Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 501: Time to go[1,193 words]

Viola turned to the she-wolf. "You're leaving Silver? What... about Gilbert?" She asked, having hoped the two of them would end up together.

Laila frowned, a small glare flashing in her eyes. "What about him? There's nothing between us, and now that my uncle isn't trying to control my life anymore, I can go back to flying."

It was already becoming obvious to Laila that she wasn't meant to end up with just one man, and she had started to accept that reality. She had resolved to live with it and carry on with her life as she had been doing in the past, convincing herself that she was simply too good for one man. It was a belief she had planted firmly in her heart to help her cope with the constant rejections she had faced, starting with her uncle.

"You two still haven't talked?" Viola questioned, since from everything she'd observed of the doctor, it certainly seemed like he wanted Laila.

"There's nothing to talk about, since he doesn't want me, and I don't chase after people who don't want me. Let's not keep the men waiting any longer."

Soon they finished up and made their way downstairs to where the men were ready and waiting, though only Gilbert and Kenny were actually in the living room, since Sebastian was still busy in the kitchen making a racket opening and closing cabinets.

Before Viola could even wonder what he was up to, her husband walked over to her with a bowl of prepared oatmeal and fruit, took her hand, pulled her down to sit on the couch, and scooped up a spoonful, blowing on it before bringing it to her mouth.

"You are not skipping lunch and dinner entirely. Eat this before we leave. Once we're back, we're all having a feast, but for now you're eating for two and I don't want the baby wearing you out. There you go, open up," he coaxed, and Viola had no choice but to part her lips and take the spoonful.

As she swallowed and he brought another spoonful to her mouth, she looked into his caring eyes and felt that she couldn't wait to have that vacation with him, where she knew both their minds would be at ease and their only worry would be the little one in her womb. She took the oats, chewing and swallowing as she watched him, his face still carrying the haggard exhaustion of the past few days.

Ruling a pack this big while dealing with enemies lurking in the shadows was the kind of trouble she hadn't realized could drain a person so completely. She couldn't help but

realize how much of their lives had been consumed by chaos. They both needed a very long break after this, she thought to herself.

When Viola emptied the bowl, he reached out and caressed her cheek, his thumb running along the side of her lip as he whispered, "Try not to get hurt, okay?"

Viola nodded. "I won't. And don't get hurt either, or get shot. I can't cure you of that bullet anymore..." That was her biggest fear, for Nick was the mastermind behind the creation of those deadly bullets, and she was the only one who could remove them, but she had lost that ability now. It had been at the back of her mind this whole time, and saying it out loud only made the worry feel more real.

"That's why we have the plan," he assured her, but his words didn't ease her worry, and she pursed her lips. "Even so..."

"I will be careful, my darling. Let's go." He interlocked their fingers and stood up, pulling her up from the couch as everyone began to grab their weapons from the large box in the middle of the living room.

Sebastian handed his wife one of the snipers along with a pack of bullets. "Don't be tempted to shift into your wolf form, as we can't reveal our scent to them." He tucked two daggers into the belt of her suit, making sure she had everything she needed before his expression softened. "Keep the daggers just in case. I love you," he whispered, bending down to kiss her forehead, his lips lingering there.

Viola closed her eyes, feeling his lips against her forehead and feeling loved as she whispered back, "I love you too."

While Sebastian and Viola remained wrapped up in their moment, everyone else continued preparing for the battle, with Ken fastening his mate's bullet belt. Gilbert and Laila, however, stood awkwardly beside each other, neither seeming to know what to do. When Gilbert finally made a move as though he was about to help her with her weapons, Laila shot him a dark glare.

"Don't even think about it."

The doctor cleared his throat and pretended he was reaching for extra bullets as he said, "I wasn't about to touch you. Just reaching for more bullets." He lied through his teeth. It was time he courted his mate, but by the Moon, he had no idea how to court a bold she-wolf like Laila who had already put him on her list of discarded males and wanted nothing to do with him, for he had been a spinless person, afraid to lose his family.

Gilbert watched her fasten everything herself while the other males had done it for their women, and he looked away, tucking more bullets into his bag, just in case she would need it there.

Laila turned to look at him from the corner of her eye, noticing how he kept carrying too much and how the weapon belt around his waist wasn't fastened properly. She reached out and fastened it behind him properly to hold the weapons he carried before he got himself killed.

Did the doctor even know how to fight? She wondered as he jerked at her touch, and she told him to stay still. She'd never seen him fight before. Though he had the body for it and looked like he could strangle a person with just one hand, she hadn't seen him in action. She wondered if they should ditch him before he killed himself and put her through grief because of their bond.

"Shouldn't you be treating patients rather than going into a pack battle, Rodrigo?" Laila asked, and the doc laughed throaty at her words, turning his broad shoulder to look at her.

"Is that worry I hear, Serrano? Are you worried about me?" he teased, the thought that she was worried about him delighting and making his wolf waggle his tail.

Laila let go of his belt, rolling her eyes. "You wish. I don't want your inexperience to slow us down."

She didn't even know why she was worrying about the idiot. He would do just fine with all those bullets he had packed, as though he were going out to fight the Supernatural World War.

"Time to go!" came Sebastian's words, holding his wife's gun in one hand and her hand in the other as they all began to leave the penthouse to meet with the others outside.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 502: The prey and the predator[1,436 words]

Zoe could sense the tension in the pack before she saw anything with her own eyes, and she paced the length of her room, picking absentmindedly at her hair, anxious with the knowledge that Matt was coming tonight to bring her home.

Without a moment's peace of mind here, she hadn't been in any state to take care of herself properly, and she knew she probably looked terrible for it. But the thought that by this time tomorrow she'd be back in her own room, in her own bed, was almost enough to make her shake with relief.

Zoe had never imagined she'd miss Silver this much, or miss even the days her brother used to annoy her half to death by refusing her something. But most of all, she missed her best friend, missed the late-night conversations on their group chat, the snacks they'd share while watching movies together.

Zoe was practically giddy with excitement as she stood at the glass wall, straining to peer into the darkness for any sign of Matt and his men. Would they come for her? She hoped they wouldn't walk into Nick's trap.

The thought of Matt sent a shiver down her spine, one Zoe couldn't help but bite the inside of her cheek over, since she'd never felt quite this way about anyone before.

She remembered the little crush she'd once had on him a very long time ago, back before it faded, slowly killed off by his constant teasing and calling her a brat.

Then, during her teenage years, it was made even easier to let go when she would always find him surrounded by she-wolves, either at their houses, "trying their cooking to compete with his," as he claimed. But Zoe had always believed those were just his innocent excuses to give her whenever she found him there, because whatever else it was adults did together, she was pretty sure it involved sex and not just cooking.

Zoe had let that crush die a quiet death before it could grow into anything more, and that was around the same time he'd come back from Mexico with his mother, she'd started treating him with more distance after that, stopped going over for sleepovers and family meals, and instead worked on building her own independence.

Slowly, that crush had faded away, or had it? She wasn't entirely sure anymore, because lately, she found herself thinking about Matt more than she even thought about Gilbert. Though she scolded herself for it, she still let herself think of him, especially as she decided to break up with the doctor once she got out of this mess. After all, most of the complications in her life had started with her short-term relationship with him.

She didn't just allow the thoughts of Matt, either, she found herself reminiscing about the past, about sleeping in his bed under his blanket whenever nightmares about her parents kept her awake. Matt used to stay up telling her stories, everything from fairytales he knew she'd enjoy like Cinderella to the Sleeping Beauty, and Zoe felt a warmth pool in her stomach just remembering it.

'I want to be like Cinderella someday, Matt. But I will not forget my slippers. I will leave my picture and my address on the back so my prince can find me fast, and I won't have to wait,' little Zoe had said to the boy reading to her on the bed, where she lay on her stomach with her elbows propped up and her chin resting in her palms, her legs swinging behind her as she watched him. He had laughed, reaching over to pinch her nose.

'Silly, if that prince comes, he will have to go through me and Seb first, and if he is not qualified, he will have his butt kicked.'

Little Zoe had gasped at him. ’You can’t kick my prince! I will protect him with my wolf and bite you and hermano!’ she had declared, jumping on him and trying to bite him while he laughed and tried to get her off him.

But who would have thought she’d never have a real wolf nor her prince?

Why had she ever let that connection between them fade in the first place? Now that she was an adult, and knew Matt properly, Zoe would bet everything she had that those women he used to hang around had strictly been about food, about him wanting company for cooking, nothing more, for his dream was to be a chef.

Zoe found herself smiling, already looking forward to the meal she’d promised to treat him to, and to witnessing her friend’s pregnancy unfold so she could be an aunt. But right at that moment, a loud boom startled her out of her thoughts, and she caught a flash of orange light in the distance that looked unmistakably like fire.

Just then, the door to her room swung open, and she whirled around to find Nick standing there, smiling.

"They’re walking right into my trap, dear cousin. Your brother and that fucking Beta are here for you, I just need to get you out of here before things get more interesting." He mused, a cigarette burning between his lips. He smoked every second of the day that Zoe hadn’t seen him without it.

"What was that sound?" Zoe asked anxiously, watching the glow in the distance grow brighter.

"An explosion. And along with it go the bodies of your brother and his Beta. Come on, let’s get you out before things turn messy and their backup gets here." He took her hand and began leading her out of the room, as Nick knew he was going to kill her brother today, come hell or high water. He didn’t want her to witness it, for she liked the bastard, even as undeserving of it as he was.

Hence, to protect her from the gruesome death Nick had in store for Sebastian, he would send her out until everything was over and he was at the top of the werewolf world. Nick was a very considerate person when it came to his family, and he was very generous too, he thought, pleased with himself.

For a moment, Zoe went numb at the thought that the explosion might have hurt someone in her family, but she recovered quickly, her eyes landing on the gun tucked into his waistband. Without stopping to think about what she was doing, Zoe yanked the gun free, jerked her hand out of his grip, and held the weapon to his head.

Nick turned, his eyes falling to the gun, then flicking back to her face, and he burst out laughing. "Now, don't play with that, Zoe. It's not a toy. It's loaded, you could hurt yourself." He cautioned.

Zoe's hand trembled, but she held it steady. "Or more accurately, I could hurt you. Call off your men, call off whatever trap you've set out there, or I will shoot you, Nickolas." She kept her voice firm, refusing to let it waver.

"You'll shoot me?" Nick scoffed, as though the very idea were hilarious. "You can't even kill an ant, Zoe. You've never hurt a single living thing in your entire life. How exactly are you going to shoot me?" He taunted, utterly confident she wouldn't pull the trigger, had she been Vee, he might have been more careful.

"Even a harmless rat bites when it's cornered by a predator, Nick. To protect my people, I will shoot you." She warned, gripping the gun with both hands.

Nick spread his arms wide, nonchalant. "Go ahead, then. Shoot me. I dare you, Zoe. But know this, I won't stop the fate your brother's walking straight into."

Cold sweat broke out across Zoe's forehead, and Nick's expression only grew more smug as she hesitated. He was right, and she knew it. She had never killed a living thing in her life, never even hurt anyone. Zoe had cried when a rat in her fashion house was caught in a trap set by Nick because it had been destroying her fabrics. She'd wept so much that she hadn't been able to eat, because she felt sorry for the rat and the little babies it had left behind.

"See? You can't do it. Now hand me the gun." He held out his hand, clearly done wasting time, and not wanting her to hurt herself with it.

When she didn't move to hand it over, Nick started walking toward her, but as he closed the distance, Zoe pulled the trigger three times, and shot him.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 503: Battle by dawn[1,332 words]

Viola's heart lurched at the sound of the explosion ringing out through the air, the bright orange light illuminating the chilly night for a moment before it dimmed away, and she clutched tightly to the coat Sebastian had wrapped around her, back when they'd split up into different cars in Silver to keep her warm from the night cold.

They had journeyed for hours in the cars since they couldn't use their wolf forms, and by the time they got there, it was 2:20 a.m. The weather had grown chilly, and everything had remained silent as everyone waited for the signal. Then came the sound.

"What was that?" Tess asked worriedly, as their group all stood outside the car that had brought them, tucked between bushes where they could just make out the pack grounds ahead of them.

"Explosion," Gilbert remarked, sniffing at the air, where the smoke began to reach them under the trees. "I can smell burnt flesh. I think he's gotten Matt's group."

Viola gripped her gun tighter at the smell, her stomach turning, nausea rising in her throat, but she held it back and reached out to her husband through the mind link, who answered immediately.

"Yes, honey."

"Is Matt all right?" She asked, burying her nose against her forearm to block out the smoke thickening in the air, the explosion clearly having been a large one to reach them here.

"He's fine. It was the first car that caught fire, not his. We've lost four men. He really thought we were coming from the front and set the explosion on the path. I have to go, amor. We've found an opening. Stay alert out there," he told her, and Viola felt reassured, relieved that it hadn't reached his Beta. She cut the connection so she wouldn't distract him any further.

"They're fine," she assured the rest of the group, her breath visible in cold little clouds as she spoke, winter clearly settling in faster on this land than it did in Silver. "They've gotten inside. We need to keep watch." She pulled the coat tighter around herself.

"How about you step inside the car, Luna? It's freezing out here." Gilbert suggested, peering through his binoculars to keep an eye on the distance, since they were all wearing wolf masks to hide their scent, which left them more exposed to the cold than usual.

Viola gave him a small smile. "I'm fine here, and—" her words were cut short as the sharp crack of gunshots echoed from the distance.

"Is it starting already?" Tess asked, raising her gun and tucking away the phone she'd been using to pass the time with a game.

Laila, sprawled face-down on top of the car with a sniper rifle, looked through the scope to try to place where the gunshots had come from, but found the grounds of the new pack still eerily calm. "Everything's clear over here, that wasn't one of our people's guns. They're still creeping in." She told the rest, cold fog escaping her lips as she added,

"I can't believe we werewolves are reduced to fighting like humans. Nick, the motherfucker, fights dirty, we should be facing off in our wolf forms and biting heads off, the way it's meant to be." She clicked her tongue, then turned to look at Gilbert, who was chuckling at her words. "What's so funny, Rodrigo? I've noticed you've been laughing a

little too much tonight, care to let the rest of us in on the joke?" She glared at him from where he stood at the side of the car, binoculars still hanging around his neck, which he was supposed to keep watch with but had dropped to laugh.

Gilbert glanced up at her on top of the car. "I just find it funny how much you love a fight, especially in your wolf form. Only, if we fought in our wolf forms out here, we'd be at a serious disadvantage against all those specialized weapons Nick's got." He told her, watching her rub her hands together to generate a little warmth in her palms. He was tempted to offer his own hands to warm hers, but he wasn't quite ready to get shot with that rifle of hers for the trouble.

"Can you do me a favor, Rodrigo?" Laila asked, turning to look at him with a smile. When he nodded, flashing that same charming grin that melted every she-wolf's panties and made her own stomach dip, she felt the sudden urge to slap it right off his face. She wasn't immune to him, especially since he was her mate, but she held it in and said instead,

"Go stand somewhere else, next to the Luna. Help her relax, because she looks like she's about to faint from worrying over those gunshots." She pointed toward Viola, who was still peering through her own rifle scope, scanning the distance.

"I'm fine," Viola told the she-wolf sprawled on the car. "It's only natural to worry, when you have family out there in the middle of a battle." She turned back to her night-vision scope and soon caught sight of their men moving in, taking down targets silently in the grounds.

"We're definitely going to win this," Tess remarked, watching closely as well. "They're picking people off silently, and with their scent masked, no one can even see them coming. Guys, I just had an idea." Tess said, watching her mate use his other ability, mind control, on a few of Nick's men and she felt proud of him being the leader of the group because of his ability.

"What?" Laila asked, wiping away dew that had dripped down from the leaves above onto her face. It was damn freezing and the dew kept dropping on her! But she would rather be soak wet with it than stand with Gilbert.

"Ken and I are planning a trip to America for a Christmas concert next month. I'd like to invite you all along, if you're interested. Werewolves don't usually celebrate Christmas, but we do back home, and I'd love for you all to experience it. We've got a vacation home out there, so it would be fun to go as a group. What do you think?"

She turned to Viola, who lowered her gun slightly, a thoughtful look crossing her face.

America, Christmas celebration. She'd never been there before nor had she been where Christmas was celebrated, and Sebastian had asked her, once, to pick any country she wanted for a vacation. She also knew Zoe had always dreamed of exploring the human

world and being a part of Christmas celebration, seeing their cities and lands firsthand. A group trip didn't sound bad at all, especially given how this battle was going, they were already winning, and Nick would likely be dealt with soon enough.

Viola had a lot of unwinding left to do, to put her parents fully behind her, stop feeling guilty for not having been able to bring them back, and focus solely on motherhood now, while keeping some distance from anything the sea witch had once put a spell on until the mermaids found another way to deal with her.

Going to America didn't sound like a bad idea at all.

Viola began to part her lips to answer when a series of gunshots erupted through the dawn air, and she quickly raised her gun, looking through the scope, just as Laila had already started firing as well.

"Shit, they're closing in on our people all of a sudden!" Laila cursed, firing on the men she could see weren't theirs.

"Oh, no, I think the silence was a trap as well. Oh, he is fucking smart!" Tess remarked as Nick's men began to come out from every direction, both men and women joining the fight.

Very soon, the battle became real, with danger closing in on their men across the grounds, growls and howls echoing through the air around them.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 504: Go back to your damn family![1,132 words]

In the room where Zoe was being kept, she stared wide-eyed at Nick, whose own eyes had gone equally wide with shock, clearly not expecting her to shoot him, let alone three times. Zoe's hand trembled as she watched blood spread from his shoulder where she'd hit him. She almost threw the gun down, but held onto it when she saw the anger and disbelief burning in his eyes.

"Not you too..." Came Nick's words, thick with surprise. He'd let his guard down, certain that out of everyone, Zoe cared for him enough that she'd never, in a million years, actually pull that trigger on him.

"I warned you to stop, but you wouldn't listen." Zoe said, trying to stay brave, trying not to look at the blood soaking into his shirt. She watched his eyes turn bloodshot, tears gathering in them, and he looked at her as though he were grieving her already, right as he reached into his pocket and pulled something out.

Zoe looked down to see it was a dagger, and she took a small step back, still holding the gun trained on him.

Nick felt a pain shoot through his chest, one that had nothing to do with the bullets and everything to do with her action. How could his own dear cousin turn on him like this? Hadn't they always been on the same side?

Though the bullets burned, buried deep in his flesh, Nick had the means and the cure to remove them easily enough later. But he couldn't look past what Zoe had just done, and he couldn't let her simply walk away either, not when pulling that trigger had, in his mind, killed the Zoe he'd once known.

"I tried to give you everything, and you turned out no different from Camilla, the bitch who gave birth to me. I thought you and I, that you and I would always stand against the world together, my little sister, but you did this to me." He pointed a trembling finger at his bleeding shoulder. "Haven't I done enough for you?!" He yelled, hot tears streaking down his cheeks, as he looked destroyed.

Zoe, seeing the tears and the raw hurt in his face, felt genuinely more disturbed by it, since it seemed her cousin had truly lost all sense of where good ended and evil began. Couldn't he see the damage he'd caused in all their lives? Couldn't he see how broken he was and how he was damaging others life along with his?

"I never asked for any of this. I just want to go home." She gritted out, trembling, the sound of gunfire and chaos still ringing outside, scaring her even more.

"So you really mean to turn your back on me?" Nick said, sounding genuinely wounded as he wiped at his cheeks with the back of the hand still holding the dagger. There was something almost childlike in the hurt on his face, as though he couldn't understand how the one person he had expected to remain by his side could now look at him and choose to leave.

"You turned against us first, Nickolas. You're no longer yourself. You are hurting everyone and yourself. Can't you see I don't want to stay here?" she questioned softly.

"Fine," Nick said, nodding his head slowly. For a moment, he looked as though her words had finally reached somewhere inside him, as though he had suddenly understood something he had been too blinded by his plans to see before.

"I'll let you go, and I'll never think of you as my dear cousin again. Go on, go back to your damn family. You all deserve each other." He gestured toward the door, watching her, with eyes that looked like that of a wolf.

Zoe glanced at the open door, then back at him, and swallowed hard. He was letting her go, and though he'd done far worse than what a few bullets could ever repay, Zoe knew

she wasn’t the one meant to deliver that justice. Still holding the gun up in her own defense, she began backing toward the door.

She kept walking backward, eyes locked on him the whole way, until she’d cleared the doorway entirely. Then, on second thought, she locked the door behind her from the outside and broke into a run down the hallway.

Zoe felt her heart leaping with relief of being free and she knew once she stepped out, she would find someone from their pack and escape this nightmare. She couldn’t wait.

But Zoe hadn’t managed more than ten running steps before she stopped, not by her own will, but by the force of something piercing into her back that stole the strength from her legs.

At first, all she felt was a strange, warm wetness, and when she reached back to touch it, her fingers found the hilt of a dagger buried in her back.

"You don’t actually think I’d let you go that easily, do you?" Came Nick’s voice, as he stepped out through the door she’d locked, having used his powers to unlock it from the other side.

One thing Nick had realized he enjoyed lately was the chase of a prey, and by shooting him, Zoe had become nothing more than another prey he wanted to give a taste of her own medicine. He liked giving people hope before taking it away, just as they had given him hope that he had a family and someone who cared about him, only to take it all back and hurt him in the worst way possible.

Zoe didn’t stop moving, even as the intense pain shot through her spin, knowing stopping might be the end. She kept walking, refusing to turn back, wanting nothing more than to get home. She just had to walk outside and that was all...

But then she felt him behind her, his hands closing around her shoulders, yanking the dagger free from her back, and before she could even process it, he drove it into her stomach repeatedly, the wet, sickening sound of flesh tearing filling the space between them.

"Taste what betrayal feels like, bitch. You think you can just abandon me? I’ll kill you first," he gritted out, stabbing her again and again.

Zoe’s fingers curled into fists against his shirt, her gray eyes locked deep into his as he drove the dagger into her one final time. He then pulled it free and shoved her away from him, sending her falling down the staircase.

Zoe felt the world tilting around her as she hit the steps, rolling down them with enough force to knock what little breath she had left from her lungs, until she finally landed on the stair landing, blood quickly pooling up.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 505: Stop talking![1,213 words]

In the trees where the Luna's group had taken position, bullets kept flying, everyone shooting from a distance and reloading with the kind of speed only skilled hands could manage. Through it all, Laila was struggling to reload, her spare bullet pack tumbling off the top of the car onto the ground.

Gilbert, still firing alongside the men stationed with them, heard her curse under her breath and hurried over, digging through his backpack to pull out a bullet pack for her. He handed her his own loaded gun and took hers, reloading it for her with quick, practiced hands.

"I've got you." Came his words.

Laila found herself staring at the doctor for a moment, watching his fingers move fast and sure with the reload, she'd assumed he'd be clueless about all this, someone likely to get himself killed here. Instead, his hands were long-fingered, the veins along the back tracing a pattern like something carved deliberately by an artist, beautiful manly hands.

Laila's mind had nearly wandered too far at the sight of his hands and what else he could do with them when she suddenly heard Viola scream, "No!"—and then bolted into a dead run toward the pack grounds.

Laila snapped out of it immediately, turning to see the Luna sprinting straight toward the direction they'd all been told to avoid. She frowned deeply as she jumped down off the car, calling to Tess, "What the hell is wrong with her? Where is she going?"

"I don't know, she was just looking through her scope, not even shooting, and then she took off. Should we go after her?" Tess asked worriedly, already reloading her gun, and Laila answered,

"Hell yes, let's go, before she gets caught in that chaos and the Alpha takes our heads for not keeping her here."

The two women broke into a run after the Luna, and Gilbert catching sight of it, had no way to stop them as they ran with speed past him. Realizing their plan to stay hidden was already ruined and as he had been assigned a leader, he had little choice but to follow, shouting orders to the warriors nearby to cover them.

Laila, running at full speed, quickly caught up to Viola, grabbing her hand, though Viola fought to pull free, crying, "He's going to kill her, Laila, we have to get to her!"

"Who?" Laila asked, keeping a firm grip on her hand. By then the rest had caught up too, and Viola, frantic, turned to face all three of them, speaking fast.

"There's no time, let's just go, I'll explain on the way." She said, already breaking back into a run as she explained, "I was looking through the scope at the building grounds, trying to spot where Zoe might be, and I caught sight of her running down a hallway. Before I could even say anything, Nick was right behind her, he threw a dagger at her." She said anguishly, hoping the dagger hadn't met.

Viola had only meant to scout the building so she could help lead Sebastian to his sister faster, never imagining she'd witness Nick throwing a dagger at her instead. Unable to hold herself back, she was already running toward the building.

Hearing this, the rest of them picked up their pace immediately, and within moments they were inside the pack grounds, gunfire roaring around them like thunder, with cloud of smoke and dust.

As if by instinct, the three of them fell into formation around Viola, covering her from every side as they ran, shooting down anyone who tried to stop or target them.

Everyone's breath was a cloud in the cold air as they ran.

A bullet struck the ground right at Viola's feet, but she barely registered it, sprinting into the building with the others close behind.

The lobby stood empty, flickering fluorescent lights buzzing overhead, and they fanned out, scanning the space for Zoe.

"Where did you see her?" Gilbert asked with his gun raised, and Viola calculated the direction from where she'd spotted her, quickly leading them toward the staircase heading up.

Gilbert took point, walking ahead, gun raised, letting the women fall in behind him, but being in front meant he was the first to see her, well before the rest, and he came to a dead stop as he almost stepped on her.

He froze in horror.

(Music recommendation: Me Before You Orchestral by Craig Armstrong.)

Viola came up right behind him, wondering why he'd frozen, but the moment she saw what had stopped him, her own feet stopped dead, alongside his.

Every drop of blood drained from her face, her gun slipping from her fingers at the sight of her best friend lying in a pool of her own blood. Within seconds, Viola dropped to her knees on the stair landing, where Zoe lay, and checked her pulse with a shaky hand.

She found a faint pulse, and Zoe's glossy eyes opened at her touch, her chest heaving with shallow breaths.

"Zoe...!" Viola called out, trembling, staring at her friend's torn stomach, the skin split open grousomely, her insides no longer contained and spiling out.

She watched as Zoe's barely-open eyes slowly turned toward her.

Zoe had tried to move and get out, but her body had failed her, and she had thought she would die alone without ever seeing any of these people, her best friend and friends, again. But seeing Viola through her blurry eyes, she felt relieved and grateful.

"She's alive, Gilbert. Please, help me lift her, sh-she's bleeding too much. We need to get her somewhere you can treat her." Viola said, panic rising in her voice as she tried to pull Gilbert down beside her, but the doctor remained frozen, unmoving, and Viola's frustration boiled over.

"Forget it, I'll carry her myself. Laila, get the first-aid kit, so he can treat her." Viola ordered, reaching out to lift Zoe herself, but Zoe's weak hand caught hers, gripping tight, stopping her from moving her as Zoe felt the intense pain might take her away faster from them.

"Pain..." Came Zoe's hoarse, weak voice, a tear sliding down her cheek. "Don't... Vee..."

Zoe could barely feel anything past the pain consuming her whole body, and she wasn't sure she could survive being moved, could already feel her own breath slipping further away with every passing second.

Viola, who until this moment had expected not even once that when they found Zoe it would be in this condition, refused to not try to do something to at least safe her.

"Let me lift you up, please, just hold on, I'll get you somewhere safe." Viola said, her voice cracking, but Zoe only smiled, blood smearing across her lips.

"Forgive me...Vee. I... Don't want to die...but I think... It's too late..." Came her weak voice, her eyes finding her sister-in-law's, who was already shaking her head, over and over. "It's okay... I'm okay, I'm not scared of dying, Vee... Don't cry."

"Stop talking, Zoe! Stop it, just stop! Please! Gilbert, don't just stand there staring, do something, you're a damn doctor, you can save her!" Viola cried out, yelling at the doctor still frozen where he stood, like he was also giving up.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 506: What happened to her?![1,041 words]

(Music recommendation: Glasgow Love Theme by Craig Armstrong.)

Gilbert didn’t need to examine her closely to know there was no treating damage like this, not without a wolf’s healing to draw on to close those gaping holes in her stomach, but he still dropped to his knees beside her, taking the hand she reached out toward him.

"I’m sorry..." Gilbert said quietly. "I’m so sorry."

Zoe smiled at him through more tears, knowing what he was apologizing for. "It’s okay... no apologies needed. We...were never meant to be, and... I’m sorry, for pushing myself on you..." With those words came a fresh wave of blood from her mouth, choking off whatever else she might have said.

"Zoe, don’t go, please. Don’t, we still have so many plans together, remember? You... you wanted nieces and nephews, and y-you wanted to see them grow up. You have to live to see them, you have to hold on." Viola pleaded and then she turned toward the two she-wolves standing behind her, tears streaming down their own faces as though everyone was accepting there was nothing to be done to save her.

Viola wouldn’t give up on Zoe for as long as she had breath in her, and she would try every last method, even if it meant giving half of herself.

"Someone get me water!"

Laila ran off and returned moments later with a bottle of water, and Viola took it with shaking hands.

"Let me see what I can do." She uncapped it, pressing her hand over the wound, hoping, willing herself to still have some trace of her old ability left. But nothing happened, no matter how hard she tried and tried, until finally she broke down and hurled the bottle against the wall.

"There has to be some way to heal her, there has to be..."

"Vee... Stop..." Zoe said, her fingers tightening weakly around Viola's, and then Viola's eyes suddenly widened with a flash of inspiration.

"We need to get her to the nearest body of water, my sister can cure her! Gilbert, carry her, now!" Viola gave the doctor a shove, and hearing her words, he immediately gathered Zoe into his arms.

Zoe cried out in pain, more blood pouring from her, dripping down over Gilbert's arms.

"Hold on a little more, Zoe. Hold on." Gilbert said.

"Laila, go get the car ready before we come out, hurry!" Viola ordered, snatching her gun back up off the floor and running after Gilbert.

The moment they stepped outside, they ran straight into Matt and his men, who were about to enter the building, with Sebastian right behind them, still firing. But at the sight of them, everyone turned, surprised, as they had expected them to be farther away. Their eyes landed on Zoe, and a fresh look of terror came over both men's faces.

"What happened to her?" Matt demanded, hurrying toward her in Gilbert's arms, her eyes closed and blood dripping. Matt felt his heart fall into his stomach at the sight.

"We need to get her to the sea, there's no time to explain!" Viola shouted, and as if on cue, the whole group closed ranks around them, covering their retreat with gunfire as Laila sped the car over to meet them.

Matt opened the door and helped Gilbert in before getting into the front passenger seat. Zoe's blood had smeared across his hand, and he stared at it, his fingers trembling as a cold fear settled in his chest. His heart pounded as he turned to look at her.

Don't let her die, dear Moon Goddess.

Through it all, Viola caught sight of Sebastian's horror-struck face as he moved toward his sister, but Zoe was already loaded into the car. Viola climbed in, and Tess closed the door before Sebastian could get any closer. The car sped away, taking them toward the sea.

In no time, Sebastian shifted and was chasing after the car.

•••

The car sped through the dark roads leading away from Nick's territory, the sound of gunfire fading behind them, replaced by the frantic thud of the engine and Zoe's shallow, wet breathing.

Gilbert held her against his chest in the back seat, his hands pressed hard over the worst of the wounds, though even he knew, deep down, that pressure alone wouldn’t be enough. Still, he did the best he could to keep her steady, refusing to let his hands falter.

Viola sat pressed against her other side, one hand gripping Zoe’s cold fingers, the other cupping the side of her face, trying to keep her eyes open, trying to keep her here, since it seemed she could barely fight anymore with the amount of blood she’d already lost.

Though Viola had surely lost her own ability to heal, her sister still had it, and she was certain that if they reached her in time, Ivy could heal Zoe, and everything would be fine again. Viola swore to herself that once this was over, she’d keep Zoe closer, in the High Tower with the rest of them, rather than letting her live alone out at her fashion house ever again.

"Stay with me, Zoe. Stay with me, okay? We’re almost there," Viola said, her voice cracking, though she fought to keep it steady, refusing to let fear seep into it just yet.

Before she’d ever received kindness from anyone else in Silver, Zoe had been the very first she-wolf to stand by her side, the first to truly be there for her. She had come to mean so much more to Viola than just a friend, and the thought of losing her now felt unthinkable, impossible to hold in her mind for more than a second at a time.

In the front, Matt had twisted around in the passenger seat, one hand braced against the headrest, his face pale and drawn as he stared at the woman he’d sped through hell to reach, the woman he’d promised, only hours earlier, would be home by tomorrow, and now she was bleeding out in front of him.

His jaw worked, his throat bobbing, but no words came out of him, because there was nothing he could say that would fix any of this.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 507: Never would again[1,391 words]

(Music recommendation: Hotel Sayre by Craig Armstrong, Lana Del Rey.)

"Laila, faster!" Viola shouted, and Laila’s foot pressed harder against the pedal, the car lurching forward, weaving between the dark trees crowding the narrow road.

"We’re almost to the coast, Vee, just hold on!" Laila called back, her own voice shaking despite the steadiness she tried to force into it. She’d never watched anyone close to her

die, had never experienced horror quite like this, and she poured everything she had left into driving, as though speed alone could outrun what was happening in the back seat.

Viola looked down at Zoe's face, at the way her eyelids kept fluttering, fighting to stay open, and something clawed its way up Viola's throat.

She reached for the dagger Sebastian had tucked into her belt, her fingers finding the hilt and pulling it free. Sebastian had told her once that she didn't yet know everything she was capable of, maybe, Viola thought desperately, her blood still carried some trace of healing in it, even now.

"Hold still, Zoe, I'm going to try something." She dragged the blade across her own palm, hissing at the sting, blood welling up dark and fast.

"Luna, what are you—" Gilbert started, but Viola had already brought her palm to Zoe's mouth, tipping her blood past her lips.

The blood slid across her pale lips, and Zoe tried her best to swallow as much of it as she could.

For one terrible second, nothing happened, as she took the blood in.

Then Zoe's body convulsed, and she coughed, bringing up more blood than before, hers and Viola's mixed together, spilling from the corner of her mouth and onto Gilbert's shirt. She turned her face weakly away, refusing more of it, refusing to let Viola keep pouring herself uselessly into her.

"No... Vee... stop..." Zoe managed, her voice barely more than a whisper now, thinner than it had been even minutes before. "It's... not... working..."

Viola's hand fell away, her own blood still smeared across her palm, and something inside her chest cracked wide open.

"That's fine, my sister will know what to do. We're almost to the water, Zoe, my sister will heal you the second we get there, I promise you, just hold on a little longer, please."

She said it like a vow, as though if she said it with enough conviction, the universe would have no choice but to obey her and hold on to Zoe's life.

Zoe's lips curved, faint and trembling, into something that was almost a smile. "You have to always... take care of... yourself, Vee... I will miss... you so much... I feel honored to... have known you."

"Shh, don't talk, Zoe. Save that energy. You won't have to miss me, because I will be here with you." Viola brushed damp hair back from Zoe's forehead, her own tears falling freely now, dripping onto Zoe's pale skin, unable to hold them back any longer.

"You’re going to see my pup, Zoe. You’re going to hold them, and spoil them, and make them a whole wardrobe before they’re even born, remember? You promised me that."

Zoe’s eyes, half-lidded and glassy, drifted toward her, something soft moving behind the pain.

"I want... to see that..." she whispered. "And Seb... as a father..." A weak, wet laugh escaped her, more breath than sound. "He’ll be... so good at it... he already... raised me... when he was still just... a boy himself... tell him that... I’m sorry, and that... I still love him, no matter what..."

Her eyes fluttered, closing for a beat too long, and Viola’s heart lurched into her throat.

"Zoe. Zoe, look at me, stay with me, keep your eyes open." She squeezed her hand hard, and slowly, painfully, Zoe’s eyes opened again, though they seemed to struggle to find her, drifting and unfocused, before settling somewhere just past Viola’s shoulder.

"I’m... trying..." Zoe murmured. "It’s getting... hard to see you... everything’s... Fading... blurry..."

Matt made a sound from the front seat, something raw and broken, and turned his face away, his hand fisting hard against the seat, unable to watch her anymore, unable to bear hearing anything else she had to say.

"You’re doing so well, we’re so close, Zoe, I can smell the sea, can you smell it?" Viola lied, or maybe she believed it, she couldn’t tell anymore where the desperate hope ended and the truth began.

Zoe’s breathing had gone shallow and uneven, coming in small, fluttering gasps, each one seeming to cost her more than the last. Her fingers, still laced with Viola’s, had gone slack, no longer able to hold on with any real strength, and Viola tightened her own grip instead, refusing to let the connection break.

"Vee..." Zoe whispered, so faint now that Viola had to lean down to catch it. "Will you... sing for me?"

The request landed like a blow. Viola’s throat closed around a sob, but she swallowed it down, nodding fiercely. "Yes. Yes, of course, anything, whatever you want. I’ll sing for you a thousand times, if you just hold on."

She searched her memory frantically for something to sing, belatedly realizing she couldn’t recall a single song, until one simple tune finally surfaced, and it felt right for the moment.

"Don’t close your eyes, my dear one, I will give you my all..." Viola sang, her voice trembling and cracking on nearly every note, but she pushed through it, because Zoe was

still watching her, a faint smile on her lips, still fighting to keep her eyes open a little longer.

"The stars are too beautiful to be watched with closed eyes, don't sleep, watch them with me. You are not alone, I will hold you close, until you're finally home..."

Zoe's lips parted, and her chest rose in a long, shuddering breath, her eyes locked onto Viola's face with a softness that had nothing to do with pain anymore.

"That's... pretty..." she breathed, her voice barely there at all now, and her eyes began to drift, unfocused, toward the car's ceiling, toward something Viola couldn't see.

"Don't look away from me, Zoe, look at me, please," Viola begged, but Zoe's gaze had already gone distant, glassy, fixed somewhere beyond the both of them.

The world had gone strange and slow for Zoe, colors bleeding into one another at the edges of her vision, Viola's face swimming in and out of focus like something viewed through water.

She could still hear the song, though it had grown impossibly far away, as if Viola were singing to her from the other end of a long, dark hallway, the notes stretching and warping, softening into something warm and formless, and Zoe wanted to hold on to the sound for as long as she possibly could.

She thought of her family and friends, and Zoe wanted so badly to hold on and stay with them. She thought of Matt's arms around her as a child, of bedtime stories about glass slippers and princes, of the meal she'd never gotten to treat him to, and now, maybe, never would.

Of the nieces and nephews she would never get to see and hold, and Zoe felt her throat close around the thought. Something in her ached at that, one final, soft ache beneath all the others. I want to be here. She thought.

"Matt... I'm sorry... I love you all..." She whispered, her voice barely a breath, staring up at the car ceiling as it blurred further away, a tear sliding down her cheek as she heard Matt break into anguished sobs.

The song kept playing somewhere very far away, and Zoe let herself follow it, let the last of the warmth in Viola's hand and the fading, muffled sound of her voice pull her gently toward the dark, until even that, at last, faded into nothing at all, and she was slowly, quietly gone.

Viola's voice cracked on the final note as she felt Zoe's hand go still and cold beneath her own, and the silence that followed was worse than any sound the car had carried since they'd left Nick's pack behind.

"Zoe?" Viola whispered, staring down at Zoe's wide, lifeless eyes, still fixed on the ceiling. "Zoe, look at me. Zoe!"

But Zoe didn't answer, and she never would again.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 508: The prayers of a brother[1,634 words]

(Music Recommendation: Resurgam by Anne Dudley, The Chamber Orchestra Of London.)

The mighty silver-colored wolf ran harder than he had ever run in his life, faster even than the day he'd first taken his wolf form, faster than any leaping trace he'd ever mastered, his lungs burning, his paws striking the ground with force, but none of it registered against the singular thought driving him forward; nothing must happen to his little sister, and he had to get to her.

As Sebastian ran after the car, toward the coastline where the water connected to the sea, memories of his little sister began to surface behind his eyes, her laughter as a little girl, and how no matter how much life beat her down, Zoe always rose back up smiling, staying kind even to the worst kind of person, someone who didn't deserve her kindness at all.

He remembered once, when she was a teenager, she had witnessed a man being tied up for execution, and she'd come to him afterward with tears in her eyes, begging for forgiveness on the man's behalf.

'Hermano, that man could have a family depending on him. What will happen to them if you kill him?' She'd held his hand, pleading.

'He has no family, and he's been working against Silver, spying on us. So don't cry to me about letting him go, criminals like him are bound to die that way. You don't have to watch it happen, if you can't stand it.' Sebastian had said, his eyes cold and strict as always, even though his heart was softened toward her, since he never liked seeing his little sister hold tears In those eyes of hers.

'You don't have to kill him, you know. You could give him a second chance, let him join your men instead. He looks so young, he could still have a whole family someday. I heard Father used to give criminals second chances, do it Dad's way. Sometimes killing isn't always the answer to things, hermano, please.'

Sebastian remembered how, even though he'd wanted nothing more than to see the criminal dead, he'd given the man a second chance, because of Zoe and her tears. And true to her words, the man had turned his life around, now mated in Silver with a child of his own and was one of the best warriors.

His little sister was so much like their mother. She always reminded him painfully of her sometimes, with that same kind heart, and that was one of the reasons, among all the others, why he had to act like his sister didn't mean so much to him in public, to avoid her being targeted by his enemies with her kind heart.

Sebastian had put distance between them because of it, worried he'd be the reason she would be hurt again after the time she had taken a bullet for him. She made him rule in a softer way, one he didn't like. Zoe was an angel who deserved more than he had given her as a brother.

He was the one who had created that distance between them, but now, running toward the car carrying her, he made himself a vow: if she survived, he would become the best brother he was capable of being. He would give her all the attention she deserved.

He would bring back her favorite brother, Alex, and let her have her way in everything. Sebastian vowed he would stop executing criminals altogether and give them second chances, the way his father used to. He would finally take her to Paris, the way she'd been begging him to for years.

He would...

By the time he broke through the last stretch of trees, the car had already come to a stop at the edge of the coast, morning light just beginning to bleed pale gold across the horizon, gilding the water in a way that would have been beautiful on any other day.

He stopped a short distance away, his chest heaving, and watched as the car doors opened, his heart hammering up into his wolf's throat.

'Muffin, will my sister survive? Will she be okay?' Sebastian asked his wolf desperately, unable to move any closer or check for himself. For the first time in longer than he could remember, he was afraid of what he might see. She had looked to be in terrible condition, her stomach torn open by stab wounds.

Muffin stayed silent, his eyes trained just as intently on the car.

He watched Gilbert climb out first, carrying Zoe in his arms, wrapped in fabric soaked through with blood that used to be her dress, her silver hair hanging limp over the crook of his elbow.

He watched Viola stumble out after them, her face a mask of raw devastation, tears cutting clean lines through the dirt and blood on her cheeks, her hands shaking as she reached out toward her friend's still body.

He watched Matt, who never cried, whom Sebastian had only ever seen shed tears twice in his entire life, both times when they were still boys, drop to his knees in the sand, his shoulders shaking violently, silent sobs wracking through him.

And Sebastian understood, in that single frozen moment, exactly what he was looking at.

His heart dropped straight into his stomach. The world seemed to shut down around him for a moment, and he stood there staring without really seeing anything at all, and just as the realization settled fully inside him, something in his chest went very, very quiet.

She's gone...

His little sister, his last remaining connection to what he and his parents had once had together, was gone.

'Hermano, are Mom and Dad now stars in the sky?' His little sister's voice came to him, a memory from when she was eight.

'I don't know,' he had replied nonchalantly, looking up at the sky beside her, where she'd come to sit next to him on the terrace. His words made her frown in displeasure.

'Why can't you ever be like Matty? You always say you don't know.'

'Matt's too sentimental for me to be anything like him, little girl. If you want to hear about the late Alpha and Luna becoming stars, go ask him. Stars are nothing but enormous, glowing balls of extremely hot plasma, mostly made of hydrogen and helium.'

Zoe had looked so hurt at his words that her lips began to tremble. 'So Mom and Dad's spirits aren't watching over us? And when I die someday, I won't get to become my favorite star, beside them...'

Sebastian hadn't meant to shatter her little belief like that, and before he could find a way to fix it, his sister had already run off crying. Within moments, Matt came storming back, carrying her in his arms, and slapped Sebastian at the back of the head as he sat there, earning himself a heated glare in return.

'You should write a book on the single best way to break a girl's whole world, man. Why the hell would you say something like that to her?' Matt glared right back, when it came to Sebastian's little sister, he was never afraid to stand up to his friend, or throw hands if it came to it.

’And you should write one about being delusional. You’re filling her head with lies that’ll grow her into a woman full of unrealistic beliefs.’ Sebastian had shot back, though his eyes stayed fixed on his sister’s trembling shoulders, pressed against Matt’s seventeen-year-old chest.

’At least she’ll grow up happy, instead of bitter like her brother. Are you going to rewire that mindset of yours and apologize, or what?’ Matt asked, handing him his crying sister, her eyes now red and swollen.

Sebastian took her into his arms, pulling her against his nineteen-year-old chest, and cleared his throat. ’I was only joking, Zoe. Mom and Dad watch over us always, and they’ll always love you. Now stop crying, because Matt’s right about one thing, people turn to stars after they leave this world.’ he said the words glaring at Matt who nodded in satisfaction.

She stopped crying and lifted her head to look at his face, wiping her nose against his shirt as she said, ’You... you shouldn’t joke like that again, hermano. Mom will be sad that you said she’s not watching over us. You should apologize to Mom.’

Sebastian kept glaring at Matt, who glared right back and jerked his head toward the stars, and after making him apologize properly to the sky, Zoe had smiled and announced to them both,

’I can’t wait to die, so I can be a star and be with Mom and Dad!’

’Absolutely not,’ Matt was quick to say. ’You are not dying, not for a very long time, you will grow as old as Elder Ysara. You’re staying here longer than any of us, if anyone’s dying first, it’s going to be us, because for as long as we live, we’re going to be your heroes, and we’re going to keep you alive. Right, Seb?’

’Right. Matt is right again. No talking about death, young lady or you will upset mom.’

Zoe’s little face took on a look of understanding as she nodded. ’Then I will never die if it will upset Mom. I will stay forever with hermano Alex, you, and Matty. Will you give me a piggyback ride to get ice cream, hermano?’

’I will lose respect if people see me piggybacking you,’ Sebastian had complained, but in the end, he had carried her on his back, running as she laughed, while Matt chased them toward where Alex was.

Sebastian came back to the present, feeling as though his soul had left his body entirely.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 509: Cure her[1,172 words]

Viola, on the other hand, held on to a firm resolve in her heart, even though she'd just watched Zoe die right there in the car. She still believed, deep down, that it wasn't over, that she still had a mermaid sister who might be able to do something. While the others had already given up, and Matt's anguished crying carried on somewhere in the background, she dropped down out of the car and walked straight into the water, where the waves crashed against the shore.

Once she stood knee-deep in the water, Viola cupped her hands around her mouth and called for Ivy as loud as she could, since she no longer had any connection to the water to summon them any other way.

It took more than ten minutes of calling before the surface of the early morning water, lit gold by the rising sun, finally broke, and three heads emerged from beneath it, her sister at the front, a deep frown already set across her face.

"Ivy, I need your help, urgently, come see, I need you to bring my friend back, she's... she's in a very bad state." Viola grabbed her sister's hand as she swam up toward the shore where she stood.

Ivy, who'd heard Viola calling from far below in the sea and had already been anticipating seeing her sister, hadn't expected to surface and find her looking so devastated, or the rest of them standing back, all looking at her with something desperate that could only be called hope.

Ivy's eyes fell on the blood-covered she-wolf still cradled in Gilbert's arms, and she swam the rest of the way onto the sand, where Gilbert laid Zoe down gently before her. Aunt Natasha and Yasmin came up beside her too, looking down at the body, the damage to her stomach plainly visible.

Ivy pressed her hand beneath Zoe's nose, examining her, while the other werewolves crowded closer around them, watching.

"She's dead..." Ivy announced, looking up at her sister, who was biting down so hard on her fingers they'd begun to bleed, though she seemed not to notice or care.

"I know, she... she died in the car, but surely you can heal her, bring her back, right?" Viola asked, hope still clinging to her voice as she knelt beside them, holding Zoe's cold hand as accepting her death was almost unimaginable to Viola, who had been there in her last moment and also knew all the dreams of life this shewolf wanted to live.

Ivy's eyes turned sorrowful at the loss of the she-wolf as she answered, "That's not within my power, Serena. If it were, I would have brought back countless people by now. I can only heal wounds and injuries, you brought her to me too late. I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do."

It was then that the full weight of it finally hit Viola, straight to the gut, and she collapsed onto the sand, pulling her knees to her chest, sobbing. "W-we sped all the way here... I-I thought we could save her, I thought..." She broke down completely, unable to hold herself together any longer, unable to even look at Zoe's body.

Ivy dragged herself across the sand until she could pull her sister into her arms to comfort her. "Shh, you tried everything you could, Serena. I'm so sorry for your loss."

Everyone remained there, grieving in their own way, though Sebastian had already slipped away from the scene. Matt had cried himself into silence, staring blankly out at the waves. Gilbert sat in the sand, staring down at the blood covering his own body, his fingers trembling. Laila stood leaning against the car, arms wrapped around herself, her eyes glossy and fixed on the body that would now forever become a nightmare to her and everyone.

The two mermaids remained in the water, and the other woman stayed wrapped in her sister's arms, having stopped crying now, staring blankly off into nothing.

"Nick killed her," Viola said, a bitter, ironic smile pulling at her lips. "She loved him more than almost anyone, stood up for him, and he killed her anyway. Heartlessly. Just like he killed our mother. He's a monster...a monster." She whispered, her fingers curling into fists against the sand.

Her words carried to Natasha, still in the water. "You found your mother's killer?" She questioned, and Viola turned to her, nodding.

"Nickolas Kade. That's his name. And today he's done even more. I will kill him in the worst way anyone could possibly die." Viola vowed, wiping the tears from her face, watching as pure hatred settled into her aunt's eyes now that her sister's killer finally had a name.

"We will find him for you, Serena, wherever he's hiding," her aunt promised, and Viola nodded, knowing full well Nick wouldn't dare stay in that pack after what he'd done, and that he'd already gone into hiding.

Her eyes went to Zoe, and Viola felt like her heart would rip out of her chest. Tears choked her throat and burned the backs of her eyes. She looked away.

"We can't stay here much longer. People will start passing along the bridge soon, and someone might see us." Said Yasmin, since the sky had already brightened fully into morning, and none of the werewolves looked ready yet to leave or bury the girl they'd lost.

Ivy turned to their aunt and said, "Maybe I should stay behind with her. You two can go ahead. I'll use the abilities you taught me to shift my tail into legs and go back with them."

Viola didn't look well, even though she'd stopped crying outright, pain and hatred both lived plainly in her eyes now, and she was clearly going to need support, especially since this loss wasn't only hers to carry, but her husband's as well. Ivy couldn't help but worry, with two people grieving at once, there'd be no one left steady enough to look after either of them, and her sister was still pregnant, something that needed remembering even now.

But before their aunt could respond, Viola reached out and grabbed her hand. "I need you to do something for me first, before you come with us."

Ivy frowned. "What?"

Viola's eyes finally settled on Zoe's body, and she felt her heart tear apart at the sight of it all over again. She crawled toward her, pulling off the coat Sebastian had wrapped around her the night before, and began draping it gently over the body, already gone pale and cold.

As she buttoned the front closed, covering the wound that had killed her, she said to Ivy, "I need you to take her back to the sea, and place her in the mermaid graves, to preserve her body." She said, but Matt, overhearing, was quick to object.

"She's a werewolf. She belongs on land, and she deserves a proper burial with her family around." His voice was quiet, but the possessiveness in it was unmistakable.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 510: Have to go[1,461 words]

"If we bury her here on land, then she's gone for good, with no hope left at all. But if we bring her to the sea," Viola turned to look at the gathered werewolves, "there's a chance, someday, that she could come back, along with the dead mermaids."

It took a while to convince them, especially Matt, explaining the ways of the sea to people who'd never trusted it. Mermaids didn't reproduce the way land dwellers did, and their numbers depended entirely on the Child of the Sea to sustain them, to stop death from thinning them out completely. Every mermaid who had died without her here to intervene still had a chance of returning, as long as their body was preserved, and there was still hope that another Child of the Sea might one day be reborn.

"We have nothing to lose by taking this chance, Matt. I want Zoe to... to have a grave with her name on the stone, but... I want her somewhere there's still hope." She said, her voice trembling by the end of it.

Matt looked out past the water, wishing, somewhere deep down, that he'd been the one to die in her place instead. "What if they never get their Child of the Sea?" He asked quietly. "She'll rot down there..."

Viola felt torn, unsure which way was right. She felt stuck in the middle of the decision, but something in her leaned toward the courage of the sea, since the body would stay preserved forever there, unless it eventually lost that preservation from the lack of energy, which was very unlikely to happen unless the grave was disrupted.

She moved closer to her aunt and asked,

"Is there any chance another Child of the Sea could be reborn into the sea?"

"We don't know for certain, but from what we understand... there's no real chance of that happening, since Azmira never had a daughter of her own. The power came to you because you were bound to her by destiny, in a way."

Viola looked down at the mermaid still floating in the water. "If I was destined to carry her legacy, why did I have werewolf blood in me at all? Shouldn't I have been born fully mermaid, the way she was?" Viola asked, unsettled by the thought that the hope she was clinging to might be misplaced, that placing Zoe there could all be for nothing.

Natasha looked thoughtful for a long moment before she said, "There's something everyone in the sea believes, something I haven't told you yet, Serena. It might help you understand Azmira's connection to you, and perhaps even a way to carry both powers, if such a thing is possible."

"What is it?" Viola asked quietly.

"There are words passed down from her time, all the way to our generation. The merfolk of old used to speak of Azmira's greatest desire in life, the one that led to her death at Vaelor's hands. It's all rather confusing, the way it's told, but if you could uncover what that desire truly was, and why he killed her for it... perhaps we could find a way to make all of this work." She told Viola gently, aware of the grief still sitting heavy on her.

(Music Recommendation: We Had Today by Rachel Portman.)

As much as Viola wanted to unravel whatever it was that connected her to Azmira, especially now, remembering what Elder Ysara had once said, that Azmira had wanted something so badly she'd lingered even past her own death, Viola knew she didn't have the strength for it right now. Every second, the reality that Zoe was truly gone kept settling deeper into her, and she felt like screaming, like crying out every bit of the hurt lodged in her chest.

"I'll try my best to figure it out..." She whispered, wiping at her eyes. "But for now, can we take her down, before the... decomposing sets in, and the preserving becomes useless?" She asked in a small voice.

"About that, actually," her aunt said, an apologetic look crossing her face. "The merfolk might not agree to having a werewolf, especially one tied to Silver, resting in our grounds. Our feud with werewolves began with their bloodline, and they're among the most hated in Aquaville, and—"

"Then we don't have to tell them," Came Ivy's voice, as she dragged herself back across the sand toward the water. "I'll take her to the grave with Yasmin. They never have to know."

Their aunt frowned at that. "But anything concerning the sea, I have to discuss with the merfolk before I decide anything, and—"

"Please," came Viola's voice. "Can't you do this for us? Please..."

Seeing her niece on the verge of tears, Natasha swallowed back whatever else she'd meant to say and nodded, reluctant. "Then you'll need to hurry. Growing a root strong enough to hold her takes time, since she isn't a mermaid herself."

Viola thanked her aunt, then walked back to the body, kneeling before it, looking down at Zoe's face, serene, almost peaceful, like someone merely sleeping, if not for the pallor that gave away the truth.

Viola raised her hand and slowly pressed trembling fingers to Zoe's cheek, her throat tightening. "So this is where we say goodbye..." She whispered, choking back a sob. "I thought you'd stay with us so much longer, Zoe..."

No matter how tightly she held on to hope for some future miracle, some eventual return through the Child of the Sea, Viola knew this could very well be the last time she ever saw this she-wolf's face, because nothing about that hope was guaranteed, and by the time, if ever, another Child of the Sea came to be, they might all have grown old, the world around them changed beyond recognition.

Viola wished, absurdly, that she had a flower to leave with her, something small and gentle to mark this. Instead, she pressed a kiss to Zoe's forehead, her tears falling freely onto the still body beneath her.

"I still remember the first day you spoke to me, back when no one else in Silver would even look my way. You never once let me feel alone after that, you are one of the best things that ever happened to me...Thank you." Viola's voice broke completely, and she pressed her palm flat over Zoe's heart, as though she might still feel some faint beat beneath it. "Rest in... peace. You... w-will never be forgotten, and... I-I will miss you so much..."

Viola cried until there was nothing left to cry, until she finally forced herself to step back, since there was no more time left to give. Laila stepped forward next to offer her own farewell, though it came out as nothing but a heart-wrenching sob, no real words managing to form, only apologies, again and again, for every moment she felt she'd failed the she-wolf while she was still alive and the times she had made Zoe's life hell because she didn't like her for Sebastian.

Gilbert and Matt didn't step forward to say their own goodbyes. They remained exactly where they stood, as though neither of them knew how to take another step toward the water.

Matt kept his eyes fixed somewhere beyond the bridge, refusing to look down, his jaw clenched so tightly it ached.

His throat worked painfully as he swallowed again and again, but the lump there wouldn't go away. He couldn't breathe properly. Couldn't think. It felt as though the entire world had suddenly gone silent around him, even though life continued as if nothing had happened.

Matt looked up at the bridge.

People were waking to the morning. Cars moved along the road. He could see strangers running, laughing, talking, going about their ordinary lives, completely unaware that his entire world had just been shattered beneath them.

Life moved on, but he wondered how he could wake up tomorrow knowing that she was dead.

He closed his eyes and remained like that, remembering the living Zoe and not the dead one.

"Matt..." Viola called him, but he shook his head.

"I can't..." he whispered, his voice choked, and Viola understood and let him be before she began to look around.

Viola had seen Sebastian following them earlier in the car, and now she glanced around for him, since it hardly felt fair to bury his sister without him there. But there was no sign of her husband anywhere, and when she reached for him through their mind link, she found it locked shut against her.

"We have to go, now," Natasha announced, glancing up toward the bridge above, where cars were beginning to pass and people were starting to move about.