

Alpha Nocturne's Contracted Mate Chapter 271

Alpha Nocturne's Contracted Mate by A E Randell

Chapter 271 Soulstone

Despite the brave face that Lexi had put on, she had still needed a couple of days to recover as her energy levels were incredibly low. She had fallen asleep a few times when they had all been sat discussing how best to proceed and then been furious with herself afterwards.

One thing had been certain though, she was going to find Greyson whether Allen wanted her to or not.

They had come to a silent agreement about it, that neither one of them would mention it outright, but they would both participate in planning the expedition out there to take care of the sites.

Lord Brarthroroz would go with them, along with a handful of specialists from the Enclave, and a few of Lord Brarthroroz's commanders would accompany them, for back up if needed.

Ann would stay behind with Adam and work on having the plans for the portal room in the Enclave approved by the council with Bartholomew's help, and take a closer look at the finances required to get their military force up to scratch, so that they would be able to respond effectively if ever situations like this occurred again in the future.

When Felix's men returned with the rest of their forces, they would restock their provisions and put together a new squad to liaise with Allen, Lexi and Lord Brarthroroz, and continue forward once the barriers were destroyed.

The following day they gathered in the same hallway that they had bid farewell to Greyson, Felix and Adam only a few weeks earlier as they left on their respective missions. Except this time, it was Ann, Adam and Bartholomew that stood solemnly in the hallway, waiting for their friends to appear.

Lord Brarthroroz sauntered casually through the doorway into the hall and grinned broadly at them as he approached.

"Seems like a nice morning for a quick jaunt into the woods and destroying some souls." He quipped as he dug through his pockets, seemingly looking for something.

"It's nice to see you haven't lost your sense of humor even in dire circumstances such as these."

Bartholomew chuckled as Lord Brarthroroz produced a large chunk of a midnight blue rock from inside his jacket pocket with an almost triumphant smirk on his face.

“Well, look at it this way Bartholomew. In all the centuries that I have lived through, I can’t think of a single one where I haven’t had to intervene in one of my brother’s ill thought out plans or schemes in one way or another.” He sighed with a rueful smile as he handed the large chunk of rock to Ann, who took it with a confused look.

“Erm, thank you, Lord Brarthroroz. I... er... love it!” Ann improvised quickly, seeing his expectant look.

“Not that I don’t appreciate Daemon Lords gifting my wife and my mate obscure rocks,” Adam said tersely, “But is there a reason that you’re presenting her with this?”

“Maybe he’s imitating a penguin’s courtship ritual.” Maeve sniggered as Ann tried desperately not to roll her eyes.

“Sure, because Lexi’s father would suddenly be under the impression that gifting rocks to his daughters best friend would be an appropriate way to begin a completely inappropriate, and pretty f*****g weird dating scenario.” Ann snapped.

“I mean... you know what they say about males enjoying getting their rocks off...” she smirked coyly, “Perhaps this is his interpretation of it..”

“Shut up Maeve.” Ann hissed as she tried to keep a straight face and push away all the intrusive thoughts that now seemed to flood her mind about Lexi’s father.

“Relax pup.” Lord Brarthroroz grinned, “It’s a soulstone. You’re going to need one about that size for each portal you want installed at the base and at the crest of the archway, and an additional five at specific points which we can discuss later.” He waved dismissively as Bartholomew seemed to perk up at this information.

“Ah of course! So, seven soulstones in total for each portal? I hadn’t realized that we would require so many just for one portal!” He breathed in awe as he took the rock from Ann’s hand and examined it closely.

“If you want them to remain accessible and functional whenever they might be required, then yes, seven stones total.” Lord Brarthroroz answered with a shrug.

“Wouldn’t that leave them open to misuse by anyone though?” Bartholomew asked as he turned the stone over in his hands.

“You don’t trust me Bartholomew?” Lord Brarthroroz frowned as he folded his arms in front of him defensively.

"I don't think he meant that in a bad way," Ann intervened quickly, seeing the look of dismay on Bartholomew's face, "I know for sure that when I bring up the possibility of a permanent portal hub within the Enclave at the Elder Council meetings, the first thing they will do is fight against it because of their concerns for security. Worst case scenario, I'll just have Eva help me work on plans for an extension to the palace and create a brand new site just for your convenience." She grinned brightly, hoping that it would diffuse the inadvertent insult.

Lord Brarthroroz looked at Bartholomew through narrowed eyes for a moment before focusing his attention back on Ann.

"If it helps put their shriveled little minds at ease, the use of the portals can be attuned to activate only for certain people. Steve can see to the finer points of attunement. It's a lot of work and will take a long time but he's not going anywhere," Lord Brarthroroz shrugged before his face took on a thoughtful look and he scratched his beard thoughtfully, "A change of scenery might even do him good."

"Steve in the Enclave? He'll fit right in here with the crusty old bastards, don't you think?" Lexi's voice snorted from the other side of the hall, "No offense Barty-boy."

"None taken." Bartholomew shrugged and sighed in resignation "Are we all set then?" She asked brightly, shrugging a backpack higher up on her shoulder as she looked around expectantly at them.

"Unless you need anything else...?" Ann left the question hanging in the air as Lexi's attention turned to her, the corners of her mouth curling up slightly.

"The only thing I need is for you to stay out of trouble while I'm gone, okay? I don't want to have to be raining down bloody vengeance on anyone else when I get back, okay Queenie?" Lexi grinned as she pulled her into a tight hug.

"Don't you do anything stupid Lexi, do you hear me?" Ann whispered softly, fighting back the emotions that threatened to overwhelm her.

"I'll be fine, Ann. Papa is with me... do you really think he's going to let anything terrible happen to me?"

"I'm simply going along for decoration then am I?" Alien's sarcastic voice cut across them as Lexi rolled her eyes.

"Don't be so sensitive, furball. There's only so much you can do against potentially a horde of dark witches, right? You can't growl them to death, as impressive as your bulging muscles and tempting physique are in both forms. Papa can smooth them with his eyes closed if it comes to that." Lexi continued unabashedly as the sullen look on Alien's face only grew larger.

“Okay kids, enough chit chat. The hellhounds are waiting and they’ll make short work of the metal your flimsy little trucks are made of.” Lord Brarthroroz announced as he clapped his hands together and headed towards the doors.

Ann and Lexi exchanged one last hug as Allen and Adam clasped their forearms in farewell, before they turned and followed Lord Brarthroroz out of the doors, leaving Ann, Adam and Bartholomew alone in the hall.

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Chapter 272 At the Morgue

Ann and Adam followed Bartholomew to his office, requesting breakfast from a passing omega as they made their way there.

Once inside the safety of his office, Bartholomew took the stone from his pocket and placed it on his desk as they sat and looked at it.

“Soulstone? It sounds kind of ominous.” Adam commented dryly. “That’s because it sort of is.”

Ann answered as she reached for the stone and held it to the light that streamed in through the window.

“If you look closely Adam, sometimes you can see the solidified energy of the soul inside...like a mist that’s infused within the stone.” Bartholomew explained.

“It’s filled with dead people?!” He exclaimed in horror. Bartholomew chuckled and shook his head.

“I suppose it is. Soulstone was formed from the souls of thousands perhaps, all fossilized centuries ago when the gods themselves roamed the earth and walked among us in various guises. It can only be found in the realms that were eventually given over to the Daemons as they rose, and accessible only by those who rule those lands.”

“How come you’re such an expert on all of this Bartholomew?” Adam asked suspiciously, clearly unnerved by the composition of the soulstone.

“Spend enough years in this place and eventually you’ll have read enough books enough times to be able to answer most questions with a degree of certainty,” Bartholomew chuckled, “It also helps to have spent a lot of time with both Lord Brarthroroz and his wife over the years.”

“You have a fair point.” Adam nodded begrudgingly.

Just then, Ann’s phone rang, earning her inquisitive looks from both Adam and Bartholomew as she checked the caller ID and saw Eva’s name flash up.

“Hey Eva, how are things?” She greeted as she moved to stand in front of the window, still clutching the soulstone in her hand.

“They’re good! As a matter of fact, I was calling to let you know that Coral has learned pretty much everything I can teach her. I’ll tell you, she’s a natural. Just needs to work on her self confidence and she’ll be almost as good of a Personal Assistant as I am.” She bragged happily.

“I’m looking forward to working with her. When do you think she will be ready to join us back at the Enclave?”

“Well, I was thinking about dropping round with her this afternoon. Is that okay for you?”

“I think that would work well, Eva. I may need you to start work on a little project that we may or may not have coming up shortly.”

“Oh?”

“It’s something that we haven’t really done before, and I know how you love to sink your teeth into a new challenge.” Ann smirked as Eva laughed on the other end of the phone.

“Sure. Why not. Listen, I have a heap of new paperwork for you as well, hours.”

Ann hung up and turned back to Adam and Bartholomew.

“Well, it looks like we’ll be making waves much sooner than we thought. Coral is ready for action so now not only do I get to try and persuade the Elder Council that direct access for the Daemon realm is a good idea, I also get to show off my Omega Personal Assistant.” She grinned widely.

“They can bark in protest all they like, you are the Alpha Queen and their job is to advise, not to dictate.” Bartholomew smiled.

“When is the next scheduled meeting for the Council? I’d rather get all of this out of the way sooner, rather than later so we can move on to fixing the other issues that are piling up on my desk as we speak.” Ann asked with a grimace, placing the stone back on Bartholomew’s desk.

“I don’t believe we have anything scheduled for the next few weeks, your highness. Would you like me to organize one?”

“If you wouldn’t mind Bartholomew, that would be tremendously helpful. It could be days Allen, and when she finally gets in t*ouch, I would rather not have any distractions.”

“Understood, your highness.” Bartholomew said as he inclined his head.

A knock at the door drew frowns from Adam and Ann, but Bartholomew seemed unfazed as he shuffled over casually to open it, revealing an omega with a large tray, filled with various foods.

He took the tray with a nod of thanks and kicked the door closed but it bounced back as Felix appeared in the doorway.

“If you don’t want me in here you could have just said...” He grinned impishly at their surprised faces.

“Don’t look so surprised, I have nothing to do except brood and twiddle my thumbs aimlessly so I went and harassed the doctors at the morgue for a little while.” he said as he walked in and shut the door behind him, throwing himself down on the couch as Bartholomew set the food out on the coffee table.

“At the morgue? Isn’t that a little morbid for this time in the morning?” Bartholomew asked with a raised eyebrow as he took a seat opposite.

“Not really. I wanted peace of mind, confirmation that Jasper was dead and the paperwork to prove it so I can officially inform my parents. Although, for Aoife... I’m still not fully sure what to tell them.”

“I refuse to think of Aoife as anything other than missing, Felix.” Ann answered with a reassuring smile, “You’ll see, we’ll find out what’s happened to her and when we know where she is, we’ll bring her home.”

“How can you be so sure?” Felix asked flatly as he stared blankly at the food in front of them, his face clouded with misery as if he couldn’t believe in what Ann was saying.

“Because there’s no body, Felix.” She answered simply, “And I have a gut feeling that she’s out there somewhere, alive, and waiting for us.”

Felix lifted his gaze and his eyes locked with Ann’s. The certainty in her voice and utter conviction that was reflected in her eyes filled Felix’s shrouded heart with the faint flame of hope.

He had listened to their positivity and flippant attitude surrounding her apparent death for days without saying a word, but inside, he had been crumbling. Yet now, something inside him told him to trust in Ann and the words that she said.

After all, he hadn't felt her death and their bond was not broken, the thread just... faded away...

Technically it was still intact which meant that Ann was right, she was out there somewhere, and he intended to do whatever it took to get her back.

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Chapter 273 Return as Heroes

The journey out to the last spot that had been scouted by the Enclave's Specialist handlers and their direwolves had been uncomfortable to say the least.

The standard black armored transport with tinted windows was not air conditioned, and the heat in the back was stifling. The only breeze came from the window in the front passenger seat, where Lord Brarthroz was seated next to an obviously tense driver.

The specialists that accompanied them sat in the front two rows, occasionally throwing worried glances back at the cages, as Lexi grinned unashamedly at them from her seat next to Allen on the back row.

"Do you have to torment everyone that you come into contact with?" Allen murmured in annoyance as he rolled his eyes.

"What? I'm just being friendly." Lexi protested with a shrug, her eyes glinting mischievously.

Allen raised an eyebrow at her as Lexi snorted.

"Look, I'm hot, I feel like we've been cooped up in this tin can forever and I'm already bored. A girls gotta do what a girls gotta do to keep herself entertained, beta-boy." She winked.

"It wouldn't be so damn hot if you hadn't brought those...those things with us for a ride along." Allen grumbled as he glanced back at the cage, "I don't know why you couldn't just teleport them in when we arrived."

"Don't you listen to the grumpy old smelly furball, my poor little babies" Lexi gushed as she crouched down in front of the metal grill and stuck a few f*ingers through to scratch under the chin of one of the sinister looking hellhounds, "The big old meanie just doesn't appreciate your uniqueness, does he?"

The hellhound's eyes seemed to glaze over as its eyelids lowered in an expression of what seemed to Allen, to look like ecstasy. He shuddered at the eerie turquoise light

that seemed to penetrate the hounds eyelids with their unnatural light and glanced across in sympathy at the enormous direwolves that huddled together in the corner of the cage, eyeing the beasts and their clearly insane mistress with suspicion and a healthy dose of fear.

"I sometimes wonder what goes on inside your head." Allen murmured with a mixture of awe and disgust.

"A pretty gooey mix of sass, s****l depravity and an incredible amount of time devoted to thinking about cake, surprisingly enough," She answered offhandedly as the hellhound pushed its snout against the metal grill and she planted a gentle k*iss on it, before standing and taking her seat next to Allen again.

The only sound in the silence of the van otherthan the hum of the motor, was Lexi's contented sigh and Lord Brarthroroz's deep chuckle from the front of the van.

After a few hours of constant motion, they pulled off onto a dirt track that abruptly ended a short way along and they continued on through the overgrown field towards the edge of the sprawling forest that lay in front of them.

The closer they got, the more excited the hellhounds became, nudging at the heavy doors of the back of the van as if eager to be off.

The van pulled to a stop and they exited the vehicle, the team that had traveled with them, hanging back a short way and making themselves look busy as Lexi sauntered past them with a snort.

"Amateurs." She muttered with a shake of her head as she flipped the latch on the outside of the van and flung them wide.

As soon as she did, the hellhounds were out and fussing around her as she giggled like a child, and the dire wolves that had shared the cage with them slunk past them carefully before bolting to their handlers.

"Anyone would think you were frolicking in a field with a bunch of cute little puppies.. .not fully grown hellhounds." Allen sneered.

Lexi scowled over her shoulder at him at the same time as the unlikely pets focused their full attention on him and bared their teeth in a viscous snarl, growling lightly. Allen swallowed nervously, suddenly feeling very vulnerable.

"Just so you know Allen, these three hounds are puppies...and they are as intelligent as you or I," Lord Brarthroroz advised as he leaned in by his ear, making him jump slightly, "I would be careful what you say. They understand every word."

Allen blinked at him dumbly with wide eyes, at a loss for words as Lord Brarthroroz wandered over to the so-called puppies and indulged them with the belly scratches that they were begging for.

“No offense Beta, but, aren’t you a little... I don’t know... .freaked out by all this?” one of the specialists asked quietly as they joined Allen to watch with complex expressions, the almost unnatural sight of an oversized Daemon Lord and his daughter playing with the monstrous looking hounds as if they were harmless and not at all moments away from embarking on a potentially deadly expedition.

“I mean, I suppose at one time, I would have been,” Allen sighed, “But I’m rapidly learning that I’m far more accepting of things like this, the longer that I spend with my mate.”

The specialists exchanged complicated looks with each other and returned to their dire wolves, beginning to attach the harnesses that held their equipment to them and Allen looked between the two groups with a resigned look.

He was part of two worlds that had collided in a spectacular fashion and for all the odd looks and whispers that went on behind their backs, the sooner the shifters accepted and welcomed different species among them, the easier it would be to repel threats like Narcissa and Eromaug before they became an issue.

He knew damn well that these specialists were going to go back to the Enclave with stories to tell about how terrifying Lexi and her fathers abilities were, and some of those people who would listen would try to twist it to their own ends, planting the seeds of discord that would further their own goals and divide communities further.

After all, at one time, Allen would have been among those people who would be all too easily persuaded about the potential evils of Lexi and her father.

There would be comparisons between this Eromaug and Lord Brarthroroz, then the questions about what made them so different from one another and what would stop Lord Brarthroroz from turning on them and working to destroy them, as his brother had done for years in secret.

This mission to destroy the sites would be imperative in shaping the narrative around Lexi and her father once it was complete, and it was just as important that they completed the tasks with minimal incident. That part at least, would be relatively easy to control.

What was not so easy to predict, and therefore mitigate, is what they might find when and if they succeeded in restoring communications. He could only hope that for Lexi’s sake, Greyson and his team were holed up somewhere and able to defend themselves until help arrived.

Anything else could prove disastrous for them all. Lexi and her father needed to return as heroes, not as bearers of bad news and cast as the villains of the whole ordeal by those desperate to see not only them, but Ann and Adam fail too.

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Chapter 274 Seductive Whispering

The specialist raised an eyebrow at Lord Brarthroroz and barely suppressed the scoff of disbelief. "You're telling me that your hellhounds can sniff out the sites faster than our dire wolves?"

"We could always make a wager on it, if you like?" Lord Brarthroroz answered casually as a sly smirk played at the edges of his mouth.

"I'm not betting my soul..." The shifter replied before he was interrupted by Lord Brarthroroz's laughter, "I don't know what's funny about that." He continued, scowling at both Lexi and her father.

"Listen buster, I think you and your little friends have us confused with the demons of the human religions," Lexi snorted, "We're daemons, not demons. There's a huge difference."

"I don't see how. You both deal in souls and dark magic, and live in the depths of hell."

"I'll have you know my home is quite comfortable and welcoming actually. If you can get past the succubi that is... although I'm sure some of your unmated would love spending time with them..." Lord Brarthroroz replied, a little offended.

"And this is exactly why I need to begin these lectures as soon as possible." Lexi muttered and sighed. "Look, we daemons are far older than anything contained in these modern, humanized religions, okay? We have been here since the beginning of time, along with the gods. We predate people for crying out loud."

"I don't hear you denying any of what I said though." The specialist sneered.

"Okay." Lexi answered calmly, "Let me spell it out for you. Daemons live in their own realms for the safety of your kind. Your petty squabbles and the way you all thrive on killing each other over pathetic issues that could be dealt with by a single conversation is quite frankly, tiresome for beings that have lived through millenia. It gets boring. Sure, we use magic, and so do you with your ability to shift into your little fleabags. You're no different to a human schizophrenic hearing voices in your head that the Goddess Selene gave form to."

The specialist blinked in surprise, a little lost for words as Lexi paced slowly towards him and stopped in front of him, scrutinizing his coat and reaching forward to pluck a stray direwolf hair from, discarding it casually.

“And as for your souls,” She continued with a sinister smile, “We don’t need to bargain for them. If we wanted them, we would take them.”

“Okay! That’s enough of that!”

Allen announced hastily as he took hold of her shoulders and steered her away from the gob smacked specialist.

“Lexi, don’t scare our team members, okay?” Allen said quickly with a pleading look in his eyes as he turned to face the specialist and frowned, “And you guys, please don’t poke the daemons for a reaction that you aren’t going to enjoy when you get it. Okay? We’re all on the same team here.”

“Perhaps they are the ones that need to understand that then.” Lord Brarthroroz rumbled nonchalantly, “I am only here to find these sites quickly and destroy them. Purely because of the friendship shared between my daughter and your Alpha Queen. The faster this is done, the faster I can return to brooding in my own realm and sampling the various whiskies that I have stashed away to alleviate my boredom.”

Lord Brarthroroz turned to the hellhounds and gave them instructions as Lexi glowered at the specialists who begrudgingly moved away and gave their own orders to their direwolves, and together, the beasts raced off into the darkness of the forest.

Allen glanced across at the men tracking the direwolves’ progress on their equipment and then turned to Lexi.

“How will you know when they have found the sites?”

“They’ll let Papa know, don’t worry. We don’t need all those gadgets, they speak to us like your wolves speak to you,” Lexi replied, tapping her head with a smile, “In here.”

“Well, we won’t have to wait too long for the first site,” Lord Brarthroroz said with a smirk, “They already have the scent.”

“What?! Impossible!” The specialists protested as Lord Brarthroroz chuckled.

“For you, maybe, but not for my hounds. If you are still wanting to be part of this operation then I suggest you follow me. It’s this way.” Lord Brarthroroz answered calmly as he began making his way into the forest beyond.

Allen didn’t miss the look of triumph on Lexi’s face as she followed behind her father without so much as a second glance at the men standing to their right.

If they were going to pick up the trails this quickly then perhaps they wouldn't be at this for too long before communications were restored.

They traipsed through the undergrowth as silently as they could with Lord Brarthroroz at their front, leading them through the shadows of the forest and beneath the canopy of leaves that didn't seem to let any sunlight filter through at all.

As they pushed further in, the darkness seemed to be almost unnatural, cloaking everything with an oppressive blanket so heavy that not even the sounds of the wildlife that should usually inhabit the forest could be heard here.

Then, in the murky light, the ethereal luminescence of the hellhound's eyes could be seen in the distance, the faint light illuminating a set of moss covered, cracked stones arranged in a rough circle.

"And here we have the first one." Lexi murmured with a grimace.

Allen and the specialists could feel the sinister prick of the magic that swirled around them. It wasn't visible, but the sensation of it made every hair on their body stand on end, and the infectious unease that it brought with it made their wolves on edge.

"Feels pretty slimy doesn't it?" Lexi commented as she turned to them, her eyes blazing a terrifying red as they nodded wordlessly.

"This one should be quite simple to teardown," Lord Brarthroroz observed as he ran his hands over the stones, as if inspecting them for any weakness, "This is not a live specimen that powers this site ...we just need to find the corpse."

"Corpse?" One of the specialists exclaimed in disgust.

"Trust me, it's better than taking the life of a living battery. We will only need to burn the remains once they are uncovered." Lord Brarthroroz said as he began rolling his sleeves up, "Now, you can either help me with lifting these central stones, or you can stand in the background mithering about the task itself."

Wordlessly, the men set to work, lifting the stones as Lexi watched anxiously from the sides. She knew that she was going to have to use her abilities and they swirled excitedly inside of her, pulsating eagerly to be made use of.

What none of them knew except her father was that each time she used her abilities, the more powerful they became, absorbing whatever it consumed to grow in strength inside of her.

Her magical side was sated and controlled easily by Allen, but her Daemon abilities...right now she only had her father to rely on, and the more she used them, the less likely it would be that her father could control them. She needed Greyson at her

side and if he wasn't alive by the time she got to him, she was terrified at the prospect of being consumed by her power.

"It's time Lexi," Her father said gently as they stared down at the half rotten corpse in the pit below, and she took a deep breath as she held her hands out in front of her.

"It's okay, we're here." Allen said as he stood at her side, with her father on the other.

Lexi wanted to laugh as she let loose the terrifying column of flame from her hands, her daemonic soul singing with happiness as it consumed the withered flesh and the magic tethered to its remains.

She could feel the surge in power, and the desire to destroy everything around her and claim it for her own, the judgmental gaze of the specialists like daggers as they watched her flame wreathed form in horror, the watchful eyes of her father and her mate desperate to stop her from becoming out of control, and above it all the little voice that whispered to destroy them all and take everything for herself.

It took everything in her to resist its seductive whispering and as she allowed her power to recede, lowering her arms, a wave of nausea swept over her.

Not from the exertion of it all, but at the sheer effort of resisting the ancient call of her daemonic soul.

As the blanket of darkness slowly began to lift from around them the specialists celebrated quietly as Allen and her father watched her uneasy expression with concern.

She knew that with this site, the barrier had been lifted without incident, but deep down she knew that the more they had to break, the higher the risk of her soul consuming everything she had fought hard to become.

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Chapter 275 Mystical Figure

Allen took the awe filled chatter between the specialists as a positive sign. They were horrified and terrified at her sheer power as the flames had incinerated the corpse in seconds, and the image of her blazing eyes set within her perfectly calm face and flame wreathed body had seemed almost deity-like.

He wouldn't be surprised at all if, at least for these three men and those that listened to them, she became an almost mystical figure.

However, Lexi was unnaturally quiet as they continued on towards the next site and both he and her father had noticed the subtle shift in her aura and the almost depressive cloud of misery that seemed to hang over her.

Allen reached for Lexi's hand wordlessly as they walked, intertwining their fingers together and squeezing her hand lightly as they walked. She turned to him and smiled half-heartedly, but Allen could see the doubt and worry in her eyes.

Lord Brarthroroz stopped suddenly and stretched.

"We'll need to take a little stop for a moment," He announced, "Need to feed the hounds for their work. A little reward always gets them working a little faster."

The specialists didn't object, merely taking a look at their equipment and nodding before swinging their backpacks down on the ground before them and squatting next to them, rummaging through the bag for a snack and a drink.

Allen smiled gratefully at Lord Brarthroroz who winked in response before he wandered off happily to where the hellhounds sat expectantly, with their drooling tongues hanging out the sides of their terrifying mouths.

"It's almost as if you two planned this." Lexi smiled ruefully as she allowed Allen to lead her off to the side a little way towards an old stump and indicated for her to sit.

"We can both feel that there's something wrong with you. Talk to me Lexi, what's wrong?"

Lexi sighed and purposely avoided the soul-searching gaze he was currently fixing her with, instead watching the antics of her father tossing small pieces of soulstone toward the hellhounds who bickered with each other for each one thrown their way.

"Lexi..." Allen pleaded with her, lifting his hand to her face and gently guiding her face back towards him, forcing her to look at him again.

"It's nothing Allen..."

"Bullshit." He hissed fiercely, "I know you Lexi. Any other time you would have been poking the others about how awesome you are trying to provoke a reaction, but you're just... silent."

"You're always telling me to stop so maybe I'm just taking your advice..." Lexi countered defensively.

"Again, Bullshit Lexi. You never listen to me and there's zero reason that you would now. Just... don't shut me out. Tell me what's wrong."

Lexi chewed her lip as she looked at his imploring eyes, hating that the sight of it made her melt and that he could push through her usual defenses with ease.

"I'm fine, Allen. Just... I wasn't expecting the way I reacted to be so... terrifying." She said finally as he frowned in confusion.

"I don't think you were terrifying... you looked pretty badass to me... beautiful as well if that makes you feel any better..." He said with a small smile trying to make her feel little better but it seemed to have the opposite effect as she tutted and stood up, pacing angrily away a few steps and wrapping her arms around herself.

"That's not what I meant." She snapped irritably as Allen moved to stand at her side.

"Then tell me Lexi," Allen snapped back in frustration as he reached for her arm, "Let me at least try to help."

"You can't help with this Allen. As much as I want you to, you can't." she hissed, "The daemon soul that whispers its desires in my heart each time I pull from its power and feed it with the energy I consume... it's getting harder to resist it Allen. You are mated to the soul that derives its power from my mother, the ancient magic of the earth, not light, not dark but gray in its application. It doesn't hunger for destruction but rather for life and all that comes with it, including death. You are my grounding, my stability for that soul, and your mere presence soothes its cravings. But my daemon soul ... it..." She trailed off, not wanting to hurt him with the words that were nothing but the truth.

"It needs Greyson." He finished for her, his mouth set in a grim line.

The sour look and hurt on his face tore Lexi apart and she wished for what seemed like the thousandth time that her life wasn't as complex as it was. It was all she could do to nod wordlessly as Allen sighed and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to his chest and rubbing her back gently.

"We'll find him, Lexi. If anything had happened to him, I think that you would have felt it. Even though you aren't marked. For now though, do you really think your father would let anything happen to you? That I would?"

"You don't understand Allen, I could feel it. The desire to consume everything around me and take its energy for myself... what if I give in? What if..."

"Enough Lexi." Allen said sternly, "You cannot live your life on what if's and if it came down to it and you were teetering on the brink of destroying not just me, but your father and friends too, I have to think that your other soul, the one that I claim as mine, would stop you somehow."

"But what if it doesn't? What if..." She whispered tearfully.

“Do you know what I think? Each of your souls are clearly intelligent enough to know what they desire. If that’s the case, then they both know that both of them live inside of you, in balance. If one of them were to succeed in consuming the other, then honestly, don’t you think it would destroy you and thereby itself?”

Lexi blinked up at him, a little bewildered. “I don’t know. I hadn’t considered...”

“If one of your souls is stupid enough to lead to the destruction of the vessel that holds it, then quite honestly, your ancestors cannot be as intelligent as I was led to believe.”

Lexi could feel the daemonic energy’s fury at his words, but she had to admit, Allen was right. Would it really risk the destruction of itself?

“You’re both wrong.” Lord Brarthroroz said quietly as he approached them, “The energy you hold in itself is not intelligent, Lexi. What matters is who controls that energy and the intention of those it is mated to.”

“Then surely, Greyson wouldn’t allow it to destroy her..” Allen asked with a confused frown as Lexi looked toward her father with the same look.

“No. Greyson wouldn’t allow that.” Lord Brarthroroz answered mysteriously with a thoughtful expression on his face.

A moment of silence passed between the three of them as a sinking feeling seemed to hit Allen’s stomach. Why did there seem to be something more behind his words?

“Let’s keep moving.” Lord Brarthroroz continued abruptly as he began directing the hounds and the specialists packed their gear away.

As they made their way towards the next site, with Lexi’s hand held tightly in his own, Allen couldn’t help but wonder what Lord Brarthroroz wasn’t telling them.