

The Vampires Promised Bride Chapter 16

“Well so much for that.” Sabrina sighed and poked out her bottom lip with a pout.

“So much for what?” Tonya asked.

“So much for adding Ryan to my list of conquests.” Sabrina said with a wry smile.

“Oh goodness Sabrina. That list is disgusting. You really need to find your mate...” Tonya shook her head.

“Your list of conquered?” Lucy asked, raising her eyebrow to Sabrina.

“Have you noticed how gorgeous your mate is? Who wouldn’t want to break themselves off a piece of that...” She could see Lucy’s eyes darkening as she spoke. She quickly waved her off. “But I never go after mated males. I do have principles after all. He is your mate so I can respect that.”

“Well he is but he isn’t. He is my mate but I am engaged to your prince...”

“It seems like that doesn’t matter to Ryan.” Sabrina shrugged. “He must feel confident that the royal family will let him keep you...”

“Well, it is more than just him making the decision here. But we haven’t been able to have a proper conversation over it yet. I did explain to him that I wasn’t going to choose him though. I have a duty to fulfill our species treaty.” Lucy felt her stomach turn as she said this. The idea of parting with Ryan was making her nauseous. Obviously, her body disagreed with what she was trying to convince everyone else. She needed to convince herself as well that she would not take him as her mate. When the time came that she would really walk away from the man that made her heart beat.

“Hmmm.” Sabrina said as a smile spread across her face. “And you think he is going to just let you go? Ryan?” She chuckled and shook her head. “He may act sweet around you but he is a fierce leader. There is a reason he can command our band of powerful elites. He isn’t a push over. He is dangerous and can be vicious at times. He can be cold and unfeeling, but he ALWAYS gets what he wants. And under his leadership we NEVER fail. THAT is who Ryan is. And if he has decided you will be his then you already are.”

“I hear what you are saying. But if I choose to leave, Ryan will be in for the fight of his life if he tries to stop me. It isn’t just me. My parents will come for me before too long. If they are even waiting as it is. If they know Jasper has come for me then they may be waiting... if not...” Lucy sighed and rubbed her forehead. “My family can be pretty scary. And if the whole family gets involved, I don’t care how strong anyone is, they can’t fight off my family.” It really did come down to this too. If Lucy was held against her will her family would crush anyone who stood in their way. They were not an ordinary family after all. Heck if her Aunt Rhea asked her Uncle Levi to, he could wipe out the vampires. Which is why the other deities have always been cautious of their relationship. Since a god can easily bend the world to their will with their power. But Rhea would never ask Levi to use his powers like that... lucky for the world.

“Sweetie... Ryan wouldn’t have to fight anyone to keep you.” Sabrina giggled and waved her hand at the silly idea.

“What do you mean?”

“He could just simply take you. He could take you and disappear with you. He wouldn’t have to fight with the vampire royalty or your family. He could just hide you away somewhere. There are so many places around the world where he could keep running and hiding. Deep maze-like caves he could hide you in... just think of the possibilities.” Sabrina shrugged and held her hand out.

“He wouldn’t do that.” Lucy said confidently.

“And what makes you think like that? You barely know him.” Sabrina was curious where this faith in Ryan came from.

“Well for one if he wanted to, he could have marked me and he hasn’t. And two I can sense that he doesn’t have bad intentions.”

“And on that note let’s go and sit down.” Tonya said and lifted Lucy up. She gave her an apologetic smile when Lucy shot daggers at her. “Sorry Lucy but Ryan’s orders. But I will say I think your faith in him would make him cry blood in happiness.”

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The group of stealthy vampires dashed through the treetops in silence. This mission was all about getting to Jasper before he did something reckless. They have a plan in the works to take down Beryl. But they were waiting for one thing all this time.

They were trying to find the location of an ancient evil. One that hid its true character, but time had a way of telling its secrets.

They have been tirelessly searching for Wicker a dangerous witch doctor... well that is what he wanted everyone to believe. But Wicker was not a witch doctor he just used it as a disguise to not get caught. He was more sinister and dangerous... they just needed to find out his location and where they met. Then they would be able to give this information to the Locke's so that they could end him.

Wicker was not someone their group of vampires could take out. In fact, if their suspicions were correct, he was not someone any of them could take out. They would need a tier one deity in order to put an end to him. Yes, he was that dangerous. And one would assume this would be an original demon but that is not the case. Wicker is a tier one deity... at least Ryan was almost certain of this. He wasn't sure what the deity's real name is, but he went by Wicker among the darkness. He lurked in the shadows and assisted the demons.

Wicker was clever, cautious and dangerous. He was never seen. In all the years they had been on this case they were never able to sniff him out. It was beginning to get discouraging and soon he was going to have to abandon finding out more information on him. They would have to take out Beryl and the pests she had created along the way. And all they would be able to do is pass the suspicions along to the Locke family. He hoped to have more than this to present to the king and queen of the vampires though.

Ryan wanted to have something. A location, motivation, the overall plan...something! But all he had was a hunch and his suspicions. This all stemmed from whispers he heard from the creatures of the shadows. Demons who hissed that his blood was not their own. But why would a deity lurk among demons? It was almost as if this deity was seeking to cause chaos by any means necessary just to cause chaos.

Ryan suddenly halted and the rest of the vampires immediately froze as well. The scent of blood wafted in the air. The strong smell of iron was getting heavier in the air as the wind carried it to them. The tiniest of vibrations were picked up as he listened closely. He could hear the sound of fighting off in the distance. His eyes flashed over to Zach and there was no need for words. Another scent hit their nose. It was blood again, but it was a scent they all recognized. It had come from Jasper.

Speed was now more important than stealth as the band of vampires sprinted through the treetops. At first Ryan felt relieved they were heading away from the forest where the witches trail went. That was until he came across the scene below him.

Jasper dripped in blood both his and foreign. He was holding off a small vicious army of creatures with pale clay looking skin. The only color was from the crimson liquid that was splattered on their bodies. Ryan landed at Jasper's side followed by Enzo, Lenny, Zach and Chaz.

"What the hell are you doing Jasper?" Ryan growled as he took a fighting stance next to him.

"I came out here to invite them to my tea party and they just got hostile. Some people have no sense of culture." Jasper panted out as he wiped a trickling red drop from his forehead. He then looked around nervously. "Where is Lucy?!"

"She is safe. Which is more than I can say for you. You can't fight an army of the voidless all on your own." Ryan shook his head angrily as the zombie-like army fixated on them.

"Oh they have a name now?" Jasper grinned looking over at Ryan who looked less than amused. "We have to take care of them. They are heading for the Slate pack."

Ryan groaned and gritted his teeth. "Let's make it quick and get back. I don't like being away too long."

Jasper looked at Ryan curiously when he said that. "I want to finish this up too. I need to see Lucy for myself." His eyes met with Ryan's and there was a sharp look between them. Which couldn't get more read into since the voidless suddenly charged into the group of vampires.

Chaz leaped forward and crashed into a blob of white creatures like a bowling ball hitting down the pins. Zach and Enzo quickly began relieving the enemies of their heads. While Lenny grabbed the heads and bodies, piling them up to burn.

"You can rest Jasper. We can handle the rest." Ryan said and sprinted forward. As he went to s***h at one of the voidless it suddenly fell over. It's body went one way while it's head went another. Jasper shrugged and grinned.

"You have to move faster than that. And here I thought you were an elite soldier." Jasper gave Ryan a cocky grin and dove into more voidless.

Ryan scoffed. "I'll show you why I am considered elite." He bit on the tip of his finger creating a string of blood. He grabbed the crimson strand that hardened under his touch turning into a blood whip. He raised it upwards and belted it forward. A loud c***k echoed in the air and five heads of the voidless went rolling over the ground.

Jasper turned and quirked an eyebrow at Ryan. “Really? You are going to use noble moves? So petty just to try to win.” He turned around with a frown. The voidless were already wiped out and none left to show his own moves on. “I guess I’ll have to show you up next time.” He let out a big yawn and rested back on his heels. “Man, I am exhausted.”

Ryan watched as Lenny torched the bodies and heads of the voidless. These were creatures that started appearing more and more. They were the ones that were responsible for the attacks on werewolves recently. They attacked with claws and fangs similar to vampires only more savage. It is enough for the blame to easily get shifted to vampires. And the fact this small army was heading towards werewolves was not a coincidence.

“Okay... well let’s head back. I need to see Lucy. She almost stopped my heart.” Jasper said, shaking his head.

“Before that... we need to talk... privately.” Ryan pinned his gaze on Jasper. His face and tone were both serious.

Jasper narrowed his eyes at Ryan. “Lucy isn’t hurt is she? If something happened to her-”

“She’s okay. But we do need to talk about her.”

Jasper straightened up and stared into the amber eyes in front of him.

What is it? Jasper asked through their mind link. The best way to keep it private would be this way. No chance of someone eavesdropping in their heads. And from the look on Ryan’s face it was a serious conversation.

Jasper, Lucy is my mate.

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“You are a demon! I’m convinced. This doesn’t make any sense. No wait. WAIT! How the hell did that happen?!” Sabrina growled, turning to Lucy. Her eyes glared at her like she was the devil herself.

“I landed on a tweester... so the star changed locations.” Lucy could see the girl’s eyebrow twitching.

“So... you mean to tell me when I was just a few spots away from the star you moved it?” Sabrina listened as Tonya snickered quietly.

“Yes. That is correct.” Lucy smiled, biting her bottom lip.

Sabrina sighed and slouched back into the bean bag. “That was going to be my first star. It has to be the cruelest thing anyone has ever done to me. I feel so... so... defeated.”

“Don’t worry Sabrina. There are bonus stars at the end of the game. Maybe you will get one of them.” Lucy said, trying to cheer her up.

“Really?” Sabrina asked excitedly.

“Yeah, they are loser stars though. They hand them out so that you don’t feel horrible because you suck at the game.” Tonya grinned as she sat her controller down.

“Ugh! That’s it. Let’s play a different game.” Sabrina tossed her controller in front of her with an over dramatic fling.

“I want cookies.” Tonya pouted and looked back to the kitchen.

“Well, go get some.” Sabrina hissed.

“There isn’t anymore and the cooks went out about an hour ago.” Tonya pouted and sighed loudly.

“Let’s go and make our own then.” Lucy giggled. Tonya groaned louder and Sabrina snickered.

“She can’t cook. She spent all her time training to fight. The only thing she can create is charred food.” Sabrina’s eyes glinted over at Tonya’s as a smirk played on her lips.

“Shut up! You can’t cook either!” Tonya spat out with her eyes furrowed.

“I know. And I own it. I can kick a*s and can sneak up on anyone. But when it comes to the kitchen... eh that’s why we have cooks.” Sabrina held her hand out and shrugged.

Lucy giggled and stood up. “I can cook.” She watched as Tonya and Sabrina turned to her with large puppy eyes.

“You can? Like... good?” Sabrina asked.

“I think I’m decent.” Lucy smiled as Tonya’s eyes began to light up.

“Okay, we will help you then!” Sabrina hopped up and lifted Lucy up with a bounce.

“I don’t need any help.” Lucy was thinking if the girls were as bad as they said they would do more harm than good.

“Nonsense. You are injured, we can’t have you doing everything on your own.” Sabrina stood up with a bit of excitement.

It occurred to Lucy that both women actually seemed excited to try their hands at cooking... regardless of what they may want you to believe. Somehow, she felt like this was going to turn into an interesting cooking lesson.

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CRASH

Lucy jumped startled by the sound of tin bowls crashing onto the floor. She was right about what making a simple batch of cookies turned into. Now each girl was trying their own hand at making their own batter. They had watched Lucy make her cookies and put them in the oven. That was when they asked if she could teach them to make them.

Lucy looked around the kitchen. When they had walked into the area it was spick and span. Now the sink was full of dishes. There were cracked eggshells discarded everywhere and a healthy layer of sugar and flour scattered the counters and floor. She wondered if they were going to have to clean all this up.

“What the hell does a dash of salt mean?” Sabrina asked, shaking her head. “Am I supposed to run with it?”

“Sabrina... you are joking right?” Lucy figured she had to have been teasing. But when she looked up at her she could see she was serious. “You were watching me when I was mixing my batch right?”

“Well, I tried but then I lost focus and started daydreaming about a dark-skinned muscular man lying next to me on the beach...” Sabrina gave her a sheepish shrug.

“Just pinch a tiny bit with your fingers and put it in.” Lucy hoped her fighting skills were better than her cooking skills. Otherwise, the vampire elites may not be that impressive. She looked over at Tonya who had a determined gaze on her forehead. She analyzed the batter she spooned out on the baking pan. And gently eased her pan into the oven.

“Whatever. I’m done with this.” Sabrina said and shoved her batter to the side. She looked over at Lucy’s fresh baked cookies and helped herself to one. Her eyes widened and she turned to Lucy. “These are amazing! They are better than the ones the cooks make for us.”

“Are they really?!” Tonya asked and grabbed one to test for herself. She tested the warm, gooey cookie out in her mouth before she turned a suspicious eye towards Lucy. “And you can fight too... I’m worthless.” She whined and took another bite of the cookie to drown her sorrows in.

“Anyone can learn how to cook. But not everyone can be a lethal fighter. You have mastered the hard one. Cooking is easy. It is just a matter of following the directions. The more your practice the better you will get.” Lucy tried to encourage Tonya who looked defeated.

“No, these cookies are amazing. Not everyone can make cookies taste like this. This is incredible.” Tonya shook her finger at Lucy who giggled at her.

“They are just chocolate chip cookies Tonya. And we still have to see how yours turn out.” Lucy grabbed the large bag of flour off the counter to start cleaning up while they waited for Tonya’s cookies to bake.

“Get out of here.” Sabrina said nonchalantly as she waved her hand in front of her.

Lucy looked closely and could see her most hated foe hanging from a web. A large eight-legged assassin dangled from a single silk string and his eight eyes were focused on Lucy’s jugular, she was certain of it. The wind created from Sabrina’s hand as she swatted at the little slayer made it sway back and forth. Then with the next swat chaos broke out.

It all happened so fast. In a moment Lucy’s life flashed before her eyes. It all happened in slow motion (at least mentally she envisioned it this way). Sabrina’s hand collided with the spider who was sent flying in the air straight for his target. Lucy screamed, throwing her hands up to shield herself and the flour bag in her hands flew into the air. In seconds all that could be seen was a big cloud of white. This was the second time that day that Lucy’s life was in peril.

She had overcome so much in life. She trained just as hard as the men. She studied and did well in school. She had well rounded herself out as a person and was also able to bake. All for what? For it to come to an end now. Right now, under the cover of flour his murderous intent was fixated on her. The grim reaper held her life string in his hands ready to cut it. Nothing could be done. There was no hope. All was for not. She coughed as she breathed in some of the flour and curled backwards into the counter.

Then she felt herself being lifted into an electrifying embrace. Sweet sparks revived her body giving her the energy to continue on. She looked up and through the falling white cloud was able to make out the most beautiful amber eyes.

“Lucy, are you okay?” Ryan asked as he looked her over with concern.

“Is she okay? She attacked me with flour.” Sabrina coughed as she walked away from the white cloud.

“Well, what do you expect? You sent that spider right for her. Disgusting little thing was going to land right on her.” Tonya said dusting the flour off of herself.

“It probably is on her.” Sabrina said innocently, making Lucy squirm looking over herself frantically.

Ryan chuckled and leaned his head down to breathe in Lucy’s scent. “We are going to have to do something about these spiders I think.” He whispered against her skin.

A dark smoke started wafting in the air mixing with the flour.

“My cookies!” Tonya cried and ran to the oven to bring out a sad tray of darkened cookies.

“Like I said... charred.” Sabrina said and waved her hand in the air.

“It’s okay Tonya. We will keep trying. You’ll get it.” Lucy smiled over at her.

“Well at least I have your cookies to eat.” Tonya grabbed another but it was slapped out of her hand.

Ryan has sprinted over to the tray with Lucy in his arms. “You made these Lucy?” He watched her confused head nod slowly. “Then they are not for anyone else to eat but me.” Ryan possessively began bagging the cookies up.

“No please! I’ll do anything, anything! Just don’t take her cookies away.” Tonya cried dramatically.

“Ryan, give her some!” Lucy scolded giving him a displeased look.

“Fine.” Ryan reached in and grabbed one cookie out. “There I shared.”

“I better be getting one of Luce Luce’s cookies too.” Jasper said and then started laughing loudly. Lucy was covered in a layer of white flour. It was all over her body and through her hair. “Halloween came early huh Lucy?”

“Jasper!” Lucy squealed and wiggled to get down from Ryan. She felt him reluctantly lower her and she jumped into Jasper’s outstretched arms.

“I told you to stay put and wait for me.” Jasper sighed into the top of her head.

“You know I don’t listen to men.” Lucy smiled up at him. She watched him step back and look her over. When his eyes landed on her wounds he frowned.

“What happened?” Jasper asked kneeling to look at the worst wound on her leg.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m fine. It is just taking me longer to heal because of the vervain. Really, it hardly bothers me.” Lucy watched as his eyes flickered at her angrily.

“It shouldn’t have happened Lucy. What were you thinking?! How could you leave the pack borders? I can’t believe you would be so reckless.” Jasper said in a low tone as he pressed his lips.

“Who do you think you are lecturing? I let myself get caught so I could-”

“YOU LET THEM TAKE YOU?!” Jasper looked up and shook his head dramatically. “Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Do you realize what could have happened?!”

“I was trying to get answers. When I heard they were after the Diamond pack I knew I needed to protect my people.”

“Yeah, I can see how being dead really helps them.” Jasper said, rolling his eyes.

“Am I dead? No, I’m not.”

“She saved us, Jasper. She saved me and Zach from our cell. We weren’t able to escape like we planned.” Tonya said quietly making sure to give Jasper the respect he deserves.

“I’m glad she was able to help you two. But her life... she is someone whose life shouldn’t be risked.” Jasper frowned and sighed. “Everyone was so worried, Lucy. I have never felt this much fear. I thought...” His voice trailed off into a whisper.

Lucy smiled at him. “I understand you were worried. But you don’t have to yell at me, right? You know when you yell like this it makes me want to rebel more.” She listened to him chuckling and walked back into him. She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him gently.

“Alright, that’s enough.” Ryan grabbed onto Lucy and pulled her back into his chest.

Lucy turned and looked up at him. “What is your problem?”

“My problem is my mate is hugging the wrong man.” Ryan said with an almost adorable pout.

“Ugh, Ryan we have been over this.” Lucy said rubbing her forehead.

Jasper stared at Ryan. His eyes were fixated on him before they lowered to Lucy. “Let’s go and have a talk. We have a lot to discuss.”

“Yes... we do.” Ryan’s said quietly his eyes never left Jaspers. He lifted Lucy up gently into his chest and slowly carried her out of the kitchen with Jasper trailing right behind him.

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Jasper followed Ryan into the room and closed the door. He looked over at the broken bathroom door and quirked his eyebrow.

Ryan chuckled as he slowly lowered Lucy down in front of him. “We had a spider incident earlier.” He rubbed his hands over Lucy’s shoulders gently as a warm smile rested on his lips.

This was a bit awkward for Lucy. Ryan being touchy and Jasper not ripping them apart didn't make sense to her. She wondered what was talked about before they came back. Jasper seemed to already be well aware of the fact that Ryan was her mate. But he was Derek's cousin and right-hand man. Wouldn't he be opposed? Or did Ryan really have something that would allow them to be together?

She looked over her flour covered self. She needed to get a quick shower, but there was no door. And the evil killer could still be in the bathroom.

"What is it, Lucy?" Jasper asked, seeing her eyes staring off at the bathroom.

Lucy inched away from Ryan's touch as she used her hands to motion over her white powdered self. "Look at me?" She giggled. "I have flour in places flour should never be."

Jasper chuckled. "Well then go get cleaned off real quick. It isn't like I'll peek in on you."

Lucy gnawed on her lip and Jasper let a thunderous laugh rip into the air.

"You are still afraid of the spider in there aren't you. Oh Lucy you are too much." Jasper wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I'll just use someone else's shower." Lucy said simply.

"You aren't showering in another room." Ryan said with a slight growl. "I'll stand watch for you."

Lucy scoffed and planted her hands across her chest. "I bet you will. No thanks. I don't need an audience."

"Are you sure? Having someone to shower with is more fun... and I could use a shower too." Ryan let his voice drop low.

"Okay time out." Lucy looked up at Jasper. "If anyone else said something like that you would kill them. Shoot, you were ready to murder Kyle when he tried to kiss me."

"WHO TRIED TO KISS YOU?!" Ryan roared. He walked into Lucy and gripped onto her shoulders.

"That's not the point."

“Oh no, that is the point now.” Ryan growled and then lifted his gaze up to Jasper.

“Ryan is your soul mate Lucy. That is sacred. Its sanctity is absolute. There is no one who will object to that.” Jasper said as he could see the confusion in her eyes. “And Lucy was going to stop him from kissing her, but I just beat her to it.”

“What did you do that made him think it was okay to try to kiss you?” Ryan asked between clenched teeth.

OH! HELL NO! Lucy shot daggers at Ryan. “What did I do?” She scoffed loudly. She stepped into him and poked into his chest. “How dare you talk to me like that. What did I do? Who the hell do you think you are? Obviously, if someone tried to kiss me it was because I led them on, right? I guess unhooking my bra and tossing it to the side might have been too suggestive huh?” She listened as he growled at her when she said this. “You know what, forget it. I’d rather take my chances with the spider than talk with you more.”

She shoved him and turned marching towards the bathroom. How could he say that? She flipped on the shower angrily and huffed in anger. Jasper had said that she could accept Ryan as her mate because they were soul mates. But what about the treaty? Even if the vampires would understand Ryan taking her as his mate, what would this mean for the treaty? And right now, she was irritated with him so she could feel a bit more rational in her thoughts. When she was next to him it was as if her body was drugged. It was slowly being consumed by him.

No... that wasn’t right. She was the one who wanted to consume him. What the real problem was... well she didn’t trust herself with him. He was the one in danger of being devoured though she didn’t think he would mind. She had to keep holding the treaty idea in her mind. It was the only thing she was barely grasping onto in order to control herself. That and now she was irritated. However, she had other ideas about how to release her frustration. She reached her hand and turned the water temperature cold. Yeah, she needed a cold shower.

From the doorway, she could hear the soft baritone chuckle coming from Ryan. She looked back and could see part of his shoulder as he leaned against the doorframe but looking away towards the wall.

“You know Lucy... that spirit of yours only makes me hot for you. You know I can wash the parts you can’t see.”

Ugh. She could almost hear the smirk in his voice. And damn her if she didn’t want him.

She clicked her tongue loudly. “Jasper, would you put your friend on a leash?” She listened as Jasper snickered and she heard his back plop on the other side of the door frame. She also heard Ryan grumble at him for being too close to where she would be showering.

“Sorry. If Lucy wants me to protect her from you then that is exactly what I will do. Mate or not.”

Lucy smiled as she listened to Jasper. She could tell in his voice that there was a serious air to it.

Ryan sighed loudly and flopped his head back banging it on the doorway. “I’m sorry Lucy. Don’t be mad at me. I got really jealous and was wrong. I never should have questioned you.”

“Thank you, Ryan. But you still aren’t joining me.”

“You want me... I want you. You heard yourself that it is okay to be with me... You’ll accept me as your mate, right?”

Lucy stepped into the cold water and sighed. She could hear the insecurity in his voice. It broke her heart but being allowed to be with him was only a start. What about the treaty? The water dripped cloudy on the floor below her as it washed the flour off of her body. She grabbed the bottle of body wash and scrunched up her nose.

“Sandalwood? There isn’t anything less... male in here?” Lucy squeezed the liquid into the scrunchy hanging up. She blushed slightly knowing it was Ryan’s scrunchy. “I hope this is the first time your loofah is seeing a woman’s body.” She listened as Ryan groaned and heard the thud of his head again.

“At least your loofah is getting some action.” Jasper teased with a snicker.

“I’ll make sure I have your own body wash for you for the next time...” Ryan said, trying to ignore Jasper. “And what are you accusing me of?” He smirked and listened to her giggle. He listened as the shower turned off and heard quiet footsteps come up to the door.

“So... am I to wear a towel all day or do you have something else for me to wear?” Lucy asked in the doorway.

“I think a towel looks good on you.” Jasper said with a shrug.

“Don’t look at her. TURN around.” Ryan said lowly.

“Relax Ryan. Jasper is like a brother to me.” Lucy rolled her eyes and moved closer next to Jasper to prove her point. She was completely comfortable with him.

“Lucy... he is a male. And you are a beautiful woman. And no matter what he isn’t related to you. There is no way I can be okay with this.” He walked forward and shoved Jasper away a couple feet. “I’ll get you something to put on.” He quickly walked to the end of the room. He grabbed out a shirt and a pair of drawstring pants. “Um... I have boxers and boxer briefs...”

“That will work for now.” Lucy said matter-of-factly. She kept her voice level to not show that she was affected about hearing that... though she was. When Ryan walked back over his cheeks looked a bit more flushed as he handed her the clothes. She smiled as she took them from him. There were some things he was bashful about too.

She quickly walked to the side of the bathroom and threw the clothes on. She rolled up the bottom of the pants and tied his shirt in a ball. She pulled the string as tight as she could and knotted it up.

“Well. At least I am not covered in flour anymore.” Lucy giggled as she held her arms out. After hearing Ryan’s apology, she was no longer upset with him.

Jasper placed his hand on the top of her head and moved it back and forth. “Much better Lucy.” He then leaned down. “What do you want to do about him? If you want me to steal you away from him just say the word.”

Ryan chuckled darkly. “Just try it and see what happens.”

Lucy turned and looked at Ryan. “I’m sorry. It is more than acceptance. I won’t abandon the treaty. I don’t want to risk there ever being a war between our species.”

Ryan sighed and rubbed his forehead with his hand. “I didn’t want to have to do this...”

Lucy’s eyes darkened as she stared at him. “If you think you are going to force your mark on me you have another thing coming.” A growl solicited from her throat as her eyes flickered to that of her wolf.

She watched him smile at her as his eyes danced in amusement. “Lucy, you are my treasure. I would never EVER mistreat you. Come on. You can feel my feelings if you really try. Open your heart up to me and you will be able to feel how I feel about you.”

She felt Jasper put his hand on her shoulder and she looked up at him. “Lucy, I am right here. You know I would NEVER allow anyone to harm you or touch you if you didn’t want it.” He squeezed her shoulder and smiled down at her. “Oh, we need to send a messenger fairy to your parents.”

“I already sent one letting them know I was safe.” Lucy watched as Jasper nodded his head. She looked back at Ryan who had a possessive gaze fixated on her. But in the possessiveness, there was also tenderness. And she could see that she was his center.

“Lucy...” Ryan’s eyes glanced at Jasper’s hand on her, and he frowned. “Please... come to me, Lucy. I need to hold you.”

She looked at his amber eyes that were pleading with her. She took a step towards him before she was pulled into his chest. He wrapped his arms around her and held her gently against his chest. He sifted his fingers through her hair with one hand while the other lightly pressed against her back.

“I never thought I would ever feel this... ever. I didn’t think I could ever have this... but I do and I can. Lucy, I need you. You are not optional to me. I can’t live without you. My soul is connected to yours. I can feel you and what you want. I know you are fighting against this... because you want to protect your pack. My Lucy... what if I told you that the treaty will stand between us?” Ryan said in a soothing baritone voice.

Lucy pulled back slightly and looked up at him. She could see his eyes were serious and that he meant what he was saying. She then looked over at Jasper who also nodded his head.

Wait a minute... Were they telling her she could be with Ryan and still unite their species? She could really have her fated mate? She felt her chest squeezing. Her eyes were burning. Was it really okay to give into the mate pull? She looked back into Ryan’s eyes as she waited for him to explain.

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Ryan sighed. He reached up and brushed his thumb over Lucy's face as he gazed into her emerald eyes. "This is a lot to ask but please don't be mad at me. I know I was wrong now but that doesn't change anything. And... I can say this clearly. Before you were my mate, I loved you, Lucy. Finding out you were my mate was wonderful but to find out you are my soul mate... it is unbelievable. I mean that doesn't happen. Our fate together was connected by someone. Maybe your moon goddess?"

Lucy shook her head and looked at him confused. "What are you saying?" She knew what it sounded like he was saying but this didn't make any sense.

"This has to be kept a secret right now. Just let me explain please." He sighed as he watched hurt begin to reflect in her eyes. He nodded his head slowly. "I'm Derek, Lucy."

"You are not the guy I have been seeing-" She suddenly stopped... but he more closely resembled the little boy she used to play with. She always excused his differences due to growing up. But looking at him now... he did look more like Derek. She thought to herself as she softly took in his scent. It was familiar. Derek... well who she thought was Derek told her before that his scent changed because of puberty. Which was true since Jaspers changed as well. Jasper however still had a hint of his normal scent while Derek didn't. But this Ryan... she was finally putting a puzzle together. There was a nostalgic scent to him... one that made her heart race. Her eyes were glued onto him as she waited for him to continue.

"That is my double, Ryan. The real Ryan. Let me explain, please. The prince's men must be people that can be trusted unconditionally. The only way to truly see that is to work among them. No one will show their true colors in front of the royals. They even act differently in front of Jasper. So, I swapped places with my double. I took on the soldier role and he took on the face of the prince. At the end of this summer, we would be switching back. The prince's soldiers would move into the palace as my elite trusted men. And the real face of the prince would be known to all. Right now, only a handful of people know who I am. I'm so sorry Lucy. I didn't realize how isolated and unwanted he was making you feel. I can tell by how you were talking how hurt you were by this. I'm so sorry..." His eyes watered slightly as Lucy's face looked more pale and pained.

"He was supposed to keep it on a friend level so you didn't fall for him. I never meant to hurt you. Please don't be mad."

Mad? Lucy wanted to laugh. Mad? She wasn't mad... okay maybe a little. But she was hurt. For years she felt like she was unwanted and not good enough. All of that could have been avoided if they just told her. Why was she left in the dark? And

then Jasper... Her chest felt constricted by air as she turned her gaze to her... friend? She wanted to scream. That hurt the most. Her 'best friend' kept this secret from her. Was he her friend or just the prince's spy?

"Back to what we talked about before Jasper," Lucy said icily. He would know exactly what she meant by that. This was a conversation they have had several times if he could truly be her friend as the prince's cousin. A real friend would have told her, right? He had seen the pain that Derek was causing her by ignoring her and not joining her for dinner. Yet, he never said anything.

"Lucy, please. Don't be angry at me," Jasper said and Lucy stepped back from both men though her gaze was turned to Jasper. She felt the biggest betrayal from him.

"Angry? Frustrated... hurt and feeling naïve as hell. But angry? No..." Her eyes watered and she shook her head. "You knew Jasper. You saw firsthand how much I was hurting over all of this..."

"He was under orders. This was top secret Lucy."

Lucy turned her head and looked at Derek. "So it's Derek? I'm your fiancé but I couldn't know this secret? Instead, you wanted me to meet another man and he would be the picture of my fiancé. That was really thought out well. What if I developed feelings for him? Of course, that is why he treated me like dirt to make sure that didn't happen. So instead it is okay for me to suffer. For years I felt like I was the unwanted trash that the prince had to take as his bride."

"You aren't unwanted Lucy. I love you. You were always on my mind. You were so bright and your energy was so attractive. When I first met you as a baby, I admit I didn't think much of you but that started changing. The more we were together I felt myself becoming more and more drawn to you. We were too young to feel the mate pull but it must have been because we would be soul mates... If I could do it over, I would make sure you knew. I'm sorry. We were wrong not to tell you. My father said it was best to keep the secret with us and I listened to his suggestion. I know now how wrong it was." Derek dropped to his knees and took Lucy's hand in his. "Please forgive me Lucy. I need you."

Lucy sighed. "I've made my stance quite clear. I plan to stand by the treaty." She felt him grip her hand tighter and he lifted up into her with a low growl.

"No Lucy. Not for the treaty. For me. As a man, as your mate. You will choose me for this or not at all."

Lucy let out an airy laugh and pushed Derek back with a fierce look. “You think because I desire you from the mate pull that I will just give into those feelings? I should ignore the hurt I am feeling and just be thrilled that my fated mate has been deceiving me for years. And not care that my best friend kept the biggest secret ever from me even though it caused me pain. I understand that you both were following orders and to hell with my feelings over it. You love me?” She scoffed. “You don’t know me. You love the idea of me. And now you feel the mate pull towards me. And if you would have just met with me, we would have known a long time ago we were fated mates.” She squeezed her hands into a fist.

“Why? Why did it have to be like that? I attended parties and dances alone or with my cousin. I had you so I shouldn’t have been alone. And I would have understood had the situation been explained to me. Look, I understand now. Really, I do. You both were just doing what you were told. But I need time...I need to process this away from the two of you.”

“Lucy,” Jasper said in a desperate tone as she took a few steps towards the door.

She looked down at the floor. “I thought of you as a brother to me... but Aiden would have never... in the end you are the prince’s cousin first. I understand that. I just don’t know what that means as far as our friendship is concerned.” She looked up at Jasper and could see the hurt in his eyes. She was hurt too. He was under orders. She understood that but where is the line between their friendship and orders? Is there a place for it? And how far do orders go? If he was ordered to, would he have killed her? Where was his line? She lifted her gaze to Derek. She should be elated that she could be with her fated mate. But she had been struggling inwardly for so long. The feeling of being unwanted and unaccepted by the prince plagued her for years. And then to hear it was all for naught? She needed to sort out her feelings.

“I don’t need to be carried.” She met with Derek’s eyes to make sure he understood. She then opened the door and walked out of the room.

She walked into the living room and felt like tearing something apart out of frustration. She was overwhelmed with emotions. Both good and bad. Okay, she could admit that if she ordered Justice not to say something she knew he would listen to her. So, she could understand Jasper’s position... a bit. Part of it was them being dumb boys. She understood this from Aiden and Justice who very rarely thought about how their actions affected other people. She once had to tell them how they hurt a girl’s feelings because the morons were oblivious. They just didn’t think things through.

All Jasper had to do was explain to Derek that her feeling rejected by his stand-in was hurting her. Had he done this Derek probably would have made her the exception and told her what was going on. Which is the problem with boys not thinking. She felt the burden alleviate from her knowing that Derek was her fated mate. The guy she was ready to give herself to was

actually the right guy. He was her fiancé. Which was not a coincidence. It couldn't have been. She was sure her parents would think the same too.

She wasn't going to reject her fated mate especially since he was Derek. But... it was best to let them sweat for a bit. She was running the show here. If she wanted a relationship, then it would be her pursuing it. That was the other thing those two needed to learn. That they were not the ones in charge. She was. She was the alpha king's daughter and didn't run behind anyone.

And while on a primal level she wanted to mark her mate on an emotional level they needed to talk some. She just needed to think of the memory of a party where she stood by the punch bowl while everyone danced with their partners. She had asked the man she thought was Derek if he wanted to go with her, but he politely turned her down. And Jasper was busy, so she ended up going alone. Even if she would have known... the real Derek couldn't have gone with her. But she would not have felt rejected. The fake Derek didn't even give her a reason. He just said 'No thanks.'. Yes, she needed to hold onto this memory for willpower.

"Are you okay?" Tonya asked, walking up to Lucy.

"Me?" Lucy gave her an evil smile and shrugged. "Sure, just teaching a lesson is all. I think they need to learn who is really in charge."

Tonya giggled. "Those are the best lessons to teach."

Lucy smiled. Finally, she wasn't being carried everywhere. Her injuries were healing, though not healed up completely. But she was a werewolf and didn't need to be coddled.

Through the wall, a messenger fairy whisked in quickly. She watched as it halted in front of her frantically.

Your parents have been attacked on their way here to find you-

Lucy didn't let the fairy continue its sentence. In a growl, she shifted into her wolf and charged out the door.

"LUCY!" Tonya yelled. "s**t, tell Ryan!" She turned as Zach opened the door to Ryan's room.

“LUCY LEFT! She shifted into her wolf and took off.” Zach yelled.

Derek growled and shook his head. “If she thinks she is going to just leave she has another thing coming. Jasper and I will bring her back. You all stay here.” He ordered and blurred out of the room with Jasper.

Lucy’s fawn colored wolf pushed off the ground with all her might. Her wounds were opening back up, but she didn’t feel them. Pure adrenaline had kicked in while she headed in the direction of her parents’ scent. As their scent got closer another scent hit her nose.

Blood.

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You move well for an old man.” Jason laughed, shifting back into his human form.

“Old man? You are older than me!” Wyatt chuckled and then looked over at Freya who was wiping her daggers clean. “I think she still managed to outdo us both.”

Jin swirled the bodies together gathering them in a whirlwind and stacking them up. “Ready to be torched... and what the heck were they?”

Wyatt frowned as he stepped near Freya. “That is what concerns me the most. But I think we know what is causing those attacks now.”

“Someone is coming!” Freya said, snapping her head to the side. She immediately relaxed and smiled. “Seems like our girl doesn’t need to be rescued after all.”

Lucy jumped through the bushes and was shocked to see her parents, aunt, and uncle. She was expecting a battle. Though from the pile of bodies to the side it looked like they didn’t need any help. She quickly shifted back to her human self. She could see her father studying her attire. She was wearing Derek’s shirt and pants.

“Lucy!” Freya said with outstretched arms.

“Mom! Dad!” Lucy jumped into her parents’ arms. They held her tight and squeezed her body between them.

“Let me see you. Are you hurt? What happened?” Wyatt knelt down as he got whiffs of the fresh blood from his daughter. He lifted her pant leg slightly, seeing the blood trickling down.

“I’m fine. Those reopened on my way to get to you. A messenger fairy told me you were fighting...”

“Why do you still have these wounds?” Freya asked as she bent down to investigate.

“The dark elves attacked with a liquid silver and vervain mixture. The silver didn’t bother me but the vervain did.” Lucy said as she watched her mother analyzing the wounds.

“Dark elves dared to attack my daughter?!” Wyatt growled. His eyes started to turn dark as Jason growled in anger.

“Did you get my message?” Lucy asked.

“Yes, we are going to deal with that little witch.” Freya said in annoyance.

“And you know your mom and dad aren’t about to just sit around even if you say you are fine.” Jin giggled as she leaned into Jason. “So here we are to bring you back. Ta da!”

Freya looked at Lucy and frowned. “It is odd how the vervain is affecting you. It is just as severe as it would be for a full vampire. How long ago were you injured?”

“It is going to be dark soon. We need to get set up somewhere and then we can talk.” Wyatt said, looking up at the darkening sky.

Freya suddenly raised her dagger and narrowed her eyes. “Come out or die.”

“Nice Freya! I’m impressed.” Jasper said, chuckling as he hopped down from the tree above them. Behind him Derek also landed. His gaze was fixated on Lucy.

“Oh Jasper. So, you already found Lucy.” Freya put her dagger away and looked at her daughter confused. “Why are you by yourself then?”

Lucy leaned in her father’s side who had a protective arm on her. She smiled smugly at the two vampires. “I was annoyed with him that’s why.” She looked at her mother and gave her a sweet smile. She looked back at Jasper and Derek. “What are you two doing here?” She said in an icy tone.

“We heard you shifted and took off running. So, we came after you.” Jasper shrugged his shoulders, a small frown on his lips.

“So what if I was running home? Were you planning on stopping me?” Lucy asked, quirking her eyebrow up.

Derek sighed loudly. “Exactly. You aren’t getting away that easily.” The moment the words left his mouth Wyatt and Jason released a low growl.

“I don’t like the way you are looking at my daughter.” Wyatt snarled as he stared at the stranger.

“How else should I look at my mate?” Derek asked with a smile.

“Your... mate?” Wyatt asked, looking at his sweet baby curled tucked safely under his arm.

“You look just like how I remember you. Sorry, it has been so long.” Derek said, looking between Freya and Wyatt.

“Are you really...” Freya started and watched Jasper nod his head. Freya knew better than to utter his name. The forest had ears sometimes. It’s Derek... I guess Selene strikes again? She mind linked to the others.

Wyatt stared at Derek. His eyes narrowed on the boy who was his daughter’s mate. “Are you mistreating my baby girl?”

“It isn’t like that-” Jasper quickly came to Derek’s defense.

“She is clinging to me and not to her mate.” Wyatt growled. “I don’t care who you are. No one will mistreat my daughter.” His eyes darkened as they narrowed onto Derek.

“I’m sorry.” Derek said quietly. “I’ve wronged your daughter. I can’t change what I’ve done. But...” He set his gaze on Lucy. “If you let me, I will spend eternity making it up to you. Please Lucy... I need you.”

Lucy pondered quietly to herself. His actions hurt her whether intentionally or not. When she thinks about how long she felt unwanted... She tilted her head to the side as she felt a deep burn inside of her chest. It felt like her lungs were being filled up with water and it was hard to breathe. But this wasn’t her. This wasn’t from her body. This was coming from Derek. She looked up to see his pleading eyes. They looked scared and were watering slightly. She could feel a deep pang of regret from him.

She knew by looking at him that he was full of remorse. She could feel it. She pictured her brother doing something similar. And she knew he would except he had a sister smart enough to beat him upside the head. Something Derek didn’t have. And the truth is she was never going to reject Derek but just planned to make him suffer a bit. But how could she continue that now? Especially in front of her father who will think badly of him if she does. Her father may not move past this moment if she acts too wounded. Plus... he was suffering. Her lungs were being squeezed from Derek’s feelings. He was scared... now she felt like she was the one being cruel. She wanted him to fret about it a bit... but the feeling that was coming through was almost an agonizing level. He was breaking and this broke her resolve. He was her mate after all. And obviously her soul mate. Very obvious at this point from the flashes of his emotions that invaded her.

“Okay. But we have to rehome Jasper.” Lucy raised a challenging eyebrow.

“Hey!” Jasper gasped.

“Done.” Derek said simply with a small smile on his face.

“HEY!” Jasper turned and said in exasperation.

Lucy giggled. “Okay, Jasper can stay.”

“Thanks for your benevolence.” Jasper whimpered out with a small pout.

“Lucy, you don’t have to. Even if he is your fated mate. I will-” Wyatt stopped as his daughter raised her fingers up to his lips.

“I know daddy. This is my choice.” She smiled softly. “It’s what I want.” And for the first time that was true. She wanted Derek... her fated mate. She turned back and looked at Derek whose eyes were still glued on her. She took a step away from her father’s side. She felt his hand reluctantly drop from her and then she slowly walked up to Derek. She paused just in front of him. She could feel the suffocating feeling inside of her slowly subside as she stared into his eyes.

“You are an idiot.” Lucy said and watched as Derek grinned.

“I know.” His eyes gazed back in to hers. He felt his heart hammering in nervous excitement. He wanted to hold her but was waiting for her. He needed to feel her in his arms... He screwed up. He didn’t think things through. And ended up hurting his most precious person.

She smiled up at him and walked forward, leaning into his chest. She felt his arms come around her and the sparks and tingles rippled over her body. This time she could enjoy them. She felt his head come to rest on hers.

“My Lucy.” He whispered into her hair.

“So what are those things?” Freya said, turning her attention to the pile of corpses.

“We call them voidless or soulless. They are the witches doing...” Derek said, lifting his head up. “Though she isn’t doing this alone. The real culprit we believe to be Wicker. Disguising himself as a witch doctor. But he won’t show his ugly face. Jasper... burn the bodies.”

Jasper walked over and lit the pile of bodies on fire. “You guys can still fight for being... out of the battlefield for a while.” He winked over at Jason. He knew they knew he was implying they were old. Jason chuckled dryly and rolled his eyes.

“I’d like to hear everything you know.” Wyatt looked up at Derek who nodded.

“Come back and stay with us tonight. I will tell you everything we have found out... you can refer to me as Ryan there. And I can explain all that as well.” Derek looked down at Lucy. “And why I haven’t been by her side...”

“Is there chocolate there?” Jin asked and smiled brightly.

Jasper chuckled. “I spied chocolate cake in the refrigerator.”

Jin's eyes widened. "Well, what are we waiting for? It is going to be dark soon so we better hurry."

Now you couldn't have asked for a better outcome. Derek is her fated mate. Stop pouting. Freya mind linked to Wyatt.

I guess deep down I hoped she would reject the treaty and just stay with us... now she is going to move away.

Yes, but she will have a piece of the black pearl. We can visit her anytime. Just think how your parents felt having to be apart from both of their children. At least we know Aiden is never leaving the nest. Freya smiled up at Wyatt who smiled nodding his head.

Wyatt wrapped his arm around Freya and pulled her into his side. "Alright let's go."

Lucy went to take a step but was immediately hoisted into the air. Derek smiled down at her as he held her bridal style. "I don't think so. You used your legs way more than you should have. And I can smell you reopened those wounds."

"I'm a werewolf not a glass doll." Lucy frowned though she was enjoying being held against his chest.

"You have to pick your battles Lucy." Freya smiled up at her daughter. "If we lose, it is because we lose on purpose." She winked at her daughter.

Lucy felt a sharp pain jolt up her leg. She remained motionless and kept it hidden from her face, yet Derek stopped walking immediately. He looked down at her in confusion and frowned.

"Lucy what hurts?" Derek's voice was laced with concern. Freya and Wyatt were instantly standing in front of them both.

"I'm fine." Lucy said quietly.

Derek set his jaw. "Don't lie to me Lucy. I felt it."

"You felt it?" Wyatt asked. He glanced over at Freya and back to Derek.

“Yes, I can feel Lucy. It is hard to explain but it has been getting stronger. Her thoughts, her feelings... her dreams...” He looked down at Lucy, his eyes flashed in amusement for only a brief moment. “And the longer the day has gone on this connection has been getting stronger.”

“You haven’t marked her yet...” Freya said as her eyes widened.

“Even with my parents that connection didn’t start until after they marked each other.” Wyatt said, looking at the couple in front of him. “You two are soul mates... but from the sounds of it, it is a connection like none we have ever witnessed.”

“What hurt?” Freya narrowed her eyes at her daughter. Hearing Derek’s explanation she now knew her daughter was hiding her pain.

“Mom I’m fine...-” Lucy sighed as she saw the anger behind her mothers’ eyes build. Her mother was more relaxed about things but if she asked for an answer, she expected one. “I pushed off of my leg when I was running. I jumped off of a boulder and I think I tore it worse. And normally that wouldn’t be a problem but -“

“With the vervain still in your system it is.” Freya sighed with a frown.

Derek’s eyes were dark and his jaw was set. She could feel him trembling slightly.

“It’s just a tear. I’m okay.” Lucy tried to calm Derek down.

Wyatt slapped Derek on the back. “Get used to it. She is her mother’s daughter, and she is going to keep you on your toes. Remember this day. You asked for her, no take backs.” Wyatt winked at Derek. While Jasper and Jason chuckled behind him. Wyatt understood exactly how he was feeling. Being a new mate, your senses are heightened, and you are extremely protective. It must be even worse for soul mates.

Derek smiled at Wyatt and curled Lucy deeper in his chest. “I can’t handle her in pain.”

Lucy felt her heart clench as the butterflies fluttered in her chest. She could see the pain in his eyes because of her. “It’s not that bad. Honest.”

“If this is this strong now it will only be worse after the marking.” Freya looked at Lucy and frowned. Her daughter wasn’t getting a possessive protective alpha... she was getting a possessive protective vampire prince. She was going to have a lot of fights in the future about having some independence. She raised her to have a mind and will of her own and trusted she would make it through the fights ahead.

“I’m worried about marking her with the vervain in her system.” Derek said quietly.

“You can’t mark her until the ceremony anyways.” Jasper said.

“I don’t care about the ceremony. I’ll be connected better to her once she bears my mark. It is safer that way.”

“Look I’m a pretty progressive dad I like to think. A mark is a fact of life. But another one is that she is my baby girl...” Wyatt felt Freya elbow him in his side.

“Well at least he is being considerate and taking his time with the marking. You know, instead of just planting it on her the moment they meet.” Freya raised her eyebrow at him and he gave her a sheepish smile in return. Wyatt’s situation was different and in a normal situation he never would have forced his mark. But he had just gotten his powers as the werewolf king and his wolf took control of the situation. Still, he felt bad about it, so Freya liked to tease him over it from time to time.

“Sorry Wyatt. I know she is your daughter. I’ll try to be more mindful of those things around you...” Derek met with Wyatt’s silver eyes. “She might be my mate, but she is more than that to me. I love your daughter. She is precious to me.”

Lucy could feel her cheeks heat with embarrassment. What was he saying in front of everyone?! The way he was staring at her father right now. It was so determined and with so much conviction.

Wyatt smiled. “Good. Because I couldn’t hand her over to anyone who she wasn’t precious to.”

“Can’t we talk about this after I have my chocolate... I mean after we are inside?” Jin giggled.

“Yes, we need to get back. I need to look at your wound and treat it.” Derek looked down at Lucy. Her cheeks were lightly flushed as she gnawed on her bottom lip. She was so damn adorable. He wanted nothing more than to taste the sweet peach below him. But with her parents there that would have to wait. Still, his chest felt ready to burst with happiness. He had his Lucy in his arms. His love. His soul mate. His queen.

