

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 17

The shock was still running through my bloodstream as the door to the admissions door slammed shut. I couldn't believe what I had heard.

The first person I'd made a genuine connection with, someone who I actually wanted to marry, didn't want it.

I couldn't believe he ignored all the signs. The signs he told me about.

Maybe he lied, my inner voice said. Maybe he actually isn't as sincere as you thought.

But then, I thought of the way he stopped the Hunt. The way he kept the wolves at bay as I recovered. The way he tended to my wounds. The way his hands felt on my sides.

No, no, no!

Hot, angry tears threatened to come out of my eyes. I blinked them away then did the only thing I knew that could take my mind off it. I ran.

I took off towards the forest, heat in my lungs and brain and let the tears slide across my cheeks. It was early enough before classes that not many students were on campus. Those who were, seemed to ignore me. So I pushed and pushed.

I broke into the forest at a sprint then slowly down to more of a run. I dodged some of the trees and broke onto a path. My chest was heaving from the exercise but, somehow, I still felt okay. I pushed my pace harder and tried to ignore the thought of white-gold eyes in my head.

Unfortunately, they crept back in.

Something about this seemed like such a betrayal. I'd only know this man for a week yet I'd come to trust him. Sure, there was the faint lingering feeling of attraction but most of it was admiration. Valentin was a strong warrior. He defeated the vampires with my mother. And yet he couldn't see me as his bride? Even as something more platonic? Though nothing seemed platonic about fated mates.

My mind drifted to Bella and her outburst with him the other morning.

She'd been asking him to choose. Was she asking between me and her?

Maybe Bella was his chosen mate and that's why she hated me. I'd burst into the school, caused a ruckus and then stolen her man.

Well, not stolen, my inner voice said. He doesn't want you, remember?

I hate when she got bitter like this. I grunted and pushed my pace harder. My inner voice slid to the back of my mind. The anger she created spurred horrid images of me tearing Bella apart. I gasped at the violence of it all and stopped short.

I collapsed against a tree and slumped down to the floor. My heart was beating erratically, enough that I pressed my hand to my chest. I let my eyes close as my head tipped back to hit the tree behind me.

It only took my heart beat a moment to return. I was about to get up, surprised at the energy I had, and run back to my dorm when the leaves started bristling in front of me. I slowly stood, hands out. Who knew what kind of creatures were in these woods.

Then, of course, a pair of beady gold eyes and cropped black hair came into my vision. I swore under my breath.

“Why is it always fucking you?” I spat.

Maximus scowled at me. “Maybe if you stop being a fucking idiot, I would stop chasing you!”

“Like you give a shit what happened to me!” I threw back at him.

“Unfortunately, I seem to care,” Maximus bit out from gritted teeth. He walked over a fallen log into the clearing where I was standing. “I watched whatever happened with you and Professor Lunerly. You confronted him, didn’t you?”

“That’s none of your business,” I hissed. Technically I had, but not in the way Maximus expected me to.

“You know, he had a fated mate before,” Maximus said. He crossed his arms over his chest. “Zahara. She was the Queen’s sister. She wound up being killed in the Uprising.”

I whipped around to look at him. My mom’s sister? I never even knew my mother had a sister. I scowled at him. “The books say you can’t have two fated mates,” I snapped back.

“Two living fated mated,” Maximus took a step towards me. “Clearly, Lunerly’s been slacking on his teaching.”

“Like you’d do any better,” I retorted: “You’d throw me off a cliff and tell me it’s training.”

“It would be,” Maximus said, entire unphased. I let out an exasperated noise and threw my hands up. I started to walk away when Maximus spoke again.

“Zahara was the Queen’s younger sister,” he said. “She was the beta of the Luna pack at the time. She was revered for how quick, gutless and strong she was. She also had a

wicked sense of humor. Her death was the reason that the Queen wound up awakening her powers. She was so distressed with her sisters death, that it sparked something in her.” He looked up at me.

“It’s how she defeated the vampires.”

My heart sunk for both Victoria and Valentin. No wonder he was so tied around my mother’s finger. They’d both lost something that meant more to them than words, a sibling and a lover.

I processed it for a second, ignoring how Maximus took a step closer to me. I startled as I realized how close he was and skittered backwards. My back brushed into the tree I was sitting at the foot of.

“Lunerly’s judgement is clouded,” Maximus said, taking another step towards me. “He’s not going to be fully there when he trains you. Let me train you. I can help.”

I snorted. “You’re going to train me to take down Kairos? Yeah fucking right. You don’t give a shit about me.”

“I don’t?” Maximus took another step towards me. He reached a hand out and let it sit against the bark of the tree, right next to my head. His eyes lowered towards me. “Then why do I keep helping you?”

I frowned. He had a point. He took another step towards me. Both hands braced my head. My heart thudded in my chest. He could kill me like this. I had no doubts he wouldn’t try. I jutted my chin up to look him in the eyes.

His gold ones scanned my hazel, looking for something. He cocked his head to the side slightly.

“You know,” he whispered. “Sometimes I wonder if you’re fated to be with me.”