

10 - Laying it All Out

(Caspian)

Her place of work was on her rental application so it's not like I had to do much digging. I wasn't stalking her, I just needed to know.

As soon as I walked in I scented her, my whole body seemed to be tethered to her presence before I even saw her. She smelled like warmth. A mix of fresh bread and something softer, greener. It reminded me of a walk through the forest in a summer afternoon after the sun baked the earth.

Her scent made me feel, it felt like walking through the sun-soaked earth barefoot, heading somewhere familiar yet exhilarating.

This was my mate, I had no doubts no second guesses.

She was made for us.

Atlas growled it, growling in my head that word over and over again.

Mate, mate, mate

She didn't seem to notice me at first, and that worried me.

Everyone, even humans felt my effect even though I kept it reigned in. I felt the cool tension in the air and the way that everyone paused, averting their eyes but still watching me.

Everyone except her.

Until she turned to me, with wide eyes. I felt like I could breathe for the first time in years. All of my thoughts that were raging through me, all of the discontentment seemed to settle. Every negative thought and feeling reigned in and I felt whole for maybe the first time in my life.

Her eyes were just like I remembered, piercing green, a green that I hadn't seen before.

Her body went taut, I could scent her fear and that made me stop in my tracks immediately.

She backed away before turning from me completely and almost stumbled running away from me.

She hit, that was the exact opposite of how that was supposed to go.

Atlas begged me to follow her, but dread overtook anything else that quickly turned into hard resolve.

She was the one I had been waiting for and I wouldn't mess this up by chasing her down after it was obvious she needed some space.

I made eye contact with a girl with dark red curls, she stared me down with a bored look that also promised death as she crossed her arms. I swore I felt her gaze on me as I left.

I didn't understand. I knew she was my mate, and this time she felt it too. I figured it was because she was mated to that Alpha and since that bond was broken now she was mine completely.

I would try again tomorrow, and every damn day until I convinced her to be mine.

The next day she tensed before I approached her, but she turned to me and spoke. It was progress, way better than her running away and I would take anything.

Her hair was a different black than mine, where I felt mine trapped light, hers shone and reflected everything around her. That was something I never would have thought about anyone before.

I've thought women were attractive before, hell I had been with my fair share of them, but I never noticed them like this. Noticed the small things about them.

Yes, Shakespeare, get it.

I swear, I will walk away if you keep that up.

You won't and don't play with my mate like that

Our mate - I shoved Atlas away.

Most people thought that my wolf was more dominant than I was, and that he took over control a lot. But it was the complete opposite. He was soft, like a damn puppy, but he reminded me of something that I could have become without the pressure of responsibilities that I never chose.

I watched her as she worked, her hair swept back into a long braid before she came back to me again. She seemed utterly unphased about me being in front of her. It was the same that I noticed when I first met her, she didn't seem to feel the effect I had on everyone else.

That night I first met her everyone stood up in my presence and she was so fixated on something else, on that Alpha, that she didn't notice.

My royal aura wasn't something that you couldn't notice. My only thought was that it affected her differently because she was my mate and it wouldn't be right for her to be scared of me.

"You're my second chance," She admitted, I guessed at that. I wasn't sure though if she and Nolan were fated mates or if they chose each other and then he found his real mate, the blonde one.

I didn't know their history but this confirmed what I suspected, it still didn't make sense why they rejected each other but I would never complain about that.

I knew she was meant for me even when she belonged to another, maybe it was because the bond was about to break. Again, I didn't care as long as she was free to be mine now.

It was hard to school myself into passive neutrality when she ran from me, but it was better than her outright rejecting me. That's why I left, I couldn't deal with that, not without having a chance with her first to even talk to her.

She said she just got out of something that caught me off guard, but it didn't surprise me. She was beautiful, and that was an understatement, but she was so much more than that.

I wanted her to know this would be nothing like any long or short relationship she had, I would do anything for her and I would find a way to prove that to her.

"I have a child, he's four and I'm a single mother. I'm taking classes at a community college because I have no idea what I want to do with my life and hadn't ever really thought about it." She almost tripped over her words.

She jutted her chin out as she finally met my eyes, but I could see her wavering. She dragged her teeth on her full bottom lip in a way that seemed nervous.

Then her words settled in.

She has a child? That made no sense. If he was four, and I saw her five or so years ago. The child would have had to be her ex-mate. Unless, well I didn't know what else it could be, but maybe there was someone else.

Maybe that's why they chose to reject each other. I didn't want to believe my mate could so easily throw away the mate bond but she didn't accept ours either. I would get the truth from her but only when she was ready to share it.

I was stunned for the first time in a while, I didn't know what to say. Her having a child wasn't a bad thing. I just couldn't wrap my mind around what happened with her ex-mate. It tugged at my memory that the blonde was pregnant during her Luna Ceremony when I went back to see Willa.

None of this made any sense to me, and I hated that feeling of confusion.

"Okay," I managed to get out. I knew it wasn't the right thing to say but I couldn't wrap my mind around it and it was better than me grilling her about her past which she probably didn't want to delve into when she was at work.

Don't leave, we just found out we're dads

I pushed him away again. I hadn't really ever thought about children. I doubt hers would like me anyway, but I was willing to try. I wanted her and that included every part that came with her, baggage and all.

Don't call my pup baggage

Leave me alone for once in your damn life

I turned to leave, every part of me fighting against it. It felt unnatural leaving her, but we would be back tomorrow.