

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 81

I cannot! Mona paced in my forehead. I will not! The High Alpha must pay. He must learn who we are and what we can do!

No! I shouted. Not here. Not now. Later.

There is no time for later! Mona snarled. The spawn must pay. Now.

I cracked and twisted as the familiar feeling of shifting took over. I hunched over, splaying my hands on the floor of the cafeteria. They shifted quickly, forming into paws as my legs and back arched into my wolf form. There was all familiar burning sensation I felt when Mona took over.

I looked down to see my clothing falling from my wolf body in burnt tatters.

I shook once before I crouched and snarled at Kairos.

Mona's rage was all consuming, hitting me like a brick and forcing me to focus on nothing but attacking Kairos. I took two steps closer to Kairos, who was looking at me with shock and awe. Around us, students were darting away from their tables, trying to avoid my violent prescience.

"Call off the pack," I barked at Kairos down the line. He blinked at me in confusion before taking another step back.

"I didn't put them on," he snapped. "I had nothing to do with this, I swear."

"Why do you lie!?" I felt Mona take over as that phrase was thrown down the line. Then, I pounced

In a familiar dance to the last time I'd ran myself at Kairos, he shifted almost instantly into his wolf. He lurched out of the way of my snapping jaws and flung his body into a table. The students still sitting jumped up and darted away from us. Then Kairos charged me. Her tackled me to the ground and had us rolling through the cafeteria, crashing into things as we did

Finally, I managed to get the upper hand again, laying him flat on his back. He shifted back to try and force me away, but his human strength wasn't enough. My paws barred down on his shoulders as he tried to scramble away.

"Call them off," I snapped.

"Get off me, you psycho!" he threw back as he struggling.

“Do as I say and I will,” I hissed. “Admit I am of higher rank.

I am the one in charge. I am the-”

“Stand down!” A voice boomed across the cafeteria.

Both Kairos and I froze. Our heads tilted to follow the sound. Once again, my savior, Headmaster Valentin Lunerly was called. He floated into the room like he was on a cloud, eyes boring into me. The flashed with something powerful.

“Stand. Down.” He repeated, harsh and cold.

“He’s been after me since the start!” I hissed. “I’m tired of being weak. I’m tired of acting like I’m not as strong as I am!”

“As your High Alpha, I command you to stand. Down!” Valentin roared in response.

Something about his tone struck me deep in my core. I whined then slowly crumbled to the ground next to Kairos, with my head down. I wrapped my arms around my naked human form as it came back to me. My gaze was cast down, as was Kairos.

Valentin slowly strode across the cafeteria floor. His dress shoes clicked against the ground. When he finally got to where I was, he took off his cloak and draped it around my shoulders. He said nothing as he did but I could feel the anger burning off of him. He stood back up and addressed the rest of the students.

“This school is out of control,” he snapped. “Between the multitude of fights on campus, the horrible events happening at parties and now, the cruelty you are displaying to one another. I’m not sure where you all learned this behavior, but it ends. Now.”

He walked back towards the door to the cafeteria then paused. He sent one last scathing look over the crowd then locked eyes with me.

“There will be punishments for those involved,” he snapped. I felt a shiver run down my spine. Valentin’s eyes flashed once then jolted from me. “For all others, a mandatory meeting this afternoon. Do not be late.” That afternoon, I slowly spilled into the campus auditorium with the rest of the school. I’d taken Valentin’s robe back to my dorm and changed into a sweatsuit. I’d pulled the hood high over my head as I walked in so no one would notice me. I’d already heard a plethora of students cursing my existence on the walk there.

Just then, a hand darted out and yanked me out of the crowd and into the vestibule. I yelled and threw my hands up immediately but I was only meet with the stern, hard face of Maximus.

Something about his face immediately soothed me. I threw my arms around his neck and buried myself in his arms. His hands came around my back and ran down mine spine. He pulled back slightly to press his forehead to mine.

“I’ll kill him,” he said into my cheek. “I’ll kill every one of them.”

“Don’t,” yanked away from him so I could look at him in the eyes. “You didn’t seen Lunerly. He was pissed. Hell take care of it. I don’t need you expelled.”

Maximus nodded but then hardened his face as he saw something behind us. I turned and saw that Thorne had somehow found us. He wore a scowl on his face as he stormed into our hiding spot.

“The fuck are you two doing?” he hissed.

“Checking in on my protectorate,” Maximus threw back.”

Something you clearly do not possess the ability to do.”Thorne’s eyes widened, nostrils flaring as he puffed up his chest. He looked like he was about to attack Maximus so I did the only thing I knew would keep him from it. I stepped in between the two men and pressed a hand to each of their sternums. Maximus immediately relaxed.

Thorne flinched then settled a second later.

“Stop it,” I said, evenly. “The fighting is why we’re here in the first place. Just calm down and think rationally.’

“Rationally isn’t a word Maximus knows,” Thorne snapped.

“Go shove your dick back in a book, you knob,” Maximus countered. “Maybe you’d learn to be a better Knight.”

“Hard to be a good Knight when you’ve got a psychotic, feral puppyas a Protecterate-”

“Enough!” I cut through Thorne’s insult. “Jesus Christ, would you both just calm down for two seconds!?”

“I’m calm,” Maximus stated. From the look on his face, I believed it. Thorne looked like he was in between throttling both of us and fleeing entirely.

He threw a hand my direction. “Whatever,” he scoffed. He started back out of the vestibule. “Just don’t get in anymore trouble, alright?”

“I’ll try,” I called after him. Maximus chuckled lightly besides me. I pulled my hood back on top of where it slipped off my head and gave him a nod. “Come on, let’s get this over with.”

The two of us walk back into the crowd of people and funnel our way into the auditorium. It was nearly full at that point, so we managed to shuffle into a seat in the back. In the front, I spotted the back of Thorne's head sitting next to Amara. She still had the ridiculous sling around her neck. I fought the urge to roll my eyes.

Further to the front was Loren. She was standing on her feet, gnawing at her bottom lip as she looked for someone. A pang of guilt hit me as I realized it was me.

Up on the stage, a woman in a human suit and low heels walked out. She was stout and had greying hair that was wrapped up in a bun. I recognized her as someone I had seen in the Admissions building before. She tapped her throat twice then cleared it. The sound echoed through the auditorium as if she was using a microphone.

"Good afternoon," she said. "Headmaster Lunerly has gathered you all here today to address recent on-goings at Lunaton Alpha Academy. Please give him your utmost respect."

She padded down the stage stairs and took a seat in the front row with a bunch of other staff. Valentin took the stage and tapped his throat just as the woman did. "Students," his voice bounced off the silent walls of the room. "I have brought you all here to discuss what seems to be a problem with decorum."

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 82

He paced across the stage. His cloak was still missing (it was in my room – duh) so he was only clad in suit trousers and his usual jacket, a long robe. He looked frazzled, hair frizzing out of its bun. The dark circles under his shiny gold eyes felt like a warning alarm.

"What has transgressed this semester," Valentin continued. "Started as petulance and has cascaded into a sort of behavior I've never seen in my twenty years since I started at the school."

I frowned. Twenty years? How old was Valentin??

"Fights breaking out in inappropriate places," he said.

Parties in which people are becoming ludicrously intoxicated. Assault of one's fellow students. It's deplorable behavior."

A murmur grew over the crowd. I heard my name mentioned a few times. I slunk further in my seat.

Maximus grabbed my leg, trying to reassure me. It did anything but that.

“Lunaton Alpha Academy is the highest regarded

Academy among wolves,” Valentin stated. “It was founded by our Queen, the great breaker of enslavement. She, herself, has retired some of her great warriors to teach at this school. For the purpose of making the next generation of warriors.” He paused in both his speech and movement. He narrowed his eyes at the crowd. “Wolves who see themselves above others do not have the makings of a great warrior. A great warrior is selfless. A great warrior is kind. None of the actions that have makings of a great warrior. A great warrior is selfless. A great warrior is kind. None of the actions that have occurred this semester have been selfless or kind.”

Another murmur rose over the crowd. A hand shot up.

Before Valentin could even call on it, the person was on their feet and shouting at the Headmaster. I recognized it as the guy who’d been sitting with the girls and Kairos when I’d attacked him that morning.

“Great warriors are also not weak,” he snapped. A few people cheered. “Weakness must be squashed.” He slammed his fist into his palm and more people cheered.

Valentin gave him a fake smile. “Mr. Yvette,” he stated. “Has your weakness in History of Wolves subsided? Last I checked the registrar stated that you were failing that course.”

There were some chuckles as well as low “ooh”s from the crowd. The Alpha grunted before he slammed back down in his seat. Valentin resumed pacing. He glanced back out in the crowd.

“None of you wolves are ‘weak’,” he said. “You all have unique talents that will make you formidable warriors.

Even those of you who cannot shift. Or those of you who do not spar well. Or those of you with additional circumstances that some may label as ‘weakness.’”

He paused to run his tongue over his teeth.

“There are threats beyond your comprehension beyond the walls of this school,” Valentin said solemnly with the shake of his head. I knew he meant the vampires even if no one else did. “If you wish you fight for your kind, stay and focus on what matters. If not, I suggest you leave. Or ignore my suggestion and be forced like Miss Laitery, Miss Jones and Miss McSilver.”

Another murmur rose up from the crowd. The names sounded vaguely familiar. It must’ve been the three girls who’d taken the photos of me. A pang of guilt hit me: It was quickly countered by Mona.

It's what they deserved, she said softly. It was the first time she'd spoken since that morning. I nodded to myself in agreement.

"This session is dismissed," Valentin said from the stage. "I will not be holding another."

The entire auditorium rose and started to vacate the room. I stayed glued to my seat until Maximus hoisted me up. I felt as though Alpha Academy was turning more on its head with each day I was enrolled.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 83

It was only a week later when I realized I had to fight Kairos, again

Petyr had been the one to tell me about the day of the second fight. He came right up to our table one morning and looked me dead in the eye before announcing the second fight would take place on the following Saturday.---

There was a sliver of fear in his gaze that I didn't act on.

But Mona clocked it and refused to let it go. She reminded me of it every day leading up to the fight and was doing the same as I changed before the fight.

I tightened the laces on the training shoes before I tied them, shoving the ends in the side as Max had taught me.

He said there was nothing worse than losing a fight because you tripped. Mona was giving me my daily pep talk. This time, she'd put more "oomph" into it.

—and we've been training for a while, she continued as I focused back in. We've put in the work to act against our weaknesses. We know Moonraiser's weaknesses too. Plus, we know from the other Alpha that he is afraid.

I tried to not roll my eyes before replying. I know, I know, I reassured her. I'm not nervous, weirdly enough.

Nothing to be nervous of, she said with a swish of her tail.

We will win.

Being overly confident is a choice, one I'd make again,

That time, I did roll my eyes at her. I stood up and brushed myself off. The locker room was eerily quiet. As soon as I stepped into the hallways that separated me from the gym, I heard the hum of the crowd. I took one last, final breath before I pushed the doors open and was met with the madness of the fight.

If possible, the gym seemed to be more full than the first time. The crowd murmured with a gentle hum as I emerged. When they realized it was me, their voices turned into “boo”s of varying degrees. I walked with my head high to the center of the gym, ignoring the way their faces were twisted at me in anger.

When I got to the sparring mat, I noticed the set up was different than it was before. Kairos wasn't there yet.

Furthermore, Maximus was not standing next to him. My personal trainer, and knight, was standing across the mat.

Thorne was still on Kairos's side, a shock to no one.

Standing in the middle was Petyr. I got up to the sparring mat and took my place next to him. His eyes cast sideways at me before facing back forwards.

Then, the doors to the men's locker room opened and Kairos came out. The crowd roared with excitement for him. The cheers and claps soared far higher than my “boo” s could reach. However, Kairos's normal scowl wasn't in place. Instead, his lips were set in a thin line, shoulders hunched up by his ears. He looked tense. Because he knows we've been training, Mona chimed in. I nodded to myself. Her comments about Petyr finally didn't seem so ridiculous. Kairos walked up to the mat and stood on the opposite side of Petyr that I was standing on.

He, too, shot me a sideways glance before facing back forward. Petyr raised a hand and the crowd's yelling dulled down instantly. jobnib-com

“The rules are as follows,” Petyr stated, repeating Thorne at the first fight. “Best two out of three fights. Winner will be announced by myself. Kairos won the first fight.”

The roar of the crowd picked up again. Petyr waited slightly before lifting a hand again. The crowd died back down.

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

Then that was it. We turned to face one another and the dropped into our own defensive stances. I noticed that kairos held his hands lower than I did. His face was completely uncovered. I cataloged that to be used later, once I'd worn him down.

This time, I didn't bother looking out into the crowd for Valentin or Loren. I could sense Valentin's aura by way of our not-bond, bond. Loren I saw when I was walking up to the mat. She was currently behind me with her sister, gnawing at her fingers much like the first fight.

I focused back on Petyr. He stepped up and looked at both Kairos and I for reassurance before raising his hand then dropping it rapidly as he shouted. "Begin!"

Immediately, Kairos was swinging.

I let him nail one out of every three punches while blocking the other two. I had to give him the illusion that I hadn't changed. I was still weak in his mind and I needed to be. After receiving a few jabs to the gut, I heard Mona growl.

Enough, she snarled. Show him the real you. The true Alpha.

I waited for him to strike again before acting. As his fist was about to collide with me, I spun out of its range.

Kairos was immediately shocked. I swiveled again, swinging my arm as I went. My elbow collided with the middle of his back, and he jolted forward. The entire crowd grew quiet as they realized, I may actually win this.

Less thinking! More doing! Mona chimed.

So, I did exactly that.

turned back to face Kairos and swung at him. He seemed to still be caught up on my last hit as the next one hit. I slashed him across the face, and he jerked back again. I waited for him to combat it, but he just stared at me with wide eyes. I threw another punch then another. He just accepted them, blank stare still on his face.

"Fight me back!" I roared, It sounded more like Mona than me.

Another punch another jab to his chest. I swung my arm and slashed at him with my claws. He swatted at my wrist to keep it from hitting him, but refused to strike back. If he doesn't want to hit me back, I should end this, I thought to myself.

I threw one, two, three jabs then used my foot as he was blocking the last jab to sweep his feet out from under him.

He fell back on the mat with a thud, shaking the stage that we were fighting on. Gasps echoed through the crowd and I ignored them, pouncing on Kairos.

I wrapped my bicep around his head, dragging him into a chokehold. His hands immediately dug into my bicep but I ignored them for the burning inside of me. I twisted my arms, putting more pressure onto his neck. I wanted to stop the blood from getting to his brain, knock him out.

But I also was okay with ripping his head. clean off.

I struggled, straining my muscles as every fiber of my being tried to get Kairos to back down. I felt tears shredding through my shoulders, a burning pain lighting up my back. I was reaching the edge of what I was capable of.

My body was strained to no end. Just as I was about to give up, I felt it. Kairos had gone limp in my arms.

I'd won.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 84

Kairos

The black out as Zora pressed into his carotid artery and cut the blood to his brain was the most peace Kairos felt during the fight.

The fight had started off fine. Zora had gone out then he had. The rush of the crowd cheering his name fueled the excitement within him. He'd never tell anybody, but he was slightly nervous at the beginning. Between his persistent, annoying thoughts about Zora and the fact that she'd been training with both Maximus and the Headmaster, Kairos had a pit in his stomach.

It didn't help that when he walked out, he saw her standing there looking like that.

Clearly, the additional training had helped her. Her legs were not only toned, but vibrating with muscle. In the thin strip of skin between her shirt and leggings, he could see the indents of her abdominal muscles. She looked like a true Alpha up there, chin tipped high.

Then, there was her stupid fucking hair. Part of Kairos thought maybe someone had told her how her curls drove him wild. He quickly realized he'd never vocalized that to anyone and it was mere coincidence. He still wanted to curse her to high heavens when he saw that she'd left her curls out. He swore, as he got up to the mat, he could smell her on the other side of Petyr. All of that aside, he started the fight well. It felt similarly to how their first fight started. Zora was quick to block but wasn't fast enough to counter every attack. The third time his fist collided with her cheek, it broke skin, sending blood pooling down her pale face and into the collar of her shirt. The sight made his stomach turn over.

What the fuck is wrong with me? He thought to himself.

He shook the disgust out of his head and tried to sail. another punch into her. He caught her twice in the ribs but the third one, she flinched out of his reach. He was so shocked with how fast she moved, he didn't have time to adjust as her elbow came down to his ribs hard enough to knock the wind out of him.

He stuttered as he tried to regain his composure. Luckily for him, Zora gave him a second to reset. He blinked to try and will his pain to subside. He rolled his shoulder once, then he heard it. There it was, in the background. A gentle hum that he wouldn't have picked up on unless he was looking for it. Asking for it.

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

His eyes as he turned back to face Zora. The sound increased and his heart seemed to swell eight sizes, threatening to burst out of his chest. He opened his mouth to speak but couldn't get anything out.

Then, she charged.

He blocked jab after punch after cross. The punches were strong, though not enough to take him off guard if he wasn't as disoriented as he was. It didn't help that each time her hands touched him, it felt like she was shocking him from his head down to his toes. All he could do was shove her away. When she roared at him then came flying at him with her claws, he swatted her away as if she was a fly.

He couldn't bring himself to hurt her.

But she would surely hurt him.

She swiped his feet out from under him and wrapped his arms around his head. His entire body felt like it was on fire. The electricity coursing through him was unlike anything he'd ever felt before. An innate desire to not hurt Zora. Not even when her arms wrapped tight enough that he felt his breath slipping away slowly.

So when he finally succumbed to her hold, he felt peace for the first time since he'd gotten into the gym.

It was suddenly ruined as he jolted back awake to a hoarse throat and the same confusion he'd had before he passed out. It took him a second to figure out that he was in the infirmary. The shrill beeping off the machine hooked into him was making his throbbing head worse. He grunted as he sat up, ripping the machine from his arm. It buzzed wildly as he stumbled out of the bed.

He discarded the nonsensical robe they'd put him in before shifting and bolting into the hallway as a nurse decided to come check on him. She gasped but made no effort to stop the auburn wolf as it ran down the hall to the exit. He burst into the night and made his way back to his house. The entire time, his mind was running itself haggard.

There was no fucking way in hell that Zora Smith was his fated mate.

Firstly, she was unlike him in every way possible. She was soft, not hardened from years of grueling training. She was wise and kind which were two things that Kairos did not

think of himself. She was pure and powerful and all things that just screamed “good.” Kairos had just broken out of the infirmary and was about two seconds away from shredding the nearest classmate to a pulp.

Second, she was Thorne’s fated mate. Wolves weren’t supposed to get a second mate while their other fated mate was still alive. Maybe it was different because Thorne was the one that Zora had rejected? Kairos didn’t pay enough attention in class to know. But he knew a wolf was not supposed to have two.

Which brought him to point three: Zora Smith was already sleeping with Maximus Wolfham. The thought made him snarl mid sprint, causing the student walking by him to flinch away with a yelp.

It didn’t change that fact that Zora was still fucking someone else. Someone else who’d been very vocal about the fact that she was his fated mate. If point two made

any sense then his interactions tonight with Zora made no sense.

His head thudded harder as he skidded to a stop in front of his house. He shifted back, unphased by his nudity as he knew the rest of campus was probably asleep at that point. He pushed the door of his house in and walked up to his room.

He slammed the door shut, probably waking his roommates but at that point, he didn’t give a fuck. His head felt like it’d melted and the only thing he could focus on was fucking Zora Smith. Specifically, the cut on her cheek that he had put there.

He’d hurt her before that. Physically and emotionally. If she was truly his fated mate, he didn’t know if he’d ever get to consummate the bond. Zora loathed him and for good reason. He didn’t know if he could apologize. If it would mean anything in the grand scheme of their relationship.

He threw himself into his bed and pressed his hand against his forehead. The headache was finally subsiding but the rest of him ached. Not in a way where he’d worked out too hard or over exerted himself but in a wanting kind of way. He wanted his fated mate.

He wanted fucking Zora Smith.

That night, Kairos stayed up all night. He worked through every possible scenario as he tried to figure how he’d win her back. He may not end up with her, but he’d be remised if he didn’t at least try.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 85

Zora

I almost couldn't believe my eyes as they carted Kairos off the gym mat. Neither could anyone else in the gym. They were silent, save for a few murmurs that rolled off the walls and into my ears.

My fellow classmates were bored by the fight. Or they said they thought Kairos held back. I couldn't disagree with that one. It was like he'd been stunned. He just stared at me as I threw punches at him. Then I choked him out like it was nothing. As I continued to watch Kairos's Lifeless body move out of the gym, the crowd dissipated into nothing. The only people left were Maximus, Loren, Valentin and I.

Loren launched herself at me and wrapped me in a hug, buzzing with excitement. "You did it!" she cried. "You really did it!"

I held her back so I could look her in the eye. I gave her a smug smirk. "I did, huh?"

"There's still one more challenge," came Maximus's voice.

He walked up and looked me in the eye. "It could be anyone's. We have to train harder."

"Jeez," I scoffed. "Couldn't be happy about my win for a second?"

It was a half a joke but I could tell by Maximus's face that it was not a joke to him. Valentin cleared his throat, causing Maximus to step to myself so we could address our headmaster. He walked up onto the stage and pinned me with his gaze.

"Though I still think this is idiotic," Valentin mused. "I can't say I'm not impressed. Everything you've been doing on the side has culminated."

I couldn't help the blush that spread over my cheeks."

Thank you," I said, softly. I felt Maximus step closer to me.

His arm went around me and curled into my hip, fingers pressing into my skin possessively.

"Still think my methods are 'unethical'?" he grit out from behind me. I furrowed my eyebrow in confusion and looked at Valentin. As always, his face was set in an emotionless trace.

"Highly," Valentin replied, a bit of grit in his voice as well. "They're untraditional and could kill someone in practice.

But Miss Smith seems to have used them to her liking."

"Unethical?" I said towards Maximus. He ignored me still gazing towards Valentin.

“So you agree, she should be taught them,” Max said.

“Not in our sessions, she shouldn’t,” Valentin said back, quickly.

“If the threat-” Maximus glanced sideways at Loren. He was talking about the vampires. “-is as deadly as it is, why wouldn’t she be taught to kill?”

Loren’s face fell. “What threat?”

“The school is facing a slight breach of borders,” Valentin said quickly. “Nothing for you to worry about.”

“But Max is worried,” Loren gestured to Maximus, standing next to me like the Iron Giant. She turned to catch my eye. “Are you being threatened?”

I gave her a shrug. “Nothing more than usual.”

“It is more than usual,” Max said, sternly. “Which is exactly why we should be training for battles of life and not stupid sparring matches.”

Valentin narrowed his eyes at Maximus. “Are you saying my methods are wrong?”

Maximus took a step towards Valentin. “I’m saying they’re not right for this situation.”

“Careful, Wolfham,” Valentin snapped. “Need I remind you I’m your Headmaster?”

“For a semester more,” Maximus hissed. “Then you and I are equals. Better get used to treating me like it.”

At that point, both men were snarling at each other, almost close enough where Maximus could take Valentin’s skull and break it over his knee. I immediately panicked and shoved myself between them with my hands up. From the corner of my eye, I caught Loren’s eyes blow wide.

“Okay, okay,” I said. “How about I decide how I train? Given that it is my life and all.”

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 86

Valentin looked down at me. I watched his eyes trail over my face and down to my hands. He lingered there before noticing how close my ass was to Maximus’s crotch. His nostrils flared slightly before he stepped back. His hand went to his mouth as he turned around. Finally, he looked back at the three of us and sighed.

“How I train Miss Smith is up to me on my time,” he said, sounding exhausted. “How you train her in your own time is up to you.”

With that he turned on his heel and walked away from us.

I stepped towards him to protest but was yanked back by Maximus. He pinned me to the front of him as Valentin left the gym, door slamming behind him. My heart ached.

I whirled around and glared at Maximus. “What the fuck was that?”

Maximus looked down at me and shrugged. I pierced him with my eyes. Loren laughed nervous behind Maximus.

She waved slightly at me.

“I’ll meet you back at the room,” she mumbled. “You guys clearly have something to talk about.”

On that note, she skittered out of the empty gym and shifted into her wolf form as she broke into a sprint across the dark campus. Then it was only Maximus and I in the gym. I thought about the last time we were alone in the gym and heat flushed my face. Maximus seemed

unphased and looked back at me with those deep gold eyes.

“What the fuck was that?” I repeated, softer this time.

“Lunery called me into his office a week ago,” Maximus stated. “After that business with Amara’s rumors. Asked if I’d been training you. I said yes. He told me it was ‘unwise’ and ‘unethical’ to train you in such a way. I told him he was going to get you killed. Then I left.”

“Jesus,” I hissed under my breath, pinching the bridge of my nose. I dropped my hand back to slap against my thigh. “You’re going to get yourself expelled.”

“Better me expelled than you dead,” Maximus said back, quickly. I narrowed my eyes at him, and he raised an eyebrow in response. “Now is it my turn to ask what the fuck was that?”

I stiffened. “What was what?”

Maximus gave me a pointed look. It was one that sent a shiver down my spine. He took a step closer to me, causing my chin to tip up to look him in the eye.

“Are you fucking him?” he whispered.

“No,” I said, evenly.

Maximus leered closer. “Do you want to?”

I slammed my mouth shut and that was all it took for him to slink away from me. I almost reached out for him but stopped when he turned around. His broad was facing me for a second as he heaved a breath then he whirled back around to face me.

“Why are you even with me?”

“What?” I said, my voice small.

“Like what are we doing?” Maximus continued. “I think you’re my fated mate, no – I know you are. But you were looking at him like he was about to climb your bones. Do you feel nothing for me?”

“I told you,” I started. “I do. But | – I feel a similar way for Valentin. I feel whole with him.”

Maximus jerked back. I felt like I’d been stabbed in the chest. He looked like he’d been. He shook his head before starting out of the gym.

“Max, please,” I called after him.

He paused, glancing over his shoulder at me. “You have until the end of the semester to decide,” he said. It reminded me of how he spoke to me the first time we’d met. He lifted his gaze to look me in the eye.

“I won’t be second. Not even to the Headmaster.”

With that, he stormed off.

I didn’t see Maximus again until we had training with Valentin. He kept his distance, sitting away from myself and Loren at lunch and barely acknowledging me in our classes. Yet, he was an ever-present figure in my life. I’d catch him looming during Basics or walking behind me as I went home from dinners. He wasn’t gone, he just wasn’t near.

It actually shocked me to see he’d come to training the following Monday evening. Thorne was there as well. He stood begrudgingly; arms crossed over his chest like there was anywhere he’d rather be. Maximus held a similar stance, eyes shifting back and forth between Valentin and like a hawk.

The headmaster looked as he usually did, completely unphased by anything either of the younger Alphas were doing. He stood with his hands behind his back and watched as I tackled Thorne to the ground. The two of us landed on the mat and immediately got up to pin one of my knees into the center of Thorne’s chest.

He grunted, trying to throw me off with his arms. I sunk one claw into the mat near his hand, pinning his arm down to the ground by the sleeve of his shirt. My other hand

wrapped around his wrist and held it at an awkward angle behind his head. I had him pinned.

“Good,” Valentin commented. “Blythwitch, tap out.”

“Not yet,” Thorne panted. He jerked his hand that dtrapped under my claw. “I can – [think _”

“I said tap out, Blythwitch,” Valentin said, more commanding this time.

Thorne continued to struggle under me. He yanked once more, and the fabric of his sleeve started to rip.

Unfortunately, my claw was also right there. If he pulled his hand up, the razor-sharp edge of my nails woudt shred through his skin. He yanked again.

“Thorne, don’t!” I cried out.

But it was too late. Thorne yanked his arm free of my grasp. At the same time, my claw slide over his skin like a hot knife through butter. Thorne roared in pain and I dropped his second hand. He bucked me off of him, I landed to the right with a thud. I felt the blood from his arm dripping down my hand as my claws retracted into my human fingers.

Thorne sat up, hand immediately slamming down on his forearm in attempts to stop the blood from pooling out of him. I jerked my head away from the sight, stomach curling in on itself.

“Fuck!” Thorne yelled. “Why isn’t it healing?!”

I almost threw out my neck, snapping it back towards Thorne. I’d been around enough injured Alphas to know that his skin was supposed to be starting to knit back together. Or at least, not bleeding as much. But the blood soaking the gym mat was still pouring out of him and his skin was still saggy and limp above the blood.

“Gods be damned,” Valentin groaned. “Wolfham! Take Blythwitch to the infirmary. Tell the nurse it’s a mate wound.”

My blood sunk from my face as I looked at Maximus. His entire face had hardened as well when he realized what Valentin was saying. He rushed Thorne, yanking the other Alpha to his feet, before slinging Thorne’s non-hurt arm around his neck. He gimped with Thorne, still holding his insanely bloody arm, out of the gym.

Once the door slammed shut, Valentin heaved another sigh. He looked at the disaster on the gym mat as if it was the floor that a puppy had peed on. He waved his hand at it and slowly, the mat turned from its deep red back to the dark blue it was supposed to be. The

marks where my claws had stabbed into it had woven themselves back together. It was as if we'd never been there.

"I always thought there was some sort of cleaning lady," I said. I turned towards Valentin. "Turns out, it's just you."

Valentin snorted a half a laugh before running a hand through his hair. He looked towards me with another blank expression. His face had a softness to it that it didn't have when Maximus and Thorne were around. But under his eyes were deep, dark circles that told me he wasn't getting any sleep.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 87

"It's just me," he said softly. "Only me."

I tugged my lower lip into my mouth as pondered that. It sounded like he was lonely. I ached to touch him, to bring him to me and tell him that he didn't need to be lonely. He had me. I dug my teeth further into my lip before I finally spoke.

"I feel like I know nothing about you," I said, gently prodding.

"Give that I am your Headmaster, I'd like it to stay that way he said. It had none of the spice that his threats/ taunts of being the Headmaster had when he used them against the boys.

"You're not just my headmaster," I whispered. Valentin jerked his gaze to meet mine. I tugged my lip back in my mouth and shrugged.

"You're also my mother's friend and fellow war hero," I clarified. "If you're as much my family as my mother claims, it's weird I don't know anything about you."

Valentin hummed. He walked over to sit down on the bench next to the locker room. I followed him and stopped before the bench, hands crossed over my chest. He sighed again and shoved his long ash-brown hair off his forehead. He turned towards me.

"What do you want to know?" Everything.

I shrugged again. "Do you have siblings?"

"No," Valentin shook his head. "I was an only child."

I stepped closer. "And your parents?"

"Couldn't tell you," he murmured. "I don't have many memories of my childhood. Probably for a good reason."

They weren't very happy."

I hummed and sunk down on the bench next to him. He seemed far more like a person than a wolf at that moment. His hair was all messy, shoved off his face haphazardly. His sleeves were pushed up to his elbows, tie undone at bit at the top. The vest he usually wore under his robes was buttoned a bit. He looked younger like that. Like he wasn't war ravaged and tormented.

He looked beautiful.

"How did you befriend my mother?" I asked.

Valentin snorted. "That's a good question," he said. "I don't know if I ever actually did. She and Za-your aunt, I met them when we were kids."

He shifted, as if uncomfortable. Then, a small smile spread across his face.

"One of the only memories I have of my childhood is of two girls with fiery red hair amongst the drab garments they vampires made us wear. They had this glow about them. They walked right up to me and declared we were friends," He stopped to snort another laugh. "I figured being with them was better than being alone. So, that was it. We grew up in the castle together."

"My mother's castle?" I asked, eyebrows knit together."

How did she have that castle if the vampires were in charge?"

Valentin gave me a smirk that lit my insides up and sent a jolt into my low belly. He hummed then looked back at the Floor.

"Not paying attention in histories I see,"

"Professor Highman speaks so slow-"

"I know, I know," Valentin assured. "I suppose I could give you a quick lesson."

I pulled my legs up to cross in front of me on the bench. "

Please do."

"Alright," Valentin sucked in a gust of air. "Wolves existed peacefully with vampires. It wasn't until the first millennia that they decided to take the wolves as slaves.

They ran us dry, kicked us out of our homes and used Dark Magiks to stop our powers from reaching their full potentials. The vampires took the Luna Castle. In exchange, they

enslaved everyone in the castle. That included all the orphaned children of the wolves they'd killed. Which was me, your aunt and your mother. It was how we met..."

Valentin

A Year Prior to the Great War

Valentin heard the crack of the whip before he felt the stinging in his back. It was enough to cause him to slam his eyes shut as he waited for the burning pain to lick up his spine and into his brain. It happened a few seconds after the noise hit his ears and he cringed. A grunt escaped his lips which made the wielder of the whip cackle in response.

"Faster boy!" A male voice called over his shoulder. "I don't have all day!"

Valentin grit his teeth as he bent down to unload another suitcase from the carriage. He felt the blood dripping down his back and into the unfinished hem of his trousers.

He tried to not focus on the pain as he pulled the last case out. He loaded them all on a dolly and pushed them into the vestibule.

The man with the whip followed after him like a hawk.

When they finally made their way inside the castle, he huffed, annoyed beyond words.

"Renault," he sneered. "You really must be harsher with them. This one took the longest amount of time to unload my things. My servants would have had it done in mere minutes." Valentin looked up and saw the man was glaring at his back. He turned around and noticed another man was waltzing down the grand steps of the castle to meet his companion. It was the same man who'd plagued Valentin's nightmares for the last twenty years.

He was pale as a ghost, with pulsing red eyes narrowed under white eyelashes. He had jet black hair that curled slightly at his jaw line. His thin lips were curved into a smirk as he looked between Valentin and the house guest.

On his feet were a pair of delicate shoes, swirled with silver stitching. His jacket and trousers had similar threads. The collar of his shirt, a stark white that glowed against his skin, was high and ended right under the bottoms of his pointed ears. As he descended the stairs, he seemed to float across them.

"Now, now, Francois," he said. "Valentin is my most loyal servant. He's earned the respect from all the castle as well as my guests. I demand he be treated as such."

Francois, the man with the whip, curled his lips into a snarl before glaring at Valentin. "He's still a mutt," he snapped. "You know as well as I do that they need to be tamed to be kept in line."

Renault hummed. He gave his guest a bored look. “Don’t tell me how to command my house and I won’t tell you how to command yours,” he said. He looked back at Valentin. His tone was still bored. “Is your back okay?”

Valentin didn’t bother to speak. He nodded once eventhough it stung like the high heavens and the blood had reached his ankles by that point. Renault hummed again.

Then, he casually threw a hand towards Valentin.

It was if all the energy in the room had shot into Valentin’s brain. He grunted as he tried to stop from keeling over.

The liquid pooling by his feet shot back up and into the wound that the house guest had made. He felt his skin stitch back together as the Dark Magiks that Renault commanded worked. Then, the energy dissipated, and he was left feeling the way he’d felt before Francois had attacked him.

“There” Renault said as he regarded his guest. He narrowed his eyes at Francois. “Don’t make me have to do that again.”

Francois seemed to become more pale, if possible. He ducked his head as he spoke. “Yes, Your Highness.”

“Valentin,” Renault said to his servant. His tone was apathetic again. “Please bring Duke du Pont’s things to his room. While you’re in the East Wing, please check on Aveline. Remind her that dinner is to be served in an hour.”

Valentin nodded, bowing his head deep, before he yanked the dolly towards the eastern wing of the Castle. As he pushed the luggage along, he was met with several tapestries, all with various depictions of battles. The one thing that was the same amongst them all; there always was a pale, human-looking creature in silver and a large, wolf in gold. They were on opposite sides of the battle,snarling at one another.

Valentin sighed and shoved his dolly farther into the cavern.

He hadn’t been alive when the vampires enslaved the wolves, but he’d heard a great number of stories from the elders. The vampires and wolves used to co-exist with minimal conflicts. It wasn’t until a few hundred years ago that the vampires decided to ruin that by enslaving the wolves. They tapped into the Dark Magiks of the ancient times and used those forces to limit the wolves’ natural powers.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 88

It was how he ended up schlepping some asshole’s luggage across a castle that used to be owned by the wolves. His parents had, apparently, been killed off when an uprising that

had been squashed. He'd never known them and lived the first twenty years of his life parentless. Yet, he was not alone.

After he dropped off the luggage, he walked down the hall to an ornate silver door. He rapped gently on the door and waited for someone to call him in before he pushed it open and entered the room.

Inside, was another pale woman with the same red eyes as Renault. Her hair, however, was as white as her skin. It was woven up on top of her head into intricate plaits and folds. She was standing on a small stage, holding a corset to her chest as two other women laced her into it. She lifted her head and gave Valentin a soft smile.

"Hello Valentin," she said gently. At the mention of his name, the two other women lifted their heads. Both wore massive grins on their faces.

"Val!" One of the women called. She dropped the laces of the corset and ran into him. Her puffy red curls tickled his nose as she wrapped her arms around him. He left out a soft "oof" as she slammed into him. He laughed gently and returned her hug.

"Hey Tori," he replied. He looked up across the room at the other woman. She had the same bright red hair as the other woman. Her's, however, was straight as a wire. It flowed down her back in sleek strands, hitting in the middle of her back. Her features were softer than her sister's. As she made eye contact with Valentin, a blush warmed up on her cheeks. She quickly looked back towards the corset she was doing up.

"Victoria," the pale woman drawled. "Please help your sister. I believe Valentin is here to tell me I'm going to be late to dinner with our guests."

"I am," Valentin agreed, stepping into the room and ushering Victoria back to the pale woman. She went willingly, darting across the room. When she got back to the pale woman, she sighed.

"Miss Aveline," she started. "Promise me you'll bring up the treatment of wolves tonight? I know you read through my proposal."

"I did," The pale woman, Aveline, said. She jolted slightly as Victoria tightened her corset, shoving her chest high and proud. "I will bring it up to Francois and Renault. I know it means a lot to you. But I cannot promise anything."

Victoria beamed. "Thank you so much," she said, voice cracking with emotions. "It will mean so much to the wolves too. Especially the ones under Mr. Francois's command. I've heard horror stories from the Wolfham Manor."

"Aye, me as well," Aveline agreed. She shifted her gaze to Valentin.

"Was he kind to you?"

Valentin rubbed the back of his neck. “Kind is not how I would describe him,”

Victoria’s sister immediately dropped her laces and stared at Valentin, wide eyed and afraid. “Val,” she started, lip trembling. “They didn’t-”

“I’m fine, Zahara,” he stated. “Any pain he caused was healed by Master Renault.”

Zahara nodded slightly then went back to her laces.

Valentin didn’t miss the way the color returned to her cheeks. The sisters finished lacing Aveline’s corset then pulled a deep red dress out from the wardrobe. They had Aveline step into it and shimmied it up her shoulders. All the stitching on the dress was the same as Renaults; a shiny silver that caught in the light.

“You look lovely, Miss Aveline,” Valentin stated. “Master Renault will be pleased.”

“Thank you, Valentin,” Aveline shook the skirt of the dress out. Zahara ran to the front and smoothed the skirt.

Victoria stood back with her hands on her hips.

“We do good work, sister,” she said.

“I do good work,” Zahara emphasized, still smoothing Aveline’s dress. “You mess about until the last minute.” “Girls, girls, please,” Aveline hushed them. “I don’t have time for this today.”

Instantly Zahara and Victoria froze. Valentin knew that Aveline’s patience was low. He also knew what would happen to the girls if they tried to push her. They both shrunk away from their Mistress and into the back of the room. Aveline walked towards Valentin and grabbed him by the bicep.

“Escort me to dinner,” she half-asked, half-demanded.

Valentin immediately extended his arm to her. He turned over his shoulder to see Victoria and Zahara both still had cast their heads down. Aveline squeezed his bicep and he turned back to her. She gave him a soft smile that made his skin crawl.

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 89

Valentin

A Year Prior to the Great War

They silently walked down the hall and into the castle.

Aveline's long fingernails pressed into Valentin's exposed skin, making the hair on the back of his neck stand up. It was a warning not to do anything stupid. He took it seriously.

"So," Aveline finally said, as if it wasn't as if she was holding a dagger to his throat. "I saw the way Zahara reacted to you. I think it's safe to say she has feelings for you."

Valentin swallowed thickly. "She may have them," he choked out. "But you know this castle isn't kind to wolves who take an interest in other wolves."

"It's not," she agreed. She tilted her head in thought. "Though I believe Renatus may be able to be swayed to pair you together. For the procreation laws, you know."

Of course, he knew the laws. The twisted, sick ones that stated females had to birth a child as a duty to the vampires. Furthermore, a child from the male of the vampire's choosing. Nothing was done for the wolves' desires or wants. It was a way for them to continue making new slaves and control the wolves. Otherwise, wolves were forbidden to mate in the castle. He wondered if it were a trick. Would Aveline really ask Renatus to make a special case for Valentin? He'd never done so before.

But also, he'd never had a servant as loyal as Valentin.

"Perhaps," Valentin mumbled as they reached the grand dining room. Aveline loosened her grip on his arm before leaving it entirely. She floated across the floor towards a seat at the head of the table.

Valentin quickly pulled her chair out for her. She fell into it as if she were a flower petal. He bowed deeply to her then turned to leave to go back to his duty at the entrance of the castle. Her hand whipped out and grabbed his wrist.

He felt her nails pierce his skin, ever so lightly. He looked down at her, terrified of what she was going to say or do next.

"Do stay for service," she hummed

"-I have to make sure the gates are guarded," Valentin stuttered. "It's my role and I-"

"Hush, hush," Aveline cooed. "I'm sure they'll manage. I'd love to have you stay."

Valentin had no other choice but to nod. A passerby would've thought she meant him to take a place at the table. Valentin knew better. He went back to stand against the wall with another wolf. Valentin thought his name was Thanatos but didn't know him well enough to be certain. They both stood, facing the table as they heard the approaching voices of their Master and his guest.

Renatus and Francois walked into the room with hushed, hurried whispers. When they noticed Aveline, they immediately changed tone. Francois held his arms out to her.

“Aveline, mon cherie!” he cried. “Ça va?”

Aveline laughed and pressed a kiss to both of his cheeks.

Ça va bien, Francois,” she cooed in response. “Et tu? Ton voyage, c’est bien?”

“Qui, cherie,” Francois replied. “Come, come. Your mate has prepared us an excellent feast.”

Valentin took a slow breath as they all sat down. He knew what came next. His heart started to beat rapidly in his chest as they brought out the first girl. She was not a wolf, but a young human with bright blue eyes and honey colored hair. Her expression was blank as she moved towards Renatus. He curled a hand around the front of her throat and brought her to his mouth.

Valentin slammed his eyes shut as Renatus pierced the side of her neck with his fangs. She whimpered, then there was the steady trickle of liquid as her blood filled the three massive chalices in front of Renatus. As Valentin opened his eyes, Renatus was licking a line up the side of her throat to clot her blood.

The bleeding stopped and the girl stood up, still dazed.

Renatus gave her a light tap on the hip and she trotted back off the way she came. Then, he flicked his wrist and two of the chalices spun towards Aveline and Francois.

“It’s a young blood,” he commented. “Aged fourteen years.

Full bodied. Hints of honey. Pure, just as you like them, Francois.”

Francois grabbed his glass in the air and tipped it towards Renatus in cheers before bringing it to his lips. Valentin’s stomach rolled as he watched the thick red liquid be consumed by Francois. A drop of it spilled down the side of Francois’s throat and Valentin had to resist the urge to vomit.

For the rest of the dinner, Valentin paid attention to their conversation. Vampire politics were boring to him, but he kept note of all the weaknesses he could find. He hoped one day, he could use them against the vampires. As long as he was a slave, however, they stayed unused in the back of his mind.

Francois slammed his empty chalice on the table to signal he was done with his meal. Valentin rushed forwards and collected it. He watched as the wolf next to him collected Renatus and Aveline’s glasses. Renatus then waved his hand. He smirked at Francois.

“How about some dessert, Francois?”

Francois mirrored his expression. He gestured to Aveline. “Only if the lady doesn’t mind,”

Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 90

“I’ll be indulging as well,” Aveline purred.

Valentin sucked in another breath. He was hoping they wouldn’t but he knew most guests tended to enjoy Renatus’s famous “dessert.” He waved his hand again. This time, instead of a young girl, three female wolves emerged. The first two went and perched themselves on the side of Aveline and Francois chairs. Immediately, the two vampires began rubbing their faces into the side of the women’s necks.

The third female had bright red hair and soft, angelic features. Valentin’s stomach dropped as he realized it was Zahara. His heart pounded out of his chest. He didn’t know she’d been Renatus’s latest obsession. He thought she was safe, confined to the walls of Aveline’s chambers as her waiting maid.

Zahara was just as surprised to see Valentin as she dropped into Renatus’s lap. Her beautiful, honeyed eyes blew wide, cheeks turning beat red as Renatus nuzzled himself into her neck. Valentin stood by, helplessly, watching as Renatus opened his mouth enough to nick the side of her neck. She whimpered in pain.

“Valentin,” Renatus called across the table. Valentin’s heart threatened to burst through his ribcage as Renatus lifted his head to glance at him. “Come here, boy.”

Valentin shuffled across the floor, stiff as a board. He came to a stop in front of Renatus, who was collecting Zahara’s blood on his finger. He shoved it towards Valentin’s mouth.

“Taste,” he demanded.

Valentin swallowed thickly before opening his mouth. His tongue felt like sandpaper. Slowly, Renatus dipped his finger into Valentin’s mouth, coating the insides of it with Zahara’s blood. The acrid, metal taste lit up every bit of Valentin’s sense, causing him to gag slightly.

Renatus tutted slightly and used his finger to push Valentin’s jaw shut. “Now, now,” he murmured. “Swallow and savor the taste as it’s the most of her you’ll ever have.”

Valentin did as he told, fighting against the lurch of his stomach in disgust. Renatus tipped his gaze up to hold Valentin’s. His red eyes were the same color as Aveline’s dress, as the liquid that was sliding down Zahara’s shivering neck. His gaze was hard, demanding.

“I heard rumors, you know,” Renatus mocked. “That you and her both felt something for one another. I thought it to be ghastly. My two most loyal servants, having impure thoughts about one another? They must have been wrong.”

Renatus turned back to Zahara. He swiped his hand up the side of her neck, collecting the blood that held there. It smeared across Zahara's skin as she whimpered. Renatus brought his hand to his lips and darted his tongue out. He hummed in ecstasy then turned back to Valentin. He dropped his voice and glared into Valentin's eyes.

"I do not take kind to those trying to take what is mine," he snapped. His face softened. "But, you are, again, my most loyal servant. So, I have gifted you with a taste."

Then, his face twisted into a sinister smirk. Valentin watched as his bloody hand trailed down the front of Zahara, dipping in the valley between her breasts and slipping under her skirts. Zahara gasped as he did. Her face flushed more and she bit on her lip to muffle any noises. Renatus leaned forward and brought his bloodied lips to Valentin's ear.

"It's too bad she tastes better down here."

Valentin shook with rage as Renatus pulled back. His hand was still working under Zahara's skirts. She looked at Valentin with her wide, pleading eyes. He kept his gaze fixed on Renatus, fury lashing through him.

"Go," Renatus finally snapped. "Leave us to enjoy ourselves, alone."

The irrational part of Valentin wanted to stay. He wanted to take Renatus's wrist and snap it then shove it down his throat. But Valentin knew that would lead to Zahara being hurt. So, he stood up straight and ran out of the dining room.

He didn't stop until he reached his bed chamber, deep within the bowels of the castle. He threw the door open, lungs burning with the fire of a thousand suns. As he stepped in his room, Victoria looked up from where she was sitting on her own bed. Her face dropped as she noticed Valentin. Immediately, she was on her feet.

"What's wrong?"

"Zahara - he -" Valentin panted. Victoria's eyes went hard.

"What about Zahara?" she snapped

"She's his - his plaything," he cried.

Victoria went still. "No," she breathed. "She can't be. She told me she was taking extra shifts in the kitchen. She - no. No!"

"We have to get out of here," Valentin said, manic. He grabbed Victoria by the shoulders and shook her. "We have to get out. Now."

Victoria shook her head, fervently. "It's no use," she whispered. "They'll kill us. They'll kill us and throw our bodies at her feet to hurt her more."

“We can’t live like this anymore!” Valentin roared. “Our magiks are repressed. Our people are tortured. Our women are assaulted.”

“What do you want to do?” Victoria scoffed. “Start a revolution?”

Valentin dropped his hands to his sides and pinned Victoria with a look. “That,” he said. “Is exactly what I want to do.”

Valentin

Two Years Into the Great War

Valentin Lunerly, his surname reclaimed, watched as the table of councilmembers entered the dimly lit chamber.

They were nearly silent as they sat in their seats, made of haphazardly cut stone. The shadows were cast on their faces in a way that made the hollows of their faces look even worse. They looked like a room full of ghosts, trapped in the dilapidated mess that used to be the Luna Castle.

Seated at the head, looking more gaunt than the rest, was Victoria Luna. Her long, red curls were shorn short.

Draped around her shoulders was a thick fur. She looked both decrepit and regal all at once. She pressed her palms into the stone table in front of her and pushed herself up.

“We’re losing the war,”

The entire council was silent amongst the flicker of flame that lit the place up. Not even Thanatos Blythwitch, who always had something to say, spoke. The crackle of fire was the only thing that answered Victoria. The rest of the room was silent. Victoria’s hand shook slightly on the table. Valentin watched as she curled it into a fist.

“Our efforts to find a weapon,” she murmured. “Have been futile.” Again, nothing.

“Though we may have broken their hold on us,” she continued, still low. “We cannot match the skills they’ve spent centuries honing.”

“So we train,” Valentin cut in. Victoria darted her eyes towards him, her chin kept straight. Valentin cleared his throat and rose.

“Moonraiser has been adept at training those of us who go into battle,” he said. He motioned towards Atlas Moonraiser, a hulking behemoth of a wolf sitting on the other end of the table. “We can prioritize it. Train any wolf past the age of thirteen to shift, to fight, to-”

“How are we supposed to train them to shift, when we can’t even control our shifts ourselves?”

Valentin looked down the table. Sitting next to Atlas was Leo Wolfham. A thick bulging scar bisected his right eye.

It looked as if it’d recently healed. The eye underneath it was a sparkling piece of citrine that had been carved to fit right in his eye socket. It shimmered as he looked down at Valentin and Victoria.

“Wolfham is right,” Victoria said, gently. “It is hard to teach what we do not know of ourselves.”

“Then we learn,” Valentin’s voice rose, shocking half of the council and making the other half raise their eyebrows. He jerked his head to look at Victoria. He grabbed her shaking fist from the table and squeezed. “We cannot give up,” he hissed, under his breath. “This war isn’t just us. It’s for entire kind.”

“Yet our entire kind will not fight,” Wolfham commented.

He spun a dagger between his fingers, lazily. Valentin’s lips set in a hard line. Wolfham raised an eyebrow. “What was the number of the resistance most recently?”

“Ten thousand and some odd ones,” Blythwitch murmured across the table. Wolfham gestured to him with the hand not toying with the weapon.

“Ten thousand,” Wolfham stated. “Ten thousand of the hundred thousand wolves that exist in the Western hemisphere. More beyond that. And yet only a fraction of that train with us. Fight with us. Do you happen to wonder why?”

“Because they’re complicit,” Valentin sputtered. “They don’t know how good life can be for them. They’re stuck thinking things are okay and improving because the vampires see the error of their ways. As soon as the war’s over they’ll regress. Things will never improve for us if we don’t fight-”

“They do not fight because they are afraid,” Wolfham snapped, cutting Valentin off. There was a beat of fire crackling as the men glared at each other. “They do not know a world without vampire rule. They do not know a world in which they can control the powers the Ancient ones have given them. They do not know freedom. And thus, they are afraid of it.”