

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 41

Zora

What the fuck?

I stared into Maximus's eyes. They were unflinching as they dropped Thorne. The stayed locked on me as Thorne darted behind Kairos. Petyr had gotten to his feet in the commotion. He yanked on Maximus's shoulder and pulled him out of my grasp.

Maximus blinked once then tore his gaze from mine, seemingly pulled from whatever trance I'd locked him in. He violently shrugged his shoulder out of Petyr's grasp then took a few steps back. He blinked as if he was trying to clear his vision. Then, he shook his head before stepping back again and shifting into a massive black wolf.

The wolf shook it's coat, causing everyone in the cafeteria to stare at us. Again. Then, it bolted for the door, darting around students before barreling out into campus. I stared after it for a second before I felt Loren by my side.

“What the heck was that!?” she whisper-yelled. “What did you do to him?”

“I-I-“

“What did you do to him?” Kairos snarled. I jerked my head to where he was standing. He looked as angry as every, shoulders hunched as he bared his teeth at me.

“I didn't do anything,” I said. My voice was small with the shock of whatever had just happened. Thorne and Kairos kept their glares pinned on me.

“Bullshit,” Thorne snapped. He jutted his chin towards Kairos. “She's using the dark Magiks. You we're right.”

“Dark Magiks?” Loren said. “All the tombs about them have been burned or sealed away. Are you crazy!?! Zora lived her entire life in the human world. How would she have learned Dark Magiks?”

“I don't know but I've never seen that happen before,” Kairos snapped. “Maximus has never gotten that angry at Thorne. Nor has he switched up in emotion that quickly. It has to be something she did.”

Maybe it was something I did. Maybe it was a result of our potential mate bond. But that had too many additional questions attached to it. My fated mate was supposed to be Thorne. By everyone else's knowledge, I couldn't also be mated to Maximus.

I didn't know what to say. So instead, I shook my head.

“No, it’s not Dark Magik,” I mumbled.

“I don’t give a fuck what it was,” Kairos snarled. “Stay the fuck away from Maximus.”

On that, he, Petyr and Thorne pushed their way past me and out of the cafeteria. The subtle jolt of electricity I felt when both Kairos and Thorne passed me was not lost on me. If anything, it gave me more questions.

The commotion of the morning was enough to have me reeling through the rest of the day. I took my morning class with the rest of the first years then met Loren for my afternoon class. Afterwards, she suggested dinner, but I was far too traumatized from the morning to go back to the cafeteria.

Loren frowned but went without me, vowing to bring me something back to the dorm room. So, I walked back to the dorms alone.

Autumn had finally hit the campus. The wind whipped my hair off my back and into my face. I’d worn shorts that morning, but the evening air was sending a chill down my spine. I wrapped my hoodie tighter around myself and quickened my pace back to the dorms.

The sun had almost entirely set behind the building as I reached my dorm. I started to fish through my backpack for my keys.

After about ten minutes of rummaging, I remembered that I hadn’t brought my keys that morning. I groaned and let my head fall into the brick of the building.

“That sounded like it hurt,” I jumped at the voice.

Maximus was walking towards the door. He was wearing the same thing he was wearing that morning except his tee shirt was in his hands. I swallowed thickly when I realized he was bare chested and walking right towards me.

“I forgot my keys,” I mumbled.

“Guess were shit out of luck then,” he swung his tee shirt over his shoulder. “Mine are probably still in the cafeteria.”

My eyes blew wide. “You been running as a wolf for that long,”

Maximus said nothing. He walked up to where I was standing and leaned against the outside of the building. I stared at him, waiting for an answer.

“Where’s Mini Moonbeam?” he said.

“Cafeteria,” I crossed my arms over my chest. “Way to change the subject.”

Maximus laid his head back against the building then rolling his neck to look at me.

“Do you want to discuss what happened this morning?” He said plainly. I swallowed. He rolled his neck back to face forward. “I didn’t think so,”

“Why is your girlfriend such a bitch?” I said quickly.

Maximus’s jaw ticked. He licked the front of his bottom teeth, eyes still facing away from me. “You must’ve misheard me. She’s not my girlfriend.”

I raised an eyebrow. “She clearly doesn’t think that,”

“I slept with her once,” His said. His voice was eerily calm. “It was a mistake. I know that and I will not be repeating it. She clearly thought it meant something when it didn’t.”

I hummed and turned to press my back against the wall. Our shoulders were a half a foot apart. It was like both of us were scared of touch. I shivered in memory of the electricity. Maximus side eyed me.

“Cold?” he asked.

“A little,” I mumbled.

Maximus shifted and pulled his tee shirt off his shoulder. I thought he was going to give it to me for a second before he yanked it over his head. Dick.

“You should shift,” he said. “Your wolf form will keep you warm.”

I swayed slightly on my feet. “I can’t,” I said softly.

Maximus’s gaze shifted to focus on me. His eyebrows were knitted together. “But Kairos-“

“

“It wasn’t controlled,” I shook my head. “Emotional shift. I can’t shift on my own yet. Maximus hummed then turned back to face the forest. It was silent save for the wind rustling the trees. I let my eyes float closed. My thoughts brought me back to memories of high school and hiding with my friends under the bleachers. We were cool enough to be in the stands watching the football game but we didn’t care. Under the bleachers was our version of cool.

I longed for those days. No wolves. No mates. No princesses. Just life as I always knew it.

“I can teach you,”

My eyes flew open. I glanced to the side at Maximus. He was still facing out towards campus. I furrowed my eyebrows. “To shift?” I asked.

Maximus nodded. “To control it,” he said. “I’ve had my wolf since I was young. I’ve been controlling my shift for years. I’d say I’m expert in it.”

I snorted.” “Course you would,”

Maximus gave me a flash of his scary eyes. I dropped my smile. “You’d do that?” I asked. He sighed deeply.

“It’s no use fighting it,” he said softly. He gestured to me. “Whatever this is between us. I know I’m supposed to be waiting for some Princess. I know Thorne is your fated mated and you’ve both rejected the bond.”

He shook his head then turned to look at me. His eyes seemed to glow in the moonlight above us. Every bit of him was beautiful in the soft white reflection of the moon. Even the scars on his shoulder and his cropped black hair looked magnificent. I found myself staring right back at him.

“But something about you,” he said softly as if it was a question. “I just feel like we’re supposed to be together. Mates or not.”

My breath caught in my throat. I stared back into his eyes and I wondered if I should tell him. If he should know that I was the Princess and maybe he was my mate after all. The beating of our hearts was pounding in my ears. The rhythmic lub-dub that seemed to follow me around. I leaned slowly towards him but was interrupted in my thoughts by a voice.

“Zora!”

I looked out to see Loren bouncing across campus. She frowned at me. “You left like a half hour ago? What happened?”

Her eyes darted between Maximus and I as if she was implying we were doing something together. I shook my head slightly enough that she would notice but Maximus wouldn’t. Her face fell then she looked at the door. I jammed my thumb towards it. “Forgot my keys this morning,” I half-laughed. “Max too apparently.”

Maximus head whipped towards me. Our eyes locked for a second before he turned back to Loren. He nodded sharply.

“We were hoping you had yours,”

“Yeah of course,” Loren rushed forward and unlocked the door.

The three of us ascended the stairs with Loren in the lead. She unlocked the door to our room and pushed in, making eyes at me that said I need to spill and quickly. I offered Max a small smile before I tried to go into my room.

“Zora,” Maximus said. I stepped back out to look at him. His lips were in a straight line. “I meant what I said. About helping.” “Yeah,” I replied, heat flooding my face. “I’ll let you know.”

“

Maximus nodded back curtly and then opened his own. I walked back into my room and let the door slam shut behind me. I turned and saw Loren with a wicked grin on her face. She ran up to me and shook me, all while whispering “oh my Gods” over and over.

I couldn’t help but laugh. Maybe things were looking up.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 42

The next morning, another note was slipped under my door. It was written in normal Valentin script with the time, ten at night, underlined twice. I frowned at it.

He usually wanted to meet in the morning, before Basics. This was at night firstly and secondly, not on the day of Basics. Something about the double underline as well seemed urgent and forced. I shoved it with my other notes and went about my day.

The day was fairly normal. A couple scoffs, a couple sneers. A few dirty looks. All in a day’s work at Alpha Academy. After dinner, Loren and I hung out in the library for a bit, doing our homework together. The clock struck quarter to ten and I slunk out of the library, hoping to go unnoticed. I pulled up my hoodie and padded across campus to the gym.

When I arrived, I gave Valentin a wave before turning into the locker room to change into my sparring gear. He called my name as I was half a foot in and I stopped. I pulled my hoodie down and looked at him across the gym.

“You won’t need to change tonight,” he said. He looked solemn and his hair was not the usual shiny brown. It looked stringy. His eyes had deep bags under them. He looked a bit of a mess, if I was being honest.

I walked across the gym. Valentin huffed a sigh as I approached running his hand through his hair. His eyes were darting around erratically.

“Are you okay?” I said, slowly approaching him.

He sighed again. It looked like there was a war going on in his brain. “I’m fine,” he huffed.

“Okay,” I drew the word out long. “Why are we meeting in the night? Usually, we get my extra sparring hours in the morning. Before Basics.”

Valentin shook his head sharply. “We aren’t sparring tonight,” he voice was low and pained. His eyes were cast towards the floor. I took another tentative step towards him, my heartbeat went into my throat.

“Valentin,” I said, gently. “What’s going on?”

“I had us meet later today,” he started. “Because I’ve heard rumors across campus that people think we’re having an affair.”

I snorted and crossed my arms over my chest. “You’re letting rumors get to you?”

Valentin jerked his head towards me. His lips were set in a thin line. His pupils pulsed on top of his white-gold eyes. “I’m the Headmaster of this school,” he said, sharply. “Of course they are. I can’t let this threaten my integrity.” “They’re rumors,” I threw back, dropping my arms at my sides. “That’s it. There’s no truth to them.”

Valentin turned his face back to look at the floor. I watched his eyes darting all over the place. He seemed to be fighting himself in his head.

“There could be,” he finally whispered.

My heart did a half a skip. Was he finally acknowledging the bond between us? The insurmountable lust and longing that circled us like a dark cloud every time we were together? I let me jaw fall slightly open, still staring at where Valentin was arguing in his own head.

“I’ve done a lot of horrible things in my time,” Valenti snapped. “I’ve killed. I’ve murdered. I’ve forsaken the Gods above to cause chaos and malice across the earth. I’ve lost my humanity for years. I am a shell of the person I was before the war. My hope and joy was lost to the vampires the moment we decided to fight back.”

I couldn’t bring myself to speak. Valentin’s jaw clenched as he continued to look at the floor. “But you, Zora,” he continued, voice switching to be soft. “You are kind and innocent and filled with the sort of light I could never have achieved. You have a wonder about you that someone will cherish and love and find all good in. You don’t deserve this. You don’t deserve-“

He finally lifted his head to look me in the eyes. He didn’t continue his sentence, but I couldn’t tell what he meant.

Him. He thought I didn’t deserve him.

“I don’t give a damn what you did,” I said, voice shaky. “You’ve showed me a kindness no one else has. You’ve helped me in a world I was completely lost in.”

“And I will hurt you so much that you will be lost yet again,” he held my eyes as he said it. It was firm. Definitive. There was nothing left to argue. He’d made his choice. And it wasn’t me or our bond. Valentin lifted his chin before he spoke again.

“I am to wed Isabella of Wolfamn when she graduates her final year at the Academy,” he said, sharp and precise. “Her marriage will be beneficial to the Lunerly name. She will be an excellent wife of the headmaster.”

He almost seemed to be explaining it to himself, to be justifying what he was saying as true. I felt a similar pang in my chest to when Thorne broke our mate bond. It wasn't as intense, but it felt just as crushing. My hand went to my chest as I gasped.

Valentin's eyes went wide. He took a half step forwards then stopped immediately. I noticed his hand shaking at his side. I took a step back, feeling a fire start to lick my insides. I plunged into my head searching for my wolf.

I found her snarling at the back of my mind. Then, there was a horrific pain shooting down my spine. I cried out and keeled over. My wolf snapped her jaws and I let my mouth fall open. I found myself speaking, but the words coming out of my mouth weren't mine.

“A wolf must not be denied her mate!” I yelled. My voice seemed to radiate through the gym. My wolf was surging through my bones and pulsing in my head.

What are you doing?! I begged her. He's not our mate! Thorne was our mate and he rejected our bond, remember?!

“He rejected what was not his to have,” I gritted. I was shook with the force in which my wolf was using. I had no control over my body, writhing on the floor and speaking in a growl from between my teeth.

“We are not to be rejected! We are inevitable!” I spit out. My back cracked and swayed across the gym floor. My body was lost to myself. I was possessed by my wolf. She tossed my head back and seemed to project her last statement to the gym.

“We are the Hier to the Luna Throne. We are a High Alpha!”

“I am the High Alpha!” Valentin snapped at her. “You have not yet ascent the throne! I hold rank above you and demand you step down.”

“Traitor!” my voice exploded from my throat. “Political spawn in the game of the wolves-“

“STEP DOWN!” Valentin yelled at me.

His eyes flashed red for a moment, boring into mine as my wolf twisted and turned my bones. With one final snarl of disapproval, she retreated deep within my mind. I collapsed on the floor in a pile. My wolf's voice was gone and I was eerily alone within the confines of my mind for the first time in my life.

I pushed myself up to my hands and knees, panting as I tried to catch my breath. My throat felt raw. I clawed at it with my hands to try and scratch the burning itch under my skin. I looked at

Valentin in a plea for help. He stared back at me, empty and cold. He turned on his heel and faced away from me.

“Go,” he whispered.

“Valentin-” I choked out.

“GO!” he roared. “Do not use my common name anymore! I am your professor and you should address me as such!”

I scrambled to my feet and ran for the door. My limbs felt numb as I left the gym, door slamming behind me. I ran towards the forest. Once I was under cover, I collapsed again and let the sobs shake my body in utter disappointment and heart break.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 43

I fell asleep hidden by the pines of the forest. I woke as the sun was starting to rise in the distance. I sniffled slightly and rubbed my eyes then gasped when I saw someone in front of me. I scrambled to sit up and press my back to the tree I’d slumped under.

My eyes took a second to adjust then my heart slowed down considerably. Maximus was sitting on the floor with me, staring at me.

“I wonder if you’re from one of the packs in Western North America,” he said as he picked at some stray leaves. He crumbled the dried ones in his hands. “You seem to like being in the forest an awful lot.”

“I grew up in Pennsylvania,” my voice was gravelly and raw with sleep. I cleared my throat. “There’s a fair amount of woods in the Adirondak mountains. Do you know where that is?”

Maximus blinked at me then shook his head. “I’ve never left the UK,” he shrugged. “Never had a need to. Especially because Alpha Academy is here.”

I nodded at him. That meant Victoria’s castle was also somewhere in the UK. Did that mean I was technically English? I messed with some of the foliage on the floor.

“So,” Maximus drawled. “Do you want to tell me why you’re out here? Again?”

I sighed and threw an acorn across the clearing. It ricocheted across the floor of the woods then spiraled off out of sight. I looked back at Maximus. His eyebrow was raised in thought. I huffed and slumped down, resting my chin on top of my knees.

“I had an argument with someone,”

“Very detailed,” Max said. I narrowed my eyes at him.

“It was my mentor,” I went on, voice quiet. I stared deeply into the floor to try and figure out how to explain the explosion that had happened. I licked the top of my mouth.

“Is he trying to sever ties?” Maximus tried.

I shifted slightly. “Yeah,” I said. “Basically.”

Maximus sighed then ran a hand over his head. His short hair looked blue in the morning light. He looked back up at me through his lashes.

“I meant what I said,” he said softly. “About helping you control your wolf. I also can step in and do whatever your old mentor was doing.”

The irony wasn't lost on me. Valentin was not only teaching me how to fight, but he was someone who I'd felt a bond with. Maximus was also someone I'd felt a bond with. Could he fill the Valentin shaped hole in my life after Valentin had announced his marriage?

My heart hurt at the thought of it again. I shrunk back in on myself and Maximus noticed. His eyes went wide. He immediately held his hands up.

“Or not,” he scrambled to say. “It's fine if you don't want to.”

“No,” I cut him off gently. “I think I'd like that.”

Max blinked at me. “You would?”

“I don't really have any other people to offer,” I shrugged.

Max quirked a smile. “Mini Moonbeam wasn't your first choice?”

“Loren is a great friend,” I said. I couldn't help but smile back. “But she will be the first to let you know that she is not super great at sparring.”

I cocked my head in thought and remembered the other day after Maximus had basically dropped me off at my door. Loren had been so excited that she'd shifted right there in our dorm room. She'd nearly knocked me over trying to turn in a circle to shift back. It wound us with both of us howling in laughter in a mass on the floor.

“Nor is she great at controlling her shifting,” I mused to Maximus.

He chuckled again and moved to stand. He pushed himself off the forest floor then brushed off the front of his pants. He extended an arm towards me. I put my hand on his and let him pull me off the floor.

I was shocked at the strength of his grasp and pull. I gasped and put my hands out to steady myself. Unfortunately for Maximus and I, my hands landed on his chest. His hand came down to steady me at my hip. The two of us were embraced in some sort of coupley way.

I looked up at Maximus’s eyes. He was peering down at me as well and our gazes locked. I couldn’t help but stare deeply into his irises. Honey gold and flecked with little bits of brown. My hand was on his pec which was, of course, impressive. His hand flexed on my hip. Then, the beating started again.

Lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub...

The sound made me fly backwards with a second gasp. My hand went to my chest to try and steady the slamming in my chest. Maximus looked like he’d frozen. He shook his head slightly then cleared his throat.

“Classes are going to start in a few hours,” he croaked. He cleared his throat again. “We better get back to the dorms.”

I nodded slightly and started my way out of the forest. Maximus followed behind at a distance. We walked silently most of the way to the dorm building. Then, I finally remembered how I’d woken up.

“Oh,” I stopped at the door to our building. Maximus stopped as well and looked at me. “How did you know I was out there? In the forest?”

“I didn’t,” Max said. It sounded slightly forced. “Well, not explicitly. Something made me wake up this morning. I couldn’t fall back asleep so I went out on a walk. I wound up walking directly towards the forest and that’s when I found you.”

I stared at him for a second. My heart was fluttering a bit at the thought. The weird mate bond stuff we’d been feeling, had it brought him to me? Had my wolf, despite the fact she was on my shit list, sent him to me?

I keep thinking through that as I opened the door to our dorm building. Maximus said nothing else and kept following me up the stairs. When we reached my door, he kept walking to his room.

“See you in Basics?” he asked. I nodded. Max nodded back. His jaw twitched slightly before he kept talking. “They’re going to start partnering us up today,” he said. “For sparring training. I’ll ask Coach to put us together if you’d like.”

“I would,” I said back. I smiled gently at him and was returned the same. Max gave me one final friendly nod before going into his own room.

I pushed the door to mine open. Loren was still fast asleep in her bed, one arm hanging out in the space between our beds. I chuckled under my breath then slowly snuck up on her. I poked her hand, and she jolted in her bed.

“Rise and shine,” I said as she slowly woke up. “Basics is in two hours and I’m craving a banana.”

Loren groaned and stretched in her bed. “What time’d you get back?”

I froze. “Late,” I stuck with. She didn’t need to worry about me coming home that morning after sleeping in the cold.

Loren hummed. “What’d Valentin want?”

“Nothing,” I said quickly. “Just the usual.”

“Okay, cool,” Loren grumbled. “Ugh, a banana does sound good.”

I chuckled along with her but meanwhile my head was reeling. I felt terrible keeping another secret from Loren. But really, I didn’t want to worry her with my nonsense. A wolf freak out was definitely nonsense.

Loren hopped out of bed and patted me on the back. “Come on, love,” she said. “Let’s get us some bananas.”

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 44

The bananas hit the spot on the way to Basics that morning. When we arrived at Basics, bananas had been eaten. Just as Maximus mentioned the night before, Coach had paired us up. Just as he’d promised me, we’d been paired together.

Loren bumped shoulders with me as I started to walk off to where Maximus was across the gym. He’d secured us a sparring mat farther away from the main mat. Kairos stood there with Petyr and glared at me as I walked by. I thought about poking my tongue at him then decided against it.

Loren was paired with another second year. She was tall with long brown hair with pink streaks in it. Loren looked nervous as she took the mat with the girl. I remembered to file that away to ask her about later.

The most unfortunate part of the whole morning was when Bella walked up to the mat next to Maximus and I. Her partner was a thin man with honey-colored hair to match his eyes. Clearly, Valentin had told her he'd ended things with me because she threw me the smuggest smirk known to mankind. I scowled back at her before facing Maximus. I must've still had a sour look on my face because Max stepped in close and dropped his voice low to talk to me.

"Don't worry about her," he whispered. "I promise she won't start shit with you."

"Why?" I questioned. "You have dirt on her or something?"

Max smirked. "Just trust me, okay?"

I looked back at Bella. She was glaring at me now, eyes darting back and forth between Maximus and I. I wiggled my fingers at her and she huffed before turning back to her sparring partner.

"Okay!" Coach boomed across class. He'd used lesser Magiks to make his voice louder. "As you can see, everyone is paired up. This will be your sparring partner until after the Holiday break. Get used to it."

There were a few disgruntled groans. Kairos and Petyr bumped shoulders in the middle of the room. My upper lip twitched. Coach blew his whistle. Everyone cringed as the sound rang through our ears. He'd still been using Magik and nearly blew out my ear drums.

"Sorry, sorry," he mumbled. "Today we're going to work on getting out of a ground pin. Moonraiser and Nguyen will demonstrate."

Coach then motioned to where Kairos and Petyr were. Kairos took his place on the ground on his back. Petyr placed himself on top of Kairos like they were wrestling. Then Kairos got his arm across Petyr's chest and shoved, hard. Petyr rolled to be under Kairos with a grunt.

"Good!" Coach called from across the gym. "Now demonstrate the reverse swing, Moonraiser."

Kairos nodded at Coach once. Then he flipped to be on all fours. Petyr took his place behind Kairos and locked his arms around Kairos's neck. Kairos wrapped his hand around Petyr's arm, gritting his teeth. Then, in one effortless swoop, he yanked Petyr over his head so Petyr was on his back. There was a resounding thud when Petyr landed back on the mat.

"Good, again," Coach yelled. "Now everyone work on their stances with their partners. A few of the third years and I will be walking around and giving pointers. Begin!"

I turned to look at Maximus with wide eyes. There was no fucking way I could throw all six feet and however many odd inches Max was over me. Furthermore, the set up for this drill was...precarious to say the least. I swallowed thickly.

Maximus nodded slightly at me. His pupils had blown wide as soon as Coach had set us off. The two of us slunk to the floor. I was still staring at Maximus like it was crazy I was supposed to know how to do this.

“Max, I-“

“Don’t worry,” he whispered back. “I’ll guide you through it. Get on your back.”

Heat flooded my cheeks. I tore my gaze from Max and did as I was told. I glanced up at him and saw his face was also slightly pink. His eyes were nearly black with how dilated they were.

Maximus was on his hands and knees as I took my back. I tucked my knees in close to my chest, something Valentin had taught me to be able to kick at an attacker when they were above me. Maximus got slightly closer to me, his knees nearly touching the back of my thighs. Then, his hands grabbed my shoulders.

Immediately, the electricity I’d come to associate him with, exploded out of his palms. So much so that I gasped, my back arching off the floor at his touch. Max’s cheeks got pinker, his eyes darker. I furrowed my brows curiously then I felt it, the slight heat building deep in my core.

Oh.

I swallowed thickly and focused on the drill. I had to keep focused on the drill. I pressed my arm, horizontally against Maximus’s chest, just as Kairos had done to Petyr.

“Now what?” I managed to choke out.

“Use the force of your arm against my throat to cut off my breath,” Max said. I felt his pulse against my arm, beating erratically on the side of his neck.

Drill.

I thought to myself. I jammed my arm further into Maximus’s throat and got a slight nod from him in response.

“Good,” he gasped. “Now use your legs to bracket my hips and roll us over.”

I nodded in response. I kept my arm pinned to Maximus’s neck as I pulled my legs out from under him. I pinned him to his sides then shifted slightly down his body to his hips. Again, the jolts of energy burned through my skin and into his. Another wave of fire burned through my core. I bit my lip to keep the moan from slipping out. Maximus dipped his head slightly and grunted. I frowned, was I hurting him?

“Are you “

“Finish the drill, Zora,” he grunted out, gaze still away from me.

I did as I was told and pressed hard on both my points of contact, swinging myself and Maximus over so that I was on top. His hands instinctively went to my hips, head shaking me free from the pin on his throat. Then, as soon as I was on top, I was on my back again with a thud.

Electricity surged through my bones and a slight cry escaped from my lips. Everything felt like it was on fire. I peeled my back off the floor and contacted Maximus's chest. His head dropped to the mat next to mine and I heard a slew of curse words erupt from his mouth.

It didn't matter that we were in Basics with the entire school. There was a wanton need surging through my body that I'd never felt before. Tremors shook me and I slammed my eyes shut. Then, they were gone.

I opened them and saw Maximus across the mat, on his knees. Above him, fist knotted into Maximus's shirt was Thorne Blythwitch.

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“The fuck are you doing?” Thorne grunted at Maximus.

Max jammed his elbow into Thorne's thigh. Thorne released his grip on Maximus's shirt with a grunt. Max immediately stood up and glared down at the other man.

“The drill as we were told to do,” Maximus snapped.

“You're lucky you're this far in the corner of the room,” Thorne hissed. He gestured to me. “I looked like the two of you were about to fuck on the mat a second ago.”

“And if we were?” Max pressed. “That wouldn't be any of your business. Last time I checked you rejected your fated mate.”

Thorne's jaw clenched. He looked at me like he was considering me then turned back to Maximus.

“Need I remind you the reason,” He spat. “There is a Princess that I am to be betrothed to. As are you.”

“Don't pull that shit on me,” Maximus said. “I don't give nearly as much of a fuck about some political marriage as you clearly do. Now, get off my mat so I can finish my drills with my partner.”

Thorne shot daggers at Maximus. His eyes slightly shifted towards me and I caught a look in his eyes.

Was Thorne jealous?

I let my jaw fall open in surprise. I couldn't believe it. Thorne had marched over here to separate me and Max, not because of whatever the hell was happening between us, but because he was jealous of what was happening. I stared at Thorne as he stormed off to correct another pair that was messing around.

I looked at Maximus. His pupils had returned to normal a bit. His shoulders were tense, however and he looked incredibly uncomfortable. I slunk back in on myself.

"Maybe this wasn't a great idea," I mumbled from the floor.

"It's fine," Maximus snapped. "I don't want you working with anyone else anyways. We just need to focus and ignore whatever it is that's going on."

My eyes went wide. "You feel it too?" I whispered.

Max nodded curtly. "I don't know what it is," he whispered back. "And I don't think we should tell anyone. So we need to ignore it for now."

I pinched my eyebrows together. Ignore it? How the fuck was I supposed to ignore the burning flame that sparked every time we touched and the intense... lust that followed? I stared at Maximus, waiting for him to give me any sort of words of wisdom. Finally he caught on as he dropped back to his knees and went to resume the position of the first drill.

"Just try and think of ice," he mumbled so that only I could hear (not that anyone was paying attention to us). "Think of the cold and how if you put an ice cube on your head, it would melt down to your toes."

I put my arm back to his throat. The sparks flew again and I tried out Max's trick. "Ice," I grunted as the heat spread down to my toes.

I imagined being dunked in a bucket of ice, like we used to do after track practices at my human high school. I thought of quenching every lick of fire with piles and piles of ice. It works somewhat and I managed to gather enough concentration to try and flip Max over again. I got halfway when Maximus pushed me back against the floor.

"You're losing the press on my throat when you focus too much on the flip," Maximus grunted, "Press harder."

I did as instructed and sure enough, I made Maximus choke before I shoved him onto his back. Then, I lost my focus and fell forward onto his chest. My hand was against his pec. The drumming, lub-dub, started in my head again as I stared Max in the eyes. The heat started up again, but I imagined ice running down my arms and into my toes.

It was enough to let me sit back, off Max and on the sparring mat. My breath came out in rough bursts from the energy exertion. Max sat up to be across from me. He nodded slightly.

“Good,” he said. “Again.”

The rest of the class was much of a repeat of that. A few times, the heat got to be a bit too much and Max or I would choke out a grunt or groan of pleasure. One of us would shove the other away and go scrambling off to the other side of the mat. Another time, when I was trying to flip Maximus off my back and over me, his hand hit the front of my ribs, just below where my bra ended. The touch had made me shiver. Maximus, in turn, had buried his nose in my back. We stayed like that for long enough that I caught Thorne glaring at us from across the gym. I scrambled out from underneath Max and the pit of desire within me faded.

By the end of class, I was utterly exhausted, both physically and mentally, and I wanted nothing to do with Maximus. He must’ve felt the same way because as soon as Coach blew the whistle for the end of class, he darted off towards the men’s locker room without even so much as a nod.

I made my way towards the women’s locker room but was cut off by a man with a platinum blonde bun. I blinked twice as Thorne stood in the way of my escape to the locker room. He looked less angry and more interested in conversation.

“Hi,” I said, quietly. Everyone kept walking by me into the locker room. I’d already saw Loren had walked in before me. All my classmates walked by us as I stared at Thorne. Then, we were alone.

“Hi,” he breathed. “I’m sorry, about earlier.”

“It’s fine,” I said as I tried to push past him. He jumped to block me again and I frowned.

“No,” he said. “It’s not. I shouldn’t have gotten so-“

“Jealous?” I said with a raised eyebrow. Thorne gave me a sad smile.

“Angry at Maximus,” he finished. “What you two do is none of my business.”

“It’s not,” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Right,” Thorne went on. “I just don’t know if that is the best pair for you. Max seemed to go easy on you and, well, I want to make sure you’re learning the skills.”

“Right,” I mimicked him.

“Being your Knight and all,” he added.

“Just my Knight,” I said. “Not my fated mate. You broke that, remember?”

“I remember,” Thorne said. There was a sort of guilt laced between his words. He cleared his throat. “Just wanted to say that

if you wanted to switch partners, Maximus can go with my partner and I could spar with you.” He threw me a smile.

“If you want,”

I lifted my hand and patted him on the shoulder. “I’m okay, thanks though,” I said and finally managed to walk past him towards the locker room.

“Yeah,” Thorne called after me “Course. Just putting it out there.”

I ignored him as I continued into the locker room. I couldn’t deal with anymore games that day. Between staving off trying to jump Max’s bones and actually fighting him, I didn’t have it in me.

I couldn’t figure out what Thorne’s game plan was but, whatever it was, I wasn’t interested in someone who’d already thrown me aside. I was worth more than that.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 46

Kairos

Kairos watched as Thorne stayed back after Basics, lingering close enough to the girl that it raised his attention. He continued to watch after everyone had gone off into the locker room, arms crossed and eyebrow raised.

He didn’t understand what the appeal was to the girl. She was pathetic. A nobody who somehow managed to get into the most prestigious Alpha Academy. He wondered how she got into this Academy. The Academy. There were dozens of other schools for Alphas around the world that she could’ve at least managed at. Who decided this school was for her?

Kairos felt a scowl work its way onto his lips as he continued to watch the girl and Thorne. His friend was shifting back and forth on his feet, a nervous tick that Kairos had picked up on. He couldn’t fathom why Thorne would be nervous around her. Other than their broken bond.

The girl snapped at Thorne a few times before storming off towards the women’s locker room. Thorne sighed and yanked at the small ponytail on his head. He turned and walked towards the men’s locker room but stopped short when he spotted Kairos.

“What’s up?” he said. Kairos raised an eyebrow.

“What’s up with you?” he said back. He gestured towards the woman’s locker room. “Fraternizing with the enemy?”

Thorne shrugged and continued to walk towards the locker room. “Just keeping tabs on her,”

“Don’t pretend I didn’t hear your entire conversation,” Kairos snarled. “I thought we agreed on the day of the hunt: kick her off campus or kill her in the process.”

Thorne gnawed on his bottom lip before looking at Kairos. “Do you really think she deserves that?”

“Doesn’t matter if she does or doesn’t!” Kairos snapped. “She’s weak. We don’t need weakness within our ranks.”

“The Queen’s appointed me her knight,” Thorne hissed. “You think I want to watch her get herself killed? Do you know what the Queen will do with me if that happens?”

Kairos huffed. “You and your fucking Queen,” he snapped.

“She’s our ruler,” Thorne grit out. “We follow her orders. Did you forget she is the reason we’re no longer enslaved?”

Kairos growled and turned on his heel. He couldn’t argue with that. He remembered very little from the war, but he remembered the shift he’d felt when the vampires fell. He remembered the power coursing through him as the cheers erupted outside of his home.

Thorne caught up with him and the two walked in tandem into the locker room. The air was thick with hot steam. Most of the students from Basics had left. Kairos chucked his shirt in the laundry and stomped off towards the showers. Thorne followed and darted to catch up.

“I think there’s something up with her,” Thorne said under his breath. “I mean she’s got this weird aura to her. Plus, Lunerly’s been up her ass since she got here. You know he’s got an in with the Queen.”

Kairos grunted in response as he reached the showers. He shed his shorts and shoes and stepped into the steam. Thorne followed behind. They took showers next to each other.

“I figure if I can win her over, maybe I can snuff her out,” Thorne continued, voice still low. “Figure out what her secret is.” “Do we really care about her secret?” Kairos said before closing his eyes and dipping his face in the shower spray. The hot water cascaded down his shoulders, ironing out the soreness he’d felt from the training he’d done that morning.

“We do if we can use it to our advantage,” Thorne said from besides Kairos. “Whether that’s in getting her out of here or getting a better in with the Queen.”

Kairos shoved his wet hair off of his face and turned to look at Thorne. His hair was also wet, unbound by elastic and falling in front of his eyes. Kairos narrowed his gaze at his friend.

“You sure this isn’t some stupid fucking excuse to try and win her back after you rejected her?”

Thorne shook his head, solemn suddenly. “I made my choice,” he said, a slight uncertainty in his tone. “I’m waiting for the Princess.”

“Right,” Kairos mumbled.

He didn’t trust that Thorne was being truthful with him. He turned so his back was getting hit by the shower. He grabbed soap and lathered his body with it before passing it to Thorne. Then he turned back and scrubbed the suds off his body under the hot water.

“The last thing I need is more people on their knees for that stupid girl,” he snapped. “It’s already bad enough we lost Max to her. I don’t need to lose you.”

“Talking shit about me?”

Thorne and Kairos turned to look at the entrance to the showers. Maximus was bare and entering the area. His broad shoulders were swallowed by the increasing amounts of steam. His lips were set in a thin line, yellow eyes piercing Kairos and Thorne.

Thorne immediately looked down but Kairos kept his eyes locked with Maximus in a challenge. Maximus ignored it and stepped up to a shower and turned it on. Its sputtered to life and Kairos looked at Thorne. His head was still turned down.

Pussy-ass bitch, Kairos thought to himself before rolling his eyes. He continued to wash himself off in the shower.

“We were discussing your obsession with the little wolfless bitch,” he said, boldly.

“She’s not wolfless anymore,” Maximus retorted. “You know that.”

Kairos turned to glare at Maximus. The two locked eyes. Kairos could read the unspoken words in Maximus’s gaze.

I know how you got her to turn.

It was a knowing threat that Kairos chose to ignore. He huffed out of his nose before scrubbing the rest of his body clean and slamming his shower off. He stormed over to the towels and ran it all over his body.

“You know,” Maximus called over his shoulder. “If you’d give her a chance, I think you’d find Zora’s a lot stronger than you’d expect her to be.”

Kairos wrapped the towel around his waist and turned to look Maximus in the eyes. He darted his gaze back and forth between Max and Thorne. He couldn't help but think he missed something. How was he the only one who wasn't entranced by the little girl? Sure, there were weird draws about her and then the way his mouth felt against her skin could only be described as orgasmic-

But she still was weak and deserved to get what came to her.

He glared back at Maximus before wrapping the towel in his hands around his waist. He glanced back up at Maximus with a fire in his eyes. The fire of a High Alpha.

"I don't tolerate weakness in my school," he snapped. "From the moment she came in, Zora Smith has reeked of weakness. I don't think I'll ever look past that to find her anything other than a nuisance." He turned and made sure to look at Thorne as well.

"Not recognizing that will be your downfall," he bit out. Then he turned back to glare at Maximus. "And will get you killed."

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 47

Thorne

Thorne watched Kairos storm off into the locker room. His heart was pounding with the implications of his friend's words. He didn't feel like Zora would get him killed.

He thought Zora would save him.

Thorne shifted his gaze slowly to Maximus. He looked completely unbothered by the conversation, eyes closed under the water and rolling his neck to wet his head. Before Maximus could catch Thorne staring, Thorne slammed the water off. He practically ran to the towels then darted off to his locker. He managed to get changed before Maximus was out of the shower.

Thorne shoved his way out of the locker room, head still spinning. He hadn't lied to Maximus. Not really, that was. He did think Zora had a secret and he truly wanted to know what it was. But more so, for himself and not Kairos's murder party.

He also hadn't lied to Zora. He did think Maximus was being too easy on her. He also couldn't fucking stand watching Maximus touching her. Something raw deep and angry exploded inside of him every time Max's hand lingered for too long or held Zora's arms too tight. Thorne knew he had no right to be, but he was jealous.

He growled to himself as he stormed out of the gym and across campus to his Kairos's house. He lived in the basement of Kairos's grandfather's house. The only shower was on the third floor,

next to Kairos's room. Thorne threw a prayer to the Gods for telling him to shower after Basics. He really didn't want to deal with the wrath of Kairos after their altercation with Maximus.

Thorne pushed open the door to his room and flicked on the light switch. He'd replaced all the ugly fluorescent bulbs in the basement with dim yellow ones. It cast a hazy feel across the basement. He chucked his bag in the corner of the room then fell onto his bed with a huff.

He'd never felt this lost in his life, not even when his parents had passed. Every muscle in his body was screaming that he was an idiot for rejecting Zora. But his brain was repeating the Queen's promise to him. The promise of the position of Alpha Consort in the royal court. It was his duty to adhere to her wishes.

But it was his wishes to be with his fated mate.

He slammed the pillow behind him over his face and groaned into it before chucking it across his room. It landed on the floor with a soft thud. There was silence then the shrill ringing of his phone.

Thorne sat straight up in bed and then darted across his room to his desk. He grabbed the receiver off the red rotary phone and held it to his ear.

"Yes?"

"Oh hi, darling!"

Thorne sighed with relief. "I thought something was wrong," he said, rubbing his eyes. "You never call me this early."

"Yes, well," the feminine voice on the other line said. "I had some time between meetings with the court and wanted to check in. I'm sure you'd prefer an eleven in the morning call to an eleven at night call."

Thorne sighed and slumped into his chair. "I would," he said. "If it didn't make me panic. Your Highness, I—"

"Thorne," the woman chided. "I've told you that Victoria is fine, haven't I?"

"Err – yes but "Thorne fumbled.

"Then Victoria I wish to be called," the Queen of the Wolves stated. "How have you been? I haven't spoken with you since Mateball but I'd assume you would've called if you'd had good news!"

Thorne sighed deeply again, rubbing his eyes harder. He tried to figure out how to put his feelings into words.

“I have some news, I suppose,” Thorne started.

“Then why haven’t you called earlier?” Victoria exclaimed. “Go on!”

Thorne rubbed at the back of his neck. “I was gifted a fated mate,” he started. Victoria sucked in a deep breath through the line and Thorne rushed to speak before her. “But I rejected her. I told you I vowed to be a suitable consort for the princess and I intend to keep my vow.”

Victoria was silent for a moment before she released a gust of air. “Oh, darling,” she chided. “Your happiness is far more important to me that.”

“But my vows to you are important than my happiness,” Thorne shook his head. “You’ve done everything for me Victoria. The least I can do is allow your daughter to choose me as her mate.”

Victoria hummed. There was another stagnant silence. Then Victoria continued.

“Are you feeling the effects of rejection?” she said softly.

“Sometimes,” Thorne swallowed. Most times, actually. Whenever he was around Zora he felt this deep pang in his gut like he’d been stabbed. “But it’s manageable for the most part.”

“I see,” Victoria hummed. “Well, you know fated bonds are irreplicable but perhaps a chosen mate bond would be created between you two?”

“If the princess-” Thorne started but Victoria cut him off.

“Of course if the Princess chooses you it will be futile,” she said. “But if not, could be a strong chosen bond. Who is this person? Do you like them? Tell me about them.”

“}

Thorne carded a hand through his still wet hair. He hadn’t bound it back yet and it hung around his face like a curtain. He thought about how to describe Zora to Victoria.

“She’s fiery,” he started with, slowly. “And bold and brash and hotheaded, but it’s all things that make her wonderful. She has the looks of an old Goddess. Fiery red hair and freckles all over her face. She was wolfless for a while but with the breaking of the fated mate bond-“

Thorne scratched his head, slightly upset with himself for being the cause of Zora’s first transformation.

“-She shifted for the first time,” he continued. “Her eyes are like nothing I’ve ever seen. Yellow and yet brown and blue and green. Some sort of magiks have to be within her. She’s stunning but

still learning how to be a wolf. I offered to help her, you know. Especially since you assigned me her knight.”

Victoria coughed on the other line. Thorne frowned. “Is something wrong?”

“Zora,” Victoria choked out. “Your fated mate is Zora?”

“Apologies for not telling you sooner,” Thorne said, sheepishly. “I thought you’d heard through the grapevine which is why you’d assigned me to her.”

“I had not,” Victoria said sharply. She dropped her voice as if she was talking to herself. “Oh, Gods above, this is interesting.”

“What’s wrong?” Thorne said, quickly. “I know you want my happiness but have I done something wrong? I promise I was acting on the good of the throne-“

“No, no, nothing wrong,” Victoria cleared her throat. “Just surprised is all. I was asked to keep Zora safe by someone. I assigned you to her because of that, not because I knew you were fated. But, now that I do know, I think my ruling still stands. You will be Zora’s knight.”

Thorne frowned again, utterly confused. “Aren’t High Alphas the only one’s who are to take knights?”

“They… are,” Victoria stuttered. “But Zora wishes me to keep her identity safe for a bit longer. You will learn in due time. Just know that she is as important to me as you are. You are to hold her life at the regard of your own.”

Thorne couldn’t find the words to say. He knew Zora was someone important. He couldn’t quite pin his finger on who or what but he was going to find out. He hummed in response to Victoria’s comment.

“Alright darling, I must go,” she sighed. “The Southern North America pack is causing issues again and I must meet with their Alpha. Stay safe and keep Zora safe as well.”

“Of course,” Thorne replied, softly. “Goodbye, mother.”

“Goodbye, darling,” Victoria said.

Then the line went dead. Thorne was left with a hundred more questions. None with answers.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 48

Valentin

Valentin felt his eyes slowly closing as he struggled to focus. Then someone slammed something on his desk. He snapped his eyes open to be face-to-face with his fiancée and future bride. She was glaring down at him with her golden eyes. Her long black hair was swishing around by her waist.

“Did you even hear anything I said?” she snapped.

Valentin rubbed his eyes. “No, I’m sorry. I’

“I know I’m not your first choice,” Bella snarled, cutting him off. “But could you at least act like it.”

“What do you mean?” Valentin snapped back. I gestured towards where she was crowding his desk. Her shirt skirt was riding high up on her thighs. It was a sight that previously would’ve sent a shiver down his spine and a jolt to his cock. But now, since her, he was merely annoyed.

“You haven’t paid attention to anything I’ve said in the last hour,” Bella hissed. “It seems like you’re entirely uninterested in anything to do with wedding planning. Don’t tell me it’s not because of her because I know it is.”

Anger coursed through Valentin’s skin. He stood up at his desk abruptly, causing Bella to jolt back. He stood up straight, chin pointed up before he glared down at the student in front of him.

“I have chosen to marry you,” he grit out. “That should be enough for you. I am the Headmaster. I don’t have time for nuptial planning nor. do I give a fuck to do so.”

Bella gasped, face twisting into a frown from a scowl. “But-“

“Now get out of my office,” Valentin sat back down, definitive. “Before you make a fool of yourself again.”

Bella scowled at him one more time, waiting for him to say something through the silence. Then, she gathered the brochures and pamphlets she’d scattered across his desk and left the room in a huff. The door slammed behind her and Valentin sunk down in his seat.

He ran his hand over his face and sighed heavily. What the hell was he doing? He looked longingly at his phone, as if Victoria was going to call him and demand he break his pending marriage to Bella right now and marry her daughter.

Her secret daughter.

That no one else knew was her daughter.

His head pounded as he mulled that over. He thought of the way people were going to throw themselves at Zora’s feet once that tidbit of information got out. Especially, her three other

marriage candidates. Another shiver of anger rolled through him as he thought of the High Alphas' sons.

He'd never liked High Alpha Wolfham or High Alpha Moonraiser. They were arrogant and overly confident. They only managed to become High Alphas after the War due to their support of Victoria. Both packs had sent a fair amount of their people to fight for the Queen. Victoria then awarded the houses the title of High Alpha, much like the Lunerly house had been granted. In that award, she'd passed a sliver of her power to them, making them more powerful than the rest of the alphas. Victoria created the High Alphas.

Alpha Blythwitch was a great man, Valentin's friend even. He was not given the title of High Alpha for political reasons. Some felt his role in the war was lesser than High Alpha Moonraiser or Wolfham. Valentin, being a key figure in the war as well, knew that Blythwitch was incidental in winning the war. However, he was a behind the scenes man and not the figurehead that he or Victoria were.

When he passed, Valentin was deeply upset. It was actually his idea for Victoria to take him under her wing. He considered it penance for not allowing the Blythwitch name to be ascended to a High Alpha. He regretted that decision the moment the Moonraiser and Wolfham sons came to the castle and brought Thorne into their little group.

Now, the Thorne he knew, the one that Alpha Blythwitch would've been proud of, was gone. He couldn't help but resent the other two Alpha sons because of that.

All fucking three of them were now going to try and win Zora's hand. The hand that belonged to him. Valentin was the original High Alpha. If anyone deserved her hand, it was him.

He carded a hand through his hair. It had become stringy and frizzy with its lack of care over the past few days. Between telling off Zora and announcing his formal bid to marry Bella, he'd had no time for himself.

He stood up from his chair with a huff. The surface of his desk looked like a paper bomb had gone off. He stared at it for a moment before giving up and yanking the door to his office open.

He needed a break. One that was certainly not going to come from the mountain of papers eating his desk.

He locked his office door and padded down the near empty halls of the Admissions building. It was near the end of the day when Bella had made her way to his office with her mountain of brochures. By the time she'd left, it was almost seven, leaving the halls with only a few straggling employees. They each curtly nodded to Valentin as he passed before making their way to the front door.

Valentin continued to the back of the building then wound his way down the dark spiral staircase to another large door. He inserted a beautiful gold key into the lock and twisted. The wood door

creaked as it opened. Valentin entered and immediately waved his hand. A slew of sconces lit up the room as the lower Magiks ebbed out of Valentin's hands. The room became illuminated in a matter of seconds.

In the center was a giant low lit pool with flowing green, blue water. There were twelve dials along the far side of the wall in various shapes. Valentin sighed as he reveled in the silence of the room. He shrugged off his suit jacket and hung it on a post then pulled the elegant robes he wore off his shoulders as well. Slowly, he shed all of his clothes until he was as naked as the day he was born. Then, with one giant breath, he dove into the green-blue waters.

The water was warm and soothing as it ran over his skin. He allowed himself to resurface and went over to where the dials were. He pulled and tugged on a few, sending foaming soap into the bath. Then, he swam across the bath to a ledge and slunk into it.

It was nice for Valentin to relax. He rarely had time to. Slowly, his eyes fluttered shut and he allowed himself to let the bubbles and water lap at his shoulders. It felt like the waves were kissing his collarbones, so gentle and light. It reminded him of another person's touch.

Her hands, soft and bare. Uncalloused, from her life of not training. The curve of her arms resting gently on his own. The dig of her nails into his skin. The way he pressed her slowly into the floor with his hips, grinding his hips into hers as her mouth parted and back arched into him and-

"Fuck!" Valentin called into the room, eyes shooting open. He slammed his fists into the water out of frustration, sending water sloshing all over the rim of the bath. The silence in the room was ruined with his outburst.

Fucking Zora. She was under his skin in the worst way. His lower half ached with the sordid little fantasy he'd just imagined. Though, it wasn't much of a fantasy. He put her in very compromising positions when he'd been training her.

He cursed and blessed himself for cutting that off. He tipped his head back to lean on the rim of the bath. He sighed and ran his hand over his face.

"Fuck," he repeated, cursing himself more than his memory at that point.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 49

Zora

It was two months into my first semester at Alpha Academy that I finally was invited to my first party. Though, I wasn't really invited. Loren was and she told me she'd rather sit at home with

me than go to the party without me. So, Saturday night, after training with Maximus all morning, I agreed to let Loren do my make up and attempt (key word) to straighten my hair.

She pulled seven or eight dresses from her closet out and laid them on my bed as she sat me on her desk chair and wheeled over his massive make up cart. She sat cross legged on a stool in front of me and colored my face like a painting.

“So,” she teased. “How’s Max?”

“Fine,” I said quickly. “He’s fine.”

Loren giggled as she swept some powder onto my cheeks. “He is quite fine but I don’t know if I’d use that word for him.” “He’s hot,” I deadpanned. “You can say it.”

“Oh he’s so hot,” Loren sighed dreamily. “And really so sweet, Zora. Our sisters are friends. I don’t think sissy’s ever said a bad word about him.”

I gnawed my lip anxiously. That was not the Maximus I knew. He was harsh and sometimes bitter and rough around the edges. Was Loren seeing something I wasn’t? Was she not blinded by the grudge I had towards Maximus for being so awful to me while I was wolfless?

“I bet he’d be really nice as a boyfriend,” Loren continued, low and soft.

Or a husband, my inner wolf said.

I startled and jerked back from Loren. This was the first time my wolf had made her presence known since the outburst at Valentin. Loren knitted her eyebrows at me, make up brush still held in the same place it was applying shadow to my eyes.

“What?” she pressed.

“My wolf, she’s – she’s back,” I fumbled over my words.

Loren dropped her hand. “What do you mean ‘back’? She left?”

I’d forgotten that I didn’t tell Loren about my wolf’s outburst at Valentin. How could I when every bit of the outburst was because I was a fucking princess? I blinked at her before settling back into my seat.

“Yeah, sorry,” I mumbled. “I guess I forgot to tell you. She went quiet for a bit. Maybe she was embarrassed about turning sporadically.”

Her tail swished in my mind. I almost smiled, missing the sensation. I don’t get embarrassed, she said. And if I was, I certainly wouldn’t run away.

Noted, I replied, letting the smirk hit my lips.

She was back. I hadn't realized how empty my head had felt without her. The swishing of her tail now felt like a warm embrace rather than a cool annoyance. She scoffed.

Give it a day and you'll be annoyed again, she mused. I couldn't help but agree with her. My wolf was a feisty one.

"Is she talking to you?" Loren asked before resuming her work on my face.

I nodded. "Does yours?"

"Sometimes," Loren cocked her head. "She's very energetic. Usually she babbles and I can't quite understand it." Loren dropped the brush she was holding for another and brought it to my lips. "My sister says it's because our wolves are our strongest personality points, amplified. I know I'm chatty but, wow, is she chatty."

I chuckled and gave Loren a pat on the arm. "You are chatty," I said. "But it's why I like you. You bring out the best in everyone."

Loren smiled back sincerely then huffed as she dropped her brush in her case. She bracketed her hand on her hips. "I think I'm done," she said as she spun me around to face the mirror. I gasped as I saw myself. Loren smiled as bright as the sun.

"Ta-da," she said.

My face was caked in the best way possible. My cheeks were pink and contoured to make my bones look high and elegant. My lips were shiny and pink, plumped and sparkling even in the low light of our dorm room. She'd lined my eyes with brown kohl to make the green-yellow of them pop. Then, she'd smoked out the corners with some shadow. I felt like I was glowing.

Loren stood behind me with her hands back on her hips. "What do you wanna do with your hair?"

"Oh, I don't know," I pulled at a stray curl. "It's such a pain to deal with I'll probably just braid it back off my face."

Loren scoffed with a hand to her chest. "That would not compliment my work! How about I straighten it for you? Maja and Pietha left some products for us."

"You'd do that?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. "You're my best friend."

I smiled at her, our eyes locking before she went over to the cabinet and pulled out a whole basket of products. She sectioned my hair and went at it with the products then took a lightning

hot straightener to it. Steam emitted from my hair but when she pulled the straightener down, it was like my hair grew out of my head that way.

“Whoa,” I said.

Loren wiggled her eyebrows. “Magiks!”

I laughed, knowing that she was kidding. The products Pietha and Maja had left were some that I’d seen before in the human stores. There was nothing magik about them. Loren continued to straighten my curls, humming as she stood behind me. I looked at my hands, my thoughts consumed by what she’d said about Maximus.

“Loren?” she hummed in reply, eyes still on my hair. I fidgeted in my seat. “Have you ever had a boyfriend?”

Loren’s perpetual smile dropped. She shook her head, more disappointed than sad. “I had a friend once who I thought was handsome,” she said. “But he didn’t see me that way. I wrote him this long letter about my feelings and he just ... tossed it away. The other girls in my pack made fun of me for weeks.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, sincerely. “That’s awful.”

Loren shrugged. “It was a harsh reality, but it made me stronger,” she said. “I learned to not put my happiness into the hands of others. Only my own.”

“I like that,” I said. Loren smiled softly. There was a beat of silence before she spoke.

“What about you?”

I frowned. “I mean no, not officially,” I said. “There was this older boy at my human school, Frankie. He and I kind of fooled around a bit but same thing as you. He didn’t really have feelings for me so it fizzled out.”

“Fooled around like ... kissing?” Loren asked.

I fidgeted again. “Among other things.”

“Wow,” Loren breathed. “I’ve never done anything like that before. Just some stray kisses at parties.”

“It’s “I paused, trying to find a word to describe sex. “Weird.”

Loren laughed, full bellied. She shook her head as she did. “That’s not what sissy said.”

“Okay then, what did you oh-so wonderful sister say?”

“She is wonderful,” Loren pointed the straightener at me in the mirror. “And don’t you forget it.” I held my hands up, giving in. Loren gave me a sly smirk before going back to her hair straightening.

“She and her friends were talking about it once,” she said. “I overheard them. They way they described it was like this magically romantic experience. Like every cell in your body was on fire and yet at the same time, ice was running over your skin. They each said there’s nothing like it.”

I snorted then clamped my hand over my mouth. “Sorry,” I mumbled, dropping my hands back in my lap. “That is just so wildly different than what I experienced. I wonder if I was doing something wrong.”

Loren gave me a look like she didn’t know either then went back to my hair. She’d almost finished when she finally spoke again.

“You know,” she said, softly. “I bet Max would make it like that for you.” (

I froze. My mouth opened and closed like a fish. I was desperately trying to not imagine what that would feel like.

The Moonbeam is not wrong, my wolf mused.

You lasted all of an hour before annoying me, I threw back. Go away.

My wolf snorted snootily before trotting off into the back of my mind and curling up to sleep. I brought my attention back to Loren. She was finishing up the final pieces of my hair, making sure my roots were as smooth as the rest of it. We made eye contact and she raised her brow.

“People on campus talk,” she said, plain as ever. “No one’s ever slept with Maximus Wolfham and been disappointed.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I dead panned.

Loren put down the straightener and I looked into the mirror. If possible, I’d become even more gorgeous. I looked like the super model version of myself, all shiny and pressed. Loren smoothed a final product from my roots to my ends before huffing and setting her hands on my shoulders.

“There,” she sighed. “Another masterpiece complete. Are you ready to party?”

I looked at myself in the mirror shiny and bronzed and almost as good, if not better, than when Maja and Pietha had done me up for Mateball. A sense of confidence waved through me. I was bad-ass. I was hot. I could do anything.

“Let’s fucking party,” I replied.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 50

Any sense of confidence had disappeared by the time we ended up outside of Kairos Moonraiser's house. Besides the fact that I was going into the house of someone who loathed me and had tried to kill me multiple times, Loren had picked out an outfit for me as well.

The skirt she'd given me was five inches too short and five inches too low. It barely covered my crotch and was pretty much a sliver of denim. Furthermore, she'd given me a shirt that was so cropped it was more likely it was a bra. Loren claimed it was a crop top on her but she was also wildly shorter than me and had B-cups where I had Ds. About half of my stomach was showing in my outfit.

I drew the line at shoes though. Loren tried to get me to put on some frilly kitten heel but I'd vehemently opposed and stuck with my trusty combat boots instead. I was pretty sure I'd flashed her my entire vagina as I wrestled them on in my door room.

"Are you sure it's okay that I'm here?" I asked for the hundredth time in the last hour.

"Positive," Loren said. "It's not just Kairos who lives here. Thorne, Maximus and Petyr all do too. Plus, there's already people all over the place. I highly doubt they'll even notice were here."

I yanked my skirt down as I felt it riding up. "Who invited us again?"

"Sissy!" Loren said as if it was the simplest thing in the world. "She specifically told me to bring you too."

I couldn't help but feel as though it was a bit of a trap. Alessia hadn't been exactly warm and fuzzy the first time I met her. She was an incredibly strong warrior and seemed to feel the same way as Kairos about weakness. Plus, her mate was Petyr, Kairos's right-hand man. The whole situation felt off.

"Okay," I said, tentatively as we finally reached the steps to the house.

Several students were lounging on the front porch with red cups in their hands. A few were smoking something that I immediately recognized as marijuana. I stared at them in confusion. Could wolves even get high?

Loren led us into the house, where a cacophony of music, yelling and loud voices met my ears. I flinched as I tried to tune out the sounds and focus on just the dull thrum of the house. Loren motioned me to follow her, and I weaved through the crowds behind her silver bob.

We ended up at the makeshift bar in the kitchen. It looked like a giant hole had been carved out sloppily to allow several male wolves in the kitchen to serve drinks out of it. Loren stood at the front of the bar and dragged me towards her.

“What do you want?” she asked, voice loud above the chatter next to us. I shrugged.

“Whatever you’re having,”

Loren leaned across the bar and flagged down one of the Alphas behind it. He was a third year who I’d seen mulling about Kairos’s crowd. He gave Loren a wink then gave me a very pointed once over. Loren held up a peace sign and the guy walked away. She turned to me, bubbling with energy.

“I’m so excited!” she said. “We have to dance! That’s my favorite part!”

I laughed. “Fine but I’m not any good!”

“Me either,” Loren replied. “But that’s what makes it fun!”

I laughed again then caught the Alpha returning with our drinks. He pushed one red cup towards Loren and then another towards me. I took it from him and he winked at me.

“Have fun,” he shouted over the music.

I blinked back at him, confused as to why he’d turned chummy all of a sudden. Loren grabbed her cup and waved at him before starting off into the crowd again. I grabbed my own cup and looked in it.

It was filled, nearly to the point of spilling over, with a pink drink. There was a bit of foam on top, swirling and sparkling as if someone had put fairy dust on top. I tentatively took a sip. The bitter burn of alcohol hit my throat first followed by something sickly sweet then something lightly herbal.

All in all, it wasn’t terrible.

I’d drank so little in my life, I didn’t have much to compare it to.

I took another small sip before following Loren into the middle of the dance floor. She spun around as she swayed her hips completely off beat. Her cup was held in between her teeth as her hands swung over her head. She looked utterly ridiculous.

I laughed at her and she took her cup out from her mouth before taking a swig. She cheers me and we both took huge gulps. Then Loren went back to dancing in the space around her. She grabbed my unoccupied hand when she spun around and shook it with her.

“Come on, Zora!” she yelled. “Dance!”

I took another sip of my drink, feeling the confidence I had lost surging through me once again. I tried to mimic Loren’s carelessness in dancing. I threw my arms and hips and legs around as best

as I could to the thrumming of the music. I don't know how long Loren and I had been like that, floating through the air to the music.

I paused and leaned into Loren. "I'm getting water!" I said into her ear. She nodded at me then went back to spinning around. She looked less like a werewolf and more like a fairy in the low, colored lights of the house.

I pushed my way back through the crowd. The room was spinning a bit as I walked. I was clearly drunk. I looked down at my cup, trying to determine if I needed a refill when I noticed, the glass was half full.

I started to panic as I became dizzier and dizzier. The room was spinning with the bright colors and the flashing lights. My feet felt like they were light under me, as if I was walking on clouds. I felt myself swaying from left to right as I stepped. I collided with someone and tried to mumble an apology but it came out slurred and unlike me.

"-absolutely wasted-" said the voice of the person I'd run into. I shook my head.

"Help," I tried.

"-got her. She's so crazy-"

""

A different voice came from the other side of me. I sagged into them, feeling my head hit the the area where their chest and shoulder met. They were much taller than me and had a heavy muscular build about them. They must've been a man.

I prayed to the Gods above it wasn't Kairos.

The person I'd ran into was speaking again.

"-Kairos will be pissed-"

Then the second person

"-tell him. He doesn't-"

The first laughed.

"-fun, you dog."

The sentences around me were clipped and made no sense. I felt a hand wrap around my bicep. It dragged me out of the room with the music and the loud noises. My head spun worse in the quiet. The bright white light above me was flickering. My body felt like it'd become boneless.

“Help,” I wheezed again. My head was swimming. I leaned against the wall of the room, willing my legs to stay stable.

“Help? No one here is going to help you, pup.”

It was the first voice. I was right about it being a man. I could make out the vague outline of him as I tried to pry my eyes open. His tone was light as if he was playing with me.

“M’sick,” I mumbled. “Not drunk. Sick.”

“Shut up, bitch!” he barked.

I felt him grab my shoulders and slam them back into the wall. My head pounded more upon contact. My vision started to turn black, the sounds of the party fading in and out.

“Be a good little slut and put out,” the voice grunted.

I whimpered, finally recognizing what was about to happen. I immediately started to try and fight my way out but it was no use. My body wasn’t mine in that moment. It had succumbed to whatever I’d taken.

Don’t give up! My wolf screamed. She felt like she was underwater. Fight, Zora! We have to fight!!

I tried once again and the man laughed at me before pressing me further into the wall. “You think you’re so strong,” He said. ” But you’re weak and this is further proof of it. I want you off campus. So I’ll be sure to give you a reputation that will force you off.”

His hands went to my chest again as he dug his knee between my legs. I cried out, pleading and begging and hoping that someone would find me. The man was trying to touch me when the door slammed open.

And then it all went black.