

# Hellbound Heart

## Chapter 261 Way Too Long

"Who is hiding?" The silver-haired man replied with an arch of his brow. "I just got here too, Alex."

Alexander crossed his arms in front of him and stood in a very relaxed posture. "And where have you been all these while? And I see that you're alone... where is Iryz?"

"I can't believe you're immediately jumping at it and interviewing me like this the very moment we met again." The man named Zeres sighed. Just like how she had reacted the very first time she met Alicia, Zeres' out of this world features made Elle unable to help but stare. She knew it might be rude of her doing so, but the visual impact he made was just amazing!

"Well, fine then. Here..." Alexander spread his arms wide at Zeres, causing the silver-haired man to blink at him. Other than his eyes, there was no other movement.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, stop playing hard to get, Zeres. Didn't you want a hug first and foremost?" Alexander smirked playfully, gesturing at Zeres to jump into his arms.

The ethereal-looking guy just gave Alexander a deadpan look before turning his attention to Elle, completely ignoring Alexander's mischievous goading. It's obvious he was quite used to the man's ways over the long years they have known each other.

"Hey... hey... what's with that attitude now, Zeres? You can stop acting tough in front of Elle. She's family... She'll understand. I know you missed me..." Alexander continued, but Zeres simply tuned out the other man's voice and acted as though he was deaf to Alexander's voice, as he continued looking silently at her again.

Just one look at them both in that moment had Elle immediately felt that both Zeres and Alexander must be really close friends. They exude the air of two men who have known each other for the longest time ever.

"Hello..." Zeres greeted Elle with a beautiful gentle smile. "I'm Zeres."

Elle smiled back before giving him a greeting nod. "Nice to meet you, I'm Izabelle."

"She's Sebastian's wife." Alexander butted in, uninvited. He sounded serious again.

Due to Elle's focused attention on the silver-haired man, she noticed the way his eyes stretched a little upon hearing that she was Sebastian's wife. It was as though that news was utterly shocking to Zeres. Which was something surprising to Elle because no matter how she looked at it, Zeres' reaction was not just the normal kind of surprise. It was like there was more in his reaction that carried the impression that he knew more serious things.

"Oh... I see..." Zeres said, his tone sounding light and natural before smiling again. That surprised look was completely gone now.,

"Uncle!!!" Alexis' voice pulled at everyone's attention. And then the boy executed a perfect landing with only the thump of his shoes hitting the ground. His eyes were bright as he looked at Zeres. "I didn't know you're coming too!"

The silver-haired man looked slightly stunned for a moment before he approached Alexis and fondly ruffled the boy's hair. "How did you grow so fast, huh, Alexis?" he asked. His eyes and smile turned even softer. "You were just a tiny little baby the last time I saw you!"

Alice and Azy on the other hand, made a soft and quiet landing behind Alexis in the next second. Both their grey eyes looked up at Zeres with surprise.

"Uncle..." Alice said and Zeres immediately dropped to his knee, spreading his arm wide towards her in silent invitation. The little girl dashed forward and jumped into his embrace without hesitation.

While Zeres was busy enjoying his reunion with the twins, Elle's attention was pulled to focus on Azy. The boy did not approach Zeres and just stood there, quietly watching the siblings welcome and got all excited over their Uncle Zeres.

Though she could not see even a tinge of expression on his adorable face, Elle could no longer bear seeing him just stand back and watch as though he was not a part of it.

"Hello, Azy. I'm back again." Elle waved her hand at him. The boy looked at her and his face brightened up.

"Azy! Come here." Alexis went to grab Azy's hand and led him to Zeres who now had his attention on the quiet boy. "You were so small when uncle was still visiting. But you still remember him, right?"

Azy stared at Zeres for a long while before he finally nodded, surprising Elle and Zeres as well.

There was a tinge of sadness and regret that momentarily flashed across Zeres' eyes before he lifted his hand and ruffled Azy's hair. "Have you been well, little guy?" he asked. His voice sounded incredibly tender.

When Azy nodded, Alexander spoke.

"We better get going. Everyone's surely waiting impatiently now." Alice immediately ran to him, grabbing her father's hand as they walked ahead of them hand in hand.

"Want to ride on my back?" Zeres asked Azy and Alexis. But the boys both shook their heads, causing Zeres to raise a brow.

"Azy and I will be sprinting ahead!" Alexis said and with just a tacit glance at each other, the two boys disappeared the next second.

"Those two think that they're no longer children." Alexander told Zeres as a wry smile curled one corner of his lips. He then breathed out a long, slightly unhappy sigh. "I didn't want them to mature too quickly... but it seems that I can't do anything about it."

"Well... you always knew your children are different from normal kids, even compared to us both when we were still children. Those two are born with immense power and that's definitely a huge influence on their development." Zeres replied calmly and rationally.

"Right. Makes me a little uneasy every time I think of it." Alexander's voice drastically changed into something almost sullen. "I wish there's a way to at least bind or lessen their power. At least only until they have grown up."

Zeres smiled at Alexander. "Don't worry too much, Alex. I'm sure everything will be alright. They have amazing fathers like you and Kiel after all."

Alexander whipped his head towards Zeres and was about to say something when he belatedly realized that Elle was right behind them, quietly following. Clearing his throat, Alexander turned his gaze ahead again. "Well... I can only hope that Zeke's returning very soon for Azy and Alicia's sake. He's been gone for way too long. That guy..."

## **Chapter 262 Personal**

"So, what's the reason for your unannounced visit?" Alex asked. The four of them, Alexander, Abigail, Alicia and Zeres, were seated around a bonfire outside the house. "Don't get me wrong, I'm thrilled that you're here to visit. But I'm quite sure you aren't just here for that. There should be more to this visit, am I right?"

Izabelle had been dragged off by the kids into the house a while ago as they had wanted to show her, their latest academic achievements. Once they left. The atmosphere had very quickly turned a little serious.

Alexander was staring intently at his friend. As though he was trying to decipher something in his face. But even so, he was not able to read his poker face.

"I found that Lilith is back here in the Black Forest. Is that right? I have some ... business with her." Zeres replied. It had been so many years since Zeres and Iryz just kind of disappeared. They just thought the two of them had decided to go travel the world together without leaving any word to the others, but the fact that they did not even return to visit or made their presence known was a bit unsettling to Alex and everyone.

"So, if Lilith's not here, you're not going to visit, are you? Just what have you been up to?" Alexander continued questioning. He did not even bother hiding what he was feeling from Zeres.

"I'm sorry if I made you guys worry. But please don't worry. Everything's alright on my end."

Zeres' response made the muscles on Alexander's face twitch a bit. But he did not continue to press on the matter anymore.

"How about Iryz? How is she?" Abigail spoke. "We haven't seen her in a long time. Why didn't you bring her along to visit as well?"

Iryz had become part of their inner circle ever since Zeres announced their engagement. The sweet girl had also been the kids' favorite auntie and that was why they had been so sad when she and Zeres just stopped coming to their home.

"She's busy."

The simple reply had Abigail's brows creasing a little. They had been thinking of looking for Zeres and Iryz. They had planned to at least find out where they were even if they could not go visit. But the people Alexander had sent to look for them came back unsuccessful every time. Alex and the two of them could not go because their hands were full, especially with Alicia and Azy needing them. Still, Alexander had sought the witches' help to look for them. But years passed and they were still nowhere to be found.

And here was Zeres today, suddenly showing up. Uninvited, but very much welcomed. He looked alright, at least on the outside. His hair was back to its usual length and there seemed to not be anything suspicious about his strength and power. Still, the three of them could not help but think there was something amiss about him right now. They just could not put their finger on it.

"You two are still together, right Zeres?" Alicia was the one who questioned him this time. There was no need to mention who she was talking about.

"She's still with me."

Again, his response made the three of them speechless.

"I can't feel Lilith's presence. She's not here anymore, isn't she?" Zeres continued talking, ignoring the probing gazes that Alex, Abi and Alicia were throwing him.

"Lilith left just this morning. She said there's something that she needs to deal with. Also, she did not say where she went or when she'll return." Alicia told him.

Zeres sighed and threw his head back as though to express his exasperation. Then he stood up in the next second without saying a thing.

"I'm leaving then. I'll come back again" those words are just blurted out.

"Wait a moment, Zeres." Alexander cut him off. His dark eyes now turning really serious. "What's with you? Don't even think you can fool us with that bad acting of yours."

Zeres rubbed the back of his neck. "I know, Alex. But I'm really fine. Whatever problem I have is not something you guys need to know, okay?"

They all lifted their brows at him. Zeres is having a problem?

"Like I said. My problem is something personal. And I'm gonna deal with it on my own, do you three understand?"

"Are you and Iryz about to split or something?" Alexander asked straightforwardly. "Is she leaving you? Wait... could it be that she's pregnant?"

Zeres' lips parted but then he closed it. He turned around and shook his head. "I'll come back to visit again soon." He said and with those last parting words, he was gone.

"Do you think he's really alright?" Abigail asked worriedly after looking at the empty spot that Zeres had recently occupied. "It's definitely just maybe a couple's fight, right?"

"Or maybe, Iryz might really be pregnant." Alex was rubbing his chin. "They've been living together for a long time already after all. Maybe those two really got married in secret."

"But I still find it questionable that he just one day upped and disappeared with her for years. And why can't he tell us more?" Alicia pondered out loud. "He's trying to avoid us at all costs."

"I'm sending someone to tail him. Though it might be almost impossible for them to follow him, it's better that we try." Alex said and the two ladies agreed, also feeling helpless with Zeres.

Meanwhile, Elle who had just returned to join the adults, saw how Zeres literally disappeared into smoke and she just stood there, utterly shocked, until Abigail saw her and called her over to join them.

"Oh Elle... how long have you been standing there? Come over here and have a seat , dear."

Elle sat down on her seat and Alicia started to tell her about what she just saw.

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A/N: Thank u for your patience! The chapter for yesterday will be released along with tomorrow's chapter. And I am very sorry for the delay of the mass release. Please rest assured it will be out this week. Thank you once again and love you guys! <3 <3

## **Chapter 263 A Couple Of Minutes**

A horrified gasp escaped Elle's mouth the moment she realized she was not dreaming. And that she was not in her room nor anywhere near Alicia's house. What... what was she doing here? How had she suddenly appeared right in the middle of... the forest?!

Panicking, she looked around and a little relief bloomed within her when she noticed the tiny glowing white flowers on the ground. She recognized these flowers as only belonging to one place specifically. This meant that she was still in the Black Forest!

But... how did she end up here?!

The only explanation that made sense was that she had sleepwalked all the way here. She remembered thinking about all the things she had heard from Alicia before she fell asleep. Alicia had given her information about the powers of the witches. She had explained to her about what she had witnessed and told her that the witches can teleport.

All the things Alicia had told her were mind-blowing. When she had gone to bed, her mind was filled with thoughts of the witches' magic. And about how unbelievably amazing it was that those kinds of magic really did exist.

Elle could not remember if she had any dream after she fell asleep. She just fell asleep and the next time she opened her eyes, she was already here. Alone in the middle of the woods and standing there in her pajamas. Should she call out for help? But what if that was a bad idea?

She calmed herself by reassuring herself that this place was safe. As long as she was inside the Black Forest, she would be safe. However, she did not know what kinds of wild animals were prowling around. Perhaps there are other more unspeakable things other than the animals that she should be wary of. Thus, she came to the conclusion that yelling might actually be a bad idea.

So, she turned around. There was no path behind her or anywhere else. But if she had sleepwalked, then she must have walked straight ahead without taking any turns. So she thought that if she just turned around 180-degrees and walked straight back the other way, then she should end up reaching Alicia's house.

Hastily, Elle turned around and walked off in the exact opposite direction that she was facing in. She wished she could just run, but the surroundings were dim. She was just glad that those little flowers were growing all around. Because without them, she would not even know how to begin navigating her way around in total darkness.

Her heartbeats were thundering loudly in her ears as she rested her hand against a tree. How far had she gone? She had been alternating walking and running for maybe twenty minutes or so by now.

After taking a few moments to catch her breath, Elle continued. She needed to get back to the house as soon as possible before any more trouble was stirred!

Something bright flashed like lightning in the distance, causing Elle to halt and hold her breath. There was no sound but a cool gust of wind blew over her. That felt unusual to Elle as she knew there should not be such a breeze in the forest that was so thick with trees. This kind of wind could only be formed in areas of land that are beside large bodies of water - specifically the seas or oceans. Thus, Elle knew that this was something unusual.

The only good thing was that she did not feel any danger from it. All she was feeling was... curiosity that kept bubbling.

With measured and quiet steps, Elle walked towards the source of that bright light.

She hid behind a large tree trunk that was before her and the moment she peeked out from the sides, her eyes slowly widened. There was a woman there! She had long silver hair and was dressed in flowing silken material. The hem of her white dress kissed the ground and the skirt fluttered elegantly along with the silvery lights floating around her. She looked like a deity of light came down to earth, or perhaps a wingless angel.

Her eyes were closed as she slashed her long sword in the air with such smooth and impossibly fast moves that her eyes even failed to follow it. It did not even make any sound but instead, produced a quiet gleam that had sliced all the falling leaves into pieces before her.

Elle's jaws dropped. Awe and amazement shone in her eyes as she continued watching that lady start to move - no, dance - with her sword like a blur. It only made Elle feel like she was watching some kind of an ethereal dance of silence.

She immediately knew this must be... Lilith. The witch queen she had heard so much about. She already knew there were only three witches with silver hair – Alicia, Zeres and the current witch queen, Lilith. Lilith was so much younger than she had even imagined –!

Her thoughts were cut off. A sword was pointed at her in an instant. Even much faster than a blink of an eye.

Lilith was already right before her, standing there as though she had been in that spot forever, looking a little surprised seeing her there.

"You are... Izabelle..." she said as if she could not believe this was indeed her.

Somehow, Elle could not help but wonder why everyone seemed to be having this kind of shocked expression the first time they saw her.

"Yes." Elle replied unblinkingly and Lilith's sword shattered into tiny white glitters before disappearing into nothing. That long and majestic looking sword that was utterly breathtaking had literally vanished before her eyes!

"I... I apologize." The witch queen said.

"Oh...oh! I... am the one who came here unannounced and disturbed you."

"May I know how long you have been here?" Lilith asked as she looked unhesitatingly into Elle's eyes.

"Maybe just a couple of minutes. I couldn't help but watch because your swordplay was absolutely amazing..." Elle trailed off at the sight of shock on her face. The witch queen tried to hide it almost in an instant but Elle already saw that look. Why... why did she look like she could not believe she had been there for about two minutes?

## **Chapter 264 Lost**

"Amazing!" Lilith suddenly burst out. Her eyes widening with awe as both her hands shot out and she clutched Elle's hands. "I didn't know you had such an amazing ability!"

Blinking in utter confusion, Elle replied. "Uhm... I think I should be the one telling you that, Queen Lilith."



"Oh dear, you should really know that you're the only one who managed to sneak up on me for around two minutes undetected!" she stressed on that last word like she still found it unbelievably amazing. Her excitement was obvious from the way her eyes were sparkling.

But while the witch queen was still busy being all amazed, Elle was just getting more and more confused.

"I've already heard about you from Lady Alicia, but she had never once mentioned that you actually have this kind of incredible ability! You truly had caught me off guard..." Lilith trailed off, seemingly finally realizing the genuine confusion in Elle's expression.

"I..." Elle awkwardly spoke to break the silence between them. "I don't think I have any... unusual ability. Well, I do know martial arts and am quite proficient at it. But that barely counts as an ability in this place... I mean against supernatural beings... like you."

Elle herself could hear the tinge of helplessness coloring her voice as she stated her last sentence. Well, it was a fact and there was nothing wrong with her admitting to it. She did not know why Lilith was saying all these, but she knew herself. And she knows she does not have any special abilities like what this queen was claiming that she does.

"Also, I... I wasn't trying to sneak up on you. I'm actually... err... lost." The last word came out from Elle's lips with a sheepish lopsided smile.

The awe was back in Queen Lilith's eyes again. It even twinkled a bit and she could almost see the words 'then that's what makes you even more amazing!' flashing across her face. Honestly, Elle was beyond surprised at this queen's attitude. She had thought the witch queen Lilith was... well, someone who was unreachable and insanely powerful. She actually was powerful. She had felt and seen it with her own two eyes and she knew that what she had witnessed was just the tip of the iceberg.

However, what surprised her was the fact that she had such a down-to-earth vibe when communicating. A down-to-earth angel inside and out! She just felt really light-hearted around her even though she had literally only just met her.

It was not the same feeling that she felt with Abi. It was like with Lilith, she could instantly feel that they could be the best of friends despite their obvious differences.

"You are lost..." Lilith repeated, her voice obviously in disbelief and one beautiful brow arched elegantly in question.

"Yes. And while I was trying to find my way back, I saw a really bright flash of light and decided to look for the source. This is how I ended up here. You are... so terrific. Nothing less than a real life beautiful warrior angel." She finally blurted out the praises she was meaning to shower her with. "Watching you made me feel like I'm watching some sort of a powerful magical dance."

"Thank you..." Lilith almost sounded a little shy accepting the compliment. It was as though she was not used to getting such compliments at all. "But that was actually just me, doing my normal training routine."

Elle's lips formed an 'o'. "It didn't look normal to me at all. You're really amazing, Lilith... oh, I mean, Queen Lilith."

"Oh, you can just call me Lilith." Lilith flashed her a sweet smile. "Do you want to take a seat or should I accompany you back to Lady Alicia's?"

"If you don't mind, I'd like to stay for a bit and watch you perform your magic. It's mesmerizing."

And with that, Elle watched Lilith continue her training. She was secretly thrilled that Queen Lilith was not opposed to having an audience as she was running through her training routine. She knew she should not have requested it, but Lilith's swordplay was too enthralling that she just had to watch it again.

When it was done, Lilith did not make her sword disappear this time. Instead, she handed it over to Elle, sword handle facing her, so she could touch it since she noticed her eyes staring at it so curiously and longingly.

Elle stared at the sword in her hand. It was as though her eyes were the sky and countless stars had filled it up. "It's so much lighter than I thought! And it's so lovely! Like it's made of light ice! Can I try swinging it?"

"Of course."

Thrilled, Elle moved back to what she perceived was a safe distance from Lilith and swung the sword. "Wow. It even feels awesome. I wonder if... this can kill vampires."

Lilith stared at her with eyes stretched wide and Elle fell silent as well after realizing exactly just what she had said. She could not believe she had blurted that out loud! She caught her lower lip between her teeth and worried about it.

"It can." Lilith responded in a quiet voice. "The truth is... most of the witches' weapons were made to kill vampires."

The information had Elle keeping her silence. She remembered that in the books she had read in the library, it had stated there how the vampires and witches were never recorded to ever have been in a good relationship. That the two races had been enemies since a long time back.

"I want to..." Elle started, looking down at the beautiful hilt of the sword in her hand. "... to be able to at least defend myself against enemies that are targeting me. It's frustrating... being so helpless and always needing others to rescue me."

The sword in Elle's hand shattered and disappeared into smoke right before her eyes. She was momentarily awed by the display before her gaze flew to the witch queen's face.

"I don't think it's a sword that you need, for you to do that." Lilith said in a serious tone, causing Elle to crease her brows a little.

"What... are you trying to say?"

## **- Chapter 265 Real**

### **Chapter 265 Real**

Lilith's gaze suddenly shifted behind Elle before she could answer Elle's question.

"Alicia." Lilith called out.

Turning to look behind her, Alicia was indeed standing right behind her. The beautiful woman was clad in a nightgown covered over with a thick and long grey colored robe.

"Queen Lilith," Alicia stared at Lilith before her gaze fell onto Elle, her eyes scanning her from head to toe. "Are you alright, Izabelle?"

Elle nodded. "I'm totally fine. Please don't worry about me at all, Alicia."

"I'm glad you're alright." The elegant lady looked relieved. "I realized that you weren't in your room and got worried when you did not appear after I waited some time for you to come back. When did you leave? None of us noticed you leaving the house."

"I was..." Elle was a bit embarrassed to answer Alicia but she knew she needed to explain. "I think I sleep-walked. I don't really know how I ended up all the way out here, but I believed I merely sleep-walked."

Alicia's serene expression changed for a moment. "I see..."

"She ended up coming across me on her way back and decided to watch me train." Lilith said to Alicia. The way the witch queen spoke and looked at Alicia was something that Elle could not ignore. It was so obvious how Lilith seemed to look up to Alicia. Respect and admiration were brimming in the witch queen's eyes, despite the fact that right now, Lilith was obviously far more powerful.

Seeing the way this witch queen behaved before Alicia, only made Elle realize how amazing and powerful Alicia was when she still had her full powers in her.

"Auntie â€" oh..." Alexis landed on the ground followed by Azy, pulling at everyone's attention, and most especially Elle. She was surprised to know that she had actually woken everyone in the house up and must have caused them so much worry for these kids to even be here, obviously searching for her.

"Princess Elle! Are you alright?" the boy asked, approaching her.

"I'm fine. Oh dear... why are you boys out here too? You both should be in bed." Elle said, feeling apologetic for all the fuss just because she was missing for a while. But Alexis grinned.

"Waking up in the middle of the night is not a problem at all to us, Princess. Right, Azy?" Alexis turned to Azy behind him and the boy nodded. "We are glad you're okay. Azy was worried because he said that â€""

"Alexis." Alicia called out and the boy immediately stopped mid-sentence and turned to face Alicia.

"Yes, auntie?"

"You and Azy should go back and let Abi and everyone know we've found Elle." Alicia reminded him and at the same time, effectively distracting him from continuing his sentence.

"Oh, right. Got it, Auntie." The boys then disappeared in blur, leaving the three ladies alone once again.

When Elle looked at Alicia, the lady smiled at her. "Please give me a moment to speak with Lilith, Elle."

Nodding, Elle smiled back and just stood there, watching as the two silver-haired beautiful women widened their distance to have their private talk. She did not bother to wonder what they were going to talk about anymore. Since she heard the first question Alicia asked Lilith as they walked away.

"I believe you already know that Zeres was looking for you." Alicia asked.

"Yes. But even I am not certain what he needed from me. I honestly find it strange that he's seeking me out as soon as he reappeared for the first time after such a long while keeping himself under the radar. Do you want me to try spying on him?"

"No. I don't think Zeres will show you anything even if you try. He'd hidden himself for years already so I don't think he'd be careless now and show you what he's hiding so easily. Just make sure to observe him carefully when he seeks you again. And do let me know once he returns."

"I understand."

"Also... about Izabelle." Alicia glanced towards Elle before she continued. "Refrain from saying anything about whatever peculiar thing that you had observed about her for now, Lilith." Her voice dipped even lower to ensure Elle would not overhear her words.

Lilith's brows creased, not hiding her curiosity from Alicia at all. "Why? I mean... I believe she needed to know. Izabelle is obviously so clueless... she should really know something more at least."

"I know where you're coming from, Lilith. But there's a reason why we are trying our best not to say anything to her as of yet." The slightly pinched look on Alicia's face told Lilith that there must be more complicated things involved for them to be behaving so cautiously like this.

The two ladies stared at each other until eventually, Lilith sighed and gave in. "Okay, I understand."

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Meanwhile, on top of a certain tall building.

Elijah's foot was dangling from the edge of the building. His other foot was bent while he was lying parallel to the edge of it. A black kitten could be vaguely seen, rolled into a furry ball and sleeping peacefully on his chest.

His gaze was staring unseeingly at the starry sky.

The image of him and that kitten on his chest was something that screams serenity and peace, compared to the buzzing and brightly lit city down below.

Until the kitten suddenly awoke, arched its back and hissed with its claws on display. It's lovely black fur standing.

"Shh... it's okay..." Elijah purred, pulling himself up and hiding the kitten back inside a deep pocket on his coat.

"I'm listening. Go on." He then said, his voice back to the usual deep and darkly melodious.

And that female voice echoed again. "So, it seems that the divorce is indeed real. However... I believe Sebastian is just trying to take our attention away from that girl."

"How can you say so?" Elijah stroked the kitten's warm fur under his coat as he asked.

"Isn't it obvious? He allowed her to stay in the country and even let her hide in the Black Forest for safety. He's obviously still trying to protect her!"

Elijah looked up again, staring at the moonlight. The soft breeze blowing and lifting his hair in slow, lazy drifts.

"But well, let's let him think he'd managed to fool us. The game would be more fun that way, isn't it?" The woman's voice was filled with malice as she chuckled evilly.

"Of course." Elijah replied. The corner of his lips tugged up into a mysterious smile.

## **Chapter 266 Better**

The next day, Elle was stuck with Abi and the kids.

Alicia was not with them for the entire day. According to Abi, she was with Lilith and the two of them were dealing with some important matters. Although Elle was dying to know what those two gorgeous ladies were busying themselves with, she knew better than to ask for more details from Abi.

Alexander was not around as well but Elle did not ask of his whereabouts anymore.

The day ended quite fast thanks to being with the kids. The many different requests and antics they had were enough to keep Abi and Elle busy and on their toes, that they had no free time to feel the miss from the absence of those others who were not there.

Once Alexis, Azy and Alice entered their bedrooms to settle down for the night, Abigail joined Elle in sitting beside the bonfire in the front yard.

The two of them talked about mundane things at first until Elle began to shift the topic into something more serious.

"I am thinking about maybe... learning how to at least protect myself." She finally said, looking at the crackling fire and "My skill is useless to the vampires... And I've been thinking hard about it. I realised that I should learn something else that would be useful to my safety. Perhaps something that won't take too long to hone."

She lifted her eyes, nervous to think of what Abigail's reaction would be like. But she was relieved when what she saw in her eyes was nothing but understanding. Abigail did not need to say it. Her eyes were telling her that she understood fully why she was saying all these things.

"I think the easiest is..." Elle continued, feeling braver now to just spill everything that she had in mind at the non-accusatory look on Abi's face. "... a gun. It should be the safest for me to use as a form of self defense against the vampire's speed. But... I'm not sure if guns can even harm the vampires."

"Guns can actually harm them." Abigail replied while nodding, causing Elle to widen her eyes at Abi.

"And if you put poison on the bullet, it can even kill them." A voice that belonged to Lilith echoed from behind Elle.

She turned and saw the two silver-haired ladies approaching them. Both beautiful and stunning. Elle could not help but be mesmerised as she took in the both of them standing side by side.

When Alicia and Lilith sat on the empty chairs around the bonfire, Lilith continued. "So you're choosing to train with guns, huh..."

"Yes." Elle replied. "I think it's the most practical for me." She then shrugged a shoulder, indicating that she would listen to any better advice if they were to be given.

"I admit guns should be far safer for you than swords or daggers when you're against vampires, Elle." Alicia added. "Lilith and I can help you with the poisons. And I believe that for the gun, Alexander should be able to provide a nice one for you."

Elle's eyes flew to Abi and when she smiled at her, Elle's lips parted in both shock and gladness. She never thought that these ladies... that all of them would actually support her so easily like this! They did not look at her askance nor question her about anything. They just took her words at face value. She had thought that there was a big possibility where all of them would discourage her from touching weapons. But... here they were... even helping her already! Lord... how lucky was she to meet these amazing ladies?!

Gushing with gratitude, Elle rose from her seat and hugged each of them, saying her thanks for their support from the bottom of her heart.

"I was actually worried. That you might object or even stop me." Elle later admitted to Abi while they were ascending up the stairs. A gentle chuckle sounded from the gentle lady walking beside her.

"I won't. I know you needed it in your situation. And I once experienced it... being helpless. It was awful." Abi told her. "But the most important reason is because we know that you truly needed it for your own sake. We never know what might happen so it's always better to be prepared and have at least a secret weapon hidden under your sleeve. Now go sleep and rest, Elle. You heard Lilith earlier. Your training starts tomorrow."

Elle's eyes glimmered with gratitude and she thanked Abi once again.

Outside, Alicia and Lilith were still sitting around the bonfire in silent camaraderie before chatting again.

"I didn't expect you to immediately support Izabelle's desire." Lilith said.

"She needs it. From here on... everything's uncertain. Things could go down the drain in the blink of an eye. Especially when Elijah is advancing with his agenda faster than ever, we can only prepare her as early as we could." Alicia replied, quietly sipping from her glass. "Izabelle is already caught up in a world that requires her to fight and might even force her to spill blood to survive and protect herself and her loved ones. Though these same things are happening in human society, Izabelle had never dealt with blood yet. She needs to learn as soon as possible..."

"What if Prince Sebastian gets angry about this?"

"It's fine. Izabelle can calm him down and I know he'd eventually give in once Elle coaxes him. And he'd definitely choose this alternative. Rather than letting Elle end up learning and using the ability she herself knows nothing about."

"Shouldn't it be easier and more helpful for her if we instead help her learn about herself and her abilities as early as now? You said she needs to be prepared."

Alicia sighed heavily, her shoulders drooping a little as she stared at her glass and then at the fire. "If only it's that easy, Lilith. Even I couldn't help but agree that it's better if Izabelle never learns about it."

## Chapter 267 Approval

Dressed in a black camouflage cargo pants paired with combat boots and a long sleeve white stretch, Elle lifted her hands and aimed at the target before her. Her blue orbs were intent and focused on the target ahead but her expression was relaxed. There was no sign of tenseness nor emotions on her face.

The gentle breeze blowing caused some strands of hair that had come loose from her braid to start swaying in a quiet dance.

**BANG!**

The loud sound that used to jolt her crazy at first no longer fazes her. Well, it had been quite a while and she couldn't even count how many times she had fired her gun until now.



A clap followed the loud gunshot.

"Good job." It was Caelian who spoke. The man was standing beside Abigail, watching Elle closely as she had been taking her aim and when she released her shot.

Releasing a long breath, Elle stared hard at her target. Her shot barely missed the bullseye. She felt a little disappointed as she was truly aiming to finally shoot that bullseye. But seeing how close it was this time, Elle felt her motivation rise even higher. 'A little bit more...' she told herself. She just needed to practice more and she'll be even better!

Three days have passed since she started her marksmanship training. It was Caelian who taught her the basics and everything else about guns since it seemed that the man was quite knowledgeable about guns. She had heard from Abi that Caelian had been serving as a marine for many years in another country and had even participated in human wars many years ago.

He was incredibly skillful and Elle could tell how good of a teacher that he was. Just within three days, she had learned a lot from him.

With a big smile, Elle turned at Caelian and Abigail. "It's amazing!" she exclaimed. The feeling of accomplishment welling up within her was really uplifting. Though she had always been athletic, Elle was not very sure about her aiming skill. She had lowered her expectations but to her relief, it seemed that she was much better in it than she had ever imagined herself to be. She truly believed and was convinced that one of the biggest reasons was because of her trainer.

"You're actually amazing, Elle." Abi grinned proudly at her, causing Elle's eyes to gleam even brighter.

Caelian nodded in approval. "I told you... you have what it takes to do it  
, Princess."

Before Elle could even form a response, another voice that did not belong to Abi or Caelian echoed from behind them.

"So this is what's occupying everyone for the past three days, huh?" Alexander arched a brow as he lazily leaned against the tree trunk. His arm had already snaked around Abi's waist but Elle did not even wonder how Abi was already right there with him. This couple who had already been together for so long were still so sweet on each other that it was nothing new to Elle and others around them, when they behaved like a couple that are newly married.

And based on Alexander's words, it seems like he did not know about this. So, it would only mean that the gun she was using would have come from Caelian and not from Alexander.

After Abi said something to him in a low voice, Alexander sighed and then he looked over at Caelian.

"So, how is she? I hope you taught her well enough, Caelian." Alexander commented.

"Princess Izabelle is good. I believe she's naturally a sharp shooter. She just needs more chances to train and take the time to familiarize herself enough with the gun."

Alexander glanced at Elle's target and he nodded with approval. But then he walked towards it, blocking the target with his body.

"I see you're indeed doing really well considering that it has only been a few days you've been training. I think it's about time you move on to the next step. Aim at me this time, Princess Izabelle." Alexander patted lightly on his chest, indicating for her to aim at his person.

Elle's eyes circled wide. She did not see that coming at all. Alexander looked serious and the way he was giving her that challenging look had her nerves stiffening. This man's presence had always been light and the kind that gives her the feeling of safety. Since the day she met him, he had never once intimidated her. Maybe because he has always been nice and gentle when dealing with her.

But today, Alexander was showing her something serious. And she could not help but swallow. She never dared to think that Alexander was not powerful. But the vibe he gives off just with him looking all serious like he was right now, was something she was not expecting. To think she would feel the chills running down her spine just by him acting all serious.

"I'm your target this time, Princess Elle. If you manage to even graze me, then you can consider yourself to have passed." He smiled and Elle somehow relaxed again. But what he said earlier was a bit... Was he trying to rile her up? If that was his aim, well, he has certainly succeeded. Because now, she felt like she really wanted to try and meet his challenge just to gain his approval.

Turning to Abi, Elle was again speechless to see her smiling. Even gesturing at her to do her best. Wow... was this real? Abi's actually cheering and encouraging her to shoot at her beloved husband?!

Now her confidence was starting to waver a little. She thought that their reactions could mean that they believe she could not do it yet.

"Now come at me, Princess. Don't hesitate. Because if you do, you won't even manage to barely graze me." Alexander continued urging her, his elegant smile even turning a little taunting. "Shoot me like you mean it."

## Chapter 268 A Bit Easy (1)

Elle's fingers tightening and clenching on her gun, Elle took a deep breath. She stared at the gun in her hand and recalled all the things that Caelian had drilled into her head over the past three days. One of the most important things Caelian had emphasized for her to keep in mind was to never underestimate the vampire's speed because some of them could even move faster than bullets. Mere human vision was not powerful enough to follow their swift movements.

Alexander was one of the Reign royals. A true vampire blue blood. If she could manage to shoot him - no, even to graze him a little - then it would mean that she would be good enough to the extent that she could definitely shoot Elijah as well, right?

"Don't worry, Elle." Abi said. "Even if you manage to shoot Alex, he'll be alright. So don't you worry, and don't be afraid. Just focus on shooting him. You can imagine him as your enemy if that helps to get you to focus." Abi even went to the extent of giving her some pointers and tips on how to properly aim at her husband. Elle was torn between wanting to burst out laughing or sweat dropping.

"Oh, how you love me, my dear wife." Alexander smirked teasingly at his wife. "Your love language did change a little over the years. But I'm loving the little changes anyways." And he then playfully sent her a sexy and playful wink.

"Behave Alex. Don't distract her." Abi replied, feigning a stern look.

"Yeah, don't distract my student with your cheesy lines, boss." Caelian butted in with a cheeky grin, knowing that this was a rare opportunity to dig into his boss while the missus was also in on it.

"If this is enough to distract her then... she's not going to ever land a shot –" Alexander replied before his sentence got cut off.

**BANG!**

After a moment of silence, everyone nodded in approval.

"Terrific!" Abi clapped and Caelian crossed his arms over his chest in a proud stance, still nodding sedately.

Elle's heartbeats were racing hard within her though outwardly, she held herself still and waited for Alexander to respond. Caelian had told her that one of the most effective ways for her to land a shot on a vampire was to catch her target off guard. He had constantly reminded her that having a gun would still be useless, no matter how high-tech it was, because of the massive difference in speed. But if she could use her top speed while the enemy was being distracted, she would definitely have the chance. And so she applied it all. While Alexander was distracted with Abi, she had caught onto that opportunity and raised her hand as fast as she could and immediately fired a shot. Not forgetting about Caelian's words, that vampires can even snatch the gun from her hands before she could even fire it if she did not shoot fast enough.

She did her very best. Believing in Abi's words that Alexander will be alright even if her shot hits him was enough to make her throw her fear and worries to the back of her mind. It was actually amazing how she had reacted because no matter what, this person was Alexander. She should not even be daring enough to point a gun at him. But she did it and even dared to shoot at him.

"Good, but not good enough." Alexander commented. "You didn't even touch my clothes."

What?! She still did not manage to hit him? Elle pressed her lips tight after hearing his words. It seems as though Alexander was not the type to mince his words when he becomes serious?

"Try it again, Princess Elle. You're not fast enough." Alexander immediately called out her weakness.

After Abi and Caelian gave her an encouraging nod, Elle raised her arms and aimed before shooting at Alexander again and again.

She did her best until she was out of bullets. But still, Alexander was untouched and unscratched. None of her bullets even grazed the corners of his clothes.

Speechless, Elle panted as she was out of breath and more than a little frustrated. It seems, it was really hard to harm a vampire even if she was armed with a gun!

"It's okay, Elle. You really are doing great actually. Alex is just on a whole other level." Abi said, trying to console her. But Elle still pursed her lips in disappointment at her own disheartening performance. "Geez. Don't be too hard on yourself. Come, let's have some rest for now. We can try again after this."

As Abi and Elle took their seats, Alexander approached them. "Well... I think Caelian is going a bit easy on you, Elle." Alexander arched a brow as he pursed his lips a little.

"Oh, come on, boss. You're not expecting me to treat the Princess like she's a commando, are you?" Caelian retorted.

"If she's willing to train harder, then why not? I believe that she's the one who wanted this. Isn't that right, Elle?" Alexander replied to Caelian then smoothly turning to look at Elle for her agreement.

Elle sheepishly nodded. She was the one who had wanted this and that was why she repeatedly asked Caelian to not go easy on her. She did not ask to go through this training only for him to treat her like a princess and give her preferential treatment. She wanted this to train very seriously and she wouldn't mind no matter how hard it was because to her, there was nothing harder than being helpless.

"I didn't go easy on her, Alex. I think that she needs just a little more time before she's able to jump to the highest level."

"But she might not have enough time, Caelian." Alexander's words had everyone falling silent. Elle noticed how even Abi looked a little surprised at what Alexander had said.

"We don't know if today might be her last chance to learn and train."

## Chapter 269 Opportunity (2)

Elle did not even have the chance to ponder about Alexander's latest statement because of Lilith and Alicia's arrival to the scene.

"I think that the princess is a little too pressured. Why don't we make her training a little bit more fun?" Lilith said, causing everyone to look at her questioningly. Everyone was piqued by her suggestion and wanted to know what fun training she was talking about.

"She had suggested a hunting game. But it would be with maybe a few of us involved as her target." Alicia was the one who answered. "Experience is always the best teacher as they say... so since she does not have the luxury to train normally due to lack of time, I agree with Lilith's suggestion. We should simulate her training to be, as best as possible, the closest to reality as it can get."

Somehow, Elle was starting to feel a little nervous after hearing the suggestion that Lilith and Alicia had suggested and agreed upon. She felt nervous because everyone's actions right now were telling her that things seemed to be getting really serious... and fast. They were obviously trying to rush her to learn as fast as possible. And she did not even know why... Was the situation with Elijah getting worse? Were they keeping something from her? Thinking about it, she decided to bite the bullet and just directly ask about it.

"Is there... a serious problem going on that I know nothing about?" Elle could no longer stop herself from asking. All these while, she had already had a feeling that there were certain things that she seemed not to be privy to. "Everyone seemed... suddenly in a rush..."

They looked at her, not saying anything. She waited but still no one spoke until Alexander cleared his throat and finally responded to her. "Don't worry. If you're worried about what's happening outside the Black Forest or with matters on Sebastian, everything's fine as of now. Elijah still has yet to make any moves actually. But that is the reason why we are trying to utilize any time of peace that you have right now. Something could happen any time now, and by then, you won't have the luxury to train anymore. Thus, what Lilith and Alicia said is really relevant."

What he said was understandable. If something did happen... there was no way she could still focus especially if Sebastian was being forced into a dangerous situation. Though she felt as though there seemed to be more to this, Elle decided to brush that feeling off and put it aside for now. She'll bring the issue again after this because right now, she knew she had to focus and grab this opportunity. If this truly was the fastest way for her to learn then... she needed to do it now.

"Lilith's suggestion is a hunting game, right?" Alexander asked.

"Yes." Lilith nodded then she looked at Elle before giving short and clear instructions. "You alone against a number of witches. Hunt them down and shoot at them with this gun."

The gun that Lilith handed to Elle was one that had a silencer equipped on it.

"The reason we chose the witches is because we know you are definitely scared to really shoot at anyone. We understand how you feel. But as long as you have that fear, you won't be able to move past it and get better." As Lilith explained, a witch appeared. It was a woman with dark hair and almost ashen skin.

Without any preamble, Lilith shot at her, shocking Elle. There had been no warning, no hints, not even a slightest indication that Lilith would react in such a way.

And what she saw next had her eyes widening in shock once again. The witch had exploded into bats as soon as the bullet hit her and then came together once again.

"The bullets you shoot are not capable of killing them. It won't even make them bleed a little." Lilith continued. "You'll only find out that you manage to shoot if they explode into bats. So, if one does explode, it means that you have successfully shot at them... If you pass this challenge, we'll move on to the real deal. Which is going to be some of us you will hunt next."

Elle secretly swallowed. Her heartbeat raced but not out of pure nervousness. She could feel the thrill mixed in there too.

"Will you be able to handle this, Princess Elle?" Alexander asked, looking straight into her eyes, wanting to determine how she was taking it. That challenging look was there

in his eyes again. And that only caused the determination to flare up even more within her.

Sweeping her gaze over everyone, Elle realized that she was surrounded by extremely powerful people - powerful not just in positions that they hold, but also in real and natural powers that they hold within themselves. Not just figuratively but physically as well. Everyone was either non-human and supernatural, while she... was just a human. But for the first time in her life, she felt like she was starting to feel something different. She felt like this was the beginning of something she knew nothing about yet.

Maybe with this... she could be one day closer to them. If not, at least she could be somewhat useful. And she would no longer feel like she did not belong in these powerful people's company. No, she would do her best to strengthen and grow herself to be deserving of all these amazing people's support and the chance is being placed before her right now. She would do this. There was no way she would let this opportunity slip through her fingers.

"I will do it!" Elle declared with so much fighting spirit, her eyes sparkling as though silvery flames were burning behind those blue irises.

"Good." Alexander said and nodded decisively as everyone smiled proudly at her. "Then let the game commence. We will be waiting here patiently for our turn to be hunted by you."

"I will do my best!" Elle exclaimed and with that, Caelian and Lilith began their coaching as Alexander, Abigail and Alicia gathered the witches who will be participating in this exercise and had discussed some secret matters with them.

## **Chapter 270 Chance (3)**

The moon was shining bright when they started the hunting game.

Lilith left Elle alone somewhere in the middle of the forest while the others scattered themselves around the area designated to them for the hunting game. They are allowed to move around the allocated zone until Elle comes along, then they should try their best in avoiding getting shot at.

Now left alone in the darkness, Elle took a long deep breath. She needed to do this! If she could not at least pass this, there would be no way she could even stand a chance against Elijah or any of his men!

She tried to calm her wildly beating heart, remembering all the things Caelian and Lilith had told her earlier. They had reminded her of a few things to avoid and also some other hints for keeping herself from giving her position away.

Immediately, Elle hid herself upon seeing an ideal place where she could hide. There was a large growth of bushes she had come across. However, Elle didn't choose to go there, remembering what Caelian had taught her that she must not choose the first potential spot she found because according to Caelian, if the hiding spot stood out for her, then it would also stand out to her pursuer.

'Look closer and choose the place that isn't expected.' Caelian's voice echoed in her head.

When Elle finally chose her hiding spot which was a not so large growth of bushes but enough to cover her, she crouched low and laid down low in the underbrush, careful to keep her head down.

Double checking on her current crouched over position on the ground, Elle slightly repositioned herself to be more comfortable and able to maintain an alert stance. And then she took calming quiet breaths again. She needed to lower her breathing as much as possible and avoid being excessively stressed from the expectations of this exercise.

Lilith had advised her to stay in hiding and remain quiet, which honestly made Elle think twice because this was supposed to be a hunting game. She needed to hunt her prey so she should be moving, right? But Lilith wanted her to just stay put and hide herself and wait for her prey to come to her instead.

Elle does get the point that this method was indeed less dangerous. But would this really be the best option for her to pass this test? She honestly doubted a little but nonetheless, she would listen to advice given to her. Lilith sounded so confident when she told her that with this, she could utilize her uncanny ability of not being easily detected.

The curiosity about the ability Lilith was talking about also made Elle decide to listen to all her advice. She wanted to know if she really had such a skill or whatever that might be called.

Time ticked by but no one appeared yet. Elle had somehow really calmed down. The quietness of the night did not bother her or scared her even a bit. Maybe because she was busy trying to identify every sound like she was looking for a phantom. And this was slowly making her feel the thrill and adrenaline of stepping into an uncharted territory like she had felt when she was exploring secret passages back home when she was younger. Just that, this was definitely an upgrade from her previously kiddy play and make-believe.



Just as she was thinking about that, a sound made her hold her breath. It was the faint sound of leaves being crushed under a person's feet.

Elle did not move. She slowed her breathing even more and breathed as shallow as she could. She focused her senses to her ears, trying to listen and identify from which direction the sound was coming from.

From the left. But then it suddenly stopped. Elle felt nervous at the thought that the witch must have sensed her and that was why they were now taking precaution.

She was tempted to move, to run away. She knew that was her innate instincts that were prompting her. But she forced herself to repeat the advice Caelian and Lilith had plied her with. Running away was a bad idea because she was going up against supernatural beings. She could never outrun a witch or a vampire! As a human, it was impossible!

So, she stayed still. Not moving. She could not tell how long time had passed before she caught sight of a dark silhouette appearing behind a tree trunk across her hiding spot.

She watched the witch look around first and then come out from her hiding spot behind the tree. This was a good sign that she had not picked up on Elle's presence yet.

Lilith had told her not to rush, but not to take too long to take action either once she had set her eyes on a target. She told her, the limit for her to wait for the perfect time from the appearance of her prey to her attack would be about two minutes.

Elle's fingers slowly wrapped around the gun as her fingers ready themselves over the trigger. She was itching to fire, but her body hesitated. Despite all her willful spirits a while ago, she found herself unable to pull the trigger.

Her fingers trembled slightly, causing her to berate herself inwardly. How come she was feeling this right now? Did she not manage to shoot at Alexander without trembling a few hours ago? What is going on with her now?

As she fought for calmness and courage to aim and pull the trigger, the witch moved closer to where she was hiding. She seemed completely oblivious that someone was watching her, and aiming at her.

Then she turned around, exposing her unprotected back to Elle's view, literally making herself completely vulnerable.

Elle swallowed. This was the right time. This was her chance! Might be her only chance! Her time limit was approaching and she needed to fire now!

