

Chapter One: *A Dream on the Moon*

A gentle pulse of power filled Sora's mind as she surfaced from a flaming sea, flashes of memories streaking through scenes of her time transforming, Kari's bullying, and the events leading up to the hellish amphitheater. Abruptly, the chaos was silenced, relief coming in the breeze of a field of nothingness.

Peace came to her turbulent dreams as she cracked open her eyes to white, yet it was only an abstract impression since no other color could describe the void that surrounded her. Sora looked up to find a black star, golden rays beaming out of its center to bathe her in radiance.

Squinting, she saw vines of obsidian thorns snaking out of the abyssal hole in reality, reaching out to embrace her; she wasn't frightened; in fact, there was something curious about their tentative touch, and a feminine voice caressed her soul.

"And who might you be?" Sora couldn't open her mouth; she didn't know how to speak wherever this was since there was no atmosphere. A resigned sigh came from the black thorns entity. *"Unfortunately, it seems our time together has come to an end... I will see you soon, Little Existence Walker."*

The slam of a dresser snapped her out of her mental haze. Shooting up, her vision flying open, Sora's copper locks swung left and right as she tried to orient herself; she discovered a dimly lit, fairly decorated, and spacious room.

A groan close to her lips, as she mumbled, "Where... am I?"

"Finally awake, are we, Princess?"

Throat constricted and tail bristling under her sheets, Sora's gaze drifted to a cross-armed, black-haired vulpes standing beside *her* open dresser. The woman's three tails—two dark and one pure white—flicked with agitation as her dull-yellow eyes centered on her.

"Who are you?" she instinctively asked, scooting to the metal wall at her back. Was she in a dungeon of some kind? "What... happened?"

"Typical teenagers, always slow on the uptake," the vulpes sighed, using her hips to bump the drawer back in as she moved to a closet that slid open at a pulse of magic. "Credit where credit is due... you do know how to pick clothes," she stated while sliding through a small selection of her wardrobe.

Falling silent, Sora did a swift take of her room and the single fox lady occupying it, putting her on high alert. The last thing she remembered was meeting her mother, and then... nothing but that weird dream about the black star and thorns.

Left ear rising, her right remained back while gauging the casual attitude of what she assumed was a Huli Jing by her black fur; although, the white tail was supposed to only belong to her Aunt Inari's Kitsune. Her traditional, red-and-black-themed qipao Chinese dress matched her Eastern appearance as she huffed and stopped to examine a particular article.

"You aren't..."

"One of your aunt's Kitsune?" the woman asked, rolling her eyes while turning to toss a blue dress for her to change into on the bed. "I wish, Princess. Hurry up and change; you have a dinner date."

Having had enough of being confused over the last few weeks, Sora pulled her tail up and hugged it, remaining in the corner of her bed. "I'm not going to do whatever you say, lady. I just woke up in this random... metal room with a lot of my belongings, which obviously means you broke into my home to steal them. I've had my fair share of weird recently, so I'm not very trusting."

“My, the arrogance and privilege of a vulpes Founder...” The vulpes’ fox-like eyes narrowed, yet her voice was patient as she swept to the side of her bed to sit in a proper pose, making Sora tense. “Why don’t we introduce ourselves then? My name is Fen, a humble three-tailed Huli Jing. And I am a prisoner—basically slave—of the most powerful organization on your planet, which has charged me with... once again, essentially being your slave.”

Her fake smile and sarcastic chime were a little off-putting as she gestured to the wall beside them, sending a pulse of refined magic through it. “Welcome to Lunar Area-01.”

Sora’s mouth fell open as the shutters pulled back to reveal the blackness of space, the stars shining in the background brighter than anything she’d seen looking up at the night sky.

“Is that... Earth; we’re on the moon?! No way!”

She sat up to press against the chilly glass. A giant cityscape of futuristic white buildings and space shuttles stretched out into a miniature metropolis with a high-speed railway connecting the facilities.

Fen followed her gaze with tight lips. “Trust me, it grows stale... especially when your movements are limited. Now, can we skip this phase of you freaking out and gawking? Your friend Wendy is in the next room over.”

Taking a deep breath, Sora let the jitters in her stomach ease as she glanced left at the dark-haired vulpes, now realizing what her three tails meant: she had to be at least two centuries old. The woman’s offhand comment about an organization brought back memories of her time with the Homeland agents.

“What about everyone else I was with—my dad? Did this organization bring them here, too?”

Fen slid her back against the glass to give her a thoughtful look for several awkward seconds before streaming out a slightly agitated sigh. “Let us make a deal then, Princess. You get up and get ready for dinner, and I will inform you of your position to the best of my knowledge. Is that fair?”

Feeling as if she had more power in this situation due to Fen’s attitude, Sora smiled and held out a hand. “Only if you call me by my name and not Princess. I’m not a prisoner, am I?”

The woman accepted but didn’t change her tone. “A question without dressing is met with silence.”

“Understood, Ma’am,” Sora snickered, not feeling particularly threatened by her agitation. Getting up, she stretched out while studying her green nightgown; she wasn’t wearing a bra but had bottoms. “Umm... who dressed me, by the way?”

“Who do you think?” Fen returned, eyes closing before falling on her bed to stretch out and get comfortable. “That unpleasant job was tasked to me... If I am being candid, you don’t seem all that bothered now,” she casually stated, Chinese accent thickening.

Sora spotted Fen’s long tails stretch out while plucking out a new set of garments from her dresser; they were still in her typical drawer, which wasn’t creepy at all. It was worth noting that she didn’t feel all that rushed or threatened after meeting with her mother.

“Well, I’ve dealt with a lot of weird crap recently, and you don’t seem all that hostile. If you were assigned to me, then I’m given special treatment, and obviously, you know I’m a Founder and who my mother is, so... yeah. As you said, heh, I’m a princess,” she chimed, shooting a wink at the woman that she knew would get under her fur.

The woman’s right ear folded against the bed as she tilted her head to frown at her. “As entitled as I thought you’d be. What it must feel like to have influential family and power... In

any case,” she grunted, forcing herself up by her core to fix her hair as Sora faced away to slip off her gown and change, “no, you are not a prisoner but a guest of the Foundation.”

“Thought so!” Sora chirped, brushing back her hair to connect her bra. “I’m getting dressed, so keep me updated, Ms. Fluffy Tail.” Her tail weaved to the left as she caught Fen’s scowl; it felt good to have a bit of fun in a tense situation. “What’s the damage?”

“So... far as I am aware, everyone at the site we found you in has been placed under what I assume is an unbreakable sleeping charm, courtesy of your mother. No one can detect it, but it is most certainly there. Speculation has it that once you awaken one, the others will rouse. I’m not so sure. I actually have a bet with Jian on it.”

Once her undergarments were on, she hesitantly tossed them into the dirty laundry hamper inside the closet. Did these people think she’d be living here now? Not if she had anything to say about it.

Feeling somewhat agitated now that she had a chance to look around at all her stolen items, Sora went to slip on the dress beside the fox woman, again flipping out her hair and brushing her bangs to the side. With a simple desire, her magic cascaded down her frame, making her perfectly presentable, cleaning her mouth and coloring her manicured nails blue to match her dress while slipping into some footwear.

“Bets are fun. I bet I’ll be back in Miami soon. Ready. Let’s wake up Wendy!”

Fen gave her a sour look that screamed jealousy. “The confidence is blinding... Are you even aware of the intricacy of the magic you just used without so much as the blink of an eye? No, never mind,” she snarled, rising to her feet to look from her sandal wedge heels to her copper locks, done up in a Gibson tuck style from the accessories on her dresser.

“You’re the one who wanted me to get on with it,” Sora returned with a short laugh, looking at herself in the full-length mirror by the corner. “By the way, what is up with that weird magic coming from your stomach? It feels similar to that cursed item I destroyed that had ghosts inside. Well, yours is a lot less dark, I suppose.”

Fen’s face tightened, hands darting to her belly as Sora did a magical sweep of her environment. “How else do you think they keep me amiable, a collar? It is a ticking bomb that could kill me at my captor’s whim.”

“It would fit the trope,” Sora chuckled, putting a hand on her hip and snapping her fingers on her own whim. “Well, consider this an act of good faith because you’ve been so welcoming!”

Fen’s tails stiffened at the loud sound, vision wide and claws extending to press against her abdomen. Red fire spun off her copper tail to encircle the stunned vulpes, and a bright, rectangular light took shape, shining through the fabric.

“Wait!”

It was too late; Sora’s desire ate through at least half of her magical power to sink her fangs into whatever was attached to Fen’s soul. It was harder and more energy expensive than she would have liked, but her impulsive decision discovered a flaw in the seal to make it turn on itself. A paper seal materialized before being disintegrated by the twinkling flames before they dispersed, leaving Fen tense and semi-panicked.

“How... Why would you do that?!”

Sora flashed her teeth, trying not to look weak after that considerable expenditure of energy. “Because I’m not a fan of taking away someone’s free will, and if you’re in my service against your will, then this is the way I’d have it. Simple as that. Fight back where you can, right? And what are they going to do, kill me?”

“Fool!” Fen’s face turned white as the lights overhead turned crimson. “Kill me! You don’t think they’re monitoring contained creatures?!”

Gut tightening ever-so-slightly, Sora’s brain caught up to her whim; maybe she had been a bit hasty since waking up. In fact, should she be acting this calm in the first place? She glanced at the Earth in the distance; she was on the moon, for crying out loud. Typically, she wouldn’t have done something like this without mulling it over. Was it a product of her complete transformation into a vulpes Founder?

A female voice spoke over the intercom above them, drawing their gaze. “Gray Delta: Peasant - Anomaly Containment Breach. Protocol Beta-799. Those in Area 232, please follow proper procedures. A-9333, Huli Jing, Xu Fen is free from her restriction ward. Room 205. Gamma Force: Whirlwind, en route.”

A little stunned at the rapid escalation, Sora oddly didn’t feel that worried as she smoothly slid in front of the panicking, dark-haired vulpes. Quickly guiding her to the bed to sit, she threw the sheet over the confused fox’s head. “Don’t worry. I’ll handle it!”

“This isn’t a game!” she whimpered. “These people *aren’t* to be played with...”

Fen choked, stiff as a board as Sora sensed a stretch in space; nine people were bending through it to flicker into the room on all sides. They took up an offensive position with futuristic assault rifles aimed at the now timid Huli Jing, quivering under her sheet.

“It’s okay! It’s okay!” Sora held up her hands. “It’s my fault. She’s not causing any trouble.”

Her ears twitched as a French woman’s voice came through one of the men’s headsets. “Let it slide, Sergeant Jacob. Fen is more intelligent than to believe she will be fine running a muck *inside* a Lunar Containment facility. Let Sora have her fun.”

The lights turned normal, and the female voice returned, Sora now realizing it was probably an AI in charge of the place. “Breach overruled. The Threat Designation returned to Safe. Please return to your activities.”

Jacob lowered his gun, eyes hardened and ready for any action as his other men lowered their weapons. “I apologize for barging in, Ma’am. Please, excuse us.”

With another twist of spatial reality, they phased out of the room, and Sora grabbed her elbow, pressure now binding her chest after sensing the aura of these soldiers. All nine of them had magic-resistant artifacts that would have made trying to influence them an absolute nightmare. Fen wasn’t wrong; instinct told her they would have pulled the trigger without a second thought, and the response time was within twenty seconds of her disabling the fox’s restriction.

She gulped as Fen shakily pulled down the sheet, chest heaving and now holding her three tails against her breast with one arm. Face turning red, she checked her tone, yet the heat in her yellow eyes was unmistakable.

“You... are unbelievable! Thinking the world revolves around you, *Princess*, and *maybe* it does, but did you hear her... I am a *peasant*. Not even *close* to a threat. And *that* is the response to someone *that* low on the totem pole. Think a *little* more, *please*.”

Sucking in her bottom lip, Sora gave herself a bit of time to let her nerves settle. She stumbled back as Fen stood up. Yeah, she was now feeling the weight of the situation. “I’m supposed to have dinner with, umm, with the big shots, right?”

Fen held her hands against her belly, her rapid breaths diminishing as she slowed their rhythm; her aura took on a new wavelength, though, based on relief and gratitude. “Yes. And while I *do* appreciate your concern. Please, be a *little* smarter in how you step, Lady Sora...”

She looked away, claws retracting now that her fur was easing up. “Thank you. Let’s move to the room next door to wake your friend.”

Sora followed her to the door that the men had filed out of, sensing their lingering presence now that she was on high alert. She paused at the entrance as Fen opened their way, glancing back at the room; the high after leaving her mother was fading now.

“A lot of things are from... my room?”

Fen rolled her eyes, showing a slight smile that wasn’t quite as bitter, and she turned to the side to let her pass while slowly clapping her hands. “How very observant, My Lady. Can we move beyond this sense of monotony? For the record, I am *not* accustomed to being demoted to a... messenger.”

Scattered mind finding its feet after the reality-inducing incident of having guns pointed at her, Sora groaned and rubbed her forehead. “Alright, Ms. High Class. I’m coming. Can you tell me a little more about how I got here and these people?”

The woman’s three tails flicked away with agitation back in her tone, yet she went over a short account of what they’d found when discovering her. Her fears abated upon hearing that the werewolf curse had vanished from all those infected; in the rush of things, it had totally slipped her mind. Wendy was in the room over, and her father had stabilized. Throughout the brief story, Sora’s focus rested on the girl’s single, glowing white tail.

“...My eyes are here, by the way,” Fen sighed, shivering a little and stepping away. “Go ahead and ask,” she growled. “Your constant stares are starting to make me feel uncomfortable... If only Jian would pay more than a glance; instead, I have puppy eyes glued on my fur.”

Sora’s thoughts were back to the conversations she’d had throughout the last few weeks.

“You have to be in contact with my Aunt Inari, right? Maybe you’re not a full Kitsune, but you *do* know my aunt, right?”

“Mmm. It’s a bit of a tale,” Fen grumbled. Her white tail drew around for the woman to run her claws along the fur. “I do not know how ignorant you are to your own kind, but one cannot just... *become* a Kitsune overnight. Inari has rules and limitations on those she *allows* to represent her—there are levels.”

A lump formed in Sora’s throat at the *real* information; the woman *had* met her aunt. Yet, the white tail gave her the sense of a pit viper; the curiosity was eating her up inside, though.

If I touch that... I might have my second tail forced on me. I could see Mom again... and probably die.

Fen’s head tilted with confusion at her tight expression. “Anyway... this room up ahead is where your friend is.”

“Long way for just being next door,” Sora mumbled, eyes still on the dangerous white fluffy appendage weaving behind the woman.

“Heh. Indeed, it is. Also, why the sudden change? You’re looking at me as if I’m about to gobble you up. There’s no need to look at me in that light. I am the smart, obedient fox because otherwise, I die.”

Stopping in front of the door, Sora looked up and down the hallway; not a person was seen in the spacious corridor that could easily fit two cars. “Where is everyone? It feels like a ghost town.”

“Not here!” Fen chimed, pressing the button for the steel panel to slide back and gesturing her inside. “Your friend awaits. Grab some clothes for her, and I would say I’d take you to the locker room, where you both can get freshened up, but I take it that won’t be

necessary due to your absurd magic. And, *please*, for the love of Inari, don't make me wait longer than is *absolutely* necessary."

Sora was a little put off by her bristly attitude that flip-flopped from 'somewhat acceptable' to bitter and jealous, but considering she was a prisoner, Sora could see herself being the same way. She was releasing stress in her own way.

Adding a smile, Sora took one look inside before her focus returned to Fen, the Huli Jing's attitude a swirling mix of uncertainty. "I am sorry for putting us both in that position. I was reckless, and I'm trying to figure out being a vulpes, Founder or not, since I lived as a human up until a few weeks ago... however long it's been. Are you feeling better without it, though?"

Fen nibbled on her bottom lip as she stared at her, folding her arms under her bust in a defensive way. "Maybe... I did misjudge you. Yes, I am feeling less... I'm feeling better. Now, let me enjoy my silence in the hallway while you... do whatever with the human. Take as much time as you need."

Sora walked in, Fen shutting the door behind her. Once inside, she half-turned, ears falling back as she heard a depressed sigh come from the vulpes outside; it felt like the woman was going to cry.

Rules for thee, and not for me... she thought, trying to see it from the captured woman's point of view. *Here this organization is catering to me while using Fen like a disposable tool. Life isn't fair...*

Mouth drawing in, goosebumps ran across her arms as she examined the room her best friend had been given: posters of bands, manga Sailor Princess characters, and many more items she recognized from Wendy's home decorated the space.

It's like... they really expect us to move in! No, I have to get us out of here.

Trying to shove the stressful environment and situation down, she smiled at her resting best friend. She was breathing somewhat heavily, to the point it was just below a snore; Sora recalled teasing Wendy about it a lot when they were younger.

She never *truly* snored, but she was a heavy breather, which brought on a chuckle when spotting the brunette grinning in her sleep, giggly mumbles breaking the silence about some dream she was having. Oddly, she talked a lot about princes and noble boys; she was a lover of the otome genre, though.

"Theo, no... that's my job..."

Sitting at the edge of the bed, she watched Wendy shift and gargle something unintelligible as some drool fell out of the corner of her mouth; clearly, she had moved on from anime princes to wonderful dreams involving her co-worker and crush, Theodore Thomas.

A light weave of *very* familiar magic was wrapped around the brunette's spirit that stood out to Sora like a bright red target on white paper. Her mother's magic; she knew it instinctively. It was crazy to think Fen couldn't sense it. Then again, the thread was so thin that the slightest touch would break the spell.

Sora figured her mother had done the same to others to give her a chance to explain the situation to them rather than the abrupt awakening she'd gotten. Eyia waking up in this base was sure to be a disaster. Plucking the string, it snapped without effort.

Wendy's eyes snapped open, coughing and wiping away the drool that leaked down her chin. "H-Huh?! Sora, wha—Jenny, she..."

Lurching forward, Sora tackled Wendy to the bed, making the brunette squeak; there wasn't a trace of the werewolf curse marring her soul. In fact, there was something comforting

embedded inside of her best friend's core that she knew was some kind of gift from her mother. It wasn't *actually* her mother's power but an impression she felt that Wendy had been visited by the fiery fox goddess, too.

"I w-was so scared!" she wept, feeling the weight of the hellish amphitheater suddenly collapse over her. "Are you okay?"

Wendy returned the hug and teared up, unable to speak as they babbled to one another, locked in an embrace; Sora had no clue what either of them was saying, but the pressure compressing her chest gradually faded. She had Wendy again.

Her brown-haired childhood friend was the first to choke out a laugh and pull away. "Heh, I'm okay... I think. Umm. So... what's with this weird room filled with, like... everything I own—is that really my K-Pop poster? I thought my mom got rid of it."

"Yeah, I don't know! Well, not the poster part. I was just told to get ready for dinner. Haha-haaa. Do I look good?"

"Pfft! Are you kidding me? You always look good," Wendy snorted, scooting back and crossing her legs while gesturing at her yellow polka-dot pajamas. "Eh? Classic, huh? Wait... Who undressed me?! Was I naked after I turned into a werewolf—yikes... I have so many questions!"

"Same! Want to figure out what's going on with me?"

"Sure!"

Using some of the tissue beside the bed to clean up, Wendy suddenly screamed, making Sora jump and almost clock her head against the ceiling.

"What?!" she gasped, glancing for danger as the door flew open to reveal Fen. "What is it?"

Wendy was clasping her red and puffy cheeks, eyes wide and staring into empty space. There were no magical attacks or anything dangerous that Sora could sense. However, the brunette's explanation made Sora's body go numb.

"This gorgeous nine-tailed fox lady came to me in my dreams—it was so real. I-I think she was your mom... Mia?"

Throat constricting, Sora moved to sit on the bed with her. "Yeah... I thought I sensed her on you. It's almost like I can smell her... it's like fire lilies. What did she say?"

"No! No! You don't get it!" Wendy shook her head, suddenly spotting Fen in the doorway. "Uh... who's the pretty fox lady?"

"Our guide—no, more like our maid?"

"Lovely..." Fen mumbled with renewed bitterness. "Happy to do your dirty laundry, Princess."

"Anyway, her name's Fen," Sora swiftly dismissed. "But that's not as important as my mom! You met her?!"

Wendy gulped and fidgeted with her feet and hands. "She, umm, she came to me in a dream and told me—" Turning to look straight into her eyes, she said, "Sora, she told me that in two days, she's going to be in Miami, to be where she should have been all along... She said you could use your magic on me to play her message since she couldn't leave it with you, or it could cause problems."

Sora's fur stood up; it was as if cold water had been dumped on her head before the sun broke free of the clouds to douse her in lighter fluid. Fen had a similar expression of disbelief; Mia, the youngest of the vulpes Founders, was coming to this planet. It changed everything.

Her mother was coming home to *be* her mother? Did that mean they could be a complete family? Dad would have his wife back? She had Wendy back as her best friend. Was everything she dreamed about to come true?

“How?” Sora whispered, throat suddenly scratchy. “My mom said she couldn’t see me because... because it could kill me. What changed?”

An encouraging smile brightened Wendy’s shiny red cheeks as she reached out to squeeze her hand. “Do your magic thing! I can’t remember it all—it’s really fuzzy. I’m excited for you! Oh, and make sure to, uh... I think she said, desire for her to interact with the environment?”

Fighting down the pressure punching her in the chest with every heartbeat, Sora held her arm against her belly; she felt lightheaded. Wrapping her tail around the back of Wendy, dazzling, magical flames ignited as she fed the desire, the fire wrapping around the brunette before exploding outward to create a visual representation of her mother.

She couldn’t breathe, and Fen fell to her knees. A small, familiar smile brightened her mother’s freckled face as she looked down on them; yet, as she’d come to expect, her elegant, beautiful mother started to flounder the moment she opened her mouth.

“Hello, Little Ember. I hope to see you soon... Hmm-eh-hehe. Where to begin? Yeesh. Haha. I’m so bad at this!”