

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 71

The next morning, I left Maximus's bed as he was still asleep. I quickly dressed and pressed a kiss to his cheek before

scrambling back to my own room. I immediately fell back asleep in my own bed. That night, Loren and I hung out in our room and finished our homework before gossiping about what happened at the party.

Monday morning, I was back to training with Valentin and Thorne. At seven in the morning, I emerged from the women's locker room at the gym. I was suited up in training gear and had already been given a pep talk about shifting by Mona. I stepped into the gym and immediately my day was ruined.

Because my adopted sister was standing in between Valentin and Thorne in training clothing that could better be described as fabric scraps.

Her sports bra was little more than a strip of fabric covering her nipples. The back was all crisscrossed and strappy across her muscular shoulders. Her shorts were so short that the underside of her ass was hanging out of them. They clung to her like glue and left little for the imagination. Her feet were barefoot. Part of me was excited to be able to slam my trainer into them and make her squeal.

"What's she doing here?" I snapped at Valentin once I was close enough to the group. Amara was incredibly close to Thorne and it made my blood boil for no reason.

"Good morning, Miss Smith," Valentin deadpanned. "The Queen has requested I extend my training to Princess Luna. It appears her former school was not nearly as adept at combat as we are. The Queen would be like her to be caught up."

My mouth set in a thin line as I stared Valentin in the eye. I knew he was saying behind the fluff that he was putting out there for Thorne. Amara is supposed to be the only Princess. Him training her was a no-brainer.

"Lovely," I replied with equal enthusiasm.

"Quite odd for a servant to have personal training sessions with the headmaster," Amara teased me. She cracked the gum in her mouth then broke into a smirk. "Isn't it, Thorny?"

I cringed at her nickname for him. Thorne smiled smugly at her then looked at me. "That's what I've been saying," he said. "Though it's quite odd I never saw you in the castle before I met you here. And Amara is saying you were her personal servant? Must've been a pretty secretive servant if I didn't know."

My heart started to race. I glanced at Valentin for help. He seemed, as per usual, completely unphased by all of the nonsense. He waved his hand.

“You can gossip about castle politics later,” he said. “For now, I’d like to focus on the point of this early meeting.” “Please,” Amara rolled her eyes. “I don’t like being dragged away from my beauty sleep for nothing.”

Valentin completely ignored her. He gestured to the sparring mat in front of him. “First, I’d like to have Amara and Zora spar so we can assess Amara’s skill level.”

I smirked and dropped into a defensive stance. “Do your worst, Princess,”

“Gladly,” Amara sneered back before launching herself at me.

The punches she was throwing were nothing like any of the other Alpha’s I’d sparred with. They had no bite behind them. I blocked them easily before sailing a few of my own punches into it. She took them with all the grace of a deer walking for the first time.

Then, she came back at me, quicker. For what she lacked in strength, she made up for in speed. I was able to block all most all of her punches except for one that clipped me by the ear. A ringing started in my left ear drum that I immediately ignore.

“Keep your hands up, Miss Smith,” Valentin called from next to me.

I ignored his comment and took the opportunity to swipe Amara’s legs out from under her. She tumbled to the floor but just before she hit it, her claws extended from her already long, electric pink nails. She plunged her talons into my Achilies heel and took me down with her.

“The fuck!?” I cursed as I grabbed my leg, aching as it bled down to my heel. Amara took no time to make sure I was okay. She rolled backward and was back on her feet in seconds. I grit my teeth and got back to my feet, arms up in defense once again.

“Princess, we are sparring,” Valentin warned. “The object is to take down your opponent not maim them.”

“Oops,” Amara giggled with another snake-like smirk.

I watched her shift her weight from one foot to another, almost in a dance, before she lunged at me again. Once again, her punches were weak but quick. Then, she whipped her leg around at a speed that was almost atomic. In a move reminiscent of what Kairos did to me, I hooked my hand around her ankle and swung her to the ground again.

She landed with a thud but then was back on her feet in an instant. Once again, her claws were out and aiming directly at my face. At that moment, all bets were off. Any sparring was done and murder was the only objective in my mind.

I darted out of the way of her swipes as she threw her entire body at me. “Claws away!” Valentin called from over my shoulder. Amara continued to swipe at me. Quick as lightning, she threw a slash at my arms then sank down on one knee and slashed me mid thigh.

I grunted in pain as her claws worked their way through my skin. Now both my legs were bleeding and trying to heal themselves. I focused on throwing punches at her, using my strength over her to combat the fact I couldn’t meet her in agility. I sailed a wicked punch into her nose and could’ve sworn I heard a crack echo through the gym.

She staggered backwards, fingers going under her nose to catch the blood that was beginning to drip out of her. She looked maniacal, blunt black bob frizzed and mused. Her gold eyes were near bulging out of her head. Her clawed hand dabbed at the blood under her nose.

“Fuck you,” she garbled.

“You wish, Princess,” I said as I finally took the offensive.

I threw punch after punch at her. Half of them were hitting her, the other half she was barely blocking. I managed to get a hold on her arm and was restraining it behind her back when the bitch decided to sink her teeth into my other hand. Her canines were elongated and dug deep within my skin, nearly hitting bone.

I cried out in pain and then there was a shock of fire within my chest. The next thing I knew, my paws were pinning Amara to the floor. My jaw was unhinged and snarling at her. My back paws had her legs pinned. She was panicking, starting to try and scramble out from underneath but I had her.

I’d shifted to my wolf form and I had her.

“Enough!” Valentin barked. “Thorne get Zora off her.”

As quickly as I’d gotten into wolf form, I slunk back into my human form. Thorne wrangled me off of Amara then draped a blanket around my bare shoulders. Apparently, shifting that quickly and fired up burned your clothes off.

I glanced down at Amara. Valentin was slowly helping her up. Her nose was completely busted, bleeding all over and making red splatters on the mats. When she finally got to her feet, I noticed I’d clawed through her sports bra straps and left it in tatters, hanging on to her shoulders for dear life.

“We’re done,” Valentin snapped. “Both of you will see punishments as a result of your actions. You will train separately from now on.”

“Thank fuck,” I snarled. Valentin shot me a look over his shoulder.

“I will take Princess Amara to the infirmary for them to reset her nose,” he said. “Mr. Blythwitch, please see to it that Miss Smith’s wounds are dressed and she makes it to Basics.”

Thorne nodded at Valentin before wrapping me further in the blanket he’d given me. I limped off into the locker room. The last thing I saw was Valentin lifting Amara into his arms. Her beedy gold eyes burned through me as she left the gym.

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Thorne

Thorne had never seen a sparring match become so violent in his two and some years at Alpha Academy. Normally, whoever was monitoring sparring would step in and break the Alphas up before someone got injured. He was completely confused as to why the Headmaster wouldn’t, especially with a student as prized as a Princess.

Furthermore, he didn’t understand why he was stuck with his un-fated mate while his betrothed was off with Lunerly. Especially since Lunerly seemed to have some sort of hard-on for Zora. He huffed as he wrapped a bandage around the other woman’s leg, making sure it was tight.

“I believe proper blood flow is needed for healing,” Zora snapped from above him.

“It needs to be tight to stop the bleeding,” Thorne retorted, yanking the wrap again. Zora hissed above him then glared down at him.

“She’s fucking awful,” Zora complained. “Like truly, entirely awful. I didn’t expect rainbows and butterflies but – fucking hell is she terrible.”

“What do you mean ‘expect’?” Thorne asked as he went to wrap around Zora’s shredded thigh. Most of it was already healing but the blood made it look worse than it was.

“I mean as her servant she ignored me,” Zora said quickly. “I’d heard rumors but actually having to talk to her-” she shook her head.

Thorne yanked the bandage tighter and Zora hissed in pain again. Her hand came down to grab at his shoulder, urging him to stop. Thorne immediately looked up at her. Her face was grimacing but there were not tears in her eyes. He went back to wrapping her up, her hand still lingering on his shoulder.

“You really want to be stuck with that?” Zora asked, incredulously.

“I don’t have a choice,” Thorne grunted. “The Queen asked. I accepted. Nothing else to do. I live to serve. I owe Victoria everything.”

“So that’s why you broke it,” Zora said, softer.

Thorne blinked and sat back on his heels. “What?”

“The bond,” Zora continued. “You broke it because you feel you owe Victoria. You didn’t want to go against her wishes.” Thorne narrowed his eyes at Zora. “Assuming I want to discuss this with you is bold,” he snapped as he sealed the wrap on Zora’s leg. “For all you know I could’ve broken it because I didn’t find you attractive.”

“Ouch,” Zora threw back with a bit of amusement in her tone. “But I get it. Why you did it.”

“Thanks, I guess,” Thorne grunted out before standing. He looked down and admired his handy work as Zora rolled her ankle tentatively. “Can you stand?”

“Did you know it was Amara?” Zora said, completely ignoring Thorne’s question.

“I had an inkling. She’s the only known Princess,” Thorne said beginning to grow annoyed. “Can you stand?”

Zora gave him a pointed look. “Had you met her?”

“For Gods’s sake, Zora,” he snapped. “Can you stand or not?”

“I can stand just – shit!”

As she rose to stand with both weight on her feet, she immediately grimaced and fell forwards. Thorne barely caught her before she fell face first into the grimy floor of the locker room. He held her by her arm and gingerly dropped her back down on the bench. She gave him a nasty look and he rolled his eyes.

“So you can’t,” he said, plainly. “You’ll probably need crutches for the next hour until your tendons heal. I think there’s some in the office-“

Zora grabbed his sleeve as he went to move away. He didn’t miss the jolt that exploded up his arm at her touch. He knew she didn’t either as they locked eyes. He could count every freckle on her face with how close he was to her.

Zora sucked in a deep breath before speaking. “You don’t have to owe someone your entire life,” she said, gently. “Being grateful sometimes is enough.”

“You don’t get it,” Thorne snapped. “My parents are gone. She did everything for me when they left. She-“

“I don’t get it,” Zora cut him off. “But I get enough of it to know that doing something just because someone of power says so is not a way to live your life.” She smiled softly. His heart skipped a beat as it made its way onto her face. “Plus, your fiancé is kind of a bitch.”

Thorne locked eyes with her for another beat. He really wanted to apologize and wrap her in his arms and never let her leave. He was so remorseful for something that he did and he wanted to make it right. But the little voice in the back of his head swayed him away from her. Swayed him to duty and honor.

He stood up straight and glanced down at her. “My duty is to my Queen,” he repeated, voice stony and even. “And her heir. My future wife. So I’d appreciate it if you watch your choice of words when speaking about her.”

Zora’s jaw clenched and unclenched. She pushed off the seat and held on to the wall as she hoisted herself to her feet. Her glare pierced him through his cold soul.

“Fuck you,” she hissed. “Stay away from me. I have no desire to hang out with Amara’s minions.”

He was about to retort when she stood completely on her feet and stormed off as if nothing had happened. Thorne blinked in surprise as he watched her leave. A normal Alpha would’ve been incapacitated for at least an hour after those injuries. Zora healed within minutes.

He kicked at the pile of medical supplies, half out of frustration and half out of confusion. He heaved a sigh before pulling at his hair and sending a curse to the Gods for putting him in such a position.

That evening, Thorne was returning from his late-night class when he spotted two figured, training next to the outdoor fields. One, he immediately clocked as Maximus based on his build. Thorne’s former friend had been scarce since his altercation with the girls in the cafeteria. He suspected Maximus was largely hanging out with Zora as he tried to avoid Thorne and Kairos in the process.

His suspicion was confirmed as he got closer to the field and saw a flurry of red hair trying to take Maximus to the ground.

She managed to get the upper hand on him and wrap herself around his neck. She clawed her way up his body and around to his back before yanking him down to the ground with her. They ended up rolling through the grass in a tangle of limbs.

He thought they were still fighting until he heard a chorus of laughter echo through the empty night. He watched as Zora rolled on top of Maximus, her legs straddling his hips. She laced her fingers through Maximus’s and playfully pinned him to the ground.

Thorne scowled at the two as anger licked through his blood. How fucking dare Maximus betray him like that? How dare he allow Thorne’s fated mate to touch him like that? Thorne’s wolf growled in the back of his mind, possessiveness rising to meet the anger in his blood.

Then, the rational part of Thorne kicked in. It was the same voice that spoke of honor and duty when it reminded him that Zora wasn’t his anymore. He had no claim over her.

He glanced back over at the two and saw that Maximus had rolled himself on top of Zora. The two looked like a happily in love couple. A pang of guilt hit Thorne again. He ignored it as he shrugged his backpack higher up on his shoulder and turned to walk home.

The tiny little voice of honor was hanging out in his brain as his wolf was screaming that it just wanted it's fated mate.

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The burning. The ripping of skin. The feel of fur back onto my paws.

“And back.”

More burning. More skin ripping. The chill across hands devoid of any hair.

“Again,”

“God,” I choked out of my mouth as I fell forwards onto my hands. “Can I get a half a second of rest?”

I heard the squishing of feet against the gym mat. Then, the shade of someone crouching down next to me. I tipped my chin up to meet the piercing gaze of Valentin.

“This method of shifting is particularly successful in young wolves,” he said softly. “It forces your body to get used to the shift quicker and it forces the body to accept it quicker. It's harsh but it works.”

My chest was still heaving. “How many times to get it to work?”

“Usually, I can get a wolf to max out at about ten shifts per minutes,” he tilted his head. “You got to five.”

Five and my body felt like it was splitting at the seams. My lungs were heaving, heart a beat too high for a normal human. I pressed my hand to my chest to try and slow it. Valentin's eyes were locked on me as I tried to slow my breathing. Finally, he held a hand out. I took it tentatively and sighed as the electricity flowed freely from his hands.

He helped me stand, one hand wrapping around my waist to keep me from falling back over. I leaned into him more than I should've. In response, I was met with a throat clearing behind me.

I instantly jumped out of Valentin's arms and wrapped my hands around my waist, awkwardly. I looked up to see Thorne pinning me down with his gaze.

"I think that's enough for today," he gritted from between his teeth.

I shot him a look, clocking how jealous he was. Then I looked at Valentin. His jaw was set as he looked at Thorne. He sighed before looking back at me.

"That was a good first start," he said, softly. "We'll try again tomorrow."

"Okay," I said softly.

"I'll walk you home," Thorne piped up from across the mat. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. I gave Valentin a half smile before walking off towards Thorne.

The two of us walking out of the gym in silence. It wasn't until we got to the Admissions building that Thorne said anything. "How's classes?"

I immediately froze and looked at him. His eyebrows creased in confusion.

"What?"

"What's your play here?"

"Play?" Thorne genuinely looked confused. "I'm just trying to make conversation."

I rolled my eyes and continued to walk. Thorne was frozen for a hot second before he jogged to catch up.

"Is making conversation so awful?" he continued. "I'm your knight. We might as well be cordial to one another."

"I don't need a knight,"

Thorne snorted. "Why 'cause you have Maximus?"

I stopped again and narrowed my eyes at him. "Is that jealousy I hear?"

"Psh," Thorne snorted, again. "No. Just know you and him are... whatever."

"Need I remind you," I snapped. "That you broke our bond. Not me."

"I know," Thorne said softly. "But, for whatever reason, the Queen has a soft spot for you. So, she paired me up with you. For which I say, again, it's not a crime to be cordial."

I huffed. Soft-spot-for-me is not how I would describe the mother who abandoned me for eighteen years but in Thorne's eyes, that's what she was. I bracketed my hands on my hips as I tried to figure out what do say to that.

The wind was whipping across the campus at that point, whisking the leaves and brush up and around like a hurricane. I wrapped my arms around me as shiver worked over me.

"Do you want my jacket?" Thorne offered.

"No I have " my sentence was cut off as I patted my waist and realized my jacket was not wrapped around my waist. It must've fallen off in the midst of the shifting training. I sighed again.

"I left my jacket," I said.

Thorne frowned. "I can go get it for you,"

"No," I shook my head. "I'll get it. Don't worry."

"Okay," Thorne said, tentatively. "I'll wait here."

"Don't," I called over my shoulder as I jogged back to the gym. "I'm a big girl. I can handle myself."

I heard Thorne chuckle behind me as I continued to jog back to the gym. Luckily for me, the lights were still on. Valentin must've still been in the gym cleaning up. I tentatively walked back through the gym. The lights were still shining bright on the blue gym mats.

"Hello?" I called.

My voice ricocheted off the walls of the gym and back into my ears. I walked across the floor, feet slapping gently against the vinyl. I spotted my jacket, discarded off by the locker room. I walked towards it and slung it around my shoulders where it was supposed to be.

I heard a noise come from the locker room that startled me. I jumped and stuck my head into the men's locker room. I heard the spray of one of the ancient showers turning on. My brow knitted immediately. It was well past the open hours of the gym. The night was on the precipice of the next day. No one was supposed be there.

Slowly, I walked into the locker room, on high alert. The spray of the shower was still going as I continued to scope out the scene. I heard several large bangs, then the hushed whispers of two people.

I crept my way past the office and into the lockers, crouching behind things as I went. The lights were all off in the locker room, save for the ones above the showers. As I crept closer to them, the people noises got louder. I poked my head out to get a better look.

I saw two people entangled in the spray of one of the showers. One was clearly a man who'd been mid-shower. He was naked and sopping wet. The second was a woman. She was fully clothed with her legs wrapped around the waist of the man as if she'd jumped into his arms. Their lips were locked in a passionate kiss. Her long black hair had just hit the spray and was shielding both of their faces.

The sight was something out of a porno. Their hands and mouths were hungry and feisty. A breathy moan came from the woman and the man spun them around to pin her to the wall. His bare ass was exposed to me. I blushed immediately then brought my gaze back to the woman.

Their faces separated as he dove in to attack her neck. She shoved her hair off her face and I couldn't help the gasp of shock that came out of my lips.

The woman was none other than Bella.

She must've heard me because her eyes shot open. As soon as she realized it was me, her lips curled into a smile so malicious I could taste it. She immediately turned up the show, moaning and writhing under the man.

"Sh," he hushed her. As he brought his head up to claim her lips again, I gasped for the second time.

Because the man who Bella was currently undulating under, was none other than Valentin Lunerly.

Valentin

Immediately, Valentin dropped Bella. Her heeled feet clattered to the floor so he knew she was okay without looking at her. His eyes were still locking on Zora's.

He watched a million different emotions wash through her. Rage. Jealousy. Hurt. His chest ached as he watched her shake her head. She turned and ran out of the locker room and Valentin couldn't help but hang his head.

"What a little creep," Bella sneered. Valentin raised his gaze to glare at her.

"Get out," he said, low and dangerous.

"What?" Bella said sharply. She leaned into him, her hand hitting his lower stomach and dipping lower. "But we haven't finished."

Valentin caught her wrist before her hand could wrap around his cock. He narrowed his eyes at her. Clearly, she didn't realize he wasn't in the mood.

"Get. Out."

Bella yanked her wrist out of his grasp. She turned clapped out of the shower, heels clicking on the tile. Once she was out, she ran a hand over her body, using magiks to dry her soaking wet clothing. She turned back to look at Valentin as her long black hair was curling at the ends.

“This obsession you have with her,” Bella snapped. “It ends. I will not be embarrassed by a weak, whore of an Alpha.”

Valentin clenched his jaw. He jammed his teeth into his tongue to keep himself from spilling Zora’s secret. That she wasn’t weak nor was she a whore. She was the Highest Alpha to exist at this school. Bella was nothing in the comparison to her.

“Noted,” he gritted out from between his teeth. “Now get out before someone else sees you.”

Bella huffed before turning and leaving the bathroom. Her black hair swished behind her. The door to the locker room slammed shut behind her. Immediately, Valentin sailed his fist into the tile of the shower.

The tile splintered and shatter, some of it falling to the floor at his feet. The spray was still hitting his back. He turned the heat up and let the water burn his skin as he pressed his head into the wall where he hadn’t broken the tile.

He hadn’t meant to jump Bella like that. He’d sworn off doing anything with her until they were married. The problem was, his hand was already fisting his cock when Bella had made her appearance known.

His training session with Zora had left him feeling all hot and bothered. He’d bottled it up and stifled it down to avoid doing something nefarious in front of Blythwitch. But as soon as Zora left, he felt the stiffening in his pants as he remembered the way her hands felt and how she smelt and the way that every time her braid whipped around, the scent hit him in the face and had him twitching in his pants.

Naturally, it was enough to drive him mad. So much so that he couldn’t walk across campus to his house. He had to sit in the locker room like some vile teenage and pump himself to the memories of his late mate’s niece.

Thus, when Bella entered, he was already on edge, teetering on the fine line of control. When she’d stepped behind him and covered his hand with her own, he couldn’t control himself. He’d picked her up and ground her into the wall like the mad- man he was. He was about two second away from ripping her panties to the side and plowing into her when Zora showed up.

The memory of the look of disappointment on her face made him slam his fist into the wall again. More tile shattered against the ground with the water from the shower.

How could he have been so stupid?

Zora's look of disappointment was the same one that he'd seen on Zahara's face. He'd told her he was going into battle and she'd begged him not to go. That was the last time he saw his fated mate.

Now, he was gifted a second fated mate and he was ignoring her. For what? His own pride?

Her safety, he told himself. I can't hurt her if I'm not with her.

But then, her face worked its way back into his mind. How disgusted she'd been with him after realizing it was him ravaging Bella in the locker room after hours.

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He sighed again deeply before turning the water off. He pressed his hand to the place where he'd shattered the tiles. One by one, they lifted from the floor and worked their way back into place. Valentin felt the magiks coursing through him as they lifted. When he removed his hand from the wall, it was like he hadn't even been there.

He grabbed a towel, wrapped it around his waist, and walked over to sit on the bench in the dark. He fished through his trousers and found his phone. The background was a picture of him and Victoria from the days immediately following the end of the enslavement. Both had bright, smiling faces. Behind Valentin's eyes, however, he could see his own pain.

He flicked the phone open scrolled through his contacts before finding Victoria's number. She picked up after the first ring.

"What's wong?" she said.

"Nothing," Valentin sighed. "Just checking in for updates."

"Oh," Victoria said in a way that reminded him so much of Zora. "No, there's nothing."

"Okay," Valentin carded a hand through his wet hair. "Amara arrived last week."

"Right," Victoria sounded exhausted. "How was the training with her and Zora?"

"Volatile," Valentin said, immediately. "There seems to be some resentment there. Zora shifted and nearly ripped Amara's throat out."

Victoria hummed. "So, she is shifting?"

"You're not concerned she almost killed the Princess in front of the Blythwitch boy?"

“It’s mildly problematic,” Victoria mused. “But he’s been around Amara enough to know her words get her into precarious situations. I don’t think he’d be shocked to see anyone trying to make her pay for them.”

Valentin hummed. “We used the Hanswolf method today. She got to five in a minute.”

“Good, good,” Victoria said. She sounded distracted.

“Something wrong?” Valentin asked. He cursed himself for how uninterested he sounded.

“No, no,” she replied. “Just thinking about the task force and their lack of updates. Do you think we’re looking in the wrong place?”

“I couldn’t tell you,” Valentin said plainly. “We’ve scoured the wolf territories. The human ones seem like the likely next place.”

Victoria hummed in agreement. “Speaking of mates, how is wedding planning going?”

Valentin couldn’t help the grimace that fell on his face. He sighed deeply before answering.

“Fine,”

Victoria laughed. “Fine? You’re supposed to be planning one of the biggest days in your life in it’s just fine?”

“It’s more of a pain if we’re being honest.”

Victoria was silent for a beat. She let out a resounding sigh before speaking again, dropping her voice low.

“Why are you doing this, Valentin?” she asked. “You know there’s another option.”

“It’s not the safe one,” he retorted. “For her, at least.”

“But it’s the one that would make you happy, make her happy.”

Valentin paused. He knew Victoria was talking about the idea of him mating with Zora instead of Bella. His mind was screaming at him to agree with her. To call off the nonsense with Bella and just finally give into the fated mate bond. But his heart knew that he couldn’t take anymore hurt.

If he lost Zora, he’d lose himself.

“I chose my path,” he stated. “Plus, she’s been spending an awful lot of time with the Wolfham heir. I have a feeling he may be the one the prophecy speaks of.”

“And you’ve not thought to bring this to me, earlier?” Victoria snapped. He could hear the sound of her raised eyebrow in her tone.

“I was still uncertain,” he countered. “Still am.”

“Keep me updated,” Victoria said, softer than previously. “I have to go. Call me if you hear anything before I do.”

“Will do,” Valentin combed through his hair a second time before going to move the phone away.

“And Valentin?”

He blinked and brought it back to his ear.

“You can talk to, you know,”

He licked the front of his teeth. “I know.”

“She was my sister too,”

“I know,”

Victoria sighed in frustration. “Right. Of course.”

“Goodbye, Tori. I’ll tell you if I hear anything,”

He pulled his phone from his ear and hung up on the Queen of Wolves. As soon as the line went dead, he threw his head in his hands and tried to not regret every decision he’d made.

Having to go about the beginning of my week like nothing had happened hurt me. Mona tried to help, stated that Valentin would see the error of his ways soon. I was highly doubtful, especially given how feral he’d look with Amara.

The horror of them hooking up was my nightmare for the week. It always started as some sort of horny wet dream, with me and Valentin hooking up in the showers. There was a mirror behind us that gave me direct eye contact with myself and Valentin’s ass. But as I tipped my head back from writhing in ecstasy, I made contact with a different person in the mirror.

Bella smiled at me with her sick, sadistic smirk as Valentin ravaged away at her. I was trapped behind the mirror, banging my fists against it in a futile effort to get Valentin to notice me.

I woke every morning covered in sweat just as the sun was rising.

It didn't make my sour mood any better. Especially when I still had to train with Valentin and Thorne. Valentin could barely look me in the eye. My only solace was Amara had been barred from our sessions.

Maximus was also pushing me harder at our sessions. He told me I'd gotten good enough at the basics that he was going to start teaching me moves they weren't getting at in Basics class. That mean toppling, turning and jumping over him as he swung at me like I wasn't a foot shorter than him.

I was utterly exhausted by the time my Friday night training with Maximus rolled around. I'd had about two hours of sleep the night before and nine cups of coffee throughout the day. I was jittery yet half-awake. I almost wished Maximus had kept our session outside.

"So today I want to work on the spinning hook kick," Max said as I stifled a yawn. "It's a Taekwondo move that always you to put the full force of your weight into a kick."

Max moved to stand in front of a dummy. He took one step forward then threw the entire weight of his body into whirling his foot around and kicking the dummy so hard in the head it flew across the gym.

I blinked at him. "I'm supposed to do that?"

"Ideally," Maximus rolled his shoulder with a shrug.

"And in what world am I going to get that much space with an opponent?" I dead panned.

"An ideal one clearly," Maximus went over and dragged the dummy back in front of me. "And one where your back is accidentally to your opponent. Or your surrounded."

"Right," I dropped into a defensive stance. "Now what?"

"You're going to step front with your non-striking foot and rotate the hip of your striking foot," Maximus said as he demonstrated.

I followed his instructions then listened for the second step. A few moments later, I shocked myself with being able to strike the dummy in the same spot that Maximus had hit. After five or six kicks, I paused to bracket my hands on my hips as I caught my breath.

"Now, you're going to incorporate it into sparring," Max said as he looked at me.

"Sparring?" I choked out. "Max, I'm exhausted and--"

Maximus dropped into stance. "It's good to practice when you're tired," he cut me off as he started to circle me. "The opponent will never give you a chance to breathe. If you train your body to always be on, it'll never turn off."

“Fucking shit,” I mumbled under my breath as I dropped back into stance. He had a point. Plus, nothing he’d said had been proven wrong yet.

We went back and forth a few times with random jabs or punches. Then, Max found a way to slide behind me, giving me the perfect opportunity to use the new kick he’d taught me. I threw it once and he blocked it from hitting his face with a grunt.

“Good,” he said. “Go again.”

So, I went again, despite the way my body was screaming for me to stop. Another few punches and blocks and Max went to a different position. I threw the kick and he gave me another nod.

We kept going and going. All the while, my muscles were beginning to burn. My heart was thudding deep in my chest and head was swimming with the thoughts of the last week.

Amara shredding my knee.

Thorne’s persistence.

Valentin with Bella.

I kept throwing my punches, swinging my leg high and ducking from Maximus’s punches. It was a dance the two of us were doing, calculated and strong. All the while, I continued to go through each event.

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Amara shredding my knee.

Thorne’s persistence.

Valentin with Bella.

Amara shredding my knee.

Thorne’s persistence.

Valentin with Bella.

Amara shredding my knee.

Thorne’s persistence.

Valentin with Bella.

My anger was boiling up and over and threatening to fly out of my body. Each punch was more violent. Each kick stronger. I couldn't hear anything but the pounding up my heart and the breathing coming from my gut.

Amara.

Thorne.

Valentin.

Amara.

Thorne.

Valentin.

Amara.

Thorne.

Valentin.

How dare they? Go against me. Betray me. I was stronger than they we're. I was wilder. I was limitless.

Amara.

Thorne.

Valentin.

Amara.

Thorne.

Valentin.

I swung and made contact with my opponent, sending them flying backwards. They toppled to the ground and I was on top of them in an instant. I brought my arm back to punch and slammed it towards the person's head. Just as it was about to hit, someone screamed my name and caught my hand.

I blinked, awakened from my stupor.

Maximus was pinned underneath me. His hands were shaking as they tried to fend me off. A trail of blood was streaming from his nose. Panic washed over me.

“No,” I breathed. “No, no, no-“

“Zora it’s fine-“

“No, Max I didn’t – I – I -“

“Please don’t. I pushed too hard I—”

My hands went to Max’s face gingerly. I didn’t miss when he flinched as I moved, as if I were going to strike him again. My palms cupped his face. I watched as tears I didn’t realize I was crying hit Max’s cheeks. His hands came up to my face and swiped the tears before they fell.

“I’m sorry,” I sobbed. “I’m sorry. I-“

I couldn’t put into word what I meant. How I felt like I’d lost control and had almost hurt someone I cared about. The fear was rippling through me like a violent current. My head was swimming, body shaking and I couldn’t figure out what to do. So I did the only thing I could do that I knew would show Maximus I was sorry.

I kissed him.

I kissed him and he kissed me back with four times the tenacity. His hands went into my hair and he pulled the back of my skull to him with a crushing pressure. All the while, my tears were streaming down my cheeks. He licked into my mouth and I was lost in the way he held me.

Next thing I knew, my hands were going to his pants. I shimmied them down his hips, still straddling him and took his cock out. I twisted my wrist around him as my mouth never left his. His hands came to my waist and he ripped my shorts off. Then he was inside me and our kisses turned to groans.

He rocked into me as his hands bruised my hips. I gripped the back of his head until I pushed myself up, ripping my shirt off and leaving my nipples to be pebbled by the cold of the gym. One of Maximus’s hands left my hips and palmed my chest. He ached inside of me as I rode him.

His hands ground me down onto him and I yelped as my orgasm hit me like the force of a bus. His followed closely after, leaving us in a pile of limbs and torn clothes. My chest was heaving as I tried to catch my breath.

Fuck, I thought. I did it again.

Some things cannot be ignored, Mona said softly. The bond of a fated mate is one.

I sighed heavily before working my way off Maximus. With a hiss, we separated, and I landed on the ground next to him. I stood up immediately, legs wobbly, and grabbed the sweatpants I'd worn over my shorts. I shimmied them back on and then turned to find Maximus holding my shirt.

"Thanks," I mumbled.

Maximus nodded. Blood was smeared on his face from where I'd kissed him but his nose had stopped bleeding and had crusted under his nostril. He ran his hand over his face, collecting most of the blood, and opened his mouth to speak. "I-"

"That was a mistake," I said sharply. "We shouldn't have done that."

Maximus eyebrows crinkled. He went to speak again but I turned and walked away, leaving him alone in the gym with nothing but his dried blood and the wet remnants of our third fuck.

The next morning, everyone was abuzz during Basics. As I stepped out of the locker room and into the gym, I learned why. Immediately, all eyes were on me. People looked at me with a range of emotions: anger, disgusting, some – even – an unabashed hatred.

"Um, Zora," came Loren's small voice from my left. "Is there something you'd like to tell me?"

"Nothing that I haven't already told you," I mumbled back, surveying my surroundings. One extreme tall Alpha even scoffed at me. Murmurs swirled around me, just out of reaching of my human hearing.

Luckily, or unluckily, for me, I was a wolf as well.

I tuned into the frequency in my brain that allowed me to hear much quieter sounds. As soon as they reached my ears, I regretted it.

"Did you hear she was seen leaving the gym with Maximus Wolfham after hours last night?"

"Ugh, what could he possibly want with someone as pathetic as her?"

I flinched as it hit me. Sure, I knew the school already thought I was awful. Hearing someone say it was a lot worse. I tuned back to the voices.

"-Princess Amara. She looks terrible. Hear it was all Smith's fault."

"That's horrible to attack the heir to the throne like that! She must not have royalty in her human world. No clue how to respect them."

I flinched again. Amara looked terrible? I hadn't seen her since our training session, thankfully. The last I saw, she was lucid and mobile in Valentin's arms. Clearly, I hadn't hurt her that much.

“This isn’t the first time she’s been violent. Seems to be a habit of hers to beat the shit out of other Alphas. You remember what she did to Kairos before shifting class?”

The voices were beginning to drive me mad. The last one was the only one that held any merit. I’d roughed Kairos up a bit but Amara? She’d been the one to start it. I looked out into the sea of students and immediately spotted her.

Her arm was in a sling, hand wrapped in a thick bandage. Despite that, she was still in the tiniest little training set. She was sitting on the side of the gym with what looked like crutches.

She had to be kidding.

I immediately turned on my heel and marched over to her. “Amara,” I gritted through my teeth.

The two girls standing next to the Princess jumped as they saw me storming their way. They immediately lept behind Amara, cowering like I was the fucking big bad wolf. I rolled my eyes and set them back on Amara.

“What happened?”

“What happened?!” she shrieked. “You know exactly what happened you heathen!”

“Recount it for the class,” I said with a fake smile. “So everyone’s filled in.”

Amara looked out at the rest of the people standing around us in Basics. Her face morphed into the delicate Princess she was trying to get them all to believe she was.

“It was awful,” she near cried. “Headmaster Lunerly was training us. Zora was throwing punches far harder than what was normal for sparring. Lunerly tried to get her to stop but she was ravenous! It must’ve been because of her resent me towards me for being her boss, you know?”

The crowd murmured in agreement. I bit my tongue to keep from lashing out. I watched Amara scan the crowd as if she was looking for someone. Then she turned back to me with a faux fear in her eyes. She shook her head.

“I don’t know who taught you those moves,” she whimpered. “But they were maniacal. Truly unhinged.”

One of the girls behind Amara, who I recognized as one of the assholes who’d chased me on my first day of classes, shot up straight. Her blonde hair bobbed with her as she ducked down to lean into Amara’s ear.

“I heard she’s been training with Maximus Wolfham after hours,” she pretended to whisper.

“That must be where she learned how to snap my wrist,” Amara said back, gesturing to the wrap around her lower arm. Despite “breaking her wrist” she still had those ridiculous long nails. Even

looking at them I could feel them shredding my thigh. I gritted my teeth and made eye contact with Amara.

“I just don’t know why you hate me,” Amara sniffled. “I was a good boss. I – I treated you fair and for you to attack me—”

“That is bullshit and you know it!” I finally burst out. The crowd surrounding me gasped. More whispers started up. I ignored all of them as I continued to hold Amara’s gaze.

“That you attacked me?” She said, soft and meek. She gestured to her arm again. “I have proof.”

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“I only retaliated once you took your claws out,” I snapped. “You were aiming to kill and I fought back to keep myself alive.”

“If that’s what happened,” The blonde girl sneered from behind me. “Why do you look completely fine and Amara’s in tatters?”

“Thorne was there,” I said quickly. “Thorne Blythwitch. He’ll back me up.”

As if on cue, Thorne emerged from the crowd and pinned me with his gaze. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, Thorny!” Amara mewed. She threw her head back dramatically. “You won’t believe what Zora Smith is saying. She said I asked for this and that she didn’t attack first, I did.”

She looked up and caught Thorne’s eye. Her snake-like gold eyes narrowed at him, mouth still set in a pout. I knew exactly what she was saying to him with her eyes. Don’t go against me.

“Isn’t that so awful?” Amara cried.

Thorne looked back and forth between Amara and I. While Amara demanded he obey, my eyes were more of a plea. A “don’t do this to me” kind of look. Thorne looked back at Amara and sighed. His eyes fluttered closed.

“It was awful,” he said, gently. The crowd gasped again like we were in a fucking tellanovella. “I’ve never seen a spar get so violent.”

“See!?” Amara cried to the crowd. She jabbed a long nail at me. “She’s insane. She should be kicked out if anything. I’ll be letting my mother know immediately.”

I raised an eyebrow as if to challenge that. Her mother was my mother and she and I both knew that Victoria wasn't going to do shit. I was the backup plan for Amara's terrible public reputation and she wouldn't be risking mine to back up Amara's nonsense.

"What's going on here?" A voice barked. I shuddered immediately as I recognized it.

The crowd parted like the red sea as Kairos stormed over to where they'd circled around Amara and I. He glanced between us, lip curled up in a scowl.

"Oh Kairos," she cried, flailing like a damsel in distress. "You must've heard how she attacked me. Now she's trying to do it again!"

Kairos's jaw clenched and unclenched as he looked back and forth between Amara and I. He huffed a breath out of his nose then glanced back down at where Amara was dramatically hanging on the blonde girl.

"I don't really give a fuck," he snapped. He addressed the crowd. "Coach saw you all loitering from his office and is pissed warmups haven't been started. So get a fucking move on before I have to ask again."

In a flourish, the crowd dissipated, running off towards the track for the laps we were supposed to be running. Kairos glanced back at Amara.

"As you're clearly injured just stay here," he then turned to glare down at me. "You. Come with me."

I shrunk in on myself as Kairos led me off to the side of the gym. Loren gave me a pat on the shoulder before running off to join the rest of the class. I snuck one final glance at Amara. From her chair, she wiggled her fingers at me, a wicked smirk on her face. I ground my teeth together then faced back to where Kairos had stopped. His arms were crossed over his barrel of a chest and he was looking at me with a voracious sharpness.

"The fuck were you thinking, hurting the heir to the Throne?" he hissed.

"I wasn't planning on it," I snapped back. "She fucking attacked me and I had to fight back."

Kairos narrowed his eyes at me. "The way to get through this school is certainly not to attack the one fucking person you shouldn't attack."

"Get through this school?" I snorted. "Weren't you trying to get me to leave a few months ago?"

Kairos slammed his mouth into a thin line. His eyes still bore into me was the intensity of a thousand suns. I took a step forward, jutting my chin up to glare back at him.

"Unless you've changed your mind," I taunted. "Don't tell me you give a shit about me now, Kairos."

His face fell flat for a second and I caught why people found him attractive. When his face wasn't all scrunched up in anger, he was goodlooking. But just as the thought went through my head, his sneer reappeared and he walked past me.

"Just don't make it harder for yourself," he snapped, leaving me confused and alone in the corner of the gym.

After Basics, nothing got better. In fact, it got worse.

Everyone seemed to keep their eyes firmly glued to me as I moved across campus. It was bad in the locker room. I ran into a stall to change out of embarrassment. Then as I left, the eyes started to watch me again. They didn't stop as I crossed campus and ran into the cafeteria.

I was assuming that was going to be my only reprieve. But it seemed like word of my morning kerfuffle and previous beat down on Amara had traveled fast. Even the lunch ladies were giving me dirty looks.

I slammed my tray onto the table and followed suit with my head. Loren sat down next to me and gingerly patted my back. "Come on, it's not that bad," she said.

I twisted my head to give her a look. "It's not that bad?" I repeated. "Everyone thinks I'm a murderous psychopath." "Well, they thought you were a psycho before so really not much has changed right?" Loren said with a shrug.

"So helpful, Loren, thank you," I grumbled. updated by jo(bn)ib.c-o-m "You're still training with Valentin?" Came a voice. I lifted my head to see Maximus's eyes boring into me. I blinked twice at him. We'd barely spoken since our last sexual escapade on the floor of the gym. I glanced sideways at Loren.

"Yeah," I said, trying to not put any tone into it. "After I shifted he wanted to start working with me again."

"And Thorne's there too?" Maximus pressed. I nodded. His jaw clenched and unclenched. He opened his mouth then slammed it back shut. He tried again and his voice came out raspy.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It doesn't change anything," I said, aware that it had a double meaning. "It's two different training styles."

"Explains why you were burnt out the other day," he said gently. His eyes flashed was something between lust and rage.

"I should've told you," I said, softly. "I'm sorry."

Maximus nodded once. Then he slunk down to the table and dropped his tray. It seemed he was eating lunch with us. I pinched my eyebrows together as he did, suddenly confused.

“Why did you ask?”

“I heard about your scene this morning,” he said. I cringed slightly. “Then Bella was talking about something that happened after you were training with him the other night.”

I froze. Bella was telling people I caught her and Valentin. That was not good for any of the parties involved. I glanced across the cafeteria and saw her sitting with her gang of third-year bitches. Suddenly, all the rumors got to me. I stood up slowly, still watching Bella chat with the rest of the girls like she wasn't actively ruining mine and Valentin's lives.

“I'll be right back,” I said slowly.

“Zora,” Loren pleaded. “Don't-“

I ignored the rest of her statement and stormed across the cafeteria, eyes still locked on Bella. I'd had it with the bullshit rumors about me. I couldn't do much about Amara but I could do a hell of a lot about Bella.

As I reached the end of the table, the laughter from Bella's group completely died. All of the other girls gave me disgusted looks. Bella, however, was smirking at me. I stared her down with all the fire inside of me.

“Oh, look who's decided to join us,” Bella chimed. “The little peeping Tom.”

“Cut the shit,” I snapped. “You and I both know this is going to hurt Valentin. So keep your trap shut.”

“Hurt Valentin?” Bella snorted then broke into a full-bodied laugh. She glared back at me.

“Valentin is a man. He doesn't need anyone to look after him, let alone someone as worthless as you.”

“I'm getting really tired of the names,” I said, anger licking the back of my throat. The girls around Bella shrunk away, leaving me and her to glare at one another. I really wanted to wipe the smug smirk off her stupid face.

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Permission granted, Mona growled in the back of my mind.

I took another step forward but was stopped as an arm came out and barred me across the stomach. I turned towards the person, growl looming in my gut. I was surprised to see Thorne had stepped in between us at that moment.

“It’s not worth it,” he said under his breath. “Fighting with her will only prove Amara’s point.”

I shoved his arm away from me. “Why do you give a shit about proving Amara’s point?” I snarled. “You already confirmed in front of everyone that I attacked her. And now you’re trying to protect me?”

I went to charge at Bella but Thorne’s arm came out and stopped me again. This time with more force. I glared up at him as he looked down at me.

“I suggest you let go of my mate if you know what’s good for you,”

Both Thorne and I turned around to see Maximus and Loren had finally caught up to me. Both glared down Thorne as he held me. Loren’s hands were on her hips, chest puffed up. Maximus had his arms crossed and eyebrow raised as if he were tempting Thorne to cross a Line. Thorne dropped his arm and turned to sneer at Maximus. “Your mate?” he snapped. “That’s rich.”

“Is it?” Max mocked. “Seeing as you broke your bond, I wouldn’t expect you to know anything about it.”

Thorne laughed, humorlessly then turned to face Maximus. He took a step towards his old friend. Both men had anger and resentment on their faces. Thorne took another step towards Maximus so their noses were almost touching.

“You know,” he mocked. “If every girl who sucked you off was your mate, I think you’d have more mates than any wolf in history.”

There was a beat in which neither man moved. Then, it all happened in the blink of an eye. Thorne was tossed across the room and slammed into the concrete wall of the cafeteria. Maximus barreled across the space he’d just chucked Thorne and shifted as soon as his hands hit the top of the table. His large black wolf snarled at Thorne as he tried to get back on his feet.

At the same time, Loren had charged at Bella with her claws out. She pinned Bella to the floor and began trying to claw her eyes out of her head. Bella held her arm up to accept the blows then used her core to spin them around so Loren was under her. The two continued to claw and gnash at each other in human form.

Meanwhile, Thorne had shifted into his auburn wolf. He charged back at Maximus and the two rolled across the cafeteria, bashing into tables and sending the other student running.

in all directions. I was frozen in place, eyes darting between the two fights at once. I was about to run and wrench Bella off Loren when a voice boomed through the cafeteria.

“That is ENOUGH!”

I slammed my hands over my ears. Loren and Bella followed suit. Both Thorne and Maximus’s wolves whined in pain. I turned to look at the source of the voice and saw Valentin.

He looked livid. His eyes were almost entirely gold, as if his wolf was about to burst out of his skin at any minutes.

His hair seemed to float away from his face with power, as did the long black robes that trailed behind him. It was as if time had stopped and everyone in the cafeteria was frozen.

Valentin’s eyes pierced through the two girls rolling on the floor, then to the wolves bowing their heads to his right. Finally, he locked eyes with me.

“My office,” he barked. “Now.”

I’d never been more uncomfortable than standing across from Valentin’s desk, sandwiched between Thorne and Maximus. The three of us were silent, heads bowed down as Valentin glared at us. Outside, I could hear the snarky murmurs of Loren and Bella.

Time seemed to move at the pace of a snail as we stood in front of Valentin, awaiting judgment. He’d barely spoken as he walked us across campus. He’d told Loren and Bella to sit outside once we arrived at his office before ushering myself and my two mates into his office.

It was precisely how I landed in a room with three of the people I’d thought I had some sort of mate bond with. The room seemed to hum with the unsaid words and the small spark of power that emanated from each of the High Alphas. My hands shook with the desire to use the magiks coursing through me.

Stay calm, Mona commanded. An outburst isn’t likely to help this situation.

I’m trying, I grit out from between the barriers of my mind.

I was about at my breaking point when the tension in the room snapped as Valentin sighed heavily and slumped in his seat. His hands went to pinch the bridge of his nose as he glanced at the three of us.

“I have bigger shit to deal with than petty rumors,” he said, sounding utterly exhausted. “Sir,” Thorne addressed Valentin, who lazily looked at the younger Alpha.

“They’re not necessarily rumors. You saw how Zora attacked the Princess. As the future High Alpha Consort-”

“I’m aware of your title,” Valentin cut Thorne off with a wave of his hand. “I also know you watched the entire spar and saw what actually happened. The crown has no use for liars, Blythwitch.”

Thorne’s jaw slammed back shut. He dipped his head, eyes wide as he searched the carpet in front of his feet.

Maximus crossed his arms back over his chest as he pinned the Headmaster with his gaze.

“So, it was just a rumor?” he asked. “Zora didn’t try and kill the Princess?”

“To some degree,” Valentin sighed and dropped his hand to his lap. “Though I will say some of the attacks Zora launched in defensive were far more advanced than I’ve been teaching her. Good to know rumors of her second trainer were not rumors as well.”

Maximus said nothing, expression neutral and focused on Valentin. I glanced to the side at him then looked back at the Headmaster.

” asked him to help me,” I cut in. “After -”

After you dropped me because I told you we should be together and then you rejected me which caused my wolf to freak out,I regret nothing, Mona said between cleaning her paws. resisted the urge to roll my eyes. I looked back at Valentin. His mouth was set in a thin line. He licked the front of his teeth before speaking.

“I see,” He sighed again then stood. He pressed his fingertips into the desk in a tent. He looked at all three of us

“What I am about to tell you,” he warned. “Is to stay between us and us only. It is of utmost importance. Do you understand?”

All three of us nodded. Valentin blinked slowly then

Sighed again.

“We found a vampire on the boarder of the campus last night,”

Both Maximus and Thorne stiffened. I knitted my eyebrows together. “I thought they’d all been killed during the aftermath of the war?”

“Majority of them, yes,” Valentin said. “A few escaped.

They haven’t been hear of or seen in the last two decades.

We assumed their threat had dissipated. Then our scouts caught the scent of one by the northern dormitories.”

“The northern dorms?” Maximus confirmed. “That’s where

All at once, the three male Alphas turned and looked at me. I didn’t need them to say anything to know that was where I lived. Nor did I need them to say anything to let me know they thought the vampire was looking for me.

For what, it seemed Thorne and Maximus were stuck on.

But Valentin’s gaze told me all I needed to know.

The vampires knew I was the Princess.

“So now what?” I asked Valentin. “You caught it. Threat gone?”

“We caught one of them,” he corrected. “Scouts smelled at least two. Likely three.”

“They’ve been growing,” Thorne said, as if working through his own thoughts.

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“We believe so,” Valentin said. “Our intel has led us to believe they have been using High Dark Magiks to create more vampires through the transfer of venom and blood.”

Making more vampires? The hair on my arms stood up on edge.

“That’s unnatural,” Thorne stuttered. “Grotesque. Foul-”

“Agreed,” Valentin cut him off. “But we can’t stop Dark Magiks. We can only fight them. Which is why I’m about to propose the following.”

He moved from around his desk to stand directly in front of me. He looked to Thorne then locked his gaze on Maximus.

“You are to be appointed as Zora Smith’s second knight,”

“What the fuck?” Thorne hissed. Valentin whipped his head towards the younger Alpha. Thorne instantly shrunk in on himself. “I mean, she already has me. She doesn’t need two does she? No one besides a High Alpha has more than one knight.”

“Yes, well,” Valentin shrugged as if to insinuate that I was a High Alpha. I narrowed my eyes at him but he seemed unphased.

Thorne barked a laugh. “She’s a-” he shook his head and raised his hands. “Whatever, mate. But it still doesn’t negate the fact she already has me.”

“And do you believe you’ve been a honest and true knight?” Valentin pressed with malice in his tone.

Thorne slammed his lips shut again. Valentin turned back to Maximus. “I’ll have the paperwork sent to you by the morning,” he said. “A formal ceremony will take place during winter break.”

“I’m honored,” was the only thing Maximus could say.

Thorne was still bitter, shaking his head. “I just don’t see.

“You’re never around Miss Smith,” Valentin snapped.”

– Seeing as her and Alpha Wolfham are-” He paused to give me and Maximus a scathing once over. “-entangled, it only made sense to appoint him as well. This level of threat requires dual guard working in tandem.”

Thorne growled before putting on a tight-lipped smile and nodding. Seemingly, in approval. Or acceptance.

“Additionally,” Valentin continued. “The three of us will train together. My sentiment on Knight’s knowing the weaknesses of their protectorate stands. You’re welcome to continue training as a duo after classes, but every morning I expect you at the gym. Seven AM. Sharp.”

I nodded once then watched as Maximus did the same.

Thorne seemed to grunt a “yes.” Valentin then looked between the three of us once more.”Any questions?”

“About a million,” Thorne grumbled under his breath.

“Great,” Valentin moved back to sit at his desk.”

Dismissed. And remember, no one must know about the vampire threat. Am I clear?”

The three of us nodded: Valentin sighed again before swiping his hair off of his face.

“Very well. Send in the girls.”

Thorne barreled past Maximus and I and into the hall. He barely looked at Loren and Bella as he stormed off, into the Admissions building. Max and I followed behind him.

As we went, I gave Loren a sad smile which she returned.

Bella's eyes were glued to me in a glare as i walked off with Maximus. The two girls then went into Valentin's office. Maximus kept walking as I hung back. He paused and raised his eyebrow over his shoulder.

"Loren," I said, softly. "Don't want to leave her alone with the wrath of Bella."

Maximus nodded once before darting his tongue out to wet his lower lip. He walked back closer to me. It was close enough that he had to tip his head down to look at me. His hand grabbed my wrist and placed my palm on his chest. The lub-dub of his heart beating under my palm immediately mixed with my own.

"Feel this?" he whispered. "It beats for only you. It protects only you. I am yours, Zora. Even if you may not be mine.

opened my mouth with a squeak. "I"

"Who are you?" he asked, low and begging.

I shook my head in response, throat swelling as the words threatened to come barreling out. Maximus held my gaze for a women longer before dropping my hand.

"When you can tell me," he said. "I'll be ready and willing.

Nothing you say could send me away."

My eyes flittered shut as I tried to imagine what he'd do when I told him. When I opened them, he was gone.

Kairos

"You hear about the nonsense in the café the other morning?"

"Naw, what happened?"

"Wolfham and Blythwitch went at it. Fucking feral, shifting and everything."

"Gods be damned. Moonraiser, you hear about it?"

Kairos palmed his face. He'd heard about it but had zero desire to deal with it. Especially with as drunk as he was.

He took another sip of his beer.

"S'nothing," he mumbled. "Lads being lads."

“Naw, mate,” Petyr chimed in with a shake of his head.”

Heard it was over Zora Smith.”

“I don’t get what so great about her,” Alexei, Kairos’s other friend, said. “She lost to Moonraiser by slamming her head into his so hard, she passed out. Kind of pathetic if you ask me.”

Petyr snorted. “Doesn’t stop Wolfham and Blythwitch from creaming their pants over her.”

Kairos shot up. He glared at his friends. “I’ve had enough about fucking Zora Smith,” he snapped. “I don’t want to hear her name. I don’t want to think about her. I don’t want to acknowledge she fucking exists!”

He punctuated his exclamation by chucking his empty beer can at the wall. It smashed into a puck before ricocheting and flying off into the room. Petyr and Alexei flinched as it did. They glanced at each other with wary eyes before looking back at where Kairos was fuming. His chest was heaving as his heart thudded in his chest.

“Fucking going downstairs,” he grunted before grabbing another beer and storming into the party happening on the first floor of his house.

Zora Smith was all anyone seemed to be talking about for the last week. It was driving Kairos mad. He couldn’t escape her and the comments about her. Between the kerfuffle at Basics on Tuesday and the fight yesterday, she was all anyone wanted to talk about.

Except Kairos.

Kairos wanted nothing to do with fucking Zora Smith or her red hair or her white wolf. She was the bane of his existence at that point. His dreams and nightmares had been full of her ever since she wrapped her jaw around his neck and shattered his leg. There were nightmares where she’d shattered both of his legs and left him bloodied and alone in the forest while voices laughed at him from within the trees.

Then, there were dreams of her, standing naked in front of him. Her red hair was down and straight, as he’d seen her at Mateball, and her lips were parted in ecstasy. As the dream progressed, her head was tossed back, perky tits at his eye level and she moved as if she was riding him. He’d woken up twice that week with a raging hard on and another with wet sheets. He felt like he was thirteen again.

The dreams seemed to be coming from nowhere. He still found her weak, still wanted to throttle her and make her feel like nothing. But then why was he in the middle of class, imagining what her lips would feel like wrapped around his cock?

And why the fuck did he give a shit if she was ruining her reputation by attacking the Princess?

The stupid fucking Princess who'd tried at least ten times to corner him that week and get him to reinstate their marriage pack. Each time, he'd politely declined. But it was getting hard to continue to be cordial.

That night, as he walked down into the party, he spotted her again. She was sitting in the lap of the same Alpha she'd brought into his room the party before. Her ass was gyrating in his lap as she "danced." Kairos scoffed and killed his beer as he walked into the kitchen to find another.

Several female Alphas greeted him as he went. Normally, he'd find one of them attractive enough to plow into at the end of the night. However, that night, none of them seemed to be doing it for him. They were all too much with too much make up or too much smell or too much in their general mannerisms. Did none of these girls have any grace anymore?

He snorted to himself and killed his second beer. Well, eight of the night if he was counting. Maybe ninth? Who gave a fuck.

As he reached for another, a hand with long, ridiculously painted nails curled around his wrist. He shut the door to reveal Amara had come to beg him again. He cracked open his beer and leaned against the door of the fridge, glancing at her with heavily hooded eyes.

"What? He bit out.

"What?" Amara mocked. "A girl can't say 'hi?'"

"I don't think that's why you came over here, princess,"

"You're right," Amara drawled, pressing her hands into his chest. "Just seeing if you reconsidered out pact. I'd hate to tell my mother that my options are limited."

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Her hand swirled around his nipple. Kairos suddenly felt nauseous. He peeled her hand off of him and tried to glare down at her. Unfortunately, his drunken state made it less tenacious than he wanted.

"Your options are anything but limited," he slurred. "My father told me all the High Alphas or their heirs were allowed to petition for the Alpha Consort position."

Amara hummed and placed her hand back on his chest.

She pouted slightly. “They were, but Lunerly is engaged, Thorne is boring and Maximus is otherwise occupied,” she ran her finger down the curve of his jaw. “Which means you’re my best bet, love.”

Kairos clenched his jaw. Was he really the only one left in the running for the position? Sure, Thorne had a hard on for the Queen and her daughter but Kairos highly doubted the Queen would want her daughter to be with a plain Alpha. He’d heard Lunerly was engaged to Bella but didn’t know of the merit of the rumor. Then there was Maximus who was so far up Zora’s ass she was practically spitting him out.

Fucking Zora, there she was again. He couldn’t escape her.

As soon as the picture of her hit his head, his cock stirred in his pants. Unfortunately for him, Amara noticed. She purred and dropped her hand to put one of her long nails into the line of his trousers.

“You like that idea?” she hummed in his ear. “You and me?” He found it disgusting, actually, but he was desperate for relief. From Zora and from the wet dreams of her he’d been having all week. He wrapped his hand around Amara’s wrist and looked down at her. Her lips had curled into a knowing smirk. Kairos said nothing in reply.

He yanked her away from the fridge and up to his bedroom. He slammed the door open and was happy when Petyr and Alexei weren’t in his room anymore. He didn’t need or want to explain himself to them.

As soon as he slammed the door shut, Amara’s lips were on his. She tasted like the cheap beer he supplied for the party. Her lips were rough and demanding against his. He hated it.

Zora’s would be soft, he thought without trying.

The thought made him angry. He grabbed Amara by the waist and dragged her to his bed. Her legs fell on either side of his crotch as her long nails dove their way back into his hair. He ground up against her and she moaned like a cat in heat. The sound was all wrong. He ignored it and kept going.

Amara pulled his cock out from his jeans and palmed it.

Her hands were cold and her long nails felt like razors against his skin. Still, he gritted his teeth. He thought of how Zora’s hands would feel, soft and subtle, just like her mouth. He moaned at the thought, head tossed back.

Amara giggled in reply and he was brought back out of his fantasies. It was all wrong, every bit about what he was doing felt wrong. He still grabbed onto Amara, slid her panties to the side, and jammed his cock into her without a second thought.

He had to get Zora out of his head. But she was so wonderful. Her hair and her smell and everything about her. He plowed harder into Amara's drenched cunt. She was soaking him in the way he wished to be soaked by Zora. He continued to drive into her, consumed by thoughts of Zora's red hair cascading around her like a flame as he drove into her like he was on fire.

Somewhere, in all of his fantasies, Amara climaxed. But Kairos wasn't done yet. He lifted Amara off him and spun her around so he could enter her from behind. She yelped as he did but then sunk back into her pornographic moans as he started to move his hips. It only took a few more slams of his dick and a couple of pictures of Zora in his head before his own climax hit him like a landslide. He pulled out of Amara and painted her ass with his cum before falling forward on his hands, utterly spent.

Amara chuckled and brushed her hair off her face. "So you're reinstating the pact?" she gasped from inbetween breaths.

"Get the fuck out of my room," Kairos said, solemnly.

Amara frowned. "But-"

"I said, get. The fuck. Out," Kairos gritted. "NOW!"

Amara jolted to her feet and scrambled out of the room and into the bathroom across the hall. Kairos was left alone with nothing more than his softening cock and Zora's red hair soaking his vision.

Zora

Basics the morning after my week of nightmares was, surprisingly, uneventful. Maybe it was that it was a Monday. Maybe it was that the temperatures on campus had finally dipped low enough that the first snow ghosted over the campus in a thin white blanket. Maybe it was just. that I was no longer interesting.

Regardless, people seemed to not give a shit about me as! walked into Basics with Loren. Training that morning with Thorne, Maximus and Valentin had been surprisingly uneventful as well. Aside from a few growls from Maximus when Thorne wrapped himself too close to me or a snap from Valentin as Maximus splayed me to the ground, it went well. I'd recounted my experience to Loren on the way to Basics.

"What's it like to have three Alphas fighting over you?" she sighed dreamily.

"Exhausting," I deadpanned. "Tell me about your Alpha."

Apparently, Loren and her mystery girl had a run in last night in the library. She wanted to tell me when she got back, but I'd been slumped over my books when she got in. Our time between my training and Basics was the first we'd had to talk about it.

Loren had just told me about how she was approaching the girl when we walked into Basics. I flinched as I waited for everyone to glare at me but was met with only blank half-stares. I furrowed my eyebrow and looked at Loren, who was doing the same.

We exchanged a wordless glance at each other before marching into the locker room and changing for Basics.

Something seemed...off. But neither of us could pin point what. It didn't help that all of Basics went as smooth as molasses. No snide remarks, no bitchy comments. No scoffs.

"Do you think some magically put a spell on this place to make people forget the last month?" Loren whispered to me as we walked back into the locker room after Basics.

"I don't know," I said with a shake of my head. "It wouldn't surprise me if someone randomly slipped them some magik memory potion."

Loren snorted. "Those don't exist."

I gave her a look that said "Really?" She shrugged sheepishly then looked down at her watch. "Shoot," she cursed. "I have to go to the library. I promised one of the girls in my math class I'd tutor her. I was supposed to start five minutes ago."

"Go," I said with a half laugh. Loren gave me a weak, apologetic smile before darting off into the locker room. I couldn't help but chuckle as she ran off.

I, unlike Loren, had no responsibilities until the afternoon.

I thought that a shower and a good ole PB&J was exactly what I needed at that moment. I shrugged off my training gear and left them on the bench by the showers as the steam engulfed me.

It seemed no one else had elected to shower in the locker rooms after class that day. I was the only one in the room and I took my sweet-ass time. Nathered my hair and body with all the soaps in there for communal use. When I finally turned off the shower, I smelled like roses and sunshine.

walked over to where the towels were and found the shelf completely empty. I guessed that's why no one else had showered. I poked my head out into the locker room, tentatively and looked towards the other shelf that usually held towels. Sure enough, there was one sitting there, fluffed and ready for me.

Unfortunately, that meant I had to mad dash across the locker room in only the skin I was born in. I did another sweep of the locker room. Everyone had pretty much left save for a few loners changing in the various corners of the locker room. I looked back at the towel and made a conscious decision.

My wet, bare feet slapped against the tile as I darted across the room. Water was still cascading off me as I went. I was about to grab the towel when it was snatched off the shelf by a well-manicured hand. I turned to scowl at the person attached to it when a flash blinded me.

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“What the fuck?” I hissed.

“Smile big, Smith!”

There was another flash, blinding me again.

I held my hand over my eyes to try and shield myself as my other hand went to grab for the towel. I heard a horrid cackle and froze. I knew that laugh. It was the blonde girl who chased me down the first day of classes.

My eyes slowly adjusted, and I saw her standing in front of me. She was holding a phone up, flash bearing down on my wet, cold skin. I gasped and immediately dropped my hand to cover my bare body. More cackles erupted.

“Come on, Smith!” someone else chanted. “Don’t you want to show the boys what their missing? Or are you saving yourself for Maximus?”

She said Max’s name like I used to say the name of famous celebrities. I had no time to snap back at them as the flashes sped up, I darted around the side of a locker as the laughter continued.

“I think we got it,” the blonde girl said. “Get ready for your big break, wolfless.”

I’ll show them wolfless, Mona growled in the back of my mind.

Not now! I snapped back. I turned over my shoulder to see the towel had conveniently been placed back on the shelf I originally saw it on. The laughter from the girls had faded as all three of them walked out of the locker room. Their heels clicked on the tile below them. As soon as I heard the door slam shut, I made a mad dash for the towel and wrapped it around me.

I scurried back over to where I’d put my training clothes and found them shredded. The girls must’ve clawed them when I walked away. I held up the tatters of fabric and groaned. I only had two sets of training clothes. I chucked them in the trash before going back to my locker and sliding back on the clothes I’d walked to class in. My hair hadn’t been dried properly, and I could feel my curls frizzing up behind me. I huffed and pulled it into a tight braid.

When I left the locker room, I was half assuming the girls to be standing outside, circling me in their wolf form like they'd done that first day of classes. I was relieved when they weren't and put some speed into my gait as I darted off to the cafeteria.

I expected to enter to the same kind of treatment that I had received that morning in Basics: indifference.

However, something had seemed to have happened while I was showering. The male Alphas were looking at me like I was edible. The female Alphas were looking at me with a vile disgust.

"You know," One male Alpha called to me. "If you wore a tighter outfit, those tits would look a whole lot nicer." "Fuck you," I hissed.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" The Alpha threw back.

Fucking whore."

I glared at him but he seemed unaffected. The smug smirk was still on his face. What the fuck was he talking about with my tits? I gasped as realization slammed into me at full force. The flashes. They were pictures.

The blonde girl and her lackies were taking pictures of me.

Naked.

Unfortunately, entering the main hall of the cafeteria confirmed my suspicions. All of the tables were covered in paper. There was a black and white photo on the papers.

As soon as I saw it, my stomach dropped to my ass. I slowly walked over and picked one up and there it was.

Me, only moments before, standing there like a deer in headlights, full frontal exposed.

I looked up, feeling all of the heat hit my cheeks. Tears threatened to start swelling in the corners of my eyes. The fuck was wrong with those girls?

I found all three of them sitting across the hall. Their eyes were pinned on me, giggling into their hands like they hadn't just completely exposed me like that. My eyes followed there, down to the end of the table. I figured out their motive as soon as I locked eyes with the man at the end. Fucking , Kairos.

I stormed across the cafeteria with the rage of a thousand suns coursing through me. In the back of my mind, Mona was just as angry, snarling and chomping her jaw at the air.

I slammed one of the papers down on the table in front of Kairos, sloshing the food he was eating all over the place.

Slowly, he lifted his head and I was met with the stony gold eyes I'd come to loathe.

"What the fuck!?" I screeched. "How fucking dare you?!"

"What now?" he said, lazily.

"Don't fucking 'what now' me, you dickbag!" I slammed my hand on top of the naked photo of me again. "You did this, didn't you?"

"In case you couldn't tell," Kairos said, slowly. He pushed the photo of me away from him with two fingers. "I can't get into the women's locker room."

Across from him, Petyr snickered. I turned my rage towards him. Another laugh shot up from beside Kairos. I wheeled my gaze towards its source. It was another male Alpha I'd seen hanging around Kairos. He was a second year but that was about all I knew.

"Now we know why Maximus hasn't been around us, lads," he chuckled. He tapped the photo of me, right on my chest. It was almost as if I could feel his grubby fingers on my skin. He snorted again. "Ditched us for a good pair o tits!"

I ripped the paper out from under his grasp as Petyr snickered along with him. Kairos, oddly enough, was silent. I knew he was to blame. He probably sent those girls to embarrass me just as he did on the first day of school.

"Fine," I threw at Kairos. "You fucking win. Now call them

What?" Kairos hissed in confusion. "I had nothing to do with this."

I threw my hand towards the girls at the end of the table. "

You didn't tell them to do this?*

"No," Kairos scoffed. "T would never approve of anything so crass. Petty pranks mean nothing to me."

"A prank?" I snapped. "You think this is a fucking prank?"

Kairos shrugged. "It's a classic prank. Older students fuck with younger students. Do they not do that in the human world?" The way he said "human world" was entirely mocking me. Petyr started snickering again.

At that moment, I lost it. My hand slammed onto the table, startling everyone who was sitting there. I pinned Kairos with a look so scathing, it felt like my inner flame was scorching him.

“You have been nothing but horrible since I got on this campus,” I growled. “I am fucking over it. I don’t want to be here anymore than you want me here. I put up with your nonsense. Your ‘Hunt’ or whatever the fuck the sadistic ritual you do here is. Your relentless pursuit of trying to bring me down.”

I paused to glare down at the girls at the end of the table.

Then I shifted back my gaze to Kairos.

“But, now, you’ve taken it too far,” I continued. “You’ve got the entire school on your side. You’re trying to break me in ways that are inhumane. You’ve now violated me in a way I cannot look past-”

“didn’t tell them to take the fucking pictures,” Kairos grit out between his teeth.

LIAR! Mona roared in the back of my mind. I was shocked as the words erupted from my own throat in a thrashing, bitter snarl. She’d rushed the front of my mind again and was clawing her way out of my throat. Just as she’d done when Valentin had rejected us. The control I had over my own body was fleeting.

I used what little control I did have, I used to force my gaze towards the rest of the table. All of the girls who’d taken photos of me crowded near the end, huddled around each other with wide eyes. Petyr looked like he’d seen a ghost, face white and lip trembling. I looked down and realized why as I saw the sparks of a beginning flame starting in my palms. My eyes were forced wide in shock.

Mona, I tried to reach my wolf. We need to calm down.