

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 61

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Leyanne sighs heavily, her expression grim, walks around me and gets into the car without hesitation, her temper pulled thin, leaving me standing on the roadside flexing my hands and trying to stop my claws coming out. I can feel my eyes burning with fury, and know they're probably glowing as red as lava with how mad I am in this second, my anger and instinctual aggression peeking out because I'm standing four feet from the enemy and everything in me is screaming 'kill it'. I can barely suppress the anxiety, the hatred and yet I know deep down I need to follow her.

"Hurry up, pet. I've not got all day." Leyanne's voice coos from inside, a slight thawing of her icy tone in what I guess is a bid to try and cool my jets and I swallow my fury, snort at the standing guard, throwing him a nasty glare, almost tasting the urge to strike him down but yet throw caution to the wind. She said they weren't a threat, and that she'll still help us...I shouldn't believe her, but I can't help thinking of the fact she warned me I wouldn't like this arrival, last night. I grin my teeth, shake my head at how stupid this is as I climb inside the dark interior of the vehicle and give stinking vampire freak a wide berth. I have more questions than apprehension and knowing I need to be braver if we're going to help our pack, means I lay my sus***ion aside and trust that the fates wouldn't lead me here to this for no reason. I jump when the door is snapped shut behind me, the interior so dark that I'm momentarily blind before my nocturnal vision kicks in and almost fall onto my seat as I clutch the cold leather and edge myself to sit down.

The inner car is spacious, unlit, and my vision starts to adjust properly just before Leyanne lights it up with a glowing ball in the center of her palm. I blink, flinching painfully at the sudden white light she just dazzled me with and snort again, showing my displeasure with her for all of this.

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"Not all of us have night vision goggles you know, Darrius. The sun doesn't hurt you so why are we sat in a dark box? Are you allergic to interior lighting?"

Wait, what? The heavy sarcasm holds a hint of warmth, and her voice pulls me to blink rapidly and look towards the person she's addressing, sitting opposite us. I only now see him that she's drawn him to me and I freeze in utter terror as I realize the scent that's still offending my nostrils isn't just from the driver at the door, but the foreboding figure opposite.

I can smell him, much like the other one, this too is a vampire and I know for a fact the sun DOES hurt them. It's why we are safer in daylight. Confusion causes me to furrow my brow, wrinkle my nose and cast Leyanne a look as if to say 'are you kidding?' surely she has more knowledge that that about these pale, ugly creatures.

"Old habits, Miss Cruden.... I dwell in the dark, I'm not used to being around in the day due to the nature of my profession." The muscular shadowy figure leans forward, still clouded in shadow, somehow shielded from Leyanne's light with a heavy dark coat that has the oversized hood pulled up so only the lower half of his face can be seen. Carved masculine lips, clean shaven, and those white pointy teeth that are impossible to hide are hinting out over the outer edges of his lower lip, although this one has a square jawline, and his pallor doesn't seem as lifeless as the ones I have come up against. His skin almost looks humanly colored, and warm, as though his teeth are fake and he's not really what he smells like.

I'm met with a husky heavily accented voice, in a body that screams of strength and power. He's in a tailored set of dark clothes, his outer jacket is leather and long on that tall body, almost like a suit, with dark crimson lining peeking out and adding a hint of opulence. I'm surprised to be able to feel body heat emanating his way and not the cold iciness we have encountered when we fight his kind. In fact, if I didn't smell him, see his fangs with my own eyes, I would be doubting what he is at all. He's one of them, only he seems different and carries the same kind of dark and intense aura as Leyanne.

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"You're not exactly giving her reason to relax with the hood? Sinister and mysterious are not always the way to make new friends, Darrius." Leyanne points out, ironically, given she was wearing one when we met her last night. The vampire pauses...seems to ponder it for a moment and then with a slight tilt of his head and a raised arm, he pulls back his hood slowly to reveal a handsome, definitely masculine face, under dark brows and a head of modern styled black hair, but I freeze as he blinks blood red, glowing eyes, my way that makes my breath catch in my throat and I choke. Startled with the intensity of their light in this dark space as they almost glow like crimson candles in the pitch black of night.

"And that reaction is somehow better?" He asks her drily, seemingly amused at my instant shock and unimpressed at the same time. Vampires that we've been up against never had the same color of eyes as me. He's the first I have ever seen, and it throws me off kilter completely, gawping his way and blinking like an imbecilic.

"I figured it would be a familiarity rather than a shock, wee pet. Surely you of all wolves can't be afraid of red eyes?" She chuckles, mocking me in that sing song way she has of talking, leaning out to pat my hand with hers, somewhat reassuringly and then leans back in her seat with a smile. I glance from her to him and back again, ignoring the fact that he's actually pretty hot for a vamp man, something we NEVER see, and yet his eyes make him look like the devil. I am at a loss for words. Caught in silent awe, staring at this hunky, devil eyed creature before me, as he gazes right back, no expression at all, and his focus makes me tremble under the intensity of his gaze. It's like he's staring right through me and yet, I have no sense of danger at all from this thirty something year old person. No alarm bells or kill switches and I realize; I have completely forgotten that his kind are someone I should never sit in a car with and have normal chit chat.

"Well, this is her. The one I told you about last night. Alora..... she's her child. Survived all this time, a hidden wee gem that time forgot." Leyanne doesn't

waste time in getting up to task and I flutter my eyes to her and back to him, my heart beating through my chest, nerves fraught, panic hitching because I'm in over my head, trying to get a read on the situation. Leyanne seems relaxed and comfortable, but that means nothing to me. I still don't know if we can trust her and him, he's isn't moving or doing anything that tells me I should run, in fact, he isn't phased at all by a wolf being in his car. He seems bored!

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"How can you be sure? There have been rumors before that never came to fruition. Varro won't listen if there's no certainty." he states openly as if I'm not even here and just addresses her directly. I try to decipher his strange accent; his English is clear and well-spoken but that overlying way he rolls his words is almost Russian, transatlantic for sure, maybe. It's light, almost not there, American hints, but in some words it's heavy and pronounced. I'm not sure where to place his origin and it might explain why he's nothing like the vampires in Arizona. Maybe they have races, much like the humans do, like wolves have colors, and up until now we have seen the ugliest, scrawniest, whitest, and lowest of the gene pool of his kind. He's definitely nothing like what we know of them at all. This one is strong, built, sinister and seems to be extremely poised and graceful, with an intelligent expression on that almost model like rugged face.

"Really? How can I be sure? You're asking me? Come on Darrius, you know better than to question my skill and knowledge in anything important. Look at her eyes... she's also white when she turns wolf. Her mother was called Marina and her family died on the battlefield at the hands of the Santo pack. Sound familiar? We don't get many coincidences in these lands." Leyanne leans towards him stiffly, a rise of her attitude that he would question her, and I curl back into the corner and try to pull apart the words she just said. Not knowing how to feel about what she's telling him or why it's important. My head confused and overactive with the sudden surge of possibilities.

"Hmmm" he growls it under his breath, and I try my hardest to sit upright and keep all my internal reactions down. My wolf is fighting me to leap out due to my growing uneasiness and mistrust, and I'm gagging on the stench of vampire invading my senses the longer I breathe the air in this small confine. Overwhelmed with the feel of them and hating that a part of me somehow wants to tune in and feel them the way I do with the wolves. I don't want them inside of me that way, and I fight it with all my will.

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"You know there's a sure-fire way to check. I know you brought him. What are you waiting on? I wouldn't have asked you to come if I wasn't sure, and he knows her by sight. He'll kill your doubts in a flash." Leyanne almost goads him, confidence oozing, her posture is straight and haughty as though she knows this is all inevitable and he's wasting time by delaying. I can't really add anything to this conversation because I don't really know what it is, what wants with me, or why he's trying to prove I am who she says I am, or who they have who would know

me face to face. My heart ups it's chaotic beat and my palms turn clammy with sheer stress at this situation.

"He's hesitant, afraid of disappointment after he's spent all these years thinking she was gone. I can't force him to look at her if he doesn't want to." The dark stranger shifts in his seat and props an arm on the ledge and turns his head out at the black tinted window, staring at the road out there and flexes that square muscular jawline. If he wasn't a vampire, if I didn't have Colton, then I would dare to say he would be crush worthy. As it is I wouldn't blink twice about staking him through the heart with one of my claws.

"How unlike you, not forcing people to do what you want. Are you going soft? Has age finally caught up with you, old man." she jokes but his low throaty growl only makes her smile wider and I get that this chick really likes to rile people. She loves to throw in those little stabby words for reaction. He becomes about a hundred times more intimidating and snaps his head back to her, scarily steady, and graceful, yet the killing intent is clear in those glowing reds.

"I'm not that much older than you!" He grinds out, clearly offended with her age digs and I blanch, doing the math in my head and realizing this goon is over three thousand years old. The grimoires have never been clear on vampire life spans but surely that can't be right. Some of the ones we killed looked way more aged than him, some were even old in terms of human looks and yet here he is, prime of youth, and over three millennia old.

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He taps his thumb which I notice is sheathed in a black leather glove on his thigh, another layer of weird on this sinister freak given they don't feel cold, so why the gloves? he sits still, as though pondering something then nods.

"You're right. It's the quickest way. And I need certainty, not possible. Varro requires confirmation as soon as I can confirm it."

I jump as my door is opened again without warning, and I realize that much like wolves, the vampires can link psychically, although we haven't seen much of it back home, and he probably told whoever it was to get in here. I instinctively slide towards Leyanne, inner nerves taking over and shielding myself beside her in hopes she will actually protect me, as a dark clothed figure appears at the blinding light of the open door, tall, muscular but shrouded in shade as the sun sits behind him and makes it impossible for me to see. I peer out, blinking as I try to adjust, eyes watering profusely, rubbing my eyes to shield the sudden retina burning brightness that's pointed right on my face. He seems to hesitate and stands there silently without coming in or getting closer.

I'm confused for a moment and look to Leyanne, then the vampire with a questioning tightness of my face, and out to the figure once more. Unsure what's happening here or if I'm expected to say something, do something. Spinning my head and then halting as a new scent enters my nose and makes everything around me stop dead and blur away as a detail homes in all my senses to one thing.

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I know his smell... there's something familiar about it, something gnawing at the back of my brain as I inhale deeper to get more of it... his scent. Memories stirring, darkness pushing away questions and thoughts as every fiber in my body grabs onto the familiar and tries to pull a face back from the eternal depths of my past. I would never forget it, it's so close, so comforting, so real. Not in a million years would I not know what is filtering through my nostrils and stimulating all my nerve endings. My body stiffens, my skin goosebumps and all my hackles raise in both alarm, shock, and a deep despair that scratches my heart and makes me gasp out a sob of recognition. Realization crashes through my senses as my eyes widen in disbelief and I throw myself out of the car instinctively to see for myself that this can't really be him.

The figure backs off at speed, seemingly panicking at my burst out, leaving the gap between us at ten feet as I get upright and glare at the hooded figure before me. Inner chaotic emotions flying crazily and the need to confirm, to see, to know it's him almost takes me over like a crazy person. My brain stammering and my soul in agony.

He's male, stands over six feet tall, powerful in body and with heat... late twenties, well he would be now, a scent that no wolf would ever mistake, especially not me as I knew it so well, and I lift my hands in disbelief. Stunned and numb all at the same time.

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"It can't be you..... how can it be you? You died. You were killed, they all were You died!!! SHOW ME YOUR FACE!" I screech at him, tears cascading from nowhere and immediately wash over my cheeks, drenching my skin, as hysteria takes grip. My heart feels like it's being shredded to pieces while fear and panic overtake my limbs and I begin to shake. Losing control as the air around us rids me of the vampire's scent from within the car and there's no more mistaking it. I can smell it fully now.

Him, wolf, my blood..... I know the scent of one of our own anywhere, and I know him. I know him as I know the back of my hand or the sound of Colton's voice. This can't be happening to me.

"Lorey... I..." he lowers his head, looking to his feet and even his voice destroys what's left of my soul. His voice, only mature, huskier and yet, it's still him. That voice would hush me to sleep with bedtime stories every single night.

The tears break harder, and I claw at my chest to counteract the crashing burning pain inside of me at the realization he's really here. After ten years of thinking him dead, yet he's alive, and with vampires as though I never mattered at all.

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"Jasper.... why?" I wail at him, betrayal wracking my body painfully and hurting me on a much deeper level than physical wounds could. "Why didn't you come for me? When mom and dad died, why did you leave me? You let me believe I was alone, all this time. Do you know how I survived, how I lived? How alone I was? WHY??" I sob, accusing him, hurling my words like weapons, amid the gulping cries of a distraught child.

My brother shifts uneasily on his feet and draws back his hood to finally expose the face I have been longing to see for half my life. Same soft, short, brown hair that flops over his forehead on one side and softer blue eyes under straight brown brows, in an aged face but the features I loved so well, still remain. Handsome flawlessness, much like our father. His eyes damp with unshed tears and he can't look me in mine as his own shame courses through and shows on the face that always found it hard not to reveal his every emotional thought.

"You were dead... that's what I thought.... You were dead. The Santo's they wiped out the clan, they left no one else alive... The farm, the village, it was all destroyed when I came back to find you." He crumbles, his shoulders sagging as his body slumps in an excruciating way, and he steps towards me, reaching out a hand and then withdrawing as though he's afraid of my rejection, of my anger. Or maybe afraid much like I am that one touch will awaken us from this dream, and neither will be standing here at all.

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I don't know how to react, what to think or feel. I stare at him, gawping, somehow rooted to my spot, anger consuming me, mixed emotions swirling around me like a dense fog. Pain, then relief, some inkling of joy and hope, but it all swirls back around to agonizing shards of biting fear as I try and absorb that this is real.

I open my mouth to speak again, but only noise comes out, a whimper of desperate sobbing that breaks me down and in a second I'm crushed against a strong warm chest, surrounded by arms that used to be as familiar as my own skin. I'm hugged tightly by the one person who used to make my day brighter, before Colton did, before our world fell apart. I can only slump into him, so caught in past memories and how this feels so familiar, so necessary and yet I cannot stop crying against his soft clothes like a wounded child.

"If I had known.... I would have found a way to take you. I would never have left you or abandoned you. I truly, truly believed I was too late. I swear, Lorey." He mumbles into my hair, his breath warming my scalp and sending shivers across my whole body as I collapse against him. Savoring the feel of him, breaking to pieces and trembling at his touch, crying over a million days of haunting pain where I mourned his loss along with my parents. My brain is so fuddled, confused, and I try to pull fragments of possibility together, so not sure that this isn't a dream. Gasping in an effort to curb my emotional breakdown and sniffing back to some level of sanity.

"But how..." the words push out with a weak tone from the chaos of my foggy head and I know I need answers more than hugs right now. They all died. Juan made sure of it, so where was he, how did he survive? Why is he with vampires?

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He exhales heavily and rubs his hand over the back of my hair, stroking me in such a familiar way that it pains me and cuts to the core like a knife, squeezing me tight as though his words are going to wound me. My instincts immediately perking up and the red alert flag of instinct moves up my spine in a cold shiver.

"There's so much you don't know. There's so much to tell you. I.... Lorey, the vampires are who saved me. There's something really important... They gave me a home because...." He hesitates, pausing between broken sentences, his voice trails off and his tone fades like a whisper as though he hasn't the will. I pull back in sus**ion, blinking away my tears to focus on his face and the joy and pain at being able to look at him again almost ends me for a second time. I impulsively reach up and touch his cheek, grazing his warm skin, checking he's real and bury my face against him again just to be sure. My brother's really alive, and here, holding me, telling me that I have someone left of my blood that still loves me. I wasn't truly alone all these years and had he known, he would never have left me in the home at all, but then....I wouldn't have bonded to Colton. I push it aside, knowing now that despite what I endured, I would never give up my mate or how I came to be his, even if I lost ten years at my brother's side. I have him now, the fates brought him back to me and all I need is truth.

"Because?" I push where he left off, and then pull away again to gaze at his handsome face and absorb every detail and line that I've missed beyond belief. When I realize no answers come, I raise my brow and nudge his abdomen lightly with my palm. He's staring at the top of my head, avoiding my focus; a look of anguish as though he's torn about what to say and even after all these years, I can still read his facial gestures as if we haven't been apart for half my life. "Tell me." I shove my palm into his chest like I did as a kid when he would tease me and hold out on something I wanted to know. His pained half smile at my reaction tells me he remembers me doing this to him so many times as a ten-year-old pup, the happiness of the familiar behavior. His whole body softens but then he lets out a sigh while his brows furrow gloomily and he reaches out to stroke my hair once more.

"No matter what.... you're my sister. You always were and always will be. I never stopped loving you. You have to know that, before..... just tell me you hear me, okay?" His words tremble, his voice low and almost pleading me to agree to his terms. Dread rises in my stomach and I pull at his sleeve nervously, yanking his hand back to my head almost childishly for rea**urance. Confused and reverting to habits of old and it only seems to wound him more so. My youthful behaviors so effortlessly returning when my brother is holding me tight. He was always my guardian, my best friend and my mentor. The protector who was always ready to kiss my boo boo's and carry me home.

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I love my brother so much. I have missed him beyond belief and if this a dream then I never want to wake up. Sobs catch in my throat and desperation overwhelms me.

"I understand. I hear you." I repeat his words, needing to know what he's holding back and not really laying any weight on them. Of course he's my brother, I know he loves me. He always did. We both thought each other dead but it doesn't change a thing, nor does it matter now. Jasper will always be in my heart and hold a special place that no other living soul can replace. There has always been a dark hole that belonged only to him.

"They saved me because of..... your mother." He dodges eye contact and goes back to staring over my head at the sky in the distance, his emotions all over the place and feeding my nerves. I frown waiting for him to elaborate, impatience growing until one little word catches my attention and I furrow my brows as I repeat back his sentence in my brain and sound it out for myself.

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"Your?" I hone right on it, loudly verbalizing with heavy questioning as he pauses. I feel his stiffness as he looks left, over the top of my head at the open door of the car which is silent and still. Leyanne and the vampire still tucked inside and leaving us to it.

"She wasn't my mother, Lorey... by blood. I'm not even related to you. I never was. We're not siblings in any other way than marriage."

I step back, gasping as my head spins and I'm hit with the weight of his words like a kick to the gut while nausea rises rapidly in response. Trying to compute, but it doesn't make sense. I glare at him, anger rising because it's a lie, frowning, shaking my head. I have the urge to laugh at him. To hit him in the shoulder and tell him to stop messing with me, but the deadpan blank look on his pale face tells me that's not what he's doing at all.

"Yes, you are. Stop it." I snap, swallowing my ludicrous bubbling despair, and step back to shove him in the chest again, only with aggression and denial. "Take that back" I snap, eyes glowing with burning rage that he's trying to hurt me or make me hate him and I don't know why. He flinches at the contact but reaches for my hand and catches his fingers in mine so he can pull me back to restrain both my hands in his.

"You have no idea what it means to be here right now, to see you, to know you're alive. God, I have wished for this moment for so long." He swallows the croak of his tumbling emotions and furrows his brow back to seriousness, quieting my voice within my chest as he exhales harshly. Caught in shocked silence and begging him with pleading eyes to stop doing this. "She was pregnant when we met her.... I was five years old. Dad was my uncle; he was raising me because my mother died in childbirth and took her mate with her. I always knew who I was,

and then you two came and you gave me a new family.” He pulls me in nearer as the choked expression and numbness stills me completely. Freezing out my thoughts as I blink and try to inhale through what he’s saying and almost fail at getting enough oxygen in the process. “She was running, from our kind, for fear of what they would do if they found out about you. And we were camping on the south side of the mountain, out there alone. I don’t think it was by chance.... they imprinted on sight. It was... beautiful. I gained a mother in the blink of an eye. And a few short months later, a baby sister.” His explanation cuts my heart from my soul and rips it into shreds, burning my body with intense pain as my brain stammers.

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“No! ... He was my dad too. He’s my dad.... she’s my mom... you’re my brother. STOP IT!” The sobs break as every memory I possess is torn in two and all I thought was real turns out to be a lie. Every moment, every happy encounter and image I have clung to my whole life. None of it is real and I was living in a fake world with people who were never even my own blood. Jasper hauls me into his arm and pulls my face against his chest with a strong palm, enveloping me with that protective bulk of body.

“He was, in every other sense of the word, Lorey. He loved you. You were his daughter; it didn’t matter to him where you were created. You both became ours and we loved you both exactly that way. It didn’t matter to us. You ARE my sister.”

“No, I don’t want it to be true. He was my dad, you’re my brother, stop saying it. They were all my family. I won’t believe you.” I can’t take this in and he squeezes harder, pinning me tight, as though somehow this isn’t the worst he has to say, and I instantly absorb his tension, reverberating through me. Picking up on his feelings even while mine are insanely overpowering and it freezes me to my core. A new wave of dread hitting me like a brick wall.

“I’ll always be your family, but the truth is.... who you are is why I got to live.... Do you understand what I’m saying?” he falters and through the mess of my head and the muggy thoughts colliding one truth I already knows rings clear. Sense prevailing, logic kicking my a**.

“Because my mom was part vampire... and that somehow saved you.” I blurt it out, whimpering, wishing none of this was true, but his tense stiffening tells me that’s not right exactly.

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“No... I mean, she was, but..... your father, Lorey, your biological dad. He’s the son of the high lord. Your dad’s one of them.”

His words have the same effect as cutting me down where I stand and even though my brain doesn’t really compute it, my body reacts just the same and my legs give out. Crumbling but his grasp on me tightens and he holds me up and to him as I break all over again. Nausea choking me and I wretch and sob at the same time, unsure how else to respond.

I'm not part vampire, diluted from my mother's side. I'm half of a freaking vampire and for the first time it suddenly makes sense why my eyes are red and hers never were. Why my gifts are strong and yet, I never saw them in her. Yes she was part vampire, but no, she didn't give this to me... he did.

I shake my head over and over and the only noises are my pathetic gulps, gasping for air, my wails of shock, as my entire life history burns to the ground and crumbles to ash. Everything I thought I was. Who I thought I was; it was never real. I was never a Whyte, I'm not even bigger percent wolf anymore. I was never Jasper's sister... I was an invading half breed, and they all knew and kept it from me the entire time. I can't sense any lies or deception in him and even I know he has no reason to tell me this if it wasn't true. Jasper was never a liar.

"Alora, your father is the vampire who has been waging a war against the wolves for two decades, taking over where his ancestors gave up. His wrath and hatred is completely fueled by the thought that wolves took his lover and his child, not once, but twice. He thought you both perished almost two decades ago and created an army to fight a war. Only then to find that no, she was cut down in the war of his own doing and his child was taken at ten years old."

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His words stop my uncontrollable deterioration and I grasp Jaspers clothes as what he says pulls together in my head. Reason and sense bringing sudden calm to my body and I jerk my face up to meet his eyes on mine.

"He started the war because of her.... us?" I blink, instantly still, my brain hitting some weird lull of hysterics to really get this and realize Leyanne is standing right behind me now. No longer waiting in the car, but here to confirm what he says.

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"He did. She ran to protect her baby from her own pack and he never knew what happened to her. When she imprinted, she never returned, thinking he would forget her. But he never..... he thought she was dead and so was his bairn, so he came after your kind to avenge you both." Leyanne touches my shoulder and makes me jump with the contact. Weirdly soft for her, as though she's explaining to a fragile mind and all I can do is shake my head. My eyes round out in bewilderment as I stare at her and then Jasper and then blanche as it hits me again

"And ten years later...." I blub, grasping at it all.

"He rebuilt his army after finding out the truth, with intentions of avenging you both once again. This war, is all about you. He knows she fell on that battleground, he thinks you were murdered on the mountain right after." Jasper releases me from his tight embrace to give me room to breathe and it gives me a

moment to pull myself together. Stunned by this new history, no longer capable of feeling anything more while so much hangs inside of me.

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"I don't believe you.... it can't be real.... I couldn't be the source of all this death and pain. All those who have died in the battles." I don't want to carry the guilt or believe this.

"Lorey, vampires have kept me alive and safe for a decade. On the strength of being Marina's adopted son and your sole living wolf family. The high lord favors me, and gave me Darrius as my eternal companion to make sure I remain unharmed..... he takes no part of his son's war. He doesn't care what he does but if he knew his heir is still alive.... He would intervene."

"You could end a war by merely existing... the high lord would exert his power and recall his son. His son.... would be tamed with the knowledge his child lived. You, my pet, are literally the one to bring peace to two kinds, by just breathing." Leyanne's words sit heavy on me and I stare between the two of them at the long distant road we came here on. Mind peacing out as I pick apart and process every single detail with eerie stillness. The prophecy that I would end a war was always within my grasp, and it was never anything to do with my gifts at all.

Almost twenty years alive on this earth, all my losses connected to this enemy, only to find they're all linked, and my loss was for nothing. I was the center of the storm and if the fates had only revealed me sooner to the vampire lord, then maybe no one would have died at all. It can't be that simple. None of it can. My mother died for her own cause, and my pack continue to suffer because of my existence. All I ever needed to do was stand up and be seen.

"I can't..... I need to think." I spew out my rush of words and push away from Jasper's close proximity as though he's causing my lack of air. Dizziness overtaking me as my vision blurs while I stumble to the verge and crumble into the gra** to sit down and put my face between my knees. Taking deep breaths to cool the sudden heat crawling over my body like fire ants. It's all happening too fast and it's so beyond crazy and farfetched. My brain is close to exploding and it's all too much to compute in such a short time.

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"Not all vampires are at war with your kind. Some of us just don't care. The lord has been left to run rogue for twenty years.... it's' time my people took their kind in hand." The low rumbling voice of the dark stranger pulls me out of my posture, lifting my chin unsteadily and I realize I'm being shadowed by the one from the car in all his huge glory. He's tall, wide, and impressively terrifying when standing like an imposing tower over me. Yet, he's standing in full sunlight, even if he is wearing a dark hood and gloves. That's the only part I seem to focus on.

"Your kind? Aren't you all the same? Vampire is vampire." I hesitate, trying to gauge if his clothing is enough to protect him but stare in shock as his naked tanned wrist peeks out from under his coat as he stretches and pulls his hood back down without a single reaction to the light. He smirks and somehow despite

all that's going on with me, I gawp at his sudden exposure and complete lack of pain. Blinking in daze that it does literally nothing to him, and swallow hard with this new piece of information. We've seen Vampires in the sun when we caught some as prisoners to extract intel. They burn and die in horrifying cries and screams of pain, then dissolve to ash like a bursting powder puff. We have an upper hand because of this weakness, and yet here's one, and he's fricken fine. Walking in sunlight could be a complete game changer to the wolves upper hand.

"Vampire is a loose term for a varied species... we can be born or made, and it makes a difference. Birth keeps us pure and strong.... it's also heavily monitored to ensure no child is born without purpose... except the occasional accident. The ones who are turned, they're weaker, slower, and they have nothing of our gifts and abilities, also easier to kill with such basic things. Lord Varro's army is borne of turned halflings. Pale eyed, weak, blood thirsty, sun fearing pawns. Consider them an abomination and an embarra**ment to our bloodlines. My kind are royalty, and we stay far from the m***rels in order to preserve our existence." His superior tone, that weird accent and his blood red eyes all surround me with a heaviness that causes me to pause and listen with no response. My heart thudding and head swirling, taking in his words. Vampires can be like humans, that can walk in light, have warm and tanned skin and look relatively pa**able, despite teeth and red eyes. Does this also mean they can control the blood hunger? Don't need it to survive and can ignore the impulse to feed? He seems pretty controlled.

"The pure breeds are rare, Lorey. Compared to other species, they are still only in their hundreds globally..... Darrius here is from the house of Danesti, one of the oldest in the vampire hierarchy, second to Draculesti.... The high lord's bloodline. Your bloodline." Now that makes me snort and choke in disbelief as lame movies we watched in the orphanage appear in my head.

"You're saying freaking Dracula was real? ... I'm a descendant of some horror story vampire?" I blurt at the absurdity and laugh insanely with a head shake. The bubbling giggle of someone having a real hard time processing reality. Sure I'm having some sort of midlife crisis brought on by the trauma of my mate abandoning me to some stupid cursed fog. Or maybe I've had a mental break, and all of this is only happening in my mind.

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"All stories come from somewhere and his bloodline was created long before his fable was. The house of Draculesti, well, they have ruled the vampires since the dawn of time.... it was the child of Draculesti that first started these troubles." Darrius gazes off towards our truck and I follow, glimpsing both my femmes staring this way and eavesdropping in as best they can. Still immobile and I guess Leyanne is keeping them tied to their seats even now. Leyanne follows my line of vision and I hear her sigh, before I look away and dismiss the sight of them.

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That renders me mute and I gulp down any kind of reaction. The memory of so long ago, Sierra telling me a story of a half breed child who died at the hands of the wolves... she was the child of the vampire king and her blood was spilled by the Lychans. If she was Draculesti and I am too... the fates really are trying to redress the balance and put things back to rights. It's all slotting into place and if this wasn't about me, I would be fascinated and excited at the piecing of the puzzle, but instead I can't breathe and I have to force my face back between my legs to catch it before I suffocate to death

"If this is all true, then you can end it... all you have to do is tell him?" Meadow's voice startles me out of my stupor and snap my chin back up to see them moving closer to me. Her and Carmen have been let out now it's obvious we are not in danger here and Leyanne trusts they will behave. Meadow comes to me in a flash to catch my hand and hold it tight. Giving me her strength, her support when she knows I'm struggling, and surrounds me with that sense of safe I need right now. "The fog.... if the vampires give up, the spell is taken back?" She nods towards Leyanne for confirmation of a possible solution to our own problem and I turn in expectation, seeing that she might be right.

"It's not the simple. Lord Varro has been out there for a decade, no one knows where he is currently. And if we need to go to the high lord, we need proof of you That means my going back and letting the mind link show today's events. That I saw you, that I know it's you. If he's to recall the vampires, it's not a case of commanding a halt. His son leads the halflings, they won't just come to heel without his say so. So, after carrying a message from his father, we then need to show Varro you lived as he's cut off any psychic linking from anyone who would stand in his way." Jasper sits down beside me, answering for the witch, all eyes on me and slides his arm around me, getting a wary look from Meadow. The mistrust evident that a male is touching her Alpha's woman. She stares at him for a long moment and then sighs, seemingly relenting that as my brother, he has a right to touch me without sus***ion.

"I remember you... Jasper. Nice to see you alive, compadre." Meadow reaches out and gives him an awkward handshake and he throws her a half smile and shrug back at her. It's weird given the circ**stances but it's also sweetly heartwarming. My brother who's not really my brother, and my sister who's not my sister, meeting properly for the first time ever. I doubt they knew each other back when we were younger as Santos and Whytes didn't really interact.

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"Meadow... and that's Carmen." She nods behind her at the hovering figure who edges closer with apprehension, and Jasper glances up, laying eyes on the new figure for the first time too. It's an instinctual almost polite response to greet someone he's being introduced to. Nothing in it other than reaction because he was raised with manners, but the next second sends everything into chaos. His whole body slams to an unnatural halt that sends a shiver through me as he's touching my body with his and I feel it firsthand.

One moment, one look is all it takes.

The spark, the clap of tension, the forced eye lock as both of them open wide in shock, bodies riveted to weird stiffness like an electric voltage has been administered. The hold of breath, the panicked gasp, and the sudden look of realization on both of their faces, seconds before both fall backwards in dramatic release and crumble to the ground panting. Like tumbling matchstick towers, both end up on the ground, shell-shocked and crumpled, blinking at one another as though only each could hold the answer to what just went down. It's a moment, felt by all around. The heavy atmosphere zinging with emotional fall out that something major has just happened between them.

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Seeing it from this side is way less dramatic than being the one going through it, and it stirs up so many sudden emotions as I click on what this is. Colton shooting through my mind's eye but also a low little inkling of warmth and joy. It doesn't alter the shock factor none the less. Jasper just imprinted on Carmen and things just got a whole lot weirder and complex.

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"What the hell was that." The vampire growls hauling my brother to his feet, seemingly irritated, and almost violently dusts him down. No one seems to know how to react and Leyanne, well she just chuckles and doesn't seem shocked at all. No hint of surprise, just an 'oh well' attitude and a pretty smug expression.

"It's called falling in love.... the wolf version anyway. Jasper just found his forever mate, and frankly, I do like a good bit of drama in the family. Well, isn't this another layer to add to a seriously strange story." Leyanne is almost cheery with the turn of events and Jasper is white and panic stricken and looks like he's about to throw up. Meanwhile Carmen is on her ass, outright staring his way with a devastated air of freak out all over her and doesn't seem to be able to respond in any kind of way at all.

"They imprinted?" Meadow is almost as speechless as me and quickly speeds over to help Carmen back to her feet. Deja Vue of a similar chaotic scene coming at me from months ago, being literally swept off my feet, and the pain in my heart intensifies with the lack of his being here. Colton would be happy to know Carmen found her someone.... God he would be happy to know my brother lives. He would be ecstatic on all counts and probably be smothering me half to death with joy and kisses. All of this, he should be here to share all these things with me. The truths, the possibility to an end to the war. Seeing Carmen finally get a chance to move on and heal. That the fates never forgot her at all.

"Carmen....?" Jasper whispers it affectionately, seems to be rolling her name around on his tongue, trying it out, familiarizing himself with what his heart will want from here on in. And despite openly staring at one another as if none of the rest of us are here, longing growing between them, neither is moving towards the other and it's a strange and strained atmosphere of pause. I can taste the

apprehension from both sides, the disbelief, the severe lack of trust that life could show them a second of mercy. My brother must have been through hell too, and now I can feel it, free from my own overshadowing emotions. I can taste his lack of faith in fates, bonding, relying on wolves at all. He's scared to approach her, and she is the same.

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"This is not our focus... we have something to do. The girl can wait." The vampire bites in, hauling Jasper to face him by his upper arm, obviously no concept of what imprinting really means for a wolf. I can see the struggle on my brother's face as logic cuts in, but his heart and needs are fully focused on the femme mere feet away. I know how it goes. After the initial shock wears off. The instant love and longing, the sudden infatuation as the thoughts and memories you were hit with open up and make you see the other as someone you've always known. Unravelling a sea of feelings you never knew were possible to have for someone who seconds before, was a complete stranger.

"Do you have any idea how much of a big deal imprinting is.... He can't fight it. Neither of them can and it's cruel to make them." Meadow's snappy attitude is aimed at the vampire I know she's having a hard time ignoring. All her instincts from the second she saw them have her riled and she's been on high alert this whole time. She is looking for any excuse to attack and I know she's controlling it best she can. Her eyes have never stopped being amber this entire time.

"Maybe weak ones like you can't... but Jasper is one of us. He took the oath; he was initiated into our coven. He comes with me... the girl can wait!" Darrius commands, grinding out his words with a low rumbling growl that sends unease through everyone. His teeth becoming more visible as he snaps, and his eyes seem to deepen in color as his pupils constrict. Even Jasper lowers his head in a sign of respect that tells me Darrius is not someone to disobey. Submissive immediately and I can tell this Darrius character, he's not as reasonable and steady as he seems to make out. There's a darkness around him, a cold aura, and a severe lack of any kind of compa**ion.

"Can I just talk to her, for a second? ... My heads full of..... I need to just touch her, just once." Jasper tries to keep control by I know only too well how strong the pull is to bring you together. The urge and instant love of the bond and he's struggling. I remember needing to be by Colton's side, feeding from his presence and aching to have him touch me.

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"Get out of the way." Carmen's voice breaks into the tension, that b**** tone I'm starting to be fond of, and the vampire is physically pushed sideways as she storms face on to my brother without hesitation. No fear in her anyway. The shock and anger on Darrius' scowling mouth only calmed by Leyanne's touch. She shakes her head to tell the vampire it's hopeless to intervene. Seems Carmen has pulled herself together and she marches right to him to get her first proper look at her fate.

Jasper doesn't hesitate either but pulls her forward to him and presses his nose to hers while he la**os her in his arms, bringing her to him like it's the most natural thing in the world. Seeing this, the fluid way they come together, makes my heart soften. The instant way they mold, that they weren't strangers seconds ago and suddenly she's the only thing he wants in this moment. Eyes locking and both faces soften to an expression I see on my mates face every time he looks at me. That level of love and need can never be hidden.

I don't want to think about tall the ins and outs of this. I mean she's my mate's ex-lover... and he's my brother. So, he's now going to make love to the girl who bedded his brother-in-law? God, this is intense. I'm not sure I want to keep thinking about it. Does this mean, she becomes my sister?

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This is the last thing I expected to happen, ever. Although now that it has, I'm sort of not mad about it. Jasper's been alone for a decade, living with these god-awful creatures and Carmen's been an untethered boat on a stormy sea for a long time. They're sort of perfect for each other and I guess the fates knew that all along. They should have bonded so many years ago, when they first turned, but were pulled apart so everything else in this story could play out.

This also means one very important thing – her love for Colton, it's gone. In the blink of an eye, her emotions, her heartbreak, all her sorrow and pain ... A band aid is applied. It all just goes away, and her heart is filled instantly with the love for the wolf the fates found worthy of her.

In a way I'm sort of happy it was this way and not slow and natural love. Carmen imprinted, she was worthy of that rarity and the fates clearly have other plans for her. I hope she sees it now too. That whatever she thinks she did to call upon punishment, it hasn't been close to true. She had to walk a path to be her own part of this bigger picture.

I turn away blushing when my brother bridges the gap and kisses her without restraint, and Meadow hugs me tight with an 'awww' noise deep in her throat. All her previous dislike of Carmen seems to wash away on the witnessing of this new love. And I know Meds is a romantic at heart.

Leyanne looks instantly bored, plays with her nails and her jewelry seemingly disinterested and the vampire stalks off shaking his head and clicking his fingers at his minion holding the door open. His dark bad mood, and aura of iciness, thankfully goes with him and I shudder outwardly. I don't like him. He isn't overly threatening but yet, something about him is terrifying and maybe it's knowing he's a completely different breed. The vampires we have known are nothing like this.

"You have three minutes, Jasper. The lord will need to see you to be convinced of her existence. We don't have time for any of this." His commanding snarl is

delivered before he gracefully slides back into the nearest SUV, clearly done with our presence. Jasper ignores him completely. So homed in on the girl in his arms and I hear the rushed whisper of his hurried words as he breaks from her lips, and nuzzles against her cheek.

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“Come with me.... I need to go with him for now. I don’t want to leave you when I just found you.” There’s no denying the utter infatuation in his tone, the intense focus on his mate, and Carmen seems limp in his embrace, flushed and sweet.

My stomach tightens and Meadow too looks instantly worried, glancing at one another in question. Carmen may not be our best friend in any kind of way, but she belongs with us, with her pack, and not running after my brother into some vampire world she’s not accustomed to, to see some high lord. There’s no telling what would happen to her. Jasper couldn’t protect her against them if they turned on her after we left.

“No. I follow my Luna. I’m here to do what she needs of me. I won’t let her down and break my word. Find me when you come back. I can’t leave her; she needs both of us with her to keep her safe on the journey home. I won’t abandon her.”

Carmen’s words shock me and with a last rushed kiss on my brother’s lips. As though she knows longer will make her weak, she pushes him away and quickly removes herself before the emotions caused by the bond take away her will power. Jasper looks instantly lost without her in his arms, and then questions what she said almost in afterthought. A sense of confusion sweeping over his expression.

“Luna?” He utters, his gaze coming back to settle on me.

Of course, he doesn’t know, and he won’t yet have time to rifle through Carmen’s memories to pinpoint everything he doesn’t yet understand. It’s only just happened, and it takes time to really sink in and open the cavern of things from another mind.

“Me. I’m Luna Santo, Colton Santo’s mate and mother of our fractured pack.” I stand up on unsteady legs, leaning on Meds for support and smile his way with a soft hint of pride. Jasper’s eyes completely burn to instant amber fire, his sweet expression dropping to furious glaring and a growl erupts from his throat, aggression on full show.

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“f***ing Santo!!!! Are you f***ing kidding me?” the swift change from smooth and steady reliable Jasper, to instantly enraged and crazed makes me jump and step away in shock. His whole aura turning deadly and he seems to grow with sudden intimidation, a warrior showing face that I had never seen on him. The air crackles with electricity and I get a taste of my brother’s ingrained hatred and pain in one suffocating blow.

So I guess I should have seen this coming, given the fact Santos slayed everyone he loved and all this time his despisal has clearly grown. I never gave it a second thought that he wouldn't know all the ins and outs, but how could he? He has only just found me.

"I'm a Santo too." Carmen meekly utters the words and Jasper spins furiously towards her with a piercing gaze. Seemingly searching his memories for the truth of her words, his eyes widening, shaking his head with venom as disgust takes over his expression.

"No..... this isn't f***ing happening. You? ... F***ing you!!!" he spins back on me, accusation heavy in his knife sharp words. "The Santos killed everyone, Lorey... our whole family. Our parents. Our entire pack! They took everyone we loved. They caused this. You can't get in bed with the one pack I aim to destroy. I swore on my life that I wouldn't rest until I took every Santo from this earth and made them suffer." His fury overtakes his gentle demeanor of a moment ago, a side to him I've never seen, and I'm fueled by his own pulsating rage. It feeds my own internal temper and my need to protect my people engulfs me. Forgetting what he is to me when faced with this kind of intent on my pack.

"They are not all like Juan Santo... not all wolves are to blame for what he did. The Santos are MY pack, my people... I won't let you do anything to them, I won't stand aside and let you try. Your mate is Santo... does that not tell you what the fates want? Are you going to deny that and destroy her along with them. Cast aside your own sister and cause more sorrow in our lives?" Tears mist my eyes, but my anger holds them at bay, spitting at him in fury. The Luna in me showing face and I march to him, squaring up, eyes glowing brightly and warn him with the snarl in my tone. I will protect my people at all costs, even against my own brother if that's what it takes. Jaspers aimed look of rage is thrown to Carmen for a fleeting moment and then back at me, a new wave of something in the depths. A coldness enveloping him that reminds me of Darrius, and I flinch.

"They deserve to die, even if the war stops. There's a debt to be repaid and it's only in the form of Santo blood.... no matter whose that is or what it does to me in the end." He casts a look Carmen's way again, loaded with meaning and I catch her crumbling despair and her lip tremble as she realizes what he means.

In one second, he was her forever... in the next he's swearing to cut down not only her entire pack, but her too, even if it kills them both. His hatred runs deeper than love can reach and in one sentence he rejects the bond and makes it clear that she is no mate that he will ever accept. I lose my temper and I fly at him, seeing red and hating his arrogance, smacking him in the chest with meaning and send him reeling backwards. Seemingly my gifts are still strong.

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"I'm Santo... so if you want to maim and kill and rebalance the debt with Santo blood, you will have to go through me. Those are MY pack and in the absence of MY mate.... I'm their queen and I will die to protect them. Every. Last. One. I won't cower because my brother dares to stand against them, I'm clear on where my loyalty lies and it's not in revenge and misguided hate." My venom outshines

him, my intent clear. Heart hammering in my chest and trembling all over with adrenalin until my limbs feel unsteady, but I stand my ground.

He stands where he was, unmoved yet not as fierce as before. Eyes locked on mine, amber to my red, claws elongated in both of our human hands. We both pant in heavy breaths, neither willing to back down or relent, stubborn and headstrong and matched in aggression.

Leyanne walks between the two of us in a rather casual manner, pushing him back a step so she can regain some space.

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"You both have a common goal and she's right... Santo is a blood line, not a collective of guilty wolves. The ones you want, are the same ones your sister has not dismissed yet. Their time will come, and you can rid the world of Juan Santo and his minions together... this is not the way. The sins of few should not be carried by the many.... Santo is not a dirty word, Jasper." Leyanne is the voice of reason and her tone is patient, as though explaining to a child. Wisdom and maturity shining through and for a second, I forget I don't trust her and find a new appreciation for her. Jasper throws an angry stare at Carmen, unable to stop himself being drawn to her at every opportunity and I see the war ravaging his heart. He turns to me after a hesitated pause, and spits his last words, ignoring Leyanne completely.

"I'll never mate with a Santo.... Not even ordained by the fates. Don't stand in my way, Lorey. No matter what happens with the war, my goal has always been to return to the Santo lands and finish what was started. I've been biding my time and if I have to take down my mate and end myself in the process of scourging the earth of their kind, so be it. I promise you; I'll die avenging our family." Jasper turns on his heel and stalks back to the car, atmosphere thick with his words, sadness growing in Carmen's heart and choking me in proximity.

Without looking back, he storms in and slams the door, so it echoes in the air and causes instant cold silence. Within seconds both cars move off, seemingly done with this and our presence. No hesitation, no minutes to cool down and rethink this. I'm sure Darrius sees this as the best outcome given how little he gave a s*** about the imprinting.

I know it's for the best, given the change in what just went down but part of me is incensed that he just walked off and left us here like this. Ten years, a s***ty ten-minute reunion and it all goes to hell when the word Santo is brought up. My brother just up and left, after telling me how happy he was to find me alive. Well screw him and his damned vengeance.

Carmen crumbles behind me with his departure, the tears falling and the flood gates opening. Pulling all attention of us three other remaining women to her pitiful state as she sits abruptly on the ground and my heart breaks instantly.

Even Meds is moved to go to her and cradles her frail figure in her arms as she weeps and buries her face in her palms.

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"I should have known this was too good to be true." she blubs out, wiping her face and trying to regain the cold composure yet failing. She's too deeply broken by this and I can sympathize. Imprinting is a whole other level of despair when your mate rejects you. I've lived it and I hate that on top of everything this girl has gone through, she now relives some of my darkest days. Maybe she's right and the fates are punishing her because I cannot get my head around why the hell things like this would keep being thrown her way.

"What now?" I blanch at Leyanne, so overwrought and done with all this s*** and just waiting on the next major thing to be tossed at me. I'm sick of all the misery and chaos and I need answers. I need a plan to fix some of this crap and get back on top of things. I don't even want to digest the fact my brother is alive and just made me his sworn enemy.

"We follow the plan... we have a fog to stop and then.... we might have a different kind of battle to intervene in." She shrugs, still infuriatingly indifferent and I wonder if this witch has a heart at all. She really doesn't seem all too invested in anything.

"It's a long journey. I know a lot just happened here, but we need to move." Meadow cuts in, bringing reality back to the mess left behind from their departure and I glance over Carmen as she pulls herself together with speed. Swallowing her tears, sitting herself upright. Pasting on that face we all see often, the cold attitude, the air of not caring. The mask engages and the wall is erected faster than I could have managed it. She always leaves me in awe.

"I'm fine.... This is how it goes.... I should have expected it. I would be a s***ty mate anyway, I'm way too selfish." She bites her bottom lip to curb its tremble. Pushes Meadow's hands away, yanks herself up and walks off to the truck, getting in and moving straight back to the rear out of sight and making it clear she wants to be alone. Meadow and I exchange worried glances and sigh in unison. A look of sympathy mirrored in us both and I genuinely want to cry for her.

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The girl needs some kind of a break. Having your imprinted mate reject you is the worst feeling in the world. Her pain right now has to be up there with the top ten of all awful things that's ever happened to her. Even beside her mom's death.

"If these things were easy and straightforward there would be no effort in putting things to rights." Leyanne jovially sing songs in that heavy Celtic brogue with a way too jolly smile and I think she might actually be some sort of sadist who thrives on the hurt and pain of others. She certainly has no qualms about behaving rudely and giving the wrong responses to emotional moments.

"This is going to be a long drive." Meadow sighs and gestures me into the truck where I too head to the back meekly, to check on my femme. I see Carmen has curled up tight on one of the beds and is facing away from me. Her body language screaming to be left alone but I can tell by the subtle shoulder movements that she's crying silently. I feel helpless and my heart aches for her, my instincts are to console her, but I know I can't. Her character, her aura, her entire self-preservation system is telling me to stay away and not disturb her. She wouldn't thank me right now for any kind of consoling.

I've been here. I know the pain of denying the bond and the agony of being parted right from the initial impact of it. She needs time to process and so do I. My head's a mess and I think I also need some quiet time to think.

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In twelve hours, I've found out that I'm pregnant with twins, my brother lives, my father is freaking vampire royalty and my entire existence was a lie. My brother is on a vendetta to take down everyone I love and thus wounding me the same way the Santos did a decade ago. Somehow, in the midst of all that, I'm the key to stop it all. All while my mate is in some enchanted state of zombie and looking to strike me down if he gets to me before I break the spell.

I have to get back and free my mate in the hopes he knows what to do, because I sure don't anymore. It's all too much. Maybe Colton has a plan to deal with Jasper, when he finally shows up to exact revenge on the wolves I consider my family now. I only hope that all of this comes together and makes some kind of sense, because the fates have to know what they're doing, or else, we're all screwed.