

Chosen 351

Chapter 351 Letter to the King

A grey wolf with dark brown spots at its feet and silver eyes that flashed amber every once in a while dashed through the woods, stopping every now and then to take a drink or to hunt. Her goal was still far from reach and she didn't dare buckle under the pressure of having run so many leagues following the Great Sirius river upstream.

Beatrice hadn't gotten much sleep or rest for that matter since she'd run from the rogue king. It had been three days since the day she'd run off. Her muscles were starting to ache with fatigue. Her sense of distance had become greatly distorted by how much she'd been running through the woods and her mental state was starting to suffer the effects of isolation.

She lost count of her estimates on the evening of her second day of running and just kept to the river. It was all she could do to keep herself from succumbing to the emptiness that threatened to invade her mind.

With her mind link having gone entirely silent, she was not sure how long her wolf and her could last before the insanity got to her, 'Damn, how does the Lone Wolf do it?' she cursed, remembering a time that the alpha of the Golden Moon pack had told his son to disconnect from the mind link for a mere one hour.

The boy hadn't been able to last the whole hour and yet this woman had now gone three days, not to mention all the time she'd spent as a captive of the Rogue King. This hadn't bothered her as much then as she had the rogues to toy with, but now... there was no one. It was just her, her wolf, the forest and the monotonous sound of the flowing river.

Nonetheless, the grey wolf pressed forward, pushing through with what little strength was left in her limbs. 'I have to make it to the capital. There is no other way. I have to warn the king.'

These thoughts were wiped from her mind when her ears picked up on sounds from the forest. It was not far from the river and the longer she paid attention, the more she felt slightly relieved. Her nose picked on a scent and the rest of her senses flared up as she entered a pack territory. She'd come across a human settlement. She broke away from her path along the river bank and made it for the small town.

It was not a large town and it wasn't noisy either. The buildings were simple, however, the business in the town was bustling. The sound of the people within the village was more lively than those at the Golden Moon pack. If the woman was to guess, this town was much more prosperous than the pack she was from and probably inhabited some humans as well.

Without clothes to wear, she couldn't shift anywhere as the royals could. She circled the settlement and finally set her eyes on a cloth line. Beatrice shifted when no one was watching, stole a few clothes from the line and sauntered into the town, barefoot and started her search for relief.

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She wanted a way to get to the capital faster. She had no money with her or any way to identify herself, but if she could get a vehicle going to the capital, she could figure something out. There was hope.

Beatrice was walking for a while before she came across an inn. The establishment was rather humble and had been painted completely white, 'Maintaining this can't be easy,' she thought to herself before entering the inn and seeking out the receptionist, "Good afternoon," she greeted. What she hadn't accounted for, however, was her appearance.

Beatrice's hair looked like it had taken a trip through a sandstorm and without much nourishment, her skin had long lost its normal glow. Her fatigue cast a look of madness in her eyes and the dark circles around her eyes didn't do her any good either. She was a mess.

"Oh, good afternoon. Err, would you like me to serve you with something?" the woman asked her, replacing her initial look of shock with a warm smile. One look at her new customer and she could tell the woman was not from their beloved town, "What brings you here? This pack is not usually welcome to unexpected guests."

"I didn't have anywhere else to go. I don't want to get into any trouble with your townsfolk, so if you don't mind. I would like to know which way to Sirius and if possible get some transport if isn't much trouble," Beatrice tried in the politest way she could muster. The scents coming from the kitchen didn't do her any good. After having eaten raw rabbit for breakfast, the craving for some nice bread and a nice cup of herbal tea clawed at her insides.

The receptionist stared her down. From her messy hair, fresh clean clothes that barely fit and bare feet, her warm smile didn't last, "What are you running from? I doubt you have the money to pay for anything. Would you happen to be from one of them breeding houses?"

Beatrice was visibly offended by the woman's suspicions. While they were valid, she couldn't allow their implication. Her politeness was gone, "No, my situation is much worse I'm afraid. I would like to talk to the king at once. Is that too much to ask?"

"Yes, it is too much to ask. The king is not in Sirius at the moment. He went off to a coronation in the kingdom of Lycaon. It's such a pity really. Losing the King of Lycaon yet his son was only coming of age. That man was lucky his son had a mate at the time too," the woman clicked her tongue and grimaced, showing her pain towards the king. Although this was only idle chatter that barely interested Beatrice, the receptionist was now stalling and it was visible.

Since Beatrice had crossed into this pack's territory, she had got a feeling of danger creeping into her mind. The silence in her mind did not help her situation as it magnified the slightest of suspicions into irrational fear. The woman grabbed the receptionist's arm and squeezed it tight, trying to regain her self-control. The receptionist looked displeased by the sudden action and wore a look of disdain. The malnourished Seeker was too weak to even bruise her, but that didn't stop the action from offending her, "Unhand me at once."

Reluctantly, Beatrice let go of the receptionist and tried again, "If you could just point me in the right direction, I'll be on my way."

The receptionist was even less inclined to help her now, "Why would I let a cloth thief out of my sight now? That would make me quite the citizen now, wouldn't it?" the woman smiled at her, a smile that did not reach her eyes.

Nothing seemed to be going in Beatrice's favour since the two had begun talking and the more they spoke, the more the woman began to feel something wrong was about to happen. She hadn't stopped running this long since escaping the rogue king. Beatrice finally stood from the counter... to leave.

"I'm sorry for having bothered you. I shouldn't have come here, to begin with," Beatrice said to her, rushing towards the door. Men that had been watching the argument immediately blocked her exit.

Beatrice turned to the receptionist with a pleading expression. She was getting desperate. Sighing, "No, she's alright. Let her through." The men relaxed at the woman's orders and let Beatrice through.

As soon as she had gone through the door and the men took their seats once more, a pair of two entered the store. A man and a boy, wearing suspicious sunglasses. It was a disguise that anyone would find suspicious.

The pair took a seat at the counter, "A beer if you may," the boy uttered first.

"The beer is for me... My nephew will have a cup of hot cocoa, if you may," the man spoke up, barely sparing the glaring boy a glance. Despite appearances, these two radiated very deadly auras. Then inn went deathly quiet and the tension was so thick it was tangible.

Chapter 352 Deadly Duo

The two new customers carried on like there was nothing happening. When Carla tried, she found that the glasses they were wearing were nearly impenetrable to the naked eye. Even with her enhanced sight as a werewolf, there was nothing she could glean from the other side of the dark shades. 'I don't think I want to look them in the eye,' she averted her gaze.

Thankfully, they acted as though they hadn't noticed her staring.

"Don't listen to his drivel. My nephew tends to let his mouth get the better of him," the older man responded, nonchalantly.

"Your... um, nephew sounds like a delight. You can't get bored with him around," the woman responded nervously. For once, she wished her customers had made their orders to go or something that shortened their stay at the inn.

"Yes, he's one of the sharpest tools in the shed. I wouldn't call him a delight though," the man smirked, avoiding eye contact with the boy. 'Are they arguing?'

Sadly, the tense air around them didn't allow for such casual thoughts. Carla was still very much afraid of these new arrivals, "What brings you to this part of the Sirius empire? I don't think I've seen you around," Carla asked them before turning to get their orders.

"We don't intend to stay in this small washed-up neighbourhood for too long. We just need to find a little bunny that's gone missing. I'm sure you might have seen her pass through. After all, you do know every face in this town," they held out a sketch for her to see. Surely enough, the woman's face faltered before she expertly replaced her smile. If it had been anyone else, they probably would have missed this.

"I'm sorry. I don't think I've seen that one," the woman replied.

“You know, Samson. It could be that your drawing was a little inaccurate,” Benji suggested with a hint of sarcasm.

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“My drawings are always perfect, Benji. It’s something his majesty agreed on as well. Besides, Carla...” in a more serious tone, “Your heart skipped a beat.” Samson tucked the paper back into his pocket.

His hand, swift as lightning, grabbed the back of the woman’s head and brought it crashing down on the counter and bouncing back with a loud thud. Carla’s hands flew to her bleeding nose, finally catching up to the whirlwind of motions that had just happened.

It had happened so fast that the moment she hit the table felt more like imagination than reality in her head. Her body had been relaxed the whole way, giving no resistance to the man’s quick movements. This man was bad news.

The woman took a step only to bump into someone. Short as he was, Benji was immovable. The little boy groaned in disappointment, “Samson, can we switch places? Guard duty isn’t meant for me. All I get to see is this woman’s rump. You, on the other hand, would love this very much.”

“Try getting serious for once in your life, Benji,” Samson pinched the bridge of his nose, knowing the futility of trying to reason with the boy. His face turned serious once more, “Now, let’s try this again, shall we?”

“Hey, that’s not any way to treat a lady,” a man’s voice intervened, “Let her go.” Samson’s fingers twitched in frustration as he turned around to take a look at the man standing up for the woman. His eyes burned a bright green with anger at what he had just done to Carla.

“I hate hero-type wannabes. You’re not even powerful enough to lick the Perfect Warrior’s boot and stand in front of me... Confident, brimming with self-righteousness... As if there is anything you know about what I’m doing. Carla... You’re going to tell me where that woman in the picture is... or else I’ll slaughter every last werewolf in this inn.”

“Don’t tell him a thing, Carla. You don’t get to walk in here and make demands like you own the place,” another stood up. All the other men in the inn followed his cue and stood to defend the innkeeper.

“It’s pitiful watching insects stand up for one another,” Samson exclaimed before turning into a blur of motion. Moments later, the ripping of tissue and crunching of bone rang clear through the inn.

Gasps rippled through the room as everyone that finally managed to catch up to his movements witnessed a scene of a man with his hand plunged into the delta’s chest. The man that had spoken up first coughed out a multitude of blood, clutching the arm that held him up helplessly, “You’re making my outfit dirty.” With that, Samson flung the man across the room allowing everyone in the room to take in the lifeless corpse that had only taken him less than ten seconds to kill.

“I’ll talk. I did see her.,” the woman screamed, giving up all efforts to resist Samson. She’d already lost one customer and a dear friend. The woman she’d tried to defend was not even worth that much to her, to begin with. However, keeping quiet would only get more of her friends killed and she didn’t want that. She’d already seen enough.

“Finally, one of you with brains that work,” Benji commented from behind her.

Thinking back on it now, she had never noticed the boy get behind her in the first place. He’d moved so fast when the man slammed her head on the counter that she had never perceived his movements.

During the time that the man had slammed her head on the counter, the boy had ghosted to the back of the counter without anyone noticing. That should have been an indicator enough for her, but it hadn’t been. Probably because the boy had distracted her with his inappropriate words.

No, that had also been the moment when the delta had chosen to stand up for her. It wasn’t that they hadn’t caught up to how dangerous these two were, they’d simply wanted to do something to put an end to their silent oppression... which had been a miscalculation on their part, “I don’t want to see anyone else get hurt,” Carla pleaded.

This pair was in a league of its own... One that none of them could begin to comprehend.

Chapter 353 Landing in Brigadia

Cole stayed by his mate’s side every chance he had. Even on the way to the airport, he sat in the same van together with the Voice of the Wild. They monitored her unchanging situation with looks of concern even though there was nothing that any of them could do about it.

The van eventually reached the airport where two royal jets were already waiting. “Don’t you think it’s reckless for both royal families to neglect their duties all at once?” Cole asked King Davin when they met outside and watched Katie’s body be moved carefully into the Lycaon Royal jet.

“I don’t let the empire stand in my way when it comes to my family. Whether it’s reckless or not, I don’t want to miss any part of their lives that matters. It’s selfish of me, but that is my decision. That’s why I took my whole family to Brigadia when it was time to get Katie back,” the king replied.

“What happens if that decision ends up getting your people killed?” Cole’s voice was lacking in emotion, but the King of Sirius could understand his situation.

“If my daughter were to die when I was out there slaving away at my desk or visiting a random pack, answering to disputes of the people, I would feel much worse than if the situation was reversed. My family matters the most to me. The empire comes next.

While we are growing up, we are taught to put the empire first at all costs, but after losing Katie once and watching my friend, Trevor lose his wife, I realised what was more important to the both of us. We don’t just want to protect our kingdoms. We want them to be places where our families can live happily,” the man tried to explain.

“That’s a twisted way to look at things. Sounds like you’re just denying all your responsibilities in the name of family,” Cole commented.

“You’re right about that,” the king replied with a sigh, “But I’m not going anywhere until I know she’s on her way to recovery.”

“Very well then,” Cole responded, setting his eyes on the unconscious girl once more. In her unconscious state, Katie looked at peace. The prince wondered if she actually was at peace or if her

mind had simply gone silent completely. It would be one of the first times that would have ever happened.

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It was like whatever was claiming her life was doing it as painlessly as possible, "It's not unsettling to see her calm and not worrying about something."

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Brigadia had four cars ready to receive the party when they had just arrived. Sandra was the first to exit the jets. Her parents rushed forward from the crowd that had gathered to receive them. The new hunter fell into her mother's embrace and did the best she could to hold back the tears that threatened to escape her. Samantha approached her along with Kenneth, "So, it's true then?" the blonde hunter asked in a sombre tone.

The lack of an answer was all Samantha needed to draw her conclusion. After hugging and greeting Sandra, the hunters approached the people exiting the planes. The hatch at the back of one of the jets opened, to release an ambulance that contained the girl being stabilised by machines just to keep her body from running out of energy.

Upon Anthony's request, Cole opened the back of the ambulance to reveal the girl sleeping peacefully within it. The boisterous hunter stared at the girl inside for a moment, trying to discern what could possibly put her in such a state. Alas, he didn't have a clue what he was looking at, "I hope you find what you're looking for in Brigadia."

"You sound like you know what we're looking for," Cole replied.

"Maybe... I don't know what you're looking for, but..." the man sighed, "I might have a faint clue." Cole's expressionless face finally showed a hint of surprise when he heard what Anthony said.

Anthony took this as a sign to continue, "The forest... It's like it's been recreated since Katie left. It started happening not long after the two of you had gone, but none of us could figure out what was happening. The patrols were getting harder to keep track of when everything was no longer looking familiar. There have been rumours of moon lotus flowers in the forest, but no proof of them. Even those that claim to have seen them can't exactly find them again."

"That's because the forest will do everything to keep humans from finding the place the goddess landed, but even nature is not that perfect and that's why people like me exist with a calling to keep such places completely hidden from humans," an old woman's voice intervened. The two men turned to face the woman that had crept up behind them.

"And you are..."

"My name is Fauna. I will be leading the king to this same place you've spoken about. It's meant to be the epicentre of power in your forest and the place where the moon goddess last landed which, other than the Origin, makes it the one place that we can be able to communicate with the goddess again," the woman explained.

Anthony looked between the king and the woman, waiting for the punchline, “Oh, you’re serious right now, aren’t you? Couldn’t you find some human way to fix her problem? She’s always been pushing herself and each time she broke, we pulled her out of it and got her back on track. What makes this so different?” the man argued.

“Believe me when I tell you this Anthony. Nothing humanly possible can be done for this condition. She might have taken it a bit too far this time... even for her,” Cole sighed, “We don’t have much time to waste. Let’s get her there as soon as we can.” The prince closed the door of the ambulance, signalling the end of this short break in their journey.

“Wait.... where is Micah?” Thorrin asked loudly.

“He sensed blood-lust somewhere in the Sirius empire and chose to go after it instead,” Evelyn replied. ‘Rogues?’

Chapter 354 Living Forest

“What about you? Did you detect it?” Thorrin asked, worry laced in his voice.

“Yes, I did, but I would not be surprised if you took it to be your worry for Katie. Let’s leave that to Micah. He should be able to get it done,” Evelyn flashed a forced smile. The Perfect Warrior put aside his worries and proceeded to the cars that had come to pick them up.

Their state of urgency didn’t allow them to visit the Hunter’s Agency. Instead, they drove to the road that would get closest to the place where Katie and Cole had met the moon goddess. The more they got there, the more the sound of the girl’s heartbeat grew erratic. Cole noticed and held her hand. The small gesture was enough to calm the unconscious Luna. This sudden reaction to the place they were going gave Cole some form of hope, “Will it hurt her?” he asked the old woman that had chosen to ride with him.

“I’m not sure about that. This has never happened before, you know,” Fauna replied. The prince didn’t notice, but the woman was watching these two with calculating eyes, almost as if she was having her own mental argument, trying to make out the meaning of all this before her.

“Then how do you know how to treat her?” Cole wasn’t done asking.

“I don’t, your Majesty. That’s why I know this might be the only way you have to get her better. Wasting time looking for a cure for something that has never existed before wouldn’t help,” the woman sighed... ‘What royal is capable of this much worry? Something’s wrong with them... all of them.’

It wasn’t just Cole she’d noticed acting this way. It was the other royals as well. Particularly King Davin towards his Queen. The man was always aware of her presence and spent almost all his time by her side. ‘Maybe they hit their heads on boulders or something.’

The ambulance finally came to a stop. “All we have to do now is...”

“I will be proceeding through the forest with you and Katie from this point on,” Fauna interrupted.

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“What do you mean by that? I am coming with all of them. That is final,” Cole argued.

When the woman saw the look in his eye, she chose to rephrase her words, "Very well then, but the moment the forest starts to bar our way actively, they stop walking, is that clear?"

Cole didn't know what she meant, but nodded all the same.

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Cole carried his mate in his arms as they traversed the forest. Memories of their encounters in these woods would flash through his mind every now and then. He wasn't alone though. Many others were accompanying him. Jason and Caden had stayed behind in Lycaon to run the empire... With the help of his stepmother, they wouldn't have much trouble as long as nothing too drastic happened.

The cool cloudy weather forced most of the people around him to rub their arms in the cold, but no one complained. As they walked further into the forest, Cole's eyes began to glow brighter and Fauna took note of the change. "The goddess can only come down once every fifty years on her own, but the reason for that is to allow the earth contain the divine energy that comes with her arrival. That also means nothing is stopping her from returning to the same place she landed in soon after... The effect would not be felt that way," the woman muttered to herself.

Cole nodded in understanding, but he was now getting uncomfortable with the woman's constant staring, "Is something the matter?"

"Oh, no. I was just wondering how bright your eyes will be by the time we make it," the woman smiled. Almost immediately, the old woman bumped her head into a low-lying branch and yelped in pain.

"Are you okay?" Cole asked her.

"Yes, I'm fine. That branch came out of no..."

A scream could be heard from someone else. Looking back, Sandra had tripped on a root and fallen on Samantha. Another painful grunt was heard, this time from Anthony. The boisterous hunter looked up at the branch he'd also bumped into, "You think you've seen it all, then that happens," his raised voice boomed as he pointed at something in the trees.

The whole party turned to where he was pointing. Vines were moving along the trees, merging into great sturdy branches while other branches were splitting into vines that reformed into different shaped branches. The roots were also moving in a similar manner, shifting the very positions of the trees slowly. It was a freakish process that seemed to speed up the deeper they walked into the forest.

"This is what I was afraid of. The forest will try to stop us from proceeding. It would be better for everyone to stop here except Cole, Katie and I since I'm sort of a guardian. It's only until we've made it to the centre," Fauna explained.

"How will we know you have made it to the centre? Cell phones don't work within this place," Anthony asked.

"Wait, seriously... That's important. How did it slip your mind?" Thorrin yelled, pulling out his phone and staring bluntly at the lack of bars on his phone.

"Well, we were all so determined to get the girl there that it just slipped my mind," the man laughed nervously, rubbing the back of his head, exposing the scar of a wolf bite on his forearm.

“You’ll know we have reached when the forest stops moving about. For now, just stay put,” Fauna replied before taking more steps into the forest. Cole bowed slightly to the rest of the party and left, following the Voice of the Wild with Katie in his arms.

Samantha took a seat on a root with an exasperated sigh, only to stand when the creeping buttress root wouldn’t stop moving, “That’s so creepy,” she shuddered.

“And I thought you’d remain seated,” Evelyn chuckled, having watched the whole spectacle in high definition.

Chapter 355 Deep Instincts

Cole followed the woman keeping wary of the moving vines. The deeper they went, the faster they moved and attempted to block their progress. Cole found that he had to dodge a branch that stuck out almost too suddenly. The first time this happened, he looked at the branch and wondered whether it had been trying to knock him unconscious.

After a few more times, however, once when he had to leap over the approaching root and another when he had to completely evade one aiming for his stomach, he was becoming more convinced that he wasn’t a special guest at all, “I thought you said they were going to try and keep the others out, but not the three of us,” the man asked her, dodging yet another one, pulling his unconscious mate closer to his body.

The king thought he felt Katie shift her weight, but diverted his attention when the groan of tree bark became audible with the moving plantlife. Without noticing it, the two of them dodged much more vines than before and started to pant in exhaustion.

“Yes, that is what I know, but my information is incomplete. I know the royals are the only ones that have access to places like this. Royals and a few special beings, but each one gets permission from divine power,” the woman said to him, “Have you ever read anything about the origin?”

“No, I have never read anything about the Origin. Up until a few days ago, that was all but a myth to me. Why would something like the Origin of Werewolves exist in the first place and no one’s been able to find it,” the man grunted? The vines were stepping up their game and now working much faster. At some point, the trees before them completely moved together and merged at the stem blocking their path completely. The two then moved to the side to find another way to keep going forward.

“The Origin exists and just like this forest is protecting the place where you and your mate met the moon goddess, the Origin protects itself. I have been...” the woman was stopped in her tracks when more trees moved together and completely blocked their path this time. The trees behind them were starting to do the same. Fear was starting to set, “Damn it. It’s trying to lock us in. I have been the guardian of the forest for a long time and not once has the place rejected me. What am I missing?”

Cole looked around and realised they were about to be sandwiched by the trees, “Come on,” Cole called the woman and started walking through the tunnel the trees were starting to form. Going back was going to be a better option, when the alpha found an opening to leave, the trees quickly barred his way as well, “Wait, why can’t we go back as well?”

“We are intruders now. The forest won’t let us leave,” the woman said to Cole.

“You speak like the forest has a mind of its own,” Cole yelled, trying to find another opening. This time though, the trees blocked the tunnel-like exit she was trying to use and started pushing in on them from both sides.

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“Well, with divine magic, a lot is possible. I wouldn’t put it against this forest to have a mind of its own,” the woman said, starting to breathe badly.

“Then talk to it, damn it. You talk to so many creatures. Can’t you talk to this forest as well?” the man asked.

“That is a desperate point, King of Werewolves. I can talk to animals. My name is Fauna. It has nothing to do with...”

“I don’t care about that at the moment. You’re standing with the Moon Goddess’s chosen and are about to be killed by a forest. The world is doomed if nothing happens. I need ideas,” Cole argued with her.

The woman stopped arguing and looked around for some way out. The vines only kept slithering and merging to form much sturdier branches that sealed their escape routes. The girl within Cole’s arms started squirming involuntarily, “Come on, Katie, you’re not making this any easier by struggling,” Cole complained, trying to keep her still. Her weakness made it easy for him to still her, but he could tell she was not comfortable.

The girl could be detecting a missing requirement to our entry. I certainly have no idea what we’re missing,” Fauna tried suggesting.

“Have you looked at the girl you’re trying to use at the moment?” Cole growled at her.

“Yes, I have, but at this rate, we’re going to be trapped. Try getting something from her actions. It could be a sign. I heard from one of the creatures that she had a very sharp intuition. It could be that same intuition trying to get her mate out of trouble,” the woman tried. Pushing on the vines in an effort to slow their approach. At first, it looked like they were merely trapping them, but as time went on, it became clear that they were closing in closer and closer. They were going to be crushed.

Finally seeing no way out, Cole placed Katie down and stared at her, searching her movements for a clue. Her fists kept clenching, but something out of it was odd. Her nails kept extending into claws and retracting all the same. She didn’t have enough energy to sustain a shift, but Cole could tell it was her aim, “Katie, closing your fist and shifting is quite dangerous,” the man reached out to stop her from hurting herself.

When he held her hands, she strained to fight him until she gave up. The man sighed in relief, “This is no time for you to be relieved. We are in a bit of a pickle here,” the old woman yelled at him, skidding backwards from the force of the trees closing in.

“I know, but Katie was going to harm herself if she kept it up. I couldn’t help myself,” Cole shrugged, tucking a stray strand of hair behind his mate’s ear. When he looked back at her beautiful face, he noticed her lower lip pulled into her mouth, caught in between her teeth. Her jaw trembled with strain from what she wanted to do. Cole brought his hand to the girl’s lip and gently pulled her lip out, “Now you’re trying to bite your lip? What’s this all about?”

Chapter 356 Cocooned in Green

“Wait, what did you say?” the woman behind her asked.

“She was trying to bite her lip. Does that mean something?” Cole asked her.

“Of course it means something,” the woman replied, abandoning the futile attempt at keeping the trees at bay and rushing back to the king, “Do you trust me?” she asked him.

“It’s not like I have a choice at the moment,” Cole shrugged.

“Meh, fair enough,” the woman replied. Claws sprouted from her hands and she slashed her hand across the king’s palm. The claws stopped at the surface of the man and cracked. Cole gasped at the sight of the woman’s bloodied nails, “Aaaah,” she screamed, “Damn it. What are you made of? That is not skin,” the woman replied.

“You should have told me before you did something that stupid. My skin is nearly impenetrable and at the moment, none of us has the tool to cut me. What were you trying to do anyway?” he asked.

“The blood of a royal is what we need. The forest will only know who we are if we present the blood of a royal as proof of permission to be here. The origin will allow any royal, but this one will allow the royal that was here the last time,” the woman said to him, “It’s my theory anyway. Now it makes sense why I could access the one back in Lycaon. I was a fool to think the rules were the same.

“You need my blood huh,” Cole looked crestfallen, “I don’t know how to give you such a thing.”

“Well, what about Katie’s? She was here as well the last time, wasn’t she?” the woman asked, looking at her. If the two of them weren’t werewolves, everything around them would be pitch-black... The space around them was becoming increasingly less and less and the woman was not sure about her theory either, “Hurry, Cole.”

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“Don’t rush me... You’re asking me to cut my mate. It’s not that easy, you know,” the man yelled back at her, “Not to mention she won’t have given me permission to do so.”

“Oh, come on. She wouldn’t want you to die either. Would you get moving already?” having had enough of the woman’s nagging, Cole bit the tip of his mate’s finger and watched the blood flow from it. As if the forest sensed the blood, a vine reached out from the bark behind her and coiled around her hand, allowing the blood to seep into the green vine.

The man watched the vine retreat from his mate and he healed her immediately. The two of them stood waiting for the forest to stop crushing them for a bit before realising nothing had changed, “You said this would work.”

“I know what I said, okay. But it doesn’t look like we are in any better situation now, does it? We might need your blood as well, Cole,” the woman replied.

“What if that doesn’t work?” Cole argued. From certainty to a gamble in less than a minute... Were they going to die here? Was the aggressive plant life that threatened to sandwich them actually going to crush them? ‘Just when you think you’ve seen it all... Vampire plants,’ Cole’s thoughts ran amok.

“How can we know that when we haven’t tried? Look, I know you don’t have much reason to trust me here, but hey... If it doesn’t work, we could always just wait for our deaths. It would be the grandest death in the history of werewolves... death by trees, but I’m sure of this. Please trust me,” Fauna tried.

Cole looked back to Katie and noticed she was much closer to him than before, her face was so close he could smell the perfume she’d used for the coronation... ‘Nice choice... If only we weren’t in this situation,’ he thought to himself before snapping back to reality. They were running out of space fast... and time. It wasn’t long before the trees would have them completely encased in a constricting cocoon of bark.

“There must be something else that can go through that armour of yours that you haven’t thought of,” Fauna tried encouraging. Her voice was only a distraction.

Cole wracked his brain helplessly for a way out of this situation, but nothing came to him. He had tried... many times after realising what his abilities were. Breaking his skin was one of the few things he didn’t know to do. He could remember a time he’d tried to intentionally injure himself, but it hadn’t worked.

Just like someone could trigger their tickles themselves, his armour rendered him immune to harm and even more from himself than others. Wolves that had found themselves trying to bite him had staggered back with cracked teeth and left him with pinpricks that healed less than seconds later.

This thought, however, had gotten to him. Bites... Werewolves that had bitten him before weren’t able to. But even then, the answer lay within that same thought. It had been staring him straight in the face. The night that he’d gained his most coveted scar. The day was etched in his mind like it was yesterday, never to be forgotten for as long as he lived.

Katie was the only one that had ever bitten him without having to be held back by his body’s indestructible capabilities. “She’s my weakness... and my strength. The irony,” he muttered to himself before pulling his mate into an embrace.

Backed up against Fauna, the woman asked, “Now what are you doing? This is not the time for you to be embracing your mate. The two of you will die if you don’t do anything about this. Damn it... I can’t move. Cole, do something.”

“I’m afraid I can’t move either...” Cole replied through gritted teeth. The forest had completely closed in on the three of them. Air was becoming a meagre resource and panic was hitting its ceiling. In despair, Cole extended his claws and attempted to pierce the insides of his palm, but it was just as he’d thought. Nothing happened. Neither his claws nor the skin of his palms gave way.”

Katie was unconscious and unable to do anything. Cole was unable to break his own skin despite all his attempts. Fauna was... well, Fauna was Fauna. The old woman was cursing every decision she’d ever made in her long life that led to this point. Being crushed by the same nature that you protected and... to some degree, controlled. ‘This can’t be it...’ she mentally called out. This was partly a mental plea to the moon goddess that brought her into this mess in the first place.

Chapter 357 Bad news... Understatement...

Within the mess of groaning plant life and rapidly creeping vines that continued to entomb the newly Crowned King of Lycaon, the future Queen and the Voice of the Wild, a sole high-pitched scream akin to

that of a dying weaver bird rang clear. The same scream continued long after the trees had stopped moving. Cole was almost sure the trees shuddered at the power this scream held within it.

Sadly enough, it was a nuisance coming from the old woman trapped with him. When Fauna ran out of options, she'd chosen to scream her lungs out. A feat that would have been counterproductive. 'Doesn't she realise there is barely enough air left for the three of us?' Thankfully, the trees had stopped moving and a resonating shudder was echoing all around them.

Peeking through one of his tightly shut eyes, the alpha realised they weren't being crushed anymore, something else was happening. "This has got to be some cruel joke," he coughed under the cruel pressure pressing from all sides. Without warning, the pressure on them vanished and a deep breath of air made its way into the man's lungs.

The vines receded faster than they'd moved in, completely spreading and letting the trees space out again. The ground rumbled from the rapid movement of plant life. When the greenery finally stopped moving, they had spread out like they normally were in a normal forest assuming the serene stillness of a peaceful forest.

Cole was even able to recognise what part of the forest they were in. The very positions of the trees were etched deeply into his memory. A wave of nostalgia washed over him reminding him of the time he'd met the moon goddess.

How could he ever forget the trees that surrounded him that night? It was the time he'd almost found his mate. He'd been evaded for so long... and on that day, the goddess herself had stopped him from seeing her. The only difference, now, however, was the blue incandescent flowers that covered the ground. Moon lotus flowers were littered all over the ground forming a trail leading deeper into the forest.

Fauna was still panting from the ordeal. She heaved a breath, "That was close. How did you manage to..." the woman stopped speaking when she noticed something bizarre with Cole's Luna. Trickling down the side of her lip was a thin trail of blood, but somehow the woman could tell it didn't belong to her. The answer felt so simple all of a sudden. The prince bore Katie's mark on his shoulder and that could only be possible if she could break his skin, "Your mate can bite you."

Cole smiled warmly, rubbing circles in Katie's back. This was his last hope, but he hadn't thought it would work. Katie was unconscious and he didn't even know what waking her up would do to her. Even then, she had been struggling to pierce her own palms earlier, almost as if she'd known what they needed to do to survive this situation.

Cole, then hoped that she would be able to bite him even while asleep. It was a gamble, but it was one that had paid off. He had also run out of options leaving him with that one course of action.

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"I remembered the day she marked me. There was no resistance to her teeth like there normally is. It was the only way I could think of," the man explained.

"Clever, but how were you sure she would bite you?" she asked, "She shouldn't even be able to move in the first place."

“You’re the one that mentioned her ‘amazing’ intuition and instincts. I just had to trust that she would do it,” the man replied with a shrug. He then took a step forward in the direction of the lotus flowers. He knew where he was going now that the forest was back to normal and required no direction in taking to the nexus of divine energy they were in search of.

It was the place he’d first met the moon goddess. The day she delayed him from meeting his mate by one day. Back then, the girl was being protected from the rogue king, disguised as a hunter. A powerful one, though... Katie was nothing like he would have ever expected his mate to be.

It wasn’t long before they finally reached the field of moon lotus flowers. Cole’s eyes were now glowing brightly in response to the massive influx of divine energy in this field of flowers. The flowers were glowing a bright blue similar to the shade of his eyes and beaming with divine energy.

“This is it, isn’t it?” Cole asked her.

“Yes... this is it. Place her at the centre of the field of flowers,” the woman instructed. Without warning or notification, Fauna moved further from the centre of the clearing. A dark expression threatened to replace her jovial countenance. She’d done a fantastic job of keeping this facade... but now that they were here, Fauna was not sure she could keep it up much longer.

As Cole placed Katie down, he noticed numerous scratches on her back. Tapping into his power, he healed the slight blemishes that the violent trees had left. Katie’s appearance was pristine in the field of moon lotuses, almost like she was made to lay there, untouched by faults... groomed to perfection.

The rest of the party that had come with them made it to the centre of the forest not long after the king had laid his Luna in the field of moon lotuses. Still dressed in the blue dress that she’d been in during the coronation, Katie looked like a princess laying down in a field of flowers. The blue flowers seemed to respond to her presence and hugged her body nicely, wrapping her beautiful frame with a blue mist of divine energy.

Cole didn’t know this, but he was the only one that could see the bright glow of the flowers. This glow was visible to him because of the divine energy in his body as one of the goddess’s chosen. This, however, was fixed by the events that followed, allowing everyone else to view this scene the same way.

The light of the sun was the first to leave the world. The flowers glowed a bright blue and extended their blue hue onto the girl laying down. A silhouette of a beautiful woman appeared kneeling beside her, “You made it,” Celeste sounded immensely relieved. Her attention was completely taken by the girl laying down before her, “You’re a difficult one. And after I helped you beat the wolfsbane last time.”

Cole recognised the woman from the last time they’d met. Almost everyone else in the field had no idea who she was but knew no other that could have shown up after they’d sought her out. It was the moon goddess herself. The silhouette slowly took on more colour until she was clear and present in the flesh. Everyone else in the field was stunned by her presence, so stunned that they could not speak, “Can you help her?” Cole asked her.

The woman’s brows scrunched up as she passed her hand above Katie. Celeste sighed sadly, “She has gone and done it now, hasn’t she?” she said, cutting the sleeping girl’s face. Looking back at the alpha, she steeled her expression, “I... I can.”

Celeste's eyes moved from the royal and surveyed the crowd that had accompanied Cole on this journey. She made eye contact with Fauna and froze for a moment. The Voice of the Wild had lost her ever-present smile and chipper attitude. Fearing that this mask had been broken, she broke eye contact and stared at the ground before her, bowing to the goddess in a respectful gesture.

"I can already tell there is bad news. Just tell me already," Cole spoke up, having missed the silent exchange.

"I'll start with the good news. There is a way I can help her return to full health," despite saying this, Celeste kept an indifferent expression. Cole's tension was getting worse but knowing it was bad news awaiting him kept the king from rushing the goddess. 'Ignorance is bliss... so the saying goes,' rang his conflicted thoughts.

The clearing went eerily quiet, a sombre mood taking over them as they awaited the goddess's next words. The Royals of Sirius, The hunters of the Chase family, the hunters of Brigadia... The three families cared for Katie dearly.

Celeste was sad to reveal it to them, "I don't know how long it will take. An injury like this has never happened before. If I'm to heal and return her to her former state, I can't know how long it will take. I'll... I'll take her to the god of medicine. Her treatment will begin then."

'Bad news... bad news... bad news...' Cole's mind searched through her words for the hint of horror he'd been looking for. At first, it didn't register... All he'd wanted to know was that she would be fine, but then...

"I can heal her instantly if I separate her from everything that makes her more special than the ordinary werewolf she would have been born to be, but that would mean she wouldn't have the power to defeat the Rogue King anymore."

No matter how slow Cole's mind could get, understanding the Goddess's words was inevitable. After all, this was among the worst things that could be said to a wolf... 'Bad news... That's an understatement. You might as well be saying the world is coming to an end...'

Cole's thoughts were turning melancholic... his mind struggled to hold onto hope... hope that he could have heard her wrong. Hope that there was another way. Hope that... hope that he was dreaming... that he was having a nightmare and he would wake up to his mate sleeping peacefully beside him.

"The god of medicine wouldn't happen to live nearby, would he?"

A glistening tear rolled down the goddess's face while she shook her head and mouthed the word 'no'. Across from her, a similar expression appeared on the Voice of the Wild. 'Truly Bad News... Katie was going to be taken.'

Chapter 358 Surrounded By Love

"What about that last thing you said about healing her instantly? I didn't quite catch that," Cole asked after a moment of silence. It was almost like he was trying to fill the heavy silence that had taken over the clearing.

“She would still be a werewolf, but she wouldn’t have the powers of one of my Chosen or those of a hunter either. She would be an ordinary royal wolf, free from the additional power I bestowed upon her when she was born,” the goddess replied.

Cole sighed, laying his eyes on the sleeping princess, “I don’t think she would be happy with that. She did promise to get better, but that is not what she would call... better. No, not when she wants to bring him down.”

The goddess sighed in response to his words, “It’s not forever you know. She will return to you when she’s all better.”

Silence swept through the whole clearing as many of them broke from the spell of seeing the goddess for the first time, “Can we at least say our goodbyes?” Sandra’s voice broke through the silence. Her voice sounded hoarse, almost as though she’d been crying, but no one asked.

“Yes,” the goddess replied, waving her hand over Katie’s body. The swirling blue mist that hung low in this field swirled over her body in a miniature tornado of power, taking form. As the mist swirled faster and faster above the girl, it began to take form, shifting from a cloud of blue mist to a floating ghostly human figure.

A silhouette of Katie appeared above her body. The body itself remained immovable. Ghost Katie’s eyes fluttered open and she regarded the scene before her. The goddess addressed her, “I’m guessing you heard everything that’s been said?”

Katie nodded to confirm the goddess’s words before turning to the people that were present because of her, “Hello, every...” her voice got caught in her throat when she finally took in their expressions. “Mum,” she called out.

Both the Queen and her adoptive mother looked up at her, “Both my mothers...” a tear broke slid down her face, “Father... both of them. Lina, my sister, Drake, my brother, my best friend, Sandra. Anthony, Samantha, Kenneth, Jackeline, Frost, Aunt Evelyn, Uncle Thorrin... You all came. Oh my... This is a little embarrassing.”

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“What’s so embarrassing about being surrounded by the people that love you?” Sandra frowned.

“The part where I’m speaking to them as a ghost that has been summoned to say my goodbyes. I left Brigadia to try and put an end to the Rogue king... and yet I return immovable. So, yeah, this is a little embarrassing,” Katie grimaced.

A giggle rang through the crowd, “You’re crying. You’re feeling embarrassed. It only sounds to me like you’ve grown up quite a bit. Teaching you to hold in your emotions had you unable to express them. I guess you did learn something out there in the big cities,” Samantha replied, with a sad chuckle. Katie had never thought of it that way. In fact, she thought learning how to express her emotions was just a form of weakness. ‘I couldn’t have done it without Ashley,’ Katie thought to herself.

“Yeah, I learnt a lot... and ate a lot as well,” the Luna replied, “I have so many stories. Maybe when I return, we could play a little more paintball. I’m sure you’d like to give Kyle a good smack on the head as well,” Katie chuckled. The ghostly apparition of the girl floated up to the five hunters that had

accompanied this party and bowed to them, "I'm so grateful to the five of you... and all the hunters of Brigadia as well."

"You don't have to do this, Katie. It's not like you're going away for a long time," Kenneth tried to stop her. The lack of reply from the girl and the goddess's failure to look them straight in the eye suggested otherwise, "No, Katie, you must return to us," Kenneth panicked.

"I will return, Kenneth. I just don't know when that will be," Katie tried to fake a smile, but the ghostly tears that shimmered on her face betrayed the purpose of her words. Without a physical form, Katie felt awkward hugging them so she settled for bidding them farewell.

When she was done bidding them farewell, she floated to the Sirius royal family, "Mum, Dad, little sister, Lina and my obnoxious big brother, Drake."

"You know, I'm perfecting my act of being a gentleman," Drake replied to her, however, his usual friendly tone was gone and replaced with one filled with melancholy.

"We lost you once before and we've only got you back," King Davin said through gritted teeth. He balled his fists in frustration.

Katie bit back tears as she watched her family. The gathering of people that had come with her was the reason that kept her focused on her mission every day. The reason she found the strength to keep fighting the rogues every day. For her to create a world where those she loved would live in peace and happiness, free of the fear that tormented this world, "I know you will be back, but that doesn't make this any easier."

"Why did you have to get so reckless again?" Lina bit back her own tears.

Katie smiled fondly at her younger sister, "When something bad is going to happen, I don't always know how to hold back, Lina. If my efforts achieved anything, they only brought the Rogue King fear and he'll still be cautious, but ultimately, I failed to capture him.

I ask that you keep everyone around you safe. Something gave him a reason to escape. Something gave him hope that he could win this war. It was so important that it even forced him to retreat and not risk getting recaptured. If you find out what it is, keep him from it as much as you can. When I return and he's not defeated by then, this will all end."

"You haven't toured Sirius yet, you know," Queen Martha changed the subject.

Now that Katie thought about it, she hadn't gotten the chance. Immediately her trip to the reserve had ended, she'd gotten herself into this situation. She'd missed out on their first family outing, "Yeah, I haven't. So we'll have to do that when I return."

"I'll hold you to that," the Queen's words were laboured and betrayed the facade she was putting up.

With her goodbyes said, Katie floated to her adoptive family. From each group she left, her heart felt heavier. She didn't know if she could make it, but she had to keep going. After all, this was the last time she would be seeing them in a long time.

Katie regarded the pair tasked with raising her since she was an infant. Thomas and Marie Chase beheld the girl they'd raised, "How didn't we see this coming?" Marie covered her lips with her palm to keep the words that threatened to pour from her.

Thomas and Marie Chase were the closest Chase hunters to Katie when she set out for Lycaon that day and they had detected something wrong was going to happen to their daughter.

They had come rushing to her rescue. They had accompanied her to Lycaon... They had watched her and helped her in her fight against the Rogue King. All their efforts had done nothing to stop what happened to her. They still ended up watching her lose all her strength and eventually collapse... immovable.

Their abilities weren't always clear. While they thought the true danger was in Lycaon and even helped Katie try to stop it, they had completely missed the signs of her pushing herself well beyond her limits. It was simply unavoidable. Even then, who could have thought her injuries would be this dire? So dire that a god could only treat her.

Chapter 359 To My Best Friend

"You can't know the future. And even the little of it you can detect allowed you to save me from the explosion at the reserve. I also can't thank you enough for saving Kyle as well. It's not something I thought I'd say... but still, I'm grateful... and," her words were gone, swallowed up by the growing anguish that threatened to consume her.

"One moment we have a daughter and the next, we don't... Who knew life would be that cruel?" Tom sighed, pulling his wife closer to him. At a moment when he wished he was speaking with his daughter's physical form, his grip on Marie's waist would get slightly tighter.

"I don't think I follow. As far as I'm concerned, I've never stopped being your daughter," the girl replied sternly before softening, "I forgot to tell you back then, but I was excited to see you guys back at the reserve. I hadn't known when I would be seeing you again."

"Yeah, and I forgot to tell you that I was present the whole time you fought that beta alpha. I watched you defeat him with Cole's help. You were amazing. I hadn't thought you'd grown that much," Marie responded.

"I had been working on my movements a lot... but that was the last I was able to move that well I guess," she responded, "Spoil me all you can when I return... And if at all, I find a younger sibling, I'll spoil them rotten."

"You better keep your word. Who wouldn't want to have you for a big sister?" Marie replied. Thorrin stepped forward, so he was side by side with Marie and Tom.

"Don't forget the family reunion. We've already waited long enough for the day to meet you as a family," Thorrin replied... 'So much I hadn't done. I guess I shouldn't have spent that week sulking,' Katie thought to herself.

"I wouldn't miss it," the girl replied, "Take care of my parents for me. I think... no, I know they are really rusty."

“We trained you, Katie. That’s not something that can be achieved by someone who’s rusty,” Marie chuckled.

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When the moment had passed, Thorrin spoke with a slight bow, “I won’t let them get carried away. One Chase is more than we can spare.”

Katie felt the pull to hug her parents, but thinking about the state she was in, she decided against it and floated on to someone else standing in the clearing. Sandra stood staring at the ground, unwilling to make any eye contact with her mentor. “Hey, you don’t want to say goodbye without letting me look at you?”

“No... I just don’t want to cry any more than I already have. The lion saved you and I was relieved. I thought I’d lost you then. Why couldn’t you just thank him and stand back up like someone who had been saved?” the girl asked her.

Katie thought back to the moment and remembered another dashing figure that had tried to save her in the throne room. “Oh, Sandra...”

“No, it’s fine. I knew I wouldn’t make it back then. I was glad when... but then, you didn’t get back up. Now, look at you. I always knew I would be the first between the two of us to go down in this fight,” Sandra’s voice threatened to break once more.

“We’ll both be standing when this is all over. It doesn’t matter how many times we tumble. Would you watch over Kyle for me, Sandra?” the girl requested.

“Won’t that be up to the Hunters to decide?” Sandra asked.

Katie turned to the Chase family. They’d been listening in on the conversation. Thorrin took a step to the right and then another to the left, just to confirm the ghost’s eyes were pinned on him, “Alright, fine, I’ll see what I can do about it.”

“Thank you, Uncle,” Katie replied, flashing him a brilliant smile before turning back to her best friend, “On a serious note though, Kyle will need all the help he can get. I can think of no one better suited for the task. Oh, Caden is a big help as well.”

“What about my birthday? I’ll finally be turning eighteen,” Sandra knew mentioning this to a Royal would mean a lot. After all, they had been waiting for that day. It would be the day when she’d find out the truth about her relationship with Jason. Was Katie really going to miss that? What if Jason was wrong? What then...?

Katie went silent at the mention of Sandra’s upcoming birthday. It had completely slipped her mind or she’d merely kept herself from thinking about it. She was going away for a time that wasn’t defined... However much the goddess hid the estimates of time, Katie had a feeling it was better not knowing. That still meant she was going to miss a lot.

“I wouldn’t get my hopes up,” the girl replied, letting her happy expression fall. She’d tried going for a cheery approach, but the fact that she was leaving her best friend before she’d even turned eighteen still darkened the mood, “I’m not dying, Sandra.”

“It doesn’t make it any easier, Katie. You’re being handed over to a goddess. They don’t even live in the same plane we do. You’ll be gone... like really gone. We know you’ll get better, but... we don’t know how long you will be gone...”

“If I might speak clearly for your friend, the world will feel the hole you’re leaving behind,” Thorrin spoke up, “I’ve wanted to say that as well. I heard what you did at the reserve and what you used to do here in Brigadia. Not to mention, I watched the rogue king retreat and get overwhelmed by the force of one girl. You might not be dying, Katie, but you are going to be missed by many,” Thorrin explained.

“I know that... More than you know,” the girl replied in a low tone.

Katie turned her attention back to Sandra and glided closer until she was right by her friend, whispering, “I forgot to tell you that you make a cool hunter,” Katie said to her friend, “I’m glad I got to see that at least. I wasn’t such a bad mentor. I’m sorry for sending you on so many unreasonable errands.”

Sandra chuckled, “You should have seen what Shaemus used to go through. You weren’t unreasonable and I loved helping you out. I was the perfect shadow. What are best friends for?”

Katie was stunned by this reply, running out of words for her best friend, “Now that you’ve got that off your chest, you should go to him. I might not be a werewolf, but it doesn’t take a mind link to tell what’s going through his mind.”

With her goodbyes done, Katie floated back to the site of her unconscious body to meet the last person she wanted to talk to. The blue-eyed king hadn’t left his spot on the ground. The red ceremonial cape was still set on his shoulders and the crown was nowhere to be seen. The ghostly silhouette knelt on the other side of the sleeping body and sought the man’s bright blue eyes.

Chapter 360 Deluge

“Cole,” she called out to him, taking note of his balled fists. His knuckles were already turning white from how much he was clenching his fists. Katie hadn’t talked to him first for many reasons... and for the storm of emotions, his presence was bound to force out of her.

Out of everyone in this clearing, Cole was the one person she didn’t want to say goodbye to for more reasons than she’d come to realise. It was because of him that she believed she didn’t have to be alone. Even when she was at her worst, Cole was the one person that was bound to stay by her side.

Imagining a world without him... and his world without her... It was a tad too much for this emotion newbie, “Cole, would you look at me?” Katie called out once more.

Cole looked up into the blue eyes of the silhouette. To everyone, this was a ghost that didn’t hold every feature of the girl, appearing slightly transparent and without the right shade of her light skin, but Cole’s wolf altered his vision and gave him the right image.

It was almost unbearable to watch knowing he couldn’t hold her. Katie smiled once she’d taken a look at his face, “Have your eyes always been this captivating?”

“Yes, they have. You’ve just always been too slow to notice,” Cole’s tone was heavy, trying to delay the inevitable conversation they were bound to have. The girl nodded in response. Turning to the moon goddess, she bowed slightly.

“Can I take something with me when I leave?” she asked the goddess.

“That would be better actually. Having something to tie you to the mortal world will be helpful up there,” the goddess replied. Excited, Katie turned back to her mate.

“Cole, there is something in my pocket,” the girl asked him.

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Cole did so and from within the pocket, he retrieved a small circular piece of metal with a small diamond set in it, “I... I thought you said...”

“I remember what I said... but I was overwhelmed at that moment and I’ve had enough time to think since then. On the night before the coronation, I realised that the day we made it official is the day that I was actually afraid of. But for as long as that day hadn’t come, there was nothing wrong with me wearing it. In fact, I’m proud to have it on me. I meant to ask you later... I guess the time never came,” she said to him. Events on the day of Cole’s coronation had kept Katie from asking this.

Cole reached for her sleeping body’s hand and slipped the ring through her middle finger. The ring appeared on the silhouette as well and she stared at it with a proud smile. The smile fell and she stared at Cole for a while before wrapping her arms around him. Surprisingly, she didn’t go through him, but he couldn’t feel her either.

It was the perfect image of being hugged by a phantom, ‘I don’t want to make this hard for anyone, but I don’t want to go anywhere. I still had so much to do,’ the girl said through the mind link.

Cole was taken by surprise when she admitted she didn’t want to go. When she had been pushing towards going with the goddess the entire time, he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You will come back, Katie,” his words were strained and it had taken him a lot to find his voice, but he forged on, “And when you come back, I’ll be here... waiting for you.”

Knowing someone would be waiting for her had never felt more special than it did when Cole said it. It was like she’d been waiting for him to say those exact words. Tears streamed down her ghostly face and her real body as well. Something had changed, “The requirement for you to leave the mortal realm has now been met. You’ll be able to go and return much easier now,” the moon goddess interrupted.

“Did you tell me that so that...”

“No, Cole. I had no idea there was a requirement. Wait for me... What am I saying? I know you will be waiting. I’ve always known. I just wanted to hear you say it,” the girl sobbed. ‘Maybe when I do return, we could go through with that request you made,’ she said through the mind link.

‘Are you sure? What about taking out the rogue king first?’ Cole asked.

‘I don’t plan on letting him roam much longer if I find him around,’ the girl replied.

“Don’t sulk when I’m gone, you’ll get wrinkles on your forehead,” Katie said out loud.

“I’ll try my best.”

“Take better care of Queen Margaret. She lost him as well, you know,” Katie continued.

“Yeah...”

“Take care of yourself as well...”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t work yourself too hard. That’s what you’ve got Jason and Caden for. Kyle can also help once he’s got the hang of it,” Katie was starting to tear up more.

“Mm-hmm...”

“Don’t drown the world in rain anymore. The sun makes people smile more,” she continued. For some reason, there was always something that popped up in her mind when she thought she was done. Cole didn’t reply this time... Instead, tears just rolled down his face.

“Be the good King I believe you to be...” Cole wasn’t going to answer her, but something was starting to happen. The flowers in the clearing were starting to glow brighter. ‘The requirement had been met.’ Katie was leaving.

“You have my word. So get better, alright?”

Katie nodded, “Yeah...” after a short pause, realising she was finally out of time, she finally said the words she’d hoped she wouldn’t get to say, “Goodbye, Cole.”

As she said it, the unconscious body on the ground began to float, following the retreating goddess. The two continued to ascend illuminated by a giant full moon glowing brightly in the sky.

Cole watched the girl vanish in a burst of blue light that showered the forest in divine energy and with that, his mate along with her scent and everything that assured him of her existence was gone. His mind went dark and his wolf confirmed the absence of her wolf as well.

Katie Sirius was gone from the land of mortals. She was out of reach. There was nothing he could do ever to reach her... nothing but wait for her. It stung... It stung so much that the man couldn’t hold back the emotions he’d held since the girl had gone unconscious. With one final cry, the sky turned cloudy and quickly started drizzling. The light drizzles quickly turned heavy, lightning streaked the sky and thunder boomed loudly as the sky let down a depressing deluge of rain.

For those that hadn’t figured it out yet, it was now clear why it had rained for an entire week when the king of Lycaon had died. Cole Lycaon was grieving...