

Chapter 124

"You're absolutely positive?" I asked both dad and grandma, who were locked in a staring match that was now going on two minutes.

"She never brought Lola to your cottage?" Dad's lips fell, and everything inside of me regretted bringing this up. ①

From her leaving him years after having Sean, to returning with me in her arms and a shadow hovering over her shoulder. They had been through more than most mated couples, and somehow managed to make it work up until her death. Uncovering her secrets felt like peeling back the layers of my memories until the woman who had raised me was almost unrecognizable. ①

"No, not once." Grandma replied. She and mom had never gotten along, and it was mom's refusal to let us see her that drove a wedge in between her and I. Dating Tyler only wedged that chasm open even more.

"How old was I when she took me? When she came back, did she act any different?"

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Did I act any different?"

"Your mom seemed happy... a lot more relaxed than when she left with you. We talked things out about Sean, and even asked him what he wanted us to do." It took him a minute to think. By the time he spoke, I was so lost in thought I had nearly missed the sound of his voice. It had faded into the background along with the rundown of tonight's football game told by the announcers. "Also, I'd say you were about nine or ten. I remember you were sleeping when she brought you home. Slept all night and all day too. She said you were tired from playing and staying up late, but I guess that wasn't the case." ①

"Nine or ten? If I was that old, how come I have no memory of it? I don't even remember her and I going on a trip like that."

"If she knew a witch that could preform a binding spell, isn't it possible they also altered your memory?" Grandma suggested, her voice kind even though there was no gentle way to say it.

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Another problem that needed solving, only this solution required me uncovering memories that could've been scrubbed from my head by the same magic that put my powers in a choke hold.

"I'll talk to Rowena and Cordelia about it tomorrow. I'm still training with them, even though I can't actually use my magic."

As Asher drove the two of us home, I wracked my memories for anything that seemed out of place. Even though I had come up short a dozen times, it kept me distracted from the pangs of guilt in my chest. I'm sure none of us were going to get a good night's sleep, least of all dad.

"She found someone to bind my magic, and never once thought to tell me about any of this." I scoffed, "Does it make me a bad person to wish she was alive just so I could ask what the hell she was thinking?"

The sound of frustration I made was muffled by Asher's chest as he wound his arms around my waist and pulled me close. I was enveloped by him and silky blanket that covered us, lulled by his

blanket that covered us, lulled by his scent and the sparks of the mate-bond. I should've been knocked out and drooling but my mind refused to shut down.

It was the first time I had admitted any of this aloud. I never usually had a tough time talking about my emotions, but my mom was a sore subject. I missed her desperately, but I was also so furious I could spit fire. What I needed was one of our old screaming matches, where I'd shout from down the hall—doing everything I could to grate on her nerves and goad her into fighting back. I'd give up and slam my bedroom door, knowing it was one of her pet peeves.

There weren't only bad memories of my mom and me. Countless trips to the aquarium and zoo, where at the end of the day my cheeks would ache from laughing so much. Sleepovers where she'd drag out her makeup bag and show me all the little powders and brushes until we were both covered in splotches of color.

"You have every right to be angry with her. She's your mom and you love her, but she kept two thirds of your heritage from you." Asher wasn't one to talk

... she kept two thirds of your heritage from you." Asher wasn't one to talk about his emotions, so it always surprised me how insightful he could be. Listening to the steady thud of his heart against his ribcage, I opened myself up to what he was saying and felt some of that rage subside. "To play devils advocate, have you ever thought she might've planned on telling you at some point if she hadn't been killed?"

"Ugh, tell me something that'll make me happy." I sighed into his chest and smiled softly when he shuddered from the feel of my nails skating down his abdomen.

Asher thought for half a second and replied, "it's been twenty-four hours since we've last seen my brother." 1

"Now that's a happy thought."

Asher dulled my anger until it no longer hurt to swallow. Still, all I could think about as my exhaustion grew stronger and sleep hovered at the edges of my vision was another version of my life where mom hadn't been killed in battle.

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Would it have changed anything? She barely called when I lived at grandmas for that year. My head pulled me one direction, battering me with facts while my heart ran in the opposite direction, bringing up memory after memory until darkness swallowed me whole.

I woke in the middle of the night to a tugging feeling in my chest. Like a second heartbeat knocking against my ribcage, it thudded relentlessly until I turned over in bed and groaned.

The crisp air made my nipples pebble and sent goosebumps raising along my skin. Half-awake and longing to slip back into that peaceful deep sleep where dreams are no where in sight, I stumbled over to the middle window along the bedroom wall. All three were large with clear panes of glass that let in endless sunlight. Giant blackout curtains were all that kept the sunlight from pouring through each morning.

Using an arm to cover my breasts, I inched open the curtain and peeked outside. The sky was painted in shades of dark blue and purple, hinting at the rising sun which would make its appearance in just a few short hours. I could see the

● which would make its appearance in just a few short hours. I could see the outline of the forest that surrounded our estate, forming a half circle around the back. My eyes darted downward to the flat expanse of land below. A stone garden wall separated the yard from the forest and standing just on the other side of the fence was Tristan. ①

The expression on his face was blank, apart from his blonde eyebrow which he cocked a second after our gazes caught one another. I rolled my eyes and closed the curtain, nearly tripping over the bench at the end of the bed as I searched for the t-shirt and sweatpants, I tossed to the floor earlier.

“You’ve got to start embracing your vampire side.” Tristan shook his head disapprovingly, “What kind of Vampire Queen goes to bed at nine at night?”

“One that’s half werewolf and has a lot on her plate.” I said dryly, briefly glancing at the writhing shadows along the forest line, making sure they kept their distance. “You might be fond of these late-night chats, but this is interrupting my beauty sleep. Did something urgent

beauty sleep. Did something urgent happen?"

"As if you need it, and it's more early morning than late night." He replied, "Urgent? No, not yet. Giovanni left a few hours ago to meet up with his contacts, the ones that might have some texts on magic. Also, I heard about your magical block. I think it'd be helpful to know Holly doesn't have one."

The only reason I hadn't asked the location of Giovanni's contacts was because of their wavering loyalty to my father. This particular vampire family was close to him, close enough to safeguard ancient magical texts my father had absolutely no use for.

Storming their home would give me the information I needed, but not their loyalty. If I could somehow gain their allegiance, other well-known families would follow.

"Good, at least someone can train their magic." I sighed, unsure why I was telling Tristan this. "We're thinking it was my mom who had a witch place the block on me when I was young. Is there any chance my father might've had something to do with that?"

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"No, he wouldn't have wanted your magic blocked. If anything, he would've —"

Tristan went still in that unnatural way that vampires did, speaking softly to himself though no sound was coming out.

"Was it about ten years ago that your mother had this done?" He asked, sky-blue eyes bright as they stared at me through the night.

"Nine or ten, yeah." I nodded.

"I was a child back then, but I remember something." Tristain said, "Something made your father incredibly angry. He called my father and uncle, along with Giovanni's father and had them meet at his headquarters. I have no clue what they talked about, but my father and uncle left that day for a weeklong mission — one they failed. Only my father and Giovanni's returned."

I knew little about Tristan's family, other than the fact that he had a younger sister who adored him. Not a single respected vampire family joined our side. As

who adored him. Not a single respected vampire family joined our side. As Tristan once explained very sourly, they were all pure-blooded and like the pedestal my father placed them on, high above the half-bloods. That was the first thing I did away with, the insane notion that a full-blooded vampire was better than a half-blooded one. Werewolves weren't prejudiced with full and half-bloods, though we had plenty faults of our own. ①

Tristan and Giovanni's only stipulation to working as my right-hand men was that Asher or I wouldn't go after their families. We would give them time to speak with them, to slowly win them over as they realized that this new world was happening whether they liked it or not.

"You think he was trying to stop my mom from having the block put on me?"

Tristan's face was resolute, "there is nothing redeemable about the man, but if there's one thing your father respected it was power, and there's no way in hell he'd let anyone take yours."