

The Meltdown

Elowen POV

"I, uh... I brought you something," Daxon said, reaching into the inner pocket of his jacket. He pulled out a small, worn photograph. The edges were frayed, the corners soft with time. He held it out to me, like it weighed a thousand pounds.

I took it with trembling fingers and blinked down at the face staring back. A woman. Pale skin. Midnight hair flowing past her waist. Blue eyes that matched mine exactly. She was laughing, holding a tiny bundle in her arms.

My breath caught. "That's..." I whispered, my throat closing.

"Your mom," Daxon said softly. "And you. You were maybe a few days old."

The world blurred. "She looks like me."

"She is you," he said. "Same fire. Same fight in her eyes. I thought... maybe it would help. Seeing her."

Something inside me cracked. Because it did help. And it hurt like hell. "She's beautiful," I whispered, barely holding the tears back. "Thank you."

His voice dropped. "You deserve to know where you come from." The photo shook in my hand like it was made of lightning instead of paper. Her

face stared back at me...soft, ethereal, and terrifyingly familiar. The same blue eyes. The same bone structure. My fucking mother.

"She was beautiful," I whispered, the words catching in my throat.

"She is," Daxon said gently. "The Fae didn't kill her. They imprisoned her."
"

My breath hitched. "She's still alive?" My mind whirled. The letter had said she was in a prison. Duh.

He nodded, his golden eyes soft for once. "We'll get her out. I swear it."

Before I could process that emotional gut punch, Ash piped in from the corner of the room where he'd been brooding like a Victorian ghost with great hair.

"We should wait," he said, his arms folded. "There's no point storming a Fae prison with no strategy. You'll get yourself killed. Or worse...capture her and lose Elowen in the process."

Daxon stiffened. "You think I'd be that careless?"

"I think you're emotional," Ash said coolly. "And you're not thinking straight. She needs a calm mind right now. Not...whatever you are when you're three seconds from shifting and growling at chairs."

"Say that again, bloodsucker," Daxon growled, stepping forward.

"Bloodsucker?" Ash's eyes flared black. "How creative. Did your balls

shrink on the way back through the portal, or were they always that size?"

"Bite me," Daxon snarled.

"Gladly," Ash hissed, fangs flashing.

And just like that, they were chest to chest, snarling like animals, radiating raw testosterone and barely leashed murder. And me? I was done.

"STOP IT!" I screamed, slamming the photo down on the table so hard it cracked the wood beneath it.

They both froze mid snarl.

"Do you even hear yourselves?" I yelled, my voice shaking. "Do you realize I just saw the face of my mother for the first time in my entire goddamn life and you're too busy trying to prove who can piss farther to even notice I'm fucking unraveling?!"

Ash opened his mouth. I raised my hand to shut him the hell up. "No. Don't you dare speak. Not until I've finished losing my entire mind in peace."

Tears flooded my eyes before I could stop them. "I didn't ask for this! Any of it! I didn't ask for powers I don't understand or this prophecy or to be hunted by some masked psycho science cult with a god complex!"

My chest was heaving now. I couldn't breathe. The walls felt too close. "You keep talking about how to protect me," I gasped. "Like I'm a fucking thing. A mission. A problem to solve."

Daxon reached out like he wanted to pull me in. I backed up so fast I hit the wall. "No. Don't touch me right now. I need to get out of here before I scream."

I grabbed my phone, shaking fingers flying across the screen. \[Emergency run. Meet me in the trees. Don't ask. Just come.\]

"Elowen, please," Daxon said, stepping forward. "You're not okay. Don't leave the Keep."

"I'm not okay because of you two!" I shouted, pointing at them like they were the chaos gods incarnate. "So maybe let me be not okay in fucking peace!"

I turned on my heel and ran. Barefoot, my hair wild, my sanity hanging by a thread. Ash's voice chased me, low and desperate. "Please stay in the wards."

But Lyssira was already clawing at the edges of my soul, screaming for freedom. "Let me out," she growled. "Let me RUN."

When I hit the ward line, a flash of red fur burst from the other side, and out jumped Taya, shifting mid-sprint, her red wolf Zuki glowing like wildfire in the dark. I didn't stop. I dropped to my knees, shoved my clothes into a pile, and let the shift take me.

Bones broke. Magic surged. My scream turned into a howl. And then I ran. Away from the boys. Away from the prophecy. Away from everything that

wanted to cage me with love and protection and expectations I never agreed to.

The trees blurred as we ran, our paws pounding the forest floor in perfect rhythm. The wind in our fur. Moonlight on our backs. The tension in my chest finally cracked open with every thud of my claws against the dirt. Lyssira howled once, long and sharp, and Zuki answered without hesitation. Our wolves were fire and frost, silver and crimson, rage and release.

We didn't stop until we reached the shallow creek deep within the wards, where the air felt cleaner, and the weight of everything pressing down on me didn't crush quite as hard. Lyssira slowed first, circling twice before shifting back. I collapsed into the moss, naked and muddy and emotionally hollow.

Taya shifted beside me, her red hair tangled, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glassy. We sat there in silence for a moment, panting like we'd outrun death itself. Then she said, her voice soft, "So... you met your mom through a photo and screamed at two of the hottest males in existence in the span of ten minutes?"

I let out a choked laugh. "And cried while doing it. Don't forget the tears."

"You're a fucking icon."

"No, I'm a goddamn mess."

"You can be both."

I stared up at the stars. My body ached from the run, but my soul? It still buzzed. With power. With fear. With everything.

"So," I said, glancing at her, "Zuki freaked out over Rylen again?"

Taya groaned, covering her face. "Yes. She practically purred when he handed me a towel after training. A towel, El. I think we're doomed."

"She really thinks he's your mate?"

"She's convinced. And honestly? I don't know. I always thought I'd just... find someone the normal way. Not sniff a dude's hoodie and go fucking feral."

Lyssira purred in my mind. "You have to agree, it's efficient."

Zuki replied enthusiastically, "We don't waste time. What's the point? Mate!"

I snorted. "So what does that make me? I've got an alpha wolf shifter, and a vampire noble sniffing me like I'm their fave chew toy."

Taya wheezed. "Okay, but...how are you mated to a vampire? Like... isn't that biologically impossible?"

"I thought so. But apparently, the Moon Goddess said 'fuck science' and just started throwing soul bonds around like confetti."

We both fell silent again, staring into the dark.

"Maybe..." Taya began, picking at the moss, "Maybe that's why fated mates are so rare now. Like, what if they didn't disappear... we just stopped finding them?"

I tilted my head. "Because the species are segregated?"

She nodded. "Think about it. Wolves stay with wolves. Vampires stay in their creepy old castles. Fae don't even look at us unless they're kidnapping someone. And humans? Totally cut off. The bonds probably still exist...they just can't activate if we're not meeting our damn mates."

A chill ran through me.

"I don't even know how many species I could be tied to," I whispered. "What if there's more? What if I end up with someone from every damn bloodline?"

"Then I'll expect an invite to the most chaotic wedding in history," Taya said, smiling.

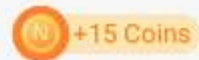
I let out a watery laugh. "Do you think the universe made a mistake with me?"

"No," she said firmly. "I think the universe finally got fed up with everyone's bullshit and made you to fix it."

Lyssira snorted. "Damn right."

Zuki chimed in, "Our girl's the storm."

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"I'm not ready to fix anything," I whispered.

"You don't have to be ready," she said. "You just have to be you. And let the rest of us show the fuck up for you when it all gets too heavy."

I blinked back tears. And this time, I didn't try to stop them.

We sat there, skin to skin, muddy and exhausted, watching the moon rise higher, two best friends carrying the weight of the world, one howl at a time.



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