

The Vampires Promised Bride Chapter 21

“Ryan you’re back...” Zach said trailing off quietly as the new people walked into the room.

“These people are our guests tonight. These are Lucy’s parents and her aunt and uncle. I expect you to treat them with respect.” Derek set a firm gaze over his vampires and watched them all nod in acknowledgment.

“So that is why Lucy took off... we thought you were ditching Ryan here.” Sabrina giggled.

“Go about your business. I know there are things you all should be doing.” Derek said sternly. He watched as one by one the group dissipated. He sighed and walked over to the couch sitting Lucy down. He frowned and knelt in front of her. She looked paler all of the sudden and he kept getting random jolts of pain that he knew was hers. He reached his hand up to smooth her hair behind her ear. “Lucy... you are burning up.”

“Okay, Lucy let’s see what we are dealing with.” Freya pulled the pant legs up on her daughter. She inspected the wound carefully.

“I don’t understand. We have taken hits from this vervain before. It has never affected us like this...” Derek said quietly.

“This special mixture wasn’t meant for vampires solely,” Freya said with disgust. “This mixture is intended for someone who is both werewolf and vampire.” She shook her head slightly as she ran her finger alongside of her unhealing wounds. The silver wasn’t bothering her daughter, but the vervain was. However, it was the strange mixture that was making it harder on Lucy. What the hell did that witch get into. This wasn’t normal witchcraft. It was dark... it was demonic. Still though... this wasn’t why Lucy wasn’t healing.

“Freya.” Wyatt walked up and stared at her concerned face. That seemed to be getting agitated over something.

“They were healing mom. I just reopened the wounds.” Lucy said trying to alleviate her concern.

Lucy.

Lucy looked up her mother confused. Why was she mind linking her?

Take it down. Freya ordered. The barrier you have set up guarding yourself against your mate.

Lucy gasped. How did her mother know about that? It was the reason it was harder for her to feel the soul mate connection. It may have leaked through a bit but the reason she wasn't constantly feeling it was because she had been guarding her heart. The truth was that she always had her guard up. She never wanted to overly expose her feelings too, so this helped guard them. She had to be strong. For her pack, for everyone. And letting people in scared her a little. The truth was she was a bit anxious about having a soul mate. Someone able to see her true self. What if he didn't like the person he saw? There was no hiding herself from that.

Freya smiled at her daughter knowingly. And she felt a bit at fault. She should have explained to her daughter a long time ago the importance of letting people in on a deeper level. Especially your mate. Though to be fair she didn't talk about the mate stuff since she didn't want her to feel bad. But it was different now that Derek was her fated mate and a soul mate at that.

Lucy, you have nothing to be afraid of now. You are allowed to claim your mate. He isn't someone you have to reject. You don't have to guard yourself anymore. You are blocking your energy from flowing properly. And connecting to your mate will make you stronger. Freya gripped onto Lucy's wrist for a moment. She should have noticed this a long time ago. She felt guilty. Lucy was the one she never worried about and because of that, this slipped by her.

What if he doesn't like who I am on the inside? It feels incredibly revealing... to be connected on that deep level.

No, Lucy. It is freeing. Trust me. I went years being isolated and having no one. I didn't think I could trust anyone or bare myself to anyone. But once I met your father, I realized how wrong I was. Having someone to share your soul with is very comforting. It is someone who truly accepts you for who you are. There is no reason to hide from someone like that. Look at him Lucy. There is only concern in his eyes. No judgement. That is what is so amazing and special about having a fated mate. It is something I never talked to you about before because of your situation... but there is nothing more amazing than the feeling of pure acceptance.

Lucy turned her head to look at Derek slightly. She met with his amber eyes that were full of concern. She looked back at her mother who had a small smile resting on her face. The problem wasn't just her blocking her mate. It was that deep down she always guarded herself so much that she wasn't quite sure how to bring those walls down.

She was sure if people knew she blocked a part of herself off that they would be shocked. She was always outgoing and helpful. Yet deep down she was guarded. And she remembered when it first happened... It was the time she was ten and she had gone to spend a week with Derek over the summer. It was the summer he turned fifteen and changed completely. She was hurt and didn't want to feel on that deep of a level. While her emotions were still there, she was able to build up an almost numbing wall around herself. No matter what, the pain would never be devastating. She could almost laugh at herself. Here it wasn't even Derek then. It was some stand-in. A stand-in was the reason she closed part of herself off.

Lucy took in a deep breath. She tried to focus on her mental barrier but the moment she deep a stab of emotional pain seeped out. She immediately halted. She didn't want to feel that. She didn't want to feel that moment again.

You have to Lucy.

Lucy shook her head and looked at her mother. "I can't-

Freya narrowed her eyes at her. "A child of mine is telling me they can't? We don't know the meaning of that word."

Lucy smiled. "I can't do this in front of everyone is what I was going to say."

"Oh... well that's more like it." Freya looked at Derek. "Take her someplace quiet where she can concentrate. Which way to the kitchen? We better get Jin her chocolate before she faints." She stood up and winked over at Wyatt showing him everything was okay.

"I'll show you and put some coffee on," Jasper said walking them towards the kitchen.

Derek reached his arms around Lucy and pulled her up into his chest. He wasn't sure what was going on but was doing what he was told. He felt her curl into his chest as he carried her back to his bedroom. He took her in and shut the door behind him. He very tenderly laid her onto the bed and adjusted the pillows around her so she could sit upright.

He slid beside her facing her. His hand came up and gently brushed across her cheek as he stayed locked onto her green eyes. "Are you okay?"

She nodded her head. "I'm okay. I just need to do something..." She watched him waiting for her to explain patiently. She didn't know why but she felt embarrassed over it. "You once mentioned that I wasn't feeling the soul mate connection

because I wasn't viewing you as my mate. That isn't entirely true... I-I-I also have built up my own little barrier in here." She tapped on her chest. "To protect myself..."

"What happened? Why did you do that?" He could feel his anger rising at whoever hurt her. Who had hurt her enough to make her build up an emotional wall?

She looked into his amber eyes. "When I was ten... and I came to visit you only it wasn't you I was visiting. But that moment really bothered me." She watched as pain reflected in his eyes. And she started feeling twinges of his grief again.

"I'm so sorry Lucy." Derek looked away from her ashamed. He was an i***t. Why didn't he think about how he could be potentially hurting her. For one, he expected Ryan to be more accommodating. Though he couldn't blame him either because Ryan couldn't risk Lucy falling for him. It was all a big mistake. And there was nothing he could do to change it.

Lucy reached out and took his hand in hers. She watched him turn back to face her. "We can't change the past. You were too young to really understand the choices you were making and how they could affect others." She smiled and bit her bottom lip. "I'm a bit nervous, to be honest."

He smiled at her warmly and leaned closer to her. He reached up and cupped her cheek in his hand. "Everything about you is also me and everything of me is yours. There is no you and me, but it is now us and ours." His eyes traveled to the lips he had been craving to touch. Even though it was taking all of his self-control he would wait a bit longer before he claimed them. He could wait until she was ready.

In a shocking motion, Lucy closed the gap between them. She captured Derek's head with her hands and held him in place. Not that she had to hold him but her possessive nature had pushed through. She squeezed her fingers in his silky hair soliciting a low throaty noise from him. Her first kiss. It wasn't awkward. It didn't feel weird... it felt right. And she was the one to initiate it.

She pulled her barriers down as she moved against his lips. She wanted to feel more. She wanted to belong to him. She wanted a connection like her parents. But she was shocked. As she disintegrated her guarded barrier it wasn't pain that she felt. It was love. The feeling she had locked up tight was her love for Derek. She didn't understand the feeling then only that she hurt when he brushed her off. So inside of the barrier, she tucked away her feelings for Derek.

He was pleasantly shocked when her lips crashed into his. It was like being liberated from a torturous situation as he tasted her sweet soft lips. He felt a strong warmth swell inside of his chest. He held her cheek tenderly in his hand as he continued to taste her lips. The feeling intensified and he could feel a rush like the floodgates opening inside of him. He realized that he was only ever feeling a fraction of Lucy. What he was feeling now was all of her... and her own feelings for him. This was the greatest treasure he had ever received. The feeling of the love of his mate. And this feeling... this connection would only grow after he marked her. And knowing this made him excited. How could life have worked out so perfect for him? That Lucy would end up being his everything.

She felt it all. His love, his desires, and the depth of how much he cared. It all poured into her. And instead of getting jumbled up by words, they all made sense to her. She could understand him and understand his thought process. Her mother was right... this was a gift. She could understand his thought process and why he did the things he did. And she could feel how much he longed for her. Then and now. It was like reading his personal diary.

His feelings for her encouraged her and she pushed into the kiss deepening it. She was pleased with his reaction to her as he seemed just as eager. She finally broke apart for air. She leaned her forehead into his as they panted for air.

“This was way better than your dream.” Derek said with a wry smile.

Lucy giggled. “Shut up.” She bit her bottom lip and nudged her nose into him.

“I love you too Lucy. You are everything to me. So much that it hurts. The very idea of being apart from you makes me crazy.”

Lucy looked into his amber eyes. “I never realized I was already in love with you then. I guess it was our soul mate connection?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t feel it when I first met you. Of course, you were a drooling baby who needed their diaper changed.” Derek grinned at her and sifted his fingers through her hair. “But after that... the more I was around you... I don’t know why, and I don’t care. All I know is that I have loved you since we were kids.”

“I’m still a bit in shock over all of this. I can’t believe you are my mate...” She raised her hand up to touch his that was resting on her cheek. She leaned into his hand, “Don’t leave me again.”

“My sweet Lucy. After this business with Beryl we won’t be parted.”

Lucy went to nod her head absent-mindedly and then stopped. Wait a minute. After this business with Beryl? She lifted her head up and looked at him confused. “Wait, when you say that what are you saying?”

“I’m sending you home.”

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“You are sending me home?” Lucy shook her head no. “Why? Don’t you want me here with you?”

“Of course I want you with me Lucy.” Derek trailed his hand down her arm and gazed into her green eyes. “I never want to be away from you. But not here. Not part of a battle party. You need to be where it is safe.”

Lucy let out an airy chuckle. “Please don’t tell me you are going to be that guy... Don’t go making the same mistakes all the guys make about the women in my family. We are not the ones who wait back at home for the men to return.”

Derek’s eyes flickered in amusement. “My future queen, your existence is too important to risk. I’m not calling you weak. Just that you are a target. This witch is after your family, and I won’t make it easy for her. I don’t know what she is planning but judging from the voidless army she has created we need to be cautious.”

“I won’t be leaving your side. So don’t be ridiculous.” Lucy could see in his eyes that he was going to be insistent. Lucky for her she had her own tricks up her sleeve. “Very well... if you really wish for me to leave then I guess I have no choice but to comply.” She watched his face drop in confusion.

A faint smile spread on Derek’s face. “Good. I will send you back with your parents and I’ll come for you as soon as all of this is taken care of.”

Oh, naïve Derek... Lucy stood up and walked up to the bedroom door. As if she was really going to obediently listen to him just like that.

“Lucy? Where are you going? I wanted to talk more.” Derek jumped up and followed her out the door.

“I’m informing my parents that I will be returning with them of course.”

Derek noticed the flicker in her eyes and could feel an odd emotion glimmering from his mate. “Lucy... what are you planning?”

She smirked as she entered the dining room.

“Lucy. Much better. I am glad you got that all sorted out.” Freya stood up and looked at the glint in her daughter’s eyes.

What is it?

He wants to send me home. Since he can’t have me fighting by his side...

Freya could read her daughter clearly. As a parent she wanted to protect her daughter. But she also trained with Lucy and knew how capable she was. And being the former huntress she had no problem being an advocate for her daughter.

“I guess I’ll be coming back with you guys tomorrow.” Lucy said innocently as Derek walked in keeping a suspicious eye on her.

Freya smiled and nodded her head. “Of course... probably for the best.” The devil in Freya’s eyes came out. “After all, we will need your help to lead one of the armies into battle.”

“What?!”

“What?!”

Derek and Wyatt said simultaneously.

Lucy smirked. Gosh she loved her mother. She was always in her corner and fighting for her to never be overlooked.

“I figure Aiden and Lucy will lead a group while we lead the other.” Freya turned an icy glare to Wyatt. “You wouldn’t be thinking of leaving me behind, right?”

“Well... no, but-”

“And after our daughter was injured and taken, we are planning to retaliate in full force, right?” Freya asked as she quirked her brow up at Wyatt.

Jason chuckled already knowing exactly what was taking place. Wyatt sighed in defeat. His queen has taken the king in this chess match. It was lost before it started.

“Alright. I’ll have Lucy and Aiden lead a group together. Not individually mind you. They will work together.” This would have to be Wyatt’s compromise.

“Perfect.” Freya said, winking at her daughter.

Derek growled lowly. “With all due respect. I do not want Lucy fighting. Period.”

Lucy turned her head from her mother to look at Derek. “Sorry ‘Ryan’. This is official werewolf business. Best not to stick your nose in where it doesn’t belong.”

A deep dark chuckle escaped from Derek’s throat. “You are mine Lucy. And you are my business. I won’t risk it. The witch is gunning for your family. She has been preparing who knows what for this moment.” He turned his head and looked over at Wyatt. “Let the vampires handle it. Keep your pack away from this witch.”

“I understand what you are saying... but you have to understand we can’t just sit by and do nothing. We have to set a precedent for attacks on werewolves. And that is we will come back viciously and mercilessly.” He glanced up at Freya and Lucy. “I understand wanting to keep your mate wrapped up in a bubble and to keep her safe. Trust me. I know what feeling you have all too well. I want to keep my family safe.” He looked at Derek and smiled. “But don’t you think they also want me safe too?”

“Mates are stronger and weaker together. It is a fact of life. Mates give you a vulnerability, but they also give you a strength and an edge in battle. It isn’t right for you to ask your mate to stay somewhere safe while you are out risking your life. Especially someone as strong as Lucy.” Freya gave Derek a faint smile. “We want to be there fighting and protecting our mate. As much as Wyatt wants my safety, I want his. My desire to fight and protect is just as strong.” She looked over and

gave Wyatt a crooked smile. “I even fought pregnant in the big demon war because I couldn’t bear not being there to help protect my mate.”

Wyatt chuckled. “I never would have allowed it had I known she was pregnant.” He shook his head. “You are fighting a battle that all of us have fought before.” He looked over at Jason who nodded his head. “Lucy is a strong fighter. And even though I tend to baby her as my little girl I know she is an asset in battle.”

“I do not doubt that Lucy would be an asset. And I don’t want to send her away from my side. But the things we have been seeing... like these mixtures that have been used in fights like the vervain and silver. And the experiments that have been going on and the voidless army. We have things we need to discuss.” Derek met with the sharp silver eyes of Wyatt. “This is not just about Lucy. This is about your whole family Wyatt. It is my recommendation for your family to stand down. Let’s discuss this in more detail in my office.”

“I think you need to hear about these things in more detail so that you can see the complete picture and then make your decision.” Jasper finally spoke up. He knew what Derek wanted to talk about. And he knew why he wanted Lucy somewhere safe and far away from the witch.

“Jasper, would you please show everyone to my office?” Derek said as he focused his gaze on Lucy.

Lucy watched as everyone slowly followed Jasper out of the room. Leaving her alone with Derek. He was quiet for a moment and stood there just quietly watching her. Then he walked up to her. He pressed into her, backing her into the wall. He leaned his two arms on the wall behind her holding her captive while she looked at him curiously.

“I didn’t want you to hear about this... what I am going to tell everyone now. But I guess it is only fair for you to hear it too.” Derek whispered into her forehead as his lips lightly brushed against her skin. “My little mate.”

She looked up into his eyes. His amber eyes reflected so much emotion, but anger was not one of them.

“Don’t think that I don’t have faith in your abilities for a moment. And NEVER think that I don’t want you by my side. Sending you away is going to be incredibly painful...” He leaned his head down and rested it on her forehead. “I’m afraid to lose you. I’m afraid for your family to fight this time. Listen to what I have to say in there... please... I don’t want you to be upset with me. Please listen and understand my actions here.” He brushed his nose over hers and smiled near her lips. “My feisty Lucy.”

She felt his breath beat upon her lips making her body shiver from his contact. His voice that started out almost sad and pleading ended with a sweet raspy breath. Every inch of her body craved him. She raised her arms up and rested them around his neck. She couldn't imagine him saying anything that could convince her that she shouldn't be by his side. But she would listen... really listen to what he wanted to explain.

"You aren't mad at me?" She bit her bottom lip as she watched a smile spread across his face. A low chuckle reverberated from his throat.

"I actually think it was quite adorable. You went to your mother to try to get your way."

"I went to the person who always has my back. Regardless of my gender."

"I always have your back. Forever and for always." Derek closed the small gap between them and brushed his lips against hers. Her lips were soft and sweet. And he really wished the timing could have been better for them. He wanted to spend more time with her and really connect to her as his mate.

"I love you, Lucy." He breathed out against her lips. "Come on. We shouldn't keep everyone waiting."

He reached his hand and interlaced their fingers together. Then looking down at her with a sweet smile he led her to his office where everyone was seated waiting for them. When they walked in he continued to pull Lucy along with him instead of her sitting next to her parents' side. Jasper had taken a seat next to a dark wooden desk and there was another large chair behind it.

"Jasper, did you get out the pictures?" Derek asked and Jasper pushed a yellow envelope towards him on the desk. He grabbed the contents and walked it over to Wyatt still keeping his fingers interlocked with Lucy's. "Take a look at these."

Lucy watched as her father opened the envelope. He reached inside and pulled out several pictures that she couldn't see but she noticed her father's shocked face immediately. Her mother even gasped looking at the pictures as they scanned through them.

"What... what caused this?" Wyatt asked in a quiet breath.

Lucy moved up on her tiptoes trying to get a better look. When that wasn't working, she walked a bit more forward and leaned her head to the side. Freya grabbed one of the pictures and turned it around so that Lucy could see.

Lucy looked at the picture of a girl laying on the ground. She had blood pouring out from her eyes, mouth, nose, and ears.

"She was a werewolf..." Jasper spoke up quietly. "But within an hour of being injected with one of the witch's creations, she was dead."

"It was like nothing we had ever seen. This was one of the first cases we documented. We watched in secret as we studied the events. She was in her werewolf form at first when whatever it was, was injected into her. Then she started coughing up blood and within fifteen minutes she shifted back to her human form. Blood soon started dripping out of her and she was screaming in pain. Within the hour... she was dead. But that is not all of it. We later got ahold of the discarded body and ran our own tests on it. She no longer had any traces of being a werewolf. It was as if she was a normal human." Derek watched Wyatt shift uncomfortably.

"What do you mean?"

"Whatever was injected into her... it was like it pulled the wolf apart from her. And her losing her wolf is what killed her ultimately. She was only the first of many cases we have witnessed. All that we were able to test were the same way. They had lost their wolf blood. They were no longer werewolves." Derek stepped into Lucy and wrapped his arm around her. "This is why this time... the werewolves need to stand down from this fight. And why I need Lucy far from this battle."

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Wyatt's eyes glazed over as he looked over at Freya. Lucy could tell by their faces that there was a deep discussion going on there. She watched her parent's fingers tighten together as their private conversation lingered in the silence. Lucy wasn't dumb. This new information had changed things. She could see it in both of her parents' eyes. She stepped a bit more into Derek. She was going to have to leave him. And she understood his reasons now, but it didn't make it easier.

She felt his arm pulling her deeper into his side. She could see her parent's eyes looking up to her and she already knew. She felt like a child once again under her parents' gaze. She knew that look. She had seen it before.

"And just like that I'm no longer the strong capable daughter anymore? Right?" Lucy snorts angrily.

“Derek is right. We haven’t studied this witch enough or her allies to know what she is capable of.” Freya said quietly.

Lucy laughed in exasperation. “This coming from the woman who dove into a coven house that was a trap. The same woman who hunted down demons on her own. You didn’t always know what you were getting yourself into.”

“I know what it is like to almost lose a mate. The blood potion that was used before on your father could have drove us apart. And looking down on your opponent is what opens you up to weakness. We know this first hand.” Freya said quietly.

“Well then don’t underestimate them. Call Uncle Levi and Uncle Titus. Ask Harley for help.” Lucy didn’t get it. They had the strongest allies around. So use them.

“We may need to ask for their help in time. There is more to worry about than just the witch. And I plan to talk with Rhea and my parents. We will discuss all of this and plan ahead. But for now... It is best if you come home with us.” Wyatt said firmly. He watched Lucy go to object and his eyes darkened. “Lucy, you are not staying. You will be coming back to the Diamond pack with us.” He made sure there was no room for objection. His commanding tone entered there as he gave his daughter an order. Something he didn’t do often. But when he did it was absolute.

Lucy’s jaw dropped. Her father just used his alpha king power to give her an order. She was stunned. Shocked. He had only ever used his father’s tone, not his alpha tone on her. And to be honest she was hurt. Maybe he knew she wouldn’t come unless he ordered her? But she felt her blood boil at this.

“If it is possible, I would like for Lucy to still attend the welcoming ceremony that we had planned before she moved in at the end of the summer. It is just a formality so the other vampires can get to know her. Jasper will escort her there and she can use her pearl to return back to the Diamond pack. You can even send her brother and a group of your soldiers with her if it will make you feel better. Of course, I will make sure to have my own escort of vampires as well. And it is in the opposite direction of the witch and the attacks, so I believe it to be safe.” Derek could feel Lucy tense under his arm. He could also feel strands of her irritation pouring through.

Wyatt nodded his head. “We need to keep up as much normalcy as we can. We don’t want to alert our enemies. Plus, this is an important moment. The vampires will be meeting their new princess. I don’t want to give them a reason to think badly of her.”

“Well I’m glad everyone is able to settle everything. Just point me in the direction of where to stand and how to act and we will be good.” Lucy shrugged herself out from Derek and opened the door to the office. “I don’t need to hear the rest. Just be sure to give me a list of my duties and I’ll be all set.” She shut the door and walked out and towards the living room. She could have at least been included in the conversations. Instead, they were spoken as if she wasn’t in the room. Yes, Lucy will not stay. Yes, Lucy will be at the ceremony.

As she heading towards the living room she spotted something interesting. She tilted her head as she watched Chaz crawling around on all fours looking under various objects. He had lounge pants on and no shirt. Someone was obviously very proud of his muscular physique.

“What are you doing?” Lucy quirked her brow at him.

Chaz looked up at her and gave her a sheepish grin. “I can’t find my phone charger. I know I left it plugged in out here. I bet someone took it thinking it was theirs.”

Lucy began giggling at his flustered looking face. She had a feeling that the someone who took it was fuzzy and a known troublemaker. Especially since she had caught the little cave brownie earlier in the action. She walked up to him and started looking around.

“Where did you plug it in last?”

Chaz pointed at the wall. “Right there. Right next to that stand. I know that is where I left it.”

Lucy looked around the desk carefully. If it was her brownie friend he would have either hid it in a drawer or... She followed the wall upward and looked at the ceiling. A crooked smile rested on her lips as she noticed a white dangling cord from a rafter.

“Hey Chaz.”

He lifted his head up and looked at Lucy. He watched the amusement in her eyes and followed the direction her finger was pointing... up. He glanced at the ceiling and sighed. “Are you shitting me? Who did this?”

Lucy giggled. “I don’t think this is one of your friends here but a cave brownie. It was here earlier today.”

Chaz frowned. "I'm not known to be the best jumper. I am more the muscles of the operation." He said flexing his arms proudly.

Lucy rolled her eyes. Yeah, she could tell he was proud of himself. She smiled and bit her bottom lip. "I'll help you."

"Really, little sis?" Chaz asked with a big grin.

"Little sis?" Lucy quirked her brow at this nickname.

Chaz flashed her a big smile. "I've decided that you are going to be like my new little sister... is that okay?"

Lucy nodded her head. At least he treated her like a normal person. And that she was capable of helping. "Well muscles, how good are your throwing skills?"

"I excel of course." His grin widened already figuring out what she was thinking.

"Good." Lucy walked up to him. "Toss me up in the air and I will grab it."

"Oh, a fun personality! Awesome, that is just what this group needs."

Lucy smiled. It might be what the group needs but she wasn't going to be part of the group. She watched as he cupped his hands together and looked up at her expectantly. She glanced up at her target and then stepped into his hand. He lifted her up effortlessly. She easily grabbed the cord that was hanging there but that is where things went wrong. The little brownie had set up a clever trap. And when she grabbed the cord, it was attached to a rag. The rag was full of dust and feathers that came crashing in Lucy's face. She was falling now but had no idea where since her face was full of debris.

"Gotcha little sis!" Chaz said and Lucy felt herself land gently in his large arms being held into his bare chest.

She was coughing and had tears dripping from her eyes from the dust. But she held her hand up triumphantly. Victory was still theirs. And she was feeling quite proud of herself. That was until she heard a familiar low snarl pierce through the air.

"Put. Her. Down." The low growl annunciated every word with authority.

She felt her body slowly slide down until she was gently put on her feet. She was still wiping her face from the dust.

“Easy Ryan. I just caught her and that was all.” Chaz then whispered lowly to Lucy. “Well at least one of you has a fun personality.”

Lucy giggled and wiped the dust from her eyes. She placed the cord into Chaz’s hands and smiled through a couple more coughs. “I think we were baited into a trap. But we still won.”

“Haha that we did little sis.”

“Lucy, are you alright?” Freya walked up to her and looked over her appearance. Her hair was messy with dust and feathers poking through it.

“I was a victim to a clever brownie trap.” Lucy smiled but it soon faded as she looked at her mother. “I am still mad at you. I just had a momentary lapse in judgement due to my triumph.”

“Hope you aren’t mad at me because I am your new roommate.” Jasper said with a chuckle. Derek growled at him, and Jasper laughed some more. “Well in a manner of speaking. Think of me as your non werebear guardian.” He said, pumping his chest out slightly.

Jason laughed at this and slapped Jasper on the back hard. “Sorry kid. You are tough but not guardian tough.”

“Ouch.” Jasper said feigning hurt.

Derek remained quiet as he held an intimidating stare onto Chaz.

Chaz only chuckled and shook his head. He looked at Lucy as he grabbed the rest of his stuff. “Next time you can throw me. Maybe then I won’t get in trouble.” He winked at her and started to walk out of the room.

“Chaz.” Derek said, making him halt in his steps. “Show them to the spare rooms where they can sleep for the night.” Chaz nodded his head.

“If you follow me, I’ll show you to a few modern cave room motifs.” Chaz added a fake tour guide accent as he waved them to follow him.

Lucy made to follow her parents but Derek’s hand shot out as she walked by grasping her wrist. She looked at him and stared into his amber eyes.

“I thought... we could talk.” Derek said softly.

“Talk?” Lucy arched her brow up at him.

“You’re leaving first thing in the morning. I thought you could stay with me.” His voice dropped quieter as Wyatt and Freya stopped walking.

“Oh... I see. I can’t stay with you, but you want me to warm your bed tonight? Is that it?” Lucy snorted and glared at him defiantly.

“Now wait a minute it isn’t like that. I just thought we could talk some Lucy. We haven’t had time to properly talk.” Derek’s voice was soft.

Lucy stared into his eyes. They were pleading with her. The thing that Lucy was realizing was that she really didn’t know Derek. Sure he was her fiancé and her fated mate. But besides the time she played with him as a child, what did she know about him? How did she retain these feelings of love... for a stranger now? She supposed it was the soul mate thing. She couldn’t deny how much she wanted to be near him. How even being close now was a comfort to her. Besides she needed to explain a few things to him herself.

“Alright.” Lucy said quietly. She turned to look at her parents and nodded her head for them to go ahead.

Wyatt’s eyes darkened as he stared at Derek. A clear warning. Before finally Freya managed to pull him along. A faint smile resting on her face.

The moment Derek closed the door to his room he wrapped his arms around Lucy. He pulled her deep into his chest and leaned his head near her neck to breathe in her scent.

“Forgive me Lucy for being selfish. Don’t be mad. I just want you safe.”

A sweet tingling spark jolted down her back and spread through her chest. She couldn’t deny how being in his arms felt like home. She sighed and turned in his arms to face him.

“What if it was the other way around Derek? What if it was vampires that were being targeted? What if there was a potion that reversed the effects for you? In this situation I would be sending you back, right? You are telling me that you would just accept this and go. While I stay here and fight. After all, I would only be doing it because I selfishly want you safe.” Lucy had fire in her eyes as she met with his amber eyes fiercely. She could see a flash of realization hit him as he finally was able to understand. He wouldn’t go. It was evident in his guilt-ridden face. What he was asking of her wasn’t fair.

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Derek felt the guilt pang in his chest. She was right, he would not leave her. He was being selfish just wanting to protect her. “Oh Lucy... I’m sorry.” He pulled her tighter into him. “I don’t know what I should do in this situation.” He leaned down and breathed in his scent trying to calm himself down. He felt so torn. “I don’t want to be away from you. Honestly, the idea of you leaving tomorrow is killing me. I am also afraid of losing you... Maybe I should talk with your parents more about this.”

Lucy let out a dry laugh and looked up from his chest. “It’s impossible now.” She could see Derek’s confused eyes.

“You are my mate, Lucy. You belong to me.”

“Derek, my father gave me an order using his authority as my king and alpha. That is something he has NEVER done before. Which means he is afraid for me. So much that he won’t risk me disobeying him by just telling me no. He gave an order I can’t refuse. He can do this because even though I am your fated mate I am not yours, yet.” Lucy sighed. What she wasn’t saying was how she felt something in her stir during that order. An order that came from her father and the king of the werewolves. Yet, it should have had a much stronger effect on her. Maybe her being a lycan was giving her an edge here. She bet that Aiden could directly defy an order from their father.

She respected her father and wouldn’t disobey him. But she felt like she could fight off his order. Lycan’s were naturally higher-ranking wolves. No werewolf could ever out rank a Lycan. Which is why they were the leaders at one time. The fact that her and Aiden were lycan’s must also mean something. Though they were afraid of what this was insinuating. Even the

very need for the werewolf king arising insinuated something big on the horizon. A war among the wolves... She hoped not. And that this was just a means to keep her family in power. But she knew her parents and family were already thinking it.

Her grandmother Lilly had said, “There is a purpose to all gifts. Even when we can’t see the reason right away.”

Her Uncle Levi always grumbled about the pesky meddling goddess Selene and how she can never leave well enough alone. Though since after the demon war she has been fairly quiet. Just a few unexplained things that happen randomly that make everyone believe she is still guiding the events here. Like Lucy being a lycan and being Derek’s fated mate.

She felt Derek’s hands rubbing small soothing circles on her back as he kept his head buried near her neck. She could get minor internal feelings from him. She could sense his turmoil and inner struggle. It was still fuzzy. But once they were marked it would come through clear.

“I don’t know if I am strong enough to do it Lucy... I don’t know if I can be away from you.”

She felt his breath beat against her neck and she closed her eyes with the sweet sensation it brought. “Then come back with me.”

“It’s been crossing my mind. But I am their leader right now. I can’t leave in the middle of a mission like this. It could cause chaos. These people here don’t know who I am yet... I am just their leader. The one they depend on to make the decisions. But soon they will be our most trusted guard and friends in the palace.” Derek nuzzled his nose into Lucy’s neck. Her soft neck was so tempting. He wanted to taste her... taste her blood. And mark her as his own.

As a pure vampire the exchange of blood will bind them together. Their blood will be linked to one another. Marking and mating is only one step of the binding process. Vampires mate for their eternal life and few ever take another mate if something happens to their first. Most end up either dying recklessly in battle or they just give up on living.

“I want to get to know the real you better... Not just the pull from our bond. I want to know about you. Since the person I have thought was you... wasn’t.”

Derek pulled back and cupped Lucy’s cheek tenderly. He gazed into her green eyes and smiled. “I want you to know everything about me. Inside and out. I want to be as familiar to you as your own hand.” He picked Lucy up and carried her towards the bed. He sat her down and climbed in front of her sitting cross legged. “Let’s talk. Tell me about yourself..

everything. I know things that Jasper has told me, but I want to hear from you. And I'll tell you everything about me. I'll start from where we left off. When my fifteen-year-old self disappeared from your life."

The two began filling in the gaps about each other. Starting with their likes and dislikes. They talked about their schools and how life was there. Derek explained that since he wasn't seen much upon his growth spurt it was the best opportunity to switch his life up. He started attending school as Ryan while the real Ryan was kept inside the palace with the private tutors. This was the role Ryan was born to fill and later he would become the leader of the palace guards.

He explained how shocked he was at first attending the vampire academy. Life was not just different but the nobles and such he remembered as a child were different. The way they treated him as Ryan was completely different. They treated him like a parasite. Some even openly bashed and mocked the royal family. It was a real eye opener.

Then when he was twenty, they started hearing rumors about a witch causing trouble. She was caught abducting vampires and wolves. He had been part of the elite army for only a few months. And within two years he had worked his way to becoming their natural leader. Which was obviously going to happen since he was a royal. Royal vampires were not just a title. They had scary dangerous abilities that were often secret and unknown.

As the leader he started leading scouting missions to try to uncover as much about the witch as possible. All the while he continued to keep tabs on Lucy. He always had Jasper report back to him and tell him about her. He loved hearing about her spirit and feisty nature.

When the strange attacks started happening about a year ago Derek took the elite army to their hideout. They would be stationed there permanently until they destroyed the witch and uncovered all her accomplices. This was also a bonding experience. One that was necessary to bind loyal soldiers to him forever.

"Nice, your parents trust you to go out and fight like that." Lucy said with a bit of envy.

"It is a rite of passage and necessary. I guess it would be similar to having your brother lead a pack into battle. My mother was never keen on it but I'm not exactly sixteen. I'm twenty-four years old. An adult. And I am protecting my fiancé and her family."

Lucy smiled at him and leaned forward. She laid her head down on his legs and felt his hand start drawing lazy circles on her back. "One of your special skills wouldn't be to freeze time, would it?"

Derek looked down at her with a sad smile. “No... I wish. I can tell you about them though. Well at least the ones I know. I want you to know all of my secrets and for me to know all of yours.”

Lucy really didn't have a lot of secrets. Just one. And that was about her wolf not being separate from her and that she was a lycan. Jasper didn't even know this about her. It was something that was kept very secretive in the family. They were worried how other werewolves would react. Her and Aiden were already the prince and princess, but would they feel indignant if they knew they were lycans?

She closed her eyes and enjoyed the tingles his fingertips sent through her. It was really fascinating how it fastened you together. It made Derek feel like an old friend of hers... a piece of herself. In a very lustful and completely clingy sort of way.

“I really only have one secret... but it's a big one.” Lucy finally said quietly. She opened her eyes and tilted her head up to look into the amber eyes looking down on her. “I mean I have abilities and things but they aren't really a secret.” She watched as a smile spread on Derek's face.

“And you trust me with your secret?”

She smiled up at him and nodded. “Yes, but I'm going to need your pinky for good measure.” Lucy said, holding her pinky finger up in the air.

Derek chuckled and locked his pinky finger with hers. He leaned down into her finger and pressed his lips against them. “So adorable. So let's hear this big secret. What is it? You aren't really a werewolf.” He chuckled at his joke and then noticed her stoic face. “That was a joke... right?”

“I'm not a werewolf.” Lucy whispered out. “Look, you really can't tell anyone. No one knows but my family. I haven't even told Jasper about this.”

Derek shook his head in confusion. “You aren't a werewolf? But you shifted.”

“I don't have a separate wolf like werewolves do. My wolf is one with me... like a lycan's would be.” Lucy watched as he seemed to ponder the information.

“So... my mate is even more badass?” A small smirk played on his lips.

“This could be a real problem for the packs. This makes me different from them. And something we feel needs to remain a secret. Especially with the treaty. It is best for them just to think of me as a regular werewolf. And that it is because I am their princess that I am larger and can command them.”

“I agree with you.” Derek watched as Lucy’s green emeralds focused on him. “I think it is best to keep this quiet. Sometimes someone is only looking for a reason to be divisive. And this could give them the reason they need. It isn’t necessary for all of them to know anyways. I do think it is strange though...”

Lucy nodded her head. “It isn’t a natural occurrence. Maybe because of my parents being the king and queen? Or it could be our crafty moon goddess up to her tricks.”

“In either case the reason doesn’t matter. You are still my adorable little mate.”

Lucy giggled. “Little mate?”

Derek shrugged. “It has been my nickname for you since you were young.” He winked at her and adjusted her more onto his lap. “Rest your eyes my Lucy. You’ve had a very long day.”

Lucy grabbed his hand and tugged on him gently. “Will you hold me?”

Derek chuckled. She had no idea how bad of an idea that was. But how could he deny her? He just needed to really concentrate on controlling himself. He grabbed the blanket and pulled it over the both of them while he pulled her into his chest. Her sweet intoxicating scent hit his nostrils while her body heat caressed his skin. It was pure torture. But it was also satisfying to be able to hold her like this.

“This your first time being held by a man while you sleep?” Derek asked, expecting for her to say yes.

“No, it isn’t.”

Derek felt his blood begin to boil. Someone else had touched what was his? He growled and tightened his grip on her. “Who dared to touch what is mine?”

Lucy rolled over so that she could look at him. She smiled. “Jasper has patted me to sleep before.”

“Oh? He has? That is a detail he has failed to report.”

“Details. Plural. Meaning more than once.”

“I’m going to kill him.” Derek growled.

Lucy giggled and leaned up pressing her lips on his jawline. “You’re adorable when you are jealous.” She winked at him. “One time was during a campout. Justice , Aiden, Destiny, Gia, Alexis, Micah, Raine and Jasper were all there. I had really bad hiccups and couldn’t sleep so Jasper patted my back until I fell asleep. And the other time...” A faint smile spread on her lips. “My parents and brother were away. Destiny was there with Harley... ‘watching movies’. Jasper was staying in Justice’s room. He was watching over me while my parents were gone. I think I was seventeen? I woke up from a terrifying nightmare. I still remember pieces of it. What haunts me the most were the eyes...” Lucy closed her eyes as she tried to blink that part of the memory away.

“Jasper came to check on me. Not sure if he heard me or just his usual checking. But he came and sat with me. He told me it was just a dream and stayed with me all night. He patted my back until I fell asleep. And was still there when I woke up. He stayed awake and watched me all night.” Lucy looked up at Derek. “He looked after me and took care of me like Aiden and Justice always did. I have always considered him like a brother to me.”

“I guess there are some stories he keeps for just the two of you. He never shared those with me... I’m glad he was there for you though. I just wish I would have been the one who was there. But I will be soon. And I’ll be the one to pat you back to sleep.” Derek leaned forward and pecked her nose. He leaned his forehead into hers and smiled. “Get some sleep, princess.”

Derek felt her curl deeper into his chest. He kept his arms on her protectively as her body relaxed, a slow breathing rhythm following. It was the sweetest feeling in the world holding her in his arms. Knowing that she trusted him in her most vulnerable state warmed his heart. He kissed her forehead and with much stealth slid away from her. He stood next to the bed for a moment and watched her sleeping body. He wanted to hold her longer, but he needed to do something first...

There was a conversation that needed to be had.

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Derek looked startled when he noticed Wyatt and Freya sitting on the living room couch. He walked over to them with a confused look on his face.

Freya chuckled. “Right on time, I’d say.”

“What are you two doing out here?” Derek asked as he took a seat across from them.

“We were waiting for you. We figured we would be hearing from you again tonight.” A small grin played on Wyatt’s lips as he looked up at Derek. They knew their daughter well... well enough to know that she would plant doubts in Derek’s head.

Derek sighed. “The thing is... she has good points. I don’t know what is right or what I should do. But if the situation was reversed I wouldn’t leave her side either.”

Wyatt smiled and looked at Derek’s amber eyes. “Of course you wouldn’t. Who would rightfully leave their mate because of the danger to their own life? The only way you would is if you were ordered to by your parents...”

“We know our Lucy very well. She wasn’t leaving your side on her own. She would need to feel like she had to. Which is why Wyatt ordered her to leave... we needed to go to an extreme.” Freya said quietly.

“...Ryan...” Wyatt made sure to use his cover name since they were not in a soundproof room. “The thing is this is an unknown and dangerous situation. For now, we will be taking Lucy back with us. We will analyze the situation and consult with our allies. But if the time comes and we decide to fight, Lucy will also be fighting.”

“I wish you could come back with her...” Freya’s voice was quiet. She remembered how hard it was being apart from Wyatt even when he was poisoned by the blood potion and wanted to kill her. It was torture to be away from one another.

Derek sighed and ran his hands through his hair. He rested his elbows on his knees and leaned into his hands partially covering his face. “I don’t know how I’m going to manage to be away from her either.”

Wyatt nodded his head thoughtfully. “This right here is only a small fraction of your lives together. You will still have eternity together. It isn’t going to be easy but all you can do is focus on the now for the sake of the future. If you must be

here I understand... But don't get sloppy because you are trying to rush things. The witch certainly hasn't rushed things. This must have been something she has been plotting since she was a child."

"And you have allies. If you need help, remember to call on those around you. Reach out to us... don't hesitate to use the resources you have." Freya added, still keeping her voice quiet.

"It isn't the witch I am worried about. Not where my army is concerned..." Derek looked up from his hand. "It's this Wicker... us vampires have had tabs on him for awhile now. We are fairly certain he is a deity, but we don't know what his game is. You know that if he is what we think he is..."

Wyatt nodded his head. "We will need to have a discussion with Levi about this..." He looked over at Freya. "It's impossible for any of us to fight against a deity. Levi and Jade... and probably Alexis would be the only ones capable."

Freya nodded her head. "Of course if Alexis fights then I'm certain that Aken will show up. He has avoided the poor girl for so long. He can't possibly plan to never see her."

"If she ends up in danger, I'm certain he will show up. Levi has mentioned more than once even as a deity you can't ignore the desire to protect." Wyatt frowned. Wicker was a problem they couldn't handle. He would have to talk to the only ones that could and see what they knew. Levi knew about this Wicker he was sure of it.

"Anyways, Ryan. I don't think we can concern ourselves too much with things that are beyond our power. We will make sure the ones who can do something know about him." Wyatt directed his attention back to Derek.

"I understand. I was hoping to be able to have more information to give. But I guess I can't expect much if he is a deity." Derek nodded his head. Yes, they could only do what they could and ending Beryl was in their means. But they needed to find her. She was rarely at the hideout that they discovered. And she was very clever. She often used disguises and cloaks. He knew she would surface again. They would just have to keep doing what they were doing and wait. Meanwhile, he would send for extra guards to be at the ready.

"Before we showed up, what was your plan with our daughter?" Freya asked curiously.

"I was so thrilled about finding her that I couldn't see any farther than keeping her close. I couldn't believe I ended up finding my fated mate let alone who she ended up being." Derek chuckled. "I honestly wasn't thinking about anything. All I

wanted was to keep her close. But I know there is no way I can keep her here without her joining in the battles. When I started thinking about this..." He sighed and shook his head. "I knew she would have to leave this area and return where she would be safe. Where she would be away from all of this." He waved his hand around in the air.

"All I know is if I was Lucy, I would be livid. I would be furious with Wyatt for sending me away. What if something happened to Wyatt and me being there could have protected him... However, as a mother... after hearing what you have witnessed... I am selfishly worried for my daughter's safety. And not just her safety, but the safety of our pack. They have had time to mass produce this. They could strike every werewolf and kill them with ease." Freya frowned as she felt Wyatt's hand find hers. The warmth of his large hands encompassed hers and brought them closer to him. "It sounds like for now the wolves are at a stalemate. We need to find out what this substance is. We need it to be studied by the covens so that they can create an antidote if possible."

"In my opinion, this is not something she was able to mass-produce. It seemed more like to me... that these were precious tests." Derek's eyes met with Freya and Wyatt's. "We can't know for certain right now of course. But I think this is something she is trying to perfect so that she can take out the targets she really wants."

"This isn't a war she is trying to win." Wyatt said quietly. "This is a grudge she is wanting to settle. Our family bested demons. She knows she can't win against all of us."

"She plans to just take us down. The four of us..." Freya squeezed her eyes feeling dumb. Of course, this was Beryl's objective. It wasn't about the werewolves. It was about her and her family. It was always about her. She was the abomination and Beryl would have been taught this. This was all about ending her line.

Derek frowned as he listened to this. He felt a flame ignite in his chest in anger. The idea of someone targeting his mate made him ready to kill. His desire to protect Lucy was overwhelming him.

"I'm sorry to say this but this is how I feel." Derek's voice was a whisper as he stared at the silver and green eyes in front of him. "I want Lucy in the vampire kingdom. She will be safer with my... the king and queen there. We know Beryl will be targeting the Diamond pack. But she wouldn't dare go into vampire territory. Not even to look for your daughter... or children. Yes, send Lucy and her brother together there where they will be safe. You know you two would be welcomed there too-"

“We can’t leave our packs. The king and queen need to be there so that the packs don’t get restless and alarmed. We will be fine.” Wyatt’s eyes glazed momentarily, and he nodded to Freya. “But we both agree. We want our future protected. Aiden and Lucy will go to stay with the vampires. At least until after the ceremony.”

“I don’t-”

“Let me finish, Ryan.” Wyatt smiled as he interrupted Derek. “After the vampire ceremony, they will either go to Elysium or the dragon kingdom of the west. The vampires may be safer than the Diamond pack, but they are not safer than the fairy kingdom. Nor is it safer than the dragon kingdom. There they have family where it will be easy for us to visit them, and where we feel the most comfortable having them.”

“If your sister thinks you are in danger, won’t she leave the dragon kingdom to stay with you?” Derek frowned slightly. He wanted Lucy back at the vampire palace. But he could understand her parents’ feelings. And the dragons had few enemies... who could afford to be enemies with the dragons. And Elysium was well protected by a living barrier. Her safety was the most important.

“No... We can’t risk something happening to Rhea. She is also a werewolf too. Her mate isn’t about to risk her life. Been there. Done that.” Wyatt chuckled. “She will look after our kids for me. And IF there is trouble the dragons will come to our aid. Since it seems like the witch hasn’t prepared anything against dragons.”

“The dragons and Elysium are far away from here.” Derek said with a frown. “It won’t be easy to visit her.”

Wyatt chuckled. “If you want to see her, just come to the Diamond pack and we will take you to her. You know my family was gifted with these special black pearls that allow us to travel to the others.” He watched as Derek’s eyes lit up a bit. He smiled and squeezed Freya’s hand. They both felt better about sending their children away for more reasons than one.

Not only were they their precious children but they were also the future. If something happened to Wyatt and Freya it would be up to Aiden to lead. The werewolves couldn’t lose their king after finally getting one. And Aiden could keep this going.

“We will escort you back to the Diamond pack tomorrow. Given the conclusion we just came up with, I don’t feel comfortable with you traveling on your own.” Derek straightened up and watched as both Freya and Wyatt’s eyes danced in amusement.

“Son, we travel with a demon and a guardian. Plus we are well seasoned in war.” Wyatt chuckled.

“All it takes is a second. If that stuff is loaded in a sniper gun of sorts... One hit is all it could take to lose everything.” Derek shook his head. “This is a special situation. Besides, this way I’ll get to be with Lucy a bit longer...”

“Well boys if we are traveling tomorrow then I suggest we should all get some rest.” Freya said standing up with Wyatt joining her.

Derek stood up and glanced at his room. “She is already asleep... I umm.”

Freya placed her hand on Wyatt’s back and gently shoved him. “Don’t wake her and let her rest.” She put a bit more force into the back of her protective mate with a small smile. How quickly he forgot what it was like to find your mate. She winked at Derek and then walked out of the room with Wyatt. She remembered. Nothing could tear her apart from her mate. Not even him wanting to kill her.

Derek smiled in appreciation and slowly crept back into his room. He eased back into the bed and curled his arms around Lucy who snuggled right back into him. He tenderly pecked her head and closed his eyes. He took in her sweet scent and her comforting warmth. The feeling of holding her while she slept was therapeutic. He felt everything calming down and relaxing. He was happy knowing he would be traveling with them tomorrow too. It would give him some more precious time with her... his little mate.

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