Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 511: Underneath the sea[1,171 words]

(Music Recommendation: Iris And Jasper by Hans Zimmer.)

Viola wanted to insist they wait for Sebastian, but every moment was another moment closer to the body decomposing, and she had no choice but to let them take her friend's body.

"Gilbert, could you help..." Viola asked quietly of the man, who looked at her as though his soul had already left his body, but he still nodded and came forward, carrying the body into the water to hand her over to the mermaids, who took her gently.

Ivy looked over at the werewolves, offering them a small nod, then turned to her sister. "I'll let the other brother know, and I'll be back as soon as I can to you."

Viola could only nod.

With that, they began carrying the body beneath the water, and Gilbert, who had handed her over, stood there watching them disappear, sunlight scattering across the surface where they had vanished.

He sank to his knees at the water's edge and buried his face in his arms, staying like that until he felt a hand settle on his shoulder. He looked up to find the Luna beside him.

He stared at her, words of apology on his tongue, as he suddenly felt that he had failed to do right by Zoe. And no matter how much what he felt for her hadn't been love, she had been his friend and a very good soul who deserved so much more from life.

"I'm sorry..." he rasped.

"It's nobody's fault..." Viola whispered, then wrapped her arms around him. Silent tears slipped from his eyes and fell against her neck.

They all remained there for a while, the only sounds left the echo of their own heartbeats, the weight of everyone's unspoken what-ifs, the steady crash of waves, and the cry of seagulls circling overhead.

Viola stared far out past the water, wondering where Sebastian had gone, and what he must be going through, if all of them together were feeling Zoe's loss this heavily.

Deep beneath the waves, Ivy and Yasmin swam quietly toward the burial grounds, where every mermaid who had died rested, even those killed by werewolves generations before. As they swam, a faint trail of blood followed behind them, since there was no way to carry the body without the water washing the wound clean, her stomach still open beneath the current.

"Sea Goddess, I hope her blood won't attract the sharks to us, for you can't imagine a shark eating her up before we could preserve her," Yasmin commented as she looked around warily. Shark attacks were not unusual when blood was involved.

"I have my Tidekin keeping watch, don't worry. If we hurry up, there is no chance of a shark coming," Ivy replied.

Yasmin sighed in relief and then went silent for a moment before speaking again.

"Ivy, now that your sister has lost someone so dear to her, do you think it might finally push her to see the advantages of staying here with us and having the power to save lives?" Yasmin asked as they came to a stop in the graves. Ivy reached for a long, slender root called the Life Root, its tip as fine as a strand of hair.

Ivy narrowed her eyes at her cousin as she held the Life Root. "Why won't you just drop this, Yasmin? My sister has a life now, a family. She doesn't want to be the Child of the Sea. Can we all just respect her decision and let it be?" she said, clearly displeased that her cousin, no matter what happened, kept looking for any opening to pull Viola away from the werewolves.

"She could suppress her—"

"Yasmin. Enough. Respect the dead," she warned strictly, and the other mermaid fell silent, knowing that this twin was fiercely loyal to her sister.

Ivy turned her attention back to Zoe. She carefully guided the hair-thin tip of the Life Root into the corner of Zoe's mouth and held it there for a moment.

Almost instantly, the root came alive.

It twitched beneath Ivy's fingers before beginning to grow, thickening and branching as large green leaves unfurled from its length. The leaves spread outward, one after another, winding gently around Zoe's body. They curled beneath her, over her limbs, and around her torso, gradually forming a living cradle around her.

Within moments, the leaves had completely enclosed her, holding her suspended in the water and protecting her body from decay, just as they did with every other body resting in the underwater graves.

"You placed her right next to your parents. Is there a reason for that?" Yasmin asked, watching her cousin secure Zoe's body with the same care she might show family.

"So that if the day ever comes," Ivy said, a bitter smile tugging at her lips, "even if it takes centuries for another Child of the Sea to be born, she won't be alone down here when they wake up to a strange world. Our father can look after her, they're both werewolves, after all."

Yasmin watched her cousin, unable to fully understand her sentimentality toward these creatures no matter how many times she witnessed it, but she kept the thought to herself, staying until the leaves had fully secured the body. Then Ivy paid her respects to all the dead resting there, pressing her hand to her chest and bowing her head toward them before saying,

"Well, I suppose this is where we part ways. I need to be with Serena. I might not be back again for a while, but I'll keep in touch."

"Just be careful, Ivy, especially around that madman who killed this werewolf and your mother. I will have my mate search for him."

The two parted ways, and Ivy used her portal to make her way to the place she'd made a habit of visiting, morning and night. She surfaced through the bathtub, and just as she expected, he was already sitting there waiting for her, a wide grin spreading across his face the moment he saw her head break the surface of the water.

"Thought you weren't going to show again today, ghost mermaid." Alex remarked, pushing himself up from where he'd been sitting on the floor. Ever since the day she'd saved him, he'd come to look forward to her visits, and her company alongside them.

"I was busy yesterday, that's why I didn't come." Ivy muttered, holding her hand out, and he immediately grabbed his robe and passed it to her, turning around to give her privacy as he heard her step out of the tub after changing forms.

Alex had figured out she was a mermaid the very day she'd helped him, and ever since, he'd claimed her as a friend in this hellhole of a place, someone who came to check on his healing heart, though she never agreed to stay longer than necessary, always rushing back to the sea the moment she could and careful around him.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 512: Husband's brother[1,356 words]

"Want to watch a movie with me today? I made popcorn, and it's actually pretty good, my sister always liked it best when I made it." He said, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly, searching for ways to thank the mermaid without it coming across like he was interested in her, which couldn't have been further from the truth, since he still held his late wife close to his heart and could never replace Natalie with anyone else.

Ivy heard him mention his sister again, something he liked to bring up in nearly every conversation they had, always some small detail about what she liked, and Ivy found herself at a loss for how to break the news to him now, so she told him.

"Sure. I'll watch the movie." She'd been avoiding being around him because Ivy was wary of men altogether, but to lessen the pain she was bound to announce, she agreed. He immediately turned around, grabbed her wrist, and pulled her along out of the bathroom.

"I've made a list of movies to watch. There's horror, action thriller, and... rom-com and—"

"Let's watch horror," Ivy said as he took her to the personal cinema in the building, where everything he could ever need was available. One could never see the need to go outside, but even having everything was tiring.

Alex brought a pack of popcorn and a can of soda and sat down next to her, handing each one to her as the movie began to play on the screen. Ivy watched him pop a piece of popcorn into his mouth, chewing with a smile on his face. Every little bit of company made him glow as though the world had been handed to him.

What an odd man he was.

"Alexander..." Ivy began softly, and he turned to her, smiling easily.

"Still not calling me Alex, I see. That's fine. What is it?" he asked.

"Do you have plans of stepping out and returning to Silver?" she asked.

Alex's smile fell away. "I want to step out, but I'm afraid I'll kill my brother if I do. I think it's best I stay here. Silver doesn't need me anymore, besides I'm dead to them," he said, having already told her how he had come to be here. As far as he knew, she was just a mermaid who couldn't possibly tell anyone that he was here and alive.

Furthermore, Alex wouldn't be able to watch his brother live happily married after destroying his own marriage and killing his family. Seeing his brother's wife would only remind him of the loss he had caused, especially now that he had learned she was pregnant. He feared what he might do if he saw her, even if a part of him wanted to make Sebastian suffer by giving him a taste of his own medicine.

That was why Alex believed it was better for him to remain here and accept his fate of never returning to the outside world.

"I think this time you will need to go. Something happened..."

The moment he caught the look in her eyes, he sensed it.

"What's wrong?"

"It's about your sister, she was stabbed..." Ivy muttered, and she watched his expression turn grave almost instantly, as though he already sensed what she was about to say. He was already shaking his head before she could say anything more.

(Music recommendation: We Had Today by Rachel Portman)

~°~

We never know which moment will become the last one we have with someone. We only know it was the last after it has already passed.

~°~

She had no idea how she'd managed to leave that coastline and make it back home, or how the rest of the day had unfolded around her, but Viola stood before the glass wall of their penthouse, looking down, waiting for her husband's return, ever since the moment she'd found herself home.

She hadn't even noticed that winter was slowly settling in Silver, that the sun had grown less harsh, that thin fog now hovered in the evening air. She hadn't noticed any of it until this very moment, struck by how strongly one person's death could ripple outward and touch so many, how Silver itself had gone quiet, how different the pack looked without the usual screens glowing overhead, nature allowed to simply exist for once, everything turned off in respect for the dead.

Zoe's death had been announced the moment they returned, and many hadn't believed it at first, since she was known and loved all across the pack, everyone's idea of the sweetest soul among them, the independent fashion designer who was known across the werewolf world.

Viola hadn't realized it was even possible to cry oneself completely out of tears and be left with nothing but a raw sting behind her eyes. She stood before the glass, noticing small things she'd never once paid attention to before, because her mind couldn't keep away from replaying the death of her friend and she had to keep it occupied with something else.

She watched as the streetlights flickered on with the sunset, fog curling faintly around the glow, and it was through that soft haze that she saw a black car pull up and few minutes later a silver-haired man step out.

Her heart leapt, half-mistaking him for Sebastian, and she almost turned to run out before realizing that it wasn't him at all. It was his brother, Alex. He didn't even bother to hide his neck, which lacked the tattoo Sebastian had, and the difference in their hairstyles made it even clearer. This time, he hadn't come as Sebastian. He had come as himself.

As Viola stood there watching her husband's twin, the door to the penthouse was opened and closed as someone stepped in.

"Luna, we've found the source of the sound from an hour ago," came the words of one of Sebastian's men, someone she'd sent out earlier and had nearly forgotten was meant to report back to her until now.

An hour ago, a loud explosion had shaken the ground, sending waves of alarm and worry through the pack. Even still in shock over Zoe's death, Viola had forced herself to act like a Luna, sending men out to investigate.

"What was it?" She asked, keeping her eyes fixed on the tall man standing outside, staring up at the building without stepping any closer.

"It was the new pack, Luna. It was bombed, and we later confirmed it was the Supreme Alpha's doing, he set the whole place ablaze." The man reported, watching her from behind.

Hearing that, Viola turned fully to face the messenger. "Has Nickolas been captured?"

She'd known Sebastian wouldn't come home to grieve the way the rest of them had, that he'd go straight after the one responsible instead, but she hadn't expected him to move quite this fast, to raze the place down entirely. Still, she didn't blame him for it, didn't think for a second he shouldn't have, not after what that place had taken from them today.

"That, I couldn't say for certain, Luna. All I know is the Supreme Alpha is on his way back now, bringing every single member of that pack home with him, as prisoners."

Viola felt a measure of relief settle into her at the news that her husband was finally coming home, her shoulders loosening for the first time all day.

She didn't think she could survive another loss right now, not on top of this, Zoe's death alone felt heavy enough for a thousand deaths, and if anything happened to her husband too, she wasn't sure what would be left of her. She'd spent the whole time since returning home sick with worry, standing at this window, biting at her fingers.

Hearing he was finally on his way, with or without Nickolas in tow, all Viola wanted now was him, safe and whole. Even if Nick had slipped through their fingers this time, she knew the mermaids were already searching for him, and a man like that couldn't run forever.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 513: Don't fucking touch my woman![1,449 words]

"Come over here for a second," Viola called to the warrior, turning back toward the glass, and he hesitated before stepping up beside her as she asked, "Do you see that man standing out there?"

He looked, his eyes landing on the figure below, and the warrior frowned. "Isn't that the Supreme Alpha? He shouldn't have made it back this fast, Supreme Luna."

"That's not him. That's his brother. Go down and welcome him in, lead him to one of the larger penthouses here." She ordered, unwilling to leave her post until she'd seen Sebastian back with her own eyes, and Alex clearly didn't look ready to come inside on his own.

The warrior went visibly pale at her words. "H-his brother? How is that possible, Luna? Wasn't he...dead?"

"The Alpha will explain everything once he's back. For now, just bring him in and make sure no one bothers him in the pack." She told the man, who looked like he wanted to press further but thought better of it, stepping back and bowing instead.

It wasn't his place to ask questions, even as one of Sebastian's most trusted warriors, the one assigned as her personal guard. But before he left, he paused and said,

"Supreme Luna, my sincerest condolences. Miss Zoe... she gave me a second chance at life. I was pulled off the execution grounds years ago because she begged for my life, and I will never forget her kindness for that. I'll go bring him in now." The man said, bowing as deeply as he could manage.

Viola offered him a bittersweet smile, thinking how exactly like her friend that sounded, and asked, "What's your name?"

"Jace, Luna. Jace Jordan." He told her, and Viola nodded.

"Thank you, Jace. I won't forget that, and I'll be sure to think of you if I ever need something handled by someone I can trust. You may go now."

She watched as the man left, closing the door carefully behind him, and her eyes fell on the many decorations scattered across the walls and stands in her living room, things Zoe had given her over time.

Viola closed her eyes and took a deep breath, reminding herself that she needed to be strong right now and not give in to the urge to cry every time her eyes fell on one of the she-wolf's gifts and the memories attached to them. There would be more of them to come, she thought, before looking back outside to see Jace already speaking with Alex, who soon followed him toward the building.

Not long after they'd disappeared from view, Sebastian finally arrived, his warriors filing in behind him, dragging chained prisoners along with them.

But Viola's eyes stayed fixed only on her husband, whose face held no expression at all, his eyes dull, like a candle had been snuffed out somewhere deep inside him. Viola realized, with a slow, sinking dread, that she couldn't feel anything from him at all, no grief, no anger, nothing, as though he'd gone completely numb, and her own heart clenched painfully at the thought.

He had raised Zoe with his own two hands, since she was an infant. His pain now would be no different from a parent losing a child. But the fact that she couldn't feel even a trace of it in him bothered her more than if she had, and Viola turned away from the glass, heading down to meet him.

Viola stepped out of the elevator minutes later and found the lobby crowded with people, whispers rippling through the group as they all stared at what looked like a fight breaking out.

Confused, she pushed her way through the crowd and froze at the sight in front of her.

It was Alex, throwing punch after punch at Sebastian, slamming him hard against the wall. She hadn't expected the two of them to meet like this, out here in the open, and she spotted Jace nearby, making his way toward her through the crowd.

"Why didn't you take him inside?" Viola asked.

"He said he'd wait right here for the Supreme Alpha, and the moment he arrived, he attacked him without warning. The Alpha ordered us to stand back and not interfere." Jace reported, as the fight raged on, Sebastian not lifting a single hand to defend himself against his brother's relentless blows. No one dared step in, everyone still frozen in shock at the sight of the twin they'd all believed dead until this very moment.

How was that possible? Was it some kind of miracle that a sister had died and a brother had come back to life? No one could believe their eyes as they stared, and the crowd kept getting bigger in the lobby area, while some watched from the terrace above. Nonetheless, even if the brothers noticed, the fight didn't stop.

Alex grabbed Sebastian roughly by the collar, driving another punch into his face before kicking him straight into the glass wall, which shattered on impact.

"I could forgive you failing me a hundred times over, Sebastian, but you let my little girl die! You fucking killer!" Alex snarled, reaching out to hit him again, his fury only deepening at the sight of Sebastian refusing to fight back, taking every hit without so much as flinching, his eyes betraying almost nothing, as though he couldn't even feel the blows landing.

"How could you let her walk straight into danger?! How could you let her die? You never even let me see my own sister!" Alex swung again, but this time his hand was caught mid-motion, and he turned to find a small woman glaring up at him, gripping his wrist.

For one disorienting second, he mistook her for his mermaid friend, whom he had left behind after she said she had something to do. But after hearing about his sister's death, he couldn't wait any longer and had rushed here.

"Let go, Ivy. He is not someone you should pity—" he said, angry veins standing out on his forehead. But then he saw the look on the woman's face and heard her words.

"I am not Ivy. I am Viola Kade, your brother's wife."

Alex immediately realized that his friend had a twin, and somehow, that twin happened to be his bastard brother's wife. He almost chuckled coldly at the irony, but the realization only made his fury spike higher.

The concern that had briefly appeared in his eyes vanished. She wasn't his friend. She was Sebastian's wife, the woman carrying his brother's child, and whatever concerns he had felt for her moments ago disappeared with the realization.

"Let go of me!" Alex warned, a murderous look in his eyes, but Viola glared right back, refusing to loosen her grip.

"You've hit him enough. This isn't how you honor the dead, Alex. None of this was his fault, he—"

"Do you have any idea how much I despise you, woman, just as much as I despise him? If I were you, I'd step back and stop defending this worthless excuse of a brother I'm cursed with. He's a killer. He always has been, since he was a boy." Came Alex's cold, heartless words, born from every ounce of pain buried inside him, the loss of his wife, his unborn child, and now his sister too, all of it laid at Sebastian's feet in his mind.

To Alex, this woman, along with his brother, were nothing but people he wanted nothing to do with. And before he left this place, he would make Sebastian understand the full wrath of his pain.

Viola understood his anger, understood he needed somewhere to pour all that rage, but this wasn't the way to do it. Words, not fists, were what this called for, and she refused to let go of his hand, until Alex finally lost what little control he had left and shoved her back hard. Viola lost her footing and hit the ground.

Sebastian, who until that moment had seemed like little more than a walking corpse, came violently alive with rage the instant he saw his wife shoved to the floor. Something in him snapped entirely, and as Alex raised his hand to strike again, Sebastian caught it, twisting it sharply behind his back before kicking him and hauling him around to land a punch of his own.

"You do not fucking touch my woman, do you hear me? Beat me as much as you fucking want, but you never, ever lay a hand on her!" Sebastian gritted out, and for the first time in his entire life, he fought his twin brother back without holding anything in reserve.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 514: The fight between brothers[1,072 words]

"You do not fucking touch my woman, do you hear me? Beat me as much as you fucking want, but you never, ever lay a hand on her!" Sebastian gritted out, and for the first time in his entire life, he fought his twin brother back without holding anything in reserve.

Alex laughed through bloodied teeth at his brother's words. "My ever-so-heartless brother finally knows what it feels like to have a wife, to want to protect someone. Do you have any idea how I felt back then, when you killed mine, and my unborn child along with her? Do you?!" He shouted, swinging another punch, but Sebastian deflected it easily and threw one back in return.

"That bitch deserved to die, and that unborn child you're so worked up over was never even yours, Alexander! Natalie never loved you! Wake up and face reality!" Sebastian snarled, shaking him by the collar until Alex's eyes flooded bloodshot with even greater rage.

"Take it back! Take those words back!"

The fight soon spiraled into something even more brutal, both men trading blows like madmen, holding nothing back, and Viola, having found her footing again, looked around frantically, aware this wasn't the time or place for any of this, their sister had died only hours ago, and here they were, tearing into each other, venting rage while confusing the watching crowd with every word they threw.

Jumping into the fight to separate them wasn't a good idea, and she knew she would never be able to pull them apart. Besides, the warriors had been commanded not to interfere.

Right at that moment, Viola spotted Gilbert and Matt walking through the broken lobby doors, and relief washed over her. The two men took note of the fight and looked stunned at first at the sight of Alex, but they soon rushed forward to pull the brothers apart without a second thought.

Gilbert hauled Alex back while Matt dragged his friend away, both twins still straining to get back at each other even as blood and bruises already covered them, wounds that wouldn't heal easily, given they'd come from each other's hands.

"If this is about Natalie, take it up with me directly, but don't you dare touch my wife again, or I swear I won't hesitate to forget you were ever my brother. Do you understand me?" Came Sebastian's warning, low and cold, aimed at the twin still glaring back at him with unrelenting rage.

"Take back what you said. Natalie never cheated on me..." Alex gritted out, but Sebastian only looked at him with something close to pity, jerking his arm free of Gilbert's grip as he said,

"I'm done trying to protect you, brother. I'm done. You're on your own from here on out, and believe it or not, I don't give a single shit anymore." Saying that, he wiped the blood from his nose, scanned the crowd until he found his wife, and seeing she was unharmed, turned and walked away, calling out as he went,

"Take the prisoners to the execution grounds. They'll all be executed first thing tomorrow morning." He walked off without another word, disappearing into his private elevator, every eye in the room following him as a dark, deadly aura trailed behind him, keeping everyone at a careful distance, even his own wife hesitating before she followed.

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(Music recommendation: Farewell Life, Arm Anderson Remix, by Christoffer Hagman.)

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There are moments when the person you love most becomes a stranger, not because they have changed, but because grief has taken them somewhere you have never been.

Viola stood at the door of the bathroom, listening to her husband breaking things, without a single sound escaping him otherwise. She had cautiously followed him after leaving the scene in the lobby, but by the time she'd made it up, he was already inside, shower

running. He never locked the door when showering, but he had this time, and she couldn't get in.

Viola heard something else shatter and flinched at the sound. She didn't need to look to know he was destroying every product Zoe had ever stocked in their bathroom cabinets, all the little things she used to bring by whenever she visited. Viola realized then that maybe she shouldn't push her way in right now, no matter how badly her heart called out to reach him. He'd shut himself off from within, sealed away even from her.

She pressed her palm flat against the cold door, and when the sounds of destruction kept going, she slowly stepped back and let him be. Maybe once he'd cooled down, she could reach him properly, but for now, she recognized the shape of a person who needed to be left alone. She wrapped her arms around herself and left the penthouse, making her way toward the elevator.

If Sebastian wasn't ready to talk, to put words to his hurt and his loss, Viola knew she still couldn't let the rift with his brother fester unresolved. It was time she did what she could to fix things, before the thread holding the Kade family together frayed apart entirely and everyone grows apart.

They'd already lost one of their own. The ones left standing needed to find their footing again, and stay close to one another, no matter what it cost. She'd only known Zoe for a handful of months, nothing compared to what these men had shared with her over a lifetime, but that didn't make her own grief any smaller.

Viola made her way down to the lobby, where the crowd had mostly cleared out by now, and asked someone where Alex had been taken. She soon found her answer, he was in Zoe's room, and went straight to him.

When Viola arrived at the door of the apartment that belonged to Zoe, the one she stayed in whenever she visited the High Tower, Viola steadied herself before punching in the passcode and stepping inside, only to find her husband's twin kneeling in the middle of the room, surrounded by framed pictures of his sister and her scattered belongings, sobbing in a way that broke something in her own chest. She hesitated in the doorway.

Had she come at the wrong moment? She wondered, careful not to let her own eyes land on the framed photos, keeping her gaze fixed instead on his back, still turned away from her.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 515: Brother-in-law[1,285 words]

"Get out," came his quiet voice, sensing her presence, though he made no effort to hide the fact that he was crying. Viola noted, almost involuntarily, the sharp difference

between him and her husband. Where Alex wept openly, without shame, her husband had simply shut down entirely.

Viola blinked several times, gathering the courage to face this without breaking down herself, and walked further into the room, sinking to her knees to look over the picture frames scattered around him. Her chest tightened painfully at one image in particular, the three of them together, Nick included, all smiling at the training grounds where they'd once helped her grow stronger.

Seeing Nick only brought back bitter anger and regret over ever knowing him. Looking at him only made her see a heartless, psychotic monster, who had taken one of the greatest things in her life, so she looked away from the frame.

"Zoe always talked about you," Viola began quietly, every breath she took carrying the faint scent of the deceased woman still lingering in the room. "You were her favorite brother, and... she never once forgot you, Alex."

Her words only made him cry harder, his face falling into his hands, his broad shoulders shaking so violently that something in Viola ached at the sight of it.

"B-but I f-failed her..." Came his broken words.

Viola looked away from him, toward the wall behind, her fingers curling into fists. "When I think about it... I feel like I failed her too. But if we all keep holding on to the blame, we'll only bury ourselves deeper in what-ifs, instead of finding any way to actually heal." She said softly.

Alex didn't answer, only kept crying, and she stayed exactly where she was, not moving an inch, letting him have that, because there was nothing wrong in it. Viola lost track of how long she sat there, waiting, until his sobs finally quieted into the sniffling of a blocked nose, and his red-rimmed eyes lifted to meet hers, holding a glare sharp enough that it might have frightened her, had she not just watched him break down in front of her moments earlier.

Men liked to hide the fact that they were even capable of crying, especially werewolf men, especially in front of a woman, and Viola offered him a handkerchief, but he ignored it entirely and went back to packing his sister's belongings.

"I'm taking these with me," he said, voice thick and stuffy. "I'm taking everything of hers out of here before he destroys it all, because that's what he's good at, hiding his own grief not treasuring anything. He's a moron." He gritted out. "He got rid of our parents belongings from his apartment and burned a lot of things. He's such a coward and an idiot who forgets the dead person the moment they die."

Viola cleared her throat, unsure how to respond to her husband being insulted right in front of her. She began helping him pack the things anyway, knowing he wasn't entirely

wrong, Sebastian didn’t keep memories of the dead the way most people did. He tucked them away where he’d never have to look at them, or destroyed them outright, the same way he was destroying everything in that bathroom right now.

"He grieves differently, Alex, but just because he handles it that way doesn’t mean he doesn’t feel it nor care deeply like others, and—"

Alex glared at her, heat flashing behind his silver eyes. "I’m not strangling you the way he did my wife only because you happen to be my friend’s sister. That’s the only reason you’re getting a pass right now. But don’t push me."

He turned back to continue what he was doing as he added, "You know your way to the door. Please."

He began quickly putting things together, as though he couldn’t wait to pack up and leave the building, and Viola sighed as she watched him.

"I hope Ivy at least told you how stubborn I am, because I am not leaving until you listen to me."

"I didn’t even know she had a sister. Don’t flatter yourself, she never talks about you." He muttered with a snort.

"Then you’re about to find out. Not until you listen to me, I’m not leaving this room, and by the time I’m done, I hope you understand you won’t be going back to live alone. You’re staying here with us. Your brother needs you." She said, and he shot her another glare that made Viola believe if looks could kill, Alex would have buried her by now.

"Just who do you think you are? I have nothing to do with you, or my brother. And from today onward, I don’t have a brother." He declared, yanking the photo frame of his sister out of her hand and dropping it into the box.

"I’m not only your Luna, I’m your sister-in-law, and because I care about my husband, I’m here to tell you that everything Sebastian ever did, he did believing it was for your own good. Natalie—"

"Don’t you dare say her name!" He warned, and Viola only smiled. "I will say it, and I’ll say plenty more about her that you won’t like, Alex. Natalie was nothing but a lying bitch behind your back, sleeping with her own stepbrother the entire time. Sebastian caught them together, and the baby she was carrying, I’m sorry, but it was never yours. And—"

"He fed you lies to cover up the fact that he killed her, sacrificed her to escape the curse, and you actually believe—"

"I don’t say things without evidence, which I gathered a while ago, knowing a day like this would eventually come."

Saying that, Viola pulled out a photograph and dropped it in front of him. She'd found it by coincidence in Sebastian's penthouse when she was looking for her charger, which had accidentally fallen between the bedframe. She was certain it had escaped being destroyed because it had been stuck there.

It had been tucked into the corner between the nightstand and the bed, and it was exactly the kind of proof she knew would speak louder than anything she could say to the man who had once loved her. So Viola had kept it without touching it.

Alex looked down at it, and his eyes trembled at what he saw. It was Natalie, sitting on her stepbrother's lap, her arm wrapped around his neck, their lips locked together, both of them barely clothed in their underwear.

Viola reached out and turned the photo over. "Natalie must not have known this one was taken. He sent it to her, along with this."

On the back, written in pen, were the words: *You always say you miss us when we're not together, so here's a little something to look back on. Make sure you hide it well, don't let him find it.* Beside the words was a crudely drawn image, unmistakably a penis.

Alex closed his eyes. "Her stepbrother fancied himself an artist..." He let out a laugh that broke almost instantly into tears, tilting his head back to stare at the ceiling as he blinked repeatedly, trying to control his emotions and the stabbing pain in his heart that travelled all the way down to his stomach, making him suddenly feel sick.

Not once had Alex suspected her. Not once had he thought she was sleeping with her stepbrother behind his back or doubted that the baby had been his when he discovered she had died pregnant.

"So she lied to me..." he muttered shakily. "I was never disloyal. I was faithful the whole time. She lied to me..."

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 516: Going Hunting[1,417 words]

"Some people never appreciate what they already have. They always want something else instead. Sebastian found out about the affair, and about the child not being yours, and he might have acted out of pure rage, killing her before he ever let you hear the truth for yourself. He never told you any of this before, because he was afraid the news would destroy you faster than anything else could. I hope, eventually, you can give him a chance."

Alex looked up at her from the photo, offering a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Thank you. Can I ask you to leave now? I'd like to be alone."

Viola nodded, rising to her feet, and rested a hand briefly on his shoulder. "I hope you'll consider staying. Sebastian was already planning to bring you home, before all of this happened. You two need each other, and... Zoe would have been so happy to have you both together again."

Viola turned to leave, but his voice stopped her.

"Viola, right?" He asked, still not looking away from the photo of his late wife.

"Yes."

"Be careful around Seb in this moment. He grieves in the strangest way and makes the harshest decisions, and he always seems to lose a part of himself along with them. When our parents died... he grew distant from the rest of us and put a wall around himself. I stopped understanding him after that. He became a different person.

"If you can... stay away from him for some time, until he cools down," he told her quietly.

Viola bit the inside of her cheek before Alex asked another question.

"Who killed my sister?"

Viola's fingers curled tightly.

"Nickolas."

Alex only nodded, and Viola left him there, hoping he wouldn't disappear before morning, before he and Sebastian had a real chance to fix things between them, though she doubted Sebastian would even be ready to talk anytime soon. She still didn't know how deeply this loss had cut into him, or whether she'd ever truly be let in, close enough that he'd speak to her about the pain he carried.

——

(Music recommendation: The Storm by Secession Studios, Greg Dombrowski.)

~°~

You can spend all day running from the truth, but when the world grows quiet and you are finally alone, there is nowhere left to run from what lives inside you.

Sebastian stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, hating what he saw in his own eyes, hating the way his mind kept spinning miles away from him, uncontrollable, regret and anger and pain buried so deep inside him that there was no escaping any of it,

because it lived inside him now, a permanent resident. He wanted to shut it all out, but there was no shutting it out, not when everything around him carried some piece of her, so he did the only thing he knew how to do: he destroyed it.

And once he'd destroyed it, he stared back at himself and watched his own eyes shift into something flat, indifferent, and he understood, on some level, that as long as he never looked at anything of his sister's again, he might survive the demon clawing at him from the inside, the one made of grief and rage in equal measure, because he had just lost his little girl. His little sister.

Whenever he closed his eyes, he could still hear her laughter, still hear her voice calling him hermano, could still see the innocent way she used to look at the world, at people, always expecting the best of them.

"Stupid girl. I taught her not to trust so easily. I raised her to be careful, even around family. I raised her well. I fucking raised her well!" He rasped, though no tears came, the words leaving him flat and hollow as he turned away from the mirror, already knowing this was all the grief he'd allow himself, and nothing more.

She was gone. The only thing left within his power now was avenging her, and maybe then his mind would finally settle. This was exactly why you didn't let yourself attach to anyone, people died, they left you behind to drown in the wreckage of missing them, and Sebastian refused to drown in that feeling, refused to let himself hate it from the inside out the way he already did.

Like a cage slamming shut against a frantic, fluttering bird desperate to escape its prison, Sebastian sealed his mind and heart away inside a cage he had no intention of ever opening again. He locked his emotions away as easily as one might peel and discard a banana, entirely unaware, as he did it, his heart was quietly turning black from within, the same slow corruption that had once claimed his brother's heart after losing Natalie.

He left the bathroom and reached out to the men already waiting on his orders, and the moment he opened the link, Jace, his most trusted warrior, spoke up.

"Are we executing the women and children along with the men?"

Sebastian's eyes barely flickered as he pulled a shirt from his closet and answered. "All of them. They committed a treasonous act, siding with him, taking part in murder. Have there been any tracks on him yet?" He asked, buttoning his shirt, pulling on his boots.

"Nothing solid yet, Supreme Alpha, but we can tell he's injured, hasn't had the chance to heal before running. We followed a blood trail into the woods, but it disappeared at some point, no further trace." Jace reported, hesitating over whether to mention that most of the prisoners taken, especially the children, were almost certainly innocent, but he knew better than to interfere with a decree already given.

"Which woods?" Sebastian asked, gathering his guns and weapons.

"Valad Forest, between his pack and the next one over. We suspect he's made his way into the neighboring territory, but the men stationed at the border swear no one's crossed through, and if he had, they'd have flushed him out, per your orders."

Sebastian took the news in stride. "I'll check it myself. Send the men out ahead, I'll join them shortly." Saying that, he closed the link and left the penthouse.

If Nick thought he could hide at the edge of the world, Sebastian would drag him back out of it and have his head on a platter, by his own hands, for this was the last crime he'd ever get the chance to commit.

Sebastian stepped out of the High Tower, but the moment he did, he found someone waiting there he hadn't expected, standing among the rest of his men. But the presence of this person reminded him of her again that he felt a stab within him.

His expression barely shifted as he demanded harshly,

"What are you doing here?"

Matt met his friend's eyes evenly. "The exact same thing you're here to do. We're going hunting, and it's not happening without me. I want his head too. You're not stopping me." He said firmly, noting the emptiness that had settled over the Alpha's face, his silver eyes carrying nothing now but pure, undiluted murder.

"It's on you. Whatever happens to you, it's on you," Sebastian said, unbothered, walking past Matt to reach his men and issue orders. From now on, he didn't want anything related to her to come hunting for him, and Matt was completely tied to her. A memory of the two of them holding a crying baby, confusingly not knowing how to feed it, flashed through his mind, and he pushed it away.

"I never said my life was on you..." Matt muttered to himself.

Matt watched him go and felt something tight settle in his gut, recognizing the pattern instantly, this was happening again. His friend was shutting everyone out, exactly the way he had years ago, only this time Matt was among those he had decided he no longer wanted around.

Sebastian had never been the kind of man who handled loss well, and everyone who'd once assumed his parents' deaths would leave him broken, hollowed out, had been surprised when he'd bounced back with startling speed instead, with nothing going wrong with his body.

But the way his aura had shifted now, that same emptiness radiating off him, Matt, still nursing his own private grief, couldn't shake the feeling that this, finally, might be the thing that broke the Supreme Alpha for good.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 517: Shifter corruption[1,271 words]

Whenever Matt let himself think too long about the fact that she was truly gone, something inside him twisted so violently he wanted nothing more than to hunt for Nick himself, to tear him apart with his own hands, and this felt like the perfect outlet for it.

But watching the way Sebastian carried himself now, Matt knew they might never be close again. Tonight, they would only fight to avenge someone they had both cared for and loved since childhood, and after it, it might be the end of their relationship.

Matt looked up at the sky, seeing no stars in it. It looked dull for a night sky, and he felt a huge lump form in his throat.

You're not seeing this, are you? You said you would one day become the brightest star, but there are no stars on the day you die... I shouldn't have made you believe in such bullshit, because now I'll try to look for you all over the sky too, Matt thought as he blinked repeatedly, trying to stop the sting at the back of his eyes from turning into tears.

He looked away from the sky and simply fell into step beside Sebastian, hardening himself for whatever came next and promising himself that he would rather not come back if he couldn't avenge her tonight.

"We scour every inch of werewolf territory until we find him, or no one comes home. Do you understand me?!" Came the Alpha's command, and every warrior answered as one voice.

"YES, SUPREME ALPHA!"

"NOW MOVE!" he ordered.

As the warriors began to spread out, shifting into their wolf forms one after another, Sebastian turned to Jace and said, "I need you to stay behind, oversee the execution, and make sure it's carried out with none of them spared."

"Yes, Supreme Alpha." Jace bowed, and right before him, Sebastian shifted. But instead of pure silver, his wolf now carried unusual streaks of black running through its fur. Before

the warrior could get a proper look, the Alpha had already sped off with his men, their collective howling echoing out into the night.

(Music recommendation: The untold II by Greg Dombrowski, Nathalie Bonin.)

Back inside the building, Viola had just left Alex, still turning his words over in her mind, whether to give Sebastian the space he'd asked her to give, or go to him and force him to talk about what he was feeling, when she heard the collective howling rise up outside and felt the shift in the atmosphere around her. She frowned, moving to peer through the nearest glass wall, and caught sight of a pack of wolves tearing down the streets, heading toward the woods, Sebastian unmistakably at the front of them.

Viola hurried outside, finding Jace and a handful of men still left behind, and the moment they spotted her, they bowed.

"Where are they going?" She asked, though she already suspected the answer, needing only to hear it confirmed.

"A wolf hunt, Luna. For the man responsible for Miss Zoe's death." Jace replied.

Viola stared out at the wolves already vanishing into the distance. She'd known there was no chance Sebastian would sit still with Nick still out there somewhere, that he'd bury his feelings the only way he knew how, by pouring everything into this instead.

What she didn't like was that he'd left without telling her. But maybe, she thought, that was exactly why he hadn't, because he knew she'd want to come with him, and her being there was one more person he could lose, one more risk, and with the state his mind was in right now, she had no idea how he'd react to that.

"Luna," Jace called, and Viola pulled her gaze back from the darkness where they'd all disappeared, the cold fog swallowing the distance whole.

When she turned to look at him, she noticed the concern etched plainly across his face. "What is it?" She asked, a thin cloud of fog escaping her lips as she wrapped her arms tighter around herself against the cold, she hadn't even noticed had settled in Silver as well.

"Just now, when the Alpha shifted, I noticed black streaks running through his fur, unusual ones. You know what that means, don't you?" He asked, and Viola felt her eyes tremble slightly at the question.

"Shifter corruption." Jace confirmed, even though she already knew, since every werewolf was taught about it from a young age.

Like many supernatural creatures, werewolves carried the risk of a sickness known as heart corruption, one that could eventually turn them into a rogue, something closer to a rabid animal than a person, losing all control of themselves, becoming what werewolves called the Lost Ones. Eventually, those who fully turned were put down, since the danger they posed to everyone around them, once the change completed, became too great to risk.

Corruption rarely struck werewolves out of nowhere, except in those who had lived exceptionally long lives, sitting dormant in some corner of the heart until something struck close enough to trigger it. Sebastian and his brother were only thirty, yet their hearts had proven far too easy to corrupt, and Viola found herself wondering whether that was somehow normal, or something specific to them that made it happen so fast.

But then, understanding settled over her. Sebastian's heart had just endured something far too heavy for anyone to carry, and losing his sister was exactly that kind of weight. The same corruption that had once taken hold in his brother's heart was now beginning its slow work in his.

Worry gripped her, since this was something that needed addressing before it worsened, and he'd already left, likely without even realizing it was happening to him at all. She turned to the warrior beside her and said,

"Don't let anyone else hear about this. Keep it between us, for now."

"I won't, Luna. But he's ordered me to execute the children along with the women. I believe there are innocent people among them, so..."

Viola understood exactly what he was asking without him needing to say it outright. "Don't execute the women or the children. I'll deal with the guilty ones myself, and the innocent will be spared, or better yet, don't execute anyone at all yet. Let me talk to him first."

Once she'd finished with the warrior, Viola made her way back inside, where, for the first time since she'd come to Silver, the building stood completely empty of pack members, everyone having already retreated for the night.

She went straight back to their penthouse, and once inside, made her way to the kitchen, pouring water into a glass. She was raising it to her lips when her eyes caught the bin now filled with all of Zoe's things, and suddenly the water felt impossible to swallow.

That night, Viola ate dinner alone, the food catching in her throat every few bites. She had no real appetite left, forcing herself to eat only for the sake of the child growing inside her, but every bite felt like swallowing a stone, one that dropped straight into her heart and pressed down, heavy and unmoving in her chest.

She cleared away the dishes afterward, each one carrying some memory that surfaced unbidden behind her eyes that made her bite so hard on her bottom lips to keep the emotions down.

Later that night, once she'd finally settled into bed, she turned her face into the pillow and cried herself to sleep, until exhaustion finally dragged her under, into dreams she welcomed without resistance.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 518: My heart belongs to him[1,552 words]

(Music Recommendation: Time by Hans Zimmer.)

Viola dreamt of Zoe. She saw the she-wolf laughing, her laughter ringing out clear and bright, somewhere in a strikingly beautiful place underwater.

Viola knew instantly it was only a dream, since there was no way Zoe could actually breathe beneath the water, but seeing her like this, whole and joyful instead of the way she'd looked when she died, brought a smile to Viola's face even as tears welled in her eyes.

She watched Zoe chase after two figures ahead of her, and as Viola drew closer, she realized, with a jolt, that they were her parents.

How were they all together? She watched the three of them run through the water like carefree children, the impossibility of it, running underwater as though it were land, made the whole scene feel even more surreal, and her throat tightened all over again, desperate for even a fragment of relief from her grief.

As though sensing her presence, all three of them turned toward her at once.

"Vee..." Said Zoe.

"Serena..." Said her mother, standing beside her father, who only watched Viola with a small, quiet smile.

"Why are you crying?" Zoe asked, now standing right in front of her, confusion written across her beautiful face. "You shouldn't cry. What's making you so sad?"

She pulled Viola into a hug, and Viola broke down completely, clinging to her fiercely as she whispered, "D-don't l-leave again, Zoe... everything feels so dull without you and n-nothing is the same again at home." Her words only confused the she-wolf further, and Zoe laughed.

"Why would I leave? I'm always with you, silly. I'm only waiting for you, just like Aunt Maddy is, just like everyone." Zoe mused, smiling, and now it was Viola's turn to be confused. Waiting for her? What did that even mean?

Viola looked past her, to her parents, whose expressions carried something bittersweet, though they nodded along in agreement with Zoe's words.

"We're waiting, my dear." Her mother said.

"Waiting for... what?" Viola asked, but Zoe had already turned away, rejoining Viola's parents, each of them taking one of her hands, smiling as they began moving off together.

"Don't go! Tell me what you're waiting for!" Viola called out desperately, unable to make her feet move toward them, as they walked further into something bright and blinding. But just before they vanished into the light entirely, her mother turned back to look at her one last time.

"It's inside you, my dear. It always has been. Only Azmira's promise to Vaelor is holding you back. Fulfill their promises to each other, and you'll finally be free. Until then... be strong."

With that, they all disappeared into the light, their laughter still ringing out toward her like music, and the tight knot in her chest slowly began to loosen, dissolving like softened butter.

But rather than waking, Viola found herself pulled back into the past, into Azmira's body. This time, she was seated on a wooden bridge over a river, staring down into the still evening water, where the orange light of the sunset reflected across its surface.

Azmira smiled as she muttered to herself, "He's going to kill me today... It's going to be my last day alive here."

The surface of the water suddenly broke, and a mermaid's head emerged from it. Viola, who was only seeing and experiencing everything without having full control over Azmira's body, saw her own face and gasped at the same time Azmira gasped, as though she hadn't been expecting the mermaid to emerge from the water.

"What are you doing here, Nerrisa?" Azmira asked in a whisper as she turned over her shoulder to look at the village behind her, where the voices of children could be heard in the distance. "You shouldn't be out here. Go back home."

Nerrisa's face was a mask of displeasure as she looked at her twin. "I felt your presence, so I came here. What did you mean when you said he was going to kill you? What is going on, Azmira?" the mermaid demanded worriedly.

But Azmira got up from her sitting position and moved away from the water.

"I need to go back before I'm missed. You should go home too, Nerrisa," Azmira said.

Nerrisa swam around the bridge so she could continue looking at her sister as Azmira walked away. Mermaids weren't in danger from werewolves at the time, so Nerrisa had no reason to hide herself.

"The last time we talked, you told me he was acting strange, and you were afraid of what he might do if you didn't marry and mate with him. You need to get away from him before he does something to harm you. You are someone everyone worships in the sea, yet you have reduced yourself to this," Nerrisa said in annoyance when her sister continued walking away instead of listening to her.

"I can't leave, Nerrisa. My heart belongs to him, and you know that. He's the one I love," Azmira said.

Nerrisa's face became angry as she called after her sister's retreating back.

"If he does anything to you or even touches a hair on your body, I will kill him and his entire family."

Azmira's footsteps came to a sudden stop, and she turned to look at the mermaid in the water with narrowed eyes.

"You will do no such thing. This has nothing to do with you, Nerrisa. It's between him and me," she told her sister, who had no idea what Azmira had planned and couldn't have known what she intended to do.

Viola, who found herself caught in the middle of the scene, was just as confused.

What the hell was going on here? Why did Nerrisa have her face? And if Azmira and her were really twins, it meant that she also had the same face, just like Vaelor had Sebastian's face.

Viola could only watch as the scene continued, desperately hoping she would wake up or at some point understand what was unfolding that would give her answers, but the scene suddenly changed, and she was no longer at the river.

She saw herself standing before Vaelor, a knife held in his hand, his eyes fixed on her with something close to murder and rage. In the next instant, he closed the distance between them, brushing her hair back from her neck with hands so tender they stood in stark, unsettling contrast to the look in his eyes. They were gentle hands.

He exposed her throat, bent slowly toward it, pressed a soft kiss there, and then sank his teeth into her flesh.

Viola understood immediately what he was doing the moment she felt the burn of his venom spreading through her, he was marking her. She felt the heat of it rush through her body, but the instant he pulled his mouth away, his dagger plunged straight into her heart.

Viola gasped awake in her own bed, hand flying to her chest, searching frantically for the pain, finding none, and let out a shaky breath of relief, looking around the dark, empty room, her pillow soaked through beneath her with tears.

Viola was so disoriented that, for a moment, she didn't know where she was until her heartbeat settled and everything came back to her.

She thought back over the first part of the dream, seeing Zoe and her parents together, and frowned, unsure what to make of her mother's words, unsure whether it had meant anything real at all, or if her own mind had simply conjured something comforting to soften the edge of her grief. Waiting for her, to do what, exactly? To awaken Azmira's powers, finally, for good?

Her aunt had told her to uncover what Azmira had wanted so desperately before her death, that maybe understanding that could reveal a way to awaken that other part of herself without having to give up her wolf. And now her mother had told her, just as plainly, to fulfill Azmira's promise to Vaelor. But how was she supposed to fulfill a promise made to a killer, a man she'd just watched murder the very woman he claimed to love after he marked her?

She'd witnessed him kill her, felt the act of it happening, almost as if it had been her own death playing out.

Viola pressed her hands into her hair, wishing desperately for some kind of clear, straightforward path forward, but everything only seemed to grow more tangled the deeper she went.

She realized, belatedly, that dreaming of a happy, whole Zoe had eased some of the choking grief inside her, had at least pushed back the image of her friend's bloodied, dying face, if only for a little while, though it did nothing to change the plain, unbearable fact that Zoe was still gone.

Sighing, she glanced at the empty space beside her in the bed, where her husband was supposed to have been but was now out avenging his sister. Then she let her gaze drift toward the glass wall, where lights flickered across the glass.

"Be careful out there..." she murmured, lying back down, unable to sleep now, left only with the quiet hope that he'd come home unharmed so they could figure things out together.

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 519: Going somewhere, Nickolas?[1,017 words]

In the middle of the night, in a land where a thin layer of snow had begun drifting down from the sky, settling over ground still carpeted in dried autumn leaves, a man could be seen staggering forward, one hand pressed against his bleeding shoulder, a trail of blood marking the path behind him.

When he reached a large tree, he stopped and slowly lowered himself to the ground, sitting with his back against the trunk, his shoulders trembling, though not from the cold. A wrecked sob tore loose from his throat, and he slammed his fist into the earth beside him.

"You fucking made me kill you. Why won't you leave my head?!" Nick groaned, caught somewhere between irritation and pain, though the pain wasn't for the woman he'd killed, it was for the friend her death had cost him.

If only she'd followed his lead, let him protect her the way he'd wanted to, she wouldn't have died, and he wouldn't have had to kill her. But like everyone else in his fucking life, she'd found it easy enough to betray him in the end, pulling that trigger, bringing her own death down on herself.

Yeah, Nick cried for her. Big deal. She had meant something to him, once. But the memory of her shooting him kept surfacing right alongside the grief, and it made him want to kill her all over again, which only made him angrier still.

"I thought you'd be different from the rest of them. All I ever wanted was a family, my own family, one that actually wanted me back. You wanted me too, until that bastard Matt must have gotten into your head, turned you against me. I know you never would've turned on me otherwise..." He murmured to a scrap of fabric torn from her clothes, still caught on the blade of the knife he'd used to stab her repeatedly.

His hands were still stained with her blood, mixed now with his own, and he stared down at the blood-soaked fabric, speaking to it as though it could hear him, some part of him believing, somewhere deep down, that it actually could and the words would reach her.

"You should've just let me follow through with the plan. We would've brought Vee into the family, all of us together. But don't worry, I'll still give you what you wanted, even though you're not here to see it anymore... I'll have Vee someday, one way or another, and every child we have together, I'll name after you." He smiled, then let out a laugh, the idea so perfect in his head he could barely stand to wait for it, if not for his shoulder, still bleeding him dry.

If that fucker hadn't blown his pack sky-high, Nick could've gone back for his own equipments, the specialized tools he needed to safely remove this damn bullet that was lodged in his shoulder. How fucking glad he was that she hadn't shot him in a fatal place like his stomach or chest.

He should've been home by now. Instead, he was running through his own land like a hunted animal because his people had all been seized, and he knew, without question, that those bastards were already coming for him.

He just wasn't in any condition to face them now, not with this injury, not when the fight would be so unfairly stacked against him.

He'd deal with Sebastian, that son of a bitch, on his own terms, in his own time, not theirs. Which meant he needed to reach one of his allied packs first, get himself treated, get back on his feet, and start putting together another plan. But first, he needed to howl over the cliff ahead and call for backup.

He took the scrap of Zoe's clothing and buried it beneath the thin layer of snow already gathering on the ground. He hated winter. It was fucking October, and parts of this land were already buried in snow!

Still muttering about the miserable cold, Nick pushed himself back up onto his feet when his sharp hearing caught sounds moving through the woods around him. He went rigid, listening, until he made out shadows shifting between the trees, wolves, and he cursed under his breath.

Nick wasn't a coward, but he knew better than to fight a battle he couldn't win in this condition, and he broke into a run in the opposite direction. He hadn't gotten far before something cut him off directly in his path, a massive wolf he recognized instantly.

"Going somewhere, Nickolas?" Asked the wolf, unmistakably Sebastian's, as it began circling him slowly.

Nick’s eyes zeroed in on the black streaks running through Sebastian’s fur, and he threw his head back to laugh.

"Well, well, well, have you looked in a mirror lately, Sebastian? You’re turning into a rabid dog already. How exactly did that happen?" He asked, tilting his head to study the wolf, all while reaching for the gun tucked at the back of his trousers.

The moment he pulled it free, another wolf leapt from behind him, jaws closing over his hand and the gun together. It fell into the snow, blood already spreading beneath it, and Nick groaned, spinning toward the Beta’s wolf, who stared back at him with murderous eyes as he clutched his ruined wrist that was bleeding onto the white.

"Escaping, are we now, Nicky Dick?" Matt remarked, using the nickname Nick’s friends had used to taunt him when he was a boy, a name he had always hated.

Nick glared at the wolf. "Why should I escape when I hold a power far greater than any of you could ever have?" he taunted back, keeping his eyes on them as they circled him.

"What powers? The one you stole by killing a mermaid, or the one you were born with, which was nothing but pure cowardice?" Sebastian gritted out with a growl. "No wonder Camilla discarded you from the beginning. She must have had a mother’s foresight to know what you would turn out to be."

Fated: The Alpha's Unwanted Luna - Chapter 520: The fight[1,121 words]

"What powers? The one you stole by killing a mermaid, or the one you were born with, which was nothing but pure cowardice?" Sebastian gritted out with a growl. "No wonder Camilla discarded you from the beginning. She must have had a mother’s foresight to know what you would turn out to be."

Nick’s eyes darkened and his expression turned sour at those words that were a sensitive reminder of his life. "So this is how you want to fucking play it, I see. Fine. I’ll play," he gritted out, shifting into his own wolf form, knowing his human form couldn’t fight them with the bullet wound still lodged deep, hidden beneath his flesh.

Sebastian’s eyes narrowed on his cousin’s wolf, silver smoke curling off it, some byproduct of whatever ability he carried that gave him the supreme Alpha’s aura. The wolf stood every bit as tall as Sebastian’s own, its coat full silver unlike Sebastian’s, which now carried the stain of corruption. Nick, done shifting, turned to face them both.

"If you and I were to stand before Silver, I would be picked as their Alpha before you. You are getting buried in your grief, cousin. What a waste," Nick said nonchalantly before

adding, "Now we can fight fair. I didn't actually want to kill you yet until I regain my strength, Sebastian, but you brought this on yourself by coming out here."

(Music Recommendation: Darkness and Light by Secession Studios.)

Nick began circling the two of them like he was the one hunting, not the other way around. "How about we make this a real fight, though, just you and me? Unless you're too afraid of me, and need your Beta here as backup."

His words did nothing but sharpen Sebastian's fury, and he bared his teeth. "Matt, stand back." He had hoped to get to beat Nick before ever doing anything else and this was an opportunity to fight him with the the burning fury inside him.

Matt stood back and Sebastian lunged, and the two of them broke into a brutal fight, paws slamming against one another, teeth sinking into flesh, tearing fur loose, as the rest of the wolves gathered in the woods to watch.

Nick was fast, far faster than Sebastian had anticipated, and despite the blood he'd already lost, he fought as though the wound in his shoulder didn't exist at all.

Sebastian slammed his body into him, sending them both rolling across the snow, but Nick twisted at the last second, landing back on his paws before lunging straight at him again.

Their claws collided, and Sebastian was forced back several steps by the force of Nick's ability and strength, which had come from the mermaid's heart.

Nick growled and charged again, but Sebastian met him halfway, their bodies crashing together with enough force to shake the ground beneath them. A true Supreme Alpha against one who had granted himself the powers to imitate one.

Sebastian's claws tore into Nick's side, while Nick's teeth caught his shoulder, sinking in deep before Sebastian wrenched himself free.

Blood dripped from both of them.

Neither backed down.

Nick's silver fur was already soaked through with blood, silver smoke still curling off his body as he panted heavily. Sebastian's silver eyes burned with rage, fangs bared as he circled his cousin slowly.

"You really think you're going to kill me?" Nick mocked, a wicked grin cutting through his blood-stained fangs. "You couldn't even save your own sister in time. What a useless

waste of a man you are. Your parents must be rolling in their graves in disappointment at what you have become."

Sebastian's ears flattened.

Nick caught the reaction and knew he had hit the mark. "That's right. Zoe's dead because of me, sure, but you're just as much to blame for it for not paying attention to her like a brother should. You are the cause of the death of every single one of your family."

To some extent, Nick's words weren't completely wrong. His parents had died because the sea witch was trying to kill Sebastian, and his sister had died because he hadn't paid her much attention lately before her death. The words hit him like a blade, and he lunged.

Nick barely dodged, but the claws still caught the side of his face, tearing three deep gashes through his fur. He stumbled back, recovered, and kept taunting.

"Did my words hurt?" He asked. "Or does hearing the truth hurt worse?"

Sebastian's growl deepened, but he gave no other reaction.

"You should've seen her face, when she realized I was actually going to kill her," Nick pressed on, deliberately twisting the knife. "When I stabbed her the first time, I almost wanted to stop, but she shot me first."

Sebastian's claws dug into the earth beneath him.

"Shut up." He warned.

"Why?" Nick tilted his head. "Don't want to hear about your precious little sister? You were having a bliss calling me Nicky Dick and using Camilla on me, so why can't I use your sister too?"

Sebastian charged again.

This time, Nick met him head-on.

The two wolves collided, claws raking into each other's bodies. Sebastian managed to knock Nick onto his back, but Nick kicked him off with his hind legs and sprang back up almost instantly.

"You know what I find funny?" Nick said, breathing hard. "Even after everything, I still want your life to be mine."

He wiped his bloodied mouth against one paw.

"Zoe could've been part of the family I wanted, she was such a good sister. But Vee still will be. Eventually."

The words made Sebastian freeze, just for half a second as they circle each other.

Nick saw it happen.

"I'll kill you, Sebastian," he said, his voice thick with a twisted kind of excitement. "And once you're dead, I'll take your wife. I'll build a home with her. I'll finally have the family I always wanted, and I'll make sure she gives me children. Plenty of them."

Something inside Sebastian snapped. He let out a roar so loud that the wolves watching from the woods flinched back. If Nick didn't carry the same powers as Sebastian, this fight would have ended already, but fighting him was like fighting himself, because Nick had everything a Supreme Alpha should have. And his words about his wife were doing nothing but adding fuel to the burning flames in Sebastian's bleeding heart.

"Sebastian!" Matt shouted, already seeing exactly what Nick was trying to bait him into with all those words.

But Sebastian wasn't listening anymore. He charged at Nick with nothing but pure rage driving him forward.

Nick's eyes glimmered, because this was exactly what he'd wanted.