

## Chapter 17

Darian let me go, I grabbed the side of the couch to steady myself after he ripped his hand from my face and I heard a gasp— followed by a loud thud and something wet splattering on my face.

“My King, that is enough, please.” Lady Hale snapped with a nervous twinge in her voice.

I heard something heavy falling on the floor and turned my head down when I smelled the blood. My heart started racing as panic set in. I couldn't see but my mind was creating illusions of what had happened and I didn't want to believe any of them.

Please say something. Tell me you're not dead.

“Alpha Emanuel, please choose from any of the unmarked girls. Whichever one you want shall be yours,” Lady Hale said.

I released the breath that I was holding, Emanuel was still alive and as long as he kept his mouth shut it might stay that way.

The smell of blood reeked and seeped up my nose. I felt the wet liquid on my cheek and I wanted to dry myself of but I was too afraid to move.

I reached up and touched my cheek with the smallest movement. The tiny droplets of blood splatter painting my skin. I could only imagine how pale I looked— nausea and in pain didn't exactly add color to your cheeks. The crimson of the blood on my skin would look like a rose petal on snow, beautiful and dead. It was how it felt, standing trembling with nobody coming to my rescue.

“Don't worry about that, puppet,”

I jerked when Darian's thumb pressed against my cheek and he smeared the blood across my skin.

"We'll get you cleaned off nice and good soon enough." He said. If I had my sight I bet I would see a dangerous smile with hate stricken eyes and silent promises.

I shook my head and prayed that my vision would return sooner rather than later. As of right now I was nothing but a sitting duck in a room full of poachers.

I heard scratches on the floor, the cracking of a bone as he presumably got up and stood straight.

He was alive at least, that was all that I cared about.

Now please, Emanuel, don't be stupid.

"You could challenge me for her." Darian said out of nowhere.

My whole body stiffened painfully but something about the thought of Emanuel fighting for me caused a heat that overpowered the pain for a moment. Would he agree to the challenge?

He wanted me, he would take care of me and he saw what I was in for if I was left with the king.

But then the reality of things with a much bleaker truth set in and I knew that if they fought, Emanuel was dead.

"Don't speak up." Trixy warned me.

"Darian will kill him!"

"That's not our problem," she defended but I didn't agree with that. Of course I wanted Emanuel to fight and to win but I wasn't dumb enough to trick myself into thinking that he stood a chance. There was a reason for why the Lycans had been our royals since forever and it wasn't because werewolves had opted to stay inferior.

"He's one of the good ones, he won't die for us." I gritted my teeth.

I pressed my nails into my palms and felt Trixy take over and try to heal me from Darians damage. Ever so slowly but surely a light started to form where darkness had been and I began to see silhouettes, black figures and light orbs.

Come on, faster!

I saw hints of the couples standing around and I must've blinked a hundred times and gritted my teeth to dust but eventually I saw a broad and hard back with arms bigger than I had seen on a werewolf. He faced Emanuel and though his back was facing me, I knew he was gleaming with pride.

And there was Emanuel, staring back with an equally fierce glare but there was an understanding in his eyes. My blurry vision somewhat returned but I shook it off and focused on those kind, playful eyes - slowly shaking my head back and forth just once hoping he would see.

Emanuel turned his head and locked eyes with me. Those eyes could make even the most lost soul on this earth feel as though they had found a home.

"I'm sorry," he said gravely with a defeated look.

"Please, do choose one of the girls." Lady Hale said giddily and gestured with her hand for the line of girls in dirty white dresses and disheveled braids standing meekly against the wall.

"One must be to your satisfaction," she purred.

Emanuel pushed his chest out and pressed his lips into a thin line.

"Yes, one was." He said darkly.

Lady Hale wasn't bothered, she knew who was really in charge and she had never been known to care for a life other than her own.

That had to make things easier - make life easier - not caring about anybody but yourself and only ever doing what feels right for you.

"Easy?" Trixy said, tired from using the last of her energy to heal me. She was slowly retreating to get some rest.

"You don't think so?"

"Caring about nobody isn't easy. Don't forget that it goes both ways. She's not happy, she's lonely," her voice was quietly echoing as she disappeared into the back of my mind.

Emanuel stepped closer to the girls, one by one he started silently ranking them - sizing them up and evaluating their looks and prominent features as well as bone structure and strength.

He moved in front of Iliana, moving away her braid that fell over her shoulder and circled her neck with his hand.

"What is your name, sweetheart?"

She took a deep breath and tilted her head back.

"Iliana,"

He rubbed her neck and licked his lips as his canines extend.

Yes, she's good, she deserves you.

Do it.

"Lovely," He mused and bit down on her neck.

The blood ran down her skin in a line and she fisted his shirt and screamed out in pain as he branded her.

I watched Darian move in front of me and I immediately stopped smiling and looked away.

If he saw me happy about Emanuel and Iliana, I was sure he'd find some way to ruin it.

"I guess you weren't worth fighting for." He said with pride swelling in his chest.

I lifted my head, looked up and stared him dead in the eyes now that I could.

"I'm not worth dying for." I said in a correction.

Darian bit back a growl and didn't look away from me even when Lady Hale spoke up.

"The Hunt is now over, you have caught your prey, it is time to show the girls their new homes. Those of you who haven't been marked will be taken back to your pack, go with captain Tala and await further instructions."

I saw the face on some of the girls who hadn't been marked, the sadness and shame.

Hopefully one day they will see that they were the actual winners of this Hunt.

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