

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna -

Chapter 331: Where are we going?[1,329 words]

"I don't think Gilbert is that kind of person. He wouldn't mock her for being honest about how she feels." Viola said, watching as he turned his head back toward her at her words.

"Hmm, you are so familiar with him now, aren't you, sunshine?" He said with a soft laugh as he reached out and pulled her closer. "I suppose you are right, he won't dare mock her feelings, because he will have to answer to me. But that doesn't change the fact that he is going to hurt her." He paused, then whispered into her hair, "Hold me. I want to feel your arms around me." And just like that he lost the battle he had been quietly fighting against himself all evening, and when she wrapped her arms around him, he found a peace in it that nothing else had given him all day.

Viola let out a quiet sigh of relief, telling herself that if he was holding her like this then there was nothing wrong and she had been reading too much into things again. But being held wasn't quite enough, she wanted him to kiss her, and he didn't, and she settled for what she had, convincing herself he was simply too exhausted for anything more and that tomorrow was another day.

She pressed a kiss to his hair and closed her eyes, smiling at their bedtime conversation about his sister that made them seem awfully like parents talking about their daughter.

Sleep wasn't restful that night, though, even with Sebastian's arms around her. She had gone to bed hungry without saying anything about it, and in the middle of the night, her stomach began to ache a little. Still, she endured it in silence.

When she woke the next morning it was to an empty bed and a note on the pillow that read: "Get ready and meet me outside. We're going out. S.K."

Going out? Viola read it twice, her eyes settling on the initials that made it unmistakably from her husband. But a quiet unease crept in alongside the curiosity, the note was too curt, stripped of any warmth, and it felt nothing like him. What was going on with Sebastian? What was with the off and on mood around him?

She barely had time to sit with the feeling, or with the hunger still gnawing quietly at her from the night before, before she made her way into the bathroom, took a quick shower, and dressed in an orange spaghetti-strap dress with short heels.

She had sent Nick a quick text the previous night explaining that she hadn't been able to leave because something had come up and apologizing for it, and he had replied this morning, but she left it unread, too tense about Sebastian's note to give it the attention it needed. She would get to it once she knew where they were headed.

She left the building, which felt noticeably emptier than usual after half of the Kade relatives had been sent away to their ancestral lands.

The air outside was slightly chilly despite it being the middle of August, and she immediately regretted not grabbing a coat. Sebastian's car was parked out front waiting for her, and he was standing beside it, holding the door open.

He was dressed casually, baggy black trousers and a long-sleeved off-white shirt that made him look younger somehow, more relaxed, and she felt a flush of embarrassment for having dressed as formally as she had in a fancy dress.

"Good morning." She greeted him, expecting, for some reason she couldn't fully explain, a kiss, and receiving only a reply.

"Good morning." No how was your night. No how did you sleep, the way he usually asked.

She got into the car carrying her confusion and the small, quiet sting of it, and he closed the door and walked around to the driver's side. He started the engine, and when she shivered, he turned the heat on and rolled the windows up without a word, but he still said nothing about where they were going, so she asked.

"Where are we going?"

"Somewhere. You'll see when we get there. I have a surprise for you." He said.

A surprise. Viola turned the word over in her mind and felt the knot of unease in her stomach pull tighter, because he hadn't said it with any warmth or excitement, he had said it with that distant, unreadable expression that sent a quiet dread settling into her chest. She could only sit with it and hope, very quietly, that it was a good surprise.

They barely shared a word beyond that initial greeting, and Viola spent the entire ride staring out of the window with dread sitting heavy in her stomach, until the car rolled to a stop in the parking lot of one of the largest restaurants in Silver. She stared at the sleek building through the glass in confusion. As she sat there trying to make sense of it, he came around and opened her door, and she had no choice but to step out.

He walked ahead of her without a word and she followed silently behind, clutching her purse like a lifeline, her legs feeling wobbly underneath her with every step. She regretted the heels.

When they stepped inside the restaurant, Viola got the shock of her life. Every single table was empty, not a guest in sight, and a sign on the screen outside had read "Closed For The Day." She looked around warily, trying to keep up with his strides. Why were they here if the place was closed? What was going on with Sebastian?

He led her into a private room despite the restaurant being closed and pulled her chair out for her like a gentleman before sitting down across from her, that cold, aloof demeanor still firmly in

place, the kind that made her wish they had simply stayed home and eaten there, if a meal was all this was about.

"What is it, Seb?" Viola decided to ask outright rather than continue suffering through his hot and cold treatment in silence.

He leveled her with a flat look and arched a brow. "What do you mean?" He asked, as though he genuinely had no idea.

Viola shrugged. "You. You are acting strange. Have I done something to upset you?" She decided to come out with it directly and hear whatever it was. She couldn't take this anymore, it was twisting her stomach into knots.

Sebastian pressed a button on the table to summon their meals and then replied, "Tell me something, do you think there could be a reason behind my behavior, Viola? Is there something you want to tell me? Some secret you might be keeping from me?" He asked, watching her eyes carefully as he said it, looking for a flicker of something that would give her away. Either she was exceptionally good at hiding things, or she genuinely believed she had nothing to confess.

Viola felt more confused than ever. "What secret? I am not hiding anything from you." The words were out before she caught herself, because she was. She was hiding one thing. The fact that she was connected to the creatures of the sea. But there was no way that could be what this was about. Could it?

Sebastian gave a single, unreadable nod. "Then let's find out, shall we?"

"Find out about what, Sebastian? You are starting to frighten me, please just tell me what this is about." Viola said, unable to hold it together any longer, but at that moment the waitresses arrived with a trolley, moving efficiently around the table and beginning to set down their meals, lifting the lids off the larger bowls one by one. And when Viola's eyes landed on what was inside one of them, she felt everything inside her drop and her heart clench tight.

No way in hell...

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 332: Secrets coming to light[1,318 words]

"We can talk about this after we finish eating, Viola." Sebastian said smoothly, gesturing toward the meals on the table that had visibly drained the color from her face.

Every single dish on the table contained fish, and at the center of it all sat a large grilled fish on a wide tray that made her stomach turn just looking at it.

"I... I don't eat fish. Can I change my order?" Viola asked, looking up at Sebastian, feeling more hurt than she could put into words. Was he punishing her? What had she done to make him treat her this way so suddenly?

"No. I made these special arrangements for both of us. Doctor Gilbert suggested you eat more of it, it benefits us werewolves, remember? I can feed it to you if—"

"No. You don't have to." She said tightly, balling her fists under the table.

Sebastian's gaze remained hard, Viola studied his familiar silver eyes where she usually saw warmth and tenderness sitting there unconditionally for her, yet right now these eyes only held coldness, as though there were a firm wall between her and the Sebastian who never failed to make her feel safe, never failed to make her feel adored.

The aroma of fish delicacies wafted through the air, and every breath she took was filled with it and it further settled the fact that Sebastian was making her do this, and he was looking at her with the strict eyes of the supreme Alpha.

"It won't taste as good cold. Eat." He urged her, going so far as to serve her plate himself.

Viola stared at him. "I am not eating. I think I would rather go home since—"

"Home?" Sebastian said with a humorless laugh, all traces of it leaving his face the very next second, his eyes going cold as frost. "You mean go back to the sea? After you destroy the werewolf world?" He accused, his voice dropping to something quietly devastating.

Viola felt her heart plummet. Cold sweat broke out along her spine. "What do you mean?"

"What are you, Viola?" He said coldly, holding her gaze without flinching. "If you truly have nothing to do with the sea creatures, then eat the fish. You can't, can you?" He paused. "I thought as much. You are an imposter, and I ended up mated to you." The disappointment in his eyes were as clear as day, it clenched around her own heart like a fist, yet something about that look in his eyes didn't feel like him. He had never once looked at her with a gaze like this one.

"Sebastian, I have nothing to do with the sea creatures, what has gotten into you?" She asked, the reality of what this was all about settling over her like ice water. He had figured it out. Deny it as she might, Viola knew in the deepest part of herself that her origin was tied to the very creatures his kind despised most, but she never expected such reaction from him of all people.

"You are still lying, Viola." He said quietly, and she could hear that it cost him something to say it, that he hated causing her pain even as he was doing it.

"I am not." She whispered agonizingly.

"I spoke to Miss Lara yesterday. She killed herself afterward. She wouldn't reveal your background or what happened to your sister to me, so I sought out Julia instead."

Tears had already started falling before he finished the sentence, but it was Miss Lara's death that hit her first. He'd spoken to her already? And that too, behind her back? She couldn't even digest the elder she-wolf's death before she realized another thing he had said.

"Julia told you I am a sea creature?"

Sebastian looked at the tears on her face and felt them like blades to the chest. "She didn't tell me. She summoned the creature who could. Julia told me Miss Lara had made a pact with a creature of the sea and knew how to call it. She filled a tub in the bathroom and called it forth. It came in a water form." He paused.

"It said, 'Your Luna is not who you think she is. She is one of us and she was sent to destroy you all. She is your greatest enemy, the one behind every misfortune you are bound to face. Her only mission is to prevent you from breaking your curse.'" He recited the words the water creature said as if he still couldn't believe it himself, yet something else seemed to solidify it.

"You have been hiding a secret, haven't you?"

She'd never thought that keeping the recent encounters she had with water would come back to bite her this soon. She didn't tell him about her encounters with water, and everything in his expression right now, the anger and mild look of betrayal told her that he knew, and a lot of his anger came from the fact that him knowing didn't come from her.

She could only nod her head.

He stared into her eyes as he asked, "Did you break Zoe's kitchen glass with your ability, yes or no?"

When she didn't reply fast enough, he gritted out, "Yes or no, Viola?"

Viola felt her throat close and her entire world shudder, as though the ground beneath everything she had built here was cracking open all at once.

"It wasn't intentional. I didn't know how I did it. It was—"

"Did you drain Ember with your ability, yes or no?" he asked again, his eyes turning colder than frost.

"I didn't mean to do it—"

"But you did it and didn't tell me about it because you were one of them. You came into my life to stop me from finding the prophesied mate who will break my bloodline curse," he accused emotionlessly.

"That is not true. I am not one of them. Yes, I have experienced strange things connected to water since that day in Nightshade, I admit that, and afterward too, but I swear that is all. I don't know who I am or what my origin is." Her voice came out quiet and fractured with pain, more tears of hurt coming down her cheeks at the accusations he was throwing at her like that.

"I kept the reason I don't eat fish from you because I spent my whole life watching people get killed and punished for things like this. I was afraid. I didn't want to be one of the sea creatures, I wanted to be here, in the world I grew up in, in your life." She choked on the words and pressed her hand over her mouth as though she could hold the cry inside. "I have nothing to do with what you were told. But if you believe it, I cannot change your mind."

Alongside the choking hurt in her chest, a deep wave of disappointment washed through her, that not even their mate bond had been enough to make him choose her over what a creature had whispered into a bathtub. But she couldn't fully blame him. Those creatures were responsible for the curse that had haunted his bloodline for generations, and that alone was enough to cloud everything he felt, everything he knew.

He had been disgusted last night. She understood it now, why he hadn't kissed her, why he hadn't touched her, why he had held her but kept some invisible wall between them. Because he had believed she was one of the things he despised most.

She hadn't told him the truth because she knew this would be the outcome of knowing.

With her vision blurred and burning with tears, Viola looked down at the fish on the table, reached out, tore a piece from it, and began to raise it toward her mouth.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 333: Immediate regret[1,168 words]

Sebastian watched her reach for the fish and something inside him cracked clean down the middle.

He had spent an entire day and a sleepless night convincing himself. He had replayed every word that creature had said to him in that bathroom, had turned each one over like evidence, had used it to build a wall between himself and what he felt for her because it had been easier than accepting that the woman he had fallen for might be the very thing his bloodline had bled against for generations.

He had held her last night knowing. Had breathed her in knowing. Had asked her to hold him anyway because even with the doubt eating him alive, he couldn't have not touched her. That alone should have told him everything.

And now she was sitting across from him with tears running silently down her face, not screaming, not defending herself with fury, just reaching out with a trembling hand to eat something that made her sick, just to prove to him that she was who he already knew she was.

A talking body of water had nearly made him destroy the best thing that had ever walked into his complicated, miserable life.

His hand shot across the table before it reached her lips. He yanked it from her fingers and threw it across the room, and then he was on his feet, and then he was in front of her, and then he was on his knees.

"Look at me." He said, when she kept her face turned away, her throat convulsing with everything she was trying to hold in. When she didn't move, he reached up and cupped her face in both hands, gently turning her toward him.

"Amor," he said softly, and it was the first time he had used that endearment with genuine tenderness since yesterday, and she felt it like warmth returning after a long cold. "I am an idiot for letting a talking body of water convince me of anything, because it played me for a fool in that moment. I was angry, angry that you had kept something so significant from me, but I understand now that you don't even fully know yourself." He stroked the tears from her cheeks with his thumbs as he said it.

What a fool he had been. That creature had planted a seed of doubt so deep it had taken root overnight, but watching her cry now, it was as though that wall of doubt simply collapsed, and he could see clearly again. How could she be one of them when she had grown up here, suffered here for four years in the hollow, with nothing and no one? And he remembered the wolf fur that had risen along her skin during their most intimate moments.

Perhaps Gilbert's report about her DNA being different had only muddied things further, made everything harder to separate and understand.

Even if it turned out she carried sea creature blood somewhere in her origin, it changed nothing in what he wanted. It did not make him want to harm her. It did not make him want to stand before his people and announce that a hybrid walked among them.

"I am sorry," he whispered, looking into those blue eyes that reminded him of diamonds. "I should have come to you directly instead of letting it build into this. But you should not have hidden it from me either, amor. Look at me, please." He pleaded softly when she looked away, biting down on her lower lip.

"It wasn't my intention to hide it from you..." She whispered hoarsely. "I was afraid that I would lose you and my place here. I don't have anything else out there, no family, no home, nothing outside of Silver. How could I have told you, knowing what I was risking?" She cried, wiping aggressively at her eyes and in the process knocking his hand away from her face, but he cupped her cheeks again and held on.

"When did you find out?" He asked, wiping her cheeks delicately, his eyes not leaving hers.

"Not too long ago. There was this water creature following me around, and after what I did to Ember..." She stopped, then pushed through it. "I swear it wasn't intentional. It was a mistake. I didn't mean to kill her." She said.

"I know. Shh, I know. You didn't kill her." He said, pulling her down from the chair and into his arms, wishing he could turn back the last twenty-four hours and hit himself for every tear currently on her face.

"I did, I drained her of fluid..." She rasped against his neck, her nose buried there while his large hand moved in slow, careful strokes along her back.

"Yes, you drained her, but you didn't kill her. Someone else did. She was poisoned with silver afterward. What you did to her was not something that could have taken her life." He told her, and Viola pulled back to look at him with wide, surprised eyes.

She sat with that for a moment before asking quietly, "Who did it?"

"We don't know yet." He said, brushing her wet lashes gently. "I am sorry I approached this the way I did. The water creature that has been following you, is it the same one that pulled you under in Nightshade? The same one I spoke to yesterday?"

Viola shook her head quickly. "No. It's different. This one is friendly." She paused, then added quietly, staring down at his bent knee rather than his face, "Don't ever do that to me again, please..." And Sebastian understood she wasn't talking about the creature anymore, she was talking about him, about last night and this morning and all the cold, awful hours in between.

"I will never take the side of the sea creatures. No matter what runs in my blood, my home is here, in the werewolf world, and I will never betray it for anything. Not when my husband rules it. Never." She promised.

Sebastian felt regret and relief wash over him at the same time. He had spent so many hours tangled up in what her being a hybrid might mean for their world, for his people, for everything, but hearing her say those words, something in him settled. He would protect her. Whatever it cost him, whatever it required, he would keep her safe from his people, because in this world, hybrids were not welcomed, only pure werewolves, and for a terrifying stretch of time he had believed this would be the end of everything between them.

But he couldn't end it. Couldn't cast her aside. Couldn't break the bond that had already buried itself so deeply into his heart he wouldn't survive pulling it out. He loved this woman. God help him, he would give it all up for her, just as she was willing to turn away from whatever part of herself belonged to the sea, for him.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 334: Forgive me[1,189 words]

"Forgive me for how I treated you since last night. I will grow enough sense going forward to never let a creature of the sea convince me of anything about you again." He said, cupping her face and accepting the deeply unimpressed glare she aimed at him. "Have you forgiven me, my love?"

"I am hungry." She said flatly, deliberately moving her face out of his hands. "I will think about forgiving you after you take this offensive fish off this table and have them bring us something actually worth eating for breakfast. I have been starving since last night." She pouted, turning her chin away from him pointedly, because he had given her anxiety all through the night and a heartache all through the morning, and he could wait a little longer for his forgiveness.

Though deep down, the relief that had lifted off her shoulders at finally being known for what she might be, was so immense she could have wept from it all over again. But the fish really did have to go.

In no time Sebastian called through a tablet screen to the restaurant workers he had deliberately dismissed earlier, he had cleared the entire floor just so he could have this conversation with his wife without a single listening ear or wandering spy. He ordered a complete change of meal, instructed that everything currently on the table be removed and discarded, silverware included, and replaced entirely. He wasn't willing to risk her tasting even a trace of fish on anything.

How he hadn't connected the dots the very first time he heard she didn't eat fish baffled him now, but then again, he had never associated her with anything other than a werewolf, and had simply assumed it was a personal preference. Now he understood. She stayed away from fish because fish were a natural kin to mermaids, and consuming certain kinds was something akin to consuming a part of themselves that ended up making them sick. It was knowledge that had once been taught in the werewolf world long before his time, buried now under generations of distance from those old conflicts.

Sebastian ordered every single one of her favorite meals he could think of, wanting to earn her forgiveness properly, though he already knew she had forgiven him for being an idiot. He needed to hear her say it before he made his own confession to her.

For a moment, Sebastian could have sworn he had been under a spell that made him believe he had been betrayed by his wife throughout last night, until he saw her tears a while ago. It had baffled him, and he wished he could punch himself for the way he had acted over the last few hours...

They ate in relative silence, a quiet broken only by the sound of her picking at her food and staring somewhere beyond the table, clearly lost in her own thoughts, until he glanced across at her and asked, "Are you still angry with me, amor?"

Viola startled slightly and looked up at him before shaking her head. "No."

"Then why aren't you eating?"

"I don't have much of an appetite suddenly. I was thinking..." She hesitated, turning her fork slowly against the plate while he gave her his full attention. "If I am a hybrid of a werewolf and a sea creature, how did my parents ever meet? And which one of them was the werewolf?" She voiced the thought out carefully, as though she had been holding it behind her teeth for a long time. "I can't help wondering, because I cannot imagine a mermaid and our kind ever coming together willingly in this lifetime."

It felt strange, and also like relief, to finally be able to say it out loud to him. She hadn't realized how much weight she had been carrying by keeping it pressed down inside herself all these weeks,

and now that it was out, every curious thought she had buried came rushing back, including the question of why she and her twin had been left at that orphanage at all.

Sebastian had sat with that same question himself, though he had arrived at the conclusion that it didn't matter as long as she remained on this side of the world.

"I can't imagine it happening either, mermaids hate our kind just as deeply as we hate theirs. And quite frankly, this is the first case of a hybrid I have heard of in this generation. The last recorded case, the story I was told, involved a hybrid who was killed because she attempted to poison an entire werewolf settlement and cause a mass killing, an act of vengeance for her father's death at the hands of our kind in the water. He was captured in a fish net. After that, no hybrid was ever found in Silver again. And that was a generation before ours."

Viola absorbed his words quietly and understood why hybrids would never be welcomed, it always seemed to come to a point where they had to choose one side, and they could never fully belong to both worlds. "Do hybrids..." She hesitated over the question, but his attentiveness gave her the courage to push through it. "Do they have wolves? Since they carry both sides, is it possible for a wolf to awaken in them?"

Sebastian sipped from his tea and gave a slow nod. "From some of the records I dug out yesterday after learning about you, yes, it is possible. But it depends greatly on whether one of the parents carries Alpha blood, because that strengthens everything. It is also possible for a hybrid to develop a tail if the other parent is of royal mermaid descent, since royal mermaids are the most powerful of their kind, long-lived and rarely ever seen on land, even in the old accounts."

Now that Sebastian turned it over in his mind, he couldn't stop himself from quietly entertaining the possibility that Viola's werewolf parent might have been an Alpha, because a regular werewolf breeding with another kind of creature simply would not produce a child with a wolf. But the fur he had seen rising along her skin during their most intimate moments suggested otherwise.

"How unfortunate then," Viola murmured, the sad disappointment sitting quietly but visibly in her expression. "I might never have a wolf, maybe being what I am was the reason I never awakened one when I turned nineteen." She pushed at her food with her fork, trying to bury the small, hollow grief of it beneath a mouthful of something she didn't really taste.

That tiny thread of hope she had always carried about one day having a wolf had just been quietly confirmed as something she might have to let go of entirely, and she was trying not to let it show too much.

Sebastian felt her emotions shift almost immediately through their bond. He sat with the question of whether to tell her, about the wolf suppressant Gilbert had found in her blood, about the fur he had seen with his own eyes.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna -

Chapter 335: Kiss and makeup[1,249 words]

Telling her would be simple enough. But telling her would also light a hope inside her, and if they couldn't find a solution, that hope would only make the eventual disappointment harder to survive.

He had already instructed Gilbert to find a way to create an antidote for the suppressant in her blood somehow, and the doctor had promised to try. So until it was made, Sebastian decided to let her sit with this new information about her background first. If she turned out to carry a wolf after all, it would mean she had an Alpha parent somewhere in this world.

But which Alpha, from which pack, could that turn out to be? Was it the mother or the father? He couldn't help the curiosity gnawing at him, the pull to know where the other half of her came from in their world. It couldn't be Silver, that would make them relatives, and the very idea was too absurd to entertain, so he scratched it out immediately.

Knowing how eager he already was about it, he understood that telling her would make her twice as restless, and she needed to settle first. So until the medicine was made, he resolved to keep that part to himself. But he couldn't sit across from her and watch her be sad without doing something about it.

"It doesn't matter whether you have a wolf or not, darling. You will still belong in this world just as much as anyone else, and I promise you that your secret will be safe with me. Always." He reached across and took her hand, the one wearing their wedding ring, and intertwined their fingers. She gave him a smile in return, one that tried its best to be warm but fell just short, the emotions she was holding inside pulling at the corners of it.

"But I really do wish to know what it feels like," she said quietly. "To have a wolf. To be part of the things only wolf-bearers can do, to run through the trees, to feel another living presence inside me, to have that connection." She paused, and the next part came out softer, more carefully. "To feel a mate bond, even without a mark..."

That part hurt more than she wanted to let on. She was aware that Sebastian would never be able to mark her, and without a wolf she might never truly share what he felt, not in the way a real bond allowed. Their connection would exist without that deeper, mutual thread that tied mated pairs beyond anything ordinary. Maybe it was asking for too much to want to feel him the way he felt her.

Viola couldn't finish her meal even with the hunger that had been gnawing at her since the night before. She was quietly certain now that her parents had been nothing more than two creatures who had resented her and her twin and cast them both away without looking back. Maybe they had been their mistakes? Maybe none of their parents wanted them...

A heaviness settled between them at the breakfast table after that, born from his wife's quiet grief at believing she could never truly be complete in their world. He tried to lift her mood, and though she smiled for him, it never reached her eyes. It was a movement of the lips that didn't travel to the heart, and in turn it pulled at his own mood naturally, until they were both two sad people pushing food around their plates and pretending otherwise.

Sebastian couldn't take it. He reached out to Matt through the mind link, canceling whatever meetings were scheduled and asking him to work through the request documents for the day. He couldn't send her home carrying that feeling in her chest, not when it was already bleeding into his own.

"Where are we going?" Viola asked quietly from the passenger seat when she noticed he wasn't driving back toward the high tower but further into the city, away from it entirely.

"You'll see." He said, glancing over at her with a small smile.

Viola pursed her lips. "I hope it isn't another surprise. I think I am traumatized by your surprises now." She said, though there was a teasing edge to it, she was aware her mood was dampening his, and she didn't want that and wanted to add humor.

"Ouch. That hurt, love." He said, pressing a hand to his chest dramatically. "Now I have no choice but to remedy that before I let you go on believing all my surprises are traumatizing. A husband's surprise is supposed to bring excitement, not dread." He said, and she rolled her eyes at him.

"You are my only husband and so far yours have given me nothing but dread. I can't wait to see how you intend to fix that. I hope it doesn't involve throwing me into the sea to see if I grow a tail this time around."

Sebastian glanced over at her and narrowed his eyes slowly. "That is actually a brilliant idea. Why didn't I think of that sooner? I should absolutely throw you into the sea and see what happens."

Even knowing he was joking, the color drained from her face slightly and she said, "You wouldn't dare." She gasped.

"Then convince me not to. Perhaps with a kiss, and I will consider changing my mind." He said, slowing the car to a stop at the side of the road and turning to face her with complete seriousness. "Kiss me, my love." He pouted his lips at her, and the expression was so utterly ridiculous on his face that she found herself laughing before she could stop it.

And then, on a quiet impulse, she slipped her phone out of her purse and snapped a picture of him mid-pout. "This would make an excellent wallpaper. The people of Silver would have a collective heart attack seeing their Supreme Alpha like this." She grinned, turning the screen toward herself and laughing again at what she found there.

"Absolutely not, wife, delete that and take a proper picture of me in a decent pose." Sebastian said, catching a glimpse of the screen and visibly cringing at what stared back at him. He looked ridiculously stupid!

"Remember what you did to me in my penthouse? You took a picture of me and refused to delete it." She said smugly, the weight that had been sitting on her chest all morning lifting almost without her noticing.

Sebastian remembered perfectly well, and he still had that picture saved, and had no intention of removing it from his gallery. But he liked teasing her, especially when it was pulling her out of a mood like this one.

"Kiss me and I will think about letting you keep it." He said, leaning toward her.

Despite the warmth that sparked through her at the thought of kissing him, Viola pressed her palm flat against his forehead and pushed him back. "In your dreams. No kissing until I know this surprise of yours is not something dreadful."

"So you'll kiss me if you like the surprise?" He asked, and his tone had shifted into something genuinely curious.

"You said it yourself, if I like it." She muttered.

"And what if you love it? Will you have sex with me in the car?" He said, grinning, and she leveled him with a flat glare and a look of disbelief at his shamelessness.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 336: Matching outfits[1,304 words]

No matter how much excitement quietly fluttered through her stomach at his words of having sex in the car, Viola held the glare firmly in place, and he laughed and drove on. "I'll take that as a yes then. I will make sure you love every second of it, but first, let's get you into something more comfortable and causal."

He drove them to a large mall in the pack, pulling his aura inward as they arrived at the front parking lots. The sight of the building made something light up in Viola's chest, she couldn't actually remember the last time she had gone shopping. It had been years, and never once with the man she loved. Evan had barely made time for things like that, and it hadn't mattered to her as much back then because she had always been perfectly happy going alone.

Sebastian took her hand the moment they stepped out of the car, locking their fingers together as they walked into the mall, which was quieter than she had expected a big building like this should be.

Working omegas in blue and white uniforms moved through the space all around them, and despite Sebastian keeping his aura carefully suppressed, every single one of them still recognized him as

their supreme Alpha, shivering slightly at the sight and bowing their heads as he passed, before raising them after he moved past them to look at the woman he was holding protectively close.

"Is it all right for everyone to see us together like this in public?" Viola asked, glancing around and catching the eyes of several she-wolves watching her with open envy and barely concealed jealousy, women she had never even spoken to.

"Anyone who has a problem with me going shopping with my wife can go kiss their own asses." He said, tightening his fingers around hers. "I am done hiding you. I want you to shine."

He had thought keeping his affection for her private in public would protect her, but that had been wrong, because she had still been made a target regardless. Now he intended to make it so unmistakably clear how much she meant to him that his pack members would think twice before disrespecting her, knowing what it would cost them. He might not announce her as his mate but he would not hide his affection.

Viola pulled her gaze away from the watching she-wolves and looked ahead, feeling a quiet surge of confidence that he wasn't trying to conceal her, alongside a quieter worry that his people might lose respect for him for keeping a wolfless Luna by his side.

The thought of never having a wolf crept back in and pulled at her mood, until Sebastian's voice cut through it.

"What color should we go for?"

"Pardon?" She looked up at him, not following what he meant as she hadn't been paying attention to anything around her.

"What color should we wear for our couple outfit? I am taking you somewhere afterward and I want us to match. Pick a color for us."

Viola looked around and realized he had brought her to the section of the mall dedicated entirely to couple outfits, everything from casual to formal wear, because in a world built around mates who liked to present themselves as a pair, every mall had one. Viola had never couple-matched with anyone before in her life. The realization sent a warmth through her she hadn't expected.

"Are you sure you want me to choose?" She asked, and he gave her a firm nod.

"Why not?"

The options stretched out in every color imaginable, and she deliberately walked past the darker shades, she had seen quite enough of those in his wardrobe and on his body to last a lifetime.

Viola settled on bright pink shirts with small furry kitten faces printed on the front, paired them with matching baggy blue jeans and white sneakers for both of them. The shirts came with coordinating sun hats, and Sebastian's grimace of quiet disaster as she placed the cap on his head

was a picture in itself. She pulled him to stand in front of a mirror after they had both changed into it, and he stood there looking like a man reconsidering every decision that had led to this moment.

Pink. He didn't like it on himself at all.

He would have given almost anything to get the offensively cheerful shirt off his body, it looked like something a teenage couple would pick on a dare, but his wife was giggling, and she had already seized his stiff hand and was clicking mirror selfies on her phone and directing him into poses with the kind of cheerful authority that left no room for argument.

"You look divine in pink, darling. It suits you so well I think you should wear it more often." She announced, and she wasn't even lying. It did suit him, brought out something almost boyish in his face, which was a remarkable achievement given that no one looking at the width of his shoulders and the cut of his build could ever mistake him for a boy.

The color lit him up in a way that made her unable to stop clicking pictures, and within minutes she had already set one of the pictures as her wallpaper and shoved the screen toward his face with a wide grin to show him how good he looked in it.

Sebastian looked at it, then at her, and thought quietly that if she laughed like this every single day, he would wear pink for the rest of his life without complaint. And the fact that she had taken a picture of both of them and used it as her wallpaper, something that made her look so much in love in it, made his heart warm like melted sugar. No husband would see his wife this happy and not participate more in what brought her joy.

He began making poses of his own as she clicked more pictures, filling up her phone storage with cheerful, ridiculous evidence of this morning outing. Plus, she was good at snapping each picture like a pro, and it became clear she hadn't lost her poise as the once princess of Moonwillow who was famous on WolfTalk social media.

Before they left, they shopped through more couple sets, casual and formal, everything in the kinds of colors Sebastian had never willingly touched before. Yellows, sky blues, more pinks, soft greens. All of it ordered for delivery to her penthouse.

They left the mall the way they had come in, hand in hand, laughing and chatting happily, but this time with every eye in the place following them down the walkway, and not even because anyone had recognized the Supreme Alpha beneath the pink kitten shirt and the sun hat. But simply because they couldn't stop looking at the couple and admiring the outfit that no one had touched yet because of its brightness.

"I am getting that color with my mate next time." Voices floated after them from the she-wolves near the entrance, and Viola caught it and smiled.

"Where are we going next?" She asked as they settled back into the car, and Sebastian grinned in a way that told her everything and nothing at once.

"It's a surprise. I think you will like this one much better."

Viola couldn't have anticipated where he took her, not in a hundred guesses. As the car slowed into a parking lot her eyes went wide, and her heart began to beat faster with something that felt very

much like pure excitement. He came around and opened her door, and stood there looking at her with that quiet, satisfied smile of his as he asked,

"Do you like my surprise?"

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 337: The fun of their lives[1,774 words]

When Sebastian told her about a surprise, Viola had stupidly thought he might take her to lunch somewhere, or something along those lines, even though they had only just had breakfast, but she never could have anticipated where he actually brought her. It was better than anything she had had in mind that it left her speechless.

"An amusement park..." She murmured, taking in the large, iron-fenced grounds spread out before her, where people were pulling into the outside parking spaces and others were coming on foot from the streets, holding their little pups by the hand and filing through the ticket booths before disappearing inside.

She could already see the roller coaster and several of the bigger rides from where she stood, and the place was alive with noise, music pumping from speakers everywhere, and the distant screaming of children and adults on rides blending together into something chaotic and wonderful. The air carried the smell of popcorn and hot dogs and the warm, sweet drift of melting sugar that she pulled into her lungs slowly.

"Do you like it?" he asked quietly, watching her face closely as she took it all in, searching her expression for a clue, even though she looked like a little girl whose long-awaited gift had been handed to her and who didn't know what emotions to display.

Viola turned to look at him with shimmering blue eyes and nodded, her head moving before she had even fully decided to speak. "I like it. So much." She confessed, and then something behind her eyes went soft and a little emotional. "I have never been to an amusement park before."

The children of the orphanage had never known what a place like this felt like from the inside, even though they had seen magazines from Silver years ago showcasing the grand opening of this very park. Viola had never once dared to dream she would actually stand at its gates.

And when she was eventually adopted, her adoptive parents had enrolled her in everything they deemed productive and steered her away from anything they considered a waste of time, she could still hear her adoptive father's voice telling her that an amusement park would do nothing for her grades, and that if she wanted to be at the top of her class she needed to get such useless ideas out of her head entirely.

She had believed, quietly and without much argument, that this was simply something she would never get to experience in her lifetime.

The excitement that rushed into her chest now felt like a wave breaking.

"If you want," Sebastian said, noticing the emotions on her face, "we can come here as often as you wish. I can always make time in my schedule to bring you here from now on." He promised, and she looked at him with a smile.

"I would like that a lot, if it's no trouble to you. Let's go inside. I can't wait."

She reached out and slipped her hand into her husband's larger one and pulled him toward the large, colorful open gates, giggling as she went. "I want to try every single ride in here. Do we have the time for all of it?"

"We have the whole day." Sebastian assured her.

He had taken his time thinking about where to bring her, and the amusement park had come to him almost like an instinct, perhaps because it was also somewhere he had never once been in his entire life. Not even as a boy.

He had always considered it beneath an Alpha bloodline, and had turned down every suggestion his mother ever made about having fun there without a second thought.

Now, standing here considerably more grown than the boy who had refused to come, he told himself he didn't need to get on every ride, he could simply watch her enjoy herself. That had been the plan, anyway.

His wife, as it turned out, had her own plans entirely.

At the ticket booth, Sebastian sent a quiet mind link to one of his warriors stationed in the crowd in plain clothes, and without standing in the long line for even a moment, they had VIP passes wristbands that granted them access to every ride in the park without waiting.

Their first stop was the Ferris wheel, and it was while Viola was getting settled into her seat that she noticed something. The security staff were turning people away, telling them the ride was temporarily closed.

A couple with three small, excited children were being redirected, and the children immediately began to cry, tugging at their father's shirt. She looked around, and then looked to her husband, and found him seated comfortably on a bench outside with no apparent intention of moving towards the ride.

"Aren't you coming on?" She called, and he shook his head, waving her forward to go ahead and enjoy.

"It's not really my thing. Go on, I'll be right here when it's done." He had absolutely no intention of getting onto that spinning contraption. He didn't trust it, and he would rather stay on solid ground where, if something went wrong up there and his mate plummeted, he would at least be positioned to catch her and avoid any unwanted accident.

Viola pressed her lips together. "That's no fun at all. How am I supposed to ride something this big alone?" She wanted the full experience, the real one, and more than that, she wanted him beside her.

"Isn't it more fun riding alone?" Sebastian questioned, not seeing why the crowd would add to the fun. She was the Luna and shouldn't be made to ride with regular werewolves with no ranks.

"It's not made for one person, Mr. Kade. You know what, never mind."

Without hesitating, she unclipped her belt, removed the protective bar, and stepped back down.

"If I'm riding alone there's no point. Let's find something else." She said, taking his hand and doing her best to keep the disappointment off her face. When he didn't move, she turned back to find him staring up at the Ferris wheel with an expression that could only be described as grim dread, before he turned back to her and gave a reluctant question.

"Do you want me to ride it with you?"

Sebastian watched her eyes brighten as she gave an enthusiastic nod and said, "Yes, and let the other people on too. It's much more fun with everyone."

She noticed his throat bob visibly as he gave the order for the ride to reopen and the waiting guests to be let through. She kept her eyes on him as the seats filled and the safety bars came down, and it was the thin trail of sweat making its way down the side of his neck that confirmed what she had already begun to suspect, though it was so absurd she almost didn't want to say it out loud.

"Are you scared?"

He turned to her with a dark scowl and a carefully composed expression and scoffed. "Why would I be scared of a ride?"

"Then why do you look pale? You're sweating quite a lot." She pointed out.

He glared upward and said, "It's blazing out here. The sun is hot." And he would be cold in the ground before he admitted the truth, that he hated anything that spun and was scared shitless of the moment it began to spin. Even as a boy, Sebastian was the kind who threw up easily and had dizzy spells from small motions.

He had locked his wolf inside him because Muffin would have been absolutely beside himself with secondhand embarrassment if he knew Sebastian was terrified of a simple amusement park ride. Besides, admitting fear as an Alpha felt uncomfortably close to admitting incompetence. So Sebastian swallowed his nausea and his pride in equal measure and held on.

"You can always hold onto me," Viola offered helpfully, biting back her smile. "Although, with the grip you have on that bar, I'm not entirely sure the bar is going to survive before the ride ends."

She heard him make a sound that wasn't quite a response as the ride began to move, and when it picked up speed and the screaming started from the seats around them, his grip found her arm instead of the bar, and she found herself watching his face with barely contained delight as his expression cycled through several shades of green, like he was about to be sick.

He made no sound. Not a single one. The Supreme Alpha of the most powerful pack in existence rode a Ferris wheel in complete, dignified silence despite his terror, though at a certain point, Viola became genuinely uncertain whether his eyes were open because he was coping with the fear or because he had passed out with them open that way, and she couldn't decide whether to laugh or feel sorry for him.

When it was over, he remained in his seat for several long seconds before carefully extracting himself and making his way to the nearest bench, sitting down with the careful deliberateness of a man reacquainting himself with the concept of solid ground. He was still holding her hand tightly.

"I'll be damned," he muttered, fighting nausea. "I think my soul genuinely left my body for a moment there. Can I have some water, please?"

Viola laughed so hard she had to sit down beside him, and pressed a cold bottle of water into his trembling hand.

For the remainder of their time on the rides, she quietly steered them away from anything that spun, tilted, or dropped, the last thing she needed was to explain to the pack why their Supreme Alpha had passed out at an amusement park.

They spent hours moving through the park together, trying everything else it had to offer, until they eventually made their way to the haunted house, where the roles promptly reversed, and it was Viola's turn to grip his arm and make involuntary sounds at every corner they encountered ghosts.

She managed well enough through most of it, right up until one of the actors leapt out from the dark for a jump scare, at which point Sebastian's reflexes acted entirely without his permission, and his fist connected cleanly with the actor's face for scaring his wife. The man went down cold without standing again.

The remaining ghost actors collectively decided that this particular couple did not require any further scaring, and gave them a wide and respectful berth for the rest of the route in the haunted house.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 338: New tattoo[1,140 words]

"I hope he is all right," Viola remarked as they left the haunted house with workers rushing in to take the unconscious man out. Sebastian had really done him dirty when all the man had been

doing was his job, but then he had genuinely scared the soul out of her body. She was still shaking and gripping Sebastian's arm tightly.

"Next time, he will learn not to jump into people's path like that. He should be lucky I didn't wring his neck," he said in irritation, not seeing the point of a haunted house at all when he was aware all the people were fake ghosts. Only, he wouldn't tolerate anyone scaring his mate in such a way.

Viola chuckled. "But he's doing his job. I hope you won't punch anyone again. It's a fun experience to be scared like that."

Sebastian scoffed. "I can't promise. I hope they don't get in our way," he said, turning to slip her hand into his so he was holding her fingers clasped protectively in his.

"The heat is getting worse. Let's get you cooled down, my darling." He steered her away from the rides to the stalls and cubicles at the sides, where different kinds of food and snacks were sold.

They bought ice cream, corn dogs, and ramen noodles from a stall, trying different flavors and spices under an umbrella table until they were both satisfied and laughing like teenagers when they had a competition to see who could endure the spiciest noodles better, and Sebastian won the challenge.

"My tongue is on fire!" Viola cried as she jumped up and down, fanning it with her hand while Sebastian laughed hard as he got her a milk drink from a cold drink store in the park.

"This will help put it out. Sit down. My poor baby can't handle a little spice. You look so red," he teased, pinching her cheek, and she swatted at his hand before gulping down the drink.

Sebastian liked spicy food because he had grown up eating everything spicy, for his late mother couldn't do without putting extra spice in everything she made, and the noodle's spice barely affected him, unlike his adorable wife, who was far more sensitive to it.

He watched her drink with a warm expression on his face, feeling his heart light and free. Seeing her this happy was worth the embarrassment on the ride, and he thought he would endure far worse than that if it meant watching her smile like this. Moments like these were rare for her, and he found that he liked being the reason for them.

Afterward, Viola found herself lingering in front of a stall that had plush teddy bears on display, the kind you had to earn by fishing them out of a glass tank with a small hook.

"Do you want one?" He asked, noticing the way her eyes had fixed on it.

She smiled. "I thought it would look nice on my bed."

"Then I will get it for you." He took her hand and walked her over to the glass, and she felt her cheeks aching from smiling so much. She had never been this happy in her entire life, and being this completely happy was a frightening thing, because happiness like this could be lost just as easily as it had come.

As he worked on getting her the teddy bear, Viola watched him with stars in her eyes, her heart warm and her stomach fluttering quietly. He was so concentrated on catching the plush bear that when he lost his grip on it, he cursed under his breath and pushed another coin in to try again. How had she ended up this lucky? How had she ended up this happy? Would this happiness last, or were these stolen moments, the kind that eventually shattered?

The thought of it breaking tightened something in her chest and planted a quiet fear there. She didn't want it to break. She didn't want it to end. She wanted a forever after, like the ones in movies and books, she wanted to freeze this moment right here and never leave it. But she knew reality was waiting outside this place, and outside here, it wasn't as soft and lovely as this.

She watched him try again and again, all the way to his twentieth attempt, until he finally won, and when the hook locked around the bear and didn't let go, he let out a whoop and threw his hand up in victory before turning, scooping her up swiftly, and giving her a princess spin followed by a firm, warm kiss on the lips.

"I got you the plushie!" He laughed, setting her back down and taking it from the vendor, who recognized him immediately as their Alpha but was having a genuinely difficult time reconciling that fact with the image of the Supreme Alpha spending the better part of an hour trying to win his Luna a stuffed bear, and then celebrating like he had won a war when he finally managed it. Was this their Alpha, or a very convincing imposter?

He presented the reward to her with both hands, a big purple teddy bear, and said, "Your prize, my queen."

Viola smiled, feeling her heart tremble as she hugged it to her chest. "Thank you. I will treasure her for as long as I have her. She's cute and warm."

"Or better yet," he said, leaning down to whisper at her ear, "you can save her for when we have our little princess. What do you think?" He kissed her earlobe, and she flushed all the way to the roots of her hair, and for the first time, the idea of having a pup with him didn't feel frightening or impossible. It just felt warm.

They passed a tattoo stall on their way through the park and Sebastian stopped, staring at the place.

"Do you want to get another tattoo?" Viola asked, looking at him curiously.

"Maybe." He said, grinning as he pulled her along towards the entrance of the shop.

She waited for him in a comfortable seating area with air conditioning, grateful for the cool air after the heat of the afternoon, and helped herself to the refreshments while she sat. She couldn't quite stop her eyes from drifting toward him, but his broad back was turned to her and whatever was being done was on his right upper arm. She sat with the sound of the machine humming until it eventually went quiet.

"Can I see it?" She asked eagerly the moment he stood up, since he had pulled his sleeve back down immediately without showing her.

"Not yet. I'll show you later." He said, taking her hand. "Let's go."

Check comment section for pictures of them

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 339: Another surprise[1,019 words]

They spent the rest of the day moving through the park, and when the sun began to sink and the sky started bleeding pink and orange at the edges, Sebastian took her hand and led her away from the noise.

They didn't take the car, they walked. Viola didn't say a word about it, even when the path took them away from the park premises, because every moment beside him was something she wanted to hold onto. They walked hand in hand, away from the noise and the lights, him carrying the teddy bear and both bags of everything he had bought for her throughout the day.

But her mind kept wandering back to the tattoo out of curiosity. She was still turning it over in her head, wondering what design he had chosen and why he hadn't wanted her to see it yet, when he stopped walking, and she looked around and realized they had come to a stop in a darkened, quiet place where the only sound was the soft crying of crickets in the surrounding dark.

"Why did we stop here?" She asked, tightening her hold on his hand as she took in the stillness around them.

Sebastian smiled, pulled his hand out of hers, and heard her make a sound of protest, but he used the hand to press a button inside his pocket, and just like that, lights came on around them, and Viola gasped before she could stop herself in surprised disbelief.

Red roses and fairy lights had been arranged into a small glowing circle, and inside it stood a long table dressed with tiny cupcakes and the kind of adorable little things Zoe used to bring back for her, cute wall stickers, sweet small decorations that had no business making her heart feel so full at the sight of them.

Viola stood there completely flabbergasted. "Did you arrange all of this?"

"Do you like it?" He asked, watching her face carefully. He had thought about getting her something expensive and precious, jewelry, things of real value, but he had tried that before and it had never lit up her face the way these simple, inexpensive things seemed to. Her eyes were already glowing.

"This... I like it. I wasn't expecting any of this." She murmured, stepping into the circle, and the moment she did, soft music began to drift from somewhere invisible around them. Her favorite

song. Love Blooms In Summer was playing. The slow, unhurried piano wrapping around the night air like something warm and cozy made her emotional and teary eyed.

My moments began when you walked into my life. Every second my heart longs for you, every moment I look for you in the people around me. My Love Blooms In Summer with no season. Love me like an endless rain, hold me like an endless ocean.

The music was still playing when Sebastian came up behind her, wrapped his arms around her, and began to sway them both gently to it, with her back pressed to his front. Her heart beat along with the rhythm and for a long, quiet moment they simply moved together, the night breeze stirring their hair and settling something deep inside them both.

A love like no other. A warmth that I longed for. My Love Blooms In Summer...

Viola's eyes fell closed on their own and she leaned back into his solid chest without thinking. She felt his hands shift in front of her before his voice came, low and quiet on her ear.

"Look at my new tattoo."

She opened her eyes and turned her head to the side. He had pulled his sleeve back to reveal his right upper arm, and she felt the breath leave her body at what was written there in careful, cursive letters.

I love you, Viola. Forever.

She looked up at him with wide, disbelieving eyes.

"I love you." He said it out loud, bringing his hands up to cup her face. "I didn't want to say the words carelessly. I wanted to say them in a moment that would be remembered, and I wanted to put them somewhere I could never take them back, somewhere I would never forget them. My skin seemed like the right place." He whispered, looking into her eyes as they filled and shimmered.

"You have given me your body. I want your heart too. I want all of you, the flaws, the perfection, and the pain, and I have seen most of it and still believe you are the most perfect woman for me, the one I want to keep with me, to grow old with and have children with, the one I want to look back on this day with and smile as we tell our grandchildren about it."

"I love you, mi amor, and I want us to spend our lives together. Will you be mine until the end of our time, through whatever we face and whatever comes our way?"

Viola couldn't find a single word to reply to that. Nothing came. The feeling inside her was too large for language, and so she simply nodded, and then threw her arms around his neck and held onto him, fitting herself perfectly into his big arms.

"I will. Forever," she whispered.

Sebastian smiled, but then asked, "Then does that mean you love me too?"

"I love you, Sebastian Kade." She sobbed into his neck, and he lifted her off her feet, held her against him, and laughed quietly into her hair.

"Then why are you crying, my love?"

"They are tears of joy, silly. I never thought I would hear those words from you." She tightened her grip and pressed a kiss to his neck, and he swayed her slowly to the music, the soft piano playing on around them as though the whole world had narrowed down to just this circle of roses and fairy lights, just this moment, just the two of them. And in their hearts, they both held the quiet, fierce belief that nothing could ever come between them.

They believed it completely.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 340: Don't move[1,139 words]

In the healing house of Silver, Doctor Gilbert stood in the lab, working on testing different medical chemicals to create an antidote for the Luna's strong wolf suppressant. He had taken blood samples from the Alpha yesterday and still had some preserved ones from the Luna that he could use as a basis for experimentation. The Alpha's blood carried the strongest healing effects, and since she was his mate, as he had quietly worked out, it might be the key to making it work and heal her.

However, for some reason Gilbert could not concentrate on the work, which he knew he should be completing as fast as possible given that the Supreme Alpha was impatient and had firmly ordered him to set everything else aside and focus solely on his wife.

His mind kept drifting to Laila, to the way his usually silent wolf was longing for her like a starved beast, but he refused to give in to it in any way and forced his thoughts back instead to the Alpha's sister's text message from yesterday.

Was Miss Zoe really serious about everything she had sent to him?

Gilbert's eyes drifted from the microscope to his phone sitting on the counter beside him.

He picked it up and opened the message again without fully meaning to.

"Okay so I have been staring at this blank text for like an hour trying to figure out how to start this and I still don't know how so I am just going to say it before I lose my nerve and delete everything again.

I like you. I really really like you and I have for a while now and it's getting to the point where I can't pretend I don't anymore.

I know you are probably the most oblivious person in all of Silver and you probably haven't noticed anything because you never notice anything that isn't medical related but I think about you a lot. Like embarrassingly a lot.

I like how serious you are about your work and how you don't try to impress anyone and how you eat an unreasonable amount of shrimp and somehow make it look completely normal.

I don't know if you feel anything or if this is completely one sided and I am about to make everything between us incredibly awkward forever, but I decided I would rather know than spend another year smiling at you and pretending my heart isn't doing something ridiculous every time you walk into a room.

So. Yes. That is everything. I have fallen in love with you and if you feel the same way, I hope you will ask me out on a date someday and give us a chance."

Gilbert set the phone face down on the counter and stared at the wall for a long moment, bewildered.

Then he picked it back up and read it again. Was she really serious? To be honest, he didn't feel anything particular toward her beyond being her doctor. And he was stunned that she felt that way toward him, even when he shouldn't have been surprised because many she-wolves in Silver had been straightforward with their feelings in the past, and he'd had to turn them down to stay away from distractions.

He was surprised because Zoe was the Alpha's sister, and he saw her as... perhaps a friend who liked to talk too much sometimes without caring if the other person was listening or not, and though he never minded her talking and quite liked it, Gilbert just didn't see her as a love interest.

But rather than allow his mind to circle back to Laila and the unsettling mate bond he wanted nothing to do with, he found he would far rather think about the Alpha's sister, who had just openly poured her heart out to him.

She wanted to go on a date with him. He turned the idea over carefully. If he could make it work, Doctor Gilbert thought, he could reject Laila, and if the Alpha gave his blessing, he could take Zoe as a chosen mate. Once he had a chosen mate and marked her, the bond with a fated mate would naturally dissolve. It had happened before.

Laila was not the kind of woman he wanted in his life. Not that his mother and aunt would ever accept anyone from the Serrano family regardless, that alone would be a battle not worth fighting. So despite his long-standing personal rule against dating and his commitment to keeping his time outside work entirely his own, Doctor Gilbert made a quiet decision. He would reply to Zoe's message and arrange a date, after he had finished developing the Luna's medicine.

He pulled off his gloves and stepped away from the counter, beginning to type a reply, but just then his phone rang. He picked it up automatically, the way he always did, because only a small number of people had his personal number and calls on this line were almost always emergencies.

Picking it up this time, however, was a mistake he felt the moment he heard the voice on the other end.

"Hello, Gilbert." Laila said softly, sitting cross-legged on her couch and fighting the wild, strong spark dancing through her body at the faint sound of his breathing alone, something that made absolutely no sense and yet made her wolf stir to life all the same.

"Where did you get this number, Miss Serrano?" he asked, keeping his voice level and professional despite the scowl pulling at his face. He didn't want her calling him. It had taken a huge amount of meditation to clear away the sensation of her lips against his.

Laila chuckled softly. "Does that really matter? Do you always ask your patients where they got your number when they reach out? I need you, doctor." She said.

Gilbert's hand tightened around his phone. "I don't want to be a part of this, Miss Serrano, and as much as I don't think I should say this on the phone, I will—" he began to say the words of rejection outright, but then she gasped, and the sound that followed made him stop cold.

"I really need you." She cried. "I'm bleeding." And before he could respond, his phone gave a soft beep, a picture message. He pulled it from his ear and looked at the screen, and his jaw tightened at the image of a wound on her thigh, deep enough that her body couldn't heal it fast on its own. She was hurt.

Gilbert's blood ran cold at the sight of the wound. His mate bond flared without warning and he didn't even realize he was already reaching for his medical bag as he said, "Stay where you are. I will be there right now. Don't move."