his father knew there was one. Clearly, Alpha Rafe had, those witches certainly did. Or at least he believed so. Though he was still curious about why they had laughed at him. It still bothered him a bit and when he looked at them now, they paid him no attention whatsoever.

Whatever had tickled their funny bones was done and over with, though it was nice to hear them say they thought he would be good to make an Alliance with. They must have seen something they liked, or perhaps he was just going to be a good Alpha one day. He did hope so, looked up at the sky and sighed, the full moon was tomorrow and he didn't know if he was going to make it home or not. Didn't want to wait another month to lay claim to Eliza. Felt Atlas huff inside of him, rubbed his chest and got kicked by Adam near instantly, sighed and nodded at him, rolled his shoulders and stretched himself out as though it was all part of why he'd rubbed his chest.

'Still bothering you?' Adam mind-linked to him.

'A lot to be honest, kind of feel nauseated by it as well.' He sighed right back at Adam.

'You'll see her tomorrow, just think about that, getting home and claiming her, now that's got to make you happy right. Even though she's human.'

Nearly laughed out loud at that thought 'I was so stubborn in trying to keep away from her, pushing her away. Couldn't bloody do it even when I wanted to.'

'When did you know we haven't had that chat yet?'

'Before the last full moon.'

'Goddess Conner, you're insane. So when she ran away after you told her to leave.'

'I know, I was an a*****e. But honestly, that day, my yelling was your fault. She was going to have a lunch date with Marlo. I didn't know about that until you told me and I kind of just lost it.'

Heard Adam snort 'No wonder you were always at him.'

'Atlas was and is not having a bar of me rejecting her and now...well I want her, human or not. She belongs to me.' He actually did smile at that thought.

'How long have the two of you been sleeping together?' Adam asked and he knew that was the real question he wanted answered.

Looked over at him and said nothing. The man would likely punch him. 'Does it matter?'

'Only if there is going to be an issue with her accepting you, is there going to be. I didn't see the two of you together ever.'

'I don't think so, might be. But when I claim her I will be asking her out officially for all to see. I'll do it with you or someone else around so she knows I mean it, that I don't want it to be secret. That should help.'

'You want to hope so. The girl doesn't seem to like you much.'

'Likes me plenty in the bedroom.' He smirked.

"What are you two smiling about?" Brayden asked. Interrupting their mind-link conversation.

"Nothing." They both answered him with a smile.

"Alpha, Beta secrets." Cameron commented "You know, Brayden, we could return that favour and have Gamma, Delta secrets."

They all chuckled at that, and Conner told them "be my guest."

Then he looked around them at the strewn-out mess of their camp sight, "Come on boys lets clean this place up while the warriors sleep." His warriors had all crashed out, they were all lying about in wolf form, either curled up alone or resting against each other sleeping off their exhaustion from battle, he wasn't going to wake them, he and his unit though had been awake the whole time had not fought for as long as they had.

Those men were exhausted, and he was going to let them sleep. They picked through and salvaged what could be salvaged, and a few wolves lifted their heads. He mind-linked to them to go back to sleep that he and his unit had cleaned up, not to worry about it. And his wolves lay back down and went right back to sleep.

The next day was long. The gypsies didn't really want to go with any of them, not even the Luna, and there was a massive meeting about the safety of them out there without an Alpha Wolf or his unit to protect them.

In the end, it was actually the princess herself who stood up to squash the argument. She spoke softly, but looked at all the remaining gypsy wolves and told them "I don't want any more of you to die for me, it is too much to ask of you, of all of those that came here to help. We all lost too much and for what? To just wander aimlessly and have that brute hunt us down one by one. To torture you all for my whereabouts. I do not want this

for us. For you. We are Gypsy Wolves, we can assimilate into any pack, but stay gypsies. If you do not choose a pack to go with, I will choose for you."

He watched that girl lift her head and looked at all of them, take a deep breath in and then state firmly "I am Princess Amara, you will do as I ask. When I am older and stronger, have my wolf, I will find a Mate, an Alpha likely. Then I will call you all back to the lives we chose to live and lead, and once more we will be roaming Gypsy Wolves, until that day. I need to know you are safe, want you to be safe. If I know where you are, I can recall you easily."

Conner watched that young girl speak to her people just like a leader would. She was strong for what had happened to her, would likely lead them once more with strength and dignity, knew which pack she would be going to. Protected till that day came when she found her Mate and was old enough to rule them all officially.

"You will all grow up and be stronger, we will become warrior gypsies and when the time comes, we will take war to that man who took your rightful ruler from you all, my mother Adria, kill him and get our vengeance for the lives he stole. So, walk amongst the Alpha's and pick one you feel suits you or I will do it for you." Then she simply turned and walked away to sit by Rafe and his Unit.

Her choice was clear to all, the Luna joined her, she would go with her princess. Conner wondered if they would all just go with her. She was their princess. He was pretty sure that was exactly what was going to happen.

But it wasn't to his surprise they did just get up one by one or in what remaining family groups there were and walk about the Alpha's that were here waiting on the outcome of their decisions. It was not something any of them seemed to take lightly either, he noticed.

He was walked up to by nearly all of them, looked at, assessed and walked off, some came back to him many times, they even took it upon themselves to walk up to his unit and look them over, walk through his warriors and he was certain talk with them. He could not rush them in their decision even though the day was passing. This was a decision for not just themselves but their families. It did appear to him that it was the ones with more than one child who had the most trouble making their decisions.

It seems these wolves were trying to find an Alpha and a pack that suited not just themselves but their children as well. He knew the moon was going to set in a few hours, could well still be here at this rate.

Every one of them picked and sat behind their Alpha of choice, but that wasn't the end of it. He was called to a meeting with just the Alpha's afterwards. He was unhappy about it, due to the longer he was there, the longer he had to wait to get home and claim Eliza. He was even more unhappy when he heard that with the full moon only two hours

away; and after so much tragedy. They wanted to stay there for the setting of the moon to see if any of their wolves would pair up.

There were many male and female warriors here from all packs unmarked, and they thought it could bring a little happiness to their packs if there was the opportunity to pair up and let their wolves find their Mates. He couldn't in all good consciousness say no to them, or no for this chance with his wolves either. And with only two hours to wait, it wasn't all that long.

He had ten hours after it set to scent out Eliza, so giving his wolves that opportunity to find happiness amongst the tragedy that had been wrought, was a good thing. He could not deny them, as their Alpha, the opportunity to find a Mate just because he wanted to go home and claim one he had himself. That would not be very Alpha of him. He had to think of the pack, ahead of himself, nodded in agreement with them and then headed back to his pack to tell them what would be going on.

He saw Adam look right at him, a little apologetically, but it was the she-wolf sitting right behind him that drew Conner's attention, a pretty blonde girl, with big brown eyes. She was just looking at Adam. Looked right at Conner when she realised he was looking at her and dropped her eyes. She was too young to be a mother of two girls sitting with her. Either they were her siblings or perhaps niece's, were at least six and seven, she however only looked to be 18 or 19.

Internally sighed to himself, if that girl turned out to be Adam's Mate, he should have met her on the last full moon, but because of his own selfishness, and cruelty towards EI, Adam had been removed from this pack before the moon had set. He was going to get a beating for that.

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Chapter 56

EI POV

EI's eyes opened and she g*****d as she woke up, she had a splitting headache and the room was overly bright to her. She squinted as she looked around the room, found herself in her bedroom, with her Aunt Juliana sitting on the side of the bed next to her, pressing a cold compress to her forehead. She sighed down at her. Saw her get up and

go turn the light off but then return, to turn the bedside lamp on. That helped with her sudden sensitivity to light.

“You’re alright El, but no shift happened.”

“What happened to me?” she g*****d, even that hurt, her throat was dry and raspy, itchy, she realised. She was given a glass of water and she drank from it, soothed her dry throat and helped a little with her headache too.

“I’m not sure, but I think you should have got your Kitsune, but didn’t. She was supposed to come forward but then...I don’t know, maybe she chose not to at the last minute.”

“Does that happen often?”

“Not really. Something is in the way perhaps. Or.”

“Or?”

“What brought her out in you, is no longer here for her and when she sensed that, retreated back.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I have a theory; you’re not going to like it. You’ve been out for hours, just so you know, and I have spoken with Sloan as well. She wants to wait for the actual outcome.”

“What outcome?”

“Well, most of the time for a half human, like yourself, a full moon can bring your Kitsune to your mind, and then on the next full moon she will emerge fully. This allows time for you to adjust to her, get to know her, so to speak. Sloan is of the opinion that is what is happening.”

“How will I know if this is what’s happening to me?”

“Well now, that is easy, she will talk to you. Most Kitsune’s are very chatty, find many human things funny and they laugh a lot, kind of sounds like, between a human actually laughing with a little bit of chuffing in-between, quite high pitched at that.”

El pushed herself up to a sitting position and realised she was only wearing a towel and a cold wet one at that. Frowned down at it, “You were burning hot. It’s just to cool you down, is all.”

She nodded “I did feel hot.” She sighed, and rubbed at her chest once more.

"You do that a lot, I see."

"Do what?" El frowned up at her aunt.

"Rub your heart, like it hurts. How long has that been going on?"

"It's nothing happens all the time. Some days it's worse than others. Today just seems worse somehow."

"Mm, that boy you were sleeping with, your stepbrother."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I think we need to El, that chest rubbing is likely because of him."

"What? I don't even like him. He's an a*****e."

Saw her aunt raise an eyebrow. "So, you're just sleeping with him, was what?"

"Do we have to talk about it?"

"I think so." She nodded "He's a wolf. So yeah, honey, we need to talk about it."

"He doesn't even like me, it's just s*x."

"Explain it a little more than that please, El. Could be important."

"It's not. In a nut shell, he comes to my room. We have s*x, then he just leaves and that's it, ignores me, told me to leave, doesn't want me around, I know that much." Found herself rubbing at that bloody ache in her chest once more, hurt more when she was talking about him. "I don't understand why it hurts, it's nothing at all."

"I doubt that, El."

"Trust me, I had to get the hell out of there. It was sick and twisted, is what it was."

"You couldn't say no to him in other words, even when you didn't like him."

She just nodded because that was the simple truth of the matter. "He made sure I knew he didn't care." She murmured "Had another girl all over him just hours later, right in front of me." Felt the tears brim and took a deep breath in and let it out slow to try and stop them from falling, that still hurt "Trust me when I say it's nothing, it is. He told me she was nothing to him as well. So just some random girl to make me understand I was nothing to him."

She saw her aunt sighing heavily now "Right. A*****e it is."

El nodded, there was nothing she could do about it, what had happened had happened, but now she was out of that place and gone. It was over for her, she'd gotten away from him, from that place and was never going back. "I'm not going back." She sighed "No one there really liked me."

"They didn't know what you were, likely thought you were human, wolves have to hide their true nature with humans inside their pack. This could have affected the way they responded to you is all."

"I don't care. Why even make me go there if they didn't want me there and I was made to. I didn't want to go, told mother that, argued with her about it. Logan shoved me in the car and made me go."

"It's likely your mother wanted you there, is all. Her Mate was trying to make her happy."

"Even if I wasn't happy, and I wasn't, I told them that, hell I yelled it at Logan right to his stupid face."

"You yelled at an Alpha Wolf."

El shrugged "I didn't know what he was, just a rich a*****e like his son," she muttered "I was angry and upset and lashed out I guess."

"Interesting..., you sure there isn't a voice talking to you in there. You have Kitsune Alpha b***d El, this would make you want to fight. Get your own way even. If he knew what you were, he would have treated you very differently, I assure you on that."

"Why."

"No wolf, even an Alpha Wolf will take on an Alpha-blooded Kitsune. We have more lives than they do. One for every tail, if he attempts to take on Sloan." She saw her aunt laugh "He will get the shock of his life. Will likely back down real fast. Sloan is also much older than she looks, as am I. We just stopped aging decades ago."

"How old are you?" El asked with a shiver. She was starting to feel cold.

She saw her aunt get up and get her some clothes and return to hand them to her. She pulled them on while her aunt looked out the window. "I am nearly 500 years old, as is your grandma, she is my twin."

"500 years old?" El gasped and nearly fell over as she was pulling her pants on, to stop and stare at her aunt. "How long do you live?"

"A very long time. As you will now, I imagine. Things will be very different for you, life adjustments have to be made in the human world, it is annoying, to say the least, to

reinvent yourself every 50 or 60 years. A new human name, I usually just pass myself off as my daughter. All shifters have to do this unless they age more."

"Age more?"

"Mm, some will age till they look 70 or so in human years and then stop, some stop aging around 25 or 30. Most stop when we look about 30 to 35." Turned and looked at El with a smile "How old do I look to you?"

"Not the 60 grandma states she is."

"Hazard a guess for me?"

El looked at her for a long minute and smiled "Maybe 35."

"That is good, I don't want to look older. Like looking young and pretty." She chuckled.

"How long have you been here in Italy? Your family, I mean?"

"Oh, my great grandpa, he came here like 2000 years ago, immigrated from Korea, met a fox and well." She chuckled "Marked and Mated her."

"Wow, so long ago."

"Yes, if you ever venture over to Korea, we have relatives there as well. Quite a few actually, Sloan would know a couple of them. Lived in Korea for like 200 years, loved it there."

"How many in America?"

"A couple, I believe. Sloan is likely in contact with all of them, she loves being out there, too curious for her own good sometimes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Taro, was born from curiosity, I believe. Sloan has yet to find her Mate, and though she is happy enough on her own out there, she gets that itch to mate still. Taro's father, he was well." She chuckled "An itch that needed scratching. She never did say who. Just that it was a week of right jolly fun." Saw her shake her head, "my twin is a little on the naughty mischievous side sometimes."

"Sounds like it." El nodded. "You said my father found his Kitsune. What did you mean by that?"

"You honey, just before he was killed he called me, said you seemed different to him, that he thought it was time to bring you here, for me to sense you out so to speak." She

sighed heavily "Then he was killed before we could organise it. Sloan saw you, said she didn't sense anything, and she should be able to. Is your directed descent and an Alpha as well. So, she didn't send you."

El sighed "Wish she had, I likely would have just stayed here and not gone back. My mother wouldn't have cared too busy with Logan." She muttered "It was like father didn't matter to her at all."

"Ah, yes. That is the Mate Bond gripping onto her. She likely met Logan on a full moon and was drawn to him instantly. Unfortunately, that can happen, kind of obliterates everyone else for you."

"So, she really doesn't care about dad anymore? Is what you're saying." El didn't like that thought at all.

"Deep down she knows she loved Taro, but her need for Logan. Outweighs everything else, she can't resist him at all, El, everything about him draws her to him."

"He took her away from me even. She let him; I was nothing to her, just like father was."

"That is not true, her need to have you with her is likely what made Logan pull you into his pack. If she'd not asked, he wouldn't have bothered at all. You're old enough to be on your own."

"Had plans to be here in Italy to study." She muttered.

"Well, now you're here, so let's focus on that. I want you to tell me if you hear your Kitsune, she'll likely introduce herself to you when she feels the time is right. Might already be in there just sitting quietly." Saw her aunt walk over to her and tilt her chin up and look right at her, stare right into her eyes long and hard.

Then just smile and nod "I think she is in there, looking right back at me." Run a hand through El's hair, and chuckled when she tilted her head to enjoy the feel of it. "She'll talk to you when she's ready. Though before you go to sleep, I want to initiate you into the pack properly, if that's okay?"

"What does that mean?"

"I little nick to you hand and a few words of loyalty is all." Can I see your hand.

El held it out to her, and then the other, "Not initiated into your mothers pack then I see."

"I don't think so."

"Come, it will take only a minute to do. It might just stop that pain in your chest as well."

"That would be nice." El nodded and followed her aunt downstairs to her office where she produced a long thin blade about 6 inches, very shiny and it had a black obsidian handle with what her aunt told her was a moonstone embedded into the handle.

Watched her cut a small line on her hand about a centimetre and then held her hand out "Your turn."

"People shouldn't mesh b***d." El commented.

"We're not people and this is how it is done. Once you are officially a part of this pack El, no one can come and take you either, not even Logan."

She looked at the blade and thought about that. "Not Conner?" she asked quietly.

"No."

El nodded and held out her hand. "What do I need to do?"

"Just answer my question when I ask it." that knife sliced her palm and she bit her lip at the sharp sting it caused "Eliza Kit Hunt, do you accept me Alpha Juliana Hunt of the Willows Moon pack to be your Alpha, pledge your loyalty to this pack and swear to never reveal it to the human world."

"Yes, Aunt Juliana." She nodded.

Felt all hot all over again and staggered a little, as their palms were pressed together and then she was alright, shook her head, "that was weird." She murmured as her hand was released, turned her hand over and looked at it, no b***d even, a tiny scar was all.

She felt a hand under her chin and looked up at her aunt. Her eyes widened as she heard her aunt's voice inside her head but didn't see her lips move 'Welcome to the Willows Moon, my child.'

"What is that?" El gasped.

"It's called mind-linking, and only one with a beast can do it." she smiled "You've got your Kitsune. She's just shy." Felt her aunt run a hand through her hair, smiled and chuckle a little "Now off you go, I'm going up to bed."

El shook her head after her aunt left. That was weird, she had leaned into the woman's hand like she was being patted. She sighed softly and looked out the window. There were no restrictions on her here, she wasn't particularly tired, headed outside to be in the breeze that was blowing, this place was quite large, and she was allowed to go anywhere she wanted, even of a night time. It was her home now, a place she felt like she belonged.

El walked about under the moon and the stars and finally felt happy for the first time in a long time, had a whole new life to live now. She should have grown up here. It would have been nice to grow up here, she thought. As she walked about, she saw several large foxes moving about and smiled at them when they looked right at her.

Got a few wagging tails in return, and nearly chuckled, no secrets here either, only a few days here and she'd been told what they were, welcomed by them and was now a part of their pack. Her home where no one could just come in and take her away from it.

He couldn't come here and just take her back, could hunt all he liked, but never could he make her go back with him, like he'd told her he would. No more did he have a claim on her body either. If he couldn't find her, he couldn't touch her. She really was free and clear. No more sick, twisted s****l relationship with him.

She sank down, out in an open field and looked up at the moon, high and bright, full in the night sky, smiled to herself and just lay back down, she was home and she knew it, just lay there out in the open under the night sky and relaxed, truly relaxed for the first time in a long time 'El, I'm Petal.'

El turned and looked around her, frowned when she couldn't see anyone close by that could be talking to her, heard a soft husky chuckle 'I'm not out there silly. I'm in here, in your mind.'

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Chapter 57

Conner POV

Conner found himself with 31 of the gypsy wolves. Although most of them were children attached to their mothers, out of those 31, only 13 of them were adults with wolves. The rest were children, whose ages varied from 1 to 17. He smiled at them all, and welcomed them to the Wandering Moon Pack, explained to them that he was currently the Heir to the pack, and he was more than happy to have them accept his pack.

That his father would initiate each and every one of them when they got back, passed on his acceptance from his father, who had expressed his wishes to accept any and all from the New Moon Pack that would want to join his pack. That they were all welcome and homes would be provided for them along with security and protection. With

permission for them to re-join their princess once again, when she called them back to her.

Asked them to go and collect any of their belongings that they wanted to take with them, and watched them all wander off to do so. He sent a few warriors with each one for security purposes and to make them feel safe. Asked Adam to go with the young woman behind him, he smiled at her and nodded, the she-wolf blushed bright red and practically bolted away from his Beta.

Which made Adam chuckle a little as he strolled along after her and the two little ones with her. They were calling her sister. She was the oldest left in her family, now responsible for the two of them. He watched on as Adam trailed her and she looked back at him a few times and was beet red each time. Smiled to himself and shook his head 'I think she likes the look of you, Adam.' he mind linked to the man.

'I am dead sexy you know.' He shot back, amused. 'The young girls always fall over themselves where I'm concerned.'

Conner laughed but said no more, he had sent him with her on purpose, they were all waiting for the moon to set and he was pretty sure she was going to be Adam's mate. The reaction to him this close to the full moon was near on a dead giveaway.

He felt an arm drop onto both shoulders and looked from his Gamma to his Dela, who were both grinning after Adam as well. "I don't think he sees it." Brayden chuckled softly.

"Dumbass is blind." Cameron laughed.

"So, it's not just me?" Conner asked them.

"No, she got intermittently closer to him as the hours passed. She was also the first one to pick our pack." Brayden smiled at him. "Didn't get passed looking at him, I watched her stop and stare up at him, then just drop her eyes, grab her siblings and walk behind him through a fairway and sit down."

"Seems to me that girls got some good senses." Cameron nodded.

"It does." Conner nodded "Though I'm likely in for a beating, he should have been here on the last full moon."

"Oh, yes, definitely going to get an a*s kicking for that, missed his mate by 3 hours. Could have been loved up and well on his way to knocking her up by now." Brayden burst out laughing.

"A bit crude." Conner shook his head, but anything was possible.

"Instant family." Cameron smiled "how you think he's going to handle that?"

"Hmm, I think he'll be fine. He has a younger sister and dotes on her. Just likely treat them like that. Though they are not all going to fit in his suite. Father may just have to let him move into his actual Beta Suite. It's got what, four bedrooms?"

"Not even that will be big enough." Brayden chuckled. "He's gonna need a suite bigger than yours. Going to have three rooms filled right away without having his own yet."

"Hmm, I guess remodelling is going to happen." Conner nodded. He was not overly concerned if any of them needed a bigger suite than he had. They would all have however many children they wanted to have.

Felt the moon set as did everyone else here, and looked about. He knew he wouldn't find anyone, but he was watching his wolves, for that moment, when they got up and went off to scent out their Mate. Saw six of them get up and leave to find what they scented, though not all of them were here. Some were like Adam off helping their new pack members collect their belongings.

Watched as Cameron shot off the mark and Brayden laughed, "Well something got him."

"Nothing for you, Brayden?"

He saw the man shake his head. "No." He didn't seem concerned at all, the man was in no rush, it seemed. Got nudged "You might want to run boss. You got in coming."

His head whipped around and Adam was running right at him, Conner was gone in a flash though he was smiling, none of them had been wrong obviously "I'm sorry Adam," he laughed as his Beta chased him all over the place, " I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He was yelling at him, even Atlas was amused it seemed.

"You selfish bastard." Adam roared at him and then was yelling at him about giving him a beating as he chased him all over the place. Several of their pack members were laughing at the two of them. Conner shot himself right behind the young she-wolf that was gifted to Adam as he saw her walking this way, picked her clean up and held her out to him "Here, she's yours' man." She was only tiny, maybe 5ft 4inches if she was lucky, weighed nothing at all.

Saw Adam look right at her and practically melt, reached his arms out to take her and she giggled and leaned right into him, they were not marked yet but it was clear they were going to claim each other. It was a really nice sight to see. He got himself a tiny mate at that, he'd always gone on about wanting a teeny tiny wolf for a mate. Just something about towering over them tickled his fancy.

Conner honestly thought it was more because he would feel big and strong, to her he would seem the perfect protector. Watched Adam put her down and then look around "Who else?" he asked.

"Cameron shot off somewhere. And six others as well. We just gotta wait."

So, wait they did, it took longer for Cameron to come back than any of them and it was irritating the hell out of him. He had tried to link to that man, got shut out damned fast and just knew he was Marking and Mating his Mate. Glanced up at the moon, they wouldn't be able to run back, so it was going to take a few hours to get there. He didn't particularly like the wait.

It took that man and his new Mate an hour to come out of the woods. Marked and Mated, he was all smiles as was she, a warrior of another pack, now coming to theirs. No one seemed overly concerned about sending their she-wolves to another pack. He only lost one to the Black Forest Pack. Everyone here had come together to defend a smaller pack. There were no enemies amongst them. no alliance deals needed to be sorted out at this time.

But he did make sure that all the Alpha's had his home pack number to contact his father if they or the she-wolf in question's, families had concerns or wanted to come by and check on her right away. The standard thing when one wasn't attending a mating ball and it was expected their daughters would mate off to other packs.

Finally, they were under way and headed home, but that bloody ache in his chest wouldn't settle. It was getting worse by the second, to the point when he actually stopped walking and near doubled over in pain.

Adam was right there "Conner?"

"Something is wrong." He gasped, it felt like his chest was being ripped open, he was on the ground a minute later on all fours and didn't care that everyone around him would see it.

"Conner, go. I'll bring them back." Adam told him and helped him up.

Atlas was ripped out of him a moment later and shot off through the woods towards their pack with all his wolfen speed. But even his wolf was in pain and agony, he was using that pain to push himself to get back to the pack, to her. Something was wrong with Eliza. It was the only explanation. They didn't even make it to the packhouse.

Atlas stumbled mid run. His feet folded under him and fell as agony ripped right through the two of them and they were left in an uncontrollable roll, and were smashed into a tree a second later at full wolfen speed. His wolf howled in pain, as he tried to get up. Then there was just an ache that filled his wolf with utter sadness.

He was shifted back to his human form and Atlas was gone, he'd fled to the back of his mind, pain rolling off of his beast. Conner dragged himself up from the ground, even he knew what it meant. She was lost to them, something had happened to her, and she was gone from them.

He struggled to get up, was injured himself from the impact with the tree, knew he had broken ribs, and also knew Atlas was not in any fit state to heal him. Stood there trying to get control of himself, his body was shaking in not just physical pain, but from the severing they'd just felt from Eliza.

He was going to have to walk the rest of the way. Had no choice, he pulled himself together and tried to convince himself it wasn't true, she wasn't gone from him. Couldn't be. His father hadn't called and told him anything was wrong here. She was fine, she had to be.

Pushed into the packhouse and headed up the stairs to her room, uncaring of his father calling out to him, wanting to know what was going on, would have felt him coming at full wolfen speed, likely could see the injuries he was sporting as well, knew he still had open wounds, didn't much care at all.

He got to her room and couldn't smell her at all, nothing near the door, though without Atlas that delicateness of her natural scent would likely elude him, put his hand on the handle and it opened. It wasn't even locked. He pushed the door open and stood there. His eyes moved about the room, it was neat and tidy. It had been cleaned but it didn't smell like her either. He looked for the photos she kept in here, nothing, couldn't see a single one of them. Walked into the room and looked at the walk-in, most of her things were gone.

Where the hell was she? His eyes moved to the floor. Her largest suitcase was gone, she'd packed it, turned and banged right out of that room, stalked down the stairs, to find his father was staring at him as he stalked his way over to him, anger was rolling off of him. His father had to have allowed her to leave, she'd packed her things.

"Where the hell is El?" he grabbed on to him. "Where is she?" he yelled with all he had.

"Son, calm down, she's fine. With her grandma in California is all. What's going on?"

"She's not fine." He glared at his father, then shook his head "She's gone from me."

Saw his father's eyes widen "Conner?" he was not stupid, his son was standing here under the weight of a full moon yelling about a girl not being here, being gone from him.

"Why would you let her leave?" he gasped and lashed right out at his father, punched him with all he had "She was safe here." He yelled at him "Now she's gone." He struck out at him and found himself set upon by his own father's unit till he was down on the ground, didn't take much with Atlas not with him.

"Calm down Conner, I just spoke to her a few hours ago. She was fine."

"No, she's not." He shook his head "Atlas is gone, because she is gone."

"Son, I'll call her. Pick him up."

He was hauled up off the ground, and walked to his father's office. It didn't matter if he could call her, she'd found a way to sever herself from him. He should have known she would, every single time words had come out of her mouth he'd known they would work. To end it between them, her natural instincts had won out, it seemed.

His eyes moved to his father as he put the call on speaker phone, "Hi Logan,"

"Hi El, are you alright? There is a concern for your safety."

"I'm fine Logan."

"That is not El." Conner stated flatly. If it was El, his beast would be back from the depths of his mind trying to talk to her.

"Of course it is son."

"No, it's not. Atlas would know. Who are you?" he stood and yelled down the line.

"You're not so dumb as your father are you Conner." A female voice came down the line, then it just clicked off.

His eyes moved right to his father. "You let El leave with her grandma. All this time she wanted to get out of here, to run away and you were stupid enough to just let her pack a suitcase and leave. Think she would come back willingly."

"A deal was struck."

"With a human who doesn't understand anything about us. And you think I'm stupid, you made a deal with a girl who doesn't like you, doesn't trust you, a man who took everything away from her and you think she was just going to honour it. You're a fool father." He grated out.

"Not so Goddess damned foolish as you, who left your unclaimed human Luna inside a pack with no one knowing what she was to you. Do you bloody think I would have let her leave, if I had known she was your Mate?"

"Where is Eliza?" It was Brittney. Her voice was soft and held a slight tremor to it.

They both looked at her, "Wherever her grandma sent her or took her to," Conner stated flatly. "She is severed from me; I can't feel her anymore." He muttered, turned his eyes

to his father "Explain that to your Luna. What that means, exactly? When one is severed from their Mate."

"Conner, there could be more than one thing right this minute. I don't believe you've claimed the girl correct?"

Glared right at his father "Not officially no."

"Then it might not be what you think, son."

"Then explain it to me." He only knew of two reasons one would sever from you completely; death or rejection. She couldn't technically issue a rejection he didn't think. They were mated to each other, so he would need to be there, for that."

Saw his father sigh, "Rejection, or...Claimed by another. If not death."

"You think El is dead?" Brittney gasped.

"No." he heard his father state firmly. "I'd be willing to bet Sloan handed her over to another pack and she was initiated into it or," his eyes fell on Conner. "She went to her friend's home pack and perhaps one of them has claimed her as their own. If she didn't know what you were Conner to her, she wouldn't know any better."

He was staring right at his father now, claimed by another? Xavier was the only other he could think of that wanted to lay claim to her. It was the full moon if she was there, in California, as his father stated she was, he could well have just laid a claim on her, marked her, seeing as she'd left here to go to them.

Watched as Brittney shoved his father right out the way from behind his desk, had no fear of her Alpha Mate, and dialed a number.

"Yes Logan." It was Sloan's voice.

"Sloan, where is my daughter?"

"Where she belongs." Came the answer.

"She belongs here, with me, her mother."

"No, Brittney, she does not. My Kit never belonged there. She was very confused there, said so herself, wanted out, has been planning getting out the whole time she has been there, I helped her. It's what I do. Save people from a fate they don't want."

"She's my daughter. You had no right to take her away from me."

"She's an adult and your Alpha Wolf of a mate had no right to lock her in, take away all her rights, and make her stay there against her own will. So, I did what any good retrieval expert does. Get her out. Send her to where she belongs."

"She's not dead then?" Conner burst out, felt Atlas finally returning to him his wolf wanted to know.

"No, but I bet right now you don't feel so good." She laughed "Got her away from you, I did."

He knew all eyes were on him, and he didn't care right that minute "She is my Mate."

"Hmm, well, I gave her to someone else that will treat her with respect, let her be who she wants to be, will give her the entire world. She doesn't belong to you anymore."

He could feel anger welling in him and not just his, but Atlas's as well, "Where is she?" he roared right down the line, all his alpha wolf aura rolling at her.

Heard a snarl come right back at him "I'm not afraid of you or your father, and neither will El be when she gets her first shift. You can't claim what doesn't want to be claimed." The line clicked closed.

He was staring at the phone, as was his father. He'd met Sloan before, and sensed nothing about her. Actually, when he thought about it, she didn't really smell at all, just whatever soap she'd used to shower with, was all he'd picked up.

"She's not human." His eyes turned to Brittney. "What is she?"

"I don't know." She shook her head. "I never saw anything."

Looked right at his father for help "Shifter of some sort, though that snarl, distinctive, too high pitched to be a wolf, and she's not afraid of you, your aura did nothing to her, likely just amused her. She's Alpha-blooded, whatever she is."

"Find out, I'm not giving up on El. I want everyone on this." he snarled and turned to leave the office.

"Conner, if Sloan is a retrieval specialist, that could take a very long time, you might not ever."

"I will never stop looking for her." He muttered and stalked off to his room, slammed the door and stared at the room. He'd been alone in here for years, could well be alone in here for many more. Could feel Atlas's rage brewing, let him have at it, watched as his wolf near destroyed everything in that room before stalking their body down to El's room, showered and climbed into her bed.

It was the last place they'd seen her, it was the only place they could feel close to her now.

She was gone, given to another, was going to get her first shift and he wasn't even going to be there to see it. Where she belongs, that he didn't understand. She belonged here with him. Who was Sloan really? What was her grandmother? She'd known that they were wolves, likely known it since the moment she opened the door to him and Adam.

Likely, bloody knew all Els friends were wolves, had she handed her over to Xavier and that man had claimed her? She was only human, his unclaimed human Luna, and she was out there in the world somewhere away from him, didn't even know what he really was to her. She had accepted some other within days of being apart from him.

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Chapter 58

EI POV

A month went by and Petal talked quite a bit, it was a weird feeling to have one inside her mind. Some days she wouldn't say anything at all to her, seemed to just be quiet and sleeping, though like her aunt Juliana had told her, she laughed a lot at the weird things humans did, found EI using the bathroom funny, asked why she just didn't go out in the woods.

Didn't particularly like the smell of coffee, but got all hopped on sugar when EI ate chocolate or cake. It was weird to say the least, it was like she was bouncing around inside her mind and the talking was flat out and hard to understand, sometimes her words all just rolled together, told EI to go chase things she saw, was up inside her mind looking at things like birds and butterflies, loved watching wild rabbits and the chickens had her undivided attention all the time.

Got the feeling of being hungry when she looked at those things, her cousins told her that was normal and when Petal did come forth, she would likely run off and hunt everything she'd seen already. That when Petal was out, she became the one inside the mind, and Petal was in charge.

It was explained to her that it was kind of like taking a backseat and you were conscious and got to watch all the things Petal would run off and do, and be able to talk to her, but unlikely she'd be able to stop her from hunting things and eating things.

Rolling in whatever horrid thing Petal felt smelled good to her, Al had chuckled at that, and told her to be prepared to come home covered in all sorts of mud and grass, animal muck, foxes rolled in everything. Though he had to admit his kitsune Akon loved to go swimming out in the lake, so thankfully his beast was clean most of the time. Not all liked swimming, but some did.

Aunt Juliana had asked her what Petal looked like and El frowned at her. "I don't understand. I haven't seen her. How would I know?"

"You should be able to see her in your mind's eyes. Close your eyes, El, and connect with Petal. Look to see what she looks like."

El tried to do this for a long time but in the end had to shake her head "Nothing, I don't actually see her, there is nothing there." She frowned "Is that normal?"

"No, but you are half human. Perhaps that has something to do with it."

"Being human is hindering Petal, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't call it hindering El." She'd stated "Kitsune's are not like other shifters, we can be a very mischievous lot, like to hide our true selves even from our own self some times." saw her shake her head "My little brother never saw his Kitsune until he ripped out of him, his kitsune Peaker thought it was very funny to hide from his own human, thought it was funny that he got so annoyed with him over not showing himself even, got a weird sense of human that one does." Chuckled a little herself "And an apt name for his beast as well. We're also not usually open to others knowing about us, always just smell like humans to others. We use a specially made soap created by our ancestors hundreds of years ago. Likely why your stepfather's son couldn't smell Sloan when he dropped by her house that day."

El sighed. She didn't want to talk about Conner, that ache was mostly gone now, but some days it still reared its head. Mostly on those days, she realised Petal was quiet. Wondered if she did not like the pain it radiated or if she didn't understand it.

"It still hurts, your chest?" her aunt asked as she looked at her, absently rubbing at her chest.

"Only sometimes." She admitted. Petal doesn't like it, is quiet on those days."

"Petal likely understands more about it than you do. El we do need to really sit and talk about Conner; I understand you don't want to. But that ache, there is likely a real reason for it. I told you once you weren't going to like it."

“Then I don’t want to hear it.”

“Honey, it’s possible Conner is your Mate.”

She stared right at her Aunt, she knew what a Mate was now, someone made just for you. Someone that was supposed to love and cherish you. Would never hurt you, always protect you. He’d done nothing to show her any of that. The complete opposite, in fact, she also knew there was such a thing as rejecting one’s Mate. Was of the opinion that was exactly what he’d been doing.

Pushing her away to let her know he didn’t want her. She’d spent the past month being educated in the ways of their world, knew lots now. Also knew that just because she was a Kitsune didn’t mean her Mate would be a fox, could be anything that had a shifter or even a human. Now that had opened her eyes, all the things she’d been told were real.

Had laughed a few times only to be told “No, they’re real. All those mythical creatures out there she’d ever heard of or read about were likely to be real and just hidden from the human world. Asked if she had to be concerned about them, and her aunt shrugged “not on most days, sometimes yes, but mostly no, or not around here. Most shifters would stay away from a kitsune pack, and know better than to try and attack one. Or take one on.

That it was hard for a shifter to know just what they were up against, unless they actually saw your kitsune, she’d walked her down to the gate and showed her that there was a symbol on the gate. It was a 9-tailed fox. Half white and half black.

She explained to her that she was black but Sloan, her twin, was white. Their colour markings were the complete opposite of each other, as were most of the Alpha twins that were born to lead the pack.

“Twins.”

“Yes, we often have multiple births, twins, triplets, occasionally quintuplets.” Had smiled right at her “you’re also likely to do that, being that you’re Sloan’s direct descendant. You might want to prepare yourself for that.”

El, had just stood staring at her, not really knowing what to say at all to that comment. Then they had just walked back through the pack. She’d been quiet for a long time then sighed and asked the question she knew she had to ask at some point.

“Will it ever go away?”

“What?”

“The ache in my chest?” El sighed.

"I don't know El, I guess that depends on your actual relationship with Conner."

"I told you what it was."

"Mm, you did. But you slept with him more than once. There is a theory that you were not likely to get your kitsune at all, because your mother was human and your father was only half kitsune, the human side would be more dominant...that it was the fact that you met your Mate and were with him that brought her out in you. So..." her aunt trailed off.

"So?"

"If that is the case, your likely already mated to him, and that is what is causing the ache inside your chest, being away from him. It may never go away, El, not until you confront him and either accept him or reject him. Which I would advise you think extremely carefully about. If Petal was brought out by her Mate, rejecting him, could see you lose her altogether, and become human once more."

Just bloody great, she thought with a heavy sigh, he'd not come for her, or not to her knowledge anyway. Wondered if he was looking for her now, he'd told her that her body belonged to him, "He knew what I was." She murmured softly.

"It is possible if he couldn't stay away from you." Aunt Juliana nodded, "Which means when I initiated you into this pack your connection to him would have diminished greatly so, or been broken somewhat. Claimed by another pack, I'd be willing to bet he felt something when that happened. If he did know about you being his Mate, he wouldn't have been able to stop himself where you were concerned. He likely got angry with you for no reason over you hanging out with that Marlo boy, his actions may have been confusing for you. Perhaps he was conflicted about you, being human and all. Wolves tend to want wolves for Mates, they don't always want humans, and if your mother is now his stepmother. Well, that's just even more likely to confuse him. I presume you have no idea if your mother shifted and got a wolf?"

She shook her head, and really thought about that. "It wasn't just Marlo. He was ticked off at my friend Xavier, for saying I was his girlfriend a month before that."

"You've known Conner, what nearly two months now? But never been near him on a full moon, have you?"

"No." El shook her head. "The first time I ran away I was with Cordi and Collin, and then the last time I was allowed to leave by his father. To visit dad's grave."

"Hmm, sounds to me like Conner didn't tell anyone what you were to him. That will cause trouble inside his pack. His father won't be happy with him, neither will his unit."

"Why?"

“Because he is the Heir, Conner is Logan’s son, right?”

“Yes.”

“Does he have any older brothers or sisters?”

“Not that I saw.” She shook her head, “or heard about and in mum’s apartment it was just photos of her and Logan and then Conner.”

“Likely he’s an only child then, so you being Mated to him, would make you the future Luna to his pack, and now you’re out here, unclaimed, and roaming about on your own, unprotected. It is likely that he will hunt you down.”

“Only going to reject me, didn’t really like me, just enjoyed the s*x.”

“I doubt that, likely he was confined in what he could say to you, or tell you, due to the fact that you were human, things work differently with human Mates.”

“Can you explain that to me?”

“I can, let’s sit.” They walked and sat under a pear tree, “Let’s see, humans aren’t just brought in and Marked and Mated right away. Even here the process is slow, some don’t handle it so well. So, to be mated to a human, you would date them for a few weeks a month even, sometimes longer depending on the bond, then bring them inside the pack with your Alpha’s permission, no shifting from the pack is usual for the time frame.

“Then on the full moon after you arrive, the shifter would generally tell you they love you, want to be with you, call you Mine at some point, word it into a phrase for all around to hear. Then, a few days later, they would let you see a shifted member of their pack here or there.

“See how you react to it, get you used to seeing shifted creatures and then sit you down and explain to you what they were, shift for you and let you meet their beast. Then, if the human accepts them and their beast, they would Mark and Mate you the day after the next full moon and you’d either get a shifter yourself or stay human on the following full moon. Quite a long process, but best done slowly, carefully to stop the rejection that is always a possibility.”

El stared at her “Is that why mother was gone so long, with Logan?”

“Yes, what you didn’t see her for?”

“About two months, then they just showed up and took me back, even when I didn’t want to go.”

“Not very nice of them. If you were under 18 I’d understand.”

El sat and stared out at the pear orchid they were in. Everyone here ate pears. It was like their favourite thing. “I think I met his beast.”

“Explain that to me.”

“I got chased by a big dark grey wolf, all over the place, and then when it finally ran away, Conner was like just there a few minutes later.”

“Hmm, it could very well have been. Shifters, like wolves, love to chase their Mates. It could have been his wolf playing with you.”

“It wasn’t very fun, I was terrified the whole bloody time.”

“Hmm, likely if that wolf was Conner’s beast, Conner wouldn’t have had a say in it. Any other contact with the same wolf?”

“Yes, two other interactions after that.”

“What were they?”

“Um, the one after that it was just walking past me and then stopped and smelled me, then it was gone.”

“Conner?”

“Yes, right there a few minutes later.” She nodded and sighed that wolf was going to be his beast. “Though Conner got weird after that, he chased me himself, all over the woods, till I couldn’t run anymore. Then offered to sleep with me. But then seemed to just change his mind.” Shook her head.

“The human part of him would also like to chase you, fun for him.”

“He did say it was just fun for him.”

“Seems he was playing with you as much as his wolf was.” Her aunt nodded “The other interaction with his beast?”

“That was weird, it just stared at me and then, I don’t know, got all puppy like, bowed and crawled towards me, rolled around on the ground and then, I don’t know, I think he tried to make me pat it. Licked my hand and nudged it with his head, whined a little. It was weird.”

“To you, his beast was trying to show you he’s not scary, to interact with you. His beast likes you, a lot, El. Likely they’d already made the decision to claim you, just needed to wait for the full moon, and you left before it.”

“He wasn’t there either, off on some company retreat. He wasn’t going to claim me.”

“Company retreat? El, that is human terms for going to another pack to help with a fight or battle between an allied pack and an enemy pack. He likely didn’t want to go. Had to go. Likely would have come home for the full moon to claim you, if he was close enough to do so. Or he’d have to wait another month to do that.”

“I don’t think so. Had that other girl all over him.”

“Hmm, that is curious, perhaps he didn’t yet know what you were to him. Just thought you were human, and well, his new Luna’s daughter, didn’t want to get a hell of a beating, over, sleeping with you.”

“Who knows?” She shrugged. It was over. That was all she knew.

“Answer me one more thing, El. Be honest and don’t be embarrassed about the answer.”

El looked right at her aunt and sighed, just knew what she was going to ask, nodded her head slowly.

“The s*x, I’m willing to bet it was better than good. But was there ever a time it was raw, and you just couldn’t or he just couldn’t control himself, go at it like crazy, rough as guts I guess you could say.”

“Yes, more than once actually.” She nodded.

“Was it just him, or did you respond in kind?”

“Is it important?”

“Oh yes, I’m trying to figure out if you and he mated to each other. He’d have known what it was, but you wouldn’t, but still could have done so. Unwittingly, but it’s possible.”

“Great.”

“When and how many times, El?”

“Um, definitely out in the woods, I was yelling at him about leaving and then all of a sudden he was, he...”

“I get it, took you in a furious manner, but you enjoyed it didn’t you?”

“Yes.” She sighed “I’m in trouble, aren’t I?”

“I would think so. Likely that pain in your chest, you’re mated to him.”

“So, what now?” she had no idea what to do about it.

“You can stay here and hope that being apart from him will eventually break your tie to him, though Petal may never come forth, she’ll likely be able to talk to you as she does now, but she might need him there for her to actually appear. I don’t know about that. You can go back, and try and sort things out with him, accept him. Or you can go back and reject him officially, which I’ve told you could be bad for Petal. So, you have a few options open to you.”

“But for Petal?”

“You need to wait on the full moon, see if she’ll come on her own. If she does and you shift, that is good, but we have long lives. There is plenty of time to think it through. You could stay here, get your degree and then go back. A few years is nothing in the grand scheme of things. Though do not sleep with anyone else.”

“Why not? Not that I want to,” she reassured her aunt, wasn’t that type of girl. “Just curious is all.”

“It’s possible he’ll feel it, as will you if he does.”

“What?” her eyes were wide now.

“It won’t be pleasant for either of you. It will hurt the other. On his end, he may feel severed from you, but you still have that ache, so is possible if he’s with another you’ll feel it. It will actually cause you and Petal pain.”

“Just freaking great.” She muttered “He didn’t want me, and now he can go hurting me anytime he likes, right?”

“Hmm, if he is cruel, yes. Is he cruel El?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged and she didn’t, just that one girl. “He did try to tell me he didn’t have a girlfriend, that there wouldn’t be any other girls once, but I just got mad at him, to me that just meant that girl he was with was nothing to him, used her to make sure I knew I was nothing to him.”

“Hmm, likely before he knew what you were to him. Then he knew and was not interested in others, from all I’ve heard today, El. I think he and his wolf were likely going to claim you. Wanted you but you just didn’t understand it. So headstrong and determined to get out of that place, that was all that mattered to you. Not the boy, or man, your need to gain your freedom, over rid everything else.”

"I don't know what to do about it?"

"I would do nothing, it is likely he and his beast are hunting you, they know what you smell like, if they figure out what Sloan is, could well track her and he'll show up here at some point looking for you. I would just wait and see. If he does love you, his wolf loves you, they will never give you up. Not if they think you're alive out here somewhere. The hunt is already on to get you back to them."

"So, he's going to make me go back, yet again my degree here in Italy will be stopped?"

"I guess that depends on how quickly he tracks you down. Could take a while. When he does come El, you'll have to make a decision, a life-altering one, he is the heir to a pack, and you'll have to go and live there. Learn how to run things and adjust to a life there."

"Great to a place where I had no real friends."

"That will all change the moment they know what you are to them."

"Doesn't mean they'll like me deep down."

Heard her aunt sigh, "It will not be easy. Don't rush your decision is all I can say. It won't just affect you, but Petal, as well as Conner and his wolf, his entire pack. He could remain Mate-less, as could you for the rest of your lives if you reject him officially."

"Yay." She muttered.

"I'll leave you to think about it. The full moon is tomorrow. We'll see about Petal then, let's just wait and see what happens." Her aunt told her, patting her on the leg "I'll leave you to think on your own."

El nodded and watched her walk away, leaned back on the tree they'd been sitting under and sighed heavily. She had no idea what she was going to do. Didn't even know if Conner was looking for her, though a part of her deep down believed Atlas was going to be.

Even now she understood it had been Atlas who had mated her out in the woods that day, she'd seen foxes and kitsune's on the surface, heard the gravel in their voices to indicate it was their beast talking, not the human part. It had been his beast who had claimed her that day in the woods, and recalled Conner apologising for it. Had told her he normally had better self-control. Sighed he'd been apologising for his beasts' actions, not his own.

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Chapter 59

Conner POV

Conner spent three days in that room, just staring at what was left of her things, touching the clothes that were left in her walk-in. Sleeping in her bed and staring at the ceiling mostly, his whole unit came by the morning after they got back. They all knew what had happened. It was not something he could have hidden even if he wanted to.

He had been brought low by losing her, right in front of all of them, he'd not really cared to speak to any of them. He was still dealing with the loss of her. He'd not even really known he was physically attached to her until he'd had to go off to the New Moon Pack and had been rubbing his chest. If that connection to her hadn't been there, then he'd not even have known she was gone from his pack, he now realised.

Not until he came home and found her missing that was, part of him was glad for that connection they'd had, but another part of him wondered if it would have been better not to have it at all. But that part of him was just angry she was gone. He was angry with himself for not telling his father what he suspected either.

He was angry with himself for being such an a*****e, pushing her away at first. If he'd not had that stupid hate of humans embedded into him, he'd likely have treated her very differently at the beginning.

Likely she would have felt welcomed and wanted to stay, hell he knew he would have treated her very differently. If not for that one human who'd tried to ruin his name, he'd have been very different with El. He'd liked humans up until that incident with Vivian Valentine. He'd been soured on humans after that and now he'd taken it out on his own Mate.

She'd left him because of it, had not even known what he was to her, but had left him. He wondered if it would have made a difference at all, if she had known? He doubted it, he'd been a real a*s, they'd had s*x, hell a lot of it, damned good for her and him. But he'd always gotten up and walked away afterwards. Never stayed with her.

The one time he had spent the night with her, she'd not even known he was there, though she had looked much better and even he'd felt better himself, after sleeping in the same bed as her, curled around her. They'd both benefitted from that, only she didn't know about it.

His father was right and he knew it. If he'd told his father what he suspected El was to him, he knew his father would never have let her leave the pack. But it was clear she wanted out of here, away from all of them, nothing had been done right around her. She had been brought here against her will and, as Sloan put it, been locked in and had all her rights taken away from her.

Even his own father had treated her terribly. It wasn't just him. She'd not had a nice time here, had planned to escape the whole time apparently, even after she'd mated herself to him, was still planning on leaving. Her one real desire was to leave and get the hell away from him and this place. A place that she truly belonged to, should be her home.

She was clearly half something, and that half was Alpha-blooded. It was no wonder she fought so bloody hard to get away, stubborn and wilful because of that shifter half in her. He and Atlas had not smelled anything really, though they had thought they'd seen that flash of Amber that day in her eyes when she'd mated herself to them.

Brayden had stared right at him in Els' room, not really said anything much, just sighed heavily, he was pretty much Conners' constant companion for those three days. He would often just come and sit in this room with Conner. He had brought several books on shifters with him to go through. They'd all obviously heard about the conversation he'd had with his father, with Sloan.

That Sloan was a shifter of some sort and had not even flinched at his full Alpha Aura rolling down the phone at her, told him she wasn't afraid of him. Brayden was trying to figure out what Sloan was. He answered questions that were asked of him, but other than that, he and Atlas didn't want to do anything but be in her room.

Adam had told them he or Kade hadn't picked anything up on Sloan that day they'd met her. She'd just smelled like whatever soap she was using. Which is exactly what Conner had stated, that she just smelled clean, mostly.

None of them had sensed anything in El. She was human, as far as they could all tell. He'd been through her bathroom and smelled the body wash she used, the shampoo she used. It was why she smelled so soft and delicate; it was all delicately scented as well. Smelled just like her, exactly like her actually, he'd commented.

Though it was Brayden that got up and looked at it, smelled it himself, commented that it was unusual for her to just scent like that, and nothing of her natural scent to pass through. He'd strolled off with the bottle of her bodywash and sank down to research it. It was made by a company that shipped world-wide and was based out of Seoul, Korea. Its company logo was a simple dark pink hibiscus flower, similar to that of the country's national flower itself.

It had branches in six continents around the world, was a widely sold product for something that only had a handful of different products, all body care products. He ordered a bunch of it out of curiosity, only took two days to get to them, didn't even have

to express ship it. Apparently, the company prided itself on not just the quality of its products but being able to deliver within a 48hr timeframe.

Brayden had brought it right to Conner, and Adam had strolled into the room with him, along with Cameron. Those two were happily Marked and Mated, and from what he'd heard, both of them had moved into their official suites up this end of the building. Their Mates were settling in well too.

He'd looked at the pair of them, and they'd both shrugged and stated requested to come here. Brayden had opened the box that had been delivered and gotten them to smell each one. It hadn't taken him long to pick the one that Sloan used, she'd simply smelt of white linen, which was the scent allocated on the bottle as well.

Then he'd given them all a bottle and told them to use it. Obviously, he had a theory of his own, that the product itself was the reason behind not being able to scent out what Sloan was. He'd not been wrong either. When they'd all come back, none of them could smell the pack scent, or what they were, their natural scent was gone, and they all just scented of the bodywash and shampoo used.

He'd looked at all of them and shaken his head. "Whatever they are, they don't want people knowing about them, likely use this to roam about at will undetected by rogues and other packs."

They all had to agree with him, he'd finally gotten off his a*s after that and packed a suitcase. He had no idea where Sloan had taken El, but his wallowing and self-pity party was done, it was time to get out there and look for her and he knew he should have done it days ago but was too down and out at losing her to get up from her bed. Even Atlas wanted to just bury himself in the bed they'd shared with her, smell her clothes and generally be where she had been while here inside this pack.

She had holed herself up in this room, not really cared about being alone, or it didn't seem that she did. Which made him wonder about shifters that didn't mind being on their own, were solitary creatures there were a few. Although that flash of Amber he'd seen, he now knew that was her shifters' eyes. Many creatures had amber eyes when shifted. Wolves, bears, foxes, many of the cat shifter breeds, cougars, leopards, panthers and tigers all have yellowish to brown eyes that could lead them to having amber eyes, though most would have green.

She could be anything, and all those animals bar wolves were known to be solitary type creatures, that might stroll around in human form and hide their scent from other shifters. He had no idea. Though he had to agree with Brayden that whatever she was likely originated in Korea. They had Asian black bears and Siberian tigers as part of their history, and some of the other animals were leopards, lynx cats, and foxes.

They were no closer to knowing what she could possibly turn out to be. Then there were the Korean mythological creatures, that they'd looked up, nine-tailed foxes, dragons,

lion creatures that did not help their search either. But he did know that not one of them would be afraid to take on a wolf either.

The shifter cats would likely be, and maybe a fox, but all the others would hold their own. Would also likely be bigger than a wolf in its true form. Told Brayden to pack, he couldn't ask Adam or Cameron. They both had new Mates that would go into heat soon. Though both did tell him they would catch up to him wherever he was in his search for El.

His father didn't even stop him from leaving, though it was 90 percent Conner's fault. His father had let her leave the pack, had told him that with the possibility of a war coming to them, he'd honestly thought she would be safer out there with her grandmother away from the pack. Seeing as she had no idea what they all were.

His first stop was not Sloan's place. He had a feeling that not only was that woman expecting him, she was going to be in full protection and fight mode. There was a possibility that Sloan had dropped El off with her friends in California, so that was his first port of call. The Lake Valley Pack, his father, had given him the address. Conner didn't even ask him how he'd gotten it. It could be any number of means.

He just drove himself and Brayden out to that pack. It was out by Irvine Lake, backed right on to the eastern side of the lake and stretched out into the mountains beyond it. Parked his car at the gate and got out along with Brayden, announced himself and requested to speak with Collin, Cordi and Xavier.

Wanted a look at that man's neck. If he was marked and had claimed El for himself, the man's head was likely to come clean off. She was not his mate and both Conner and Atlas knew that. One didn't just go about taking something that didn't belong to them, and he had laid his claim on her, they knew what she was to him.

It didn't take long for the three of them to drive down to the gate, his eyes moved right to Xavier and his neck, there was no filigree on him. Had to stop himself from actually sagging with relief. But that didn't mean she wasn't here. It wasn't likely they would bring her here to him. It might well be a nightmare getting her out of another pack.

"Conner?" it was Collin.

"Collin, is Eliza here?"

"No, did you lose her again?" he smiled right at him.

"I didn't lose her." and technically, he hadn't. "She was taken." He stated.

Watched Cordi step forward "What do you mean, she was taken Conner?" he could hear the concern in her friend's voice.

"Her grandmother took her, was supposed to bring her here to her father's grave, and then bring her back to the pack. She never came back." He told her.

Heard Xavier laugh now, "Well, ain't that karma for you." He'd already warned Brayden of who Xavier was, and that he'd had designs on El, had called her his girlfriend.

Narrowed his eyes on that man, "Do you really want to piss me off Xavier, my wolf has no qualms ripping your head off."

"It would start a war." He snorted, "and we outnumber you."

"You think that, but just because I'm standing before you, doesn't mean my Beta and Delta aren't else were with a bunch of warriors ready to rid this pack from the world, if you're hiding her here." He didn't have any of that, but they didn't know that.

They did know Adam was his Beta and that it was very rare for an Alpha to travel without his unit, so it was plausible that he had Adam somewhere out of sight but close by.

"Alright boys, enough. I get it you're both interested in Eliza. Stop this. El wouldn't want it." she shook her head. "Why? Do I always have to be the one in-between all of you?" she walked right over to him "Conner, El is not here. If she was, I would actually put her in front of you." shook her head "You are an a*****e but you are her Mate yes?"

"Yes, and am actually mated to her, or was till she vanished and was severed from me 5 days ago." He nodded.

"May I?" she indicated his collar.

"I have not marked her, there is no need to look at that Cordi. But I, and my wolf Mated her, she Mated us back."

"Then how did you lose her?" it was Xavier.

"I had to go and attend an allied pack that was being attacked, and with the threat of war reaching out to our home pack, father opted to send her away. She was still unaware of what we were at the time."

"You're an i***t," Xavier muttered, "I'd never have let her leave the pack. Would have sank my fangs into her before leaving."

"That would be irresponsible with the full moon only 3 days away." It was Brayden. "Could have killed her."

"She's tough."

"Do you actually know what she is?" Conner asked.

Saw all three of them look right at him now. "No, I guess not. She's not human, she is a shifter herself. unknown as of yet what."

His eyes were on Cordi, that girl was her best friend. If anyone could hazard a guess, it would be her. He could also see her brain ticking away on it. He noted that everyone was watching her, "You were human once, weren't you?"

"I was." She nodded "Not so much anymore." She stated "El, was human. I grew up with her, slept over in her family home, she stayed at mine. We've both even been here and stayed here with Collin and Xavier inside the Pack."

"Her dad was here a few times, worked for the Orange County Parks, ran a few studies around these parts. Had permission from my father to be inside the pack all the time."

"Likely he wasn't human either. Some sort of shifter himself."

"Then dad would know." Saw that man's eyes glaze over, was only a few minutes, then shook his head. "Dad says he was human, but we are on extremely good terms with the OC Parks, their people come and go as needed."

"Cordi, I would appreciate any help." He looked right at El's best friend.

"You're going to claim her then?"

"Yes." He nodded.

"Didn't really seem like you were nice to her. She doesn't like you Conner, called you an a*****e, said you had a girlfriend. Did you?"

"No, not at all."

"Then why would she tell me she saw you with someone else just hours after she gave herself to you?"

Heard his own Gamma snarl in anger. He didn't know the full extent of their relationship, and was just now finding out. He could feel anger rolling off his Gamma, and ignored it for now. They could argue about it later. Were likely too, by the sound of that snarl. Saw all of them look right at Brayden and knew they knew he didn't know.

"I didn't know she was my Mate then, I have issues with humans. Or had issues, I was trying to make her go away." he shook his head, "not so much over the past month. My wolf never cared, she was human, just wanted her. I couldn't deny what she was to me over the last month, couldn't bloody keep my hands to myself either," sighed "Yes I

treated her badly, but I won't do that now, I want to find her, apologise, I want her, we both want her back."

He could tell she was weighing up his words, this was her childhood best friend he was talking about. "She Mated you?"

"She did, I don't think she even knows what she is. But yes, Mated herself to me."

"How do I know you speak the truth?"

Though about that long and hard "I guess you have to take my word for it."

"I don't actually." She shook her head "I haven't spoken to EI in 5 days myself, all her social media is gone, her phone is disconnected, vanished even from me. I am concerned we would normally talk daily."

"She always smiles when texting you." he nodded.

"I can't help you Conner, I don't know where she is. If her grandma took her, you'd best question her. I would like to know she is okay myself."

"Sloan is not human, she is an Alpha or some sort herself. Questioning her will not be easy."

Heard Collin laugh "Are you telling me our EI is Alpha-Blooded?"

"In part, yes, half we believe, her mother is definitely human, her father not so much."

"Do you know what her grandma does for a living?" it was Cordi.

"I do, is not only a truth seer, but a retrieval specialist."

Heard Collin whistle now, "Well, Conner. I wish you luck getting your Mate back from that woman. Will protect her grandchild fiercely, I imagine, and if she knows anything about your and EI's relationship like we do. I don't think she's going to just give you that information."

He already knew this, unfortunately, nodded his head and turned to walk away.

"Conner, give me your phone." It was Cordi. "I'll put my number in it, call me when you find out where she is. You might need help swaying her."

He handed her his phone and she called herself from it and then handed it back to her. "Call me or text me." She stated.

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Chapter 60

Conner POV

He was standing at the site of one Taro Kit Hunt's grave. It was a lovely white marble headstone with yellow daffodils planted on it, though it was the symbol that was impressed right into the marble that had his attention. It was either a pack symbol or a shifter symbol and he knew it, it was not open for all to see, it was simply carved into the top of it, small and precise. It was a sitting fox that was smelling a daffodil inside a circle.

Spoke volumes to him and Brayden, but to everyone else, who wasn't a shifter, it was just a simple but pretty carving on a headstone. To him and Brayden, it meant the man had a fox for a mother and was likely a fox shifter himself, which meant so was El. Though the carving did not depict what type of fox or what colour.

He was curious himself, Atlas huffed inside his mind. He didn't care what she was, only that she was meant to be his, that Conner had screwed it all up. He had to find out where she was? Likely she was inside a fox pack now, right in the den itself, that was not going to be an easy thing to find. Those shifters did like to keep themselves well hidden, usually so well hidden you didn't even know you were on their territory unless face to face with one.

Accounted for the specialized soap that she used, that her grandmother used, they were Alpha-blooded and keeping one's half human grandchild safe and unscented to everyone was no easy feat, he imagined. This also accounted for why she liked being outdoors and wasn't afraid to be in the woods ever. It was her natural habitat.

There were, however, many breeds of foxes out there, likely as many packs as wolves had. Though he knew many of them actually resided inside the big cities themselves, they were more sociable with humans, likely those rich gated communities were owned by foxes.

If her father was always here, and had the use of the Lake Valley Pack, he presumed their home pack had to be close. Though Sloan herself lived in Seattle, so it was possible that she had her pack up there and her son was here solely because it was where Brittney had come from. Who knew, not him, that was for certain? Foxes were not like Wolves, come and go from packs, free spirited. Fit into gypsy packs easily.

"A fox shifter?" Brayden sighed. "That is not going to be easy to find, a den."

"No, it's not. Especially considering Sloan stated she handed her over to another, is where she belongs."

"So, in Sloan's home pack in other words."

"It is very likely yes." Conner nodded "I don't even know where that is, or where to start looking. But Eliza has Italian descent, so I would be guessing we should start with that if Sloan is not going to be forthcoming."

"She did want to study in Italy."

"That she did. Likely, I'm guessing is probably over there somewhere." He turned and walked back to his car. As he called his stepmother, she picked up right away.

"Conner?"

He knew what her question was, and knew she was not about to ignore any call from him. "Not with Cordi, but your husband's grave was interesting, to say the least."

"Why?"

"Got a fox on it." he commented.

"Yes, I know. He loved foxes, studied everything about them, had a whole collection in his study on them. It's in storage for El actually."

"You should have led with this Brittney, there are fox shifters. It's likely he was one, that El is part fox."

"Oh, I didn't know that, Conner, I'm sorry." She sounded a little shocked to him.

He sighed, she was still new and dealing with carrying an Alpha pup at that, wondered about that, seeing that El was a half Apha-blooded fox. "What was your pregnancy like with El?"

"Um, normal for the most part. Why?"

"Most part? What wasn't normal about it?"

"She came early, is all, was like 2 and a half months earlier than expected, a tiny little baby at that. But a good, strong fighter. It took a long time to have her years, in fact, but both Taro and I were healthy, the doctor said."

"That could have just been because he was a fox and you human is all." Shook his head
"Where is the storage unit, can you send me the details? There might be something in there that leads me to his home pack."

"His home? He always considered Italy his home, took El there all the time when she was growing up."

"Really, now that is interesting to me. Do you recall where in Italy?"

"Um, I didn't go the last few years. They were father-daughter trips, those two were like peas in a pod."

"Brittney, where in Italy? It's important, likely where El is." He pulled her back on track.

"Um, I don't really recall, I haven't been there since El was like ten. He would usually take her while I was away on school excursions or she would go with Sloan. I would ask Sloan."

"She's not going to tell any of us where Brittney, so you really need to think on this. Get yourself a map of Italy and see if anything jogs your memory. Also, what university was she supposed to go to? Likely Sloan has let her enroll in it."

"The University of Bologna. It's where her father studied."

"What did he study?"

"Entomology and Dendrology."

"Insects and Trees." Shook his head, two things foxes loved. "Text me the storage details there might be something in there that helps me, locate his home pack, what about family photo's?"

"Everything that was Taro's is in there, for El."

"Did you ever tell her that, might have helped her to know she still had those things."

"I never had the chance, she was always so angry, Conner."

"Mm, because you and father took everything away from her. Everything that was her father, all the things she was attached to. Likely felt suddenly disconnected from her heritage even if she didn't know what she was."

He heard Brittney sigh "I didn't know Conner."

"None of us did, Brittney," He acknowledged. And clicked the line closed. It was getting late. He looked at Brayden. That man had yet to explode about what he'd heard Cordi

state, "Let's get some food and rest, check out that storage site in the morning. This hunt is not going to be easy."

"No, Italy is a large place, and even if she attends that university, there is no guarantee she's going to be on campus the day we are there, might not even be staying on campus, likely within the new pack and commutes to and from with others of her kind."

"Agreed and who knows what days she'll need to be there, what times her classes are. If those around her are her alpha-blooded relations." This was turning into something that might not be manageable for him. Getting her back could well take months or even years and he knew it. He might not ever be able to get her back.

Not if she actually feels like she belongs there, if she is comfortable there, she might just stay there regardless of him being her Mate. Knew she had to have been initiated into that other pack, it was the only explanation for her feeling severed from him, unless, of course, that person Sloan gave her too, took her for their Mate.

Though when he thought about that, Sloan had said that person would respect her choices, so he didn't think that was it, she wouldn't even know what they were right away, so he could only come to the conclusion that she had been initiated, which meant they had told her what she was as well. That was likely going to come as a shock to her.

They headed for the storage site first thing in the morning and everything was neatly boxed up in there. Everything had been labelled for what it was, that made things easier. He was sitting on a box as Bradden was going through Taro's things. He was actually looking at photos of her and her father in a photo album, smiling at her as a little baby, even then she had those unusual eyes, her father had them too.

Sloan as well, held out a picture to Brayden. It was of the three of them. She was about one in the photo, had black hair and silver-grey eyes just like her father and grandmother. "You want to bet those silver-grey eyes of hers are part of her Packs distinct lineage."

Saw the man look at it "Yes, find the den with those eyes and we'll likely find EI herself." he nodded.

"Are you going to yell at me Brayden, I really don't like waiting for you to explode?" he sighed when the man just turned back to looking through the box he was in.

"Good, let you fear when it will happen." he muttered, and said no more.

Conner shook his head, he didn't so much as fear it, just wanted it over and done with. To be honest. He went back to looking at the photos. There were lots of photos of her and her father camping out in the woods, doing outdoor activities and holidays, he realised.

Took him many hours to go through those boxes, to find that photo album that he thought he was looking for. She was little and there were lots of kids around her. All looked Italian descent, likely these were all pictures from inside Taro's home pack.

"I got it, or at least I think so." He said after looking through it, there was a lake, open fields of grass and trees. Though he noticed that not one photo actually showed the buildings, carefully taken, though he could see in the background of a couple of them, foxes off in the distance. The question now was, could they use those photos to source out where in Italy this place was.

She was of different ages inside the album, from a small toddler, six years old and then maybe like ten as well, even one when she was likely 16. This album showed her growing up. She'd not changed much, was always pretty, even as a little one. Seems her father took her there often, likely trying to sense out her shifter or not.

Though it wasn't just her father in them, Sloan was in some of those pictures as well, and another woman, close enough looking for him to know it was the woman's sister. This was their home pack, though why Sloan was out here away from it, he didn't know.

Not even he really liked being away from his pack, from the forest that surrounded it, he felt connected to the land that was his, to the other wolves inside it. He was curious if Foxes didn't have that strong connection themselves. Or if they just liked to wander like gypsies did.

He handed the album to Brayden and he flipped through it, looked at the photos, "It's the same lake," he noted, "Likely is the pack, but there is no picture of the den itself."

"I noticed that, carefully taken, though a few inside it, just not the building itself."

"Countryside not city." Brayden nodded "That might make it a bit easier. Dens in the city's would be harder to find."

"Walled in or a single apartment building." Conner nodded.

There was no symbol on the album, none on any of them, but Brittney had not been wrong, about all the pictures of foxes, the man had heaps of them, lots of mythology books on fox shifters of all cultures as well.

"Let's go home." Conner sighed.

"You don't want to talk to Sloan."

"No, she didn't like me anyway, is not going to give me anything on EI. If EI was unhappy and wanted to leave, that's all that would have mattered to Sloan. We'll head for Italy and start the search there, with her university of choice."

“That would be too obvious, Conner.”

“Let’s just see when we get there. Sloan is a fox, cunning and sneaky, likely highly intelligent and likely very wealthy if she is an Alpha. Also, with it being Taro’s alma mater, I’d be willing to bet, Sloan could pull strings and get El back into her school of choice. Perhaps she thinks we wouldn’t go there because it’s where we would expect her to go. So obvious a place to look that we’d dismiss it.”

“Hiding her in plain sight, you mean?”

“Yes, sometimes the best place to hide someone is right under their nose.” Conner nodded.

He packed several of those boxes into his truck, most of them actually. Brayden just stared at him for a moment and then helped him. He was going to prep for her to come home, he was not going to give up on her. No matter how long it took, he would bring her home and show her their suite was filled with all the things from her life growing up, that he wanted her to have those memories around her.

Showing her that he cared about her, hadn’t really done much of that, needed to show her he really did care, though coming across her might be an actual issue with Atlas, he was going to want to claim her on the spot. Stopping his beast from doing that was another matter, something else he was going to have to work on.

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