

Kings Breeder 921

[Chapter 921](#)

Eliza

I walked through my family home, feeling the cold, empty, loneliness of a large, vacant house.

No one was ever around. My parents were always busy, Lena was still in the hospital, and I was just alone....

Even George couldn't stay long. He stuck around long enough to make sure Lena was going to recover and then had to go back to his life excavating in New Dianny.

You'd think his sister being back in town after months of being in another realm would warrant a real visit.

Sighing, I headed down the stairs. Each one creaked loudly, echoing through the silence of the house.

When I couldn't stand the silence anymore, I went to visit Lena at the hospital.

She still had to regain her strength before the doctors let her travel back to the Dark Realm.

She looked so healthy now. The color had returned to her cheeks and she was all smiles.

"How are you feeling?"

Lena shook her head at me. "Don't even ask. I swear, they're just keeping me here because everyone in the family wants to have more time to visit with me."

I laughed and rolled my eyes. "Is it so bad that everyone cares about you?"

Lena shrugged. "No. But I miss my kids and I want to go home."

I smiled but I knew my smile didn't touch my eyes.

"Eliza, what's wrong?" Lena reached out and took my hand.

I sighed and shrugged, turning away from her. The pain and emptiness in my chest from rejecting Jared were too much sometimes. I still thought of the village and the Dark Realm as home, but I knew I couldn't go back there now.

"This is about Jared, isn't it?" Lena's voice pulled me from my thoughts.

I bit my lower lip and sighed. What was I supposed to say? I could tell her how much I missed him, but what use would that be? I was the one that rejected him. I deserved everything I was feeling.

"You know, Xander told me what happened right before we left the Dark Realm. Why did you reject him?"

Slowly, I met Lena's eyes. "Would you do anything to protect your children?"

"Of course." Lena creased her brow.

“While I was in the Dark Realm, it was just one bad thing after another. I couldn’t live like that. And I don’t want my child to experience that.” I put my hand on my stomach.

“Eliza, you know that life everywhere is one thing after another.”

I shook my head. “Not like it was there—curses, blood sacrifices, and Hestia.... She's still out there gathering strength and forces. She already threatened my child once.”

Lena squeezed my hand gently and gave me a sad smile.

“You know, the darkness only wins when you give up.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You have the perfect husband, great kids, and a very luxurious life.”

Lena frowned. “I had to build that luxurious life. And I didn’t get it by giving up.”

“You don’t know what I’ve been through with Jared. It was becoming too much. The Light Realm is safe. I want my child to be safe.”

“Eliza, you grew up safe in the Light Realm and remember what you did?” Lena chuckled.

I winced. “I ran off to the Dark Realm.”

“Exactly.”

“At least, here in the Light Realm, my child will be surrounded by family.”

“But at what cost?” Lena sighed. “In the Dark Realm, your child will have a mother and a father. Plus, I’m there, and Xander is your family too, so are our children.”

“What about Hestia? We’ve tried to stop her. She just keeps coming back and one of these times, she’s going to do something that can’t be undone.”

“There will always be people like Hestia out there. The best we can do is refuse to give into their demands.”

I narrowed my eyes and crossed my arms. “I haven’t given into any of her demands!”

“Haven’t you? Hestia wants to destroy the light and love between people, between the Light and Dark Realms. By rejecting Jared, leaving the Dark Realm, and keeping Jared’s child from him, it means she’s won.”

I bit my lip and looked down at my lap. Lena’s words tumbled around inside my head.

“Eliza, you know that you should always do what you think is best. But running away is never what is best. So, think about why you really left.”

“Yeah, I will....”

When Xander returned with a doctor, I left them to discuss releasing Lena and heading back to the Dark Realm.

My heart ached as I walked out of the hospital. I missed Jared so much. Being in the Light Realm didn't feel like home anymore. I felt like I didn't even belong in my own family.

My vision blurred and I stumbled down the walkway a little, my mind racing.

My knees wobbled slightly and a powerful dizzy spell came over me. I reached out for something to hold onto but my hand grabbed air. The ground felt like a rug being pulled out from under me.

I pitched forward and then stopped in midair.

"What...?"

I blinked the blurriness from my eyes and looked around. Someone's strong, powerful arms were wrapped around me, holding me and keeping me from falling to the ground.

My eyes locked onto my rescuer and I recognized him immediately.

"Declan?"

He was the Royal Guard always handing me tissues.

He smiled brightly, the last thing I remembered as I faded into blackness.

When I came to, I glanced around furiously. I didn't recognize the room I was in. There were people standing all around me. It was so bright and the bed I was in was uncomfortable.

"Eliza, honey, it's okay. Calm down." My mother's voice was sweet music to my ears.

I saw her sitting on the bed beside me, holding my hand. My dad was standing behind her, hands on her shoulders.

"What's going on?" I asked, eyeing the doctors and nurses around me.

I must have been in the hospital again. Only this time, I was the patient.

"You fainted, sweetie," my mother said, giving me a deep, concerned look.

Immediately, I wrapped my arms around my stomach.

"The baby?"

Smiling, my mom reached out and put her hand over mine.

"The baby is fine. You've been unconscious for several hours, but the baby is absolutely fine."

I looked at the healer, who said, "Your mother is right. We ran all the necessary tests and your baby is just fine."

I sighed and nodded. Tears pricked my eyes, tears of relief.

"That's good news."

"I do have some concerns about your pregnancy," the healer added.

The relief vanished in a second. I swallowed hard.

“Wh-what concerns?”

“From what I can tell, you’re exhausted. You’ve been pushing yourself too hard. It is critical that you take care of yourself for the sake of the baby. You should be taking it easy for the rest of the pregnancy.”

“We’ll make sure she takes it easy,” my mother agreed, nodding.

The doctor left me alone with my parents. I felt awkward sitting there with them alone.

Jared should have been there. If I was fainting, it affected his child, and he had every right to be there.

The loneliness I felt earlier swelled up inside of me again and I longed to see Jared, to feel his warm touch.

“Eliza, are you going to heed the doctor’s warning this time?” my mother asked.

“This time?”

“We have it on good authority that Mila also told you to take it easy in the Dark Realm, a suggestion that you obviously ignored.”

“I didn’t ignore it. There were refugees in my village and Lena was sick.”

My mom scoffed. “You could have let others handle it. But I will enforce your taking it easy, if I have to.”

“What do you mean by that?”

My mother pursed her lips and exchanged a quick look with my father. What were they planning?

“You can’t return to the Dark Realm. It’ll be too much for you and the pregnancy right now.”

I nodded. “That’s fine with me.”

My mom brightened slightly and squeezed my hand. “You have no idea how much I love hearing you say that.”

My parents had been through enough with me running off without telling them, going to another realm and getting married. Now, I was in the hospital. They didn’t deserve feeling like they were constantly going to lose me.

Now that I was going to be a mother, I understood them a little differently.

“I’ll take better care of myself and the baby from now on, I promise.”

Both my parents smiled and hugged me close.

I was released from the hospital the next day and my parents brought me home. The last few times I’d been sick or hurt in the Dark Realm, it seemed like it took forever for me to get better because of their limitations in medicine.

In the Light Realm, it took a fraction of the time.

My parents kept a close watch on me to make sure I was taking care of myself, but they weren't overbearing. My mom was good about bringing me snacks and healthy drinks.

They stuck around a lot more now that they were looking out for me. It was nice to have them around, especially since they weren't trying to control my decisions anymore.

When I got to their house, I spent my days in the garden hammock reading.

Song birds kept me company and the flowers were always so gorgeous and fragrant.

The hammock swung back and forth in the mild, summer breeze. Most days, I'd fall asleep and take an afternoon nap while reading.

I felt so calm and at peace for the first time since coming home.

I felt like I belonged.

"I brought you some lunch." My mom appeared in the garden with a glass of iced tea and a sandwich.

Groaning, I pulled myself into a sitting position and set the book aside.

"Thank you."

She set the plate in my lap. "If you're up for it later, we could go for a walk."

I smiled. "I'll let you know."

She left me to eat my lunch in peace. I felt like my mom and I had reached a new understanding and it made me feel more welcome with my parents than I had in a long, long time.

As I washed down my sandwich with the iced tea, I saw someone else in the gardens, a familiar figure walking among the flowers.

He seemed to be moving closer to me.

I stood up and twisted back and forth, shaking off the stiffness from lying in the hammock.

As he got closer, I recognized him. "Declan!"

He grinned a happy, bright, boyish grin and trotted over to me. "Hey. I was looking for you."

"Really, why?"

"I wanted to see how you were doing."

I nodded, my cheeks warming unexpectedly. My stomach fluttered and I looked down.

"Thank you for... helping me."

Declan smirked. "It is my job to help damsels in distress."

I giggled and looked into his handsome face. "Well, how lucky for me that I went into distress with you nearby."

He winked. "Anyway, you seem to be recovering quickly, and the king and queen are talking about returning home soon."

"That means you'll be going with them?" I creased my brow.

"It is my duty. But I am glad that you are okay and that your baby is okay."

"I can't thank you enough." My blush got even hotter and I wrapped my arms around myself.

It was so strange to enjoy his company this much. I barely knew him, but I felt comfortable with him.

"Well, if you're ever in the Dark Realm again, look me up."

"I will! Are you leaving now?"

"I've got a few hours to kill. Care to show me around the gardens?"

"Okay." I nodded and walked with Declan.

We easily struck up a conversation and I felt like I'd known him for years.

[Chapter 922](#)

Jared

I sent scouting party after scouting party into the dark forest to look for Hestia or her lair.

Every single one came back empty-handed.

Pacing my office, I waited for Archer and Brandt to report back from their most recent scouting missions.

"Knock, knock," a soft voice said. Zoe poked her head into my office.

I stopped pacing and smiled at her.

"What brings you here at this hour?" I motioned for her to come in.

She grinned and found a chair, easing herself into it.

She wasn't that far along in her pregnancy, but far enough that she had a nice bump growing. Sometimes, when I looked at Zoe, I tried to imagine Eliza with a baby bump like that, and it made me miss her all the more.

"I was feeling a little lonely and wanted to see if you were around."

"I'm here... waiting." I sighed and sat down at my desk.

Zoe came by from time to time, just to chat. I knew she was lonely. It was clear that no one else she knew had come to Midnight Sun as refugees with her, and she seemed on the shy side, too shy to make new friends in the village.

"Waiting for what?" She bit her lower lip.

"News from Beta Archer and Brandt."

"I hope it will be good news." She looked at me with big, bright eyes.

I shrugged. "That's my hope, as well. Though, I'm starting to doubt they ever will. It has been weeks, and they've turned up nothing."

Her smile faded. "That's really upsetting. Isn't there anything more that can be done?"

"Unfortunately, not right now." I sighed and shook my head.

"Jared...."

Miriam popped into my office. She pursed her lips, glaring at Zoe and then at me. I wasn't sure what her problem was. Zoe was a frequent visitor to the pack house these days.

"What is it, Miriam?"

"Archer wants you to meet him outside the village." She spoke tartly, glaring at Zoe again.

"Now?"

"Now," she confirmed.

"I'm on it."

I pushed back from my desk, ready to leave.

Zoe got up, too. "Can I keep you company?"

"Actually, I could use your help with something." Miriam took Zoe's arm and led her down the hall.

Whatever that was about....

I headed out of the village and met up with Archer. He slowed his pace and arched an eyebrow at me.

"What are you doing out here?"

"Miriam said you wanted me to meet you outside the village."

Archer frowned. "No, I just sent word ahead that I was about twenty minutes away...."

I scoffed. Miriam was a meddler.

"Well, I'm here. Do you have good news?"

Archer and I headed back into the village, walking down the main street. All the renovations were complete and the village was thriving more than ever. I was so excited to see it grow and prosper.

There was just one thing missing... our Luna.

I could see it on my pack member's faces. They all missed Eliza, just like I did. Her energy, determination, and positivity had helped the village grow.

Archer sighed heavily beside me. "Nothing new. We've scoured every inch of that forest. Hestia has vanished and left no trace of herself or her hideout."

“Great.” I shoved my hands in my pockets.

When we got back to the packhouse, I sent Archer to get cleaned up and rest. He’d been running round-the-clock scouting missions since I returned from the capital.

The next morning at breakfast, I considered what to do next. If we couldn’t track Hestia from the dark forest, I had to think of another way to catch up with her.

There had to be something.

Perhaps, Mila could track her with magic.

“Good morning, Jared.”

Zoe grabbed a plate and sat down beside me.

“Zoe, it’s good to see you. I hope Miriam didn’t tire you out too much yesterday.”

Zoe giggled lightly and pressed her arm against mine subtly.

“You’re very considerate.”

“Zoe!”

Miriam’s voice shrilled through the kitchen.

Zoe started and pulled away from me.

“Jared has a lot on his mind and needs to focus. It would be best if you didn’t bother him.”

Zoe sighed but she picked up her plate and followed Miriam.

She always had such a sharp eye on everything happening in the pack house.

Later that afternoon, while I was still puzzling over what to do about Hestia, a messenger came with a letter from the capital.

It was addressed to me, from King Xander and Queen Lena.

They were back in the Dark Realm.

I went to my office to read the letter. It was an invitation for me to come to the palace, whenever I was ready. There was a little note that mentioned Eliza and my heart skipped a beat.

The letter told me that Eliza had fallen ill and was told not to leave the Light Realm until after she’d given birth.

I called Miriam and Archer to my office to talk about the letter and what options I had.

“Well, the choice is obvious. You should go to the Light Realm and be with your mate. The two of you are stronger together,” Miriam said.

Archer shook his head. “Jared, Hestia is still out there. She’s a great threat and needs to be dealt with.”

“Yes, but right now, she is off the grid. You’re wasting resources chasing after her. Archer and Brandt can continue to look while you go to Eliza. If they find anything, we can send word. If not, then it won’t matter.”

“She has a point,” I said to Archer.

He shook his head. “Jared, we know that Hestia is regrouping. She’ll come back stronger and more powerful. We need to get ahead of her.”

I stroked my chin and nodded.

“I think Miriam is right. We aren’t making any progress on finding Hestia. But I know that Eliza won’t feel safe in Egoren until Hestia is dead.”

“We need more resources,” Archer said.

I scoffed. “Yeah, right.”

“You just said that your brother, the Dark King, invited you to the palace. His entire city was destroyed by Hestia. You don’t think he’ll want to help?”

“I...” I chewed the inside of my cheek. I hadn’t thought of that before.

Xander and I weren’t exactly best friends. We’d only exchanged a few words. I kept thinking that I had to handle this on my own. But Xander was involved now; he might want to help.

“He might have other ideas for how to sniff her out.”

“That’s a good idea, Archer. Gather a small party. We’re going to the capital.”

When Archer and I arrived in the capital, I was impressed to see how much of the city had been rebuilt since the last time I’d been there.

In just a few weeks, it looked like it was almost back in working order.

A lot of refugees must have moved back, too, because the parts of the city that had been rebuilt were busy and bustling with activity.

At the palace gates, we met with King Xander, who met us personally.

“Welcome back, Jared.”

“Thank you.” I bowed to him respectfully.

“I’ve set up quarters for your travel companions. They can find them down this corridor.” He motioned down a hall as he led us through the palace.

“It’s been a long journey. Go to your rooms; get settled in. I’ll check in with you later.” I directed to my men.

They nodded and headed to their quarters. I was looking forward to a little rest myself, too.

“Might I have a word with you, privately?” Xander asked before I could follow my men.

“Very well.”

I followed Xander to his office. It was a round room with a cathedral ceiling and bookshelves lining the back wall from floor to ceiling. An ancient map of Egoren was framed on the wall, taking up almost the entire wall.

Xander turned to me with a bright smile. He looked friendly and grateful.

I smiled back, a little uneasily.

“I wanted to thank you for all the help you provided in saving the capital, and my family.”

I scoffed. “I’m not sure how safe any of us are with Hestia’s threat still out there.”

“You’re right. She is a problem that needs to be solved.”

“That’s part of the reason I accepted your invitation,” I admitted.

Xander’s brow furrowed for just a moment and then he smiled again.

“I’ve been attempting to track Hestia for weeks, now, and she continued to elude me. My scouts have followed dead end after dead end. We’re... out of options.”

Xander nodded. “Then you’re asking for my assistance?”

“I am. You have more resources, better contacts, and you know where she might hide in this world.”

“I will commit whatever is necessary to help find her. In fact, I’ve already put a bounty on her head. Soon, she will have nowhere to hide.”

“That’s... good news.”

Xander sighed and sat down at his desk. He motioned to a nearby chair for me. I sat uneasily. This was a much more casual meeting than I’d anticipated.

A servant came in and poured us each a glass of whiskey. She bowed and left the bottle on Xander’s desk before leaving.

“I admit, I have my own selfish reasons for asking you to come.” Xander picked up his whiskey glass.

“And what’s that?” I narrowed my eyes. Was this the part where the other shoe dropped?

“I wanted to know more about my mother....”

I nodded slowly. It wasn’t like I didn’t expect Xander to want to know about her. He was just a kid when she left, and I’d had more time with her.

I picked up my whiskey and took a sip.

“Our mother was one of the kindest, gentlest people I’ve ever met. She—” I sighed. “I never felt like I had enough time with her, because she was taken when I was so young.”

Xander chuckled darkly. “I feel the same.”

“How about our father? What was he like?” I asked the question tentatively. There was a part of me that wasn’t sure I wanted to know about the man who had cursed my mother and me.

Xander sighed and ran his thumb up and down the edge of his glass.

“Well, he was strict and firm. But I know that he cared about our mother and us... even if he didn’t always know how to show it. I think most of his actions resulted from a desire to give us a better life. But seeing who his father was... he didn’t exactly know the right way to do that.”

I chuckled humorlessly. “I imagine that’s true.”

“Xander....”

A sweet, feminine voice floated in from the office door.

Queen Lena entered, a soft smile on her face. She gave me a warm, welcoming look and then turned her attention back to the king.

“What is it, my love?” he reached an arm out to Lena.

The Queen immediately went to Xander and let him wrap his arm around her.

I looked away, an ache filling me. I longed for Eliza harder than I had since she left.

“It is getting late, my King. You should think about retiring soon.”

I noticed Xander’s smirk as he looked at the queen.

“How can I resist? I’ll be right behind you.”

Lena nodded and left. She gave me a quick wave as she walked by me.

“I’m guessing you have your own reasons for wanting help with the search for Hestia?”

I arched an eyebrow. “I do believe it is in the realm’s best interest to find her.”

“Don’t misunderstand, I agree. But I’m guessing you want the freedom to travel to the Light Realm and collect your mate?”

“Is it that obvious?” I grumbled.

“Lena and I are traveling to the Light Realm soon. Leave the hunt for Hestia to Archer and my Beta. You can come with us.”

“I don’t know....”

Xander chuckled. “Trust me, if Eliza is anything like Lena, this is exactly what she’s waiting for.”

I smirked. “You think?”

Xander nodded. “We’ll get there just in time for the harvests, and that means the Moon Ball—a very romantic time.”

We shared a playful smile. For the first time, I felt like having a brother might not be such a bad thing.

[Chapter 923](#)

Eliza

Taking it easy was easier said than done with the harvests and the Moon Ball approaching. My mother kept a close watch on me, though, and wouldn't let me help too much. I was limited to tasks that I could perform while sitting down.

I sat at a table folding napkins neatly around silverware, making them neat little packages. The napkins added quite a decorative flourish.

"Eliza, Eliza...."

I looked up as several of the older kids, in their mid-teens, came running up to me where I sat.

"What is it?"

They smiled at me and looked at me with bright, gleaming eyes.

"Is it true that you went to the Dark Realm?"

"Yes, it is true." I laughed and continued folding the napkins.

My hands were starting to cramp up from the repetitive folding.

"Are you mated to the Dark King's brother?" another asked.

I giggled and nodded. "You guys seem to know a lot about me."

"We want to know everything you did in the Dark Realm."

"Can you tell us the story?"

"Please, please!?"

My smile widened. I couldn't help it. They were so excited and joyful and I found that I loved being around kids these days.

I put a hand on my stomach fondly.

There was part of me that enjoyed the irony of the situation. When I was their age, I used to love hearing the stories from people my age, and I'd beg them for their time.

"Alright, if you can finish folding the rest of these napkins and silverware, I will tell you the story."

The kids smiled and sat around the table, grabbing silverware and napkins, and getting right to work.

"Well, it all started when I went to the Dark Realm. I'm an archeologist, and the chance to study another culture and its history was too tempting, so I followed my passions."

"That sounds so romantic," one of the girls said.

"Oh, it didn't start out that way. I was minding my own business in the Dark Realm when suddenly, I was snatched and the next thing I knew, I was being sold at some kind of slave auction!"

The kids gasped and looked at each other, wide-eyed and fearful.

“But I had nothing to fear. A very handsome, strong young man decided to save me. I didn’t know it at the time, but he turned out to be the Dark King’s brother.”

“Oh, my Goddess!” another young girl gushed. “He saved you!?”

“Yes, he did. After that, our adventure really began.”

Recounting my story of meeting Jared and falling in love with him made me long for him all the more. My heart ached but I didn’t want to stop talking about him either. It was painful, but it reminded me of the good times.

I continued to tell them of my adventures right up until the point when I first arrived at Jared’s village.

Sighing, I bowed my head. Intense fatigue washed over me.

“Oh, don’t stop the story now! I want to hear the rest,” one of the young women said.

“I’ll tell you the rest later. Right now, I need to take a nap. It is better for the baby.”

They gave some disappointed sighs, but none of them argued as I got up.

There was a car nearby that was willing to take me back to my parents’ house. When I got there, my mom already had a snack waiting for me.

“You should eat before resting.”

She pulled out the chair at the kitchen table.

I sighed and sat down. Jared was still on my mind and I missed him terribly. Talking about how we met got me thinking and I couldn’t shake the feelings that came with it.

“Are you feeling alright, Eliza?” my mom put her hand on my forehead.

“I’m fine. I’m just tired.”

My mom sighed and sat down beside me. “You know, I think you’ll really enjoy the Moon Ball.”

“Mom, I’m married and pregnant. The ball isn’t for me. I’m only helping out to keep busy.”

My mom chuckled. “The Moon Ball is for everyone. Besides, it is a good excuse to get dressed up, and that always makes everyone feel better.”

“I don’t know if I want to get all dressed up. I’m supposed to be taking it easy, aren’t I?”

“Eliza....” She reached out and took my hand. “I know you’ve been through a lot and you still have questions. I just want you to know that despite what you think, you still have a lot to thank that Moon Goddess for.”

“After the year I’ve had....”

“Yes, even after the year you’ve had. But you have a child on the way, and your family is here for you. You’ve had marvelous adventures that most people only dream about.”

“Yeah, well those adventures nearly killed me and my child.”

My mother smiled wryly. “Perhaps. But you’re still standing, and you are going to make a wonderful mother.”

“Thanks... maybe you’re right. Maybe I do have things to be grateful for.”

I finished the snack she gave me and headed to my room. As soon as I lay down, tears pricked my eyes. I couldn’t help the overwhelming feelings that bubbled out as I cried myself to sleep.

The day of the Moon Ball, everyone was so excited. I couldn’t help but feel excited, too. While I got dressed, many of the young girls who had helped me with the napkins hung around to get ready with me.

I wore a sage green dress with a high waist. Around the waistline was a jewel-encrusted belt that ran around the back and over my shoulder to form one strap.

The neckline was low cut and the skirt went all the way to my ankles. The back of the dress was low cut and open.

It was a simple but elegant dress that accented my hair, my curls covering my neck, and bare shoulders just right.

“Oh, your dress is so pretty!” one of the girls said.

She had on a short, white dress with a flaring skirt that had golden sparkles all over it.

“Thank you. I’m just going to touch up my makeup. You girls should head to the ball.”

“Oh no, we’re riding with you!”

I giggled and nodded.

They chattered on about the young boys that would be at the ball and who they thought might find their mates. I listened to their giggling and chattering as I put on my mascara and a little blush.

I was a lot paler these days due to my pregnancy.

I stepped back from the mirror and gave myself a once over. I looked like I was ready for a ball.

My father met me and the other girls at the bottom of the stairs. He held his arm out to me.

“You look stunning, my darling,” he said, kissing my cheek quickly.

I blushed and looked down. He led me out of the house where a limo was waiting.

I paused. “A limo?”

My dad just chuckled and shrugged. He helped me into the back seat and the girls clamored in with me.

He didn’t join us.

“Dad, aren’t you coming?”

He shook his head and shut the door. I was alone in the limo with the chattering girls.

They had so much to say and were so excited that it was contagious. I smiled and laughed along with them. They all wanted to know about me and my adventures. It was really hard to feel lonely when they were gushing over me and asking so many questions.

Several times, the girls stopped themselves short of saying something.

I got the sense that they were hiding some big secret. Was that why they were hanging around? Did the secret have to do with the limo my dad had procured?

Then again, I remembered what it was like to be that age, bursting with energy and excitement and so many ideas and fantasies.

The limo pulled up and someone opened the door. There was a purple carpet extending from the limo door. Just as I tried to step out, someone held a hand out to me.

I looked up and saw Declan. Smiling, I took his hand and let him help me out of the car.

Behind me, the girls all giggled and whispered. I ignored them and leaned into Declan, still a little unsteady on my feet.

“Thank you, again.”

Declan grinned. He was dressed so nicely. He wore a royal suit that distinguished him as a Royal Guard but was still much nicer than his usual outfit. It was a deep, crimson color and had a pin that designated his rank in the royal army.

He had a big smile on his face and he looked very handsome.

I bit my lower lip, my stomach fluttering. I couldn’t help but think of how attractive he was in the red suit with the lights from the party behind him.

Suddenly, guilt washed through me. I looked down at my feet.

How could I be thinking of Declan being attractive? I was married and pregnant with another man’s child....

“It is nice to see you again, Eliza,” Declan said.

“It’s nice to see you, too,” I murmured.

“Is it?” Declan’s voice sounded concerned.

Sighing, I raised my eyes to his. “It is always nice to see you. I wasn’t expecting you to be here... and dressed so formally.”

Declan smirked. “Well, I’m not on duty tonight. Can I escort you into the ball?”

“Certainly.”

We headed down the purple carpet and into the ball. As soon as we entered the doors, I stopped walking and gasped, looking around the ballroom.

The room was decorated with fall harvest colors: reds, yellows, oranges, and deep greens. There were twinkling, golden lights hanging from the ceiling, intermingled with decorative leaves and acorns hanging down.

The tables all had harvest centerpieces with squashes and gourds in cornucopias, along with decorative grasses and fall-blooming flowers.

A band was playing in the back corner, soft, mellow music to ease the guests in as they arrived.

The thing that struck me most was the warm scent of fresh, delicious foods. My stomach growled slightly and I realized I was starving, even though my mom was feeding me all the time.

Growing a baby took a lot of extra energy.

“There are some people that want to see you,” Declan said, pulling me from my awe.

He led me to one of the tables where Lena and Xander were sitting.

“Lena! Xander! I didn’t know you were coming.”

“We saved you a seat.” Lena motioned to the seat beside her.

“I’m so glad to see you both again. And you, Lena, all healthy.”

I sat down with them and Declan sat beside me. I chatted with my cousin and her husband for a while.

After a while, I went to mingle with some of the other guests. I ran into a ton of people I knew. They were all quick to congratulate me on my pregnancy and welcome me back to the Light Realm.

I glanced at my mom, feeling like she had a hand in what people were saying. I was happy and grateful, but it seemed like my mom was trying to get people to make me feel more at home in the Light Realm.

All it did was remind me how much I missed Jared.

When the music changed and became more upbeat, guests went out onto the dance floor.

Someone held a hand out in front of me. I smiled as I realized Declan was asking me for a dance.

I held my hand out, ready to accept his offer, but a movement out of the corner of my eye caught my attention.

[Chapter 924](#)

Jared

My heart stuck in my throat as I approached Eliza.

She stood with a Royal Guard. I could tell he was asking her to dance.

I strode toward her quickly, ready to intervene. I just knew that the moment she saw me, she wouldn't accept a dance from someone else. Even without the mate bond, the connection between us was stronger than anything else she could feel for anyone else.

I kept my eyes on her as I approached, knowing she'd feel my presence. We'd always shared such a deep, profound bond and nothing could get in the way of that... not even some handsome guard that she seemed to know.

My wolf snarled a little, angry that Eliza was speaking to another man. There was a part of me that wanted to rush over and push him out of the way.

I wasn't there to make a scene though. I was there to reclaim her heart. If I made a scene with him, it would only push Eliza away more.

After talking to Xander in his study, I realized how right he was. Eliza needed me to prove something to her, so I had to make sure everything I did was about her, not my own jealousy.

Eliza's eyes flicked toward me quickly. She looked back at the guard and then paused. Slowly, she turned her entire head toward me.

The moment our eyes met, the entire world changed. I felt like everyone and everything fell away and only the two of us existed.

I knew Eliza felt it too because she turned away from the young guard and her entire attention was on me. Inwardly, I felt satisfied that she practically forgot about the other guy. But I kept my focus on her.

My heart hammered in my chest as I stared at her. The music faded away, all the glittering lights and the party was a distant memory.

There was only Eliza and my beating heart. I imagined that her heart was beating in time with mine as I got closer.

Her dress was absolutely stunning, giving her an elegant and poised look without being flashy or overbearing. I did love her in the color green. It made me think back to a party in the garden at my pack house where she'd worn a similar color. And boy, did she wear it well....

Gasping, Eliza threw herself at me. Tears flew from her eyes as she wrapped her arms around my neck. I pulled her close, burying my nose in her neck.

I ran my hands along her back, feeling her smooth, warm skin.

Her stomach pressed against mine, making my abdomen quiver. I ran my hand through her hair, massaging her scalp gently. Breathing in, I inhaled her sweet scent. It flooded through my nose and into my veins, taking me over from the inside out.

She fit perfectly in my arms and I knew she belonged there.

I brought my lips to her ears. "I missed you so much...."

Eliza gasped. She pulled back and looked into my eyes. She still had tears in her eyes.

Guilt swelled inside of me as I saw her tears. I knew they were tears of joy, but it still saddened me that she was going through such strong emotions because of me.

"I missed you too," she whispered back, licking her lips.

"Come dance with me."

"Yes... anything. I will follow you anywhere."

Grinning, I pulled her gently onto the dance floor and took her in my arms again. I looped one arm around her waist, holding her as close as possible so I could feel her stomach brushing against mine. I put my other hand on the back of her neck, cradling her body to me.

"I love you, baby. I shouldn't have let you go...."

"Just hold me," she whispered back.

Her hands clung to my shoulders like they were the only thing that anchored her to this world.

Every possible emotion washed over me. I was overjoyed at seeing her, relieved that she was alright, sad that I'd let her go, and filled with so much love and appreciation for her that I never wanted to let her go again.

As I held her in my arms, so many thoughts ran through my head.

Had Eliza always been this beautiful with her curving hips and her unruly hair? Even when it was tamed for an event like this, it was wild and had a life of its own, just like Eliza was.

Eliza let out a small whimper.

I tipped her head up and looked deeply into her eyes. They were glassy with so much emotion.

I leaned in and kissed her puffy, red lips. Instantly, a spark passed between us and Eliza tightened her arms around me. She kissed me back with such vigor and passion. I cradled her, swaying back and forth to the music while I kissed her sweet lips.

Our connection felt completely rejuvenated. My wolf was soothed and calm now that I had Eliza in my arms again.

When our lips parted, I pressed my forehead to hers, thinking of all the things I wanted to tell her. We had so much to discuss but I couldn't ruin the moment.

The soft music was perfect, as was the way our bodies moved together in such synchronicity. I worried that if I moved now, it would break the spell between us.

I wanted to know everything about what she'd been through since we parted ways—all the good and the bad. I wanted to take the bad from her and show her that it didn't matter if we were separated by distance, because I'd still thought of her every single day.

For the moment, all I could do was hold her in my arms and enjoy the way she felt.

We were together again, finally. That was all that mattered.

Eliza's body relaxed against me as we danced. She leaned her weight on my chest and let out a soft, happy sigh.

Silently, I told myself that I would never let her go again. Eliza was the most important thing in my life and I would always protect her and our child.

I felt like a horrible husband because I hadn't been holding up my end of the vows. But we were back together now, and I'd spend the rest of my life making it up to her.

As many thoughts were running through my head, I couldn't bring myself to say anything. We danced in beautiful, peaceful silence, just holding each other, completely lost in our embrace and togetherness.

I felt like Eliza and I were one, hearts beating in unison, bodies moving together. There was no longer a division between where I ended and she started.

When the song wound down, I reluctantly stopped dancing with Eliza. That dance had been pure bliss, and I never wanted it to end.

We pulled apart but before Eliza could say anything, I took her hand and led her outside to the gardens.

Like the ballroom, the garden was decorated with twinkling golden lights. There were a few fountains running, the water sparkling in the little lights.

Pathways had been cleared and were lined along the borders with glowing lights that lit up the flowers and plants just enough to see them in the dark.

Several other couples were in the garden, whispering to each other and enjoying the romantic setting.

I wanted to talk to Eliza in private, so I pulled her down a garden path. She didn't resist or speak. I had a feeling that she also felt like speaking too soon would break the magical spell between us. I clutched her hand firmly, keeping her close.

It was a cool night, filled with the scent of night-blooming flowers.

We found a secluded bench and I sat down, pulling Eliza onto the bench beside me. An electric charge shot between us.

She gasped and moved a little closer to me. A shiver ran through her and I slipped my suit coat off, draping it around her shoulders.

I put my arm around her, tucking her against my body. She snuggled up to me and sighed.

"Eliza." I murmured her name.

"Jared."

My name on her lips sent a bolt of electricity down my spine. I grabbed her hand and squeezed, tightening my arm around her shoulders at the same time.

"I know we have a lot to talk about."

"Do we have to have the talk?" Eliza shifted and looked straight into my eyes.

I couldn't fully describe what I saw in her eyes. It was a mixture of sadness and regret, but also love and devotion, a desire to move forward and forget about our complicated past.

I cupped her cheeks and kissed her quickly on the lips.

"You have no idea how much it means to me that you came after me," she whispered against my lips.

I chuckled lightly. Xander had been right. All she needed was for me to show her a big gesture of how much I cared and how much I wanted her.

For a moment, I didn't know what to say. I saw a little white, night-blooming flower nearby and I plucked it from the garden. Turning back to Eliza, I tucked the flower behind her ear, pinning some of her hair back with it.

Her cheeks turned rosy red and she looked at her lap, worrying her hands.

"So much has happened since we were last together. I have so much to tell you."

"I know. And I have so much to tell you too but..."

I placed a hand on Eliza's stomach. Her words trailed off and she smiled lightly.

"When I heard you had fallen ill, it was a real moment of clarity for me. But I want you to know that I missed you every minute of every day that we weren't together."

Eliza threw her arms around my neck and hugged me fiercely.

"I missed you too, so much that sometimes, I thought I couldn't breathe. That's why I don't want to talk about everything yet. I just want to be here with you, enjoying this moment."

I brought my arms around her again and pulled her as close as I could on the bench. Her body was warm and soft, her arms around me the perfect comfort. I couldn't fathom how I'd ever let her walk away.

Even when she rejected me, I should have gotten on that boat with her and followed her to the Light Realm. I should have been more sensitive to her desire to help her cousin and her fears about staying in the Dark Realm with Hestia on the loose and the dangers to our child.

But she was right. For now, I just wanted to hold her and feel her around me and enjoy our reunion.

[Chapter 925](#)

Eliza

A comfortable silence settled over us. My heart raced in my chest; my skin hummed in the warmth of Jared's coat. Just being close to him, I felt so alive and awake.

He tightened his arm around me, squeezing me a little closer.

I smiled and felt my cheeks warm. I didn't know what he was doing there or why he'd come after me, but I was just glad he had.

"It is nice to sit here with you and just... be still, for once," I muttered.

Jared chuckled and nodded. "Without everything else getting in the way."

“Yeah.” Sighing, I glanced down.

Jared cupped my chin and tilted my head up. “What’s wrong?”

I felt my lower lip quiver. There were a few questions I needed answered before I could relax fully and let myself enjoy his presence.

“Jared... why did you accept the rejection so quickly?”

Jared’s eyes slid to the side. He sighed and released my chin.

“What would you have done if I hadn’t accepted?”

I creased my brow. I wasn’t expecting him to ask me a question back.

Shaking my head, I looked down. “It would have made me angrier. I would have felt like you were trying to stop me from leaving.”

“Yes, you would have. I realized that.”

“And you just went along with it, then?”

Jared nodded slowly. “If I hadn’t accepted, it would have pushed you away more. You were already scared and upset. If I didn’t go along, I knew there’d never be a chance for us to talk like this.”

I smiled lightly and took Jared’s hand. Threading our fingers together, I gave his hand a little squeeze.

“I’m glad you know me so well,” I whispered.

Jared smirked. “Besides, you were the one who reminded me our bond existed just as strongly without the mate bond.”

“But I know how important the mate bond is to you.”

“Eliza,” Jared sighed and shook his head. “You are more important to me than the mate bond. Not pushing you away is more important.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek, confused by his response.

“But... you were so intent on getting our mate bond back the last time.”

Jared nodded. “Because it was my mistake to fix.” He pressed his palm to his chest. “I was the one who acted hastily, and I didn’t want you to suffer for that.”

“Jared, what are you talking about? You didn’t make a mistake. I always understood why you did it. Even before you told me, I had my suspicions, and they were true.”

Jared bowed his head. “You shouldn’t have had to feel that, and you shouldn’t have had to make all those guesses and rationalities. It really wasn’t fair to you.”

I creased my brow and leaned against him a little more.

“I should have had faith in you. Right from the start, I should have trusted that you’d come through.”

“How could you have known that I was right there?”

Jared shrugged. "I should have. You always pull through and from now on, I'm going to remember that and I'm going to trust it."

"Jared...."

"No." He shook his head.

My protest died on my lips.

"Ciana told me something that Mila told her, about not letting you go to the Stone Circle because you'd get hurt. But I didn't share that information with you. I thought I was protecting you."

"She... what...?"

My mind raced with a million questions, but Jared seemed to be trying to tell me something important. I wanted to let him say what he needed to.

"If I'd shared the information back then, we could have worked together to come up with a plan ahead of time. We could have avoided your injury and the pain you went through when I said all those... horrible things."

My heart ached a little. I'd always known that Jared had a reason for turning me away when we went to Aries's mansion, but he'd never told me. Thinking back, it would have been nice to have the chance to work on the problem together.

"And when I rejected you, that was also pain you didn't need to feel. I should have trusted that you'd pull through and had a plan."

I didn't even know what to say. Jared had never been this open and self-reflective before. He was completely different from the man I'd left behind.

"From now on, I want to trust you and have faith in you. I want to be the kind of guy who isn't going to run off and try to solve all the problems on my own, not when I have someone as capable, smart, and strong as you around."

My heart melted and tears stung my eyes. Everything he said was so deep and heartwarming. He really had changed so much in the time we'd been apart.

"Eliza...."

I wrapped my arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. He slowly brought his arms around my waist.

"Thank you." I buried my face in his neck and hugged him.

Jared didn't say anything. He held me close and kissed my hair.

Finally, I pulled back and looked into his eyes.

"So, what does that mean for us? What do you want to do now?"

Jared took my hands in his, clasping them together. He lifted my hands and kissed the backs of them. Then he moved his hand to my stomach.

My heart raced and I held my breath, waiting for him to tell me what he wanted.

Whatever he said, all I wanted was to be with him and to build our future together.

“I want us to be together and I want us to be a family. It doesn’t matter to me where that is. If it is in the Light Realm, so be it. If it is in the Dark Realm, we’ll make it work there. I don’t care where we are. It is wherever you want to be.”

Sighing, I leaned my head on his shoulder and he put his arm around me.

“Jared, I want to go home....”

“Home?”

“The one place in both realms where I have ever truly felt at home.”

I felt Jared nod. He’d know what I meant.

The village where Jared and I had officially become a couple, where I’d fallen in love with him, where I’d invested my time and efforts to create something beautiful—that was home to me.

“I’m more than happy to take you home. However, the doctors have said to take it easy for now. This time, I’m going to make sure that you listen.”

I groaned but didn’t protest. I couldn’t argue with his point. It was the same one my mother had made, too.

I’d promised my mother that I’d take better care of myself for the sake of the baby. I couldn’t break that promise now.

“Don’t worry, I’ll stay here with you until you get the all-clear to travel. We can spend some time with your family until the doctors say you can travel.”

“With my family?” I lifted my head and arched an eyebrow.

Had Jared been planning this? Had he already talked to my family? Suddenly, my father’s odd behavior from before the party came back to me. He’d brought me to the limo but wouldn’t say anything about it.

“Were you the one who sent the limo for me?”

Jared smiled sheepishly and nodded. “I might have made some arrangements beforehand.

“Why?” I creased my brow.

Jared shrugged. “I knew tonight would be special, and I wanted to make sure that you had the best time. Besides, I needed to talk to your parents and they had certain expectations.”

My cheeks turned red and I shook my head. I didn’t know if I was embarrassed or furious at them.

“What do you mean by expectations!?”

Jared chuckled and patted my shoulder. I relaxed slightly but I still didn’t like what he was implying.

“As you can imagine, your parents weren’t too keen on me stepping in again. I explained the situation but they wanted me to show them that I was committed, so I did.”

“So, they are okay with you being at their house with me until I can travel again?”

Jared shook his head. “Not quite, but trust me, I am working on that.”

I giggled and nudged him slightly.

“Oh, I know.”

Jared reached out and tugged one of my wayward curls, making it bounce. He grinned and wound the hair around his finger.

“You know me too well.”

My cheeks warmed and I glanced down. Being around him made me feel so light and giddy. I didn’t even need the mate bond to feel that way.

“Jared, do you want the mate bond back?”

Jared pursed his lips and cupped my cheeks in his hands. He ran his thumbs along my cheeks and stared deeply into my eyes.

My insides trembled and I bit my lower lip. All I wanted to do was fall into his arms and stay there forever, mate bond or no mate bond. Did he feel the same way?

“Eliza, that last time I wanted to restore the mate bond because I couldn’t stand that I’d hurt you. Even though it was to protect you and our child from absorbing the curse, I know how much it hurt you. I couldn’t live knowing that I’d caused that.”

I nodded. “That doesn’t answer my question.”

“I’ll leave it up to you, then. You said once that we don’t need the mate bond to know we love each other. But if you want to restore it, we already know how to do it.”

“You want me to make the choice?” I gasped.

Jared nodded. “All you have to do is tell me you want to restore the bond and I’ll make it happen. Whether it’s tomorrow or twenty years from now, I’ll do it whenever you ask.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then I’ll never ask. This is your decision, Eliza. I don’t need the mate bond as long as I have you and our child. That’s more than what I ever hoped for in life.”

I leaned on Jared. How was it possible that I’d found such an incredible man to spend the rest of my life with?

I hadn’t thought about whether or not I wanted to restore the mate bond. It seemed like my doctors wouldn’t let me do much until after the baby was born, and the flower Jared needed was all the way in the Dark Realm.

I didn't have to make a decision today. Jared was with me again, and that was all that mattered. He'd support whatever I decided.

"Is there anything you do want?"

Jared chuckled. "I want to know who the Royal Guard escort was who asked you for a dance."

[Chapter 926](#)

Jared

"We should get back to the party. People will start to talk." I sighed and stood up.

Eliza pouted at me. "Let them talk. Since when have you cared about rumors?"

I chuckled and took her hand, pulling her to a standing position. "I think your friends and family want to see you. I shouldn't occupy all your time, seeing as I'm still trying to gain their favor."

"Fine," she whined.

Hand in hand, I led her back into the party. She still had her seat by the king and queen, but I also noticed her entire family at one table together.

In the interest of trying to keep on her parents' good side, I led her to their table.

Her brother George was there, as well, and he had his date with him.

"Eliza, Jared, come join us," Ernest called, waving us over.

I pulled a chair out for Eliza and she blushed as she took her seat. I sat beside her, placing my hand on her thigh under the table.

"I see the two of you finally reconnected," Ernest said, winking.

Eliza's blush deepened and I smirked. "All it took was a limo and some sweet talk."

I saw Gemma roll her eyes and shoot me a quick glare.

"Thank you, Daddy, for keeping Jared's secret. It was a great surprise."

"It was worth it to see the smile on your face." Ernest smiled at his daughter.

My chest felt a little tight, seeing how much her family loved and adored her. If she decided to return to the Dark Realm with me, I'd be separating her from all that.

"Well, it is nice to finally meet you," George said. He set an elbow on the table and gave me a look that didn't quite match the sentiment in his words.

"It is nice to meet you, too. Eliza has told me a lot about her brother."

George sniffed and slipped his arm around his date's shoulders.

He didn't seem entirely pleased to have me there, but he wasn't glaring at me like Gemma, and he hadn't said anything outwardly disdainful.

“Jared, how are things in your village?” Ernest changed the topic of conversation.

I smiled gratefully. “They are coming along really well. The new school is almost finished.”

Beside me, Eliza perked up. “Really?”

I nodded. “Yup. I’m thinking the first class should be able to start enrollment in the next month or so.”

“That’s great news!” she gushed.

“Really. Proper education is the backbone of a community. I commend you for making it a priority.”

I rubbed Eliza’s back. “Honestly, it wouldn’t have happened without Eliza and her determination to see it through, even when we had refugees flooding in every day.”

“You took in refugees?” George suddenly seemed interested.

“When the capital was under attack, they had nowhere to go. They came to the smallest, furthest out of the way village possible, and that was mine.”

“We had to feed them and give them medical aid. It was a lot of work,” Eliza added.

Gemma scoffed. “Is that the reason you weren’t taking it easy?”

“Mom,” Eliza groaned. “I wasn’t going to let refugees starve and fend for themselves.”

Ernest stepped in. “From the sounds of it, the two of you provided great humanitarian efforts in a time of need. That is admirable.”

“Thank you, Daddy.” Eliza grinned at him.

“Since the war ended in the capital, I’ve been able to refocus on the village. New housing is going up and all the pack house renovations have been completed.”

Eliza’s eyes lit up. “Oh, wow. I’m glad everything is moving forward.”

“And the refugees, how are they getting settled?” Ernest asked.

“A lot of them went to other packs. We couldn’t support the huge numbers of them. But from what I hear, now that the capital is being rebuilt, a lot of them are headed back home.”

“The capital is being rebuilt already?” George asked, arching an eyebrow.

I nodded. “King Xander has put all his efforts into the capital.”

“It’s probably for the best. We were stretched to the limit with the extra residents,” Eliza said, sighing.

“That’s why I decided to put in some new housing, in case any of the refugees that came to the village decide to stay on a more permanent basis.”

Eliza’s smile widened even more. She seemed to like hearing about the progress in the capital and in the village. Maybe, it was even enough to get her to want to come back.

“I hope some do decide to stay. Their presence has brought some new life into the village.” Eliza said.

I thought of Zoe and how she longed for a simpler, quieter life.

"I'm sure some of them will prefer the small village life to a bustling city. The damage will still take some time to be repaired. Some refugees will have a while before they have to decide if they want to return."

"How far along are the repairs on the capital?" George asked.

He showed an unusual curiosity in the goings on in the Dark Realm, and I couldn't help but notice the small looks of disapproval that Gemma kept shooting him.

"They are making unbelievable progress," I reported. "King Xander is certain that by next year, the bulk of the damage will just be an unpleasant memory."

"I'm assuming they will be updating to all the latest amenities in the capital?" Gemma asked, a tart look on her face as if she'd just bit into a lemon.

"Yes, I'm sure King Xander is making all the necessary upgrades." I nodded.

"Well, it sounds like the capital would be the place to live in the Dark Realm. With a child on the way, are you two considering moving to the capital?" she asked.

I glanced at Eliza. She gave me an apologetic look and frowned slightly.

Whenever I felt bad that I'd be taking Eliza away from her family, her mother would start in on something and then I didn't feel so bad.

"Well, I think there's a good chance that we'll visit the capital a lot. Now that King Xander and I are getting to know each other... it would be nice to spend more time there," I explained.

"Just visit?" Gemma asked.

I nodded. "My home is still Midnight Sun, and I'm not ready to leave."

George perked up suddenly. "Midnight Sun?"

Gemma shot him a disapproving look.

"Yes, that's the name of my pack." I turned to George.

"Hmm. That sounds like a cool pack to join."

Gemma sniffed and narrowed her eyes at her son.

"My dear, why don't we dance? It is getting late and I'd like at least one dance with my lovely wife." Ernest stood up and held his hand out.

I watched as Eliza's mother hesitated for a moment, giving both her children a specific look. Then she took Ernest's hand and they went out onto the dancefloor.

George's eyes floated around the room. He paused on a group of men about his age.

"Ahh, I haven't seen them in forever." He nodded in their direction and got up, his date following him to talk to his friends.

I took a deep breath and relaxed.

Eliza took my hand and gave it a squeeze. "You're doing great, Jared. My father clearly likes you and my brother is warming up to you fast. My mom... well, she'll come around."

"I'll keep trying...."

I trailed off and shook my head. I didn't want to mention it to Eliza, but I wasn't sure how long I'd last in the Light Realm. If I couldn't even imagine surviving this until the baby was born, could I manage it for the rest of my life if Eliza decided she wanted to stay here?

Sighing, I shook my head. I couldn't think like that. I needed to find a way to make this work if that's what she decided.

I wasn't used to having so much family to manage. I'd adjust.

Eliza leaned her head on my shoulder and I heard her utter a little sigh.

"Are you feeling okay?"

She nodded. "I'm just getting tired. It's been a lot of excitement for one day and I'm already getting tired faster these days."

"If you're ready to head home, we can go. I have no reason to stay longer."

Eliza lifted her head and smiled lightly. "Yes, I'd like to go home."

We headed to the large banquet table where Lena and Xander were sitting.

"We're heading out for the night. It was good to see you tonight," I nodded to the king and queen.

"We'll see you again soon, I'm sure," Xander said.

"Take care of yourself, Eliza, and my little niece or nephew." Lena giggled.

Eliza nodded. "I will. I'll see you again soon."

When the song ended, Eliza went to her parents to say a quick goodbye.

"Jared and I are going to head out. I'm tired and should get off my feet. It has been a busy day."

Her mother nodded. "Make sure to get plenty of rest and drink lots of water. Let me know if you need anything."

Eliza rolled her eyes. "Jared can take care of me."

Her mother cast an unconvinced look toward me.

Eliza and I said our goodbyes to a few more people and headed back to the limo. I'd paid the driver for the whole night.

Eliza settled in the back with her head on my shoulder. Almost as soon as the limo pulled away from the curb, Eliza was sleeping soundly.

I watched her sleeping reflection through the tinted window of the limo. She was so beautiful and looked so peaceful.

I was the luckiest man in the world to have found a woman like her. And the fact that she was letting me be close to her again was unexpected but just reminded me how amazing she was.

The driver took us in a different direction than Eliza's parents' house, per my instructions.

When we arrived at our destination, I gently woke Eliza up.

She mumbled something, her eyelids fluttered.

I kissed Eliza's eyelids. "Wake up, sleepy."

She mumbled again and opened her eyes. She rubbed them and looked around.

"Where are we? This isn't my parents' house."

Instead, I'd brought her to an adorable little house that was the perfect size for a small, growing family. It had a gorgeous garden in the front and a covered porch. Out back there was a yard and a patio.

I stepped out of the limo and held out a hand to her.

"No, this isn't your parents' house. Actually, it is ours."

"Ours?" Eliza gasped. She took my hand and I helped her from the limo.

"That's right. Whether you want to live here full time or just have it be a home away from home, it's ours. We can visit whenever you want for as long as you want.

"Jared..."

I scooped Eliza up in my arms, bridal style.

"Ready to see your home away from home?"

[Chapter 927](#)

Eliza

"This place is..." I couldn't even form words....

Jared carried me through the white picket fence gate that surrounded the front yard. He carried me up the stone walkway lined with ground-creeping roses that were closed for the night.

On the covered porch, there was a bench swing, and the garden around the porch was stunning.

I could practically see our child playing in the yard when they got older.

My heart swelled and I clung to Jared as he carried me up the stairs.

On the inside, the house was cozy. There was a moderate size living room that opened into a kitchen with double doors to a patio in the backyard.

He carried me up the carpeted stairs and to the master bedroom. It was a three-bedroom house and when we walked past one of the closed doors, he paused.

“This could be the nursery.” He nodded to the closed door.

My stomach squirmed and I still could think of anything to say. This was so perfect it literally took my breath away.

In the master bedroom, Jared lay me on the large bed, right in the middle.

“This is... unreal...” I whispered.

Jared smirked as he pulled my heels off. “Well, we never had a real honeymoon, so the time we spend here can make up for that.”

Jared’s eyes lit up as he roamed them over me. My heart hammered in my chest and I felt shy suddenly. I curled my knees to my chest as he sat on the bed beside me.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He grabbed my hand and squeezed it gently.

I felt my cheeks get warm. The blush spread down my neck and across my breast. Why was I so shy suddenly?

“This is so much more than what I expected,” I admitted.

Jared ran his thumb across my knuckles. “I only want to make you feel comfortable. If this is too much, we can go back to your parents’ house.”

I shook my head quickly. “No, that’s not what I meant. This place is amazing. I just can’t believe it is all ours!”

“Believe it. Since this is unofficially our honeymoon, I think it is only fair that I spend an unreasonable amount of time pampering you.”

I giggled. “Is there an unreasonable amount of time to do that?”

Jared smirked. “No, absolutely not. Seeing as you’ve been on your feet all day, I thought I’d start there.”

“Start...?”

Jared pulled a bottle of lotion out of the bedside table. He repositioned himself on the end of the bed and pushed my dress up my legs.

He squirted some lotion into his hand and slathered it on one of my feet. The lotion was cold but I forgot about that a second later when Jared started massaging my foot, working his fingers into all the creases and crevices.

Moaning, I leaned back on the pillows and relaxed. I closed my eyes, enjoying the way he dug all the tension out of my feet.

After several minutes, Jared switched to my other foot. The feeling was just as divine and I melted into his touch.

Slowly, he worked up my calves, using the same massaging techniques to work the tension out of my legs. As he went, he pushed my dress up higher to get to my thighs.

I relaxed completely, turning into a puddle of mush as all the tension left my body and his fingers continued to relax me.

All the loneliness I'd been feeling, how much I missed him, it welled to the surface again. How could I have thought that he didn't care about me? With how much care he showed me now, it was inconceivable to think he ever felt any differently toward me.

I opened my eyes and saw Jared looking at me. His eyes were filled with so much love and adoration. It was like he could barely contain his emotions.

At that moment, I knew without a doubt that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him, and I was going to....

"What's on your mind?" Jared asked.

He leaned in closer, hovering just above my face.

I licked my lips slowly, trembling.

"I was thinking about... how I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

Jared grinned and closed the space between us. He kissed me hard on the lips. Instantly, I wrapped my arms around him and pulled him down to me.

I parted my lips, inviting him in. Jared pushed his tongue into my mouth, rolling it over mine. I pushed back with my tongue, tasting him.

He wrapped his arms around me, holding me close.

Our kiss brought a familiar spark back to me. I felt like I could sense his every emotion and desire. It was the same connection we'd always had.

I moaned against Jared's lips, kissing him more fervently. He ran his hands down my sides, the silk of my dress rubbing against my skin, sending shivers through me.

I unbuttoned Jared's shirt, running my fingers up and down his muscular chest. He grunted and pressed his lips harder to mine.

Finally, I had to pull away and catch my breath. Panting, I looked deeply into Jared's eyes. His expression was so full of love and appreciation I thought my heart would explode.

I still clung to him, refusing to let him go. Now that I had him back, I'd never let him go.

"I love you, Eliza," he whispered. His voice was deep and quiet but filled with emotion, almost like he was afraid to express those things aloud.

He bowed his head, resting his forehead against mine.

"I never want to lose you or our child."

My heart swelled in my chest, about ready to burst right through my rib cage. Jared lifted his head and our eyes met again. I couldn't speak. All I could do was stare deeply into his eyes and hope that he saw how much love I had for him there.

Jared wanted what I wanted. He wanted to be together forever and to protect our child. I really couldn't ask for more from the man I'd given my life to.

"I love you too, Jared. And I want to be with you forever, a real family."

A spark ignited in Jared's eyes. He grinned and kissed me again. I grabbed him, pulling him closer, and rolled my body against his.

Jared smirked against my lips and pulled the zipper down the back of my dress.

Clothes on the floor, he kissed along my jawline, down my neck, and across my shoulder. His lips were warm and hot, sending shocks of pleasure through me as his hands moved up and down my sides.

I ran my fingers down Jared's spine and he shivered, bringing his lips back to mine. We explored each other's bodies with the lightest, most erotic caresses. I memorized each line and curve of his muscles.

Our lips never parted as we gave over to our passions. My legs quivered with desire, every moment, every touch reminding me why I loved him and how much I craved his touch.

Moaning, I pulled his body against mine, skin on skin, and I wrapped my legs around him. My insides pulsing with heat and lust.

Jared grunted, pleased. He grabbed my hips and thrust inside of me, slowly, tantalizingly.

I threw my head back, moaning as his stiff arousal filled me completely, stretching my insides apart pleasantly.

I curled my fingers around his shoulders, gasping as I kept kissing him.

I gave myself over to him completely, letting passion and pleasure drive me as our bodies moved together in the perfect rhythm.

Completely spent, Jared and I lay together, our legs still intertwined, our heavy breathing mixed together. He rested his head on my breast, clinging to me. My heart beat rapidly against his cheek.

After a long moment, Jared turned on his side. He slipped one arm around my shoulders, pulling me against him, and he placed his other hand on my belly.

"How's everything going in there?"

"We are absolutely fine," I assured, covering his hand with mine.

"Ever since you told me you were pregnant, I've had all these beautiful dreams of our future and our family. Now, I want to spend the rest of my life making sure they come true."

"What kind of dreams?" I tilted my head up to look into his face.

"Eventually... a little house out of the way where we can raise our kids quietly."

“Kids?” I asked.

Jared chuckled. “Well, after seeing you and your family, I feel like a big family is the way to go.”

I sighed and rested my head on his chest.

“So, yes, we will raise our kids in a quiet part of the countryside. But we will make regular visits to the capital so our kids can visit with their cousins and family. And hopefully, we can come to the Light Realm regularly so we can see your parents and the entire extended family.”

“You really have it all planned out, don’t you?” I asked. I yawned and smiled. Jared painted a beautiful picture of our future together.

“Our children won’t want for anything but they won’t be spoiled, either. They’ll live real, exciting lives with adventure and enrichment.”

“Not too much adventure, I hope. Look where that got us....” I giggled again.

“Our lives haven’t been so bad. Just look where we are now.”

I nodded and snuggled closer to Jared. I felt so safe and loved in his embrace. When he talked to me about the future, I knew he’d always be there to hold me.

I listened to Jared talk about the future of our family and what he wanted us to have as my eyelids grew heavy. I felt his heart beating against his cheek, my own heart beating in my breast in time with his.

Like we were one.

Suddenly, I realized that I was home—not in the Light Realm, not in the house that we were in, but with Jared. He was my home. Wherever he was, it was my home. Nothing could ever tear us apart again, I was sure of it.

Jared’s voice faded away into heavy breathing. Our arms still wrapped around each other, legs entwined, I felt like it was the perfect ending to a great day.

My eyelids finally drooped closed. Jared’s chest rose and fell deeply. He was asleep.

I was right on the edge of sleep when a shiver ran down my spine and I heard a distant, eerie voice.

“You may have won for now, but I’m not going anywhere....”

The whisper was so faint I thought I was dreaming it. But I knew the voice.

Hestia....

“I will finish what I started, in this generation or the next. You’ll never be rid of me.”

[Chapter 928](#)

Jared

The soft, rhythmic sound of Eliza’s breathing woke me up. She was in a deep sleep, her body curled against mine. She felt so warm and cozy against me. I tightened my arms around her for a moment, basking in her warmth and the love I could feel radiating off of her.

I moved my hand to her stomach where our child was growing.

There was nothing I wouldn't do to protect her and our baby.

Leaning in, I kissed Eliza's forehead. I bent down and kissed her stomach.

She sighed and snuggled into the pillows.

Smiling, I gently pulled away from her, careful not to wake her. She needed all the rest she could get so our child grew healthy and strong.

I went to the kitchen and started preparing a hearty breakfast. Gemma had made me promise that I would feed Eliza well and make sure to keep her hydrated. No one, including me, wanted her to pass out again or push herself too much anymore.

I cracked some eggs in a pan and added a few slices of bacon. While I pushed the bacon around in the pan, I kept thinking of the future I'd described to Eliza last night.

All night, my dreams had swirled around that future. I couldn't stop imagining what our life and family would be like.

Whenever I thought of it, my heart rate increased and a smile tugged at my lips. I'd never known how much I wanted a family until I started to think about it. And the more I thought about it, the more I wanted a big family with lots of kids.

Chuckling to myself, I added some home fries to the skillet.

Hopefully, Eliza would appreciate the idea of lots of kids, too.

Unfortunately, I had a feeling she wouldn't want to grow our family any more until we were sure that Hestia was no longer a threat.

I hadn't gotten to talk to Xander much at the Moon Ball, but I knew that Hestia was still out there. She was the only threat to my family and our happiness.

At the same time, I knew that with Eliza by my side, we could face anything together. We'd already beaten the odds on that over and over again.

We'd survived curses, bad injuries, crazy storms, and of course, rejections and broken mate bonds. We survived Aries and everything Hestia had already thrown at us.

I was confident that our love and our bond could get us through anything.

As I plated up breakfast, my ears prickled with the sounds of Eliza moving around the bedroom. I left the food in the kitchen and headed in to check on her.

Her eyes were still closed, and I watched as she stretched and slowly opened her eyes. The moment she saw me, she sat up straight, the blood draining from her face.

"What's wrong?" Immediately, I went to the bed and sat beside her.

Eliza creased her brow. She took my hand and seemed too shocked to speak for a moment.

"I had a dream...."

"What kind of dream?" I asked when she didn't continue right away.

I ran my thumb over her knuckles and caressed the back of her hand with slow, gentle circles.

"It was Hestia. She was there, promising me that we'd never be rid of her and that she'd carry on what she started from one generation to the next if she had to."

Eliza put her free hand on her stomach.

I shook my head and took Eliza's hand from her stomach, holding them both.

"I'm sure it was just a dream. Eliza, I know that you've been worried about Hestia because of the threats against our baby. She's weak and can't cause any more harm."

I didn't entirely believe what I was saying but I wanted Eliza to believe it. Even if it wasn't true, we were in the Light Realm until the baby was born. That was more than enough time for Xander and the Royal Army to track Hestia down.

We were safe here. The light would keep her away.

"I don't know, Jared," Eliza bowed her head. "I've had dreams before that... came true."

I arched an eyebrow. "Like what?"

"When Lena was poisoned, I had a dream that the Moon Goddess came to heal her. The very next day, My Great Aunt Rosalie showed up with a cure. It had to have been some kind of vision, right?" she looked at me with wide, fearful eyes. Her curly hair, a frizzy mess around her from bed-head.

Concern twisted in my stomach, but I shook my head and clasped her hands between mine.

"Not every dream you have has come true, has it?"

Eliza frowned. "No, I guess not."

"You've been worried about Hestia and I know the warnings the doctor gave you have made you uneasy. I'm sure it was just a dream based on your worries," I assured.

Eliza nodded and sighed, sinking back into the pillows.

I didn't want to alarm her, but I knew that Eliza had always had some kind of precognitive sense or ability with visions. It had been her dreams that led us to the ancient city in the first place.

For now, she needed to rest. I wasn't going to let her worry herself sick.

Hestia was being handled. She wasn't our problem right now.

I cupped Eliza's cheek as she got comfortable on the bed again.

"Listen to me, Eliza. Hestia is the palace's concern right now. They are hunting her and they have more resources than we do. They'll find her. I'm sure of it."

"You're sure?" she blinked at me and bit her lower lip.

I nodded. "Absolutely. Right now, she isn't our concern. Our only priority is to have a happy, healthy baby. That means you should stop worrying and rest."

I slipped my arms around Eliza and held her close in a hug. She trembled in my arms. I hugged her tighter and kissed her cheek. When I released her, I eased her back onto the pillows.

"Rest, now," I ordered.

Eliza nodded and closed her eyes, settling back down.

I watched her until her breathing evened out again and she was asleep once more. I kept a hand on her arm, watching her sleep. I wanted to make sure that she slept peacefully, and she seemed comforted by my presence and my touch.

While I watched her, I thought about Hestia again. It was possible that Eliza had some kind of vision that told us Hestia's plans.

I'd pass the information on to Xander when I had a chance. I also made a note to ask him whether or not Hestia could get to us in the Light Realm. It seemed unlikely, but I wanted to be 100% sure so that I could help keep Eliza's fears at bay.

When I stood up, Eliza grabbed my arm. Slowly, I eased back down on the bed. I guess I would have to stay with her until she woke up.

Fifteen minutes passed before Eliza woke up again. When she opened her eyes, she smiled. The color and roundness had returned to her cheeks. She looked much better rested.

I smiled back. "Good morning."

"What smells so good?" she sat up, sniffing the air.

"Oh, I made us breakfast."

"Great, I'm starved!" Eliza pushed the covers back.

I stood up and grabbed the covers, tucking her back in. "Stay here. I'll bring you breakfast in bed."

Eliza smiled shyly, a warm blush touching her cheeks. My heart raced, seeing how adorable and beautiful she was all at the same time.

The sheet was tucked around her body, but I could still see the luscious form of her round breasts underneath.

Before my mind wandered too far, I headed back downstairs to the kitchen. I warmed up our breakfast plates and put them on a tray. Before going back upstairs, I slipped out to the back garden and picked a fresh rose. I laid the rose across Eliza's plate and brought breakfast to her.

I set the tray on the bed and Eliza's eyes widened. She immediately picked up the rose and smelled it.

"Wow, this really is like our honeymoon, isn't it?" she stuck her tongue out at me playfully.

I chuckled and pushed a glass of orange juice toward her. "Fresh squeezed, filled with vitamins for you and the baby."

Eliza gave me a look but she couldn't hold back her smile, even though I saw her try.

"You're too perfect."

"Well, as beautiful as it is, this breakfast isn't just for looking good. Eat up. I promised your mom that I'd make sure you and the baby ate well."

Eliza shook her head but she grabbed her fork.

"So, now that you have me in the Light Realm without a curse hanging over our heads, what do you want to do?"

Eliza glanced at me, her cheeks pudged out from her mouthful of egg. She swallowed hard and sighed, washing it all down with some orange juice.

"It's not like the Light Realm is anything new to me. What do you want to do?"

I pushed my home fries around on my plate, thinking of what most interested me in the Light Realm.

"I'm sure there are a lot of tourist sights here, but I'm thinking I want a more authentic experience. Where can you take me to get a true Light Realm experience?"

Eliza shrugged. "That depends on what you're looking for. There are a lot of options. In Winter Forest, there are tons of temples and museums that show off Light Realm culture and history."

"That sounds right up your alley," I teased, poking my fork at her in the air.

"You seem to like history, too."

I nodded in confirmation. "Temples and museums sound like a good way to spend the day. It sounds like a lot of walking, though."

"Jared, I can walk. I'm not a cripple. Besides, there are plenty of benches to sit on and cafes to stop for healthy food."

"That all sounds good. What else is there?"

Eliza tapped her cheek with the butt of her fork, her eyes roaming thoughtfully.

"If we want to do a bit of traveling, we could head to Valoria. It's a ways away, but it will show you what real city life is like."

"Real city? Are you saying I've never seen a real city? I did recently spend time in the capital."

Eliza giggled and shook her head. "That's not a 'real city,' like we have in the Light Realm."

"Since Valoria involves travel, I'm going to vote on Winter Forest for today. Once the doctor gives you the all-clear to travel, we can visit Valoria together."

I scooped up the dishes and headed out of the room.

“Get ready for temple and museum visiting. Please wear sensible footwear.”

I left Eliza to get ready and cleaned up the dishes in the sink. I tried not to worry about Eliza’s dream and Hestia, but dark thoughts kept ebbing into the back of my mind.

[Chapter 929](#)

Eliza

I went to the bathroom and hopped in the shower. I washed my hair and squeezed the water out.

Wrapped in a towel, I checked my reflection in the steam-covered mirror. I dried off quickly and secured my hair in the towel to help it dry faster.

I got dressed in a casual outfit, something that would be comfortable for driving around and walking around. As Jared suggested, I put on comfortable shoes.

As I got ready for the day, I couldn’t shake the sense of uncertainty hanging over me. I wanted to believe that my dream was just a dream, but I wasn’t so sure anymore. Hestia’s voice sounded so real and what she said... was terrifying.

And the worst part was, she was still out there lurking around, and I knew exactly what she was after.

Every shadow started to look like her, and I just couldn’t turn off the unease that writhed in my stomach.

Over and over again, I tried to push those thoughts aside and focus on the good things.

Jared and I were back together. We were spending quality time together doing something fun, no longer fighting for our lives. We had a house, a village, and a baby on the way. I was excited to show him the Light Realm and all the places I knew he would love.

“Knock. Knock.” Jared knocked on the bedroom door.

“Ack!”

“Whoa, you’re a little jumpy,” Jared teased, winking at me.

I shook my head and took a deep, steadying breath. I’d been so lost in my thoughts I forgot he was even in the house. I took a moment to steady myself and stop my skeleton from trembling.

“Eliza, are you okay? I didn’t mean to scare you.” Jared came across the room and put an arm around me.

“I’m fine. I was just lost in thought.”

“Can I entice you to come out of your thoughts and join me in the present?” he asked, holding a hand out to me. “Our car is ready.”

I smiled and took his hand. Enjoying a day in the Light Realm with Jared sounded like exactly what I needed to keep my mind off the other stuff piling up in the background.

Jared led me out to the car and we pulled away from our little house. I turned around and watched the house shrinking in the distance as we drove off. In the sunlight, it looked even cuter and more perfect than before.

I couldn't wait to come home to that house tonight. It did really feel like a home away from home.

"Can you take us to Winter Forest? We'd like to do a tour of the museums and temples there," Jared told the driver.

"Yes, sir." The driver replied.

It wasn't a long drive to Winter Forest, but we still got to see some of the gorgeous landscapes of the Light Realm.

There were rolling hills with little golden flowers blooming on them making them look like mounds of gold in the shimmering sunlight.

When we arrived at Winter Forest, I saw the awe in Jared's eyes. He looked around at the silvery trees, their leaves full and green.

The town built between the trees was busy but quaint.

The car pulled up at the first museum on our day tour. It was an archeology museum of ancient cultures uncovered throughout the Light Realm.

"Did you work on any of these digs?" Jared asked as we perused some of the ancient artifacts that were almost as old as the Light Realm itself.

"Oh, I wish! I would have loved to be on the dig that discovered this." I pointed to an artifact in one of the glass cases.

Jared scrunched up his nose and tilted his head sideways. "Uhh... what is it?"

"Are you kidding? This is one of the oldest plane propellers ever discovered. It is hundreds of years old.

Our ancestors were trying to master flight that long ago..."

Jared smiled and slipped his arm around my waist.

"I love seeing how excited you get about old artifacts."

"I can't help it. You know, I think that the only way not to repeat our past is to document it and learn from it."

"That is very insightful, Eliza. I think you're right."

We stopped at a temple next. It was one of the oldest temples still standing, and the Moon Goddess priestesses that worshipped there weren't like any other.

They wore pure white, cotton dresses with white and purple flowers in their hair. They walked around barefoot, chanting and praying to the Moon Goddess.

Many of them were gifted Moon Goddess relics once they completed their training and they wore those relics somewhere on their body—rings, pendants, headbands, tiaras, etc.

The temple itself was carved from white marble and when the afternoon light hit it, it looked like it was a gateway to heaven.

Jared and I walked across the tile floor and I pointed to a few of the stained-glass windows and paintings.

“It is said that the first White Queen herself commissioned those windows and paintings.”

“Huh....” Jared studied the face of the first White Queen closely, squinting his eyes. “Lena does look a bit like her, doesn’t she?”

I rolled my eyes. “Hey, there’s a guided tour up there. I bet the guide can tell you a lot more about this place than I can.”

We headed to the tour group and tagged along.

The guide gave an extensive history of the temple and the different artifacts.

I was familiar with a lot of the history, so I began to wander away from the tour group a little. I was looking at a white, marble statue when a chill ran down my spine.

Freezing, I held my breath for a moment and slowly looked around. The hairs on my arm and back of my neck stood on end.

I felt like someone was watching me but I couldn’t see anyone. Everyone in the temple was going about their own business and paying attention to things in front of them, not to me.

Instinctively, I looked for Jared.

He was talking to the tour guide, asking a lot of questions by the looks of it.

A fond smile touched my lips. I was glad he was enjoying himself.

Sighing, I shook off the uneasy feeling. It was probably just me being a little paranoid from this morning. No one knew where Jared and I were, and we were out enjoying the day.

I went to Jared and slipped my arm through his.

“Ready to take a lunch break?” he asked me.

I nodded and we headed out of the temple. Right across the street there was a café with outdoor seating. Jared and I got a table with an umbrella to cast some shade.

We ordered lunch, and I couldn’t help but feel like something was off. It was that same feeling of being watched but There were only a few other people at the patio table.

“What did you think of the temple?” I asked Jared, trying to push my feelings aside.

“The Light Realm puts so much into the worship of the Moon Goddess.”

I giggled. "Well, yeah. The White Queens come from the Light Realm and they are essentially the Moon Goddess incarnate."

"That's a good point."

When our food arrived, I glanced around the café again. I just couldn't shake the feeling of being watched.

There were a few other couples sitting outside at other tables. I noticed one woman sitting by herself. She wasn't looking in my direction but I get a strange feeling when I looked at her.

"Eliza?"

I shifted my attention back to Jared. "Hmm?"

"How's your lunch?"

"Oh, it is fine." I picked up my sandwich and took a bite.

"Good. If you could let your mom know that I'm taking good care of you and feeding you well, I'd appreciate that."

I giggled and nodded. "I'll make sure that she knows."

Jared and I talked a little more about the next museum we'd be going to, but by the time I finished my lunch, I needed to relieve myself.

"I'm going to take a quick trip to the restroom, then we can get on the road again."

I was washing my hands when I noticed a shadow in the corner move in the mirror. Lifting my eyes, I tried to follow the reflection in the mirror but it was gone.

"Cool it, you're just imagining things," I whispered to myself. I dried my hands off.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed my shoulder.

I whipped around, coming face to face with the woman from the outside tables. She was standing way too close to me.

"Personal boundaries," I muttered, holding my hands up and trying to put some distance between us.

The woman smirked. "I know who you are," she spoke in a low whisper.

I froze. Her eyes were intense and her look was steely. My knees trembled.

"You're the one Hestia is after."

I swallowed hard. My heart pounded in my chest. I needed to get out of here, now....

Keeping my hands raised, I backed toward the bathroom door. I looked around the bathroom, hoping that someone else was in there.

I remembered that when I came in it was empty. This woman must have been waiting for me, or she snuck in after me.

Either way, I was alone with her and I knew she was working for Hestia.

I took a step back and the woman took a step forward.

With a cruel smirk, she opened the palm of her hand revealing a pile of yellow powder in her hand. She blew on the powder.

“No!” I threw my hands up, trying to shield my face.

The fine grains of the powder blew into my eyes, blinding me. I blinked furiously, trying to clear my vision. All I could see was a blurry mustard color, the powder turning to goo in my eyes. I swiped out with my hand, trying to keep the woman back.

All I struck was air.

Then, a hand came down on my belly. Terror ripped through me as I realized this woman was going after my baby....

“Don’t touch me!” I cried, trying to push her hand away.

She just laughed, tightening her grip. She was too strong. I couldn’t push her away.

Tears wet my eyes as I realized I was powerless to protect my child.

Searing, white-hot pain shot through my spine and down my legs. I screamed, my legs giving out from under me. I collapsed on the bathroom floor, jolt after jolt of pain tearing through me like I was being stabbed over and over again.

Through my blurry vision, I saw the woman’s form disappearing out the bathroom door.

My body twisted as shock after shock of pain ripped through me.

I screamed again.

[Chapter 930](#)

Every cell in my body felt like it was on fire. I screamed and writhed in agony. Nothing had ever felt this horrible, not even when the Cryptex cursed me.

I could hear my screams echoing off the bathroom walls, my mind swimming in pain and fear. I didn’t know what was happening to me. The pain was going to kill me. I just knew it....

How could anyone survive that kind of pain?

Suddenly, I felt like I was falling. The bathroom floor dropped out from under me and I was whizzing through the air, falling further and further into a bottomless pit.

My stomach flew into my throat and my head spun as I fell through the darkness. I thought I’d fall forever, screaming and moaning in pain as the bottomless pit swallowed me whole.

The walls of the pit were made up of my memories of Jared. I saw them so clearly, of all the love and experiences we shared.

As I watched them, the memories started to change. It was like they were being erased.

No... not erased, rewritten. Things that we shared in the past were changing to be ugly and cruel.

The wonderful memories of dancing together, getting married, and traveling the Light Realm—I saw them run like watercolors, bleeding together, and the images that reformed were different. They were dark and brutal.

My heart raced and I tried desperately to remember the happy memories. I could barely hold onto them as more and more of my memories changed.

Suddenly, I came to a lurching halt, stopping dead. My body jerked and I stopped falling, hanging in midair.

A woman appeared before me. She looked familiar. I knew I should have recognized her, but the memory that told me who she was, was just out of reach....

I frantically searched my mind for a name, for anything that told me who this woman was, but I came up empty. It was a black hole where memories of this person used to be.

She emerged from the darkness and stood before me, a wicked smile on her lips.

My stomach churned. She was very unsettling. I felt an instinct to mistrust her but I had no idea why I felt that way.

“Who are you!?” I pointed at her.

“Oh, Eliza, I’m hurt. You don’t remember me?” she put her hand on her chest and blinked like she was going to cry.

I scoffed, doubting she would shed a single tear.

“Who are you?” I repeated.

Her wicked smile widened from ear to ear. “I’m Hestia, my dear. You might not remember, but I am the one after you and your child.”

“What!?” I gasped. Instinctively, I wrapped my arms around my stomach where my child was growing.

I still had the memory of my baby but something was... off. This was Jared’s child... why did that fill me with a horrible feeling of disgust?

“What the hell did you do to me!?” I demanded, glaring at the woman. My voice trembled, and so did my legs.

This was all wrong. This had to be a dream, some horrible dream. What was happening to me?

Anger flared in my chest and I wanted to jump at this Hestia person and beat her until she undid whatever she’d done.

“Oh, come now, is that any way to talk to someone that has given you a gift? I don’t hand out gifts like this to just anyone.” Hestia chuckled.

The sound was like nails on a chalkboard and I cringed.

“What are you talking about? You haven’t given me a gift. You’re taking things away from me, right out of my mind!”

I could feel more and more of myself slipping away. I grabbed the sides of my head and fought against it.

“Oh, but I have given you a gift. It will ensure that you and your child are always safe from harm. Isn’t that what you want?”

“Well... yes... but you... I don’t trust you!”

“Smart girl.”

“Then why are you doing this!?”

“I told you, it will ensure that you and your child are safe. That’s what mothers want, and I sense that you’re no different. Just accept this gift and move on with your life.”

I shook my head. “No!” I tried to make sense of what Hestia was saying but my mind was so foggy and clouded.

Nothing felt right anymore. I didn’t even feel like I was in my own body. My mind raced in a million directions but I couldn’t hold onto any thoughts or memories. Things were being rewritten so quickly.

“What is the gift?” I gasped, my voice weak. My body was getting weak, too.

Hestia walked up to me. She put her hand on my back and leaned in close. I felt her hot, sour breath on my face.

I cringed away but I couldn’t get away from her.

“To keep you and your child safe, I’ve given you a gift that will make you forget about your past, your love, and your child. You will live a new life, free from the burden and pain of your memories.”

“What!?” I pulled away from the woman.

Fear and horror filled me. I felt the tug of despair threatening to drag me back down that hole and keep me there forever.

Darkness crept in from all sides, reaching for me with spindly little fingers.

“No! I won’t forget! I won’t forget!” I fought against the darkness.

I swiped my arms at the air, determined to keep it away from me. I wouldn’t forget about my love. Who... Jared, I wouldn’t forget about Jared. I loved him. He loved me. We were going to be a family.

Hestia’s power was strong. Whenever I latched onto a memory of Jared, it was yanked right out from under me and I was floundering in the darkness again.

There had to be something I could hold onto, something strong enough to stop her magic.

Jared... I thought of the song, his mother’s locket, and our shared birthday. Jared and I were destined to be together, forever and always.

“I will remember. I will remember... the song... the locket... our birthday...” I whispered. “The song... the locket... our birthday... Jared....”

My stomach lurched again and I was dragged back down the hole through a flood of distant memories that seemed so far away now, I didn't know if they really were mine.

It was like I was watching my life from the outside. I was witnessing my memories like I was watching a movie.

I was back at the seedy brothel where I was being sold as a slave. Jared came to the room to collect me. He was cold to me as he told me he was taking me to his village.

When we got to the village, he put me to work. He never spoke a kind word to me. He pushed me around and ordered me to always wait on him and serve him.

Despite his cruelty, I couldn't help falling in love with him. He was harsh, but it wasn't long before I discovered his curse.

The more I learned about it, the more I realized he was just cranky because of that curse. I knew I'd be cranky too if I had a curse hanging over my head for my entire life.

Since I was there to serve Jared, I made it my mission to break the curse. I knew that when it was broken, he'd reveal his true self to me and we could be together. He'd come to love me like I loved him when he had a real future without the curse.

I worked tirelessly to break the curse. Finally, when I did, I thought that Jared would come around. I thought he'd appreciate me for working so hard and caring for him, for freeing him.

Instead, he informed me that my only purpose was to serve him and have his children.

I remembered the night he seduced me, using my feelings against me. Not long after that, I found out I was pregnant. I had lingering hope that Jared would see me as more than a breeder... as the mother of his child.

He wasn't happy when I told him. He didn't take me in his arms and hug me and kiss me like I wanted him to.

Instead, he just sneered and muttered something like “about time.” He sent me back to working and cleaning for him.

When we got word from the capital that Lena was poisoned and sick, I begged Jared to let me go see her and help.

“How can you help? You're no good for anything except taking care of my home and having my children.”

My heart shattered into a million pieces, and I knew then that he would never love me that way I loved him. He'd never appreciate me or cherish me. He was a cruel man.

I had to get away from him.

In the dead of night, I ran away to the palace to help Lena. King Xander agreed to let me return to the Light Realm with them. I was so grateful, finally finding an escape from Jared.

Now that I knew he'd never love me, I had to get away from him. I had to protect my child from becoming like him.

Just as we were boarding the boat, Jared showed up, demanding I return to his village with him, for the safety of our child.

My heart swelled with hope that he really did care.

"You can't leave, Eliza. I need you here. I need you and our child." He spoke to me softly, sweetly, running his fingers through my curls.

It was the same way he'd spoken to me when he seduced me.

My heart hammered in my chest, and I wanted to believe that he was really there for me and that he cared about me.

I couldn't take that chance....

He'd already fooled me more than once, and this was my one shot at getting away from him.

I made the devastating decision to reject him to save myself and our child. It was the only way to get away from him, the only way to get to the Light Realm.

The flicker of pain in Jared's face when I rejected him burned into my mind, but it was quickly overshadowed by the anger that exploded in his eyes.

He dismissed me completely and told me I was on my own. In tears, I boarded the ship and headed to the Light Realm.

Slowly, I came out of the memory, back to the place where Hestia had met with me. She was gone, but all my memories were so clear now.

Panic rose in my chest. I'd escaped from Jared to protect my child. But he followed me to the Light Realm.

He was here to force me to give up my child to him....