

Kings Breeder 911

Chapter 911 It Didn't Work

He looked down his long, pointed nose at us. His eyes weren't mean or suspicious; he just seemed curious about us.

"Well, we are looking for something very specific and it has brought us to these mountains," Archer explained.

"Specific, huh?" the man asked, tilting his head to the side.

"Yeah, we're looking for a Lunalily. My sources say there's a valley in this mountain range where the flowers grow."

"A Lunalily?"

I held the picture out. It was possible if these men were locals, they might have a different name for the flower.

His eyes widened as he studied the picture.

"Yes, I know of this flower. The cave is not far. If you follow this narrow path, it will lead you there." He pointed behind him at a very narrow path that disappeared into the mountains.

"Thank you." I took the picture back and put it in my pocket.

Archer nodded at me and we headed to the path.

"Oh... one word of advice," the man said, catching our attention.

I turned back and looked him right in the eyes. He gave me a deep look full of several emotions I couldn't identify.

"The cave where your Lunalily grows... several other plants and creatures reside there as well. Many are poisonous. Touch only the plant you're after."

"Uhh... thanks." I nodded.

The path was narrow and Archer and I had to walk single file. Archer was right, though; it was a lot better than hiking randomly through the mountains, hoping we found the right path to the cave.

Less than an hour later, we came to the cave opening. It burrowed deep into the mountains, but I could see a small pinpoint of light on the other end. It must have led out into the valley.

"Okay, I doubt we'll be able to see much in the cave. I think it'll be better to look for a Lunalily in the valley on the other side," I said, pointing to the pinhole of light.

"Good call. We should walk a straight line through the cave and not touch the walls."

"Also a good idea."

I took a deep breath and ducked into the cave. We had to walk hunched over because the ceiling was low. Halfway through, my back ached and I fought the urge to stand up completely.

Finally, we made it out of the other side. The cliff walls of the valley rose up around us, plants growing out of the steep, jagged walls.

"Up there, Jared! I see one." Archer craned his neck back, pointing up.

"I see it..." Sighing, I took my backpack off. "I'll climb up there and get it."

The cliff had a lot of hand and footholds. I climbed up to the flower and pulled out a small trowel from my pocket. Without damaging the roots, I wiggled the flower out, but I couldn't catch it.

"Archer, catch the flower!" I shouted to him as it fell from the cliff.

I looked down and saw Archer dive forward, catching the flower delicately in his open hands.

"Whew! I got it. Come on down, Jared!"

I shimmied back down the cliff. Archer handed me the flower and I wrapped it in damp clothes before tucking it into a plastic bag and into my backpack for safekeeping.

"That was easy."

"Maybe too easy," I grumbled, putting my backpack on again.

"Don't say that, Jared. It should be a good thing when things are easy."

I chuckled and shook my head. "Usually, when things go this well, it is followed up by something less good."

"We've got two days back to the village. Anything could go wrong." Archer chuckled and headed back to the cave.

I groaned a little. He might have been joking but Archer didn't know how right he really was.

Just as we made it out of the mountains, a group of rogues surrounded us.

"Well, well. What did you pull out of that cave? We hear there's buried treasure in there." The rogue leader said, grinning and showing rotten teeth.

I cringed. "We didn't find any treasure; I can assure you of that!"

"But if you're looking for a fight, we're happy to oblige." Archer smirked and wiggled his eyebrows.

There were four rogues all together. It didn't seem like much, and I knew that Archer and I could fight them off in our sleep.

I didn't want any more delays.

My wolf was anxious to return to Eliza and restore the mate bond. I too was anxious to have it restored.

"Just hand over what you pulled out of the cave and there'll be no need for a fight," the rogue leader said, holding a hand out to us.

"Not going to happen!" I snarled.

The rogue grinned. "Well, it looks like you're going to get the fight after all."

"Wait...." I took my backpack off and set it aside. I wasn't going to let the flower get crushed in this.

"Get that pack!" the rogue leader ordered.

His rogues jumped at us.

Archer went to the left and I went to the right. I straightened my arm and flung it into one of the rogue's necks, clotheslining him. He groaned and fell on the ground, groaning and rubbing his neck.

I whipped around and pounced on the other, slamming his head into the nearest rock.

Archer took out a third rogue quickly.

Only the rogue leader remained. He glanced at his fallen comrades and then at us.

"Well... you guys can keep your treasure. I don't really need it." He laughed nervously, holding his hands up in surrender and taking a slow step back.

I glanced at Archer and raised an eyebrow.

Archer shrugged.

The rogue leader chuckled again. He turned on his heel and ran off.

"Some leader," I muttered. I grabbed my backpack and we were off again.

By the time we got back to the pack house, my wolf was so excited. He couldn't wait to feel the mate bond again. His excitement overflowed into my veins, and I wanted to see her and hold her with the strength of our bond returned.

First, I needed to prepare a special drink for us. It wasn't as easy as just giving her the flower. We needed to drink it and then say a prayer to the Moon Goddess to restore the bond. If we were meant to be together, she'd bless us and restore the bond.

I chopped up the flower roots and petals and put them in a tea strainer. When the water was boiled, I let the petals and roots steep for ten minutes and added a few magical love herbs that Mila had told me about.

When the drink had cooled, I brought two mugs of it to Eliza's room.

"What's this?" she asked when I handed it over.

"This is to restore the mate bond. We drink the drink and say a prayer to the Moon Goddess." I handed Eliza her mug and clinked mine against hers.

She smiled widely, and I could see how much it really meant to her to restore the bond. She'd been telling me that it didn't matter to her, but I could tell that it did.

"Bottoms up." Eliza tipped her mug back and drank the whole thing down.

I chuckled and mimicked her. The drink was sweet and flowery. It was gone so fast.

I took Eliza into my arms and we lay down on the bed together.

"Moon Goddess, please accept my humble plea to repair the broken bond between Eliza and me. She's my mate, my wife, my Luna, and I wish to feel that bond with her again."

I cupped her blushing cheeks. Eliza bit her lower lip.

"Moon Goddess, I pray that you restore the bond between Jared and me, that you allow us to love each other and be bonded together as we are meant to be."

Just as she finished, I kissed her. Hearing that she really wanted the bond restored made my heart swell.

She kissed me back but after a moment, pulled away.

"Umm... I don't feel anything. Do you?"

I frowned and shook my head. I looked deeply into Eliza's eyes, searching for the deep connection of the mate bond that we were supposed to share. I didn't feel anything except for the love I always had for her.

"The bond isn't restored," I said. "It didn't work."

[Chapter 912](#)

Eliza

Jared's face fell when he realized the mate bond wasn't restored. My heart ached in my chest, seeing how sad he looked. He'd wanted to restore it so badly. I knew he did.

There was a part of me that wanted it restored too, despite how much I didn't think we needed it.

I wrapped my arms loosely around Jared's neck and looked into his eyes. He looked away.

"Hey, look at me."

Slowly, he lifted his shimmering, deep orbs to mine.

I licked my lips slowly. "It doesn't matter, okay?"

"Of course, it matters! How can it not?"

Sighing, I tightened my arms around him, pulling myself closer. I slid my body against Jared's.

"It doesn't matter because I don't need the mate bond to tell me how much I love you. Do you need it to tell how much you love me?"

Jared shook his head and slipped his arms around my waist. "No, I know that I love you."

"Then we don't need the mate bond. My heart flutters every time we are together. Isn't that enough?"

Jared smiled and slipped his hands over my butt. He squeezed, pulling me closer until our hips ground together.

"Yes, that should be enough." He nuzzled his face into my neck, his words a soft murmur on my skin.

"Then, show me that we don't need the mate bond." I hugged him closer, pressing my breasts against his chest.

"Mmm, yes, ma'am," Jared purred.

He kissed my neck, sucking gently and nipping as he worked his way up my throat to my lips. His lips came down on mine and I rolled my body against his.

It had been far too long since we'd been together like this. I kissed him fervently.

Jared pushed his tongue between my lips. He nipped my lower lip with his teeth and sucked it into his mouth.

"Mmm."

A shiver ran down my spine, tightening my core. I rolled my hips against Jared, feeling his hard arousal pressing against my leg. My thighs trembled with desire.

Jared's hands slid under my shirt. His thumbs grazed my stomach lightly and he caressed his fingers up my sides, pulling my shirt up my torso.

Our kiss broke as my shirt came off, tossed to the floor. I quickly grabbed the hem of Jared's shirt and pulled it off. It joined my shirt on the floor. I put my hands on the back of Jared's head and pulled him back to me, our lips colliding urgently.

He ran his fingers down my spine. I trembled and shuddered in his arms. Jared rolled on top of me and grabbed my wrists. He pinned me down lightly, straddling my waist. He swooped down, kissing along my jawline.

I moaned and arched my back, the warm, hard muscles of his chest pressing against my n****s until they tightened into hardened little nubs. I curled my hands around his shoulder blades.

Jared's lips moved along the base of my throat. He pressed his tongue against my skin, dragging it slowly across my clavicle.

His hands moved back down my sides and he hooked his thumbs into the waistband of my pants. His tongue ran up my other clavicle and my throat. He flicked my earlobe.

I gasped and hugged my arms around his neck. I rolled my hips against him and Jared's c**k jumped. A low groan escaped his lips just under my ear.

Our pants quickly joined the rest of our clothes on the floor. Jared cradled my hips in his large hands, gripping me tightly. The velvety tip of his erection slid against the inside of my thigh.

My p***y ached and wetness pooled between my legs. My skin was on fire and I writhed on the bed.

Jared brought his lips back to mine. He kissed me sweetly, his hands massaging my backside. My legs trembled with desire and I bent my knees around Jared's legs. He wrapped his arms around my back, pinning my body to his and lowered his hips to mine.

His strong, firm organ sank into my tight channel, spreading me apart in blissful pain. I threw my head back on the pillows, moaning wantonly, clinging to him and crying out in pleasure.

Jared gasped into my mouth, kissing me harder as he thrust into me. My legs quivered and I rolled my hips to meet his thrusts. The pleasure in my abdomen built with each thrust. I kneaded his shoulder blades with my fingers and slid my hands to the back of his neck.

My fingers knotted in his hair and I clenched my legs around him. My p***y tightened around him, increasing the pleasurable friction between us.

His c**k stoked my inner walls, spreading my insides apart to an almost painful point. I hugged him close, clinging to him and sobbing with pleasure.

All thoughts left my mind but one... the mate bond couldn't make me love him more than I did or make me feel more from our lovemaking.

Jared thrust harder into me, tipping my hips up. His c**k struck me hard on my internal pleasure spot.

"Mmm!" I moaned and arched my back.

Something deep inside started to blossom, like a sleeping flower bursting into bloom. I met Jared's thrusts and closed my eyes.

My fingernails bit into Jared's back. I couldn't take it anymore....

The feelings inside of me reached an all-time high and my body burst with pleasure as thundering waves coursed through me and my body trembled and rippled with the effects of my orgasm.

I moaned, clenching my legs tighter around his hips. I pulled him deeper inside of me.

Jared groaned, tightening his arms around my back. He held me as close as possible and my skin started to hum. He gasped and I thought he felt the same humming on his skin as I did.

His c**k quivered and he buried his head in my neck, moaning and groaning as he came hard, releasing inside of me.

We clung to each other, the highs of our climaxes still hanging around us in a blissful afterglow.

There was something stronger, something I had never felt before. Or, maybe I had felt it before but I could barely remember.

"Jared..." I whispered, my voice no more than a gasp.

"What is it?" he asked, lifting his head and looking into my eyes.

The moment our eyes met, my heart fluttered giddily and I bit my lower lip. My skin hummed all over and I felt like I was melting into him.

"Do you feel that?"

Jared grinned widely and nodded. "Yes... but I don't understand. Why... now?"

I shrugged. "Maybe we needed to consummate in order for the ritual to be complete?"

"Of course! Why didn't I think of that? It makes perfect sense." Jared nuzzled his head against my breasts.

I wrapped my arms around his head and cradled him against me. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever felt. His skin against mine filled me with so much love and joy—the way he looked at me, how his hands felt on my sides.

It was like I was seeing him and feeling him for the first time.

"We should do something special, to mark the occasion," I said, a thought coming to me.

"What would you like to do?" Jared asked, meeting my eyes again.

"Well... I did say I wanted to 'mark' the occasion." I bit my lower lip.

Jared's eyes lit up and he propped himself up next to me. "You're serious?"

"Yes!" I nodded vigorously.

"Eliza... I would love to mark you and bear your mark."

Jared scooped me into his arms and held me against him. I gasped and closed my eyes.

"Please, mark me."

I tipped my head to the side, exposing my neck.

Jared chuckled. He pressed his lips to my neck, kissing me sweetly. He parted his lips and sank his teeth into my shoulder, breaking my skin.

My stomach fluttered and I clung to him as an overwhelming sensation of pleasure ran through me—pleasure and a feeling of completeness.

When Jared pulled his teeth back, I whimpered. I didn't want to feel separated from him.

He hooked his finger under my chin and tipped my head back. I opened my eyes just as he kissed my lips.

"Your turn, my dear."

He guided my face to the crook of his neck. I wrapped my arm around him and brushed my nose along the line of his neck and shoulder.

Jared gasped, his whole body tensing. I felt his pleasure just as much as I felt my own.

I bit Jared's shoulder and he groaned, a shudder running through him. He cupped the back of my head and held me close.

When I pulled back, I saw my bite healing quickly, but a faint mark remained. I brushed my fingers over it and Jared's eyelids fluttered.

"Jared, I don't need the mate bond or a mark to know that I love you and that I want to be with you. But it definitely makes everything stronger."

Jared smirked and looped an arm around my back.

"Ack!" I cried out as he swooped over me and I was on my back again.

"I love you, Eliza."

"I love you, too," I murmured just as Jared's lips covered my own.

He kissed me slowly, passionately, running his hand down my side and over the curve of my hip. He slipped his fingers between my legs, stroking the inside of my thighs and moving higher and higher.

His fingers brushed my p***y and I trembled, my lips and clit swollen with desire at the new, strong bond between us.

I gasped and my core tightened. Jared's fingers pushed my lips apart and stroked my most sensitive parts. I moaned and shuddered, pleasure coursing through me faster than blood.

His fingers grazed my clit and I cried out.

Jared's lips curved up, smiling against mine as he kept kissing me. He circled his finger around my clit, rubbing in a slow, tantalizing circle. My legs shuddered, and I rocked my hips back and forth.

My clit throbbed at his touch and my p***y quivered. I moaned into his mouth, pleasure rippling through my legs and abdomen. I clung to Jared, sobbing as he brought me right to the edge with another powerful orgasm.

Jared pulled his mouth away. I panted and gasped as my legs continued to quiver with the aftermath of my climax.

A second later, Jared was over me again. He slipped his arm around my back and nestled between my legs.

Our eyes met and I watched his handsome, sexy face as he breathed raggedly, hungrily—hungry for me.

My stomach flipped and fresh desire overtook me. I reached for Jared and pulled him down on top of me.

[Chapter 913](#)

Knock. Knock. Knock.

"What...." I groaned, rolling over and colliding with Jared's chest.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

"Jared, Eliza?" Miriam's voice called from the hallway.

Jared sighed heavily and sat up. I pulled the covers over my head again. Once we got up, the magic from the night before would be gone for good and we'd have to face the world.

"What is it, Miriam?" Jared asked. He grabbed the sheet and pulled it down from my face.

"Hey," I whined quietly. I grabbed at the sheet again.

Jared pulled it away from me and shook his head. He winked at me and tickled my sides.

"Stop it!" I gasped, trying to stay quiet so Miriam didn't hear us goofing off.

"Jared, there's been an influx of refugees from the capital. Your messenger has returned and has a report you'll want to hear," Miriam said.

Jared immediately stopped tickling me.

"Sorry, love, it is time to get to work."

"I know." I sighed and stretched.

"We'll be right there, Miriam."

We dressed quickly and met Miriam in the hall. She gave us a look, like she didn't approve of something. Knowing Miriam, she probably thought we shouldn't be together since the mate bond was severed.

"Come with me."

I glanced at Jared with a sheepish grin and shrugged. He took my hand and we followed Miriam to the kitchen.

The messenger was at a table, scarfing down soup, sandwiches, and crackers like he hadn't eaten in days.

"Get this man some more food. He's starving," Jared said, motioning to one of the cooks.

"Right away!"

I sat down across from him. He was pretty dirty, too, his clothes ragged. He'd come straight to the kitchen to eat, it seemed, without cleaning up first.

"Are all of these refugees coming in from the capital?" I asked, opening the conversation.

The messenger swallowed a soggy lump of bread and nodded.

"The capital is a mess. Residents are leaving like crazy. They all want to get far away." he reported.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Jared asked. He sat beside me.

The messenger pulled something out of his pocket and handed it to Jared. It was my engagement ring....

"I couldn't deliver the message. I couldn't even get close to the palace." He hung his head somberly.

"That's not important right now. What did you see?" Jared encouraged.

Under the table, he put his hand on my leg. I bit the inside of my cheek to hold back my gasp.

Was it wrong to feel so happy and so much love when there were so many dangers in the world?

"Aries attacked the capital with his rogue army. It was a mess, but the royal army was able to hold them back. They quashed the rebellion."

"That's good news, isn't it?" I creased my brow when the messenger shook his head.

"You'd think. However, all the rogues are still there. Now, they are just attacking to cause mayhem. They don't have the goal of a rebellion, which makes them a lot more dangerous. They've split off into smaller groups and are plaguing the capital with attacks."

"That explains why all the refugees are coming here...."

Jared nodded. "The capital is no longer safe."

"The rogues were there before I even got there. It was a total mess. People were terrified."

"What news of the king and queen?" I asked, tapping my fingers on the table.

The messenger sighed. "The king and queen barricaded themselves in the palace with their children. No one has seen them for a while but from what I gather, they are safe."

"Safe as prisoners in their own home," Jared grumbled.

"Rumor has it that Hestia and Aries are in the capital now, working together. They are draining energy from captives and calling more and more rogues every day. They're planning something big...."

I shuddered. That sounded bad, whatever it was. Aries and Hestia, together again—it had been too much to hope that Aries would freeze to death and Hestia would crawl into a hole and die.

I shuddered. That sounded bad, whatever it was. Aries and Hestia, together again—it had been too much to hope that Aries would freeze to death and Hestia would crawl into a hole and die.

I felt Jared's eyes on me and I glanced in his direction. His look told me he was thinking the same thing I was.

We didn't need words to know that Hestia and Aries were up to no good and we couldn't let them complete their plan.

"Eat up, man. Then get cleaned up. You can tell us anything else later."

"Thank you."

The cook brought over a plate covered in bacon and eggs.

Jared and I left him to keep eating. When we were alone in the hallway, Jared grabbed my arm and pulled me to him.

"What are you doing?" I gasped.

He smirked and grabbed my left hand. He lifted it up to the light and carefully slid my engagement ring back into place.

"That's where it will stay forever, from now on," Jared said. He kissed the ring on my finger.

"I don't ever want to take it off again." I examined the ring for a moment, but I was still concerned about Jared's thoughts on the situation.

Even though it was a sweet moment, Jared was distant, his eyes unfocused.

"Jared, what are you thinking? This situation at the capital isn't something we can ignore."

"I know... I'm thinking I should lead a small group to scout out the situation. I can send word to our allies to meet us there."

"You think a full-on attack is wise?" I creased my brow.

Jared shrugged and stroked his chin. "I won't know until I get there. But I want our allies at the ready. I should get some more hands here to help with the refugees."

"I can do that."

"Eliza, you're supposed to be taking it easy." Jared gave me a look.

I scoffed. "I can help the refugees get food and clothes and supplies. That won't strain me too much."

"Alright. I'll make my travel plans and you take care of the refugees." Jared took me in his arms and hugged me.

I nuzzled against his chest and wrapped my arms around him.

"Check in before you leave?" I asked.

"Of course!" Jared kissed my lips quickly and departed.

I went straight to the garden, where Giselle and Scarlett were gushing over some new fabric that had been delivered.

"You two look like you need something to do," I said, approaching.

"Oh, Eliza, you are a sight for sore eyes! I'd love something to do," Giselle said, brightening up.

"Hey! Am I boring you that much?" Scarlett whined, putting her hands on her hips.

Giselle rolled her eyes. "What do you have in mind? A little painting, some dusting?"

"Not this time." I shook my head. "We've got refugees pouring in, and I'd like to get some supplies distributed and some shelters put up on the outskirts of the village."

"Awe, Eliza, you are such a humanitarian," Scarlett winked at me.

"I'm the Luna of the village. This is my duty. Come on!"

We gathered up a bunch of supplies and headed to the outskirts of town.

Jared had already sent several men to help organize the refugees.

"You three, start assembling the shelters," I said, motioning to a few of them. "And you over there, I want you to go around with this clipboard and take everyone's names, first and last. If you can get their pack of origin too, that would be great."

I handed the clipboard off to another volunteer.

"And what would you like us to do?" Giselle asked motioning to herself and Scarlett.

"Scarlett, can you pass out blankets and clothes? We don't have a lot, so prioritize the elderly, sick, and children, also pregnant women."

"Should I get you a blanket then, too?" Scarlett giggled.

"I think I'll manage." I scoffed and sent her on her way.

"How about me?" Giselle held her hands out to me.

"Food and water. Make sure those who seem the hungriest are given food first. Promise the others we will get more food soon."

Giselle nodded and got right to work.

I assigned a few more tasks to some of the other volunteers.

The refugees coming didn't look like they were in bad shape. Most of them just looked like regular people trying to relocate. They seemed weary from travel, but not as bad as the messenger.

There were some that looked sick, though.

I went to the nearest volunteer. "Can you set up an infirmary tent? I'd like to get the sick looked at. I'm sure it is nothing, but I'd rather they all get tested and treated before mingling with the population. This is the perfect situation for a bad outbreak."

"Good idea, Luna. But we don't have any medicine yet."

"I'll get word to Jared to have a healer and some medicine join us."

I sent another volunteer off with the message and got back to work.

There were a lot of kids standing around looking bored and lonely. I found a few boxes of toys and started passing them out.

"There's a big field over there, why don't you get a game of soccer going? I bet a bunch of these kids would love to play with you," I said, handing a soccer ball to a young boy.

He grabbed the ball and grinned. Motioning to some of his friends, they all ran to the field and started playing.

Many of the other kids came over to me and I handed out some more toys. Seeing their smiles and happiness brightened the mood in the entire refugee camp.

When a healer arrived, I got her set up in the infirmary tent. She started making the rounds and giving out cough medicine and checking all the sick refugees' vitals.

After she checked on several, she came over to report to me.

"This doesn't look like anything more than a common cold. I believe they picked it up while traveling. It's a long journey, and a lot of them didn't have luxurious travel accommodations."

"That is good news. Give out as much cough medicine as you can spare. Please let me know if there are any more serious ailments going around." I touched her shoulder.

Giselle and Scarlett were waiting for me outside the infirmary tent.

"Things are already looking up." Giselle motioned to the camp and the smiling faces.

"It is a start. This good mood won't last long if we can't get more permanent dwellings set up." I sighed heavily.

"Or better yet, get them back to their homes," Scarlett said.

I nodded. "Jared's working on that."

We kept working to provide resources and comfort for the refugees. Just when one task was done, something else popped up for us to take care of.

It wasn't until mid-afternoon that Jared found me. He pulled me aside.

"Hey, I've got a lot of work to do."

"I know. I'm about to head out and I wanted to say goodbye." He looked at me with deep eyes.

"It feels like we only just got back together." I put my hands on Jared's shoulders.

"I won't be gone long. I promise." Jared cupped my cheeks and kissed me on the lips. "You'll be busy. You won't even know I'm gone. You've already done such great work here."

I pouted slightly and shook my head. "Of course, I will know."

Jared kissed me again. "We'll see each other again soon."

I hugged him again, but I didn't want to let him go. I didn't want to be parted from him... not again.

[Chapter 914](#)

With each passing day, more refugees arrived.

Every morning, I went to the kitchens in the pack house and had them cook up as much food as they could. I got some volunteers together and we'd all bring the food out to the refugee camp.

The shelters were up and they housed a lot of them.

For some of the refugees who had been there longest, we'd managed to find housing within the village, and pack house. But we were completely packed to the seams and about ready to burst.

Scarlett and Giselle helped me hand out new clothes and supplies.

We even had a bathing station set up for them. It wasn't the most glamorous setup and there was usually a long line at the bathing station, but no one complained.

I expected them to start complaining and getting restless after a few days.

Apparently, the alternative of returning to the capital was a lot worse.

From the moment I woke up to the time I lay down at night, I was on my feet helping the refugees.

The ones who had been around for a while knew the drill.

But with more arriving every day, I had to get them checked in. It was important to keep a constant list of who was coming in so we could track them down as needed.

The infirmary was constantly pocked with kids who were getting into scuffles and scoping their knees. Fortunately, no one was fighting or bickering over supplies. They seemed to understand that we were doing our best.

It didn't matter. Every day, our resources were getting stretched thinner and thinner.

I had sent word to our allies for help and supplies, but no one had come yet.

"I'm not sure how much longer we can keep this up," Miriam said, stirring a giant pot of chili on the stove.

I sat in the kitchen, rubbing my feet and eating a snack.

It wasn't fair to ask the village members to cut back on their food and supplies to help the refugees, but most of them had been happy to give up some of what they were used to in order to spread the wealth.

"Our allies should be here soon," I muttered.

"Well, hopefully, they will bring enough to restock us as well. Soon, we will need the same aid as our refugees." She sniffed and got back to work.

I shook my head, but it wasn't like she was wrong. We couldn't keep it up forever.

"Do you need anything else from me?" I asked, standing up.

"No. I'll let you know when the chili is ready." Miriam waved her spoon at me.

I found Giselle and Scarlett in the refugee camp. They were helping pass out the most recent supplies we'd managed to scrounge up.

"How many refugees have come in today?" I asked.

"Eliza, we've been going at this for weeks," Giselle said. "We can't keep going like this."

"I know. I promise we'll get relief soon. Can you please tell me how many refugees come in today?"

Giselle sighed and pulled out the clipboard. "We had ten more come in today."

"That's more than yesterday!" I cried.

Giselle nodded somberly. "It seems like more and more are coming every day."

"I'll go over our supplies and reorganize portions for the larger groups coming in." I handed the clipboard back.

I knew that even if I reorganized the portions, it still wouldn't make up for the larger numbers of refugees coming in.

Sighing, I headed back to the mansion.

"Luna Eliza! Luna!"

I turned around as a pocket member ran toward me.

"What is it?"

"A big group of people is coming." She pointed past the refugee camp. With each passing day, more refugees arrived.

Every morning, I went to the kitchens in the pack house and had them cook up as much food as they could. I got some volunteers together and we'd all bring the food out to the refugee camp.

The shelters were up and they housed a lot of them.

For some of the refugees who had been there longest, we'd managed to find housing within the village, and pack house. But we were completely packed to the seams and about ready to burst.

Scarlett and Giselle helped me hand out new clothes and supplies.

We even had a bathing station set up for them. It wasn't the most glamorous setup and there was usually a long line at the bathing station, but no one complained.

I expected them to start complaining and getting antsy after a few days.

Apparently, the alternative of returning to the capital was a lot worse.

From the moment I woke up to the time I lay down at night, I was on my feet helping the refugees.

The ones who had been around for a while knew the drill.

But with more arriving every day, I had to get them checked in. It was important to keep a constant list of who was coming in so we could track them down as needed.

The infirmary was constantly packed with kids who were getting into scuffles and scraping their knees.

Fortunately, no one was fighting or bickering over supplies. They seemed to understand that we were doing our best.

It didn't matter. Every day, our resources were getting stretched thinner and thinner.

I had sent word to our allies for help and supplies, but no one had come yet.

"I'm not sure how much longer we can keep this up," Miriam said, stirring a giant pot of chili on the stove.

I sat in the kitchen, rubbing my feet and eating a snack.

It wasn't fair to ask the village members to cut back on their food and supplies to help the refugees, but most of them had been happy to give up some of what they were used to in order to spread the wealth.

"Our allies should be here soon," I muttered.

"Well, hopefully, they will bring enough to restock us as well. Soon, we will need the same aid as our refugees." She sniffed and got back to work.

I shook my head, but it wasn't like she was wrong. We couldn't keep it up forever.

"Do you need anything else from me?" I asked, standing up.

"No. I'll let you know when the chili is ready." Miriam waved her spoon at me.

I found Giselle and Scarlett in the refugee camp. They were helping pass out the most recent supplies we'd managed to scrounge up.

"How many refugees have come in today?" I asked.

"Eliza, we've been going at this for weeks," Giselle said. "We can't keep going like this."

"I know. I promise we'll get relief soon. Can you please tell me how many refugees came in today?"

Giselle sighed and pulled out the clipboard. "We had ten more come in today."

"That's more than yesterday!" I cried.

Giselle nodded somberly. "It seems like more and more are coming every day."

"I'll go over our supplies and reorganize rations for the larger groups coming in." I handed the clipboard back.

I knew that even if I reorganized the rations, it still wouldn't make up for the larger numbers of refugees coming in.

Sighing, I headed back to the mansion.

"Luna Eliza! Luna!"

I turned around as a pack member ran toward me.

"What is it?"

"A big group of people is coming." She pointed past the refugee camp.

My heart sank.

More refugees? We could barely support the ones that we had....

My heart sank.

More refugees? We could barely support the ones that we had....

I followed her out to the road and saw a group of shifters coming toward us. They were all carrying large packs and there were carts covered in crates.

I smiled, and all the weight lifted from my shoulders and chest. "Those aren't refugees!"

I ran down the road to greet our allies. They had crates and crates of supplies.

"Luna Eliza?" the woman at the head of the group asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Alexa, an envoy from Pomeni pack."

"And I'm Gerard from Saboreef."

"Welcome, welcome, both of you." I shook their hands and motioned toward the refugee camp.

"It looks like you've got a good camp set up," Alexa said.

"It is passable, but we are running low on supplies. My volunteers are waiting to help you distribute it."

They went on ahead with several Pomeni and Saboreef members bringing in more crates of supplies behind them.

Another pack envoy brought up the rear with her own supply caravan.

"I'm Jennifer of Alvar pack. My Alpha and Luna send their greetings."

"Thank you for coming. We have many shifters here who need aid."

"And we are here to help."

She joined the others, and supplies started getting passed out.

I got back to the camp and sat down, watching as the mood in the refugee camp blossomed again. My volunteers all sighed and looked so relaxed and relieved.

Our ally packs had brought more than enough supplies to get us through months with refugees, even if twenty came every day.

Relief coursed through me.

"Gerard, I was hoping to get some more shelters erected. The ones we have are getting a little packed. Is that something you can organize?" I asked him.

"Certainly, Luna."

"I'd like another bathing station to be set up. The lines at the one we have are getting really long," I said to Alexa.

"I'm on it."

Soon, the refugee camp was bustling with busy volunteers again. They brought fresh clothes, more food and drinks, shelters, blankets, cots and bedrolls, shampoos, toothbrushes and toothpaste, other toiletries, and even propane stoves for cooking.

That meant the refugees could start fending for themselves with food, and Miriam and the cooks wouldn't be so taxed with all the cooking.

Despite the extra help, we had a long way to go before the refugees would be settled. They couldn't all stay in the village.

After distributing most of the supplies, Alexa, Gerard, and Jennifer met with me and Miriam in the pack house. We'd found rooms for them in the pack house, a thanks for their assistance.

"Eliza, you've done an amazing job here, but you know that the refugees can't stay," Alexa said.

"I do. Midnight Sun is too small to accommodate them all."

"We need to think about relocating many of them. It will take the strain off of you and it will prevent us from needing to bring more aid. It was a long journey. We thought we might get here too late," Gerard said.

I nodded. "What do you want to do? Some of them can stay here but... are any of your packs willing to take on some refugees?"

Jennifer smiled. "That's one of the reasons we are here. Tomorrow, I will go around and take a poll to see which refugees want to go to which packs. Families will want to stay together, I'm sure."

"That's a good idea. We can assess who wants to go where and then determine if those packs can accept the refugees that want to go." Gerard nodded.

It was a plan.

Jennifer made good on her word. It didn't take long for her to come up with lists of refugees that wanted to go to each of the other packs.

Only a handful chose to stay in Midnight Sun. For that, I was grateful. It would take us months to recover after the deficit from the refugees.

It took a few days for the envoys to organize the refugees going with them but one by one, they left again with many of the refugees in tow.

The camp was almost empty by the time they left, and I immediately sent out crews to start cleaning it up.

Giselle and Scarlett went with me to address the refugees who had chosen to stay with us. I had them gather in the gardens behind the pack house.

"Welcome to Midnight Sun. We are happy to accept you as members of our pack."

"Thank you, Luna Eliza," they chorused.

I nodded and motioned to Giselle. "Giselle has come up with permanent housing for you. Please see her to get your assigned dwellings. Scarlett is working to get jobs for you so that you can officially become part of our community."

They bowed their heads to me again. I left Giselle and Scarlett with the newest pack members to get them settled and I went to my room for a nap.

I'd been running myself ragged for weeks. The moment I lay down on the bed, my stomach and heart twinged.

I immediately thought of Jared and looped my arms around myself.

He hadn't sent word at all about his scouting party or their progress. When he left, he told me he'd only be gone for a few days. It had been weeks....

Things were starting to calm down now that the refugee camp was gone. One of the jobs I'd had Scarlett give our new pack members was to draw up a plan for the new elementary school.

Now that renovations were back on track, I wanted to make sure that the entire village was updated when Jared returned, including the school he'd envisioned.

"This is a great floor plan. Are you sure you weren't an architect before?" I asked, reviewing the blueprints.

"I've always been creative, but I've never designed a whole school," she said.

I grinned. "Well, it came out great. I'll get going to schedule builders."

"I really can't wait to see my own plan once it is built."

"Jared will be really pleased to see this, too. It has been his dream to have an elementary school for the kids of Midnight Sun. I'm sure he'll love this."

"Thank you. I'd really like to impress my new Alpha. I want to show him that I belong here."

"You won't need to impress him too much. He'll just be happy that the school is ready."

"Eliza, the scouting party is back." Miriam popped her head into the study.

"Oh!" I dropped the plans on the desk and ran outside.

They hadn't sent a messenger ahead or any word that they were coming back. That was unusual. It didn't matter. I couldn't wait to see Jared and hear about the capital.

The scouting party was in the front of the pack house. They looked tired and hungry, overworked.

There were only a handful of them with a few refugees. I walked through them, making eye contact with each one. There was something somber and dark in their eyes.

When I got through the scouting party, my heart squeezed in on itself and sank... Jared and Archer hadn't returned with the scouting party....

[Chapter 917](#)

The Royal Guard warriors and my allies eagerly went back into the capital and the palace for a much-deserved rest.

I hesitated, staring at Aries's body.

King Xander approached me. I took a half step back, unsure what I was supposed to do if he started asking questions.

"You seem troubled," he said.

I shrugged. "It wasn't an easy fight."

"And yet, without your quick thinking and leadership skills, my army wouldn't have had the opportunity to attack. My entire family and loyal soldiers would have been trapped in the palace and eventually perished. The rogues could have outlasted us."

I nodded. It seemed like the closest thing to a "thank you" I was likely to get from a king.

“What’s bothering you? It was a well-fought battle and you took down Aries.” Xander waved his arm over Aries’s body.

“Hestia is still out there somewhere.” I sighed and rubbed my temple. “I didn’t see her during the battle, but my intel told me she was in the capital.”

She probably fled when she saw the army under attack. What is she after, anyway?”

“Uh, she wants to destroy the bridge between the Light and Dark Realms and... well, put an end to the White Queens.”

All the blood drained from Xander’s face.

He turned on his heel and sprinted back to the palace.

“Your Highness!” I raced after him, Archer hot on my heels.

He didn’t even pause when I called out to him. The king pushed through the warriors and hurdled up the palace stairs.

I kept up with him, through the corridors and to the queen’s chamber.

His eyes were wild and frantic as he slammed his shoulder into the chamber door, busting it right off its hinges.

With the exception of myself and my wolf when Eliza was in pain, I’d never seen anyone act so protective and unhinged at the same time.

“Sire, what’s the matter?” one of the guards stationed outside the queen’s chamber asked.

Xander didn’t address them. He went right in. Archer and I followed.

“Lena!” Xander shouted.

“Oh... Your Majesty!” A young servant was hunched over something on the floor. She looked up with tear filled eyes, glistening with fear.

“Move!” Xander motioned her aside.

He froze in place. I saw all the energy and the feelings of victory drain from him in a second. He dropped to his knees beside the queen’s form on the floor.

Her eyes were closed and she was pale. I could see that she was still breathing, but when the king touched her she was completely unresponsive.

Eliza

“Where are Jared and Archer?” I asked, sitting down with the leader of the scouts.

The others had gone off with the survivors from the capital to get cleaned up, fed, and settled.

“They sent us back with the survivors and are working on a plan to get the rogue army out of the city,” he reported.

“Did you learn anything about the king and queen while you were there?”

My heart continued to beat erratically. It was good to know that Jared and Archer were safe, at least, they were when the scouts left them.

He’d already told me about all the troubles they’d encountered along the way that had slowed them down, turning their “few days” into “a few weeks.”

“Unfortunately, no. What we do know is that they are still barricaded within the palace.”

I sighed and nodded. “Thank you. Go rest and recover your strength.”

He nodded and left me alone in the living room.

I had some answers, but it wasn’t enough. The scouts had left Jared and Archer in the capital days ago. Anything could have happened to them and we’d never know.

How would they get word to us?

Things around the village had calmed down now that the refugees were settled and we weren’t running low on all supplies and resources.

Construction on the school had started, and it became clear after the first few days that they didn’t need me checking in every day to get an update on their progress.

All the other renovations had wrapped up.

I was bored... and worried. If I didn’t keep myself busy, my wolf and I got so restless thinking of Jared being in the capital with the rogue army and no backup.

To keep my mind busy, I went into the garden and started clipping summer blooms. It was getting late in the season now, and I wanted to get some flowers in the mansion before they wilted and died.

There were some late-season flowers just starting to bloom, and they brought entirely new colors and scents to the garden.

I knelt on the ground and clipped some ground-creeping roses, setting the blooms in a harvesting basket.

Under my knees, I felt a small vibration through the ground and the sound of engines filled the air.

It sounded like a lot of cars. That was unusual in these parts.

I threw my shears down and ran to the front of the packhouse, brushing dirt from my hands and pants as I went.

A long line of cars drove straight for the packhouse. From the flags on the windows, they belonged to King Xander. It was a royal motorcade.

My heart sank.

Were they here with bad news?

I should have been happy to see them at all because it meant the rogue army wasn't keeping the King and Queen prisoner in the palace anymore. The capital was liberated.

But dread crept through me like a crawling cancer. Something was wrong for them to show up here.

My heart ached for Jared.

Scarlett came out of the packhouse and stood next to me. She chewed her lower lip and shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

I took her hand, understanding that she was just as nervous as I was, and for similar reasons.

The vehicles came to a halt and the third vehicle in the line opened its doors.

Jared and Archer got out of the back.

My heart stopped for a moment as I roamed my eyes over Jared. He had all of his limbs, he was walking normally. There wasn't a single sign of blood or injury on him.

My heart kicked back on and I jolted forward, running right into his arms....

Scarlett ran right to Archer, flinging herself at him.

Jared wrapped his strong arms around me and held me tightly, burying his face in my hair.

"You're alright! I've been so worried. You were gone and...."

Jared covered my lips with his, kissing me passionately in front of everyone.

I didn't care. I slipped my arms around his neck and kissed him back. Every nerve in my body lit up and I felt like I was floating.

"I missed you," I gasped.

"I missed you too." He kissed my forehead and pulled me into another hug.

As happy as I was to see him, there was something off. Through the mate bond, I felt Jared's worry and concern. He was fine, and so was Archer, but someone wasn't....

"Jared, what's wrong?"

He looked down at me and met my eyes with a serious, somber gaze.

"I'm sorry, but our reunion has to be cut short." He sighed heavily.

"You're leaving again?"

"I am, but I need you to come with me." He motioned to the car.

"I don't understand. Jared, what happened in the capital?"

"We don't have a lot of time. I'll explain on the way. Right now, you need to come to the capital. The queen has been poisoned an—"

“Let’s go.” I cut him off and jumped into the car.

It was a long drive back to the palace, and Jared was able to fill me in on everything that had happened.

“Fortunately, there were few casualties on our side and few from the ranks of the Royal Guard. The rogues took the worst of it, and Aries is history,” he finished.

I nodded. “I’m glad Aries is out of the picture. But how did the queen get... poisoned?”

Jared took my hand and clasped it between both of his.

We had some privacy in the back seat with the landscape rolling by through tinted windows. Hearing about Jared’s victory should have elated me, but I couldn’t stop thinking about my cousin.

“I didn’t even think about it until after the battle. Hestia was in the capital and she was after White Queens. I should have known but... I only mentioned it to the king as an afterthought.”

“This isn’t your fault.” I cupped Jared’s cheek.

“When we got to her, it was already too late. Hestia had poisoned her and vanished... again.”

“Hestia’s still out there?” I whispered.

Jared nodded, casting his eyes down.

Tears stung my eyes and I turned away from Jared. I looked out the car window, chewing on the edge of my thumbnail.

The weight of everything that had happened since I came to the Dark Realm crushed down on me—curses, kidnappings, wars, injuries, rejection, and now... poison. Hestia had been the mastermind behind the latter, and she was still out there.

I couldn’t help but wonder if everyone’s lives would have been better if I’d never come to the Dark Realm.

Tears streaked down my cheeks and I sniffled.

“Eliza.” Jared murmured my name and slipped his arms around my stomach from behind. He pulled me against him and hugged me.

“I never should have come here. I shouldn’t have insisted on staying here in the Dark Realm,” I whispered, shaking my head.

If I’d left when Jared told me, or when he rejected me... if I’d never come here at all, would any of this have happened?

Hestia never would have had to poison my cousin to get what she wanted. I was always getting in the way of her plans and making her go to more and more extreme measures. I never should have meddled....

“Eliza, you can’t think like that. Hestia always wanted the White Queens out of the way. She would have gone after your cousin whether you were here or not.”

“We don’t know that. I should have gone back with my mother and... now Lena is hurt... possibly dying.”

“That isn’t your fault.” Jared kissed my neck.

“We’ve had every chance to kill Hestia and she always gets away! We should have tried harder, we never should have let her...” I sniffled as more tears fell from my eyes.

“We’ll get her, Eliza. The queen is hurt, but she is still alive. That means we have a chance to save her and I’m not going to give up on her, just like you never gave up on me.”

I nodded slowly and wiped my tears away.

“You’re right. She needs me to be strong and to fight for her. I won’t give up and I won’t let Hestia get away with this!”

[Chapter 918](#)

I sat by my cousin’s side as healers circled around her, working to figure out what was wrong. Why was this happening?

I never thought that saving Jared would lead to Hestia coming after my cousin, my family....

I’d pushed her to this. It was all to save Jared, which was a good cause, but now Lena might die. She didn’t deserve this.

King Xander sat on her other side, holding her hand.

Neither of us was willing to leave her.

“What can you tell me?” Xander asked the healers after a few days of testing and analysis.

“We still don’t know what she was poisoned with, only that she was poisoned,” one healer said.

“That’s all you’ve learned, in the past four days!?” Xander snapped.

The healer cringed and bowed his head.

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty, but this is a very complex poison. It isn’t like anything we’ve seen before. We can only guess as to what effects it is having.”

“And what are those effects?”

The healer sighed and went to the queen’s head, holding his hand over her mouth like he was feeling her breath.

I watched everything they did but stayed silent. It wasn’t my place to make a fuss over this. But I was still going to be there.

Jared stood against the wall behind me. He was never far away, but he understood that this was a family matter.

“Based on her vitals and response to certain stimuli, it appears she’s asleep. But we cannot wake her up. The poison is keeping her in a constant sleep state,” the healer explained.

“Like a coma?” I asked.

The healer shook his head. “Not quite. Based on her nervous system responses to light, pain, and other stimuli, she’s just asleep. There’s too much brain activity for it to be a coma.”

“Well, if the potion is just keeping her asleep, then she’s not in any immediate danger, right?” Xander asked.

The healer pursed his lips. “We can keep her nourished and hydrated, but long term, that won’t work. Since she’s asleep, she’s cycling through the different brain patterns of sleep. Long-term, it will force her brain to shut down.”

Xander gaped and sank into his chair.

I grabbed her fingers and squeezed. She jerked slightly, but her breathing remained even and her eyes didn’t open.

“Your Majesty, we should get her to the Light Realm,” I said.

Xander looked at me and arched an eyebrow.

“Their medicine is much stronger. They might have ways of keeping her alive until we can find a way to wake her up.”

“You’re right. The Light Realm is much more suited to figure this out.” He nodded.

“Can I accompany you?”

“Of course. She is your family, too.”

The king left, muttering about arrangements for his Beta to stay with the children and watch over the kingdom.

While Xander arranged to transport his wife to the Light Realm, I made arrangements of my own.

Jared watched me as I walked around the guest quarters we’d been assigned to, packing what little I’d brought with me.

“Are you sure you should be going with the king and queen?”

“Why wouldn’t I? She’s family. You’re the one who told me not to give up on her.” I tossed some clothes in a suitcase and looked under the bed for my shoes.

“I know, Eliza. That’s... you definitely shouldn’t give up on her, but it is a very long journey to the Light Realm.”

I stood up and put my hands on my hips, glaring at Jared. “You think that matters to me!? My cousin is dying!”

Jared nodded slowly. “I’m just worried about you. Remember what Mila said?”

"I know what Mila said!" I snapped, throwing my arms up. "But this is more important. With everything I've learned about magic and curses, I could help her, but only in the Light Realm."

"I'm not saying you shouldn't help, Eliza. I just want you to consider what you're about to do."

"I'm about to help save someone in my family, someone I care about. If you expect me to stay here and do nothing while my cousin is dying, then you don't understand what family means to me!"

"You don't have to stay and do nothing. You could still help without going to the Light Realm. I'm concerned about your cousin, too. I'm also concerned about you and the baby."

"Well, you don't need to be concerned about me. I can take it easy in the Light Realm, and they have great doctors there. Nothing is going to go wrong."

Jared pursed his lips. "Please, Eliza, the trip to the Light Realm isn't all that easy. Think of your health, and the health of the baby."

I crossed my arms. How could he ask me to put myself ahead of my cousin when she was in immediate danger and whatever Mila was worried about with my baby was just a possible danger?

"I am!"

Jared clamped his mouth closed. Slowly, he nodded and took a step back. "Alright, I understand."

I finished packing in silence. I did understand why Jared was concerned, but my only priority was saving my cousin.

The baby and I had been fine for weeks while helping the refugees and with renovations. I was certain that any danger had passed and I could handle a trip to the Light Realm.

"Eliza?" Jared's voice pulled me from my thoughts.

"What?" I arched an eyebrow at him.

"Do you think that you and the baby would be better off in the Light Realm?"

He creased his brow, eyes focused on the floor.

I thought over his question carefully. It was obvious to me that he didn't understand how I felt about my family. Maybe it was because he never had a big family like me, but I couldn't explain what they meant to me to him.

And if he wasn't going to accept how much I cared about them and what lengths I would go to for them, would he ever understand me? Would we ever be able to last as a couple if he fought with me every time I needed to help my family?

I shrugged. "You did say that you would understand if I wanted to go back."

Jared's brow furrowed even further and I saw the hurt look in his eyes. He wouldn't look at me, but I could feel the presence of the mind link opening up between us.

Turning away from him, I shut it down quickly. Our mate bond had been restored, as well as the mind link between us. But I wasn't ready to open up to him like that, especially if he was questioning my motives and loyalty to my family.

"I want you to be happy, Eliza."

I nodded and grabbed my bag. "I will be."

I left the room to join Xander and the rest of our travel group.

Every step I took away from Jared felt like I was walking on pins and needles. The further I got from him, the more it hurt to breathe.

That look of pain and hurt in his eyes... it had almost been too much.

I didn't want to leave him, but I couldn't stay while my cousin was in danger. He didn't understand that. Why didn't he understand that?

My wolf was restless but I ignored her. I was going to the Light Realm with or without Jared's blessing.

Xander's travel group met at a boat headed for the Light Realm. My cousin had already been loaded on board with healers and was being kept comfortable in a stateroom.

The mood on the boat was somber and quiet. I could tell everyone was worried about her. They loved her a lot, just like I did.

I watched Xander standing in place like a statue. He seemed so lost and confused. People approached him but he didn't speak to anyone.

The boat crew ran around, pulling off the ropes and getting ready to depart. Just as they were about to remove the plank, all my heartstrings tugged tightly and my wolf whined in my head.

I felt the strongest pull to turn around and I couldn't resist.

Jared was standing on the plank. I saw his wolf in his eyes, and my wolf was desperate to get back to him.

She was inconsolable, and I knew she'd never let me leave while Jared and his wolf were standing there.

Was he doing that on purpose to keep me here? Suddenly, I was beyond irritated....

Why would he show up here if he planned to try and manipulate me into staying!? I'd already told him my reasons and he didn't get it. He couldn't guilt me into staying by appealing to my wolf.

"Hang on," I said to the crewmen taking the plank down. "I'll just be a minute."

They nodded and let me walk off the plank to Jared.

"Why did you come?" I asked stiffly.

"I didn't want you to leave angry at me." Jared reached for me, putting his hands on my shoulders.

I gasped and closed my eyes, feeling all his love for me. Through the mate bond, I could sense his love, concern, and protectiveness.

My wolf became even more insistent that we stay with our mate. She wouldn't leave as long as he was there.

I shook my head, fighting the urge to sink into Jared's arms.

I couldn't abandon Lena for someone who didn't know the importance of family. I needed to be strong, but when Jared cupped my cheeks, I almost lost all my nerve....

There was only one way to get my wolf to leave without him.

"I know you can feel the strength of our mate bond, just like I can. Please, don't leave me. Come home with me." He spoke softly, pressing his forehead to mine.

"Jared... I... my cousin...."

"What about our baby?"

I gasped and looked into his eyes. His gaze bore into me, looking straight through me and into my soul.

My body hummed and I couldn't pull away.

"Eliza, please. Come back to me."

Jared closed the space between us and kissed me warmly on the lips. He poured all his love, tenderness, and devotion into that kiss. How could I possibly leave him?

The irresistible pull toward him was there again as strong as ever, but I managed to push him away.

"No." I looked into his pleading eyes and forced my voice to stay calm, "I, Eliza, now reject you as my mate!"

Jared scoffed lightly, his hands dropping from my face. He stared at me for a long moment. First, his face was a mask, and then his hard shell shattered a little and I saw the pain in his eyes. A barely noticeable shudder went through him.

Jared sighed and stepped back, the pain disappearing as his features were replaced with an expressionless mask.

"I accept."

Suddenly, Jared staggered back like he'd been punched in the gut. He recovered quickly, standing up tall and holding himself still as a statue.

I blinked at him several times, surprised he'd given up so quickly. My legs trembled as the rejection struck me like a bolt of lightning. I grabbed the plank rail and leaned against it, forcing back the tears that threatened to fall. Nodding, I left him on the plank and returned to the ship.

This wasn't about us. It was about saving my cousin. For her, I had to stay strong, even if that meant breaking Jared's heart.

I glanced at him one last time as the boat pulled away. He just stood there, staring off into space.

I went right to my stateroom and shut and locked the door. Immediately, I burst into tears and flopped down on the bed. My wolf howled mournfully in my head and I hugged myself, trying to comfort us both.

[Chapter 919](#)

Normally, I didn't mind traveling by boat.

But for the first couple of days, every wave turned my stomach and made me run straight for the bathroom.

I wasn't sure if it was because I was pregnant or because I was so sad over losing Jared... again.

The mate bond was gone all over again. I'd had to do it, though. It was the only way to be there for my family and right now, they needed me more than Jared did.

The threat to the Dark Realm was nearly gone. Hestia was all that was left, and she was weak.

Lena was in trouble, and so was the White Queen line.

Even though the boat was small, Xander assigned two Royal Guards to me. They followed me around everywhere I went and were constantly stationed outside my door.

They didn't talk to me much, but I knew they were always there.

I went to the back of the boat and watched the Dark Realm fading into the distance.

The memory of Jared's pained, broken look as the boat pulled away from the dock swam in my mind.

My stomach clenched and I sniffled.

One of the guards handed me a tissue. I nodded and wiped my eyes. That was some real, full-service guard duty....

I headed to Lena's room and sat next to her bed. There'd been no change since we got on the boat. I hadn't expected to see any change in her, but it worried me about how still she was getting.

She used to jerk when I touched her. Now, the reactions were less and less.

Was her brain shutting down already?

When I left the palace, I hadn't had a lot of clothes to bring with me but I had seen some familiar books on a shelf in my room. I didn't think Lena would mind me borrowing them.

I kept one of the books in her stateroom. It was one of her favorites.

The healers made it seem like since she was asleep, she could still hear us. Xander talked to her a lot but as king, he couldn't be with Lena all the time.

I picked up the book and started reading where I'd left off. For some reason, I thought that if I kept reading to her and talking to her, she'd hear me and hold on a little longer. She would fight to stay alive.

Taking Lena's hand, I squeezed her fingers four times until I got a reaction from her.

“Don’t ever stop doing that, okay?” I asked.

There wasn’t much else I could do except be there for her.

Xander joined me. “How is she today?”

“The same.” I sighed and bowed my head.

“Thank you, Eliza, for reading to her and being with her when I can’t.”

“She’s my cousin. I’m not giving up on her.”

“And I know she will be forever grateful to you for that, as am I, and our children.”

Underneath Xander’s kind words, I could sense that he wanted to be alone with his wife.

“I’ll come back a little later and read to her more.” I gave Lena’s hand one last squeeze and headed back to the deck of the boat.

Every morning, I walked the deck. I knew it like the back of my hand.

My guards trailed behind me as I walked the deck again after leaving Lena’s room. Other than reading to her and walking around, there wasn’t much else to do.

When I stayed alone in my room, I just thought of Jared and I got upset. On the deck I got fresh air and exercise. It was better than lying around weepy and mopey.

Automatically, my feet took me to the back of the boat. Every time I walked the deck, I ended up there, even without thinking about it.

We’d been traveling for a few days, and I could still see the border of the Dark Realm.

“Jared,” I whispered to myself.

“Jared,” I whispered to myself.

Even though I had family with me, I still felt alone. Why hadn’t Jared asked to come along? If he had... maybe none of this would have happened.

I hadn’t told him he couldn’t come; he’d just assumed. Instead of being supportive, he’d dismissed my concerns about my cousin and my desire to help her.

My heart clenched and I covered it with my hands like I could keep it from falling out of my chest.

This was all wrong. He wasn’t supposed to....

The pain from the rejection coursed through me again and tears wet my eyes. I sniffled and bowed my head.

One of my guards handed me a tissue. I nodded and accepted it. It was the same guard every time. The other one didn’t seem to notice.

I watched the Dark Realm fade through blurry eyes and returned to my stateroom.

The moment we crossed into the Light Realm, I knew. The air tasted differently.

A helicopter flew in to meet the boat. Xander must have sent word ahead.

The helicopter scooped up Xander and Lena and took them straight to the hospital. I stood on the deck and watched the helicopter disappear; my unruly, curly hair even more tangled from the wind the chopper kicked up.

Xander left his men and guards with me on the boat, but a heart-sinking loneliness set in. Everyone I loved was so far away now....

"I did the right thing," I told myself, pacing back and forth on the deck. "It's what had to be done."

Tears stung my eyes again and I stopped pacing, wrapping my arms around myself.

My faithful guard was there again with a tissue.

I took it from him and dabbed at my eyes. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." He spoke in a strong, deep voice but I could tell he was young, a lot younger than I expected, more like my age.

I smiled a little. "Oh, so you do speak?"

He pulled his helmet off and grinned at me. His eyes twinkled with kindness, and his smile was so genuine and pure. "Only if you want me to."

I nodded. "I'd like to have someone to talk to, now that my family is gone."

"I'm happy to oblige. My name is Declan."

"I'm Eliza."

I didn't expect Declan and me to become friends, but it lightened my mood to have someone else to talk to for the rest of the boat ride.

As soon as we docked, I headed to the hospital and met up with Xander and some other family members.

"Any news?" I asked.

Xander shrugged. "They've run a whole lot of tests. The doctors think that the best course of action is to give her a blood transfusion to get the poison out of her system."

"That could work." My heart lightened.

I noticed that Xander still didn't look happy.

"What's wrong?"

"A blood transfusion could mean that she loses her White Queen powers. Of course, I'd rather have her be alive and without her powers than the alternative... but it would still be a big loss to her."

I nodded in understanding. Lena was a White Queen. To lose her powers could devastate her, even if it meant saving her life.

The hospital had a room full of cots set up for anyone that wanted to stay close to Lena. The first night I was there, I tossed and turned, thinking of the impossible decision Xander had to make—to save his wife and possibly have her hate him and never overcome the loss of her powers, or... watch her wither away.

Sighing, I looked at the ceiling. “Please, Moon Goddess, don’t let your beloved, blessed daughter lose her powers or her life. She doesn’t deserve this. Give her another chance.”

I drifted to sleep and found myself in a strange, lucid dream.

I stood in the hospital room where Lena was sleeping. She was hooked up to beeping monitors.

From a distance, she looked perfectly peaceful and content. She didn’t look like she was sick, poisoned, or dying.

Lena’s cheeks were rosy and full.

It took me a moment to realize she wasn’t wearing her hospital gown. She was wearing an elegant, white dress with a silver tiara on her head and fresh flowers in her hair.

This was definitely a dream of some kind.

The air around Lena swam with a glittering mist that clung to her eyelashes, making them sparkle.

She had her hands folded over her chest with a bouquet of white carnations clutched in her fingers.

Then it dawned on me... was she dead!?

I rushed to her side and grabbed her arm, ready to shake her awake. My hands went straight through her arm.

“Right... I’m dreaming....” I shook my head and stepped back.

What was going on?

Suddenly, a bright light flashed in the room and a woman stepped out of the shadows.

She was dressed in a long, flowing white dress with sleeves that floated around her. Her hair was silvery white, fluttering on an invisible wind.

She was absolutely gorgeous, her eyes bright with the full moon reflected in them. She had a pitcher in her hands.

Barefoot, she walked toward Lena, practically floating.

“Moon Goddess,” I gasped. I bowed my head to her. Who else could this be other than the embodiment of the Moon Goddess?

My heart hammered in my chest. It was like she’d descended from the sky just to answer my prayer.

She nodded at me and tipped the pitcher over above Lena.

Automatically, Lena parted her lips but the rest of her remained perfectly still.

A silver liquid poured from the pitcher right into Lena’s mouth.

Lena gasped and her eyes fluttered open.

I blinked and sat up on the small cot. It had all been a dream....

Or had it?

I grabbed my shoes and ran to Lena's hospital room. Xander was sitting with her, holding her hand.

"Oh, Eliza, I didn't know anyone was awake." He nodded to a nearby chair.

I pulled the chair closer to Lena.

"I was sleeping but I had this... dream. It was strange." I shrugged and took Lena's other hand.

"I'm going to approve the blood transfusion. I know she might never forgive me and I know... the risks. But I need her and our children need their mother."

"I understand," I said.

"Actually, that won't be necessary."

Xander and I both tensed and looked at the door, and Great Aunt Rosalie came in. She walked with strong, elegant strides as she approached the bed.

"Great Aunt Rosalie!" I gasped, bowing my head. I couldn't help but notice the similarities with my dream.

"May I?" She held her hands out, showing a vial with a potion.

"Yes, please." Xander stepped aside.

She poured the potion into Lena's mouth. I held my breath for a moment.

Lena's eyes fluttered open and she coughed. We all knew then that she was going to be okay....

Xander pulled her in his arms and I began to cry in relief. My great aunt hugged me tight and soothed my back.

"There, there. Everything will be alright," she assured me.

But I couldn't be sure.

[Chapter 920](#)

Jared

I returned to the palace to check on Xander's kids and make sure his Beta, Adrian, had started reconstructing the capital, as instructed.

It wasn't my place to check on those things, but I felt like I owed him, seeing as he had to take off so soon after we beat back the rogue army.

"You look like my dad." A small voice caught me off guard as I walked into the palace.

I turned and saw a young boy, about five or six, standing by the door.

“Oh, hey there, I didn’t see you. Who’s your dad?”

“The king. That makes me a prince.” He pointed to his chest.

I couldn’t help but smile. Seeing him reminded me of Eliza and my unborn child. At the same time, I was very happy to meet my own nephew.

“What’s your name, little prince?” I asked.

“I’m Wyatt.”

“It is very nice to meet you, Prince Wyatt. I’m Jared. I do know your father.” It was a bit of a fabrication.

I hoped that when Xander and Lena returned, I might actually get the chance to build a brotherly relationship with him.

“Why are you here?” Wyatt asked.

“Well, since your dad is traveling, I wanted to check on you and make sure everything is okay here.”

“We’re okay.” Wyatt nodded.

“Prince Wyatt, there you are!” A woman ran down the hall and grabbed his hand. “Your tutor has been looking everywhere for you.”

Wyatt looked down, his cheeks red.

“I don’t want to study. I miss my mom and dad.”

The nanny scoffed. “You need to study while they are away. Your father insisted.”

She half dragged him down the hall, not even sparing me a glance.

I waved to Wyatt. “It was nice to meet you. Maybe I’ll see you after your studies.”

He brightened and beamed a smile, waving back to me.

Watching the sharp, shrewd nanny practically drag Wyatt away made me cringe. Was that what life was like as a prince, growing up with nannies and tutors, constantly having to study and train?

Maybe I had been hasty in thinking that growing up in a palace was easy and luxurious.

I met up with Beta Adrian. He assured me that all efforts were being made to rebuild the capital, but I was welcome to stay and oversee if that would make me feel better.

Xander seemed like he was a good judge of character. His Beta was more than capable.

I stayed at the palace for a few more days thinking everything over. Oddly enough, my heart hadn’t been ripped out and stomped on when Eliza rejected me.

It hurt but she was the one that convinced me that our love never needed the matebond. It was stronger than that. It existed before the mate bond, and without the mate bond.

I saw Wyatt a few more times around the palace but I never got to talk to him. His nannies and tutors kept him very busy.

Poor kid—he never got to actually be a kid.

I felt sorry for him. Whenever I saw him, I thought of Eliza and our child. There was a chance that I'd never see my own child.

If Lena didn't make it, I doubted Eliza would come back to the Dark Realm.

But hope still glimmered in my chest. We'd survived far worse, and I knew in my heart that she'd come back to me... when she was ready.

Every now and then, I got reports from my scouts about Hestia. It took a few days, but I finally put together the pieces about why Eliza had really left.

I thought over everything she'd said in the car and when she was packing.

In her mind, as long as Hestia was alive, our child would never be safe in the Dark Realm. It was true. Until Hestia was dead, our child would always have an enemy here. In her mind, as long as Hestia was alive, our child would never be safe in the Dark Realm. It was true. Until Hestia was dead, our child would always have an enemy here.

Hestia had not been shy in making that clear.

Eliza was leaving to protect our child just as much as she was going to look after Lena.

If I wanted Eliza to return, it was up to me to rid this realm of Hestia once and for all.

"Jared, we got word from the Light Realm," Archer informed me one morning.

I sat in the garden with my coffee, watching Wyatt at a fighting lesson. He was good for a boy his age.

It made me wonder if I would ever be able to teach my own son to fight.

"Eliza?" I asked perking up.

Archer sighed and shook his head. "King Xander. He sent word that Queen Lena has made a full recovery and they will be returning soon."

My heart sank slightly. I nodded and smiled, but it felt strained. "That is good news. Did he mention whether Eliza was returning with them?"

"No. I'm sorry, Jared." Archer stuffed the note in his pocket. "Do you want to wait and see if she returns with them?"

I finished off my coffee and shook my head. "I've been away from the village for too long. If she comes back, she knows where to find me."

"Very well."

Beta Adrian loaned us a vehicle to get back to the village quickly.

When I showed up without Eliza, there was obvious confusion.

"I don't understand. What do you mean she's not with you? She left with you," Giselle said, crossing her arms.

“Eliza had to be with her family. She’ll come back.”

Giselle narrowed her eyes. She was one of the first to meet me out front, followed by Scarlett and Miriam. They all wanted answers and hadn’t let me go inside, blocking my way on the porch.

“Why didn’t you go with her?” Giselle asked.

Scarlett crossed her arms and nodded to emphasize Giselle’s statement.

“That’s... complicated.”

Miriam sniffed. “Then un-complicate it. Jared, you should go after her. We need her. You need her.”

“I don’t owe the three of you an explanation on this matter, but if you must know, she chose to leave without me.” I snarled and pushed by them.

Miriam followed after me. “Jared, stop throwing a tantrum and go after Eliza.”

“I’m needed here.”

“She’s your Luna. You can’t just let her get away.”

“She made her choice. If she wants to come back, she’s more than welcome to.”

I headed up the stairs and glanced over my shoulder. Miriam stood at the base of the stairs, hands on her hips. She narrowed her eyes at me with the look a mother gives to a disobedient child.

I shook my head and continued up the stairs. There was no way that I could explain to them what had really happened. It didn’t matter anyway.

I’d made peace with Eliza’s decision. She wanted to be there for her family, and she wanted to keep her child safe from Hestia.

I was the one who had failed to eliminate Hestia and keep my own mate and unborn child safe.

There was a part of me that agreed that Eliza was better off in the Light Realm until Hestia was no longer a threat.

It didn’t stop me from missing her and thinking about her.

I checked on the renovation progress and the school. It was almost done, and I couldn’t have been happier.

Eliza had really done a great job getting the plans for the school. In just a few months, there would be kids in the school attending classes.

I walked through the village and checked on some of the refugees. Halfway up the street, I sensed I was being followed.

I looked around and saw Giselle and Scarlett following me.

Sighing, motioned to them to join me. “What are you two doing?”

“You know, it is a really crappy thing for you to do to let Eliza go after all the time she spent saving your life,” Giselle said.

I scoffed. “Tell me how you really feel.”

“I believe I just did.”

“What do you have to say?” I asked Scarlett.

“I think you should go after her. Women love that stuff—big, romantic gestures of devotion and love.”

“I will go after her. But there’s something I need to do first. Eliza is vulnerable as long as Hestia is around. She’s getting weaker, and now is the time to eliminate her as a threat forever.”

“Well, that makes sense,” Giselle muttered.

Scarlett nodded in agreement.

“Can I get back to checking on my village?”

The two of them nodded and wandered off. I was glad that Eliza had such good, loyal friends in my pack. She knew how to inspire people and get people to love her.

If she didn’t come back, it would be a big blow to Midnight Sun.

“Alpha? You’re Alpha Jared, right?”

I turned to see who was calling me.

One of the newer refugees came toward me. She was young, in her early twenties. She had a warm, friendly smile on her face and her green eyes sparkled in the sunlight. Her clothes were a bit shabby but she wore them well, the colors complimenting her tanned skin and soft features.

“Yes, I’m Alpha Jared. Can I help you?”

She came closer and held her hand out to shake.

“I’m Zoe. You helped me out of the capital when the rogue army was there.”

A smile tugged at my lips. “That’s right, I remember you. Are you settling in okay?”

She nodded and glanced down. Her straight, blond hair slipped over her shoulders like a curtain around her eyes.

I noticed that she touched her stomach several times. It was hard to see because she wasn’t showing that much yet, but she was pregnant.

My heart went out to her. I could tell that she was alone here. Had she lost her mate or husband to the rogues?

“I can’t thank you enough for rescuing us. I really thought I was going to die in the capital.” Her cheeks turned a warm red as she lifted her eyes to mine again.

She seemed timid. I couldn't blame her for that after everything she'd been through, but deep in her eyes, I saw determination and a strong will to survive.

"When I left the capital, King Xander's Beta was already working on rebuilding the city. In no time, refugees will be able to return home."

Zoe frowned slightly. "Will we be required to leave?"

"No... I just assumed... since the city is so much different than a quiet village like this."

Zoe winked at me. "Well, assuming is your first mistake." She giggled lightheartedly.

I chuckled along with her.

"This quiet, simpler life is very appealing after what I went through in the capital. It's the perfect place to settle down and raise my baby."

She looped her arms around herself.

I smiled and nodded. "You're welcome to stay." I felt sorry for her, being ripped from her home and on her own to raise a child. There was something so sweet and soft about her.