

Design of Fate

Chapter 5

IMEELA

How in the world did I end up willingly walking through the woods with a group of strangers?

Nobody since Emilio had ever helped me with the countless vampires who had come after me throughout the years. I lost track after a while, but I would venture to say upwards of a hundred. I had either been lucky enough to evade them or had to eliminate them. I used to feel a lot of guilt and shame over eliminating them, but Emilio taught me the hard truth: it was either them or me.

Now, do not get me wrong. I was thankful for them coming, but I was at a complete loss of what to do.

Four years had been spent completely on my own. Six years prior to that were spent with one other person. Now, a fated beloved swooped in and saved the day. Not to mention that we would be heading back to their pack. Staying in one place would be a foreign concept to me. Could I do it though?

Honestly, the thought of remaining sedentary sent a thrill of excitement through me. It would be weird as hell, but it would also mean a chance at having a future that did not require running and hiding.

“Here we are. Would you like to ride with us?” Jackson asked, pulling me from my reverie.

I blinked, looking around, and realizing that we had made it all the way to where vehicles were parked. We made the entire trek with me stuck in my own thoughts. How completely embarrassing!

“Sure,” I said, blushing.

He just gave me a smile and opened the back door for me. I hesitated for just a minute because I had not been in a vehicle in many years. He closed the door once I did get in before joining me around the other side.

In this confined space, his chai scent was so much more potent. It smelled just like my mother’s recipe. It was not great for him to smell so delicious because I would end up embarrassing myself just to catch a whiff.

I was too young when everything happened for my mother to really explain beloved bonds in detail. I had no idea who to really ask about them without looking incompetent. That was all that I needed.

My eyes drifted over to Jackson as he talked to the guy that he had introduced as his brother. He was devastatingly handsome. 6'4 and had a body that looked to be sculpted from pure muscle and strength. Not to mention that he had the most mesmerizing green eyes I had ever seen. Dark brown hair that was longer on top and shorter on the sides connected to groomed facial hair.

He relaxed back into his seat and gave me a smile. He probably knew that I was looking at him, but he did not seem cocky about it like I had seen in many humans I had encountered.

Sadi's little stomach told me that she was hungry, and I felt horrible that I had not been able to feed her yet. We ended up running halfway through our trip. I had no idea how the vampires had found me so quickly, especially since I had gone out of my way to remain hidden.

"We can find her something to eat. What do you think she'll eat?" Jackson asked me.

How the hell should I know that? I never had something that was dependent on me. I would know if she was a vampire, but that she was not. We were two very different species.

"I actually have no idea. Do you think you could ask Zeus. He's a wolf, a different kind, but it's a similar premise I believe," I murmured, scratching her belly.

Jackson's deep laughter caught me by surprise. I looked over at him and noticed the blue shimmers were present. That meant that it was Zeus. I thought at least. It would take time to learn to differentiate between two beings in one body.

Zeus reached his hand over and rubbed Sadi's head, causing her to purr. It made us both smile.

"You make a great point actually. Not many people would think to ask the wolf, so thank you for that. When we stop, I can actually hunt something for her if you'd like me to. She's old enough to have been weaned off the mother's milk. It's up to you," he offered.

That was a very sweet offer. He did not have to do it, but he would if I wanted him to. Perhaps I could convince him to teach me when we reached their pack. I would hate to have to rely on others to provide for her. She should be able to start hunting soon and would need someone to teach her how to do it since she would not have her pack around her.

"Thank you. I'd like that. Do you...do you think you could teach me when we get the pack? That way I'll know how to provide for her. I know how to hunt animals, but hunting for myself is different than for her," I asked shyly.

His answering smile should have been illegal because it made him even more handsome. That was not fair. Not fair at all.

I had not even realized I dozed off until I heard a car door shut. My eyes popped open, and my heart thundered at the unfamiliar territory. It took a moment for everything to come rushing back to me.

We were on the side of the road for some reason. I hesitantly got out of the car, stretching my sore muscles. I had not sat down like that in a long time. Not to mention that I had been outrunning those vampires for ten miles before I happened across Jackson's group.

Speaking of Jackson, he was sitting on the ground with a bowl in front of Sadi. I walked closer and saw some type of meat that had clearly been chewed so that her body could digest it. That really meant something special to me.

I knelt down next to Sadi and petted her head while she ate. My mind was reeling with how much everything had changed in the course of hours. It was frightening but also felt right. It was difficult for me to fully wrap my head around.

Something that I had always feared was getting complacent because that was when things would go wrong. It was when I would have to take off in the cover of darkness or underneath the safety of the blazing sun.

"Thank you, Zeus. I appreciate you hunting for her," I said softly.

"You're more than welcome, Imeela. It was my pleasure."

I noticed that his voice was deeper when it was Zeus speaking than when it was Jackson speaking. Was that how it was with all counterparts? I would add that to the growing list of questions that I might be brave enough to ask one day.

Sadi was very content once she finished eating and was nearly in a food coma. She was one happy wolfy alright. I gently picked her up and got back in the car so that we could continue onto the hotel.

"We're going to a hotel that's associated with our pack and some allied packs. This way it'll be more secure than going to a random hotel," Jackson mentioned as we pulled into a larger town that I had not visited before.

I nodded in understanding. My eyes scanned our surroundings, hoping to not come across any vampire signs. It was one reason why I steered clear of larger towns and cities. They were often hunting grounds.

"How far away is the hotel from here?" I asked.

"Less than ten minutes," he told me.

I decided to hide my scent. That way it would hide it from the car as we got closer and opened the doors. Luckily, with this being an enclosed space, it would pull my scent from the air.

My mouth fought a smirk when I heard them all inhaling deeply, obviously realizing that something was missing. God, this was a little amusing. It had been a very long time since I had any form of amusement, so you could cut me some slack.

“That’s an awesome ability,” Brynn said, grinning widely in the rearview mirror.

“It’ll last for twenty minutes. That way nobody would scent me from the street when we got there. Extra precaution,” I explained.

I could tell that they were all curious about earlier and right now, but nobody asked me to divulge my story. It was something that I definitely appreciated. The past decade was spent with absolute secrecy of who I really was.

The car pulled into a parking lot where the others had already gathered.

It took every ounce of my training to keep my heartbeat and breathing steady as we parked. Jackson came around to open my door for me. It was a very sweet gesture. My father had been the same way for my mother. The back of my eyes burned with tears, so I had to blink the away.

“Thank you,” I whispered past the lump in my throat.

“You needn’t thank me, but you’re welcome,” he told me with a sincere smile.

The group had apparently already got everything situated and led us inside the building. It was beautifully decorated with a nature theme, but I kept my focus in front of me because I felt the beginning of a panic attack coming on. I had a history of them, but this was the first one in months.

JACKSON

‘I like Sadi. It’s like her protector wolf that came to her right before a life-sized protector wolf known as Zeus would come along,’ he mused.

He loved the fact that Imeela had asked him about what to feed Sadi because she was interacting with him but also distinguishing the difference between the two of us. It made him feel seen.

I had not thought about it like that. Sadi was like a good omen, watching over her until we found her.

My eyes trailed over her while she was focused on the door of the elevator. She was gorgeous. There was no doubt about that whatsoever. It was easy to see that she must have had a rough time lately. I had no idea what her story was, but I would not ask until she decided to open up. Just her trusting us was something that I would not take for granted.

No idea how long she had been on her own, but it must not have been easy. She was clearly malnourished. That tugged at us because it was in a mate’s nature to desire to provide for them. The only scenario that I could think of similar to our situation that I knew of personally was Dante and Ziyah. Perhaps I could reach out to him eventually for some advice because I did not

want to push Imeela or do something that fucked everything up. I knew that he had Kade to help guide him, so perhaps I would eventually be able to run a few things by him.

“Okay, this entire floor has been reserved by us. The suites each have two bedrooms and communal living room space. Let’s go ahead and order some food and just get some rest. We’ll leave out first thing in the morning,” Theo told everyone.

Maya skipped over waving menus around. She was an adorable dork but not as adorable as my very own Ms. Dorky. Brynn earned that nickname fair and square.

I turned to Imeela who looked like she was getting very overwhelmed, so I led her to one of the bedrooms and opened the door for her. She was very good at controlling herself, but it was like I could almost sense or feel what was just underneath the surface through her aura or something.

“Do you have any preference of what you want to eat?” I asked her. She just shook her head. “Okay. I’ll find something good. Take all the time you need, and if you don’t want to come back out here to eat then you can eat in your room. We’ll all understand. Okay?”

I saw the relief pass through her eyes immediately. She thanked me and said she was going to grab a shower.

My hand rested against the wall, and I rested my forehead there too. This had been the best and worst day of my life thus far. Best day for finding my mate, but it was the worst possible way to have found her. There were many things that I had no fucking clue about, such as why there were vampires chasing her. Why did she worry about someone finding her scent? My gut told me that there was something serious going on, but it also told me that if I asked her about it right now then it would close herself down tightly.

The door opened, startling me. Imeela sheepishly peeked her head out and gave me a small smile when she saw me.

“Would you umm mind wolf pup watching while I’m busy? No worries if you’re busy or anything,” she said quickly.

Sadi just bounced out of the room and sat down in front of me. I picked her right up, causing her to yip at me.

“I really like her. It’s no problem at all. Never worry about it. Just focus on you while Sadi and I bond.”

Imeela gave me a legitimate smile that brightened her entire face. Then she ducked her head back into her bedroom and closed the door.

At least she was not shutting me out. I would take this as a win.

“C’mon, Sadi. Let’s get to know each other.”

She did not feel up to coming out to eat, and nobody blamed her for that. I took the couch in the communal area, but I doubted that I actually slept a wink. My body was hyperalert for two reasons. One, she had just faced five vampires who wanted her dead for reasons still unknown to me. Two, because my mate was so close, but we were still strangers who met each other under unfavorable circumstances.

Sadly, she looked like she had slept about as well as I had. She was still gorgeous even if there were dark circles underneath her eyes.

We ended up eating breakfast before we left out. Well, I would like to say that she ate, but it was even less than Mira consumed. She did seem full though, so I did not push it. That just showed me how little she had been consuming on a regular basis.

I could tell that she was extremely nervous about going to Dark Moon. I just hoped that she would give it an honest to goddess chance. To give me and Zeus a chance.

Shana Allen

Jackson is about to learn her story. Do you think he's ready to hear it all?