

Traded To The Lycan King by MG Wattsons

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Chapter 61

*Colette

“You should at least try to rest **and** lie down while you wait for them all to come back,” I **insist**, and he shakes his **head**.

*If I have to rest for a minute longer, I am going to implode.” He grumbles, taking a step. I panic, my arm sliding up his back **as** he groans in pain, his head flying back as he grits his teeth.

“Sorry!” I hiss, releasing him as he slumps to the side, **his** hands landing on the side table to hold himself up. “Shit,” I mutter.

“Perhaps **a** walking stick would be better,” he says, wincing.

*Or maybe you should be sitting down at the very least.” I say, looking around the room, finding a tall stool for him to sit on. I drag it over to him, then as gently as I can I lead him to it. My eyes scan his back, the pink, melted skin breaking my heart with every breath he takes.

“Are you going to fill me in on what you and Hayes were silently figuring out? Or do I have to find out with my father?” I ask

him.

He exhales, his hand on **his** side and a grimace on his face as he tries to inhale a deep breath

“Percy and Leandra, no longer speaking, is not a coincidence. At least I do not believe it is.”

I furrow my brows, **walking** around in front of **him**. Merikh reaches out, tugging me closer to him as he wraps his tired arms around me, sticking his hands in the pockets of my jeans. I place my hands on his face, stroking it with my thumb, afraid to touch him anywhere else. Should it cause him any more pain?

“What makes you think that?” I sigh, relishing the sparks from our bond that zip through us. His color returns to his cheeks. no longer looking so gaunt as the sparks work as a painkiller for him

“There are certain ways someone can be spelled or enchanted to do whatever the spellcaster wants. Most species have a way to do it, but only two leave the host a shell of themselves when they are too far away from their caster. Meaning that when the others fled after the fight, they took the ca ster with them, also meaning that the person behind it all is a witch or a fae.”

I chew on my lips, processing what he is saying. Then I open my mouth to ask another question, but the door flies open. I turn to look at my father as he rushes in, Brent and Elm right behind him and Hayes bringing up the end. I step to the side, my hand sliding to Merikh’s hair, just to have a hand on him

“Hayes says you have an idea of whom to look for?” Brent asks hopefully and Merikh nods, his eyes looking glossy and dull as he grows more drained by the second.

“You should be in bed,” I remind him quietly and his eyes skirt in my direction, a hint of annoyance filtering through **the** bond between us **and** to smile. Sick and exhausted, and he still gets annoyed with me. That has to be a good sign, right?

I try

“Both Percy and Leandra, the woman from the woods, have stopped eating and talking. He says, looking around. Caspian looks at Brent and Elm over his shoulder, both looking stunned as their brows knit together and they look at each other.

“Is it possible?” Caspian asks them. Elm pinches the bridge of his nose and Brent drags his hand through his short, dark hair. “I can’t begin to imagine who it would be on my end, but it is a possibility, yes,” **Elm** admits. Brent frowns and nods, looking at the ground.

“My circle of people is much smaller than Elm. I trust them all explicitly, but that does not mean it can’t be possible.” Brent admits.

“I see,”

Caspian **says**, an unimpressed frown on his lips before he sighs. “Does anyone in particular come to mind?”

“I can only think of two.” Elm says, “the others have been silent **on** council matters. But there are two who are openly against werewolves and **lycans**.”

“I will need to go back to my coven. To try to see if I can break what curse has a hold of them.”

He who has traveled and when Brent says. “But tryi
would like to speak with them

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“I thought **you** had done everything you could to break it and failed?” I ask him and he shrugs.

“Verbal communication is not the only kind that exists. There are ways around spells without breaking them.”

“Go now,” Caspian says to Brent. He moves toward the door and I look **at** Merikh, trying to decide if I should stay with him.

-Go with Brent—He says through the mind link.

-Are you sure?— I ask him, and he offers me a gentle smile.

-Even if I try to run. I promise you will be able to catch me with no issues—
He says, making me chuckle **out loud**.

“I will come with you Brent, I call to him as he opens the door. He pauses, pushing it open for me to exit along with him. His willingness to take me only solidifies my thoughts that he is **not** working with the enemy, but that doesn’t mean I won’t be

cautious.

I look once more at Merikh as he turns and speaks with my father, his eyes meeting mine as the door closes.

“It **is smart** to keep an eye on me,” Brent says, shocking me.

“Are you saying I need to keep an eye on you?” I ask, arching a brow.

“No. But if I were you or Meirkh, I wouldn’t trust me blindly either. There is a lot at play here, a lot at stake, actually.”

I nod, exhaling slowly as we walk down the hall and take a right turn, heading to the stairwell.

“Can I ask you a question, Colette?” He asks curiously.

“Ask away,” I tell him and he thinks for a moment, either thinking of a question or how to phrase one.

“The thought of a hybrid has always excited me. What type of powers would they have? Would one species be more dominant than the other with powers? Or can a hybrid really only be one species?”

I chuckle, caught off guard by his excitement, and I shake my head.

“There is a lot that I am still learning about myself. My abilities, that is. I adore the water, it makes me feel better. When I am away from it, I am weak, like Caspian seems to do as well. I can survive being away from it, but I am prone to human sickness and exhaustion.”

“Hmm,” He hums. He opens his mouth to ask another question but snaps it shut, choosing to wait for me to continue.

“I am still learning what I am capable of. I can manipulate the water, not like Caspian can, but still. Uh, I can also make it **rain**. from the water underground. My cheeks are pink with embarrassment, feeling like I am bragging or talking about myself too much, but when I look at Brent, he seems completely captivated.

“That is astonishing. Do you plan to continue to work on your abilities?” He asks me, and I shrug.

“We need to get back to our pack. They need us and our protection and with Merikh being so injured, he needs the strength of his people to help speed the healing. And Caspian needs to be back in the ocean sooner rather than later.” I explain with a soft sigh.

I’m not sure yet that I am ready to say goodbye to the father I just found, but I am Luna. Not just a girl with a dad. I would love to learn more, figure out my li

mits and **how** to use it to protect the people I love. But right now, it's one thing at a time. Wanted and desires need to be pushed aside for needs to be settled first.

"Have you thought about going back with Caspian?" He asks, arching a brow and I chuckle.

"And where would I stay?" I ask him. "I am half werewolf. Breathing under the water isn't really a speciality of werewolves."

"Ah," he says with a frown. "That would have been pretty cool if you were able to breathe underwater long term like you father can."

I laugh. "That would be pretty sweet. I won't lie

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He stops at the door I visited earlier and I ready myself to see the hollow version of my gamma male. Brent forces the door open, revealing Percy, who sits on the couch in white pajamas, staring at the wall.

"Percy," I call to him sweetly, and he doesn't move. I move closer to him, taking a seat at his side while reaching out to take his hand. "We are here to ask you **some** questions, okay?"

He doesn't acknowledge **us** as Brent steps forward, pulling out a pen and placing it in Percy's hand along with a tiny pad of paper. Percy doesn't even look down at it. He just holds onto both for dear life.

"Percy, what is the last thing you remember?" Brent asks. Percy's fingers move, writing down four letters, the very same ones that match the fogged up mirror in my bathroom.

FIRE.

"Percy, what do you mean by fire? Can you explain that?" I ask him and for the first time, his eyes flicker to me, looking more like his as he looks away. He writes nothing else. He instead zones out once more and I find myself growing frustrated. "Percy, I command you to tell me something!" I hiss out, angered by the lack of progress we have made recently. "Draw a picture, something"

He shakes his head, and then suddenly he is drawing something. Brent looks at me, impressed, before he looks down and I lean over as well.

“What is that?” I ask Brent.

“It looks like a lily,” he frowns for a second before his eyes go wide.

“What?” I ask him. He groans in frustration before he stops.

” . Elm isn’t going to take this well.” He grumbles,

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“What does a lily **mean?**” I ask him as I grab Percy some water from the night stand, hoping I can get him to drink something. “And *why* would that be something that concerns Elm?”

“Elm calls his mate his lily. His queen. It is the name everyone **calls** her now.” Brent says.

I spin to look at him, taken aback by his response, then my nose crinkles in thought.

“But how would Percy know that?” I ask him. “He is as new to this council stuff as I am. I doubt he has met her before.”

Brent looks at the small paper still on Percy’s lap as Percy stares out the window as if in longing. A frown tugs at Brent’s lips as he lets out a heavy sigh

“I don’t know. But I do know that the second Elm sees this, he will be **alarmed**”

“You can’t really think **that** Elm’s own mate has something to do with...”

Until recently, I really didn’t think hybrids could exist either, and yet here one stands in the flesh next to me.” He gives me a soft smile.

I move toward Percy, sitting on the bed next to him. My hand reaches out, gently grabbing his to get his attention, but it's like: trying to get the attention of a hollow log.

Percy, you need to drink something." I say softly, shaking his hand slightly.

"He won't drink it." Brent reminds me.

"But he responded to me, demanding he draw something." I remind him and he shakes his head like I'm not understanding something.

"Your Luna command worked because it appealed to the gamma in him. His job is to protect you. It is what he is programmed to do. He can only fight so much, he won't waste the energy listening to the demand to drink water."

"I can't just let him waste away and die because some asshole possessed him and left him like this." I grit out fighting back

tears.

"I know he is your gamma and you have a special bond, but we need to inform the others. If it is Lily, then Elm needs to know. he is being betrayed and **act** accordingly."

"I thought you were going to try to break the curse, or whatever it is. At least try to make it better?"

"I need things. If it were a simple witch's charm, it would be easy, but with the Fae if it is Lily's doing, then I need things from nature. They tie everything they do to the earth. So right now, we need to focus on sharing what we know first."
"

I look at Percy once more, reaching out and turning his face so his empty eyes are trained on me. He is just a shell of who he is. The light gone from his eyes and his skin pale and sunken already. He is wasting away and we need to save him, just this once it is my turn to protect him.

"Percy, I will be back later I whisper to him, hoping he can hear me somewhere in his void mind. Then I turn to Brent and sigh heavily. "Let's go."

It hurts to walk away from Percy, leaving him looking like this when he has done nothing but put himself on the line. I want nothing more than to return the favor and protect him back, but I can't do anything until we break this freaking link between him and the asshole who has their claws in his brain.

We move in silence back to the room where Merikh is. I rest my hand on the door, pausing when it opens slightly but stops. I can hear voices, that of my biological father and Merikh whispering in hushed tones and then I hear my name

“But, Merikh, Colette would be safer” I hear my father plead.

“She is safe with me. Did I not prove that?” **Merikh** growls lowly.

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I furrow my brows in confusion, looking up at Brent, who clearly can't hear what is being said as clearly **as** I can with my enhanced hearing. Had he known that this was my father's plan to ask me to go with him all along? Was that why he brought it up

earlier?

“She was safe with you, but now that you are injured, how long will it be until you can protect her again? Colette should be working to hone her skills. She has potential to be both a skilled siren and werewolf if we let her embrace both sides. Let her stay with me, just until you are back up to full fighting strength.”

“I will not let her out of my sight.” Merikh says, his voice laced with **pain**. “She is my mate. Mine to protect and rule with. Without her, I am nothing.”

My mouth is dry as I try to swallow. They think they can make decisions without my consent? Say yes or no to things that concern me without even first consulting me? **Would** Merikh even tell me if he didn't know I overheard him? I remove my hand, taking a step back. My fingers quivering before I drop them to my side.

Brent stares at me quizzically but he says nothing as I push back my frustrations and annoyance before I shove the door open. and enter the room pretending like I had heard not a word they were discussing.

“We spoke to Percy,” I say, looking between them, then I scan the room, trying to find **Elm**. “Where is Elm?”

“He needed to step out for a moment.” Merikh says, his face flushed as he sits with his hands on his knees, leaning forward, looking pale.

“You should be laying down.” I say, making sure to lay my disappointment on the table. He looks at me like I might have gone crazy and I roll my eyes. “You are injured, Merikh. You need to heal and pushing yourself will only make it take longer.”

“Colette, what did Percy have to say?” Merikh asks, conveniently changing the subject.

“Nothing, but he drew a picture of a flower” I say, motioning to Brent, who produces the paper and hands it to Merikh. His brows knit together in thought.

“Is this a lily?” He asks, looking up, and Brent nods.

“Yes.”

“Damn it.” Caspian curses under his breath. Merikh **looks** at him, concern spreading over his face.

“You don’t think Elm knows, do you?” He asks Caspian, who shrugs.

“Who the hell knows these days? One moment I trust everyone and the next I am getting stabbed in the back.” He throws his hands up.

“We don’t think he figured it out and ran, do we?” Brent asks cautiously. My brows shoot to my hairline in alarm and I look around at the three men who look uneasy about the question posed.

“No.” I finally respond. “No. He wouldn’t have stayed through a fight like that to ditch us now.”

Elm, for some reason, felt genuine every time we spoke, like there was an understanding of trust between us. He is a royal who believes in honesty and equality.

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“Who is ditching who?” He asks, coming into the room.

“No one,” I smile, damn happy that he proved my instincts right, at least this time anyway. “But we do **have** to talk with you.” He nods, looking around the room, a single eyebrow arching as he releases a deep breath. Then He walks over and takes a **seat** on the edge of Merikh’s bed near Merikh where he sits on the stool trying to stay upright.

“No need to be dramatic and delay it.” He announces, *and* I look at Brent, waiting for him to speak. After a moment he doesn’t and I sigh, taking the drawing from my father’s hands and placing it nearly in his. He frowns at it before looking it over.

We watch as his eyes go from confused to curious, and then his cheeks redden and he stands abruptly. Elm doesn’t utter a word, instead he seems to stew in his anger and frustration. Then he clears his throat and drops the d

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“Lily.” He says softly, like a disappointed whisper. “What the hell have you done, my love?”

“Do you really think it was her?” I ask, not entirely convinced yet. There are many variables to think about. Like why she would do it, how Percy would even know who she is to point the finger of blame on her.

“Do you have reason to think it is not?” He asks, skeptically.

“That came from someone I know never met your queen. Percy drawing a lily could mean a few things. Like the flower was present. Or maybe he is trying to send us to a meadow for answers.” I offer and he shakes his head, not believing me.

“Colette, He wrote fire on the mirror as a warning that it was the dragons. He is warning us with elements. Lily’s have no meaning in our worlds, and if Percy had met her, like he would need to in order to be possessed, perhaps she shared her name”

*Lily wears a broach, one that I had made for her, to remind her she is my little flower when I am away. She has never taken it off. If he had seen that, it would explain the drawing and how it looks so similar. Elm says,

“It sounds like you want it to be her,” I say, running my hands through my hair.

“I am a practical being. Letty. One who rules with logic and not emotions. The fact is, there is a likely probability it is my Lily. Which means I need to find her. If you will excuse me again, I need to make contact with the rest of my kind to locate my queen.” Elm rushes out the door, leaving it wide open behind him.

“I will take that as my cue to leave as well,” Brent says. “I will try to break the curse or work around it now that I know what to do. He gives a slight bow before he rushes out the door as well.

“Do you really think it was a nature fac?” Merikh asks, looking at my father, who is rubbing his temples.

“Who knows anymore?” He grumbles. He gives me a gentle smile before looking back at Merikh and giving him a stern look. “I beg you to reconsider what we talked about.”

“I won’t,” Merikh clips out and Caspian sighs heavily before shaking his head. He brushes past me, dropping a kiss to the top of my head and a soft smile before leaving the room.

“So, what did you guys talk about?” I ask Merikh, raising a brow, waiting for him to answer.

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Merikh looks at me with a small frown, his face pale and sweat beading on his brow. It’s obvious he is in pain and exhausted. I should help him back into bed, force him to rest, but I need to **know**. I need to know he wasn’t going to make a decision for me and never tell me. Merikh and I have come too far, suffered too many lies and miscommunications to falter now,

But I need him to come out and say it. For me not to be disappointed in him and what we have. He has to be the one to bring it up first and tell me how he feels without demanding I do one thing or another. He sighs, then he stands, taking a fumbling step toward me as his eyes drift closed and open slowly.

“Shit,” I mutter, rushing to him, holding **him** up as he hunches over.

“We need to talk,” He whispers, but his voice is weak as I move him to the side of the bed.

“Save your strength. Right now, I need you to try to scooch onto the bed for me.” I tell him as he sits, and then with intense care and lack of speed, he drags himself to the middle of the bed, his eyes closing

I guess that talk will have to wait until he wakes up, no matter how much I feel. I need the answers now. He sighs **as I** gently pull the soft sheet up and over his body, then I move to the door. If Merikh **can’t** tell me, then I will talk to **Capsian** and hear his side of things first. Learn why he chose not to come directly to me first before approaching my mate:

“Stay,” I hear the words muffled by the pillow, my hand pausing on the doorknob. “I need you.”

His words are all I need right now, stopping me in my tracks, reminding me that he has done nothing wrong yet. Merikh is sick, severely injured and his body drained from its constant **healing**. An argument between him and my father over me is the least of my problems. No matter how upset it makes me. Right now I need to be a good mate and luna.

I turn back around, looking at him as his barely open eyes lock on me, **his** body working hard to breathe easy. My heart aches. my eyes getting watery as I move wordlessly to the bed. I kick off my shoes and take off my t-shirt, leaving me in only my bra as I crawl in next to him.

My warm skin touches his clammy body and he shivers, seeking more skin to skin from me. The sparks dance through the bond and I can feel his muscles relax, the telltale sign that the bond is easing his pain as it should. I lay next to him, my body pressed up against his side as I reach out and stroke his hair from his face.

“Is this better?” I ask him, and he hums happily in response.

His breathing grows more regular, his body working less strenuous as he seems to fall back into sleep. I sigh, just looking at his all too handsome features. My thumb strokes his high

cheekbones, making me smile softly as I run over his stumbled face. I tilt my head, next assessing **his** sharp nose and the tiny freckles that from a far aren't noticeable.

I wish I could see his piercing green eyes at this moment, witness the love he has for me, but instead of waking him I let him sleep, continuing my assault of touch on his face. My fingers trace his lips before I lean closer and press mine to his. He smirks and hums, his eyes remaining closed.

"I missed you." He whispers, and I chuckle.

"How can you miss me? I **have** been by your side all along" I remind him, and he shakes his head softly.

"Not when I close my eyes. I miss you when I close my eyes." He says, sounding a little drunk.

"Then dream of me, you crazy alpha." I grin, then bite my lip. It shouldn't make me blush, but it does. The way he speaks, even when he is exhausted and ill

"**Too** tired to think," he murmurs. His voice breaking off. As I lean closer to his ear.

"Then I will tell you what to dream about," I whisper to him.

"Min, yes, please

So many options spin through my mind. What would constitute a good dream for him? The devious part of me, the one that wants him to heal so I can enjoy my nights with him in a different way, begs me to say things I shouldn't. **But** then again,

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perhaps I should give him something to look forward to.

"I want you to dream about when you are better. When all of this political crap is taken care of and it's just **you** and me. Back in our pack, in our room. In our bed." I say my cheeks are heating as I speak to him. "I refuse to leave the room for an entire week, and I refuse to let you leave my side."

“Maybe, something less spicy.” He groans, shifting around on the bed slightly, and my eyes pop wide.

“Oh my gosh. I’m sorry,” I giggle, realizing he must be uncomfortable laying on his stomach with whatever my imagination is. doing to his body.

“Me too.” he sighs.

“Why don’t you tell me what you want to dream about? It may help you actually fall asleep more efficiently.” I offer.

“You, and me. Our future. Our family,” he says, his eyes opening for a moment, and meeting mine. My heart stutters when our gazes meet, my desire to be closer to him nearly suffocating as I wiggle further into his side. He chuckles and then his eyes fall closed again.

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“Let’s see. Our future.” I whisper in thought. “In our future, I see three kids. Maybe two boys and one girl. She will have stunning eyes and my **hair**. Our boys will look just like you, but they will be wild because they won’t have to worry about wars and death. They will get to be kids, all of them.”

As I speak, I realize I can see this future all **too** well. All the way down to the cute black tennis shoes our future little boys are wearing. Merikh makes me want it all. The life I never knew I wanted or could have. All I want is him, me and peace. And in order to have that, we need honesty. I have his loyalty and he has mine. But where we lack is truth and openness.

“Our relationship will be perfect.” I murmur, speaking into existence the way I want it to be between us. “We trust each other, and we share our expectations. There is nothing we don’t share as we rule together.”

I move my hand down his neck, his head stretching to the side, seeking my touch. I drag it down his arm, stroking it up down until I finally hear his lightly snoring. A smile dances across my lips and I watch him as he sleeps in peace.

-Luna. Caspian asked to speak with you – Penny says through the mind link

-Tell him I will be there soon, please—
I shoot through the link. I can feel her acknowledge my request.

and

I don't move right away, instead I lay for a few minutes longer watching Merikh, not wanting to disturb him by removing myself from his side. Then I lean forward, pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek.

"I will be right back. I've been summoned." I whisper.

I extract myself from the bed carefully, watching him the entire time to see if the pain comes back and is too unbearable for him. When I make it to the door and notice he hasn't moved, I exit and rush to my father's office.

I pass by the open hole in the ceiling and wall where the conference room used to be, careful not to hit the new construction that is already in place to secure the building to prevent further damage.

As I make it to his door, he exits, looking surprised for a brief moment before giving me a gentle smile, Caspian motions toward the doors leading outside and I **walk** along beside him **in** silence until we exit the building and the doors close behind us. I can see how tense he is, the nervousness in his stature.

"Everything alright?" I ask him, and he chuckles dryly,

"That is a loaded question, dear daughter" He shakes his head. "My leadership has led to the downfall of the very thing protecting everyone."

I frown. "Your leadership is the only one that wants unity."

"For

ryou. I wanted unity if it meant you were safe." He sighs. "I was selfish, and now many lives are on the line."

I blink, my chest tight as his words sink in. He regrets choosing to protect me.

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"I see." I murmur.

He pauses and looks at me, his eyes growing wide. "I don't regret my choice, Colette. There is no shame in admitting I would choose you above all else. I would do it all over again if I had the chance. What I need is to be realistic with myself right now. Every innocent life lost is in my hands."

I sigh, looking up at the sky, taking in the cool breeze that dances **over** my face.

"You led the council," I say, looking back at him. "You were not the one who made the decision for them. Caspian, you call yourself selfish. I call the others weak minded. Their fear caused them to make an enemy of us, not the other way around. **Fear** and jealousy are divisive points. Not a father's love or the desire to make everyone equal in the council."

He huffs out a puff of air and looks at me, pride in his eyes.

"You are already such a wise Luna." he smiles. "Your mother would be so proud."

I look down, watching each step as I wring my hands.

"Will you tell me more about her?" I ask. "I want to remember her, to imagine her smile and the way she loved me."

"I actually wanted to discuss something with you first," He says, clearing his throat. "How would you feel about coming back with me to my world?"

I'm not surprised by his question, given the conversation that he had with Merikh. "Uh, after everything settles down?"

"No, I mean when we all leave in a few days' time." He explains, his hand going behind his head to scratch an itch. "I already brought it up to Merikh,"

"He hates the idea," I tell him without **even** have to address it with Merikh first.

"Naturally, but you would grow more powerful, and I could teach you-"

"You mean you could keep me safe, hidden away there because you know no one else can get to you there?"

"That too," He agrees. "There is so much you could learn, so much strength for **you** to unlock so you can use it to protect your pack, your mate."

“And where would I stay?” I ask him, arching a brow. “I can’t remain underwater forever.”

“We don’t know that,” He shrugs.

“Uh, hello. I am half wolf. Remember?” I ask him. “I may be half siren, but I don’t have a tail or scales for extreme swimming abilities when I get wet. Hell, I don’t look like you do when you are in the water. I look..human.”

He seems to grow sad and shakes his head.

“I’d have a cabin for you to stay in at night and during the day you could be in the water, learning, growing.”

“But I would have to leave my injured mate.” I remind him. “Something I would never feel right doing. I refuse to hide.”

He shakes his head, convinced that I am not understanding him,

“Colette, you are not hiding,” he clarifies. “You are learning, training. You will be getting stronger, strong enough to protect **those** you love and care about from attacks from the dragons.”

“And what happens if an attack happens when I am not there?” I ask him with a raised brow. He says nothing, just stares at me before he shakes his head, looking disappointed.

“We need to hope that doesn’t happen.” He whispers “You need this, Colette. Your pack and even **Merikh** need it. I just need you to think. Don’t answer me right **now**. Discuss it with Merikh, think about it. This is something I feel like would be beneficial to the whole of our cause. You need to do what is best for your pack, not **just** your relationships”.

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“I should get back to Merikh,” I mutter. Confliction stirring in my head and chest.

I know Caspian is right. My powers, whatever they may be, could very much come in handy and, as someone who can't offer much in the way of my werewolf abilities, this would be a huge advantage for us.

What I did in the woods with the fake giants was something I had no idea I could do. Heck, I'm not sure I could even do it

if I tried. But if the ocean makes me stronger than the freshwater lake in my pack, should I not try to see what it can do

again for me?

"Promise me you will consider it?" He asks. The sincerity in his voice is enough to make me see he wants this not to just keep me safe where he lives, but he wants me to learn, to grow.

"I will think about it." I tell him with a tight smile as I back away and turn, heading toward the mansion that once was so grand.

As I enter, I see Hayes storming out of a room, his fist flying into the adjacent wall as he screams in anger. I stop, watching **as** he drags his hands through his hair and then leans forward, resting his forehead above where he punched a hole.

"Hayes," I call out to him, walking in his direction as he straightens himself up and turns, shock written on his face. He tries to hide the hole in the wall, leaning against it with his back and clearing his throat.

"Luna," He says, bowing his head in respect, which only makes me raise a brow. Hayes has been respectful to me, but he is my brother through my mate, not just a beta or a pack member. It is so obvious that he is hurting and it's not just Merikh being injured.

"Leandra still not speaking?" I ask him and he looks down

"How am I supposed to reject her if she can't respond?" he growls, though his anger is **not** directed toward me.

"Why would you reject her?" I ask him and he looks at **me** like I've lost all ability to speak coherently.

“She is a traitor. I can’t take her as my mate now.”

I frown at the man I know to be wise beyond his years. One whose opinion is highly valued not only by Merikh but everyone who knows him. But maybe that is why he is so great at advice. Because he can see things from the outside perspective and with this situation, he is in the thick of it. Making terrible mistakes without asking anyone for their external thoughts or opinions. When it comes to his own life, he is lost.

“Being a traitor is a conscious choice.” I say softly, “I doubt she asked to be bewitched and used against her own kind. Seems to me she was used, not asked.”

Hayes presses his head back into the wall, lifting it and slamming it back. He does it again, hammering it against it twice, now three times, before I step closer and place my hand where the back of his head is repeatedly hitting. He stops and tilts his head to look at me, sadness in his eyes.

“What the hell am I supposed to do? I prize loyalty above everything, Colette,” He whispers, sounding broken. “Seeing her out there, fighting us..I can’t erase it. The colors of her eyes didn’t matter. She was going to kill my alpha, her alpha. How do I just forget that?”

“I don’t know.” I tell him honestly, my shoulders popping up in a shrug. “But I think it’s worth trying

“It’s like...everything went to hell when those damn zombie wolves arrived and now...now we are stuck there. Burning for the sins of our ancestors and tearing everyone else down with us,” He scoffs.

“That’s an interesting way of putting it, I **admit**. “Not quite how I see it, though.”

“Yeah, well, how the hell would you describe it?” He scoffs, his frustration seeping through his words. “We’ve been attacked so many damn times I can’t count anymore. We make no headway, these assholes just take win after win and we just lose everything.”

“It’s just life.” I **shrug**. “For so damn long, I was living in hell. Stagnant. Nothing to do or live for, losing everything, including

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who I was every day. I lived longer. Sometimes one person's hell is another person's salvation. All of this? These fights, these losses? That's proof we are still fighting. Proof these assholes can't beat us."

"So what you are saying is if we fight long enough, eventually we will win one?" He scoffs, and I chuckle.

"I don't know." I admit. "But giving up on the things that can make what you call hell feel a little less awful won't guarantee you any wins, either."

He snaps his mouth shut, looking at the door across from us. Then he sighs.

"Brent is with Percy, trying to break the hold they have on him. Then he will be here, working on Leandra next."

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should be there with her. I can only imagine how hard it will be for her to understand what happened, what is

"And happening

"I have to reject her once she is free..." He whispers. "I just don't know that I can do it. She is my mate, who I have waited for. But what if she is my Lauren...?"

I frown, hating how stubborn he is, but then again, he is **so** like his brother in that regard.

"*Leandra will need time to come to terms with everything first, Hayes." I say. "So I am going to ask you to not reject her for a month. Let her heal, come to terms with how used she was. Who knows, maybe you both will help each other."

He opens his mouth to say something, but I shake my head and step away from him.

"And she is **not** 'your Lauren! She was a one of a kind backstabbing bitch. She chose to betray Merikh and you. Leandra had no control over her actions.

“I suppose.” He murmurs, pushing off the wall..

“Don’t make me use my mate against you, Hayes.” I give him a stern look and he frowns. “There is no need to be in hell when you have the option of heaven. Stop being such a stickler for your made up rules and live a little. If Merikh and I can make this work, you can at least give her a chance.

As I turn to walk away, **an** ear-piercing scream tears through the hall, coming from behind the closed door where Leandra is. I rush forward to throw it open, but Hayes beats me to the handle. The door flies open and Leandra is on the ground writhing in pain as gasping cry tumbling from her lips,

Hayes drops to his knees, pulling her head into his lap, cupping her face as she shakes and cries out again. His eyes are filled with agony as he looks at me, trying to figure out what to do. I rush over to her, touching her skin, and notice how cold she is and how frail she feels. She is malnourished and something, or someone, is causing her immense pain.

“Shhh, it’s okay, I’ve got **you**” Hayes whispers to her. Leandra’s shaking hands reach out and grip into his forearms, holding onto Hayes tightly as her eyes roll to the back of her head. “Shit, shit shit.” Hayes panics as he shakes her gently.

“I need to go find Brent or Elm,” I say, jumping up and sprinting out of the room. I don’t make it three steps before Brent breaks into the room, his face pale and blood dripping from his nose. His state catches me off guard as I reach out and help him stand upright.

“What the hell is **going** on?” I ask him, and he sucks in a shuddering breath.

“They are fighting back. He whispers.

“Who is fighting back?” I ask and Hayes looks at me.

“The who has them in the curse?” He growls. “Does that mean they are close?”

Brent nods, and Hayes jumps up immediately, rushing out the door.

“Damn it.” I **groan**, helping Brent to the nearest chair before I tear from the room, sprinting after Hayes.

I scream after him, only for him to ignore my every attempt, so I kick my speed up. I may not **know** how to **fight**, but running

is slowly becoming my thing. Well, hiking was, but stamina is stamina, so I race toward **him**.

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“Hayes! Stop!” I cry out in my Luna voice, hoping the command is enough to make him stop.

But it’s not. That or he intentionally tuned me out, so he didn’t have to hear my commands. I should stop, and I should reach out to Merikh. He is the only person I know who can get through to Hayes, but he is injured and the second I say something, he will come running. I can’t risk that.

So I instead make the incredibly stupid executive decision to stick with Hayes and ensure he is safe. Two is better than one when it comes to fighting and though I don’t offer much by way of packing a punch, I can turn water on like a spout and blind a bitch if I need to. I hope I can anyway.

I follow his scent until I see him stopped and looking around in the woods, trying to figure out which way to go. He spins in a circle, growling in frustration, before cursing the moon goddess for the shit going wrong in the moment.

“Hayes.” I say, gently.

“You shouldn’t have come out here.” He hisses, stalking toward me. “Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

“Are you?” I spit at him. “Rushing out into the woods with no idea where you are going and who you are looking for? The same words. I remind you, that you were attacked in my spelled giant like things.

“I’m trying to save her. They are hurting her on purpose. He grits out.

“They are trying to lure us out and they are, yet again, winning. You are letting them win, Hayes.” I say, my eyes boring a hole

into his.

“You are the one that told me to give her time, Luna. This is me trying to buy her that damn time. Please, I am begging you... help me find this bastard and end them.” His eyes are wild and his voice desperate, and I realize there is no way I can deny his heartfelt plea

“Do you have any idea where they might be?” I ask him with a heavy exhale and his eyes water.

“Not yet.” He mutters.

“Then let’s start looking,” I agree. “But no telling Merikh until we are done. Deal?” I ask, and he nods in agreement. Neither of us **wants** Merikh out here dealing with things in his state.

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person

Hayes is frantic, not thinking right as he rushes through the woods, his head swinging from side to side. We know the who is **controlling** them is close. They have to be for Leandra to wake up from her void state. The question is, where is this person now? How close do they have to be?

It feels like an hour has gone by and Hayes is sweating, his hair a mess as he drags his hands through it for the hundredth time. No amount of telling him we will find them or to focus on looking will calm him. The poor man is distraught and crumbling with every passing second.

“Hayes,” I say, trying to get **his** attention as I step in front of him with my hands out. He scowls, saying nothing as he tries to **step** around me. I slide to the side. He is moving too, and he growls. “Enough!” he roars. “Go back to the mansion if you want to give up. I didn’t ask you to come with me.”

“I wasn’t **going** to suggest we stop looking.” I sigh. “I was going to suggest we split up. Cover more ground.”

He thinks about it for **a** second and then he pinches the bridge of his nose, shaking his head.

“No, not a chance in hell, Luna. I may be falling apart here, but I am not crazy enough to let you **leave** my side. You are my Luna and Merikh would literally kick my ass.”

I sigh, not really surprised or upset by **his** answer, but I needed him to relax, come back to his senses instead of storming through the woods like a frantic animal looking for a way out of a forest fire.

“We have been looking for an hour.” I tell him and he groans, throwing his hands up.

“I know, I know.”

“Brent has probably already broken the curse, and Leandra is lonely and terrified. We need to go back.” I say with a sympathetic smile. “Making sure she is okay is more important”

“Or **you** both could **make** another lap.” A feminine voice says, sounding amused. “I don’t mind waiting if you want to keep looking for someone you won’t find.”

I spin slowly, my eyes landing on a beautiful woman with deep brown hair and a crown made of pearls and silver. Her arms are crossed over her midnight velvet dress, a smirk on her pink lacquered lips. Her eyes are a stunning shade of orange, accented by dark mascara and eyeliner.

“Oh, I think we have found who we are looking for,” Hayes growls, moving toward her. I stop him by grabbing his arm.

I’m not sure how many strange women there are wandering around the woods out here, but before we go on the attack and kill someone, I want to make sure it’s the right someone.

No more zombie wolves, no more controlling the people we care about and want to protect. If this is Lily, if this is the bitch toying with people’s minds, I will let Hayes end her sorry existence.

“Lily..?” I whisper and she quirks an eyebrow, fear flashing in her eyes.

“I do not want to harm you.” She says and I scoff, watching as Hayes’ fists clench, his knuckles growing white.

“I am doubtful of that, considering you have already hurt so many people.” I tell her, and she takes a step closer to me. Hayes growls, stepping between us as he glares at her, barely restraining himself and his lycan

“All I want is to speak with you.” She insists. “It is urgent.”

*You want to talk to me? Fine, but my time comes at a price,” I say, shrugging and crossing my arms over my chest, taking a

similar stance to hers.

“What?” Hayes whips his head to look at me like I am insane.

“Name your price then.” She says, grinning, looking both pleased and relieved at my answer.

“Release the curse on my **kind**.” I say, matching her grin with a snarky smile. She laughs, the sound much like a song as it echors back off the trees.

“I am afraid I **can’t** do that” She shakes her head

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“Then we have nothing to discuss.” I tell her, “And I can let Hayes kill you to release the others.”

Hayes steps forward, his lycan breaking free before she juts her chin to a tree. A branch cracks, crashing down on Hayes. He tries to dodge it, but he isn’t quick enough as it lands on his legs. He groans in pain and I rush to him, my wolf prickling in my **mind**, wanting to be let out.

“I can not do that, but I can help you.” She explains.

“I don’t understand how you can help me with anything. The only thing I want is my kind free from your mind tricks.”

“I will help your beta if you speak with me.” She says, pointing to Hayes. “I will remove the **branch** and heal him.”

I look at Hayes, who struggles to **move** the thick branch. Even in his lycan form, he is stuck.

“What could you possibly have to talk with me about?” I ask her, trying not to look nervous over the amount of blood pooling around Hayes,

“Rumor **has** it you are a hybrid,” she says.

“You know I am.” I scowl at her. “You and Giselle, and whoever the hell else is on your side.”

“What kind of hybrid?” she asks **and** I furrow my brows, once again confused by her questions. Why the hell is she asking these questions? Is she trying to verify what she already knows or tricking me into some strange admission to use against me? “Again, you already know this,” I tell her, and her eyes light up. “So why are you asking such stupid questions?”

“So it’s true...” she chuckles, placing her hands on **her head**. “Holy shit. Caspi actually had an offspring. I thought Elm was making shit up.”

“Not just an offspring, but a Luna.” I scowl at her. She nods like she is processing the information.

“Yes, yes, that is right. He had **mentioned** you are mated to the Lycan King. How is he, by the way? When I received word of his injuries, I knew I had to come and help offer my services.”

There is no way this woman is Lily. Not with these questions. The only thing remaining is who the hell is she. Because if she isn’t Lily, then why the hell is she here right now?

“You aren’t Lily, are you?” I ask her, and she shakes her head.

“No, I am **not**. She smiles. “I am a fae, but I am not Lily.”

I blink at **her**, **my** eyes wide as she **chuckles** and waves her hand like it’s no big deal.

“Then help my Beta. Now.” I point to Hayes and she extends her hand, the tree branch lifting and the blood around him tickling backwards up his leg and back into his wound. I blink as I watch it in slow motion, like a movie in reverse. Hayes equally stunned into silence.

“Now that we have that settled. Why don’t you take me back to the mansion with **you?**”

“Not until you tell me who the hell you are.” I glare at her. “You stopped us, injured my beta, asked me off the wall questions and all I know about you is that you are not Lily and you are a Fae. I don’t know you well enough to trust you.” I tell her.

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Hayes stands, looking at his lower half like he had just seen a ghost, then his eyes meet mine.

“She is the princess.” He whispers, looking at the Fae once more, **who** smiles.

“That I am. My name is Hyacinth. Elm is my brother.” She says, giving me a nod. “I am here to help with your bewitched friends and even heal your alpha

“He actually sent for you.” A voice from my dreams tuts. My skin goosebumps, my head spinning as I try to keep myself from breaking down. The fear claws at my chest, making its way up my throat in a painful bubble as I turn and look at a woman

with white hair.

Her skin is pale, her eyes an icy blue as she smirks at me, enjoying the effect she has over me. She stays near a tree, keeping her distance, and I realize it’s more of a projection of her. She is not physically here, yet...it feels like she is breathing down my

nerk

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“Ah. You came too.” Hyacinth says, frowning. “Did Elm call you, or did you feel guilty for starting all of this shit and come to apologize?”

“Oh no. I am here just to play a little. I’m bored. All my play things are locked up **and** I just can’t quite reach them, and with you coming to set them free, I figured I could at least have a chokehold on this one.” Lily says.

“Are you that much of a coward you can’t come in your physical **form?**” I ask, trying to sound strong.

She cackles, her figure floating over to Hayes as she makes like she is touching his cheek. He swipes at her and his hand right through her form as she giggles.

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“Oh stop, that tickles and my elm is a rather possessive Fae King. He won’t like it if I tell him you touched me.” She teases.

“You are sorely mistaken if you think he has any feelings for you **now,**” Hyacinth **says**, sounding bored.

“No?” She shrugs. Then why did he sneak me back into his room for a little fun? How else do you **think** I got my hands on that little sweet redheaded gamma? Elm supports me, Hyacinth.”

My stomach churns and I look at Hayes, the two of us caught between a fight we don’t know how to **win** as these two fae women face off in a verbal war. Then Lily swoops in front of me, stopping only to grin.

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Elm I am ready for him now. That he no longer has to fake being on your side, and then she vanishes.