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"Lenore, you are in no condition to go anywhere. You can't even move. I'm surprised you're able to talk already. That must be thanks to your primordial blood." Taric carried her delicately as they continued to descend through the underground kingdom.

"That is my sister and I am going to her! Aba, you're taking me with you," Lenore said, simply unable to lift her head to look behind them.

"If he wants to leave this place to find Elena, he won't be taking you anywhere." Taric shot a quick side glance at Aba showing that he meant business.

"You can't keep me here. Damn it! Why can't I pull Elena to me?! Is it the barrier still, down here?" Lenore growled out in frustration.

"Lenore, stop it!" Taric glared at her as his fingers bit into her skin. "You don't understand the devil's fruit, but I do. I know all about it. It isn't over. The effects are deep in your system. You are not a god or an original demon. We don't absorb the fruit. You are going to need time to recover." He saw her angry eyes snap up at him and he let out a sigh. "Give me some time and I'll remove this barrier. As if there is a barrier strong enough out there that I

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can't break. Especially not this one. This is not Rogio's barrier, like he wants everyone to believe. I thought it felt weird, but it didn't make sense. However, knowing that it is Vladimir changes things. I don't know how he found him, but I am almost certain he used the mimic to create the barrier. In another world, I could have become a creature like the mimic. The product of two powerful beings that went wrong." He stopped and then shook his head. "The point is, it will be easier for me to remove the barrier. I'm practically back to full strength. Once you've recovered, I'll get rid of it. Then you'll be able to mind link with everyone again. No, I won't do it before you recover, because I can see just how stubborn you are. I won't allow you to risk your health. You can fight me on it once you've recovered."

"I am going to my sister," Lenore said coldly. She didn't care who or what was standing in her way. If her sister needed help, she was going to her.

"Nora, I will bring Elena back, but I think Taric is right. You should stay here for now. Vladimir is after you too, and you have been weakened. We can't allow him to have you." Aba could feel the panicked emotions in him. Elena needed him. She was in danger. "How do I get out of here?!"

"There are several other entrances that have been well hidden. Perhaps they have even been forgotten about. Well, Vladimir would know about

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them, though. In either case, there is one he wouldn't be able to get to because you now have to swim underwater to get to the other side. With a deep breath, you can make it. I'll get the map so you can see which direction to swim in."

A loud splashing noise was heard off one of the lower chambers. Aba smelled him before he came into view.

"Who wishes to die?" Taric growled, turning to look at the unknown man.

"Bernie!" Lenore saw a glimpse of him as Taric turned.

"Elena wanted me to deliver a message to you. She said that she is safe and will come to you." Bernie watched as Aba's gaze settled on him.

"Where is she?"

"Safe." Bernard said simply as a low growl filled the room.

"Where is she?!" This time the thunderous growl shook the underground cave.

Bernard snorted as his lips curled up in a smirk. "She's at my mating den. Completely safe. Of course, in order to get her there, I had to give her air a couple of times."

Aba's nostrils flared as he tried not to lose his temper. He saved Elena. She would be located in

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an underwater area. A place too deep for vampires to get to. "Is she okay?" His voice softened. Regardless of how he felt about Bernard he rescued Elena.

"As well as to be expected. She is hurting and worried about everyone."

"Take me to her." Aba watched as Bernard shook his head. "Take me to her!"

"I can't."

"Listen, I know you have feelings for her, but she isn't just my charge. She is my mate!"

"She is mine too!" Bernard yelled out, shocking both Aba and Lenore. Taric stood there listening quietly, but the news wasn't shocking to him.

"What do you mean?" Aba's voice quieted down, but he already understood.

"From the moment I met her, I was drawn to her. A few years ago, I knew the truth that was already in my heart. She was my mate. Fairy magic can be weird and unpredictable. And it hurts like hell that she wasn't given the mate pull with me. Why only me? Why am I the only one who knows we're meant to be together?" His arms shook as he looked at the ground. "Why the fvck would this happen? Why doesn't she feel this too? I know it's happened before but fvck, it sucks." He looked up at Aba. "I love her. I've been there for her. Where

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the hell have you been?! And now you just get her. Just like that. A blind man could see that she wanted you. Why does she only know you are her mate now? Maybe... had it come out earlier, I wouldn't have fallen so deep. There is no escape now. She is the only one I'll ever love."

"I'm sorry," Aba whispered out, understanding his pain. He had worried about it too, when he planned to let Elena live her life without him. It was unbearable. The memories of his past life hit him like a ton of bricks. The desperation he felt when his mate kept running away from him. He might have ended up getting manipulated then, but that pain was real.

"I hid the bond because I was afraid I would end up hurting her. I was a fool. I was so wrong. I'm sorry Bernard." Aba's gaze met with the kelpies firmly. "I understand your pain but—"

"Then let me have her! I'm the one who has been there for her, I—"

"I won't let anyone have her. I love her. I need her. I messed up. I'm so sorry for what I did to her. But if she wants me, I'll never stop fighting for her. I will be anything and everything she needs from now on."

"You better." Bernard gritted his teeth. "I hate it, but she doesn't want me. Because I love her, I won't hurt her. Because I can't tell you how badly I want

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to keep her in the den I made for her. It was going to be our home one day. Now it will remain empty because I won't take anyone else as a mate." He looked away and to the room he came from. "I'm going to stay by her side though. I'll be the best friend she could ever ask for, since that is all the room she has for me in her heart. But any place in

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her heart is my place. I feel like such a sh*tty kelpie for not claiming what is mine. But she has made me a better person. Her light gave me light." He looked up at the ceiling with a soft smile. "She doesn't get it, does she? No matter how many times I try to tell her. She has the sweetest, warmest light I have ever felt. She is a shadow

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bender, but she doesn't have dark energy. Her magic is fairy magic. Lenore's light bending is more vampire magic." He turned and looked at Lenore. "You know this too."

"Yes. My grandmother Willa is a shadow manipulator. Not the same as a shadowbender. My magic is similar to my grandmother's, only more powerful. You know, they always thought it was Elena's energy that blocked my great grandmother from seeing the ultrasound, since she controls the shadows. But that can't be true. Because Aba was trying to see Elena. It had to be me who used the dark to block Aba. Yet, I control the light." Her brows furrowed as she tried to understand what this meant.

"Things are always black and white, or in this case light and dark. You can bend the light but your energy is not warm and sweet. It's dark and edgy. Just what I crave." Taric grinned at her. "Your sister controls the shadows but she doesn't have any malice inside of her. There is pain but she has a lot of love in her energy. That is what I felt when you two used your magic." Taric pressed his nose to Lenore's head. "I think you were each given the power you needed for your futures."

Why doesn't Elena feel a mate bond with Bernie?
Lenore linked to Taric in private.

She has been in love with Aba, from what you

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have told me. Fairy magic does have a life and will of its own. Her own will could have suppressed any other bond out there because she had already chosen Aba. Dangerous magic. She did it unintentionally. Almost like forming a mental bond, which seems more likely because she wasn't conscious when she did the blood bond. This was probably her case. However, it does happen. It is what happened to Aba in his past life. It was a one way bond.

Bernie growled in the air and then turned to look at Aba. "I'll lead you to the lake and bring her to you. It's better that way, so I don't have to give you air on the way down." He hated it, but this would be what's best for Elena. He knew that a guardian was her strongest protector. It was their purpose. "If you misstep with her, even once, know I will be there. And if she ever wants me, I will give myself to her, because I am already hers."

"It won't ever happen, so you might as well get that out of your head." Aba kept his voice controlled. He knew Bernard was in a lot of pain. On a level, it connected them. Though he wasn't about to share Elena, he could tolerate him and his misspoken words. "Lenore, I'll be back with Elena. We can make our next plans from there."

"Be safe." Lenore pursed her lips together, hating that she couldn't do anything. She watched Aba follow Bernie into a room where they disappeared.

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She then flipped her eyes up to Taric. "How can we get Vladimir out of my grandfather's body?"

"We need to figure out who all knows about Vladimir. We need to find the traitors."

"Could he see my grandfather's memories? He knew how to act like him and—"

"Yes, he was able to see everything. Almost as if it was a past life, because they're connected by blood. The blood has memories. This was well thought out, which tells me he had a seer predict this future. He anticipated having primordial grandchildren. He planned to reproduce with them to create a new generation of vampires. He was going to use you as a breeding machine." His face hardened, darkness clouding his eyes. "Vladimir is a cruel bastard. He is right on par with my father. They will do anything for self gain and their own vision. They don't care who they sacrifice, including family."

"Will your father kill you if he finds you?" Lenore asked, wishing she could lift her arms. Instead, she could only continue to stare at him.

"No, but he would use me as a power vessel. He would punish me, lock me away and drain my powers. Probably a few thousand years of punishment until I learned my lesson."

"Is he a lot stronger than you?"

"He is probably a bit stronger than me, but he also had the loyalty of the demons. Maybe in a one-on-one I would win, but my father would have planned for it. He already anticipates I will try to overthrow him and is ready. But the day will come when the odds will be in my favor."

"Then we can't let him find you until then." She listened as he chuckled, carrying her down the hall.

"Don't worry. Everything is being well planned. A temporary truce with Selene has ensured I will be victorious in the end. I just have to play her waiting game. And in the meantime, I'll make this into a home. A home for us if you choose."

"What if I have to go to Elysium? Could you go there with me?" Lenore watched as he slowly shook his head.

"No." He eased her onto the bed, settling in next to her. "But you can stay here with me. Your wolves might have a destined place, but it will still work the same way, regardless where you're at. As long as one of you is in Elysium and one on earth it doesn't matter."

"But we were told—"

"To make it easier. So neither of you had to make that choice. But you have a choice. Trust me, there is always a choice." His nose traced over her

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cheek as he left a warm kiss on her temple. "Let me protect you. Stay with me...please."

"Taric, you don't have to say please." Her lips twitched up and she sighed. "I hate how I can't move on my own." She grumbled when she tried to roll to see him.

Gingerly he moved her body to her back, then leaned on his arm to look at her. "Tell me what you need help with and I'll help you until you're able to move again."

She felt the tingling electricity shoot through her as his fingers traced over her cheek. "I choose you. I want to be with you. If you are stuck here, then let me be stuck here too. We will reawaken this kingdom. Make it new again. This can be a place of refuge for those who don't flee to Elysium. It has everything down here to make it work. With a little bit of effort, we can have it restored so that it's no longer a tomb for the past. We can make it the hope for the future."

"We can make it a place for demons and vampires to go into hiding. We can expand and create a working underground environment." Taric nodded his head with a smile. "Yes, I like this idea. The best part will be having you by my side." His eyes wandered over hers as a crooked smile crept over his face. "You know..." He began to slowly trace over her side as he lowered his head to hers. "Just

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because you can't move doesn't mean I can't make you feel good. Little creature, it's best you take your leave," he said, eyeballing the invisible fairy bear who didn't hesitate to take her leave.

"With the things happening to my family—"

"It's perfect to get your mind off of things. You

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can't go anywhere anyway and I have been dying to taste you." His fingers hooked around the hem of her pants as he stared at her.

"Taste?" She asked in a coquettish voice. She listened as he chuckled, his lips nipping her bottom lip.

"Who am I kidding? You already know I'm not going to just taste, but I am going to fvcking feast. Tell me you want it," he demanded in a low growl. He felt her chest rise as she let out a shuddering breath. "It's okay to want it. Let me take your mind off of things." His tongue traced over her bottom lip as his fingers rested on her pant hem. Waiting for her permission. "I need this too. I have to give my demon something before I take everything." His hot breath fanned her lips.

"I want it," she whispered out, his lips curling up as he lifted away from her.

"Good." He gripped her pants, yanking them down in one swift motion. The smell of her arousal was driving him crazy. He had to remind himself that this time it was all about pleasing her. His desire for her was consuming, aching in his bones and gnawing at his sanity. But he would hold back, knowing she needed time to heal. Instead, he would savor the taste of her flesh and revel in the sound of her screams as he brought her to heights of pleasure she had never known before.

He lowered her panties, licking his lips as he placed her legs around his shoulders. His eyes darkened as he looked at his exposed mate, setting off a primal need in him. "Lenore." He breathed out, his eyes fixated on its target. "There is no going back now. You belong to me. I'm going to show you my possessive nature." He growled as

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he dipped his head between her legs. "MINE!"



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