

Chapter 122

"You're sure you're alright?" Asher asked for the second time, the only sign of his worry was the crease between his eyebrows and how his attention kept drifting from the road to where I sat in the passenger seat.

Cordelia had taken a couple of photos of the sigil on my chest, the one now hidden by the oversized t-shirt I wore, to investigate herself. An 'x' with frayed ends like fletching of an arrow, with a long slash that went vertically through the center. I tried not to worry too much that this one had left her stumped, and instead tried to stay optimistic. Breyona had sent the pictures to her parents, who would now be on the lookout for any texts or relics that matched. ³

"It doesn't hurt anymore, but it is strange ...now that I can see this thing, it feels kind of familiar. I'm positive I don't have any memory of it though." I wished I could fully reassure him, but the strange feeling bubbling in my stomach had surfaced along with the sigil.

I knew that the pain I had experienced

I knew that the pain I had experienced wasn't the only reason Asher was asking if I were alright. He'd always have a healthy dose of suspicion towards the witches, but he also trusted the gut feelings I had around them. The ones that told me both could be a threat if they wanted, but not to myself or anyone I held close.

'Alpha, Luna...' Asher's Beta's voice filled our heads without warning. 'Just got a phone call from a doctor up at Grove Hospital. There's a woman there who's just woken up from an eighteen-year coma. The picture of the symbol on that witch's hand, this woman has one that matches.' 3

Asher and I locked eyes, undoubtedly thinking the same thing. Somehow, this woman is tied to the witch that had tried to kill me. So far, she was our only connection. 1

"Let's go." I told Asher with a firm nod, "I'll let my dad know we're stopping by afterwards."

We had been just a few minutes away from Asher's parents house, where dad, grandma, and Sean were still staying. I

grandma, and Sean were still staying. I was dreading having this conversation with him, because he already looked years younger since moving into town, but I had to ask about mom. There was every chance that she had something to do with this binding spell, and even though I hoped she wasn't involved, I had long ago realized there was a lot I didn't know about the woman. 1

The drive was a long three hours, but the views made the trip worthwhile. We were on a long highway that curved and winded through the mountains, past streams and over a long bridge. Halfway through, the exhaustion from the ritual Rowena had done weighed my eyelids down. The gentle hum of the highway faded in my ears as darkness swallowed me whole.

I woke startled, my heart thudding beneath the sigil on my chest. A dream I couldn't remember floated just out of reach, the details becoming hazier as more and more awareness seeped into my veins.

"Did we just get here?" I mumbled to Asher, who sat in the driver's seat tapping on the screen of his phone

Asher, who sat in the driver's seat tapping on the screen of his phone.

As I sat up, I realized he had covered me up with his sweatshirt. Rather than giving it back to him, I slipped it on.

"Got here half an hour ago." He set his phone down and smirked, eyes trailing down my face to his sweatshirt. The remnants of his warmth still clung to the fabric. Not only was I drowning in the fabric, but also his masculine scent. "You looked like you were getting good sleep for a change."

The halls smelled of bitter antiseptic, with undertones of artificial fragrance within the soaps and cleaners used. Seeping through the veil was undertones of blood and pus, mixed with stale cafeteria food.

I'd never been to a hospital myself, but I hadn't imagined it this busy. Werewolves weren't sick nearly as often as humans, so most of the wolves were here for some wound or another. There were a few humans in the mix, being treated first since their healing was much slower than ours.

(Oh!) The young receptionist's cheery

ours.

“Oh!” The young receptionist’s cherry-colored lips popped open. The middle-aged RN in baby pink scrubs, who looked like she spent more time here than at home, was unfazed and even snorted at the receptionist as she tittered, “Alpha, what an honor.” ①

“Dr. Anderson told me you two were coming.” The RN gave the receptionist a side-eyed look and shook her head disparagingly, motioning for us to follow her down a wide hall. “Nice to meet you Alpha, and Luna. Saw that speech of yours live. You didn’t disappoint.”

“Good to know I didn’t scare everyone off.” I replied with an awkward chuckle, “It was a risky plan.”

“Risky, but us werewolves don’t scare easy.” She nodded in agreement; her strong chin held high. “My grandson was there in the crowd, saw the whole thing. Wouldn’t stop talking about it for days, mind you. I reckon it was hard on you, Alpha. Seeing your mate get shot like that.” ①

“I contemplated hiding in the crowd myself.” Asher’s smile was polite, but

● contemplated hiding in the crowd myself." Asher's smile was polite, but anyone could see the truth in his eyes.

"Now that would've been a sight to see." She replied with a small chuckle. We turned down three separate hallways, each one bustling with nurses and patients. The RN stopped at one of the many doors and placed her badge against a small scanner. "Might've taken a day off for a change to see that. Anyhow, the doctors right inside. It was a pleasure meeting you both."

"You as well." I replied with a smile, following Asher into the hospital room.

Two beds sat across from one another, separated by a sea-foam colored curtain. Both were surrounded by heart monitors and those wire hangers that hold bags of fluid. While one of the beds was empty, another held a woman just a few years younger than my dad.

Her wheat-blond hair was short, curling at the ends where the strands reached her shoulders. The heart monitor at her side beeped slowly, because the woman on the bed was fast asleep.

bed was fast asleep.

“Alpha Asher, and you must be Luna Lola. Glad you two could make it on such short notice. If you wanted to speak with her, I’m afraid she’s been out for a while now.” Dr. Anderson stood beside the woman’s bed, a clipboard in his hand as he scribbled some notes and flipped to the next page. “We had to sedate her shortly after she woke up. She has no idea where she is, and the last thing she remembers was from eighteen years ago.”

I glanced at the woman in the bed, at her pale skin and angular nose. I tried and failed to imagine what it would’ve been like for her—to wake up in a body eighteen years older than what you had.

Dr. Anderson caught my eye as they fell to the mark on her hand, identical to that of the witch that tried to kill me.

He nodded impassively; his eyes curious as they remained steady on my face.

“When we pointed out this mark to her, to ask if she knew anything about it—it sent her into psychosis. Also, she’s a full-blood werewolf. Found that out when she grew claws and tried to carve the mark off herself.” I could see the questions

off herself." I could see the questions bubbling in his eyes. "I've worked at quite a few hospitals, and I've never seen a case like Flora's. Eighteen years. No brain damage, nothing on her MRI's. Perfectly healthy, and yet she wouldn't wake up. The mark on her hand, something like that looks an awful lot like magic. Don't know much about the subject, but my parents told me plenty of stories about forest witches as a kid." 1

"Is there a question in there somewhere, Dr. Anderson?" I took a step forward as I spoke, mostly to keep Asher from snapping at the man. A hard-headed Alpha through and through, but that's exactly why he needs me by his side. 1

He tilted his head and studied my face, "guess I'm just curious if there are any vengeful forest witches I need to worry about."

"Not at the moment, but if that changes, we'll mind-link you." My smile was playful, but still held the authority of a Luna. I continued before he had the chance to ask another question, "Have someone contact us when she wakes up again and if there's a psychologist in the building send them here as well. Provide

ain and if there's a psychologist in the building, send them here as well. Provide all resources needed for her to sort through the changes she's going through. When she's ready, we'll speak with her. For the time being, does she have any relatives nearby?"

"I'm afraid not." I wondered if all doctors had the same sense of reserved sympathy, and if it was the things they witnessed in a day that taught them to hold it together so well. "A couple in this pack adopted her as a child when her mother died. Her adoptive parents died in a house fire just a couple weeks after Flora slipped into a coma. There are a few distant cousins of her adoptive family a few states away. Are you thinking we should give them a call? It's been eighteen years and not one family member has been to visit."

I smiled sweetly, "we'll let her decide if she wants to contact any family members, but I would like the name of the adoption agency that handled her case."

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Chapter 123

"You handled that well." Asher chuckled, his laugh deep and rich like liquid amber. His breath was hot and curled in the air between us. The cold metal of the car chilled my back, easily seeping through Asher's sweatshirt. His hand rested on the roof of the car and his eyes were devastatingly serious as he said, "I was going to tell him to take his questions and fuck off." 1

I always took the chance to toy with my hot-headed mate, especially when he made it so incredibly easy.

I gave him a petulant look and tried to push past him, "you never did have any manners."

My back hit the side of the car with a little more force this time. Rather than hurting me, it brought a twisted smile to my face. My head swam with his earthy scent as he leaned in close, always hovering over me. I could feel his fingers tangling in my hair where they hadn't been before.

"You're wrong, I have some manners." He lowered his head and breathed in my

owered his head and breathed in my scent. The stubble on his cheek grazed my neck, sending goosebumps pebbling my skin. He noticed every reaction my body had to his and chuckled in my ear. "If I didn't, this entire hospital would hear me fuck you on the hood of the car, and don't bother lying, Lola. You wouldn't lift a finger to stop me." 2

I got my revenge an hour into our drive home. The sun had vanished, darkening the sky as the moon's silvery light took hold. The glittering forest, sprawling with light and life turned dark and mysterious at night. You could fully appreciate how dense it was when day turned to night and the slivers of shadow began gather and pulse.

I had been ignoring them for a while now and hadn't even allowed myself to glance their way. They were always there, just out of sight—constantly reminding me what they could do. What they could offer. No matter how tempting tapping into that power was, the price was rarely ever worth it.

The darkness paired with the curvy highway was lulling me back to sleep, but

Highway was lulling me back to sleep, but there was something I wanted even more than another long nap—something Asher had knowingly put into my head.

Letting the image form in my mind, I pictured the two of us parked in a secluded dirt lot. The freezing metal of the car hood on my back was nothing compared to the heat of Asher's cock filling me, or the warmth his hand provided as it wrapped around my throat, his thumb stroking my cheek as he told me how good I was—how well I took everything he gave. I sent the mental image down the mate-bond, always underestimating his reaction. ①

I grabbed onto what my dad called the 'oh shit' handle as Asher's head snapped to where I sat, sending the car veering into the other lane. The tones of bright honey had been sucked from his eyes within half a second. Blinking rapidly, he sent us back into the right lane. Thankfully, we were the only car on the road, which is what finally made me giggle. ②

“What the hell, Lola.” His snarl was angry, but he couldn't stop glancing my way. ①

way.
●
Toying with Asher, letting him evoke these feelings and emotions, it was a distraction from everything else going on, one I needed if I were going to survive the upcoming weeks. I was determined to savor every uninterrupted moment alone with him.

Even though he was now expecting the next few clips I sent his way, he clearly underestimated my creativity. His knuckles turned white on the steering wheel, and his hair was now a mess from the number of times he ran his fingers through it. I had always been a fan of Asher in sweatpants, especially now that the material was stretched taut against his erection. ①

The moment the scent of my arousal permeated the car, Asher jerked us to the side of the road. A small stretch of gravel provided even more coverage, not that it mattered with how quickly he tore the clothes from my body and pressed me against the hood. The husky sounds he made as he cursed me for being so tempting, for constantly wanting a rise out of him, they'd forever be seared into my memory.

my memory.

I was riding a post-sex high until we reached his parent's house and I remembered I was going to dredge up some unpleasant memories. Dad still loved her in a way and remembering that the woman he knew had a life full of secrets only brought him pain.

It was around ten o'clock at night when we strolled into Asher's parents house. The scent of grandma's lavender cookies was within every corner of the house, and even trickled outside as we walked through the front door.

Standing by the large entertainment center in the living room was Killian, a glass of amber liquor in his hand. Dad sat back in the leather recliner attached to the sectional. His eyes flitted up from the football game on tv as he greeted us.

"If you're lookin' for Sean he's not here, took up a part-time patrol shift. What's got you two smelling like that?" Dad grunted, scrunching his nose as he took a long drink of the beer in his hand.

For a moment embarrassment flooded my cheeks, but the scent of what Asher and I had done was long gone. What did cling t

I had done was long gone. What did cling to our clothes and skin was the sterile scent of the hospital.

"Definitely a hospital." Claire's soprano came from the kitchen, followed by a head of chocolate-brown hair. She held one of grandma's cookies in her hand, and judging from the jumbo size, I'd say grandma in for a long night. "Only been to one a handful of times. I'm definitely not fond of them."

"I never could stand the smell of those places." He shook his head, his mind most likely flitting back to his injury and the physical therapy appointments he absolutely loathed going to.

Grandma flitted out of the kitchen a couple seconds later, her soft-black hair twisted into a bun on her head. The plate clinked against the glass-top table, turning it smoky from the steam. Tiny buds of lavender dotted the tops of the cookies, coupling with the specks of vanilla bean to form a beautiful pattern.

"Claire's asked me to bake a few things for the University's bake-sale fundraiser." Grandma smiled proudly, her apron speckled with hints of brown

her apron speckled with hints of brown sugar and flour.

"Begged was more like it. My cooking skills are sub-par and haven't improved much over the years." Claire sighed and shook her head. Killian looked her way, his eyes glazing over for just a few seconds before the forlorn look was wiped from her face, replaced with an intimate smile. She cleared her throat, blushing as she continued without pause. "Still, I could get used to this if I'm not careful. Your grandma is going to have the whole town hooked on these things. I might have to buy her a shop in town."

Dad chuckled, his chest rumbling from the gravelly sound. "It's worse when you're raised on it."

"You hire someone else to run the place and give me free reigns of the kitchen and you got yourself a deal." Grandma said with a nod, darting back into the kitchen when the oven timer sounded.

Asher gave me a single look that made my stomach drop, and for once, I wished I hadn't developed the ability to see past his expressionless façade. I knew he had sent Claire a quick mind-link when she

his expressionless façade. I knew he had sent Claire a quick mind-link when she snatched up another cookie and stood from the couch.

"I think we should go look into that cookie shop." Claire stepped into Killian's side, molding herself to the previous Alpha's torso.

"But the game?" Killian frowned as Claire led him down the hall, his eyebrows gnashing together in an expression nearly identical to Asher's.

A strange flutter wormed its way into my heart as I tried to picture Asher and I like that—twenty years older with children of our own, looking around at all the hard work we had done over the years, and how our family and people could relax and reap the rewards. It was the future we worked towards, one where all people, werewolf or vampire, could safely have families of their own.

Dad's low chuckle startled me, "now that you've gone and chased everyone off, what's it you wanted to talk to me about? I might not be as useful as I once was, but I still got some of your grandma's genes. Mean's it's a little harder to pull the wool

an's it's a little harder to pull the wool over my eyes."

I took half a second to calm my nerves before jumping right in. Subtlety wasn't my strong suit, and I had spent the better half of the day gnawing over scenario after scenario. Rather than pull up a picture of the sigil on my chest, I lowered my shirt to show where my heart rested within my ribcage. Inches below my collar bone sat the sigil, it's dark ink just as bright as Asher's cobalt mark on my skin.


"This thing on my chest, it's a mark from a binding spell—to bind my magic. Mom was the closest person to me who knew the full truth about everything. Binding my magic sounds like something she would do, trying to keep me safe while also making things more complicated...but I need to know for sure so we can find a way to remove it." I sighed, guilt swirling within the depths of my stomach when an echo of pain flashed across his eyes—eyes I once thought held my same shade of blue. Father and daughter in every sense except for blood. "I need you to think back, as far back as you can. Did anything—anything at all stand out as strange to


back, as far back as you can. Did anything
● anything at all stand out as strange to
you? Was there ever a time where you
didn't know where she was or what she
was doing? I hate bringing this up, but I
wouldn't if I weren't sure she had
something to do with it."

"Other than when she came home with
you bundled in her arms, crying that she
had made a mistake, there's only one
other time I can remember. When you
were five, your mom and I were going
through a rough patch. Sean was getting
into his pre-teen years, and he was
nearing his first shift so his hormones
were all over the place. Things were
getting bad with him in school. A few
kids, they could tell he wasn't going to
have a she-wolf for a mate. For a long
while, your mom and I argued on how to
approach it. She wanted to storm the
school with her claws drawn and raise
hell. I didn't want the kid to feel like it
was something abnormal or strange...so I
disagreed." Dad cleared his throat. Regret
flashed in his eyes, mingling with the
wisdom and experience he accumulated
over the years. "I thought we were close to
divorce, so I told her I understood when
she took you and went to mom's cottage." 1

flashed in his eyes, mingling with the wisdom and experience he accumulated over the years. “I thought we were close to divorce, so I told her I understood when she took you and went to mom’s cottage.”

“I’m sorry—she said what?” Grandma’s head popped out from the kitchen, and as though she could see it through the clothes I wore, her eyes latched onto the binding spell sigil. “That woman never brought Lola to my house—certainly not by herself.”

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