

# Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 91

“We can convince them,” Valentin said, stern. “We can show them the shift. Show them how our bodies were meant to be-”

“Val,” Victoria warned, low enough that only Valentin could hear it. He ignored her and tossed a hand towards Moonraiser.

“Atlas!” he cried. “You have a young boy. Not yet one year of age. Don’t you wish him to shift? To know life devoid of chains?”

Moonraiser grunted before looked at Valentin. “I’d be a fool not to,” he grumbled. “But that doesn’t change that our forces are small and weak. We can barely defend the walls of this castle let alone the land outside of it.”

“Thanatos,” Valentin pleaded at the man across the table. ”

We cannot give up. Not now.”

Blythwitch looked up at Valentin and shook his head before averting his gaze. “I’d rather my son be alive in chains then dead because we tried to break them.”

“Gods be damned!” Valentin roared.

Valentin slammed his fist against the stone table, causing it to crack down the middle. Everyone jolted. Moonraiser shoved his chair back and was on his feet in a second, snarling down the middle of the table. Wolfham looked as though he was about to stab his blade into Valentin’s head. Even Blythwitch had startled.

“That is enough!” Victoria snarled. Her hand wrapped around Valentin’s bicep and yanked him away from the table. She dragged him out of the room as she called over her shoulder. “Meeting adjourned!”

Then, she pulled him down the hallway and shoved him into the lift at the base of the castle. Her fingers pressed into the worn-down buttons and the doors slammed closed. Slowly, the lift jolted then began to rise.

Victoria whirled on Valentin. “The fuck is wrong with you!?” she hissed. “Causing a ruckus at the council meeting? I’ve never seen you so unhinged!”

“They’re giving up!” Valentin snapped. “They can’t give up.

We’re so far. We’ve reclaimed the castle – your family’s castle – and we have the high ground. It’d be a death wish to surrender now!”

“And it’s a death wish to keep going with no warriors,” Victoria snarled back. “Our warriors are weak and untrained. Our wolves are ticking time bombs of ancient magiks. We have nothing left to give, Val. Why can’t you see that?”

“Because I refuse to give up,” he said, lifting his chin in pride. “We started this war. We will not give up on it.”

“Right,” Victoria crossed her arms over her chest. “But we will be the ones to lose it. Then all of their blood, all of their children’s blood, will be on your hands.” Victoria glared up at him, urging him to go against her.

Yet, he held his ground. Valentin still held his head high as he dropped his voice low and threatening

“Then let me paint my hands red.”

Victoria glared at him for another moment before the lift dinged, signaling it’s destination had been met. The doors creaked open. Victoria shoved Valentin in the center of the chest, forcing him out and into the hall. She still snarled at him like a feral beast.

“Tell Zahara you’re trying to get us killed,” she snapped, one last time before the doors slammed shut and the lift continued to rise.

Valentin roared in anger and threw his fist into the wall besides the lift. The stone shattered in the same way the table did, deep in the depths of the castle. Yet the way the light hit it made it seem so much worse above ground. He let out a huff before he turned and sulked down the hall.

When he got to the third door on the right, he knocked twice before shoving the ornate door open. From inside, a delicious smell of lamb and fresh herbs hit his nostrils.

His mouth watered as his stomach gurgled. He was unsure the last time he had eaten.

Standing at the hob was Zahara Luna. Valentin stopped to stare at her for a moment. Her long, straight red hair was as beautiful as ever, even wrapped up into the chignon she wore as she cooked. Her features had hardened with war and age. They were still softer than Victoria’s yet sharper at the jaw and nose than they’d been when they started the rebellion.

She had her hand over a pot, lazily drawing a circle with her finger. Inside, there was a big wooden spoon that was following in the same pattern as her finger. Zahara had come to love the lower magiks once she’d been freed. She tended to use them every chance she could get. Her head tilted and she made eye contact with Valentin. She smiled softly.

“Hello, love,” she murmured.

Valentin said nothing as he strode across the room. He wrapped his arms around her waist and buried his nose into the crook between her neck and shoulder. He sucked in her scent, honeysuckle and basil and let it cool the fire in his soul from the council meeting. His eyes fluttered shut and a familiar, low thrum began to pulse in his ears.

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

“Bad meeting?” Zahara murmured, still stirring.

“Beyond bad,” Valentin pressed a kiss to the side of her neck then released his hold on her waist. “We’re losing.” “I’m shocked,” Zahara deadpanned. “As if the dwindling supplies haven’t been apparent.”

Valentin tooked into the pot of stew. “And yet we’re having lamb?”

“Only because I hunted it myself,”

Valentin sighed and pieched the brim of his nose. “Zahara, I told you I don’t like you going outside the castle-”

” was only in the woods to the south. There were patrols the entire time I was outside-”

“It doesn’t matter. We saw vampires congregating in the south. I refuse to let you be hurt-”

“Valentin,” Zahara turned and pressed her hand against his chest.

Instantly, he was soothed. She looked up at her with her honey gold eyes shining in the low evening light. She held his gaze for a moment before pressing up on her toes and gently bringing their lips together.

A swell of electricity emerged from their touch and descended Valentin’s body. It both soothed and invigorated him. His hand went up to cup the back to Zahara’s head and deepen the kiss. She smiled against his mouth and pulled away. She looked back up at him with wide eyes.

“I can take care of myself,” she whispered. “Trust me.” “I trust you,” Valentin nuzzled their foreheads together. I

just don’t trust anyone else.”

“Well, you should,” Zahara pulled away to stir the stew once more. She grabbed two bowls from a shelf and served some in both as she murmured. “Being a Luna has its benefits.”

“And what about a Luna mate?” Valentin joked.

Zahara rolled her eyes as she turned to hand him his bowl.

She watched as he held the spoon to his nose and sniffed, steam and herbs wafting into his nose. Slowly, she reached out and pulled the end of his hair.

S'getting long," She mumbled.

"Haven't had time to trim it," Valentin said back before pushed the spoon into his mouth. It burned in the best way.

Zahara shook her head. "Don't," she said. "I like it. It's nice."

Valentin smiled as he drew another spoonful. He paused and dropped it before leaning down to capture Zahara's lips with his again. He smiled into her, and she returned it.

"Anything for you, Alpha Consort Lunerly," he murmured.

Zahara broke into a wide grin and wrapped his arms around his neck before going in for a deeper kiss. Valentin instead put the soup to the side on the counter and wrapped his arms around the waist of his fated mate. He opened his mouth so she could devour him more. He was about ready to forgo food again when there was a slamming on the door.

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"Fucking hells," Valentin hissed, slowly untangling himself from his mate. She pouted as he did. He pressed one final kiss to her cheek before going to the door. He swung it open and was greeted with none other than his sister-in-law.

"Come to admonish me again, sister?" He drawled.

"No," Victoria shoved herself into their home. She looked at her sister. "Pack a bag. You're leaving."

"What?" Zahara squeaked. "Why?"

Victoria brought her bottom lip in between her teeth before she looked back at Valentin.

"They're coming," she said.

All at once, Valentin's world collapsed.

"How do you know?" Valentin hissed as he threw on his armor.

He heard Zahara scrambling through the bedroom, shoving random articles of clothing and several worn photographs into a sack. There were a few curses and clatters as she tore through their stuff, trying to find their valuables.

“Informant,” Victoria was pacing in their living space. ”

Confirmed by the watch. Cluster of dark magiks and shadows has gathered a few kilometers east of the lake.””The lake?! Shit,” Valentin cursed. He pulled one armored boot up his leg. “That can’t be more than an hour west.”

“Precisely,” Victoria confirmed. “We think they’re planning to strike just as the sun sets. The first wave will be a distraction, sacrificing the vampires in front to the last of the sun before the entire hoard attacks.”

“Half our forces are trying to take back Wolfham Manor right now,” Valentin hissed. “We have little to no one stationed here.”

“Trust me, I know,” Victoria said. “Moonraiser has already given me an earful. It’s exactly why she’s leaving.”

Valentin turned to see Zahara standing behind him. He immediately rushed forwards and took his face in his hands. He gently pressed a kiss to her forehead. He turned back to his mate’s sister.

“Where are you having her go that’s safe?”

“Across the sea,” Victoria stood foreword and wrapped her own arms around Zahara. “There are packs there that will take her.”

“I’ll - I’ll stay!” Zahara protested.

“I know a lot of low healing magiks. I can help!”

“The fuck you will,” Victoria snapped, dropping her arms.” You’re getting the Hells out of here and staying put until we come get you.”

“I can’t just leave!” Zahara cried.”Love, please,” Valentin begged, hands going back to her face. “It’ll be worse if you’re here. We won’t be focused on the fight but rather on where you are.”

“This is absurd!” She replied. Thick tears were beginning to stream down her face. “You can’t go. You can’t!”

“I’ll come back for you,” Valentin said. “I promise.”

“Don’t break that promise, Valentin,” Zahara threatened.

Her hands had dug into the front of his under shirt, just under the gleaming gold plate of his armor. She shook her head. "Don't make me a widow."

"I promise, Zahara,"

Valentin kissed her fully on the mouth, once more, feeling the salty tears mixing with her tongue and making her taste sour. He pulled back to press their foreheads together. He felt her shaking under him. Slowly, he let go.

He knew that if he held on any longer, he'd never leave.

"There will be a maid here to get you to the transport," Victoria said, already striding to the door.

"Go with her," Valentin instructed.

"Val!" Zahara cried. "Please don't."

"I have to, baby," he said. "For us. All of us."

"Be ready at the hour!" Victoria called.

"Val, please," Zahara pleaded. "Go with the maid, love. Please," Valentin begged.

"I love you," Zahara whispered.

Valentin nodded.

"Until my bones are broken and my soul is lost,"

With that, he left his mate in his home and strode down the hall, ready for battle.

Valentin

Two Years Into the Great War

By the time the sun was low in the sky, the wolves were ready. They all stood at the gates of the castle in formation, waiting for their surprise to crest over the darkened hill. Those who could control their shift stood in their wolf forms at the front. They were snarling, dripping with drool as they pawed at the ground. The rest of the wolves were behind them in their gold armor. The sun was radiating off the metal, sending rainbows into the sky.

Standing in the middle, head-to-toe in gold, was Victoria.

Her rowdy red curls were plaited back off her face and tucked under a helm. The shoulders of her armor were equipped with extra daggered, drenched in sunlight to make their blades more lethal to the vampires.

To her right was Valentin. He was cloaked in his own armor, hair pulled back off his face save more one ash-brown strand that moved in the wind. In his hand was a sunlight blade, crafted by those wolves with the highest affinity for the magiks. It weighed heavy in his hand.

Despite himself, he kept looking over his shoulder, as if Zahara were going to spring from the castle and launch herself into battle.

“Look ahead!” Moonraiser called from a top a tower behind the rest of the foot soldiers. “Dark cloud coming in at true north!”

Sure enough, a dark cloud of movement was hurling through the sky at them. It skittered and faulted, jerking slightly before cresting over the hill and barrelling towards the gates of the castle.

“Incoming!” Moonraiser bellowed. “Brace!”

The dark cloud suddenly evaporated, leaving a cluster of pale, red-eyed humanoids sprinting towards the gates at breakneck pace. Valentin wrapped his hand harder around his weapon and brought it up, dropping into the defensive stance that Moonraiser had taught him.

The vampires reached the gate and took it down in one swoop. Then, the wolves charged. It was a clash of silver and gold as bodies and wolves went flying across the area beyond the gates. Valentin managed to slice clean through one vampire’s neck, sending his head flying.

The next vampire to approach him, however, moved too close to the sunlight streaming in from west. As he tried to grab Valentin, the sun caught him. He shriveled to dust at Valentin’s feet, leaving him without an enemy.

Valentin immediately glanced next to him to see if anyone else needed help. Though it seemed all the vampires had stepped into the low light of the setting sun. Each had shriveled into a burned pile of dust at the wolves’s feet.

One by one, they all ran into the sun until none were left.

Valentin jerked around to survey the area. He spotted Blythwitch across the field. He made eye contact with the other wolf. “That it?” Blythwitch mumbled.

The all waited, the timer of the sun ticking as it curled behind the tree line. They were only shrouded in darkness for a moment before the second wave hit. Those vampires were stronger.

They flew out of the trees beyond the smashed gate like bird and landed atop several of the wolves in the front.

With a simple twist of their hands, they snapped the necks of the wolves, leaving them to fall to the ground in a mass of fur and blood.

Valentin did the best to hold his own. He grounded several vampires that came at him and only got a few scratches in response. But it felt like he had been fighting forever. Every time he thought he'd have a second to breath, another vampire came snarling and snapping towards him or Victoria. He pushed himself hard, wielding the sword more like a battering ram than a knife.

Unfortunately for him, it just wasn't effective.

He slashed at one vampire trying to claw it's way up her back when a pain so violent burn through his skull like a hot arrow.

His sword fell to the ground, hands grabbing his pulsing head as he keeled over. He screamed as the fire exploded in his brain and wrapped itself over his entire body. It felt like something was snapping him in two. As the pain finally subsided, he realized.

Zahra.

"Victoria!" he roared, scrambling to his feet and grabbing his sword. "VICTORIA!"

He locked eyes with the queen as she stabbed through a vampire. Instantly, her shoulders fell. He couldn't hear her but he knew what she was saying from her lips.

"No,"

She darted towards the side of the castle and Valentin took off after her. The two fought through straggling vampires as they burst through the trees of the south forest. All the while, Valentin's heart was hammering in his chest. His mantra flowing through his head like a prayer.

Please be alive. Please be alive. Live. Just live!

Victoria skidded to a stop in front of him and Valentin slammed into her back. The two tumbled to the ground in a mess of gold and limbs. Valentin's head was still pounding as he looked off to see what had made Victoria falter.

In the distance, he could make out a carriage, tipped on its side. The horse at the front was limp, blood pooling underneath it. To the side of the carriage were two people.

The one's hands were limp and pale white. The other had long, dark hair that cascaded down the back of its silver armor. It looked like the armored person was trying to cradle the limp person but Valentin knew better.

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“Get off her!” he screamed, voice going hoarse.

He scrambled to his feet and ran towards the two people.

The armored person threw a hand up and Valentin was airborne with dark magik. He flew backwards and landed in the dirt with a thud. His vision went blurry as he tried to sit back up. The image in front of him would be burned in his mind for the rest of his life.

Renault was hunched over Zahara's pale body, wiping the blood from his mouth. Zahara's eyes were open, staring into a void of nothingness as her chest heaved in short, shallow pulses. Besides him, Victoria was wailing hysterically. Valentin tried to rush Renault again.

“I’LL FUCKING KILL YOU!”

“I’d like to see you try,” Renault purred as he lifted his hand again, sending Valentin clattered backwards once again. He licked the rest of the blood off his lower lip and pierced Valentin with his red eyes.

“She always was the sweetest,” he whispered. “But you know that.”

Valentin struggled to his feet again and brought the sword into his hands. He looked to see Renault had dropped Zahara to the floor. Her honey gold eyes were lifeless as they looked off into nothing. Valentin's breathing stutter then he was rushing Renault again. He raised his sword and went to bring it down onto Renault's head.

The vampire caught it in one hand as if it were made of wood. A sizzle of smoke rose from his hand where he was holding the sword, but he was otherwise unphased. He yanked the sword forewards and Valentin tumbled towards the ground.

“I’m becoming bored very quickly, Valentin,” he mused

“Why?!” Valentin cried from the ground. His face was wet but he was unaware he had been crying. “Why, you fucking monster!? Why her!?”

“Why her?” Renault snarled, turning back to leer down at Valentin. “Need I remind you how you started this fucking sad excuse for a war?”

He stepped forward and pressed his foot into Valentin’s sternum. The wolf cried out at the weight of it pressing into his chest. He felt like a tree had landed in the middle of him. He scrambled, desperate to get out from under the vampire.

“You take what is mine,” Renault hissed. “I take what is yours. It is the only way for you to understand how serious I am.”

Valentin continued to scramble under Renault. His claws came out of his hands like knives. He tried swiping at the vampire’s skin but it was no use. It was not only porcelain in color but in strength. Meanwhile, Renault was still pressing the entirety of his weight into Valentin’s chest. “It’s a pity, truly, that you thought to revolt,” Renault snarled. “You had always been my most loyal servant.”

He slammed his foot harder into Valentin and the air escaped from his lungs. He continued to try and claw through Renault but was getting nowhere. Slowly, his vision was fading into darkness as all the oxygen was crushed out of his lungs. He closed his eyes, resigned to see Zahara again when there was a bright flash of light.

Immediately, the weight was gone. The indent in his chest was still making it hard to breathe but he was able to suck in enough air to turn his head towards the ray of light. He squinted to get his eyes to refocus then gasped when he saw her.

Victoria was shrouded in sunlight. It was emanating from her as if she was the sun herself. Her skin glowed, free of any clothing as she moved closer and closer to her enemy.

Her eyes had completely blown out and were impaling rays into Renault, pinning him to the side of the castle.

He scrambled to get himself out of the rays, but his back was glued to the wall. All of his white skin was smoking as if he was being burned. He snarled and clawed at Victoria as she approached.

“You -fucking - cunt!”

“The wolves will be enslaved no longer,” Victoria said.

Except, it wasn’t Victoria’s voice. It was an ephemeral echo that seemed to echo across the forest. Valentin thought he was going crazy and blinked at her when she spoke again.

“Nature requires balance,” Victoria’s sunned body spoke.

You have been in charge for far too long, Renault Saint Claire. That ends now.”

“You can’t – kill me!” Renault snapped. “I am the – King of Vampires!”

Victoria twisted her wristed and a ball of sunlight formed in her palm. She raised it up and watched as Renault’s eyes blew wide in fear. She smirked slightly at him.

“A King must be destroyed by a Queen,” she drawled.”

That, of which, lam.”

On that note, she hurled the ball of light at Renault. His strangled cries grew louder as the sunlight swelled so large, Valentin slammed his eyes shut to keep from blinding himself. Then, it was silent. The light died down as a hand pressed to the side of his face. He opened his eyes slowly and saw the familiar crown of unruly red curls. Victoria smiled down at him.

“Is it over?” he choked out.

“He’s gone,” Victoria said softly. “It’s over.”

Zora

Present

I sat staring at Valentin for a moment when he finished. I sniffled slightly, unaware I was crying. My hand came up to wipe my tears from my cheeks.

“Wow,” was all I could think so say.

“Yeah,” Valentin murmured. He shifted slightly where he was sitting. He seemed to have become more disheveled as he told the story. His hair was a mess by the end, tie completely off and discarded. I could tell he didn’t want to recount it. But I was grateful he did.

“So, my aunt,” I said, gently. “She was...?”

“Gone, yes,” Valentin replied. “She’d been drained by Renatus.”

I hummed. “And my father?”

“I don’t know,” Valentin said. “One day after the war, your mother had come to me. She told me that she was with child. I asked her with whom and she told me it was during a celebration. She couldn’t even tell me the wolf’s name.”

So I was a child of a one night stand. Made sense in my long line of trauma. I gnawed at my lip. Valentin sighed deeply, through his nose. His eyes flutter shut.”She told me it was her,” Valentin whispered. “That Zahara’s soul had come back in the form of Victoria’s

child. I refused to acknowledge it for a while. While we may live among ancient magiks, something like reincarnation was beyond my realm to belief.”

He opened his eyes and turned to face me. His deep gold gaze pierced into me and warmed me from my heart outwards. My lips parted slightly, and I watched his eyes dart down to them.

“Then, I met you,” he continued. “And you are so much like your mother. Fierce and tenacious. But you are also Zahara in the deepest of your beings. She wanted to help, always wanted to help others. That goodness, I feel it deep within you.”

“You do?” I squeaked.

Valentin nodded. “Whatever part of her that I thought was gone, now sits inside you, Zora,” he reached out tentatively and grabbed my hand. He snorted, humorlessly. “It makes sense that I feel the way I do when I’m around you. You’re every bit of my first mated that I loved.”

My heart stilled in my chest. I ached with the desire to throw myself at him and ravage him on the floor of the gym. It certainly wouldn’t be my first time. Instead, I slowly pulled my hand away from his and back into my lap. He jerked his head towards me with a frown.

“What?” “Then why won’t you be with me?” I said. I almost cringed at how terribly needy I sounded.

“I just told you why,” Valentin said, sharp enough to cut me deep but not with enough emotion that he seemed uncontrolled. “I loved Zahara. What did that get me other than losing her? I won’t bring myself to love you. I must protect you. From this world and myself.”

I stood up abruptly. I glared down at him. “That’s bullshit and you know it!”

“It’s not,” Valentin said, emotionless once again. “Look at what your mother did. She sent you to live without our people for eighteen whole years. There is nothing we won’t do to keep you safe.”

“But what about my happiness?” | threw back. “Did either of you ever consider that?”

Valentin ducked his head to his chest. His hands were squeezed into tight fists on top of one another. His eyes slammed shut again and he spoke as if he were in pain.

“How can you be happy if you are dead?”

At that point, I'd had enough. I turned on my heel and marched into the locker room. Valentin didn't bother to come after me. He knew I would've run away from him anyways. When I got to my locker, I slammed my fist into it in frustration.

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I dented the thing beyond repair and the huffed when I realized I couldn't get my coat. I slammed my fist into it one more time and wrangled my long winter jacket out of it. I shrugged it on and immediately left the locker room.

I pushed out into the center quad of the campus as white flurries descended from the sky. It was my first snow at Alpha Academy. I looked up and watched as the snowflakes drifted down from the midnight blue sky and into my face. They kissed my eyelashes before melting into my burning hot skin.

I sucked in a deep breath then blew it out slowly. The campus was peacefully quiet. Nothing about it seemed like the place that had made me miserable over the past few months. In fact, the buildings seemed to hold me like a hug, surrounding me and warming me. It was like a reminder that I was home. This was my home.

No one was going to take it from me again.

I padded out across the center park of campus. When I got to the middle, amongst several bare, skinny trees, I looked up. The snow was coming more rapidly now, though not enough to make me want to leave it. Each flake felt like it was cooling the burning growing inside me. I let my eyes close once again as I smelled the deep mahogany of the trees surrounding me.

"Smith," I pried one eye open to see who'd call me. Immediately my stomach dropped. Kairos was standing ten feet away from me. His hands were in the pockets of his carpenter's jacket. His facial hair was growing out, leaving him with a light five o'clock shadow. His eyes didn't hold any of the malice they usually did. He looked soft. Yet, I was still on edge.

"What?" I said plainly.

Kairos said nothing, taking a step forward before looking up into the sky at the snow. "I haven't seen much of this," he mused. "Moonraiser Keep is much farther south. We tend to just get rain."

His hand came out to gently catch a snowflake. It immediately melted in his palm. He smirked. "S'kinda nice."

I blinked at him. There was no way in fucking hell he was trying to make small talk with me. I licked the front of my lips then locked eyes with him.

“What do you want, Kairos?”

He seemed to flinch as I said his name. Then, immediately, his features were soft again. He quirked his head to the side. “Can we talk?”

“We don’t do talking,” I snapped. “We fight. And last! checked, the next one wasn’t until the new semester. So, buh-bye.” I went to walk past him and to go back to my dorm when his arm shot out and grabbed my forearm. I immediately shook him off me and glared at him. But his eyes were still that sort brilliant yellow.

“We don’t have to,” He said, barely above a whisper. “Fight that is.”

I blinked at him again. This was a new fun tactic. I raised an eyebrow. “What are you calling it off?”

“I can,” he said.

narrowed my eyes at him. None of this sat right with me.

All semester he’d been a total dick. Now he was giving up the fight for the name of peace? Because of some pretty snow? Yeah, hell-the-fuck-no.

“Don’t be a wuss, Moonraiser,” I threw at him. Then I turned around and started to walk towards my dorm. “I’ll see you next semester.”

I kept walking and didn’t turn around until I got to my dorm building. When I looked back across campus, I could see a single person standing where I was in the park. His head was tipped back, eyes watching as the snowflakes spiraled down to stick to the ground.

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I got back to my room around midnight and tried my best to be quiet when I walked in. It was all for nothing as I looked over and saw Loren wasn’t in her bed. I frowned and flicked on the light, allowing me to not stumble around like a bull in a China shop.

I pulled off my coat and flopping into my bed leisurely. I was still slick with sweat from training. Yet my mind felt like it was under water.

Between all the things that Valentin had told me and then Kairos seemingly trying to make nice with me, my head was a battlefield. I darted back and forth between thoughts of my mother and Valentin losing Zahara to trying to figure out what Kairos would gain from getting on my good side.

None of it made sense.

Why did Renault attack Zahara? Did Kairos think I was stupid? Valentin must've left out the part where he and Victoria killed Aveline. That soft look in Kairos's eyes was so human and so unlike him. Did Valentin still have feelings for Zahara?

I slammed my hands over my eyes and bashed my palms into my eye sockets. I groaned and let them slap back down on my quilt. It appeared my night was going to be filled with horrible thoughts. I got out of bed and walked to the bathroom. When I got back, Loren was still gone.

I furrowed my eyebrows at her perfectly made bed then looked at the clock. It was almost one in the morning.

Even on nights when she stayed out late studying, she was always home by one. I towed off my hair, worry creasing in my skin, before changing and getting in bed.

The next morning, Loren wasn't in bed when I woke up.

Maybe she's just with a friend, the rational part of my brain tried.

You are the small Moonbeam girl's friend, Mona replied. I rolled my eyes.

Not helping, I said back.

Mona then huffed at me before trotting off in the back of my mind. Honestly, it helped that she was worried too.

Normally, I'd let it slide but something about this time felt different. Loren never stayed away for long and a whole day was bordering on too much. I gnawed on my lip as I got dressed for the morning.

I went through a whole morning of classes without my spark of white, blonde hair popping up. By lunch, I was losing it. Maximus even stopped by to check on me. He stood next to the table, frowning.

"No Moonbeam?"

I shook my head. "I didn't see her last night either. Is it bad that I'm worried?"

"No," Maximus said. "It's normal. I'll ask Petyr if Alessia has heard from her."

I nodded at him then watched him walk over to sit with Petyr and Kairos. Kairos seemed shocked at his boldness.

Maximus hadn't sat with the others in months. Not since he started training me. I half expected Kairos to lunge and attack Maximus but he did nothing. He tilted his head back to his meal and jabbed at it with his fork.

By the time I got back to my room, I was in full blown panic.

The panic bloomed inside of me as I noticed a piece of paper sticking out of my door. I rushed forward and snatched it before barricading myself in my room. As I peeled back the followed sheet, my panic rose.

Tonight after the sun sets. Come alone to the western forest or more blood will be spilled.

It was sign with a burgundy, wet heart.

“Fuck,” I hissed. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Calm down, Mona instructed. We need to think rationally.

“Rationally?!” I said to the no one around me. “My best friend is missing – captive! – and I’m supposed to remain calm?!”

The blood is a threat, Zora, she spat. Going there will get us killed. We should consult the High Alpha-“Valentin isn’t going to be fast enough,” I cut her off. “It’s almost four. Sun sets in less than an hour. I have to go now.”

Zora-

I didn’t listen to the rest of what Mona had to say. I threw my back on the floor and burst out of my room. I turned to run down the stairs and ran smack into Maximus. He barely moved as I collided with him while I felt like I’d run into a wall.

“Where are you going?” he stated as if it were as casual as iftt were raining.

“Loren, she-”

“Is at her parents, Zora,” Maximus cut me off. “Alessia said she meant to leave a note and forgot.”

narrowed my eyes at him. I couldn’t tell if he was lying or not. If anyone was lying or not. All knew was I had to try and save her.

“Oh,” I replied. “That’s a relief.”

“Agreed,” Maximus said. “I heard it directly from Alessia.

There’s nothing to be worried about. So where are you going?”

Fuck.

“Hungry,” My hands flew to my stomach. Maximus raised an eyebrow What are you doing!? Mona growled behind me. He could. be useful!

Or he could get us in even more trouble, I threw back. The note said alone.

“I can walk you to dinner,” Max tried and went to turn around.

“No!” I said, quickly. I cleared my throat then stood back up and gave him a soft smile. “No thank you is what I mean.”

Maximus’s lips curled into a snarl. “You’re seeing him, huh?”

“What?” I snapped. “No, I-”

“Whatever,” Maximus snarled. “Just know my timeline still stands. End of the semester.”

He turned on his heel and marched down the hall to his room. I had to fight myself to not roll my eyes. Men were so predictable.

Focus! Mona snapped. The sun has nearly set.

I nodded to myself then bolted down the stairs and out of the dorm. I tried to walk as casually as possible across campus but there was an urgency in my step that never had. A few students gave me weird looks but as soon as I was into the forest, beyond the tree line, I was alone.

I immediately shifted, trying not to burn through my clothing as my emotion took over. I thought most of it survived as I shook out my coat. Then, I was in full search mode. I tipped my nose to the ground and sniffed at it.

There were woodsy smells then something so metallic and acidic, it almost burned my nose.

Blood.

Follow that! Mona barked. I took off, nose to the ground, paws peddling along. I don’t know how long as was facing the ground. Finally, I came to a puddle of bright red liquid.

I looked up and was horrified to see a person hanging from the trees. I shifted back immediately, tearing through my jacket and leaving the cold winter air to hit my arms.

“Loren?” I whispered.

“Guess again.”

I whipped around to see who it was and immediately was slammed in the head. Darkness consumed me as I heard maniacally laughter.

## Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 96

Kairos

The Day Before

Kairos watched as Zora walked away from him. He huffed a sigh before mumbling to himself.

“That could’ve gone better,

He turned away as Zora got farther from him. He’d meant it, what he told her about the snow. He figured sharing something personal like that would humanize him more.

But he was left alone, nothing changed between them.

The last challenge was still on the calendar.

He really, really did not want to fight her again.

Everything about her was becoming mesmerizing to him.

The way she spoke to the way she moved and – Gods help him – the way she said his name.

Kairos Moonraiser never liked his name. It was an old Greek name that had been passed down across generations. His father had one too. It meant something like “perfect moment” and he thought it was utter bullshit.

But when she said his name, it was like he’d never heard anything as wonderful.

Zora made him like the parts of himself that he hated. His name. His anger. Somehow, she twisted it and made it useful to her and that made him happy. He was so fucked, so utterly fucked. She had to be his fated mate. No woman (or man) had ever made him feel the way she did. And she hadn’t even touched him.

He ran a hand over his face. Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement. Immediately he whipped around with a growl.

Not ten meters from him was Amara. Her hood was pulled over her head but he could tell it was her from how tall she was along with the bright right red of her nails coming out from under her sleeve.

He watched her move through the shadows, across campus. She hadn't noticed him, despite the noise that erupted from his throat. He tracked her with his eyes to the edge of the forest line, then watched her disappear into the trees.

His eyebrows wrinkled in confusion.

It was nearly one in the morning. The fact that he caught Zora so late made sense. He knew she was training and watched her leave the gym. But Amara didn't train. Nor did she study. So, what the fuck was she doing?

Kairos thought about following her but decided against it.

Knowing Amara, she was probably going to blow a first year in the opening where they taught shifting. He shivered in thought and walked back to his house.

The next day, at lunch, Kairos was stunned for the second time in twenty-four hours when Maximus came over to their table.

Maximus had all but abandoned his friends the last few months. To see him standing at the end of their table had Kairos flabbergasted. He blinked at the man at the end of the table, watching his mouth move but hearing nothing.

"What?" he deadpanned.

Maximus scowled at him. "Loren? Moonbeam? Have you seen her?"

"Nah, mate," Petyr chimed in around a mouth of food. "You want me to ask Less?"

"Yeah, please," Maximus sat his tray down next to Petyr.

Kairos watched every move, waiting for the punchline. "Zora's worried."

There it was.

"About what?" Kairos asked as casually as he could.

There was a beat of silence before Maximus replied. He looked at Petyr when he spoke and Kairos wanted to roll his eyes so badly, they twitched.

"Loren wasn't back in her room last night," he said. "Or this morning."

Petyr frowned. Kairos knew he didn't get along that well with his mate's younger sister. But he also knew that family was family. Loren missing affected him too. Kairos also couldn't help to think it was odd that the younger Moonbeam girl wasn't in her room last night.

He'd run into Zora incredibly late. Then he'd seen Amara wandering off

Kairos cleared his throat. "You hear anything about the Princess, recently?"

"I don't see how this is related to Loren," Maximus snapped.

Kairos shrugged and moved some food around on his plate. "It isn't," he said. "Just curious."

"Why?" Max said, plainly. "I heard you broke off your father's arrangement."

"Doesn't mean I'm not concerned about who else is touching her," Kairos threw his fork onto his platter and fixed Maximus with a glare. "You've read the Book of the High Alpha. Protect the queen at all costs."

"She's not the queen," Maximus grit out.

"Alright, we're done with this," Petyr said, nervously waving his hands in front of Kairos and Maximus. "Lunery's already up our cunts about fighting. Let's not do it again."

## Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 97

Petyr went to stand, and Kairos followed taking his tray with him. Petyr looked down at Maximus as he spoke. "I send a message to Alessia as soon as possible."

Maximus nodded. "Thanks,"

Kairos and Petyr gave each other side glances before Petyr gave a curt nod to Maximus. The two walked to put their trays by the trash. Petyr snorted unattractively. He knocked his shoulder into Kairos's.

"Crazy what getting laid will do to you,"

Kairos said nothing as he glared at Petyr. He slammed his tray into the return pile and sulked out of the cafeteria. He could vaguely hear Petyr grumbling about Kairos's knickers being in a twist.

They were. And it was Zora Smith's fault.

Kairos attended his afternoon classes with less conflict but a hell of a lot of Zora Smith thoughts. By the end of his four o'clock class, he was in a terrible mood. It was further exacerbated by the fact that he ran into Amara. He nearly collided with her as he left his building.

“Watch where you’re fucking going,” he snapped. He was about to blow by her without a second thought when he noticed how utterly disheveled she looked

Her eye weren’t caked in their usual kohl. Her pupils were pinpricks, barely visible unless you squinted. Under her yellow eyes were deep, dark circles. A hoodie was pulled up over her head but Kairos could see her usually sleekbob was a frizzy mess under there. Her hands seemed to be shaking, several of her long nails looked gnawed off.

Kairos immediately took a step back and looked at Amara with wide eyes. She seemed to be mumbling something under her breath. Kairos was trying to pick it out but couldn’t. He stepped in front of her and she barely noticed. He forcefully grabbed her shoulders and she jerked her head up to look at him.

“What are you on!?” He snapped. He shook her once. “I’m not watching you overdose on campus, Princess.”

Amara seemed completely unphased. She kept mumbled, eyes drifting from Kairos’s to behind him.

\*”Have...have to go...” she ranted. “Needs...needs..blood!”

On the last word, her eyes bulged and she scrambled to get out Kairos’s grasp. He ignored her and held on.

“Who needs blood?” he snapped.

“Me! More, more, more, more!” Amara rambled, scratching at Kairos’s arms. He grunted in pain as her nails cut his skin but he held on tight.

“Why do you need blood, Amara?” Kairos pressed.

“Bring...bring...her...” she paused. “Blood...blood! More, more, moremoremore!”

She scraped at Kairos more and he lost his grip on her shoulders as she cut him. He grunted and jerked away from her, hand going to cover the thin lines of blood pooling on his wrists. Amara seemed unphased, still. She continued to walk towards the forest, shaking and twitching nervously.

Kairos paused for a moment.

Amara was going exactly where he saw her going last night. She’d also mentioned a “her” which made Kairos wary. He knew Loren was missing. Had Amara done something with her?

All of the things happening made him wary. He needed to check on Zora. Something about the situation wasn’t right. He made his way across campus and found her dorm. He

walked in without a problem and went up to the floor where Maximus lived. He knew she lived next door.

He gently brought his fist to her door and rapped on it lightly.

He was psyching himself up to speak to her when the door flew open. However, standing there was not Zora Smith, but the missing Loren. Kairos jaw unhinged as he stared at the blonde in front of him. She had a light smile on and looked unscathed.

“Hiya,” she said. “Can I help you?”

“Y-you were missing,” he said.

Loren frowned. “I was at home,” she said gently. “Damn, Zora really didn’t get my note.”

“No,” he snapped. “She didn’t and she’s been running wild asking people about you.”

“Well, where is she?” Loren asked.

Kairos peered over Loren’s head and into the room. No one else was in the room and Zora’s bed looked untouched.

Panic washed over him. Amara wasn’t talking about Loren. She was talking about Zora.

“We have to go,” Kairos said, quickly. “I think Zora’s in danger.”

Zora

My hearing came back first then the feeling in my fingers and toes. I felt a drip, drip, drip of liquid sliding down my inner thigh. The same drip was sliding down my neck and into the valley of my chest. There was a subtle groan of chains in my ears followed by several snickers and hushed voices.

Then came the pain.

My head was pounding. My arms numb from how they were positioned behind me. Yet still, they ached and felt heavy. My legs felt like they were freefalling. The worst of it was my neck. It felt like I’d been stabbed by a dull blade and ripped up the carotid artery.

moaned in agony then slowly opened my eyes.

It took me a few moments to get used to how dark it was surrounding me. I could tell by the whistle of the wind through the trees that I was still in the forest. Slowly, the shapes of the leaves and branches faded in from the darkness. Then, I caught sight of the people standing below me.

It looked like there were three people, all with skin so pale they seemed to glow in the moonlight. They all seemed masculine. Two had longer, scraggly brown hair. The third had hair black as night. He seemed to be the leader, barking hushed orders at the other two.

“I told you to stop being so greedy!” he snapped. “Gareth, you told us we could have some,” one of the men whined. “Why you lyin’?”

“I’m not,” the dark-haired man said. “But we have a job. If you want to get paid, we finish the job.”

“Job said unharmed,” the third man grunted.

There was a crack that sounded like skin on skin. Then, I heard a thud and watched as the third man stumbled below me.

“Stop being a cunt,” The dark-haired man said. “You will get some of her blood when we finish.”

My blood? I rolled my neck, ignoring the pain and burning sensation that spread down my skin. I looked down and saw that the liquid dripping off my feet was landing into a bucket below me. My heart skipped a beat when I realized the liquid wasn’t black, but red.

They were collecting my blood in a bucket.

“Stop,” I tried to command. My voice was hoarse and rough and barely came out. My throat felt like sandpaper as I spoke. However, it was loud enough that all three of my assailants turned to look up at me.

The brown-haired man not on the forest floor nudged the dark-haired man. “Oi, Gare,” he said. “Pup’s awake.”

The dark-haired man looked up at me and smirked. I tried to hold my gasp in, but it slipped. The man laughed in return. The corners of his bright red eyes crinkled. I’d been taken by vampires.

Vampires.”Good evening, sleeping beauty,” Gareth, the dark-haired man, called. He had a thick, Northern European accent. He cocked his head and smirked at me again. I noticed his fangs protruding from his upper lip.

“Nice nap?”

“Where am I?” I rasped.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” the brown-haired man next to Gareth sneered.

Gareth brought an arm out to cross the front of the other man's chest. "Come on, Edmund," he chided. "Don't tease dinner."

His eyes flashed as he said it and I whimpered, trying to get myself out of whatever bindings I was in. Chains rattled around me then I felt the burning sting on my skin.

I jerked my head and saw the place where the silver chain had touched me was causing a bubble to form on my skin.

A giant blister, oozing worse the more I struggled.

Zora! A voice chimed. I nearly sighed in relief

Mona. We're-

I know, Mona cut me off. Shift. Let me out. I'll get us out.

I glanced back down at the vampires below me and spit at them. It landed on the ground near their feet and they all laughed.

"Fuck you!" I hissed. "I'll kill you!"

The rage boiled up in me and I started to feel the burn of the fire that I associated with shifting. It built up and up and then, just as quickly as it came, it melted away. I couldn't shift.

## Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 98

Mona! I cried

The chains, she said, quickly. They must be magik! They're keeping you from shifting.

I jerked again, hissing when more pain came from where the silver touched my skin. Gareth laughed below me.

"Good try, pup," he mocked. "Those chains are covered in wolfsbane. You're shit out of luck if you wanna shift."

"Stupid bitch," the man standing sneered. "Going to be wonderful to watch the light go out from your eyes when we drain you."

The man who Gareth had tossed to the floor had finally stood up. He looked up at me and licked his bottom lip.

There was a hunger in his eyes that lit up an innate fear deep within me.

“She smells so good,” he moaned.

“Stand down, Wesley,” Gareth snapped. “Don’t make me tell you again.”

Wesley turned to look at Gareth and frowned. Then he took one step closer to where the blood was dripping from me. He shock a hand out and cupped it, letting it drop of blood fall into his fingers.

“Wesley!” Gareth snapped and lunged towards him.

“Jussa taste!” Wesley whined before shoving his fingers in his mouth. Before Gareth could even strike him again, Wesley disappeared into a puff and a shriek so violent, it made my ears ring. We were all left staring in silence at the place where Wesley stood. The only noise was my blood, splattering into the bucket below me.

The other brown-haired man frowned and looked up at me. Then he looked back at Gareth. “Thought you said wolfbane kills all there magiks.”

“It’s supposed to” Gareth said slowly before taking a step back from my blood bucket. He took back up at me.” Guess this one’s a special pup, huh? What’s your secret, Wolfie? Why’re you so important?”

”Expensive too,” the other man added with a grumble.

I was about to toss another explicative towards the men when there was a rustling amongst the leaves. Both vampires dropped into attack stances and barred their fangs. Then, slowly, from between the leaves, Amara emerged.

“Amara!” I cried, my voice crackling. “Get help! There’s vampires! They’re-”

“Quiet!” Gareth snapped. His lips curled back up into a sadistic grin. “She’s with us. Aren’t you, princess?”

I looked at Amara and my heart dropped. She looked haggard, covered in bramble and dirt. Her eyes were blown wide with deep dark circles under them. She moved slowly towards Gareth, yet there was a twitch in her that was erratic.

“I did what you said,” she snapped. “Now give me, more!” Her hands went for Gareth’s neck. He swatted her away with a tut. “You’ve had enough,” he said, as if talking to a child. “No one likes a blood whore.”

Please,” Amara whined. “I need it. I’m dying. I-”

Amara was reaching for Gareth’s neck again. He swatted her more violently this time. She landed in a tumble of Limbs at his feet. She broke into sobs as Gareth gared down at her.

“I should’ve known,” he snapped. “Whores like you will never be satisfied.”

His head snapped up towards the forest and he snarled.

He reached down and grabbed Amara by the front of her shirt yanking her to her feet. He grit his teeth as his red eyes bore into hers.

“Were you followed?” he hissed. Amara was scrambling to get out of his grasp so he shook her. “Answer me girl!”

“-I don’t know!” Amara cried.

“Pathetic!” Gareth cried. He threw her to the side and dropped back into his attack position. Besides him, the other man did the same. The rustling of the forest grew louder and louder until it became a roar in my ears.

Then two wolves burst into my view. One was auburn. My mind immediately knew it was Kairos. The other, was a beautiful ashy brown that could be only one person.

Valentin.

They’d come for me.

Surprisingly, as the wolves were the size of two of the vampires, Gareth attacked first. He seemed to fly off the floor of the forest and directly towards Kairos. He wrapped the wolf in a bear hug and tackled him into the nearby brush.

The other man seemed less offensive. He held his hands out as Valentin’s ash brown wolf chomped at his feet. His teeth were bared, saliva dripping off them. The other vampire seemed to be saying something under his breath.

He stopped as Valentin launched off of his haunches and tried to clamp his mouth around the man’s neck.

The other vampire barely made it out and yelped as he did so. He, too, launched into the air as if he had wings. He jumped over Valentin and scrambled towards the exit of the clearing. He got about two feet into it when Gareth was launched into him by Kairos. The two vampires landed in a cluster in the forest

As they dia, they tipped over my bucket of blood, sending it sloshing out onto the floor. “No!” the other vampire screeched, reaching for it. Gareth yanked him to his feet, away from my blood.

“Leave it!” he snapped. “You saw what happened to Wesley. Your life is worth more than her poison!”

Valentin seemed to be processing their words. His deep gold eyes darted back and forth between the vampires and my blood bucket. He tipped his snout up to me and his eyes blew wide then jerked back to Gareth. He dipped his head low, lips snarling up in a vicious curl. "How dare you hurt my mate!" he threw down the line.

His mate, I thought, drearily.

You're dangling from chains hung in a tree and you think that is the most important thing? Mona scoffed. Gods, help us.

It was Gareth's turn to be shocked. He'd clearly never heard a wolf speak before. As he was trying to get his bearings, he tumbled backwards over the other vampire and landed on his ass. He scrambled to get up but it was too late. Kairos was right behind him.

His mouth came down at lightning speed and wrapped around Gareth's head. I tried to close my eyes so I didn't have to watch it, but the sound was enough. There was a sickening CRACK that echoed through the trees. I slowly peeled my eyes open and watched as Kairos spit Gareth's head out. It thudded across the forest floor and landed at Valentin's feet.

The rest of his body stayed vertical for a beat before it, too, fell to the floor. It landed directly in front of the other vampire, who had begun shaking violently. Kairos and Valentin made eye contact before they both dropped their heads low again. They circled around the other man as he shivered.

"Please," he begged with his hands up. "Don't kill me. I'll tell you anything. Anything! Just don't kill me."

"Pathetic!" Kairos snapped as his jaw bit into the air. The vampire flinched and skirted away from him. He unfortunately ran into Valentin, who treated him with equal malice. tell you anything. Anything! Just don't kill me."

"Pathetic!" Kairos snapped as his jaw bit into the air. The vampire flinched and skirted away from him. He unfortunately ran into Valentin, who treated him with equal malice.

"Moonraiser, watch him," Valentin ordered. "He could have valuable information about who did this. I'll get Zora down."

Kairos growled at the vampire, seemingly unhappy with how the tasks had been divvied up. Valentin, however, walked over to the lever that was keeping me suspended in air. He shifted effortlessly back into his human form. He was wearing a plain long-sleeve shirt and trousers, seemingly off the clock as headmaster.

He pulled the lever gently and I winced as my skin pressed into the silver as gravity took me down. I slowly fell from above the scene and landed on the forest floor with my arms still bound behind me.

Valentin instantly ran over and cupped my face in his palms. “Oh, love,” he said softly. “I’m so sorry.”

His wrist collided with one of the chains and he hissed as he jerked away from me. Then he looked back at me and his eyes grew wide. I gave him the best smile I could muster.

## Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 99

“Wolfsbane,” I grunted. Then, I snorted. “Bane of my existence.”

“Gods, almighty,” Kairos hissed over Valentin’s shoulder.

Valentin said nothing in return. He pressed his hands into one of the chains and tried to peel them apart. He dented one but wound up with burns deep in his palms. He ran his fingers through his hair in frustration then grunted as it ghosted over his burns.

“Move,” Kairos barked.

I watched his wolf walk over from behind Valentin. He, too, shifted effortlessly. His eyes were pinned on mine for a second before he reached down and grasped the chain.

He pulled once and it snapped down the middle. His palms also had burns, but I could tell they were worse from how the blood was pooling in his hands.

The two men gingerly unraveled me from the chains. I fell onto the floor as I became undone, my body aching and screaming in all the ways it’d been tormented. I was only there for a second as strong arms pulled me up.

My head hit Kairos’s forearm as he rest me across his lap.

Valentin sat across from me, lifting my arms and checking the blisters, etched into my skin. Then his hands went to my neck. He moved my blood-dried hair off my shoulder and immediately winced. Kairos tipped his head down to look as well then went pale as a ghost. “Is that normally how they do that?” he grit out.

“No,” Valentin shook his head, and I felt his fingers press gently over my wound. “They used special knives. Ones forged in wolfsbane. They’re designed to bleed wolves.

That’s why they’re stilt open wounds and why her body hasn’t healed them yet.”

Valentin looked up at Kairos. He frowned. “Where’s the Princess?”

“Dunno,” Kairos grunted. He gestured to me with his chin. “Got more important things here.”

Valentin nodded as if he understood. His hands were still checking my body. He looked back up at Kairos.

“Find the princess. We need to know her involvement,” he tipped his head back down and put his hands under my neck and thighs. “Plus, our prisoner has run off.”

“Fuck,” Kairos swore as he transferred me to Valentin. He pressed one hand on my thigh. A warmth spread over my body that disappeared as soon as his hand left. I almost cried out at the lack of touch but I bit my lip to stifle it.

Kairos gave me another look, his dark gold eyes blown so wide they were nearly black.

He gave Valentin a curt nod before he shifted and darted into the brush. Then, it was just the two of us. Valentin was still working on my body, turning each limb in his hand to assess the damage. I slowly brought my hand up. It was blistered all off my wrist but I still couldn't believe Valentin was there. I needed to touch him to be sure. My fingers grazed his cheek.

“I-”

“Save your energy, love,” he said, softly. He gently pulled my hand back down and tucked it over my ribcage. “You need it to heal those wounds.”

Then he stopped shortly. He ran a hand over the part of my thigh that had been bleeding. “You've healed,” he stated, shocked.

“What?” I mumbled. I looked down, expecting to find a gash where the vampires had sliced me open. Instead, all I saw was dried blood. Then, I remembered the warmth there. I dropped my head back to rest on Valentin's arm.

“Kairos,

,” I said softly.

“What?” Valentin gasped. “He healed you?”

I could only hum, eyes slipping closed and breaths becoming deep.

“He can't have,” Valentin whispered to himself. “These wounds can only be healed by

I didn't get the end of his sentence. It slowly faded to a ringing. Then, everything around us swirled into a deep, dark blackness. The pain was lifted as I passed out.

The dull beeping of the infirmary was becoming the opposite of an omen.

It signaled that whatever trauma, whatever bullshit, I'd been through was over. I sighed deeply as I woke up to its low noise. Immediately, I felt a hand squeeze mine.

Warmth moved from the tips of my fingers up to my brain. and down to my toes. It felt like my entire body was held in a hug. I felt more peace wash over me. My neck lazily rolled towards my hand as my eyes fluttered open.

It took a moment for them to focus but when they did, I let out another sigh. Maximus's gold eyes were staring at me.

His lip was quirked in the teeniest, tiniest of smiles. His hands were wrapped around mine.

"Hi," I rasped.

"Hi," he said back.

He continued to stare at me as my eyes roamed the room.

I noticed we weren't alone. In his usual position was none other than Valentin Lunerly. He was still in the same casual shirt and trousers he'd been in the forest. I noticed a smear of my blood across his thigh. My eyes worked their way up to his. Just as he always was, his face was set in an impassive mask. He nodded gently at me and another bout of warmth worked its way through my other hand.

I continued to explore the room, lazily. However, that changed when my eyes landed on the third person, leaning against the wall. I tensed immediately as I recognized the auburn hair.

Kairos Moonraiser was in my infirmary room.

He must've felt me staring into his back because he turned around to face me. All of the hardness he usually held was gone. His freckles felt like they were twinkling on his tan face. His harsh gold eyes were softened and welcoming as they looked at me.

Another surge of warmth spurred through me, and I fidgeted. It was becoming far too hot. I kicked the blanket over me free of my feet and sighed in relief when the cool air hit the burning of my feet. I settled back in the bed and pressed my hand to my face.

"What happened?"

"What do you remember?" Valentin said, gently.

I closed my eyes as I tried to fish through my brain for the memories. There was a fuck ton of pain. A lot of burning and the smell of charred flesh. Then, I vaguely remember two

wolves bursting out of the forest. One auburn and one the ashy brown. I dropped my hand and opened my eyes to glance at Valentin.

“You were there,” I turned towards Kairos. “And, for some reason, you.”

Kairos’s softness vanished for his hardened eyes and jaw. He opened his mouth to speak but was cut off by Valentin.

“Mr. Moonraiser was the one who alerted me you were in danger,” he said. “He’d found Princess Amara wandering the campus in a daze and brought her to me.”

I frowned. “Amara? Is she okay?”

“She will be,” Valentin buffed. “She just needs to detox.”

“Detox!?” My eyes felt like they were going to burst out of my skull. “They drugged her?”

“She drugged herself,” Kairos snapped. Everyone in the room slowly turned to look at him. I must’ve looked confused because he sighed and dropped his arms to his sides.

“She drank vampire blood,” he continued. “It causes delusion in wolves.”

“Like you’ve done a hallucinogenic,” Valentin added.

“Gods,” I hissed.

“Also highly addictive,” Valentin sat back in his chair and crossed his ankle over his knee. His hand went to rub his face. I noticed the very light starting of a beard on his chin. “She’s detoxing so we can understand what happened.”

“Does wolf blood do the same for vampires?” I asked.

“Sort of,” Maximus said. “It’s more of a depressant for them. Think of like human marijuana. That’s why they were draining you. To get high and have a supply.”

I frowned again. In my memories, I vaguely remember one of the vampires trying to taste my blood and then, he was gone. My head started to pound at that moment, so figured I’d ask Mona later. I pressed the heel of my palm into my eye socket. I was about to ask everyone to leave me to sleep when the door burst open.

A flurry of dark robes swirled through the room and ended at the foot of my bed. The person wearing the robes was tall and adorned in various gold chains and pins. They slowly pulled back their hood and my breathing stopped for another moment.

Queen Victoria Luna was at Alpha Academy.

“Your Highness,” Maximus scrambled to spit out. He stood up from the edge of my bed and bowed his head. Kairos was doing something similar. To my left, Valentin simply crossed his arms over his chest..

## Their Hidden Princess – Chapter 100

“At ease, Alpha Wolfham,” came my mother’s voice. She sent me a soft smile before addressing Valentin.

“I got your message,” her eyes drifted back to me. “A vampire on campus?”

“Two, Your Highness,” came Kairos. He took a step forward so he could face my mother. “The Headmaster and I killed one. The second has been brought in for questioning.”

“Gods be above,” my mother whispered. Then she nodded once at Kairos. “Thank you, Alpha Moonraiser. The headmaster told me you held yourself with honor and power.”

Kairos tipped his head again. “Your honor,”

“I will meet with you in a moment,” Victoria said to Max and Kairos. “For now, I’d like to hear Miss Smith’s story.”

Maximus gave my hand one final squeeze before he and Kairos left the room. Then, it was just me, Valentin and my mother: As soon as the door slammed shut, Victoria’s hands were on my face. She searched my eyes desperately.

“Are you hurt?”

I shrugged. “Just sore. I—”

“This is why I shouldn’t have brought her back, Val,” my mother hissed at the Headmaster. “Someone must’ve tipped them off. They know about her. They damn nearkilled her!”

“She’s alive, Victoria,” Valentin said, trying to soothe his friend. “Those two vampires were weak. Gammas, if they were wolves. They were nothing-

“But they’re working for something!” Victoria seemed hysteric as she turned towards Valentin. The two shared a brief glance before Victoria was back looking at me again.

Her eyes searched mine before she stroked down the side of my face. “My sweet girl,” she said softly. “I could’ve lost you.”

I pushed her hand away gently. "I'm fine," I said. "But I would've been better if you'd told me that these kinds of threats still existed. If you told me that I'm some sort of wolf weapon!"

"Weapon?" Victoria blinked at me. She glanced sideways at Valentin then at me again. "You're not a weapon."

"Victoria," Valentin warned.

"She's not!" My mother snapped at him. She looked back at me. "She's not."

"She deserves to know," Valentin said plainly.

"Tell me," I begged.

Victoria sighed and sat down at the foot of my bed. I'd never seen her look so unlike a Queen. Her hair was wild, unbound as it usually was. Her eyebags rivaled Valentin's and she looked puffy from tears. I watched her eyes flutter shut as she sucked in a deep breath.

"There was a prophecy," she started, voice low. "When you were born. Of a wolf who could take down the vampires."

"Take them down?" I interjected. "I thought you and Valentin had already killed most of them and imprisoned Renatus."

My mother shot Valentin a scathing look that said he should not have told me about the vampire king. Then, her face softened as she looked back at me.

"We couldn't have killed them all," she said. "But we drove them out of the British Isles. We knew they were bound to regroup off shore and come back to try and enslave us again. But when that happened, we'd be ready. Because we had you."

"Me?" I whispered.

Victoria nodded. "The prophecy I was given told of a wolf who was born from the queen. She was said to have five fated mates, a number that was completely unheard of."

Five!?

Wolfham, Lunerly, Moonraiser, Blythwitch, Mona said back. There's four.

My heart thudded deep in my chest. I looked at my mother and held her gaze as she continued.

"The wolf was said to bring down the vampires," she continued. "Once and for all. And bring back balance to the world. When the seer told me this, I laughed. I had never lain

with a man. I assumed my line would end with me. But then, I remembered the night after the war was over. My cup had run dry and my mind was a hurricane.

There was darkness then warmth and a man's warm hands."

"Victoria," Valentin gasped besides me. It was clear he didn't know. He'd told me she didn't know my father.

Victoria frowned then looked at me. Tears were springing in the corners of her eyes. "You were so little," she whimpered. "And yet such a perfect baby. I knew I'd been gifted you by the Gods. You we're to be our savior."

"So I am a weapon," I breathed.

"Yes," Valentin said. "A weapon. Our weapon. The one who will wipe out all of the vampires."

Two weeks later...

I slammed the door to the car that dropped me back on campus. I heaved a sigh and let the driver walk past me to grab my bags. To my right, a large wolf in a jet-black suit got out of the front seat of the car. We made eye contact, and he gave me a curt nod. I looked back forward and heaved a heavy sigh.

This was my life now.

After my attempted kidnapping, I'd been sent back to the castle for the winter solstice. For two weeks, I barely saw anyone other than my maids and the wolf who'd rode back to school with me. He was my new bodyguard, assigned to me by mother after the vampire's attempt to kidnap me.

His name was Bubba, and he was a gruff ex-warrior from a pack in the Northeast of the United States. He reminded me of what Hollywood thought a Marine was. He barely spoke, grunting and nodding seemed to be his preferred methods of communication.

But, was stuck with him.

As he went around to meet the driver for suitcase hand off, I was still trying to figure out how I was going to get away with a bodyguard. According to everyone on campus, I was a nobody. Why would a nobody need protection? That truth was, I wasn't a nobody. Underneath all the nonsense I used to cover my identity, I was the Luna Princess. There was a prophecy about me being a weapon to destroy all the residual vampires from the Great War.

I was still unsure of the prophecy before the holiday. But then, my mother, Queen Victoria Luna, had brought me to the prophecy room. There, in shimmering gold ink on a piece of

parchment, was my life story. Seeing it made it feel more real, and the words burned even more.

“Born of royalty, bound to five,

The collision of dark and light,

Remaker of olden times,

Night to his knees,

Light to rise,

Balance is once again in sight.”

I stood there slack jawed as I read it. Then my mother gingerly tapped me on the shoulder and told me I was going to save us all. It was the last time I saw her during the Holidays. The morning before I returned to the prestigious Alpha Academy, we'd had breakfast. Neither of us really spoke. I figured that Victoria felt guilty for all the pain she'd caused.

She'd left me at a human orphanage until I was eighteen, then swooped in and tried to marry me off. She thought that by being with my fated mate, it would awaken my powers. It was only by my protest that I wound up at Alpha Academy. If I could graduate, then I wouldn't have to marry one of the sons of the High Alphas.

But that had all been a ruse as well. In order to unlock the power to vanquish the vampires, I did have to be with a fated mate. The marriage candidates were my mother's way of trying to do that. The High Alpha's she'd won the war with all had kids. If I had a fated mate, she'd figured they'd be a son of one of the High Alphas.

I huffed another sigh. I hadn't seen any of them since my kidnapping attempt. I'd come to know them all, some better than others. My nerves ran down my spine as I thought about them.

Kind, stern Maximus Wolfham.

Polished, mature Valentin Lunerly.

Intelligent, protective Thorne Blywitch.

And harsh and violent Kairos Moonraiser.

I bough my lip to keep myself from groaning. Kairos was the bane of my existence. He'd previous tried to murder me because I was wolfless. But, something within him had changed. He'd been one of the two people to come save me from the vampires.

Now, he was still sharp around the edges, but he was softer around me. It made the fact that the third of our three round sparring was a week from my return to campus, much worse. I was supposed to fight him or risk being volunteered to get off of campus if I didn't.

As Bubba lifted my bags into my dorm, I stopped short. He turned around and frowned at me. "Princess?" he said softly.

"I told you, Bubba," I swiped my hand over my face. "You can't call me that on campus."