

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna -

Chapter 381: Nick's plan[1,648 words]

Sebastian steered her to their seats, where food and drinks had been laid out and the others had already gathered around the table, immediately filling the air with praise.

"I never knew you could play the piano like that." Sebastian said, unable to conceal the pride glowing in his eyes or the urge to kiss her as he pulled her chair out for her.

"I learned when I was being groomed to become Moonwillow's Luna. I never finished my training though, everything fell apart before I could." She sat down and he took the chair beside her, taking her hand and interlocking their fingers as though he could already feel how raw her emotions were sitting just beneath the surface right now.

He had felt every emotion flowing through her as she sang, and his eyes had immediately found the tears on her cheeks. She had poured every feeling she carried into the song, leaving nothing behind.

Sebastian suddenly wanted nothing more than to end the night here and take his wife back to their room. She didn't just look tired, she looked emotionally hollowed out, like she had given every piece of joy she had into that performance and come back with nothing left for herself. Everyone else in the hall was smiling and laughing. Everyone except her.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

Viola shook her head. "Nothing." But something was wrong, she could feel it, she just couldn't put a name to it. A sadness had settled over her and the urge to cry was rising in her throat without any warning she could point to.

"Do you want to go back to our room? We can cuddle until you feel better." Sebastian suggested, caressing the back of her hand with his thumb.

She would have very much liked that, to be held in his arms, alone, away from the noise and the crowds that were draining her. But as a Luna, she needed to learn how to hold herself together under pressure, for the sake of her pack. Leaving before the marking had even taken place would not reflect well on either of them.

"I'll be fine." She said, flashing him a smile that he immediately narrowed his eyes at, because he could feel what was behind it.

"You don't have to hold yourself together for the pack if you aren't feeling—"

"Supreme Alpha." Matt's voice came from beside him as he appeared at Sebastian's shoulder. "Do you have a moment? I need to speak with you outside."

Matt had tried to reach him through their mind link but Sebastian had shut it off to give Viola his full attention. But what Matt had to say couldn't wait, and he had come in person.

Sebastian caught the gravity in Matt's eyes and then looked back at his wife. "Tell me what you decide once I'm back. If you don't feel like mingling, we are going back to our room." He stood, and with many eyes on them, pressed a kiss to her forehead before following Matt out of the hall.

Viola only looked away from his retreating back once he had disappeared from view. She turned to find Zoe already on the dance floor with Gilbert, both of them laughing. Tess was dancing with Kenny, her head thrown back with genuine happiness. Viola's heart tightened at the sight of all the happiness surrounding her. Her sadness only deepened, leaving a painful tightness in her throat and chest.

She wanted to cry. Maybe it would help. But crying in public with cameras flashing every few seconds would do her image no good at all. She should have just told Sebastian to take her back to the room when he offered.

The noise around her was beginning to blur at the edges, pressing in on her all at once, and to ease it she reached out and flagged down a passing waiter, taking a glass of wine from the tray. She swallowed it down in one go, but it didn't wash away any of the sadness.

She was still sitting with it, mellowing in her strange, unnamed emotions, waiting for Sebastian to return so she could tell him she wanted to leave, when a shadow fell over her and she looked up to find Nick standing there with that easy smile of his.

"Nick, what are you doing here?" She asked, finding that not even his familiar face brought her any comfort or ease right now.

"I'm hurt you haven't noticed me in the crowd until now. I've been here since yesterday." He said, sitting down in the chair Sebastian had vacated. "This was actually the ceremony I invited you to, and you turned me down, unfortunately."

Viola didn't have the energy to unpack that and the reason she had turned him down. She could only reply with, "I had to come with my Alpha first. It would have been inappropriate to come here as your date."

Nick smiled. "Yeah, I figured as much when I saw you both here. You sang beautifully up there, Vee, like the song of a siren. You captivated every single person in this room. Me included." He said, holding her gaze, his eyes moving over her face and catching the glassiness in hers, like she was fighting tears.

"I'm glad. And thank you." She replied, with none of her usual warmth behind it.

"So, would you like to dance?" He asked, glancing briefly at the couples on the floor before looking back at her. Before she could say no, he added, "Everyone's dancing. You look lonely sitting here by yourself, move around a little and you'll feel better. Come on." He was already on his feet, taking her hand and pulling her out of the chair before she had finished forming a response.

Viola found herself in the middle of the dance floor before she was ready for it, Nick's arm coming around her waist and drawing her in.

"Nick, I'm not in the mood. I don't feel well." She told him, trying to ease back from him and the dancing couples around them, but he didn't let go.

"You'll feel better once you dance. Come on, Vee, don't be a bore. Dance with your lonely bestie."

Viola frowned. "Why do you always do that?"

"Do what?" He asked, tilting his head and studying her face, which had gone a shade paler than usual.

"When you want me to do something, you use loneliness as an excuse. I feel like you manipulate me into going along with you by making me feel guilty for saying no." Viola said, coming to a stop and planting her feet. She refused to let him move her anymore, because for some reason she couldn't quite name, his touch was making her skin crawl, which was strange. He was her friend. It had never felt this way before, expect that one time he held her hand the way Sebastian used to do.

"That's not my intention and you know it. I'm just trying to cheer you up the way I always do. Come on, let's dance." He reached for her hand again, but this time Viola stepped back and pressed her hand to her head.

"I am not dancing, Nick. I feel dizzy. I'm sorry." Saying that she turned away from him, but she didn't return to her chair. Instead she made her way out of the hall through the back door, desperately wanting fresh air, feeling suffocated and nauseous. The music inside the hall was getting to her in a way she couldn't explain and causing her head to ache.

Viola walked out into the back garden where the space had been prepared for the couple's marking ceremony later that evening. The music became a muffled sound behind her and she welcomed the warm evening air, but it only made whatever was building in her throat rush upward faster, and she doubled over onto her knees on the grass and began to throw up, her heart drumming so hard and fast she could feel it in her temples.

She threw up until there was nothing left to come up, and then got to her feet on unsteady legs and made her way to a bench in the corner to sit for a moment.

She was completely unaware that Nick had followed her out quietly and was standing in the shadows behind her, waiting for the drug in the wine to work as intended. But looking at her, he had a feeling more than the drug was affecting her at that moment.

Viola's heart felt unsettled, her emotions pressing in on her from every direction at once, and with no one around to hold herself together for, she broke down. She buried her face in her palms and let the tears come, her shoulders shaking silently in the dark as wrecked sobs escaped her lips.

"Oh goddess, what is wrong with me? Why am I suddenly feeling this way?"

She desperately wished she were somewhere else. She wanted to disappear so badly that it frightened her, the intensity of the feeling confusing, unfamiliar, and unlike anything she had ever experienced before.

She didn't want to be here.

She was homesick for a place she had never even known.

Her eyes began to suddenly grow heavy, her limbs losing their strength beneath her for no reason she could identify. She realized she needed to get back inside before she passed out in this corner, but the moment she pushed herself up from the bench, dizziness hit her so hard and so fast that her footing gave way completely.

She was falling, and then she wasn't.

Someone had caught her.

Viola looked up through her swimming vision and found Nick looking down at her, and then her limbs gave out entirely and she went limp against his chest, unconscious.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 382: Missing Luna_Part 1[1,174 words]

Sebastian stepped away from the hall with Matt, walking to a stretch of hallway where the music couldn't reach them, and stopped at a balcony before turning to face his friend. "What is it?"

Matt came to stand before him with his hands in his pockets and began to report. "The shipment has arrived in Silver, but we unfortunately lost five men to the creature's attacks."

Sebastian's expression barely shifted. He had expected something like that to happen. Mermaids were stubborn and would never allow themselves to be taken by werewolves without making them bleed for it. But rather than lose the chance of breaking his curse and building a real future with his Luna, he would sacrifice ten thousand men before he gave up that opportunity, the one thing that had been holding his hope together, especially now that he had accepted there was no prophecy to search for.

Somehow along the way of life, Viola had become his everything, and Sebastian would sacrifice far more than men and sea creatures to have that easy, wonderful life with her.

"Is the mermaid in captivity?" He asked, because that was the only question that mattered to him right now.

"She is. I just got off a call with Ray and he told me he believes they captured one of the bloody royals, and if you don't get back soon or if they stop giving her the sedative doses, it's only a matter of time before she floods all of Silver. He said she's a crazy one." Matt said.

Matt knew how important the mermaid was to his friend. He had worked alongside Sebastian in the search for her, but his entire family was in Silver, and the last thing he wanted was for them to drown.

That was exactly why this news couldn't wait. The sedative they had been using to keep the mermaid subdued had been developed by their doctor, Gilbert, and he hadn't produced enough bottles to keep the creature sedated until the next full moon. Without it, she would continue using her powers in the hope of escaping.

There were different kinds of mermaids, just as there were different ranks among werewolves. Alphas were the highest among shifters, and in the same way, royals were the highest of the sea, capable of controlling any form of water, not just what was near them. It was said no other creature had ever come close to a royal, because they never surfaced and every mermaid in existence would lay down their life to protect them.

How Sebastian's men had caught this one was a mystery.

Sebastian could barely believe his luck. Because the heart of a royal mermaid didn't just have the power to break the curse of his own generation, it could reach two generations ahead. His son, if he had one, would be born free of it.

"Is Ray certain about what he reported?" Sebastian asked.

"He sounded damn sure, especially after watching her kill his companions with her abilities. I think we need to cut the trip short and return to Silver. Gilbert will have to produce more sedatives to keep her stable until the next full moon, and we need to make sure—" Matt cut himself off mid-sentence and gave Sebastian a sharp, concerned look. "What's wrong with you?"

Sebastian's face had gone ashen, nearly the same color as his silver hair, and he was pressing a hand to his chest with a deep frown pulling at his brow.

"It's not me. It's my wife," he said, already turning away from Matt and heading back toward the hall.

"She's been feeling down ever since she sang that song, and I think it's getting worse. I need to get her out of that hall."

He was more determined than ever to take her back to their room to rest, whether she wanted to or not. He could feel that she clearly wasn't well and was only trying to put on a brave face for the sake of his image, something he couldn't have cared less about right now.

Sebastian put the mermaid situation aside and moved quickly back into the hall, but even before he reached their table, he could feel it. She wasn't there. Zoe, Gilbert, Tess, and Kenny were all seated and talking and laughing around the long table, but the space where Viola should have been was empty. A dark scowl settled hard on his face as he approached.

They all turned to look at him. "Hermano, where is Vee?" Zoe asked, glancing behind him with a smile still on her face.

"I left her here." He said flatly, already turning and scanning the hall.

"Maybe she went to the restroom?" Zoe offered.

Sebastian didn't wait to hear anything else. He went straight to the female restrooms and asked every she-wolf coming out whether they had seen his Luna, and every one of them shook their heads fearfully at the expression on his face. The feeling inside him was rising, pressing against his chest, and the more he moved through the hall without finding her, the darker it got. Where could she have gone in the space of a few minutes? Had something happened to her?

He tried to track her scent but without a mark between them it wasn't clear enough, her scent had blended into the dozens of others filling the hall.

He stepped out through the back door and caught it immediately. Faint, but unmistakable. Daisies. He followed it into the garden where it grew stronger, and then it stopped. The feeling in his chest had gone quiet. He could no longer feel her, which meant she was either unconscious or had calmed herself down somehow.

He didn't like the first option. His pace increased.

He almost stepped on the vomit in the grass before he caught himself and looked down, and he didn't need to examine it to know it was hers. It carried her essence clearly enough, and the stone that had been sitting in his chest became something heavier in his heart.

'Matt. Send the men out. My wife is missing.' He sent through the link after searching the entire garden and finding nothing but her faint lingering scent and no sign of her anywhere.

'Have you checked your room?' Matt asked, already moving, trying to keep his voice steady because he could hear from Sebastian's tone alone that he was close to the edge in a pack that wasn't theirs.

'She wouldn't have fucking gone back without me. I know my woman, she would wait to tell me even if she felt terrible. She would wait.' His voice through the link was quiet in a way that was far more dangerous than shouting. 'Stop the ceremony if you have to and search the entire grounds. Every corner of it. If anything happens to her before I reach her, I will bring the entire Grim pack to the ground.'

Then he cut the link and kept moving to look for her.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 383: Missing Luna_Part 2[1,396 words]

Matt felt panic rise in his chest because this was not good at all. Sebastian had sounded so calm through the link, but a calm Sebastian who said he would kill an entire pack was the most dangerous version of him that existed.

Matt didn't want to stop the ceremony yet, just in case it wasn't something that extreme. He moved quickly and quietly, alerting their men about the missing Luna. If anything happened to her in this territory, there was no doubt everything would point directly at Alpha Daniel, a man who had made no secret of his dislike for their Luna and who now had a daughter sitting in a dungeon because of her.

"I hope we don't end up at war because of this." Matt muttered under his breath, and he was about to step outside and join the search himself when he noticed Zoe hurrying toward him, a deep frown already carved into her beautiful face.

"Beta Matt, what's going on?" She asked when she reached him. Zoe hadn't thought much of her brother searching for Vee at first, but when she noticed his men rushing out of the building with urgent, purposeful strides, a bad feeling had settled in her stomach and she had come out here.

"It's nothing. You should go back inside." Matt said, reaching out and taking her small hand in his to steer her back in, because the last thing they needed right now was for her to get caught up in this too. They weren't yet sure whether this was their enemies' doing, but until they knew, he wasn't taking chances and having her going outside unprotected.

Zoe planted her feet and yanked her hand back. "I am not a little girl anymore, Beta Matt. I am an adult and I have every right to be wherever I want to be. Tell me what is going on. Where is Vee?" She looked at him with equal parts worry and annoyance, because she hated the way he still treated her like the world was constantly out to get her, something even Sebastian didn't do to quite this extent.

But right now her concern for her friend was louder than her irritation with Matt.

"I don't know." He said, pressing a hand to his forehead.

Zoe's frown deepened. "What do you mean you don't know? She was sitting in the hall a little while ago." Panic was beginning to climb steadily inside her too. "Has she... gone missing?" She swallowed hard, and when Matt didn't answer quickly enough, she grabbed his sleeve and gave it a small, urgent shake. "Tell me. Please..."

"I believe so." Matt said, and watched her release his sleeve and step back, her hand flying up to cover her mouth as a devastated look crossed her face. He hadn't wanted to tell her, had known it would hit her like this, but she would have persisted until he did, and now he regretted it. But she recovered from the shock faster than he expected, straightening herself and saying,

"How is that possible with this many men around? Maybe you haven't looked in the right places yet. Let's check the rooms, come with me." She grabbed his hand before he could tell her that Viola was suspected to have gone missing from outside.

He let her pull him along anyway. Maybe she knew somewhere he hadn't thought to look, and if not, it was far better to keep her searching inside than to have her wandering outside alone, where something could go wrong and she could end up being shot again.

If Matt remembered correctly, the doctor had said that another bullet wound, after the severe injuries she had suffered from the first one that had weakened her wolf, would be nothing short of a death sentence.

What had started as a few minutes had stretched into thirty, and Sebastian was still moving through the garden. The sun had dipped behind the horizon, painting the sky shades of pink and yellow, and the day's heat had given way to a cool evening breeze that stirred his hair and coat as he ran across the grounds like a madman on a hunt, desperately trying to track down her scent lingering in the air.

The ceremony was still going on, with the music blaring in the background, and Sebastian was losing what little patience he possessed right now. Where could she have disappeared to? He had thought that question countless times as he continued following every possible trail and scent he could find.

The only thing he found minutes later was her wedding ring lying in a small puddle of water, the gold catching what little light still reached it and immediately drawing his attention to it. The moment his eyes landed on the familiar ring, his heart lurched violently in his chest, dread washing over him as a thousand terrifying possibilities flooded his mind.

Sebastian bent down and picked it up, examining it closely. His wife never took her wedding ring off except to shower, and the moment she stepped out, she put it right back on. She would never have left it lying in a puddle like this.

Sebastian looked up in the direction from which the ring had been on the ground and found himself facing a maze crafted entirely from dense, towering hedges, tall enough that nothing beyond them was visible, thick enough that nothing could easily pass through them. The Grim pack's grounds were expansive, and at the back of the main pack house, this hedge maze stretched out in every direction.

He had found her ring here. Which meant she had come this way, or had been brought this way, while she was unconscious.

His fingers closed around the ring. Without wasting another second, he leaped into the air and shifted into his wolf form, not caring in the slightest that an Alpha didn't take his wolf form in another Alpha's territory unless he was looking for a fight.

Sebastian became one with Muffin and they tore through the maze, going round and round in circles that kept bringing them back to the same paths. His frustration was building fast alongside his anxiety.

A Luna going missing was not unheard of, Alphas with enemies had faced it before. He had read just a few days ago about a neighboring pack whose Luna had been taken, and it had been her cold, lifeless body they found in the end. He had read it without feeling a single thing.

Now his own wife was missing and he felt like something was being carved out of his insides, like he was about to lose his mind entirely, like he would tear the entire Grim Pack apart with his bare hands before he accepted that outcome.

'Let's calm down for a moment. I think I can hear movement in the distance.' Muffin said, taking the lead as his human was being hit by too many things at once.

'I can't calm down. I can't fucking calm down! I need to find her right now!' Sebastian shouted through the link between them.

'If you can't calm down then step back and let me find our mate. My senses are sharper than yours right now and I can find her faster if you let me work.' Muffin said firmly, forcing Sebastian back so he could take full control. His human's panic was making the search harder than it needed to be.

Muffin's eyes sharpened. He went still and drew in a slow breath through his nose, pulling the air apart scent by scent, and then he caught it. The faintest thread of daisies. He began following it, head low, pace measured, tracking it carefully.

When Muffin pushed out of the twisting entrance of the maze, her scent grew stronger and he picked up his pace, his tail swinging with the restless energy of getting closer to his mate. He swung left and right through the passages, following the trail, and then the maze opened up into the middle ground at its center, and Muffin came to a screeching, skidding stop at what he found there.

Sebastian surged back up immediately at the sight.

Despite the darkness surrounding the space, his vision was sharp enough to see everything clearly, and everything inside him went completely, utterly still.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 384: Trust me[1,317 words]

Matt and Zoe kept searching through the rooms on the grounds where the one Sebastian and Viola had been given was located, but even after going through every single one, there was no sign of her anywhere.

When they opened the last door and found it empty, everyone still down in the hall celebrating, Zoe's shoulders dropped. Little sobs began leaving her throat before she could stop them, and she quickly covered her face with her palms and turned her back to Matt, unable to hold herself together and not wanting him to see it.

This was what she had always feared most. The unexpected attack on a Luna's life that happened so often in their world. She had carried that fear for her friend quietly at the back of her mind from the very beginning, and now here it was.

She had never once imagined it would happen while they were all surrounded by people. If she hadn't been so consumed with Gilbert, she would have been sitting right beside Vee the whole time. She would have been able to stop anything from happening to her, the way she had once protected her brother from a silver bullet. She would have taken far more than one for Vee.

The worst scenarios began playing through her mind one after another, and she shuddered and cried harder into her palms. Just days ago a Luna from a neighboring pack had been kidnapped and found brutally killed. And now her friend...

She turned and started to move, intending to go outside and help with the search herself, but Matt caught her hand and drew her back, and before she knew it his arms were around her, pulling her against his chest.

"Shh. Don't cry, she will be fine. Seb and I will find her, I promise you." He whispered into her hair, one hand cradling the back of her head, his fingers threading gently through the strands to soothe her. But Zoe only cried harder.

She let him hold her anyway, she couldn't help it. Her slender arms came around his narrow waist and she held on, wanting the comfort even while she couldn't fully believe the promises she desperately wanted to believe. Something must have happened. Vee wouldn't simply disappear in the middle of a ceremony, not after giving a performance like that on stage and bringing life to an entire boring audience.

"I-I sh-should have d-done something. I should have been b-beside her..." She sobbed into his chest, and his arms tightened around her waist, his fingers spreading across her back as he kept saying, "Shh. Don't blame yourself, Zoe. Everything will be fine."

He knew she didn't believe him. But he kept saying it anyway and kept holding her, and he genuinely wanted her to stop crying, because for reasons that went all the way back to when she was small and used to follow him everywhere, he had never been able to stand tears in her eyes.

He much preferred the bubbly Zoe, the one who would talk and talk until she started to annoy him, but always managed to amuse him too because he always ended up genuinely wondering sometimes if she ever got tired of talking that much.

Her tears were never something he could be comfortable with. Zoe was the kind of person who would lay her life down for someone she cared about without a second thought, who loved her family without condition, who blamed herself for every small thing that went wrong because she believed she should have been able to prevent it, even when there was nothing she could have done. She had been exactly like that as a little girl. Growing up hadn't changed her at all, Matt realized.

He thought of the time she had cried for an entire afternoon over losing the eye off her little plushie wolf, the one she used to hug to sleep, because she believed it meant he wouldn't be able to see her properly anymore and would always be in pain.

Matt felt her tears soaking through his shirt and her shoulders shaking so hard he thought she might break, her voice barely holding together as she kept murmuring Vee's name. To stop her, he pulled back just enough to look at her face, but her eyes were squeezed tightly shut, tears streaming down her flushed cheeks, silver hair plastered against the wet skin.

He raised his hand and carefully moved the hair away from her face, tucking it behind her ears, and then gently wiped her cheeks with his fingers. "Look at me, Zoe." He said it quietly, and it was enough to make her open her eyes, revealing those silver irises, the white around them now pink and swollen from crying.

"She is going to be all right. I promise you that. I will do everything in my power to keep her safe for you, but if you promise me you will not step outside, I will go right now and help your brother search for her. Can you promise me that?" He asked, holding her small face carefully between his large palms and stroking her cheeks with his thumbs.

"I...I will go with yo—"

"No, you won't." He said firmly. "You will slow us down. We will find her faster if we are not worrying about you at the same time. Have I ever promised you something and not kept it?" He looked down into her brimming eyes and waited.

Zoe didn't have to think about it. She shook her head. Unlike her brother, who had a complicated history with promises, Matt had always been different. Since she was small he had kept every single one. Whatever he said he would give her, he gave her.

"Good. Then trust me now."

She didn't want to stay and pace and imagine everything her friend might be going through, but she also didn't want to be the reason they found her a minute too late. With every bit of reluctance she had and a lump sitting heavy in her throat, she gave him a small nod. "I will stay..."

She saw him smile just slightly, his hazel eyes catching a warmth she hadn't seen in them before. She had expected him to let go and head straight out, but instead he took her hand and walked her back to her room and saw her inside.

"I will come back and tell you the moment we find her. For now, rest." He said, stroking her hair the way he used to when she was little, and for the first time in her life she wasn't the least bit annoyed by it. She was comforted.

"Don't forget your promises..." She whispered.

Matt smiled. "I won't. Be a good girl and don't step outside." And then without thinking about it, he leaned forward and pressed his lips to her wet cheek. "I will be right back."

He turned and left, and the door closed behind him, leaving Zoe standing there with a confused feeling she didn't know what to do with and a sudden jolt in her stomach from the touch of his lips

on her cheek she couldn't quite explain. She stood with it for only a moment before the worry for her friend swallowed everything else and she began to pace.

Matt jogged out of the building and went through the back door, and then he stopped dead in his tracks.

Sebastian was striding toward him with a murderous expression carved into his face, naked, his shifting clothes left somewhere behind. Cradled against his chest was his wife, limp, one arm hanging at her side like dead weight, her body covered only by the shredded remains of the gold dress she had worn to the ceremony. And for a single moment, Matt's heart stopped beating entirely as he looked at her.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 385: Where did you find her? [1,067 words]

What had happened? Was she dead? Matt thought as he ran toward Sebastian, pulling off his coat and draping it over his friend's shoulders, but Sebastian barely blinked. That dark, murderous look hadn't shifted from his face and he looked as angry as a bull, his aura rolling off him in suffocating waves that hit even Matt hard. Matt quickly checked to confirm the Luna was still breathing and found she was, merely unconscious, and the relief that moved through his chest was immediate.

"Where did you find her? What happened?" He asked, trying to keep pace with Sebastian's long strides back into the building, but if Sebastian heard him, he gave no sign of it and kept walking, leaving muddy footprints across the clean marble floors of the pack house.

Matt followed silently behind him, knowing he would get nothing until Sebastian had cooled. But he couldn't stop his eyes from going to the Luna, to the state of her dress, torn to near shreds, barely covering her body, what remained of the fabric tied roughly around her chest and lower half of her body. She was covered in mud from head to toe. Had she shifted, the way the Alpha had? Or had something far worse happened before Seb got to her?

Matt was desperate to know, but the moment they reached the room Sebastian shared with his wife, the door was slammed in his face before he could follow inside, Sebastian's voice coming through it. "Send word to Silver. I need my warriors here by tomorrow."

Matt stood outside that closed door for a long moment, staring at it. Warriors? Did it have to come down to this?

He didn't need to wonder long about what that meant. Warriors were called when a war was about to break out between packs, and it seemed Silver and Grim were finally about to come for each other's throats in the most direct way possible.

He pulled himself together and turned away, remembering first that he had promised Zoe he would come back and tell her her friend was found. He would do that before making the call for backup, and hopefully before he did, he hoped Sebastian would have reconsidered about starting a war between the packs.

Inside the room, Sebastian went straight to the bathroom without stopping in the bedroom. He used his foot to start the water running into the tub while he supported Viola with one arm, then used his free hand to add bathing gel to the filling warm water.

He did all of it without his expression changing, that cold hardness hadn't left his face and it didn't intend to. He wanted to put his fist through a wall. He wanted to find whoever had done this to his wife and take them apart piece by piece, but he didn't know who, and not knowing was its own particular kind of torture and pain in his heart.

His heart was breaking apart so much he didn't know what to do with it.

The image of what he had found when he cleared that maze kept flashing through his mind, and every time it did, his blood ran hotter.

Even before the tub had finished filling, Sebastian shrugged Matt's coat off his shoulders and stepped into the water with Viola still in his arms. The tub was large with plenty of room and he sat down and settled her onto his lap instead, pulling her against his chest, and then he simply held her there in the foamy water and stared up at the ceiling with his hand rubbing up and down her spine.

And for the first time in a very long time, tears began to roll down Sebastian's face.

He cried silently, staring at the ceiling, before he buried his nose into her mud-coated hair and pulled her closer. "I am sorry I didn't find you sooner, my love. I'm so sorry."

He rocked her gently as though she could feel it, as though she could feel the weight of his regret at having left her side long enough for someone to do what they had done to her in that maze.

The memory of how he had found her made his tears stop as abruptly as they had begun, replaced by something colder and more dangerous. He began to wash her body methodically and automatically, not allowing his mind to wander anywhere else.

He washed her body three times, as though he could scrub away the touch of whoever had laid their hands on her before he arrived.

When he reached her neck, where he had left a hickey that very morning, something inside him twisted painfully. Another hickey sat right beside his, its marks even more pronounced against her skin. Then he found another near the top of her breast, and Sebastian's face flushed a furious red. For a brief, terrifying moment, he wanted nothing more than to storm out, hunt down whoever had done this, and kill them with his own hands.

He took a long, steadying breath, forcing the murderous rage back down before quietly continuing to bathe her.

On the third change of water, once the foam was fully rinsed from her hair and skin, he carried her out of the tub and into the room.

Sebastian dried them both and then, without bothering to dress either of them, got her beneath the blanket and slipped in behind her, her back to his front, one of his legs sliding between hers so his thigh pressed up against her warmth, his other hand finding her chest and holding her close.

He listened to her steady breathing without closing his eyes.

His mind kept going back to it. Her naked body lying in the mud at the center of the maze. Her dress torn to near nothing beside her. Someone had assaulted his wife and left her there for him to find.

That image was not going to leave him. And the worst part, the part that was eating at him more than anything else, was that he had not been able to catch a single scent of whoever had done this anywhere near the scene. Whoever it was had left no trace.

Sebastian buried his nose in the curve of her neck and closed his eyes.

Once she woke up, he would find the culprit.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 386: What happened?[1,435 words]

Viola's entire body was aching and she had a terrible headache she couldn't think past, beyond the warmth surrounding her that made her want to keep sleeping, but the throbbing in her head pulled her back. She opened her eyes to a dark room and slowly became aware of the solid wall of warmth pressed against her back, the leg trapped between her thighs, and the hand dropped carelessly around her waist and curled up to her bare chest.

At first Viola had no idea how she had ended up in that position with Sebastian, she knew it was him even before she turned around, but she lay still for a moment and let herself feel him against her like that, both of them without clothes, because the last thing she could remember was being consumed by emotions after singing.

The intensity of those emotions was gone now, but the headache wasn't, and neither was the ache through her whole body. She slowly lifted her leg to free him from between her thighs and carefully turned over in his arms to face him. Though the room was dark, her vision wasn't quite that of a human's, and his face was clear enough to her in the dark.

His eyes were closed, but she doubted he was deeply asleep, his lashes were twitching too much for that. She raised her hand and brought her fingers to his face, tracing the lines of it slowly. His under eyes, then the straight bridge of his nose, down to his lips. She was tracing the thick, well-shaped arch of his brow when his stormy silver eyes opened and locked with hers, and her hand stilled against his face.

They stared at each other as though time itself had frozen. In those silent moments, something unspoken passed between them, something neither of them could explain nor ignore.

Without saying a word, he slowly closed the distance between them, his movements careful, almost hesitant. Before she had fully registered what was happening, his lips were already on hers, brushing against them in a soft, tender kiss.

But the gentleness lasted only a heartbeat.

A low, almost pained sound rumbled deep in Sebastian's chest as the kiss deepened, his mouth slanting over hers with a hunger that stole the air straight from her lungs. His lips were firm and warm, pressing insistently until she parted for him, and the moment she did, his tongue swept inside, stroking hers in slow, deliberate strokes that made her toes curl beneath the sheets.

He tasted like storm and salt. His breath was hot and ragged against her cheek, mingling with hers as their mouths moved together. He kissed her like a man who had almost lost everything, devouring her with a desperation that made her head spin and her fingers curl into his skin.

One of his large hands slid up her bare back, fingers splaying wide as he pulled her impossibly closer, crushing her breasts against the hard wall of his chest. Her nipples tightened instantly at the contact, pebbling into sensitive peaks that ached with every shift of their bodies against each other.

Viola felt him growing hard against her thigh, the thick, heavy length of him pressing insistently into her soft skin as he rocked subtly toward her. A shiver raced down her spine and heat pooled low in her belly as arousal hit her hard.

His other hand cupped the back of her head, threading his fingers through her damp hair and tilting her face exactly where he wanted it so he could kiss her even deeper. Their tongues tangled, slick and urgent, the wet sounds of their mouths filling the quiet dark room.

He sucked gently on her lower lip before claiming her mouth again, deeper this time, harder, until her whole body was trembling and a soft whimper escaped her throat before she could stop it.

But beneath the fierce hunger, Viola began to feel something else bleeding through the kiss. His emotions. For some reason she could feel a fraction of them inside her own chest, and she didn't know how, but the intense rage and gut-wrenching guilt pressing against her heart didn't belong to her. She realized quickly that they were his, and that he was pouring every bit of it into the kiss.

It was overwhelming, like drowning in someone else's storm. Her heart clenched painfully.

She pulled back abruptly, breaking the kiss with a sharp gasp, her hands flying up to cup his face, palms cradling his strong jaw as she searched his stormy silver eyes in the darkness.

"Sebastian..." she whispered, still breathless from the intensity of it. Her thumbs moved gently against his skin, feeling the tension locked in every line of his face. "What's wrong?"

No answer. He only stared at her.

"Talk to me. Please." She added softly, and watched emotions play across his face and eyes like he was fighting to keep some demons inside him from breaking loose. She almost thought he wasn't going to say anything at all, and then he spoke.

"Someone assaulted you today and left you in the middle of the hedge maze for me to find," he said calmly, but the moment he saw the horror cross her face, the anger he had been struggling to suppress surged right back to the surface, belatedly realizing she didn't even know what had happened to her.

There were few things more devastating to a mated werewolf than another man laying his hands on their mate. They were possessive and fiercely territorial by nature, and the thought of another man touching the woman who belonged to him burned far deeper than any physical wound ever could.

It was only through sheer restraint that Sebastian wasn't turning the entire Grim Pack upside down in search of the culprit and cutting off all the limbs he had used to touch his mate.

Viola fell silent for a moment, the horror plainly visible in her blue eyes as she tried to process his words. She had no memory of it happening, and yet she couldn't deny them either, because faint, hazy fragments were beginning to surface.

She remembered the sensation of struggling against someone's hands as they tried to remove her dress while whispering words of endearment into her ear, words that made her skin crawl and forced her awake from a numb, sleep-like state. She had pushed the person away, even striking him with a stone before trying to crawl away from him, but he had caught up to her and pulled her back.

She remembered her body being far too weak to fight back. She remembered slipping back into unconsciousness, convincing herself it was only a dream and nothing more, that this person wasn't real. But after that, she had no memory of what happened next.

Was that what it had been... a sexual assault?

She had truly believed she was dreaming. Her mind had been strangely blank, unable to tell what was real and what wasn't. She hadn't even realized those fragmented memories were real until this very moment.

Viola turned to face the ceiling and pulled the sheets tighter against her chest, unable to fight the overwhelming shame that washed over her, as though covering herself more completely could somehow erase the fact that someone had taken advantage of her while she was unconscious.

After a long, painful silence, she asked quietly, her voice carrying a devastating fragility,

"Did... did he penetrate me?"

The question sat in the air between them like a heavy weight. Because if the answer was yes, she knew what it could mean, what it had meant for Sofia.

Once a werewolf's mate caught them with another person, or learned they had been with someone else, whether intentionally or not, it made no difference. Before the mating mark had been given to strengthen and anchor the bond, the spark between mates would begin to crack. Quietly. Steadily. Like something slowly dissolving into dust. It had happened in countless cases throughout their world.

Viola felt the lump in her throat tighten until it settled heavily in her chest, making it difficult to swallow as she waited for his answer.

"I don't know." Sebastian said quietly, and he too turned to look at the ceiling. "I was searching for you for over thirty minutes. I found your ring lying in a puddle near the hedge maze. I found you in the center of it..." He couldn't finish the sentence and she said,

"How did you find me?" Her voice was barely above a whisper.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 387: Nick is the culprit[1,064 words]

"Let's not go into that. Let's talk about who did this, you don't need to know how I found you—"

"I need to know, Seb. Because if I don't, it will leave a strain between us and I don't want that. And I know you don't want it either. Tell me." She said firmly, and Sebastian replied,

"It won't leave any strain unless you let it. The important thing is that I found you, and now we should focus on—"

"It's already leaving its strain on me! I'm overthinking!" She snapped, unable to hold it in, turning to look at him with emotion brimming in her eyes. The same overwhelming feeling that had driven her out of the hall was threatening to rise back up, only this time it came with an intense wave of anger at the thought that someone other than Sebastian had their hands on her.

"I need to know, Sebastian. At least before you start pulling away from me, because I know that's what eventually happens to every she-wolf who goes through this. It's what always happens between mates in a situation like this lately. How did you find me?"

Her voice was barely above a whisper this time, and Sebastian turned from the ceiling to look at her, stunned by the admission she had just made.

So she truly believed he would leave her because of this?

Yes, his mate bond was in turmoil, just as it was meant to be in situations like this, where his mark wasn't on her neck yet. He could feel the conflict raging inside him, the instinctive hurt and the rage. But not for a single second did Sebastian doubt that he would choose her over it. There was no force in the world powerful enough to make him abandon the woman he loved because some bastard wanted to break them apart by assaulting his wife and leading him to the hedge maze to see and find her that way.

He rolled onto his side and looked at her for a long moment.

"It isn't going to change how I feel about you, sunshine. Not on my part. Not a single thing. I love you just as much as I did yesterday... if not even more."

He made sure she heard every word before explaining how he had found her in the hedge maze. As he spoke, the color gradually drained from her face, and her fingers tightened around the sheets.

"What are the last things you remember after leaving the hall, my love?" he asked quietly, reaching out and gently drawing her into his chest.

He needed her to feel it, to know, without a shadow of a doubt, that he was never going to become another Javier to her because of what had happened. But he also needed to know what she remembered before she had been taken into that maze.

The thought alone made his blood boil all over again, but he forced himself to stay calm. He needed every detail while it was still fresh. Whoever had done this had to be found before tomorrow.

Viola's eyes became distanced.

After hearing the full picture of how she had been found, she no longer knew what to feel, so she chose not to feel anything at all. She embraced the numbness deliberately, locking the overwhelming emotions behind a wall at the back of her mind and letting detachment take over instead.

"I felt overwhelmed by everything around me and stepped outside for air. And then... I don't know what came over me. I was crying, and before I knew it I was passing out, but I saw..." Her voice trailed off and she frowned.

Nick.

She had seen him. She was certain of it. His face had been right there in front of her before everything went dark.

"What did you see?" Sebastian asked, looking down at her deeply furrowed brows.

"I saw Nick... he was holding me as I was falling..." She said with an absent, faraway look, unable to bring herself to believe he was responsible for this. And while she was still thinking it through,

Sebastian had already let go of her and was moving out of the bed. Viola snapped back and grabbed his hand, sitting up with the sheet falling away from her exposed torso.

"Where are you going?" She asked.

"To fucking find the bastard. You should sleep, I might not be back tonight." He told her, his mind already running through every way he intended to deal with his cousin for what he had done. It seemed his suspicion wasn't far from the truth about who his cousin really was and Sebastian would send him to join his brother in hell.

"Wait, Seb. Don't go, we are not sure he was responsible for this. My head was spinning, I might have hallucinated. Nick is my friend. I don't think he would have... would have done that to me..."

A sudden wave of shame overwhelmed her again, irrational but impossible to fight. She pulled the sheet tightly against her chest, as though hiding herself would somehow make what had happened feel less real. Her head slowly lowered, her shoulders slumping in quiet defeat.

Viola was confused, hurt, and embarrassed all at once, even though none of it had been her deliberate doing, she couldn't stop the feeling from coming. And she couldn't stop the sudden mistrust toward her best friend either.

Because if he had caught her the way she remembered, what a best friend was supposed to do was take her back to the hall, or find her husband or someone to come and take care of her. That was what was supposed to happen.

So how had she ended up in the center of a maze, naked, with hickeys on her body?

Was it Nick? The thought of it sent a rush of betrayal through her chest, followed immediately by anger. He had betrayed their friendship. He had hurt her in a way she would never forgive, not ever, if it turned out to be true...

Tears rolled down her cheeks and she quickly wiped them away and sniffed.

Sebastian noticed her tears and immediately let go of the idea of going after Nick tonight. He got back onto the bed and pulled her into his arms, holding her against his chest.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 388: That's what led to her death[1,492 words]

"Nick wouldn't have done such a thing, could he?" She whispered, more tears streaming down her face, the imagination of it alone feeling like staring into something too horrible to look at directly.

It couldn't have been him. He couldn't have done something like that to her, but yet he was the last man she remembered seeing.

"As much as I want to comfort you, sunshine, Nick is the son of a greedy woman like Camila, and the brother of a traitor like Javier. Apples don't fall far from their trees. And if he is responsible..." Sebastian gritted out, his arms tightening around her, "I will kill him in the worst way possible." He opened his mind link quietly and ordered Matt to send men to apprehend Nick immediately.

Though Sebastian wanted to believe there had been no sexual intercourse involved in the assault, he couldn't confirm it, whoever was responsible had concealed their scent and left nothing behind he could use as identification. But sexual intercourse or not, Sebastian was not going to allow his bond with her to wane. Not if he had to fight it every single day until the day he would mark her finally.

Viola cried into his chest, and when her tears finally dried and nothing more came, the detachment settled back in more solidly than before. She pulled back from him slightly. "I should talk to him. I can always tell when he isn't being truthful with me, I know him well enough to—"

"You are not seeing him alone. I have already sent men to take him into custody. Once he is there, we will see him together."

Before all of this, Viola might have pushed back and pleaded for more time before his arrest. But she couldn't bring herself to do that now. She felt nothing, nothing at all, and that was its own kind of answer to the relationship they had once had.

"Don't leave my side tonight. Stay with me."

She gently pulled his hand, guiding him back down onto the bed before settling her head against his chest and laying down half on him. Beneath the blanket, she draped one leg possessively over his, slipping it between his warm, muscular thighs, wanting to remain there for as long as she possibly could.

She had a new fear now, one she had never imagined she would carry. She wanted to hold on to every moment of the affection he still had for her before the inevitable happened, before the unmarked mate bond took over and began pulling him away from her, the way it was said to do when it perceived something like this as a betrayal of the relationship.

She put her arm around his waist and said quietly, "For now let's pretend none of this happened. Tell me about Natalie like you promised you would tonight. Why did you kill her?" She asked, remembering the topic she had been carrying all day and not wanting it to get buried under everything that had happened, under her... assault. She felt the constricting feeling rise in her chest at the thought of Nick being responsible and pushed it firmly back down.

"Are you sure you want to talk about it tonight?"

He pressed a gentle kiss to her hair, feeling the storm of doubt and emotion swirling inside her. He wanted to reassure her further about his love, but he knew it would be better to prove his words through his actions rather than simply saying them.

She was emotionally fragile right now. More than anything, she needed to feel safe and secure in his arms and his world.

Guilt gnawed relentlessly at him. None of this would have happened if he had simply turned them around instead of attending the ceremony that morning. Better yet, if they had never come to the Grim Pack at all and he had chosen to deal with the other packs through war instead, she would still have been safe beside him and this life changing event wouldn't have occurred.

He had promised to protect her.

Tonight, he felt as though he had failed at another promise yet...

Viola nodded against his chest.

"Yes. Tell me everything. From how you met her... to how you killed her."

Sebastian had always known this day would come, the day he would finally tell her the whole truth. Because if he was going to spend forever with her, there could be no more lies, no more secrets left standing between them.

But after everything that had happened only hours ago, the confession somehow felt both less important and far more urgent.

He couldn't afford to let Alex reach her first and tell her his version of the story, the one he had believed for years, the one that had made him hate Sebastian with every fiber of his being.

The last thing Sebastian wanted was for Viola to look at him the way his brother did.

If anything, his wife deserved to hear it from him. So his eyes drifted idly to the wall clock, 2:29 am, and he parted his lips and began to talk.

"I wasn't the one who married Natalie. I wasn't the man who had that so called perfect relationship with her." He said, and Viola's head lifted from his chest immediately, her eyes finding his with a small frown.

"How is that possible? I followed your relationship for years through social media and—"

"It wasn't me, love. I never did any of that with her. It was my brother." He confessed, watching her eyes move through confusion and then slowly into realization before she asked, "You mean... Alex isn't dead?"

Sebastian nodded. "I never killed him. What the pack witnessed was someone else's blood on those sheets. I may not care about many things, amor, but family has always meant the most to me and I cherish every one of them. Killing Alex was never an option. Everything you saw with Natalie, that was Alex."

Viola absorbed his words carefully, and it suddenly occurred to her that the photo album she had looked through that day, the one that had given her a strange, nagging feeling she couldn't name, hadn't been her imagination after all.

The man who appeared in every photograph with Natalie always wore turtlenecks and long-sleeved shirts, and something about him had never quite looked like the man she had married and come to know so intimately enough. At the time she hadn't known Sebastian intimately enough to pinpoint what was off. Now she understood exactly what it had been.

"So where is he now?" she asked, resting her head back against his chest as he slid a hand behind her head, gently guiding her to lie comfortably against him.

"My brother is in hiding. In the past we used to switch places every month, but after he started seeing Natalie, he negotiated for six months each. Most of the time I gave him even more than that, only going out for a month at a time and leaving him longer stretches, because I was awkward around his woman and never knew what excuse to give whenever she looked at me wanting intimacy. I had given my word never to lay a hand on Alex's woman, so rather than go against it, I gave him more days."

Viola listened carefully, her own situation fading to the background for a moment as she was pulled into his. She couldn't help the surprise at the revelation that Alex wasn't dead and they had managed to pull off a twin switch on the pack members with no one suspecting at all.

"Did Natalie never notice the difference between the two of you?" She asked, genuinely curious, because she had felt something was off from a photograph album alone, let alone in person. If she knew the man she married so well, she would have picked up the differences.

Sebastian's lips curved into a bitter smile.

"That's what led to her death. Her love for him was never the sunshine-and-rainbows kind you imagine. There was a deep crack in their relationship long before everything fell apart."

"Did you kill her because she found out about the two of you?" Viola asked quietly, hoping with all her heart that wasn't the reason.

It felt far too small a reason to take the life of the woman his brother had loved enough to risk everything for, the woman he had taken across the world, professing his love for her in every country they visited, even in the human world.

"I wish it were that simple. I wouldn't have killed her for that." He said, his voice going cold and distant as his eyes moved to some point on the wall. He had never told anyone this. But his wife needed to hear it from him.

When the silence stretched, Viola asked softly, "What did she do?"

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 389: Protecting Alex[1,539 words]

"I found her cheating on Alex with another man. Her stepbrother." He said, and without waiting for her reaction, continued. "I came home that day as my brother, after our time apart, and was told she had gone to her family's house the moment Alex had left the pack. She had been there for two days. Normally we spent three or more days in our hiding place before switching." He left the curse out of it for now and kept going.

"But that month I came home early, we had only taken two days instead of four. I thought I would do what my brother would do and go and collect her, or at least see her there. I didn't tell her I was coming."

Sebastian had walked into the house and asked one of the omegas where Natalie was.

"She's resting in her room, Supreme Alpha," the omega had replied.

As her husband, or rather, the man pretending to be one, and having watched the way his brother cared for her through the videos they exchanged to keep each other updated on the life they would eventually return to, the natural thing to do was to check on her.

So he did.

When he reached her bedroom door, he heard it.

His footsteps came to an abrupt stop before he could announce his presence.

Her loud moaning and laughter. And then her words.

"Oh Alvin, you do it so much better than my husband. It's always different with you, you fill me so well I never want to go back to him." Natalie had purred, her voice carrying clearly through the door to the Supreme Alpha standing on the other side of it.

"That's why I keep telling you to leave him and come back to me, Nat. I'll fill you up every day and every night. I love your tits and the way they harden for me. I saw them perk up when Dad and I came to visit the Supreme Alpha last week. You were sitting right beside him, but it was obvious you wanted me. What a naughty girl you are."

The voice belonged to Alvin, her stepbrother, who had come into her life after his mother married Natalie's father. Their parents had wanted them to become siblings, but Alvin could never see Natalie that way. Neither, for that matter, could Natalie. They had fallen in love as teenagers and had been secretly sleeping together ever since.

"You know I can't leave him. Daddy wants me to stay married to him and give him an heir to secure our position, and I like the position of Supreme Luna too much to let it go. I think it's best we enjoy each other in secret like this whenever he is away on his stupid monthly trips. Oh Alvin, fuck me hard."

Sebastian had felt his body go cold. Because despite not being the man who had loved this she-wolf, he knew exactly what Alex would feel hearing those words come from the woman he loved and would have laid his life down for without hesitation.

"At this rate, Nat, I think I might end up being the one to father your child, so let's do it without the condoms and make it more fun." Alvin had said, and Natalie had moaned so loudly that Sebastian's fist clenched at his side. His first instinct was to go in there and set them both on fire where they lay, but he had done the only sensible thing instead and left. It wasn't his fight. He would tell Alex about his wife and let his brother deal with it on his own terms.

Sebastian had left the house without announcing himself to Natalie or anyone in her family. He went back home intending to tell his brother immediately, then stopped himself, deciding he would tell him in person, where he would be able to control his brother's hurt.

Natalie didn't come home that night, or the night after. It was two days later, by which point Sebastian was already back in the pack for two days.

"Oh darling, you didn't tell me you were back." Natalie had said, hugging him, and it had taken everything inside Sebastian not to physically push her away.

"I just came back today." He lied, stepping out of her reach. "How long have you been away?"

"Just since yesterday, I missed Daddy and wanted to spend time with the family. I was so lonely without you here. Oh, how much I missed you." She had purred in that same voice he had heard her using on Alvin, moving forward to kiss him. He dodged it smoothly.

"I see. You must have spent most of your time with Alvin."

Natalie's smile faltered, and she immediately grew defensive.

"Why would I spend time with Alvin? I didn't even see him once while I was there. He was with his friends, and I was with Mom the whole time. Alvin and I barely crossed paths. Why would you think I spent most of my time with him?"

"Nothing," Sebastian replied flatly, though he had already begun seeing her in a light she desperately didn't want to be seen in.

He had always respected Natalie for the light she had brought into his brother's life. But in that moment, he had never despised anyone more than he did her, because she was on the verge of plunging Alex's world into darkness with her betrayal.

His brother had always been easygoing, always talking about Natalie with a smile, telling Sebastian how much he loved her. Hearing those words time and time again had made Sebastian respect the she-wolf deeply.

Now, all he could see was the person who was about to shatter the heart of the man he loved most.

From that day Sebastian understood exactly who Natalie was, no different from the many she-wolves who believed they could climb the social ladder by clinging to the Supreme Luna title. He avoided her as much as possible until she cornered him one night, two nights before he was due to switch with Alex.

"What is wrong with you, Seb? You have been acting strange and pulling away from me." She had complained.

"Can't you see I've been busy, Natalie? I don't have the time." Sebastian said offhandedly, pulling off his clothes to change in the closet.

Natalie pursed her lips. "I know you are busy but you always made time for us before. And I really think you need to start cutting back, because I am going to need you more now." She said, walking toward him and taking his hand before placing it flat against her abdomen. "I just found out I am pregnant. We are going to be parents."

Sebastian was at a complete loss for words.

She was pregnant?

Was it Alex's child... or Alvin's? The very man Sebastian had overheard saying he intended to get her pregnant without using protection.

"Whose child is it?" Sebastian asked through gritted teeth, watching Natalie's expression change.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded. "It's your child, of course. I can't believe you're acting like this after telling me time and time again that you couldn't wait for us to start a family, Seb. Are you accusing me of cheating?"

She gasped in apparent horror before covering her mouth with her hand.

"Wait a minute... have you been cheating on me? Is that why you barely pay any attention to me anymore? Oh, Goddess..." Her voice cracked as tears welled in her eyes. "I can't believe I'm pregnant with our first child while you've been sneaking around behind my back... cheating on me."

She broke down into tears that looked so heartbreakingly genuine that they only made Sebastian feel sick to his stomach.

If Alex ever found out about this, there would be no turning back.

He loved this she-wolf so completely that Sebastian feared he would convince himself the child was his, forgive a wife who had been betraying him from the very beginning, and continue loving her as though nothing had happened.

Natalie was an exceptional liar. Her tears, her trembling voice, the devastation on her face, every part of it looked real.

And when it came to choosing whom to believe, Sebastian feared Alex would choose his wife over his own brother.

A rage unlike anything Sebastian had ever experienced exploded inside him.

He didn't even realize he had moved until his hand was already wrapped around her throat.

"You take me for a fool, Natalie, don't you?" He gritted through his teeth, watching the horror spread across her face. Sebastian had never been a forgiving man, he killed without hesitation when pushed to it, and Natalie meant nothing to him. He tightened his grip.

"You think I will let you hurt my brother with your lies." He said, watching her try to make sense of his words, but he didn't give her any time to process them. He strangled her to death right there with all his supreme Alpha strength. And it was only afterward, in the silence that followed, that he fully registered what he had done.

He had killed his brother's wife.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 390: Once he's free[1,429 words]

Sebastian was quiet for a moment after telling Viola everything that lead to Natalie's death. Then he continued.

"I killed her before I even fully realized I was doing it. I couldn't bring myself to tell Alex about her betrayal afterward, because I believed her betrayal would have hurt him more than mine, so I made it look as though I had marked her and she had died from the curse. But in the end it was the same outcome regardless. He was later told of her pregnancy by the pack healer Natalie had visited before her death on the day of her funeral.

"Alex ended up with a broken heart either way, and it has cost him his health."

Viola couldn't help but feel sorry for her husband's twin. A werewolf's broken heart was far more devastating than a human's or any other creature's.

Werewolves were supernatural beings created in pairs, destined to find each other at the right moment. When they lost the mate their heart had accepted, the heartbreak ran so deep that it began to destroy them from within. Their heart would slowly weaken, eventually failing altogether, and it was believed that death reunited them with their mate in the afterlife.

"He's already in the second stage of heart failure," Sebastian continued quietly. "He coughs up blood whenever his emotions, especially his anger, become too intense. It's slowly killing him. Every heartbreak weakens his heart a little more..."

His voice trailed off for a moment before he finished in a low, guilt-ridden tone.

"And... I recently broke it again."

Viola, who had been listening in silence and finding it genuinely difficult to accept that Natalie had faked her love for Alex all along, asked quietly, "What did you do recently to break his heart again?"

The hand that had been moving slowly up and down her spine stopped in the small of her back.

"The last time I left, Alex was supposed to take over from me and return in my place. But I didn't trust him with you. So I drugged him and put him to sleep so I could come back to you myself. He hasn't spoken to me since that day... not until the day we arrived here."

Viola felt his arm tighten around her, and she turned to look at him. He was staring silently at the ceiling, his expression unreadable.

He had betrayed his own brother to come back to her.

At the exact moment she had needed him most, when Javier had been moments away from executing her, Sebastian had chosen her over his twin, just like Alex would have chosen Natalie over him.

"Did he understand... or did he feel betrayed?" she asked softly, still trying to find her footing after learning Alex was alive. The brother Zoe had never stopped talking about. The one she had always spoken of with such sadness and longing.

"He felt betrayed," Sebastian answered quietly. "He told me he's dying faster because his heart can't keep up with my betrayal."

The heart that could be healed once the mermaid's heart was used and fix all the problems.

For both of them.

But Sebastian kept that thought to himself.

He wasn't ready to tell his wife that part of the truth, not now that he knew she was part mermaid. He feared she would find it hard to support sacrificing one of her own kind.

"Why don't you tell him the truth, then?" Viola asked softly. "Maybe it would help him understand why you made those choices. If Alex knew who Natalie really was and everything she'd been hiding, he might finally be able to make peace with what happened instead of blaming you for it."

Sebastian smiled faintly.

"Did you know he had her face tattooed across his chest after she died? The walls of his room are covered with her photographs. He still worships her memory. Every night, he talks to her... and cries for her. Just because she's dead doesn't mean she's gone to him.

"If I tell him the truth now... it might finish what her death started."

His gaze drifted toward the ceiling for a moment before returning to her.

"I plan on letting him out soon, letting the world know he's still alive. Alex is much stronger now than he was back when I decided to hide him.

"Who knows? Maybe once he's free, he'll find another mate who can help him heal from losing Natalie. And when that day comes..." He paused before finishing quietly, "I'll tell him everything."

He leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to her hair before lifting her chin so their eyes met.

"Now that you know all of it..." he asked softly, searching her face, "do you love me any less, amor?"

Viola shook her head. "No. I don't love you less..." She paused. "But I am afraid that a day will come when you will love me less." She finally voiced the fear that had been sitting in her chest, even while she was still absorbing everything he had just told her, the pieces falling into place in ways she hadn't expected.

That was why he had never mourned Natalie the way a widower would. Why there were no photographs of her around him. Why he never spoke of her with the longing of a man who had once loved and lost his wife.

And, despite everything, she couldn't help but feel quietly overwhelmed by the realization that she was his first love.

But as much as she wanted to hold on to the warmth that realization brought her, the events of that night kept dragging her thoughts back to the hedge maze...

To what had been done to her there.

And to what it might do to them now that it had happened.

Sebastian didn't answer immediately. Instead he moved her upward until her head was resting on the same pillow as his and their eyes were level.

"If I have to say this a million times for you to truly believe it, sunshine, I will say it every single morning. I will never love you less. Not even when the bond interferes. I am working on something, and once it is done, I will mark you permanently on the next full moon. When you carry my mark, nothing on this earth will be able to come between us." He leaned forward and kissed her nose, her forehead, and both of her closed lids.

"I love you, Viola. I will love you until our forever." He whispered.

Viola felt her throat tighten at his words, and yet the fear didn't leave her chest entirely. She wished he could mark her right now, tonight, so she could be certain. But he had said he was working on making it possible, and she had to hold onto that. She put her arms around him and pulled him close.

"I love you too." She pressed a kiss to his chest. "But if a day comes when you feel differently about me, Sebastian, please don't try to hide it. Tell me. Always tell me how you feel."

"You bet I will. And it's going to be an 'I love you' every morning."

He wrapped his arms around her again and held her like that, quietly and steadily, until she finally felt safe enough in his embrace. Her breathing gradually evened out after a long moment of comfortable silent, and within minutes, she was asleep.

Sebastian was deeply, privately grateful for that.

He slowly untangled his limbs from hers and eased out of the bed without disturbing her. She stirred slightly and then settled back into sleep. He pulled the sheets up to her chin and stood there for a silent moment, looking down at her.

She had listened to everything. She had heard him confess to killing Natalie with his bare hands, yet she hadn't called him cruel for it. She had simply understood, just as he had always quietly believed she would, in a way most she-wolves never could.

That was what made her so right for him.

Viola wasn't naïve to the kind of cruel world he lived in. She had grown up in the middle of one just like it, and perhaps that was why they fit each other so perfectly.

But the memory of what she had gone through in that maze came rushing back, and the anger returned to his chest like something igniting. He pressed one last kiss to her forehead and then left the room.