Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 421: Nothing would stop him[1,170 words]

Viola held out her hand, and Wave rested his watery one on top of it. A soft light emitted from where they touched. At first, nothing happened, and just as she was about to point that out, a familiar voice began to speak inside her head.

"Serena, it’s me, Ivy. If my message reaches you, I believe you already know that I am doing fine, and I want you to know that I am in desperate need of your help..."

Viola’s eyes became emotional at the sound of her sister’s voice. However, Ivy sounded so distressed that Viola forced herself to push her emotions aside and focus on the message.

"Yasmin, our cousin, has been captured by some of the land-dwelling werewolves. I need your help finding her exact whereabouts. She has a family back here, a child, a mate, and our aunt, her mother. Serena, I don’t want to burden you or reach out to you like this after so many years apart, but I am desperate. I just need you to follow my instructions and sing so we can track her. If anything happens to her, her mate will never forgive me... nor the werewolves..."

Viola listened as her sister explained her relationship with Yasmin, unaware that Viola had already met the mermaid and had seen their relationship through her memories. Ivy went on to describe how everything would fall apart for their aunt if anything happened to her only child.

"Please, Serena..."

The message ended there, and Viola stared at Wave, who looked back at her as though silently asking what she planned to do now.

Until now, Viola had only seen her sister through Yasmin’s memories, but hearing Ivy’s voice made everything feel so much more real. Her heart swelled with a happiness she hadn’t thought possible after believing Ivy was gone forever, though that joy was dimmed by the desperate circumstances that had finally brought them back together.

"I’ll need to talk to Sebastian before I see Zoe."

Saying that, she stepped back into the shower to rinse off before heading into her closet, with Wave trailing behind her. Under normal circumstances, Viola would have told him to stay outside before he drenched all her clothes, but she was too preoccupied with how she was going to start the conversation with Sebastian.

Once she finished getting dressed, she didn’t even stop for breakfast. Instead, she headed straight for Sebastian’s office, where she assumed he would be.

However, when she got there, neither Sebastian nor Matt was there, and she frowned before walking away.

Viola even checked his penthouse but still couldn’t find him. After searching every place she thought he might be, she asked one of her bodyguards to mind-link the warriors at the training grounds and confirm whether Sebastian was there.

When they told her he wasn’t, Viola suddenly had a feeling she knew exactly where he was, and she immediately started walking in that direction.

"We’re going to see the Mermaidia in the nobody water!" Wave exclaimed excitedly as he leaped ahead of her.

By the time Viola reached the place, she had already begun preparing herself to sing in pink again.

Instead, she was met with a shocking sight.

The guards were gone.

The door had been left wide open.

Her heart skipped a beat.

She quickened her pace, but before she could even step into the lab-like room, Wave came leaping back out, shouting,

"The other Mermaidia is gone!"

As if refusing to believe him, Viola hurried inside.

True to his words, the tank stood empty, just like every other tank in the room.

Her heart slammed painfully against her chest.

"Where could she have gone?" she whispered, her face paling. A horrifying thought struck her.

"Could it be Sebastian already..."

•••

Meanwhile, far from where Viola was, in another part of the building, the unconscious mermaid was wheeled into a room where the Supreme Alpha, Doctor Gilbert, and Matt stood watching as the prized creature was brought in.

Sebastian stepped aside as Gilbert opened the large, coffin-shaped glass containment pod where the creature lay unconscious, looking almost peaceful.

The doctor ran his fingers lightly over the shimmering scales on her tail before saying,

"She is still well hydrated. We only have two days before the sacrifice, Supreme Alpha, and just as my grandfather's books say, we need her to become dehydrated. It takes two full days for a royal mermaid to reach that state."

"I thought mermaids couldn't survive out of water and would begin dehydrating immediately," Matt questioned, looking down at the magnificent creature, her glowing scales shimmering across both her tail and midriff.

"The royals are different." Gilbert examined one of her shimmering scales, a jewel so precious that only the pearl tears of a royal mermaid were considered more valuable.

"They possess a natural water reserve within their bodies. Even if they remain out of water for several hours, it won't immediately affect them. It takes approximately forty-eight hours before dehydration truly sets in."

He gestured toward the unconscious mermaid chest. "Right now, her heart is protected by a powerful enchantment, gifted by their Goddess. Even unconscious, we cannot cut it out. If we tried, her heart would release a deadly toxin that would affect everyone around her instead. That is why I ordered her removed from the water first."

Sebastian silently studied the creature as he listened to Gilbert's words.

Although he had heard countless stories about mermaids throughout his life, this was the first time he had ever seen one in person... and in her full glory.

Her tail sparkled brilliantly beneath the lights, though Gilbert had assured him the glow would disappear once dehydration set in over the coming days.

What he couldn't ignore, however, was the faint resemblance she bore to his wife.

The shape of her nose... the curve of her face...There were similarities.

They were likely related through the mermaid who had given birth to Viola, Sebastian concluded.

Even so, that changed nothing in his plans for the creature. He had reached a point where turning back was no longer an option.

His conscience, already small when it came to the creatures he blamed for the curse he'd carried all his life and suffered through it, had become even easier to silence.

As long as she wasn't Viola's twin sister, he didn't care who he had to sacrifice to achieve this long awaited goal.

He would use the mermaid to protect his wife from the consequences of his mark...and to cure the disease he himself had inflicted upon his brother.

This month, there would be no switching. This full moon, his wife would finally carry his mark, and his mind would finally be at rest.

"Hang her up." Sebastian ordered, stepping back from the glass and allowing his men to move forward and pull the creature from the water. While Gilbert filed his reports, the men hung her against a tall stand, binding her with rope woven to withstand tremendous strength.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 422: Release your power[1,102 words]

"Un-fucking-believable, is it just me, or does she somehow look like... the Supreme Luna?" Matt remarked, a slight frown crossing his face as he studied the creature up close. "Seb, look closely and you'll see the—"

A glare from Sebastian sealed his lips before he could finish his observation, and Matt quickly cleared his throat, knowing Sebastian hated mermaids to the point that he wouldn't tolerate any of them being compared to his precious wife. No matter how much Matt thought the two looked alike, he decided it was wiser to keep his mouth shut.

"Have you gotten the dagger ready?" Sebastian asked the doctor, who looked up from the tablet displaying an anatomical diagram of a mermaid with her chest cut open, her glowing heart exposed, much like this mermaid's own would be in a few days.

"Everything's ready. We just need her prepared before the day arrives, that's all... and—oh, she's coming around," Gilbert said as the mermaid's head slowly turned, consciousness returning to her while a soft groan of discomfort escaped her lips.

When her blue eyes opened fully and regarded them all with pure hatred, Sebastian's silver eyes barely flinched, showing no reaction at all. She snarled at them before parting her lips and unleashing a scream that shattered every pane of glass around them as she thrashed against her bindings.

Gilbert dropped his tablet and covered his ears, and Matt cursed as their men began collapsing to the ground around them, only Sebastian remained unaffected, being a Supreme Alpha.

When she showed no sign of stopping, he raised his hand, smoke curling from his palm, and reached out to seal the mermaid's mouth shut, trapping her screams inside.

"You're too loud, mermaid."

Yasmin yanked at her bindings, desperate to teach the werewolf the lesson of his life, but she couldn't move. His powers were burning against her skin, and her blue eyes snapped to the ashy smoke restraining her mouth as something dawned on her.

It confirmed what she had feared about this werewolf in particular.

He had used a mermaid before to obtain the power he was now using against her.

She wasn't going to be his first victim.

He possessed abilities that werewolves were never meant to have, powers they could only obtain by tearing out a royal mermaid's heart and devouring it.

Yasmin wasn't surprised that he had done such a thing, but the realization filled her with terror. If he had stolen another royal mermaid's heart before, then he intended to devour hers just as mercilessly.

The pain and fury of being treated this way made her close her eyes, preparing to unleash her sharpest scales at them, scales that would leave permanent marks across their skin, even if they wouldn't kill them.

But then she stopped as someone suddenly burst through the door, panting.

The mermaid's eyes flooded with relief at the sight of her cousin rushing in and she dropped the attempt to hurt the werewolves around her.

Viola, who had made her way there with Wave's help, hurried forward. The moment she saw Sebastian standing with his hand outstretched, his power sealing Yasmin's mouth shut, she reached out and pressed her hand gently against his. He turned to her, surprise flashing across his face as he asked,

"What are you doing here?"

"Release your power. You're hurting her." Viola said gently, seeing the pain etched across the mermaid's face.

Gilbert and Matt exchanged glances, unable to help but wonder how the Supreme Luna had found her way to this hidden place, where they'd planned to drain every drop of water from the mermaid's stored reserves.

Sebastian's brows knit together in displeasure, but he lowered his hand, turning back to her. "You shouldn't be here. How did you find this place?"

He saw her turn her head slightly to the side, and Sebastian followed her line of sight to find Wave glaring at him from the corner. He cursed under his breath. Of course, the little bastard had brought her here to see the mermaid he had in custody.

"Can we talk? In private," Viola asked, her eyes flicking toward the mermaid, who had calmed down now, as though she trusted she was safe with Viola there. Yet tears glistened at the corners of her eyes, ready to fall and harden into pearls.

Sebastian turned to Gilbert and Matt. "You two, keep watch. I'll be back." Then he took Viola's hand and led her out of the room.

After Sebastian left, the air became awkward. Matt and the doctor's relationship was no longer what it had once been, ever since Matt had warned him not to hurt Zoe and if he dares hurt her, he would have his limbs.

Meanwhile, Gilbert, who had already decided that once this mermaid sacrifice was over he would take the Luna's advice and tell both the Supreme Alpha and Zoe that she deserved better than him, found it difficult to maintain a friendly atmosphere around the Beta, who would no doubt break his leg for hurting Zoe regardless of the warnings.

Rather than speak to the doctor, Matt turned to the mermaid, who was glaring at them with undisguised hatred, and said, "You understand our language, don't you?"

Yasmin snarled at him, and he smiled.

"I'll take that as a yes. Let's have a conversation and pretend the doctor isn't in the room, shall we? What kind of food do you eat in the sea?"

Meanwhile, Sebastian led his wife into the adjoining room on the deserted floor, one that resembled a warehouse, and closed the door behind them before turning to face her patiently.

"What did you want to talk about?"

Viola didn't want to open the conversation with telling him to release the mermaid because she was related to her, so she started instead with, "Can you tell me why you have her?"

Sebastian tucked his hands into his pockets, looking away from her. "I planned to tell you this once everything was done, but I suppose it’s best you know now. She’s the only way I can mark you without killing you, and the only way to cure my brother. There are records showing that sacrificing a royal mermaid, using her heart, has lifted this curse across two generations before.

"Since I no longer want to follow the prophecy, I have no choice but to use a mermaid as the sacrifice." He turned to look at her, and when he saw her expression, his eyes took on a look of understanding. "You don’t like that I want to use her, do you?"

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 423: Both on different sides[1,296 words]

This was exactly why he hadn’t wanted to tell her, Sebastian thought, because he knew that no matter how he explained it, she would never feel entirely at peace with him using something that came from her own kind, to lift his curse and solve the biggest problem standing in his way.

Viola, who until now had assumed he wanted the mermaid for whatever reasons other werewolves usually captured them for, suddenly felt torn. So this entire time, when he’d spoken of finding a way to mark her safely, this was what he’d meant, a mermaid’s heart?

She had looked forward to being marked, to sharing his emotions the way he already shared hers, but she had never imagined it would come at this cost. And it was also, once again, his way of fixing things with his brother, since once Alex was cured, Sebastian could finally risk telling him the truth about their past, without fear that the truth alone might worsen his condition.

That was a reasonable reason for him to capture a creature he never truly liked to begin with.

But if Viola did nothing to stop him from using this particular mermaid, she would be failing her own sister, possibly even dooming her to death somewhere in the sea. Ivy had given her so much, even when Viola believed she hadn’t deserved it, and for the first time, her sister had asked for her help. She didn’t want to fail her.

Viola wished, almost desperately, that this had been some nameless, faceless mermaid with no connection to her sister at all. Maybe then she could have looked away, fought

down her conscience. But could she really look away from this one and still live with herself afterward?

"Sebastian..." Viola began, slowly pressing her hands against his chest, catching the suspicious look already forming on his face, as though he sensed she was about to plead for the mermaid's life.

"No," he said, before she could even continue. "This is the only way I can mark you, the only way I can save you, and save Alex, the people who matter most to me. Mermaids are hard to find, baby, and a royal one could lift two generations of this curse. I can't let her go. I've searched for one for years. I'm sorry, but you're going to have to look past this, and if you can't, I can ask Kenny from Grim Pack to erase the memory from your mind, so you'll never know I killed a mermaid to mark you. Is that what you want?" He asked gently, cupping her cheeks in his hands, but Viola shook her head, feeling the sting build behind her eyes as everything was becoming so difficult than she thought.

"No. Listen to me, Sebastian. I know how much this sacrifice means to you, but I can't let you kill this one. Please," she whispered. "She's related to my sister. They were together when she was captured. We have to return her to the sea as soon as possible or Ivy will be in trouble."

Sebastian went still at that, then cursed under his breath and dragged his fingers through his hair. He stared at her for a long moment, as though weighing something heavy, before he cursed again.

If he let the mermaid go, he would have to let his brother go too. Alex would die this month, Sebastian had heard from him just last night, which was exactly why he'd rushed to begin preparations as soon as possible. And if he let this mermaid go now, he would lose his only chance to mark Viola, condemning himself to a life spent fearing that some other fated mate might one day appear, pulling his love away from her against his will, toward someone else entirely.

"You said your sister is a mermaid, and she was with her when she was caught?" He asked, watching Viola nod her head.

"Then we can send Wave to bring her here. I'll build a man-made river, and we can keep her there, safe from the dangers of the sea. She'll be protected with us, and I'll keep her safe for you." Sebastian said, reaching out to take her hand.

Viola frowned. "What about Yasmin? What happens to her?"

"I don't know who the fuck Yasmin is, Viola. All I know is my wife, and my family." Sebastian said, frustration barely contained in his voice. "I can't let that mermaid go. If

she goes, there's a real chance I lose not just you, but my brother too. I'm doing this for us. For our future. You have to look pass this one, love."

Viola shook her head, again and again. "We can try to find another way to cure Alex, and... and I can live without your mark, for as long as I know you'll still love me. But I can't let Ivy down again, Seb." She said, pleading. "Please..."

"You don't know what you're saying. I'm destined to a dozen possible mates, and only one of them is truly meant for me, and you're not the one, Viola. Not yet. But if I mark you and you survive it, you will be. Are you willing to let me lose that for the sake of one mermaid you don't even know?" he asked, looking down at her tear-streaked face. He hated himself for making her cry, but he saw no other path.

Sebastian was trapped in a situation he couldn't turn back from, and to save both her and his brother, he was willing to make any sacrifice in this world.

"Sebastian... don't do this. You know I love you, but we don't have to use a mermaid for this. We can—"

"We can't! I don't have much time left. Don't you understand that? I have a dozen other reasons to kill that creature!" He released her hand and dragged his fingers through his hair. "She has to die."

"We can look for another way, please..." she pleaded, forcing more tears into her eyes. She knew he hated seeing her cry. She didn't have any other way to convince him, and if it took manipulating him with her tears, then she forced herself to sob into her hands.

She was willing to work with him to find another way out of this, and if it came to Alex, she could research her abilities and see whether they could heal him. Seeing how torn he looked, she added, "Won't you do this for me? We don't have to kill her..."

"I'm sorry, my love. There is no other way. I've spent my whole life researching this, and every path leads back to sacrificing the source of my curse. Gammas!" he called out.

Three men immediately walked into the room and bowed to him.

"Escort my Luna back to my penthouse. Make sure she's comfortable, and make sure she doesn't step outside until I arrive," he ordered before turning and leaving the room without waiting for a response.

Viola, caught off guard by his orders, rushed after him, but the guards caught hold of both her arms. At that moment, Sebastian's voice rang out once more.

"Don't you dare hurt her while you take her back!"

"Sebastian!" Viola yelled, struggling against the men's grip as she realized he was confining her to his penthouse until he had finished the sacrifice. The realization stunned her, and she cursed him in fury, "You bastard! How dare you?!"

"I love you!" Sebastian called back, his voice already fading into the distance.

"Fuck you! Come back here, we are not done talking!" Viola screamed, but the men were already pulling her away. Though they weren't using force against her, she couldn't break free of their hold.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 424: Stepping into disaster[1,403 words]

Sebastian returned to where the mermaid was being held, finding his Beta and the doctor both crouched behind the pod that had carried her in, dodging the scales she was hurling at them in rage and his eyes immediately darkened at the scene.

As he approached, Matt called out,

"Seb, duck if you don't want to get hurt! She's crazy!"

Sebastian, already in a foul mood, raised his hand and suspended the sharp scales flying toward him in midair with his power, then swiped everything aside without much effort, knocking the mermaid more firmly against her bindings.

"If you don't want to die right now, you'll stop that." He warned her, a dark look in his eyes that made Yasmin reconsider attacking him further, as he could hurt and kill her with the powers he possessed. She couldn't help but wonder who among her clans he had killed to get the powers.

Her eyes darted behind him, searching for her cousin, whom she believed would come to her defense, when the cruel werewolf spoke again.

"She's not coming to your rescue. And the next time you try to call her back here, in any way, I'll make sure your death is far more painful than it needs to be." He warned, his aura bleeding into the air around them, releasing a cold, toxic chill that felt like standing in a mountain of snow.

"You are cruel," Yasmin said. "And you'll pay for this. My mate will hunt you down until he has your head," she gritted out, knowing her mate. As one of the Warriors of the Seven Seas, he would never let this go unavenged if Sebastian killed her. He would tear apart the lands and slaughter every land-dweller if that was what it took to find the werewolf responsible.

"I'll be waiting for him. And as for being cruel, I thought we'd already established that fact. It's fairly well known. So, if you know what's good for you, you'll keep your mouth shut," he said, resisting the temptation to let his temper end her life before the time was right.

Sebastian was well aware that Viola was only trying to make things right with her sister, and as much as he loved her, as much as he wanted to help her reconcile with Ivy, he had his own obligations to think about.

Mermaids were the source of his suffering every month. He despised every single one of them and had never seen them as creatures deserving of mercy. Viola had been the only exception because he loved her, an exception he had extended to her twin as well.

But no one else would receive that same privilege. As far as he was concerned, none of them had cared enough to protect Viola herself during all the years she had suffered in the Hollow. So why should he extend that same mercy to the rest of them now, when all they had ever brought into his life was misery through this damned curse?

In two days, if he didn't complete the sacrifice, Sebastian stood to lose far too much. He knew Viola would be furious with him for going through with it, but he told himself he would make it right afterward, that he would fix things between them. He would finally confess to her what the curse had truly done to him, why he needed it gone, and why he couldn't afford to let this mermaid go.

Her suggestion to search for another way might have worked, if his curse hadn't been tied up in all of it.

"Matt, I need you to double the guard outside this door, and across the entire floor. No one gets in here, not even my wife. Especially not her." He ordered, knowing full well how clever she was; she wouldn't have been his wife if she wasn't such a clever woman, and something told him she'd try to come back and free the mermaid herself.

Matt frowned. "For a moment there, I actually thought we weren't going through with this, seeing as the Supreme Luna was against it. That's the first time I've seen you not give her what she wants." He remarked, brushing himself off after diving to the floor to escape the enraged mermaid he'd provoked simply by asking what they ate in the sea. Were mermaids that short-tempered?

"I'll give her the world, anything she wants, but this..." His eyes drifted to the mermaid. "This is the only way, Matt. She'll understand, when the time comes." Saying that, he walked away from the room.

"I hope she does," Matt muttered before turning to the mermaid with a grimace look on his face.

Elsewhere in the building, Zoe was seen walking down the halls toward Viola's room, nervously fiddling with her hair, anxious, unsure whether Viola was still upset with her, unaware that her friend was currently caught in a far bigger dilemma than anything Zoe imagined.

When Zoe reached Viola's penthouse, she took a deep breath and typed in the passcode, only to be met with a red light flashing the wrong password. She tried again. Same result.

"Did she change it again?" she muttered to herself, remembering that Viola had done this once before, though she had eventually shared the new code with her.

Zoe checked her spare phone in case she had missed a message containing the updated password after her original phone had mysteriously disappeared from her room the night before. She had searched high and low for it without finding a single trace, but thankfully she always kept a second phone with everything backed up, so she hadn't lost any of her important information.

However, there was no message from Viola, and her shoulders slumped in disappointment.

She tried calling instead, but the phone rang endlessly, three times, unanswered, and she frowned. Was Vee really ignoring her completely?

Zoe hadn't been able to sleep, her mind replaying the conversation she still needed to have with Viola about what Nick had told her, though deep down, she knew Nick had been wrong to accuse her friend of pushing her brother to banish him.

She knocked on the door, but there was no reply, and eventually Zoe gave up, slowly backing away. She decided to find her brother instead and talk to him directly, but when she reached his office, one of the guards told her he'd already stepped out of the packhouse.

Zoe walked back to her apartment in High Tower, feeling as though everyone around her was suddenly disappearing without a word of explanation. What was going on?

Once inside, she texted her boyfriend and waited for a reply that never came, her shoulders sinking further. When she tried calling, his phone was unreachable too. He hadn't called or texted her at all since they'd returned from the Grim Pack.

She hated moments like this, when she couldn’t reach anyone, because they reminded her too much of the time she had lost her other brother and Sebastian had avoided her after breaking a promise he had made.

Zoe had gone through so much trauma that she had needed therapy, attending countless sessions before she finally began to feel like herself again. She had a mountain of work waiting for her at her fashion studio, which she was supposed to return to, but with everyone suddenly becoming unreachable, she doubted she would be able to get any work done without clearing any misunderstanding between her and Viola, and fixing things with Nick and her brother.

Zoe sat there, staring down at her screen, Nick’s name displayed on it, before finally tapping it and calling him, the one person who had always been there for her, more consistently, it seemed, than her own brother ever had.

Just as she’d expected, Nick picked up on the second ring.

"How did you know I was about to call you, Zoe? Perfect timing. I’ve decided when and where we’ll meet. Will you come?" He asked her.

"Sure. I don’t have anything else going on lately. Is there anything you want me to bring you on my way?" she asked, wiping the tears from the corners of her eyes, relieved that, at the very least, Nick wasn’t giving her the cold shoulder without explanation.

Unaware of it, she was walking straight into a disaster that would change the course of her life forever.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 425: Coming to a decision[1,320 words]

"How could he?" Viola repeated for the countless time that day, pacing the length of Sebastian’s living room, too angry to sit still even for a second. She couldn’t believe he would lock her up like some prisoner, posting guards to keep watch over her.

It didn’t matter whether they’d hurt her or not, she had expected better of him, and the realization disappointed her, broke something quietly in her chest that made her feel like she suddenly held nothing in his world. How could he?

She’d known she hadn’t married a saint, that the cruelty everyone whispered about him hadn’t simply vanished just because he’d fallen in love with her and sworn to be with her forever. But never in a million years had she imagined he would lock her away and stop her from saving someone who mattered so much to her sister.

Just as much as he wanted to protect his twin, she wanted the same for hers. But he hadn't understood the gravity of what killing that mermaid would cause, not just for Ivy, but for himself as well.

Yasmin's mate, as her twin had described him, was feared by many throughout the sea. He was a renowned Sea Guardian of the Seven Seas. Whatever that truly meant, Viola didn't know how powerful he was, but she knew he wasn't someone to be trifled with, and his revenge would be brutal. Sebastian hadn't even waited to hear her out about the consequences of his actions before ordering his men to lock her up here.

She marched to the door and knocked. "Tell your Alpha I need a word with him right now!" She called out to the warriors, who had been ignoring every order and command she gave, as though they couldn't even hear her, clearly determined to make it plain that Sebastian's word carried far more weight than hers.

That thought alone infuriated her further, because Sebastian himself always said she was his equal here, but it no longer looked like it.

Viola was aware her pregnancy hormones might be intensifying the emotions swirling inside her, but even accounting for that, it didn't change the fact that she was genuinely furious and wish she could punch some little sense into him, regardless of her love for him.

"I'm sorry, Supreme Luna, but the Alpha can't be disturbed right now. He's busy, and he'll see you when he sees fit," one of the warriors replied, not even bothering to reach out through the mind-link and relay her request to their Alpha. Instead, he gave her the same flat, automatic response, hoping it would be enough to stop her from banging on the door and bruising her fists before they ended up being blamed for the marks on her hands, just as Miss Hailey had once been blamed after the Luna slapped her so hard that she'd bruised her own palm.

They had been ordered not to hurt the Supreme Luna, but she was the one hurting herself by pounding on the door, and they had no doubt they would be the ones held responsible if she injured herself further. Neither of them was looking forward to that.

"I'd suggest you take a nap. Your meal will be brought to you shortly," he added.

"He'll see me when he sees fit? He actually said that?" Viola asked, disbelief coloring her voice, because she knew her husband never ignored her calls, no matter how busy he was, he always made time to hear what she had to say. But it seemed his determination to sacrifice the mermaid had blinded him entirely to everything else.

She stepped back from the door, her decision already made. He wasn't coming to hear her out, and she couldn't afford to wait for him to see her "when he saw fit", which, if she thought about it honestly, likely meant after the sacrifice was already done and nothing could be reversed. Viola refused to let that happen.

If he was sacrificing the mermaid for the sake of marking her, then Viola would give up the mark entirely, for her sister's sake and his, and instead live with whatever fate loving him brought her. As for Alex, she decided she would find another way to cure him. She had already healed Sebastian from the strange bullet Nick had used in an attempt to assassinate him. If it came to that, she could try to heal Sebastian's twin's heart with her own powers as well.

But she wouldn't stand by and let him put the entire pack's and Ivy's lives in danger without making him understand the consequences of what he was about to do, because the repercussions would be severe, and they would no doubt affect everyone involved. Rather than sit here and let him cause irreversible damage, she would rather do everything she could to stop it.

Viola might love him more than anything in the world and would gladly lay down her life for him, but this time, he was going too far. His actions would affect so many innocent people, yet he had no faith in her judgment and hadn't even given her the chance to explain.

And the way he'd simply ignored her call, dismissed her entirely, drove tiny needles straight into her heart, feeding the anger already building there.

As she walked back toward the couch, Wave plopped out of the sink drain and landed on the floor with a splash.

"Did you find her Tidekin?" Viola asked the creature, whom she'd sent back to the sea to search for a way to reach her sister through her Tidekin.

Wave shook his head. "I couldn't find it. I can't go deeper into the sea without you, or I'll get lost. I can only stay near the surface, where I keep watch on the sea witch's Tidekin and any Tidekin."

Viola rubbed the back of her aching neck. "Then we'll have to do this ourselves. We're going to release the mermaid. Is there a color of song I can sing to put werewolves to sleep?" She asked, and the creature perked up eagerly at the mention of freeing the mermaid.

"Sing in orange!" Wave announced, and Viola frowned slightly, tucking her hair back behind her ears.

"I don't know how to sing in orange. I don't even know how I managed the pink song, it just happened, on its own." She said, walking toward the door.

"Then sing anyway. Maybe this one will come to you too," Wave told her, and Viola nodded.

Viola cleared her throat and began to sing in front of the door, letting the song flow through the door toward the men standing guard outside.

But rather than achieve what she'd hoped, it only brought confused frowns to their faces, all four of them turning to glance back at the door they were guarding, wondering why their Luna was suddenly singing at them. Was she trying to charm them into compliance with her voice?

"Did it work?" Viola asked Wave once she stopped singing, and the creature said, "I'll have to go check."

Wave slipped through the small gap beneath the door, expecting to find the men fast asleep, but nearly collided with one of the warriors' legs instead and quickly slipped back inside.

"Didn't work. They're not sleeping, don't even look sleepy, Mermaidia. Maybe orange isn't inside you. Try singing in pink instead, and command them to open the door." Wave suggested again, and Viola nodded, beginning the same song she'd used the day before, before ordering,

"Open the door for me."

She waited to hear it swing open, but instead came the voice of one of the warriors.

"We can't open it, Supreme Luna. The Alpha has forbidden it."

Viola nearly yanked at her own hair in frustration as she turned to Wave. "Why isn't it working? It's the same song I sang yesterday."

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 426: Strange Dream[1,250 words]

Wave leaped away from the door and hopped onto Sebastian's couch, pacing back and forth as he said,

"Sometimes, when mermaids are too emotional or frightened, the color song doesn't work properly, just like that other mermaid in captivity. She's not singing in colors because she's too distressed by her situation, and if she does sing, the effect might reverse and— Oops, it's reversing on you, I see," Wave said, watching as Viola began to sway sleepily on her feet.

"I think something is wrong with me, Wave..." She muttered, confused.

"You sang while your heart was too overwhelmed, and now the song has reversed on you. You shouldn't have sung while you were hurting over what that monster did to you. Sing in another color quickly and fight the sleep," Wave urged, but it was already a few moments too late. The effects had taken hold of her body, and she couldn't resist them.

"Oh, great," Viola muttered, feeling her legs give way beneath her. Remembering her condition, she quickly dragged herself toward the couch and collapsed onto it, right where Wave had left it soaking wet.

She groaned.

She fell asleep before she could even scold the creature for climbing onto couches and beds, or tell him to warn her about the consequences of things beforehand.

Only, the sleep that followed was anything but peaceful. Viola found herself wandering across a vast stretch of muddy land, her bare feet sinking into shallow puddles, her legs unsteady beneath her, as though she were learning to walk again after an injury, or like a baby taking its very first steps.

The sky hung suspended between dusk and evening, the air cool around her. At first she was confused about how she'd gotten there, until she told herself she was only dreaming, and in dreams, unsteady legs and things that made no sense were perfectly normal. She looked around.

She saw houses in the distance, lamplight spilling from their windows, and she began walking toward them. The closer she got, the more she realized the houses were built of mud, their roofs thatched with hay, so different from the modern world she was used to. Laughter filled the air around them, and Viola's eyes darted warily from one direction to another.

Viola didn't understand why she was having a dream that made absolutely no sense, but she found herself drawn toward the sound of that laughter anyway.

When she arrived, she found a bonfire blazing in front of the houses, people dancing around it, men and women dressed in strange garments made from leaves and animal skins, all of them barefoot. She arched a brow in wonder as she studied them.

Some sat off to the side beating drums, while others sang as the dancers laughed and celebrated. Viola simply watched them, assuming she was invisible, since this was only a dream.

Until one man in particular, seated among those singing, spotted her and smiled.

For a moment, her breath caught in her lungs as the firelight fell across his face and she recognized him.

Her husband.

The same silver hair. The same silver eyes. Only his skin was more deeply tanned, more larger than she last remembered, no tattoo marked his body, and he wore animal skins instead of clothes.

The hide was wrapped around his hips like a skirt, secured with strips of leather. His broad, muscular torso was bare, his bronzed skin glistening as though he'd rubbed oil over it. His silver hair hung well past his neck.

This wasn't her Sebastian. She knew that much.

And yet she couldn't stop staring, because he wore her husband's exact face.

Before she realized it, he was walking toward her.

Viola didn't move, certain he would simply walk through her, or past her, since this was surely nothing more than a silly, meaningless dream. But as the man reached her, he stopped right in front of her, his beautiful smile crinkling the corners of his eyes and making her heart skip.

"We meet again," the man said, his voice deep and rich, speaking in a language Viola had never heard in her life. Yet somehow, she understood every word, and the realization sent a shock straight through her.

"What is your name?" he asked.

Viola found herself staring, mesmerized by his silver eyes and the warmth radiating from his powerful body. He had asked for her name, and she parted her lips to answer.

However, instead of her own name, another escaped her mouth, as though it had always belonged to her.

"Azmira."

Who in the name of hell was Azmira?

That wasn't her name.

Yet, in this dream, it felt as though it truly was. Her real name, Viola... Serena... both seemed to drift away into a hazy fog, leaving only the strange name echoing in her mind.

"Azmira." He said carefully, smiling and revealing his teeth.

"We celebrate the rising of the moon, and I sing to the Goddess to send you to me again, Azmira. I could never forget your eyes, not since the day I first saw you in the waters." He

said, his hand rising to tuck back her hair, which Viola belatedly realized was damp, behind her ear.

She wanted to ask what he meant, but she was too captivated by him, by how much larger he seemed here, to speak. She watched his eyes drift down over her body, where his eyes darkened, and Viola looked down to find herself, stark naked, and flushed with embarrassment.

"You wear no clothes. The Goddess sent you to me the way you came into this world, unclothed." Saying that, he removed his own covering and draped it around her, sparing her modesty at the cost of his own without hesitation.

What in the world was going on here? Viola thought, as he took her hand in his, large and warm, making her feel unexpectedly safe.

"Come, come meet my pack. I will introduce you to them." He led her into the dancing, singing crowd, and the moment they noticed their Alpha leading a woman toward them, everything stopped, every eye turning to stare.

"Ash Pack has found its Luna. The Goddess has sent me the woman of my dreams." He announced, laughter rumbling through his chest, warming something inside her as she turned to look at him.

Whatever was happening here, not everyone seemed pleased by it, some danced in celebration, while others stared at her with open displeasure.

Viola’s eyes looked around until it landed on one man in particular, whose face mirrored the one holding her hand, and she understood at once he was his twin, they looked identical, except this one carried a darker aura, one that sent a shiver down her spine and made her unable to look away.

This dream was beginning to feel far too real for her comfort, and Viola began to panic quietly inside.

The man holding her hand led her back to where he’d been sitting when she first spotted him, then announced, "I shall mark her when the moon rises to it full glory, until then she will stay with us!"

Some of the crowd cheered; others murmured amongst themselves. Viola’s eyes darted around again, frantic and confused, before she reached down to pinch herself to wake up from this stupidity, but the moment she did, blue scales rose along the back of her hand, then vanished just as quickly, freezing her in place. Mermaid scales!

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 427: What about my wife?[1,467 words]

"Where has she come from, brother? We cannot accept a stray as our Luna without first knowing her background." Came a deep, dark voice, and Viola looked up to meet the other twin’s eyes, locked onto hers as he rose and walked slowly toward her.

This one carried an even darker energy than the one standing beside her, and something about him reminded her far more of her own Sebastian than the other one.

He came to stand beside her, and she stopped breathing entirely as he leaned down, his nose grazing the side of her neck. The warmth of his breath sent a hot trail curling down her stomach as he inhaled her scent, and when his lips brushed the shell of her ear, her lower abdomen clenched.

"I remember you, little girl," he said, his voice low. "You wanted to play my brother too, hmm? What brought you here?"

Viola’s back stiffened as words of explanation rose to her throat, but she couldn’t speak. She didn’t even know what to say.

"Don’t you dare toy with my brother. I will uncover your motive for being here, and if you deceive him, I will kill you."

"Don’t frighten my woman, Vaelor. Step back!"

Viola stared at the one called Vaelor as he was shoved away from her. Looking at him, her stomach filled with a thousand fluttering butterflies, her heart skipping loudly in her chest.

"I have my eyes on you, stray," Vaelor said as he slowly stepped backward, his eyes locked onto hers in silent warning before he finally turned away and disappeared into the night.

An odd urge rose inside her to run after him and explain herself.

But explain what?

She didn’t even belong here.

Before she could make sense of those feelings, the other man had already taken her hand in his, smiling warmly into her eyes.

"Don’t let Vaelor frighten you. I will protect you and make you my Luna."

I don’t want to be your Luna. It’s not you I came here for, Viola heard the thought echo inside her mind as her gaze remained fixed on Vaelor’s retreating figure. I gave up my tail for him...

The thought startled her so violently that it seemed to tear her straight out of the dream.

She woke with a gasp, jolted by something cold splashing across her face.

Her eyes flew open to the dimly lit living room of Sebastian’s penthouse, where Wave hovered over her, his mouth already full of water and ready to spit another mouthful at her.

"Don’t you dare, Wave," she groaned, her head throbbing as though someone had struck it with a hammer. She shoved her wet hair back from her face as she slowly sat up.

"I thought you’d never wake up again, Mermaidia. You slept forever." Came the creature’s complaint, regarding her strangely, since she was frowning so deeply.

"I just had the most absurd dream of my entire life," she said, rubbing her eyes and glancing around the dark room. "How long have I been asleep?"

"Since yesterday. Tomorrow is the day your monster kills the mermaid, and we still haven’t saved her!"

•••

Sebastian’s car came to a stop in front of High Tower, and he opened the door and stepped out. His silver eyes lifted toward the almost-full moon in the sky, which would reach its glory tomorrow night, and he felt a sense of peace settle over him, knowing that by this time tomorrow, his curse would finally be over.

Rather than suffering and carrying the pain of a generational bloodline that had nothing to do with him, he could finally worry about other things during the full moons instead. Maybe he could even participate in moon festivals.

His father and forefathers had all suffered through this curse alongside their twins, but none of them had reached their thirties while still carrying it. They had either allowed the curse to take the lives of three of their Lunas and spared the fourth, or, like his

grandfather, they had used a mermaid, the main source and reason for their curse, to lift it.

Sebastian's generation had taken so long to find a way out because the curse grew worse with every generation that passed without fulfilling the prophecy. His father hadn't suffered during the full moons, but he and Alex had.

Yet it would soon be over, Sebastian thought, not just for him, but for any son he might have one day because a royal mermaid would lift two of them.

The best reward of all would be marking his mate afterwards, finally experiencing the full bliss of the bond. He had already made arrangements for a short vacation with her, a way to make up for everything he'd put her through lately, especially locking her up and staying away from her, though he'd only done it because he didn't want her talking him out of the marking, or out of curing Alex with the mermaid's heart blood.

Sebastian shut the car door just as Matt walked up beside him. "Has she reached dehydration yet?" He asked his Beta.

"She's in the process, and she is mad as hell, the entire room has been destroyed with her screams." Matt replied, falling into step behind Sebastian.

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"Which is?" Sebastian arched a brow at his Beta.

"They said the packless building their own territory shouldn't be their concern, that it's better they finally find somewhere to belong rather than causing trouble across the werewolf world at large. As long as they don't touch any of their own members, and since they consider your cousin a sensible person, they believe he deserves to be given authorization and recognition by you. Nick has already sent requests to several of them,

inviting them into his new territory, promising them advanced weapons for protection, the same kind you've refused to extend to many of them."

Sebastian stopped walking at that, his jaw tightening, his fists curling inside his pockets. He'd refused many of them the resources to build advanced weapons because he had given them chances before, chances they'd squandered by turning those very weapons against him, which was exactly why he'd taken the privilege back.

But Nick, ever the clever one, was apparently willing to hand it all over freely, turning them against Sebastian, undermining his request that they band together and bring down the packless and Nick's growing pack.

It seemed no one was seeing Nick the way Sebastian saw him, as a threat working against all of them, and Nick was making it far easier for those already looking for a reason to turn on Sebastian to finally do so.

"What about the Grim Pack? Did you send the message to Kenny?" He asked, masking his reaction to all of this, something he'd assumed he could deal with properly once Viola bore his mark and the sacrifice was over.

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Matt suggested, the most likely explanation, since the man was now essentially an ally to Silver, and as Alpha heir, he held nearly as much authority over his father's pack as his father did, authority Sebastian needed now more than ever, to help sway the packs Nick was working to turn with his ability to compel.

"I hope he doesn't go back on his word," Sebastian remarked, resuming his walk, fighting to push Nick's case out of his mind before it drove him into a rage worse than what he already felt.

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Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 427: What about my wife?[1,467 words]

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Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 428: You don’t have to apologize[1,449 words]

"You don’t actually expect her to still be asking for you, after you locked her up like a prisoner, Seb. I haven’t heard anything from the guards watching over her, but no doubt she’s furious with you." Matt said matter-of-factly, since no mate would ever be pleased about being locked away like that.

Though Matt himself was as single as anyone could be, with no time to spare for mating, no idea where in the world the Moon Goddess had hidden his own mate, or even where he’d begin looking should the right time ever come, which, honestly, he suspected might

never happen, he still knew without a doubt that the Luna would be angrier at Sebastian than she'd ever been before.

"I didn't lock her in a dungeon, but in my house, where she gets everything she wants," Sebastian said with a scowl.

"It doesn't change the fact that you locked her up. She's still going to be mad, man. And I'm telling you, angry women are not easily appeased. Once all of this is over, I hope you consider that vacation I asked you about."

At this point, Matt couldn't wait for all of it to be over, the sacrifice, Nick finally held accountable for everything he'd done so he could finally take a long, well-earned vacation from work and from the pack altogether. He pictured Mexico, exploring somewhere far from all of this, but even if he were granted that vacation right now, he wouldn't be able to take it, not while he wanted Nick brought to justice just as badly as Sebastian did, for everything Nick had done to hurt their Zoe in the past.

And Matt— "Where are you going?" Matt's thought cut off as he noticed Sebastian suddenly changing direction, veering away from the lab.

"To see my wife. I need to appease her, like you suggested," he said flatly, already walking toward his penthouse. He belatedly realized he hadn't felt anything from her since yesterday, since he'd ordered her to remain locked inside his house.

Matt followed him into the elevator, unwilling to miss the drama of the couple's reunion or see how Sebastian planned to make up for what he'd done.

However, when they arrived at the door of his penthouse, all four guards were found fast asleep on the floor, sprawled across one another. Sebastian's heart nearly stopped when he found the penthouse unlocked, the door hanging open.

For one fleeting second, he thought the worst.

His wife had been kidnapped.

He dashed inside.

Sebastian didn't need to search the place for long to know that he couldn't feel her presence anywhere in the house.

He began ordering a full search, but then he stopped when he noticed the couch was soaking wet, along with the rug beneath it. He didn't need to wonder any further. The realization of what must have happened slowly dawned on him.

"That blasted creature! Hurry, check on the mermaid!" he ordered Matt, who was still examining the sleeping men on the floor.

"Do you think she escaped to free the mermaid? You don’t think she can do that alone, do you?" Matt asked in disbelief as he got to his feet and tried to reach the guards through the mind-link, only to find it completely silent.

"I can’t reach them, Seb. It’s couldn’t be the Luna’s doing, could it?"

"She’s gotten to her, and I trust that it’s her doing. She’s going to free the goddamned creature!"

They hurried off to check on the mermaid themselves, but when they arrived, Sebastian was stunned to find all the men he’d posted there fast asleep as well, the door hanging open.

His steps came to an abrupt halt when he saw that the mermaid was gone too.

A cold sweat ran down his spine, and whatever hope he’d had of finding his wife still there before she did the unreversible for him vanished like sand in the wind.

"Viola," he gritted through his teeth.

•••

A few minutes earlier.

Viola walked down the silent hall leading to where she had last seen the mermaid after putting the men at Sebastian’s penthouse to sleep, careful not to alert the warriors. She had learned her lesson, to properly command with her song, she needed to strip every emotion and feeling from her heart, which hadn’t been so difficult after learning the mermaid was to be killed tomorrow.

Viola was still shaken by her strange dream, but she’d set it aside for now, telling herself it was nothing more than a dream that had come to her at a moment when she was already furious with her husband. None of it made sense, so she chose not to dwell on it.

She had changed into one of Sebastian’s shirts and a pair of his shorts, which wouldn’t have stayed up around her waist at all if not for the drawstring, since she had no clothes of her own in his penthouse, and doing what she was about to do required comfort above all else.

She peeked her head out from behind the pillar she was hiding behind and looked at Wave, who was staring directly at the dozens of men stationed around the mermaid.

"How many of them are there?" she asked Wave, but unfortunately, Wave didn’t understand numbers and simply held up a fistful of countless watery fingers instead, making her roll her eyes.

"Forget it. I'll just sing."

"You never taught me numbers, Mermaidia."

"I'll teach you once this is over. For now, stay quiet and let me concentrate."

With that, Viola began to sing as she stepped out of hiding, walking confidently toward the guards. Her song reached them even before she did. One by one, she watched them collapse into sleep against one another on the floor, and a feeling of satisfaction bloomed in her chest.

She hurried to the leader and searched his pockets for keys, and once she found them, Viola smiled to herself and rushed to unlock the door, pushing it open with a little difficulties from it heaviness as it was different from the advanced doors of silver.

Once inside the room, she stopped short at the sight of the mermaid, who looked weakened now, her once-radiant tail dulled to a lifeless shade of blue. Yasmin was looking at her with a faint smile on her tired, pale face.

"You sing so well, cousin..." Yasmin whispered weakly, seeing Viola only as a hazy blur, her weakened eyes unable to focus without water around them. "Not even I can sing that well. I was never gifted with the song of colors, only the scream of mermaids..."

Viola walked toward her and began working at the binds, saying apologetically, "I'm sorry, on behalf of my mate, and I hope you'll relay that to your own mate, so he won't stir up trouble here because of this."

The binds proved stubborn, so Viola allowed Wave to gnaw through part of them before tearing the rest apart with all her strength. The moment they gave way, the mermaid collapsed to the floor, weak, gasping for breath, and trembling like a fish out of water. Viola made space for Wave to drench her in water, and a little color slowly returned to her body as the water soaked into her skin.

"You don't have to apologize on behalf of your mate," Yasmin replied to her earlier words, "because he will pay for what he did, Serena... I won't let him go free," she gritted out, some of her strength finally returning to her body and giving her the energy she needed to speak.

Viola looked down at the mermaid she barely knew. If it weren't for her connection to Ivy, she wouldn't be risking Sebastian's fury over any of this. Hearing the mermaid's words, she said,

"I'm freeing you on one condition: your mate won't play any tricks. He won't come after my man or try to destroy our pack, and he won't do anything to harm my sister. If you promise me that right now, I'll take you home myself, Yasmin."

The mermaid stared at Viola in stunned disbelief at her words, before smiling bitterly. "You shouldn’t stay in their world, cousin. They’ll turn on you eventually, the same way they turned on your mother."

"I don’t have a mother," Viola said, rising to her feet and walking toward the wheeled pod, pushing it closer to the mermaid and opening it to put her inside as she knew she couldn’t carry the mermaid all the way out of here. She turned back around to help her inside when Yasmin suddenly grabbed her hand, stopping her.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 429: My home is here[1,121 words]

"You don’t know half of the things your mother went through for your sake, Serena. She suffered so much before she was killed so mercilessly by these monsters. And do you know that your so-called mate has powers that came from killing a royal mermaid? Your mother was a royal, and she—"

Viola turned to look at the mermaid, her eyes hardening with coldness. "I don’t care who she was or anything she did. She gave us away to die. I will never forgive her for it. And if I were you, I wouldn’t insinuate that my husband’s powers came from killing my mother. I could still leave you here at his mercy, and you and I both know my husband has no mercy for your kind."

Yasmin clamped her mouth shut, unsurprised by her cousin’s cold words, since she’d already been told how Serena tended to act cruel and cold on the surface, even though she carried the kindest heart underneath. However, Yasmin couldn’t see any kindness toward their kind within her. She looked too brainwashed by the creatures she’d grown up around to even consider, for a moment, that her home wasn’t here but with them in the sea.

Ivy had also warned her that Viola was stubborn, but it still hurt Yasmin to know that Viola had no idea what their mother had truly endured for their sake, how she’d been killed because of it, and that her so-called mate might well have been responsible. The killer was said to have come from Silver and had taken their mother’s heart to gain the abilities and powers that came with it.

Seeing that the mermaid wasn’t pushing the subject anymore, Viola resumed lifting her up, with Yasmin’s help, to reach the glass pod and to place her inside it.

It took so much effort to get her inside that Viola’s entire body was trembling by the end of it. The mermaid was so heavy, it was almost as though she’d soaked up water like a rag doll, making herself weigh twice as much as she looked. Viola hadn’t eaten since

yesterday, and she'd woken straight into all this stress without any rest. It was really starting to get to her, but she pushed it aside, determined to complete this task first.

Viola began pushing the pod out of the room, grateful that the wheels moved so effortlessly despite the weight inside it.

She was still trying to figure out where and how to get the mermaid out of the building unseen, when Yasmin spoke up. "I don't need a river or the sea to get home. I can call my Tidekin through any large, open body of water that isn't enclosed, and it will open a portal straight to the sea."

Viola was about to say High Tower didn't have anything like that, when she remembered the large pool Sebastian had taken her to, to learn and practice her powers, and she made her way there instead, grateful it was a deserted place at every hour of the day.

When she arrived, Viola opened the pod and turned it toward the water, to let the mermaid slip in the water. Without wasting a moment, Yasmin dove in with a loud splash, swimming happily in circles, leaping like a dolphin, diving in and out again.

Viola watched the creature until her joyful leaping slowed, her tail's shine finally restored, and she swam back toward the edge as the center of the pool began swirling in wide circles, opening a portal for her that would lead her back home to her family.

"You gave me your word your mate won't come after mine," Viola reminded her, unwilling to let any trouble fall on Sebastian because of this. She had released the mermaid to avoid anyone getting hurt but she wouldn't like the same outcome to happen even after all her efforts.

Yasmin regarded her strangely. "You don't actually think he'll let you go free after this, do you, after you saved me? You should come home with me. I can make you breathe underwater, and—"

"My home is here," Viola said with certainty, her hand coming to rest on her stomach. "I belong here, with him."

Yasmin's eyes followed Viola's hand resting on her abdomen, and she narrowed her eyes. "You're with his monster..."

Viola's eyes hardened at the word the mermaid kept using. Though she was already aware that it was what the creatures of the sea called every werewolf, she didn't like hearing it used for her unborn child, and she made that clear.

"Don't you dare use that word here again, or I will change my mind and make sure he catches you again."

Yasmin looked displeased by Viola’s threat. "Once I am in the water, he can’t catch me again. He only succeeded the first time because I was caught off guard and trying to protect Ivy."

Hearing her sister’s name, Viola’s hardened expression softened slightly. "If it’s possible, once everything has settled, can I meet Ivy?"

"I can’t promise you that. It’s no longer safe for us to come to the surface. Your monster might harm us for his own selfish use, the same way he did your mother. You are following the same fate she did, and it’s a shame you’re following it with her killer."

"He was born with those powers, mermaid," Viola gritted out, realizing that she and this particular cousin of hers were never going to grow close, become friends, or see eye to eye. "He didn’t kill any mermaid. You were supposed to be his first, and I let you go."

"Keep believing his lies, and you’ll end up just like her, Serena. I hope you come to your senses and return home. And whenever that day comes, you can always send your Tidekin to open a portal for you. Goodbye, cousin." Saying that, Yasmin dove into the swirling center of the water, and in a flash, she vanished, the water slowly settling back into stillness, as though no mermaid had ever been inside it at all.

Viola felt the tension finally ease from her shoulders, and she could breathe again at the thought that she’d saved her sister and helped her out of trouble. It felt as though a heavy burden had been lifted from her back, allowing her to breathe freely again.

But the relief was short-lived, as the atmosphere around her suddenly changed.

A cold shiver ran down her spine, making her turn around.

She froze.

Her husband stood there, watching her, his eyes the color of frost and his aura bleeding outward like flames of snow.

He was furious. And his anger was directed entirely at her.

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Viola felt her throat go dry under the way he regarded her, and then her gaze shifted to the still pool, where the mermaid had used the water as a pathway back home. Her palms grew sweaty as she struggled to find the right words to say to him. She knew how hard he

had worked to capture the mermaid, believing her heart was the key to curing his brother and breaking the curse that had kept him from marking Viola.

The silence between them became suffocating.

When she could barely breathe through it anymore, Viola took a hesitant step toward him.

"Seb, I did—"

But he stepped back.

His eyes were red-rimmed around the silver, his expression that of a man defeated, betrayed by the very person he least expected to hurt him. He turned his back on her and walked away without saying a single word.

His footsteps echoed through the silence as he disappeared into the shadowed corridor, leaving Viola standing there alone.

For the first time, the full weight of what she'd done hit her.

She had saved Yasmin. She had done what she believed was right.

But she had also taken away the one thing Sebastian had spent half his life trying to obtain. And now, she had no idea what that would mean for either of them.

"You shouldn't have done that, Supreme Luna," Matt's voice came from the side.

Viola turned toward him, belatedly realizing he'd been there the whole time too.

"He spent half his life searching for a way out of that curse. You took that possibility away from him in a single day, right after he'd finally put everything he had into it."

"But killing a living being for something like that was going too far. I only did what I believed was right," Viola said, defensively, though a thread of uncertainty had already begun creeping into her heart now.

She'd thought everything through before acting. She'd known Sebastian would be furious. She'd known freeing Yasmin might cost her his trust, his forgiveness, and most of all, the mark she'd wanted so badly, and she had told herself she would live with that, would find a way to make it right by curing his brother some other way.

But she hadn't expected him to look at her the way he just had. Still, she couldn't bring herself to regret saving a living being from a sacrifice that would bring such enormous consequences.

If she had to choose again, she would do the same thing. But that didn't mean she wasn't afraid of what came next between her and her husband, especially with the way he had looked defeated and hurt.

"The Alpha sees the world in black and white, Luna," Matt continued. "His morals aren't like yours or mine. To him, things are either bad or wrong, there's very little middle ground. And when he decides something is bad, he doesn't hesitate to act."

He paused, watching the direction Sebastian had disappeared into.

"He's been like that since we were children. He's lived his entire life by rules and consequences. And when it comes to mermaids..." Matt's expression turned defeated too. "They're not living beings to him. They're tied to the worst thing that's ever happened to him. His curse runs deeper than most people know, and from the look of things, you haven't seen the full extent of it yet, Luna. So when it comes to their kind, his hatred overrides almost everything else. He doesn't see killing one of them the way you do."

Viola swallowed. "You mean there's more to his curse than just it killing his mates?" She asked, and watched Matt nod solemnly.

"More so that it could be the undoing of his entire pack, if it isn't handled properly." Matt continued, his voice quieter now.

"What you did wasn't just stopping a sacrifice, Luna. You took away what he believed was his final escape. He spent years preparing for this. He'd convinced himself that once it was over, he would finally be free. He could live normally. He could finally mark you without wondering whether it would cost you your life."

Viola's chest tightened, but still, she couldn't see any way that sacrificing a mermaid was truly the only outcome left.

"Is there another way he could achieve the same outcome, without sacrificing a mermaid?" She asked quietly, knowing that if there were another way, she would do everything she could to help him find it, and as for what the curse had actually done to him, she resolved she would have to sit him down and hear everything from him directly. But what Matt said next made her stomach turn.

"The only way out now is either he lets three of his mates die under his mark, in order to reach the fourth, or he finds his prophesied mate, the one who could cure him of the curse, and his entire bloodline along with it. That's the only way out left now, Luna."

She stared at him, understanding immediately that neither outcome involved her staying in his life. If it came down to sacrificing three mates, and she now knew Natalie hadn't been among them, she would be the very first sacrifice. And if it came down to the prophesied mate instead, she wouldn't be in the picture there either, since the moment he

followed that path, everything in his life would resolve itself, and whatever affection he held for her now would simply die along with it.

"Are you sure there's no other way?" She asked.

Matt sighed. "I don't know of any other way, Luna. Maybe he'll find one. Maybe Gilbert will discover something else, who knows. But I know Sebastian. When he loses something he's spent his entire life fighting for, he takes it personally. Especially when the person who took it from him is someone he loves. I just hope he doesn't shut you out of his life."

Viola's heart sank.

"But killing Yasmin would have affected more than just her," she whispered. "Her mate could come after us. Her people could retaliate." Her voice faltered. "I let her go because I didn't want any of that trouble falling on him either."

"I know," Matt said. "And I'm not telling you that you were wrong to save her. I'm telling you to understand exactly what you just took from Sebastian, before you try to make him understand why you did it."

Viola lowered her gaze. That was the part she hadn't considered.

She had been thinking about Yasmin's life, and Ivy's, the danger to Silver, the consequences of killing a royal mermaid.

But what about Sebastian?

What would happen to him now?

And what exactly had she just condemned him to, by saving Yasmin?

She had believed she was choosing between a life and a mark. But it seemed bigger than that now, far bigger, because she hadn't been told the extent of his curse in the first place.

She was only beginning to realize her choice might carry consequences neither of them had been prepared for.

"Thank you, Matt. I need to see him now, and face this, before it's too late."