

Chapter 21 Elysium is Calling

Aba's forehead creased deeply as he struggled to orient himself. His body was sprawled on the cold, unforgiving ground instead of his comfortable bed. He attempted to move, only to feel the weight of his massive bear's form holding him down. It all came back to him in a rush - the shadow that had loomed over them, the blinding pain that had taken over his body and then darkness. He realized the shadow must have knocked him out. Opening his eyes, he saw his paw encased in a thick layer of ice, numbing and restricting his movements. Burning pain surged through him as he struggled against his frozen limbs, desperate to break free from whatever had caused this icy imprisonment. He tried to listen for the sound of the attacker, but there was nothing. How long had he been unconscious?

With a mighty effort, he pushed his trembling body to its paws and surveyed the grisly scene around him. Several of the vampires were dead. One looked like they had just taken their last breath. His eyes widened as he snapped his head around, looking for Bernard. Finally, his eyes landed on him, no longer transformed but curled

up in a shivering ball. With lightning speed, Aba shifted back into his human form and rushed to Bernard's side. He watched as his eyes slowly looked at him as his teeth chattered uncontrollably. Aba could tell from the kelpie's condition that he was in grave danger.

"This is it for me, bear. G-g-guess you won't have to be s-s-shattered by Elena choosing me." He gave Aba a crooked smile.

"I told you to get the hell out of here," Aba growled as he looked around at the frozen wood around them. It would be difficult to start a fire.

"L-l-listen, forget the lake and go to the waterfall. Behind the fall, there is a pool. I left a friend with Elena. He will bring her out through there."

"Shut up horse, you're going to be fine. We'll get you patched up." Aba lifted the man in his arms. His body was frozen, and Aba was surprised he could even speak. He sprinted away from the area. He had to warm up the kelpie and fast.

"I never knew you cared," Bernard chuckled out quietly.

"I don't but Elena does. Don't you dare die," Aba growled as he continued to race through the frozen brush. What had affected this entire area

like this?

"I saw it." Bernie's body went completely still, frozen in a rigid position as his muscles locked up with tension. The shivering stopped, replaced by a numbness that spread through every inch of his body like an icy embrace. "There was a shriek in the shadows. It smiled as it fell over us."

A shriek in the shadows? That made little sense. Was the shriek controlling the shadows, taking advantage of the situation? Or is this another trick the nycrops was using? If he wasn't a guardian, he would be in the same condition Bernard is in. As soon as he reached dry wood, he quickly created a fire, keeping Bernard in his arms so that he would stay warm. Within a moment, the fire roared, and Aba briskly rubbed the kelpie's arms, trying to warm him up.

"It's too late. Elysium is calling me home." The kelpie stared at the fire as he felt a warmth spread inside of him. One that the flames did not cause. "It's better like this. Make sure she knows she's amazing. Never forget to remind her how wonderful she is. She doubts herself, don't let her. Love her for me. Make her happy."

"Damnit Bernard, don't give up!"

He watched as a frozen smile rested on Bernard's

face, his eyes staring unblinkingly into oblivion. His body lay completely still, devoid of any signs of life, and Aba knew he had lost him.

"Damnit." Aba whispered as he slammed his fist at the ground. If the vampires hadn't shown up when they did, they would have seen the approaching shadows. Maybe he could have done something then.? What the hell was going on?

"Rest easy. I promise I will take good care of Elena." And though Aba wasn't sure, he felt like he heard the kelpie say 'you better' faintly, from another plane. He lifted Bernard's lifeless body, kicked out the fire, and headed towards the lake. The least he could do was send his body home.

Bernard had been a good friend to Elena. Yeah, he was closer to her than he would have liked, but he couldn't deny that he had been good to her. He was there for her. Unconditionally. Thinking of Elena's pain made Aba more infuriated with himself. He should have done more. He should have made that damn horse run away.

When he reached the lake, he lowered Bernard's frozen corpse into the dark waters, watching as it disappeared into the murky depths. He knew it would be retrieved in the depths of the lake. His heart clenched in pain for Elena. A surge of guilt

and helplessness washed over him, knowing there was nothing he could do to ease her pain or protect her from this devastating loss. He had failed to protect her once again, and the thought tore at his soul like a sharp knife.

The shadow shriek had got the jump on him because of the vampires. This was something he couldn't afford to happen again. Maybe if he had let his demon loose, he could have prevented it all. There were too many unknowns, and he couldn't erase the past. He looked away from the lake and in the direction where the waterfall was located. Letting out a quiet sigh, he walked away from the lake.

Nothing else mattered right now except getting to Elena. "Hold on El, I'm coming."

Elena opened her eyes, watching the fire dance. She had drifted off to sleep but wasn't sure for how long. She looked around and saw Uno skipping around the fire. Then suddenly he stopped, and his body seemed to grow tense. His wings fluttered slightly and then seemed to droop.

"Uno?" Elena watched as he snapped his head in her direction.

"Let's take a little walk." He watched as Elena turned her head to look back at the water.

"Is everything okay?" She swallowed, already knowing that Bernard had been gone for too long. She expected to see him when she opened her eyes, but he wasn't there. It made her anxious, but she hoped everything was alright. After all, she was the one who told Bernard to leave. She made him go give her sister a message.

"We shouldn't stay still for so long. There is another way out." He watched Elena's conflicted face. "We can't stay here anymore. This area is no longer protected by Bernard's magic." His voice was quiet as Elena blinked, trying to understand.

"Are you sure?"

"This is free territory. I don't know what's wrong, but I can feel his power fading."

"Maybe it's because of the barrier? Maybe he's stuck now too." Elena thought about it rationally, nodding her head. Of course, it had to be something like that.

Uno nodded, the weight of the situation becoming more and more apparent. "It's possible," he replied, his voice tinged with worry. "In either case, we need to leave." Elena rose to her feet as Uno

fluttered in front of her. "He's okay, right?" She pursed her lips together as she glanced back at the unmoving water.

Uno hesitated for a moment before he decided not to answer. "Follow me and stay close."

Inwardly, Elena was spiraling, gripped with the fear that she had lost her friend. She tried to get her mind off of it, but then it went to her family. They were prisoners and her grandfather had gone off the deep end. She had to take care of all of it herself so she didn't risk a war. She had another entrance to the underground vampire kingdom so that she could reach her sister and Aba.

Aba... her relationship with him was up in the air. They were mates, but he had refused her. He even blocked the bond from her, and she only felt it because she drained the magic from him by accident. When he left, he basically rejected them being together. She wasn't going to simply accept that. But she also couldn't force him to be with her. She was still blanketed in doubt. What if he just didn't want to be with her because she wasn't what he wanted? She wasn't the perfect fairy princess. Maybe he feels slighted that he ended up with her? She hated how she started doubting herself. She was just overwhelmed and in a dark mental place.

Alright Elena, that's enough! Let's focus on what we know and what we have to do. Right now, that's getting out of this tunnel. One thing at a time, brain! she told herself, mentally shaking off the disgusting cloud that was settling in her. Everything was going to be fine. Bernard was probably trapped too. It was going to be okay.

She walked through the twisted, dark tunnels until Uno came to a stop. What now? The creature gave her a small sheepish smile as he lowered himself to the ground.

"I forget which path to take."

Elena let out a small laugh of relief and stepped closer to view the two paths. "Well, let's just try one and see where it takes us?"

"I don't think we have a choice." Uno frowned as he looked between the two options. One led outside, but he wasn't certain where the other one would lead. In either case, sitting there led them nowhere.

"Come on Uno. Give your wings a rest." Elena reached down, picking the small creature up in her hands. She looked at the two paths and then settled on the one on the left. Hopefully it was the right choice.

"Up you go," Justice said as he lifted Derek up to sit beside Lucy.

Nita and Colton were helping the others while they were still waiting on all the effects of the devil's fruit to wear off. With them, helping was Willa.

"I'm so sorry," Willa kneeled next to Derek and Lucy. "I didn't realize it wasn't Alaric until it was too late."

"Where are we?" Lucy asked as she looked around. She was regaining control faster than the others. Most likely it was because of her primordial blood, even though she wasn't given active powers.

"It's a room located below the royal chambers. It's an oubliette. A magically imbued room with only one way out." She looked up at the ceiling at a small square with a sigh.

"Can it hold a guardian, though?" Colton glanced over at his father. Colton wasn't given fairy guardian powers, but somehow he came around faster as well. He was up and moving around the same time his dad was. He moved next to Ashton and Joel, who were still unable to move.

"You guys are lucky enough to just be walking

around. You are in no condition to use your powers. That is, if you can." Willa looked at her hands. "I can't use my magic. I think something else was added here."

"What happened to Alaric?" Lucy asked as Willa shook her head sadly.

"I don't know."

"I should have told Elena to go to Elysium. I didn't know what we were dealing with. She is going to handle this on her own. I messed up." Lucy closed her eyes as she felt Derek's comforting presence reach out to her. He still wasn't able to speak, but their bond was still connected. As soulmates, they could feel each other's emotions and know the other's thoughts. Derek was telling her it was going to be okay and to trust in the strength of their daughters.

"He planned to force Elena to get engaged to Luther. It was when I fought him on it that I realized it wasn't Alaric." Willa sighed, shaking her head. "He realized I figured him out and he trapped me down here. Alaric told me about Vladimir. He had wanted to create a superior vampire species but needed a primordial for it. Even a strong pure blood was no match against a primordial vampire. They found his old journal

ages after he was destroyed. It was a well-organized plan on how he would have breeding stock from the purest bloodlines, and he would marry these women off only in name. Meanwhile, he would be the one impregnating them. Holding them prisoner so they could never speak of what was happening." Her lips trembled as she shook her head. "This is what he plans to do to Elena and Lenore. The engagements are just a cover-up so no one will really know what is happening."

"How do we get him out of Alaric's body without destroying it?" Lucy asked, deep in thought.

"We need to find out who released his soul to take over Alaric's body. They must have a tool or are working with someone powerful." She sighed as she looked up at the ceiling. "We can't do anything about this anyway. We're stuck here."

"Eventually, my family will come looking for me. That old king is a fool. He is no match for the fury they will rain down upon him. He started playing an old game without knowing the rules have changed."

"The girls just have to stay away until then. If he gets a hold of them—" Willa closed her eyes. "I pray to the gods Elena doesn't return."

Lucy took a slow breath. Her daughters were smart and strong. They would be okay...they had to be okay. Please...let them be okay.



49

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