

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 61

Zora

Did I have sex with Maximus again?

Yes.

Should I have?

No.

Was it quite possibly the best sex of my life?

Yes.

I couldn't bring myself to be embarrassed as I slunk back into my room. I'd left in just as much of a fluster as I had the night before. I didn't want to sit with Maximus for too long, wallowing in whatever weird bond was happening. I pressed the door closed then turned around.

I gasped as I saw Loren standing in the middle of the room. Her arms were crossed over her chest and she had such a strong disappointment on her face, I felt like I could taste it from across the room.

“How was ‘training’?” She said, making air quotes around the word with her tone.

“S’fine,” I mumbled. “You scared me.”

Loren hummed. “So is sex part of the exercise regime?”

“I-What-I-“I stuttered but Loren cut me off again.

“Unless that was someone else I should congratulate,” she said as she jabbed her thumb towards the wall we shared with Maximus’s room. I felt all the heat in my body move into my face. I held my hands up defensively.

“Loren, I can explain-

She dropped her arms to hang loosely at her sides. “When were you going to tell me?” Her voice had become small and frail.

“I – I was going to!” I stuttered again. “I promise. I just was so flustered last night and then-“

“Last night?” Loren squeaked. “So, you hid this from me all day?”

“Yes and I’m so sorry. I was so confused and—“ I took a step towards her and she shuffled back. I winced.

“Are we friends?” She said, still quiet and upset.

“Of course!” I sighed heavily. I shoved my fingers into my temples. “I really was going to tell you. I just needed time to process it and figure out what the hell even happened and what was supposed to happen and-” I blew out another breath.” I’m sorry Loren.”

Loren nodded. She looked back up at me through her eyelashes. “Friends don’t keep secrets,”

A pang of guilt washed over me. I was keeping so many secrets from Loren. So many that she deserved to know. Instead, I bit hard on my tongue before sighing again.

“I know,” I said, softly. “I really am sorry, Loren. I promise I was going to tell you.

Loren gave me a half smile. “Just don’t do it again,” she said. “And tell me everything.”

I ignored her first statement before launching into my story. When I got to the first kiss, her jaw fell slack and she stared into my eyes for the entire rest of the story. When I told her about our most recent romp in bed, she squealed. I finished with a weird half a grin.

Loren wrinkled her nose. “You totally have sex hair now that I’m looking at you.”

I smoothed a hand over my braid and Loren cackled as I did. She finally stopped and rested her chin in her hands. “So do you like him?”

I fidgeted. I remembered her comment about secrets and huffed a breath. “Kind of,” I said. “I don’t know how to put it in words. Like he feels like a piece of my puzzle that has yet to be completed. I like him but he doesn’t make me feel full.” “Wow,” Loren breathed. “Maybe you really do have two fated mates.”

I fidgeted again. “About that,” I cleared my throat. “My wolf seems to think I may have more than one fated mate.” Loren’s eyes went wide. “How does she know that?”

I gnawed on my bottom lip. I couldn’t reveal the wolf’s secret to Loren. But I owed her some of the truth. She was the biggest support I had at school.

“She heard rumors,” I said, softly. “Tales of a queen from before the Great Enslavement. She had four fated mates.”

“Four?” Loren gasped. “Here, I can’t find one and yet someone can have four!?”

“I guess,” I shrugged. “I didn’t realize it either.”

“Wow,” Loren leaned back. “So you think both Valentin and Maximus are your fated mates?”

“And Thorne,” I nodded.

Which was odd because those three were three out of the four potential suitors my mother had picked for me. I wondered for a second if she knew they were my fated mates before I did. Then I remembered she shipped me off to the human world for eighteen years. She wouldn't have done that if she knew I had three fated mates, right?

Would she have?

Four, my wolf corrected me. Your mother chose four potential suitors. Each from a High Wolf house.

Right, Kairos. The bane of my existence at Alpha Academy. I shuddered in the thought of his beady gold eyes focusing on me for something as intimate as sex.

“Thorne too, wow,” Loren breathed, jolting me out of my thoughts.

She looked pretty dejected at that point. I felt ridiculous, talking about my potential three-four-fated mates when Loren didn't have one. I reached and squeezed her wrist gently.

“Hey,” I said, soft and gentle. “You'll find them. I promise.”

Loren gave me a soft smile and put her second hand on top of mine. “You're right,” she patted my hand. I gently pulled it back into my own lap. Loren gave me a soft smile.

“They're just.....not here yet or something,” she said.

“Exactly,” I chorused. “I bet you in second semester you'll find them!”

She frowned. “But then I'll have to wait until fall of my third year to have another mate ball.”

“It'll be worth it,” I smiled at her. She smiled back. Then she sighed. “So three fated mates.”

Four, maybe, Mona chimed in from where she was cleaning her paws like a cat.

I don't want that sociopath, I threw back. I'm okay with three.

Suit yourself, Mona mused, judging me from the bowls of my mind. She darted off and out of my forebrain. “Three fated mates,” I breathed. “But I guess it's only two now that Thorne severed the bond.”

“Maybe he can reinstate it,” Loren mused. “If you can have three fated mates, maybe you can also fix broken bonds.” I shook my head, not convinced. “I don't think so. What's broken is broken is they always teach us in high magiks.” Loren cocked her head. “That's true,” she said. “But they also teach us that you only have one fated mate like ... ever.” I laughed then shrugged. “Maybe they don't know as much as they tell us they know.”

Loren gasped then grabbed my arm. “Or, or, or,” she chanted, with a glint in her eyes. “Maybe you’re some super secret princess!”

I tried my best to school my face neutral. I couldn’t tell her yet. For as wonderful as she’d been, this secret could be detrimental to my time at Alpha Academy. I nearly gnawed my tongue off to keep myself from speaking. I swallowed thickly and gave Loren a smile that felt lukewarm.

“Maybe,” I chorused. “But probably not. There’s nothing Princess-y about me at all.”

Loren frowned. “Don’t say that!”

“It’s true,” I said before getting up. I stretched and faked a yawn. “Anyways, I’m beat. I’m going to sleep. Walk with me to Basics tomorrow?”

Loren nodded. “Of course,” She also stood and drew back the covers of her bed. She turned over her shoulder to smile at me.” Goodnight Zora. I’m glad I met you.”

I smiled back at her. “I’m glad I met you too.”

I got into bed and was met with another sleepless night as I thought about how many more times I’d have to lie to Loren. I wondered if she’d stick around after all of that, or if the first friend I’d made would leave me like everyone else did.

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The next morning, a formal, Alpha Academy headed letter arrival at my door. I opened it up and my stomach sunk as I recognized the elegant script. Valentin had requested my prescience in his office that morning. Unlike his notes he used to send me about training, he signed this one. “Headmaster Lunerly” swirled in black ink on the bottom.

I closed my door and held the letter in my hand as Loren yawned and stretched. She smacked her lips a few times before sitting up and looking at me.

“Whut is it?” She grumbled.

I raised the paper towards her. “Valentin is asking to see me,” I put the paper down on my bed. “Well, the headmaster is.” “Sounds important,” Loren mumbled as she curled herself back in bed. “Time is it?”

“Like seven,” I laughed. “I’ll meet you at Basics. Go back to bed, sleepy.”

Loren grumbled something unintelligible before diving back under the covers. I laughed as I shrugged on my hoodie and a jacket. I left my sleeping pants on and shoved my feet into some slip-on boots before I took off towards the admissions building.

As the cold autumnal air hit me, I wrapped my jacket tighter around myself. The hazy early morning air clung to the ground of the campus. It looked like a ghost was resting itself across campus. I tugged my jacket closer together and hurried my steps.

The admissions building was once again, eerily quiet. A few other workers were starting to walk in. They gave me curt nods that changed into scowls once they saw my attire. I scuttled along until I reached the door to Valentin's office.

The last time I'd been in his office, it'd been full of tension and exhaustion and unspoken promises. I hoped that this encounter would be more positive than the last time. I brought my hand up and gently rapped on the door. A beat passed before the door swung open.

There, in all his glory, was Valentin Lunerly.

His dirty brown hair was back to its shiny state. It was pulled back into a loose ponytail with a few pieces hanging in front of his ears. They curled slightly under his chin. His face was completely clean of hair as if he'd shaven that morning. His gold eyes were boring into mine with a violent intensity.

"Miss Smith," he addressed. His voice held no emotion in it. It felt cold to my ears. "Come in."

I stepped by him and into the office. It was less of a disheveled mess than it was before. There was no warmth in it. Just a desk and two chairs. It was as if Valentin Lunerly had ceased to exist as a person.

The door slammed shut behind us. I turned over my shoulder and watched Valentin motion towards the seat across from his desk. I slunk into it and he did the same in his own seat. Without saying anything else to me, he pushed his rotary phone across the desk and motioned to it.

I tentatively picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, darling,"

"Hello, mother," I replied. Nothing about it felt natural, a forced greeting I knew I should use.

"I have been... told about the Jackell boy," she said. I froze. In the chaos of sleeping with Max, I'd almost forgotten the fact that I'd damn near been assaulted only a few weeks ago.

"You have," I said, slowly.

"He's in custody," Victoria went on. I shot a look at Valentin. He seemed to be unfazed. Victoria sighed deeply in the receiver, and I adjusted my focus back to her.

“This wouldn’t have happened if you’d told people your true identity,” she whispered.

Instantly, a rage ignited in me. How dare she? She was making it out to seem as though this whole thing was my fault. That if I had actually accepted my role as Princess, I wouldn’t have been almost assaulted?

“How do you know?” I snapped. “It could’ve fed his anger. It could’ve made it worse.”

“I wouldn’t have,” Victoria said, sternly. “You don’t know. The wolves respect royalty. They wouldn’t have. They couldn’t have-“

“There’s a lot I don’t fucking know!” I roared into the phone. I was livid. I was sick of the unknown and was acting out because of it.

“I don’t know anything!” I continued to bark. “Because you’ve kept me in the dark. You left me away from this world then you get upset when I don’t understand it. I didn’t want ask to be taken out of this world and I certainly didn’t get asked to be dropped back into it!”

With that, I slammed the phone back on the receiver and hung up on my mother, the Queen of the werewolves.

I huffed and sank back into my seat. It was then that I realized where I was. Valentin Lunerly was staring at me across his desk. There was a certain softness in his eyes that was missing from when I’d walked into his office earlier.

The gentle “lub dub” of our hearts beating in time with one another was filling the silence. Something hung in the air between us. It was volatile, waiting for some sort of spark to set the entire room into flames.

My hand twitched and Valentin abruptly stood up. He cleared his throat and brushed his hair off his face.

“You shouldn’t talk to your mother like that,” he mumbled.

“She acts like all of this is my fault,” I whispered back. I was utterly exhausted.

Valentin lifted his head and looked me in the eyes. He shook his head gently. “None of this is your fault, Zora,” he said, soft as a feather. “And I don’t believe your mother thinks that as well.”

“Don’t protect her,” I said with as much bite as a chihuahua.

Valentin braced his hands on his desk and leaned across it. I was frozen as his face came closer to me. His gold eyes sparkled in the light of his office.

“I only protect one person,” He said, almost threatening me. “And that is you. It will only be you. It will always be you.”

“So give up the fight against me,” I begged, feeling utterly pathetic. “Stop pushing me away and just allow yourself to be what you’re supposed to be. My fated mate.”

Valentin sucked in a breath. It came out shaky, hitting the tip of my nose. I could almost taste him, spearmint and juniper berries. I wanted more of him. I wanted every bit of him to crash into me.

Instead, he stood up and looked down his nose at me. Any warmth in him was gone and his tone was harsh and factual as he spoke.

“I am not your mate,” he gritted out, as if fighting himself. “It has come to my attention that you have chosen Maximus Wolfham for that distinction. If you do care for him, I’d consummate the bond and tell your mother. She will be ecstatic.”

There was no happiness for me in his tone. In fact, he seemed bitter. I watched his hand move to grip the back of his chair. Though the chair seemed fine, his knuckles were white with frustration.

All hopes I had for him to finally give in and allow himself to want me, were lost. He was set. I wasn’t his nor was he mine. We were two tethers, running far away from one another on different paths. Never to cross.

I licked the front of my lips and stood. I looked Valentin right in the eye as I spoke, my words dripping malice. I needed to hurt him, just as he hurt me.

“I already have consummated the bond,” I said, level and proud. “Twice.”

There was a distinct snap that resonated through the air. I looked down at Valentin’s hand to see he’d snapped the back bar in half. His hands were balled into white fists, covered in shards of wood. I let me gaze drift to his eyes. The gold was so dark it was nearly black. Still, his face showed nothing.

With a blank stare and an eventual shake of my head, I stormed out of the room.

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Of course as I’m leaving, I run into none other than Bella. Luckily for me, the tears had yet to spring from my eyes to my cheeks. I sucked them back up as she got closer.

The bitch had the Gaul to be perfectly done up at eight in the morning. Her skirt was ridiculously short and flounced around her thighs. She was wearing some sort of heeled boots and a little cropped cardigan. Most of her mid section was out, tanned and smoothed. Her long black hair was swishing around her waist, super shiny and straight.

And I was in a glorified sack.

“What are you doing here?” Bella snapped as she got close enough to me.

I jabbed a thumb towards Valentin’s office. “Oh, you didn’t know?” I feigned kindness with a sickly sweet smile. “We fuck at seven most mornings. Before the rest of the professors get in.” I flashed her my teeth, making the smile even faker.

“Just so people don’t talk,” I half-whispered at her.

Bella’s entire face contorted into a bitter sneer. She stepped up to glare down her nose at me. I should’ve been more scared of someone nearly a half foot taller than me but it was fucking Bella.

“Listen, cunt,” she bit out. “No matter how hard you try, it won’t change that fact that he’s mine. He’s proposed to me.”

She stood up straight and threw my fake-ass smile back at me. “Heard what happened at Kairos’s,” she said. “Of course, you’d be one to hook up with someone in the bathroom.”

My jaw fell completely slack. The fucking audacity of her to insinuate that I was into the attempted assault on me was disgusting. I was almost raped and here she was telling me she knew I’d be “one to do that”.

Instead of lashing out, I stood up as straight as I could. I put on the sweetest, sickest smile I could possibly muster and I walked past Bella. As I got past her, she scoffed. So I wheeled around and looked at her.

“Oh, by the way,” I added. “Tell Valentin I’m so sorry for breaking his chair. I didn’t know he’d be that... passionate.”

Bella’s eyes almost bulged out of her head. She glared at me more violently than she had before. I blew her a kiss before spinning on my heel and darting off. I was almost out of the Admission’s building when I started to hear screaming and banging from the hallways where Valentin’s office was. I snickered to myself as I darted out of the building.

The truth was, I didn’t think that Valentin actually liked Bella. I knew that the feelings that I felt towards Valentin were reciprocated. I’d felt them reciprocated as the hardness in his crotch whenever we were pressed together. Then, there was the electricity and the deep thrumming of our hearts that I’d come to associate with the mate bond.

The fated mate bond.

That I was slowly started to believe I had multiple of.

A queen deserves a royal court, Mona drawled from the back of my mind.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes. I'm barely a princess, I said back. Actually, no one knows I'm a fucking Princess.

There is an aura of a princess about you, Mona countered. Even if they do not know, they can sense it.

Right. By assaulting and attacking and being generally miserable towards me.

Because they knew you were different, Mona's tail swished. She was clearly annoyed.

I dropped the subject completely, trying to not argue with the voice in my head. I didn't need to be crazier than I already was. My mind drifted back to my nights with Maximus. A heat crept up in my cheeks as I remembered him, driving into me.

I'd never had sex like that. Raw and deep and unrelenting. Yet somehow, my heart was tugging me more towards Valentin. There was a complete draw to him that I didn't have towards Maximus.

The fact of the matter was, I didn't want Maximus. I wanted Valentin.

But did Valentin want me?

I knew he did in the depths of his being, yet I had to convince him to believe the voice in the back of his mind. I'd heard through the rumor mill that he and Bella had set a date: New Year's Eve of that year. That left with me with three months to try and weasel my way into his brain.

Three months to convince him to allow himself to be mine.

I sighed as I reached my dorm room. It was going to be challenging but I knew I had it in me. I got back in my room as Loren was waking up. The two of us walked to Basics together. Loren only asked a few questions that were easy enough for me to side step. But when we got to Basics, I noticed her gnawing her lip. I knew she was trying to figure out if I was lying out of omission.

Coach blew his whistle to start class. He paired us off and let Kairos demonstrate something. Once again, Kairos glared at me before he demonstrated. I fought the desire to roll my eyes. His attention to me was becoming boring.

Coach blew the whistle again and I searched the crowd for Maximus. He walked over to me with his normal emotionless expression. I licked the front of my teeth and offered him a half smile.

"Hi," I said, softly.

"Hi," Maximus replied, still with no emotion. "Ready to train?"

I nodded. That was the end of our conversation as we walked over to the training mat. That morning, we were working on countering kicks. I was supposed to throw a high kick and Maximus was supposed to grab my ankle and take me down. Then, I was supposed to do the same to him.

The first time Max's hand wrapped around my ankle, the jittery electric feeling surged from his hand to my skin. We locked eyes and both relished in the feeling. However, when I blinked, my eyes opened to Valentin's face. I gasped and blinked again, Max's face coming into focus. Immediately, I lost my focus and fell on my ass.

"Shit," Maximus hissed. He dropped down to offer me a hand. "You okay?"

"Yeah," I mumbled. I grabbed his hand and let him pull me up. He glanced at me with hunger in his eyes, but I felt nothing. I blinked again and pulled away.

"Sorry," I grumbled. "Distracted."

A frown worked its way onto Maximus's face. It was like he could tell that it wasn't him that distracted me. It was someone else.

The rest of Basics was fairly uneventful. I could feel Maximus's mood worsening throughout the session. I also was incredibly aware of how Kairos was watching us. His sneer was permeating through the room. It didn't help that I had shifting that afternoon, where none other than Kairos was the teaching assistant.

All during class, he was watching me like a hawk. I really was hoping I could force a shift out and snap my jaws to get him to back off, but Mona was not working with me.

You weren't working with me, she protested as I walked to lunch.

I rolled my eyes. I'm working as best I can, I threw back. You're the wolf. You're the one who's supposed to come out when I let you.

You're still not letting me, Mona protested as she cleaned her paws. The movement was more cat-like than wolfish. You have to fully give up control to allow me in.

I grabbed a sandwich from the cafeteria line. I still hadn't grown accustomed to the fancy food they served. Even for breakfast, I usually ate a banana and a granola bar. I sighed heavily as I turned to try and find Loren in the crowded room.

I am, I replied to Mona.

You're not, she fought back. Once you accept that you and I are one, then you will give up.

I couldn't dignify that with a reply, so I ignored her once I found an empty table and started towards it. It looked like Loren was caught up in her own class, rendering me to eat my meal on my own. I set my tray down at the empty table and shimmied into the seat.

However, I should've known I'd never get any peace at that school. As soon as my ass hit the seat, a body slid in next to me. I jerked and turned my head to see Thorne Blythwitch sitting next to me.

"Hi," he offered with a smirk. Then he frowned when he noticed my meal. "That's not going to be enough."

"It's been enough," I grumbled before taking a hulking bite of my sandwich. I jerked my chin towards him. "Can I help you?"

"Just checking in," Thorne said plainly before diving into his meal. "I am your Knight."

"I'm aware," I dead panned. "Maximus is doing a perfectly good job at training me, by the way."

Thorne's lip twitched. "Is he?"

"Yup," I popped my "p" before taking another bite of my food. Thorne sat his fork down and turned his entire body in his seat to look at me.

"People have seen you two on the field after hours," he said, slowly. I raised an eyebrow as if asking if that was a problem. Thorne cleared his throat then lifted his head to look me in the eye.

"They've also seen you leaving his room," he whispered. I froze. I slowly chewed then set my sandwich down. Thorne's eyes were locked on mine.

"That's not any of your business," I grit out.

"It is," Thorne said. "Because as I've stated, I am your Knight. I am supposed to protect you."

"I don't need protecting," I snapped. "Especially from you."

"You don't get it," Thorne threw back, anger licking his tone. "The Wolfhams are High Alphas. They wouldn't bother with low Alphas unless they had something to gain."

Kairos froze. I watched my spit dribble down the side of his cheek and land on my own shirt. Then, his lips twisted into a smirk so sadistic, I felt like the Antichrist was looming over me.

He reared back before slamming me into the floor again. Darkness threatened to consume my mind until I heard Mona's voice echoing through the emptiness of my skull.

Let me in! She cried. Let me IN!

My body ached but I tried as best as I could. I let every muscle in my body, every bone and fiber of my being, become open. Instantly, warmth flooded me and then there was only fire.

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Kairos

The burst of flames that erupted underneath Kairos had him flying through the air and across the forest. The force of the fire was like nothing he'd ever felt before. His arm instinctually went to cover his face. Then he started asking himself questions. Like, who the fuck was Zora Smith?

That kind of High Magik, to conjure a flame powerful enough to throw a wolf back, ran deep in someone. Someone like Zora, a nobody Alpha from some place West of the epicenter of Wolf-kind, couldn't have that power. Well, he thought to himself, they could but not if they were a High Alpha.

When the flames stopped roaring, Kairos dropped his hand. The light from the flames was still bright but not enough that he couldn't make out the shape of a wolf from within the flames. He smirked to himself, happy that the only that the girl could shift was him.

The flames died down and his smirk left just as quickly. Standing proud in the spot where Zora Smith was standing, was a stark white wolf. He blinked and rubbed his eyes, trying to make the wolf return to its grey color that Kairos had last seen it at. But despite his efforts, Zora Smith was still a white wolf.

No one had seen a white wolf emerge in years.

The only other white wolf to emerge was the Wolf-Queen, Victoria Luna. As far as Kairos knew, Queen Luna didn't have any biological daughters.

Unless...

He shook the thought out of his head as the light from the fire finally died down. Zora's wolf glared at him from across the forest. She opened her mouth and barked and the entire forest shook with its force. Kairos, ever the warrior, immediately was on his feet. He shook then focused deep within himself, on the anger perpetually burning within him. Then, his hands started to crack and shiver and in less than ten seconds, his body was no longer his.

It was the massive, strong body of his wolf. He shook once, feeling the new way his limbs could mold and fold under him. Then, he took a defensive stance. He looked up and saw Zora's wolf beginning to circle him.

Her snarl was still evident and a few times, she barked again, before breaking back into the salivating, snarling mess. Kairos was half convinced it wasn't Zora until he caught the sight of her eyes. The wolf's were the same hazel-gold that the girl had.

She snapped her jaw in Kairos's direction and he took that as his sign. He lunged at her, jaws going for her throat as his paws hit the side of her body. His teeth cracked as they snapped together, narrowly missing her as she darted out of the way.

He dipped his head low to the ground and went for her throat again. If he could pin her to the ground, he could make her submit. He was the High Alpha. She was nothing to his rank.

Kairos charged at Zora again. His jaw was just about to close around her, teeth bared when she seemed to disappear into thin air. His teeth clattered shut again and he skittered to a stop. He turned and found her across the forest, still as feral as ever.

"What High Magiks was that?" He barked through the telepathic line that all wolves could use.

"A power you could only dream of, Moonraiser," A voice, that sounded half like Zora's and half like something ethereal, spat down the line.

Kairos jolted in response. He was not expected her to know how to do that. Just a few weeks ago, Zora could barely keep herself from shifting when he taunted her. Now, she was able to use the line? And with some sort of magik as well?

Something felt off.

Kairos couldn't tell if the shimmer of magiks swirling around the white wolf was nefarious or godly. Truthfully, he didn't give a fuck. He was a warrior and the way the white wolf was standing was a challenge.

Kairos never turned down a challenge.

He dipped his head low again and snapped his mouth before he bared his teeth. Zora's wolf took the same stance and the two circled each other in a violent dance. Zora, surprisingly, was the one to charge first. She rammed her head into Kairos's flank startling him and sending him flying across the forest.

His body thudded to a stop against a tree. He shook his head before getting back up. Zora was mid charge when Kairos reared up on his hind legs and swiped a front claw towards her. He felt contact with her muzzle and couldn't help but smirk when he heard her cry out in pain.

The white wolf staggered back as three crimson lines bloomed on the fur of her jowl. Kairos watched, edging closer to her in the process. Zora shook her head, muddying the red blood into her muzzle and giving her a foul pink sneer. Some of the blood dripped down into the dirt by her feet. She huffed one more breath out of her nose before barreling towards Kairos.

He barely squeezed past her and was in the process of turning back to snap at her when he felt her jaw wrap around his back leg. There was a sickening crack then the burning white pain surging up his entire body. Kairos yelped and slunk to the ground.

She'd snapped his leg bone in half.

He looked back up and met her eyes, teeth bared still as he tried to get up. He collapsed as he realized it was futile, any weight he put on his leg burned. His body didn't have enough time to heal to attack back.

Zora stalked towards him. Her mouth came down and Kairos snapped towards it once. Zora's wolf growled back at him in warning.

"Submit," she demanded down the line.

"No, you fucking bitch!" Kairos threw back as he snapped towards her again, thrashing wildly on the floor of the forest. Zora moved towards his broken back leg. Her front paw pinned it to the floor and his yelps of pain sounded so foreign he didn't realize they'd come from his throat.

"Submit!" She demanded again a swirl of magiks wrapped around her word. It hit Kairos in the face like a ton of bricks. He'd felt the same thing before when he'd disobeyed his father. The magik attached to Zora's word was the same magik of his father.

The magik of a High Alpha.

Kairos whimpered again as the magik took over, forcing him to bare his throat to Zora. Her jaw wrapped around his neck, lightly enough not to puncture his skin, yet hard enough to send a message. She was not to be messed with.

At that point, several human voices were swirling through the forest. Zora, still holding onto Kairos, jerked her head towards them. From the brush came Professor Valencia and the other students that he was supposed to be assisting in teaching. So much for that, he thought to himself as his head hung loosely from Zora's lips.

Valencia gasped as she saw the scene in front of her. The blood was still dripping down Zora's snout and getting caught in Kairos's neck fur. The trees they'd been fighting between were also caked in blood, shattered in the spots where their massive bodies had collided with them.

As Valencia caught sight of Zora, her eyes nearly bulged out of her head. "Heavens to Luna," she gasped under her breath. "Your Highness, I—"

"Not the queen," Kairos spat down the line, heaving a giant breath as he did. His eyes caught Valencia's and she went pale, as if she was about to pass out. Her eyes darted back and forth between the two wolves.

"Zora," she finally breathed.

As if one cue, Zora dropped Kairos from her lips. Kairos immediately was free falling. His wolf body smacked into the ground. The pain in his back leg was so bad, his vision went blurry. Without any focus on his wolf shape, Kairos naturally slid back into his human form. The chill of the cold air licked his skin as his fur slid back under his skin. Kairos was left bare, bloodied and broken on the floor of the forest.

He heard a thud behind him and gently turned over. In place of the wolf, was Zora's human body. Where he'd swiped her was a gnarl, three-clawed gash on her human neck. However, in place of her wolfish features were her soft human features. To anyone passing by, she'd have looked like just another girl.

Kairos knew better.

He knew Zora Smith had secrets. And he was determined to figure out what they were.

After he had a little nap to heal his leg.

It was the last thought he had before everything faded to black.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 65

It was at that point in my schooling at Alpha Academy that I realized I need to stop passing out.

Though, I figured, having two beings trapped in one body would make anyone pass out. Mona huffed in my darkness, annoyed. It was enough to bring my back to my body. I was shivering in the cold and could feel the goosebumps rising on my skin. I blinked slowly, vision returning to me as I shivered.

I realized that I was moving. As if someone was carrying me. I tried to force my eyes open again and got about halfway before the exhaustion took over and they slammed back shut.

“Just relax,” A voice soothed.

For a moment, I thought it was Mona's, the way it rang in my head. But then I realized, Mona didn't have that deep of a voice. I tried to peel my eyes open again and was only met with the blurry outline of a man with tawny brown hair.

“We need to stop meeting like this,” I mumbled.

“Stop putting yourself in compromising situations and we will,” Valentin said back. He had no bite in his voice, just stating the facts.

I curled my face into his chest, seeking warm from the whipping wind that hit my skin. Involuntarily, I shivered. Valentin's hand squeezed tighter under my rib cage. "We're almost to the infirmary," he said, softly. "Go back to sleep and you'll wake up in the warmth."

It was hard to argue with that. I let the exhaustion burn through my body and fell back into the deep slumber with only an "M'kay" escaping from my lips. Mona was still there though, racing around in the back of my mind, carelessly. She charged towards the front of my mind and I woke up again.

The familiar beeping of the infirmary was the first thing I heard, followed by the groan that escaped from my lips. My head felt like it was run over by a truck and my hand went to it instantly. There was a shuffling besides me.

I peeled one open and glanced to my right. Once again, Valentin Lunerly was sitting in the chair next to me. His expression was as neutral as possible, another normal for him. I pushed myself up in the infirmary bed and raised an eyebrow at him, trying to not feel the burning in my head as I did it.

"Do you even have emotions?"

"I do," Valentin said, emotionless. "You know I do."

I slammed my lips together as I remembered the training sessions. The way we'd been tangled together and how hot and heavy he felt against me. I blushed at the thought the completely changed the subject.

"Did I win?"

"Did you win," Valentin repeated. "I wasn't aware it was a contest."

"No," I cocked my head slightly. "But I'd like to know."

Valentin shifted to sit up in his seat. "Did you shatter Mr. Moonraiser's leg and then hold him by the neck before you were demanded to drop him?" He said. "Yes."

"Oh," I felt the heat bloom further in my cheeks as well as the pride.

We are triumphant, Mona mused in the back of my mind. Her chest was proud and lifted in the back of my mind.

For a non-contest, I reminded her.

Semantics, her tail swished and then she vanished once again.

I took a mental note of the rest of my body. Besides my head, everything seemed pretty okay. I rolled my neck, though, and froze. The skin on the right side of my neck was very tight. It was almost as if it were fresh and new. I gasped as the memories came flooding back to me.

Gushing liquid rolling into my fur. The shredding feeling in my neck. The yelp that escaped my throat. Kairos's wolfish grin. My hand went to my neck. My fingers hit three raised lines on the side of my neck. I glanced at Valentin. His jaw was clenched. "A scratch made by a High Alpha will never fully heal," he said, solemnly.

"Even if I'm a High Alpha?" I whispered. Valentin nodded gently. He pushed his hair back off his face and sat back in the chair. "The positive from this experience is it looks like you can control your shift now," he said.

"Control is not the word I would use," I mumbled as I pressed the heel of my palm back to my pounding head. "I feel like I got hit by a brick."

"That's normal for beginning shifts," Valentin replied. "You're trying to swap back and forth between two bodies. It takes a lot of brain power."

I nodded once then shifted uncomfortably. "Now what?"

"Now," Valentin huffed. "We train."

"We train?" My eyebrow shot into the air again. "I thought we were done with that."

"We we're," Valentin said. I watched his jaw tick slightly. The only bit of emotion in his expression. "But the Queen has been notified of your shifting progression. She wants me to continue training. With Mr. Blythwitch as well."

I groaned. "The fuck does Thorne have to do with this?"

"He is your Knight," Valentin said. "He is to be your sparring partner while I instruct."

I licked the front of my teeth then tipped my head down to my hands. I side-eyed Valentin.

"I don't see your finance enjoying that much," I deadpanned.

Valentin shifted in his seat. I turned to look at him and saw his jaw was clenched again. A bit of emotion was in his eyes, slipping through the cracks in his façade. But I couldn't name the emotion, myself.

"Bella understands I have a duty," he choked out. "I will make sure she does."

I hummed in response. Something about that made me angry. Bella was the least understanding. Especially since she saw me as a threat.

Which I was.

Because Valentin was my fated mate.

“How’s wedding planning going?”

I tried to sound as nonchalant as possible but it came out bitter. I locked eyes with Valentin. I watched as a million different things crossed his face. Hate. Anger. He stood abruptly and walked towards the door to my room, stiff as a board. He pulled the door open then gave me one last look.

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning. Same time and place,” He whispered.

The door slammed shut and I was left alone.

Thorne

Thorne had no clue why he was dragged out of bed by the Headmaster that morning. He further had no clue why he was going to the gym to train. He tended to train outdoors. He was uneasy as he opened the door to the gym, unsure of if the Headmaster was going to punish him? Reward him? He had no idea what for either way.

When the doors opened and Thorne spotted a mass of red hair in the middle of the gym all his questions were answered.

Fucking Zora Smith.

Of course, this all revolved around her. She was the ever-present knife in his side. First, she’s his fated mate. Then, he has to reject her. Then, he becomes her knight. And now, he was her sparring partner under the watchful eye of their headmaster.

As he sparred with her that morning, he couldn’t help but wonder why he was there. He knew the Queen and Valentin Lunerly had a history. They both were key figures in winning the war with the vampires. Lunerly had been mated to the Queen’s sister, for Gods’s sake. Thorne had seen Lunerly in the castle a few times, but they’d never interacted. He knew that Lunerly was also in the running for the Princess’s hand in marriage.

What he didn’t get, however, was why the fuck Valentin Lunerly cared about Zora Smith.

“You’re too far on your heels,” he corrected as Thorne landed a punch to Zora’s forearm.

Thorne watched as Zora corrected herself before trying to swipe at his side. She missed by a landslide and Thorne took the opportunity to wrench her arm into an awkward pin behind her back. She grunted in pain before kicking into the side of his calve. Then, it was Thorne turn to twist and cry out as he dropped Zora to the ground. She fell on her back and immediately skittered away from him to get to her feet.

“Too slow,” Lunerly said. He sounded like he’d rather be anywhere but in the gym at that moment. “A wolf going a hundred percent would’ve pinned you in an instance.”

“Then tell this wolf to go a hundred percent,” she grit from between her teeth as she stood. She dropped back into a defensive stance and glared at Thorne. “Stop going easy on me.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Thorne said and genuinely meant it. She was still his fated mate, bond or not. He had zero desire to see her in pain.

“You’ll get her more hurt if you go easy on her,” Lunerly snapped. Then, the anger was gone and he was neutral again. “Go in for the kill, Blythwitch.”

So Thorne did.

He threw punch after kick after punch at Zora. Surprisingly, she managed to absorb most of them and counter back. But Thorne was watching the way she was sinking back on her heels. He knew he could catch her off balance.

As she threw her entire weight into him, he sidestepped her. Zora lunged forward and Thorne took the opportunity to jam his elbow into her back. She flew to the ground with the full force of his strike and nearly bounced off the gym mat.

“Fuck,” Thorne hissed and immediately went to help her.

She batted his hand away and tried to force herself up on her own. He must’ve seriously hurt her as she got to her hands and knees but couldn’t make it past there.

After watching her try, twice, Lunerly finally stepped in. He hoisted her up from under the arms and sat her back on her feet. Thorne couldn’t help but notice the way Lunerly’s hands lingered on Zora’s waist. They splayed out as if they were trying to touch as much of her as possible.

Jealousy lit up in him like a wildfire.

“What am I even here for?” Thorne snapped. He gestured to Zora. “To beat her up? That seems highly unproductive.”

“Need I remind you that you’ve never seen an active battle?” Lunerly hissed. “How would you know what is productive?”

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Thorne was silent.

Lunerly stepped past Zora to narrow his eyes at the other man. “In war,” he started. “Your allies are your greatest strengths. They know you better than yourself. You are Miss Smith’s knight. You should be devoted to her.”

“Smith isn’t even a high alpha,” Thorne protested. “She shouldn’t have a knight.”

Lunerly’s nostrils flared. Luckily for Thorne, Zora stepped in between the two men. She gave Lunerly a pleading look then turned to Thorne.

“Look,” she braced her hands on her hips. “Neither of us wants you to be my knight. But what the Queen says, goes. So suck it up and punch me like I’m actually a threat instead of breakable.”

But you are breakable, Thorne wanted to say. The image of her face as he’d broken the bond was the first thing in his mind whenever he looked at her. How lost she’d looked. How broken.

He sucked in a breath through his nose. “Fine,” he said. He turned to look at Lunerly. “How am I supposed to fight as her Knight versus her ally?”

“Knights are an extension of a High Alpha,” Lunerly said. “You’re supposed to fill in the blanks where she can’t. Be the strikes she can’t take or the strikes she can’t throw. In sparring with her, you’re to learn her weaknesses. That way, you can fill in where she doesn’t.”

Thorne nodded once. Lunerly nodded in agreement. “This is true in wolf form as well,” Lunerly said. “Miss Smith’s wolf is much smaller than yours. But what she lacks in strength, she makes up for in agility.”

He motioned between Thorne and Zora. “Shift,” he demanded. “I want to see the same sparring as wolves. Miss Smith has had less practice in this form and we need to catch her up.”

Thorne nodded at Valentin then let the wolf in the back of his mind race forward. With a shake, he shifted into a large dark blonde wolf. He shook his fur clean of his human skin as he landed on all fours then looked towards his sparring partner.

She was frozen, eyebrows knitted.

“Miss Smith,” Lunerly deadpanned. “I asked you to shift.”

“I – I can’t,” Zora stuttered. Her forehead was crinkling and un-crinkling as she tried to force the shift. She managed to elongate her canines slightly, but as soon as she made eye-contact with Thorne, they shrunk back into her mouth. “Fuck,” she hissed.

She made a face again and looked down at her hand. Her nails slowly extended from her finger tips but, once again, as she made eye contact with Thorne, they shrunk back in on themselves. Lunerly seemed to notice this. He glanced to the side at the blonde wolf.

“Blythwitch,” he said “You’re dismissed.”

“What about sparring?” Thorne threw down the line, tail flicking in annoyance.

“It will wait for another day,” Lunerly said. “Dismissed.”

Thorne shifted back into his human form and stormed out of the gym. That whole morning had been a colossal waste of his time. Knight or not, Zora was not a match for him as a sparring partner. He was getting nothing out of that arrangement and Lunerly knew it. As he turned back to look at the two people still in the gym, he watched as Lunerly stepped up to Zora and braced his hands on her shoulders.

Anger and jealousy consumed Thorne again. How dare Lunerly touch her? She was his fated mate.

Not anymore, he reminded himself.

He turned his head down to the ground, rethinking all of his choices and loyalties. Would happiness be so miserable? Would repaying his debt to Victoria really make him feel fulfilled?

Just then, a shimmer of light sprouted from across the gym. Thorne turned his head just in time to see Zora’s body disappear into the white fur of her wolf.

Zora

I left my first new training session with Valentin in a shit mood.

I was annoyed to no end that I couldn’t make myself shift in front of Thorne. Fucking dickwad would probably hold that over me. But, Mona was even more pissed.

I don’t understand, she spat in the back of my mind, pacing. He’s not even our mate anymore. Why does he have this hold over us?

Hell, if I know, I grumbled back. I looked down at my hand and focused on the feeling of dirt under my paws. My hand immediately shifted into a paw, fur sprouting from my skin down to my elbow. With a clench of my fist, I was fully human again.

I don’t get it either, I mused as I left the locker room. I was back in my day clothes post-training and had about an hour until my first class. My curls were wet and pinned back in a braid behind me. I shrugged my bag higher on my shoulder as I walked across campus to the cafeteria.

I don’t even like Thorne, I continued my thought. If I’d been embarrassed to shift in front of anybody it’d be Valentin. I have a raging crush on him.

Glad you’re finally admitting it, Mona wolfishly chuckled. But this shifting business is peculiar.

Do you think it has something to do with the bond rejection? I asked her.

Perhaps, she mused. Some kind of sub-conscious nerves?

I sat on that thought as I reached the main lawn of campus. Did Thorne make me nervous? Kind of. Well, yes, actually. My secret was the least safe with him. He was in the castle when I was there. His mother was my mother in a way. If anyone knew who I was, it was Thorne Blythwitch.

But there was something else, laced between the nerves. A sort of disappointment that I couldn't pin to any one moment. It wasn't disappointment that he broke our bond. It wasn't disappointment that he hung out with Kairos and his merry band of douche-fucks. It was almost as if I was disappointed in the fact that he didn't really know me.

That makes some semblance of sense, Mona added. He barely gave you a chance to look at him before he was breaking the bond. I'd imagine that would be a blow to your ego.

But not yours? I mused.

Mona scoffed. I am an ancient High Magikal being. Nothing will blow my ego down.

Noted, I snorted back. But maybe you're right. Maybe it's disappointment in that he doesn't see me as worthy of his time. Or strong enough for it.

That would be a good reason as to why we can't shift, Mona said. Why give someone our strongest form when they think we are weak?

I shook my head with a sigh. God, this wolf shit is exhausting, I breathed towards Mona. Does it ever get easier?

Did you miss the part where I said "ancient High Magikal being"? Mona said back with another wolfish chuckle. It never gets easier. Only more complicated.

I didn't dignify that with a response as I continued my way across campus. I was almost to the cafeteria when Loren came barreling across the campus with her arms out. She was calling my name like a psycho, causing everyone to look at her as she went.

"ZORA!"

I couldn't help but laugh. She lunged herself at me and I caught her in a flourish. We nearly toppled to the grass but managed to stay on our feet for the most part. I push Loren off me, gingerly, then hold the buzzing woman in my arms.

"I have news!" she squeals.

"Okay, okay," I half laugh. "Seems like half the campus noticed."

Loren's still jumping up and down as she drops her voice to a whisper only her and I can hear. "I felt something,"

I blink at her. "Okay?" I draw the word out.

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"Like something!" she whisper yells. "Something mate something!"

"Oh. Oh!" I exclaim. I get why she's so excited now. "Wait, what? With whom? I thought you said no one current enrolled is doing anything for you."

"They're not," Loren said. "But there's a bunch of students transferring from another Alpha Academy today. I ran into one in the cafeteria while I was waiting for you and I had to come tell you!"

"Okay, okay," I tried to place my hands on her shoulders to calm her down. "What's he like? Do you know his name?"

Loren stopped moving immediately. She frowned then cast her eyes towards the ground. "Their name," she started, quietly. "Is Ani."

"Ani," I repeated, trying to get my singular brain cell to work. "Ani. Okay, I'm following. What's their story?"

"Well," Loren rubbed at the back of her neck. "They – um – she said she's a transfer with a bunch of other students. Something about their dorms being at capacity due to a fire. And well, we have space, always. So they sent the students here for the rest of the semester until the dorms are repaired."

I paused. New students? I hoped they wouldn't hear anything about my stellar reputation on campus. The last thing I needed was more assholes digging around me.

"Okay," I said for the millionth time. "And why do you think she's your mate?"

"Um, she," Loren made sure to emphasize the word. "Touched my shoulder as she passed. And I felt that sort of electricity. Not like static shock but, like, more. And I think she felt it too. She was like breathless after she touched me."

"Wow," I breathed. I broke into a grin. "This is amazing Loren! See, I told you there was someone for you. She was just at a different school."

Loren fidgeted and cast her glance down again. "You don't care that she's a ... she?"

“(

“Not at all,” I said before putting my own hand on Loren’s shoulder. She tipped her head up to look at me. “Just care that your happy is all.”

Loren broke into a wide smile. “Thanks, Zora. You really are a good friend.”

I tried to not let my lies show on my face. I quickly changed the subject as I saw a mass of people walking towards the Admissions Hall. I jerked my chin.

“Those the new students?”

Loren turned over her shoulder and looked. “Probably,” she grabbed my hand and yanked me towards the building. “Come on, let’s go look!”

I laughed as Loren tugged me along. Once we got closer, I spotted a crowd gathering around a lavish black car near the Admissions building. It was the same kind of car I’d been brought to school in. My eyebrows knitted as I stared at it. Was my mother on campus for the new students?

The door to the car opened and I immediately felt my stomach drop. It hit the ground in front of me and shattered into a million pieces. I couldn’t stop staring as a woman got out of the car. A cheetah print heel hit the ground and I cringed at the memories of the shoes clopping around the castle for the months I’d been there before going to the Academy.

I followed the long, olive legs up to the equally dark olive stomach then up to the short black bob that curled under the woman’s angular jaw-line. Gold eyes pierced me from across the crowd. It parted as she walked further out of the car. Then it was just us.

“Fuck,” I breathed.

The woman’s lips curled up into a snakelike smile. As if she was ready to strike. She stepped close enough to me that I could feel her rotten, sour breath hit my nostrils as she spoke.

“Hello, sister,”

Besides me, Loren was buzzing again. “Oh my god,” she said. “Welcome to campus Princess Amara!”

I could barely speak as Amara smirked down at me.

Several of the other students, Loren as well, had lightly bowed at Amara. I could only stare at her as she tipped her chin in amusement, eyebrow rising as well. She tutted before speaking.

“Come on, Zora,” she teased. “You know better than anyone how to treat a Princess. Don’t you?”

My heart started pounded erratically in my chest. Was she about to reveal my secret to everyone? Was I about to be exposed? Loren nudged me in the back and I was knocked out of my stupor. Amara was still waiting, expression turning sour by the second. I dipped my head slightly in a bow, ramming my jaw back to its place.

“How do you know the Luna Princess?” Loren whisper-yelled behind me. Amara clearly heard her because she chuckled before turning her bemused expression to me.

“Zora and I go way back,” she drawled. “Don’t we?”

“You do?” Loren sounded hurt and I knew why.

I sucked in a huge breath of air, letting my eyes flutter shut. “When that woman picked me up,” I started then turned to look at Loren. “She brought me to this castle. I guess it was the Queen’s castle. I’ve seen A – Princess Amara in passing. I didn’t realize who she was until this moment.”

Loren gave me a look that said she believed none of my bullshit. “You only realized she was the Princess to the Luna Throne as she walked onto our campus?”

I shrugged. “I guess,”

“Oh stop being so silly, Zora,” Amara cut in. She swung an arm around me. She was taller than me by a few inches, but only because of the ridiculous shoes she was wearing. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have had to look down to speak to me. I suppose it was fitting for the next thing that came out of her mouth.

“Zora was my housekeeper,”

There were a few hushed whispers and gasps among the crowd of people surrounding us. I glanced back at Loren from under Amara’s arm. She had this look of utter disappointment on her face. Once again, I knew why.

“Loren, I promise I-“

“Hush, hush,” Amara patted my arm petulantly. She turned to Loren. “Moonbeam, right? Your sister and I go way back.” Loren’s jaw clenched as she tried to smile. “So, I’ve heard.” I cataloged that as an “ask later” thing.

“Right then. Well, Moonbeam,” Amara waved her hand. “Zora was under lock and key, you know? They were worried about her attacking someone. Since she was such a child in the eyes of the wolves. Unpredictable. You can’t possibly think we’d let her know she was attending royalty, could we?”

Loren’s face seemed to let up a bit. I wondered why Amara was helping me but then I heard the snickers, and snide scoffs pick up in the crowd. She wasn’t helping me. She was making fun of me. I turned to look at my sister and saw her leering down at me. She had a wicked grin on her

face. It was one that begged me to challenge her. One that said “would you rather be embarrassed or honest?”

Don’t give into it, Mona growled in the back of my mind. She knows who the true next Alpha is. She’s winding you up to get a rouse out of you.

It’s working, I gritted in the back of my mind. I was becoming fed up with the amount of bullshit the universe was throwing at me these days. I shrugged out of Amara’s grasp and went to go back to stand next to Loren when she called my name. I spun back on my heel to look at her.

“Zora, darling,” she drawled. It was like she was a snake winding up to strike. She gestured to the bags that were being brought from the back of the car to the curb.

“Do me a favor and help me bring these to my rooms?” She flashed me a sickly smile. “For old time’s sake.”

I was two seconds away from throttling her when I felt a shoulder brush mine. I flinched slightly as a jolt of electricity shimmered down my arm. I looked to see Maximus standing to my left, jaw set as he stared at Amara’s pile of stuff.

“I’ll help you,” he said quietly. “If we do it together, it’ll go faster.”

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I frowned. “Max, you don’t have to—“

“Shut up and let me help,” he said under his breath. He glanced down at me. “Don’t make this a bigger deal than it needs to be and she won’t either.”

The two of us started towards Amara’s stuff. She must’ve had twelve suitcases, all either cheetah print of electric blues and pinks. Each was stuffed to the brim and weighed fifty pounds. I thanked God that Max and Valentin had been training me. Had I still had my human strength, I would’ve fallen over after lifting one.

Max, of course, held up three like he was holding us a feather. The two of us were about to walk off to the dorms when Amara called out, again.

“Zora,” I was beginning to grow annoyed by my own name by then. “Who’s your friend?”

Max dropped the suitcases and turned around. He immediately bowed to Amara before meeting her eyes. “Princess Amara,” “Maximus,” Amara all but purred. She sauntered over to stand

directly in front of Maximus. All of the attention she'd had in making me miserable was now lost as she looked at Max like he was naked.

"I didn't know you went to this school," Amara went on.

"It's the best Alpha Academy," Maximus said, plainly. "I wish to be as capable of a warrior as your mother. To get that education, I came here."

"Interesting," Amara mused. I could almost hear the purring in her heart from where I stood. She lifted one long, pointed nail and pressed it gently into the front collar of Maximus's shirt.

"And my mother's proposal," she dragged her nail down Maximus's chest on his sternum. My blood started to boil as he nail dipped lower and lower. "Have you-" Her claw danced on the line of Maximus's pants before skimming over his belt. "- considered it?"

I watched as Maximus's nostrils flared. The crowd around us was still watching the interaction between the two of them. I stood to the side, rippling with anger yet unable to do anything to the "princess." Maximus turned to glance at me. His eyes softened slightly only to harden as he turned back to Amara.

Then, he defied everyone in the crowd's thoughts by stepping closer to me.

I could've sworn I heard a few gasps come from the crowd. I looked out and saw Loren with a smug smirk etched into her lips. So much for her being pissed with me.

Maximus looked Amara dead in the eyes. I didn't need to be her to know how steely his expression was.

"I thank the Queen for her consideration," he deadpanned. "But I'll have to decline."

Amara scoffed. "Decline?" she almost spat. "I don't think this offer was one that could be 'declined'?"

Maximus took another step towards me and Amara's eyes blew wide. It was like someone had finally caught her up with the fact that Maximus was choosing me over her. She leered towards me before sending Maximus a soft smile.

"How fascinating," She said with none of the bitterness masked. "That you choose a servant over the royal title of Alpha Consort. Some may even find it ... stupid."

This seemed to piss Max off. He stepped closer to me and his arm went around my waist. I instinctually leaned into it. This seemed to make Amara even more angry. Her fake smile dropped into a scowl.

"I am thankful to the crown," Max grit out from besides me. "And I owe the Queen my life. But I also owe myself my life. And in this case, I'm choosing myself."

Amara's tongue flicked out to lick her lips. "Very well," she deadpanned. "My mother will be... intrigued to hear of this." She snapped her fingers twice. "Constable. Bring my bags. Zora you're off the hook. For now."

I tried to ignore the threat as Amara and the driver walked away. I was left with just Maximus, his hand possessively curled around me.

I looked up the steps of the Admissions building and caught Valentin's tawny hair looking down at the spectacle in front of him. I may have been seeing things, but I could've sworn his gold gaze was locked on Maximus's hand around my waist.

"Come on!" Loren begged. "It's her first day on campus. You really think she's going to go to a party tonight?"

I dragged my hand over my face. We'd been at this for the last half-an-hour. Loren was beginning to bog me down. "It's not Amara," I said for the hundredth time. "It's going back to that stupid house with those stupid people."

"But it'll be different," Loren tried. Again. "We're bringing our own drinks. Maximus said he'd be on the lookout and Jeckell is gone."

"Doesn't mean there's others that won't try the same shit," I palmed my face. "Really, Loren. All I want to do is read my tacky romance novel and go to bed."

I turned back to the book in my hands. It was something I'd picked up from the "free" part of the library that afternoon. A cliché novel about mermen and sirens. It was highly unrealistic but damn, did it have good sex scenes.

Loren "hmped" and crossed her arms over her chest. Then she jumped across the room, snatched the book out of my hands and threw it away from me. I stared at her, slack jawed and completely baffled.

"I was reading that—"

"I refuse to let you live your life in fear!" Loren said. "You have two more years here and one will be without me. I need you to actually have fun for once!"

"My book was fun," I grumbled but Loren was already dragging me out of my bed. She sat me back in her make up chair and started musing about with my hair.

"Shush," she said. "Braids or straightened?"

An hour later, we were walking back to the same damn house we'd been nearly two months ago. This time, Loren had allowed me to wear my own clothes. My boots were slapping against the concrete as I walked. I wrapped my arms around myself as the breeze swept across campus, kicking up the first falling leaves as it did.

Loren was power walking in front of me. She was wearing a similar outfit to the last party; a tight black skirt, cherry red heels and a black mesh top that floated around her midsection. Her heels clacked against the pavement as she turned around to usher me forwards.

“Come on you two!” she shouted. “I wanna dance!”

“I hope she’s not assuming I’m dancing,” a voice besides me grumbled.

I tried to stifle my smile as I looked sideways at Maximus. He’d met us outside our rooms as he promised Loren he’d walk us to the party. He was dressed nicer than his usual attire in a pair of dark jeans, crisp white shoes and a long sleeve grey shirt he’d pushed up to his elbows. His hair was getting long and was starting to curl at the back of his neck.

A weird part of me wanted to run my fingers through it.

Not weird, Mona mused from the back of my mind. Being as he is your fated mate.

I fought the urge to roll my eyes. Go sniff someone’s butt or something,

Mona grumbled as she took off into the back of my mind. I only could make out part of it but it sounded something like ”ungrateful” and “I am thousands of years old.” Normal bitterness for my inner wolf.

“You alright?” Maximus’s voice cut through my inner monologue. I shrugged.

“Fine,”

A beat passed.

“We don’t have to go,” he whispered.

“Loren wants to,” I said back. “Plus, she’s right. I can’t spend my entire life in fear of parties.’

“Given what happened to you,” Max grunted. “I think you can.”

I nudged our shoulders together. A small electric snap surged through us. “But I have the big bad wolf to protect me now, don’t I?”

I watched Maximus’s jaw tick slightly as he cast his eyes towards me. He licked the front of his teeth then opened his mouth like he was about to speak. He slammed it back shut as we got close enough to Loren.

“Are you guys flirting back there?”

“No,” I said just as Max said “Yep.” I glared sideways at him as Loren’s lips broke into a massive smile. She bracketed her hands on her hips.

“Okay, we’re going in,” she said. She reached into her purse and pulled out a small can. She tossed it to me. The label was something I hadn’t seen before but said “Craxxy Punch” in bold letters. I raised an eyebrow at her.

“S’good,” she assured before cracking open her own can. I followed suit and we cheers-ed before starting up the steps into Kairos’s house.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 69

As I faced the front porch, the lines swayed a little bit. I swallowed thickly and almost turned and ran away until I felt Max’s chest at my back. His breath ghosted over the shell of my ear as his hands went to my waist.

“You’re okay,” he said, gently. “I’ve got you.”

My body shivered with the jolt that flushed down it like water. I instinctually leaned into Max. I couldn’t help but smile when I felt his smile in my ear. I took one more breath and plunged into the roar of the party head first.

The noise was just as debilitating as the first time I’d been to a party. A cacophony of voices and bass lines and God knew what else. But seeing Loren begin to dance, brought a sort of freedom over me. I started to move my hips and then sped up a bit as Loren grabbed my hand and dragged me into the center.

I tentatively sipped my drink, half concerned there would be wolfsbane in it again. But then I remembered that I brought it. There was nothing to be concerned about. Time seemed to pass effortlessly as I danced with Loren. Maximus stood off to the side, sipping a beer and watching us intently. Though, no one seemed to want to bother Loren or I as we danced.

Soon, I felt the familiar hum of alcohol. My eyes fell shut to the music as I swayed. But as soon as I opened them, I began to feel the rise of panic. My heart started thudding for no reason and all of the lights suddenly seemed too much. My head swam and I started feeling itchy all over.

Without even so much as a look as Loren, I ran off the dance floor. The room was thudding and spinning and swirling all at once. A wave of nausea coursed through me. I heard my name being called but I needed to find a bathroom. I needed water. I pushed through the halls of the party, gasping for air.

Finally, the music became too much. I wrenched the first door I saw open and stumbled inside of the silence.

“What the fuck?!”

I finally took in my surroundings as my heart slowed. Sitting on the bed in the center of the room, was Amara. Her skirt had been shoved up to settle at her hips. Her cheetah print heels were half on. Her shirt was missing, and one cup of her bra was shoved under her small, perky boobs. Sitting next her, was a third-year Alpha I'd seen directing Basics with Kairos a few times. He was also shirtless, pants unbuttoned.

“Shit,” I cursed and averted my eyes. “I was – There was – I -“

“Your servant’s a little perv, huh?” The Alpha said.

“No, no, I -“

“Zora, Gods almighty!”

I whipped around to see Loren and Maximus had finally caught up to me. They both looked panicked. As they took in the scene, their eyes bulged slightly.

“I was looking for a bathroom,” I finally managed to get out. My voice was small and weak compared to the roar behind me. “There’s one downstairs, dumbass,” the Alpha tossed at me. I glanced back and saw Amara had righted herself back in her bra. Her snake-like gaze was fixed on me, observing my shaking hands.

Maximus growled behind me I shrunk to the floor with my head in my hands. Tears pricked my eyes as the panic rose in my chest again. My hands shook violently as I pressed my palms into my skull. My head was swarming and every time I closed my eyes, I felt Jeckell’s eyes on me or I saw Amara writhing on the bed.

Max’s hands were on me in an instant. His touch instantly soothed me. I was unaware I was sobbing until the gasps turned into hiccups. Maximus got on the floor with me and wrapped his arms around me. Amara and the Alpha stood over me, both hungry with power.

“I didn’t know you were this pathetic, Zora,” Amara taunted. “It’ll be fascinating to see what Kairos does with you in round two.”

“What I do with who?”

We all looked to see Kairos standing in the frame of the door to the room. He looked pissed. He crossed his arms over his chest and looked back in forth between all five of us.

“And what the fuck are you doing in my room?”

Kairos... an hour earlier...

The party in his house was in full swing by the time Kairos came down from his room. He’d slicked his hair off his head as he got out of the shower that day. He was cuffing his sleeves as he

finally hit the first floor. Most of the party was dancing at that moment, a few of the patrons standing by the bar.

Kairos worked his way through the crowd, making sure to nod at anyone who greeted him. He had a reputation to maintain. Especially after the nasty business with Jeckell a few months ago. The school was up his ass and his father was further up his ass with comments of “good behavior” and “appropriate interactions.” He and his friends were on guard to keep any debaucherous behavior out of his house.

As he reached the bar, Thorne stepped up to clasp him on the shoulder. “Brother,” he roared over the pounding music.

“Is everything good?” Kairos yelled back.

Thorne nodded once but Kairos could tell something was off in the way his jaw ticked. He leaned back in to speak into Kairos’s

ear.

“You hear about who made their way to campus today?”

Kairos pulled back to shake his head. Thorne’s eyes went wide before he dove back in to speak in Kairos’s ear.

“Amara Luna,” Thorne said. “My sister. The Princess.”

Kairos’s face twisted into a smug frown.

He’d heard stories of the adopted Luna Princess. How she was tall, thin, beautiful in the way as hawk was. He’d also heard stories of how she’d seduced male Alphas to be at her beck and call then would turn around and seduce someone else. She played men like one would play a harp, plucking at the strings until it made the sound she wanted.

Kairos had no desire to be a part of it.

His own love life had been increasingly stale since his third year had started. Furthermore, there was that weird pit in his stomach he had for Zora Smith. She’d almost destroyed him, snapped his leg into fourteen pieces and made him miss two full days of training. And yet, he wondered what it’d be like to be hers. To wrap her in his arms and keep her locked in his possession. Away from Maximus, away from Thorne, away from-

“Mate, you listening?” Thorne jolted Kairos from his inner mind. Kairos blinked twice then looked off to where Thorne was pointing. Thorne leaned back into to speak to his friend. “She’s been eye-fucking you for the last five minutes!”

Unluckily for Kairos, the Luna Princess was seated across the room. She was perched in one of the few luxurious chairs they had in his house, right ankle crossed over her knee. Her plump lips were wrapped around the straw of her drink. Thorne was right; she was totally eye-fucking him.

Then, she surprised Kairos even more by shifting her legs so that her teeny tiny skirt rid up her thighs. She placed her right foot on the ground slowly, making sure Kairos got a full eye of the underwear she wasn't wearing, before recrossing her left ankle over her right knee.

Kairos simply raised an eyebrow before turning and looking back at Thorne. He leaned into his friend's ear.

“That's what you rejected your fated mate for?”

Thorne jerked back with a scowl. He glared down Kairos for another second before sauntering off into the party. Kairos yanked a beer out of the hands of a first year Alpha. He slugged half of it back then snarled at the first-year, who ran off, before finishing the rest of it. He slammed the empty can against a wall, flattening it with ease before chucking it into the house.

He sulked off into the main room where a plethora of Alphas were dancing. A few Betas lingered in the room as well. One in particular caught his eye. Loren Moonbeam was swaying like a tree in wind across the room from him. He leaned back against the wall and watched her. She was so unlike her sister, Petyr's mate, that it shocked him. He wondered how two people so different could be related.

He was still musing that thought with a smirk when a shock of red hair entered the room and his entire stomach dropped to his toes. Zora Smith was at his party. Again.

He instantly sneered. Was she an idiot? Did she not remember what happened the last time she was in his house? He got even angrier as he noticed the tall man looming behind her in the doorway.

Fucking Maximus. The traitorous cunt.

His eyes were glued to Zora as she worked her way through the crowd to meet with the younger Moonbeam. They both had drinks in their hands – ones Kairos knew he wasn't serving. Still, the sight of the three of them made him sick.

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He turned and almost ran over the woman standing behind him. He was about to apologies when a hand of long pointed nails curled around his shoulder. “Kairos,” Amara, his fucking betrothed to be, purred.

“Not now, Amara,” he snapped. “I’m not in the mood.”

She had the audacity to pout. “Not even for your Princess?”

Kairos froze. He gently pried Amara’s hand from his shoulder and dropped it at her side. She was close enough that he could touch their noses as he looked down on her. Her lipstick was slightly smeared, eyes wide and dark.

“What do you want?” he said, evenly.

She hummed and wounder her arms back up around his neck, leaning into him. “What do you think I want, Alpha,”

The way she addressed him made all of the hair on his arms stand up. His stomach churned. He was entirely unaroused by her performance. He was about to tell her to fuck off when her chin turned into the crook between his shoulder and neck. She flicked her tongue out and licked a wet, mushy stripe up the side of his neck. She reeked of rum.

“I’ll let you fuck me any way you want, Alpha,” she moaned into the curl of his ear. “Raw, if you want.”

Kairos had enough. He shoved her back. She stumbled as the shock and force of his actions hit her. Her facial expression was anything but happy.

“You’re delusional if you think I want someone else’s sloppy seconds,” Kairos snapped.

Amara sneered at him. “I am the Princess. I am your future wife-“

“Nothing about you is in my future,” Kairos snapped. “Consider the deal off.”

He turned on his heel and disappeared into the back of the house on that note. Amara was left screeching in anger behind him.

Kairos slunk off to the backyard, yanking his carton of human cigarettes out as he went. He shoved one in his mouth, flicked a flame between his fingers with magik and lit the thing. He sucked in enough smoke to make his head swim before he exhaled it all.

His father was going to kill him.

Kairos had explicitly been told that his marriage to the Luna Princess was a big deal to his father. The Luna Family was not only the ruling pack, but they were a pack of great power. There were rumors that powers unbeknownst to the common alpha could be unlocked if he married a Luna. High Alpha Moonraiser made it clear to his son that those powers were to be his. Whether Kairos liked it or not.

And Kairos had just told Amara the deal was off.

He sucked in another breath of smoke and stared into the sky. Why couldn't he have just let her fuck him? He could've laid there and dreamt of someone else and made his father happy. But he didn't.

Because it wasn't right, he argued with himself. He inhaled more smoke. The fuck was even right anymore? He spent most of his time thinking of the weak, red-haired disaster than anything else. Her very prescience at the party had sent him into a tailspin. What was it about her that made him so angry?

He sucked the last of the cigarette and threw the butt out into the bushes. He tried to fish around for another one and came up empty. He cursed loudly, chucking the empty carton into the night before turning and storming back into his house.

He body-check a second year coming down the stairs as he made his way to his room. He was about to push his door in when it opened itself, surprising him as the person he wanted to see least was leaving.

"It'll be fascinating to see what Kairos does with you in round two," the heir to the throne said as she moved to leave his room.

"What I do with who?" Kairos barked. Amara looked like a kid caught in a candy jar. Her eyes blew wide as she realized who she was standing in front of.

Kairos looked around her. Sitting on his bed, shirtless, was some other Alpha he'd seen in passing. Slumped on the floor, was none other than Zora Smith. Maximus was curled around her protectively. The younger Moonbeam was also there, gnawing on her lip anxiously.

His eyes darted back to Maximus and Zora. The anger in him burst through his lips and he was yelling before he even had time to process what had happened.

"And what the fuck are you doing in my room?"

Zora

It seemed like everyone in Kairos's room froze at his prescience. The man himself looked pissed. His eyes darted from me to Maximus to Amara to her companion and back. There was an indefinite amount of time in which none of us spoke. Finally, Loren was the one to speak.

"We were looking for a bathroom," she squeaked. "And came in here but Princess Amara was already in here with that guy." "My name's Dave," Amara's Alpha friend sneered at Loren. "We have like ninety percent of our classes together." Loren waved a hand at him before giving Kairos a soft smile. "Sorry?"

"Out," Kairos barked. His tone had all of the tenacity of an Alpha. Immediately, everyone scrambled out of the room. Maximus helped me up and we were halfway out the door before Kairos stepped in front of us.

“Not you,”

I swallowed thickly and tipped my chin up. Normally, I’d have more bite to me and feel empowered to fight Kairos. But post whatever the hell had happened to me downstairs, my energy was depleted. Luckily, I felt Maximus curl around me. “Not now, Kairos,” Maximus warned.

“Your girlfriend can speak for herself,” Kairos snapped at Maximus. Then he shifted his gaze to look down at me. “Our second fight. You said best two out of three.”

“I did,” I sighed. I was exhausted. “When do you want to do it?”

“Next week,” Kairos said. “Saturday.”

“Fine,” I sighed. “Can I go?”

Kairos’s jaw clenched and unclenched as he looked down at me. When his face wasn’t set in it’s permanent scowl, it was kind of nice. His freckles softened him and he had a kind of curl to his hair that I’d never noticed before. He was quite handsome.

As if Maximus could read my thoughts, his hand flexed at my waist. I was snapped out of my stupor and realized I was thinking kind things about fucking Kairos of all people. I sucked a breath in my nose and pushed past him. As our shoulders brushed, I could’ve sworn I felt a tiny twinge of electricity. I shook it off as we left his room.

Maximus walked Loren and I back to our dorm room. It was a quiet walk; Loren and I were completely silent at most points. Maximus would only break the air to ask if I was cold and-or okay. When we got back to our rooms, Loren stood in front of our open door, inviting me in.

Instinctually, my eyes drifted to where Maximus was opening his own door. I sent Loren a pleading look. “Go,” she mouthed with a soft smile. She closed our door and I immediately turned to look at Max. His foot was halfway into his room as he paused and looked at me.

Despite feeling like I didn’t want to be with him over Valentin early in the week, I was drawn to him at that moment. He felt like safety in the chaos that had ensued over the night. He held the door open wider and I skuttled in, head ducked.

Once the door shut, however, I felt nervous and uncertain all over again. Would he pin me to the wall again and roam his hands all over my body? Would he expect something from me because I’d come in his room? My heart thudded in my chest.

“We don’t have to,” Maximus said softly. I turned to look at him. His arms were crossed over his broad chest as he leaned against the back of his door. He shrugged slightly.

“I’m not expecting anything,”

“Oh,” I said, because I couldn’t really think of anything else to say. “Okay.”

Maximus nodded once. “Do you need anything?” I shook my head. He nodded once then pushed off the back of his door. I sat on the edge of his bed, feeling even more nervous, and slightly embarrassed for some reason.

Max yanked a couple of bottles of water out of his fridge and handed me one before cracking one open himself. He slugged half of it before looking at me. I was amazed at how neutral he was, face set in the same line it always was in. It was like I had no effect on him yet my skin was crawling with the effect he had on me.

“Do you want headache stuff?” he asked. “I don’t know how much you drank—”

“How are you so calm?” I cut him off.

“Calm,” Maximus repeated slowly. Then, he snorted a laugh. “I don’t think I’m anything close to calm. But I’m trying not to scare you off.”

I licked my lips before pulling the bottom one between my teeth.

“Right,”

“The bond between us it’s...” he trailed off, trying to find words.

“Weird?” I supplied.

Max half laughed. “It’s something,” he padded across the room and dropped into a bean-bag he had positioned where another bed would’ve been. His hands ran over his head. His hair was spiky up in various spots as a result. He huffed and tipped his chin to stare at the ceiling.

“I can’t explain it. It’s like I know there’s something there but there’s also part of it that’s missing.”

“I feel the same way,” I mumbled.

I didn’t elaborate and tell him how I was aching for touch from Valentin and how I enjoyed having sex with Maximus but he didn’t feel as whole some as what I felt for Valentin. I also didn’t dare to mention that Thorne was still a nagging pain in my side. A less subtle pain than Valentin but still a pain.

So, I kept my mouth shut and fell backwards into Maximus’s bed. I stared at the ceiling for a few moments before my eyes slithered shut. I heard the crunching of Max getting off the bean bag then felt the thud as he body fell into the bed next to me. Both our legs were hanging off the side, our backs and necks pressed to the mattress.

I slowly turned my head to look Maximus in the eye. His dark gold eyes were shining with something I hadn't seen before. I reached towards him as if I could capture it in my palms. The back of hand hit his cheek. Max's eyes fluttered shut as he leaned into it. A spark broke into my skin from where he touched it. Slowly his hand came up to cover mine, sending more electricity down our shared arms.

"Are you okay?" he whispered. "From earlier."

I nodded once. "Just was thinking about last time I was there. I got too caught up in my anxiety."

"It won't happen again," Max promised. "I'll always protect you, Zora. I promise."

He gingerly pressed a kiss to the center of my palm and I couldn't help but melt into his touch. He sat up and shrugged off his shirt and jeans. I followed suit and replaced my bra with one of Max's massive shirts. We peeled back the covers of his bed and tucked into it, Maximus's arms wrapped around me.

His lips pressed to the top of my head and I heard him murmur again. "I promise."

It was enough to console me to sleep.