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It was when we reached the third chapter of Rowena's book that Cordelia's knowledge came into play. The chapter on sigils and their unique brand of magic was one of the longest in the book.

"Sigil's tie into the other forms of magic since there's a symbol for just about everything. There are ones to scare off enemies, capture memories and fool the human eye. There are a few witches, who after decades of practice, manage to create their own but it's dangerous and tricky work." Cordelia said as she entered the room, a small and unassuming book in her hand.

"So, a sigil that's meant to shield someone from an enemy has protection magic mixed in with it?" Breyona questioned. She'd deny it vehemently, but it was clear she got her love of magic and myths from her scholarly parents.

"For the most part, yes. Let's say you're exceptional with sigils. You should be able to use ones that vary in their effects. Protection, elemental manipulation, illusions, it's all at your fingertips if you have enough power. On the other hand, if you're a seasoned witch who specializes in protective magic, the only sigil you'd be able to successfully pull off is one in your field." Cordelia explained, and both Breyona and I nodded along as the pieces clicked together in our heads.

"Not that I don't love being a werewolf, but I wouldn't have minded some kick a*s magical powers." Breyona sighed dramatically and sunk into the couch.

While I giggled alongside Cordelia, I knew there was some part of her that wasn't joking. Without her wolf, she was essentially a ridiculously strong human with enhanced senses.

"I've used a healing sigil or two in the past and they worked like a charm, never tried any other kind though." Rowena's head of glossy auburn hair appeared from around the corner. Her ruby nails were tearing one of grandma's garlic knots in half as she spoke. "My mother would tell me all about what happened to little witches that tried to cast big spells out of their skillset...never ends well."

"On that note, I'd like you to have this." Cordelia shook her head at Rowena for trying to scare me off, but little did they know there wasn't anything anyone could do to knock me off this path. If magic meant protecting my friends, family, and pack—then sign me up, risks included. "Take this book home with you, study the sigils and their meaning's. It's a beginners guide so you shouldn't be able to drain yourself into a coma if you try one out."

The cover was bound in plum colored velvet, which was soft as it brushed against my fingertips. This time I did pale, and much to my surprise, so did Breyona.

Grandma cleared her throat from in the kitchen. She came around the corner and stood in the doorway, her hands firmly planted on her hips.

"I feel like I should've been made aware of this before you had me start using magic." She said to Rowena, whose immediate look of understanding took some of the ire out of her words.

"This isn't a risk for more experienced witches, or ones that have been unknowingly using their magic for well over forty years." Rowena replied with a reassuring smile. "I doubt it'll be a problem for Lola either, it's more of a precaution for young children with little impulse control."

"Better safe than sorry considering we have no clue how powerful she is or where her skillset lies." Cordelia swiveled her eyes away from Rowena, and her expression quickly shifted from scrutiny to amusement. "Don't think I don't remember how it was to be a young witch. You can't imagine how much trouble magic can get you in."

"I might be able to imagine more than you think." My laughter was light as my thoughts strayed to the shadows that fled when I came near. They hadn't yet come out since the sun was still bright in the sky, but soon they would.

The five of us talked as we ate, though the conversation was mostly carried by Rowena and Cordelia's steady influx of knowledge on magic. Even grandma threw in a question or two, mostly pertaining to her own magic, which she and Rowena had yet to discover.

"The specifics of your magic and its uniqueness is completely up to you to discover. You've already made incredible progress by learning to call it forward instead of only being able to use it subconsciously." Cordelia snagged the d***y plates before grandma got the chance and winked when she noticed my creeping grin. She paused on her walk to the kitchen and said not unkindly, "Only an incredibly powerful witch could hold onto her magic for as long as you have. Not only that, but you've been using it all this time without knowing. I can't say I've read anything about this happening before."

"I haven't either, but that makes it even more exciting. As a fellow natural, it's my duty to help you come into your own. Plus, I've never met one that's put their magic into food." Rowena's eagerness turned her cheeks the color of gala apples.

Her dedication to helping my grandma discover herself in this new world brought a feeling of relief I couldn't explain. Grandma, who shifts once a week only to traipse through the forest to give her wolf a breath of fresh air, now had a way to defend herself.

"Well, I've got to head out." Grandma murmured to the four of us as she wandered around the living room in search for her purse and car keys. "I want to beat your dad back home or else he--"

Her mouth clamped shut the same moment my head popped up from the book. Rarely ever was grandma distracted but discovering a secret witch heritage is bound to throw anyone off their game. From the guilty look on her face she knew there was no shrugging her comment off.

"Where's dad?" I asked smoothly, not at all trying to hide my interest as I slowly set the book down.

"Your father is out for coffee, and that's all I'm saying on the matter. I will see you all tomorrow, I assume." She nodded once and made a beeline for the front door.

Every time I looked back on this moment, I remembered feeling an intense desire to know the truth. Grandmas never had a reason to keep anything from me—other than my vampire heritage, but I've long forgiven her and dad for that. When she made a move towards the front door without so much as an explanation, something inside of me lashed out.

That thing didn't want her to leave—I didn't want her to leave.

My eyes were still on grandma's face when the lock on the front door clicked shut, followed by the loud snap of the deadbolt. The tips of my fingers tingled like I'd touched an exposed wire.

Grandma froze and the hand that hovered a few inches away from the doorknob fell to her side.

Everyone was looking my way, but I wouldn't give in to the curious stares that painted their faces, even though Breyona's star struck expression paired with her open mouth made me want to cackle.

"Lola..." Grandma scolded me, but I could tell she didn't know what to do in this situation. Her voice lacked the fiery wrath that would fill it when she was thoroughly pissed off.

"Dad's getting coffee at six in the afternoon?" I asked, holding back every ounce of my skepticism because grandma could tell how implausible it sounded without. "He doesn't even drink coffee."

"No, but Flora does...and if you breathe a word of this in his direction you'll live to regret it, hear me?" Her jaw was set in the same stubborn way as dad's often did.

Where I should've felt cautious, a jolt of giddiness washed through me. The flash of heat that flickered in her eyes was surrounded by a gentle lavender glow.

Grandma blinked a few times and the fire vanished as though it had never been there. I wondered what her magic felt like, if it tingled her nerves like jolts of electricity, or exploded like fireworks beneath her skin.

"He's with Flora getting coffee?" Surprise washed through me, carrying away the small bursts of magic I swore I'd been feeling.

"Yes, and he doesn't want anyone to know about it." Her eyebrows softened, "...you know how your dad is. He's not going to admit how much he wants this by

asking for help, but he's also terrified he's going to mess it all up. They're meeting in person, which is a start."

"We won't say a word." I promised her, letting a smile hold back the questions that hid behind my lips.

There were two that were almost painful to silence.

Something changed between them since the bake sale, where they orbited closer and closer to one another only to back away. I longed to ask what happened if only to fill the blanks in my head. My second question was much more important, and it was one I knew I'd get the answer to soon enough. Who asked first?

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After promising another three times, grandma finally left to beat dad home. He had no clue she'd overheard him talking to Flora on the phone and found out about their get together, even though he should've realized you can't hide anything from grandma.

Rowena slipped away to her bedroom after making me swear an oath I'd tell her, or Cordelia should something like that happen again. She left the three of us to eat grandma's leftovers and brush through various sigil books. Beneath each hand drawn symbol was a tip to help make the spell stronger.

Many called for white chalk or paint, others wanted black, and the harsher sigils called for animal blood. Some of the symbols became so complex my eyes couldn't discern where one line began and another ended.

There was one sigil that sent my thoughts veering towards the marks on my neck. It wasn't Asher's on my mind, even though I showed off the cobalt mark every chance I had. Unfortunately, in doing so I also had no choice but to show off my other mark, the one belonging to Tristan.

The dull cold that clung to it made it almost impossible to forget.

"Since you're good with sigils, you wouldn't happen to know anything about removing a vampire's mating mark?" It was impossible to keep my voice light after voicing a question like that. I settled for an awkward and drawn-out laugh. "I know the two aren't related, I just--"

"In a way, they are. A mating mark binds you and another person on a spiritual level, and just like a sigil it won't stray from its purpose. On the other hand, a sigil fades or vanishes once the spell reaches completion whereas a mating mark is for life..." My stomach was twisting and turning, riding the waves of my hope as it ebbed and flowed. It crashed into the rocky shore when Cordelia said, "As for how to remove it, there isn't a magical remedy I know of that I can tell you...but if I may ask, has he tried marking someone else?"

“He doesn’t exactly have someone else to mark.” I grimaced. No matter how desperate I was to get this thing off my neck, I wouldn’t pass it to another unwilling soul.

“Right, well...I’ll see if there’s any spells or sigils that have to do with mating marks. In the meantime you should focus on your magic. The more attention you give it, the easier it should be to take control. After all, you can’t train a dog you never spend time with.”

When her eyes crinkled with sympathy my hope vanished, leaving me to succumb to the waves.

Forty-five minutes later and a quick but steamy conversation with Asher through mind-link, I found myself sandwiched between the wall and his sweaty muscular form.

Nights ago he clasped a hand over my mouth and smirked as my moans were muffled against his flesh. Tonight was different in many ways.

Either he could see the stress in my eyes and knew I was nearing my breaking point, or he was nearing one of his own because the second he walked through the door, he attacked. His hands were greedy, squeezing and pulling as they sought out my warmest, wettest areas.

It was a good thing all I wore were baggy work-out clothes because within seconds they were scraps of fabric that littered the floor. He coaxed every single scream from my lips while his rough hands wound themselves in my hair, and his feral tongue explored my mouth. He hadn’t let me lay a finger on his c**k, and I’d been trying again when my fourth o****m rocked through me. I could do nothing but thrash against him as I whimpered and cried out the last of my frustration.

“So, Cassidy’s coming to this sleepover of yours?” Asher raised an eyebrow from where he sat propped against the headboard.

The sight of his b**e chest and bulging arms was delicious, but it was the tent his c**k made beneath the bedsheets that made me stumble. The temptation that swelled in my breast was overpowered by the soreness in between my legs, and it was that soreness that sent me floating back down to earth.

“You sound surprised.” I chuckled as I rummaged through the drawer for a change of clothes and glanced up at the vanity mirror where I met his eyes.

The clothes I had been wearing currently covered the living room floor in the form of homemade confetti. At some point we made it to the bedroom, which meant any piece of clothing not protected by a door now had an undertone of s*x that clung to its fibers.

“I know how Cassidy is. She never struck me as your type...then again, you were close with that blonde back in your hometown. You looked stunning wearing that black dress, I can see why Chelsea stood in front of you in every photo.” There wasn’t an ounce of shame or decency in his honey-flecked eyes, just that air of

confidence that seemed utterly impenetrable. His lips twitched as surprise rippled across my face. "I was curious, so I found pictures from that night. It was hard to believe you grew up with that tool with how much you glared at him in every photo."

I cracked a smile. "He kept saying I looked gothic like it was an insult, and what do you mean you didn't think she was my type?"

Asher's towering form appeared behind me, a dark shadow that scooped me off my feet and tossed me onto the bed. I landed with a light thud, giggling as he hovered over me and effectively caged me in.

"Gothic? He should've been k****d for saying you looked anything short of perfect." He snorted, sending a puff of warm air against my neck from where his nose trailed along the soft skin. "As for Cassidy, she can be shallow and self-centered. Material things matter to her, and embarrassment is a betrayal she'll spend the rest of her life punishing you for—something I do not speak from experience on, but I've met plenty who have."

While I wanted to know more about Cassidy's vengeful side, the confidence in which he spoke about me made my face flush with heat.

"I think I'm curious too, and unfortunately I'm not resourceful enough to scour the internet for pictures of you..." I chuckled weakly, then took a quick breath before I could back down. "What was it like growing up here? How was your childhood with Cassidy and Brandon?"

When his eyes darkened and some of the golden tones faded, I knew his mind had gone somewhere unpleasant. The weight of his expression lifted when I wrapped my arms around his neck and held myself against his chest.

"Things were normal when we were kids. We'd play, get d***y, and get in trouble." He half-shrugged, then ran a hand through his hair because he knew my silence meant I was waiting for a better answer. "Cassidy was an outsider for a while. She'd mostly trail after Brandon and I, but somehow she ended up a part of our group. Training started during my preteens which took up a good bit of time. I couldn't do as much anymore, couldn't play sports or hang out after school. It caused a rift between the three of us for a little while. When I left for your pack Cassidy stayed in touch, but by that point Brandon and I already cut ties."

"That sounds rough, to be isolated from everyone like that." I knew Asher wouldn't want sympathy, yet I couldn't help but feel bad for the child that he'd once been.

It didn't take a gut feeling to know he was holding back. While there weren't any salacious memories with Cassidy that stood out, there was plenty with Brandon that still stung him like an old wound.

"So you and her never..." I trailed off, feeling my breath hitch when his eyes settled on my lower lip.

His thumb forced the swollen flesh from between my teeth where I'd been chewing on it. My eyes fluttered shut when his tongue grazed the indent my canine left.

"Have her and I ever..." He trailed off; his voice low as it rumbled from his throat. "...kissed? Dated? Fu-"

"Yes, all of the above." I hissed and tried to pull my head away when his teeth sunk into my lower lip, right on the spot I'd been biting.

Ever so gently, he let go. He held back the need that darkened his eyes long enough for adoration and love to shine through. It made the gold return to his eyes, and I watched as it rippled and multiplied.

When men like Asher were fortunate enough to fall in love it consumed every fiber of their being, plagued every nightmare and dream until the voice that spoke in their head was that of their beloved. It was terrifying to feel that in another person, especially an Alpha whose instincts play a hand in every decision made.

It was a tightrope these men walked, a precarious balance between unconditional love and unbridled obsession.

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Asher made himself scarce for the rest of the night per Breyona's orders. Zeke stopped by half an hour after our conversation about the past and stole him from the front step after promising no alcohol or half-naked women. He made sure to clarify that meant for Asher and not himself before peeling off into the night.

'Wait till he finds out instead of a kegger, we're teaming up with tonight's patrol.' Asher's voice was amused as it rumbled in my head, each syllable an aftershock that made goosebumps lift along my arms.

'You're going to ruin his entire night.' I bit back my laughter as the doorbell rang and both Cassidy and Breyona's cheerful faces played on the security camera. 'I have to go now; the girls are here. Maybe give a little and let the poor Alpha have a beer, he's been working hard since Carson's d***h.'

I couldn't make out Asher's reply because I'd already opened the front door and my head now rang with the excited chatter of Cassidy and Breyona.

The cheerful blonde of the two toted in what looked like a kit full of nail supplies and make-up, while Breyona held up two bottles of the dark-colored whiskey Giovanni and Asher often drank. The maple and teak finish were still growing on me, but for Breyona it was an instant favorite.

"So, I came overprepared. Bite me." Cassidy said with her nose in the air but paused when she remembered who stood beside her. Breyona already had a

cheeky grin on her face, so only a second passed before Cassidy began laughing and said, "I would say that while standing in a room with a vampire and a vampire's mate."

"No worries, we only take our blood from bags." I teased and waited for the flash of disgust or hesitance to cross her face.

Only laughter shimmered in her baby-blue's, which grew as she charged up the stairs after Breyona. I followed quickly behind, my heart light and smile wide even though I had questions for both of them tonight.

I could ask about Cassidy's date with Lars while Breyona was in the room, but when I retold the story of how I made yet another unbreakable deal with the shadows to save my best-friend's life, I preferred the two of us alone.

Like everyone else, Cassidy knew little to nothing about the shadows, and I wanted to keep it that way.

An hour later, with our nails freshly painted and one bottle of liquor down, we stumbled into the kitchen to order what was probably an obscene amount of pizza-or what would've been if we were three human girls and not three tipsy she-wolves.

The entire wait for the food I ran over various scenarios to get Breyona alone. Mind-linking was always an option, but I knew her face would give away the truth. All I needed was five minutes to explain the truth before I could make my escape and seek solace in the second bottle of liquor she brought.

My slow trickle of ideas turned into full-scale panic when the doorbell rang. A jolt of frustration darted down my spine, so fast that I couldn't be sure if it were magic or just an effect of my liquor fueled emotions.

"Oh my goddess." Cassidy hissed half a minute later. She darted into the kitchen; her hands empty of the pizzas she was supposed to be grabbing.

"The delivery driver stole the pizzas?!" Breyona gasped, staring at Cassidy's empty arms like someone had kidnapped her mate.

"What? No, no one stole the pizzas. Kendrick Bennett is outside!" Cassidy snorted, then lowered her voice to a whisper. I realized she was blushing when she started fanning her face. "He's the captain of the lacrosse team ...he and I dated six months during my freshman year at the university. He's still unmated, and sometimes I can't help but think about him. Our relationship...it was so intense, I just..."

"You should go talk to him." I blurted, clapping a hand over my mouth even though it was far too late. "It sounds like you aren't completely over him."

Thankfully, Cassidy was tipsy enough to mistake my blunder as one of those bad ideas that pop up only when alcohol's been consumed.

"You think so?" She whispered and leaned in. "Sometimes I don't think I am...but I have a date with Lars tomorrow night."

"No ones saying leap into lacrosse guy's arms and s***w-"

"What Breyona's trying to say is you don't have to do anything you don't want to do." I narrowed my eyes at her lopsided grin.

"...you're totally right, I should go talk to him." Cassidy tittered, her eyes peering through the kitchen and towards the front door. Her glossy lips tilted up into a smirk as she tugged her sleep shorts up her hips and readjusted her tank-top to reveal a hint of cleavage. She called out over her shoulder, "I'll mind-link you 'code red' if he tries to get handsy!"

"As if you can't take him yourself! I saw you in training today!" Breyona whooped, "...oh, and don't let the pizzas get cold!"

"You're so right, but wouldn't it be a great way for some girl-bonding if we did it together?" She winked and slipped out the front door.

"Did you notice how she said nothing about the pizzas?" Breyona said with narrowed eyes seconds after the door clicked shut.

"Let's not worry about the pizzas for a few minutes..." I cleared my throat and mentally prepared the colossal apology I was about to give. When Breyona's eyes glazed over, I decided we needed a little fresh air. "Come on, we're going outside."

"But pizza..." She whined as she slid off the barstool and followed.

I closed the sliding glass door behind us and heard a quiet beep from the security camera mounted on the side of the house. We headed beneath the canopy on the patio and sank into a set of lounge chairs that overlooked the forest thirty feet away.

An in-ground pool sat off to the side, not yet cleaned and prepared for the summer. We still had a couple of weeks left even though the days were passing with gaining speed.

"I get why you brought us out here now..." Breyona said after taking deep breaths of the crisp nighttime air. "I can't believe I almost got drunk and forgot...how can I forget about something like that?"

The breeze carried the scent of moist soil and fragrant plants, mixing with everything else to create an earthy perfume that called to the beast inside each of us.

"I get how you can forget; it was your life that was almost taken. Don't blame yourself for wanting to take your mind off it." The feeling was more familiar than I wanted to admit. When it's your life that d***h calls for, and you narrowly avoid

its grasp, you'd do anything to forget about it. "I just wanted to tell you in private..."

Breyona could hear the way my voice wavered and could see that the pain in my eyes was left over from that night and would probably never leave my side.

"Tell me, Lola. I swear I'm not mad at you. I can't be, and neither can Gio. I'm here, I'm alive, and that's all that matters. Anything else we can deal with; I just need to know exactly what happened." She pleaded, and the desperation in her voice shattered my own selfish need to shove away the pain.

Starting from the moment the bonds around my wrists and ankles snapped, I launched into the blood-soaked memory of last night. Every word I screamed and every emotion I felt hovered in the space between us, growing heavier the more my voice cracked and the more my throat constricted.

"You only told them to save me...that was it?" She trailed off, a hand over her mouth as she stared at the dark forest with her eyes wide in confusion.

It wasn't the response I'd been expecting, not in the slightest.

"I wasn't exactly thinking about specifics. I just wanted you alive and not wounded. I didn't care how it happened..." I admitted and felt horrible in doing so.

Breyona's voice was fragile and still so confused, "...and they didn't ask you for anything?"

"No...they didn't-Breyona, why are talking like that? What aren't you telling me?"

Her eyes flitted to the forest just as the shadows deep within began to thrash and squirm. I could hear the echo of their silky voice when they noticed her and I. The reluctance written across her face as she turned her attention back to me made me wonder if she could hear their whispers too.

"When I told you the car Asher loaned me broke down, it was the truth...but I didn't tell you how I got to training." The breath she let out was shaky and bordered on a sob, but it wasn't grief that welled in her eyes...it was joy. "I shifted, Lola. The shadows gave me my wolf back."

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"I know, it's insane." Breyona's laugh was breathless and just a bit choked up as she wiped the tears from her eyes. Staring off into the forest, her voice unnaturally soft she said, "I never thought I'd be able to feel that kind of freedom again it's like -it's like I can breathe again." >>

" Breyona , I don't know why they did that ... but there's no way they won't want something in return . " I wasn't sure what made my chest ache more , warning my best – friend her dream come true might actually be a nightmare , or seeing the denial bleed across her face when I continued carefully , " I'm just worried they'll take back what they gave you in the first place ... " I didn't want to say it , but she wasn't giving me a choice . There was stubborn refusal in her warm hazelnut eyes , but I knew no matter how miserable she was without her wolf , she'd be worse off without Giovanni . " ... Giovanni's life . " I murmured and watched as the iron bars of resolution slammed down over her eyes .

" No , that's not it . " Breyona stood from the patio chair but made no move to head inside . Frustration was written across every corner of her face and was obvious in the semi – aggressive way she pulled her hair back . " So I'm not a witch , but that doesn't mean my gut feelings can't be right too .

Well , right now mine is telling me they wouldn't take my wolf and save Gio's life , only to return her and finish the job . " I wanted to reassure her , but the only thing I felt was worried , both for her and Giovanni . " Why can't I just have both ? " Her voice cracked , and she clenched her hands into fists while letting out a shaky breath . Devastation still shimmered in her eyes , but she held it down so well . " Let's – let's just drop it for tonight , okay ? I know we can't ignore it forever ,

but if I could just have these few days with Gio . We can figure out what to do when I come back . " Just from watching her pull the splintered shards of emotion from her skin and patch herself together , I realized I might've not given my best – friend enough credit . Not once had she faltered at my side , even though she was going through so much herself . Instead she kept her problems to herself , even though a subtle feeling told me she'd been drowning in them .

Feeling like a monumentally crappy friend I stood and wrapped my arms around her waist , which I was sure looked comical since I was nearly a foot shorter than her . Sure enough , she began to chuckle , but I could hear the sniffing it covered . Watching the happiness that had just been rekindled fade in her eyes had a sobering affect .

" We're going to make sure you can have both , Breyona . I'll use every bit of magic I have to make sure of it . " I promised , cracking a grin at her brave nod and the way she hastily wiped at her eyes . Minutes later , Cassidy eagerly interrupted with news about her lacrosse player ex boyfriend , Kendrick . With gossip and a rapidly cooling pizza waiting , Breyona and I raced back inside .

While we stuffed our faces with pizza from the small parlor down the street , Cassidy told us all about her whirlwind romance with Kendrick – which seemed more fueled by lust than anything else . Breyona wrinkled her nose at my slice of Hawaiian every other minute , but otherwise was absorbed in every seedy detail of Cassidy's story .

" My mom was absolutely against Kendrick from the start , despite what she says . It took her almost a year just to get over the fact that I wasn't Asher or Brandon's mate . " Cassidy rolled her eyes and let out a small huff as she tore the crust off her slice of pizza . From what I could tell of her expression , she looked more exasperated than jealous or longing .

I didn't have nearly enough to drink to feel comfortable asking my questions outright, but I apparently Breyona had. "Did you want to be one of their mates?" Her voice grew quieter even though there was no one in the house to hear us. Any wolves patrolling the grounds would be well out of range, but that didn't stop her

from asking it as though it were a secret. She hiccupped once and added, "... don't worry, Lola is freakishly good at not getting jealous. She won't go all tri-brid on you for talking about her mate.

"When I snorted in her direction her smile widened. Maya's tail swished in my head, letting me know how wrong our endearing friend was about us not getting jealous. "I've definitely thought about how incredible it would be to be Luna, but at this point being mated to one of them would feel like being mated to a brother.

"Cassidy wrinkled her nose, creasing some of the freckles splattered along its slim surface. "I think our parents expected it because of how persistent I was back then. The minute I saw Brandon and Asher wrestling in the dirt, rougher than all the other kids, I knew I wanted to be best friends. "The ease at which she spoke dissolved the tension in the room.

If there was any hesitation on her end, I couldn't sense it. My relationship with Asher and the titles I'd been given didn't affect the things she said, or the way she treated me. It was refreshing and eased the rest of the trepidation I had towards Cassidy. "Asher said himself, he's never even kissed her. Which means there's no reason to be jealous.

"I reminded my wolf, who at times could be much more hot headed and stubborn than myself. A contemplative look forced her lower lip out in a pout, which lasted but a few seconds. "I'm sure my mom won't hate Kendrick this time around. Hm, I might just cancel my date with Lars. Kendrick has a game out of town that day anyway, and I'm nothing if not persistent - which means I have to go too, especially if there's a good afterparty.

"Clara's pretty persistent with Mason ... Breyona pointed out, folding a slice in half before taking a large bite. I tried to wait patiently as she chewed, but I was already hooked. "... but I don't think it's friendship she's after. " "What do you think she's after?" I asked before Cassidy got the chance, and noticed I was the only one of us to appear worried.

Understanding in the form of a cringe slapped me across the face when Breyona leaned in and said, "His di- " "Wow, okay. Um, are you sure? How do you know?" Even though heat blossomed across my face, I pursed my lips and waited for an answer. "Mason stepped out of training to take a call from her right when I walked in the building. "She smirked tipsily, gently waving her uneaten slice of pizza around as she talked.

"Naturally, I harassed him until he told me everything. She's been asking Asher for him for days now, but Mason keeps refusing. Well, one of Mason's patrol buddies was given guard duty and she used her taser magic and knocked him right out. Took his phone right out of his pocket and called Mason with it ... " "

No way , she sounds like a total badass . Taser magic ? Goddess sign me up ! ” Cassidy exploded in warm laughter , the sound light and airy .

” That’s not even the best part ... ” Breyona shook her head , making her messy bun grow loose . ” She tied some of the bedsheets together at the hotel and wrapped them around his waist . Mason got to the hotel and found his friend hanging off the third – floor balcony . Which I know sounds dangerous , but his friend had already woken up at that point . The only reason he hadn’t gotten himself down was because Clara threatened to zap him again ... and apparently a second zap s o soon after the first does something to the bowels and you just sh- ” ” It sounds like she just likes pissing him off .

” I replied , lifting my eyebrow in her direction . ” ... also , how does Mason feel about it ? ” ” Yeah , she likes pissing him off the same way you like pissing Asher off . ” The cheeky grin that stretched across her face grew wider , because she knew she’d won this round . ” As for Mason , he was blushing the entire time he ranted about her .

” Really , you think he likes her back ? ” I couldn’t help the surprise that popped into my voice . Werewolves who found love after surviving the death of their mates were rare . Mason had a better chance than most since he hadn’t completed his bond , but that didn’t lessen the pain of knowing your soulmate had left this world and moved on to the next .

” I think he’s attracted to her , which he’d b e an idiot not to be , but I think he doesn’t really know what to do with the attention . Luckily , like I said ... she’s persistent . She’ll find some way to get them alone together and push his buttons , just like you and Asher- ” Hey , I was never the one to get him alone ‘ remember ? He was the one stalking me .

” I said shrewdly , letting out a sound o f exasperation when she and Cassidy collapsed in laughter , sputtering snippets of conversation in between their snorts and wheezes . As both she – wolves succumbed to laughter and pawed at the tears budding i n their eyes , my thoughts darted to Mason and the curvy exotic dancer who apparently had a thing for him .

There weren’t any flashes of fear or other gruesome emotions warning me about the young witch , only a healthy dose of suspicion which was far less than Asher’s regular everyday amount . I returned to the conversation just as the two had pulled themselves together . Cassidy was pouring herself another shot , while Breyona grabbed a few containers of ice cream from the freezer .

” We’re just teasing ... ” Cassidy giggled and tossed back the strong – scented liquor . Her perfect pout remained in place even though I knew her throat must be burning . ” ... I think every she – wolf dreams of meeting her mate that way . It’s just so strange seeing Asher wrapped around someone’s finger with how untouchable he can be .

” ” Those are the best ones though . ” Breyona sighed , plopping down with a pint of mint chocolate chip – the worst ice cream flavor to grace this planet . ” The men that act all tough and brooding , but secretly they want you more than you could ever imagine . Mason’s getting the brooding part down , especially since

meeting Clara . I think things between them would be ... explosive . He just has to stop being so stubborn . “

She giggled at her choice of words , undoubtedly comparing it to Clara’s magical abilities . That night , after finishing two containers of ice cream and suffering through a long winded romantic comedy we ended up hating halfway through , I stared at the ceiling in my bedroom and thought of Mason . It didn’t matter how much time had passed , only that I was responsible for the death of his mate .

There was no telling what could have changed with time – if she would’ve left her Vampire spouse to follow the bond that tugged at her soul . I’d taken that choice from her , and that future from Mason . The gentle and repetitive sound of Breyona’s snoring had yet to lull me to sleep , so I wasted the time conjuring ways to get Mason and Clara alone together .

Most of them were juvenile , like having Asher assign Mason as her personal trainer . It wasn’t too far – fetched since Clara knew absolutely nothing about defending herself without magic , but he’d see through me in a second if I were the one to give the order .

Someway somehow , they would find themselves alone together , I was sure of it . Even more so , if Breyona were right and the spark between them mirrored Asher and I’s , it would only be a matter of time before they both caught flame .

I wanted this desperately for Mason , for him to have some fraction of his happiness restored – some shred of peace reclaimed since his reason for existing had been so cruelly ripped away . Exhaustion was weighing down my eyes and pulling me into its deep abyss when my heart skipped a beat and a jolt spread throughout my chest .

Though the feeling was abrupt , there was no stopping myself from tumbling over the edge . Right before plummeting , I wondered if it were my thoughts about Mason or something else entirely that caused my elusive magic to crackle down my nerve endings , and even more so I wondered what it meant .