

Chapter 123

She looked so different. Her eyes were bright and I thought it looked like they were gold but it was the sunlight filtering in between the trees branches. The fact that she looked younger than I was didn't help. A small smile came to my face as I registered that her hair was only about to her shoulders. For so long I had been growing out my hair for it to be longer than hers and here she was sporting a short cut. It felt the same as when we were back on the territory, when she would sit on the couch and read. So much so that it made me tear up.

"Is everything okay?" She closed her book and sat up.

I shook my head. "It's fine. Any way you can tone down the power?"

Chuckling, Mom shook her head. "It's not me. It's the tree. He's a transplant from the Fey Realm and likes to show the earth how superior he is. Did you want to go to another room?"

I thought about it but I shook my head. Walking around, I slipped my shoes and socks off as I walked on the glass covered ground. It really was like walking in the Fey Realm. It was a completely different feeling, at least the handful of times I had been there. It was going to take a minute though to get used to the level of power the tree was exuding.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?"

I sat down on one of the roots that created a bit of a natural bench. "Avoiding paperwork. Everyone is gone today and I'm already ahead of the game."

"So you thought to come over? I'm a little shocked. I figured I would be the last person you would want to be stuck around."

Humming, I sighed and leaned my head back against the wood. "I'm mad and upset. But there was so much more going on than I thought. I thought you were just..."

"Running away from responsibility?"

I nodded and looked at her. She was tracing the top cover of the book she had in her lap.

"I've been known to be non-committed but after years of dealing with explosive matters, the smaller things I tend not want to be part of. I am sorry, Vale. I never meant for you to feel like I abandoned you. That would be a bad habit of mine." She chuckled softly. "Ever since I was a kid, I would find things that would hold me down but as soon as I felt they were okay...I would be gone. Or if I thought I could protect others by going off on my own."

"I know, Mom. Between Zeke and what happened and then the news that you killed Mark. Everything felt like you were just fighting everything I was working towards. It hurt and I felt like if you had just talked to me, we would have been able to work something out. Then I just was angry. The only way I thought I could get you in would be put a bounty out for you."

She smiled. "Well, that didn't work well."

I laughed and shook my head. "No, no it didn't. Between you, Grandpa and probably Pipsqueak I had no chance."

"I mean, you technically found me on your own. When you brought in Peter to the club."

"I guess I did, didn't I?"

Mom shook her head. "I thought I had been made. I honestly thought you were there for me. Then you didn't even recognize me. I don't think I realized how much power I had until you froze in fear. Especially when I hadn't done anything to you."

"I mean, you can't expect me to recognize you when you look like my little sister with blue hair."

This made her burst out laughing, her arms wrapping around her stomach. "Your...little...sister. Goddess."

My head shook as I looked up into the tree. It was just so massively impressive. The air was cool but you could still feel the warmth of the day filling the room. No wonder she was reading here. Once you got used to the power, it was really comfortable. I closed my eyes and listened to my mom's chuckles but also the wind rustling the leaves above.

"The runes on your back...are they still there?"

She took a couple breaths to stop her giggles. "Yeah. It was the only way Uriel found to help reign in my power. Otherwise, it was just wild and I couldn't control it. Nearly

took out an entire city."

I hummed and eventually peeled my eyes open to look at her. "Can you help me? Help me be better?"

"In what way?"

"All ways. I'm so far behind Zeke when it comes to training and then I feel like I'm so ineloquent when it comes to speaking and knowing what to say. It's like because I've been out of the High Council's castle all these years, I've lost everything I learned there."

She reached out and took my hand, squeezing it. "Vale, you're far too hard on yourself. You always have been." I sat up straighter, looking at her as she smiled. "You are perfect, the way you are. The High Council was never supposed to dictate how you are as a King. It was always supposed to be a foundation. One that you have used and worked with for a while. I'm also not the one that is an expert on being a good King."

Leaning back, there was a sad smile on her face. "Because of what happened with Logan and Micah, your Dad spent the majority of his time pretending to be the Alpha King. No one knew outside of a select few that the power had been passed to me. So, I wasn't privy to those meetings or how to act. I was only me, doing what I could with the power that I had. Just like you are doing."

"But..."

"No buts, Vale. If you want me to teach you to be stronger, that I can do. Hector will always be a gentler teacher

though."

I laughed. "I know. But training with you always helps remind me how much further I have to go."

"What does training with Hector do?"

"Remind me I'm out of shape."

She laughed and nodded. "I saw Zeke when he picked up the kids the other day and I thought he was going to die where he was standing."

"Yeah. You say that he's the gentler teacher."

Her smile was wide, menacingly. "It depends on what your goals are really. Hector right now is doing the basics in how to fight against vampires speed, fey's magic, as well as monsters. Getting your body so accustomed to fighting that your head is free to adjust on the fly. What are you looking for?"

I looked down to my lap for a moment, my mouth in a thin line. "I want to be able to hold my own against Oran. I want to be able to protect Zeke if I need to. I don't want to feel overwhelmed by his power."

Her inhale and exhale were torturous. "I mean, it won't be in time for the meeting coming up."

"That's not supposed to be for fighting though. That's supposed to be our lifting off point."

"We don't know if we are even going to have a battle on our hands."

I nodded. "I know. I just...want to be able to have the option that I'm not going to immediately die at his hands." She huffed and shook her head. "Please Mom. If you have to, consider it you making up for lost time."

Mom growled. "Oh, you sneaky boy. Trying to use that as leverage."

"Do you know how off-putting that is for you to say that when you look like you're twenty."

She cracked a smile. "Alright. That mouth just got you in trouble. We can start tomorrow. I'm not ready today. I need to add more runes if I'm to not accidentally kill you."

My eyes widened. "You add more?"

"Sometimes they break and I need to reapply. Or add more if I'm going to need to throttle myself back even more." She stood up and reached out, taking my hand. Pulling me up with her, she pulled me with her as we walked out of the atrium. "First though, I have something you might like."

We wove back through the castle, past the dining table and into the largest kitchen I had seen next to the one in the High Council's castle. This was far more modern though. It also made you feel like it was used by a witch. The dark green cabinets and different flowers drying gave it a feeling like I could easily find a cauldron somewhere in here.

"I'm glad I decided to stay up last night. Sometimes, I just get feelings that I will need things."

She went over to the fridge and opened it up, pulling out a

Tupperware container. My eyes widened and I started to shake my head.

"No way. No way is that..."

Mom's smile was so big as she took the lid off, revealing a perfectly made cake. There had to be at least four, maybe five layers under a deep blue frosting. She took out two plates and forks before cutting one huge slice and one average slice. Pushing the large slice to me, I picked up the plate and watched as the fork cut into the moist cake. Putting the cake laden fork in my mouth, I stood there for a couple seconds. I could feel my mom's eyes on me, probably wondering if it was like she always asked. What I didn't expect, nor did she, was the emotions that bubbled up and I bursting into tears.

Setting the plate down, I covered my mouth as I sobbed. Mom's arms wrapped around me and held me as I cried. She cooed me and stroked my hair as she told me everything was going to be okay. I just nodded, wrapping my arms around her small frame. ¹

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'm so sorry."

Chapter 124

I regretted everything. Every bowl of pasta I'd ever eaten. Every piece of bread. Every cookie, cake, and piece of pie. I regretted every elevator ride instead of taking the stairs. Every time it was a quick drive instead of walking. Every lazy decision I made was coming back to haunt me as sweat poured out of my body. We had passed breathing heavy over an hour ago. Now, I was just wheezing like I had asthma.

Somehow, everyone knew that I was going to start training with my mom as soon as I got home. They also made sure to get me out on time the next day. I had the meeting with Vampire King, or Oran, tomorrow. So she said it was the perfect time to understand how much I shouldn't be fighting him. Boy, was she right. She had asked Naresh to take a backseat this time and he happily scoffed, throwing out unhelpful critiques.

"This reminds me of when you came back from the High Council and ran away from Zeke."

It was like she had been just taking a stroll. Not a hair wasn't out of place; not a single hit of sweat, or even a slight glow. When I came this morning, I had seen Uriel again and they were talking but it seemed like Mom was in pain. She explained it wasn't a fun process to add the runes to her back, holding her power in, but that it was necessary in this case. I thought that it would even our playing field this morning. I was severely wrong.

"It feels so much worse now than it did back then." I wiped my face with my shirt.

The salt was starting to sting my eyes and it tasted awful. I tried to get up but my knee locked and I started to fall to the side. Hands grabbed my shoulder and I looked up, my mom smiling at me.

"I think you were more out of shape back then. You're doing better to stand up to me."

I scoffed. "You're stronger though. I was out of shape back then, but now...it's just the gap of power that I think is severely apparent."

She hummed. "Should I add more runes...?" I'm pretty sure she was saying it more to herself than me but I shook my head.

"It's fine. I just need to accept my own weakness."

"No. Never accept your own weakness, Vale. You need to understand your weaknesses but never accept them.

Always fight to be better. You have people you love that you want to protect. How are you supposed to do that if all you do is accept that you won't be able to do that?"

My head fell. "I just..."

"Sweetheart, I'm not showing you or training you to show you that you are incompetent. Time and training, I think you could hold your own against Oran." Her eyes were far away. "When I fought Micah, I had been training your Dad, Hector, and Bryan. They were hilariously unprepared. Hector

probably was the closest at the time. I thought that since I could hold my own against Papa, that I...I could defeat anyone. That I was the shit."

Her smile was bright and she looked down at me. "I lost. I lost against Micah. He had the numbers, the magic, the strength. I technically lost."

"Maximillion saved you, right?" I had heard some of this story but not that my mom had lost.

She nodded. "Max got in the way of Micah and his final shot. If he hadn't, I'd be dead. So, you can feel like your the shit. You can be on top of the world but you will never be unbeatable. Everyone has weaknesses and you have to overcome them and be stronger in order to protect the ones you love. You must understand them. Exceed them. Always push yourself. Know your limitations. Know when you need help and don't be afraid to ask for it."

I sighed and stood up, my legs felt like jelly and my whole body was screaming at me that it hated even breathing. "If we don't take a break, I might not even make it to the meeting tomorrow."

Throwing her head back, she laughed. "You're fine! You did better today than you did that first day years ago."

She slammed her hand on my back. The action had pain radiating all over my body and I leaned over, throwing up the small amount of food that I had for breakfast. Gasping, my mom started to rub my back and pull the hair up out of my face.

"No...don't...it's gross."

Snorting, Mom shook her head. "I changed your diapers, young man. You want to talk about gross? You think I didn't know when your father snuck you snacks that you weren't supposed to have when you were little. Please. I smelled it all. Touched it all. This pales." She was quiet for a moment. "Sorry, I didn't mean to push that far."

I shook my head. "I needed it. Everything just hurts."

We chuckled together and Mom helped me back up to my feet. She continued to hold me up as we walked out of the training rooms and down the hall. There was an unattached bathroom and she helped me into it. She set up the shower and turned it on warm.

"Tomorrow before you leave for the meeting, take an ice bath. I'll let Zeke know as well. You're supposed to do one about 24 to 48 hours to help the inflammation and since we won't be working tomorrow, it will be the perfect time to do it. For now, take a warm one. It will help relax your muscles."

I nodded, feeling more like a child than I had in years. "Thanks, Mom."

She headed out, but before closing the door, Mom smiled at me. "You are always my child, Vale. I will take care of you. There are just times when I know you can take care of yourself and you don't need me anymore. That is a testament to your strength. Nothing else."

Smiling, I smirked at her. "You know, it would be more

impactful if you didn't look like you needed to get carded at a bar."

Mom flipped me off before slamming the door shut. I laughed and shook my head. The bathroom was as opulent as the rest of the house and it felt like a luxury. Even with how large and beautiful ours was at the house. It really made me wonder how much time and money my mom and Hector poured into it. My brow furrowed for a moment.

'I wonder what she does to make money. Before, I knew Dad was well off with the pack and everything. She helped with our pack but she never took a cent.'

Naresh hummed. 'Well, Maximillion gave her everything. So it could be from that. He was over a hundred right? And working for Morgan? So it would make sense he would have money.'

I nodded. 'That's true. Plus, I doubt Morgan would let them just struggle. I just never really thought about it before.'

'You haven't thought about our finances either though. You let Zeke take care of that.' He chuckled.

'Alright, alright. So I have more than physical weaknesses. Thanks, Naresh. Fuck off.'

He laughed all the way into the back of my head and I finished up the shower in a huff. Inspecting the bathroom, I realized Mom had put not just towels, but had extra clothes for guests as well, in all sizes. It looked like that there were sizes for kids too. I grabbed one of the larger boxers, sweats, and a shirt before rubbing my hair with the towel.

Hanging it up on the back of the door, I walked down back into the kitchen where Mom was making a snack.

"You know, I could trim your hair. It's getting long."

My eyes widened and I ran my hands through my hair. "For so long I wanted to grow it longer than yours. But...now you have it so short."

She slipped a bowl of yogurt with fresh fruit, granola, and what looked like a drizzle of honey. "I do all the kids and Hector's now. It's kept from my skills getting rusty." Her smiled was nostalgic as she dipped into her own bowl of yogurt with a spoon. "I still can't do it with my eyes open though. It feels too off."

I smiled. "You were always the best. Maybe it is time for a change."

Mom shrugged. "Whatever you want. I'll be happy to do."

"Can we do it short? Like a sweep to the side on the top but buzzed on the sides?"

"You sure you want to do something so drastic? I mean, a year or so and it will be past your butt."

I took a couple bites of the yogurt, mulling it over. "I think it might be fun. I can always grow it back if need be. Plus, the whole reason I was growing it has gone out the window. Zeke always looked better with long hair than I did."

"You look handsome, sweetheart."

Rolling my eyes, I shook my head. "Says my mom."

She laughed but I watched her eyes light up, looking behind me. Hector came in, completely drenched in sweat. He also lit up and came over, kissing her on the top of the head.

"I see you faired better than I did." He grumbled but turned to smirk at me. "It doesn't look like Vale faired well though."

I grimaced. "You have no idea."

"He threw up."

Hector laughed and shook his head. "Well, better than I did that first time. It took me three hours to regain consciousness."

My eyes widened and I looked at Mom who had a sheepish look on her face. "I didn't have as many runes then. You held out a lot longer than I thought you would. So did, Vale. He's not in as bad of shape, he just needs some refinement and strength training. Maybe a little stamina too."


Hector smirked. "Same with Zeke. I think we could make sure the two of them work on that stamina together."

I blushed and tried to shake it off. "You know, talking about my sex life with my parents...isn't something that ever should be normal."

Mom laughed. "Oh sweetheart, get over it. It's just sex."

My face went red. "I keep saying that it would mean more if I wasn't looking at you two like your ten years younger than I am!"

Hector snickered. "It's just our looks. I've never felt so damn

 +25 BONUS


old in my life. Especially trying to just talk to the guys I'm training. What is a yeet? Why do they keep saying I'm 'yeeting' someone across the field?"

I snorted and covered my mouth to keep the last spoonful of the snack in. Auri was laughing and shaking her head. "Love, it means you tossed them. Well, more like violently threw them across the field."

"Ooooooh." Hector hummed as grabbed a water bottle out of the fridge. "That makes sense."

"I can't even with two. I just can't..." I shook my head and buried my head in my hands.

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