

Hellbound Heart

Chapter 391 Light and Darkness - Part 9

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In the heart of a desolate clearing, shrouded in ashen fog, a couple stood hand in hand. One with raven black hair and dark aura that seemed to absorb all lights and one with silver hair, shimmering like a lone starlight in the darkness.

They were gazing towards an imposing mass of shadows and jagged peaks that was dominating the horizon. It looked like a mountain of darkness with a summit lost in the oppressive blackness of the skies above.

Tendrils of dark fogs danced and writhed like living entities around them, never getting too close, as if hesitant to come between them.

"That's our destination," Zeke said as he pointed into the pitch darkness ahead of them.

"So, we're close," Alicia whispered. The news didn't excite her no matter how much she told herself to be glad they're finally reaching the place.

"Mn," Zeke confirmed with a nod.

Alicia felt her chest tighten slightly. The fact that their journey was nearing its end now appeared harder for her to take than she initially thought. She knew she should feel glad, even relieved. She was genuinely excited to see Ezekiel's mother. But it seemed she wasn't ready yet... she didn't want to reach the end, knowing that what awaited after this journey was an uncertain future she believed would be just another separation from her beloved.

She dreaded it but she knew she had to stay strong. She knew that the only thing they could do was move forward. They cannot stop... or go back...

Taking a deep breath, Alicia turned to Zeke and mustered a smile. Only to see him looking at her with eyes that were mirroring her emotions. She could just see it... feel it... He knew exactly what she was thinking and feeling in this very moment.

Zeke reached out and gently caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers. The gesture was tender. His touch was warm against her cool skin, comforting. Reassuring. It was as if he was silently telling her that everything would be alright, that no matter what happened next, they would find their way back to each other's arms. Always.

Alicia leaned into his touch, drawing strength from his silent vow.

"We're near, but we still have a couple more battles to deal with," Zeke said.

And just as Alicia nodded, Zeke pulled her into his embrace. His arms wrapping around her with swift precision.

Then a loud thud echoed through the desolate clearing.

Alicia looked bellow and her eyes widened at the sight of centipede-like monster. The creature's body was a grotesque amalgamation of chitin and sinew, its segmented form glistening with a malevolent sheen. And it was already dying, its long, sinuous body curling and twitching in its death throes.

When she spotted Zeke's blade protruding right between the monster's giant, multifaceted eyes, her lips parted in surprise and awe. When did he even...

That was really fast! She'd watched her husband fight countless times since their journey began but... it seemed he was not going to cease surprising her any time soon. She already knew he was truly powerful and she was supposed to be already accustomed to his prowess but she couldn't help being amazed every time.

She really marvel at his reactions, especially the way he remained unfazed by any surprise attack, and how he could kill a monster with a single, precise strike. It was as if he had memorized every fatal point of every creature they encountered. It was truly astounding, almost insane, that it made her wonder just how many monsters he had slain over the years to achieve this level of mastery and power.

Alicia couldn't help but look at him with pure awe. It was truly hard for her not to! "If you keep looking at me like that," Zeke tilted his head, biting back a smile. "I might actually decide to have you just sit like a princess while I kill all these monsters myself," he said, clearly delighted by her admiration.

Alicia playfully narrowed her eyes. "Show off," she said with a teasing smirk.

Zeke chuckled, the sound rich and warm. "I didn't even do anything special."

Alicia lifted an eyebrow and reached up to pinch his cheek gently. "An absolute cheeky show off!" she declared, her tone mock-stern. "When did Ezekiel Reign even start to become this cheeky and show off?"

"Beats me..." Zeke shrugged. "You should ask yourself, Alicia. I'm only like this when I'm with you, so I don't know the answer."

"Oh, so it's my fault now, is it?"

"Absolutely. You always bring out something in me I didn't even know I was capable of showing," Zeke said, tapping his forehead gently against hers. "And what can I do when you're looking at me like I'm the most amazing and most powerful man in existence? I'd willingly go off and provoke and defeat all the most dangerous monsters just to see that look in your eyes, Alicia."

"Don't you dare do that, Ezekiel," she replied, her tone suddenly strict. "You're already the most amazing and unparalleled man to me, so don't you do anything dangerous just to impress me, you hear me?"

When he didn't respond and just gazed at her with those beautiful, intense eyes, Alicia continued, "Your answer?"

He reached out, caressed her hair, and whispered, "I heard you, my wife."

Alicia cleared her throat, trying not to actually blush. "Good."

Just as she said that, a monstrous shriek pierced the air. The ashen fogs around them seemed to ripple with the sound. More monsters were coming!

"Now here it is... this one's a little big. Shall I impress you more?" Zeke asked with a straight face though his eyes gleaming with a playful challenge.

"No. You've impressed me enough, you cheeky man," Alicia replied, her voice firm as she looked at Zeke. "Now I want you to be the one to take a rest this time. Sit here and watch me fight, Ezekiel." As she spoke, her entire body began to glow fiercely. Even her eyes glowed like moonlight, exuding her power and determination.

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Zeke's lips lifted in one corner. "As you wish, goddess."

Obediently, Zeke moved away gracefully from her and sat atop the piled-up corpse of the centipede-like monster he had killed earlier. He settled there like a king on his throne, legs parted, resting his elbow on one knee and his chin in the palm of his hand.

"I'll stay here and watch, Alicia," he continued, gazing gently at her.

Alicia turned her attention to the approaching threat, her glowing form a stark contrast to the encroaching darkness. The monstrous shrieks grew louder, but she stood her ground. The fact that her man was watching gave her an extra surge of strength.

The monster emerged from the fog, grotesque and menacing, its many eyes reflecting the eerie light of Alicia's glow. Alicia was almost taken aback because well... this was nowhere near 'a little big'. This monster was huge!!! Bigger than the ones they had encountered before!

Still, Alicia didn't falter. She'd seen Zeke killed one this type of monster. And she definitely wouldn't want to let her man watch her getting intimidated!

And so, fiercely, Alicia launched herself into the monster. Her movements were a blur of grace and power, each strike precise and devastating. The glow around her intensified, illuminating the battlefield and pushing back the ashen fogs.

From his vantage point, Zeke watched as Alicia fought with a ferocity. She was a force of nature, a warrior goddess in her own right. His warrior goddess.

The monster fell.

Alicia retrieved her blade and then turned back to Zeke, her glow slowly fading. She was breathless but triumphant, a victorious smile on her lips.

"Impressed?" she asked, walking back to him.

"Always," Zeke replied, still sitting there like a king.

Despite knowing that what she showed him wasn't even close to his battle prowess, the way he looked at her as he said that one word was more than enough to make her feel like she was truly amazing. To be praised by this man was just truly indescribable!

Her blade flew like lightning.

It travelled mere inches past Zeke's face, slicing through the air with a sharp whistle before striking the monster that had appeared behind him. The force of the throw was so powerful that it blew his dark hair back, yet he didn't even blink or flinch. Instead, he smiled as the monster behind him tumbled to the ground.

"Perfect aim," he commented and Alicia couldn't stop herself from grinning.

"So I finally managed to impress you for real, it seems," she replied, a playful twinkle in her eyes.

Zeke bit his lower lip, a soft laugh escaping him. "There is no single moment you stopped impressing me, Alicia. But I have to admit, watching you fight and protect me so lovingly is a bliss I didn't see coming."

"There is no single moment you stopped impressing me, my queen. But I have to admit, watching you fight and protect me so lovingly is such a bliss I didn't see coming."

Alicia lifted her chin, pride radiating from her. The look in his eyes made her entire world pause for a moment. Now she understood what he had been talking about just a while ago. To be the object of that gaze of his... good lord... she'd willingly risk her safety to see it again!

The moment she retrieved her blade, Alicia clenched around the hilt as she felt the atmosphere shifting to something more ominous.

"I think I need to show off a bit more," she said, causing Zeke to move his hand to cover his lower lip.

But she could tell he was smiling because of the twinkle in his eyes.

"By all means, my wife," he replied. "I'm all yours to impress."

Just as Alicia turned to face the darkness, another monster appeared.

It was so huge it towered like a coiling mountain before her. It resembled a centipede, but this one was way much bigger than the one Zeke had killed. And its skin was grotesque, resembling the slimy, segmented body of a worm.

Alicia couldn't help but freeze. She had never encountered such a colossal foe, not even in her wildest nightmares. Intimidation crept over her, and she unconsciously looked back at where Zeke was. Only to see him smiling at her. He was still as calm, as if the size of the monster before her didn't matter to him at all.

Somehow, Zeke's unbothered reaction was like magic to her, magic that gave her absolute confidence, assuring her that there was nothing she couldn't defeat.

And just like that, Alicia's power flared around her as she faced the towering monster again. The air around her shimmered with her energy, a radiant glow that contrasted sharply with the monster's dark, slimy exterior.

The fact that her powerful husband was right behind her, watching her was more than enough for her. As long as he was right there, there was no way she'd get scared of anything or be defeated without a fight.

Spreading her hands wide, Alicia's twin blades lengthened, their light flaring like the wings of a white phoenix engulfed in fire. She floated in the air, like a descending white star, as the coiling monster before her shrieked, its horrific cry echoing through the desolate clearing.

The creature's body twisted and writhed, seemingly preparing for something. Alicia focused on the beast, ready to strike, when she heard Zeke's voice, low yet clear, reaching her as if he were whispering in her ear.

"Babe..."

"Hm?" Alicia responded, her eyes never leaving the monster.

"Do you need a little advice?" His tone was as calm and intimate as when he whispered sweet nothings to her in the early morning.

"Sure." She could almost feel his steady presence beside her.

"Aim at nothing but its legs."

"Is that all?"

"Mn."

"Got it." Alicia smirked back at him, confidence surging through her. And in an instant, she vanished from her spot, moving like a lightning towards the monster.

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In an instant, Alicia vanished from her spot, moving almost like a whisper of lightning. She reappeared beside the monstrous centipede, her twin blades slashing downward with white-hot light that cut through the thick fog and the creature's legs. Following Zeke's advice with precision, each strike was swift and devastating, severing the beast's limbs with ruthless efficiency.

The monster shrieked, its massive body convulsing as it lost its balance. But Alicia continued her relentless assault, understanding now why Zeke had told her to focus on its legs—they were the creature's most vulnerable part. Despite this, the legs were tough as stone, and Alicia had to exert all her strength to sever each limb.

As she fought, Alicia realized just how formidable these creatures were. The monsters of this world were truly on a completely different level. They truly needed to be destroyed! But if this was full of these monsters... if this world bred creatures like these, would the battle against them ever end?

Alicia let out a yell as she attacked another limb, a bright silvery light bursting from her blade upon contact. She gritted her teeth when her blade met resistance midway. She immediately let go, leaving it embedded in the creature's limb, and used her other blade to slash from the opposite side.

Releasing both blades, Alicia moved away quickly. Lights began to gather between her palms, and as she stretched her arm forward, a beam of light shot forth, striking just below where her blades were lodged. Her magic pushed against the limb, and finally, it fell.

Alicia moved again, fast as lightning, to catch her blades before the massive body of the creature toppled to the ground like a mountain. The noise of its fall was deafening, the ground shaking violently under its weight.

The once imposing creature was now a writhing mass of wounded flesh, its legs reduced to stumps. As it lay defeated, Alicia hovered above it, her blades still glowing with residual energy.

Panting hard, Alicia turned to look at Zeke. There he was, now standing, his eyes filled with pride and a soft smile playing on his lips. He gazed at her as if she were a divine entity, worthy of worship. The intensity of his admiration made her heart swell to the point where she feared it might burst.

"Perfect execution," he said. "Incredible, as always."

Alicia bit her lip, half in disbelief. Being praised by Ezekiel was truly something extraordinary, and she knew she would never get used to it, no matter how often he did it. His words made her feel truly amazing—so much so that she couldn't even find the right words to describe it. A part of her wanted to ask him to tone down his praises before they inflated her confidence too much. She knew how dangerous overconfidence could be, and Ezekiel's compliments were the most powerful confidence boosters she'd ever known.

Her twin blades retracted to their normal length, their glow fading as she caught her breath. "All thanks to your tip," she replied, unable to suppress the beaming smile spreading across her face.

The battles they fought were incredible in how they lifted her spirits. They made her momentarily forget everything—the lingering sadness and hurt of leaving their son and the fear of possibly being separated from Ezekiel again.

Each battle they finished left her feeling stronger. She was truly thankful for this, as it felt like she was being prepared for something greater. She was gathering strength so that when the time came, she would be able to withstand anything once more.

"No... it's thanks to your own strength, skill, and power, Alicia," Zeke said, his eyes gleaming in the dim surroundings. "You are strong. Don't ever forget that."

Alicia bit the inside of her lip, his words hitting her deeply. The years she had spent feeling powerless had made her forget that she, too, was strong.

Zeke reached out and pulled her into a gentle embrace. "Mn... I'm strong," Alicia whispered, pressing her head against his chest. "I will never forget that again."

He kissed the crown of her head. "As you should, my goddess," he whispered softly. Before Alicia could respond, a strange, loud sound echoed through the air.

Alicia pulled back slightly, her senses sharpening as she tried to pinpoint the source of the strange noise. The air around them was still heavy with the aftermath of their battle, but there was an unsettling tension that hadn't been there moments before. The sound was unlike anything she had heard before.

She glanced around and realized they were already hovering far from the monstrous centipede she had just taken down. Her eyes widened as she saw a greenish smoke seeping from the creature's body. And then, without warning, it exploded, a massive burst of smoke engulfing the entire area where they had been standing only moments ago.

"It... exploded itself?" Alicia asked in disbelief.

"Yes," Zeke replied calmly. "Several massive monsters do that when they're dying."

"So, what's inside that monster's body is that greenish stuff?"

"Those are lethal poisons," Zeke explained. "If you had wounded its body, you'd be hit by those toxins."

"That's why you told me to aim at nothing but its legs!"

Zeke nodded.

"Why didn't you tell me that?" she asked.

"I knew you'd listen to me."

Somehow, that left Alicia speechless. "Are you serious? What if I had accidentally wounded its body?"

A small, meaningful smile tugged at the corner of Zeke's lips as his fingers lazily played with the silver strands of her hair. "Do you think I'd let anything dangerous touch even a strand of your hair?" he asked, his voice filled with quiet confidence.

Alicia could only bite back a smile as she gazed dreamily at him. "You should consider toning down your awesomeness, my husband. You're making everything, even battlefields, feel like paradise. And that's not a good thing because I might not want to leave this dangerous place," she said, half-serious and half-joking.

"I will try," he replied as he entwined their fingers together. "Now, ready to keep going?"

Alicia nodded, and with that, they continued their journey toward their final battle.

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Alicia and Zeke's last battle had been intense. Initially, they tried to stall, dragging it out as long as possible. But as with all battles, theirs finally reached its end.

They had defeated their final enemy together, their blades piercing the monster's heart in unison.

Now, they found themselves in a river filled with glowing, crystal-like stones. The water was clear, and the bluish rock formations beneath made the place look truly magical. Alicia was immensely grateful for this bath; she definitely did not want to meet Ezekiel's mother covered in dried blood and dirt.

Zeke washed her hair gently in silence while Alicia enjoyed the water. She couldn't believe it was over. If she could, she would want to extend this journey just a little longer. Just one more battle together. But she knew that was no longer possible. They had reached the inevitable end, and now she could only prepare herself for what awaited them.

"I've been wanting to ask, but what... is your mother's name?" Alicia asked. She had been curious for so long but refrained from asking, knowing that the mere reminder of his mother might bring back memories of the hellish past Zeke had endured.

"Kaliza. But she preferred being called Kali," Zeke replied.

"Kali..." Alicia repeated softly. "Such a beautiful name."

Alicia looked up into the darkness, her eyes gleaming wistfully. "I wish Azy could meet her too," she murmured.

The mention of Azy's name made her throat ache instantly. She quickly looked down at the water, scooped some with her palms, and splashed it on her face.

Suddenly, Zeke was in front of her, his arms around her waist as he lifted her slightly from the water.

Alicia looked down at him.

"My mother already knew about Azy," Zeke said. "Not because I told her about him, but because my mother can see the future. When I first met her, she told me she had already seen my wife and my son a long time ago. She even knew Azy's name."

Alicia's eyes widened slightly with surprise.

"After my mother's death, her soul was forcefully summoned to this world. The king of this world at that time, on the verge of losing himself to madness, made her his queen to bind her to him. My mother allowed it because she had seen a future where we would meet again, in this very place. So for many years, she stayed here, waiting. Even after the king's death and the destruction of this place, she remained. She said she knew I would need her," Zeke continued. "I asked her why she directed me to that cliff where I first met you. Her answer surprised me..." Zeke smiled a little. "She said it was because she left something there that would awaken my demonic power. But I ended up awakening my power on my own before reaching that place. As to why she chose that cliff, she said she once dreamed I would meet my woman there for the first time."

Alicia's eyes brimmed with emotion, wet with tears.

"Mother already knew about our situation, and that's why I'm bringing you to her. Because she asked me to. She's going to help us. So don't worry... no matter what happens, we'll be together and return to Azy in the end."

Alicia nodded, smiling through her tears, and hugged him tightly.

...

They arrived before an old, massive gate made of onyx stones. Upon entering, they found themselves inside the ruins of a colossal castle. Despite the destruction around them, there were pristine and untouched statues that lined the path. All twelve statues were female, each one perfect and resembling guardian angels.

Just as Alicia was wondering who these statues represented and why they remained unscathed amidst all the ruins, her attention was drawn to a circle that seemed like an altar.

And there she was, an ethereal lady with grey eyes and dark, silky long hair that touched the ground. She looked like the queen of darkness, a spirit both beautiful and eternally trapped in the shadows. She smiled at them. A smile so beautiful and heartwarmingly serene.

"Mother..." Ezekiel said softly, his eyes tender as he looked at her.

"You're finally back, my son," she said to Zeke, her voice as warm and beautiful as she was.

Kali stretched her arm, and Zeke looked at Alicia before letting go of her hand. He stepped in the circle and hugged her. It surprised Alicia because despite the fact that she's a spirit, she can be touched like she was solid. "Forgive me if I made you wait for long but as promised, I brought my beloved wife, mother." Zeke uttered. Soon, Kali released him and she looked at Alicia. "I've been longing to meet you, Alicia. You are truly beautiful... Come here, child."

Alicia stepped forward, and they embraced. It felt as if she were holding light itself, a warmth so inexplicable it seemed to seep into her soul, making her feel like she could melt into her embrace forever. There was also that feeling of familiarity, which Alicia could not quite explain because this was the very first time, she'd ever met her. Yet it was as if she had been yearning for this woman's embrace her entire life.

"You can call me Mother, Alicia. I'm your mother-in-law, after all." Kali uttered sweetly like the loveliest mother one could ever ask for. "Mo... mother," Alicia uttered.

Kali's eyes shone with happiness. "I have already seen you long ago, but you are even lovelier in person."

"Now I understand why Ezekiel is the most handsome man... because his mother is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," Alicia replied, smiling as she looked at her with awe and admiration.

Kali's smile widened. "You flatter me, my child."

"It's true," Alicia said shyly, now realizing that their hands still clasped. It was truly amazing because there was no awkwardness between them at all. It was as if this wasn't their first meeting at all, but simply a long-awaited reunion. "I'm so happy to finally met you, Alicia." Kali looked at her with such warmth and tenderness. "And even though our meeting will be brief, this is already more than I could ever asked for. I'm so beyond grateful I've met you."

"Me... too... mother." Kali gently squeezed her hands as emotion brimmed in her beautiful eyes. "And I always wanted to tell you how thankful I am that my son fell in love with you. Thank you for coming to his life and making him smile again, Alicia."

Alicia shook her head, trying to hold back her own tears. "It's I who should be thankful, Mother. Being loved by a man like Ezekiel makes me feel like I'm the luckiest woman in existence."

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"As much as I want to keep her here a bit longer, Alicia needs to leave this world now, son," Kali said. She held both Alicia and Zeke's hands, and they could feel her hesitation, as if she didn't want to let go yet. But Kali's eyes were firm and full of conviction. She had the look of a mother willing to do anything to help her child, even if it meant parting forever.

"Alicia, my dear, please listen..." she began, gently pressing Alicia's hand. "I'm sorry that we don't have time left to even chat a bit longer. You have to get out of here as soon as possible. I will help you and Zeke cross dimensions. But once you two are there, Zeke will have to leave you behind. You will stay there until you're cured, while Zeke must return here immediately."

Alicia shifted her gaze to Zeke before she nodded at Kali. "I understand, Mother," she replied.

Kali smiled at her, lifting her hand to gently caress her cheek. "You will be cured and return to Zeke and Azriel, my dear. So be strong, always, and never give up."

Alicia closed her eyes, pressing her cheek against Kali's palm, savoring the warmth while she could. "I will... I promise, I will."

Kali's eyes shimmered with pride. "Good. Remember, no matter how dark it gets, there is always light waiting to guide you back. You have the strength within you to overcome anything, my child."

Alicia nodded, unable to speak due to the surge of emotion. They hugged once again. They all held on as if trying to imprint the moment into their memories. As they finally pulled apart, Kali nodded at Zeke, a silent communication passing between mother and son.

Zeke acknowledged his mother's gesture. He took a deep breath, steadying himself, and then stepped back, wrapping an arm around Alicia's shoulders.

Alicia and Zeke moved to the center of the altar and they watched as Kali began to perform the spell. Her movements were fluid and graceful, each gesture imbued with an ancient power. In that moment, she truly looked like the queen of darkness, her silhouette bathed in the ethereal dark glow of the altar, her dark, silky hair swirling around her like a living entity.

Kali's chant grew louder, the words resonating with a deep, melodic cadence that seemed to echo through the ruins. Shadows danced and twisted around her, as if responding to her call, creating a mesmerizing display of dark magic. Alicia could feel the power building.

As the spell intensified, the ground beneath them began to hum with a low, resonant vibration. Kali's eyes met Alicia's, and in that moment, Alicia saw a sense of fulfillment and peace in Kali's expression.

The dark magic swirled around them, forming a protective barrier as the portal began to materialize. Alicia could see the edges of the vortex, a swirling mass of darkness, growing clearer with each passing second. With a final, sweeping gesture, the spell concluded, and the portal solidified into a shimmering gateway. Zeke's grip on Alicia's hand tightened and when Alicia looked at him, she knew they needed to go now.

As they crossed the threshold, they looked back one last time. Kali stood there, her form still glowing with an otherworldly darkness. It was bittersweet. Even though Alicia had only just met Kali, not even an hour ago, the prospect of this being their last encounter filled her with a deep sense of sorrow. She already felt an ache in her heart, knowing she might never see this remarkable woman again.

But Alicia understood. She knew that Kali had been waiting for this moment for so long. Alicia wished Kali could stay here a bit longer, perhaps until she could return, but she also knew that Kali deserved rest. She deserved to finally stop waiting and be free.

"Stay strong, my children," Kali's voice rang out. "And remember, love will always guide you back to each other."

Kali's eyes then met Alicia's. And in that moment, Alicia saw Kali's smile—a smile that made her heart lighten despite the surrounding darkness. It was a smile filled with gladness and love, an expression that conveyed so much without a single word. Kali looked genuinely happy, and that was more than enough for Alicia.

"Thank you, Mother," Alicia whispered. "I will never give up."

With those words, the darkness swallowed them and the world around them dissolved into a blur. ...

Alicia opened her eyes and found herself alone in a soft bed. The spacious room was dim but utterly mystical, illuminated by the faint glow of what seemed like enchanted lanterns. The air was filled with a soothing fragrance, like a mix of lavender and something otherworldly.

Slowly, she rose from the bed, the plush blankets sliding off her as she moved. Her feet touched the cool, polished stone floor, and she headed towards the large window that

dominated one side of the room. She drew back the heavy, velvet curtains, and the sight that greeted her took her breath away.

Her lips parted in awe as she gazed outside. She was inside a massive castle. Beyond the window, a dark landscape stretched out before her, unlike anything she had ever seen. It was dark, but it was a darkness filled with beauty and wonder. A gleaming blue river wound its way through the dark valley below, its waters sparkling like liquid blue sapphire.

Scattered across the landscape were houses and small castles, their windows glowing softly in the dimness. The entire place seemed to be alive with a subdued, magical energy, bustling and lively despite the darkness. She felt as if she had stepped into a dream, a place out of a fairy tale, where anything was possible.

Where was she? This was definitely the place where she would be cured, right?

She did not expect this. She thought she'd be brought to another desolate world but this one was literally a dark paradise! This realm looked peaceful and thriving, but Alicia knew she needed to learn more about this place to be sure of its safety. Because there was only one thing she was certain of right now: she was going to meet someone very strong, someone who could help her. The Light Queen named Evielyn, Gavriel's wife.

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Shifting her gaze from the breathtaking view, Alicia looked around the room, her eyes scanning the dimly lit space. Her gaze settled on the empty spot beside where she had lain earlier. The blankets were undisturbed, the pillow untouched. Ezekiel... The thought of him brought a pang to her heart.

She remembered Kali saying that Ezekiel must return immediately, but had he really left right after bringing her here?

Taking a deep breath, Alicia shook her head, trying to dispel the sadness creeping in. She couldn't allow herself to feel down just because her husband had left before she woke up. She knew he needed to return immediately.

Still, a part of her ached with the need to see him, to reassure him that she would be alright, to tell him she would get cured and be waiting for him. She lifted her gaze

toward the door, a sudden urge to bolt out and search for him, in case he was still here, coursed through her. But as she attempted to move, she realized how weak she felt. Her body was so frail that her legs were already trembling with weakness.

Clenching her fists, Alicia struggled to return to the bed. Somehow, she managed to reach the bed and sank down onto it, her breath coming in shallow gasps. It seemed she needed to wait for someone to come. The door opened, and Alicia's eyes widened in surprise as Zeke entered. She had truly thought he was gone! Forgetting her weakness, she rose eagerly to get to him but stumbled and fell.

She didn't hit the ground, though, as Zeke caught her immediately, as if he had anticipated her fall. He lifted her effortlessly and sat on the bed, cradling her like a princess. No words came from his lips, but Alicia could feel his worry in the way he held her and the way he kissed her head repeatedly.

"I'm fine. My legs just felt really weak just now," she assured him, pulling away slightly to look at his face. "I thought you already left."

"I would never just disappear on you like that, Alicia," he replied, his eyes filled with a mixture of concern and affection.

"I know. It's just that... Mother said you had to return immediately," Alicia said, her voice tinged with relief and confusion.

"Yes, but I couldn't leave without making sure you were settled and safe. And I had to speak with the Light Queen first. She will be here very soon," Zeke explained.

Alicia nodded, her hold on him tightening. "I wish I could stay a bit longer, at least until you two meet, but I have to leave now," he continued, kissing her forehead gently.

Alicia wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. "I'll be fine, Ezekiel. I'll wait for you. I'll make sure to get better. I promise. So please... don't worry about me and just... be safe and return to me, okay?"

He held her even tighter, burying his head against the crook of her shoulder. After a few silent moments, he released a slightly shaky breath. "I'll come back as soon as possible. Wait for me, my wife."

"I promise," she replied. She smiled gently at him before leaning in to kiss his lips.

He instantly kissed her and they shared one last passionate kiss, pouring all their emotions into that moment. When they finally pulled away, Zeke stood.

With a final, lingering touch, Zeke stepped away. He paused and after turning to her for one last look, he finally left. ...

The quiet spiral of darkness in the middle of the altar rippled, sending tiny waves through the air. Black lightning crackled within the swirling shadows, illuminating the ancient stone chamber with brief flashes of eerie light.

Kali, who had been standing there, lifted her face. Her eyes never wavered from the center of the altar.

Then, through the shifting darkness, Zeke emerged. His figure was initially a shadow against the deeper shadows, but as he stepped forward, his form became clearer. The moment his foot touched the solid ground outside the spiral, the darkness behind him began to dissolve, melting away.

Zeke walked over to his mother, his steps purposeful and steady. The air was still charged with the remnants of dark magic, but it seemed to calm as he moved. Reaching Kali, he wrapped his arms around her in a firm embrace.

Kali hugged him back tightly. "You did well, my son," she whispered, her voice filled with pride and relief.

With a gentle smile on her face, Kali patted her son's back. "Don't worry, you will see her again soon, my son."

"I know, Mother. And I'm sorry for making you wait again," Zeke said, his voice tinged with guilt.

"No, son. I'll always... always be willing to wait for you. No matter how long," Kali reassured him.

But Zeke dropped his head, his shoulders looked heavy with the burden of his feelings. "I don't want you to keep staying here, waiting and waiting forever. Even if it means I will not see you again... I just... I just want you to finally... leave this desolate place."

Gently, Kali rubbed Zeke's hair, her touch soothing, loving. "I know you hate my situation, but my son... I am beyond grateful that I am still here to help you. Please do not worry because after this... I will finally free myself. I will leave this place once my purpose is complete. Once I make sure that you and Alicia return to your son safely."

Zeke pressed the heel of his palm against his forehead. "Forgive me, Mother... I... I couldn't find another way—"

"My son," Kali cut him off gently. "You've done everything. You don't know how amazing you are. How incredible you have become. How powerful you have grown."

Zeke met her gaze, then looked away, shaking his head. "But no matter how powerful I become, it's still not enough. I still..."

"Oh, my dear Zeke..." Kali cupped his face, making him look at her. "Son, have you forgotten what I told you when we first met? I told you, didn't I? Alicia... Alicia was supposed to have died long ago, when she died the first time. Her soul would have disappeared. But you saved her. You did not give up on her. You did everything to hold onto her. You defied fate. And now you're here, about to conquer a world full of monsters. You are the strongest I have ever known. Stronger than any kings I've met. Alicia and your son think the same. So keep your head up, my son, never lose hope. You are a great man. The greatest to us. You've been fighting relentlessly, but you will win it all this time. You will not fail again."

A deep, long breath escaped Zeke's lips as he nodded at his mother. His posture straightened, a renewed sense of determination now evident in his stance. Kali smiled, pride and love brimming in her eyes. "So go... go conquer this world and finally end this war, my son."

Zeke dropped to one knee and gently pressed his forehead against the back of his mother's hand. "I will, Mother. I will not disappoint you."

"You never once did, my son," Kali said.

Zeke rose, the weight of his doubts lifting as he met his mother's steady gaze. "Thank you, Mother." Kali nodded, her expression serene yet powerful. "Remember. No matter what obstacles you face, know that I am with you always. You have the power to change the course of fate, Zeke."

Chapter 397 Light and Darkness - Part 15

Chapter 397 Light and Darkness - Part 15

The moment Zeke returned to their base and reunited with Gav, the great war of the Underworld erupted.

Zeke and Gav faced the two remaining princes separately. Zeke squared off against the firstborn and most elusive prince. Gav, meanwhile, took on the deadliest and strongest one.

The battle between the four princes was extreme, each clash sending shockwaves through the battlefield. Countless soldiers and monsters fell with every passing moment, their cries of pain and fury filling the air. As the ground continued to be covered in blood and dead bodies, the air itself grew thick with the stench of death. The battle cries and the roars of the dying drowned out all other sounds, creating a symphony of carnage and despair. Zeke fought with a cunning that matched his elusive opponent. The prince of shadows twisted and turned, blending into the darkness, but Gav's senses were

sharp, his resolve unbreakable. Every time the elusive prince attempted to vanish, Zeke was there, striking with lethal precision.

Gav, on the other hand, fought to weaken his enemy. Their duel was a tempest of power and strength, each blow resonating with the force of a thousand storms. The prince's attacks were relentless, but Gav's raw power and darkness wasn't losing. The battle raged on, a maelstrom of blood and steel. Time seemed to blur, each moment stretching into an eternity of violence and carnage. It lasted for what felt like an eternity, each second dragging on with the weight of a thousand lifetimes. But soon, as the ground became more saturated with blood and the bodies piled higher, Zeke and the firstborn prince finally reached a critical juncture. The first-born prince, sensing his impending defeat, unleashed a final, desperate attack. But Zeke countered with a devastating strike, his blade cutting through the prince's defenses and finding its mark.

The firstborn prince fell, his body crumpling to the ground. Zeke stood over him, panting heavily, his eyes blazing with triumph and exhaustion. He looked across the battlefield and saw Gav, emerging victorious from the ruins, the other prince now lying motionless at his feet.

The air grew eerily silent, the sounds of battle fading as the realization of victory washed over the surviving soldiers. The two enemy princes fell at last, and a roar of victory erupted from the ranks of Zeke and Gav's forces. But the celebration was brief, a mere flicker of triumph in the grim reality of war, for now...

It was time for the final battle. The last two remaining princes were about to face each other. Only one would become king; the other must die.

The soldiers dropped their swords. The monsters immobilized, just waiting for their princes' commands.

In their midst, Zeke and Gav stood, both covered with blood.

Gav scoffed, a bitter smile spreading across his face. "So, it seems there is no other way but this in the end, huh?" he said, his voice tinged with disbelief. Then Gav threw his sword on the ground.

"I've told you this before, Zeke," Gav continued, shedding his armor piece by piece as he spoke. "That if you can't find another way and we still have to fight for this to end, I will just let you take my head."

Zeke, too, began to shed his armor, the weight of each piece falling heavily to the blood-soaked ground. "And I've told you that we'll see this through until the end, didn't I?" His voice was firm, unwavering.

With a swift motion, Zeke pointed his sword at Gav. "Be a man and pick up your sword, Gav."

Gav met his gaze. "Zeke," he said coldly, "stop being stubborn. This is not about ego or anything anymore. If you've forgotten, you have a wife and a son waiting for you."

"And you don't?" Zeke shot back.

Gav's eyes widened in surprise.

"You have a wife and son waiting for you too, you fool," Zeke said as he threw something towards Gav.

Instinctively, Gav caught it. It was a pendant.

"Open it," Zeke ordered, and Gav, still stunned, obeyed.

As soon as he looked at the picture inside, he froze. The image of a woman with silver hair and familiar eyes stared back at him. Beside her was a boy with dark hair and hazel eyes, a face he'd seen in his dreams as well.

"That woman is your wife, her name's Evielyn," Zeke continued. Gav stumbled back, clutching his aching head. "You've forgotten them. They're still waiting for you until now, hoping and waiting for your return. Yet here you are, asking me to just take your head?"

Gav looked at Zeke through the strands of his hair, his eyes now burning with something dangerous.

"I know your heart knows them, even if you can't remember. So fight, Gav... fight for them. And I'll fight for mine."

Zeke stretched out his hand and slashed his palm with his sword. As his blood dripped onto the ground, he declared, "I'm severing our blood oath, Gav. From here on, you're now free from my control."

A pain so intense seemed to pulse within Gav that he fell to one knee, gritting his teeth and clutching his heart. The agony felt as if it was tearing him apart, but soon, the pain began to subside. His blurry vision cleared, and the first thing he saw was the images inside the pendant. My... wife? My... son? Ev... Evie?

His heart clenched, aching so intensely it felt like it was bleeding.

"Pick up your sword and stand, Gav," came Zeke's voice. Gav tore his gaze away from the pendant and looked at Zeke. Their oath was severed. Now, Gav could feel his power, his darkness, swirling and taking control of his entire being.

"Only one of us will win. One of us must die," Zeke said. "Take my head if you can, Gav."

Gav grabbed the pendant and then his sword, rising to his feet with a wicked smile. One of his eyes had already turned pitch black.

A villainous laughter then echoed from Gav. "Fine then, Zeke. Since that's what you wish. I'll gladly fight you to the death and take your head!"

Chapter 398 Light and Darkness - Part 16

Chapter 398 Light and Darkness - Part 16

Zeke and Gav's blades clashed, sending shockwaves through the ground. Dark lightning bolts from the sky struck everywhere, illuminating the battlefield with a sinister glow. It was like watching two fallen angels, each fighting to claim the other's life.

Their soldiers and the monsters stood frozen, watching the brutal combat unfold. The generals had dropped their weapons, their eyes filled with sorrow as they witnessed their lieges in a deadly duel. They could see it clearly: Zeke was more than serious, and now Gav was revealing his true colors, his unrivaled darkness seeping into every strike.

Though they had always known this day might come, that this cruel game would never end until only one remained, the reality of it happening before their eyes was almost too much to bear. Because Zeke and Gav had been together for so long. They had fought so many battles together, and won together. Now here they were, against each other.

Ruka left his post and made his way to the corpse of a huge monster. He climbed atop it and sat down, resting his face in his palm as he turned away, facing the opposite side as if to avoid watching the death fight.

Archer followed him and sat beside him. Unlike Ruka, Archer faced the battlefield, his eyes vacant and hollow as he watched the fight with a detached resignation.

As he watched, he could see that the clash between Zeke and Gav was truly such a spectacle of power and fury. Their movements were a blur of speed and precision, each strike met with a counter, each parry with a riposte. The ground beneath them cracked and splintered from the force of their blows, and the sky roared with dark energy.

Gav's attacks were relentless, seemingly fueled by the darkness that now controlled him. His one pitch black eye, burned with an intensity that seemed to consume him. Every swing of his sword was like a dark promise of death.

But Zeke's every move was calculated, his strikes precise. It was as if he could read Gav's every move. As if he could see the future. "You're stronger than this, Gav!" he shouted, his voice rising above the clamor.

For a moment, Gav's movements faltered, his attacks losing their edge. But the darkness within him flared, seemingly pushing him on, demanding victory at any cost.

Gav roared and he came at Zeke like a powerful blast, and the battle raged on and on.

Gav and Zeke were fighting with everything they had. No one was backing down, and as time passed, the two of them only seemed to become more powerful, deadlier than ever before. Their sheer intensity and strength might as well destroy the underworld itself.

The soldiers and monsters, who had once stood around them, were forced to move away to avoid getting caught in the fray. Those who had witnessed similar battles in the past were shocked, for they had never seen a duel this intense, this overpowering, this endless between two princes.

"I know it's hard to accept, but you know this was meant to happen." Archer spoke in a low voice without tearing his eyes off the battle. "His liege knew this himself since the very beginning."

"I know," Ruka replied, throwing his head back and looking up at the eternal dark sky. "I just had my hopes up, I guess... His liege is powerful. So powerful I thought..." Ruka sighed deeply. "I wished he wasn't a part of this cursed, cruel game."

"Don't speak like this is already over. Like you said, he is powerful, so powerful he might win."

"Prince Gav is the destined one, remember that."

"Well, what if His Liege defies fate and wins in the end?"

"What if he doesn't?"

Archer ran his fingers through his hair, damp with blood and sweat. "Well... then I guess all we could do is accept it."

The two generals fell silent, Archer's eyes continued to stare at the intense duel before him.

"I want to leave this world," Ruka said, dropping his gaze to the pile of dead bodies spread like a blanket over the desolate land. "I'm tired. Tired of these endless battles..."

"If you can find a way and you need someone's help, let me. I'll help you get out of here," Archer replied, his voice softer. Ruka never thought this huge ass man who was always so loud could actually speak like this.

"How sweet of you." Ruka smiled faintly.

"Shut up. I'm trying my best to console you here."

"So, if there's another choice for us, you'd still want to stay here?"

"This world is tiresome, I admit. But... I don't think someone like me belongs anywhere but here."

"Don't say that. You're not even that bad. You're just a muscle head with a savage's body and soft heart."

"Say more stupid thing and I'll leave."

Ruka's smile widened before it faded again. "I still believe no one deserves to stay in this damned world forever. Unless, of course, if one day, things would get a little better. But even I know that will always stay a dream. Sadly, this world seemed to only exist for chaos and bloodshed."

Archer sighed. "I'd like to believe there's a chance for change. Zeke and Gav, they're different from all the princes in the past. The two of them fight for something more than just power."

Ruka nodded, his eyes distant. "Yeah, I see that too. That's why before we realized it, we ended up being so attached to them. I've been thinking as well for a long while now if maybe... just maybe they can break this cycle. Maybe they're the ones who will finally bring some hope to this world."

A loud explosion interrupted their conversation, and the ground shook violently, but Ruka still didn't turn to look.

"Let me know when it's over," he said, resting his head against Archer's broad back.

"Alright," Archer replied, as another explosion rattled the ground.

Gav and Zeke had proven to everyone that they were one-of-a-kind, the strongest princes this world had ever known. Their strength was such that if neither of them fell soon, this death fight might never end until the Underworld was reduced to ashes.

Then, suddenly, the entire battlefield went quiet. A deadly standstill ensued.

"Is it over?" Ruka asked, his voice tinged with hope and dread.

"Yes," Archer replied.

"Who fell?" Ruka's voice was almost a whisper.

When Archer didn't respond immediately, Ruka dropped his head, clenching a fistful of his own hair.

Chapter 399 Light and Darkness - Part 17

Chapter 399 Light and Darkness - Part 17

Far across from them, in the midst of a massive crater they both created, Zeke and Gav stood. One of Gav's wings was severed, its blood still dripping onto the ground, while Zeke leaned heavily against Gav, a sword protruding from his back.

"Took you long enough," Zeke said, a weak smile playing on his lips as blood dripped from his mouth.

Gav, still shrouded in darkness, remained silent, his head bowed.

"Don't look like you're the one defeated here, Gav," Zeke continued, coughing up more blood. "Stand tall."

Gav's grip tightened on his sword. He struggled to speak. "Why did it have to be like this, Zeke?"

"Sorry, there is no other way but this," Zeke replied.

Gav sucked in a shaky breath.

"What do you want me to do after this?" Gav finally spoke again, but this time, his voice and eyes were emotionless.

"Be a good king," Zeke smirked weakly.

"Bullshit," Gav retorted.

"I'm serious," Zeke insisted. "I think there's still a tiny hope for this world. Maybe it just needs a sane king. So don't go mad and stay sane as long as you can. If you do that, the sun might actually shine in this world of darkness."

"I don't believe there's any hope left here. But since I don't have anything else to do from here on, I guess I'll listen to your dying wish," Gav said, his tone resigned.

"Good," Zeke whispered, a faint smile crossing his lips.

A soft smile tugged at the corner of Zeke's lips. "No. Don't concern yourself about my family. Concern yourself with yours from now on. Find a way to remember them, at least for now."

Zeke coughed again, his breathing growing more unstable. Gav pulled away carefully to look into Zeke's eyes. "Any more you wanted to say?" Gav asked.

"Tell those generals of ours not to cry," Zeke said, a faint chuckle escaping his lips.

"Anything more? Don't you have any... instructions I need to do... for your wife and... son?"

A soft smile tugged at the corner of Zeke's lips. "No. Don't concern yourself about my family. Concern yourself with yours from now on. Find a way to remember them, at least for now."

Gav's eyes widened in realization. "You..."

Zeke's smile turned devilish. "You can take this sword now, Gav. Then bring me to the ruined Apache Castle and... just... lay me there on the ancient altar. That's... all."

Gav's jaws clenched in determination. With one swift move, he pulled the sword that was pierced right through Zeke's heart.

Zeke fell, but Gav caught him, cradling him gently.

"Thanks... Gav..." Zeke whispered, then his eyes closed as he took his last breath, a peaceful expression settling on his face.

Gav dropped his bloodied sword, and one by one, the generals approached, followed by the soldiers and monsters. No one made a sound.

Surrounded, Gav swept his gaze across them and stopped when he met the generals' eyes. "Your Liege told me to tell you this: 'Don't cry,'" Gav said loudly, causing the duo to widen their eyes before they buried their faces in their palms.

"There will be no funeral or anything. I don't think this is the end for this powerful creature just yet, so save your tears," Gav continued, causing everyone to instantly lift their dropped heads.

"W-what do you mean, Your Highness?" Ruka asked, his voice trembling slightly.

"I mean that... I just don't believe this is the end for him. Zeke's not the type to fall so easily like that."

Everyone was stupefied. They all had the same thought: 'So easily? You really called his fall 'easy'?'

"As per his wish, I will be bringing his body somewhere." Gav then made eye contact with Ruka and Archer again. "I'm leaving everything to you both for now until I'm back."

Without waiting for the generals' response, he disappeared along with Zeke.

...

Gav's journey to the ruins of Apache Castle, with Zeke's body in his arms, was swift. He moved fast, not stopping or resting even for a moment. Despite the stone-cold expression on his face, a storm of emotions raged inside him. He had not realized he'd killed Zeke until he woke up from his senses. He had lost himself midway during their intense fight. And by the time he regained his senses, his sword was already protruding from Zeke's body.

Something in him wanted to go mad. Something in him wanted to destroy. Just destroy. Anything. Everything.

But then Zeke had spoken those words. Gav could only think about one thing: this had to be planned. Otherwise, Zeke would never die without saying anything about his beloved wife and son. He was certain of that, at the very least.

He still hated the way Zeke moved and did things without giving him a signal. He should've known better, knowing the kind of man Zeke was. But still... he should've at least given him a tiny heads-up about what he was about to do. But there was nothing. Nothing at all!

As Gav neared the ruins of Apache Castle, his mind raced with thoughts of what Zeke's plan could be. He refused to believe that this was truly the end. Zeke had always been one step ahead, always planning, always thinking. He was certain he already anticipated this.

He took a deep breath as he finally entered the gates of the ruined Apache Castle. The weight of Zeke's body in his arms felt heavier with each step he took. He walked slowly through the midst of the standing statues, their silent, watchful eyes seeming to follow his every move.

As he approached the altar, an eerie stillness filled the air. The place was too quiet, too empty. Doubts began to creep into his mind. Had his realization been wrong? Was there truly a plan here, or was he clinging to false hope?

"Damn you, Zeke," he muttered, gritting his teeth. "You always have to do things your way."

He shook his head. No, he reassured himself. This was Zeke. There had to be something that was about to happen here. Maybe someone would revive him. Yes, this was Zeke, after all. He did not need to second guess. Zeke was not the type of man who would die just like that.

Gav moved towards the altar, and ever so gently, he placed Zeke's body there.

Chapter 400 Light and Darkness - Part 18 [END]

Chapter 400 Light and Darkness - Part 18 [END]

Gav stepped back from Zeke's body, expecting that something would soon happen. But the altar remained silent. Still, Gav watched intently, waiting for some sign, some indication that his belief in Zeke's plan was justified.

Minutes passed, each one feeling like an eternity. Gav's body became more rigid, impatience seeping through him, making his darkness leak. He tried to rein himself in, to shut his darkness and shove it back deep within him. But the longer he waited and the longer nothing happened, he felt like he was about to explode.

His fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles turned white. The raging emotion was boiling within him again. Destruction. Carnage. Bloodshed. He wanted to...

Abruptly, he turned. He needed to leave before he lost himself and did something he'd regret once his senses returned. It's fine... that damn man will just probably appear before him after he's done with his lone wolf journey. That always happened; it'd eventually happen any time soon.

Right... he better leave now.

Taking a few steps away from the altar, Gav turned once more to check. Zeke's body was still right there, lifeless.

Gritting his teeth, Gav continued to leave. He didn't use his power to disappear. He walked.

But then, his steps halted. Slowly, he turned.

Zeke's body was enveloped with darkness. Shadows swirled all over him.

Gav stilled, just watching. Despite the fact that the magic swirling over Zeke was as dark as his own, he couldn't feel any bloodlust from it. The magic was calm, peaceful, just different from his own.

As the shadows danced around Zeke's body, Gav's earlier anger and impatience ebbed away.

Then the soft breeze grew stronger, so strong that the entire ground began to rattle. The peaceful, untouched statues standing around the altar began to emit a dark, bluish light. This magic flowed toward the altar, enveloping Zeke's body in a swirling blend of darkness and bluish light until he was no longer visible.

A soft breeze blew through the ruins. The calm atmosphere rippled with an unseen force.

Then the soft breeze grew stronger, so strong that the entire ground began to rattle. The peaceful, untouched statues standing around the altar began to emit a dark, bluish light. This magic flowed toward the altar, enveloping Zeke's body in a swirling blend of darkness and bluish light until he was no longer visible.

Then abruptly, there was a blast of power. It was powerful yet silent. The bluish light ceased emitting from the statues, and the ground gradually calmed. And one by one, the statues began to crumble.

Gav stood there, quietly watching, his eyes fixed on the altar. The darkness began to subside, and slowly, a silhouette emerged. Zeke was there, now standing and looking up.

Gav could see who Zeke was looking at—a woman, a spirit, ethereal and radiant. She smiled at Zeke, caressing his face with her translucent hand. Then, slowly, she shattered into a dust of light, disappearing into the air.

Zeke didn't move for a while, but as if his knees had given out, he sat and laid back on the altar. He lifted his arm and covered the upper part of his face with the back of his hand.

Gav snapped and rushed toward him. "Zeke!" he called out, immediately squatting next to Zeke's lying form. He grabbed Zeke's hand off his face as he spoke, "Don't you dare die on me again, you..." Gav trailed off at the sight of... Zeke's tears.

He froze. Gav had never seen Zeke cry. He didn't know this ice-cold man could actually cry.

"I don't think I died, I was just killed... by you," Zeke said, smirking at Gav before he casually covered his eyes again.

"I honestly think you got yourself killed on purpose," Gav replied, a little awkwardly. He really did not know how to react when this man was like this.

Zeke took a long, deep breath. "Did you see... her?" Zeke then asked.

"Yes. For a while."

"She's my mother."

"Is she the one who revived you?"

"Yes. She said this was her purpose for staying in this place for so long." Zeke removed his hand from his eyes and looked up at the dark sky. "She finally left this dark world. She's finally free."

Gav found himself at a loss for words, so he too lay down and spread out on top of the altar next to Zeke. They lay there quietly for a long while, just staring at the dark, gloomy sky.

"So... you're going to leave soon too, aren't you?" Gav eventually asked.

"Don't worry, I'm not leaving yet."

"You should leave already. You don't belong here."

"And you think you do?"

"Yes... And it's not like I can ever leave this place from here on."

Zeke slowly sat up and looked down at Gav. "I will be seeing your wife and son again soon," Zeke told him.

Gav held Zeke's gaze for a while before he lifted the pendant in his hand and looked at the images inside. "Is she... and the boy well?" Gav asked.

"Yes. And your wife is an excellent ruler. Her empire is thriving and peaceful."

A gleam flashed across Gav's eyes. "That's great then."

Gav rose as well and stretched his hand to Zeke, giving back the pendant. "They don't need someone like me in their lives anymore. I will just... ruin her... them... her peaceful world. I'm one with the dark now, Zeke, I'm certain you know that. And this world... I'm bound here now for the rest of my life."

Without waiting for Zeke's response, Gav left the altar, walking away.

"Gav," Zeke called out, causing him to stop.

He turned to Zeke over his shoulder and smiled ever so slightly. "It's really time for you to leave this world, Zeke. Your stay here is long overdue." He then turned forward but still didn't move. "If you meet her, tell her to forget about me. Tell them not to wait for my return anymore. Because I will not... be coming back."

Before Zeke could respond, Gav disappeared, leaving Zeke looking at the pendant Gav left behind. He could only sigh deeply.

"You fool," Zeke muttered, lifting his face to the sky again. "But too bad for you, Gav. I don't think your all-powerful wife will listen. She might actually barge into this hell herself to come get you once I tell her what you said. You better prepare yourself."

Zeke then stood and closed his eyes. His demeanor shifted. As the breeze blew around him, Zeke opened his lips and spoke with the wind. "I will not waste all your sacrifices, Mother. Thank you for everything. Thank you for waiting for me all this time. I..." he swallowed, clenching his fists. But soon, his grip relaxed, and his entire body followed. "I promise that my loved ones and I will live happily for a very... very long time. So please... be at peace forever, Mother... goodbye."

~ The End~

___ Dear Readers,

Thank you for all your support until now.