

Chapter 61

The next week passes in a daze, one I wish stayed forgotten. Marco hasn't spoken, just sat in her room for the entire time, only leaving for her funeral. Axton and I have tried to get him to leave, knowing he needs blood but nothing we do seems to work. Yet as each day passes, he slips further into psychosis, induced by his insatiable hunger. After the second day when we realized he hadn't fed for four days before Sondra's death, Axton having counted the blood bags in the basement, he forbids me going into the room by myself.

Which is hard because one thing I know is Sondra wouldn't want us moping, life goes on, and things need to be taken care of. So, for the past two days, I have done nothing but organize housing and work details for our move to the city. Axton today is dealing with never ending strigoi attacks, his absence from the city really amped up the attacks, so much so Osiris having taken over for a mere week, called him begging him to come back to help since the city has been in a panic state since the first one, on the night of Sondra's death.

We couldn't seem to catch a break and even the boys are teething so it's been a never-ending cluster luck. Having finished packing up the kitchen I walk to the closet to start that task next. Most of the pack was already in the city, the trucks having picked up the women's belongings yesterday, so there is only the main packhouse left to move. My mother and Luke are moving into the penthouse apartment Axton owns. So today we are planning to pack what's left of the pack house for the truck arriving tomorrow.

Reaching the top shelf, Axton's arms wrap around me from behind as I pull down the box from the top cupboard in the huge linen closet. "I need to head into the city," he whispers, dropping his head onto my shoulder.

"How long? I can meet you at the packhouse tonight, mom and I should be done here by this afternoon hopefully," I tell him and he nods and then sighs.

"Has he come out?" Axton asks me, and I shake my head peering down the hall toward Sondra's room. None of us have touched her room. Most of Sondra's

belongings we have put in storage for Marco to go through when he's ready, despite him claiming he wants nothing.

Axton exhales, kissing my cheek then wandering down the hall toward her room. "I put the boys in their bouncer's downstairs. Luke is watching them while your mother brings some boxes up from the basement," he tells me as I follow him. Axton stops at the door and knocks, but like usual Marco doesn't answer so he pushes the door open. Marco is still sitting in her rocking chair, staring at her bed, his fingers steepled under his chin, with a dark expression on his face.

"Marco?" Axton calls out while stepping into the room. Axton moves cautiously, stepping in front of him.

"Get up, Marco." Marco says nothing, but leans back in the chair, watching Axton.

"I could have changed her," he mumbles. His voice was rather raspy after so long of barely speaking.

"Sondra didn't want that," Axton reminds him.

Marco rocks back and forth in her chair and nods. "No, she didn't. Maybe if I convinced her when she was younger, she may have taken the offer, but I was too late. We were always too late. Fighting against time, looking for the perfect opportunity which never came and when it did, she was too old to take it. She believed she was a burden to me." Marco says, looking over at me.

"Always too late. I was too late to stop Floyd from marking her, too late to stop their wedding, too late at telling her I love her. Always so focused on work, waiting for an opportunity that never came. I missed my opportunity to save her. Instead, I willingly gave her up to him thinking that is what she wanted when all she wanted was for me to save her from him." Marco whispers, Marco rubs a hand down his face, looking rather tired, it makes me wonder if he has slept at all, or if he has just been lost in his own head.

"And now that is the burden I carry, the burden of time. Time, I thought I never had and will never get again."

"So why are you wasting more of it by sitting here?" Axton asks him.

"Time is irrelevant without her now. I was always fighting to get back to her, and now I have no reason to keep fighting; I already lost any time I perceived as valuable," he chuckles.

“I wasted it, and because I did, it killed her.” Marco states.

“I don’t know, but your crazy is starting to show and if Sondra was here, she would be beating it back into its box. So instead of wasting more of this never-ending time you have, why don’t you come do something productive with me, like save the pack that Sondra worked so hard to build from being eaten by a strigoi?” Axton suggests.

Marco pauses and seems to think for a second. Yet Axton is right, so long in here and he is starting to show sides of him he usually kept hidden. He wasn’t even trying to hide his fangs, usually he did, mostly he tried to keep what he is hidden. However, now he dropped the mask and doesn’t seem to care.

“I can’t go into the city. I am not even sure I can leave this room right now, Axton. Your scent is enticing enough. If I step out there, I may just kill somebody. Sondra would be furious if I killed somebody, especially one of her own.” Marco tells him, only as he speaks the words do I realize why he is in here. Lost in his own thoughts, he ignored instinct for far too long, leaving him trapped and making him ravenous. The only safety was in this room, away from temptation.

“Are you trying to make me look bad? Damn, Marco, I swear you just like the damn taste of me. Blood bags not doing enough for you these days, you have a freezer full downstairs?” Axton snaps at him while unbuttoning his jacket. I stare at him, wondering what he is doing before looking at Marco. Axton shrugs off his jacket, tossing it on Sondra’s bed, and shakes his head.

“I just fucking ironed this shirt too,” Axton huffs, unbuttoning his white button-down shirt. He hands it to me and I hesitantly step into the room, only for Marco to move with speed I miss. Axton’s threatening growl sends shivers down my spine when Marco moves with a blood crazed gleam in his eyes. Axton cutting off his path toward me as if he expected it. Marco shakes his head, staggering back and blinking rapidly.

“Mark my mate and I mark your chest with a stake,” Axton growls, while Marco shakes his head, his body twitching and he swallows.

“Elena, leave the room. Shut the door behind you, please.” Axton says calmly, holding his shirt out to me. I glance at Marco then Axton who stands chest to chest with Marco. My hands shake as I take his shirt, rushing from the room as he asked. My heart thumps erratically in my chest when I peer back in.

“Close the door, Lena. I’ll be out in a minute,” Axton tells me. Lexa urges me to listen, but I worry for my mate. Reluctantly, I shut the door. The moment I close the

door I hear a savage growl, and struggling. I hold my breath, and Lexa presses to the surface in case Marco comes out.

Pain flickers through the bond fleetingly, as I hear stuff being smashed around and my hand twitches for the door handle. I can hear fighting, hear that Axton shifted when I hear a loud thump which makes my heart jolt in my chest. When silence falls, I grip the handle, only to hear Axton's voice.

"Did you have to take a chunk out of me? I'm not a fucking steak, you damn cannibal," he scolds. Exhaling in relief, I open the door to find Marco pressed to the floor, Axton straddling him naked, having shifted back. He has a huge bite mark on his arm, ribs and even his shoulder blade. Blood cascades over his chest and back and I near faint at the sight of him. Axton looks like he had a blood-bath, puncture wounds in his neck yet not in the correct place to mark him. Marco, however, is also in the same state, Khan having torn him to pieces. The room is nearly completely upturned, and stuffing from the mattress covers the floor like snow.

"Your balls are touching my fucking leg!" Marco snarls.

"Your teeth were in my damn neck, so I guess we're even!" Axton retorts. I clear my throat and both of them look at me.

Axton looks down at Marco pinned on the floor and Marco wipes his mouth with his thumb, before sucking the blood off it.

"Wow, well this is awkward, just one man's balls on another man's leg, a few love bites, nothing sordid, just a drive-thru snack, nothing to see here," Marco quips. Axton growls at him, shoving him off his feet.

"Clearly, he likes to be the top! I don't know how I feel about that," Marco says, dusting himself as he sits up.

"Those were my good pants," Axton snarls, standing up.

"And that was my good hand, you damn savage! You know you're poisonous to me, right?" Marco snarls, holding his hand up to show Axton. I look at his hand to see where Khan had bitten him, his hand black and looking infected.

"Fuck!" Axton curses.

"I'm fine. I'm too old for such a prissy bite to affect me," Marco tells him. Axton snarls, reaching for his hand.

Marco jerks it back. “We don’t need to hold hands afterward. Your mate is right there, have you no manners,” Marco snaps at him and I raise an eyebrow at him while Axton rolls his.

“I can see why you and Sondra got on so well, the same snarky sarcastic sense of humor,” Axton snaps as he bends down, snatching his jacket and holding it up. Claw marks shredded through it. He groans. “Hers was far better,” Marco replies, and even now, with his normal facade back in place, I can still see the mention of her name causes him pain. Just now, not in a blood craze, he has better control of his emotions to mask it.

“You can borrow one of mine. I have few in the car,” Marco says, back to his normal self.

Marco moves to the dresser, the only thing really left intact. He picks up a photo from it.

“Next life my love, next life we’ll get it right,” he mumbles only just loud enough for me to catch. Axton watches him worriedly, then grabs a sheet, wrapping it around his waist. A few minutes pass and Marco seems to be slipping back into the same depressive mood.

“Marco?” Axton calls, drawing him back to us. Marco jumps and sets the photo back down. He clears his throat and straightens his shoulders.

“We have work to do.” Marco speaks, walking out of the room and past me without so much as a glance back. Axton wanders out slowly and sighs.

“Reckon, he’ll be alright?” I ask him, and he shrugs.

“No idea, but at least he is out of this room.” Axton tells me. He presses his lips to mine briefly. “I will see you tonight.” he sighs. “Now to go try to squeeze into one of his damn suits, or I am going to the meeting in this old sheet,” he chuckles, and I hold his shirt out to him. He takes it, pecking my cheek.

“I love you!” he calls over his shoulder.

“Love you too,” I chuckle, watching him leave. When he does, I turn back to close Sondra’s door. Sucking in a deep breath, I pull it closed and get back to work.