

Cried Wolf 81

Chapter 81

'Not just any vampire's blood flame, Reaper, the vampire king, Alec's blood flame,' I say.

'The vampire king! The first time you came here, I sensed something happened to you. He marked you, didn't he?'

I nod my head.

I had no idea what he had done at the time. He grasped my wrist and left a mark, and I couldn't stop thinking about him in the same way I couldn't stop thinking about Magnus. My body was drawn to him, and I desired to be near him. What am I supposed to do, Reaper? 'How will Magnus react when he learns that Alec is my second mate?'

'I wish I had the answer for you, Luna.'

May enters the enchanted garden along with the other witches.

Wow! so beautiful. Look at that gnome! May says and pokes its belly. The gnome doesn't move, but when no one is looking, his expression shifts to one of irritation. You weren't joking when you said there was a unicorn,' she says, approaching us. 'Nina, are you okay you look like you've been crying?'

'Oh, no, I think I'm just allergic to some of these flowers. My eyes went all red and puffy after I smelt them,' I force a laugh.

'Fern and the others are going to take me to see the Grimghouls, the Shadow Reapers and the vampire king next! Are you going to come with us?'

You know, the vampire king isn't some kind of freakshow for you all 10 look at!' I lash out angrily. Everyone is staring at me strangely because of my outburst defending the vampire king. 'I apologise. I didn't intend 10... –

'We understand you are under a lot of stress, Luna, with everything going on with the wolf council, Fern explains.

'I know, but I still should not have snapped like that. I'm sorry,' with a frown.

'It's fine. You don't have to go with us, May says.

They leave the enchanted garden and enter the dungeon.

'Let's have a cup of tea,' I say to Reaper.

We walk into the kitchen and notice the iron kettle hovering above the fire. I grab a teacup, place it on the table, and fill it with one scoop of sugar and a teabag.

Waving my wand at the iron kettle, I exclaim, 'Listo Levitatus.' It floats over to my teacup and fills it with hot water.

'You should probably tell Magnus about being the vampire king's blood slame,' Reaper says.

As I tremble at the thought, the teacup starts to wobble. I set the cup down and take a deep breath, attempting to relax.

'I can't tell him, Reaper, not just yet. But there could be a way to break the blood flame?'

I've never heard of a way to break a blood flame, but you could always reject Magnus and break the mate bond? That way, you would only have one lover instead of two?'

"Reaper!" I growl. 'I love Magnus, and I am his Luna, We grew up together and have known each other all our lives. My love for Magnus is not something I will throw away. Can't I reject Alec instead?'

'Doesn't work that way with vampires,' he says.

'Well, then how does it work?'

"All I know is that it's different with vampires,

'That's not very helpful information, Reaper,' I sigh. "Maybe we can find some information in the forbidden room back in Shadow Crest?'

'Perhaps,' he says.

Yiselda, May and the others return to the kitchen.

I'm sorry if he frightened you, May. I don't know what's wrong with him. I've never seen him in that state before.' Yiselda says.

May is shaking. I stand up from my seat and run over to her.

What happened? Are you okay?' I ask.

'I will be fine. It was a lot more terrifying than I thought it would be going into that dungeon'

"How so?' I ask-my heart races with worry.

The vampire king was worried, pacing back and forth in his cage and pulling at his hair. He appeared to be quite anxious and was constantly muttering to himself. As we approached, he turned savage, screeching loudly through the bars as if famished of blood, setting the Grimhounds off. They tried to attack us by advancing their arms through the bars and clawing at us. I didn't have a choice except to put the vampire king to sleep. And being the vampire king, he is stronger than most, so our sisters had to help cast the 'Dreamus Sleepous' spell as it had no effect on him even when I had cast it onto him myself.

A dreaded feeling consumes me. I'm forcing myself not to run to Alec. What if they hurt him? Was it my fault he became feral?

'Is he going to be, okay? Has he not been getting enough sustenance? Why would he turn feral like that?' I ask, clearly worried.

Yiselda laughs, 'My dear Luna, what has gotten into you? It's the vampire king, and you shouldn't worry yourself over him. But for what it's worth, he is not hurt. He is simply taking a nap and will hopefully return to his normal self once he awakes. He hasn't missed a meal, so I am confused about why he

turned. Vampires do not die if they haven't consumed blood in a long time. They simply become vicious, losing all control of themselves.'

I force my tears back, 'I need to go home. Thank you for the tea, Yiselda,' I say and dash out the front door and enter the circle. May, Fern, Ria, Ela and Lilac appear behind me. But I don't wait for them. Instead, I race inside the packhouse and up to my room.

'Nina, is that you?' Magnus yells out.

'Um, yeah, it's me. I'm feeling exhausted. I'm going to go lie down for a while,' I say and climb under the covers and hug my knees.

The door creaks open, 'I know you've only been gone for a few hours, but I've missed you, he says as he crawls beneath the blankets with me.

He pulls me in closer and nuzzles my neck as he snuggles up behind me. I turn to face him and caress his cheeks. I'm overcome with guilt and begin to cry.

'Nina, it will be okay. If you think Alpha Bennet and the wolf council will exile you from your own home and pack. Then he has another thing coming. I'd give up my Alpha status if it meant staying with you,' he says, wiping my tears away with his thumb.

Magnus, I could never ask you to give Shadow Crest and your status away," I sob.

"You wouldn't have to ask,' he says.

He kisses me passionately, and suddenly Alec's face flashes through my mind. I break the kiss and struggle for air.

'Nina, what is it?' Magnus says.

'I'm sorry, I need to go, I'll be back later,' I say, hurriedly putting my shoes back on 'Skedaddle Dash,' I say before Magnus can respond.

I appear downstairs, and Reaper flies onto my shoulder.

'We need to go to the forbidden room and figure this out now,' I say to him and make a hasty descent to the basement. May and the others are concocting magical potions,

"Come to help make some love potion?' Lilac winks at me.

No, sorry, not today I have some things I need to do. I'll see you all later,' I say, stepping into the circle and teleporting into the forbidden room I lick my wand for light. Reaper lands on the altar and keeps an eye on me while I leaf through dozens of books over the next two hours.

There has to be information somewhere,' I say.

Have you considered asking the vampire king himself? Resper suggests,

Reaper, why didn't think about that? Hey Alec, Vampire King, It's your blood flame here, I suppose you wouldn't tell me how to te tegnod fiame between you and me uyarry chance, would you?' I shake my

head at Reaper. "Could you imagine his reaction, Hefper d aland, let me do the honoure for you and break it, I think it was quite obvious, Aeaper that he doesn't want this so

stop and wants to be with me.'

"Okay then, how about this? They fight to the death. Whoever lives wins?"

'Reaper!' | growl.

Chapter 82

I'm having trouble sleeping. I slip out of Magnus' embrace and take a seat on the balcony. I can't get my mind off seeing Alec tomorrow. I should be more concerned about Alpha Bennet and the witches' fate. My inner wolf is crying to be let out. Perhaps going for a run will help. Shifting, I try not to wake Reaper. I leap from the balcony and course my way through the woods of Shadow Crest.

My mind thinks of both Magnus and Alec. The notion of them both sends warm sparks through my body. Damn mate and blood flame bond! I can't get them out of my head. I can see the lake ahead of me. At this hour of the night, it would be terribly cold. I rush up the slope at lightning speed and plunge into the lake. The ice-cold water overpowers me, but in a good way, as it cleanses my mind of the two men I want to be with.

The sun is slowly rising. I've been in the water for almost two hours. I'm semi-conscious and have become hypothermic. I don't want to get out of the water, though. I don't want to feel the guilt of thinking about Alec when I'm with Magnus. There is a howl in the distance. It's Magnus sending an alert out. I'm disoriented, and I'm wondering what the alert is fox I'm barely afloat and feel myself slipping deeper into the lake. I know I have no option but to swim out of the lake at this point, but my paws refuse to move. My body completely submerges underwater, and I realise I'm drowning. After a few moments, I feel the force of someone jumping into the water. I'm hauled out of the water just as I'm going to drown.

Magnus yells, 'May, Josie, I found her!'

I manage to shift to my human shape, but I'm out of energy to move.

'Nina, please wake up!' he shakes me gently. For a brief period, my eyes open slightly, but I can't keep them open. I'm shivering uncontrollably.

Magnus?' | murmur.

Yes, Nina, it's me, and you're safe now.'

"You're so cold, he says as he lifts me. He carries me to the packhouse while holding me tight to his chest.

Everyone rushes over to see us.

Where was she? What happened to her?' Leon asks.

I found her submerged in the lake. I think she has been in there for some time.'

What would make her do something so erratic, swimming at ridiculous hours in the lake in the dead of winter?' Leon asks.

We will worry about why later. My priority is to get Nina warm. Magnus says and enters the house. He places me on our bed, removes his clothes, and holds me in his arms. His body is like a heater on its own. My body presses closer to his for more warmth. The shivering slowly dissipates. Magnus caresses my face until I fall asleep.

It's right after lunch. I wake. Magnus has not left my side. He gazes into my eyes. 'Nina, are you feeling better?' I nod. Can you tell me why you were in the lake?' he asks calmly. I start to tremble and shake my head no, holding back my tears. 'Nina, please, you have to tell me? Has something happened? I don't want to lie to him, but I don't know how to tell him. I shake my head yes. 'Did someone hurt you?' he asks. I can hear his heartbeat rapidly increase at the thought. I shake my head no. His body instantly relaxes. Okay, do you want to talk about it? I shake my head no, giving him a solemn stare. The moment you are ready to tell me and talk about 11, you will come straight to me, won't you?' I shake my head, yes, and he pulls me in for a tighter hug. 'I love you, Nina :

And I love you too, I whisper

We are interrupted by a knock

Who, what exactly is it? Magnus inquires.

Alpha Bennett will be here soon he informs me

Okay I'll be up and dressed in a moment then I'll close the door and return downstairs As Magnus dresses I sit up and reach for my clothes, Vihase you doing Nina? You need to rest

Yiselda and the others will need me at Pandora's Box just in case Alpha Bennett prompts anything,' I remind him,

He frowns, Surely, they can manage without you?'

As a member of the Midnight Covenant, I must be there and assist,

"I'm just worried about you, Nina. You had hypothermia this morning and almost drowned,

Stepping closer to Magnus, I wrap my arms around him. "I'm sorry I scared you this morning. I didn't mean for that to happen,' explain

He kisses the top of my head. 'Just swear not to scare me like that again!

'Promise,' I say quietly.

We walk downstairs together. Everyone approaches me.

"Are you all right, Luna?' Josie replies as she embraces me.

I'm glad you are better now. Why were you in the lake last night?' May asks.

My mother and father approach me with sad expressions and embrace me. I speak up before they ask the same question as everyone else.

Thank you, everyone, for all your concern. It means a lot to me. As for what happened, that's a conversation for another day

'But... May says

That's final, I say as loud thuds hammer on the door. As Magnus opens the door to see the wolf council, a blast of black mist nies over them, frightening them. Everyone ducks down as Reaper swoops over and lands on my shoulder.

You need to control that thing of yours, Alpha Bennet sneers, glaring at Reaper.

This thing is a Shadow Raven and my familiar. His name is Reaper' I retort.

Yiselda emerges behind them, 'Are you ready, Alpha Bennet?' she asks, scaring them even more.

We make an effort not to chuckle.

Alpha Bennet scoffs, Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton will stay here with the rest of us.' 'Let's go, he says.

As we exit and follow Yiselda, Magnus escorts Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton inside.

'To that circle over there, Yiselda tells Alpha Bennet. He walks in front of her as they get closer. She pushes him into the circle while clutching his shirt, and they both vanish. We enter the portal and emerge from Pandora's Box.

'Where on earth is this place?' Alpha Bennet asks.

'Fae Forrest, Yiselda replies.

"Why have I never heard of Fae Forest before?"

Because it's not on any map, it's a hidden location, and for a good reason. Only a few people know of this location, she says.

We walk inside, and Alpha Bennet takes his time taking in all the items floating and moving around the rooms. He tilts his head at the self-sweeping broom.

This way, if you don't mind, Alpha Bennet, Yiselda says, hurrying him up.

We walk through the hallway, enter the large inirror, and watch as Yiselda opens the door on the right,

"There is nothing in there? It's just darkness. Is there even a floor to stand on in there?" Alpha Bennet asks.

Yiselda smiles at him and turns back to the dark empty room, 'Materialise, she says. A book appears in her hand. She casts the next spell while Alpha Bennet gives her a weird look as he tries to figure out what use the book will be

Sprouto Spawniate, she says.

Hips Bennet takes a step back in astonishment as he watches the staircase of books develop in front of his eyes. Everyone but me

ng 69 we walk up the stairs

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Part of me is excited and wants to see Alec, but the other part feels guilty and thinks of Magnus.

We come to a standstill in front of the dark wooden door.

'What do these symbols mean?' Alpha Bennet inquires:

'If the dark ones on the other side escape their cells, these markings will prevent them from exiting through this door.

'Like an invisible forcefield?' He asks.

'Yes, it will also harm them, inflicting severe pain and injury if they try to force themselves through it.

As Yiselda opens the door, he responds, 'I see. Alec's sandalwood and sage scent waft out the door, past me. My body is telling me to run to him. I'm still exhausted from nearly drowning this morning. I muster my strength to keep my feet from running to him. My fists clench, and I walk behind everyone, so they don't see me struggling to fight myself.

Grimghouls snarl at Alpha Bennet and the others. I see I'm close enough for them to grasp me through the bars, yet they don't seem bothered by my presence. I'm curious as to why they wouldn't attack me.

'What are these vicious things?' 'I've never seen them before, Alpha Bennet adds, taking a step back.

'Grimghouls, with their razor fangs and claws, they can rip someone to pieces in seconds, Yiselda adds. Alpha Bennet trembles.

Alec's stare is scorching through me as we approach the Shadow Reapers, I smile at Lilac and keep my eyes down to avoid staring at him. Unlike the Grimghouls, the Shadow Reapers approach me. Yiselda gives me a strange look, and I shrug. They retreat to the rear of the cell as Reaper lets out a caw.

'I'm a Shadow Raven. They are drawn to me,' Reaper explains.

Oh,' I say out loud, receiving more strange looks.

Yiselda explains to Alpha Bennet how they lurch down your throat and take over your mind and body, causing hallucinations.

'I can barely see them in the dark,' he says.

'Illumini,' Yiselda casts the spell of light, illuminating the cell. You can see the Shadow Reapers now. They don't seem to enjoy the brightness and scramble to the back corner. They are human silhouettes with black mist emanating from them in the same way as Reaper does. 'Dimulous,' she says, their cell now once again dark.

'I supposed it's time for you to meet their master, the vampire king,' Yiselda says, walking towards Alec's cell.

They approach the cell. I can see out my peripheral vision Alec's hands clenched around the bars, and his head is wedged between them. I remain behind everyone, keeping as much distance as I can. My

hormones are raging as a result of his scent, and Alec appears he is also struggling to hold himself back as his hands tighten around the bars and beads of sweat form across his forehead as he watches me.

'This is the vampire king?' Alpha Bennet sneers.

'Yes, it is him,' Yiselda confirms.

Alec suddenly focuses on Reaper on my shoulder and begins to laugh hysterically.

'Hello, Reaper. It's been a long time, my old friend,' he smiles.

Reaper caws

'You know the vampire king?' I ask him,

'Did I not mention that?' He mind-links.

'Um, no, you did not tell me that. Care to explain?'

/ lpha Bennel scoffs, Interrupting the mind-link between Reaper and me, 'He looks as weak as a wart on a toad's rear and only looks to be around twenty years old?'

Alec hisses and Nashes his teeth at Alpha Bennet, causing him to back away. Alec then returns to staring at me intently.

Appearances can be deceiving, Alpha Bennet says, 'He has been here for a long time, and his powers are phenomenal. It took the entire coven to get him in here using multiple spells at the same time. Yiselda says.

'How long has he been in here?' Alpha Bennet asks.

'More than seven hundred years.

My heart sinks at the thought that Alec has been alone here for so many years. Finally, I look him in the eyes. As his eyes burrow into mine, my heart beats faster. It's as though we can peer into each other's souls. He has a sad and longing expression on his face. His eyes close, and he breathes in. I realise he is taking in my scent and is definitely feeling the same urges as me. It's evident to me he wants to hold me and touch me. I blush and look away before he opens his eyes.

'So, this vampire king here had let all these dark creatures on the loose to kill everyone seven hundred years ago?'

According to the stories I've heard, he was once a magnificent King until he went mad after losing his blood flame Juniper to humans.' She was a witch and was burned at the stake only a few days after Alec and Juniper met!

Llet out a gasp and stare solemnly at Alec. It's hurting him hearing the story. I can see it and sense it.

'Forth of vengeance, he summoned Shadow Reapers and Grimghouls and ordered vampires out to slay all humans.' Werewolves attempted to defend humans by preventing them from invading human territory. Thousands of werewolves had perished, and the war was slipping away from them. Witches rushed in to aid, and we've been able to keep him here ever since, but with great

difficulty and many more deaths. The vampires vanished and have been in hiding ever since. However, I have heard rare stories of

their necks. Vampires are still around. It's just that no one has ever lived after seeing them to tell the tale of their existence. After a few centuries, werewolves had forgotten the vampire king, and he became little more than a terrifying fable, told to their pups each night. Werewolves eventually turned on us and almost wiped us all out.'

I've unknowingly moved closer to Alec's cell. My hand reaches towards his cheek. I have to touch him. Yiselda takes my wrist, looks at me strangely, and pulls me back towards her. Her grasp on my wrist is tight.

Now that you know he exists, you understand how important it is that we survive so that we may continue to keep Pandora's Box sealed from the rest of the world.

'Why don't you just kill the king and those creatures?' Alpha Bennet asks.

'The vampire king cannot simply be killed. Even if we starve him, he doesn't die. Instead, he becomes erratic and loses his mind. Although they don't like sunlight, it also does not kill them.'

'What about a stake to the heart?' Alpha Bennet suggests.

'Well, if you want to go in the cell and risk your life trying to stake his heart, be my guest. But, even then, we don't even know if that will work,' Yiselda says. "You'd probably be dead before you could blink since he has incredible strength and speed and would drain your blood in minutes.

'What about all those creatures then?

'They weren't always Grimghouls and Shadow Reapers. The Grimghouls are the Pixies of Silverfay Forest, where they and familiars reside. They are the only ones left to exist, and Shadow Reapers are souls from the dead that need to be returned to their resting place. For many years, I've been researching spells in the hopes of reverting the pixies to their original forms and returning them to Silverfay Forest, as well as returning the souls of the shadow reapers to their resting places. Hence, why witches before me chose to seal them all in this dungeon in hopes of restoring them back and keeping the vampire king under control, but now if you are satisfied, we shall return to Shadow Crest?'

Alpha Bennet's face contorts in thought as he stares at Alec, who won't take his gaze away from me. Alpha Bennet looks between us, perplexed as to why he is so interested in me.

All right then, let's go back to Shadow Crest, he replies.

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Yiselda comes to a halt as we approach the circle to port back to Shadow Crest.

'Fern, Ela, Ria, Lilac, I would appreciate it if you could return to Shadow Crest with Alpha Bennet while I stay behind with Luna here.' She says. 'Sure, Yiselda,' they smile. Fern grabs Alpha Bennet by the back of his shirt and shoves him through the portal. I turn and giggle, looking at Yiselda, who is irritated and has her hands on her hips. My laughter stops.

Uh oh, Reaper mind-links.

'Is everything okay?' | ask.

What possessed you to approach the vampire king in such a manner?' You seemed like you were about to touch him? 'Do you realise he has the ability to kill all of us, Luna, even you?' she claims.

I'm sorry, I didn't intend to do that.' I couldn't help myself...

You couldn't help yourself, she scoffs.

I glance to the ground with guilt and clutch my wrist, feeling the tingles. Perhaps if I show Yiselda, she'll be able to assist me in figuring out how to sever the bond? I'm immediately dizzy. I haven't recovered all of my strength after nearly drowning this morning." I stagger and grasp my head.

'Luna?' replies Yiselda, steadying me.

I concentrate and shake the dizziness away. I have something I need to show you,' I say, revealing my wrist to Yiselda and showing her the mark. She gives out the loudest shriek I've ever heard before falling back. She stands up, takes my arm, and pulls my wrist close to her face.

'It cannot be. Alec has marked you. You are the vampire king's blood flame,' Staring at my wrist in disbelief, she finally looks at me. 'You have two mates!' she exclaims.

Taking my arm back, I walk away a few steps and solemnly stare up at the sky.

'Yiselda, I don't know what to do. It will destroy Magnus if he finds out I have a second mate, but I can't help these feelings towards Alec. I want to be with him too.' I explain.

She grabs my arm and yanks me back into the house.

'Where are we going?' I ask.

'You must sever your bond with Alec for your own good and protection. We need to ask Alec how to do that, she adds as she pulls me up the staircase of books.

'Skedaddle Dash,' she says, making us blink from the dungeon's entrance and reappear on the other side outside Alec's cell."

Alec immediately emerges from the shadows of his cell and reaches his hand out for mine. 'Luna,' he says. I instinctively reach my hand out to take his, but Yiselda pulls me back.

'Alec,' she growls. 'Nina is Luna of Shadow Crest and fated mates with Magnus. You have to break the bond with Nina!'

"No," he says firmly without hesitation.

'Alec, how do you suppose you will have a relationship with her behind these bars? If Magnus finds out, he won't allow her here again, and you know what will happen to Nina if she isn't near you frequently. For her sake, break the bond,

Alec lunges at the bars scaring Yiselda back, 'I said no! he yells.

“W-:What will happen to me if we stay apan7” | ask.

Alec looko away with guilt.

The blood Name draws you to your other half like the rate bond. You will begin to burn if you resist it or rernáIn too far away from Jutro lame for too long. I starts ás a fever, but it steadily worsens until you eventually bum to death

| gasp and cover my mouth, ‘Magnus would never cope without me. It would kill him,’ I say.

“And it will kill me too if anything ever happened to you,’ Alec says

Alec and I stare solemnly at each other.

‘If you don’t break the bond. You know she will die, Alec,’

‘No, she won’t. Magnus will have to let us be together in order for her to live. Do you think he is willing to let her die if he loves her that much?’ Alec retorts.

‘Do you think Magnus is going to share his mate?’ Yisélda argues.

‘Our mate,’ he corrects her.

I fall to my knees and cradle myself. Yiselda kneels beside me and rubs my back as I start to cry.

‘If Alec doesn’t break the mate bond, you will have to tell Magnus, Yiselda says sympathetically.

Wiping my tears, I stand up to see Alec has retreated to the shadows of his cell. Approaching his cell, I grip the bars.

‘Alec, please, breaking the bond is the only way for us to live and cease these feelings we both have for one other.’

Alec’s hands reach through the bars with an instant flash, cupping my face, his lips crashing onto mine. A euphoric feeling flows through my body and his, and my inner soul melts from his kiss. I’ve always felt happy with Magnus, and I know I’m in love with him, but something was always missing in my heart, and now, kissing the vampire king, I realise that the missing piece of my soul was my second mate, Alec.

I’m overcome by the overpowering sensation of being whole with Alec and Magnus. We break the kiss for breath, and I take a step back, swaying and collapsing. Reaper takes flight from my shoulder and settles alongside me on the ground,

‘Luna!’ Yiselda and Alec exclaim simultaneously. Yiselda cradles my head in her lap

‘Luna,’ Yiselda says again as she tries to wake me.

“Yiselda, let me out, let me help her!’ Alec begs.

‘Alec, you will never be free from that cell, and I certainly won’t let you anywhere near the Luna,

Alec scowls at her, ‘I will make sure you will regret keeping me from my treasured blood Name, Yiselda,’ he angrily says.

Yiselda ignores him and waves her wand over me, 'Awaken,' she says. Alec watches closely on my eyes Micker awake Yiselda helps to sit me up.

'Where am I?' I say, taking a glance around. Then the memory of kissing Alec loghes through my mind. I raise my eyes to Alec, who has a troubled expression on his face,

Are you all okay, Luna? 'Yiselda refused to let me out to check on you, he adds..

'Are you okay, Luna? Yiselda wouldn't let me out to check on you,' he says.

'I haven't been the best since this morning. I'm sorry, Magnus insisted I stay home and rest, but I didn't listen to him,

'What happened this morning?' Yiselda asks.

'T-I almost drowned in the lake... before sunrise,'

"You almost died?' Alec asks.

'What! Isn't it the middle of winter right now in Shadow Crest?' Yiselda asks.

I nod my head, 'I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't stop thinking about Alec and felt so guilty. I wanted the longing for Alec to stop, so I shifted and went for a run and stayed in the icy cold water of the lake for as long as I could. It helped keep my mind off Alec. I was in there too long, and when I tried to swim out of the lake, I couldn't move my paws. I was too cold. Soon after, I began to sink underwater, and Magnus found me as I blacked out. He took me home and kept me warm in bed until not long before the meeting with Alpha Bennet. He wanted me to stay and rest, but I refused'

"How come he didn't tell me?' 'I would have made you remain at home as well, adds Yiselda.

Timagine he didn't have time to tell you

Viselda looks at Alec, 'This is more reason for you to break the bond, Alec, Her life has already been put at risk once, and putting it

off will only further risk her life. End it now, or I'll be sure to punish you,' she warns.

Alec glares at Yiselda, 'No," he repeats.

'Luna, this leaves you with no choice. We have to inform Magnus of your second mate,' she says.

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'Nina, wait before you go. You will come back to see me tomorrow?' Alec pleads.

| approach the bars and grasp his hand in mine, I'll come back as soon as possible.'

Yiselda, Reaper and I leave Pandora's Box and port to Shadow Crest.

The wolf council are still talking to Magnus in the dining room. I take my seat next to Magnus. He takes my hand, kisses it, and resumes his focus on Alpha Bennet.

Yiselda, I informed Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton about what I witnessed in Pandora's Box, confirming its contents.' So, we've agreed that witches can live in Shadow Crest for the time being.

'For the time being?' Yiselda is confused,

'Yes, for now, he answers as he stands up. 'We'll say our goodbyes and stay in touch, he says as he walks towards the packhouse's entrance. Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton are right behind him as he walks out the door.

Ela, Fern, Ria, and Lilac rejoice and hug each other as they learn they will be able to stay in Shadow Crest

With that, I'll be downstairs concocting some potions!' Ria says, 'I'll help,' says Lilac. 'Me as well!' Ella and Fern say. Don't forget about me, May says as she dashes downstairs after them.

'Well, that's good news for the girls, Yiselda says, smiling

Reaper flies from my shoulder and lands on the window ledge as Magnus pulls me in for a hug and gives me a strange look, 'You smell different, like sandalwood and something else I can't put my finger on,

| give Yiselda a worrisome look. She nods, indicating to tell him.

'Magnus, there's something I need to tell you,' I say

Sure, what do you want to tell me?' he smiles.

I look into his mesmerising green eyes. My hands start to tremble and my eyes water. Magnus can see something isn't right.

'What is it, Nina?'

'Can we go somewhere private? And with Yiselda as well,' I add.

He looks to Yiselda. She looks away with guilt.

'Sure, let's go to our office,' he gently takes my hand. Sparks tingle up my arm.

Entering the office, he takes his seat, and I take mine next to him. Yiselda sits on the two-seater couch against the wall.

There is an awkward silence while Magnus looks between Yiselda and me.

So, which one of you are going to tell me what's going on?" he says, breaking the silence.

Yiselda and I exchange glances, and she nods again for me to speak.

'Do you recall how you noticed this symbol on my wrist and when told you it appeared when Alec held my wrist?'

"Yes, you said it slightly burned at first, and you felt a little strange?" he says.

'Well, uin,' I say, holding back a sob. I take a deep breath. 'Alec marked me. I'm his blood flame,' I say with a trembled voice

Magnus gives me an odd look and grabs my wrist, saying, I don't get it? What is a blood flame, and why would he inflict this mark on you?

You know how werewolves mark their soulmates? I say. He nods, 'Well, for vampires, they mark their blood flames,

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There is complete silence as Yiselda and I watch Magnus process it all. You can tell from his face he is trying to understand what! Suddenly he stiffens, and his face pales

'No no, no, no, no,' he says abruptly, standing up, his hands tugging at his hair. 'How? You can't?' He struggles to speak and continues to panic. Then he comes to a standstill and anxiously glances down at me, fumbling with my fingers.

'You had said you felt strange that day. In what way did you feel strange?' he asks with a hurt look in his eyes. I can see he already knows the answer but is hoping I tell him otherwise.

'B-because since that day, I feel the mate bond with Alec. I feel a magical sense of overwhelming wholeness as if I could never live without either one of you. My heart and body tell me I'm meant to have both of you. The bond has been pulling me and urging me to go to him as it does with you.' I explain.

Magnus casts a glance out the window. I can hear his laboured breathing. His hands are gripped so tightly that I can see blood

dripping

'He's not going to be able to have you, Nina. You are MINE!' he shouts as he approaches me. He grabs my shoulders with his bleeding hands and pulls me into his chest.

'We'll fix it, Nina. You'll never have to see him again.'

Before I can tell him it won't be possible since it will kill me, he smells the sandalwood scent on me and takes a step back, a scared expression on his face.

(

That scent, it's his, isn't it?'

I nod but avoid making eye contact. Magnus, on the other hand, slowly lifts my chin to look at him.

'Nina, please tell me nothing has already happened between you two? Please give me another explanation as to why his scent is all over you!?'

Tears stream down my face onto his fingers as he holds my chin, 'I-I can't give you another explanation.' I cry.

The hurt that appears in Magnus's eyes is unbearable to watch. I try to look away. But now I see pain and anger in his eyes.

'I'm sorry, Magnus, he kissed me, and I struggled against the bond to stop the kiss from continuing,' I confess.

'Did you like it?' He frowns.

'W-what?'

'You heard me, Nina. 'Did you like the kiss?' He yells.

I fall to my knees crying and look up at my beloved Magnus, 'It felt like I was kissing you.'

Magnus storms out of the packhouse

'Magnus, please!' I chase after him, but Yiselda grabs me.

'Luna, he needs to process everything.' 'You should give him some time, she suggests.

I hesitantly nod. I want to hold Magnus and tell him I love him no matter what. My inner wolf whimpers, wanting to comfort his wolf.

Magnus didn't come back to our room that night. I spent most of the night peering out the window, wondering where he was and when he'd return.

'Reaper, please try and find him for me?' I say out towards the moon tree. I watch as Reaper flies into the night in search of Magnus.

Will Magnus ever forgive me? What if he wants to leave me? Is he going to reject me and find a new mate?' All these thoughts and more flow through my mind until I fall asleep from fatigue."

I look onto Magnus's side of the bed as I wake. He isn't there. Reaper is on my window sill.

'I couldn't find him Luna,' Reaper mind-links.

I run downstairs to see if he is having breakfast. Everyone else is eating breakfast, but Magnus is nowhere to be found.

Good morning, Luna, everyone says.

'Has anyone seen Magnus?' I ask with a slight tremble in my voice that everyone picks up.

'Isn't he in bed?' Josie asks.

'Um, no, I thought he might be down here eating breakfast,' I say.

'Is everything okay?' Flint asks.

I'm not sure if I should inform them Magnus is upset. I'm also mates with the vampire king. I solemnly nod and force a small smile. "He's probably out having a run in wolf form.'

Everyone nods and eats their breakfast. My appetite had disappeared. All I could think about was wanting to know if Magnus was okay, but I already know he isn't. I'd be upset too if he came home and told me he had a second mate. How am I ever going to make us okay again? I burst into tears and ran up the stairs, shocking everyone at the table. I enter my room and close the door behind me.

Chapter 86

I'm sitting against the door when I hear a gentle knock.

"Luna, it's May, Josie and the witches here. We have come to see if you are alright. It's not like you to burst into tears and run away like that

"Magnus is the one you should all be worried about,' I sob

'Why is that, Luna? Has something happened to him?' May asks, concerned.

I've done something terrible. Magnus will never forgive me,

I'm sure there is nothing in this world he wouldn't forgive you for,' May reassures me.

'Does that include cheating on him?' I say.

They all gasp and whisper to one another.

'Luna, I think you need to let us in and tell us what has happened so we can help you,

I'm a horrible person May. Why would you want to help me?'

'Because you are my sister, and you are not a horrible person. You are the sweetest, kindest, most understanding person I have ever met, she retorts.

'That's right,' They all agree.

Slowly I stand and unlock the door. The girls all wrap their arms around me. It's a hug I welcomed.

We all climb onto my massive bed, plump the cushion and get ourselves comfortable as they ready themselves to hear what I am about to tell them.

May wipes the tears from my face

'The day I first went to Pandora's Box, something happened to me while we were in the dungeon Do you remember when Alec held my wrist?'

'Yeah, you were insane being that close to him in the first place,' Ria chuckles but pausea when she notices my serious expression

"He had marked me,' I say, holding my wrist for them all 10 see. They all furrow their brows, gazing closer to my wrist and shoving each other out of the way. Lilac lumbles off her bed onto the floor.

I'm okay, she adds as she crawls back into the bed.

So, what exactly does that mark mean?' May inquires,

'It means Alec the vampire king is my blood slame. Alec is my second male,

'What!?' They all say. Everyone but May falls off the bed in shock.

Once they regather on the bed, they all look at each other and back at me,

'I feel the mate bond with Alec the same way I feel it with Magnus My mind and body are yearning to be with both of them. Alec refuses to break the bond between us, and I don't know how to break it. Then we kissed, and it was so magical and amazing like was kissing Magnus. I told Magnus about Alec being my second mate. He was angry and upset, which of course he would be, but I haven't seen him since.'

May wraps her arms around me, 'It will be okay. We will help you figure this out, won't we, girls?' They all nod and give me sympathising looks. 'We should tell Dad so that the warriors can find him?' she suggests.

'What will Mum and Dad think of me having two mates, May? They will be so ashamed of me,'

'No, they won't be None of this is your fault, and there is a reason you have been given two mates, Nina. The gods and goddesses have willed in 'She says, trying to make me feel less guilty

I can't believe the vampire king is your mate,' Lilac says. 'I get he's handsome and all, but he is a vicious murderer, Luna. He is evil,'

He has been nothing but kind and gentle towards me, Lilac, and even so, he has spent hundreds of years alone in that dungeon and lost his first blood flame, who was killed at the hands of humans. If someone purposely killed Magnus, I would probably do everything in my power to kill whoever was responsible
100,

Lilac doesn't know what to say

'I think Lilac just wants you to be very careful around Alec, that's all,' Ria says.

'My main focus is to find Magnus and have him home with me where he belongs.' I say.

Everyone nods in agreement.

'Then what are we all doing in here then? We will split up and all search for him,' Fern says.

Josie dashes downstairs while the rest of us 'Skedaddle Dash' and appear out the front, Josie frowns with her hands on her hips, 'That's not fair,' Josie pouts.

'Life is never fair, Josie,' May says.

Josie and I shift into our wolves. I'll be able to pick his scent up better this way. The witches all squeal and start patting Josie and me. Next thing you know, we are on our backs, suckered in with belly rubs until May clears her that at the witches.

Oh, yeah, Magnus, right,' Ela says.

The Smokey cat hops atop Fern's shoulder, and the two of them run forwards. Everyone has dispersed, going in separate ways. I sprint to the summit of the mountain. He may be staying at one of the camping lodges. I dash in and out of the woods, hoping to get a whiff of his scent, but to no avail. I search every site and shelter and found no trace of him.

I sit and mope, trying to think of where he could be and where I would go if I were upset. Then it hits me Shadow Crest Lake, where we have shared so many fond memories. I dash down the hill through the woods until I reach the lake. I pick his scent up straight away and race towards him, sitting on the lake's

edge, eyes downcast. My wolf whimpers, and I lower myself resting my head on his lap. He looks down at me, and I see he hasn't slept. Bags have formed under his eyes; his hair is all scruffy, and his eyes are puffy from all the tears. I whimper again, telling him I'm sorry.

He lifts me into his chest as he holds me close. I shift back into human form and place my hand on his cheek. Sparks fly between us. He pushes his face further against my hand taking in the blissful feeling.

"Although I feel so hurt and broken right now, I know none of this is your fault, Nina. We will work through this together." We kiss passionately and make love. Returning to the packhouse, we take our time. Before we enter, I come to a halt. "I want you to know that Josie, May and the witches all know. I told them this morning," I informed him.

"Good, because the more of us who know, the more of us who can assist us find out how to sever the tie between you two, he continues

We enter the home to find the others discussing where they had looked and searched, "You found him, Luna, Lilac beams.

"Thank you all for your concern. As you know, it's a lot to take in, and it took some time to absorb it all," Magnus says.

"Of course, Alpha," Lilac says.

Magnus turns to me, "Let's have some lunch, then we can talk privately and see what resolutions we can come up with," he says.

Once our lunch is finished, we enter our office and close the door. Magnus sits on the two-seater couch. I sit next to him, and he pulls me onto his lap.

Part of me is currently yearning for Alec, while the other part is happy and content being this close to Magnus.

"I don't want you going back to Pandora's Box," he says calmly.

"But!" I say. Magnus presses his finger against my lips.

"Until we figure out how to sever the bond, I can't have you going there. I can't have you near him."

Magnus, I think it would be better if Yiselda could join this conversation to give you more insight. It's not going to be as simple as just not going near him, and what if it takes months or even years to figure out how to break the bond?"

Then that's how long it will be until you return to Pandora's Box,"

"Magnus, Pandora's Box is my second home now. There will be times I may have to be there to help Yiselda and the others,"

"Then they will have to do it without you,"

"Magnus, please, let's talk to Yiselda and see what she has to say,

'Yiselda isn't my mate, nor does she have any authority over me, Nina. You are not returning to Pandora's Box, and that is final,' He growls.

Chapter 87

I throw myself from his lap, dash to our bedroom, slam the door behind me, and sit on the balcony. Reaper takes flight from his moon tree and lands on the railing.

'I'm guessing things aren't going so well?' He mind-links.

'No, he won't let me go back to Pandora's Box until the bond between Alec and me is severed!

'What if it's unbreakable?' Reaper inquires.

Then I'll have no option but to go against Magnus' wishes and meet Alec, or I can wait it out and eventually die from being separated from Alec for too long,

I spend the following few days primarily in the basement concocting potions and practising spells to avoid Magnus. My mind and body are constantly fighting me to rush to Magnus and be with him, but they are also fighting me to go to Pandora's Box and be with Alec. I already feel like I've betrayed Magnus from the kiss Alec and I shared. I don't want to betray him again and defy his desire to see Alec in Pandora's Box. Every day it becomes worse, but I push past it and concentrate on making potions in the bubbling cauldron.

Ela, Fern, Lilac and Ria have come down many times over the few days to help me, but I sent them away every time, telling them I needed to be by myself. Another two days pass. Magnus has been trying to talk to me at every opportunity. 'I'm not ready to talk about it, Magnus,' I say each time. I let him still hug me and kiss me because I love him, and it brings some comfort to me. Returning to the basement, my body begins to heat up, but I ignore it thinking it's from all the steam and plumes of smoke and continue my work. Reaper has been sitting on his perch I made him. He is the only one I have allowed to stay by my side.

You should get some rest, Luna.' You've been working on this for more than five days. You don't appear to be in good health. He mind-links.

I ignore him, but he continues to speak. 'Perhaps you could change and go for a run, and I'll fly beside you?' he asks, hoping.

Sweat beads collect on my face and torso. 'It's boiling down here, I complain.

'How about we walk outside for some fresh air?' I cave and nod. I manage to mutter 'Skedad' before slumping to the floor. I've suddenly become exceedingly weak and unable to cast a spell. 'Luna! I'll get help,' Reaper says.

No, don't do that. All I want are Magnus and Alec, I whimper.

I can get Magnus for you, he adds as he rushes up the stairs, leaving little time for me to say no.

Reaper caws furiously as feet stampede below. Magnus gets down on his knees at my side and places his hand on my arm. 'How come she's so hot?' Is she sick?' Magnus asks Reaper, then realises he and Reaper cannot mind-link.

Magnus picks me up and carries me up the stairs while yelling for help. May and Lilac come running over to us. 'Magnus, what's the matter with Luna?' Lilac asks.

I'm not sure Reaper came up to me wildly cawing. I followed him down the basement and discovered her on the floor. She is unbearably hot to the touch I'm struggling to hold her any longer. She is burning my skin,' he says,

Take her to her room and place her in a cold bath. I'll go to Pandora's Box and bring Yiselda back with me,' May says.

Magnus can't remove my clothes as the sweat and heat make them stick to my skin. He turns the water on and places me in the bath and holds my head up with one hand, and trickles cold water. He scoops up onto my face with his free hand.

Magnus lifts me out of the ice-cold bath and puts a towel over me. He rests his palm against my temple. 'You're still flaming hot, Nina, he exclaims, horrified

A knock comes from our bedroom door 'It's May, and I'm here with Yiselda, she adds.

Please send her in quickly, Magnus begs, his voice shaking with fear.

Yiselda enters the restroom and stares down at Magnus, soaking wet on the floor with me on his lap.

She speaks with a heavy sigh, It's begun, she wores.

What has started? Magnus asks

Did Luna not warn you that the blood same will continue to pull her and urge her to Alec and that if she resists it for too long or rights it, there will be implications?

I knew she'd be battling their bond, but she never mentioned any negative effects?

When you resist it or stay away from your blood name for too long, you physically start to burn It begins as a feret, then your body continues to heat up, and you die.

She's going to die! Magnus snarls. Argh, he groans as he places me on the tiled floor. He glances down at his scorched hands from holding me

What should we do? How can I help her? He pleads.

The only way to prevent her death is to bring them together, says Yiselda.

What! There has to be another way, he says.

you with

The only other option is to break the bond, but we don't know how to, and it appears that we don't have much time left to save Luna, you must bring her to Pandora's Box night now she warns

Magnus growls and battles his inner demons. He doesn't want me near Alec, but he also doesn't want me to die. With no choice, he grabs a blanket and lifts me with it to avoid his hands being burnt from skin contact. Yiselda dashes out the front door. Rapet and Magnus rush after her. Yiselda grabs the back of Magnus's shirt and drags him into the circle as they approach.

For a brief period, my eyelids flutter open, and I glimpse someone else walking out of the portal but they don't follow us. Instead, whoever it was, dodged into nearby shrubs. Tortured my arm and gestured to the thruba, hoping to draw the attention of whatever was lurking there. But, with no time to spend, Magnus protests, betoundings, and my mood is stunted.

door. He is captivated by the enormous muffin. Yiselda stepped through but he does not have time to get another before leaping through. Yiselda opens the door on the right and says, Maletilise, and a too-tiered a Santiate, the te dropping the book at her feet. Magnus steps back as the book falls into a staircase. React. Tea. Avea adora the dark wooden door.

'I must warn you, Magnus, Alec is in a worse state. You need to be afraid to handle over the food, mate. The

blood names, no matter what.

'What do you mean he is in a worse state?'

'I have been trying to persuade him to sever the bond of at least tell me how to do it but because he refuses, I've been depriving him of his daily sustenance of blood, which leads vampires to become unstable and somewhat wild, she says and opens a large black door with strange marks and drawings.

I don't think I like the sound of any of this, Yiselda,' he says following her through the dungeon. He sees the Gringhous as she walks past. 'They are more vicious-looking than I ever imagined them to be, he says.

'Don't get too close to them. They will rip your hand off, if not your whole arm. Even the opportunity.

We can hear agonising moans emanating from further up as we approach the Shadow Reapers, who are spell-sealed in their area of the dungeon.

Alec. I murmur.

Magnus stiffens, and a sombre expression develops on his face as he approaches the cell where Alec is.

Alec snarls and hisses. He appears to be physically and emotionally warning with himself. Yiselda was correct when she defined his current situation as unstable and somewhat wild.

Chapter 88

'This is supposed to be the vampire king? Yiselda. I'm not handing Nina over to that monster,'

Alec pauses, stares at Magnus, and snarls his fangs. Magnus' wolf teeth expand, and he growls in response.

'Now is not the time for a snarl off,' Yişelda says to Aléc and Magnus. Alec drops his eyes to Nina lying weak in the arms of Magnus. His expression softens, and he reaches out to touch Nina, but Magnus steps aside and pulls me closer to his chest. 'It burns, I gasp, biting my lip and forcing it to bleed. My skin feels as though it is on fire. I open my eyes and tilt my head to see Alec looking at me longingly. His skin is red and covered with blisters, and I can see blisters forming on my arms. As I weep, the pain becomes unbearable.

'It's okay, my darling, Magnus replies as he prepares to remove the blanket he's using to hold me.

Alec, you must stand aside so we can place her in the cell with you, Yişelda commands. Alec moves to the cell's rear, where he can't be seen. 'There is a spell in place at the entrance of his cell. Do you see the line of salt here?' she asks Magnus.

Magnus nods.

'Do not break the line. Place Nina over it and then step back immediately. Yişelda unlocks the door, and it creaks as she pulls it open. Magnus hesitantly stands at the entrance, his hands tremble as he is about to give me to the person he loathes, the very one he doesn't want me near, my second mate. Removing the blanket, he ignores the burn that heats his flesh and gently lays me on the other side of the line. A tear falls from his eye and lands on my cheek. My hand touches his cheek. 'I love you, Magnus,' I say. 'I love you too, Nina,' he says and steps back. Yişelda closes the cell door and locks it just as Alec swoops in like a flash of light and snatches Nina up, returning to the shadows of his cell swiftly. The moment Alec swooped me up, the burning pain immediately subsided and was replaced with sweet, warm tingles. Alec cradles me in the corner. His back turned to the cell bars. As he caresses my face, I can see his skin is healing. I cup my hand over Alec's, and he pulls me closer to him. We gaze into each other's eyes. His aren't his usual light brown but primarily black. I can see he is straining himself from doing something, but I'm not sure of what. Our lips draw closer to one another, the blood from my lip drips down my chin, and his eyes momentarily light up. And I realise he wants blood, my blood, and is fighting himself from taking it. I smash my lips onto his and kiss him fiercely as he savours every drop of blood from my lips. He tenderly grips and sucks onto my bottom, bleeding lip with his as we eventually separate, not wanting it to finish.

As I instinctively submit to Alec, my head tilts up. On my unmarked side, his teeth skim across my nape. The tingling sensation that floods through my body cause me to gasp. His teeth suddenly sink in, and he moans from the sensation of drinking my blood. He withdraws his teeth and looks endearingly into my eyes. Raising my hand to his face, I gently wipe the blood drips from Alec's lips.

'My, Luna, my darling, my Queen, he says.

Reaper caws and looks pleased that Alec has become my second mate.

'Alec,' I say and wrap my arms around him. We spend some time in a loving embrace before Alec licks the puncture marks he made on my neck. My body arches, and I gasp at the thrilling feeling that soars through my body.

Magnus had walked over to the Shadow Reapers before we had kissed as he couldn't bear to watch us. Usually, a mate would feel horrendous pain when the other mate became intimate with another person. He thought it was odd he felt no physical pain, just jealousy.

We kiss passionately again, and when we part, I notice my skin has completely healed along with Alec's. Magnus storms over to the bars.

That's enough, now give me back, my mate,' he scowls.

Magnus,' I say, standing up. Alec grabs me and holds me to his chest.

"She is my blood same,' Alec says firmly.

They glare at one another. 'Alec, it's okay Magnus is my mate, and I need to go back to him,'

Alec cups my face with both of his hands 'When will you be back' he asks.

Tomontow,' I say Alec looks at Magnus for confirmation. He squeezes the bars. 'Nina is my soul mate. She is my whole world in Bringing her back here each day keeps her allve, then so be it,' he growls, clearly not pleased with the concept but also knowing he

has no other choice for the time being

Asl approach the cell door, Alec immediately spins me around and kisses me gently one final time before I see him again Magnus is emitting a deep growl. Yiselda unlocks the door, and I gently walk over the line to leave the cell. Magnus quickly throws his arms around me and kisses my temple and the opposite side of my neck, nuzzling into my nape. Alec is the one who lets out a deep growl this time

Im sorry, I say to Magnus as I look at him.

Is not your fault. It had to be done, Magnus replies softly, attempting to mask his pain

"Let's go home and spend some time together. Just you and me,' I say

He nods and grabs my hand in his as he leads me out of the dungeon. We enter the portal and spend the afternoon swimming at Shadow Crest Lake and climbing the most prominent trees we can locate, just as we did as kids

We dont spend a single moment apart till we return to Pandora's Box the next day

Knowing how to access the dungeon, I don't wait for Yiselda

T'll wait here at the entrance,' Magnus frowns, not wanting to see me near Alec,

I cup his face and kiss his lips. 'I'll be back soon,' I say.

I take the key hanging on the far wall, unlock the cell, and step over the salt line. Before I see Alec, he has already swept me off my feet and smothering my face in kisses.

'Alec,' I giggle

T've missed you,' he says.

missed you too,' I say

We kiss, and he strokes my face with his thumb. I wish I could take you somewhere wonderful, like for a picnic on a mountain top or a dance beneath the stars, he says thoughtfully.

I wish I could just get you out of this dungeon, I sigh. "Did you really set those creatures onto the humans all those years ago?" I ask.

Alec looks away for a moment, then nods his head with regret.

Can you tell me what happened? Can you tell me about Juniper?" I ask.

It might be easier if I show you instead," he says.

I'm confused until he shuts his eyes and hovers his hands slightly over each side of my head. Then, a ball of light appears and blinds me. When I open my eyes, I'm no longer in the dungeon but travelling along a cobblestone path in a village. There are individuals on horses everywhere and ladies on foot holding shawls over their heads and baskets packed with bread and fruit.

A beautiful young woman runs into me, shouts, Sorry, and keeps running. I chase after her as she rushes up the road and into a little cottage dwelling. Sorry, I'm late grandma, she apologises,

Juniper, will you ever be on time, says her grandmother.

Juniper laughs. Probably never, Grandma, she says. I raise my head over the window sill to peer through it. I then stuffs a loaf of bread and a couple of small bottles into the basket. They look just like potions.

You need to buy along, Juniper, and get these healing potions to the Hillsbury home if you go now, you will be home before dark! Don't let more creatures of the night capture you.

Dreadus left

really can

and

you've had too much run.' Juniper smiles.

Pep's, une tout le

more people were found dead this morning with those markings on their neck. You can never be too

, dinier.

Immediately to be home before nightfall. Juniper replies, kissing her grandmother on the

cheek because, grandmother.

even

can't buy us at the state. So who knows what these creatures of the night

can remember we may be witches, you're capable of doing to us, she worries.

I feel the same trepidation as Juniper does at her grandmother's words.

Juniper departs from the cottage and strolls for an hour through the forest, eventually arriving in a valley with another settlement. I covertly follow behind her. She knocks on the door of a wood lodge.

Juniper, A respectable gentleman greets her and welcomes her inside the house. Another resident of the house is hacking and gasping for oxygen.

I was terrified I wouldn't receive the potion on time. Florence is on the verge of death, he claims.

I pop my head up and observe Juniper and the gentlemen enter a room with an elderly lady in bed via a window. She is quite pale, coughing, and gasping for breath. Juniper arranges the basket on the bed and takes a healing potion. She extracts the cork from the bottle and proceeds to elevate the lady's head.

Drink, Florence. 'It will cure you of your illness, Juniper asserts.

Florence initially struggles but eventually consumes the potion. Within minutes, her cheeks have taken on colour, and her eyes have become bluer. She rises to her feet and crosses her arms across her chest.

'Florence, it worked, the gentleman adds, clasping Juniper's hands in his. I'd want to express my gratitude to you, Juniper, and your grandmother, he continues.

Your very welcome, Mr Hillsbury, Juniper smiles.

Florence rises from the bed and joins her husband in walking Juniper out.

'It's already becoming dark, Juniper observes as the sky darkens.

Mr Hillsbury, his neighbour says as he limps up the path.

'It's lovely to see you, George, Mr Hillsbury says with a smile and a nod of his hat.

'Florence, your wife. She is out of bed walking? The doctor said she was so sickly she would die by tis very night. I don't understand,' George says. 'I came to offer my condolences to you, but here she stands filter than a fiddle,'

'It's a miracle, isn't it?' Florence says. Juniper gave me medicine that cured me straight away,' she says without thinking of the consequences of her words. Her husband attempts to elbow her to stop her from talking.

'No medicine would do such a thing,' George says, glaring at Juniper,

Juniper trembles and takes a step back.

'Dear, I believe it is a bit implausible to claim you were suddenly cured. Mr Hillsbury responds uncomfortably, Juniper was here all day attempting to mend you. Florence casts a puzzled glance at her husband

'I must be going now. Grandma wants me home before dark, and as you can see, the moon is rising,' I say, turning and stepping onto the path. George snatches her arm, causing her to fall over and drop the basket. The bread and a bottle of healing potion roll out. George picks up the bottle and inspects it reading the label and pulling the cork off. He sniffs, then drinks it.

Juniper's and Mr Hillsbury's faces are flushed with fear. Juniper rises to her feet as George approaches her, his limp gone. George comes to a halt and stares down at his leg before returning his gaze to Juniper.

'Impossible, my limp has gone.' He looks at the bottle in his hand, then at Juniper. 'This isn't medicine. This is a magic potion. You're a witch!' he points his finger at Juniper.

Juniper runs frightened from the village as George creates a commotion causing neighbours from their houses. Men follow George, chasing after Juniper. She runs as fast as she can and knows they will go straight to her house to search for her. She knows they will burn her at the stake.

I'm sorry, grandma, I can't go home she whispers into the wind. A shimmering breeze swirls around the fog of her breath like a spell, collecting her words and delivering her message to her grandmother.

Juniper abandons the trail and sprints into the woods, eluding the horde of men.

She falls to her knees, becoming fatigued to walk any further. There are odd and unsettling noises all around her. She notices two cunning eyes looking at her from the darkness when she glanced up. The eyes flash like a flame, and she immediately recognises them as Alec's

Alec swoops forward and covers Juniper's mouth with her palm as she screams,

My blood name, I've been looking for you for many years,' he says.

Juniper trembled in his arms. He carefully takes his hand away from her mouth. She gives him an odd expression as she touches her mouth, which tingles from his contact,

'Why do I have this sensation?' she muffles,

With a gasp, he crashes his lips against hers, sparks and warm tingles erupting between them. Juniper draws closer to Alec as they continue to kiss

She finally takes a step back, I'm very sorry, sir. I'm not sure what got into me.' I'd never openly kissed or desired to kiss a man like that before. 'You'll have to forgive me, she admits, blushing.

'What is your name?' he inquires.

Juniper and yours, sir?

'Alec,' he smiles. 'No need to apologise, Juniper. We are blood flames, which means we are destined to be together.' He says.

'Blood flames?' she asks curiously

Alec caresses her cheek, 'Yes, blood flames, when we touch it feels magical, like nothing else you've ever felt. Once we find each other, we have urges to stay close to each other. Staying away from each other causes pain and even death if not careful. The gods chose us to be together.'

'We were destined for each other?' she asks, taking a step closer to him.

'Yes,' he says, showing his fangs with a smile.

Juniper exhales and takes a step back. You've got fangs? And your eyes were red as fire when I first saw you?

That's because I'm not human, he says quietly.

Are you not human?' She pauses for a minute, then gasps once again. 'The night animals, the ones who devour people and leave wounds on their necks?'

'Creatures of the night is one way to describe us, but we like the word vampire, my love, he says, smiling.

'Why are you murdering people?' she asks.

'We survive by consuming blood' Human blood tastes the best, yet we drink from animals mostly to limit the number of human fatalities, and the people we kill are far from lovely people. They have either raped, murdered or blackmailed people.

I'm not human, either, Juniper admits. I'm a witch, and the people in the valley are looking for me.' So that's how I ended up in the woods. If they discover me, they'll burn me at the stake, Alec, she sobs as Alec draws her into his chest and consoles her. They can't hurt you if you stay with me, Juniper, my darling, he says.

I live with my grandmother in a cottage in the village over there,' I need to see her. I need to take her with us, she begs.

'Would it be too unsafe to return to the cottage?' he wonders,

'I'll go at first light. Then, if there are no guards or men near the cottage, I will sneak in and get her.' She explains her plan.

'Can't I grab her for you now while it's still dark?'

The crowd will already be there, with lit torches and more men.' 'I can't let them hurt you, Alec, she declares.

I'm Alec, the vampire king, and I'll destroy them all before they blink, he declares, emanating a tremendous aura.

'Are you a King?' Juniper is taken aback.

Yes, and you will be Queen, he replies with admiration.

"You can't kill people, Alec They are just terrified of witches, once they realise we are harmless and only want to help them prosper and heal their sicknesses, they will cease hunting and burning us at the stake. Let's wait till the men have searched my

grandmother's house. Then, when they realise I'm not there, they'll go, and we'll be able to take my grandmother and escape this place.'

'Wouldn't it be easier just to kill them?'

'I'm sure it would be Alec, but we're not monsters, she replies, making Alec smile at the sweet, loving witch in front of him, knowing how fortunate he is that the gods picked her only for him.

Chapter 90

Alec and Juniper spend the night gazing up at the stars and moon as Alec learns everything he can about Juniper and her past

I think you should tell me more about yourself, Alec. I've been telling you everything about myself, but I still don't know anything about you other than you're Alec, the vampire King, she replies enthusiastically.

The sun will be rising soon, and I'm not fond of the day. We shall retrieve your grandma while it's still dark and return to my castle, where we will hold a great feast and celebrate our love. I will tell you all you want to know about me then,' he smiles,

Juniper nods, and they hold hands as they trudge through the woods to her village,

'Over there, that cottage there is where grandma and I live. I don't see anyone around, do you?' she asks.

Alec slowly and carefully scans the area, 'No, I don't see anyone,' he says.

Stay here, I'll peep through the back window, and if no one is inside, I'll climb inside,'

T'll keep watch outside then?' he says.

Juniper sneaks up to the window, peers through it, then turns and nods to Alec. Assuring him that everything is well on the inside. I hear her scream not long after she walks into the room. Alec bursts through the window inside the cottage, only to see men emerge from hiding. One man is holding a knife to the throat of an older woman, and I know it's her grandmother. Three men are tackling Nina. Alec grabs one by the throat and throws the man out the window. The rest of the men stand around me, ready to fight. I hiss and bare my teeth, making them tremble.

Creature of the night, the grandmother murmurs.

Alec continues to kill them one by one. More men enter the cabin as Juniper is dragged outside. She screams again when she sees the man with the knife slitting her grandmother's throat. Alec's hands emit a black mist as he summons Shadow Reapers and Grimghouls, The Grimghouls rip men apart, while Shadow Reapers induce the men to imagine that other men are the enemy, and they begin attacking one another. Alec escapes the cabin, only to find Juniper chained up to a wooden beam, standing on bundles of sticks. A guy hurls a lit torch at her feet. 'No!' Alec yells and rushes towards her,

Men yell, 'Don't let him get to her, stop him!' As Juniper screams in agony, Alec snaps their necks and rips the heads off hundreds of men. As Alec arrives at Juniper, her cries have stopped, and her entire body is enveloped in flames. She is no longer alive.

Alec's breathing becomes more rapid, and he sends out a high-pitched shriek that causes people's cars to bleed.

Thousands of black flashes zoom and dash around, moving too quickly to identify what they are as people's limbs fly across the ground. Shrieks and screams are heard, and it quickly becomes silent. Finally, the black Moshes come to a halt

Hundreds of vampires stand near their king as they watch him mourn his blood fame. They had killed everyone in the village. The only sound now is the cries coming from the king, the vampire king'

As the sun is about to rise and the fire is doused, he orders the vampires to retrieve Juniper's body for burial of the castle

I am summoned to the Realm of Shadows alongside the Grimghouls and Shadow Reapers. We emerge of a gloomy mediaeval castle where the only light comes from a few candles spread about. Alec is standing over a dark stone coffin in the underground crypt; he lays black flowers on it, kisses it, and walks out into the night. He raises his palms, and a burst of black power emanates from all around him, opening a vast portal.

I will avenge your death, Juniper, and all humans shall pay, he cries into the night sky. Then, swarms of vampires, as well as Grimghouls and Shadow Reapers, rush through the portal. Alec is the last person to enter, and I rush in just as the portal closes.

We've arrived in werewolf territory. The alpha warns Alec to return to where he came from.

Alec laughs, 'You fool. I'm the vampire king. It is you who shall be warned. Join me and eradicate the humans or die along with them,

The alpha charges at Alec but the Grimghouls shred him apart before he can even get near Alec. The pack trembles and flees, informing other packs of what happened. Alec and his legion wipe out many packs over time. Anywho had tried to stop him from entering human lands and villages. A slew of witches come and cast spells to keep Alec at bay.

My blood flame was a witch. You should all be pursuing revenge alongside me!' he shouts,

The witches work together, casting spell after spell until he is encased in a magical blanket that prevents his entire body from moving. They create a portal, and on the other side, I can see the Midnight Coven. Alec is magically forced through the portal. Other witches contain the Grimghouls and Shadow Reapers and push them through to join their king. Alec continues to fight, but there are too many witches making him unable to repel all their spells at once. The swirls of magic around him lift into the air and into the Covenstead. A witch casts a spell in the corridor where two doors are. Her spell creates a third door, a new section of the Covenstead. She places a book in the room of darkness that forms into stairs and leads to a dark heavy door. She opens it and casts another spell creating the dungeon. Witches used spells to confine the Grimghouls and Shadow Reapers to their cells and Alec to his. As a witch draws a line of salt over the iron-barred door, several incantations are uttered. That is when Alec is freed from the spell that had been binding him. He hisses and lunges at the bars, attempting to bend them to escape.

'It is of no use, vampire king. Your cell is bound by magic to keep you within. No matter your strength, you will never leave this cell until the day someone lets you out, but after wiping out most of their werewolf packs and intending to wipe out the human race. Therefore, we sentence you to remain in this

dungeon forever,' she says and walks away. The witches converse near the Shadow Reapers and Grimghouls.

'No, come back. Don't leave me here. Juniper, I'm sorry! Juniper!' he screams out in agony.

'We have never seen these creatures before. I sense they are not what they seem,' Emmerson the witch says. Another pulls a mirror from her pocket and holds it in front of a Shadow Reaper. They gasp as they see an elf in the reflection.

'Try one of the Grimghouls,' Emmerson says. The mirror is held in front of a Grimghoul to reveal a pixie.

'The vampire King has summoned the Elves and pixies from Silverfay forest and changed them into these hideous monsters. She explains to the other witches.

They cast many spells to change them into their original states but failed. Being a danger in these forms, the witches have no choice but to keep them in the dungeon with hopes that a day will come when they will be returned to Silverfay forest in their natural forms.

As an added precaution, the witches inscribe sigils and lay wards over the doors after closing the heavy black door.

I'm suddenly back, looking into Alec's solemn eyes. I burst into tears and wrapped my arms around him, and cried.

I'm so sorry, Alec. I'm so sorry you lost your blood flame when you found her. I'm so sorry you've spent hundreds of years in here grieving her death and being alone, I say.

I'm sorry as well. I've spent a lot of time reflecting on her death and realised that she would not have wanted me to avenge her death. She was so kind that she would have wanted those guilty to survive, hoping that one day they would see their actions were wrong. he says.

You shouldn't be in here, in this dungeon. It's not right to treat you like a

'Monster?' he says, That's exactly what I became when Juniper died, Luna,

'But you're not anymore, I say as I gaze into his eyes.