

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 21

The gym was filled with people.

They were boo-ing me as I made my way to the sparring mats. Most of them had been cleared away from the area, save for one. It was shiny as if someone had just polished it. Standing smack in the middle was none other than Kairos.

I walked towards him, chin off my chest and eyes piercing anyone who made contact with me. Several wolves tried to get in my face to scare me, but I didn't let them. As I got closer to the mat, two people stood up to stand next to Kairos. One was Thorne and one was Maximus.

I knew he didn't give a shit about us, my inner voice spat.

I don't know why you even considered it, I threw back.

Being fated mates doesn't mean he has to like me. In fact, being fated to a girl without a wolf probably makes him angrier.

My inner voice scoffed and I ignored her. I didn't have time for her petulance. I needed to be locked in to the sparring mat. I stepped up to the mat and waited for the crowd to die down. They roared louder until Thorne held up one hand. Immediately, they silence.

"The rules are as follows," he stated. "Best two out of three fights. Winner will be announced by Maximus."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "How is that fair?"

"Not everything in life is fair, human, Maximus hissed.

There went my hope of having him potentially on my side

for this. I rolled my eyes. The crowd was starting to liven up again. Thorne held up his hand again.

"All sparring techniques are for use," he said. "A knockout results in an automatic win. Fighters, take your positions."

I walked further into the mat. Maximus and Thorne stepped back into the crowd. I took the stance that Valentin had taught me: right foot in front of left and shoulder, shoulder opponent. The crowd started going again. I looked out into the back of the gym.

Loren and Valentin were standing next to one another.

Loren was gnawing her nails. Valentin had a frown etched into his lips. He caught my eye and mouthed one word.

Speed.

“Begin!” Thorne called.

I snapped my face back to Kairos. He barreled towards me with a yell, fist raised high. I side stepped quickly and dodged out of his way. He blinked once then turned back to me. He threw two quick punches, both of which I blocked. Blocking his strength hurt like hell but it was better than taking a punch to the face.

He wound up for a third punch. He swung and I dipped under it, rolling off my back to stand behind him. I picked up my foot and jammed my heel into the space at the back of his knee. He fell to the floor but wasn't phased, he swung his opposite leg around in a move that was very similar to the one that Valentin had used to put me on my ass the week before.

I jumped over it and swung my fist into his ribs. He grunted in surprise. Then it turned into a growl.

“Stop dancing, pup,” he snapped. “We're here to fight.”

“I'm trying to,” I said. I blocked a high kick with my bicep.

The smack of skin on skin stung. “But my opponent has more fun playing with his food.”

That earned a snarl from Kairos who took another step back and charged into me. He threw a quick succession of punches my way. I dodged the first three but the fourth caught me in the jaw. I yelped and staggered back with force.

The crowd behind Kairos was going mad. Kairos, himself, looked enraged. His dark gold eyes were pulsing with anger. His hair was sticking up all over, arms and legs rippling with muscle. I quickly dropped back into my stance. I tried a combo of jabs that Valentin taught me.

Kairos blocked each one of them.

He kned me in the side, sending me off balance before he took his elbow and jammed it in the back of my neck. I sputtered as I landed on my hands and knees on the ground. I could feel him raise his foot to slam it into my back and quickly rolled away. His foot hit the bare mat and I was back on my feet.

I could already feel my jaw swelling as all the blood rushed from my head. I wobbled slightly but still was able to avoid another few strikes by Kairos. This time, the third came across the same cheek as my swollen jaw. I staggered again.

Come on! My inner voice screamed. Show him how strong you really are! The air was coming out of my lips in huffs. I threw another punch then a kick. As my foot was about to come down on Kairos's thigh, he caught it. He yanked hard and I flew to the ground again. My head bouncing off the mat, causing a ringing in my ears and blurring my vision.

Then he was on top of me. My first thought was to fight. I clawed at the skin on his shoulder. I couldn't see well but I must've drawn blood. Liquid slid down my fingers as Kairos hissed.

"You fucking bitch!" Kairos hissed. He grabbed me by the shoulders and slammed me down against the mat, just as he had done when he caught me during shifting class.

My vision started going back and forth from black to white to visions of Kairos above me, face red and snarling.

I kept digging my nails into his skin. He tried to shake him loose, but I caught him in the face, causing him to swear.

He grabbed my wrist and twisted. Hard.

I cried out in pain. Adrenaline coursed through my veins, causing my vision to come back, crystal clear. I looked at my left wrist and found it completely bent at an odd angle. Still, I fought. Then Kairos grabbed my other wrist and pinned it under me. I was completely helpless.

"GIVE UP!" he yelled. His spit and blood coated my face.

"No," I said, voice barely recognizable. I kept trying to push myself up from underneath him. Then I remembered the last thing Valentin had told me at our final training session yesterday.

When in doubt, use your head. So I did exactly that.

I used what little strength I had to rear my head back and sail it forward. I made contact with something and heard a sickening crack. Then, I felt nothing.

I woke up choking on my own lungs for air. My throat was dry as hell as I wheezed. It was if not enough air existed in the world. I panted, mind and heart racing a thousand miles a minute until I felt a hand cover my own. Instantly I was soothed.

I turned and was met with white-gold eyes.

Valentin.

"What - where -" I wheezed.

“Deep breaths,” he instructed. He was still holding my hand tight. “Your body is still coming down from the adrenaline. You may be feeling a bit out of sorts.”

You think? I tried to calm down my breathing but there was only one thing I needed in that moment.

“Did I – win?” I choked out.

The look on Valentin’s face told me everything I needed to know.

I didn’t.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 22

I felt every bone in my body crumble in itself.

I didn’t do it.

Kairos beat me.

I shifted slightly in the bed I was in. I recognized the room immediately as the infirmary. There was a low beeping noise coming from my right. I looked down and saw an IV sticking out of my hand. I frowned. I tried to sit up further; but my brain was pulsing in my skull. I slunk back down and looked at Valentin.

“What happened?” I whispered.

“You were doing well,” Valentin said back soft. “Then he got under up. Swiped your foot and had you on your back.”

I nodded. I remembered that. Then everything got kind of fuzzy. Valentin sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“He threw you to the ground a few times then you headbutted him. Hard,” A soft smile crossed his lips. “Not what I meant when I said ‘use your head’ by the way.”

I smiled back but my head started to pound more. I closed my eyes. “So I didn’t win,”

“No,” the joking tone had completely left Valentin’s voice.”

You threw yourself at Kairos so hard that you knocked yourself out. He was stunned, but only for a moment or so. Once everyone realized you were passed out, Maximus called it.

I wanted to curl up in a ball and die.

Not only had I lost to Kairos but I'd made myself look like an idiot by throwing my skull against his. Part of me was proud I'd stunned him. The other part of me was cursing myself for the pulsing in my head. I closed my eyes, hoping to drown it out.

I heard a gentle buzzing, then Valentin shuffling around. "Hello?" he said. There was a loud, shrill voice in the phone then he sighed. "Yes, she's here."

I didn't need to ask to know who he was talking to. I silently held out my hand. Valentin dropped the phone in it. I brought it up to my ear.

"Hello, mother," my voice sounded crackly.

"Hello?!" Victoria screeched. "You almost die and all you have to say is 'hello?!'"

"I didn't die, did I?" I mumbled. "Plus, your screaming is making my head feel like Jell-O."

"You are unbelievable!" she went on, shrilly. "What in the Gods green earth were you thinking?"

"I was thinking that I was tired of being shoved around like nothing," I popped one eye open. Valentin's face was neutral but I knew he was thinking the same things. "I had to prove myself," I went on. "He had this Hunt thing going on after me and-"

"Valentin didn't tell me his Hunt was after you," she snapped. "The annual hunt is usually after the weakest wolf."

I snorted. "Well,"

Victoria sighed deeply. "Zora, I cannot believe you thought it was a good idea to face the son of a High Alpha without awakening your inner wolf," she said. "Furthermore, I am sorry you felt like you had to."

I blinked twice. "Um, thank you?"

"We should've sent you in as the Princess," she went on.

This was all a mistake."

"Wait, wait," I cut her off. I sat up straighter, wincing as I went. Valentin's hands were immediately cupped around me. I swatted him away. His eyes went wide as he sat back down. "I'm happy I came in the way I did," I continued. "If I came in as the Princess, everyone would've treated me like gold. I needed to come in as a wolfless nobody so I knew the gravity of what I was stepping into. I would've never trained this hard - caught up that quickly, really - if Kairos wasn't out for my head." I shook my head once.

"I don't regret any of it."

“I do!” Victoria sounded panicked. “You’ve been hurt over and over-”

“I’m not afraid of being hurt,” my voice was steady. “I’m afraid of giving up. When I give up, that’s when it’s over. Being hurt never phases me. I’ve been hurt enough I know how to deal with it.”

I hoped Victoria picked up on the dig at her. By her silence, I figured she did. She sighed again. I let my eyes flutter shut.

“So the Mateball is in a few days,” she said, gently.

My eyes flew open. “I’m sorry,” I hissed. “Now that you know I’m not dead, you’re trying to marry me off again?!”

“Zora-”

“What the fuck is your obsession with marrying me off to one of these psychopaths!”

I noticed Valentin flinched to my right. I ignored it entirely. I considered him just as insane as the others; trying to ignore something that felt so natural and right.

“If you’d let me explain,” Victoria pleaded. “I was going to tell you the truth.”

“Then tell me,” I snapped.

“When you were born,” my mother started. “A prophet came to me. She told me that you were destined to be with the sons of the High Alphas. Maximus Wolfham, Kairos Moonraiser, Thorne Blythwitch and Valentin Lunerly.” She said Valentin’s name quickly and sharply. It was if she didn’t want to admit he was one of the people was supposed to be fated to.” Right,” I said. “I deduced that when you dropped three of their headshots in front of me before I was shipped to this hellhole.”

“Yes, well there’s more,” Victoria mumbled. “She said that one of the men could be your fated mate. When you recognized the fated mate bond, and accepted it, your natural gifts would be unlocked.”

I furrowed my eyebrows. I thought of what Valentin and Maximus had taught me about the great war between vampires and werewolves. My mother was said to have powers that she unlocked as well. Did I have these same powers?

“But I don’t even have a wolf,” I said softly. “How am I supposed to have gifts when I don’t even have a wolf.”

“My hope,” Victoria went on. “Is that by finding your fated mate, you will unlock both. At once.”

My jaw fell unhinged. That was why she was so keen on me finding a mate. She was trying to help me. At once, every horrible thought I'd had towards marriage was absolved. By finding my fated mate, I would not only be as powerful as the others, but potentially more.

Maybe we should've been such a dick about this? My inner voice mused.

Probably not, I responded. But if she told us, then we would've known. My inner voice "humph"ed before disappearing in the bask of my mind. I could've sworn I saw a shimmer of silver fottow in her path. I blinked a few times before bringing my attention back to the room.

"Ill go," I said, quickly. "To Mateball. I'll go." "

Victoria seemed to sigh in relief. "Thank the Gods," she said. "I'll send some attire for the occasion to your room.

Don't worry, it won't be embossed with the royal crest."

"Okay," I nodded. My neck was slowly feeling less stiff. "

Thank you."

"You're welcome," Victoria said. "Now please give the phone back to Valentin so I can arrange for the shipment of clothing."

I slowly removed the phone from my ear and handed it back to Valentin. He looked pale as he picked it out of my hand and held it back to his ear. I tuned him out and stared at the ceiling.

Someone play here comes the child bride...

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 23

The nurse let me leave the infirmary a few hours after my call with Victoria. She made me promise not to spare for the rest of the week. Given that it was Wednesday, that meant I was only missing one session of Basics. She gave me a note, some advil and sent me on my way.

I got my first glimpse at myself since the fight as passed a mirror when I was leaving. My entire right side of my face was covered in mottled, purple-blue bruises. My right eye was swollen and puffy. My hair was a tangled mop on my head, far from the sleek twist I'd put in it before the fight. My clothes were covered in blood, Kairos's and mine. There were a few points in my lip that were split. Same with my head. My wrist had been reset but was in an air-cast.

I looked a mess.

I left the infirmary after the sun had set. It was easy to dart across campus in the shadows, without being noticed. I slunk all the way up to my dorm room without running into anyone.

When I turned around, I noticed Loren was standing next to her bed. Her eyes were red rimmed as if she had been crying. She slowly reached for a hug then shrunk back in on herself as she surveyed me.

“A mess, aren’t I?” I half-laughed, trying to break the tension. “Oh Gods,” Loren cried. “I knew it was bad but this is worse than I imagined.”

“Don’t ever spar with Kairos,” I joked. I waved my air-cast.”

Might break a wrist.”

Loren said nothing but tenderly wrapped me in a hug. It was the gentlest anyone had ever hugged me. Tears welled in my eyes. I was so frustrated and this was what I needed, someone to just care. I rested my head on top of Loren’s and let the tears stream down my cheeks in sobs.

The whole time I cried, Loren gently rubbed circles in the middle of my back. When my tears had dried, she sent me to the bathroom to shower. I came back in one of her fluffy pink towels to find she’d dug through my closet and laid out some of my old, human clothes.

“I figured they’d be comfiest,” she said softly.

I nodded at her and slunk them off. I didn’t dare look in the mirror as the rest of my body, scared it’d be worse than the bruising on my face. updated by jobnib.com When I turned around to face Loren, she confirmed it was with her face. I got into my bed with minimal wincing and Loren climbed in next to me. She rested her head on my shoulder, hip to hip with me. We sat in silence for a while before Loren snorted in laughter.

“What?” I asked through a laugh.

“Just thinking about the look on Bella’s face when

Professor Lunerly picked you up and carried you to the

infirmary,” she chuckled again. “Utterly priceless.”

‘I wish I’d seen it,” I laughed.

“Yeah,” Loren said sadly. “Me too.”

I turned slightly to look down at her. “Thank you for being a good friend,” I said gently.

Loren smiled. “Thanks for being a person worth being a good friend to,” she replied.

I returned the smile back then let myself get comfy on my pillow. It only took a few minutes but then both Loren and I were dead asleep in my bed, covered by my old quilt.

The next morning, my bruising had gone down significantly. I could feel my fingers on the hand that Kairos broke. My split lip had only one medium sized welt in it instead of two large ones. I showered before morning Basics and Loren helped me cover some of the bruising with make up.

The two of us grabbed some fruit from the near empty cafeteria in the basement of our dorm before we headed to Basics. We got about half way before I started to notice the people whispering.

“That’s her,” one girl said. “The idiot who challenged

Kairos.”

The man who she was speaking to snorted. “She looks about twelve pounds, soaking wet. She should’ve known he’d kick her ass.” Loren pulled me back to look at her. She shook her head. “Don’t listen to them,” she said under her breath. “You did great.”

I slowly looked around and noticed that everyone else around us was whispering as well. I was surprised my hearing picked up on it but horrified by what they were saying.

“I can’t believe she lost.”

“I can, she has no wolf. She should’ve known.”

“Well I heard she didn’t know she was a wolf until some strange lady told her she wasn’t.”

“I heard she isn’t even a wolf. Just a human spy.”

“-weak-”

“-pathetic—

“-fool-”

“she lost-”

“-lost-”

“-lost!-”

“-LOST!-”

I slammed my hands over my ears and whimpered. All of their voices were so loud in my head, crumbling me down to a shell of a human. I felt someone tug at my good hand.

I aimlessly followed them, head ducked down, eyes slammed shut.

The pulling stopped and I slammed into someone’s back. I crushed my eyes shut and whimpered again, this time out of the pain throbbing in my brain. Hands gently grabbed my forearms and pulled my hands from my ears. I slowly opened my eyes and was greeted with deep honey-colored eyes.

Maximus was gingerly holding my arms and pulling them away from my face. My ears were still ringing from everyone else’s voices roaring behind me. I winced slightly and Maximus dropped my arms. His hands went up to cup my face. He gently pulled me to look at him. Our eyes met and I realized this is the closest I’d ever been to him. I could make out freckle just under his right eye. It was faint enough that you had to be this close to see it.

“You have to force them to the back of your mind,” he said.

He sounded like he was underwater. I tried to nod but cringed again as the voices came back.

“-miserable bitch-”

“-honestly, who is she-”

“-she looks ridiculous-”

I slammed my eyes shut again. Maximus’s hands cupped my face harder. He shook me slightly and my eyes flew open.

“Focus, Zora!” he shouted, still under water. “Use your mind to push them back. Make them a background thrum instead of the front of your mind.”

I pinched my eyes shut and tried. I envisioned my mental-self shoving the voices back with my hands. I kept pushing and eventually, they quieted down. I gave them another few pushes and then, they were barely a thrum.

I gently pried my eyes open. Maximus was still holding my face, near inches from me. He slowly let go. I blinked a few times, expecting the voices to come back. But they were gone, pressed back into my brain away from me. I tested letting them come forward a bit but then cringed at how loud it was. I pushed them back again. Then, it was silent save for the whistle of the wind down the alley I was standing in.

“What the fuck was that?” I whispered.

“Seems as though your wolf has decided to start to wake up,” Maximus replied. His hands were back at his sides. I missed their warmth on my face. “Your hearing kicked in.” You just heard every conversation in the mile radius of the school.”

Holy shit.

Maximus gave a half laugh. I hadn’t realized I said that out loud. “Yeah, not fun,” he said. “Mine came in when I was eight. Wound up being the exact time my stepmum was in bed with my dad.” He shuddered.

“Is that how you knew to control it?” I asked, voice still low in fear of making the ringing in my ears return.

Maximus nodded. “Most parents teach their kids when they’re young,” he said. “We all know how to control it.”

“Oh,” I said. Maximus twisted his face in a way that told me he forgot where I came from. He rubbed at the back of his neck.

“I just saw you panicking and knew immediately,” he said.”

I’m sure Moonbeam could’ve helped you but – I don’t know. I just pulled you hear so you’d be away from all of it when you came out of it.”

I blinked a few times at him. Didn’t he just watch me getmy shit rocked yesterday? Who was this man and where was Maximus Wolfham.

“Thanks,” I said, dully.

“Yeah,” Max replied, nodding his head. His hand went back to rub at his neck. “Look, I need to ask you something.”

My face fell. I was not prepared to handle whatever he was about to throw my way. I pointed over my shoulder.

Basics is starting soon, ya know?” I said. “Can’t miss it!

Clearly I need more training.”

I cringed. Maximus’s lips set themselves in a thin line. He licked the front of his teeth then pointed his chin at my wrapped wrist.

“You can’t even spar,” he said. “You can be a few minutes late.”

I frowned. He had me there. I stared at him, waiting for him to speak. He looked up at the sky and blew out a breath. Then he looked back at me. My hazel eyes met his shiny gold ones and for a moment time stopped.

“The Mateball,” he said. “I’d like you to go with me.”

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 24

My eyeball twitched in its socket.

What the fuck?

“Um, is this a joke?” I managed to get out. Maximus immediately frowned at me.

“Why would I joke about this?”

Okay. Noted. Mateball is not a joke. I shrugged, trying to be as casual as possible about it. “I thought you hated me,” I said. “This being another way to mess with me wouldn’t surprise me.”

Maximus grabbed my forearm and held my wrist in front of my face. It was limp in the air cast. He ground his teeth together.

“I think you’ve been messed with enough,” he sneered then dropped my arm. I let it fall limply to my side. I blinked at him again.

Unfortunately, I think he’s serious, My inner voice said.

He can’t be, I shot back. I mean he’s had it out for me since I got here. Now, all of a sudden, he wants to take me as a date to prom? Fuck that.

My inner voice shrunk back in my mind and I figured I won that argument. I turned my attention back to Maximus, whose brows were furrowed. He opened his mouth as if he were about to say something but I cut him off. “No,” I said, short and sweet.

“No?” Maximus raised an eyebrow.

“No,” I repeated. I crossed my arms over my chest and raised my own eyebrow. “You’ve been nothing but an utter dick since I’ve arrived on campus. You cannot think that asking me to some stupid dance is going to make me fall at your feet.”

“It’s not a dance,” Maximus gritted from between his teeth. “It’s Mateball. It’s highly important-”

“Important to you,” I cut him off. “What’s most important to me is surviving.”

I turned on my heel and left Maximus in the alley. With one more glance over my shoulder, I added to the knife I'd left in his chest.

"Something I don't think I'll be able to do if I go with you to Mateball," I whispered. "Everyone already has it out for me. Going with you would add another target for people to attack me at."

I left the alley and stormed off to Basics. When I arrived, Coach had a special spot for me to watch the sparring. He sat me in front of the mat where Loren was energetically trying to fight a third year and failing. She gave me a concerned look when I finally walked in, her eyes darting from me to where Maximus was trailing behind me.

"Later," I mouthed to her. She nodded in reply. I sat and tried to learn as much as I could from the people around me. It wasn't until halfway through class that I looked across the gym and spotted Kairos. He looked like shit.

Both of his eyes had deep bruises around them. He had a gash on his jaw, no doubt from me, that looked like it had to be stitched back together. His movements were sloppy and lazy. His opponent almost got the upper hand until Kairos slammed him into the mat. He stood up wincing and looked at me across the gym. His deep gold eyes glared at me from beyond his bruised eye sockets. I held his gaze until he looked away.

Part of me was proud of myself, I clearly managed to do some sort of damage to the fearless warrior that was Kairos Moonraiser. Despite that I was wolfless, I was not completely lost.

Class ended and Loren immediately dragged me to the cafeteria. We grabbed lunch and then walked out to eat it on the campus lawn. We sat down and started unwrapping the lunches we'd gotten to go.

"So what did Maximus do for you?" Loren asked, as casually as she possibly could. I could sense from her twitching she was dying to know.

"Well, apparently my wolf hearing kicked in," I sighed. "It was like everyone in the world was in my ears. So he helped me with that."

Loren gasped and grabbed my arm with a huge smile. "That's amazing Zora!" she said, shaking me slightly. Then she dropped my arm and frowned. "Well, not amazing that you felt that. I remember when mine kicked in." She shivered. I chuckled around a bite of sandwich. I swallowed before continuing, tried to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"And he invited me to Mateball," I mumbled.

Loren paused mid bite then slowly brought her sandwich away from her mouth. Her eyes were wide with wonder. I took a small nibble of my own sandwich avoiding her gaze.

“Tell me you said yes,” Loren said softly.

I groaned and dropped my sandwich back in its wrapper.

At the same time Loren whisper yelled my name in shock.

“I can’t believe you rejected Maximus Wolfham as a mate!” she whisper yelled.

“I didn’t reject him as a mate,” I said. “I just said no to being his prom date. He’s a weird guy and I never know what his true motive is with me. I could see this being another way to embarrass me.”

“Zora,” Loren shook her head. “You’ve got it all wrong.

Wolves never mess about with having a mate. Mateball is Like the most important day in some wolves’ lives!” I flinched. Maybe I had mistaken Maximus’s intentions. poked at my sandwich again. Suddenly, my appetite was completely gone.

“He hates wolfless,” I said softly. “Told me so himself. So how could he have possibly been okay with me being his mate.”

“I know Max has been hard on you,” Loren put her hand on my shoulder. She shook it lightly. “But he wouldn’t joke about this.” She sat back on her heels and smiled.

“Honestly, maybe it’s the Gods’ way of telling him that wolfless aren’t as bad as he thinks,” she said. She laughed lightly.

I couldn’t help but smile. “It would be high ironic for the guy who hates wolfless to be stuck with a wolfless girl as a mate,” I picked my sandwich back up and chomped another bite.

Maybe Loren was right. Maybe Maximus was more okay with me being his potential fated mate than me being wolfless? But then there was this whole princess thing. I tried to ignore the sinking feeling as I finished my lunch. I figured a topic change would be better.

“So what do people wear to the Mateball?” I asked Loren.

Her eyes went wide. “Oh it’s the most fashionable event of the year!” Great. Fashion was not my forte. I fidgeted in my oversized tee from my time in the human world.” I’m thinking I’ll wear a pink gown,” Loren went on. “My mother had matching gowns made for sissy and I when we were young. But sissy’s already chosen a mate so she won’t need it.” Her nose wrinkled.

I laughed. “When am I gonna meet this sister of yours?” I asked.

“She’ll be at Mateball,” Loren assured. “But she won’t take part in the dance.”

I frowned. “Dance?”

“The Dance of the Moon!” Loren said cheerfully. “Where the Moonlight streams in through the moonroof and lights us to our mates!” Her face fell as she saw my own expression.

“You didn’t know did you?”

I shook my head and finished the final nub of my sandwich. “I suck at dancing,” I said around a mouthful of sandwich.

“Don’t worry,” Loren waved a hand. “It’s really primal.

Usually a bunch of sniffing and letting your wolf take over.”

My heart dropped down to the pit of my stomach. How was I supposed to let a wolf take over when I didn’t have one?

Somehow, this was worse than just some wolf-y prom.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 25

The day of Mateball, there was a knock at my door at eight in the morning. Loren was dead asleep in her bed. The knock woke me up slightly but I figured I was imagining things. It wasn’t until the second, louder knock that my eyes opened. I begrudgingly slunk out of bed and opened the door. I had to rub my eyes to make sure I was seeing things correctly.

Standing in front of my door were two extravagantly dressed people. The one on the right had spikey black hair that curled around their face but also stuck up straight to the ceiling. They were dressed in all sorts of leather and silver chains. They cracked their gum at me as their eyes a ran over me.

The second person was more masculine. They had on a pin

-stiped pantsuit, that ended slightly below their knees, and shiny silver cowboy boots. Their hair was wild and wavy yet still looked perfectly coiffed. They wore a pair of matching silver sunglasses. They reached their black-painted fingernails up and ripped them off before giving me the same look as their partner.

“Oh, Heavens and Hells,” they whispered under their breath. They turned their head to look at their partner in the eyes. “Maja, we have a lot of work to do darling.”

I rubbed my eyes again. “Sorry, can I help you?”

“We’ve been sent to help you with preparations for the Mateball,” The person with spikey hair, Maja, said. They+15 Bonus

gave me another look up and down. “Pietha’s right. We have a lot of work to do.”

“Um,” I started. I heard Loren start to stir behind me and immediately froze. I stepped out of the door, closing it slightly behind me. I dropped my voice to a whisper. “Did the Queen send you?”

The person in the suit, Pietha’s, lips curled into a smirk. ” She send her regards, darling,” they drawled. Then they punctuated it with a wink. “But don’t worry. We were told to keep it on the DL.”

I felt the panic that was starting to rise in my chest expel out my nose in a sigh. My shoulders sank down to their normal level. “Thank God.”

“Yes, yes,” The suited person waved. “Anyways, I’m Pietha Robins. Stylist to the stars of the wolf world. He or him, please,” he jammed a thumb towards the spikey haired person. They wiggled their fingers at me.

“Maja Porter,” the spikey haired person said. “She or they if you will. I’m a MUA and hair artist.”

“MUA?” I repeated. “Hair artist?”

Maja snorted. “Well I can’t say hair dresser,” they said. “My work is far superior to that.”

“Zora?” I heard behind me, all grumbly and full of sleep. I turned and saw Loren had finally gotten out of bed.

“Oh, sorry,” I said and propped the door open a little bitmore. “My, um, hair and make up people are here.”

“For tonight,” Loren walked up to the door. When she took in Pietha, her eyes shot wide and her jaw dropped.

“You’re – you’re -”

Pietha rolled his eyes. He looked back at me. “This is the reaction I wanted from you.”

“Sorry,” I mumbled. “I’m not exactly versed in wolf pop culture.”

Pietha said nothing and pushed past both me and Loren and into my room. Maja followed behind, toting in a giant cart of stuff after her. Loren was still slack jawed standing next to me.

“Did you hire them?” she whispered.

I shook my head. “They were a gift,”

“From the lady who found you?!” Loren whisper yelled. I bit my lip and nodded. Loren shook her head in amazement. “She must be high up in order to get Pietha Robins to come to Alpha Academy.”

“Ladies,” Pietha drawled from inside my room. Loren and I turned and looked into our room. Maja was already unloading cartons of make up and hair tools. Some of them I’d never even seen before. Pietha stood next to them, hands on his hips.

“Are we starting or not?”

“We?” I said as Loren squeaked out the same word. She had gone deadly still.

“We? Nosotros? Nous?” Pietha drawled. “What other language would you like me to speak it in?”

“So, you’re doing hair and make up for both of us?” I said, slowly as I wrapped my hand around Loren to hold her still.

“Yup,” Maja said with another crack of their gum. I swear Loren almost fell over. Had my hand not been there, I think she would’ve. She opened and closed her mouth a few times, with only squeaks of the beginning of the words coming out. I patted her gently on the shoulder before pushing her towards the chair that Maja had set up.

“She says thank you,” I said as Loren fell in the chair, eyes still darting back and fourth between my two personal employees. I shook my head with a half laugh. I sat on the edge of my bed as Pietha and Maja went to work.

It took about two hours of work and Loren was done. They curled the bottom of her blunt white-blond hair so that it tickled her cheeks. The rest was pin straight. They used some stunning purple shimmer on her eyes that made them pop out of her head.

Pietha had picked out a stunning white and gold gown for Loren. It was mainly white with shimmering gold thread in the fabric. There were several gold appliques that swooped around her collarbones. He complimented it with massive gold chain that wrapped tightly around her neck. She looked absolutely beautiful.

“This is insane,” Loren said staring at herself in the mirror.

“This day is insane. This is insane. You are insane.”

Pietha smoothed the fabric on her shoulder. He hummed lightly. “You’re welcome, darling,” he said. “I do my good work on blondes.” He glanced towards me.

“But I do my best work on redheads,” he said with a wicked grin.

I cringed slightly. Loren hopped up from the chair and swung me into it. She held onto my hands as she looked me in the eyes.

“Next time you see this magic woman,” Loren said softly as she squeezed my hands. “Please thank her from the bottom of my heart. For both finding you and for this absolute treat. I will never, ever forget it.”

I smiled at her softly and squeezed her hands back. “Of course,” I said.

Loren bounced back up and started towards the door. “I have to call my mother,” she said. “We’ve been fans of Pietha for ages!” Her cheeks rouged slightly as she said it, looking at Pietha behind me. “I’ll see you at Mateball, Zora!” Loren called over her shoulder as she ran out of the room. Then, I was alone with Pietha and Maja. I swallowed thickly as Maja swung her hair around so I was facing her.

“Now what are we going to do with you?” she drawled.

I swallowed again before I was swarmed with brushes and curlers.

I don’t know how long as I was in the chair but the sun started to set as Pietha finally let me up. He then bombarded me with seven different dresses that, I thought, were all in the same color. According to Pietha, I was more suited for a deep moss than a Kelly green.

Then, he laced me up sixty seven thousand different ways.

I felt my skin and bones be pulled the plumped and pushed into position. Then, he went at my hair, straightening it from its wild tangle of curls into a sleek ribbon of red. Maja then went in and pulled and wove it behind me. In the end, only two of the sleek red ribbons still hung in front of my face.

Maja and Peitha were grinning from ear to ear as they finally spun me around. I was met in the mirror by the most beautiful version of myself I’d ever seen.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 26

“Wow,” I breathed and I truly meant it.

My usually unruly curls were flat ironed into sleek beautiful red hair. The light kept catching on it and made it glisten. My face had never looked so smooth. Planes upon planes of perfect skin. My jaw looked sharp and defined. Maja had lined my eyes with kohl. Their hazel color popped against the paleness of my skin. My lashes were long and darker than usual. They curled up and felt like fans when I blinked at myself.

The gown that Pietha had put me in was a deep mossy green. It was as if the dress was made of millions of pieces of fabric, all woven together to form ropes. They curled and curved around every bit of me and accentuated my hips, waist and ass. One skimmed the underline of my breast then swirled down to my hip.

To pull it all together, there was a silver choker around my neck. It looked like vines had twisted their way around my throat. Every few vines, there were emeralds that were placed deep within the grooves of the vines.

I looked ethereal.

“Like a princess,” Pietha breathed, as if he could read my thoughts.

I turned around to look him in the eye. He smiled softly at me. He ran his hands over my shoulders as he did with Loren earlier. “I did say I do my best work on redheads,” he mused. “You look amazing.”

“Thank you,” I breathed. I flung myself into Pietha’s arms.”

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, thank you-”

“Darling,” Pietha said. “I don’t want you smudging your make up before they get a look at you.”

I drew back quickly. He swiped a finger under my eyes. It came up clean. He smirked at his own work then dropped his hand to his side. He grabbed me by the biceps and steered me towards the door.

“Maja has the car ready,” he swung the door open. As he did, he put a silver clutch in my hands. It matched choker on my neck and the shiny silver shoes on my feet. “She’ll drop you off in style. Then, hopefully, you won’t return home tonight.”

“What does that mean?” I looked at Pietha with wide eyes.

Pietha just rolled his eyes and shoved me out the door.

“Ta-ta, darling!” he wiggled his fingers at me. “Have a good night.”

Bewildered, I stumbled down the stairs and out into the night. Sure enough, the moon was high and bright in the sky. It was nearly at its peak, looming over the campus like an omen rather than a hopefully light.

I heard a horn and turned my head in the direction of the noise. Maja sat in the front seat of a long sedan. I stumbled into the car and huffed when I had to drag my dress into the car. Maja laughed from the front seat.

“Where to, Miss?” Maja said from the front seat in a fake accent.

I took a deep breath, preparing for whatever the night was going to give me.

“Mateball,” I said. “And step on it.”

Maja laughed again and I smiled softly to myself. I was beginning to think that maybe this wouldn’t be that awful.

The car rolled up to the Auditorium, a large stone building covered in the moon phases, and came to a stop. Maja got

– out and opened the door for me but that’s as far as they went. I ascending the giant stone steps all on my own wobbly feet. At the top was a great stone door with a howling wolf on it. Behind the door, I could hear music.

With my final deep breath, I shoved the doors open.

Inside was what I’d imagined: a bunch of my fellow wolves in formal attire. Some were dancing, some were sat on the outside rim, perched on fancy looking couches holding champagne flutes. Others were chatting amongst each other in a circle around the dance floor. Some were dancing like it was the Victorian era, barely touching and looking longingly at each other.

As people noticed my late arrival, several whispers spun up around me. I tried to tune into the voices behind me with my wolf hearing. The whispers became louder in the back of my head.

“Who is that?”

“My, my she’s stunning!”

“–Is that a Pietha original gown? How did she get her hands on it?”

“She’s stunning-”

The voices became a bit much. I tuned them back out, shoving them into the back of my mind as Maximus taught me. But I still heard the way their conversations stopped and their heads turned. I shrunk in on myself as I had done before. I quickly ran away from the entrance. I b-

- lined it to the drink table.

“A glass of white, please,” I said to the unassuming bartender.

“Which white?” the bartender asked, bored.

“Oh, uh-”

“Try the Sancerre,” a low voice rumbled from my right.

My blood chilled in my veins. I knew that voice. I’d felt it drip down my ears as a snarl.

Stop dancing, pup

I gasped and whipped towards the source of the voice. My fears were amplified as I looked into a piercing set of darkgold eyes. The memories from my fight came crashing back into me. I slammed my eyes shut and tried to talk myself out of the swirl of anxiety building up inside me.

The man laughed. “First time a woman’s actually closed their eyes at the sight of me,” he drawled. “Usually they stare.”

I slowly opened my eyes and made eye-contact with Kairos Moonraiser. My heart was thrumming in my chest as his lips curled up into a smirk.

“Hello, gorgeous,” he drawled. “I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Kairos. Son of High Alpha Moonraiser.”

I breezed right over the pretentious introduction and blinked at him twice. He didn’t recognize me? His hand was reaching for mine. I sizzle of electricity jolted from his fingertips to mine. I immediately panicked and yanked my hand away.

Kairos frowned at me. He looked confused. His eyes looked back up and met mine.

. “What-” he started then

his smile dropped.

My own pulse was so fast I felt like my chest was about to erupt. Slowly, his face worked it’s way into a snarl. A Low growl escaped from his throat. He took his hand and balled it into a fist. He pierced me with his eyes before storming off away from the drink table. My heart skipped again and I let out a huff of a breath.

“So the Sancerre?” the bartender deadpanned.

So much for anonymity.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 27

The bartender shoved a glass of wine towards me. I took it tentatively and looked back across the floor. People had stopped whispering and were outright staring at me.

Some had horrified looks twisted across their faces.

Others looked disgusted.

I guess my altercation with Kairos outed my identity.

I took a huge swig of my wine. It was slightly acidic as it trickled down my throat. I was never much of a drinker when I was in the human world. It never appealed to me to lose myself like that. But now, as I was glared at despite looking the best I'd ever looked, I wanted to be lost.

I took another swig. Everyone's eyes had slowly moved away from me, leaving me to look at them. I noticed several people chatting in the far right corner of the room.

A particular gold and white dress caught my attention. I followed it up to the person and immediately spotted Loren.

She was talking to a much taller woman with the same pale skin as her. But this woman had swooping, long dark brown hair. It was curled and perfected into beautiful Hollywood waves. Her dress was a deep dark blue that accented her gold eyes. Her features were almost identical to Loren's.

Her sister, I thought to myself.

Better go introduce yourself, my inner voice said. It wouldn't hurt to have a few additional allies.

For once, I agreed with my inner voice. I slunk around the outside of the room, avoiding any additional altercations.

I walked up behind Loren and gently placed my hand on her shoulder. Loren whipped around. Her surprise turned into a genuine smile and she wrapped me in a hug.

"Zora!" she said. "You're here. Oh Gods, you look amazing!"

I laughed lightly, feeling the heart creep up my cheeks." Thanks. They really did me well,"

Loren smiled brightly. She grabbed the woman standing next to her and brought her forward.

"This is my sissy,

Alessia,

she said. "She's the next High Alpha of

Moonbeam.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” I said, sticking out my hand. “I’m Zora Smith.”

Alessia hummed and gently shook my hand. “So, you’re the infamous Zora?” she raised an eyebrow. “Kairos really has it out for you.”

“Unfortunately,” I rubbed my arm.

Alessia hummed again. She sipped the champagne in her hand. “So, are you hoping to find a mate tonight?”

I was grateful for the change in topic. I sighed and fiddled with my own wine glass. “Maybe,” I said. “I’m pretty new to this whole thing so I’m just trying to go with my instincts.” “That’s the best way to do it!” Loren piped up.

“Agreed,” Alessia said. “That’s how I found my mate. Here he is now

I looked over my shoulder and my heart sunk to my toes.

Petyr sauntered over from the bar. He had a smug smirk on his face until he saw me. Then his face fell. He wrapped his arm around Alessia’s waist and pressed a kiss to the side of her face. His lips were still set in a neutral line. His jaw ticked as he took in me and Loren.

“Mini Moonbeam,” he drawled looking at Loren. He turned towards me and nodded once. “Wolfless.”

“Petyr, be nice,” Alessia said with no threat in her tone. I felt my lips curl in disgust. I nodded back at him. Loren’s hand grabbed at my elbow.

“Did anyone walk you through the steps of the Mateball?” she said gently. I shook my head. Alessia took another sip of her champagne then addressed me.

“It’s simple really,” she said. She gestured to the ceiling above the dance floor.

A giant window was radiating the night sky down onto the dance floor. People danced joyously under the moon as it edged closer and closer to being directly above the dance floor.

“At midnight, the lights will go dark as the full of the moonlight sets upon the dance floor,” Alessia continued. “The moonlight and your inner wolf will lead you to the one who is determined to be your fated mate. If you have one in the room, you’ll feel a tug in your chest towards them. If you have one in the world, you’ll feel a dull thrum in your body. Then, your heartbeats will set in time together and it’ll sound like there’s two drums in your head.”

I frowned. I felt like I'd had that sensation before. Loren squeezed my elbow, sensing how uncomfortable I was.

"It'll be okay," she said softly. "Apparently, your body will know what to do."

"It's true," Petyr chimed in. I snapped my head towards him. It was the first time he'd addressed me in a way that wasn't malicious. He tugged Alessia closer to him and looked deep in her eyes.

"I saw her across the dance floor," he continued. "And I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world, lit up by the moonlight in that silver dress."

Petyr nuzzled his face into the space between Alessia's chin and chest. She laughed lightly and rested her head on top of his. She planted a light kiss to his cheek bone then drew back. She noticed I was looking at them and smiled lightly at me.

"Even if your mate isn't in the room, don't lose hope," she said. "My first year, Petyr wasn't at school yet. I felt the dull thrum and I knew I had time to wait."

I turned towards Loren. "Did you feel the thrum?" She smiled sadly at me and I felt her own sadness work its way through my bones. "I'm sorry," I said quietly.

"It's okay!" she said, perky as ever. "I can still choose a mate. But that's a whole different type of Mateball." I nodded. "What happens then?"

Petyr gestured towards the dancefloor with a smug smirk.

"If you look there, you'll see how the Chosen mates court one another," he said.

I looked over my shoulder and the first person I saw was Bella. Her long black signature ponytail was down that night. Her hair was woven into a loose braid on the bottom that fanned into curls around her face. She was twirling across the dance floor like a snowflake falling in winter: all graceful and elegant. At the end of her spin, she extended her arm. A masculine hand darted out from the crowd and accepted hers. She pulled the man attached to it out to the floor. His hand immediately went to her waist, lingering above her ass. When I saw the man,

I gasped.

It was Valentin.

My hand went to my mouth as I watched his other hand slide into hers. They spun around the dancefloor like a work of art. I couldn't help the deep pang of jealousy that spurred in my chest. For all the touches that Valentin avoided, or the fiery connection the two of us felt, I never thought he'd go so far as to pick a chosen mate over me.

Don't show how upset you are, my inner voice said. Don't let them win.

I chomped on my lower lip, inevitably messing up the red Lip that Maja had put on me earlier in the day. I continued to watch Valentin and Bella twirl across the floor with aplenty of other couples. The others looked like they were in love, eyes locked and lips curled in smiles.

Valentin looked neutral as ever. So much so, it was sending Belta into a scowl.

"Excuse me," a voice ripped me out of my staring. "May I cut in?"

I turned towards the voice but I already knew who it was.

Maximus stood behind me. He was wearing a dark blue suit that made his eyes pop against his skin. His hair was shirred short to his skull yet was darker than his suit.

Petyr, Loren and Alessia had all turned towards him.

"May I?" Maximus said. I glanced down and noticed his hand was extended.

"What?" I said softly.

"May I have this dance?" Maximus repeated.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 28

I stared at the hand in front of me. I blinked twice before turning and looking at Loren and her sister. Alessia's mouth was curved into a smirk, champagne glass pressed to her deep purple lips. Loren looked as shocked as I felt.

She nudged me back towards Maximus.

I let my eyes linger on Alessia's smirk for another second before looking back at Maximus. His hand was still outstretched. Half of me wanted to grab it and feel the flood of electricity surge through me. Half of me knew this was just another trick.

My heart, however, demanded I look towards the dance floor. I turned back towards the room. The moonlight was starting to fill the whole dance circle. A clock was ticking in the back of my mind. But, none of that mattered because Valentin had stopped dancing. Bella was yelling in his ear but he was staring at me.

Staring at me as I stared at Maximus's outstretched hand.

I jerked my gaze back to the situation playing out in front of me. Maximus's eyes were still locked on me. Suddenly, everything became far too much.

“I’m sorry,” I croaked out, voice cracking.

I pushed past Maximus and ran towards the bathroom. All the eyes in the room were on me as I ran. When I finally got to the bathroom, I locked the door behind me and sunk to the ground in a pile of green fabrics. The tears pricked my eyes immediately. This was all too much. Every bit of it. From the new world! was thrown into to the new rules I was supposed to adhere to. Then there was this whole husband prospect that – actually – was a fucking mate. Then this with these gaggle of men who had incredibly confusing feelings for.

Some of which were weirdly reciprocated, others that were not. Then some which were a fucking joke apparently. Because all of the stuff above wasn’t enough.

– I can’t win, I thought to myself.

But you can, my inner voice fought back. You are Princess Zora Luna of the Wolves. You are the daughter of the savior of the wolves. So act like it!

For once, I agreed with my inner voice. Hosting a pity party for myself was not going to solve all my problems. I stood up with a sniffle and looked at the mirror. Luckily enough, whatever Maja had sprayed on my face had glued the make up to it. Only a smudge of lipstick was missing. I used my thumb to smudge it back into place. Then I swiped away a stray tear and fussed with my hair.

When I stood up and took my full appearance into account. My inner voice was right. I was a fucking princess. I looked the part, so now it was time to play it. I smoothed out the front of my dress then pulled the door to the bathroom open.

I walked back out into the main room with my chin held high. I grabbed another glass of wine and shot half of it back down my throat. My other glass had been lost in the shock of it all. I took a deep breath and scanned the room.

It looked like everyone was back into their own conversations. Maximus was still talking with Petyr across the room. Alessia and Loren were standing a bit away from them, talking to each other. Loren looked nervous. Alessia seemed unphased as per the rest of the day.

I slugged the rest of the wine. A pleasant warm sensation washed over my body. I placed the empty glass down and walked a bit towards the dance floor. Then, a loud ring sounded through the room. Cheers erupted from the crowd. Everyone seemed to rush towards the dance floor.

I was ushered in by some of the outside crowd.

Then, the lights went out.

Oh God. It was happening.

Moonlight streamed in through the window above the dance floor as the moon reached the apex of the sky.

Instead of the moonlight illuminating the room, it made everything darker. I gasped as my vision went despite my eyes being open.

I then remember what Loren had said regarding letting my body take control. I let my eyes fluttered shut. I took a deep breath in and tuned into the sounds around me.

There was the crackle of conversation and an occasional cheer but beneath that, there was something more. There it was again.

Lub dub, lub dub, lub-dub...I took a tentative step towards the noise. Then, I felt this slow hum building in the back of the beating. My heart stuttered a bit. Petyr hadn't mentioned hearing both the sounds. I continued to take another step. Then, I felt a pull on my dress.

My eyes flew open. I was still blinded by the darkness. I stepped away again and heard the crushing tear of fabric.

I gasped and tried to pull on the fabric beneath me. I felt someone stutter at my feet. I kicked out to try and dislodge them from the skirt of my dress but missed.

I heard a light snicker. Someone was trying to sabotage me. They were trying to ruin Pietha's dress and embarrass prie as was in the chaos of trying to find my fated mate. I yanked at my skirt again.

"Quickly!" I heard whispered by my feet. I kicked out again and made contact. Someone "oof"ed behind me and stumbled to the floor. I gathered my skirts in my hands and darted away. Miraculously, I managed to not run into anyone. I let my instincts take over as I ran from my attackers.

Then, my vision slowly returned. However, the only thing I could see was someone glowing in the moonlight. I couldn't make out their face but I could tell their suit and hair were lighter. Their skin was a tanned and darker than both their suit and their hair.

I squinted and walked towards them. Slowly, they became clearer and clearer in the glow of the moonlight. I felt this deep pull towards whomever this person was. Their form became masculine and slowly but surely, a pair of gold eyes started glowing out of the moonlight.

I reached for the person, body, mind and heart were aching to touch this person. I let my hands touch his and felt the electricity melt over my bones. Every part of my body was on fire and suddenly, all of the room came back to me.

Standing in front of me, was Thorne Blythwitch.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 29

“Oh,” I breathed. I had no clue how much he knew about me. Did he know who I was? Who my mother was? Was this about to be the way my secret got out?

“No,” he shook his head. His gaze snapped from mine. “No, no, this isn’t how it was supposed to be.”

“Thorne-” I reached for him. He stepped back out of my reach. I felt the panic in his eyes seep through my bones.

Something was begging for me to touch him. I needed it more than I needed air at that point. But he stepped away from me. My chest felt like a weight was placed on it.

“No,” he repeated, still shaking his head in disbelief. “-can’t.”

“What?” My voice came out as barely a whisper. I felt the crushing reality of the situation driving me into the ground.

“I’m supposed to be the available for the Princess,” he said, eyes darting back and forth on the floor. “I – It’s my duty.”

“Duty?” I said. “Thorne, please, I -”

I felt pathetic, begging for him like that. But there was a driving need burning me up from the inside out. My whole body was twitching with the need to just touch him. I’d never felt like this before. Thorne shook his head again. “No,” he said firmly. “I am a Knight of Queen Luna. I must be able to fulfill my duty. I refuse the bond.”

I felt like I’d been shot in the chest. I crumbled to the ground in pain. The burning and need that was once in my bones was replaced by an ice so cold and a pain so white. I cried out and dug my nails into my chest. I felt hands come to my shoulders. They did nothing to ease the pain I felt.

“You have to reject it too,” someone said. Valentin. How was he here right now? I cried out again, the icy cold reaching my finger tips and feeling them shake in my lap.

The pain was so strong, my vision went out. I felt another scream force its way out of my throat.

“I can’t!” I choked out through gasps.

“You must,” Valentin said sternly. “If you don’t it will consume you whole.”

” – I -” my body felt like it was exploding from the inside out.

“You must try, Zora!” Valentin’s voice was becoming frantic.

He shook me once. I felt my brain beginning to freeze over in my head. I started to feel faint. I let my body fall slightly. Slowly, darkness was overcoming my body. I felt my consciousness beginning to slip. I accepted that this was it for me. As the peace overcame me, I gave up. Then, there was only fire.

All the ice in my body turned to flames. The blood in my veins exploded into flames and licked every surface that was previously frozen over. I lifted my head from Valentin’s lap. I screamed as if fire was about to explode from my lungs. I felt a warmth wash down my arms and legs. There was a crack then a shudder then I felt my bones shifting.

My palms splayed out on the floor of the dance floor. Then my fingers snapped and shaped themselves into a new form. My toes snapped out of the heels I was in and shaped and shimmied themselves as well. All the while, fire licked over my body in every which way. I felt a bark, build in my chest and explode in my ears. Then I shook. I felt the fur coating my skin and I felt the burning subside in my bones.

I had awakened my wolf.

I looked towards Valentin. His white-gold eyes were wide in wonder. “Zora,” he breathed. “Sever the bond.”

I knitted my eyebrows together but then, I felt it. It was a shimmering gold thread that felt like it tied me to Thorne.

He had backed away from the whole situation and was standing across the floor. I furrowed my brows and visualized a pair of scissors they bracketed the gold thread and then

-

Snip!

All the ice was gone. The fire returned to a dull hum in my limbs. An exhaustion swept over my body. I felt my front elbows hit the floor then the underbelly of my wolf body slumped with it. I whined, low and sad. Then, I felt the fur shrink back into my skin. My paws slunk back into fingers and toes. I blinked and my vision shifted back to the one I’d know. The cold floor chilled my skin and raised goosebumps on my human skin.

I shook for only a moment before I felt fabric be draped across my skin. Then, a warm hand on my shoulder. I closed my eyes for the hundredth time that night and fell into a sleep that only seemed inevitable.

When I woke up, I heard the familiar beeping that I associated with the infirmary. I shifted slightly and felt my bones crack and pop... but nothing hurt. My eyes slowly opened as I took into account my body.

My arms were still there. My legs were still there. I could wiggle my toes. Somehow, I was alive.

What a relief, the voice in the back of my head said. But this time, she sounded different.

I sat up in the bed I was in. Hello? I called into the back of my head. I could've sworn I heard a wolfish laugh.

Hello! The voice said again. I felt my eyes bulge. I felt a tail swish around in the back of my mind. What the fuck was happening?

You've awakened me, the voice said. I am here now. Fully.

I blinked. But you were here before? I said. How - I-

am you. I've always been you, the voice said. The tail in my mind swished again. But now I am who you've always wanted us to be. The wolf you were meant to be.

I blinked again. A low chuckle sounded from my right. It twisted in my bed to face the person it came from.

Valentin smiled brightly at me.

"I feel like you're always in that seat," I mused out loud.

"I feel like you're always getting hurt," Valentin threw back. He stood and sighed. "How do you feel?"

How did I feel?

"Alive," I said. "Normal. But also, not? I wish I could explain it."

"No need," Valentin said. "I had the same feeling when my wolf awakened."

"Yeah probably when you were like eight or something," I snorted.

"My wolf didn't wake until I was eighteen," Valentin shoved his hands in his pockets. "It was how it usually was before we broke out of the vampire's grasp."

"Oh," I said. "Maybe my wolf didn't get the memo."

I heard, my wolf said. I just ignored.

How are you so sassy already?

I'm you, she snorted. You were sassy before you got me.

Valentin chuckled and brought me out of my thoughts. I glanced at him. He was smiling slightly out of the corner of his mouth.

"What?" I asked.

"Do you want to see?"

I furrowed my brows. "See what?"

"Your eyes," he continued, offering me a hand.

I tentatively took it to stand up. I expected some of the crazy sparks that had happened before, but felt nothing.

Maybe with the awakening – and snapping – of my bond with Thorne, whatever was going on with Valentin had slipped away. I filed it away in the back of my mind to ask Victoria if bonds could disappear.

Slowly, I let my feet touch the ground in the infirmary.

Everything felt so much more. The grooves and the slants of the floor were so much more prominent now. I felt every dip under my toes. It was insane. My jaw fell slightly slack. I looked up at Valentin.

"Easy now," he cautioned, hand still holding on to mine." Everything will feel much more intense now."

I nodded slightly before setting my second foot on the ground. Valentin led me across the room to a mirror. What I saw, made my hands fly to my mouth in shock.

I had expected my eyes to turn gold when my wolf was awakened. However, there, in front of me, situated where my old hazel eyes were was a pair of stunning, green-gold eyes.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 30

Thorne

Thorne Blythwitch had dreamed about his mate since he was a young boy. It was hard not to when his life had been so miserable as a boy. A mother dead when he was eleven and a father who couldn't give two shits about him.

Flash forward and he was then sixteen, with no parents at all and nowhere to go.

In the times between when he was eleven and when

Queen Victoria took him in at sixteen, Thorne thought a Lot about his dream life. His mother and father, welcoming him into their arms. A mate by his side, preferably the one he was fated to. It was his dream.

So why had he rejected Zora when she was presented to him?

Why had he cut the bond he'd been begging for his whole Life.

He was replaying the moment in his head. The words he'd said. I reject the bond.

"Idiot," he cursed under his breath. He had been sitting outside the Auditorium for a better part of an hour after Zora shifted. He wanted to stab needles in his eyes and rewind it all back.

But he couldn't. For multiple reasons. Firstly, a broken bond was unrepairable. Thorne couldn't go back to Zora. Even if he tried to make her his chosen mate, the magik of the fated mate bond was gone.

Secondly, he was betrothed to the Princess. He couldn't have betrayed Victoria like that. She did so much for him, dragged him out of the hellhole he was in. The prospect of the Princess was greater than Thorne's own personal want for happiness. He couldn't let Victoria down.

But, what would it like to be happy?

"Fucking idiot," Thorne swore under his breath again. He ran his hand through his hair, yanking it out of the braid he'd woven into the top.

*"Yo!" a voice called out.

Thorne lifted his head towards the sound. He saw a shadowy figure in a Kelly-green suit trudging through the woods behind the auditorium. He narrowed his eyes slightly and used his wolf sight to hone in on the man. He slumped down when he realized who it was.

"I'm not in the mood," Thorne snapped. "Fuck off, Kairos."

Kairos raised his hands in defense. "Easy killer," he snorted. "I was sent to check on you."

"I'm fine," Thorne rubbed at his eyes. "Now can you please leave?"

Kairos said nothing. He sat down next to Thorne on the bench. Thorne lifted his head to glare at his friend. Kairos kept his face schooled and gaze towards the ground. He fished

through his pockets and procured a cigarette. He shoved it in his mouth then snapped his fingers and the end of the cigarette lit up.

“You shouldn’t use magiks for something so trivial,”

Thorne scolded in a know-it-all way.

“And you shouldn’t break a mate bond,” Kairos mumbled around the cigarette. He pulled on it then blew it out of his shoulder. He shrugged.

“But here we are,”

“You know why I did it,” Thorne said softly.

“I don’t actually,” Kairos leaned back on the log. “So, if you’d care to enlighten me.”

Thorne dug the heels of his hands into his eyes. “Victoria has done everything for me,” he dropped his hands into his lap and glanced at his friend. “Everything, Kairos.

When my father died in combat, she was the first one to offer to take me in. She got me into Alpha Academy, despite the fact I am not a High Alpha or even from the families of Knights. She did it all. I cannot let her down by not allowing the Princess a chance at my hand.”

Kairos nodded slowly, reveling in the silence. He took another drag of his cigarette before holding it in his lungs and speaking.

“She could take my hand, you know,” Thorne sailed his fist into Kairos’s shoulder, causing Kairos to choke on the smoke in his lungs. Then, he burst into laughter. He punched Thorne back. Thorne sat on the Log and dropped his head into his hands again.

“Not fucking helping,” Thorne spat.

“But it’s true,” Kairos went on. “There are four of us that the Queen picked for this mysterious princess. You, me, Max and fucking douche-bag Lunerly. Twenty-five percent chance that one of us gets her.”

“Yeah,” Thorne mumbled. “Great.”

“Your chance at happiness shouldn’t be twenty-five percent,” Kairos continued. “Probably less than that. What if this Princess is a mega bitch?”

Thorne chuckled slightly at that. He nodded in agreement.

“Yeah,” he said. He turned to look at Kairos. “You would’ve been okay if it was the wolfless girl?”

Kairos's lip twitched. He took another drag on his cigarette. "If she made you happy, yes. If she was truly, honestly, your fated mate? Absolutely," Kairos shook his head. "Something about her is up though. It wouldn't surprise me if she somehow awoke some dark magik to curse you as her fated mate."

"I don't think a wolfless could do that," Thorne mused.

Especially one as fragile as her. Though," he paused and cocked his head in thought. "I suppose she isn't a wolfless anymore." Kairos licked the front of his lips. He sat in silence for a moment before pulling on his cigarette. He finished it then flicked the filter off into the dirt.

"She's still weak," he bit out. "And there's no room for weakness at Alpha Academy."

"What else can you do?" Thorne asked. "You've already beaten the shit out of her. If that won't keep her down then what will?"

"Dunno," Kairos mumbled. "But I know she's harboring some big secret. And it's not that she's your fated mate."

"She couldn't have known," Thorne added, brows knit. "No one ever knows who their fated mate is. Unless there's signs but I've avoided her like the plague."

Kairos shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He shoved his brown fringe off his face then sighed before standing. He brushed off the front of his pants. Thorne stayed sat. He eyed his friend suspiciously.

"No mate for you?" he asked.

"No," Kairos said quickly. "Nothing. Not even a thrum."

Thorne hummed. He could sense his friend was lying. But Thorne knew better than to poke the bear that was Kairos Moonraiser. He figured, when the time was right, Kairos would tell him whatever it was that was bothering him.

Kairos looked down at Thorne and extended a hand.

Thorne took it and hoisted himself up. He stood and let Kairos clap him on the shoulders.

"You looking to party?" Kairos said.

"Please," Thorne said. Kairos laughed and swung his arm around his friend.

"Maybe get some leggy blonde to get the redhead out of – your head, yeah?"

"Yeah," Thorne agreed.

Later that night, a leggy blonde had herself perched in Thorne lap. She held a glass of whiskey on her lap and was feeding it to Thorne at an alarming rate. Still, Thorne was stuck with thoughts of Zora.

The way she looked when he broke the bond replayed again and again in his head. No matter how drunk he was, he couldn't get rid of her. Every time he closed his eyes, he was met with her hazel-gold gaze and her cries of pain.

It was stained behind his eyelids like a plague.