

Hellbound Heart

- Chapter 361 Best move

Kyle's smile remained, undeterred by her hostility. "Fool you? Never, my queen," he purred.

"Who are you?" Lilith's voice was now laced with frustration and incipient rage. Her fingers clenched hard around the hilt of her sword, turning her knuckles so white.

Kyle's smile widened. "Ah, you wound me, love," he replied.

"Shut it and tell me who you are," Lilith retorted, her words edged with a sharpness that cut through the tension like a blade. "Or I will slash your neck this instant."

She pressed the blade of her sword against his throat until a tiny rivulet of blood trickled down his skin. Still, Kyle's smile remained.

"Go on, then," he challenged softly. "My heart and soul are yours anyway, so why not take my life too?"

Lilith's eyes widened. Her icy exterior shattered for a heartbeat.

Suddenly, Kyle moved leaning forward, aiming to meet the gleaming edge of the blade with the tender flesh of his neck.

But Lilith's instincts kicked in, and she reacted with the swiftness of a striking serpent, retracting her weapon just in time before her blade pierced his throat.

Before the relief of her swift action could sink in, her anger and fear manifested in a different manner. Her free hand, clenched into a tight fist, rocketed towards Kyle's face, connecting with his chiseled jaw with an audible thud. His head snapped to the side, and for a split second, time seemed to stop.

Kyle's head turned back slowly, his cheek adorned with a crimson mark where Lilith's blow had landed. Kyle's tongue darted out, a slow and deliberate movement, as he tasted his own blood that had pooled at the corner of his lips. His once gentle and playful gaze transformed into something sinister.

"You little..." his words were suspended, an incomplete threat that was cut short by the sudden surge of movement. Lilith seized Kyle by the neck and forced him down to the ground.

Kyle's eyes, once a striking shade of grey, now burned with a malevolent crimson. He fought against her grip, his muscles straining as he attempted to break free. But an invisible force seemed to bind him, preventing any retaliation.

His attempts to resist were met with an unyielding power that emanated from Lilith.

"So it seems you can feel the pain that is inflicted onto your host," Lilith said.

The vampire's surprise only deepened, his eyes widening.

Lilith's smirk was both smug and calculated. "Let me ask you, whoever you are," she continued, her voice dripping with a knowing edge, "of all vampires out there, why did you choose Prince Kyle to be your host?"

When the vampire remained unresponsive, a triumphant smile curved Lilith's lips. "It seems he fooled you real big," she remarked, her voice laced with a touch of amusement. "As expected of him."

The vampire's features contorted.

Lilith's head shook slowly. "Did you know that the Prince Kyle I know never knew how to make such a face? At least, not in front of me? Of course, you don't."

The vampire bared his teeth.

"It seems you didn't even bother studying your host's character before taking over them," Lilith taunted, her tone dripping with condescension. "Now, I can't help but think that you are just such a lowly ghost or nameless something."

"Bitch..." the vampire hissed. He struggled against her grip, but it was futile.

Lilith's smile only grew wider. "Stop trying," she told him, "It's futile."

As her words settled in, Lilith continued. "Let me tell you a secret, little ghost," she drawled. "When Kyle and I were young and crazily and foolishly in love, this vampire prince bound himself to me through a powerful spell. In short, he gave me the power to completely subdue him, and unless I release him from my spell, his body will be fully under my control, literally."

The vampire's face contorted once again, though this time, it was due to shock.

"You chose him because you thought you could use him for his power," Lilith's expression turned serious. "But are you really sure he actually simply let you take over his body without a plan?"

"You bi –"

"Sleep, Kyle." Lilith commanded and just like that, the vampire's crimson eyes immediately dulled and shut closed. His consciousness slipped away and his body slumped limply into the ground.

Lilith stood there as she watched his form now peaceful and unguarded in sleep.

She clenched her fists, swallowing a lump in her throat. She had chosen to put him to sleep because she could no longer bear to look at him wearing those expressions, she knew the real Kyle would never make. She could no longer bear hearing those words she knew Kyle would never spout, at least not to her.

Slowly, she sank next to Kyle's unconscious body. Her hand reached out to touch his face when she suddenly retracted and quickly stood up once again.

As soon as she turned around, Lilith's heart skipped a beat at the sight of Ezekiel. She straightened her posture, masking the emotions that had swirled within her just moments before.

"I... I only put him to sleep," Lilith said, her voice steady, "But I can wake him up if you want me to."

"No, you did the best move, Lilith." His acknowledgement caught her off guard, and she couldn't help the surprise and pride to stir within her.

Ezekiel crouched next to his brother. When he touched Kyle's hand, there wasn't any dramatic flash or display, but a keen observer might notice the minute tremble in the leaves or the slight shift in the air's temperature. She could sense the silent energy exchange between the brothers and knew better than to interrupt. Her fingers twitched, betraying her impatience, but she waited, her gaze fixed intently on Ezekiel.

Until Ezekiel finally put down Kyle's hand.

"Do you have any idea who's the one that possessed him?" Lilith inquired.

Zeke nodded, still not taking his eyes off Kyle. "Yes," he replied with voice measured.

Ezekiel gently placed Kyle's unconscious body into a vast flat stone that was circular in shape. At first glance, this stone could be dismissed as nothing special. But it was actually an ancient prison that held a much deeper and darker history.

Elle and Abi who had arrived a while ago stood next to Lilith as they watched the two princes in silence.

Once Zeke rose and left Kyle's body in the altar, Lilith broke the silence. "Please tell me who is the spirit that took over Kyle's body."

The prolonged silence Ezekiel allowed to stretch only served to heighten the trio's curiosity and concern.

"It's a powerful witch, isn't it?" Lilith continued asking. "A silver-haired one... I believe."

Ezekiel tilted his head slightly, eyes lifting to the vast expanse of the night sky. For a brief moment, a shadow of emotion flitted across his usually impassive eyes.

"You're right." He finally confirmed.

Lilith visibly looked like her world crumbled for a moment upon hearing Zeke's confirmation.

Worriedly, Abi piped in. "What is... going to happen with Kyle?"

"The only way for the spirit that possessed him to leave his body is..." Lilith's voice hitched despite her effort to remain calm and collected.

Just as the words seemed to fail her, Zeke interjected. "The spirit will relinquish its hold in one of two ways – either the host's mind descends into irreversible madness or the host dies."

Elle and Abi's eyes widened in shock, while Lilith simply stood there, paralyzed.

Trying to grasp at any strand of hope, Abi stammered, "Can we not... perhaps perform an exorcism? Force the spirit to vacate his body?"

With a desolate shake of her head, Lilith spoke, "The entity inside him used an ancient forbidden spell. Any attempt at a forceful eviction would result in..." she paused, "If we try to force it, both Kyle and the spirit could die."

"That... can't be..." Abi shook her head in denial.

Clenching her fist, Lilith then walked forward and approached the altar. Her gaze fell to Kyle for an immeasurable amount of time before she lifted her hands.

Her lips opened and ancient, foreign words echoed. The atmosphere grew dense, thick with the tang of old magic. Each word Lilith pronounced resonated with an energy that was both haunting and mesmerizing.

The stone floor beneath Kyle started to hum with energy as ancient carvings etched into the floor began to come alive. And slowly, the intricate patterns started to pulsate, emitting a soft, ethereal glow that gradually intensified.

These beams of light intertwined and twisted, solidifying into chains.

The chains then looped around Kyle's wrists, ankles, and torso, holding him in place, imprisoning him.

As the final word left Lilith's lips, Lilith's shoulders slumped and a heavy stillness settled.

Abi's gaze turned to Zeke, searching for some hint of emotion, a crack in his always composed facade. But he just stood there, unfazed, like a statue carved from the hardest stone.

Ezekiel's lack of reaction would have made anyone think something negative but Abi felt the opposite. Because she knew that when Ezekiel appears stoic and emotionless, the man was actually always planning and thinking about a solution on his own. In fact, Abi already believed that the man already had a solution to save Kyle.

His calm demeanor always gave some odd sense of security, a belief that as long as he was there, everything would eventually be alright. However, this faith was double-edged. Because Abi knew that Zeke's methods were unconventional, often ruthless. The memory of past incidents where he had chosen brutal efficiency over compassion lingered in her mind, causing her to only hope that this time, Zeke found a softer solution.

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After Lilith volunteered to stay and watch over Kyle for the night, Abi left first to check on the kids.

Elle retreated next as she thought that Lilith and Ezekiel might need some privacy to talk about Kyle's situation.

However, just after a few minutes, Ezekiel was behind her.

"I'll take you back in the cavern." He said when she looked behind her and their eyes met.

Elle nodded and soon the two of them were walking through the forest in silence.

Just as when Elle opened her mouth to say something, Zeke spoke first. "How's Iryz?"

"She finally woke up this afternoon," Elle replied. "I think my healing is really working on her. I just hope and pray that it's not something temporary." Her voice faltered slightly on the last sentence.

"Don't underestimate yourself. Remember that you are just a beginner right now and already managed to accomplish such feat, Izabelle."

Elle's cheeks flushed, making her sapphire eyes glisten with surprise. "Yes," she responded, her smile radiant. "I promise to continue growing and learning so I can ensure her complete healing!"

His lips curved in a fleeting smile, casting a rare warmth over his usually stoic features. "That's the spirit," he commended.

Elle's eyes sparkled with joy, her radiant grin lighting up her face.

However, as they approached the entrance to the crystal cavern, a sudden thought made Elle pause.

She lifted her head and stared at Ezekiel's back, causing the man to halt as well and turned slightly to meet her eyes.

Elle felt a twinge of nervousness as their eyes locked. But a question—a burning need for answers—gnawed at Elle. Gathering her breath and steeling herself, she finally opened her mouth and spoke. "Prince Ezekiel," she started tentatively.

When he faced her, she looked down and stared at her hands. "I'm... I want to ask you now because I'm afraid I might not have another chance to do so... Could you... tell me something about my..." She placed a hand over her chest, feeling the irregular heartbeat within. "...my heart?"

Lifting her face once more, her expression grew slightly more intense. "Please answer me. I... I need to know the truth. Is it true that you... stole this heart that is meant for someone else and gave it to me so I could live?"

"Please answer me. I... I need to know the truth. Is it true that you... stole this heart that is meant for someone else and gave it to me so I could live?" Elle asked.

But before Zeke could respond to Elle's question, a figure materialized from the depths of the cavern: Zeres.

As soon as Zeres and Ezekiel's eyes locked, an electric tension seemed to fill the air. Elle, picking up on this charged dynamic, shot glances between the two.

Ezekiel's face betrayed no emotion, as usual, even in the face of Zeres' piercing gaze. But still, the cavern's natural stillness seemed to amplify the weight of two male's silent standoff.

After what felt like an eternity, the fierce glint in Zeres' eyes dimmed. He broke the gaze, retreating to lean against the cavern's cool, shadowed walls in silence.

Silently, Elle let out a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding.

As Elle's gaze settled on Ezekiel once more, the heavy silence was abruptly shattered. "The heart that pulses within you, Izabelle, is undoubtedly yours," Ezekiel proclaimed.

Elle's heartbeat echoed loudly in her ears, making her momentarily deaf to the world around. "Mine? How can you be certain it's mine?"

"Prophecy," Zeke replied simply. "A prophetess from long ago, long before you were even born, had told me that a red-haired girl with sapphire blue eyes will be the next owner of the last werewolf's heart."

For a few moments, Elle didn't know how to react. Until Zeres' words that day in the forest, echoed in her mind.

"Where did... you get the heart?" she asked in a low, hesitant voice.

"After Alyssa's death, I recovered that heart from a witch who dared to dig up her grave and steal the girl's heart. To ensure that no one would violate Alyssa's resting place again, I kept the heart in the castle. The witch who tried to steal the heart had already placed the heart in a jar infused with magic," he explained, as if he already knew that Elle would want to know the details of how it was possible for anyone to keep a heart that had been removed from a body. "Though I believe the heart would not rot even without the dark magic, I didn't do anything to it and simply left it inside the jar for a long time. However, it was later stolen from the castle while I was away. Countless years passed, and I stumbled upon it precisely when you were in dire need of a heart to survive. It was in Calliste's laboratory. The old witch had been meddling with the heart, attempting to possess the heart for herself, to become immortal. But her experiments were obviously in vain as the heart wouldn't simply sync with just anyone. However, just as I suspected, the heart didn't reject you."

Zeke's gaze softened; a hint of nostalgia momentarily danced in his eyes. "I remember the first time I saw you, a little girl with red hair and striking blue eyes. The prophetess' prediction immediately echoed in my mind when I saw you, but I cast it aside initially. After all, there were other children with similar features. But when mere weeks after our meeting you were in desperate need of a heart transplant, the pieces started to fall into place. Though I found potential donors for you, your body rejected each human heart. That's when it became clear: you were the girl from the prophecy. And as time revealed, I was right."

A silence settled for a while before Ezekiel continued with absolute finality in his tone. "So don't overthink about this anymore, Izabelle. This heart was always meant to be yours; there's no further reasoning or complicated explanations needed. Because if this heart wasn't meant for you, you wouldn't even be standing here today."

Elle bit the inside of her lip. A realization dawned on her... he was right. The issues concerning this heart shouldn't matter anymore. This heart was inside her, beating within her... it belonged to her now, and that was all there was to it.

Meeting his gaze, she nodded slowly, a hint of a smile on her lips. "Thank you for answering me," she expressed, her eyes shining with sincere appreciation. The assurance that Ezekiel hadn't wrongfully taken the heart from someone was more than enough for her. She had unwavering faith in him; even if he had offered only a brief explanation or none at all, her trust in him would remain steadfast.

Ezekiel's large hand, gently settled on her head in a comforting gesture, before he then shifted his focus to Zeres and walked towards him.

The two men stood face to face in silence. But then, Zeres was the first to give in and looked away.

"Iryz will be fine from now on, Zeres." Zeke broke the silence between them. "Izabelle may not be able to do it instantly but believe in her. Don't forget that she's someone who only find out about her abilities just days ago. I'm sure you know how extraordinary she is already."

"I know..." Zeres replied, looking down for a moment. When he looked up, there was a raw honesty in his eyes. "I'm well aware now," he murmured, his voice soft, "of how special she is."

Zeke lifted his hand and patted Zeres shoulder. Then without a word, Zeke turned around to leave when Zeres' voice echoed in the silence. "I'm sorry, Kiel."

Zeke paused, his back still to Zeres. But without uttering a word, Zeke simply raised his hand in silent acknowledgment of Zeres's apology, and then, like a shadow merging with the surrounding darkness, he vanished.

For a while, Zeres just stood there silently. There was now a subtle slump to his shoulders, a weight borne of deep emotions.

When he turned his gaze to Elle, his eyes revealed a rare vulnerability. "I'm sorry for everything, Princess Izabelle," he whispered, his voice carrying layers of raw remorse and apology.

Seeing the emotions in his eyes, an understanding and compassionate smile was Elle's respond. "I knew you are not a bad person, Zeres. Now, shall we go back to Iryz?"

Zeres simply nodded, his eyes reflecting gratitude and relief.

Chapter 364 Are you happy?

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Back in the prison altar, Lilith remained standing right before Kyle as he knelt there, unconscious and chained.

"Why...? Why did you let the likes of anyone to possess you like this?" she asked. "Putting yourself in such great danger like this?"

She looked up, clenching her fist tight.

"I have imagined every scenario of what would it be if we cross each other's path again after many years but this..." She then smiled bitterly, in disbelief. "This wasn't something I ever would have come up with..."

"So you've been imagining our reunion the past ten years, huh... Lilith..." Kyle's voice echoed, jolting her. Her widened eyes snapped towards him.

When their eyes met, Lilith almost fell catatonic. That look in those gleaming grey eyes as he looked at her in that moment looked so much like... Kyle's. The real Kyle's!

But Lilith quickly squared her shoulders and told herself this must be the witch trying to fool her again. But why was it that this felt so... no, that couldn't be!

She glared at him, not daring to drop her guard down. "It seems I need to be specific and command you to sleep for hours." She muttered when Kyle smiled.

His gentle eyes gazed at her in silence as he knelt there. Those grey eyes looked almost dreamy. They held a softness, a faraway look, as if he were beholding a long-lost dream come to life. As if he was gazing at a cherished memory, something he had yearned for and thought he'd never see again.

It made Lilith's heart race. She couldn't help it. But... those look in his eyes were just a little too... overwhelming and real.

Kyle, seemingly lost in the moment, murmured, "You've become even more beautiful, Lilith. Have you been well?"

Words eluded her.

Without thinking, she began to raise her hand, as though intent on making him sleep to escape further emotional turmoil.

"This is truly me, right now, Lilith." He said when he realized what she was about to do.

But she held firm. She watched him closely, searching for any sign of deceit. "Then prove it. Tell me something only the real Kyle knows."

Kyle slowly caught his lower lip between his teeth. His eyes locked onto hers with an intensity that was hard to place. For a moment, he looked as though he was battling with the weight of the words he wished to say, but then a small smile tugged at his lips. He looked away, threw his head back, and casted his gaze to the heavens above. The wind played with his raven-black hair, accentuating the shimmer in his eyes.

The sight of him kneeling, all the chains, the way his dark hair swayed by the soft breeze... those eyes of his that were gleaming tugged something deep within Lilith's heart.

"Lilith..." he uttered her name, while he was still looking up at the sky. "May I ask you just one question and, can I have a truthful answer?"

A brief hush enveloped them. In that stillness, Lilith's certainty grew: this truly was Kyle. Every beat of her heart seemed to echo that realization, louder and faster than she'd ever anticipated.

It was almost overwhelming. All these emotions suddenly crushing on her right now. She knew she hadn't forgotten about him all these times. She knew she still missed him despite her convictions. But she hadn't anticipated the overwhelming rush of feelings upon seeing him again.

"Yes," she whispered. Her voice wavered, struggling to form even that singular response.

His gaze found hers. And just like that, their past flashed in their minds like slideshow. Memories of their past flitted through their minds, clear and vivid as if projected on a screen. They recalled their first meeting at the Reigns castle, the frenzied escape from the vampire royal guard where he held onto her, that moment they first parted and thought it was goodbye... until they saw each other again during that battle. Every kiss, every embrace, that first and last dance, and that final goodbye resurfaced so vividly.

The strangest part was that, despite a decade having gone by, those memories felt as fresh as if they'd happened just yesterday. Lilith had thought that their relationship was a youthful impulsiveness. She'd thought that as time matured them, they'd gain insight and see past their former misconceptions and realize that it was youthful infatuation, a phase they'd simply outgrow. She had believed that with time, those intense feelings would fade, and maturity would reveal the naive blindness of their young love.

But here she was now. Feeling like nothing had changed. That ten years had not passed at all.

The silence grew and pressed upon them. It was only punctuated by the insistent sighs of the breeze, which seemed to have a particular interest in playfully tousling Lilith's moonlit silver locks and making her ethereal white dress billow and dance like the ghostly wisps.

"Are you happy?" The timbre of Kyle's voice, feather-light yet layered with depths of emotion, echoed. "I've been wondering... even though I heard you've been doing well. I just want to hear it from you myself, that you're happy."

A gust surged forth, a little stronger, almost as if the wind itself held a vested interest in her response, urging her to reveal her truth.

But Lilith couldn't respond. She opened her lips but no word came out. Her fingers curled into fists, nails biting into her palm.

As she wrestled with her emotions, and was about to force the words out of her lips, a shadow of pain passed over Kyle's features. His grey eyes, normally pools of tranquility, frosted over. "Lilith," he rasped, pain lacing every syllable, "Put me to sleep. Now!" Recognizing what was about to happen, Lilith swiftly chanted the incantation that immediately blanketed him in the serenity of slumber once again.

After a few breaths, Lilith approached closely and asked. Her eyes gleaming with so many emotions. "How about you, Kyle? Have you been happy?" she asked.

Chapter 365 Friendly smile

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Elle awoke with a start, a cold sweat painting her forehead. Her breath came in sharp, staccato bursts, each inhalation a futile attempt to dispel the terror of her nightmare.

Pushing the covers aside, she launched herself out of the bed, her heartbeat frantic. She hastened outside, and the blaze of the noon sun, stunned her. She had thought it was still late in the morning!

Soon, she found her feet rushing to Alicia's house.

As she approached, wafts of a just-concluded lunch filled the air.

She almost collided with the door, breathless. The door opened to reveal Alicia, her face morphing from surprise to concern. Behind her, Zeke and Azy were just settling down from their meal.

"Elle, what happened?" Concern etched lines into Alicia's gentle features as she welcomed her.

"I'm alright, Alicia, truly," Elle immediately assured, though her voice wavered, betraying the unease that thrummed beneath her attempts at composure. "I just need a moment with Prince Ezekiel. May I, please?"

"Of course," Alicia gestured towards the inside. "Come in, Elle."

But Elle hesitated, her feet rooted to the spot, the residual terror of her nightmare still grasping at her. "I'll just wait for him here, Alicia," she insisted.

Understanding quickly flashed across Alicia's features before she nodded at her and retreated to call Zeke.

As soon as Zeke appeared, and Elle, now a bundle of nerves, blurted out her urgent plea. "I need to see Sebastian!"

Zeke studied her calmly as he gently shut the door behind him. "What happened?"

"I'm... I'm sorry for the disturbance, Prince Ezekiel –"

"It's alright, Izabelle." He held her gaze. "Be calm and tell me what happened."

"N-nothing, but... I had a bad dream. And Sebastian is..." she paused, took a deep breathe before she continued. "He's all bloodied and I don't think he's fine at all. Sebastian needs me. I want to see him." Elle confessed, a hint of fear brimming in her eyes.

"I know it's a nightmare, but..." Elle's gaze on Zeke became pleading, "But I can feel it, Sebastian needs me."

"You know it's going to be dangerous for you, Izabelle."

"I know. But I want to go and please don't worry... I will be very careful. I won't make things hard for him. And besides... since the witch backing Elijah is now here, it shouldn't be that dangerous anymore, right?" Elle replied, frantically doing her best to convince Ezekiel to allow her to go.

As if summoned by the charged atmosphere, Gav materialized, his arrival cutting through the silence that followed Elle's plea. "Why don't you let me go with her, Zeke?" Gav said.

Elle was surprised when she turned to look at the man who just spoke. Because this Gav suddenly seemed different again. His darkness and oppressing demeanor that usually clung to him was absent making room for a disorienting calm that seemed as

alien as it was unexpected. It was as if the obsidian night that cloaked his soul had been pierced by the first rays of dawn. If his appearance changed, she would be very sure that this was another person! This one seemed to be the complete opposite of the darkly intense and dangerous Gav! What happened? Why was this man incredibly calm right now? Was another spirit took over his body or something?

"Alright," Zeke agreed, causing Elle to snap at Zeke, shocked. She didn't expect that. She thought Zeke wouldn't agree since he had been so adamant of even letting Gav leave the forest even when there was Alexander that was with him. So why? Was it because Gav was calmer now? Had the unsettling calm radiating from Gav dissolved Zeke's resistance?

Elle's eyes darted between the two males, confusion laced with disbelief. But then, relief immediately took over. Because right now, nothing else matter to Elle but to be able to go and see Sebastian! She needed to see him doing alright with her own two eyes because if she won't, she didn't know if she could bear just staying here anymore after what she saw in her nightmare.

"Shall we go, Young Lady? You're in haste, aren't you?" Gav's voice, bereft of its familiar ominous undertone, and now coated with such politeness, pulled Elle from the tumultuous sea of her thoughts.

Elle looked at Zeke again as if to make sure about something but Zeke's lips lifted in a faint smile, and he subtly nodded, granting her the confidence she sought.

Whispering her gratitude at Zeke, Elle took a deep breath and walked towards Gav.

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It was about twilight when Elle and Gav arrived in Queza. Under the amethyst sky, the city shimmered, a vivid blend of the ordinary and the extraordinary, painting pictures of life in its manifold expressions.

Gav remained calm, though there was a certain regal air about him that made people turn their heads to look. Yes, Elle had asked him to put on a mask, and she did as well, so they could easily blend into the crowd. But it seemed the mask wasn't helping. Perhaps it was because Gav was also very tall. Not to mention the serene calm that cloaked him was punctuated by an unspoken regality that didn't bow to the anonymity of the crowd.

Thinking it might be better for them to be invisible, Elle was about to ask Gav if he could make himself invisible, just like her, when someone bumped into him.

It was a thief.

Gav's response was seamless, an effortless maneuver that had the thief stumbling, the ground kissing his disgraced form. An undercover policeman in pursuit seized the moment, pinning the thief with handcuffs.

"Too bad for you, little rat," the young policeman chuckled before looking up at Gav and saying, "Thanks, man—"

But suddenly, the brown-haired guy with dark brown eyes and a wide, friendly smile trailed off and blinked at the sight of Gav.

Unexpectedly, Gav just stood there, staring at the undercover policeman who was still squatting on the ground.

The two men locked eyes when another woman approached them, calling out a name: "Levy!"

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A slender black-haired woman, joined the scene. "Levy! What are you do —"

Her words suddenly faltered, her sentence left hanging as her gaze landed on Levy's unusually pensive demeanor. Following the trajectory of Levy's transfixed gaze, her eyes settled on Gav's towering form. And in that moment, the woman seemed to immediately felt the unmistakable aura about Gav, that blend of mystique and dominance that seemed to weave an invisible net of gravity around him, pulling attention and commanding respect.

Despite the woman's confident entry a while ago, she obviously cowered a little as she forced herself to look at Levy again. "You know him?" her voice lowered in a very cautious manner as she asked. Her blue eyes then flitted cautiously between Levy and Gav.

Levy blinked, shook his head as if to clear his mind, then scratched the back of his neck - a telltale sign of his uncertainty. He offered a sheepish grin towards the woman, his voice dropping to a hushed whisper as if sharing a secret, "I feel like... I indeed know him. Not just know him actually." He tilted his head in a way as though he was truly trying to force himself to remember something. "But it's strange... I cannot remember."

The woman creased her brows before shifting his gaze to Gav and accidentally made eye contact with him, causing her to seemingly freeze for a moment. While stepping into the thief's back with one foot, Levy broke the silence, pulling Gav's attention back to him. "Uh... do you happen to remember me?" He smiled shyly. "I feel like I know you but... it's strange but I couldn't remember."

Just as when Elle thought Gav would ignore the man, Gav, to Elle's surprise, responded. His voice, a silken blend of authority and intrigue, "What is your name? You're... familiar."

"Really?!" the policeman exclaimed, suddenly looking all happy. "My name is Levy. Levy Caster!"

Gav mused over the name. "Levy." He muttered. Levy's eyes, wide and expectant, mirrored the energy of a huge puppy awaiting acknowledgment from a long-lost master.

"Your name indeed... sounds familiar." Gav nodded, and he too was obviously trying his best to remember something. But in the end, just like Levy, Gav's attempt seemed fruitless as well. Levy didn't look disappointed though and instead continued asking while he was pressing his feet harder onto the thief who now started to struggle beneath him. "How about you? What is your name? I think I will definitely remember."

"Gavriel." Gav immediately replied and for a moment there, Levy seemed to become very still. The dark-haired woman that was somehow still standing right there looked confused and utterly amazed at the same time. It was as if she was trying to decipher why Levy was so carefree before Gav!

"Your name rings a bell for me too..." Levy forced a shy chuckle as he rubbed the back of his neck. Obviously, Levy couldn't remember a think even after hearing the man's name.

"Caster... We have to go, Caster." The black-haired woman finally said, looking at Levy with meaningful gaze. "Oh, right. I'm sorry but we have to go... we're going to deal with this little rat here and then me and my sweet partner will have to – ouch!" Levy trailed off when the woman pinched him hard at the back. "Detective Laiza Sloan, you can't flirt with me like that in front of – ouch!" The woman grabbed the thief and dragged him away leaving Levy. So Levy quickly brought out a card and politely gave it to Gav. "Apologies, but duty calls, or else my sweet Laiza will have my head," he quipped, his laughter a melodic contrast to Laiza's stern demeanor.

"Who the fuck is your sweet girl, you, airhead?!" the woman named Laiza yelled. The corners of Levy's lips quirked up in an infectious, wholehearted chuckle. His laughter a melodious chime that cut through the thrumming energy of the crowd, "That's my girl, Laiza by the way." he told Gav with a twinkle in his eyes. Then drawing himself to full height, he offered a more formal tone. "I must go. Do contact me when you have time, I believe I should be able to remember something, if not everything, the next time we meet." With a grin that balanced mirth and courtesy, Levy took a step back without breaking eye contact. And when Gav acknowledged with a solemn nod, without another word, Levy turned on his heels, chasing after the female detective.

Gav stared at the card in his hand before lifting his head towards the leaving Levy. Just as Levy was about to be swallowed by the bustling crowd, he cast a final, spirited wave over his shoulder, before his silhouette gradually obscured by the throngs of people.

Elle sighed, unable to keep a smile from crossing her face now. She couldn't help but imagine the Levy guy as a golden retriever. Elle then shifted her curious gaze to Gav. Gav wasn't from this world so there's no way he knew that Levy guy! The possibility of him having prior connections with Levy was just improbable. And yet, Elle didn't know why but even she felt like the two were truly not complete strangers to each other. There was such a familiarity between them, as if their souls recognized each other despite their minds drawing a blank. Intrigued, Elle voiced her thoughts, her brow furrowing in curiosity. "Do you think you've crossed paths with him before?"

Gav looked at the paper again and a faint smile tugged at the corner of his lips. Something mysterious also glimmered in his eyes. "I don't know. I don't remember a thing about him but... I feel like I am really glad to see him here looking fine and happy." Carefully stowing the card away, Gav's gaze met Elle's. But soon, his attention was diverted upwards, to the skies that were gradually filling with brooding, dark clouds. His demeanor shifted, the lightness replaced with seriousness. "A storm is brewing. We should go. It's about time for us to reach our destination."

Elle cast a quick glance at the foreboding horizon and nodded in agreement. "You're right."

Midnight. Outside the Reigns castle...

Sebastian stood there silently. His demeanor remained calm, and his piercing grey eyes were unflinchingly fixed on the grand structure before him.

The rain was strong. The wind howled, rustling the leaves and causing the ancient trees to groan in response. This entire hill, upon which the Reigns castle majestically stood, seemed caught in the heart of the raging storm.

With barely a sound, Lucas appeared, landing swiftly and gracefully next to Sebastian. His arrival was heralded only by the subtle rustling of his coat, which fluttered like the wings of a nocturnal creature.

"It's about time, Your Highness," Lucas said, his voice cool and composed despite the chaos around them.

Sebastian gave a slight nod, his face partially hidden by the cascading rain. "Don't you think this storm is a bit too much?" he inquired.

"Ehm... I think so too, actually. Alexander seemed a bit overdoing it. The human soldiers trying to cross the borders are said to be literally pushed back by these fierce

gusts right now." A smirk played on Lucas's lips. "But don't worry, he's just probably indulging himself after refraining from using his power for so long."

Sebastian sighed let out a thoughtful sigh. "Well, he claims to be a civilized person now."

"Exactly. So he's not going to cause any unnecessary deaths, and that's the only thing that matters—"

Suddenly, a tree branch, propelled by the furious wind, hurtled towards Lucas, causing him to sidestep and dodge.

"Probably..." Lucas continued.

Sebastian's expression abruptly changed. His eyes, once pensive, now bore such incredible intensity. This change did not escape Lucas, who felt an immediate tug at his warrior instincts, causing him to immediately turn serious.

"As planned, I'm getting in first." Sebastian declared and with that, he took a confident stride towards the looming entrance of the castle. "Please be careful, Your Highness." Lucas told him. "Don't forget someone is waiting for your return in Black Forest."

At the mention of Black Forest, a hint of warmth touched Sebastian's eyes. The corner of his lip curled into a half-smile. "I know," he whispered. And then, like a wisp of shadow, he disappeared into the castle's ominous darkness,

Once Sebastian was gone, Lucas took a deep breath. He raised his hand, and almost instantly, from the shadows, figures emerged, their pallor skin contrasting starkly against the dark backdrop. The vampires stood in silent formation, their crimson eyes aglow, radiating an otherworldly energy and readiness.

When all lights in the castle were extinguished, indicating that all was set, Lucas' senses sharpened. He could hear the subtlest rustling, feel the pulse of every creature nearby. He raised his hand again, and with a swift movement, signaled the next phase of their strategy.

Responding with supernatural agility, the vampires surged forward. Their movements, a blur to the human eye, bore the elegance of predators and the discipline of elite warriors.

...

Sebastian's footsteps echoed through the sinister silence of the throne hall, a space once adorned with grandeur, now transformed into a scene of horror.

The scent of blood was potent and lifeless bodies scattered on the floor.

At the center, upon the majestic throne carved from obsidian and adorned with gemstones that symbolized the Reigns' lineage, sat Elijah. There was a woman in his lap. Her face bore a vacant expression as the last of her essence was drained by the prince. When Elijah pulled his face away from her neck, the crimson stream flowed freely, dripping onto the cold marble floor.

Elijah then discarded the woman's lifeless body. His eyes, that used to have the regal crimson glow that a Reign prince possess, now held a hellish hue of the darkest red. His skin was now pallid and cadaverous. His hands were claw-like, and his veins, now had the same color as his eyes, protruded prominently against his ash-colored and corpse-like skin.

The remnants of his princely demeanor and elegant appearance were now completely gone. At the entrance of the hall, Sebastian stood tall, his posture unyielding but his eyes blazed a fiery crimson, reflecting both his royal lineage and his fury. The sight before him was a perversion of everything the Reigns stood for!

This man before him could no longer be called a Reign. No, this creature was no longer even a vampire. He's now... a corrupted being. In short, a mindless monster. The signs of corruption were obvious: the eyes devoid of humanity, the corpse-like skin, the color of his protruding veins and the insatiable thirst for blood and death. Since... when? When had Elijah started this descent into darkness? When had Elijah even become corrupted?

Vampire corruption was something that was unheard of for centuries. Vampires were immune to sickness. However, within their seemingly invulnerable existence, there was one affliction they acknowledged as one and only true vampire's ailment: Corruption. The knowledge surrounding this ominous condition was scarce because there were only three vampires throughout the entirety of vampiric history that had developed or had been hit by this so called Corruption. Strikingly, all three were blue-blooded, and were direct heirs to the vampire throne. This led many to speculate that Corruption was only confined to the male Reigns.

It was also said that once this nefarious condition took hold, hope for reversion to their former selves was zero. The exact cause of this corruption also remains a mystery, with no definitive explanation provided in any records.

And one of the worst thing about this was that these corrupted heirs will not only lose their humanity. Their powers and abilities will also reach far beyond their pinnacle, automatically turning them into destructive creatures that were nothing but a massive danger to the world. In fact, it was said that two corrupted princes long time ago had lived for countless of years, wreaking havoc, and causing so much death and destruction because none could stand against them. Elijah's voice, tainted with an eerie fusion of cruel delight and hollow malevolence, resonated through the hall. "You're finally here, my dearest brother," he murmured, his words ringing like a mournful hymn signaling a prince's descent into darkness and the rise of a true monster.

The floor beneath Elle's feet suddenly shook, causing her to wobble. As she started to sway, a gasp escaped her lips, thinking she might crash onto the cold, hard ground.

But just in the nick of time, Gav reached out and grabbed her arm, pulling her back upright. "Thanks," she mumbled, her voice shaky from the surprise. He nodded, his eyes scanning the surroundings, trying to decipher the cause of the sudden tremor.

"E-earthquake?" Elle stammered, her eyes wide.

"I don't believe so," he replied calmly. His gaze darted towards the castle, and whatever he saw or noticed in its shadows darkened his expression. "Stay behind me, Izabelle," he cautioned. "Entering this castle might not be the best decision right now. It's not safe."

"But Sebastian is in there!" Elle protested.

"I know," Gav replied firmly. "But there's something wrong inside. It's more than just a fight."

As if on cue, another tremor shook the ground, softer this time but no less ominous. Elle's heart raced; images from her nightmare flashed before her eyes. She felt an urge to run into the castle, to find Sebastian.

Without thinking, she tried to move forward. But Gav stopped her. "Don't go," he urged. "Zeke asked me to keep you safe. So please, stay here."

"Seb might be in danger right now!"

Gav's eyes met Elle's, and whatever he saw in her expression made him sigh in surrender. "Fine. I'll go find him. But you stay here. Promise me you'll stay here."

Torn, Elle's hands balled into fists at her sides. She wanted nothing more than to plunge into the castle herself, to be at Sebastian's side. But fear gripped her. What if her presence made things worse? What if Elijah uses her as a pawn against Sebastian again?

She knew Gav was strong. He could even be stronger than she'd ever imagined. Because Zeke himself said, this man was going to be the King of darkness after all. She could definitely trust him!

When Elle finally gave him a small nod, a hint of relief softened Gav's stern expression. "Good. Stay here. I'll come back once I've assessed the situation inside."

And then, with a swiftness that left her startled, Gav transformed into a haze of smoke and vanished.

Another lightning struck followed by a tremor came as soon as Gav was gone, causing Elle to place her hand over her heart, feeling its rapid pace under her fingers. Taking several deep breaths, she tried to will her anxiety away. She needed clarity now, more than ever. Giving into panic wouldn't help anyone.

After grounding herself, Elle decided it was best to stay hidden. So she focused her energy and cloaked herself in invisibility. She couldn't risk getting caught. Not now. Not ever! But the storm continued raging, filling the sky with loud crashes of thunder and bright flashes of lightning. Elle, soaked and alone, could feel the ground shake beneath her every now and then. Nobody needed to tell her that even this storm right now was not natural; it felt like it was made on purpose, a noisy, flashy cover for something happening inside the Reigns castle.

As she stood there, she couldn't help but think about all these power that the Reigns possess. The power it would take to create a storm like this was beyond what Elle could grasp. It was scary but also a bit comforting. The Reigns were just incredible. But a chill ran down Elle's spine as she remembered that their enemy right now was a Reign too. Power like this, she realized, was actually as deadly as it was protective.

Another jolt from the ground, stronger this time, sent Elle tumbling to the wet ground. She was still for a moment, catching her breath, when an unsettling silence fell. The thunder and lightning had suddenly stopped; only the rain, steady and cold, kept pouring.

Elle's heart pounded in her chest, so loud she could hear it over the rain. Something wasn't right. She should be relieved that the ground wasn't shaking anymore, but the quiet was as scary as the noise had been. If not scarier! It felt like everything – the storm, the shaking, whatever happening inside the castle – had suddenly frozen.

A sick feeling curled in Elle's stomach. Gav was still inside, and every silent second that ticked by made her worry grow. Why wasn't he back yet? Elle stood. Every part of her hoping to hear a sound. But there was nothing. Just quiet. The longer the silence stretched, the more worried and scared she became. It felt like the quiet was wrapping around her, tighter and tighter, until she felt she had to move or she'd be trapped by it. Elle's foot moved, almost of its own accord. "I'm sorry, Gav," she whispered. "I know I promised, but you said you'd come back. Yet..."

Biting her lip, Elle steeled herself and rushed towards the massive doors. She bravely pushed against it until a creak echoed, the sound amplified by the unsettling silence that dominated the atmosphere. Inside, the silence felt even more extreme. It was thick and suffocating, filling every corner, every space, as though the castle itself held its breath in fearful anticipation of something. What's going on?

Elle's heart thudded loudly in her chest, each beat echoing the rising tension as she ventured deeper into the castle. She couldn't see anyone due to the darkness but a sharp, metallic smell hinted at something more sinister. It was the unmistakable scent of blood.

Pushing aside her fears, Elle pressed on. Until she sensed a strange energy that was oddly familiar. It reminded her of the time she'd been in that cave when Prince Ezekiel and Gav had appeared out of nowhere. This must be Gav's power, right?

Without hesitation, Elle followed it, hoping it might lead her to Gav.

With every step, this energy grew stronger, guiding her like an invisible thread. Just as she realized it was leading her to the grand throne hall, Elle's feet froze mid-step.

Gav was right there, standing quietly and seemingly immersed in a extreme concentration. His arms, stretched forward, were entwined with a massive circle of dark energy. It pulsed and swirled, a terrifying yet mesmerizing spectacle that seemed to breathe with a life of its own, imbibing the air with a forbidding and otherworldly majesty.

The dome-like energy, dark and potent, radiated an ominous illumination casting dim highlights upon Gav's features. He appeared untouched, a mysterious tranquility gracing his features. Before Elle could reach him, Gav's gaze met hers. His voice, steady yet tinged with an unspoken intensity, cut through the silence. "You promised me you're not going to move, young lady," he chided gently.

Elle's retort was immediate, a mix of relief and anxiety lending her voice a fervent edge. "You said you'd come back." Gav's smile, subtle and laced with a helpless amusement, broke through the seriousness of the moment. "I guess, you looked more patient than you actually are," he commented.

"Please... where is Seb? What is... going on?"

Gav's expression became a little grave. "Sebastian is inside. Still fighting with Elijah right now. And forgive me, but I cannot let you in. Too dangerous."

"Is he alright? He's doing fine, right?" "Well..." Gav's hesitation only amplified the erratic beats of Elle's anxious heart. "He's somehow holding on. That Elijah has gone mad it appears."

"Let's help him, Gav... please." Elle pleaded. Gav's answer was enough to shake her core. Sebastian was supposed to be stronger than Elijah! Even if Elijah was mad, Sebastian could still take him down. Alexander had told her that before, that Sebastian was way stronger than Elijah. So why? How was Seb just somehow holding on? Did Elijah use some underhanded tactic on him again?

"I can't. I need to focus on this barrier to keep the two of them inside. It would be catastrophic if they get out. They would cause massive chaos outside if that happens." Gav told her honestly. "And Sebastian asked me himself to stay out of the fight and just make sure the barrier will not be breached no matter what. I can only do as he says since controlling my magic in this world is not as easy as I've expected. In fact, it's incredibly hard. I'm certain that I will only end up causing more trouble for everyone if I join this fight."

"But... Seb..." "I know you're worried but I'm certain the last thing Sebastian would want right now is you suddenly entering the danger zone and endangering yourself."

A resonant crash cut through their dialogue, causing Elle's breath to catch. ...

Inside the barrier, the throne hall was reduced to a battleground. Elijah's chilling laughter, sardonic and haunting, rippled through the air. His eyes alit with the sinister glow of corruption, bore an unhinged semblance of power. Every movement was accentuated by a suffocating energy that pulsed and swirled around him, rendering the atmosphere thick with an indescribable menace.

Sebastian was visibly overpowered. His attire was now marred, bloodied and torn.

"Get up, Sebastian," Elijah taunted sardonically, his voice dripping with derision. Sebastian, though battered and weakened, attempted to rise from rubbles.

But before he could muster his stance, the corrupted vampire lunged forward with a savage glee. A force, dark and potent, accompanied his strike, and once more, Sebastian was crashed hard against the barrier.

As the haunting echo of the crash faded, a chilling silence reigned, broken only by Sebastian's ragged breathing and the sharp sound of his blood splattering onto the cold stone.

Pushing through the pain, Sebastian lifted his head. His eyes, ablaze with a fierce crimson glow, defiantly met Elijah's gaze. "How pathetic. Why do you keep standing when you know you're useless against me?" Elijah launched a swift kick, connecting with Sebastian's face. The force was so brutal it sent Sebastian sprawling across the hall, skidding painfully on the ground.

"This is boring! You're such a weakling, Sebastian!" Elijah's voice dripped with scorn. As he flexed his hand, his nails darkened and elongated, transforming into a very long and razor-sharp blades, a grotesque manifestation of his corrupted power.

Walking like zombie, Elijah approached Sebastian with a predatory gleam in his eyes. "What must be done to a weakling? They must be chopped to death. Your royal body did entertain me for a bit. But it's time to move on to the next fool who dares to stand

against a godly being like me! Hahaha! Perhaps... whoever is behind this formidable barrier will be next!"

Elijah, intoxicated by his own power and consumed by his newfound god-complex, was getting closer to Sebastian. The cold, metallic sheen of his dark elongated nails reflected the dim lighting of the throne hall.

Sebastian's world swirled into a mix of pain and darkness. And in the middle of all that, a familiar yet desperate voice cut through, a scream that stirred something primal within him. Elle?!! Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

His heavy lids barely lifted when the scene of horror unfurled before his eyes. Elle - fragile, brave, and defiant - stood between him and Elijah. With every ounce of strength he could muster, Sebastian croaked out a desperate, "N...no... Iza... stay back..." He tried to move, but his body was unresponsive and heavy like a chained stone. Elijah raised his dark, blade-like claws and lunged towards Elle. Time seemed to slow, and in a blink of an eye Sebastian saw a bright red splash of blood. Then Elle fell.

"No!!!" The scream that erupted from Sebastian's core was primal and gut-wrenching. Something dormant, something potent and primal stirred. A surge of energy then exploded from him, unrestrained and cataclysmic. Powerful, dark wings unfurled from his back, and tendrils of pure, demonic magic wrapped around him. It was as if the very essence of night had taken form.

Faster than a blink of an eye, Sebastian shot forward like a comet, colliding with Elijah. Their combined energies were so intense, they consumed the surroundings, plunging everything into complete and utter darkness.

Thank you so much @Dreamer_P for the supergift!!! <3

When the impossibly thick and ominous darkness began to dissipate, an eerie calm followed. Sebastian and Elijah stood there, with Sebastian's hand impaled through Elijah's chest

The entire world seemed to stop as Elijah's blood dripped from the heart that was now gripped to death in Sebastian's hand.

The rapid sequence of events left Elijah in a momentary daze, but as reality settled in, his face displayed an unexpected emotion: a smile. It wasn't one of mockery or madness, but one filled with relief and genuine gladness. His expression conveyed a

deep sense of yearning, as if he had been anticipating this moment for a long time and that he was just nothing but overwhelmed with relief that it had finally come to pass.

"Finally." Elijah's voice broke the haunting silence. "You've made me wait for too long but I guess, the wait was worth it... Sebastian."

Though Sebastian's eyes were still a storm of crimson and darkness, he retracted his hand, letting the lifeless, blackened heart in his grasp drop.

Elijah stepped back, staggering. The gaping hole right through his chest was so gruesome, and yet, the smile on his face remained. "I'm... leaving my babies to you... Princess Elle." He then continued before glancing at Elle.

And Elle, who was still on the ground with her glowing hand on herself, met his gaze with utter shock. It was obvious to her now that Elijah had indeed purposely missed her fatal spot when he attacked her. Elijah had intentionally spared her life! That was why he knew she wasn't dead even before looking at her! A while ago, outside the barrier, Elle and Gav heard Elijah's voice. What she heard shook her entire being, and before she realized it, she jostled Gav's arms away, momentarily weakening the barrier, and hurled herself into the fray.

In that moment, every thought evaporated from Elle's mind, save one: Sebastian. The mere idea of Elijah taking him away from her was unthinkable. She'd face death before allowing it!

And when she was inside the barrier, what welcomed her was the exact same scene she saw in her nightmare. Elijah was approaching Sebastian with those sharp, blade-like, and elongated nails, while Sebastian was on the ground, bloodied and gruesomely wounded. And so, just like that, Elle's body moved and without thinking, she jumped between them like a suicidal fool. When he slashed her, she thought she was a goner as she herself saw her own blood splatter in the air as she fell. Still, perhaps due to survival instinct, the very first thing Elle did upon landing on the ground was press on her wound. Her hands immediately glowed to heal herself as she lifted her eyes and looked at Sebastian. But what she saw next was darkness and a powerful energy that nearly sent her away flying had she not coincidentally fallen into the ground.

Everything happened too fast for Elle to really have the time to even process anything. But now she realized that she was not a goner. The glow of her hand already died down and that was an indication that her wound wasn't lethal or even major. Because if it was, the healing should still be going on right now! "I know you're going to take good care of them." Elijah's voice pulled her out of her thoughts but all she could do was look at him and listen to whatever he was saying. "Ah, they have my cute caretaker..." Elijah suddenly mused, a gentle smile curved at the corner of his lips. "But still... do check on them for me, okay? And go tell them not to wait for me anymore... because I'm never... coming back to see them." Elijah cough blood as he staggered back once more. His gaze, filled with a complex dance of emotions, returned to Sebastian.

"Now I can finally rest." A final cough, deep and wet with blood, racked his frame. His weakening gaze faltered but he gave Sebastian another smile. "Just know that I would never ask for a better end than this. Bye... brother." With a final sigh, his knees buckled, and he crumbled to the floor.

Sebastian fell to one knee. His wings disappearing as his eyes were now slowly returning to their usual color. But Sebastian still looked disoriented. "Iz... za..." he murmured mindlessly when Elle rushed to him and wrapped her arm around him. "Seb!" She cried, gripping him tight. When she felt his entire body freeze, she pulled away and looked at his bloodied face. Her trembling fingers touched his face. "Sebastian... it's me, can you see me?" "Iza..."

"Yes, Seb. I'm fine..." "Iza..." he reached out and held her face. His fingers also started to tremble. "You're..."

"Mn. I'm fine, Seb. My wound wasn't deep, so I quickly healed it." She explained, trying her best to reassure him that she was alright. Because she could still see the horror in his eyes. He lunged at her, hugging her as he cried. The fear that coursed through his entire being that moment was so intense that Elle could literally feel it in her bones. She knew just how much she'd scared him because of her dangerous action. "I'm sorry..." Elle whispered to him as she embraced him back. "I was so scared he'd take you away from me so I... I did that."

"Iza..." He said nothing but her name until Elle felt his body sag against her. She was momentarily scared to death until she realized he passed out on her. Remembering just how badly injured Sebastian was, Elle laid him down on the ground. She could see some of his wounds already healing but the blackened and gaping wound across the front of his torso looked horrific and it didn't seem to be naturally healing like the other wounds on him. Extending her hands over him, she concentrated herself and her magic began to glow. While Elle was busy and focused on trying to heal Sebastian, the barrier dissolved around her. Gav then quietly approached. But he was not alone. Zeke was next to him. Zeke's gaze fell to Sebastian and Elle first before his eyes shifted to Elijah's dead body. He walked towards the body and slowly, he dropped into one knee. Zeke stared at Elijah's face for a while before his hand reached out and gently closed Elijah's still-opened eyes.

When Sebastian awoke, he found himself in the familiar confines of his room within Reign's Castle. As he stirred, his initial impulse to leap out of bed was halted by the sight of Elle beside him. She occupied a chair, her hand tenderly clasped around his.

Slowly, he extended his hand, fingertips grazing her delicate features. And when he detected the gentle rhythm of her breathing, Sebastian felt an overwhelming surge of relief that literally sent shivers down his spine.

Running his quivering hands over his face, he drew in a few deep breaths before gingerly slipping out of bed. Just as he began to lift her to tuck her into the bed, Elle's eyes fluttered open. "Seb...?" she blinked in surprise. "Wait... why are you lifting me? Put me down; you're—"

Sebastian settled back onto the bed, cradling her in his arms and hugging her tightly. "I'm fine now. You healed me, didn't you?" "Yes, but..."

"I'm completely healed now, Iza," he assured her as their eyes locked. "Thank you."

Elle nibbled the inside of her lip before finally breaking into a relieved smile. "Thank goodness." She gently reached out and touched his face. "But please, do tell me if you're feeling any... pain or discomfort, okay? Some of your wounds weren't normal after all."

Elle nibbled the inside of her lip before finally breaking into a relieved smile. "Thank goodness." She gently reached out and touched his face. "But please, do tell me if you're feeling any... pain or discomfort, okay? Some of your wounds weren't normal after all."

Sebastian nodded, his lips finding her forehead in a tender kiss. Then, unexpectedly, he pulled her into a tight hug, muttering a curse under his breath. "Damn... I thought I..." He drew another deep, shaky breath and buried his face against the curve of her shoulder.

"About Elijah..." Elle began hesitantly. "I believe he intentionally missed my vitals."

Silence settled between them for a long while before Sebastian emitted a soft, almost inaudible "Mn" sound of acknowledgment.

Elle held him close, and for another immeasurable stretch of time, they remained locked in a wordless embrace until eventually, Sebastian gently pulled away.

His gaze was calm now as he searched and survey her. "Are you... really okay?" Elle nodded. "I am. I've healed myself as well, so now I'm perfectly fine."

Sebastian's gaze lingered on her neck, and then suddenly, he moved in to kiss her skin. At first, it seemed like a simple kiss, but he surprised her by lightly grazing her skin with his tongue, sending shivers down her spine. And when she finally realized something hard beneath her, she grabbed his face and gently pushed him away, making him meet her gaze.

Her face flushed. "Your... your brother was here last night." She did her best to diffuse the rising heat, knowing that, despite everything settling down, this wasn't the appropriate moment for such intimacy. "I think he should still be here. Everyone was busy—"

Sebastian caught his lower lip between his teeth, his gaze shifting towards the window. "Right..." He sighed, and his expression shifted. "And it's today, isn't it? The day Zeke and Alicia leave."

Elle nodded quietly, already sensing the change in Sebastian's emotions.

"Let's go find them. They might still be here," Elle said as she climbed off the bed and took Sebastian's hand.

Sebastian followed her lead, and together they stepped out of the room. To their relief, they found Zeke, Alexander, Lucas, the prophetess, the king, and some other important figures of Viscarria still in the castle. Elle and Sebastian promptly joined the group, which was deep in discussion about the situation.

Alexander and Zeke had indeed dealt with the humans already. The soldiers' memories had been erased, and they were relocated to a different place where human conflicts were currently occurring. The memories of the human leaders were also wiped, along with all the videos uploaded on the internet. However, the prophetess expressed his concern. "Is this really enough? What about the millions, if not billions, of people who have already seen those videos on the internet?" "Many of those people never believed those videos in the first place," Alexander explained. "You know how skeptical humans can be when it comes to the supernatural. The rest will likely dismiss them as mere hoaxes. Though, of course, humans are naturally curious creatures, so some will continue to investigate. It's inevitable. And realistically, we can't expect to keep our existence a secret forever."

The prophetess and the officials exchanged shocked and uneasy glances upon hearing Alexander's words. "Alex is right." Zeke spoke. "Times are changing, and human modernization will only make it increasingly challenging for vampires to conceal themselves." The prophetess soke again, her voice filled with concern. "Your Highness, please tell us that this is you advising us to start preparing for the worst—"

Zeke's gaze locked onto the prophetess', and he interrupted her with a stern expression. "Whatever you have in mind will only make everything worse." "But Your Highness—" Abruptly, Alex interrupted the prophetess. "Many of you turned your backs on Sebastian just days ago for the most trivial reasons, simply because you learned that Zeke and Sebastian aren't pure vampire royals?" Alex's sly smirk swept across the now frozen officials, including the prophetess.

"Honestly," Alexander laughed, "you all are becoming quite absurd. You've known I'm not a full-blood vampire for ages, so why is this suddenly an issue? You should be grateful that Zeke and Sebastian also possess demon blood, which only makes them far more powerful than ordinary vampire royals." He shook his head and turned to Zeke. "I believe many vampires are growing weary of their long lives. Perhaps it's time for us to let them pursue their desires, in exchange for allowing them to fend for themselves," he said with a knowing smile. "Please don't joke about something like that, Alexan—" the

king began. "What makes you think I'm joking?" Alex cut him off, his gaze turning piercingly sharp. "You all are truly disappointing. Do you believe that if you turn your backs on Zeke and Sebastian, I'll still be willing to fight for vampires like you? Vampires whose loyalty can be so easily swayed can go die for all I care."

Chapter 372 Don't jinx it

Chapter 372 Don't jinx it

"I thought you all knew this, but I suppose I must spell it out for you. Without this prince right here," Alexander pointed at Zeke, "without this prince you dared to call a 'halfling,' the vampire race would have neared extinction. You all would be hiding and living like notorious criminals, hunted or used, and this country would have been erased from the map. You need to grasp that what I support isn't this country or vampires; I support Zeke's ideals because I agree and believe in them. That's all there is to it. So don't delude yourselves into thinking I'll come rushing to save you when things go bad. Honestly, it's absurd how none of you seem to realize that there's no one here who cares as deeply about vampires and this country as Zeke. Are you all blind or simply foolish? Now, if you still don't understand what I'm saying, then I suppose..."

The eldest official suddenly lowered his head, his voice tinged with remorse. "Please, accept our sincere apologies. Your words ring true. We have indeed been excessively self-absorbed, losing sight of what truly matters."

"Forgive us, Your Highness. We pledge not to repeat our mistakes," another official added earnestly, and eventually, followed by everyone else.

Zeke's response was measured and composed, his hand rising in a casual but resolute gesture. "That's enough." He dismissed them with a calm finality. "I will address everyone once more before I leave, and I expect every one of you to be present."

The prophetess and the king exchanged glances, they looked like they still have concerns to say but they nodded respectfully and also left the room. After everyone had departed, Alexander let out a heavy sigh like a tired old man. "Ah, why did you dismiss them so easily like that? I was thoroughly enjoying scolding those idiots." "Your scoldings should be enough for now, Alex."

Slumping back in his seat, Alexander continued the conversation. "On a serious note, Zeke, what are your thoughts on this matter? Do you believe this peace this time will last long?" Zeke's response was blunt and direct. "No."

Elle's heart rate quickened, prompting Sebastian to offer her a reassuring glance. "One way or another, humans will eventually uncover the truth, and it won't take as long as we might hope." Zeke continued. Sebastian's eyes locked with his brother's as he asked

the pressing question on their minds. "What is your plan for handling this, brother?" "For now," Zeke responded, holding Sebastian's gaze, "we will continue with our current efforts and do everything within our power to maintain the peace for as long as possible." "Well, that's always been the most sensible plan in this situation, I suppose," Alex concurred with a nod. "I'm honestly more concerned about the children right now." Zeke chimed in, his tone contemplative, "Indeed, I can easily picture Alexis leading his own vampire army in a great revolution." Alex let out a groan and brought his hand to his face. "Don't jinx it, Zeke. And don't forget how your son possesses enough power to be the world's greatest threat even right now. And if these two decide to have children as well..." He glanced at Elle and Sebastian, shaking his head. "I shudder to think of the future of this world." Though despite his words, he wore a playful smile.

Elle interjected softly, "Alexis and Azy are such good and kind boys. They have genuinely kind hearts and are among the nicest and most responsible children I've ever encountered. I'm certain they'll be advocates for peace, no matter how formidable they become." "They are," Zeke acknowledged with a relaxed expression, his gaze drifting upward toward the ceiling. "But when war rears its head, there are circumstances that can force anyone to pick their weapons and fight." "And should they decide to fight for a cause they believe in," Alex added, "no one will be able to stop them." Zeke shifted his attention back to Elle, offering an ever so slight but gentle smile. "But do not worry. While the future remains uncertain, everything will eventually fall into place. You'll all be here for them, after all." Alex couldn't resist a smirk. "And I'm quite certain that you and Alicia will be back here by then, won't you?" Zeke nodded, and the expressions on Elle and Sebastian's faces brightened. In that moment, Lucas entered the room. "Everything is in order, Your Highness," he addressed Zeke. "Shall we proceed with announcing the prince's passing to the entire country?" The room's atmosphere immediately grew heavier, and Zeke nodded. "Yes, the entire kingdom will mourn his death." "Understood, Your Highness." Lucas then left, leaving the group now shrouded in silence.

Sebastian remained seated, his gaze fixed on the floor, lost in thought. Elle was tenderly squeezing his hand, offering silent support. Sebastian eventually broke the silence, his voice low and restrained as he spoke, "Elijah told me... that he had been waiting for the moment when I would kill him for a long time. Do you know more about this matter?"

Zeke fell into a contemplative silence, as if carefully choosing his words. "Elijah is the child of a maid who used to take care of the king, our so-called father, while he was alive in prison," he began. "The woman disappeared, likely right after she found out she was pregnant. When I first encountered Elijah, he was already fourteen years old. He behaved normally but was exceedingly obedient. From the very beginning, something about him struck me as off. I decided to investigate and discovered that the maid who was supposed to be his mother had died long before Elijah was born. I spent years searching for her but to no avail. My conclusion is she's already long dead before Elijah appeared. Whenever I asked Elijah about his mother, his only response was that she was dead. It's hard to get anything out of him because he kept his distance from everyone, determined in preventing anyone from getting too close to him."

Chapter 373 I will

Chapter 373 I will

Zeke paused briefly before continuing. "I kept a watchful eye on him, but I eventually stopped prying too much into his affairs, hoping that if I act like I started to fully trust him, he would eventually drop his guard down and get closer instead of distancing himself. Also, despite everything, I couldn't shake the feeling that Elijah was silently pleading with me to leave him be. In the end, I chose to put some trust on him because I know that there was always a reason for someone's behavior. I also held onto the hope that, with time, the truth would surface—perhaps when Elijah was ready, or when he'd finally come to me and open up or seek help. But that moment never arrived, at least not until I left."

Silence reigned for several moments.

"After seeing Kyle yesterday night," Zeke continued, his gaze hardening, "everything finally fell into place. Elijah has been possessed for a considerable length of time, I suspect, perhaps since the day I first encountered him. And since then that witch had been residing within him." "Was it the witch we thought had been backing him?" Sebastian asked.

"Yes, and this witch happens to be none other than his own mother as well." Sebastian's brow furrowed in confusion. "But Elijah is not a half-blood; he's clearly a pure-blood vampire." Zeke clarified, "That's because the woman who conceived and gave birth to Elijah was a vampire in the flesh. She definitely used a forbidden spell for her to put her soul in the vampire maids body and kept it alive. This witch had already taken control of the vampire woman's body before Elijah was even conceived. When Elijah reached a certain age, or perhaps once the vampire woman's body died, she shifted her possession to Elijah— either by force or willingly. The presence of this entity within him remained completely concealed, likely due to the fact that Elijah either suppressed or imprisoned the witch, preventing her from emerging. Alternatively, it's possible that the witch forced Elijah to keep her hidden to avoid detection."

Zeke ran his fingers through his hair as he sighed. A smile, faint but understanding, graced his lips before he shook his head. "That little brat... I always sensed that he truly didn't want anyone's help, but I never imagined he genuinely had no desire to be saved either."

"I don't understand..." Sebastian's jaw clenched. "So he wanted to die because he was being possessed? And why me? Did he deliberately orchestrate all those events in the

past, even involving Iza and putting her life in danger, just to provoke me into killing him? Why? Why did he have to go to such lengths? And why did it have to be me?"

Zeke held Sebastian's gaze unwaveringly. "Because this very same witch, who is essentially his mother, is the same witch from the past who tormented you."

Sebastian froze. "Elijah clearly knew about it," Zeke continued, his voice steady. "He was aware of that witch's history. That's why he chose you to be the one to end his life. Because killing him would also completely destroy that witch's soul in the process. When Elijah passed away, the witch inhabiting Kyle's body also vanished. She was screaming Elijah's name and demanding to know what he had done as she endured a painful demise. I believe Kyle may have some knowledge of this as well, but I couldn't inquire further because he's still unconscious." A heavy silence enveloped the room, and for a long while, no one spoke. Then, it was Sebastian who broke the silence, moving his hands to bury his face in his palms. His voice wavered with a mix of emotions as he muttered, "That damned... little..." He couldn't continue, his voice breaking slightly.

Alexander offered a somber perspective, his tone tinged with resignation. "He must have believed that there was no other fitting end for that woman's death than this. It's just twisted how it had to be carried out this way. Perhaps, this is the result of housing something vile and malevolent within him for so long." "We will never have all the answers on how it all unraveled to this point." Zeke said. "What we do know is that Elijah had made this decision long ago. This is his choice, and whether it aligns with our notions of acceptability or not, it no longer matters. He is gone." He held Sebastian's gaze and added. "Never blame yourself or feel guilty. Any of us could've killed him either way the moment he descended to corruption. There's just no other choice." "I don't blame myself," Sebastian replied. "But I do hope you're not thinking it was your fault because you failed to eradicate that monster completely. There's no way anyone, even you as Zeke, could have known."

Zeke offered a reassuring smile before standing. "I know." He said as he placed a hand on Sebastian's shoulder. "My time is almost up. I need to finish my business here and go back to the Black Forest." And with a final pat on Sebastian's shoulder, Zeke finally left.

...

After concluding his discussions with the kingdom's most influential figures, Zeke made his way to the location where Elijah's coffin rested. He stood there silently, a stoic figure in front of the final resting place of the prince, lost in his thoughts for an extended period of time.

As the moment to depart approached, Zeke paused as he walked past Lucas who was standing by the door.

The loyal man voiced his thoughts with a sigh. "I hope you won't take another eternity this time, Your Highness." "I hope so too."

When Lucas let out another sigh, Zeke offered a reassuring gesture by squeezing the man's shoulder. "I'm relying on you, Lucas. And do keep an eye on my son from time to time."

Lucas smirked and replied confidently, "You need not ask, Your Highness. I'd gladly lay down my life for him if the situation demanded." "Don't be absurd. A dead man can't protect anyone." "Fair point. I'll keep that in mind. Now, please, go. Your time is running out, isn't it?" "Then... until later, Lucas," Zeke said as he continued on his way. "Come back alive, Your Highness." Lucas uttered without turning to face him.

"I will."

Chapter 374 I'll remember

Chapter 374 I'll remember

The sky was a deeper, more vivid blue than usual, stretching out like a vast sapphire blanket above. Beneath this expansive azure, the Black Forest stood in serene repose, its usual whispers of mystery now hushed in a rare moment of peace.

It was finally time. Zeke could feel it. As he entered the house, he found Alicia and Azy together in the living room. Alicia, seated on the couch, was gently holding Azy's hands, speaking softly to him while he nodded in solemn understanding.

The sight of them made Zeke pause. A lump formed in his throat. Hiding behind the door, he pressed his back against the cool wall. He then dragged his palms across his face, weaving them through his hair. After a deep, steadying breath, Zeke's eyes regained their usual calm. Ready, he moved into the room towards his wife and son.

At the sight of him, both mother and son turned. Azy's face lit up. "Dad! You're back."

Zeke offered his son a tender nod and, wordlessly, enveloped both Alicia and Azy in a warm embrace. This gesture alone conveyed the unspeakable truth to Alicia and Azy: it was time to say goodbye.

Alicia's grip on Azy tightened, and for a long, silent moment, they just clung to each other, surrounded by a wave of heavy emotions. Then, Azy broke the quiet. "Please don't worry about me, Mom, Dad," he said, trying to reassure them. "I promise I'll be

alright. I'll be happy here with Alexis, Alice, and everyone. I promise I'll take care of myself, though I know they'll look after me too."

Zeke and Alicia pulled away slightly, gazing at their son with eyes filled with mixed feelings of pride, sadness, and love.

"Please don't cry, Mom," Azy continued, with a brave smile. "I want you to be happy. And please, try not to miss me too much, okay?"

"Oh, Azy..." Alicia's voice trembled as she wiped away her tears, which were falling silently.

"All I wish for is to see you healthy and strong again, Mom. Focus on healing and then come back," Azy pleaded with hope in his voice.

Alicia nodded, her voice thick with emotion. "I promise," she whispered, pulling him into another embrace.

When Alicia finally released Azy, he turned to face his father. Dropping to one knee to, Zeke clasped Azy's hand and gazed intently into his eyes. "Always remember what I've told you, Azriel. If something ever bothers you, no matter how small, don't keep it inside. Reach out to your uncle Seb, Alex, or any of your aunts."

Azy nodded earnestly. "I'll remember, Dad."

"Do you promise?"

"Promise," Azy affirmed with unwavering certainty. The father and son then shared a heartfelt embrace.

Zeke turned his gaze to Alicia, and the three of them, united by a bond stronger than anything else, held each other close once more.

...

Soon everyone was gathered in a meadow that was surrounded by the towering trees of the Black Forest. The atmosphere seemed to pulsate, an evidence to the potent magic coursing through the air. Zeke and Gav, both emanating their demonic power, stood as polar opposites: Zeke's magic was a gentle stream, while Gav's raged like a wild inferno, necessitating his isolation from the group.

Zeke, standing close to Alex, communicated without words, using their eye telepathy. Though his face remained stoic, Zeke's eyes shimmered with intense emotions. "Thank you..." he began, his silent message resonating deep within Alex. "Before I entrust you with the care of my son once more, until I return, I need to express my gratitude, Alex."

Alex glanced away, a smile playing on his lips as he rubbed the back of his neck. He wasn't accustomed to seeing Zeke in this manner, but Alex understood all too well the significant changes that fatherhood could bring to a man.

When he returned his gaze to Zeke, Alex's smile lingered, a teasing light still dancing in his eyes, though it was clear that the emotions were getting to him too. "Don't worry about it. The ten years I've looked after Azy are nothing compared to the centuries you spent cleaning up after my antics, Zeke. And Azy, well, he's a great kid. He hardly needed much from me as he's a well-behaved kid to look after. But I know things will be different this time, with Alicia away... Still, you have my word, I'll keep him safe. He's pretty much my son now, too."

Zeke's eyes softened, an unmistakable warmth seeping into his usually icy gaze. This was a side of Zeke that few were privileged to witness – a father's vulnerability, a warrior's trust. "And for that, I can never thank you enough."

"Now that's enough, Zeke." Alex sighed, still smiling. "Remember, time is just a perception for beings like us. Before you know it, you'll be back with Azy."

Zeke moved closer, and the two men embraced like brothers. Zeke's silence was heavy with gratitude; the firmness of his grip conveyed more than words ever could. Alex, understanding this unspoken language, reassured him softly. "Focus on your mission. Leave Azy to me. Nothing will happen to him on my watch. Otherwise, I couldn't face you again." A silence descended between the two, but it was a comforting silence, filled with the understanding and depth that only centuries-old friendships could provide. Alex clapped Zeke on the shoulder. "Go do what needs to be done and come back." Nodding in acknowledgement, Zeke then approached Sebastian. The brothers, having shared their private conversation earlier, simply exchanged a look of deep understanding before hugging.

"I'll keep my promise, no matter what," Sebastian whispered firmly. "So you better keep yours and return with Alicia, safe and sound."

"I will," Zeke responded. As they stepped back from their embrace, there was a resolute air around them, each committed to their vow.

As Alicia finished her conversation with Elle and Abi and giving them her final embrace, she finally made her way over to Zeke and Azy.

Chapter 375 I'll be just right here

Chapter 375 I'll be just right here

The atmosphere around them shifted dramatically. A storm brewed overhead, the wind turning fierce, carrying with it dark, ominous clouds. They all sensed it—the gate was on the brink of opening.

Alicia and Zeke wrapped their arms around their son in a protective, final embrace. "Please take care in there, Mom, Dad," Azy pleaded, returning their hug with equal intensity. His small hands clutched at the fabric of their clothes, gripping tightly.

"Mn. And you, take good care of yourself, too, okay?" Alicia's voice trembled with emotion.

"I promise," Azy vowed, gazing up at them with a brave smile.

Suddenly, a forceful burst of energy rippled through the forest, signaling the opening of the gate. A colossal vortex of inky blackness emerged, its presence magnified by the raging storm above, which crackled with lightning and echoed with thunder.

Despite Azy's outwardly calm demeanor, the boy's grip on his parents became so intense that the fabric of their clothes began to fray. Alicia and Zeke wrapped their arms around him as they each fought back the tears threatening to overwhelm them.

"We will be back, as soon as possible, Azriel," Zeke whispered.

Azy managed a firm nod.

Zeke tenderly kissed the top of Azy's head and turned to usher Alicia. But Alicia's hand clung tighter to Azy, unwilling, unable, to let go. Her body shook uncontrollably, her voice cracking with each word. "Don't... please don't get hurt or fall ill... okay? My precious Azy?"

"Mom..." Azy's hand gently cupped her tear-stained cheek, his young eyes looking deeply into hers. "I've made that promise already. You believe in me, don't you?"

Alicia choked on her emotions. "Always... you're my everything, my dear."

Seeing his mother's pain, Azy tried to comfort her. "Then have faith in me. I'll grow strong, and you'll return, even stronger too. We have that promise, don't we, Mom?"

Through the blur of her tears, Alicia managed a bittersweet smile. "Yes, my brave Azy. Yes."

"Then please go... I'll be just right here, waiting."

Azy's gaze shifted to Zeke, his message sent silently, directly to his father's heart. "Dad, it's time to take her. Please."

"Thanks, son," Zeke replied and with a decisive, protective motion, he pried Alicia gently, yet firmly from Azy. He lifted her into his arms and in a moment, he disappeared and materialized with Alicia at the edge of the swirling vortex.

And as the darkness finally swallowed them, Alicia's sobs echoed in Zeke's embrace, each heart-wrenching sound screams the pain of leaving their child behind.

...

Two months later...

The life in Viscarria returned to how it used to be. A peaceful, beautiful place. It was as if the issue with the humans a couple months ago never happened. After Elijah's official funeral, Sebastian had immediately dealt with the issue regarding the half-werewolves. It came to light that the individual masquerading as Elijah, manipulating events from the shadows, was none other than the leader of the half-werewolves. Moreover, Snow's disclosure that Elijah himself had provided the details of the ritual supposedly meant for Elle only stirred more questions and speculations. Had Elijah intentionally misled the half-werewolves? Had he known the true nature of the spell and chosen to use it to bring back Zeke and Gav? Or was it simply a mere mistake and a coincidence? However, they all realized that they might never discover the truth, given that Elijah was no longer with them.

And when Sebastian discovered the sinister intentions the half-werewolves harbored for Iza, Sebastian was consumed by a fierce rage, initially desiring nothing more than to kill them all. But he was also aware that Elle would not be happy with such violence. So he decided on life imprisonment for them instead. That was when Snow unexpectedly killed the leader guy within the prison confines. The brutal fight between the two half-werewolves left Snow severely injured so Elle needed to cure him to survive. Snow later admitted that they had been misled by their leader; their true desire was not to harm Elle but to serve and protect her. This confession, however, did little to sway Sebastian's judgment. Doubtful of the sincerity of Snow's words and cautious of their true intentions, Sebastian chose not to release Snow from prison. And now that two months had passed since the kingdom mourned Elijah's death, Sebastian felt it was time for the long-awaited grand wedding between him and Iza.

When he shared his thoughts with Elle, she was overjoyed but also expressed her reservations due to Kyle's situation.

Kyle had been comatose since the ghost vacated his body that fateful night. Despite Zeke's assurance that he would wake up, Kyle's prolonged slumber weighed on everyone's minds.

Sebastian understood Elle's concern and he too agreed that it would've been so much better if Kyle would finally wake up. So in the end, they mutually decided to give it a little more time, hoping that Kyle would wake up very soon. Meanwhile, as the days

progressed, Iryz's recovery continued to gain momentum. Each day brought with it a noticeable improvement in her strength and health. She and Zeres, living in the peaceful Black Forest, often visited Reigns castle for Iryz's healing treatments.

Elle, whose abilities as a healer had seen remarkable growth, approached each session with a fusion of professionalism and heartfelt care. Her dedication was evident in the way she meticulously prepared for each visit. The progress she observed in Iryz with each visit not only filled her with pride but also with a deep, personal satisfaction. It reinvigorated her drive, imbuing her with an unmatched sense of purpose and confidence. The improvements, of course, were not lost on Zeres. His eyes, always observant when it comes to Iryz's well being, captured every small triumph, and his face would light up with unspoken joy. His relief and gratitude were obvious in his every glance and word, knowing that the day when Iryz would fully regain her health was transitioning from a distant dream into a rapidly approaching reality.

Chapter 376 Trio

Chapter 376 Trio

The morning was picturesque, with warm sunlight streaming through the windows of Reign's Castle, bathing everything in a golden glow.

In the primary foyer, soft footsteps and the gentle rustling of school uniforms subtly echoed, filling the space with a lively yet serene ambiance as the three royal children, Alexis, Alice, and Azy, prepared for school.

Alice had just finished tying her shoes when she noticed Azy having trouble with his necktie. Moving closer with a gentle, knowing smile, she silently guided his hands, skillfully demonstrating the steps to make a perfect knot. Her fingers deftly adjusted the fabric, ensuring his tie sat neatly against his collar, all without a single word spoken, yet conveying sisterly care and guidance.

Alexis watched his sister help Azy with a proud smile, adjusting his own tie as he did. Elle and Abi, seated in the foyer, occasionally cast glances at the young trio. Leaning in close, Elle whispered to Abi, "They really grow up so fast, don't they?"

Abi nodded in agreement. "It feels like just yesterday they were playing with toy soldiers and dolls. And now, they're stepping up, taking care of each other."

Elle turned her gaze back to the kids, especially focusing on Azy, who seemed finally relieved now that his tie was perfectly in place. "I'm just so glad that Azy have Alexis and Alice. Azy's transition to school will be so much smoother with them around."

Abi placed a comforting hand on Elle's arm. "Don't worry, I'm sure Azy will fit right in."

Once the trio was ready, Elle and Abi walked over to them. "You two, make sure to look out for Azy, alright?" Abi instructed her twins.

"Don't worry, Mom." Alexis spoke with confidence. "I'll make sure Azy feels right at home in school."

Alice nodded in agreement. "We'll both take care of him, mom," Alice said in a soft voice.

The majestic doors of the foyer swung open and Sebastian entered. Azy didn't speak a word but his eyes gleamed at the sight of him.

Sebastian smiled warmly, almost as if he had just heard Azy express his excitement about his presence. "Of course, I wouldn't miss your first day at school for the world," Sebastian said to Azy, his eyes taking in the sight of the boy smartly dressed in his uniform. "Are you ready?"

Azy nodded, "With Alexis and Alice by my side, I am."

Sebastian turned to the twins, a genuine gratitude in his eyes, "Thank you, both of you. It means a lot."

Alexis, ever the confident one, responded, "It's what family does, right?"

Sebastian nodded, smiling. "Right."

With that, the trio, escorted by Sebastian, exited the grand foyer, ready to face the new adventures that awaited them at school. Elle and Abi remained, their gazes lingering on the departing group.

The trio then made their way to the sleek, black car parked in front of the castle. The vehicle, though elegant, was designed to be unobtrusive, blending in with the everyday traffic rather than announcing its royal occupants.

As they settled into the plush seats of the car, Sebastian and Lucas joined them. Alexis turned his gaze towards Sebastian. "Is Lucas going to follow Azy around inside the school, Uncle?"

Sebastian glanced at Lucas before replying, "No. Lucas will try to watch from a distance."

Alexis nodded, a thoughtful look crossing his features. "That's great. I don't think Azy will ever make friends if a royal guard, especially of Lucas' caliber, is following him around."

Lucas gave a small, almost imperceptible smile. His usual stoic demeanor softened momentarily as he reassured them. "Don't worry, Alexis. I'll be discreet. It's important for Azriel to have a normal school experience as much as possible."

The car journey to the school was filled with a mix of quiet anticipation and the soft murmur of conversation. Outside, the scenery shifted from the lush, manicured grounds of the castle to the more bustling, lively streets of the city. Buildings and people going about their daily lives provided a vibrant backdrop to the children's contemplative silence.

Upon arriving at the school, the car eased to a gentle stop. The environment was a flurry of activity with students arriving, laughter and chatter filling the air. The school, a large, welcoming building with an air of scholarly dignity, seemed to buzz with the energy of youthful curiosity and learning.

As the children began to disembark, Sebastian turned towards Azy, his expression serious yet gentle. He leaned closer, ensuring their conversation remained private amidst the chaos of the school drop-off zone.

"If anything unforeseen happens, always remember what we've been training for, okay? Azy?" Sebastian's voice was low.

Azy didn't speak, but the determination and understanding in his grey eyes was more than enough for Sebastian to feel a surge of reassurance. "I trust how capable you are, Azy. Well, then. See you back home." Sebastian gave a final, affectionate pat on the boy's hair, a small gesture that carried his love and confidence in Azy.

Sebastian then turned to give a subtle nod to Lucas, who had quietly positioned himself a discreet distance away.

With a last wave and encouraging smiles, the car pulled away and Sebastian returned to the castle. ...

Back in the castle, Elle, was deeply engrossed in her paperwork. Unaware of Sebastian's entrance, she continued her work until he was almost upon her. His approach was quiet, catlike. Sebastian perched on the edge of her desk. His voice, deep and subtly seductive, broke the silence. "Have I told you before how beautiful you are when you're engrossed with your work, baby?"

Elle couldn't help her cheeks from turning a little red no matter how much she tried to ignore this seductive prince before her. "I thought you said you're going to the Black Forest to check on Kyle," Elle said, her voice steady but as always, her body was already betraying her as it reacted to his nearness. "Yes. But not after I got my kiss from my busy wife," Sebastian replied, his voice a blend of playfulness and desire. Elle raised an eyebrow. She opened her mouth to say something, but before she could form the words, Sebastian swiftly swiveled her chair around and knelt before her.

Caught off guard by his sudden move, Elle's words faltered. The intensity in Sebastian's eyes was intense as he looked up at her, an undeniable desire and mischief playing within their grey depths. He gently lifted one of her legs over his shoulder, his actions deliberate, and he licked the inside of her thigh. "I can't function well, unless I have a taste of you. And since I can't ruin your lipstick, I'll kiss you down here instead," he whispered and Elle could do nothing but wantonly spread her legs for him.

Chapter 377 Second wedding

Chapter 377 Second wedding

Upon arriving in the Black Forest, Sebastian immediately noticed that the presence of the queen of witches was notably absent, prompting him to head directly to her house where Kyle had been staying the past two months since he fell into coma. As he approached, two witches who had been vigilantly standing guard outside promptly departed, acknowledging Sebastian's authority with their silent exit. The door creaked open, revealing Kyle lying on the bed.

Stepping closer, Sebastian's imposing figure loomed over Kyle. He initially looked down at him with evident concern, but something caught his eye, causing his brow to furrow in curiosity. "How long do you intend to sleep, Kyle? When did you wake up? And why are you still acting bedridden, fully awake as you are?"

At the sound of Sebastian's voice, Kyle's eyelids fluttered open, a faint smile playing at the corners of his mouth. He raised a finger to his lips, signaling Sebastian to lower his voice, his gesture belying a sense of calm and quiet amusement.

"The witches already left. Now answer me. You better not tell me you've been awake for a long time and just pretending until now so Lilith won't kick you out of her house. I'll punch you right now if that's the case. You don't know you're the reason why my grand wedding with Iza is still not happening."

Kyle's response was a gentle chuckle. "Relax, big brother. Honestly, I only woke up yesterday." He exhaled deeply, a frown touching his brows. "I had no idea I was out for so long."

Sebastian scrutinized him, concern etching his features. "You sure you're not hiding any discomfort? You look a lot weaker than I expected."

Shrugging weakly, Kyle admitted, "A tad drained. But it should only be a matter of time until I'm back in full form."

Sebastian's fingers grazed Kyle's wrist, feeling the weak pulse. "I can't believe you've been reduced to this," he murmured, his brows creasing. "I think Iza needs to check on

you –" "I'm fine, brother." Kyle stared at Sebastian with serious and almost pleading look in his eyes, causing Sebastian to sigh. "

"And Zeke said, I will definitely regain my strength back in time." Kyle continued in a still serious tone before his expression changed again. "Speaking of which... Zeke left, right?"

"Yes," Sebastian replied, his voice dropping a notch. "And he took Alicia with him."

A long sigh escaped Kyle. His gaze, though clouded with a touch of sadness, returned to Sebastian with a resilient smile. "I guess we're on standby for their return. But as for me... Don't worry, I'll be back in the castle soon. I have a job to do, after all. For now though... please let me stay here a bit."

"I'm not planning to drag you out if you don't want to. As long you regain your strength, you can stay here however you want, I don't care." Sebastian said. With a soft smile, Kyle replied, "That's why you're my favorite brother right now. Go on, get your wedding plans rolling. I've unintentionally delayed them enough. My apologies for the inconvenience." Sebastian smirked. "Alright, I'm heading out."

"And brother," Kyle added, his voice softer, "keep my awakening between us for now."

Sebastian raised a hand in acknowledgment, silently promising discretion.

...

With no time to spare, Sebastian had thrown himself into the frenetic whirl of wedding preparations as soon as he returned from the Black Forest. And just like that, the wedding day arrived almost too quickly.

Sebastian waited in a room with burgundy velvet and tapestries that muffled outside noises. The calming scent of cedarwood and amber filled the air as his anticipation grew. He looked down, brushing invisible lint from his immaculately tailored tuxedo, adjusting the fit for what felt like the hundredth time.

The faint sound of a clock's ticking provided a rhythmic heartbeat to the room. With every tick, Sebastian felt time pulling him closer to the special moment he had been waiting for. In his company was Azy, his best man. Azy had been watching Sebastian closely for a while now since they were left in this room by themselves.

"Uncle... why are you so nervous? Is there... something bothering you?" Azy's voice, tinged with concern cut through the silence.

Sebastian paused. A tender smile played on his lips as he caught his lip between his teeth, a gesture that betrayed his nervous excitement. "This is my and your aunt's big day, Azy," he said. Azy blinked. "But... isn't this your second wedding with her already?"

Sebastian's smile broadened, softened by a sigh that carried unspoken stories. "Yes, you're right. But our first wedding..." His voice trailed off, as memories of that day surfaced — a ceremony that was devoid of warmth. "It was nothing like today. This is the first time I'm going to wed her properly, Azy," he confessed, the depth of his emotions evident in his eyes.

Azy fell silent.

"Don't worry, I'm fine. This is normal," Sebastian reassured him, gently patting the boy's hair. His voice carried a mix of reassurance and self-comfort, aimed as much at Azy as at himself.

Azy tilted his head. "So the first time... wasn't proper?"

Sebastian, noticing Azy's contemplative gaze, decided to open up a little more, feeling the significance of this moment not just for himself, but for this young soul who was watching him so intently.

"You see, Azy," Sebastian began, his voice softening, "sometimes in life, we get second chances to make things right. Your aunt Elle and I, we've been through a lot, and our first wedding... well, it wasn't what we truly desired. It was mostly dictated by circumstances."

Sebastian's eyes wandered to a distant point, back in time, to memories only he could see. "The first time, it was under circumstances far from ideal — more of duty and something else than of choice. Today, it's about choice, love, and a future we both want."

Azy nodded slowly. "So, it's like... it's more real this time?"

"Yes, exactly," Sebastian replied, his smile widening. A gentle knock sounded on the door. "Your Highness, it's time," called someone from outside.

Taking a deep breath, Sebastian stood up. He extended his hand towards Azy. "Shall we go make this day memorable?"

Azy took his hand, his eyes shining with pride and excitement.

As they walked toward the door, Sebastian felt a wave of calm assurance wash over him. The nerves were still there, fluttering in his stomach, but they were overshadowed by the overwhelming joy and excitement of what was to come.

Chapter 378 Love

Chapter 378 Love

In the heart of the Reigns Castle, the grand hall stood still in anticipation of a wedding like no other. Hundreds of candles lined the walls, casting a soft, ethereal glow over the hall. Majestic chandeliers hung from the towering ceilings, each facet of their crystal prisms gleaming in the ambient light. The scent of roses and lilies wafted through the air, a fragrant reminder of the blooming love between Elle and Sebastian.

But tonight, they were complemented by an even more breathtaking spectacle: the grand staircase, transformed into an ethereal wedding aisle. It cascaded downwards in graceful sweeps, each step cloaked in white satin, flanked by arrangements of white roses, lilies, and cherry blossoms, their petals occasionally breaking free to float down like gentle snowflakes.

The blossoms seemed to flow down the stairs like a river of flowers, converging at the landing where a plush white carpet began, leading straight to the altar.

Sebastian waited at the foot of the staircase, every inch the regal prince. His suit of deep navy with gold embroidery perfectly echoed the grandeur of the hall.

His gaze flitted through the guests and there was Alexander, his grin almost mischievous, as if he knew all the turmoil swirling inside Sebastian. With a slight nod, Sebastian acknowledged him, a hint of a smile teasing the corner of his lips.

Time seemed to elongate, the seconds stretching into what felt like hours, and then – the announcement. His heart skipped a beat, then two. The heralding notes of the bridal song reverberated through the hall, signaling the bride's arrival.

All eyes turned towards the top of the staircase.

And there she was. Iza. His Iza. In that moment, the universe seemed to contract until she was all he could see. The gown she wore was a cascade of shimmering white, making her look like she had descended straight from the heavens. Her fiery red hair was a perfect contrast against the pristine white of her dress. Utterly spellbound, his breath caught in his throat. Fuck... she's so beautiful. As Elle began her descent, a hush settled over the crowd. Each step she took seemed to be in rhythm with the beating of his heart. Sebastian's eyes never left her, a mix of love, pride, and admiration shining brightly. He would do anything, endure anything, to relive this moment – to witness her, in all her glory, walking towards him like this.

Her eyes locked onto his, the shimmering blue depths reflecting the many emotions coursing through both of them. The world around them seemed to blur, and as she took each step towards him, memories of their journey flashed before their eyes. Every laughter they shared, every tear they shed, every challenge they faced – it was as if their collective past was parading before them, paying homage to their love.

Sebastian's throat tightened, a swell of emotions threatening to overcome him as he remembered just how dark his world had been before her. For so long, he'd seen no light, literally or emotionally. Back then, he couldn't even imagine himself living in a world that wasn't shrouded with darkness. But here he was now. Iza had changed him, redefined him. She was the light that pierced his darkness, the force that rewrote his destiny. The years he had spent cloaked in shadows seemed distant now, almost inconsequential. How had a single person managed to erase years of darkness in his life?

As she finally reached him, another surge of emotion rose within him, threatening to overwhelm him. Their hands met, fingers weaving together in a dance of silent vows. "Every moment leading up to now pales in comparison to seeing you like this," Sebastian murmured, his voice thick with emotion. Elle's eyes brimmed with tears, sparkling brighter than any jewel. "Sebastian, before you, I never truly understood what it meant to have a dream come to life."

And with that, the ceremony unfolded, each second weaving into the next, culminating in the poetic release of doves into the deepening sky. They soar high above, as if to carry the couple's vows to the heavens.

Sebastian and Elle's gazes held, revealing the depths of their souls to one another. In that moment, they both came to believe that even in a world often shadowed by pain and darkness, love remained the most potent magic. It was a force that lit the way, guiding even the most lost souls and most hellbound of hearts, to where they belonged.

~ The End ~

a/n: Hi guys! This is the official ending of 's main story. But yes, this is not the final goodbye yet. I will be writing a very short spin-off for Kyle and Lilith next(should be less than ten chapters). And then a final spin-off for Zeke, Alicia, and Gav's situation in the Underworld (This could serve as a transition before Spellbound resumes and also transition for the planned standalone book for Alicia and Zeke so make sure not to miss it.) Yes, I do have a plan to write a standalone book for Zeke and Alicia right now and the title will be Hellbound Love. Please check the book in my profile and add it in your library for now. You can also leave review on it already and let me know if you're excited to read it. I also want to say that Hellbound Love will be the final book of Hellbound series and maybe the last book i'll be writing here on NovelFire (we will see ;)). So, for Spellbound, it will continue once the final spin-off ends. It's not going to be long so don't worry because I'm cancelling the original season 2 plan for it. My reason is because I don't want to make Gavgav and Evie suffer anymore. Lol. I think they've had enough. XD

Alright, see you in the next chapter, guys! And thank you for still being here by the way. Love ya'll. For more announcements or updates from me, follow my facebook page @Author_kazzenlx

You can also join my Facebook group > Kazzenlx's Readers (Official Group)

Chapter 379 Kyle & Lilith (Part 1)

Chapter 379 Kyle & Lilith (Part 1)

A few days ago in the Black Forest...

After Sebastian departed from Lilith's house, Kyle made an attempt to exit the room, yet found it immensely challenging. His body was in a state of extreme weakness, allowing him only to stagger a few steps toward the door.

This level of frailty was foreign to Kyle, leading him to ponder if this was akin to the debilitation humans experience during severe illness.

With a feeble chuckle, Kyle had no choice but to return to his bed, parched. He was thirsty so he thought that maybe, if he drank blood, this weakness would go away. But if it's blood he needed, then why was he not craving for it? Why did he feel like he was craving for water instead? Everything he was feeling and experiencing at the moment was just so un-vampire-like. Confused and feeling lightheaded, Kyle lay back down, his gaze weakly scanning the confined space he was in, a room filled with Lilith's scent.

The idea of Lilith discovering him in this feeble state made him bite his lip. Damn... he needed to at least regain a little strength before she came back. He couldn't let her see him in this state!

...

Hours swiftly passed, and it was deep into the night when the soft click of a door echoed within the witch queen's house.

Lilith entered, removing her cloak and hanging it behind the door. She proceeded quietly to her room, pausing momentarily before reaching for the doorknob and gently pushing the door open.

With utmost care and silence, she lit the lamps with her magic, bathing the dark room in light. Her gaze immediately settled on the man lying on the bed.

He was completely still. Rather than approaching him, Lilith leaned against the door behind her, releasing a deep, quiet breath. It had been months, and with each day he remained unconscious, her worries grew, haunted by the 'what ifs'. What if he never woke up again?

On that night at the prison altar, Lilith had watched him fight hard against the wicked queen's spirit. The torment on Kyle's face as the spirit refused to leave his body, threatening to take his life, was etched vividly in her memory. The worst part was her helplessness; as Kyle fought for his life, all she could do was watch.

She stood there, feeling utterly useless. Her attempts to assist had backfired, with her power being absorbed by the ghost, which only made it stronger. It was a shocking revelation for her, how the spirit could so easily draw power from her, simply because they were both silver-haired witches.

If Prince Ezekiel hadn't been there... Kyle would surely have...

Lilith shook her head, dismissing these thoughts. Dwelling on the past was futile. The malevolent witch queen was finally gone forever, thanks to Kyle and his formidable brother. Now, Lilith was dedicated to a new mission: developing a spell capable of destroying a malevolent witch queen's ghost without harming the host, to prevent future tragedies like what Kyle had gone through from happening again.

She quietly closed the door and moved towards the back door, stepping into the spring just a few paces away.

Submerged, she sat with closed eyes, her bare form enveloped by the water. And as her long silver hair billowed around her, the water around her turned misty.

Upon opening her eyes, she gazed at the star-filled sky, her thoughts inevitably drifting back to Kyle. His question lingered in her mind: Was she happy?

For the past decade, she had devoted herself to her duties, never pausing to contemplate her happiness.

But since bringing Kyle's unconscious body into her house, his question incessantly echoed in her mind, prompting a deep self-reflection.

She realized that her role as queen had become her life. If she were truthful, the idea of returning to an ordinary witch's life was unimaginable. She recognized she wasn't lonely, yet couldn't claim to be happy either. She existed in a state of in-between, feeling that her life over the last ten years was her true destiny.

She had been content and at peace. But since that night, or perhaps since she began watching him sleep in her bed, her sense of contentment and peace wavered. A longing for his touch, his warmth, began to surface. She found herself yearning to be beside him, to sleep in his embrace.

And so, these feelings intensified with each passing day, to the point where Lilith now found herself anxious about what would happen once he awoke. What would she do? Could she still manage to let him go and push him away once more?

These questions lingered, unanswered. Yet, her mind urged her to remain resolute and adhere to her decision until the end. She believed that Kyle deserved better than her. His love for her was evident, his heart seemingly unchanged. Kyle was a good man, one who merited the best the world could offer.

She thought that Kyle deserved a woman who would prioritize him above all else, someone who would stay by his side eternally and never leave. The realization pained her deeply, but she knew she couldn't be that woman. Even if circumstances allowed her to choose him now, she was aware that one day she would inevitably leave him. Because unlike Kyle, she was bound to age and pass away.

...

Having returned to her room, now dressed in a silk nightgown, Lilith seated herself on the bed beside him.

She fiddled with her fingers in silence. After a moment, she lifted her gaze to him and began, "I... I've decided to send you back to your home tomorrow. I thought... you might wake up faster there, surrounded by your family."

She bit her lip, her eyes shifting to the moon peeking through the window.

"I'm sorry... in the end... I couldn't do anything for you..." Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke.

Suddenly, Kyle's voice broke the silence, startling her. "I don't know what made you say such a thing, but you're absolutely wrong, Lilith."

Chapter 380 Kyle & Lilith (Part 2)

Chapter 380 Kyle & Lilith (Part 2)

Lilith's gaze widened in astonishment, locking onto Kyle, who returned her look with a soft smile, his grey eyes sparkling.

"When... when did you..." she faltered, still caught off guard by his unexpected consciousness.

He extended his hand, gently caressing her face, his smile slowly dissipating. "Why do you look so sad? Is it because you think you couldn't do anything for me?"

Words failed her as she opened her mouth, speechless. Sad? Was that the emotion her face was betraying at this moment?

"Would your sadness dissipate if I asked something of you?" he continued, his thumb tenderly brushing her cheek.

Lilith found herself immobilized, bewildered about how to react or respond.

Nonetheless, she nodded, not wishing to imply there was another reason for her demeanor, which he interpreted as sadness.

"Then, would you sleep next to me?" he proposed, surprising her further.

He tilted his head slightly, his tone laced with a hint of mischief. "What's the matter? Is the queen feeling shy?"

Her face flushed slightly as her lips parted, her reaction eliciting a chuckle from him, which only intensified Lilith's embarrassment. What was happening to her at this moment?

"Then make room, vampire prince," she finally responded.

"As you command, your majesty," he replied, his voice warm with affection.

He shifted to create space for her, and as she lay down beside him, she internally chastised herself, asking herself what the hell was she doing.

Unexpectedly, he turned her towards him and enveloped her in a hug, pressing her face gently against his chest. "I can hardly believe this is real, but if it's a dream, please don't wake me up, Lilith," he whispered, his lips brushing against her head in a tender kiss.

Frozen in his embrace, Lilith was overwhelmed by his words, his warmth, his touch... how had things come to this again?

"Yes... you are... dreaming," she responded feebly, her voice barely audible. "This is just a dream."

She knew that upon awakening, they would return to reality and part ways once more. It seemed futile to reunite like this, so it was perhaps best to consider this moment nothing more than a dream.

Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to relax in his hold. Although a tightness lingered in her throat at the thought of what the morning would bring, the profound pain that once consumed her seemed absent. Perhaps it was because they had endured this before, or maybe she had long accepted the impossibility of them being together.

A faint smile played on his lips, and his embrace tightened, his body molding to hers. "Then, as this is just a dream... may I do all that I've longed to do with you before I wake?" he murmured.

She pressed her lips together, her eyes shut tight, emotions churning within her. She realized this might not be wise for either of them, yet the sincerity in his voice, the way he held her, made resistance futile.

"Yes," she breathed, a concession born of her desire to grant him this moment. It was the least she could offer to the man who loved her more than she believed she deserved.

Kyle's body tensed, and with a hint of reluctance, he slightly withdrew, their eyes meeting.

The smile on his face had vanished, replaced by a searching gaze in his grey eyes. Whatever he discerned in her eyes sparked a flurry of intense emotions, among which hurt was unmistakably present. He swiftly concealed it, however, and offered a gentle smile as he tenderly caressed her lips with his thumb.

Lilith, anticipating a kiss, found herself instead pulled back into his embrace, as if he were clinging to life itself. He released a shaky breath, enveloping her in a silence that spoke volumes.

No words were exchanged, yet the understanding passed between them through that silent exchange. His reaction, his understanding, began to pain her more than anything else. She had hoped, that over the past ten years, his memories of her would have faded, or his feelings would have dulled. But the way he held her, with the same intensity as the last time she bid him farewell, indicated that nothing had changed for him.

For what felt like an eternity, they remained in silence. Her throat hurt, her chest tight. She knew she was hurting him again, but she also knew there was nothing she could do. She couldn't choose him over her duty, couldn't die for him, couldn't sacrifice her identity as a witch and the witch queen for him.

Closing her eyes to prevent tears from spilling, she steeled herself and broke the painful silence. "Are you... just going to hug me like this until you wake up tomorrow?" she asked, trying to mask the hurt in her voice. "I thought you wanted to do everything you've longed to do with me before you wake up."

His grip loosened, and their gazes met once more. This time, there was an unfathomable fire in his eyes. "I wonder if... your answer would remain the same if I tell you what I wanted to do with you, Lilith," he said, his voice deep and hoarse.

She found herself momentarily lost in his gaze before replying, "My answer will not change." His eyes dilated, seemingly struggling to believe her resolve.

Surprised by her words, he remained silent, his gaze fixed on her as if anticipating more. "Your brother told me that except for your vampire heartbeats, all of your vampiric

abilities vanished when that woman's spirit was destroyed forever. However, he said you will eventually regain everything and return to your usual self soon after you wake up."

Realization dawned in his eyes, but before Lilith could gauge his reaction to losing all his powers and abilities, he rolled over her. "So this is why you said 'yes' so confidently, huh? Because I'm practically human now, and nothing harmful will happen even if we—"

"That's...!" she interjected, her face flushing red. "I can't believe sex is the first thing you think of after finding out you're practically human now!"

He tilted his head, a devilish smile playing across his angelic face, causing her to momentarily lose her breath. "Sex... when did I say I'm thinking about that, my queen?" he teased.